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## Disputes over gold mining and dispossession of local afrodescendant communities from the Alto Cauca, Colombia

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### ABSTRACT

In 2001, the local afrodescendant community from La Toma faced a double threat. First, new mining legislation was introduced and their ancestral mining activities were declared illegal. Second, paramilitary groups entered the territory and initiated a regime of terror that continues to date. Mining titles were conceded to multinationals and private parties, while the communities were restricted in their access to land-based resources. This paper deals with different dimensions of local dispossession resulting from violent mechanisms as well as from the neoliberal adjustment of the mining regulatory system in Colombia.

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### Introducing Colombian extractivist geographies

The year 2001 is deeply ingrained in the memory of the afrodescendant community from La Toma, in the Alto Cauca region of Colombia.<sup>1</sup> In April, the most important paramilitary group at the time, the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), took control of the region and began a regime of terror that resulted in selective murders, forced displacement and confinement, and violent restrictions to the communities' management of natural resources. In the Alto Cauca, the AUC commander Ever Veloza (alias H.H.) has confessed to several crimes, including the massacre of more than 40 indigenous people from the Naya region in 2001<sup>2</sup> and the displacement of 100s between 2001 and 2004. Though the AUC was dissolved in 2004 after a process of 'social reinsertion', communities from the region have confirmed that paramilitary organisations continue to exist under new names.

During 2001, a new Mining Code was promulgated and the ancestral gold mining activities of the afrodescendant community were made illegal until such time as a mining title was allocated by the national government. In subsequent years, under protection of AUC paramilitaries, backhoes entered the region and started the uncontrolled extraction of gold along the riverbanks that flank the Cauca river. The local community was never informed about the legal process to formalise their mining activities, and the arrival of death threats and increasing violence in the region did not render circumstances fit to engage in lengthy bureaucratic procedures. Three years later, in 2004, the local inhabitants came to know that several mining titles had been allocated to multinationals and private actors. According to

the legal rights acquired by the entitled parties, local afrodescendants had to evacuate their ancestral territory as they were considered illegal inhabitants, and their mining an illegal economic activity.

The complexity of mining practices and actors in La Toma can be better pictured if categorised according to the different actors, their extractive practices and legality:

- (1) Ancestral mining: is mining developed by afrodescendants, traditional inhabitants of the Alto Cauca, legally recognised by Law 70/1993 and by the Auto 005 of 2009. The community in La Toma does not use environmentally damaging chemicals such as mercury or cyanide in their mining. Ancestral mining is based on the 'barequeo' technique, where miners use a wooden plate to separate the gold from other material; sometimes using other techniques such as water pumps and mechanical rock-crushing machines. In the case of La Toma, this form of mining has not been legalised via a formal mining title and, therefore, it remains illegal from the perspective of the Mining Code.
- (2) Mechanised small-scale mining or backhoe mining: in La Toma, this mining is developed by actors who are foreign to the community, often guarded by illegal paramilitary forces such as Rastrojos or Águilas Negras. At times, the guerrillas Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) have also participated in this form of mining through informal taxation of the backhoe mining or through the provision of paid protection for the mining operations. Next to the backhoes, this type of mining uses mercury and cyanide to separate gold from other materials. This mining has not been granted a mining title or an environmental license; thus, from the perspective of the Mining Code and the public institutions for environmental control, it is an illegal economic activity. Whether due to lack of political will or lack of institutional capacity, local and national authorities have had great difficulty controlling the influx and activity of illegal mechanised mining.
- (3) Large-scale mining: in La Toma, this type of mining has been granted legal permits but extraction has not yet started. This contention can be understood as the result of resistance by the local population and supporting social organisations. According to the Mining Code, this mining is characterised by its productivity, efficiency and technical capacity, standards that are more often acquired by multinational corporations. As shown by the Observatorio de Discriminación Racial (2011, 35), in the municipality of Suarez where La Toma is located, the most extensive mining licences have been granted as follows: 1717 ha to Andrés Rendle, 1404 ha to Multinacional Anglo Gold Ashanti, 314 ha to Raúl Fernando Ruiz and 99.7 ha to Héctor Jesús Sarria. Although this titling is legal as it is based on a formal process regulated by the national government, it does not necessarily receive a 'social license'.<sup>3</sup>

Zooming out from the local mining settings of La Toma, it is important to analyse how different mechanisms to promote extractive industries have led to profound transformations of landscapes across Latin America. Numerous communities have been disenfranchised from their lands and environmental assets, generating local violence, displacement and radical change to their traditional livelihoods. Since the early 1970s, many scholars criticising these impacts have identified the economic dependency on minerals, petroleum and other extractive industries as a curse for Latin America and other tropical regions.<sup>4</sup> The 'resource curse' argument emphasises the undesired stream of power relations that dependency

produces and reproduces, which overlooks citizenship rights and create underdevelopment rather than the promised modernisation, progress and development.<sup>5</sup>

Neoliberalism has impacted on legislative and institutional designs in relation to mining since the early 1990s, and is expressed in the promotion of foreign direct investment, the change of regulations, and the consequent limitation of state control over the exploitation of mineral assets. From a political economic perspective, the expansion of mining frontiers after the 1990s is the result of a spatial fix of capital to resolve the crisis of overaccumulation, where new geographies are intended to be included in the production–distribution–consumption process in order to access new resources as well as new consumer societies<sup>6</sup>. What follows is a process referred to as extractivist: capital flows accumulate outside of the site of extraction, and damages and risks increase for the local communities.<sup>7</sup>

In the early 2000s, a leftist turn in the politics of several governments in Latin America prompted new hope regarding the management of natural resources in the region. New political constitutions in Ecuador (2008) and Bolivia (2009); greater taxes and royalties in Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela; the re-nationalisation of several mining and energy companies in Argentina and Bolivia; and state funding of resource exploitation in Brazil were some of the signs of change.<sup>8</sup> Although revenues have been funnelled to social programs and profit from mining capital was not solely accumulated by the same private hands, the leftist turn has not proved different in its model of the exploitation of nature. On the contrary, some academics have argued that neo-extractivism has continued to open new geographies to resource exploitation.<sup>9</sup>

While the so-called Progressist (and leftist) turn has not been able to shift the dependency on raw materials, conventional neoliberal mining has been reinforced in Colombia, among other countries in the region.<sup>10</sup> In the year 2001, the Colombian government designed a new flexible and foreign investment-friendly mining code to strengthen the corporate extractive mining industry. As a result of this legislation, foreign mining investment increased from 627 million USD in 2003 to 2162 million USD in 2011.<sup>11</sup> In the same period, the mining contribution to the GDP enlarged from 1.8% in the year 2002, to 14.5% in 2011.<sup>12</sup> The number of mining concessions has shown a similar exponential increase from 2952 titles in 2004, to 8905 in the year 2010.<sup>13</sup> Also, concessions have shown an exponential increase in the total entitled area (see Table 1). On a regional scale, a study of the mining sector has shown that 241 mining titles have been granted and 350,447 ha have been titled in the Cauca department; by the year 2012, more than 1,106,665 new hectares were waiting for legal allocation.<sup>14</sup>

The mining boom has not only been reflected in national legislation and official national figures. It is also shown in the illegal ventures of miners who, guarded by illegal armies, use mechanised backhoes to excavate in the watersheds of strategic biomes such as the Amazon, the Pacific and the inter-Andean valley. While new extractivist geographies have been created, conflicts have multiplied. The term extractivist geographies refers to the uneven intersection between economy, ecology and society when an economic activity accumulates profit in places and by people different from the settings of resource-extraction, and results in direct or indirect impacts on local socio-ecosystems affected by contamination, degradation and other processes. Recent research by national NGOs has reported more than 274 collective actions opposing mining and oil projects between 2001 and 2011.<sup>15</sup> Another study developed by the Environmental Justice Organizations, Liabilities and Trade project in 2014

**Table 1.** Mining entitlement in Colombia 2004–2010.

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Number of mining titles	2952	3459	4283	5580	6603	8267	8905
Number of entitled hectares	1,040,323	1,202,915	1,569,001	2,416,199	3,418,893	4,385,886	4,805,940
Entitled national territory	0.9%	1.1%	1.4%	2.1%	3%	3.8%	4.2%

Source: Based on 'Censo minero departamental colombiano' (Misterio de Minas y Energía, 2010).

has shown that more than half of the 72 socio-environmental conflicts in the Andean region occurred as a consequence of the mining expansion.<sup>16</sup>

To understand the tension between legal and illegal mechanisms creating extractivist geographies in Colombia, we can benefit from the concept of dispossession as discussed by David Harvey<sup>17</sup>. According to his reflection on Rosa Luxemburg's explanation of primitive accumulation, capitalism is an open system that permanently needs an outside(r) to stabilise itself: for capitalism to expand it is necessary to incorporate cheaper inputs and wider markets. According to Luxemburg, as read by Harvey, capitalism satisfies these needs by forcing into the system new territories for extraction and new people for consumption. Harvey explains that, in order to incorporate new territories and consumers, two prominent mechanisms are utilised: first, extra-economic force (such as usurpation, spoliation, expropriation, fraudulent appropriation, robbery and fraudulent alienation); and second, legal and normative deprivation of local communities. In what follows, these mechanisms of dispossession will be used as analytical tools to examine (i) the legal mechanisms that have given a formal structure to extractivist geographies in Colombia, and (ii) the coercive practices that coexist and are exercised locally, and are meant to protect legal and illegal private accumulation.

First, I present the activist and participatory methodology applied in the research. Second, I discuss the national mining code, and the ethnic mining rights recognised in it. I then present the case of La Toma in order to describe how afrodescendants from the Alto Cauca have confronted a double territorial pressure of dispossession: by the legislation that has benefited private mining entitlement, and by the armed groups that have guarded the illegal mining of backhoes. Finally, I provide some conclusions on how the legal framework in relation to mining has, along with territorial violence, been used to dispossess local ethnic communities in Colombia.

## Methodology

This paper discusses some of the results of research into conflicts over land and water in Colombia and Brazil.<sup>18</sup> In Colombia, the research focused on the inter-Andean valley of the Cauca river, in a region known as the Alto Cauca in the south-west of the country. It followed a longitudinal methodology where many long and short visits have been made to the territory between 2009 and 2016.

The epistemological perspective in the investigation was to research *with* and *for*, rather than *on*, the social movement.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, this research aimed at contributing to the local contestation to extractivism by critically analysing the struggles over land-based resources. A Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach was embraced from an activist perspective, recognising that knowledge is a situated process with the participation of different actors

over time: local communities, academics, activists and public officers.<sup>20</sup> The collective crafting of knowledge has made it a communal good, shared and protected by the community. It is understood, therefore, that it has not been due to this particular research that social organisation and contestation has emerged, but rather this research aimed at contributing to the process of resistance.

Drawing on this perspective, the research aims and objectives were prior agreed upon with different Community Councils<sup>21</sup> from the Alto Cauca region, and with the Community Council from La Toma in particular. An explicit openness about political ideas and engagement with the social organisation was part of the ethical framework of the research. As the research agenda overlapped with the social movement's agenda, leaders and people from the local community acquired confidence towards the work, the use of the information and the long-term commitment to their struggles.

Formal research methods have included social mapping, participatory documentaries, archival research, workshops and interviews.<sup>22</sup> In 2012, I lived in a mining site for eight months, and I later visited the region frequently during periods of crisis upon request of local actors who asked me to be present. I have participated in demonstrations, facilitated dialogues between leaders and local, regional and national governments, made public press releases to support the communities' defence of their territories, and served as facilitator in the communities' dialogue with national governmental institutions and international human rights organisations.

### **The normative expansion of the Colombian mining frontier**

Addressing the Colombian legal framework on mining is crucial for understanding local conflicts over gold mining in the Alto Cauca. The following section provides an introduction to the Mining Code, and discusses some of the opportunities and restrictions that it brings to ethnic communities in terms of accessing mining resources.

The Mining Code was legislated in Law 685/01. Given the fact that mining regulation was a top priority to the government at that time, the Code previewed the formalisation of traditional mining by establishing Special Reserves (Article 31). These zones were meant to be granted to miners who could demonstrate that they had mined in a particular mining setting before 2001. This right is not restricted to ethnic communities and, it does not reflect, nor protect the cultural particularities of indigenous and afrodescendants. To overcome this limitation, and in coherence with the protection of ethnic communities condensed in the Political Constitution of 1991, the Mining Code recognised the possible allocation of Mining Zones to ethnic communities (Articles 121–136). However, even though the Code grants indigenous persons and afrodescendants the right to prior entitlement (Articles 124 and 133 respectively), it does not provide the communities the right to veto. In other words, even communities whose livelihoods do not include mining activities are trapped in a mining curse: when not displaced by the multinational capital, local inhabitants are forced to become miners, either under their own management through the priority right, or through exploitation by an actor foreign to the community.

Implications of the mining legislation do not stop with the forced creation of extractivist geographies. A community that has traditionally worked on mining, for example, and decides to make use of its right to prior allocation, is expected to meet certain requirements of productivity, efficiency and technical capacity that make it very difficult to uphold the

entitlement. As a consequence, economic standards do not only imply a forced change to increase productivity through changing technology, but also the search for external financial support to meet the requirements. The current mining legislation implies, therefore, a normative-forced transition from subsistence economy to an economic system that, based on accumulation of surplus, implicitly pulls (i) new private actors and (ii) foreign financial capital to the mining settings.

Recently, a network of NGOs has researched cases of indigenous communities from the Chocó region, who have demonstrated limited capacity to maintain their rights to ethnic mining entitlement.<sup>23</sup> According to the findings, even when a community is granted an Indigenous Mining Zone, the requirements on productivity make it difficult for the local miners to reach the standards. In addition, the communities are exposed to threats, murder, assaults and other forms of violence that generate coercive pressure over their territory and economic practices. Despite the mentioned difficulties, the right to prior entitlement is an aspiration of most ethnic mining communities as it is the only scenario they see through which they can continue to control their territory.

Against the aspiration to ethnic entitlement, a major difficulty arises regarding mining by afrodescendants in the Alto Cauca: the right to prior mining has been made dependent on collective land titling by the state land agency, INCODER<sup>24</sup> (Article 131 of the Mining Code). Although it sounds reasonable, this requirement constitutes a bureaucratic barrier to afrodescendants whose lands have not been formalised since Law 70 was formalised in 1993. While an unprecedented process of formalisation of collective land ownership has taken place between 1996 and 2015 in the Pacific coast<sup>25</sup>, there have not been any 'collective territories' granted title in the inter-Andean valley within the framework of the Law 70. As a result, ethnic mining entitlements have been restricted to communities from the Pacific coast, and ancestral mining communities from the inter-Andean valley have been excluded from such rights. These bureaucratic barriers constitute a primary reason that communities from this region have not been able to organise extractive projects that promise social, economic and ecologic sustainability.<sup>26</sup>

### **La Toma: a mining site of dispossession**

Besides legislation, the Colombian mining boom has been expressed through the actions of illegal backhoes that, with limited institutional control, extract gold from the river basins of important ecosystems such as the Amazon, the Pacific and inter-Andean valley. In the case of this last region, legal and illegal mining have contributed in different ways to local dispossession and socio-environmental conflicts. Even though more than 30 backhoes were seized after illegal gold extraction from the region in 2014, the proliferation of the backhoes has not been efficiently controlled by public institutions.<sup>27</sup> A relevant case in the government's struggle – and failure – to control illegal mining have been the threats to Ricardo Cifuentes, government official in Santander de Quilichao, who was forced to leave his job and the region in response to the threats to his life after denouncing the action of different backhoes in a mining site known as San Antonio.<sup>28</sup>

In the region, a salient conflict over the access and control of gold mining has been the one in La Toma District, which is home to more than 1300 households of afrodescendants. The first inhabitants of La Toma were brought as slaves to the local gold mines. After the abolition of slavery in 1851, many afrodescendants developed diverse livelihoods based on

agriculture, fishing and artisanal gold mining. Despite their long history of gold extraction, local inhabitants have disputed the control over their traditional mining practices and territory since 2001, against the interests of foreign mining corporations, illegal backhoe miners and the government. By defending ancestral small-scale gold mining, communities are opposing the pressure of the normative system – that has led to private mining titles – and are confronting the pressure of violence by illegal armed groups that have guarded both legal mining operations and illegal mining backhoes.

In the year 2000, the Ministry of Mines conceded the first mining title in La Toma to a private person, who aimed at selling the 99.7 ha allocated to him to the multinational corporation Anglo Gold Ashanti. By the year 2009, more than 95% of the 7000 ha that make up the district of La Toma, was granted in concession by the national government to private actors.<sup>29</sup> From the community's perspective, such entitlement was illegitimate as it was conceded during a period of regional control by the AUC paramilitaries, who violently restricted the community's autonomy to decide over their land-based resources. Controversially, as the mining territory was privatised via mining concessions, local artisanal miners were automatically declared illegal miners. The illegality of their mining was supported in the Mining Code that states that only formal title allocation makes mining legal.

As was set out in the previous section, and though the Mining Code allows Mining Zones for ethnic communities, the right to formalise ancestral mining has been made conditional upon the previous concession of collective territories to afrodescendant communities by the INCODER. In the case of La Toma, such formalisation of collective land ownership has not yet been granted due to the complex bureaucracy and a correlated lack of political will by local and national government. Ancestral miners have been rendered illegal as a result of a delay on the collective land entitlement. Such crafted bureaucracy resonates with the argument by Campbell in this collection. According to her research in the African context, neoliberal mining reforms have introduced normative categories that are uprooted from reality, creating a dichotomy between regulatory frameworks and empirical realities.<sup>30</sup>

Local miners respond to being categorised as 'illegal' by the authorities with indignation. Expressing the collective feeling, one inhabitant from La Toma declared:

One thing has to be said in relation to the concept 'illegal' ... because the Mining Code has placed us to be the 'illegal' whereas, in reality, the ones that are illegal are the multinationals (...) I want to formulate a question: is it us, the ones that have done traditional mining for centuries in this country, the ones who are illegal miners? For me, the illegals are the ones that make big environmental impacts across the country and only generate pollution. (Speech in the Encuentro Nacional de Consejos Comunitarios, Bogota 05/2012).

This reflection, directed to more than 1000 participants of a national congress of afrodescendant leaders in the year 2012, invites a critique on how legality does not imply legitimacy. As a matter of fact, legality can contradict what is considered legitimate when, as in the case of La Toma, traditional inhabitants are turned into illegal mining actors on their own land, even though they are practicing the same ancestral activity that the national constitution is supposed to protect. Making resourceful use of the options given to traditional miners by the Mining Code, in September 2015 the Mining Cooperative from Suarez, along with other social organisations, demanded that the Mining Ministry formalise traditional mining in the region under the legal concept of Special Reserves. However, this aim raised new difficulties: the ministry pushed miners to accept individual formalisation of the mining extraction, while communities and social organisations opposed such an approach because it did not reflect



the collectiveness performed in mining and it exposed local inhabitants to violent pressures from private parties who may have been interested in making use of the formalisation granted individually.

Similar pressures have indeed been experienced by local miners who have confronted the violent entry of backhoes into the territory (particularly the river 'Ovejas') since 1997. Guarded by illegal armed groups, the 'retreros', named after their ownership and operation of backhoes (*retroexcavadoras* in Spanish), have made it very challenging for the local afro-descendants to exercise territorial control. A local leader said it clearly:

Mining and territorial governance is complex because one can say to the foreign miners 'you do not enter here' but in practice one must recognize that the armed conflict, and what the paramilitaries are doing through their politics of fear and terror, is actually implementing by force a local policy of extraction. (Interview with a leader from the *Consejo Comunitario* of La Toma, Bogota 05/2012)

The incursion of illegal backhoes, the granting of mining permits to multinationals and private parties, and the legal framework to govern the subsoil that has restricted access to land and gold by local afrodescendants, have resulted in the unequal allocation of, and access to land-based resources in the Alto Cauca. The subsequent dispossession of the local community has different variants: (i) dispossession of land by the mining titles granted to private actors; (ii) dispossession of land-based resources by the incursion of backhoes that have reduced the number and quality of places for fishing and artisanal mining on the Ovejas river bank;<sup>31</sup> (iii) dispossession of collective land uses and cultural practices resulting from the postponement of collective land entitlement and collective mining licensing; and (iv) dispossession of the people's ability to control land and land-based resources due to the presence of illegal armies, and the threats to, and murders of community members that have come with it.

## Conclusions

The analysis of the ethnic component of the Mining Code has exposed some of the practical difficulties in the normative regime to incorporating traditional extractive practices of afro-descendant mining communities. First, the options given to ethnic communities that are settled in mining-rich territories are to become legal miners or accept that mining titles be granted to foreign parties; alternatives to mining are not considered, even when traditional livelihoods are not centred around mining. As a result, formalisation runs the risk of creating new extractivist geographies and mining communities, while it can change the equilibrium of traditional livelihoods characterised by diversity. In other words, within this juridical context, communities with diversified economies may be forced to commence or intensify mining, displacing economic activities that have traditionally been complementary to mining. Second, formal pressures of productivity and efficiency have created the risk of forcing a transition in the local economies and landscapes that may have major impacts on the traditional practices and worldviews of ethnic communities. It is not the wealth in underground resources, then, that curses the local communities. Political decisions are being taken, that result in the community having to face restrictions on their autonomy in ancestral territories and traditional practices.

In the case of afrodescendant communities from the Alto Cauca, the situation has an additional variant: collective land-titling, granted by the Law 70 of 1993, has been delayed

for more than 20 years. Until collective land formalisation is granted to afrodescendant communities in the region, they are legally disqualified as subjects of prior mining entitlement and, consequently, are more exposed to the possible impacts of mining by multinational and private actors. Even though local communities in the Alto Cauca are ancestral miners, the on-paper opportunity given by the Mining Code to formalise their extraction of gold has not granted real access to mining resources. As a result of the denial of their rights to land and gold, communities in the Alto Cauca are forced to face a double bureaucracy: one, to formalise their collective land ownership; and two, to formalise their mining activities.

Alternatively, local miners have attempted a different form of mining formalisation through a Special Reserve. Though this legal resource has been used by the local community to limit mining allocation to private parties, this concept has proven insufficient to acknowledge the collective practices structuring the mining tradition of ethnic communities in the region. The several difficulties found in the legal system to legalise local ancestral mining and to stop the government's mining allocation to multinational and private parties, have resulted in the need to differentiate what is legal from what is legitimate. While legality has been experienced as a mechanism of dispossession, the concept of legitimacy can be framed as an oppositional discourse by local communities to defend their culture, territory and ethnic rights.

Besides the juridical system that limits access to land and mining by afrodescendant communities in the Alto Cauca, another prominent mechanism used to control land-based resources has been the para-State military violence that has paralleled and defended legal mining entitlement, and guarded illegal mining extraction. The uneven co-relation has been denounced by the community from La Toma, who has characterised the mining entitlement as illegitimate because it took place while the community was victimised by the AUC paramilitary group. Conscious of the social and ecological damage, local communities have also requested local authorities to stop illegal gold extraction by the backhoes.

Dispossession in the Alto Cauca has occurred through a combination of normative and violent mechanisms. While the illegal actions of the backhoes are expanding the mining frontier beyond State control, dispossession has also resulted from the norms that aim to enhance foreign corporate capital and large-scale mining projects. Accumulation by dispossession, in the case described here, has not only been shown to be coercive, but also legalised through a sophisticated structure of norms that has restricted the communities' autonomy to decide over their resources and territory. This paper has argued that normative and coercive mechanisms have been complementary in dispossessing ancestral miners from their right to collective land, to land-based resources, to their traditional mining culture and to exercise control over their territory.

By addressing the complexity of extractivist geographies in Colombia, this article contributes to our understanding of the internal armed conflict in two ways: first, it helps to clarify how the armed conflict has occurred in practice, what interests have driven it, and which actors have been responsible. Secondly, it provides empirical support to the official recognition of the existence of subjacent factors to the internal armed conflict in the case of afrodescendant communities whenever a legal or illegal economic activity has (i) been supported by an illegal army and (ii) has affected the human rights of an afrodescendant community (based on the Decree 4635 of 2011, complementary to the Victim's Law). In the context of the current peace dialogues, it can be argued that an assertive transition to 'peace'

may only be achieved once the conflicts over mining and over other land-based resources are not only accepted as structural to the historical internal armed conflict, but also addressed adequately by the State.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, social participation should be seriously considered while effective mechanisms to grant ethnic rights should be established, ones that reflect clear political and institutional will, as well as sufficient financial capacity.

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## Notes on contributor

**Irene Vélez-Torres** is a professor in EIDENAR, Universidad del Valle, and has a PhD in Human and Political Geography, University of Copenhagen. She has worked on the critical analysis of socio-environmental conflicts, rural–urban migration, ethnicity and social movements in Latin America. She has explored participatory and interdisciplinary methodologies in order to create knowledge that is valuable for communities as well as for academia. Vélez-Torres' latest publications are: Vélez-Torres, Irene. 2014. 'Dimensiones del extractivismo minero en Colombia. Análisis de las racionalidades de gobierno durante la última década.' *Análisis Político* 82: 45–57; Vélez-Torres, Irene & Varela, Daniel. 2014. 'Between the Paternalistic and the Neoliberal State. Dispossession and Resistance in Afro-descendant Communities of the Upper Cauca, Colombia.' *Latin American Perspectives* 41 (6): 9–26; Vélez-Torres, Irene & Márquez, Francia. 2014. 'Territorios para la autonomía de los pueblos e ¿Internet para qué? Reflexiones sobre procesos comunicativos de organizaciones afrodescendientes en Colombia' En: Valencia, Juan y García, Claudia Pilar (Eds.). *Movimientos sociales e internet*. Bogotá: Editorial Pontificia Universidad Javeriana; Vélez-Torres, Irene. 2014. 'Governmental extractivism in Colombia: Legislation, securitization and the local settings of mining control.' *Political Geography* 38: 68–78; and Vélez-Torres, Irene & Agergaar, Jytte. 2014. 'Political remittances, connectivity and the trans-local politics of place: an alternative approach to the dominant narratives on 'displacement' in Colombia.' *Geoforum* 53: 116–125.

## Notes

1. Afrodescendants, Afro-Colombian or black communities are considered in Colombia ethnic groups that, next to indigenous and Rom communities, have been granted differentiated ethnic rights. According to the Political Constitution of 1991, the nation was recognised as culturally diverse and the State was given the legal responsibility to protect ethnic communities and their territories. As declared in Law 70/1993, among other ethnic rights granted to afrodescendants, the right to *collective territory* is prominent as territory is considered a necessary space for the cultural reproduction and the well-being of these groups. To read about the ways afrodescendants have self-identify and socially organise since 1970 to claim rights such as territory, culture and autonomy, see Restrepo, *Etnización de la negritud*.
2. Ethnographic research on the paramilitary massacre and displacement in this region is presented in Jimeno et al., "Experiencias de violencia".
3. This concept implies that the mining entitlement is not legitimate in the eyes of the local community.
4. A historical analysis of dependency in the Latin American can be found in Mignolo, "Philosophy and the Colonial"; and Acosta, "Extractivism and Neextractivism".

5. To examine dependency from the perspective of citizenship, see Nem Singh, "Reconstituting the Neoliberal State".
6. More on the behaviour of mining in the neoliberal context: Gordon and Webber, "Imperialism and Resistance," 63–87; and Bridge, "Mapping the bonanza," 406–21.
7. To approach the debate on extractivism, see Gudynas, "Transitions to Post-extractivism"; and Martínez Alier, "Los conflictos ecológico-distributivos".
8. Gudynas, "La ecología política del progresismo," 147–67.
9. An interesting analysis of the limits encountered by leftist governments to divert from neoliberalism can be accessed in Andreucci and Radhuber, "Limits to 'counter-neoliberal' Reform". Also, on the governmental challenges to deal with extractive industries in Latin America, see Gudynas, "Transitions to Post-extractivism".
10. A comparative analysis of extractivism in Colombia and Peru has been presented by Velez-Torres and Ruiz, "Extractivismo neoliberal minero".
11. Ministerio de Minas y Energía, "Censo minero departamental."
12. The following video presents one of the dialogue scenarios created between stakeholders: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Twlm8nLQNmc&feature=youtu.be>.
13. El nuevo siglo, "Crece aporte de minería al PIB."
14. For the numbers of titles and hectares allocated to private and multinational mining in Colombia, see Duarte, *Situación minera en los territorios campesinos*.
15. CINEP & PPP, *Minería, conflictos sociales*.
16. Perez, "Conflictos ambientales en Colombia."
17. While Chapter 27 of *Capital by Marx* provides a sharp explanation on accumulation by dispossession in the context of Primitive Accumulation, I would like to focus on the interpretation made by David Harvey in *The New Imperialism*.
18. The project, financed by NWO–CoCoON, took place between 2010 and 2015. See: <http://www.landsandrights.blog.com/>.
19. On different relationships with social movements in the context of research, see Ballard et al., "Globalization, Marginalization and Contemporary Movements", 615–34.
20. Some of the researchers who have discussed an activist, organic, participative and collaborative research are Fals, "Investigating Reality in Order to Transform it", 33–55; Hale, "Activist Research", 96–120; Katz, "Vagabond Capitalism", 709–28; and Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology", 218–29.
21. The Community Council (Consejo Comunitario in Spanish) is the figure created in 1993 by the Law 70 to formalise the traditional, social and political organisation of Afro-Colombian communities. Councils gather yearly in assemblies to take major decisions for the community and the territory, and are administrated through a board of directors elected every year.
22. Velez-Torres, "Reflections on a Participatory Documentary Process", 299–306; and Velez-Torres et al., "Cartografía social", 59–73.
23. ABC Colombia, CINEP, and Tierra Digna, *Alimentando el conflicto en Colombia*.
24. INCODER is the public institution responsible for formalising land ownership.
25. On the land titling process in the Pacific region, see Offen, "The Territorial Turn"; and Restrepo, *Etnización de la negritud*.
26. An example of alternative mining projects that are meant to be more sustainable and socially equitable is Oro Verde in the Chocó region. For more information, go to the GOMIAM project in: <http://www.gomiam.org>.
27. Several media have reported drawing from critical research on the environmental impact of illegal mining. See: El espectador, "Ejército destruye seis retroexcavadoras"; Proclama del cauca, "Incautadas máquinas retroexcavadoras"; and Tenthoff, "Siguiendo la ruta de la minería"; Semana, *La guerra contra la nueva coca*.
28. Vanguardia.com, "Defensoría llamó la atención."
29. On local mining entitlement: Observatorio de discriminación racial, *La disputa por los recursos*.
30. Campbell, "Distancing from an Investment-led Perspective".

31. To address the discussion on dispossession of land-based resources in terms of quantity and quality, see Bebbington et al., "Mining and Social Movements", 2888–905; and Bebbington, "Underground Political Ecologies".
32. As an illustration of the connection between peace and land-based conflicts, afrodescendant communities agreed on not going to La Habana, where the talks with the FARC are talking place, arguing not only that the dialogue has gone too far without their participation, but that the government has failed in accomplishing old and recent agreements to grant the rights of ethnic communities. See Elmundo.com, "Afrodescendientes no acompañarán la mesa."

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