International Institute of Social Studies

Gendered meanings of place/space, community and empowerment

Experiences of Afro-Colombian displaced women from the Pacific Region, Colombia

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Alejandra Ramírez Bermeo

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Members of the Examining Committee:

Dubravka Zarkov

Kees Biekart

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Inquiries:

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List of Acronyms

ACNUR	Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)
ACOPLE	Alianza de Organizaciones por lo Emocional (Alliance of organizations for the emotional)
ASIMUCAHO	Asociación de Mujeres Cabeza de Hogar (Association of Women Head of Household)
AUC	Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defense of Colombia)
AFRODES	Asociación Nacional de Afrocolombianos Desplazados (National Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians)
CODHES	Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento (Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement)
ELN	Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)
FARC-EP	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army)
PAPSIVI	Programa de atención psicosocial y salud integral a víctimas (Psychosocial and comprehensive health care program for victims)
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
RPM	Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres (Peaceful Women's Route)
OCHA	Oficina para la Coordinación de Asuntos Humanitarios (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs)
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
UARIV	Unidad de Atención y Registro Único de Víctimas (Unit of Attention and Unique Registry of Victims)

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Abstract

This research is about the meanings of place, the processes of displacement, community building, and struggles for empowerment narrated by Afro-Colombian women community leaders in Cali, Colombia. The section *Reforma rural integral* part of the 'Peace Agreement' signed by the Colombian government and the FARC-EP defines the place as an economic asset restricting it to its physic meaning in contrast to the definitions given by the women who also attached to place symbolic and social meanings.

This study relies on a phenomenon of individual and collective political struggles around place/space in which these five women engage in collective action countering injustices perpetrated against the displaced Afro-Colombian people during Colombian violent conflict. In doing so, these women build their roles within the new communities in Cali following or challenging patterns of gender identity and engaged in institutional processes in order to provide themselves means to survive in the city and overcome the label of 'victims'.

The intent is to demonstrate how through the narratives the five displaced Afro-Colombian women create a place for themselves in different ways, through intersections of gender, race, age, and family, as well as through loss and struggle. They show women's gendered perception of the old and the new places that go beyond economic benefits and that influence women's empowerment.

Relevance to Development Studies

Displacement is observed as a milestone in the lives of women who as consequence of the Colombian armed conflict were forced to leave behind social bonds, traditional practices, and symbolic connections with the environment that surrounded them. Once the women arrived at the new context barriers on economic, political, and social issues are met. Then, in order to overcome this situation certain conditions of development are required, such as finalizing or continue school, courses on food production, skills training or micro-enterprise, among others. Only few cases manage to access courses where they are taught about victims' law, human rights, or gender. For this reason, development is an important element for the reestablishment of victim's rights.

From this perspective, it can be said that displaced women coming from a divided society gather together in communities pursuing the rewards of future development. Development in terms of enhancement of individual and collective choices and social justice where meanings of place are encountered. Though, many cases do not overcome their category of 'victims', some women manage to take advantage of the opportunities given by the new context, becoming active agents rather than passive, challenging gender roles and becoming representatives of their communities in institutional spaces.

This study shows that women are not talking from an idea of emancipation in the classical development way (men vis a vis women), but in terms of embeddedness in the community and opportunities, knowledge, and recognition. Furthermore, this research brings a new perspective to the debates about women's emancipation and empowerment by connecting notions of place as socially and

symbolically constructed where ethnic/racial and gender power relations influence the women's role in the society.

Keywords

Chapter 1
Introduction

The 24th of November of 2016 the final Peace Agreement was signed by the main actors: the Colombian government and the FARC-EP (in English, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army). The implementation of Agreement's has six chapters (Integral rural reform, Political Participation, Solution to the problem of illicit drugs, Victims, and Mechanisms for implementation and verification) started on 2nd December that year.

For the aim of this Research Paper, two chapters are important: first chapter *Reforma rural integral* (Integral rural reform) and chapter 5 *Víctimas* (Victims). In the first chapter, the Colombian government and the FARC-EP shared the intention of reversing the consequences of the armed conflict, in order to restore to the victims of forced displacement and the communities their rightful ownership of, and voluntary return to the land (rural territories) from which they left (Peace Agreement 2016: 17). In this regard the section on *Víctimas* considers that "The application of the land restitution policy will obey, among others, the technical criteria of historical density of the dispossession and the conditions for the return" (Peace Agreement 2016: 184). People who would benefit by this land restitution process would have technical and financial support for the reconstruction of their life projects and strategies for revenue generation, "strategies for recovery and reconstruction of the social fabric; strengthening of the organizational processes and the construction of the historical memory for reconciliation" (Peace Agreement 2016: 184).

The proposed Integral Rural Reform implies that for the government and the FARC the land, and the place/space from which people were forced to flee, is seen as physical, and geographical– as land that can be used for economic activities such as agriculture or building. But such understanding does not consider the social and symbolic meanings of the place and the land. For the five displaced Afro-Colombian women leaders from the Colombian Pacific coast living in Cali that took part in this research, physical, symbolic, and social meanings of place/space are intertwined. Therefore, the place/space that they are claiming as a result of the Peace Agreement it is not necessarily the land in the rural areas they left.

These five women embody intersections of race/ethnicity and gender with leadership position in the communities they are members of. They have shared collective exercises of displacement, emplacement, and empowerment with their communities, and have narrated them to me, offering specific perspectives on the meaning of place, community and empowerment. Displacement – and especially one caused by violent conflict - is often seen through the prism of victimhood in literature, in political scenarios, and interventions. However, although this research does not deny realities of victimisation by violence and displacement, the focus is on how women reconstruct their lives and become leaders in their new communities, while continuing to relate to the places and communities they have been forced to leave. This means that the women I talked with want "to use [their] capacity in one way or another, to be an agent rather than a passive being, a victim (…) [they] will try to influence the course of events as much as

possible, rather than sit back and suffer changes" (Eduards 1994 as cited in Kaufman and Williams 2010: 64).

1.1 Socio-historical context

The conflict in Colombia dates from 1940s and 1950s, when the country passed through a long period of confrontation between two major parties: the Conservatives and the Liberals. This period until 1957 was called 'La Violencia' ('The Violence'). It ended with a pact between the two sides in which the sharing of power was interchanged every four years. The agreement called 'El Frente Nacional' (the 'National Front') allowed these two parties to maintain exclusive power not giving chance to other movements to participate in the democratic agenda.

While the elites distributed the power and the positions in the government, the unequal development in different regions of the country and the unequal distribution of the land raised feelings of discontent among the population. That gave birth in 1964 to two left-wing guerrillas: the FARC-EP and the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional, in English National Liberation Army). By the 1980's both groups managed to expand from small rural areas to wider regions in which extortion and selective kidnapping were the motors for their financial support[1].

In the 1980's armed right-wing groups started organizing as counterparts of the guerrillas by expelling them from the territories they controlled. These private armed groups, called 'paramilitaries', were constituted as 'self-defence' unities that in some cases were formed by members of the state military, politicians and private actors that initially were concerned about protecting the civil community or their land properties from the actions of the guerrillas. However, many of the paramilitaries started working for powerful drug cartels by looking after the drug shipments, protecting powerful landowners' territories, and killing on behalf of their own drug trafficking business. In 1997 many paramilitaries formed a coalition called Atodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC; United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia) whose actions were camouflaging their illicit economic activities, including drug trafficking, expulsion of population, kidnapping and extortion.

In the disputes over the territory, the guerrillas, the AUC and the official state military (when present) unleashed violence that hugely affected rural communities. Systematic murders, massacres, disappearances, sexual violence, and displacement intensified the feelings of abandonment of the rural communities by the State. As stated by the Colombian organisation Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres (in English Women's Peaceful Route):

> The land is the most coveted good in war because it obeys to the war strategic needs as a corridor for supply, or for its natural wealth as agricultural production or subsoil wealth (…) [E]xpressions of explicit violence by armed actors

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[1] Although other guerrilla groups formed later, they are not addressed in this research because the only guerrilla groups that have stayed active up to 2016 are FARC and ELN.

have to do with the purpose of appropriating land as the main cause of displacement (2013: 113).

Several governments tried to put an end to the conflict, but a number of reasons have made resolution impossible. Finally, from 2002 onwards, during the administration of Álvaro Uribe Vélez, the so-called 'Democratic Security Policy' – in practice a military strategy, supported by the US anti-terrorism campaign - was introduced in order to defeat the illegal armed groups militarily. This program made possible the demobilisation of the AUC members from 2003 to 2006 under the 'Justice and Peace' law. The process raised many doubts among the public, as the small drug organisations appeared from the remains of once bigger AUC structure.

With the departure of Álvaro Uribe Vélez in 2010, the former Defence Minister of his government, Juan Manuel Santos Calderón, arrived at the presidency. With the advantage of weakened guerrilla due to the 'Democratic Security Policy', Santos Calderón decided to try again a strategy of dialogues with the FARC. The process begun in 2012 and culminated in November 2016 with the Peace Agreement.

Prior to the peace negotiations between the FARC and the government of Santos Calderón, in 2011, the *Law 1448 Victims and Land Restitution Act* and the *Law Decree 4635* specifically addressing Afro-descendent communities were created as tools with which the State undertook to generate a series of economic, symbolic, psychological, educational, and political strategies, seeking to re-establish the rights of populations affected by violent conflict. The Chapter 5 of the Peace Agreement on Victims emphasises many of the commitments from these previous laws, adding a gender component throughout the document. In addition, the participation of the victims at the table of peace negotiations allowed the agreements to target the direct needs of the population and promote strategies differentiated by ethnic status.

1.1.1 The Pacific region

REGIONS AND DEPARTMENTS OF COLOMBIA

CARIBBEAN REGION
Atlántico, Bolívar, Cesar, Córdoba, La Guajira, Sucre, Magdalena, San Andrés y Providencia

PACIFIC REGION
Cauca, Chocó, Nariño, Valle del Cauca

EASTERN PLAINS REGION
Arauca, Casanare, Meta, Vichada,

AMAZON REGION
Amazonas, Caquetá, Guanía, Guaviare, Putumayo, Vaupés

THE ANDEAN REGION
Antioquia, Boyacá, Caldas, Cundinamarca, Huila, Norte de Santander, Quindío, Risaralda, Santander, Tolima

○ El Charco (Nariño)
○ Santa María de Timbiquí (Cauca)
○ Buenaventura (Valle del Cuaca)
○ Cali (Capital of Valle del Cuaca)

Map 1 Regions and departments of Colombia. Source: the author

The Colombian Pacific region is an area known for its high ecological and biological diversity, wealth of natural resources and its population - mostly indigenous and afro-descendent. The low social mobility, geographical isolation, and institutional weakness make for the high poverty rates, quality of life below the national average and reliance on extractive economies and politics (Acemoglu and Robinson as cited in Galvis et al. 2016: 4). These practices of extraction sometimes clash with the worldview of the grassroots communities that inhabit the region and whose relationship with their *territory*[2] has symbolic and social meanings.

By 2015 one-third of Pacific region population lived in poverty, which includes low health security, inadequate water and sewer coverage, deprivation in educational achievement and low quality of employment (Galvis et al. 2016: 21, 24). These conditions, fed by the absence of the State, have facilitated the presence of illegal armed groups (especially in rural areas) whether guerrillas, paramilitaries, or drug traffickers since the end of the XX century. Their fight over control of the resources (of mining or logging), illegal crops, and routes for the trafficking of arms and drugs, placed Pacific region communities in the middle of violent actions.

Consequently, the population have been forced to cede territories to the illegal groups. People were violently displaced from rural areas (usually) to cities in which the new place and new social contexts and relationships crated new

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[2] In terms of Grueso and Arroyo, *territory* is not only a possessed property, but "is seen as a constructed by the communities on the basis of the 'use spaces' (espacios de uso) of the ecosystems that sustain the life project of the community. The territory is the space where the social matrix is woven generation after generation, linking past, present, and future in a close relationship with the natural environment" (2005: 102).

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dynamics. Hence, displaced people lose not just their land and the link with their *territory*, but also the networks and relationships built there, and sometimes their role in the community also changed.

The new context provides the internally displaced people with a set of varied challenges and prospects, that according to Bjarnsen and Vigh "may result in new opportunities for empowerment in or liberation from suppressive social hierarchies" (2016: 12). This process of liberation might bring development of specific socio-affective attachments to the new place, as well as the old, that could lead to creation of different community ties and could trigger a reconstruction of the self, necessary in the new context.

The Peace Agreement supposes new considerations for the internally displaced people. In its approach to the restitution of land, the State assumes the meaning of land and territory solely as an economic asset and omits to understand the meanings of the land linked to identity, sense of belonging and ancestral heritage, or its social relevance evident in community networks and relationships. But as my research with women shows, social and symbolic meanings of both the places they had to leave and the places where they reconstructed their lives are as important as the actual plots of land they are invited by the government to go back to.

1.1.2 Women in wartime mobilities

According to the Consejo Noruego para Refugiados (NRC - Norwegian Refugee Council) and the Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados (ACNUR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) (2014: 2) the major percentage of victims of displacement by 2014 were women (51,2% women in contrast to 48,6% men, regardless of ethnicity). Displacement bought the loss of "individual and cultural identity, the silence or separation of community spaces, the fracture of affective ties and the violent transformation of daily dynamics in their family and social relationship" (Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres as cited in NRC and ACNUR 2014: 4). Being an Afro-Colombian woman adds another layer of vulnerability, as recognized by the Colombian state (see Ministry of Labour, in UARIV 2013: 25) as well as women's organizations:

> "The cultural impact [of the conflict] has been especially relevant among Afro-descendant and indigenous women. Being black or indigenous, being poor and women, have been conditions that have led to greater victimisation. Violence is transversal to the conditions of marginalisation and poverty of different ethnic groups" (Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres 2013: 469).

Thus, the power of resilience is a force that should be recognised in order to understand women's agency and their experiences and strategies in the new context.

Some Afro-Colombian women have developed new networks of community support in the new places, have gained access to different forms of livelihood means and have become leaders in their neighbourhoods achieving recognition within their communities. The possibilities offered by the city where majority of the displaced have gone have allowed them to access education, develop new sense of belonging and strengthen their sense of belonging to the

territory from which they came, as well as enhance their autonomy and self-esteem.

1.2 Research questions and objectives

Main question:

How are meanings of place, the processes of displacement, community building, and struggles for empowerment narrated by Afro-Colombian women community leaders in Cali, Colombia?

Sub-questions:

1. What are the **social and symbolic meanings given to the places** left behind and newly inhabited, by displaced Afro-Colombian women?
2. How women narrate their **belonging** to different places and communities, and their **struggles** to establish new life after displacement?
3. How are **gender and ethnicity/race** embedded in these narratives?

Objectives:

My theoretical objective is to strengthen the body of knowledge about relationships between displacement, women's empowerment, and community in a post-conflict context, and to specifically contribute to the knowledge about Afro-Colombian women and communities. On the one hand, there is very little theoretical work about displaced Afro-Colombian women that are leaders; on the other hand, the literature that does exist presents displaced women in a war setting mostly from a victimhood approach. My perspective diverges from this one, while simultaneously acknowledging the loss and the violence they experienced.

My social objective is to contribute to the social justice by addressing injustices in which knowledge and experience of the minorities and victims of displacement are not being considered to build a stable and durable peace.

I also hope to contribute to the social policy interventions in support of women's empowerment. In this regard, Bauder stated:

> What is needed is a fundamental challenge to the idea that one ideology can legitimately dominate over another (…) Social policies must ensure that local communities have voices in the debate of societal norms and expectations of work, education, family, or whatever categories these communities identify (2001: 288).

My research is an attempt to contribute to such challenges to theory, policy, and practice.

1.3 Justification

This research is relevant to a conflict or post-conflict setting, particularly for Colombia that has just entered a process of peacebuilding. The Chapter 5

of the Peace Agreements regarding Victims and its section on land restitution promises that people forcefully displaced by conflict will receive back their land. However, not all of those people are planning to move back to their former *territories*. In this regard, there is a need for a broader understanding of what place means to the displaced people, and what are their motivations to build their life in specific places, in order to inform future applications of the policy on behalf the victims and their rights.

1.4 Methodologies and Methods

This project is based on interviews and participant observation (following Peretz 2004) of five displaced Afro-Colombian women from the Colombian Pacific coast, living in Cali, and the meanings they give the old and new places of their lives. Gillian Rose notes that "feminist, post-colonial and post-Marxist critiques argue that all knowledge is produced in specific circumstances and that those circumstances shape it in some way" (1997: 305). The knowledges of these five women, based on personal experiences, are the ones in which the meanings of places are embedded, including circumstances of the armed conflict, forced displacement, emplacement, struggles of reconstructing one's life, activism, loss, and resilience.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty (as cited in Peake and Trotz 1999: 2) has noted that "the image of women as homogeneous and victimised was productive of the 'Third World woman' as a fragile category in a discursive framework in which 'Western feminism' could be seen as the only side of agency and critical femininity". In order to defeat these frames of victimhood in which images of women are essentialised, and with the purpose of capturing the complexity of their subjectivities as well as their diverse experiences, I have conducted this research by paying attention to empowerment and self-realization after displacement.

The five women I interviewed come from rural settings, and now live in a city. They belong to non-governmental organisations where they play an active role as leaders, and their voices represent Afro-Colombian displaced women from the Pacific region. They are women of influence. They are not requesting for land restitution in the rural areas and do not plan to go back to the regions from which they came. Instead, they are claiming physical, symbolic, and social places in Cali. But the places they came from still matter to them.

All the interviewed women agreed for their true names to be used in the research. The interviews were semi-structured and divided into two themes, the first one concentrated on the past, the second associated with present experiences in Cali. Additionally, I conducted a mapping exercise with each woman in order to identify the places - in their *territories* and in Cali - the women considered the most important. The maps helped me "see" what was dear to the women in each context.

The method of a semi-structured interview made it possible to "unfold in a conversational manner offering the participants the chance to explore issues they [felt were] important" (Longhurst, 2003: 143). I asked very broad questions about their notions and feeling about places in relation to the process of Land Restitution and the life they lead before the forced displacement in terms of

community participation, hopes and expectations, as well as their current life in Cali.

Additionally, I also used observation method, joining as an observer in the meetings and gatherings of women's organisations and community groups. There I could observe how they negotiate their leadership in groups varied by age, gender, and ethnicity. In three out of five cases I conducted the interviews in the women's houses where I could also see very briefly the particularities of their neighbourhoods.

1.4.1 Interviewed women

Before moving to Cali, I started contacting organisations, institutions, and colleagues whose work is related to voluntary activities for displaced communities, women's groups, or Afro-Colombian cultural spaces. The first contact yielded a link with Erlendy Cuero Bravo. To find the other women, I talked to various colleagues when I arrived in the field, went to various organisations, and participated in a number of group meetings and workshops. I went to the Casa Matria para Mujeres (Matria House for Women), the organisation Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres and a meeting of the Mesa Municipal de Mujeres (Women's Municipal Table) where I was guided to three women: Elena Hinestroza Venté, Francelina Carabalí Torres, and Eloísa Montaño Guerrero. Eloísa introduced me to Elsy Johana Mancilla Paz. These are the women who shared their stories with me:

Elena Hinestroza Venté is a 52-year-old singer from Santa María de Timbiquí (Cauca) where she was the leader of a women's organisation and women's music group. Back there, she had a contract-based work with the municipality. Nowadays she lives in the neighbourhood Los Lagos, leads a music group 'Integración Pacífica' and is a member in La Casa Cultural 'El Chontaduro' (in English, Cultural House 'El Chontaduro'). She does not have a permanent job.

Francelina Carabalí Torres is 52-year-old poetess and storyteller from El Charco (Nariño) where she was a teacher (she had contract-based work with the municipality) and the leader of a women's organisation. Nowadays she lives in the neighbourhood Llanogrande leads the organisation ASIMUCAHO and is a member in La Escuela de Identidad Cultural 'Ser Quien Soy' (in English, School of Cultural Identity 'Being Who I Am'). She works in The Program of Psychosocial Care and Integral Health to Victims (PAPSIVI).

Erlendy Cuero Bravo is a 42-year-old leader, the one with most influence in the group. Having born in Buenaventura she started her engagements with the communities once she was displaced to Cali. Nowadays, she lives in the neighbourhood Villa del Sur, is the coordinator of AFRODES Cali (Asociación Nacional de Afrocolombianos Desplazados, in English National Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians) and its vice-president at the national level, and she is the leader in 'El Camino Propuesto'. Erlendy has a stable job in ACOPLE (Alianza de Organizaciones por lo Emocional, in English Alliance of Organizations for the Emotional) as a coordinator of the program.

Eloísa Montaño Guerrero is a 55-year-old artisan from Buenaventura where she had a liquor store as her business. She started her process working for the communities once she moved to Cali. She is currently living in the neighbourhood Cristobal Colón, developing her own clothing brand, leading one artisans'

organisation, one women's foundation and leading the Afro Committee in her *comuna*. She does not have a formal job, but she is a businesswoman.
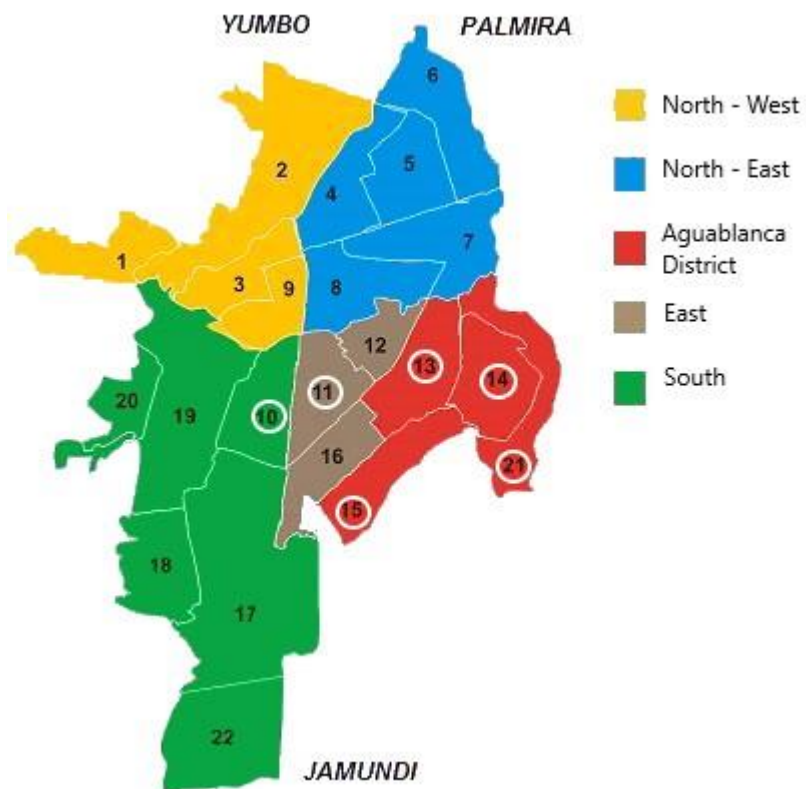
Elsy Johana Mancilla Paz is 29-year-old artisan and dancer from El Charco (Nariño) where she learned the bases for the activities she practices now. Back there, she did not have job stability, but for brief periods, she used to work for the municipality. Today, she is living in the neighbourhood Ciudadela Invicali, is a member of Entramados and the Fundación de Empresarios y Artesanos Afropacífico and is developing her own women's accessories brand.

1.4.2 Sites of research

The municipality of Cali has a political-administrative division made up of 22 *comunas*; each *comuna* gathers together neighbourhoods that share socio-economic and demographic particularities. In total, Cali has 249 neighbourhoods and the fieldwork that lasted four weeks was conducted mostly in neighbourhoods located at the east of the city. According to the Encuesta de Calidad de Vida 2012 – 2013 (in English, Quality of Life Survey 2012 – 2013) "(*comunas* 7,

Map 2 Comunas in Cali. Source: the author.

13, 14, 15 and 21) have the largest proportion of the Afro-Colombian population with 48%, followed by the centre-east conglomerate (*comunas* 8, 11, 12 and 16) with 15% of the population that identifies itself as Afro-descendant" (as cited in Alcaldía de Santiago de Cali 2015: 22). As a socio-economic demarcation, the neighbourhoods are categorized from strata 1 to 6, with 1 being the lowest in hierarchy, characterised by socio-economic features such as deficiency in public services, problems of security, and poverty (Castillo, et al. 2012: 135, 136). Adding to this, the most common strata in the neighbourhoods gathered in the *Comuna* 10 and 11 is the 3; the *Comunas* 13, 14, 15 and 21 have most common level 1 and 2 (Alonso, et al. 2007: 51 – 113).

Interviews were conducted in the women's houses, community houses and cultural centres where their groups and/or organizations meet. Those places where located in the *comunas* 10, 11, 13 and 21. Although the *comuna* 15 was not a site of research, it was brought through the interview with Erlendy as the place where she has more influence. A document issued by CODHES in 2011 (as cited

in Observatorio Social 2011:22) stated that the displaced people who arrived to Cali "are located in the most vulnerable *comunas* of the city, establishing kinship networks with other generations of migrants who had settled in other districts of the city". Therefore, taking elements of displacement and ethnic affiliation, it is possible to understand how Elena, Francelina, Erlendy and Elssy ended up living in those areas and finding in those *comunas* their spaces of influence.

The *comunas* where the women live are characterized by the presence of gangs and high homicides. According to OCHA (2014: 3), this is especially relevant for *comunas* 15 and 21 (classified at strata 1). This is reflected in restrictions to mobility due to invisible frontiers that marked the presence of gangs or non-state armed actors (guerrillas and various other paramilitaries) (OCHA, 2014: 2).

Following Riaño-Alcalá (2002: 293) the degree of risk in the *comunas* 13, 14 and 15, all classified at strata 1 (where Elena, Elssy and Erlendy live and/or work) is evident in the Map 1 (Observatorio Social, 2011: 20), which shows that these *comunas* have the highest rates of homicides in the city. The *comunas* 10 and 11 (where Eloísa and Erlendy live respectively), classified at strata 3, are areas where the gangs or homicides rates are not as high. Additionally, both *comunas* are legally established, while the *comunas* 13, 14 and 15 are "neighbourhoods that were mainly formed by invasion processes and illegal urbanizations, with a population of scarce economic resources coming from other places in the city and displaced from the countryside" (Red de Salud de Oriente 2011).

1.4.3 Narrative analysis

None of the women told their stories using a narrative of victimhood. Even when loss and pain are elements of these narratives it is not shown from the perspective of the victimhood, but as part of experiences that define their lives and they subject positions (Kaufman and Williams 2010: 4). For some women becoming a leader is a conscious choice. For others, the decision to become a leader is more about "overlapping lines of connection than parallel points of departure" (Drummond as cited in Peake and Trotz 1999: 93).

In this study I use narrative inquiry as "a form of case-centered research" (Mishler 1996 as cited in Riessman 2014: 4) where "the 'personal troubles' that participants represent in their narratives (…) tell us great deal about social and historical processes" (Riessman 2014: 4). These historical processes of armed conflict, displacement, emplacement, community building, and empowerment are embodied experiences and are part of the narratives the five women bring. Those stories "are works of history as much as they are about individuals, the social spaces they inhabit, and the societies they live in" (Riessman 2014: 4).

Thematic analysis was used to interpret personal narratives and to understand how the narrators construct the meanings of their lives in places they left and to which they came. Riessman notes that "narrators can position themselves as agentic beings that assume control over events and actions (…) they can shift among positions, giving themselves agentic roles in certain scenes and passive roles in others" (2014: 11). After collecting the women's stories, I have "inductively create[d] conceptual grouping from the data [where] a topology of narratives organised by theme is the typical representational strategy" (Riessman 2005: 2). This type of analysis helped me theorise across the different stories "finding

common thematic elements across research participants and the events they report" (Riessman 2005: 3) and identifying narrative through which they give meanings to place/space.

1.5 Theoretical perspectives

This research uses interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives combining studies of place/space, displacement, community, and empowerment, and using feminist conceptualisation of intersectionality as both a theoretical perspective and a methodological tool. Winker and Degele (2011: 51) have offered an intersectional methodology in which the level of social structures, constructions of identity and symbolic representations are drawn together. The interactive dimensions of inequality "can mutually strengthen or weaken each other" (Crenshaw as cited in Winker and Degele 2011: 51) shaping women's experiences and their narratives. This research focuses on gender and race/ethnicity as elements of identity affiliation, cultural symbols, and social structures, tracing them in women's narratives about places they left and live in now (Winker and Degele 2011: 58, 59).

1.5.1 Meanings of Place

Jeff Malpas considers that space "must be understood as a social and discursive practice, and as a product of interrelations rather than a self-contained, bounded, homogeneous entity" (as cited in Arias 2010: 32). This perspective allows me to see the subjects of my research as people who are geo-referentially located and connected to social, political, and cultural processes embedded in a place.

Doreen Massey (1994) also defines place/space in terms of social relations as contextually produced. This means that place/space is constituted by fluid interrelations and intersections "[conceived] of all facets of social life – including social structure – as spatial (…) [in which] the concept place-structure enables the expression of community-based ideologies simultaneously as a structural and a spatial concept" (Bauder 2001: 287).

Jansen and Löfving (2007)   note that "place is remarkably often reduced to the 'décor' where the violence 'takes place', but it is seldom viewed in conjunction with phenomena constitutive of both displacement and emplacement" (2007: 6). Hence, they propose an approach in which the relationship between violence, displacement, and emplacement are seen as processes that help to configure notions of space (Jansen and Löfving 2007: 6). Consequently, "places [do not] constitute [only] physical, social, and sensorial realms for our actions, but for our memories and imaginations as well" (Riaño-Alcalá 2002: 280). This means that places evoke emotions related to the past or can trigger hopes for the future (Brown and Pickerill 2009: 28).

Arias (2010) defines 'space' as a social product that is constantly transformed and reproduced obeying to the dynamics of the daily life. For the author, 'space' is "simultaneously tangible and intangible, as a set of social circumstances and physical landscapes and as a constellation of discourses that simultaneously reflected, constituted, and at time undermined, the hegemonic social order" (Arias 2010: 29). Following this assumption place/space can be understood as 'lived spaces' that "encompass[es] both the 'perceived space' of material spatial practices and the 'conceived space' of symbolic representations and epistemology" (Lefebvre and Soja as quoted by Peake and Trotz 1999: 6). Thus "space is

not just the backdrop against which social interaction takes place; space constitutes difference and is deeply implicated in the production of identities and inequalities" (Peake and Trotz 1999: 6, 7).

While some authors use 'place' and 'space' interchangeably, in this research I will use the concept of 'place', and approach it as shaped by ethnicity/race, gender, and war i.e. displacement experiences. I will explore meanings of both the rural places from which women were expelled (in Colombian terminology called *territories*) and the urban neighbourhoods of Cali where they settled.

1.5.2 Meanings of Community

Kaufman and Williams (2010) consider a context of war as a trigger for women to work together with the purpose of fulfilling their needs, and create networks that starts as a support net and ultimately leads to political action.

In this set of ideas, it is possible to say that building community is tightly related to feelings of empowerment based on inter-ethnic solidarity, neighbourhood-based exchange and activism and variation of protest actions (Brown and Pickerill 2009: 32; Peake and Trotz 1999: 93).

For the women I interviewed, these relationships are built initially within neighbourhoods with whose population they shared similarities in geographical background, experiences of violence and displacement, as well as gender and race. Later, when they start to feel familiarity with the city, the networks expanded to other neighbourhoods, *comunas* or transcend geographical scenarios to enter political, academic, and cultural fields.

1.5.3 Women's Empowerment

Sarah Radcliffe (1993) calls for attention to the romanticised idea of empowerment as implicit deconstructions and constructions or raising new identities but also as inscribed in the same pattern as the hegemonic order. Naila Kabeer considers empowerment as the set of actions performed by women to take responsibility for their own decisions and own lives, overcoming social constraints and taking advantage of conditions of the place that allows them to mobilize around their self-defined priorities (1994: 260). When women decide to act they have to determine in which type of action they are going to engage, and these decisions are context-specific and linked to their sense of self (Kaufman and Williams 2010: 63, 64), as well as their lived experiences.

According to the organization Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres, one of the main trigger of women's activism in their violence affected communities is the broken trust in the government and the state due to its absence from the rural areas (2013: 182):

> "After being victims of violence by armed actors and suffering the negligence of the State, [women] engage in women's organizations, and victims or human rights organizations. They found in other women the example and the invitation to work in groups, to think about the rights they have as women and as victims. This is how, through sorority (solidarity among women), many victims become leaders and human rights defenders, and weave their lives to value and

recognise themselves as subjects of law, to demand state attention and contribute to building the paths leading to peace" (Ruta Pacífica de las Mujeres 2013: 473).

Through their organisations or other urban community spaces, the women develop a type of activism that puts pressure on the formal political structures (Kaufman and Williams, 2010: 58) or creates conditions for self-organizing within neighbourhoods.

1.6 Theoretical perspectives of this research

In this research place, community and empowerment are understood as concepts that nurture each other and overlap in the women's experiences. I approach my research problem from human geography perspective considering meanings of place as physical, symbolic, and socially constructed, as well as context-specific, related to the broader understanding of subjects' realities, particularly those located as social minorities in Colombia, due to their gender and ethnicity/race.

Regarding the theoretical discussion about race and ethnicity, the women I interviewed used both notions interchangeably. However, I will use the notion of ethnicity rather than race in order to encompass the terminology used in institutional, organisations and academic documents about Colombia and its minorities. While I am aware of the debates that surround the notions of ethnicity and race in cultural studies, I take both race and ethnicity as ideological constructs in order to "underscore the 'contingency of biological categories which are chosen according to social and cultural criteria in specific material circumstances'" (Kobayashi and Peake 1994: 234). This suggests that race and ethnicity are geographical and historical constructs whose specificity and effects must be named (Peake and Trotz 1999: 4). Those specificities – in the lives of women I interviewed – include violence, displacement, emplacement and struggles to reconstruct their lives and thus also their selves. They do so by various forms of activism and by creating new communities, engaging with people and places where they settled. As Rose points out:

"Many feminist geographers argue that identities are extraordinarily complex, not only because gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality, to name just a few axes of social identity, mediate each other, but also because each of those elements is relational. That is a sense of self-depends on a sense of being different from someone else. Identity is theorized as based on the difference from others but not on separation from others" (1997:314).

Gender and ethnicity are not just identities – they are structures of power that create specific social location for Afro-Colombian women as social minorities. But other social relations of power are important for their experiences as well. As already stated, their rural background intersects with their life experience in complex ways. On the one hand this complexity is tied to the history of the conflict wherein rural territories have been especially targeted by violence. On the other hand, it is also related to traditional gendered roles that often-limited life options for rural women. This is especially important when reflecting on women's decisions not to leave their new urban lives and go back to the rural

areas. Age and marital status, as well as experiences of marriage and family are equally important. All those relations of power are implicated in life choices of women I interviewed. Thus, not surprisingly, the stories of their experiences and the meanings they attach to the places they left and those they now live in have many differences, as well as similarities. I have group their stories into three narratives: *Recreating traditions and the self*, *Activism and Justice*, and *Motherhood and opportunities*. All three narratives share a few main themes, even if they are told differently: the relationships of place and time; the sense of community; and the meaning of empowerment.

Chapter 2 Recreating traditions and the self

Elena Hinestroza Venté and Francelina Carabalí Torres preserve the links between the old and new place by the practices and promotion of what they see as their cultural heritage and traditions. This heritage is expressed through the clothes they use, the way they communicate, the music they interpreted, the poems, the storytelling, and the rhymes they create and share, but most importantly, it is defined through race and gender. The women arrived at Cali from rural areas, and have guided their path through the city by strengthening their cultural identities and identities of other Afro-Colombian women from the same regions, in the organisations they lead.

Both women note that they are being uprooted from the place, but not from the person they are. This means they feel being embedded in their communities and having a sense of belonging, not only as individual but also within a community they feel is 'their own'. Pinderhughes notes that "the peer-community is firmly anchored in the neighbourhood, and community-level ideologies are spatially grounded in the context of the neighbourhood" (as quoted by Bauder, 2001: 281). Thus, in the city the women recreate social and symbolic geographies of their former *territories*.

2.1 Meanings of Place

For Elena and Francelina, the recognition of the importance of their traditions as a cultural heritage has been a concern that shaped their decisions and leadership in their organisations, both in terms of past and present contexts. As Harcourt and Escobar explain "culture, identity, and the defence of the environment thus emerge as the organising principle of both everyday life and political strategy" (2005: 11).

Back in their former *territories*, both women played an active role in their communities as leaders of women's group, where their daily practices "demarcate the territory [and] consolidate it through the construction of cultural identities" (Grueso and Arroyo, 2005: 103). These identities were rooted in a geographical location but have also been expressed through their social relations and in their cultural practices such as singing, making poetry and storytelling. What these practices contained were stories of their daily lives, surroundings, and struggles, because as Elena said, "the Pacific region always sings to tell a story". Therefore, the stories are "located in particular times and places, and individuals' narratives about their troubles are works of history as much as they are about individuals, the social spaces they inhabit, and the societies they live in" (Riessman, 2014: 4). This is how the two women's cultural practices not only reflect their rural and urban *territory*, but also are gendered and ethnicized representations of their social struggles.

Elena's and Francelina's past *territories* are places of contradictions. On the one hand the places they left mean peace and harmony, on the other they represent diverse forms of violence. In this regard Riaño-Alcalá notes, "places are marked by memories of death, destruction or fighting as they can be haunted by images of horror and destruction, but the memories of group rituals, local myths or collective moments of encounter inhabit these places as well" (2002: 277).

Therefore, what women bring to the new context are both feelings of loss and happiness, including the dearest elements of their lives, those that are tightly related to their traditions both in symbolic and social terms. Nostalgia is powerful in the experiences of places they left, as 'spaces of remembrance' that evoke 'bittersweet' memories (Kaplan and Kleiner as quoted by Brown and Humphreys, 2006: 244).

Both women write poetry as a traditional form of expression, and they both expressed the feelings of nostalgia and loss in poems which they recited for me:

> I wanted to swim in the puddles
>
> Remembering my childhood
>
> And how I could not do it
>
> I cried for God I cried
>
> I cried because for me, my land was in ruins
>
> But it was all different for those who did the damage (Elena)

> And today here I am
>
> Running from that violence
>
> That mercilessly threw me out
>
> Far from my inheritance
>
> Because in the field one lived
>
> Enjoying one's paradise
>
> Until the evil ones arrived
>
> And shredded everything
>
> Destroyed everyone
>
> Evil crosses my way
>
> In the countryside, one lived
>
> With all its traditions
>
> Sharing in barter and *minga*[3]
>
> With our values the whole breeding pattern
>
> What the older people left
>
> With lots of bonanzas
>
> And very few errors (Francelina)

In Cali, one of the possibilities that the city gives to the women is the relative freedom of mobility due to the size of the urban area, in contrast to the more restricted mobility in the rural territories. In addition, Cali gives them the possibility of remaining anonymous when needed, and the chance to expand their networks in terms of cultural or social links. These are particularities that show the relationship between place/space and community. The violence the women

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[3] In Latin America, as for this context, *minga* means voluntary communal work.

faced in the rural areas is more related to control over the *territory* and resources by the illegal armed groups. In the city they are not completely free to go around or safe from violence either, as there they have to deal with crime related to the presence of gangs and drug business, or urban guerrilla segments.

Elena's lives in Los Lagos, a neighbourhood that is part of the *comuna* 13. Her house is two blocks away from the main street. Around there it is possible to find a school, a carpentry workshop, and various sales premises in some houses. The block where Elena lives seems quiet, although the *comuna* 13 is one of those with the higher rates of gang presence and homicides. On the other hand, Francelina lives in the neighbourhood Llanogrande, located in the *comuna* 21, nearby a shopping mall, a park and a main street. Francelina describes the area as safer from the one she was before; however, she also mentions gangs and drug trafficking.

While being in the city means they have to struggle for recognition of their rights and cultural identity, it is also a place that offers opportunities - economic, political, academic - for achieving a better life. It allows the women to recover from their traumatic experiences of the armed conflict. Moreover, the place they create and are embedded in as city dwellers is made of non-material values such as knowledge, traditions, solidarity, sorority, and recognition.

The *territories* the two women left are, for them not located in the past but have been brought to the present through their cultural practices. Although Elena's and Francelina's understanding of culture is very fixed – marked by specific cultural artefacts and practices such as clothes, pottery, songs, story-telling - they have derived certain particularities of it in order to shape it within Cali. Elena recreated the territories by creating her music group 'Integración Pacífica' and Francelina by being a member of the Escuela 'Ser Quien Soy'[4]. This reflects how "women attempted to bring the village of origin into the [city] in order to carry on with the tasks, sign the skills that had given them a sense of place in their original villages" (Farah, 2005: 210).

During the mapping exercise of both past and present contexts, Elena and Francelina pointed out the places that they considered important. Many of them were significant not for the physical space itself but because it is a community space - community houses, schools, cultural houses, parks, or their own houses.

The attachment that women develop to their neighbourhoods in Cali is influenced by the characteristics such as ethnicity and class of their inhabitants, where social dynamics are not far from the practices that existed in their previous territories.

This means that Elena and Francelina live both in the past and in the present, recreating through their practices imaginary places. Rather, "there is a sense that if the cities are to act as locations for identity once again, they must be 'reimagined' as such" (Carter, et al. 1993: VIII). Then, the place for Elena and Francelina is understood as a site where experiences occur, it is made of symbolic elements such as nostalgia and memories, but it is also social through the activism and community building. In this narrative, place "mean[s] both the site of

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[4] The Escuela de Identidad Cultural 'Ser Quien Soy' (the School of Cultural Identity 'Being Who I Am') is an itinerant school that is concerned with strengthening and promoting the cultural practices typical of the Colombian Pacific. Its members are mostly Afro-Colombians of all ages who the school is a space to meet their cultural heritage.

subsistence, the site of cultural, ancestral and kinship relations, and the site of security and affirmation and renewal" (Kothari as cited in Harcourt and Escobar, 2005: 115).

2.2 Meanings of Community

One of the strongest elements that contributed to the women's sense of familiarity in the city is the community networks that they created. For Elena and Francelina, Cali became 'home' once they came together with those they call 'their people'. In their case this means people with whom they share similarities such as geographical background, ethnicity, and gender. The link they built with 'their people' is made of solidarity bounds through traditional practices, as explained above. When they moved to Cali they have looked for other black women from their own regions who might have the same ideas, within the neighbourhoods, *comunas*, or beyond. Consequently, the communities they have created are mainly cultural communities where the traditional practices related to their region structure the activities of groups they lead. Porter (as quoted in Kaufman and Williams, 2010: 103) considers community essential to the experiences of identity in the political, economic, cultural, and social scenarios. In the case of Elena and Francelina, their cultural spaces are also permeated by political struggles with issues of identity, culture, and victim's rights, but are firmly embedded in very specific communities: mainly Afro-Colombian women from the Pacific region.

Elena locates her community in the Distrito de Aguablanca, a district that reunites the *comunas* 13, 14 and 15 and whose population comes mainly from other departments (67% of its total inhabitants) such as Chocó, Cauca and Nariño, as well as from other cities in Valle del Cauca (Red de Salud de Oriente 2011). This area is affected by marginality and crime, and the higher rates of homicides by gangs (52% of the total cases in Cali). Francelina's community is also located there, but additionally, she works in the neighbourhoods Santa Helena, Terrón Colorado, and the *comuna* 21, places that share similar characteristics with the Distrito de Aguablanca in terms of population and security issues.

Both leaders describe their belonging to their communities through references to physical and social spaces, referring to neighbourhoods or *comunas* whose major population is constituted by Afro-Colombians with whom they share the struggle to overcome multiple social inequalities. Belonging to this community provides to both women a sense of security in the spaces where they can share their knowledge and have the possibility to improve their quality of life, "giving room for dreaming and imagining" (Hage as quoted by Jansen and Löfving, 2007: 10). But these are also places where they can run away from violence, going from one neighbourhood to another, without losing their community networks.

> "I feel my community in the East of Cali, in the District of Aguablanca because here are my people. We understand each other and speak the same language, we have almost the same customs. That's why I feel here belonging to a community" (Elena).

The cultural communities that both women have built embody the links between places across time. Elena's music group 'Integración Pacífica' is grow-

ing because of its acceptance beyond their own *comuna*, and participation in institutional spaces such as the Municipal Table of Victims and the group of women victims of sexual violence. 'Integración Pacífica' and the Casa Cultural 'El Chontaduro' (organisations where she is an active member) reunites people with similar geographical background who identify themselves as Afro-Colombian.

Francelina's leadership in the organisation ASIMUCAHO and in the Escuela 'Ser Quien Soy' hold two different scopes. The first one is exclusively community of women, where their race or geographical background do not matter. The second community consists of both women and men of Afro-Colombian identities with a similar geographical background and traditions. In ASIMUCAHO the community is built through solidarity that helps to improve women's living standards. In 'Ser Quien Soy' the bond is created by the practice of traditions and the strength of the Afro-Colombian Pacific identity. Although the two spaces seem to have different stated objects, Francelina see them as equal parts of her identities and activism.

The leadership roles both women have performed while living in their former *territories*, are tightly link to gender stereotypes where they - as women - are "often charged with the duty of transmitting culture within the domestic domain and symbolising group identity and respectability in the wider arena" (Peake and Trotz, 1999: 5). However, both have embraced the task of preserving and transmitting their cultural heritage and identities, and both define it through the intersections of being Afro-Colombian, being a woman and coming from specific *territories*. While these definitions can be seen as essentialized, they also have deep socio-historical roots of shared experiences of exclusion, marginalization and violence. Francelina has expressed some of her experiences that link 'being a woman' and 'being an Afro-Colombian' in a poem:

> Woman
>
> They cut your beautiful life
>
> Life-generating life
>
> Women, the violence today humiliates us
>
> We are destroyed by hope
>
> And they take away the joy
>
> Today, women rise in their struggle Today, the cry of protest demands justice
>
> Today, women make alive the memory for life
>
> Of those men immolated by the fire of rifles
>
> We have the right to know why you violate us with your corrupted system (Francelina)

Both leaders have a common concern related to the transmission of traditional values and practices to the new generations, first in their families, then extended to the members of their organisations, finally expecting to influence people of their neighbourhoods or *comunas* that come from the Pacific region or who are Afro-Colombian. Through their activities these women and their preoccupation with preserving their cultural heritage in the surrounding where "oral

traditions start to disappear, and children no longer have the same tie to territory" (Grueso and Arroyo, 2005: 103) begin to transform the meanings of the *territory* bringing it within the city spaces which they encounter as Afro-Colombian communities from the Pacific.

Following the same discussion, Jasper states that "a collective identity is not simply the drawing of cognitive boundary: most of all, it is an emotion, a positive affect towards other group members on the grounds of that common membership (…) independently of the ultimate goals and outcomes" (as cited in Brown, 2009: 27). In their organising processes, Elena and Francelina are aware "of the need to strengthen and recover the everyday productive practices that have characterised communities" and establish and incorporate cultural, socio-economic, and political projects as Afro-Colombian communities within the scope of the city. "This is why the defence of the territory as a cultural habitat renders this movement into a politics of place" (Grueso and Arroyo, 2005: 104).

2.3 Empowerment

In this narrative, the sense of empowerment is linked to the sense of belonging to a cultural community, defined through ethnicity, gender, and geography. Both women have been leaders already in their rural territories, working with groups of women with whom they share the same concerns, such as enhancing the quality of life, the value of being a woman, and the richness of their cultural identity. Therefore, in terms of leadership, the displacement did not constitute for them a sharp breaking point. A difference was with regard to ethnicity, as their rural activism "[did] not include claims to assert ethnic rights" (Table 7.1 in Grueso and Arroyo, 2005: 111).

Away from territories, however, being Afro-Colombian has acquired new importance, and they grounded their activism in preserving the specificities of Afro-Colombian cultural identity and heritage. Being able to do this is a strong element of their sense of empowerment.

For Francelina and Elena, empowerment is both related to the expansion of their individual knowledge and sharing it through the networks where they have influence. It also means the ability to help other Afro-Colombians who have faced displacement due to the armed conflict and to advocate for them within state institutions. In a way "the ethnic and territorial struggles and organising have modified this dynamic; women have shifted from participating in social service provision to action and reflection for women's rights, and from these to the rights of the black communities" (Grueso and Arroyo, 2005: 108). The two community leaders started to acquire knowledge and tools - such as knowing about their rights and the law, among others - to broaden the scope of opportunities for the displaced Afro-Colombian people. Francelina reflected on the links between individual and collective aspects of empowerment:

> "Empowering is appropriating, being sure of what to do, having a position within a community. It makes me feel empowered to work with the community, participating in academia. The support of the community is important for me" (Francelina)

Elena and Francelina see their places of influence first in the *comunas* where they feel they belong to their communities, but also in more 'formal' places such as The Municipal Table of Victims, the Video Reconciliación, the Committee of

Women Victims of Sexual Violence and Physical Integrity and the Javeriana University, spaces within which they might be recognized precisely because of their community has achieved social recognition. The fact that the two women are leaders relates to having a recognition inside their own communities. So, is not just about knowledge but also about being recognized for the multiple struggles the women engage in: on the one hand facing the consequences of the armed conflict in the *territories*, on the other, dealing with poverty, racist and gender discrimination, and presence of gangs in the city neighbourhoods.

Elena and Francelina recognize that, as the city has given them opportunities and knowledge, they also have given something back. Preserving and teaching others about their cultural heritage is an important element of giving back. Their public performances of music and storytelling, for example are deeply related to their cultural heritage and the need to change the stereotypes of the displaced Afro-Colombian people in Cali. Cultural heritage and emotions "not only inspire and sustain activism but … they may shape individual's preferred organisational forms and movement tactics" (Jasper as quoted in Brown and Pickerill, 2009: 26). And in this case, they also shape empowerment:

> "In Cali, what has contributed to my empowerment is that, after state abandoned vulnerable populations, being the voice of the ones who have no voice makes one empowered. And what often disempower you is that you are vulnerable to everything, to threats. So, what makes one vulnerable and it makes one disempowered also empowered us, because we are working to defend the people, the disadvantaged, the vulnerable and we are in the eye of the hurricane, unprotected" (Francelina)

The way these women portray their leadership is through the practice and dissemination of their cultural traditions, in which there are messages that invite their communities to remain united through their ethnic identities and to strengthen the struggle for their rights. As Gabriel (cited in Brown and Humphreys, 2006: 247) has argued, "… fantasy can offer a third way to the individual, which amount to neither conformity nor rebellion, but to a symbolic refashioning of official organisational practices (…), allowing a temporary supremacy of emotion over rationality and of uncontrol over control". The women, in fact, produce the fabric of their actions encompassing both emotions and rationality, not as a temporary task, but as a process that needs to be sustained for all the members of their groups.

Chapter 3 Activism and Justice

Buenaventura is the city from which Erlendy Cuero Bravo and Eloísa Montaño Guerrero were uprooted. They are two women whose narratives of place and space is related to activism and struggle for justice. Although they both explicitly claim Afro-Colombian identity, they do not ground their narratives in struggles to preserve culture and tradition of their communities, but rather in struggles for justice for these communities. For both, the recognition of the rights of the Afro-Colombian communities and the internally displaced people determine their role in Cali, where they recreated the links to their 'previous selves' and the *territories*.

Having faced difficult and changing circumstances, including harassment and threats in their *territories*, they decided to engage in political action both as individuals and as part of extended community networks once they moved to Cali. Their participation in institutional spaces at the local level and for Erlendy at the national level have positioned them as grassroots leaders from where they advocate for the victims' rights and assistance, and claim for places where their communities can envisage new life projects.

3.1 Meanings of Place

When Erlendy and Eloisa talk about their former *territories* they do it referring to their childhood, traditions, and community support, but also in terms of the memories of intensive lived experiences that were encompassed by emotions and images of the conflict. While for Erlendy the images brought forward events like the death of her father, the struggle over her father's house, her displacement to Cali, and (more recently) the murder of one of her uncles, for Eloísa is the threat to her business, the harassment of her daughter and her divorce, which, although it was not related to her experience of displacement, constituted an important milestone in her life decisions.

> "Buenaventura is everything. It is my land, my roots, the nostalgia for the lack of the sea. I love that port" (Eloísa)

> "El Uribe is the memory of my dad, of the strength, of the ability to sit down to study, to say "you have to be able, you cannot fuck-up the life of anyone" and I always remember my dad when I'm falling, like I draw strength from my dad." (Erlendy)

For both leaders, "the 'home' that was lost has not simply been left behind in another place (…) it has also been left behind in another time and is therefore often experienced as a previous 'home', irrevocably lost both spatially and temporally" (Jansen and Löfving, 2007: 10). For the two women, the past is what made them direct their actions towards future, and injustice, rather than identity is what motivates them. Although they both feel deep nostalgia for their former *territory*, their past experiences there, is what triggered their actions and dictated their decisions to continue the struggle for justice in Cali. That is why for Erlendy and Eloísa their experiences of displacement and emplacement "(re)constitute

conceptions, embodiments, and inhabitations of space" (Jansen and Löfving 2007: 6). Buenaventura is a port town, but the life there is closer to the rural patterns. In addition, Buenaventura is much smaller than Cali. The shock caused by their arrival at Cali is generated by the absence of solidarity bonds left in Buenaventura and certain daily practices specific to the *territory*.

Nowadays, in Cali, both leaders are transforming the initial effects of the city into another, where "'home' emerges here through both political and social histories of inclusion and exclusion and is thus not only about place but also about the people through whom we 'feel-at-home'" (Jansen and Löfving 2007: 6). Representing their people is one of the main reasons why Erlendy and Eloísa decide to engage. Thus, unlike in the previous narrative, their place of struggle is mainly in the present in an enabling context that allows them to join community and institutional struggles. This reflects that "women are associated with place not because they are homebased or placebound, but because their inaugural and continuing role in shaping a new politics" (Gibson-Graham 2005: 131).

These leaders have developed strong ties within neighbourhoods or *comunas* where Afro-Colombian and/or displaced are majority population. The neighbourhoods (located in the *comunas* 10 and 15) where these two leaders have influence share not only a similar population (Afro-Colombians, low-income, and/or displaced), but also the characteristics of places with low socioeconomic levels. Erlendy and Eloísa live in different neighbourhoods from those they work in (in *comunas* 10 and 11 respectively) where they feel less familiar, but more secure, arguing they have "a concern to find or establish secure places that may serve as bases for developing a future" (Jansen and Löfving 2007: 11). Those neighbourhoods have buildings and houses marked as strata 3 socio-economically, are closer to main streets, have easy access to public transport, their population is varied and have open places for recreation (parks, recreative units). However, their influence in other areas obeys to what Steinberg (as cited in Staeheli 1994: 390) explain as an articulation of struggles that operate "within the margins of social power – in spaces where the reach of powerful agents and forces is incomplete. Whether these spaces are households, neighbourhoods, workplaces, communities or the boundaries between them, social movements are relatively (but only relatively) uninhibited in the margins. It is in the margins that they can work to create spaces for resistance".

These two women's participation in communities ensures that they are addressing community concerns to be raised and hopefully met in institutional contexts, where they have a voice:

> "I am not staying at the individual level of my own well-being, but I also speak for my people who are there. Let them know that, regardless of where God is going to put me, I will always have time to listen to my people, to talk with them" (Erlendy)

Both women embody an Afro-Colombian identity and previous experiences of violence that constitute their links with the former *territory*. These experiences pushed them to guide their choices and actions in order to represent 'their people' in their fights for justice. It is precisely "through resistance and active posi-

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tioning, [that] women rearticulate bodies and places; as they reinhabit their bodies and struggle with and over places, they engage in a transformative feminist politics of place" (Harcourt and Escobar 2005: 8).

Erlendy does it through her participation in the Consejo Municipal de Paz (Municipal Council of Peace), Mesa Municipal de Víctimas (Municipal Table of Victims), and as the leader in the Asociación El Camino Propuesto, coordinator of AFRODES Cali, vice-president of AFRODES national and coordinator of ACOPLE.

Eloísa is an entrepreneur who combined culture and business in her brand Esencia Negra to provide income to the community members:

> "Here it should be a cultural space where the people of the Pacific could sell their goods all year round, create a route where we can find the people of the Pacific" (Eloísa)

She is a member of The Civic Committee of the *Comuna* 10, the Afro Committee of the *Comuna* 10, the Women's Collective of *Comuna* 10, Entramados (which is an artisans group) and is the leader of the Fundación de Empresarios y Artesanos Afropacífico (Afropacífico Entrepreneurs and Artisans Foundation, group made up of women heads of household and displaced women), and is the owner of Esencia Negra.

3.2 Meanings of Community

Among the neighbourhoods, *comunas,* region or the country, the communities Erlendy and Eloísa have built are determined by the issues of injustice, violence, and victimization. Therefore, these are political, rather than cultural communities. They are forged through commonly shared experiences that breed a sense of trust and make them work for common goals that "not only motivated and mobilized them but allowed them to work together despite the differences that might otherwise divide [them]" (Kaufman and Williams 2010: 68). As Anderlini points out,

> "'Women activists focus their own efforts on changing entrenched attitudes and practices by finding their own entry points and building on their social ties (…) women learn to work within the constraints of their particular society, given their particular goals" (as cited in Kaufman and Williams 2010: 69).

These constraints are entrenched in the neighbourhoods or *comunas* where the people that Erlendy and Eloísa represent inhabit. Erlendy's Afro-Colombian community is mainly settled in the neighbourhood Llano Verde (*comuna* 15) where many houses use bars on windows to prevent robberies; some of the parks are frequented or occupied by gangs, sometimes with the presence of drug micro-trafficking. In this neighbourhood, many households opt to open small businesses in the houses as a strategy to generate income. In addition, because of the low employability and low wages, households of 48m^2 tend to have more

than five inhabitants. AFRODES, the organisation that Erlendy presides is located in this neighbourhood, but because of recent threats to all the members, the group has been forced to change the meeting place to the Community House in the *comuna* 21. This place is on the main street with a lot of commercial movement (bakeries, little shops, fast-food restaurants, etc), densely populated, it has a soccer field, a church, a library, and a school. It is safer for all the members (who are mostly Afro-Colombian men and women) and with easy access. Additionally, the Community House is spacious, have a kitchen, tables and chairs for everybody, and its main entrance has securing bars with a lock.

The neighbourhood where Eloísa currently lives and works (*comuna* 10) seems quiet, is nearby a main street, with some small business around, but has a sewage channel that is better avoided due to possibility of robbery. The Afro-Committee of the *Comuna* 10 that Eloísa leads has an equal number of Afro-Colombian men and women, that usually meets in her house because of the lack of other meeting spaces:

> "Llano Verde was like being in Buenaventura at the time. In Llano Verde, I could have the relationship with the people; it marked my life, it is my little Buenaventura. My community here in Cali is in Llano Verde" (Erlendy)

Although Erlendy and Eloísa lead women's organisations they also lead mixed groups where they raise social issues. Women's activism promotes the connection between people and among broader community groups in Cali and in Erlendy's case activism is also related to other regions in the country.

The ties these leaders made are with people with whom they have a common experience of displacement, identity, and a similar geographical background. This context and these communities enable Erlendy's and Eloísa's emancipation and empowerment. AFRODES, which is Erlendy's organisation, interconnects issues of race and displacement at the national level. Eloísa initiatives are related to the struggle for recognition of physical and political spaces for Afro-Colombians from the Pacific in Cali, where the importance and contributions of this population are unknown. The leaders' activism reflects how "such identities are forged from multiple discursive regimes that intersect in organisations which 'are not discursively monolithic, but pluralistic and polyphonic'" (Ford as cited in Brown and Humphreys 2006: 234).

> "My community did not exist, I claimed it. (…) I opened that Afro Committee in *Comuna* 10 because as I do not have a specific house here in the *comuna* (but I plan to live here while living in Cali) then it is not convenient for me to be in a single neighbourhood committee because I want to follow serving, working with the community; so being in a single neighbourhood limits me. That's why I open myself to the *comuna"* (Eloísa)

3.3 Empowerment

For Erlendy and Eloísa the displacement has generated an awakening in terms of their leadership and their concerns about identities and life projects. Lubkemann identified that "social opportunity topographies resulting from wartime movements (…) have fixed effects (…) that may be socially empowering in

some respects while simultaneously presenting daunting new challenges that are disempowering in other aspects" (2016: 17). On the one hand women were forced to leave their *territory* where they have their dearest relationships with people and the environment, on the other, going out of this comfort zone, allows them to rewrite their roles as leaders in the city gaining recognition and participation in institutional spaces:

> "For me to be empowered is to want, to achieve, to do. In Buenaventura came a time when I was more comfortable than empowered. Leaving my house, leaving my city, getting the divorce at 50-years-old is not easy, I had to start almost from the scratch. I think this is empowering" (Eloísa)

Both leaders started their activism on a small scale through the creation of grassroots organisations. As soon as they started gaining knowledge about the law, being familiar with the city and its inhabitants, they broadened their networks gaining attention. "When women do make significant strides at the local level, attempts to take their efforts to arenas at larger scales are often blocked (…) Women are confronting the difficulties of translating their efforts into social power that is necessary to extend their struggle into other spaces and scales" (Staeheli 1994: 388 - 390). Broadening the scale has brought to them two main effects: one is their influence over politics at local or regional agendas where they participate as displaced Afro-Colombian women; two, as they gain recognition and participation they ended up causing discomfort to other leaders or political figures who could hinder the process:

> "You want to organize things, but you find that, while you want to organize, others want to hinder the process. And to that, the officials are added" (Erlendy 2017, personal interview).

Considering that they have created activist spaces in Cali, these women overcharge themselves with work which lead them to a sense of emotional and physical exhaustion over the community leadership and the lack of commitment of its members. This situation is explained by Harcourt and Escobar where in order to find their 'competitive niche' communities, especially women, have to overexploit themselves (2005: 5). This can trigger a "state of mental and physical exhaustion brought on by over-work or trauma. Individual and group burn-out can also be associated with a social movement's defeat, the process of confronting the unobtainable goals of movement" (Burnout and Plows as cited in Brown and Pickerill 2009: 28). This situation is experienced by Erldeny:

> "You start looking for alternatives, but you do not find them. You start to feel impotence, rage, then one says agh! I'm already tired of fighting! (...) The process is already tiring, but I know that while I'm here I will not stop going to look at the problems. Then you do not know how to fight, but I'm tired" (Erlendy)

Both women are aware that the implications of being leaders in the communities is not about personal achievements but community goals. Erlendy and Eloísa "have not assumed their leadership from a gender perspective, or with gender as fundamental struggle, but on the basis of a broader cultural principle, that of the construction of a society that encompasses women and men" (PCN leader as cited in Grueso and Arroyo 2005: 107). Erlendy and Eloísa started their involvement in community issues firstly in women's groups, but their involvement in the community opened their perspectives once they meet other groups

facing similar struggles and got to know about their rights as displaced Afro-Colombian population.

One way to understand the type of leadership that Erlendy and Eloísa follow is the concept of 'meshwork' brought by Harcourt and Escobar which described place-based groups who engage in "dynamic vertical and horizontal networking, connecting among themselves and with others in places far and near, across cultural, political, racial, and ethnic divides" (2005: 14). This engagement "is the most usual starting point for women engaging in public life" (Kaufman and Williams 2010: 102) at the local level, and leads to political action and empowers women "in a way otherwise impossible in this traditional society" (Kaufman and Williams 2010: 65). Therefore, it is possible to categorise their organisations as "sites of struggle where different groups compete to shape... social reality... in ways that serve their own interests" (Mumby and Clair as cited in Brown and Humphreys 2006: 234).

Erlendy and Eloísa develop a feeling of 'difference' from other inhabitants of Cali, a situation that "adds a particular emotional pressure to activism and requires a high degree of emotional reflexivity in order to overcome or cope with this dissonance" (Brown and Pickerill 2009: 28). This situation is very much related to Eloísa's case, where the organisational setting also enables her to process her feelings "to transform personal emotions such as anger and hopelessness into 'a collectively defined sense of injustice'" (Reger as cited in Brown and Pickerill 2009: 27)":

> Cali has welcomed the people of the Pacific, but I feel that it does not accept us. I feel that here they are going to squeeze the maximum from us, but they will give us only a little bit to calm us down ... Cali feels that it is doing us a favour because we are here. First, because we were uprooted our *territory*, and second because we are here (Eloísa)

Erlendy's activism come from a moral stand but also because she feels nobody else will address the struggle the way it is needed. A struggle that she has been able to sustain, despite many threats, the fatigue, and the disappointments about other leaders' commitment.

Regardless of their motivations, both women in order to set a more just scenario for displaced Afro-Colombian people, take action once the conflict touched them directly (Kaufman and Williams 2010: 62) by portraying specific "types of narratives to engage in, gain political power and agency" (Kaufman and Williams 2010: 4). The fact that they have gained a place in some institutional settings does not guarantee that "they will not be untouched or unscathed by the conflict around them" (Haleh Afshar as cited in Kaufman and Williams 2010: 4). This situation is more evident for Erlendy, who because of being part of national leadership, is also the target for threats, having to move away for some time from the grassroots communities she represents and having to rely more on local authorities as support for her security.

Chapter 4 Motherhood and Opportunities

Elsy Johana Mancilla Paz, from El Charco, is the youngest women in the group (29-years-old), has one child of 4 years old and is starting her community process as a member of an organisation and a foundation. Her role in both places is not an incidence, but deliberate participation. However, being one of the oldest siblings in her family makes her responsible for the youngest by encouraging them to enhance their quality of life by studying.

Elsy is different from the other four women in many aspects: her age, her association to the displacement, and her gendered role in Cali, reflecting that "women's experiences are socially constructed and because they vary widely based on the specific processes of construction, women's issues differ from context to context, across and within states and across time" (Kaufman and Williams 2010: 28). Elsy's experience of displacement is different, her role in the city is less salient and her life project is strongly linked to her family.

4.1 Meanings of Place

Elsy's sense of place is made from the memory of intensive lived experiences that were encompassed by emotions and images brought forward by events like the domestic violence in Guapi (while living in her aunt's house for six years), the struggle for overcoming her traumas, and the birth of her son.

Her decision to move away from El Charco (when she was 12-years-old) to continue her secondary school follows her hope to improve her quality of life once she becames an adult. This situation means that for Elsy meanings of place are shaped by her experiences in El Charco (where she is from), Guapi (where she completed her secondary studies) and Cali (the city where she lives now). However, Elsy's experience of displacement did not mark her as much as the six years of domestic violence when she was an adolescent. As stated by Riaño-Alcalá (2002) "memories of terror are imprinted in places, and feelings of fear have radically transformed the relationships of people and places" (299). This reflects why for Elsy while El Charco is synonym of family and natural richness, Guapi is both a place of domestic violence and the place in which she connected to traditional dancing, and contrary to both, Cali is the place to escape from violence and find opportunities.

> "Cali has given me everything I ever wanted and did not have. What my land denied me. I am a good dancer. In El Charco I was never a good dancer, in Guapi I was a very good dancer. In El Charco I was never very good at anything, here I am very good at what I do, and people recognize me, they talk about me, so I can say that I belong to Cali, because people want me to belong to Cali" (Elsy)

Although she was displaced from El Charco with her family (made of 3 sisters, seven brothers, mother and father), most of her painful memories are from Guapi, and from that experience she builds her relationship with different places of her life. Cali has helped her to re-kindle her emotions with her family and herself and is the place that received her after running away from violence. Not entirely safe from violence, as in Ciudela Invicali (*comuna* 14), the neighbour-

hood where she lives, the presence of gangs, drug trafficking, murders and ordinary crime is high. However, this situation does not appear to affect her perception of security, that seems encompassed with what Jansen and Löfving describe:

> "Security denotes a set of rules that a person masters, familiarity 'a space where one possesses maximal spatial knowledge', and community 'a space where one possesses a maximal communicative power'. 'Sense of possibility' [defines] 'home' as a social and physical shelter and attaches to it the opportunities for change, improvement, and the unexpected – that is, room for dreaming and imagining" (2007: 10).

So, while there are social constraints that might affect Elsy's perception of security, she has managed to raffle them, finding "'Home' […] imagined as a place free of violence, both remembered and anticipated" (Jansen and Löfving, 2007: 8). At this respect, Elssy says:

> "For me, a home is a place where you come and feel at home regardless of whether it has a roof, that you feel relaxed and do not feel any complication, for me that is a home" (Elsy).

Elsy lives in the present and projects her life with her family to a hopeful future. Her past experiences are also part of the present, pushing her to look for opportunities to enhance her quality of life. In looking for opportunities, she found knitting and weaving as a connection with her cultural traditions, a way to resilience, and an economic improvement. She created the link to the former places and the new place through her productive unit making accessories for women. This means that her traditional knowledge gains a new value because it is a way in which she obtains financial means and also allows her to be part of an extended network of artisans in Cali. Lubkemann reflects that "the transformation of an individual's relationship to place through migration can profoundly alter the social opportunity structures that cultural agents must navigate (…) in order to realize all the aspects of the life projects to which they aspire" (Lubkemann, 2016: 16). That is why Elsy takes all the training opportunities that help her enhance her productive unit.

4.2 Meanings of Community

Elsy's experience of displacement generated positive and negative outcomes. Knowing that her family link is the main structure of her life choices, she signifies the displacement as the event that contributed to strengthening that bond:

> "The profit is that I have always been with my brothers and my parents, we were all together. If we did not move, we would have separated a long time ago and we would not have the relationship we have now" (Elsy).

It is due to this familial solidarity that the sense of uprootedness does not seem to be traumatic for her. What makes Elsy feel emplaced is her personal or rather family community. Callaway points out women tend to put "others – their children, husbands, and community – ahead of themselves" (as cited in Kaufman and Williams 2010: 61). This is reflected in the choices Elsy made since a very early age, the fact that she was willing to continue studying in Guapi (despite living in the situation of violence) as she followed her need to create a model that her younger brothers could imitate. Other similar experience took place with the birth of her son, who due to complications of his health forced

Elsy to give up her full-time work outside the home, to explore the textiles and make of it an income from home.

Elsy's emotional sustenance comes from her family, whereas her material sustenance comes from her artisan and artistic unit that allows her to be part of Entramados and the Fundación de Empresarios y Artesanos Afropacífico (artisans organisation and artisans foundation). Her membership in this groups might be considered a "'community economy' as an ethical and political space of becoming. In this communal space individual and collective subjects negotiate questions of livelihood and interdependence and (re)construct themselves in the process" (Gibson-Graham 2005: 133). Before being part of these groups, she was an isolated woman who did not feel confident enough to promote her products. Thanks to those groups Elsy gained confidence in her work and managed to participate in activities where she could enhance her knowledge and expand her 'community economy' network.

Therefore, although motherhood is not central to all women's experiences, it is central for Elsy in terms of giving shape to her family and economy community. In other words, Elsy's experience "is possible to read […] as enabling [her] not only to repeat [her] traditional roles but equally to disrupt the expected logic: fulfilling traditional roles under crisis and/or in non-traditional ways [that] lead to redefinitions of those positionalities" (Peake and Trotz 1999: 172).

Although Entramados and the Fundación de Empresarios y Artesanos Afropacífico do not have a permanent location, their members gather together in their own houses and share information relevant to participate in commercial events or trainings.

4.3 Empowerment

Considering the previous segments and knowing that family and motherhood play a major role in Elsy's experiences, it is possible to say that her empowerment is motivated and nurtured by her sense of motherhood and family. In this regard, motherhood might be seen "both [as a] resource and [a] limit, as it extends possibilities and reinscribes hierarchy" (Peake and Trotz 1999: 84). As a single mother Elsy was forced to find a way out of unemployment and to generate income, but she found in this struggle an opportunity to start her own business while considering including her siblings in it in order to reach her hopes for a better future for her family:

> "For me, this is the family business. Because one of my brothers is studying systems, the other is studying marketing, the other did express marketing and personal coaching and the one who graduated right now is going to study business administration or something related, so I say, you are all studying to organize the family business, the idea is already there, the door is open, all you have to do is stabilize it" (Elsy)

This woman's personal growth is very much gendered due to the role she chooses to follow within her family and the groups where she holds a membership. As an Afro-Colombian woman who lives in a neighbourhood stratum 1 her chances to obtain a formal job are reduced to technical positions (if she has been trained), domestic service, or manual activities. As a response to these constraints Elsy takes advantage of her former knowledge to provide herself economic means that otherwise have been denied to her. As Kaufman and Williams

astutely note, Elsy is "embrac[ing] [her] gender essentialism" (2010: 6) to express her agency.

From Elsy's experience of displacement is possible to point out that this event constituted "a space of opportunities and new beginnings" (Jansen 2008 and Turner 2004 as cited in Turner 2016: 37) that lead her to find a powerful position away from the label of 'victim'. Elsy has found in Cali a place to be emplaced not in terms of putting down roots and belonging, but as taking control over her life projects (Turner 2016: 38). Her experiences confirm that the possible outcomes from a warscape "include situations in which wartime movement opens vistas on new social opportunities and/or serves as the conduit for upward socioeconomic mobility and social empowerment" (Lubkemann, 2016: 17).

Elsy has found a way to strengthen herself, is grabbing every opportunity the context offers to her in order to improve her abilities, she is travelling the road to resilience. A notion explained by Cumbers "describe those 'small acts' of getting by, finding new ways and creative ways of surviving, bringing resources into a household when traditional or existing ways of 'making a living' have evaporated" (2010: 60). Then, although "resilience does not necessarily lead to action that challenges hegemonic power (…) it is about the 'attempt to recalibrate power relations and redistributive resources'" (Katz as quoted in Cumbers, 2010: 60). That is how Elsy has understood the mechanisms through which she can gain access to places where she can establish her productive unit at the time that she acquires recognition.

Elsy is becoming an empowered woman facing "not only (…) new challenges but also with new opportunities" (Lubkemann, 2016: 17). She might not be concerned for challenging the existing social relations of power, but she is on her path to 'reworking' as an attempt "to create spaces that can improve [her] conditions of existence" (Cumbers, 2010: 60).

Chapter 5. Synthesis and Conclusion

Although Elena, Francelina, Erlendy, Eloísa and Elsy are Afro-Colombian women and have a common experience of displacement this research shows that women are not a fixed and monolithic category who act in the same way (Kaufman and Williams, 2010: 4). Considering their differences, in this chapter I discuss how place/space and community are signified, produced, contested, and negotiated in Cali, while intersections of ethnicity/race and gender produce potential common ground for the empowerment of the five women.

All the women decided to move to Cali after being uprooted from their rural areas. This decision was upheld due to personal (sometimes familiar) connections they had:

> "Back there, one thinks a lot when one has to go to a place as a displaced person. One begins to make relation and connections, so I discarded the other cities because first I thought: Where do I go? Who is going to reach out to me? Then I remembered that in Cali I had an aunt, who offered me her house. That was the first helping hand" (Francelina).

While it is true that displacement "includes loss of capital and entitlement, as well as dramatic disconnections from persons, objects, and environments invested with emotional attachments" (Loizos 1981, 1999 as cited in Jansen and Löfving 2007: 10) it should also be perceived as a process of disembeddedness (Bjarnesen and Vigh 2016: 14) that as such has caused a disruption in the lives of the women. With disruption I refer to the disempowering and empowering opportunities and relations that appeared after the displacement (Lubkemann 2016: 31, 32) and the social condition with which they will be identified in the new context (Lubkemann 2016: 30). In other words, this is a struggle with the label of 'victims'.

The five women were not exempt from assuming the "responsibility for their families in the cities to which they [were] displaced under culturally and economically difficult conditions" (Grueso and Arroyo 2005: 113). However, although their process of displacement, arriving and first settlement was different, their processes of emplacement in Cali have some common aspects, such as their access to education, political participation, and control of their life projects that shaped their meanings of place, community, and empowerment.

Therefore, contrary to displacement, emplacement is a continuous process of embeddedness in a place, understood as a process of socio-affective attachments, that is "a vast, intricate complexity of social processes and social interactions at all scales from the local to the global" (Massey 1994, as cited in Bjarnesen and Vigh 2016: 13). This process of embeddedness in Cali has helped the women to negotiate their social position as a pursuit of a "existentially meaningful life-making [that is not exonerated of] an ongoing struggle for access" (Bjarnesen 2016: 54) and that is part of their decision to overcome the social category of 'victims'.

5.1 Meanings of Place

For the women, the place is "a discursive construct deployed to locate [themselves] in a complex and often confusing world" (Peake and Trotz 1999: 153) and a source of their identity. Their *territory* is the ground where "body, home, community, and habitat are joined in everyday experience as well as in history (…) Place is (…) a nexus of relations, a patterned logic and ethos of contingent connections rooted in a particular way, anchored in a given space and time" (Massey 1994 as cited in Rocheleau 2005: 77). This link with the former *territory* is perceived by Francelina and Eloísa through their ethnic and gender identities and cultural practices,

> "El Charco is life, it is joy, it is brotherhood, it is harmony, it is exchange, it is having everything" (Francelina).

> "Buenaventura is everything. It is my land, my roots, the nostalgia of the lack of the sea. I love that port. Buenaventura for me is my passion" (Eloísa).

Cali is seen by the women as a site of subsistence, where cultural, ancestral and kinship relations are encountered, it is also the site of security and affirmation and renewal (Smitu Kothari as cited in Harcourt and Escobar 2005: 115). The women moved from *territories* that were not safe, to the city where they feel safer but where there are other violence dynamics and where there is also more poverty. Even though Cali may have more possibilities to get out of poverty, the women are not exempt of struggle for taking advantage of those opportunities, as Staeheli says "women are confronting the difficulties of translating their effort into social power that is necessary to extend their struggle into other spaces and scales" (1994: 390). This situation is clearer in the experiences of Erlendy and Elsy,

> "I used to work at night and during the day I slept three hours and went to meetings to fight. I never gave up, never. That allowed me to gain knowledge, so I was invited to training, graduate courses, everything that was offered I did it. The whole issue of victims' rights, the rules, the laws, everything, I learned it. Because I started to participate and to realize my rights... and all that brought me to this day" (Erlendy).

> "I have done courses in social services, footwear design, agricultural production, nails, food handling, stucco and white labour. My sister and I have done everything they offered us that was free, even though we had to walk" (Elsy)

As a city, Cali is a place of political pluralism and is under constant transformation. This transformation is firstly anchored in the neighbourhoods and *comunas* through the women's activism where they "rearticulate bodies and places; as they reinhabit their bodies and struggle with and over places" (Harcourt and Escobar 2005: 8) but also with other bodies that might share the same social difficulties. For the women, living in a neighbourhood where they can find others like them facilitate the relationship that they build with the city. Then "the space both reflects and in turn affects the constitution of social relations, that social forces and processes always and inevitably unfold in markedly different ways in different places" (Arias 2010: 39). In Cali, the *comunas* and neighbourhood differences mark and define who relates to whom, the types of interactions and communication between people, and different ways of looking and behaving.

5.2 Meanings of Community

As a result of their experience of displacement, the five women had put in play their system of 'rooted networks' (Rochelau as cited in Harcourt and Escobar 2005: 12) in their former *territories*. Once in Cali, and in order to re-establish the links or build similar networks, they have to create 'multiple and movable roots' (Rochelau as cited in Harcourt and Escobar 2005: 12) that work as solidarity links and also give them a sense of collective identity. This collective identity, as explained by Jasper (1998) "is not simply the drawing of a cognitive boundary; most of all, it is an emotion, a positive affect towards other group members on the grounds of that common membership" (as cited in Brown and Pickerill 2009: 27). One example of this, is given by Elena:

> "Here in the East of Cali, in the Aguablanca District is my community, here are my people and those who understand each other. We speak the same language, we have almost the same customs, we understand each other, so that's why I feel here in community" (Elena)

Finding or creating their communities in Cali gives the women a sense of belonging, again explained by Elena,

> "I arrived at The Chontaduro Cultural House and sat down, and I heard that these ladies had the same methodology as the group of women of Timbiquí and then I thought 'Ay *juemadre* I already got here! These are the same things. They are my *comadres*, they are my buddies" (Elena)

Cali is one of the biggest and most important cities in Colombia, inhabited by people with multiple identities, and with issues of socio-economic inequalities, forcing women to strategically engage with others Then their communities are no longer constrained by "the boundaries between the personal and political, the private and the public domains [but are fluid and allow women] to move between these in various ways, often challenging normative gender roles" (Farah 2005: 211). Roles that in their former *territories* were mainly of caretakers, teachers, or with jobs limited by their obligations in the households, while in Cali this shift allowed them to create and lead their own communities to address concerns of identity, injustice, and inequality.

For the five women, meanings of individual and collective "culture and identity are established as the organising principles of both everyday life and political strategy [where] blackness is not seen as something given but under constant construction and well beyond skin colour; blackness is seen more in cultural than in racial terms, as an ethos and commitment to life and resistance to domination" (Grueso and Arroyo 2005: 109). This resistance encompassed the community strategies to fight over their rights and claim institutional spaces of participation, from which they can defeat the stereotyped notion of Afro-Colombian. As one example of this fights Eloísa points out:

> "We as people of the Pacific have contributed much to the culture of Cali. But Cali has not been grateful to us because we are from the Pacific, it has not remembered that we have contributed and that we deserve a better treatment" (Eloísa).

Women not only created a community, they also represent it, therefore their concerns are not just about economic and social justice, but also about identities, about being recognized in their own terms.

5.3 Empowerment

Difference is precisely what distinguished these five women from the stereotyped notion of 'victim' or 'displaced person'. This is because they "illustrate the ways in which women joined together to meet the needs created by the conflict, filling a vacuum and empowering them at the same time" (Kaufman and Williams 2010: 64). If women felt victims of displacement at the beginning of their arrival to Cali, they have overcome this label and they do not feel 'victims' anymore, they have made a choice towards appropriating this new space in Cali "to negotiate for their rights or as a focal point to gather [Afro-Colombian] fragments and reestablish their social, political, and economic lives in exile" (Farah 2005: 211). This feeling is expressed in the voices of Elena and Elsy:

> "I say that in Cali, the first year I was a victim because I did not know where I was or where I was going, but after the first year I started to free myself because I started to pick up my tools. That was my music and I started to go out and started to feel that this is my territory" (Elena).

> "Since we arrived here, we did not allow to be seen as 'poor things, they come from far' because Rosita [her mother]) does not like that" (Elsy).

As noticed before, "the self is the space where we attempt to align our politics with our emotions, where we make sense of why we feel certain ways, and where we need to understand internalised oppression, in order to resist aligning with existing oppressive behaviours in society" (King 2005 as cited in Brown and Pickerill 2009: 31). In is not just the self as individual but extended to a community, entering the public realm and becoming political actors. Women do so by establishing their organisations and gaining recognition within and outside of it, opening new spaces in institutional or cultural settings where, as leaders, they enhance the concerns of the communities they represent.

The five women defined 'empowerment' in terms of being or becoming someone, out of nowhere; as the ability to imagine a life project and work for it. They consider empowerment as a process that involved them and their communities. The women have assumed the leadership as new forms of reshaping their own and community identities and social roles.

5.4 Final reflections

Through this study, I wanted to understand how displaced Afro-Colombian women narrate and give meanings to place/space through their relationship with community building and empowerment. In a first stage, I referred to a multidisciplinary literature that discusses notions of displacement, emplacement, place/space, community, and empowerment. I argued that the place/space is configured by social and symbolic elements that shaped the life experiences of the women across time.

The framework of the 'Peace Agreement' has limited the meanings of land that the women left behind in the *territories* as physical. The five women have redefined place/space and belonging totally differently than Colombian government, and this is why they are not going back. Tough, the feelings of nostalgia are still present, they are not going back to the rural areas because of the physical, social, and symbolic links they have built in the city. In the women's perspective, the place left behind is referenced as that which evokes memories of childhood,

the abundance of food, an everyday life anchored to nature, the traditions such as singing, dance, poetry, birth, and rituals, the ethnic and gendered identities. But it also means experiences of violence, state abandonment, and a small territory of limited mobility and difficult exit and access. The social meanings of these territories are thus imbued by both the violent practices of war and by family relationships, neighbours and the communities that inhabit it. It is a place where the bonds of support are inherent to the ways of being but also severed by experiences of violence.

Cali is a place of struggle but also of opportunities. The women arrived to the city having a status of 'victims' and due to the opportunities that the new place offered to them, they found the ways out of that label, and now they are leaders of their communities. Cali is seen as a place of open doors, where women can imagine and made possible their life projects, but it also means poverty, insecurity (in terms of gangs, robbery rates, and drug trafficking) and misrecognition. According to the five women, Cali means expanding knowledge (with regards to their rights and institutional processes), being part of institutional spaces, and having recognition for their community work. As for the social bonds, the women have created communities very similar to the ones they left behind, which means that their members are mainly Afro-Colombian people, some of them displaced. But they create these communities with different motivation, some to preserve cultural heritage, others to fight for social and political justice.

Before the displacement some women advanced community work, had a job with the municipality, were in search of income stability or were launching a life project. After the displacement, the women relied on the people they knew in Cali while finding their place in the city, first in terms of material resources (a house, a job), then in building solidarity ties and community networks, finally claiming places of recognition and participation. Each of these elements are necessary to create that feeling of belonging to the place where women are. Feeling welcomed or accepted by Cali, whether in terms of cultural appropriation or in terms of participation in decision making, adds to a sense of belonging.

The three narratives showed how that the women are politically engaged, but in different ways. They are part of grassroots organisations whose concerns are related to spaces for recognition, social justice, and life project opportunities. Through these communities, women have become aware of their rights and the institutional tools that can be used to facilitate their access to spaces for participation, from where they can raise their voices.

Certainly, gender and ethnic/race roles in the rural *territories* changed once the women moved to the city. First, their gender roles in the rural areas were linked to the care of the household and the children as a first task, then community issues were met in order to improve the life quality of the majority. In the city, women had to deal with the responsibilities of the home, but not as their main task. Sometimes they had to negotiate with their families their acquired role as leaders, and as a result, often the members of the family get involved in the community work too. Regarding ethnicity, although the women in the *territories* embodied the traditional practices, they became aware of its richness once they arrived in Cali and found in their difference a source of knowledge, activism and empowerment.

Finally, it is important to stress the narratives included in this document assume a special connotation in the framework of the 'Peace Agreement'. This refers to the possibility to achieve social justice for the people affected by displacement and guarantee conditions for their reparation. The interviewed women have seen critically this issue, considering that the Colombian government has not been able to protect either the communities in the rural *territories* nor the leaders who are advocating for the victims' rights in the city. Therefore, going back to the *territories* is not seen as an option by the women. This is not only due to the distrust of the state institutions, but also because of the rooted networks they have already built in Cali.

As a final remark, it has to be said that given the number of participants in this research, the findings cannot be generalized as a representation of all displaced Afro-Colombian women. Nevertheless, the life stories of these fife women can help to understand the struggles for representation, claims for social justice, influence and participation that motivated the women to sustain their community work. These are all linked to women's understanding of place as simultaneously symbolic, social, and physical, embedded in and produced through specific – violent, challenging but also empowering, collective and individual practices - that the women engage in. The aim of this research is to raise the voices of these social actors, whose perspectives are not articulated within the policies of the Colombian state.

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Appendix A: Interviewed Women

Elena Hinestroza Venté is a singer and has a long way participating in community spaces. Born and raised in Cheté (a small town in the municipality of Timbiquí, department of Cauca) this woman moved to the age of 17 to Santa María a small town nearby hers. There she lived with one of her sisters and met her current husband with whom she had nine children. She recognises Santa María as the place where she found her cultural identity and became a singer, leader of a women's organisation and women's music group. The time previous to her displacement she held a contract with the municipality through her organisation and had several projects in progress with the women of Santa María. When she is forced to move she entrusts the organization to one of her colleagues, but months later the organisation and the music group dissolves. Once in Cali Elena arrives at a settlement where she spent eight years before moving to her own house in Los Lagos, east of Cali. While living in the settlement and after the first year of having arrived, Elena starts a new music group called Integración Pacífica. Nowadays the group remains playing traditional music from the Colombian Pacific coast and Elena has expanded her network joining the Casa Cultural El Chontaduro (in English, Cultural House El Chontaduro), the Municipal Table of Victims and the Video Reconciliación (in English, Video Reconciliation). As activities related to her life in Cheté, she entered primary education and in Santa María used to participate in artisanal mining. Although she has participated in different courses in Cali she does not talk about them, but she says that through her music she has consolidated her place in the city, therefore she does not describe herself as a victim anymore. She does not have a formal job in Cali but through her music group, she has gained recognition.

Francelina Carabalí Torres has always been involved in identity and ethnocultural issues as a teacher or from practice. Although she was born in Ilario López (a small village in the municipality of El Charco, department of Nariño), she spent most of her childhood in El Charco where since her five years old went to study. There she met her husband and had five children but one of them died due to health complications. While she lived in El Charco she performed as a teacher, she was part of the municipal plant of teachers and was in process of linked up to the national plant of teachers, this process was interrupted due to the displacement. At the time she worked, she studied at distance in the Universidad Tecnológica Diego Luis Córdoba from Chocó (department of Colombia) and obtained her Degree in Spanish and Literature, and founded ASIMUCAHO (in English, Social Association for the Integral Development of the Female Head of Household). Once her husband is murdered, she is forced to move to Cali where she arrived as a widow and with her four children. In Cali, she has suffered urban displacement, therefore nowadays has just moved to an apartment in Llanogrande (east of Cali). She has participated in events related to intercultural studies, has taken diverse course training and after a long time of employment instability, this year she joined the Programa de atención psychosocial y Salud integral a víctimas – PAPSIVI (in English, Program of psychosocial care and comprehensive health for victims), while being the leader of ASIMUCAHO (Cali), member of the Escuela de Identidad Cultural 'Ser Quien Soy' (in English, Cultural Identity School 'Being who I am'), AFRODES and the Women's Committee of Sexual Violence and Physical Integrity. She stills recognises herself as a victim.

Erlendy Cuero Bravo's leadership and work directed to Afro-descendent and displaced communities are due to her own displacement. Born in Guaimía (a small town in the municipality of Buenaventura, Valle del Cauca), she grows up in Buenaventura (Valle del Cauca), is orphaned at the age of thirteen, and goes to the care of her paternal grandmother. Between that moment and her definitive displacement to Cali, she spent some periods in Cali where she met the father of her two children. After her separation, and by economic problems Erlendy returns to Buenaventura, but she is forced to move a few years later. In Buenaventura, Erlendy begins to validate her secondary school, a process that must interrupt by the displacement and start over in Cali. In Buenaventura, Erlendy was not engaged in any specific activity or had a stable job, nor was she linked to any community process, and her family nucleus consisted of her and her two children, although she had the support of her extended family. In Cali, she has trained in several trades, but it has been her leadership that has allowed her to find a stable job in ACOPLE. Nowadays, she is the leader of the association 'El Camino Propuesto', the coordinator of AFRODES Cali, vice-president of AFRODES national and coordinator of ACOPLE. In addition, she is a member of the Consejo Municipal de Paz (in English, Municipal Council of Peace), and the Mesa Municipal de Víctimas (in English, Municipal Table of Victims). The place where she lives in an apartment in a residential, located in the neighbourhood Villa del Sur and that she shares with her son. She has surpassed the vulnerability status as a displaced person, but she is vulnerable now because of her activism.

Eloísa Montaño Guerrero is an artisan whose link to Afro-descendent communities, women and traditional Pacific crafts emerge once she moves to Cali. She is born and grew up in Buenaventura (Valle del Cauca) where she spends her entire life until the displacement. There is also born her only daughter. In Buenaventura, she completed her school education and carried out technical studies in systems and marketing. In the labour field, she worked in various sectors until she opened her own business, and it is because of the possession of this space that she is displaced with her daughter. Once in Cali, she arrives at the commune 10 and she has lived there since; nowadays, she lives in the neighbourhood Cristóbal Colón. Her link with craftsmanship arises in response to the separation of her husband (not the father of her daughter) and continues with this activity which links her to training scenarios, she creates her company (with its brand Esencia Negra), participates in events and promotes the creation of a foundation and an organization – Entramados (which is an artisans group) and is the leader of the Fundación de Empresarios y Artesanos Afropacífico (in English, Afropacífico Entrepreneurs and Artisans Foundation) – around this theme. Although she does not have a stable job, she is investing all her time and energy in strengthening her company while she has incidence in The Civic Committee of the Commune 10, the Afro Committee of the Commune 10, and the Women's Collective of Commune 10. She has never identified herself as a victim.

Elssy Johana Mancilla Paz is an artisan whose leadership is exercised within her family. Born and raised in El Charco (Nariño), she decided to move to Guapi (Cauca) to attend high school and stayed in her aunt's house and her family where she suffers various forms of domestic violence for six years. When she graduated from school she moved back to El Charco, where she did not have a permanent job, but she was linked to the mayor's office as a teacher and then to one of its dependencies as a secretary. Then, she moved to Tumaco (a municipality in Nariño) to continue studying. When returning after obtaining her degree, she coincided in the displacement of all her family group formed by father, mother and ten siblings. They arrive at Cali in 2010. Since that date, neither she nor her siblings have managed to establish themselves in the workplace, although they have participated in various training to develop some work. For Elssy the birth of her son in 2013 means the beginning of her weave company and for that matter, it is linked to training, events, and two organizations dedicated to the artisan theme. Her leadership is exerted within her family group by helping her younger siblings prepare academically. She currently lives with one of her sisters, two nephews, and her son. In her case, the displacement was not as meaningful as her previous domestic violence experience. Nowadays she is a member of Entramados (which is an artisans group) and the Fundación de Empresarios y Artesanos Afropacífico (in English, Afropacífico Entrepreneurs and Artisans Foundation).