

Carleton University

Gold in the Chocó, Colombia

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Abstract

This dissertation undertakes an ethnography of gold in the Chocó department of northwest Colombia. It answers this question: *What is gold about if it is not just about gold?* The dissertation does not offer one answer, but rather shows various ways to understand gold in the Chocó. It examines artisanal, small-scale, and large-scale gold mining to show gold is part of a fixed subsistence livelihood economy, a hustle—or *rebusque*—economy, and economic fictions on the frontier through money laundering and speculation via small-scale, and, tentatively, large-scale gold mining. Gold is the thread that connects the dissertation's discussion of artisanal mining and the subsistence livelihood practices of rural Afro-descendant people; mine talk and mine practice; the epistemological difficulty and ambiguities of knowing in context of conflict; the hustle of *paisas*, or white outsiders from other regions of Colombia; migration and displacement to and from the Chocó; frontiers, the state, and collective territory; small-scale gold mining and the hustle; gold and its role in money laundering; multinational mining corporations on collective territories; Afro-descendant organizations and the process of prior consultation; speculation and money laundering; and the political and environmental effects of small-scale and artisanal mining for Afro-descendant communities. The dissertation explores gold from its material extraction in mining to its connections with different economies. Eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork, gold mining apprenticeship, and investigative analysis constitute the dissertation's methods.

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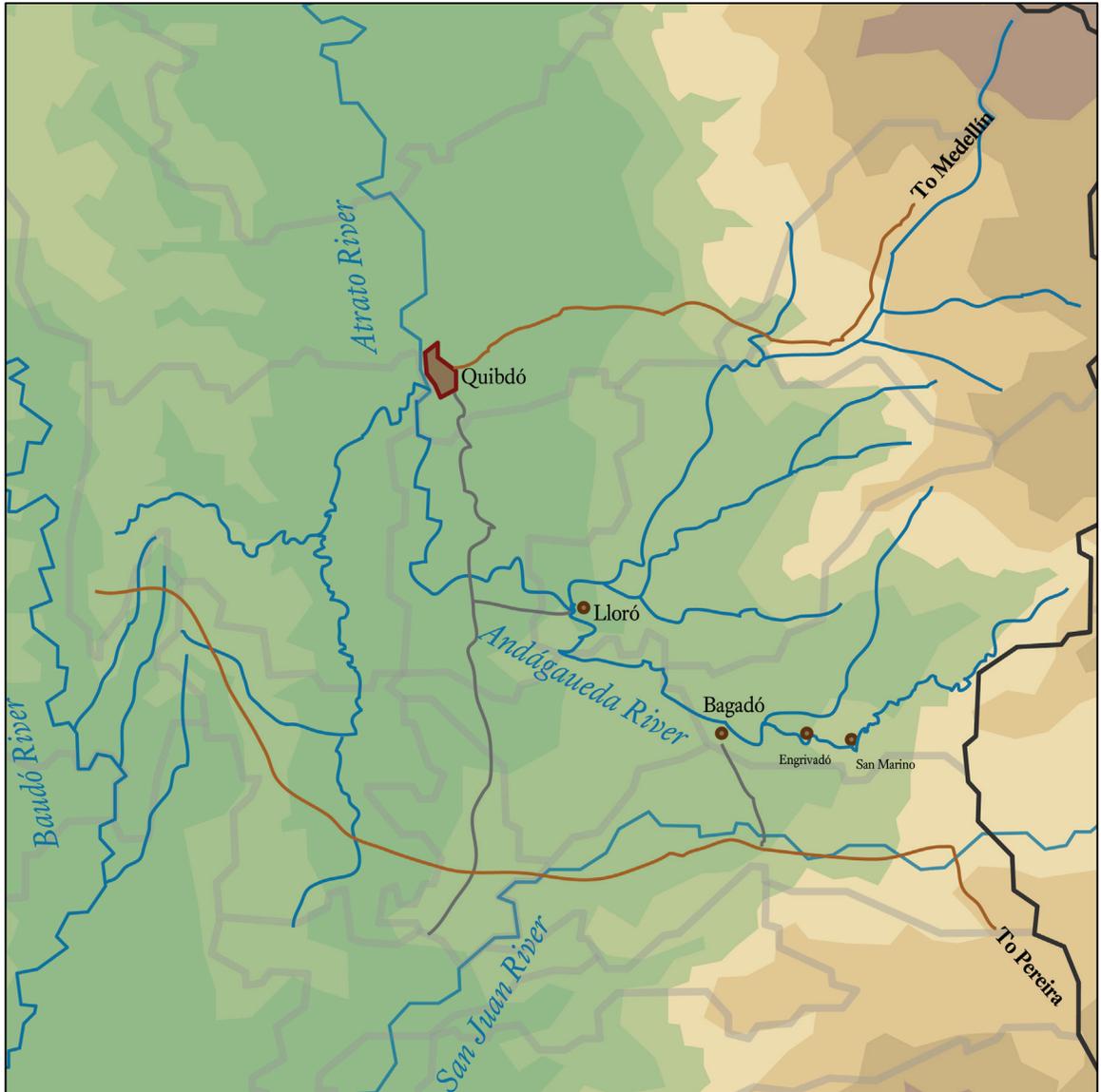
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Illustration 1: Map of Colombia¹



¹ To make this and the following illustration, I altered a map from Colombia's Agustín Codazzi Geographic Institute published on Wikipedia (2009).

Illustration 2: Map of the Upper Atrato River and Upper San Juan River



Chapter 1:

Introduction

A wooden plank wedged on top of two tree stumps, half a meter off the ground, is the highest point for miles. Mauricio and I sit catching fleeting cellular signals from the closest town. He is thin, bearded, and wearing shorts and plastic flip-flops. He leans forward holding a cheap second-hand Nokia phone with worn buttons high in front of his face squinting at the flickering grey bars that show a cellular signal. I do the same with a similar phone. Mauricio and others often take the half-kilometer trek from the village near the river to the plank to make calls late in the day. We stretch searching for signals in the evening light. It is a patient and unreliable task.

Above us, thin wispy clouds float as the sun descends towards the forested horizon. It has not rained today. On this hilltop and others, between the Colombian Pacific coast and the Andes mountains, such a dry day, at this time of year, is unusual. Typically, at least part of the day, clouds hang thick, grey, and low with rain. Some municipalities in this region, Colombia's Chocó department, in the country's northwest, register the highest accumulation of rainfall in the world. Hot, humid air arrives from the Pacific to the west, meets the cold air above the slopes of the Andes to the east, and dumps, in some places, an average of 12.3 meters of water a year, making it one of the wettest parts of the world (National Climatic Data Center, 2008).

When I first arrived here five months ago, I worried this pervasive wetness might destroy my equipment. Before leaving Bogotá in November 2010, I carefully packed my camera, tape recorder, and computer in plastic bags. My plan was to spend a year doing

doctoral fieldwork in anthropology learning how to gold mine in this part of Colombia. After arriving to the Chocó, and moving to the village, I learned Mauricio used a black plastic bag to protect electronics as well, but only when it actually rains. Today, we do not cover our phones.

We feel the breeze moving down from the mountains and slap at insect bites. We smell the pungent forest odors of soap, mixed with crushed insects and rotting plant material. Mauricio calls his niece in the Chocó's capital Quibdó. I call my family in Canada. That evening, we get a signal. It is only barely enough to exchange a greeting. The signal barely lasts enough for us to catch family news. When the phones drop their connections, we try again to call other people: my partner in Bogotá and Mauricio's cousin in a nearby town up the river. The signal gives out completely. Mauricio, pointing at the undulating forest below us, says, "The wind."

With the rain, the hilltop typically offers a clouded gray view in all directions. However, this evening, the lush forest landscape opens in all directions and we can see the three focuses of my research on gold mining. On the east side of the hill, about 30 meters below where we stand down the steep hillside are small piles of gravel and stone, the remains of an artisanal gold mine. A family of Mauricio's neighbors, a man named Esteban, his mother, brothers, sons, and nieces and nephews, used hand tools to dig trenches and a tunnel into the hill and to pan for trace flecks of gold. Artisanal miners including Esteban use manual labor to work gold bearing gravel throughout Colombia's mineral rich regions. They use these techniques in the Chocó's Atrato River and San Juan River regions, the Lower Cauca River in the department of Antioquia, the San Lucas

mountains in Bolívar, some municipalities in Córdoba, and rivers in Nariño and the Cauca.¹

Besides the piles, four rumbling large yellow excavators slowly level the hill down to its bedrock. These heavy machines consist of a boom, bucket, and cab on a rotating platform resting on rusting caterpillar treads. Two cousins, named José and Geraldo, from the Lower Cauca near Colombia's second-largest city Medellín, own the excavators. The machines move like dinosaurs. They dump gray gravels onto metal troughs called classifiers, where water and the heavy metal mercury catch small specks of gold. The excavators glint in the warm evening light, their metal hydraulics reflecting the setting sun.

The two cousins use techniques similar to the artisanal mining of Mauricio's neighbor Esteban, but on a larger scale, using mercury, machines, and more water. While this mining destroys forests, causes erosion and sedimentation of the river, contaminates the land and water with mercury and diesel, and damages people's health, it provides employment and income to some people. The label small-scale seems a misnomer because such mining can encompass large areas. The term comes from Colombia's old Mining Code, before reforms in 2001. Most miners who use excavators describe themselves as doing small-scale mining, in Spanish² *pequeña minería*. People opposed to this mining label it mechanized mining or medium-scale mining, respectively *minería mecanizada* and *minería mediana*.

¹ Colombia's Human Rights Ombudsman's Office, the Defensoría del Pueblo de Colombia, has a report on mining in Colombia that describes these mining regions (2010, pp. 121–217).

² Except in select cases, for non-Spanish speakers and non-specialists in Colombia, I use the English for Spanish terms, place names, and organizations. Where appropriate, I provide in the text the Spanish original. Where this does not suffice, I use the Spanish term in italics and dwell on the terms meaning.

To the east of the hilltop, the distant mountains of the Andes loom craggy. A half hour speedboat ride from Mauricio's village up the river into the mountains—past the cellular tower that stands above the nearest town—two multinational mining corporations, one Canadian and one South African, have legally recognized concessions for mineral exploration projects. Rumors of their presence, as well as an exploration visit in 2009, raised concerns for the Afro-descendant communities and Indigenous people living in the area, the groups that claim to represent them, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Quibdó, and others concerned about large-scale mining. Critics describe it as mega-mining, or *mega-minería*. When I first saw those mountains from this hill, they captivated me. They seemed ominous, appearing as the clouds cleared as if emerging from nowhere.

The terms for these sorts of mining in the Chocó—artisanal, small, and large—come from how people discuss mining itself, although the law has shaped this use. Artisanal mining refers to mines comparable to those run by Mauricio's neighbor Esteban: family groups use hand tools and gasoline-powered water pumps. Colombia's 2001 Mining Code recognizes artisanal mining by Afro-descendants and Indigenous people provided it uses traditional hand techniques and only moves a small amount of material. Some people call it ancestral mining to evoke hundreds of years of mining.

Small-scale mining, similar in scale to the one owned by the two cousins from Antioquia, refers to mines that use large excavators, dredges, and heavy machinery while employing half a dozen mine workers or more. Small-scale mines in the Chocó employ workers who have migrated from mining regions in Antioquia to seek their fortune. Mostly outsiders own these mines. Since 2001, the Colombian government has tried to shut down small-scale mining in favor of a more regulated mining industry by making it illegal. The

national state favors the large-scale mining projects of foreign multinational corporations over small-scale miners. These companies, like the ones with concessions in the mountains, are able to meet the government's rules on formal title and environmental impact assessments.

This dissertation examines these kinds of gold mining in the Chocó and provides answers to the question, *what is gold about when it is not just about gold?* I explore Esteban's artisanal mine below us and similar mines in the area, the small-scale excavator mine of the two cousins from the Lower Cauca, and the large-scale gold mining project in the distant hills. In total, I spent two years in Colombia and eighteen months in the Chocó. My fieldwork consisted of participant observation, apprenticeship gold mining, and open-ended interviews in Mauricio's village with black artisanal miners and white small-scale miners between November 2010 and April 2012. Before I turn to the dissertation's argument and outline the chapters, I take a moment to discuss the racialized dynamics of mining alongside the department itself, other forms of resource extraction, the regional armed conflict, and gold's role in the underground economy. This provides elements of my argument and situates the dissertation within the Chocó's complex political and economic context.

Race in the Chocó

The trees below the hilltop grow out of a thin layer of clammy poor red soil. Red dust from the hike cakes my black rubber boots. The thick rainforests that spread out below belie the soil's infertility and tendency to erode. To grow plants, Mauricio's neighbors make soil from anthills. They let chickens pick dirt gathered from anthills clean

of insects. Then, after letting the mixture dry in the sun for a two or three days, they use it to fill hollow logs sliced in half lengthwise to make shallow containers that they suspend from bamboo tripods a meter in the air. There they plant herbs for food and medicine as part of diverse subsistence techniques that complement gold mining.

The soil marks a property boundary. It delineates surface usufruct rights for rural people and subsurface mineral rights for the national state. The surface rights to the territory above the soil belong to the Afro-descendant communities and Indigenous people living on the edges of the river. The subsurface rights to the gold and minerals underground belong to the Colombian state. Since constitutional reforms in 1991, and the adoption of Law 70 in 1993 to implement the relevant changes, the Colombian government has slowly recognized hundreds of Afro-descendant community councils and their collective territorial rights (e.g. Asher, 2009; Cárdenas, 2012; Restrepo, 2004; Wade, 2002, p. 2). These community councils, or *consejos comunitarios*, emerged out of the 1991 constitutional reforms. For many community councils, it took years and the help of NGOs, academics, church groups, and other organizations to consolidate their claims. In a manner parallel to Colombia's Indigenous people, who had similar rights under older legislation, many Afro-descendant black community councils were able to gain surface rights through making claims to collective land ownership.

As mining is a key source of livelihood for many Afro-descendant communities, this legal arrangement is a problem because it means most communities do not have legal title to mine their own land. Worse, as noted above with the Canadian and South African companies, the Colombian state's mining authority has granted mineral rights on some collective territories to foreign mining companies. People share rumors that foreign companies plan open pit gold mines in this and other areas of Colombia.

On the hilltop, Mauricio continues to stretch to get a cellular signal. The view of never-ending forest gives me a feeling of isolation. I had a similar expansive view as my plane landed in Quibdó months before. The city lies a few hours away by speedboat and bus on the Atrato River at its confluence with the Quito River. Both rivers meander wide, muddy, and often swollen with rainwater. Despite the Chocó's high annual rainfall, a handful of times a year the weather stays dry for weeks on end, and the rivers' water levels can fall a meter or more.

Quibdó's population of 130,000 extends east from the Atrato River's bank in a mishmash of shops, government buildings, and houses. Inland, homes built on stilts perch between roads and ravines. They look precarious. Some tumble down when prolonged wet weather brings floods and landslides.

While small, Quibdó has many neighborhoods. Cars and buses easily access older areas, but they cannot reach the neighborhoods of people who moved to the capital to escape rural violence. To reach their houses, people walk down narrow alleyways and up muddy paths. Away from the river, Quibdó's urban geography gives a sense of chaos. However, there is a tight grid of streets by the Atrato River in the city's old town.

Near the river, in the heart of this downtown, a colorful mural stands painted behind the altar of the city's grey cathedral built last century. Its three panels depict an interpretation of the department's past and its racial makeup. In the first, Spanish conquistadores stand beside suited men, Indigenous people wear chains, and a black man kneels with pans full of gold. In the second, a dove flies above Jesus and Indigenous and black people receive the word of God in the form of a bible from a white priest. In the third, the sun sets over the forest, a river flows by homes on stilts, and a small crowd waves to the right. The mural and its figures reflect the Chocó's mainly black and

Indigenous population, the Catholic Church's presence, the importance of gold, and the role of outsiders.

Contested estimates³ put the Chocó's population at 90 percent Afro-descendant and four percent Indigenous (Asher, 2009, p. 2, 200). Along with Brazil, Venezuela, and Panama, Colombia has one of the highest Afro-descendant populations as a percentage of the total population in Latin America (Hooker, 2008, p. 282; Inter-American Dialogue, 2003).⁴ Nationally, estimates, again disputed, put Colombia's Afro-descendant population at 4.5 million people, or 10 percent of the total (Asher, 2009, p. 2, 200; Wade, 2002, p. 21).⁵

To refer to this population, writers use diverse terms: Afro-descendant or *afrodescendiente* (e.g. Dixon, Burdick, and Winant, 2012); black or *negro* (e.g. Wade, 1993, p. 2-27, 1995; Restrepo, 2004); and Afro-Colombian or *afrocolombiano* (e.g. Asher, 2009; Dennis, 2012). British anthropologist, whose early fieldwork was in the Chocó, Peter Wade (2006, p. 107-109) reflects on these complex racialized classifications and terminologies and their influences across the continent. He emphasizes how these categories change depending on context, and argues that people make "clear identifications of self and other in particular contexts, which may have far-reaching

³ Kiran Ashar, in *Black and Green* (2009), discusses the unreliability of the Colombian Pacific's demographic data. She notes the 1993 census reported the Chocó biogeographic region—the broader Pacific region—had a population of 2.3 million, or 6 percent of Colombia's total (2009, p. 200). Ninety percent of that was Afro-Colombian, with 4 percent Indigenous. Of the total regional population, she reports estimates that 1.3 million people live in rural areas.

⁴ Hooker (2008, p. 209) notes the difficulty in gathering statistics and country comparisons. In some countries, only a small percentage of the Afro-descendant population self-identifies as black or *negro*.

⁵ Peter Wade (2002, p. 6, p. 21) in his introduction to a special issue of *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* considers various estimates in the literature from academic and state sources which range from 4 to 45 percent. He notes state estimates settle on 26 percent.

structural consequences in terms of labor markets or political mobilizations or police harassment, without there being a collective consensus, independent of context, on who is ‘black’, ‘brown’ and ‘white’” (Wade, 2006, p. 110). While the meaning of the terms change depending on who is speaking, racialized identities shape social, political, and economic relationships.

Rather than using the term Afro-descendant in this dissertation, I considered adopting place based identity markers in the same way people from the Chocó do. That is using the names of villages, towns, and rivers to identify people, rather than consistently referring to the rural black population as Afro-descendant, or black. For example, people who live on the Atrato River say *Atrateño*, people from Quibdó use *Quibdeseño*, etc. However, this seemed to leave aside the broader literature and political context of Afro-descendant organizing. While black, peasant, or free, from *negro*, *campesino*, and *libre*, were the next most used identity markets for rural people in the Chocó, who almost never said Afro-descendant, I adopt the term throughout the text as a synonym for and replacement to these other terms.⁶

Returning to Quibdó’s geography, directly opposite the cathedral is the central bank building. The plaza lies between both buildings. Downtown Quibdó’s streets run inland on a grid pattern from the two buildings parallel and perpendicular to the river. Until the 1980s, the central bank building was the only place to sell gold in Quibdó. Since

⁶ Roosbelinda Cárdenas (2012, p. 310) adopts the term ‘black’, rather than the more dominant politically correct Afro-Colombian—or as I do Afro-descendant—which she notes gained currency after the Durban conference on racism. The term black, or *negro*, circulated in the Pacific after the passing of Law 70 and the recognition of collective territory and ‘black communities.’ Colombian anthropologist Eduardo Restrepo outlines how black Colombians went from being fellow nationals to ethnic others (Restrepo, 2004). My usage of the term Afro-descendant reflects a more common usage in the English literature especially related to concerns over mining in the Colombian Pacific.

legal reforms that privatized gold sales in the 1980s,⁷ the building's main attraction is a library. When in Quibdó, along with many high school students and other visitors, I found the library's collection, air conditioning, and view conducive to writing and thinking. Looking to the west across the Atrato River busy with boats, canoes, and mining dredges, I could see the opposite shore and a row of houses on stilts backing the forest.

To the north, downriver from the bank and on the urbanized eastern shore, shops sell boats and mining machinery. A plaza inland from the river has a polytechnic college, a university, an indoor soccer field, a hospital, a school, bars, and restaurants. In the park between the bank building and river to the southwest, a set of concrete steps leads down to the dock. Boats leave from there heading up or downriver to rural villages and small towns. Early morning speedboats leave here on the full-day journey north to the mouth of the Atrato on the Caribbean coast.

Further upriver from the bank and the dock, an open-air market thrives with bustling sellers and shoppers. People hawk produce brought in from down the Atrato River by canoes or trucked in from the Andean interior. They sell a variety of starchy banana called plantain, white-fleshed and brown-skinned yuca (*manihot esculenta*)—known in English as cassava or manioc—, fresh mangos, fruit, herbs, plants, meat, fish, and eggs. Afro-descendant merchants run the produce stalls, cook stands, and cafés. Along these streets, a mixture of eateries, bakeries, and restaurants; grocery,

⁷ Thomas Naylor, an economist at McGill University, notes the 1980s financial instability created a capital flight crisis from Colombia (1996, p. 205). The government responded by buying gold, which it resold on the world market. This encouraged Colombia's mining sector to sell gold to the state monopoly which facilitated money laundering; the state responded by privatizing the gold trade opening it to private buyers (*Financial Times*, 1984 in Naylor, 1996, p. 205).

clothing, and hardware stores; bars and clubs; and gold-buying and selling exchange houses advertise their services.

These gold buying and selling exchange houses, or *compra-ventas*, serve as pawnshops, but they rarely seem busy. Sometimes two shops face each other across an intersection, displaying small scales to measure the gold dust brought in by miners, and a small collection of pawned old cameras, DVD players, or video game consoles. The reforms that favored private gold sales in the 1980s brought these pawnshops to the Chocó. Most often, whites from the Andean interior of Antioquia and other departments own the exchange houses and many of the brightest, best-lit, and commercially successful stores. People use the label *paisa* to refer to these white store-owners and small-scale miners.

In the Chocó, the term *paisa* refers to anyone not obviously of African or Indigenous descent, including lighter-skinned storeowners, miners, priests, merchants, and, in my case, anthropologists. I draw attention to this definition of *paisa* because residents in Colombia's Andean regions use the term to refer to people only from certain departments. Outside of the Chocó and the Colombian Pacific, the term means people from the country's coffee-producing departments of Antioquia, Caldas, Risaralda, and Quindío. *Paisa* points to a subnational identity which settlers from this Andean region carry with them throughout the country working as migrants, street vendors, petty traders, miners, and shopkeepers. For those who identify in this sense of *paisa*, the notion connotes a capacity for hard work, economic success, Catholicism, conservatism, and whiteness.

While I have written on *paisa* identity elsewhere (Rojas and Tubb, 2013; Tubb, 2009, 2013), in the Chocó the term means something else. In the Colombian Pacific,

people use *paisa* to refer to white outsiders not just from Antioquia or the coffee region. It applies to anyone who is not Indigenous or Afro-descendant. Complicating the notion further, an Afro-descendant person from Antioquia might self-identify as a *paisa*, while an outsider from another region of Colombia working in the Chocó would not identify as *paisa*, nor see an Afro-descendant born in Antioquia as *paisa*. In the Chocó, although few would call an Afro-descendant person a *paisa*, they would call a lighter skinned migrant a *paisa*. The meaning of *paisa* shifts depending on the speaker, location, and context. For this dissertation, I adopt the use of *paisa* in the Chocó, referring to lighter skinned outsiders.

Far from the downtown, on Quibdó's outskirts on the highway heading south to the San Juan River region, a large circular building hosts one of the department's main Indigenous organizations. Its location on the outskirts of the city reflects the fact the department's significant Indigenous population lives on reservations (*reservas*) in the headwaters of the department's many rivers in the most isolated and remote areas (Losonczy, 1997, 2006). Despite linguistic, cultural, and economic differences, Afro-descendants and Indigenous people face similar legal challenges to control their territory (e.g. Consejo de Autoridades Indígenas de la Asociación de Cabildos Indígenas Wounaan, Embera Dobida, Katío, Chamí y Tule del Departamento del Chocó, 2013; Loingsigh, 2013).

From the cathedral's mural to the racialized geography of Quibdó's commerce, I briefly discuss Afro-descendants, Indigenous people, and *paisas* because of the significance of racialization in the Chocó. As my ethnographic fieldwork was with Afro-descendants and *paisa* miners, I rely on secondary sources when I address Indigenous people and communities.

The tension between *paisa* and Afro-descendants is a key theme in the film *Chocó* (Hendrix Hinestroza, 2012), released to great fanfare and billed as the first feature film set in the department. The young Afro-descendant female protagonist named Chocó raises two young children while working as an artisanal miner on a small-scale mine. Unable to make money to buy her daughter's birthday cake after losing her job panning for gold at the mine, the young female protagonist sleeps with the older *paisa* store owner. The film explores race and gender through the relations between her, her partner, the *paisa*, and the mine owners. While it did not receive a universally warm reception, the film shows some of the politics of race (and class and gender) in the Chocó.

Despite this dynamic, in Colombia's capital, Bogotá, most people see the Chocó as black and anything but *paisa*. While Colombia has many regions consisting of mountains and valleys, coastal plains, interior grasslands, forests, and large cities, the population and national state power centers on Bogotá and the regional capitals of Cali, Medellín, Bucaramanga, Cartagena, and other large cities. The Chocó and the Pacific hardly enter into the popular image of Colombia. As a racial order of an imagined white and mestizo Andean population grounds Colombian nationalism (Wade, 1993, p. 19-23), outsiders often forget the Pacific and the Chocó as the blackest, poorest, most isolated region with the worst statistics for infant deaths, health, education, literacy, and violence.⁸

People also speak and write about the Chocó in clichéd naturalistic language.

⁸ Kiran Ashar (2009, p. 58) notes most writing on the Chocó begins with a list of the region's poverty and lack of development. In the 1980s, observers described the region suffering the "inertia of underdevelopment" (Sanders, 1982 in Asher 2009, p. 57). Others wrote about "problems of poor living standards, lack of basic services, high rates of illiteracy, malnutrition, and infant mortality" (Asher 2009, p. 57). The National Planning Department (DNP) in 1995 describes the region as characterized by poverty (1995, p. 2 in Asher, 2009, p. 57)

When he was a young journalist writing Colombian Nobel prize-winning novelist Gabriel García Márquez (1927–2014) described stepping off an airplane into Quibdó as entering into a hot, humid, dark African jungle. He called the Chocó an area that “Colombia does not recognize” (1954, 1982, p. 182-221). On the national television news, the rare stories of the Chocó focus on natural disasters; the low-intensity conflicts between the military, rightwing paramilitaries, and leftwing guerrilla groups involved in drug trafficking; the Chocó’s exotic wildlife and thick jungles; the region’s folkloric annual festivals including Quibdó’s two-week celebration of Saint Francis of Assisi or, as locals call him, San Pacho; and the region’s weather. In the latter case, reports often dwell, like I did on the dissertation’s first page, on the region’s high rainfall and humid climate.

Before I started fieldwork, friends in Bogotá reflected these stereotypes, expressing worry that I planned to spend time in the Chocó. They warned me of the heat, the people, the rain, the danger, the bugs, and the violence. This racialization of space, nature, and danger reflects how people outside of the Pacific and the Chocó think about the region. If the Chocó enters the discussion, it does so in essentialized ways that cast the department as an isolated jungle where blacks, Indians, paramilitaries, guerrillas, and traffickers live.

The journey from Quibdó back to the hilltop takes a bus and a slow boat upriver. The rivers that flow by Mauricio’s village and the capital are the Chocó’s arteries. Rivers dominate this part of the department’s physical and human geography, providing transport, a source of food and water, and a disposal method for human and mine waste. They start as streams in the Andean mountains, snake through forests, pass mines and settlements, and join the Atrato River to flow north to the Caribbean or the San Juan River to flow south west to the Pacific. There they spill silt, leaves, tree trunks, plastic bags, soft drink bottles, and other human refuse into the sea.

The Colombian Pacific is often described as a rich ecosystem, the “Chocó biographic,” the lungs of the world, and a landscape that hosts thousands of tropical plants, animals, and insects. These ideas of nature have complex and contested histories. Environmental organizations, Afro-descendant and Indigenous activists, scientists, academics, bureaucrats, and others contest how to define, name, and understand Colombia’s Pacific region.⁹ While the region they refer to, with its forests, rivers, and Afro-descendant and Indigenous population, extends from Panama in the north to the Ecuadorian department of Esmeraldas in the south, in this dissertation I do not adopt their focus. Instead, I write about the Chocó and relevant rivers, towns, and villages.

While I explore artisanal, small-scale, and large-scale gold mining in the Chocó, I also examine Afro-descendant and Indigenous collective territory on which this mining takes place. This brief discussion of urban space, nature, racialization, nation, and region serves to introduce some key parts of the role race plays in the Chocó. By outlining the racialized dynamics of mining in this dissertation, I show the intersections of constructions of race, mining, and collective territory. Exploring these together shows many artisanal miners in the Chocó are Afro-descendants, while small-scale excavator owners and their workers are often *paisas* who come from Antioquia or other departments. In addition to mining, *paisas* come to the Chocó to extract lumber and cocaine. The latter exacerbates the conflicts in the region.

⁹ Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar (2008) discusses culturally constructed ways of understanding nature in the Colombian Pacific and knowledge (Escobar, 2008, p. 110-155). He outlines the anthropological literature on the Pacific over the last thirty years to discuss the production of nature, the ways that biodiversity has become a regional issue, and activist knowledge that comes into confrontation with knowledge produced by biologists, planners, and developers (Escobar, 2008, p. 111-112).

Resource Extraction and Conflict

The clang of metal on stone reverberates up the hillside from the mine below. The sounds of the excavators working contributes to a sense of place Mauricio and I feel as we struggle with our phones. Mining is ever present here. The mine is at the head of an old logging trail no longer in use, but widened by the caterpillar treads of those excavators crawling through the thin red topsoil. With the erosion from machinery and the constant rain, the path is a slippery red scar etched into the forests, a smaller version of the trenches and tunnels of the mine. Climbing that path earlier, Mauricio skillfully avoided the tangled roots that hid muddy pits. Following behind it looked as if he used gravity to help him tumble up the path. Since I lack Mauricio's technique walking in the woods, the fifteen-minute hike left me muddy and exhausted. Mauricio knows how to move in the forest.

In his late thirties, Mauricio comes from a nearby village. The village consists of a dozen low cement houses on two pebble-lined streets perched high above but not too far from a fast-flowing river. There are more than forty Afro-descendant villages and towns similar to Mauricio's on this and neighboring rivers. The village range in size from a dozen to hundreds of people. People have lived on the areas rivers for generations, ever since the Spanish brought their ancestors here as slaves to mine for gold (e.g. Sharp, 1975, 1976). People often have their own artisanal mines in the bush. They tend fruit trees and forest crops of corn, yuca, plantain, and sugar cane. In the afternoon, after working in the mine, men might take to the woods with prized dogs to pass a pleasant afternoon hunting a Colombian tapir—a *guagua* in the Chocó—one of the forest rodents to find a home in this landscape. Their artisanal mining complements these activities.

The first time I went into the forest, I went hiking with a group of four adults and

four children. We carried machetes to help us follow one of the many overgrown trails. As we walked the path, we slashed at plants that closed in too closely. The undergrowth made it difficult for us to see far into the bush. On that hike, an eleven year old—the youngest among us—disappeared into the woods. As we searched from the trail, it was impossible not to get a sense of the size and the density of the surrounding forest. We spent three hours backtracking, looking, calling for him using a trailing ‘cooo’ sound that carries better than words, and listening. We found him by a stream, soaked, and crying

Paisa miners, who live in small camps near mines that dot the river’s edge, began arriving in 2008, in part because the high price of gold, and in part because of state repression of small-scale mining in other mining areas. Most miners come from Antioquia’s mining regions in the Lower Cauca to seek their fortune in these forests. Many find little more than hunger, poverty, and hard labor. *Paisas* come looking to earn money by extracting wealth from the region before moving on to somewhere else. They mine, log rare tropical hardwoods, and grow coca. For the past century, extraction booms in mining, logging, and coca have shaped social, political, and economic life across the Pacific (Escobar, 2008, pp. 69–110; Leal León & Restrepo, 2003; Leal León, 2008; Molano, 1996b; Ramírez, 2011; Taussig, 2004). Loggers haul lumber to fast-flowing rivers to float the wood down to lumberyards in rural towns. They live in small huts made from green tarpaulins with black plastic roofs. While many come from Antioquia or the interior, Afro-descendant workers come from small fishing villages on the Pacific Coast and other parts of the Chocó to cut trees. Many people used to cut teak and mahogany, but now the loggers who remain seek more isolated and less valuable trees (e.g. Leal León & Restrepo, 2003).

In 2012, not far downriver in another village people told me *paisas* had asked if

they if could plant gnarled, woody, green coca bushes. On a nearby river, I heard rumors a paramilitary group also wanted to grow an illegal coca crop. In Colombia's frontier areas of the Pacific, in the south, and in the Amazon, peasants grow coca as a cash commodity (Ramírez, 2011; Villar & Cottle, 2011, p. 12-13, 87-88). The little green leaf provides the region's most valuable crop—indeed, in many areas, the only valuable crop. Workers make money by planting coca and making coca paste, while trying to outrun eradication campaigns from the United States' (US) war on drugs which has pushed coca crops into increasingly remote regions (e.g. Villar & Cottle, 2011, p. 179). In a nearby town, coca workers blocked the road to protest aerial spraying by Colombian contractors funded by the US government. Gold miners, loggers, and coca growers seek their fortune in remote parts of the forests where they engage in these illegal economies.

Other people live in the Chocó's forests too. The thick vegetation and difficulty moving makes it easy to disappear deliberately. Colombia has suffered a three-party internal conflict between paramilitaries, guerrillas, and the state since the 1960s. This conflict rarely affected the Pacific until the late 1980s and 1990s, when armed groups formed within or moved to the department to participate in the increasingly important drug economy. The largest guerrilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), and the smaller National Liberation Army (ELN) have encampments in the region that Mauricio and I can see from the hilltop.

While the guerrillas forcibly recruit Afro-descendant and Indigenous youths into their ranks, the Colombian army conscripts others. Colombia has a system of mandatory military service for men. Poorly paid and clothed, soldiers receive a "military pass" after serving. Most formal employers ask to see the pass, and military service marks a man's age. While students, professionals, or those who can afford to buy the pass do not serve in

the military, and young men from the city often serve only a year, the children of rural peasants regularly complete two years of service.¹¹

A young man who travels without a military pass risks having soldiers on patrol stop and conscript him on the spot. The guerrillas and paramilitaries do much the same: forcibly recruiting young people into their ranks. In Colombia's ongoing war, combatants on all sides often come from the same regions. Much of the time, the conflict seems frozen in a stalemate: soldiers stay in towns, or on the main roads. The guerrillas for their part do not leave the forests. The illegal mines, lumberyards, and coca plantations co-exist with and fuel the conflict. I mention the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, and the soldiers because they all use the same logging trails and rivers to move across the landscape as miners and local people. Gold mining shapes the conflict.

The internal conflict has displaced over five million people (Consultoría para los Derechos Humanos y el Desplazamiento, CODHES, 2013). The violence and resulting rumors, fears, and terror brought on by the state, allied rightwing paramilitaries, and left-leaning guerrillas have uprooted hundreds of thousands of rural Afro-descendants and Indigenous people (Amnesty International, 2008; CODHES, 2008; Duque, 2013; Loingsigh, 2013; Howard, Hume, & Oslender, 2008; Oslender, 2007, 2008; Taussig, 2003). The conflict has ties to the illegal and legal economy of resource extraction.

Three hundred kilometers to the north, in the Lower Atrato River region on the Caribbean coast, paramilitary violence with state complicity and active support has

¹¹ President Juan Manuel Santos has promised to end mandatory conscription; as of July 2014 has not done so (*El Espectador*, 2012)

cleared peasants from their land¹² and destroyed villages to promote African palm oil plantations. Further south government-supported extractive development ventures in the form of large-scale multinational mining projects threaten to dispossess residents as well.

The conflict, the presence of armed actors, and an illegal economy raises a question about representing fieldwork in a way that does not put people in additional danger: How should I refer to particular people, to the river, and to Mauricio's village? In discussing an early draft of my dissertation, one person reminded me, "Real people still live here." While another person said, "It would be good to write about this village." Responding to these conflicting concerns, I have chosen not to reveal names of specific people, villages, and rivers. As with Mauricio's name, I adopt pseudonyms for people's names. I only use real names when I draw on publicly available documents, or when I write about public figures, politicians, journalists, and academics. Rather than adopt a pseudonym for the village, the river, and the region, I use the generic terms. Instead of inventing names, I use the village, the river, and the town to refer to where I worked. While far from an ideal solution, as it implies the generalities of a typical town, village, or river, I prefer this to inventing pseudonyms.

All of this is to say that in addition to addressing mining and racialization in the Chocó, I look at the rural economy, other forms of resource extraction, and the connected conflict. The view Mauricio and I saw making phone calls encompasses a landscape of forest and rivers, which provides a home to miners, loggers, coca growers, guerrillas,

¹² By the phrase "their land" I reference both collective territory held by Afro-descendant communities and family lots. I complicate and unpack this short hand by discussing land tenure in some detail. In Chapter 3, I address family lots and rural subsistence production. In Chapter 6, I turn to collective territory and the state in the Colombian Pacific.

paramilitaries, soldiers, and Afro-descendant and Indigenous people engaged in subsistence production. Different people move on logging trails and rivers.

Afro-descendants have villages near the rivers. Migrant *paisa* workers seek their fortune mining land to which multinational corporations hold mineral rights. Soldiers, guerrillas, and paramilitaries have an uneasy presence. The conflict and these many forms of extraction bring the Chocó into interaction with other regions.

Region and the Underground Economy

When I first visited where Mauricio lived, the village seemed isolated. To get there took a day traveling from the city: two hours by bus, and then two hours by slow boat.

Later, I found speedboats and faster ways to travel. Geographically the coffee-producing region of Colombia—which includes the departments of Antioquia, Quindío, Caldas, and Risaralda in the Western Andes—is not far, east just over the Andes mountains beyond the river’s headwaters. Nevertheless, poor maps, irregular transport, and the expanse of forest exaggerate the distances, which makes the village seem isolated. Placing gold mining in the village within broader contexts connects it to a political economy of gold and coca. In the dissertation, I show that understanding gold mining requires a hard look at the illegal drug economy.

Narcos—or drug traffickers—move drugs from the Colombian Pacific and the Chocó for sale in the US, Canada, and Western Europe. In some rural areas of the Chocó, they produce cocaine with coca plantations, coca paste factories, and laboratories. Smuggling routes lead to the coast, where fishing boats, speed boats, and makeshift submarines move cocaine to networks that transport drugs north through Central America

and Mexico into the US and Canada (UNODC, 2011, p. 65, 2013, p. vii). The Chocó has a key geopolitical position connecting Colombia's Pacific region to the Caribbean via the Atrato River. While the Lower Atrato has become a zone of industrial banana and African palm monoculture plantations, displacing rural peasant populations and turning a landscape of smallholdings into one of industrial monocultures. The same area has long been a staging ground to launch drugs north via the Caribbean.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported in 2011 that Colombia remained a cocaine producing and exporting country (2011, p. 60). Colombian traffickers act as intermediaries between Bolivian, Colombian, and Peruvian coca producers; Central American gangs; and Mexican cartels to supply cocaine to the US and Canada (UNODC, 2013, p. ix). UNODC assessments on the financial flows of drug trafficking put 2009 cocaine profits in North America at \$35 billion, West and Central Europe at \$26 billion, and the Caribbean and Central and South America at \$18 billion (UNODC, 2011, p. 128).¹³ That same year, cocaine profits in Colombia reached \$9 billion (UNODC, 2011, p. 7).

After reinvesting money to cover the costs of shipping and transport drug traffickers launder as much as 60 to 80 percent of total cocaine profits (UNODC, 2011, p. 10). People use front companies and fake investments to creatively hide illegal funds from law enforcement. This money laundering brings together legal and illegal ventures (Nordstrom, 2007). In Colombia, traffickers launder money using fraudulent contracts, money-lending transactions, real estate deals, import schemes, the stock market, cattle

¹³ Unless noted, all \$ are US\$.

and land deals, cars sales, luxury imports, and gold mines (Croda, 2013a, 2013b; *El Espectador*, 2013b; Justice Department, 2007, p. 56; Murphy & Bocanegra, 2013; Vulliamy, 2012; Wilkinson & Ellingwood, 2011). In each case of money laundering, traffickers need legitimate-seeming businesses to report drug profits as their own. In this dissertation, I show how gold mining in the Chocó provides opportunities for traffickers to launder drug money.

Since the 1980s, the Chocó's gold and platinum production has grown as hundreds of excavators arrived (Defensoria del Pueblo, 2010, pp. 192–193). Official Colombian government figures show that between 2008 and 2011, the Upper Baudó municipality, and the Middle Baudó municipality produced gold worth more than \$500 million, or nine percent of Colombia's gold over the period.¹⁴ Yet, these municipalities have no historical mining and not enough gold mines to warrant the reported figures. The media and the Treasury Inspector's Office of Colombia (*Contraloría General*) reported that Medellín-based foundries claimed gold from these municipalities to launder drug profits. Their report suggests money laundering accounts for 20 percent of the country's \$2 billion gold industry (Correa, 2013; *El Espectador*, 2013b).

This dissertation draws on gold production figures and news reports to show the ways that in addition to being the result of mining gold can provide an excellent money laundering technique. Canadian journalist Nadja Drost (2012a) quotes Juan Pablo Rodríguez, president of a mining industry group, “At any point in the business chain [of

¹⁴ I discuss these figures and their source in detail in the section “Small-Scale Mining” (p. 127, Chapter 7, “Small-Scale Gold Mining”), and the Upper Baudó in the section “Gold-Based Money Laundering” (p. 278, Chapter 8, “Small-Scale Gold Mining and Money Laundering”).

gold], you can launder money” (2012b). A gold bar that matches the dimension of a piece of letter-sized paper 2.54 (1 in) thick would weigh 29.6 kg and have a value of approximately \$1.26 million.¹⁵ People use gold not just to launder money. Globally, wealthy elites, government officials, criminal organizations, and states have long taken advantage of gold to move wealth, avoid capital controls, launder money, and pay for weapons, contraband, and narcotics (e.g. Grosse, 2001; Cretin, 2002; Delpirou and Mackenzie, 2000; Duhamel, 2006; Dupuis-Danon, 2004; Dupuis, 1996; Grimal, 2000; Meyzonnier, 2000; Naylor, 1987, 1996).

In late 2011, after a decade of increasing prices and amid fears of global financial instability, gold prices reached a record high, trading at \$1,921¹⁶ per troy ounce¹⁷ on the world markets as investors and speculators bought gold (Wearden, 2011). From 2001 to 2011, dozens of multinational gold mining corporations, more than half registered in Canada (Ministry of Mines and Energy, 2008 in MiningWatch Canada and CENSAT-Agua Viva, 2009, p. 11), came to Colombia attracted by recently liberalized national mining laws, support from the Colombian government, supposedly untapped mineral deposits, and the prospect of free trade agreements. For its part, the Colombian government promoted foreign investment in mining. They called for mining to become a locomotive that would pull the economy forward (Departamento Nacional de Planeación,

¹⁵ According to the online calculation service WolframAlpha (2014a) a 2.54 cm (1 in) thick letter sized gold bar measures 21.58 cm (8.5 in) x 27.94 cm (11 in) x 2.54 cm (1 in), with a volume of 236.49 cm³ (93.5 in³) and a mass of 29.6 kg. On April 13, 2014 its value was \$1.26 million.

¹⁶ I convert Colombian pesos (and Canadian dollars) to US dollars to allow for relative comparisons and to give non-Colombian readers a sense of the value of money. I have used a rate that applied during my fieldwork: 1,800 Colombian pesos to US\$1, and CAD\$1 to US\$1.

¹⁷ Although the troy ounce (0.0311 kg, 31.1 g) denominates world gold prices, while in Colombia’s Pacific and the Chocó miners measure gold in *castellanos* (0.0046 kg or 4.6 g), Colombian national statistics use metric measures. I convert gold weights into kilograms to help with comparison.

2010). The dissertation shows how that alongside this boom in mining, gold helps launder money.

More than half multinational mining corporations in Colombia have head offices in Canada (MiningWatch Canada and CENSAT-Agua Viva, 2009, p. 11). Stock buyers in North America interested in mining have invested money in Colombia as foreign direct investment. The Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX), Canada's main stock market, hosts 70 percent of the world's mining companies (Deneault & Sacher, 2010, p. 1). Canadian securities markets make it simple to raise investment capital and speculate, with minimal taxation (Deneault & Sacher, 2010, p. 15). Québec sociologist Alain Deneault and economist William Sacher argue that Canada has become a tax haven of choice for the world's mining industry (Deneault, 2011). Most Canadian gold mining companies in Colombia have small exploration ventures. Their business models rely on selling their claims to larger mining companies able to exploit a project. In this dissertation, I show how this foreign mining investment might provide a means to launder money.

In this dissertation, in addition to the themes discussed in earlier sections, I explore the links between drug money laundering through small-scale gold mining and multinational exploration projects in Colombia. To summarize the themes, the dissertation addresses gold in the Chocó by exploring artisanal mining, small-scale mining, and large-scale mining. I connect the racialization of Afro-descendants, Indigenous people, and *paisas* alongside mining. I bring together mining in the Chocó with subsistence production, resource extraction, and gold-based money laundering. In linking large-scale mining to the conflict, I outline what it brings to Afro-descendant communities. After this outline of these interrelated themes that connect the Chocó region, Mauricio's village, and mining in Colombia, I can now turn to the dissertation's argument in detail.

Gold in the Chocó

In this dissertation, I answer the question: *What is gold about if not just about gold?* I provide many answers. Gold ties the dissertation together and is its object of study. Each chapter serves to answer the question in a different way. Gold is part of subsistence production, where Afro-descendant artisanal miners combine gold with other subsistence livelihood strategies. Gold ties into broader rural resource based economic extraction in Colombia's forests. Mining offers a way to make a living available to the country's urban and rural poor who engage in it, alongside picking coca, coffee, and other activities. Gold draws people into the Chocó's forests seeking a fortune but often finding not much more than poverty. Mining draws in large-scale gold exploration companies into frontier areas, looking for their own mining profits or, and what I describe as, economic fictions. Gold mining allows cocaine traffickers to launder their illegal profits through small-scale, and, possibly, large-scale gold mining. I explore the ways that gold is and is not about gold. The story I tell is a complex one, without a singular argument, but together I aim at an ethnography of gold in the Chocó.

Each chapter answers the question in a different way. For example, on artisanal mining we could say gold is the Devil's metal. This is not to say that gold is cursed, but rather Afro-descendants see the metal as related to the Devil. At the same time, gold is a key part of subsistence production that includes gardening and hunting. Mines that give gold provide a source of cash income in rural areas, a complement to other livelihood activities. Mining—and other forms of globally linked extraction—serve to complement subsistence production. Mining is one of the ways that people go about making a living. By centering the analysis on gold, I show gold in the Chocó is, in this instance, not about the metal itself, but a complement these subsistence livelihoods. Following through the

answers to the question in different circumstances leads me to the other chapters' observations. In this way, gold provides the lynchpin that connects the chapters together.

Gold as a yellow, shiny, valuable, soft metal emerges from mud in the Chocó's forests. It is what Canadian capitalists, *paisa* miners, and Afro-descendant miners hope to find. Artisanal miners hope for a mine that gives. Small-scale miners have their own gamblers' luck. Canadian investors seek another kind of profit. In each case, gold embeds deeply within surrounding economies. In the case of artisanal miners, it becomes a matter of subsistence. In the case of small-scale miners, it becomes what I describe as a creative hustle, a translation of *rebusque*, which is the Colombian term for the informal economy. In the case of large-scale mines, gold connects to the speculation and financialization of stock markets.

By exploring gold and its linkages, I create an ethnography of gold in the Chocó. I tie together the themes of the chapters and explore artisanal, small-scale, and large-scale mining, *paisa*, Afro-descendants, and multinational corporations, the rural subsistence economy, the hustle economy, and the global underground economy, mines that produce gold and mines that launder money, collective territory and land conflicts, rural violence and conflict, and Canadian junior mining companies.

Gold plays a vital part in the rural subsistence livelihoods of Afro-descendant communities, of the hustle economies of migrant *paisa* miners, is something vital for cocaine producers and exporters and a key part of speculative Canadian capitalism. The yellow metal emerges from muddy pits; it comes amalgamated with mercury for small-scale miners, or purchased in Panama and smuggled to Colombia for money launders. Gold becomes the focus of ambiguous, confusing, and contradictory talk; it brings disruptive violence to rural areas; and it attracts Canadian capitalists with their own

stories. If gold provides the link within and between the chapters, each chapter follows connections from and to the place of the Chocó.

By an ethnography of gold, I do not mean tracing a gram of gold from one mine into the global markets. That project could be an interesting one, if methodologically challenging. Instead, I think about gold from different perspectives. I explore its production, alongside the ways it connects to other things. I mean to treat gold in a grounded, descriptive, and practice-oriented way. Gold is not simply what holds the dissertation together; I also try to show how gold is not always just about gold. Here, I discuss gold's material production and connection to daily practice and to everyday quotidian livelihood.

Turning to forms of gold production, rather than assuming how global capitalism works Anna Tsing reminds us (2004) we need to empirically study it. Here, from ethnography in an out-of-the-way part of Colombia, I show the ways gold is not always about gold because it enables speculation and money laundering. By following the metal and the money, I show that it has a capacity to transform, create, and combine which makes it a key step for speculation, swindles, and stock scams. I also show how it provides a way for cocaine traffickers to launder money.

Conducting ethnography to shed light on Afro-descendant communities and artisanal mining lead me to this observation that gold is not just about gold. To properly understand gold mining I dwell on mining in Colombia's Pacific forests, to small-scale mining in other regions Colombia, to foreign multinational corporations, and money laundering. If gold is the lynchpin that hangs the chapters and dissertation together, answering the dissertation's question requires following various analytical threads. To do this well, context matters.

A place's geographic, temporal, economic context is significant in writing about gold. Writing about mining in the Chocó required getting my hands dirty: working for months on end knee deep in mud. It also meant other kinds of work. I draw on investor chat rooms, corporate documents, online discussion forums, and blogs. The rumors and gossip of fieldwork found echoes in their online equivalents, as allegations, rumors, and speculation raise questions about the ways gold is not about gold but a way to launder money. The Chocó's context matters as a constructed place, as a peripheral area, as a marginalized capitalist frontier, as a place where extractive industries have arrived and left, and as a place shaped by decades of war.

Gold is the lynchpin of this dissertation. It pulls together discussion of subsistence strategies, the hustle, migrant labor, land conflicts, armed conflicts, mining conflicts, capitalism, and money laundering.

The Hilltop View: The Dissertation Outline

The hilltop view with Mauricio that opens this chapter serves another purpose than merely a compelling moment to begin the dissertation. Our view from the hill and Mauricio and my attempts to catch a cellular connection has two purposes. First, it lets me outline the dissertation's form following rivers into the Andes. Second, it lets me introduce the research methods and the difficulty of making sense of fieldwork. For now, I turn to the dissertation's outline, later I turn to its methods.

Casting our eyes from the hilltop view, we look east up-river towards the Andes mountains. Below us lay what was once an artisanal mine, and what had become a small-scale mine with two excavators slowly leveling the hill. Our view encompasses the

forests where people make a living in hunting, gardening, fishing, as well as logging, coca, and mining. Afro-descendant communities, Indigenous people, and *paisa* migrants find a livelihood in these forests. Without any clouds, Mauricio and I can see up-river to the forests and mountains. We see an area that is both the collective territory of an Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities and an area where multinational Canadian and South African mining companies have mineral concessions.

On the surface, the chapters follow the same route as our eyes, going up the river, pausing on the mine and forest, towards the mountains, and then back to the village. Our reaching out to catch cellphone connections shows connections and the ways that our spot is far from isolated. This lets me reflect on some more tenuous and harder to pin down relationships: the ways that gold mining links to cocaine production, the political and economic foundations of violence and conflict in the area, and the ways that foreign mining companies are involved in speculation and possibly money laundering through mining projects. The view outlines the chapters.

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the region, its constructions of race, extraction in the forests, and the people who live there. This allowed me to introduce the main argument and themes of the dissertation, its key question, and this chapter outline. The hilltop view and searching for connections shape the dissertation and introduces the research method.

Chapter 2 turns to the holes in the ground left over from mining, to develop a history of gold, resource extraction, and displacement from flooding and war. I develop the theoretical lens of economic fictions in resource extraction's frontiers and dwell on research methods and writing. I do three things. First, I draw out the regional context from a discussion of how people continue to survive after displacement, flooding, and

conflict. To do this, I outline a history gold in the area, alongside foreign mining corporations, and how people find a livelihood in the region. Second, I reflect on the Chocó region as a frontier of capitalism. In the Chocó, resource extraction connects the area to capital's centers. This facilitates what I describe as economic fictions. Through economic fictions, I show how resource extraction projects in frontiers enable stock market speculation, swindles, and money laundering. Third, I explore my fieldwork methods and what I called apprenticeship ethnography and investigative analysis. Here, I dwell on the epistemological challenge of fieldwork, a theme to which I return.

Chapter 3, “Artisanal Gold Mining and the Fixed,” turns to artisanal gold mining that had taken place below the hill, the ways that it connects to subsistence livelihoods and what people call their “fixed,” and the reasons some people support small-scale miners coming to their territory. The chapter describes artisanal gold mining as part of and a compliment to the subsistence economy. The term Artisanal mining refers to mining using hand techniques and tools, often with miners from the same family and with little capital investment. Drawing on livelihood strategies and mining talk, I describe mining techniques at Esteban's mine, Pedro's mine, and other mines. I explore how people describe how they discover gold, the mines that give, the mines that take, and mining dangers. I turn to the ways Afro-descendants make a living, and their subsistence strategies, which people refer to as their *fijo*, or their fixed. People describe some of this subsistence as daily bread, or *pan coger*. I show how artisanal mining intersects with what people do to find a living. Gold forms part of and a complement to this subsistence production because, like other boom commodities before and after—*tagua*, lumber, and coca—it provides people with a way to access cash. In this chapter, I show how gold is not just about gold because it complements gardening, foraging, hunting, and fishing.

Chapter 4, “The Hustle,” has two themes. First, what people do outside of subsistence livelihoods and what they call the hustle, which brings *paisa* migrants to the Chocó. Second, I explore the epistemological confusions and ambiguities of fieldwork. This chapter allows me to place gold within other rural livelihood strategies. In the first case, I show how the hustle complements the rural subsistence economy through activities encompassed by the Colombian term *rebusque*, which I translate as the hustle. The hustle refers to what people do outside of the fixed. In the second case, I discuss the rural context of violence and conflict by addressing the ambiguities in making sense of ethnographic fieldwork. Through vignettes on rumors, conflicts, fears, migration, and the hustle, I raise epistemological issues of fieldwork and representing knowledge about mining and the conflict in the Chocó. On the first topic of the hustle, I also discuss the ways Afro-descendants engage in the hustle, and explicitly discuss *paisa* migrants to the Chocó from other regions of Colombia. This lets me show some non-mining reasons that people come to the Chocó. While many of these migrants to the Chocó, have fled their own region’s histories of rural conflicts, land consolidation, and violent displacement coming to the Chocó as vendors, traders, miners, and coca growers, the chapter also explores the ways that the hustle helps destabilize the region’s rural economy. Gold then becomes part of this economy, where money moves fast, and people move to a booming, frontier economy shaped by the hustle, mining, migration, and the conflict.

Chapter 5, “Frontiers and the State,” looks at migration to and from the Chocó. First, I follow an Afro-descendant miner looking for work outside the Chocó. Second, I address *paisa* miners looking for work in the Chocó. This shows migrants to and from the Chocó and their hustle. First, the chapter explores migration from the Chocó as Afro-descendant people migrate to find work. Through a trip with an Afro-descendant

miner, who lives in the village where I worked, I trace a circular way of making a living moving to and from the Chocó buying small trade items to sell. Traveling over the Andes to Medellín brings the village into direct contact with other regions of Colombia.

Exploring his hustle lets me show how it complements his subsistence livelihood. Second, this allows me to bring the Chocó and Antioquia together as a frontier region. I trace the place our bus circles, the Atrato River and the Andágueda River's headwaters, as a region at the limits of the departments of the Chocó, Risaralda, and Antioquia. Historically, people running away from state power, including Afro-descendant slaves and Indigenous people, settled this area. The Pacific enters the Colombian imagination as a dangerous remote frontier. James C. Scott (2009) writes on the economy, politics, and culture formed against the state in South-East Asia. His work resonates with the Colombian Pacific, its economy, and the contentious history of rural people with the state. Thinking with Scott shows gold miners and drug traffickers have also come to places where the state has little presence. Drawing on Deborah Poole (1987, 1994, 2004) and her discussion of Peru, I focus attention on regional power brokers who build culturally distinct forms of control that draws on excesses of force and violence and social relations through drinking, festivals, and unspent signs of wealth. I show a link between the violence that affects daily life in the Chocó, and the economics and politics of the state on the margins. More than social foundations, violence has political economic basis in the frontier spaces. Third, I combine these themes of migration and political economic foundations of violence in frontier areas, by turning to displacement through violence brought by small-scale *paisa* miners coming to mine the frontier region between the three departments. I explore a *paisa*-owned mine in the mountains, which operated from the 1920s to the 1980s.

Canadian and South African companies now jointly hold the concessions to this mine. In

2013, a judge in Quibdó suspended the project due to 30 years of conflict centered around the old mine that displaced rural Indigenous communities in the area. Through the migration with Don Alfonso, the literature on frontiers, states, local power brokers, and political violence, I argue that gold is not about gold by showing it as part of a history of mining violence, which has disarticulated rural forms of subsistence production. This contested territory inhabited by Indigenous people and Afro-descendant communities, is an area claimed by multinational large-scale mining project, which is precisely where the guerrilla, paramilitary, and military conflict is most intense. This chapter also explores how violence makes the hustle necessary in rural areas by disarticulating rural subsistence production on the frontier.

Chapter 6, “Large-Scale Mining on Collective Territory,” outlines community responses to this violent history through Afro-descendant activism and claims to collective territory. While the state has recognized these groups its own reasons, they face another threat from large-scale multinational junior Canadian gold mining companies. First, I explore Afro-descendant and Indigenous people’s responses to these kinds of destabilizing processes in the frontier and then turn to their fight for legal recognition of collective territories. I open with Ximena, a leader from a village in the area, talking about the arrival of a helicopter from the Canadian and South African mining project mentioned and a geological survey team accompanied by soldiers. The soldiers told people living there just to displace. Ximena’s frustration, obvious in our interview, coincided with the national state’s long delay in recognizing the Afro-descendant title to the area. Second, I explore the activism around black community’s collective territory. As the arrival of outsiders in the 1980s and 1990s brought land conflicts and violent expulsion, Afro-descendant and Indigenous people began to claim collective territory. In the Pacific,

following 1991 constitutional reforms put in place after the demobilization of the left-wing guerrilla groups¹⁸ and the World Bank's pressure on the Colombian government to decentralize, Afro-descendant people began to push for and take advantage of new legal frameworks that gave a form of territorial control to local community councils.¹⁹ While the political activism around black organizing allowed for territorial claims and a process of political recognition, it coexisted with these earlier processes of economic disarticulation, the destruction of rural livelihoods, and displacement from the conflict. For its part, the Colombian policy makers pursued these policies because it gave them local interlocutors, in the form of community councils, through which it could govern. Third, I turn to the ways Afro-descendant organizations and activists like Ximena, and nongovernmental organizations, the Church, and academics, see multinational large-scale mining in Colombia. By describing Canadian mining in Colombia, and the worries that Canadian mining companies bring to activists in the Chocó, I address the challenges Afro-descendant people face from mining despite the constitutional reforms that have granted them collective land title. I address some recent foreign mining in Colombia's South of Bolívar and Lower Cauca mining areas to make sense of these fears. Fourth, I develop this discussion by reflecting on a meeting of a community council on prior consultation around the Canadian junior mining companies with South African mining giants in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda frontier. I conclude by pointing out the people at the meetings were equally concerned with small-scale mining on their territory

¹⁸ For example, the Movement of the 19th of April (M-19), the National People's Liberation Army (EPL), and others.

¹⁹ Forrest Hylton (2006) discusses Colombia's twentieth century history of democratic openings followed by violent repression.

and discuss a meeting to negotiate the entry of the small-scale miners to the village.

Chapter 7, “Small-Scale Gold Mining,” describes small-scale miners practice as they arrived to the Chocó, the ways they gain local support, and their location within political economies of conflict and violence. First, I address small-scale miners who arrive to the Chocó to work Esteban’s family mine. Six months into my fieldwork, José and Geraldo, the two *paisa* cousins from the Lower Cauca, brought their machinery to the hill where Mauricio and I made calls. They had fled to the Chocó from the Lower Cauca region of Antioquia to escape the conflict and its negative consequences for small-scale miners. Their mining operation consisted of excavators and employed migrant *paisa* miners. While Afro-descendant people make a living with a mixture of farming, hunting, fishing, trading, and gold mining, the *paisa* outsiders concentrate on mining. The two cousins sought permission from landowners and community councils, and used excavators, large dredges, and heavy machinery. I describe their mining techniques, their livelihood, their hustle, and how they gain support from local people. Second, I show how this mining is not only about mining. I draw on conversations at the mine about games of chance, diesel fuel, and gold mining to suggest that gold is not always about gold because it can be used to launder money. Third, I develop a detailed discussion of gold mining statistics in Colombia. I show that mining figures in some areas of the Chocó are both too high, indicating improbable mining increases, and too low, indicating an improbable lack of production. Fourth, I turn to small-scale gold mining and the conflict, as armed actors control mines, extort miners, and moving municipal production around.

Chapter 8, “Small-Scale Gold Mining and Money Laundering,” shows how gold links small-scale mining, the underground economy, and drug money laundering. I explore not simply local money laundering in the Chocó through small-scale gold mining but

outline a history of gold-based money laundering over the last thirty years in Colombia. The chapter problematizes small-scale mining as not just about mining. I begin by looking at the already mentioned gold mining production statistics in the Chocó's Upper and Middle Baudó municipalities. Despite having no mines in the area, my estimates, based on official registration statistics, suggest Medellín based companies claimed to have produced more than \$500 million worth of gold between 2009 and 2011. To explain these production figures, I argue gold has connections to the cocaine economy and money laundering. Drawing on media reports and academic literature, I explore gold-based money laundering in Colombia over thirty years. For this, I discuss money laundering globally and in Colombia. This allows me to show the creative ways that drug traffickers launder money through real trade, smuggling, and securities. Turning to gold's role in the global underground economy broadly, I show Colombia's history is not unique. I address the ways gold facilitates the underground economy of fraud and capital accumulation around the world. From here, I outline gold-based money laundering in Colombia's mining frontiers over thirty years.

Chapter 9, "Large-Scale Gold Mining and Money Laundering," explores how Canadian multinationals are neither so multinational nor so large-scale. I do this by turning to their histories of gold-based money laundering and speculation. I problematize multinational large-scale mining corporations and junior Canadian mining companies operating in remote regions of Colombia by suggesting they are not always about mining either. I address the epistemic question of knowing in the context of global finance, drawing on rumor, media reports, online blogs, investor message boards, and newspapers. I turn to frontier territories and the out-of-the-way places these companies operate to show how they enable not simply mining but the appearance of mining. I argue the basis of

Canadian junior mining companies is an economic performance and fiction. I point to possible connections between Canadian mining companies, fake gold exploration projects, and money laundering by Canadian organized crime. I show how economic performance through junior mining companies serves to facilitate pump and dump schemes, speculation, tax minimization, and, tentatively at least, money laundering. Without suggesting this is the case in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda, I argue that economic fictions in out-of-the-way frontiers facilitate these processes of speculation, swindles, and money laundering. I argue the threats of expropriation and disarticulation of rural livelihoods comes not simply from expulsion from mining projects but also processes that involve no mining. I argue we need to understand multinational corporations as embedded in local political economies. Adopting the use of “multinational” that I encountered during fieldwork, I show how large-scale multinational projects are much less formal and large than often assumed. I show a need to rethink Colombia and Canada’s gold mining industry in connection to underground financial flows.

Chapter 10, “Gold in the Chocó” comes back down to the river to explore mining’s consequences where I did fieldwork. Through mine sediment, I discuss how mining reshapes the river, municipal elections, the environment, and local politics. While both artisanal and small-scale mining causes sedimentation on the river, the latter has greater results.

Chapter 11, “Conclusion,” returns to frontiers and economic fictions. I address the resource extraction literature and suggest a need for further research on the ways gold mining is not just about gold.

Chapter 2: Theory and Method

One hundred meters down stream from the village, on the riverbank, are two large pits left from an old small-scale mine, filled with rainwater surrounded by weeds. In a turn of phrase common in the Chocó, old mines produce only weeds, which people call bad herbs, or *yerba mala*. The phrase refers to the sun-loving scrubby bushes that grow in former mine sites. Little more than weeds struggle for survival in the mined-out landscape where forest once stood. The reference to the herbs' badness reflects that the plants people cultivate for food or medicine do not grow in former mine sites. Heavy machines have long since dug below the tree canopy to get at gold, creating an undulating, otherworldly landscape of gravel, stone, and pools of water.

American anthropologist Anna L. Tsing (2011, 2013)¹ describes the leftover sites of logging as blasted landscapes: the territorial dregs of intensive capitalism. Almost by definition former gold mines have no value left. With the gold taken from the ground, only stones and weeds remain. Tsing explores human and biological life in what she calls post-capitalist landscapes. She looks at the *matsutake* mushroom in the northwest Pacific forests of the US, formed as the result of decades of forest planning, and describes how this high-value export item provides livelihoods to refugees from Southeast Asia (Tsing, 2013). She provides a way to understand how people survive amid landscapes like the one I saw from the hilltop.

¹ This discussion draws on Anna L. Tsing (2011) and on my detailed notes from her public lecture at the University of Ottawa (2013).

Gold mining provides a similar high-value export that helps provide a livelihood for Afro-descendant residents in a landscape shaped by mining, logging, and coca that has created, what Tsing might call, a leftover landscape. Mining turns forests to stone, logging changes ecosystems, and the herbicide glyphosate sprayed from low-flying airplanes funded by the US government's war on drugs destroys coca crops by killing all vegetation. I dwell on Tsing's observations on mushrooms and turn to how people survive displacement from flooding and war.

The Chocó has served as a source for extracted natural resources for a long time. Gold miners have worked the region's gravels for gold for centuries. Until the markets fell apart after the Second World War, rural peasants mixed gold mining with the gathering of a hard seed called vegetable ivory or *tagua*, destined for the export buttons market. The cash crop provided a complement to mining (Leal León, 2008). Today, a handful of stores in Quibdó sell handicrafts made from *tagua* as part of development projects funded by foreign international development agencies. Since the 1980s, itinerant loggers have removed tropical hardwoods. Since the 1990s, the Chocó has emerged as an area for growing coca and smuggling cocaine. Each of these exports lead at one point to temporary local booms in commodity extraction: *tagua*, lumber, coca, and now gold. After the raw materials dried up, demand withered, jobs left, markets collapsed, and capitalists began extraction somewhere else, the rural Afro-descendant people found other ways to survive. They remain in these forests and survive in the margins left over by extractive industry.

By the river, excavators had dug the two pits. When they mined the area, their sharp-toothed metal buckets gouged deep holes down through layers of sediment and gravel to the bedrock where gold had settled at the curve of the river. The heavy machines piled mounds of gravel and stone from underground. Over the three years since they left,

water had filled the twenty-meter-long pits that lie between a soccer field and the river.

Between the holes and the riverbank stand fruit trees: *zapote* (*quararibea cordata*) and guava (*psidium guajava*). The *zapote* tree grows in the hot lowlands of Latin America. Their trees stand ten meters high, and the softball-sized fruit has thick green leathery skin that hides a seed surrounded by sweet, stringy, juicy orange flesh. The guava's flesh turns pink and sugary on the cusp of rotting. The first time I went to the two holes by the river was to pick slightly under-ripe *zapote*. I walked with Mauricio's brother, Javier, and Javier's four young nephews. One of the children, the same one who had become lost in the woods, shimmied up a tall *zapote* tree to throw the fruit down to us. The water filled holes in the ground left by miners, the fruit trees, and the children show one form of subsistence and making a living before and after mining.

The second time I went to the two water filled formed mine pits was during a week without rain. The temperature hovered at thirty-five degrees Celsius. The blue water of the mine holes reflected the cloudless sky and afternoon sun. The water's temperature promised relief from the heat. I went with the four young nephews, aged seven, nine, eleven, and thirteen. They lived in the village with their maternal great-aunt because their mother worked as a cook two days' bus travel from the Chocó in a mine in the Lower Cauca. Most miners employed on the excavators near the village came from that mining area. Their great-aunt, retired from a state job and in her sixties, took care of them for their mother. She made sure they ate, studied, and played. At the two mine holes, the kids splashed and hurled themselves in the water, did somersaults, and launched cannonballs. I swam, circling the pool methodically, counting ten laps while trying to avoid a rotting fish floating in the middle of the pool. Despite the dead fish, the hole in the ground became a place to play.

The four kids and I went swimming that day to feed fish. The great-aunt used the pool as a makeshift fish farm. One of the kids fed the surviving fish vegetable scraps and fistfuls of enriched nutritional flour. The flour comes in one-kilogram plastic bags with cartoon characters on the package. The Colombian Institute for Family Welfare ships packages of this fudge-flavored, protein- and vitamin-enriched, beige wheat flour throughout the country for children, the elderly, and the infirm. In the village, people ate the flour and used it to grow fish, fatten pigs, and feed hunting dogs.

The many remote mine pits scattered throughout these forests find non-human uses too. They create a breeding ground for mosquitos, tadpoles, and frogs. Weeds slowly overrun the gravel on their banks as vegetation that thrives in sunlight and poor soils reclaims the open spaces. To my eye, the former mines look dead, empty, and barren. A place where mineral extraction has converted fertile tropical forests into weeds, stones, and pits unable to support the diverse, ecologically complex life that thrived there before. To understand what I mean about life going on after mining and capitalist extraction in the Chocó, I turn to Anna Tsing's discussion of the *matsutake* mushroom.

Tsing (2013) describes mushroom as the first life to emerge in the flattened, atomic-bombed ruined rubble of Hiroshima Japan during the autumn of 1945. Although the fungi survived, it concentrated the radiation from the nuclear blast. This turned the expensive delicacy into a radioactive poison. More recently, Tsing describes people who gather the aromatic wild fungi in forests across the northern hemisphere to ship to Japanese mushroom lovers who pay high prices and consider the *matsutake* an exquisite delicacy. The flavors and aromas of the mushroom make a treasured gift that helps close business deals and lubricate Japanese capitalism. The mushroom is hard to find, but it does grow in the poor dry soils of human-disturbed forests in the Pacific's northern

hemisphere, including the northwest United States. To take Tsing's example, the mushroom thrives in Oregon's forests shaped by decades of logging and fire suppression (Tsing, 2013). These forests are abandoned former assets of lumber barons. This shows capitalism's unexpected frontier: the fungi thrive where the lumber industry's commodification of the landscape failed. Throughout the twentieth century, policy makers sought to repress fire and protect valuable ponderosa pines and the other timber stands favored for commercial logging. Unexpectedly, this prevented their favored species from reproducing: Pines thrive best in sunny, burned-out landscapes, and fire suppression encouraged the growth of less valuable lodgepole pine forests. The policies created forests full of unburned trees where ponderosa pines did not reproduce. Without the fire clearing the forests, the living, dying, dead, and rotting trees caused by human interventions became the perfect *matsutake* environment (Tsing, 2011, p. 1). It took decades to develop, which made it impossible to commercialize mushrooms with industrial agriculture techniques (Tsing, 2011, p. 8). The lives of many mushroom pickers in the area are also rooted in capitalist expansion. Most pickers came to Oregon's northwest forests as refugees from the US Indochina wars in the 1970s. Laotian and Cambodian immigrants found incomes gathering mushrooms using skills developed in the forests of upland Laos and Cambodia. They earned money by picking mushrooms and shipping them to Japanese consumers willing to pay high prices. On the margins and frontiers of capitalist accumulation, they worked in their own time in a precarious form of forest foraging.

While they leave behind not much more than bad weeds, even holes in the ground have their uses as rural Afro-descendant people in the Chocó find a livelihood in artisanal mining for the export gold market and other forest subsistence production. Weeds, fruit trees, fish farms, and children all offer some forms of survival in this human altered

landscape at once leftover from prior moments of capitalist accumulation and a frontier of contemporary resource extraction. Here I dwell on other processes that have reshaped the landscape: from mining dredges to bombs. Similar to Tsing's mushroom pickers in the Oregon forests, mining has changed the landscape and exacerbated flooding, which, along with armed conflict has displaced people to, from, and within the Chocó.

Displacement, Flooding, and War

In the Chocó, flooding and the conflict have caused displacement. Based on conversations with people in the village, the upper reaches of the river had a landslide in the early 1990s. Heavy rains brought rocks into the river and dammed its course. The water backed up for hours until the pressure caused the rubble dam to break and the water to explode downriver. Afro-descendant people had built their homes close to the water's edge in villages or solitary houses near their gardens because the river provided for drinking, cooking, bathing, and cleaning. People said that when the dam burst, water levels rose quickly, washing homes, possessions, and people downriver. The water drowned some people and left others stranded clinging to tree trunks. Parents told stories about clambering to higher ground with their children on their shoulders. They described how, the next day, as the water subsided, helicopters flew overhead beaming images of the flood to the national news. People displaced by the flooding moved to the city. Some stayed to rebuild their village on higher ground. A Spanish non-governmental organization provided tin for roofs, concrete, and training in building techniques, while local people provided the labor. People who had once lived in their gardens on the river moved into the village. The village cemetery remained exactly where it stood before the flood: downriver

and inland from where the village had been. More than a decade later, excavators turned that old village site into a pockmarked terrain of gravel piles with two holes in the ground.

The displacement from the flood was not the first time villagers fled the water.

Gabriel, the oldest resident at 96, remembered a flood when he was a young boy in 1936.

The flood made the second page of the *New York Times*:

BOGOTÁ, Colombia: More than thirty persons are believed to have been drowned and scores are homeless as the result of a sudden flood of the [river]. The flood waters have swept away many houses in the villages [on the river] (*New York Times*, October 10, 1936).

A flood in an out-of-the-way part of the Colombian Pacific made it into this paper of record in the heart of New York because an American mining corporation, the Chocó-Pacific Mining Company, had offices, mess halls, fuel tanks, and machine shops in the town of Andagoya near the San Juan River. In the Chocó, people told me that the Kennedy family made their money with gold taken from the Chocó, and that it helped build the Yankee Stadium in New York. About two hours south of Quibdó, near the San Juan region's capital of Istmina, the company employed multi-story gold dredges that dug into rivers in the Chocó chewing up the land and converted plantain and sugarcane crops on the river's edge into gravel piles to extract gold. In the 1930s, the mining company built a hydroelectric dam and a network of electricity towers to supply its dredges. The company worked the Chocó from the early twentieth century until its nationalization in 1977. In Andagoya, the rusting metal hulks of some of its buildings remain, as do the wooden-framed workers' quarters with screened-in porches. The company that once employed electric dredges and local and international workers has long gone. The daily flights taking gold north stopped. The large dam it built on a river in the jungle has fallen a part and disappeared beneath the water. All that remains of the company are the dark

skinned blue eyed children and grand children of workers' unions with local women, the shells of former company's warehouses, and an electrical turbine plant. The *New York Times'* article, the physical ruins, and water filled pits show how gold has long integrated the Chocó with extractive capitalism from large-scale mines.

Declining gold prices alongside labor and political pressure drove the company from Colombia in the 1970s (Wade, 1990, p. 140). Contemporary observers criticized the company for its labor practices and its exploitation (Escalante, 1971). Responding to these critiques and local pressure, the state nationalized the American company. It did the same to the Canadian-owned Pato Consolidated Gold Dredging Limited, which worked the Nechí River that feeds the Lower Cauca River. In the Chocó, the nationalized Chocó-Pacific Mining Company went bankrupt and shut down. In Antioquia, the nationalized Pato Consolidated Gold Dredging Limited formed what became Mineros S.A. Today, the company continues to dredge the Lower Cauca River and remains one of Colombia's largest gold producers (Mineros, 2014). During my fieldwork, another kind of foreign miner came to the Chocó: a small-scale dredge owned by a Brazilian miner. The miner had worked the Nechí River following a route already mined by the Pato Consolidated Gold Dredging Limited. In the Chocó, he planned to do the same by reworking the rivers where the Chocó Pacific Mining Company had dredged.

On the river that flows by Mauricio's village, the American company's dredges had left wide gravel beaches, shifted sediment, and altered the river's course for decades. The dredging made river flooding worse. The machinery reshaped the river and shifted the landscape. Gabriel remembers the flood of 1936 and one in the 1990s as moments of upheaval and displacement. Despite leading lives altered by displacement caused by flooding made worse by mining, Gabriel and those who remain in the village find a living

in this mine-altered landscape. In the Chocó displacement has violent roots as well.

In Quibdó, a small one-room church stands across from the cathedral, with its mural depicting race in the Chocó, and attached to the building of the Diocese of the Catholic Church that overlooks the Atrato River. Rows of square photographs cover four sides of the church's walls. Each simply framed photograph is less than a sheet of letter-sized paper. Age and humidity have discolored most of the photos, but some are crisp, freshly hung, and brand new. Each photograph portrays a victim of the armed conflict in the Chocó. The Diocese human rights office keeps the church as a haunting reminder of the region's drug-fuelled conflict.

On the right-hand wall, facing across the pews, halfway to the back, hangs a faded black and white photograph of a middle-aged man from the village. Today, his house is roofless and covered in vegetation. A decade ago, the FARC guerrilla shot him in the back of the head down by the pebble beach below the *zapote* and guava fruit trees, close to what are now water filled holes that stand where the village used to be. They left his body to float downriver. The guerrillas had come to the village and stayed for weeks to recover from injuries and to rest. For them, the village became a refuge, far from the city, soldiers, police, and paramilitary. Villagers saw it differently: an occupation with forced political meetings and threats to anyone who tried to leave. The man the guerrillas shot worked as a low-level representative of the municipal government. They accused him of being an informant. They saw him as a threat, killed him, and returned to the forest.

The villagers left as well, displaced this time not by floodwaters but by violence. They took what possessions they could, stacked them into canoes, and made for nearby towns. Some people continued on to Quibdó or the Andean cities of Cali, Pereira, Medellín, and Bogotá. Some registered for small amounts of humanitarian aid with the

state as displaced people and never returned; some, the ones I knew, came back. They returned to their homes weeks, months, or years after the murder. As with earlier floods, many left, but some remained. The village survives. It took me a long time to understand why people came back after floods and assassinations.

In the evening down by the river, I sit listening to the dusk sounds while talking to Mauricio's brother-in-law, Pedro, who has spent months teaching me to mine. Our conversations and my work at his mine shape much of this text.

Looking around he asks me, "Do you like the city?"

"Yes." I pause. "I guess."

Enjoying the cool breeze, he points at the forest, his pineapples across the river, the boats bobbing by the concrete dock, the river, and the moon becoming visible.

"Have you ever *been* to the city?"

I understand his point from the way he tells me and from the context of looking around. That evening the river does seem beautiful. Pedro prefers rural life to city life. Even with the risk of floods, wars, and the guerrillas' occupation, he keeps coming back. This does not mean he has no connections to the city. He has a house in Quibdó, which he built after the FARC occupied and displaced the village. Now, he works to save money from his artisanal mine ten minutes upriver to build another house in Quibdó. Mining provides him a way to survive.

He once said to me with a grin, "If you're going to displace (*desplazarse*), you should have somewhere to go."

His comment is interesting for two reasons. First, because it suggests both his hope to enjoy an income generated from renting out his houses in one of those hard-to-access neighborhoods in Quibdó where displaced people live. Second, because the

term *desplazarse* has a complicated meaning. On the one hand, it refers to forced displacement, as in *desplazamiento forzado*. On the other, it refers to the reflexive verb form of movement, as in *desplazarse*. Pedro thus simultaneously means both forcible displacement through violence and flooding and a reflexive displacement through choosing to move to the city. This speaks to the complicated reasons people move and migrate.

The conversation down by the river warrants a brief discussion of similar moments of dialogue in this dissertation. I use quotations drawing from audio recordings and field notes. I took field notes after mining, in the afternoon, the early morning, or immediately on waking. I do not distinguish between audio recordings and reconstructed dialogue from notes. I conducted some tape- or video-recorded formal interviews, but the most interesting conversations took place in other contexts. I have used dialogue from these notes or recordings, but I see all as my re-interpretations of these conversations. Translation also poses issues. Often people spoke in an articulate manner, and literal English translation rarely reflects this eloquence. Readers should consider the text within quotes as the product of this ethnographic encounter and as a reconstruction and interpretation of remembered conversations, rather than direct, literal quotations.

Turning back to Pedro, despite the flooding and the threat of violence from the guerrillas that forced him to Quibdó, he came back. He stays in the village despite the guerrillas who move freely in the area and the waves of miners, loggers, and others who keep arriving to the Chocó's mining frontiers. In the city, Pedro and thousands of displaced rural Afro-descendants find jobs as day laborers, construction workers, food sellers, and domestic workers. His comment makes clear that he prefers life in the forests and rivers depopulated by floods and war.

I opened with that view from the top of a hill where I worked and looked for a cellphone signal with Mauricio at dusk because it allowed me to place the view of forests, rivers, and mines that frames the dissertation. In this chapter, I have taken a perspective from hole in the ground to address the Chocó's broader political economy, and the village's past displacement from war and flooding made worse by mining. The hole in the ground and a former mine site show the ways people make a living despite displacement from conflict and flooding. Showing livelihoods in the Chocó's rivers and forests lets me introduce themes of Afro-descendant artisanal mining and subsistence production within the landscape of rivers and forests. Pedro and others prefer this life to the city. While connecting an Afro-descendant village to mining, violence, and displacement shows people still live there, find pleasure in their livelihoods, and uses for holes in the ground, dwelling on the ways capitalist accumulation has shaped this landscape in Colombia's Pacific allows me to begin a theoretically informed discussion of economic fictions.

Economic Fictions

Economic fictions provide a key analytical observation and theoretical framing for the dissertation. My concern involves mining in the Chocó as what I call an economic fiction. I titled an earlier draft "Fictitious Mining" to highlight gold mines that are not *just* about gold. Here, by "not *just* about gold," I meant extraction whose profits came not from mining itself, but from other processes, including conflict, money laundering profits from cocaine production, and stock market speculation. Despite the more inclusive present title "Gold in the Chocó, Colombia" which emphasizes the metal, in this section I consider fictions as falsities, deceptions, and untruths in frontier regions. I point to money laundering

and speculation as mining's economic fictions. Understanding mining's economic fiction lets me connect rural places in the Chocó to capitalist accumulation through resource extraction, speculation, money laundering, and primitive accumulation.²

During fieldwork, I often watched the evening news at Esteban or Pedro's houses on their satellite televisions. The world's coffee, oil, and gold prices, and the exchange rate of the Colombia peso with the US dollar scroll by at the newscast's end. We sometime spoke about the price of gold. Pedro asked me once, "Why does the television price seem higher than what I can get in Quibdó?" I suggested that as the Colombian and the US currencies rise and fall, the gold selling price in Quibdó moved in the opposite direction than the newscast's peso to dollar exchange rate. While this might not have been the cause, I mention the television newscast and our conversations for another reason. Although we talked about local and world gold prices, and the US currency, my development of the idea of economic fiction does *not* draw on these conversations in the field.

Anthropologists Stephen Gudeman and Alberto Rivera (1990, pp. 16–17) describe the domestic economy of peasant producers in the Colombian Andes. The two anthropologists documented economic metaphors within Andean peasant talk through conversations with peasants about their understandings of the economy. For Gudeman and Rivera, this represented one way of talking about the economy. They called this a "conversational community" which they use to describe other schools of economic thought. They also use this term to describe economic conversations grounded in

² Anna L. Tsing (2004) uses the metaphor "friction" to describe globalization, capitalism, and how local communities respond in remote places. She calls for empirical description of this process.

European and Western mainstream classical and neoclassical economics, heterodox economics, and political economy. In this section, I build on conversations about political economy to develop a theoretical framework around of economic fictions.³

Karl Marx ([1867] 1981, pp. 536–540) describes fictitious capital⁵ in opposition to real capital, that is capital used in production by workers, and money capital, that is money, gold, and funds held. He describes fictitious capital as in commercial and bank credit, stocks, and securities. That is, paper claims on future production:

All this paper actually represents nothing more than accumulated claims, or legal titles, to future production whose money or capital value represents either no capital at all, as in the case of state debts, or is regulated independently of the value of real capital which it represents (Marx, [1867] 1981, pp. 599).

Stock speculation as claims to future production is key to understanding the Canadian mining industry. As examples of fictitious capital, Marx offers the paper trade in future profits through bills of lading. Rather than money as a means of payment for products that circulate, bills of lading—a document issued by the shipping company which details a

³ Within a perspective grounded in political economy and work on capitalism in the United Kingdom, Karl Polanyi (2001) discusses “fictitious commodities.” While this is not my starting point, it is useful to pause here for a moment. Polanyi develops “fictitious commodities” in his classic text on the great transformation, which describes the development of capitalism in UK. He describes land, labor, and money as fictions because people do not produce them for sale, yet they are vital parts of the economic system. He contends:

Labor is only another name for a human activity which goes with life itself, which in its turn is not produced for sale but for entirely different reasons, nor can that activity be detached from the rest of life, be stored or mobilized; land is only another name for nature, which is not produced by man; actual money, finally, is merely a token of purchasing power which, as a rule, is not produced at all, but comes into being through the mechanism of banking or state finance (Polanyi, 2001, p. 68–76).

I do not begin with Polanyi because my point is not human relations to land, labor, or money as fictitious commodities, but to the ways economic activities can facilitate capitalist speculation and money laundering; here I turn to the other Karl, through Marx’s work fictitious capital.

⁵ Of course, Marx’s discussion of economic fictions is much more systematic throughout his work on the price/value distinction than my discussion. However, for reasons of space, I stick to Capital, Volume III, Chapter 25.

shipment of merchandise and gives title to a particular person—provide for payments due on a future date.

Drawing on the *Manchester Guardian* (November 24, 1847, [1867] 1981, pp. 536–537) Marx describes making money from the commercial trade of moving goods paid for with bills of exchange paid on shipments of physical goods that never need happen. He summarized it as follows. A London trading house (A) directed a buyer (B) to buy from merchants (C) in Manchester and ship goods to a buyer (D) in India. The buyer (B) pays the merchant (C) with a six month banking draft—a note promising future payment. The buyer (B) secures his venture with another six-month banking draft from the London trading house (A). The trading house (A) secures its transaction with the buyer (D) in India with a third six month banking draft made against a mailed bill of lading. The trading house makes profits not from payments received on trade goods delivered, but from exchanging bills of lading.

The shipper and the co-signee were thus both put in possession of funds—months before they actually paid for the goods; and, very commonly, these bills were renewed at maturity, on pretense of affording time for the returns in a ‘long trade.’ Unfortunately, losses by such a trade, instead of leading to its contraction, led directly to its increase. The poorer men became, the greater need they had to purchase, in order to make up, by new advances, the capital they had lost on the past adventures. Purchases thus became, not a question of supply and demand, but the most important part of the finance operations of a firm laboring under difficulties. But this is only one side of the picture. What took place in reference to the export of goods at home, was taking place in the purchase and shipment of produce abroad. Houses in India, who had credit to pass their bills, were purchasers of sugar, indigo, silk, or cotton—not because the prices advised from London by the last overland mail promised a profit on the prices current in India, but because former drafts upon the London house would soon fall due, and must be provided for. What was so simple as to purchase a cargo of sugar, pay for it in bills upon the London house at ten months’ date, transmit the shipping documents by the overland mail; and, in less than two months, the goods on the high seas, or perhaps not yet passed the mouth of the Hoogly, were pawned in Lombard Street—putting the London house in funds eight months before the drafts against those goods fell due. And all this went on without interruption or difficulty, as long as

bill-brokers had abundance of money ‘at call;’ to advance on bills of lading and dock warrants, and to discount, without limit, the bills of India houses drawn upon the eminent firms in Mincing Lane (Marx, [1867] 1981, p. 537).

What Marx calls a swindle hinged not on making a profit on the trade in physical goods but of making profits by receiving paperwork and pawning the bills of lading which arrived before the goods and, sometimes, even before the goods had left England. The paperwork transformed the slow business of trans-oceanic physical trade to a rapid money-making scheme in which physical goods served to hide the profits from a paper operation. Real trade allowed people to accumulate fictitious capital by profiting from moving paper claims to future profits; future profits on trade which itself may have never materialized. These profits on the trade in physical goods that never happened were a swindle that generated fictitious capital as profits from paper claims to future production (Marx, [1867] 1981, pp.536–537). Marx provided other examples—trade with Brazilian, American, Canadian, and West Indian merchants, railway swindles, trade with China, etc. These schemes worked because they relied not on producing goods for sale but on the appearance of trade and producing goods for sale. I pull at three threads of his discussion of fictitious capital: the distance, as in the difficulty traveling between England and India; the speculative, as in people hoping to sell bills of exchange for future profits; and the swindle, as in this method of profit.

On distance, James C. Scott (2009, p. 40–45) describes the difficulty states had in controlling large areas in South East Asia as stemming from a high “friction of terrain.” Good roads and rivers made travel easier, while jungle and mountains make it harder. States could not control large areas because the friction of terrain made some places harder to reach and control. The idea suggests the difficulty of reaching frontier regions and of moving goods and people. The months it took to ship goods from England to India around

the Cape of Good Hope came from the distance involved and the friction of terrain at the time. While sea shipments were far faster than shipping on land, shipping to India still took months. Despite the ease of shipping on the oceans relative to land, it still took months for messages between trading houses in London and India. Even mailed bills of lading took two months on the overland routes. The slow mail and boat to India—forms of friction of terrain—helped traders accumulate fictitious capital because it meant the time/space distance was great. The swindle Marx describes relied on this time/space distance between merchandize sales and the paper claims to future profits. When the telegraph cut mail time, the Suez Canal opened, and steam ships arrived, all of which shrunk the time required to ship goods, the schemes Marx describes fell apart. That is, as steam ships, the Suez Canal, and telegraphs shrank time and space they smoothed the friction of terrain and made trade easier as buyers and sellers could send messages in days not weeks, and move goods in weeks not months, their method of fictitious accumulation of capital changed. Making fictitious capital on trade that never happened with India became impossible, other methods economic fictions developed.

On speculation, I distinguish between it and investment. The stock markets and securities market offer insight on the distinctions. John Maynard Keynes ([1936] 1996, p. 285) remarked on securities speculation that a stock buyer hopes to predict not a price for the stock that reflects a company's future profits, but the price that other people engaged in stock buying will take as the price. He described this as a beauty contest:

It is not a case of choosing those [faces] that, to the best of one's judgment, are really the prettiest, nor even those that average opinion genuinely thinks the prettiest. We have reached the third degree where we devote our intelligences to anticipating what average opinion expects the average opinion to be. And there are some, I believe, who practice the fourth, fifth and higher degrees (Keynes, [1936] 1996, p. 284).

The distinction between speculating and investing is, “Investing is an activity of forecasting the yield over the asset’s life; speculation is the activity of forecasting the psychology of the market” (Keynes, [1936] 1996, p. 284). Speculation, involves a company’s stock value increasing not just through—what Marx would describe as—accumulating more real or money capital, but also through fictitious capital. While stocks are paper claims to future profits, as Keynes notes, what matters are not future profits, but a compelling story of future profits and a belief that others will believe in the future profits. This kind of speculation is an important part of capitalism’s financialization in its globalized form.

Economic anthropologists Jonathan Friedman and Kajsa Ekholm Friedman (2008, 2013, p. 252) argue for a reconsideration of globalization within a “larger global historical arena.” While they draw parallels between communication and transportation advances late in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and the present, they describe globalization as an object of study in a perspective that stresses financial capital, speculation, and criminalization (p. 252). In another article in the same recent issue of *American Ethnologist* as the Friedman article, Don Kalb (2013) builds on their earlier work on financialization (Friedman and Friedman, 2008).

From a world systems perspective, which stresses the interconnected nature of capitalism, Kalb describes one of the key insights of Friedman and Friedman (1978) as their emphasis on the “financialization” in the world system. Kalb credits the term to Fernand Braudel, which described financialization as the “‘autumn’ in an accumulation cycle in the world system” (Braudel cited in Kelb, 2013, p. 259) in which capital in the core becomes used for “speculative purposes at home and abroad in a frantic effort by the core to regain its profitability” (Kelb, 2013, p. 259). Kelb cites Giovanni Arrighi (2000)

who develops Fernand Braudel's writing on the *longue durée* of capitalist history. Arrighi discusses financialization within capitalist development not as a teleological and unavoidable phase, but as a reoccurring moment of speculation driven crisis in market capitalist economies. Arrighi sees this as a feature of capitalism over its entire lifetime, with characteristics of "flexibility" and "eclecticism" and financial expansion (Arrighi, 2000, p. 4). Arrighi cites the Dutch withdrawing from commerce by the mid-eighteenth century to become "the bankers of Europe," fifteenth century Italy as "Genoese capitalist oligarchy switched from commodities to banking," the English in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, or the US today (Braudel, 1984, p. 242–243, 246 in Arrighi, 2000, p. 4–6). The American geographer and political economist David Harvey describes financialization as part of 'flexible accumulation' (1989 in Arrighi, 2000, p. 4). In each case, the economy's financialization heralds a move away from production towards fictitious capital, sparking speculative financial bubbles on real assets. A similar process seems to be occurring in contemporary mining in Colombia. Canadian junior mining companies projects are easier in part by the relative distance of some remote areas like the Chocó. Before this, let me turn to one of the most oft cited examples of speculative bubbles and the sixteenth century Dutch tulipmania.

The tulipmania that peaked in Holland in March 1637 is an example of a speculative asset bubble. Some tulip varieties in Amsterdam fetched high prices as Dutch East India Company merchants brought back Asian bulbs alongside spices. The tulips became a rare, high-value commodity from far away, which helped create a speculative bubble in Holland, at the time Europe's mercantilist capitalist center. The price collapse led to the flower's loss of value, while many traders lost fortunes (Goldgar, 2008).

Despite tulipmania belonging to its own historical, social, cultural, and economic

context, it does show some unexpected features of speculation. A point made by Anne Goldgar (2008, p. 2–5) bears emphasis: my brief retelling above reflects a popular analysis of tulipmania (2008, p. 6). She describes this basic accounting as one based not in fact, but on propaganda against the trade “cited as if it were fact” (Goldgar, 2008, p. 6). Instead, she argues we need to see tulips not as a commodity, but as works of art, as paintings, or as luxury objects. Her point, to properly understand the tulip’s role in Dutch society, there needs to be a contextualization not in terms of a facile discussion of speculation, but in terms of social and cultural context. Still, it seems to me this is the case in most examples of speculation: cultural context always matters. I turn this perspective to another well-cited discussion of contemporary speculation and the 2008 financial crisis in the US.

While the US financial crisis has many definitions, with no consensus over its causes, characteristics, or effects, events in leading up to 2007 and 2008 sparked a worldwide financial crisis. Part of this came from a speculation on home ownership and property prices. Homebuyers, often entrapped by predatory lending schemes and unaware of this fact, leveraged themselves to buy houses, in part, believing house prices could never fall. In one reading, one could argue they hoped for future profits from the higher sales prices: as long as home prices rose faster than the interest on their mortgages, selling would earn them a profit. In another reading, owning one’s home is a powerful symbol of middle class freedom and financial acumen in North America. However, when high oil prices in 2008 led to increased unemployment, people began to lose their homes and leave their mortgages. As house prices fell, the housing bubble burst.

This basic story was complicated greatly by subprime mortgages, offered to low income buyers, by unscrupulous mortgage sellers who entrapped them and the later shifted the risk to third parties through the financialization of these mortgages in complex

derivative schemes. This meant speculation on houses by buyers, lenders, financial institutions, and others brought the financial system to the brink of collapse, and destroyed some banks. Like Goldgar's observation on tulipmania, this brief discussion risks a myopia to cultural and social contexts behind the bubble: namely how houses in North America carry cultural weight as home ownership provides a status symbol, symbolizes maturity, adulthood, middle class aspirations, and financial safety. This cultural context is precisely what allowed unscrupulous lenders to entrap buyers into mortgages they could not honor. Nonetheless, although the reasons for the rise in prices and later collapse are complex, it does seem clear a capitalist logic of financialization, speculation, and fictitious capital accumulation through profits on future sales influenced home buyers, banks, mortgages sellers, and others in the financial sector.

One consequence of the 2008 financial crisis was that by 2011, world gold bullion prices reached \$1,900 a troy ounce. In some cases, people moved their money from stocks into gold. Speculators bought gold hoping for higher prices, which reflected their perceptions of value, and hope for a safe haven in gold. As people moved money from stocks, bonds, and US dollars, into gold, they reflected a belief in gold holding value. This created a gold price bubble; that is, gold prices increased in part because of speculation on further price increases.

Turning to speculation in remote areas, I address Marx's discussion of primitive accumulation in relation to the Highland Clearances in nineteenth century Scotland (Marx, [1883] 1990, p. 890). At the time, Scottish landowners replaced their highland tenants with sheep; forced communities to move to the coast to become crofters who survived on fishing or gathering kelp for sale to English manufacturers; displaced people to lowland cities in squalid conditions to work in manufacturing; and sent them to the

Americas. To clear highland communities, landowners rewrote the law, burned people's homes, killed some families, and, found other ways to remove people. They hoped to make profits from sheep by supplying English industrialists with wool for their manufactured cloth and by selling kelp. Marx describes this enclosure as primitive accumulation.

Marxist geographer David Harvey (2003) describes another form of contemporary primitive accumulation, in what he calls accumulation by dispossession. He describes contemporary process of displacement and capital accumulation through privatization, financialization, crisis manipulation, and redistribution. Harvey highlights commodification, alongside financial swindles, casino capitalism, and other forms of speculation as part of contemporary capitalism.

A commentary on Colombia today could use Marx's descriptions of primitive accumulation or Harvey's work on accumulation by dispossession to refer to the processes that displace peasant producers from rural areas to urban slums to clear the way for African palm plantations, monoculture banana plantations, and gold mines. A critique of mining in Colombia could develop an analysis of foreign mining investments bringing violent displacement through primitive accumulation and accumulation by dispossession. Those opposed to large-scale mining fear multinational corporations will clear away small-scale miners to create space for large-scale mining projects. Those critical of small-scale mining describe them as clearing away rural peasant producers and fuelling the conflict (e.g. *Agencias Británicas e Irlandesas trabajando en Colombia*, 2013, p. 1, 9, 10; *Peace Brigades International, PBI*, 2011, p. 3, 9, 22). These ongoing processes repeated across Colombia are all reminiscent of Marx's primitive accumulation. Just as sheep dispossessed the Scottish highlanders, gold mining dispossesses rural populations in

Colombia.

I hope to make a different reading of Marx's discussion of primitive accumulation. While this risks a misreading of his work, and the historical record of the highland clearances, the question is worth asking: To what extent did speculation in sheep's wool (and kelp) underpin the clearances? Certainly, James Hunter (2011), a notable historian of the West Highlands, shows how a boom and bust in the trade in kelp and wool shaped the Scottish political economy in the early nineteenth century. While perhaps an anachronistic reading on my part then, it seems to me that landowners who replaced rural populations with sheep by pushing them onto coastal crofts to pick kelp were speculating on their future profits. While Hunter notes the landlords at the time described what they were doing as a process of improvement, it resulted in the brutal expropriation of rural lands, enclosures, and depopulation for profit. Some profits came for a time, but not long. A few decades later, many landowners sold their land in another kind of rural speculation: deer hunting lodges and deer forests. While with the clearances I can only hypothesize as to the speculative aspect of primitive accumulation, with the idea of economic fictions in rural Colombia I hope to suggest the ways that speculation and fictitious capital in out-of-the-way places coincides with primitive accumulation. Through exploring economic fictions, I point to primitive accumulation rooted in speculative ventures. A process of primitive accumulation through violent displacement to accumulate fictitious capital is an apt descriptor of some gold mining. Gold mining projects that displace people become not simply about gold, but speculative ventures based on economic fictions in out-of-the-way places. To this I add a further illegal aspect.

Continuing the earlier discussion of Marx's analysis of English trade with India, I highlighted three elements: distance, speculation, and the swindle. While I come back to

distance momentarily to make the point that speculative mining ventures as economic fictions rely on distance, for now I dwell on the last aspect of Marx's discussion of fictitious capital: swindles. Like the Dutch trade in spices and tulips, Colombia too trades in a high-value commodity. Not to caricature or pathologize Colombia's economy, cocaine is an important illegal high-value export commodity that creates a kind of primitive accumulation through economic fictions on the frontier.

While the production and export of cocaine creates displacement and violence in rural regions, unlike processes of commodity production, say bananas, coffee, oil, gold, or forest products, which produce legal profits through dispossession, cocaine profits are illegal and need to be legalized. Contemporary primitive accumulation in Colombia occurs not simply through the extraction and displacement of peasants for speculative ends in future profits, but also through money laundering through fake speculative ventures. Traffickers launder illegal cocaine profits through apparently legitimate businesses as a swindle reminiscent of Marx's discussion of England's trade with India takes place. Speculative primitive accumulation on the unrealized future profits from mining projects provides a mechanism to launder cocaine money. It leads to dispossession and displacement of rural people, not through primitive accumulation on its own terms, but through economic fictions that obscure a different profit source. Not only do fake small-scale mines in out-of-the-way frontiers launder drug profits by displacing people, but so to do speculative ventures by Canadian junior mining companies.

I propose that cocaine traffickers launder profits through what appears to be speculation in both small-scale gold mines and large-scale multinational mining projects. It creates a primitive accumulation that transforms illegal profits from cocaine into mines that displace people even as they launder money rather than mine gold. To connect the

discussion of Marx's observations on distance, speculation, and swindle of fictitious capital, I argue speculative fictitious capital arrives to frontier rural areas far from the centers of state power where primitive accumulation through fake mining helps launder money. Of course, all of this co-exists with *mere*, and more traditional, speculation in gold mining and primitive accumulation from capitalist extraction.

In making this observation, I hope to shift critiques about resource extraction and mining in Colombia away from a focus on gold mining on its own terms. I critique it not simply as fictitious capital and speculative claims to future mine profits, nor simply financial swindles on stock schemes on mining projects, nor even just primitive accumulation through violent dispossession by small-scale miners, but as speculative ventures that hide illegal profits from other sources.⁶

Bringing in the earlier discussion of speculation, fictitious capital, and claims for hoped for future profits, I develop the idea of economic fictions. This describes a process by which contemporary Colombia's rural violence from mining projects link to fictitious capital in rural areas. That is, to mining projects that may not exist or that do not mine gold. Returning to Marx' discussion of English trading houses and India, their swindle relied on the distance, remoteness, and widespread speculation. This also applies to mining fictions in Colombia.

⁶ While I do not address this, it seems probable tax evasion through junior mining companies could also help explain similar processes. That is, just as gold mines can clean cocaine money, so too can they help people evade taxes. I have focused speculation and money laundering as ways of using fictitious production to legalize cocaine profits, but a similar technique might work for tax evasion. Namely, exploration expenses for mining projects are tax deductible. This is an unexplored aspect of Canadian mining in Colombia. This raises the question of mechanisms that would allow fake mining exploration expenses to lower tax obligations. Alain Deneault and William Sacher (2012; Deneault, 2011) describe Canada as a tax haven of choice for the world's mining companies, which promises insight in this direction.

Money launderers take advantage of mining projects to launder cocaine profits. I point to mineral extraction in Colombia not as primitive accumulation but as fictitious production to launder cocaine profits. While this takes place in out-of-the-way places, left over from earlier periods of capital accumulation, it shapes the landscapes like the one I described in this chapter's beginning. By linking gold mining to cocaine production and export, I see gold and cocaine not just as high value export oriented goods emerging from Colombia's jungles valued on international markets, but as tied together through economic fictions in which profits from the former (gold) legalize profits from the latter (cocaine). Mines produce a profit not just through gold mining *per se*, but also through speculation and legalizing drug money. Gold becomes not simply about gold as a source of wealth, but also as a mechanism to legalize profits. I conclude with a discussion of methods and writing.

Method and Writing

Most chapters adopt the anthropological trope of an opening vignette to introduce a recurrent theme or question. The dissertation's opening did not simply serve to launch the discussion of the Chocó, but the hilltop view with Mauricio also let me outline the dissertation's structure and argument. I now turn to looking for cellphone signals and my research methods.

Mauricio and I struggled to find a cellphone connection. The cellphone signals came briefly. Like finding gold itself, the signal was hard to catch. Our conversations with family and friends were truncated. The moment let me highlight my presence in the field and our action of reaching for connections. By reaching, I mean at once our task of

stretching out our arms hoping to catch a signal with our phones and reaching in the sense of trying to find tenuous connections. There is little so tenuous as a cellphone connection destabilized by wind, but the fact both of us could reach our destination, to a nearby city and to Canada, shows that sometimes after luck and patience some connections can be made. This introduces two methods I deploy.

The methods are what I call *apprenticeship ethnography*, and, for want of a better term, *investigative analysis*. In this section, I turn to these two research methods. I aim first at a method grounded in ethnographic fieldwork, participant observation, conversation, and apprenticeship mining. Second, at a method grounded in critical reading of newspapers, corporate documents, academic literature, websites, and data analysis. My reticence on the latter term will become clear as it has some weaknesses. Investigative analysis in this sense tries to develop the tenuous connections that come out of apprenticeship ethnography. By tenuous, I contrast it to an ethnographic analysis grounded in physical and embodied practice. Methodologically I draw on either one method alone or a combination of the two.

Apprenticeship Ethnography

Inspired by the literature on apprenticeship anthropology (e.g. Cooper, 1989; Palsson, 1994; Lindsay, 1996; Crossley, 2004), my first research method relied on an ethnographic apprenticeship in mining. Without dwelling on this literature for reasons of space, this involved anthropology's mainstay of participant observation. I learned the skilled practice of gold mining from miners by mining gold. I worked unpaid with various miners in the village. I observed the mining, talked to people about mining, and undertook

an apprenticeship in mining.

Russell H. Bernard has a somewhat inclusive definition of participant observation, arguing that it applies to everything that one does in the field (Bernard, 2006, p. 342). In his qualitative research methods cookbook, he lumps a series of strategies under participant observation: field notes taken about things you see and hear in natural settings, photographs of the contents of people's houses, audio recordings of folktales, videotapes of canoes, and transcriptions of taped open-ended interviews (Bernard, 2006, p. 342). Bernard also includes a discussion of questionnaires, surveys, structured interviews, etc. While I did all the former, and some of the latter, I find this expansive definition less useful to describe my method.

Harry Wolcott (2005) would describe what Bernard discusses as data gathering; he uses participant observation to mean something else. He describes ethnography as a craft; something learned in the doing (2005). For this reason, I prefer his definition of participant observation as "an art," more than simply what one does in the field. This does not preclude Bernard's forms of data gathering, but Wolcott definition captures something else: the task implied in Clifford Geertz' over simplified phrase of "being there." Geertz (1988, p. 1 in Wolcott, 2005, p. 95) says, "What a proper ethnographer ought properly to be doing is going out to a place, coming back with information about how people live there, and making that information available to the professional community in a practical form." More than a methodology of gathering data, or merely reporting to a "professional community," participant observation is also about being in a place and interacting with people (Wolcott, 2005, p. 95). In my case, I adopted this to do what I came to think of as a mining apprenticeship.

Wolcott calls ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation as a "form of

inquiry in which one is immersed personally in the ongoing social activities of some individual or group for the purpose of research” (2005, p. 95). It is a project of personal involvement, aiming at achieving an understanding and retelling the experience: both the being there and later the writing about the being there (Wolcott, 2005, p. 66). In Wolcott’s sense, I strove for fieldwork as a process of wholehearted and embodied commitment to mining. My ethnographic work then aimed at “intimate long-term acquaintance” (Wolcott, 2005, p. 68) with mining, with miners, and in a way, with gold. I went about gaining an understanding of mining grounded in mining’s physical practice. I attempt a self-conscious sharing of this work through this dissertation, as I explore the ways gold is not just about gold.

In chronological terms, I went to Bogotá in May 2010. Although I visited the Chocó in September 2010, I started the period I think of as fieldwork by actively seeking out opportunities to mine in November 2010. I confirmed a field site in February 2011. This was a village I frequently visited, and where I lived for extended periods of time and where people seemed happy to have me. Until January 2012, I spent most of my time in the village mining. I began writing in earnest in January 2012. I left the Chocó in April 2012 and returned to Canada in May 2012. I went to Colombia for a month in August 2013 to visit the village where I had worked.

During two years in Colombia and eighteen months in the Chocó, while I did use conversations and interviews, I mostly engaged in apprenticeship mining. I gained labor experience mining. I split my weeks between Pedro’s mine, Esteban’s mine, and José and Geraldo’s small-scale mine. I spent months at a time in the village and visited most of the Afro-descendant villages and towns in the region. I attended social events and political meetings, purchased supplies, and sometimes conducted interviews. I spent time mining,

throwing stones, digging, and panning. I did my best to engage with people, and spoke to them about what seemed to worry and interest them and me. I soon realized that looking exclusively at mining was to miss the other things that miners did to make a living. In response, I turned to learning about hunting, gardening, migration, and political meetings.

My analysis developed out of a gold mining apprenticeship. I went mining, and did what people did. By apprenticeship I mean the embodied experience of learning how to mine, of helping at different mines, and doing what people told me to do, trying to be useful, working hard, and learning. Learning to mine, like any physical labor, it took time to learn skill. My methodological approach to understanding gold meant I woke up before dawn, travelled with people to their mines, threw stones, used a pan, dug trenches, moved water, followed a gold seam, worked under ground, and did other things. While I was an enthusiastic learner, this does not mean I was very good. Nor does it mean I relied on what I could learn mining. In this sense, I always remained a student of mining, never a practitioner in the same ways as my teachers. For me, my stakes in the mine were much lower.⁷

In the text that follows, I try to share the physicality and rhythms of mine work.

⁷ While this and other questions of power were fundamental to my fieldwork, I do not put them front and center in this discussion. I hope to elaborate further in a suitable venue about my position as a white, North American, male, heterosexual, and well-funded anthropologist and how this shaped my research in Colombia. While I try to reflect this through the themes I write about, it has not been my research focus. In developing a discussion of mining and money laundering, I have bracketed these important issues worthy of further in-depth discussion. I have tried to focus not on the politics of fieldwork, although very important, but to explore what came from this fieldwork encounter to understand mining. This does not mean I leave aside issues of power, race, class, and ethical engagement, but it does mean in this dissertation I do not put them front and center. Another area for further elaboration is gender issues around mining and fieldwork. My dissertation draws on a male oriented perspective on mining that reflects the nature of my fieldwork, which was often with men. There are many issues that I leave for further reflection.

This means the quickening pace when the earth has gold and the slowing quiet frustration of a cliff falling in a rush that un-did a week's work. By learning to mine things that at first seemed exceedingly difficult became mundane. I developed a proficiency in some small aspects of mining, even if this simply meant mastering the practical, rapid movements required to clear stones quickly enough to be useful.

Writing about Haitian Vodou Timothy R. Landry (2008) suggests that it is difficult to “experience culture with our notebooks, nor do we experience culture with only our minds or even only with their bodies, we experience culture through movement and action.” This is true with mining. I did not go to the mine with a pen and paper, although I sometimes went with a camera,⁸ but after work I did go back to my proverbial tent in the evening to write. While I tried my best to experience mining by day, at night I found writing a form of catharsis and a way to try to make sense of a day spent working. I regularly came home, drank coffee, ate rice, and filled dozens of pages of text. I wrote about mining and what I did as a first approximation of interpreting fieldwork. A tiny part of this description and analysis finds its way into my attempts at sharing a practical understanding and participation in gold mining. It was working on one river, on a handful of mines, that I kept running into broader concerns. Near the end of my fieldwork, I began to realize gold involved more than gold. To address this, I turned to the second method and what I call investigative analysis.

⁸ An initial draft of this dissertation incorporated photography from the field, however, in developing this text I have left aside photography for simple reasons of time: To incorporate writing into this text properly would have been lengthened the process by a third.

Investigative Analysis

While an apprenticeship in mining allowed me learn about gold, it also raised questions that were hard to answer because people did not want to address them directly. Rumors that I sought to confirm, but could not. Making sense of what I came across required a different method than ethnographic commitment. Here, in a manner similar to searching for signals with Mauricio using a cellphone, I turned to other tools to explore connection. In Canada in 2012 and 2013, I began to interrogate my own prior assumptions about Colombia's gold mining industry, adopting a technique that I have come to call investigative analysis.

Initially, two things interested me. First, why was the junior Canadian mining company that had a presence in the Upper Andágueda and Upper Atrato so hard to pin down? Although I looked into the companies involved on the request of people in the affected communities, I found it difficult to confirm information on their projects. The information available seemed to echo each other in a cacophony of rumors. Websites and company reports began to repeat themselves by saying very little. Actually confirming what a company was doing on the ground was not easy.

The second question was how to explain gold production statistics for where I did my fieldwork and for other municipalities in the Chocó? This raised questions in my mind about a possible disconnection between gold mining and gold production figures. In both cases, looking at the junior mining industry and gold statistics, it was hard to be certain. In the field, and talking to people at mines, I had heard rumors that miners were moving gold to other municipalities to register it somewhere else and claim royalties, something I confirm in a detailed discussion of gold production statistics.

Initially, I found this analysis of mining companies, mining statistics, and later,

money laundering challenging. I began to do this work and analysis, yet kept coming across questions that an apprenticeship in mining could not address. As I tried to trace gold's relationships across the Chocó and to put my own fieldwork in an appropriate context, I saw a need to engage critically with more than my own field notes and one small community. Dwelling only on apprenticeship meant that I was missing aspects of mining that I needed to understand as part of broader relationships. The apprenticeship ethnography allowed me to raise questions, satisfactorily answering them required other techniques.

Nonetheless, the year and a half of apprenticeship gold mining meant I had meant I had little time, funding, or training to engage in money laundering or large-scale multinational mining projects. George E. Marcus (1995), in his work on multi-sited ethnography, offers an approach. Indeed, my own apprenticeship in the Chocó did employ a moving ethnographic practice as I visited different areas, shifted mines, talked to different people, and traveled across the region. However, the challenge of a deep multi-sited apprenticeship on money laundering and junior mining companies was impossible. I turned to secondary sources to respond to this difficulty.

Anna Tsing (2004) in answering the question of how to study the global observes, "Rather than assume we know exactly what global capitalism is, even before it arrives, we need to find out how it operates in friction" (Tsing, 2004). To do this, I develop other methods to study gold and the Chocó. While I found it impossible to do fieldwork with junior mining companies, or money launderers, I did find ways to complement the ethnographic research I did do with other methods. It was this investigative analysis that allowed me to approximate gold's role in these other economies. A workshop held at Carleton University's Institute of Political Economy on corporate research in March 2013

taught by Dr. Tom Juravich, a University of Massachusetts' Labor Studies and Sociology professor, gave me research tools that inspired this approach (Juravich, 2012, 2013).

Taking cues from investigative journalism, I turned to an intensive, critically informed, reading of aspects of gold in the Chocó.

My interests moved away the practice of extraction in the Chocó to gold's role in other economies and what Thomas Naylor (1996) calls the underworld of gold. I drew on a close reading of the literature, especially in some of the criminology literature on money laundering, but also other sources including online databases. I turned to academic articles and civil society reports to understand gold mining's broader connections. I sought out and compiled gold mining statistics in Colombia. I read, and kept in a database, company documents, news reports, web reports, and discussion forum postings. I searched Colombian government websites and went through online mining concession registrations to map them onto the landscape I knew from fieldwork. I hope that combining apprenticeship mining through participant observation with investigative analysis provides a better understanding of gold in the Chocó. There are challenges to both approaches.

Epistemological Challenges

It would be all too easy to miss the ways gold is not about gold by dwelling simply on mining practice. Looking to news stories, company reports, public statistics, and critical literature it is all too easy to forget not all gold come from the ground. Both methods miss what the other contributes. While apprenticeship mining raises questions about money laundering and junior mining companies' speculation, it provides no

answers. At the same time, investigative analysis says little about subsistence production, people's livelihood, and the physicality of mining. I use the two complementary methods to untangle gold in the Chocó. Together, they help understand the ways that gold is and is not about gold. Taken together apprenticeship ethnography and investigative analysis lets me address various aspects of gold. Both raise the epistemological question of interpretation and veracity: How do we know? What justifies a belief, opinion, or analysis?

One approach I take to addressing this concern is in the writing techniques I use. Still, while being deep in a pit with mud oozing over my feet expressing a sense of a desire to find gold seems relatively easy. Expressing other things from that same position becomes harder. Drawing on newspaper reports, aiming to make political economic connections between gold, speculation, junior mining companies, and money laundering raise their own conclusion about gold and economic fictions, but pinning this down and confirming it at the level of daily practice and then sharing those conclusions is not straightforward.

Writing Challenges

The analysis, observations, and description in this dissertation draw from moments of fieldwork in apprenticeship ethnography or from the investigative analysis. I begin each chapter with a vignette reflecting on a moment where I learned something to introduce the theme the chapter elaborates. Writing these sections involved repeated decisions in creating, crafting, and reworking the dissertation's text. Here, I want to dwell on this aspect of writing: representing research. On the one hand, I show moments textually derived from conversations, events, and reflections and I often ground my analysis on this. On the other, I

try to weave together statistics, news reports, and other sources. In writing, I made many choices. My fieldwork focused on a specific area over a bounded period, and I took thousands of pages of notes. Later, I compiled hundreds of news sources, academic journals, and reports. Textually turning these experiences, field notes, and other sources into this dissertation meant striving for the most engaging, eloquent, and grounded writing as possible. I say engaged through my participation and involvement, eloquent through persuasive and compelling prose, and grounded through actual events. Compelling writing takes diverse choices in representation, description, and portrayal.

For example, while I spent 2010 to 2012 in Colombia, I integrate field notes, description, analysis, recordings of conversations, and interviews using the present tense. I put fieldwork descriptions, beside secondary sources and news reports. While I have often settled on using the present tense, and other tenses as required, I note the obvious: fieldwork already happened. My attempts at descriptive writing and analysis can explain these choices. I flow writing, field notes, analysis, dialogue, and interpretation together for the same reason. Like all writers, I use narrative tools to make decisions resulting in subjective word choices, descriptive composition tricks, and idiosyncratic analytical turns. While I hope this juxtaposing and weaving together serves the explanatory purpose, I note that I draw and develop field notes written during or after events that expand on observations as they emerged. The dissertation's text does not consist of written notes presented alongside analysis.

Rereading and expanding field notes lead me to jog memories and develop further interpretation. My writing comes from an iterative, circular, and reflexive process. Iterative as I wrote and rewrote sections, circular as I developed arguments and interrogated my own assumptions to better express those arguments, and reflexive as I included my own presence

in my writing. This included my decisions on what to put in and what to leave out. In all the description, I have left in some elements, and removed others. I hope I have written a text that has many parts, shifts in tense, and changes in voice and position to create better description and analysis. I do not see this as having an aesthetic purpose, but rather an explanatory one. My judgments of relevance and even the adjectives, nouns, and verbs I choose come from this writing, reading, interpreting, rereading, rewriting, and reinterpreting field notes and developing this longer text. While this does not create an objective account, I do aim to create an account responsible to the meaning, purpose, relationships, and understanding developed from apprenticeship mining and investigative analysis.

Aiming at accessible prose, I use contemporary English-language writing styles, prefer concise sentences and avoid passive voice. This makes representing some Spanish forms difficult. On conciseness, in Spanish texts writers often use run-on sentences to great benefit. On passive constructions, a normal English phrase would be “I dropped the book,” in Spanish it would be “*Se me cayó el libro.*” In the English, the subject taking the action is the speaker who dropped the book. In the Spanish, the subject doing the action is the book that fell involuntarily from the speaker. The English passive voice might allow similar subjectless generalizations and better reflect the imprecision of this common speech form. I mention this because in contexts of conflict and fear talk about actions often had an unarticulated subject performing them: “He was killed,” “They were displaced,” or “The town was taken.” My own use of “guerilla”—as opposed to “guerrillas”—in an early draft reflected a similar imprecision. The former term implies something general, undefined, and non-specific: *the* guerrilla in the mountains. The latter implies specific real people: *individual* guerrillas. While other writing choices may have allowed me to reflect fieldwork’s

imprecision better, I hope my choices allow for a compelling text. As with any text, this dissertation's success depends on other people's interpretations of its quality and completeness. Here, I think writing carries more weight than I might have thought. With this discussion of writing, I complete this discussion of method and writing, and now turn to putting all of this into practice by discussing artisanal gold mining.

Chapter 3:

Artisanal Gold Mining and the Fixed

Pedro works an artisanal mine with his wife, Martina, their twenty-year-old son, Antonio, and Martina's brother, Javier. He has slowly worked the mine for twenty years, shifting gravel and moving up the gentle sloping hillside to find gold. Pedro, Antonio, and Javier mine most days, sometimes washing more gold, and sometimes less. Most of the time, they find enough to justify the labor. The three miners stand in the mud at the bottom of a two-meter pit they have dug over the last four days. Muddy gray water oozes over the top of their rubber boots, letting cool liquid in around their toes. As they dig, they pass pans full of gravel and mud to Martina and me to wash in the sluice box. These pans, or *bateas*, come from town. Two of the pans have split from use. Pedro has repaired them with plastic strips cut from an engine oil bottle held in place with metal tacks.

My task involves clearing stones and gravel from the sluice box where Martina dumps the full pans. A steady stream of water washes the material down the sluice box, but sometimes it gets stuck, and I clear the excess stones and gravel away. By mid-morning, I begin to find hunks of petrified tree trunks, worn smooth with age, mixed in among the stones. I hold one up to Pedro.

“Why the wood?”

He says from the pit, “Gold likes deep places. To get to the metal, you have to go down to the bedrock. God sprinkled it during the biblical flood six thousand years ago.” He uses *peña*, a term for the bedrock of hard gray stone that miners dig to. He describes it as the “skull of the earth.”

“How do you know where to dig?” I ask.

“You watch the shape of the land and the stones,” he says. “You ask yourself, ‘Where did the water flow before?’ To find gold, you need to find the old streams.”

The four of us keep working. In the rhythm of clearing stones, I think about the “biblical flood.” How else but divine involvement could hunks of wood—worn to the shape of thousands of smooth, rounded, flat stones—mix so thoroughly with the rocks below the surface? The wood gives credence to Pedro’s flood-based understanding of mining, even if the petrified wood formed more slowly than the six millennia he suggests. Pedro’s comment stands out for two reasons. First, the biblical foundation of how to find gold shows the influence of the Catholic Church in the Chocó. Second, as people rarely talk about gold while working, that Pedro told me how to find it at the mine was remarkable. I turn to both points in more detail and the ways that people talk about finding gold and how they find it: mine talk and mine practice.

My aim in this discussion of the talk and practice of artisanal mining is to explore artisanal gold mining on its own terms and as part of the subsistence economy of Afro-descendant rural people. Drawing mining talk and practice, alongside descriptions of these other livelihood strategies, I describe mining techniques at Pedro’s mine, at Esteban’s mine below where Mauricio and I made phone calls, and at other mines. I discuss how people talk about finding gold, mines that give, mines that take, and mining dangers. I then turn to mining as a complement to other activities. I turn to the ways Afro-descendants make a living, and their subsistence strategies, which people describe as their *fijo*, or fixed. People describe these subsistence strategies as daily bread, or *pan coger*. In this way, I show how artisanal mining intersects with and connects to the ways people make living. Gold complements this subsistence production and provides cash.

Mine Talk

Priests and missionaries from Quibdó regularly visit some rural villages. I mention them, alongside Pedro's comment about the biblical flood, because a *paisa* Catholic priest who had worked in the region for decades explained to me how miners find gold. Beside me is María Antonia, a lawyer from Bogotá. The priest and the two of us sit on red plastic chairs in the front room of the priest's house sheltering from the midday sun. I am accompanying María Antonia to a town near Quibdó, where she has come to run a workshop on mining and prior and informed consent. I have been in the region for two weeks. I record the interview with a microphone perched on a stool. The priest explains gold mining in the Chocó. I feel nervous and, unaccustomed to the regional accent, I ask only a couple questions and leave the priest and María Antonia to talk.

He begins, "Mining is neither easy nor comfortable. It is difficult and dangerous. In the San Juan, women, famously called diviners, used to help miners find gold. They knew how to read the landscape and stones, follow where the water used to flow, and find where the gold lay. Miners paid for their services, but only after they had exploited the mine. The women, they did an exploratory study, as the *gringos* do today."

Using *gringo*, the priest references the foreign mining corporation in the region. The term for the women he uses, which I translate as diviner, is *vayadora*. I use the term "diviner" for the popular notion, in English, of a person who searches for water under the ground with a wooden stick. Gold diviners do not use sticks, but they look for gold where the water used to flow. Maybe the popular notion is not wrong. Gold and water have something in common: they both like deep places. Finding gold, according to Pedro, does mean finding where the water used to flow.

The Priest continues, "Now, 'mechanical diviners,' by which I mean excavators,

have replaced the work of these women. The machines can get to a level where an artisanal miner can never reach. They go much deeper.”

While it takes Pedro a few days to dig a meter down, an excavator can move the same material in one scoop as it digs ten meters or more down to the bedrock.

“To get gold out, artisanal miners invite these excavators onto their land. They think, ‘We cannot leave the gold there. We have to get the gold out.’ Sometimes, people have no way of reaching the gold because it lies too deep under the ground. In this case, the excavators provide the only way to get gold out. The excavators can achieve a depth an artisanal miner can never reach. They say, ‘we cannot die and leave the gold in the ground.’”

“You spoke of the diviners earlier on...” I probe.

“Some years they became famous all over the Chocó. In Quibdó and the San Juan, the diviners, above all, were women. They could go into the bush; they could tell people where to find gold. Miners would go and exploit the mine. They hardly exist anymore. Diviners form part of this culture.”

The priest’s interview suggests mining’s importance, the ways that Afro-descendant miners find gold, the reasons that these artisanal miners allow outsiders and heavy machinery to mine their land, and a mining culture in the Chocó. Finding gold requires moving tons of stone and gravel to get a small amount of metal. The labor that Pedro, Antonio, Martina, Javier, and I do shows one form of mining. What the priest calls “mechanical diviners” can reach the bedrock. The excavators can ease an artisanal miner’s physical labor. While the way the priest says “culture” points to how the church, activists, and others see artisanal mining as something traditional, ancestral, and female. There is another way of understanding mining and gold in the Chocó: artisanal gold

mining as one aspect of rural livelihood practices. The excavators bring changes with their machines. The reference to the gringos signals the arrival of the mining corporations that María Antonia has come to talk about. Diviners—mechanical or otherwise—are not the only way to find gold.

Another technique, pointing to these understandings, involves people looking for lights during a full moon. I hear about this one evening sitting in a group of five people on the edge of a dirt soccer pitch with two bright lights hanging on poles overhead. I listen to their ghost stories about the gold with a hacking cough and a bad fever caused by the unaccustomed heat. The five of them organized a workshop on mining. My travelling companion this time has spent some years in the Chocó. She turns the conversation to ghosts by telling a story about her university in Bogotá.

“The building used to house a hospital. Our office’s floor had the psych ward. As I left late one night, I realized I had lost my bag. The next morning, the women who made coffee said the ghost of a young woman, who committed suicide because of her lover, took my bag.”

She continues, “A building in downtown Bogotá has another ghost. People say the Colombian military took, tortured, and killed the revolutionary guerrilla priest Camilo Torres in the building. The officials said he died in combat, but people say they saw him taken alive into the building. Today, everybody in the building says they have seen him.”

“Maybe ghosts provide a way to remember what we cannot speak about.”

One of our companions, a young woman from a nearby town, says, “There exists a ‘wise one’ who knows too much.” Her term for “wise one” is *sabio*. “The wise one goes after human flesh. It eats people. Yet, it is neither a magician nor a sorcerer. It flies at night. It knows where the gold lies. This ‘wise one’ tells a miner how to find the gold.

Many miners will never look for gold unless a 'wise ghost' has told them where to look. The foreign mining companies who find the gold on their own have their own ways of detecting gold. Here though, in the Chocó, when the 'wise ghost' finds gold he moves it, quickly, when nobody expects it. This explains why you can follow a gold seam and in a moment find it turns to nothing."

My companion, who told the ghost story about Bogotá, remarks, "You admit to seeing a ghost."

Another woman says, "What about the lights and the people who try to find the graves of long-dead Indian princesses by looking for lights. People call them treasure hunters now."

She uses the term *guaquero*, which I have translated as a treasure hunter. In some cases, it describes a grave robber who looks for pre-Colombian Indigenous graves in deep holes called *guaca* to sell the treasure they find. To my ear, her use seems not to refer to people looking to sack burial grounds, but to gold miners.

"The treasure hunters go out at night looking for lights on the ground. When they find lights, they mark it. They go back the next morning to the same spot with shovels."

My companion says, "Someone once asked me to go on a walk at night to look for lights. Five or six of us planned to go during Holy Week on the night of a full moon. I did not go though. I felt too afraid."

Changing the subject, a young woman replies, "I once dreamed of an old rum bottle filled with a kilogram of platinum. The bottle came from before, when nobody valued platinum. Some miners had hidden the metal in the rum bottle. They thought that platinum might someday be more valuable. I mean before the Chocó Pacific Mining Company, back in the nineteenth century when people discarded platinum. I dream about

the value of the platinum-filled rum bottle today. You could sell a half a kilogram of platinum for millions. What would the value of a kilogram of platinum be today?”

Our conversation between five people occurred at night. The ghost stories add to Pedro's and the Priest's comments on knowing how to find gold. Our conversation about ghosts and wise ones telling people where to find gold and moving gold, treasure hunters digging for treasure, Indian princesses, lights on the ground coinciding with the full moon, and walking at midnight to find mines echoes the priest's description of diviners in both content and form. I note this because only during relaxed evening conversation do people speak about how to find gold. This suggests understanding artisanal mining in the Chocó requires knowledge of the context of Afro-descendant miners. It makes Pedro's conversation in the pit remarkable because all other similar stories that I draw on come from conversations at dusk, late at night, by the river, or over a beer. People spoke about gold after a long day's labor, but almost never while working. These conversations speak to the ways that people think about mining and helps explain why, in the priest's words, they invite excavators onto their land: They cannot “leave the gold in the ground.”

Wealth and the Earth

The deeper Pedro, Javier, and Antonio dig, the faster their hole fills with water. From the pit, Pedro fills a pan, which he tosses to Martina at the top of the hole. At the same moment, she deftly throws him an empty pan. The two pans cross in midair: one full and one empty. Pedro and Martina each catch the pan thrown by the other. Pedro fills his new pan, while Martina dumps the full one into the sluice box. They repeat this smooth motion of filling, throwing, catching, and dumping all afternoon. The exchange makes the

labor look deceptively easy.

My task involves clearing the small sluice box, where Martina dumps the material. The box consists of an old dugout canoe cut in half with a metal grill placed over a burlap sack to catch the gold. It acts as a riffle. The word “riffle,” the technical English term, refers to the metal grill and burlap sack. The sluice box receives the water, earth, and stones, while the riffle lets sand, stones, and gravels wash away leaving the gold behind. It seems impossible, but the technique works well for the quantity of material artisanal miners can shift by hand.¹ Pedro and most artisanal miners rely on gravity, or as he calls it, “the way gold likes deep places,” to trap gold rather than mercury or cyanide used in small-scale and large-scale mining.

When the four of us finish the day’s mining, Pedro takes apart the sluice box by removing the wooden planks on both sides of the canoe that hold the riffle in place. Martina slowly and methodologically washes the sack and gravel three times. Men do the hardest mine labor of digging and hauling, while women throw stones and do the skilled work of panning. Martina pans the mixture of sand and gravel to concentrate the gold and remove the other material. As she finishes, she shows me the small sand-sized flecks of gold, which appear as yellow flakes of flattened sea salt. She pours the mixture of gold, water, and silt into a gourd. It contains less than a tablespoon of gold, worth \$150 and the result of five days’ digging the pit two meters down to the bedrock. They split the money evenly between the people who worked at the mine: in this case just Pedro, Javier, and Martina because I do not accept payment. The next day, after washing all the gravel in this

¹ As I describe in Chapter 7, small-scale miners use the same process, but with the heavy metal mercury to trap the gold.

pit, the three fill the hole in again. They start digging another hole further up the hill.

For Afro-descendant people using techniques similar to Pedro, Martina, Javier, and Antonio, in mines across the Chocó, artisanal mining provides a source of cash income. Through these mining techniques, they wash alluvial gravels for gold with large quantities of water. Placer gold mining means separating the miniscule quantities of gold mixed in with deposits of sand, silt, and gravel left by ancient streams and other waterways. Artisanal miners work as family units, often working land owned by a family, using hand techniques to find the metal. Their mines produce gold slowly, but reliably. They know that if they mine for a week, they will find enough to make it worth their while. They share the profits with the miners, in this case, family members who dug the pit all week. Mining provides cash income that complements subsistence strategies including agriculture, fishing, and hunting. The day starts early. People wake before dawn, bathe in the river, and then head to their mine. They arrive by six in the morning. Some miners try to finish slightly after lunch, to do other activities in the afternoon and evening. Others, those who rely more exclusively on mining, work all day.

When a mine has gold, for example, Pedro's mine, people say it gives. I use the English for the verb *dar* to note the use in the Chocó, "The mine 'gives' gold." In their writing on peasant economic models in the Colombian Andes, Stephen Gudeman and Alberto Rivera (1990) examine peasant metaphors for the economy. Gudeman and Rivera draw on recorded conversations with peasants, analyzing metaphors about the economy. One such metaphor involves how Andean peasants understand the earth's strength, "as created for humans, to be used by them," which Gudeman and Rivera argue comes through notions of "giving" (1990, p. 25). They report that people say, "the land gives" (*la tierra da*), as in "the land gives maize," "food," "a harvest," or "the crops" (1990, p.

25). They argue this means for Andean peasants only the “earth gives the base” and “all wealth comes from the land” (1990, p. 25). They show how rural Andean peasants explain the strength of the earth as “given” by God though human labor can “help.” The human relationship with nature is neither “homogenous nor balanced” because agriculturalists can never count on a return for their labor (1990, p. 25). People describe agriculture as luck (*una suerte*); a gamble (*un juego de azar*); a lottery (*una lotería*); and as part of destiny (*el destino*).

In the Chocó, I understand mines and the earth that give with Gudeman and Rivera’s analysis in mind. People see the earth as a source of wealth, particularly agricultural and mine wealth. The idea of mines that give reveals how wealth comes from the earth, and, like peasant farmers, hard labor does not produce a mine’s wealth; the earth gives it. When a mine does not give gold, no amount of labor or effort will change that, just like if a crop fails, work will not make a crop grow. I discuss below how people get a mine and the relationship with agriculture. Pedro’s mine may give, but some mines take. In the same ways that people only talk about stories of the supernatural ways to find gold with a diviner, lights on the earth during a Holy Week full moon, or excavators while relaxing, people never talk about mine accidents while mining.

Accidents and the Devil

Women used to carry stones on their backs to dive down to reach the bottom of the river. They collected mud in wooden pans to carry back to the riverbank. Ximena, an activist, involved with the Afro-descendant community council upriver, told me about how she mined as a young woman. Proudly, she explained how she used to carry heavy

stones in her arms, dive deep under water, remove gravel from the river bottom by hand, fill a pan, and bring it to shore to wash. Working deep underwater and holding their breath for so long, many people lost their lives to the river. Today, while men now go diving with air tubes and machines, mining underwater is still dangerous.

I follow Julio, a big muscular miner who carries diving equipment: a gray and black wetsuit with an outer shell peeling with age, a belt of weights, a diver's mask made of glass and black plastic, a long thin yellow rubber tube, and a chewed-up breathing piece. I follow him from the village to his small dredging machine. People call them mini-dredges because, in comparison to the dredges the Chocó Pacific Mining Company used to have, these machines are miniscule. My plan for the day is to watch Julio and his partner dredge the river bottom.

Julio built the machine on a metal frame attached to four large floating orange fiberglass pontoons. The machine has a motor at the back and a long sluice box on a 20-degree angle. Another motor attaches to a small gray compressor that feeds air into a large blue tank, which connects via a long thin air tube to the diver. Unlike Pedro's pit digging, mini-dredges only need two people: one under water, the other controlling the motor and watching the air compressor. Julio and his partner split the gold two ways.

The water where they dive in flows cold and clear. In the morning, Julio's partner crouches in the water, gently moving a thick tube that sucks up the riverbed. He throws larger stones onto a pile on the shore as a deep hole begins to emerge at the bottom of the stream. It develops slowly, soon two meters by two meters. From the shore, the task seems easier than Pedro's laboring to dig a pit with shovel and pans. In both cases, the basic technique involves digging down to the bedrock and washing the material for gold. But Julio and his partner employ a suction tube to mine under water. The metal riffle on

the dredge uses drops of mercury to catch the gold.

A diesel-powered pump forces the water in one end of a thick tube, which connects to a steel contraption that forces the water to double back at a 90-degree angle. The pressure of the water creates a powerful suction force, pulling water and gravel into the hole at the end of the metal contraption. This creates a steady flow that sucks material up from the bottom of the river. The water pulls the sand, gravel, and small stones out into the sluice box on the mini-dredge. It works so well that water and stones come out at the top fast and heavy. A plastic cover keeps the material from flying into the air.

By the afternoon, Julio takes over from his partner. He works so deep underwater I can only see his feet. He passes stones up from the depths, holding each aloft for his partner to take. As the day progresses, the hole, which had been ankle deep, reaches meters under the water's surface. Julio breathes through the air tube. Bubbles float from the depths: the only sign of life. Julio's partner watches the motor and the air pump. Both deaf and mute, the man makes hands signals to Julio whenever he comes up from the hole.

I watch them, counting the ripples coming off from the pontoon's vibrations. The rain has been heavy for the last three weeks, leaving the rivers swollen. Julio and his partner dredge a smaller, slower side stream. Normally, with the river water lower, they would be on the river. When Julio comes up from the pit and looks around, I say, "Good-bye. See you tomorrow."

He replies, "God willing."

People regularly use the expression "God willing," literally "If God wishes it" from "*Si dios quiere*," to reply to my farewells. The phrase provides evidence of the linguistic influence of Catholicism. It also gives insight on the unpredictability of mining and the role of God. Working in a makeshift mine pit three meters underwater seems

remarkably dangerous. But, as with talking about finding gold, miners only discuss danger and accidents while resting. At the mine, workers say they have to have positive thoughts, or the gold will leave—or be taken by the Devil.

Weeks later, on Pedro's porch back in the village, I talk with a friend of Pedro's from a nearby village. Two brothers walk by carrying a homemade mini-dredge on their shoulders with pontoons made from battered rusting oil drums. As they pass, Pedro's friend begins to tell me about how he used to own a mini-dredge and go diving in the river. He had a business partner, whom he called his *socio*. But one afternoon he worked on the surface while his partner dove underwater. His partner had insisted on working two shifts back to back to make extra money to send his son to high school in Quibdó. While they worked disaster struck. The pit they dug branched out horizontally to form a tunnel above the bedrock in the mud below the river bottom. They went as deep as they could go before "their ears started to bleed." While his partner worked in the pit at the bottom of the river, a tree that must have fallen into water floated over the hole and snagged its branches on the depression at the bottom of the river. The branches trapped his partner and snapped his fragile rubber air tube. The tube quickly filled with muddy water and, unable to escape; his partner drowned. It happened quickly, and, but for his business partner's wish to dive an extra shift to send his son to school, Pedro's friend would have died.

He says, "You should never take someone else's spot in the mine. It should have been me underwater. Terrible accidents happen when someone gets greedy. I have never gone diving since."

Pedro, listening to his friend, says, "People behave strangely for gold, especially young people. Gold and hard liquor have the same result: they make someone lose their restraints. Sometimes, when three or four mini-dredges mine the same spot, it gets

dangerous. If a mine gives, someone might murder the other miner. You can kill someone easily. You put poison in their air tube or cut it, call it an accident. How would anyone know?”

The other miner sips his beer and agrees. Pedro’s cynicism reflects the risk for miners that death could come swiftly not from trees or accidents, but from human intervention. Similar accidents to the one that killed the diver happen all the time, as do these rationalizations which suggest the fault was with the victim—for being greedy and taking someone else’s place.

At Pedro’s mine, the gravel embankment gave way, gently at first, subtly, barely perceptibly, and then it came down. It gave us no time to let out a cry of warning. Still meters down in the pit, Javier leapt out of the way. He could not get out of the hole. Instead, he scrambled to the pit’s other side as the hillside trapped his foot. While not serious, the landslide immobilized him for ten minutes while Pedro dug him out.

In the shelter of Esteban’s bar, a wooden building made of palm leaves and plastic, I talk with Alejandro, Pedro’s cousin in his early sixties. Alejandro tells me that many years ago he worked deep underground in a tunnel. While digging, he came across a tunnel made by his ancestors who had gone underneath the river. His grandparents dug the mine years before and left behind this old tunnel. He breached the wall of the older tunnel, and the water quickly flooded his own. The water, an element that often accompanies gold, terrified him. He thought he might die, but he managed to crawl backwards and escape to the surface and get out of the way of the onrush.

Later, travelling, I went panning with villagers in front of a police station. A young man had his leg broken while working when a stone fell on him. Most people continued panning, but four family members carried him out of the mine. Another accident made the

national newspapers. A landslide near the municipal capital killed seven miners. The miners worked late at night during a heavy rain.

I met Enrique. I remember him well because he had a small beard and came back from the city to mine. Along with many people, he had gone to the city to get away from “public order” problems, a euphemism for the conflict. He had come back a month before I met him. A handful of excavators had started to mine his family’s land. He wanted to pan there and make sure the excavator owners paid him his share of his family’s percentage. This might represent 16 percent of the mine profits, divided among dozens or even hundreds of siblings, cousins, and children. While he waited, he worked on a mini-dredge in the river. He cleaned stones and worked to keep the sluice box clear. He also made sure the motors worked smoothly, and the diver who owned the machine had enough air. After I had met him, I counted fifteen mini-dredges pulled up on the shore the length of the river. Where he worked, four dredges mined the riverbank underneath a steep cliff on the river’s edge, and two excavators worked above them. That riverbank gave gold. The four mini-dredges worked below the excavators; all hunched and close together. The rain, the weight of the excavators, and the mini-dredges combined to weaken the base of the cliff. With no warning, it shifted and came down in an avalanche, crushing the four dredges, injuring four miners, and killing Enrique.

When I arrived at the village, Mauricio told me the news in the rain. “An accident had occurred a three weeks ago at the same spot. Accidents happen because a ‘protector’ guards the gold,” he stated. At first he said a “*cuidandero* owns the gold,” but then he changed terms. “The Devil owns the gold. The Devil and gold like deep places. The landslide destroyed the excavators. What happened came from nature. The natural world suffers from mining. It reacts in violent ways.”

Mauricio's explanation sounds similar to the comments made by the miner whose diving partner died. Mauricio makes a direct connection between a protector, or *cuidandero*, and the Devil. The link between the Devil and gold reoccurred often, complicating the possibility that the earth and God give gold.

Reasons to Mine

While with the priest who told me about the diviners, I asked him about the much larger dredges that some landowners and Afro-descendant community councils invite onto their villages land.

“If someone comes with machinery they may say, ‘We need it because we cannot leave the gold in the earth. We have to get the gold out.’ The community councils might discuss it, and some people might want the excavators to come, while other people do not want them to enter. It happens a lot. People, who cannot get gold out any other way, ask machines to come onto their land. It divides people. The *paisas* with their excavators divide the leaders. Some leaders manipulate people and behave in their own interests.”

The priest describes how some people see no viable alternatives. “People say, ‘The miners exploit me, but I get a little. If I drown, at least save my hat.’ If someone is going to die anyway, the person can at least save something. They let the dredges mine the land. ‘That way, at least I will get a little bit before I die.’ ‘If they will come with legal businesses anyway, and the legal businesses will finish with everything, at least I can get a share first.’”

“They [the municipal government] give those illegal business licenses. They have offices in Quibdó that give people permission. A peasant will say, ‘A peasant does not get

anything from these businesses.’ So if people with licenses are going to come and exploit a mine, at least I get something now. So, what happens? Peasants rent out their land to allow people to exploit it: mining or logging.”

“Some community councils have begun to take advantage of the territory. Others have begun to defend their territory. Some people say no to the excavators and fight for a more rational exploitation of their land: gold and lumber. But they face a hard fight. People arrive from other areas with chainsaws to exploit the lumber. They come with twenty or thirty mules. They take out all the trees in a territory. If people want to see a license, they show them a license bought in Quibdó, where [a state agency] sells it... for a price. Ten years ago, the Atrato only had lumber and fishing with a mine here and there. But the excavators came four years ago and scandalously destroyed the river.”

“The excavators pay people a million pesos to take out the gold. People here have no money and no savings. So they feel they have to get the gold out. If a miner wants to pay a million, two million, the peasants accept it. People feel they have to get the gold out. People cannot see the zeroes. If you speak about one million, two million, and 10 million, it confuses people.”

“Imagine if the dredges came back, then people would fall for it all again. They would say, ‘You have to get the gold out.’ ‘Today, we will get the gold out.’ But, by doing that, people finish off their savings. People ask if they get everything out now, then we do not have to ask what they left us. They took everything out.”

“‘I go to the mine for an hour, I might come back rich. I will work hard, and I could become rich. It could happen any moment.’ Miners have hope. They always have hope.”

“People take advantage of everything at the moment. They do not know what will

happen tomorrow. They might say, ‘I’m going to drink all the beer in the store. Down to the last drop of *aguardiente* [anise-flavored sugar cane alcohol]. I want to spend my last penny. I might leave a little in the corner for breakfast. But I will spend all of it at once. Tomorrow, I will see how things turn out.’”²

The priest’s analysis of why peasants allow small-scale miners with excavators onto their land shows the importance of mining for Afro-descendant villages, its inherent danger, and the reasons people try to find alternatives to mining themselves by inviting *paisas* to mine. Miners make decisions to balance the opportunities of getting gold they know the ground will give and the risk of mines taking lives. Mining provides a dangerous complement to subsistence strategies. The priest’s comment about mines that “take” shows an understanding of mining and the Devil. The explanations for the tragedy given by Pedro’s friend from upriver and Mauricio’s story about the cave-in both connect gold and the Devil. Bad things happen when a worker unbalances this relationship by taking someone else’s place, taking someone else’s place, disrupting nature, or working where mishaps occurred before. The explanations for the tragedy show the immediacy of economic choices and how miners live in the here and now. Pedro’s own excavation has been in his family for decades, which implies gold, like alcohol, does not always make a person lose their restraints and inhibitions. This also explains why Pedro’s neighbor Esteban allowed excavators in. For months, his family had dug a tunnel below the hilltop where Mauricio and I made phone calls. As they dug their mine deeper, their desire to bring in excavators to make the work safer increased. Despite the fact that the machinery

² For the last sentences, the Priest uses the Spanish phrase “Paint the thing,” as in “*Pinta la cosa.*” This refers to how gold appears in the bottom of a pan after washing for the metal.

would level the entire hillside, and finish the family mine that had supported his family for forty years using a variety of mining techniques, the tunnel they had dug was getting too deep. Yet, the tunnel was still giving gold. The more they dug, the more gold they got. Each day the tunnel was more dangerous. That tunnel helps explain why Esteban allowed excavators to mine.

“Do you want to go in?” Esteban asks with a grin.

I peer into the darkness of the mineshaft. “To help?”

“Noooo,” he replies with the “o” drawn out long, rising then fading. “To see what’s inside.”

Goaded on by his teasing, I continue into the darkness of the makeshift tunnel. The walls consist of a mixture of sand, clay, dirt, gravel, small pebbles, and stones. The heavy blue-gray earth cakes to Esteban’s boots. The dust in the air leaves our skin a powdered gray.

Esteban and his family have dug the shaft in a winding underground path following a vein of gold for 20 meters. The tunnel has no support bars or wooden posts; stones and pebbles fill the walls, and the bedrock makes for an almost-level floor. The water flows slowly down towards the entrance, where Marco bails it out. It is a thankless task. Water keeps filling the hole. Going deeper, the reassuring daylight from the tunnel entrance disappears. Esteban passes me, going in with a wheelbarrow.

I follow him along a gentle curve to the left. A candle casts a small circle of warmth, the flickering glow against the gloom. Esteban and his family have been laboring here for weeks. Their shifting, sweating bodies working in the heat slowly extend the tunnel’s reach into the hillside. The tunnel enters the hill 30 meters below the hilltop.

The dark shapes take on a clearer form: Ernesto, Esteban’s 17-year-old nephew,

loads an old wheelbarrow with a heavy mixture of sand, gravel, and mud. He pushes the burden down to a small temporary pond and skillfully spins and rocks a pan to check if the blue earth carries gold. The gutter where he works has steep banks on both sides. His great grandparents chiseled the lower walls into the bedrock, so the surface slopes gently down to a larger stream where the runoff flows. With Ernesto gone, Esteban now starts to fill the wheelbarrow. Once he has finished scooping blue-gray earth, his son Marco stops bailing the water and takes the wheelbarrow from him to push it out the tunnel and down to the gutter where his grandmother Sofía works. She stands barefoot for comfort. Earlier she yelled at me, “Take your shoes off! You will get a better grip and not get hot.” Having tried to mine in sandals and barefoot, I keep my rubber boots on and go deeper into the mine past the warm glow of the last candle and further into the darkness. The temperature rises. As my eyes adjust to the darkness, I see Esteban’s brother, The Chief. He crouches with a metal bar, picking at the wall.

The heat stifles. We sweat in the flickering candlelight, the air claustrophobic and heavy. The Chief works hard, drenched, at the face of the mine. The shadows make his task hard to follow. The candlelight only lets me see red shapes. The Chief picks at the rock using a long metal rod. He raises the bar and smashes it down on the tunnel wall to loosen the stones. He uses a metal claw to scrape the loosened material into a pan. Here the miners have widened the tunnel, opening a larger circular area.

Each worker takes turns doing a task. People do them for short shifts, changing every fifteen minutes. Soon The Chief will take someone else’s place, bailing the water, filling a wheelbarrow, pushing it out, and washing for gold in the gutter. Esteban’s uncle, Rodrigo, works with a pick, a scraper, and his bare hands to fill the pan from the mix of material on the ground. He digs above the bedrock. This makes it easier to break up the

base of the tunnel and get the gold carrying material out. Ernesto fills the wheelbarrow with the stones Rodrigo piles. He also loads it with a loose material that collects at the bottom of the tunnel. Then Esteban pushes it all out to the ravine. His son Marco bails water down where Sofia cleans the stones.

I ask Sofia how long she had been working here. She replies, “I have worked the mine for forty years. I raised my kids here, and now I collaborate with my grandchildren.”

They have been extending this tunnel for three months. They know the gold mine gives gold, but they can extend the tunnel only so far. Esteban and his brothers have begun to negotiate with two *paisa* cousins José and Geraldo to come onto their land with two excavators to remove the hill and get down to the level of the tunnel.

Subsistence Production and the Fixed

While I return to the reasons that Esteban invited the excavator owners onto his family’s land, I pause here to put Sofia’s statement that she raised her children and grandchildren mining into the context of the subsistence production that gold mining compliments. Putting gold mining alongside diverse rural production practices shows how people make a living, and that gold is something important to their livelihood. Mining is not an alien activity, but part of subsistence practices that include planting crops, gardening, gathering fruits, rearing domestic animals, fishing, and hunting. To describe these activities, I consider how people spend their time and energy.

Afro-descendant artisanal miners like Esteban, Pedro, and their neighbors combine gold mining with these subsistence forms. Together, these create an economic livelihood that allows rural Afro-descendants to get their daily bread, or their *pan coger*. They refer to

this assemblage of practice that include planting crops, gardening, gathering fruits, rearing domestic animals, fishing, hunting, and mining as their fixed (*fijo*). Gold mining then is not simply about gold, but it contributes to this diversity of activities in the Chocó's rivers and forests. Gold provides a cash, and mines a kind of savings, or *ahorros*, yet, like other, earlier export oriented resource booms in the Pacific—in logging, *tagua*, coca, etc.—gold offers a source of cash income complementary to rural subsistence practices. Only in limited cases can some producers sell their crops in town because of high transportation costs and low prices for agricultural products, so they attain cash through mining, coca, logging, or migration. While gold mining in this sense is a part of their fixed, sometimes it might not be as people spend increasing time on market-oriented activities that earn cash and destabilize the economy of rural production. For now, I turn to the activities of the fixed.

Land Tenure and Lots

Physical settlement patterns of rural Afro-descendant people show the significance of gardening and mining. I pause on the Chocó's property regimes to outline how people see family land. While nobody has legally recognized individual land title, the collective land claims process with the national state did, after many years, give the Afro-descendant community council a legal title to a large area. This created a collective, inalienable, and non-transferable legal ownership. While this provides a difficult to enforce legal protection from outsiders interested in logging or mining within the territory of the collective title, rural Afro-descendants within the collective territory recognize families as having their own individual lots (*lotes*).

A lot refers to an area of bush, garden, or mine near the river, perhaps a hectare or

more in size, with an owner or owners. While there are no physical markers, maps, or legal recognition of private ownership, people do recognize a system of lots. Each lot belongs to the descendants of the people who first opened the land. That is the descendants of the families who started a mine, planted fruit trees, or cleared a garden. Ownership is collective, at the level of the family, not the community. The act of opening the bush, or *abriendo monte*, gave their descendants claims to that lot. Within the collective territory, land not considered to be a part of a lot, people do see as shared community land. For lots though, while dozens or more people may collectively share the claim to a lot, at least when it comes to mining they see it as a family concern. Lots are not part of a broader collective title. Lots include mines, gardens, and fruit trees. A community council President I met hoped to find funding for GPS training to map the collective territory and formalize this land tenure system of lots. Still, in practice, even without maps, people did know which land belonged to which family.

Mauricio's family had a lot, an old mine, that nobody had worked for decades, which edged Don Alfonso's mine. Don Alfonso told me he never went there, because from a ridge to a stream belonged to Mauricio's family. In another conversation, Don Alfonso pointed out that Esteban's tunnel was on a mine that was partly his. He said he was of an older generation than Esteban and a cousin of Esteban's mother. Through his grandmother, he could claim a share to their mine. The claim seemed slightly contentious with Esteban, and Don Alfonso did little to pursue his claim. In the few weeks I worked with Esteban, Don Alfonso came twice to pan for gold from the tunnel. Both times, he found nothing.

Many people used to prefer living in wooden homes built on stilts near their gardens and mines and on their own family lots at the river's edge. This scattered

family-oriented settlement pattern still exists as isolated homes built on lots. On the river where I worked, it was less common. One house I visited on the other river stood slightly back from the beach. The owner had built it on top of a platform on four posts, with wooden walls, two small windows, and a corrugated metal roof. While the metal provides better waterproofing, it makes houses uncomfortably hot and noisy when it flexes in the heat. A young man, his wife, and two young children lived in the house. In front, on a gravel beach, he had two wooden dugout canoes that he used to navigate with a long pole. He had a large wooden boat with a small nine-horse power motor for trips to town. Behind the house on his lot, he had planted a garden, including a small plot of sugar cane, corn, a banana stand, and yuca trees. In the forests, he had fruit trees. As we chatted, he assured me below his sugar cane crop the earth would give gold. He explained his grandfather used to mine it, but now he was saving it. He knew the gold was there. He said he spent some of his time cutting lumber because on this river the logging was better than the mining.

On the river where I did fieldwork, this isolated settlement pattern was no longer the norm as it had been until the floods in the early 1990s. After the floods, people moved into the villages. While the flood destroyed their homes and belongings, the Colombian state and a Spanish NGO provided materials to build their houses. While the government and NGO provided the techniques, materials, and training, local people provided the labor. Pedro, Esteban, Mauricio, and others spent time in the 1990s in a nearby town building concrete houses as construction workers. Sometimes, there was a mismatch between houses built, material provided, and the number of people who needed homes. In one town, dozens of concrete houses were built with walls but no roofs. The houses stand unoccupied as the forest reclaims the streets and trees grow out of the floors.

Those from the village and many others on the river, who did not leave for the city,

having learned the building techniques and using the donated supplies, rebuilt their homes in a centralized village situated away from their gardens and mines. Some of the villages were later abandoned as people fled violence. In the village where I worked, the owners of ten houses live in a town. Nonetheless, although most of the wooden houses by the river gone, one man does prefer to stay on his lot by the river. An older man, in his late 60s, he has a small house on stilts in his garden ten minutes up river by dugout canoe. He visits his daughter in the village regularly but prefers his gardens. From the village, people regularly return to their family lots to plant crops, pick fruit, and mine.

These lots are not contiguous but scattered. The river's geography, the soil conditions, the places that people work, and kinship relations over time shape the lot patterns. A family might have a mine lot on one curve of the river, and then a kilometer up river another lot with sugar cane. Walking with Mauricio to collect avocado from a tree on a lot on an island, we did not pick avocados from a tree heavy with avocados owned by another family despite the fact they no longer lived in the area.

The reason he said, "It is not my family's lot."

When I asked whose lot it was, he said they had displaced down river. They sometimes came back to tend and harvest their gardens. People mine their lots, but they also grow crops and pick fruit.

Yuca, Corn, Plantain, and Rice

The river houses, garden lots, and Mauricio's unwillingness to eat someone else's food shows gardening's importance. Pedro, Esteban, and Don Alfonso were all successful gardeners in addition to miners. I outline what they grow and how they grow it to show

that gardening provides a base for daily sustenance. People plant many crops in their lots, including sugarcane, yuca, corn, plantain, and banana.

Sugarcane provides the basis for making *panela*, a solid sugar molasses made from the boiled liquid from crushed sugar cane, and *biche*, a fermented sugar cane alcohol. Women use *panela* for cooking, adding it to meals, a breakfast snack, and to make *agua panela*. The later consists of boiled water, *panela*, and lemon, which women cool with ice made in large plastic bags and frozen in freezers when there is power. People drink it for energy during the day. The first weeks in the field, I only brought water to the mine. The heat and exertion left me exhausted. When I began to drink it, the iced *panela* water gave me stamina and energy in the heat. Only once did I come across alcohol made from local grown sugarcane. Pedro rediscovered a year old plastic bottle of *panela* water while hunting. Over the intervening year, the sugars in the bottle fermented creating a sour alcoholic drink. He, others, and I tasted it in the evening and laughed at our luck finding the *guarapo*.

Sugarcane stands were on flat lands near the river's edge. Until recently then, men planted sugarcane along the river's edge. They agreed though this was less common now as people use cash from mining to buy *panela* and distilled cane alcohol called *aguardiente* in town. Periodic humanitarian flood relief from the Colombian government also provided supplies of *panela*, even if it invariably came months after the flood. Five years of mining meant people could afford to buy *panela*; still some people did still grown cane. A few kilometers from the river, Esteban's brother had a large crop of sugar cane, a hut to sleep in, and a wooden cane press. The press could crush the cane and extract the juice. Once, coming up river with him, we stopped so that he could get out and do some quick work on his plants. He stopped for twenty minutes, clearing bush with a machete around his

sugarcane, before we continued. While growing sugarcane had fallen from favor, replaced with bought *panela* and *aguardiente*, people relied on their lots for the basic starch crops of yuca, corn, and plantain.

Yuca is a small woody shrub that grows a large edible starchy root. The plant grows in poor soils. Yuca needs little preparation or maintenance other than using a machete to clear vegetation. People grow yuca in their lots, planted near the river, or on marginal soils. When ready, men and women return two years after planting to harvest the starchy tubers. In the village itself, Don Alfonso had a half dozen yuca plants near his house; a hedge against a future when he cannot go to his more distant lots due to age and frailty. The large, brown skinned, white-fleshed root provides carbohydrates. People eat yuca boiled with salt, accompanied by plantain and cheese for breakfast, in stews with meat and corn made in a pressure cooker, or grated and made into bread for special occasions cooked in clay wood fired ovens.

Corn provides another food source. People planted corn on their own family lots, sometimes on islands in the river, where the soils were better. While the wild corn variety people use does not grow as well in the lower reaches of the river, in its slightly drier upper reaches corn covers some hillsides. People complained the heads of corn were a small, with few kernels, and worse than before. People use long steel machetes to clear the vegetation so they can plant corn. In the cleared area, they sprinkle kernels of corn. With this slash and mulch agriculture, the rain, and the heat, the corn kernels germinate. Six months later, they provide a crop. Still, because when planting the crops people did not fully clear the land, to me initially the corn seemed part of the bush. With surprise, I often realized that what I took to be a forest landscape included corn, yuca, sugar cane, and plantain plants.

Plantains and bananas provide another food source. People grow plantain, a starchy large non-sweet banana, a small variety of plantain called *primitivo*, as well as sweet bananas reminiscent of those available in North American supermarkets, and smaller, red, sweeter finger length bananas. Pedro has a stand of plantain near his mine. People grow plantain on their lots. In the evenings or afternoon they picked a large bunch of plantain to last a few days, which they stored on their back steps. Everyone eats bananas and plantain daily: boiled, stewed, and fried for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, or as snacks.

People drink *panela* water and eat yuca, corn, and plantain. They complement this with rice and cheese. Despite the ready availability of plantain, yuca, and corn, people prefer rice to these starches. Pedro's son remarked, as he showed me how to cook rice in the Chocó's style, i.e. browned in hot oil, salted, and then boiled uncovered, that he would like to eat rice three times a day. Pedro said people used to plant rice, but like sugarcane they now buy it town with money from mining. Mauricio's sister also buys cheese wrapped in a black plastic bag from Quibdó. The cheese is feta flavored, brine-less, heavily salted and lasts for days without refrigeration. It is common in the Colombian Caribbean and Pacific. People sometimes add sardines or tuna provided by humanitarian flood relieve or bought in bulk from town.

Fruit Trees and Herbs

If people had their own lots where they planted crops, which they tended or harvested in the afternoon when not mining, families also relied on growing fruit which came into season throughout the year. One afternoon not long before dusk, Pedro and I crossed the river to the other side. As I followed him up the hillside, I realized he had a

quarter hectare sized pineapple field growing. He had cleared it two years before with his wife's brother Javier and planted pineapple. He returned every few months to use a machete to clear plants. That afternoon, we picked ripe pineapples. He gave me more than I could eat to take home, and the rest we carried for his kids. He had stopped returning to his pineapple stand and left them to rot after some guerrillas camped there for a few days trampling the plants and eating the fruit. Soldiers did the same a few days later,

Pedro had a stand of fruit trees further up river. The first time my partner visited, after a morning work at the mine, he took me, her, and his nephews to that lot to suck on *zapote*, papaya (*carica papaya*), guava, and other fruit. Don Alfonso has a large stand of *borojó* (*alibertia patinói*) trees on a family lot. He sells the fruit in town: the *borojó*, although the color and consistency of shit, it has juice that is thick, pulpy, and delicious. In Don Alfonso's *borojó* garden, he also has a tree that bears a small, yellow fruit, with a large stone, almost no flesh, and a sweet, sour flavor. Mauricio and I visited—on his request—to pick that fruit one afternoon; it was more fruit than we could carry, even after we filled plastic bags. We ate the fruit by biting down, spitting out the skin, sucking the flesh, and spitting out the stone. One end of the village had an apple cashew tree, which twice a year, gave hundreds of delicately flavored pear-like cashew apples. Lime trees were common in backyard plots.

One plant, that no longer grows, is *chontaduro*, or peach palm. The fruit's flesh is chalky and dry, somewhat like a potato, but with flavor and texture people appreciate with sugar or salt. Different people remarked to me that the palm trees used to give lots of *chontaduro*, but now they give none. Mauricio pointed to the *chontaduro* palm trees standing near the village that had long since stopped giving fruit. The *chontaduro* fruit available in Quibdó or a nearby town was imported from the Andean interior. Gabriel

attributed the disappearance of the *chontaduro* to small-scale mining and a change in the water that hurt agriculture.

While people tended their lots, grew crops, and picked fruits, they also had kitchen gardens near their houses. Sometimes, this was an herb garden, grown in the air on raised platforms behind a house, which women used for cooking and medicine. The village also had bushes of lemongrass, other herbs, and *borojó*, lemon, and yuca trees. Behind Don Alfonso's house, in the garden with walls made from corrugated roofing metal, Don Alfonso had a large garden with many plant varieties. People also gather herbs from the forest.

The oldest resident in the village was Gabriel. When I met him, he was slightly deaf but proclaimed his happiness that at 96 he was almost a 100. He suffered an illness as a child, and could not walk. This also meant he had never worked only in mining. Instead, he dedicated himself to agriculture. He grew crops, gardened, and was an agriculturalist and a healer. Until the floods, he had lived with his wife up river on his lot near the fruit trees Pedro showed us. But, as a child, his father had taken him to an African slave to learn about plants. In the 1920s, the old slave explained to Gabriel about plants. They went to the river's headwaters. He learned healing, herbs, and how to make *balsanicas*—a liquid herbal mixture common in the Chocó that helps cure illnesses, impotency, infertility, snake bites, and other health issues. He explained he knew how to cure snakebites with a *balsanica* [sic]. He sometimes sent his son, or other people, into the forests to gather herbs to make these mixtures of herbs and alcohol.

Domestic Animals and Hunting

Other than crops, fruit, and herbs, people also get food from domestic animals, hunting, and fishing. Families kept pigs in stalls not far from their houses or tied to posts. One older man explained he leaves a pig on an island, which his family owns to forage for itself. This worked until a flood washed away the island. Esteban kept his pigs near his house, feeding them plantain and household scraps. When it came time to kill the pig for Christmas, he came around and took orders and money from people for a half pound of pork.

Another meat source was hunting. This took skill, a dog, and time. Only Pedro and Javier regularly went hunting. He sometimes took his nephews and me. Hunting provided a source of food and relaxation. Pedro loved to go hunting after a day's mining, or when had not been enough rain for mine work. No rain meant there were fewer insects. Hunting armadillos, rabbits, and Colombian tapir (*guagua*), a large rodent that lives in parts of South America, provided an afternoon relaxation. It was both a way to pass the time and a needed source of meat. Pedro had a hunting dog, which, he proudly told me, had killed 88 *guaguas* over six years. The dog, named Guapi, was a white, medium-sized, hunting dog. He had short hair, and his claws had their fur worn away from scrabbling at the hard earth. Pedro had a second hunting dog too called Troqui. He was training him, but to quote Pedro he was a "*baboso*," or a drooler. By this, he meant Troqui was not a good hunter.

When I accompanied Pedro, he went into the bush, and I stayed with his nephew watching the long canoe. Sometimes we went into the bush and slashed through the undergrowth with a machete. Pedro and the dog worked together in the forest to herd the *guagua* into its bolt hole in ground, where Guapi could then catch him. Pedro's dog's call, which was a coo sound, low, irregular, and combined with Pedro's intimate knowledge of

the forest, meant he could find the *guagua*. The *guagua* for its part, Pedro explained, tries to escape into forests or to throw itself into the river. In one memorable day in March 2012, Pedro and Guapi caught two *guaguas*.

In the morning, we went in a small canoe up a small side river into the shady forests. Pedro yelled for me to bring the canoe up the glassy river. I waited in the canoe while Pedro and his dog caught a *guagua*. In the afternoon, after we returned to the village with the *guagua*, a *paisa* miner arrived from a camp downriver. They had seen a *guagua* near their camp, and he asked if Pedro could come with Gaupi to hunt it. Pedro, Javier, and I set out down river in a canoe to track the *guagua*. For the next three hours, we waded and tracked the animal. We ran rapidly, while some people swam neck deep in the river to prevent the animal escaping down river. The animal escaped anyway and swam with its back curving out the water. We pursued in a boat, and Javier speared it. On shore, Pedro burned the animal's hair off, divided the flesh, and gave Guapi the head. Pedro trained Guapi with the *guagua* heads. Guapi died six months later killed by rat poison.

Gold and Subsistence

Talking with Pedro about the crops, fruit trees, hunting, and mining, he said “We are in the glory, man. Life is hard, but in Quibdó, nothing comes easily. It is hard to get food there. Here, at least you can always go find plantain, fruit. You can go hunting and get your *guagua*.”

Here I focus on the settlement, family lots, crops of sugar cane, yuca, corn, and plantain, fruit, domestic animals, and hunting to put Sofia's comment that she “raised [her] kids” mining into its context.

Her gold mining, like everyone else's, complements these other activities. Mining in combination with these other activities allows rural Afro-descendant people to make a livelihood; gold provides savings and access to cash that accompanies, coexists, and adds to these complementary tasks. Mining allows people to make money, but their lots allow them to make a living. Taken together, people see this gardening, fishing, hunting, other activities and mining as their stable activity, the thing they ought to do. People find food by gardening, foraging, and hunting. Their mines accompany, coexist, and add to these activities. Gold is the only source of cash because prices are so low that agriculture cannot provide them enough. Gold then is a part of and a complement to these other forms of production. Gold provides a source of cash that allows rural people to buy necessities of oil, salt, cheese, salt crackers, sardines, tuna, gasoline, clothes, and shoes, to save money, and to pay for extras like television, phones, and stereo systems. By discussing what people do alongside mining, I show how people go to their family lots to grow food and to mine gold.

After rising early, and mining in the mornings, people go to their lots to work, to plant, or to harvest. Later they go hunting or fishing. This provides the basic livelihood. Some people focus all their energy on mining, and it becomes an activity they do in the morning, and afternoon, after nights of heavy rains and during dry periods using water pumps. While the area has one of the highest rainfalls in the world, there are sometimes dry periods of a week or months on end when people do not mine and they engage in other activities.

For most people, these activities do not replace mining, just as mining does not replace these activities. Rather each supplements the other. It provides what the other does not: money and food. They cannot eat gold, and they cannot sell plantain, yuca, sugar cane,

or corn. Don Alfonso did sell *borojó* one year, but the work barely seemed worth it, so he stopped. Gold complements and forms part of these subsistence strategies, and together people call this their fixed, or *fijo*: what provides them a reliable livelihood, what people should be doing. Mining complements these other activities, which in the Chocó, do seem to offer bountiful sources of food. A leader deeply involved in organizing, described area of the Lower Atrato, hard hit by war, as one so agriculturally productive that it gave corn, sugar cane, bread fruit, *borojó*, plantain, banana, and much more than anyone could possible eat or sell. The landscape produced a cornucopia of edible plants, animals, and fish, but the violence had displaced people to the city where they had nothing.

Violent displacement and shifting markets have made this rural subsistence economy harder, as it has made it impossible for people to sell what they grow. Thirty years before, rural communities supplied towns with food on market days, but now outsiders bring cheaper often imported food from the interior. While before rural communities brought bananas and plantain into town to sell, now nobody bothers because prices are too low to pay for the gasoline. This kind of rural economic production mixed with agriculture is not so unique to the Colombian Pacific. One migrant *paisa* miner, who came to the Pacific because he found it difficult to make a livelihood in their home region, also mixed gold with agriculture. He built a hut up river alone, had his own animals that he sold to José and Geraldo, as well as corn, yuca, and plantain. He gardened as well as mined. Still, Gold is part of this subsistence livelihood of rural production, in that it provides a cash income. Gold complements other activities, but is part of a broader fixed economy. Sometimes changes throw this off balance, and later I turn to what happens outside of the *fixed*, but for now I turn back to gold, what people spend money on, and gold's relationship to the devil.

Gold, Savings, and Consumption

A priest gives mass in the village. He begins, “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord. My spirit rejoices in God my Savior. The Word of God. Sit down.”

The priest, looking at the assembled village, says, “A question. Raise your hand. Have you, at some time in your lives, worked the mine?”

As he surveys the room during the long awkward silence, people look at him. Nobody raises a hand. Nobody says anything.

“Now, what is the most precious item a mine can give? Who gives it?”

“God,” someone says.

“God? Who else?”

Alejandro, in the second row on the right, sits awkwardly. The big man squeezes into a tiny primary school chair, “They say around here the state owns the metal.”

“Okay,” the priest continues, “Another small question: When one goes to the mine, what phrase should you never say?”

From the back, Don Alfonso says, “*Maunifica*.” As the only evangelical in the village, I had not expected the spry 73-year-old to come to this Catholic Mass held for Christmas. He came in and sat down at the back as the priest started.

“*Maunifica*,” repeats the Priest, “Why can you not say that word?”

Alejandro begins to reply, but he trails off, “They say because....”

Don Alfonso says, “The gold will go.”

“Why? Why will the gold go? Why, if God gives gold, will it go when someone evokes the name of God by saying *maunifica*?”

Don Alfonso cackles at the back of the room. He enjoys interrupting the priest.

“Okay,” the priest continues, trying to ignore Don Alfonso. “Twelve years ago

when we gathered material for the title of the community council, many people said gold belonged to the Devil. Because of this....” he trails off. “You do believe this, don’t you?”

Don Alfonso says, “No.”

“Okay then, why can you never say *maunifica* in the bush? If gold belongs to the Devil?”

Don Alfonso says, “The people, the old people.”

Mauricio says, “False beliefs.”

The priest asks, “Don’t people have this belief that gold belongs to the Devil?”

Mauricio responds, “Yes. Clearly.”

“You do not want to say it. But people do believe this? Anyone who does not agree put up your hand.”

Nobody puts up a hand.

Alejandro says, “It worked.”

The priest continues, “You cannot say *maunifica* because if you do the gold will disappear. They say the Devil will take the gold. Therefore, automatically, the gold belongs to the Devil.”

Not letting the priest continue, Don Alfonso says, “Reverend. Why does this word scare the Devil and make him go away when someone says *maunifica*?”

He seems interested, which I credit to the fact that as one of the older people in the village, he uses the term “*maunifica*” regularly under his breath as an expletive to remark on something extraordinary or add emphasis to a comment. I do not remember hearing him use it while mining.

The priest says, “I will answer your question. But first I want to ask another question.”

Don Alfonso laughs again at the back. He enjoys Mass.

“First, I want to ask another question. Why, if the Devil owns gold, do you mine it? How do you take away gold from the Devil? The second question, if you believe the Devil owns gold, why does he....”

Don Alfonso says, “No. I say no.”

The priest replies, “Let me answer your question. What did you ask?”

Don Alfonso, “Why when someone says *maunifica* does it scare the Devil so that he takes away the gold?”

The priest continues, “I’ll answer that now. The word comes from the Bible. And if I say it to you in Latin, I do so because you know the word in Latin. I would not do so otherwise.”

Don Alfonso says, “Would you do me a favor? The word comes from the Bible—can you give me a quote so I can look for it?”

The priest says, “Yes. Luke 1:46-5.” He explains, “The problem is the word does not appear in Latin. It appears in Spanish. But here you know it in Latin. In Latin, they say, ‘*Magnificat anima mea domino,*’ or ‘My soul magnifies the Lord.’ Here, in the Chocó’s with colloquial Latin people say ‘*Maunifica Anamame.*’ The Virgin Mary said this phrase. It has great truth and importance and tells us a central message of the Bible: Confidence in God.”

The priest says, “Now, I do not believe the Devil owns gold....” Don Alfonso interrupts again, asking for the reference. The priest says, “Mary said this after a significant event, when the Angel Gabriel told Mary she would become the mother of God. She became a missionary. This brings us to the first part of today’s lesson: the importance of solidarity.”

The link between mining and the Devil resonates with how people see mining. Artisanal mining has long served as a way to save, or *ahorrar*. When someone needs cash—to buy salt, oil, sugar, or other items in the market that the land does not provide directly—they have gone to the mine to extract gold. Mining offers one strategy for residents in combination with other strategies for survival, which include agriculture, hunting, migration, and fishing.

One evening as I was drinking beer with an activist involved in the community council, he said that people believed this idea about the Devil, and they did not invest mine profits, seeing gold as sterile. He argued the mistaken nature of the belief. People could invest money. I thought about Pedro, who had spent the money from his mines on building two houses. He built the first house in Quibdó when he displaced from the FARC ten years ago. He built a second house as a form of retirement income. He did not see gold as sterile. Other stories reflect gold's complex nature.

Others did echo this comment though. Miners often do not save what they mined, instead they used the gold to buy electrical generators, flat-screen televisions, refrigerators, outboard motors, large speakers, touchscreen phones, netbooks, new clothes, and shoes. Sometimes they use the money to gamble and drink. They rarely use money from gold mining productively. The phrase “badly made money,” or “*la plata mala habida*” reflects how people see the money they have made from some kinds of mining outside their fixed. Mining that they did not to complement other activities. They do not invest this money productively, because it is sterile, fruitless, something that will not “give.”

In one conversation, Alejandro tells me, “Money comes easily and goes easily.”

People spend money quickly. If they did not, it would disappear. People consider

this Devil's money because they cannot invest the cash productively. The forms that mining profits take means something. If people try to store cash as paper money, it will evaporate. Stored in its metal form, gold will grow. Alejandro tells people to melt gold dust from the mine and store the metal in solid form to prevent it from evaporating and disappearing. He explains, "If you want to store cash, you have to store it in a hot place, for example in the oven. If you do not, then when you go to open the box in which you stored the cash, the bills will have wilted and disappeared. If you wait long enough, all the bills will have evaporated. People store gold as a metal, because it will not disappear." Gold grows. It keeps longer. He stresses that people should melt gold for their savings, or *ahorros*, rather than leaving the metal as gold dust or putting it in a bank account. When I bought gold from Don Alfonso—which he and I had mined—and made earrings for my partner, Martina, Pedro's wife, congratulated her by telling her that she now had her "*oros*," or her "golds." Etymologically, the phrase seems close to the term Alejandro used for savings, "*ahorros*."

Under a cashew apple tree, Pedro tells me the story of a man in the town near the village. He took 10 kilograms of gold as his percentage from the excavators. He went crazy in town, paying, Pedro says, the high-class girls for a kiss.

"The primary school teacher, 50 thousand pesos [\$25] a kiss."

I splutter on my Pony Malta. "Just for a kiss?"

Pedro says, "Do you know how many kisses you can have in a day? He spent his days at the bar, drinking pure whiskey. He also gave gold to his son, a police officer. His son lent money to his superiors, who lent money to their superiors in the police force. However, his superiors and their superiors never paid the money back. They denied that they had ever received the money. The son, not knowing any better, never asked for the

proper papers. So when he tried to get the money back, his superiors denied it. In the end, the son died. The old man lost his two hands throwing dynamite into the rivers to catch fish. The man now has no hands. He sits in the town, penniless, begging for cigarettes. People around here have to show that they have money, even if they do not. So they go and spend money on expensive new televisions, fridges, boats, and motors, even when they do not have the money.”

Referring to Esteban’s new freezer and boat motor that he had bought with money from the tunnel, Pedro said, “If I wait long enough, they will be mine anyway, bought at a deep discount.”

His son-in-law Carlos describes what happens when the mine gives. “If you have one woman, then you get twenty. If you come back from panning for gold and it went well then you sell the gold. Even if you had gone in the hopes of buying a spare part for a motorcycle, you call your friends. You have a party and drink the gold away. Not by buying beer or *aguardiente*, but by buying only pure whiskey.”

Pausing to reflect, he says, “We do not even know how to drink whiskey here. We drink it like water, unlike the Scots! Showing everyone our success even if we do not have any.”

One song that plays most Sunday mornings in the village reflects this sentiment:

And I drank the lease and the grocery money
I became an eight [8] there where the light bulb's red³
And I forget that I am poor and a wage earner

So that nobody sees the poverty at this table
They tell me that I told the bartender
And he very attentively served us only whiskey
And women rained on us as if from the sky.

Jimmy Gutiérrez, 2010, *I Drank the Rent and Grocery Money*⁴

Chapter Summary

I end on Jimmy Gutierrez's song (2010), which played regularly in the village, because it indexes the relationship between miners, mine wealth, and the story of the priest about the Gold and the Devil. Gold embodies the basic necessities of savings as a complement to household subsistence production and agriculture. It is also badly earned money to be spent on public expenditure of wealth in drinking or to buy high-value consumer goods. Some gold miners access their savings by finding gold and spending it,

³ The expression "I became an eight [8] there where the light bulb's red" makes a reference to references the encircled shape stacked dual circles of the written number 8's shape and how a person might become tangled up, or *enredado*. The verb form *enredar* means to get tangled up, mixed up, or messed up, in a complicated situation, and to be a troublemaker or naughty and mischievous. The line "became an eight" implies someone getting messed up drinking the grocery money. The red color of the light bulb references a bar with sex workers and implies trouble.

⁴ *Y me bebí lo del arriendo y el mercado*
Me volví un ocho allá donde el bombillo rojo
Y hasta olvide que soy pobre y asalariado

Que no se note la pobreza en esta mesa
Me cuentan ellos le decía yo al cantinero
El muy atento solo whisky nos servía
Y que las viejas nos llovían como del cielo

Jimmy Gutiérrez, 2010, *Me Bebí lo del Mercado*

others engage in mining that complements other activities. In either case, gold is not simply about gold but is connected and part of these other economies and forms of production and consumption.

Michael Taussig (1980, 2004) interprets stories of the Devil in the Colombian Pacific as the response of black sugar cane cutters and gold miners to an emerging capitalist export economy dominated by exchange value and wage labor. Taussig draws on Karl Marx's work on commodity fetishism (1992 [1886]) where Marx distinguishes between use-value and exchange-value. Taussig reads this into an Afro-descendant peasant's diabolic accounting for the inequalities of wage labor. He sees stories about the Devil as a local theorization of the commodity fetishism implicit in the development of capitalist commodity exchange.⁶

Taussig (1980) adds to his analysis of the Colombian Pacific in a reading of June Nash's (1993) ethnographic work on the Devil and Bolivian tin miners. Nash's account remains a classic ethnographic description of an Andean mining town. She explores the towns' location within a wider economy and dedicates two chapters to exploring labor conditions and the miners' supernatural order.

I do not take Taussig's analysis of his own and Nash's ethnographic work as my departure point for this discussion of the Devil and gold, because he bases his analysis in Western models. James Ferguson (1988, p. 495) points out that Taussig reproduces the grand dichotomy of capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production. Peter Gose (1986) has a similar critique. Gose, drawing on extensive experience in the Andes, interprets the

⁶ David McNally (2012) adds to this literature on supernatural explanations for capitalism with his work on markets, monsters, zombies, and vampires.

Bolivian case that Taussig discusses from a perspective grounded in Andean ideas sacrifice as a “motivated negation of the possessive individualism of exchange” (1986, p. 298). A future area for my own interpretative work will be to build on this kind of analysis. In a manner similar to Gose (1986) and Gudeman and Rivera (1993), I hope to develop a better interpretation of gold and subsistence production, agricultural production, the informal economy, and the Devil in the Colombian Pacific. In this chapter, I have pointed towards some directions this analysis will go with the fixed. I describe the Devil as owning gold, the way gold likes deep places, as gold being related to water, and gold as a living and growing element. Nonetheless, this chapter points in directions for further work.

While it is self-evident that gold miners mine gold, the following chapters show this is not always the case. The next chapter explores this other economy of consumption. For now, I have tried to show gold mining where the objective is gold, and where it is part of other forms of production. I have done this through Pedro, José, and other artisanal miners talk and practice.

I described the reasons that people mine gold on their family lots, how they engaged with mining, how they mined, and how they talk. I showed what artisanal miners do and say. I did this from the perspective of those who mine by exploring a handful of mines and a number of conversations. Bringing together mine practice and mine talk also showed Afro-descendant miners’ livelihood strategies within land tenure and subsistence activities.

First, I turned to practice. In mining regions, people make a living mining using various techniques: Pedro’s artisanal pit mining, Esteban’s tunneling, José’s mini-dredging. Each technique reveals the skill involved in these mining techniques. This gives a sense of mining as a way of earning money from the wealth-giving earth.

Second, miners have a rich knowledge and understanding of finding gold, of making a living, and of knowing how to mine. Talking about mining rarely took place at the mine lest the gold leave. This reflected local understanding of gold related to the Devil, as something alive, and something that can move or be moved.

Spending a chapter on artisanal mining seemed appropriate, given that much of my fieldwork involved learning from miners, including Pedro, Esteban, Martina, Sofía, and other men and women. I worked with Pedro some months as he and his family slowly shifted a mine up the hillside. Our mining used water to move stones and wash the sand and gravel. While physical and tiring, it had a steady and slow rhythm. To extract even a small amount of gold, we needed to move hundreds of kilograms of material. Our labor though did not always feel hard. Pedro had a relaxed approach. His pace quickening only as he began to wash gold. We left every morning for their mine, and most people spend most days, except Sundays and dry periods when it has not rained for weeks, working their mines. By afternoon, we returned to the village to do other tasks.

This had a gendered component. Pedro and Javier went hunting, fishing, or gardening. Martina looked after her grandchildren, cooked, or washed clothes. She also went to pick plantain and yuca. Mining offers them a way to make a living in the Chocó. While Pedro's technique involves digging sand and gravels, Esteban's technique involves tunnels underground below the hill where Mauricio and I made phone calls, and Julio's involves diving underwater with a mini-dredge. Each family has their lots and gardens. The mines last not years, but decades.

Sofía, Esteban's mother, told me she raised her children and grandchildren for 40 years from the same mine—alongside other activities. These forms of mining take skill, in the work of panning and washing for gold as Martina or Sofía do, in the digging tunnels of

Esteban, and the diving underwater of Julio. Mining takes specific techniques to throw stones quickly, to hold a pan properly, or to cup a hand to gather and clear material rapidly. While I have not catalogued these techniques in an extensive taxonomic commentary, digging pits, pumping water, diving, and tunneling encompass common techniques that are part of the quotidian labor of artisanal miners. Mining provides a way for rural Afro-decedents in the region to make a stable living, when combined with hunting, gardening, and other activities.

People rarely talked of mining while mining. But mine talk—where, when, and what—has significant implications. These stories helped show some reasons people mine, how they hoped to find a wealth, and the risks of finding too much wealth—and little. People talked about mining and its dangers after a day’s labor, or late at night, while relaxing, watching the river, and drinking beer. This unremarked prohibition on talk while mining and the proclivity to talk later signals a fraught relationship to mining as a livelihood strategy.

The re-occurring motif of Devil bargains resulting in unproductive wealth can show a way of mining. While Pedro remarked he was his own boss, and that he belonged to no one—literally that he had no owner, or *amo* in the sense of slavery—and could do what he wanted. The most extensive enunciations of mining came from non-miners, most notably priests. The stories told by the priests of diviners and of gold as the Devil’s metal, received complex responses. People did not quite agree. The connection between gold and the Devil seemed self-evident, as people were reticent to say *maunifica* and exorcise the Devil while mining. Don Alfonso’s used *maunifica* as an expletive and he never said it while working. So, this echoed the priest’s explanation of the prohibition on saying *maunifica*, yet Pedro’s mine was productive, and he combined it well with other forms of production.

Putting mine practice and mine talk together, links the mine work of digging, tunneling, and diving to mine conversations and stories of ghosts, diviners, finding gold, and Devil's bargains. This does suggest an important mining tradition in the Chocó, where artisanal miners have their own understandings of how to mine, and mining's relationship to the supernatural, and to good and evil of gold.

Artisanal gold mining takes a central place in the region's economy and consumption patterns. Mines are family-run mines, and people use hand techniques and tools, come from the same family, and labor together on family land. These mines require little capital investment—although a mini-dredge and small-diesel powered engine make the task easier. Both the terms “traditional mining” and “ancestral mining” suggest long histories, ancestral knowledge, and territorial claims. I prefer “artisanal mining” because people used it reference mining: People spoke of panning as a group, or *bareque*; panning, or *catear*; washing, or *lavar*; tunneling, or *guacheando*; diving, *busiando*; and using a water pump, or *bombeando*. Artisanal, traditional, or ancestral mining encompasses a human scale of mining, which complements hunting, gardening, cultivating plantain, banana, corn, sugar, and fruit. In rural Afro-descendant villages, mining gives people independence, and a source of cash.

Artisanal mining provides Afro-descendant peasants a feasible, attractive, and attainable livelihood. Pedro, Esteban, Julio, and their neighbors make money in a way that complements other economic activities, and they find pleasure through mining, through being their own boss, through the challenge of digging and laboring and the possibility of reward. Alberto Rivera and Stephen Gudeman (1990) argue that forests provide savings to Andean peasants when left on the ground; peasants, when they need to withdraw money, they cut down trees. Mines in the Chocó offer a similar sense of savings—people mine

when they need to buy cash. Mines that give provide a reliable complement to subsistence production. This indexes ideas of the earth that provides wealth, rather than wealth's foundation coming from human labor and effort (Gudeman and River, 1990). The ground gives gold, and miners, such as Pedro and his family, can mine steadily and extract a relatively stable amount of metal. Pedro's mine gives a steady income as part of his fixed. Sometimes though, getting the gold out is dangerous. This is what happened to Esteban—and so, he asked the excavators onto his family's lot to take out, or *sacar*, his savings.

Other miners, long since having lost their inhibitions, might mine 20 meters below ground or take someone else's turn diving in the river. Here, mines do not give but take. As people dig, shovel, dive, and dredge, washing the gray gravels over their sluices deep in the forests, rivers, and tunnels, there's a risk in extracting a metal that "likes deep places." Their tunnel might cave in at any time. The explanation of the mining implies the possibility of striking it rich by digging to the bedrock, diving in unforgiving rivers, or shifting dangerous gravels. Pedro says gold makes people lose their inhibitions. Like a drunk, miners and gamblers can take dangerous risks. They can forget their own mortality, mine too hard, tunnel too deep, or take someone else's turn.

The Devil can also move the earth's gold, meaning people can lose everything. Michael Taussig (1978, 1980, 2004), in his writing on cane cutters and miners in the Cauca Valley, points out that people see too-successful miners or cane cutters as having struck a bargain with the Devil. This dooms people to spend cursed profits unproductively. The mine and the Devil, the accidents, danger, and hard work suggest coexistence. The Devil owns the gold, and mining can be dangerous. If people know the ground has gold, they do what they can to mine it, and they risk accidents. Mine accidents

bring terrible consequences. People rarely talk about the Devil, lest he anger and take away the gold, which reflects a sense of how people explain mining accidents and mining. If the Devil can render promising mines fraught and dangerous, this helps explain why miners invite small-scale miners to excavate their land.

Mining's objective as gold allows people to access their savings and the wealth the earth gives, despite the risks. Mining comes in waves. Pedro once pointed out to me indentations in the forest—"workings of our ancestors," he said. Along with many men his age, he worked in logging in the 1990s. He complained that holding a chainsaw all day and hauling lumber was much harder than mining. At the time, the price of gold was lower, and there were more trees to cut. Prices might fall again, as occurred in the past, and people will turn to migrant labor to supplement their rural livelihoods—or they may move. Pedro's son said that after gold comes coca.

The facts that mines give and take and that mines are savings explain why people allow excavators to mine their land. Pedro, Esteban, Jose, and other miners would see not mining gold in some areas as stupid, representing failure to not take advantage of the situation.

People do invite outsiders onto their land because of the difficulty of getting gold out of the ground and their feeling that their mine has gold. Since mines also take, the risk of not letting an excavator mine include not getting any gold and dying while mining. Excavators allow mining to occur in places far deeper than artisanal miners can reach. For example, Esteban and his family, 20 meters underground in a pitch-black tunnel lit with a solitary candle, saw the excavators as a better alternative to their own artisanal miners.

Chapter 4: “The Hustle”

When the sun sets in the village, people block the entrances to their homes with two horizontal wooden planks. While I never asked why, thinking back, the reason might have been toads. Large, knobby, green, gray amphibians often hopped inside to hide in cool dark spaces as the sun went down. The house of the parish priest, or the *casa cural*, where I lived, has a concrete floor that attracted them. The building’s name comes from the parish, but other visitors, like me, and sometimes *paisa* miners, stayed there. A Priest came once or twice a year for annual festivals and events. They rarely stayed the night.

The building had concrete block walls painted light blue, a tin roof that flexed loudly with the heat and rain, and smooth cement floors. It had a large room with public telephones that rarely worked, a kitchen at the back for cooking school lunches, and two small bedrooms. I slept in one room, and the other housed haphazardly stacked school desks. In the evenings, I left the doors and windows ajar to let cool air into the building. The open door attracted the ponderous toads that crept into places they did not belong. Copying my neighbors, I swept them outside.

This evening ritual of sweeping toads out from inside places could provide a source for the colloquial Colombian use of “toad” in the Andean interior. To call someone a “toad,” or “*sapo*” in the Colombian Andes is to gravely insult them. Andeans utter the word with venom. *Sapos* stick their nose in other people’s business, cannot keep to themselves, speak publicly about private events, and talk about someone else’s dirty laundry. When someone calls someone a *sapo*, means they are marking them as a gossip,

informer, tattletale, and snitch. In Colombia's war, *sapos* often die young because armed groups will threaten and kill people who they see as having collaborated with their enemy as informers. While ominous note might tell someone to mind their own business, to shut up, to stop talking, or suffer the results, the armed groups may not always send a note.

In the Chocó, *sapo* is a *paisa* term. Afro-descendants use another word for someone who talks about what they should not: *corrinche*. This term has two meanings. First, it refers to an informal gathering, such as a party among friends or a neighbor playing music too loud, or a disorderly meeting with people talking across each other. Second, a *corrinche* is a gossip, someone, often a woman, with a big mouth, who spreads rumors and will not mind her (or his) own business. In the latter sense, *corrinche* echoes the meaning of *sapo*. Whether I adopt the *paisa* term *sapo* or the Pacific's term *corrinche*, rural people avoid speaking about topics that risk the label. A guarded speech results, as people mind their own business to avoid speaking about sensitive issues.

For an ethnographer asking questions, this made some lines of questioning out of bounds. It was difficult to pin down the economies of mining, the money people made mining, and the conflict's effects on how people make a living. People spoke carefully, worried about the label of gossip. Sometimes, the best answer I could get to some questions was a joke as deflection. This puzzled me, as I did not always realize the subtext of my question. In this context, I learned to not ask about some themes directly: the conflict, details about mining activities, some strange visitors, or the specifics of money. Why did the some *paisa* mine foreman haul diesel fuel in the pre-dawn morning during rainstorms? How could the small-scale miner owners buy gas, if they had not found much gold for six months? My field notes include reflections on the stories and rumors. Yet, while trying to understand some issues, for example, the conflict and the amount of gold

people found, some questions seemed inappropriate to ask. For example, we rarely talked about the conflict. This made it difficult for me to make sense of gold mining in the Chocó. In this chapter, I aim to stay with the resulting ambiguities by dwelling on the lack of clarity around talking about mining and the conflict.

The chapter addresses two elements: first, it explores the economy that complements the fixed rural subsistence economy where people combine artisanal mining with gardening and hunting. The Colombian term for this is *rebusque*, which I translate as the hustle and use as the chapter's title. The hustle refers to what people do outside of and in addition to the fixed. Second, I dwell on rural violence and the conflict to address the ambiguities, difficulties, and epistemic challenges of making sense of my ethnographic fieldwork. Through vignettes on rumors, conflicts, fear, migration, and work, I address the hustle. Drawing on this ethnographic fieldwork, I also address the epistemological challenge of ethnographically representing mining and the conflict. On the hustle, I show how Afro-descendants engage in it and how *paisa* migrants come to the Chocó from other regions of Colombia. This lets me begin to discuss displacement and migration to the Chocó for work. Many migrants have fled other areas of rural conflict, land consolidation, and violent displacement to the Chocó to find a hustle as vendors, traders, miners, and coca growers. The chapter shows how they help destabilize the rural fixed subsistence economy. It shows how money circulates quickly. It explores why people move to a booming frontier economy shaped by the hustle, mining, migration, gold, and the conflict. It addresses the challenges of conducting ethnographic fieldwork in this context of conflict.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (2013), Colombia ranks as the fifth most dangerous country in the world for journalists. Journalists and human rights

defenders, who report on and write about Colombia's internal conflict, provide information and analysis as they struggle to account for the war. They document dates, times, places, events, people, human rights violations, massacres, displacement, and violent confrontations between armed groups. Each year, the Diocese in Quibdó publishes a report listing the victims of human rights violations in the Chocó, i.e. what happened, to whom, where, when, how and why. Nationally, many organizations such as Amnesty International, CODHES, Human Rights Watch, and the Ombudsmen's Office produce similar information. They strive for a kind of objective account and do a valuable job. However, their journalistic or human rights standards of proof are different to what I strive for ethnographically. I hope to explore another kind of representation of the conflict and rural Colombia through conversations, rumors, gossip, *corrinche*, and the contradiction and ambiguities of research to reflect how people live in contexts where uncertainty and a lack of clarity is normal. This ambiguity of ethnography is not unique to the Chocó, the conflict, or my fieldwork. It is, I think, a common part of accounting for many situations. But, these ambiguities do raise issues of how to ethnographically represent interpretations of apprenticeship mining.

I raise the issue of representing conflict¹ because making sense of the hustle is difficult. For example, looking at gold mining statistics seems to offer a seductive

¹ Colombian historian Mary Roldán (2011) addresses the issue of representations of violence in her Forward to the English language edition of a collection of reports from Colombia's war by Colombian journalist Juanita León (2011). Roldán argues that León describes not the front lines of massacres and shootings but rather records stories about the daily lives of those affected by conflict. León talked to the coca pickers in the south, to the paramilitary strongholds of Córdoba, to the oil town workers in the Magdalena, and to people in guerrilla held territories. She avoids what Roldán calls the "numbing sameness" of many accounts of Colombia's conflict, which list statistics, events, names, organizations, places, and dates.

objectivity, but, as I show later on close inspection, they may not represent mining in the Chocó. I hope to draw out the hard to pin down ambiguities of fieldwork and offer an account that reflects my doubts and confusions. I mention the ambiguities of representation alongside gossipers—*sapos* and *corrinches*—because the fear of getting involved in someone else’s business. I begin with the experience of *corrinche*.

Talk and Music

In the city, a few hours from the village, I try to talk to my partner on the phone. I am in Quibdó and she is in Bogotá. The clock has just past two in the morning. Music pounds from the apartment across the street, creating a *corrinche*, or a noisy party, without revelers. Black speakers made from plywood and fabric perch on the second floor balcony, which hangs from the side of a top-heavy four-story building facing the street. The speakers have blasted at full volume the same three songs for two weeks for the whole neighborhood to hear.

I rent a room in the poorer, lower-middle class area in the densely populated area at the top of a steep gulley twenty minutes from the center of Quibdó by foot, or five minutes on a motorcycle taxi. I use it as a place to leave things when I am in the village and stay when I am in Quibdó. The three-story recently constructed building has pastel lemon painted concrete walls. In contrast to the surrounding nondescript gray cement block buildings, with a four small windows and rebar sticking out of their roofs, this building has large windows and open spaces.

The aid worker and his wife, who I sublet a room from, told me in the afternoon, with a hint of desperation that our neighbor had played the same three songs for two

weeks. Earplugs did not block the sound. We could not help but listen and hate it. Judging by the songs, they meant something significant for our neighbor. I never asked what, as after listening for hours, the music left me too angry for a civil conversation. The three Vallenato songs on heavy rotation evoked nostalgia, loves lost, betrayals, infidelity, drinking, and masculinity:

We suck liquor
to the floor my partners
that is how one passes the time
afterwards, we'll go where the damn whores
to where the damn whores
my friend, to where the damn whore feet take us.

Jimmy Gutiérrez, 2012, *For Those Who Will*²

The last two lines play on the word *puta*, or whore. It took me months to catch the double entendre. I still struggle with an apt translation to the lyrics. I have gone for the more common use, but the song could imply a slightly less vulgar, “to where my damn feet take me.” The song’s YouTube video (Gutierrez, 2010), with almost four million hits, makes the sense in my translation clear enough.

This and many other songs became part of my fieldwork’s rhythm. The sounds of musical styles popular in the Chocó including *Vallenato*, *Salsa*, *Chirimía*, and *Merengue* came from the stereos at corner bars, front porches, clubs, buses, and taxis throughout

² *Chupemos Guaro
al piso parceros
así es que uno se entretiene
después nos vamos pa' donde las putas
pa donde las putas
patas compita nos lleven*

Jimmy Gutiérrez, 2012, *Pa Las Que Sea*

towns, and villages. The music seemed overwhelming at first, a wall of invasive, frustrating, and exhausting sound. Over the months, I developed an appreciation for the music, even this song.

This evening, the heavy, hot, humid, and breezeless air combined with the music left me unable to sleep. I lie in a pool of sweat on a single cotton mattress. During the summer—it has not rained for two weeks—my sweat clings to the pillow and sheets leaving an oily texture, which only hard hand scrubbing removes. I hope to cope with the heat, music, and insomnia by talking on the phone with my partner in Bogotá. The music makes it almost impossible to speak.

I had risen the day before, early in the predawn fog to catch a small boat downriver from the village, then a bus to Quibdó. Tomorrow I fly to Bogotá to help my partner prepare paperwork for a visa application for Canada. She and I last spoke two weeks ago. I have much to tell her. Rumors in the village suggested the paramilitary or maybe common criminals, *delincuentes comunes*, had hijacked a bus on the road to a nearby town last month. A week ago, some guerrilla shot at two policemen who were walking in the town at dusk. I wanted to tell her about both events. That I felt safe, my fieldwork was good, and I was mining. But as we talked, we were nervous and worried someone might listen in on our telephone conversation, even though over the music we could barely hear each other.

At the time, the Colombian government faced a scandal because its security service had tapped the phones of human rights defenders, journalists, and Supreme Court judges. The scandal eventually led to closing the organization. We both felt anxious and worried. Could someone be listening in? While some topics were too sensitive to speak about in public, we had developed a habit of self-censoring and reflecting carefully on the topics we discussed on the phone. Our self-censoring reflected our own paranoia and concerns that

someone might listen in and a sense of what could and could not be openly discussed.

Over the music, I spoke in euphemisms about events, and used general terms. I tried not to use specific places, real names, or too much detail. The worry someone might eavesdrop was overblown because we could not even hear each other. The music and fear make the conversation impossible. I hang up. Since I cannot sleep, I write about ambiguities.

Rumors and Conflict

One afternoon in the town downriver from the village, I sit and reflect on how people deal with uncertainty. I sit on a life jacket in the gravel near the water where boats pull in. A tree casts shade and I wait for a boat to go upriver. I have been waiting since the day before, travelling sometimes requires patience.

Pedro called in the morning to ask why I had not arrived yesterday. I told him I had planned to catch the speedboat, but it had mechanical trouble and did not leave Quibdó. He said he had heard it had transmission trouble. I wondered how he knew. The village's phone could not make or receive calls. He had to climb fifteen minutes into the bush to make phone calls. By the dock in the afternoon, with a large plastic radio, he listens to the faint signal from the radio transmission in town that passes news and messages to nearby villages. A priest from a nearby town once lost his way between two villages. He had tried to hike a short distance through the forest at dusk, but did not make it. As night fell, he managed to call the radio station in town. The radio station announced he had lost his bearings. On hearing the news the nearest village sent out a search party to find him. The radio had told Pedro about the motorboat's repairs. I found out trying to catch the boat

that never came.

I took a bus instead. First, I caught a *rapimoto*—a cheap, fast motorcycle taxi—from Quibdó to the newly built bus terminal twenty minutes out of the city. From the terminal, I caught a *chiva* bus to the village. A *chiva* consists of a large multicolored wooden cab built on a truck body. It serves as mass transport in rural areas. The hard, uncomfortable benches and metal bars separate rows of seats. In Colombia's big cities, *chivas* have become fashionable for pub-crawls in tourist areas. The multicolored buses are a symbol of Colombian nationalism. Here, the *chivas* are the cheapest transport. The air circulates making the *chivas* more comfortable than the closed in more expensive crowded mini-buses.

The route from Quibdó follows the main paved road. The *chiva* drives alongside other buses, minivans, trucks hauling lumber, wide flat bed tractor trailers carrying excavators, yellow taxi cabs, private cars, three wheeled motorized taxis, and motorcycles. At one point, we turn onto a gravel track. The traffic leaves deep gouges in the loose gravel surface. The road's conditions were so bad people blockaded the road to try and force the town's mayor to repave the road.

We bounce through potholes. The long stretches of slick mud make getting stuck a concern. The short distance can take an hour or more. I try to sit directly behind the driver, sliding on the plastic foam covered blue seats. Hands on the metal poles that hold the roof up have worn through the red paint leaving bare metal. The back of the *chiva* has a sign that shows the regular route with pastoral images of a village. A small, square picture of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the *Virgin del Carmen*, hangs above the driver. Revolutionary slogans and graffiti of the guerrilla—the National Liberation Army (ELN)—cover the bus in black and red scrawls: “Not a step backwards,” “46 years,” and

“Victory or death.”

The first time I saw this graffiti it sent chills up my spine. Rumors had it the guerrilla stopped the bus to quickly paint the texts. Almost nobody people wanted to answer my questions about the writing, and it soon stopped bothering me. The texts were slogans of the ELN. They are Colombia’s second largest armed insurgency. They have a presence in the area.

When I got to the village that evening, the FARC, the largest guerilla group attacked the police station in town. I heard nothing about it until the following evening when Mauricio, who had been there, arrived to the village. Sitting in a front room, the lights dim, his sister and brother and I listened to his whispered story about what happened. I had missed the shooting by a three hours. The shots came at eight o’clock Sunday night. I left for the village from the Quibdó bus station at six o’clock on the remarkably bright, clear night. I caught the beautiful sunset with my camera motoring towards the village.

Mauricio said the shots came out of the jungle from across the river. “You could see the bullets red in the night.” They shot at two police officers on patrol, silhouetted against the sky. The bullets were off their mark. They landed nowhere near the police. Instead they fell into the water and the forest. One bullet hit Mauricio’s cousin’s roof.

“The guerrilla are lazy people in the mountains,” he joked using the term *vago*. “We couldn’t even see them.” He did not leave the house, sheltering under a mattress. Some people left their wooden houses, running low and looking for cement buildings to shelter in. Mauricio whispered his assessment of the situation. “They wanted to test the waters. To see what they could do. To remind everyone they existed. They wanted to test their weapons and make sure they still worked.”

Mauricio's account had a certain lack of precision. He told his family and me, late at night after the kids gone to bed. Although, the guerrilla had not hurt anybody, many details remained unclear. This story shows the difficulty of asking questions and finding out what happened and why. It reflects my own concerns, which made it difficult to ask Mauricio what happened, and his reluctance to speak too explicitly.

I heard a similar story from Mauricio's sister, about a small group of criminals who captured one of the *chivas* in a nearby town. She said it might have been "common criminals" or the paramilitary. She said that they forced all the passengers off the bus, and then made everyone give them their valuables, watches, money, electronics, and cellular phones. They did not kill anyone, and the bus continued. The same thing once happened to the motorboat. The driver had left Quibdó for town with a full boat. But, not far from Quibdó, someone held a gun to the driver's head, and made him pull over into an isolated stream. They made everyone give them money, cellphones, jewelry, and other valuables before escaping with accomplices into the forest.

Talking about the conflict, people spoke in ambiguous terms about what happened, in many case the reason remained uncertain: Did the paramilitary commit the highway robbery, or were they common criminals? Did the FARC shoot from across the river? Mauricio's manner of making jokes and whispering rumors added to my unanswered questions. This made all three events, the shooting, the bus hijacking, and the boat robbery, hard to confirm.

On the *chiva* coming to town I passed the state's response to the FARC's presence: a dozen soldiers in full combat gear. Or at least, this might have been the military's response to the FARC. I never asked. I studiously tried to minimize contact with armed actors, legal or otherwise. Our spray-painted *chiva* first passed soldiers milling

around next to a beer canteen on the side of the road. Our bus passed eight soldiers on patrol, four on each side of the road in two columns, wearing jungle gear, faces painted in green, goggles strapped onto helmets, and bulky backpacks covered with a light mesh to blend in better with the forest. They carried black Israeli-designed assault rifles built in Colombia.

Closer to town, near the end of the trail, the bus passed more soldiers. They stood protecting a newly built cell phone communications tower, which *paisa* engineers from Antioquia had recently finished. The soldiers were drinking orange soda with a handful of kids from a four-liter bottle, their guns resting against the building. When our *chiva* arrived in town, I saw more soldiers walking around in the open space by the river. Some were drinking in one of the canteens. I visit Mauricio's cousin who runs a small store to ask about a boat to the village

The ELN had a presence in the area around the village; the FARC has one further upriver; the paramilitary had a presence on a nearby river system; the military and police occupied the nearest towns. Most had a reputation as lazy. Too lazy to do any real work, too lazy to earn an honest income, and so lazy they turned to the conflict. The conflict becomes another way of surviving. Some kids join the guerrilla or the paramilitary; others work for the police or the military. Most mine for gold.

Traveling to town on an errand, soldiers once captured and conscripted Pedro's nephew. He did not have his military papers. When I met him, barely 20 years old, he had almost finished his second year of service. He described soldiering as hard, with bad food. He had a large insect bite on his forehead that had become infected and was home convalescing for two weeks. He said he has never met any guerrillas, and that he hopes never to meet them. Pedro worries the guerrilla will be unhappy with his nephew, a

soldier, in the village. Pedro did not let his nephew enter the woods.

I spend time describing the bus, graffiti, guerrilla, paramilitary, and the soldiers on patrol because it speaks to the nature of conflict. While their presence could, at any moment, intrude on daily life, more often than not, they represented a nuisance, a threat, or a topic of indirect conversation.

Rebusque: The Hustle, Buying, Selling, and Credit

It is mid-afternoon in July. I am again in the open area where the *chiva* dropped me, waiting for a boat upriver. An elementary school teacher waits like me. He works in a nearby village in a one-room school. He spends the school week in the village and goes to Quibdó on weekends. None of the regular boats have come to town today. Mauricio's uncle said one of the drivers from a nearby village had gone to Quibdó because of his ill mother. The other did not bring down passengers at five o'clock this morning, so it will not return upriver in the afternoon. After asking around, and waiting most of the day, the teacher and I find a ride. Geraldo and José's diesel boat will make the trip to the village. The foreman and his assistant fill the boat with fuel containers. They agree to take us. We wait. Soldiers drink beer in a canteen watching the two men load the boat.

I sit on my lifejacket, down by the river, watching kids swim. A small cube truck pulls up and a tall, elegantly dressed *paisa* woman gets out. She wears a bright orange dress. Someone from the town starts to help her unload large plastic bags containing packets of chips, candies in bulk, and soft drinks. Talking to the teacher, I ask what the woman does.

The teacher replies, "*Rebusque.*"

“The hustle?” I ask, using his term.

He did not exactly use the term “hustle.” He said *rebusque*, which I have translated as “hustle.” Another translation of *rebusque* is “gleaning.” Let me dwell on the meaning and translation of *rebusque*. In feudal Europe, peasants gleaned seeds by gathering the leftovers following the grain harvest. Michael Taussig (1978) used the term to describe workers who picked over the sugarcane fields after the harvest in the Cauca Valley (1978).

I prefer the translation “hustle” because of another meaning of *rebusque*, which describes the creative ways that people make a living on the urban and rural margins. As with gleaning, peasants, the urban poor, homeless people, and displaced people engage in this *rebusque*. In English “hustle” provides a sense of moving rapidly in some direction and gaining something through cunning, persuasion, and violence alongside other creative strategies. Most engaged in *rebusque* will find only poverty, but even when met with failure, their work has a certain honor to it. Colombians commonly use *rebusque* to refer to begging, street performers, and street hawkers of food and cheap goods. In her master’s thesis, Ana Belen Fonseca (2011) explores the usage of *rebusque* among displaced street performers hustling a living through performances on Bogotá’s public buses (2011). The literature on street markets and public space in Colombia’s cities explores these urban activities (Bromley, 1978; González, 2008). However, the teacher’s use of the term and the broader meaning of *rebusque* in the Chocó and other rural areas of Colombia show *rebusque* encompasses more than urban subsistence strategies. It means what people do outside of the fixed.

One of Colombia’s leading contemporary journalists and social commentators, sociologist Alfredo Molano, wrote about *rebusque* in his collections of life stories (1996a;

1996b; 1997). Drawing on interviews, Molano tells stories of displaced people, settlers, and itinerant workers throughout Colombia. He describes people migrating to the southern jungle to find their fortune as coca pickers, young *paisa* prostitutes who come over the mountains to mining camps in the Chocó to make money for a week or two, and drug mules⁴ caught trying to smuggle cocaine north. Molano uses *rebusque* to describe this work and it applies to people who come to the Chocó to find work in logging, mining, and coca.

With the translation, “hustle,” I aim to connect to Molano’s broader sense of *rebusque* to express a way of understanding these diverse livelihood practices in Colombia. The hustle refers not simply to street trade and migrant labor in mining and coca picking, but other forms of production, consumption, and exchange. It describes what those who sell fruit, fried food, hamburgers, and other products on street corners, buses, and in public spaces do to make money. It includes a woman raising kids with the income from a small stand, who pays no formal taxes and no rent to the city for the use of street space. The term encompasses street trade and itinerant labor, such as logging, coffee picking, coca picking, and rural and urban construction work, alongside displacement, conflict, extortion, drug trafficking, and other urban and rural moneymaking schemes. It refers to the informal economy. The term allows for a better understanding of life in the Chocó’s forests and rivers because it evokes the political, economic, and social circumstances of the area. The hustle describes the daily strategies to find an income and refers to Colombia’s profitable and sometimes illegal underground economy.

⁴ A drug mule is a courier who moves drugs across the border. They are often poor, with few choices, or are coerced.

The etymology of *rebusque* offers clues to its meanings. *Busque* translates as “search.” The prefix “*re*” comes from Latin for “sending something backwards” or “repeating,” and in Spanish also means “intensifying” or “opposition or resistance” (Real Academia Española, 2013). *Rebusque* thus means intense “re-search,” not in the sense of academic inquiry, but in the sense of cyclical, creative, and intense searching. As with gleaning, it means picking over and scavenging to make a living outside of stable, fixed employment. Trying to define its meaning, the teacher told me, “*Rebusque* means what someone does to survive outside of the fixed.” His use of fixed means both rural subsistence production and his own permanent employment as a teacher.

Both definitions of *rebusque*, as hustle and gleaning, match the widespread colloquial use in Colombia. Vox’s Spanish dictionary (2003) defines *rebusque* in three ways.⁵ First, it refers to the “temporary work that someone does to complement a stable work.” Second, it can take the reflexive verb form of *rebuscar se las*, as in “hustle oneself a life,” from “*rebuscar se la vida*.” Third, it means “to hustle for oneself ingeniously to solve the daily difficulties of quotidian survival,” as in, “Look, we have to hustle to find a good job.” The *Real Academia Española* (2014) defines the noun *rebusque* as a “casual and ingenious solution to a difficulty.” It defines the verb *rebuscar* as “collecting the fruit left in the fields, particularly in the vineyards, after harvest,” or “to search with zeal and sacrifice to solve a problem.” It defines the reflexive *rebuscarselas* as, “contriving to confront and overcome daily difficulties.”

The *rebusque* hustle means informality not only in the sense of unregulated

⁵ These are my translations.

employment outside of a permanent formal job—such as not paying social security, being a member of a union, paying taxes, having a bank account—but also in the sense of a complement to this economy. This provides a variation of Vox’s first definition, the “temporary work that someone does to complement a stable work,” which Esteban’s brother explained to me as “work outside of the fixed.” People use the term *fijo* for fixed, but they mean *rebusque* as a complement to a regular, stable, reliable, and steady salaried employment as well as rural subsistence income.

In rural and urban areas, teachers, community leaders, and itinerant merchants sell clothing, cologne, makeup, and perfume from mail order catalogues to students, students’ families, and villagers. A teacher’s main income comes from his or her salary; the mail order catalogue *rebusque* provides extra income. A public official might engage in *rebusque* by selling favors, a politician by pocketing a part of the municipal budget, a police officer by accepting bribes from illegal small-scale miners, a guerrilla by charging protection money to small-scale miners in their territory, a soldier by assassinating kids and claiming them as combat kills to receive extra vacation time or other favors. Each engages in this sense of the hustle as moneymaking outside their fixed jobs.

In each case, the teacher, politician, policeman, guerrilla, or soldier has a fixed income and its complement in *rebusque*. The hustle does not replace stable employment, or the lack thereof in the case of subsistence producers, but it does provide a complement or addition to this livelihood. Indeed, people engaged in the hustle may look for their own *fijo*, or fixed: their own home, food stand, permanent job, or mine. Migrant workers, who come to the Chocó to hustle, hope for a fortune in addition to mere subsistence.

The hustle represents the ways that people understand these economic relations. Stephen Gudeman and Alberto Rivera (1990) raise the importance of economic models

for Colombian Andean peasants, as demonstrated through metaphors such as savings from lumber stands or mines rather than the bank, or the earth that gives mines and food. The hustle offers another such metaphor. Gudeman and Rivera (1990, p. 54–77) describe Andean peasants aiming to build the base. Finding a fixed is something similar. It means finding in a stable, reliable, and secure foundation. Someone engaged in the hustle works outside the fixed, yet they also hope to find a fixed. People see that a regular wage would make a good fixed. They see the same in Pedro's lots, hunting, a mine, and a home built in Quibdó when the FARC displaced the village. For Pedro, all of this is something fixed: his security, retirement plan, and a monthly income. The other things he does though, outside of this, are his hustle.

Turning back to the teacher who I am talking to by the river, and the cube van:

“She does not do the hustle,” the teacher clarifies by explaining the woman is the manager. That is her fixed. Her job though involves selling to small storeowners in town. She works for the snack company, and sells packages of chips to people who then resell them. He uses the term hustle to describe what the people who buy junk food to sell are doing.

He explains. I take notes. The hustle comes on top of what someone already earns. It provides a secondary activity in addition to something else. Someone might have a profession, or something they do: they are a student, a politician, a peasant, or a miner. The hustle provides them extra income that supplements their fixed income of their regular activity.

“The hustle is the informal economy, what you do while trying to get profits,” the teacher says, using the terms informal and *ganancias* and *utilidades* for profits.

Mauricio never has much luck mining. However, he can sometimes make a little

money selling perfumes and lotions from the glossy catalogue. He sells Amway by mail order in the villages he visits as a leader. Twice I went with him to meetings, and he had cologne samples. After the meeting, he spent half an hour discussing the relative merits of a particular cologne versus another. The problem though was that selling by mail order Mauricio often ended up subsidizing some clients and losing money. Someone might order something, but when the cologne arrived they would be unable to pay for it. Mauricio made just enough for it to be worthwhile.

I watch the woman from the cube van, the “manager” selling street vendors soft drinks, bulk packages of individually wrapped snacks, and lime flavored potato chips.

I think about an earlier incident from the previous month, of another truck of *paisas* from the interior. They arrived the same way. Rather than snack food, their truck brought televisions, stereos, DVD players, CD players, MP3 players, netbook laptops, satellite dishes, small electrical generators, portable washing machines, microwaves, refrigerators, fans, radios, and gas ovens. The *paisas* sold these appliances on credit to local people. They had a whole store on the back of their truck: with a tent and banner promoting their sale. It was Sunday, and many people from the town and rural villages in town for shopping looked at the appliances. People could buy items outright as one payment, or as three payments over three months. I did the math on the cost of a refrigerator. With the three payments, the price was 45 percent higher over three months. When I asked Mauricio how the *paisas* secured their loans to people in the villages up river, he said that if someone did not pay they sent people to make sure that people did.

Making loans then offered them a form of hustle because debt holds a social stigma. Afro-descendants rarely accept or give credit unless they have to. Signs in the *paisa* and Afro-descendant stores all say, “Don’t ask for credit, so we don’t have to say

no,” or, a variation on the same idea, “Credit will be given to those over ninety-five whose mothers can vouch for them.” People might take credit from an Afro-descendant storeowner with whom they have familial or kin relationships. *Paisa* merchants could make more profit than Afro-descendant store owners because they had no family relationships to deal with. They could use violent threats to ensure payments. Unlike with Mauricio’s colognes, people felt obligation to pay *paisas* back.

People called these loans *gota a gota* loans, or drop by drop loans. This is hustle for the moneylenders. While *gota a gota* is high risk money lending, it provides credit to those who otherwise have none. What makes this a profitable form of money lending is the cost of default: default carries a threat physical bodily harm or death. Interest rates were at least 5 percent a month and sometimes much higher. They compounded daily. Moneylenders expect daily payments, which explain the name “drop by drop.” A merchant in the markets of Quibdó, or a taxi driver, might work all day earning 70,000 pesos. After expenses and their *gota a gota* payments, they end up with a pittance for their labor. While *gota a gota* is a form of loan sharking, and the only credit available to Colombia’s rural poor, the risks of default are dangerous, and people hold a certain, justified horror of *gota a gota* loans.

Work and Displacement to the Chocó

Late at night at the nearest town’s dance bar, after going to a dance bingo at a club, I cannot hear to talk.

“I’m hungry,” I yell in Mauricio’s ear.

He nods in agreement. We leave to find something to eat. He and I go downstairs

and walk to a small *paisa* stand on the street in front of a shiny new pharmacy. Most stores in town are dingy, old, and poorly lit. This one has bright lights and white walls. Three young *paisa* women sell hamburgers from a street-side stand—their hustle in front of their pharmacy. Their mother sells ice-cold beer and half bottles of liquor from the pharmacy. On weekends she keeps the store open well past midnight. The women working the food stand have their hair pulled back in tight buns. Mauricio and I order from one of the sisters. She looks six months pregnant.

“Do you have hamburgers?” I ask.

“Yes.”

“What else do you have?”

“Chorizo sausage.”

“How long would a hamburger take?”

“About 15 minutes.”

Mauricio eyes the slightly salted boiled potatoes on a hot plate above a grill. In my ear, he says he only wants potatoes.

“A potato,” I say. “Will you give him one while I wait for the hamburger.”

The young woman cooking tells me her name, Lila. I chat with Lila while she cooks.

Lila prepares the burger. She takes a slab of pink meat from a plastic container, peeling off pieces of wax paper from both sides of the patty before placing it on the gas grill. Beside the burger on a large grill, she cooks mounds of onions. Her technique mirrors the burgers sold on many street corners in Medellín late at night. Just over four years before, on my first visit to Colombia, in downtown Medellín, my hosts took me out for a burger made in this exact distinctive way.

“I have done this three years,” she replies in answer to my question.

“From Medellín?” I ask.

“No. Not Medellín. A little further, when you get to the first bridge over the Magdalena River. That’s Puerto [...] on the other side of the river.”

She adds the bacon. Its grease flavors the onions. Lila presses down on the burger with a spatula, the fat sizzles.

I ask, “Why did you come here?”

“Trying to get ahead.”

People often use the expression, “*Tratando de salir adelante.*” It means both trying to survive and to thrive: “to get by” and “to get ahead.” For Lila, opening a pharmacy and selling hamburgers in this town, as one of a handful of *paisa* families, offers her way to save a little something. It also offers something that is not available so easily in both Medellín and Antioquia: a chance to open a pharmacy and a street corner hamburger stand. Medellín, Bogotá, and areas where state policies are stronger, have undertaken programs of urban revanchist reforms to public space that emphasize a certain kind of public space that makes it harder for people like Lila and her family to make a living. In the Chocó, in Quibdó, and in rural areas like this town, these policies have not been put in place. If someone wishes to hustle by selling hamburgers, sausage, fried dough, chicken, *empanadas*—a corn pastry filled with meat and fried in a half moon shape—, or cut mangos they can with no state persecution.

“Why did your family come to the Chocó? Why not Medellín? How did you arrive to the town?”

“First, a brother came, later a sister, then I came. Then my siblings and I brought our mother and father.”

“Did they all come?”

“Yes.”

Lila explains that she and her family migrated from the Magdalena River valley to flee the violence and find work. They had displaced to the Chocó from Antioquia. While the violence affects both areas, she heard that there was work in the Chocó.

Her hamburger stall seems popular in town. The food she prepares, along with fried chicken, represents an accessible form of progress, a symbol of the *paisa* capital brought to the this rural town that people can just about afford; or at least on special occasions, like the this weekend with its dance bingo at the club to launch the political campaign. A thin slice of hamburger meat between two steamed, stale buns, with melted cheese, fried bacon, sliced hard green tomato, and crisp lettuce provides a link to Medellín and the whiter, more progressive, *paisa* coffee regions. The link made more explicit by the gleaming store and the three *paisa* sisters selling food.

Lila wraps the hamburger and bun in a thin foil bag, the open end topped with crushed potato chips. A toothpick, which she uses to spear a small hardboiled Cornish egg, holds the whole burger together. She adds five kinds of sauce: ketchup, a bright yellow vinegary mustard, white mayonnaise, a pink sauce made from mayonnaise and ketchup, and syrupy sweet pineapple sauce. The pineapple sauce is popular, and points to food preferences. While the Chocó has a rich and diverse fruit—*borojó*, *zapote*, guava, *marañón*, or cashew apples (*anacardium occidentale*), coconut, banana, and fingerling banana, and countless more, whose names I never learned. If people have the choice, they prefer the expensive green granny smith apples; the sweet red seedless grapes imported from Chile; or the bottles of commercially produced Mango juice. None of these are the cheapest options, but they all come from somewhere else. Like the hamburger and the

packaged snack foods, they offer something exotic that is accessible. The combination of sweet sauces and salty meat on a soft bun, steamed to mask staleness and to mimic bread floppy from a microwave at a fast food restaurant, combined with crunchy potato chips makes the meal distinctively *paisa* and thus attractive.

“What is good for us is to work!” she says, handing it to me.

I agree, thinking about her food stand, getting ahead, and pulling oneself up from not that much. Lila and her family are not the only people who have migrated to the Chocó to find a hustle. Many *paisa* migrants from Antioquia and the Caribbean have come to the area. *Paisa* migrants own corner store, restaurants, and pharmacies. They hustle in food stands, as travelling sales people, and with motorcycles taxis.

Many motorcycle taxis, or *rapimotos*, drivers in the Quibdó came from the Caribbean. When I pressed one *paisa*, clutching on tight, he explained that he had come to Quibdó from Barranquilla on the Caribbean because the “department [the Chocó] has a money, which moves fast.” By this, he means that he could go to work for a day, in his hustle with the taxi, and make \$30. After paying for his *gota a gota* loan on the motorcycle, he could make a decent income. The other reason for motorcycle taxi’s in Quibdó is that people came here to leave other areas. Unlike Lila fleeing violence, the drivers came to the Chocó simply to find work. They left urban renovation policies that saw the cities’ investing in parks, public space, and traffic calming measures for the urban middle class and tourists benefit, but detrimental to those engaged in the hustle of driving a motorcycle all day. The Caribbean port city had begun persecuting these motorcycle taxi drivers, so some came to the Chocó. The *rapimoto* charge a fixed price of \$2 a ride, anywhere in Quibdó. While the motorcycles bring a kind of chaos to the streets, they provide hundreds of people with a livelihood and a rapid transit system. Some drivers told me of similar

processes of the expulsion of *rapimotos* in favor of regulated taxicabs that had happened in some cities in the coffee regions. Displaced *rapimoto* drivers from there also came to Quibdó to hustle a living.

Lila explained it well. She tells me as she hands me the burger, “The Chocó is a good place to work. Here, the money moves faster. In general, the people of the Chocó, the blacks, don’t like to work in the city—they like to work in their bush.”

The bush, or *monte*, is how people refer to their mines, gardens, and hunting grounds. Most Afro-descendants in the village make money in the bush which they then spend in town. Although poor, when they need money, they extract natural resources: go mining, cut trees, etc. They spend money at stores or food stands like Lila’s. They spend money on consumable items—salt, oil, cheese, tuna, and sardines—or on larger items—televisions, generators, and electric appliances—or at parties and on the street. People make money in the bush, and spend it in town.

Lila explains, and this is her perspective, that *paisas* work better in the city. She leans in, “blacks work in the mines, make money, and then spend it. They never save.” “*Paisas*,” according to her, “make better and more successful storekeepers.”

At least on the surface, her family’s pharmacy, and other *paisas* stores, contrast with older stores owned by Afro-descendant shop keepers.

“Blacks here cannot do well in the city economy,” Lila says with a conspiratorial wink. “We [*paisas*] work better. When they come to the city, they enjoy spending money. They go to the *monte* to make a living, but in the stores, they spend it. *Paisas* own many of the bigger stores in the Quibdó, but, blacks own most stores in town. We decided to come here and set up shop.”

While Lila makes the distinction between *paisas* and blacks, her distinction is

exaggerated. While many *paisas* do come to run stores, food stands, or drive motor-taxis, many others come to rural areas to make a living in the bush, as miners, loggers, coca pickers, or as itinerant sellers selling shoes, clothes, pots and pans travelling to rural communities.

Reparations and Conflict

Don Alfonso asked me if my partner had gone to Bogotá, or if she was in Quibdó. He knew she was a lawyer and worked with victims. He explained that he wanted to ask about the newly passed Victim's Law. The Colombian government intended the new law to provide compensation to victims of Colombia's long running conflict. He had heard about it on television: could he get compensation? Since my partner had travelled to Bogotá for a month, he asked me to read a piece of paper.

He brought out a folded typewritten report from a police commander in Medellín. His son had worked as a police officer in Medellín in 1993. Don Alfonso told me the commander's report described how unknown assailants had shot and killed his son while he had performed his duties as a policeman. Almost twenty years later, Don Alfonso wanted to get a pension under the new Victim's Law. After we spoke, I called my partner to ask what he should do.

She explained that Don Alfonso had no good options to get a pension or compensation under the Victim's Law. First, he had only a certain number of years to make a claim for a pension. Since his son died twenty years ago, the period had long since past. Second, as his son died on duty, he did not qualify for compensation under the Victim's Law. When I explained this to Don Alfonso, he looked disappointed. As I went

into details, he changed the story. He said the commander's report was wrong. His son died while entering a friend's house, to stop a burglary that was taking place. He was actually off duty. The gunman, on a motorcycle, killed him while trying to enter a friend's house.

I asked Don Alfonso why the police had not mentioned a burglary, and the man being off doing. He explained the police commander wanted him to be able to get a pension. Now, at 73, he had little regular income. All this happened twenty years ago. But, he now hoped to qualify for compensation under the new law. When I told my partner this, and how his son died, she said it did not change anything. He should go to the Ombudsmen's Office, or the Defensoria del Pueblo, to ask what he should do. Don Alfonso said he would go. As far as I know, he never went.

Two weeks later, Don Alfonso came to me with a similar question, for a different family member. He and I sat in a park in Quibdó. He asked me again about the "*Doctora*"—he meant my partner. *Doctora* is used as a term of formal greeting and respect, which in this case, also marks the fact that there is a class difference between Don Alfonso as a rural Afro-descendant farmer and miner, and my partner a white—in the Chocó *paisa*—lawyer from Bogotá. He told me he wanted to ask a question for his "stepdaughter," the middle-aged woman sitting beside him opposite me on the park bench down by the main market in Quibdó.

"He has a son, my half-brother, which makes him my stepfather," she said.

She hopes that since Don Alfonso and I have a friendship, my "wife" the *Doctora* can give her legal advice. I say I can ask. She tells me her story. I stop her periodically for clarification. I take notes, and try to get the details right.

Don Alfonso's stepdaughter told me that she had a daughter. In 2004 her

daughter had turned fourteen. She had lived with her father in a village about three hours by boat from Don Alfonso's village. The daughter of Don Alfonso's stepdaughter had gone to stay at her father's house with a friend. But, someone had "informed" on them and told the region's military commander that both were *guerrilleras*. They must have reported that the daughter of Don Alfonso's stepdaughter and her friend had come to the village from the mountains. Soldiers came, captured both of them and another boy who was 18. The soldiers accused all three of being guerrillas. They took them to the mountains, where they shot them. They claimed the three teenagers were guerrillas that had died in combat during a firefight. They claimed them as combat kills. The father of the daughter of Don Alfonso stepdaughter testified the soldiers captured her without resistance and then shot her. When the military asked for the names of the young people, their families kept quiet. The circumstances of their assassinations meant the families of the teenagers had all been too afraid to claim the bodies or name the dead. The soldiers took the bodies to the nearest town and buried them as "No Names," (*Sin Nombres*) that is as unknown guerrillas killed in combat. Three more "No Names" added to the thousands of Colombians buried without name under similar circumstances as false positives (*falsos positivos*).

Don Alfonso's middle-aged stepdaughter told me all this as she sat in front of me cutting up mangos to sell in the Quibdó market. She wanted advice on getting compensation under the new Victim's Law her daughter's assassination by soldiers in 2004. She had tried to claim compensation, but could not even start the process, because the officer asked for her daughter's civil registry—the equivalent of a birth certificate—that she did not have. She gave birth to her daughter in a remote village, and never registered the birth. She had gone to the nearest Civil Registry to request a

certificate for her dead daughter. The registrar told her that she had to go to the Attorney General office in Quibdó to get a report of the events and they would issue a civil certificate. So, she went to that office, and they told her they had no records of the event, perhaps because the body had no name. Without that certificate, Don Alfonso's stepdaughter could not get a civil registry for her dead daughter. Without that she could not apply for compensation under the new Victim's Law.

I shared all of this with my partner. She explained to me what they needed to do. Don Alfonso's stepdaughter ought to go to the Attorney General's office in Quibdó, the Fiscalía, and ask for an exhumation of the body of her daughter. "Does she know where they buried her daughter?" Once they exhume the body, she should seek a DNA sample from the remains to prove they were of her daughter. With this proof, the Attorney General could produce a death report. With the report, she could request a Civil Registry to prove her daughter had existed. With that, she could apply for compensation.

On hearing the complex process, I said in frustration "How long does a DNA test take in the village? Years?"

"Yes," she replied over the phone. "Don't you get it? That's the point. At the moment her daughter does not exist legally. Without that, how can one prove she had been this woman's daughter? The only way to get proof comes from a DNA test. She could try the Ombudsman's Office or the third floor of the Diocese where they have a small group of people working on similar human rights violations."

A week later, I share my partner's advice with Don Alfonso. Again I have nothing useful to share. I explain what she said, so he can tell his stepdaughter what she could try to do to claim compensation for her dead child. I describe the exhumation, the DNA tests, and the paperwork. Don Alfonso stirs his herbal tea, listening. Telling him this, I think of

how both he and his step daughter have terrible stories of family members killed: a son, shot on duty, and his step-daughter's teenaged daughter killed by soldiers, yet are unable to access the new law and prove what happened.

“How many people have the same stories to tell of this conflict?” I wonder aloud.

He tells me another story of another adolescent a village nearby who had been drinking one morning, ten years before. Soldiers showed up, captured him, took him to the bush, and shot him. They let his body float downriver. But this time, the priest in the village made a huge scandal. He organized a march, and some protests. The family members of the adolescent received compensation for his murder: \$20,000, or two installments of \$40,000. Don Alfonso could not remember.

“What happened to the soldiers?” I ask.

Don Alfonso shrugs. “Who knows? The military commander threatened the priest in town for making so much fuss.”

I do not know if his stepdaughter followed up on my partner's recommendation to visit the Ombudsman's Office. Likely not. She spends most days peeling mangos and selling them on streets near the market. Trying to get compensation for either would involve successfully navigating three bureaucracies and proving the existence of her dead daughter. It seems likely that both she and Don Alfonso will never qualify for either forms of compensation. Despite its promise the Victim's Law seemed inaccessible.

Chapter Summary

This chapter gave an account of two themes. First, *rebusque*, which I translated as hustle, or “what one does beyond the fixed.” This fixed, or *fijo*, means both a permanent

job—a teacher, a municipal worker, a storekeeper—and the rural subsistence with which Afro-descendants survive. As salaried employment is rare, rural subsistence practices provide the fixed for most people. It includes growing crops, picking fruit, growing and gathering herbs and medicinal plants, tending backyard plots, keeping domestic animals, going fishing, hunting for meat, and artisanal gold. The hustle describes what people do beyond these activities. It also refers to the ways *paisa* migrants to the Chocó earn money to sell merchandize, to drive *rapimotos*, to lend money, to log, to grow coca, and to mine. Lila's family arrived to the Chocó to look for a livelihood. They opened a pharmacy (their fixed) and sold hamburgers (their *hustle*). Alfredo Molano describes the great hustle, or *rebusque mayor*, as part of the cocaine economy and conflict. The term refers as well to the rural conflict: to extortion, to common criminality—bus hijackings and boat hijackings—, and to the armed actors. While the hustle brought migrants to the Chocó, later I address Afro-descendants who leave for the city to hustle in Medellín. The hustle lies behind Don Alfonso and his step-daughter questions about compensation for their children's deaths, while the challenges they both faced in documenting events bring up the chapter's other theme: ambiguity.

This second theme is fieldwork's epistemic challenge. Through discussing gossipers—*sapos* and *corrinches*—, my conversation with my partner in Bogotá, rumors, fears, and conversations about the war, I showed some difficulties in knowing. Here, the hustle, conflict, mining, all made confirming some things difficult. I began with experiences of *corrinche* to address the conflict's tensions, stories about the war, and conversations about violence, fears, and worry. In representing both the conflict and the

hustle in the Chocó, I have tried to address fieldwork's confusions and rumors, and not offer a deterministic accounting for making a living or violence.⁶ Writing about these themes is full of ambiguities. In choosing these representations, I have tried to remain true to my fieldwork.

I see some fears, although not violence, in guarded phone conversations and labels of *sapo* or *corrinche*. I show fieldwork's epistemological tension of interpretation to develop this question in the sense of ethnography. I sometimes did not ask direct questions, because I did not know what implications inherent in the question. I have shown the ambiguities I had in writing about fieldwork.

Mauricio said, to explain why the guerrilla attacked the soldiers at dusk the FARC wanted to test the waters, see what they could do, remind everyone they existed, and use their weapons. His answers provide an interpretation of events; just as my own explanations to my partner late at night over a phone I reflected other explanations, even if neither she nor I could hear much over a neighbor's music. Who knows why the guerrilla attacked that evening. State bureaucracies need different proofs to account for the conflict as Don Alfonso and his daughter found when they tried to claim compensation as victims: without certificates, a DNA test, and other documentation, they had little option.

⁶ Michael Taussig (1987) discusses the rubber boom in the Colombian and Peruvian Amazon at beginning of the twentieth century. He draws on Roger Casement reports on nineteenth century capitalist expropriation and the terror that accompanied it. Taussig argues that Casement found an explanation for the horrific acts of the rubber trappers on Indigenous people in an economic explanation for violence. In contrast, Taussig argues an alternative explanation: the rubber tappers inflicted horrors on Indigenous population not from their rational self-interest, but from their fear of forest terrors. Taussig calls this the colonial mirror, finding violence not in economic rationalism but in rubber tappers' fear: what they did to Indigenous people came from their terror of what they though Indigenous people would do to them. While I do not elaborate here on Taussig's colonial mirror, this discussion of the difficulties of representation reflects his epistemic murk.

As written bus graffiti—“Victory or death,” “46 years,” or “Not a step backwards”—intrude in daily life, even faded over a year and a half, they constantly remind people of war. When I was a newcomer to the area, the *chiva* graffiti and the soldiers on the roadside disturbed me. They became commonplace, the conflict quotidian, yet ready to flash unannounced and unwarned to the foreground. Nobody dared scrub the black and red lettering because they feared the guerrilla would return. Yet, the guerrilla did not refresh the paint either and had not been to town in months.

Ambiguities explain many people’s hustle to the Chocó. People leave and displace fleeing violence *and* to find work. Lila, as she tells me about coming to the Chocó, offers her interpretation of why she and her family moved. They left violence and came to find money in the Chocó. Untangling their reasons by trying to separate forced displacement and economic migration misses her complex choices. Writing about fieldwork and the hustle is difficult. Like Mauricio’s answers, finding explanations for some things proved difficult. Sometimes evasive responses’ had unexpected subtexts.

On my return to Canada from the field, one colleague asked me about my research. Responding to my explanation, they asked, “Will this be one of those research projects where you never return to the field?” My reply, like Mauricio’s explanation for the FARC’s attack, was my own deflection. My response, “I’ve not published anything yet,” did not engage with the question. Like Mauricio, I did not respond to the question directly. I reflected instead on the difficulty of interpretation. In this chapter, I have done the same, and dwelt on talk about and rumors of violence and the hustle. I opened by describing how I arrived to the village through *rapimotos*, buses, and boats, and then discussed migrants to the Chocó to work in various areas. I can now turn to Afro-descendant migrant leaving and small-scale *paisa* miners arriving to the Chocó.

Chapter 5: Frontiers and the State

The road from Quibdó to Medellín is one of two main arteries from the Chocó's Atrato and San Juan regions to the Andean departments. The road follows the Atrato River over the eastern edge of the Andes between the Chocó and Antioquia. As our bus picks around potholes the road twists through the forest and mountains. The sky hangs gray as the Pacific's humid air hits cooler currents and dumps a steady rain. Our bus passes two small cattle farms. Mostly *paisa* settlers live here. A handful of soldiers talk to a farmer drinking something steaming on their porch. The last time I took the trip there had been more soldiers. Their assault rifles rest casually against the wall. Nearby, a soldier sleeps in a hammock pitched under a tarpaulin roof dribbling with water. On a hillock overlooking the road, a small metal tripod mounted machine gun carelessly points towards our bus. Dressed in army fatigues, the gun's owner chats on a cellphone. I note the soldiers because my travelling companion, Don Alfonso, glances sideways at them as our bus passes.

In his early seventies, Don Alfonso wears pressed pants with a carefully placed, cream colored, narrow brimmed hat covering his close-cropped white hair. Following most people in the village, I call him "Don" out of respect for his age. For fifty years, he has made a living traveling between the Chocó and the Andean interior. On this trip, he plans to buy bulk goods in Antioquia's capital Medellín. He has three shelves in his living room where he sells small items. He stocks plastic razors, gum, soap, detergent, sugar, oil, toilet paper, batteries, flashlights, salt, deodorant, and other basics. He sells to neighbors

in the village or to migrant *paisa* mineworkers living there temporarily. Not having been to the city in months, he needs to restock his shelves. While he sells *borojó* fruit in town, has gardens on a family lot for plantain and yuca near the village, a backyard full of fruit trees and herbs, and a small family gold mine he works periodically, his store selling to his neighbors provides him a little extra income. He buys what he sells on bus trips to Antioquia's capital Medellín and Risaralda's capital Pereira. I accompany him for the second time.

On the bus, Don Alfonso and I sit cramped in the back seats. During the trip the bus moves drunkenly. A metal rod digs into my thigh. I try not to vomit. I find it hard to sleep or do anything. Five rows forward, a young woman retches into a black plastic bag. She misses and her sick dribbles onto the floor. The driver's assistant washes the mess with laundry detergent from a bright red bottle. The liquid does little to clean the yellow vomit and only masks the smell. Bus tickets cost less than seats on the daily flights between Quibdó and Medellín. The bus to Medellín takes twelve hours, the flight thirty minutes. Like Don Alfonso, few Afro-descendants from the Chocó looking to trade or for odd jobs, *paisa* migrants, miners, mothers visiting children in the city, people coming home to see parents, and students going to university classes can afford airplane tickets. They use the bus. When they can afford it, workers for non-governmental organizations, public servants, mine owners, and anthropologists fly.

Don Alfonso and I both see the trip as a break from the village. A week's mining in Don Alfonso's artisanal mine left both of us bored. Bored in the sense of *aburrido*, meaning frustrated at the poor returns from our time invested. Don Alfonso's discontent comes from the mine's lack of results. My annoyance comes from a lingering backache and the feeling I am no longer learning much about mining. The store has him "bored" as

well. Recently, his neighbor's children stole some pennies and tricked him into selling them bubble gum candy with his own money. He installed wooden bars made of skinny split tree trunks to protect his merchandize. Not having made the trip for months, and low in stock after selling to the kids who'd stolen from his store with his own money, he needs to buy more stuff. Medellín is the cheapest place to buy merchandize in bulk; prices in Quibdó, the nearest town, and the village increase as each person take a percentage. By going to Medellín to buy in bulk, Don Alfonso can make his own profit from the sales.

I plan to learn from him about what he purchases, and to buy a football as a Christmas present for the four brothers in the village. Footballs cost a lot of money for rural people. A good leather ball that will last on the rough stone of the football pitch—beside the cemetery, pools of water, and fruit trees—costs twice as much as a bus ticket. It costs a few days work at the mine. My ability to go to Medellín and to buy a football shows I have money. Don Alfonso finds a use for this. For months, he and I had planned to go coffee picking together in the coffee growing regions on the way to Medellín. Heavy rains and floods during the picking season, and a feverish illness that kept us bed ridden for a week, meant the trip never took place. Don Alfonso thought up this two-day shopping trip to replenish his store as an alternative. He asked me to front the money for bus tickets and to buy merchandize. I agreed, provided he explained to me the economics of the trip. We discussed how much to sell each purchase for, and what he hoped to make on the sales. He promptly paid me back some weeks later. Bubble gum in particular offers a lucrative 1,000 percent return on investment. In the mountains, only four hours from Quibdó, the bus stops at a small restaurant on the roadside still on the Chocó' side of the mountains. I invite Don Alfonso for breakfast.

The restaurant consists of a house perched beside the road overlooking a valley.

Mist hangs thick and the rain makes it hard to see. A woman takes orders from the twenty bus passengers, road crew workers, and a smattering of soldiers. The menu consists of stewed beef, fried fish, or fatty pork rinds. Don Alfonso declines my invitation for breakfast. He does not feel hungry, and, anyway, doctors have warned him to watch his cholesterol. Despite being nauseous on the bus, I feel hungry. I order the rinds and sugary coffee. It takes a long time to come. I worry Don Alfonso and I might miss the bus. But there is time because the driver, having brought a busload of passengers, eats without paying. When the food arrives, Don Alfonso pokes me in the ribs:

“Too much cholesterol.”

I snap back, “Leave me alone, I can eat what I want.”

The man beside us has fatty pork rinds too. He carefully peels away the fat, placing small hunks on his plate. I eat all my rinds, but leave the rice and fried plantain. The restaurant’s owners earns a living serving meals for drivers and passengers making the trip over the Andes from Quibdó to Medellín and the other way around. Migrant miners, loggers, and truckers from interior departments on their way to Quibdó stop here for food. Buses leaving the Chocó and heading over the Andes stop for breakfast. Named for its physical location, about 18 kilometers from Antioquian border in the upper limits of the Atrato River, the restaurant is in the Chocó but near Antioquia. It is remote, far from Quibdó and Medellín, an in-between space. After passing through some settlements beside the road, where soldiers drink hot drinks and chat on cellphones, our bus leaves the Chocó and enters Antioquia proper. The road snaps back and forth in sharp bends and the landscape changes.

Row after row of neatly planted coffee bushes climb up both sides of the steep valley. Here on the eastern slopes of the Andes, coffee bushes have replaced the forests of

the western slopes of the Andes. The contrast between the rainforest and the regimented neatness of this landscape is striking.

Don Alfonso explains, “These mountains give money.”

To explain his comment on how much money the coffee plants represents, he points to a large empty square surrounded by coffee plants. He calls it “raw bush.” Beside the empty space, plants cram together tightly, the earth around them colored dark black. The soil color comes from the small mounds of composting coffee fruit flesh used as mulch. Don Alfonso describes the two coffee picking seasons, the changes of microclimate depending on the altitude, the farming techniques coffee growers use, the two periods of fertilization, the way to get plants ready, and how to pick them when they bear fruit. He moved for twenty years back and forth between the village and the coffee region, following the growing and harvest season picking and tending plants. It is a far cry from the slash and mulch agriculture on his family’s lot on the river. He worked for a friend who had bought a coffee farm in the 1980s with money made in drug trafficking. They had been friends since the 1950s when they first spent a season picking coffee together.

As a young man not even eighteen, Don Alfonso left the village to look for odd jobs work and adventure. At the time, Colombia suffered rural violence during which hundreds of thousands of rural peasants lost their lives. He told me that he and his friend found murdered swollen bodies hidden in rows of coffee in the Valley of Cauca. They both fled to Buenaventura on the Pacific to find safety. Don Alfonso told me this watching television in the village.

During October 2011, Colombia’s seven o’clock evening news showed non-stop coverage of the war in Libya and the hunt for Muammar Gaddafi. People talked about how dangerous the war in Libya looked, with its bombings, and guns. Watching the news in

Pedro's front room, Don Alfonso asked me about Libya's location. I mumbled something about the Mediterranean, North Africa, somewhere west of Saudi Arabia near Egypt.

He thought for a bit and said, "I've been there."

"Where?"

"Saudi Arabia."

"What?"

He explained about the coffee picking as a young man with a friend and going to Buenaventura. There, in Colombia's main Pacific port, his friend found a job on a merchant ship. Don Alfonso stowed away till they had travelled out to sea where he too found a job. He said the boat travelled to many places, including Saudi Arabia.

I pressed for more details.

He deflected my question, and cracked a joke about women in Saudi Arabia.

"You knew someone loved you," he explained, "by the way she wore her veil."

He made a motion covering his mouth. But, he complained, he could never understand the women and he did not enjoy Saudi Arabia. After working on the boat for two years, they came back to Colombia.

Almost two years later, after talking to him about a draft of this chapter, I tried to bring up the trip again—to get more details.

"What was Saudi Arabia like in the 1950s?"

Slightly annoyed, again he rebuffed my inquiry, "Why such interest Daniel?"

He left the village at eighteen and came back at twenty-one. Over the next fifty years, Don Alfonso travelled to the coffee regions working as an agricultural laborer. On one of those trips, he told me he met his wife. She was a young *paisa* woman who came back with him to the village. She died a couple years before I met him.

He grinned and motioning with a hand as he remembered her, “A true *paisa*. Her long straight hair that fell down to her waist.”

“We even had white children, one of them was a police officer in Medellín.”

In the 1980s, his travelling companion on the Buenaventura trip, who was also a *paisa*, made money in narcotics and bought a coffee farm. Don Alfonso told me he often went and worked for his friend on the way to Medellín. We had planned to go to that farm, before both of us got ill. I could not tell if what Don Alfonso described as “friendship” represented warmth between old travelling companions, or reflected a more complex relation of worker and employer.

Driving into Medellín, after a long bus ride, we arrive to the bus terminal. Don Alfonso calls his daughter-in-law on his battered cellphone. He asks her if she has cooked dinner. She must have replied no, as he tells me she will cook something. She owes Don Alfonso three months rent. This is another reason for the trip: Don Alfonso wants to collect overdue rent from his son and daughter-in-law. They live in a small house in Medellín that Don Alfonso owns. He built the house with his share of the gold he received when he let excavators on to his family mine three years ago. His son pays him roughly \$80 a month to rent a small apartment. He also takes care of the building for Don Alfonso, who spends most of his time in the village gardening and mining.

Our plan involves spending as little money as possible. If we do not watch expenses on the trip, we will lose money, rather than make it. But, Don Alfonso and I start off badly. The bus ticket from Quibdó to Medellín costs \$33. Don Alfonso complains of the expense. I bought the faster more expensive route direct from Quibdó to Medellín. The second route, via Pereira the capital of the neighboring department of Risaralda, costs a little less. To get better seats, Don Alfonso buys a return ticket on arrival. The route

from Medellín to Pereira and then Pereira to Quibdó takes longer and means travelling over night. As he buys the tickets, Don Alfonso, tells me that I can pay for the trip to Medellín while he will pay for the return tickets. Of course, I realize I will pay more, but accept his offer with good grace because it was my fault in the first place. The bus leaves at eleven o'clock in the evening. The two of us will spend the night in Medellín. We plan to go shopping all day the next day, and then leave on the over night bus. To get to Don Alfonso's house, we take a small city bus from the terminal to the city center. From there we will take another bus north towards where he lives.

As we walk across a large park in the center of Medellín, to catch the next bus, I notice Christmas lights hang everywhere. Don Alfonso smiles and makes a quick detour to ask the price of the multi-colored decorations. He says the cheap, bright, and festive plastic tube lights will sell well in the village. Tomorrow he will buy some in "The Hole."

The Hole, known as "*El Hueco*" encompasses the dense commercial streets in Medellín's center, where hundreds of small stores and vendors sell everything imaginable. Don Alfonso has come to shop there. It's the cheapest place Don Alfonso knows to buy merchandize in bulk packages. The plan for tomorrow is shopping. Today, I run to keep up with him as he walks quickly to catch a bus. After an hour heading north during Medellín's rush hour, our bus arrives to his house well after dark.

The house seems more humble than his descriptions had led me to believe when we had first planned the trip. I am slightly disappointed, yet not surprised. The neighborhood was built over a few years as an invasion. The house remains unfinished; it's walls bare showing its made of hollow red bricks. Dob Alonso tells me he hopes to smooth the walls with cement and paint them a pastel color. He plans to invest more money from the mine in the house, and to live there on the second story when he cannot

live in the village by himself anymore. The house has two apartments on the ground floor: one for his son, daughter-in-law, and their three kids, the other for a nephew from the village. Don Alfonso's nephew had gone back to the village for three months to make sure he received a share of Esteban's mine, which two excavators had started to work. Don Alfonso and I sleep in his absent nephew's cramped apartment.

His daughter-in-law has lights strung with tinsel hanging on her small three-room apartment's wall. His son fixes another set of lights. He first fiddles with one broken electrical regulator box, then giving up, delicately strings the lights' wires together to bypass the defective part. Don Alfonso jokes he will take the repaired lights to the village to sell. The news comes on television. Don Alfonso and I eat the food his daughter-in-law cooked for us: liver and onions with margarine slathered cornbread.

I talk with Don Alfonso's son. He left the village for Medellín in 2004 because of violence and lack of work. He found a job building bridges. He leaves to start at five o'clock in the morning, and returns home at eight o'clock at night. He complains that he has to go build the bridge until New Year's Eve, and then only gets two days off before taking up another contract to build a bridge a day's bus trip away. He earns the minimum wage, has to work overtime on holidays and Sundays, and worries he might lose his job if he does not go, if he refuses overtime, or if he does not travel. After the news, Don Alfonso and I go to sleep.

Next morning, Don Alfonso and I take a bus downtown, and walking the last twenty minutes. Street vendors fill The Hole selling coffee, gum, sweets, clothing, magazines, books, wallets, antiques, knick-knacks, and hundreds of other things. Men and women buy in the street, and in enclosed malls packed with stores. Stores often come together. A street selling nothing but shoes, then beside it, another that sells only

cookware. Don Alfonso's task: strike a tough bargain with sellers to buy merchandize that he thinks he can sell in the village for more than it costs him to buy. He worries people will charge him more if I—“a *Mister*,”¹—go with him.

While I go to the bank and to buy a football, he goes shopping.

On his invitation, we meet for lunch. Then we go to a store to pick up what he bought. Cheap colored Christmas ornaments fill one wall of the store. At the back are the products he has bought and already paid for: two large plastic black bags. The bags sit beside piles of identical packages. Shelves up to the ceiling are full of similar bags. He needs one last item: small, silver foil packs of single use shampoo. He cannot get the price he wants. He tells the people that he “buys in bulk” and should get a discount. They refuse. Don Alfonso hauls the bags outside—without the shampoo—and together we catch a yellow taxicab to the bus terminal to head back to Quibdó via Pereira.

I sit up front, Don Alfonso behind me with his bags. A woman drives our taxi. I have only met two women taxi drivers in Colombia, and I ask her about it. She tells me the company she works for has five hundred male and three female drivers. Intrigued, Don Alfonso asks if she works nights. She says no, but that she works a lot to pay for her car. She tells us a family friend lent her money, but she only has to pay back \$25 a day, and the loan only has a small interest. Thinking about my interest free loan to Don Alfonso, I ask her about the “drop by drop,” or *gota a gota*, loans. “Do you have one?”

“No! With those, the payments keep going up, first \$25 a day, then \$30, then \$35. Nobody can ever pay them off.”

¹ I discuss Don Alfonso's use of “*Mister*” in Chapter 9.

She explains. Before she started to drive a taxi regularly she worked in clothing design for twenty years. Medellín has a fashion industry. She designed and made clothes to sell in The Hole. Stressful, she said, but she liked it. She did it all: design the pattern, buy the material, provide instructions to the seamstress, make sure the workers made the clothes to the right specifications, deliver the clothes to the shops, solve problems, and deal with buyers and suppliers. She complained that she had nothing to show for it but an unpaid for taxi bought on borrowed money.

From the back seat, Don Alfonso agreed, telling us he worked in coffee as a day laborer all of his life. He complains he too has nothing to show for it. He says, “You never get ahead”

She went on, “It seems harder today. There’s a lot less money circulating than before. The government has been cracking down on coca and mining. People have no money to buy anything. I have a friend who brings t-shirts in from Panama. Clothes cost less money there. In Panama people make it on boats. The bosses pay them badly; they don’t have to pay taxes. They get no time off and have no benefits. How can people compete with that? But, I ask you do their clothes have better quality? My friend brings it in through Buenaventura. The clothes sell cheaply and now I drive a taxi.”

I ask her about buying in The Hole to sell in their hometowns, “Why do so many people do it?”

Ignoring my question, she tells Don Alfonso, “You should go buy jeans in the south of Medellín. Jeans cost less there. They will put whatever logo you want on the jeans: Diesel, Levi, and Tommy, whatever. You can buy jeans for \$10, and sell them for \$35.”

The mention of imports of tax-free clothes from Panama intrigues me. The hustle

can be lucrative. Enough, she implies to keep people like her designing clothes in Medellín.

I don't have time to ask anything else. Don Alfonso simply takes her card and says that he will go buy jeans one day. She drops us off at the Medellín Bus Terminal, where the two of us wait for the bus to Quibdó via Pereira.

Don Alfonso rests on the bench in the terminal to wait. He unpacks and repacks the two large, black, garbage bags. The packages of razors, radios, batteries, soap, and salt all spill out. He places everything into little plastic bags and redistributes them into his backpack, shoulder bag, and large striped carry all. He carefully packs his bags to make them look like normal luggage: with no merchandize. When he finishes, his luggage looks inconspicuous. He tells me he does this for safety. To prevent robbers and not raise suspicion from the bored soldiers on the highway who stop buses heading into the Chocó.

He does not want to travel with one big bag of merchandize. "It is too dangerous," he says, "It make you a target."

Other people seem less concerned than he is. Large sacks, in bright colors, wait for bus assistants to load them onto bus roofs for the trip in all directions. Many people buy in Medellín to take home to sell just like Don Alfonso. His hustle is one many people use.

Three hours later, as our bus leaves Medellín, I hope to fall asleep in my window seat, but cannot because I listen to a young boy scream. Over the course of the bus trip, I learn the child has a broken leg. He cries out in pain, moaning, and writhing. The buses' every twist makes his agony worse. A passenger yells to the child's mother that she should take him to a hospital.

"I did, in Medellín. They sent us back to Quibdó," she snaps back.

A medical trip, his mother had taken him to a hospital in Colombia's second

largest city, but now she had to go back to the Chocó on the bus. I see there is nothing to be done on a highway between two cities at night. So, take two travel sickness pills to sleep.

I wake up groggy at seven in the morning. A landslide has blocked the highway; trapping our bus behind a long line of other buses, trucks, and private cars in the San Juan valley, somewhere between Pereira and Quibdó, just before the Chocó's last Afro-descendant town of Santa Cecilia.

Don Alfonso and I pace back and forth all afternoon waiting for something to happen, grateful for the stretch, worried the food costs from the delay will make our trip uneconomical. By evening, machinery has slowly cut a track through the side of the large hill that had fallen on the road, enough to let cars and buses travel over. When the two of us get to Quibdó late that night, almost 24-hours after we left Medellín, I feel grateful for the landslide. The FARC guerrilla controls that part of the highway. Two weeks later, a friend told me the guerrilla stopped his bus, and told the passengers to dismount. They set the bus on fire, and murdered the driver. He said the bus company had not paid the guerrilla's tax that month. The landslide that trapped us lay almost due south of the restaurant where our bus had stopped for breakfast two days before. I mention the bus burning, the landslide, and the restaurant for two reasons. First, this shopping trip shows one part of how the hustle which Don Alfonso uses to make a living through migration. Second, our route, which took us from Quibdó, to Medellín, to Pereira, and back Quibdó, marks a frontier.

The Shopping Trip as a Hustle

Turning to making a living. I described the soldiers on the road between Medellín and Quibdó because Don Alfonso's glanced at them with ambivalence. I had seen his look at the soldiers drinking hot drinks and talking on cell phones as fearful. Throughout rural Colombia young men in military uniforms casually carrying assault rifles are common enough. Traveling on a public bus, they mostly wave us on. However, in isolated areas between towns, soldiers stop public buses at checkpoints to review identity cards of passengers, ask people their business, and look through luggage. While my own experiences of these moments seemed nerve racking, my fear had little foundation: I had the correct identification, a Canadian passport with visa, an accent, and money. Don Alfonso had his paperwork in order, but no passport, the wrong accent, and no money. His worry came from his luggage of tightly wrapped packages.

After the landslide, soldiers stopped our bus. As Don Alfonso left his seat to go outside and be patted down for weapons, he pushed his bags further under the seat in front of us, anxious the soldiers might make him open them up. They could have made him unpack his bags in public, which would lead to an inconvenience of having to repack. Worse, they might have accused him of transporting razors for the guerrilla—or some other trumped up charge to demand a bribe. He worried that if he had unpacked he would have to pay a bribe to keep his luggage. Or, worse, it would have let others know that he had merchandize worth robbing. Such an eventuality would have made the trip economies disastrous—losing money.

Two years after this trip, chatting with Don Alfonso while he rested on hammock in the late afternoon shade in the village, after I had asked him about Saudi Arabia a second time, our conversation returned to that trip. He said he would never do any more

trips to Medellín or Pereira.

“I’m too old and slow.”

He explained the last time he went the trip went wrong. As he left Medellín, someone robbed him of the stock he had bought. They took all merchandize and all his money. He returned to the village with nothing. While his shopping trips often brought risks, they had once been a way for Don Alfonso to make a living outside of his village, but now he had stopped making them.

The trip shows creative ways of making a living: Don Alfonso’s has a fixed, when he rents his house in Medellín and makes money from his son. He had a lifetime of moving between village and city in his hustle; he spent more than a decade working as a migrant coffee picker; he travelled to Saudi Arabia as a ship’s boy; and made money in circuits of migration. Like the *paisas* in the Chocó, he found work by migrating. Like many people, he leaves to hustle some money, to buy for trade, to work in coffee, maybe to build in a house; but unlike many, he always came back. He returned to the village, where with fewer expenses he gardened his family lots, he saved money, and he lived from his *pan coger*. At home he makes a living other ways. He works an artisanal gold mine at his family mine. He has an extensive garden with plantain, lime, avocado, and fruit trees. He has an herb garden outside his kitchen door. He grows dark brown, sweet, borojó (*Alibertia patinói*) fruit that he sells to his nephew in town who sells it to visiting truckers who arrive weekly and ship it to the Caribbean city of Barranquilla. To survive he has diverse strategies combining fixed rural subsistence and urban rents with migration.

Don Alfonso’s travels show one of many thousands of trips made by Afro-descendants to make a living migrating over the Andes looking for work. Don Alfonso’s son works in construction in the city and follows bridge building contracts

throughout the country. The woman taxi driver, who complained about the difficulty she had paying for her taxicab, worked making clothes until tax-free clothes imported from Panama ended that. The money that Don Alfonso's friend made in drug trafficking networks allowed him to buy a coffee farm. Our trip, like these others, indexes these forms of moneymaking that involve moving from rural areas to urban ones, and back. It shows local, regional, and transnational connections as part of these diverse survival strategies.

American anthropologist Norman E. Whitten (1965, 1974) identifies shifting livelihood strategies that combine export oriented extraction and subsistence as characteristic of the Pacific. Writing about the town of San Lorenzo, in the north of Ecuador on the Pacific lowland littoral area that extends south from the San Juan River, Whitten describes the region's characterized by "boom-and-bust" export cycles combined with a subsistence economy. People complemented their own subsistence with vegetable ivory (*tagua*) and rubber at the beginning of the twentieth century, then in lumber, and gold. Whitten and Colombian anthropologist Nina S. Friedeman (1974) tackle these economic strategies of shifting from subsistence economy of fishing, agriculture, gathering, and gardening and export oriented extraction and migration. Arturo Escobar (2008, pp. 80–85) discusses strategies that people working on African palm plantations or shrimp farms use. Jaime Arocha describes the fast money that arrived into the Pacific littoral with mining and shrimp investments (Arocha, 2004). Michael Taussig (1977, 1980) writes on the commodity fetishism and the domestic workers (Rubo and Taussig, 1977) points to the ways that people make a living drawing on diverse strategies. Wade (1993) has two chapters that highlight how people from the Chocó travel

to Medellín as domestic workers, as construction workers, and to sell food and drink on the street (1993, p. 182).²

While life chances and luck constrain these strategies for many people, as forced displacement and natural disasters mean often people have little choice in migrating, sometimes they do. Some villagers from the Chocó headed to southern regions of the country to visit family and pick coca for a season or two before coming home; others move to the city or towns because the threat of violence meant they could not come back to tend gardens. While he took advantage of my ability to buy a bus ticket to make a small profit selling small goods in the village, Don Alfonso also worried about costs, getting stopped by police, and getting robbed. Although he has a house in the city that pays him a small rent, he worried about the ownership papers from the informal purchase agreement.³

For Afro-descendants, migration to other areas of Colombia to find work or make money is common. People leave and return. The mother of the four brothers that I described swimming in pits in the ground in Chapter 2 spends her time working as a cook in the Lower Cauca. The boys' great aunt, who looks after them, worked as a trained nurse in another municipality. Her cousin spent the 1980s driving a speedboat from Colombia to Panama moving people and goods. Young women and men leave for towns and cities to find employment as domestic workers for middle class families, in construction, or as security guards. Others leave their homes to finish high school,

² These processes were not unique to the Chocó, and there exists a broader literature on informal economies, labor strategies, forced displacement, and migration in Latin America more broadly. See for example de Soto, 2002 and Hart 1973.

³ This topic of purchase agreements in Colombia is one I would like to consider more, but I do not do so do not for reasons of time.

university, and do military or police service. I spoke with a middle-aged man about excavators on his family land. He told me he had worked as a logger in the Amazon, picked coca in the south, and then come back home to his village to bring the excavators to get his gold. Moving between the Chocó and the coffee regions, between the Pacific's forests and the city, and even further afield, shows labor networks and the ways that people make a living have been around for a long time in combination with traditional cultivation practices. Drawing out Don Alfonso's strategies and the people and goods move across Colombia link the Chocó to the Antioquia through the hustle. Migrants move Colombia in complex bidirectional networks of labor, commerce, and trade. Now, I turn back to the route demarcated by our bus trip.

The Frontier Between the Highways

I discuss the bus route in order to draw attention to a space between the highways and the area that our bus travelled around. Of the two roads that connect the Chocó to the Andean interior, one follows the Atrato River northeast from Quibdó to Antioquia on the way to Medellín. The other follows the San Juan River west to Risaralda and Pereira. Both climb through the wet rainforests up and over the eastern side of the Andean mountains into the coffee region. Almost all the food, except for the plantain and other crops that come up the Atrato, commercial goods, and gasoline imported to the Chocó's Atrato and the San Juan regions travel along these roads.

I spent some time describing the trip and where our bus stopped to eat and the landslide because these two locations mark an important space. The two locations where our bus stopped—first for breakfast on the way to Medellín on secondly where the

landslide blocked our bus on the way back—lie on a north south axis which crosses the forest and mountains between the two highways. It intersects the two roads leaving and entering the Chocó and cuts through the upper reaches of the Andágueda River that flows between the headwaters of the Atrato River and the San Juan River.

On the Medellín to Quibdó road where we stopped, the restaurant has a small store that sells salt, oil, flashlights, dried breads, batteries, candies, and salt crackers to people living in Indigenous settlements along the highway road. On the Pereira to Quibdó road the landslide shows how heavy rainfall can make transport precarious. The place where the landslide occurred is the entrance to the Indigenous reservations of the Upper Andágueda. From that entrance, trails connect the highway to villages in the forests of the Upper Andágueda. I draw attention to this area as a geographically, socially, politically, and economically constructed frontier.

First, the headwaters of the Andágueda River encompass three departments. Taking as the point the source of the Andágueda River, where the political boundaries intersect: the Chocó lies to the west, Risaralda to the southeast, and Antioquia to the northeast. The Andágueda River flows from this tri-departmental intersection high on the eastern slopes of the Andes' western range. The area then between the highways, which are accessed by the trails from where our bus stopped, lies within the frontier.

American Anthropologist Deborah Poole (1987) uses the term frontier to refer to “any socially constructed relation of social difference, and specifically to the ways in which this imagined relation of (hierarchical) difference or exclusion is encoded into the territorial or geographic identity of a group of people” (1987, p. 369). I use frontier to reference the populations living in the territorial limits between the roads where the three departments meet, the racial differences, and the ways this area can be understood as the

limits of the three departments and a place ripe for resource extraction accompanied by violence. The road that Don Alfonso and I travel does not simply mark an area that people travel through seeking their fortunes in the Chocó or seeking a livelihood in the interior. The highway also marks a region with a complex racial past whose human population reflects inter-ethnic settlement patterns of Indigenous people, Afro-descendants, and *paisas*.

This frontier space signals *paisas* who live in the coffee lands, Indigenous people in the upper reaches of the Andágueda River and tributaries of the Atrato River, and Afro-descendant villages who live on the middle and lower reaches of the Andágueda River and the lower reaches of the Capá River and the Tumbutumbudo River, both tributaries of the Atrato River. While I began with the soldiers to mark Don Alfonso's discomfort, I also note the military's presence on those road networks. The young men in military greens carrying assault weapons show the ambiguous state presence.

The Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda as a Frontier

It is said that the history of peoples who have a history is the history of class struggle. It might be said with at least as much truthfulness, that the history of peoples without history is the history of their struggle against the State.

Pierre Clastres, 1989, *Society Against the State*

French anthropologist Pierre Clastres (1989) worked with the Guayaki Indigenous people in Paraguay's northwest Amazonian frontier with Brazil and Argentina. His insights help to understand the frontier where the Chocó, Risaralda, and Antioquia intersect. Clastres explores politics and power in stateless societies. He argues that descriptions of Amazonian peoples as an ancient group who had never developed agriculture, states, and

as unconnected to the outside world misses the ways they abandoned village living and agriculture were responses to external factors. These factors included political power, colonization, conquest, disease, and forced labor. Clastres describes state living not as an evolutionary result of human civilization, but argues the Guayaki's subsistence were ways of warding off incorporation into coercive states.

Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1992) discuss the Southern African borderlands of the Kalahari Desert. They argue that studying the social composition of this space involves not isolation but connections. They look not at cores and peripheries, but at connections between places. They explore the area, "world of culturally, socially, and economically interconnected and interdependent spaces" (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992, p. 16). They argue that anthropologists took "tribes," "peoples," and "territories" as cultural units, and had a tendency to naturalize states, territories, and people. They criticize descriptions of cultures as static and unchanging in ways that describe mobile connected peoples as residents of a specific territory. For example, they unpack anthropological perspectives on the !Kung, inhabitants of Kalahari Desert, as living examples of "antiquity," whose livelihood practices revealed precisely how the !Kung lived for centuries (1981 in Gupta and Ferguson, 1992, pp. 14-15). They cite Pratt (1986) who asks: "What picture of the !Kung would one draw if instead of defining them as survivors of the stone age and a delicate and complex adaptation to the Kalahari desert, one looked at them as survivors of capitalist expansion, and a delicate and complex adaptation to three centuries of violence and intimidation?" (Pratt, 1986, p. 49 in Gupta and Ferguson, 1992, p. 15). They take up Wilmsen (1989, in Gupta and Ferguson, 1992), who argues that we to understand it as part of deadly process of contact with the West and with state building projects. Wilmsen argued the !Kung's supposed egalitarian

classlessness resulted from incorporation into a broader underclass within wider social formation (Wilmsen in Gupta and Ferguson, 1992, p. 16).

On states, political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott (2009) has similar observations. He takes up Clastres and examines the state building in the lands above three hundred meters in Southeast Asia. Scott calls this *Zomia*, an area that encompasses the Central Highlands of Vietnam, Laos, Burma, Thailand, India, Cambodia, and four provinces in South China (2009). In those countries' lowland areas, residents describe hill people as primitive, tribal, backward, forerunners to states. Scott describes runaway, fugitive, maroon communities, who, for centuries, have resisted valley based state making projects that brought slavery, conscription, taxes, forced labor, epidemics, and war (2009, p. x). In Scott's perspective, these people's survival strategy relied on evading state incursions and putting themselves beyond the reach of the state. Scott argues that rather than the state leaving people behind, people ran away from states. Their livelihoods became not impoverished forms of state government or a living history, but developed as a result of state colonization projects. Livelihood strategies, forms of social organizations, political ideologies, and oral cultures kept valley states at arms length. Rather than archaic remnants of people left behind by states, hill people adopted techniques to prevent incorporation by nearby states (Scott, 2009, pp. x-26). Scott puts self-governing peoples side by side with state-governed peoples, complicates notions of backward and modern, barbarian and civilized, and—citing Eric Wolf (1982)—people without and people with history (Scott, 2009, p. 2).

Scott develops the notion of “zones of refuge,” arguing that people displaced to the hinterlands and ran away from states to the ungoverned frontier. Along with Clastres and Gupta and Ferguson, Scott complicates prevailing assumptions of a civilization

abandoning primeval hill people; rather it was they who abandoned civilization. “Zomia” becomes a zone of refuge, or a “shatter zone,” populated by the “human shards” of people seeking refuge from bloody state formations (Scott, 2009, p. 7). The people who fled state building projects lived as fugitive, transient peoples whose livelihoods relied on foraging, hunting, swidden agriculture, and fishing. This made their economic strategies impossible for the states to levy taxes or expropriate a surplus (Scott, 2009, p. 9).

Thinking with this notion helps to understand the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda’s past of inter-ethnic settlement.

Scott notes the idea of shatter zones could apply to other regions around the world. For example, it could apply to Central Africa where people fled slave raiders. Or, the New World Indigenous communities and Afro-descendant runaway slaves who fled Spanish colonization and moved to regions with the least cultivable lands in the hot and humid lowlands of the Amazon and the Pacific (Scott, 2009, p. 13). I could describe much of Colombia as a contemporary and historic shatter zone. The Guajira peninsula between Colombia and Venezuela is a region where the Spanish colonial and later republican governments were unable to subdue the Indigenous populations, who retreated to the dry coastal desert and survived on smuggling for hundreds of years (e.g. Grahn, 1997).

Afro-descendant maroon communities in the Magdalena River valley escaped from Cartagena’s slave ports to form free *palenqueros* on the Magdalena River (e.g. Fals-Borda, 2002). The mid twentieth century peasant frontier expansion in the southern regions of Colombia after violence in the 1950s provides another example of people escaping rural violence by moving towards the Amazon region (Molano, 1987; Ramírez, 2011). While I do not have archival or ethnographic material to trace the racialized composition of this tri-departmental frontier of the Upper Andágueda and Upper Atrato in great detail,

thinking with these notions of shatter zones and subsistence strategies against “the state”, moving away from the national one, as well as municipal and departmental, proves useful insight to describe the region’s history of settlement.

In this, and many areas of the Colombian Pacific, racial histories of settlement and state formation link territory and place in the Upper Atrato. In the lower reaches of the rivers and the urban areas, Afro-descendants make up most of the population, with some *paisa* settlers controlling commerce, buying gold and lumber, or engaging in itinerant extractive labor. Traveling into the mountains up the Andágueda and Atrato, the populations change and becomes Indigenous. These racialized histories of settlement have shaped this frontier between the Chocó, Antioquia, and Risaralda. Across the Pacific, small Afro-descendant settlements populate lower reaches of the rivers flowing from the Andes and Indigenous people populate their headwaters. Over the mountains, *paisa* settlers live in the coffee valleys of Antioquia and Risaralda. I turn to these three populations in the Upper Atrato River and Upper Andágueda River frontier.

Race, Displacement, and Settlement

At ninety-six, Gabriel describes himself as an old man, an invalid. He had polio as a child, the disease left him unable to walk, his legs twisted, and gnarled. He moved around a lot, displaced by flashfloods in 1936 and the 1990s, and by periods of violence in 1948 and the early 2000s. He carefully wrote down his memoirs in a notebook. While he aimed at an universalistic account of his village—in a manner that mixed Christopher Columbus, with Colombian politician Jorge Eliécer Gaitán assassination in 1948, to the present—his hand written, unpublished, unedited, and repetitive “Memories of a

[Villager]” describe the settlement of the village. While there is great literature on memory in Colombia (e.g. Riaño-Alcalá, 2002, 2006), I dwell on his ‘memories’ as a written oral history. But, taking his account on its face value, one brief excerpt:

Who founded my family? In the year 1890, four *paisa* brothers with the names: Pablo, Juan de Mecio, José Lizardo, and Silvestres came to the Chocó from Medellín, Antioquia. The four brothers fled in search of a refuge and to save their lives because of a war. Their parents died in the war, but in Quibdó they realized the river had land, which a family in Cartagena owned. On that land, there existed a mining claim. They arrived on the land after the Spanish came. They paid for the mining claim in Quibdó, and the gold miners had to pay to work the mines. The family from Cartagena sold that land to the four brothers, one of them being my grandfather.

Gabriel explains that four brothers fled Medellín in 1890 seeking refuge, from war and family tragedy, to this river. The brothers bought mining rights on the river, married Afro-descendant women, had children, and built the village. His vision of the village’s founding speaks to the river’s settlement by Afro-descendants and *paisa* migrants from the Andean interior. The male *paisa* settlers’ arrival implies two histories: the obvious one of their presence and the second one of the gendered relations with Afro-descendant women they married who already lived in the area. Turning to the latter first, I reflect on the Afro-descendant settlement in the Colombian Pacific.

Afro-descendant Settlement

Most accounts agree escaped slaves on the mining frontier of the Chocó played a role in the population of the Choco. Here, like the broader Pacific, Spanish colonial power shaped Afro-descendant and Indigenous settlements. Peter Wade (1993, p. 101) speculates that Afro-descendants scattered to the Chocó’s remoter regions living in the jungle and isolated from colonial society to make detection by the Spanish harder (e.g.

Wade, 1993, p. 101; Whitten 1974, p. 50; Cordoba 1983; Atencio Babilonia 1973, pp. 88–90; Friedemann, 1977). Arturo Escobar (2008, p. 42) summarizes the literature on the settlement patterns on the Pacific lowlands, and the region's rivers, forest, and further south the Pacific littoral to reach a similar conclusion. German Colmenares (1979) highlights the slave-owners in the Andean regions and gold mining in the Pacific (see Sharp, 1976). French historian Aprile-Gnisset (1993) describes two periods of settlement. A first cycle of settlement by Indigenous groups, and a second by slaves and former slaves as the Spanish expanded their influence throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Sharp, 1970, p. 24). Colombian Mario Diego Romero (1995, 1997) shows the importance of the slave population expansion and the mining frontier as slaves and free blacks worked their own mines. During the expansion of the slave-mining frontier, the Spanish forced Indigenous groups to provide food and supplies to the enslaved Afro-descendant population (Aprile-Gnisset, 1993, pp. 12–13). Orián Jiménez (2004) explores the agricultural and mining regions of the headwaters of the Atrato, San Juan, and Baudó Rivers. Freed blacks settlers moved throughout the rivers cultivating plantain, yuca, and corn expanding through the territory (West, 1952). Meza Ramírez (2002) stresses the importance of mines in the Chocó, and the ways liberation from slavery movements became settlement strategies (Meza Ramírez, 2002, pp. 86–88). The rivers provided routes into the jungles where runaway slaves could disappear in out-of-the-way frontier areas (see Sharp, 1983, p. 23 in Meza Ramírez, 2010, p. 88). This pushed Indigenous people further up river.

Indigenous Settlement

Caroline Williams (2004) provides an excellent and detailed colonial account of state, church, and indigenous relations in the Chocó offers insights about the period from 1510 to 1755. Working on the Capá and Andágueda River's region of Lloró, French anthropologist Anne-Marie Losonczy (2004, p. 51; 2006) notes a similar scattering. Losonczy describes small, spread out populations with enormous cultural and linguistic diversity, permanent states of war, and a succession of incursions and prosecutions by the Spanish (Losonczy, 2004, p. 58). Losonczy (2004, 2006) writes about the tributaries of the Capá River intersects with the territory of the Upper Atrato and Andágueda. Her analysis supports the notion of this area as a "shatter zone." She notes the Chocó status as one of the last areas colonized by the Spanish because of the difficult climate, landscape, fast rivers, and made possible a strong resistance from Indigenous population (Losonczy 2004 p. 58). Describing the region's settlement, rebellions, conflicts, disobedience, and escapes to remote parts of the jungle created autonomous areas of exclusion (2004, p. 55). The closeness of the state, the church, and mining meant Indigenous people responded with constant war against the colonial powers and by fleeing to more and more spread out settlements in remoter areas in the river's headwaters (Losonczy, 2006, p. 61). In the late nineteenth century, the contemporary patterns stabilized as Afro-descendant people settled near mines and mining centers in the lower reaches of the rivers, while Indigenous groups settled in river headwaters (Losonczy, 2006, p. 65-68). Across the Chocó, Indigenous groups occupy the most remote and highest reaches of the Upper Baudó, the Lower and Upper Atrato, and the Upper Andágueda. On the Andágueda, Losonczy argues the late nineteenth century expansion saw a swing between dispersion and isolation as small groups lived in areas where the state and church did not have a presence. This changed though as

the state moved in. After failures to start a rubber boom at the beginning of the twentieth century, missionary groups created residential schools for children in the Upper Andágueda, separated people by force, Christianized their children, and destroyed traditional practices (Losonczy, 2006, p. 65-68). This brought a *paisa* presence to the region and connected the area to the region on the other side of the western Andes.

Paisa Settlement

Nancy Appelbaum (2003) writes about race and regional colonization of Rio Sucio, Caldas, describes the mixed racial histories in a coffee town in the region with “white,” “black,” and “Indian” populations (Appelbaum, 2003, p. 4). While not about the tri-department area encompassing the space between the two-highways, her book covers the settlement and colonization in Rio Sucio located in the valley between the western Andes and the Cauca River. Describing the racial origins of the region (2003, p. 11), she notes the accounts of Antioquian settlement and colonization of this region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and developed as elites from the region’s administrative center in the Cauca encouraged Antioquian peasant settlers (Appelbaum, 2003, p. 14). Repeated waves of peasant settlements to the agricultural frontiers in the nineteenth and twentieth century played a role in the coffee colonization of the Western Andes (see Appelbaum, 2003). Historian Catherine LeGrande (1986) points to the complexity of this coffee expansion and the roles of municipal, departmental and national states, some of which pushed people and some of which encouraged them in. Coffee settlers or colonists moved south from the Antioquia reshaping the landscape and creating the coffee regions Don Alfonso and I travelled through and where he worked for many years. The literature stresses

the positive sense of the term *colonización* in, for example James Parsons' writing on Western Antioquia's colonization (1968). Appelbaum (2014, pp. 11–15) draws on the ambiguity in the more contemporary English use of “colonization” to mean a complex ambiguous racial, economic, and cultural process. Colombian historian Mary Roldán (2002, p. 41) analyzes mid twentieth century Antioquia and highlights the role of incipient regional state building alongside concepts of race. Roldán points to the racial and cultural part of Antioquian settlement, and how settlers imposed a *paisa* or *antioqueño* identity at the limits of Antioquian territory.

This brief discussion Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and *paisa* settlement in the area that our bus route loops in the headwaters of the Andágueda River and the borderlands of the three departments provides insight onto the role of the departmental and national states. While not perfectly applicable because of the state's role in expanding the coffee frontier, Scott's notion of a shatter zone populated by people running away from the state applies to the settlement patterns of Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and *paisas* in the Chocó. They fled respectively slavery, the church, and Andean violence. Together, they created a human geography of people, who escaped coercive state power, ran away from forced slavery, gold mine gangs, and residential schools, to areas where they could live at the limits of state power. This describes the human geography of the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda River and this frontier as a shatter zone.⁴

If the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda are historical shatter zones,

⁴ As we see in Chapter 7, the push of small-scale *paisa* gold miners today, moving further and further into the Chocó expelled by state policies that shut down their illegal mines in the Lower Cauca could be seen as a similar process of shattering.

displacement has a contemporary history as well. People displaced from there because of the war, miners, coca growers, and armed actors moving into the area. Colombia itself has one of the highest levels of internal displacement in the world at over 4 million people (CODHES, 2011). The Chocó is one of the worst affected departments. In the 1990s, the imposition of violence through the Operation Genesis in the Lower Atrato brought state sponsored, monoculture, African palm plantations, and lumber projects into the area. The Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda is one of the areas of the Chocó with a high number of displaced people. Understanding the Colombian Pacific lowlands and the west side of the Andes show the limits of state power. I can now return to the frontier zone between the two highways, and the recent history of armed conflicts and displacement that revolve around a mine conflict. Over the last thirty years, in this frontier space, people have run away from violence associated with mining.

I described the restaurant's store selling staples to displaced Indigenous villages on the road to Medellín because Embera Katio Indigenous groups settled there. They fled to the highway from the Upper Atrato and Andágueda watershed over the last twenty years to escape a gold-fueled conflict fueled by mineral extraction controlled by *paisa* miners has disarticulated local form of subsistence economy. While I have argued the zone is a historical shatter zone populated by Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and *paisas* that fled coercive power, more recently it has become a zone of displacement that people have had to leave. Thinking about economic and political relations between rural residents and the state in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda helps clarify this analysis. To understand this, I show the political and economic foundations of violence at the limits of state power.

The Political Economy of Rural Conflict at the Limits of State Power

When Don Alfonso travelled to Saudi Arabia, he was running away from rural violence in the 1950s. That period of rural violence quickly became known as *La Violencia*. *La Violencia* encompassed widespread rural conflict which greatly impacted the Andean region and rural peasant populations.

In 1963, Catholic priest Monseñor Germán Guzmán Campos and Colombian sociologists Orlando Fals Borda and Eduardo Umaña Luna ([1963] 2005) published the first full-length sociological analysis of the period from 1948 to 1953 in which more than 200,000 rural peasants died. Their analysis, based on interviews, archival research, and Guzmán Campos' notes as a parish priest in Líbano, Tolima, provided a detailed analysis of the violence and in particular focused on the violence perpetrated by bandits, criminals, guerrilla, and paramilitaries. The contemporary conflict in Colombia has roots in this period during mid-twentieth century. Much of the early explanations focused on the rural conflict and what became known as banditry. I dwell on these explanations of *La Violencia*, and later turn to analysis of violence grounded in local politics and rural economies to explore the conflicts in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda.

British Marxist social and labor historian Eric Hobsbawm writes about *La Violencia* in his discussions of social banditry (1963; 1981). In the first book (1963), drawing on historical examples from the United Kingdom, Europe, and the Mediterranean, he explored the kinds of social movements that he described as pre-political, or archaic. He discussed these as social bandits as primitive revolutionaries. A decade later, he followed up with a book on just bandits (1981). For Hobsbawm, the notion of “social banditry” referred to criminals regarded not simply as “criminals by public opinion” (1981, p. 1) but as “peasant outlaws” whom only the state regarded as

criminals. They remained within peasant society and people considered them to be their “heroes, [...] champions, avengers, fighters for justice, [and] even leaders of liberation” (Hobsbawm, 1981, p. 1). Hobsbawm stressed the social connections between peasant and rebels, outlaws, and robbers that makes them “social bandits” which could make them a “precursor or the companions of major social movements such as peasant revolutions” (Hobsbawm, 1981, p. 23). This might explain Hobsbawm’s later analysis, after spending time in Colombia, of *La Violencia* as a failed social revolution that made “violence the constant, universal, and omnipresent core of public life” (Hobsbawm, 2002, p. 373).

Drawing on Hobsbawm’s notion of social banditry, Colombian historians Gonzalo Sánchez Gómez and Donny Meertens (1983) undertook an analysis of banditry during *La Violencia*. Differing from Hobsbawm, they drew on Anton Blok’s writing on the Italian mafia (1986). Blok’s ethnography focuses on the histories of the mafia and state building in Sicily (1988)—more recently he worked on bandits in the frontiers of nineteenth century Netherlands (2001). Blok considers bandits, mafias, violence, and honor. In his reply to Hobsbawm, Blok argues that he misses how banditry occurs not simply within peasant society but also connects to the local politics, power brokers, and economics (2002). His research on the mafia in a Sicilian town explores violence connected to employers, landowners, and state building projects in rural Sicily. Violence helped these rural powerbrokers control rural populations. Blok describes the peasant bandits not as social but political forms of violence and control set in particular contexts. Context matters, as bandits did not need to receive popular support—as in Robin Hood robbing from the rich to give to the poor—but support from political bosses.

Sánchez Gómez and Meertens take this up, and describe bandits of the later periods of *La Violencia* as crucially relying on the support of local power brokers. They

describe this as “political banditry.” They explore the banditry that emerged in Colombia on the right and on the left as having this political aspect in common with the Sicilian Mafia’s where rural politics, landholders, and economies mattered more than the embeddedness of social relationships. They connected criminal gangs and bandits with party machinery and regional landed, elites. Rural violence drew on political and economic relationships in rural areas and relations between peasants, bandits, and politicians.

Mary Roldán (1998, 2002) emphasizes a similar point, while adding her own analysis focusing on regional identity. She argues the parts of Antioquia that were most violent during *La Violencia* remained so due to geography, strategic resources, a lack of state presence, complex regional ethnic identities, and political dissidents (Roldán, 2002, p. 288). She stresses relations between the state and particular armed groups (Roldán, 2002, p. 289). She read violence “against a history of internal colonialism and exclusion in which multiple points of difference between regional authorities and local inhabitants existed over such issues as land and resources, access to political power, and the right to self determination” (Roldán, 2002, p. 291). Then and now paramilitary forces emerged in frontier areas with limited state presence and little “loyalty or identification” by people to the local or national state (Roldán, 2002, p. 292). The paramilitary and guerrilla existed in contexts of regional political economies and local politics and economics. More than social banditry, *La Violencia* reflected regional and local elites organizing for their own self-interest (Roldán, 2002, p. 295). Contemporary violence in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda region has a similar history.

Aldo Civico (2010), an anthropologist who has worked with mafia in the south of Italy and paramilitary in Colombia, draws on Blok and notes the authorities collusion with

violent groups to highlight connections between legitimate state forces and paramilitary forces (Civico, 2012, p. 78). Civico describes the paramilitary forces that formed in the early 1990s in Medellín and their relations to Colombian police, business leaders, emerging paramilitary leaders, and drug traffickers from Cali and the North of Valle. Civico describes Medellín's recent past of paramilitary control and state/paramilitary relations, which relied on a "loose network that is a flexible, ambiguous, fluid, opportunistic, and transitory arrangement" (2003). Civico shows relationships between law enforcement, mafia power, autonomous gangs, and paramilitary groups in Medellín (2012, p. 86). Civico notes some authors have described violence in some urban areas that results from a weak state and an ambiguous relation between the state and organized crime (Civico, 2012, p. 79). He shows the complicity between the state and mafia that allow the latter to provide "protection, votes and social control." Civico shows how the paramilitary in Colombia link with and stand separate from the state (Civico, 2012, p. 80). This became clear in Colombia after the "Paramilitary Politics" scandal. The scandal saw two thirds of the congress under investigation for ties to the paramilitary (Civico, 2012, p. 80). Civico notes Veena Das and Deborah Poole (2004) explore spaces at the margins where the state often cooperates with local power brokers or organized crime (cited in Civico, 2012, p. 79). Deborah Poole explores something similar in highland Peru in her earlier work on *gamonales*.

When Gómez and Meertens (1983) published their discussion of the violence in Libano, Tolima in English (1992) as "Bandits, Peasants, and Politics" they dropped the term *gamonal* from the original title "*Bandoleros, gamonales y campesinos*" replacing it with politics—referencing Blok's earlier discussion and their emphasis on local politics. An Andean term, *gamonal* refers to these kinds of local power brokers that lived in highland

Colombia during *La Violencia*. Writing about the cattle-rustling frontier of the highland Department of Cusco, Peru, Poole (1987) describes Peruvian *gamonales* as a class of “bilingual, bicultural, and horrendously abusive landlords” common in Peru in the nineteenth century. The term *gamonal* itself comes from a hardy, lily plant called the *gamón* (*asphodel*) that parasitically grows in poor soils, flowering and reproducing at the expense of neighboring plants (Poole, 1987, p. 372). In Peru and Colombia the term refers to local powerbrokers who used their personal and cultural positions to consolidate culturally distinct forms of place based political and economic power.

Like people from Bogotá imagine the Chocó as black, violent, and poor, people from Cusco imagined the frontier where Poole’s worked as dangerous and fearful place, populated by criminals, full of threatening intruders, yet where people were better and had more flare and daring (Poole, 1987). Before she first went to the area called Chumbivilcas, Poole had expected to find imagined violence. When she got there, she found real violence where peasants went armed, beatings were common, cattle rustling celebrated, and highland political bosses still ruled. She found in Chumbivilcas a “real cultural landscape structured around specific forms of power and the violent acts upon which this power is based” (Poole, 1987, p. 368). She gives insight on *gamonales* in the frontier zones of Peru, where she defines power as historically and culturally specific forms of “coercive and consensual social relations” that create frontiers and reproduce them in the social difference they encompass (Poole, 1987, p. 369). *Gamonales* fused economic and political power with a seemingly arbitrary exercise of force and violence. The *gamonales* had a reputation for random violence, breaking into homes, beating men and raping women, stealing property, and feeding feelings of envy (*envidia*) and “temptatious capricious desires” (*antojo*) (Poole, 1987, p. 372). *Gamonales* targeted

people with whom they had social relations through drinking, parties, or labor or through permanent godparent relations (Poole, 1987, p. 372). *Gamonales* founded the basis of their power in “servile,” or “feudal” relations. While *gamonales* controlled agricultural land and livestock, they did not aim to convert it into productive investments. Poole describes the grandfather, powerful *gamonal* who amassed large quantities of money, but rather than invest it, he sat beside his money, sunning it in the afternoon. Rather than handing it over to the state during land reform, he, allegedly, buried it. *Gamonales* became wealthy as resident landlords who lived in their territories and controlled their farms directly through networks of families. Poole describes how they used ethnic identities and cultural idioms normally considered as “Quechua” or “Indian”, e.g. only speaking Quechua at home for joking, lovemaking, and anger. Through cattle rustling’s theatricality *gamonal* reinforce their power, while straddling a position on the frontier, between coast and highlands, Spanish and Quechua, Mestizo and Indian, and various forms of exchange.

Poole ethnographically and historically explores *gamonales* and elaborates on the social and economic context in which they thrived. Her analysis centered on the daily and lived experiences, made sense of regional histories not from a perspective of culture bound to territory but from a historical awareness of power. Rather than taking as self-evident the nature of *gamonales*, she shows their relation to the state and the cultural politics of frontier cattle rustling. *Gamonales* sold livestock into capitalist markets, transformed them into commodities, and returned with the money they earned to their *haciendas*. The money they then “re-invested” not in capital improvements to produce more commodities but in perpetuating a theatre of violence that reproduced family power (Poole, 1987, p. 389). Poole shows the territorial, cultural, and economic frontiers, and the particular legal frames, geographies, and histories of violence, the imagination of

unpopulated and lands, the nocturnal terror, the symbolic exchange, the accumulation, the display of wealth, the cultural values of honor, vengeance, individualism, and dominant masculinity, and the ways that *gamonales* connect to state power (Poole, 1987, p. 387).

A discussion of power brokers in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda and the region's rural economy and histories of displacement provides a start towards Poole's (1987) culturally specific sense to understanding forms of violence in the area. Drawing on the discussions of Poole, Civico, Blok, Sánchez and Meertens, and Roldán I have shown local contexts of power brokers, politics, economics, and the state, are required to make sense of violence. This is the case in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda frontier zone settled by Indigenous and Afro-descendant people. I will now turn to violence related to gold mining in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda frontier where *paisa* migrants arrived to the Chocó. Their routes mirrored Don Alfonso's migration from the Chocó, but they disarticulated the forms of rural subsistence production on which he, and Afro-descendant and Indigenous people rely on described. Later, I explore local forms of resistance to this violent displacement and the multinational mining project in the frontier between the two highways.

Gold Mining and Displacement

While my aim with Don Alfonso's trip has been to explore economic migration and a frontier region that is a shatter zone and a zone of displacement, in this last section I support the latter argument on displacement in more detail. I show the role of mining and local power brokers that bring violence and cause displacement. For that, I return to the

frontier zone between the two highways. The Indigenous people living in the upper reaches escaped there by running away from Spanish and Republican colonial power, and former or escaped slaves settled to the lower reaches of the river. The Indigenous people there have run away from mining, displaced by conflicts over gold mining: here, gold is not simply gold, but a part of a political economy that brings violence and displacement to this frontier area.

January 30, 2013 a Land Restitution judge for the Directorate of Ethnic Affairs in Quibdó granted an injunction halting a mining project with titles controlled by Colombian corporations and Canadian and South African multinational mining corporations in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda (Dirección de Asuntos Etnicos, 2013). The judge noted the Ministry of Mines approved mining titles to more than 24 percent of the legally recognized collective territory of the Indigenous Embera in the area to these mining corporations. Ten further mining titles claimed another 54 percent of the Indigenous territory. Together, the domestic and foreign mining companies claimed more than 80 percent of the Indigenous reservation, or *reserve*, in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda. The judge suspended the mining titles because of gold mining's devastating consequences.

Colombian journalist and professor at the Universidad de Antioquia in Medellín Juan José Hoyos (1995), a non-governmental organization representing some Indigenous groups in the Chocó (Asorewa, 2013), and journalist José Mosquera (2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2008d) describe the mining conflicts that wracked the area between the highways since the 1970s. Drawing on their work provides some context for the judge's decision to suspend the mining titles. In February 1987, hundreds of Indigenous men, women, and children from the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda displaced to the village of Aguasal

near the Andágueda because of conflicts surrounding a *paisa* controlled gold mine on their territory. The killings had started ten years earlier in 1975 when an Indigenous man named Aníbal Murillo from the Embera Katio reserve in the Upper Andágueda discovered a gold mine (Asorewa, 2013, p. 192). The conflict for control of that mine led to divisions of communities into different armed groups and more than 400 deaths on all sides; it brought mass displacements to the municipality of Lloró on the lower reaches of the river, to the edges of the Quibdó Medellín road, and to the streets of Bogotá and Medellín (Asorewa, 2013, p. 192).

The conflict originated with a gold mine in the territory of the Indigenous people and the presence of *paisa* miners from the southwestern Antioquian town of Los Andes. Los Andes is the closest town over the Andes in the coffee region of southwest Antioquia. The conflict began when police entered the River Colorado, a tributary of the Andágueda River, to retake the gold mine that one of the Indigenous communities in the area had forcibly taken control from the *paisas* just days earlier. Two *paisa* families had controlled the gold mine in their territory since the War of a Thousand Day had ended in 1903. Newspaper accounts describe how two *paisas*—Guillermo Montoya and Ricardo Escobar—took control of the mine in 1927 (Mosquera, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2008d). They controlled the mines, and the Montoya and Escobar families had close-knit relations in the area, with local kinship ties, and support from the various Indigenous communities.

Writing in 1946, Antioquian novelist Jesús Botero Restrepo (1946) describes in the novel *El Andágueda* a fictional account of the *paisa* colonization of the Upper Andágueda River. The novel recounts a young *paisa* man's coming of age as a miner. While the novel makes only passing mention of the Afro-descendant communities, or “blacks,” who live in the Andágueda's lower reaches, Botero describes the miners' life and the “Indians” of

the Upper Andágueda. He write about the gold mines where the gold never ran out. Although fictional, the account lets us see how Antioquian men of letters imagined mining, commerce, and agriculture of small prospectors, farmers, and traders who pushed into mining areas of the Upper Andágueda and Upper Atrato. The novel fits into *paisa* notions of a positive expansion and incorporation of areas into Antioquia's influence.⁵

The region has had a long connection over the mountains into the southwest of Antioquia and the municipality and town of Andes. Located on the eastern slope of the western Andes, the municipality of Andes has been a central area of southwest Antioquia. The mines on the Andágueda appear in even older accounts, and the river itself is referenced in the colonial literature (see Williams, 2004, p. 14, 20). James Parsons describes the river as a smuggling route between the Caribbean and the Cauca, as smugglers brought cargo from the Caribbean via the Atrato River, and over the Andean mountains (Parsons, 1968, p. 154). For his part, Hoyos (1995) described the Catholic missionaries that arrived in the Upper Andágueda at the beginning of the twentieth century to build a residential school in Aguasal, where *paisa* Priests spend decades evangelizing the Indigenous population.

⁵ Reading about a young man from the coffee regions of Antioquia crossing over the mountains into the Upper Andágueda to mine gold makes me think of Joseph Conrad's ([1910] 1987) Charles Marlow and the heart of darkness. Hoyos (1995) describes the *paisa* colonization and the violence perpetrated in the name of Catholicism in the headwaters of the Andágueda River. This has parallels to colonial violence. Hoyos' descriptions of the conflicts and displacement from the Upper Andágueda seem as terrifying as anything Conrad describes. I raise the comparison with Conrad deliberately aware that Chinua Achebe (1977) critiques the *Heart of Darkness* as projecting an image of Africa as "the other world, the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man's vaunted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality." Regarding the Upper Andágueda, as with Conrad's fiction, I suspect we can learn from Botero's fiction about the *paisa* colonization of the area as a literary representation of the period's early mining history.

Hoyos (1995) accounts for violence in the area as related to gold mining. He argues that the two-*paisa* partners from Andes who owned the productive gold mine in the Upper Andágueda until one of them died. After the death, the remaining partner and the heirs of the dead partner fought each other for control of the mine. By 1968, Hoyos reports, both families agreed once again to peacefully mine in the Upper Andágueda. After the second original partner's death, the two families drifted apart once again. This was when Murillo found a mine far richer than the one the two-*paisa* families controlled. Hoyos reports the descendant of one of the men forced Murillo to sell them his rights to the new mine for 100,000 pesos.

Angry because the other family had denied his family's access to the new mine, the grandson of one of the original partners and local Indigenous group attacked and forced 150 hired workers to leave. Hoyos reports they took control of the mine, the cyanide plant, fourteen mules, and the fifty-seven cows. That evening they smuggled gold to the nearby Antioquian town of Andes over the remote mountain trails to purchase guns (1995, p. 15-19). When the police moved in to retake the mine for the other family, the conflict worsened and both sides fought to control the mine.

Throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s different armed groups—guerrilla, paramilitary, and soldiers—moved into the Upper Andágueda and Upper Atrato mountains to control the mines. This included the Nineteenth of April Movement (M-19), the National Liberation Army (ELN), the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). The army put a price on the heads of the guerrilla. An Indigenous paramilitary self-defense force formed to hunt the guerrilla down. The conflicts over control of the new gold mine worsened conflicts between Indigenous communities over who would control the mine. A peace agreement signed

between the factions in 1990 only lasted a little while (Hoyos, 1995). Ten years later, the mining conflict left the area as ravaged as ever (Asorewa, 2013, p. 195; Mosquera, 2008b). The FARC and ELN controlled the area, used it as a transit route, safe haven, supply zone, and an area to hide from state forces. Reports in 2012 and 2013 show armed confrontations between soldiers and guerrilla displaced hundreds of families (*Observatorio Pacífico y Territorio*, 2012; *Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia*, 2013).

In speaking about the mining conflicts, the judge in Quibdó reported that what began as armed conflicts between *paisa* miners from Antioquia for the control and use of a gold mine resulted in thirty years of burning villages and killing of opposing sides, members of the Indigenous communities, and guerrilla, military, and paramilitary forces. The judge suspended thirteen mining titles owned by Colombian and multinational corporations in the Andágueda because of this rural violence linked to mining in a zone at the periphery of state power.

Chapter Summary

By following a trip with Don Alfonso to Medellín and back to the Chocó I show his purpose in the journey, and the spaces that he and I travelled around. A twelve-hour bus trip to and from Colombia's second largest city Medellín with Don Alfonso to buy in bulk, cheap, imported goods to take back to sell opened this discussion of livelihood, frontiers, connections, the state, and conflict. Our two-day trip speaks to connections, diverse livelihood strategies, and the physicality of travel. The journey shows the difficulty and risks in Don Alfonso's way of making a living as he engages in a hustle to augment his subsistence in rural areas, and hunts at movements of people, merchandise, and capital.

Our route circles an area where rural violence and displacement have shaped politics. Coming back down the mountains, a landslide traps the bus at the entrance to an Indigenous reservation. The settlements of the Upper Andágueda lay a hike into the mountains. The trail links the Indigenous village to the highways. While remote, the area's recent conflicts interconnect with mining and have had devastating results. This region between the two roads, at the border of three departments, marks a frontier shatter zone—where Indigenous and Afro-descendant people moved historically to escape slavery and forced labor—and a zone of displacement—where people have fled conflicts on their territory brought by *paisa* miners and armed actors from Antioquia engaged in gold mining. For thirty years, gold miners, left wing guerrillas, right wing paramilitaries, and local factions have forcibly displaced thousands of residents to settle on the highways near the edges of their territory, to the regional towns, to coffee region's cities, and to capital of Bogotá. The mining in the Upper Andágueda and the resulting violence shows how we need to understand violence in the frontier as connected with local economies and politics.

The Upper Atrato River and Upper Andágueda River is a frontier area between the coffee regions of Antioquia and Pereira, and the Chocó's jungles. This area is cast in the imagination of *paisa* miners and Afro-descendants living on its lower reaches as something dark and ominous. Although, as Afro-descendants move from the Chocó to Antioquia to make money, so do migrant workers come to the Chocó's gold rich rivers. There, the violence and conflict they bring disarticulate rural livelihoods and subsistence production. Don Alfonso makes his living in a hustle, moving in and out of this region, as do *paisa* miners in the area. The tri-departmental frontier zone of the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda, with its *paisa*-controlled mine has had disastrous results for Indigenous people

in the area, forcing people to flee, and causing internal division. Miners and armed groups—guerrilla forces, paramilitary forces, and military forces—have moved deeper into the headwaters of the rivers, bringing violence and displacing rural residents. In January 2013, the judge in Quibdó suspended the multinational and domestic mining companies' titles in this frontier area because of the thirty years of conflict. I now explore the mining titles of the multinational corporations in this frontier zone, and the local politics and violence in this frontier region where the judge suspended and local resistance to this violent displacement as people struggle to control their territories in the face of mining.

Chapter 6:

Large-Scale Mining on Collective Territory

Ximena comes from a small Afro-descendant of Engrivadó in the middle reaches of the Andágueda River. The village has three streets that run parallel to the river, a handful of small stores, an elementary school, a high school, and a small church. The population of a few hundred residents fluctuates as people come and go. As with the much smaller village where I spent most of my time, people made a living from their fixed mining, logging, hunting, growing crops, fishing, and sometimes migration.

Ximena and I sat at one end of the highest street, with a view overlooking trees and the river. I had come to the village with my partner to formally interview Ximena for a group of lawyers in Bogotá who planned to undertake legal work on behalf of the community council related to a mining project on their land. Two years before I met Ximena, a helicopter with geologists and soldiers landed near the village of Engrivadó. People worried the helicopter was part of an exploratory survey for a Canadian and South African joint venture. Ximena had participated in local Afro-descendant activism for many years, and my partner had come to interview her. Ximena passionately and eloquently answered our questions about the town and the event.

My partner asked, “How long has the community been on the territory?”

She said, “I want to tell you a little something else. Do we need to live here? We came here because they forced our ancestors to come. They brought us here to serve them as slaves, so it belongs to us. Should we not live on our land? They subjugated us and forced us to do what we did not want to do. Now they tell us ‘Nobody lives here.’ That is

impossible. We demand they recognize that people live here.”

Ximena’s comments connected Afro-descendant populations on the middle reaches of the Andágueda River to slaves brought from Africa. Her comment expressed a claim to the land and frustration at the failure of the Colombian state to recognize the people living on it. Her comments raise questions about what she means by “here” and her concern about the inhabitants’ rights to live there. The interview had a twofold context: first the aforementioned foreign mining corporation prospecting with the help of the Colombian military and a helicopter, and second an eleven-year fight for a collective land title. In this chapter, I address both collective territory the foreign mining corporations. I show the fears that people have about foreign gold mining in their territory and their attempts to respond to small-scale mining on collective land. I conclude the chapter dwelling first on a workshop on prior consultation for the mining project discussed in the previously, and then I address a meeting to discuss the entry of small-scale miners to the village where I worked.

Multinational Mining Project

On August 15, 2008, organizations in Quibdó denounced the presence of a geological survey in Engrivadó. They reported a helicopter arrived with geologists from a subsidiary of the South African mining giant and members of the Colombian Army Engineering Battalion. The soldiers and geologists encamped near the Afro-descendant town. The soldiers used chainsaws to build a heliport. They destroyed trees, palms, gardens, two-month-old corn, yuca, and other plants. They cut down trees to make cabins and left plastic strewn about. Soldiers encouraged some people to “displace” to the

nearest town or to find a job with the company, “It pays well.” They asked residents, “Why are you still here? Haven’t you displaced yet?” using the Spanish sense of displace for movement. The soldiers stopped people from traveling through the heliport to their family lots. The geologists and the soldiers said they had permission from the Ministry of Mines and Energy to prospect in the area. Their helicopter flew over the region three times a day (see Foro Interétnico Solidaridad Chocó, 2008; Ontario Public Service Employees Union, 2009).

The helicopter sparked concern about the presence of a mining project in the mountains between the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda and the frontier between the two highways. The mining company and military presence near the family lots worried and angered Ximena. Stories, reports, and analysis among non-governmental organizations in Quibdó suggested that a Canadian company planned to turn the Dojurá hills, located 30 km southwest of Quibdó north of Engrivadó and the Andágueda River, into a giant, open pit mine. In the Embera Indigenous language, “Dojurá” means “birthplace of the springs,” and the proposed mine would be located at the source of some tributary rivers in the Upper Atrato watershed, including the Capá River and the Tumbutumbudo River. Local rumors suggested the project would extract seven precious minerals, among them gold, copper, platinum, uranium, and coltan.

While I noted a judge in Quibdó had suspended the mining claims in January 2013 because of the mass displacement of Indigenous peoples over thirty years due to mining conflicts, in 2011 the project still seemed to be progressing rapidly. So much so that Ximena feared that mining would soon displace Afro-descendant people. Different organizations in Bogotá and Quibdó came to visit the Afro-descendant villages on the Andágueda River and Upper Atrato River to run workshops on prior consultation and

help people develop strategies of how to respond to these perceived threats from multinational mining corporations with title in the area through workshops.

Collective Territory

The frustration in Ximena's reply to my question about her community related not just the foreign mining corporation, but to the Colombian state's failure to recognize the presence the Afro-descendant population's presence on the Upper Atrato and Andágueda Rivers. This shows that there is a complex relationship to "the state." This is at once a distrust of military force and a desire for legal land title. At the time of our interview in March 2011, the Colombian government had still not granted a collective title to 72,000 hectares of rural land claimed by the organizations that represented the Afro-descendants in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda. People involved called this "the process," or *el proceso*. While the government did grant the collective land title on September 17, 2011 to the organization the "the process" had already taken eleven years. To understand Ximena's frustration, I think it is important to study this process and the delay in the granting of the title. Understanding the previous twenty years of collective titling in the Colombian Pacific, places her anger within broader political currents of Afro-descendants organizing in Colombia.

Colombian scholar Arturo Escobar works on Colombia's black communities and collective titles, especially in the southern Pacific lowlands south of the port of Buenaventura. Escobar began working in the region in 1991 (Escobar, 2008, p. 7). He focuses on the discussions of the Pacific by the state, non-governmental organizations, academics, leaders, and a small, dedicated, eloquent group of black activists (Escobar,

2008, p. 7). Escobar's writing on Afro-descendant activist social movement organizations looks at the ways of thinking that have emerged since the 1980s. He interweaves theoretical and scholarly discussions with the ways black activists explore academic and activist knowledge. His work has been influential in understanding the collective titling process in rural areas. Here I adopt the term that activists use, describing these as black communities, or *comunidades negras*.

In the 1980s, various rural, black, peasant organizations formed on the Chocó's San Juan, Atrato, and Baudó River watersheds. Escobar argues these movements produced discussions of territory in the Pacific region. By the 1990s, this emergent discussion linked culture, history, environment, and social life, to place. This shaped understandings of space among activists involved in the social movements, and to a more limited extent, inhabitants of rural rivers (Escobar, 2008, p. 62). Through this, black communities across the Colombian Pacific slowly gained a form of territorial control. In the 1980s, the peasant organization of the Atrato River formed. It brought together hundreds of smaller groups based in the villages on the middle reaches of the Atrato River, north of Quibdó (Escobar, 2008, p. 53).

In 1987, the Colombian government agreed to grant the peasant organization special management of 600,000 hectares of territory in the middle reaches of the Atrato River (Escobar, 2008, p. 53). The agreement began a new "territorial order" in the Colombian Pacific, which according to Villa "demonstrated the efficacy of a political discourse that articulated black cultural experience to the specific pattern of appropriation of the territory" (Villa, 1998, p. 441 in Escobar, 2008, p. 53). The claims to territorial recognition drew on the Afro-descendants' historical presence in particular territories, and their land use and livelihood strategies.

Constitutional reforms in 1991, in particular Article 55, created a legal context for more widespread recognition of the collective territories of “black communities”

throughout the 1990s. In Article 55 of the 1991 Constitution, the state recognized

the collective property rights of black communities that have occupied the empty land (*tierras baldías*) in the rural riparian zones of the Pacific coast, under their traditional production practices [and establishing] mechanisms for the protection of the cultural identity and rights of these communities, and to promote their economic and social development (Republic of Colombia, 1991 in Asher, 2009, p. 2).

American anthropologist Kiran Asher describes the debates that led to constitutional change in 1991 (2009, pp. 1-31). Asher notes divergent sources of Article 55. One story she describes comes from an official with the national cartographic survey, who flew with a well-known sociologist Orlando Fals Borda—who much earlier had written the analysis of *La Violencia* cited earlier—who flew over the Pacific region in a helicopter. The story goes that Fals Borda noticed the entire Pacific region had no fences. After discussing this with people in the region, in Asher’s account, he inferred that people in the Colombian Pacific managed land collectively and that they did not hold individual titles. As one of the authors of Article 55 and the constitutional reforms, Fals Borda helped enshrine collective land rights for black communities in the new constitution. While Asher notes this story overstates Fals Borda’s role, she uses it to open her discussion of the constitutional reforms that recognized the collective rights of Afro-descendant communities (Asher, 2009, p. 35-36). This frames her observation that the reforms helped to create exactly what they enshrined: legally recognized black communities with collective territories governed by a state recognized structure of community councils.

E. P. Thompson, in his account of inheritance in the forest areas of Berkshire and East Hampshire in England (1975; 1976), points to historically grounded constructions of

property, ownership, and “the land” passed down over generations. Each represents complex, historically contingent, gradations of use-rights. Thompson describes property regimes as historically specific (1976). Land tenure systems and the roles attached to particular physical landscapes change over time. From Thompson, I aim to suggest the Article 55 that recognizes “collective property rights” of black communities stems not simply from the state’s acknowledgement of *preexisting* forms of collective ownership, but also resulted from the state’s recognition of the political demands from rural peasant groups contesting the incursions of mining and logging concerns (Asher, 2009, p. 37).

My own fieldwork supports this observation; families recognized inherited property rights to lots based on whose ancestors originally cleared the land. People did not understand all their territory to be collective. This suggests a more complex land tenure than one derived simply from a lack of fences. At the time, Article 55 represented a partial, and at the time politically attainable, recognition of what until then the state had considered “empty land.” The constitutional recognition came out of demands by Afro-descendant people for a legal recognition of their long presence in rural river areas.

Asher has an excellent discussion of the political campaign and development of black cultural movements. She describes Article 55’s drafting in 1991 and what she calls the “long and winding road” to its implementation through Law 70 in 1993 (Asher, 2009, p. 40-46). Different groups argued various positions. Some denied an African past, others saw the reforms as inventing an ethnic and cultural identity based on racial characteristics, some saw this as a response to a habit of conflating ethnicity and Indigeneity in Colombian scholarship, while other groups argued the constitutional recognition righted an historical invisibility (Asher, 2009, p. 49). After debate among black activists and the Colombian state’s own foot-dragging, on August 27, 1993 the Colombian president signed Law 70

and thereby implemented Article 55 (Asher, 2009, p. 49).

Law 70 had three focuses: ethnic and cultural rights, collective landownership, and socioeconomic development (Asher, 2009, p. 50). It recognized “black communities” as ethnic groups. It called for their protection and for culturally relevant education and development programs. It gave them collective ownership to rural river regions. It addresses the issue of giving rights to Afro-descendants living in other regions of Colombia in conditions similar to the Pacific. It gave rural Afro-descendant people land, provided they keep—in the state’s perspective—“traditional” practices of subsistence exploitation, implicitly mining, logging, fishing, hunting, and gardening for subsistence but not commercial exploitation. It excluded urban areas and limited collective territorial rights to the surface, while excluding subsoil and mining rights. The law provided for state-funded education programs, credit programs, and technical support to Afro-descendant community council (Asher, 2009, p. 51).

Asher documents post-Law 70 activism, the complexities of regional clientelism, and the ways that rural peasant groups began to focus their attention away from fighting logging concessions and working towards collective land title (2009, p. 55). It took ten years after the original agreement in 1987 for the state to recognize the territorial land claims of the peasant organization of the Middle Atrato in the form of a collective title to 800,000 hectares granted in 1997 (Escobar, 2008, p. 53; Asher, 2009, p. 40). While they won recognition, the organizations saw their populations displaced by violence at the hands of guerrilla, paramilitary, and state forces and the encroachment of monoculture agriculture and the drug conflict. Despite these set backs as violence and the presence of outsiders began to disarticulate rural economies, the fight for legal recognition through Article 55 and Law 70 inspired similar organizations to form throughout the Chocó and

the Pacific and attempt to protect what became know as collective territories.

Territorial based peasant organizations formed in the Chocó including peasant organizations on the San Juan River, the Baudó River, and the Upper Atrato and Andágueda Rivers (Escobar, 2008, p. 53). These groups brought leaders together with non-governmental organizations and state agencies to map, draw, and traverse their territory. In some cases, this meant the rapid expansion of community councils and the territory of black communities as the state rapidly recognized collective title claims under Law 70 and Article 55 (Escobar, 2008, p. 54). The laws at once gave communities claims to territorial control, and created local interlocutors for state projects, programming, and plans. In the case of Engrivadó, the town was part of a broader black community council representing the Afro-descendant residents of the Upper Atrato River, the Capá River, the Tumbutumbudo River, and the Andágueda River. Their process took eleven years.

Afro-descendant Collective Territory in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda

Rural people formed the organization in 1994 with the support of the Diocese of Quibdó. In December 1999, it renamed itself as the Greater Community Council of the Popular Peasant Organization of the Upper Atrato (*Consejo Comunitario Mayor del Organización Popular Campesina del Alto Atrato*, or COCOMOPOCA). In 1999, the organization asked the Colombian state for collective title to territory in the Upper Atrato and Andágueda watersheds. They hoped to ensure continued access to their productive land, clean water, and mines. Eleven years later, when I interviewed Ximena, the state still had not granted their collective title. Despite dozens of meetings, workshops, and an elaborate documentation process, the state failed to legal recognize the rural

Afro-descendant population and the organization representing the rural population had limited access to state funding for educational or development projects. It also meant, for Ximena, and many Afro-descendant activists, the state had failed to recognize the basic fact of their existence. Or, as Ximena put it, the fact that someone lives on the land.

Ximena's comment reflects her own biography and participation in this organizing process. In the 1980s, a *paisa* woman from Medellín came to Engrivadó and contracted her as a domestic worker in Pereira as live-in help. Many young, adolescent women from the river valleys of the Chocó left for the Andean interior as domestic workers in a similar way (see Rubbo & Taussig, 1983; Wade, 1993). After working for five years in Pereira, Ximena, then in her early twenties, returned to Engrivadó. While she and I watched soap operas, she told me she had wanted to marry and raise a family, but the problem in the city was, "There had been no *paisas* I wanted to date."

She returned to Engrivadó, met a man, had, and raised a family. When her children became adults and moved out of her house, she again moved to the city to raise other people's children. In 2000, she fell ill and returned home to look after her grandchildren. This brief biography shows again movements from the Pacific to the city and back to the river looking for a job, in a way similar to Don Alfonso in his migrations. She explained that when she lived in Engrivadó, she participated heavily in the formation of the rural peasant organization that became the COCOMOPOCA. She became an organizer and lay missionary with the Catholic Church's diocese. For periods in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s, she was an activist organizing on the Andágueda. As a young woman, she stayed for a couple days, or a week, in rural villages running educational and theater workshops and events to promote a collective notion of territory and the rural peasant process. The frustration she expressed in our interview in March 2011 drew on

her involvement in the process. Her anger was palpable: for eleven years the state had repeatedly denied the title that she, and so many others, had worked for.

The state recognized the COCOMOPOCA's claim on September 17, 2011 after eleven years when it granted a collective title to 72,000 hectares. The formal celebration took place in the organization's assembly area near the town of Yutó. Hundreds of delegates, including representatives from most of the organizations' forty-three towns and villages, from regional and national non-governmental organizations, activists from Quibdó, politicians, church people, people from different villages, and a smattering of journalists attended the celebration.

This collective titling process consumed thousands of hours of organizing. It drew on support from local, national, and international non-governmental organizations that lobbied the state alongside peasant representatives through meetings with state agencies. Over the eleven years, the claim involved workshops, mapping exercises, reports, and assemblies. Colombian anthropologist Sandra Patricia Martínez Basallo documents this land claims process (2011; 2013). She argues some reasons for the delay included a change in government, conflicts with neighboring Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, conflicts with municipal elites, and internal questions of how to define collective claim. In interviews and conversations, people also explained that they saw domestic and multinational mining companies as a key factor in the title granting delay. Ximena saw the Canadian and South African mining companies in the Upper Atrato and Andágueda as the decisive factor that explained why it took so long to legally recognize the collective title. She saw the state's failure to recognize the rural residents' existence as stemming from economic interests in mining. The soldiers confirmed this for her, when she saw them working closely with the mining company. When they told her neighbors "to just

displace” or “to work for the company” she interpreted the project as the reason for the delay in receiving the title. Although, six months after our interview, the state did recognize their collective title, she and other activists worried that another branch of the Colombian state had already granted mining concessions to a reported 55,000 hectares of the new title. She mistrusted the large-scale project on the river. To make sense of her mistrust, I turn to how rural activists and their allies saw Canadian mining companies in Colombia

Large-Scale Mining and Fears of Displacement

State supported economic development projects often coincided with violent dispossession of rural people in the Chocó.¹ The COCOMOPOCA reported that low intensity conflicts in its territory had displaced 45 percent of the population. Their figures draw on a census conducted in 1999 and more recent internal censi. This highlights migration for diverse reasons, including violence and the fear of violence at the hands of armed groups. For Ximena, the soldiers’ comments raised concerns that the mining project could result in further displacement. The fears of violence related to mining coincided with many mining projects in Colombia.

While the country’s mining industry has seen growth over the last two decades, it has often come alongside rural displacement. Twenty years ago, Colombia had little foreign direct investment in mining. Only the bravest mining companies worked in the

1 For example, December, 2013 the Inter-American Court of Human Rights declared the Colombian state “intentionally responsible” for events in 1997 in the Lower Atrato when soldiers and paramilitary displaced thousands of rural peasants (see Inter-American Court of Human Rights, 2013; Sanford, 2004).

country with heavy security details to protect against threats of kidnapping and extortion. Mining Code Reforms in 2001 ushered in rapid changes to the mining industry, the privatization of the state-owned mining company, and a flood of foreign investment. The country's National Development Plan for 2010 to 2014 (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2010) called for large-scale mining to become a central pillar of the country's economy; a "locomotive" that would pull the rest of the country through large increases in mining. This coincided with an explosion of foreign investment, particularly Canadian, into the mining sector. Many foreign mining corporations in Colombia have been had negative results for local residents.²

It is in this context, that the mining concessions affecting the Afro-descendant collective territory and Indigenous communities in the Upper Atrato and Upper

² The Cerrejón and Drummond are Colombia's two largest coalmines on the Caribbean coast. They use rail networks to move coal to the Caribbean coast, then container ships to European and North American customers. Both mines have displaced Indigenous people, caused devastating environmental damage from coal dust, pollution in the ports, deaths from speeding coal freight trains, allegations of ties to paramilitary groups, and labor, human, and environmental rights violations (PBI Colombia, 2011, p. 20).

The case of a proposed Canadian gold mine in the highland wetlands of Santurbán frames discussion of Canadian junior mining companies in Colombia (MiningWatch Canada and CENSAT-Agua Viva, 2009; Indepaz, 2010). In 2011 and 2012, rural peasants, urban environmentalist, and business organizations successfully campaigned to halt a GreyStar, a Canadian gold junior mining company, later renamed EcoOro, gold mining project in the highland wetland *paramo* which provides water to Bucaramanga, capital of the department of Santander. Urban and rural activists have attempted to limit the mining project in the *paramo* region, and have successfully stalled the project (MiningWatch, 2014).

In the case of a proposed gold mine in the town Marmató, in the coffee region of the department of Caldas, a Canadian company planned to relocate the entire village and the artisanal gold mining families to make way for a large, open-pit gold mine. The Marmató project drew interest and visits from Canadian non-governmental organizations. Partly because of the scale of the proposed mine, but also allegations that paramilitary groups linked to the project killed a Catholic priest who had been a key organizer protesting the mine (Mining Watch, 2009; Molano, 2011b). The Marmató mine is a project of Colombia's largest gold producer, the Canadian corporation Gran Colombia Gold. That company's main gold production comes from the Providence mine in Segovia, in Antioquia's Lower Cauca region. The company bought rights to the Frontino mine amid allegations the state had pressured unions to allow the deal through paramilitary violence (Hoyos, 2012).

Andágueda were so upsetting to activists including Ximena. While she may not have known of the specifics of Canadian corporations, she and those who saw the helicopter, as well as activists in Quibdó saw the soldiers and the geologist as bringing a threat from mining corporations. Ximena and other like her interpreted the large-scale multinational corporations as threatening. Based on historical experience, they worried these corporations would displace rural residents.

In 2009, Canadian companies represented a reported 52 percent of the foreign corporation with investments in mining in Colombia (Colombian Ministry of Mines and Energy Mining in Watch Canada and CENSAT-Agua Viva, 2009, p. 11). Many mining companies registered on the Toronto Stock Exchange have exploration projects in Colombia. Their business plans of junior mining companies involves finding a possible mine site, exploring it, seeking investors, and then selling the project to a larger company for exploitation. Dozen of Canadian mining projects in Colombia since the 1990s underpin the fears in the Chocó from mining projects. To understand why, I turn to a common narrative among activists about Canadian mining in Colombia, focusing on the South of Bolívar.

Narrative of Canadian Junior Mining Companies in Colombia

Just after seven o'clock April 25, 1997, paramilitary forces murdered a miner and mine organization leader in Rio Viejo, a small mining town in the gold rich hills of the San Lucas Mountains in the South of Bolívar. The municipality is near the Lower Cauca mining region and is an important small-scale mining region. Most accounts from non-governmental organizations and newspapers (*El Tiempo*, 1997a, 1997b; Human Rights

Watch, 1998; Loingsigh, 2002, 2003) differ in describing the murder's details, how many paramilitary took part, what they said, and the victim's profession. Newspaper reports at the time described him as a street seller, while most non-governmental organizations reported that he acted as president of a mining committee that brought together small-scale miners in the South of Bolívar. All agree the paramilitary mutilated the man's body and attached his head to a post, leaving it facing nearby mountains. They told the town they had come to get rid of the miners' organization and to control gold mines in the area. Three months later, the paramilitary assassinated the regional miners organization's vice-president. At the time, activists described the murders as a "systematic repression" by paramilitary forces linked with Canadian multinational corporations (Eliécer Molano, 2008, p. 400). They argued that paramilitary violence was clearing the way for Canadian multinational mining investments. Reports of the period described a Canadian mining company as claiming one of the richest mining claims in the region. The company had signed an agreement with a South African mining giant on joint exploration (MiningWatch Canada & CENSAT-Agua Viva, 2009, pp. 25-35).

Following multiple Canadian speaking tours, the union leader Francisco Ramírez Cuellar (2005; 2006), asserted the murders came in response to opposition to Canadian companies from small miners. He outlined a complicated past. In a story reminiscent of the account of the *paisa* mine in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda, in the 1950s a man bought ten-mining claims in the South of Bolívar. Although he bought the claims, he never knew the mine's location. Ramírez's argued that while the national state failed to recognize the mining claims and the man never did any mining, by the 1960s small-scale miners with no title had begun mining the area. Reforms to the mining code in 1994 gave the small-miners two years to legalize their mines. Despite ninety-mining associations in

the region legalizing, only small-scale miners worked the area. A 1996 official survey listed the property as belonging to the family of the man who had claimed the mine in the 1950s.

Ramírez reported that the Colombian Ministry of Mines contacted a Colombian lawyer named Luisa Fernanda Aramburo to draft a new national Mining Code. The drafters delivered the code to the Colombian Congress the day after the miner's murder on April 26, 1997. If the 1997 law had passed, it would have annulled the claims of the small-scale miners to favor the man who had originally claimed the mine in the 1950s—and thus open the way for the Canadian company to exploit. Although that draft legislation never became law, because of small-scale miners organized protests, the Colombian government successfully passed similar reforms four years later.

In 2001, the Colombian Congress passed a new mining code; which, Ramírez alleged, the Canadian government helped draft. Ramírez (2005, pp. 45–50) asserted the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), through funding to a Calgary based non-governmental organization, played an essential role in rewriting Colombia's 2001 national mining code. His allegation, cited by many anti-mining activists, rested on the idea the CIDA funded the Calgary NGO that had contracted the same lawyers who later wrote the Colombian mining code. Ramírez alleged that CIDA played a direct hand in writing the 2001 Mining Code, which the Colombian Congress passed into law August 2001. Canadian and Colombian human rights and civil society organizations (Arsenault, 2007; MiningWatch Canada & CENSAT-Agua Viva, 2009) have often cited Ramírez's analysis. Nonetheless, a MiningWatch report cited a letter from the North-South Institute—an Ottawa based organization—to the Canadian Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Development of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade on March 18, 2002. Chris Arsenault, a journalist, tried to confirm

these allegations. He interviewed a senior Canadian official who explained, “We had a five-year, \$11 million project in Colombia, which ran from 1997 to 2002, to help Colombia strengthen its institutional capacity in both the Ministry of Mines and Energy and the Ministry of the Environment and the regulatory agencies these agencies worked with” (2006; 2007). Even if CIDA did not draft the code, the new law drastically changed the legal position of small-scale miners in favor of large-scale multinational projects.

The code removed protection of some areas from mining projects by allowing mines in national parks and heritage sites. It changed the royalty rate for foreign mining companies from 15 percent to 4 percent. It liquidated the state mining company. It removed powers to suspend a company’s mines for repeated environmental violations. It created mining reserves for Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities with mining traditions; this meant Indigenous and Afro-descendant people could claim a mining title, if they had legal title to the land. It expanded the concession period to thirty years, allowing for extensions of a further ninety years. It removed the difference between small and large-scale mining companies, forcing them to compete on the same playing field (MiningWatch Canada & CENSAT-Agua Viva, 2009, pp. 9–10).

Many small-scale miners considered this last provision to mean the new mining code made small-scale mining illegal because they could not operate without state recognized concessions and without environmental assessments. Through mining code reforms, and later military repression of small-scale miners, the Colombian government did what paramilitary violence could not: they legalized the clearing of small-scale miners from their land. This created a space for multinational mining corporations.

Turning back to the Chocó, a different Canadian and the same South African companies have a similar mining project in the collective territory of the Afro-descendant

organization in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda. Luisa Fernanda Aramburo, the same lawyer who had worked in the South of Bolívar, and who had drafted the 1997 Mining Code, worked as a legal representative of one of the companies with the claims (Loingsigh, 2006). On January 31, 2012, she asked the Colombian government to provide her information on the names of Afro-descendant and Indigenous groups affected by the mining projects in the Upper Atrato and Andágueda River (Ministerio del Interior, 2012). Aramburo's request for information on the project in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda was for the same concessions the Quibdó judge suspended in 2013.

Multinational Mining Corporations

Afro-descendant and Indigenous activists, NGOs, and I all had difficulty in finding out information about their project in the Upper Atrato and the Upper Andágueda. For example, it was hard to determine its exact location, the claim's size, and the minerals they were looking for. It was unclear whether the project was in the COCOMOPOCA's territory or the Indigenous reservations further up the Andágueda River.

While the South-African mining giant has no information available on its website about the project, a Toronto-based Canadian corporation listed the project prominently on its website and corporate filings. These documents list the project as a joint venture to explore eleven concessions. While I found mapping the exact location of these concessions

difficult, they do seem to coincide with the titles suspended by a judge in January 2013.³

Another possible area of the Dojurá project is at Capá River and Tumbutumbudo River's confluences in the Upper Atrato, north of the Andágueda. Both locations lie west of where Antioquia, Risaralda, and the Chocó border, in the frontier the Afro-descendant and Indigenous people live between the two highways.

Before the judge suspended mining rights in January 2013, Continental Gold Limited's annual reports (2012) and website (2011) listed the mining project as consisting of 44,105 hectares, three registered concessions, six awaiting registration, and five in applications for concession. This paperwork described the "Dojurá" as subject to an October 4, 2006 agreement between Continental Gold Limited's chairman and the South African company. The company describes the project as an area in which miners on the Andágueda River have produced gold for more than 400 years. The document described how, in the river, flowing to the south, large dredges had mined the area alongside small-scale artisanal mines. They reported the project had the potential for "porphyry-style gold and copper deposit," which, citing survey reports from the 1960s, they described as an eight by five-kilometer zone found within their mining concessions. In 2012, they reported an airborne, geophysical survey suggested the property's potential for mineral deposits. The company reported it had suspended the joint venture agreement, due to security conditions that prevent further exploration (2011; 2012).

Weeks poring over their corporate documents left me with many questions,

3 Lining up maps provided by the online Colombian Mining Property Register (Catastro Minero Colombiano), maps of local geographic features, maps available of the Upper Andágueda river, and descriptions and maps in Hoyos (1995) suggest suspended titles lie near the same area as the mine founded in 1975 which sparked violence in the Upper Andágueda.

including did the project have a connection to the *paisa* mining in the Upper Andágueda, that had sparked violence and caused the displacement in the area. My own attempts to determine the location show how it can be difficult to understand mining projects in Colombia. While the helicopter landing and soldiers telling people to move raised questions, pinning down specifics about the project is difficult. The project seemed to be a joint venture between a South African company and the Canadian company with a claim covering 55,000 hectares. It is hard to confirm much more information from publicly available documents. Many of the mine concession owners are not the same as two companies involved in the project. As with the project described earlier in the South of Bolívar, various Colombian and companies also have titles. A lawyer for Canadian company appears listed on the title registries in the area. Understanding the Canadian presence in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda has been difficult. One result of the helicopter landing was that it put multinational mining on the horizon for activists and people involved in the Afro-descendant organization. As such, the Afro-descendant organization held workshops on large-scale mining and the prior consultation.

A Workshop on Prior Consultation

I attended many workshops with the Afro-descendant organization on the Andágueda River between 2010 and 2013. One workshop, similar to half a dozen others I was present at, focused on prior consultation and the mining project in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda, in the town of San Marino. The town stands on a promontory circled by the Andágueda River, at its highest navigable point, upstream from Engrivadó. The town is the largest settlement in the area, between the municipal capital of Bagadó

and the Indigenous reservations further up the river. The COCOMOPOCA held the workshop in response to the perceived threat from the Dojurá project.

I travelled with the activists organizing the workshop. Our group had people from villages on the river, from Quibdó, and María Antonia, the lawyer from Bogotá who would run the workshop.

Our metal-hulled boat docked at the beach the day before the workshop. After our small group disembarked, we walked up a gravel trail to the town. On the way we passed a soccer field on our left. We passed a police station with a sandbag barricade to our right. The sandbags protected a bunker painted white and green, the national police's colors. The police and military had fortified barracks and a large presence in the area. The barricade and a wall with narrow concrete windows provided protection from a guerrilla attack. The police station had fortifications because on December 18, 2005, guerrillas from the ELN and the FARC attacked, and took control (*tomó*) of the town. News reports in *El Mundo*, one of Antioquia's regional papers, described the guerrillas as injuring nine civilians, killing eight policemen, and kidnaping 29 soldiers—who they later freed (*El Mundo*, 2013).

Overlooking the town, in the nearby hills, three police watchtowers stand. In a hushed voice, a member of our group explained in my ear that tunnels connected the towers to the police station. It seemed reasonable at the time; yet, on reflection the tunnels would have been hundreds of meters in length. Activists in Quibdó worried the Colombian military planned to station an elite, highly trained, anti-guerrilla high mountain battalion in the town. The battalion would use the town as a base to attack the FARC and ELN guerrillas in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda. On the other side of the river, opposite the police station, two excavators were mining; the soldiers did nothing to disturb them.

The central plaza of San Marino housed a church and school. Before the war, in addition to crops, these mountains gave money from cattle. People kept cattle for meat, and the town had been prosperous, and much larger. The town's fortunes had declined in the 1990s as guerrillas and paramilitary forces began to extort money from the cattle farmers. Hundreds of people left to go to other cities in the Chocó or the Andean cities of Pereira, Medellín, or Cali. One leader told me, "The FARC took the village and they killed someone for being a rat [a tattle tale, toad, or *corrinche*]. The guerrillas took another town downriver for a couple days. They threatened to kill the priest and held a gun to his head. Further down the river, the paramilitary killed a priest and a young Catholic missionary. The violence hit hard here."

María Antonia, the lawyer from Bogotá who came to run the workshop on the mining project in the Dojurá hills and large-scale mining corporations in the Chocó. I have known her for the better part of a year. She works for a small law firm in Bogotá and does consulting for the Afro-descendant community council. The firm have helped organize workshops on mining and "prior consultation" for the organization.

The night before the workshop, María Antonia and I went for a walk north walking out of San Marino. We pass three soldiers coming towards us escorting two ashen-faced teenagers. The soldiers carry assault rifles two rusting rifles. Did they belong to the boys? Maybe the soldiers would accuse them of fighting for the guerrillas? More likely, they had been out hunting. María Antonia and I look at each other; what can we do, at dusk, in San Marino, against soldiers? Who knows the trouble the kids might be in, or what the soldiers might accuse them of having done.

While walking, she, and I talk about the mining conflicts in the Upper Andágueda, the Dojurá mining project, the Indigenous groups, the colonial mines in the Upper

Andágueda, and the violence since the 1970s. After our walk, we sit and talk about mining with three older men. Our talk turns to gold mining, and the tunnels their grandparent's had built in the area. One of the old men told us that a hundred years ago miners used to dig tunnels. The tunnels used to go 70 meters underground and were 2,000 meters long. He told us a story about a mine owner who came from the US: a white man.

Mining in the Chocó

I paraphrase, one of the older men explained that the white man came looking for gold, bought a piece of land, and hired local miners. His mine gave gold. It came out in nuggets. However, he tricked his workers to mine ever more hours in the tunnel. They dug the tunnel deeper underground, and they worked harder and harder. Yet, the American, did not pay them on time. Therefore, the old man explained, the workers began to plot their revenge. They began to drag their feet. They worked slowly. They stopped shoring up the mine tunnel walls with wooden support beams.

Another old man said, "Gold plays tricks. It is alive."

The first man continued explaining that one day, the tunnel, without support beam, caved in and trapped the gold. The river water flooded the mine. The American lost his tunnel. The workers had their revenge.

The other old man continued the story, "Years later, my uncle found the tunnel himself while digging. He accidentally hit the old mine tunnel which had filled with water. The water flooded his tunnel... he barely escaped alive."

This story told at dusk by three old men about their grandparents speaks to long histories foreign miners in the Chocó. Slavery ended in the 1850, when the Colombian

government gave Afro-descendants control over their mines. While mine owners in the region abandoned their land in the 1860s, by the turn of the century English, French, German, and American prospectors and mine engineers began to bring their technology to Colombia (e.g. Wade, 1993, p. 141–143). In particular, investors from the US had begun to lay claim to mineral rights in what became the Chocó.

Colombian historian Claudia Leal León (2008) described the speculative mining boom that followed at the hands of foreign investors. It began in 1888 when a man from Boston gained mining title to forty-six mines in the Chocó. Soon, another American claimed seventy-six mines. By the early twentieth century, what became an explosion in mining concessions spread to merchants and regional authorities that began to form companies and sell stocks (Leal León, 2008, p. 424). At the time, there were 2,148 mining claims in the Chocó (Leal León, 2008, p. 424). A mayor in the area claimed that although 90 percent of the titles remained unexploited, people had claimed concessions to as much as 50 percent of the region's territory (Leal León, 2008, p. 427). Leal León argued most prospecting claims relied on a foreign mining company expressing interest in exploiting a project. The titling in the Chocó represented a speculative bubble, and only a handful of mining companies actually engaged in mining. The speculation in mining titles had material results.

Some speculators used their claims to charge rents to Afro-descendant miners already working the rivers. On the San Juan River, one family bought a 75 percent stake in a mine. They then tried to prevent other people from working the mine. This led to disputes over who controlled a mine and caused violence. Residents tried to stop a dredge near the Chocó Pacific Mining Company's offices in Andagoya, which led to the deaths of employees and shareholders (Leal León, 2008, p. 427).

While the mining speculation did not coincide with more mining only a handful of foreign mining companies extracted minerals in the region. The Chocó Pacific Company built a company town, complete with tennis courts, phones and electricity in Andagoya. The company's interests expanded beyond dredging in Chocó, to include the Lower Cauca region of Colombia and partnership with a Canadian mining company. In 1915, the Anglo-Colombian Development Company began to dredge the Nechí River in the Lower Cauca (Benjamin & Singewald, 1919, p 383). In 1950, James Parsons describes the company as a big business that produced two thirds of the gold in Antioquia (Parsons, 1968, p. 58). The Canadian corporation partnered with the International Mining Corporation of New York that owned the Chocó Pacific (Parsons, 1968, p. 58). The Canadian company ran five large floating dredges on the river's lower reaches and dug 25 meters into the bottom of the rivers and employed over 500 workers (Parsons. 1968, p. 5; Shlemon & Phelps, 1971). The Colombian government nationalized the Chocó Pacific Company in the 1970s and the nationalized company went bankrupt in the 1980s (Wade, 1993, p. 141-143). At this time, it nationalized the Canadian company on the Nechí River. The mining code reforms in 2001 privatized that company again as *Mineros S.A.*, which remains one of the largest gold producers in the Lower Cauca (*Mineros S.A.*, 2014).

I tell this story to point out the historical connections between the Lower Cauca and the Chocó mining regions and the shared expertise and labor connections between the Andagoya and the Lower Cauca. The labor and machinery moving between these two regions today has its roots in the earlier presence of foreign mining companies in the two regions. I describe the mining boom in the Chocó in the early twentieth century because speculation helps understand why only some mining projects in Colombia have resulted in large-scale mines. I have come to understand the project in the Upper Andágueda as a

speculative venture. Whatever the mine's status, it did bring a half dozen workshops in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda on prior consultation.

A Workshop on Mining

María Antonia wears a purple shirt and stands at the front of the church with a circle of people sitting around her on the pews. Twenty people made up of one or two representatives from each of the villages on the Andágueda. Most people are in their forties or fifties, but some are younger. They listen intently as María Antonia talks and writes on large newsprint at the front of the room. She focuses on two issues, spending the morning talking about small-scale mining and the afternoon talking about prior consultation and large-scale mining projects.

María Antonia starts the workshop by asking about small-scale mining in the territory. People explain that dozens of small-scale mines, mostly owned by *paisas* and some locals have begun to extract gold on the river. She asks about the mining taking place on the river and the community council's collective territory. She points out the two large excavators had recently moved into an area across the river from the police station. From the pews, people yell their answers to her question:

“They bring problems to navigation of the rivers and environmental destruction.”

“The government owns this problem. We do not have any machines [excavators]. We do not have anything good. The government should take the blame. The ecological damage they do is bad. There is almost no fish coming up the river anymore. The water has become undrinkable. The machines leave the water contaminated with oil.”

“Sometimes people have conflicts between the community councils, the

landowners, and the excavators.”

“Sometimes a landowner does not want an excavator, but they cannot stop them. They come anyway.”

“Our children may go hungry. There have been more than six years of excavators, but they have left nothing. They came to the villages and to town. We now have better conditions to fight against the mining.”

The room and the leaders do not share one voice. Not all the comments oppose small-scale mining. Reflecting complex political and economic realities around mining, other people articulate another, equally eloquent perspective.

“The excavators are ancestral,” someone yells.

Another person, “Sometimes the excavators do good. They make pathways through the forests when they bring in the excavators from the highway. This brings benefits. They bring jobs. Some people come back to their land from the city.”

“They let people pan for gold. Panning for gold gives people money.”

These comments on small-scale mining give a range of perspectives. Opinions on small-scale mining were not unanimous. Some people who voiced opposition to small-scale mining actually had excavators on their family land. Others appreciated the opportunities that panning provided. People explained the nuance that it was okay to mine land where nothing could be grown, but not okay to mine gardens or fruit trees, or agricultural lots. The decisions over whether or not to support mining were often complex. The possibility of a Canadian mining company exploring or mining in Dojurá hills elicited similar reactions, divided people, and brought tensions. Some saw it as a threat, others as an opportunity. They responded to small-scale miners and to larger projects in the region in different ways. In the afternoon, she turned to large-scale mining and prior consultation.

María Antonia explains the changes to the mining legislation since 2001. Here, she had a pedagogical purpose, and did not elicit conversation. Instead, she explained recent legal frameworks; the National Development Plan to make Colombia a mining country; the Free Trade Agreements with Canada; the foreign mining projects in Colombia; and the coal mines in the Caribbean region; and the Colombian government's hope to make Colombia a mining powerhouse in Latin America. She explained the threats from mining and the right of Afro-descendant people prior consultation. She outlined Colombia's constitutional framework, which meant that government ratified international treaties had constitutional status, that also gave Indigenous and Afro-descendant people a right to prior consultation under the International Labor Organization's Convention 169 on the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples (1989), Article 15:

1. The rights of the peoples concerned to the natural resources pertaining to their lands shall be specially safeguarded. These rights include the right of these peoples to participate in the use, management and conservation of these resources.

2. In cases in which the State retains the ownership of mineral or sub-surface resources or rights to other resources pertaining to lands, governments shall establish or maintain procedures through which *they shall consult these peoples, with a view to ascertaining whether and to what degree their interests would be prejudiced, before undertaking or permitting any programs for the exploration or exploitation of such resources pertaining to their lands*. The peoples concerned shall wherever possible participate in the benefits of such activities, and shall receive fair compensation for any damages which they may sustain as a result of such activities (emphasis added, ILO, 169, Article 15).

In Colombia, Indigenous people and Afro-descendant communities have used this Article 15 to claim prior consultation on exploration or exploitation projects that affect them. María Antonia explains prior consultation because it offers one of the legal tools that people have to protect their territories from mining projects. While the Colombian

government granted collective land title to many community councils, it only grants surface rights, not subsoil rights. People have no right to veto mining projects on their territory; they only have the right to prior consultation.⁴

While María Antonia explains what prior consultation could mean to the assembled leaders, she hopes to get people to think about prior consultation means locally.

Through 2011, 2012, and 2013, the COCOMOPOCA held similar workshops in dozens of villages on prior consultation. María Antonia discusses these rights, the mining project, and the joint venture between South African, Canadian and US companies in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda.

She asks who had to be at a prior consultation meeting. She answers her own question: The Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of the Environment, the Human Rights Ombudsmen, the Attorney General's office, national and international organizations, and the entire community. She explains how important it is the community has its own experts, and how prior consultation should be long and slow. The assumption of course that this would make it a good process. She spent time on this because the COCOMOPOCA's leadership, people in NGOs, the Catholic Dioceses in Quibdó, and organizations in Bogotá feared the mining company could simply meet with the leaders, fly them to Bogotá, and undertake a rapid prior consultation. This would not

⁴ Indigenous groups have used legal challenges over a lack of prior consultation to suspend mining projects. In 2012, after a campaign by Indigenous groups, Afro-descendent groups, and NGOs, the Constitutional Court, suspended a US and British mining project in the Lower Atrato. The company had not properly undertaken a "prior consultation" process with the Indigenous and Afro-descendant people in the area (see *Agencias Británicas e Irlandesas trabajando en Colombia*, 2012).

encompass the broader community, nor provide people with information on the ramifications of a proposed mining project. They worried prior consultation would become a mere formality. As one of the legal tools, María Antonia and others saw prior consultation as a means to allow people to properly consider the ramifications of mining. In a conversation after the workshop, it became clear; people sometimes have diverse perspectives of a large-scale mining.

After María Antonia finished for lunch, I take a walk around the village. A middle-aged man asked me about the meeting. He had not attended, so I tried to explain what she had said as best I could in a few minutes. He replied, not terribly interested, “Great. The mine will bring jobs. We need work.”

His comment shows the ambivalent feelings many people have about mining project. Many people worried about the results of a large-scale mining in the territory, increased sedimentation, environmental damage, loss of food, the presence of armed actors, and so forth. Others hoped to get benefits from the proposed project or jobs in construction. The tension helps understanding the hopes and fears that people have regarding a multinational mining project in the area. Especially because violence in the area led a judge in Quibdó to suspend mining projects in the Upper Atrato River and Upper Andágueda. It seems likely the suspension coincides with the Dojurá project of companies based in Canada, South Africa, and the US

A Community Council Meeting and Small-Scale Mining

Here, I step back six months from the workshop on prior conversation, and away from San Marino to the area where I spend most of my time. One Saturday night, early in

April 2011, about a month before Mauricio and I made phone calls on the hilltop, at the end of Holy Week, Esteban plans to have a dance at his bar in the village. Antonio, Pedro's twenty-year-old son, who taught me how to mine, teased me in the afternoon. He said, I could dance with my partner who would be visiting from Bogotá. He laughs, "You might have better rhythm with her than you did a few nights ago, when you showed your salsa moves with your own shadow." Esteban tells everyone there will be *aguardiente*, and he invites the whole village to the party, with Salsa and Vallenato music.⁵ The news of a dance raises people's expectation. About half the village plans on going. His bar, or *cantina*, is small, but provides him a business selling beer to visiting miners.

Before the party starts, Esteban and Mauricio called a meeting of the village's community council. In the village, the council consists of the heads of each of the families. In the late morning, Mauricio, who represents the village in a larger community council that consists of a few dozen small villages, goes to each family's house to invite people to the meeting before Esteban's party. He invites my partner and I to come and participate in the meeting.

The meeting starts as our group forms a rough circle on the wooden benches and chairs in Esteban's bar. The bar has a small wooden building with a wall and bar on one side, and benches on the other. Three walls are open to the air. In one corner, he has large, black speakers made of plywood and felt, with metal grills, and tweeter, bass, and

⁵ People throughout the Chocó listen to this popular musical rhythm heavy on the accordion from the coast. Quibdó has bars that specialize in the style. The music itself originates from black communities in the Caribbean coast, but in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the style spread throughout the country on the back of a television soap opera (Wade, 2000). Peter Wade (2000) provides a rich discussion of the country's music scene and how the Vallenato style—Colombia's "tropical music"—spread throughout the country and internationally. The lyrics often speak of daily life and hard living.

subwoofer assembled in Quibdó by Antonio's cousin who has a workshop in one of the neighborhoods where displaced people live. Normally, Esteban serves a beer called *Poker*, soft drinks, cheese swirls, lime flavored potato chips, and single, cardboard packets of gum. For the meeting though, the bar is closed. A 40-watt light bulb hangs above us. Above the night sounds of calling frogs and buzzing insects, I can hear the muffled television at the far end of the village where Pedro watches the news—he does not come to the meeting.

Those who come to the meeting arrive punctually at seven. Esteban had called the meeting to talk about letting two excavators, owned by José and Geraldo, into the village to mine his family mine. Not everyone thinks it a good idea. However, rather than cause conflict by publicly trying to prevent the arrival, those opposed did not attend the meeting. The meeting is to determine what the community council will negotiate. Most of Esteban's family came, Mauricio, Don Alfonso, and others. The others include young people, and Alejandro who is in his late 50s and lives in a nearby town. He has travelled widely, and participated in local politics. Some people are absent.

Mauricio takes charge of the meeting. He holds up two typed paper template: one of the last meetings formal agenda and another a blank sheet to write minutes. He reads from the document calling the meeting to order. A heavily pregnant María, who lives beside Don Alfonso, writes minutes. These minutes will serve as the official record of the meeting and the decisions made which Mauricio will take them to an upcoming assembly of the larger community council in a week. He has paperwork from previous meetings in a large binder thick with papers. Throughout the evening—when unsure the correct procedure to follow—he leafs through those papers looking for answers.

The first step requires getting signatures. In the larger community council

assembly, signatures might be for funding agencies to prove a meeting took place. Mauricio asks us to write down our full names, cellphone numbers, national identification card numbers, and where we come from. Even though the meeting has a dozen people, it takes about half an hour to get signatures and fill out the paperwork. People write slowly, and when I ask what to write for my community, Mauricio says “the village. You live here.”

As we do this, Mauricio asks for two people to volunteer to go to town next weekend for an extraordinary assembly. His question meets with a long silence. Nobody wants to go, so nobody volunteers.

Alejandro interrupts him, with an authoritative tone, “You’re doing it all wrong. First we need to elect a temporary president and secretary to run this meeting.”

Again, nobody volunteers. After a long silence, two of the younger people put up their hands. People nod and quickly “elect” them unopposed: a temporary president and secretary. Continuing as before, Mauricio reads the agenda. Alejandro points out that after the council president’s election, the previous meeting’s minutes need approval and the new president should run the meeting, not Mauricio. Mauricio continues to read the previous meeting’s minutes slowly. He follows a form whose language is identical to the agenda he just read. Some slight details changed: the date, and the names of the previous president and secretary. María makes her notes in large block letters on the new agenda. Mauricio gets impatient and skips the last two pages of the minutes—which described the previous meeting decisions. He asks if people approve the minutes. Hands go up. He returns to the agenda for today’s meeting. He puts two issues on the agenda at the agenda’s end under other business.

First, make a decision about who to send as the village representatives to a meeting of the larger community council. Second, what to negotiate with José and

Geraldo's and their mine that Esteban wants to bring to the village. The owners had been in negotiations with Esteban's family to mine their land, but they need permission from the community council.

Mauricio speaks slowly and purposefully, determined to follow the agenda. His ability to do this provides him a certain influence over the proceedings. Despite the new president and secretary, Mauricio talks. Alejandro, who seems more experienced than Mauricio, interrupts whenever he wishes and makes declarations with a confidence that eventually directs the meeting. People sit and fidget, bored as Mauricio moves through paperwork. After an hour, and the paperwork done, the meeting turns to "other business" of the meeting and the miners.

The Upcoming Meeting of the Community Council

The first question concerned Mauricio. He had been a member of Board of Directors (*mesa directiva*) of the larger community council organization more than his maximum two terms. The special emergency meeting the following weekend would elect another representative to replace Mauricio. The Chamber of Commerce in Quibdó rejected the organization's papers on these grounds. To be able to register at the Chamber of Commerce, it is important to find Mauricio's replacement. The problem: nobody wants to volunteer.

Someone asked, "Why can't Mauricio keep the position?"

Mauricio paused for a moment, before Alejandro said, "Mauricio already served on the Board of Directors. They need a new member."

The silence continues. Another person suggested that I go. After all, "I planned to

go to the meeting.”

I declined by arguing, “I did not come from the community and could not represent it.”

The silence continued. After a few minutes, Esteban and his son Marco agreed to be the representatives. THAT decision took 30 minutes. I described the need for paperwork, the election of a president, and secretary, and the other formal parts of the process, not only was similar to many such meetings, but because participating took time, organization, paperwork, and documents. After Esteban and his son agreed to go, the discussion turned to the second topic. The following week, Esteban did not go to the meeting. Someone else went instead.

Small-Scale Miners in the Village

As the meeting shifted to mining, the mood shifted. Alejandro spoke more and his comments were more dominant.

He said, “The owner of the excavators should have come to the meeting to negotiate, not just to the mine administrators. We do not want any animals in town. Downriver, the excavators have mules that they use to carry jugs of diesel fuel to the mine. They have four large dogs. We do not want the mules in town; they will wreck the village. They will just shit everywhere. None of the excavators mine with proper permission or legally. The miners held a meeting in town a few weeks ago with the departmental organization charged with environmental protection. The owners agreed to replant with trees and to dig pits to catch mine runoff, so silt does not block the river. We can put all that in the contract: no animals, planting trees, and building silt traps. They should face

penalties if they break the contract. What about, ‘The community will take matters to the authorities.’”

After Alejandro spoke about authority, most people nodded. Over the ensuing conversation, people agreed the points they would negotiate. Alejandro said a broken contract should have penalties. I suggested impounding excavators.

Alejandro turned the discussion to royalties and payments by the miners to the community council. He meant the small-scale mine owners would pay the community council to have permission to bring two excavators into the community’s territory. Alejandro said this meant \$700 per excavator. Following this, people spoke for a long time about whether payments to the community council from the mine should be a fixed rate paid monthly of \$150, or a royalty of 2 percent of the gold mined every time the excavators washed for gold. The first possibility meant a fixed payment each month irrespective of the mine, and 2 percent meant a larger percentage of each wash. After deciding on proposing a percentage for every wash, discussion turned to receiving those payments: after each wash or when? Would someone from the community have to watch each wash? What if the foreman decided to do a wash on short notice? Would someone from the community have a chance to get to the mine to make sure? Would the same person have to be at each wash?

Alejandro said, “Someone different should go each time because gold and gasoline make people behave strangely. Do you remember? When the excavators arrived here in 2007, people from the villages lent them money to keep mining, so that they could pay workers, and keep going even if they found nothing. The gold from the washes we should melt down for savings. Do not leave the gold as dust. Do not put in a bank account. Melted all together, gold becomes harder to steal.”

On the question of royalties to the community, Alejandro proposed the community should ask José and Geraldo to pay 20 percent of the money as pure gold, and the other 80 percent in “public works” (*obras sociales*). Don Alfonso says they should level the land around the cemetery and the holes down by the river where the kids went swimming because an earlier round of excavators had left the holes that had filled with water and malaria mosquitos near the fruit trees. Alejandro proposed building something permanent so the community could have it after the miners left.

As he finished talking, he said that when negotiations take place, more than one person should talk, the whole village, not just one person. He tapped his own head, saying, “If only one person talks all the time, then folklorically [*folklóricamente*] speaking they would take it on the head.” What he meant was that the guerrilla—or miners—would threaten an individual, but less likely the whole community.

Everyone accepted Alejandro’s suggestions. The decision was to ask Geraldo and José to pay 3 percent of each wash, and negotiate down to 2 percent. They would not allow animals in the community. The mine entry to the community had to be downriver, far from the village. Mine workers could live in the community, provided they rented houses. As what had turned into a three-hour meeting wound down, music started playing and the long awaited party began.

I described this community council meeting as it raises the issue of small-scale mining and the negotiations. Small-scale mines with excavators had been on the river for four years. While working in a nearby village, they had mined hectares of forest. The priest in the town downriver said that a few years before there had been 70 excavators on the river. In early 2011, only two mines remaining where the one that belonged to José and Geraldo and another owned by a *paisa* a few minutes boat ride further upriver. A few

weeks before the meeting, Geraldo had come to “negotiate” with Esteban and his family about bringing excavators onto his family mine. I put negotiate in quotes because while people use the term *negociar*, the meeting shows the terms for entry of a mine were pre-set. Esteban and his family had worked in a tunnel in dangerous conditions for months deep under the hill, following a seam of gold by digging a tunnel directly into the hillside. Esteban and his family had been tunneling deep underground for months, and he wanted José and Geraldo to mine the hill where Mauricio and I made phone calls to get the gold out. They wanted the excavators to get gold at deeper levels that they could dig. As “co-owners,” (“*co-dueños*”) they would get a 16 percent share of the profits.

I asked, “How would Esteban, his wife, and two sons make a living when the excavators went home?”

I asked Marco, Esteban’s son.

He replied with a grin, “When the excavators come, we won’t have to work.”

“What about when they go, having taken all the gold?”

Marco shrugged.

While I discussed a negotiation with the community council as giving permission, as Alejandro put it, the meeting really concluded the miners would pay a small amount of money to enter their machinery into the area. Although people called this a “permission,” or *permiso*, to mine, it was really a permission to allow the transport of an excavator across their collective territory. Second, the community wanted either a lump sum payment of about \$150 a month, or 2 percent of profits from a mine. The meeting did not decide if whether they could mine, just choosing between two kinds of compensation. The debate’s terms had limits, and people had little space to make certain decisions.

One activist for the small-scale mining organization in Quibdó argued small-scale

miners offered better conditions than multinationals. Rather than paying a few percent to the government, they paid 2 percent to the community council and 16 percent to the landowners—a higher percentage than multinational corporations pay. The absence of half the village, who disagreed with the mine, suggested some people might not have the freedom to oppose small-scale mining because of pressure from armed actors or the miners, so better to be quiet. The items open for negotiation were mules, shit, dogs, trees, and housing.

What was open for negotiation had limits: for example, there was no opportunity to oppose the mine. Initially many people supported the mine because they thought the idea of letting excavators get the gold was a good idea. Others did not attend the meeting, silently expressing their opposition. One told me he was opposed because he thought it a bad idea to let a miner onto a mine that was giving. Alejandro's discussion at the end of negotiating as a group raised the threat of violence behind the entry of the excavators. The guerrilla groups, who extract protection money from miners, complicate whether or not people might allow the mines. While on other rivers, where people opposed mining, the guerrilla prevented small-scale miners working people's land.

This negotiation took place within the context of mining in the Chocó. Small-scale mines mine within certain practices, and discussion revolve around sinkholes, banning animals, and forms of payment of a small percentage or monthly payment. People discussed little else. While small-scale gold miners in the Chocó and the Lower Cauca operate outside the law, those involved have agreed upon practices. Some community councils have formal resource extraction regulations.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explores the responses by Afro-descendant community organizers to violence in the Upper Atrato and the Upper Andágueda River. This chapter has discussed mining threats alongside processes of community organizing as a response to the destabilizing process of resource extraction in these frontier regions. I opened with an interview with a local leader called Ximena, and her anger with soldiers who told her neighbors to “Just displace.” With her comment, Ximena expressed her anger at the state having taken eleven years to recognize her Afro-descendant community council’s collective territory. It took eleven years for the COCOMOPOCA to gain collective title under the 1991 Constitution Article 55 and the 1993 Law 70. While violence in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda led a judge in Quibdó to suspend mining projects, this chapter addresses this process of recognizing collective territory alongside people’s fear of foreign mining. A workshop on prior consultation around the large-scale multinational mining project finds echoes in the negotiations in the village where I did fieldwork. Some people see mining as an opportunity. Others see it as a threat.

Multinational mining corporations’ recent past in Colombia highlighted people’s fears of the correlations between mining and conflict. Ximena, worried future large-scale mining will bring violence and damage to the Chocó. Canadian mining companies in Colombia and their rumored links to paramilitary violence make this fear worse. The Canadian government’s role in rewriting Colombia’s mining code provokes other fears. The workshop about a mining project shows the ways people see mining. The emphasis on prior consultation is one way Afro-descendant activists hope to respond to mining projects. I have outlined paramilitary violence in the Lower Cauca River, and perception of the Canadian government’s role in rewriting the Colombian Mining Code in the way

activists link mining and conflict. While Ximena and others perceive the foreign corporations in the Chocó as threats, the conversations at María Antonia's workshop suggested some people saw mining as an opportunity. Mining offers threats and opportunities. People see prior consultation as a means to prevent and delay the project, and a place from which to negotiate. While the community council represents Afro-descendant villages in the area, the people it represents sometimes had divergent perspectives.

The fight for legal recognition of collective territories does not provide a panacea. The soldiers' comments to Ximena's neighbors, the anti-guerrilla battalion in San Marino, the guerrillas near the village, the narratives of the role of the Canadian government on rewriting Colombia's mining code, and violence in the South of Bolívar all showed that proposed mining projects—real or otherwise—can have real consequences for Afro-descendant organizers. I opened with Ximena worried about the South African and Canadian mining project, the geological survey team accompanied by soldiers, because, although the project had not displaced anybody, people thought it would. Canadian projects in Colombia had displaced people, so the same happening in the Chocó seemed to be a matter of time. After all, the soldiers had told Ximena's neighbors to displace. Her activism and that of many Afro-descendant organizers responded to these kinds of land conflicts and violent expulsion. In the 1990s and 2000s, black activists and their social movements fought for territorial control based on ethnicity and land use. In the Pacific, following 1991 constitutional reforms legal frameworks did give a form of territorial control to local people, yet it also gave the state, policy makers, and mining companies an organized group of people with whom to consult.

While the COCOMOPOCA's titling delay shows the role Quibdó based

organizations played in helping it gain legal recognition, and the prior consultation workshops showed fear of foreign mining companies, I describe a community council meeting in the village to raise other challenges to collective territory. Despite legal ownership, community councils operate with a highly constrained political space. While Afro-descendant community councils did have constitutional recognition of collective territory, when it came to the day-to-day governance, *paisa* miners negotiated with local families. While various workshops on prior consultation took place around the Canadian and South African project in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda frontier, the negotiation for small-scale mining raises another issue of navigating a legalistic process, and unspoken pressures. In both meetings, various members of the community expressed opinions: some people favored mining while others opposed it.

Finally, I raised the historic investment in mining in the Chocó to note Leal León (2008) and her discussion of a speculative bubble in mining titles at the beginning of the twentieth century. The mining claims far outnumbered the mines. I continue the story from the negotiations about the entry of the excavators into the village by discussing small-scale mining. Later, I turn to large-scale multinational mining projects and speculation.

Chapter 7: Small-Scale Gold Mining

The mercury races down the metal trough of the large rusty classifier like rain on a window. The mercury, a silver toxic liquid commonly used by small-scale miners, traps the little flecks of gold hidden among the pebbles and stones from the hill. For the last month, a shiny new yellow excavator and an old rusting orange one have been demolishing the hill where Esteban's family had been tunneling and where Mauricio and I made phone calls. Today the *paisa* miners wash for the gold that has steadily gathered at the bottom of the sluice trough for a week. José, dressed in rubber boots, spoons the buttery mixture of clotted gold and leftover liquid mercury into a plastic kitchen-mixing bowl. His cousin, Geraldo, owns the two excavators working the mine. They both wear wide-brimmed reed hats in a style from the Caribbean coast that has become a symbol of Colombian nationalism and in the Chocó a marker of whiteness and wealth. Along with most of the owners of the hundreds of similar mines scattered across the Chocó, the two consider themselves *paisas*, white people from Antioquia. The two cousins, their workers, and their machinery arrived a month after the community council meeting to discuss their arrival.

Since 2008, the number of small-scale gold mines in the Chocó has rapidly increased. The small-scale miners use excavators and employ drivers, workers, and mechanics. The twelve workers, most *paisas*, live in the village and work seven days a week, 12 hours a day, in two shifts. This mine, along with many others on this and other rivers, provides employment for migrants from the interior and from other parts of the Chocó. Small-scale miners exploit land once mined by artisanal miners, who allow the

excavators entry because the machinery can dig much deeper than they can with their hand tools.

Earlier in the morning, before I started watching José collect the mercury, I had gone to the mine with residents from the village. I joined half the village and people from neighboring communities up and down the river. The two cousins, the excavators' owners, allowed us to pan for gold. They let people pan for gold for two hours. This wins them support from local people. In addition, as many drivers do not know how to find gold, they watch people pan to know where to dig. The excavator drivers rely on artisanal miners to find the richest gravels.

I went panning with Esteban, his wife, Luisa, and their teenaged son, Marco. They live in the village. While they used to mine this mine as a family, they stopped when the tunnel they were digging got too deep. I first met Esteban when he worked a motor pump, washing away the hill where I made a phone call with his neighbor Mauricio. Later I worked with him and his family in the tunnel underground. He and his extended family negotiated the entry of José and Geraldo—the two *paisa* cousins—their workers, and their machines in exchange for 16 percent of the mine's profits after expenses. Opening the mine to the small-scale miners meant other people beyond Esteban's immediate family could pan for gold the handful of times a week that José and Geraldo allowed it. The *paisa* miners agreed to pay the local community council a small percentage of the gold they mined.

Although the mine was in an area legally recognized as the collective territory of an Afro-descendant community, each family in the village has their own lots, which might be a few hectares in size. The common land consists of virgin forest, or *monte biche*. People use their lots for crops, fruit trees, pigs, mining, and other subsistence activities. The lot

owners descend from the first person who cleared the virgin forest, planted the fruit trees, or started to mine. Each descendant shares the land his or her grandparents opened. Even though José and Geraldo have been in the village for only two months, they have taken charge at the mine on Esteban's family lot, deciding when people can pan for gold and for how long. They pay a 16 percent of what they mine to Esteban's family.

In gold panning, or as locals say *bareque*, the task rarely changes. First, fill a wooden pan with a blue-gray mixture of sand, stones, mud, and clay from the mine front the excavator has opened. The front lies at a wide pit's bottom where the excavator has dug. The pit lies where the hill Mauricio and I made phone calls from, which had been, the same spot that lay below where Esteban's family had been tunneling for months.

The night before the machines had uncovered the old streambed Esteban and his family had followed. This morning, the excavators had hastily recovered the streambed because Esteban did not want to let his neighbors pan it. While people grumbled over this and complained, "It was no good," they were still eager to do *bareque*. They use their bare hands, metal bars, and metal hooks to fill their pans. They make a circular motion in the water to wash away the pebbles and mud, leaving gold. In the morning, working beside Esteban and his family, I filled a pan. Luisa, in her forties, wearing a bright red bandana on her head, worked beside me. As I filled a pan, she said, "There is no gold there." In a way similar to the excavator drivers from the interior, I did not recognize gold-bearing stone, gravel, and sand.

One excavator worked beside us. The heavy machine pivoted deftly on its caterpillar treads, its rusting metal bucket swinging close enough behind me that I could feel the wind from the movement on the back of my neck. With full pans, Luisa and I moved ten steps to a nearby pool of water. She dexterously handled the pan, showing skills

learned over a lifetime of artisanal mining. I moved awkwardly.

I had regularly gone to gold mines for the past six months, accompanying families in their labor and learning the practice of mining—a mining apprenticeship—but I never mastered Luisa’s trick of panning. It lies in a loose but firm wrist motion, the wooden handles of the pan rotating to create a smooth back-and-forth motion and centrifugal force that pushes lighter sand and gravel out of the pan and leaves behind water and gold. My back bent at the waist, the pan full, and the sun beating down, I moved clumsily. Hot sweat dripped down my forehead and back. Luisa stopped her panning to help me. She took the pan from my hand and finished what I had started. It usually took me five minutes to fully wash a pan. After some quick turns of her wrists, Luisa handed the pan back to me. It contained two tiny specks of gold. She had been right, not enough gold to make it worth the effort. Although panning normally lasts two hours, someone passed the word after an hour: the time had ended. Everyone grumbled, but watching from behind sunglasses, Geraldo signaled the end of the day’s panning. He wanted to get back to his own washing for gold.

In the late afternoon, I take photographs of José and Geraldo washing a week’s worth of gold. As I watch José scoops up the mercury and bright yellow flecks appear in the liquid. It gives me a rush of adrenaline. Nevertheless, I feel concerned about the danger posed by the metal; mercury has a reputation for being toxic. José, Geraldo, and the workers seem unconcerned. José works directly in the metal trough, collecting as much of the mercury as he can in his bare hands. The miners added the mercury to the trough the week before to catch the gold. Rather than using a pan and centrifugal force, they use the heavy metal and large quantities of water. The running water washes away all the sand and gravel, while the heavier gold sticks to the similarly weighty mercury in the

sluice gate's metal grill riffle. Small-scale miners in Colombia buy mercury in large quantities.

“What about the danger from the mercury?” I ask José.

As he spoons mercury into a plastic kitchen bowl, he responds, “Mercury is not poison. I have been working with it for 20 years. Nothing has ever happened to me. The cyanide the multinationals use though, that is poisonous. A little kills.”

José's reply reminds me of a talk I attended in Bogotá a year before.

Representatives of a giant mining company, the one apparently with a project in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda River, defended the use of cyanide in large-scale mines and demonized small-scale miners and mercury. With a PowerPoint presentation and photographs, the presenter told the audience of students, academics, and activists that cyanide had fewer negative health and environmental consequences than mercury. He argued the toxic heavy metal stays in the environment forever and concentrates in fish and people. Cyanide has an immediate impact, and then it disperses quickly.

Watching José, I reflect on how he and representatives from the multinational mining company that have a mining title have opposing stories. For each, the other's mining represents a threat to Colombia's forests, water, and human residents. Irrespective of small-scale and large-scale mining and their environmental, human, economic, and social costs, each saw its own claims that cast the other's form of mining as more damaging. This is one tension between small-scale miners and their organizations and multinational mining corporations.

Hundreds of small-scale mines employ tens of thousands of people throughout the country, mainly in two regions: the Lower Cauca in Antioquia and the Chocó. In summer 2013, small-scale miners affiliated with mining cooperatives shut down roads and

transport networks in both regions to protest a government campaign and national mining legislation passed in 2001 that criminalized small-scale miners. In these regions, gold mining offers an employment opportunity for itinerant workers and locals. Towns have developed machine shops, gas stations, and buying and selling houses that support the industry. In the village, some *paisa* workers had fled the Lower Cauca. The military repression and guerrilla and paramilitary extortion displaced small-scale miners. They left, came to the Chocó, where they hoped to strike it rich in the region's more remote mines in areas where the state had little presence on the collective territory of Afro-descendant communities and Indigenous people.

José scoops the mercury with a spoon to collect the dollops of silver liquid and gold caught in the sluice box's metal riffle. This way of collecting gold seems ingenious: The sluice box rests on a 20-degree angle; the water flows over the riffle; the little flecks of gold bond to the much heavier drops of mercury, nestling into the bottom of the metal grill; water washes away stones and gravel.

After collecting the gold, José separates the liquid mercury from the solid mercury and gold mixture by squeezing it through a dishcloth. Gobbets of liquid mercury fly into the air and onto the ground. A buttery amalgam forms from the mass of gold that sticks to the mercury. José collects as much as he can in a bowl. He pours the remaining liquid mercury into a small empty soft drink bottle and dumps the pasty mercury-gold fusion into a colored plastic cooking bowl. From a mass of mercury-gold the size of a large tennis ball, he spoons out a small golf ball sized chunk. The smaller amount goes to Esteban and his family; José roughly calculates their 16 percent with a spoon. He makes no move to put aside any for the community council. Later, José will vaporize the mercury with a blowtorch and a ceramic bowl to separate the gold and send the toxic metal into the air.

This vaporization produces gas that concentrates the heavy metal in people's hair, clothes, and food.¹

Although often easygoing with me, José's cousin Geraldo watches grumpily. He once complained about having to pay everyone: 16 percent to Esteban and his family as co-owners, 2 percent permission money to the village's Afro-descendant community council to travel through the territory, protection money to the paramilitary forces and the guerrillas present in the area, and taxes to the police and the municipality. The costs of machinery, repairs, spare parts, diesel fuel, food for the twelve male workers and three female cooks, and wages for the mechanics, drivers, cooks, and washerwomen all add up. The mine does not produce enough gold, and Geraldo laments the debt piling up; he has not paid wages for months. Although the mine does not produce as much as he and José need to cover their debts, it still offers hope. A good day could provide tennis-ball-sized hunks of gold worth thousands of dollars. Two years later, when I return to visit, I learn Geraldo and José have fled, leaving their machines rusting in the forests. They never paid the 2 percent to the Afro-descendant community council. When they left they owed Esteban money. The army killed the guerrilla commander, who had extorted money from the miners, during a raid in a nearby village.²

When Geraldo and José finish their task, they leave six shift workers to do their own wash. Most migrated here for the season, some *paisas* from Antioquia, some

¹ Leontien Cremers and Marjo de Theijeidrc (2013, p. 2, 8-9) have an excellent edited volume that discusses some of the damage caused by small-scale mining and mercury, especially this vaporization process. On small-scale mining in Colombia, see Sarmiento, et al (2013, p. 46-67).

² I heard about the event a week later, when I visited the community with a non-governmental organizations based in Quibdó. As is often the case, I am unsure of the exact details as I only visited briefly and did not have the opportunity to confirm the details.

Afro-descendants from other regions of the Chocó. The small-scale mine employs only men, young and old. A handful of teenagers came to seek their fortunes in the Chocó's mines. Others have been miners for decades, working in Antioquia and then coming to the Chocó. Some send wages back home to their families. Three women, also *paisas*, take shifts cooking meals and cleaning clothes for the men.

The sluice boxes' order becomes crucial when the six workers on shift wash for gold. Each successive box has a poorer earning potential. The first, which traps the most gold, belongs to the co-owners—José and Geraldo, with 16 percent to Esteban's extended family of mother, brothers, aunts, uncles, children, and nephews and nieces, all descended from his grandparents who opened the mine a half century before. The foreman gets the contents of the second sluice box. The third, fourth, and fifth sluice boxes belong to the mine workers.

Felipe, a muleteer whose job involves hauling diesel fuel with his five sturdy mules, takes enormous care in taking apart the third metal sluice. He shakes the material into a plastic tub, careful not to lose any gravel. He washes the burlap sacks three times to make sure no gold or mercury can escape. Tall, with heavy muscles and a neatly trimmed black beard, Felipe laughs as he holds up a cleaned sack for me to photograph, half joking he calls what he is doing, "Our hustle."

Rebusque can translate as picking over field crops, as in "gleaning." This applies to both Esteban and the villagers gold panning that morning as well as Felipe's small-scale mine workers' washing the three sluices. Gold panning on someone else's mine provides villagers a complement to a fixed from subsistence production. For Felipe and the

workers, the washing of the sluices provides the gold left by the classifier which augments their fixed salary of \$200 every two weeks.³ For them, gleaning represents about \$100 a month. With their salary, this represents one and a half times Colombia's minimum wage. Yet, since they were behind on their wages, they had no fixed, and their income consisted solely of their hustle.

Panning and washing for gold takes physical strength and skill. Miners develop their own techniques and practices. Mine owners gain legitimacy in the villages in which they mine by allowing residents to pan for gold. They ensure the loyalty of their workers by letting them clean the last sluice boxes. Mining has unspoken norms of ownership and rules. These practices shape how miners and the people in the village where they work interact. I began this chapter by describing the laborious practice of extracting gold from the earth using physical, mechanical, and chemical means because Felipe, Esteban, José, Geraldo, and other small-scale miners hope to find gold. To understand why, I pause on what Felipe said about his hustle.

Villagers who pan for gold, Afro-descendant workers from other regions of the Chocó, and the *paisa* mine owners and mine workers all came looking for their fortune. The miners, the landowners, the machine owners, the mine workers, and the villagers who pan for gold all hope to make money. The boom and bust nature of this extractive economy provides a key feature of economic life in the Chocó. Before coming to the Chocó to mine, Felipe grew coca and sold coca paste in the Lower Cauca. In this area of the Chocó 20 years ago, Pedro worked not in mining but in logging. As the price of gold

³ Wages were \$800,000 Colombian pesos, however, here and in most instances I make approximations of all monetary values to US dollars.

increased between 2001 and 2012, people put away their chainsaws and brought out their shovels to mine gold. Nonetheless, Alfredo Molano (1997) writes about the “big hustle,” or *rebusque mayor*, which he describes as narcotics smuggling. By exploring the links between different kinds of hustle, I look at small-scale miners in the Chocó and show the ways gold is not simply about gold because it connects to other economies.

This chapter follows on from the previous chapter’s discussion of a community council meeting. From Felipe, José, and Geraldo, I address *paisa* miners who fled to hustle in the Chocó’s frontier from the Lower Cauca region of Antioquia to escape the conflict and its negative consequences for small-scale miners. While Afro-descendant people make a living in their bush, in a mixture of farming, hunting, fishing, trading and gold mining, some *paisa* focus their energy on mining. By dwelling on these mining techniques, their hustle, how they gain support from local people, and how people talk about mining, I show how their gold is and is not about mining. In particular, by drawing out labor conversations from the mine on games of chance, diesel fuel, and gold mining, I suggest that gold is not always about gold, and it connects to other economies. By developing a detailed discussion of gold mining statistics in Colombia, I show how the gold mining industry in the Chocó’s frontiers raises question about gold production: in some municipalities it is too high, and in other areas it is too low. To explain this, I connect small-scale gold mining and the conflict.

Work Stories about Mining

Juan and I stand in the shade cast by the black tarpaulin roof of a shelter made to cover the engine-powered water pump. The truck motor sits bolted to a metal frame. An

engine coupling connects it to a large water pump using a ring made from dozens of pieces of sliced tire rubber to dampen vibrations. The engine gleams, freshly washed with diesel fuel. The motor's small identification plate says something in Japanese. Last century, the motor powered a truck that hauled goods across Colombia. Now, recycled from a truck wreck, it pumps water. Better said, it used to before it broke down. This diesel water pump provides water to Geraldo and José's machines on Esteban's family mine. Its breakdown has stalled Felipe and the others' work. Today, two weeks after the washday described in the previous section, I stand watching Juan, a mechanic who is visiting from Quibdó, repair the heavy truck motor that drives the water pump. Our conversation and later conversations with workers at the mine push me to think about gold, and consider it something other than it seems.

The mine has two engines. Both pump water through heavy aluminum tubes with leaks that spray geysers of cold gray liquid. The engine Juan fixes sits beside the water reservoir a hundred meters from the hill where the excavators are digging. The motor pumps water from the reservoir for the rusting classifier. The classifier stands two stories high. The metal contraption has two sluice boxes that sort rocks and stones from gravel using water and mercury. The pumps work all day, converting diesel energy into moving water.

Juan, rotund, clean-shaven, and with ready smiles, comes from a small Antioquian mining town near the Lower Cauca River. That humid country has been Colombia's main gold mining region for centuries. In his 60s now, Juan spent his youth repairing machinery for small-scale miners who used excavators, dredges, and high-pressure water pumps to mine gold. He described the Lower Cauca as too hot—using heat as a euphemism for violent conflict over territory by armed groups.

The Lower Cauca has an uneasy balance between guerrilla and paramilitary forces. Armed groups control river sections and mines. Along with coca, gold provides these groups with a profitable business. Armed groups control cocaine, gold mining, and other economies. The paramilitary demobilization in 2006, under Colombia's Peace and Justice Law, simply meant many former paramilitary continued to commit crimes, but now under new names (Hristov, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). Demobilization did not lead to peace, but created the growth of what the state labeled emergent criminal groups (*bacrim*). These *bacrim* and the guerrilla monopolize the legal and illegal economies in the territories they control.

Juan's comment on the heat of the Lower Cauca references state forces that have tried to shut down illegal mining. Many miners, including José, Geraldo, Felipe, and Juan, have left for the Chocó looking for new mining opportunities. In doing this, they left the guerrilla, paramilitary, and state to fight among themselves for control of mines. Juan hoped for something better in the Pacific's lowland mining frontiers. His *rebusque* hustle includes visiting mine camps and fixing broken machinery. He dreams about saving enough money to start a small mechanic shop in Quibdó.

Shirtless and sweaty, Juan wields an old grease gun to pump lubricant into the engine's little holes. He runs his fingers over the motor's tubes and pipes, catching on a hunk of metal twisted from overuse. Pausing to take a closer look, he files down the metal. He replaces and cleans the spark plugs. Moreover, he complains: the last mechanic ordered an unnecessary and expensive part couriered to Quibdó from the US. Juan tells me that dirty spark plugs caused the problem, not the expensive replacement coupling tube ordered online. Methodically and skillfully, Juan carefully finishes twisting nuts and resetting cables. The motor fixed, he turns the ignition, and the machine rumbles to life.

The water pump engages, and the miners can start working again. Finished repairs, Juan talks with me for ten minutes.

“Juan, how did you learn to fix engines? From your father?” I ask.

“No. He taught me only how to gamble.”

His answer makes me imagine gold mining as a calculated game of chance. In the Chocó, people enjoy playing dominoes, cards, dice, bingo, and other games. During the town’s annual religious festival, they toss coins at squares of colored cardboard to win money in a popular street games. People play dance bingo at clubs where DJs host special events mixing popular music, bingo, and prizes. In a nearby town, a restaurant had decades-old video slot machines. Many evenings, fighting boredom, I learned to play cards and dominos. To win takes skill at counting and remembering who played what. With gold mining, as with dominos, even the best players can draw bad hands and lose. Some people mine, dreaming of fast and easy money and hoping to find gold. This gambler’s hope and whispered stories of quick profits draw miners into the Chocó’s forests.

In Pereira, the capital of Risaralda, a young Afro-descendant man told me about a singer in a Chocó town who struck it rich. The singer had no money, and he never won fame for his music, so he asked excavators to dig his family’s land. The miners dug for a week and found nothing. Angry with the singer, who had made them gamble and lose, they left. Weeks later, distraught and depressed, the singer had a vision. He begged and cajoled the miners to return, and when they did, he made them dig in a spot under his house. There they found gold worth a thousand million pesos. The young Afro-descendant man said, “Can you imagine his percentage? Now rich and famous, the singer drinks only whiskey.” In the story, the singer gambled it all. But, he won money,

fame, and fortune.

With these thoughts in my head, I ask Juan directly, “Is gold mining gambling.”

Over the roar of the mine and the water pumping beside us, Juan surprises me with his reply. He tells me a story not about gold, but about the lottery, a kind of gambling.

“A friend of a friend, Mario, was from a small mining town in the Lower Cauca River in Antioquia. He won a big lottery worth hundreds of millions of pesos.”

A big deal in Colombia, people sell lottery tickets in the street as a form of *rebusque*. In Antioquia, the departmental government has a monopoly on legal gambling and licensed lottery kiosks and individual sellers. Win, the lottery corporation, uses the slogan, “Close to you and your desires.” On its website, it boasts having a presence in Antioquia’s 125 municipalities with a network of 9,000 independent vendors in the department’s rich and poor neighborhoods (Gana, 2014). Female sellers sit on small wooden chairs on street corners with portable machines and signs. The kiosks and street sellers retail lottery tickets along with cellphone credits, and allow people to pay bills, make phone calls, wire money, and send messages. Towns without electricity or banks have Win kiosks and sellers.

Juan continues. “Naïve, Mario worked his whole life as a miner. He must have been an idiot. He knew nothing about the city. Winning the lottery, he became a wealthy idiot. Carrying his ticket, dressed in new clothes and clean shoes, he went to Medellín to the Win headquarters to claim his prize. As he approached the lottery company’s offices, two men stopped him at the corner. They asked him, ‘Where are you going?’ ‘I am going to claim the lottery.’ ‘What will you do with all the money?’ ‘I don’t know.’ ‘Do you know the lottery puts the money in a bank account? Do you know the government steals money from your bank account? Every time you use the account, they take your money.’”

In a way, Juan's account of what the men said rings true. Due to complex anti-money laundering legislation, opening a bank account may take months. Banks also collect a tax of under half a percent applied to bank transactions in Colombia. Consequently, rural and urban people do not trust banks, especially in poorly served rural areas. One miner explained to me that people should save money as gold because a bank will simply "eat it."

Juan explains how the men pressed Mario further by saying the lottery corporation would rip him off. "'They give you only a little money every month. It takes years to get your winnings. You only get a little at a time, and they steal a bit monthly.' The two men then offered to buy Mario's ticket outright. They said to him, 'All the money, in cash, up front, you will not have to pay taxes. We will pay cash for your lottery ticket. You can do what you want with the money. Buy a house or a car. You don't have to wait.'" Mario thought for a moment and then sold them his ticket. They gave him cash, hundreds of millions of pesos. Mario went home to the mountains. He built a house and bought a new car. The two men went to the lottery center with Mario's ticket. They claimed it as their own and received their winnings every month paid straight into their bank accounts. They paid the tax to the government. For the next 12 months, Mario felt happy."

"Then the police grew suspicious. They asked Mario, 'Where did you find so much money? How did you buy a car? How could you afford to buy a house? Have you paid your taxes?' Mario explained he had won the lottery and bought the car and house with his winnings. The police asked for proof: a receipt, a copy of the ticket, a note from the bank, and a record of his win. The police wanted formal documentation of the lottery win, but by selling his ticket for cash Mario did not have any evidence. With no papers, he could not even prove he had won the money. The police arrested him on suspicion of drug

trafficking.”

Juan finishes the story. “The police put Mario in jail. What happened to the two men who bought the ticket? They kept the lottery winnings. The lottery paid them monthly, straight from the lottery company into their bank accounts. And where did they get the cash to buy Mario’s ticket?”

The story describes a man going from poverty to riches and back. Juan seems to interpret the lottery winner going to jail as an unsavory end for people who find easy money. Mario ended worse off than when he started, whereas the men who bought the lottery ticket went free. I see this as reflecting contemporary Colombia’s drug-fuelled conflict, which leaves Mario and others as victims. In this case, victimhood comes not through violence but through the cocaine economy. The two men hiding in the shadows near the ticket office took advantage of Mario’s lack of understanding of the lottery, banks, and taxes to launder their money. I see Juan’s point becoming clear when he asked, “And where did they get the cash to buy Mario’s ticket?” They convinced Mario to sell the ticket to them not through violence or overt threats of violence, but through what seemed to be a favor to avoid what Mario took as little understood and suspicious taxes. In the story, Mario seemed too trusting of the men. In another sense, Juan also sees what happened to Mario as being Mario’s own fault

The common Colombian expression “Don’t give papaya,” or “*No dar papaya*,” implies, “Don’t give someone the opportunity to take advantage of you.” The basis of the phrase comes from a homology between the fruit and a certain female sexual organ. People use the opposite as well: if people do “give papaya” and allow others the opportunity to take advantage of them, then they deserve whatever happens. Another variation: If people give others the opportunity to take advantage of them, those others

should take advantage because not to do so would be to display their own stupidity. Juan's story revolves around Mario "giving papaya" in allowing the two men who bought his ticket to take advantage of him. In this perspective, the fault lies with Mario, who acted stupidly, and in this perspective therefore deserved what happened. Of course, this blames the victim. This tale—about a man's foolish, trusting naïveté in an economy where people can and do take advantage of each other regularly—shows how powerful people use less-powerful people. The two men used a legitimate business, the lottery, for their own ends. Mario went to jail. They gained legal access to money gotten illegally. Juan's story reflects one technique by which drug traffickers transfer money into bank accounts.

This story's truth, that is did the events really happen and did Mario exist, is less relevant than Juan's point. Even if there never existed a bumbling miner from Antioquia who won the lottery and went to jail, people do use lottery tickets to launder money. The most recent example comes from Colombia's Caribbean Coast, where the authorities accused Enilce del Rosario López "The Cat" of laundering millions of pesos for the paramilitary through lottery sales (*El Espectador*, 2013d). Juan's story describes a creative way in which a legitimate business serves other ends. The lottery, a game of chance, involves more than chance. For the two men in the story, it matters not who won the ticket, but that the lottery legitimizes their money. I note that when I asked about mining and gambling, Juan told me about money laundering through the lottery. I had other conversations about a similar sort of process.

Diesel Fuel, Water, and Cocaine

One day in October, I helped Meta haul jugs of diesel fuel. Meta is his nickname; I

never found out his real name. He comes from Medellín, the capital of Antioquia, though his nickname refers to a department in eastern Colombia, a cattle area with wide plains close to Venezuela. Fit and muscular at 18 years old, Meta came to the village three months before for a job as a mine assistant: his hustle. His assignment consists of odd jobs: lubricating the excavators, carrying food, watching the motor, and hauling fuel. I help him carry fuel for three hours. It takes me some time to realize that, as with Juan's story of lottery tickets, diesel fuel also has its secrets.

Hauling diesel fuel provides a daily ritual. Felipe arrives with plastic jugs lashed to his heavily laden mules. Felipe, who had called washing for gold the hustle, comes from the same region as José and Geraldo. He is their cousin through marriage. His family lives in the Lower Cauca, where he grew coca until the state put pressure on coca producers. He came to the Chocó with his mules, Dólar, Juanus, and three others, to carry diesel. When he explains how he came to the Chocó and mentions the former president's name, he spits in disgust.

Each mule carries three jugs: one jug of diesel on each side and one stacked on top. Felipe lashes the plastic containers to a wooden frame using narrow rope. In Colombia, mules have brought food and supplies to remote regions of the country for centuries. Felipe's mules haul fuel the half-kilometer up from the river where the foreman, who also comes from the Lower Cauca, unloads them each morning. The foreman is a large man, who rarely smiles or talks. He brings hundreds of jugs of diesel in a large metal-hulled boat from town. The boat's powerful engines make the trip half an hour long. At least once a day—some days during daylight hours, others at night during heavy rainstorms when no other boats use the water—the foreman and an assistant bring the diesel fuel upriver. From the beach near his hut, Felipe's mules carry the fuel to the mine.

Felipe has five mules. He pats one, playing with its ears. Proud of his animal husbandry and the science he employs, he explains how he injects the animals with “vitamins so they stay healthy.” He feeds them cane molasses mixed with grain bought in Quibdó. Leaving the jugs for Meta and I, he heads back for more fuel from the river. Leaving, he says, “I should teach you how to drive the mules so I can take time off and see my family.”

Laughing at his joke, I stay behind with Meta. It starts to rain. The water soaks us while we haul the battered yellow and blue jugs 200 meters to a shelter that covers two rusting oil drums. Taking a path too rough for the mules, Meta and I balance on wooden planks over the mud with the almost-half-meter-high 19-liter jugs (5-gallons), one in each hand. My shoulders lock from the weight.

As the rain starts to pour too heavy even for this task, Meta and I seek shelter in the plastic shed. Meta unscrews each jug’s cap, throws aside the plastic bags threaded in the caps to keep out water, and fills one of the large metal storage drums with fuel. Emptying each jug, we pour the fuel through a white sheet that covers the drum to catch leaves and bits of gunk in the fuel. On a slight angle halfway down from the top of the two drums, a pipe connects them. As the diesel settles to the bottom, a liquid moves through the angled pipe from one tank to fill the other. It takes me an hour to realize that not only do leaves and sticks catch in the sheet, but also the connecting pipe moves diesel from one drum to the other, leaving water in the first drum. The heavier water sinks to the bottom of the first, while the lighter fuel floats to the top and flows into the second. That drum now full, and the rain slowed to a drizzle, Meta and I refill the emptied jugs to carry them a hundred meters to the excavators working near the classifier.

One of Meta’s daily tasks involves hauling jugs, filtering leaves and water, and

transporting the clean fuel. When I realize this, I wonder how the water gets into the jugs. Each jug has a cap and a plastic bag seals its threads. The water cannot come from boat spray, rain, or the river water. I ask Geraldo, the excavator owner, why the diesel jugs contains water. He tells me the truck drivers who bring the fuel to the town downriver, where the foreman fills the jugs, siphon off diesel fuel and replace it with water. Meta removes the water from the adulterated fuel so the excavators do not break.

The Colombian state heavily regulates diesel, gasoline, and kerosene fuel in rural Colombia because along with coca leaves and cement they form an integral part of cocaine fabrication. In his discussion of gold mining and cocaine in the southern Pacific, Michael Taussig (2004) describes how cocaine producers truck cement into the region as a raw ingredient for cocaine. Daniel Mejia and Daniel Rico (2010), economists at the Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá, estimate that making cocaine accounts for 2 percent of the cement consumption in Colombia and 1.5 percent of gasoline. According to the United Nations, to produce one kilogram of cocaine requires between 280 and 325 liters of fuel (Walsh, 2012). To make coca paste, the raw ingredient of cocaine, workers chop leaves by hand or with a wood chipper and mix them in plastic barrels or plastic-lined pits in the ground. They add fuel to draw out the active ingredients from the leaves. The fuel also powers machinery, electrical generators, lights, cutting machines, and mixers used in drug plants in the forest. Supposedly, to prevent drug production, in areas of Colombia where people grow coca, the state issues licenses for people to transport gasoline, diesel, kerosene, and other key ingredients of cocaine. The licenses certify that the person transporting the substances has no outstanding cases of trafficking, fronting, or illicit enrichment related to buying, using, distributing, producing, storing, or importing controlled chemicals (*Dirección Nacional de Estupefacientes*, 2010, p. 9 & 16). Traffickers

still find fuel though.

Colombia's network of oil refineries and pipelines make the country the third-largest oil supplier in South America. This network provides drug traffickers and armed actors access to the fuel they need to produce drugs. For example, in the Middle Magdalena River region, near the Lower Cauca, police destroyed clandestine refineries used to produce gasoline from crude oil stolen from pipelines (Walsh, 2012). The drug producers heated the crude in tanks to refine the gasoline, which they used to produce cocaine. Colombia's main oil company Ecopetrol reports that in 2012 in the south of the country, police seized a million liters of crude stolen from the Transandino pipeline, while also destroying 21 illegal refineries that supplied fuel to cocaine producers (Walsh, 2012).

Cross-border fuel smuggling also plays a role in supplying the drug industry. In an interview in *El Universal*, a Venezuelan daily, Colombian researcher Ariel F. Ávila argues that along the Venezuelan and Colombian border region of the Guajira, organized crime controls an unlawful economy based on gasoline smuggling. Each month, smugglers bring in 35 million liters of fuel. Smugglers illegally import gasoline from Venezuela (Ávila, 2012 in Valencia, 2012). The calculation seems simple: The price of subsidized Venezuelan fuel is as low as at two cents a liter, whereas in Colombia the official cost is \$1.25 (Jack, 2013). In the Caribbean region, hundreds of small vendors sell gasoline. Ávila argues that import and export schemes of contraband gasoline provide a sophisticated way of laundering money (Valencia, 2012). Paying for gasoline in Venezuela with dirty money and then smuggling it to Colombia, where people sell the fuel, converts dirty money into pesos. The contraband gasoline provides cocaine producers a fuel source.

In the Chocó, fuel costs are prohibitive, and the state tightly regulates fuel transport to prevent drug fabrication. Only small-scale miners can easily transport

significant amounts of fuel. While their mining remains illegal, they can get military and police permission to move fuel. Miners can bring gasoline and diesel into the remotest parts of the Chocó. Geraldo's explanation implies that some people divert a portion of the fuel to other ends. I interpret his explanation, that truck drivers use siphoned fuel to pay extortion demands, to imply that truckers who bring fuel from Medellín or Pereira to the Chocó drain some off and replace it with water. In addition, armed groups control fuel shipments, extort money, and divert gasoline to make drugs. Corroborating the illicit transport of fuel, one of Quibdó's newspapers, *Chocó 7 Días* (2012a), reported on a boat transporting more than three thousand liters of diesel fuel and 65 cylinders of propane on a river near the Pacific Coast without police certificates. The newspaper hinted the fuel could have helped produce cocaine. Reports and Geraldo's explanation suggest drug producers find ways to get the fuel they need through small-scale mining. Fuel brought into the Chocó serves the purposes of cocaine producers and small-scale miners. Fuel ties into the drug economy. In this way, illegal mining hides even more illicit cocaine economies. An illegal mining economy hides an illicit one, in the same way that the lottery tickets help people launder money. That mining hides the cocaine economy happens in other ways.

Gold Mines with No Gold

Late December, the mine workers at Geraldo's mine hope to go home to see their families for the New Year. I chat with one skinny, late middle age, and tired looking, worker who came from the Lower Cauca to the Chocó. Standing down behind the classifier, I have a hard time hearing above the roar of the water. He complains that José

and Geraldo have not paid anyone for months. The leftover *rebusque* gold from the sluice box has provided little money. Six months' mining in the jungles of the Chocó, and he has earned only debts from Geraldo. He has no money and cannot afford to leave. Above the din of the machinery, he yells that in the Lower Cauca, where he used to live, it was better. There, small-scale mines had five, ten, or more excavators, each in good repair, each with enough fuel. The excavators worked seven days a week for 22 hours a day. The owners paid workers on time, every two weeks. It did not seem so important if they found any gold. The machines kept working. The workers received pay regularly even when there was no gold.

Frustrated, he said, "They did not find any gold, yet they still paid us on time. Not like here."

Here in the village, at José and Geraldo's mine, not finding gold changes the situation. Close to Christmas, José and Geraldo now have two excavators each. Each excavator works all day, with three or four employees per excavator on 12-hour shifts. In this way, six to eight men mine from six o'clock in the morning to six o'clock in the evening for six days, and on Sunday they have 18-hour shifts to switch the schedule. Frequent breakdowns and repairs mean that some weeks people have nothing to do. This, combined with poor gravels that do not give much gold, meant Geraldo still owed many workers back wages. Geraldo complains to me about bankruptcy and unpaid debts.

Taking this comment alongside his description of mining in the Lower Cauca, something seems strange. If the worker's story rings true, then in the Lower Cauca people may have received pay at a mine that produces no gold. Are there gold mines that do not produce gold? How could a mine, with employees, heavy machinery, and expenses, survive with no gold? Mining costs money; maintaining heavy machinery, importing spare parts,

paying and housing workers, and hauling diesel all add up. Felipe's hustle in panning for gold, along with the leveled mined-out landscape around us, shows that finding gold here is the purpose. The story of the *paisa* miner shows this may not always be the case.

As in discussions of lottery tickets and diesel fuel, could gold mining serve other purposes? Could the importance of mining revolve not around gold from the ground, but the cocaine economy? Could the miner be suggesting the appearance of a mine somehow offers more value than gold production? A winning lottery ticket enabled two men to launder money. Watered-down diesel tanks allow people to move contraband fuel to make cocaine. Might gold mining without gold have links to Colombia's cocaine economy and the conflict? While the earlier descriptions of small-scale mining provides a sense of it as a way to find gold, the three conversations suggests sometimes mining can be more complicated. I now turn to small-scale mining and the conflict in the Lower Cauca and the Chocó to better understand the miner's complaint. Later, I turn to gold and money laundering directly.

Small-Scale Mining

I first visited the Chocó in September 2010. Mines were common, and I visited towns in search of a field site. Because of my interest in artisanal miners, I paid scant attention to the small-scale mines with their excavators, extensive workings, heavy machinery, and *paisa* workers. In retrospect, small-scale mining dominated the landscape in the Chocó's mining regions. *Semana*—Colombia's most important weekly news magazine—reported in 2013 that the department hosted 350 mines, 800 machines, and 50 dredges (*Semana*, 2013). After Geraldo and José arrived to dig Esteban's family mine, I realized the mistake in my earlier lack of interest.

On Christmas Day 2011, over a guesthouse breakfast, a *paisa* explains to me most miners who left the Lower Cauca headed west. As the government began to harass illegal excavator owners in the Lower Cauca, he and his partner crossed the Andes from that region looking to mine in the Chocó. He came to the river, with a flatbed truck hauling an excavator. He had bought the excavator with a friend after saving money from mining for years and borrowing from *gota a gota* moneylenders. The earth had given gold. He complains, over rice, eggs, and coffee, that in the Chocó his mine gave nothing. He was going broke.

Another evening, with Geraldo drinking beer in Esteban's canteen in the village, he tells me a story. He had started mining accidentally. In 2004, he and his cousin José came west, fleeing the Lower Cauca, where the rightwing paramilitary United Self Defense Forces of Colombia, or in Spanish the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (AUC), had begun extorting money from miners. In Istmina, he started to buy and sell gold. Miners came to his gold buying and exchange house from rural areas to sell gold for cash. If they needed money—for repairs, fuel, or workers—Geraldo loaned it to them. In 2007, when one miner could not repay a loan, Geraldo repossessed the man's mining equipment: his excavators, classifiers, motors, and tubing. To recoup the loss on the loan, he and his cousin José, who had more experience in mining, opened the forest trail to the river, built a camp near the river, and began mining. They paid the landowners, the Afro-descendant community council, the municipal government, the guerrillas, and others. At first, the mine gave, but then no longer. Geraldo complained at the expenses. He owed five months' wages, and mining cost him \$1,000 a day in diesel, food, pay, and parts. Downing his beer, he says, "The government bothers us: They seize and burn machinery."

He really means the national government bothers small-scale miners. Municipal

governments charge a percentage royalty on gold mined locally. By registering their gold and paying this royalty, small-scale miners can sell gold. Despite the illegal nature of the extraction, the municipal royalties legitimate the small-scale mines. Drawing on these registrations, the Colombian Ministry of Mines and Energy's Mining Information System (Sistema de Información Minero Colombiano, 2013) provides detailed online gold production statistics nationally from 1931 to 2012. It provides statistics by department annually from 1992 to 2012. Data is available every three months⁴ by municipality from 2004 to 2012. Despite their two decimal places, the figures are misleading. Miners and others can pay taxes on gold they sourced elsewhere because they move gold around.

Illustration 3 shows national gold production from 1931 to 2012 drawn from the government's data.⁵ Illustration 4 shows total departmental registrations from 1992 to 2012, including in the main gold-producing areas of Antioquia, the Chocó, Córdoba, Bolívar, Caldas, and Nariño. Illustration 5 charts the Chocó's gold production in kilograms every three months since 2004. The Chocó barely registered in comparison to Antioquia and Córdoba as a gold producer in 2004. In 2008, the department's gold production rose rapidly so that in 2009 it provided almost half of Colombia's gold, worth \$1 billion. My calculation uses the average world price that year: \$1,224 a troy ounce. The Chocó produced: 840 kg of gold in 2004, 2,039 kg in 2005 (a 143 percent increase from 2004), 1,192 kg in 2006 (a 42 percent decrease from 2005), 1,590 kg in 2007 (a 33 percent increase

⁴ The periods are: January to March; April to June; July to September; and October to December.

⁵ I compiled this and the following charts using Microsoft Excel and the data visualization software Tableau drawing on Colombia's publically available data from for 2004 to 2011 from the Banco de la República, Ministerio de Minas y Energía, Minercol, and Ingeominas and for 2012 from the Servicio Geológico Colombiano (Sistema de Información Minero Colombiano, 2013).

from 2006), 3,340 kg in 2008 (a 110 percent increase from 2007), 10,847 kg in 2009 (a 225 percent increase from 2008), 24,233 kg in 2010 (a 123 percent increase from 2009), 27,915 kg in 2011 (a 15 percent increase from 2010), 17,073 kg in the first nine months of 2012 (a 16 percent decrease for the first nine months of 2011). In 2010, the Chocó's share of production was more than Antioquia's.

The detailed gold production figures in Illustration 6 chart national gold production every three months at the municipal-level. The light blue demonstrates the shift to the Chocó. The Chocó's blue and Antioquia's orange register the increases in specific municipalities. Illustration 7 shows production in the Chocó—from the least to the most. Note the shifting scale on the vertical axis for this and the following charts.

Illustration 3: Colombia's Gold Production (1931–2012)

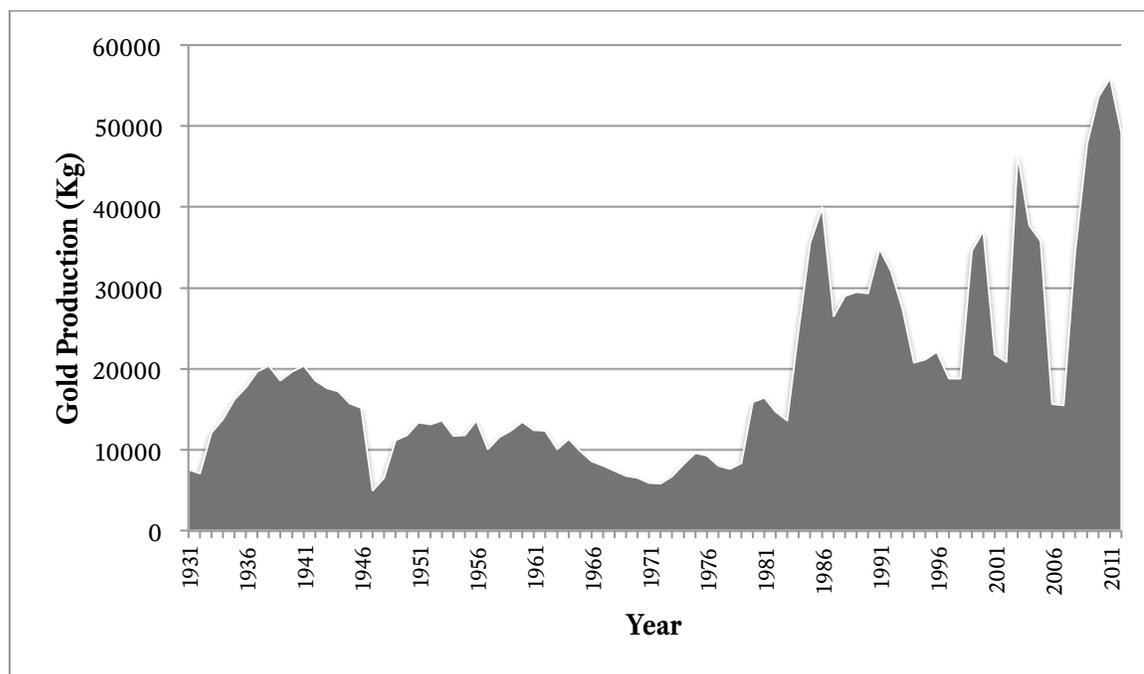


Illustration 4: Departmental Gold Production in Colombia (1992–2012)

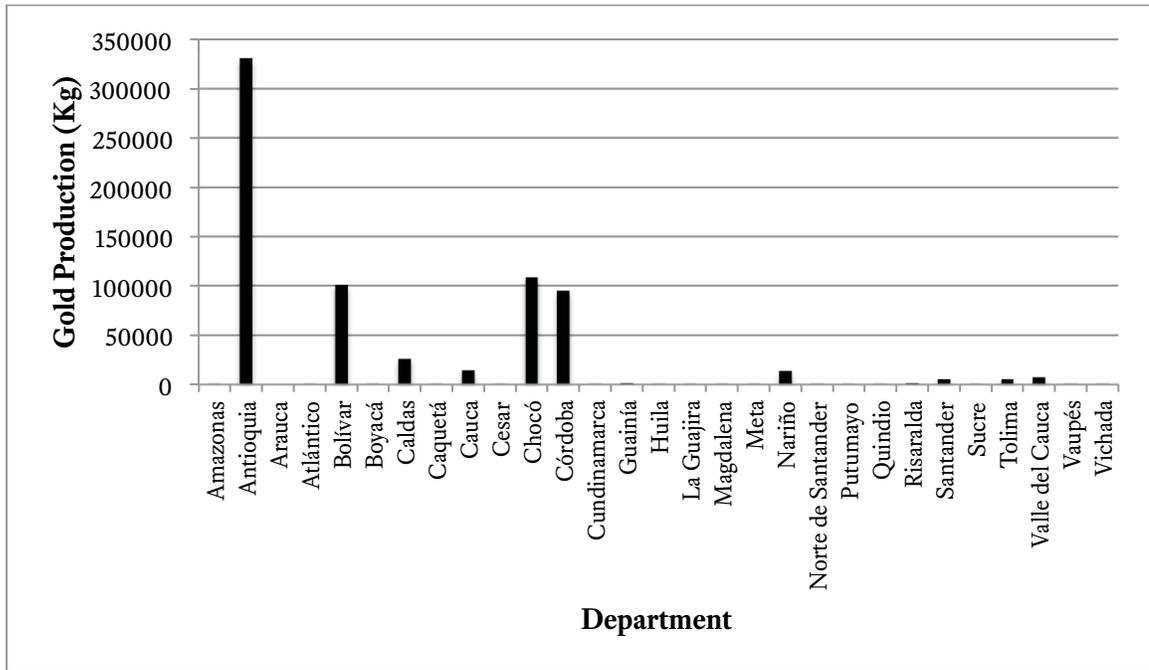


Illustration 5: Chocó Gold Production (2004–2012)

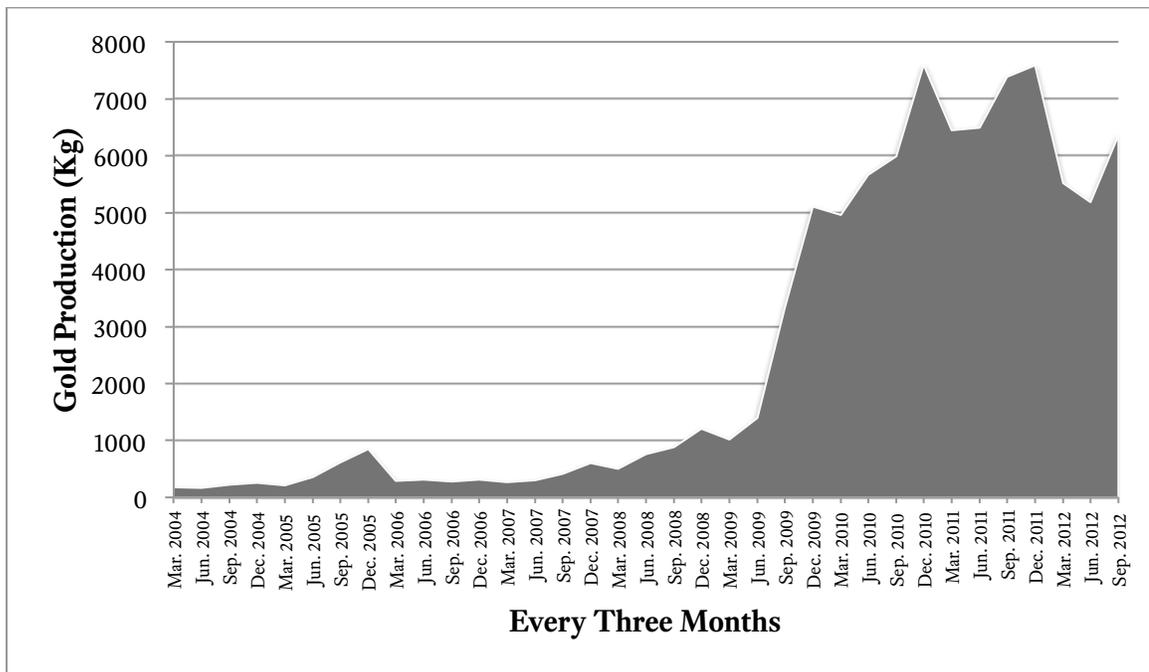


Illustration 6: Municipal Gold Production in Colombia (2004–2012)

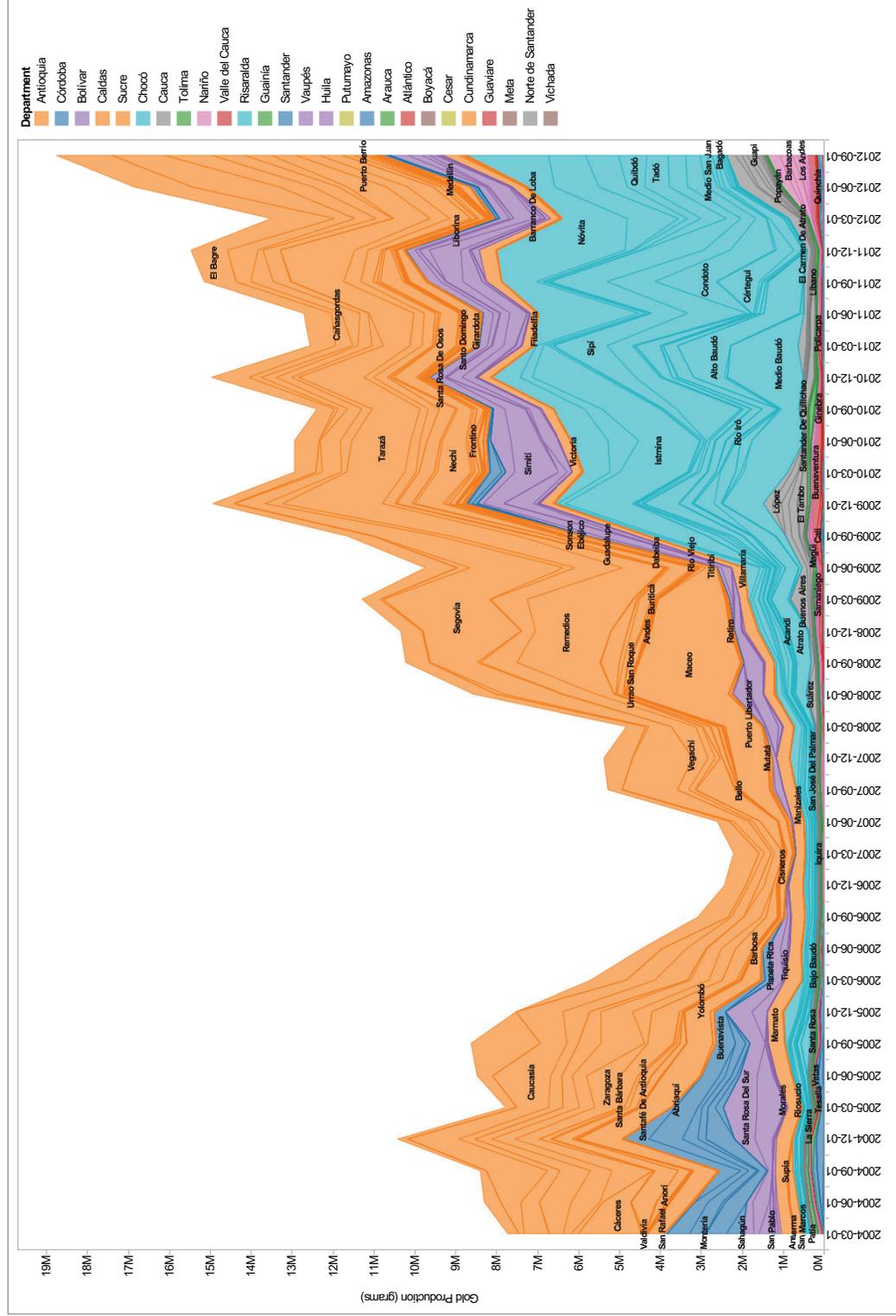


Illustration 7: Municipal Gold Production in the Chocó (2004–2012)

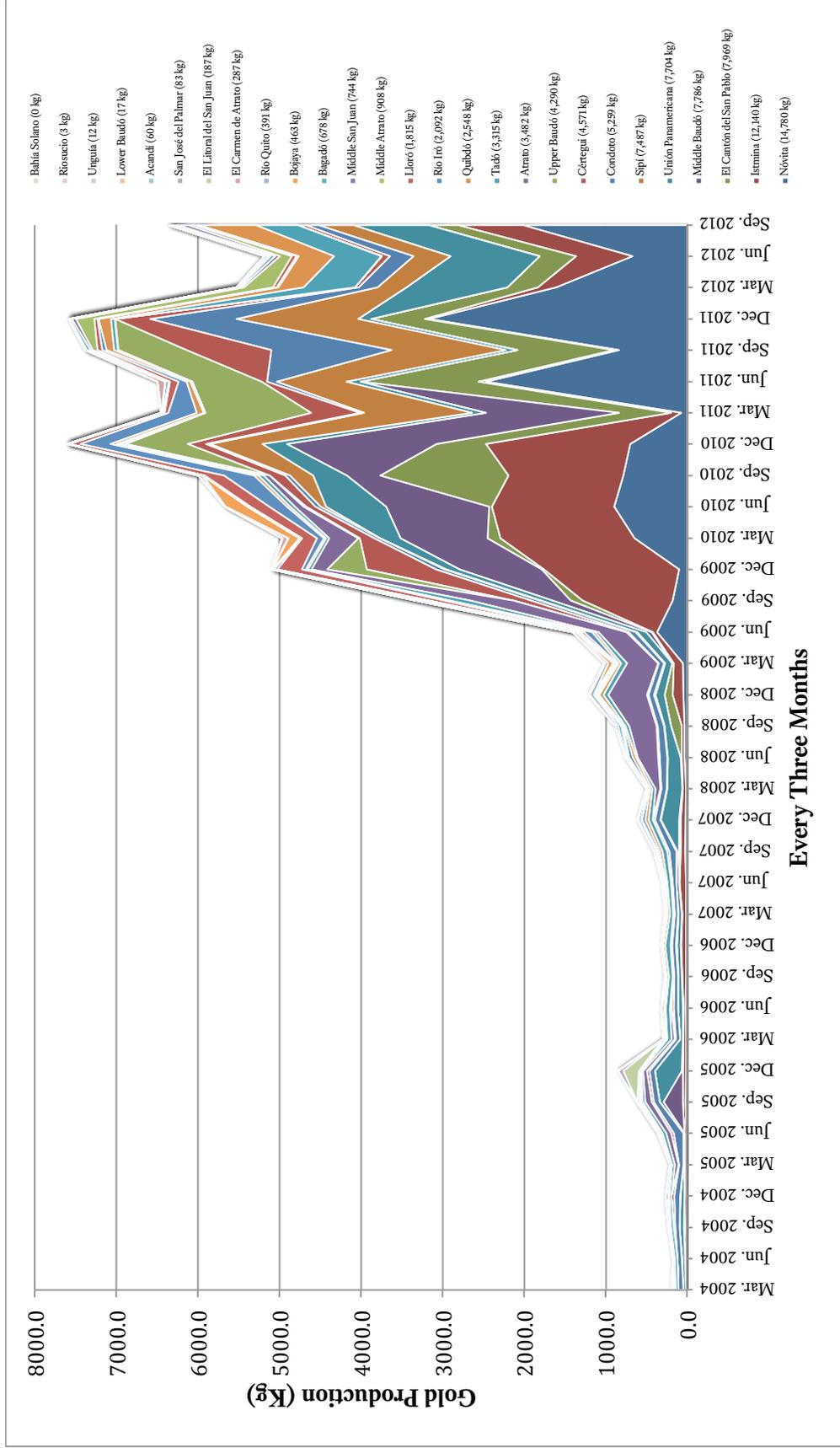


Illustration 8: Quito River (2004–2012)

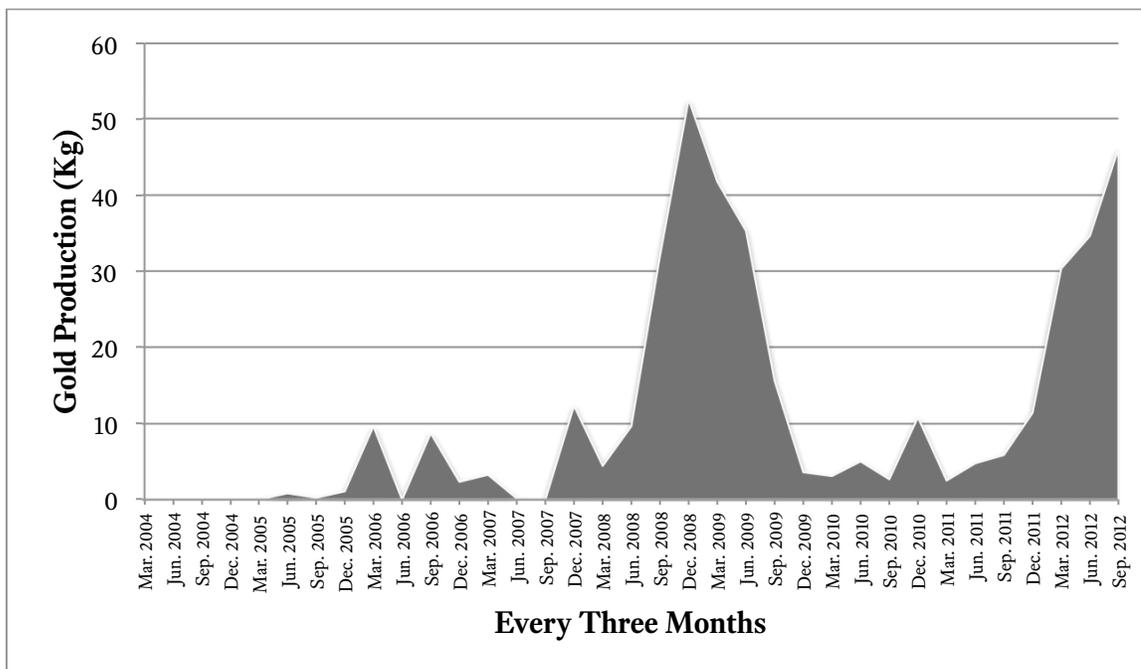


Illustration 9: Lloró and Bagadó (2004–2012)

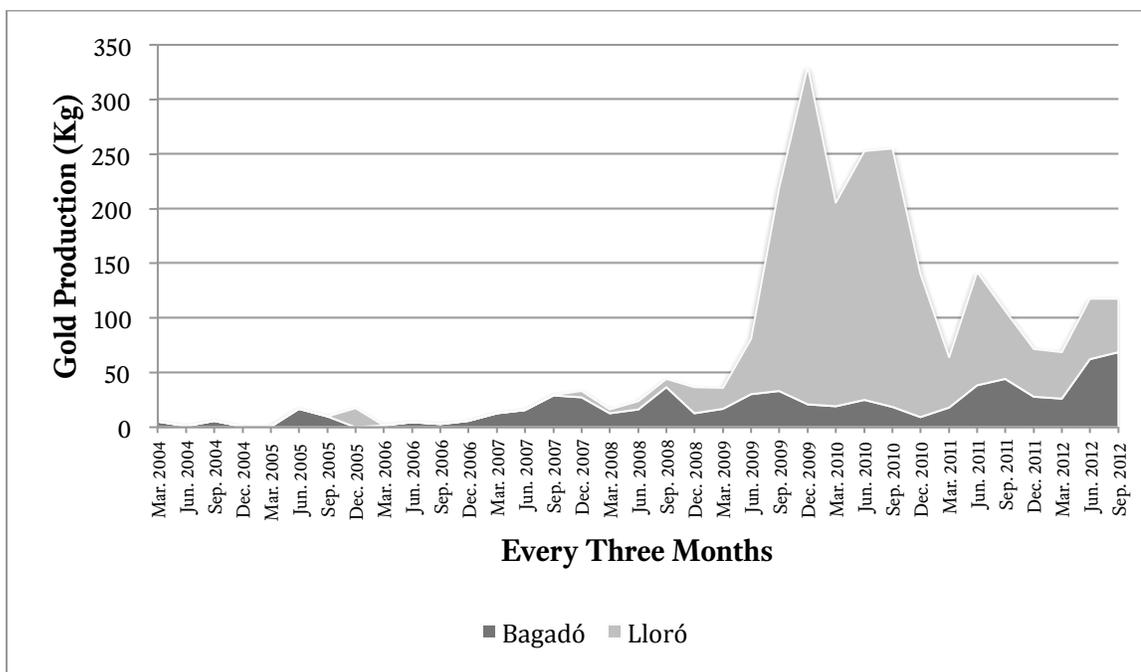


Illustration 10: Istmina (2004–2012)

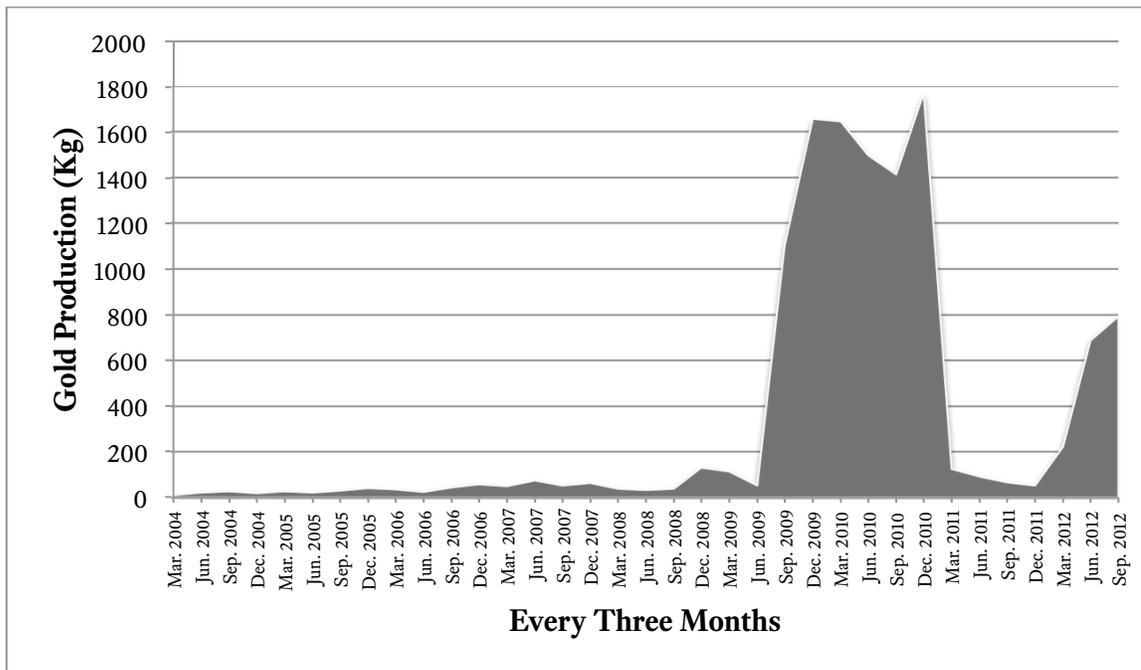


Illustration 11: Sipí (2004–2012)

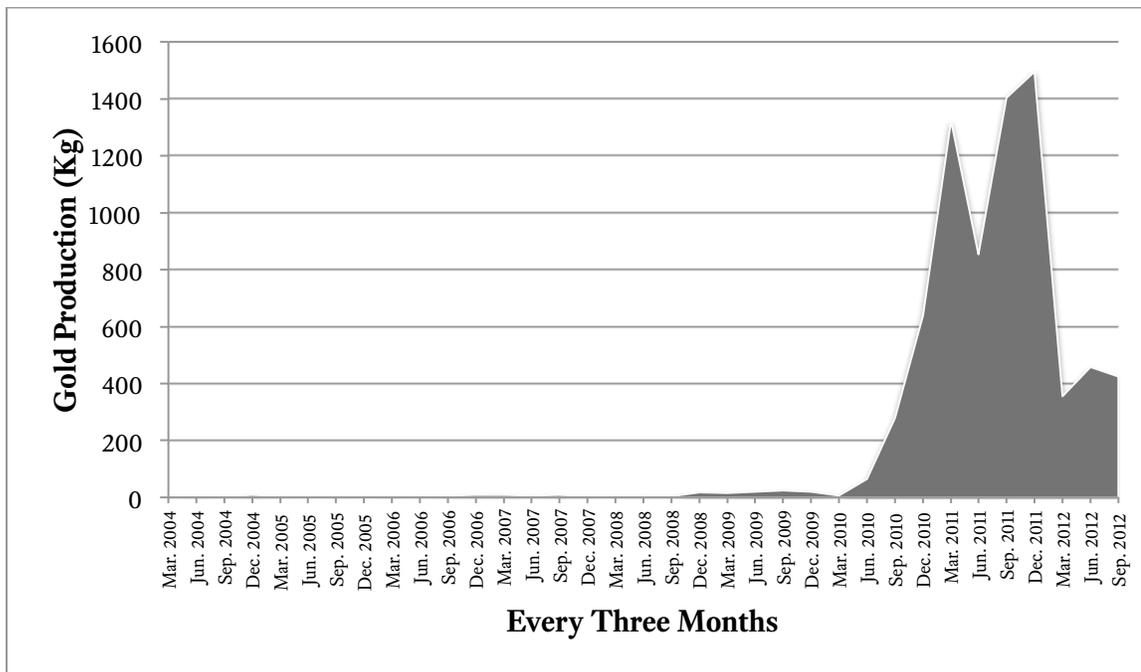


Illustration 8 shows gold figures on the Quito River. Although 30 dredges operated between 2007 and 2009 (*Semana*, 2009), production peaked at 56 kg in the three months ending December 2008. Production in other municipalities in the Chocó, such as Novíta, reached 3,161 kg. Over the same period, according to the Catholic Diocese, the Andágueda River had as many as 75 excavators operating on dozens of mines. Illustration 9 shows low gold production levels in the two municipalities of Lloró and Bagadó because production peaked only at 300 kg, although at the time there were dozens of excavators. If the three municipalities—Quitó River, Bagadó, and Lloró—seem to produce low amounts of gold compared to the reports of high numbers of excavators, other municipalities produced much greater amounts of gold, despite not such a marked increase in the number of excavators

Istmina, on the San Juan, has long been a gold mining capital. Gold registrations remained steady and low from March 2004 until March 2009. Then gold production increased 2,033 percent over three months between July and September 2009. *Semana* (Ronderos, 2011) reports that the municipality engaged private contractors for local projects, assigning contracts that matched the royalty payments from the reported gold production. The municipal government immediately transferred the same amount of money as the royalty payments to third parties for unfulfilled work contracts.

Illustration 11 shows figures for Sipí, offering another example of sudden excessive production. In 2009, Sipí registered the second-largest amount of gold in Colombia, yet the municipality is a drug route more than a mining frontier. It borders the departments of the Chocó and the Cauca where the Garrapatas Canyon links coca-producing regions in the interior to the San Juan River and the Pacific (*Semana*, 2012). For two decades, armed groups have fought to control the area's narcotics transportation.

From these charts, it appears that gold production in the Chocó has increased markedly since 2008, in part coinciding with the movement of miners from the Lower Cauca to the Chocó. Yet, the gold production statistics do not represent municipal gold production, but municipal gold registrations. This subtle difference means the charts show not which municipalities produced gold, but where miners paid royalties. I offer two explanations for the graphs' shape: money laundering and the movement of gold registrations. Looking at the Lower Cauca mining region, where Geraldo, José, and the *paisa* with whom I had breakfast came from, illuminates some aspects of small-scale mining that help explain these graphs.

The Lower Cauca Region

Because some small-scale miners in the Chocó arrived from the Lower Cauca, looking at mining there helps explain the Chocó's small-scale mining. Writing for the respected Medellín-based non-governmental organization the Popular Training Institute (Instituto Popular de Capacitación) Yhoban Camilo Hernandez Cifuentes (2012) describes the municipalities of the Lower Cauca River—Tarazá, Cáceres, Caucasia, Zaragoza, El Bagre, and Nechí—as comprising a centuries-old gold mining epicenter. Until 2007, the area produced half of Colombia's gold. As in other areas, small-scale miners there have no legal title, do not own the land they mine, and pay a percentage to the owners. Hernandez Cifuentes estimates that mining provides 48,000 jobs and a living for 80 percent of the population there (2012). Mining connects to the conflict because armed groups control mines, extort miners, and profit by moving municipal gold registrations.

The Conflict and Control

In 2010, the main center-right daily newspaper *El Tiempo* (2010) described confidential reports written by the Attorney General and the police about gold mining in the Lower Cauca. The reports explained that in 2010 the authorities detected armed groups controlling gold mining in the Lower Cauca River, in Zaragoza in the Valle del Cauca department, Los Fararlonos in the South of Bolívar department, and in the Santander department.¹ They reported that gold mining offered armed groups greater and faster profits than cocaine. Consequently, different armed groups fought to control gold mines directly. Writing in the *New York Times*, Simon Romero (2011) reported the FARC were directly profiting from gold mining. In these areas, armed groups made as much as 30 percent of their profits from gold (*El Tiempo*, 2010). One consequence was increased homicide rates. In the Lower Cauca, homicides had increased in mining areas in 2010 to 189 per 100,000 as compared to the national average of 35 per 100,000. To explore the connection between small-scale mining and the conflict I turn to two areas: the South of Bolívar region during the 1990s and a mine in the Lower Cauca's mining town of Segovia.

Newspapers (*El Tiempo*, 2010; Morales, 2010) reported that in the 1990s paramilitary forces took control of small-scale mining in the San Lucas hills of the South of Bolívar. In one area, two paramilitary commanders, "Macaco" and "Julian Bolívar," controlled mining. They arrived in 1998 with the paramilitary and forced residents to mine. One witness reported, "children and women enslaved to exploit gold" (Defensoria del Pueblo - Colombia, 2010). People could not leave the area without a safe-conduct pass

¹ Colombia's Defensoria del Pueblo (2010) has an excellent report on small-scale mining in Colombia that discusses these issues in some detail.

from the paramilitary (Defensoria del Pueblo - Colombia, 2010). While the paramilitary paid 20 percent of mining profits to land owners, they forced workers to labor 12 hours a day. Macaco and Julian Bolívar controlled between fifty and eighty mines in the area, in addition to fifty mines in the Lower Cauca (Tiempo, 2010; Morales, 2010). They recovered 270 kilograms of gold a month, using helicopters to fly it out (Defensoria del Pueblo - Colombia, 2010). Writing for *El Colombiano*, a Medellín-based newspaper, Germán Jiménez Morales (2010) reported that in the San Lucas hills of the South of Bolívar criminal groups fought to control gold mining.

Shifting focus to the town of Segovia, in *Semana*, Juan José Hoyos (2012) reported on Frontino Gold Mines, a mining company that was one of the country's largest producers. In 1825, miners founded Segovía as a company town. In the twentieth century, various foreign corporations controlled the Frontino mines located near Segovia, which provided jobs, education, and training. In 1977, the US company that operated the Frontino mine went bankrupt. To pay the companies' debts to its workers, the state forced it to turn control of the mine over to the 1,200 workers and 700 retirees. The former workers and retirees ran the mine until 2010 (Hoyos, 2012). In 2000, those miners opened the Providence mine, as one of the mines that formed part of Frontino. With price rises, the company made money. The Providence mine provided 80 percent of the gold.

Armed actors controlled this as well. Reporting for *El Espectador*, one of Colombia's most important newspapers, Róbinson Úsuga Henao described how Hugo Escobar Jairo Cataño, or the "Gold Tsar," took control of mines in the Segovía area. When the authorities arrested him in 2012, he was one of the richest men in the area alongside Toño Marrano (Úsuga Henao, 2012). Marrano employed 500 workers and controlled a 300-employee mine adjacent to Frontino's Providence mine (Morales, 2010).

In 2010, the Colombian government liquidated the former Frontino Gold Mines and sold the mine to a Canadian company called Medoro. Medoro merged with another Canadian company, Gran Colombia Gold. Both companies had registered on the Toronto Stock Exchange. Management in Gran Colombia Gold includes Colombians also involved in the country's largest petroleum producer Pacific Rubiales. The Canadian registered Gran Colombia Gold now operates five of the former Frontino mines, including the Providence. The Colombian financial newspaper *El Dinero* calculates the former Frontino Mines were worth more than the \$37.5 million Medoro paid (*El Dinero*, 2011). Now owned by Gran Colombia, the former Frontino mines provide the bulk of the companies production.

The Segovía town and the former Frontino mines remains a mining epicenter. Former employees and retirees of Frontino Gold Mines sell gold mined using excavators and small-scale operations to Gran Colombia Gold. The company buys gold from 50 and 60 small mines in operated by former workers in the surrounding area, where 7,000 people find employment (Gran Colombia Gold, 2013). The company reports that it has contracts which “require the artisanal miners to form companies or cooperatives that comply with local employment and other laws and agree to follow Gran Colombia's rules and procedures and operate within the company's mine plan and deliver the ore to the Canadian company's plant for processing” (Gran Colombia Gold, 2013). Segovía remains conflicted.

The Conflict and Extortion

While small-scale mines provide a direct source of profits for armed groups as in the South of Bolívar and Segovía, armed groups also extort miners (Hoyos, 2012). Colombian sociologist Jairo Bedoya (2010) describes protection money as key to

Colombia's underground economy. He documents how armed groups extort businesses by charging vaccinations (*vacunas*) (Bedoya, 2010). Stores, bus companies, small factories, fabric sellers, street sellers, and traffickers all pay a percentage of their profits to armed groups.

Hernandez Cifuentes (2012) described how criminal groups and corrupt authorities extort small-scale miners. Writing for *El Espectador* María del Rosario Arrázola described the guerrilla in El Bagre and Nechí who extorts between two and five million pesos (US \$1,000 to \$2,600) per excavator and receive 1,600 million pesos (US \$849,600) a year from this business. The *Fundación Ideas para la Paz* (2013), reported that Jorge Giraldo and Juan Carlos Muñoz, two professors at the EAFIT (*Escuela de Administración, Finanzas y Tecnología*), a private university in Medellín, found that armed groups receive between 350 million and 650 million pesos (\$185,850 and \$346,085) a month from mining. They describe gold mining as the new drug trafficking because it is so lucrative (Foundation Ideas of Peace, 2013). In Segovía, miners pay armed groups between 5 and 10 million pesos (\$2,600 to \$5,300) for each excavator that enters an area (Hernandez Cifuentes, 2012). To mine an area, they pay between 2 and 5 million pesos (\$1,000 to \$2,600), plus 10 percent of the value of every ounce of gold removed. The first time a miner refuses to pay this tax, the armed groups take away the keys to the machinery. The second time, they burn the machinery (Morales, 2010).

The Conflict and Municipal Registrations

Small-scale miners sell their gold to intermediaries, rather than to gold foundries directly. Miners working in the mountains have little choice but to sell their gold to buyers

in nearby towns. The intermediaries can divert the gold, moving it to other parts of Colombia or to other municipalities. This means the metal finds its way into other municipalities, where the municipality certifies it as coming from another mine. It is easy for those buying gold in one area to register the profits somewhere else. Writing for the *Semana*, Teresa Ronderos (2011) notes the state suspended royalty payments to some municipalities including Istmina because of suspicious work contracts paid with royalty money that came from somewhere else.

Chapter Summary

This chapter describes small-scale gold mining through conversations and mine labor. It follows on from where the last chapter ended with the entry of a small-scale mining operation to the village. I turned to the small-scale miners who arrive in the Chocó to work in Esteban's family mine. While I do not discuss *paisa* miners in the Upper Atrato and Upper Andágueda, I do discuss José and Geraldo's mine where I did fieldwork in the Chocó. These two men were cousins from the Lower Cauca, who came over the Andes to work on the river. Four years later, they began to level the hill where Mauricio and I made phone calls. Like many *paisa* miners, they had fled to the Chocó from the Lower Cauca region of Antioquia, where the conflict and state pressure had negative outcomes for small-scale miners. They had come to the Chocó running away from the state. Their mining operation consisted of excavators with mostly migrant *paisa* workers. While Afro-descendants find a livelihood through farming, hunting, fishing, trading, and gold mining, the outsiders concentrated on mining. The two cousins gained permission from local landowners and the community councils to use excavators and heavy machinery. By

describing their mining techniques, and their hustle, I showed ways small-scale miners gain support from local people. At the same time, this mining is not only about mining. Drawing on conversations about lottery tickets, diesel fuel, and gold mining, I show that gold is not always about gold. From these conversations, I develop a detailed discussion about gold mining statistics in Colombia and show that mining figures some areas of the Chocó are too high, and in other areas too low. I show that in out-of-the-way frontiers, small-scale gold mining links to the conflict as armed actors control mines, extort miners, and move municipal production around.

Geraldo and José had started mining Esteban's mine in May 2011. Their machines leveled the hill and they dug down to the bedrock where Esteban and his family had dug a tunnel two months before. To garner support from the Afro-descendant population of the village, the small-scale miners allowed people to go gold panning. People appreciated the opportunity to mine another family's mine at a depth they could never reach by hand. This provided them with an opportunity to earn a little extra money. The urban and rural populations call their labor *rebusque*, which I translate as the "hustle."

As I noted, the hustle is a form of production, consumption, and exchange. It included street trade, migrant labor, logging, coffee picking, extortion, drug trafficking, gold mining, and other urban and rural moneymaking practices (Belèn Fonseca, 2011; Bromley, 1978; González, 2008; Molano, 1996a, 1997; Taussig, 1978). Translating *rebusque* as the word "hustle" instead of "gleaning," better reflects these creative livelihood practices. With the gold washing, I show how migrant in the Chocó's frontier region use a hustle to complement their wages. Small-scale mine workers, coca pickers, itinerant workers, rural people, and the urban poor hustle to find money in rural areas. For small-scale miners finding gold matters. It is, as Felipe said, their hustle. While José and

Geraldo let Felipe and the mine workers wash for their hustle, they pay wages to the regular miners, give a percentage to landowners, and let community members pan for gold.

José used his bare hands to collect the mercury and gold using mining techniques that contrast the ways large-scale multinational corporations use cyanide to extract gold. Both are dangerous as mercury and cyanide are highly poisonous. While the Colombian state considered artisanal gold mining legal, it casts small-scale gold mining with heavy machinery as illegal because of the lack of environmental assessments, technical studies, or mining concessions. The state has begun persecuting, intimidating, and stigmatizing small-scale miners, like Geraldo and José, across Colombia. On November 27, 2010, Colombia's Minister of the Environment, Housing, and Territorial Development reported closing 50 illegal mines (Hernández Cifuentes, 2012). The police and military arrested workers, impounded and burned machinery, and levied sanctions. By favoring foreign, direct investment and by shutting down small-scale mines, the state sparked protests from mining organizations in the mining regions. In the Chocó and the Lower Cauca, some small-scale miners formed organizations to protect their interests. Small-scale miners saw themselves as victims of both persecution and the armed conflict (Hernández Cifuentes, 2012). In both areas, the organizations claim they represent small-scale miners as victims of domestic mining corporations, armed actors, the national state, and multinational mining corporations. They point to the state's failure to offer legalization or public policy promoting small-scale mining. In 2011 and 2013 thousands of small-scale miners in the Lower Cauca and the Chocó struck. They blockaded the main highways and tried to force the government to stop criminalizing small-scale miners (e.g. *El Espectador*, 2013c).

From the hustle at the mine and small-scale mining, I turn to work conversations about practices that are not as they seem. The lottery ticket, the watered-down diesel fuel, and the gold mines without any gold in the Lower Cauca show the ways mining can sometimes link to other activities and the broader drug economy. While the lure of gold has brought migrants, miners, mechanics, muleteers, and others to the Chocó, gold is not always only about gold: context matters. Beginning in 2008, hundreds of miners came to the Lower Cauca. The number of mines and the quantity gold produced rapidly expanded. Until 2008, the Chocó registered as Colombia's fourth-largest gold producer. Since then, it has registered as the first or second-largest producer (Sistema de Información Minero Colombiano, 2013). Despite increases in production, publicly available gold figures show under-registration in some and over-registration in other municipalities. In some areas, gold production figures do not match what is happening on the ground. On the River Quitó, with 30 dredges, and the Andágueda River, with 75 excavators, gold production increased by only a small amount. In Istmina and Sipí, production increased at as much as 2,033 percent in three months. In some municipalities, miners register gold that came from another municipality. Small-scale gold mining connects to other economies.

From this discussion of unusual production figures, I turned to small-scale mining in Segovia in the Lower Cauca and the South of Bolívar. In both regions, armed actors controlled mines, charged protection money from small-scale miners, and to capture royalties from municipal governments they control they registered gold mined in one municipality as coming from another. I have shown the complexities small-scale mining. For migrant *paisas* and artisanal miners, small-scale mining is part of their own livelihood practices of rural production. From conversations at work on lottery tickets, diesel fuel, and gold, I have shown the ways that small-scale gold mining connects to conflict,

extortion, and municipal politics. Later, I discuss the importance of context, and how anomalies in gold registrations link small-scale mining to the cocaine trade and money laundering.

Chapter 8: Small-Scale Gold Mining and Money Laundering

Late in 2011, I hike over the Baudó hills towards the municipal capital of Pie de Pato with my partner, who recently found a job in the Chocó working to coordinate flood relief in the municipality of the Upper Baudó. The Baudó River flows into the Pacific, but has its upper reaches inland from the Pacific in Colombia's north west coast. It is the first time I have been the Baudó River, but not the first time I had come across the area. It took me a year to understand the surprising nature of my first encounter with the Baudó.

Jairo was my age, from Quibdó. He is involved in local activism and politics. We were at a cultural event at a university in Quibdó, waiting to watch a dance performance celebrating rural Afro-descendant culture and relationship to the land to begin. I had just met him. When he found out I was interested in mining, he excitedly told me that, according to recent figures, of Colombia's 32 departments, the Chocó produced the most gold in 2010. He was proud, a demonstration that the Chocó was first in something. He handed over an issue of Quibdó's newspaper *Chocó 7 Días* (2010b). The paper reported the department produced the most gold in Colombia (see *Chocó 7 Días*, 2012b). It listed some municipalities by their total gold mined. The Chocó was now producing the most gold in the Colombia. Smiling, he told me the small-scale mining associations in Quibdó hoped, unrealistically I later realized, to start an office of the Ministry of Mines in the Chocó. I agreed the idea was exciting.

When I spoke to him, I had been in the Chocó for only a week in the hope of studying gold mining, and did not know the department's geography. None of the

municipalities listed in the article meant anything to me. For example, it did not register to me as interesting that the newspaper reported the Chocó's Upper Baudó municipality had the third-highest gold production in Colombia. The newspaper article drew on the national gold statistics produced by the Ministry of Mines and made publicly available on its website (Sistema de Información Minero Colombiano, 2013). These figures describe the municipality where miners registered their gold, but not necessarily, where the gold came from.

I had come to the Chocó hoping to study gold mining. In late 2010, when Jairo told me the department had produced the most gold in Colombia, I took it to simply confirm my study's timeliness. That evening, after talking to Jairo, I noted the Chocó had produced the most gold and listed the municipal breakdown in a notebook. At the time, I saw the Upper Baudó as simply one of the Chocó's many municipalities with increased mining. I did not realize the surprising nature of the figures until a year later when I visited the area. The Upper Baudó has no gold and no gold mines; yet figures suggested it was the third largest producer of gold. This brings me to my hike in 2011 and the Upper Baudó's municipal capital of Pie de Pato.

My partner asked me to come to Pie de Pato to video the village's annual festival for the Afro-descendant community council. Therefore, I carry a camera, sound equipment, and tripod to record the celebration of the town's patron saint St. Martin of Porres. Our hike has left me exhausted. In the morning, she and I took an eight-hour motor canoe trip from Quibdó. Our boat left before dawn, and now, late afternoon, we walk the last 3 kilometers through the forests. The path makes its slippery way over the Baudó hills. I stumble with the heat. She had brought pieces of fried chicken wrapped in tinfoil and lightly salted boiled potatoes for lunch. The food has not been enough. Hungry,

tired, and thirsty, we follow five young men carrying heavy loads of boxes, plastic bags, sacks destined for a store, and our luggage.

Carlos Andrés Meza Ramírez (2010) discusses modernity and black towns and villages on these networks of trails between Quibdó, the Atrato River, the Baudó River, and the Pacific coast. He provides a photo of an old man on this trail hoisted on someone's back. When I first saw the photo (Édgar Domínguez, 2003 in Meza Ramírez, 2010, p. 30), it seemed shocking and reminiscent of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century colonization of the hot lowlands of the Ecuadorian Amazon (e.g. Muratorio, 1991). As I hike, hot and tired from the long day's travel, I think about making this trip on a wooden chair on someone else's back.

We pass a small encampment of soldiers in camouflage sleeping in hammocks. One of them lazily waves us on. The trail turns towards the municipal capital, Pie de Pato. Its name means, literally, the "Foot of the Duck." The Duck refers to the Pato River's bird life, which our boat had travelled along that morning. The Pato River flows east from the Baudó hills. On the east side, it flows into the Quito River and then the Atrato River and north to the Caribbean. On the west side, the streams flow into the Baudó River and southwest into the Pacific Ocean. The soldiers camp at the highest elevation of the trail over the Baudó Hills. I look in front of us across undulating forests gray and overcast, with the town opening out below us.

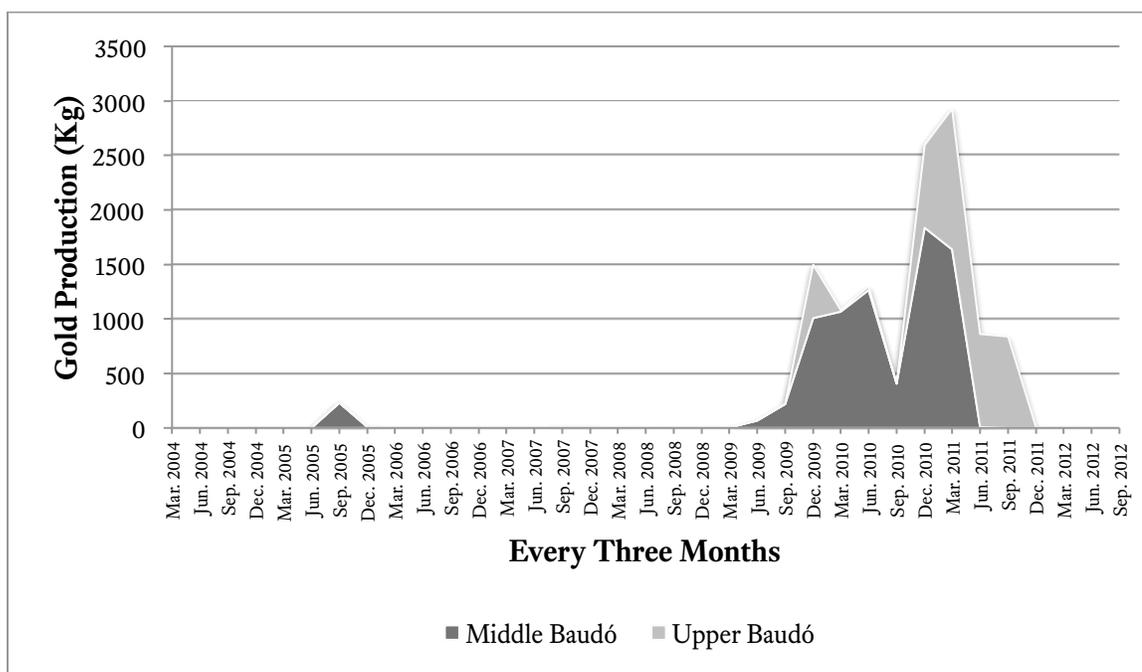
A second route to Pie de Pato opens twice a week, when a bus leaves from Istmina for Puerto Meluk on the Baudó. From there, the boat travels up the Baudó River to Pie de Pato. That trip feels more dangerous because guerrilla and paramilitary control parts of the river where they produce coca. One of my partner's jobs in Pie de Pato involves talking to displaced families, many of whom flooding had displaced. Others have moved

because of the paramilitary or guerrilla presence and their coca. The Baudó region supplies other commodities besides cocaine to world markets. In 2011, a Canadian lumber company from Vancouver sought environmental approval to extract lumber using helicopters from the Upper Baudó's forests to the port Bahia Solano on the Pacific coast. The company had planned to log the forests controlled by coca growers, but lost their environmental license after a legal challenge (*Chocó 7 Días*, 2010; Molano, 2011a). While the Baudó River does have lumber and cocaine, it does not have any gold.

From our viewpoint, near where the soldiers rest, on the last part of the trail before it descends into the village, I pause to look down at the town of Pie de Pato. It is sleepy and quiet with no electricity. Most houses stand on stilts to protect against floods from the rain-swollen river. Some streets have planks in the street to walk. The town center has a smattering of canteens with loud music coming from speakers powered by generators, a kiosk for lottery tickets, schools, a medical center, and the mayor's office. The church and a priest's house are on higher ground.

I take a moment to pause on this trip to the Upper Baudó because, unlike the Atrato River and San Juan River, the area has no gold mining. No excavators dig the riverbanks, and no dredges work near the municipal capital or rural villages. Despite what the gold mining statistics say, the area had little to no gold mining past or present. Yet, between 2008 and 2011, the municipality registered as producing the third-highest amount of gold in Colombia (see Illustration 12). Indeed, it was in part because of gold that some companies reported they had mined in the Upper Baudó, that the Chocó registered the most gold mining in Colombia in 2010 which given Jairo such excitement.

Illustration 12: Middle and Upper Baudó (2001–2012)



The Baudó River has three municipalities, the Upper, Middle, and Lower Baudó. Gold mining statistics for the Upper and Middle Baudó from 2004 until 2009 totaled 279 kg—the Lower Baudó did not produce any gold. From January 2009 to December 2011, gold figures increased despite a lack of gold mines. Gold registrations in 2009 amounted to 1,784 kg, representing in my estimates \$55.8 million (at \$972 per troy ounce, the average world price in 2009). In 2010, this figure increased 202 percent to 5,381 kg, worth over \$212 million (at \$1,224 per troy ounce, the average world price in 2010). In 2011, it was 4,632 kg, worth over \$234 million (at \$1,572 per troy ounce, the average world price in 2011). In the first nine months of 2012, it fell to 1 kg. This estimate for the value of this gold comes from my own calculation. I added up the total figures for each municipality, and then calculated an estimate of its selling price based on the average annual gold price for the year in question. This provides a rough estimate, as the value of the gold depends on the price of gold in Colombia and not the average annual world price. Nonetheless, the

estimates help understand the scale of gold registrations. These official government sources, for the three-year period ending December 31, 2012, show the total for the Upper and Middle Baudó reached 11,796 kg, with, I estimate, a value at world prices at over half a billion dollars. This is a large amount of gold for a river with few or no gold mines.

In 2013, newspapers began to cover dubious royalty payments related to these gold production figures (e.g. *La W Radio*, 2013). None, however, have remarked on the scale of the figures, focusing instead on royalty payments. I did not realize until much later, but I ought to have asked Jairo about the figures he showed me. How did the municipal figures in the Middle and Upper Baudó reach 9.2 percent of the country's total gold mined between 2008 and 2011, with no gold mines? Explaining these figures takes a detour through the broader gold mining industry in Colombia. I argue gold-based money laundering provides the likely answer. This chapter frames money laundering within a broad discussion of gold's many roles in the global underground economy and the Colombian economy, as well as the many ways small-scale mining helps gold-based money laundering.

In August 2013, after writing an early draft of this discussion, I returned to Colombia. In Bogotá, I shared my analysis with many people. One conversation in particular sheds some light on the regional economy. Late at night while talking with a friend about gold, the Chocó, the Upper Baudó River, and the northern Pacific Coast, the issue of drugs came up. We began to discuss the Baudó River and money laundering

“It's possible,” she said, “Colombia is a magical country.”

She told me a story about fishing on the Chocó's northern Pacific coast. Teenagers from the villages of Pizarro, Nuquí, Tribugá, Bahía Solano, and Jurando on the coast use small fishing boats to catch floating plastic-wrapped packages of cocaine, known

colloquially as the “white wave,” or “*ola blanca*.” Smugglers sometimes throw drugs overboard as they pass these coastal villages and towns, coming from the port of Buenaventura, heading north to Panama and Central America. The “white wave” makes detection of larger shipments harder because police concentrate on the kids (Meza Ramírez, 2010). The teenagers who fish for the “white wave” make a little money, but act as decoys and allow bigger drug shipments to make it north. News reports suggest Mexicans cartels, including the Sinaloa cartel, controlled by Joaquín “Shorty” Guzmán before his arrest in 2013, have representatives in Buenaventura orchestrating shipments (Althaus, 2013). Newspapers describe cocaine transporters who use small submarines to move cocaine north to Central American networks (e.g. *El Espectador*, 2013f).

My friend told me that on one of her visits to the area, on the Chocó’s northwest Pacific coast and not far from the Baudó River, she had seen the remains of earlier drug routes. Walking on a beach, she came across an airstrip where the jungle met the ocean. Old concrete runways cut straight in the sand. The landing strips, unused for years, had allowed smugglers to fly cocaine north in light aircraft. The airborne technique fell out of favor as drug enforcement’s radar systems improved. Today, kids fish the “white wave,” while small boats and submarines move cocaine northwards and are harder to detect. I mention the “white wave,” jungle airstrips, and cocaine smuggling because it shows how the Baudó River is tied into this broader economy of production, consumption, transport, and shipment of cocaine.

In the 1990s, Colombia’s war arrived on the Chocó along with the drugs. The San Juan became a shipment route for drugs flowing down from the interior to the coast. The sparsely populated Pacific Coast became a launching ground to send shipments of cocaine north to Central America, with the final destination of the USA and Canada. Traffickers

used small airplanes leaving from jungle runways to drop shipments in the sea. There, boats took them north. Later, mini-submarines launched from the region's rivers and forests and towed north by fishing boats ready to drop them at a moment's notice if questioned by the police.

I begin with the Baudó's gold production figures alongside cocaine smuggling to bring together small-scale gold mining and this economy directly. Here, to answer this question, as well as the questions raised earlier around lottery tickets, diesel fuel, gold mines, I argue small-scale gold mining is not just about gold, but also provides a way to launder money. To support this observation, I take two detours. First, I discuss the global underground economy's scale, and the importance of cocaine trafficking and money laundering. Second, I turn to trade, finance, securities, and gold-based money laundering. From this, I show how global and regional networks of gold smuggling raise questions about gold in the Middle and Upper Baudó specifically, but also the Chocó and the Lower Cauca. I argue that gold is not always about gold, but rather also about money laundering. I show how over the last three decades, gold has helped launder money in out-of-the-way frontiers.

The Underground Economy and Cocaine

While the size of the illegal share of the global economy is difficult to measure, it is certainly significant. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2009) offered a compelling estimate of the situation in 2009. That year, the profits from illegal enterprises reached an estimated \$2.1 trillion or 3.6 percent of the estimated global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (2011, p. 5). This estimate primarily encompassed tax evasion,

in addition to social security fraud and crime. The criminal economy includes drug trafficking, prostitution, loan sharking, car theft, illegal gambling, burglary, robbery, human trafficking, and forgery. The UNODC estimated the profits of transnational organized crime, excluding tax evasion and social security fraud, amounted to \$650 billion, or equal to 42 percent of the underground economy and 1.5 percent of the global GDP (UNODC, 2011, pp. 7-8).

The UNODC provided a detailed analysis of cocaine production, transport, and sales. It estimated cocaine represented 20 percent of total criminal profits around the world, equal to \$85 billion. While consuming countries in North America and Western and Central Europe made the most profits from cocaine, transit countries in Central America, Mexico, and West Africa also made money from the drug, as do the cocaine-producing countries of Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru. The UNODC estimated that in 2009 profits from cocaine sales in North America total \$35 billion and in Western and Central Europe \$26 billion. Mexican drug cartels' profits that year from drugs, including cocaine, were an estimated \$13.8 billion. In Colombia, these profits were an estimated \$9.4 billion, or 3 percent of the country's GDP (see UNODC, 2011, p. 68; Alliance for the Advancement of the Agora, 2011). Of this, only an estimated \$1 billion profits went to Andean peasant growers, with the balance going to brokers and intermediaries.

I describe these as estimates because, as Margaret E. Beare, a criminologist at York University in Toronto, and Stephen Schneider, a Sociology and Criminology professor at St. Mary's University in Halifax, point out, by its nature nobody knows the scale of money laundering and the underground economy (2003). They argue the taken-for-granted 3 percent estimates are overly large. They describe a cottage industry of international organizations, state bureaucracies, law enforcement agencies, journalists,

and others who write about money laundering. Beare and Schneider argue this work sometimes has a dubious empirical foundation (2003, p. 48-60).

While traffickers reinvest the money they make in producing, moving, and selling cocaine, a surplus remains that needs to be laundered. Before spending the profits from cocaine trafficking on real estate, goods, or services, those involved must find a way to hide the source of the money from law enforcement agencies. Of the total global illegal economy, in 2011 the United Nations estimated people launder \$1.6 trillion each year (2011, p. 5). By US State Department estimates, law enforcement captured only \$3.1 billion from money laundering in 38 countries; they captured 80 percent of that in North America (UNODC, 2011, p. 131). The authorities estimated they caught less than 1 percent of total money laundering. Compared with an estimated seizure rate as high as 40 percent for cocaine shipments, this suggests most cocaine money laundering attempts end successfully (UNODC, 2011, p. 131). While the UNODC reported most money laundering from cocaine takes place in countries where traffickers make their profits, some laundering takes place in other countries. Before exploring the techniques used to launder cocaine profits in Colombia, I look in more detail at what constitutes money laundering and its relationship to the Colombia's main high-value illegal export: cocaine.

Money Laundering and Cocaine

To launder money requires creativity. Money launderers aim to hide the source of criminal profits from law enforcement by inserting illegal money into the legal economy. Writing on global organized crime, Carolyn Nordstrom (2007) describes money laundering as spanning the intersection of legal and illegal. Robert E. Grosse, director of

the Center for Global Business at George Mason University, defines money laundering as cleaning cash made through illegal enterprises (2001, p. 3). The challenge comes from large cash deposits to bank accounts, which can raise suspicion about the source of the cash. Drawing on the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network, Grosse lists three steps to money laundering: placement, layering, and integration (2001, p. 3).

Placement involves moving illegally earned cash into banks. Since most large financial transactions use credit cards, checks, direct deposits, wire transfers, and other non-cash means, successfully placing dirty cash into a bank account makes it possible to use these non cash means of payment. This makes it easier for people to spend laundered money without raising suspicions (Grosse, 2001, p. 3). Money launderers place their cash into financial networks using many techniques, including “smurfing,” which involves people depositing small amounts of cash into multiple accounts to make the deposits appear legitimate. Government anti-money laundering authorities do not force banks and money exchange houses to report transactions less than \$10,000. This makes it difficult to catch money launderers and detect illegal transactions when they involve small transactions (Grosse, 2001, p. 3).

The second step of layering involves a series of apparently legitimate financial transactions that make it difficult for banks and law enforcement agencies to trace a fund’s original source. Money launderers create an appearance of legitimacy by varying the frequency, volume, and complexity of their financial transactions and by passing drug money through businesses that report high cash turnovers such as casinos, cash-transfer businesses, maid services, barbershops, lawn care, and jewelry stores (Grosse, 2001, p. 6). Another strategy involves making international wire transfers: In the 1980s and 1990s, drug traffickers wired money to Panamanian and Caribbean tax havens, then to London

and Luxembourg, and finally Miami and Europe to layer the profits (Grosse, 2001, p. 9).

The third step involves integrating layered funds into the legal economy through seemingly legitimate businesses. This might involve buying commodities or assets such as real estate to make funds appear legitimate.

Through placement, layering, and integration, money launderers can move criminal profits into the legal economy, putting them out of the eye of police and financial authorities. Banking secrecy laws, lack of communication between tax jurisdictions, a global network of tax havens, and national laws all make it harder for police and banks to prevent transnational organized crime from laundering money (Grosse, 2001, p. 4). With these money-laundering steps in mind, I turn to laundering profits from cocaine in Colombia.

Types of Money Laundering in Colombia

Colombian drug traffickers have adopted many creative money-laundering techniques through forms of placement, layering, and integration. Political scientists Olivar Villar and Drew Cottle (2011) described the economic effects of cocaine on Colombia's economy. On the one hand, in the 1980s, money from cocaine sales helped prevent the debt crisis from hurting Colombia to the extent it hit other Latin American countries. On the other, the UNODC reported that the laundering of cocaine profits makes legally produced goods and services less valuable, decreases exports, and allows organized crime to take control of the economy (UNODC, 2011, pp. 110–113). Different laundering techniques in Colombia include trade-based money laundering, laundering through banks, laundering with securities, and gold-based money laundering. To show the

scale of each and the creative strategies employed, I describe the first three techniques in more detail. Then I turn to the role of gold in the global underground economy, before turning to gold-based money laundering and placing Colombia's small-scale gold mining within this underground economy.

Trade-Based Money Laundering

Helen Murphy and Nelson Bocanegra (2013) report in the *Los Angeles Times* on money laundering in the desert coast of the Guajira on the Colombia–Venezuela border. While the Chocó lies on Colombia's northwestern border with Panama, the Guajira lies on the northeastern Colombian border with Venezuela. The Guajira has a long smuggling past going back to the Spanish colonial period (Grahn, 1997). Although most trade today crosses from Venezuela legally, the two journalists describe smugglers who use doctored papers to bring consumer goods such as laundry machines, fans, and other appliances across the border into Colombia. In 2013, Colombian authorities estimate they seized 10 percent of total contraband, worth \$128 million, that came in from Venezuela.

Contraband items can help launder profits from cocaine, gun running, prostitution, and gold mining. Luis Edmundo Suarez, the head of the Colombian agency charged with preventing money laundering, says trade-based money laundering uses real estate, retail sales, exports, imports, and farming. Legitimate-seeming transactions are the foundation of trade-based laundering (Murphy & Bocanegra, 2013).

Colombian drug cartels pioneered the practice with the so-called Black Market Peso Exchange (Financial Action Task Force, 2006). In this scheme, cartels smuggled illegal drugs into the US and sold them for cash. In the US, they sold dollars from drug

sales at discount prices to a peso broker for Colombian pesos. Then, in Colombia, the peso broker deposited the pesos into the traffickers' Colombian accounts. The peso broker moved the dollars into US bank accounts through layered transactions so as not to raise suspicions. Using the US funds, the peso broker contracted a Colombian import company in need of dollars to buy US goods, for example, computers from a US-based export company. The peso broker then paid the US exporter in dollars from a US bank account. The exporter shipped the computers to Colombia, where the Colombian importer sold the computers for pesos. From the sales of the imported computers, the importer then repaid the Colombian peso broker in pesos. The peso broker then transferred the now-laundered pesos to cartel-controlled accounts in Colombia. Through the Black Market Peso Exchange, traffickers could launder US dollars from drug sales into Colombian pesos under the guise of legitimate trade.

Writing in the *Los Angeles Times* from Mexico City, Tracy Wilkinson and Ken Ellingwood (2011) describe how Mexican drug cartels use similar techniques to launder money. I pause on their adoption of these techniques, because, as I show later, Mexican organized crime shares strategies with Colombian groups. The Mexican cartels trade items—fruit, fabric, toys—to disguise illegal profits as legitimate trade goods. Rather than moving cash from drug sales to Mexico in bags, they employ laundering specialists who use drug dollars to buy commodities and export them to Mexico. The commodity exports appear legal. This allows organized crime group to repatriate cash from drug sales in the US to Mexico (Wilkinson & Ellingwood, 2011).

In neither the Colombian Black Market Peso Exchange nor the Mexican schemes did trade-based money laundering involve fraudulent imports or exports (DEA Public Affairs, 2006; Department, 2007, pp. 56–57; Financial Action Task Force, 2006). Rather,

trade-based money laundering hides dirty money through the real movement of high-value goods. This makes it hard for law enforcement organizations to catch because it would require casting a suspicious eye on legal trade movements supported by free trade agreements and neoliberal reforms. Financial transactions offer another technique to hide dirty money behind a veneer of legitimacy.

Finance-Based Money Laundering

The Wachovia Bank scandal offers an example of a bank involved in laundering cocaine profits. Ed Vulliamy (2012) reported in *The Guardian* that Mexican and Colombian traffickers launder drug profits into and through North American and European banks. He reported on a rare settlement in Miami, Florida in 2011 between US authorities and the former Wachovia Bank (2011). In the settlement, bank officials admitted to moving \$110 million from drug sales and failing to look into \$376 billion transferred into its accounts in the US from small Mexican money exchange houses over 10 years (Vulliamy, 2012). This figure represented one-third of Mexico's annual GDP. Although the US government had brought a criminal investigation against Wachovia concerning money laundering, it settled the case with a deferred prosecution: If the bank did not repeat the offences, the government would drop the charges. Wachovia forfeited \$110 million in profits from the scheme and paid a \$50 million fine (Vulliamy, 2011).

At the height of the global financial crisis in 2008, Wells Fargo took control of Wachovia, and the company came under investigation for money laundering shortly thereafter. The criminal probe started when police seized a DC-9 jet that landed in the Ciudad del Carmen in Mexico carrying 5.7 tons of cocaine worth \$100 million (Vulliamy,

2011; Hopsicker, 2007; 2011). After a two-year investigation, the US Drug Enforcement Administration showed how money laundered through a Wachovia Bank account bought the plane. Police uncovered billions of dollars in wire transfers, traveler's checks, and cash that money launderers had transferred between Mexican exchange houses and Wachovia bank accounts. Mexican drug traffickers used exchange houses to convert dollars into Mexican pesos. After wiring the money back to bank accounts in the US, criminal organizations used the money to buy aircraft and move drugs. Catching the scheme took a long time because the small money exchange houses in Mexico, which enabled the laundering, also handled billions of dollars a year in legal cash remittances from Mexicans working in the US.

Another example of a bank involved in laundering drug profits is the UK-based HSBC Bank. In December 2012, HSBC settled with US authorities on charges of its participation in a \$1.9 billion drug money-laundering scheme between 2000 and 2010. In a manner similar to the Wachovia bank, HSBC had received drug cash in bank accounts in Mexico, which it then moved to businesses located in the US and other countries. Launderers then used the money to help buy consumer goods that they sent to Colombia (Mollenkamp and Wolf, 2013). *The Guardian* reported that HSBC admitted to moving \$881 million for two drug cartels and accepting \$15 billion over-the-counter bulk cash payments in Mexico, Russia, and other countries between 2000 and 2010 (Treanor, 2012; Treanor and Rushe, 2012). As with the Wachovia case, HSBC faced deferred criminal prosecution for five years..

Global financial institutions, such as Wachovia and HSBC, helped launder billions of dollars and simplified trade-based money laundering. Some even argued moving illicit money helped stabilize the global economy during the 2008 financial crisis. The head of

the UNODC said, “In many instances, the money from drugs was the only liquid investment capital. In the second half of 2008, liquidity was the banking system’s main problem and hence liquid capital became an important factor” (Syal, 2009). In Colombia, Mexican and Colombian organized crime launder money through the stock markets.

Securities-Based Money Laundering

In April 2013, the Mexican newspaper *El Proceso* reported on Colombia’s largest stock market crash, in which thousands of clients of the brokerage house InterBolsa stood to lose between \$200 million and \$500 million. *El Proceso* drew on allegations made by Colombia’s Liberal Party leader in the Colombian Congress (Croda, 2013b). The newspaper reported the company’s financial difficulties stemmed from Mexican and Colombian traffickers laundering cash through the buying of securities on the Colombian stock market (*El Espectador*, 2013a). The allegations implied the drug trafficking organizations of Daniel “Crazyman” Barrera in Colombia and Joaquín “Shorty” Guzmán in Mexico used InterBolsa to launder drug money. Until his arrest in 2012, Barrera controlled the drug trade from Colombia’s Eastern Plains to Venezuela. Until his arrest in 2013, Guzmán commanded the powerful Sinaloa Cartel, which controls a large part of the Mexican cocaine trade that moves drugs north into the US (see Hernández, 2010). Before bankruptcy, InterBolsa was the second-largest Colombian stock brokerage. It handled a third of Colombia’s stock market transactions.

The Mexican and Colombian press (Croda, 2013a, 2013b; *Semana*, 2013c; *El Espectador*, 2013e) reported a stockbroker employed by InterBolsa laundered the money. Colombian officials arrested the broker in November 2012 on the US Drug Enforcement

Agency's instructions. Eleven days after the insider's arrest, InterBolsa defaulted on a bank loan and declared bankruptcy. The newspapers reported that US authorities sought the employee to charge him for using false business records to gain permission from the Colombian government to move dollars into InterValores' accounts in Colombia, thereby laundering money.

As with the HSBC and Wachovia, organized crime in Mexico made cash transfers from Mexican exchange houses to accounts in the United States. They sent the money to Colombia for laundering on the stock market (Croda, 2013b). On May 8, 2013, Colombia's Liberal Party Chief Simón Gaviria stated that the US Justice Department had InterBolsa and 11 other Colombian brokerage firms under investigation for directly laundering money. He alleged that in a luxury hotel in the north of Bogotá, the Chicago Prosecutor's Office had recordings of Colombian stockbrokers receiving 36 "controlled deliveries" of cash from traffickers. The politician described how the US Drug Enforcement Agency noticed a Colombian working for a criminal organization cashing stocks into Colombian pesos originally bought with US dollars (Croda, 2013b; *El Espectador*, 2013b; *Semana*, 2013). While these remain allegations, I take them as examples of securities-based money laundering involving Colombian and Mexican organized crime (FINTRAC, 2013).

The 2011 UNODC report outlined the scale of money-laundering cocaine profits. The authorities estimate they caught only a small percentage. The UNODC estimated 3 percent of Colombia's economy involved narcotics worth roughly \$9 billion each year. People laundered money through trade, finance, and securities. These money-laundering techniques involved legal businesses at every stage, connecting corporations, banks, and stockbrokers in Colombia, the US, and Mexico. As cocaine moved north, an inverse flow

of money heads south disguised as legal trade, bank transfers, or investment. While this does not suggest drug traffickers and money launderers form a vertically integrated, hierarchical corporate bodies, it does suggest techniques to move money from the illegal economy into the legal one. I show below that gold offers another compelling technique. Before discussing gold-based money laundering directly, I pause to outline gold's role in the broader underground economy to show the utility of this high-value metal in moving and hiding legal and illegal wealth.

The Underground Economy and Gold

McGill economist Thomas Naylor argued gold offers the international economy an “anonymous, portable and liquid instrument [for] covert transactions and hidden savings” (1996, p. 192). He outlined the wide-ranging role of the metal since the Second World War, as individuals, corporations, and states have used gold to amass wealth, speculate, secure illicit investments, smuggle, commit fraud, evade taxes, move capital, pay for narcotics, finance black market deals, sidestep monetary controls, and launder money. Naylor introduced gold's illicit uses, showing how gold simplifies a host of transactions. The following section outlines the strategies he discussed. I show how gold aids illicit transactions.

Governments and dictators have long used gold to accumulate, hide, and move wealth. During the Second World War, Adolf Hitler's fascist forces captured and stockpiled European gold. They used the stolen gold to pay for trade and move wealth out of occupied Europe. Hitler's forces smelted and sold the gold to refineries in Switzerland to gain foreign currency to fund the war. The Allies did not recover much of this gold. In

Southeast Asia and the Pacific, Japanese soldiers similarly plundered temples, governments, citizens' homes, museums, and banks. This gold too remains lost. Naylor notes suspicions the Japanese hid the gold in the Philippines, where it formed the foundation of the wealth of Ferdinand Marcos and his family (dictator of the Philippines, 1965–1986). When the Marcos family fled the Philippines in 1986, gold from black market sellers flooded gold exchanges houses in Japan and Hong Kong. Today, Marcos' daughter remains embroiled in allegations that she hid her wealth in tax havens (*CBC News*, 2013). There are other examples. In the 1960s, Indonesian President Achmed Sukarno (1945–1967) hid \$750 million of gold in banks in London, Geneva, and Tokyo. The Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie (1930–1974), bought the country's gold at below world prices, sent it to Switzerland, and invested in Swiss watches and Alberta beef (Naylor, 1996, pp. 192–194).

Naylor highlights gold's role in speculative and fraudulent investment schemes. In the 1980s, 23,000 people invested in the International Gold Bullion Exchange in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Two brothers had promised to store the invested wealth as gold. The gold never existed, and the brothers stole \$75 million. In another example, a mining company formed on the premise of producing gold from previously mined ore. The enterprise never came to fruition, while promoters stole investors' money (Naylor, 1996, pp. 198–200).

In some countries, people use gold to secure long-term savings. In India, while traditionally some women could not inherit land, they could inherit gold. At weddings and on birthdays, family, friends, and guests gave gold as gifts. For similar reasons, in some Muslim countries, gold provides security and protection to divorced women. Japanese citizens held savings measured at 1,500 metric tons of gold in the 1990s. In Iraq, during

the first Gulf War, the poor and middle classes sold their gold savings at below world market prices to buy food. The country's rich bought the gold and sold it on the world market. In Armenia, during Communism's collapse, people sold their gold in pawnshops at 30 percent below world market prices (Naylor, 1996, p. 202)

Examples of gold smuggling abound. In the gold-producing regions of the Central African highlands, smugglers in the 1980s moved gold from the former Zaire, today the Democratic Republic of the Congo, into Zambia, where Saudi Arabian diplomats sold it to Belgian and Swiss brokers. In the 1990s, China produced nearly 100 tons of gold a year, but the profits went to "gold lords" in Muslim separatist areas. Smugglers there moved 20 percent of the gold to Hong Kong, to purchase jewelry that they smuggled back to China. In the early 1990s, in the former Soviet Union, the Russian mafia and ex-Communist party officials gained control of gold fields. Mining increased 30 percent, while the Chechen mafia and illegal traders profited from smuggling gold (Naylor, 1996, pp. 209–210).

Gold enables complex schemes to defraud state coffers. In Kenya in the 1980s, the state offered pre-shipment financing of 15 percent of expected earnings to export firms. It also offered export-financing compensation so firms could recoup expected earnings before they made the profits up to 20 percent. While only a couple firms took advantage of this offer, one firm did so by winning a monopoly on gold exports. Using faked imports and exports the company combined both programs to steal millions from Kenya's Central Bank. In another example, in the 1980s the Japanese government printed gold coins with metal valued at 40,000 yen. The government guaranteed it would either repurchase the coins at the fixed price of 100,000 yen. If the price of gold increased beyond that, it would purchase them at gold's world market price. Unbelievably good, the offer allowed creative

coin forgers to mint two tons of fake gold coins using gold worth 40,000 yen. They then sold the gold coins back to the Ministry of Finance for 100,000 yen, pocketing \$70 million (Naylor, 1996, p. 210-212).

Gold facilitates the evasion of foreign currency controls. In 1987, Jordanian dealers provided gold to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, from which smugglers moved it to Egypt to buy Egyptian pounds. In 1984, Turkish banks bought 60 to 90 tons of the metal and sent it to Germany to receive Deutschmarks, which they then used to make foreign currency loans. In the 1990s, before the authorities caught them, criminals used a fleet of cars to smuggle £35 million between Luxembourg and England. Once in England, Hawala Indian jewelers used the metal in a parallel banking network to move money (Naylor, 1996, pp. 196–198).

Finally, gold can support money laundering. Most jewelry stores and gold retailers produce large amounts of cash, which makes them perfect fronts for cleaning dirty money. In the 1980s, authorities arrested a Lebanese man in Los Angeles flying to Europe. He carried \$2 million in small bills from cocaine sales in a briefcase, planning to take it to a money-changing firm in Zurich, Switzerland. That same year, Swiss police arrested a Turkish smuggler and Italian accomplice carrying drugs. All three had the phone number of the same Swiss money-changing firm. The resulting investigation led law enforcement to the Turkish Grand Bazaar, where shopkeepers buy, sell, trade, and rent gold. They discovered the key role that gold played in laundering profits from the European heroin trade.

The main transit route for Afghani heroin to Europe went through Turkey. Smugglers moved cash payments for heroin to Switzerland using ground transport routes. In Switzerland, they deposited Turkish cash in Swiss banks. They then wired some to

Turkey and converted the rest to gold. They smuggled the gold to Turkey and divided it between jewelers, drug traffickers, and Afghani and Pakistani opium merchants. Ironically, because the Swiss banking giant Credit Suisse thought Turkish money came from tax evasion and credit flight, and they lobbied their Swiss embassies in Turkey to ensure easy visas for Turkish residents to profit from this, they simplified gold smuggling and money laundering. Before the scheme fell apart, the smugglers and money launderers had moved two billion Swiss Francs (about \$2.2 billion). In the resulting scandal, the Swiss Minister of Justice resigned because her husband had served as vice president of the firm that supplied the gold to the Turkish traffickers (Naylor, 1996, pp. 196–198).

The recent past in Latin America illustrates how gold smuggling plays a key role in the region. While a comprehensive study of gold's regional underground economy remains unwritten, evidence of its scale abounds. Bolivia's State Mining Corporation head, Hector Cordova, explains that smugglers move at least 50 percent of Bolivia's artisanal gold mining to Peru, with smaller percentages taken to other neighboring countries (*La Prensa*, 2012). The gold contraband makes its way to Peru through hundreds of small transactions known as "ant smuggling" (Quispe Condori, 2012). The Bolivian Minister of Defense claimed that Bolivia loses \$150 million in tax revenue a year to gold smuggling, with 50 percent of the metal ending in Miami (Quispe Condori, 2012).

Guyana offers another case. In the 1980s, to prevent capital flight, the Caribbean nation created a state monopoly to buy gold. Naylor argued the policy failed as people smuggled most of the gold abroad via the island nation of Curacao (1996, p. 206). In January 2013, Curacao's main newspaper reported on gold smuggling between Curacao and the US. This comes on the heels of an \$11.5 million heist of gold bars in Curacao's main port smuggled from Guyana (Isles, 2013; *Curaçao Chronicle*, 2013). In 2014, Guyana

faced the possibility that the US would place it on a global anti-money laundering blacklist (Gurney, 2014).

The Peruvian gold mining industry provides another example of strange transfers of gold from one country to another. Out of the US, journalist David Kaplan noted that between 1994 and 1997 Peruvian gold exports to the US ballooned nine-fold from \$19 million to \$177 million (Kaplan, 1999). He reported that 40 percent of Peruvian gold companies fraudulently received export-tax rebates. They exported gold to the US, received Peruvian tax rebates, smuggled the gold back to Peru, and then re-exported. They claimed multiple tax rebates on the same physical metal (Kaplan, 1999).

Drug trafficking and gold contraband flourished in Colombia, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, and Venezuela's Amazon frontier after the Brazilian government encouraged small-scale miners to enter the region (Naylor, 1996; *El Diario Hoy*, 1994). They and their heavy machinery quickly spilled over into neighboring countries. At the time, gold came from small-scale and artisanal producers. This created a transnational economy in which miners paid bribes, wages, and suppliers in gold (Naylor, 1996, p. 203). The bonanza brought extortion, murder, and massacres. It had a devastating ecological outcome as tons of mercury flowed into the region's rivers. The miners paid no taxes and had no legal title (Naylor, 1996, p. 203).

Naylor reports that Venezuela, Panama, and Bolivia lost almost 70 percent of their gold to cross-border smuggling into the Amazon (Naylor, 1996, p. 206). Naylor, quoting Brazilian Minister of the Environment Henrique Brandao Cavalcanti, notes 40 to 60 tons of gold left Venezuela for Brazil each year. Brazilian gold smugglers used small planes to move gold onto Uruguay and then sell it on the international markets. In the 1980s, Despite no domestic gold mines, Uruguay became the largest supplier of gold to the US

(Naylor, 1996, p. 203).

Examples abound of the yellow metal's role in the global and Latin American underground economy in the latter half of the twentieth century. Around the world, dictators, plutocrats, executives, private individuals, speculators, criminals, drug traffickers, and money launderers have used real or falsified gold shipments. They did so to pile up wealth, move money, avoid capital controls, take advantage of import-export schemes, profit from differential exchange rates, plunder national accounts, commit complex fraud, secure long-term investments, support speculative gains, evade taxation, avoid currency controls, simplify contraband networks, pay for drugs, and launder money.

Gold has three characteristics which make it the perfect high-value commodity to aid illegal transactions: it can hold wealth, it can be easily transported, and it is straightforward to transform from one form to another. Its characteristics of substitution and fungibility make it a strategic financial cog in the underground economy. In a world of interconnected transport networks, with fast air, car, boat, and train travel, gold provides a way to move capital across borders. Gold's physicality allows for difficult-to-detect transactions. With gold's role in the underground economy, I turn to Naylor's last example: a Colombian gold-based money-laundering scheme to show cocaine traffickers' long involvement in Colombian's small-scale gold mining industry.

Money Laundering and Gold

In 1989, law enforcement shut down one of the largest money-laundering schemes in US history involving Colombian cocaine traffickers and gold. In the 1980s, the Medellín Cartel sent drugs to the US, produced in coca-growing areas in Bolivia, Peru, and

Colombia. At the height of his power, the cartel's flamboyant chief Pablo Escobar boasted he could pay Colombia's national debt. In 1989, *Forbes Magazine* estimated his fortune at \$3 billion (Associated Press, 1989). Escobar controlled the largest cocaine cartel of the time with vertically controlled cocaine shipment and sales. The cartel bought Andean cocaine, smuggled it to the US, and sold it to customers. From 1985 to 1989, the cartel used a scheme called "La Mina" to launder over \$1.2 billion (Maxwell, 1990).

Robert E. Grosse (2001, p. 76), Raymond W. Baker (2005), Thomas Naylor (1996), and Evan Lowell Maxwell (1990) each described La Mina in some detail. A Medellín based banker handled the Cartel's finances and money laundering. He approached an Argentinean, who owned a gold-refining company, to set up the scheme. The latter's company bought gold direct from producers, refined the metal into bullion, and sold the gold bars overseas. The Argentinian agreed to the task and opened a currency brokerage house in Montevideo, Uruguay. He also started a jewelry business in Los Angeles. At first, he ordered gold shipments from his business in Uruguay to his office in Los Angeles. Although Uruguay had no gold mines, he bought gold smuggled into Uruguay by miners in the Brazilian Amazon. Soon, rather than sending real gold, his currency brokerage house began to make lead ingots, plate them in gold to disguise them as real gold ingots, and export the gold-plated lead bullion to Los Angeles.

Workers employed in Los Angeles separated the gold from the lead, sending the lead back to Uruguay to repeat the procedure. At the same time, in Los Angeles, they used cash from cocaine sales to buy scrap gold and gold jewelry. Then workers smelted the bought gold into bullion. They sold the real gold bullion to New York buyers, justifying the sales with the customs forms from the Uruguayan gold-plated lead imports, which certified the metal's origin. The New York gold buyers wired payments to

Uruguayan bank accounts. The Argentinean took his commission and wired payments to bank accounts controlled by the Medellín Cartel. The scheme worked because regular imports of gold-plated lead bullion justified gold sales in New York. They had gold bought with drug money in Los Angeles, which the banks paid for wiring money to Uruguay.

La Mina soon ran out of scrap gold in Los Angeles. Therefore, the money launderers adopted a new technique by recruiting two Armenian jewelers based in New York. The Armenians agreed to ship scrap gold to Los Angeles and accept cash from drug sales in New York as payment. The Argentinian set up a dummy jewelry store in New York to collect gold. The two Armenians mixed drug money payments with their normal business. Soon the Armenians faced a gold shortage of their own, while the Argentinean had trouble selling the bought gold. They changed the technique again.

A refining company in Fort Lauderdale, Florida bought the gold, smelted it, and then sold it to the brokerage house in New York supplying the Armenians. The refinery deposited payments for the gold directly into New York accounts. The Argentinean wired the money to Uruguay and then to Medellín cartel accounts.

As physical shipment of real gold from New York and Los Angeles to Florida became unwieldy, the cartel's money launderers developed a new procedure using fake gold sales, removing the need for the metal. Rather than sending metal, they began to move cash stashed in boxes labeled as if it was gold. At first, the Armenians mixed the cash in with the jewelry store's regular bank deposits, and later they simply sent cash to Fort Lauderdale. In financial difficulties, the refinery accepted cash instead of gold. Then in 1989 disaster struck for La Mina on three fronts.

First, a bank officer grew suspicious of the weekly multimillion-dollar cash deposits from an Armenian wholesale gold business. Wholesalers would not usually

receive that much cash. Second, a courier company employee found a hole in a box and noticed the boxes not scrap gold but cash. He reported this find to authorities. Third, a Medellín Cartel money broker in Atlanta mentioned La Mina to an anti-narcotics agent conducting a sting. The agent was pretending to provide a money-laundering service, and the broker told him to study La Mina to get ideas on how to launder money. The agent did just this and put together the other leads.

The authorities arrested people involved in the New York and Fort Lauderdale companies as well as 127 others people. They seized half a ton of cocaine, millions in cash, and bank accounts. It led to the Argentinean's imprisonment and some Medellín Cartel members' extradition. Pablo Escobar died three years later trying to escape the Colombian police. The Medellín Cartel fell apart in the early 1990s. More decentralized narcotics trafficking organizations linked with the Colombian paramilitary replaced it.

To briefly summarize, over a four-year period, La Mina's money-laundering techniques changed significantly. Sometimes people used legal businesses in gold mining to launder money; at other times, they did not use real gold. It was partly La Mina, which explains why Uruguay emerged as the largest source of gold imports to the US (Naylor, 1996, p. 205). At times La Mina used gold-plated lead bars and at other times boxes of cash. A complicated paper trail disguised the lack of gold and provided the documentary cover for phantom gold shipments. As with all money laundering, La Mina mixed the illegal with the legal. Gold's fungible nature allowed the Medellín Cartel to launder cocaine profits. While the authorities shut down La Mina in 1989, gold's role in laundering Colombia's cocaine profits evolved over time as traffickers adopted other gold-based money-laundering techniques.

Gold-Based Money Laundering

Colombia's daily *El Tiempo* (2010) reported in 2010 that Salvatore Mancuso, extradited chief of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, the country's main rightwing paramilitary group, had revealed gold's role in money laundering to a Washington DC Federal Court. The Colombian paramilitary used dirty money to buy Panamanian gold. They smuggled the gold to Colombia, where they melted it down, recast it as bullion, and then issued it to a handful of small-town mayors in the department of Córdoba. The mayors reported the gold as originating in small-scale gold mines in their jurisdictions. The paramilitary then sold the gold legally and pocketed the money. While the mayors collected millions in mining royalties, the paramilitary recouped 70 percent of these royalty payments through fictitious contracts. The municipal governments paid the paramilitary for uncompleted public works projects. Mancuso's comments refer specifically to the municipalities of Ayapel, Buenavista, Montelíbano, and Planeta Rica in Córdoba and the years 2004 to 2006. Illustration 13 shows kilograms of gold mined in Córdoba from 1997 to 2011. Gold figures dropped abruptly 99.8 percent from a high of 7,227 kg in 2004 to only 14 kg in 2007. The department's gold production almost disappeared after 2006. These gold figures show high levels of gold mined from 1996 until 2005.

Illustration 14 shows departmental gold figures from 1991 until 2011 for the main gold-producing departments. Over almost a decade, Córdoba produced the second-highest amount of gold, despite having no legal gold mines. The area had little mining before 1991, when gold mined increased 279 percent over the previous year. Except for some activity in 2010, it has had little mining since 2006.

While the other Colombian departments' mining histories go back centuries,

Córdoba's does not. Since the 1990s, Córdoba has represented a bastion of paramilitary control. According to Colombian journalist Juanita León, the contemporary paramilitary emerged in the region (Leon, 2005, pp. 185–205). Córdoba remains a key cocaine route north to the Caribbean.

Writing 10 years earlier, investigative journalist David Kaplan (1999) cited law enforcement reports that described Colombian drug traffickers using gold to launder money. Kaplan argued money laundering and tax schemes underpinned the ballooning \$2.5 billion of foreign gold that flowed into Miami from Colombia and other countries. Quoting law enforcement officials, Kaplan described the gold-mining and sales industries as rife with corruption. Refineries in the US imported record quantities of gold from Colombia and Peru. According to Kaplan, this allowed drug barons to launder money. Gold imports from Latin America into Miami increased 26-fold from \$18 million in 1989 to \$465 million in 1994 (Kaplan, 1999). Colombian gold shipments to the US increased from nearly nothing in 1993 to \$200 million by 1996 (Kaplan, 1999). They bought a ton of gold a month in Colombia and sold it in Panama. The narcotics traffickers bought the gold at small buy-and-sell pawnshops (*compra-ventas*) across Colombia. In Kaplan's words, they took over the gold trade and used it to move wealth and launder money (Kaplan, 1999).

Illustration 13: Córdoba (1990-2011)

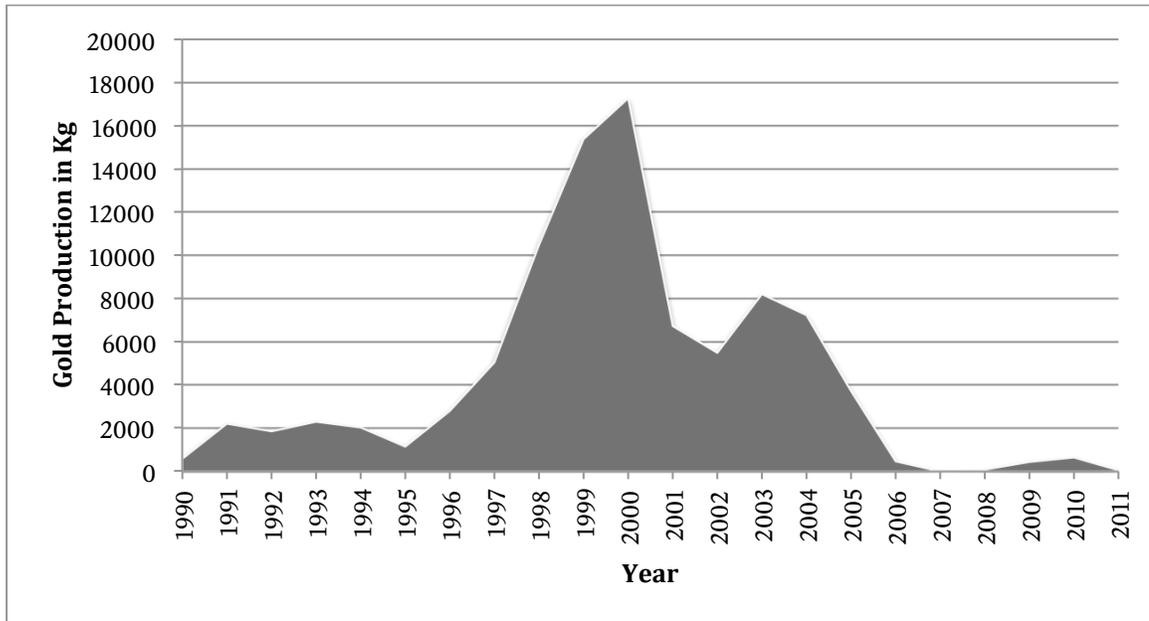
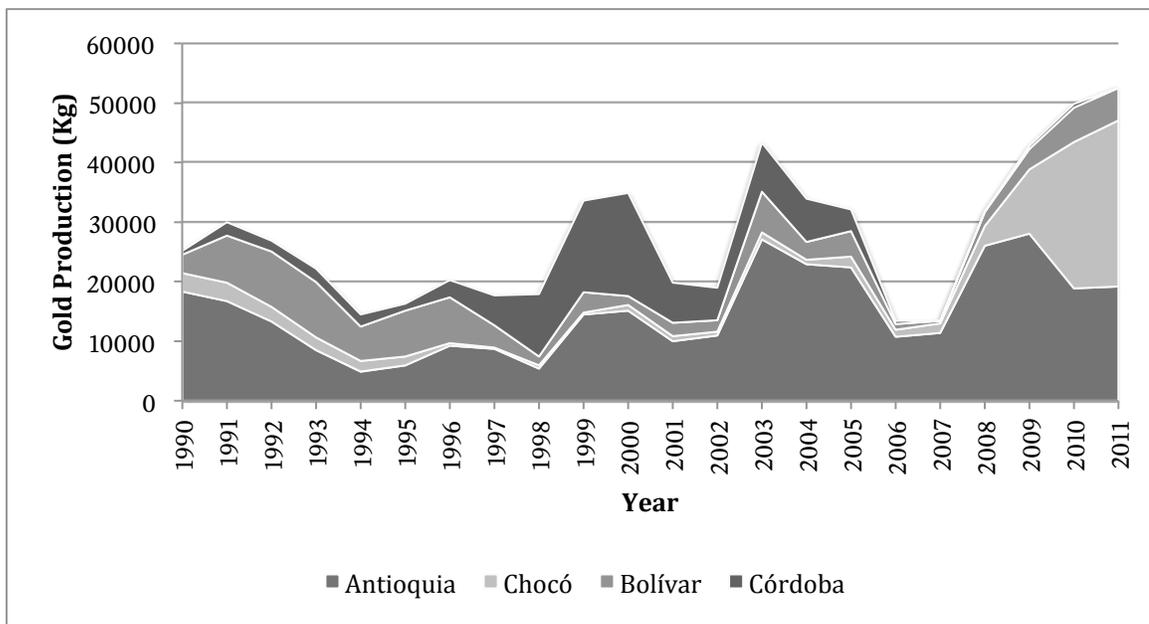


Illustration 14: Antioquia, Chocó, Bolívar, and Córdoba (1990-2011)¹



¹ Banco de la República Ministerio de Minas y Energía, Minercol, Ingeominas (2004-2011) Servicio Geológico Colombiano (2012).

Gold-based money laundering did not simply involve Colombia and the US. One scheme involved moving gold between Switzerland, Italy, Panama, and Colombia. In 1994, the Italian police cracked an arrangement in which drug traffickers used US drug money to buy a ton of gold a month in Switzerland. The refineries sent the gold to jewelers in Italy, where goldsmiths turned it into jewelry. They sold the jewelry in the Colón Free Trade Zone in Panama. This is the Western hemisphere's largest free port and is located on the Caribbean side of the Panama Canal. To facilitate free trade, the government barely tracks imports or exports and puts no duties on them (Naylor, 1996, p. 216). By 1998, Panama imported 25 to 30 tons of Italian gold worth \$300 million (Kaplan, 1999). A decade before Mancuso's description of gold's use in money laundering, Kaplan reported that organized crime smuggled the gold to Colombia, where Colombian small-scale gold miners registered the metal as coming from their gold mines. They sold the gold internationally to Swiss gold refineries. While the scheme produced seemingly legitimate gold sales between four countries, Colombia's domestic gold mining simply increased as launderers recycled the same gold (Kaplan, 1999). It seemed that after authorities shut down La Mina, Colombian drug trafficking organizations found other gold-based money-laundering techniques. Kaplan warned, "If the focus remains merely on hard cash and not precious metals, the world's drug barons may yet live to see a new Golden Age" (Kaplan, 1999).

While some Colombian authorities have worked to prevent narcotics smuggling out of the country, examples of gold smuggling to the country abound. In 2000, the Panamanian newspaper *La Crítica* reported Colombian authorities seized 50 kg of Panamanian gold in the Antioquian municipalities of Caucaasia and Segovía in the Lower Cauca River (Critica, 2000). Colombian organized crime used financial brokers in Panama

to buy large amounts of gold from wholesalers, then smuggled it into the gold-producing areas of Antioquia, Chocó, Córdoba, and Bolívar. The smugglers registered the gold as if it had been sourced from a small-scale mine. They then sold it back to dealers in the US and Panama (*La Crítica*, 2000).

The Chilean newspaper *Emol* reported smugglers moved gold into Colombia using 150 gold “mules” traveling from Panama and Mexico, bringing in \$150 million. In 2000, Colombian and law enforcement authorities arrested seven people in distinct parts of Colombia possessing 18 kg of gold (*Emol*, 2000). In 2006, Colombia’s main weekly newspaper *Semana* described these arrests as being part of Operation Broker, which lasted from 2000 to 2003. The operation saw 54 people arrested in Haiti, Spain, Colombia, and Guatemala. In another case, authorities impounded an aircraft in Medellín carrying a ton of gold (*Semana*, 2006).

Kaplan reported that the New York airport authorities arrested a Colombian woman who had attempted to smuggle two solid-gold tractor-trailer hitches to Colombia by disguising them as steel (Kaplan, 1999). The *New York Times* reported smugglers produced gold sheets, wallet inserts, belt buckles, wrenches, and even screws (Weiser & Hernández, 2003). By recasting bullion into cheap hardware and enameling the metal, smugglers moved gold to Colombia. In 2003, in Bucaramanga, the *Vanguardia Liberal* (*Semana*, 2006) reported police found abandoned gold bars on a flight from Cali to Bucaramanga. *Semana* (2006) reported police arrested a passenger with sheets of gold traveling to the same airport. In each case, it seems likely launderers hoped to melt the gold, recast it as bullion, and declare it as locally mined. By buying gold with dirty money, and smuggling it to Colombia, traffickers laundered funds from drug sales. They may have even invoiced the same physical metal multiple times (see Financial Action Task Force, 2006).

The School of Business and Management Sciences at the Universidad Sergio Arboleda reported on gold smuggling (*Semana*, 2006). The authors argue that between 2003 and 2005, Colombia exported more gold than its miners produced. They note that in 2005, Colombian government statistics on gold exports to the US did not match US government statistics on gold imports from Colombia. Colombia reported exporting \$372 million of gold to the US, which reported importing only \$275 million of gold from Colombia (*Semana*, 2006). While swings in gold prices account for some differences, it raises suspicions as to the scale of gold laundering. One company exported \$8 million one year, \$150 million the next, \$150 million the following year, and finally nothing (*Semana*, 2006). The year 2000 saw increases in Colombia's gold exports with no related production increase (Morales, 2010).

In June 2011, Colombia's main national business newspaper *El Dinero* (2011) ran a front-page story on Colombia's bonanza in gold-based money laundering. The newspaper reported that by 2011, Colombia's gold exports reached more than \$2 billion, making gold the country's third-largest export. *El Dinero* reported gold linked illegal armed groups to front companies in money-laundering schemes. Echoing La Mina, Kaplan's reporting, Mancuso's revelations, and a handful of reports throughout the decade, *El Dinero* showed Colombia's gold industry has close ties to money laundering. The newspaper quoted a report that estimates only 14 percent of the country's 53,000 kg gold came legally. Illegal small-scale mining and money laundering accounted for the remaining 45,580 kg (*El Dinero*, 2011). Although the article paints all artisanal and small-scale mining as potentially criminal, it raised issues with Colombia's gold exports and money laundering. For example, between 2009 and 2010, Colombia's gold exports increased 135 percent. Some gold came from municipalities that had no gold mining in the past, but which had suddenly become massive

gold producers (*El Dinero*, 2011). On this point, after a detour through gold's role in the global underground economy, cocaine trafficking, and money laundering, I return to my conversation with Jairo about the Upper and Middle Baudó.

Chapter Summary

In 2013, the Colombian Auditor General became interested in the Upper and Middle Baudó's gold figures and in dubious royalty payments. In news reports, the Auditor General suggested Medellín-based gold smelters took advantage of lax controls to illegally register gold in those municipalities. Reports suggested organized crime laundered 13,000 million pesos through irregular royalty payments to the municipal government (*El Espectador*, 2013b). *La W Radio* station reported that 12 companies had declared gold from the area, despite the fact none of them had registered as mining companies or worked in the Upper or Middle Baudó (*La W Radio*, 2013). The companies made royalty payments to municipal bank accounts in the Upper Baudó, and a judge's decision in Quito resulted in the immediate transfer of the funds to third-party accounts to pay for supposed municipal debt (*La W Radio*, 2013). As with Mancuso's "army of mayors" who contracted fake public works to recoup royalty payments with the paramilitary, in the Upper Baudó payments from municipal gold royalties disappeared through the same means. This helps explain why miners moved gold from municipality to municipality. It also shows how important it is to understand the context of local politics and economics. The gold production, which may have totaled half a billion dollars over the previous three years, stopped abruptly in January 2012—just as a new municipal government took over. A month before my final visit, a new political party had won the local municipal elections.

The Office of the Treasury Inspector, or *Contraloría General* (2013a; 2013b, p. 163-165; 2014, p. 178-181), argued money laundering could explain the Upper and Middle Baudó's gold registrations. While the mechanics of this remain unclear, it does raise the possibility of money laundering. The UNODC estimates on the global underground economy; the examples of trade, finance, and securities-based money-laundering techniques; Naylor's discussion of gold's role in the global underground economy; La Mina in the 1980s; newspaper reports, and Salvatore Mancuso's revelations on the extent of money laundering in Córdoba raise the possibility that money laundering can explain the spike in gold production statistics in the Middle and Upper Baudó. The area with no gold to mine and no gold mines is part of money laundering that includes import and export schemes, gold smuggling, and fake contracts. Indeed, money laundering helps explain elements of the Chocó's gold production statistics. As with the Lower Cauca, the Chocó's forest frontier provides the perfect opportunity to illegally mine for gold and to launder money through fake gold mining.

On this last point, as Uruguay became the largest exporter of gold to the US in the 1980s, in part on the back of La Mina, which laundered \$1.2 billion (\$2.39 billion in 2014 dollars),² money laundering could help explain the gold figures for the Baudó River and the patterns of the Chocó's small-scale gold mining industry. This answers the questions raised about Juan's lottery tickets, Meta's diesel fuel, and the *paisa's* well-paying fake mines and badly paying real mines. Gold mining and money-laundering ties the Chocó's frontier areas to broader contexts of the global underground economy. The Chocó, already

² This calculation is based on the Consumer Price Index, and made using WolframAlpha (2014).

a cocaine-producing region, becomes a location to launder money.

This chapter has discussed the global connections of small-scale mining through the underground economy and money laundering to show how gold is not always about gold. Later, I return to the river where I conducted fieldwork. There, I show how multinational large-scale mining corporations searching for gold link to local political economies and conflict. I show how they too may be involved in money laundering.

Chapter 9:

Large-Scale Gold Mining and Money Laundering

Waiting in the office of a non-governmental organization in Quibdó left me feeling awkward. Five days in the city and trying to start fieldwork left me insecure, anxious, and uncertain. I hoped to discuss possible field sites with the president of an Afro-descendant organization. I had organized an interview in his office. I waited two hours for him to arrive. Sitting on a plastic chair in the office, idly taking notes, I struck up a conversation with a young woman working at the organization. Her boss never arrived, so I told her I hoped to learn how to mine. She told me about the impounded dredges rotting in the Atrato River opposite Quibdó's main market. They were slowly sinking into the mud. Two years before, Colombia's military had captured 27 Brazilian-owned dredges, which had worked on the Quito River near the town of Paimadó. She explained to me that people worried about the threat from these Brazilian multinationals. Later, she used the same word to refer to the Canadian and South African mining companies that had contracted a helicopter, geologists, and soldiers to descend unexpectedly upon Engrivadó on the Andágueda River..

At the time, her use of "multinational" to refer to Brazilian and Canadian mining struck me as mistaken. I jotted a note to the effect. It seemed to me she had equated two unrelated forms of small-scale and large-scale mining based on foreign ownership, Canadian or Brazilian. The Canadian and South African multinational mining project on the Upper Atrato River and the Andágueda River, as with many other Canadian junior mining projects in Colombia, had formal papers, international funding, legal backing,

official titles, geologists, and, so it seemed, money to spend on exploration, helicopters, and offices. The Brazilian dredges had no title, no environmental assessments, little paperwork, and an itinerant migrant transnational labor force. Her comment did not reflect the distinction I saw between these two kinds of large-scale and small-scale mining. She used the nationality of the mine owners to describe them as foreigners, as “multinational.” While I dismissed her comments at the time, on reflection I think that inadvertent afternoon conversation offers useful insight into multinational mining. These projects can take place in local political and economic contexts that make them less multinational than they seem initially.

Large-Scale Mining and Multinationals

Colombia’s main weekly news magazine *Semana* (2009) reported that soldiers had impounded the 27 Brazilian dredges in 2009. In the Chocó, the word to describe these rusting two-story machines is “dragons.” When the military impounded these dragons, they had almost dredged away the town Paimadó. The machines had diverted the Quitó River, and the rushing water began to cut into the town itself, washing away houses and a wall built to stop further erosion. The machinery destroyed watercourses and fish habitats, and it made the river impassable to canoe punters who use the edges of the river to navigate. The dredging damaged local subsistence strategies of the kind.

Semana (2009) reported that a handful of Brazilian dredge owners worked the municipality on the Quito River and made millions of dollars in gold. The dredges first arrived in 2006. Brazilian miners owned the machinery. Each dredge cost between \$195,000 and \$390,000 (2009). Using a metal tube, measuring between 25 and 40 centimeters wide,

the dredges sucked up the river bottom, passed the material over a sluice box, and caught the gold with mercury. The technique is similar to the one used by mini-dredges but on a larger scale. The newspaper article quotes a Brazilian dredger who said each dredge could extract 0.2 kg a day, or maybe 50 kg of gold a year. The newspaper reported the dredges had extracted gold with a market value of \$39 million (*Semana*, 2009).

Semana reported the Afro-descendant community councils began to complain about the dredges. It quoted a leader who said, “We have always lived on artisanal mining, but the dredges arrived, and they finished everything. You cannot say no to the dredges. If you do, they will take you to their camps. The areas are controlled by the FARC’s 34 Front, and paramilitary groups. They all make money from mining” (*Semana*, 2013).

He and another community leaders denounced death threats. At the same time, they tried to get a mining title under the 2001 Mining Code. While they did receive legal title, they quickly lost it again when they could not pay the annual fees (*Semana*, 2013b). In 2013, *Semana* reported that many of the 27 dredges had returned (*Semana* 2013).

When I passed some dredges, I saw the machines had large banners proclaiming they had permission from the local municipal governments to dredge the river to improve water transport. While the signs proclaimed that they were there to repair the damage done by the earlier mining with the municipal government’s blessing, the stones and gravel streaming over the dredges’ classifier indicated they were mining—and not clearing the river. Still, people said the “multinationals” had permission from the state—even if the municipal government could not legally grant them this permission.

I heard rumors of other foreigners involved in small-scale mining. A man from the US, a Korean, and group of Chinese men owned dredges or excavators on the San Juan. *Semana* (2013b) reported on a Korean working a mine opposite a military base in Istmina,

the largest town in the San Juan. *Semana* (2013b) reported on 18 Chinese citizens, with Volvo machinery, who hoped to get into mining, bought fake permission, and paid thousands of dollars to mine. Yet, when they received death threats from armed groups they fled. A company listed on the Australian stock market has mining titles in Novitá, where workers use excavators and, according to the company's website, had permission from the Afro-descendant community council. Photos on the website show a small-scale mining operations (Condoto Platinum, 2014). In each case, people in the Chocó describe these companies as “multinationals,” even if none seemed similar to the large-scale multinationals bent on opening an open pit mine that María Antonia described in the workshop in San Marino in the Upper Atrato and the Upper Andágueda .

Multinationals and the Village

During Christmas 2011, multinationals arrived at the village. I heard of their impending arrival for a week. “The multinationals will arrive soon,” said people. The only multinationals I had heard about were large mining concessions. Sitting with Pedro in the village, he explained to me his understanding of “multinational.” Slapping his cupped hand onto his elbow twice in rapid succession to indicate cheapness, he announced, “No more of those cheap excavators, but a real multinational company. They even have the proper licenses from the municipality to work the river.” Could he mean a Canadian corporation already on the river? Had the Canadians on the Upper Andágueda and Upper Atrato already come to do prior consultation in the village where I did fieldwork?

A week later, helping the workers from the “multinational”, which turned out to be a Brazilian owned operation, build a large cookhouse, canteen, and huts for workers, I

realized Pedro had echoed the words of the young woman at the non-governmental organization in Quibdó. By multinational corporation, Pedro simply meant this Brazilian owned small-scale mining venture. The Brazilian owned mine—with workers from the Chocó—used a stationary excavator with an attached extra-long boom on top of a metal platform floating on two pontoons. They had permission from the local municipal government to dredge the river.

The mine workers built their wooden shacks exactly on the site of the old village, down by the fruit trees and the two large pools of water left on the former mine site. They had received permission from a nearby Afro-descendant community council to mine the river. They built eight shacks with moist, rough-cut timber brought up from the town. While the workers came from the Chocó, they had already spent a year in the Lower Cauca working for the same Brazilians who owned the machinery. I never met the Brazilian, but the foreman told me they left the Lower Cauca River because of the state, the police, and the military. They came to the Chocó to mine this river. They said the Brazilians had made a good living dredging the Nechí River, where Pato Consolidated Gold Dredging, a Canadian company, had worked in the twentieth century. Now they planned to mine on a river in the Chocó, where the US Chocó-Pacific Mining Company had already worked.

Throughout my fieldwork, people made references to the US dredges, white miners in the Chocó, and an earlier presence of multinationals. The dredges had moved up the river; a handful of surviving workers of the US company still received money from their pensions.

One of my first conversations with Don Alfonso sticks in my mind. I had gone to his house to share a meal of stewed chicken. Having been in the village for a week, I wanted company. Over dinner, he asked me if I preferred the name “Daniel” or

“Mister.” It took me a moment to catch on that he meant the formal English greeting because he emphasized and elongated the letter ‘I,’ making the word sound like *meeester*.

Catching on, I asked, “Why ‘Mister’?”

He responded by telling me the white people who worked for the Chocó-Pacific Mining Company liked the title “Mister.” As a teenager, he had called them “Mister.” “What does it mean?” he asked. I explained the term meant a token of respect akin to *Don* or *Señor*, adding, “I prefer Daniel.” Along with everyone else, I called him Don as a sign of respect, and he wanted to return the formality.

The usage of “Mister” and the history of dredges on the river meant people associated dredging with multinational corporations. People used the term “multinational” to refer to Brazilian dredges that worked near Paimadó; the rumors of Koreans, Chinese, and Americans in the San Juan; the concession near Engrivadó; the presence of a Brazilian in the village; and the Chocó-Pacific presence in the area. In the notes I jotted after talking to the young woman in Quibdó, I tried to distinguish between multinational corporations in the Upper Andágueda and the dredges. I saw them as something qualitatively different and carefully tried to distinguish kinds of mining. Her comments stressed the nationality of the owners and implied other commonalities. That afternoon’s conversation about the dredges and the use of the term “multinationals” raised for me a question: What is a multinational corporation anyway?

I linger on this use of “multinational” because of assumptions about different kinds of mining held by those involved in anti-mining activism. These assumptions were behind the community workshops around the open pit mine. There is a perceived difference between multinational corporations and the small-scale mining industry. In the Chocó, with a history of US mining companies, the use of “multinational” to indicate a

foreigner suggests some similarities between small-scale and large-scale mining. In my notes, I described a distinction. Small-scale miners do little exploration, no preliminary studies, no engineering reports, no environmental assessments, and they operate without legal recognition. Most do not have legal title. If they have permission, it comes from a municipal council. Real multinationals, I thought, have massive open-pit mines, use heavier machinery, have legal title, and mine on a larger scale. In the workshop on multinational mining, activists worried about large-scale, open-pit mining that employed hundreds of people and reshaped an entire landscape.

Two narratives seem dominant: a white legend and black legend. The white legend fits with the story of Canadian corporate benevolence and corporate social responsibility, where mining projects bring jobs and development to rural areas and profits to investors and the Colombian state. In Colombia, multinational mining corporations sponsor sporting events, run glossy websites, and produce television commercials promoting their projects and the benefits of foreign direct investments. The black legend offers a more critical view of large-scale open-pit mining. People critique the human and environmental effects of foreign direct investment that threatens land and people. They worry multinationals will worsen conflicts, bring labor and human rights violations, and threaten Colombia's Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and peasant populations. Keeping in mind the way people in the Chocó used the term "multinational" to describe small-scale mining, in this chapter I explore connections between small-scale mining and the multinational mining industry in Colombia. I turn to the ways multinational mining is not just about gold. To do this, I first address the Canadian junior mining industry. Second, I turn to the epistemological questions of research on corporate connections. Third, I focus on large-scale mining in out-of-the-way areas as related to money laundering.

The Economic Performance of Canadian Mining Companies

Through a discussion of Canadian junior mining company Bre-X, which shook Canadian stock markets and investors in 1997, Anna Tsing (2000) described Canada's mining industry as an economy of appearances. Here, I discuss her work on Bre-X's theatre and speculation in Indonesia, and then apply it to Canadian mining. Tsing (2000) described the speculative economy of gold mining and international finance capital. In her post-mortem of the Bre-X scandal, she described how what she called a dramatic economic performance of finance capital, rather than gold mining, underpinned the Calgary-based junior Canadian mining company. Bre-X, along with many junior mining companies, aimed at staking a claim, exploring the claim, and then selling the claim to a larger company able to extract the gold. In this case, the claimed exploration and mine results that never existed.

Bre-X's growth hinged on its claim to have found massive gold deposits in Borneo, Indonesia, in an out-of-the-way part of the country close to where Tsing had earlier conducted fieldwork. At its peak in 1997, the company claimed deposits of more than 2 million kg of gold, which would have been worth billions of dollars. Investors poured into the company's stock as they hoped for a share of profits from the unexploited gold mine. The company's stock price increased from pennies in 1993 to more than CAD \$286.50 in 1997. In Canada, news reports on the company's stock filled hundreds of pages of newspapers and magazines. Tsing describes the investment story as one that relied on tales of lonely frontier prospectors finding gold in remote jungles after days of trekking and lifetimes of exploration (Tsing, 2000, p. 128).

At the time, Canadian and US investors saw Southeast Asia as ripe for investment. The Bre-X find fit into this broader narrative—just before the Asian financial crisis—of

stories of Asian jungles ripe for Canadian capitalist exploitation. Tsing argues the story played into North American notions of rugged outdoorsmen striking it rich in far-off places. Tsing concluded that Bre-X's success at attracting investment relied not on gold coming out of the ground but on what she labels the performance of finance.

Bre-X had no gold mine. It did not even have much legitimate gold exploration. Rather, it merely gave the appearance of owning a title to a potential mine. From this, stock promoters were able to sell the story to Canadian investors and speculators. This story of a mine—or an economic fiction of future mining profits—resonated in Canada. While the mine itself did not exist, and the site in Borneo had no gold, the story the company told played on notions of Canadian capitalism and an economy reliant on extraction of minerals and lumber.

In 1997, after a series of conflicts over ownership involving the Indonesian government and other Canadian and US mining companies, the project in Borneo began unravel. The death of Bre-X's chief geologist under mysterious circumstances, apparently from suicide after jumping from a helicopter, coincided with the news from the US company conducting an audit that showed the mine had no gold and the core samples had been faked. The stock collapsed as the fraudulent nature of Bre-X's claims emerged.

Tsing describes this as the dramatic performances of finance (2000, p. 118):

Performance here is simultaneously economic performance and dramatic performance. The “economy of appearances” I describe depends on the relevance of this pun; the self-conscious making of a spectacle is a necessary aid to gathering investment funds.

Here she means Bre-X stocks rose, and then fell, because promoters created a spectacle of gold mining. The stocks climbed, not because the company had found gold, but because it performed as if it had. The mine project also articulated with national and regional

state-making projects in Indonesia that sought to increase foreign direct investment. Tsing argues that with the slick websites, corporate presentations, and compelling story of a new mining frontier, the Bre-X scandal sheds light on the junior Canadian mining sector and the surreal quality of their economic performance. Tsing (2000) described Bre-X as performing a theatrical simulacrum of being a junior mining company. It did not have a mine, and someone had planted the gold that the company had claimed to have found in its core samples. Bre-X's annual reports, technical briefs, geologically findings, website, and even the online investment chat rooms and forums that supported them played into this performance. This aspect of international finance combined with dreams of foreign investment and a fantasy of a remote empty frontier enabled the Bre-X fraud. Yet, Bre-X was a fiction. It had no mine, just websites, reports, and other material portraying a story of a mine. I find echoes of this kind of economic performance in Canadian junior mining in Colombia and other parts of Latin America.

Media reports often describe Colombia as Latin America's most friendly country for foreign investment and as a place to do business. On June 6, 2013, *Forbes Magazine* labeled Colombia the new Indonesia. Journalist Heather West (2013) argues that Colombia, like Indonesia in the 1990s, has a rapidly growing economy, rich in natural resources, and is undergoing a flood of foreign investment. Citing annual growth of 4 percent, investment grade debt, a young and large population, West's upbeat commentary portrays Colombia as a profitable place for investors (see also Schipani, 2014). Junior mining companies registered on the Toronto Stock Market have become key investors in Colombia.

Canadian junior mining companies represent more than half of foreign mining corporations in Colombia (MiningWatch, 2009). Canadian stock markets play home to

more than 70 percent of the world's junior mining companies (Deneault and Sacher, 2012, p. 2). Many of the foreign mining companies in Colombia have corporate registrations in Canada (MiningWatch, 2009). Like Bre-X, many business models revolve not around extracting gold, but around raising capital through stock markets in Canada to fund exploration projects. Their aim is speculative; stake claims, raise money to explore the claim on the Canadian stock markets, and then sell the project on to the majors to extract the gold from the mine. Many of them endeavor to produce buzz and interest from investors, so they can continue exploration.

In this chapter, I look at how some Canadian junior mining companies may be involved in money laundering. The discussion remains tentative and hypothetical. I explore how junior mining companies engaged in a theatrical economic performance might allow for money laundering. To raise questions for further research, I describe documented examples of money laundering through junior mining. Then, I use less well-documented examples. Before this, I illustrate the epistemological difficulties of this kind of investigative analysis through the artwork of Mark Lombardi.

Mapping Corporate Connections

Just weeks after September 11, 2001, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) called on the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York to look at a series of

drawings on exhibition by Mark Lombardi (National Public Radio, 2003).¹ The US artist had committed suicide in 2000, leaving behind detailed constellations of curves, dotted lines, dashes, arrows, and symbols drawn in pencil on huge pieces of paper to show complex global interconnections between the legal and underground economy. The FBI came to see a particular drawing, Lombardi's rendition of a complex spider web of global financial companies, corporations, and international terrorist organizations (National Public Radio, 2003). Lombardi sourced hundreds of books and newspapers to figure out these connections, noting each one on an index card. His diagrams distilled complex information onto large sheets of paper in a compelling way. Of course, it raises questions of truth, and it is hard to verify the connections: The sketches seem anecdotal, even libelous. Nevertheless as works of art, Lombardi's drawings offer compelling interpretations. While his sketches would not hold up in court, a peer-reviewed publication, or a newspaper, they still seem to point at thought provoking, if impossible to confirm, connections over time and space, portraying the intersections of illegal and the legal economy. I raise Lombardi's art because although legal proof relies on national courts and long investigations involving thousands of hours, I think connections worth further consideration can be found. While Lombardi as an artist, and myself as an anthropologist, do not have any great investigative capacity, I think we can point to some broad contours. Inspired by Lombardi and cognizant of his weaknesses, I point to an

¹ My interest in Mark Lombardi was inspired by a paper presented by Gregory J. Grandin, from New York University, titled *A Conspiracy of Everyday Life: Mark Lombardi, Reaganism, and the Paramilitarization of Capitalism; or, How Iran- Contra Explains the World* (2013) at Latin American Studies Association 2013 Annual congress in Washington, D.C. The title of the panel was *Declassifying Capital: Forensic Technologies and Corporate Power* chaired by Prof. Carlota McAllister at York University.

unexplored facet of Canadian junior mining in Colombia in order to make some connections and raise some questions for further investigation. I describe four stories to highlight a need to cast a critical eye on Canada-based junior mining companies, stock speculation, swindles, money laundering, and economic fictions in out-of-the-way places.

Canadian Organized Crime and Money Laundering

Writing for the Canadian newspaper the *Globe and Mail*, John Saunders (1988) described the mysterious May 1988 disappearance of a Toronto stockbroker who had sold shares for a junior gold mining company listed on the Calgary stock market. His disappearance coincided with the stock losing 94 percent of its value, plummeting from \$4.25 in January to \$0.25 in April that year. The company's former investors took the stock brokerage that sold the shares to court. An Ontario Court judge dismissed the civil case in 1993, because he did not believe the victims—a stock promoter, a disbarred lawyer, and a Montreal stock speculator—actually owned the stocks. The judge suggested the men likely acted as a front for Vito Rizzuto, a man who had a reputation as a mobster in Montreal. (When Rizzuto died in December 2013, the Canadian media covered his funeral as one for the head of the Montreal Mafia.) Saunders reports the judge noted the checks and money orders the three men used to buy the stocks came from Rizzuto and his Montreal associates. The stock purchases reached as much as \$50,000 at a time, made with \$10 and \$20 bills. The judge suggested Rizzuto's associates “washed” the money through the company to give “a false appearance of public participation” (Saunders,

1988, 1993).² The case offers an example of one way that Canadian organized crime used a junior mining company's stock to launder money, in the Ontario Court judge's terms.

Writing in 2008, journalist Bruce Livesey (2008) describes how the Rizzuto family used global financial markets to their advantage, using commercial businesses to make and to launder money. One of Rizzuto's business ventures involved importing Colombia cocaine to Montreal via the Caribbean (Livesey, 2008). Livesey describes a Canadian police sting operation. In the early 2000s, a Vancouver-based stock promoter set up investments to help what they thought was a Colombian cartel launder drug money through the stock market and shell companies. They sold securities to launder money for their cartel contact, which in reality was an undercover RCMP officer. The same police officer posed as a drug trafficker, opened an account at a Swiss bank in the Bahamas, laundered the money through a casino and restaurants connected to the bank, and moved the money through other companies back to Canadian banks. A Canadian lawyer claimed to have laundered over \$150 million in the early 1990s with Rizzuto and the Hells Angels. In 2002, the RCMP arrested these men and 58 others, a third of whom were Canadian. Livesey (2008) quotes former FBI agent Ross Gaffney as saying, "We used to say dumb ones make millions, the semi-smart ones make tens of millions, and the crafty make hundreds of millions."

Through shell companies, manipulation of stock prices, swindles, speculation, and "pump-and-dump" schemes, organized crime was able to drive up the price and then pull

² While the Canadian authorities never prosecuted Vito Rizzuto, Revenue Canada took him to court for failing to declare revenue from profits on stocks in November 2000. In August 2001, Rizzuto settled with Revenue Canada (Thanh Ha and Peritz, 2010).

out their money, making a profit and laundering money in the process. Livesey quotes police sources that describe Canada as a haven for money laundering, relying on white-collar professionals, lawyers, accountants, stockbrokers, insurance agents, real estate agents, and staff at financial institutions (Livesey, 2008). He quotes criminologist Margaret Beare of York University in Toronto as stating, “Within the criminal [world], money laundering has taken on a life of its own and has become an integral ingredient in criminal organizations” (Livesey, 2008; Beare, 2003, 2007)

In broad strokes, these cases show one way a Canadian junior mining company has played a role in a money-laundering scheme. It involved faked investments to launder the profits from cocaine sales for the Montreal Mafia. It was an economic fiction that relied on the same kind of economic performances that Anna Tsing notes for Bre-X: hope for future profits from a gold mine that never existed. Money laundering requires false companies that seem legitimate, with appropriate paperwork, documents, and materials: Junior mining companies can provide just this mechanism. While Bre-X offers an example of Canadian-style speculation in a gold mine with no gold, this example provides a connection between the same kind of company and not speculative fraud but money laundering hidden behind a large-scale mining project. From this background, I now consider other examples of possible money laundering through gold mining using Canadian junior mining corporations.

Large-Scale Mining and Money Laundering

Here I address allegations, online and in the Mexican press, that link Vancouver drug gangs to money laundering involving a Canadian mining company in Mexico and

Colombia. The following draws on investor web boards, blogs, newspaper reports, and other online sources. The quality of sources varies greatly, offering plenty of space for further investigation and critical analysis. This means my conclusions here are at best tentative. I aim for a cautious discussion and analysis. While I hope to provide grounds for further research and raise questions about the Canadian junior mining companies operating in remote regions, I may prove to be wrong. Fragments of allegations, weak sources, online rumors, make the situations described hard to confirm. Even so, the discussion offers insight on the difficulty in making sense of some junior mining companies. I think it says something about allegations and rumors found on online investments websites. These aspects of capitalism and mining in Latin America require further study, including through interrogation of what people mean they talk about multinational corporations. Anna Tsing (2000) discusses investor chat rooms and the role these investor boards and websites can have in promoting stock. Still, as the sources are poor, I do not use the names of people or companies involved. For those interested, it is simple to read the documents cited and reconstruct the analysis and draw conclusions. I also suggest a second analysis, which sees the same case as a stock market scheme. As with the first proposed conclusion, this conclusion is tentative and requires further confirmation. In sum, what I offer here is an example of organized crime laundering money through junior Canadian mining companies in Mexico and Colombia, a stock market scheme, or neither. Before turning to the allegations and their sources, I need to give some background on British Columbia's drug economy and a Canadian drug trafficking organization called Global United Nations Syndicate (GUNS), which is relevant to the story.

Tim Wilson, writing for the Bogotá-based Insight Crime Think Tank, describes the

assassination of a Canadian in Mexico (Wilson, 2012). The Canadian worked for GUNS out of Vancouver and the surrounding region. Wilson describes the Canadian as a high-ranking member of GUNS, who spent much of 2010 and 2012 in Mexico working for Mexican drug traffickers. He died in early 2012 from gunshot wounds in Culiacan, in the Mexican state of Sinaloa (Bolan, 2012a). Writing in the *Vancouver Sun*, crime reporter Kim Bolan (2009a) describes GUNS as a public part of the British Columbia drug scene. The value of the Canadian province's marijuana trade to the northwest of the US reached \$9 billion in 2012 (Bolan, 2012b), which is equal to the value of annual cocaine exports in Colombia. Bolan describes 135 groups working in a pyramid structure of the region's drug economy in production, import, wholesale, and street sales; with its international connections GUNS ranked as a mid-level group (Bolan, 2012b). The founder of GUNS, Clayton Roueche, played a role until his arrest in 2008. Jess Hyde (2013) writes in a cover story on Roueche in *Rolling Stone* offers some insight, although Bolan reports the Vancouver police called parts of it fictional (Bolan, 2013).

Hyde links Roueche to the Lower Mainland's drug industry, painting a startling picture of British Columbia's marijuana economy. Roueche and other members of GUNS took to flying marijuana out of 16 landing zones in the Okanagan via low-flying logging helicopters to the US. They then used profits from marijuana sales in the US to import cocaine into Canada (Hyde, 2013). As cocaine came north to the streets of Vancouver, marijuana and synthetic drugs moved south (Bolan, 2008). The techniques for smuggling marijuana and synthetic drugs into the US and cocaine into Canada involved use of airplanes, tunnels, helicopters, ships, snowmobiles, and hockey bags on cross-country treks (Bolan, 2009). Hyde (2013) describes how US authorities arrested Roueche during a stopover in Texas on a flight originating in Mexico City. The authorities diverted the

airplane to catch the Canadian. After trial and conviction, a US judge sentenced him to 30 years in prison. Since then, Canadian and US police have worked to fragment GUNS. Members of the organization died in Mexico in 2008, Argentina in 2009, and Vancouver in 2011. I examine the initial two cases because of allegations of connections between GUNS and a Canadian junior mining company.

In July 2008, two GUNS members from Vancouver died from gunshots in Guadalajara, Mexico. In some accounts, there was a connection between the two men and a Canadian junior mining company. I draw from online reports and a newspaper in Guadalajara. I do not use the names of the people or companies involved. On February 26, 2012, a Mexican journalist Antonio Neri reported on two investigations of a US citizen and a Canadian citizen for fraud and death threats (Neri, 2012). The first case involves a Mexican state attorney and complaints filed by a former employee of a mining company. The former employee alleged an armed man, hired by his former employer, a mining exploration company, had threatened to kill him. Neri reports the employee told the government investigators that he had worked with the US citizen and the mining company as its human resources chief. His employer asked him for a loan of \$39,000 to cover payroll. He did so, expecting quick repayment. By November 2008, the company had fired him. He never received severance pay. Neri reports the man's former employer, an American, told him that if he kept complaining, he would be killed (Neri, 2012).

The second case, Neri relates in the same article, involves allegations against the same US and Canadian citizens by a Mexican woman in front of a federal public prosecutor. A leaked copy of the witness report is available online, posted by an

anonymous blogger³ and quoted in *El Informador* and *El Occidental*, newspapers from Guadalajara, in the Mexican state of Jalisco (Ruvalcaba, 2012; Neri, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). In these accounts, the woman made a statement to the Mexican attorney general's office in Jalisco, Mexico, alleging criminal death threats against her (Procuraduría General de la República, 2012). She testified that two men had threatened her because she had information about a group of Canadians and Mexicans who, she alleged, had disguised themselves as a mining company to launder money for the Vancouver-based GUNS. If true, the copy of the document and newspaper reports describe the following situation.

In 2006, the American mentioned previously hired her. She had worked in his home, and three people regularly visited: the two GUNS members from Vancouver who died from gunshots in Guadalajara, Mexico, in 2008, and a Canadian. The American invited her to dinner with this Canadian. She and the Canadian soon began a relationship. The Canadian had come to Mexico as the director of a Canadian-based junior mining company with a joint venture with the American's mining company in a remote region of the state of Jalisco. She alleged her American employer began to receive regular cash payments in amounts upwards of \$50,000 from Canada. Her job was to change this cash into Mexican pesos at currency exchange houses. She said she did this 30 times, with the amount of money she changed increasing each time. The money supposedly paid the salaries of the Canadian junior mining company's workers and exploration expenses, the American's overhead, several Mexican mining companies, and the two Canadians from Vancouver—the GUNS members who were later found dead.

³ The blog is about organized crime in British Columbia's Lower Mainland and the rest of Canada (GangstaOutBlog, 2012a, 2012b),

The woman alleged that she used various bank accounts, in the names of Mexican and Canadian mining companies, to receive money wired from Canadian bank accounts in Edmonton, Alberta. She describes a visit by a colleague of the Canadian from Edmonton, Alberta, who had wired money to Mexico. The visitor had an argument with her Canadian boyfriend. Later, she confronted her boyfriend, and she alleged he told her that the supposed mining company was laundering money for Clayton Roueche and the “United Nations Gang” in Canada. They were financing a fake mining project in Mexico and Colombia to launder money. She said her Canadian boyfriend replied to her direct question: “We are laundering money with Canadian, Mexican and Colombian mining companies.” She said she wanted to stop, but could not. The woman described continuing to go to money change houses, continuing to accept dollars, continuing to convert them to pesos, and continuing to make payments to hotels in Jalisco and to the two Canadians from Vancouver—until they died in 2008. In 2010, the Canadian returned to Canada.

The newspaper reports written by Antonio Neri in *El Occidental* and *La Prensa Jalisco* (2012a, 2012b, 2012c), an article written by Omar Ruvalcaba in *El Informador* (2012), and the allegations the woman makes—posted online as leaked witness testimony—(Procuraduría General de la República, 2012) suggest the possibility that a Canadian junior mining company with a project in Mexico and Colombia was receiving money from Canada in US dollars to launder through fake mines in Mexico. The company would have converted the money into pesos at Mexican exchange houses, then paid local mining company employees, overhead, workers’ wages, hotels bills, and two GUNS members in Mexico. In this account, the allegations suggest the mining project was an elaborate money-laundering scheme that brought together Vancouver drug traffickers and a Canadian junior mining front company through a fake mine. At first glance, linking a

Canadian junior mining company and money laundering seems startling. Yet, in the spirit of Lombardi's maps and Anna Tsing's (2000) economic performance, and in the context of the way gold is used in the global underground economy and small-scale mining in Colombia, the idea at least seems possible.

Certainly, Mexican cartels used money-changing houses in Mexico as part of massive money-laundering schemes that involved Wachovia and HSBC. The names of the two Canadians assassinated in Mexico, the location of the Canadian mining company's project, the investments in the company listed in its corporate records, and the people who were directors in the company at the time all support a reading which could conclude that what the woman alleged is true. The company lists only two projects, one in Mexico, and one in Colombia. It described the former in a technical brief prepared in 2006 and published on its website (Munroe, 2006a, p. 19; 2006b).

These reports listed the concession of 10,750 hectares as a joint venture with nine concessions controlled by the Mexican mining company that employed the American, two concessions controlled by another mining company, and two concessions controlled by a man named Pablo Antonio Fitch Pariente. The anonymous blog notes that this technical report states the Canadian company signed an agreement in 2002 to pay Fitch Pariente \$345,000. In 2008, the US Treasury alleged Fitch Pariente's involvement in a money-laundering scheme. The US Department of the Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control blacklisted what it described as a drug-money laundering financial network that included the Fitch Pariente, 14 Mexican companies, and 16 other people tied to a part of the Mexican Sinaloa cartel (Department of the Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control, 2008; Lawder, 2008). The network smuggled thousands of tons of marijuana into the US, which the Treasury called a "vital component" of the Sinaloa Cartel's money-laundering

network. The blacklist included four Mexican mining firms. This blacklisting does support the allegations that a Canadian junior mining company was involved in some kind of money-laundering scheme for a Vancouver drug gang and through fake mining projects in Mexico and Colombia.

At least one other possibility exists, which is that people in Mexico, the US, or Canada attempted to paint the Canadian company as if it was laundering money, though it was not. This could be an attempt by a third party to discredit the individuals and companies involved. To discuss this second possibility, I turn to other news reports. In February 2013, reporting in *El Occidental*, the same journalist who broke the previous story reported the police had found two Americans dead in a small remote town. In Neri's report (2013), the police immediately took the bodies to the morgue. At the time, the US media identified the men as the CEO and CFO of a Dallas-based mining company. Almost immediately, the US media followed up with reports that the bodies and the men had never actually existed and that someone had faked the story.

Kim Susana, writing for *ABC News* (2013), reported that Neri told a Dallas radio station that a policeman from the rural town had called him and his colleagues to report the deaths of the two Americans. Neri admitted having simply run with the story. On questioning by the US media, he admitted there had been no evidence the bodies existed or that two men had died (Susana, 2013). Writing for the *Dallas Morning News*, Gary Jacobson and Alfredo Corchado (2013) tried to follow up on the case of the US-based mining company. They found its offices did not exist, and they reported the two executives reported dead had also never existed (see *Fox News Latino*, 2013; Walsh, 2013). They described online allegations, connections to a Mexican drug cartel, the Russian mafia, and a "pump and dump" scheme to promote an American company. The company

itself, while listed as based in Dallas, Texas, had registered in Nevada in 2004, with head offices in Edmonton, Alberta. The Online Edgar filings from the US securities reporting office for the company show its founder was an Edmonton-based real estate agent (Securities and Exchange Commission, 2004). The corporate registration documents note the founder has “no experience in gold mining business ... does not have any formal training as a geologist or in the technicalities of management of a mineral exploration company. Our management lacks technical training and experience with exploring for, starting, and working a mine” (Securities and Exchange Commission, 2004). While I found no evidence the Edmonton real estate agent had involvement in the US company by 2012, the company’s financial reports showed millions of shares issued with no profits and no mining. It too seemed to be a mining company without mines. The US company was promoting exactly the same mining project on the same site as the Canadian company. Indeed, it claimed to be the sole owner and said the other company was there without legitimate basis. From this perspective, it is plausible that all the allegations described earlier simply aimed to discredit the ownership claims of the Canadian company, in some kind of stock market-based swindle.

Peter Hristov (2010) describes the CEO of the US company as a seasoned stock promoter allegedly involved in the Russian Mafia (see also Baines, 2010). He reports on allegations that the CEO had orchestrated a “pump-and-dump” scheme aimed at investors (Hristov, 2010; Mathers Research, 2012). In 2012, the Canadian company reported on its mine claim that the US company’s project had been non-operational for several years. Despite the US company claiming the contrary, the Canadian company published a detailed report on its website with photos and videos showing evidence the site and machinery have been never been in operation. It released a press release that the

US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) had “temporarily suspended trading in the securities of [the US company] because of questions about the accuracy of statements made by [the US company] in press releases to investors about, among other, the company’s business and arrangements” (Pura, 2013). Meanwhile, the US company said it had paid \$7.5 million for the mine in 2010 (Jamasmie, 2013). The Canadian company disputed these payments, claimed ownership of both mines, and displayed claims to concession certificates. The SEC suspended the US company’s stocks in November 2012 after it claimed to have a joint venture with one of Canada’s biggest gold mining companies, while the CEO of the Canadian company noted there has been no mining in the Mexican site since 2007.

This case seems interesting regardless of whether Vancouver drug gangs launder money through it or the companies are victims of a slander campaign. The case could be one of money laundering, stock market manipulation, or something else. Whatever the truth, it is clear that mining was not taking place: In play were economic fictions around speculation or money laundering. Despite a report by the Canadian company in 2005 that described the project as starting soon (Munroe, 2006a, 2006b), and reports that the US company was involved in some kind of pump-and-dump scheme (Tucker, 2013; Levene, 2006), neither company has done much mining at either site. Nonetheless, according to its public filings at SEDAR—the Canadian securities reporting agency—the Canadian company has an accumulated deficit of slightly over CAD\$15 million and mining projects in Mexico and in Colombia, neither of which has produced any gold nor seemed to progress very much on the ground.

Laundering money through fictitious mining expenses at least seems plausible, which raises the possibility of a Canadian junior mining company in Mexico—and in

Colombia—laundering money through fake mines. The question for further research is whether junior gold mining companies could launder money in Colombia using the technique employed by the Montreal Mafia in the 1990s to launder money through a Toronto junior mining company. I turn to a last example of money laundering with Canadian corporate connections to explore this idea further.

The “Narco Plane”: Colombia, Costa Rica, and Canada

In May 2013, the President of Costa Rica went on national television to ask for forgiveness for taking two flights (to Caracas, Venezuela, and Lima, Peru) on an airplane owned by a businessman whose reputation in his native Colombia linked him to money laundering for the powerful North Valley Cartel. The press covered the incident, reporting that former high-level aides of Colombian President Alvaro Uribe (2002-2010) had also flown in the plane (*Semana*, 2013d; *Proceso*, 2013; *El Tiempo*, 2013b). A Canadian petroleum exploration company owned the plane, which in the scandal was dubbed the “Narco Plane” because the company had been founded by a Colombian businessman, who apparently also lent the plane to the Costa Rican President, with alleged ties to drug-traffickers.

The businessman, Colombian born but now a Costa Rican citizen, had founded a Bogotá-based, Canadian-owned junior exploration oil company in Panama in 1995. He left Colombia in 2007 following accusations of money laundering for the North Valley Cartel, whose leader was arrested in Brazil and extradited to the US (e.g. Taussig, 2008). The Canadian company at the heart of the incident—the same one founded by the Colombian businessman—claimed it had lent the plane directly to the president’s office and that it

had no ties to the Colombian. Indeed, it reported a Canadian investment house based in Toronto served as its only shareholder. Of interest is that the Colombian accused of money laundering has a personal blog dedicated to his corporate philanthropy (Education is Human Right, 2012), on which he describes a fundraising event on Bay Street, Canada's largest financial district. He describes the event as being organized by directors of the companies controlled by the same Toronto investment house that owns the petroleum company he founded. Among these companies is another junior petroleum exploration company in Colombia and a real estate investment firm with offices in Fort Lauderdale, Bogotá, and Medellín. While the allegations in the press are unproven, it does raise the question of why a Colombian allegedly involved in money laundering in Colombia founded a Canadian company exploring for petroleum in Colombia that owns an airplane operating in Costa Rica that flies between Costa Rica, Venezuela, Peru, Mexico, and the US and moves a Costa Rican president and senior Colombian officials (*Semana*, 2013d; *Proceso*, 2013; *El Tiempo*, 2013b). Perhaps coincidences, but they raise the possibility these companies serve to move money.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have suggested ways that Canadian-based large-scale multinational mining projects in Colombia are also not just about gold. I have raised the possibilities of speculation, stock market swindles, and money laundering. I discussed “multinational” corporations in Quibdó and the village where I did fieldwork, to point out that in everyday conversation people did not distinguish between the kinds of small-scale mines owned by foreigners and so-called Canadian or South African large-scale

multinational corporations. This chapter has explored local connections of Canadian junior mining companies in Colombia, Mexico, and Central America. Considering the possibility that large-scale mining projects are involved in speculative schemes and stock market scams in the way that Bre-X was, I have shown that just as small-scale mining has international connections through money laundering, so too could multinational mining projects connect to local economies of narcotics and conflict through money laundering. In the same way that the *paisa* miner described the Lower Cauca as having mines that were not about gold, in this chapter I have suggested Canadian junior mining companies have mines where the mine itself serves as a front for other activities. In both cases, context matters. Following on from the epistemological difficulty of ethnographic fieldwork in a context of conflict, I have drawn on Mark Lombardi's art to illustrate the challenges of mapping and investigating the connections between the legal and illegal economies.

While I make no claims as to the nature of mining projects in the Upper Andágueda and the Upper Atrato frontier between the Chocó, Risaralda, and Antioquia, I do note that money laundering that relies on fake mines takes place in precisely these kinds of out-of-the-way frontiers at the limits of state power. Tsing (2000) uses economic theatre and economic performance to describe this process, because Bre-X relied on appearing to be a promising company. Stock market investors bought into Bre-X's stocks on the basis of the fiction of unexploited Indonesian jungle waiting for Canadian capitalists and their mining companies. The combination of stock market speculations and fictions and distance in the Indonesian frontier allowed Bre-X to make money not from gold mining, or extracting gold from the ground, but from claiming to have found the world's largest mine. Frontiers where the state has little presence lend themselves to rural

subsistence production and to capitalist extraction. I show how important it is to understand local politics and economics. Bre-X was a fiction, in the sense that there was no mine, built through reports, corporate documents, websites, and investor discussion forums.

Like Bre-X, mining corporations in Colombia often describe the areas where they work as empty. They do so in ways that erase centuries of mining and Colombia's armed conflict. Using Tsing's essay on global financial capital and Bre-X's scandal to look at Canadian multinational junior mining corporations in Colombia is suggestive. Both might be involved not simply in mining, but also in money laundering. It seems possible that money laundering provides as much insight into mining investment in Colombia as investment, speculation, and stock schemes.

I put Tsing's observations and Lombardi's artwork side-by-side with a discussion of Canadian multinational junior mining companies to complicate the increase of Canadian junior mining corporations in Colombia. The most obvious comparison is direct: like Bre-X, many Canadian mining corporations investing in Colombia make money not by extracting gold, but by raising money on the stock market based on projected future earnings of mining concessions they hope to be able to explore. That is, they hope to make money not from taking gold out of the ground, but from attracting Canadian speculators. Another possibility I raise is that this economic fiction serves as a front to enable stock market scams and money laundering. Just as money laundering through small-scale mining requires real small-scale miners—such as José and Geraldo—money laundering could coexist with a legal Canadian junior mining industry. In either case, over the decade and a half since Colombia's Congress passed the new mining code, at most a handful of Canadian junior mining companies are on their way to becoming the large-scale

multinational mines that María Antonia and activists such as Ximena feared on the Upper Andágueda and Upper Atrato.

I have shown that context matters. I have suggested mining companies, speculators, and money launderers can all make money—or clean money—without mining. I have suggested the role of organized crime in laundering through junior mining projects in Canada, Mexico, and Colombia. In a remote frontier area already involved in cocaine production, export, transport, and smuggling, I have suggested understanding mining investments requires considering the similarities to the small-scale mining industry and the local political and economic contexts of the locations where they claim to be exploring.

I explored this possible money laundering through mining companies by linking the legal economy of securities to money laundering through fake mining projects. Canadian experts on money laundering Margaret E. Beare and Stephen Schneider (2007) caution against relying on sources other than police and court documents when discussing money laundering. In recognition, I have drawn on rumors and gossip. This discussion provides some insights into how to think about multinational corporations in the Chocó. Both the young woman at the nongovernmental organization and Pedro in the village saw a link, which I at first dismissed, between small-scale mining and multinational corporations. Adopting the spirit of Lombardi's art, in which he used drawings and curves in pencil to make connections, I outlined some preliminary elements of these connections. The examples I have highlighted raise questions. Much of my analysis would not stand muster in a newsroom, let alone a court of law. Still, relying on anecdotal evidence and rumors, I have tried to describe these examples in general terms. As an anthropologist, my interests are in the patterns that these rumors, half-truths, and interpretation of complex

realities provide in untangling the various economic activities and mining fictions in frontier areas. This chapter has relied on newspapers, web forums, and anonymous blogs to make tentative observations and raise questions. The money-laundering literature, (i.e. Beare and Schneider, 2007, p. 114–127; Naylor, 1994; and FINTRAC, 2013), suggest these conclusions are worth further research, because in Canada organized crime has laundered money through the securities sector and the gold sector, and Colombia small-scale gold mining in out-of-the-way frontiers has enabled money laundering through small-scale mines. In this chapter, I have suggested this possibility for Canadian junior mining companies. My task was not proving these linkages, so much as sketching possible maps, and showing the ways that gold is not just about gold in Colombia. To show why context matters and to bring the discussion full circle, I return to the consequences of all this for local politics and economy of the river where I conducted fieldwork.

Chapter 10: Gold in the Chocó

The musical trio ChocQuibTown¹ mixes Latin beats with funk and hip-hop. The group's name fuses the words *Chocó*, *Quibdó*, and *town*. One of their songs, "Poisoned Fish,"² has a fast beat that makes its lyrics hard to catch. Part of the song's chorus is, "No, no, I won't eat that fish, even though it's from the Chocó."³ The song addresses vote buying and influence peddling in municipal and departmental elections:

And very wary people who want to poison my head
Poisoned fish on the table, but that does not stress me
Watch out watch out for influence peddling
By people who without any decency want to see you in decline⁴

The song portrays candidates as giving mercury-poisoned fish from the Chocó to their supporters, which is literally true and a metaphor for unfulfilled promises. I interpret the song as linking the ecological impacts of gold mining with electoral politics. In this chapter, I discuss the ecological impacts of gold mining and electoral politics in the context of small-scale and artisanal gold mining and point to the complex ways different forms of gold mining reshape a place politically and ecologically.

¹ Christopher Dennis (2012) provides an excellent ethnographic monograph discussing Afro-Colombian hip-hop and ChocQuibTown.

² "Pescao Envenenao"

³ "Yo no me como ese pescao así sea del Chocó [sic]."

⁴ *Y mucho ojo mi gente que quieren envenenarte la cabeza
Con pescao malo en la mesa
pero eso a mí no me estresa
Ojo mucho ojo que el tráfico de influencias
De gente que sin decencia quieren verte en decadencia*

ChocQuibTown, *Pescao Envenenao*

The dissertation has moved up the river to address different kinds of mining and money laundering, ending on how small-scale and large-scale mining in frontier areas could be used for money laundering. In this chapter, I come back down to explore mining's consequences in the place where I did fieldwork. Drawing from a discussion of the river and mine sediments from artisanal and small-scale mining, I show how mining shapes and reshapes both a river's ecology and local municipal politics. I begin the story with one of my last days in the field, then turn to earlier periods of fieldwork, before returning to the end of my fieldwork.

While I wait to go downriver from the village to the town, tired from the previous night's New Year celebrations, I notice the river running clear for the first time. The water flowing by my idly trailing hand sparkles and reflects with rare clarity the shore's deep green vegetation. For the first time in more than a year, sediment from mine runoff does not cloud it. The water's familiar opaqueness comes from trillions of chalky grey sediment particles produced from a dozen gold mines upriver. While artisanal and small-scale mining causes sedimentation on the river, small-scale mining has a greater impact. As we prepare to leave, my mind turns to a morning in November 2011.

Artisanal Mining and the River

The sun rises early and red; the moon is gray, fading, and not fully set. The river water is low ochre and silver colored. The sky has vanishing wisps of fog. I travel by boat to Pedro's mine, with Pedro, Martina, and Javier. Pedro pilots skillfully. He wears a well-worn red tracksuit, emblazoned with an oil company's logo. Martina holds a thermos flask of freshly brewed sugarcane tea and green plastic containers of rice with fried cheese.

Javier, Pedro's age but taller and thinner, stands on the boat's prow holding a smooth-handled wooden pole. Nobody talks over the motor's steady drone. The trip from the village to Pedro's mine upriver lasts 10 minutes. Crouching low, sheltering from a cool breeze, I write in pencil trying to catch the river's sensation. Our boat passes a riverbank garden thick with sugarcane, plantain, and banana. Nearby are avocado and fruit trees. We motor past several hillocks and large swaths of leveled stone and rock—an old mine site left by excavators two years gone. The river's rippling surface reflects the rising red sun and palm trees on the shore. Wood smoke whiffs from a passing village. The moon finally disappears. Birds call over the nine-horsepower motor's low steady drone as they fly in formation.

Turning into the bubbling river current, Javier poles us through shallow rapids where the wide river curves west. Standing with shoulders forward and feet apart on the canoe's prow, Javier wedges the long pole between riverbed stones. By pulling his arms back, he smoothly slides the boat forward. His punting, or *palenque*, helps guide the long wooden canoe in shallow water. As the boat arrives, Pedro kills the motor, lifting it clear. Javier jumps to shore while heaving the boat's yellow and blue wooden prow up. Tying the painter to three waxy ferns, Javier secures the boat, and Pedro, Martina, and I clamber ashore.

The water moves slowly, and the ferns look strong. I scribble questions in my notebook: Will the three plants keep the river's steady tug from dislodging the boat? How can Javier know the ferns will hold? Deftly securing the boat to vegetation shows knowledge of place. Javier's subtle trick was learned through a lifetime of forest living. He uses similar knowledge when he machetes trees to make wooden traps for hunting, or turns banana plants into sunshades while we dig. For him, such showcases of local

knowledge and forest living are unremarkable.

Carrying a small jug of gasoline, I follow Pedro along a narrow, muddy path into the forest's damp shade. Green foliage closes in on us. He clammers over fallen tree trunks and around murky puddles, swiping the underbrush with his machete to trim it back. Getting closer to the mine, the thick undergrowth gives way to a plantain garden. The brown soil underfoot turns into mine sediment and gravel. Where the dark gray mine runoff reaches the plantain trees, the plants wilt yellow and die. Entering Pedro's mine, the path turns into a narrow channel. On one side, layers of sand, stones, pebbles, and clay form a cliff three-meters high. The top layer is made of caking brownish-yellow clay, while the bottom layer consists of stones wedged within dark blue sediment, which forms the cliff's base. On the other side, small stones piled in a jumbled heap mark the decades Pedro's family has worked at this one mine. Twenty meters back, near the mine entrance, where the gravel sand cliff stood decades ago, sweet bananas and yuca trees grow. The forest slowly reclaims the mine's stone piles, and Pedro even has a garden. A large fallen tree trunk protects a shelter with wooden planks for benches and a cook fire. Black plastic sheeting creates a roof that covers the planks and pots. A thin stream runs between the cliff and stone mound that moves water and sediment downhill from the mine front.

Mining takes water, lots of water. Pedro's mine has two sources. The first, a reservoir capped by a wooden sluice gate, sits above the mine front where the stone mound meets the cliff face. Pedro has built a sluice gate above the point where the water channel's gray bedrock base disappears under a three-meter clay, gravel, sand, and stone cliff. The sluice gate holds the water that fills a 300-meter-long trench, which connects to a reservoir high in the forest. After Pedro lifts the sluice gate, thousands of liters of stored water swamp the mine's front. The water pressure pulls at the sand, gravel, and stones,

eating into the cliff and washing sediments down the channel and out of the mine, where it slowly kills his plantain garden.

In summer, whenever there is no rain for a week or two, or when Pedro needs a focused jet of water, he uses his second source. This water comes from a red gasoline-powered water pump. Past a clump of sugarcane and two banana trees, the pump's plastic shelter is 10 meters into the bush. It has English safety instructions printed on its red metal shell. The pump looks old, scratched, and well used. Javier tells me its age: six months. He engages the motor, while Pedro aims the tube's metal nozzle to direct a pressurized stream that cuts into the cliff face. Standing sideways, using a figure-eight motion, he targets a dangerous overhang of stones and gravel. The overhang quickly crumbles. Javier cuts the motor. Pedro, Javier, and I pause and wait for Martina.

She fills a pan with sediment using a metal spike, two meters long, one end flat and the other pointed. Working below the mine front, where the bedrock channel disappears under the cliff, Martina pans for gold while standing in a dirty puddle formed by dripping sluice water. The pan resting on her feet, she swirls its water with one hand. Her fluid motion ejects large stones. Her circular rocking floods the pan again. She cups smaller pebbles, tossing them aside. Stones and pebbles gone, she tips the pan, letting water in again. Swirling this way and that, the water carries the remaining gravel and sediment out. She repeats the motion to clear the pan. Done, she stands and shows me four tiny gold flecks, almost invisible in the wooden pan.

“Almost nothing?” I ask.

“Almost nothing,” she replies.

Gold lies deeper. Our task today then is washing the cliff away so Martina can try again tomorrow. As she shows me there is no gold, Javier, at the cliff top, starts the water.

Pedro said to find the gold you had to follow the flood. Here, he and Javier make their own flood. Javier pulls a rope that lifts the sluice gate up, releasing an avalanche of brown water that courses over the mine front. The torrential waterfall washes stones, sediment, sand, and gravel down the channel. Pedro uses clumps of clay to anchor two wooden planks to the channel edge to direct water away from the stone pile and against the cliff. The plank helps pulverize more of the cliff base. The water pulls apart the sand and gravel. The large stones remain motionless, waiting for Pedro and I to loosen them.

Pedro takes Martina's metal spike. Using the pointed end, he loosens earth from around the large boulders. I grab the other spike. Copying what I have seen Pedro do many times, I wash the handle to clean the grit and dirt, which would have dug into my hands and drawn blood. Bringing the metal spikes down hard, I loosen sand around a boulder. Javier uses a shovel to move gravel. We do this for five minutes, until the stream of water slows to a trickle. I dig, spray soaked, just below the sluice gate. Pedro and Javier dig at the cliff's gray-blue stone base. The water carries the material we have loosened away down the channel. It leaves a slowly growing sediment bloom in Pedro's dying plantain stand.

When there is no water left, Martina has breakfast ready. Hot sugarcane tea to drink. Salty hard white cheese with boiled plantain picked from nearby trees to eat. I'm still hungry. Pedro points me to a bunch of yellow finger-length bananas growing five meters into the bush among the stones where the mine front used to be. Finishing breakfast, Pedro leaves to check the reservoir in the forest. I follow. Hiking along a trench winding up a lightly inclined forest slope, I hear water, rain, insects, and birds. At the trail's end, another sluice gate dams a larger reservoir. This pool is perhaps 40 meters square. Pedro closes the gate to stop reservoir water from filling the trench. Large piles of gravel on the reservoir's edge indicate that excavators dug this large hole in the ground.

I ask Pedro why excavators do not mine his land given they used to work this reservoir. He explains that his neighbors from a nearby community used to own the lot but had left it years ago. They were displaced. They fled rumors of violence to Quibdó in 2000, after the guerrilla killed Pedro's cousin down by the pools of water near the village's football field. Along with many families, they left for Quibdó and never returned. One of them came back three years ago with a pair of *paisa* miners. They stayed for three months. The *paisas* used excavators to mine the lot, open the reservoir, and take the gold. When the gold was gone, they left a moonscape of sand and gravel in the forest, which became a water reservoir.

Pedro still lived in the village. Ten years before, he and his young family had also left, but returned a few weeks later. Despite threats of violence, he liked living in the village more than the city. His father, Gabriel, owned the lot, but Pedro worked it most mornings. In the afternoon, he had hunting, gardening, fishing, and other chores to do. As Pedro and I stand by the reservoir, he points to it, explaining he now has a plentiful supply of water from the excavator pit, which makes his mining easy.

I spent a significant portion of my fieldwork with Pedro learning how to mine. Pedro's mining coexists with his food plants and the forest. The mine provides a small but steady income for Pedro, Martina, and Javier, who split the money. Like Javier's knowledge of tying boats, and Pedro's knowledge of river navigation, intimate knowledge of landscape is required for artisanal mining. Mastering Martina's technique of panning for gold takes practice—despite a year of trying, I never could do it well.

I describe Pedro's mine and gardens, and note the dying plantain patch, to show some environmental effects of artisanal mining. While this mining does produce sediment, which washes from the mine front into the forest, it does not reach the river. While in the

short term the sediment does filter into the ground and kills the plantain, on the longer term other plants have moved on to the piles of stones left over from the mine. This is a contrast to the wasted landscape of excavator mines and holes left over in the ground. Over the old artisanal mine, the forest grows back. The banana trees and plantain die, yet Pedro's mine has little effect on the river. This contrasts with sediment from small-scale mining, which can reshape an entire watercourse.

Small-Scale Mining and the River

Another morning at Estaban's mine, José and Geraldo have four excavators working. The constant roar of machinery moving earth and water accompanies Carlos and me. Carlos is in his early 30s and plans to save money, build a house, and start a motorbike repair garage in his village. He comes from an Afro-descendant village five hours away by bus. Four years earlier, he first came to this river to find a job on an excavator. He comes back often because his common-law wife, Eva, is Pedro's youngest daughter. She had not quite graduated high school when they started dating, and at first Pedro did not like Carlos. But because Carlos has stayed with Eva, and they bring their children to visit the village, the tension is gone. Carlos, Eva, and their children stay at Pedro's home when they visit. Eva is now finishing her high school diploma through distance education classes. I help her with her English homework, while her mother Martina looks after the children. Carlos used to help Javier and Pedro at their mine, but he just recently got a job working for Geraldo as a hose handler. Despite the much harder working conditions, longer hours, and delays in payment, he prefers the new job. The money is better, he says.

Carlos and I stand high up on the two-story-high metal classifier, perching

precariously on top. A wooden platform is tied to the metal frame. With the sky clear, I can clearly see the Western Andes as the early morning wisps of fog float over the green forest. The view is reminiscent of the one Mauricio and I shared months before, before these excavators leveled the hill. Carlos wears an apron of black plastic; I wear filthy jeans and a t-shirt. Water soaks us both. The classifier's metal frame consists of two stories, with two metal sluice boxes on an inclined plane. The boxes line up one on top of the other, akin to a snakes and ladders board game. An excavator, driven by a *paisa* from Medellín, dumps stones into the classifier's metal mouth. The stones and gravel comes in the classifier's giant mouth at the top. The boulders, sand, and gravel go through the machine, passing over the trays separating the stones from the sediment. The old diesel Mack truck engine built in Japan, which Juan repaired a month before, pumps the water that powers the hose controlled by Carlos.

Here, the mine has two excavators: one orange, one yellow. The other two work at another classifier. The yellow excavator sits frozen while an 18-year-old assistant from Medellín pumps in lubricant. Silver slime oozes from the holes he fills. The first excavator is three years old, the second ten. The newer orange excavator steadily lifts and dumps stone piles into the classifier. Smoothly turning, the machine grasps stones and gravel, pivots, lifts, and then dumps the stones. The *paisa* operator repeats this digging and dumping all day long. The control joysticks and machinery convert his hand maneuvers into the movements of the giant contraption.

Carlos' plastic apron protects him slightly from the water spray that leaves his high-pressure hose and ricochets off stone. Carlos directs the water jet in a sideways figure-eight motion to wash the stones into the classifier. The high-pressure water stream blasts the stones and gravel. Tied down with twine, the water pressure pulls the hose

upward. Carlos has to fight the hose using all his body weight to control it. The excavator works down and to the right of the classifier. The driver removed the cabin front windscreen to see better, which leaves the operator's face open to spray from the classifier. Using his index finger, Carlos can direct water away from the operator. A thick-callused blister forms as the water pressure rips away at the skin of his finger.

To give Carlos a break during his 12-hour shift, I take over. I last 15 minutes. Vibrations reach the core of my body. My lower back aches. The noise leaves me dazed. I am shaking. My hands are stinging so Carlos motions for me to stop. I am grateful and climb down. The high-pressure water washes stones through the classifier using metal grills. The classifier separates stones from gray water, sediment, and gravel. The dirty mixture flows from classifier over mercury-laced metal sluice box troughs that trap the gold. A bubbling, rushing stream covers the half-kilometer distance to the rain-swollen river. The sediment from the mine turns the river cloudy and leaves channels of gray gravel in the river.

Sediment and the River

Artisanal and small-scale gold mines wash gravel, sand, and sediment into waterways, leaving gold behind. The river's color, quality, and clarity depend on the number, kind, and scale of mines on the river. That New Year's Day morning as I prepared to leave the village and was surprised at the river, the small-scale miners had gone home for the week. They were not mining. The river water ran clear. These two descriptions of washing for gold—with Pedro and with Carlos—show how José and Geraldo use their excavators to mine and how Pedro's family mine using a similar

technique, yet with different results. In both cases, water carries away sediment and leaves gold. But in the case of small-scale mining, the sediments change the river's color.

Pedro's runoff barely reaches the river; the dead banana trees and plantain mark where sediment blooms seeps into the ground. Hourly, the excavators move tons of rock, sand, and gravel, and use thousands of liters of water. By my estimate, each excavator's bucket load of material dumped into the classifier's mouth contains more material than Pedro, Martina, Javier, and I might move in a day. The heavy truck motor could empty Pedro's long trenches of water in an hour. After heavy rains, Pedro might have enough water to wash for two or three days. The classifier works 22 hours a day except for the week around New Year, when workers go home to their families, or when it breaks down. Throughout 2012, a dozen mines up and down the river flushed masses of sediment downstream. In 2009, more than 70 excavators worked the small-scale mines on the river.

Water plays a fundamental role in village life. Villages stand near the river, with easy access to water. Heavy skies dump downpours, swelling the river. People's garden plots lie on riverbanks, where the soil is made rich with flood sediments. The water levels tell the season. High water from flash floods means winter and dry spells and low water means summer. The river swells and retreats with the weather and the rain. The river and the water's depth play a part of the daily rhythm of conversation. This river, along with all the rivers on the Colombian Pacific, rises and falls rapidly depending on the rainfall in the mountains.

The concrete steps at the dock in village show the change. Over the course of a week, the river goes from a dry summer drought, to a raging deluge. Floods cause damage. Once a flash flood washed away the rain shelter by the dock where people swim and bathe. It caused one of Geraldo's large metal boats to smash Pedro's smaller boat onto the rocks,

breaking it in half. Pedro did not receive compensation from the miners; frustrated, he repaired his boat with plastic strips, pieces of cardboard, and dozens of small nails to seal it from the water.

People use rivers to deposit garbage and human waste. Sitting, waiting on New Year's morning, I saw a black garbage bag float by. Rivers move junk downstream: garbage bags, old t-shirts, packaging, sardine tins, soft drink bottles, and other refuse tossed from wheelbarrows directly into the river. The garbage passes village or city until it wedges in tree roots to dangle high in the air at low water. The rivers also move trees, logs, and branches torn from riverbanks during high waters. The river regularly rises and falls two meters. The increased mine sediments from all the small-scale mines aggravate the flooding. Still, the rain and rushing water brings their own sediments. The high water cuts knifelike into the riverbanks, and like Pedro's mining, pulls sediment and riverbank downstream. The heavy rains pull sediment down from the mountains. The water's force wedges entire trees mid-current, roots high and dry. Animals—sloths, rodents, and forest cats—use the rivers to escape hunters.

This natural erosion combines with mine runoff from the small-scale mines. Sediment from Pedro's artisanal mine barely gets to the river. The tiny particles from the excavators shape and reshape the river, which people worry will increase flooding downstream. These sediments reshape river currents. The material gathers at the river's edge, making the water shallower, forcing the current to flow faster, and making punting canoes harder. Stones and gravel form sandbars in unexpected places make navigation harder.

Rivers provide transport. Long flat-bottomed wooden canoes, dugout canoes, motorized wooden boats, metal-hulled gasoline boats, and the daily speedboat from

Quibdó use the rivers. Punters and boat pilots know these waters, but sediments from the mines make navigation more treacherous. Beaches, islands, and hidden shoals emerge suddenly, and then move. Stone piles dent delicate propellers. A long wooden boat carrying old ladies and young children capsized at a tricky rapid. Nobody died, but people complained the small-scale mines were making the river harder to traverse.

Early morning, during the day, and late at night, Afro-descendant rural residents bathe, wash clothes, and bathe in river water. Women carry laundry on their heads in large plastic bowls to the river to wash by hand on the rocks. The sediment from the small-scale mines turns the water cloudy with suspended particles, which make the river water undrinkable, dirty, and polluted. It leaves a thin film on clothes and dishes, and people are concerned the water could cause skin rashes.

They also worry the fish cannot breed, as sediment covers the spawning beds. People say the fish used to come upriver in late January. When the runs of fish are plentifully, people easily catch them. Gutted and deboned, the silvery fish hang in the sun drying. With salt added, the fish last for months, providing cheap protein. People catch fish with large nets, small rods with bait, and traps. Late evening, early in the year, with the sun going down, Pedro and Javier enjoy fishing. They stand on their canoes, which are tied to shore, using rod and line, or holding handmade fishing nets, ready to cast them wide. Pedro fishes with a long metal-tipped spear and handmade wooden traps. Later, in the evening, using stout rope, he ties a trap to a tree by the water's edge. Driving long sticks into the soft bank, he jams the trap in place and places rancid meat inside to attract fish. By morning, the river had washed away the tree, trap, rancid meat, and caught fish. Pedro tells me fish know their spawning grounds by smell. With all the sediment, he worries the fish do not run as well. Some say they have stopped running completely.

Without the fish, protein gets more expensive. People worry about fish and the mercury from the runoff from the small-scale miners. Fish was still available, but it cost money. An old *paisa* man visited the village the week after the fish had run on the Atrato River. He had a large blue plastic barrel with fish from Quibdó to sell. Nobody had any money to buy blue barrel fish, so the *paisa* kept travelling without selling anything.

Sediment from the mine runoff does have an unexpected benefit: construction. In Quibdó, to build something requires concrete, made from cement, sand, and gravel. Large flat-bottomed canoes leave Quibdó each morning going upriver. They carry people to work all day, waist deep in water, shoveling sand, and gravel into their boats. The mine sediment makes their jobs easier because the river replenishes the material they remove. Sediments from the small-scale mines cause floods, make travel more dangerous, put people at risk from the dirty water, hinder fish migration, make fish harder to catch, and raise worries about mercury poisoning. The link between the water quality and small-scale mining is obvious. This explains my surprise that New Year's Day with the clear river.

As I wait on the boat, I watch children bathing in the cool clear water. Little boys are doing cartwheels with happy shouts. They throw themselves from steep rocks into the river. They float past, splash to shore, scramble up the slippery rocks, and laughingly launch themselves again. The small-scale mines and their sediments change this landscape and rivers. As excavators move hills, the resulting sediments reshape the river. If small-scale miners change the river, this makes transport harder, destroys fishing, and damages water quality. Small-scale mining reshapes local politics as well.

Mining and Politics

That New Year's Day 2012, leaving for Quibdó, I feel nostalgic and sad. The village's wooden boat fills with people going to town. To usher in the New Year, Pedro painted his house bright colors for good luck. People wear new shirts, running shoes, and pressed jeans. I still wear clothes streaked with gray from the mine and cheap plastic sandals bought cheaply. The new mayor invited everyone to an inauguration celebration on New Year's morning the day he assumes power. In October, the mayor and council had been voted in. Concerts, soccer tournaments, campaign visits, candidate dance bingo parties, and voting filled the months leading up to the election.

Electoral politics in Colombia changed in the late 1980s when decentralization inspired by the World Bank led to the creation of municipal elections for politicians (e.g., Rojas, 2004; Tubb, 2013). Often hailed as successful in Colombia's large cities of Bogotá and Medellín, where a series of mayors have used decentralized political power to undertake progressive policies, municipal elections in rural areas have been less clearly positive.

While eating salt crackers, Pedro's father Gabriel complained about candidates for the municipal elections. He made a rapid motion with his hand to indicate filling his mouth as he said, "Rats eating." He hoped to get a candidate for council to fix his television's antenna—"something useful"—in exchange for his vote. The invitation cards to the mayor's inauguration ceremony came in small cream envelopes, with each family's name written in a neat calligraphy. The invitation promised food and drinks and a celebration to close the electoral process. The elections had started many months before, with boats moving voters up river.

Many kinds of boats move along the river: a twin-engine motor launch and two

single-engine wooden canoes transport people between town and village. The high-speed motor launch leaves a town upriver at five o'clock just before dawn and arrives in Quibdó by eight o'clock. In the village, people hear the boats kilometers before they arrive. The regularity allows people to tell the time. The two wooden canoes pass the village at dawn and return in the afternoon. They transit more irregularly—a few times a week, especially when there are passengers. Those boats are made with a base of hollowed tree trunk, with wooden planks attached by bits of metal and strips from plastic oil jugs nailed in place with cardboard to make it watertight.

In the spring, months before the elections, FARC guerrillas had blockaded the Middle Atrato River. The Catholic Dioceses Office in Quibdó reported that two guerrilla had put out a bulletin, which declared the Middle Atrato closed to boat traffic until after the last day to register for elections. They shot and killed three civilians, students at the main public university in Quibdó, who did not stop at their blockade. For a few days, they stopped all river transport and prevented the moving of food to Quibdó from the Lower Atrato. On the national television evening news, reporters spoke from Quibdó's dock about the mass kidnapping as “an act of terrorism.” The military claimed to be moving in to rescue the prisoners and prevent a humanitarian crisis. It seemed the guerrillas had put the blockade in place to prevent non-residents from registering their identity cards in the elections in the Middle Atrato. To vote in Colombia people need to register to vote months before the elections. The blockade prevented people from registering to vote in towns where they did not live. I never found a satisfactory explanation for why the guerrilla wanted to prevent this .

On the river where I worked, for weeks before the registration deadline, the candidates for mayor in the different local municipalities brought dozens of boatloads of

supporters from the regional capital to the rural municipalities to register them to vote. They hoped to secure these extra voters during the October elections. Only people who registered in a municipality six months prior to the elections could vote. Maybe this explained the guerrillas' armed blockade. On the river though, before the elections, boats moved freely. Some days there were three or four more than usual. For weeks in May, they moved hundreds of people from the regional capital to the rural towns, each carrying 20 or 30 people. Each candidate brought boatloads to register for the elections, and then back again for political campaigns, free concerts, electoral events, and the election itself. To mount and win an electoral campaign, candidates seemed to have access to money to bring in voters, pay for campaign events, and buy their votes.

Since many candidates do not have the money to win a campaign or to pay their followers, they borrowed money for their campaigns as *gota a gota* loans. Local politics rests on the interests of politicians and financiers. In one nearby town, the mayor had a reputation for living in Medellín. The local mayors (*alcaldes*) granted "illegal" permissions for excavators and dredges, levied taxes on the gold production, and made money from the royalty payments. While in office the candidate would recover the money spent on campaigning. A significant part of campaign spending went towards local events, which often involved music.

Elections, Music, and Dance Bingo

Months before winning the election, a mayoral candidate held a campaign event that involved dance and bingo. People filled the town's plaza, milling outside the only club in town. The town straddles two sides of the river. The older side perches on a rocky

outcrop, and the new lies on the opposite bank low on the river's edge.

Many buildings on the rocky outcrop are two or three stories high. The main plaza houses the diocese's office, a large square church with paint peeling from the walls, as well as schools. On one side is a heavily fortified police compound with walls that have narrow slips for windows. The plaza also has basketball courts, stores, and pharmacies owned by *paisas* and Afro-descendants, a library, some hardware stores, and a medical center. A narrow metal bridge connects the two towns. While too narrow for car traffic, it serves pedestrians, wheelbarrows, and pushed motorcycles.

The newer side on the other side of the river sits at the end of a gravel road from the highway. Slightly downriver is a lumberyard with wood stacked for drying, processing, and shipping. Trucks, buses, taxis, and motorcycles wait in the plaza to take people to other nearby towns. Two *paisa* brothers own one of the stores that sell canned food, dried goods, frozen meats, toilet paper, cleaning supplies, and candles and other necessities. Three bars ring the large gravel plaza in the middle of the town. The floor above the three bars contains three boarding houses. A room with cold showers, plastic chairs, and no windows costs \$2.50. The hostels and restaurants cater to visiting outsiders—construction workers, government officials, teachers, and anthropologists. A restaurant, owned by a young *paisa* couple, sells lunch. During the year and half I regularly passed through the town, the couple moved from one side the plaza to a better location on the other. They worked steadily to improve their restaurant over the year, adding a concrete walled and roofed porch, tables, and tablecloths. Beside that restaurant, a small grocery sells fresh imported fruits and vegetables: onions, potatoes, cabbage, mangoes, and tree tomatoes, as well as green apples and sweet grapes imported from Chile. Behind the plaza lies a large dirt football field.

The town's population has grown over the last decade as violence has displaced people from rural areas. Don Gilberto owns a store in the plaza that I visited regularly. He is Esteban's cousin and left the village where I worked and came downriver with his family. He was displaced when the guerrilla came and never went back. He built a small store, with a kitchen at the back and sleeping space on the second story for his family. He sells soft drinks and beer from fridges, coffee in the morning from a plastic thermos, toothpaste, deodorant, candy, cookies, and cheap clothes. In season he buys *borojó* from Don Alfonso and sells the smelly, sweet putrid-looking fruit with flesh the color of shit in tightly wrapped black plastic bags to a visiting *paisa* trucker who, takes them to the Caribbean in an aging Dodge truck with balding tires.

People from rural areas come into the city on Saturday or Sunday to buy supplies, play soccer, go to a party, or attend election events—for example, the dance bingo at the club. All the teenagers and people I knew from the town and village planned to go to the dance bingo. I bought a bingo card from Laura because she said they would sell fast. Laura, in her early twenties, is Don Gilberto and Esteban's niece. For now, she has a small job as an event promoter. For a few weeks, she had a small fried chicken stand. She is also studying nursing through a distance education program. I help her with her English homework. She studies while she makes bingo cards for the event. She uses a big black marker on pastel-colored card paper to write the numbers on a grid.

Mauricio, Laura's friend Juliana, and I sit outside Don Gilberto's store listening to music from the bars. We wait for Laura to finish making cards. A fast-paced salsa by the Niche Group comes on. In the Pacific, "*niche*" is slang for a homeless street boy in Cali. But this band, with musicians from the Chocó, became big in the 1990s. I have a digital recorder, which I use to capture the song's lyrics:

Give me your love and give me the illusion of knowing
 that one day you'll be mine nothing more
 Because the pain that consumes me today will continue
 If you don't remember more of me it will be the end
 Come back and don't put into doubt the whole reason
 that gives life to the heart when there is love

Niche Group, 1984, *Only Love*⁶

The song ends. Someone yells, "Up." Another person adds, "More." They whistle. Don Gilberto sells beer as people drink. Some are waiting for the evening dance bingo to start in the club in the old town across the river. Others will stay on this side of the river, drinking at one of the bars in the new town. I sit on wooden steps sweating, as the air hangs is humid, even at night. The next song plays, a Vallenato heavy on the accordion. Laura and my friends chatter excitedly, the conversation flowing.

"It's getting going, the motor's warming." Mauricio says, using the local idiom *calentar motores* for "getting started."

I reply, "Oh yeah," while trying to catch the lyrics on the next song that plays.

Laura yells for us to go without her. "I will come up in a moment. Save me a seat."

Mauricio, Juliana, Laura, and I sit on the wooden steps for another 10 minutes chatting. The music keeps playing, the same popular blend of music that mixes the

⁶ *Dame tu querer hay dame la ilusión de saber
 que un día tu serás mía nada mas
 Porque el dolor que hoy me consume seguirá
 Si no te acuerdas mas de mi ya será el fin
 Vuelve y no pongas en duda toda la razón
 que le da vida al corazón cuando hay amor.*

Grupo Niche, 1984, *Solo Cariño*.

Chocó's *chirimía* rhythm with salsa and Caribbean music.

Juliana yells over the song, "Let's go."

The three of us leave Laura to walk across the bridge to the older town on the rocky outcrop.

On the yellow bridge over the river, which has metal slats missing at one end, Mauricio says, "Me, I want to drink." This is my translation. He actually said "*Quiero perder control*," which literally means, "I want to lose control."

He motions towards a single red light bulb in the gasoline station's mechanic shop and says, "Those lights there, the ones that take away pain. Daniel, can you see the lights over there, the red ones by the garage? Do you know what they mean?"

Before I can answer, Juliana interrupts.

"Sex workers." She deliberately uses the politically correct term "*trabajadores sexuales*." She recently came back from a feminist workshop in Bogotá funded by a women's network from Quibdó. She tries to drown out Mauricio's next comment.

He answers his own question, stating, "Women living the happy life."

"Sex workers," Juliana interrupts him again. She cares about the phrase.

I change the subject. "Where will they hold the dance bingo?"

"The Place. Do you know it?"

"No, I've never been."

"Me neither," he lies to me, setting up for another comment. "Juliana can be the guide!"

"Oh god. Yes, I've been there," she yells, turning to ask me, "Do you know how to dance *reggaetón*?"

"No."

“Well. We will see.” Pausing, she adds, “Let’s see if we can win a prize.”

As we come off the bridge, a motorcycle passes us by. The music gets louder as our small group gets closer to our destination. Our conversation trails off as we enter the town plaza and then get to The Place. Juliana explains my presence to the burly bouncer frowning at me.

She tells him, “A friend.”

He lets us in.

In The Place, a cool breeze enters the open bar from the night air. Already eleven o’clock, dozens of people fill the room. Loudspeakers emit music in the Chocó popular musical style, with trumpets and clarinet. While the town has many canteens and bars, tonight this is the place to dance. Set back from the plaza, on the second floor, The Place has wide windows and a wooden floor for dancing. It is across from the parochial office, the municipal office, and the fortified police station.

People bustle about. We are early still. Juliana grabs us a red plastic table covered in advertisements for the brand of Pilsner beer popular in Medellín. The music from the speakers comes fast, rhythmic.

Someone yells in my ear, “Have you registered?”

“Yes,” I respond, having purchased a card. Soon I realize I have to register my bingo card. I ask Juliana, “How much do they cost?”

She shrugs and asks me to buy two for her.

I do.

The DJ, a young well-dressed man, calls into a microphone that plays over the music, “In a few minutes, we are going to start this spectacular bingo. Please, those down below, come on up and register your cards.”

As he stops talking, the music changes. He plays a political campaign song. Only listening again to the recording do I realize the whole event is to launch a candidate's electoral campaign for the office of mayor. The winning candidate's no less. Young people wear jeans, running shoes, and t-shirts with sparkles on them. Young women, many teenagers, some in their twenties, wear makeup and bright colors. People dress to impress.

The host calls, "Can everyone look for their tables?" As the crowd settles slightly, he continues. "A great big hello to everyone present at this danceable bingo. Here we have [...] from Panama. A Panamanian in this small town."

I wonder, how does a Panamanian get to the Chocó—and why this small town on this river. The same political song that had already played comes on a second time:

Come everyone, the solution has arrived
 I tell you that he's now here
 That man I tell you, he has [his] mother in town.
 So as we are already celebrating, we know who will win
 And by mistake they say who will bring peace
 Already we want to know that with [he] we will win
 Everybody with [him]⁷

The song ends with more introductions. The crowd gets restless. The DJ still has not started bingo. Four more songs play. Mauricio and Pedro's son Antonio pass *aguardiente* around.

Laura, just arrived, yells in my ear, "Bingo."

⁷ *Ven llego la solución, [el]
 Yo les cuento que ya llegó
 Que hombre que les cuento, tiene la mama aquí.
 Por eso ya celebramos, sabemos quien va a ganar
 Y por equivoco dice a quien traerá la paz
 Ya quisimos comprender, que [el] nos va ganar
 Que todo el mundo con [este].*

She and I laugh. More music plays.

The host yells, “We are going to play for a secret prize, a gaming console, a set of towels, a set of sheets, a set of glasses, a pressure cooker, and a plate set with 150 pieces. Hello to everyone. Welcome to this marvelous dance bingo. Come listen. Come dance. Come play a bingo to bring peace and living together. Here there is no fighting.”

I note his invocation to peace—a repeated part of the campaign song.

“The person the people have waited for has arrived. The people who know, they feel energized for him. Listen. Now, in just a moment, someone important has come. The man from Panama!”

A young man gets up to speak, “Good evening my people. I come from a community up river: one hundred percent from a village. Listen up. I come here for the October 30 election. Vote for our candidate. Although the town is small, the people will go with everything we have. We will have *chirimía*, *reggaetón*, and *vallenato*. So let’s go with our candidate. I’m telling you, he has arrived. The solution has arrived. He will keep you in mind. His mother comes from this town. We are already celebrating, because we know he will win.”

The song plays for a fourth time.

The DJ continues with another joke, “Seven prizes, we have here this night. The first a surprise prize, \$3,000, and a motorcycle. The second prize is a set of towels, 7,000 real towels. Seriously. The third prize is a set of sheets, 3,500 sheets. Fourth is a set of cups, hundreds and all full of fresh coffee. The fifth prize is a pressure cooker that boils tomatoes, potatoes, and onions. The sixth prize is a set of cups and \$25 in cash. The last prize, a big speaker with four ports.”

The DJ explains the candidate’s many virtues, and then says, “We are going to

start now. Right away. For the first bingo prize, you have to get the right shape. All the prizes will come from shapes on the bingo card. The first shape will be a [...], the first letter of the candidate's name. Fill the rows and columns."

The DJ then thanks the sponsors for the event, the gasoline shop, the pawnshop, one of the *paisa* stores, the radio station, and the candidate. Again, he makes another joke about the first prize, which is a surprise. "A trip for two, a flight to Acapulco and a trip to Venezuela."

He starts to call numbers, "People exited. The first is number ninety-eight. Nine eight. Control yourselves. Everyone wants to win. First number is ninety-eight. Second number is forty-seven. Forty-seven. Forty and seven. Thirty-four. Listen up. Thirty and four. Now it's thirty-five. That's it, go thirty-five. Sixty. Sixty. Six zero. Listen up good. Seven one. Listen up. It's seventy-one. A full dozen, it's a real dozen. Twelve. Twelve. One two. Remember the prize is for the first letter of the candidate's first name."

He repeats the numbers he just called, and then continues.

"Two ducks bathing in water, a pair of twos, twenty-two. Fried dough. It's number eight. Who wants to win?" he yells.

"Everyone," the room replies.

"Let's continue. Here at The Place we work to bring you whiskey from New York and *aguardiente*. We've got people from Quibdó, Medellín, and Zaragoza [a mining town in the Lower Cauca]. This matters. We want change."

The implication is the candidate represents a change: a change brought by outsiders—*paisas*—marked by expensive alcohol and connection with people from other parts of Colombia.

He calls out more numbers as someone yells, "Bingo."

A woman goes up to the announcer.

He counts the numbers out again, one by one, slowly, and deliberately. He claps his hands, “The winning card. This is our lucky lady. She has won the surprise first prize.” With another joke, “The surprise prize—that man over here. He is your prize.”

He starts again, “This time, the first letter of the candidate’s last name.”

Each time he begins a new round of bingo, the announcer picks a letter that is part of the candidate’s name, or he uses letter which begin words representing education, progress, and development.

“Listen up, here at The Place we reach the national and the international levels. We have come here with you... with the force that decides: the people [*El pueblo*]. The people decide who will win in this town. This dance bingo is for the best town in the world.”

Politics and Music

The evening continued in much the same way. I stop here to pause to analyze the event. One intention is to provide a sense of the chaos of fieldwork, but that night also strikes me as important. Although it was in July 2012, four months before the elections at the end of October, it was a campaign event. In the event, the music, the bingo announcer, and people’s genuine excitement, the campaign music and dance bingo index many things.

It suggests a relationship between the rural community and the town. People moved between their village and the town regularly. Sometimes they went to events that included soccer and dance bingo, but they also went to shop, to go to church, and to party.

People come to town to spend a few pesos on the weekend. Perhaps they had made a little money on their mine; or, in the case of Laura or Juliana, in their hustle in the town. Parties like this one were common. In most cases, they had nothing to do with campaign events or bingo. But on weekends or during the many annual festivals, The Place would be full of young people. In a similar way, with a different musical choice, the bars across the river in the old town often had older men drinking. Part of the reason for this is that there was money circulating, with all the outsiders working in mining, the work available for people at mines, and the chance to pan for gold.

It shows aspects of local politics. The dance bingo was designed to help promote a particular candidate. His song played many times over the course of the evening. From the description though, I have also shown some of ways that electoral politics plays through social relations, drinking, dance, and music. The local electoral process revolved around developing social relationships. Music played an important role. This dance bingo took place early in the campaign, but there were dozens of other similar events, some of which were much larger. Each served to create a connection between the electorate—“the people”—and the candidates. The language focused on local symbols of progress: for example outsiders, the young man described as coming from Panama, international whiskey, and linkages to other regions. The music and the events did not include any discourse of politics, beyond the presence of the mayoral candidate; the dance symbolism bingo does bring elements of the campaign and the candidate described in the song. The music is in the local style, it extolled a particular candidate’s strength, honesty, local character, support he had from local people, and his commitment to the community. The announcer at the bingo mentioned “education” and “children,” but the sense of politics was limited. The candidate, who was the son of a woman from the town, owned a

small-scale mine with a handful of excavators.

It connects politics to music. Not only were campaign songs like “Everyone for [him]” common, but alongside events like the dance bingo were much larger concerts, which thousands of people attended, held by each candidate. They brought in musicians from Quibdó and even audience members from the city. People came into the towns from rural communities for the all-night parties. Popular musicians from Quibdó toured towns in the Chocó for concerts from May until the October elections, brought in by different candidates and their parties to mark key moments in their electoral campaigns: to launch the campaign, to attend the town festival, to close the campaign. The candidates held smaller concerts to help attract votes, build alliances, and promote a kind of political engagement. Large concerts marked the close of their campaigns. These concerts brought popular local singers and musicians to rural areas for all-night parties. Hundreds of people came in—on boats paid for by the candidates—from rural communities to take part in the festival. Near the end of the campaign, the two nearest towns to where I worked had the same headline act, a popular *chirimía* singer from Quibdó, on different weekends. In both events, he had songs extolling the different mayoral candidate’s characteristics of strength, honesty, and localness. The following days and weeks, people talked about the relative merits of the different concerts, who had come to play, the number of attendees, the weather, and each event’s relative success, all as part of discussing the relative merits of the different candidates. These campaign events seemed to be, at least for many people, as important as any other characteristic of an electoral candidate, including any policies they might have. Music and these campaign events were important to municipal politics. If ChocQuibTown meant their song “Poisoned Fish” as a critique of this form of local politics based on false promises and gifts, the song “Everyone for [him]” was a form of

local politics. While ChocQuibTown's refrain, "No, no I won't eat your fish, even if it is from the Chocó" is a musical critique of events like the dance bingo, as the campaign song suggests politics through music. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I never heard ChocQuibTown's song in the rural areas where I worked; their mixture of funk and hip-hop found more of an audience in Bogotá's Andean urban centers. In part, I assume that its content would be dangerous to listen to in some rural areas. While I heard the song "Everyone for [him]" for the first time at the dance bingo, the candidate's supporters played it regularly until his inauguration on New Year's morning. I am unsure if they did this to give their support or to show their support.

It connects politics to mining. Candidates might visit a rural village to chat, make vague promises, and shake someone's hand. They brought bottles of *aguardiente* and soft drinks to share, and they spoke in vague terms of progress. On this river, with little gold registrations, candidates promised to pay voters approximately \$15 if they "promised" to vote for a candidate. The Spanish word for vote is the same as the Spanish word for vow: *voto*. Candidates asked for people's vow and vote, and promised to pay their supporters, and to bring more concerts and boat rides for voters. In other municipalities, with more gold mining, the day prior to voting, candidates promised \$200. These dance bingos and concerts for which famous musicians were brought in, singers commissioned to produce campaign music, and votes for purchase all cost money. Some candidates were involved in small-scale mining and owned excavators. Rumors said they hired cronies, moved to Medellín or Pereira, and stole money from public works. While elections cost money, winning elections allows the winner to influence gold mining. While almost all small-scale excavator mines and dredges in the Chocó are illegal, it is the local municipality that registers the gold and receives royalties. This allows miners to sell gold legally. The mayor

and council control municipal coffers and the process of legalizing gold and enforcing mining legislation. This might explain such interest in winning elections.

By coming back down to the river and discussing electoral politics and mine sediment, I intended to show the ways that small-scale mining shapes the river and politics and how people on the river interpret this. While both artisanal and small-scale mining causes sedimentation, small-scale mining reshapes and moves the river. Small-scale mining also reshapes electoral politics by providing funds and a rationale for vote buying and campaign politics. By discussing the relationship between rural areas and the town and politics to music, I have shown some ecological and political impacts of small-scale mining. Certainly, people worried about fish, sediment, and the shifting rivers that made transportation more difficult, but they also appreciated the possibility to pan for gold, earn wages working for small-scale miners, have money to spend on weekends, and attend political campaign events. Artisanal mining and small-scale mining have different consequences.

Chapter Summary

More than a year and a half after the elections, and a year after my fieldwork ended, I returned to visit the village and town. The excavator owners, José and Geraldo, had left suddenly two months before I visited. They went back to Medellín, or Zaragoza in the Lower Cauca. Nobody knew exactly where. They had left their workers unpaid. The workers had left too, still owing money at Esteban's bar. José and Geraldo also owed money to Esteban's family for their share as co-owners. José and Geraldo never paid the two percent to the community council they had negotiated before they arrived. People

seemed happy they had gone. Like the mayor's promises during the election, most of what they had promised to bring had come to nothing, maybe because their mine had not given much gold, the machinery had kept breaking down, and the guerrilla still demanded their *vacuna*. When the two-*paisa* cousins left, they did so quickly, leaving excavators worth hundreds of thousands of dollars in the bush to rust in the forest. They left, someone said, because they had not paid the guerrilla the protection money. Someone else said that Geraldo owed too much money to a moneylender in Istmina. Esteban's son, who had shrugged his shoulders when I asked what he would do after the miners had left, had left voluntarily to begin compulsory two years of military service. Esteban grumbled about the *paisas*, wishing they had never come. He was also concerned because soldiers had recently shot a guerrilla commander in a nearby village. Nonetheless, the river still ran dirty. There were dozens of mines now, more than when I had worked there, much farther upriver.

I have juxtaposed the discussion of small-scale and artisanal mining with sediment, politics, and dance bingo inspired by ChocQuibTown's song about poisoned fish and politics. My interest has been to show that on a basic level, the labor of Carlos cleaning gold with a high-pressure hose and Pedro, Martina, and Javier moving rocks and panning have different impacts on the environment and politics. For the artisanal miners, they reshape the landscape and their gardens around their mines, with sediment, and runoff. Nevertheless, the impacts are comparatively small. This is not the case for the small-scale miners, who leave the rivers polluted, destroy fish habitats, and bring flooding. In a similar way, while this mining allows Pedro and his family to make a living and find a little money, the dozens of small-scale mining ventures can make much more money. This large amount of money shapes the electoral process. I do not think it is a coincidence that votes cost hundreds of thousands of pesos (hundreds of dollars) in municipalities with high levels of

gold registrations; after all, to launder money requires control of the municipal government. People from rural areas and the town saw politics as a dirty business, and viewed the money they could make from their vow to vote, alongside the concerts, music, and travel, as something they could get out of the municipal politics that otherwise did little for them.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

During my fieldwork, each time I considered the question, “What is a Canadian doing studying gold mining in Chocó?” I had no easy answer. On three occasions I was asked a variation of the question: first, a European aid worker asked me after I had been in Quibdó only a week; three months later a *paisa* small-scale mine owner asked me; and then a student asked me during a guest lecture to an undergraduate anthropology course in Bogotá a year and a half after I had left the field.

The aid worker in Quibdó asked the question on our first meeting. A common friend had introduced us, and I came to ask whether I could leave a rucksack, clothes, camera, and laptop at his office while I went travelling for four days. The aid worker agreed, but as we talked, he looked me up and down and asked the question. From his pointed look and sharp tone, I took it as, “What is a *damn* Canadian doing studying gold mining in the Chocó?” He worked with Afro-descendant and Indigenous community organizations for an international NGO that had an office in downtown Quibdó. Canada had gained a bad reputation in those circles because most multinational mining companies in Colombia were Canadian. He was familiar with the geologists and soldiers who had arrived unexpectedly to Ximena’s village, flattened the gardens, and told people to displace. He had heard the rumor that soldiers and geologists were working for Canadian and South African multinational corporations.

I had not thought through an answer to his question, so I mumbled the more roundabout truth. I did four months of research on Medellín during my master’s program,

where I studied *paisa* regional identity and urban public policy during the 1940s and the 2000s. During that research, I found a passing mention of a Canadian mining corporation that had opened offices in Medellín in the 1950s. At that moment, I became interested in Canadian mining companies in Colombia and the Lower Cauca. I read in a report from Mining Watch (2009) that more than half of multinational mining companies in Colombia were Canadian. I explained to the aid worker that I had hoped to write about a Canadian mining company in Colombia, but that when I began my doctoral coursework I read about other kinds of mining and my interests shifted. I told him I planned to study multinational mining companies alongside small-scale and artisanal mining.

Ending my story, I explained that I hoped to visit Istmina to find a possible field site. I added that I had read all I could find about the San Juan River and the mining towns there. The region's capital seemed a promising start.

He agreed. Warming slightly he asked another question, "Do you know anybody in Istmina?"

"No," I said.

He asked, "Do you have a hotel?"

"Yes," I lied, thinking to reserve one.

"Do you know the priest's phone number?"

"No?"

"It is always good to have the priest's phone number."

The aid worker's interest in my contacts in Istmina, in a hotel, and in the priest's number reflected his concern for my safety. I had been doing fieldwork a week. I think he worried about me going to the town alone. Various scenarios might have worried him: a kidnapping, the guerrilla arming a blockade or burning a bus, a police or military

inspection, a robbery, or a traffic accident.

Among Quibdó's NGO community, Istmina had a reputation as a frontier boomtown and center for gold mining and drug trafficking. In the forest between the town and the Pacific, smugglers grew coca, exported cocaine, mined gold, and laundered money. The San Juan River provided a route from the interior to the Pacific. The city served as a rest area for drug traffickers and illegal gold miners. I made the trip to Istmina, and while I did get into a traffic accident when the front wheel of the van I was traveling in fell off, I did not find a field site.

The second time someone asked about my research interests as a Canadian in Colombia was in Istmina. I had gone to Istmina that morning in a red Toyota, sitting cramped in the back, nauseous from the exhaust and worn-out suspension. A *paisa* small-scale mine owner asked me the question over lunch following a meeting of a small-scale mine owners' co-operative. Throughout the meeting, the men and a handful of women talked about government policies that made their mining informal—they did not like the term “illegal.” They had no way to legalize their status. They complained about the guerrilla who threatened them with kidnapping, about soldiers who seized their machinery, and about Canadian multinational corporations who were going to take their mines. In 2011, Quibdó's main newspaper, *Chocó 7 Días*, ran editorials about the threats from multinational Canadian corporations. After the morning meeting, one of the miners invited me to lunch at a restaurant owned by a *paisa*. We went in a convoy of white air-conditioned SUVs with black-tinted windows.

Over a large steak and beer a tall *paisa* with a gruff voice and a neat mustache asked, “Why is Canada interested in mining in the Chocó?” He did not leave me time to try to answer his question or let me tell him I did not see my interest in artisanal mining

and small-scale mining as having to do with Canada. Instead, he continued talking.

Looking at me intensely he said, “I am glad you are here. I am sick of people portraying us as terrible. We are hard working people. We are victims too. The guerrilla kidnapped me and made my family pay a ransom.”

I felt uncomfortable with his intensity and his assumptions. Nevertheless, I listened and nodded politely as he and the others spoke. There were six *paisa* miners at the table. As we ate, I wondered how I had gotten invited to lunch with these small-scale miners. I had simply asked for an interview with one miner in Quibdó two weeks previously, and he had invited me to the meeting. An out-of-place comment pulled my thoughts back to the meal.

A man, gesturing and complaining, said, “The Canadians are coming here and pushing us out of our mines. It is like that movie about Africa and conflict metals, *Blood Diamond*. Theirs is blood gold. They come here and make all the money.”

The comment felt out-of-place because the small-scale *paisa* miner was contrasting Canadian multinational junior mining companies in Colombia to a 2006 Hollywood movie about blood diamonds and conflict minerals in Africa. To me, the small-scale miners seemed similar. Canadians and *paisas* were outsiders pushing people off the land. I stayed silent though and thought about the morning’s meeting.

I had listened to people talk about small-scale mining. They had talked about the need for public policy, state support for the industry, and investment in mining. They spoke of state institutions providing capital to small-scale miners; training programs for miners; exploration and research funding; and help with mapping, workplace safety inspections, and environmental and technical support and training. In that meeting, these miners came across as hard working business people. That comment about blood gold

shows how they viewed their struggle against Canadian corporations and a state bent on shutting down small-scale mining. That night in my notes I wrote, “It would be too easy to paint small-scale miners, *paisas* working on Afro-descendant and Indigenous land, as terrible.”

The comment about Canadians and blood gold also made me think of who makes money from mining in Colombia. This made me think of another conversation. Months later, at the mine near the village on the Sunday after I had helped Carlos on the classifier, I sat a hundred meters away from the excavator and began to talk to Geraldo. I asked him about mine profits, but he turned our conversation to cocaine profits. He began to explain, gesturing to add emphasis to his comments, that it was not Colombians who made money in drugs anymore, but North Americans.

“The Americans,” he said, “like Donald Trump and George Bush, are the real narco kings.”

I nodded.

He continued, “After all, Bush admitted to doing cocaine, didn’t he? The narcos make all their profits in North America and Mexico anyway. They should make cocaine legal. It would make more sense.”

He continued to talk about excavators from Japan, weapons coming from Israel, and about the money he paid to the paramilitary, the guerrilla, the mayor, the police, and the community council. At least in his analysis, North Americans seemed to profit more from Colombia’s gold and cocaine than he did.

The third time someone asked me about my research interests was in Bogotá during a guest lecture. A friend had invited me to talk about my work on mining and ethnography to a class full of second- and third-year undergraduates. I spoke about

fieldwork on artisanal mining, ethnography, and the importance of focusing on practice. My talk must have seemed abstract. A student from an Indigenous community in the south of the country explained her concern about Canadian mining projects on her community's land. She asked me the exact question I had difficulty answering when the aid worker and the miner had asked me a year prior. Unlike the first two times, I now had a better response. Despite the fact I was Canadian, I explained that I thought it important to realize gold was not just about gold. My answer to the student's question was a foreshortened version of the central part of my then-unwritten dissertation. This dissertation has been my longer answer to the question, "What is a Canadian doing studying gold mining in Chocó?" In this conclusion, I outline what my answers have contributed to a broader discussion of resource extraction in Latin America.

What is gold about if it is not just about gold?

I have explored the question, *What is gold about if it is not just about gold?* I have addressed gold in the Chocó, drawing on eighteen months of fieldwork. I strove to ground my analysis in everyday mining practices, drawing on relevant literature and theoretical work as needed. My fieldwork included a mining apprenticeship in the Chocó and later investigative analysis to explain observations from the fieldwork. I have provided a sense of gold mining from its material extraction embedded within other economies. The dissertation shows many ways to understand gold.

I have highlighted gold's physical production to show it as something people mine. I have shown gold as part of a fixed economy, a hustle economy, and an economy of economic fictions through money laundering and speculation. I have aimed to show the

metal's different roles. Gold came from the ground in Martina's pan in a way that complemented a fixed rural subsistence economy. It appeared in an amalgam trapped in the toxic liquid mercury to provide Felipe his hustle and José and Geraldo an income as part of an informal economy. Sometimes it was never mined at all as smuggled gold and the idea of gold were part of economic fictions that include speculation by multinational corporations and complex money-laundering schemes.

I examined artisanal, small-scale, and large-scale gold mining on Afro-descendant and Indigenous collective territories on rivers in the Chocó. I have described the talk and practice of artisanal and small-scale miners and their economies of the fixed and the hustle. Conversations and rumors at the mine suggested gold was part of a broader underground economy. To explain those rumors and unusual official gold production figures, I addressed how gold is involved in money laundering and the armed conflict. Linking gold, the underground economy, the conflict, speculation, and money laundering has let me explain how frontiers with limited state presence provide a space for both legal and illegal economies to coexist. Gold is about itself and what it allows. Looking at the wider connections of gold helps explain economic, political, and social effects of mines that do and do not exist. I have embedded artisanal, small-scale, and large-scale gold mining in the economies of the Chocó, the Pacific region, Colombia, and more broadly.

The observation that gold embeds in other economies seems banal. Nothing is only about itself; everything embeds in other things. But, what I aim to emphasize is how gold mining can involve activities unconstrained by mere mining, physical extraction, and production. Gold embeds in legal and illegal economies, which may involve gold as a part of a process but not as an end in itself. I have shown how profits from fake gold mines come not just out of the ground but also from speculation and laundering money from

cocaine trafficking.

This observation might apply to other forms of resource extraction in Latin America. Petroleum is not only about petroleum, coal is not just coal, lumber is more than lumber, and so forth. Each resource economy embeds in local, regional, and international contexts and economies. While I have mapped gold in the Chocó, there remains space for work on this nexus between resource economies and economic fictions. My work suggests the need to blur the lines between the legal and illegal and the formal and informal to study many things. From this perspective, resource extraction may be about more than it seems. This observation is my basic contribution to the growing literature on extractive industries in Latin America.

Instead of outlining my arguments with a discussion of why I wrote the dissertation the way I did, the decisions I made along the way, or conversely what worked, what failed, and what I would do differently, I aim to highlight my contributions, from the observation that gold is not just about gold, to the resource extraction literature in Latin America.

The literature on resource extraction, especially mining and hydrocarbons, is extensive and addresses many topics: the political economy of resource extraction; the thesis on the resource curse and the resource endowment, or the ideas that resource based economies bring negative or positive political, economic, and social consequences; the development debates on dependency; the discussions of certification processes; the relations between humans and their environment; the link between extractive industries and armed conflict; gender; corporate social responsibility; human rights, environmental rights, labor rights, and issues arising from their violation; extra-national responsibility for human rights violations at home and abroad; the social protests around resource projects;

and the need for prior consultation and free, prior, and informed consent for affected communities.

Rather than adding to all of these debates, I discuss my contributions through five themes: ethnography and the materiality of mining, economic fictions and frontiers, the new extractivism in Latin America, the resource curse, and community resistance to extractive projects. First, I show a need to ground analysis of resource extraction in material production, Second, I question the economic foundations of resource extraction. Third, I discuss insights from the idea of economic fictions in frontier regions. Fourth, I show what my work can tell us about the resource curse and the idea that resource extraction brings negative social and economic consequences. Fifth, I raise the issue of strategies of resistance to multinational mining projects.

An Ethnographic Perspective on Resource Extraction

Timothy Mitchell (2009, 2013) discusses the materiality of oil through what he calls carbon democracy and the historical intersections of coal, oil, and democracy in the twentieth-century UK and the US. Mitchell argues the material production of energy from coal and oil shaped democratic processes in these countries. He explores coal mines before the First and Second World Wars, the oil crisis of the 1970s, the ties of neoliberalism to oil, and the contemporary oil conflicts in the Middle East. He shows, for example, how labor movements emerged in coal mines as mine workers isolated from management were able to organize. Through their control of coal, the labor movement was able to gain democratic reforms. The shift to an oil-based economy, supplied by oil from the Middle East with different labor conditions, reshaped these domestic democratic

possibilities in Europe and the US. Shifting energy regimes away from coal reshaped the leverage that organized labor had. In a similar way, moving to oil influenced political Islam in the second half of the twentieth century. Mitchell's analysis is no Marxist materialism, as he does not describe automatic relationships between the structures of an energy economy and democracy, but he does show historically grounded connections between energy regimes and the materiality of their extraction, and the resulting political and economic possibilities.

Fernando Coronil (1997) had a similar approach in his history of oil, nature, money, and modernity in Venezuela. Providing inspiration for Mitchell, Coronil explored oil and democracy in Venezuela, alongside the state, speculative development projects, and the intersections of foreign loans with different forms of capitalism. Robert West (1952) makes a similar point on Colombia, in showing the geographies of gold production mattered in shaping the colonial settlement patterns of New Granada (e.g. Sharp, 1976). They all show that material production has ramifications.

I have tried to begin from the same grounding in production. I have shown how gold's materiality enables certain things. While a critical eye on gold similar to that of Coronil and Mitchell on oil might aid in understanding contemporary traders, global metals markets, and stocks markets in Canada and Colombia, my intervention has been more ethnographic. Describing the materiality of gold mining lets me show how mining embeds in other economies and how mining in out-of-the-way places allows what I have described as economic fictions. This emphasis on materiality reflects my choice of research methods.

To study gold I used ethnographic moments from fieldwork at a handful of mines near a village on a river in the Chocó. This let me show how the metal connects to broader

resource economies and money laundering. If gold mining holds the dissertation together, the chapters worked through artisanal, small-scale, and large-scale mining by moving up rivers into the Andes. I addressed artisanal mining and subsistence economies, talk and practice, the hustle and conflict, the epistemological difficulty and ambiguities of knowing in contexts of war, migration and displacement to and from the Chocó, frontiers and the state, small-scale *paisa* miners, gold and international money laundering, Canadian multinational mining corporations in collective territory, speculation and money laundering, and the political and environmental results of small-scale and artisanal mining on an Afro-descendant village. I relied on two research methods.

I adopted what I have described as an apprenticeship in gold mining. By this I mean the embodied physical experience of mine work and skill development in mining from gold's material production. By engaging in this way with the people in the village where I worked, I encountered difficulties. I explored the ambiguities of research, that an ethnographic approach did not let me explore, by drawing on rumors and gossip. I needed a second approach to address issues of money laundering and junior mining companies.

I describe this as investigative analysis. This involved trying to answer the questions coming out of the ethnographic fieldwork that I could not answer. I used secondary literature and media reports. I put apprenticeship ethnography of the daily practice of mining alongside an investigative analysis of money laundering and speculation. From an ethnographic perspective, this meant I expanded on my fieldwork to answer questions from fieldwork. My interest came from trying to make sense of what multinational corporations were doing in the Chocó and stories of mines without any gold. This approach was not inspired by a multi-sited ethnography (e.g. Marcus, 1995), as I conducted fieldwork only in the Chocó. However, the approach allowed me to connect to

secondary literature, news reports, websites, and blogs to trace gold's different uses in the underground economy.

These choices of method framed the way I combined the two approaches of apprenticeship mining and investigative analysis. I opened the dissertation by unpacking a landscape shaped and reshaped by mining and resource extraction. Each chapter began with the analysis of an interpreted moment. I wove together stories and talk about mining with mining practice and, where relevant, an investigative analysis of gold. That is, I followed observations locally to try to understand their broader context. Alternatively, to put it more concretely, I developed a discussion of resource extraction from ethnographic work grounded in material production. This combined methodological approach has proven a strength of the dissertation.

Still, there were some gaps in this approach. While a grounding in mining is one of the project's strengths, it led me to emphasize some directions over others. For example, state voices and the various social movements of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and *paisa* small-scale miners form a small part of the discussion. Voices from the state on the issue of economic fictions at the local, national, and international levels are also absent. While I explain these absences based on my emphasis on practice, addressing these perspectives is an area for future work.

Nonetheless, I hope I have shown the importance of long-term fieldwork in understanding resource economies. I emphasize the importance of my methods that strove to ground writing in fieldwork. Sometimes it worked, and sometimes it did not. There were places where more analysis and discussion could have added to the dissertation. Here, I note I drew on theory to explain situations and to produce insights. I combined long-term interaction with people and complemented that with other kinds of

research to follow the connections out. In both cases, I started with everyday worries and then built out to see where it took me both empirically and theoretically. I tried to maintain the subtleties and insights of ethnographic research, and from that saw theory as a tool for explanation. I think this commitment to ethnographic research in combination with other perspectives is a contribution I make. While I see the dissertation as marking a moment and the endpoint of a process, it also marks the beginning of further research and engagement. I hope this future work will address the gaps in the dissertation that stem from its grounding in mining practice. While I have tried to address the themes I discuss not as unconnected, but as integrated and connected, there is much still to do. Nevertheless, I believe only from an ethnography of gold in the Chocó grounded in material practice using the methods of apprenticeship mining and investigative analysis was I able to explore gold's material production and lack therefore.

Economic Fictions on the Frontier

I spent time learning about subsistence production on a river. I also tried to connect this location with other places. However, this was not enough to understand gold because the metal was not just part of a subsistence economy. It was part of other economies. People did not control their landscape, because outsiders who came onto their land reshaped the relations of production. The frontier became a socially, economically, and politically constructed place where people move to and from. The frontier in the watershed of the Upper Atrato River and Andágeuda River became a destabilized place where violence was a means to an end and embedded in wider political economies of mining. Gold brought the frontier and other locations together. Mining changed property

regimes. People could not secure control of their territory despite legal recognition because outsiders, land conflicts, and mining projects all complicated daily life. I have argued the idea of economic fictions warrants thinking about the political economy of frontier places.

I have shown some of the unexpected contours of finance, extraction, and capitalism, and the ways gold is sometimes not about gold. Underpinning a reconfiguration of rural life is more than simply resource extraction. Some frontier sites become locations for what I call economic fictions that include speculation and money laundering. Some of this is nothing new: the case of Bre-X and the everyday fiction of capitalism, what Anna Tsing (2000) describes as a theatrical performance, reminds us that speculative investments and pump and dump schemes are nothing new. I have added to this work by exploring money laundering and the nexus between legal and illegal and real and fictitious economies. This links gold in frontier places not just to crony capitalism but also to the illicit underground economy and cocaine exports. The Chocó's mining frontier becomes a place for capitalist expropriation, alongside speculation and money laundering through fake gold mines. Mining in the frontier helps hide economic fictions where people make and clean money through mines that produce no gold.

None of this is unique in either time or space to the Chocó today. Claudia Leal León's (2008) work on mining in the Chocó at the beginning of the twentieth century illuminated the speculative aspects of many early mining claims. I have shown how money laundering through gold mining has a long history since the 1980s. My contribution has been to show the economic fictions of mining that let us understand mining in the Chocó and Colombia from a perspective that de-centers gold.

The observation that gold involves various economies applies to other forms of

resource extraction. Similar resources serve both speculative ends and, in Colombia at least, to launder money. In mining, oil, gas fracking, coal, lumber, carbon credits, land grabs, and construction projects, the two elements of speculation and money laundering are likely important. Discussing money laundering, I have addressed how certain economies and places lend themselves to economic fiction. I think the perspective is applicable further afield to help understand other forms of resource extraction, money transfers, property deals, construction booms, land speculation, development projects, tourism, and other activities whose projections and discourse do not match the realities on the ground.

On mining though, my insights on money laundering and speculation in the Chocó suggests gold involves more than production in places where there is a nexus of the legal and illegal. This perspective, I hope, can help make sense of multinational corporations and other forms of mining. In that sense, my work is part of a burgeoning literature on resource extraction. My contribution is to question resource extraction itself as being just about the resource.

Frontier locations can be found between the Upper Andágueda and Upper Atrato, in the Chocó, and in Colombia's mining areas. They can be seen as post-capitalist areas, where foreign investors and small-scale miners have long left, and as new areas, where they are returning. In both cases, I have shown that projects ostensibly involving gold mining may be what I describe as economic fictions. These economic fictions thrive in frontiers where property regimes are in flux and where people do not control their territory. Outsiders bring land conflicts and pursue extractive projects in areas where neither the state nor communities control their landscape. Economic fictions rely on areas where the rule of law is tenuous and where armed conflicts continue. The dissertation's

title, “Gold in the Chocó, Colombia” suggests an element of this geographic point. The Chocó is where economic fictions are possible because of its real and imagined distances as a socially, politically, and economically imagined region. This distance allows people and companies to buy and sell mining project concessions or register gold production without any mining. Economic fictions rely not merely on the false sensation of geographic distance, but also on violence, conflict, and geography.

These observations came out of fieldwork, as I followed different themes as they appeared. The hill framed the argument by setting the location. Fieldwork helped me point out multidirectional flows of people, which make it impossible to think of frontiers not as merely isolated and disconnected. Sometimes people, in their everyday practices of trying to make a livelihood, brought together different areas. Other times, they connected in not so obvious ways.

By trying to think about gold in this place, I came across the unexpected realization that gold is not always about mining. One area for future work is to think critically about the ways this observation applies to other processes. I think drawing on the underground economy, speculation, and money laundering literature would allow insight on challenges that communities face from land grabs, real estate deals, commercial ventures, and forms of resource extraction. Considering them as economic fictions on the frontier raises a new perspective to understand foreign and local investment and the associated violence. To explore this, I turn to the literature on resource extraction and mining.

The New Extractivism Literature

Eduardo Gudynas (2011) explores Latin America as an open space for resource

extraction and as a place where capital moves to increasingly remote areas. His work (Alayza & Gudynas, 2012; Gudynas, 2008, 2010, 2011) is part of the literature on the new extractivism in Latin America. Gudynas makes the argument for a strong relationship between Latin American economies and resource exports. His work elaborates a much older literature on countries that rely on commodity exports. In Canada, this includes the work on the staples theory developed by Harold Innis (1999) and Mel Watkins (1967). These Canadian political economists explored Canada's historical reliance on resource exports, such as fur, wheat, oil, and so forth. Norman Whitten (1974) and Robert West (1952) emphasized resource extraction in the Chocó. Gudynas contemporary work focuses on soybeans, hydrocarbons, and mining in Latin America.

Gudynas (2008) explores the diverse positive and negative social and environmental consequences of soya bean exports from Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. He argues the commodity is the latest in a long line of exports. It provides economic benefits for a rural managerial class but has social and environmental costs for most of the rural population. Gudnyas' analysis focuses on the soybean itself and the transformation in rural life wrought by agribusiness oriented to global markets. Corporations take over traditional farming and leave small farmers, peasants, and indigenous groups threatened by a market logic.

There is much truth to his observation that "the classic image of poor farmers and rich ranchers is replaced by one of rural managers, most of them with university-level education, living in cities and specialized in business management. The MBAs are replacing farmers" (2008, p. 515). However, his analysis could need expansion from a perspective on the physical production and export of soybeans, and the economic fictions through speculation, futures markets, and the other ways that rural MBAs can make

money without ever producing any soya.

On mining and hydrocarbons, Gudynas argues the recently elected left-leaning governments in Bolivia, Brasil, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Uruguay have adopted the policies of a new extractivism that links resource extraction to national progress and development (Gudynas, 2011, p. 379). The same is true for right-leaning governments in Colombia, Chile, and Peru (Gudynas, 2011, p. 379). Latin American countries are heavily reliant on exporting minerals and hydrocarbons. Politicians, bankers, and others present resource exports as an economic motor, or in Colombia's case a locomotive, that will drive the economy forward and create development.

Gudynas addresses many aspects of natural resource exports and foreign investment across the continent (Gudynas, 2011, p. 381). He shows how primary materials are central to Latin American economies, as oil and mining fetch high prices and shape many countries' development strategies (Gudynas, 2011, p. 381). He flags the old problems of natural resource exports. Without any value added, they bring negative social results; create enclave economies; have high environmental costs; bring the risk of mine abandonment; raise the issue of permission in remote areas; cause the displacement of communities; bring violence, and criminality to rural areas; lead to corruption and influence trafficking in permits; and result in the persecution of labor unions, social movements, and environmentalists (Gudynas, 2011, p. 384).

Nonetheless, Gudynas (2010) draws a number of conclusions. He argues the South American progressive governments have produced a new style of extractivism that combines new and old features. The presence of the state has an increasing importance in terms of direct and indirect action. The resource sector embeds in international economics and finance, creating extractive enclaves, territorial fragmentation, and

ongoing environmental and social impacts. The state captures or attempts to capture a greater proportion of the profits from the sector to finance social programs and provide a source of social legitimation. Some governments begin to see extractive economies as necessary to combat poverty and promote development. Extractivism is part of a contemporary developmentalism in South America that maintains a myth of progress.

While taking much of Gudynas' insights seriously, my contribution is to disrupt the seeming normalcy of resources themselves. I have shown gold is not just about gold and that people make profits not simply from extracting gold but from the appearance of extraction. While the new extractivism literature is helpful, I believe a material engagement with production that questions the taken-for-granted claims of the promoters of resource projects in public and private sectors might shed light on the industry. I have tried to show how this works in Colombia through a discussion of some of the ways that foreign investors may not be that interested in their own mine projects. It seems worth considering the negative ramifications from a perspective that moves beyond material production and sees resource extraction as an economic fiction in frontier areas. I add speculation and money laundering to Gudynas' perspectives. I point out that sometimes extractive projects are not the source of profits. An area for further work involves an exploration of whether patterns occur with other forms of extraction similar to the ones I describe in Colombia.

I have argued that neither Colombian small-scale mining nor Canadian multinational mining projects should be taken for granted. Canadian corporations, with their presence in Colombia, are also key investors across Latin America's resource sector (Gudynas, 2010). Many companies have a base in Toronto or Vancouver stock exchanges with projects across the continent. The structures of Canadian securities, the smaller

stock exchanges, and the regulatory regime mean that Canada acts as a flag of convenience for mining companies (Alain and Sacher, 2012). Authors such as Gudynas (2011) worry about high levels of foreign direct investment. I suggest the need to rethink this investment and not accept multinational projects at face value. I also suggest being more suspicious of tales of capitalists, frontiers, and new mining in unexplored places and studying when projects do not work or perhaps do not exist. In short, I suggest exploring resource extraction as an economic fiction.

The Resource Curse

The literature on the resource curse helps to explain some interpretations of resource extraction economies in Latin America. In their excellent work on hydrocarbon economies, Owen J. Logan and John-Andrew McNeish (2012) cover this literature. The resource curse thesis suggests that resource economies bring negative social and economic outcomes. Logan and McNeish (2012) define the curse as follows:

commonly applied to describe how countries rich in natural resources are unable to use that wealth to boost their economies, and how, counter-intuitively (if one discounts imperialism), these countries have lower economic growth and development outcomes than countries without an abundance of natural resources. In the post-cold-war period, during which economic stability became a key concern of international governance and investment, discussion of a resource curse also became a way for northern governments to account for the complicated state of affairs faced by resource-rich countries in the global south: intractable conflicts, resource wars, complex political emergencies, conflict trap, resource securitisation, petro-violence, petro-populism, blood diamonds (Logan and McNeish, 2012, p. 10).

Logan and McNeish argue for theoretically informed grounded research as a means to understand resource economies in the North and in the South. They show there is often much ground to cover between the thesis of the resource curse and its counter argument the resource endowment. Their book explores midrange examples. Logan and McNeish

note the various studies, while not exhaustive and with the usual subject restrictions in time and place, strive not for quick facts and policy responses, but a rethinking of the resource curse thesis. They point at the interconnected and interdependent ways that resources become sites of complex struggles.

Logan and McNeish describe a commonly cited exception in the resource curse literature is Norway and its oil. They argue the explanations of why Norway escaped the curse tend “to stereotype national politics and flatten out critical social and historical evaluation” (Logan and McNeish, 2012, p. 8). The facile explanation makes it harder to see how social and economic struggles over decades articulate in the present. They argue the negative and positive effects of large-scale oil and gas production in Norway are examples of neither the resource curse nor blessing, but instead of how the labor movement shaped energy politics in the country. Like Timothy Mitchell (2009, 2013), they show how resource extraction and trade unions reshaped democratic processes.

Until the 1980s, experts saw exploiting natural resources as a way to promote development. Some people saw a need for resource endowments that would allow countries to progress from underdevelopment. The authors draw out complex interdependencies to explore Bolivia, the North Sea, Venezuela, Azerbaijan, Bolivia, the Soviet Union, Norway, and the United Kingdom. The consequences of the oil and gas industry become paradoxically both a blessing and a curse for socio-economic development. Exploring this duality is the question at the core of their volume. The authors address international policymakers that see resource management through standard Western models of economic governance, institution building, and national sovereignty. They note some people question the resource curse by adding more variables to their mix of explanations; others critique the whole discourse. However, their book

addresses some of the methodological and theoretical challenges, emphasizing the “interface between the political and economic dynamics of global capitalism, on the one hand, and local processes of value formation, personhood, histories, and relationships to resources, on the other” (Logan and McNeish, 2012, p. 30).

Logan and McNeish see a need for better governance in areas with large resource endowments. Nevertheless, they critique the good governance and the corporate social responsibility discourse, and focus instead on the need to find a social framing for oil and gas industries in the northern and southern hemispheres. They argue for research that examines the linkages between decision making on all levels, power relations, institutional and non-institutional actors, and “global ethnography.” They move beyond technocratic solutions to resource politics in the North and South and bring together research on resources in the North and South (Logan and McNeish, 2012, p. 30). I hope my dissertation contributes to this by drawing on bottom-up research that addresses the broader issues of global ethnography grounded in insights from mine work. We can learn much from Logan and McNeish and their calls for grounded understandings of capital and politics and the need for historically and temporally specific discussion. Contributing the discussion on the resource curse, and the broader literature on Latin America, I have shown how gold can be both a blessing and a curse when it happens within the context of subsistence production and as a complement to rural livelihoods. When it is embedded in and complementary to some economies gold can be a blessing. When it is part of an economic fiction and the underground economy, it can cause devastating human and environmental results. I have shown how some of the negative ramifications from mining in Colombia on the environment, local politics, and the conflict come from the way mining articulates with cocaine production and export. While true for other forms of

resource extraction, it is clear that specifics matter greatly.

Social Movements and Resistance to Resource Extraction

There are dozens of community and mine conflicts across Latin America. Canadian companies often have involvement in these conflicts, either through foreign direct investment or their role in lobbying to rewrite national mining legislation. This is the case in Colombia, where there are numerous Canadian junior mining companies. While large investments are made, they often have complex consequences. The work of Anthony Bebbington and others provides insight on conflicts between communities and resource projects.

Anthony Bebbington, Leonith Hinojosa, Denise Humphreys Bebbington, Maria Luisa Burneo, and Ximena Warnaars (2008) address community relationships to mining projects in their work on the Andean region. They describe two movements resisting mining projects: the first involving a junior Canadian mining exploration project in Ecuador and the second involving a large-scale mine in Peru. In the Ecuadorian case, community organizers met great success in preventing the project. In Peru, they met with less success. Both cases show the complex grounded dynamics in which different groups of people support or oppose mining projects.

What strikes me in thinking about projects like the Canadian ones in Ecuador and Peru is that even before a spade has been put in the ground, the idea of mining has many repercussions. Whether or not they are real mines or speculative ploys, the idea of mining changes many things. The same kinds of social movements and networks that Bebbington and others describe in Ecuador and Peru existed in the Chocó near where I worked.

While I chose not to fully map those connections in the ways Bebbington and others do because of the conflict in the area, I have tried to show some of the key challenges faced by the political processes and social movements of Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities to deal with mining projects. This work contributes to the growing literature on community responses to mining. Focusing on the political economy of rural Colombia shows some of the challenges they face. Despite my initial interest in Canadian mining in Colombia, I attempted to move beyond a simplistic black and white analysis. I have shown gold's complexities in the region and the ways gold embeds within other economies. I showed some challenges people face to help explain some of the violence directed at those opposed to gold mining. That is, if an armed actor has direct economic interests in mining projects, it might help reveal why violence is involved.

However, another question I raise from the work of Bebbington and others is around the Ecuadorian and Peruvian cases. There is much more space for critical work on the multinational corporations involved. However, in both of the cases Bebbington and the others discuss, the details on the companies involved is not very deep. There has been great work on mapping the local history of social movements and community resistance, but less well-developed exploration of the multinational corporations involved. Of course, as Alain Deneault, Delphine Abadie, and William Sacher found out when they and their publisher were sued for libel for the content of their book *Noir Canada* (2008), on Canadian mining companies in Africa, many challenges exist in critical research on multinational corporations. Still, I have attempted to do some of that mapping in the case of Colombia and described the difficulties I faced. I do think this perspective would help in mapping some multinational corporations. This is also important when it comes to questions of strategy and how to respond to extractive projects.

The nature of the multinational corporations involved raises questions of strategy for social movements and community organizations that wish to intervene in a project. If a mining project is imminent and spades are about to go in the ground, particular strategies may be developed. The strategies of resistances change if the project itself is merely speculative. They shift again if the project is engaged in money laundering. In some cases, delaying a project or protesting might merely help the promoters justify their own lack of visible progress. The Dojurá project that I described in the Upper Atrato could be an example of this. Little mining exploration has taken place, yet it was listed on corporate documents to attract investors. Directors can earn hundreds of thousands of dollars in fees for merely having a title they have done little to develop. This raises questions for people concerned about community organizing and social movements. I suggest a need to rethink some multinational mining projects. One implication is questioning the basic economic foundations of these projects. Rather than assuming mining projects have the objective of just building a mine, there is space to explore economic fictions.

My contribution is to understand this in the local political and historical contexts of mining and multinational projects. No longer can gold be seen as unconnected to everything else. Just as Mauricio and I looked for cell phone signals in the mountain, trying to find some connection, I have tried to think through, critique, and reimagine foreign multinationals and small-scale mining. One conclusion this leads to is that multinational mining corporations in Latin America may not be always be as large scale as they are portrayed, particularly the Canadian junior mining companies. Multinational companies may also not be so Canadian as might have been supposed. This raises questions about the nature of Canadian mining corporations around the world. My point has been to try and show how they are more connected to local political economies than

one would think at first glance. They are not mere alien outsiders arriving, but are embedded in and integrated with local political economies. Just as multinational mining corporations are not quite as multinational as they first seemed, small-scale mining is not as local as it seems.

To conclude, Logan and McNeish (2012) call for a grounded, contextual research on resource extraction that makes connections. I hope I have been able to do this in a compelling way that brings an ethnographic perspective to gold in the Chocó, while putting it within a wider context. One of the tasks of the social sciences is description and analysis. I hope I have been able to do both. My contributions have been to show that gold is not just about gold and that context matters. While the observation could be taken as banal, as nothing is about itself and everything needs to be taken in context, my thesis contributes to a project that questions the foundations of resource extraction. To understand gold in the Chocó we need to not only understand the context of a river and a region, but place them within a broader nexus. We need to think of gold alongside subsistence economies, the informal economy, and economic fictions from speculation and money laundering.

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