Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero communities at the National Museum of Colombia: a reflexive ethnography of (in)visibility, documentation and participatory collaboration

A thesis submitted to The University of Manchester for the degree of

PhD in Social Anthropology with Visual Media

in the Faculty of Humanities

2016

Sofía Natalia González Ayala

School of Social Sciences, Department of Social Anthropology
# Contents

LIST OF IMAGES .................................................................................................................................................. 5

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................................................. 7

DECLARATION ....................................................................................................................................................... 8

COPYRIGHT STATEMENT ...................................................................................................................................... 8

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..................................................................................................................................... 9

INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................................................................. 10

SUBJECT, HYPOTHESIS, THEMES .................................................................................................................. 10

ETHNOGRAPHER’S GAZE ................................................................................................................................... 13

VISUAL MATERIAL ............................................................................................................................................. 16

A MUSEUM ETHNOGRAPHY ................................................................................................................................ 23

Collaboration, communities and museums ........................................................................................................ 24

RACE, RACISM AND RACIAL STEREOTYPES .................................................................................................... 26

THESIS STRUCTURE ........................................................................................................................................... 28

CHAPTER 1: ‘WAKES AND LIVING SAINTS: FINALLY!’ ...................................................................................... 30

Three ‘Curatorial Scripts’ ..................................................................................................................................... 33

The National Museum’s collections and the ‘invisibility of studies of the Black’ .............................................. 34

The NM’s ethnographic collections and the ethnologist’s vision ........................................................................ 35

‘Invisibility’ and ‘stereotypy’ .................................................................................................................................. 37

Huellas de africanía [traces of Africanness] ......................................................................................................... 39

Afro-genesis and the Colombian racialized geography ......................................................................................... 43

The 1991 Constitution and Law 70 of 1993 of ‘Black communities’ .................................................................... 45

New museology and ‘contact zones’ .................................................................................................................... 49

Millenios de diversidad [Millennia of Diversity] (1994) ........................................................................................ 51

The ‘voids’ in the Museum collections, the Strategic Plan 2001-2010 and the ‘48-91’ project ............................. 52

Curating stereotypes ............................................................................................................................................. 56

CONCEPTUAL THEMES ....................................................................................................................................... 74

The politics of (in)visibility .................................................................................................................................. 75

Ethnography, documents and the museum effect ................................................................................................. 77

Exhibitions as documents ..................................................................................................................................... 78

Documents as ‘new’ museum objects .................................................................................................................... 79

Participatory collaboration as curatorship ........................................................................................................... 80

CHAPTER 2: BACKSTAGE .................................................................................................................................... 83

Backstage - Frontstage ......................................................................................................................................... 86

MUSEUM MEETINGS AND MINUTES ............................................................................................................. 88

Taking minutes ....................................................................................................................................................... 89
List of images

Exhibition Velorios’s catalogue cover (p. 17)

Simulated funerary altar, made in 2007 by Augusto Sánchez (p. 18)

Museum designs based on photograph of simulated altar (p. 19)

Photograph of exhibition’s entrance (p. 20)

Image of ‘ninth night’ banner (p. 21)

Photograph of set up of the Itinerante in Villavicencio in 2010 (p. 22)

Chapter 1: ‘Wakes and living saints: finally!’ Jaime Arocha’s column in El Espectador (p. 30)

Un negro es un negro (p. 58)

Negra menta in Negricolas (p. 60)

Negra Nieves in Negricolas (p. 61)

Front cover of book Afro-reparaciones (p. 63)

Negra Menta in Afro-reparaciones (p. 69)

Jesús Abad Colorado’s picture (p. 70)

Martha Posso Rosero’s picture (p. 71)

Slave ships 1 (p. 72)

Slave ships 2 (p. 73)

Chapter 2: Backstage: Page 29 of Velorios’s exhibition catalogue (p. 83)

The minutes of 5 May 2006 (p. 92)

Page of minutes with Arocha’s hand-drawn scheme, dated 31 January 2008 (p. 107)

Chapter 3: Frontstage: Screenshot of Velorios’s ‘Profane area’ from Manglerojo’s website (p. 113)


Sacred and profane: Velorios’s exhibition’s scale model and screenshot from Manglerojo’s website (p. 118)

Screenshots of the ‘African ancestors’ corner and the ‘Agony’ stage (p. 120)

Screenshots of the ‘Death’ stage and the corner for the ‘Adoration feasts to Baby Jesus (p. 122)

Arocha’s hand-drawn plan for the exhibition (p. 134)

Moya’s plans for the exhibition (p. 137)

Museography division’s plans for the exhibition (p. 140)

StillS from the lobby’s video of the exhibition inauguration (p. 143)

Screenshot of Velorios’s ‘script’ (p. 150)

Chapter 4: Travelling Wakes and living saints: Screenshot of the Itinerante’s website (p. 151)
Banner with the titles, logos and names of the institutions that organized, supported and sponsored the exhibition (p. 159)

Images of the rest of the banners, which can be expanded and downloaded freely (p. 160)

Letter 1: a new presentation of the exhibition’s script (p. 167)

Letter 2: a new presentation of the exhibition’s script (p. 168)

González’s drawing of the plan (p. 170)

View of the two rooms where the Itinerante was setup (p. 171)

The set up in Guapi’s coliseum (p. 175)

Before and after the Itinerante in Buenaventura’s House of Culture (p. 176)

Banners in the entrance of the Itinerante in Buenaventura (p. 180)

Chapter 5: Tour-guiding: Stills from tour-guides videos that travelled with the Itinerante (p. 185)

Stills from the video I edited of Niches en Acción members, Marly Estrada and Jhonatan Fruto tour-guiding at the Javier Sánchez school in Barranquilla (p. 201)
Abstract

The University of Manchester

PhD Candidate: Sofía Natalia González-Ayala

Thesis title: Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero communities in the National Museum of Colombia: a reflexive ethnography of (in)visibility, documentation and participatory collaboration

12 April 2016

The subject of this thesis is the temporary and travelling exhibition Velorios y santos vivos: comunidades negras, afrocolombianas, raizales y palenqueras [Wakes and living saints: Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero communities]. ‘Velorios,’ as many people involved in the project referred to it, portrayed Afro-Colombian funerals and devotions to Catholic saints, and was on display in the temporary exhibitions hall in the National Museum of Colombia, in Bogotá, from 21 August to 3 November 2008. Before it closed, a travelling version was designed that began to go around the country in 2009. When I wrote this thesis, ‘the Itinerante,’ as the travelling version was referred to at the Museum, was still available as one of the displays that its Travelling Exhibitions Programme (TEP) offered to the public. I use Velorios and the Itinerante as the main ‘characters’ in an ethnography of the National Museum of Colombia, where I explore the different instances in which this major exhibition produced visibilities and invisibilities regarding the place of Afro-Colombian people in the nation. As a museum, this institution is responsible for managing, researching and displaying its four collections (of art, history, ethnography and archaeology) but also, as one of the Ministry of Culture’s ‘special administrative units,’ it is in charge of designing and implementing policies that regulate all the other museums in Colombia. This is in keeping with national and international official legislation regarding cultural heritage, like the National Culture Plan and UNESCO’s resolutions, and in support of the development and strengthening of museums, museology and museum design in the whole country. Here I show what these responsibilities and duties translate into on the ground. The themes that the thesis explores are i) (in)visibility, ii) participatory collaboration and, also as the means to approach these themes, iii) documents and documentation. They are all components of the kind of curatorship that this museum exhibition conveyed.
**Declaration**

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

**Copyright statement**

i. The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the “Copyright”) and s/he has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.

ii. Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made only in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made.

iii. The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trade marks and other intellectual property (the “Intellectual Property”) and any reproductions of copyright works in the thesis, for example graphs and tables (“Reproductions”), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.

iv. Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this thesis, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions described in it may take place is available in the University IP Policy (see http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DoculInfo.aspx?DocID=487), in any relevant Thesis restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, The University Library’s regulations (see http://www.manchester.ac.uk/library/aboutus/regulations) and in The University’s policy on Presentation of Theses.
Acknowledgements

This thesis is dedicated to my mum, Nancy, who is my pillar and role model in life.

To Pete and Rupert, my two supervisors, who committed patiently to this project, and helped me to cross boundaries in ideas, ways of writing and of doing anthropology that I was not aware of, I am deeply grateful.

To Katie, Hong and Owen, my housemates and family in Manchester.

To María de Lourdes and Michael Brendan, my dearest friends.

Special thanks to my uncle Julio, the representative of Ayala family in the UK.

I also thank my colleagues and friends at the anthropology department, most especially Sofía and Paola, and also Ines, Thodoris, Hester, Rachel and Hannah.

Jaime Arocha, my teacher and mentor, and other members of the GEA – Grupo de Estudios Afrocolombianos, made this work possible institutionally and personally. Thank you too.

Cristina Lleras supported me both on a personal and institutional level, and encouraged me to make the most of an anthropological environment very different from the one I was used to in Colombia.

Colciencias funded my studies and expenses in the UK, making it possible for me to dedicate myself fully to many days of thinking and writing.

Last but not least, during ‘fieldwork,’ which often felt like a déjà vu, Niches en Acción in Barranquilla, particularly Deibys and Marly, supported me and invited me to be part of their social project, to which I hope this thesis contributes. In Bogotá, I must give special thanks to Johanna Galindo, Loretta Meneses, Yasaira Sánchez, Bertha Aranguren, Antonio Ochoa and Adriana Parra.
Introduction

Subject, hypothesis, themes

The subject of this thesis is the temporary and travelling exhibition Velorios y santos vivos: comunidades negras, afrocolombianas, raizales y palenqueras [Wakes and living saints: Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero communities]. ‘Velorios,’ as many people involved in the project referred to it, portrayed Afro-Colombian funerals and devotions to Catholic saints, and was on display in the temporary exhibitions hall in the National Museum of Colombia, in Bogotá, from 21 August to 3 November 2008. Before it closed, a travelling version was designed that began to go around the country in 2009. When I wrote this thesis, ‘the Itinerante,’ as the travelling version was referred to at the Museum, was still available as one of the displays that its Travelling Exhibitions Programme (TEP) offered to the public. I use Velorios and the Itinerante as the main ‘characters’ in an ethnography of the National Museum of Colombia, where I explore the different instances in which this major exhibition produced visibilities and invisibilities regarding the place of Afro-Colombian people in the nation. As a museum, this institution is responsible for managing, researching and displaying its four collections (of art, history, ethnography and archaeology) but also, as one of the Ministry of Culture’s ‘special administrative units,’ it is in charge of designing and implementing policies that regulate all the other museums in Colombia. This is in keeping with national and international official legislation regarding cultural heritage, like the National Culture Plan and UNESCO’s resolutions, and in support of the development and strengthening of museums, museology and museum design in the whole country. Here I show what these responsibilities and duties translate into on the ground. The themes

---

1 ‘Black’ [negro] refers to a racial category inherited from the colonial period, which alludes to the local Black movement that emerged in the 1970s and also to the ‘Black communities’ [comunidades negras] that the 1991 constitution includes in Law 70. ‘Afro-Colombian’ [afrocolombiano] is a more recent name that acknowledges ancestry from African enslaved people, and alludes to the word ‘Afro-descendent.’ ‘Raizal’ is an ethnic category that refers to the native people and diaspora from San Andres, Providencia and Santa Catalina Islands in the Caribbean Sea. ‘Palenquero,’ also an ethnic category, refers to the people from San Basilio de Palenque, a maroon enclave founded by African enslaved people in the colonial period near Cartagena, Bolívar, in the Caribbean continental region, and also to their diaspora and language. For readability I will include all four categories into the label ‘Afro-Colombian.’ I discuss these categories in more detail below.

2 There was one international version of the exhibition, which took place in 2010 at the University of Barcelona, in Spain, led by a historian who had presented a paper in one of the seminars organized at the Museum in 2008. I do not have the space or enough information to discuss it here.

3 In the beginning of 2016, the Itinerante appears as one of the TEP’s ‘past’ exhibitions, possibly not available for lending anymore. According to this office’s website the exhibition travelled until 2014, and had 64,731 visitors (http://www.museonacional.gov.co/exposiciones/itinerantes/Paginas/Pasadas.aspx, 10-Feb-2016).

that the thesis explores are i) (in)visibility, ii) participatory collaboration and, also as the means to approach these themes, iii) documents and documentation. They are all components of the kind of curatorship that this museum exhibition conveyed. That is, paraphrasing the words of a Museum staff member, what stories were told in this exhibition, how and with what kinds of objects. I will explore these three themes below.

In my analysis I use the notion of (in)visibility to argue that this exhibition accumulated both visibilities and invisibilities. Thus, following Halpern (2014), I approach (in)visibilities as not merely visual, but as ‘accumulations,’ ‘densities,’ ‘sites of production,’ ‘apparatuses’ and ‘spaces.’ In this case, there was also accumulation of ‘voids,’ ‘silence,’ and absence. I use visual documents to present and disassemble this accumulation. Velorios was an attempt to counter the absence (‘voids’) or the racially stereotyped representations of Afro-Colombian people in the NM’s collections and exhibitions, understood by the scholars involved in the process as a form of ‘invisibility’ (Friedemann, 1984). Velorios and its itinerant version were a unique experience at the National Museum because they emerged from a demand made by two scholars from the National University of Colombia, who at the time belonged to the Group of Afro-Colombian Studies [Grupo de Estudios afrocolombianos, GEA], a Black and Afro-Colombian sociologist, Claudia Mosquera Rosero-Labbé, and an anthropologist with long experience in the study of Afro-Colombian communities and GEA’s leader, Jaime Arocha. In 2005 and 2006, they approached the Ministry of Culture’s Director of Ethno-Culture and Regional Promotion,5 Doris de la Hoz, and the Director of the National Museum, Maria Victoria de Angulo de Robayo, for the National Museum to create a hall dedicated to Afro-Colombian people—which never came to fruition. In their view, such a hall would constitute a form of ‘Afro-reparations’ for historical and current racial discrimination (Mosquera and Barcelós, 2007). After long and difficult negotiations, as a means to keep the conversation going, Arocha proposed a temporary exhibition about funerary rituals, and the NM’s Arts and History Curatorship office became responsible for the project. As it progressed, more Afro-Colombian people got involved, initially to advise whether what was to be presented in the exhibition was right and appropriate. When the project became more political and disagreements with its scope and subject were made public (including a critique by Mosquera, who eventually withdrew from the project), ‘participation’ was the label that helped to validate and protect it. From 2009, when the Itinerante began to travel around the country, collaborative participation took off, giving continuity to the process while other (in)visibilities accumulated. Digital documentation, distribution and circulation counteracted the authority of the curators, the Museum and the Ministry of culture, but they also disseminated this authority.

5 The Dirección de Etnocultura y Fomento Regional was one of the departments of the Ministry of Culture, when it was created in 1997. In 2008, this office was divided into the Dirección de Poblaciones and the Dirección de Fomento Regional (http://www.secretariasenado.gov.co/senado/basedoc/decreto_4827_2008.html#2, accessed 20-Sep-2015).
As a previous doctoral thesis demonstrated (Lleras, 2011), the 2008 exhibition’s visitors at the Museum perceived Afro-Colombians—they were visible—as exotic ‘others,’ part of the Colombian multicultural nation, and this meant that the reparations agenda remained invisible. In this thesis, I demonstrate that this perception prevailed as the travelling exhibition circulated around the country, and argue that such visibility went hand in hand with the fact that Afro-Colombians were invisible as authors, curators or research leaders in the exhibition’s acknowledgements.

Turning to the second theme, I argue the accumulation of (in)visibilities took place through ‘collaborative participation,’ through which Velorios and the Itinerante questioned the curatorial and administrative model that the NM followed at the time, led by in-house curators and their corresponding collections. I present collaborative participation not in ‘rosy terms’ (Foster, 2006) but as including conflict. A hierarchy of knowledge, race and geography was enacted in terms of what people, places and objects were included and excluded, who was invited to participate, the places where fieldtrips were made and the temporary and travelling exhibition set up, and how people were acknowledged for the work they did. Afro-Colombian and non-Afro-Colombian people were involved and acknowledged differentially. I show that while conflict and structural hierarchies limited Velorios’s and the Itinerante’s scope and outcomes, conditioning the input that museum staff, anthropologists and Afro-Colombian people were able to effect, and the forms of acknowledgement they were granted, they also allowed the exhibition to stay alive, in circulation. Collaborative participation in Bogotá and in the regions where the Itinerante was set up countered hierarchies, but the fact that Afro-Colombians were acknowledged as representatives and sabedores (literally, knowers; i.e. advisors or experts) and non-Afro-Colombians as curators, authors and research leaders, re-established those hierarchies.

Documents and documentation—the third major theme—were another central element in the way that (in)visibilities accumulated and were characteristic of the project’s collaborative participation. Following Riles (2006), I use documentary clusters as ethnographic objects (that provide information about how the exhibition was presented to the observer), as methodological and analytical tools (to disassemble the exhibition), and as a way to structure my ethnographic narrative and present it to the reader. Many of the objects used to tell Velorios’s and its itinerant version’s story were visual and textual documents, and it is as digital documents that the exhibition still exists today. In the initial stages of the exhibition project, documents collected during fieldtrips were thought of as means to rescue and record disappearing practices. Documents were also produced to record the curatorship process in the form of minutes, sound recordings, video and photographs. In the temporary exhibition, they were presented as proof, careful and detailed records of activities, places, people and objects related with Afro-Colombian religiosity, thought of as a means to counter racial stereotypes and to contextualize the exhibited rituals. Copies of these records were returned unedited to community leaders and stored in the Museum’s archive. The temporary exhibition was thoroughly documented with pictures, videos and textual descriptions, which were used to design its travelling version. In this ‘Itinerante’ stage of Velorios’s life, digital documentation, leaving the Arts and History Curatorship offices, the Museum and Bogotá, helped collaborative participation to take off. I show how these
documents were produced, clustered and circulated, disseminating the Museum’s authority—and by extension that of the multicultural state—at the same time that they questioned it. Inspired by Riles’s proposal of an understanding of ethnography as a modality of ‘response,’ that is not passive but collaborative, and her views about the document as ‘just a means [that] points to an end beyond itself—even as what captivates participants is the means of document production’ (Riles, 2006: 27), I invite the reader to ‘complete’ this ethnography by not just reading, but also seeing it as a cluster of documents that accumulated and circulated for several years and in different spaces.

To do this, I propose a visual methodology that dissects what this exhibition made visible and invisible. Following Halpern (2014) I approach vision as an operation, a quality and a technical condition, and I argue that the ethnographic gaze that operated in the exhibition was instrumental in its further circulation. My position as visual documentarist in relation to this exhibition, to the people it represented, and to the documents it gathered, are pertinent in my analysis. The idea of doing this PhD emerged from my own participation and that of other anthropologists in Velorios and the Itinerante from 2007 until 2011. There were changes in the roles I played, my ‘ethnographic’ gaze, and the acknowledgement I was granted during the process I describe. As a non-Afro-Colombian professional anthropologist who worked for more than three years at the National Museum, I occupied a position in the hierarchies of race, geography and knowledge I discuss in the thesis. Then, in 2012-3, I did fieldwork in Colombia as an anthropology PhD student based the UK, and followed the Itinerante, no longer as a contractor hired by the National Museum. These positions conditioned the ways I produced and used documents and the kinds of acknowledgement I obtained. While doing my PhD I was not hired for the museum, I did not use a camera, and I was located in a different geography—within a different set of racial and knowledge hierarchies. Each chapter, and the thesis as a whole, is a cluster of visual and textual documents that enacts a different (although related) position in the hierarchies I discuss. This means that the notions of ‘fieldwork’ and ‘research’ require some explication, to distinguish clearly what they meant while I worked for the Museum and while I did my PhD.

**Ethnographer’s gaze**

I became involved in the exhibition project for the first time in mid-2007, then called ‘Living ancestors’ [Ancestros vivos], when I travelled with anthropologist Arocha, my colleague Lina del Mar Moreno, and Afro-Colombian teacher and sabedora Carmen Paz on a short fieldtrip to the Northern Caqueta region to help as a volunteer. Since being an undergraduate, I had been interested in reflexivity, in the use of audiovisual tools and in observing the observers—anthropologists, so I proposed to Arocha—who had been my dissertation tutor—that I accompany them. In exchange I could help them with the audiovisual documentation that they were carrying out. Arocha accepted this and in December 2007 he invited me to attend an official meeting for the first time. In March 2008, I was hired by the National
Museum’s Friends Association (FA)\(^6\) to work as one of five non-Afro-Colombian young professional anthropologists to be in charge of various tasks, including doing fieldtrips and bibliographic research, acting as ‘technical secretaries’ in charge of office work and taking minutes, data organization, tour-guide training, text writing and editing. We had all graduated from the National University of Colombia, where we had attended Arocha’s courses. He supervised some of our dissertations, and we became involved in the project as members of the GEA, to which some of us still belong. Initially I was hired to produce and copy audio-visual documents. I also edited them to be displayed in the temporary exhibition. Later on, I participated in the production of the visual and textual documents that composed the Itinerante, and mediated between the Museum and the local organizations that set up the exhibition. By the end of 2008 I had become an in-house audiovisual documentarian and researcher for the project.

From 2009, I worked for the Museum for two years as the person in charge of the travelling version of Velorios, as well as other exhibition projects, including the collecting, producing and editing of audiovisual material. As Velorios’s ‘commissary,’ I coordinated and helped set up and dismantle the local versions of the exhibition; I also documented with video and photographs the exhibition making and dismantling, and documented the perceptions of local organizers. This work became a sort of fieldwork. I also presented reports for the Museum’s Travelling Exhibitions Programme (TEP), documenting the ways people appropriated the set of panels with pictures, text and a few other objects that constituted the travelling version of Velorios. I realized that people appropriated the exhibition’s materials in different ways, according to local structures and material conditions.

The project acquired a life of its own. All the material produced for the temporary and travelling exhibitions, like the voluminous audio-visual material that I and other anthropologists produced, was stored at the Museum’s Documentation Centre, as evidence and material available for further research. Through Velorios the ‘Afro’ subject gained presence in the institution as a museological object. By 2011, the exhibition continued to visit other localities in the country under the responsibility of a young Afro-Colombian woman who had worked as a tour-guide for the temporary exhibition. She also worked for a parallel project to set up the travelling version that the Museum’s Education Division (ED) was taking to public schools around Bogotá. I worked for the Museum until mid-2011.

In September 2011, I began my PhD at Manchester University and did fieldwork in Colombia for eleven months between September 2012 and August 2013. The exhibition was still available for any organization, group or institution willing to set it up, but the Museum was not currently offering any help, financial or otherwise. I spent time both at the National Museum, documenting the set up and dismantling of another temporary exhibition and reviewing archive material, and accompanying two groups that organized versions of the Itinerante in two different cities, Buga, in the south-west of...
Colombia, and Barranquilla, a Caribbean port city. At the end of 2012, one of these groups, Niches en acción (NeA), an association of Afro-Colombian young people, organized a tour of the exhibition around schools in Barranquilla. I accompanied NeA, helping them with the exhibition set ups, guided tours and dismantling, and spending time with some of their members. I carried my video and photographic cameras with me, with the idea of documenting their appropriations of the exhibition. I offered them the material I produced, but they also produced material with their own cameras, which they used on their Facebook website.

I produced a short documentary film with one of NeA’s acquaintances, a man of Palenquero descent who was leading a project to disseminate Palenquero language in schools around the city, but after I finished an edited version, he decided that this video should not be released or distributed in public. He feared that his ideas might be copied or ‘stolen.’ Meanwhile, I realized that the members of NeA had made use of some of the audiovisual and textual documents included in the Itinerante, and used them for their own agendas, in their own ways, and adapted to their own means. As for NeA, they were supremely cautious of the ways in which they presented themselves when I wanted to interview and record them. Meanwhile, at the Museum, only a few people (and progressively fewer) who had been related with the project still worked there, and their participation had influenced or benefitted them or their work in different ways. I also realized that visual materials from the first set of fieldtrips carried out in 2007 had been produced and appropriated by Afro-Colombians and non-Afro-Colombians and that this had been acknowledged in different and uneven ways. By then, although nobody seemed to be fully satisfied with what Velorios had achieved, the Itinerante had endured for several years as one of the displays that the National Museum offered to the public.

In September 2013 I began writing up, but even though I was back in the UK, my fieldwork felt too close. In the original research project for the PhD I had planned to also create an exhibition about Velorios and the Itinerante, using the audiovisual material I had collected and perhaps re-editing it. Instead, I decided to present this material in context, and used it along with other digital documents as a means to defamiliarize myself (Mosse, 2006). Approaching videos and photographs in this way allowed me to gain distance from the roles of anthropologist, institutional representative, museum employee, research assistant, student, colleague and friend. Writing the thesis became a form of activating them and other project documents, emphasizing and making use of their ‘availability’ for further research, a feature that characterized the project as ‘public.’ In the following section, I present some of these images in their context of circulation to introduce my visual methodology, and to show some examples of how the exhibition made some things visible by making others invisible.

---

7 The word ‘niche’ is a racial category used to refer to Black people. The words ‘en acción’ translate ‘in’ or ‘into action.’ I will refer to this group and its name in a more detailed way in chapter 5 (Tour-guiding).
**Visual material**

The visual material in my thesis is the exhibition as it circulated in webpages, books, banners and DVDs. I present Velorios and the Itinerante as accumulations of digital clusters of textual and visual documents, and the clustering of documents as a museum technology at the National Museum. To document these accumulations I captured screenshots. These screenshots offer 'pictures not simply of what things looked like, but how things were given to be seen, how things were “shown” to knowledge or to power—two ways in which things became seeable' (Halpern, 2014: 24, quoting Rajchman [1988], my emphasis). In this way I disassemble the exhibition to analyse how the ‘Afro-Colombian, Black, Raizal and Palenquero communities’ were given to be seen by Velorios and the Itinerante, that is, how (in)visibilities accumulated, circulated, dispersed and re-accumulated.

I argue that the relation between the names of people, the images they produced, and the images produced of them, was instrumental in the way these clusters of documents accumulated and circulated as the exhibition Velorios. To explain how images and the texts that accompany them can be understood in the museum context, I approach photographs and films as a ‘class of objects’ that are not straightforward (Edwards, 2003: 84). They record parallel realities, like the ‘space between the collector and the collected, the photographer and the photographed, the museum and the source community’ (p. 84). They have ‘potential to seed a number of narratives’ (ibid., quoting Poignant, 1994). Photographs and films have open meanings that are ‘mutable and arbitrary, generated by their viewers and dependent on the context of their viewing, their relationship with written or spoken “texts” and the embodied subjectivities of the viewer’ (ibid.). The screenshots that I captured of Velorios and the Itinerante are images that show who was able to document, was documented, and was acknowledged for documenting. These distinctions enact the positions that Afro-Colombians, non-Afro-Colombian anthropologists, Museum staff and the National Museum occupy in structural hierarchies of geography, knowledge and race in Colombia.

Below I present a series of screenshots that show how images and texts circulated in the exhibition as digital clusters. The series begins with one screenshot composed by an image of the exhibition catalogue’s cover in a PDF file, and the internet address where I downloaded the file for free. The catalogue’s cover includes two photographs, logotypes, captions for both photographs and the exhibition’s title. As a sequence, and with the captions that describe how the photographs were produced, the screenshots that follow show how personal and institutional ‘authorship’ of funerary altars, of photographs of altars, and of designs based on the photographs, were cumulatively acknowledged or neglected. Also, how institutional projects interweaved with personal ones, such as this PhD thesis.
This is a digital version of the exhibition’s catalogue cover. The picture on the front cover (right) is described in the small white text on its top left, which reads: ‘altar for the rising of the cloth built by Moraima Simarra in Palenque de San Basilio on the 2nd of April 2008. Photograph by Sofía Natalia González Ayala.’ The picture on the left is described below, where it reads: ‘Wake [Velorio] of Genara Bonilla in Boca de Pepé, middle Baudó, Chocó, 1995. Photograph by Jaime Arocha.’ The text on the front cover does not say that unlike Arocha’s picture, which was of a real wake that took place while he was in the area, mine was a simulated altar that Luis Gerardo Martínez (a historian Palenquero and one of the sabedores that participated in the project) and I had asked Moraima to build, as a demonstration of what a real altar like the ones her mother was acknowledged for making in the town would look like. Until then no wake had taken place during our fieldwork visit, so a simulation of a funerary altar seemed like a good solution for us to accomplish our task. I remember, though, the sense of transgression that this reconstruction produced. Both Moraima and Luis Gerardo knew that there were people in town who did not agree with what we were doing, but we decided to do it anyway. Later on, Moraima was hired in Velorios’s setup to work as an architect of a similar altar. Along with the names of the photographers, other names appear: The ‘Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero communities,’ as the exhibition’s subtitle and subject, the National Museum of Colombia, as the exhibition and catalogue’s ‘author,’ and a set of logos of the institutions and companies that supported the exhibition.

The two pictures at the top right of this screenshot show another simulated funerary altar, made in 2007 by Augusto Sánchez, in Condoto, Chocó (Pacific region). It became a trope in the exhibition. The picture was taken by Lina del Mar Moreno, one of the young anthropologists hired by the Museum to assist the project. She described this particular occasion as ‘rescue ethnography’ (Moreno, 2008: 147). A clear acknowledgement of who authored the altar is stated below the image, and in the text on the left, below the subtitle ‘Augusto Sánchez’s tumba’, the context of how it was built is explained: ‘Augusto Sánchez [who appears on the left side of the image], exiled by violence from Acosó [Chocó], represented for us in Condoto, Chocó, what a funerary altar to commemorate a last night would look like; all this as petitioned by Walter Valencia, Secretary of Culture of that municipality’ (Ministerio de Cultura and Museo Nacional de Colombia, 2008: 59). The authorship of the picture is included at the end of the catalogue, in the credits section.

In the Colombian Pacific region it is still customary that people use the word tumba [grave] to refer both to the place where a deceased person is buried and the kinds of arrangements or ‘altars’ that are built during funerary ceremonies or velorios [wakes]. The word tumba is also used to refer to the ‘altars’ built for patron saints, and the word velorio is also used to refer to the feasts dedicated to patron saints.
Sánchez’s altar and Moreno’s photograph were used by Museum designers for the designs used in the exhibition’s image, and were reproduced in the catalogue’s introduction, without any specific acknowledgement regarding the origin of the design. PDFs of the catalogue can be freely downloaded from one of the Museum websites.¹⁰

The same design was used next to the exhibition’s entrance in the vestibule of the Museum in 2008. Here I reproduce part of page 67 of the PhD thesis that then Arts and History Curator Lleras wrote analysing the temporary exhibition and its visitor study (2011). It shows some of the ‘interventions’ that visitors made in Velorios, and Lleras acknowledged my authorship of the photograph, as she did with all other pictures that appear in her work. But as with the catalogue, she makes no acknowledgement of this specific design or of its origin, as by then it had been integrated into the exhibition as one of the many ‘authorless’ designs that comprised it.
Moreno’s image was also used in the banner for the ‘ninth night’ in the travelling version of Velorios, and the designs it inspired were reproduced in the banner’s background, but only the photographers were acknowledged on the banners. On the exhibition’s webpage, the Museum designer is acknowledged for the design of the Itinerante’s banners. This screenshot is of one of the webpages where the banner can be freely downloaded.\footnote{https://sites.google.com/site/ancestrosvivos/exposicion-itinerante/pendones, accessed 18 October 2015.}
To complete this series of page-clusters, below is a screenshot of one of my pictures from one of the Picasa albums I created for the different versions of the exhibition, as a personal project that later became my PhD. The picture features a simulated ‘ninth night’ altar made by Mr. Luis Eduardo Perea, one of the local organizers of the version of the Itinerante that opened in Villavicencio, Meta, in 2010, where he had moved to from the Pacific region when he was younger. It used motifs from the ‘ninth night’ banner that I showed in the previous page. He dedicated it to his mother, Mrs. Eva Palacios, who had passed away several years before and for whom he had not made an altar of this kind. The travelling exhibition inspired him to do this, naming the altar as is customary on the ninth night of the novenas. As had happened with the altars exhibited in Velorios, within the Itinerante, this altar or tumba was ‘reactivated,’ recontextualized and exhibited as a cultural practice of Afro-Colombian people.
In the thesis, I use screenshots as images of what the exhibition looked like, and of the clustering mechanisms that allowed, enhanced or limited its circulation. These mechanisms are digitalization, (limited) availability, and the figuration of the images and names that the exhibition clustered and circulated. Each chapter of the thesis is to be seen as a cluster of documents, composed by the screenshot that introduces it, the text that follows the screenshot, and the other screenshots and accompanying captions that each chapter includes. Thus, each chapter ‘disassembles’ the images and texts that the exhibition accumulated and circulated. The screenshots are also records of the kind of access I had to the exhibition’s documents while writing the thesis. They are images of what I was able to see and capture, and of the clustering and accumulation mechanisms that allowed their circulation. By including the frame I highlight the fact that the image is a digital file, easy to copy, which enhances the possibility of further circulation. Then in the text I refer to the context for their production, and I explain what conditioned my access to the documents in the first place. Some of these screenshots, like the ones at the beginning of Chapters 1-4, show the process of accumulation of (in)visibilities that I analyse in the thesis. Some others, like those of digital minutes, scripts and official letters, analyse these accumulations by pulling them apart, in ‘collaboration’ with the text that describes the process. A few more, like the ones from the book Afro-reparaciones, and from the work of the Afro-Colombian artist Liliana Angulo, which I discuss in Chapter 1, make visible the material that remained invisible in the accumulations that Velorios produced.

**A museum ethnography**

I present Velorios and the Itinerante as simultaneously museological, anthropological and bureaucratic projects. These projects attempted to represent and include, but also to return and provide Black and Afro-Colombian people with the means for the production of their own representations in the National Museum of Colombia. As I will show in Chapters 1 and 2, for Arocha the temporary exhibition that opened in 2008, and the fieldtrips made during its research stage, gave continuity to the work he led at the GEA, combining a museological and anthropological approach. Lleras, while employed as Arts and History Curator at the National Museum, was also doing a PhD in museology at Leicester. In Chapters 3 and 4 I will show how the Itinerante gave continuation to Velorios combining bureaucracy with museology.

This ethnography uses the different stages of this exhibition to respond to concerns that, since the late 1980s, were posed in conferences and publications regarding ‘the poetics and politics of museum display [which] illustrated how the selection of knowledge and the presentation of ideas and images are enacted within a power system’ (Karp, 1992: 1). This thesis, and Velorios and the Itinerante, deal with issues that the National Museum, like many other museums, contend with in the multicultural era (Macdonald, 2006a). After Vergo’s *New Museology* (1989), several books with the words ‘museums’ and ‘community’ or ‘communities’ in their titles have appeared (Karp, Kreamer and Levine, 1992; Peers and Brown, 2003; Modest and Golding, 2013; Crooke, 2007). Their authors have reflected on the
relationships between museums and communities, presenting case studies, mainly from English-speaking contexts; the books have mainly been published in English, in the UK and the US, and deal with the perspectives of museum staff and scholars. With few exceptions (Crooke, 2006; 2007) Latin American cases are not analysed.

This literature refers to intersecting areas, exploring, on the one hand, how different groups among the ‘public’ claim museum forms and spaces to represent society in its diversity (Karp, 1992: 11; Macdonald, 2006) and, on the other, how museums are trying to ‘broaden their audiences’ (Karp, 1992: 11) and re-imagine their constituencies (Levine, 1992: 137). Other themes include how the museum and its forms are used ‘as a means of reinforcing and giving legitimacy to group and place-based identities’ (Macdonald, 2006: 88), or to help deal with key social policy issues, such as tackling exclusion, building cohesive communities, and contributing to community regeneration; and as tools for rural and urban groups to talk about their own history (Crooke 2006: 170). Furthermore, museums may be used as stages for ethnicity seen as an alternative to national identity, and for ethnic groups to convey legitimacy and visibility, ‘in order to be granted greater political rights, autonomy, or “national” status’ (Kaplan, 2006: 153-4).

My field-site was the National Museum and the itineraries that Velorios and the Itinerante made beyond it. It fits with another research area found in the literature by inviting us ‘to consider the exhibition and its process as one extended cultural act or artifact’ (Levine, 1992: 153) and museums as ‘ethnographic sites’ (Bouquet, 2012; Macdonald, 2002). As Karp stated in 1992, '[e]xhibition makers too have identities; these include their professional standing and commitments they have to serve the community [...] Yet they are also members of communities, and bring to their world personal and communal histories that often relate to and interact with the histories of the communities that compose the constituency of their museums’ (p. 22). In the collection she and Modest edited, Golding remarks on ‘the situated nature of knowledge and the political positioning of museum authority, which can be challenged by the experience, beliefs, and emotions visitors bring with them’ (2013: 13). To follow the ‘social life’ of this exhibition, I build on a PhD thesis in museology which involved ethnographic methods (Lleras, 2011) and follow the trend of museum studies that approach these institutions as ‘ethnographic sites’ (Bouquet, 2012: 98), particularly Macdonald’s, focused on exhibition-making and interpretation (2002), but also others that focused on collection practices (O’Hanlon, 1993), or tour-guiding (Katriel 1997; Morgan 2011).

**Collaboration, communities and museums**

This thesis explores the meanings of ‘curatorship’ and ‘community’ in a collaborative endeavour. In Chapter 1, I present the theoretical and museological background of Velorios and the Itinerante, which goes back to attempts to represent Black and Afro-Colombian people after the 1991 Constitution. Like the collaborative exhibitions grouped in the third section of the Peers and Brown collection (Phillips, 2003), Velorios is part of ‘a micro-history of [an] approach to exhibition development’ (p. 157) that
began in the early 1990s. This approach, Phillips states, is characterized by ‘power sharing,’ ‘the articulation of a post-colonial museum ethic, a shift in emphasis from product to process, and a renewed affirmation of the museum as a research site’ (pp. 157-158). As Phillips argues, there is no single model; instead a ‘spectrum’ has emerged between two types, the ‘community-based exhibit’ and the ‘multivocal exhibit’ (ibid.). In spite of these efforts, some of the concerns that appeared in Karp, Kreamer and Levine’s collection (1992) are still relevant in the recent one by Modest and Golding (2013), which reaffirms the ‘power system’ that Karp referred to in the early 1990s. One of these concerns is the very definition of the concept of ‘community’ in opposition to, external to or different from museums. This definition conveys both inclusion and exclusion (Golding, 2013: 20). In their collection, Golding and Modest (2013: 2) ‘want to push forward more liberating both/and conceptions,’ considering how community participation has questioned or re-defined curatorial practice.

These publications signal the limits to collaborative and participatory endeavours in museums. Peers and Brown state that in the museum context ‘partnering’ and ‘collaboration’ are terms that ‘reflect the perspective of the museum’ (2003: 2). These arrangements do not alter the ‘traditional relations of power between museums and source communities’ (ibid.). Karp (1992) refers to the African Americans’ demands in regard to the historical denigration of the cultural achievement of these communities: ‘Here the community demand is not for a place in an accepted scheme, but for revision of the scheme itself’ (Karp, 1992: 2). For collaboration to transcend tokenism, the change has to come from within, and, Levine states, ‘[f]urther institutional change is inevitable’ (1992: 138). In sum, these collections signal that, first, ‘communities’ are not homogeneous within themselves (Peers and Brown, 2003: 9; Onciul, 2013). Second, that they exist within broader structures of power in relation to other ‘communities.’ Third, that participatory collaboration, if useful in mobilizing them, is insufficient to address more ambitious and transformative agendas, such as Afro-reparations (Mosquera Rosero-Labbé, 2007). It is core policies and management that have to change (Nicks, 2003: 27). Currently ‘engagement’ (a synonym of collaboration and participation) is conditioned by context and to what extent the museums (and their communities) are willing to change their own procedures and ‘indigenize’ (Onciul, 2013: 94).

This leads to the ‘Black, Afro-Colombian, Palenquero and Raizal communities’ that Veloríos and the Itinerante represented, and how this exhibition defined the people that ascribe themselves or are ascribed to that category. This is necessary to comprehend what their demands in relation to the museum and the exhibition were, and how they changed as the project developed, and even more so if we consider that this definition entailed inclusion as much as exclusion. On the one hand, as Lleras’s (2011) study of the temporary exhibition opened in 2008 demonstrated, Afro-Colombians were a minority among the exhibition’s (and Museum’s) audiences. These ‘communities’ are local in two ways: they are all Colombians citizens and, although a minority, they are inhabitants of Bogotá, the city where most of the Museum’s constituency comes from. On the other hand, we can consider Afro-Colombian people as a ‘source community’ (Peers and Brown, 2003: i). Most of the Colombians that identify with or are ascribed to these categories live outside the Colombian capital city, where the NM
is located, but the NM’s collections do store objects that they could relate to as makers or subjects. As I will show in Chapters 1-3, this would imply considering objects that belong to different collections of the Museum, but also broadening the notion of ‘object’ to include documents stored in its Documentary Centre and the events and performances that the Museum’s Cultural Division organizes. Furthermore, as I will show in chapters 1 and 2, this would mean considering ways of exhibiting stereotypical representations, slavery and also absence and lack of representation.

As I will show, there were inclusions and exclusions in the Museum’s building, at the meeting table, during fieldtrips and in the Itinerante’s trips (Chapters 2 and 4), in opening, accompanying and closing events, in publications and websites (Chapter 3), and in the selection of tour-guides or ‘monitor-teachers’ (Chapter 5). A conception of Afro-Colombians as a rural and traditional kind of ‘community’ that underlay the initial conversations at the National Museum meant that urban Afro-Colombians who do not identify with such conceptions were excluded from fieldtrips and from the temporary exhibition’s materials (Chapters 2 and 3). The emphasis on ethnicity implied that racism and racial discrimination remained unaddressed directly and explicitly, and that the attention pointed to violence against Afro-Colombians in the Pacific and other regions remained hidden, unemphasized. The travelling exhibition attempted to give continuity to the process and address those exclusions (Chapters 1 and 4). Internal relationships of power (between urban and non-urban communities, among younger and older scholars, between disciplines) complicate the picture of the museum-community relation already presented (Chapters 1-5).

**Race, racism and racial stereotypes**

This thesis provides ethnographic examples of the ambiguity and contextuality of the ideas about ‘race’ and of racist practices in Colombia. I use the word race as an analytical concept to signal racial hierarchies that are assigned to people and places in the Colombian context, which I discuss in Chapter 1. The written texts in minutes and on the exhibition’s walls, in the catalogue, or in the travelling exhibition’s banners rarely contain the word ‘race’ or ‘racism’. I show that, in the institutional and official environments that characterized my fieldwork, ‘race’ was implicit in geographic references used in addressing people as originating from the Pacific or Caribbean region, areas understood as being populated by people of darker skin (Chapters 1 and 2). In Chapter 2 I show how accusing people of being racist put at stake the continuation of the project at the Museum in Bogotá or the conversations that the project’s documents stressed as an objective. In chapter 5, I recount some examples of overtly racist comments that were made or more subtle racist attitudes that were assumed in my presence, and how silence seemed the best way to guarantee the set up of the travelling exhibition in a school in Barranquilla.

The thesis discusses what it meant for the National Museum to deal with the representation of Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero people only as ethnic groups, and not as racialized Colombians. The exhibition emerged from what was thought of as an anti-racist project to provide symbolic
reparations for Black and Afro-Colombian people, and it portrayed them as part of the multicultural nation. An anti-racist agenda, which organized the agenda of Black social movements and a handful of academics from the 1970s, was superseded by the multiculturalist agenda of the 1991 National Constitution. The culturalist approach that the exhibition obeyed addressed racism in a limited way, and this gave it continuity within the Museum as an institution of the multicultural Colombian state. In Chapters 1 and 2 I show that an ‘ethnic’ view obscured other views, which were simply ignored, considered inappropriate, prone to generate more stereotypes, or too difficult to understand or present in an exhibition at the National Museum. In the social sciences, such views focus on racism and racial discrimination (in the job market, education, politics or development) as effects of racial stereotypes. In the arts, they signal the lack of acknowledgement of the artistic representation of Blackness and of Black and Afro artists.

I show that avoiding the exhibition of racial stereotypes (Chapters 2 and 3) did not prevent visitors at the National Museum and outside from interpreting the exhibition based on their own prejudices (Chapters 3 and 5). In that sense, Velorio contributed in the production and circulation of another stereotype, that which gathers all Colombian Black and Afro-descendent people under the label of multiculturalism as exotic ‘other.’ Yet my ethnography also shows that local organizers of the Itinerante, like Niches en Acción in Barranquilla, CEPAC in Buenaventura and the Museum of Religious Art in Cali (Chapters 4-5) appropriated the exhibition and used it strategically as a means to navigate structural racism and gain legitimacy within bureaucratic procedures set by national and local official institutions. The case of NeA, composed by young urbanites who self-identify as Black, as Afro-Colombian, and many of them as of Palenquero descent, shows how the name of the group asserts a positive connotation for the racial category ‘niche.’

Two examples of the texts that clustered with images in the exhibition are the category ‘Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero communities’ [BARP] and the acknowledgement labels that the project provided. They enact the distinctions between ‘museum’ and ‘communities’ that the literature above signalled and criticized, indicating the place that the people they refer to occupied in the project and the kinds of ‘power structures’ between ‘different communities’ (Karp, 1992). The BARP category circulated in the exhibition title (as subtitle). In correspondence, the distinctions between researchers and researched, ‘curators’ and ‘sabedores,’ Bogotá and the ‘regions,’ national and local institutions, always placed Afro-Colombians under the second label in those pairs. BARP is also a clustered category that shows the heterogeneity inside ‘communities.’ It is the product of a strategic agreement between members of Afro-Colombian organizations who do not necessarily identify with all the categories it contains, which are as ambiguous as the racial-ethnic system that the BARP category describes. This category circulated with the exhibition, providing a means for anti-racist agendas to broaden their audience, but only hidden behind the frontstage of multiculturalism. This marks the limit of participatory collaboration. Like the ‘participatory’ label used to protect the project (Chapter 2), this multicultural ‘frontstage’ allowed the exhibition to be in circulation as the Itinerante (Chapter 4). The
BARP category and the label ‘Niches en Acción’ are strategic means for Black and Afro-Colombian organizations to circulate their agendas supported by local and national institutions.

Heterogeneity appears in the different demands and meanings that the exhibition provoked for Black and Afro-Colombian people. In Chapter 1 and 2 I show that the views of Black and Afro-Colombian sociologist Claudia Mosquera and artists Liliana Angulo, Mercedes Angola and Martha Posso were not included in the temporary exhibition. In Chapters 2 and 3, I show the meaning of the ‘participation’ of Afro-Colombian scholars, leaders, sabedores, members of the Afro-Colombian Culture Board, and the Minister of Culture. In Chapters 4 and 5, I refer to the few Afro-Colombian tour-guides ['monitor-teachers' or monitores docentes] that participated in the project, two of whom were eventually hired to work for the itinerant version. Participatory collaboration also gave continuation to relationships between the project and the people contacted during fieldtrips (Chapter 2), some of whom participated in the exhibition as altar and corner ‘architects’ and as performers or speakers in the series of accompanying events (Chapter 3), and who were key contacts with the local organizations that set up the different versions of the Itinerante (Chapters 4 and 5).

**Thesis structure**

The chapters of this thesis are organized in relation to the contents of the minutes of the Museum meetings that I introduce in Chapter 1 and analyze more thoroughly in Chapter 2. The four subjects the chapters deal with were discussed in those meetings, and materialized in ways that were conditioned by the structures I have already presented. The thesis is organized chronologically. Chapter 1 presents the theoretical and historical background of the exhibition and of this thesis. It deals with what the attendees to the initial Museum meetings referred to as ‘visibility’ and ‘stereotypes,’ and it discusses two key concepts that underpinned their conversations: the ‘invisibility of studies of the Black’ and the ‘voids in the National Museum collections.’ It also presents the National Museum of Colombia as a public institution following the precepts of the first and second wave of the ‘New Museology’ (Macdonald, 2002) and as an ‘indigenous museum’ (Geismar and Tilley, 2003). I present the notion of ‘Afro-reparations (Mosquera Rosero-Labbé, 2007) and present examples of artistic representations of racial stereotypes. I discuss the concepts of '(in)visibility,' of exhibitions as ethnographic documents, and of participatory collaboration.

Chapters 2 and 3 (Backstage and Frontstage) describe the process that preceded the temporary exhibition’s opening in 2008 at the National Museum in Bogotá, as well as to the materials that the exhibition gathered. In Backstage I analyse what it took to be invited to participate in meetings: a first presentation of ‘participatory collaboration ’ as curatorship. I refer to minutes and minutes taking, distinctions between back and front stage that were at stake, and how fieldtrips were made where visual material was collected, and new material was produced, copied and returned unedited. The Frontstage chapter deals with how decisions were made in regard to the design, look and appearance of the temporary display. It focuses on the implications of choosing funerary rituals as the subject for
the exhibition. It also deals with the different ways in which visual materials, objects and forms of
acknowledgement were exhibited and published, and how the exhibition visitors (mainly non- Afro-
Colombians) saw them based on their own prejudices. It also presents the visual material created by
documenting Velorios’s final appearance and its guided-tours, which served to continue its circulation.

Chapters 4 and 5, Travelling Wakes and living saints and Tour-guiding, are dedicated to the travelling
version of the exhibition, which began to go around the country in 2009. Participatory collaboration
took off and superseded curatorship. Inside the Museum building in Bogotá, parallel projects took
place in three Museum divisions. Outside of the Museum, various institutions and groups set up
versions of Velorios in different localities and spaces, appropriating it for their own agendas. The
Travelling chapter is dedicated to the production of the travelling version of the exhibition and to its
first two touring years, 2009 and 2010. The spirit of the travelling exhibition was to encourage the local
organizers to appropriate it, but this appropriation—characteristic of curatorship-as-participatory
collaboration—was limited by access to space, and by bureaucratic parameters established at the
Museum. The Tour-guiding chapter focuses on tour-guiding or ‘monitor-teaching’ as another form of
curatorship, inside and outside the Museum. I present the case of Niches en Acción, an Afro-Colombian
youth organization in the Caribbean Coast city of Barranquilla that organized a local tour of the
exhibition in public schools in the city in 2012 and 2013. I also present tour-guiding as the site for Afro-
reparation as affirmative action.
Chapter 1: ‘Wakes and living saints: finally!’

Velorios y Santos Vivos: ¡por fin!

A LAS NUEVE Y MEDIO DE LA MAÑANA del 21 de agosto, era increíble que a la sala de exposiciones temporales del Museo Nacional la habito el silencio.

Por: Jaime Arocha

Lo aproveché para recorrerla muy despacio, parándome frente a cada uno de los siete altares, hasta regresar al origen, donde a uno lo saludan 18 tallas africanas. Cuando me detuve, temblaba. La solemnidad me había conmovido, porque además recibía un realce particular por la estética del color propia de los universos simbólicos que los africanos crearon en este país y que descendientes de ellos, venidos de siete regiones distintas, habían logrado plasmar con contundencia.

Cuarenta y ocho horas antes, el mismo lugar escenificaba un diálogo de lenguas, culturas y oficios del cual yo jamás había sido testigo: en ese español terció de creole, doña Yastay Dilbert Bryan...
On August 27 2008 the Colombian anthropologist Jaime Arocha wrote an article in the nationally circulated *El Espectador* [The Spectator] newspaper, dedicated to the temporary exhibition *Velorios y santos vivos*, titled ‘Wakes and living saints: finally!’ He signed it as a member of the research group *Grupo de Estudios Afrocolombianos – GEA* [Group of Afro-Colombian Studies] from the National University of Colombia’s *Centro de Estudios Sociales – CES* [Centre of Social Studies]. I translate the section reproduced in the screenshot above:

At nine thirty in the morning of 21 August, it was incredible that silence inhabited the National Museum’s temporary exhibitions hall.

I made the most of the occasion to go over it slowly, standing in front of each one of the seven altars, until I returned to the beginning, where 16 African carvings greet you. When I stopped, I trembled. Solemnity had moved me; I also received a particular splendour from the colour aesthetic proper to the symbolic universes that Africans created in this country and that their descendants, from seven different regions, had been able to express forcefully.

Forty-eight hours earlier, the same place staged a dialogue of languages, cultures and professions that I had never witnessed...

Arocha went on by naming those who had engaged in the dialogue that had taken place two days earlier in Bogotá, the capital city where the Museum’s establishment was decreed in 1823 (Rodríguez Prada, 2008):

- Vastay Dilbert Bryan
- Miguel Cuesta
- Catalina Plazas
- María Eusebia Aponzá
- María Yobadis Londoño
- Moraima Simarra
- Wisman Tenorio
- Amparo Carrizosa
- Rosamalia Quiñones
- Ligia de Pinillos
- Nury Espinosa
- Carolina Mendoza
- Ángela Montoya

He was very careful in referring to them using the respectful *don* or *doña*, indicating their provenance from those ‘seven different regions’ as *guapireñas* (from Guapi) or *tumaqueño* (from Tumaco), or their professions, showing that some of them worked at the museum (like the curators, the museographer and the restorer) and some did not.

The column ends as follows:

The people from the Museum were able to express the ideas that we have been treasuring since 2007, when our research in the terrain began. We made [these ideas] clear thanks to the questions that curators Cristina Lleras and Juan Darío Restrepo posed to us by locating themselves in the place of a visitor who doesn’t know anything about wakes, living saints and the descendants of Africans. The total frame that we all put together to display this canvas of profound majesties and emotions is made of precious materials for human understanding: listening capacity, tolerance and patience.

---


2. All translations from Spanish to English in this thesis are mine unless otherwise indicated.

3. In this thesis I refer to the National Museum of Colombia as the Museum with capital M or as the NM, to distinguish it from others I mention.
At the beginning of 2007, sociologist Claudia Mosquera Rosero-Labbé, then another member of the GEA, referred in another publication that circulated in paper, digital form and online to the early stages of the process that led to the exhibition making. She wrote about ‘a permanent hall’ not in terms of a ‘dialogue’ or ‘human understanding,’ but of public servants’ responsibilities and duties that were expressed in a ‘Development Plan’:

>a permanent hall of Black and Raizal culture must be established in the National Museum of Colombia; this hall does not exist today in spite of the intentions expressed in the museum’s Development Plan and of the initiative to create a committee dealing permanently with this delicate subject and led by Doris de la Hoz and Consuelo Mendez, from the Ministry of Culture; by the museum’s director, Gladys de Robayo, and by the curators Cristina Lleras and Carolina Vanegas. This committee must take ownership of the discussion about symbolic reparations from the National Museum (ibid.: 254).

A first set of visibilities and invisibilities appear in these two texts. The one that stresses positive outcomes, conversation, diversity circulates in a broadly known newspaper. The other one, which stresses the anti-racist agenda that set the background for the project, although also available for free, has a more restricted circulation. At one level, these documents are records of events and actions from their authors’ perspectives and positions. At a different level they are records of the conditions that allowed them to say what they did. They are public documents that circulate for free in digital format and online, authored by a male non-Black or Afro-Colombian anthropologist and a female Black and Afro-Colombian sociologist. The anthropologist’s was published in a broadly known platform and celebrated the accomplishment of a long process; the sociologist’s in a more specialized and restricted network, with a more demanding stance. These conditions enhance the circulation of the column and restrict that of the article. Arocha and Mosquera are authors of their writings, and this authorship helps them do other things. In them they acknowledge people for actions in which they have participated and collaborated.

These texts and their context of circulation contrast with, and are less visible than, the set of documents that became one of the main sources for this thesis: the minutes taken during the meetings that began in May 2006, initially between these two GEA scholars, staff members of the National Museum’s Arts and History Curatorship and of the Ministry of Culture. These minutes remain stored at the National Museum’s Documentary Centre, and I kept them among my files due to the fact that I worked in the project they documented. They are records of a process of translation from ideas into documents, objects and actions. They show what it took for the discussions that took place during

---

4 I call Mosquera a ‘sociologist’ and not a ‘social worker,’ which is the literal translation of her professional training.

5 Most probably Mosquera refers here to the Museum’s Strategic Plan that I mention below.

6 This was probably a mistake in the book, as the name of the Museum’s director at that time was María Victoria de Angulo de Robayo (Ministerio de Cultura and Museo Nacional de Colombia, 2008: 9).

7 This text by turn contrasts with the much more restricted access to a later version, published in the local version of Le Monde Diplomatique (El Dipló), in December 2007, to which I refer in Chapter 2, Backstage.
meetings to become ‘politically consequential inflections [that] solidified into the exhibition space’ (Macdonald, 2002: 132). In these minutes, the interventions of meetings attendees indicate that three sets of ideas for ‘curatorial scripts’ were brought to the table: One considered a permanent hall dedicated to Black communities, another one an exhibition about funerary rituals of Afro-Colombians, and a third one the displays that occupy most of the permanent exhibition halls at the Museum. In the following section, I will use these three ‘scripts’ as a guide to contextualize Velorios and the Itinerante historically and conceptually, and also to introduce the conceptual themes I deal with in this thesis.

Three ‘curatorial scripts’

In the minutes of the first three meetings documented, in May, June and August 2006, both scholars were quoted as insisting on the need for the hall, but with different emphases. Sociologist Mosquera claimed that the Museum was, in her view, obliged to provide ‘deep visibility’ [honda visibilidad] for Black, Raizal and Afro-Colombian people in a dedicated permanent hall, and on the establishment of a ‘commission’ to discuss its contents. She understood this as an act of reparation and a matter of asymmetry in a museum of ‘White people.’ Anthropologist Arocha stressed the separation was necessary because Black periodicity was different, not an ‘appendix’ of White history, and that urgent action was needed as the patrimony and objects of Black communities’ knowledge were disappearing, research about them was late and ‘stereotyped,’ and so it was necessary to find a patron for a research team to collect and rescue ‘ancestral material,’ as it had been the case for studies about indigenous peoples. This, for him, justified doing fieldwork. These ideas, as I will explain, referred to their research interests, both as individuals and as leaders of the GEA, as well as to traditions in social sciences, in anthropology and in museum practice in Colombia. Mosquera’s interventions had an anti-racist emphasis that she would later label as ‘Afro-reparations,’ whereas Arocha’s was on rescue and salvage anthropology, and reflected his work in the Pacific region, and his earlier interest in ‘clusters’ of data, traces of Africanness and funerary rituals, which I will refer to in the sections below.8

In response, the Museum staff stressed that the Museum’s ‘current conditions’ made the creation of such a hall matter of more discussion. As I will show, this argument reflected the way in which the National Museum’s exhibition halls and collections were organised and managed. Curator Lleras’s emphasis in local and foreign exhibitions and collaboration and participation reflected, on the one hand, and her work experience as a one of the two in-house curators, responsible for maintaining the ‘narrative’ that the Museum’s permanent exhibitions followed (its ‘curatorial script’), and institutional guidelines (a different kind of documents) that she followed as public servant. On the other hand, they showed her interest in scholarly discussions that she followed as a PhD student of museology at

---

8 The minutes of the May meeting begin by reporting that there was still no clarity about the National University’s role or who should make the initial proposal.
Leicester. In fact, after these conversations, she became interested in the representation of Afro-Colombian people at the Museum, and made it into the subject of her research (Lleras, 2011).

According to the minutes, negotiations began to take place. The anthropologist proposed and designed a research project for a temporary exhibition to give continuity to the conversations that had begun, and this became one of the ‘projection activities’ of the GEA. The subject would be funerary rituals among Afro-Colombians, and the exhibition highlights would be the altars that he had observed and documented during previous research in the Colombian Pacific region. No open call to other proposals was made, and although other subjects were discussed, they were dismissed for reasons I will discuss in following chapters. In this way the exhibition would pay homage to both ancient and recently deceased ancestors of Afro-Colombians. It would also denounce the dire consequences that Colombia’s armed conflict has had for them, particularly since 1996. Fieldtrips would be made in seven areas highly populated by those groups, not only in the Pacific region, to collect objects and information for the exhibition, and further discussions about how to make the scholars’ demands into a ‘permanent’ reality in the Museum would take place.

The National Museum’s collections and the ‘invisibility of studies of the Black’

In this section I consider the history of the establishment of the National Museum’s collections and curatorship offices, and link it with the development of anthropology as an applied and academic discipline in Colombia with an emphasis on the ‘Indian’ or the ‘indigenous.’ Then I do this in order to discuss the concepts of ‘stereotypy’ and ‘invisibility of studies of the Black’ (Friedemann, 1984) that underpinned the ideas of a ‘deep visibility’ of a ‘stereotyped’ and ‘late’ research in regard to Afro-Colombian people mentioned in minutes.

According to Rodríguez Prada (2008), what is now known as the National Museum was created by Decree 117 in 1823 under the denomination of the Natural History Museum and Mining School, inspired by the French Museum of Natural History and created in direct collaboration with French scientists. She explains how naturalists and scientists were hired by the newborn state to collect, study and disseminate knowledge about the territory, in association with ideas of the development and progress of the nation (np.). In 1826, the ‘Museum’ and the ‘School’ were fused with the Central University of Bogotá; its collections were moved and used to create other museums around the city, including the Museum of Fine Arts of the National University (in 1903) and the Museum of Archaeology.

---

and Ethnography of the Ministry of Education (in 1939), until the Museum moved in 1948 to its current venue in the old *Penitenciaría de Cundinamarca*, the ‘Panopticon’ (Rodríguez Prada, 2010: 101-2).

The management of the Museum’s collections during the time I talk about in this thesis, was a correlate of the Museum’s spatial arrangement and the history of its curatorship offices.  

At the northern wing were the offices of the Patrimony and Ethnography (P&E) Curatorship, which were in charge of the ethnography and archaeology collections and of the ground floor exhibits. This office was part of the ‘ICANH,’ an acronym for the *Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e Historia*, [the Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History], an entity that, like the National Museum, depends on the Ministry of Culture but has some degree of autonomy. The ICANH’s offices at the National Museum are a sort of ‘satellite’ of its main buildings, located in Bogotá’s colonial centre.

In the Museum’s southern wing were the Arts and History (A&H) Curatorship’s offices, in charge of the first and second floor halls displaying objects from the 15th century conquest until 1948. It was artist Beatriz González, who worked for the Museum as curator from around 1990 until 2004, who designed the ‘narrative’ or ‘script’ that organized all of the Museum’s permanent exhibitions halls. There, older objects and histories were exhibited in the lower floor, and more recent histories and exhibits on the higher floors. The temporary exhibitions’ hall, next to the Museum’s entrance, was the place where both curatorship offices took turns to lead shorter-term displays. Of all the temporary exhibitions, only a few took place in (a usually difficult) partnership between these two sections of the Museum. Thus it was not the first time that researchers from the A&H in the south wing engaged in a project with anthropologists, who if working for the Museum would usually do it based at the P&E at the north wing. In spite of this, the project that led to the production of Velorios, which involved not only anthropologists and fieldtrips, but also the ‘Afro’ subject, was dealt with in the A&H Curatorship, and not in the P&E Curatorship, for reasons I explore below.

**The NM’s ethnographic collections and the ethnologist’s vision**

In the 20th century, the *vision* of ethnologists, archaeologists and ethnologists was key in the conformation of what is now the P&E collection, stored in the National Museum. Botero (2013) explains that the ICANH’s ethnographic collection was constituted mainly between 1944 and 1963, by ethnologists from the *Instituto Etnológico Nacional* [National Ethnology Institute]. Colombian ethnologists’ interest in indigenous ‘material culture’ followed the training in scientific research

---

10 In 2011, the National Museum’s Arts and History Curatorship was divided into two curatorship offices, one for the arts collection and another one for the history collection. A committee met from 2011 to 2014 to write a document to guide the project for the renovation of the National Museum’s script and museography (http://www.museonacional.gov.co/sitio/renovacion/metodologia.html).

11 In Colombia, the British ‘ground floor’ is the *primer piso* [first floor].

imparted by French ethnologist Paul Rivet, director of the Trocadero in Paris since 1928. Rivet, who by the 1930s would ‘bring teaching, research, and museum activities closely together’ in the Musée de l’Homme in Paris (Shelton, 2006: 71), played a fundamental role in the professionalization of anthropology in Colombia (Pineda, 2007: 371). In 1941, he helped found the Instituto Etnológico in support of indigenous communities whose physical and cultural survival was under threat (Friedemann and Arocha, 1984). A friend of then President of the Republic Eduardo Santos, Rivet conceived of ethnology as:

an ‘urgent discipline’ [disciplina de urgencia] that would allow the registry, preservation, research and dissemination of the strategies used by human beings of all societies to represent their relation with the world ([quoting] Rivet, 1943: 1). And museums, because of their visibility in the cities’ structures, were for Rivet tools for ethnological research and dissemination. Therefore collecting objects was an integral part of a process of extensive documentation of a cultural area. The idea was that if ethnography represented a culture in a figurative way by writing, in the Museum the object would be exhibited to represent that culture (p. 59).

Botero quotes an interview she did in 1998 with Roberto Pineda Giraldo, who studied with Rivet at the Instituto Etnológico, where he explains that the aim of expeditions and devices to obtain ethnographic objects was:

to collect large amounts of materials so that they would not be lost [...] not just that it [the object] was described in the terrain but also that it remained in the museum. Each expedition was obliged to bring pieces to augment the museum but, fundamentally, to have witnesses [testigos] of what technology and material culture existed at that moment’ (P. 60).

Pineda Giraldo considered that the vision of these ethnologists was directed towards the ‘Indian’ or the ‘indigenous,’ a tendency that was characteristic of Latin America and of the USA up until at least the 1960’s. The ‘Americanist’ vision of Rivet’s students at the Instituto Etnológico saw the transatlantic slave trade as an ‘African migration’ and the Spanish colonial project as a ‘European migration:

The fact that Rivet was the creator and first director of the National Ethnology Institute was very important with respect to indigenous affairs [lo indígena]. Rivet was an Americanist, and the Americanism was what concerned the archaeological and ethnographic Indian. It had nothing to do with European or African migrations. [...] So when we studied with Rivet, our vision was totally towards the indigenous (P. 59-60).

By the end of the 1950s, Colombian anthropology had a stronger influence from North American social and applied anthropology, with an emphasis on the ‘living man’ (p. 61). Anthropology departments were created in the 1960s around the country, closely linked to the implementation of state development policies with the support of international cooperation agencies, or with the Alliance for Progress US Programme in the late 1950s (Arocha and Friedemann, 1984). In Botero’s view, later

---

13 Later the Musee de l’Homme in Paris, France.
generations of Colombian ethnologists did not collect objects because of the development of audiovisual recording techniques and also because of recent research carried out by the communities themselves (p. 61).

After the 1960s, a common source of jobs for professional anthropologists was as public servants and functionaries. In the late 1970s and early 1980s Colombian anthropologists Nina S. de Friedemann and Jaime Arocha engaged in researching the current situation of anthropological practice in the country, reflecting on the kind of anthropology that was needed then in the Colombian context. One of the outcomes of this research was the book *Un siglo de investigación social: Antropología en Colombia* (1984), where they signalled that along with other social sciences, anthropology had emerged in Colombia as an ‘applied’ discipline to help reduce the ‘negative impact’ of social change. This meant that a lot of the outcomes of Colombian anthropological practice circulated in the form of reports, a ‘minor’ form of knowledge in relation to ‘scientific’ research, states Jimeno in her contribution to the book (1984: 186). On the other hand, as Pineda explains in the same volume, some reports did not circulate at all, as some anthropologists in the 1970s preferred not to write, or to do it anonymously, as a way to avoid what they considered an imperialistic practice that took advantage of indigenous people’s knowledge. These anthropologists also wished to avoid stigmatization, as writing and publishing about social subjects were prosecuted by the State as subversive practices (p. 239). In one of Arocha’s contributions, he explains that the results of anthropologists’ research would usually be inaccessible to those who needed it the most: indigenous people, the general public and state public servants. The authors of this book advocated transformations in local anthropological practice and its subjects of study, so that the work of the anthropologist should be acknowledged not as folklore, or bureaucracy, but as science. Furthermore, *science* (as they understood it) should be a tool for the transformation of stereotypes about Black and indigenous people.

‘Invisibility’ and ‘stereotypy’

In *Un siglo de investigación social*, Nina S. de Friedemann published the seminal article *Estudios de Negros en la antropología colombiana: Presencia e invisibilidad* [Studies of the Black in Colombian anthropology: Presence and invisibility]. It begins as follows:

Almost twenty years ago, in the *Instituto Colombiano de Antropología* [ICAN], when I looked for some resonance for the direction that my work among Black groups would take, a respectable and already famous colleague offered me the most incredible opinion I have ever received in my professional life: ‘studying Blacks was not anthropology.’ Anthropology, in that *instituto*, was taught as a discipline that studied man. It is worth mentioning, though, that the main interest of the institution and its researchers were archaeological and contemporary Indians. In spite of this, that colleague’s point of view, with respect to mine, was a broadside (p. 509).

In the article Friedemann examined some of the circumstances that for her ‘contributed to the marginal situation of the studies of Black people [estudios de negros] in the development of
anthropology in our country’ (p. 510). She stated that both in Europe and in America ‘Black people [‘los negros’] were subject to invisibility and stereotypy’ (ibid.), which were ‘part of a process of socio-racial discrimination’ and ‘tools of a hegemonic communication and information system, dominated by European thought in its relation with Africa and America’ (p. 511). This invisibility thus implied an intrinsic contradiction: it was sustained by the public circulation of texts that depicted el negro in demeaning and non-scientific ways. This meant that the visibility of el negro was stereotyped, and this was explained by the fact that stereotypy was in the hands of racist elites.  

14 Stereotypes made black people invisible by not acknowledging the cultural achievements that came from Africa as worthy of being a subject of study in the social sciences, and of anthropology in particular. To counteract a stereotyped visibility, she advocated a scientific visibility.

In Colombia, Friedemann explained, knowledge about ‘el negro’ could be traced back in some chronicles from the times of the conquest, in colonial and republican official documents and in writings made by priests and parish priests. In the 19th century, this knowledge was present in ‘anthropological’ productions written by the Chorographic Commission and religious missionaries, and later on, in the 20th century, in literature and folklore. But she also signalled it was ‘passional rather than rational’ images that appeared whenever ‘the presence of the Black was visible in socio-economic analysis, in cultural-historical narratives and in literary story-telling [relato]’ (p. 512): If by the end of the 18th century such images ‘presented the Black as more vigorous, less sensitive to pain, better adapted for reproduction [más aptos para la reproducción] and for the accomplishment of hard tasks, but also with a dehumanized image’ (p. 515), in the early 20th century authors described them either as ‘physically strong and violent’ or ‘indolent and apathetic’ (pp. 527-8).

Like these depictions, the control over the means of their circulation was racialized. Friedemann shows how works that counteracted stereotyped images were of limited distribution in the country. Many of these works were produced by authors born in Colombian regions historically populated by ‘el negro,’ and some them were auto-biographical. Examples of these were poet Candelario Obeso’s *Cantos populares de mi tierra* [Popular songs of my land] of 1877, or Jorge Artel’s 1940 *Tambores en la noche* [Drums in the night], born respectively in Mompox and Cartagena, in the Caribbean region, as well as Arnoldo Palacios’s 1949 *Las estrellas son negras* [Stars are black], from the Chocó Department, on the Pacific coast. Similarly, Friedemann references works and authors who had engaged in researching ‘el negro,’ but who were little known in Colombia: for example, ethnologist Aquiles Escalante’s pioneering work in Palenque de San Basilio (1954; 1979), who was born in the Caribbean city of Barranquilla, where he worked after doing his studies in the *Instituto Etnologico Nacional* in Bogotá. Some authors

---

wrote in forms not acknowledged as ‘social science,’ like Chocó-born ethnologist Rogerio Velásquez’s 1953 novel *Las memorias del odio* [Memories of hate], or Manuel Zapata Olivella’s *Chambacú, corral de negros* [Chambacú, corral of Blacks] first published in 1962, or *Presencia negra* [Black Presence], the newspaper founded in the 1980s by Chocó-born Amir Smith Córdoba.

In another article in the same book, Arocha explains the relation between what he called the ‘invisibilization’ of ‘data’ and the generation of racist stereotypes, which affected not only *Blacks* but also *Indians*:

> Several chapters in this book show that, on the one hand, data about the current behaviour and the history of indians and Blacks [indios y negros] have been subject of a process of invisibility. On the other hand, they show that the available information has prompted the generation of stereotypes and distortions that affirm the supposed socio-racial inferiority of those people (Arocha 1984: 30).

Since colonial times, Arocha explains, ‘the colonial information system’ managed the knowledge that was available about Black people in a ‘distorted’ way, creating stereotypes. The correlate of this was the disappearance of ‘important cultural achievements:’

> With respect to Black people, the colonial information system established the bases for the development of two stereotypes: savagery and an innate incapacity of Africans to evolve. This development was based in the distorted management of the knowledge already available in the 16th and 17th centuries about Africa and its people. In this way it was possible to dislocate social, political and religious conducts radically different from European ones, making important cultural achievements disappear’ (ibid.: 32).

Friedemann and Arocha’s further work intended to respond to these preoccupations, in particular the research and recovery of these ‘cultural achievements.’ This is key to understanding Arocha’s interest in the National Museum as a privileged site for the circulation of objects and images. Below, I will explain why he proposed the funerary rituals of Afro-Colombian people to be the subject for an exhibition.

*Huellas de africanía [traces of Africanness]*

Colombian anthropologist Eduardo Restrepo (2003) has traced a genealogy and analysed what he labelled as the ‘Afro-Americanist focus,’ represented by the work of anthropologists Nina S. de Friedemann and Jaime Arocha, later joined by historian Adriana Maya. In his article, he criticized the conceptual and explanatory model, and the methodology and the narrative strategies that in his view...

---

15 That being said, Velásquez also wrote and published many academic articles.

16 Other little-known trends include the influence in Colombia of 1920s’ Paris-based Negritude and of characters such as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X, associated with the 1960s’ Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the USA (Wade 1995; 2009).
characterized this focus. He argues that these three scholars have posited, since the 1980s, an Afro-Americanist perspective that departs from the criticism made by Mintz and Price in 1976 to the 'encounter model' represented in Herskovits’s work in the 1940s. Restrepo explains that in their book Mintz and Price considered that:

> the African heritage shared by enslaved people... would make reference to “grammatical” unconscious principles that may underlie in the behaviour of the enslaved people imported to the American continent (2003: 91).

They used the concept of ‘cognitive orientations’ to describe the ‘knowledge shared by the members of Central and Western African cultures,’ which shaped the ways that enslaved people responded to new circumstances in America, and ‘became communities and created cultures in the face of new situations’ (ibid.: 92).

The key ‘concept’ in this perspective is thus ‘traces of Africanness’ [huellas de africanía], which has been built, Restrepo argues, jointly between the three scholars: authored by Friedemann, elaborated by Arocha, and oxygenated by historian Maya (ibid.). To define these huellas de africanía Restrepo quotes Friedemann (1997) and Friedemann y Espinosa (1993):

> [Traces of Africanness] interpret the cultural background that is submerged in the iconographic subconscious of the Africans of the enslaved diaspora. The traces become perceptible in the social organization, music, religiosity, the spoken word, or in the theatre of the carnival of their descendants, and as a result of the processes of creation and resistance, where reason and feeling have been guides to cultural improvisation.’ [And in] ‘works, adornment, dance [bailes, danzas], forms of organization, territorial use, communication and so on’ (Restrepo, 2003: 94).

Also characteristic of Friedemann, Arocha and Maya’s Afro-Americanistic perspective was the relevance given to the work of Gregory Bateson ‘in the argumentation for this notion [...] and by the centrality given to ecology and cultural materialism to interpret the processes of cultural resistance and creation among “Afro-descendants” in the New World’ (ibid.: 90). From Bateson they used the notion of ‘local epistemology,’ and his views on the formation of habits, as a key to explaining the ‘preservation and operation of this African legacy’ (p. 94). Restrepo quotes Arocha (1996) to show how he explains that their approach was interested in ‘clusters of phenomena’ and not in isolated traces, which in his view required creating ‘a perceptual comparative apparatus’ that combined history and ethnography in both continents, an ‘archaeology of ethnicity,’ that in contrast to the Afro-Americanists in the 1940s, was concerned with ‘groupings of events and facts related in a systematic way’ (Restrepo, 2003: 94). These huellas de africanía were ‘clusters’ of traces that expressed or interpreted ‘submerged’ or ‘unconscious’ grammatical principles or cognitive orientations preserved through time.

An example of such ‘clusters,’ which was a precedent of set of ideas that organized exhibition Velorios, was already suggested in an article that Arocha published in 1997, where he linked his earlier interest in the relationships between violence, culture and huellas de africanía. It was based on data obtained
in a research project called *Los baudoseños: convivencia y polifonía ecológica,*\(^\text{17}\) [Baudoseños: ecological conviviality and polyphony] for which two expeditions were made in the region in 1992, and where historian Maya had been a co-researcher. In this article, Arocha dealt with:

the mental processes developed by Afro-descendant people in the Baudó river valley, because social sciences in Colombia have not acknowledged them and because they begin to be extinguished. In effect, it has been three years since all the peoples of the biogeographic Chocó witnessed forms of violence that they did not know. They are under the threat of exile or annihilation (1997: 216).

One of the objectives of that research project, which coincides with the Afro-Americanist view described above, was:

To portray the evolution of Afro-Colombian mental processes as a result of memories of Africanness, and resistance to slavery and to hispanization, and not just as effect of the official abolition and of the teachings of the Spanish (p. 217).

In the article he explains that he uses Bateson’s definitions of ‘mind,’ ‘system’ and of the ‘immanence’ of the mind (p. 216) to explain ‘death’ among Afro-Baudoseños to illustrate the ‘immanence of the people-time system’ (p. 217). He writes:

It is true that the religious practices of Black people make use of Christian ritual and liturgy, but they still take place in the spirit that is shared by the religions practised by the ancestors of those who were enslaved during the colony in Nueva Granada: Akan, Ewe-Fon, Yoruba and Bantu (Arocha 1996; Serrano 1994). The rituals are not expiatory of guilt or sin, but celebrations of life, light and colour (p. 219).

In this article, Arocha proposes what such kinds of religious practices consist of, linking the feasts for the Virgin, the treatment of the deceased, and African practices: The feast to the Virgin of Poverty [*La Pobreza*], the Patron Saint of *Boca de Pepé*, a small town in the Baudó river in the Chocó Department, takes place on the 8th of September, the same day that Cubans celebrate for the Virgin of Charity, Patron Saint of El Cobre and of Cuba, where she impersonates the African oricha Ochún. In the guise of a person, *La Pobreza* smiles if she likes the feast, and if not she makes herself so heavy that it is impossible to carry her in the procession. Familiarity characterizes relationships with patron saints and virgins: they are told off with their devoted ones when misbehaving, and caressed when behaving. A similar familiarity characterizes the treatment of the deceased. The seriously ill are accompanied, talked to and given their favourite food. The *guaco* bird announces death. When a person dies, the entire community participates in the preparation of the *velorio* [wake]. A black ribbon is placed at the head of the altar made for the vigil. A black ribbon has the shape of a butterfly or of an icon used to represent the axe of Chango, another oricha (according to Thomson, 1993). People gather in a sacred space where they fall into a trance singing *alabaos,*\(^\text{18}\) drinking alcohol and coffee and smoking. The

---

\(^{17}\) ‘Baudoseños’ refers to inhabitants of the adjacent areas to river Baudó, Chocó, in the Colombian Pacific basin.

\(^{18}\) *Alabaos* are *a capella* religious chants sung during wakes in the Pacific region.
next day there is a funerary procession ‘which, like among Bantu people, [...] is not only for people to say goodbye to the deceased person, but also so that they can demand explanations as to why they have left’ (p. 220). During the burial there is more demanding from relatives and more falling into trances.

Then Arocha explains how he relates this *huella de africanaí* with the ‘immanence of a mental circuit’ during the burial, using Serrano’s and Maya’s descriptions:

As each person grabs some earth to pour it over the coffin, they may draw a cross made of clay on the forehead (Serrano 1994). This other trace of Africanness [...] demonstrates the immanence of the mental circuit formed by relatives, cemetery and soil. Once the coffin has been covered, a ‘palm of Christ’ is planted on the funereal monticule. This planting also has an African past and marks the conclusion of a life cycle, of which the beginning point was signalled by the navel-palm that fertilized the buried placentae. Additionally, the palm of Christ will serve as a shelter to the different souls of the deceased person (ibid.). The physical representation of the ancestor facilitates the future communication with him and his presence in the community (p. 220).

Then comes the nine nights of praying, and finally the ninth night, when the final farewell to the deceased takes place with the sunrise. Arocha then shows how culture and violence are related, describing the fatal consequences that impediments to proper care of the dead have for Afro-Colombians in the Chocó Department:

As funerary rituals are the most meaningful events in Afro-Colombian culture in the Pacific littoral, it is evident that there the impact of terror has a greater capacity to annihilate culture, maybe more so than among other Colombian peoples (Arocha, 1997: 221).

Arocha’s interest on the relationships between violence and culture went back to the work with which he had obtained his PhD, from Columbia University, New York, in 1975, with a thesis entitled “La Violencia” in Monteverde, Quindío: technoenvironmetal and technoeconomic determinants of homicide in a coffee-growing municipio.19 Later on, he participated in the Comisión de Estudios sobre la Violencia en Colombia [Commission of studies on violence in Colombia] and the report that this commission published in 1987, and was a representative of the National University in the peace process with the M-19 guerrilla group in 1988-9.

These ideas were reflected in the ‘script’ that Arocha proposed in the second documented meeting. The minutes record that the main focus was a proposal Arocha presented to the group for an exhibition about ‘burial ceremonies’ [funebria], ‘the way people face death’ or ‘the cult for ancestors’ in different regions, which might be the Northern Pacific, the Southern Pacific, San Basilio de Palenque and the San Andrés and Providencia islands in the Caribbean region, making it possible to see

---

19 In Colombia, *La Violencia* [The Violence] with capital letters refers to the period from 1948 to 1965, characterized by an armed conflict between the liberal and the conservador parties’ members (Fondo documental Jaime Arocha, 2014: 5). Arocha’s thesis was published as a book in Spanish in 1979.
differences and common traces among the Afro-descendant communities, and also relating to other elements, such as food, music and social relations. He added that the research project must be supported with theses-writing people or assistants, and that a tentative activities timeline must be made. The title suggested for the exhibition was *Antepasados vivos* [Living ancestors], which made reference to another nodal concept in this Afro-Americanist focus.

**Afro-genesis and the Colombian racialized geography**

In Restrepo’s view, as important as *huellas de africana* is the concept of ‘Afro-genesis,’ defined in opposition to ‘criollo-genesis’ or ‘indo-genesis,’ quoting Maya (1998):

*contrary to the criollo-genesis and to the indo-genesis, [this perspective] insists on the importance of the permanence of cultural complexes of African origin in the processes of cultural, territorial and political reconstruction and recreation of enslaved people and their descendants in our country (Restrepo, 2003: 95).*

‘Afro-genesis’ was also defined as opposed to ‘Euro-genesis,’ a term Restrepo explains using a quote from Arocha (1996):

*An analytical paradigm that tends to highlight the European heritage and to minimize the impact of the African legacies (Restrepo, 2003: 95).*

Arocha made reference here to ‘the colonial information system’ that distorted the knowledge about ‘el negro’ and to the ‘hegemonic communication and information system dominated by European thought in its relation with Africa and America’ that he and Friedemann wrote about in 1984. This information system was related with what anthropologist Wade referred to in 1993 in his ethnography of the ‘Colombian racial order.’ In this work Wade looked at space ‘as a landscape of meaning, a “moral topography,” exploring it as a metaphor for race and culture, but [also] as a means through which social relations constitute themselves in a concrete form’ (1993: 43). Colombia was—and still is—seen as a ‘country of regions’ that emerged racialized (ibid.: 56) while simultaneously ‘races’ emerged as regionalized (p. 57-8), constituting a ‘spatial distribution of race, wealth, and power’ (p. 269). In his view:

*Colombian nationhood is a relational totality in the sense that any region, albeit ambiguously and contestably bounded, exists in relation to others, and the meanings attached to each derive in part from...*

---

20 Maya obtained her PhD in history at Université de Paris (Pantheon-Sorbonne) in 1999 with a thesis entitled *Witchcraft and reconstruction of identities among Africans and their descendants in the Nueva Granada, 17th century*, published in Spanish in 2005.

21 ‘Criollo’ was the way to refer to people of Spanish descent born in the American continent in colonial times. On the other hand, ‘indo’ alludes to the Americanist vision that I already signalled, characteristic of Colombian and Latin-American social research, which highlights the contributions in history of indigenous or native groups that preceded the arrival and conquest by European people in the 15th century.
relations of difference. Thus, for example, the Atlantic [Caribbean] coastal region is “black” in relation to the Andean interior, but “not so black” in relation to the Pacific coast [...] The inscription of difference in landscape is fundamentally important not only because this constitutes certain social relations (involved in migration, colonization) in racialized ways, but also because difference is experienced in a spatially embodied fashion. One travels bodily from hot to cool, from black to white, when moving from the Pacific coast to Bogotá: it is in this sense that landscape has such a mnemonic function in “sustaining collective memory” (p. 64).

Arocha and Moreno (2007) coined other terms to refer to this racialized geography, as *andinocentrismo* or Andean-centrism and *trópico-salvajismo* or tropical-savagery, explaining that they were preconceived ideas on which the nation-building model was based that persist to the present:

the preconception that the tempered *Andes* mountains shelter civilization, which has to go down from there to the torrid areas of barbarism, populated by people considered racially and culturally inferior (p. 588).

It is at the top of these Andes mountains that the National Museum, like many other institutions where many decisions that affect the ‘regions’ are made, including the Presidency of the Republic, Congress and Ministries. Many times one feels that the Colombian ‘nation’ is actually *located* in Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia and of Cundinamarca Department. Velorios exhibition, and all the meetings that led to its set up took place in Bogotá, and it was from and to there that later the Itinerante would travel. Arocha and Moreno drew on the work of anthropologist Margarita Serje (2005) and historian Alfonso Múnera (2005), to explain how the dominant and homogenizing ‘vision of the nation’ was built from the Andes, distributing ‘races’ in a ‘hierarchy of space’.

From the time of independence, when they began to conceive the nation that they wanted to found, the *criolla* intellectuality faced the overwhelming fact that more than 80% of their inhabitants were illiterate Blacks, Indians, Mulattos and Mestizos, and that more than three quarters of its territory was composed of ardent coasts and plains, and impenetrable grasslands and jungles. How can one build a homogeneous sense where the most absolute and undesirable heterogeneity prevailed? How does one integrate this overwhelming and diverse majority of inhabitants in the notion of citizens? Furthermore, how does one idealize a geography perceived with profound mistrust and with negative connotations and make it into the unique place of the “fatherland”? [...] From the Andean region a vision of the nation was built that became dominant, to the point that other regional elites shared it at the end of the 19th century. The hierarchy of the territories, which conferred natural superiority to the *Andes*, and the hierarchy and spatial distribution of the races, which placed white-coloured people at the top, were two main elements in the narrated nation, while no equivalent counter-image emerged in other regions that had a similar power of persuasion (Arocha and Moreno, 2007: 594)
In the following chapters, I will show how these andinoctrismo and trópico-salvajismo and racialized geography, as well as hierarchical relationships between institutions and people, were enacted in the ‘fieldtrips’ organized for Velorios and later for the Itinerante’s journeys.  

The 1991 Constitution and Law 70 of 1993 of ‘Black communities’

The names of Afro-Colombian people are also a central element to understanding stereotypes and ‘invisibility.’ In the newspaper column and in the minutes I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, Arocha spoke of ‘Africans and their descendants’ and Mosquera of ‘Black, Afro-Colombian and Raizal’ people. The Velorios exhibition included in its title an additional name: ‘Black, Afro-Colombian, Palenquero and Raizal communities.’ These names refer all in the 2000s to those who in 1984 Friedemann and Arocha called ‘el negro’ or ‘los negros.’ As I will show, what names to use in the exhibition was the subject of debate during the discussions that took place in the preparation of Velorios.

In 1991, the Asamblea Constituyente [Constituent Assembly] recognized the diversity and plurality of the nation in the new Colombian Constitution. It declared that ‘the Colombian State is plural (Art. 1), that the State recognizes and protects the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Colombian Nation (Art. 7) and that the State has the obligation to protect the cultural wealth [riqueza cultural] of the Nation (Art. 8) (Bonilla, 2008). Also in 1991, the Colombian Congress approved Agreement 169 on indigenous and tribal peoples in independent countries, adopted by the 76th meeting of the General Conference of the ILO in Geneva, in 1989 (Law 121 1991), legitimizing ‘ethnicity’ as a tool for the claiming of territorial and cultural rights. In the Colombian Constitution, Transitory Article 55 included a new name for ‘el negro,’ although not one yet fully defined: ‘comunidades negras’ [Black communities]. This article ordered the ‘creation of a commission to establish the mechanisms that would allow for the protection of cultural identity and promote the economic and social development of Black communities which inhabit wasteland in the river zones of the Pacific basin’ (Bonilla, 2009: 10). In 1993, the Congress of the Republic approved Law 70, following the conclusions produced by this commission, in which both Arocha and Friedemann participated (Arocha, 1998a; Wade, 2006). It included the definition of ‘Black communities’ as and ‘ethnic group,’ and procedures concerning land ownership, ethnoeducation and ethnodevelopment (Bonilla, 2009: 10). The object of this law was:

---

22 In the initial Museum meetings’ minutes, ‘stereotype’ appears twice in regard to the need for new ethnographic research and ‘knowledge.’ After curator Lleras suggests that the group looks at two exhibitions about the Caribbean region and the Chocó Department, areas where many Afro-Colombian people live, as possible examples for the project at hand: ‘Prof. Arocha intervenes saying that in the littoral everything that can be presented will be fragmentary because the research processes are very recent [tardíos] (There has been a stereotyped knowledge), therefore there are structural problems that are difficult to solve’ (5 May 2006). And some months later, without clearly stating who said what, while discussing a project draft for a temporary exhibition written by Arocha, the minutes read: ‘Emphasis must be made in fieldwork and the recollection of objects to avoid stereotyping and to ensure that they are places where it is safe to travel’ (6 Dec 2006).
to recognize the right of the Black Communities that have been living on barren lands in rural areas along the rivers of the Pacific Basin, in accordance with their traditional production practices, to their collective property as specified and instructed in the articles that follow. Similarly, the purpose of the Law is to establish mechanisms for protecting the cultural identity and rights of the Black Communities of Colombia as an ethnic group and to foster their economic and social development, in order to guarantee that these communities have real equal opportunities before the rest of the Colombian society.  

Law 70 also defined ‘Black communities’ in the following terms:

It is the group of families of Afro-Colombian descent who possesses its own culture, shares a common history and has its own traditions and customs within a rural-urban setting and which reveals and preserves a consciousness of identity that distinguishes it from other ethnic groups (ibid.).

Arocha (1998a) referred to the 1991 constitution as a definite tool for the inclusion of Afro-Colombian people:

The new constitution does not build the nation either by integration or segregation [as was the case in the 1960s in the United States], but through the preservation of ethnic diversity. Nevertheless, this innovation requires that, among other things, Afro-Colombian identities are perceived in positive ways in fields other than sports and music (para. 1).

In this article, Arocha adheres to the notion of Afro-descendants, introduced by the Brazilian activist Sueli Carneiro in 1996. He explains the role of names in these required transformations, as a tool for the inclusion of Afro-Colombians to counteract what he called a ‘linguistic-political limbo’ produced through a series of eliminations. African origins have been erased from people’s names, a form of invisibilization that goes back to the times of the slave trade, when personal names were lost after baptism in African ports, where many of the original ethnic denominations were replaced by African geographical denominations. After manumission, freed slaves adopted the surname of the old slave owner. Later on, the Bourbon Reforms attempted to eliminate the nomenclature system based on skin pigmentation that had organized the colonial society into racial castes, which after independence helped racial terminologies disappear, but not racial discrimination.

In a later article, Arocha (2004) insists on ‘the political value of ethnicity’ to counteract the negative images presented about Afro-descendants and Africa in the education system and mass media:

The reconceptualization of themselves and of their movement has led to people from the rivers and jungles becoming aware of being carriers of a rich and particular identity, which has not been foreign to the sustainability of their territories (p. 169).

---


24 For a shorter version of this article in English, see Arocha 1998b.
He then insists once more on the value of funerary rituals, as an example of the ‘holism’ that this identity represents. This holism that is present in views about the world such as ‘munu,’ that are characteristic of Bantu people. Most of the African people enslaved during the slave trade were Bantu, he explains referencing Maya (1998).

But other scholars have been critical of such views. Restrepo sees this category from yet another perspective. Through the title of his book *Etnización de la negridad* (2013a) [Etnization of Blackness], he labels the process through which being Black was turned into belonging to the ‘Black community’ and the ‘Afro-Colombian’ ethnic group. He uses the neologism *negridad* ‘to refer to discourses and practices of *lo negro*’ (p. 26). The closest translation I can think of for both ‘negridad’ and ‘lo negro’ is the word Blackness, but Restrepo explains that he uses the term as analogous to *indianidad* [Indianness] (ibid.), and distinguishing these terms from the people who are adscribed or ascribe themselves to the categories. In his book, he deals with the interplay between the Afro-Colombian social movement, the Catholic Church, functionaries, social sciences practitioners, lawyers, laws and institutions in the ‘invention of Black communities,’ which involved inserting the ambiguous system of classification that characterizes the Colombian racial order into a legal regime which does not admit ambiguity. Names enact the ambiguous way in which racism works in Colombia, and so do the official numbers (one of the ‘forms of visibilization’ or ‘visualization’ that Restrepo discusses critically): The 2005 Colombian Census, which introduced as one of its variables the ‘ethnic’ and ‘racial’ categories ‘Negro (a), mulato, afrocolombiano,’ ‘Raizal de San Andrés y Providencia’ and ‘Palenquero,’ calculated a total of 10.6% of the Colombian population. Wade (2006) explains that the State re-considered that number to 26%, but that calculations went from 4% to 45% of the Colombian population (p. 61). This statistical ambiguity was another dimension of the ‘deep visibility’ that Mosquera claimed at the National Museum, and just as Colombian regions are classified as *darker or not so dark* in relational ways (Wade, 1993 [see quote above]), their inhabitants may classify others or themselves.

Wade has approached names, the 1991 Constitution and Law 70 from a different perspective to Arocha, and more in line with Restrepo. He states that in the 1990s, ‘invisibility’ was no longer the issue, at least in the political arena (1995: 357). In his work, he has traced the genealogy of the various denominations of Black people, the documents that contain and legitimate these denominations, as well as the use that different actors (including scholars and activists) make of them, as *representations of Blackness* and as a process of indigenization. He states (2009) that ‘the term *comunidades negras*, while still current and still potentially problematic in relation to, say, urban contexts, has been joined and to some extent displaced by the terms *afrocolombianos* and more recently *afrodescendiente*’ (para. 27), which may be better received to mobilize anti-racist agendas within the hegemonic discourse of pluriethnicity and multiculturalism. Cárdenas (2012) uses Hall’s (2001) theory of articulation to coin the notion of ‘black multiculturalism,’ referring to the efforts to gain multicultural recognition for Afro-descendants in Colombia. She explains that in Colombia, as in other Latin American countries, multiculturalism emerges in opposition to ideologies of *mestizaje* or cultural and racial mixing. This *black multiculturalism* articulates ‘ethno-territorial blackness, politics of victimization, and diasporic
anti-racism’ (Cárdenas, 2012: 116). An example of this is Colombia’s *Día Nacional de la Afrocolombianidad* [National Day of Afro-Colombianness] which was decreed in 2001 as a form of recognition of pluri-ethnicity and Afro-Colombians’ need to recover their history: ‘Its passage was in keeping with Colombia’s “multicultural turn,” which by 2001 had been more than a decade in the making and had become an institutionalized logic of the State’ (ibid.: 114). The consequence of this was, in her view, to solidify the image of Colombia as an inclusive nation that celebrates cultural diversity and the historical contributions of diverse groups, but leaves aside the recognition that racism has characterized this history. This contrasts with the UN resolution that declared 2011 the ‘International Year of Afro-descendants,’ which has precedence in the UN declaration of human rights and in the Durban Declaration (2001): the UN’s main objective is to ‘eradicate racism’ (p. 115).

Alongside this political *visibility* was the fact that the ‘invisibility of the studies of el negro’ that Friedemann discussed in the 1980s was no longer the case in the same way in the 1990s. By then she and Arocha had several and varied publications on the subject, including *América negra* [Black America], a journal they edited that began to circulate in 1991. In the year that *Un siglo de investigación social* was published, British anthropologist Peter Wade finished the PhD that along with two more long fieldwork stays in Colombia helped him write the book *Blackness and race mixture* (1993), translated as *Gente negra, nación mestiza* (1997). In this publication he acknowledged the influence that Nina S. de Friedemann’s work had had for him (along with that of Whitten and Taussig), but unlike her (and Arocha and Maya), his work has focused on ‘Black culture’ and racial relations, among other themes, rather than *huellas de africanía*. Another trend in this academic field is the work of Eduardo Restrepo, who started publishing about Black and Afro-Colombian people in 1996. In line with the works I have mentioned above, he has been dedicated to studying what other scholars have produced on the subject, like the bibliographic compilation he published with Axel Rojas the same year that Velorios opened in the National Museum (Restrepo and Rojas, 2008).

More recently, Restrepo (2013b: 15-7) has stated that four research lines have developed in ‘Afro-Colombian studies.’ One was led by the Afro-genetic view of anthropologists Friedemann and Arocha and, later on, historian Adriana Maya. Another one by a group of sociologists and anthropologists who focused on the Pacific region and ‘developed a series of studies about population, productive models, cultural strategies of Black populations’ from a local and regional perspective. A third group of academics has focused on politics and demographics. The fourth one, where Restrepo locates himself, has been interested in the politics of representations of blackness. Restrepo (2013b) explains that since 2000, this field has moved from a focus on culture and ethnicity to include other subjects: such as race and racism, and also affirmative action, differential focus and ‘Afro-reparations;’ as well as sexualities, subjectivities, corporalities and representation. More work has taken place in cities, and when carried out in rural areas it is not limited to the Pacific region. The early work of sociologist Claudia Mosquera Rosero-Lábbe (1998) stands out among these urban studies with its emphasis on racial relations, and Restrepo acknowledges her as a pioneer in the introduction of the notion of *Afro-reparations* and affirmative action in Colombia (Restrepo 2013b: 14).
**New museology and ‘contact zones’**

When the Museum meetings began, the idea of a separate hall dedicated to Black, Afro-Colombian and Raizal people as a form of ‘visibility’ and as an ‘Afro-reparation’ drew on discussions in the field of museum studies. For Lleras as an in-house curator, these discussions suggested that separation was not necessarily an answer. She had in mind the ‘script’ of the whole Museum, which reflected, as Arocha’s interventions quoted in minutes suggest, the mid-century ethnologists’ vision. In one of these meetings, Curator Lleras brought up the example of the National Museum of the American Indian in the United States, where a concern existed that if each group had a separate museum it could result in the Smithsonian National History Museum being thought of as only for ‘Whites.’

This reflected an interest in the role of the public (the visitor, the audiences) as central in the production of exhibitions, and in similar discussions that were taking place elsewhere, about ‘broader’ and ‘inclusive’ narratives that represented different ‘communities’ in museums.

Macdonald (2006a) states that the ‘representational critique,’ of which the American Indian museum is an example, emerged in the 1980s and translated in the world of museums to the trends labelled as the ‘New Museology’ by Paul Vergo in 1989. This ‘representational critique’ posed questions for cultural and social disciplines about how meanings come to be inscribed and by whom, and how some come to be regarded as ‘right’ or taken as given. This was related to the challenges posed by postcolonial and feminist activists and scholars with respect to exclusions and silences in public spheres. The ‘first wave’ of the New Museology called for ‘a shift to seeing the museum and the meaning of its contents not as fixed and bounded, but as contextual and contingent,’ (p. 3) broadening its interests in collecting, archiving and exhibiting ‘operations’—to include, for example, commercialism and entertainment—and accepting that ‘the museum and its exhibitions may be variously perceived, especially by those who visit’ (p. 2). Macdonald also states that Clifford and Marcus’s *Writing culture*, (1986) had a central role in this development. This book became a famous reference point not only in the social sciences, but also among people from other disciplines, including designers and artists.

Since 2000, the ‘second wave’ of New Museology has attempted to transform museum ‘operations’ in search of a reconnection between practice and research (Boast, 2011: 59; Macdonald, 2006a: 3). Sometimes the call for change is about previously absent people participating in different forms and degrees of decision-making (who decides what to collect and exhibit, and how), and at other times it is about collecting practices (what is considered worth collecting, how and for who). Sometimes it is about the use of new media and other exhibitionary practices (how the interpretations of collections are communicated), or about the subjects exhibited—usually controversial, politically charged ones,

---


26 Interview with James Clifford, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9AKrRGuBM0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C9AKrRGuBM0), accessed 20th of September 2014.
as well as for conceiving audiences as ‘diverse, plural, and active, rather than as a relatively
homogeneous and rather passive mass’ (Macdonald, 2006a: 8).

I want to present here an article and a concept as the seminal link between these two waves, in a
similar way that Friedemann’s ‘invisibility’ and ‘stereotypy’ were for the field of Afro-Colombian
studies. In his ‘Museums as contact zones’ (1997), Clifford used a ‘meeting’ between museum staff,
community representatives, functionaries and scholars, which he attended in a museum basement, to
re-elaborate the concept of ‘contact zones,’ coined by Mary-Louise Pratt (1991). This was a concept
that the US linguist developed inspired by Peruvian Guamán Poma de Ayala’s 17th century ‘autograph
manuscript’ El Primer Nueva corónica y buen gobierno, a collection of drawings and writings in Spanish
and Quechua, that denounced the opprobrious treatment the Spaniards gave to American populations,
which never made its way into royal hands in Europe. In his article Clifford used the notion of ‘contact
zones’ in a dual sense: to foreground circumstances in which museums, which are privileged ‘sites of
ethnomimesis’ may become ‘contact zones,’ but also to challenge museum practitioners around the
world.

In his article, Clifford stated that ‘even encounters that are ethnocentric—which they all are to a
degree—can produce reflection and cultural critique’ (1997: 198). In saying this he followed Pratt’s
view of Poma de Ayala’s manuscript as an example of what she called auto-ethnographic texts,
‘instances where the colonized subjects attempt to represent themselves in forms that involve the
terms of the colonizer’ (Pratt, 1992: 7) that constitute answers or dialogues with metropolitan
representations about the ‘other,’ and imply partial collaboration and appropriation of the conqueror’s
language. She stated that ‘a contact perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by
their relations to each other’ (ibid.: 7), frequently under radically asymmetrical power relationships, of
intersection, interaction, improvisation and in opposition to diffusionist perspectives. In the ‘contact
zones’ the ‘colonized’ may produce auto-ethnographies or auto-ethnographic expressions through
processes of translation and ‘transculturation,’ a notion that Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz
proposed in the 1940s, to counteract words such as deculturation and acculturation, which described
culture transferral in a reductionist way and imagined from a metropolitan perspective, and to
‘describe how subordinate or marginal groups select or invent from materials transmitted towards
them by a dominant or metropolitan culture’ (ibid.: 6).

But here I keep in mind the ‘radically asymmetrical’ and ‘ethnocentric’ power relationships that
characterize these ‘contact zones.’ In regard to participation becoming a trope in the museum practice
and scholarship that followed Vergo’s New Museology and Clifford’s contact zone, Boast (2011) warns
about a ‘set of assumptions about the social and political nature of the processes by which knowledge
is produced and reproduced in the museum’ that appear in museum studies literature on the subject
(p. 58). Despite recognizing that this knowledge is relative, socially learnt, and linked to the
understanding and engagement with objects, intellectual control over interpretation and presentation
has largely remained in the hands of the museum. Undermining the concept of a contact zone as a
space for cross-cultural dialogues and source community expertise is the idea that it could be merely an extension of the museum as an instrument of governmentality expressed as multiculturalism (ibid.: 59). Under the influence of the multicultural turn, the National Museum of Colombia can be thought of as this kind of ‘contact zone,’ and Velorios as an ‘auto-ethnographic’ expression, which enacted mutual and asymmetrical power relationships of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity,’ along with geography, gender, age and class are revealed, but also processes of—even if limited—translation and transculturation. Borrowing Mosquera’s words, these are also the unequal sites for deeper transformations.

*Milenios de diversidad [Millennia of Diversity] (1994)*

Previous to Velorios there had been attempts to represent Afro-Colombians in the post-1991 National Museum. As a public institution, it had to reflect the new constitution and, by extension, Law 70, by translating those texts into its exhibition halls. In 1994, historian Adriana Maya, then head of the History department of the Andes University, wrote a ‘Museological script about Afro-Colombian communities’ for the museum. In that script Maya stated that writing it was ‘justified’ by Law 70, Article 7 of the 1991 Constitution, and a re-structuring project for the National Museum that would ‘offer visitors a panorama both of the country’s history and of its cultural diversity’ (Maya, 1994). This script was thought of as a means to ‘include in the south hall on the first floor of the Museum—called ‘encounter of cultures’—the ethno-history and the contribution of Africans and their descendants to the construction of the nation’ (p. 2). Maya, in accordance with the Afro-genetic approach I discussed above, proposed incorporating into the museum script the relationships between past (history) and present (ethnography), as well as the connections between Africa and Colombia, an attempt that would require transforming the clear distinctions between history and ethnography that the Museum’s collections reflected. According to this document, ‘it was agreed that the ethnohistory of the Africans and their descendants in Nueva Granada would be represented in the hall dedicated to the colonial period on the Museum’s first floor and not in the southern hall on the ground floor, which had been assigned to host an archaeological and ethnographic temporary exhibition of various Colombian ethnic groups’ (ibid.: p. 3).

That year the National Museum opened three refurbished halls to the public with the exhibition *Milenios de diversidad*. The ‘encounter of cultures’ that Maya mentioned in her script was now a ‘millennia of diversity.’ In that exhibit, the ‘important contribution made by millennial cultures’ to the present day was ‘narrated,’ ‘shown’ and ‘traversed’ in chronological order, beginning 12,000 years in the past at the ‘Population and early societies’ hall, and then to the ‘Complex societies’ hall before finally the ‘Ethnography: Indigenous and Afro-American contemporary societies’ hall (*El Tiempo*, 10–July-1994). This hall, according to impressions gathered by anthropologist Peter Wade in his fieldnotes before the exhibition had been finished and opened to the public, portrayed indigenous groups as if almost all of them came from the Amazonia region; about 20% of the exhibit was devoted to ‘Afro-Colombians’, and the items on display were overwhelmingly from the Pacific region. He noted that the
exhibits had been put together by the then ‘ICAN,’ with no input by Black or indigenous organizations. Arocha and Friedemann, as pioneers of Afro-Colombian studies, were involved in the process of writing the hall texts for that exhibition.\textsuperscript{27}

In 2001, another subtle attempt to introduce the subject in the Museum took place. The 6th Annual History Conference held at the Museum dealt with the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Colombia. Beatriz González, then A&H Curator, gave a presentation later published as ‘The images of the black in the collections of official institutions’ (González, 2003). But also in 2001, the exhibits that had been inaugurated as \textit{Millennia of diversity} were dismantled. Sections of it, and of other exhibits based on the script that Maya had written in 1994, remained in the texts on the Museum’s first and second floor halls, when the ‘Museum meetings’ began in 2006. By then, the role of the museum, and by extension the meaning of curatorship had been strongly influenced by the ideas of the New Museology, as new exhibitions, museographic scripts and other kinds of \textit{documents} produced at the NM showed.

\textbf{The ‘voids’ in the Museum collections, the Strategic Plan 2001-2010 and the ‘48-91’ project}

In 2004, Cristina Lleras was appointed to succeed González as one of the two in-house curators, after she had worked in the A&H office since 2000. Her appointment also signalled a change in the way curatorship was understood in the Museum, and what kinds of objects would be stored in its collections. By then, the Museum’s exhibitions had to reflect not only the Constitution, but also a ‘strategic plan’ within which the ‘participation’ of citizens, ‘diversity’ and ‘multiculturalism’ were tropes, also in line with the New Museology precepts I presented above. In 2011, González explained in an interview that she had designed the Museum’s chronological script while in charge of the A&H Curatorship, using the Louvre Museum in Paris and the National Gallery in London as models, with the help of a few acknowledged historians, and making the most of the building’s architecture.\textsuperscript{28} She explained what a ‘curatorial script’ was:

\begin{quote}
A curatorial script must be first made writing the narrative and then choosing the works, the pieces, and the objects that correspond to each action. It is like film scripts.
\end{quote}

For her, museums were obligated to show a balance between preserving, studying and communicating, with the purpose of preserving the memory of the country rather than being full of people, and furthermore it should offer the visitors references that allow them to reflect on themselves and their present. She resented the fact that new exhibits did not allow the visitors to appreciate the work of art that the Museum’s building was in itself. Lleras, whose work at the A&H combined with academic

\textsuperscript{27} Personal communication from Natalia Otero, an anthropologist who worked in the set up of that exhibition.

training in museology in Colombia and in the UK, exposed a different view in another interview. For her, the Museum should function as a site for discussing current issues and sharing multiple stories that reflect the 1991 Constitution, which would be meaningful for visitors (so that they want to visit) through growing collections that talk about them, and the recent history of Colombia, and include objects or subjects connected with everyday life. These two views signalled a change from the museum as monument to the museum as communicator, more in line with the views of New Museology’s second wave.

In a later interview with Lleras, I asked her what had made her and her team in the A&H Curatorship become interested in the ‘Afro’ subject in 2006. She said that she had not met anthropologist Arocha or sociologist Mosquera before they began to attend meetings at the Museum. She explained to me that she had not been thinking about the ‘Afro’ subject but about ‘diversity,’ and that in the office she led they used as reference for their work two documents that signalled the existence of ‘voids’ in the Museum’s displays and collections: the Museum’s Strategic Plan 2001-2010: Bases for the National Museum of the future (Ministerio de Cultura and Museo Nacional de Colombia, 2003), and a project that they called ‘48-91.’

My problem was that I took the Strategic Plan seriously, which continues to be an authoritative source [carta de verdad] for the National Museum. The Strategic Plan says everything: about the voids in the collections, in the exhibitions... and [it includes] every one of its 52 projects, one of which is the construction of the script [for a permanent exhibition] between 1948 and 1991. This is accompanied by a proposal to include research done at the Museum in a series of research activities that scholars from the National University or Javeriana University were doing to obtain funding from Colciencias [the National Science, Technology and Innovation Administrative Department].

These ‘voids’ were to be filled with new objects, scripts and exhibits. It is not clear to me if 48-91 was ever officially approved as such, or, unlike the Strategic Plan Lleras referred to, available online, it certainly did not circulate openly. But it worked as a blueprint for the actions carried out at the A&H curatorship’s office. The 48-91 that Lleras spoke about was a project to develop more research and exhibition projects, titled ‘Del bogotazo a una nueva constitución: irrupción de la cultura popular y construcción de lo público [From the bogotazo to a new constitution: irruption of popular culture and construction of the public] (Colombia, 1948 – 1991). The objective of this project was twofold: to feed the Museum’s collections using research and temporary exhibitions, and to develop a script for a


30. Interview 9 April 2013. Colciencias is the national institution in charge of managing budgets and designing policies for research and innovation in Colombia.

31. The Bogotazo is the name given to the riots triggered after the assassination of liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on the 9 April 1948 in Bogotá. It marked the beginning of the period known as La Violencia [The Violence] and the beginning of the armed conflict in Colombia. Lleras provided me with a digital version of the ‘48-91’ document in 2013.
hall dedicated to the ‘cultural processes in the country from 1948 until 1991.’ In relation to the ‘voids’ in the Museum collections, and following what the Strategic Plan stated, 48-91 states that:

The Museum collections and permanent exhibitions present voids in events, social processes and other key subjects that reflect the multi-ethnic and pluricultural character of the Nation, especially in regard to the second half of the 20th century. It is meaningful that between 1999 and 2003, the National Museum of Colombia made a National Survey with the objective of asking Colombians what pieces they considered must be part of the museum’s collections. More than a list that can be followed blindly, the elements identified in this exercise signal imaginaries of the ways we should represent ourselves. From this perspective, from the 1,815 surveys systematized most of the answers are associated with the situation of violence and the lived conflicts, especially during the last 25 years. But additionally, the answers also included other testimonial objects and art works related mainly to the 20th century (pp. 1-2).

The subjects that these research-exhibitions would address were ‘popular culture, communication media, music, sports, social movements and the domestic sphere’ (p. 2), framed by a ‘Collections policy’ that prioritized the acquisition of ‘testimonials of the social history and the art history of the 20th century’ (p. 8), following a specific methodology for the creation of ‘scientific scripts’ for exhibitions that would later constitute the ‘script’ of the envisioned hall that would represent the recent history of the country.

That document also reflected changes in the kinds of objects that the Museum could use to represent the ‘diverse’ nation, which related to the transformations that Botero signalled in her article (2013) on the work of anthropologists-collectors and of the kinds of objects that museums are to collect. One of the members of Lleras’ team at the A&H Curatorship, one of the co-curators of several of those exhibitions (and also mentioned in Arocha’s column above), stated that the project had to do with the aim of creating a ‘collections policy:’ ‘They always talk about physical growth [of the Museum], but this will only be possible if it is tied to a conceptual growth of the collections. There are no collections or a mature script to tell the history from years ‘48 to ‘91,’ he said to me. This ‘conceptual growth’ would require changing ideas about what and how to collect and exhibit not only objects, but also images of the nation. Lleras explained to me what kinds of exhibitions this project produced:

[The ‘48-91’] project wanted to do several temporary exhibitions with the intention of building multiple views regarding the cultural processes between years ‘48 and ‘91. ‘Cinema,’ ‘Rock,’ ‘Telenovela,’ ‘Si lo tiene ¡tráigalo!’... There were things about the 1st of May, the [national] beauty pageant, salsa music; what is called ‘banal nationalism,’ forms of nationalism that pass through every-day life (ibid.).

‘Cinema,’ ‘Rock,’ ‘Telenovela’ and ‘Si lo tiene ¡tráigalo!’ were the names of some of the temporary exhibitions that took place in different halls of the Museum: Nación rock [Rock nation] (2007), about young people's appropriation of an international music genre; ¡Acción! Cine en Colombia (2007-8),

32 Interview with Juan Darío Restrepo, 23 May 2014.
about the history of cinema in Colombia intended ‘to note how the country has been seen in cinema and how cinema has been watched in the country;’ and *Un país de telenovela* [A soap opera country] (2009), about the role of national television soap operas in the portrayal and production of images of the national.33

The title of the project, and Lleras’s words, show that the project intended that this ‘new permanent exhibition’ about more recent events in the history of the country would fit within González’s chronological script that already organized the Museum and would represent citizens that already *participated* as such. But Mosquera and Arocha’s claim for a hall focused on a specific group of people (Black, Afro-Colombian and Raizal) who had been historically excluded from the dominant narratives of the nation or, when included, were stereotyped and racialized. This signalled a different kind of ‘void,’ related with the ‘invisibility’ and ‘stereotypy’ I signalled before, and a different kind of claim about the use of museums. Macdonald (2006a), explains that since the late 20th century there has been ‘an increased claiming of the museum form, and existing museum space, by different groups, and of changing museum-society relationships in which museums have come to be seen less as offering up preferred or superior culture and more as responsible for representing society in its diversity’ (p. 92). The demand made by scholars Mosquera and Arocha reminded me of the work described by Geismar and Tilley (2003), who state that in the 1970s the participation of researchers (linguists, ethnomusicologists, anthropologists) in the Vanuatu Cultural Center was key in its change of focus to being ‘less on the museum itself and […] more about “getting Melanesians interested” in the regeneration of traditional culture,’ and in the growing context of political (and thus cultural) self-determination prior to independence in 1980 (p. 172). They remark that the museum acts as an intermediary between a ‘global network of museums and artefacts’ and grass-roots organizations (p. 174), and that there is a coming and going between many ‘indigenous’ museums and cultural centres and ethnographic museums, which they accept act as critical reference points and models (p. 186). In the early 2000s, the same Strategic Plan that Lleras talked about, apart from signalling the ‘voids’ in the collections (p. 26), also referred to ‘getting people interested’ in the ‘Afro’ subject, in terms of ‘sensibilization’ and ‘participation:’

In relation with other priorities of social development, the Museum Strategic Plan is directed to accomplish, from its field of action […] b) The dispositions of the Law 70 of 1993 [of Black communities] and of the CONPES Document 3169 of 2002 ‘Policy for Afro-Colombian population,’ as pertains to the Ministry of Culture to lead its actions towards sensibilizing the national society and the different instances of the State in the face of the Ethnic and cultural diversity of the country; to promote the

---

33 *Si lo tiene ¡tráigalo!* [If you have it bring it!] (2008), an experimental exhibition that invited the audience to bring objects of ‘everyday life’ that would help increase the collections’ ‘voids’ in relation to the social history of the country in the 20th century. A later one, more controversial, was *Las historias de un grito: 200 años de ser colombianos* [Histories of a scream: 200 years of being Colombian] (2010), an exhibition that along with the temporary exhibitions hall on the ground floor, occupied two of the Museum’s permanent exhibitions halls with objects, images, videos and texts that exhibited a critical view about Colombia’s independence from Spain, its ‘main characters’ and those who tell such ‘histories.’ For a discussion on *Las historias de un grito* see Suárez (2011).
participation of the Ethnic groups in the different instances of the National System of Culture; and to contribute to strengthen, project and protect the cultural values of Afro-Colombians, with the objective of maintaining, enriching and disseminating their cultural identity’ (Ministerio de Cultura and Museo Nacional de Colombia, p. 16).

These statements signalled another challenge. To include in its exhibitions ‘images of the nation’ in circulation, like the ones that 48-91 proposed to feed the Museum’s collections, or as material for exhibitions, would have meant exhibiting racialized stereotypes as those I have already described. During the meetings at the Museum, Lleras insisted on using previous exhibitions as references. Considering approaches made regarding the country’s regions in previous exhibitions both in the National Museum (‘Caribe espléndido’—Splendid Caribbean) and in the Antioquia Museum in Medellín (‘Chocó, vecino pacífico’—Chocó, Pacific neighbour), and also two art exhibitions that opened in Bogotá as the Museum meetings began that were mentioned in minutes as possible templates for the exhibition. One was the 11th Salón regional de artistas [Regional hall of artists], particularly its displays selected from the Pacific region, and the other was Viaje sin mapa, which I will refer to in the next section. However, minutes quote the two academics as regarding them as difficult to understand and lacking context. What would it have taken for the National Museum to produce an exhibition that dealt with inapppropriate images in circulation?

Curating stereotypes

In this section I introduce a set of artistic and curatorship projects that were discussed in the preparation of Velorios. These projects directly tackled invisibility and stereotyping and showed the connections between current and historic racism. Specifically, I will consider the exhibition Viaje sin mapa, where the work of artist Liliana Angulo was first displayed in a mainstream art gallery. Also, I will look at the book Afro-reparaciones (2007), which sociologist Mosquera co-edited and co-curated, using some pieces from Angulo’s work Negra Menta, as well as other pieces included in Viaje sin mapa, like the photographic work of Martha Posso Rosero.

Negra Menta [Black Mint], 2003 in Viaje sin mapa [Journey without a map], 2006

Viaje sin mapa opened in 2006 in the Republican House, an art gallery located in the Luis Angel Arango Library’s building in Bogotá’s city centre. This exhibition was co-curated by Mercedes Angola and Raúl

34 This library and the gallery inside it, like the Gold Museum, belong to the Cultural Division of the Banco de la República [Bank of the Republic], the Colombian central bank or ‘bank of banks’ (http://www.banrep.gov.co/en/node/22726, 26-May-2015). The Banco’s Cultural Division owns the two biggest art galleries in Bogotá: the Republican House [Casa Republicana] in the Luis Angel Arango Library [BLAA is its acronym in Spanish, and it is also the biggest one in the country], and the Museum of Art of the Bank of the Republic, just across the road from the BLAA in the colonial centre of the city. Peter Wade was also approached in 1989 and 1999 by the Bank of the Republic to write scripts (pre-guiones) for exhibitions on black culture in Colombia. In 2003, an exhibition was designed under the leadership of Adriana Maya called Comunidades afrocolombianas: Legado y presencia [Afro-Colombian communities: Legacy and presence] (http://www.banrepcultural.org/sites/default/files/expo_comunidades_afrocolombianas_mo.pdf, accessed 2-
Cristancho. In an article about the exhibition, Angola (2006) explains how she got involved in the exhibition project and her views on the names and images that it dealt with:

I began this journey in mid-2004, after Raúl Cristancho asked me why Afro-Colombian artists were not present in the artistic Colombian context. He proposed that we worked on the co-curatorship of Viaje sin mapa. I became interested in his proposition, being myself Afrodescendant and a teacher-artist at the School of Plastic Arts in the National University, because it articulated several questions: the reasons why these artists have not been made visible in the national artistic institution, and why there is such a small amount of research, statements and debates around representations of the Afro in Colombian art, and consequently the impossibility of naming relevant Afro-Colombian artists (para. 1) [...] Viaje sin mapa opens up the questions and initiates a debate about the invisibility of Afro representations in the field of art. It signals the existence of diverse repertoires of representation, of that which has been named and built historically as ‘Black’ and currently as ‘Afro’ in Colombia. Such representations, including the ones in this exhibition and other existing ones, must be made known and socialized, breaking with institutionalized stereotypes and costumbrismos; the field of artistic and visual practices is a favourable territory to open up the configuration of new representations that dynamise and activate processes and policies in the fields of social life and the institution of art (para. 8).

Liliana Angulo was one of those Afro-Colombian, Afro or Black artists that Angola talks about, but her work also reflects on what the categories ‘Black’ and ‘Afro’ imply. Angulo has said that her earlier photographs-sculptures relate to her ‘own image and [her] racial identity as a Black person born in Bogotá,’ as well as ‘stereotypes and representations of the Afro,’ and are the product of her investigations ‘about the word black and the identity associated to that word.’ In her early self-portraits, like those in the series ‘A Black is a Black’ [Un negro es un negro], she painted her skin with black colour and ‘deformed’ her face with different objects as an experiment that she likened to an act of affirmation of the idea of wanting to be ‘blackier’ [más negra, which can also be translated as ‘more like a Black person’].

Sept-2015). In the last pages of the leaflet designed for that exhibition, the credits section explains that it had as collaborators Peter Wade, Dolcey Romero, Orián Jiménez and Martha Luz Machado, so it is possible that Wade’s pre-guiiones were used for that exhibition. The Gold Museum was created in the beginning of the 20th century and focuses on indigenous people because they produced many golden artefacts, but it does not show that enslaved and free Black people also did.

Raúl Cristancho was also co-curator, with historian Adriana Maya, of the exhibition Mandinga Sea: Africa en Antioquia (2013) in the Antioquia Museum in Medellín.

Un negro es un negro (see * in screenshot below) in Angulo’s blog Negricolas: a neologism that plays with the word ‘negro’ (black) adding to it the suffix –cola, ‘that cultivates or grows’ or ‘that inhabits.’ It can thus be translated as inhabitant of black or Blackness, but also as black or Black inhabitant (in Spanish the word for ‘earthling’ and ‘terricolous’ is terrícola).
A later work, ‘Negra Menta,’ consists of photographs of a woman whose ‘natural’ skin colour we do not know posing disguised as cartoon character Negra Nieves. In this work, Angulo conflates a stereotypical name (the word ‘negramenta’) with a stereotypical image (a drawing of Negra Nieves), signalling both the textual and visual aspect of a racial stereotype.\(^{37}\)

Negramenta is a pejorative word used in Colombia to refer to black people in general. The name of the series "Negra Menta" (Black Mint) is a play on words to refer to the original term and also to the character of Negra Nieves (Snow Black), which is pun on ‘Blanca Nieves,’ the name in Spanish for the Grimm Brothers’ character, Snow White.\(^{38}\)


\(^{38}\) Original in English, quoted from http://4.bp.blogspot.com/_xqEfyh-9TEA/TAS_LBnjTlI/AAAAAAAAABs/1ogR3g0Klm8/s1600/Negramenta5.jpg, accessed 20-May-2014.)
Negra menta in *Negricolas* website.

"Negra Menta" (Detail)
Color Photography
Multiple Images (18) Eighteen photographs
15.7 x 19.7 inches each.
2003.

*Negramenta* is a pejorative word used in Colombia to refer to black people in general.
The name of the series "Negra Menta" (Black Menta) is a play on words to refer to the original term and also to the character of Negra Nieves (Snow Black).
Negra Nieves in Negricolas, where Angulo shows a sample of the cartoon ‘Negra Nieves’ that inspired Negra Menta. She references the cartoon’s author, but she also names the selection as hers.

From left to right, the cartoons read: ‘I want to earn a living by the sweat of your brow,’ ‘my ignorance is perfet! [sic]’ and ‘I’m in anthropological angst...’
In 2007 Angulo gave a public talk about her work. I have transcribed and translated a section where she spoke about Negra Nieves and Negra Menta:

When I was a kid, [Nieves] attracted me a lot because there was not much presence of Black people in the media... I wondered if the person who did it was Afro or not. Later on I found out she was not [...]

When Consuelo Lagos created her she was a maid [empleada doméstica] and Consuelo Lagos used her to talk about current issues, as she does today. [Nieves] was ignorant and clumsy but that made her see things that perhaps other people didn’t see. [Lagos] got sued because she represented Black people in that way, and so Nieves mutated to be a philosophy student at the university. Nieves changed completely from the 90s until now. I began to work with this character because I met this girl, who arrived at Bogotá from Tumaco [a port town on the Pacific coast with a high Afro population] to work as a babysitter and maid, who was about 15 years old at that time, and her name was Lorena. When she lived in Tumaco she lived there as a normal teenager, she is very pretty, and in Bogotá she’s in a house all the time, submitted to the imaginaries of domestic service in Bogotá, and very foreign to the city because there was no way for her to insert herself in many of the things that happen in the city [...] Her body is painted in black as an act of affirmation and as a way to look for the graphic qualities of the cartoon using colour photography (16:16 on).
Front cover of book *Afro-reparaciones* (Mosquera et al., 2007), with one of the pictures from Negra Menta, which conflates slavery, racism and a gender stereotype in one image
Afro-reparaciones

Mosquera’s insistence in the dedicated hall as an ‘act of reparation’ coincides with the ideas exposed in the book Afro-reparaciones: Memorias de la esclavitud y justicia reparativa para negros, afrocolombianos y raizales (Mosquera Rosero-Labbé and Barcelós, 2007). Like Viaje sin mapa and Negra Menta, this book tackled racism and racist stereotypes explicitly, and also posed the subject of reparations for the descendants of African enslaved people in Colombia. This book shows how the materials combined within it are different kinds of documents and these differences are ways for us to understand what it took for documents to be part of a ‘script’ at the NM. On the one hand it is a source of information and analysis about the idea of reparations to Afro-descendant people or Afro-reparations brought to the National Museum in 2006. On the other hand, it constitutes an attempt to combine images and text to present and discuss the issues included in the book. Furthermore, this is a record of the moment in which the Museum meetings began to take place. Lleras acknowledged that Mosquera had shared the contents of her book Afroreparaciones with the Museum meetings’ attendees before its publication (Lleras, 2008: 138).

In the final pages of the book contain a section dedicated to describing a list of GEA’s ‘Projection activities’ with projects that its members were involved in. Two of these ‘activities’ referred to the hall and to a temporary exhibition that were under discussion at the Museum:

Active participation in the commission created by the National Museum of Colombia and the Ministry of Culture to analyse the creation of a hall in the National Museum that makes visible [visibilice] both the African root and the historical, economic and cultural contribution of Blacks, Afro-Colombians and Raizals to the Colombian nation. [And] preparation of the temporary exhibition funerary rituals in four Black cultural areas of the country, which will open in the first semester of 2008. Maestro Jaime Arocha is responsible in the GEA for this commitment’ (Mosquera and Barcelós, 2007: 793-4).

At that moment, Mosquera was still part of the GEA, so it was presented as one of its products in the book’s final pages. According to this presentation, Friedemann’s ideas on ‘invisibility’ and ‘stereotypy,’ and on ‘traces of Africanness,’ along with the work of researchers Aquiles Escalante and Rogerio Velásquez, among others, as well as an attempt to position local approaches to anthropology and social work, constituted the background for the emergence of this group at the National University of Colombia in 1999. Jaime Arocha, then Associate Professor of the Anthropology Department; Claudia Mosquera, then Assistant Professor of the Social Work Department; and Edidson Moreno, then

---


40 The word used in the book, and that I have translated as funerary rituals, is funebria, a technical term used in archaeology to refer to funerary objects, and not rituals (http://forum.wordreference.com/threads/funebria.2202181/?hl=es, 26-05-2015), in apparent accordance with the focus on the recollection of objects in the meetings I will discuss below.
Associate Researcher of the Social Studies Centre, founded it within this Centre (ibid.: 789), and it soon was acknowledged officially as research group by Colciencias.\(^{41}\)

At that moment, Mosquera’s ideas on anti-racism and Afro-reparations were had joined the ethnographic and historical approach of *huellas de Africanía* and the Afro-Americanist focus led by Arocha. The GEA’s ‘academic interests’ were in ‘following Africanness in Colombia through inquiry into the notions of themselves that Afro-descendants invent on the basis of African memories,’ the ‘ethno-boom’ of Afro-Colombian intangible patrimony/heritage in relation to the dispossession of territories to which Afro-Colombian peoples have been subjected, and the burgeoning of cultural industries in Colombia. They also focused on the ‘social inequalities, racism and discrimination, and their relations with and impacts on the notions of race and Afro-Colombian identity,’ the development of ‘an Anti-racial and Anti-oppressive line of Social Work intervention’ and the understanding of ‘emergent identities’ of urban migrants from the Caribbean and Pacific regions’ Black departments using the tools of ‘Intercultural Social Work,’\(^{42}\) as well as the ‘intersection between the identity marks differentiated by gender, race and ethnic group [etnia], linked to the idea of human mobility and the concept of Africanness’ (ibid.). I will later refer to how these ‘academic interests’ changed in early 2008, after a conflict that caused Claudia Mosquera to create another research group, IDCARAN.\(^{43}\)

This book is also an example of what we can understand by ‘clusters,’ in this case of people, documents and events. It reveals a network of authors that would connect with Velorios later on, from academic and non-academic backgrounds (historians, anthropologists, journalists, sociologists, intellectual leaders of the Afro-Colombian social movement, statisticians and artists), who dealt with subjects (gold mining, education in different levels, Black organizations) and places with substantial Black, Raizal, Palenquero and Afro-Colombian populations (Palenques, Bojayá, Northern Cauca, San Andrés and Providencia). Some of the articles’ authors in this compilation were included in the list of people who would make a ‘critical visit’ to the National Museum’s exhibits later that year, and some of them would go on to write articles for Velorios’s catalogue.

The book, placed along with the exhibition and its catalogue, suggests a hierarchy of geography and knowledge between authors. One of them, Palenquero historian Luis Gerardo Martínez, would participate in the Museum meetings intermittently as a sabedor,\(^{44}\) as he was knowledgeable about funerary rituals in San Basilio de Palenque, his hometown, and his ‘voice’ was transcribed and included

---


\(^{42}\) I keep Mosquera’s stylistic choice of capitalizing non-proper nouns such as ‘Anti-racial’ and ‘Social Work,’ as I regard it as an intentional action to make text more powerful and performative.


\(^{44}\) The words *sabedor* (male) and *sabedora* (female) and its plural *sabedores/as*, which appear throughout the thesis, translate ‘knowers or people who know.’
along with those of some of the sabedores in the final pages of the exhibition’s catalogue. In contrast, three of the anthropologists involved in the exhibition, Jaime Arocha, Lina del Mar Moreno, and Alejandro Camargo, who like Mosquera were GEA members, wrote articles for this compilation and the exhibition’s catalogue.

In the credits and copyright page at the beginning of the book Afro-reparaciones ‘curatorship’ is acknowledged to the book’s designer and to sociologist Mosquera. But what was this form of curatorship? Was this an activity that one would expect to take place in museums or galleries, but not with books? As I will now show, there was not only text editing, but also very specific choices regarding the selection, composition and display of images in relation to text involved in this curatorship.

**Reparations against ‘neutral’ national memory**

The Afro-reparaciones compilation included Mosquera’s article ‘Reparations for Black, Afro-Colombian and Raizal people as rescued from the Transatlantic Slave Trade and exiled by the war in Colombia,’ where she elaborates a forceful argument about the need for the Colombian State to carry out reparations and affirmative actions with an ethnic-racial perspective, and explains what she means by ‘deep visibility’. The tone of her writing is provocative, denouncing and uncomfortable:

> In Colombia it is urgent to widen the ethnic-racial Black debates that denounce the hierarchical social construction of the Black race—a social fact that affects the living quality of the enslaved people’s descendants and of the geographic zones of Black majorities—, that oppose the folklorization, the patrimonialization for ethnic transnational tourism and the essentialization of Black culture—that exoticize all that is Black as if it did not need materiality to reproduce itself—, that revoke the silence (mudez) that the State has imposed over the Memories of Slavery and that write a new narrative about the contributions made since their arrival by the Black people, Afro-Colombians and Raizals to the construction of the nation, which would enter with dignity into the National Museum of Colombia, the Gold Museum, the Caro and Cuervo Institute and the official History manuals (Mosquera Rosero-Labbé, 2007b: 220).

Mosquera states that it was during the 2001 Durban Conference that the reparations subject was positioned.45 For her, Colombia, as one of the countries where members of the African Diaspora live in the present that is committed to complying with the Durban Conference declaration, has not carried out actions in order to fulfil this commitment. She locates herself as belonging to a group of ‘activist intellectuals who maintain that the descendants of enslaved Africans brought in the framework of the

---

45 In 2001, the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban (South Africa) declared that ‘slavery and the slave trade are a crime against humanity and should always have been so, especially the transatlantic slave trade and are among the major sources and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and that Africans and people of African descent, Asians and people of Asian descent and indigenous peoples were victims of these acts and continue to be victims of their consequences’ (United Nations, 2001: 6). This declaration also stated that the governments of countries involved in the trade should carry out actions to protect and compensate these present day victims. Colombia is one of these countries.
transatlantic slave trade to Nueva Granada are a subalternized group to which the current Colombian State must give reparations’ (ibid.: 231). 46

In Mosquera’s view, there are three reasons for this. First, although historic and present day racisms are not the same, they work in a similar way. The enslaved workforce provided colonial society with great economic benefits and slavery was key in the ‘social construction of the racial difference of the Black being, [and it is there] where we must look for the reasons for structural, social and quotidien racism and of all the associated discriminations’ (ibid: 234). Second, because like with people, Colombian geography was racialized creating frontier zones which:

[...] contain the resources that a part of the transnational capitalism needs, that is, the resources associated with biodiversity. In Colombia they are the poorest areas. To show the historic, social, cultural and political fact of an imagined geography would have the effect of denaturalizing the alarming state abandonment in which the Black departments live, which during the Colony, before the imposition of the myth of Andean nationality, constituted during the 19th century (Múnera 2005: 197), had enormous importance (Ibid: 236).

The third reason has to do with how the Colombian State has safeguarded what Mosquera refers to as a ‘neutral national memory,’ when this memory is in fact non-unique, plural, heterogeneous, contradictory and ‘diverse,’ and how the State remains silent about the role of slavery in its constitution and history:

The Colombian society, as a whole, must create more awareness about its slavery past and assume the damages that the continuum of this economic institution caused to enslaved people and keeps occasioning in the present to their descendants through racisms. The silence that has been maintained in the face of this economic institution shows several dimensions of the issue. The first one is that it is a historic fact from the past that causes annoyance because it is seen according to today’s ethical values. The second is the mistrust of the old slave-owning families, that do not want to be signalled as such today and that also pretend to hide that their fortunes today have their origins in that ignominious activity, although from the creation of the Republic, perhaps much before, they have remained in important power positions, as much in the State as in private economic activity, accumulating historic privileges, carefully looking after the neutral memory of the State and assuming the role of guardians of the socio-racial order inherited from the Colony. It is curious, but with the exception of only a few historians who are experts on the transatlantic slave trade and in its relations with the Vice-Royalty of Nueva Granada, with the institution of slavery and with a part of the economic elite, almost nobody in Colombia knows which families linked with the enslaving economy nor what role it played in it the Catholic church, especially the Jesuits [...], along with other economic agents from that time linked with the slaving trade (Ibid: 237).

46 The Viceroyalty of New Granada was the name of the territory of which part would be named in the 19th century as the Republic of Colombia.
In Mosquera’s text, words challenge the ‘neutral’ national memory by discussing the relationships between slavery, racism and discrimination towards Afro-Colombian people. In correspondence, in the book Afro-reparaciones images make those issues visible by showing the way those people and issues look. It includes images of small drawn reproductions of the slave ships ‘Aurora’, ‘Brookes’ and ‘Vigilante,’ inserted between each of the 31 articles. These include images reproduced from those taken by photographers, artists and anthropologists showing Afro-Colombian and Black people from all around the country.

In sum, the book shows and discusses two of the subjects that were forcefully pushed by Mosquera and Arocha in the initial Museum meetings: the transatlantic slave trade and the recent armed conflicts, and the consequences of both for Afro-Colombian people in the present.
Seven pictures were chosen to mark the book’s main sections and chapters, which belong to Liliana Angulo’s photographic work ‘Negra Menta.’ Below, ‘Chapter 3 Reparations from the Colombian internal armed conflict.’

Capítulo 3
Reparaciones desde el conflicto armado interno colombiano
Jesús Abad Colorado’s picture introduces the following chapter. Colorado is a photographer who has documented the war in Colombia for several years. The article, ‘Bojayá, between fear and media’, was written by two journalists and is about a massacre that took place in 2002 in Bojayá, a small town in Chocó, in the Pacific region, with a high Black/Afro-Colombian population. 119 civilians were killed. Although this was not directly a racism-related event, the abandonment of the State in which the town and the region remain is a historic consequence of slavery, and made this population more vulnerable to the violence produced by the armed conflict.

Bojayá: entre el miedo y los medios
Anna Carola Robledo Ruiz
Julien Andal-Ruiz Ocho

Resumen
Este artículo tiene la intención de mostrar la realidad vivida en Bojayá, Chocó (Colombia), que incluye tanto terror como abandono y violencia. The article introduces the following chapter. Colorado is a photographer who has documented the war in Colombia for several years. The article, ‘Bojayá, between fear and media’, was written by two journalists and is about a massacre that took place in 2002 in Bojayá, a small town in Chocó, in the Pacific region, with a high Black/Afro-Colombian population. 119 civilians were killed. Although this was not directly a racism-related event, the abandonment of the State in which the town and the region remain is a historic consequence of slavery, and made this population more vulnerable to the violence produced by the armed conflict.
Another picture, by Martha Posso Rosero, shows some children in front of a zotea, a platform used by women in the Pacific region to grow plants for cooking and medicine. This is one of the *huellas de africania* that Velorios attempted to portray as both very valuable and endangered. Valuable because in these *zoteas* part of the process called *ombligada* takes place, which according to the Afro-Americanist focus’ literature reminds customs from West and Central Africa and thus constitutes a ‘trace of Africanness’. Endangered because of the armed conflict that displaces and disperses people from this region.
The last page of the article is followed by one almost empty. At its bottom there is a small reproduction of a slave ship. These blank pages with slave ships reproductions appear throughout the book, following most of the articles.
There is no explanation as to what they are until the book’s final pages, as if replying to *Negra Menta*’s piece in the front cover: they are slave ships.
**Conceptual themes**

In this introductory chapter I have shown that for Mosquera, a key figure, a dedicated hall in the National Museum was a means for realising the ‘deep’ visibility that she and Arocha demanded from the Museum. As Mosquera’s publications show, she conceived of official institutions like the Museum as protagonists in keeping and disseminating a ‘neutral’ national memory. Additionally, the book Afro-reparaciones was a ‘curatorship’ precedent that organized visual material and texts in a book, presenting and challenging stereotyped images of Afro-Colombian people, and also a stereotyped figuration of their names, by including them as authors of photographs, texts, and of the book itself.

On the other hand, for Arocha, such a hall would work as a means to do research that counteracted stereotyping and the ‘invisibility of studies of the Black,’ in which the Museum was one of the institutions that, located at the top of the Andes, reproduced a dominant view of the Colombian nation that homogenized its cultural diversity. Instead of that hall, a temporary and a travelling exhibition were produced, portraying Afro-Colombian people and their culture as part of the diversity of the multicultural nation, not as authors or curators of their own representations.

The history of Velorios, in the different phases I describe and analyse in this thesis, shows how this exhibition was enmeshed in politics of visibility and invisibility, which I label here as (in)visibility. As I said, a hierarchy of knowledge, race and geography was enacted in the ways that people were acknowledged and acknowledged others, using names and images. Like the two texts with which I began the chapter, as well as *Afro-reparaciones*, *Negra Menta* and *Viaje sin mapa*, I approach Velorios as a set of documents that clustered and revealed a social life of those images and names, which I approach as ‘documents of documents’ (Biagioli, 2006) that are crucial to understand the kind of curatorship that this project conveyed—which I label here ‘participatory collaboration’ —and the ‘visibilities’ (Halpern, 2014) that accumulated at the Museum and then dispersed, but accumulated again in the local versions of the travelling exhibition, which I will call ‘the itinerante,’ as it was referred to at the Museum. In the following section will use Halpern’s (2014) use of the concept of visibility and Riles’s (2006) elaborations on the ethnographic value of documents, linking them to the theme of participatory collaboration in the authorship of Velorios, to indicate who was rendered responsible but also who was acknowledged for the work they did in the exhibition, and how this acknowledgement took place. I approach the temporary and travelling versions of the exhibition not just as means for but also as different kinds of visibilities within which the anthropologists’ vision, authorship, visual documents and names of authors changed along the way and played a crucial role.

---

47. *A*ny form of visibilization produces not only what is made visible, but necessarily implies a field of no-visibilities,’ states Restrepo (2013a: 158).
The politics of (in)visibility

The notions of ‘deep visibility,’ ‘stereotyped knowledge,’ ‘invisibility of the studies of the Black,’ and the ethnologists’ vision help me introduce the term (in)visibility, which was at issue for understanding the exhibition. Visibilities are not merely visual, states Orit Halpern in her book Beautiful Data (2014). They are ‘accumulations,’ ‘densities,’ ‘sites of production,’ ‘apparatuses’ and ‘spaces:

Visibilities are accumulations of a density of multiple strategies, discourses, and bodies in particular assemblages at specific moments ... [They] can be constituted through a range of tactics from the organization of space—both haptic and aural—to the use of statistics... [They are] sites of production constituting an assemblage of relationships, enunciations, epistemologies, and properties that render agents into objects of intervention for power. Visibilities are historically stipulated apparatuses for producing evidence about bodies, subjects, and now, perhaps, new modalities of population (p. 24).

[They are] spaces where representation, practice, technology accumulate (p. 37).

Nevertheless, visibility is visual, a correlate of the sense of vision, which ‘makes the organization of the senses critical to understanding the tactics of governance and power at any historical moment’ (p. 24). As Halpern explains, this means that vision needs to be understood not only in the isolated physiological sense. Vision is also an operation, a quality and a technical condition, which, in the case I consider, changed in relation to the places where visibilities accumulated at the Museum and then dispersed, and then accumulated again in local versions of the Itinerante. At the Museum, vision as operation was exerted by those who observed and collected (anthropologists), by those who exhibited (museum staff) and by those who visited the exhibition (the audience). As a quality, vision was expressed in the objects, texts and images that comprised the exhibition Velorios and that staged Black, Afro-Colombian, Palenquero and Raizal people as racialized, of particular geographic origins and furthermore as different, but also as similar and familiar to the visitors of Velorios and the National Museum. As a technical condition, vision was determined by access to recording and display equipment (cameras, sound recorders, TV screens, projectors, DVD players) and to spaces (the Museum’s building, its permanent exhibitions script, the objects in its collections and its administration model). Outside the Museum, these operations, qualities and technical conditions transformed, re-adapting to local structures of power over the control of space and other resources. This thesis offers an insight into the ways the senses were organized in visibility ‘tactics.’ I focus on how museum staff, scholars, activists and cultural entrepreneurs, but also different kinds of audiences, exerted and contested the tactics of power and governance in complex and contradictory ways.

As Halpern demonstrates in her book, visibilities are not univocal or simple either. In the Backstage and Frontstage chapters, I discuss how rendering people visible to power, to the state and to the general public was, for those involved in the process, a need and a strategic means for reparation through the transformation of negative stereotypes (as in making people visible in ‘the right way’ or ‘as they really are’). Being visible to power, in this case, implied a moral imperative and a political tool for claiming rights and tackling racial discrimination. But not all Black and Afro-Colombian people are
disenfranchised, and those who are require differentiated attention: they are disenfranchised in
different ways, so they need to be seen in different ways. As more people got involved it became
evident that visibility had multiple meanings, and that many people disagreed with the vision of
ethnographers, ethnologists and anthropologists that was central in Velorios. However, once the
Itinerante left the Museum, local organizers of new versions of the exhibition appropriated its
materials and used it to legitimize their own agendas—when they had the means to present and
circulate them.

As I have indicated above and will show in this thesis, pre-existing (in)visibilities were inserted into the
Velorios exhibition. One was constituted at the National Museum, an institution located in the centre
of the Andes mountains, at the top of a Colombian geography that is both racialized (Wade, 1993) and
Andean-centric (Arocha and Moreno, 2007), and where the ‘neutral’ national memory (Mosquera
Rosero-Labbé, 2007a) is displayed and maintained, and conditioned by the historically racialized access
to the means for the circulation of knowledge, images and representations. This (in)visibility also
assembled in the National Museum’s history, its administrative organization and the building where it
functions. Another (in)visibility condensed in ‘stereotypy,’ the historic accumulation of visual and
textual stereotypes which circulate in the media and in literature, that Friedemann (1984) linked to
with what she labelled the ‘invisibility of studies of el negro,’ and Arocha (1998) as the ‘political-
linguistic limbo,’ which are reflected in the ‘voids’ in the National Museum’s collections (Ministerio de
Cultura and Museo Nacional de Colombia, 2003). In the case I study, this ‘invisibility,’ ‘limbo’ and ‘voids’
also relate to the absence of open discussions about race and racialization and are interlinked with a
more recent (in)visibility of Afro-Colombians as part of the multicultural and pluriethnic—neutral—
nation within which they figure as a different, exotic ‘other,’ another way of understanding Cárdenas’s

The National Museum of Colombia can be understood as a ‘new museum’ if focusing on the role of the
public in the work it does, but also as an ‘indigenous museum’ (Geismar and Tilley, 2003), which
produced and circulated the exhibition Velorios and its different versions incorporating visual and
textual documentation, and participatory collaboration, as ‘generic museum technologies.’ In their
study of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and National Museum (VCC) in the South Pacific Ocean, these
authors propose that:

[the] use of generic museum technologies within ‘indigenous’ museums may be analyzed less as an
aesthetic model of spectatorship, or in exhibitionistic terms of ‘resonance’ and ‘wonder’ (Greenblatt
1991), and more in terms of social practice, of the incorporation of new technologies into pre-existent
structures of practice (Bourdieu 1977) and understandings of relations between persons and things (p.
171).

This exhibition was a form of visualization (Restrepo, 2013a) through the technology of digital
documentation. As I showed in the previous sequences of images, and in those I will use in the
following chapters, documentation, digitalization and visualization combined as bureaucratic practices
to help spread and accelerate circulation, creating ‘clusters’ around the exhibition. I show how bureaucratic procedures like meeting, writing minutes (Backstage chapter) or the circulation of letters, contracts and reports (Travelling chapter), co-opt at the same time that they redistribute and flatten hierarchies of geography and race. I consider the conditions that shape the networks of the circulation of knowledge that are permitted by and reinforce, but also have the potential to transform, social structures in Colombia. By travelling, the exhibition was reincorporated into local structures and hierarchies between older and younger generations, and urban and rural backgrounds, which organized a form of control over the spaces of its presentation.

Therefore, although I make reference to issues of representation, I am less interested in the effectiveness of this exhibition in ‘representing’ Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal or Palenquero people in the National Museum of Colombia than in the use of documents as a museum technology and clustering mechanism. Two reasons justify this. Another PhD thesis was already dedicated to reflecting critically on the limits that such an attempt at representation implied (Lleras, 2011). It acknowledged that the exhibition portrayed Afro-Colombian people as an exotic ‘other’ and part of the ‘pluriethnic’ and ‘multicultural’ Colombian nation, and that these were notions that some Afro-Colombians identified with and others did not. However, the exhibition was in fact effective in the sense that it still survives after several years, in the documentary forms of a set of banners, a digital archive and several publications and webpages, which have also become ‘new’ museum objects. How did this project manage to achieve this in spite of several, strong criticisms? What does this say about the kind of museum that the National Museum of Colombia is, especially in relation to the Constitution, the Strategic Plan and 48-91 I introduced above?

Ethnography, documents and the museum effect

In the book Documents, Riles (2006) thinks of documents as ethnographic artifacts (p. 1) in an attempt to respond ‘to the challenges of doing ethnography in conditions in which the distance between anthropologist and informant, theory and data are no longer self-evident or even ethically defensible’ (p. 5). She explains that to study documents is ‘by definition also to study how ethnographers themselves know, [and so the document] becomes at once an ethnographic object, an analytical category, and a methodological orientation’ (p. 7). As I have shown, the documents in this thesis are of different kinds. There are textual documents, such as the minutes taken during meetings that I analyse in the Backstage chapter, and the letters and reports I use in the Travelling chapter. There are visual documents like the pictures and screenshots I use throughout the thesis. There are also combinations of textual and visual documents like the catalogue and the banners of the Itinerante, or like the websites I mention in the Frontstage and Travelling chapters.

Riles also explains that the different authors in her compilation ‘are interested in how diverse types of agency are produced, stretched, or abbreviated through the medium of the document; in short, in the responses, human and nonhuman, that documents demand or offer up’ (p. 21). The ethnography of
documents ‘concerns the capacity of documents to place their own agency in abeyance, such that what is made visible in the document, rather, is the creativity of another agent,’ in sum, ‘bureaucratic processes compel others’ creativity in the first place’ (p. 21). This *creativity* means that ‘completion is effectuated only through and because of both sides’ shared appreciation or “empathy” for the aesthetics of completion’ (p. 23). This leads to an understanding of ethnography as a modality of ‘response,’ that is not a passive one but of collaboration: ‘the document is just a means; it points to an end beyond itself—even as what captivates participants is the means of document production’ (p. 27).

In the *Travelling* and *Tour-guiding* chapters, I show how the catalogue, a DVD with guided-tours and the banners of the Itinerante were three-dimensional visual and textual documents of the temporary exhibition produced to ‘respond’ to demands from Afro-Colombian representatives, but also to be appropriated by local organizations.

Riles and the other authors in her compilation write about written and bi-dimensional documents, like the minutes that the *Backstage* chapter deals with in detail. But what about *visual* documents such as those I showed in the screenshots above? The first three pictures of the sequence above were taken by anthropologists doing fieldwork. As such, they can be understood as the ‘ethnographical documents’ that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998) talks about, such as field notes, recordings, photographs, films or drawings, which are *inscriptions* of what we cannot carry away: the intangible, ephemeral, immovable, and animate. She explains that the artifacts and performances that have historically interested ethnographers are *contingent*, ‘embedded in the flow of life […], not generally made to stand alone set off for exclusively aesthetic attention’ (p. 64). In this case, funerary rituals and the altars that are built to guide and say farewell to deceased relatives. But also *simulations* of these altars made specifically for the attention of the photographers-anthropologists. In photographs, these altars were detached from their context. They became what Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls ethnographical objects, which are *artifacts of ethnography,* ‘simultaneously found and made’ objects/fragments by the ethnographical gaze (p. 55). Both kinds of altars, ‘real’ (like the one made for the wake of Mrs. Genara Bonilla on p. 56 above) and ‘simulated’ (like Moraima Simarra’s, made as a demonstration), were included in Velorios. Once in the Museum, we recontextualized these altars as ‘new museum objects’ in the project’s archive, in the temporary exhibition and in the travelling exhibition. This recontextualization was like the ‘museum effect’ that renders the quotidien spectacular, explains Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (p. 54). The intertwining of collected objects and exhibitionary practices produce new meanings, and that is the ‘liberatory potential’ but also the ‘despicable power’ of the museum and its museum objects, as they can produce an ‘unpredictable or uncontrollable opening up of alternative reading and interpretations’ (Preziosi, 2006: 52).

**Exhibitions as documents**

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett states that exhibitions are ‘powerful engines of meaning’ (1998: 157), ‘agents’ that—with greater or lesser success—*constitute* what they exhibit as art, heritage or culture; they
create the art and/or ethnographical object, and also constitute subjects (ibid.: 80). But I am less interested in this way of approaching museum exhibitions than I am in seeing them as documents. In following Riles’s notion of documents above, this and other authors state that exhibitions also ‘speak’ about the agendas of the people involved in their creation and production (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 78; Bal, 2006: 529). As with Riles’s collaborative documents, Griffiths (2008) sees exhibitions as ‘technologies that mediate’ (p. 161) and interfere, serving as stages for those who decide what is exhibited (the expository agents, the writers and the directors of the play), the materials exhibited and those who see the exhibitions. Bal (2007) states that visitors and exhibited objects are co-narrators that create the exhibition through their interactions (p. 73-4), and Kratz understands exhibitions as cultural and communicational forms that shape and are shaped by the politics of representation that work through the uneven interactions between the means for exhibitionary communication (culturally conventional contents and forms) and ‘the various processes and people involved—with diverse expectations and backgrounds—in producing, presenting, and visiting exhibitions’ (Kratz, 2002: 95). In accordance with what González, Di Liscia and Bohoslavsky (2011) propose, I historicize the contents of Velorios exhibition ‘to place it in the realm of interpretation and biased knowledge’ and I approach it as ‘an imprint, the document of an era’ (p. 21), when a clustered name was in circulation that it helped to legitimize: Black, Afro-Colombian, Palenquero and Raizal communities.

Documents as ‘new’ museum objects

In 2009, Geismar published another article analysing a process of ‘return’ and ‘reactivation’ of an archive of photographs taken in the early 20th century in Vanuatu by British anthropologist John Layard at the VCC, which in some ways shares the phases of Velorios and of the Itinerante, and which is useful in understanding how the fieldtrips made in 2007-8, thought of initially as a form of ‘rescue,’ became a form of ‘return’ and ‘appropriation.’ She reflects on how in Vanuatu, audiovisual materials and other documents become ‘new kinds of museum objects,’ like Velorios’s digital archive, stored in the Museum’s Documentation Centre, and the Itinerante’s banners, which are kept in the Museum’s storage rooms between setups. These objects, like Velorios’s different versions, are in this ‘indigenous museum’ not just to be stored and eventually exhibited, but as a means for something else, to ‘do’ things with them. In the thesis I show how ‘participatory collaboration’ meant that the practices of altar-making, tour-guiding, exhibiting and ‘monitoring’ involved in its different versions were forms of ‘activation’ like the ones Geismar (2009) describes:

…the VCC thus uses museum technologies of audio-visual recording (photography and video) to make new kinds of ‘museum objects’ out of the documentation of personal testimonies, stories, myths, music, ceremonies, ritual practices, and national political and cultural events (Geismar and Tilley 2003). These new museum ‘objects’, primarily in the form of photographs, videos, film, and sound recordings, open new avenues for participation in social life. The return of images such as those by Layard to Vanuatu has always been associated with the idea of ‘doing’ something, both inside and outside the museum. Local villagers who collaborate with foreign researchers expect not only that researchers will return copies of
notes, photographs and publications to the community but also that the direction of research itself should benefit community interests and agendas. Documentation is not there just to be collected and exhibited in a museum gallery or stored within the archive; it is there to be activated within communities. There is an understanding that historical photographs are vital tools in a process that, following Huffman, is often described explicitly as ‘cultural reawakening or revival’ (Huffman 1997: 2). Local people are encouraged to use images to remind themselves of past practices, with the hope that they will start to do them again. Thinking with images is thus an important way of making things happen (p. 56).

This sense of participatory collaboration as a form of ‘curatorship’ also appears in the meetings that I describe in detail in the Backstage and Frontstage chapters. Then, participatory collaboration took off in the appropriations that the organizers of the different versions of the travelling exhibition produced. Finally, in tour-guiding, or ‘monitoring,’ and in the oral presentations that the members of an Afro-Colombian organization did with the Itinerante in schools in Barranquilla, near the Colombian Caribbean coast, an area located at the bottom of the racialized geography.

Geismar ‘thinks with images’ to explain how photographs may be understood as ‘visual histories.’ In a similar fashion, I use visual and other documents that have clustered into ‘new’ museum objects, and as much as I ‘think with images,’ I think with documents that embody the history of anthropology and museums in Colombia:

Rather than being mere representations of history ‘made’ elsewhere, Layard’s photographs present not only a history of anthropology and photography in Vanuatu, but also contain a history of ideas that have, in turn, been partially made by photographs. Complex social and political relationships between visitors and Small Islanders, and between generations of anthropologists, have been embodied within Layard’s photographs from the outset. These relationships continue to be replicated and reflected upon with the reproduction of each image—as they are printed, photocopied, digitised, and finally, now published (ibid.: 19).

This thesis is also a visual and textual ‘document’ and a ‘visibility’ that articulates the (in)visibility constituted by Velorios y santos vivos: Comunidades negras, afrocolombianos, raizales y palenqueras. I borrow Halpern’s words (2014: 24) to show that this thesis works like Foucault’s ‘careful descriptions’ and ‘close detailings,’ which offer ‘pictures not simply of what things looked like, but how things were given to be seen, how things were ‘shown’ to knowledge or to power—two ways [description and detailing] in which things became seeable’ (ibid., my emphasis).

**Participatory collaboration as curatorship**

In the historical section of this chapter I introduced a definition of ‘curatorial scripts:’ narratives that guide a specific distribution of objects in space. ‘To curate an exhibition,’ one of the members of the A&H Curatorship explained to me once, ‘is to tell stories with objects.’ The work of curators like Beatriz González or Cristina Lleras with respect to the exhibitions curated at the National Museum could thus
be understood as equivalent to the relationship between authors and books, or film directors and films. But Velorios and the Itinerante, as I will show, employed a form of curatorship that I label participatory collaboration, and were in fact presented as participatory endeavours. But how was this participation acknowledged? As the screenshots above show, there was authorial acknowledgement granted to writers and photographers (most of them anthropologists). However other kinds of roles, despite being key in the process of curatorship, were acknowledged as sabedores or architects. In this thesis I use these different kinds of documents as sources to show that once this ‘participatory collaboration’ as curatorship was acknowledged, the hierarchical structures it counteracted were re-established, as is evident in the screenshot of the exhibition’s catalogue.

This is resonant with artistic practices that since the 1960s have had the intention to collapse the distinction between ‘performer and audience, professional and amateur, production and reception’ (Bishop, 2006: 10), and for which ‘Nicolas Bourriaud’s ‘Relational Aesthetics’ (published the year after Clifford published his Museums as contact zones) has come to be seen as a defining text (Bourriaud, 2006: 160). In Bourriaud’s manifesto he was also referring to the ‘liberatory potential’ I mentioned above, which ‘exhibitions of contemporary art’ offer as alternatives to everyday life:

[It is important to take a new look at where artworks are situated within the overall system of the economy –symbolic or material – that governs contemporary society: quite apart from its commodified nature or semantic value, the artwork represents, in my view, a social interstice. [...] An interstice is a space in social relations which, although it fits more or less harmoniously and openly into the overall system, suggests possibilities for exchanges other than those that prevail within the system. Exhibitions of contemporary art occupy precisely the same position within the field of the trade in representations. They create free spaces and periods of time whose rhythms are not the same as those that organize everyday life, and they encourage an inter-human intercourse which is different to the ‘zones of communication’ that are forced upon us (ibid.: 161).]

Similarly to Boast’s criticisms of the trope of participation in museums, Foster (2006: 195) warns that any form of participation includes contradiction, conflict and ambivalence: ‘For the most part these artists and curators see discursivity and sociability in rosy terms. As the critic Claire Bishop suggests, this tends to drop contradiction out of dialogue, and conflict out of democracy; it is also to advance a version of the subject free of the unconscious (even the gift is charged with ambivalence, according to Mauss).’ This corresponds to the labelling of the invitation of sabedores and ‘architects’ to collaborate in the exhibition process as forms of ‘participation’ and ‘self-representation,’ but not as forms of curatorship or authorship.

Thus central to the historicization of Velorios as a document is the revealing of how participants and collaborators got to participate in the first place, and then how they were acknowledged. The ‘problem’ with collaboration is that it implies working within preexisting conditions, practices and hierarchies, that is, the different forms of (in)visibility I referred to above. The ‘potential liberation’ and ‘despicable power’ lie in how the materiality of the exhibition (now dispersed, distributed and available online for
free) embodies the movement from an individually authored idea to a collective script to an authorless set of digital and non-digital objects, in who and what was granted authorship, in the way that Afro-Colombian people were invited and acknowledged in the process.
Chapter 2: Backstage

Comunidades negras, afrocolombianas, indígenas y palenqueros

Intensificando el viaje a Colombia, parecía que el viaje no había terminado para que un registro patrimonial saliera por televisión, pero si para que fuera objeto de transporte físico.

Nos explicaron en Bucaramanga, una salvadora de las ceremonias para muerenes y santos se adelantaba a responder a nuestras preguntas, cuando uno de los adultos nos propuso de que por ningún motivo la organización que él representaba tolerara que la información que recogíamos saliera de los límites de ese departamento. Reaccionamos diciéndonos que ya le habíamos explicado que la exposición sería en el Museo Nacional, en Bogotá, y que luego vendría una visita itinerante duran otras 2009.

Aunque rechazó y explicó que lo que había que decir era que las representaciones que formamos se quedaban en Colombia, la señora se rió a la altura.

Pese a estos inconvenientes, que fueron superados adecuadamente, como resultado de estas exploraciones quedan en la Universidad Nacional y en el Museo Nacional archivos con las entrevistas realizadas y temáticas grabadas, transferidos a formato digital. La misma se hizo con fotografías y videos. La antropóloga Juliana Betancur Vélez se responsabilizó de clasificar todos los materiales de audio y la antropóloga Sofía González Ayala de videos, nombres, analogías, reconocimiento y editar las fotografías y los vídeos grabados en terreno. Hemos hecho cuentas de todo ello y hemos enviado a las comunidades que visitamos, con el fin de que las organizaciones y los grupos comunitarios dispusieran de una valiosa memoria frente al cambio.

El análisis comparativo de los registros que aceptamos deberá hacerse en los próximos años.

Hasta ahora nuestra guía en buena parte ha consistido en los criterios museográficos que priorizan el objeto, su historia, características y funciones, a partir de matrices estandarizadas que el Museo Nacional dirige y perficia en función de sus colecciones.

En este caso, la innovación ha consistido en los detalles evolutivos y etnográficos que aparecen en el pulso, herramienta utilizada para realizar la carátulas. Esta información la hemos utilizado para el montaje de los programas que formamos en el museo permanente y entre los niños de las organizaciones de la base. En dinámicas, en la Universidad Nacional hemos ofrecido dos talleres basados en el proyecto uno, durante el segundo semestre de 2009, referente a métodos y técnicas de investigación etnográfica para estudiantes de la maestría de lingüística y otro, en el primer semestre de 2010, en el contexto de los cursos clasificados como antropología social para estudiantes iniciales de esa carrera, algunos de cuyos trabajos finales nutren este catálogo.

También se incorporan a este recorrido los materiales reunidos por un grupo de estudiantes que a finales del segundo semestre de 2007 hicieron una salida de terreno que incluyó a Leticia y Cundinamarca. El grupo entró en contacto con la profesora María Leticia Mosquera quien había apoyado el trabajo que doña Leticia Mosquera, Lina del Mar Moreno y Jaime Arrieta efectuaron en julio de 2007.
The previous screenshot appears on page 29 of Velorios’s exhibition catalogue. I use this document to introduce some of the ways in which the audience were allowed into the National Museum’s backstage. I also want to detail some of the features that characterized the particular form of curatorship that I am calling ‘participatory collaboration’ and which characterised the exhibition Velorios: meetings and fieldtrips and participation. At the bottom of the screenshot appears a picture of one such meeting. The caption reads:

Encounter of the permanent seminar in the National Museum’s curatorship offices. In the picture, Carmen Paz (teacher from Northern Cauca), Luis Gerardo Martínez (Palenquero historian), Leocadia Mosquera (Chocoana teacher) and Cristina Lleras (National Museum Curator of Art and History), 19th of June 2008.

This picture of the ‘permanent seminar’ along with another one with ‘community representatives’ (Arocha, 2008: 21) were the only two that showed ‘encounters’ or meetings that preceded the exhibition opening at the Museum in the catalogue. They reveal another set of (in)visibilities. Both were with Afro-Colombian people, although, as I will show, not all of these meetings involved their presence and there were pictures of the meetings where only non-Afro-Colombian people attended. Making visible Afro-Colombians’ ‘participation’ it made invisible the fact that other meetings, which were also documented with pictures and minutes, were only attended by non-Afro-Colombian museum staff and anthropologists. In the text above the picture, anthropologist Arocha refers not to this image, but to other images produced during the fieldtrips that the research for the exhibition involved. He explains that some of the people interviewed, photographed and recorded, enquired about where the images that the research team was collecting would go. He describes how in one case, a local leader stated that he would not allow the team to take away the information that they were collecting. The team’s response was that an exhibition would be made in the National Museum and in the following year a travelling exhibition would be produced. Then Arocha explains that an archive was constituted that collected information (videos, sound recordings and pictures), which remains at the National Museum and that copies of these materials had been sent to the communities visited ‘as a valuable memory in the face of change.’ The catalogue was like the text in emphasising throughout the participatory and consultative character of the research. Finally with the screenshot I also introduce some of the uses that fieldwork and audiovisual material had at that stage. First they were a means to rescue endangered practices, and then they were used to engage in an exchange between the National Museum and Afro-Colombian communities. Images were used as proof, but also as a means for participation. In this text, Arocha also stressed how documentation would be (in)visible, not exhibited but stored in an archive at the National Museum in Bogotá. This screenshot also shows the limits to the ‘participatory collaboration’ that this exhibition employed. First, all the people in the picture are

---

1 *Chocoana* or *Chocoana* are the words used to refer to inhabitants of Chocó Department. According to the 2005 census, in Chocó there are about 300,000 Afro-descendant people, making it one of the areas with the highest relative number of Afro-descendant population in Colombia. This is also one of the areas that has been strongly affected by displacement produced by the armed conflict.
labelled as 'members of the permanent seminar,' but while Afro-Colombians are presented as 'teachers,' 'historian,' and with their regional provenience, the museum curator is presented with her job title at the National Museum. In this way, 'race' (as ethnicity) underlies the reference and lack of reference to geographic origin. The screenshot documents the visibilities and invisibilities that the pictures, texts and catalogue accumulated and circulated vis-a-vis the documentary archive and websites constituted by the project. As a digital file it is easier to make it available for free online. This availability—here a synonym of visibility—of the project's documentation is conditional on having a computer with an internet connection.

The exhibition's catalogue was launched on the same day that the exhibition opened to the public, and contrary to what usually happens with museum exhibition catalogues, it does not show the final appearance of the exhibition or its highlights, the funerary and patron saint altars, because they were built after it was printed. In that sense, it is a document of the back-stage process of Velorios, characterized by meetings at the museum, fieldtrips and the official management of disagreements. But besides being a record it is a document in another way, acting instrumentally as a museum technology. By intentionally documenting the behind-the-scenes of the exhibition it reveals and enacts endeavours that legitimized the exhibition because Lleras insisted during meetings—and later in the catalogue—that museum studies literature reflects and criticizes the fact that traditionally museums have not accounted for making-of processes (Lleras, 2008: 137). In the next chapter I will show how this effort was not reflected effectively in the physicality of the temporary exhibition. However, in the catalogue four short articles discussed processes behind the scenes, including the one by Lleras.

One part of the 'participatory collaboration' were the meetings that were a regular practice at the Museum. They adapted to this project by involving some members of the audience in its back-stage. While this implied that many decisions were discussed collectively, as a collaboration, hierarchies and protocols were followed: Sabedores were invited only after it had been decided that an exhibition about funerary rituals would be made; they did not participate in fieldwork data systematization, and did not have much influence regarding organization, selection or the exhibition's museography. The people involved in the process I describe here followed—or not—protocols or 'rules of the game' (Bailey, 1980) while negotiating how to, and who would, represent Afro-Colombians in the Museum of the Colombian nation. As elsewhere, the involvement of non-museum scholars and of sabedores shaped the project in ways that revealed that the role of the public in the production of exhibitions was no longer the exclusive domain of museum staff.

To understand this process, I use Sharon Macdonald’s ethnography of the Science Museum in London (2002). In the late 1980s, she entered, as ethnographer and member of the public, the Science Museum ‘behind the scenes’ (ibid.). She used Goffman’s dramaturgical model of ‘impression management’ in face-to-face interaction (1978), and his distinction between frontstage and backstage, to explain the managerial restructuring that was taking place at that institution. The ‘main organising principle’ of collections-based departments had been replaced by ‘divisions’ that transformed the role
of and views about ‘the public’ (p. 43). The newly created division of Collections Management focused on objects, ‘work which for the public was mostly “back-stage”: the acquisition, conservation, restoration, storage, researching and cataloguing of artefacts’ (p. 4). By contrast, the division of Public Services focused on visitors, on managing and maintaining the museum’s ‘front stage’ or ‘front of house’ matters, which ranged from ‘educational services and mounting exhibitions to managing the restaurants and toilets’ (ibid.), including ‘the external appearance of the Museum, its promotion, its exhibitions and especially the entrance areas, its “customer relations,” and its “customer services”’ (p. 45). Exhibitions, which used to be organized within the collections departments and were generally devised by the curator of a particular collection, were now to be oriented (like in other neighbouring national museums) to ‘the public,’ or to the ‘consumers’ or ‘customers’ as they were increasingly being called (p. 43-4). As Macdonald’s work demonstrates, this new emphasis conceived ‘the public’ as ‘consumer-citizens’ – ‘choosing selves’—for whom the museum would ‘provide not just what they “ought to have” but what they might “want”’ (p. 44-5), an innovation that would prove to be highly problematic when considering the interpretations that those visitors made of new exhibitions regarding, among other aspects, their engagement with their appearance and ‘physicality.’

In the National Museum of Colombia, something similar seemed to have been taking place since the reforms introduced by the 1991 Constitution. This document, among many other things recognized the ‘diversity’ of the Colombian nation and triggered a series of institutional re-structurations at national, regional and local levels. ‘Citizens’ had a new participatory role in institutions such as the National Museum through, say, the 1,815 surveys made between 1999 and 2003 ‘with the objective of asking Colombians what pieces they considered must be part of the museum’s collections.’ As I described in the introduction, in contrast with the case Macdonald describes, the case in Colombia is that almost two decades after reforms took place, the National Museum’s collections, administration model and building still reflected disciplinary distinctions that structured its operations similarly to that of the pre-1991 National Museum (and to the ‘old’ Science Museum) led by in-house curators and their corresponding collections. While the role of and views about the ‘public’ (of the ‘diverse’ ‘citizens’ and ‘communities’) were also being negotiated, the collections-based structure, the chronological script and the use of the Museum’s building were not. The demand for a hall dedicated to Afro-Colombians as a form of reparation would have required structural changes in those aspects too. Therefore the participatory collaboration in these negotiations of the P&E curatorship meant that in fact they were never involved.

**Backstage - Frontstage**

In Goffman’s model, the ‘front’ and ‘back’ stage relates to a distinction between performance and audience. He defines performance as:

---

2 From 49-91, see the introduction chapter.
all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers (1978: 32).

Correspondingly, the front is the label he uses to refer to:

that part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance (ibid.).

In relation to this front there is a back stage or ‘back region,’ where the ‘facts’ suppressed in the front make an appearance (p. 114). In Goffman’s model, either the backstage as a whole or its access is kept hidden from the audience, as ‘the vital secrets of a show are visible backstage’ (p. 116):

a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course […] It is here that the capacity of a performance to express something beyond itself may be painstakingly fabricated; it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed (p. 114).

In Macdonald’s *Behind the scenes* (2002) she uses the frontstage notion to focus on the ‘subtle’ but ‘not less significant or controversial’ shift in the greater priority given to ‘the public’ in the Science Museum’s activities (p. 44). I am inspired by Macdonald’s use of Goffman’s model, but in this case, the ‘back’ and ‘front’ distinction has to do with protocols in relation to what is made available—and in what ways—to the audience. Before they began to meet with museum staff, first the scholars, then the community representatives were part of ‘the audience,’ that is, they had no previous access to ‘vital secrets of the show’ and all the ‘dirty work’ and conflicts that making an exhibition at the National Museum entails. During the ‘Museum meetings,’ they engaged in a process of negotiation in which some of these ‘vital secrets’ were shared and contested, reinforcing, but also questioning, the authority that the museum staff and scholars had face-to-face with the people that would be represented in the Museum. Some members of the audience had access to the Museum’s back stage.

In this chapter I discuss the limits to this access.

In the discussion, I describe and analyse some of the written and audio-visual archive material stored in a folder with DVDs chronologically organized, labelled and available—albeit not to be taken away—at the Museum’s documentation centre. In this chapter I refer mostly to minutes kept during formal meetings that took place from mid-2006, mainly at the National Museum. Although they are public documents, their access is restricted to those with the time and patience to find, read and watch them, but they are also technologically enhanced as they exist in the form of digital files, easy to copy and circulate. In this archive there are traces of activities that characterized the negotiations prior to the opening of Velorios: at the Museum, meetings were documented by taking minutes and, as the exhibition’s opening approached, also by recording sound and taking pictures, particularly when ‘sabedores’ attended what was labelled a permanent seminar; outside the Museum, fieldtrips were documented through written fieldnotes, pictures, video and recorded sound.
I also signal the different roles played by those materials. By placing them in conversation with other events and documents produced outside of the Museum (a book, other meetings, an artistic intervention and a published article) and then with the exhibition's materiality and further outcomes (travelling display, catalogue, webpages, PhD theses, other published articles), it is possible to assess the limits to audience participation in the National Museum’s backstage.

**Museum meetings and minutes**

The curatorship of Velorfios’s temporary and travelling versions was characterized by small groups of people meeting repeatedly, mainly at the National Museum, to demand, express, negotiate, contest, convince and persuade. These were similar to other meetings museum staff attended, a common practice at the Museum and other institutions. When I worked there, I remember many times people seemed to dislike or even hate them, referring to them as a useless waste of time, but everybody went. Everybody had to go. Yet many times I found the meetings at the Museum interesting and even pleasant, and perceived that, although repetitive and sometimes boring, a lot happened in the time and space they framed. Usually coffee or tea would be distributed among attendees—sometimes with biscuits. If the Museum Director was present, the meeting would take place in the ‘sala de juntas’ [hall of meetings or committees], next to her office, at the bottom of the first floor in the southern wing of the Museum. Every month, that same place would be used to celebrate that month’s birthdays, with cake, sodas and small presents, and always with a sense of obligation that only daring or ‘busy’ people would challenge—or subvert. During the meetings, usually a protocol would be followed using a meeting schedule [orden del día], and I learnt that it was possible to listen to others and show respect while at the same time chatting, gossiping and expressing one’s thoughts. People would sit around a table, face to face, perhaps with the exception of a person taking minutes who faced a computer screen. Authority and hierarchies, as well as collusion and transgression were displayed in who spoke first, who kept quiet and who attended or refused to do so, and also in who led the meetings or who took minutes.

Yet the meetings that preceded Velorfios’s opening were different. The demand that Mosquera and Arocha made for a hall dedicated to Afro-Colombians would imply, as further discussions and developments showed, transformations not only to the Museum’s exhibitions but also to the way it worked as an institution, disputing its autonomy in relation to the Ministry of Culture as well as the traditional roles played by in-house or specially hired curators and, more generally, by members of the public. Arocha and Mosquera were members of ‘the audience’ who worked for another public and centralized institution, the National University. Contrary to what would usually happen with other exhibitions, where in the first—official—instance a written project would be discussed in a Management Committee meeting and unofficially in informal gatherings, during these meetings transgressions to the order of places and of people in the Museum were taking place, which reflected an order of places and people in the Colombian racialized geography: a demand to modify its
exhibitions came from an institution that was not above it in the hierarchy, and an anthropologist was to engage in a project with the A&H curatorship. Furthermore, an Afro-Colombian was involved in the curatorship.

Taking minutes

The minutes in the forty Word documents that I refer to in this chapter were taken between May 2006 and August 2008, before the opening of the temporary exhibition. Considered chronologically they reveal patterns and transformations. Placed in relation to other documents and events, they reveal the agendas pushed by those involved as well as how they were contested. The descriptions they contain, although concise, allow me to show how negotiations developed in each meeting and throughout the months, as well as how the agendas of the different people involved marked and shaped the project, revealing their positions in a very complex network that connected institutions, individuals, subjects and places. These documents reflect what it took for concepts and ideas to later materialize in the physical content of the exhibition. They show more or less explicitly who said what, who led discussions and who pushed what agendas. Who met, how often, where and for how long shaped the materiality and appearance, as well as the scope and consequences of this endeavour. Hierarchy, authority and “audibility” (who gets heard) were recorded in the careful protocols followed for how people named each other and in who, later on, was acknowledged for their work and how. Meetings were always recorded with a date, place, and time, following a format that would facilitate filing in an archive later on, a common practice at the Museum that was adapted to the protocols this specific project demanded.

During the Museum meetings different activities took place. People proposed and defended their ideas, and they shared what they or other people said or did outside of meetings. Subjects of discussion and further actions were defined and research methodologies were designed. The people in charge of taking minutes for the Velorios project were Carolina Vanegas, one of the researchers at the A&H Curatorship, and later on anthropologists Lina del Mar Moreno and Juliana Botero, all of whom also engaged in the discussions they were documenting. Moreno and Botero, who also took part in fieldtrips, were hired for the project as ‘technical secretaries.’ The minutes also recorded how hierarchies between the participants changed over time. The minutes always included a list of attendees and references to what they represented or the work they were doing: institutions (‘National University’, ‘Ministry of Culture’), geographic or ethnic origin (‘Chocoana’, ‘Palenquero’, ‘Raizal’), occupation (‘editor’) or combinations (‘Chocoano priest’, ‘Anthropologist GEA-CES’). Many

---

3 Some of the people involved in the process mentioned previous meetings with the Museum Director, but if minutes were taken, they were not included in the archive produced for the project.

4 ‘GEA-CES’ is the full acronym for Grupo de Estudios Afrocoblanos – Centro de Estudios Sociales.
times the person who took minutes quoted the person who spoke but other times they preferred the impersonal or summarizing ‘it was discussed’.

In the early minutes, hierarchies of knowledge appear in the roles that people played, the tasks they carried out and the ways they were addressed. When curatorship assistant Vanegas and later anthropologist Moreno took minutes, Jaime Arocha was referred to as ‘profesor’ while Claudia Mosquera (also a scholar) and Cristina Lleras (the Curator of Arts and History) were referred to by their names. The invited people ‘related with funereal rituals,’ would be referred to in minutes as sabedores, or as ‘community representatives.’ If they were mature women, ‘doña’ or ‘señora’ [Mrs.] preceded their name, and as time passed, Leocadia Mosquera, Carmen Paz and Dilia Robinson would be labelled as las señoras—the ladies, and as ‘doña Leocadia’, ‘doña Carmen’ and ‘Miss Dilia.’ The minutes were longer and more detailed when the two young anthropologists kept them. Anthropologist Botero, perhaps unintentionally, set a mark of authorship in the minutes she took, as only she referred to people using full names (‘Jaime Arocha’ ‘Cristina Lleras’ and not ‘profesor’ or ‘doña’), and only later on she would add the customary ‘Miss’ to refer to Dilia Robinson, from the region where she had done fieldwork for her undergraduate dissertation (the San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina Islands).

The minutes all include a list of attendees and the place of gathering, which were also correlates of pre-existing institutional and disciplinary hierarchies and, later on, acknowledgements. Only Arocha and Lleras attended every meeting at the Museum, and one of them would lead. With three exceptions, all the meetings documented were held at the National Museum. Two took place at the National University, but no Museum staff were present. One took place at the Ministry of Culture, and was led by the Minister. Higher ranking Museum staff attended only on exceptional occasions. The then Museum Director, María Victoria de Angulo, and the P&E Curator, Margarita Reyes, did not attend any of the meetings, except for a protocolary introduction that Director Angulo did at the ‘communities representatives’ critical visit described below. The then Deputy Director, Liliana González, only attended the meeting held at the Ministry of Culture. Dilia Robinson and Luis Gerardo Martínez attended intermittently due to other commitments, like Claudia Mosquera, who would eventually leave the project for good.

Sometimes people who appear in the attendees list are not quoted, they are silent and quiet, like sabedoras Leocadia Mosquera or Carmen Paz, whose voices became more present as the exhibition opening approached. Sociologist Claudia Mosquera was not quoted much, but her interventions, like sabedora Dilia Robinson’s, were particularly direct. Ministry representatives were also very ‘quiet.’ In contrast Lleras, but mostly Arocha, were constantly quoted. Lleras would call the meetings to order, propose what was desirable, bring ideas and material to discuss and express concerns in terms of what was possible to do at the Museum. Usually Lleras or Arocha established and appointed tasks. Invited

\[^5\] InSanandresano creole and among Raizal people, ‘Miss’ is the customary title prefixed to women’s names regardless of their age or civil status.
sabedores approved or disapproved of what was proposed, but also proposed their own views and concerns.

There were also contestations. As time passed and the project gained independence, the minutes became longer and less constricted to the Museum’s model. Recordings and pictures were added to document the process behind the scenes.
The minutes of 5 May 2006: Initially the minutes were short and concrete summaries. The meetings were temporary, but the minutes remain to be stored in an archive as record of the process.

‘Translation,’ as a process of documentation (events turning into documents) was taking place.
Participation in meetings

The minutes taken during Museum meetings are documents that reflect hierarchical relations between the people who met and who took them, and also enact the power of the act of meeting. They are powerful because what is mentioned in the minutes is inscribed both as record and as a task for the people meeting. It is there to be dealt with later because the minutes, as public documents, are available in an archive for anyone to see. This power is limited by the hierarchies at play in their production, but enhanced by their availability. But, to be present, people had to be invited. Here I show what it took to be invited to participate in this project.

In May, June and August 2006 seven people who worked for three national institutions met in the Museum: anthropologist Jaime Arocha and sociologist Claudia Mosquera, from the National University of Colombia; Doris de la Hoz, Ulia Yemail and Consuelo Méndez took turns to attend as representatives of the Ministry of Culture; and Cristina Lleras, the National Museum’s Curator of Arts and History, with Carolina Vanegas, researcher at the same Curatorship office, who acted as hosts. A first set of hierarchies arises in this list. Mosquera and Arocha were renowned scholars from the principal public university in the country. Arocha, the only male and oldest person present, had then a higher rank and longer experience than Mosquera. Lleras’ rank was below the current National Museum’s Director, María Victoria de Angulo, and the Deputy Director, Liliana González. Lleras was in her late twenties and had been the Curator of the A&H collections for about two years, after having worked, like Carolina Vanegas, as one of the Curatorship researchers with her predecessor, artist Beatriz González, who kept that role for 14 years. De la Hoz was the Ethno-culture Director, one rank below the then Minister of Culture, Elvira Cuervo, who had previously been the Museum Director for 13 years. At that time, Vanegas was in charge of taking minutes. The only meeting attendee who was Afro-Colombian and Black, as she self-identified in Afro-reparaciones, was sociologist Mosquera.

In the third Museum meeting, in August 2006, the team discussed inviting people related with the funebria subject so that they could ‘contribute with ideas for the exhibition’ and proposed they should be representative of different regions ‘so that the different rituals can be compared.’ Names were suggested of people that complied with these requisites. Also, invitees from universities around the country (Medellín, Antioquia, Cauca, Valle, Chocó, Javeriana and Cartagena) were invited to visit the museum’s permanent exhibitions ‘to nourish the content,’ possibly funded by the Ministry of Culture. Mosquera suggested that the subject of the visits could be: ‘What should the role of the National Museum be in a pluri-ethnic country with racial discrimination?’

Mosquera’s demand for reparations to Afro-Colombians and Arocha’s emphasis on rescuing their endangered culture required that other voices engaged in this conversation. For Mosquera, these voices were of academics knowledgeable of the subjects at stake, and for Arocha, of people knowledgeable of Afro-Colombian funerary rituals. For both of them, such invitees had to be from different places around the country, and the team as a whole considered involving regional institutions and grassroots organizations. A different kind of transgression to the backstage took place in the
fourth meeting, when a few Afro-Colombian representatives were invited to participate in meetings as sabedores. To the protocol of naming and taking minutes an additional protocol was added. In the following section I refer to what it took to be invited to participate as sabedor or sabedora in this project, and what this participation meant.

**Meeting with sabedores and sabedoras**

In November 2006, a temporary exhibition about Afro-Colombian funerary rituals became the main subject of conversation during Museum meetings, and as described above people ‘related with funerary rituals’ from the regions that would be represented were invited to join the discussions. The sabedores included: Leocadia Mosquera, an alabaos cantor and teacher from Chocó Department; Carmen Paz, a community leader and teacher from Northern Cauca; Luis Gerardo Martínez, a Palenquero historian, community leader and member of the CNOA (Conferencia Nacional de Organizaciones Afrocolombianas [National Conference of Afro-Colombian Organizations]); and Dilia Robinson, a Raizal sociologist with work experience as a regional and district public servant and in the Ministry of Education, and President of ORFA, the Organization of Raizal people living out of the Archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina.\(^6\) Also Emigdio Cuesta, Catholic priest and renowned leader from Chocó Department, and member of the Afro-Colombian Pastoral and Executive Secretary of the CNOA,\(^7\) and Ruby Quiñones, a school teacher and leader from the Southern Pacific region, eventually attended a few meetings and helped in other ways with the setup of the exhibition. All of them had been born in regions with high Afro-Colombian populations but lived in Bogotá or travelled there regularly. They were acquaintances, from previous professional or personal projects, of Arocha, Mosquera, Vanegas and the Ministry representatives. In the headings of minutes they appeared as ‘representatives’ of the places they were born, in spite of the fact that most of them lived in Bogotá. Although all of them were professionals none of them was an ‘academic’ but, as I will show below, they all had done ‘research’ about their own people.

Dilia Robinson, who figured as the Raizal sabedora and representative in the minutes, had been involved as an ‘auditora’ in a virtual text-book called Atlas de las culturas afrocolombianas [Afro-Colombian Cultures Atlas], available for free online,\(^8\) which historian Adriana Maya coordinated. She

---

\(^6\) Dilia Robinson worked as consultant for the National Minister of Education and coordinated the Ministry of Education’s National Ethnoeducation Program from 1997 to 2003. She wrote the monograph used for the San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina Islands in the 2003 Atlas de las culturas afrocolombianas (http://www.colombiaaprende.edu.co/html/etnias/1604/channel.html), an educational website that historian Maya coordinated. Robinson shared this monograph with the museum meetings attendees, and co-wrote an article about the islands with anthropologist Juliana Botero, published in the exhibition catalogue.

\(^7\) http://www.convergenciacnoa.org/equipo%20tecnico.html, 17-Sep-2015. According to the minutes, father Emigdio Cuesta attended only two meetings, but his role was key in the opening and closing ceremonies of the exhibition, to which I refer to in the next chapter.

also wrote the monograph used for the San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina Islands. Furthermore, she had worked as a Consultant for the National Ministry of Education and had coordinated the Ministry of Education’s National Ethnoeducation Programme from 1997 to 2003. She had also been involved as a ‘consultant’ in the preparation of a document that began to circulate in 2008 in official domains, called ‘Plan integral de largo plazo para la población negra /afrocolombiana, palenquera y raizal: Propuestas para el Capítulo de Fortalecimiento de los Grupos étnicos y de las relaciones interculturales del Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2006-2010.’ In this text, the four names that were later added to the exhibitions’ title as ‘communities,’ were defined as follows:

Black/Afro-Colombian [Negra/Afrocolombiana]: A person that belongs to the ethnic group that is present in the whole national territory, with African historical, ethnic and cultural roots and of African descent, born in Colombia, with its racial, linguistic and folkloric diversity. For the effects of this policy document, it will be understood that the Black and Afro-Colombian population will also include the Palenquero and Raizal population (p. 2).

Below, the document defines the latter two:

Palenquero population [Población Palenquera]: The Palenquero community is constituted by the descendants of enslaved people who, through acts of resistance and freedom, sheltered in the territories of the Colombian Northern coast from the 15th century in the denominated ‘palenques.’ The community of Palenque de San Basilio, the only one that remains, maintains an ethnic awareness which allows them to identify as a specific group; they possess the only creole language with a Spanish lexical base, a social organization based on the Ma Kuagro (age groups), and funerary rituals like the lumbalu or medicinal practices, which make evident a cultural and spiritual system on death and life.

Raizal population [Población raizal]: The Raizal ethnic group is constituted by the ancestral natives from San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina Archipelago. Their insular character, customs, religious practices and language make them into a group clearly differentiated from the rest of the national society (p. 3).

I introduce these definitions here to show the reader a new appearance of the ‘Black communities’ that I introduced above. These definitions share a characteristic: the notion of ‘Black communities’ that Transitory Article 55 and Law 70 had introduced had expanded to include the categories of ‘Afro-Colombian,’ ‘Palenquero,’ and ‘Raizal’ as ‘ethnic groups’ and ‘populations.’ It also broadened in geography to include the entirety of the Colombian territory. This definition of Black, Afro-Colombian, Palenquero and Raizal people as ‘populations’ and ‘ethnic groups’ include ‘race’, subordinated but visible, as one trace of ‘diversity.’


10 In fem. in the original because it corresponds to the noun ‘persona,’ which is female in Spanish.
Planning fieldwork: protecting, collecting and returning

Doing ‘fieldwork’ meant different things for the different people involved. In the final pages of Velorios’s catalogue (Ministerio de Cultura and Museo Nacional de Colombia, 2008) a section titled Reflexiones sobre la investigación [Reflections about research] contains four articles. The last one, ‘Conversación de sabedores y sabedoras’ [Conversation between sabedores and sabedoras], is an edited transcription of conversations which took place at the Museum in June and July 2008 between Dilia Robinson, Leocadia Mosquera, Carmen Paz, Luis Gerardo Martínez, Jaime Arocha and Cristina Lleras. The conversation begins like this:

Miss Dilia Robinson: I have sat here because I feel moved by the fact that it is the first time that the contribution of Black communities to the history and culture of this nation will appear in the National Museum of Colombia. I feel the need to contribute the little I know, and to make sure that when somebody talks about my people things are said as they are, because, honestly, I feel irritated when I read things that makes one say: “gosh [miércoles], who did they ask?” One doesn’t know everything, but one knows the everyday, and one knows how to distinguish what’s being said. For example, there is a text that some people are taking as reference to talk about Raizal people. What we Raizal people feel is that it was a person who did a study in San Andrés, made an interview with two or three people and came back with that (Conversación de sabedores y sabedoras, 2008: 149).

Further ahead, Carmen Paz explains her initial reservations about the subject of the exhibition, and how the idea of doing ‘fieldwork’ made her change her mind:

To be honest, at the beginning I felt some rejection against the name Funerary rituals of Afro-Colombian and Raizal people, because we’re always seen as Black women [negras] who practice witchcraft, that practice occultism, that do weird things […] So when they told me that we would go to our towns to talk with the community, with our people, I said “how nice,” because it is a very good way for them to know in a direct way how we are, because here in Bogotá they talk about us and they don’t know us (ibid.: 150).

In May 2007, minutes reported a conversation about the places where fieldtrips—salidas a terreno—that Arocha had proposed would take place. In his original proposal, five altars would represent five Afro-Colombian regions. Lleras and Vanegas were concerned about the limitations in budget and space available at the Museum, so Arocha asked them to imagine one exhibition with five altars, and another one with only one altar where somehow variations among different Afro-Colombian rituals would be shown. Vanegas proposed visiting three regions might be enough. Mosquera stated that given the amount of information published about Palenque, a visit there was not necessary. Luis Gerardo Martínez said it was necessary to visit that town to document changes in the rituals. Then Mosquera is quoted saying that “the reasons to make an exhibition about funerary rituals, and not another subject,

was the impact of war on the rituals and the acculturation experienced by those who were displaced to 
the cities because of the war,’ and that ‘it was impossible to represent all regions but the maximum 
effort must be made to represent the diversity of Afro-Colombia.’

This ‘Afro-Colombian diversity’ related to geography and ‘culture’ endangered because of violence and 
the displacement of people to cities. Arocha’s emphasis on rescue and ‘salvage’ anthropology. He 
would talk about the places where the patrimony of Afro-Colombians was disappearing and thus had 
to be collected and protected. Mosquera focused on the places where people were being displaced by 
armed conflict and thus losing their culture. Museum and Ministry staff referred to the ‘regions’ and 
‘communities.’ In an earlier meeting, Martínez is quoted as saying that the exhibition could serve as a 
‘point of encounter,’ collecting what is disappearing, bringing it to the city and staging it in ways that 
are engaging for and allow people to recover it, as ‘perhaps family transmission of those different 
forms of knowledge does not guarantee their perpetuation due to the lack of interest of apprentices.’

Additionally, the idea of doing fieldtrips and collecting information and other materials had 
implications for the meaning of ‘reparation.’ A discussion about the protocols for recollection and, 
furthermore, return or research results would be added to the agenda. The people who attended 
meetings as sabedores and sabedoras had done research on the history and culture of their 
hometowns themselves (Robinson had a BA in sociology and Martínez one in history) and they read 
and exchanged with anthropologists and historians. In one of the minutes, Leocadia Mosquera referred 
to herself as a ‘natural anthropologist,’ as she had been interested in collecting her people’s traditions 
from young age. Dilia Robinson, whose quote above expressed annoyance at generalizations made in 
 writings about Raizal people, also made it clear that in order for research to be carried out in an 
appropriate way, ‘people from the communities’ must understand the importance of the project and 
be trained, and that it was important to establish links with ‘local organizations so that the broad sense 
of the project is understood, undermining the idea that materials will be used to make researchers 
rich.’ She further posited that people in the communities would have to be involved substantially and 
‘effective mechanisms of return’ had to be devised, ‘as people are tired of contributing their 
knowledge to research because generally information does not get returned to them.’

The involvement of ‘support teams gathered in the regions,’ ‘people from the communities’ and ‘local 
organizations’ was now on the agenda. In discussing who was appropriate to contact, attendees 
mentioned names such as ‘Fundación Jorge Artel,’ ‘Organización Festival de Tambores,’ ‘Centro cultural 
Mama-u’ and Palenque’s ‘patrimony team,’ all of which were cultural groups, rather than activist or 
political organizations. Lleras insisted that the inclusion of organizational representatives would allow

---


13 Later on she shared with the meetings’ attendees her own manuscripts about funerary rituals (attached to the 
minutes 29 April 2008).

for wider local involvement, ‘education,’ ‘training’ and ‘sharing tools and knowledges.’ Ulia Yemail, one
of the Ministry representatives, insisted on the ‘impact in the regions.’

Dilia Robinson and Luis Gerardo Martínez’s demands resonated with the earlier proposal to create a
travelling exhibition, but complicated Arocha’s proposal to do fieldwork to collect and rescue. Another
activity during trips to ‘the regions’ and ‘the communities’ would be to find out about places where the
exhibition might be set up later on and to seek agreements with organizations in the regions about
‘adequate forms to link the new generations and the presence of the generational shift.’ These
emphases would later shape the developments that I will discuss in the Travelling Wakes and living
saints and Tour-guiding chapters.

Field-trips [salidas a terreno]: politics of visibility and visuality

Apart from contacting people and searching for objects and information related with funerary rituals,
one of the purposes of doing fieldwork was to document them visually. As I explained, I joined the
research group for the first time as a voluntary assistant to help take pictures and shoot videos, initially
only during the visit to Northern Cauca. Later on, I was hired to do a fieldtrip to San Basilio de Palenque,
along with Luis Gerardo Martínez, the Palenquero sabedor.

The first set of fieldtrips took place from 19 June to 28 July 2007. They consisted of travelling by plane
to seven areas around the country, in short stays, in teams composed of sabedores and
anthropologists. Another visit would be made the following February to document the Adorations to
Baby Jesus in northern Cauca Department, as members of the local communities stated they wanted to
be represented by their Adorations to Baby Jesus feast, and not with their funerary rituals, which were
no longer done in the ‘traditional’ way. Visits to Palenque de San Basilio and San José de Uré, in the
Caribbean region, took place in March and April.

During these first fieldwork trips, I remember discussing with Arocha a structure of successive stages  
of the funerary rituals, which resembled the ‘cluster’ that Arocha had written of earlier (1997), and which
would organize the exhibition. Fieldwork and meetings worked as a kind of anthropology lesson, with
Arocha, the professor, discussing findings as possible traces of Africanness with younger
anthropologists like myself.

During visits we conducted interviews, visited cemeteries and also attended, recorded and
photographed wakes, including the process of altar-making. We followed Father Emigdio Cuesta’s
suggestion to ask for permission in communities before attending and recording funerals. As part of
the protocol, we took great care in documenting the names of people interviewed, photographed and
of those who helped us contact and find other people. We also immediately returned digital copies of

15 According to the ‘Agreements’ in the minutes on 13 April 2007.
unedited recordings, videos and photographs to local contacts. In one early meeting Arocha said that the GEA had had an authorship dispute with an Afro-Colombian organization, ORCONE, because of a documentary they had made. Additional copies of this material remain stored at the National Museum and at the National University as part of the project’s collection, but we did not follow up what reactions this material had after fieldtrips.

The new ‘protocol’ that applied to fieldwork and design meant that the role of anthropologists was not just to collect but to return videos and research products. During fieldwork, we sometimes asked people to build simulated altars, and visually documented the process of altar-construction and the resulting setups. In this way we created new ‘objects’ like those Geismar and Tilley (2003) reflected on, or like the ‘ethnographic objects’ that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett discussed (1998). A different ‘lack of context’ to the one that scholars had observed in art exhibitions was at stake, which generated disagreements that soon became a subject of discussion during meetings. Meanwhile, another kind of ‘participation’ exposed the broader frame in which the funerary rituals exhibition project enmeshed.

**Afro–reparations: Meeting to discuss a hall dedicated to Black and Afro–Colombian people**

Parallel to the discussions about the temporary exhibition, a different set of ‘meetings’ was taking place at the National Museum in order to discuss broader issues regarding ‘how to nourish the permanent Museum exhibits’ contents’ and what Mosquera expressed as ‘what should the role of the National Museum be in a pluri-ethnic country with racial discrimination?’ But what would ‘reparation’ imply? As I showed in the previous chapter, the use of space at the Museum had a long and complex history of debate. What Arocha and Mosquera were asking equated to having a whole collection dedicated to Afro-Colombian people, like the ICANH’s collections, which had been constituted, as I explained, between 1944 and 1963 and with an indigenous emphasis. Mosquera was also signalling issues regarding control over space and the means to produce and circulate images and words of what the nation is. The ‘voids’ that the Strategic Plan and 48-91 signalled were not just in the collections, but in the permanent exhibitions and this had to do with the difficulties that working together with the P&E curators had already shown. In fact the P&E Curator did not attend any of these meetings.

In spite of this, connections between people in Bogotá and in ‘the regions’ were created, some of which were maintained over time. Some of the people contacted during fieldwork would also attend a bigger ‘communities representatives’ meeting the following September. Others would work as architects of simulated funerary altars that would become, as Arocha had proposed, the main objects exhibited in the temporary display. It became evident that ‘reparation’ with a hall in the Museum would not be enough.

---

16 Minutes 4 May 2008.
The critical visits of ‘Afro subject researchers’ and ‘community representatives’

In the archive produced by the Velorios project, two longer sets of minutes are contained in the folder ‘Relatorías visitas críticas MNC’ [Minutes of critical visits to the National Museum of Colombia]. The first one refers to the meeting with academics that had been strongly pushed by Claudia Mosquera in the initial official gatherings at the Museum. It took place in February 2007, the same month that Barack Obama announced his presidential candidacy in the USA.17 The ‘hosts’ were Lleras, Vanegas and the then Director of the Museum’s Education Division, Fabio López. From the Ministry, Doris De La Hoz, the Ethno-Culture Director, was present. Arocha introduced himself as participating in the research for the funerary rituals exhibition. Mosquera was quoted only once, insisting on the need for a permanent conversation and a hall dedicated to Afro-Colombians. Lina del Mar Moreno, the young anthropologist who was also a member of the GEA, was introduced as the technical secretary of the exhibition project, so she was probably in charge of taking minutes. None of the people ‘related with funerary rituals’ or sabedores who had already attended a few meetings appeared in the minutes.

Among the ‘guests’ were three scholars who would write articles for the future temporary exhibition’s catalogue, as was historian Adriana Maya, who would later be called to work out the historical background of the exhibition. A few of these guests had written articles included in book Afro-reparaciones, as had Arocha and two other anthropologists involved later on in the exhibition project. Although the Museum staff were used to dealing with knowledgeable scholars as exhibition curators or in seminars and conferences organized in the Museum, or had had scholarly training themselves, it was the first time a group of twelve university lecturers and professors who were ‘experts on Afro-Colombian subject,’ Afro-Colombian or not, had been invited to meet and discuss what the National Museum was, what people thought the main needs for Afro-Colombian communities were in relation to memory and history, and what relationships were possible to weave between these and other communities in the Museum.

Lleras led the two-day meeting. She opened the conversation by stating that research was not always easy to translate into the language of the museum and that the agreements and commitments produced must be in accordance with the possibilities of the Museum. Then the group made a visit to the Museum’s permanent exhibitions and discussed the issue further, concluding that the institution not only excluded Afro-Colombian peoples’ history and culture, but were inappropriate and incomplete in regard to many other subjects as well. The Museum reflected, one of the attendees stated, a lack of the knowledge and research about those subjects outside of the Museum.

Almost six months later, in September, another special first time visit took place after the first set of fieldtrips. For two days fifteen men and women who introduced themselves as Afro-Colombian, Palenquero or Raizal people and also as members of cultural and social organizations from all around

the country, many of them school teachers, all professionals, gathered with Curator Lleras, curatorship researcher Vanegas, anthropologist Arocha, sociologist Mosquera, one of the Ministry representatives, and sabedores Leocadia Mosquera, Carmen Paz and Luis Gerardo Martinez. Although Martinez had also published an article in the Afro-reparaciones book, he had not been present in the ‘Afro-Colombian subject experts’ meeting in February. Like the academics’ visit, this one was focused on the Museum as a whole and not specifically on the temporary exhibition about funerary rituals, and the ‘guests’ were asked to express their expectations about the presence of Afro-Colombian communities in the institution. Again, Lleras did not directly use the question that sociologist Mosquera had proposed, but opened the discussion by asking the attendees more general questions, like what they understood by the word ‘museum’ or what they thought the role of museums was in society. In this meeting people expressed their ideas about what they thought the National Museum did and how it worked, as well as what its contents should be, which included: tradition, armed conflict, ‘the memory, but also what made parents lose it.’ The Museum was regarded by this new set of ‘guests’ as similar to history school-texts and as a place that keeps what is important and communicates it, though also, as boring and full of old objects.

In the discussion that followed the visit to the museum’s permanent exhibitions, one of the attendees, Rosamalia Quiñones, who had been a key contact in the fieldtrip to Guapi, near the Pacific Coast, and was later an architect of one of the exhibition altars, was quoted as saying that the visit had produced hatred in her and that she wanted to cry: ‘Why have there the assassins, the guilty ones, those who killed us. Why not have the history of the Black and the contribution that the Black has made in the country?’ Sabedor and historian Luis Gerardo Martinez was quoted saying that in the Museum ‘one as Afro-Colombian does not find oneself.’ Aura Dalia Caicedo, from Pacific coast port Buenaventura, was quoted saying that ‘if we are not in a national space we do not exist.’ The meeting finished, as had the previous one, with questions about what the Museum was willing to do. Lleras replied a lot of work was needed and this was a very complex subject that exceeded the Museum’s possibilities, but as a way ‘to go from the abstract to the real,’ she stated, ‘an exhibition program could be made to feed the collections.’

According to the meetings minutes, the temporary exhibition about funerary rituals was not discussed in this meeting and similarly, the ideas discussed in this meeting, which referred not only to the place Afro-Colombian people must have in the Museum, but also to the institution as a whole, were not mentioned directly in later meeting’s minutes. After this ‘community representatives critical visit’, the meetings to discuss the exhibition on funerary rituals resumed during the last months of 2007, but no Ministry representatives or sabedores attended. Anthropologist Juliana Botero was hired as technical secretary and Lina del Mar Moreno left the country to begin her postgraduate studies in Mexico. This was the time for selecting materials that would be included in the exhibition, deciding how they would be exhibited and beginning to write the catalogue. Also, the project became more public, and more views about how Afro-Colombian people should be represented in the National Museum were brought up in meetings.
Disagreements with the exhibition

At the beginning of November 2007, the first external criticism was raised in a meeting. According to the minutes, Lleras informed the team (there is no reference in the minutes as to how she found out) that Esperanza Biohó, a renowned cultural entrepreneur who led the foundation Colombia Negra [Black Colombia], ‘in the name of several members of the Afro-Colombian community, manifested to the Minister of Culture her disagreement with the subject of the exhibition, because the first time an exhibition about Afro-Colombians was to be made, it would be about death, a sad aspect of life, while there are so many pretty [bonitas] things to do, show and represent from Afro communities.’ A few weeks later Biohó and Colombia Negra made a representation of a Lumbalú, the Palenquero funerary ritual, in Bogotá’s Central Cemetery. Biohó’s familiarity with the subject went back to her involvement in a previous representation of a Lumbalú that took place in Palenque itself, which appeared in the docu-fictional film Del Palenque de San Basilio [From Palenque de San Basilio] directed by Erwin Goggel and released in 2003. Biohó, who was born in the Pacific region but lived in Bogotá, was the film’s writer and assistant director, and Colombia Negra distributed it. Biohó’s disagreement was not with the fact that funerary rituals of Black and Afro-Colombian people would be staged, but rather with who would do it and where it would be done. Furthermore, by expressing her disagreement with the subject of the exhibition, and then staging the Lumbalú in public, Biohó was also staging her authority as a representative of Afro-Colombian communities. She was one of the members of what at that moment was called the Mesa de Cultura Afrocolombiana [Board of Afro-Colombian Culture], a nascent body of representation for cultural ‘issues’ which was in communication with the new Minister of Culture, Paula Marcela Moreno Zapata, the first Afro-Colombian woman to be appointed in that position.

This action put the legitimacy of the exhibition at stake. In the face of this, according to minutes taken at the end of 2007, Arocha stated (and Lleras agreed) that a stronger justification had to be made of why the subject of funerary rituals had been chosen. Furthermore an emphasis needed to be placed on the ‘consultation’ process of the project. Using this word would help give value and legitimize a process that had in fact involved Afro-Colombian people’s input by framing it as an endeavour that could fit the ILO’s notion of ‘prior consultation.’ Lleras proposed making a formal meeting with Biohó, and Arocha suggested inviting other people to that meeting: the new Minister, the ‘regional sabedores who live in Bogotá’ and other Afro leaders and organizations, thus helping activate a network he knew agreed with the project. From then on, the words ‘participation’ and ‘consultation’ became part of the project’s written vocabulary.

---


20 I have explained that the same year the 1991 Constitution was signed, Colombia adhered ILO’s 169 Convention.
Meeting at the Ministry of Culture

In December 2007 a meeting at the Ministry of Culture’s offices took place to discuss the future of the exhibition. This was the first time I attended an official meeting and I remember the Minister seemed in a hurry, busy, signing papers an assistant would bring even after the meeting had already begun. Minister Moreno had been appointed by President Álvaro Uribe Vélez in May 2007, soon before the first set of field trips for the exhibition project was made. Also present at the meeting were Alfredo Dusán from the Ministry, and other members of the ‘permanent seminar:’ Carmen Paz, Leocadia Mosquera, Juliana Botero, Lina del Mar Moreno, and Carolina Vanegas, but the conversation reported in the minutes took place between Cristina Lleras, Jaime Arocha, Claudia Mosquera, Liliana González (the Museum Deputy Director) and Minister Moreno. Sociologist Mosquera had last attended a Museum meeting before the first set of fieldtrips, more than six months earlier. None of the Ministry representatives that had attended the Museum meetings was present.

The meeting began with Arocha defending the subject of the exhibition, followed by Lleras, who explained who had been involved, some ideas about broadening the scope of the exhibition (to schools and with a photographic travelling exhibition) as well as outcomes the project had already produced. Then the Minister stated that the Afro-Colombian Culture Board had not agreed to being represented through an exhibition about their funerary rituals, as this might generate a negative and schematizing image. Moreover, she suggested: emphasizing music, as it was a subject that could be better received both by Afro-Colombian communities and the general public; changing the name of the exhibition to make it more appealing, not emphasizing death; making the most of the link between Africa and africanness [africanías]; and making a conference cycle to contextualize the exhibition. Arocha and Lleras insisted the exhibition’s subject related to other subjects and that ‘communities have participated constantly in the research process and in the decision making, in a very respectful way.’ They added that people from Northern Cauca had said they did not want to be represented with funerary rituals, and so it would be. Liliana González, the museum’s Deputy Director, added that due to the lack of space and after almost two years of research and discussion it would be very difficult to change the exhibition’s subject.

Claudia Mosquera then stated the exhibition was a minimum effort in the process of symbolic reparations and the recuperation of the memory of Afro peoples, but it was now time to put other things into work. For this she suggested ‘the formation of a permanent commission to think about the reparation to the Afro peoples through their inclusion in the museum of the nation, comprised of international people and entities with experience in the subject, national scholars and members of

---

21 The Mesa Afrocolombiana de Cultura—Board of Afro-Colombian Culture—was part of the ‘official’ representative board for Afro-Colombian, Black, Palenquero and Raizal communities at that moment. Esperanza Biohó, mentioned above, was a member of that board. The legitimacy of the board has been seriously contested, and even sued, relating to Law 70 for Black communities and ILO resolutions on Prior Consultation. No agreement exists when I write this.
grassroots organizations [miembros de la base].’ Liliana González then said that for them as an
institution it was clear that the exhibition was only a beginning. The minutes concluded by reporting
that ‘the Minister reminds Claudia Mosquera’ that a Museum expansion was on its way and that the
Museum was already working with museums in the regions on making visible Afro-Colombians as well
as other non-visible groups, suggesting that she had discussed this subject before in other spaces.

A protocol was followed by going to the Ministry and by the Minister saying the complaint had come
from the board, not from its individual members, one of which was Esperanza Biohó. In following what
the complaints were and the alternatives proposed, it seemed that nobody apart from Claudia
Mosquera questioned the idea of only making an exhibition at the National Museum. The main theme
of discussion had been the temporary exhibition, and not the original proposal of a hall dedicated to
Black and Afro-Colombian people as a reparative action. Racism and reparations were not part of the
agenda for the Minister either, who on the day of her appointment said: ‘I am a representative of the
Afro-descendant community, an Afro-Colombian who was born here in Bogotá but who has her roots in
Northern Cauca, in Santander de Quilichao. I represent my community, and as an Afro-descendant
woman I feel very proud.’

Article El Dipló

As I have shown, although Mosquera’s participation was fundamental in the development of this
project, in general the minutes report less of her speech than of other participants. Her ‘voice’ was
characterized by the straightforwardness of her statements in relation to the need for a separate hall
and for a permanent and ongoing discussion about the Museum displays. She had stopped attending
the regular meetings at the Museum before fieldtrips took place and was not involved in that part of
the research.

Soon after the meeting at the Ministry of Culture, Mosquera published an article in the Colombian
version of Le Monde Diplomatique, El Dipló, under the title For Blacks, Afro-Colombians, Morenos,
Palenqueros and Raizals. Memories of slavery and ethno-racial restorative justice: What does the
Colombian State do? I knew it constituted a turning point in the story I wanted to tell, not only because
after she published it she stopped working on the project, but also because that action triggered a
conflict between her and Arocha that some months later ended up in her forming a separate research
group at the National University, IDCARAN. Nothing was stated in the minutes about the publication of
this article or its consequences. It was not part of the exhibition archive.

In her article, Mosquera replicated sections from the Afro-reparations book published one year earlier,
where among other issues she explained why for her the Colombian state must ‘peremptorily pursue
historic reparations and give form to ethnic-racial reparative justice’ (Mosquera Rosero-Labbé, 2007b,

n.p.). However, in this article she modified her statements about the ways that the State has safeguarded a ‘neutral national memory.’

A visit to the National Museum of Colombia will show the ignominious way this racist institution disregards the African memory and how it devalues (desvaloriza) the role of Afro-Colombians and Raizals in the construction of the nation. If you auscultate its public servants and its curators’ surnames, you will see it is not an innocent institution. There you find the guardians of a socio-racial order at work [vigente] from Colonial times, ready to keep on defending with postmodern arguments for the neutral national memory. That order is so strong that I dare to bet that the person appointed as the Minister of Culture, Paula Marcela Moreno, a Black woman, does yet not assume her role in the advancement of the Black cause, and she will not be able to do much to allow the historic alterity of Black people in the country to be respected in that institution. The National Museum depends on the Ministry of Culture but I am almost certain that nothing will happen in a structural way in its script. I fear the Black Ministry will not be able to remove the ignominious banner that we find in the entrance of the Museum, which says: the Spanish brought to America: peaches, yellow fever and slaves (!), equating human beings with fruits and disease. The temporary exhibition the Museum has accepted to carry out after heated discussions with Afro-Colombianist scholars about Funereal rituals are palliative gestures. Let us not be deceived: the guardians of the socio-racial order know how to build smoke curtains and co-opt with good manners. The National Museum of Colombia must be the subject of a profound public debate, not only because of the ignominious place it gives to Afro-descent people. I believe every group that comprises the pluri-ethnic and multicultural nation requires a Museum that has a plural script, less asymmetrical and more respectful of the memory of the ‘defeated’ (ibid., n.p.).

The publication of this article took the rest of the team by surprise and generated negative reactions, in particular from Lleras and Arocha, who felt directly and unjustly accused by Mosquera. In spite of the fact that it was clear that this was an action against the possibility that the Museum and the Ministry were only interested in the exhibition, it put the project’s legitimacy at stake once more. With this action Mosquera broke ‘some basic rules of conduct’ (Bailey, 1980) that she had accepted to follow even if she had not attended every Museum meeting. She published opinions she had not expressed face to face during meetings. By publishing her article, she opened access to the project’s backstage in an inappropriate way. Furthermore, she directly accused the Museum’s public servants and curators of being ‘guardians of the socio-racial order at work from Colonial times,’ and indirectly accused them of being among the families that accumulated their wealth through slavery and that have since then remained in powerful private and public sector positions. This broke the protocols established which, in this case, both maintained the authority of the Museum and the project’s (and its leaders’) legitimacy.

From then on, with the sole exception of Arocha telling the group he had attended a seminar she organized, Mosquera’s name was never again mentioned in the minutes, and her participation in the project was only acknowledged in one of the exhibition’s catalogue articles (Lleras, 2008), but not as an author, curator or researcher. The demand for a hall almost disappeared as a matter of discussion in
later meetings, although Arocha would bring it up as a comment or in other spaces, and it would
remain as an underlying idea. This hall has not yet come to exist at the National Museum.
Page of minutes with Arocha's hand-drawn scheme, dated 31 January 2008: the minutes become clusters of documents.

‘Translation,’ as much as a process of documentation takes place as a process of visualization (written documents turning into textual-visual documents).
'Will the exhibition be made?'

‘Yes,’ replied Lleras to Arocha’s question, as described in the minutes of 31 January 2008, which I have pasted as a screenshot on the previous page. By that time, criticism about both the subject of the exhibition and the scope of the project had been made public, albeit non-officially, by Biohó and Mosquera. To protect it, Biohó’s ‘political management’ and Mosquera’s article were ‘replied’ to with slow paced institutional protocol. Three months later a public presentation about the exhibition was organized at the museum, but it did not work as expected because although a big effort to invite as many Afro-Colombians as possible was made, only people who agreed with the exhibition appeared. Biohó, who had been especially invited, excused herself, saying she was unwell.

Later on, Lleras attended a meeting with the Afro-Colombian Culture Board, an action that by following the protocol and showing politeness and respect acknowledged the board’s unstable legitimacy. She wrote that in this meeting ‘the members of the Board expressed their concern about whether there would be enough contextual information to understand universes rich in symbology, and highlighted they did not want ‘others’ to speak for them’ (Lleras, 2008: 139). The Board members also stated the four official names must be included in exhibition name: Afro-Colombian, Black, Raizal and Palenquero. Sabedores agreed that it was the best to do that, because ‘that was an unfinished discussion and there would always be people who did not feel included.’

Lleras consulted statistitian Fernando Urrea, who explained to her that people might identify with racial categories (like Black) or with ethnic categories (like Afro, Raizal or Palenquero), or with both. Then Arocha stated that other names could be included, such as Moreno, Renaciente and Niche, which were not ‘official’ but were words that Afro-Colombian people use in everyday life to refer to themselves around the country.

As a further response to the Culture Board’s concerns, the team decided that the exhibition would be sacralized with an ecumenical ceremony during its opening. This sacralization would reply to a different kind of disagreement, like the ‘lack of context’ I referred to above. Soon after the idea of making an exhibition about funerary rituals was proposed, one meeting’s minutes quote Lleras expressing her concern about the possibility of fetishizing rituals that imply complex social relations that are of difficult representation. To this, Arocha replied that having people who knew about the rituals could be helpful to avoid stereotyping. Simultaneous to the discussion about the subject, scope, representativity and authority of those involved, a translation was taking place from the language of written texts, which Arocha and Mosquera had experience dealing with, into the language of curatorship, museum objects and space. Later on, having people ‘who know about funerary rituals,’ fieldwork trips and the two big meetings in February and September 2007 widened the design concerns museum staff had with ‘avoiding scenography’ and ‘fetishizing’ and with how to ‘transmit the meanings to the public’. It was also important to find ways to ‘include them all, how to make them

23 19 June 2008.
24 Representatives meeting, September 2007.
see and feel themselves represented and how to make evident the tensions and realities of Afro and Raizal people in the country. In the next chapter I will discuss how these and further conversations became the materiality of the temporary exhibition.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have shown how documents reveal and enact hierarchies between the people who organized or hosted meetings (museum staff and the Minister) and those who were invited (like scholars and later on sabedores). Actions like Biohó’s Lumbalú contested such hierarchies. Mosquera’s article in *El Dipló* broke ‘the rules of the game,’ and although she did so voluntarily, it meant that she was not acknowledged as an author, researcher or curator, and that her ‘script’ for Afro-reparations in a hall at the National Museum was excised from the agenda.

As I have explained, curator Lleras told me that she did not know Mosquera, Arocha, or their work prior to this project. There was never a pre-existing specific budget, project or official open call from the Ministry of Culture or from the Museum for this exhibition. In fact, in minutes it appears that a ‘project’ had to be written and constantly re-written and the ‘budget’ designed and adapted to negotiate funding. The people involved invested a lot of voluntary or ‘additional’ work, time and resources, often requiring a high level of personal commitment to counterbalance the lack of a public policy that is clear and appropriate to deal with the consequences of slavery and racism in Colombia and that, instead, focuses on ‘positive’ features of the Colombian nation, such as multiculturalism and diversity.

Furthermore, the exhibition’s subject generated disagreements that revealed conflicts regarding the legitimacy and authority of the people who attended the meetings. The initial requirement for being invited to the meetings was ‘to be related with’ or know about funerary rituals of a certain kind: traditional, unorthodox, those that were endangered because of the armed conflict and the violence and displacement it generated, and also those that, according to the ‘Afro-americanist focus’ that Arocha followed, constituted *huellas de africanía*, historical and ethnographic ‘clusters’ of ‘data’ that required more research.

The ‘profound visibility’ that Mosquera demanded in the initial meetings, and that for her justified the making of a hall and not just a temporary exhibition, had to do with her views on the need for historical reparation to a ‘neutral’ national memory. An implicit exclusion of urban-born Black and Afro-Colombian people was taking place. These were people who, of course, also practiced funerary rituals but in ways that we later described in the exhibition’s catalogue as ‘bureaucratized,’ ‘homologous’ and ‘modernized’ (Arocha et al, 2008). Such ‘profound visibility’ would imply also talking

---

25 Minutes 1 November 2007. Later on, when the exhibition was about to open, Lleras stated fragments of interviews from the field were to be included in the exhibition so that ‘it is people from the regions who talk and explain the sense of things’.
about all the regions where Afro-Colombian populations live. This would have meant doing fieldtrips to cities such as Buenaventura, Cali, Medellin, Cartagena, Barranquilla and also Bogotá, where Afro-Colombian presence goes back to colonial times and is not necessarily related with displacement because of armed conflict or a lack of opportunities. Afro-Colombian people born in those places who openly questioned or did not acknowledge such notions of African ancestry never appeared in the minutes’ lists of attendance. It is not clear to me if they were invited or not, but I know that at least Lleras conversed with some of them about the exhibition later on, in different spaces. As I have shown, all these disagreements were managed with a lot of care and with formal and official actions.

Different kinds of roles were played, and each role had a certain kind of authority that was at stake in who hosted and who invited who: at the top the Museum staff, followed by the scholars and then sabedores. There were also combinations of roles and this complicated the picture: the Museum staff were also bureaucrats who had scholarly training, the scholars worked for a public institution, the anthropologists also had audiovisual experience and skill, the sociologist was an activist with an inclination towards art, the Raizal sabedora was a bureaucrat with a sociology BA, the Palenquero sabedor had a BA in history and the Chocoana and Caucana sabedoras were school teachers. There was a hierarchy not only between people but also between places, events, objects and actions. During the initial meetings a core group was formed with members of three national institutions. Meetings were institutional, official, closed, non-public and bureaucratic. Nevertheless the recorded minutes, pictures and sounds, the official summaries of what happened, are available (they are ‘public documents’) in the Documentation Centre in the National Museum, albeit unpublished and with restricted access. The minutes, pictures and sounds taken were appropriate, legal and authorized documents.

Selections of these materials were used and transcribed in the catalogue and exhibition. Projects were academic, bureaucratic and institutional, unpublished, with some versions available in the archive. Budgets were neither published nor public, with restricted circulations, unavailable in the project’s archive, institutional, bureaucratic. The exhibition’s archive was not published; it was public but with restricted access and constituted the projects’ collection. Some photographs were made public in the exhibition and in the published catalogue. Fieldwork was institutional but once people left the Museum, there was less control. Field-notes were private.

The publication of Afro-reparaciones, co-edited by Mosquera was an attempt at affirmative action and reparation in itself: institutional, academic and militant, available online, an assemblage of different kinds of written and visual material. Biohó’s disagreement with the subject of the exhibition was brought to the meetings as non-official information, and the artistic event she organized at the central cemetery was a non-official, public action that took place outside of the Museum. Then again Mosquera’s article in El Dipló was a written academic and militant action: published but with restricted availability. Lleras’s replies to Biohó, Afro-Colombian Culture Board members and the Minister’s disagreements were official institutional actions: one public presentation about the project and two
visits to the Board. The reply to Mosquera’s *El Dipló* article was also written down, in an article in the exhibition’s catalogue.

Making an exhibition in the National Museum using the official label of ‘Afro-Colombian, Black, Palenquero and Raizal’ might have helped legitimize official ‘representatives’ of those communities. Because more than just the *invited* people knew about the project, disagreements arose, first about the subject chosen as representative of Afro-Colombian people—funerary rituals, and the way it would be shown—perhaps revealing elements that should not be shown, and then about the scope of the project—a temporary exhibition seemed to move away from the original demand of dedicating one of the National Museum’s halls to Afro-Colombian people.

In order to protect the project, some of the elements that made the project possible—what Bailey (1980) calls ‘effective’ actions, were presented as what the same author defines as ‘normative’ (good, right, just or fair) under the labels ‘participatory’ and ‘consultation.’ Inviting people knowledgeable on funerary rituals was initially thought of as an effective measure: it was ‘to check that what was to be said was right.’ Simultaneously, this invitation was *effective* in another sense: only those with accommodating ideas about tradition and Afro-Colombian identity were invited. The project was made public, at least to a certain extent, through inviting scholars and members of the communities to be represented to take part in the discussions just as the appointment of the Ministry of Culture seemed to legitimize being regarded as ‘Afro-Colombian.’ As the project advanced, disagreements manifested regarding its subject and scope. It became more *political*. Invitations were then *presented as a normative*, complying with consultation and participation principles such as those established by the ILO, and thus protecting the project when its legitimacy and future seemed to be at stake.

In this chapter I referred to meetings to discuss curatorship and participation. In the next chapter, I will refer again to meetings, but to discuss museography and its ‘political legibility.’ Then the transgressed distinction between backstage and front was restored. I will focus on the design process and in the materials staged at the Museum’s temporary exhibitions hall, and the reactions and analysis it generated, while keeping in mind questions about who was acknowledged and how this acknowledgement took place in public. Simultaneously, the *temporary* materiality of the exhibition was thoroughly documented and preserved in the form of visual and textual documents.

In the catalogue’s final pages Arocha and Lleras appear as ‘research coordinators,’ heading the list of people who worked for the exhibition. This fits 48-91’s guidelines, where exhibitions were research projects designed to ‘feed the voids’ of the Museum’s collections; but it also states that hierarchies of knowledge were reinstated. Lleras led the project as an in-house curator and Arocha as an invited curator. In spite of this, as time passed ‘curatorship’ became a collective and contested process, disagreements with this proposal manifested, and more people had a say in what the exhibition was for and would look like. ‘Participatory collaboration’ made Arocha’s clustered script transform to the point that it dissipated. Technology also conditioned access, and this was crucial in the *(in)visibility* that was at work, in which the museum technology of documents in the form of minutes was not just a
record, but a means to do something else, which could be ‘activated,’ in the ways I have done it here. The archive is digital and thus easy to reproduce. The ‘objects’ collected were fieldwork video, photography and sound that are available as digital files for the public in the Museum’s archive.
Chapter 3: Frontstage
On the previous page, I have copied and pasted a screenshot of Velorios’s ‘Profane area’ as it appears in the virtual version of the exhibition that anthropologist Juan Pablo Moya designed after he documented it with pictures. This was part of an independent project that is maintained by MangleRojo, a collective to which he belongs.¹ It shows what the exhibition looked like once the visitor was inside the Museum’s temporary exhibitions hall, facing its entrance on the right and the exit on the left. Next to the exit and a little blurred are nineteen photographs showing who was in the team that during the previous years had met regularly and worked together to produce the exhibition: Museum staff, anthropologists and Afro-Colombian sabedores and ‘architects.’ A thorough visual documentation of the exhibition’s appearance made it possible for anthropologist Moya, one of the team members, to create a digital recreation of Velorios, as it was opened at the National Museum in 2008, as his personal project. This website allowed anyone with an internet connection to access many of the features of the materials that the exhibition included which being now closed are no longer available.

On the right side of the exit, there were two texts that referred to the exhibition. They introduced it and explained the way space was organized in the hall. No author signed them, but a curious visitor might have thought that the people whose pictures appeared on the far left had written them. Printed on a light box, the first text made reference to the process that had made Velorios possible using future tenses. This was because it had been written and printed before the exhibition opened. It stressed what and who the exhibition was about (‘Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero communities’ and ‘Africans and their descendants in Colombia’), that Black people are descended from Africans, that they had been consulted, and that their ancestral, spiritual, honorific and solidary traditions are endangered by change, industry and war:

Wakes and living saints. Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero communities

Wakes and living saints is a categorical step towards including Africans and their descendants in Colombia in the exhibitions and collections of the National Museum. It was born from a proposal developed in consultation with Black communities’ organizations in seven Colombian regions, united by the intention of making visible the contributions that Afro-Colombian, Black, Palenquero and Raizal people have made to the nation’s formation.

The profane and sacred spaces in the display show the ancestral dialogue that extends through the wake and the nine nights, between prayers and sacred chants around the funereal altar set up in the house’s living room, dominoes games and legends told in back and front yards. Nowadays that tradition to heal the pain disappears due to the cold visits to funeral parlours, and to the extinction of small autonomous farmers who own collective territories, caused by the industrialization of agriculture and mining, but also to the war that impedes the funereal rituality and dilutes Afro-Colombian identity. These changes will

appear in the videos projected inside that profane space; there also will be other illustrations about the Africans from whom Black people descend.

The centre of the sacred area offers a vision of the spirituality personified by Congo river valley carvings that celebrate the ancestors with three altars: one to honour the Lady of Carmel, who protects sailors in the South Pacific region; another one to San Pacho, Quibdoseños’ patron saint, and one for Baby Jesus who is worshipped in February by Afro-Colombians from Northern Cauca. In turn, around the perimeter an emphasis will be made on the solidarity that each stage of the funeral rites triggers: agony, death, wake, burial, nine nights, the last night and anniversary, and also on the moving ceremony for the dead to become living saints.

Next to that text, on the left side of the entrance, another one was stuck on a door-panel that hid the room’s light controls from view. It was printed on a black and magenta background next to three pictures taken during the fieldtrips I discussed in the previous chapter. These showed examples of Afro-Colombian people in their front yards during wake ceremonies, along with an explanation about sacred-profane relations and their possible resemblance to African traditions:

During the ritual the house is divided into three spaces: a sacred one where people hold a wake over the body, pray and chant; the kitchen, of a semi-sacred character, where women prepare the food that young and teenager ladies share among the attendees; and another one is the profane zone, generally at the front yard, where singers, relatives and friends who have come from near and far get together. There they play dominoes, tell double entendre jokes and share legends of supernatural beings and everyday life stories. This tradition seems to follow ancient traditions from African groups such as Congo and Yoruba people.

In the centre of this area there were chairs and tables with some of the games described in the text and a few books available for on-site consultation, that were related with the exhibition’s content and history. These were books like Ombligados de Ananse, by anthropologist Jaime Arocha, De sol a sol, by Arocha and Nina de Friedemann, and Brujería y reconstrucción de identidades entre los africanos y sus descendientes en la Nueva Granada, siglo XVII, by historian Adriana Maya. It was an area where visitors could chat, sit down and play the board games and cards available, as it happens during the wakes that the exhibition portrayed. It was also the place used in the visitor study to conduct interviews.
Picture of the ‘Profane’ area, from Lleras’s thesis (2011: 68), which shows the ‘contexts’ projection on the left.

Figure 2 First space of the exhibition. Photo Carlos Gustavo Suárez.
The ‘moving ceremony for the dead to become living saints’ was described, shown and explained after crossing the Profane space and entering into the ‘Sacred space.’ This was almost three times bigger and with stronger lighting. It was a space which the visitor would enter after crossing a threshold formed by two walls connected with a drywall lintel, and long white curtains that hung very close to the ceiling, reminiscent of the white sheets and curtains commonly used in funerary and patron saints’ altars. On each side of the threshold one curtain was tied with black fabric ribbons, as it was customary to do in the past in the Caribbean Archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina. Drywall panels were attached to the four corners of the perimeter and another four corners were built with drywall panels in the centre, forming distinct tri-dimensional areas that the production team referred to interchangeably as ‘corners’ [esquinas] or ‘altars’ [altares], or, at least in one of the Museum meetings, as ‘reconstructions’ [reconstrucciones], but also as the places or subjects they represented (i.e. ‘Angelito’ [Little angel], ‘Africa’ or ‘Uré’). Separate colours on the walls and vinyl floor that covered the wooden decking helped create a sense of boundaries between each one of these corners-altars, which were dedicated to eight specific subjects and places, and became the highlights of the exhibition. With a few exceptions, glass cases were not used to exhibit the objects or to protect the altars.
Above, a picture of the exhibition’s scale model below shows how the hall was divided into the ‘Sacred’ and ‘Profane’ areas. At the top left, the corner for the ‘Angelito’ altar from Uré, followed by the Wake [Velorio] stage (this wall showed the ‘Burial’ stage in the final presentation of the exhibition), and then the corner with two altars from Palenque de San Basilio. Below, a screenshot from Manglerojo’s website that depicts the threshold that divided the hall.
If visitors stood on the threshold that led to the Sacred space, distributed in a clockwise sequence that began on the left, in walls and floor adjacent to the perimeter area, they would find objects, texts, videos, pictures that referred to stages of the ritual. These were the Agony on the area adjacent to the wall, a room arranged for a wake in San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina on the corner area, Death on the wall, Little angel from San José de Uré on the corner, Burial and Wake on the wall, Nine nights and Rising of the cloth altars from Palenque de San Basilio on the corner, Novena and Última noche on the wall, last night altar from Guapi on the corner, and finally Anniversary on the right side of the threshold.

From the same initial position visitors faced the Worship to the ancestors [Culto a los ancestros] altar or corner, used to show West and Central African pieces from the Bertrand collection on plinths (small metallic objects were displayed in a glass case) placed on a brown map of the African continent printed on the vinyl floor. The other three central corners were used to display objects related with patron saints’ devotions. In a clockwise direction, these were an altar to Saint Francis Assisi or San Pacho, a corner for the Baby Jesus adoration feasts, and an altar to Lady of Carmel (Virgen del Carmen). Surrounding these four corners or altars, on the floor, was a white vinyl ring featuring the names of the stages of the funerary ritual:

- Agonia, Muerte, Velorio, Entierro, Novena, Última noche, Aniversario o cabo de año

   [Agony, Death, Wake, Burial, Nine nights, Last/ninth night, Anniversary]

This ring marked a distinction: outside it, funerary rituals were exhibited, and inside it, patron saints and the African pieces from the Bertrand collection represented the ancestors of Afro-Colombians. If you stood on one of those words, and looked towards the perimeter of the Sacred area, you would see the matching text on the wall.
Two screenshots from Manglerojo’s website, showing the ‘African ancestors’ corner at the top, and the ‘Agony’ stage below. Both images show the ring on the floor that I have described, and the one below shows how the word ‘Agony’ on the floor matched the corresponding stage on the wall.
Just like paint and drywall helped differentiate the corners or altars, texts printed on plotter cut vinyl and placed on the walls described the contents and actions taking place in each corner and stage, and helped signal different moments in the funerary ritual sequence. Every stage included videos, recordings and photographs that showed related archival or fieldwork material. Every now and then visitors could hear in the background sound samples of different kinds of music that people play and sing during wakes. This music is usually the deceased person’s favourites, although no written explanation was available on the walls about that (perhaps tour-guides offered it, and certainly the exhibition catalogue did). Everyday objects like a megaphone and a mobile phone were displayed without the glass cases that were so common in other halls at the Museum. They were placed on white platforms attached to the white walls, as if left there by somebody (perhaps one of the Afro-Colombian that appeared in the pictures and videos). While these items were not to be touched by the visitors, the books mentioned above, a visitors’ comments notebook could, and toy mule and an ox from the Adoraciones feasts were there for children to play with during workshops.
Screenshots of the ‘Death’ stage (above), which shows how objects were exhibited. Below the corner for the ‘Adoration feasts to Baby Jesus,’ from northern Cauca region (below).
In fact, Velorios began not inside but outside the hall, which was ‘sacralized’ as a whole, responding to the concerns of the Afro-Colombian Culture Board. On the right side of the exhibition’s main entrance, next to three TV screens with headphones that showed videos about the setting up process and the opening-sacralization ceremony, you could read a text printed on black plotter cut vinyl on the wall which, in contradiction with the ‘Profane’ and ‘Sacred’ distinction inside, sacralized the space as a whole:

You are about to enter a sacralized space that consists of altars that have served to communicate with our ancestors. We have consecrated these to the unburied ancestors from San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina; Palenque de San Basilio; San José de Uré; Quibdó; Tumaco; Guapi and the northern plains of Cauca Department, so that through prayers, chants and respectful attitudes we help them arrive where they may not have been able to due to the armed conflict and prevailing violence which have prevented their relatives to do the ceremonies you will know about after crossing this threshold.

Big black plotter cut vinyl words were distributed above on the wall showing names used to refer to those whom the exhibition was about, including the four official categories in the name of the exhibition (Black, Afro-Colombian, Palenquero and Raizal):

Renacientes, raizales, palenqueros, morenos, mulatos, cimarrones, libres, negros, afrocolombianos, niches, comunidades negras

On the left side of the entrance was the exhibition image and title, which I have referred to above (p. 60). The wall around it was left empty for visitors to leave messages for their ancestors, which along with the visitors’ book were used as sources for the exhibition’s visitor study and for Lleras’s thesis (2011), and which I documented with photographs. At the beginning of the exhibition they wrote and stuck heartfelt thoughts to deceased relatives but as time passed they used it to write ‘x loves y,’ names or other messages.

These documents and descriptions of Velorios’s tangible features allow me to introduce the subject of this chapter which is the exhibition’s ‘political legibility’ (Macdonald, 2002). I focus on how the hierarchies of those involved in the exhibition, which I described in the Backstage chapter, were contested in and through its material forms, that I treat as its ‘frontstage.’ In Goffman’s model, the front includes different parts. First, the setting or the ‘scenic part of the expressive equipment,’ (p. 34) and second, the ‘personal front,’ which includes ‘items that we most intimately identify with the performer himself and that we naturally expect will follow the performer wherever he goes’ (ibid.). Velorios’s front was comprised of not only the materials that were exhibited in 2008 in the temporary exhibition’s hall, the hall itself and the Museum’s building, but also by the documents that some

---

2 The words renaciente [renascent] and libre [free] are used in the Pacific region to refer to Black or Afro-Colombian people, by themselves and by others. Libre makes reference to a colonial category that classified people of African descent who were not slaves because their mother was free when they were conceived, or because they bought their own freedom (process known as ‘self-manumission’) (Restrepo, 2013a: 238; Arocha, 2008a: 12).
members of the production team created that recorded that *frontstage*. By ‘documents’ here I refer to the exhibition’s archive, which includes the exhibition’s script and my own pictures and videos, as well as the exhibition’s catalogue, Mangle Rojo’s website and Lleras thesis (2011), and link them with the meetings and minutes that dealt with *museographic* issues and the interpretations that Afro-Colombian and non-Afro-Colombian visitors made of Velorios.

In this chapter I explain how Velorios produced and dealt with two layers of decontextualization of the funerary rituals of Afro-Colombians. The first one was produced by the anthropologists’ ‘ethnographic gaze.’ The second by the ‘museum effect’ that makes the quotidian spectacular (Kirshenblatt Gimblett, 1998). ‘Museographic solutions’ were used to present elements of the Afro-Colombian funerary practices that could be distressing for the Bogotá public, and therefore reinforce stereotypes, in ways that were ‘familiar’ and emotionally engaging, counteracting the ‘ethnographic gaze.’ Nevertheless, the fact that the rituals exhibited were presented as of Afro-Colombian people presented them as ‘exoticised’ by the ‘anthropological view,’ and visitors interpreted Velorios as presenting a ‘multicultural’ and idealized ‘other.’ Simultaneously, visitors connected the content of the exhibition to their own experiences of loss and grief. Just as *labelling* the project as ‘participatory’ protected it from external criticisms, the actual participation of Afro-Colombians counteracted the ‘lack of context’ or ‘museum effect’ through what was thought of as ‘return’ and ‘sacralization.’ This positioned the exhibition between the ‘real’ and the ‘non-real,’ and generated very emotional reactions (positive and negative) among visitors.

Minutes show that ‘participatory collaboration’ shaped the way that the exhibition was staged, but they also show the limits of this kind of ‘curatorship.’ During the conversations they documented the anthropologists’ and the curators’ authority, although undeniable, was undermined, which reflected in the progression of sketches and plans for the exhibition discussed during meetings. Once the exhibition opened and its catalogue was published, that authority was restored through the attribution of authorship, which undermined the capacities for participation. Building on the idea of exhibitions as documents, the materiality of the exhibition can be understood as a tangible means of acknowledgement of the (outcome of) practices and of authorship. In a sense, the tangibility of the exhibition drew attention to the Museum’s role and the hierarchies involved in the exhibition rather than the participatory ethos that had infused and inspired the exhibition in its development. The ‘legibility’ of these material forms therefore had political force in the way that people’s names can be understood as a form of acknowledgement and authorship. Although, especially when under threat, the exhibition was presented as *participatory*, and was in fact so, when the exhibition opened the contributions of those who had participated seemed to not match the ways they were acknowledged, or their ‘authorship’ in Velorios. Within this political legibility, I describe the ways that the participant’s images and names were inscribed and were or were not seen. They became *documents* of the limits of participation and reveal the politics of (in)visibility at work in Velorios.
In the visitor study made for the exhibition, to which curator Lleras contributed conducting surveys and interviews, and organizing focus groups, and that was a key source for her thesis (2011), she referred to different actions in which Afro-Colombian people were involved as forms of ‘participation’ and ‘self-representation’ (pp. 185-7). She wrote of the presence of sabedores in the research process and of the ways in which consultation had been taken into account that were considered in the exhibition’s design. She also wrote of the presence in the exhibition set up of Afro-Colombian architects from each area visited during fieldwork. They were brought to Bogotá to lead the construction of the corners-altars and the consecration ceremony that was a main part of the exhibition opening, the special events made to coincide with the exhibition, which included workshops, dance, theatre and music performances, and finally to the presence of a few Afro-Colombian tour-guides. She also considered the closing ceremony, which was led by Emigdio Cuesta, the Afro-Colombian priest and social movement leader who had been involved as a sabedor in early meetings and directed the Catholic section in the sacralization ceremony, and by teacher and sabedora Leocadia Mosquera. Lleras explained that these forms of ‘participation’ and ‘self-representation,’ although an advancement, had proved to be incomplete:

Arocha and I critiqued the fact that community members did not make the final decisions regarding the theme and the design of the exhibit; it was rather the museum staff and the anthropologists who looked to community members to validate certain decisions that had already been made [...] In the future, there would have to be more negotiation and means of direct participation. For any museum, the democratization of its activities, ranging from decision-making to interpretation, is key to its transformation. Nevertheless, participatory mechanisms should lead to incorporation strategies so that these become permanent (p. 45-6).

In the previous chapter I introduced some of the means through which this ‘validation’ took place. In this chapter, I discuss in material terms what that process signalled regarding these ‘participatory mechanisms’ that, according to Lleras’s quote above, should lead to ‘permanent incorporations.’ She wrote her thesis while she still was working at the Museum, and keeping in mind the initial reason why Velorios had begun, which was the demand that the National Museum made symbolic reparations to Afro-Colombians. But instead of following the initial proposal to create a dedicated hall, she used the exhibition as a form of research—as if following 48-91 but also for her own PhD project—to find out the ways in which Afro-Colombians wanted to be included in the Museum.

While the exhibition was still open, A&H Curator Lleras, anthropologist Botero and I met to design the travelling version of the exhibition, and in one of these meetings we discussed the surveys that were being made up to show that Afro-Colombians were a minority among the exhibition’s visitors. Lleras organized interviews and focus groups with some of them, which allowed her to understand the issues

---

3 1 October 2008.
at stake. In one of the meetings she told us the opinion that a very important Afro-Colombian leader, the founder of the organization *Cimarrón*, had of Velorios:

Juan De Dios Mosquera said to Cristina Lleras that even though he acknowledges the effort made by the Museum with the exhibition, [it] had an anthropological vision of seeing and studying the semi-savage other. He considered that it would have been very interesting and the message would have been very different, had we exhibited on the same level other forms of doing the ritual, in such a way that the funerary rituals of Afro-Colombian, Black, Raizals and Palenquero people were not exoticized by pulling them out of their context.⁴

This leader’s view, like those of other Afro-Colombian people she spoke to, showed that what had actually been *exhibited* had been an *anthropological view* of Afro-Colombians, the ‘ethnographic gaze.’ Some of the political consequences of this appear in Lleras’s thesis, where she explains that ‘a social worker very knowledgeable on issues of legislation and rights […] thought that it was important for outside anthropologists to instigate research but also deemed it important for communities to have access to knowledge production schemes. [The social worker] said it was a political discussion:

because this initiative comes from someone who is not one of us. It’s about how the others are concerned about recuperating what is ours, from their point of view. I think Jaime Arocha’s work is admirable, and there’s a sector, and I’m a part of [this sector,] that thinks that these alliances are important, but will not necessarily represent what we are. There is also a resistance to make our [culture] visible (p. 191, [a quote in the original]).

Then Lleras explains that this social worker, talking in the name of the communities to which she belonged, ‘analysed different examples where the communities have cultural assets that cannot be explored by them[elves] because they lack the tools or the access to institutional power,’ and commented:

If Jaime Arocha would not have done this, then who would have? We don’t have the means or the logistics to do this. When we want to do it [research and have access to institutions] we can’t because we are not in a position to do it (ibid.).

In spite of all the care that had been taken in acknowledging the participatory and collaborative character of the project, anthropologist Arocha remained a main voice in the process. What had gone wrong in the acknowledgement? What about *sabedores* and *sabedoras*? What had been the *political legibility* of the exhibition? This analysis signalled that control over the means for the circulation of knowledge was a key in what Lleras called ‘permanent incorporations’ or, in Mosquera’s words, for *Afro-reparations*. Within these means *authorship* is crucial, as the early work of Arocha and Friedemann that I discussed in the introduction signalled.

Political legibility and museography

In her *Behind the scenes* (2002), Macdonald proposes that in order to understand the ‘political legibility’ of exhibitions it is necessary to see it as a consequence of specific decisions taken in the process of ‘reality setting in,’ through which ideas turn ‘into a physical reality’ (p. 128) or translate ‘into the physical space’ (p. 135). She states that, ‘What often matters is the specific physical arrangement of exhibits – where they are laid out relative to others, their positioning at certain ‘key points’ and so forth (p. 186). In a similar line, Preziosi (2009) defines *museography* as including ‘elements,’ such as art history, which ‘are highly coded rhetorical tropes or linguistic devices that actively “read”, compose and allegorize the past (p. 491), and the *museum*, at its ‘most basic and generic level,’ as constituted by ‘a choreographic or spatiokinetic complement or analogue to the labour of reading a novel or newspaper, or attending a theatre or show’ (ibid.). Thus here I unfold ‘examples of what came to be politically consequential inflections, showing how they came to be progressively solidified into the exhibition space’ (Macdonald, 2002: 132).

I have already shown the power of being present in meetings. Here I want to focus specifically on the ‘museographic’ or ‘design’ decisions made during those meetings, including who was involved and how people interpreted them, and showing how meetings translated into the exhibition. Everyone in meetings had a say, but hierarchies were re-established when only Museum staff and anthropologists met to discuss design. As I have shown, the first *museographic* concern was the use of a hall to represent and make symbolic reparations for Afro-Colombian people. In regarding the exhibition as a form of affirmative action, sociologist Mosquera insisted that the exhibition had to be ‘representative’ of Afro-Colombian diversity, but should focus on those who, among them, had suffered the most from war and displacement and the acculturation it produced. The exhibition would have to represent and contextualise in specific ways. Once discussions centred on a temporary exhibition about funerary rituals the *museographic* concerns had different implications.

Lack of context: complex social relationships

From early on the people involved in this process expressed concerns that signalled a disparity between the funerary rituals that would be represented and their representation in the National Museum. In the minutes taken the day that Arocha proposed the idea to make a temporary exhibition about funerary rituals, he is quoted as saying the exhibition would be based on a wake he attended in Chocó Department, where ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ elements combined. In the following meeting, the Museum’s staff expressed their concerns about avoiding ‘scenography’ and ‘fetishizing’ the rituals as if just ‘simplified’ to a set of altars, as Arocha had proposed, because of the difficulty of representing complex social relationships. Attendees (no *sabedores* were yet present) agreed the exhibition must

---

5 9 June 2006.
signal how violence modifies the rituals, eroding the social fabric [tejido social] of the communities that practice them, which a successful representation of the rituals in the Museum would help to recuperate.\(^6\) But the new context where the rituals would be represented, an exhibition in the National Museum, would not be the context where ‘complex social relationships,’ such as the combination of ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ elements that would be represented, take place, and this could lead to prejudiced misinterpretations. According to the minutes, Arocha proposed that perhaps having people who knew about the rituals could be helpful to avoid stereotypes, and so from then on sabedores were involved in the discussions. Initially Arocha and the sabedores expressed a similar concern to that of the museum staff, which signalled a fundamental disparity between the ‘real’ and ‘performed’ funerary rituals, but not in terms of what objects (the altars) were not able to do.

‘Cantar sin muerto,’ singing without a dead body

In March 2007, the minutes describe two meetings that centred on how to appropriately represent the rituals. A different kind of ‘lack of context’ was at stake in comparison with art exhibitions like \textit{Viaje sin mapa} and the 11\textsuperscript{th} \textit{Salón nacional de artistas}. Concluding the first set of minutes, Arocha is quoted as asking for sabedores Carmen Paz, Luis Gerardo Martínez and Leocadia Mosquera to make suggestions to help the exhibition be ‘realistic and not reduce the intensity of emotions and sensations that the wake implied.’\(^7\) The minutes of the day finish by saying that, for the group, acting still seemed an inadequate solution for showing the rituals in the most realistic way possible, even if it were done by people who can ‘cantar sin muerto’ [sing without a dead body], such as those older people who have mourned relatives many times.’ In the next set of minutes, anthropologist Arocha is quoted as saying that the challenge for the exhibition was ‘to make a dignified representation of sacrality, not vulgarise it, and in that sense try that what was to be presented in the exhibition was not acted performances, and if it were, make the acting known to the public.’\(^8\) In this set of minutes, two sabedores appear as attendees in a Museum meeting for the first time. Father Emigdio Cuesta, Afro-Colombian leader and Catholic priest, was quoted in minutes saying that ‘acted reconstructions of funerals’ never transmitted ‘the sensations of a real ritual’ and Dilia Robinson, Raízal leader and public servant, stated that ‘the total reconstruction of a funeral was not possible as it was a very sensitive moment that involves feelings and sensations difficult to act.’ Attention was moved from the objects that would be decontextualized and exhibited, to the people that such exhibition would represent.

A local initiative that I could regard as a form of ‘performance’ or ‘acted reconstruction’ was also mentioned but not discussed further at the Museum, perhaps because it took place in the small town of Andagoya, in Chocó Department, far away from Bogotá: the \textit{Alabaos Festival} that has taken place

\(^6\) 3 November 2006.
\(^7\) 2 March 2007.
\(^8\) 14 March 2007.
every year since 1997, a competition between singers of *alabaos* cantors. Although it was not stated explicitly in the minutes, they might have also referenced examples such as Erwin Goggel and Esperanza Biohó’s *Del Palenque de San Basilio* film, where a *lumbalú*, the Palenquero funerary ritual, was reconstructed by Palenquero people in the town of Palenque de San Basilio and the surrounding areas. In early 2008, Lleras proposed using a photographic work about *plañideras*, women who sing and cry for a fee during funerals in the Caribbean region, but Arocha stated that the photographer did not have ethnographic information that allowed a better understanding of this practice.

*Sacred and profane*

Later on, during and after the first set of fieldtrips in mid 2007, discussions among the anthropologists led to explanations first among ourselves, then to Museum staff, to *sabedores* and later on to the exhibition visitors, that while people mourned, the house where the wake was taking place was ‘divided’ into three ‘spaces.’ In a ‘profane’ space, men, mainly, and less close attendees would gather to tell stories about the deceased, chat, drink, play board and card games, gossip and joke. A ‘sacred’ space would be comprised of a room with the coffin and the body or an altar in honour of the dead person, which would be surrounded by people praying, chanting and, in San Basilio de Palenque, also dancing. Finally, the kitchen would be a ‘semi-profane’ (or semi-sacred) space, where food would be prepared to be distributed among the wake attendees. This resonated with distinctions that *sabedores* made in their own writings, which Luis Gerardo Martínez labelled as between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the house, and Dilia Robinson as between ‘sacred’ and ‘pagan.’ But in the wakes we attended, it was precisely the lack of permanent distinctions between such ‘spaces’ that made these funerary rituals ‘different.’ The *leko* or the *alabaos*, songs that women, usually, sing around the corpse or in front of the altar can be heard from outside the house. At certain moments the chatting and joking will cease or increase and be heard all over the place, people move from one place to the other, sometimes joining one activity, sometimes another. Drinking and eating takes place everywhere too.

*Stereotypes and brujería*

In an early meeting *sabedora* Leocadia Mosquera remembered that when she was a child ‘people had to hide to carry out the wakes with chants and *alabaos*, as in Quibdó and its surroundings [where she had been born and grown up] this was prohibited by the priests,’ and even the police would hinder them. For other Afro-Colombian people these practices had simply disappeared, been forgotten or even never known at all. Carmen Paz’s words quoted earlier make it evident that exhibiting funerary rituals might be associated with ‘witchcraft.’

In April 2008, four months before the exhibition’s opening, the team discussed its general structure and the way altars would be displayed. One of the subjects discussed was the idea that the exhibition would display non-orthodox religious practices that could be reduced to mere witchcraft by the
The film *Perro come perro* (‘Dog eats dog’) was released that month, and Lleras used it as an example of the kinds of things other people did (in this case a film director and producers) that the exhibition must avoid. Apart from Lleras, none of the meeting’s attendees had seen the movie, but at least Arocha did afterwards, and he later dedicated two of his fortnightly columns in *El Espectador* newspaper to criticizing its stereotypical portrayal of Black and Afro-Colombian people. *Perro come perro* was set in the cities of Cali and Buenaventura, which have dense Afro-Colombian populations, and among other characters it depicted a Black woman from Chocó department as a *bruja* [witch] who uses a man’s corpse to harm the person who killed him (an action I later learnt is ‘secreto,’ a secret), and a Black man as a tough, evil and unbeatable hitman, therefore staging another stereotype, that which associates Black men with extraordinary strength. Decisions would have to be made in relation to a very specific kind of visitor ‘[…] somebody who’s never seen anything like this,’ and ways had to be found to explain that the relationship with the dead that the exhibition wanted to portray was not ‘witchcraft,’ but a particular way of expressing ‘conviviality with the spirits of the dead,’ present in life through dreams, or in signs that foretell death such as the presence of black butterflies in the house or of certain birds singing, ‘[…] which begins before the agony [stage]; those signs, which have a context, […] that belief, or feeling, that the dead don’t just leave.’

That day, Miss Dilia, the Raizal representative, asked if a coffin would be exhibited in the San Andrés Islands corner. An ‘altar’ would ‘represent’ each of the other areas visited during fieldwork, but, as it was not customary to make altars among Raizal people, she wondered how the objects for their place-corner would be arranged. Lleras replied (she hesitatingly called this ‘a museographic solution’) that objects would be placed in ‘a completely different setting,’ with photographs and videos to help them ‘not be completely decontextualized,’ (as if replying here to her own and Arocha’s earlier concerns about a lack of context) and allow us to see the use people make of them. Also, written explanations would help explain the objects. So there would be two kinds of spaces, Lleras continued explaining, ‘reconstructions,’ like the corner of a house, but also others that would not be reconstructions but would ‘allow us to see all the elements that refer to the moments [momentos] of the ritual [rito].’

**The ‘script’ of the exhibition**

The involvement of people ‘who know about funerary rituals,’ the fieldwork trips and the ‘Representatives Critical Visit,’ in September 2007, widened the design concerns Museum staff had

---

9 17 April 2008.


11 29 April 2008 (Minutes and sound recording).

12 Ibid.
with ‘avoiding scenography’ and ‘fetishizing,’ with how to ‘transmit the meanings to the public.’ A new dimension of ‘collaborative participation’ in the curatorship of the exhibition, where the curator-audience distinction was blurring again. Later on concerns were focused on finding ways to ‘include them all, how to make them see and feel themselves represented and how to make evident the tensions and realities of Afro and Raizal people in the country.’ In a later meeting, Lleras is quoted as saying that fragments of interviews from the field were to be included in the exhibition so that ‘it is people from the regions who talk and explain the sense of things.’

But after the first set of field trips and the meeting with community representatives took place, when regular Museum meetings resumed, no sabedores or Ministry representatives attended until the beginning of 2008. This period was dedicated to selecting materials that would be included in the exhibition based on what had been collected during fieldwork: mainly videos, photographs and sound recordings. Also to begin writing the catalogue, where it would be made clear what places and subjects were not included in the exhibition and why. Arocha led the analysis with the assistance of anthropologist Botero. By then, the subject of the exhibition broadened to include Catholic patron saints after the visit to Northern Cauca. Visits to Palenque and to San José de Uré (both located in the continental Caribbean region, which was at that point ‘under-represented’), as well as another visit to Northern Cauca to document the Adorations to Baby Jesus feasts, the following February, were planned and later on made.

In the minutes of meetings that took place after fieldwork, Lleras is quoted as explaining that it was necessary to create a ‘matrix’ that crossed ‘information and objects with regions and stages’ so as to know ‘on what resources we can count on, what we need, and what objects we must bring, buy, commission or rent.’ This matrix was another kind of documentary cluster that gathered other documents, including the objects and information collected during fieldwork. Later on, as I will show, this document of documents was worked and re-worked to create the exhibition ‘script,’ but was also fed with pictures—visual documents of the final presentation of Velorios. The abstract exhibition began to materialize in lists of objects that represented the stages of the funerary ritual and the places visited. ‘The phases of the ritual that have more objects to show are the wake, the novena and the anniversary [cabo de año] with the worship to the saints; the phases of agony and death could be represented with pictures, without being morbid,’ somebody said during a discussion between Vanegas, Lleras, Arocha and Botero in November 2007. Arocha stated what objects must be included: a canoe, a balsada or the altar for a saint, the songs and games of gualíes, pabellones, a religious songs’ notebook, and traditional (wood and leather) instruments would be exhibited with plastic ones. The

13 Representatives meeting, September 2007.
14 1 November 2007.
15 3 April 2008.
16 9 October 2007.
challenge for him, according to the minutes, was ‘to make these objects narrate what people have said through time so that they don’t become cultural industries.’

But these were not the only challenges. On 6 November 2007, Lleras, Arocha, Vanegas and Botero met with historian Adriana Maya, who would be ‘in charge of giving a historic vision to the display and to add the Bertrand carvings collection to the ethnographic part, so as to make the bridge between Africa and America.’ Historian Maya had first been quoted in the minutes of the academics’ ‘critical visit’ that took place in February 2007. After Arocha summarized the developments of the project, the minutes of the November meeting continue as follows:

[Adriana Maya] highlighted that most of the pieces from the Bertrand collection are Bantu. In spite of this, many of the traces of Africanness present in the funerary rituals are Yoruba, and this presents an even bigger challenge to the exhibition. [She] signalled how important it was that the exhibition show the Afro’s immense creativity, and their capacity to adapt to adverse circumstances and devastating spaces, and asked how it would be possible to make the exhibition visitors see, in the present day altars and tumbas, the ruptures, adaptations and interpretations, but also the permanences of very ancient traditions brought from Africa by the captives and kept by their descendants. Among these traditions, both researchers [Arocha and Maya] mentioned the relationship between saints-living-deceased, and emphasized the importance of visitors understanding this spiritual dimension and comprehend that, for them [Afros], patron saints are dead people, and that’s why they also make tumbas for [patron saints]. Similarly it is very important to show the effects of the Christianization among Afro people and the appropriations that they have made of religion through the years, so that, among other things, the general public understand that behind the images of Catholic patron saints, Afros see other things, and invoke something else, because the Christian epistemology allowed African continuities.

This was the same day that Esperanza Biojó’s disagreement with the exhibition was discussed, and Maya expressed her own concern that people might not agree with ‘death revealed in the public scene’ as it would imply showing intimacy and the painful past. To this, Arocha replied that sabedora Leocadia Mosquera had stated that it was time for ‘secrets’ to be revealed in a respectful and responsible way.

Copied in the minutes for a meeting that took place at the end of January 31 2008 is a scan of a plan that anthropologist Arocha hand-drew in one of the small notebooks he would usually carry with him, which I showed in the Backstage chapter. By then, the meeting with the Minister of Culture had already taken place and El Dipló had published sociologist Mosquera’s article. According to the minutes of the day, ‘this [drawing] made it possible to discuss what objects would go in each space. One possibility would be that each region represented a phase of the ritual.’ Arocha’s design represented the sequence by stages that he had developed during fieldtrips in mid-2007 and which reminded of his description of a wake from 1997. This became the basic structure that organized the exhibition design and, as it makes evident, proposed to integrate the ‘devotion to saints’ (such as the Adoration to Baby

---

17 1 November 2007.
Jesus feast from Northern Cauca region that the people interviewed and recorded preferred to be represented with, rather than funerary rituals, which are no longer practiced in the traditional way) within the cycle of the funerary ritual, and stage it in one single space with the ‘contexts of change and modernization’ and the ‘cartography.’ In the following meeting, Arocha proposed that the African pieces from the Bertrand collection would go in the central module so that people would see them first when they entered the exhibition.  

18

18 6 March 2008.
Below the hand-drawn plan the minutes read:

Corners (numbers 2 to 5) and central module (numbers 1, 6, 7 and 8): stages of the ritual

Walls A, B and C: Contexts of change and modernization

Cartography

Number 9: Table for consultation books
From the minutes of 3 April, different people’s input began to modify, little by little, Arocha’s proposal. The 3 April meeting was the first meeting since December 2007 that sabedoras Carmen Paz, Leocadia Mosquera and Dilia Robinson attended, although three more meetings had been documented in between. That day, a discussion was described between them and curator Cristina Lleras, anthropologist Jaime Arocha and historian Adriana Maya, about how to exhibit the ‘historical context’ and the ‘contexts of modernity and cultural resistance’ that the exhibition must show, for example, whether these ‘contexts’ should spread throughout the exhibition or be separated by only one wall. The anthropologists had designed another scheme for some of these ‘contexts’ and the discussion it triggered only revealed the difficulty of ‘representing complex social relationships’ in the exhibition.

In April 2008, Lleras told anthropologists Arocha, Botero and González, and sabedoras Paz, Robinson and Mosquera that during the meeting that she had attended with the Afro-Colombian Culture Board at the Ministry of Culture, Esperanza Biojó ‘mentioned the words ‘to sacralize,’ but she did not go deeper into the subject.’ The minutes continue by quoting Arocha, who ‘commented that he had been recently thinking to sacralize the exhibition with a consecration and homage [reconocimiento] to the unburied dead people [muertos sin sepulcro] and, at the same time, to denounce the genocide and ethnocide of the recent past.’ In a later meeting, between Arocha, Botero, myself and Lleras, Lleras shared a suggestion made for the ‘contexts’ by Juan Darío Restrepo, one of the curators in the Arts and History Curatorship, who would many times overhear our conversations because his desk was right next to the table we used for our meetings. He proposed we used one of the walls of the exhibition to project videos and photographs with texts to contextualize the images.

On 29 May, less than three months from the opening, the minutes describe a concern that anthropologist Ramiro Delgado conveyed to the members of the team. He was a scholar from Antioquia University who had attended the ‘critical visit’ with academics in February 2007, had participated in part of the fieldtrip to Palenque de San Basilio, and was acknowledged for his work in that town. Members of that community disagreed with the idea of exhibiting funerary altars, because they thought that a re-creation of an altar that Palenquero teacher Moraima Simarra did for Luis Gerardo Martínez and me in Palenque was related to some recent deaths there, and had constituted, the table feared, a sacrilege. I documented the making of this simulated altar by taking pictures and shooting video, in a similar way to how anthropologists Arocha and Moreno had done so some months earlier. Nevertheless, Martínez, who was the Palenquero representative in the regular meetings, disagreed with Delgado, as did Simarra, who would in fact be the Palenquero altars’ architect in the temporary exhibition and was one of the daughters of ‘Señor,’ acknowledged in the town for her knowledge on funerary rituals. As a way to respond to this concern, the group decided to send letters to the places visited in fieldtrips to ask for authorization to build altars in the exhibition and to propose

---

19 After this meeting historian Maya stopped attending and did not respond to calls.

20 29 April 2008.
that it would be sacralized. In Palenque’s case the addressee was the Consejo comunitario, the local main government council, which replied in a positive way. In all other places different institutions had given this authorization, depending on who had been contacted during fieldtrips.

In the same meeting, anthropologist Juan Pablo Moya, who would lead the group of tour-guides and who had not participated in fieldtrips, proposed to create a separation at the bottom of the exhibition hall to provide a darker space for two projections that would be used for the ‘contexts.’ Lleras considered this division appropriate because ‘in this way we emphasize both the importance of the altars and of the contexts, and so the visitor doesn’t have to choose in the same room what to pay more attention to.’ On the 10 June, anthropologist Moya, who had previous training in architecture and design, sent a set of plans for the exhibition beginning with a map copied from Google maps which located the exhibition in the Museum (in green) and the Museum in the city of Bogotá:
Here I reproduce two images of Moya's plans for the exhibition. Below, the hall located with in a plan of the Museum. Below, a plan of the exhibition with the division at the back of the hall.
Following Lleras’s request, the Head of the Museography Division began to attend meetings as the exhibition opening approached. When the group meeting had to consider more precise decisions about the location and distribution of the different elements the exhibition was to be composed of (the altars, the contexts, history, geography, the meaning of objects and the ‘voices’ and images of the protagonists of the rituals) and its final look, Amparo Carrizosa (professional designer and Head of the Museography Division) and Juan Darío Restrepo (professional communicator and curator at the Arts and History Curatorship), both young, urban and non-Afro or Black, led these meetings, which began two months before the exhibition’s opening. Their criteria were expressed in terms such as not overloading the temporary exhibition, adequately explaining why objects stood where they did, keeping symmetry, and considering the little space available, all of which was based in what the Museography Division and the A&H Curatorship had experienced regarding ‘what had worked’ and what had not for the visitors of previous exhibitions. As in earlier meetings, a lot of discussion was dedicated to determining ways to ‘not confuse’ the visitor, so instead of a coffin, to ‘avoid morbidly,’ the solution proposed was to ‘write a card with the typology of the different kinds of coffins about which people talked to us in the field [during fieldtrips].’

In the first meeting that Carrizosa attended, which none of the sabedoras did, curatorship assistant Restrepo suggested that the ‘Profane’ space be set at the front of the hall, after the entrance, as if it were the front yard of the house, providing the ‘contexts’ in a projection on one of the walls and creating expectancy ‘towards what was behind the division,’ and also to receive visitors who would then enter the ‘Sacred’ space with the tumbas or funerary altars. Although Arocha disagreed with this, arguing that the African pieces must be the first thing that visitors saw, the group eventually agreed that the ‘Profane’ space would be at the entrance. Furthermore, during that conversation, the idea of separating the ‘contexts of modernization’ from the ‘cartography’ in two projections arose. The next day, designer Carrizosa sent a set of possible plans to curator Lleras, which she forwarded to Arocha, Botero and me to comment on and choose from. Arocha’s hand-drawn plan for the exhibition had by now become a hall-scale computer-drawn plan designed first by anthropologist Moya and then by Head Museographer Carrizosa, and by 19 June the exhibition had been given a new provisional title: *Living ancestors: dead people unburied by the war*. This plan, like the much more detailed script with lists of objects that matched it on an Excel document, a selection made from the ‘matrix’ Lleras talked about months earlier, circulated and was discussed among the members of the curatorship team by email and during meetings, the preferred way in which to discuss the exhibition with sabedoras. On 3 July, a three-dimensional model of the exhibition was ready, and it was used from then on during the

---


22 June 11 2008.

23 Only small changes to the general distribution from this 19 June version were introduced in the final model: the Anniversary was staged right next to the Guapi corner and the two projections in the Profane space were projected towards the centre of the walls.
meetings to discuss with sabedoras and among the group in general what would go where with precision. This model was used during further meetings to re-organize the contents of the exhibition and to check, with sabedoras, that everything looked OK. By then, Arocha’s original scheme, which reflected his (and also historian Maya’s) views on the cyclic character of the funerary rituals, cycles that integrated the ‘profane’ and the ‘sacred,’ and Catholic patron saints as dead relatives, had literally been spread and re-distributed after sabedoras, Afro-Colombian leaders, and other anthropologist and museum staff had a say during the conversations.
This is an image of the computer-drawn plan for the exhibition that members of the Museography division presented to the meeting group.
The exhibition: sacred and profane

In fact, ‘reconstructions’ of altars were made and ‘acted reconstructions’ of the rituals were included as part of the exhibition, along with the ‘museographic’ solutions, text, video, sound recordings and pictures thought to provide the context necessary to understand those reconstructions. The eight ‘corners’ where the exhibition highlights were exhibited looked like fragments of houses; dioramas open for people to walk through. The exhibition was between the sacred and the profane.

Inauguration: sacralization

During the exhibition’s opening, it was not the sabedores or sabedoras who were acknowledged but the corner’s or altar’s architects, and a ninth night altar was dedicated to Orlando Fals Borda. It was a political act and a sort of religious ceremony (Emigdio Cuesta is a priest and an activist). In spite of the intention to make visible the making-of process as part of the exhibition, apart from father Emigdio Cuesta none of the sabedores or any other attendees to the Museum meetings spoke.

The exhibition entrance was free of charge and so too its inauguration on the evening of 21 August 2008. I remember the excitement. My memories become stronger when watching the pictures and the video I shot that day and later edited to be played some weeks later next to the entrance of the exhibition. The Museum Director and the Dean of the National University’s Human Sciences Faculty opened the event with protocolary speeches outside the exhibition, in the Museum’s lobby, which were followed by what had been planned to work as an ecumenical sacralization ceremony: speeches by a Protestant pastor, a Catholic priest and a Cuban Santería babalao. First spoke the pastor. A Raiz al pastor that Miss Dilia knew was going to lead the Protestant section, but he cancelled at the last minute. Instead, a more orthodox non-Raizal dedicated his talk to explaining how terrible and scary death was. Then two priests from the Afro-Colombian pastoral, including Emigdio Cuesta, made what looked more like a pep talk with fists raised to the audience and all. Here’s what the congregation said (including myself):

To each one of us that we begin to ask to the male and female ancestors and to the natural forces [las fuerzas de la naturaleza] that they move away from us the prejudices, discrimination, racism, that be this a cry against the abandonment of our peoples, from this place, and with this symbolic act, we raise our voices… [sic]

Against so many dead innocent people (and the public-congregation: ‘we are present’)

Against the lack of state policies for our peoples

Against war and violence

Against discrimination and corruption

Against forced displacement
Against historic exclusion

Against the presence of armed actors in our territories

Against indifference

Against the lack of solidarity
Still from the lobby's video of the exhibition inauguration
Then the priests and the **architects**, with incense in hand, led the crowd to the entrance of the exhibition and opened it officially. Inside, the Cuban babalao had set an altar next to the ‘African ancestors’ corner, where people could receive a blessing. The hall was full of incense smoke and people taking pictures, shooting video, playing the piano and singing in the San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina corner. In his speech, the National University’s Faculty of Human Sciences Dean had stated that the exhibition paid homage to the recently deceased sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, whose ninth night coincided with the opening ceremony, and Mrs. Ligia Pinillos, the Guapi corner-altar’s architect, led a ‘symbolic’ last night for Fals Borda with **alabaos**, which some of the attendees joined in on. Sometime later, to her surprise and annoyance, Mrs. Pinillos was told the last night had to stop. It was not customary for the National Museum to remain open until sunrise, when ninth or last night rituals [**última noche** or **última novena**], like the ones the research team had attended during fieldtrips, would typically finish, with prayers, chants, eating and drinking leading to disassembling the altar or **tumba**, and saying a last good bye to their deceased relatives. The opening ceremony was a ritual and an ‘acted’ performance: the priest and pastor did not speak to a necessarily religious ‘congregation,’ and a ninth night ended suddenly, before it was properly finished as far as **architect** Mrs. Pinillos was concerned.

As architects insisted it was not appropriate that a last night altar did not have a name, and as the day of the exhibition’s inauguration coincided with the ninth night after sociologist Orlando Fals Borda passed away, Arocha proposed that the Guapi corner-altar was named after him. Fals Borda was not an Afro-Colombian, but was acknowledged as the author of Participant Action Research (PAR) methodology, and one of the founders of what is now the National University’s Human Sciences Faculty. Although the exhibition was sacralized as a whole by the ceremony and its accompanying texts described above, the temporary exhibitions hall was divided into a ‘Profane’ and a ‘Sacred’ space, in the way I described at the beginning of the chapter.

**Closing ceremony**

At the end of Velorios there was a sort of funerary ritual. It finished on 3 November 2008 with a public ceremony in the National Museum that was less formal, more improvised and smaller than the inauguration, led again by Emigdio Cuesta, along with some of the members of the curatorship team, a few teachers who had participated in different activities during the exhibition and a few other attendees. We toured the exhibition, stopping at each corner-altar, where Father Emigdio encouraged us to sing, say a word for the ancestors or share any thought we wanted to. When it finished, the closing ceremony turned into an unusual (for museum staff) exhibition dismantling that evoked the 'levantamiento del paño' [raising the cloth], ‘quitar los lutos’ [taking the adornments], and ‘desarmar/levantar la tumba’ [to dismantle/clear the grave-altar] which we knew was the final stage of the wake or **velorio**. Mrs. Leocadia Mosquera, the **sabedora** from Chocó Department who had participated in meetings since the end of 2006, had the last say on which objects could be kept and re-
used and which were to be discarded, particularly the ones from the last-night tumba in the Guapi corner, which in a real ceremony require particular care and vigilance from those who lead songs [cantoares] and prayers [rezanderos]. In fact, some of these objects were included in the travelling version of Velorios, to which I dedicate the following chapter.

Political (in)visibility

The minutes show that in Velorios curatorship and museography worked together in promoting the idea of participation, and that this undermined the ideas that Arocha proposed by physically splitting a ‘cluster of phenomena’ that originally combined the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane,’ and ethnography, geography and history. According to Lleras’s analysis, visitors mainly engaged with the ‘altars’ or ‘corners’ in Velorios. It is possible to think that the way space was organized affected their interpretations.

In order to make the exhibition ‘familiar,’ the hall was made to look like a house where a wake or ritual was taking place, separating the ‘front yard’ from the rest of the ‘house.’ To make messages ‘clear’ walls were placed to separate historical, economic and political ‘contexts,’ presented in the ‘profane’ area, with dimmer light that allowed the projections to be seen. But most visitors did not see these and instead engaged with the ‘sacred rituals,’ in a bigger area that was well illuminated and where all the ‘exhibited’ objects were displayed. In that ‘sacred area,’ to respect Afro-Colombians’ views on the difference between devotion to patron saints and death rituals, a more subtle distinction was made by placing funerary altars or ‘corners’ and ‘stages’ around the hall’s perimeter, and the ‘festive’ patron saints in the centre, where West and Central African ‘carvings,’ metal work, masks and musical instruments were exhibited on pedestals and in their own ‘corner.’ This meant that the crucial connections between the funerary rituals of Afro-Colombians, and patron saints devotions (‘the moving ceremony for the dead to become living saints’ that linked patron saints, the living and the dead), with African beliefs, were physically contradicted. In fact, according to Lleras’s analysis, for the exhibition visitors the connections between funerary rituals, African ancestry, historic discrimination and racism, and the more recent consequences of armed conflict among Afro-Colombians remained invisible.

The ‘political legibility’ among non-Afro-Colombian visitors (the majority of the audience) also meant that they perceived Afro-Colombians as the ‘multicultural’ and idealized ‘other.’ Curator Lleras explained in her analysis that in fact what they saw was not so far from orthodox Catholic practices, and when it was, visitors misunderstood it. For example, some of them said that they were struck by the Angelito ceremony, represented with a colourful installation and described in the text as ‘joyful’ [alegre], which was what the meeting attendees precisely wanted to avoid. Among Afro-Colombians

24 The ‘angelito’ or ‘little angel’ refers to the funerary ritual for babies and children, called bunde, chigualo or gualí, nowadays in disuse (during fieldwork carried out for the exhibition we did not witness any). One of the main
(the minority of the audience), an acknowledged Afro-Colombian leader considered that the ‘anthropological’ view exhibited in Velorios exoticized Afro-Colombian people, and an acknowledged Afro-Colombian social worker considered that they did not necessarily felt represented with the views that appeared in the exhibition. The ways that the ‘participants’ in this project were acknowledged, that is, recognized for the work they did, and how this recognition took place was also key in this political interpretation of the exhibition. It was a mixture of different forms of acknowledgement that included authorship, crediting and paying homage. If participation had undermined hierarchical structures of knowledge—and by extension of race, geography and gender—acknowledgement and authorship re-established these hierarchies.

**Reading acknowledgement**

Participation in *Velorios y santos vivos* was acknowledged in the exhibition in the ‘credits’ section that was located next to the exhibition’s exit, in the ‘profane’ area. As I explained, the light was dimmer in this area, so it is possible that many visitors did not see it. The nineteen pictures portrayed most of the people who participated in the curatorship process, including anthropologists, museum staff from the A&H curatorship, *sabedores*, the group that participated in the ‘communities representatives critical visit’ and the *architects*, along with their names and short descriptions of their backgrounds and how they had participated in the exhibition. According to the minutes, Lleras had proposed during meetings the idea of this set of pictures, as a way to make evident the making-of process behind the exhibition (again transgressing the boundary between the ‘backstage’ and the ‘frontstage’), denaturalizing it, and showing that it had not appeared magically but through the efforts of many people. She explained that, according to museum studies literature, this was something that usually remains hidden, and is one of the main criticisms made of ethnographic exhibitions. This was another challenge: transmitting that process, showing that the result is only one possible narrative, that it is not the only way to see the subject and that other people might have met and done it a different way. But missing from the pictures were people who had also been part of the process, like sociologist Mosquera, or like the Ministry representatives that attended initial meetings and the academics that had attended a ‘critical visit’ in February 2007. The other way in which the ‘backstage’ was displayed in the exhibition was in the videos that showed the set up and inauguration ceremony, placed outside the temporary exhibition’s hall, on the right side of the entrance. These videos were edited and displayed some days after the inauguration, but the visitor surveys did not enquire if visitors saw them or the credits pictures.

---


particularities of this ritual was the use of percussion instruments, singing, as well as the *bundeo*, a sort of dance led by the baby’s godparents where they rocked the corpse and passed it on to other relatives. The altar, made by a group of people from San José de Uré, a town in the Caribbean region, in Córdoba Department, was, as was customary, very colourful, and the only one in the whole exhibition that included an actual small coffin with a brown-skin doll dressed up in white, again, as was customary, according to this corner’s *arquitects*. 

--- 

25 29 April 2008.
As mentioned above, the final section of the catalogue was dedicated to reflections about the research process. There, sociologist Mosquera’s participation was only acknowledged in Lleras’ article about the exhibition’s ‘Behind the scenes.’ Luis Gerardo Martínez and Dilia Robinson had produced their own research and texts about funerary rituals, which they shared with the attendees of the meetings, but only sabedora Robinson co-authored an article with anthropologist Botero, while the other sabedores voices appeared in a transcribed conversation. Eight pages in the catalogue were used to acknowledge, thank and credit people for the work they had done in the temporary exhibition, but the catalogue’s copyright is of the National Museum of Colombia and the Ministry of Culture. Arocha and Lleras appear as coordinators of research, heading the credits section of the catalogue, followed by all other participants in the curatorship process, acknowledged as members of the ‘Permanent seminar.’ The catalogue’s contents also relate to the meetings and the exhibition. Anthropologists and Lleras led the writing that was afterwards circulated among all the ‘museum meetings’ attendees. Sabedora Robinson’s authorship of the text about spirituality in San Andrés Islands was only acknowledged in the minutes. Lleras and Arocha attended all meetings. Sabedora Leocadia Mosquera authored a text about patron saint San Pacho, which was included in the exhibition with her name.

The inauguration can also be seen as a form of acknowledgement, but with the exception of Father Emigdio Cuesta, sabedores did not appear as central figures. Instead, architects were invited to open the exhibition doors and speeches were made by the Museum Director and the National University’s Human Sciences Faculty Dean. On the other hand, in spite the fact that the text next to the entrance consecrated the altars exhibited to the ‘unburied ancestors’ of Afro-Colombians, the last night tumba in the Guapi corner was dedicated to sociologist Orlando Fals Borda. In Arocha’s column in El Espectador with which I began this thesis he did not include the names of younger anthropologists or of the sabedoras or sabedores, even though some of them had also participated in the setup. A lot of care was put into acknowledging the people who appeared in pictures, and their skills or professions, using their personal names and trying to keep their local dialects, like cantaora instead of cantadora or cantante [singer], or embalsamadora [person who embalms] or chasque, a local name in some parts of the Pacific region for people who spread the word that somebody died. But while this was intended to respect vernacular words, it also made stronger the idea of difference. Velorios made Afro-Colombian people visible by stressing their ‘difference’ as members of Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero communities, who come from regions other than Bogotá. Furthermore, in this exhibition Afro-Colombian people were not acknowledged as authors of the altars (as are artists like Liliana Angulo and her work in the book Afro-reparaciones or in the exhibition Viaje sin mapa). Instead, they were architects that ‘helped in the representation of a corner,’ ‘made’ or ‘built,’ ‘designed’ and/or ‘reproduced an altar’ that somebody else designed. Afro-Colombians were not acknowledged as curators of the exhibition either, instead, they were sabedores, ‘representatives’ of the places where they had been born or ‘members of the permanent seminar.’

In spite of all the efforts made in the project to acknowledge people’s participation, not everyone’s participation and authorship were acknowledged in the same way. The length of the project, its
ambitious objectives and the number of people involved made the attribution of responsibility and the acknowledgement of the work and effort they invested a source of constant debate, care and misunderstanding. In 2011 we invited sabedoras Dilia Robinson, Leocadia Mosquera and Carmen Paz to a meeting at the Museum. We wanted to discuss a new exhibition project. Dilia Robinson expressed how she felt disappointed and unrecognized by the Museum when she heard that Jaime Arocha had been paid for the exhibition, while none of them had. She insisted it was not really the money that produced her disappointment, but feeling that her knowledge and that of the other members of the group had been appreciated in different ways by the Museum. Why was Arocha’s work worth paying for and theirs not? On the other hand, anthropologist Arocha also stated several times that the Museum never properly acknowledged the work and experience he invested in this project. He knew about other exhibition projects where ‘invited’ curators, who did similar work to what he had done, got paid much more than he had. The minutes show that several times he raised as one of the subjects to be discussed a sort of exchange between institutions, in this case between the National Museum or the Ministry of Culture and the National University, so that he could dedicate part of his teaching hours to the project. This exchange never took place. Furthermore, he had used his own cameras and computers to take and process pictures during fieldwork, but similarly to the catalogue’s copyright, it is the National Museum that kept the ownership rights over those pictures. This institutional ‘authorship’ is similar to the label ‘Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquero,’ which appears in the full title of the exhibition, as something between a proper name and copyright.

**Frontstage conclusion**

After the temporary exhibition, collaborative participation became an agenda that superseded the concerns expressed thus far about the exhibition in terms of curatorship and museography, which were included in the structure of the travelling version of Velorios. Anthropologist Arocha was not involved in this new phase of the project apart from attending one meeting. The extensive visual documentation that recorded the materials arranged in the space of the exhibition hall, set the conditions for its further continuity and circulation. After the temporary exhibition about funerary rituals, thought of as a means to ‘rescue’ and to ‘begin a conversation,’ instead of Afro-reparations in the form of a dedicated hall, ‘participatory mechanisms [that] should lead to incorporation strategies so that these become permanent’ were on the agenda (Lleras, 2011). In an interview I did with curator Lleras in 2009, she explained that the budget for the Museum version had been around 480 million Colombian pesos (around £130,000), which was mostly spent on the organized events accompanying the exhibition, most of which were produced by Afro-Colombian people from different places around the country and Bogotá. This made the exhibition one of the most expensive ones organized at the Museum. Most of this money, if not all, came from public funds provided by the Ministry of Culture while, as I explained, Afro-Colombian Minister Moreno was in charge. Like bringing architects to Bogotá from the regions represented, the events that took place accompanying Velorios showed a new dimension of the notion of ‘return’ and ‘reparation’ in the project. All of the architects had been
contacted during fieldtrips or through sabedores, and some of them organized or helped organize local versions of Velorios.

The play La Tunda was another example of an acted reconstruction of a funerary ritual of a baby or child, an angelito, but unlike the acted lumbalú in the film Del Palenque de San Basilio, it was a play based on local oral tradition created and performed by the dance, theatre and musical group TUMAC, from Tumaco, a port town on the Southern Pacific coast, near the border with Ecuador. Arocha had documented a performance during the fieldtrip in 2007 and I edited the video produced, which was included in the temporary exhibition and then performed at the Museum as one of its special events. Some of the pictures Arocha took were included in the catalogue (p. 47) and in the travelling version. Members of that group were a key part of the exhibition: Mr. Francisco Tenorio, an old acquaintance of Arocha, artist and Afro-Colombian leader known to the curatorship team for his role in the maintenance of traditions developed with his wife and other relatives and friends. Mr. Tenorio attended the representatives meeting in September 2007 at the National Museum. Wisman Tenorio, a younger member of TUMAC, was the architect in charge of the Tumaco corner in the temporary exhibition, dedicated to the Virgin of Carmel, and as he proved to be very skilful with his floral arrangements, he also helped arrange other sections of the exhibition. In 2009, they both helped organize the Tumaco version of the travelling version of Velorios, ‘the Itinerante.’
Screenshot of Velorios’s ‘script’ with pictures from fieldtrips and from the hall at the Museum. On the left, from top to bottom, the categories *Esquina: Archipiélago Raízal* [Raízal archipelago], *Muerte* [Death] and *Velorio de angelito* [Wake of a little angel, or child]. It began as a ‘matrix’ where lists of objects and subjects organized the information collected in the curatorship process. Once the exhibition was setup, curatorship and museography were documented in a self-sufficient ‘script,’ and pictures replaced objects and video.
Chapter 4: Travelling *Wakes and living saints*
On the previous page, I have pasted a screenshot of the webpage that the then National Museum’s webmaster created in 2010 for the travelling version of Velorios y santos vivos.¹ I provided him with texts, pictures and other materials that he used to design a ‘microsite’ [micrositio] linked to the Museum’s travelling exhibition’s page in its official website. The screenshot features a picture I took in 2010, when I travelled to Buenaventura (Valle Department), Colombia’s biggest port on the Pacific Coast, and one of the places that had not been included in the fieldtrips made in 2007-8 in spite of its high Afro-Colombian population. In the picture appears a group of people who posed for me, smiling in front of the panels and next to the velorio [wake] altar that they had recreated in the chapel of Ladrilleros, a coastal town that belongs to Buenaventura. I met them during a visit I made to pick up the banners and other objects that the organization in charge of this version of the exhibition, the Buenaventura office of the CEPAC Centro de Pastoral Afro-Colombiana [Afro-Colombian Pastoral Centre] had set up in May and June. From the web page, digital versions of the panels can be accessed online by clicking on the ‘what objects travel?’ [¿QUÉ VIAJA?] tab below the exhibition’s title,² reinforcing the intention that this project and its products are public and widely available. Of course this was provided that the interested member of the public had an internet connection and a computer, and that the webpage worked properly.

The temporary and travelling version of the exhibition were articulated through several personal and institutional projects. Some of them, as the screenshot shows, literally linked to the temporary exhibition project. At the time I wrote this thesis, this webpage was still functioning, but only the links it provided to the Museum’s home page and to the exhibition’s materials were still active. It did not provide links to other related materials and webpages produced in and outside of Bogotá. The webpage makes visible the National Museum’s and other national institutions’ efforts, but not those of local institutions. This screenshot thus documents the Museum’s view and investment in the travelling exhibition project.

This screenshot is also a document that is part of the Museum’s archive, but it links with other clusters of documents produced outside the Museum. This link appears in the set of buttons on the right. The top button links to the website designed for the temporary exhibition. The button below linked to Moya and Mangerojo’s virtual version of Velorios, which I used in the previous chapter. The ‘Exposición Temporal’ button links to the official website of the temporary exhibition that opened in 2008 at the Museum. The ‘Exposición permanente’ button was supposed to link to the area of the first floor halls where the Bertrand pieces were displayed before Velorios. This link was never set, and neither was the one for the button below it, which was supposed to link to the separate project that the Education

Division carried out with the travelling exhibition. Nevertheless, a website was indeed created for that project, also maintained by MangleRojo.\footnote{http://manglerojo.org/desarrollo/ancestros-vivos/, accessed 8 October 2015.}

The screenshot also shows my own position in relation to the project, to the visual material it produced, to the NM and to the people I photographed. I took the picture that portrays a group of people acknowledged below as ‘authors of the altar,’ although I do not recall having consulted with them how or if they wanted to appear in this website. I assumed they would feel proud to do so.

Although I took the picture and wrote the text, they are ‘authorless.’ I did this work as commissary and to provide records which proved that the exhibition had actually taken place. The logos at the top are all of national institutions that supported the travelling exhibition. No logo is included of the CEPAC, the local organizer of this version of the exhibition, or of any other local organization that participated in the Itinerante.

It is also a record the way that the names of people and institutions figured as authorships and acknowledgements, therefore ‘documents of documents’ (Biagioli, 2006) that work as the ‘hinge’ between the ‘the development and the publication of a claim’ (p. 127). Following the protocol I had learnt during the temporary version of Velorios’s research phase, I collected the names of the people involved and included them in this picture, calling them ‘authors of the wake altar,’ but I did not include my own authorship as photographer. At the top of the screenshot are six logos of institutions involved in the making of this project: the National Museum of Colombia’s Friends Association (FA), the Group of Afro-Colombian Studies (GEA), the National University of Colombia, the Ministry of Culture and the National Museum of Colombia. This last logo, at the top right, links to the museum’s main website. At the top left, the sentence ‘Event in consultation with the Ministry of Culture’ made reference to the National Programme of Cultural Consultation [Programa Nacional de Concertación Cultural],\footnote{I use the translation from the French word ‘concertation’ (dialogue, consultation, http://www.wordreference.com/fren/concertation), which seems appropriate for the activities that this programme of the Ministry of Culture carries out (http://www.mincultura.gov.co/planes-y-programas/programas/programa-nacional-de-concertacion-Cultural/Paginas/Programa%20Nacional%20de%20Concertacion%20Cultural.aspx, accessed 22 July 2015).} which at that moment did not have an official logo. Under the big purple flower at the top right, a button links to the ‘credits’ [CRÉDITOS] section. There, museum staff and younger anthropologists were acknowledged for the exhibition’s production (design, texts, photography and video) and for their work as Travelling Exhibitions and Events Coordinators. Below, I was acknowledged as a coordinator of the regions versions, while the people responsible for each region were named after the name of the place where the exhibition was set up. This is followed by a list of acknowledgements for the Itinerante that the Education Division led, which I will discuss in the next chapter.
In this second section of the thesis I refer to the new phase of Velorio’s life as the Itinerante. After 2009 ‘collaborative participation’ took off and more projects developed, including this thesis. In early meetings, museum staff proposed making travelling exhibitions on different subjects as a response to Arocha and Mosquera’s demand to create a new hall dedicated to Afro-Colombians in the National Museum, and fieldtrips were intended to work as a means for ‘rescue’ and documentation, and then for ‘return,’ after input from Raizal sabedora Dilia Robinson. During those fieldtrips architects were met and then brought in from the visited regions to collaborate in the setup at the Museum and afterwards they helped or organized local versions of the Itinerante, which would also respond to the Afro-Colombian Culture Board’s claims in regard to places that were not visited during those fieldtrips in spite of having high proportions of Afro-Colombian population (like Cali and Buenaventura). The exhibition was intended to be able to be set up in any place and by any group that showed interest, but priority was given to the areas visited during the 2007-8 fieldtrips, the ‘donor regions.’

Later on, when the proposal for a temporary exhibition about funerary rituals was under discussion, making a travelling version became a means to respond to concerns from one of the sabedores. The minutes quote Dilia Robinson as stating that it was necessary for the project to design effective means to return the research results to the collaborators that would be contacted during fieldtrips. This led to Ministry staff having to show their willingness to support financially regional versions of the exhibition as forms of local participation. Later on, the Itinerante [travelling] version of Velorio became a project that would respond to one of the main concerns expressed by the Afro-Colombian Culture Board in regard to the lack of representation, in fieldtrips and in the temporary version, of certain cities with high proportions of Afro-Colombian populations, such as Cali or Buenaventura. It would be an additional product of the ongoing curatorship project that could be a photography display, which would be easy to carry, attractive and resistant to weather and use. Later on, it also became a means to respond to concerns from participants in the focus groups that Lleras made for her research and for the exhibition’s visitor study: ‘A further discussion in the first focus group led to the conclusion that the museum had to go to the communities, it had to come closer to the people and involve schools more actively: “Here we don’t have a culture of museums, and this has to be mobilized inside the communities”’ (Lleras, 2011: 218).

Like Velorio, the Itinerante enacted relationships of power and contests between the National Museum and the public in and outside of Bogotá, and more generally between institutions that belonged to the central state and local institutions and communities. On the other hand, it showed who made use of the resources offered by the Museum and in what ways, in accordance with their positions in a hierarchy of knowledge, geography and, by extension, of race. At first anthropologist

---

5 May 2006.


Arocha’s ideas became predominant in Velorios’s script over the Afro-reparations agenda pushed by Mosquera. Meanwhile other members of the curatorship team contested this script, and later on it was appropriated by the authorship of the Museum and other institutions. Curator Lleras’s PhD project was the result of a bringing together of the work she did as a public servant in the A&H Curatorship, the Velorios exhibition, its visitor study and her personal research and commitment, but her authorship was diffused later in a document based on that thesis that was circulated and discussed within the Museum, and became the core of the proposal for the current discussions for the development of a new museum script. In a similar way, my work as a research assistant, visual documenter and then ‘commissary’ was useful in the proposing of my own PhD. I produced several hours of visual material that remains at the museum, with which I share my authorship as a photographer. Sharing authorship with the Museum was a given that only Arocha was not happy to accept. As I explained, he had not agreed beforehand to the conditions under which his participation in the project would take place.

Similarly to the difficulty involved in the use of the space of the Museum in Bogotá, the venues chosen to set up the exhibition caused disputes that many times made it last shorter than planned. The minimal condition required by the Museum in order to lend the exhibition was that local organizers had a place to host the exhibition and keep it open for at least a month. Spaces were appropriated for the purposes of the exhibition, even if temporarily, and this caused conflicts with other people who wanted to use the same spaces for different activities: whether a coliseum regularly used for sports and other kinds of events, two rooms in a building of a university, a Casa de la Cultura [House of Culture] whose staff had not received their payment in the last two months or a big hall in a convent. 8

In spite of this, conflicts were always resolved, and the Itinerante was always ‘back home’ in its black bags, though perhaps scribbled on, dirtied or with a metallic structure or a screw lost. Like other objects from the Museum collections, it remained safe in its storage rooms, ready for new setups to take place. It had, in a way, acquired the ‘museum object’ aura. Here I also show how slowly the role of the anthropologists, as curators, audiovisual documentarians, writers and mediators was replaced by clusters of images and texts.

(Re)Designing the Itinerante

While Velorios was still open at the National Museum, the travelling version became the subject of meetings between curator Lleras, anthropologist Botero and me. Anthropologist Arocha attended the first one in September 2008, but from then on, he was less involved in the behind the scenes of this

---

8 The Casas de la Cultura [Houses of culture] are local ‘cultural’ organizations that exist all around Colombia since the 1940s. In 1975, Colcultura, the national institution that was replaced in the 1990s by the Ministry of Culture, gathered these in a section that promoted the establishment of more Casas de la Cultura (http://www.sinic.gov.co/oei/paginas/informe/informe_64.asp, 21 October 2015). These institutions usually depend from city or Department-level government offices like Secretaries of Culture.
new stage of Velorios, the Itinerante. Until the end of the year we—a curator and two young anthropologists—met to decide what the Itinerante would be comprise of and how it would take place. Meanwhile I took pictures of the items described in the script, as most of them had actually been created for the exhibition. Botero inserted these pictures in an Excel file to illustrate what the actual appearance of the exhibition had been. From this script and the other materials produced for the temporary exhibition—which Botero and I organized in digital folders which we saved in CDs, labelled, and then put into a physical folder for storage in the Museum’s Documentation Centre—we selected pictures, edited texts and gathered them, using as a basic structure the stages of the funerary ritual (agony, death, wake, burial, ninth night, last night and anniversary) and the eight corners with funerary and patron saints altars or tumbas that represented each place visited during fieldtrips and the African ancestors of Afro-Colombians.

Lleras, Botero and I used this structure of stages and corners to sketch what the contents of the banners would be, and then we passed the selected material to the Museum’s Head of Museography, who proposed designs that we discussed and commented on them via email or in meetings. We also showed them to a group of school teachers who had been involved in different activities while Velorios was open. Lleras proposed dedicating a banner for credits of the exhibition, and I proposed we dedicated another one to the ‘relationship between patron saints and living people.’ More pictures were added to the ones exhibited at the National Museum. Videos would be also copied and sent as ‘support’ and ‘educational’ material. Also in those meetings the idea emerged that I would record some of the exhibition’s guided-tours and use them to train regional tour-guides emerged. The Itinerante consisted of banners, objects from the temporary exhibition, printed written-visual materials and DVD videos. These materials constituted a sort of script for remakes of the temporary exhibition. To make it self-explanatory we made texts shorter and pictures bigger, and, realizing that local organizers would not always have a screen and DVD player available, we ‘replaced’ some of the videos with sequences of pictures. In this new phase of the project, ‘return’ gained a new meaning where on the one hand the Itinerante would help feed the ‘voids’ in the Museum’s collections and on the other ‘return’ meant a sense of duty. The idea of reparation had been incorporated into a series of existing Museum procedures that limited its scope.

The Itinerante’s physical presentation

I have showed in the preceding chapters how through meetings, collective curatorship and collaborative participation, the authority of the anthropologist-curator was counteracted. Here I will show how through the travelling exhibition the authority of the Museum also disseminated. An indication of this during 2009 was the nineteen banners made of a flexible printable material with pictures.

9 These school teachers were some of the ones I refer to in the ‘Tour-guiding’ chapter.

10 8 October 2008.
pictures and texts taken from the temporary exhibition that were a *documentary cluster* of the
temporary exhibition. These banners can be seen and downloaded from the Museum’s webpage,\(^1\) and
also from the parallel project that the Education Division led.\(^2\) Big pictures and texts—even shorter
than those made into plotters and printed on the temporary exhibition’s white walls—were printed on
white banners decorated with re-elaborations of the same designs that had been used for the
temporary exhibition and in the catalogue. Eleven of those banners were 1x2 metres in size and
designed to stand on metallic structures provided by the Museum.

The setups organized in different towns and cities around the country were, like the version opened at
the National Museum in Bogotá, temporary. In the following two chapters I use digital and non-digital
documents that I and others produced or helped produce to counteract that temporality. These
documents summarized and reorganized what was exhibited at the National Museum.

As I described earlier, the exhibition’s ‘script’ was an Excel document that preceded the set up and
then was *fed* with pictures taken during the temporary exhibition. The script contained the structures
of the sequence and of the corners that corresponded to the seven regions visited. The Itinerante was
similar. Stages of the ritual and corners-fieldsites-altars became categories in the script, and then
banners in the Itinerante. In that sense, the Itinerante was like a script: Each one of these categories
was made into a banner, and more banners were added or modified, in order to adapt what was in the
temporary exhibition into the new form of presentation, and also to respond to the results of the
visitor study as assessed in Lleras’s analysis (2011). As versions of the exhibition were made, banners
and other objects were modified or added, again in response to the reactions and comments that each
version generated (which I documented when setting up and dismantling the exhibition) as well as
institutional requirements.

Like the temporary exhibition and its catalogue, the Itinerante was a mixture of forms of authorship,
acknowledgement and crediting. The banners were also like loose pages of a book. Three of these
banners introduced the exhibition, saying who organized it and what it was about. One had the
exhibition’s full title, the same map of the places visited in fieldtrips used in the catalogue (in black and
white) and a summary of the introduction text that the visitors could find in Velorios’s Profane area.
Another banner had the first part of the title (*Velorios y santos vivos*) and logos and names of the
institutions that organized (the Ministry of Culture, the National Museum, the National University and
the GEA), supported (the National Museum’s Friends Association) and sponsored the exhibition (Valtec,
a digital printing company). All the credits for the *architects* that had built or designed altars-corners
for the Museum, and also for the photographers of all the pictures included (mainly Arocha and me,
but also other young anthropologists who had contributed to the project), were included in the


banners. Almost all the images and designs are individually authored with a line below, above or on the side with the name of the person portrayed or the designer.

With the banner titled Abuelos africanos de la gente negra, afro-colombiana, raizal y palenquera [African Grandparents of Afro-Colombian, Black, Raizal and Palenquero people], we intended to make the connection between Afro-Colombians, Catholic patron saints, deceased relatives and African ancestors more explicit. It included a picture of a patron saints’ altar that Arocha had taken on one of the fieldtrips which had not been included in the temporary exhibition. It also included a map of Africa, designed by Juan Pablo Moya, showing the regions in West Africa from which, according to the sources used for the exhibition, Afro-Colombian, Black, Raizal and Palenquero people descend. These were attempts to make the connections that the temporary exhibition had failed to convey. These and other changes were introduced in relation to the visitors' comments and reactions to the temporary exhibition’s structure and contents.
Banner with the titles, logos and names of the institutions that organized, supported and sponsored the exhibition.
Images of the rest of the banners, which can be expanded and downloaded freely
Seven banners were dedicated to the stages of the funerary ritual. One was added for the ‘Funerary procession’ stage, between the Wake and the Burial, as one visitor from the Caribbean region commented that this was a very important part of the ritual and so it deserved separate attention. We also combined the ‘Novena or nine nites and Last night or ninth nite’ stages in one banner, although they were originally separate in the temporary exhibition’s sequence. In the Wake (Velorio) stage we added a note to the title of the panel explaining that ‘in Palenque de San Basilio the term ‘velorio’ [wake] refers to the wake, funerary procession, burial and the entire nine nights/novena, including the ninth and last night or ‘levantamiento del paño’ [lifting the cloth]. The other eight banners were horizontal (1x1.50m) and were designed to hang from walls. We called them ‘gigantografías’ [large size prints] because most of the space of each banner was used for one large size picture of each of the corners-altars set up in the temporary exhibition, with a brief explanation that summarized the respective hall texts.

The ‘3D’ objects that accompanied the panels were seen by the museum staff as ‘original’ objects, so they had to be handled with special care, for conservation reasons, as objects that were part of the Museum’s collections. Their originality had to do with them being especially made for the temporary exhibition, like grave clothes such as the two habits for Saint Francis Assisi and the Virgin of Carmel and a wedding dress and a replica made in San Andres of a ‘winding sheet’ and a pillow that Raizals used traditionally as a shroud. Pictures replaced some of these objects, such as the replica of a wooden cross that people use in wakes in Palenque that was exhibited hanging from the ceiling. In the banner, the same object was portrayed in a picture of an actual funerary procession that I had attended and documented during the fieldtrip I did to Palenque. Some print material was also included: pack of novenas to San José de Uré (small leaflets with the prayers to the patron saint), print versions of the Profane Area projections, an exhibition catalogue, a replica of the ‘junta mortuoria’ book which was used as a visitor book, and a pack of leaflets that summarized the exhibition’s contents.

A set of 3 DVDs was also included. They contained all the videos played in the temporary exhibition (including those showing the set up and inauguration and the maps and Contexts projections), and guided tours by Arocha and the exhibition tour-guides (which I will discuss in the next chapter). From talking with the organizers of what would be the first version of the Itinerante, in Guapi, Cauca, we realized that it would not always be possible for local organizations to have a TV and DVD player available for the exhibition’s duration. Consequently, some of the videos that demonstrated how some of the objects included in the exhibition were made became pictures or sequences of pictures. For example, in the Death (Muerte) banner, a sequence of four pictures of a woman who demonstrated to anthropologists Arocha and Moreno, during their fieldtrip to San Andrés Island how a winding sheet would be made ‘replaced’ the video of the same demonstration that had been exhibited at the Museum. In the Wake banner, a picture of Mrs. Purificación Gómez, a secular cantor [cantaora] from

---

13 ‘Nite’ instead of ‘night’ is the local spelling of the word in Sanandresano creole, which was used in the exhibition.
Padilla, in the northern Cauca region, replaced the video with her singing that we had exhibited had at the Museum. The two sequences projected in the Profane area were also made into printed sequences of pictures and text.

According to the minutes that anthropologist Botero took, in our meetings we established that people in charge of the setups in the regions would decide whether to exhibit the gigantographies with the representation of the altars made and photographed in Bogotá, whether they would represent their own altars or tumbas, and furthermore what to keep, add, modify or exclude from what the Museum sent. A clear emphasis was placed on the idea that communities were to appropriate the exhibition: 'We must make it very clear that the ideal is that each region appropriates the exhibition, intervenes with whatever they consider necessary and adds new things,' read the minutes of 27 October. Additionally, some of the banners were left open for intervention. The panel for the ‘Anniversary or cabo de año’ consisted mainly of a set of frames printed on magenta intended for people who made or visited the exhibition in its different versions to stick commemorative cards or novenas made for relatives’ death anniversaries. Another panel was dedicated to the exhibition credits. It included the pictures and names of many of the people involved in the fieldwork and in the making of the exhibition, and as with the Anniversary panel, room was left for local makers and visitors to stick pictures.

**Working as ‘commissary’**

At the beginning of 2009 anthropologist Botero left for France to begin her postgraduate studies and I was hired to work as the Itinerante’s ‘commissary’ for the Travelling Exhibitions Programme. My duties were to coordinate the national setups, travel with the exhibition and lend it, under the name of the National Museum, to different organizations, provided they had the appropriate credentials to sign contracts with the FA, with whom I signed my own ‘provision services’ contracts. Although I did not work directly for the Ministry of Culture, during these trips I was sometimes addressed as its representative and the Itinerante was called ‘the museum.’ In spite of the fact that the exhibition was designed to be self-explanatory, I was hired to go with it as a mediator for local communities, and also with the idea that I would collect local visitors’ and organizers’ reactions and perceptions. This would provide more information and create links in the regions for the ongoing project on the representation of Afro-Colombian people in the Museum, led by the A&H Curatorship. I also became a sort of ‘curator’ who understood the original concept of the kinship between living people, deceased relatives and patron saints, and I worked with local organizers to adapt the spaces available to match that concept. If necessary I would explain to them what the concept was, and I would also train tour-guides or do guided-tours myself.

In between setting up and dismantling the exhibitions, during that year I worked for two more exhibitions for which I signed two more ‘service provision’ contracts with the FA, based in the A&H Curatorship, where I had become a sort of in-house multi-tasking professional. One was *Llegó el Amazonas a Bogotá* [The Amazonas arrived to Bogotá],\(^{15}\) a joint exhibition between the A&H Curatorship, the Patrimony and Ethnography Curatorship and Tropenbos, an environmentalist NGO. For that exhibit, I participated in the curatorship process, which involved the participation of indigenous people from the Amazonian region in a somewhat similar way to that of Velorios (they attended meetings and worked as tour-guides, and the work of an indigenous painter was exhibited as part of the display), and I gathered and edited videos for the exhibition similarly to how I had done so for Velorios. Later in the year I was hired by the A&H Curatorship to work with another anthropologist to do the visitor study for the exhibition *Diego, Frida y otros revolucionarios* [...and other revolutionaries].\(^{16}\) For that contract I did surveys and short interviews with the exhibition’s visitors, analysed the results and made a report jointly with my colleague. Meanwhile, I began my personal visual documentation project, as I was interested in the ways that local organizers appropriated the Itinerante, adapting it to their own means and parameters.

To be put into circulation, Velorios adapted, with modifications, to a pre-existing model for travelling exhibitions. Being a ‘commissary’ was part of my contractual obligations, which followed a template designed originally for travelling exhibitions of pieces from the Museum’s collections, like paintings, sculptures or photographs. Hence Parra, the Programme Coordinator, whom I submitted my reports to, was a professional restorer. This meant that I would bring the objects that would be used to set up the exhibition, I would meet with the local organizers to check the ‘conservation state’ of the banners and objects I was giving them and we would all sign the ‘delivery minutes’ [acta de entrega] as the giver (me) and the receiver (the responsible local organizer). I would help set up the exhibition and take pictures of the setup and inauguration (when there was one) before going back to Bogotá. Some weeks later I would return to document the exhibition closing (if there was one), pick up the banners and objects (printed materials and DVDs would be donated to the receiving party), revise their ‘state of conservation,’ sign the ‘return minutes,’ collect the impressions and experiences of the local organizers, and go back to Bogotá or to the next city, town or venue for the following setup. According to the contract I had signed with the FA, during these trips I had to make sure that the person who signed the ‘letter of intention’ also signed the ‘receiving’ and ‘return’ minutes and a free loan agreement that legalized and legitimized this operation. My job was done once all this paperwork was physically in the

---


hands of the Programme Coordinator, which many times meant that I had to wait for or almost chase the relevant person, and even in these cases sometimes I did not succeed.

To set up the exhibition it was necessary to follow a series of procedures: Writing and sending letters and emails, contacting people by phone and email and asking for paperwork, and organizing trips. Free loan contracts had to be signed, and many times we had to chase people to do it. This was all part of an auditing and legal procedure through which the Museum, the Ministry and the FA controlled the use of public funds.

Reports

My work transformed as the project progressed. The trips to setup the exhibition were a way to gather information about how to engage in better ways with the local organizations, where I took notes as I had learnt with Arocha at the university and during fieldtrips. Initially, they were continuations of the fieldtrips I had been part of in Velorios. I would stay for three days for a setup and for two and a half days for a dismantling, but sometimes I stayed for a bit longer. These reports looked like short stories about the trips I did. Following the naming procedure I learnt in Velorios, I referred to the people who organized the versions of the exhibition using both their full name and their local role or activity, such as ‘local leader,’ ‘director of the House of Culture,’ ‘cultural manager’ [gestor cultural], ‘teacher,’ ‘director of the documentation centre,’ ‘tumbas’ builder,’ ‘director of dance and music group’ or ‘cantors [cantaoras].’ I listed the objects that local organizers added to what I had brought with me. Another ‘obligation’ I had as a contractor with the FA was to write reports, following the instructions that the Programme Coordinator gave me, including a separate document where I would create tables to be filled in Excel documents. They listed specific information about the town or city hosting the setup, the number of visitors and the opening and closing dates. This information corresponded to the ‘letter of intention’ that each organizing entity had to submit to the Museum to officialize the free loan contract. It was essential for the Programme Coordinator to know the number of visitors and what the partner had invested. Every month, to receive my payment, I needed to write yet another kind of report, which followed a template that was used for other contractors and projects, and which would be printed, checked, signed and filed for further auditing. Ideally, all these documents would match: projects, contracts, reports and outcomes.

In spite of the short-length of my stays, I was able to grasp a few aspects that gave me ideas about the relevance of the actions we were carrying out from the Museum. A lot of this seemed not useful enough, not appropriate for what the Museum could offer or for meeting people’s demands. In spite of this, as we organized more setups, sometimes people found out about the exhibition and asked for it.
An important part of the openness of the exhibition was that people in charge of local versions had to do their part in responding to what the Museum was providing. This was called the ‘contraparte’ and meant that as the Museum gave, it required documents in return.

**Bureaucracy**

From 2009, the Itinerante became one of the projects of the National Museum’s Programme of Travelling Exhibitions, funded by the National Programme of Cultural Agreement [Concertación] of the Ministry of Culture to travel around the country, and simultaneously a separate project in the Education Division that was funded by the Secretary of Education of the Bogotá District to be set up in schools around the city. Curator Lleras and the then director of the Education Division, told me in separate interviews that their original idea was to make a joint project between the offices they led, to give continuity to what had been done for the temporary exhibition, but due to administrative complications, a lack of coordination between funding sources and differing institutional priorities, it was not possible for them to do so. In spite of this, during the first travelling year both projects shared the same banners.

The travelling version of Velorios had to adapt to administrative parameters set at the Museum, but it also modified them. My role in the project changed along the way. The contracts I signed and the reports I wrote show that while I kept some of the procedures I had learnt in Velorios I was also being trained in new bureaucratic and administrative procedures. This was also how curator Lleras gave continuity to the process we had begun with Velorios. Meanwhile, a new kind of exhibition began to arise in the Travelling Exhibitions Programme (TEP). A webpage was developed and I managed an email account called veloriosysantosvivos@museonacional.gov.co. Two new sets of banners were printed and a new leaflet was designed and printed. For the second year some changes were introduced based on comments people had made that that I collected, such as the inclusion of a glossary with words that visitors had found difficult to understand. For the Anniversary panel we decided to add some examples collected in the first itinerary year. For the Credits panel, seeing that nobody had put pictures in the frames provided for them to do so, we decided to add pictures I took during 2009. The panels were also replaced due to normal deterioration, including some young visitors’ scribbles. These changes were not reflected in the Education Division’s sets. A few printed texts with explanations for the ‘3-D’ objects were also added.

In 2010 I had become a travelling anthropologist that moved around the Museum (literally, as I had no set desk assigned) between the A&H Curatorship, the TEP and the places I visited travelling with the exhibition.

---

Paperwork

A cycle ‘ends’ with paperwork (this is what I mean by documentation), proving that work has been done and that many people have benefit from it: the monitor-teacher in charge writes a report for the Education Secretary (full of pictures, big numbers). Deibys reports back to the PTE (lists of attendance, pictures of versions, numbers of places where the exhibition was set up). Teachers at schools in Barranquilla use the ‘exhibition’ as part of their activities, take pictures and include them in their own regular reports. Meanwhile, some of the local institutions in charge of the exhibition wrote their own reports, with visitors’ reactions, pictures and sometimes videos.

As I have explained, formal letters played a key role in the continuation of Velorios. When in 2008 criticisms arose from anthropologist Delgado—speaking in the name of a faction of Palenquero people who thought it was inappropriate to set up altars without anybody having died—about the appropriateness of exhibiting representations of funerary altars in the Museum, formal letters were written and sent to regional representatives to seek their authorizations. Later on, one of the subjects thoroughly discussed during the meetings dedicated to planning the Itinerante was a letter directed to the people who would set up the exhibition, which was signed by curator Lleras. This letter explained what the exhibition was about, what the intentions of the Museum were, what it offered and what the receiving organization or institution was expected to do. A checklist of the objects that the Museum could send was included, as well as a checklist of additional objects that the local organizers could add, along with instructions to complete and return these forms. All of these documents were written in very formal and polite language, and before sending them phone calls would have already been made and emails sent. These letters were also a means for curator Lleras to introduce the people working on behalf of the Museum for this new project: me as the ‘commissary’ of the exhibition and Adriana Parra as the Coordinator of Travelling Exhibitions.
Letter directed to the person who would be responsible for the setup in San Andres Island, signed by curator Lleras, and with a list of objects that the Museum can send and another one of objects the local organizers may add. It asks for the lists to be returned checked: a new presentation of the exhibition’s script.
La exposición denominada "Velorios y Santos vivos", está vinculada a partir de la exposición "La experiencia del dolor" que tenía lugar en el Museo de Arte Moderno de la Ciudad de México. La muestra propone una reflexión sobre la muerte y el dolor, a través de la presencia de imágenes de los santos que han sido venerados por la comunidad, así como de la vida cotidiana que se ha desarrollado en torno a ellos. La exposición se desarrolla en un formato de visualización de imágenes en diferentes dimensiones, permitiendo al visitante explorar diferentes perspectivas sobre la muerte y el dolor en la comunidad.

La muestra propone un recorrido por diferentes aspectos relacionados con la muerte y el dolor, como la religiosidad, la memoria y la memoria de la muerte, la percepción de la muerte en diferentes culturas y la experiencia de la muerte como un evento individual y colectivo. La exposición se basa en la exposición "La experiencia del dolor" que tenía lugar en el Museo de Arte Moderno de la Ciudad de México, pero con un enfoque diferente que permite al visitante reflexionar sobre la muerte y el dolor desde diferentes perspectivas.

La exposición propone un recorrido por diferentes aspectos relacionados con la muerte y el dolor, como la religiosidad, la memoria y la memoria de la muerte, la percepción de la muerte en diferentes culturas y la experiencia de la muerte como un evento individual y colectivo. La exposición se basa en la exposición "La experiencia del dolor" que tenía lugar en el Museo de Arte Moderno de la Ciudad de México, pero con un enfoque diferente que permite al visitante reflexionar sobre la muerte y el dolor desde diferentes perspectivas.
As time passed and setups were organized, the format of these letters changed in tone and appearance. Sometimes the possible organizers of the Itinerante were familiar with Velorios, but many times those who would be in charge of the setups had not seen the exhibition in Bogotá and said they did not understand what the Museum would send or what exactly they were supposed to do. A later version of this letter included pictures of previous setups, in an attempt to make it clearer for the reader what the exhibition could look like. In spite of this, when I would arrive people would not have necessarily read the ‘instructions.’ I made drawings according to the places that would be used for the setup. In that sense, I was a kind of curator, trying to make sure that the sequence of stages–corners structure was maintained.
Drawing of the plan I drew to organize the banners and other objects in the version of the exhibition in the Universidad Tecnológica del Chocó
View of the two rooms where the exhibition was setup
Local versions of the Itinerante

At the end of 2012, Adriana Parra, then Coordinator of the Travelling Exhibitions Programme provided me with an updated report for the Itinerante. By then, the exhibition had been setup in 25 cities and towns around the country, including the versions that the Education Division had organized in schools in Bogotá. The places where most visitors had gathered were Guapi, Buenaventura (including Juanchaco and Ladrilleros), Pereira, Trujillo, Zipaquirá and Barranquilla (where Niches en Acción setup the exhibition in 25 schools around the city).\(^\text{18}\) According to this report, between 2009 and mid-2013, 56,487 people attended the Itinerante (37,885 [67%] outside Bogotá and 18,602 [33%] in Bogotá).\(^\text{19}\) This report was a table with a list of places, venues, opening and closing dates and the number of visitors, but what did these items and numbers convey?

Travelling as return

The first objective of the travelling exhibition was to return to the places where fieldtrips had been made, but funds were limited and it was not possible to visit every single town where documentation had taken place. Even when the local contact was a person who had worked as an architect in Velorios, we would usually be re-directed to people in institutions who controlled access to venues where the exhibition could be held. This, I found out, became a key issue in which the Itinerante was enmeshed.

Like the demand for a hall dedicated to Afro-Colombians at the Museum, the most basic museographic concern, the control over the use of space, was at stake. Time, people, places and funds would need to be mobilized locally. Sometimes the exhibition was used to attempt to foster links that had existed beforehand between the Ministry of Culture or the Museum and local leaders, politicians or cultural managers.

As I have explained, one of the controversial aspects of the exhibition, which was thoroughly discussed in preparatory meetings, was the distance between the real funerary rituals and the representations of these rituals. Formality helped the team meeting at the Museum to convince, persuade or bypass detractors and keep the project going. Museography helped them to generate a representation that was engaging for non-Afro-Colombian visitors.

The first version of the exhibition took place in Guapi, Cauca. While Velorios was still open at the Museum, two members of the organization Cococauca, Dionisio Rodríguez and Rosamalia Quiñones, asked to be the first hosts. Quiñones had attended the community representatives meeting in September 2007, and had been one of the exhibition architects. When I arrived one month later the

\(^{18}\) The list does not include the Barcelona version.

\(^{19}\) According to Lleras's study (2011: 89) 32,172 visitors saw the temporary exhibition in 2008. Among these, 12,016 came to see it specifically (for which entrance was free) and the rest bought tickets to see the entire museum and saw the exhibition as well. The National Museum has around 300,000 annual onsite users of its diverse services and 150,000 visitors saw the temporary exhibitions in 2008.
exhibition had already been dismantled and packed. The mayor had promised to keep the exhibition in
the coliseum but they had to use it for other activities. In Quibdó, the capital of Chocó Department, the
exhibition became entangled in a conflict for the use of space with the Centre of Afro-Colombian
Culture in the Technological University of Chocó. In Tumaco, the exhibition was opened in the House of
Culture, but only after I did a lot of lobbying at the mayor’s office.

In northern Cauca Department, two setups took place. The Secretary of Culture, who had expressed his
interest to host the exhibition, did not show interest once I arrived. Two teachers and a young man
who had committed to helping the Secretary went with me to the town convent to convince the nuns
to lend us a big room that they used for different events and gatherings. We set up the exhibition
there, but when I returned to pick it up, it turned out that not many people had visited it. In the nearby
town Padilla, we set it up in the town school. There, I had a meeting with the school teachers, who
suggested other themes that an exhibition about Afro-Colombian people might include.

In the Caribbean Archipelago, the exhibition encountered the historical lack of interest and resistance
that local representatives and organizations usually make manifest towards representatives of national
institutions, which have neglected their Raizal population for years. In Providencia, where Baptists and
Jehovah’s Witnesses have big congregations, many people were scared of the exhibition’s subject and
spoke against it. In spite of this, the person in charge of the House of Culture ensured that the
exhibition opened, as she was interested in keeping a good relationship with the central government.

The local versions of the Itinerante confirmed that if many times the organizers and local populations
were familiar with previous representations of the wakes, there was no agreement with regard to the
appropriateness of such representations in an exhibition, or who had the authority to make or approve
such decisions. This revealed a tension between younger and older generations, and between urban
and rural backgrounds. For some, usually younger people with a more urban background,
reconstructions of altars were only that; they were not the real thing and were therefore appropriate.
For others, usually older people in smaller towns and more remote areas, singing *alabaos*, setting up
tumbas or arranging a space as if somebody had died constituted a dangerous action that might ‘call
up the dead,’ ‘bring ruin’ or generate fear among communities. As I had learnt during fieldtrips and in
the conversations that we had had with sabedores at the Museum, in some places the altars and songs
were still used or remembered as things *alabaos* cantors did during the wakes to lead the recently
dead person to follow the right path, and to ask the souls in purgatory to help him or her to arrive in
heaven. In others, songs and altars now belonged to the field of the ‘cultural,’ and were only displayed
or performed for audiences.

In bigger cities like Quibdó or Tumaco, acted reconstructions of wakes and other forms of
representation were displayed with the exhibition, usually during opening ceremonies. Two funerary
altars and a patron saint altar were built, and a performance took place during the inauguration
ceremony. In Tumaco, Wisman Tenorio, who was one of the temporary exhibition’s architects, with his
friend La Pola set up three altars, and organized a performance in the exhibition opening, during which
a group of elderly women sang *alabaos* and represented the games of a *gualí*. In Guapi, Cauca, the organizers decided not to do so because a previous reconstruction of a wake coincided with (for them *caused*) two deaths. They were very clear that simulations of altars and the singing of *alabaos* would be inappropriate, but the pictures of altars that had been made in the Museum were acceptable. After the opening the mayor and his wife claimed that setting up at least one altar from Guapi would have been a good idea.

Organizations and local leaders used the exhibition for their own agendas. In Palenque, the *consejo comunitario* made it clear that building altars in the town was inappropriate, but that showing pictures of altars-corners was fine. They were happy to hold the exhibition as one of the multiple activities that would take place during the annual 'Festival de Tambores' [Festival of Drums], a cultural event that, following UNESCO’s intangible heritage declaration for the town, now gathers hundreds of national and international visitors every year. The members of the *consejo comunitario*, who had agreed to host the exhibition were busy with the other events they were responsible for, so I set up the banners almost on my own and for that reason not many people visited, at least while I was there. While concerts, dance presentations and other cultural events took place all around the town, the set of banners was in the primary school, in the outskirts of the town. In spite of this, they reported that 1100 people had seen it, and afterwards moved the banners to the secondary school, where Moraima worked and she made use of them for class-room activities.

In Uré, the organizer, María Yovadis Londoño, was also a school teacher, as well as a town leader and one of the architects in the setup at the National Museum. The closest major city to Uré is Montería, the capital of Córdoba Department, and María Yovadis proposed that we displayed the exhibition at Córdoba University for a few days, as she thought it was important that students in the institution saw it. Moreover, a group of researchers who had done fieldwork in Uré were based at that institution. As the Museum would not pay for two setups in the same area, the local organizers agreed to set it up on their own in their town, a few hours away. María Yovadis and I chatted about how the structure could be replicated in other spaces, and she took responsibility for the banners and the other materials. This meant that they had to find sponsorship to recruit a group of people from Uré and, after much negotiation, which by then I knew was normal, we managed to set up the exhibition in the University’s main library, where a group of elderly women from the town set up an *angelito* altar, just as they had done as the architects of this altar-corner in Bogotá. Some days later, the group collected the exhibition materials and set up their own version, with a new *angelito* altar, in Uré’s secondary school, where María Yovadis worked.
The set up in Guapi’s coliseum, where we organized the panels to imitate the distribution of space in the Museum. On the left side of the picture, tables and chairs resembled the ‘Profane area.’ And towards the right side, the ‘Sacred area.’
Before and after of the room used for the Itinerante in the House of Culture in Buenaventura
The audience as curators

A second objective of the Itinerante was to respond to the Afro-Colombian Culture Board in regard to their concern for a ‘lack of representation’ in Velorios’s fieldtrips and exhibition of urban areas with high numbers of Afro-Colombian people. A setup of the Itinerante led by the Afro-Colombian pastoral in Buenaventura, and a ‘failed’ attempt to set it up in Cali, the city with the highest number of Afro-Colombians according to the 2005 Census, showed the limits to the scope of action (both in material and in political terms) of the National Museum in the two cities with the highest numbers of Afro-Colombian people in the country, which had not been included in the fieldtrips.20 Once the Itinerante had been set up in all the areas where fieldwork had taken place, it became one of the several displays that the Museum’s Travelling Exhibitions Programme offers to the public.

This ‘travelling exhibition’ is one of the sets of displays that the National Museum’s Programme of Travelling Exhibitions offers. According to the section dedicated to this programme on the Museum’s website, it ‘responds to the Museum’s commitment to widen its programmes, projects and services outside of the Museum,’ under three ‘lines of action.’21 One is directed to institutions that ‘conform to the security and conservation conditions to receive’ original pieces from the Museum’s collections. Another one is presented as an alternative for spaces that don’t comply with these conditions, and consists of photographic reproductions. Velorios y santos vivos was the first exhibition that this division of the museum offered in its third ‘line of action,’ which is:

Exhibitions that support the acknowledgement/recognition [reconocimiento] and visibilization of ethnic groups and vulnerable social sectors […] directed at local, regional and department institutions, public and private that are in accordance with our intention, like associations, foundations and organizations, among others and/or that have as their main objective to promote cultural and artistic activities, like museums, libraries, exhibition halls, houses of culture, public entities buildings and so on.22

Following on from this, it is clear that in mid-2015, when I made the screenshot of the Itinerante webpage above, it is still available for people ‘outside the Museum.’ However, its availability is dependent on specific, albeit flexible, characteristics. These are that ‘institutions’ have an appropriate place for the promotion of ‘cultural and artistic activities’ or are interested in the ‘acknowledgement/recognition and visibilization of ethnic groups and vulnerable social sectors,’ or both. The fact that the Itinerante was the first exhibition offered in this ‘line of action’ coincided with an administrative change that was taking place in the Ministry of Culture. In December 2008, while the Ministry of Culture was under Paula Marcela Moreno’s leadership, the ‘Ethno-culture Direction,’ which

20 Arguably the two cities with the highest number of Afro-Colombians in the country (http://www.afrodescendientes-undp.org/FCkeditor_files/File/PP_AVANCE_POB_AFROCOLOMBIANA.pdf).
22 ibid.
had been key in the initial stages of Velorios was split into two ‘directions,’ one for ‘populations’ and the other for ‘regional promotion.’\textsuperscript{23}

The National Museum is not only responsible for its collections and exhibitions but, according to the \textit{Strategic Plan}, its third ‘strategic area’ should provide tools for the ‘strengthening’ of all the near 400 museums around the country, ‘to enhance the training of their human resources, [...] to promote the museological and museographic renovation of their exhibitions [...] and to propitiate the construction of multiple narratives of the history of the cultural processes in Colombia’ (p. 59). Underlying these statements is the idea that the National Museum, as an extension of the Ministry of Culture, is an authority with regard to museological and museographic design and contents. But how is this authority perceived in practice?

\textbf{Buenaventura, Juanchaco and Ladrilleros: the Month of Afro-Colombianness}

Buenaventura was the first version of the exhibition that a group asked for and that was organized in a place where fieldtrips had not taken place. They said they wanted their version to be as similar as possible to the one that had been set up in Bogotá, so they set up altars that represented different regions on the Pacific coast, among which the port city of Buenaventura is a main recipient of migrants.\textsuperscript{24} Each altar was under the responsibility of a group from a different area on the Pacific coast. When I arrived with the exhibition, ready to set it up, a big group of people had already gathered by the CEPAC (\textit{Centro de Pastoral Afro-Colombiana}), of which Father Emigdio Cuesta was also a member.

This version of the Itinerante was a successful in ways that were different to the instances I have described above. Sister Ayda Orobio was in charge and with her team was very efficient at collecting paperwork. This showed that they were used to dealing with institutions such as the National Museum, but also that they were interested in continuing a relationship after the exhibition. They organized, without the direct intervention of the Museum, a series of events surrounding the Itinerante. These included convincing the mayor’s office to make the exhibition into a central event locally by linking its opening to the \textit{Mes de la Afrocolombianidad} [Afro-Colombianness month],\textsuperscript{25} which included performances of oral traditions and funerary rituals by a local dance and theatre group, and organising school visits while the exhibition was open.


\textsuperscript{24} It is arguably the municipality that has the highest percentage of Afro-Colombians in its population, 88.5\% (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, 2010: 11).

\textsuperscript{25} Slavery was abolished in Colombia on 21 May 1851, which is why the commemoration of ‘Afrocolombianidad’ [Afro-Colombianness] takes place in May. The anti-racist agenda of this commemoration is covered by the usually ‘cultural’ events organized under its framing. The focus on the use of funds for dance, music, theatre and art (including exhibitions) at such events, although portraying Afro-Colombian people in positive ways, reinforces one of the stereotypes about Black people and Afro-descendants (see introduction).
The exhibition inspired the team that was constituted in Buenaventura to propose a project to create the *Museo vivo del Pacífico* [Living Museum of the Pacific]. ²⁶ However, due to local clashes of interests and to the fact that Sister Orobio was transferred to another city, this museum never came into existence. They also asked repeatedly for our assistance from the Museum, but their main requirement, finding a site in Buenaventura, was not part of our responsibilities.

With their own resources, the team organized two set ups in Juanchaco and Ladrilleros, two coastal towns that belong to the Buenaventura District, where the main economic activity is tourism. The people that took responsibility for these setups, led by the then local priest, who was also a member of the Afro-Colombian Pastoral, divided the banners between the Catholic chapels of the two towns, and set up simulations of funerary altars in both places. When I arrived to document the setup, pack up the exhibition and take it back to Bogotá, the group of local architects told me that tourism and migration had virtually extinguished this kind of practice, so that now the building of altars for the exhibition was a way to re-kindle local pride. They organized a closing act in the Juanchaco chapel where they played board games (as if in a ‘real’ wake) and performed a wake and of a *guali* in front of the respective altars they had built, and with the congregation gathered for this unusual activity in the building. The Chapel and altars became a sort of stage to remember the old ways of doing funerary rituals, at least for that night.

Banners in the entrance of the Itinerante in Buenaventura. Above, on the left, a new banner introduced in 2010 that reads ‘Travelling exhibitions, National Museum,’ and at the bottom of the panel, the logos of the Ministry of Culture and the National Museum, and the caption ‘Event consulted with the Ministry of Culture,’ next to the banner with the full title and introduction of the exhibition. Below, the ‘Credits’ banner next to the one provided by the Buenaventura mayor, which reads ‘21st of May Day of Afro-Colombianness. Our traditions and cultural practices. Pathways of identity,’ and below the picture: ‘To be Afro-Colombian is more than a matter of skin,’ with the name of the mayor and ‘Committee of Afro-Colombianness’ next to the city’s coat of arms.
Funerary rituals of the Pacific in the Religious Art Museum of Cali

In early 2010, the Cultural Director of the Colombian-American Centre (CAC) in Cali contacted the Museum to set up a version of the exhibition in their exhibition’s hall, but he soon found out that the Museo de arte religioso de Cali (MAR) [Religious Art Museum of Cali] was about to open the exhibition Ritos Fúnebres en el Pacífico Colombiano [Funerary rituals in the Colombian Pacific], sponsored by the Cali mayor’s office and presented as one of the activities that accompanied the 14th version of the Festival de Música del Pacífico ‘Petronio Álvarez,’ a festival that stages ‘traditional’ music from the Pacific region along with more recent ‘fusions.’ The CAC’s Cultural Director cancelled the project, even though I explained that the Itinerante was different from the one that the MAR had organized, because it showed relationships between the Caribbean and Pacific regions, and because it included patron saints. He explained to me that the audience for this kind of event in Cali was very limited and that it would most probably be understood as the same exhibition.

In August, after another setup in the nearby municipality of Mulaló, I went to the inauguration of Ritos Fúnebres and saw that it had an almost identical structure to Velorios, with the stage sequence and altars representing different places around the Pacific region. Also, it was portrayed as a ‘participatory’ endeavour, as it had been organized with the Federación Colombiana de Colonias del Pacífico, an organization that gathered migrants in Cali from different areas in the Pacific region. I spoke with the MAR’s curator, who explained to me that the members of the colonias did not agree with the relationship between the funerary rituals and patron saints devotions that Velorios had portrayed in Bogotá and in the Itinerante. This made it for him a different exhibition, although he recognized that Velorios had inspired it. He had in fact visited the version of the Itinerante that I had just helped dismantle in Mulaló and had copied some of the texts in the banners, but no acknowledgement was made to the National Museum or to Velorios. In the end, as the CAC Cultural Director predicted, some people who knew about Velorios thought that Ritos funerarios was the same exhibition. Back in Bogotá, the Museum staff’s reaction was calmer than I expected. For them, if other people had ‘copied’ Velorios then it meant that the exhibitions produced at the Museum were good.

Ritos fúnebres was also different in other ways. On the one hand, it was more explicit in terms of how death was portrayed, including an adult sized empty coffin arranged for a wake as one of the exhibited pieces. On the other hand no mention was made at all of the political and historical contexts that Velorios had attempted to convey. If we think of the MAR’s curator as one of the Itinerante’s visitors, this would confirm how unsuccessful Velorios and its travelling version were in showing the centrality of this idea. Instead, these funerary rituals were displayed as a cultural feature that, according to the text that the exhibition’s curator wrote, make of Cali an ‘inclusive, pluriethnic and multicultural city’ (Vallejo, 2010). This view was probably re-enforced by its association with the Petronio Álvarez Festival and by the fact that the central act during the inauguration was a performance of a wake, which included an actor playing a deceased person, by a group who had won an award at the Alabaos Festival in the Chocó town of Andagoya.
Audiovisual documentation and authorship

As recorded in the minutes of the meetings for the preparation and design of the Itinerante, by the end of 2008 I had become a sort of in-house audiovisual documentarian for Velorios y santos vivos. In the ‘Execution, results and products by contractual obligation report’ section that I wrote so as to receive the last payment of my contract with the FA in 2010, there were two ‘contract obligations’ that referred to the production of audiovisual documents. The first one was ‘to carry out a photographic and/or audiovisual register of the activities of the setup and inauguration of the exhibition and to submit it in a CD at the end of each exhibition.’ As the corresponding ‘result and submitted product’ I wrote that I had ‘registered 20 hours of video and 350 photographs of the setups and dismantlings’ in the versions of the exhibition I had helped setup. The second ‘obligation’ was ‘to select the audiovisual material that would go onto the Velorios y santos vivos’ web page on the National Museum’s site.’ I reported that ‘I submitted the corresponding material to the Webmaster, the web developer and the Chief of the Museum’s Communications Division.’

In early 2009 I began uploading these pictures from my personal Picasa album (a free online application developed by Google) and forwarded it to a list of contacts, including some of the Museum’s public servants. But I also documented the ways that people set up the exhibition and how they adapted the materials that the Museum provided. In June 2010, after I shared one of the online albums I had organized with the pictures I had taken, the Museum’s Deputy Director replied and proposed that we included these pictures in the website that was being designed for the Itinerante. But in contrast to my online albums and to the exhibition’s banners, I am not acknowledged as the photographer of these pictures. In fact, the contract I signed to work as a commissary stated that I give up my patrimonial rights—but not the moral right —of any product realized during the development of the contract, including photographs, videos and writings. On the mini-site there are no logos of any of the local institutions that had set up the various exhibitions either. This contrasts with the care taken to acknowledge national institutions and the general design and conception of the exhibition, which are on the mini-site but not included in the banners.

The assumption by myself and others was that this relinquishing of authorship to the national institution was just part of the job.

I had been in charge of moving the materials around and coordinating the travelling for the first two years (2009-10), but then the exhibition became quite well known and continued to visit many other localities in the country under the responsibility of a young Afro-Colombian woman who had worked as a tour-guide for the temporary exhibition and for the travelling version that the Education Division had taken to public schools around Bogotá. To this day the exhibition remains available for any organization, group or institution that is willing to set it up, but the Museum is not currently offering any help, financial or otherwise.

After the first year of my PhD in Social Anthropology with Visual Media programme at Manchester University, I did fieldwork for eleven months between September 2012 and August 2013. I spent time both at the National Museum and accompanying two groups that organized versions of the Itinerante. In 2012, one of these groups, Niches en Acción, organised a tour of the exhibition around schools in the Caribbean port city Barranquilla after they had visited another version of the Itinerante. My intention this time was to follow the ways that local organizers of the exhibition made use of it locally—and not just how they presented it back to the Museum. In the next chapter, I focus on the ways that this Afro-Colombian organization, whose members were very efficient at following the bureaucratic and legal requirements that signing a *comodato* [free loan] contract with the FA required, would nevertheless manage to use the exhibition to further their own collective and personal agendas. The means to do this was through tour-guiding or doing ‘*exposiciones*’ [oral presentations] and the DVD with recorded guided tours, as well as the exhibition catalogue were tools that Niches en Acción made use of to train themselves watching videos and reading texts.

As the exhibition travels, it moves around in an itinerary of non-linear points of request, approval, authorization, documentation, evidence, proof, gratitude, reporting, certification, recognition, legitimation and acknowledgement. All these points are materialized as textual and visual documents on sheets of paper, pictures and/or videos (either hard or virtual) that act as forms of evidence and prove the exhibition has actually been set up. So, for example, after Niches en Acción decided they wanted to set up the exhibition in different schools in Barranquilla, its director, Deibys Hernández, had to write a letter of request to the National Museum (which provides a form that can be adapted) for it, along with another set of documents that showed proof that Niches en Acción is legally able to form a contract with the Museum. At the same time, Deibys (or another member of their organization) had to go to the schools they wanted to visit and propose, using another letter, that they participate in the itinerary by providing space for the set up and help from teachers and administrative staff. The contract was written and another commitment form was provided to be filled in, and the exhibition was sent from Bogotá to Barranquilla via courier. Many phone calls had to be made and emails had to be sent to confirm the set ups were approved in the schools. Authorization letters were provided and the exhibition was transported, set up, photographed and shot. Pictures were published on Facebook to call for members of Niches en Acción to help with setting it up and guiding tours (voluntarily). Then new letters were requested, provided and collected that certified the exhibit was set up in each school.

All of these elements were by turn gathered to make a report for the National Museum, and the Ministry of Culture. The whole process was then incorporated into their organizational history, and acted as a form of evidence and certification for future projects and alliances, such as the one I witnessed while I stayed in Barranquilla, with the local branch of the *Instituto Nacional de Bienestar Familiar* (ICBF) [National Institute of Family Welfare].

---

28 I will explain this name in the following chapter.
Tour-guiding was also one of the ways in which Velorios remained at the Museum, along with a small section from the temporary exhibition. One of the videos from the temporary exhibition and the display dedicated to the African pieces from the Bertrand Collection that had been included in Velorios were incorporated into the Museum’s ‘permanent’ exhibitions, modifying a previous display that also included some of these pieces and texts that used parts of the ‘script’ written in 1994 by historian Adriana Maya. This space was used by one of the tour-guides, or ‘monitors,’ that I will talk about in the following chapter, as part of her guided tours in the Museum.
Chapter 5: Tour-guiding
To introduce this chapter I selected three stills that stress the educational character of the exhibition project and the ‘handing off to a new generation’ that the exhibition project had as one of its objectives. I present these images to highlight the intention to generate encounters between different kinds of knowledge (academic, bureaucratic, museological, museographic, ethnic or traditional), materials (texts, objects, images, sound) and actions (exhibiting, tour-guiding, performing) in the temporary exhibitions hall. These encounters act as horizontal conversations, unlike the museum hierarchy. In these three stills different people are tour-guiding the exhibition at the same spot (the ‘African’ corner). At the bottom, sociologist Luis Meza, one of the Afro-Colombian tour-guides hired to work for the exhibition talks to me at the same time that he talks to a virtual public through the camera. While the exhibition was still opened at the Museum in 2008, I recorded and edited this material and made it into a DVD that became an intermediary between the NM and future organizers of the Itinerante. This is similar to the case of the Afro-Colombian organization Niches en acción I referred to in this and the previous chapter, which also acted as an intermediary between the NM and local institutions in Barranquilla.

In the National Museum, ‘education’ is kept distinct from ‘curatorship’ and tour-guides (‘monitors’ or ‘monitor-teachers,’ as they are called in the National Museum) are distinct from curators. Education and curatorship are physically placed in different offices. In the days I worked for the Museum, these offices were located in different parts of the Museum: Museography and Education in the northern wing and the Arts and History Curatorship in the southern wing. In the meetings that preceded the opening of Velorios the distinction was also temporary. As with the Museography office, the National Museum’s Education Division got directly involved in the project only a few months before its opening at the National Museum in Bogotá. In fact, neither monitors nor other members of the Education Division were ever present in the meetings documented with the minutes that I have referred to in this thesis, even though many of them had training in design, history and arts. This meant that their input was, in many ways, subordinated to that of the A&H curatorship office. Many decisions had already been made when they engaged in the ‘participatory collaboration’ that characterized Velorios. In spite of this, ‘education’ was one of the repeated subjects of the Museum meetings. The issue I deal with in this chapter is the place that learning, teaching and more generally ‘education’ had in the project and more generally in the Museum.

In the stills from tour-guides videos that travelled with the Itinerante, which appear in the previous page, a temporary flattening out of this hierarchy took place. In these images, Afro and non-Afro tour-guides, and the anthropologist-curator appear talking about the contents of the exhibition face-to-face to an audience. At the top I show one ‘permanent’ monitor-teacher tour-guiding in front of a group of school students. Below is anthropologist Arocha doing a ‘special’ guided-tour. His audience are some teachers that he was acquainted with from a previous project. Facing him is the child of one of these teachers recording him while he spoke, and to his left are anthropologist Moya and other monitor-teachers. Among them, Barranquillero and professional sociologist Luis Meza. He appears again in the bottom screenshot, tour-guiding especially for a recording that I would edit with the intention of
training tour-guides for the travelling version of the exhibition. In these three guided-tours, they are all
talking in front of the African ancestors corner in the temporary exhibition at the Museum. I use the
three screenshots above not as proof, but to propose tour-guiding as a form of affirmative action and
Afro-reparation, which may counteract the limited access to the means for the production and
circulation of their own images and names among Afro-Colombian people. Also, to introduce the
involvement of five young Afro-Colombian university students in the temporary version of Velorios,
and the use that the organization Niches en Acción made of the Itinerante in Barranquilla, a port city in
the Colombian Caribbean Coast. As did the set of banners designed at the Museum, the catalogue and
the DVD with recorded guided tours at the version at the National Museum worked as the link
between the training as ‘monitor-teachers’ that takes place in the Museum and the ‘formación’ or
training of young members of an Afro-Colombian organization. Unlike the audiovisual material
produced and displayed in the temporary exhibition, the documentary ‘museum objects’ that the
banners, catalogue and DVD constituted were seen and ‘activated’ not as forms of ‘cultural
reawakening or survival’ (Geismar (2009: 56) [quoting Huffman]), as anthropologist Arocha proposed
in early meetings in 2006, but as a form of ‘telling stories with objects’ that characterized this
‘participatory collaboration.’

Peers and Brown (2003), in the introduction to their edited volume about experiences around the
world where museums and ‘source communities’ have engaged in collaborative projects, confess that
their book lacks ‘material written by source community members themselves,’ (p. 15) and that it is
characterized by an ‘imbalance of voice represented in the articles and section introductions’ (ibid.). In
this chapter the ethnographic ‘documents’ that I produced were of intangible guided-tours and
exposiciones [oral presentations]. Here I present tour-guiding as the site for ‘return’ and ‘reparation’
both in the Museum and outside. At the Museum tour-guiding as curatorship (‘telling stories with
objects’) and in Barranquilla’s schools it all became a form of ‘oral presentations’ or exposiciones.
Exposiciones were in fact a familiar category and practice in schools, being the name that students give
to the presentations they and their colleagues do in front of the class, explaining a subject they have
researched. Usually they make posters ['carteleras'] that combine text and pictures (something that
Power Point presentations have now replaced in richer schools or at Universities when projectors are
available). Sometimes for Deibys Hernández, president of the Afro-Colombian organization Niches en
Acción, who organized the Itinerante in Barranquilla, to set up the exhibition meant unpacking them
and leaving the banners standing in the school’s corridors or classrooms. He would then ask the
students to read and make notes or copy the texts that the banners displayed, as they do many times
with their teachers’ presentations. These banners were among the ‘new objects’ that documentation
practices had produced (including also panels, print material and DVDs) that were inserted into local
pre-existing practices. Here I show how in and outside the Museum, tour-guiding offers a site for
understanding the negotiations of the authority of the Museum in the field of education, a site par
excellence for the circulation of stereotypes, one of the (in)visibilities I presented in the thesis
introduction.
Tour-guides and education in Museum meetings

From the earliest Museum meetings in 2006, the minutes describe how education became an axis in the project that led to Velorios. On the one hand, Lleras had suggested that young people from the communities participated as much as older generations. On the other hand, the exhibition would help give continuity to an ongoing project, led by Arocha and the GEA, that trained Bogotá school teachers in the Cátedra de estudios afrocolombianos [subject of Afro-Colombian studies], and he suggested inviting these teachers to be part of the process. Additionally, as I have explained in the Backstage and Frontstage chapters, two of the sabedoras that met regularly with the team, Carmen Paz and Leocadia Mosquera, were school teachers who had been born in the departments of Cauca and Chocó respectively, but who had lived in Bogotá for many years. According to the minutes, the version of the project that Arocha wrote, which meeting attendees discussed in February 2007, included among other subjects ‘involving the new generations of young Afro-Colombians’ for ‘generational replacement.’

After the 2007 fieldtrips, when anthropologists and staff from the A&H Curatorship met (Arocha, Lleras, Vanegas and Botero) to discuss the information and materials collected, this subject was mentioned once more. Museum staff were to think about a programme to specifically train Afro-Colombian young people who lived in Bogotá. A later version of the project explains that it would ‘contribute to the generational replacement of male and female secular cantors [cantaores and cantaoras], sindicos and other ancestral religious officiants, [and] support the introduction and consolidation of the Cátedra de estudios afrocolombianos, at least in the education system in Bogotá. Apart from the temporary and travelling exhibition, among the products of the research project would be ‘work with teachers, the

---

1 3 November 2006.

2 Law 70 of Black communities establishes that the ‘subject of Afro-Colombian studies’ is one of the ‘mechanisms for the protection and development of the rights and of the cultural identity of Afro-Colombians. Article 39 states that ‘The State will be vigilant that that in the national education system the knowledge of the cultural practices of Black communities and their contributions to Colombian history and culture is known and disseminated, so that it offers equitable and formative information of the societies and cultures of these communities […] The subject of Afro-Colombian studies will be included in the social sciences areas of the different education levels according to the corresponding curricula’ (http://www.alcaldiabogota.gov.co/sisjur/normas/Norma1.jsp?i=7388, accessed 22 October 2015).

3 6 December 2006.


5 9 October 2007.

6 In the exhibition catalogue, Arocha explains what the role of sindicos among Afro-Colombians was: ‘These local officiants emerged because […] priests and missionaries only visited Afro-Colombian towns on the occasion of patron saint festivities. Meanwhile, liturgy and church decoration were under the responsibility of these autodidactic people, with their particular interpretations of orthodoxy, which may be considered ‘aberrant’ by those who reject heterodoxy. All in all, they played a quotidian role in the spiritual and emotional healing of the members of communities’ (2008: 71).
creation of supporting materials to be used in schools [and] the training of young Afro-Colombians as exhibition monitors.’

While these meetings were taking place at the Museum, Arocha and four younger members of the GEA, collectively wrote an article about ‘Eleggú y los Caminos de la Tolerancia’ [Eleggua and the pathways of tolerance], concerning the Programa de Formación Permanente de Docentes [Permanent Programme for Teachers Training] or ‘PFPD’ that they carried out in 2006, in agreement with the District Secretary of Education of Bogotá. The name of the project honoured the oricha Eleggua:

one of the main deities in the Yoruba pantheon in Togo, Benin and Nigeria, who persists in America through representations such as that of the Niño Jesús de Atocha [Holy child of Atocha] and who guides those who dare to go by unknown paths. With this denomination we made explicit our adhesion to the acknowledgement of the role that the memories of Africa have had in the nation building (Arocha et al, 2006: 96).

In this PFPD, members of the GEA taught 40 teachers from public schools in Bogotá ‘the achievements and contributions of the Afro-Colombian cultures to national life,’ with the objective of ‘making them visible.’ Meanwhile, these teachers were also observed by the anthropologists in order to ‘identify mechanisms and patterns of discrimination and racism to overcome them and achieving the inclusion of the Cátedra de estudios afrocolombianos as a conviviality compass in the different schools’ (p. 95). This teaching-while-observing project showed ‘tensions that emerged while looking for a space for the studies about Central-Western and Central Africa and Afro-Colombias in the school curriculum’ (ibid.). These ‘tensions’ appeared not only during lectures, but also during the school visits that this group of authors made; racial stereotypes circulated throughout the school system and making this evident would sometimes produce strong negative reactions from teachers. The means to counteract this, in the authors’ view, followed the previous work of the ‘Afro-Americanist focus’ that Restrepo described in 2003:

Our proposal to contribute to the rectification of the concealment of Africa and Afro-Colombia consisted of the study of the ethnic origins of Afro-Colombians, their ancestors’ sagas, and the resistance against slavery as antecedent to the ethno-historical and ethnographic itinerary through the Afro-Colombias (ibid.).

In the view of these authors, a version of this concealment was a ‘learnt conduct’ that the education system naturalized. As I showed in the introduction, two of the authors of this article, had coined this ‘learnt conduct’ as andino-centrismo [Andean-centrism] and trópico-salvajismo [tropical-savagery] in their contribution, on the following year, to Mosquera’s book Afro-reparaciones (Arocha and Moreno, 2006: 96).

As part of the PFPD, a short expedition was also organized to the Pacific region with some of these school teachers.
Schools, universities, research centres, and lecturers, as much as deans and public servants must work hand in hand with each other to counteract this form of invisibility, they proposed (p. 103).

Monitores docentes [Monitor–teachers] at the NMC

‘Education’ appears again in the minutes of April 2007. That day, curator Lleras, the anthropologists and the sabedoras discussed strategies to attract school teachers to the exhibition. This led to a discussion about the characteristics that a ‘monitor,’ the name used for tour-guides at the Museum, should have. Curator Lleras explained to the sabedoras that usually ‘monitors’ at the Museum received training where they learnt how to ‘manage the audience’ [manejo de públicos], to tour-guide in the Museum’s permanent exhibitions, and that they received additional training for temporary exhibitions. Ideally, she explained, some of these monitors should be Afro-Colombian and have an interest in the subject, and although they would not receive the ‘monitor-teachers’ training, they would work together with monitors already working in the Museum.

On 29 May, less than three months before the exhibition’s opening, Juan Pablo Moya attended his first meeting at the A&H Curatorship regarding the exhibition. Moya had studied anthropology at the National University of Colombia, like Moreno, Botero and me, and like us, he became involved in the project as a professional anthropologist and as a member of the GEA. He, Lleras, Arocha, Botero and I met that day and among other subjects discussed the proposal that Moya had made to Lleras the day before to develop a project that involved the exhibition’s tour-guides and also teachers and students from schools in Bogotá. This project, designed by anthropologist Moya to create a ‘bridge’ between the exhibition and a group of teachers interested in the application of the Catedra de estudios afrocolombianos, who were organized in the network that, like the PFPD project, was called Elegguá. This bridge was the seed for the parallel travelling exhibition organized between the ECD and the District Secretary of Education of Bogotá. It kept the name that the exhibition project had had up to that moment, ‘Living Ancestors’ [Ancestros Vivos].

The minutes describe that we discussed the subjects included in the course for the exhibition’s teacher-monitors. All of them stemmed from the exhibition’s script: ‘Basic notions about the slave trade,’ ‘ethnic origins of Afro-Colombians,’ ‘historical context,’ ‘list of objects,’ ‘stages of the ritual, cult to the ancestors and relationship between patron saints-dead people-living people,’ ‘contexts of

---

8 Lina del Mar Moreno was the young anthropologist who worked as the ‘technical secretary’ for the exhibition project and travelled with Arocha and the sabedoras in the first set of fieldtrips, before Juliana Botero was hired.

9 17 April 2008. That day Lleras also told the group she had met in a separate space with lecturer and curator Mercedes Angola and artist Liliana Angulo, whom I mentioned in the introduction chapter.

10 Juan Pablo Moya, like Juliana Botero, Lina del Mar Moreno and I, had recently finished our undergraduate studies, thanks to which we were regarded (and hired) as professional anthropologists.

11 https://sites.google.com/site/ancestrosvivos/, accessed 17 August 2015.
hypermordenization’ and ‘notions of racism and discrimination.’ Some books by Arocha and Friedemann were also included. In the same set of minutes, Arocha is quoted as saying he was concerned that, due to the little time available for training, tour-guides might lack enough precise information. Furthermore, Arocha wondered how it would be possible to transgress the visitors’ prejudices when they entered the hall. For curator Lleras, guided-tours had very specific purposes that matched her views of the Museum as mass media:

Visitors should not feel confronted or annoyed with the contents of the guided-tour because people go to museums to learn and to have fun, the strategy [Lleras] proposes is to ‘convince them’ ["echarles el cuento"] in a very subtle way, without questioning their preconceptions directly. The challenge is to shake the audience [remover cosas en el público], to generate sensorial experiences.

Then the minutes quote the curator as she explains what kind of ‘impact’ she expects the exhibition will have, guided-tours included:

The exhibition only manages to transmit a few ideas, we cannot cover everything or present with depth all the complexity or all the information gathered in the field. In this way, the work is a little ungrateful, but the ideal is to leave the visitors with some doubts and questions, that they leave thinking new things. To do this we might tell stories, give full names to the protagonists of the stories gathered in the field, present many examples and, with that kind of a guided-tour [visitas comentadas], plus leaflets, objects and the exhibition’s narrative itself, we can do a good job, impact on and obtain a good reception from the audience. All of this implies refining the communication between all the participants in the process.\footnote{29 May 2008.}

I have explained how fieldtrips and meetings were sometimes a site to learn-through-practice, and also how having attended lectures with, or having been tutored by, Arocha and belonging to a group like the GEA could lead to employment with the National Museum. Furthermore, I have shown that voluntary work and personal commitment was key in the development of this project. These were characteristics of the training of ‘monitor-teachers’ at the NM. The training course for monitor-teachers that is mentioned in these minutes was regularly designed, organized and delivered by members of the Museum’s Education and Cultural Division (ECD). The ‘volunteers course’ or voluntariado is the gateway to becoming a tour-guide or ‘monitor-teacher,’ and may be a means to professionalize in the field of museology, as it is recognized not only in the National Museum but in other museum institutions as well.

‘School of Guides’ and ‘Voluntariado’

In the introduction of this thesis I explained that artist Beatriz González worked as the curator of the National Museum’s arts and history collections for fourteen years and that Lleras succeeded her in that
role in 2004. I also explained that González had developed the temporal and linear narrative that the Museum’s permanent exhibits displayed in 2008, from early times on the ground floor to more recent events on the second one. González’s influence and imprint on that institution, and more generally in the field of museums and museology in Colombia, makes itself evident in her curriculum vitae. She’s acknowledged by some (including herself) as the creator of the ‘Guides School’ in the Museum of Modern Arts of Bogotá. Following her professional journey and those of two more Colombian museum practitioners directly involved in the history of the ECD, it is evident that this ‘Guides school’ was a predecessor of the 

According to López Rosas (2006), from 1978 to 1983 artist Beatriz González led a group of guides that opened ‘a very rigorous space to reflect on the pedagogy of art in the Museum of Modern Art of Bogotá’ (Ibid: 6). To this group belonged renowned artists like José Alejandro Restrepo¹³ and Doris Salcedo,¹⁴ and curator José Ignacio Roca.¹⁵ Later on González continued to work on the theme of education in the Section of Plastic Arts of the Bank of the Republic, in the Luis Ángel Arango Library, with a group mainly composed of students from the Social Communication Faculty of the Externado University. In the 1990s, in López Rosas’s view, the group of guides of the Bank of the Republic and the ones in the National Museum of Colombia set trends in relation to the approach towards contemporary art, the history of Colombian art and in the pedagogic foundations for education in museums, creating materials and designing didactic halls (ibid.: 7).¹⁶ This was in the context of an increase in the number of visitors that museums were receiving, and of thinking about the museum as mass media. In López Rosas’s view, the beginning of the 21st century was seeing more autonomous education departments, at least in the bigger institutional Colombian museums, in relation to curatorship departments.

López Rosas writes from personal experience. In the 1990s, he was trained in one of these ‘school of guides,’ which he eventually coordinated.¹⁷ He also worked at the National Museum as the chief of the Education and Cultural Division, and was part of the group that created the Master’s Programme in Museology and Heritage at the National University of Colombia, which he directed from 2006 to 2008. He also directed the Museum of Art of the National University of Colombia from 2006 to 2007. López’s


¹⁶ They created the series ‘Study guides’ [Guías de estudio] that are distributed to visitors of the Bank of the Republic’s exhibitions, and are available (in Spanish) in http://admin.banrepcultural.org/blaavirtual/todaslasartes/guiasarte/indice.htm (accessed 13 August 2015).

professional experience coincides with those of Daniel Castro, another of the members of González’s ‘School of Guides,’ who also worked in the NM’s Education Division, has directed two public Bogotá museums and has just been appointed as the new Director of the National Museum as I write this. In the absence of museology programmes at the professional level (that is, undergraduate), tour-guiding becomes the way to become a professional in the field of museums. In the interview I mentioned above, González explained that to recruit people for the ‘school of guides’ that she founded in the Museum of Modern Art of Bogotá, she ‘sent letters to universities in which [she] invited Philosophy and Fine Arts students who wanted to participate in a guides’ school.’ Only nowadays the recruiting system, at least in the National Museum, is very different from how things were done when González worked at the MAMBO. I will now describe what it takes to become a ‘monitor-guide,’ which requires first that one is certified as ‘voluntario’ [volunteer].

Programme for the voluntariado course

The programme for the ‘training course for young volunteers’ explains that the course is designed for two kinds of roles, that is, to be certified as a ‘monitor-teacher’ [monitor docente] or as a ‘project volunteer’ [voluntario de proyecto]. According to the guidelines for this programme the monitor teacher:

is somebody who unfolds [despliega] a constant study of the Museum collections and at the same time maintains the curiosity of its diverse visitors with the objective of designing and implementing educational dynamics (guided tours, workshops, didactic materials, etc.) which allow the audience to get close, recognize and enjoy the permanent and temporary exhibitions.

Currently this training begins with a ‘foundations’ stage that is divided in three cycles: ‘Museums and heritage,’ ‘Education and Pedagogy in the Museum,’ and ‘Ethnography of collections and audiences.’ Trainees meet every Saturday afternoon for approximately four months to discuss a reading list and talk with museum practitioners from different areas of the Museum and other institutions. To obtain their ‘volunteer’ certificate, which can be included on one’s CV, they must work for 40 hours without payment in one of the Museum’s divisions and curatorship offices, or in support of the different special events that take place in the Museum (mainly those of the Cultural and Education Division, such as concerts or the Museum’s anniversary, which hundreds of people attend).

If they want to be certified as monitor-teachers, they must additionally pass three tests. The first one is an introductory guided tour [Guía introductoria]. Guidelines are provided for this guided tour, which must include mention of the Museum’s history and collections, the building’s history and distribution, and instructions about how to behave during the visit. The second one is a ‘general guided tour’ [visita


19 Version 7 April 2015.
comentada general], where the volunteer must choose six pieces from the permanent displays, introduce their ‘aesthetic, conceptual and contextual characteristics’ and relate them with the introductory guided tour’s guidelines. The third one is a ‘hall didactic’ [didáctica en sala], where the volunteer designs and produces ‘a tool—it can be a methodology or a material—that facilitates or potentiates the audience to learn and approach one piece, one subject or one collection from the Museum,’ a sort of workshop based on the Museum’s exhibitions. The reading list includes material published in other Spanish-speaking countries, such as Spain and Argentina, and also publications written by Colombian museum scholars and practitioners, and documents produced by ICOM (which are usually translated to multiple languages).

The programme finishes with three sessions (numbers 13, 14 and 15, so if the group meets every week this is the 4th month of training) in which discussions and observations are directly applied to the design of a workshop, didactic material and a ‘pilot.’ From interviews I infer that this is the period in which volunteers begin their unpaid 40 hours and decide if they want to become a certified monitor-guide/teacher or only a volunteer. The fifteenth session is designated, the programme states, to discussing the subject of accessibility in the Museum, a project that has been ongoing for several years now that intends to make the Museum an ‘inclusive space in which people with disabilities [en situación de discapacidad], elderly people, toddlers and young children [primera infancia], and vulnerable populations are able to practice their citizenship and fulfil their rights to enjoy and learn about cultural heritage’ (ibid.: p. 18).

As I explained above, since 2011 volunteers have been encouraged to develop ‘projects’ with specific ‘objectives’ to support curatorship, museography, and conservation and restoration Museum divisions. So, even if they are not interested in becoming monitor-teachers, they will still be given a certificate that shows they have done this (and so their experience is, in his view, ‘laboralizable,’ relevant to finding a job). In the past few years the number of people doing the course has increased, and as the leader of this course in 2015 explained to me:

Museology is not considered as an option conducive to becoming a professional person among people at school in Colombia [...] That’s why museums need to see the possibility of becoming more than spaces that promote [activities such as] to preserve, to exhibit, to educate, and to research, at the same time that it configures a culture of museum appreciation, and the construction of audiences [construcción de públicos]. The training of audiences in a museum, especially in Latin American museums, does not take place in a way that the public learn contents, but that the public learns how to be a public. This sounds paradoxical. That is, that they learn how to relate with the space, not to touch, that they understand why one doesn’t touch, that they interact with the museum, that they realize that a museum is not covered in one day. That it is not a checklist where you take a picture with the sculpture, upload it to

---

20 Many of the tour-guides I have spoken with report they do not read comfortably in English or French, which limits their access to most of the literature produced about museum studies.

21 Many of the tour-guides that work in the Bank of the Republic did the volunteer course at the National Museum.
Facebook and that’s it, it’s part of my history and my cultural legacy, as Ana Rosas Monteco, a Mexican researcher says [...] So when the volunteers do their course they have the option to become a tour-guide or monitor-teacher, or to be a volunteer for a project.  

This view coincided with the Museum’s Strategic Plan, which includes as one of its ‘strategic areas’ the ‘development of audiences’ [desarrollo de públicos] (Ministerio de Cultura, 2003). On the other hand, current monitor-teachers explained to me that some of the certified ‘volunteers’ and ‘monitor-teachers’ from the National Museum made use of this certification to work in other museums in the city.

The Voluntariado: monitor-teachers and mediators

I conducted interviews with two of the ‘permanent monitors’ that currently work at the National Museum. Both of them did the voluntariado course and also became ‘monitor-teachers.’ They also signalled how the voluntariado has formalized through the years. Both of them, despite their different fields of expertise, found a space for their training and also a means for income in the Education and Cultural Division of the Museum. While working in the ECD they were able to study and they have both used their working experience for academic research purposes. Both of them have coordinated projects in the ECD and are, while I write this chapter, doing their master’s studies using their own experiences at the museum in their research. They have also helped shape the emphasis of their guided tours, workshops and projects, as well as tour-guides training, from the perspective of their own professional fields.

One of them, who has an educational qualification in pedagogy and psychology from the Pedagógica University, explained to me what a ‘good monitor’ was, in his view, using as an example one of his more experienced colleagues, the ‘permanent monitor’ that appears in one of the screenshots at the beginning of this chapter:

He keeps the attention of an elderly person, an adult and a child, and because of the dynamism of the discourse, he [is] able to talk about very specialized issues but also general issues, and so he is able to respond [llenar la inquietud] to a person who has a trained perception [say university students and lecturers] but also to those who have an ingenuous perception [like school children].

The other monitor, a professional industrial designer from the National University, did the voluntariado and began to work as a monitor-teacher in 2006. She explained to me what formalization meant: when

---

22 Interview with Juan Ricardo Barrangán, May 2015.

23 In Colombia, educational qualifications are called licenciaturas, and are undergraduate programmes that train students to become school teachers specialized in different subjects. Thus a person who studies a licenciatura in biology is a ‘professional’ expected to work teaching that subject in schools. Juan Ricardo, as a professional ‘pedagogue,’ is specialized in the field of education and in teaching other teachers.

24 Ibid.
she did the course, there was less reading and it was more ‘experimental’ and ‘sensorial,’ and included activities like walking barefoot in the Museum. Now there is a programme with a reading list, it is more ‘academic.’ She remembers that at least four different people led the course while she did it. She described for me how she does her guided visits:

With the audience one begins in a very general way, introducing the exhibition (one doesn’t know who one’s with). As one talks and advances and asks people things or they ask you, then one begins to get an idea of who’s with who, then one asks more, or they ask more, or one stops to listen to what they have to say, and then there is room for what one thinks, one’s opinion. This is in the case of the general public. But if one is with an academic group, say with master’s students, one doesn’t have much room to say those things, and one has to be very careful with one’s opinions [because they will suggest that that’s what they are, opinions]. But if on the contrary one is with a family, or a more relaxed audience, one can explore what one thinks of the object one’s seeing, of what’s there. They don’t have the theoretical grounds, but they have the experience of the object that one’s observing.

She also explained with more detail, and from her experience, what the process of becoming a monitor-teacher consisted of, if one wants to follow that route after the 40 hours of voluntary work.

To be a monitor-teacher, you need to do the tests mentioned in the guidelines I quoted above. Then each time a temporary exhibition is organized, you need to do and pass a ‘study group’ that is based on the contents that the curatorship offices have already provided. Assessment is done in practice: both monitor-teachers told me that they had accompanied a senior monitor-teacher who led the voluntariado for several years, in two of his guided-tours to learn how to do them. Then they would do a trial ‘visita’ or guided tour with some of the permanent monitors. The audience would be told that it was a trial and the permanent monitor would be there to make any necessary corrections. The final test is with the audience and, although this test is oral, there is a written test at the beginning of the voluntariado, as a first and very simple filter. This test involves also a form of ‘curatorship,’ or telling stories with objects, which in spite of following the guidelines provided by the curatorship offices, leave room for their own narratives. As part of their test to become ‘monitor-teachers,’ they randomly choose two objects that they need to talk about to create and do their guided tours. The permanent monitor would know when a new tour-guide is ‘ready’ to guide on his or her own. In this evaluation, ‘coherence’ is very important. In this monitor-teacher’s view, there is little room for what one thinks, and so phrases like ‘I think that’ or ‘my opinion is’ are not as well regarded as, ‘as Adriana Maya said,’ quoting acknowledged authors and giving up one’s own. This is the process that Afro-Colombian tour-guides would also need to go through to become one of the Museum’s monitors. But as I mentioned above, tour guides’ training in Velorios required what for some was an ‘exception,’ but for others an affirmative action, a ‘quota’ for Afro-Colombians.
Tour-guiding, Velorios and Afro-Colombians

In the Frontstage chapter, I explained that Lleras (2011) introduced the inclusion of Afro-Colombian tour-guides in the exhibition as one of the forms of ‘participation’ and of ‘self-representation’ that Velorios conveyed. She also presented this action as ‘breaking the rules:’

Under normal circumstances, people who work in the Education Division of the Museum have to complete a course and pass certain tests before giving guided tours of exhibitions. For this particular case, we had to break our own rules in order to incorporate Afrocolombian students who had not taken the course but who attended the study sessions. Initially, the group was composed of around 12 people, six of whom worked in the exhibition alongside other white or mestizo guides (p. 185).

Here I link tour-guiding with the initial demand that GEA scholars Arocha and Mosquera had made in 2006 for the Museum to make reparations to Afro-Colombian people. I will now refer to other professional journeys to place them in parallel with those of monitor-teachers at the Museum. What was phrased as an ‘exception’ or ‘breaking the rules’ on the Museum side, and as ‘quotas’ on the young Afro-Colombians’ side,25 provides a site for affirmative actions that accord with pre-existing procedures at the Museum. At the same time I show what modifications were necessary, such as being present in meetings and being trained as a volunteer, or the use of audio-visual and printed material.

The way that Afro-Colombian students became monitor-guides for Velorios helps me assess what an effective site to do reparations at the National Museum could be, in a way that that their job stability does not depend on the presence of particular people. There was no institutional policy that granted continuation to their participation in the process.

Two of those Afro-Colombian students were undergraduate students of qualifications in education at the Distrital University. The way that they learnt about Velorios reminded me of the recruiting system that González had used in her ‘school of guides.’ In interviews that I did with them, they told me that they found out about the project after they received an email from a Distrital University lecturer who taught a course in African history that they attended.26 One of them was studying a qualification in basic primary and arts education, and had been born in Raspadura, Chocó, but had relocated with her family to Bogotá when she was a child. The other had been born in Bogotá, but her mother was from Buenaventura, and her father from a Caribbean town. She and a few others of the 12 Afro-Colombian students that Lleras mentioned were members of CEUNA, the Afro-Colombian University Students

---

25 Wade (2009) explains that in spite of the hegemony of the ‘Afro’ category, which could be instrumental—as it has been in the Brazilian context—in the ‘implementation of affirmative action programmes and racial quotas (Maio and Santos 2005), [this instrumentality] has been ignored in Colombia, despite the presence of some incipient affirmative action programmes in, for example, university admissions (Cunin 2000; Wade 2006, p. 114)’ (para. 40).

26 This and other lecturers at the Distrital University organized ‘África en la escuela’ [Africa at school], an event that gathered school teachers and others to reflect about applied experiences of or related with the subject of the Cátedra de estudios afrocolombianos.
Collective, an organization created in 2004 ‘to work for measurements that counteract the lack of Afro-Colombian students in higher education and the lack of ethnic contents in universities’ syllabi.

CEUNA, like many other Afro-Colombian youth organizations, form groups that help their members to find sources of income and political anti-racist ‘training’ [formación].

As this Afro-Colombian young woman explained to me in 2012, at least some of these 12 young people took for granted that all would become paid tour-guides for the exhibition. In her words, they thought they would be what they understood as the ‘quota’ for Afro-Colombians in the exhibition, a procedure they were acquainted with from their participation in national and international gatherings of Afro-descendant organizations. The ECD team had a different view, composed, as I have explained, of people who had been trained and worked as monitor-teachers themselves and who were not, or at least did not self-identify as ‘Afro.’ The late involvement of the ECD in the ‘participatory collaboration’ that characterized Velorios, meant that in their view it was an ‘exception’ and ‘breaking the rules’ that was not ‘fair’ with other non-Afro people. As the exhibition’s opening was too close for this group of Afro-Colombian monitor-trainees to do the voluntariado, they were especially chosen because of their interest in the ‘Afro’ subject, but as even permanent monitor-teachers would need to do with other temporary exhibitions, they would have to pass an exam, which only three of them did. Two more Afro monitors were hired to do tour-guiding shifts some weeks after Velorios had opened, to replace two experienced monitors who would begin to work in another temporary exhibition. So from those twelve young Afro-Colombian students initially selected, only five worked consistently for the exhibition. The Director of the Education Division and the Volunteers’ coordinator selected the exhibition tour-guides a few days before it opened. From my conversations with the tour-guides, it is clear that there was no clear agreement from the beginning in terms of the conditions under which the training, selection and hiring would take place. But this ‘exception’ meant that, in any case, the ECD adapted its own parameters, and comprised the contents of its voluntariado for Velorios.

According to the ‘Work program’ [Programa de trabajo] devised to train the monitors for Velorios, there were five ‘work sessions’ organized from the 14th of July. A reading list was included with works by Arocha, Friedemann and Maya and a few articles that related with the subjects of the exhibition. Study groups were constituted composed by four to six trainees, some of whom had already worked as monitor-teachers for other temporary exhibitions and had therefore made the voluntariado. I attended one of these sessions to present and discuss with the group of trainees the ‘contexts’ of

---

27 In Spanish, Colectivo de Estudiantes Universitarios Afrocolombianos. CEUNA’s blog: http://ceunafro.blogspot.co.uk/search?updated-min=2015-01-01T00:00:00-08:00&updated-max=2016-01-01T00:00:08:00&max-results=1 (18 March 2015).

modernization. At least once, the group of tour-guides went around the exhibition with Jaime Arocha. I recorded this ‘special guided-tour,’ and include in the first page of this chapter a still from it.

Two of the Afro-Colombian monitor-guides got involved in the travelling version of the exhibition that the National Museum’s Education Division toured in Bogotá in association with Bogotá’s District Secretary of Education, after Velorios finished at the Museum. A joint project began in 2009 between the District Secretary of Education (with its program ‘Museum-City-Museum’) and the Museum’s Education Division (with its programme ‘Museum outside of the Museum’) through its Association of Friends of the National Museum, a private entity that managed signing contracts and receiving money for the Museum. The Museum would offer the exhibition and the monitors’ education service (talks and workshops the ED regularly offers, usually to schools and universities, which they charge for). Regarding this new project, the ECD director explained to me that Curator Lleras had proposed the project to him as a way to give continuity to the process that had begun with the temporary exhibition. With teachers who were applying the Cátedra de Estudios Afrocolombianos in Bogotá, and who had participated and led some of the activities carried out in the Museum while the temporary exhibition was open, like bringing their students to visit the exhibition, use it for their school projects, or attend its accompanying events. These teachers became hosts for the travelling version of Velorios organized in 2009-10 in Bogotá.

Like the other monitors, they designed and developed ‘workshops’ based on their own personal interests in the subject and their expertise as teachers-to-be. While the project was still on-going Juan Pablo Moya left the project and a monitor-teacher who had worked for Velorios and had been tour-guiding at the Museum for a longer period took charge. One of the Afro monitor-guides helped her coordinate it for some time. This longer-experienced monitor was not Afro-Colombian, but was familiar, through reading historian Adriana Maya in her undergraduate courses, with the Afro-genetic approach that she advocated. In fact, she appropriated her experience with Velorios by creating her own guided-tour [visita comentada] using the African objects from the Bertrand Collection and other objects exhibited in the permanent exhibitions. She also appropriated the exhibition, and more generally her work at the Museum, and used some of its materials in her guided-tours.

In 2010, when I began to work for another related project, one of the Afro-Colombian monitor-teachers became the commissary of the exhibition. She was hired by the Museum’s Travelling Exhibition’s Programme based on her previous experience and also partly because I proposed that it was necessary that an Afro-Colombian person was in charge of the travelling exhibition. Furthermore, at least in my view, she was ideal for the job because as a member of CEUNA and the Afro-Colombian movement she was very well connected and knew many people around the country, which would

\[29\] Parallel to the one that I coordinated with the Travelling exhibitions Programme and the A&H Curatorship in association with the Ministry of Culture, and that toured around the country (and later on also in Bogotá).

\[30\] AAMN for its acronym in Spanish, Asociación de Amigos del Museo Nacional.
facilitate the setting up of more and more versions. In spite of this, she never adapted well to the Museum’s procedures. She expressed to me she never felt fully comfortable with the administration side of the institution. She was not well paid as she was only working as a commissary, in charge, as I had been, of travelling with the exhibition and setting it up. When I worked as a commissary I did other jobs as well, including editing video and pictures and writing projects and reports, which made my situation more stable. As I explained, when I got hired for this project, I had already graduated as a professional anthropologist. Furthermore, contrary to all other ‘monitor-teachers,’ whose training as volunteers was necessary to be certified, and perhaps find a job in the museum field, her work remained an ‘exception.’ This view disregarded what it took her to be there in the first place, in the structural terms that I showed in the first chapter of this thesis. Unlike the further use that the non-Afro monitor-teacher I mentioned above, and myself, made of our work, this limited the use that the Afro monitor-teacher could make of her experience at the Museum. But recording these guided-tours, as well as the other ‘training’ she had had as a member of CEUNA, were key in the further circulation of the Itinerante. In the following section I refer to the use that another group of Afro-Colombian people made of Velorios and the monitor-guide training.
Stills from the video I edited of Niches en Acción members, Marly Estrada and Jhonatan Fruto tour-guiding at the Javier Sánchez school in Barranquilla
Niches en Acción (NeA) and Velorios y santos vivos

In this section, I place the Museum’s voluntariado vis-à-vis the youth organization Niches en Acción to present them as a site for affirmative action in the form of a source for professionalization and employment. In 2011, the Afro commissary and the members of a group called Niches en Acción organized a version of Velorios at the University of Atlántico, in Barranquilla, the capital of Atlántico Department, in Colombia’s Caribbean region. The Itinerante’s commissary had met Deibys Hernández, a law and social sciences licenciatura student at the University of Atlántico, and NeA’s president, during a meeting of Afro-Colombian organizations that they both attended. In 2012 NeA organized, now without the commissary’s presence, a tour for the Itinerante in 10 Barranquilla schools. Similarly to the one that the National Museum’s Education Division organized in Bogotá, the hosts in each school were teachers who had experience applying the Cátedra de estudios afrocolombianos, and were sometimes of Palenquero origin.\(^{31}\)

For years, Palenqueros or descendants of Palenqueros who live in places such as Barranquilla have used idiosyncratic organizational forms to support each other when needed. Examples of these are ‘juntas’ [gatherings, councils] and ‘cuagros,’ traditional organizational forms from San Basilio de Palenque. Nowadays, these work as bases for the constitution of other collective forms that can sign contracts with the government and its institutions as ‘foundations,’ ‘corporations’ or ‘associations.’ In Barranquilla, many of my Palenquero acquaintances, or those of Palenquero descent, told me that they or their parents had belonged for a long time to such an organization, and that making it into a ‘foundation’ was the only way to be able to interact with official bodies and perhaps carry out projects, which provide a source of income. Usually, these projects involve the ‘rescue’ and dissemination of Afro-Colombian cultural traditions.

Once in NeA’s hands, setting up the exhibition depended on the good will and time of its members. Versions were different depending on the school, the teacher, the time available and the institution’s interest. Often, Deibys would introduce the exhibition and Niches en Acción, and then set up the panels for students to copy the texts they contained. Sometimes the Itinerante literally took over the classrooms where it was set, making the classroom into an exhibition hall which would remain for a few days, or other times it became an event that took over the whole school for a few hours. I remember thinking that NeA’s use of the exhibition was also very pragmatic: keeping records of the number of visitors was very important, and every student that saw or listened to it was asked to sign a list of attendees that Deibys would diligently send to the Museum later on. Sometimes I also carried out these tasks and Deibys emphasized that that was very important. This, as I showed in the previous

---

\(^{31}\) Barranquilla, the fourth largest city in Colombia, is after Cartagena one of the most common places where Palenqueros move to find jobs and establish themselves. Deibys, like other members of NeA, was born in Barranquilla but his mother had been born in Palenque.
chapter, along with sending back the panels in good condition, guaranteed that the Travelling Exhibitions Programme at the Museum would regard them as trustworthy recipients of the exhibition.

No altars would be set up, and according to Deibys this was because there was not enough time to do so. Time and resources were limited, and a lot depended on the good will of school administration, staff and teachers. Some of these were acquaintances, friends or family with NeA members, and usually the exhibition would be framed as an ‘Afro’ or ‘Afro-Colombian’ activity.

Sometimes there was also tour-guiding. When I asked NeA members how they had learnt the contents of the guided tours, they explained to me that they had watched the DVDs, read the catalogue and, of course, the content of the exhibition. So they did what we had expected when we designed the travelling version in 2008. Similarly to what happened with the monitors at the Museum, their input stemmed from what we did in Bogotá. If sometimes what they said sounded to me like empty words learnt by heart, many times they did their own interventions to the script that the Itinerante carried. They would emphasize or bypass parts of the exhibition while leading students, or add their own knowledge as Palenquero people, as professionals in social science disciplines (Deibys had studied to be a social sciences teacher, his sister Marly had studied sociology and their friend Angelina had recently graduated as a professional historian), as members of the Afro-Colombian social movement and as students of the University of Atlántico. As much as time and noise allowed them to, they used the exhibition to present their own knowledge in relation to the subjects that the exhibition presented. An example of this was a guided-tour led by Marly Estrada, Deibys’s sister, where she added her own knowledge about the transatlantic slave trade to the exhibition’s contents, emphasizing that self-manumission (buying one’s own freedom) was one of the main ways in which enslaved people became free.

NeA, teachers and students also used the Itinerante similarly to how teachers use textbooks and ask students to do ‘exposiciones,’ the word used in Colombia for exhibitions and for oral academic presentations (at school and also in undergraduate courses). In fact, I heard people referring to the banners as ‘carteleras’ [posters]. With Deibys, some of the school teachers organized thorough, if short, activities which included presentations by students after they had seen and read the exhibition. These host teachers made their own appropriation by presenting the exhibition as one of their own school activities, including them in the reports they presented regularly as part of auditing school procedures, which are by turn part of general auditing activities at the local Secretary of Education. Again, these would usually be presented as ‘Afro-Colombian’ activities that schools needed to proof they were carrying out, useful for teachers who kept their posts because they had been hired in an idiosyncratic form of Afro-Colombian teachers ‘quota.’ This was also useful for schools that had to prove that they imparted, according to Law 70, the Cátedra de estudios afrocolombianos.
Travelling through racism

In an event Deibys attended, where different Afro-Colombian organizations showed what they called ‘meaningful experiences,’ or ‘successful’ activities or projects that they carried out, he said that the exhibition could help change the bad perception that Barranquilla people had of their non-orthodox wakes that, like *lumbalú*, included a form of singing-crying they call *leko*. The exhibition was something that carried the Ministry’s and the Museum’s name, which garnered respect in the way that the *in action* in their organization’s name did. This respectability seemed to be something I carried with me as well. I continually sensed Deibys saw me as a representative of the National Museum and of the Ministry of Culture, even though I made it as clear as possible that I did not work for them anymore.

One day he asked me on the phone, while I was in Bogotá, if he should send his reports to me, so that I could take them to the Museum, or if he should send them to the Museum directly. I had shown a lot of interest in the documents he produced, so perhaps this was just a sign of trust, but at the moment I understood it as a sign that he saw me as directly connected with the Museum, as an employee. He was always very careful to wear the Niches en Acción t-shirt whenever he set up the exhibition. Niches en Acción used the exhibition to portray themselves in a positive way. The exhibition helped Niches en Acción, and Deibys in particular, to open the doors of schools. Deibys was very careful in the way he introduced himself, other NeA co-members, and me, as an anthropologist who was accompanying them and who was studying in the UK.

In that school, other NeA member, Deibys and I were reluctantly given lunch by the school director. Perhaps he was using his personal money for this. We ate it in the teachers’ room, which was cooler and drier than Barranquilla outside. Meanwhile we chatted with some of the teachers who were waiting between lessons. One of them explained to us, mocking Palenquero accent, how much it disappointed him that the few Palenquero students he had taught, had all only wanted to have many women and get drunk, emphasizing that if they did not progress it was because of their own lack of aspirations. Another one said, perhaps trying to cheer up the conversation, that they should exploit their talent for sports and use that to earn a living and progress in life. I waited for an angry response from the two NeA members, or from another teacher in the room. I stayed quiet, and felt confused. There was no response. The teachers just kept on making their points. I asked myself why this was happening and if I should say something, or disagree at least. But I did what Deibys and his colleague did and just remained quiet. Or I may have said something that did not contradict what they said openly. The subject changed, and it was time to continue showing the exhibition to students. Neither member of NeA, nor I talked about it at that moment. I still wonder two years later why I did not get very angry and shout at those two racist teachers. I guess I wanted to avoid conflict. An angry response would possibly have put the activity at risk in that school and perhaps in others. I also remember a feeling of containment, of the need to keep my mouth shut, of the uncomfortable silence. Perhaps Deibys and his companion felt this way too, but I did not want to ask.
Had I been less shocked and confused about what I was hearing and seeing, perhaps I would have been able to mention my own and very different perception of Palenquero people, of how proud I felt of the fact that there are still two creole languages in our country, one of which is theirs, and that the way he mocked it was completely inappropriate. Or that he should read the pioneering work of another Barranquillero, ethnologist Aquiles Escalante, about Palenque de San Basilio, and thus better understand the social relations that were still part of their lives as migrants or as Barranquilleros of Palenquero descent.

A second memory: Before or after this, I chatted with the other NeA member while we were setting up or dismantling an exhibition. He told me that he is aware that they (meaning Palenquero or Black people like himself) are physically strong but not very smart. Two years later I wonder where he got this idea from. Perhaps it was from the media, or perhaps from teachers like those we met at that school. Perhaps it was from his own experience of trying hard but not completing his undergraduate studies, as he later told me in another school.

A third memory, on Marly’s veranda, in La Esmeralda neighbourhood: As I said before, Marly is another one of NeA’s members, a sociology student at the University of Atlantico and Deibys’s younger sister. She always refused to let me record our conversations, except for when she did guided-tours for the exhibition. At her door front, with two of NeA’s members, I bring up the anecdote with the two teachers at the school that morning. Her response is angry. ‘Had I been there,’ she says, ‘I would have told those teachers off.’ ‘Saying this kind of thing is inadmissible from a school teacher,’ she said, ‘A builder can be racist and still be a good builder, but a teacher who is racist is unacceptable.’

A fourth memory: Deibys and I visit another school’s director and introduce ourselves before we begin to set up the exhibition. She receives us in her office and while we talk she directs her words and smiles at me. She ignores Deibys. I felt angry, but kept the conversation going. I knew we had to be polite with the director in order to set up the exhibition. We did both things. I didn’t bring the subject up with Deibys. I wonder two years later why that happened. Perhaps it just felt uncomfortable to discuss it with him, or perhaps we were both used to that kind of treatment. As perverse, unfair and painful as this may read, it could also be that my presence, as his companion, granted Deibys the respectability that he seemed to lack when being regarded as and called ‘niche’—even if he thought it was inoffensive, or ‘Palenquero’—in the disrespectful way the school teacher I mentioned had used the name.

**Niches en acción’s name and biography**

In an interview I did with Deibys, he stated that one of NeA’s main goals is to strengthen identity. When I asked him about the name of their organization, he told me that ‘niche’ is a word people use in Barranquilla to refer to a dark-skinned person and that it was not pejorative. So people would say, ‘Hey, niche, what’s up?’ [Oye, niche, cómo vas?], and in Deibys’s view, it would not be offensive. The ambiguity of the word and its connotations is confirmed by its definition on the Royal Spanish
Language Academy’s website, where, regarding its use in Honduras, Venezuela and Cuba, it is described as a ‘disrespectful and colloquial adjective’ to refer to a person ‘of Black race,’ or to a ‘lower condition or tasteless’ person or thing.  Niche’ is also part of the name of one of the most famous Colombian salsa bands, Grupo Niche, who were the inspiration for a recent soap opera.

As for the second part of the name, ‘In action means in action,’ Deibys replied when I asked him about it. It does remind one, though, of the names of two national public programmes directed to low-income populations: ‘Jovenes en Acción’ [Young people in action], which offers training and education subsidies to young people, and ‘Familias en Acción’ [Families in action], a subsidies programme for low-income families with children, which were both launched at the beginning of the 2000s, during Pastrana’s presidency. Even if the resemblances were unintended, it shows how NeA made use of phrases that were already in circulation.

Another document Deibys sent me by email was the association’s ‘historical summary’ [reseña histórica]. It states that Niches en Acción was created in 2005, in the ‘Nueva Colombia’ [New Colombia] neighbourhood in Barranquilla’s South West localidad, known in the city because, like other low-income neighbourhoods such as La Esmeralda, it has a high population of Palenquero families. Apart from stating when and where the association came into existence, and that it was composed of men and women who ‘identified with the Afro-Palenquero ethnic group’, this ‘reseña histórica’ stressed that they were legally recognized by the Chamber of Commerce and by the Ethnic Direction of the Ministry of the Interior and Justice. This recognition allowed NeA to sign contracts with public bodies like the ICBF [the Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar [Colombian Institute for Family Welfare]] and with private organizations like the FA. They managed to use the exhibition, which they ‘borrowed’ from the FA, as an asset they offered in a project ‘for the recuperation of traditions’ funded by the ICBF. Deibys said the exhibition would help undermine stereotypes, while in a conversation we had ‘outside’ during a wake he also insisted, with other acquaintances, that it is very expensive to sustain the practice.


33 The name caused some controversy between a biographer of the recently deceased band’s director, Jairo Varela, and the scriptwriter of the soap opera. The soap opera is ‘fiction,’ the scriptwriter insists, but after all, the radio commentators explain in the following link, the use of the name ‘niche’ in the title along with use of the band’s music creates ‘confusion’ as much as it attracts spectators http://www.wradio.com.co/escucha/archivo_de_audio/la-novela-niche-del-canal-caracol-es-una-ofensa-a-jairo-varela-biografo-del-grupo-niche/20141007/oir/2450582.aspx, 28-March-2015).


36 The city of Barranquilla is divided into five ‘localidades.’
Tour-guiding conclusions

In the Colombian context, where museology does not yet exist as a profession but only at master level, ‘tour-guiding schools’ have worked as a means to become a museum professional. Organizations such as Niches en Acción and CEUNA provide institutional legitimacy and a platform for a similar kind of professionalization. They also resemble juntas and cuagros insofar as they provide tools for young Afro-Colombian people to find a job. In fact, as with many other ‘Afro-Colombian organizations’ that exist in Barranquilla, being a member may help guarantee a ‘cupo’ or a place to study at a public university, a controversial measure that, as far as I could learn while in Barranquilla, was still in place. Although they are potentially working for the legitimization of anti-racist affirmative actions directed to Afro-Colombian people, many times the activities they carry out seem to be part of a loop in which Afro-Colombian people are trained to be ‘traditional’ Afro-Colombians. Simultaneously, they provide a platform from which mobilizing other agendas, an example of which is the career as local politician that Deibys has been building for several years.

In 2012 I met one of CEUNA’s leaders who had participated in the Velorios study group and who did not pass the exam I described above. He told me he disagreed with not having been selected to work as one of Velorios’s monitors, after all, he was Palenquero, so how could they argue that he did not know about the contents of the exhibition? In any case, he told me (and according to my interviewees, other Afro tour-guides that quit the training study group thought similarly) that at the time he did not feel comfortable working for that institution. On the opposite side, I remember conversations with the director of the ECD, where he expressed his disagreement with hiring people just because ‘they were Afro.’ He was not aware that these are initiatives that this ‘exception’ that ‘broke the rules’ were seen as necessary for the team constituted at the A&H Curatorship, who had by then grown an awareness of the need to carry out actions that suppose ‘active interventions against negative discrimination’ (Restrepo, 2013b: 250). If we consider that the ‘rules’ at work were those of the (in)visibilities, stereotypy and racialized geography that I have described, it is easy to understand the discomfort (to say the least) that Afro-Colombian monitor-teachers felt at the Museum. Tour-guiding in Velorios and the Itinerante, like the ‘projects’ that organizations such as NeA organize in Barranquilla, in practice, can be seen as affirmative actions or forms of Afro-reparation, in the sense that they involve the specific involvement of Afro-Colombian people, their culture and knowledge. But unlike the voluntariado course at the National Museum, the certification that they provide is not officially acknowledged. Acknowledging and ‘strengthening’ cultural difference and diversity, unless framed and mobilized as actions that are transformative, only help maintain the ‘neutral national memory’ already in circulation.
Conclusion
With the two screenshots above I introduce the conclusion of this thesis and show the current relation that the Museum and NeA have between them and with Velorios and the Itinerante. Above, NeA use the picture acknowledging the exhibition and the Museum’s support, presenting it as one of its main activities. Below, the Museum does not acknowledge either of them, and uses the picture as an authorless background to present one of its many projects. Both screenshots have in common that no acknowledgement is made to the photographers, possibly one of NeA’s members (above) and a monitor-guide (below), or to the people who appear in the picture. The top screenshot shows a fragment from the cover picture of Niches en Acción’s Facebook page, for which they used a picture of one of the versions of the Itinerante that they organized in a school in Campo de la Cruz, a town near Barranquilla. A group of students sits on the floor and three of the exhibition’s banners stand in the background. The caption includes a link to the National Museum’s Facebook page, and acknowledges that they supported the exhibition. Below, the image shows the official webpage of the Museum’s ECD’s programme ‘Museum outside of the museum,’ which links directly to the Museum’s official homepage. Heading this ECD website there is a picture of another version of the Itinerante, with some of the banners in the background. One of the ‘monitor-teachers’ that participated in Velorios and the Itinerante in Bogotá is looking at the camera. He poses with some school students who are wearing masks they made in one of the workshops designed by another ‘monitor-teacher.’ The caption reads: ‘Activity with the John F. Kennedy school,’ but there is no acknowledgement of the fact that this ‘activity’ was one of the versions of the Itinerante that the ECD organized in Bogotá, part of the projects I discussed in the two previous chapters. No link is provided to any of the Velorios or to the Itinerante’s websites nor to Niches en Acción’s Facebook page.

The fact that the images are included in these websites contrasts with the fact that only a few people who participated in the project are still working in the Museum, none of them the Afro-Colombians that made the project into a ‘participatory’ one and that, as I have shown, made it possible. This shows that while the National Museum is willing to include, exhibit and own representations of Afro-Colombian people, it is reluctant to include Afro-Colombian people as producers and owners of their representations. It also shows that Afro-Colombians make limited use of the National Museum to legitimize their agendas. Almost 10 years after the initial meetings at the National Museum, not much is left of the controversy, excitement, or energy that characterized the history I have described. The Itinerante’s banners remain in storage at the Museum. Use of the audiovisual fieldwork material stored at the Documentary Centre is limited due to official regulations that restrict the reproduction of images without signed consent from the photographed or recorded persons. However, some of the

websites that I have ‘quoted’ in screenshots, at the time of writing, are working, available for further appropriations and ‘activations’ such as those I have done in this thesis.

The National Museum and the Ministry of Culture own the copyright of the Velorios exhibition. This institutional authorship provides the images of the exhibition with a ‘textual’ authority they lack as simply a ‘class of objects’ (Edwards, 2003) and enhances their circulation, but the fact that Afro-Colombian people do not figure as the exhibition’s authors or curators reinforces the stereotype of the Afro-Colombians as exotic ‘others.’ I have highlighted the limited access that Velorios and the Itinerante offered to Afro-Colombian people as a means for the production and circulation of their own images and names. They figure as participants, sabedores, architects, performers of the exhibition, but not as its curators, nor as the coordinators of the local versions of the exhibition. They figure as participants and collaborators, or as ‘members of the permanent seminar,’ but not as coordinators of research. Both in Velorios and in the Itinerante they worked as tour-guides, but the fact that their preparation took place late in the process meant that they were not certified as ‘volunteers’ or as ‘monitor-teachers,’ which can be a tool to obtain a job in the museum field. Tour-guiding training and certification can be a field for affirmative action and Afro-reparation, conducive to a permanent inclusion of Afro-Colombians at the National Museum.

**Social life of documents, images and texts**

Throughout the thesis, I followed the ‘social life’ of digital versions of clusters of visual and textual documents. This ‘exhibition’ exists now as clusters of documents, stored as archive material and as ‘museum objects’ at the National Museum, and as online resources that can be downloaded for free, to be re-activated, be it as educational resources in schools or cultural centres, or disassembled and accumulated in other (in)visibilities. I showed what these documents made visible and invisible, how documentation took place, and who engaged in this participatory and collaborative endeavour. I have also shown the different kinds of texts that accompanied the images that this exhibition accumulated.

These texts and images, and the degree to which they were visible or invisible, enhanced or restricted the further circulation of Velorios and the Itinerante. In correspondence, the different kinds of labels that designated and acknowledged the people who participated and collaborated in Velorios limited or enhanced the further use that Afro-Colombians and non-Afro-Colombians could make out of it. Thus, I have approached the different forms of acknowledgement that the exhibition involved, and the figuration of names of people and institutions as the ‘texts’ or the ‘number of narratives’ that images can seed (Poignant, 1994). I have also presented these images and texts as ‘documents of documents’ (Biagioli, 2006) that worked as the ‘hinge’ (p. 127) between the development (curatorship) of the exhibition, its circulation (at the Museum and outside), and interpretation (by different audiences). I have presented different forms (and lack) of acknowledgement as a key trace of the forms of (in)visibility, documentation and participatory collaboration that Velorios involved. As much as this enacts the hierarchies I have discussed, it also enhances circulation.
In this thesis I have presented ‘participatory collaboration’ as the form of curatorship that Velorios and the Itinerante conveyed, not in ‘rosy terms’ (Foster, 2006), but revealing the structural hierarchies that conditioned how Afro-Colombians and non-Afro-Colombians participated and collaborated, and how they were acknowledged for their participation and collaboration. I have shown what it took for this particular (in)visibility to accumulate, circulate and be activated following the social life of images, texts and clusters of visual and textual documents. To do this, I approached Velorios as a cluster, a document of an era (Gonzalez et al.), an auto-ethnographic text (Pratt, 1991, 1992), and an ethnographic artifact (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998; Riles, 2006). I have attempted to counteract its potential as ‘anti-politics machine,’ (Restrepo, 2013a: 157) by historicizing it, making visible some of the disagreements that remained backstage, and by revealing the hierarchies of knowledge, geography and, by extension, race, that were visible albeit not exhibited in its frontstage.

In Chapter 1 I presented how a first set of (in)visibilities assembled in the initial meetings at the Museum. The ‘Afro-Americanist focus’ that took the lead in the curatorship of Velorios, and located it in relation to some of the elements that remained invisible in the exhibition and in the documents it produced, including the history of the National Museum’s collections, and works in the field of Afro-Colombian studies that are not part of that Afro-Americanist focus. I also presented the book Afro-reparaciones (Mosquera et al., 2007), the exhibition Viaje sin mapa (2006), mentioned in the interventions documented in minutes, and both of which included and the work Negra Menta (2003) by Liliana Angulo. This work tackled directly, in a museum exhibition and in a book, some of the racial stereotypes that Velorios did not.

In Chapter 2, Backstage, I showed how meeting attendees at the National Museum engaged in a form of curatorship that I have labelled ‘participatory collaboration.’ The minutes that recorded the attendees’ interventions are available in the exhibition’s archive as public documents, as an attempt to make this backstage visible. I considered this set of minutes as a documentary cluster that recorded the conditions for the production and circulation of these textual and visual documents, hierarchies of knowledge, geography and race that were at work in this ‘participatory collaboration.’ The pictures of meetings that Afro-Colombian people attended, which were included in the exhibition’s catalogue, made the backstage partially visible, and this visibility proved and validated their ‘participation’ in the project, in response to disagreements and criticisms. Where fieldtrips did and did not take place, as well as the production and use of audiovisual material collected and returned during those fieldtrips, revealed a social life of visual and textual documents. While conversations took place about the representation of Afro-Colombian people at the Museum, some of the keys for a form of reparation as ‘return’ began to operate. Two kinds of audio-visual documents became the main ‘objects’ collected: on the one hand, audio-visual material produced locally, by Afro-Colombian people who made audiovisual records of wakes and burials. On the other hand, those produced by anthropologists who attended and recorded wakes and simulations of altars. These materials were returned unedited to local acquaintances, but no follow-up was made.
In Chapter 3, Frontstage, I discussed how these materials were edited and displayed throughout the exhibition, along with texts and objects. Their distribution in the space of the temporary exhibition’s hall assembled another kind of (in)visibility that revealed hierarchies between objects, images and texts, which ‘competed’ for the visitors’ attention. The form of curatorship that the project implied, ‘participatory collaboration,’ meant that the curatorial script based on ‘clusters of data,’ which Arocha proposed for the distribution of objects in the temporary exhibition was separated ‘to make messages clear.’ The visitors’ interpretations showed that this separation shaped the political legibility (Macdonald, 2002) of Velorios—it was in this sense also a visual legibility. The two visual projections that explained the ‘historic’ and ‘political’ contexts of Afro-Colombian funerary rituals were separated with a wall and a threshold from the altars or corners that were the exhibition’s highlights. These projections, as with all the other videos, were exhibited, but most visitors did not stop to see them. Numerous TV screens displayed documentary videos that only younger visitors stood to watch. Visual materials were produced and exhibited in two more attempts intended to make visible the backstage process and the participation and collaboration it had implied. One of these attempts appeared in three screens outside the exhibition hall, which showed the exhibition’s set up and inauguration and, as all the audio-visual documentary material displayed, emphasized the role of Afro-Colombians as makers of the funerary rituals and of the exhibition. Another one appeared in the pictures of the Afro-Colombian and non-Afro-Colombian participants and collaborators, but the space where they were presented was poorly lit and located next to the exhibition’s exit. Furthermore, Afro-Colombian people were a minority among visitors. However, clusters of visual and textual digital records of the exhibition, like the ‘script’ and the websites I quoted with screenshots, gave permanency to temporary Velorios, and to the ‘subject’ of Afro-Colombian studies at the Museum.

In the exhibition Velorios, images were used to give credit to the people involved in the participatory collaboration that characterized the project. The screenshot that introduces Chapter 3 documents the limited visibility of these images in the exhibition, which contrasted with the other forms in which participatory collaboration was acknowledged, including personal and institutional authorship in the exhibition catalogue and websites, the exhibition’s title, and participation in the opening ceremony of the exhibition. In this way, Afro-Colombians were both visible and invisible. This, I argue, was another central element in the ‘political legibility’ of the exhibition, and meant that visitors read the exhibition including Afro-Colombians as subject and as exotic ‘other.’

This (in)visibility can be placed vis-a-vis the (in)visibility of the minutes (again, available but stored in an archive at the Museum’s building in Bogotá), where the discussions regarding design and museography were documented. These conversations, and the series of sketches that were produced to organize the materials that would be exhibited, show how participatory collaboration challenged a more traditional conception of ‘curatorship.’ The original idea that anthropologist Arocha proposed in a hand-drawn sketch, while the project still was called ‘Living ancestors,’ pasted in one of the minutes, entailed this form of curatorship. Among the documents produced, a ‘script’ created using a digital database software, and based on a ‘matrix of objects’ that contained the information collected in the fieldtrips
and documentary research, worked as the link between fieldtrips, the temporary Velorios (of which it contained visual and textual records) and the Itinerante (for which it provided materials and a structure to create and organize banners). The replicability of the Excel file provides an example of how digitalization helped participatory collaboration to take off.

In Chapter 4, *Travelling Wakes and living saints*, I showed how this (in)visibility disassembled in a documentary and bureaucratic process that dissipated the NM’s authority (which in Velorios was concentrated in its building and in the A&H curatorship office) but also disseminated and reinforced its authority as one of the Ministry of Culture’s ‘special administrative units.’ Letters, agreements and reports were, like the pictures of meetings with Afro-Colombians in the catalogue, documents that proved and made evident, while also conditioned and kept under control the circulation of the cluster of visual and textual documents that composed the Itinerante, from Bogotá to the ‘regions’ and back to Bogotá. This legitimized the Museum’s role as a national public institution and as a representative of the government and its Ministry of Culture. By the end of 2008, ‘participatory collaboration’ took off through ‘return’ and ‘appropriation.’ Instead of a hall as a form of Afro-reparation and as a means for the ‘deep visibility’ of Afro-Colombians, which would have required the participation of the P&E curatorship office and of the ICANH, the Itinerante distributed into other Museum Divisions, outside the Museum’s building and towards the ‘donor regions.’ This return and appropriation were conditioned by local hierarchies over the control of space, and revealed the limits of the Museum’s authority in the face of, and of the resources it is able or willing to provide for, local institutions, cultural centres, groups and organizations. Locally, the Itinerante also was legible within the pre-existing (in)visibility of Afro-Colombians as part of the multicultural nation. At the Museum, the Itinerante opened room for a flexibilization of the conditions under which, as a national institution, it supports local entities with travelling exhibitions. But it also helped legitimize its limited scope of action in keeping the Afro-Colombian subject as part of the diversity to be ‘disseminated,’ leaving aside the social inequality that the government has committed to eliminate in international and national agreements like the 2001 Durban declaration. Within this (in)visibility, racism remains hidden behind the frontstage of multiculturality.

In some of the versions of the Itinerante Afro-Colombians activated it as a tool for ‘cultural reawakening or revival’ (Geismar, 2009), building funerary altars to make homage to deceased relatives. In others, the itineraries of documents showed that local institutions shared an ‘appreciation or “empathy” for the aesthetics of completion’ (Riles, 2006: 23) with the Museum, which served both sides’ (the national and the regional or local) agendas. Again, public acknowledgement re-established a hierarchy of the national over the local institutions. However, the case of the Museum of Religious Art in Cali showed how a local institution made use, as audience, of the contents of Velorios and the Itinerante, not acknowledging the NM, curators, researchers or sabedores. They also presented their *Ritos funerarios del Pacífico Colombiano* as a participatory and inclusive endeavour carried out with local Afro-Colombian organizations. The ‘participatory collaboration’ at work at the National Museum turned into a model of ‘curatorship.’
In Chapter 5, I showed how tour-guiding became a different kind of activation of these clusters of documents, as educational tool that circulated in schools, both in Bogotá and outside. More documents were produced as a form of proof, and as such continued to circulate. At the same time, the documents that composed the Itinerante were used by the members of Niches en Acción to train as local tour-guides, and to present themselves in public. It may work as a means to introduce and legitimize affirmative actions and anti-racist agendas, while at the same time it may be co-opted and accumulate in more (in)visibilities.

The textual and visual documents in the thesis recorded the ‘parallel realities’ or ‘the ‘space between’ (Edwards, 2003) my role as visual documentarian and the roles of Afro-Colombian people. They show how participatory collaboration, (in)visibility and documentation link together. As I have shown, these roles transformed in the different stages of the life of Velorios and the Itinerante. The trajectories of the images I produced and the way my name figured in relation to them and to the work I did for the project showed how I was positioned, as one of the non-Afro-Colombian anthropologists in the team, in a hierarchy of knowledge that distinguished us from Afro-Colombian sabedores, ‘architects,’ performers and tour-guides. But in this process I ceded my authorship of textual and visual documents, as did all other individual authors, to the institutional authorship of the Ministry of Culture and the National Museum. This is another constituent element of the participatory collaboration that characterized Velorios and the Itinerante.

The visual documents that I produced as anthropologist, commissary, project coordinator, made Afro-Colombian people visible while I remained invisible, operating the camera. With the sole exception of one of the pictures on the credits wall that was almost invisible in the temporary exhibition, I was always ‘behind the scenes.’ This position, vis-à-vis the position of other pictures that portrayed Afro-Colombian people, and the different kinds of acknowledgement I received for my work, meant that I was always one level on top, in a hierarchy of knowledge (as researcher and camera operator), race (as non-Black or Afro-Colombian) and geography (as an Andean-born Colombian who lived and travelled from Bogotá), in relation to them. The changes in these figurations of my name also meant that I was one level below the institutional authorship of the National Museum and the Ministry of Culture. My position as producer of screenshots, a different kind of visual document, was also different to the one I had in the materials these screenshots portray. ‘Vision’ as operation, quality and technical condition (Halpern, 2015) changed. I produced them using a different set of tools and from a different place, conditioned by my access to the internet and to a computer, and to the materials that the exhibition project left intentionally available to the public for further consultation, use and research. They document a different position which, although enhanced by the familiarity and knowledge I had as participant in the process, was closer to the position to any other virtual visitor of the exhibition.

Nevertheless, visual documents also make evident different ways in which Afro-Colombians contested and counteracted these structures. During the fieldtrips for the temporary exhibition, in the conversations that took place at the Museum, in different people’s disagreement with being portrayed
with funerals or as exotic other, Afro-Colombians manifested the need for careful and aware use of images. In the fieldwork I did in 2012, this became even more evident to me, in the vigilance that members of Niches en acción put into presenting themselves in public, in front of the camera, or by clearly stating that they did not want to be photographed or recorded. Furthermore, they produced their own visual materials and publicized them with their own means. Also, by then I had become very wary and careful of when, of what and for what reasons (for whose benefit) I would produce or distribute any new footage or photographs.

The project collected and exhibited audiovisual materials produced in contexts different to those of the National Museum and anthropological research. I did not refer to or analyse these materials in this thesis. They would require a different approach that investigated the intentions and relationships between the people and institutions that produced them, are represented in them, and act as their audience. I hope to have contributed a methodology that considers all these elements.

‘Everyone for a new country’ and ‘Memory and nation’

Thinking of Velorios and the Itinerante as ‘documents of an era,’ I want to place them along two more recent figurations of the (in)visibility of Afro-Colombian people, one at the National Museum, and another in a public document, Law 1753 of the 9th of June 2015. With this law, President Santos’ National Development Plan ‘Todos por un Nuevo país’ [Everyone for a new country] 2014-2018 was issued by the Congress of the Republic, using the notion of Afro-descendent populations in its article 112 (p. 72).\(^4\) The text does not refer explicitly to developing policies or carrying out actions that are anti-racist, but it says that an ‘inter-sectorial plan’ will be elaborated adhering the resolution 68/237 adopted by UN, Proclamation of the International Decade for People of African Descent.\(^5\) It also says that this plan ‘will be oriented towards guaranteeing the recognition, justice and development of Afro-Colombian populations and will contain measures tending to guaranteeing equal opportunities for such population’ (ibid.). Furthermore, it also includes the notion of ‘Comunidades negras, afrocolombianas, raizales y palenqueras,’ which was based on the categories used in the 2010 CONPES document 3660,\(^6\) titled ‘Política para promover la igualdad de oportunidades para la población negra, afrocolombiana, palenquera y raizal’ [Policy to promote the equality of opportunities for Black, Afro-


\(^6\) CONPES is the acronym for Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social [National Council for Economic and Social Policy], created in 1959 [the year that the Alliance for Progress Programme began]. This entity, under the technical secretary of the National Planning Department, is in charge of presenting, evaluating and approving the programs, policies, projects and strategies according to the Development plan that every President proposes for discussion and approval to the Congress of the Republic (https://www.dnp.gov.co/CONPES/Paginas/conpes.aspx, accessed 26-Aug-2015).
Colombian, Palenquero and Raizal population]; the same categories used in the sub-title of Velorios y santos vivos.  

This document contrasts with how Afro-Colombian people appear in a new hall that was inaugurated in 2015 at the National Museum with the title ‘Memoria y nación’ [Memory and nation]. This institution resists accepting and transforming its role as a keeper of a ‘neutral national memory’ (Mosquera Rosero-Labbé, 2007a). The new hall portrays the period that the project 48-91, which I introduced in Chapter 1, wanted to address by doing research to fill the voids in the Museum’s collections. Afro-Colombian people figure as donors of a baton that represents the Fiestas de San Pacho [Saint Francis Assisi Festival] that Chocoanos celebrate every year all around the country, which was included as one of the corner-altars in Velorios and the Itinerante, and was included in UNESCO’s intangible heritage list in 2012. This is in keeping with the (in)visibility I have explored in this thesis. The new hall is the research subject for the MA degree that a monitor-teacher is doing while I write this thesis, and she makes the most of her guided-tours to see what reactions visitors have while, she tells me, she feels that more and more control over her guided tours is exerted by higher ranking museum staff. This monitor-teacher also tells me that, during their guided tours, monitors have been asked to highlight the 1991 Constitution, which includes Afro-Colombian people only as Black communities, one of the exotic ‘others’ that compose the multicultural and pluriethnic nation.

**Contribution**

This thesis contributes to the fields of visual anthropology and museum anthropology by offering a visual methodology in a museum ethnography. It examines the museum as producer and circulator of clusters of visual and textual documents that may reinforce or legitimize pre-existing stereotypes. I present the ways in which these clusters accumulated and circulated, producing both visibilities and invisibilities, and as research, analysis and presentation tools. I bring together visual and museological methods by approaching visual and digital documentation as a museum operation. This thesis presents the ‘social life’ of the clusters of visual and textual documents that Velorios and the Itinerante accumulated and circulated (a ‘visual economy’) that offers a view on considerations that ‘visual repatriation’ projects may involve (Edwards, 2003: 85). This work contributes to Colombian research topics by building on the ‘Afro-Americanist focus’ that I presented in Chapter 1. This visual, digital and documentary methodology provides tools to approach traces of Africanness. It challenges not only disciplinary distinctions between history and anthropology, but also the organizing principles of collections, archives and exhibitions at the National Museum and elsewhere.

---


This ethnography contributes to museological practice and research. Like other works that have considered both researchers and researched as ‘historical subjects’ that make ‘a key ethical principle of collaborative exhibition projects [...] that both sides should be able to define and gain the benefits they deem appropriate’ (Phillips, 2003: 159), I indicate the need to consider different forms of acknowledgement as a substantial element in any collaborative or participatory project, including not only the exhibitions but also related elements that circulate in public—for example, their preparatory stages, opening, accompanying and closing events, as well as websites or catalogues. This implies considering that ownership, authority and knowledge have different meanings within and between different ‘communities’ (Herle, 2003: 198). The thesis responds to the questions that Modest and Golding (2013) ask regarding the meanings of ‘curatorship’ in participatory and collaborative museum practice, and considers the views of scholars, artists, sabedores, public servants and leaders from political and cultural organizations at national, regional and local levels. My ethnography provides an answer to the question that Phillips (2003) asks regarding ‘the growing popularity of collaborative exhibits’ and the ‘social agency of museums’ (p. 158). It shows what the limits of participatory collaboration in museums are in processes of social change. It stresses their role as places where ‘symbolic restitution’ can be made for the injustices of the past—and the present—not in lieu of but as a means for sensibilization and awareness of the need for ‘more concrete forms of social, economic, and political redress’ (ibid.). Unless used openly as part of agendas that address openly and explicitly structural hierarchies (not only) of knowledge, race and geography, exhibitions may become ‘anti-politics machines’ (Restrepo 2013a) that reinforce, legitimize and circulate pre-existing racial stereotypes.

I showed that (in)visibilities, participatory collaboration and documentation involved structural hierarchies between institutional over personal authorship, and of national over local institutions. The ‘conversations’ and the sense of continuation and replicability that characterized this participatory and collaborative project, in spite of its participants’ good intentions, reaffirmed the hierarchy of race, knowledge and geography I refer to in this thesis. The visual material presented and analysed in screenshots documents how participatory collaboration took off and superseded curatorship, and the limits of this form of participatory collaboration in regards to the original demand for Afro-reparations that Mosquera and Arocha made to the National Museum in 2005.
Bibliography


