Eduardo Restrepo

ETHNICIZATION OF BLACKNESS IN COLOMBIA

Toward de-racializing theoretical and political imagination

This paper is an ethnography of the articulation of ethnicity in the politics of blackness in Colombia. Based on the author's fieldwork in the southern Pacific region over the last 10 years, the paper briefly describe the ethnicization of blackness in Colombia and shows how this process implies a particular articulation of memories and identities in the politics of representation of alterity. The ethnicization of blackness involves a specific 'imagined (black) community' both within and beyond the nation. The specificity of this imagined black community is anchored in the objectification of memory, culture, nature and identity. Therefore, it is argued that the ethnicization of blackness is not a new euphemism for race, but that to understand the particular inscriptions of blackness as an ethnic group one has to problematize the 'racial closure' assumed by most scholars in the study of blackness.

Changing the terms of an argument is exceedingly difficult, since the dominant definition of the problem acquires, by repetition, and by the weight and credibility of those who propose or subscribe it, the warrant of 'common sense'.

<div align="right">(Hall 1982, p. 81)</div>

Introduction

Las Marías is a small village halfway down the length of the Satinga River in the heart of the Colombian Pacific Lowlands. In January 1992, something especially disturbing happened. Father Antonio Gaviria, a familiar figure in

the area, arrived with several other people to conduct a workshop. He brought along a video. As no one in Las Marías had the implements required to present the video, they were transported by canoe to the nearest town, Bocas de Satinga, located two hours further down the same river. The uncommon event caught the attention of most of the local people. Everybody wanted to watch the 'movie', and everyone, from young children to the oldest people, attended. No one could have imagined the impact that it would have. The film was about one of the most painful and unjust chapters of Western history: the capture of people in Africa, the way in which they became imprisoned, were beaten and forced to leave their societies and territories and then brought to the American continent to work as slaves in sugar cane plantations or in gold mines.

Everybody was shocked. A dense mixture of surprise, anger and sadness could be felt in the air. After the film was over, a silence pervaded the viewing arena for what seemed like an eternity. For most of the viewers, it was the first time that they realized that the parents of their grandparents had been enslaved, that they lived there because their ancestors had been brought by force to the Pacific Lowlands to mine the gold two or three hundred years ago, and that Africa was the magical name of the land from which they had come. How can it be understood, this that could be interpreted as a sort of 'collective forgetting'? How is it possible that these African descendents did not have some oral register of the experience of slavery that had ended only 150 years before? How had they elaborated their identities without any reference to Africa or the dynamics of resistance to slavery, both so important for other Afro-descendents in the Americas?[1] What are the implications of this lacuna for the process of ethnicization that black communities have engaged in over the last two decades in Colombia?

In order to address these questions, one must start by abandoning an essentialist category of 'blackness'. Rather than transcendental immutable entity, this ethnicization must be analysed as 'a relocation of 'blackness' in structures of alterity' (Wade 1997, p. 36). As Stuart Hall argued: 'If the black subject and black experience are not stabilized by Nature or by some other essential guarantee, then it must be the case that they are constructed historically, culturally, politically' (1996a: 446). In this paper, I will argue that what one may call the ethnicization of black political subjects and subjectivities must be understood as an ongoing process of the articulation of blackness in Colombia that has established a specific relationship between territory, identity, cultural tradition, nature and otherness.

Needless to say, this conceptualization confronts those tendencies anchored in a naturalized, homogenized and non-historicized assumption of 'blackness'. My approach is deliberately non-essentialist in the sense that it assumes that there are 'no guarantees of identity or effects outside of the determinations of particular contexts' (Grossberg 1996, p. 165). There is no

sort of transcendental ontology that constrains a necessary articulation of blackness. Paraphrasing Hall (1993, p. 355) in his application to nationalism of Laclau's statement that class has no necessary political belongingness, I would argue that black historical experiences have no necessary political belongingness.

The emergence of the ethnic black political subject and subjectivities has in many ways impacted not only the Colombian 'national imaginary', but also local memories and identities such as those in the case of the Satinga River in the Pacific region described above. In the first part of this paper, I will focus in how these memories and identities have been actively produced, transformed and contested in the process of the ethnicization of blackness.[2] Then, I will describe some of the techniques of enactment and forms of visibilities of ethnic black political subjects and subjectivities. Finally, I shall draw some conclusions about the pertinence of de-racializing 'blackness', both in the theoretical and in the political imagination.

Oblivion, memories and identities

Memories are not only inscribed in words and silences, but they are also expressed and lived through places, material objects and bodies. The articulation and naturalization of a particular representation of the past is often an important component of the constitution and reproduction of the social orders as well as the historical justification of specific power relationships. Nevertheless, the contestation of institutional memories and narratives of the past are always nodal aspects attached to different kinds of 'counterhegemonic' movements and agendas. As embodied in common sense and ideological discourses, then, memory is a slippery place, a misty object and a moving target of political struggles.[3]

Thus, memory is not the result of a 'simple' exercise of recording and storing what happened to a given group of people. As many authors have noted (see Bond & Gilliam 1994, Zambrano and Geneco 2000), memory is an active, selective, positional and polyphonic social process. In Hall's words: 'There can, therefore, be no simple 'return' or 'recovery' of the ancestral past which is not re-experienced through the categories of the present: no base for creative enunciation in a simple reproduction of traditional forms which are not transformed by technologies and the identities of the present' (1996a, p. 448).

As Williams (1961) noted, what becomes the object of remembrance, what is deemed socially relevant, what comes to constitute the past of a people, what are seen as relevant 'events' to register, and how people weave together their tales about themselves and others, are not neutral and objective facts, but the expression and result of selective traditions. Although at first

glance it seems paradoxical, remembering also and always implies forgetting (Alonso 1994). Rather than the manifestation of a fixed past, in the process of ethnicization memory is the incessant re-creation of the past from the multivocality of the present. For Carlos Rosero, a well-known activist of PCN (Process of Black Communities), the constant production of the past from the way in which we understand the present is also a political project associated with the future. As he clearly said: 'Each interpretation of the present is also a representation of the past, and, in the same way, it is a statement on the future'.

As the evidence from fieldwork indicates, the process of the ethnicization of blackness has introduced transformations in the regimens of memory from which local populations have produced their past and imagined their communalities and alterities. In order to illustrate this point, let me return to the southern Pacific region. In the first weeks after my arrival at the Santinga river, at the beginning of the 1990s, I was impressed by the word *libre* (free-person) with which black people in that region often referred to themselves. I immediately associated this word with the literature on slavery, and with the fact that during the colonial period *libre* was a juridical category and an object of social adscription and was as such recorded in population censuses. At that time, it was 'evident' to me that this category necessarily indicated the presence of a collective memory of this historical shared experience of only a few generations before. Hoping to find substantial fragments of the slavery period in the oral tradition and, with a bit more luck, of the very African origin, for months I devoted myself to searching for the local contents of the notion of *libre*. However, the first weeks of research were sterile in this sense; nothing in the oral tradition seemed to offer even a minimal trace of slavery or Africa. However, I was sure of its existence. Relatively little time had passed since slavery had been legally abolished (in 1851), and it had undoubtedly been an important part of the daily life of the peoples of the Pacific region. Therefore, from my point of view generated by my conventional formation as an anthropologist, it seemed odd that the oral tradition did not register it. The great-grandfathers of many people with whom I was living at the time had been slaves in the mines (*reales de minas*) in Barbacoas or Iscuandé.

Faced with the difficulty of finding tracks that would lead people to speak about the experience of slavery, my working hypothesis was that, for reasons that I would have to explore, the contents of this experience were jealously hidden from strangers. I even ventured to think that somehow this experience was part of a valued treasure that was reserved for certain socially prescribed situations and entrusted only to a few specific individuals. In opposition to my expectations, I had to abandon this hypothesis. The gradual increase of my ethnographic knowledge showed me that there are different spheres that in effect are kept secret from strangers, with none of them suggesting even

tangentially the existence of an oral tradition on slavery. Thus, is it possible to conclude that both the experience of slavery and the memories of Africa had been subjected to a sort of 'collective oblivion'? And if that was the case, how could one interpret this scandalous 'silence'?[4]

In fact, on the one hand, one could find these silences in the oral register in several ways, such as in the local origin mythology or in tales about the first people inhabiting the river or the current village. There is no oral narrative about Africa or the times of slavery. On the other hand, however, it is also evident that in ritual practices, kinship systems or even in daily language there are not only an African heritage and marks of the colonial times, but also a kind of collective memory that is inscribed in bodies, words, and places. These embodied memories are beyond individual self-reflection and underlie practices and relationships. This articulation, configured by different registers (from oral tradition to bodies), thus constituted a sort of dispersed and discontinuous regime of memory (Losonczy 1999, pp. 22−3).

This dialectic of silences and embodied memories helps us to understand why the people in Las Marias were shocked by the video that showed 'their own history'. Talking about that experience, Nelson Montaño, one of the most important local activists said, 'the workshop … began with a video that showed the way in which the people lived there in Africa, then the forced trip of black communities, the way in which the people arrived in chains. They were hit, tortured − the whole story. Painfully, there were people that cried when they saw that because they didn't know. Brother, I was one of those who cried when I saw it'.[5]

Something similar happened at a nearby river. Father Alex, with other activists of the local organization, visited the rural areas:

> We began by telling them that here in America there were no blacks. This got their attention because they did not know this part of history. We worked a lot on that part of history, of course. For many people that was new, and some of them had a notion. There was a tape cassette that crudely tells how the slaves were put in ships, how they were thrown into the sea. This got the attention of people, and they considered that horrible. Moreover, when one said, for example, their last names: you, the Carabali, the Carabali is an ethnic group there; it is a tribe from Africa. The Lucumi are the descendents of the Lucumi. These are African last names. This got the attention of the people.[6]

As I have stated before, if there have been these sorts of silences about African origin or slave experiences in the oral tradition of the black people of the Pacific Lowlands, there also have been practices, relationships and words anchored in their African origins and/or slavery. On the one hand, as Price (1955), Whitten (1974) and Quiroga (1994) have shown, there are sets of

ritual practices in relation to the saints and certain funeral ceremonies in the Pacific Lowlands which have been configured by the interplay of African background with Hispanic and indigenous influences. On the other hand, the anthropological literature about the Colombian Pacific Lowlands has recorded for a long time that some black people call themselves, and are called by others, *libres* (West 1957). *Libre* was the colonial category for a particular location in social and juridical terms. As has been noted by Wade (1997), during colonial times this notion belonged to a detailed taxonomy of social locations referred to as *sociedad de castas* (caste society). First of all, *libre* signified a person of African descent who was not a slave because either his/her mother was free at the time of his/her conception or she/he got her/his freedom through legal mechanism. In the Colombian Pacific, the most frequent mechanism used to obtain freedom was self-emancipation (Sharp 1970, 1976). Slaves had one day of the weekend to work for themselves in different activities. Some of them worked during these days in mining or in agriculture, and the product of their work belonged to them. Saving this money, they could pay their 'owner' for their freedom (Leal 1999).

Bearing this in mind, it is not surprising that someone visiting the Colombian Pacific region would consider that the notion of *libre* is just the peoples' conscious expression of their oral tradition about slavery. Even some historians have interpreted this notion of *libre* in that way (Maya 1998). Although this notion has roots in previous social classifications like the *sociedad de castas*, it now has a different connotation, and it is basically the tip of the iceberg of local knowledge that does not indicate a self-reflexive reference to the Hispanic colonial times. On the Satinga river in the Colombian Pacific, for example, the particular meaning of *libre* exists in a complex articulation within a deeply woven set of categories. Each of these categories is partially constituted in relation to others, and partly in contrast to them. Each one of these categories constitutes a term in the local grammar of identity. Thus, the notion of *libre* is not just the local transcription of a racial category of 'black' as simply opposed to 'white' and/or 'indigenous'.

In contrast to a modality of dispersed and discontinuous memory embedded in the oral silence of both African origin and slavery, the process of ethnicization of blackness faces a re-accommodation of identities, memories and silences. It is not that now the local populations are aware of their 'true' past, which for various reasons (one of which is probably the painful character of the experiences) they had thrown into collective oblivion. It is not that now the true lost history has been recovered by a new awareness fostered by the organizational process. Nor is it a fact that a few prominent foreign figures came to impose on the local populations a history that is not theirs. Less yet, is it that the modalities of dispersed and discontinuous memory disappeared like magic, overnight, because they finally received the accurate version that had been slippery until then. Even in those cases in which there was oral tradition

about the African origin and/or slavery, the process of ethnicization involved modifications in the economy of identities, memories and silences.

The recent process of ethnicization in the southern Pacific region of Colombia has involved a type of production and relation with the past, a way of imagining community based on origins and historically shared experiences, as well as a relocation of subjectivities and identities. What could be the motivation for presenting videos that contain content relating to Africa and to slavery, if not the pretension to constitute a community grounded in an ancestral continuity? Indeed, is not this community presented as one that has always been an object of oppression and injustice, as well as one with a long history of resistance? And, as a moral and political consequence, are not those descendants of the enslaved, those descendants of the African kingdoms, compelled to the collective task of overcoming oppression and injustice by means of the constitution of those organizations based on their ethnic specificity? To imagine community, one that goes beyond kinship, the settlement or the river, has been one of the principal objectives of advisers, activists and governmental officers.[7] This is a community of origin and memory that relates to and defines a 'we' beyond the local identities anchored in the river, the settlement or kinship.

Therefore, the ethnicization of blackness passes through the production of its past; this process was what, from the perspective of the local populations, allowed them to imagine a community beyond the concrete experiences of the settlement, of the river or of the kinship, upon which there had been constituted other types of subjectivities and identities. This ethnicization of memory and identities supposes imagining a community of origin in Africa and of a past in slavery and runaways and maroons (*cimarrones*) based on a linear and expert discourse of historicity. Thus, the ethnicization of blackness supposed a redefinition of identities, memories and silences.

The ethnicization of the black political subject and subjectivities

The techniques of enacting ethnic black political subjects and subjectivities have been multiple: they range from meetings to workshops, from assemblies to departmental (and national) commissions, from ethnic organizations to the programme or institutional component, from legislation to projects as mechanisms of interaction with the state and NGO's. They have involved forms of visibilities through maps, censuses, documents and surveys. They have been put in operation by an army of experts, from activists and governmental officers to advisers and academics.

In their interaction, these techniques and forms constitute the most profound apparatus through which black political subjects and subjectivities

have been articulated into an ethnic group. In their apparent neutrality, rationality and objectivity, in their silent labour of assembling, in their registering and reporting, they have become one of the most powerful components of the ethnicization of blackness. From the state or the Church to ethnic organizations, these techniques of enactment and their forms of visibilities have been systematically displayed. The tacit consensus by these diverse political actors about these techniques has precisely constituted the basis of their powerful effects.

One must differentiate between these various techniques that entail the concentration of people in a determined time and space with a specific aim. Workshops, meetings, assemblies and commissions are techniques of this type. Each of the above involves the spatial displacement of, and the temporary rupture of, the daily routine of work or festivities in order to be informed, to gather data and to take/legitimize decisions. They are techniques of production and circulation of a certain kind of speech, of a particular management of the body and of the establishment-reproduction of specific power relationships. In fact, to be informed includes a wide scale of activities that go from receiving 'news' or training to gaining 'awareness' or 'consciousness'. Thus, in this space-time of the meetings, the word was regulated: who, how, when and what was spoken followed a format that was not that of the space-time of the daily life of work or even the festivity of the local populations. Even if local 'formats' were used as templates, they mainly appeared for the sake of performance, and served to marginalize local practices as a reification of 'tradition'. *Alabaos* (a sort of singing funeral prayer), for example, were sung to open an assembly, or *décimas* (a type of poetry from the oral tradition) were written to be recited at an event, but the space-time formats in which *alabaos* or *décimas* has been usually produced is totally different.

The bodies were confined into the discipline of a chair in school classrooms. People had to concentrate on presentations that often followed the model of conferences or technical presentations. The participants' interventions were regulated according to topic and time. The schedules and rhythms were defined on the basis of a temporality marked by the clock. These techniques implied a management of the body that was strange for many local people, although more familiar for the activists and advisers who possessed 'scholar capital'. Finally, these techniques inserted relations and assumptions into the matrix of interaction among the attendees at multiple levels.

Even though it has been commonly argued that these events involved the equal participation of all present, this was not the case given that both the format and the themes of many of the events had been defined in advance according to the financial resources provided by a specific entity, or the urgencies of organizational dynamics. Moreover, hierarchies were established between those who designed and co-ordinated the workshop and those who

attended, activists/non-activists, leaders/militants and men/women, among others.

Other types of techniques established certain modern modalities of action and planning. The organization itself was one of the more widespread techniques of this type. Many organizations arose in the context of the Transitory Article 55 (AT-55) – one might even argue that there was an organizational 'boom' in the first three years of the 1990s.[8,9] From the perspective of the advisors and activists, these organizations were created in response to a previous situation of 'non-organization' of the black people. Moreover, this 'absence of organization' has been considered the reason for the situation of abandonment, marginality, 'backwardness' and poverty of the peoples of the region. Given this assumption, it is not strange that the proposed 'solution' was to teach local people about 'real organizations' and support their creation. Especially for the Church in this region, the goal of 'organizing the people' has constituted one of the core causes since the 1980s.[10] In terms of contents and form of operation, the ethnic organizations created all responded to the state logic of the institutionalization of the 'social actors' – with legal representatives, a president, a treasurer, and legal inscription.

The ethnic organizations of the black communities in this way reproduced a mode of institutionalization of political action (c.f. Pardo 2002). Thus, at some levels the ethnic organizations were inscribed in the logic of social action previously developed by other figures such as Community Action Boards (*Juntas de Acción Comunal*) or Parents' Associations for the Schools (*Asociaciones de Padres de Familia*). However, ethnic organization transcended these other modalities of institutionalization of social action not only because of their stronger dynamic, but also because they became a network with different levels of intervention and a different approach to the negotiation of state politics (Grueso *et al*. 1998).

In sum, the ethnic organizations were not the simple expression of a sort of 'traditional' form of social organization of pre-existing political subjects or subjectivities as they sometimes represented themselves, or as certain advisers or academics sometimes suggested. Rather, they were novel modalities of collective action closely tied to the logic of the Colombian state (Pardo and Alvarez 2001) and involved the configuration of an ethnic black political subject (the black community as an ethnic group) and the re-articulation of subjectivities (the interpellation of individuals from a novel imagined and distinctive collectivity).

Instances of legislation can also be understood as another type of technique utilized in enacting black ethnic political subjects and subjectivities. The current items of legislation relating to the topic of ethnic rights for blacks (mainly the Transitory Article 55, Law 70 of 1993 and decree 1745 of 1995) have been the result of a process of negotiation between the government and

the representatives of the ethnic organizations of black communities.[11] Besides the implications of the processes of authorization engaged in by those representatives, this negotiation fixed the legal meanings of the black ethnicity. These meanings were defined upward through meetings, assemblies and workshops from the local to departmental and national levels. They were also shaped through documents, activities and representatives downward from the Special Commission (national level) and by the Departmental Consultative Commissions to the local organizations. The course of these double flows of redefinition worked to distil the meanings of the blackness as an ethnic group. The Special Commission and the Departmental Consultative Commissions mainly responded to the bureaucratic logic of the state, with schedules for each one of their sections and secretaries, as well as their hierarchies, documents, files, and so forth. At both levels, the experts' discourses constituted the main currency through which the positions were discussed and agreements reached.

Moreover, the legal system was not organized in such a way that it was possible to tolerate ambiguity. This has also contributed to the ossification of the notion of black ethnicity. Who is or is not a member of the black community, and what black ethnicity means have been rigidly defined through the pronouncement of laws and decrees. Nevertheless, this reification has had a performative effect due to the fact that laws and decrees have been widely circulated among activists and local populations, given that it was the basis of several workshops and training activities. Nowadays, it is relatively easy to find a person in a region as distant as the far reaches of the Colombian Southern Pacific who not only can recite from memory extensive passages of Law 70 of 1993, but who also uses such diction to engage others in conversation or when articulating a request. If one keeps in mind this fact, and appreciates the general tendency among the rural populations of this region to deify written texts (and laws in particular), then it could be argued that the legislative proposals have produced important performative effects of reification in the black community as an ethnic group.

Another important effect of this negotiation between the representatives and the government has been the constitution of a feeling of 'community', a sort of novel 'we', among the representatives and activists associated with the different organizations. In fact, in diverse national (Special Commission, but also the national assemblies), regional (Departmental Consultative, but also the departmental assemblies) and local (workshops, meetings and assemblies sponsored by each organization) scenarios, there existed a 'feeling of community' among the activists and representatives. This feeling acted as a nodal point of understanding, the relevance of what has been named since then 'The Process' (*El Proceso*).

The notion and practice of working and interacting with other actors based on 'projects' or 'programmes' equally belongs to the type of technique that shapes the ethnicization of the black political subject and subjectivities through

certain modern modalities of action and planning. The design and implementation of a project or a programme is an exercise of planning, which according to Escobar (1992) constitutes one of the mechanisms through which the discourse of 'experts' colonize the life-world (a la Habermas) to produce 'the social'.

Both the government and the body of active NGOs have implemented or supported several projects or programmes which involve the 'participation' of ethnic groups such as the black communities. This 'participation' is generally achieved trough representation of those communities by their leaders or representatives. In fact, even though these projects have had different objectives and scopes, since the new Political Constitution of 1991 almost any project or programme elaborated by the government and NGOs demand the representation of those ethnic groups that are involved in, or affected by, their activities. These demands of representation are performed on different scales – from the national to the local. These multiple requirements of representation of black communities as ethnic group involve the implementation of mechanisms of authorization of certain people who not only speak for these ethnic black communities (nationally and/or locally), but also speak about them. These continuous processes of definition of who can legitimately speak for and about these 'communities', and the enacting of this authorization constitute an important technique of articulation of the ethnic black political subject and subjectivities. In the innumerable debates, alliances and struggles over 'representation' among local populations and national, regional or local organizations the ethnic political subject and subjectivities are performed and contested. These confrontations, disagreements and confluences are differentially echoed in the actions of representatives of the government and NGOs by functionaries and assessors of these projects or programmes. Therefore, it is the juncture between those demands of representation, and the processes of performing them, where specific projects or programmes became a technique of enacting the black ethnic political subject and subjectivities.

Projects are not only designed and implemented by organs of the government and individual NGOs. For the ethnic organizations, projects have occupied a crucial role in obtaining financial resources. Advisers and activists have appealed to a number of state and non-governmental institutions for monetary support for different kinds of projects – from those related to the conservation of biodiversity to those committed to the support of small co-operatives. However, the projects have always have been contrived as more than a privileged strategy for obtaining financial resources. The have engendered a daily exercise of self-definition and enactment, visible to others, of what black communities are or are not, what their 'problems' are, and how, when and who must solve them. Thus, these communities have been scrutinized, unfolded and inscribed through the instantiation of numerous projects conceived of by the ethnic organizations. These projects have

constituted not only a discursive field of articulation of the concept of blackness as an ethnic group, but also an instrument of social intervention in the realm of the daily life of local populations.

In relation to the forms of visibilities, there has been a broad spectrum spanning from the 'simple' compilation of signatures to the making of maps, surveys and censuses, all the way to the writing of documents or the publication of pamphlets. The creation of maps and censuses constituted one of the first activities of the ethnic organizations in the southern Pacific region. These local maps and censuses were not merely neutral tools for the description of a pre-existing social reality. Rather, as Biggs (1999, p. 377) has argued, cartography (and specifically the resulting maps) introduces a kind of register that, in its abstraction, when objectified and differentiated, the space becomes associated with modernity. This analogous association is parallel to the way in which the clock is linked with the modern representation of time.[12] According to Urla (1993), censuses are not the neutral and objective technology that positivists, technocrats and policy-makers have supposed. On the contrary, censuses constitute a specifically modern political modality of invention and intervention of 'the social'.[13]

In the last decade, most of the maps, censuses and surveys have been produced by the local organizations involving an active participation of local populations in the southern Pacific region. During the second half of the 1990s, maps, censuses and surveys were important pieces in the constitution of the Community Councils (*Consejos Comunitarios*). They were also used as physical evidence in the attempts to achieve legal recognition of their territories (under the name of lands of black communities).[14] As forms of visibilities, maps, census and surveys have contributed to the production of black ethnicity. The exercises of mapping have introduced criteria and codes of spatial representation, objectification, abstraction and differentiation. Hence, this form of visualization has conditioned what, who and how certain aspects have been spatially displayed and registered. It is through these maps that 'the territory' has become objectified. Here, as Thongchai puts it: 'A map anticipated spatial reality, not vice versa' (quoted by Anderson 1991, p. 173).

Mapping must be understood as an expression of a tendency toward an 'ethnically dressed cartography', that not only constituted an important part in the iconographic narrative for the bureaucratic requirements of the state for the recognition of their territorial and cultural rights, but that also shaped the spatial gaze of the local people articulating their experiences, categories and practices into the notion of territory. Thus, as far as these maps attempted to combine and bring together these various and contradictory ways of representing places, one might understand them as an epistemologically hybrid exercise.

Censuses and surveys have also introduced other forms of visibilities. Rather than being neutral and objective methodologies, censuses and surveys

actively intervene on the 'social reality' for which they are claimed to account. They imply not only a grid of accountability, but also the operation of a set of power relationships embedded in the question/answer mechanism. Their effects of truth are based on the compelling magic of the quantitative realm, mostly presented in the form of graphs or charts. For the case of the south Pacific, censuses and surveys crystallized explicit criteria of belonging to the 'community'. Thus, in order for someone to be considered a member of the 'community', these censuses and surveys defined patterns of mobility and presence/absence. Like the map, the censuses and surveys defined criteria for the ossification of the black ethnicity. The 'community' started to acquire a particular existence in terms of numbers spreading in multiple ways through variables such as age, sex, time of habitation, 'head of family' and type of occupation. Censuses and surveys inserted a set of conceptual borders in order to produce a clear cut 'we' – the 'community'.

Conclusions

For those scholars and activists who come from countries of Latin America such as Colombia or Ecuador, that which appears to them as a tendency to racialize 'blackness' (or 'indigenous') in the analysis and discussions in the Anglo-American academy is surprising. Even though this academy preaches *ad nausem* the historical 'constructedness' and contingency of social categories (Alonso 1994, Norval 1996), one could argue that 'blackness' is still mainly thought about through 'racial' glasses. This does not mean that this academy does not recognize the historical emergence and 'variedness' of both 'blackness' and 'race'. On the contrary, for example, the comparison between Brazil and the USA used to illustrate the differences of 'racial formations' developed by Marvin Harris (1974) are by now classical.

　　Rather, the point to which I would like to call attention is that the 'academic common sense' that seems to assume that 'blackness' is always and necessarily *racially* constituted, at the same time that it is supposed that this constitution emerges in particular historical junctures, and that there are significant differences from one social formation to another. I would like to suggest that this necessary *racial closure* of 'blackness' is problematized both theoretically and empirically with the analysis of the ethnicization of blackness in Colombia. Ethnicization is not a (politically correct) euphemism for race, nor is it the description of a particular form of *racial* articulation of 'blackness'. As I noted, the articulation of blackness as an ethnic group has involved the transformation of memories and identities, as well as the emergence and deployment of novel political subjects and subjectivities.

　　This ethnic articulation of blackness (or indigenousness) should not be understood as a specific construction of 'race', nor even as a process of

'culturalization of race' or a 'racialization of culture'. Rather, it constitutes a novel historical 'event' (in Foucault's terms) that cannot be reduced to a new 'racial articulation'. It involves a specific altericization of 'blackness' (or 'indigenousness') that appeal to the interwoven notions of nature, territory, community, tradition, and identity. It demands a novel assemblage of memories and identities as well as the enacting of ethnic political subjects and subjectivities. In order to grasp the historical specificity of these transformations, one must begin to think of 'blackness' other than through the rubric of *racial closure*.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   I am aware of the contrast and parallels of these sorts of questions that could be found in other places of black presence such as the Caribbean, Brazil, Venezuela or the USA. In particular, other studies on maroons have dealt with similar issues lending to opposite conclusions such as Richard Price (1983) in the Caribbean or in Friedemann and Cross (1979). Even though it would be very interesting to make a comparison with these cases, this kind of exercise would involve a step further of my paper, which is an attempt to focus on a specific historical juncture.

2   It is important to bear in mind that local people are not limited to reproducing in advance what has been assigned to them by the 'ethnic imaginary'. On the contrary, the local populations have taken different positions in relation with their interpellation into the ethnization of blackness. They have inscribed, transformed and engaged it in multiple ways. Some of them have been opposed to its more concrete implications as the collective legalization of their land, whereas others have taken part openly in the process. In this paper, I will not describe this local polyphony of the ethnization of blackness because my point is to illustrate the emergence and transformation of this articulation through the production of a novel regime of memory and identity as well as political subjects and

subjectivities in the discursive field mainly constitute by the state, NGOs and the ethnic organizations.

3   This dense weaving of memory, identity and power has been theorized recently for the Latin American context with the notion of *politics of culture* (Alvarez *et al*. 1998).

4   I do not want to argue that all the black people in the Pacific region had 'erased' their oral memories about slavery or their African origin. On the contrary, there are places in which those articulations have been made. For example, for the case of El Charco, the oral tradition registers the last master of the region, but as Almario (2001) has demonstrated this register is much more complex and polysemic than at first glance one would assume. In a recent thesis, Oslender (2001, p. 177) quoted a report from a state institution in which the 'community' in the river San Francisco had an oral memory about slavery: '"The cultural memory of the communities [of the river San Francisco] speak of the slave uprising in Cascajero, when the slaves used the absence of their master Julián to stage a rebellious attack throwing the kitchen and work instruments into the river and onto its beach. When the master saw this mess he called the place Cascajero [a mess]. That's how the community got its name. (INCORA 1998c, point 2.1)"'. Nevertheless, this 'erasure' of slavery and African origin from oral tradition has been a widespread process (c.f. Hoffmann 1999, Losonczy 1999, Wade 1999). Needless to say that the explanation about this uneven 'retention' of African origin and slavery is beyond the scope of this paper.

5   Interview by Oscar Almario and the author with Nelson Montaño, president of Orisa (Organization of Satinga River), Bocas de Satinga, 24 November 1998.

6   Interview by Oscar Almario and the author with Father Alex Jiménez del Castillo, activist of Organichar (Organization of Black Communities of El Charco), El Charco, 21 November 1998.

7   This labour has not been simple and is far from being finished. There are many zones where this labour has been less intensive than others, multiple are the dynamics of hybridization and confrontation with local knowledge. Thus, when I speak about ethnicization, I do not consider that it has been led to an end with equal intensity and with the same effects on all levels. In order to have an image more according to what has happened in the south Pacific region, I would say that depending on the different places and levels this ethnicization has spread out with greater or lesser intensity, managing in an unequal way to restore this economy of visibilities of black community as ethnic group.

8   The Transitory Article 55 (AT-55) of the Political Constitution of 1991 defined the creation by the government of one Special Commission of Black Communities, with the participation of the activists that represented the communities involved. This Special Commission wrote the text of the Law 70 of 1993, which recognized the collective propriety over the lands of the Colombian Pacific of these communities that have inhabited this region,

according with their traditional production practices. For detailed analyses of
the Transitory Article 55 and Law 70, as well as for their implications in the
ethnicization of blackness, see the recent special issue of the *Journal of Latin
American Anthropology* edited by Wade (2002).

9   A similar irruption was produced on the national level (Agudelo 2000).

10 For an ethnography of the local narratives and practices of intervention of
the Catholic see Niño (2001).

11 For a description and analysis of this legislation and the development of the
social movement of black communities, see Grueso *et al*. (1998), Pardo
(2002), Oslender (2001, 2002) and Wade (1995).

12 See also Giddens (1990) and Anderson (1993).

13 In the same way, Anderson (1993) has argued how censuses, maps and
museums have been technologies of representation since the colonial states.

14 For a more detailed analysis of the context of creation of these Community
Councils and the process of legal recognition of the territories of black
communities, see Oslender (2002).

References

Agudelo, C. E. (2000) 'Nuevos actores sociales y relegitimación del Estado.
Estado y construcción del movimiento social de comunidades negras en
Colombia', Ponencia simposio *Hacia el Estado de Derecho en América Latina:
globalización, sociedad civil, seguridad ciudadana y gobernabilidad democrática*,
50th International Congress of Americanistas, Varsovia.

Almario, O. (2001) 'Tras las huellas de los renacientes. Por el laberinto de la
etnicidad e identidad de los grupos negros o "afrocolombianos" del Pacífico
sur', in *Acción Colectiva, Estado y Etnicidad en el Pacífico colombiano*, ed. M.
Pardo, Colciencias-Icanh, Bogotá, pp. 15–40.

Alonso, A. M. (1994) 'The politics of space, time and substance: state formation,
nationalism, and ethnicity', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, no. 23, pp. 379–
405.

Alvarez, S., Dagnino, E. & Escobar, A. (1998) *Cultures of Politics/ Politics of Culture:
re-visioning Latin American Social Movements*, Westview Press, Oxford.

Anderson, B. (1991) *Imagined Communities*, Verso, London.

Biggs, M. (1999) 'Putting the state on the map: cartography, territory and
European state formation', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 41,
no. 2, pp. 347–405.

Bond, G. C. & Gilliam, A. (1994) *Social Construction of the Past. Representation as
Power*, Routledge, London and New York.

Escobar, A. (1992) 'Planning', in *The Development Dictionary*, ed. W. Sachs, Zed
Books, London.

Friedemann, N. S. & Cross, R. (1979) *Ma Ngumbe. Guerreros y ganaderos en
Palenque*, Carlos Valencia Editores, Bogotá.

Giddens, A. (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*, Stanford University Press,
Stanford, CA.

Grossberg, L. (1996) 'Identity and cultural studies: is that all there is?', in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, eds S. Hall & P. du Gay, Sage Publications, London, pp. 87–107.

Grueso, L., Rosero, C. & Escobar, A. (1998) 'The process of black community organizing in the southern Pacific Coast region of Colombia', in *Cultures of Politics/Politics of Cultures: Re-Visioning Latin American Social Movements*, eds S. Alvarez, E. Dagnino & A. Escobar, Westview Press, Oxford, pp. 196–219.

Hall, S. (1982) 'The rediscovery of "ideology": return of the repressed in media studies', in *Culture, Society and the Media*, eds M. Gurevitch, T. Bennett, J. Curran & J. Woollacott, Methuen, New York, pp. 56–90.

Hall, S. (1993) 'Culture, community, nation', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 7, pp. 349–363.

Hall, S. (1996a [1989]) 'New ethnicities', in *Stuart Hall. Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds D. Morley & K.-H. Chen, Routledge, London and New York, pp. 441–449.

Harris, M. (1974) *Patterns of Race in the Ameritas*, Norton Library, New York.

Hoffmann, O. (1999) '¿"La política" vs. "lo politico"? La estructuración del campo político contemporáneo en el Pacífico sur colombiano', in *Hacer política en el Pacífico sur: algunas aproximaciones*, Documento de Trabajo 39, Cidse-Universidad del Valle, Cali.

Leal, C. (1999) 'The illusion of urban life in the forest. a history of Barbacoas and Quibdo on Colombian Pacific region', Master thesis on Latin American Studies, Berkeley, CA.

Losonczy, A. M. (1999) 'Memorias e identidad: los negro-colombianos del Chocó', in *De montes, ríos y ciudades: territorios e identidades de gente negra en Colombia*, eds J. Camacho & E. Restrepo, Ecofondo-Natura-Instituto Colombiano de Antropología, Bogotá, pp. 13–24.

Maya, A. (1998) 'Demografía histórica de la trata por Cartagena 1533–1810', in *Los afrocolombianos. Geografía humana de Colombia*, Tomo VI, ed. A. Maya, Instituto colombiano de cultura hispánica, Bogotá.

Niño, A. M. (2001) 'De la caridad a lo social: el caso de la Prefectura Apostólica de Guapi', thesis of anthropology, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá.

Norval, Aletta (1996) 'Thinking Identities: Against a Theory of Ethnicity', in *The Politics of Difference. Ethnic Premises in a World of Power*, eds Edwin Wilmsen & Patric McAllister, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, pp. 59–70.

Oslender, U. (2001) 'Black communities on the Colombian Pacific Coast and the "aquatic space": a spatial approach to social movement theory', doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow.

Oslender, U. (2002) '"The logic of the river": a spatial approach to ethnic-territorial mobilization in the Colombian Pacific region', *The Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 86–117.

Pardo, M. (2002) 'Entre la autonomía y la institucionalización: dilemas del movimiento negro colombiano', *The Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 60–85.

Pardo, M. & Alvarez, M. (2001) 'Estado y movimiento negro en el Pacífico colombiano', in *Acción Colectiva, Estado y Etnicidad en el Pacífico colombiano*, ed. M. Pardo, Colciencias-ICANH, Bogotá, pp. 229−258.

Price, R. (1983) *First-Time. The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Price, T. (1955) 'Saints and spirit: a study of differential acculturation in Colombian Negro communities', Northwestern University Ann Arbor University Microfilms.

Quiroga, D. (1994) 'Saints, virgins, and the devil: witchcraft, magic, and healing in the northern coast of Ecuador', PhD dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Illinois.

Sharp, W. (1970) 'Forsaken but for gold: an economic study of slavery and mining in the Colombian Choco, 1680−1810', Ann Arbor University Microfilms International.

Sharp, W. (1976) *Slavery in the Spanish frontier. The Colombian Choco, 1680−1810*, University of Oklahoma Press.

Urla, J. (1993) 'Cultural politics in an age of statistics: numbers, nations, and the making of Basque identity', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 20, no. 4, pp. 818−843.

Wade, P. (1995) 'The cultural politics of blackness in Colombia', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 341−357.

Wade, P. (1997) *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*, Pluto Press, London.

Wade, P. (1999) 'The guardians of power. Biodiversity and multiculturality in Colombia', in *The Anthropolgoy of Power. Empowerment and disempowerment in changing structures*, ed. A. Cheater, Routledge, London and New York, pp. 73−87.

Wade, P. (ed.) (2002) 'The Colombian Pacific in perspective', *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 2−33.

West, R. (1957) *The Lowlands of Colombia*, Louisiana State University Studies, Louisiana.

Whitten, N. (1974) *Black Frontiersmen. Afro-Hispanic Culture of Ecuador and Colombia*, Waveland Press, Inc., Illinois.

Williams, R. (1961) *The Long Revolution*, Harper Torchbooks, New York.

Zambrano, M. & Geneco, C. (eds) (2000) *Memorias hegemónicas, memorias disidentes: el pasado como política de la historia*, Icanh-Universidad del Cauca, Bogotá.