Introduction
The Colombian Pacific in Perspective

Introduction

In many Latin American nations, black history, identity, and culture have become public and political issues in unprecedented ways as “multiculturalism” becomes an official ideology of nationhood in such countries (Assies, Haar, and Hoekema 2000; Van Cott 2000). In some contexts, black people have become the subjects of legislation directed specifically at them, giving them particular rights.¹

Nowhere is this so evident as in Colombia, a nation unique in Latin America in having very detailed legislation directed at so-called black communities. Beginning in 1991 with a transitory article in the reformed Constitution and culminating in Law 70 of 1993, along with a series of associated decrees, legislation has opened the way for rural black communities in Colombia’s Pacific coastal region to gain collective title to land. In addition, two special seats were, between 1993 and 1997, reserved for black delegates in the House of Representatives, while black representatives now participate in important state bodies such as INCORA (Colombian Institute of Land Reform), Ministry of Mines, Ministry of the Environment, and Ministry of Education, as well as in organisms created especially to oversee the development of black communities, such as the Division of Black Community Affairs. Recent legislation has promoted the creation of Afro-Colombian studies in the national curriculum and given black students special access to grants for university studies.²

A great deal of all this activity is directed at the country’s Pacific coastal region, a mainly rural area inhabited predominantly by black people, alongside indigenous and white/mestizo minorities. This region is not unique to Colombia, since the northern part of Ecuador’s Pacific coast is very similar historically and culturally (Whitten 1986), but the combination of this very particular regional complex with the recent changes in the legislative panorama make the Colombian case of great interest.
Colombia's Pacific coastal region raises questions which are of broad concern to many other contexts in Latin America. What happens when a racial/ethnic social movement confronts legislative changes that seem to favor its aims? To what extent does official state multiculturalism co-opt and fragment a racial/ethnic social movement? How do the state and neoliberal, globalizing capitalism mediate processes of community organization? Does the implementation of legislation on land titling necessarily lead to the rigidification of notions of community and reinforce divisive versions of cultural difference? What changes in black identity and historical consciousness occur at the grassroots level when blackness becomes such a public and politicized issue? What relationships emerge between local intellectuals (e.g., young, black, educated people who take leadership roles in processes of political organization and consciousness-raising) and other local people (e.g., older black people who are farmers, miners, loggers). What are the links between culture as aesthetic commodity, as political object, and as way of life? What role do the memories and images of Africa and slavery have in shaping black identity in this changing context?

The articles in this special issue seek to address these broader questions in the context of examining Colombia's Pacific coastal region. These articles originated in a panel on "Black Populations, Social Movements and Identity in Latin America" that formed part of an international anthropology conference, Manchester '99: Visions and Voices, held October 27-31, 1999, to celebrate 50 years of anthropology at the University of Manchester. The contributors all have extensive fieldwork experience in the Pacific region of Colombia. Several are Colombians (Carlos Efrén Agudelo, Oscar Almario, Mauricio Pardo, Eduardo Restrepo), two are French (Michel Agier, Odile Hoffmann), and the other is German (Ulrich Oslender). There is an interdisciplinary feel to the special issue, since not all the contributors are anthropologists: Agudelo is a sociologist, Almario a historian, and Oslender and
Hoffmann are geographers. These four, however, have carried out long-term intensive fieldwork, including participant-observation and informal interview techniques. This gives their work an eminently ethnographic feel while enriching the special issue with insights from their own disciplines.

In this introduction, I will first briefly describe the Pacific coastal region, its history, society, and economy, in the context of Colombia and its black population. Next, I will outline the recent legislative changes affecting black populations in the country, before locating the present set of articles in the existing body of literature on black people in Colombia and Latin America. Then I will turn to the conceptual issues that arise from the present collection of papers.

The Pacific Coastal Region in the Colombian Context

From the 1520s, Africans were imported into settlements along the northern coast of Colombia. Cartagena, on the Caribbean coast, became the main slave port for the region and Africans were used in agriculture and personal service in this region and elsewhere from early on. The main occupation for Africans, however, was in gold mining. From about 1560, colonial settlements in the gold-rich regions of the Cauca Valley in the southwest and Antioquia in the north increased the demand for slaves to compensate for the fast declining supply of indigenous labor.

Due to its extremely humid climate, difficult river-crossed terrain, and constant indigenous rebellions, the Pacific coastal region was not effectively settled by the Spanish until the first half of the 17th century in the case of the southern half of the region, when towns such as Barbacoas, Tumaco, and Iscuandé were founded; and, in the case of the northern province, the Chocó, not until the late 17th century when the area was finally pacified after numerous indigenous revolts. The principal activity was placer gold mining. White settlement was very sparse and limited to the mining towns, some of which, such as Barbacoas, were prosperous settlements linked into international circuits of trade. By the late 18th century, indigenous people were outnumbered by black slaves and libres, blacks who had become free, usually through self-purchase with resources gained from gold-panning on their own account on their days of rest. As white control was severely limited, it was also difficult to stop slaves from running away and the numbers of these libres were swelled by cimarrones (fugitive slaves). Mestizaje (racial mixture) was limited compared to many other regions of the country.

By the time slavery was abolished in 1851, it was already a weak institution in most of the country, retaining importance only in the Cauca Valley and the Pacific region. In the latter area, white elites retained some interests in mining and agriculture and also controlled commerce. The region was domi-
nated numerically by black people who continued to mine, fish, hunt, and grow subsistence crops. Indigenous people increasingly formed a minority and, as blacks migrated from colonial mining centers along the region’s myriad rivers, they settled more and more in the headwaters of the rivers. Settlement patterns for blacks were rather dispersed and followed riverine patterns. The region continued to be a mining frontier.

From the late 19th century, foreign mining companies began to exploit the area. Commercialization of natural resources such as tagua (the ivory palm), rubber, and cacao drew in some immigrants from abroad and from the interior of the country. Whitten argues for the southern area of the Colombian and the northern area of the Ecuadorian Pacific region that these interests created a boom-bust economy, as national and international demand fluctuated over time, changing the “social demography” of the area as people came and went (Whitten 1986:4). Since about the 1960s, logging has become important throughout the region and, in the south, African palm plantations and large-scale shrimp farming began to make serious inroads on the land beginning in the 1980s. Small-scale mining has become more mechanized, using technology ranging from small motorized pumps through two-man mini-dredgers to large mechanical diggers. The whole region is being increasingly exploited and colonized, leading to more intensive in-migration from the interior and out-migration of local blacks to the big cities of the interior. As the Colombian state tries to re-orient the country to the Pacific basin economy, there are also plans afoot to build more roads, pipelines, and international ports in the region and, not least, a new inter-oceanic canal (a long-standing dream). Over the last few years, the region has been wracked by guerrilla and paramilitary violence as the conflicts that have affected many other areas of Colombia have spread from the northernmost Uraba zone steadily southwards, leading to massive displacements of people to regional and national urban centers.5

The Pacific region is the “black region” par excellence of Colombia, but it is important to grasp that many—even a majority of—black people live outside this region which is actually quite sparsely populated. This is a tricky subject as statistics on the number or distribution of black people in Colombia are a contested matter. Figure 1 is a map of areas with a “high proportion” of blacks, but such representations can only be based on estimates. Census data which included a racial classification (made by the enumerator), were last collected in 1918 (T. Smith 1966). The question of who is “black” is, of course, a very subjective and contextually variable one in a country such as Colombia and maps such as these do not specify how “black” is being defined. Despite this, figures are regularly produced that specify the racial composition of the Colombian population: in such estimates, blacks range from

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four percent to 45 percent of the total. The Colombian government has produced estimates which have ranged from six percent to 16 percent, but which seem to have recently settled on a figure of 26 percent.6

In any event, as the Pacific region receives ever more attention in the wake of 1993 legislation directed mainly at it, the presence of black people outside the region becomes doubly important. Outside the Pacific region, the main
concentrations of black people—bearing in mind the indeterminacy of that category—are in (1) the Caribbean coastal region, principally along the coastal strip itself, especially in Cartagena, and along the major rivers into the inter-Andean valleys; (2) the upper-central Cauca Valley around the city of Cali (especially in the northeast Cauca province and the southwest Valle del Cauca province); and (3) the major cities such as Bogotá, Cali, and Medellín. Black people in these areas are involved in economies based on urban services, industrial manufacturing, commercial cattlefarming and cashcrop agriculture, all of which are rather different from the situation in the Pacific region.

The 1991 Constitution and Law 70 of 1993

The legislation that defined Colombia as a multicultural and pluriethnic nation and that outlined special rights for both indigenous and black populations is covered in some detail in several of the articles in this special issue (see, especially, both Pardo and Restrepo; see also Agier and Hoffmann 1999; Arocha 1992, 1998; Asher 1998; Grueso, Rosero and Escobar 1998; Sánchez, Roldán, and Fernández 1993; Van Cott 2000; Wade 1995), so I will be brief.

In essence, constitutional reform was part of attempts to modernize the political system and further the peace process with various guerrilla movements. Indigenous and, to a lesser extent, black organizations participated in the reform process and managed—only just in the case of the black lobby—to get various articles included which addressed their special interests as “ethnic groups.” In the case of the so-called black communities—the term that became institutionalized in this process—this concession was Transitory Article 55 which primarily promised collective land rights for rural, riverine black communities in the Pacific coastal region. After arduous negotiations between the state and black organizations, AT 55 was later formalized into Law 70 of 1993, the major provisions of which are outlined in the opening paragraphs of this introduction. On the basis of this law, several land title claims have been successfully made by the local community councils which must be formed for this process and which are charged with mapping out the land claim and its beneficiaries. Oslander and Hoffmann describe aspects of this process in their articles.

It is too early to judge the overall impact of this law, but some things are evident. Despite provisions in the law that apply to black people in the country as a whole (for example, regarding Afro-Colombian materials in education), the law has regionalized the issue of blackness, making the Pacific coastal region the location of blackness in the nation. It has also ruralized blackness, nationally and regionally, by focusing on rural land claims and effectively ignoring the large urban black populations. Finally, it has “indianized” blackness by casting the issue in terms of bounded, rural communities, based on
so-called traditional production practices rooted in the land. It is clear that in dealing with black people, the state (and to some extent, black organizations themselves) looked to existing ways in which indigenous rights and claims were represented and legislated for. Nevertheless, Law 70 has also clearly been a major step forward in bringing blackness into the public eye and creating a national forum for issues around “black communities” to be debated. I return to an assessment of Law 70 below.

The Conceptual Background: Representations and Studies of the Colombian Pacific

Reports on the Pacific coastal region date back to the 1820s when the North American and European travelers who were touring the newly independent—and thus commercially more open—Latin America included the area in their itineraries (see Wade 1993:95-96). In the 1850s, a special commission was sent out by the Colombian government to map and review the state of the nation and it also reported on areas of the Pacific coastal region (Restrepo 1984; Wade 1993:13). The overall concern was with progress and black people were seen as a problem due to their supposed indolence—a not uncommon theme in ideas about black people throughout Latin America as new nations concerned themselves with their past, present, and future in a modernizing world.7

Such a concern continued into the early decades of the 20th century with studies of Colombia, such as Francisco Vergara y Velasco’s Nueva geografía de Colombia (1974[1901]) and was reflected in two early studies of the southern Pacific region by a missionary, Bernardo Merizalde (1921) and Liberal politician Sofonías Yacup (1976[1934]). The engineer Jorge Álvarez Lleras (1923) also wrote an account of his travels in the Chocó province. These writers were working in a context of debate about race, mestizaje (race mixture), and national progress. Merizalde’s was an important voice as the Church at the time had a great deal of influence in the area and controlled such public services as education and health. Yacup, on the other hand, was a member of the Liberal Party which, since it oversaw the abolition of slavery in 1851, had dominated the region politically, its somewhat anti-clerical views coming into competition with the Church, especially after the national Liberal victory in 1930. None of these writers was as disparaging about the local black populations as the writers of the 1850s commission, but they all saw the area as abandoned, poverty-stricken, and in need of modernization and integration into the nation.

The vogue of blackness that occurred in some areas of Latin America in the 1930s and 1940s—with afrocubanismo in Cuba and the widespread popularity of black-influenced music such as samba, tango, and, in Colombia,
porro and cumbia—had very little impact on ideas about the Pacific coastal region. This vogue depended at least in part upon primitivist associations of blackness not only with authentic roots but also with avant-garde European fashion; however, the Pacific coastal region was seen as the epitome of backwardness.9

Early anthropological work on the Pacific coastal region figured as part of broader research on black Colombian or Afro-Colombian culture (see Friedemann 1984; Wade 1993:40-42). The earliest works by José Rafael Arboleda Llorente (1950, 1952) and Aquiles Escalante (1954, 1964) followed broadly in the footsteps of their teacher, Melville Herskovits, who had defined an important current in Afro-American research with his interest in identifying Africanisms in New World black cultures (Whitten and Szwed 1970). As with other scholars working in a national tradition, they and others, such as the folklorist Rogerio Velásquez and the novelist and polymath Manuel Zapata Olivella (who focused primarily on the Caribbean coastal region), tended to focus on descriptions of local black cultural practices—for example, of music, dance, oral traditions, rituals, curing, and productive activities (see Friedemann 1984; Wade 1993:40-42 for references to some of their works). Foreign scholars at this time included Thomas Price, who also worked in the Herskovitsian mold on religious practices (Price 1955), and Robert West, who produced a ground-breaking historical geography of the Pacific coastal region which still serves as a key work of reference (West 1957).

The emphasis changed in the late 1960s with the work of Colombian anthropologist Nina de Friedemann who, focusing initially on the southern Pacific coastal region, began to investigate social relations and structures in more detail and place religious practices more firmly in the context of national Catholicism (Friedemann 1966-69, 1974, 1977b). This focus gained further strength with the publication of a key collaborative piece with Norman Whitten which saw black Pacific coastal culture as an adaptive complex in the regional and national context (Whitten and Friedemann 1974). Whereas Thomas Price and Arboleda Llorente had talked about “Afro-Colombian” culture, Whitten and Friedemann referred to “la cultura negra” and this became a widely-used category. Friedemann’s work outside the Pacific coastal region also placed the black cultures of Colombia’s Caribbean and inter-Andean valley regions in a national frame (Friedemann 1976, 1977a, 1980). For Friedemann, as for Whitten in his ground-breaking work on the coastal regions of northern Ecuador and southern Colombia (1965, 1986), questions of ethnic relations and of discrimination and exclusion were integral to an analysis of culture (see also Córdoba 1983). Friedemann also published widely in the press and was instrumental in drawing attention to what she called the “invisibilization” of blacks in Colombia (Friedemann 1984). In broad terms,

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this concern mapped onto the interest in challenging ideas of Latin American "racial democracies," supposedly based on dynamics of race mixture and tolerance, that had grown out of studies of race and class in Brazil from the 1950s.10

In the 1980s, Colombian anthropologist Jaime Arocha also turned his attention to the black populations of Colombia, playing a key role in training a generation of graduate students who have carried out fieldwork in the Pacific coastal region since the 1990s. His work, carried out often in collaboration with Friedemann, with whom he co-edited the journal América Negra, has highlighted the marginalization of black populations, especially those of the Pacific coast, and their inventiveness and adaptability in the face of difficulty (Arocha 1986, 1989, 1991, 1992, 1998; Friedemann and Arocha 1986). More recently, both Arocha and Friedemann have re-emphasized the presence of Africanisms in black and mainstream Colombian culture, with an emphasis on the Pacific coastal region, but also going further afield (Friedemann and Arocha 1986; Friedemann 1993; Arocha 1999). Michael Taussig has written extensively on black populations with an interest in the way cultural practices and representations are molded by, but also subvert capitalist relations of production. Although he has written directly on the Pacific coastal region itself, his main focus has been on the adjacent inter-Andean valley of the Cauca river (Taussig 1978, 1980, 1987). My own work, influenced strongly by that of Whitten, Friedemann, and Taussig, has dealt with the Pacific coastal region, but in rather particular contexts: first, in the very north of the Choco, which is as much part of the Caribbean coastal region and also heavily colonized by migrants from the interior; and second, in the city of Medellin where I looked at migrants from the Chocó (Wade 1993).

The 1990s in Colombia have seen an explosion of work on black populations, which cannot all be cited here, but much of which is cited in the articles included in this special issue.11 Increased academic interest relates partly to the growth of a Colombian black social movement and reflects earlier such interests in the black social movement in Brazil (Andrews 1992; Fontaine 1985; Hanchard 1994; Winant 1992). Not surprisingly, much of the work has focused on the Pacific coastal region as this is the area singled out by legislation for land title claims.12 Some work has also looked at the Caribbean coastal region, specifically Cartagena.13 Notably, a three-year multi-site Franco-Colombian project focused on the city of Cali in its regional context, investigating patterns of migration from the Pacific coastal region and the life of migrants in the urban context.14 Of the authors contributing to this special issue, Hoffmann and Agier were principal investigators in this project, while Agudelo was an associated researcher and I myself acted as an adviser. Restrepo was also linked to the project, although formally a researcher with the Colom-
bian Institute of Anthropology and History (ICANH). Obeying the dictates of the new legislation on black populations, ICANH's social anthropology section, headed by Mauricio Pardo, had begun a program of Afro-Colombianist research which it realized partly through collaboration with this project. With the several other researchers also involved in the project, it acted as an important crucible for research on black populations in the southern Pacific and the Cauca Valley area around Cali.

One central theme emerging from this body of work on Colombia is the variety of black experiences and situations in the country. The Pacific coastal region, which actually stretches from southern Panama to northern Ecuador, is in the Colombian and Latin American context an area rather sui generis. Its history, demography, and economy make it rather different from most other regions with significant black populations. The tiny size of the resident white population, the massive preponderance of blacks (about 90 percent) alongside a small but significant indigenous population (which has a long history of intermarriage with the blacks), the dispersed, riverine forms of settlement, the relative communicational isolation of the area, despite being an important producer of gold and other natural resources—these aspects make it very different from, say, the city of Cali and the nearby town of Puerto Tejada in the adjacent Cauca Valley, or Cartagena on the Caribbean coast. Even the Pacific coastal region itself is quite internally varied. The northern half was historically linked to the Caribbean via the Atrato River, which ran north through the middle of the area, leaving its coast relatively unsettled; indeed the northernmost zone of the Colombian Pacific region, near the Panamanian border, was settled as much by black people from the Caribbean coast as it was by people from core areas of the Pacific region. In contrast, the southern half of the Pacific region had been traditionally linked to Pacific maritime routes both north and south. These differences are still manifest in language, music, and other cultural practices.

It is not possible here to summarize the work on Latin American and Colombian black populations, but I want to draw out three general themes which have been salient in much of this literature and see how they pan out in the context of the Colombian Pacific and this set of articles.15

The first theme is that of racism and the relationship between race and class. This has formed the mainstay of debates about race in Brazil since the early 1950s (see Reichmann 1999) and has been an important thread in the work of Whitten on Ecuador (Whitten 1965, 1981, 1986; see also Schubert 1981; Stutzman 1981). It has also been significant in my own work and that of Nina de Friedemann and Jaime Arocha on Colombia (Arocha 1986, 1992, 1998; Friedemann 1984; Friedemann and Arocha 1986; Wade 1993; see also Streicker 1995). Given the history of official claims in these countries that

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racism is not an issue and that a state of racial democracy exists and—in Colombia and Ecuador—that the black population does not merit attention, it has been important to demonstrate that racism does exist, to show that the low status that affects most black people is due in part to its mechanisms and not solely to the workings of race-blind class discriminations and the legacies of past disadvantage, and to argue that black populations have their own particular cultural forms that do deserve scholarly attention.

The nature of the Pacific coastal region gives a particular twist to these issues. On the one hand, racism has been an important theme in research on the region in two senses: first, when the object of analysis is a town context—say, Tumaco in the far south, or in Quibdó in the north-central area—where a small white or light-skinned elite is dominant and discriminates against the black majority; second, when the object of analysis is the region as a whole, viewed in terms of its poverty, exclusion, and exploitation, for, as a marginalized region, it seems to stand for the overall marginality of blacks in Colombia. On the other hand, racism seems of little relevance when carrying out ethnography in small riverine communities where virtually everyone is black and “black identity” is—or has been until recently—rather meaningless. In this context, the Brazilian debates on race and class seem not to have the conceptual purchase that they might have for studying Cartagena or Cali.

It is noteworthy that the articles in this special issue hardly analyze racism and racial discrimination as such. The reader will find very few occurrences of these words and when they do occur it is generally in reference to their use by someone else—a black social movement activist, for example (e.g., Pardo, this volume). This is not to say that racism is not important to these authors, but it forms a backdrop to the issues they analyze. This is in part because the existence of racism and the cultural specificity of black populations, especially those in the Pacific coastal region, are now more recognized—even admitted by the Colombian state—than they were previously. It is also because the authors address a particular conjuncture, characteristic of the Pacific coastal region today, in which black identity and politics is forming more around defense of local territories from encroachment by outside forces (including indigenous communities) than it is around issues of racism as such. As Pardo shows in his article, local Pacific region communities often bypass the urban black organizations, which might give more weight to racism, and go straight to the central government institutions that can deal with their land title claims. Identity is also forming more around notions of cultural difference and the right to maintain that difference. An important post-1991 black organization, Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN), based in the Pacific region, argues that “presenting the situation of Afro-Colombian communities in terms of racial discrimination has little audience”; instead, the right to difference is
more effective (Pedrosa et al. 1996:251; my translation). Respect for difference is of course linked to anti-racism, but the emphasis is on claiming territorial and cultural space, rather than on racism per se.\textsuperscript{18}

A second major theme of the literature on black populations in Latin America has been that of mestizaje (mixture) which, in the context of national hierarchies of race, class, and region, often acquires overtones of blanqueamiento (whitening). Mestizaje is a broad term that encompasses (1) processes of sexual union between people of different racial categories who produce offspring categorized as intermediate (such as mestizo, mulato, zambo, moreno); (2) processes of cultural mixture perceived as associated with such reproductive processes; and (3) political discourses in which individuals identify themselves with other mestizos or a mestizo nation, and discuss the value of “the mestizo” or “the mestizo nation” in relation to hierarchized concepts of white, black and indigenous (C. Smith 1997). The mestizo was seen as a poor basis for national progress by some nationalist thinkers in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries. But other intellectuals in the early to mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century affirmed the positive value of mixedness as the characteristic feature of national identities—this was particularly clear in Brazil with Gilberto Freyre and in post-revolutionary Mexico.\textsuperscript{19} Even so, mixedness was often seen as leading to the eventual disappearance of black and indigenous people, while immigration policies often encouraged lighter-skinned immigrants, while discouraging darker-skinned ones, in an effort to “whiten” the nation. At a personal level, individuals engage in practices of mixture which might include marrying or having sex with a partner perceived as racially different and combining cultural elements derived from contexts seen as distinctly racially coded. Such practices may become strategies of whitening, if the motive is, or is perceived by others to be, one of moving upwards in the racial hierarchy by distancing oneself or one’s children from blackness and indigenousness. Both collective and personal dimensions of whitening are predicated on the dominant status of whiteness, or at least lightness (C. Smith 1997; Stutzman 1981; Wade 1993, 2000, 2001; Whitten 1981, 1986; Whitten and Torres 1998).\textsuperscript{20}

As Whitten (1986) and Whitten and Torres (1998) have argued, ideologies and processes of mestizaje as a progressive, whitening, nation-building process have been counterbalanced historically by ideas and practices of black and indigenous resistance and solidarity. This is also a theme I have explored in detail, trying to outline the factors that influence how these dual dynamics interweave in everyday contexts (Wade 1993). The emergence of black and indigenous social movements, vindicating the value of black and indigenous identities, and the advent of multiculturalist constitutional and legal reforms in some Latin American nations, which celebrate their ethnic and racial diversity—at least on paper—are the latest twists in this complex interplay, rather
than a radical break with it. Oslender argues in his article that these dynamics of integration and resistance are not necessarily simply opposed: black resistance may be sponsored by the state and capitalist interests (see also Restrepo, this volume, who argues that black social movements in the region have emerged in ways strongly mediated by the state, the Church, and various NGOs). Almario also shows how local black historical narratives take some of their shape from, while also resignifying and subverting, official histories—an idea that is also evident in Taussig's study of black religion and devil beliefs (Taussig 1980).

As with the theme of racism, the Pacific coastal region has a particular relation to the theme of mestizaje. On the one hand, key texts in the development of the theme have drawn on the region (e.g., Stutzman 1981; Whitten 1981, 1986; Whitten and Torres 1998). The concept of mestizaje seems most relevant to the region when, as with racism, the object of analysis is either a town context where racialized stratification exists, or, in the nation-building frame, the region as a whole where it represents the blackness that is supposed to be integrated into the mixing, whitening nation. On the other hand, in the small, dispersed, riverine settlements of the region, the concept seems to have less power. For historical reasons connected with the limited white settlement in the area, the region has seen as much or more mixture between indigenous and black people as between white and black (or indigenous).

For the articles in this issue, mestizaje is a framing concept which does not receive much detailed analysis as such. In keeping with the temporal and regional focus of this special issue, black resistance occupies the front stage. However, Oslender suggests that whitening forms of mestizaje may still be evident in the "discursive inclusion" of ethnic groups into the newly defined multicultural nation, alongside their real exclusion by ideologies of whitening and their acceptance, conditional upon such whitening. Almario also traces the dominance of whitened historical narratives which privileged white families in the foundation of certain settlements in the southern Pacific region, ignoring the role of black settlers. Local blacks have subtly different narratives which reinstate them and legitimate their presence and land-holding. Agudelo and Pardo both note the problems that whitening may present for black political solidarity, as it presents a possible means of avoiding black identification.

The third theme is that of "Africa" and Africanisms in New World black cultures. Herskovits's approach has been criticized (Mintz and Price 1992; Yelvington 2001), but an overall interest in the bridge between the two continents is still active. In Colombia, Friedemann and Arocha have been influential in pursuing this agenda and identifying "huellas de africanidad" (imprints of Africanism) [Friedemann and Arocha 1986; Friedemann 1993; Arocha 1999].
For people in the black social movement, "Africa" has a very uncertain status. In the Pacific coastal region, as Almario observes in his article, oral traditions connecting people in the region to Africa are virtually nonexistent; even the history of slavery is very subdued in the collective memory. Among the educated, urban activists, Africa can be an important icon (Restrepo 1997:300; Wade 1999b), but it may not be: images of the cimarrón (fugitive slave) and the palenque (fugitive slave settlement) may be more ubiquitous (Wade in press). When it is an icon, “Africa” is often evoked as a collage of globalized images, referring for example to Bob Marley and Nelson Mandela, rather than being closely tied to specific Africanisms in Afro-Colombian culture. That is, “Africa” assumes the status of a black diaspora in which precise genealogies are not necessarily central (see Agier, this volume; Wade 1999b). It is unclear whether the notion of Africa will assume greater importance or not in the Colombian Pacific.

Black Identity and Social Movements in the Colombian Pacific

The first major issue raised by the papers in this collection in relation to black identity and social movement is that of the impact of institutionalization, co-optation and fragmentation, above all in the context of the 1991/1993 reforms.

The black social movement in Colombia started out in the 1970s as a small set of urban nuclei, protesting about racism and the marginality of black populations in both material and discursive domains. Although black individuals who hailed originally from the Pacific coastal region were very influential in this movement, the movement had rather few repercussions in the region itself. Agudelo argues that racial identity was a minor element in electoral politics in the southern part of the Colombian Pacific and was usually conflated with being a local, as opposed to an outsider. As Restrepo and Pardo show, it was outside bodies, especially the Church, which in the 1980s helped form peasant organizations and promoted the inclusion of materials about black history and culture in their educational activities. This was more evident in the northern province of the Chocó than in the south. Then, in the 1990s, the movement exploded with the advent of constitutional reform and Law 70. The gains won here for blacks were the result of black protest and political mobilization—the AT 55 was included in the new Constitution after some effective protest, including the occupation of public buildings. Yet, the overall recognition of black and indigenous claims has also been analyzed as responding to state strategies of developing marginal regions to neoliberal modes of governance in which the state delegates its presence to approved ethnic organizations in these regions; to the state's desire to appear democratically respectful of minority rights on the international stage; and to the possi-
bility of constructing "traditional" indigenous and black communities as "natural guardians" of the environment, especially when this includes potentially valuable biodiverse reserves (see Pardo, this volume; Gros 1997; Escobar 1997; Van Cott 2000; Wade 1995, 1999a). As Agier and Restrepo argue, the emergence of an ethnicized concept of black community was strongly mediated by a host of different agencies, rather than simply emerging from the grassroots (see also Oslender, this volume). This at once puts a slightly different spin on well-known discussions about problems of the co-optation and institutionalization of social movements. The Colombian case shows that the movement itself emerged in a complex dialectic involving various different bodies.

Related to this and relevant to the analysis of social movements in general is the internal diversity of the movement and the complex interactions between different actors within it. In the case of the Colombian Pacific, we can see local community councils which are formed to file land title claims. These councils include a varied set of people to begin with, from subsistence farmers to school teachers who may have traveled widely outside the region (many school teachers from the Pacific region have had experience in the Amazon region, for example). There are also the more urban-based, better-educated individuals who form part of regional black activist organizations focused around the new legislation, some of which may be the kind of peasant organizations which have taken on an agenda and discourse about the vindication of black culture and identity, others of which may have been formed with such themes more directly in mind. As Hoffmann shows, such individuals are often engaged directly with "the communities," making regular field trips as advisors and disseminators of information about Law 70. She shows how in some cases older, less-educated community members defer to their advisors on matters of what constitutes black culture and tradition. There are also a few more or less national black activist organizations, of which the most influential is perhaps Cimarrón, based in Bogotá, which was formed well before the 1991/1993 reforms and thereafter started "accompanying" peasant land movements. In addition, there is a large number of small economic, often cooperative, enterprises, the basic rationale of which is to generate income for poor black people—and which are often run primarily by and for women—but which involve attendance at workshops on black history, identity, and culture, and on gender issues as well. There is also a variety of "cultural" associations and organizations which focus on regional styles of traditional music and dance or on reggae, rap, and hip-hop. As might be expected, these vary widely in terms of their ideological stance vis-à-vis black identity and racism (see Agier, this volume; Wade 1999b). Finally, there are a number of political parties or individuals engaging in the electoral arena which, more or less linked to the Liberal Party, have taken up the banner of black rights (see Agudelo, this volume).
All this makes "the black social movement" a highly varied and diverse network, rather than anything approaching a unitary phenomenon. Take the case of Proceso de Comunidades Negras, a black NGO that arose out of the 1991/1993 reforms and is regarded as an important representative of the black communities in the southern Pacific region (see Pedrosa et al. 1996; Grueso, Rosero, and Escobar 1998). Although its headquarters are in Buenaventura, it is actually a coordinating network rather than a single group; nevertheless, the fact that people representing the PCN undertake international tours rallying support for black communities in the Pacific coastal region, and that entering the name as an Internet search item generates many hits (including its own website), gives the impression of a coherent group. When I was doing fieldwork in Cali in 1997, I came across two smaller groups who said they worked with the PCN. One was an “association for the integrated development of Afro-Colombian communities” called Ku Mahaná (which I was told meant “with our people” in palenquero, a creole language from Palenque de San Basilio in Colombia’s Caribbean coastal region). This worked mainly in and around Cali and was also closely linked to the Movimiento Nacional de Comunidades Negras, a political grouping allied to the Liberal Party and engaging in traditional modes of electoral politics. Ku Mahaná received some funding from Transgas, a subsidiary of the Colombian petroleum giant Ecopetrol, which was running a pipeline through areas near Cali and contracted “community work” out to them. This is not far from the case Oslander (this volume) analyzes in which a palm-heart processing company sponsored the land title claim of a Pacific community; the result was to create a titled community which, whatever the possible benefits for the local black people, also served its commercial ends.

The other group connected to PCN was already defunct, but had been a small NGO, funded partly by Swissaid, and with a background in advising indigenous communities. It helped PCN with community work in the Pacific coastal region, disseminating information about Law 70 and advising on land claims. Again, funding for this work derived in part from Ecopetrol with which PCN had been in negotiation. These two examples give some idea of the complexities surrounding a single “organization” and the intricate networks within which it is an important node.

It is with this in mind that the problems of institutionalization, co-optation, and fragmentation that Pardo discusses need to be assessed. These are indeed characteristic of the black social movement in Colombia, but they can also be considered to some extent “situation normal” for social movements which can be thought of as complex networks with varied connections to a variety of nodes in civil society, the state, and mainstream politics. Pardo’s point is that a predominant trend within the network at present is the push for land titling in the Pacific region and that this takes place mainly through quite institu-
tional channels, dampening the radical potential of the movement. However, legislation opens up unforeseen opportunities and even state institutions can foster these. A recent Constitutional Court case involved a black activist, president of the local chapter of Cimarrón, who had protested that, since there was a “black community” in the city of Santa Marta, on the Caribbean coast, a representative of this community should, by the rights of Law 70, sit on the education committee of the local council. The local council, supported by regional courts and ultimately the Supreme Court, had denied that Santa Marta had a black community. A regional court made an inspection of certain areas of the city and concluded that a black community did not exist. For its purposes, a “community” had a clear boundary and a long-standing institutional existence. The Constitutional Court took a more flexible view, in effect accepting that a “community” could be fragmented and also emergent. This was also an important case in applying the terms of Law 70 outside the Pacific coastal region.

In short, although Pardo is right in his slightly pessimistic analysis—an assessment that is reinforced by Agudelo’s account of how traditional clientelistic party politics continues to dominate in the region—one must take account of the wider dimensions of the black movement network, the innumerable black “cultural” organizations that exist in the cities and towns, the spaces opened up for legal innovations, and the complex intersections between income-generation, black identity, and gender identity that may occur in, say, a women’s small-scale bread-making cooperative in Buenaventura. Such a perspective attends to the imbrication of politics and culture recently highlighted by Álvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar (1998; see also Fox and Starn 1997). Escobar and Álvarez (1992:3) observed that “new” social movements occur in a world in which “a multiplicity of social actors establish their presence and sphere of autonomy in a fragmented social and political space.” This can be as true of specific social movements as it is of the overall political panorama in which they occur.

A second important issue raised by the authors in this collection of essays is that of the impact of social movements and of legislation on identity, in terms of possible essentialisms and rigidification. Agier argues that in the Tumaco carnival, the town’s “cultural sector” puts on a display of a devil, a priest and a heroic black musician that simplifies ideas about blackness and whiteness into Manichean binaries that are easily readable to a wider audience and can move in global circuits of commoditized images. He shows that these figures are, in the local context of oral narrative, ambiguous and internally heterogeneous. The priest is seen as black and white, as persecutor of the blacks, but also their protector against the devil; the devil is a threat, but also a teacher, and he is black, white, and mixed-race.
The question remains, however, of the extent to which the more essentialized representations of identity that appear in the carnival, constructed by the local cultural entrepreneurs, have the power to colonize the townspeople's concepts and displace the heterogeneity and ambiguity surrounding these mythical figures and local conceptions of identity. A close look is needed beyond the confines of the festival itself. It may be that the objectified and essentialized images produced by the black activists for this context simply add to the multiple fragments of imagery circulating locally and translocally, rather than becoming dominant binaries that channel people's conceptions of themselves and others. It is clear that people may be taking a more objectified view of something called "black culture" or "black identity," but this does not necessarily entail simplifying, binary essentialisms.²⁶

Hoffmann's article is very apposite to this issue. She shows that, while the 1993 legislation on black communities does entail the construction of notions of territory and identity that are quite clearly bounded in the regional context—sometimes with the encouragement of urban black intellectual activists who tend to use a more literate register of memory—these notions are also subject to constant re-definition in daily practices in which people seek to achieve consensus or workable solutions that seem appropriate. Thus "white" and "Indian" families may be included in the definition of a "black community" that is seeking land title: reference is made to black-indigenous intermarriage, or to histories of cooperation, exchange, and sharing, as practices constituting a right to "be black" for the purposes of the land claim. Hoffmann's examples are very telling in the way they juxtapose the ethnography of grassroots pragmatism with the more rigidly defined categories characteristic both of legislation and intellectual discourse. It is worth noting that the terrain is very much under construction. It is very unclear what the long-term trends will be and whether the examples she gives represent seeds that will burgeon or marginal cases that will wither on the vine. It may be that the relative indeterminacy of racial categories in Latin America, while it has often been seen as something that helps mask racism and undermine black solidarity, may also work against the rigidification of identity.

In a recent piece, Ferreira da Silva (1998) contests analyses by U.S. scholars such as Hanchard (1994) which saw the blurred nature of racial categories as weakening black consciousness. Looking at interview material from Brazilian labor activists, she argues that ideas about what constitutes black consciousness may be too narrowly predicated on U.S.-type models. Her interviewees did not show explicit signs of being racially "conscious" and even denied the existence of racism, but it was clear they were aware of patterns of racial inequality and of the moral discourse surrounding blackness. As labor activists, their agenda of social equality inevitably had a racial dimension to it,
even if this was not predominant. Hanchard (1999) responds that the Brazilian context is strongly influenced by the U.S. one such that U.S. models may not be as inappropriate as Ferreira da Silva argues.

The case of the Colombian Pacific is very different from Brazil, but there are some of the same dynamics of a local flexibility about identity, in this case being negotiated for the purposes of land claims, interacting with "external" models that are less flexible. The legal models which require a certain clarity of identification—as do the U.S. models of racial identity—may in the end shape local dynamics in the Colombian Pacific more strongly than U.S. models influence Brazil. This is simply because they have the force of a law which directly affects the territories of local black communities.

On balance, then, there is reason for pessimism—the fragmentation of the black social movement, the penetration by state and capitalist interests of social movement dynamics, the overpowering dominance of clientelistic party politics—but also some interesting positive features, some of which are perhaps particularly Latin American—a growing network of awareness about black identity and culture which opens up unforeseen opportunities, and some flexibility about categories in local contexts. Undoubtedly, the major reason for pessimism is the terrible scourge of violence that is afflicting the region, just as in so many other areas of the country (Wouters 2001). Massacres of civilians, murders of community leaders, and the massive displacement of people from rural areas are hardly conducive to the productive negotiation of territories and identities.

Black identity in the Colombian Pacific is in the process of redefinition, apparently towards modern or postmodern forms: young, urban, black intellectuals tell the older black folk what their "black culture" is; iconic, globalized, collage images of Africa circulate; identity becomes both more and less flexible, both more central to politics and more multiple. I think it is important to recognize that the Pacific coastal region has always been modern (or as modern as anywhere else) in the sense that it has always been integrated into global circuits of commodities and information. The fact that it was (and is) isolated and poor does not make it simply "traditional" or outside history. As García Canclini (1995) argues, everywhere in Latin America are hybrid cultures in which the urban and the rural, the traditional and the modern interpenetrate. Almario shows that rural black folk construct their own histories using the categories of official history, such as land deeds, wills, and private ownership of land and figures of the white elite. In this sense, what is happening in the Colombian Pacific is not a transition from traditional to modern forms of identity, but from identities adapted to and struggling with a particular location in national and transnational circuits to identities that are now facing new conjunctures of those same circuits.
Notes

1. On Ecuador, see Whitten and Quiroga 1998; on Brazil, see Arruti 1998; Véran 1999.

2. In June 1998, the Ministry of Education passed Decree 1122 which stated that all state educational establishments should include “Afro-Colombian Studies” as a subject in their curricula. See Ministerio de Educación Nacional 2001; Rovira de Córdoba and Córdoba Cuesta 2000.

3. For the history of the region, see, for example, Almario and Castillo 1996; Aprile-Gniset 1993; Colmenares 1979; Romero 1995; Sharp 1976; West 1957


5. For literature that describes the Pacific coastal region from the early 20th century onwards, see notes 12 and 14, below. See also Cifuentes 1986.

6. For various estimates, see Arocha 1992:29; Monge Oviedo 1992; Mosquera 1985:29; T. Smith 1966. The state estimates come from the Banco de la República (for 1963; see T. Smith 1966:215) and the Minister of the Interior (for 1996; see Glèlé-Ahanhanzo 1997:5). The figure of 26 percent is given by the National Planning Department (DNP 1998:16 and appendix) which gives a total figure of 10,562,519 Afro-Colombians in the country, a figure said to be based on the 1993 census, on information supplied by grassroots organizations and regional coordinators, and on Document 2909 of 1997 produced by CONPES (National Council for Economic and Social Planning, a sub-division of the DNP [National Department of Planning]) called “Programa de apoyo para el desarrollo y reconocimiento étnico de las comunidades negras” (document available on-line at the CONPES website, but without the vital appendix which presumably contains the relevant data). The same figures are cited, for example, in Ministerio de Educación Nacional (2001:26), an Afro-Colombian curriculum handbook. Meanwhile DANE (National Department of Statistics), using its 1993 census as a basis and projecting into 2001, has identified a number of municipalities with a “significant Afro-Colombian population”: the total population of these areas comes to 4,846,327 (13 percent of the national total), but this excludes the major cities (document titled “Estadísticas Sociales,” dated 2001 and available on the DNP website [www.dnp.gov.co], section on “Diversidad étnica y cultural,” subsection “Estadísticas”). These data are reproduced by another Afro-Colombian curriculum handbook (Rovira de Córdoba and Córdoba Cuesta 2000:25). Urrea, Ramírez and Viáfara (n.d.) use a combination of sources—the 1993 census, their own large-scale survey work on the city of Cali, estimates for other parts of the country, and DANE’s household surveys, which
in 2000 asked a "racial question" in which the household head was asked to classify household members in relation to four model photographs—to arrive at a figure of 5,417,612 (18 percent of the total population).

7 Key historical works on race and nation include Graham 1990; Skidmore 1974; Stepan 1991; see also Appelbaum, Macpherson and Rosemblatt in press. On race and nation, see also Stutzman 1981; Whitten 1981.


9. See, however, Waxer (1998:107-111) who shows that, in the 1950s and 1960s, some dance orchestras based in the southern Pacific coast port town of Buenaventura participated in the popularisation of black-influenced Latin American music, into which they wove modernized versions of local styles such as *currulao*.


12. Texts include Apriile-Gniset 1993; Arocha 1999; Asher 2000; Camacho and Restrepo 1999, which despite its general title is mostly about the Pacific coast and the adjacent Cauca Valley; del Valle and Restrepo 1996; Escobar 1997; Escobar and Pedrosa 1996; Leyva 1993; Losonczy 1997; Pardo 2000; Wade 1995, 1999a. See also Uribe and Restrepo 1997, which has essays on black populations by Escobar, Losonczy, Pardo, Restrepo and Wade. See also note 14, below.


14. This project was titled "Organización social, dinámicas culturales e identidades de las poblaciones afrocolombianas del pacífico y suroccidente en un contexto de movilidad y urbanización" and was run jointly from 1996 through 2000 by CIDSE (Centro de Investigaciones y Documentación Socioeconómica) of the Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Económicas, Universidad del Valle, Cali, and IRD (Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, Paris). It has resulted in numerous publications, many of them working papers produced by CIDSE. See the papers in this special issue for some references. See also Agier et al. 1999; Agier and Hoffmann 1999; Hoffmann 1998; Urrea 1997; Urrea et al. 2000; Wade 1999b.

15. For general reviews of approaches to the study of blacks in Latin America, see Fontaine 1980; Wade 1993:ch. 2, 1997; Whitten and Szwed 1970; Whitten and Torres 1998.

16. On Tumaco, see Agier, this volume; Hoffmann, this volume; Agier et al. 1999; on Quibdó, see Friedemann 1977b; Wade 1993:ch. 7 See also Whitten 1986:ch. 8 on San Lorenzo, a town in northern Ecuador.
17 The admission by the Colombian state of the existence of racism is at best an implicit one. In my experience, the existence of Law 70 of 1993 is rarely justified explicitly in terms of the existence of racism in Colombia. One judgement by the Constitutional Court—a body that has taken a particular interest in following up issues connected to affirmative action legislation (Van Cott 2000:116-117)—does provide a coherent justification for Law 70 in terms of both past and present racism, but it is the only such official intellectual legitimation I have seen. See Corte Constitucional, judgement T-422/96, September 10, 1996.

18. Nevertheless, at a recent conference in Cartagena, Colombia, on “Afrodescendientes,” a spokesperson for the PCN commented to me that, in his view, the issue of racism was assuming greater importance for the PCN and the black social movement in general (Carlos Rosero, personal communication, October 2001).

19. See the essays by Skidmore on Brazil and Knight on Mexico in Graham 1990.

20. In addition to the sources cited, there is a large literature on mestizaje in Latin America which includes Appelbaum, Macpherson and Rosemblatt in press; de la Cadena 2000; Graham 1990; Guss 2000; Hale 1996; Martinez-Alier 1974; Nelson 1999; Skidmore 1974; Stepan 1991; Twine 1998:ch. 6; Wright 1990.

21. See Jackson 1995 for a similar view of the multiple agents involved in lowland indigenous social mobilization in the Colombian Amazon.

22. See again Jackson (1995), who shows how lowland indigenous people adopted, for purposes of public representation, images of “indigenous community” that were somewhat at odds with their own social life, but that came from more experienced highland indigenous activists.

23. See http://www.afrocolombia.f2s.com/


25. For discussion of this topic, see, for example, Brown 1998; Warren 1998; Watanabe 1995; Werbner 1997

26. Werbner (1997:229) argues that “objectification,” a positive form of collective self-identification, should be distinguished from “reification” which is a pernicious essentialism which distorts and silences.

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