Article

Hidden in Plain Sight: Tourism Planning, Afro-Colombian Society and Community in Barú, Colombia

Evan Ward

Department of History, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602, USA; evan_ward@byu.edu

Abstract: This article builds upon the scholarship of Alina Helg and other historians working on questions of racial identity in Colombia, and the Caribbean section of that country more specifically. Colombia is unique in that its identity is indigenous, African, as well as European. Its Afro-Colombian elements are often overlooked by virtue of the mestizo identity that has dominated settlement of its Andean highlands around the capital, Bogota. Using technical and social reports from tourism development on Barù Island, near Cartagena, this article explores the Afro-Colombian communities that established themselves on the island in the wake of emancipation in the mid-19th century, as well as the efforts of these communities to protect their rights. I also examine recent Constitutional Court decisions supporting the rights of Afro-Colombian communities like those on Barù against the developmental ambitions of governmental and private tourism developers who were intent on transforming the island into a mass tourism destination. The article concludes that recent legal shifts towards protecting Afro-Colombian rights secured a recent victory in favor of the islanders vis-à-vis designs of the state to impose its vision of global tourism development there.

Keywords: tourism; Colombia; Afro-Colombian

"Undoubtedly, the two-century-old tradition of presenting Colombia as a *mestizo* nation has greatly contributed to black Colombians' invisibility."

(Helg 2004, p. 3)

1. Introduction

"I didn't like Cartagena," African-American blogger "Ekua" observed in a 5 November 2013 post. She lamented the absence of Afro-Brazilian culture in Colombia's Caribbean showcase of colonial splendor. "I'm passionate about Afro-Latin cultures and I wanted to explore Afro-Colombian culture of the Caribbean Coast and the genres of music that emerged from it," she said. "I imagined I'd find similarities between Cartagena and other highly Afro-Latin destinations I've fallen in love with such as Salvador, Brazil and Havana, Cuba. While those cities and countries certainly have many racial equality issues to work through, I was astounded and inspired by how much pride these places showed in culture that are clearly derived from Africa and how these cultures were an imperative part of the larger cultures of each country." (Ekua 2013).

Ekua's blog ignited a firestorm of posts, some supporting, others challenging her critique of Cartagena's paucity of Afro-Colombian culture. At the same time, she addressed a theme that scholars of the Colombian Caribbean have studied in a more systematic fashion. "[The] long, lasting insistence on Colombia being a mestizo-Euro-Indian nation has historically played down its African component," Aline Helg observed in the introduction to her monograph, *Liberty and equality in Caribbean Colombia*,

1770–1835. "Thus, unlike Afro-Cubans, Afro-Brazilians, and African Americans, few Colombians of partial African descent have identified with African ancestry and blackness." (Helg 2004, p. 3).

This was certainly the case on the island of Barú, located ten miles southwest of Cartagena, Colombia. It juts twenty-five miles into the Caribbean and includes three communities: Barú, Ararca, and Santa Ana. Once a peninsula, a canal was dug by authorities around 1930 between Cartagena and the Magdalena River, a waterway known as the "Dique Canal". As a result, the island, a later report noted, "has remained in its primitive and pristine stage, being therefore an ideal location for an integrated and fully controlled tourism resort" (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1975, p. 15).

Historically, Spanish *Dons* populated Barú in the late 16th century. The crown awarded lands on the island to Luis de Espulgas, who brought one hundred and forty-four slaves with him to work the land. On the eve of slavery's abolition in Colombia two hundred and fifty years later, a group of Afro-Colombians purchased an extension of the island as communal lands that could not be alienated, even after their death. Colombia abolished slavery two days later on 18 May 1851 (Cassiani 2017, p. B2).

The residents of Barú, or *baruleros*, as they were called in Spanish, subsisted from fishing; agriculture; and the sale of coconuts, lemons, papaya, and other tropical fruits from the end of the nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, when disease blighted the coconut production. Landholders during that eighty-year window (1870 to 1950) included Trifon Gomez, Andrés Gomes, Fancisco de la Rosa, Nicolas Molia, Jose Paria Morales, and Juan Julio. Their descendants coexisted with a small coterie of owners of vacation homes. According to one account, the *arrivistes* and the islanders arrived at agreed upon prices for the sale of land (Conseo Comunitario de Orika 2006).

After disease blighted the coconut production, beginning in the 1950s, *baruleros* looked for other means to supplement their income. Fishing endured as a mainstay to the economy. The production of handicrafts for the growing number of tourists on the island and in neighboring Cartagena compensated as well for the lost agricultural production (Conseo Comunitario de Orika 2006). Using planning documents from international and domestic agencies, this study argues that tourism planners privileged the Hispanic cultural identity over the region's Afro-Caribbean past and, at the same time, paternalistically attempted to transform the communitarian ethos and subsistence-based economy of *baruleros* in advance of the large-scale beachside tourism development and, thereby, the Colombian government and private interests.

2. Methods

The article begins with an overview of tourism development in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century. Once its distinctive phases have been delineated, an analysis of domestic and international planning documents reflect the gradual disappearance of Afro-Colombian culture as a tourist draw. The article then uses the government's 1974 socioeconomic assessment of the island to illustrate the paternalistic attitude of planners to local community values, as well as strategies to integrate the villages into the tourism project. The ambivalent tone of the report suggests that even its authors questioned the notion of "progress" presented by the plans for mass tourism at Playa Blanca (a specific beach on the island)—prefiguring the emergence of sustainable tourism in the 1980s (Tefler and Sharpley 2008, pp. 39–40). It resonated, however, at the time with contemporary tourism planners and funding agencies who increasingly believed that mass tourism development disrupted the traditional social and economic structures of communities affected by large projects, such as the one planned for Barú. This perspective, collected in a seminal UNESCO-World Bank report, *Tourism—Passport to Development?: Perspectives on the Social and Cultural Effects of Tourism in Developing Countries*. (de Kadt 1979), led to the reevaluation of international support for state-led tourism projects. The concluding section of the paper briefly chronicles the local resistance to private tourism development and the ultimate triumph of local claims to communal land rights.

In the final analysis, tourism development represented one area in which the marginalization of Afro-Colombians persisted, supporting the work of Aline Helg, who has written that in the contemporary period, "they continue, fragmented and divided, to face racial discrimination in their

own communities without legal protection." ([Helg 2004](), p. 264). The recent legal victories of the *baruleros*, however, represent a new chapter in their history, one in which they have taken up legal mechanisms in their own defense, instead of relying solely on the "negotiation and manipulation of elite divisions" to advance their rights ([Helg 2004](), p. 264).

2.1. Results: Erasing Afro-Colombian Identity in Tourism Attractions

During the twentieth century, Latin American countries passed through three stages of tourism development. These stages differed by the degree and nature of integration to the global economy. First, from the early twentieth century until 1960, national governments promoted international tourism domestically and established policies friendly to international hotels and airlines, which established a presence primarily in urban areas, including national capitals. Second, from 1960 until 1985, as modernization imperiled cultural patrimony, international aid organizations, such as UNESCO, the Organization of American States, the World Bank, and US AID, promoted cultural tourism as an avenue towards economic development. Cultural tourism went hand in hand with the emergence of sea, sun, and sand tourism developments located at the periphery of emerging nations. Ideally, the proximity of cultural attractions to sandy beaches maximized the opportunities for economic development. Economic inefficiencies, corruption, and social disruptions discredited this model after a decade and a half. The third wave of tourism development in Latin America, beginning in the mid-1980s, witnessed a swing back towards private models of tourism development which were deemed more competitive and profit-generating than their state-driven predecessors. The government of Peru, for instance, ceded control of hotel operations at Machu Picchu to private interests. Thus, in place of international aid organizations facilitating mass tourism, neoliberal policies in the emerging world encouraged global corporations to maximize profits. At the same time, more sustainable approaches to tourism found advocates at the grassroots level ([Ward 2014]()).

In this respect, Colombia was no different than other countries in Latin America. What made Colombia unique was the figurative fault line that divided the country between two cultural regions: the Andean world towards the south and west and the Afro-Caribbean expanse along its northeastern coastline. Spanish colonialism left a ponderous architectural footprint on the nation's cultural landscapes still evident throughout the country today (both in the Andean capital of Bogota as well as in the Caribbean jewel of Cartagena). This, as well as the privileged status of the indigenous population as wards of the state (justifying the Spanish presence on the grounds that natives be converted to Christianity), left more tangible reminders of the nation's *mestizo* past. The more ephemeral legacy of Colombia's Afro-Caribbean inhabitants accented the folklore, cuisine, and cultural traditions of its northeastern coast but suffered markedly in the touristic representations of the nation's heritage.

The first major surveys of Colombia's tourism potential identified Afro-Colombian attractions as potential interests to international visitors, including "folkloric music, *comida tipica*, traditional fiestas, specialized architecture, important historical monuments, and others" ([Fadul 1961](), p. 24). More specifically, the authors noted, "Colombia is musically one of the richest countries in the Western Hemisphere. It offers up-date[d] and danceable Afro-Colombian rhythms like the *porros*, *cumbias*, *mapales*, *fandangos*, *vallenatos*, and others, as well as the music of the highlands with an intense indigenous flavor, such as the *bambucos*, *guabinas*, [and] *pasillos*." ([Fadul 1961](), p. 24). Gastronomically, the same rich variety was available in the country's different regions, "from the coastal *sancocho* of *sabalo* or meat, *arepas* with eggs, *bunuelos de maiz*, *carimanola*, to the *cabrito antandereano*, *el ajiaco*, and the *sobrebarriga cundimarquesa*, *los frijoles antioquenos*, *el tamal tolimense*, and many other traditional plates that would please the palates of many foreign travelers" ([Fadul 1961](), p. 24).

Furthermore, Fadul noted in his report for the Empresa Colombiana de Turismo, an aggressive and savvy tourism promotion campaign for the sun, sea, and sand would draw favorable comparisons with other Caribbean destinations, but the use of "folkloric music and traditional dishes" could be especially helpful in attracting tourist demand ([Fadul 1961](), p. 109). Likewise, "seasons of Carnival and fiestas attract many tourists" ([Fadul 1961](), p. 110). "Wherefore it can be deduced," his report

concluded, "that the tourist center with the greatest diversity of attractions and activities, as well as certain attractive traditional accents, will have the greatest market or international demand." (Fadul 1961, p. 64).

Two years later, however, as the National Tourism Corporation began to confer with international aid organizations, foreign consultants emphasized the appeal of Spanish colonial architecture in and around Cartagena at the expense of Afro-Colombian contributions. Under the auspices of the United States Agency for International Development, for example, John P. Gilbert noted, "With its 'living history' of Spanish origins, its invaluable architectural treasures, its splendid beaches, the dramatic diversity of its landscapes and climates, its ports and rivers, and easy access from the North and Central America, here is—without dispute—the logical jumping off point for the development of the Colombian tourism industry in the future," (Empresa Colombiana de Turismo, S.A. 1963, p. 4). Similarly, the J. Stanton Robbins Corporation touted Cartagena as "*La Ciudad Heroica* of the Colonial epoch" (Stanton Robbins & Co. n.d., p. iv). "Historically," the report noted, "it is one of the Americas' most dramatic and interesting cities. The walled city, the great San Felipe Fortress which guarded it, and the incredible forts and sea walls that protected the harbor entrance are fascinating to visit." (Stanton Robbins & Co. n.d., p. iv).

In the late 1960s, the Colombian government established ties with UNESCO to simultaneously promote tourism development and to preserve cultural patrimony throughout the country. Much of the initial effort centered on the prospects for these objectives near Cartagena. Although Spanish culture trumped Afro-Caribbean culture in early assessments of the tourism potential, the prospects for immediate gains from beach tourism relegated cultural tourism to secondary importance in the pursuit of economic development. To put it more simply, beach tourism supplanted Spanish and Afro-Colombian culture, privileging smart, global enclaves over heritage attractions.

Once the Colombian government signed an agreement with UNESCO for tourism consultations, the Paris-based organization sent one of its most adept beach tourism consultants to Cartagena, Juan Arespachochaga. He made the trip at the tail end of a consultation in the Dominican Republic. As in his report for Dominican tourism development, Arespacochaga distinguished between the most desirable locations for tourism development and those that could be most easily developed for immediate benefits. The sparsely populated peninsula of Barú, in Arespacochaga's estimation, offered the greatest competitive advantage for beach-front international tourists, even though the government would have to build a bridge connecting Barú with the mainland. What made Barú particularly attractive beyond its white sand beaches was its apparent plasticity. Without any mention of the approximately three thousand mixed-race and black subsistence-farming residents, Arespacochaga painted an enticing portrait of five potential beaches on the peninsula, with initial emphasis on the beach at Majon. With an undaunted vision, even amongst the most optimistic tourism consultants, Arespacochaga calculated that hotels and apartments could house up to sixty thousand tourists at any one time on the 1000 hectares of Majon's sandy beachfront property. Even then, the future phases of hotel development could accommodate "fifty thousand more beds, reaching a total of 110,000 beds, and even this would only occupy one fourth of the actual space, which could then be used for green space and luxurious urban amenities" (de Arespacochaga 1968, p. 8).

Isolation and the aesthetics of absence were so important to Arespacochaga that he was willing to recommend that the Colombian government build an airport on the island so that tourists could avoid driving through Cartagena's industrial park on their way to the island and, it might be inferred from his report, the local communities on the island once they crossed a proposed bridge. Instead, the government could consider "the possibility of construction of an airport [...] using the main highway [which ran through the industrial park and to the ferry bottleneck] for transport of materials and supplies in [...] as access by ferry to Tierrabomba and to Cartagena takes too long" (de Arespacochaga 1968, p. 9).

The Colombian government did not adopt all of Arespacochaga's suggestions but did pursue the development of the sun, sea, and sand tourism on Barú as the centerpiece of tourism development

in the region. In a subsequent consultation, this time with the Arthur Little and Integral Ltda. firms, the government singled out Barú, Santa Marta (to the south), and San Andrés (an island to the north) as future tourism centers. Each center would cater to a different clientele: Santa Marta to Colombians and Venezuelans, San Andrés to Colombians and Central Americans, and Barú to international (meaning North American and European) tourists. "Consequently," the report ran, "not only would these projects not compete with each other, they would be complementary." (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1975, p. 14) Consultants sketched a cursory description of the donditions on the island:

> "The local inhabitants of the peninsula still maintain many of their original habits and make their living out of primitive fishing and agriculture. These communities lack all elementary services, such as water and electricity, and have very limited facilities for education and public health. There are no springs of fresh water in the peninsula, and the water drawn from wells is brackish and unsuitable for human consumption. The native population['s] needs for water are met with rainfall collected and stored in dirt reservoirs dug near the towns without any sanitation measures. In very hard years these reservoirs have become exhausted and water has to be hauled by boat from the Cartagena water supply system to the entrance of the peninsula." (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1975, p. 16)

2.2. Results: Challenging Community Cohesion

Against this backdrop, the Colombian government commissioned a socioeconomic assessment of Barú's inhabitants prior to the acquisition of land there. This study is important because it illustrates the profound effect that mass tourism development posed for the traditional communities (in this case an Afro-Colombian community with traditions rooted in the nineteenth century) deemed "obstacles" to mass tourism development. Although developers presented strategies for capitalist economic development amongst the islanders, they did so at the expense of traditional Afro-Colombian ways of life. The extended, descriptive analysis of the study illustrates the ambivalence of the researchers to the benefits of the project vis-à-vis the traditional ways of life that had endured despite pervasive modernization in the surrounding environs, namely in Cartagena. In the field of tourism planning, this suggested a growing tension between planners, who saw the destructive potential of such projects, and the entrepreneurs, who claimed that such projects would usher in economic benefits for all.

Thus, in 1974, the National Tourism Corporation enlisted the services of ten consultants (three women and seven men) to assess the conditions on the island, including their "intuitive impressions about the communities and its inhabitants" (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 1). The survey techniques included interviews and statistical analyses, with the objective of understanding how the local population would fare with the arrival of workers from the mainland and tourists from abroad. The study carried a tone of beneficent paternalism, aiming to "obtain a holistic vision of the situation in the communities, of the possible solutions to multiple deficiencies, above all those economic [practices] that they exhibit, and to have a basis to define and implement policies of improvement in the communities [...] which will translate into lasting benefit for them and their descendants" (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 2).

The survey documented that local residents practiced a subsistence economy based on group ownership of the land, a feature that would have been familiar to their Afro-Colombian forebears at the outset of emancipation in the mid-19th century. The planners were astonished at the absence of technical innovations in agrarian practices. "The principle features of agricultural on the island permits us to classify them at the paleotechnic level," the study asserted (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 3). Furthermore, the fortunes of *baruleros*, they observed, remained highly dependent on climactic conditions. Islanders continued to use slash and burn techniques to renew land where the nutrients had been exhausted by intensive cultivation (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 3).

In addition to subsistence agriculture, most inhabitants supplemented their livelihood with fishing, animal husbandry, or fashioning handicrafts for sale on the mainland. These observations unwittingly described a persistent, communal ethos predicated on subsistence production completely out of character with the individualistic tendencies of acquisitiveness in nearby Cartagena. The isolation of the *baruleros* preserved their traditional values to the extent that they surprised the very investigators charged with assessing the impact of mass tourism there.

Likewise, the researchers noted the communal nature of property. Residents "control 'land' by way of its possession," the consultants observed, "[since] access to the land guarantees acceptance within the community." (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 5). They recommended to the government that it guarantee access to the land for the existing inhabitants for this very reason (its social as well as economic benefit). Legal measures, they suggested, should be taken to "guarantee its use and make impossible its alienation" (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 6).

Local attitudes towards the sea offered the sharpest contrast between the existing practices of islanders and the tourists that large resort complexes would attract. Islanders did not view the Caribbean as a source of recreation but instead a medium to be respected as a means of transit to the mainland and a source of sustenance. "All of these attitudes differ greatly from those that [tourists] have when they arrive at the sea," the researchers noted (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 31). Such attitudes epitomized the traditional views of Afro-Colombians whose ethos developed according to divergent norms decades earlier.

In the realm of training, educational levels paled to even the most modest of levels on the mainland. Parents could not provide for the basic classroom needs of their children. Moreover, parents insisted that their children help with household chores, which resulted in "high levels of absenteeism" (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 9). Inadequately trained teachers and subpar facilities further tempered parent and student interests in formal education. As a result, among its approximately three thousand inhabitants, less than two hundred students attended primary and secondary schools (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, pp. 10–11). Prevailing social practices also frustrated educational patterns prevailing on the mainland. "One of the teachers mentioned that upon completing the fourth grade, the young women are given in marriage and that they ordinarily pass directly from school to the nuptial bed." (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 12). Ultimately, a lack of relevance of the curriculum to prevailing economic practices discouraged attendance at school.

Among the young, opportunities for recreation accounted for much of the truancy at school. Instead of attending classes, youngsters "[sallied] forth to hunt crabs [...] and play with them like domesticated animals" (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 27). All this happened prior to the more sobering existence that awaited them as farmers and fishers later in life. Adolescents played ball in the street or cavorted at the pool hall. If not pathological, the researchers still found this somewhat suspect (*los jóvenes dispondrán de mucho tiempo libre*) (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 27). Once working, islanders certainly did not adhere to the eight-hour work-day. Farmers and fishers worked in an irregular pattern. During the day, farmers tended to observe siesta to avoid intense heat or showers. Women cared for children, who seemed ubiquitous, while snatching any available moments to gossip with their neighbors (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 28).

The pool hall constituted the cultural center of the island. The art of the pool shark elicited the highest praise. Young people, biding their time until their opportunity arose to play at the real table, shot marbles with modified tree branches to mimic their elders. Women played dominos in the shadow of the pool hall. Teenagers danced the salsa, mimicking the most proficient practitioners on the mainland (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 29). Alcohol accompanied formal and informal activities of note. All participants of age lubricated their leisure hours with white rum. The festivities of the patron saint of Santa Ana meant nothing more, the consultants suspected, than a drunken revelry shared by "residents and their guests that arrive from other communities, from Cartagena, and adjoining regions" (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, pp. 29–30). Similar practices followed a successful day of fishing, the arrival of a relative, and during funerals.

As the report progressed, however, it acknowledged that not all prevailing practices were in need of extirpation. Planners rued the imminent arrival of the television and what such a technology would mean for the social structure of the communities. If only the islanders would ignore the urge to worship the "small screen" (*pantalla chica*), "they will have saved one of the more cohesive aspects of the community"—face to face conversation (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 32). But, it may be a futile effort, they noted. "Unfortunately, the appeal of the television is so great that [conversation] will suffer a setback, or at the very least, the thrust of conversations will suffer a great change as the central theme of their discussions shifts to telenovelas and American police shows (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 32). Ultimately, they argued authorities should let locals guide the opportunities for leisure activities and at the same time, discourage the spread of "bars, cantinas, pool halls and houses of ill repute" (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 33).

Health conditions did not vary as widely from mainland norms as social and economic factors. Yet, the authors questioned the efficacy of homeopathic treatments, observing that instead of sending the infirm to Cartagena, afflicted islanders were treated with herbal remedies and purgatives (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 21). The researchers also detected the persistence of folk beliefs about causes of sickness, noting, "'cold' is considered indicative of sickness or pregnancy." (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 21). One woman complained of painful births due, in part, to the full hair of head with which her son was born. Prayer was invoked to "influence the stage of health of people, animals or plants". Among the most prevalent was one repeated during the planting of corn to "combat the diseases that affect it; the same happens with cattle to kill the worms that develop inside of them." (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 22).

Recommendations included promoting hybrid approaches to treatment. Preventative campaigns should accompany basic health services on the island, the planners recommended. At the same time, healers and midwives could assist with diagnosing sicknesses and complications. Specialized services might be made available on the mainland for more advanced cases. The consultants emphatically stated that these recommendations were made for those living on the island and that if hotel guests availed themselves of these services, "they should pay [for treatment]." (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 26). In the end, their report suggested the same quality of service should be made available to tourists and residents alike.

Housing practices exhibited a similar pattern to land tenure. It is not known, as will be apparent later in this paper, whether the government or private investors ever took the findings of this study into account as conflicts over land "ownership" arose in ensuing years. "In general," the consultants noted, "the inhabitants of the communities studied [...] declared themselves owners of their land and of their houses: Although this acquired right is not supported by legal title, the notion of property ownership gives its occupant the sense of stability and quite possibly this pattern has manifest itself during years or even generations." (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 34). Visual cues from the relative age of homes gave some sense of long-time occupancy. Movement from house to house rarely took place. Once a house began to deteriorate, its occupants simply built another one on the same site. Family members lived with relatives until the new structure was completed.

Much like their Afro-Colombian ancestors, *baruleros* built their homes from local materials. As such, the general style had not changed much over the years and conformed to conditions dictated by the weather. The kitchen served as the focal point of domestic social life. It was built separate from the traditional living area. Women lorded over this space, which was occasionally invaded by other relatives when new homes were being constructed. Families often sat in homemade wooden chairs oriented towards the street or on the ground. "There, they doze, chat, listen to the radio and greet passersby," the researchers noted, "thus is established a space of circulation that goes from the street, passes through the social area of the home, and ends in the kitchen." (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 36).

The most sobering reflections followed the objective description of homes on the island. At that moment in time, it was difficult for the consultants to know what type of changes tourism would bring

to the social structure of the island or even how the locals might react to those monumental changes. A sense of remorse pervaded the pages that acknowledged the imminent arrival of cataclysmic changes that would radically transform the island. The researchers sensed a prevailing air of satisfaction among the residents of Barú and Santa Ana—even a sense of pride. It would only be after the changes had taken place that they would realize what had been lost—a chilling thought. The spirit of individualism would do no less than "have corrosive effects on the integrity and communitarian strengths [which would] accelerate its decomposition" (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 39). Ready answers escaped these experts:

> "For its eminently qualitative character, it is difficult to give concrete recommendations [on how to avoid social disintegration] or express formulas that facilitate specific decisions. It is likewise impossible to separate dimensions of the communitarian life and, accepting that changes will occur in this respect, think that things might stay the same, as if they might be preserved in a museum for the exhibition and admiration of themselves and others." (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 39)

The scientific team further manifested its growing ambivalence towards the benefits of modernization in their recommendations for community improvements. In suggesting enhanced infrastructure, the consultants recognized that developers could fulfill their obligations to the islanders to the letter of the law or, if more generous, holistically improve their quality of life. For example, in providing water for the island, the state could calculate the needs on a per capita basis, or, if they intended to eradicate the use of unfiltered water, they might provide even more than necessary simply for survival (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 39). Moreover, improvements should fundamentally serve to protect the existing social structures and practices from "the pernicious effects of accelerated development and exposure to violent economic and cultural changes, guaranteeing to maximize the social organization and cohesion required so that the communities are able to selectively and critically assimilate the experience that will accompany said development" (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 44). Just as the project should be rolled out in stages to maximize economic return, foreseeable changes to the lives of the inhabitants should be slowly introduced to minimize "social trauma" (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, pp. 44–45).

Convinced, perhaps, that traditional ways of life retained their own merits, the consultants cited the need to help residents cultivate the idea "that not everything they represent is worthless" and that they should defend what they found useful while at the same time not closing themselves off to potentially helpful innovations (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 55). However, the researchers also anticipated the hubris of technocrats, teachers, and experts who would come to the island with a bias against traditional practices. They would also need to be advised against undue prejudice. These specialists should themselves "consider the residents capable of making the best decisions for the defense of their properties and the well-being of their families" (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1974, p. 56).

Ultimately, the study documented not only the enduring character of traditional society within the Afro-Colombian communities of Barú but also the ambivalence of the researchers themselves to the intended benefits of the tourism project on their well-being. As the study progressed, it became apparent that mass tourism posed more ill effects to the existing community than the superficial benefits it promised.

3. Results: Resisting Cultural Erasure

A year after the study was concluded, consultancy Integral Ltda. made several recommendations for developing the island's existing communities in tandem with the construction of the resort. In its initial stage, 2900 hotel rooms would be built at Mohan Beach by 1982, expanding to 4500 by 1990. In addition to a proposed bridge to link the island to the mainland and access roads to the resort, the planners

envisioned an eighteen-hole golf course (expanding to thirty-six holes by 1990), an equestrian school, marina, shopping centers, and residential areas (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1975, pp. 25–29).

Integral accepted many of the recommendations of the study, including the creation of facilities in a nearby community on the mainland, Pascabellos, "to house most of the persons employed by the hotels and other tourist facilities" (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1975, p. 40). On the island, provisions for public services and infrastructure would be implemented on a provisional basis. This would not only save the developers money but also reduce the number of conflicts foreseen by the authors of the socioeconomic study associated with moving towards an individualistic social structure. For example, water would be made available to community centers in Barú and Santa Ana during the first stage, with full service sewage and water hookups to homes provided during the second stage of development (1982–1990) (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1975, p. 34). Likewise, electricity would flow to community centers in Santa Ana and Barú during the first stage of development with home connections made available later (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1975, p. 36). Telephone connections would follow the same pattern (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1975, p. 37). Additional quality of life features would include "schools for kindergarten and grade school students, a health center, a police station and town hall, a post office, a fisherman wharf, parking facilities, children playgrounds, a covered market, paving of the square and main streets, and construction of sidewalks and trails" (Corporaciòn Nacional de Turismo 1975, p. 40). No timeline was provided for the implementation of these latter features.

What changed in ensuing years was not so much the position of the developers (who were plagued by in-fighting concerning who would hold control of the project) but the political and legal climate regarding ethnic communities not only in Colombia but also throughout Latin America. *Baruleros* mobilized for collective action in the face of the looming actions to displace them from their ancestral communities. They refused to vote in subsequent presidential elections as a result of nonexistent public services, including water and electricity (the latter of which arrived on the island in 1993).

The legal climate changed as well during the mid-1990s. While the Zapatista uprising in Mexico in 1994 was the most visible movement to assert indigenous rights in the modern state, Colombia had adopted laws protecting indigenous and black communal lands the previous year, in 1993. A tug of war for Barú island ensued with developers and local politicians pushing for development on the island, while the Constitutional Court in Bogota tended to side with the islanders. A new generation of consultants placed pressure on the Colombian government to act in favor of communal Afro-Colombian rights. In 1997, a United Nations fact-finding team confirmed the patterns of racial discrimination against black Colombians, making note of the contested claims to land in Barú (Commission on Human Rights, Economic and Social Council, and United Nations 1997).

Finally, in 2015, the Constitutional Court ruled in favor of ancestral land rights in a dispute over a stretch of land on Barú known as "La Puntilla". A year later, in a landmark decision, the Constitutional Court blocked the construction of a major highway that would link the new bridge between Pascabellos and Santa Ana to the Playa Blanca development further inland (El Espectador 2016).

In an earlier decision on the same case, which was vindicated by the 2016 landmark decision, justice Humberto Antonio and Sierra Porto affirmed,

> "The footprint planted by the execution of the project in question is notorious and acquires greater importance in view of the fact that the inhabitants of the region are engaged in activities such as fishing, tourism, aquaculture, and agriculture. In effect, the impact of the project does not exclusively affect environmental and socioeconomic dynamics because even the cultural sense of this [community] is disrupted by the sense and proportion in which the consequences themselves alter the relationship between the subjects that compose it, its environment, and the components that make it up." (Porto and Antonio 2010)

Thus, a century and a half after emancipation, Colombia's Constitutional Court vindicated those early claims to the collective ownership of land and set a precedent for future state-led negotiations

with Afro-Colombian communities. Such a decision reversed the attempted erasure of a collective society fighting to preserve its unique cultural identity.

4. Conclusions

From the colonial period, Nueva Granada, and later, the nation state of Colombia faced a crisis of identity. Spanish conquistadors established their seat of power in the Andean interior, where mestizaje and colonial power symbolized their presence in the New World. The importation of slaves on the Caribbean coast, however, introduced a competing cultural ethos into the Spanish dominated domain: Afro-Colombianism.

While Aline Helg has charted the subordination of the Afro-Colombian identity throughout the colonial and national period, recent developments in tourism projects, including on the island of Barú, demonstrate more contemporary examples of such cultural eradication: first, in the cultural representations of major tourism attractions in and around Cartagena and, second, in the efforts to manipulate traditional socioeconomic relationships on the island in advance of plans for beach tourism there.

Remarkably, the socioeconomic study conducted on the island in 1974 deviated from the trajectory of development that dominated the plans for mass tourism projects on Barú. Most importantly, the report offered an overview of life there, much as it had existed for centuries, including subsistence practices, architectural norms, and community social structures that endured even as Caribbean Colombia surged towards modernization. Had the conclusions of the report been taken to heart by politicians and developers, the plans for tourism development might have been relocated elsewhere or, at the very least, the rights and practices of *baruleros* might have been respected without their recourse to legal avenues. Their persistence, moreover, rewrites Helg's contention that Afro-Colombians have traditionally avoided conflict in defending their rights and, in the process, opens a new chapter in Afro-Colombian political identity on the Caribbean coast (Helg 2004, p. 264).

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