

THE TERRITORIALIZATION OF ETHNOPOLITICAL REFORMS IN COLOMBIA

Chocó as a Case Study

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Abstract: This article looks at the Chocó Department, where black and indigenous ethnic movements demanded collective land rights and autonomy to safeguard local livelihoods from resource-intensive economies. However, after decentralization and state restructuring reforms granted constitutional protections of local ethnopolitical autonomy in the nineties, most indigenous and black communities failed to benefit from the new rights. This has been explained as the result of human rights violations, neoliberal development, and armed groups' appropriation of regional economies, which created stressful conditions for self-governance. In such a scenario, autonomy was maintained only by communities that could resist violence and hold regional or national governments accountable. I build on these claims and add that the difference between the intent and the actual outcome of the reforms is explained by the way new institutions were territorialized or adapted by specific actors to local dynamics. In the Chocó Department, reforms were territorialized in a context of weak institutions, government corruption, and resource-intensive land-use changes that worked against ethnopolitical autonomy by enabling local intermediaries, who frequently made decisions that went against community rights.

In 2005 one of Colombia's oldest ethnic organizations, the Chocó Department's Embera-Wounaan Regional Indigenous Organization (OREWA), succumbed to violence and internal divisions, raising concerns about the effects of armed conflict and corruption on local organizational efforts. OREWA's breakdown also resulted from the way it adapted to reforms that overhauled governance practices and changed local political dynamics. As in other parts of Latin America, Colombia's decentralization and state restructuring reforms addressed ethnopolitical autonomy in response to social movement demands and new international norms on the rights of ethnic groups (Hooker 2005; Van Cott 2001). The reforms enhanced as well the role of these groups in the conservation of natural resources (Davis and Wali 1994; Dove 2006) and endorsed neoliberal environmental policies to stimulate environmental markets (Arsel and Büscher 2012; Schminck and Jouve-Martín 2011), such as those for water or carbon sequestration.

I would like to thank Patricia Tobón Yagarí for her invaluable help in doing this research in Quibdó. At the time of my visit she was a lawyer for ASOREWA. For their insight, time, and support, I am also indebted to Jairo Miguel Guerra from the Instituto de Investigaciones del Pacífico; Father Luis Carlos Hinojosa, Albeiro Parra, and Luis Felipe Flores from Quibdó's Social Pastoral Commission; Gloria Salinas, Efraín Jaramillo, and Fernando Castrillón from the Colectivo de Trabajo Jenzera; and Francisco Mosquera and Nicolasa Campaña, from the Consejo Comunitario Mayor de la Organización Mayor Campesina del Atrato.

Latin American Research Review, Vol. 49, No. 3. © 2014 by the Latin American Studies Association.

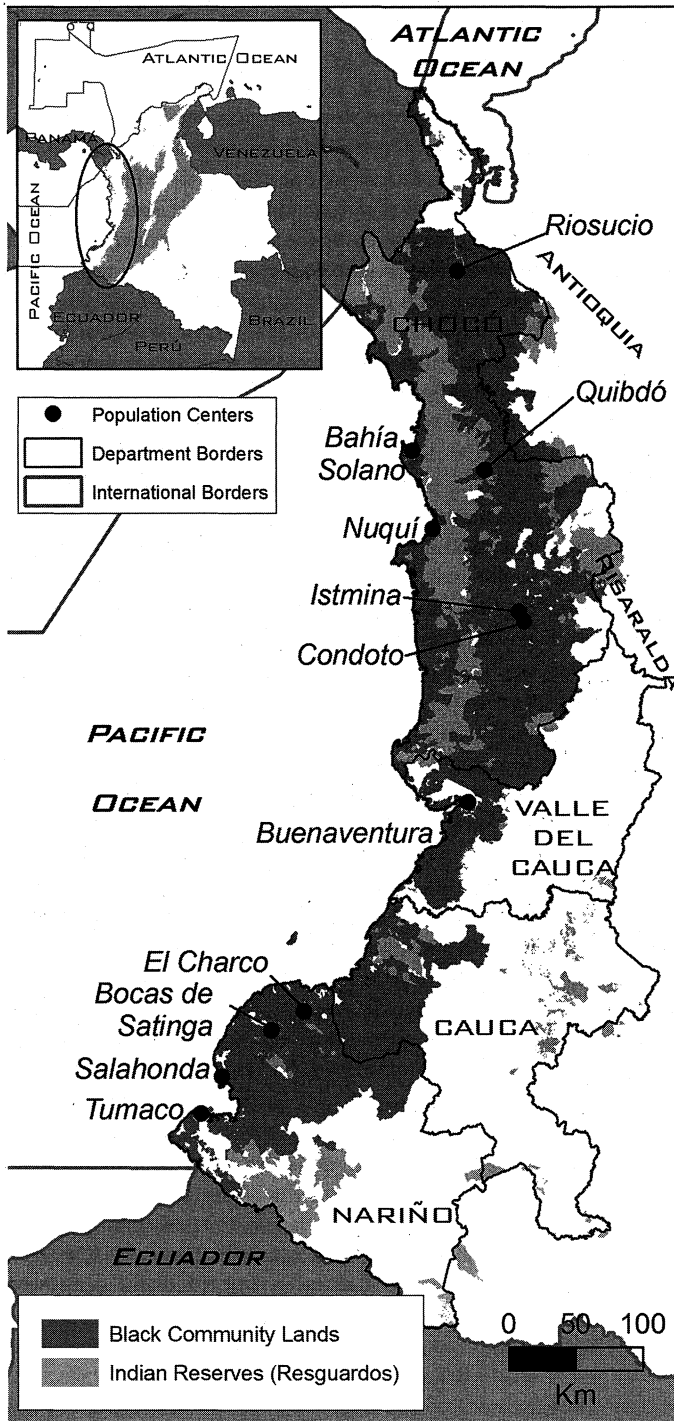
Colombia's reform advocates promoted decentralized spatial planning to increase the central government's territorial legitimacy in the hope that unifying the fractured country would end armed conflict (Asher and Ojeda 2009) and tackle cultural differences. The 1991 Constitution recognized Indigenous Territorial Entities (Entidades Territoriales Indígenas, ETIs) as subnational authorities whose governance over decentralized fiscal resources, health and education programs, natural resources, and customary justice systems was enabled by laws passed between 1991 and 1999. The Constitution contained a transitory article on the land rights of Afro-Colombians, whose territorial claims were formalized in 1993 when Black Community Councils were created but not recognized as public authorities in the same manner as ETIs.

Indigenous communities acquired collective land rights to 34 million hectares of land, and riverine Afro-Colombian communities acquired rights to 4.7 million hectares (DANE 2005). However, most groups either failed to benefit from these rights or are struggling to maintain a semblance of them. For example, as of 2007 only 18 percent of the country's indigenous territories had applied the new legal framework (Chirif and García 2007), while violence deterred Afro-Colombian organizing. This article examines another outcome of the reforms, namely how they provoked a crisis of ethnic organization in a region where social movements had been relatively influential. The literature on Colombia's ethnic politics offers ample evidence in support of two main explanations to make sense of this. First, capitalist expansion and regional political economies of violence uprooted people, traditional livelihoods, and grassroots organizations. Second, and as a result, only communities with capacities to mobilize innovative strategies and networks of support could safeguard local decision-making practices.

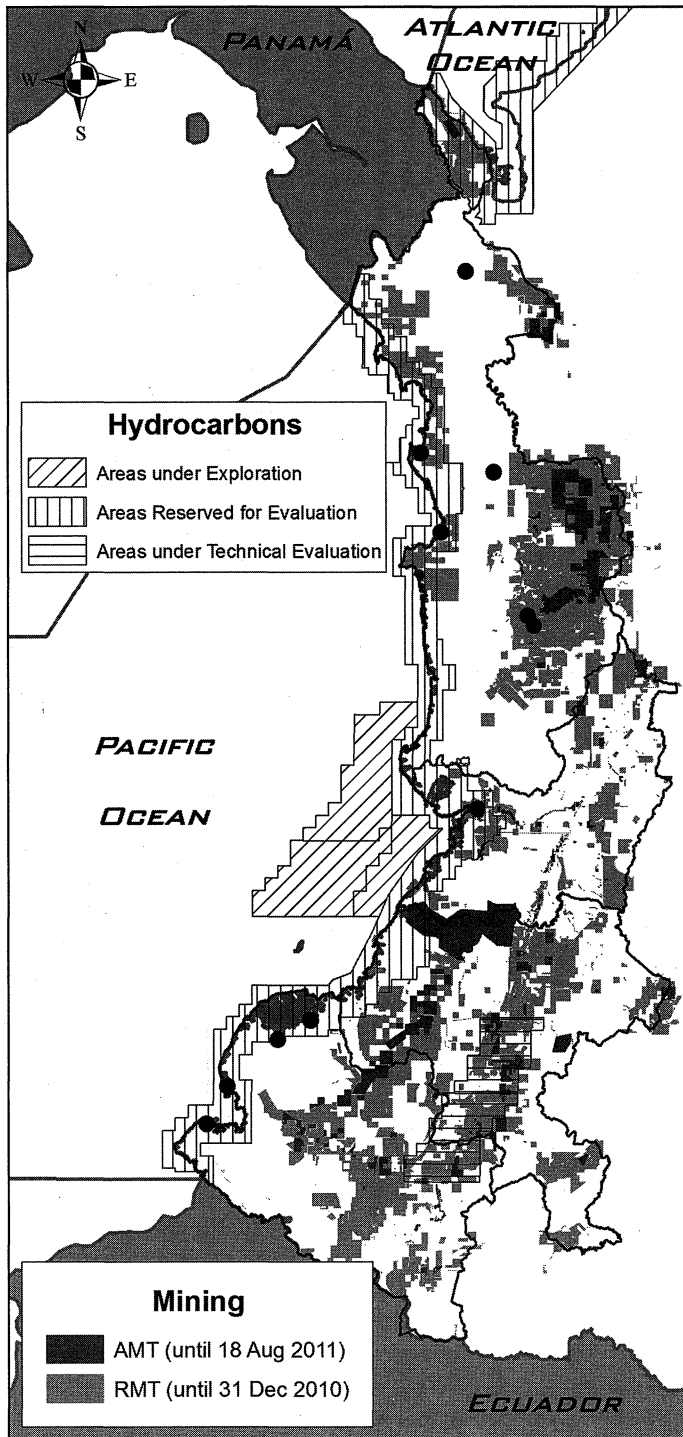
In the first case, few communities could endure neoliberal economic reforms that delocalized decision making to favor large capitalist companies, nor could they fend off an increasingly regionalized political economy of war based on violent land occupations to control people and natural resources (Houghton 2008; Villa and Houghton 2004; Oslender 2007; García and Jaramillo 2008; Asher 2009). In the second case, communities that sustained local decision making did so by linking up to national and international social-movement networks, resisting violent pressures on their communities, or holding the national government accountable (Hernández 2004; Wirpsa, Rothschild, and Garzón 2009; Chirif and García 2007). Chocó's OREWA as well as other ethnic organizations in the department arguably had similar capacities, yet they failed to benefit from the reforms. So what other factors beyond the detrimental effects of armed conflict explain organizational breakdown? In this article I associate the crisis of ethnopolitical organizations with the way reforms were adapted to specific local dynamics.

THE CHOCÓ DEPARTMENT

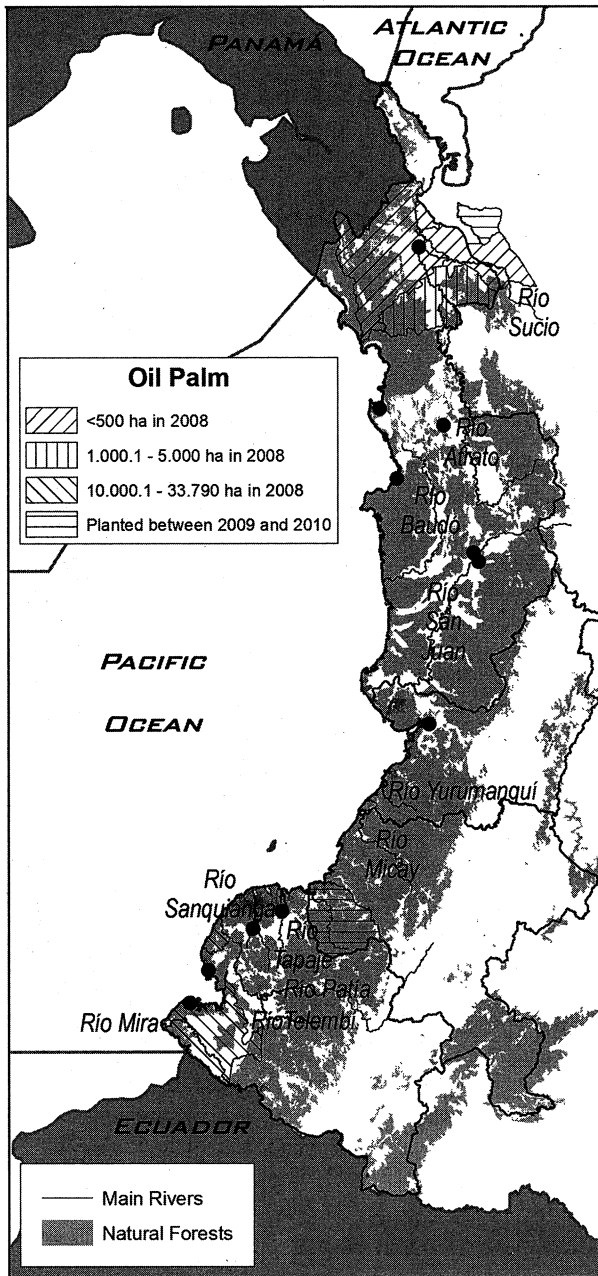
The heavily forested Chocó Department is a biodiversity hotspot located in the Pacific littoral (see map 1). Central government claims over this periphery historically undermined the region's sociocultural dynamics and local decision-making practices (Villa 2004). Not coincidentally, its 390,000 inhabitants currently count



Map 1 Ethnic community lands. Map created by Nicolás Vargas Ramírez.
 Sources: Black community lands and Indian reserves: Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi (IGAC) (2010) and Instituto Colombiano de Desarrollo Rural (2011, 2012). Cartographic base: IGAC.



Map 2 Mining and hydrocarbon concessions. Map created by Nicolás Vargas Ramírez.
 Sources: Hydrocarbons: Mapa de Tierras de la Agencia Nacional de Hidrocarburos. Mining:
 Approved Mining Titles (AMT) and Requested Mining Titles (RMT) in Catastro Minero
 Colombiano. Cartographic base: IGAC.



Map 3 Oil palm, natural forests, and rivers. Map created by Nicolás Vargas Ramírez. Sources: Oil palm: *Geografías de Derechos, Violaciones y Resistencias*, <http://www.hrev.org/project/geographiando/> (2011). Natural forests: Instituto de Hidrología, Meteorología y Estudios Ambientales (IDEAM), IGAC, Instituto de Investigaciones de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt (IAVH), Instituto de Investigaciones Marinas y Costeras José Benito Vives de Andrés (INVEMAR), Instituto Amazónico de Investigaciones Científicas (SINCHI), and Instituto de Investigaciones del Pacífico John von Neumann (IIAP) (2007). Continental, coastal, and marine ecosystems of Colombia: IDEAM, IGAC, IAVH, IIAP, INVEMAR, and SINCHI. Cartographic base: IGAC.

among Colombia's poorest as well as victims of its worst violence. In 2008, 36 percent of the population had been forcefully displaced, and contrary to national trends, poverty in Chocó increased from 64 percent to 79 percent and indigence from 31 percent to 49 percent between 2002 and 2005, while additional quality-of-life indicators demonstrate that the majority of the population cannot meet its basic needs (DNP 2008).

Chocó's relationship with the national government was historically mediated by mining companies, a merchant class primarily interested in extraction (Wade 1993), and by Claretian missionaries who had arrived in 1909 on an evangelizing mission (Flórez 2007). Chocó became a full department in 1945, at which point local elites gained access to key patronage institutions, while profitable economic activities continued to operate through commercial links in the departments of Antioquia, Risaralda, and Valle del Cauca. Between 1950 and 1980 economic pressures intensified as it became a national imperative to integrate peripheral areas to support modernization policies (Asher 2009). In the 1980s aggressive entrepreneurs arriving in the region pressured local economies by co-opting or circumventing local institutions and coercing populations (García and Jaramillo 2008).

Black and Indian place-based social movements formed because of such economic pressures and successfully declared the lowlands as territories of difference (Escobar 2008). OREWA began to lead indigenous land claims in the late 1970s, and black peasant communities along the Atrato River followed suit in the 1980s. The black peasant's "ethnicization" process (Restrepo 2002) hinged on reconstructing a common African-Colombian culture buttressed by geographical remoteness (Sánchez, Roldán, and Sánchez 1993), spatial relations to riparian environments (Almarío 2002; Oslender 2002; Hoffman 2004), and traditional knowledge and practices that supported conservation (Escobar 2008; Asher 2009; Arocha 2009).

TERRITORY AND POLITICS

Chocó's claims to land thus affirmed a distinct ethnogeography, defined as conceptions of the relationship between people and the environment (Kolars 2009, 67), that build on the physical, social, and symbolic characteristics of land to bind people to specific political agendas (Sack 1986)—in this case, securing collective lands in support of autonomy. Such conflicts over space illustrate how territory is now a "central feature of modern states," displacing the nature of land conflict from ownership claims over small units of production to control over larger geographies following different principles (Ng'weno 2007, 265). This trend is most visible at the local level and in multicultural settings where different social and political actors engage in territorial politics (Ng'weno 2007).

Studies on indigenous politics in Latin America have shed light on the territorial thrust of ethnic conflict. Ethnopolitical claims became more salient when, among other things, neoliberal policies reduced local autonomy by facilitating third-party access to Indian lands and resources (Yashar 2006). Indigenous groups substantiated territorial demands by asserting that indigenous identity and practices were contained within ancestral lands (Jackson and Warren 2005) and by negotiating territorial rights within national jurisdictions that conceive the rela-

tionship between people and their habitat in terms of property rights (Chirif and García 2007). Colombia's relatively small Indian population successfully maintained "a territorial agenda of land repossession" (Rappaport 1994) that linked identities, political strategies, and land-use practices to delimited geographical areas, which allowed them to resist violence and acculturation (Velasco 2011).

On the other hand, decentralization modified the spatial relationship between different tiers of government, prompting new forms of interinstitutional coordination between local, regional, and national institutions, and requiring local people or institutions with the knowledge, resources, and technology to navigate the new system. This empowered local intermediaries who implemented reforms to suit their own objectives (Haller 2002), explaining in part the mixed results produced by decentralization. In Colombia, decentralization led to innovative governance across many municipalities. In some regions embattled by violence, civil society organizations or elected officials facilitated groundbreaking strategies to resist armed conflict, form communities of peace, or congregate local constituent assemblies to find peaceful solutions to conflict (Mitchell and Ramírez 2009). But the reforms also opened opportunities for armed clientelism and violent rent-seeking in weak institutional settings (Eaton 2006) and where civil society organizations were lacking.

As the 1991 Constitution reordered Colombia's territoriality, it prompted a functional redefinition of ethnic governance. It ratified the International Labor Organization's Convention No. 169 on the rights to land and self-determination of tribal peoples (Law 21/91), renovated Law 89/1890 maintaining colonial land titles and Indian councils or *cabildos* as representative indigenous authorities, and embraced ethnic and cultural diversity (articles 1, 2, 7). The Constitution also included provisions to pass an Organic Law of Territorial Ordination that offered additional instruments for ethnic autonomy, but which Congress failed to enact on nineteen occasions, citing disagreements over the state's administrative, fiscal, planning, and environmental functions (DNP 2007a), before it became law in 2011.

Territory and Neoliberal Development

This legislative overhaul on ethnic rights boldly transformed governance in one-third of the country's territory, eventually colliding with national economic growth priorities that hinge on competitive, market-based plans in resource- and land-intensive economic activities. A central point of contention is how article 332 of the Constitution, which establishes state ownership of subsoil and nonrenewable resources, curtails autonomy. This contradiction became evident in a set of legislative initiatives designed to open markets for environmental services and extractive activities. The Mining Code (Law 685/2001) and Forest Law (1021/2006) and bills to pass a law for rural reform and water and *páramo* laws all contemplated some level of privatization, even in collective lands.¹ Ethnic organizations, environmentalists, and organizations such as Colombia's Commission of Jurists

1. *Páramos* are high elevation tropical valleys and wetlands located in the Andes at an altitude between 3,000 and 5,000 meters.

mobilized against the measures when they identified clear loopholes enabling investors to circumvent provisions on the rights of ethnoterritorial groups (Jaramillo and Velasco 2007). The Constitutional Court agreed and in 2008 found the Forest Law unconstitutional on grounds that it violated ethnic rights to free, prior, and informed consultation (*El Tiempo* 2008).

Such tensions were also at the center of acrimonious confrontations between the government and ethnic social movements. During a series of contentious episodes in 2008 in the Cauca Department, where Indian cabildos were occupying privately owned lands that they contended should be allocated to Indian *resguardos*, or reserves, President Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002–2010) famously accused Indians of being the country's largest landowners and keeping large tracts of idle land (González 2011). Such rhetoric not only distorted facts about ethnic territoriality—most ethnic lands are located in protected areas such as forest reserves where the government wants to increase natural resource exploitation—it deliberately ignored the fact that most of these lands are not under the control of indigenous authorities.

A year later, Colombia's Constitutional Court condemned this state of affairs when it published Judicial Decrees 004 and 005 in 2009 demanding government safeguards of ethnic minority rights.² Decree 004 cites extensive evidence of gross human rights violations of indigenous peoples, including deterritorialization and uprooting resulting from the illegal or irregular use of natural resources in ancestral lands, while Decree 005 orders the protection of Afro-Colombian communities violently displaced from collective lands. The Court found the government culpable for failing to protect communities or even colluding with illegal actors.

More recently, the United Nations Development Program (2011) criticized Colombia's unsustainable political and economic use of its territory that exacerbated land-use conflicts. The report blames neoliberal rural reforms that increased inequality and land concentration and undermined rural institutions, including those of ethnic communities. It cites the wasteful use of agricultural and pasture lands, where 78 percent of the 22 million hectares of arable lands are not cultivated, while cattle ranching is overextending by 54 percent (from 21 to 39 million). This is the result of violent counter-agrarian reform, a strong landowner preference for expanding cattle ranching or leaving land idle, and loss of competitiveness resulting from increased imports. The report legitimizes specific claims that biofuel projects have negative environmental effects and are expanding into ethnic lands, where people have been displaced and food production is decreasing.

Against this backdrop, most people interviewed for this article believed that the government is trying to guarantee maximum exploitation of natural resources in preparation for free trade agreements that require an overhaul of environmental and ethnic rights legislation in order to allow mining and hydrocarbon exploration. The government's 2006–2010 and 2010–2014 National Development Plans confirm some of these claims. Both plans contemplate resource-intensive eco-

2. Corte Constitucional de Colombia, Auto 004/09: Protección de los derechos fundamentales de las personas y los pueblos indígenas desplazados por el conflicto armado o en riesgo de desplazamiento forzado (January 26, 2009); Auto 005/09: Protección de los derechos fundamentales de la población afrodescendiente víctima del desplazamiento forzado (January 26, 2009), <http://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/>.

conomic development, and the latest plan seeks to position the country as a strong energy-producing economy, for which it is offering large sections of the country's territory under hydrocarbon and mining concessions (DNP 2007b, 2010).

INTERVIEW DATA ON TERRITORY, AUTONOMY, AND NATURAL RESOURCES

This data was collected in 2009 and 2010 in Bogotá (D.C.), Cali and Buenaventura (Valle del Cauca), and Quibdó (Chocó), where I observed different social-movement meetings and held interviews, informal conversations, and off-the-record discussions with twenty-one men and nine women. Thirteen of them were activists or leaders in Indian or black organizations,³ ten were members of nongovernmental organizations,⁴ three were scholars at Claretian University Foundation or the Environmental Research Institute of the Pacific, three were government officials from regional human rights, environmental, or development institutions,⁵ and one was a leader from the Independent Social Alliance, an indigenous political party. I cite the names of sources who allowed it.

Conversations normally started with open-ended questions. I asked members of Indian or black social movement organizations, councils, and cabildos to describe their organization's assessment of the status of ethnic governability and territoriality in the Pacific coast in general and in Chocó in particular. I asked government officials to describe how their offices support indigenous or Afro-Colombian organizations and asked members of nongovernmental organizations to describe their work in ethnic territories. All were asked to explain what their organizations have identified as main obstacles and/or opportunities for the sustainable management of natural resources.

In the interview process a majority of people shared general comments and normative assessments (see table 1) before discussing the status of ethnic territories, autonomy, and natural resources (see table 2). Activists and members of nongovernmental organizations for the most part considered territories as places that sustain the cultural and economic survival of historically marginalized groups, and they agreed that self-governance is a matter of social justice that can also lead to better management of natural resources. Leaders in social movement organizations expressed that ethnic communities have the right to resist statutory laws that contradict local autonomy.

Respondents tended to identify challenges and opportunities facing their organizations (table 2). Most people emphasized external challenges and opportunities and only a few underlined individual or organizational culpability in explaining challenges to local governance. Self-critical discussions usually came

3. OREWA, the Integrated Peasant Association of the Atrato River, the Indigenous Organization of Antioquia, the main community council of the Alto Atrato Popular Campesino Organization, the Black Communities Process, the Interethnic Solidarity Forum of Chocó, the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia, and the Community Council of Anchicayá.

4. The Jenzera Foundation for Alternative Development; Quibdó's Afro-Colombian, indigenous, and social pastoral commissions; Pax Christi; and the World Wildlife Fund.

5. Chocó's Regional Office of the Ombudsman, the Regional Autonomous Corporation for the Sustainable Development of Chocó, and the Autonomous Regional Corporation of the Cauca Valley.

Table 1 General comments and normative views on territory, autonomy, and natural resources

	General comments	Normative or ethical views
Territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place for life, spirituality, culture and economy • Connected to identity • Threatened by multiple short-term interests* • Place of resistance • Should not be divided or parceled out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land inherited from ancestors; sole legacy of slaves; must pass on to other generations • Communities are customary owners of land
Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance maintained territorial integrity • Forced displacement is a deliberate strategy to reduce autonomy • Government, in collusion with violent actors or companies, undermine ethnic-territorial governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutional right • Self-governance is an unalienable human right and a matter of justice and survival • Ethnic minority rights should be protected as they have been deliberately denied • Right to free, prior and informed consultation on development projects should be meaningful
Natural resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic base • Communities know how to best manage them • Customary practices are sustainable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Profit maximization is the wrong goal when making decisions about resource management • Benefits provided by resource extraction should not be deterritorialized (i.e., only benefit outsiders) • Resources are a common good and should be used considering the community's economic needs • Best practices in resource management come from coordination between government, communities and companies

Source: Author's interviews, informal conversations, and field notes.

*Black leaders speak of harm or injuries to the territory (*afectaciones al territorio*) that prevent people from enjoying their land (*disfrutar del territorio*). Indian leaders often speak of reorganizing the territory (*saneamiento territorial*) and territorial governance (*gobernabilidad territorial*).

from individuals with whom I developed trust or from listening to spontaneous and off-the-record conversations. Critiques were shared by highly committed individuals with long trajectories in these movements who worried about co-optation and lack of accountability and democratic deliberation. Notwithstanding their critiques, they emphasized the role of violence and government malfeasance in creating a harmful environment for local organization.

The columns in table 2 on opportunities point to national and international laws on collective property rights and the support of government allies and activist networks. Communities continue to produce innovative leadership, cultivate resistance strategies, ally with others, and learn and adapt to new realities. The

Table 2 Assessment of challenges and opportunities to territory, autonomy, and natural resources

	Opportunities		Challenges	
	External	Internal	External	Internal
Territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statutory laws on collective property rights • International laws that support collective rights of ethnic minorities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful self-governance in some territories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enclave economies • Development undermines ethnic territoriality • Overhaul of environmental laws • State's subsoil rights • Armed group occupation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing land-use practices resulting from mining, coca, or logging • Loss of traditional knowledge
Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constitutional Court • Ombudsman's Office • Networks with domestic and foreign advocacy groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovative leaders • Historical ability to resist • Cross-cultural alliances • Willingness to learn and adapt • Customary laws • Self-awareness campaigns • Increase organizational capacities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companies overpower local authorities • Failure by government authorities to hold the Constitution's promise of a Social Rule of Law • Weak coordinating governance mechanisms • Flawed process of free, prior and informed consultation • Human rights violations • Local government corruption • Control of local economies by violent groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weak local and regional organizations • Internal political divisions • Weak leaders; have lost political vision • Misappropriation of fiscal transfers or other communal resources • Organizational fragmentation, unrepresentative organizations • Authoritarian practices by some community leaders • New generations lack interest in traditional work • Disconnect between geographically spread-out communities and urban leaders • Dependence on international aid and cooperation • Organizations fail to protect own populations
Natural resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal recognition of community resource management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional management practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contamination, longer rain/drought seasons • Large development projects • Extractive companies • Unclear environmental service market instruments, such as programs to Reduce Emissions from Deforestation (REDD) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local leaders abusing power to privatize resource use • Few economic alternatives to reduce poverty

Source: Author's interviews, informal conversations, and field notes.

column on external challenges highlights the difficulty of local-level organizing when the government and communities disagree over development projects. Many respondents argue that despite constitutional provisions, ethnic territories continue to exist as internal colonies and as such are undermined by plans of the central government to profit from its subsoil rights by claiming lands for mining or hydrocarbon concessions or large development projects (see maps).

Respondents believe as well that the government, especially under Uribe's administration, weakened environmental legislation and challenged the rights to free, prior, and informed consultation on development projects. In addition, as a result of local government corruption or simply because the government treats them as second class citizens, ethnic communities cannot count on effective, legitimate government institutions to solve collective problems. Finally, guerrillas, paramilitaries, and drug traffickers that largely finance their activities by controlling regional economies are occupying ethnic territories, further violating the rights of communities there.

Changing land-use practices lead to rapid social change, compelling or coercing communities into growing one single crop (e.g., coca or palm oil) or working in mining or timber extraction. This monetizes traditional economies and increases dependence on outside food markets. It also changes authority structures whose legitimacy is based on holding knowledge about different traditional practices of production.⁶ Government collusion with violent actors has also weakened local organizations and produced rent-seeking incentives, feeding internal divisions and leading to opportunistic leadership and misrepresentation of community interests. Other threats include the corrupt privatization of local resources to favor one family or group, authoritarian practices by local leaders, generational changes, and organizational fragmentation.

Respondents connected to the black and indigenous social movements, including research centers and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), tended to contextualize current predicaments within a longer historical process, providing detailed accounts even if I expressed familiarity with the reforms and more interest in current events. This confirms Khittel's (2001) findings that there is a need, especially among black social movement activists, to contest with historical facts the sustained denial of Afro-Colombian history by mainstream historiography and to equip ordinary people with arguments to vindicate their collective land claims. I acknowledge this historicized account by discussing periods of activism and innovation (ca. 1980–1989), negotiation of a new territorial agenda (ca. 1991–1993), and territorialization of new institutions (1994–2010) in the next sections.

ACTIVISM AND INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATION (1980–1989)

The 1980s represent a critical juncture for the advance of ethnic rights. Organizations such as OREWA, the Integrated Peasant Association of the Atrato River (*Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato*, ACIA), the Organization of

6. This point was articulated by Fernando Castrillón (agronomist with Semillas) and Mario Angulo (PCN leader) in conversations in Bogotá and Buenaventura.

Popular Neighborhoods of Chocó (Organización de Barrios Populares del Chocó, OBAPO), and the San Juan River Peasant Association (Consejo Comunitario General de San Juan, ACADESAN) among others, contributed to a movement that placed ethnic territoriality on the national agenda and transformed Colombia's territorial relations. Chocó's social movements were swayed by Cauca's Regional Indigenous Council, which reframed Indian-state relations in the 1970s by seizing and giving new meanings to old institutions on indigenous lands and governability (M. Valencia 2002; Rappaport 2007; Avirama and Márquez 1994). OREWA was also influenced by the Claretians, who redefined their mission following the Second Vatican Council's mandates for social justice, and the Latin American Episcopalian Conference's update of missionary work to address cultural differences (Flórez 2007).

In the 1970s, the Claretians founded the Embera Indigenous Center and an Indigenous Social Pastoral Commission that hired social scientists, trained indigenous leaders, and supported Indian land rights (Flórez 2007). In 1980, the Embera Indigenous Center changed its internal bylaws to create OREWA, and by 1983 Chocó's regional indigenous congress established the organization as Chocó's highest Indian authority. In 1982 OREWA organized the first protests in contemporary Quibdó against discrimination and the massacres occurring in the Andágueda region (Flórez 2007).

Lack of legal titles and denial of indigenous governance created territorial problems, none more dramatic than the events that unfolded in the upper Andágueda River, where non-Indian heirs of an old gold mine claimed a vein found in 1975 by Embera Indians in ancestral land, at this point a forest reserve. Claims to ownership of the mine produced a complicated series of events leading to more than a decade of violence against Emberas involving the old mine owners, police, paramilitary groups, and guerrillas (Hoyos 1994). The conflict eventually positioned OREWA as a chief mediator in this region when it replaced the Claretian intermediaries. It also highlighted the supportive role of the National Land Reform Institute (Instituto Colombiano de la Reforma Agraria, INCORA) in Indian land claims against mestizos who used the Mining Code and regional police authorities to uphold their claims. Between 1978 and 1979, a *cabildo* and later a *resguardo* were constituted in the Andágueda following INCORA's land verification commission (Hoyos 1994).

In the 1980s most communities lacked legal title to their ancestral lands, the only exception being a 24,324-hectare reserve (Flórez 2007). Chocó's indigenous groups were for the most part organized along extended family lines in dispersed communities that had little contact with the government or other outside groups, mainly because the lowland's inhospitable environment served as a protective buffer. This ended around the 1970s when Indians became increasingly exposed to settlers and economic modernization projects. To address this situation, indigenous movement activists identified *resguardos* and *cabildos*—the functioning governance units for Andean Indians, which had been captured by activists in the Cauca Department—as a key legal strategy to protect indigenous governance and territorial rights and to address the social needs of poverty-stricken communities (M. Valencia 2002; Tobón et al. 2012).

As it set out to build a more favorable institutional context for Indian autonomy, OREWA's 1982 founding congress sought to replace police inspectors and Indian townships—the authorities with jurisdiction over Indian communities—with *resguardos* and *cabildos*. To do so, they organized an Indian census that found 27,010 indigenous people living in 157 communities (Flórez 2007). However, the push to create *resguardos* incentivized settlement among seminomadic groups unacquainted with *cabildos*, laying new forms of governance over traditional communities (Tobón et al. 2012). By 1991, 63 *resguardos* had been constituted and 206 communities were affiliated to OREWA. In 1999 Chocó's Indian population had increased to 40,000, and in 2010 there were 119 *resguardos* extending over 1,302,621 hectares covering more than 26 percent of the department's land (Flórez 2007; ASOREWA 2010).

ACIA, OBAPO, and ACADESAN

Chocó's majority black peasant population also lacked property titles and was increasingly vulnerable to private land concessions that threatened its territorial cohesion. This was also a potential problem for Indians who were opposed to further capitalist penetration of ethnic lands (Villa 2001). With OREWA and Claretian support, ACIA mobilized between 1983 and 1987 to protect black territories endangered by timber companies (Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato 2000) and secured 800,000 hectares of land and the community's right to manage their forests. Around this time, ACADESAN organized peasants in the San Juan River, and OBAPO formed in 1985 to raise awareness about the cultural and territorial connections of urban families whose economic subsistence alternated between work in forests and community plots and informal employment in the cities (Organización de Barrios Populares del Chocó 1993).

OREWA supported black peasant territorial rights, pointing to similarities between blacks and Indians who had shared a common territory, even holding discussions on legally formalizing interethnic territories in the lower San Juan River, where there was grassroots support for such a measure (Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia 1990). The interethnic agenda failed as it was hard to sidestep legal limits to joint organizing—only Indians had the right to autonomy-granting *cabildos*, while blacks at the time could only form peasant-user associations.

The black ethnicization process was not without opposition. According to an ACIA leader interviewed, not all black peasants living in what would become collective territories supported the social movement even if they shared a "territorial vision" (interview, Quibdó, 2010), and some holders of individual titles feared segregation, as well as losing access to credits or programs for individual property owners and forfeiting their right to sell land (Hoffman 2000; Rivas 2001). In the end, the ethnicization was relatively successful. The 1993 census found that 45 percent of the Pacific coast's black population adopted the new identity: the highest scores were found in Chocó: 80 percent from the south and center and 95 percent from the north and east identified as "ethnic" blacks (Barbary, Ramírez, and Urrea 2004, 254). The ethnicization process coincided with local or-

ganizational efforts. The Ministry of the Interior has formal record of 140 councils in the Chocó Department with territorial rights to more than 60 percent of the department (DANE 2005). However, the Interethnic Solidarity Forum of Chocó claims that there are 617 councils, representing about 85 percent of Chocó's population (Programa Presidencial 2010).

NEGOTIATING A NEW TERRITORIAL AGENDA (1991–1993)

The National Constituent Assembly, elected in 1990 to redraft the 1886 Constitution, addressed ethnic social movement claims represented by two elected indigenous delegates. The Afro-Colombian movement failed to elect a delegate as it was generally difficult to unify Colombia's diverse black population under one banner.⁷ Black peasant communities from the Pacific divided their support between OREWA's Francisco Rojas Birry, who was also the National Indigenous Organization's representative at the Constituent Assembly, and Lorenzo Muelas from the Association of Indigenous Authorities (Sánchez, Roldán, and Sánchez 1993). Not having a direct representative reduced Afro-Colombian visibility in the assembly; so to raise awareness different protests were prepared, including peaceful takeovers of the Haitian Embassy, Bogotá's INCORA offices, and Quibdó's Cathedral (Centro de Pastoral Afrocolombiano 2003).

In the case of indigenous communities, new laws built on prior legislation addressing their specific rights to collective lands, namely Law 89 of 1890 (Sánchez, Roldán, and Sánchez 1993). Law 60/1993 on political, fiscal, and administrative decentralization covered cabildos, which were also included in the General Participation System (Law 715/2001) to receive central government fiscal transfers. In recent years the transfers amount to about 436,000 pesos (US\$242) per person per year, according to the government (Presidencia de la República de Colombia 2005).

In the case of black peasants, there was no legal precedent to contemplate similar collective rights for riverine communities. Between 1819 and 1991, the law offered nothing other than incorporation into national society as mestizo peasants (C. Valencia 2002). For example, the Agrarian Reform laws of the 1960s covered black peasant claims to land under individual property titles. If they also received credits that they failed to pay, land could be sold to cover the loss (Hoffman 2000). Law 2/1959 on forest development and natural resource conservation placed the Pacific under reserves subject to government-designed Forest Ordination Plans that destined some lands for agriculture, hydroelectric development, or logging. Because it viewed black peasant communities as settlers encroaching on national forests, the law simply denied black consuetudinary rights (Villa 2004).

This changed after the Constituent Assembly passed Transitory Article 55 on the rights of riparian black communities, establishing a special commission made up of regional social movement organizations and a mix of central government

7. In the 2005 census, 11 percent of Colombians—or about four million people—self-identified as black (DANE 2007). Roughly one million people live on the Pacific coast and in other areas where collective land rights constitute a key component of black identity.

institutions involved in planning, governance, and natural resource management, and giving it until 1993 to spell out these rights. The commission redacted Law 70/1993 which created community councils (hereinafter referred to as councils) based on prevalent customary forms of organization among riverine black communities (Jaramillo 2001). The law enabled councils to oversee collective property and natural resources, divide land internally, choose legal representatives, and settle conflicts that may be solved by traditional authorities.

Law 70 capitalized on the stewardship role of these communities, an indication that government elites accepted the new identity as a means to achieve forest conservation (Rivas 2001; Oslender 2002). The councils are thus not recipients of fiscal transfers and must negotiate funding with municipal governments or seek outside financial support to do their work. Councils serve as community intermediaries in local administrations, a situation that has produced rivalries between municipalities and councils over general matters of jurisdiction in the provision of justice and environmental planning (Rivas 2001).

THE TERRITORIALIZATION OF NEW INSTITUTIONS (1994–2010)

Once key laws were passed in 1993 to enable ethnopolitical autonomy, social movement activists and local authorities began to reorganize *cabildos* or form councils. This required lengthy procedures to delimit territories, train new leaders, or explain new rights and responsibilities to community members. But violence and forced displacement made it increasingly difficult to implement the reforms, a particular challenge for black communities that were just beginning to adopt the momentous legislation enabling councils. According to Mario Angulo, an activist in the Black Communities Process (Proceso de Comunidades Negras, PCN), councils are just beginning to negotiate and adapt resource management plans for the first time (interview, Buenaventura, 2010) but continue to face great difficulties with rule enforcement (Vélez 2009). Some communities are successfully constructing wider networks of community councils, or *consejos mayores*, to strengthen and unify local authorities around similar collective action objectives.

OREWA's 2005 capitulation highlights the difficulties facing ethnic-territorial authorities embedded in violent geographies and detrimental political environments. OREWA's breakdown was formally explained as a consequence of increased threats against communities and leaders and restrictions on the movement of people and goods due to armed conflict that destroyed regional social networks (ASOREWA 2011). But there was more to the story, namely the absence of internal and external controls over organizational procedures, especially those coming from the communities. According to off-the-record conversations with OREWA staff, this allowed a few insiders with privileged access to OREWA's finances and legal instruments to embezzle resources destined for health and education and to use the organization as debt collateral. In the end, organizational assets were embargoed by courts, archives were lost, and OREWA's leadership became bitterly divided. To save their organization, *cabildos* assembled at OREWA's 2005 congress resorted to a legal maneuver using Decree 1088 of 1993

on the regulation of traditional Indian associations, which allowed them to create a new entity named ASOREWA: the Association of Embera Dobida, Katío, Chamí, and Tule Indigenous Cabildos of Chocó–OREWA.

According to Patricia Tobón, an indigenous lawyer for ASOREWA, this resulted in two OREWAs functioning at the same time, as well as many cabildos splintering away to form smaller associations (interview, Quibdó, 2010). ASOREWA began a slow process of reuniting its social base at the same time that it started civil and criminal investigations to hold accountable those suspected of embezzlement, while old and new activists came together to restart programs from scratch. At the time of my visit, they were still clarifying events leading to the creation of ASOREWA and rebuilding trust among other social organizations and government officials. Today, the old OREWA remains on paper and no longer functions. This protects the new OREWA from additional lawsuits. OREWA's downfall resulted from a combination of factors, including violence, but also from the misuse of new rules reshaping the relationship between indigenous lands and communities and other institutions.

Territorial Dynamics, Intermediaries, and Local Decision Making

With decentralization, national government institutions delegated responsibilities to local institutions with which regional ethnic movements had developed mostly adversarial relations in the past (Pardo and Álvarez 2001). Before the reforms, organizations such as OREWA functioned as intermediaries between local indigenous authorities and national or regional institutions, often setting central government institutions such as INCORA against antagonistic departmental executives in order to advance ethnic rights. Some interviewees claimed that this concentration of authority under regional organizations produced stronger regional leaderships with the capacity to defy regional or national authorities. Though Decree 1088/1993 presently allows regional organizations to become territorial authorities, the cabildo is now at the center of local decision making. Regional organizations at the moment assume roles as board members in environmental bodies or as managers of subsidized health resources or education programs, including schools, bilingual curricula, and teacher contracts. ASOREWA currently runs a Health Care Institution (Institución Prestadora de Salud, IPS) known as Erchichi Jai.

Decentralization thus recast cabildos as the core of indigenous governance, reducing the leading role of department-level indigenous organizations as intermediaries between Indian communities and the national government. From here on, indigenous governance had to build upon intermediations between cabildos and local and departmental institutions, a situation that required a careful balance between customary and statutory laws that would make sense to communities, and not simply replicate old clientelistic practices learned from patronage networks of political parties or local government (Oslender 2001). Not surprisingly, most communities were ill prepared to assume administrative functions or coordinate fiscal resources and development projects with municipal authorities; likewise departmental or municipal authorities were usually unsupportive or unprepared

to address ethnopolitical autonomy, giving it very low priority unless pressured by indigenous authorities. Nonetheless, some cabildos affirmed their authority when they were able to address health and conflict adjudication and, most importantly, to resist armed groups, provide security, and prevent forced recruitment of youths (Rodríguez 2006).

The Muriel Mining Company's defective previous consultation process was widely cited in interviews with NGOs and ethnoterritorial authorities as an example to highlight the limits of ethnic-territorial governance in Chocó. The project is located on the border between the departments of Chocó and Antioquia, directly impacting the territories of at least eleven indigenous and two black communities in the Jiguamiandó basin, and indirectly affecting the lands of communities in five municipalities in both departments. In 2006, a delegation of two black community councils from Murindó and Curvaradó and one cabildo from Murindó met in Carmen del Darién (Chocó) and Murindó (Antioquia)⁸ with company officials, and representatives from the Ministry of Mining and Energy and the Ministry of the Interior and Justice to approve gold extraction. Once exploration began, the company and national governments were accused by eleven cabildos and councils from the Jiguamiandó basin for circumventing a consultation process with the communities directly affected by the project. These authorities also claimed that the councils and cabildos involved in the negotiation were not legitimate authorities in their own communities.⁹ Eventually, the Constitutional Court's ruling T-769 of 2009 stopped the project on arguments that due process had not been followed, and a 2011 *tutela* ruling (T-693/11) further endorsed principles of free, prior, and informed consultation during and after the implementation of any development project, citing the Muriel company as a key case.¹⁰

The above underscores how the reforms tested new leaderships and local channels of representation. In some places, traditional authorities such as the Embera *jaibanás* (healers or spiritual guides) overlapped with cabildo leaders formed by social movement organizations, or whose Spanish language skills or connections with municipal governments or other local authorities gained them influence inside and outside their communities. Meanwhile fiscal transfers created incentives to formalize cabildos, which in some places had beneficial impacts on the community's well-being, but as delegates to OREWA's 1995 Congress warned, also motivated revenue-seeking leaders to form smaller cabildos (Flórez 2007).

There were also generational changes at the center of divisive leadership dynamics. According to Jairo Guerra, director of the Environmental Research Institute of the Pacific, "organic" or peasant, rural or traditional leaders were replaced by well-traveled, formally educated or urbanized leaders who isolated themselves from the grass roots once they became heavily invested in cultivating political careers in national and international social movement networks (interview, Quibdó

8. Roughly 100 km southeast of the town of Riosucio in map 1.

9. Corte Constitucional de Colombia, Sentencia T-769/09 (October 29, 2009), <http://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/relatoria/2009/T-769-09.htm>.

10. Corte Constitucional de Colombia, Sentencia T-693/11 (September 23, 2011), <http://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/relatoria/2011/T-693-11.htm>.

2010). This seemed to increase demands on local organizations to secure funds to support a larger staff of leaders. ASOREWA's lawyers complained about leaders only visiting their base communities when departmental or national congresses approached to proselytize and secure the support of delegations that decide on leadership positions. Some interviewees from ASOREWA and Quibdó's Social Pastoral Commissions also argued that as violence escalated, OREWA and other local organizations across the region stopped doing grassroots work, further disconnecting themselves from the communities and thus from local controls.

A final challenge for ethnic territorial institutions was their embeddedness in regional and national governments undergoing high levels of corruption. Government officials and sometimes illegal groups were using local organization as fronts for illegal transactions. Administrative corruption in Chocó reached a low point in 2007 when the attorney general's office opened 536 investigations involving 602 public officials in 24 municipalities (*El País* 2007). Investigations found gross cases of embezzlement, one involving a drug trafficker known as "Chocó's other governor" who had signed 13 contracts worth 2 million dollars using the department's public health system (*Semana* 2007a). Meanwhile, impoverished and isolated communities had only the Catholic Church to alleviate the most basic humanitarian needs (*Semana* 2007b), a claim supported by ASOREWA's lawyers and the staff at Quibdó's social pastoral commission (interview, Quibdó, 2010). Meanwhile, in violation of the Mining Code, the Ministry of Mining and Energy granted 9,000 fraudulent mining titles covering about 4 percent of the country's territory, including forest reserves, páramos, and natural parks, while another 20,000 permits expanding to 20 percent of the country were in line for approval (*Semana* 2011c).

Land-use Changes

The most unfavorable impact on local authority structures resulted from the transformation of traditional activities, including mining in black communities and food production and logging, which had all been labor-intensive traditional practices. As local and national markets increased demand for these products, capitalist intermediaries gained a stronger presence and intensified resource- and capital-intensive practices that transformed economies and landscapes across the region (Escobar 2008). In this sense, Indian communities in northern Chocó constitute a dramatic example of disenfranchisement, pauperization, and food insecurity after cattle ranchers cornered them in their own territories, completely overhauling traditional practices of production (Tobón et al. 2012). This section highlights four key areas of land-use change to describe the ways local authority structures were either undermined or co-opted by business practices or land-use changes.

Coca, mining, and biofuels provide examples of groups financing illegal activities at the expense of ethnic communities. Coca cultivations increased in the San Juan and Atrato River areas and Bahía Solano after eradication policies in southern departments forced *cocaleros* into other regions (*Semana* 2011a; Restrepo 2011). Communities there are increasingly terrorized, confined, and even massa-

cred by drug traffickers who are co-opting leaders and organizations to facilitate this trade.

In the case of mining, irregular activities increased in black territories. By 2008 most rivers were occupied by dredgers and backhoes, many owned and operated by armed groups, according to an environmental authority in Quibdó who wished to remain anonymous. This person also claimed that since councils are weak authorities and property in black territories is managed along extended family lines, many influential families were negotiating deals to bring in mining equipment in exchange for a 13–24 percent share of the profit. This same source complained about the government's inability to prevent environmental degradation because civilian authorities cannot travel through paramilitary- or guerrilla-controlled zones without the support of the military. Most mining activities proceed without proper environmental licenses or management plans and lack oversight from the Ministry of the Environment, the Colombian Institute of Geology and Mining, or the Autonomous Corporation of Chocó (Corporación Autónoma Regional para el Desarrollo Sostenible del Chocó, CODECHOCÓ) the region's development and environmental authority (*Semana* 2008).

In the case of the palm oil industry, government investigations in the municipalities of Carmen del Darién (Chocó) and Belén de Bajirá (Antioquia) revealed paramilitary connections and accused companies of usurping the territories of three councils, destroying their organization, and displacing people (Quevedo and Laverde 2008). The attorney general accused CODECHOCÓ, the National Institute for Rural Development, and the Ministry of Agriculture for failing to control these companies. On top of the human rights violations and deforestation, the companies operated with army protection and obtained loans of 11 billion pesos (US\$6.1 million) from the Agrarian Bank.

Meanwhile, community forestry is expanding the influence of business intermediaries that can provide the management plans, environmental assessments, and technical information required by law (Mejía 2009). Since most communities lack the capacity to execute or pay for such reports, they work with intermediaries, often agreeing to provide labor and transportation to commercial centers in exchange for low wages or small profit margins. Logging is also increasingly managed by illegal groups that communities fail to denounce out of fear (Mejía 2009).

Finally, the Delfines Community Council near Bahía Solano became an example of local corruption in environmental management. In 2006 the council obtained a three-year CODECHOCÓ permit to extract 13,000 m³ of native forest from 300 hectares which they then transferred to Prima Colombia Hardwood, a subsidiary of Canada's Prima-REM (*Semana* 2011b). President Uribe had agreed to a 15-year, 1.5 billion dollar extraction contract with Prima (Molano 2011), and another report says that council leaders also allowed Prima to exploit 44,596 hectares of forests (*Semana* 2011b). CODECHOCÓ claims that it cancelled the permit after detecting irregularities (*Territorio Chocoano Noticias* 2011). The council claims that it went through a process of free, prior, and informed consultation whereby the community agreed to cede 70 percent of the collective land to Prima in exchange for a percentage of the profit. Neighboring councils however, accused Delfines of corruption and clientelism (Molano 2011). Rodríguez (2006) claims that legal

representatives from Delfines had a loose interpretation of local autonomy, attributing to themselves the right to make decisions without consulting or being accountable to community members, even breaking previously accorded resource management agreements.

Commercial logging, gold mining, and palm oil and coca cultivation thus empowered business intermediaries, technical experts, or violent entrepreneurs. As with the set of political reforms, few communities could readily incorporate such business practices that monetized local economies and affected food production.

CONCLUSION

Chocó's ethnic movements have pressed for autonomy to safeguard the livelihoods of black and indigenous groups as resource-intensive economies threatened ancestral territories. However, after achieving the constitutional protection of local ethno-political autonomy, most communities failed to benefit from the new rights. Research on Colombia's ethnic politics points to the detrimental effects of human rights violations, neoliberal development, and violent appropriation of regional economies, and suggests that communities with capacities to resist and hold governments accountable, though under great stress, are preserving local decision making. Cauca's indigenous resistance provides the clearest example of what constitutes such capacities. This resistance dates back to colonial times (Zuluaga 2001) and combines contentious and formal political mechanisms that have been adapted to different political regimes (Velasco 2011) and that have drawn lessons from other contentious organizations, such as those of peasants or workers (Cortés 1984). Resistance also includes economic strategies that allow interaction with regional markets in order to support communal economies (Pachón 1996). This history of engagement with outside authorities, contentious social groups, and surrounding markets not only helped sustain local economies and cultural cohesiveness but also supported some level of self-determination even in dire circumstances.

My work highlights how local actors territorialized new and old institutions or adapted them to specific local political and economic realities to achieve different objectives. In the 1980s Chocó's Indian activists shaped a territorial agenda of land repossession influenced by four groundbreaking events: Cauca's Indian movement claims for land, culture and autonomy; the local Catholic Church's encouragement of land repossession; INCORA's support for collective land titles; and new international laws on the rights of tribal groups within nation states. This reinterpretation of local and international laws opened a window of opportunity for Chocó's black peasants to achieve collective land rights by advocating a spatially based environmentalist identity later endorsed by the national government as part of a conservationist strategy.

Chocó's ethnic organizations thus constructed a distinct ethnogeography, which was eventually sanctioned by decentralization reforms that approved Indigenous Territorial Entities and black councils. As decentralization modified the relationship between different tiers of government, local and regional actors were expected to deliver new forms of interinstitutional coordination. This was dif-

difficult to achieve under Chocó's institutional setting weakened by armed conflict, government corruption and obstructionism, and capitalist extraction. In such a context, the new framework endowed local intermediaries with increasing controls over communal decisions, disenfranchising communities and organizations across the board.

By the late 1990s, the reforms had failed to produce the intended results for a number of reasons. First, not everyone could comply with complex institutional demands. Second, the reforms prompted new types of leaderships that in some cases undermined traditional authorities or in others placed themselves outside community controls. Finally, they provided some leaders with new controls over communal lands, which leaders then used to negotiate with business intermediaries.

This failure of reform highlights the significance of resistance strategies as developed over time by communities in other regions of Colombia, and demonstrates that re-creating such conditions will be difficult for peoples whose interaction with Colombia's current institutional and economic dynamics is more recent. Local autonomy is thus increasingly contingent on the support of regional and national governments. Ultimately however, autonomy will result once ordinary community members find inter- and intrainstitutional mechanisms to scrutinize the work of leaders and institutions representing their interests.

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