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**Intersectionality and Orthodox Marxism in practice:
Two interpretations of the Lowlands of Northern Cauca,
Colombia**

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Daniela María Quintero Gallego
Colombia

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Members of the Examining Committee:

Prof. Dr. Murat Arsel

Dr. Lee Pegler

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Inquiries:

Postal address:

Institute of Social Studies
P. O. Box 29776
2502 LT The Hague
The Netherlands

Location:

Kortenaerkade 12
2518 AX The Hague
The Netherlands

Telephone: +31 70 426 0460

Fax: +31 70 426 0799

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List of Acronyms

LNC	Lowlands of Northern Cauca
UPRA	Unidad de Planificación Rural Agropecuaria (Rural Agricultural Planning Unit)
CC	Consejo Comunitario (Community Council)
OTEC	Observatorio de Territorios Étnicos y Campesinos (Observatory of Ethnic and Peasant Territories)
FARC	Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces)
ICETEX	Instituto Colombiano de Crédito Educativo y Estudios Técnicos en el Exterior (Colombian Institute of Educational Credit and Technical Studies Abroad)
ACONC	Asociación de Consejos Comunitarios del Norte del Cauca (Northern Cauca Community Councils Association)

Abstract

This study emerges from a theoretical debate between Orthodox Marxism and intersectionality. The former sets social class at the centre stage in inequality analyses, while the latter one explores the relevance of a juxtaposition of other social categories and identities through a lens of inequality. The study provides an empirical contribution to this theoretical debate by analysing a specific place and offering two interpretations of the same reality, first from the Orthodox Marxist perspective and then from the intersectional one. The context under analysis is the *Lowlands* of Northern Cauca (LNC), in Colombia. After employing an ethnographic approach during fieldwork, the researcher pinpoints two major features that characterise life-chances in this place. These are the development of sugar-cane agribusiness and the state's official policy of multiculturalism enshrined in Law 70 or Black Communities Law. After analysing the LNC from both approaches, the author reflects considering the strategy of analysis and suggest a non-antagonistic and rather complementary relation between Orthodox Marxism and intersectionality.

Relevance to Development Studies

Intersectionality has gained a strong academic influence in Development Studies since the last three decades. It has been a useful tool to understand inequality, systems of oppression and exclusion. Meanwhile, theories like Orthodox Marxism have lost influence in the field. This, because social class is no longer considered as the principal element in a social development analysis. This research paper relates to this phenomenon in Development Studies and aims to unveil a dialogue between the two from an empirical case. The author's strategy of analysis is also relevant to Development Studies because it promotes a responsible engagement with theories foreign to the researcher. Regarding the Colombian case situated in the LNC this research attempts to give a more prominent voice to the singular and exceptional narratives encountered in this place.

Keywords

Intersectionality, class, Marxism, black communities, Law 70, sugar-cane, Lowlands of Northern Cauca (LNC), multiculturalism.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The theoretical debate

In the process of understanding oppression, inequalities and exclusion, and its relationship with collective and individual identities, intersectionality appears to be a panacea to grasp the mechanisms and consequences of domination fully. Some authors have called it a significant paradigm of research (McCall 2005; Hancock 2007), a hegemony (Mann 2013) and a primary analytical tool (Yuval-Davis 2006). Although it could be understood as a concept, a theory, a lens or a methodology, intersectionality aims to unveil the interaction of different identities, such as gender, race and class, and the result of these interactions in terms of power (Davis 2008: 68). As a response to theories of oppression that give primacy to a specific axis of domination or which analyse these axes separately (Bohrer 2018), intersectionality studies each type of discrimination and inequality in a symmetrical way and proposes an overarching understanding of oppression in the constitution and reconstruction identities.

Marxist theory of oppression in the Capitalist modes of production is one of the approaches that intersectionality aims to problematize and criticise. Mainly, it alleges that Marxism reduces all forms of subordination to class antagonisms, erasing race, gender, ethnicity and other types of identity-based oppression. For instance, from a Marxist perspective, the answer to the question of how people locate themselves in a social structure of inequality would be social class (Wright 2000b: 1). Based on historical materialism, it accounts for the material conditions of existence that shape people's lives, putting their relationship with the means of production in the centre stage of the analysis of inequalities in Capitalism. Therefore, intersectionality theorists argue that this prominence of class makes the analysis gender and race-blind.

At first sight, it is possible to envisage two extremes of a theoretical frame. On the one side, intersectionality intends to include more than one form of oppression in the study of social inequalities looking for a more nuanced theoretical and methodological framework. On the other side, Marxism focuses on the structural foundations of Capitalism and intends to highlight the supremacy of social class relations as the primary source of oppression in the study of disparities. I will briefly present a review of the debates regarding the contemporary relevance of social class and later, the main approaches to intersectionality and some critical views towards this approach.

The contemporary relevance of social class

An intellectual project rejecting social class as one of the main underpinnings of theories of social change and inequality was constituted during the second half of the 20th century. New schools of thought like post-modernism, post-colonialism and post-structuralism were sceptical regarding Eurocentred theories of social change like Marxism, and within this discourse, social class as the leitmotif of any critique to Capitalism was forsaken. As Milner (1999: 9) stated, “the most straightforward explanation for this growing lack of theoretical interest in class difference would be that class has ceased to be of central empirical significance to our culture”. The debate regarding whether social class should remain forgotten in our culture or not relies on the acceptance, abandonment or most cases, modification of the

idea of a polarised class structure between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat which struggle would lead to the decline of Capitalism.

On the one side of the spectrum, advocates of a Marxist class analysis like Wright (1985; 1998; 2000a; 2000b) have expanded on the work of Marx to develop a Neo-Marxian project of class analysis. The agenda of this project has been addressing the issue of a non-polarised class structure in the realm of a Capitalist system (Wright 1985: 8-9). In this respect, Neo-Marxians assume that the complexity of changes in the working conditions of individuals is variations of class locations within contemporary Capitalist society (Wright 2005: 15). The normative agenda of a Marxist class analysis includes the development of Marxian categories like class interest, class consciousness, class formation and class struggle that contribute to the understanding of people's actions and their intent to transform social relations.

Moving on the spectrum, it is possible to identify a relevance of social class that rejects a strictly polarised Marxian class analysis. However, it remains certain that under Capitalism there is a global and systematic unequal distribution of different resources that require a general analysis of inequality. For example, Chibber (2014) accepts an antagonistic relationship between the universal compulsions of capital and the universal grounds for resistance. This does not mean that the tension should still be between proletarians and the bourgeoisie, but that the current system of production imposes itself around the globe through domination and exploitation and that this imposition ultimately results in resistance from workers to defend their quality of life. Assuming this, any radical theory of social change must resort to some level of abstraction, reductionism or universalism (Chibber 2014: 67).

Taking one step further some scholars believe in the relevance of social class but locate their theoretical foundation away from the Marxist notion of class. Furthermore, eschew any revolutionary role of a class as the motor of social change. They may alternatively rely on a Neo-Weberian (Breen 2005) or Neo-Durkheimian (Grusky and Galescu 2005) class analysis. Regarding the first one, class is still a pivotal element to understand links between an individual position in capitalist markets and unequal distribution of life chances, defining life chances as “the chances that individuals have of gaining access to scarce and valued outcomes” (Breen 2005: 32-34). Thus, social class serves an instrumental role in the analysis of the relations of domination and subordination in Neo-Weberian work. In practical terms, they have pursued a strong empirical contribution of disaggregating classes at the level of occupations (Grusky and Sørensen 1998). For example, the Goldthorpe class scheme (Erikson et al. 1979), rests on a classification based on positional differentiation in labour markets that affects the distribution of life chances. In the same way that Neo-Weberians disaggregate social class, Neo-Durkheimians believe that the focus of class analysis should be on the formation of small classes that will rise in the realm of production and that will influence values, life chances and lifestyle. All in all, neither of those approaches focus on a polarised class structure and move away from an emancipatory or normative role of an oppressed class.

Getting closer to the other side of the spectrum and following the motion for a more disaggregated approach to class, some authors argue that instead of expecting that in the long run society will be divided into two classes, what should be expected is a scenario where fragmentation across classes and disaggregation analysis will be the new paradigm for class analysis. In this respect, Lekhi (1995: 72-74) problematizes the forward movement through which a class in itself becomes a class for itself ending in a situation of the abolition of classes. On the contrary, if this movement does not happen, what is left is a problem of fragmentation of classes towards difference and dispersal in which it is relevant to “identify [...] how

other forms of oppression may be constitutive of class” (Lekhi 1995: 76). The inclusion of other systems of oppression and identities have also led to explanations about the fundamental role of class in the understanding of these *other* systems of power. For example, the fact that Herring and Agarwala (2006: 336) argued that “class analysis sensitive to caste social embeddings has proved an indispensable conceptual tool in explaining differences in redistributive policy in India”, displays the importance of a renewed class analysis that copes with contemporary problems and that is conscious of these other forms of oppression.

At the other end of the spectrum, some authors have consistently argued that social class understood from a Marxian perspective is no longer relevant. They assert for a disappearance (Balibar 1991) or a dissolution (Pakulski and Waters 1996) of classes. In both cases, these side of the spectrum can be labelled as a post-class approach in which social class is no longer the pivotal element to understand social inequality, and is instead inserted into other sets of approaches that look at multiple systems of oppression. For these scholars, one of the main reasons why class is doomed to disappear is because Marxism itself is going towards its destruction (Balibar 1991: 154) since it is not plausible to evidence or defend an antagonistic relationship between a bourgeoisie and a proletariat at neither the theoretical or empirical levels. Therefore, some suggest that instead of reconstructing class theory, it must be absorbed into a more plural and dynamic theoretical vision of social change (Pakulski 2005: 153), similar to an intersectional or juxtapositional understanding of the world.

Intersectionality

Several scholars have written a large quantity of work about intersectionality regarding its theoretical and methodological pillars, its strengths and shortcomings. Five main approaches written by Crenshaw (1989; 1991), McCall (2005), Hancock (2007), Hankivsky (2014) and Collins and Bilge (2016), stand out in the academic literature for their influence in bringing forth further developments in the field, as well as their capacity to concretely synthesise the complexities of the term. However, in most of these works, their interpretation of class and its relevance within the central conceptualisations of intersectionality are very unclear.

The term intersectionality was first introduced by the American legal academic Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 (as quoted in Hankivsky 2014: 2), when she realised that in the process of understanding regimes of oppression and discrimination, Gender Studies left aside analysis of race and Ethnic Studies left aside analysis of gender. Therefore, she understood intersectionality as a way to render visible black women at the intersection of both, gender and race/ethnicity systems of oppression. Later, Crenshaw developed three types of intersectionality: structural, political and representational (as quoted in Colfer et al. 2018: 6). Structural intersectionality is the conjunction of the compelling experiences that women of colour suffer because of their gender and race (2018: 6). Political intersectionality is the affiliation of political movements’ agendas, whether feminist or anti-racist, that have rendered violence against black women an insignificant concern (2018:6). Finally, representational intersectionality refers to the narratives of black women that reinforce violence and marginalisation against them (2018: 6). It seems that since most of Crenshaw’s work focuses on experiences of black women and their gender and race/ethnicity identities, she gives class a secondary dimension and it remains unclear her understanding of the role of class in the debate she proposed.

McCall (2005) offers a more nuanced and practical understanding of intersectionality and has a critical view of the methodological considerations of this approach. After an exhaustive literature review of the term, she proposed three conceptual approaches to intersectionality, depending on how academics and policy analysts use analytical categories. These are the anticategorical, intracategorical and intercategorical approaches (McCall 2005: 1774). The first one deconstructs the analytical categories, the second one aims to study the affability of categories, and the third one suggests a temporary use of categories to study the relationship between them and inequalities. Regarding her critical view on intersectionality, McCall (2005: 1788) acknowledges the new literature on intersectionality has focused mainly on race than social class. In this regard, she studies wage inequalities by Gender, Class and Race in four cities of the United States in 1989. As an indicator of class, she used the level of education because the recent literature on wage inequality has been centred on disparities between college and non-college educated workers. However, little emphasis is made on the reasons why McCall decided to include education as an indicator of class in the analysis.

The third most influential approach was proposed by Hancock (2007: 63), who understands intersectionality as a normative theoretical framework and a methodology to conduct research that considers various categories. Once again, this author categorises conceptual differences among approaches to the study of social categories by grouping into the unitary, multiple and intersectional approaches. Regarding conceptions of class, the author suggests that an intersectional approach should define a social class based on specific criteria that reflect on quantitative and qualitative differences and that look at an expanded definition of a socioeconomic class (Hancock 2007: 72). In this respect, neither the works of Crenshaw (1991) or McCall (2005), acknowledge the need to look at broader definitions of class in the intersectional approach nor, although Hancock (2007) mentions this, she does not emphasise on how to expand understandings of a specific category of interest.

The fourth and fifth more influential approaches are more inclined towards the application of intersectionality. These are the works of Hankivsky (2014) and Collins and Bilge (2016). The former defines intersectionality as an understanding of individuals as shaped by the synergy between diverse social locations which occur within systems and structures of power. Hankivsky offers a practical set of principles to provide a framework for implementing this approach. These are intersecting categories, multi-level analysis, power, reflexivity, time and space, diversity of knowledge and social justice and equity (Hankivsky 2014: 2, 8-12). In the same way, the second work offers some core ideas of intersectionality about social inequality, power, relationality, social context, complexity and social justice (Collins and Bilge 2016: 25-30). This second practical intake includes what Collins (2017: 22) calls the domains-of-power framework, which suggests that analysts should look at four different domains of power: interpersonal, disciplinary, cultural and structural.

Critical views on intersectionality

Other scholars have aimed to look at intersectionality more critically and unveil some of the paradoxes and theoretical problems that such an ambitious project aimed to accomplish. For instance, Yuval-Davis (2006: 195) considers some analytical issues that emerge in the study of the conjunctures of gender, class, race, ethnicity and more, arguing that each of these social divisions has a different ontological basis and that there is a need to differentiate between different kinds of difference. Issues of asymmetry must be considered in the construction of identities and understanding of oppression. While exploring whether if there are limited numbers of social divisions to include in the study of a complex of power relations, the author responds, "in specific historical situations and in relation to specific people there are some social divisions that are more important than others in constructing specific positionings" (Yuval-Davis 2006: 103). If there is a group of social divisions that are more relevant than others, it is equally feasible that one social category will be more significant than others in specific contexts without leaving aside an intersectional analysis.

Some scholars have denounced some problems within intersectional theory. For example, one theoretical dilemma that remains unresolved is the issue of whether to omit class entirely or whether to regard it as of tremendous importance (Walby et al. 2012: 228). To solve this puzzle, some have proposed a dialogue between intersectionality and Marxism, which have unleashed what Bohrer (2018) calls intersectional Marxism. The author attempts to highlight the mutual insufficiency of both theories developed individually and "moves towards the development of a theoretical framework that can adequately account for relations of domination and exploitation organised around race, class, gender and sexuality" (Bohrer 2018: 48). Notwithstanding, other authors critique the minimal role of a Marxian understanding of class in the intersectional analysis. In that respect, Gimenez (2001: 8) argues that "in so far as the 'class' in RGC¹ remains a neutral concept, open to any theoretical meanings, just one oppression among others, intersectionality will not realise its revolutionary potential".

1.2 The setting: The *Lowlands* of Northern Cauca

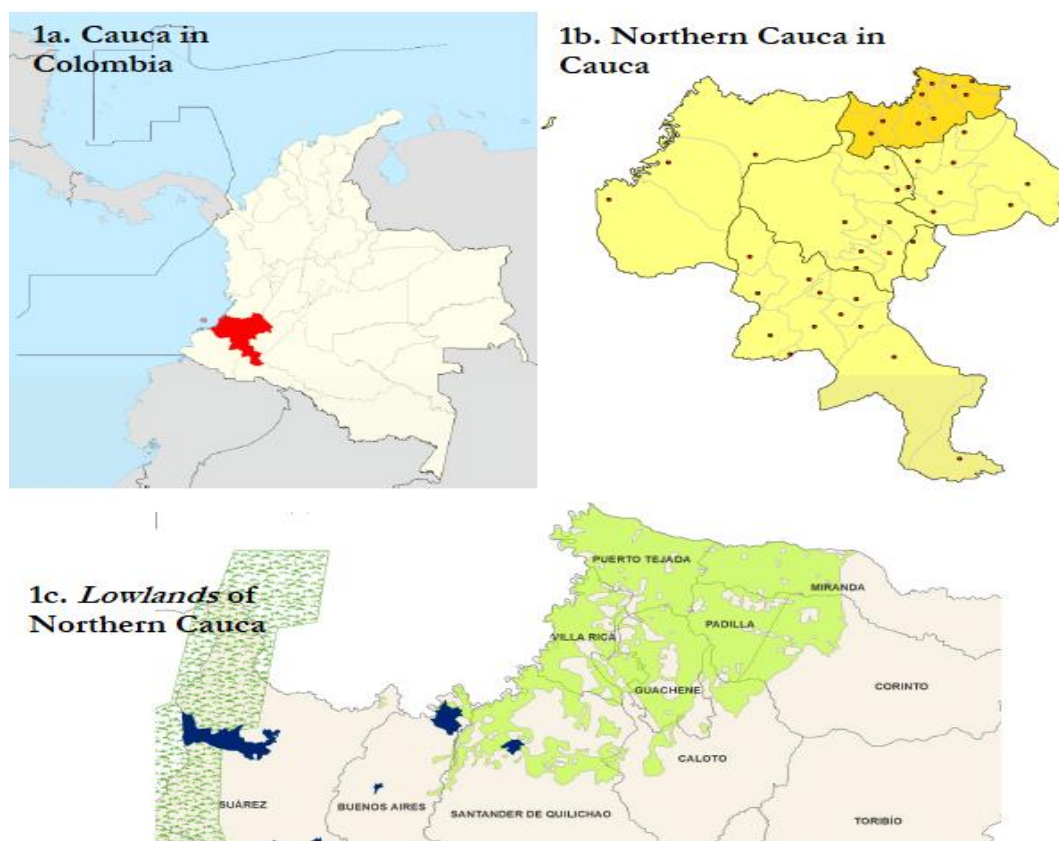
Looking at a region where Capitalism has influenced people's subjectivities and struggles regarding identities of class, race and ethnicity, is essential and insightful for the Marxist-Intersectionality debate. The regional focus of this paper will be on the Lowlands of Northern Cauca (LNC). Cauca is to one of the departments of Colombia (as shown in Map 1a) and is comprised of 42 municipalities. The region of Northern Cauca (as shown in Map 1b) is comprised of 10 municipalities: Santander de Quilichao, Buenos Aires, Suárez, Puerto Tejada, Caloto, Villarrica, Corinto, Miranda, Padilla and Guachené (Vanegas and Rojas 2012: 7). Northern Cauca has become a target of development projects, as well as an epicentre of armed conflict (Arboleda-Mutis 2012), space where sugarcane and mining are now part of the 'natural' landscape, and home of a black population that has suffered years of exclusion and invisibility in the eyes of the State. Furthermore, it is a region that has experienced struggles over territory and recognition based on a shared ethnicity. Thirdly, I use cursive in the subtitle of this section for the word *lowlands* to make the distinction between the highlands and lowlands of Northern Cauca. Essentially, the highlands of Northern Cauca are the municipalities of Suárez and Buenos Aires in which mining is the major threat to black people's

¹ Race, Gender and Class intersections.

settlements and ways of living. The highlands are also currently the epicentre of an academic project that seeks to rethink the region as an agroecological bulwark of organic production and as both a multicultural territory of small and medium producers and a decentralised network of towns and medium-sized cities (Escobar 2018: 196). However, in the *lowlands*, the dynamics are entirely different, and such a reimagination is inconceivable in the region. A distinction is therefore necessary.

This study will focus on the lowlands of the region where sugar-cane agribusiness has become a naturalised and an iconic element of North Cauca's identities. The Lowlands of Northern Cauca is comprised of 8 municipalities: Santander de Quilichao, Puerto Tejada, Caloto, Villarrica, Corinto, Miranda, Padilla and Guachené. In Map 1c it is clear to see this distinction, as the light green shows the presence of sugar-cane monoculture and neither Suárez nor Buenos Aires are part of this micro-region.

Map 1. Cauca, Northern Cauca and the *Lowlands* of Northern Cauca



Source: Maps 1a and 1b from cauca.gov.co, as presented in Arboleda-Mutis (2012) and Map 1c modified from Solarte (2016).

In this territory, there is a relatively high presence of Afro-Colombians whose quality of life is fragile and critical. On the one side, 68.2% of the population of the LNC recognize themselves as Afro-Colombians, considerably higher than the same in the rest of the department of Cauca and the rest of the country, where figures stand at 21.64% and 10.31%, respectively (DANE as quoted in Ministerio de Cultura² 2010: 4). On the other side, indicators of living standards reflect that poverty levels are higher in the LNC than the national average. For example, according to the Unsatisfied Basic Needs Index, 31.9% of the population in

² Ministry of culture.

the LNC live under poverty conditions (Vanegas and Rojas 2012), a higher figure than the 27.7% of the Colombian population also live in poverty. Although these measurements can give an overall idea of the living conditions of the population, they by no means unveil the totality of their daily struggles and realities.

1.3 Research question

The main research question is: *To what extent can Marxist class analysis or intersectionality account for contemporary Afro-Colombian politics?* I have to clarify two things: Firstly, by Afro-Colombian politics, I mean the formal and informal ways in which certain structures and institutions shape the social organisation of Afro-Colombian communities. I will focus hereunder in the Afro-Colombian politics of the LNC to later reflect on to what extent the LNC case can be representative of other ethnic minorities and peasants elsewhere. Secondly, I will develop the Marxist class analysis from an Orthodox perspective to account for the most recognisable elements of this class analysis and contrast them with the intersectional approach from now on.

1.4 Research methodology

Ethnographic dimensions

Since one of the main objectives is to bring into the light narratives of real people and to situate them in the specific setting of the LNC, I employed an ethnographic approach during fieldwork. There are two main features of this approach that are evident throughout this study. Firstly, doing ethnography means that people's actions are analysed in everyday contexts and not under the conditions created by the researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 3). In July and August of 2018, I conducted fieldwork in the LNC. Firstly, I did an extensive circuit for six days through seven of its eight municipalities: Santander de Quilichao, Corinto, Caloto, Miranda, Padilla, Puerto Tejada and Villarrica. I did this because it was the first time that I visited the territory and I did not know the means of transportation or the levels of insecurity that I would be facing, and also because this first approximation would give me an opportunity to identify possible respondents and start bonding with them. Secondly, when analysing data in an ethnographic approach, it is key that the interpretation of meanings, functions and results of human behaviour and institutional practices are situated within wider contexts (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 3). The overall aim is to understand in depth the meanings of the interviewees' ideas and actions to gain a broader understanding of the dynamics of life-chances in the LNC.

Participant observation

One of the core methods of data collection used in this study was participant observation. I do not mean that the interviews and discussions are not relevant. On the contrary, both of these complemented the data collection process, but what I observed in the LNC played an important role in triggering my interest and motivation to develop this paper in the way it exists today. Participant observation involves socialising with people, making them feel comfortable in your presence, and also experiencing their lives of those people as much as is possible (Bernard 2006: 342-344). In this study the second aspect of this definition is fundamental. For instance, the recognition phase provided me with a solid idea of the landscape, and the dynamics between municipalities and the daily routines of the black population, which varied across settings. I ultimately decided to stay in two specific towns: Villa Rica and Miranda. In one of these towns, I stayed at one of the participant's homes for a week, allowing me to immerse myself in the daily realities of many life the way an Afro-Caucans. Finally, it is relevant to mention that I wrote ethnographic fieldnotes every day and some key parts of those observations and reflections are used in this study.

Unstructured interviews

I conducted 20 unstructured interviews with academics, colleagues working in the field, sugar-cane workers, community leaders, one ex-town councillor, one ex-town major, legal representatives of Black Community Councils and peasants. Although they were all scheduled, they were performed in their working space or their homes. I had little control over their responses, and my questions emerged during the interview rather than before. Noticeably, whenever I encountered sugar-cane workers or Community Council leaders, I inquired about their perceptions of sugar-cane mills, life aspirations and working conditions. To access these participants, I deployed the snowball sampling method. This method provides a sample through referrals provided by individuals who know of other people that possess some of the characteristics that the researcher is interested in (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981:

141). Since the levels of violence and insecurity are relatively high in this region of Colombia and it was the first time I was doing this kind of fieldwork, I considered it safer and more convenient to talk to people that someone had previously recommended.

Strategy of analysis

I will address the Marxist-Intersectional debate by enriching it with empirical insights from the real experiences of individuals or groups of individuals. I will divide this study into the following chapters: in Chapter 2, I will present the starting point by introducing two leading features about the LNC and a special character whose role will be explained. I focus on these two aspects because they reflect what I experienced during fieldwork and I consider them as events of this setting that shaped today's life-chances of its inhabitants. After presenting the features and the character, I will start the analysis by offering two interpretations of the same reality, or using the same starting point. Chapter 3 will be from the standpoint of an Orthodox Marxist and then from the standpoint of an Intersectionalist in Chapter 4. I invite the reader to understand that I will assume a pure, rigid and 'theatrical' role in these two chapters that will elucidate the main concepts and theoretical underpinnings of both approaches. The main reason for employing this strategy of analysis is to take the first step towards a further empirical discussion of the theoretical debate between Marxism and Intersectionality. Finally, in Chapter 5 I will reflect on the pros and cons of doing this academic exercise as a researcher motivated by theoretical debates grounded in empirical and real-life problems.

Choosing one narrative

The twenty people I met during fieldwork gave me a credible and reliable first idea of the main concerns that they face as Afro-Caucans. It was initially intended that this study be an exhaustive analysis of their narratives and multiple voices. Nevertheless, there was one specific narrative that I encountered at the end of the fieldwork, which embodied in some way the narratives of those twenty people I met and whose ideas simultaneously challenged everything that I was previously told and every preconceived idea I had about the region and its people. His name is Marcos, and due to the complexity of his words and behaviour, I will choose his narrative as the connecting thread of this investigation.

There are two main reasons why I chose Marcos to be the subject of my research. Firstly, he was one the interviewees with whom I shared the most time during my fieldwork. I met Marcos through Maria, a 25-year-old woman, with whom I stayed for a week in one of the LNC municipalities. Maria offered me to stay at her place for some days so I could easily talk to the people she knew in town, and she introduced me to Marcos. Staying with her was a good opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the neighbourhood dynamics that surround Marcos in his everyday activities. Since Maria and Marcos see each other at least three times a day every day, they have built a strong relationship that allowed me to share and observe more with Marcos than in a regular interview.

Secondly, I also chose him to be the main character of this debate because out of all the people with whom I shared and talked, Marcos was the one that surprised me the most. His ideas and behaviour challenged everything I thought about Afro-Caucans and also contrasted strongly with the general narrative of sugar-cane and functioning of the CC that I witnessed during fieldwork. Before visiting the region, I read how it had been the epicentre of capitalist agriculture, violence and ethnic struggles in the country and I expected everyone

there to identify themselves with some of these, at least in informal terms. Indeed, I came across strong political participation of black people in the realm of CC who acknowledge the influence that the sugar-cane agribusiness has had in the LNC. Moreover, some of them portray a negative image of how that industry came into being with the displacement of black peasants from their lands 50 years ago. However, the self-assessment of Marcos' life main achievements working with the sugar-cane, the positive way in which he perceives the sugar-cane mills role in the region, his relationship with nature, and his expectations in life all contested the strong political discourse that I had been encountering during fieldwork. Noticeably, Marcos' case unveils the complexity of the real-life experience of an Afro-Caucan, a population of whom I by no means pretend to be representative. Marcos' exceptional story intrigued me the most and motivated me to do this study. This is why this study is not about the strong ethnic and political discourse of black communities, but one of exceptions and singularities.

It is important to note that while Marcos is the focus of this study; his interviews become even more salient when contrasted with the others that I conducted throughout my fieldwork. Excerpts from these interviews will be used sporadically to situate Marcos' positionality relative to the wider context of LNC, as well as to bolster my theoretical analysis in both, the intersectional and orthodox Marxist analysis.

Chapter 2 The Starting Point

2.1 Introduction

The LNC is a region where many forces intersect and have come together to form an amalgam of realities that social or economic indicators fail to display and understand. Two main factors influence inhabitants' individual and collective identities, their perceptions of the structures that emerged from history and their struggle for recognition and social inclusion: The domination of sugar-cane plantations and a key turning point for Afro-Caucans, the multiculturalism of the State.

Development of sugar-cane in the LNC

At the end of the 19th century, a new development discourse sustained on opening the economy to foreign markets and capital was being appropriated by the Colombian state and having a strong influence on the LNC. From the beginning of the 20th century, the power of landowners in the region with international capital increased, as did their interest in improving the transportation routes that connected the region with the rest of the country and the world. Noticeably, according to Mina (1975: 84), the construction of several projects such as the railway between Cali and Buenaventura, the international port of Buenaventura and the inauguration of the Panamá Canal contributed to the expansion of local markets, a flourishing of the economy and to the formation of a capitalist society in the Northern Cauca. Therefore, landowners who had connections to international markets had enormous advantages because they were able to commercialise and export agricultural products more easily. Notably, some of these landowners were already building large sugar-mills in the region, such as La Manuelita, with an important share of foreign capital and mechanisation. The mechanisation, rationalisation and transformation of agriculture into industry, gave rise to an agribusiness project based on sugar-cane plantations.

By the end of the 20th century, the landscape of the region had changed substantially, with an unequal land concentration in the region that is still evident today. In the 19th century, LNC was an ecologically diverse environment in which black peasants had subsistence crops (cocoa, plantain, bananas, oranges and cassava) and planted them in their traditional farms. By 1970 the region served as a cultivation field of mainly one crop: sugar-cane. Today, crossing the region implies facing miles of sugar-cane monocultures which belong mainly to the sugar-mills driven by powerful elites in Colombia. This unequal distribution of land is reflected in the Land Gini Coefficient of the LNC which is approximately 0,81 according to the Geographic Institute Agustin Codazzi (as mentioned in UPRA³ 2013: 28). This contributes to the unfortunate status of Colombia as the country with the fifth highest Land Gini Coefficient in the world, with a measure of 0.9 (Suescún and Fuerte 2017).

³ Rural Agricultural Planning Unit.

The multiculturalism of the state & Law 70

Between the 1980's and the 2000's several Latin American states such as Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, México, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Perú and Venezuela decided to recognise multiculturalism or grant special rights for ethnic groups such as indigenous and black people (Wade 2010:128). This recognition, called official multiculturalism, was materialised by passing new legislations or even new constitutions. In Colombia, approximately from the 1980's, the Pacific region, one of the most biodiverse regions in the world and home of the highest Afro-Colombian population in the country today, was a target of development projects that threatened the survival of its people and the conservation of natural resources. Because of this, black social movements from the Pacific united through shared ethnic identities and strategically positioned themselves in relations between culture and territory (Escobar 1998: 63), resulting in the Colombian state's recognition of indigenous and Afro-Colombian rights.

The recognition of difference and ethnic diversity in Colombia unfolded in the reform of its constitution in 1991 and the recognition of Colombia as a multicultural state. Because of this, in 1993, the Colombian government reaffirmed the recognition of collective territorial rights to Black Communities by approving the Black Communities Law (Law 70). The primary objective of this law "is to recognise the right of the Black Communities that have been living on barren lands in rural areas along the rivers of the Pacific Basin" (Ministry of Internal Affairs, Government of Colombia 1993). There are three defining features of this Law: First, it grants collective property over the land that Black Communities have occupied since colonial times. Second, it created the legal figure of the Community Council (CC) as the main bureaucratic body of Black Communities, which were constituted in order to receive collective property over their land. Third, it was conceived mainly under the reality of the Pacific region (Solarte 2016: 46), precisely because the roots of the initiative were bounded to the specificities of that space. Regarding this third feature, the same Law restricts collective property only to other parts of the country where Black Communities occupy barren, rural and riparian zones (Ministry of Internal Affairs, Government of Colombia 1993).

Although the root of this process was in the Pacific, Law 70 influenced the LNC and the current territorial autonomy processes and collective titling requests of Black Communities in the region that are taking place. In the LNC there are 28 Community Councils (Vanegas and Rojas 2012: 66). Some of them recognised by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, others only by the municipalities, and others existing *de facto* without being recognised by formal authorities. What differentiates the recognition of a CC is dependent upon the adjudication of collective ownership over their land. For instance, a CC might be recognised by the municipality but not by the Ministry of Internal Affairs because it has not been adjudicated collective ownership of the territory. Hence, one of the main claims and struggles of these communities is to be recognised as a formal Community Council even without collective entitlement to receive the same differentiated treatment from the state and private sector in environmental and social struggles.

In this regard, the Observatory of Ethnic and Peasant Territories or OTEC presented a characterisation of 217 Community Councils throughout the country that are currently demanding for collective property rights based on Law 70 (OTEC 2017). The inter-Andean Valleys region, formed by the Northern Cauca and the Andean zone of the department of Valle, was identified as the second area with the most collective titling demands in the country after the Pacific. What is more, this region has the most Community Councils that report significant environmental threats from the construction of roads and pipelines, agroforestry

interests and agro-industrial cultivation of cocoa, rubber and oil-palm (OTEC 2017). The process of ethnization and establishment of Law 70 in the region has created a narrative of resistance against the development projects underpinned in the Community Council struggles.

2.2 The main character: Marcos

The first time I saw Marcos I was sitting in a chair in front of Maria and Marcos's house. They are neighbours but live essentially in the same house. It was already sunset, and I was watching how Maria and some other eight people from the neighbourhood were playing jumping rope with two ropes and were laughing and sharing in that Friday afternoon. I was feeling very uncomfortable because my medium white skin, clothing and my iPhone 6s made me stand out as a clear outsider in this small LNC town. Maria was kind and offered me a chair to sit and wait until it was time to eat. After about one hour looking at them playing an elder and skinny black man arrived in an old motorcycle with a big yellow sack. He was wearing big jeans that were embroidered with the name of one of the best-known sugar-mills in the region, worn-out boots and a stamp shirt of the union of that sugar-mill. He parked in front of me and sympathetically saluted me. I realised at that moment that he was the first to salute me without strangeness and confusion like the rest of the neighbours. After he got off the motorcycle, he emptied the sack in the floor, kept the yellow sack and took some steps back to park the motorcycle inside the house. He had brought some racemes of bananas, plantains and cassavas. When those who were playing realised that he had placed the food on the floor, paused the game and each one took what they pleased. Specifically, Maria took two bananas and gave one to me. I was shocked by what was happening since I was about to eat a banana from someone, I have just met without buying it or even asking whether I could eat it. I decided to say nothing and ate it while looking at how everyone took the food without greeting or thanking Marcos. I would eventually realise that Marcos would collect some food and bring it to share with everyone in the neighbourhood every time would return from his farm some miles away. This first encounter with Marcos would spark the admiration and intrigue I felt about him over my stay.

Maria told me that day that it would be useful for me to talk to Marcos because he had been a sugar-cane cutter and soon introduced us. Although I wanted to talk to him, I felt no rush to interview him immediately because I knew that I would have more time to spend with him later. However, due to Maria's insistence, I interviewed him briefly outside the house. I was soon amazed by Marcos' story and the positions he had occupied throughout his life. When Maria introduced him to me, she only said he had been a sugar-cane cutter, and she never mentioned all of the things I would find out later that day.

During this encounter, I realised that Marcos was currently retired after working for 40 years in the sugar-mills in the LNC. He spent the first 20 years cutting cane and loading it to the trucks and was later relocated to head of logistics of a small sugar-cane yard because of an occupational illness. In my view, he has had a very active life, serving as a member and twice president of different sugar-cane unions, and being a co-founder of one of the Community Councils. When he mentioned this last membership, I was eager to know more about him because somehow his participation in the sugar-mills and the CC materialised the two facts which I was interested in. The development of the sugar-cane agribusiness and the

multiculturalism of the State have influenced Marcos life in some way, and because of this, I found myself particularly responsive to his story, ideas and behaviour. The second thing that intrigued me the most was that, in the land that he acquired with his earnings while working for the sugar-mills, he chose to plant sugar-cane in one part and subsistence crops in the other. On one side, I have always associated sugar-cane with privileged groups owing large hectares of land and was astonished that Marcos, not being a landowner in the region, had sugar-cane on his land. On the other side, I linked traditional farms with a narrative of resistance against monocultures and agribusiness, and this made me intrigued to understand how Marcos perceives and relates himself to these uses of the land. In short, I identified that most of the elements of the LNC that I had previously studied such as capitalist agribusiness, identity claims, Community Councils, traditional farms and resistance were being embodied in one person and I was willing to inquire more into this character.

Over the next few days, we saw each other almost daily because I stayed at Maria's house, as mentioned earlier. We engaged in different informal conversations, and he seemed to enjoy my inquisitive mood every time we spoke. One day, he offered to take me on a 'tour' along with his plots of land with sugar-cane and subsistence crops. We went there on his motorcycle, which took us fifteen minutes. The reason for the short drive is that sugar-cane plantations surround this particular town and it is not necessary to go that far to encounter these plantations.

While Marcos worked in the sugar-cane mills, he acquired some plots of land on which he first decided to plant only subsistence crops such as cassava, bananas, citrus fruits, plantains, cocoa, avocado and mango. After some time, he also decided to plant temporary crops such as maize, soy, millet and pumpkin. However, he mentioned that most of the harvests of these temporary crops were lost because it was unprofitable to sell them in the market. At the same time, he was reluctant to replace the temporary crops for sugar-cane crops because he was told that it would harm the land and that after planting sugar-cane he would be unable to plant anything else. Nevertheless, after he decided to cultivate sugar-cane on some of his lands for economic purposes, he realised that the situation was not as bad as everyone had warned. Marcos has been able to plant maize in the middle of sugar-cane furrows and assured me that as long as the land received the requisite nutrients, it would be possible to cultivate anything. Today, his main source of income comes from sugar-cane which, he says, does not require much effort because after he plants it, he needs to wait for a year until the plant is ready to harvest. There is no need for Marcos to inform the sugar-mill when the crop is ready to harvest because the sugar-mill already keeps a record of it.

All of the plots of land that grow subsistence crops are surrounded by sugar-cane. Figure 1 shows the proximity of one of Marcos's traditional farms with a sugar-cane plantation. This image evidences my main behind understanding how sugar-cane plantations shape Marco's life, materially and subjectively. Marcos highlights three different advantages that having a monoculture brings to his traditional farms. Firstly, sugar-cane monocultures are usually surrounded by a canal which prevents crops from flooding. Secondly, the access paths to his traditional farm were constructed by the sugar-mills because they are also the main paths to the plantations, meaning Marcos did not need to invest in them. Thirdly, he has benefited from the fertilisers that the sugar-mills did not use and had used them on his traditional farm.

Figure 1. Marcos working on his traditional farm located next to a sugar-cane plantation



Source: Fieldwork 2018

On a regular day, Marcos wakes up at seven in the morning, and he is ready to leave in his motorcycle to one of his two traditional farms by eight. Sometimes he visits both farms in one day, but this depends on the weather, his energy and availability. In fact, since his major source of income is sugar-cane, he sees his work on the traditional farms as a hobby which he enjoys greatly. He always keeps a machete to remove weeds and dead leaves from the trees. Marcos also collects the fruits that are ready to eat as well and places them in a yellow sack.

It is worth mentioning that the only time when Marcos engages and interacts with the sugar-cane is during the first months when he needs to treat them with fertilisers and compost. Once the plant is of a certain height, no more daily maintenance is needed. This situation is very different from the traditional farms because the crops constantly need to be cleaned and revised over the year to prevent the fruits from decomposing or being destroyed by different pests.

Chapter 3 Orthodox Marxist Perspective

“Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past”

Marx and Engels (as quoted in McLellan 1971: 125).

3.1 Introduction

The two features that characterise the LNC and Marcos' experiences must be understood from a materialist conception of history. This method engages in a historical understanding of facts and analyses them as a result of a historical process while acknowledging that the internal structure of the facts is essentially historical (Lukàcs 1971: 1-7). Marcos' actions and ideas are rooted in a set of material and historical processes that located him in a specific place within society and determined his social consciousness. The evolution of structures in the LNC has shaped the life chances of Afro-Caucans, and material processes have shaped Marcos' perceptions about his surroundings and position in society.

The decisive element in history is the sum of the relations of production which forms the economic base of society that also supports the legal and political superstructures (McLellan 1971: 124-125). Therefore, it is essential to look at the social relations at the level of production in the LNC and their role as a driver of social change in the territory. In other words, looking at Marcos' relationship with the means of production will be the primary methodological instrument to understand his narrative. These relations necessarily precede the relevance of social class in the LNC. Although definitions of class vary enormously, I will maintain the division of capitalist societies into two classes: capitalists and proletariat, which I will examine later.

In the first part of this section, I will describe a process of class formation that started before the development of capitalist agribusiness in LNC. The second section will intend to understand the multiculturalism of the State under the lens of Orthodox Marxist. Lastly, I will extrapolate Marcos' ideas and behaviour to illustrate how the sugar-cane industry has managed to embrace the economic and ideological spheres of Afro-Caucans lives.

3.2 Class formation

The LNC is divided into two classes, proletarians and bourgeoisie. The former are the owners of the means of production who employ wage-labourers and the latter are those who do not own the means of production and survive by selling their labour power to the bourgeoisie (McLellan 1971: 152). This process of class formation started in colonial times and resulted in the creation of a capitalist class in the sugar-cane industry, as well as the formation of a proletariat that became dispossessed from their means of production and obliged them to sell their labour or more elsewhere.

It is important to provide a historical account of LNC before sugar-cane. The work of Mina⁴ (1975), revised by their authors Taussig and Rubbo (2011), aims to give a detailed account of Northern Cauca, from the moment African slaves arrived at the region until 1975.

An imperialist enterprise was developed to dominate indigenous people after the Spanish arrived in modern day Colombia. The Spanish enslaved people to work in gold mines on the land, but after 60 years of domination, the destruction of indigenous people meant there was no labour force to sustain the Spanish empire, motivating them to import slaves from Africa. In the 1600's, the Spanish started to import black slaves in large quantities to the current capital of the department of Cauca, Popayán (Mina 1975: 23). This import of free labour turned to gold mining into a profitable industry.

Over the 250 years that Colombia experienced slavery, there were constant struggles from black populations resisting Spanish domination, particularly in Northern Cauca. Mina (1975: 32-34) highlights that slaves' rebellions were very common during the 18th century and that free blacks decided to settle themselves away from the Spanish and cultivate their food rather than integrate into wider society. Fugitive slaves formed *palenques*, hidden autonomous settlements with independent governments that embraced African culture and languages. Specifically, free black slaves and fugitives in the country, *palenqueros*, were known for their tenacity and strength at fighting imperial tyranny. In Northern Cauca, these *palenqueros* were known for their tobacco cultivations and their illegal commercial operations. Since they were heavily fortified and these operations occurred in the depths of the forests, they were feared by the Spanish.

After the abolition of slavery, landowners created a new order of domination called *terraje*, creating a new dynamic of class conflicts between a peasantry fighting for land rights and landowners who insisted that peasants work as labourers or pay rents (Taussig and Rubbo 2011: 77-80). Mina's testament to this struggle reads:

To the memory of the peasants who died in the bloody class struggles that took place in the Valley of the Cauca River during the second half of the 19th century. In those times, the former slaves almost conquered the New World for the small farmer: a world without landowners, without foreign markets, where peasants lived in a beneficial harmony among each other and with nature. (Mina 1975: 7)

This inscription details a period of class struggle and formation before the emergence of industrial capitalist agriculture and bourgeoisie class based solely on the production of sugar cane in the 20th century. This poses the question of the extent that the development of sugar-cane agribusiness impeded the struggles described by Mina. In the 20th century, a group of landowners with connections to international markets started to construct large sugar-mills like La Manuelita. These developments were accompanied by the conversion of the free black peasantry into a group of wage slaves (Mina 1975: 83). This term is used because the work conditions under which the black people worked were precarious, as a black farmer argued: "we, peasants reject the sugar-cane because is the raw material of the slavery", (as quoted in Taussig and Rubbo 2011: 157). It is fair to say, therefore, that the sugar-cane agribusiness impeded the conquest of free farmers and resulted in a consolidation of a capitalist and a proletarian class.

⁴ Pseudonym for Michael Taussig and Anna Rubbo.

It is beyond the scope of this study to describe the forces and the large consequences that Capitalist agriculture, in general, has in the environment or society as a whole. In this study is focused on class formation in the LNC, I will focus on the impact of capitalist agriculture in creating social differentiation. At the beginning of the 20th century, Northern Cauca was integrated into the international market system, with the construction of communication routes coinciding with an increase in sugar-cane production to meet international demand. This was a paradigm shift away from traditional subsistence farming. Peasants became increasingly vulnerable as they were forced to take out loans and became subject to international prices. Furthermore, sugar-cane industrialists were pressurising them to sell their land at very low prices under the threat of direct dispossession of their land. Most of the indebted farmers were eventually forced to sell their land at extremely low prices.

By the 1940's most of the land belonged to the sugar mills. Black peasants became obliged to sell their labour power to the powerful new capitalist class. This resulted in the process of proletarianization of the black peasantry. Proletarianization occurs when there is the generalised employment of wage labour in commodity production, and agricultural producers are separated from their means of production (Bernstein 2000: 261).

The process of proletarianization was accompanied by the emergence of a strong sugar-cane bourgeoisie. According to Collins (1983: 48), "from the decade of 1930, it is possible to describe a common class situation based on their property over the means of production of the sugar-cane crops and sugar production". Three main factors influenced this. Firstly, most of the land that was lost by the black peasantry ended up as the private property of the sugar-mills, which gave them more power over the means of production and fostered their capital accumulation in the industry at the expense of the proletarian class. Secondly, land acquisitions in the sugar-cane industry were underpinned by the influence and power of a few families who wanted to consolidate their power over the industry. For example, the 14 sugar-mills that were constituted during 1929 and 1950 mainly belonged to three family clusters that made the production of sugar highly concentrated and centralised (Collins 1983: 51). Thirdly, relationships between these families resulted in collusion and the entanglement of their interests. These families began to inter-marry to secure industrial power for their children and appointed members of different families in influential board positions.

While factors such as the unequal distribution of land, the family clusters and the close relationship between these were key elements in the constitution of the bourgeoisie, the notion of exploitation through the extraction of surplus value from the workers is the key to understanding what happened in the LNC. The constitution of a capitalist class is embedded in the exploitation of the proletarian class, creating a system based on the uneven distribution of rights and powers of people over productive resources (Wright 2005: 23).

It is important to understand the processes of class formation in the LNC in order to create the conditions in which workers realise their class position and make the jump from a class in itself to a class for itself. It is the class consciousness of the proletarian that enhance their subjective awareness of their class interests and the conditions to achieve them (Wright 2005: 21). This collective realisation is necessary if the LNC peasantry is to destroy the conditions of exploitation, alienation and domination that control their material lives; and implement progressive social change. As Lukàcs (1971: 24) writes, it is within such analyses that the conditions for the liberation of the proletariat from the insidious effects of bourgeois ideology will rise.

3.3 The multiculturalism of the state on the target

Recalling what was described earlier about the multiculturalism of the state, there is a forceful ethnic discourse in the LNC today that is underpinned by the existence of and legitimacy that the Community Councils (CC). As mentioned previously, Law 70 created a narrative of resistance against the violation of human rights and destructive development projects. Some of the CC are demanding collective property rights over their territory in order to become officially recognised as a CC by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. “The law’s objectives are the protection of black communities’ ethnic identity and rights as well as the promotion of their economic and social development in order to guarantee equality” (Cárdenas 2012: 309). Some would argue that these collective titling demands are the ideal way to recover the land that was lost 50 years ago with the expropriation of land from the black peasantry. Solarte (2016: 80), highlights the relevance of the political struggles in Northern Cauca that black people have followed in order to raise awareness about the dispossession of their lands for mega-projects and highlight the fact that they want to regain ownership of the land. However, by distracting black people with bureaucratic and legal procedures, the implementation of the Law in the LNC has rendered the roots of the land dispossession invisible.

The Law 70 itself has structural loopholes that do not recognise the land that was lost during the development of sugar-cane agribusiness and does not directly tackle the problem of land tenure in the LNC. Firstly, granting collective property to the communities currently occupying the territory ignores the black peasants that were previously dispossessed and forced to move to other rural or urban areas. This is a limitation of the law as it does not adequately confront the many historical dispossessions and subsequent inequalities that occurred in LNC. Secondly, restricting the collective property adjudication to barren, rural and riparian zones, ignores the reality of the LNC where there are no barren territories, and most of the Afro-Caucans live in urban areas which are not necessarily located close to the rivers.

The disputes over land and natural resources have led black people to resort to their ancestry and historical possession of their territories to defend their rights (Solarte 2016: 74). The fact that the multiculturalism of the State centres its focus on ethnic territorial rights sets aside the consequences that the process of class formation has had on the life-chances of Afro-Caucans. If the law’s objectives are to promote social development and equality for black people, it should not limit land adjudication to barren, rural and riparian zones. It should relocate land from the elite bourgeoisie owning most of the land in the LNC used for sugar-cane plantations and give it back to the black peasants as a way of compensation.

Undoubtedly, the Colombian state is fully aware that doing this would disturb the accumulation of capital upon which the sugar-cane bourgeoisie have built their enterprise at the expense of the wage labour available in the LNC. It is worth emphasising the instrumentalisation of the state by the bourgeoisie (McLellan 1971: 182). The sugar-cane bourgeoisie has been influential over the state apparatus at the local, regional and national levels (Collins 1983: 47). The state played a key role in the constitution of the sugar-cane empire, and past agrarian reforms have ended up facilitating the expansion of sugar-cane monocultures (Rojas 2016: 224) and actively promoting the sectoral integration of sugar-mills in guilds, furthering the industrial goal of capital accumulation (Collins 1983: 71-72). The sugar-cane industry has become deeply embedded within state practices in LNC making the possibility of redistributive reforms increasingly more complicated as time goes on. Law 70 is an example of a well-intentioned reform that does not address the issue of the unequal distribution of land as it does not tackle the unequal social relations at the level of production,

and is therefore beneficial to the sugar-cane bourgeoisie. Afro-Caucans are aware of this unequal situation, as summarised in the following quote by one of the members of a CC:

The sugar-cane as such is not bad, what happens is that large land extensions are in the hands of a few and if this persists it will not allow us to think of having a different quality of life.⁵

3.4 What Marcos' narrative unveils

Marcos' story gives us some hints about what happened 50 years after the establishment of the sugar-cane agribusiness in the LNC and after the class formation described earlier. One thing is certain: the economic structure of sugar-cane agribusiness has determined Marcos' life-chances. It has shaped his life in such a profound way that he normalises and accepts the presence of that business as something given and the only way to improve his living conditions. The power of the sugar-cane capitalist class to perpetuate and reproduce itself in the region uncovers how "the hegemony of the bourgeoisie really does embrace the whole of society; it really does attempt to organise the whole of society in its interests" (Lukàcs 1971: 65) in three different ways. Firstly, by ensuring that it will be provided of a workforce which considers working in the sector as the only economic option to improve material welfare. Secondly, by reinforcing its capital accumulation not only at the expense of proletarian labour but also from the sugar-cane production of small-landowners who do not have any other option than sowing sugar-cane in their land and sell it to the sugar-cane business. Thirdly, by incepting their bourgeois ideology into society dissipating any class antagonisms.

On the first point, Marcos' early integration and permanence in the sugar-cane sector unveils an inherited role as a sugar-cane worker and a perpetuation of the need to sell his labour power to the sugar-mills. On the one side, when Marcos was 20 years old, he joined the sugar-cane industry because his father was working as a sugar-cane cutter and he had to replace him because his dad got sick⁶. Therefore, Marcos' class position was determined by his fathers' and influenced his first encounter with the business. Making an analogy with what Marx and Engels said: Marcos has made his own history under given circumstances transmitted from the unequal and unjust mode of sugar-cane production of the last century. On the other side, most of Marcos' adult and senior main economic activity was associated with the sugar-cane cut until his retirement. During 40 years Marcos' worked as a proletarian in large extensions of sugar-cane throughout the whole region and this forged his idea of the sugar-cane business as the only possible option to survive. This is reflected in Marcos' comments describing his opinion of the following anecdote:

One day someone said that he would not care or he would not be affected if the sugar-mills are forced to leave the region because he was still going to be a 'good worker'. I thought immediately of the foolishness of this idea! If there is no sugar enterprise then where is he going to work and be a good worker? (laughter) Because if no one hires you then where you will work? I was outraged by this comment and thought of the nonsense of such statement.⁷

⁵ Interview with Andreina, Afro-Caucan member of a Community Council and ACONC (2nd August 2018).

⁶ Interview with Marcos (10th August 2018).

⁷ Interview with Marcos (10th August 2018).

Notably, this quote shows how the bourgeoisie has managed to position its project by imposing the sugar-cane industry as the industry par excellence of the region in the eyes of its inhabitants. Marcos does not envision any other industry in which he could perform or sell his labour, therefore does not conceive an alternative situation. Not only his permanence in the sugar-cane played a role in this. Also, the fact that the town where he lives and his traditional farms are surrounded by sugar-cane continue reinforcing this idea because of the proximity between him and the crop.

On the second point, it must be highlighted one of Marcos' current land uses and its meaning for the reproduction of the dominance of the sugar-cane bourgeoisie. Marcos decided to change from transitory crops to sugar-cane because the first option was no longer profitable. Consequently, he planted sugar-cane and has a type of contract farming with one of the sugar-mills. This reflects that even after retiring from his proletarian work, the sugar-cane industry still benefits from the result of his work as a small-landowner. Although Marcos is the owner of the land, he does not own other means of production to break free from the dominance and oppression of the agribusiness. Either way, the bourgeoisie has continued its capital accumulation at the expense of Marcos' independence and life-chances. Today, Marcos is no longer a proletarian, nor he can be considered as a bourgeois. However, as a small-landowner, he still exhibits the consequences of his proletarian life.

On the third point, Marcos' agency and strategic behaviour in the realm of sugar-cane are an illusion created by the Capitalist system in which the logic of capital accumulation is the prevailing way to accomplish well-being and life satisfaction. In other words, the bourgeoisie has managed to enforce his ideology during his years as a proletarian which materialised in Marcos' perception of the sugar-cane as follows:

I feel thankful to the rich because I worked in a company owned by rich people, and they provided me with a pension and the earnings that allowed me to obtain what I have today. How could I not be grateful for that? If I had worked for a poor person, I would not have anything and also be poor. What could a poor person give to me? Nothing? Don't you think? Nothing! The only thing the poor can give me is poverty, while the rich can give me a coin and I am of course always able to obtain something from them.⁸

This quote reveals two things. Firstly, the fact that Marcos feels grateful to the rich because it has provided the opportunities to improve his economic welfare opposes with the negative image that dispossessed peasants portrayed the sugar-cane business 50 years ago. Sugarcane is no longer considered as the raw material of slavery but as the raw material for life improvement. It reveals the loss of memory of the antagonistic peasant discourse and of the bloody class struggles that took place at the end of the 19th century. Secondly, inadvertently, Marcos' strategic thinking continues supporting the economic structure in which sugar-cane was built. This indicates that the production of ideas, conceptions and consciousness is interwoven with the material activity and intercourse of men (Marx and Engels [1845] 1970: 47). In this case, Marcos' consciousness about his location in society and positive perception of *the rich* is the result of his constant need to improve his material conditions of life in the realm of the capitalist project of the LNC bourgeoisie.

⁸ Interview with Marcos (10th August 2018).

Following that Marcos' ideas and social awareness are rooted in material needs, it is also possible to understand his lack of interest in the ethnic political struggles of the CC. Although he is a co-founder of one of these entities, the way he articulates his thoughts regarding one of the pillars of this organisms unveil a lack of sense of belonging with his African roots and descent:

I think that people believe in and exploit all of the Afro-centric discourse for their own benefit, but deep down it is untrue. The only thing that I know is that I am black and that I am Colombian. When people mention the African diaspora and all that, I remember that I was born in Colombia, my father was Colombian, my grandfather was Colombian, as was my great grandfather. I see myself as Colombian. The fact that they brought us from [Africa] does not interest me, the only thing that interests me is that I am Colombian, I live in Colombia, and I live the way Colombians live, not the way the Africans live. I don't give that much thought. That is why when people call me an Afro-descendant, I respond by saying, "No! I am black."⁹

The economic structure and class hierarchy of the sugar-cane business have located Marcos in a position where he does not give much relevance to his ethnicity. This, because his gratitude towards the sugar-cane bourgeoisie does not correspond with the discourse of resistance that it has been built around the multiculturalism of the state, the Law 70 and the endeavours of the Community Councils in the LNC.

3.5 Conclusion

The process of class formation in the LNC started before the development of sugar-cane. A free peasantry was being constituted in the first half of the 19th century and refused to be dominated by large landowners. Nevertheless, with the emergence of a sugar-cane bourgeoisie in the 20th century and the rationalisation of agriculture, black peasants were dispossessed from their lands and obliged to sell their labour to the sugar-mills. Though Law 70 aims to be an egalitarian reform, it does not tackle the unequal distribution of land with a large extension of lands in the hands of a few. In other words, the ethnic discourse appears as a deviation that ignores the root of the injustice in which the sugar-cane industry was built. Marcos narrative is a singular example of the dominance of the sugar-cane in the region and the scepticism that one part of the population in the LNC portrays of the ethnic discourse. An antagonistic peasant discourse is lost in Marcos life, and this is partly explained by his class position in the LNC economic structure.

⁹ Interview with Marcos (10th August 2018).

Chapter 4 Intersectional Perspective

“The complex social inequalities fostered by intersecting systems of power are fundamentally unjust, shaping knowledge projects and/or political engagements that uphold or contest the status quo.”
(Collins 2015: 14)

4.1 Introduction

Marcos' story should be analysed regarding the power relations associated with his race, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity that influence his opportunities in LNC. Without interacting with Marcos, it is possible to 'locate' him under specific categories because of his skin colour, his economic activities and social-political participation. From his skin colour, I could place him as a black person (*race*). From the lands he owns and the fact that he is retired I realised he has a relatively high economic position (*socio-economic status*). And from his participation in a Black Community Council, I could situate him under a specific political project of black people in Colombia (*ethnicity*). However, after I interacted with him and other people in the region, I was able to grapple with the different ways in which these three identities interacted and are interdependent in Afro-Caucans experiences.

Situating Marcos' experiences, in broader structures of capitalist agriculture and significant institutional changes such as the multiculturalism of the state highlight their influence on power structures in LNC. Power relations are mutually constituted interactions and should be analysed via the intersections of different identities and across domains of power (Collins and Bilge 2016: 26-27). It is impossible to understand all of these structures independently from one another. There are four different domains of power: structural, cultural, disciplinary and interpersonal (2016: 26). The first three domains of power will structure my analysis. Since the interpersonal domain of power seeks to bring to the light people's lives, how they relate with others and who is in an advantaged or disadvantaged position within social interactions (2016: 7), I will analyse this domain of power by constantly bringing people's lives into the light in the analysis of the other three domains of power. By doing so, I will explore how ethnicity, race and socio-economic status play different roles in determining life chances and opportunities in the LNC.

4.2 Structural domain of power

The structural domain of power reflects how life is organised and structured within a society. It is determined by the organisation of social institutions like the economy, religion or policies that determine and reproduce inequalities (Collins 2002: 277). Two specific structures have transformed the organisation of LNC society. The first is the development of capitalist agriculture of sugar cane in the LNC, which became the major source of employment in LNC and gives relevance to the category of socioeconomic status into the analysis. Also, the establishment of this capitalist economic system has manifested into the racialised system that exists today.

On the other hand, Law 70 displayed a political project from the Black Communities in the Pacific and transformed the power relations within the LNC. Notably, it empowered those whose struggles were defined by ethnicity claims based on the unequal treatment of black people in society. Therefore, it is possible to envisage the first intersection of socio-economic status, race and ethnicity at a structural level.

Afro-Caucans' lives in LNC are mainly structured around the sugar-cane business. At the edge of the highway and roads, there were some houses and farms of people that still manage to plant some plantains and cassava or subsistence crops in their small plots, but the vast majority of crops are sugar cane. The fact that Afro-Caucans' lives are mainly structured around this industry unveils an unequal economic situation where people's life opportunities are confined to the sugar-cane industry. Whilst there are sparse cases of other informal work, transportation costs and low levels of education are two large barriers that propel people to employment within the sugar cane industry.

While I recognized the town of Miranda, I identified that the buses transporting sugar cane workers to the field were old and dirty school buses, as displayed in Figure 2. I then inquired into another type of transportation reserved for the plantation heads or non-manual workers and found that these predominantly white workers are transported in new school buses with air conditioning¹⁰. The disparity in transportation conditions reflects Mina's (1975) observation that the sugar-cane industry developed with the creation of a division of labour defined through racial categories.

Figure 2. School buses transporting sugar-cane workers in Miranda



Source: Fieldwork 2018

Analysing the structural transformations that sugar cane has had on LNC society and how this industry is organized at the level of the sugar-cane cutting unveils certain systems of power that impact the levels of social inequality in the region. Firstly, a specific social hierarchy based on the access to the means of subsistence has forced people into a situation where they are forced to work on the fields. Their unprivileged socio-economic status means they have no access or right to be transported in new buses with air conditioning. It is therefore fundamental to understand how race has reinforced their place in that bus.

The bus situation reflects Zillah Einstein's argument that that capital will always intersect with the bodies that produce, meaning that the accumulation of capital is always entangled with the racialized structures that enhance it (as quoted in Collins and Bilge 2016: 16).

¹⁰ Interview with Manuela, gatekeeper in Miranda (25th July 2018).

Therefore, it is not only the colour of the skin or the activities they perform in the economic system that is of relevance, is the interconnectedness of the socio-economic status and categories of race that characterize the dominance of the sugar-cane industry which shapes the lives of Afro-Caucans today.

Some days later, I decided to share my observations with Marcos and better understand his perspective about the sugar cane industry in LNC. Interestingly, Marcos defended the sugar-cane mills by arguing that the run-down school buses that I observed were a vast improvement on the open-air trucks that transported workers in the past. Marcos elaborated his thoughts on the relationship between the sugar cane capitalists and labourers, stating:

I feel thankful to the rich because I worked in a company owned by rich people, and they provided me with a pension and the earnings that allowed me to obtain what I have today. How could I not be grateful for that? If I had worked for a poor person, I would not have anything and also to be poor. What could a poor person give to me? Nothing? Don't you think? Nothing! The only thing the poor can give me is poverty, while the rich can give me a coin and I am of course always able to obtain something from them¹¹.

Notably, Marcos' perception about his position in the current social structure of the LNC is not an antagonistic one, as he does not feel oppressed by it at all. Marcos has some awareness of his socio-economic position, as he reflects on feeling in an advantaged position just not as advantaged as the rich. This is clear at the end of the quote, where Marcos portrays himself as a utility-maximizing strategic actor that gains from the existence of the sugar-cane capitalists. I believe this stance to be both linked to his status as a landowner, and also indicative of the way that the structures of sugar cane agribusiness shape people's subjectivities and perceived life opportunities. Marcos expresses a binary, capitalist worldview where rich is good and poor is bad, and value is solely experienced in monetary terms. Despite his membership on a community council, it is telling that Marcos' worldview revolves around the individual, and therefore reflects the structural impact of sugar cane on subjectivities within LNC.

It is also important to express the influence that the implementation of Law 70 has had on the life in the LNC. The law has influenced the manner in which Afro-Caucans are organizing to reclaim collective ownership of land and claiming special recognition as an ethnic minority. The law transformed power relations within the LNC because it allowed Afro-Caucans to exercise agency over their life chances to claim social justice and equality in the region inside and outside the legal realm.

The multiculturalism of the state and the institutionalization of black communities shaped the structure of society and transformed the power relations between Afro-Colombians and the State. It is important to reiterate that the Ministry of Internal Affairs does not recognize some of the Community Councils as such because they have not been allocated with the collective property of their land. Instead, black people have constituted Community Councils Organizations that have formal registration in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Solarte 2016: 68) but are not covered by Law 70. This reflects that collective ownership has not impeded black people to group themselves and look for recognition and participation in the municipalities. These black population which reclaim ethnic and racial visibility outside the

¹¹ Interview with Marcos (10th August 2018).

legal arena and outside the collective property of land, are avoiding being silenced and are exercising collective agency by grouping themselves as black communities in LNC.

4.3 Cultural domain of power

In this section, I continue exploring how in the cultural domain of power, social institutions and practices play a role in reproducing ideas that can justify social inequalities (Collins 2017:16). The social structures mentioned before underpinning society in the LNC, but representations and ideas can both justify those structures and challenge the status quo. I will now try and situate Marcos' story in relation to other realities of Afro-Caucans and provide a deeper analysis of Marcos' statements to reveal the major historical process of coloniality and its influence on LNC.

The race is more than Marcos' skin colour. In fact, this social category has played a role in his life chances and certainly those of his past generations. Unwillingly, he has endured the project of a coloniality of power, which, different from colonialism, unveils a process of racialization uncovering abiding patterns of power that were born in times of colonialism which delineated culture, labour, intersubjective relations, individual aspirations, rationality and knowledge production in ways that accredit the superiority of the colonizer (Quijano quoted in Mendoza 2015: 113-114). Notably, in colonial times the distribution of work was determined by racial categories, which not only determined economic activities but also influenced people's subjectivities, culture and practices. Today, although Eurocentric colonisation is over, Eurocentric coloniality remains where European rationality and logic dominate the Third World. This is evident not only in Marcos' life but in those of the other people I interacted with.

Coloniality of power is a useful tool to understand how the sugar-cane agribusiness inherited the racialized system of colonisation, and also to unveil how the Latin American inheritance of the project of rationality/modernity from Europe became embedded in power relations. For example, the fact that after acquiring land Marcos was obliged to turn his transitory crops into sugar-cane transformed the relationship between him and nature. The rise of sugar-cane appropriated Marcos' work and identity, changing his relationship with the land to the ultimate benefit of the sugar-mill. Marcos' relationship with his land and his reflections on his socioeconomic status are both reflective of a historical, cultural Europeanization, where humans have come to aspire to certain material benefits and powers at the expense of nature (Quijano 2007: 169).

Solely using coloniality of power overlooks the influence of other systems which have been materialized in categorizations of socio-economic status and ethnicity. I have argued here that Marcos' shift to sugar-cane can be problematized and understood as something that transformed his relationship with nature, making into something to be conquered, representing a process rooted in the racialized conquest of the region many years ago. However, contrasting this with Marcos' perception of the sugar-cane mills uncovers a different version of this story. While I have tried to argue that sugar-cane business is a materialization of the capitalist system of oppression, which has influenced Marcos' relations with nature, Marcos does not necessarily understand himself as oppressed by the structures around him. Conversely, Marcos spoke proudly of the opportunities afforded to him by the sugar cane

industry and proudly told me about his achievements and the status and recognition that his career brought him within his local community.

Recalling how I met Marcos, there are some elements that elucidate Marcos' socio-economic status not only from the lands he owns but also from the symbolic power of having such lands and the recognition of his status in the neighbourhood. Marcos' behaviour displays a symbolic capital, and it emerged out of his place as a successful labourer within the community. Symbolic capital, in Bourdieu's terms, defines what forms or uses of capital are recognized as legitimate grounds of social position and which exists solely in the 'eyes of the others' (as quoted in Siisainen 2003: 196). Marcos is recognized in the neighbourhood not as a poor person, but as a powerful agent that shares the result of his daily work (fruits and vegetables) with everyone around him. Because he wears clothing with inscriptions of the most dominant sugar-cane mill in the region or that mills' union, he is ascribed a high level of legitimacy from the community, and Marcos is granted a certain status. This is another example of the way in which the historical dominance of agricultural capital shapes culture and, consequently, life opportunities in the region.

4.4 Disciplinary domain of power

Community Councils became an arena of contestation for Afro-Caucans, affording them a new level of political participation that their socio-economic status had previously excluded them from. I will analyse this using the disciplinary domain of power, a tool that helps explain how rules and public policy can be instrumentalised to either uphold or challenge the existing social hierarchy (Collins 2017: 26). In LNC, I observed a dissonance between a strong political discourse based in the CC and people's actual perceptions about the functions and utility of the CC.

The multiculturalism of the state has undeniably supported a political discourse fostering a system of privilege based on ethnicity claims. I witnessed the strong political endeavour of black communities fighting for territory. For example, a 25-year-old black woman who works for ACONC (Northern Cauca Community Councils Association), agreed that the LNC CC's were created to fight for the protection of the territory and to sustain an organized struggle with constitutional legitimacy.¹² This narrative was also supported from legal representatives of CC and former mayors of LNC towns that sought to utilize Law 70 outside of the Pacific and in the LNC region. Most of them agreed with the idea that the Afro-Colombian population possess a culturally specific and traditional way of living that has been passed down through generations. They feel that CC's will allow them to defend these specificities against external threats.

Conversely, another portion of the community council's members did not feel a strong attachment to these traditions. In Marcos' case, I sensed a rejection of the political background of the CC and a scepticism towards the ethnic discourse based in the African diaspora:

I think that people believe in and exploit all of the Afro-centric discourse for their own benefit, but deep down it is untrue. The only thing that I know is that I am black and

¹² Interview with Maricel, Afro-Caucan member of ACONC (2nd August 2018).

that I am Colombian. When people mention the African diaspora and all that, I remember that I was born in Colombia, my father was Colombian, my grandfather was Colombian, as was my great grandfather. I see myself as Colombian. The fact that they brought us from [Africa] does not interest me, the only thing that interests me is that I am Colombian, I live in Colombia, and I live the way Colombians live, not the way the Africans live. I don't give that much thought. That is why when people call me an Afro-descendant, I respond by saying, "No! I am black."¹³

This scepticism and rejection of the Afro-diasporic identity must be understood not only from the axis of ethnicity and race but also from his socio-economic status and nationality. Marcos gave much more relevance to his identity as a Colombian than to his identity as an Afro-Colombian. This does not mean that the strong ethnic discourse in the LNC is not real or true. Nor does it mean that Marcos does not believe in the power of CC or the Law 70. What this shows is that "individuals have multiple 'subjectivities' that they construct from one situation to the next" (Collins & Bilge 2016: 125). These thoughts must be situated in Marcos' specific context and situated in larger dynamics of the LNC. It is also useful to compare his context with those that defend the Afro-Colombian identity. It is important to note that a large portion of the CC members that I talked to, that displayed a strong political discourse, had some type of tertiary or higher education. Some were even pursuing double degrees. Their connection with traditional farms and sugar-cane was clearly lower than Marcos'. Marcos was the only CC leader with whom I talked that did not have this level of education, and that did not grow up in a community where the African offspring was a strong narrative. Certainly, there are many Marcos' out there that do not have the means to access or 'believe' in ethnic political discourses.

Taking this individual analysis to a more general level, Law 70 in the LNC has delineated black political participation, unveiling how "power operates by disciplining people in ways that put people's lives on paths that make some options seem viable and others out of reach" (Collins and Bilge 2016: 9). Since the Law 70 became apparently the only mechanism that Afro-Caucans have to make their voices heard, these "multiculturalist policies actively produce and manage blackness and indigenosity, bringing ethnic communities into direct relationship with the state, [...] bureaucratising them" (Wade 2010: 142). Therefore, it is important to question how those who remain excluded from this mechanism, those who struggle to be included into the realm of the Law 70 and those who use this mechanism to challenge the different systems of oppression have adapted to the emergence of the CC. These three cases will be analysed hereunder.

I encountered some people in the LNC whose socio-economic position did not make easy their participation in the Black Community Councils. Maria's story, for example, unveils how, although she recognized herself as an Afro-Colombian woman and was interested in being part of the CC, she prioritized other material needs such as being a single mother without any financial support. This lack of time and economic means to go to the CC meetings automatically excludes Maria from participating in the CC political space. As a matter of fact, most of the people with whom I interacted in Maria's neighbourhood were familiar with the Community Council but did not want to get involved because they were sceptical about the power of the CC mechanism to improve their material conditions. These 'exceptions' indicate the relevance of an intersectional analysis of the implementation of the law, in which

¹³ Interview with Marcos (10th August 2018).

not only race and ethnic identities play a key role, but also the socio-economic status of people determines participation in Black Communities.

Other community leaders did not just recognize this mechanism in positive terms only but also in terms of oppression and discrimination. In a discussion with a CC legal representative, he referred to it as a way for black people to self-discriminate. Referring to using the CC to obtain ethnic rights, he mentioned that “in order to have specific help, specific condition is needed [...] you have to discriminate yourself to receive help”¹⁴. It is possible to understand this last narrative as an experience of privilege and oppression at the same time (Hankivsky 2014: 3). It would be a mistake to understand this as a completely negative perception of the ethnic discourse. He was referring to the complexity of his identity, and the way he has experienced privilege by being a legal representative of the CC, and also the oppression that caused him to use his race as a political tool and strategy to fight for social equality. Gayatri Spivak would refer to the CC’s strategic use of identity politics as ‘strategic essentialism’, meaning the “strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (as quoted in Eide 2010: 76).

Beyond territorial struggles, CC’s need to be understood as a means of achieving better living, education, and working conditions. Colombia is living a phase of post-Peace Agreement and Bacrim (Criminal Bands) together with FARC dissidents are fighting over the territory to continue with illicit-drugs cultivation. For this reason, social leaders in the country are being assassinated because they are seen as an obstacle to this conflict. Therefore, the problem of survival within CC leaders is one of the key points in their agenda¹⁵. Secondly, the CC is also a mechanism through which people look for access to higher education. For instance, one of the members of a CC told me that most of the activities they do are based on training seminars to explain how to access to tertiary education¹⁶. They invited educational credit foundations such as ICETEX (Colombian Institute of Educational Credit and Technical Studies Abroad), which supports people with low income but high academic performance in their pursuit of accessing quality education. Furthermore, another community leader told me that they are also fighting for additional aid. For example, there are some scholarships for Afro-Colombians that were being granted to non-black people, something that has reduced since the formation of CCs, which have increased access to scholarships for Afro-Caucan students. The CC is also used to improve the working conditions of Afro-Caucans in their jobs. Marcos, for example, mentioned that the main topic in the agenda of his CC is to intervene in a wrongful dismissal of some women from their jobs who requested the CC to assist with their case.

That said an intersectional analysis of Law 70 is essential to properly understand the CC as an arena of contestation and adaptation for Afro-Caucan people. In this case, an analysis of the disciplinary domain of power emphasizes how their race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status come together to shape their participation in the CC and the ways they exercise power and agency over the shortcomings of the law and even within the CC’s themselves. The CC’s are both a means to bring visibility to the Afro-Caucan situation, and also a way to turn that recognition into an improvement of their material living conditions.

¹⁴ Interview with Edinson, legal representative of a Community Council (1st August 2018).

¹⁵ Interview with Víctor, legal representative and Major Counsellor of ACONC (28th July 2018).

¹⁶ Interview with Neptalí, member of a Community Council (27th July 2018).

4.5 Conclusion

Looking at the structural, cultural, disciplinary and interpersonal domain of power has unveiled the interconnectedness of the social categories of race, socio-economic status and ethnicity, in the understanding of Afro-Caucan life chances. The co-existence of the sugar-cane agribusiness and the implementation of Law 70 unleashed a set of complex power dynamics with different consequences for social inequality. At a structural level, sugar-cane has imposed as a racialised system based on different socio-economic hierarchies that are evidenced in the small details of a regular day in LNC such a school bus picking up workers to take them to their workplace. Furthermore, Law 70 shaped black people organisation into CC but also triggered the existence of another type of communitarian association. At the cultural level, the sugar-cane industry is not only a reflection of the coloniality of power in the LNC but also a meaning of symbolic capital for some Afro-Caucans. Lastly, analysing the implementation of the Law at the intersection of the ethnic and socio-economic levels unveiled the fact that CC's have become an arena of contestation and political participation for Afro-Caucans.

Chapter 5 Reflection

Instead of a conclusion, I will provide a reflection after harmonizing two seemingly opposite academic stances: Orthodox Marxism and intersectionality. I started this paper by exploring the theoretical debates and tensions around the question of whether the social class is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of social inequality, or if the juxtaposition of many other categories defines contemporary debates of social development. Specifically, I tried to explore to what extent can Marxist class analysis, or intersectionality accounts for contemporary Afro-Colombian politics. I concluded this project with more questions than answers to the initial main question but gained specific lessons that will nourish future discussions on the topic and the methodology behind the research. In the following section, I will present several considerations. First, I outline some insights regarding the writing process of this document. Second, I summarize key considerations about my understanding of the LNC and Marcos' narrative. Last, I will present the reflections about the theoretical debate.

Reflections on the process

Before engaging in the practical exercise of conducting both analyses, this document was meant to be a theoretical discussion on the dominance of social class in the understanding of life-chances over other categories that appear under an intersectional approach. I deliberately chose to study the LNC because I knew that the development of a sugar-cane industry created a large labour force that did not exist before. The purpose was to complement the theoretical debate using the LNC case and Marco's story to highlight the role of historical processes in shaping reality. Notwithstanding, before attempting to defend such a statement, I needed to engage in a proper and 'responsible' understanding of both antagonistic approaches and put them into practice. Essentially, I needed to take one step back and position myself as an intersectional researcher in order to grapple with the complexity of reality and historical processes. I was not keen on an intersectional and subjective understanding of the world. Therefore, the project required an exploration of the overlap between identities, systems of power, and mechanisms of oppression. After having taken a step back in the research process, I present this study as an invitation. An encouragement to give always a chance to other ways of interpreting the world, different from the ones with which you feel more connected as a researcher. By doing this, our appreciation and understanding of real-world problems will help us avoid making theoretical claims without a robust empirical basis. I used to limit my understanding of reality as something rooted in the material and observable phenomenon. However, after doing this research, I take one step forward towards a more nuanced and less deterministic understanding of the world.

Reflections on the LNC and Marcos

I explored the Afro-Colombian politics by looking at the regional impact of Law 70 on the LNC. Specifically, I tried to understand Colombian multiculturalism by focusing on the development and dominance of sugar-cane agribusiness. I analysed the influence of these complex sociological phenomena through class, identity, and power relations. I highlighted the law's complex historical and cultural specificities in order to problematize the widely acclaimed Law 70 and contribute to increase the efficacy of future multicultural policies of the Colombian state.

The narrative of resistance that characterised the LNC black peasantry fifty years ago against the sugar-cane industry has been transformed and adapted under the context of Law 70. To this day, the struggle to protect the territory remains alive but is no longer embodied solely by peasants, nor is framed solely under the realm of the land as a means of production. The ethnic and racial discourse has been strategic essentialised, in Spivak's terms, to adapt Afro-Caucan struggles to legal and bureaucratic arenas.

That said, it is essential to underline the relevance of what I found while analysing Afro-Colombian politics in the LNC not only for an understanding of the Colombian context, but also to other contexts. The two specific features of the LNC, the sugar-cane agribusiness and the official state policy of multiculturalism are not specific to this region or to the Colombian context. Although, the specificities of LNC make the dynamics of these features a singular one, there are some elements that might be useful to understand other regions of the world. On the one hand, traditional farming has been systematically replaced by agribusiness all around the world dispossessing peasants from their means of production and transforming the relationship between them and nature. Therefore, the narrative I present here about the transformation of the peasant discourse to an ethnic one, is fundamental in the study of peasants belonging to an ethnic minority elsewhere. One of the main consequences of this transformation in the LNC context is that the ethnic/racial discourse might have shadowed the historical struggle of the peasantry. It is worth exploring if this has happened elsewhere. On the other hand, as I mentioned earlier in the study, official multiculturalism policies were also implemented by several Latin America states. This is why looking at the Colombian case in a critical way, might contribute to a better comprehension of other state's recognition of ethnic diversity, especially of those of African descent.

Lastly, as I explained earlier in more depth, Marcos' narrative challenged the narrative of resistance against sugar-cane agribusiness and also the ethnic political discourse of Law 70. Marcos is certainly not representative of those struggles, but he indeed seems to represent the *other* story of the LNC. His is a narrative that does not see the sugar-cane industry as something particularly malicious, but as part of Afro-Caucans' identities and something through which it is possible to benefit from. In addition, Marcos represents the voices of those who do not believe that the ethnic discourse can actually improve their well-being and material welfare. While one cannot blindly extrapolate this individual and local story to national or international contexts, his perspective allowed me to realise the limitations of theories that occasionally do not fit with reality. Therefore, it is a challenge as researchers to also look at the singularities we encounter in fieldwork.

While analysing Marcos' thoughts, I encountered a major challenge in the intersectional perspective. In most of the intersectional literature, the emphasis is on peoples' voices and subjectivities and how that relates to structures. The challenge was how to cope with the fact that he did not feel oppressed. Who was I as a researcher for stating that he was an oppressed subject because of the embeddedness of his life in the sugar-cane economic structure? I tried to grapple with the dilemma, by exploring into his education and socioeconomic status. Conversely, under the Orthodox Marxist approach, in a way it was a more straightforward answer to argue that it was a result of the hegemony of the bourgeoisie that was embracing the whole of society, including Marcos' subjectivity and way to see the world. After having done both analyses, I am still uncertain of how to grapple with this type of narrative, but I will let the reader decide which explanation is more suitable to understand Marcos.

Reflections on the debate

While exploring to what extent can Marxist class analysis or intersectionality account for contemporary Afro-Colombian politics, I made special emphasis on the “or” of this question throughout this paper. When I initiated this academic endeavour, I expected to arrive at conflicting conclusions depending on the perspective I was telling the story. However, I ended up discovering a complete narrative while including both analyses, rather than encountering incompatible results. In short, I found a non-antagonistic relation between Orthodox Marxism and Intersectionality while exploring the LNC and Marcos. Instead of perceiving both approaches as opposing to each other, there are strong advantages of looking at their complementarities.

Firstly, since both approaches look at different elements and employ different methodologies while using them, I discovered distinctive elements of the LNC. On the one hand, under a materialist conception of historical analysis I resorted mainly to the historical work of Collins (1983), Mina (1975) and its revised version by its authors: Taussig and Rubbo (2011). I needed to explore historical processes like black resistance in colonial times and the emergence of sugar-cane agribusiness in depth to highlight the relevance of social class today. In that sense, I presented Marcos’ narrative as a revision of that discourse today and encountered that the sentiment of resistance is not a defining feature in his life. On the other hand, under an intersectional approach, I resorted less on historical works and more in what I experienced during fieldwork. Mainly I employed a detailed analysis of my observations, people’s voices regarding the CC’s and used the domains of power framework of Collins and Bilge (2016) to structure the analysis. Essentially, if I would have employed only one approach, I would have missed looking at the other sources that complemented my understanding of LNC. Making both analyses helped me to discover more nuances and shades in the story.

Secondly, through both approaches, I could explore critically the official state policy of multiculturalism enshrined in Law 70. From an Orthodox Marxist view, the law does not tackle the issue of land redistribution, and it relates this with potential interests of the sugar-cane bourgeoisie in state’s autonomy to redistribute the land. Thus, it was irrelevant to explore the functioning of the CC’s because it did not address the interests of the proletarian class. From the intersectional side, it was not evident the issue of land redistribution. However, I could focus more on the implementation of the law by examining the power relations that occur in the functioning of the CC’s. Notably, I proposed to look at them as arenas of contestations for Afro-Caucans. Within this analysis, the ideas of strategic essentialism and experimenting oppression and privilege at the same time, intrinsic of an intersectional approach, were fundamental to understand Afro-Colombian policies in practice. It was surprising to encounter voices in the realm of the CC’s that felt discriminated by being a participant of these spaces. In short, examining the law through an intersectional lens allowed me to look beyond land and class struggle and explore CC’s at a more practical level.

In spite of the complementary relation between intersectionality and Marxist class analysis in this research, it is possible to reflect on how this study contributes to the debate of the contemporary relevance of social class. One thing is clear; it is evidently no longer possible to envisage a situation where society is divided into two pure classes in the LNC. Although in the Orthodox Marxist perspective the peasant’s dispossession unleashed a process

of social differentiation, Marcos' story can no longer be situated in this simplistic hierarchy. Neither the participants of the CC's in the LNC can be located in neither of those class locations. Nonetheless, by bringing social class at the centre of the analysis, the focus on the land dispossession contributed to the understanding of how life is structured in the region and how this situation came into being. Under this approach, the sugar-cane landowners' capital accumulation was only possible through the detriment of a black peasantry. This last element, fundamental in the Orthodox Marxist approach and mostly in the history of the LNC disappears and is overlooked from an intersectional approach.

In the intersectional approach, the concept of social class did not appear in the analysis and was replaced by socioeconomic status. I did this to elucidate the fact that under a pure and 'orthodox' intersectional lens, social class understood from a Marxist perspective, is not taken into consideration. This avoidance of Marxist class analysis in intersectional perspectives is necessary to be able to juxtapose a notion of socioeconomic status with other identities such as ethnicity and race. For example, socioeconomic status played a key role in explaining the lack of participation of people in the CC's and Marcos' scepticism of the Afro-diasporic discourse under the intersectional perspective. However, this role never was a pivotal element in the analysis, nor it shadowed the relevance of the other social categories. While class analysis was absorbed into a more plural understanding of the LNC, the narrative of land-dispossession and an antagonistic relationship based on the powers over the LNC's lands was blurred or non-existent. My point here is that for a better understanding of Afro-Colombian politics, the Orthodox Marxist approach brought to the table the root of an antagonistic sentiment always presents in the LNC. Ignoring this entails a fundamental loophole for future politics that aim for social development and equality in this place.

Finally, although the intellectual project rejecting social class as not having any cultural significance today, condemned to disappear and to be dissolved into other general theories, it was evident the paramount importance of this theoretical tool to tell one key part of the story. The story of the LNC would certainly be incomplete without the historical revision of an antagonistic sentiment in the region against the land concentration in hands of a few. However, it is also certain that not being able to identify a polarised class structure today also entails reconstruction of class. This project should maintain the hostile relationship between the universal compulsion of capital and the universal grounds for resistance, following Chibber (2014), but without being absorbed into intersectional approaches.

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