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Water Grabbing in the Cauca Basin: The Capitalist Exploitation of Water and Dispossession of Afro-Descendant Communities

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ABSTRACT: This article examines water grabbing in the Alto Cauca in Colombia as a form of accumulation through ethnicised and racialised environmental dispossession in the capitalist system. Characterised by privatisation and historical trends of exclusion, this violent accumulation model has shaped a particular form of environmental racism leading to negative impacts experienced in historically marginalised Afro-descendant local communities. Analyzing two development projects in the upper watershed of the Cauca river – the Agua Blanca Irrigation District Project and a Project for Diverting the River Cauca – the article concludes that many actors are responsible for the negative effects of the regional development model. These include the state, national and foreign private companies, and powerful international economic stakeholders.

KEYWORDS: Water grabbing, dispossession, Afro-descendants, environmental racism, socio-environmental conflicts, Colombia

INTRODUCTION

The Alto Cauca is a valley in Colombia formed by the Cauca river passing between the central and western mountain chains towards the Pacific. With a rough topography, the Alto Cauca descends from the upstream colonial city of Popayan to the downstream, impoverished district of Aguablanca in the city of Cali. According to the Census of 2005 (DANE, 2005), the Afro-descendant population in the Cauca Department stands at around 22% and the indigenous population 21%. Despite comprising more than 40% of the local population, ethnic inhabitants have been marginalised from official political participation¹ and their livelihoods have been affected negatively by territorial planning that has largely served the regional elites.

Historically, the economic interests of downstream elites from the Valle del Cauca Department have taken priority over the livelihoods of impoverished ethnic communities upstream, as the former's private interests in agro-industry, electric generation, and large-scale gold mining have tended to shape the socio-ecological dynamic of the Cauca watershed. Over the last six decades, the state has been the private sector's most important ally, and many public policies have been designed to favour foreign and domestic private actors. Between 1950 and 1970, the *hacendados*² defined the expansion of the sugarcane agro-industry as a regional priority, so regional socioeconomic development was unequally

¹ Since popular elections were established in 1991, only one indigenous governor, Floro Alberto Tunubala Paja (2001-2003), has been elected amid great opposition from traditional hacendados. No Afro-descendant has ever been voted into power.

² Traditional landowners, descendants of *criolla* families that inherited land in the geographical valley of the Cauca river when Nueva Granada was founded. Due to the lack of effective agrarian reforms, these families continue to own much of the land and most of the businesses in the region today (Fajardo, 2002). Current land grabbing by agro-industries can therefore be seen as a trend in the exclusion and de-territorialisation of ethnic communities inherited from colonial times and headed by regional economic and politic elites.

distributed in favour of economic consolidation downstream³ of the Cauca river, while generating negative impacts on the environment and the communities upstream. Such spatial distribution has been inherited from colonial times when the haciendas were established downstream of the basin and indigenous and African slaves who had escaped were forced to settle upstream in less accessible and less favourable conditions. Later, in 1980, the building of the Salvajina dam was prioritised, with state support, by the hacendados to prevent the river flooding over the agricultural lands downstream and to generate hydropower upstream. The impacts of a changing river regime on the local population were neither accounted for nor addressed. Between 1990 and 2000, the national privatisation boom encouraged multinational corporations to enter the region aggressively in order to privatise the Salvajina dam and the gold-mining extractive industry upstream. Afro-descendant and indigenous communities, who had lost territory downstream during colonial times, have since been subject to growing pressure exerted by the private sector, which is increasingly looking upstream to expand its production and extractive activities.

Historically, the hacendados' interests, in alignment with the state, have tended to regulate land acquisition and administration downstream while neglecting the less accessible lands upstream. During the last few decades, however, private economic interests have been increasingly associated with violent territorial disputes and militarisation in the Alto (high) Cauca. Although guerrillas have been active in the region since 1970, it was only in 2000 – when the AUC paramilitary⁴ started granting territorial control to the multinationals Union Fenosa, Anglo Gold Ashanti, and the Smurfit Kappa Group – that violent confrontations began to affect local ethnic populations (Molano, 2009; Gonzalez Posso, 2011). Since 2004, paramilitary and guerrilla forces have expanded their actions and launched independent ventures related to the illegal extraction of gold and the production and transportation of cocaine. In the meantime, local communities upstream have focused their social organisation on resisting large-scale extraction activities, limiting the expansion of private electricity generation, and opposing the permanent military pressure of hostile forces in the territory.

The local ethnic population's efforts to reclaim their rights to land and water, and to self-determine a model of life independent of the hegemony of the hacendados' capitalism, are grounded in the following argument. Currently, some 40% of the residents in the Alto Cauca are self-employed in traditional work related to farming, mining, and fishing (Urrea, 2010), which allows some to identify themselves as 'agro-miners' and gives them a certain degree of economic and labour autonomy. When communities and local organisations in the Alto Cauca claim recognition of their ethnic identity as agro-miners, they are also demanding respect for their living space, showing that 'territory'⁵ is the dynamic in which traditional culture shapes local space and vice versa. In addition, in order to grant communities ethnic rights, their local space must be understood in its socio-ecological complexity and must also be protected as the economic and cultural foundation of the local Afro-descendant society. In this context, water and land grabbing represents the discriminatory formation of a regional waterscape in which (i)

³ For the purposes of this article, 'downstream' refers to areas that lie towards the lower/southern part of the Cauca basin, rather than 'downstream' in the sense of the ocean. Similarly, 'upstream' comprises those areas that lie towards the higher/northern part of the basin.

⁴ That is, illegal armed groups from the far right. Their roots go back to the violence that has been used historically by national elites to protect their economic and political privileges. Their organisation was formalised in the 1980s in response to the advantages that the state was allegedly granting to insurgent groups. In 1996, they were consolidated around the AUC (United Self-Defence Group of Colombia) (Velázquez, 2007; Grajales, 2011). Paradoxically, after the Programme for Economic Reintegration, created in 2002 during the presidency of Álvaro Uribe Velez (Varela, 2010), paramilitary groups increased both in number and geographical range. Their organisation has also been revealed in the BACRIM (emerging criminal gangs) and other paramilitary groups such as *Rastrojos*, *Aguilas Negras*, and *Los Paisas*, among others (Gonzalez Posso, 2011).

⁵ Following Peluso and Lund (2011), I invoke the collective aspect in the term 'territory' as a discourse that claims and disputes control over production and dwelling practices in the physical and social space of autonomy, dignity, and life. Considering the holistic approach of Afro-descendant communities in the Alto Cauca (Escobar, 2000), expressed in their livelihoods and quotidian discourses to defend lands and rivers, I take water and land as being indiscernible biophysical and cultural assets of the territory.

the Cauca river is regulated to grant private profits to hacendados, (ii) the Salvajina dam is privatised to favour multinationals, and (iii) state policies and regional militarisation justify and strengthen foreign investments.

This article critically analyzes water grabbing, not from a technical perspective but as historical exercises of power in the Alto Cauca that have led to the dispossession of local Afro-descendant communities in favour of the capitalist expansion of water-based projects. Using a political ecology approach, I show how the linked processes of economic development, political power, and environmental change are transgressing the rights of local Afro-descendant communities. This approach aims to provide an empirical understanding of regional water-based projects and of the bureaucracies and private groups leading the privatisation agenda. By analyzing the history of the dispossession of local communities in the Cauca watershed, my objective is to contribute to theoretical debates in political ecology by showing how water and land grabbing are connected to environmental racism.

The article is organised into five sections. Following this introduction, I go on to frame conceptual debates on dam building and privatisation as forms of dispossession and environmental racism. I then contextualise the region geographically and historically, before explaining the participatory methodology used. In the fourth section, I propose a periodisation of the history of regional dispossession based on the characterisation of five phases, from the conception of the development model in 1950 up to the sale of the shares of the Spanish multinational Union Fenosa to national companies in 2010. Finally, I conclude that regional landscapes and waterscapes have been produced within a historical context over power between private elites and local communities battling 'unwanted development' (McGee, 2010). Since private economic interests and political power have transgressed the rights of local Afro-descendant communities to remain in, use, and reproduce their culture and territory, a socio-environmental debt to these communities must be recognised and repaid by private companies and the Colombian state, with international stakeholders being held jointly responsible.

ETHNICISED AND RACIALISED PRACTICES OF DISPOSSESSION

Dams and other large-scale development projects have long been the subject of controversy in Latin America and elsewhere in the global south due to their impacts on the lives, health, resources, and cultures of local communities (Derman and Ferguson, 1995; McDonald-Wilmsen and Webber, 2010; McGee, 2010; Molle, 2007). By changing hydrological cycles, dams disrupt water-based production systems, especially communities' territory-based livelihoods associated with fishing, seasonal agriculture, hunting, and riverine mining. The failure to account for these impacts in Cambodia (Hughes, 2008), Mozambique, Brazil, and other countries in the global south (Richter et al., 2010) indicates that it has been impossible in practice and analytically difficult – given that it is unfeasible to measure quantitatively the socio-cultural and ecological goods impacted – to evaluate accurately the net costs and benefits of dams, as well as the feasibility of resettlements and social adaption (McDonald-Wilmsen and Webber, 2010).

While this article exposes and criticises the negative effects of constructing and operating the Salvajina dam in Colombia, it seeks to go beyond these points to demonstrate the strategies and impacts of an elitist and racist model of regional development. In this respect, it shows that the process of privatisation that Latin America underwent in the 1990s (Lobina and Hall, 2007), and which occurred locally in the privatisation of the Salvajina dam, consolidated the dispossession of the Cauca river initiated four decades earlier. In 2000, this privatisation was followed by the decisive incursion of multinational corporations into the territory and the simultaneous escalation of paramilitary violence in the zone, demonstrating how foreign investment was legally promoted by national legislation while illegally guaranteed by regional militarisation.

Privatisation reforms introduced in Latin American countries during the late 1960s, and then consolidated during the early 1990s, affected former irrigation strategies and water distribution

systems (Gelles, 2004). The privatisation of dams and water supply systems has been opposed and criticised (Wester et al., 2009; Spronk and Webber, 2007) as the latest phase of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2007), set in motion in Latin America under the tutelage of US neoliberal ideology and implemented through international financial institutions' policies (Spronk and Webber, 2007). Private interests of accumulation underlie the impoverishment of local communities and historically marginalised ethnic groups when such projects generate unequal access to socio-ecological goods, favouring instead the private sector. This segregation is not exclusive but is importantly correlated with ethnicity and social practices of racism. Confronting this issue therefore requires a critical understanding of the history of socioeconomic practices surrounding the exclusion of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities as a legacy of colonial times (Grajales, 2011).

The concept of environmental racism emerged in the US in the Afro-American social movement in 1970 to denounce the inequalities faced by black communities living in devalued, polluted, and deprived areas (Leroy, 2006) and disproportionately exposed to toxic substances, dirt, and risk (Bullard and Hendrix, 1987; Bullard, 1993). This conceptualisation of environmental racism does not deny other forms of socioeconomic marginalisation, but it does recognise that the ability to access socio-environmental goods differs with ethnicity, as it does with class and gender (Leroy, 2006). It is therefore possible to reconstruct a critical history and geography of ethnicised and racialised⁶ societies and territories. By correlating ethnic marginalisation with practices of dispossession, environmental racism emerges as a struggle that allows ethnic communities to dispute their ascribed identity against exclusionist discourses of ethnicity and race. Simultaneously, as a concept, environmental racism makes it possible to demonstrate geopolitics structuring the relationship between the processes of ethnic identification (Hall, 2003) and the distribution of environmental goods, services, and risks.

The notion of environmental racism allows one to analyze the particularities of ethnic marginalisation and its correlation with the misappropriation of ethnic communities' socio-environmental commons. In Colombia, this relationship can be seen as an inherited, unequal power relation between slaves and colonialists, actualised in the modern capitalist system through social oppression and the territorial dispossession of indigenous and Afro-descendants. In the case of the Alto Cauca, this dispossession refers simultaneously to land and water grabbing, since the communities that inhabit the lands upstream conceive of this territory as a unit in which the river is inseparable from the surrounding land. Traditional livelihoods, simultaneously associated with fishing, agriculture, and riverine gold extraction, have become paramount in the ethnic identity ascribed to Afro-descendants. For them, being and living in the Alto Cauca means (i) having access to water (for consumption and other uses) and (ii) collectively owning the land. As a cultural principle and practical guideline for territorial management, this unity has been expressed explicitly in public claims by communities and social organisations.⁷

Although the capitalist rationale disaggregates the economic value of water and land when making capital out of commons, regional grabbing affects the whole water and land configuration of territories, threatening the cultural survival of local inhabitants. Environmental racism becomes, in this context, a useful concept with which to criticise the differentiated effects of the capitalist system on the historically impoverished sections of society in the Alto Cauca – the 'wretched of the earth' since colonial times (Fanon, 1963). At the same time, its activist practice renews knowledge and power disputes by local communities when creating tools to understand and struggle against impoverishment

⁶ I will use the category 'ethnicised/racialised' without debating possible conceptual differences between race and ethnicity, given that, first, both are social constructions marked in Latin America by historical processes of discrimination and impoverishment (Wade, 2010) and, second, that racist practices shaping water and land grabbing in Colombia are based on simultaneous discourses of ethnicity and race.

⁷ More information can be found in www.renacientes.org. In the Alto Cauca, the relationship between land and water also has a historical dimension as far as the *palenques* (the earliest settlements and forms of social organisation of the freed blacks) that were established along the riverbanks are concerned; their gold-mining practices allowed some Afro-descendants to buy their freedom and purchase land.

by elites. The geopolitical dimension of environmental racism helps one comprehend the economic geography of territories in which land use, industrial development, and urbanisation patterns (Pulido, 2000) promote differentiated and discriminatory formations of society based on ethnicised and racialised practices of water and land grabbing. Due to the accumulation by private actors in the Alto Cauca, I will typify 'grabbing' as a particular form of accumulation through ethnicised and racialised environmental dispossession in the capitalist system (Harvey, 2007).

In Colombia, ethnicised and racialised territories have been sculpted by violence. By mobilising both violent and social forms of capital, guerrilla and paramilitaries have become constitutive elements of accumulation and economic development in the process of state formation (Grajales, 2011). Violence does not reflect the absence or weakness of the state, but it is a particular dynamic of state formation in which illegal armed groups produce and use displacement (Querubin and Ibáñez, 2004) and water and land grabbing as a means to accumulate, control, and exploit rural land and environmental goods and services to favour the private interests of elites. Not only have these actors been key pieces in the formation of the state, their violent processes of governance and territory building have also defined the singularity of the Colombian state. As Derman and Ferguson argue (1995) in the case of dispossessed fishing communities on lake Malawi, human rights violations in Colombia have also resulted from a violent political context that is organic to the state, which has supported accumulation by economic elites through racist practices of water and land grabbing.

METHODOLOGY

This article builds on fieldwork conducted using participatory action research (Fals Borda, 1979, 2001; Kondon, 2005) with Afro-descendant communities and social organisations from the Alto Cauca from 2009 to 2011. Despite being neither indigenous nor Afro-descendant, I have built academic, political, and affective relationships with certain ethnic communities and social organisations in order to create opportunities for social change together. Having studied in a public university and as part of the environmentalist movement, I have undertaken the challenge of contributing as an academic to strengthen the knowledge on ethnicity and socio-environmental conflict in Colombia and provide local communities with new tools of knowledge and power to support them, and help protect their lives, rights, and territories. The complexity of the context in the Alto Cauca, community demands, and my ethical responsibility led me to position myself politically as a citizen researcher (Jimeno, 2008), acting socially beyond academic interests (Hale, 2006) to confront the injustices faced by local communities and organisations. In this sense, I created spaces for reflection and research into socio-environmental conflicts with the local inhabitants and their leaders. As an organic intellectual (Gramsci, 2005), I have taken part in the people's organisational processes and mobilisation.

The principal organisations and communities with which I worked in the last few years were the PCN (the Black Communities' Process), the Palenke del Alto Cauca (a regional coalition of Afro-descendant community councils), and the community council in La Toma. Considering gender and generation differences, several methods were applied: (i) workshops to analyze the current situation and construct future community plans; (ii) workshops based on memory to reconstruct timelines; (iii) social cartography to construct maps of environmental assets and territorial conflicts; (iv) open-ended interviews and informal conversations about territorial integration; and (v) fact-finding missions to verify conflicts and provide permanent support to local and regional organisational processes. The workshops, cartography, interviews, and all formal and informal meetings were carried out in the Alto Cauca territory, either in people's homes or in organisational spaces where leaders meet. To identify the discourses of the government and private sector, I conducted an in-depth analysis of official annual reports, project reports, press releases, laws, stockholder structures of private companies, development plans, and general information on official websites.

In addition to the academic results and products of this research, some materials have been produced as useful tools for the community. These products were conceived, socialised, and adjusted

during the research process, and the final versions were returned to the participants and local leaders: (i) a 52-minute participatory documentary made with 14 young local participants, (ii) a book describing and analysing the process of social cartography, (iii) a two-metre-wide poster illustrating a timeline of the local history of socio-environmental conflicts confronting the community, (iv) copies of the social maps drawn by different groups, and (v) technical maps of the territory based on the social cartography and fact-finding missions. These materials are being used for communicative, pedagogical, and political purposes by local leaders, and have also been shown and saved by members of the community as a material memory of the research process and their own record of the struggle.

THE CONTEXT OF THE ALTO CAUCA

The Alto Cauca symbolises the national inequality in rural property that is a legacy of colonial times, Colombia being one of the most unequal countries in the world with a Gini coefficient for land ownership of 0.86 (Grajales, 2011). In the Alto Cauca, the titling of land for the ethnic population accounts for less than 30% of the land in Cauca Department (Gamarra, 2007). Moreover, the quality of titled land is poor in terms of its accessibility and fertility. Although it is true that the hacendados claim they are the legal owners of the land, historically its inhabitants have been ethnic communities who defend their right to be counted as legitimate inhabitants of the territory and legal users of its goods and services.

As a consequence of the historical dispute between regional elites and the ethnic local people, the Alto Cauca is home to important ethnic organisations such as CRIC (Regional Indigenous Council in Cauca), ACIN (Association of *Indigenous Cabildos*⁸ from northern Cauca), and PCN (the Black Communities' Process), as well as the principal social movements from the last decade in Colombia, namely Indigenous and Popular Minga and the People's Congress. The history of dispossession (Harvey, 2007) and resistance, particularly the struggle to recognise and redress the damage caused by the Salvajina dam, has led local communities to band together as agents of a global civil society (Clark et al., 2005). As a case in point, the PCN has stood out in the anti-globalisation movement as one of the most representative grassroots Afro-descendant organisations in Colombia (Escobar, 2008).

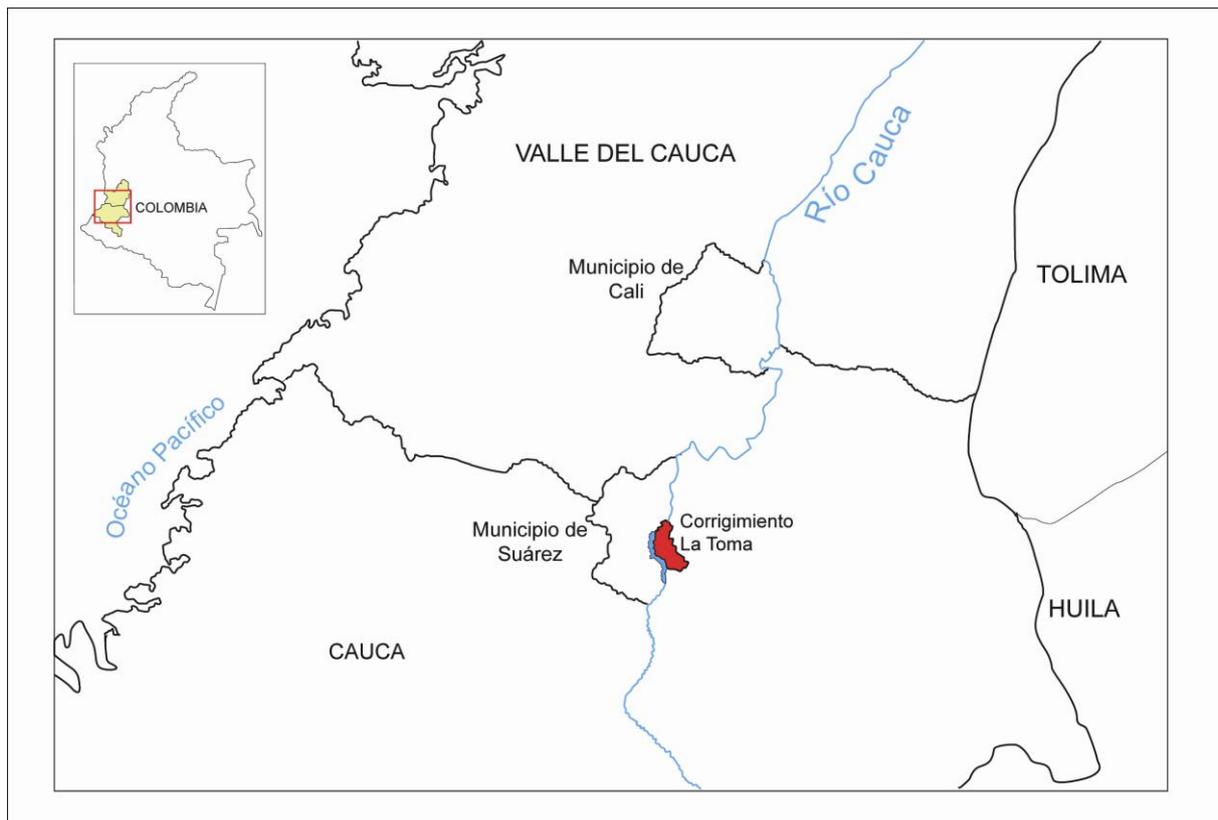
Although the Political Constitution of 1991 recognises the territorial rights of Afro-descendant communities, and Law 70 of 1993 promotes the social and legal mobilisation of their ethnicity (Restrepo, 2002), neither really constitutes a functional strategy (Friedman, 2002). Rather, the legislation merely repositions Afro-descendants' ancestral memory and identity (Ng'weno, 2007). By recognising Colombia as a multi-ethnic nation, the Political Constitution has drawn a new scenario in which the cultural rights of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities have been shaped by quotidian practices, social mobilisation, and juridical processes. Using ethnicity as a tool to vindicate and make political claims regarding communities' rights does not mean questioning the legitimacy of ethnic identity; instead, it means recognising multiple processes of ethnic identification (Hall, 2003) that are as symbolic as they are political, rooted both in communities' history and contextualised needs. Since 1993, community mobilisation in the Alto Cauca has been accompanied by its juridical counterpart – seen in efforts to prevent the diversion of the Ovejas river into the Salvajina dam and to demand that EPSA produce an environmental management plan for Salvajina with prior and informed consultation. In both cases, the juridical argument was based on the need to guarantee ethnic rights and to prevent adverse impacts on cultural traditions.

The Alto Cauca hosts the largest industrial and food conglomerate in Colombia, which has benefited from development projects promoted in the upper watershed of the Cauca river since 1950 by large landholders downstream. The main projects that have transformed the economic geography, hydrology, and regional landscape are the Agua Blanca Irrigation District Project in the municipality of Cali, Valle

⁸ Indigenous Cabildos is the autonomous social and political authority in territories of indigenous communities as recognized in the Political Constitution of 1991 (PC Articles 246 and 330).

del Cauca Department, and the Project for Regulating the River Cauca, which included the construction of Salvajina in the municipality of Suarez, Cauca Department – the country’s first multipurpose dam (see figure 1). It is not coincidental that this region is currently an important site of confrontation in Colombia’s internal armed conflict (Marin Correa, 2011) and heavy rural-to-urban migration is being reported (Urrea, 2010). The cities of Cali and Popayan in Alto Cauca are the largest centres receiving displaced people from the south-western part of the country (Barbary and Urrea, 2004).

Figure 1. Map of Alto Cauca showing the locations of La Toma, Suarez, and Cali.



In 1995, the Paez Law (Law 218) decreed economic measures to support industrial growth in the Cauca region (Urrea, 2010). Contrary to what was originally intended, it has driven away the more vulnerable segments of the population, primarily to the neighbouring Valle del Cauca and Bogotá (Observatorio Politico, 2008). This migration is a result of people’s need to flee the violence and an attempt to escape their increasing impoverishment. According to the 2005 census, almost half (46.4%) the households surveyed reported unfulfilled basic needs in the Cauca Department (DANE, 2005). As such, the Afro-descendant migrant populations have been forced into overcrowded conditions in urban peripheries, where choosing between informal work, unemployment, and delinquency is a daily triple dilemma (Tovar, 2008).

Economic pressure on territories upstream during the last six decades has led to the spatial segregation of the benefits and damages of water-based projects in the Cauca basin. From the perspective of political ecology, conflicts in the Alto Cauca refer to access to and ownership of the land, the latter understood as territory rather than as capital for private accumulation. The connection between the history of exploitation and dispossession (Harvey, 2007), and the existing de-territorialisation and expropriation of environmental goods and services from local populations, illustrates a local environmental racism. Accordingly, these communities are rendered recipients of the

economic system's negative externalities (Martinez-Allier, 2002), while their rights tend to become invisible or are denied and violated (Sánchez, 2011).

BETWEEN SALVAJINA AND THE AGUA BLANCA IRRIGATION DISTRICT: A CHRONOLOGY OF REGIONAL DISPOSSESSION

Complexities involved in territorial control call for a more in-depth understanding of the historical trajectories, tactics, and instruments used by powerful actors in regional planning (Peluso and Lund, 2011). In the case of the Alto Cauca, the scale chosen to analyze such bureaucracies and power dynamics was the high basin of the Cauca river in order to demonstrate not only the institutional arrangements, but also the history of water and land grabbing in local communities and their struggles to defend their territories. Thus, analyzing socio-environmental conflicts in this area was less a hydrological choice than a political one that highlights the local memory of struggles (Gordon et al., 2003) by Afro-descendant communities. Similar to the case of Bangkok, as discussed by Molle (2007), hegemonic power in the Alto Cauca flows in a direction opposite to the Cauca river itself, favouring downstream urbanisation and agro-industrial private interests. In what follows, I address the historical upstream-downstream nexus in relation to water and land grabbing by national elites and multinational corporations in local ethnic communities, along with the support of national and regional governments.

Enlistment of public institutions to serve private interests (1948-1978)

Stimulated by visits from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and advisors from the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in the 1950s, hacendados' families began to consider technical and institutional strategies to consolidate their agriculture and livestock raising, as well as food industries.⁹ In a meeting of industrialists in 1952, the creation of an autonomous institution was proposed to promote regional development, an idea supported by President Gustavo Rojas Pinilla (1953-1957), who facilitated a constitutional reform in 1953 to create regional development entities with administrative and financial autonomy. The CVC (Regional Autonomous Corporation for Cauca) was created under this model by means of Decree 3110 on 22 October 1954, with the purpose of supporting productive transformation through the management of the natural resources of the Cauca river's upper watershed.

The vision of development implanted in the hacendados' minds required a radical geographical transformation because it implied (i) that power generation was needed to supply industrial demand and cater to a growing urban population, and (ii) that the available areas could be expanded for agriculture and stock raising. The hacendados centred their interests on the Cauca river, not only because it effectively limited their expansion of land – the river was, after all, prone to permanent flooding – but also because it could be transformed into an opportunity for generating new services and businesses. Thus, from 1958 to 1962, the Agua Blanca Irrigation District and the adjacent dike and levee of the Cauca river were constructed under the management of the CVC – work that envisaged draining 5600 ha located to the south and east of Cali.

This model for holding back water by means of a levee reduced the risk of flooding when the river was high, thereby encouraging land occupation and real estate speculation. This meant that the owners of farming land obtained added value for urban land in a process of valorisation and extraordinary accumulation, little of which benefited the new inhabitants, who were able to satisfy their urgent need for housing. Thus, the district of Aguablanca (communes 13, 14, 15, and 21) was born, which had 1.2 million inhabitants in 2005 (Tovar, 2008), making up 55% of Cali's population and becoming the most

⁹ During the same period, the TVA exercised significant influence over Mexico's government by introducing the concept of the river basin as the main unit for regional development, based on both dams and irrigation systems. This model strengthened what has been critically called the national hydrocracy in Mexico (Wester and Vargas-Velázquez, 2009) and illustrated the role played by the US in defining a development model in Latin America.

densely populated and racially segregated commune in the city (Barbary and Urrea, 2004). Today, 1400 ha of the original irrigation district is being assessed to determine whether it will be converted into an area for the further expansion of Cali (Velazquez and Jimenez, 2004).

As Richter et al. (2010) have argued, half the world's large dams were built between 1960 and 1970 to benefit the irrigation needs of large-scale plantations during the Green Revolution in the global south. In Colombia, the increase in demand for sugar by the US after the Cuban revolution in 1959 favoured agro-industrial economic growth and increased the hacendados' pressure on the CVC to conduct new studies on regulating the Cauca river flow based on building a dam. Although, initially, the benefits did not appear to compensate for the costs of the mega-works, subsequent studies did show advantages for the cane-growing sector. The principal benefits were derived from preventing losses from floods, increasing production yields, and expanding the availability of land (CVC, 1985). At the end of the 1970s, the CVC as a public institution, representing the hacendados' interests in development, decided to transform the regional hydrography and develop the country's first multipurpose project on the Cauca river.

Construction and first decade of operations of the Salvajina dam (1978-1995)

In 1978, the CVC signed Agreement No. 21 to carry out the Project for Regulating the River Cauca, ratified by the national government through CONPES (Council of Economic and Social Policies) in November of that year. The project had three objectives: (i) to control floods in the valley's flatland for agro-industrial use; (ii) to reduce river contamination during periods of low water due to dilution of the sediment (CVC, 1985); and (iii) to produce 270 MW of electricity as part of the interconnected energy system (Quintero, 2010). The principal infrastructure work in the project was the Salvajina dam in the municipality of Suarez. This project was carried out by grabbing water and land from historically impoverished and marginalised communities (McDonald-Wilmsen and Webber, 2010), as reflected in the controversial purchase of land that started in 1979 and ended with the flooding of Salvajina during the first three months of 1985.

The local inhabitants distrusted the project's 'official' objectives, claiming that "the construction of Salvajina... was supposedly with the aim of regulating the waters from the Cauca river, but also with the pretext and strategy of taking the land from the people and giving that land from northern Cauca to the sugar mills that have them today" (young woman, leader, 2011). The interest in increasing agricultural and livestock profitability can be found in all the CVC's public documents and studies (Quintero, 2010), showing that the project's main objective was to implement regional agrarian reform by controlling the river flow and consequently expanding private agricultural lands. The control acquired by the dam on the Cauca river flows not only destroyed inhabitants' lives in the submerged area, but also radically disrupted local communities' territory-based livelihoods downstream. Therefore, while the elite's objective was to expand their own agrarian production and territorial control downstream by grabbing water and land from ethnic populations upstream, the dam became a key piece of the regional waterscape of dispossession.

When Salvajina was constructed, families whose lands were submerged by the dam were not resettled. Although several farms were bought from the landholders, not all were paid a fair price; instead, the purchase was characterised by a series of irregular procedures that the inhabitants continue to denounce to this day. In the first place, there was bureaucratic intimidation by public officials, whereby the person responsible for negotiating the land took advantage of the lack of titles or ownership deeds and of the inhabitants' inexperience in procedures for titling and selling. At the time lands were purchased in Suarez, the absence of title deeds resulted in economic speculation by the state in the form of undervaluing land prices. The Agustin Codazzi Institute, in charge of the evaluation process, "only took into account their agricultural use" (interview with a public servant of the CVC, 2011) and did not assess their other uses for transportation, fishing, or artisanal mining in view of the

difficulties and inconvenience involved in converting other values of the territory into economic value. This undervaluation favoured the CVC and harmed local livelihoods.

The state has not admitted to having used any specific strategy when purchasing the land. Nevertheless, many inhabitants from La Toma and Mindala – the main objectors to the project – were forced to sell their farms and leave the territory. At that time, no one had any idea that the forced migration generated by Salvajina would prove to be an incentive to settle in the district of Aguablanca, where 'pirate' (or non-regulated) urban developers had already occupied the floodplains. At present, public institutions in Cali claim that the clandestine settlements in the district of Aguablanca are placing the structural integrity of the dike and levee at great risk (El País, 2011). While they persist in evicting the district's impoverished inhabitants, the government and the CVC deny the settlement's history and the responsibility of both private and public stakeholders with respect to the forms of land occupation and the enhancement of urban land values.

The irrigation district of Aguablanca and the Salvajina dam projects approached the Cauca river from a capitalist perspective, oriented towards guaranteeing the development of private industry. Afro-descendants and indigenous communities, on the other hand, were rendered invisible as inhabitants of the Cauca territory and users of the river's socio-ecological and economic benefits. Some of the impacts they have reported include, among others: (i) greater physical distance between families; (ii) forced migration and urban impoverishment; (iii) the loss of cultural practices for want of contact with "brotherly peoples" (young leader, 2011); (iv) a shift from traditional alluvial mining to intensified lode mining; (v) a decrease in agricultural production due to less fertile soils in the mountains; and (vi) a change in rainy cycles and its impact on agriculture. To the extent that these negative effects on ethnic communities were not considered and private interests were favoured, the waterscape formation in the Alto Cauca is relevant for two reasons: (i) to criticise the socio-ecological impact of dams and large-scale development projects, and (ii) to understand empirically the history of ethnicised and racialised water and land grabbing.

The general dissatisfaction caused by the project, analyzed as a set of negative externalities by several studies (Carrion, 2010; Observatorio de Discriminación Racial, 2011; Sule, 2006), led the communities to organise a march towards Cali and another towards Popayan in 1986 to present a claim to the CVC for benefits that would compensate for the dam's negative effects. In Act 86, the government and the CVC agreed to develop infrastructure such as roads, health centres, and schools for the communities by way of compensating them for the damage caused. According to local inhabitants affected by the project, 25 years later the commitments made in this Act have yet to be fulfilled. As a concrete process, environmental racism involves a form of unjust dispossession that generates collective impacts and therefore collective responses (Leroy, 2006). These organised responses are strategies designed by local communities to battle "unwanted development" and are usually based on what local communities call the reaffirmation of the self and defence of the territory, which they express in practice through demonstrations, blockades, marches, and other action tools of dissent (McGee, 2010). According to Basavaiah (1996), it is these forms of social organisation and the mobilisation of communities to defend their environmental goods that oblige the state to take measures to grant people their rights.

The ongoing model of neoliberal privatisation (1995-2000)

The Political Constitution of 1991 was the result of a dialogue between the government, some guerrilla groups that had laid down their arms, and several social sectors involved in the process, with the hope of including their historic struggles within the national legislation. However, once this new legislative framework of rights emerged, the largest process of privatisation in the country's history was triggered. In 1993, Law 99 was issued to reform autonomous corporations – such as the CVC – in order to separate functions such as environmental management from previous responsibilities such as electric generation. Thus, in January 1995, EPSA (Energy Company of the Pacific) was created to take over the

energy business from the CVC in the regions of the Alto Cauca and the Pacific. From 1995 to 1997, the CVC restricted its actions to environmental management while the company went public, having created favourable purchasing conditions for those who had collaborated with the CVC in power generation (EPSA, 2011): 15.8% to CVC, 18% to EMCALI (Public Utility Services in Cali in the process of privatisation), and 2.2% to minority stakeholders. In 1997, barely two years later, under the auspices of the Law of Privatisations (Law 226, 1995), EPSA was sold to an international consortium formed by Houston Industries and Electricidad de Caracas. The EPSA case illustrates the intense process of privatisation in Colombia during the 1990s.

The privatisation of the energy sector was justified by the need to increase its power generating capacity to compensate for scarce supply during periods of drought, and it was based on the notion of the public sector's inherent incapacity to fulfil its functions (Lobina and Hall, 2007). In reality, privatisation was strongly pressured by the need to service the state's debt, which consumed a large part of the GNP. This situation tends to result in governments accepting fiscal policy adjustments and restructuring the economy if ordered to do so by multilateral financial agencies (Hall et al., 2005). In the case of the Alto Cauca, the local impacts of privatisation are illustrated in the conflict between the community of La Toma and EPSA during the short period of transition between the privatisation of Salvajina in 1997 and its exit to Union Fenosa in 2000.

The first private owners of the dam proposed to increase the generation of power and expand the hydroelectric system to supply 44% of the demand for energy that was being imported by the Valle del Cauca (Ortega et al., 2006). Once again, watershed management aimed to satisfy private demand downstream and increase private profits. The state's institutional adaption and redefinition of the national legislation compelled the involvement of private foreign actors in the ownership and management of the Salvajina dam, in turn favouring practices of water and land grabbing for private economic accumulation. Although it would only represent 1.5% of the EPSA-intended power expansion plan, the electricity generation expansion plan included diverting the Ovejas river (in the Suarez municipality) to the Salvajina reservoir. Once again, the project did not take into account its impact on local communities, especially on Afro-descendants' livelihoods.

Supported by Law 21 of 1991, which regulates the right to free, informed, and prior consultation with ethnic groups, local communities conducted their own study, which found that among the 41 impacts of the river's diversion, only five were positive. Their main argument was that, once they had lost any use of and access to the Cauca river, it would be the death of their traditional culture and community. They also risked losing the only river they had left: the Ovejas river. The local inhabitants summarised their defence of the Ovejas river and territory as follows:

[f]or us, that river is life. It raised us. I am a mother, the head of the household, and that river has also nurtured my two children. My mother brought me up on that river. My grandparents raised my mother there. The young people from this village don't know how to do anything else nowadays than artisanal mining. In this respect, we have been alleging our right to stay here in the territory, defending this territory in every way (young woman, leader, 2010).

A decade of multinationals and exacerbation of the violence (2000-2009)

Spronk and Webber (2007) have argued that "accumulation by dispossession is not merely privatisation of formerly state or public resources but their acquisition by transnational capital". In fact, in the Alto Cauca, the privatisation was consolidated in 2000 when the first private consortium sold its shares to the multinational corporation Union Fenosa. In the following decade, EPSA faced a change in the relationship between the company and the communities. Although the state had failed to grant local communities their rights by not paying them compensation for their submerged lands, the definitive withdrawal of the CVC as the dam's primary owner cemented the state's further failure to address people's needs and, simultaneously, to monitor the environmental and social impact of the new owner's actions. When withdrawing from the company, the CVC lost its territoriality. Moreover, while

its environmental management responsibility became bureaucratic, the protection of local communities' socio-environmental rights became elusive.

The CVC no longer had a role in social interaction with the community, a function that was delegated to the EPSA Foundation, which was created in 1999. In line with Decree 624 of 1989 — whereby the Taxation Statute of Colombia was issued — a deduction of up to 30% of the taxable income of taxpayers was granted (Article 125) when they made donations to foundations, associations, and corporations. EPSA not only reduced a significant percentage of its income tax, but was also able to channel that money through an entity with a more social front in order to serve its economic interests. Although the EPSA Foundation is legally independent and non-profit, it works toward the same purposes as EPSA. This sudden abandonment led the communities to mobilise and peacefully occupy the CVC premises in 2006 to demand an environmental management plan for the dam and a meeting with EPSA. However, the company failed to respond or provide any solution to their demands.

According to local leaders,

there is confusion between EPSA and the EPSA Foundation because they use the same vehicles and even the same workers. That is a 'good neighbour' strategy to confuse us. The Foundation has corporate responsibility for its production projects, while EPSA has to respond directly for its environmental liabilities... EPSA washes its hands, and the people believe that they are gifts when in reality they are taxes (male adult, PCN leader in the Alto Cauca, 2010).

The strategic use that the company makes of this confusion is revealed in the denunciation and mobilisation that the community from La Toma organised from 2006 to 2008. They showed that EPSA wanted to use lists of those who had attended meetings held by the EPSA Foundation as if they were catalogues of community participation and acceptance of a prior consultation about the environmental management plan for the dam (male adult, leader, 2011). After exposing these facts, the community broke off communications with EPSA.

Such confrontations between the multinational corporation and the local population must be contextualised with regard to the increasing violence in the Alto Cauca, the worst since the construction of Salvajina.¹⁰ Paramilitary actions in the Alto Cauca cannot be attributed to the presence of Union Fenosa in the territory, but nor can they be separated from the latter. After a meeting with EPSA in 2006, the Consejo Comunitario from La Toma received the first direct life threats by paramilitaries. In addition to the multinational Union Fenosa, the Keshada Corporation — the Colombia-based affiliate of the multinational mining conglomerate Anglo Gold Ashanti (with South African, British, and North American capital) — and the Smurfit Kappa Group — a multinational paper industry (originally with British capital) — also entered the region (Muñoz et al., 2010). As paramilitary interests became further tied to the protection of elite "property rights against landless peasants' demands" (Grajales, 2011), the presence of three multinationals and an important route for the illegal drugs trade towards the Pacific became a sufficient motive for paramilitaries to want to control the zone.

In 2009, after being bought internationally by the Spanish corporation Natural Gas (Murcia, 2009), Union Fenosa sold 63.82% of its shares in EPSA to Colombian investment companies.

The emerging panorama (since 2010)

Since the new owners (national capital) took control in 2010, EPSA has undertaken a local campaign to garner goodwill among the local communities. However, after some three decades of frustrated attempts at dialogue, the distrust of their inhabitants is inevitable. The corporation's new discursive strategy has to do with its 'nationalisation', and officials insist that since Salvajina now "belongs to

¹⁰ Regional violence reached its highest point in 2000-2002, when the AUC paramilitary group used armed force to obtain territorial control of the Naya river region, where the state of Cauca reaches the Colombian Pacific. Coordinating their actions from the municipality of Timba, the paramilitary commanders, alias 'H.H.' and 'Don Berna', later admitted that they had committed more than 3000 assassinations during this period as a part of their campaign to "secure the region" (Molano, 2009).

Colombians", the local people should support the project "for the good of everyone and of the nation" (elderly woman, 2011). The inhabitants heard a similar argument when the CVC arrived to build the Salvajina dam in the 1980s and told them that it was "a service for the nation and the inhabitants should co-operate" (elderly man, 2011). With their vivid memories, the inhabitants laugh ironically when they talk about trusting EPSA again.

The idea that EPSA belongs to 'Colombians' is far from the reality. The earnings of the Salvajina project in relation to the production of energy continue to be concentrated, but this time in the hands of *paisa*¹¹ industrials. This is revealed by the composition of the shareholders of the new controlling companies, namely Argos Investments, the Bank of Colombia Investment Group, and Colener (an energy subsidiary of Colinvertaciones) (EPSA, 2010). These companies form part of the well-known GEA (Business Group of Antioquia), the principal conglomerate in the country. On analyzing their stockholder structure (table 1), it is possible to conclude that Argos Investments is the new majority owner of EPSA, with an almost 40% holding.

Table 1. Stockholder structure of companies that owned or were associated with EPSA in 2010.

Company	Structure of stockholders and investors	Stocks (%)
Argos Investments (cement)	Suramericana de Inversiones S. A.	36
	Pension funds	16.8
	Nutresa Group ¹²	6
	Others	41
Bancolombia (Bank of Colombia Investment Group)	South American Investments	29.1
	Pension funds	19.7
	Argos Investments	5.6
	International stockholders	10.5
	Others	35.1
Colener (energy) Colinvertaciones	Colinvertaciones ¹³	100
	Argos Investments	50.5
	Pension funds	31.8
South American Investments	Others	15.7
	Argos Investments	35.4
	Pension funds	19.5
	Colinvertaciones	10.6
	Nutresa Group	9.9
Nutresa Group (formerly National Chocolates Group, food-processing conglomerate including coffee and biscuits)	Others	24.6
	South American Investments	38.5
	Argos Investments	10.4
	Pension funds	19.5
	Others	31.6

Source: based on official data from companies' annual reports on Web pages.

¹¹ A popular term for people originally from the states of Antioquia, Caldas, Risaralda, and Quindío. During the nineteenth century, the process known as the Antioqueña Colonisation was characterised by the migration of *paisas* from Antioquia to other states in the so-called *Eje Cafetero* (coffee belt).

¹² For information on the conglomerate see www.nutresa.com.

¹³ The Colener company is fully owned by the Colinvertaciones company. This demonstrates that current 'multiple' ownership of EPSA is more a game of company names than a diversification of investors.

It is important to bear in mind that, aside from the sugar and paper produced from cane and cane bagasse,¹⁴ two other important products currently make it possible to implement the Project for Regulating the River Cauca: electricity and ethanol. These are key elements in the national energy matrix and fundamental links in the strategy to expand exports (DNP, 2005). Although the government's plan includes an expansion of electricity networks, it is disturbing to see how unequally the implementation of the national energy matrix is progressing, because the production of energy (electricity and agro-fuels) per se is growing without any evidence of analogous changes in energy connection and consumption by local populations.

According to the inhabitants of Suarez, their electricity is of poor quality and disproportionately expensive. Moreover, the private appropriation of the Cauca river was also carried out at the cost of access to drinking water for people in the vicinity of Salvajina. This particular supply covers only 66% of the population in Cauca (Observatorio Politico, 2008), and some 7000 inhabitants from La Toma do not have aqueducts or sewerage systems. One of the most critical effects of this situation is that a lack of drinking water and basic sanitation facilities in the Santa Rosa de Lima School has become the main reason for students dropping out of school (focus group with women, 2011).

Basic rights such as education, communications, mobility, and work are being violated by the limited access to water and energy resources related to the Cauca river and its private appropriation. This situation in the Alto Cauca coincides with controversies raised by other scholars regarding privatisation as a structural barrier to guaranteeing human rights (Budds and McGranahan, 2003). Local space is subject to being made a supplier, while the ancestral inhabitants of these territories are subject to the violent dispossession of their water and other territorial assets by means of force, threats, corruption, and state bureaucracy. The growing and unresolved impoverishment to which these communities have been subjected has resulted in their being tragically driven from their own territories (Barbary and Urrea, 2004; Tovar, 2008).

In addition to the violation of rights, the project's multipurpose nature has enabled EPSA to undervalue the importance of energy production, thereby strategically evading its responsibility for the dam's negative impact. This position is demonstrated in recent reports and articles made public by the CVC and UNIVALLE (Callejas et al., 2010), which evaluate some of the effects of Salvajina with respect to the objectives of its construction. Interestingly, they warn about the negative impact of variations in the flows of the Cauca river induced by Salvajina, but divert attention away from the study of the energy sector. This same evasion of responsibility was evident in a meeting held on 11 July 2011 between EPSA and more than 100 inhabitants of La Toma. The EPSA representative sought to address the participants' concerns by playing down the importance of power generation and asking them to trust in the new relationship opened up between the community and the company after 2010. This systematic evasion of responsibility by EPSA regarding the effects of Salvajina confirms that there are no clear criteria for evaluating the responsibility of different project stakeholders, enabling private actors to take an advantageous position while the liabilities and social debt acquired by the project are diffused at the expense of the local population's unresolved impoverishment.

Conclusion

This article has shown that there is a local-global connection in the conflict over water and land in the Alto Cauca. This connection is expressed in three forms of territorial intervention by international stakeholders. First, there is the influence of banks, credit agencies, and other international financial institutions in defining the geographical and hydrological regulation of the region, particularly the connection that has been established between implanting a development model and executing water-based projects that have ended up privatising water goods and services, excluding all traditional uses by the community. Second, there is the direct presence of multinational corporations seeking to exploit

¹⁴ Sugarcane waste after the sucrose has been extracted.

economically the river's watershed, either by mining for gold or through hydroelectric power generation. Third, while international financial institutions have played a central role in economic planning and regional development, Salvajina illustrates the trans-nationalisation of economic and political interests that mould water and landscapes of the global south. Local inhabitants, social organisations, and several scholars are convinced that an alternative local-global linkage needs to be reinforced in order to protect this territory and enable another '*Paz-ific*' (a play on the sound of and the adjective 'peaceful').

I have shown how today's dispossession – characterised by privatisations and the global market – derives from trends of exclusion in which ethnicised and racialised water and land grabbing have historically shaped a particular form of environmental racism in the Alto Cauca. This discriminatory action has been in favour of the property interests of political and economic elites, both national (represented by hacendados and industrialists) and international (represented by various multinationals). However, limiting one's reflections on water and land grabbing to the role of international stakeholders would be incorrect. The case analyzed here shows how the economic interests of regional elites have oriented the region's socio-spatial organisation to the extent that their model of capital accumulation and control of political power has guided territorial regulation for the last six decades. A small group of families with inherited political and economic power has promoted and benefited from the two most important development projects in the Alto Cauca: the Agua Blanca Irrigation District and the Project for Regulating the River Cauca. Regional elites, meanwhile, have turned a blind eye to this group's responsibility for the impacts of water and land grabbing on Afro-descendant communities, particularly with respect to urban impoverishment, the privatisation of rural means of community life, and forced migration.

Reflecting on private responsibility for these impacts leads one to question the role of the state. Although, for the periods discussed here, it is possible to find nuances and differences, what is certain is that the state has at no time guaranteed the rights of Afro-descendants, nor has it propitiated an improvement in their quality of life and wellbeing. Furthermore, it has acted irresponsibly regarding the quality of water for human consumption and neglected to address issues of land loss resulting from the erosion of watersheds. This omission of its public functions calls into question the idea of the existence of a social state based on the rule of law in Colombia. Instead, what we find is a highly bureaucratised apparatus that favours both national and international private interests, whose procedures raise barriers to communities in accessing services and obtaining their rights. The case analyzed shows that government bureaucracy and national legislation have favoured the expropriation of water as a common good of the ethnic communities in the Alto Cauca, in complicity with the water and land grabbing practices of domestic and foreign private actors.

Since the CVC was effectively constituted to benefit regional elites, and subsequently oriented by the Constitution of 1991 towards increased private accumulation, one can criticise the Colombian state for invariably favouring private interests, even when these have directly violated the rights of historically marginalised ethnic populations. Following the political ecology approach that focuses on the state's role in environmental and social transformations (Derman and Ferguson, 1995), I have shown how the Colombian state is politically responsible for negatively affecting ethnic populations.

The Afro-descendant communities of the Alto Cauca continue to denounce the state's irresponsibility in this trajectory of dispossession. While they confront the companies in local and international spaces, the major criticism of inhabitants and organisations is directed against the state for favouring projects, programmes, and laws that contravene the communities' interests. Moreover, communities have also condemned the state's simultaneous abandonment with respect to satisfying basic needs and guaranteeing rights such as access to drinking water, basic sanitation, education, mobility, and communication. These communities have faced numerous life threats for having opposed the elitist development model, and they have defended their access to and traditional use of the Cauca river. Despite their protests, however, the silent complicity of the majority of the state's institutions has

meant that the local population has had to migrate to protect themselves and to seek new ways to subsist, or else remain in their traditional territory under blatant threat.

The ways in which the machinery of political power define a territory's governability are dominated by an interest in capitalist accumulation (Harvey, 2007), with economic allies such as international financial institutions (Hall et al., 2005) and multinational corporations (Correa, 2007) that influence the political and economic geography of both region and country. In this respect, it is possible to state that environmental racism is promoted by regional elites against local inhabitants whose land, water, and other environmental goods have been expropriated. This generates a socio-environmental debt – differentiated from but shared between public and private stakeholders – owed to the Afro-descendant communities of the Alto Cauca for the cultural, economic, and environmental damage demonstrated through the paper. Private companies have focused on accumulation through the extraction and production of goods and services out of such places. Historical accumulation by regional elites has occurred through the active denial of communities' rights – an attitude traced to colonial times. In addition, while state policies have favoured private accumulation interests, the government's palpable absence as a guarantor of rights has been the norm – a dispossession regime that regional leaders have termed 'structural racism'.

The issue of ethnicised and racialised dispossession in the Alto Cauca was addressed forcefully by a regional leader, who declared that "this territory receives a great deal of threats because for us black people, [for] us Afro-Colombian people, the flatland was lost to the sugarcane crops, so today all we have left is this territory on the hillsides" (male adult, leader, 2011). The dispossession discussed in this article is markedly racist and consists of a trajectory of water and land grabbing traditionally occupied and used by black freedmen. From the early 1950s, the agro-industry expanded in the flatlands. Later, dam building forced the migration and de-territorialisation of local communities. Currently, this extraction activity is advancing aggressively upstream. From this perspective, the geo-history of regional water and land grabbing as a case of environmental racism consists of the progressive loss of territory inhabited by Afro-descendant communities, as well as the privatisation and expropriation of the environmental assets of which they make use. Ethnicised and racialised dispossession in the region has been made possible by the historical bureaucratic arrangements of national elites and multinational corporations, facilitated by the state. As a result, private accumulation practices regarding water-based projects have sculpted regional landscapes and waterscapes to the detriment of communities' livelihoods, thus deepening regional violence and ethnic marginalisation.

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¹⁵ Community Council is the autonomous social and political authority in territories of Afro-descendant communities recognised in the Political Constitution of 1991 and legislated by Law 70/1993.

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