

## **Facing Racism, Leaving Multiculturalism: Afro-Colombian, Black, Palenquero, and Raizal People's (In)visibilities in Colombian Museums**

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## Facing Racism, Leaving Multiculturalism: Afro-Colombian, Black, Palenquero and Raizal People's (In)visibilities in Colombian Museums

Sofia Natalia Gonzalez Ayala

This imaginary guided tour gathers chronologically some of the ways Black, Afro-Colombian, Palenquero, and Raizal communities or people in Colombia have appeared represented—visible and invisible—in Colombian museums between 1994 and 2023. I reflect on exhibitions (one of which I participated in), artworks, and books to show how a multicultural vision of the nation in museums has helped maintain a neutral memory that hides the dire consequences of

the transatlantic slave trade among Afro-descendants. I also work to recompose a pathway for more radical, anti-racist, and reparative initiatives that tackle and question racism and racist stereotypes in museums and exhibitions, an endeavor that requires collective and collaborative actions between public and private institutions, involving Afro- and non-Afro-descendant scholars, artists, activists, curators, researchers, designers, and writers.

**Keywords:** Afro-Colombian, anti-racism, Black, Colombia, multiculturalism, museums, Palenquero and Raizal communities, reparations

I invite the reader to approach this piece as if attending an imaginary guided tour of representations of Black, Afro-Colombian, Palenquero, and Raizal communities or people in Colombian museums between 1994 and 2023.<sup>1</sup> I start this tour referring to the current state of these representations in exhibitions at the Museo Nacional de Colombia [National Museum of Colombia] in Bogotá, and relating them to an ongoing project called Museo Afro [Afro Museum], led by the Museo and the Ministry of Culture. Then the tour takes you backwards in time. The next stop is the 2008 exhibition *Velorios y Santos Vivos. Comunidades Negras, Afrocolombianas, Raizales y Palenqueras* [Wakes and Living Saints: Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, and Palenquero communities, from now on *Velorios*], which was on display from 21 August to 3 November at the Museo Nacional. This is my personal highlight because it was also my first job as research and curatorial assistant, and the main subject of my doctoral dissertation (González-Ayala, 2016). Subsequently, I move further back in time to describe and discuss another exhibition, a book, and the work of an artist that tackled racial stereotypes against Black and Afro-Colombian people. I finish the guided tour moving further into the past, to show exhibitions that were organized from the 1990s to the present and that have dealt with Afro-Colombian history, image, representations, and stereotypes in institutional contexts. In this imaginary

guided tour, I want to show you some ways to incorporate anti-racism and reparations in museums, which requires leaving aside multiculturalism.<sup>2</sup>

Let me begin with some historical context. In Colombia, like in other Latin American countries, the Spanish colony organized its population in a 'so-called caste society' (García et al. 2022: 28) that located exploited natives and enslaved Africans at the bottom and white Spanish people at the top. From the beginning of the 19th century on, post-independence, the Republic of Colombia's political rhetoric was built on a contradictory ideology, a 'foundational fiction' of *mestizaje* ('race' mixture) that helped elites to deal with an intrinsic dilemma in creating national sentiment: 'how to make the manifestly mixed character of the Colombian population compatible with the clearly white connotations of progress and modernity' (García et al. 2022: 40). The word *mestizo* translates broadly as 'mixed-race,' but the specific label 'white-mestizo' (*blanco-mestizo* in Spanish), in Colombia and other Latin American contexts,

'includes elite and middle-class people who are seen as or self-identify as white and also mestizos who are at the lighter end of the color spectrum and differentiate themselves socially and culturally from Indigenous and Black people and from darker-skinned working-class mestizos' (Moreno Figueroa and Wade 2022: 216).

After the Colombian Political Constitution of 1991 recognized the country as a 'pluriethnic' and 'multicultural' nation, the image and ideology of the country as *mestizo* was replaced, largely thanks to Indigenous and Black movements (García et al 2022: 42). From then on, there have been different attempts to include, reflect on, acknowledge, criticize, and teach the ways in which Afro-Colombian people have been part of Colombian history and culture. Art, curation, and exhibitions have contributed to that aim of a diversified national self-representation and opened space for anti-racism:

'Multiculturalism may in some scenarios be reduced to simple co-optation and appeasement, but in others it "opens up sociocultural arrangements to a more diverse set of habits"' (Goldberg 2008, cited in Moreno Figueroa and Wade 2022: 13).

Nevertheless, in her study of the Black middle class in Colombia, Mara Viveros, an Afro-mestiza professor of gender studies (2022) describes the effects of multiculturalism as 'precarious and individualized' (p. 118). She acknowledges some of its achievements, including more attention for, and discussion of, structural racism. This also includes affirmative action for Afro-descendants in universities and the creation and application of discriminatory laws against racism. But she states that neoliberal multiculturalism has not resulted in any meaningful redistribution of resources. For most Black people, living conditions have not improved, nor has their political autonomy been augmented.<sup>3</sup>

In this introduction to the guided tour, I want to make explicit

how the place where I was born, the place where I did my undergraduate studies, and my racialized appearance as well as other physical features have defined my place in Colombia's racialized social hierarchies. Thus, I provide an example of how geographic location and physical characteristics have affected, if not determined, my role and participation as a white-mestizo anthropologist, researcher, and curator in exhibitions. *Blanco-mestiza* is also the label others have used to refer to me—usually Afro-descendant people from social movements and members of the academy.

I was born and grew up in a town in the mountains, some 250 km southwest of Bogotá, where most people would self-identify as mestizo if ever asked to label their racial status or ethnicity. In Colombia, one's birthplace is one of the practical manifestations of the structural racism that some authors have termed racialized geography (Wade 1993), Andean-centrism, or Tropical-savagery (Arocha and Moreno 2007). Altitude and weather are linked to physical human traits in an 'imagined nation' (Múnera 2005) that has morally located civilization and lighter-skinned people in the highlands (where Bogotá is) and poverty, underdevelopment, and darker-skinned people in the warmer lowlands.<sup>4</sup>

I did my undergraduate studies at the Universidad Nacional in Bogotá in anthropology, a discipline locally traditionally associated with researching and writing about Colombian indigenous people (Botero 2013), and, since the 1990s, about Black, Raizal, Palenquero, and Afro-Colombian communities (Restrepo 2013b), but that implicitly assumes that practitioners are not themselves from those communities. Nina de Friedemann (1984) called this exclusion a consequence of the invisibility of works by Black scholars and stereotyped nature of studies about Black people in Colombian anthropology. This has excluded Afro-Colombian anthropologists such as Aquiles Escalante, Manuel Zapata Olivella, and Rogerio Velásquez from the discipline's canon (Hurtado-Garcés 2020).

My first job as a research assistant, in 2008, consisted of making videos for the *Velorios* exhibition. From then on, museums became my research and practice field, and the way they include, exclude, or misrepresent different groups, particularly Afro-Colombians, became one of my main research interests. In this piece, I intend to share some of my findings, stressing the need for a more radical stand that turns the multicultural perspective on Afro-Colombian people in Colombian museums into a restorative and anti-racist endeavor. I will suggest some of the ways this could happen, involving both Afro and non-Afro-descendant people.

In addition to reading the essay, I invite you to visualize it as a picture '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' (Rajchman [1988], cited in Halpern 2014: 24). I attempt to disassemble how the Afro-Colombian, Black, Raizal and Palenquero communities have been seen in museums in Colombia, that is, how visibilities and invisibilities have accumulated, circulated, dispersed, and re-accumulated. 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' (p. 24).

Tour-guiding serves me as a narrative tool with which to dissect exhibitionary accumulations that make Black, Afro-Colombian, Palenquero, and Raizal people visible as diverse members of the multicultural Colombian nation but invisible as authors and protagonists of their own representations in museums. It helps me to re-assemble them imaginatively. The tour is also a visibility, a space where 'representation, practice, technology accumulate' (p. 37), and an ethnographic narrative—one of the languages museums speak. This guided tour is of an imaginary exhibition of initiatives related to this subject that have been organized or talked about in Colombian museums to date. It is an attempt to build on what has been done before and use it from an anti-racist perspective. Let us start from the present.

### **Black, Afro-Colombian, Palenquero, and Raizal people at the Museo Nacional (2023)**

In the last year I have visited the Museo Nacional a few times. It is located in an old prison, the Panóptico [Panopticon], in the center of Colombia's capital, Bogotá, and it is one of the city's top tourist attractions after the Museo del Oro. My last visit made me remember an article by Claudia Mosquera Rosero-Labbé, published in 2007, where she stated that

'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. [...] This committee must take ownership of the discussion about symbolic reparations from the Museo Nacional' (p. 254).<sup>5</sup>

I will address the issue around the committee later. For now, I would like to emphasize that the 'Development Plan' Mosquera Rosero-Labbé mentioned was probably the Museo's 'Strategic Plan 2001–2010,' which spoke about 'getting people interested' in the 'Afro' subject by giving that 'cultural identity' increased 'exposure,' 'dissemination,' and 'protection' and inviting Afro-Colombian 'participation' in cultural processes (p. 16) but made no reference to racism against or symbolic reparations for these groups:

'As far as other priorities of social development are concerned, the Museum's Strategic Plan is directed to carry out, within its field, [...] b) the provisions of Law 70 of 1993 [on Black communities] and of the 2002 CONPES Document 3169 'Policy for the Afro-Colombian population' inasmuch as it charges the Ministry of Culture with "orienting its activity towards exposing society and state institutions to the ethnic and cultural diversity of the country; promoting the ethnic groups' participation in the National System of Culture's institutions; and contributing to strengthening, projecting, and protecting the cultural values of Afro-Colombians for the purpose of conserving, enriching, and disseminating their cultural identity"' (Museo Nacional de Colombia 2003: 16).

Today, there is no such 'permanent hall' dedicated to Afro-descendants at the Museo, but visitors and researchers will find several objects related to and made by these groups scattered throughout its collections and permanent exhibitions. For example, on the third floor, in the hall called Being and Making, visitors can see some of those objects:



Figure 1. In this photograph you see an installation about Afro-Colombian Buenaventura-born *maestro* Baudilio Cuama, a musician and an expert in making marimbas. Traditionally made along southern Colombia's Pacific coast, marimbas are used in the genre of music of the same name and also in *currulao*. The installation includes a life-size photograph of its maker, a marimba, Cuama's voice and other related objects, music, and sounds. © Sofia Natalia Gonzalez Ayala, all rights reserved, used with permission.



Figure 2. If you follow on to the end of the Being and Making hall, you will find a painting by the recently deceased Colombian painter Fernando Botero, depicting two unnamed dark-skinned women's backs. © Sofia Natalia Gonzalez Ayala, all rights reserved, used with permission.

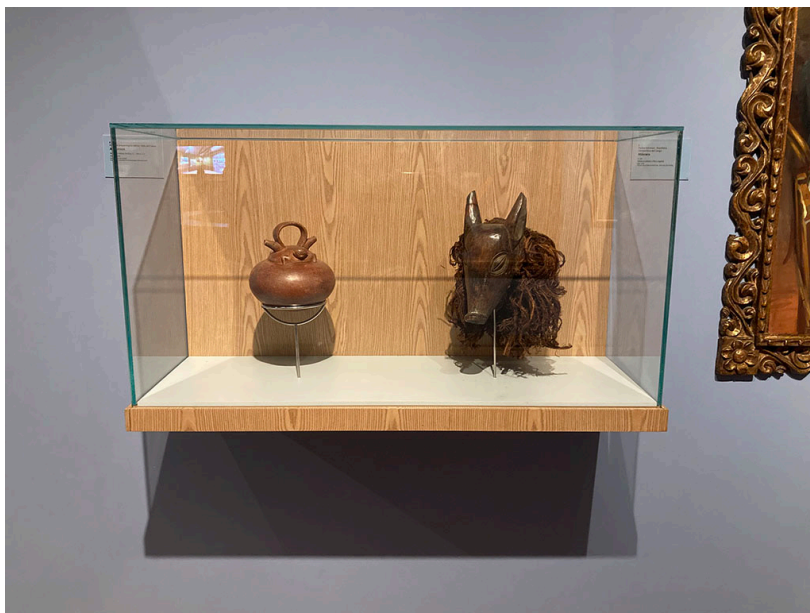


Figure 3. In front of Botero's painting, in a glass case, a twentieth-century Chokwe mask from the Democratic Republic of the Congo next to an archaeological object from the Calima culture. © Sofia Natalia Gonzalez Ayala, all rights reserved, used with permission.



Figure 4. In another section of the same hall, a few objects referring to Afro-Colombian Cartagena-born writer Candelario Obeso and his work are exhibited, also in a glass case. © Sofia Natalia Gonzalez Ayala, all rights reserved, used with permission.

If you go downstairs, to the second floor, more objects depicting or made by Afro-descendants are displayed:



Figure 5. In the hall named *Memory and Nation*, on a wall full of images, a few of them on screens, others in photographs, or in paintings, Afro-Colombian faces and bodies appear. One of them is called the *Mulata Cartagenera*, made by Colombian painter Enrique Grau in 1940. Seeing it evoked a memory: after the UN declared 2011 the International Year for People of African Descent, the Museo highlighted one piece monthly to commemorate this declaration. In March, the *Mulata* painting, and the unnamed young woman who posed for it, circulated in programming leaflets as the piece of the month. © Sofia Natalia Gonzalez Ayala, all rights reserved, used with permission.



Also, on the second floor, in the Being Territory hall, we can find an abbreviated version of Afro-Colombian artist Liliana Angulo's work *Un caso de reparación* [A Case of Reparations] (Angulo 2015). This piece exemplifies one potential way that archives can give cultural reparations: publicizing the names, provenance, and professions of enslaved Afro-descendants and those who enslaved them. Angulo created it during a residence researching the archives of the Royal Botanical Garden in Madrid, Spain. It focuses on how the 1780s Botanical Expedition and its Spanish leader José Celestino Mutis benefited from the slave trade. Also, it makes visible the contributions of free and enslaved people of African descent as workers for the Expedition and authors of botanical drawings. Paradoxically, this piece stands juxtaposed with objects that emphasize Colombian 'cultural diversity,' hiding its powerful, provocative, and disruptive character. In this imaginary guided tour, I link to a video of the artist presenting and contextualizing her work,<sup>6</sup> and I ask you to use some time to watch, read, discuss, and reflect on Angulo's piece and on the importance of naming enslaved people—in contrast to Botero and Grau's anonymizing of their models.

Around the time of my last visit to the Museo, a travelling exhibition was open for three weeks on the ground floor in the Panopticon Workshops and Visible Storage hall. It helps me to show another way in which the presence of Afro-descendant people in this institution follows a multicultural vision of the nation. The exhibition's name was *Un Rebulú de Saberes para la Hermandad* [A Gathering of Knowledges for Brotherhood] and it showed a summarized version of the Museo Gastronómico del Chocó [Gastronomic Museum of Chocó].<sup>7</sup> The exhibition was organized and co-created with the Museo Afro project,<sup>8</sup> the Museo Nacional, and the Ministry of Culture. According to the Museo Gastronómico's creator and director, Diana Mosquera:

'This gathering of knowledges will come to Bogotá to build brotherhood, introducing people to Chocó Province's culture through its cuisine in order to counteract cultural homogenization in Colombia [...] We want the African diaspora's traditions and heritage to have a dignified place in the national narrative and, of course, in constructing the Museo Afro de Colombia' ('Un rebulú...' 2023).

*Un Rebulú de Saberes para la Hermandad* was set up by distributing objects and texts as if they were displayed in a home's kitchen and rooms. At the center of the exhibition, a dining table became a venue for talks and workshops that made the exhibition a 'living museum,' as director Mosquera describes it. Walking around this exhibition and hearing about the concept of a 'living museum,' I remembered a project that had taken place years ago, the exhibition *Velorios y Santos Vivos*.

I will now ask you to imagine that in front of you is a big table with books, leaflets, and headphone sets, surrounded by posters that refer to the projects I will describe, with touchscreens and tablets connected to the internet for you to explore related websites (when available), and chairs

for you to sit down, read, listen, and discuss.

### Living ancestors project and *Velorios y santos vivos* (2006–2014)

I was hired in 2008 as a professional anthropologist to be a research assistant on the project Living Ancestors, which would become the temporary and then travelling exhibition *Velorios y santos vivos. Comunidades negras, afrocolombianas, raizales y palenqueras* [*Wakes and Living Saints: Black, Afro-Colombian, Palenquero and Raizal Communities*]. According to its catalogue, *Velorios* attempted to show 'the relationships that exist between the ancestors and living people, and between the ceremonies for Catholic saints and for the dead' (Ministerio de Cultura and Museo Nacional de Colombia 2008: 23). The temporary exhibition included representations or recreations of tombs for the dead and altars to celebrate the devotion for the Virgin Mary and Catholic saints.<sup>9</sup>

This project emerged from a demand made by two scholars from the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Claudia Mosquera Rosero-Labbé and Jaime Arocha. In 2005, they reached out to the Museo Nacional to propose creating the 'permanent hall' dedicated to Afro-Colombian people that Mosquera wrote about two years later. Since 2007, the Museo's Arts and History Curatorship hosted the project, with support from the Ministry of Culture. Fieldwork took place in groups usually composed of at least two anthropologists and a Black or Afro-Colombian leader. They collected objects and information in seven areas highly populated by Afro-Colombians. Museum staff, anthropologists and Afro-Colombian *sabedores* [wise people, literally 'people who know'] and altar 'architects' met regularly to produce the exhibition. This group of contributors, along with several other Afro-descendants from all around the country who visited and commented critically on the exhibitions, were probably the 'committee' that Mosquera Rosero-Labbé also wrote about in 2007. The temporary exhibition's website has been archived, should you wish to explore it.<sup>10</sup>

*Velorios's* introductory text, next to its entrance, explained its intentions and how objects such as funerary and religious altars were organized in space, suggesting a co-existence between the 'sacred' and the 'profane' in funerary and Catholic rituals.<sup>11</sup> In this way, the exhibition identified 'traces of Africanness' (*huellas de africanía*) in Colombia. Coined by Nina de Friedemann, this concept is used to signify 'the cultural baggage that is submerged in enslaved diaspora Africans' iconographic subconscious. The traces become perceptible in their descendants' social organization, music, religiosity, speech, and carnival theatre as a result of processes of creation and resistance where reason and feeling have guided cultural improvisation' (de Friedemann 1997: 175); they are visible 'in works, decorations, dance, forms of organization, of territorial use, communication and so on' (de Friedemann and Espinosa 1993: 101). The text that hung on the wall stated:

*Velorios y santos vivos* is a landmark step towards including Africans and their Colombian descendants in the Museo Nacional's exhibitions and collections. It emerged from a proposal developed in consultation with Black community organizations in seven Colombian regions with the shared goal of making Afro-Colombian, Black, Palenquero, and Raizal people's contributions to the national identity visible.

In the exhibition, the profane and sacred areas show the ancestral dialogue that extends through the wake and the nine nights of the vigil. Around the funeral altar built in the house's living room, you can hear sacred prayers and chants. Meanwhile, in the back and front yards, people play dominoes games and tell legends. Nowadays, this traditional way of healing the pain is being replaced by cold visits to funeral parlors. The small autonomous farmers who own collective territories are almost extinct because of industrialized agriculture and mining, and also because of the war, which makes funeral rituals difficult and dilutes Afro-Colombian identity. These transformations will appear in the videos projected inside the profane space alongside other illustrations of the Africans from whom Black people descend.

At the center of the sacred area, Congo River Valley carvings celebrate the ancestors and offer a vision of the spirituality they embody. Next to them, three altars do the same: one honors the Lady of Carmel, who protects sailors in the South Pacific region; another one, Quibdó's patron saint San Pacho; and one is for Baby Jesus, who is worshipped in February by Afro-Colombians from Northern Cauca. The perimeter of the space, for its part, emphasizes the solidarity born in each stage of the funeral rites: agony, death, wake, burial, the nine nights, the last night, and the anniversary, and also in the moving ceremony for the dead to become living saints.'

Next to these introductory words, a few pictures showed examples of Afro-Colombian people in their front yards during wake ceremonies, along with an explanation about sacred-profane relations within the ceremony and their possible resemblance to African traditions. In the center of the 'profane' area, there were chairs and tables with some of the board games described, as well as a few books for on-site consultation that were related to the exhibition's content and history. It was an area where visitors could chat, sit down, and play with the board games and cards available, as it happens during the wakes that the exhibition portrayed. It was also the place that researchers in charge of the visitor study used to conduct interviews. Once they crossed over into the 'sacred' area, visitors could learn about the 'moving ceremony for the dead to become living saints.'



Figure 6. This picture of the exhibition's model shows how the hall was divided into the 'sacred' and 'profane' areas using a white curtain. But the exhibition as a whole was sacralized using texts, an opening ecumenical ceremony, and a special closing event led by an Afro-Colombian group of people. © Sofía Natalia Gonzalez Ayala, all rights reserved, used with permission.

On the threshold that led to the sacred space, visitors would find altars, objects, texts, videos, and pictures organized in 'stages' of the ritual defined for the exhibition: Agony, Death, Wake, Burial, the Nine Nights, the Last Night, Anniversary. There were also a few West African twentieth-century objects from the Museo's Bertrand Collection, which aimed to represent Afro-Colombians' ancestors. They were intended to link present-day orthodox and non-orthodox Catholic rituals with the pre-colonial memory, knowledge, and spirituality that survive as traces of Africanness. The *Velorios* hall as a whole was 'sacralized' in response to concerns expressed by consulted Afro-Colombians. On the right side of the exhibition's main entrance, next to three TV screens with headphones showing videos about the installation process and the opening blessing ceremony, hung a wall text that, reframing the 'profane' and 'sacred' distinction inside the hall, sacralized the space as a whole:

You are about to enter a sacred space consisting 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.<sup>12</sup> We did this so that through prayers, chants, and respectful attitudes, we help them arrive where they perhaps could not, due to the armed conflict and prevailing violence which have prevented their relatives from doing the ceremonies you will learn about after crossing this threshold.

Big black words were distributed above the wall. They showed other names used in Colombia to refer to Afro-Colombians: renacientes, raizales, palenqueros, morenos, mulatos, cimarrones, libres, negros, afrocolombianos, niches, comunidades negras.<sup>13</sup> As I said before, thinking

of the 2023 exhibition *Un Rebulú de Saberes* as a living museum made me remember *Velorios*. This is because, apart from the objects, altars, images, and texts, during the three months the exhibition was open, the Museo Nacional organized several cultural, educational, and academic activities where Afro-descendants were protagonists. Also, because once the temporary exhibition finished, it continued to exist in the form of a travelling display. The Museo's Arts and History curator, another research assistant (also an anthropologist), and I selected objects, texts, and audiovisual material from the exhibition, including pictures of its highlights—eight assemblies of objects reconstructing funerary and patron saints' altars—and then printed them on 21 banners that constituted, along with other elements, its travelling version.<sup>14</sup> In 2009 and 2010, I was responsible for its itinerary. The exhibition's tour was a way of returning the research results to the people interviewed and photographed during fieldwork.

Since 2011, when I began my PhD at the University of Manchester (UK), I used *Velorios*' biography or 'behind the scenes' as my research focus. I followed on another PhD thesis where the Museo's Arts and History curator focused on visitors' interpretations of the temporary exhibition (Lleras 2011). She demonstrated the limits for the transformation of stereotypes that a multicultural view offers for a national museum: in most cases, visitors—most of them non-Afro-descendant—had their existing ideas about Afro-Colombians' exoticism reinforced. In fact, she realized the difficulties involved in 'representing a more critical multiculturalism and taking on the issue of representations of the painful past and reparation as serious matters' (Lleras 2011: 290).

Meanwhile, what was by then not only a curatorial but also a research project continued its life at the Museo. As I knew the travelling exhibition kept travelling around the country with a young Afro-Colombian woman in charge, I proposed that my PhD fieldwork consist of following them in 2012 and 2013 and staying on site while it was open, something I had not been able to do before. I also thought seeing its preparation and return process at the Museo would be interesting, while the curators worked on it there in between stops on its tour, and just hanging out at the Museo, which would imply spending time where I had worked for more than 3 years. My plan was to use audio-visual recording tools to distance myself from what seemed like just going back to my previous life. In fact, that year of 'fieldwork' in Colombia many times felt like *déjà vu*. I became what Mosse (2006) refers to as an 'insider ethnographer,' which meant I defamiliarized myself with the project I had been so involved with, noticing precisely what it had not included.

To share with you what I noticed, let us go back in time a bit, and recall Mosquera Rosero-Labbé's statements quoted above. They signaled a challenge to the Museo Nacional to provide reparations for Afro-descendants. This would mean exhibiting explicitly racialized stereotypes but, at the same time, using curatorial and design work to highlight and question racism, signaling how images, names and categories that are

produced and circulate in museums, art, and the media also produce and circulate racist stereotypes.

**Curating stereotypes and racism in an exhibition, artworks, and a book (2006–2007)**

In 2006, as the Living Ancestors project started, three related projects led by Afro-Colombian women tackled invisibility and stereotyping and showed the connections between current and historic racism. The first one was the exhibition *Viaje sin Mapa* [Travel without a Map]. The second was Liliana Angulo's artwork, which was first displayed in a mainstream art gallery in *Viaje sin Mapa*. The third one was a book about Afro-reparations which Mosquera Rosero-Labbé co-edited and co-curated, using some of Angulo's art pieces, as well as others included in *Viaje sin Mapa*.



Figure 7. Screenshots of *Viaje sin mapa's* leaflets or 'study guides' (Cristancho and Angola 2006).

*Viaje sin Mapa* opened in 2006 at the Casa de la Moneda [The Coin House], an art gallery located in the Luis Angel Arango Library's building in Bogotá's city centre.<sup>15</sup> This exhibition was co-curated by Mercedes Angola and Raúl Cristancho. Its title was inspired by Graham Greene's *Travel without maps*. In

the curatorial text she wrote about the exhibition, Angola (n.d.) explains how she got involved in the exhibition project and her views on the names and images that it dealt with:<sup>16</sup>she got involved in the exhibition project and her views on the names and images that it dealt with:<sup>16</sup>

'I began this journey in mid-2004, after Raúl Cristancho asked me why Afro-Colombian artists had no presence on Colombia's art scene. He proposed that I co-curate *Viaje sin mapa*. I became interested in his proposal, considering I am Afro-descendant and a teacher and artist at the Universidad Nacional's Fine Arts School, because it articulated several questions: Why have these artists not been made visible in national art institutions? Why is there so little research, statements, or debates around representations of the Afro in Colombian art? That makes it impossible to name relevant Afro-Colombian artists' (Angola n.d.: 1).

'*Viaje sin mapa* raises questions and initiates a debate about the invisibility of Afro representations in the art field. It signals the existence of diverse repertoires of representation, which has been named and built historically as 'Black' and currently as 'Afro' in Colombia. Such representations, including the ones in this exhibition and others, must be made known and publicized, departing from institutionalized stereotypes and traditions. The field of artistic and visual practices is a favorable territory to open up the configuration of new representations. These will dynamize and activate processes and policies in the fields of social life and the institution of art' (Angola n.d.: 8).

That lack of presence and visibility can be understood as a form of racism, and thus this exhibition, as anti-racist. It included works by Fabio Melecio Palacios, Martha Posso Rosero, Fernando Mercado, Javier Mojica Madera, and Aníbal Moreno, among other Afro-Colombian and Black artists that curator Angola talked about. *Viaje sin Mapa* also presented Liliana Angulo, whose early work reflected on and decomposed categories like 'Black' and 'Afro,' used to refer at the same time to identities and racial and racist images and words.

Angulo refers to her early work as 'photograph-sculptures' that relate to her 'own image and [her] racial identity as a Black person born in Bogotá,' in the highlands, counter to where Colombia's racialized geography would locate a Black person's birthplace and home. These works, like *Viaje sin Mapa*, dealt with 'stereotypes and representations of the Afro.' They were the product of her investigations into 'the word black and the identity associated to that word.' For example, in her early self-portraits in the series *A Black is a Black [Un negro es un negro]*, she donned black face paint and 'deformed' her face with different objects. This was an experiment that she likened to an act of affirmation of the idea of wanting to be 'blacker' (*más negra*) (Banrepultural 2010).

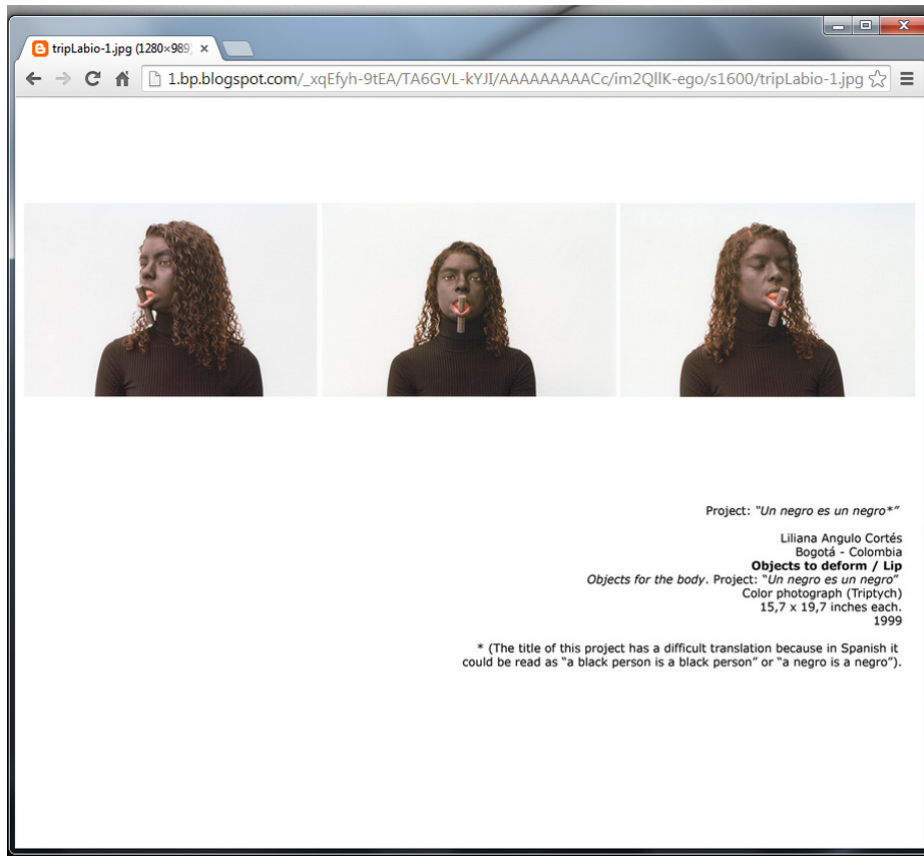


Figure 8. Screenshot of *Un negro es un negro* (see explanation under \* in image) on Angulo's blog *Negricolas*, a neologism that plays with the word 'negro' (black) adding to it the suffix *-cola*, 'one who cultivates or inhabits.' It can thus be translated as 'B/blackness-dweller' or 'B/blackness farmer.'

A later work, *Negra Menta*, consists of photographs of a woman whose 'natural' skin colour we do not know. She poses 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*), signaling both the textual and visual aspect of a racial stereotype (Angulo 2010).

*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 (Angulo 2010).



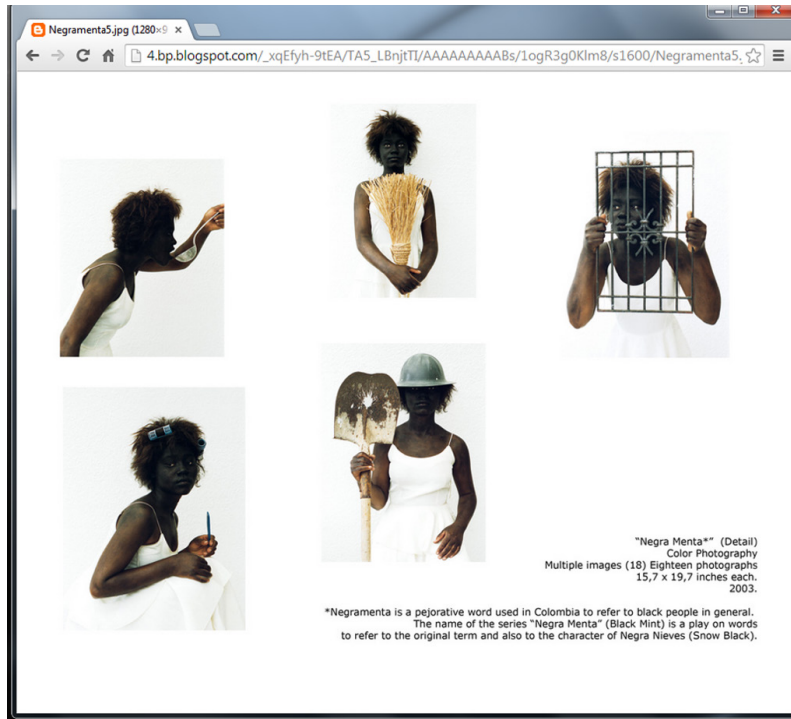


Figure 9. A screenshot of Angulo's piece *Negra Menta* on the *Negricolas* website.



Figure 10. This screenshot shows three examples from the cartoon *Negra Nieves*, which inspired her piece *Negra Menta*. She references the cartoon's author, but she also labels the selection as hers, appropriating it. From left to right, the cartoons' captions read: 'I want to earn a living by the sweat of your brow,' 'my ignorance is perfect! [sic],' and 'I've got anthropological angst...!'

In 2007 Angulo participated in a public conversation during an art festival in Medellín, the second biggest city in Colombia, where she spoke about *Negra Nieves* and *Negra Menta* (Angulo 2007). She explained how she intended to use photography as a means to affirm and re-signify Afro-descendants' racially stereotyped presence in the media, and to acknowledge their difficult situation working in big cities, like Bogotá:

'When I was a kid, [Nieves] attracted me a lot because Black people were not really present in the media... I wondered if the person who created it was Afro or not. Later on, I found out she was not [...] When Consuelo Lagos created her, [Nieves] was a domestic worker and Consuelo Lagos used her to talk about current news, as she does today. Although [Nieves] was portrayed as ignorant and clumsy, she could see things that perhaps other people did not. [Lagos] got sued because she represented Black people in that way, and so Nieves turned into a philosophy student at the university. Nieves changed completely from the 90s until now. I began to work with this cartoon character after I met a girl who arrived to Bogotá from Tumaco [a port town on the Pacific coast with a high Afro population] to work as a babysitter and maid. She was about 15 years old at that time, and her name was Lorena. When she lived in Tumaco, she had a normal teenage life. [...] But in Bogotá she never leaves the house where she works, conforming to stereotypes that associate her with domestic service and keep her an outsider in the city, without enough tools to participate in many of the things that happen in this big city. [In *Negra Menta's* photographs,] her body is painted in black as an affirmation action and as a way to obtain the graphic qualities of the cartoon using color photography' (Angulo 2007).

*Viaje sin Mapa* and Angulo's work directly tackled racist stereotypes in ways that *Velorios* did not. But this direct exposure implied an interesting contradiction: while trying to question racial stereotypes, these circulated in a mainstream museum, leaving space open for reinforcing stereotypes and misinterpretations but also for new, difficult—but necessary—discussions.

In 2007, Angulo's work and of other artists in *Viaje sin Mapa*, were included in the book *Afro-reparaciones: Memorias de la esclavitud y justicia reparativa para negros, afrocolombianos y raizales* [*Afro-reparations: Memories of Slavery and Reparative Justice for Black, Afro-Colombian, and Raizal People*, henceforward *Afro-reparaciones*] (Mosquera Rosero-Labbé and Barcelós 2007). This book presented and discussed racism and racist stereotypes explicitly. At the same time, it put forward the subject of reparations for the descendants of African enslaved people in Colombia.



Figure 11. A screenshot of *Afro-reparaciones'* front cover, with one of the pictures from *Negra Menfa*, which conflates slavery, racism, and a gender stereotype in one image.

Mosquera's insistence on a permanent hall serving as an 'act of reparation' coincides with the ideas showcased in *Afro-reparaciones*. On the one hand, this book is a source of information and analysis about the idea of reparations for Afro-descendant people, or Afro-reparations, brought to the Museo Nacional in 2005. On the other hand, it constitutes an attempt to combine images and text to present and discuss the issues included in the book—that is, what reparations are and how they must be provided in the Colombian context. At that moment, Mosquera and Arocha, the two scholars that had approached the Museo to propose the exhibition project, were leading a research group at the Universidad Nacional called the Grupo de Estudios Afrocolombianos [Group of Afro-Colombian Studies, GEA], of which I am now also a member. Mosquera's ideas on anti-racism and Afro-reparations joined the ethnographic and historical approach of 'traces of Africanness' and the Afro-Americanist focus that Jaime Arocha advocated.

Thus *Afro-reparaciones* is also an example of an 'accumulation,' in this case, of people, documents, and events. But 'accumulation' here is also a synonym of 'curatorial work' [*curaduría*] accredited in the book's legal page to its designer and to Mosquera (Mosquera Rosero-Labbé and Barcelós 2007: 4). 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, Black organizations) and places (Palenque, Bojayá, Northern Cauca, San Andrés, and Providencia) related to Black, Raizal, Palenquero, and Afro-Colombian populations.<sup>17</sup> Some of the volume's contributors were included in the list of people who would make a 'critical visit' to the Museo Nacional's exhibits in 2006 and 2007, and some of them would go on to write articles for *Velorios's* catalogue. As I will now show, their work involved not only text editing, but also very specific choices regarding the selection, composition, and display of images in relation to text.

The book 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' (Mosquera Rosero-Labbé 2007). There, she elaborates a forceful argument about the need for the Colombian State to carry out reparations and affirmative action with an ethnic-racial perspective, and 'deep visibility.' The tone of her writing is provocative, denunciatory, and discomfiting. Mosquera states that it was during the 2001 Durban Conference that the question of reparations was posed.<sup>18</sup> She affirms that Colombia, as one of the countries where members of the African Diaspora live in the present, is committed to complying with the Durban Conference declaration. In spite of this, it has not carried out actions to fulfill this commitment. She locates herself as belonging to a group of 'activist intellectuals who maintain that the descendants of enslaved Africans brought through the transatlantic slave trade to Nueva Granada are a subalternized group to which the current Colombian State must give reparations' (Mosquera Rosero-Labbé 2007: 231).<sup>19</sup>

In Mosquera's view, this relates to the continuity between historic and present-day racisms and to the creation of a racialized geography. Also, to how the Colombian State has safeguarded 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. In her article, words challenge the 'neutral' national memory by discussing the relationships between slavery, racism, and discrimination towards Afro-Colombian people. Likewise, the images in the book make those issues *visible* by showing the way those people and issues look. It includes images of small drawings of the slave ships the *Aurora*, *Brookes*, and *Vigilante* inserted between each of the 31 articles that compose the book. Images by Afro-Colombian and non Afro-Colombian photographers, artists, and anthropologists show Afro-descendants from all around the country.



Foto: Liliana Angulo Cortés

### Capítulo 3 Reparaciones desde el conflicto armado interno colombiano

Figure 12. In the screenshot to the left you can see one of the seven pictures chosen to mark the book's main sections and chapters, part of Liliana Angulo's photographic series *Negra Menta*. Next to it, the chapter's title: 'Reparations from the Colombian internal armed conflict.'



Foto: Jesús Abad Colorado

### Bojayá: entre el miedo y los medios

ALBA CAROLINA LANCHERES RUIZ  
JULIÁN ANDRÉS RINCÓN OREZ

#### Resumen

Esta crónica recoge la historia de la confrontación armada vivida recientemente en Bojayá, Chocó (Colombia), que dejó un saldo importante de muertos de la población afrodescendiente y una serie interminable de historias relacionadas con el miedo y la desolación que produce la guerra. El documento mostrará diferentes escenarios en los que se vivieron los momentos previos a la confrontación, su desarrollo mismo y sus trágicas consecuencias. Al final revelará imágenes de la guerra y de las heridas que abre.

*Palabras clave:* paramilitares, guerrilla, iglesia, ejército, confrontación, comunidad, autonomía, violencia

Figure 13. In the screenshot to the left, 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 the media,' was written by two journalists and is about a massacre that took place in 2002 in Bojayá, a small town in Chocó, near the Pacific coast, with a high Afro-Colombian population. 119 civilians were killed. The state's ongoing neglect of the town and the region is a historic consequence of slavery, and it made this population more vulnerable to the violence produced by the armed conflict. It is thus a manifestation of structural racism.



Foto: Martha Posso Rosero

### Conocimientos ancestrales amenazados y destierro prorrogado: la encrucijada de los afrocolombianos

SANTIAGO ARBOLEDA QUINÓNEZ

#### Resumen

Este artículo propone la noción de "desterrado" como alternativa a las nociones de "emigrante" y "desplazado", que han hecho carrera en las ciencias sociales. Esta permite una restauración epistémica de proyección prolongada con base en la cual se enfatiza la importancia central de los conocimientos construidos por los afrocolombianos, estrechamente vinculados a la riqueza natural de sus entornos ancestrales, en una defensa radical de la vida.

**Palabras clave:** afrocolombianos, desplazados, emigrantes, desterrados, región Pacífica, conocimientos ancestrales

Figure 14: Another picture, by Martha Posso Rosero, shows some children in front of a *zofea*, a platform used by women in Colombia's Pacific region to grow plants for cooking and medicine. This is one of the traces of Africanness that *Velorios* attempted to portray as both very valuable and endangered: valuable, because these *zofeas* host part of the post-birth ritual called *obligada*,<sup>20</sup> which Afro-Americanist literature links to customs from West and Central Africa and identifies as a 'trace of Africanness'; endangered, because of the armed conflict that displaces and disperses people from this region.

Molano, Alfredo. 2001. *Desterrados. Crónicas del desarraigo*. Bogotá, El Áncora.

Mora Ojejo, Luis Eduardo and Fals Borda, Orlando. 2002. *La superación del eurocentrismo. Enriquecimiento del saber sistemático y endógeno sobre nuestro contexto tropical*. Bogotá, Cundalúpe.

Obeso, Candelario. 1988. *Cantos populares de mi tierra*. Bogotá, El Áncora.

Pardo, Mauricio (ed.). 2001. *Acción colectiva, Estado y etnicidad en el Pacífico colombiano*. Bogotá, Instituto Colombiano de Antropología e historia (ICANH) – Coleciencias.

Quijano, Aníbal. 2000. "Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina": 201-245, en *Edgardo Lora (ed.), La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas latinoamericanas*, Buenos Aires, Clacso-Unesco.

Romero, Mario Diego. 2002. *Sociedades negras en la Costa Pacífica del Valle del Cauca durante los siglos XIX-XX*. Cali, Colección de autores vallecaucanos, Gobernación del Valle.

Sábató, Ernesto. 2000. *La resistencia*. Buenos Aires, Seix Barral.

Villa, William. 1988. "Movimiento social de comunidades Negras en el Pacífico Colombiano. La construcción de una noción de territorio y región": 431-449, en Adriana Maya, *Geografía humana de Colombia. Los Afrocolombianos*. Tomo VI, Bogotá, Instituto Colombiano de Cultura Hispánica.

Walsh, Catherine. 2002. "La re-articulación de subjetividades políticas y diferencia colonial en Ecuador: reflexiones sobre el capitalismo y las geopolíticas del conocimiento": 175-214, en Catherine Walsh et al, *Indisciplinar las ciencias sociales. Geopolíticas del conocimiento y colonialidad del poder. Perspectivas desde lo andino*, Quito, UASB/Abya Yala.

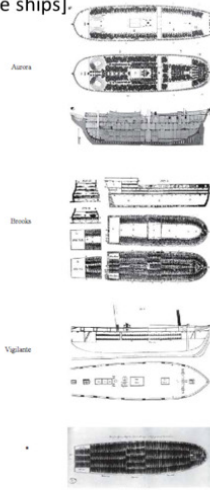
West, Roberto C. 2000[1957]. *Las tierras bajas del Pacífico colombiano*. Bogotá, ICANH.

Zapata Olivella, Manuel. 1997. *La rebelión de los genes. El mestizaje americano en la sociedad jinetera*. Bogotá, Altamira.



Figure 15. The last page of the article is followed by one almost empty. At its bottom is a small reproduction of a slave ship.

**Barcos Negreros**  
[Slave ships].



The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Data Base on Cd-rom. 2000 David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson, Herbert S. Klein. Cambridge University Press.  
\*Archivo General de Indias, "Ingenios y Muestras", 66.

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Figure 16. No explanation is offered for the small boats until the book's final pages, as if replying to the *Negra Menta* piece on the front cover: they are *barcos negreros*, slave ships.

In sum, *Afro-reparaciones* shows and discusses two of the subjects that were forcefully advocated by Mosquera and Arocha when they first approached the museum in the mid-2000s: the transatlantic slave trade and the recent armed conflicts, and the consequences of both for Afro-Colombian people in the present. It does this using images that confront us with stereotypes, horror, and beauty, and texts that name people and call racism by its name. For the last section of this guided tour, I invite you to imagine what it would mean and require to put together *Velorios*, *Viaje sin Mapa*, *Negra Menta*, *Un negro es un negro*, and *Afro-reparaciones*.

**It is time to face racism, become anti-racist, and set multiculturalism aside (1994–2023)**

Today's visitors at the Museo Nacional will find representations of Afro-descendant people in its permanent exhibitions through installations, sculptures, photographs, paintings, sounds, and texts. This is done using artistic, historical, and ethnographic pieces from its collections and elsewhere. Some of these pieces were made or authored by Afro-descendants. Nevertheless, they are presented to the Museo's visitors following a multicultural narrative that portrays and organizes Colombia's history under categories such as 'Memory and Nation,' 'Being and Doing,' and 'Being Territory.' These labels remind us of the 'neutral national memory' that Mosquera denounced in 2007 and that *Velorios* questioned, following an anti-racist path that had already been opened.

The last part of this guided tour describes this path, using a

chronology as a means to accumulate experiences that might sometimes appear dispersed, disconnected, or unaware of each other. It refers to exhibitions and other events that have attempted to deal with lacking and inadequate Afro-Colombian representation in museums, and the limitations that a multicultural narrative entails for this endeavor. It enumerates a network of people and institutions that have proposed and gathered subjects, objects, and names in exhibitions, museums, and related events regarding Afro-descendants' history, artistic practices, and ethnography. It also shows a solid body of institutional, museological, historical, and artistic knowledge that keeps growing today.

In 1994, three years after the 1991 Multicultural Constitution, historian Adriana Maya wrote a 'Museum script about Afro-Colombian communities' (Maya 1994) for the Museo Nacional. This script proposed that curators 'include in the south hall on the first floor of the Museo—called "encounter of cultures"—the ethno-history and the contribution of Africans and their descendants to the construction of the nation' (p. 2). That year, the Museo Nacional opened three refurbished halls to the public with the exhibition *Milenios de diversidad* [*Millenia of Diversity*]. In that exhibit, it displayed the 'contributions' of 'millennial cultures' from 12,000 years ago to the present day. But although one of these halls was dedicated to the ethnography of 'indigenous and Afro-American societies' (Sierra 1994), no mention of Maya's proposal was included. Seven years later, the 6th Annual History Conference held at the Museo Nacional dealt with the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Colombia. Artist Beatriz González, then the Museo's Arts and History Curator, gave a presentation that was later published as 'Images of Black people in the collections of official institutions' (González 2003). Also in 2001, most of the exhibits that had been inaugurated as *Millenia of Diversity* were removed.

Now we move to the institution that hosted *Viaje sin Mapa* in Bogotá, the Banco de la República and its Museo del Oro. In 2003, historian Adriana Maya there spearheaded the temporary exhibition *Comunidades afrocolombianas: Legado y presencia* [*Afro-Colombian Communities: Legacy and Presence*],<sup>21</sup> possibly finding the space she had not encountered for her 1994's 'Museum script.' Her collaborators included Afro-Colombian and non-Afro-Colombian scholars such as Peter Wade (one of the authors referenced for this guided tour), Dolcey Romero, Orián Jiménez, and Martha Luz Machado, also a member of the Group of Afro-Colombian Studies who researched the African pieces included in *Velorios*. These last two published articles in *Afro-reparaciones* too.

In 2006, the same year *Viaje sin Mapa* was inaugurated, the *40 Salón Nacional de Artistas, 11 Salones Regionales de Artistas* [*40<sup>th</sup> National Salon of Artists: 11 Regional Halls*] took place. It was an art exhibition organized by the Ministry of Culture that included a section for artists from Colombia's Pacific coast and focused on Afro-Colombian communities and traditional mining practices. Its curatorial team included Afro-Colombian artists and scholars from Quibdó (Ministerio de Cultura 2006).



In 2013, five years after *Velorios* opened in Bogotá, the exhibition *Mandinga Sea: Africa en Antioquia*, co-curated by historian Adriana Maya and Raúl Cristancho (co-curator, with Angola, of *Viaje sin Mapa*), opened at Antioquia Museum in Medellín. That exhibition combined artistic and historical approaches to show the current and historical presence of Afro-Colombian people in Antioquia province.

Also in 2013, artist and curator Mercedes Angola joined the Togolese scholar Maguemati Wagbou to continue her investigations on the non-stereotypical use of images in exhibitions. They co-curated the photographic exhibition *Presencia Negra en Bogotá: Décadas 1940, 1950 y 1960* [*Black Presence in Bogotá: the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s*]. It took place at the Claustro de San Agustín Museum, which belongs to the Universidad Nacional (where both were lecturers), and portrayed the experience of Black Colombians who moved to Bogotá from all around the country in those decades ('Presencia Negra en...' 2013).

Then, in 2018, *A bordo de un navío esclavista, La Marie-Séraphique* [*On Board a Slave Ship: the Marie-Séraphique*] was opened at the Museo del Oro in association with the History Museum of Nantes, France, reconstructing how France used that ship to traffic enslaved people in the eighteenth century. But its curatorial team included little reference as to how the Spanish slave trade took place. Possibly, they were unaware of the work historian Maya had done for the Museo del Oro in 2003 and for the Museo Nacional in 1994, or of the way slave ships were displayed in *Afro-reparaciones*.

In 2023, the exhibition *Retratos imaginados* [*Imagined Portraits*] opened in a small hall at the Universidad del Rosario, a private university in Bogotá. It resulted from a research project led by two scholars from that institution. *Retratos* exhibited a set of portraits made by AI using archival information about the university's participation in the slave trade (Universidad del Rosario 2023). This exhibition was associated with *Una línea de inventario* [*An Inventory Line*], a play written and staged by Diokaju, an Afro-Colombian actors' collective who brought to life the enslaved people *Retratos imaginados* portrayed. At the end of the year, a small exhibit in the same venue displayed *Solo cicatrices* [*Only Scars*], an installation that reflects on the scars that slave owners and slavery left on enslaved people, by Afro-Colombian artist Fabio Melecio Palacios. He also participated in the *Viaje sin Mapa* and *Mandinga Sea* exhibitions. I wonder what it would be like to place these last three projects next to *Un caso de reparación* (Angulo 2015), the forementioned installation on archival reparations you can find today on the Museo Nacional's second floor.

For the Museo Nacional and other museums to be reparative and anti-racist, their exhibitions must deal with difficult subjects such as violence, death, sacrality, and stereotypes. They must learn from the research, design, curatorial, and participatory methodologies that public and private institutions have already put in place. Afro-descendants must participate as the curators, researchers, protagonists, and authors of their

own writings, artworks, and images. But this cannot be an individual effort. In order to leave behind 'institutionalized stereotypes and traditions' (Angola n.d.), public and private institutions such as museums, archives, and universities need to work together.

The exhibitions, book, and artworks I have discussed in this imaginary guided tour bring together creative, respectful, and provocative attempts to deal with difficult subjects. They advance what that Afro-reparative permanent hall for Afro-descendants might accumulate at the Museo Nacional. They discuss and show slavery, death, racist stereotypes, displaced and stigmatized spirituality, violence, and the erasure of Afro-Colombians. They contain the work of Afro-Colombian and white-mestizo scholars, researchers, *sabedores*, and artists that have produced 'diverse sets of habits' (Moreno Figueroa and Wade 2022) and have opened space for reparation in multicultural contexts. This imaginary guided tour has also been an imagined encounter, a *rebulú* (gathering) of Afro-Colombian and white-mestizo people (and people who prefer another or no labels).

I am a frequent museum visitor, and one of my favorite ones is the Museo Nacional. Its exhibits elicit a combination of pleasure and satisfaction at seeing a well-cared-for museum space full of diverse representations of who we are as Colombians. Nevertheless, those feelings turn into suspicion when I compare the exhibitions with the actual conditions of inequality, poverty, and violence that still affect Afro-descendants more than the rest of the Colombian population. Moreno Figueroa and Wade (2022) also advocate for the powerful idea 'that anti-racism could address racism's structural dimensions in a more radical way' (p. 14). It is time for the Museo to accept publicly how it has historically contributed to producing and reproducing stereotypical images about Afro-Colombian people. It is also time for critical and public reflections on how its ethnography, archaeology, art, and history collections were gathered; for Black and indigenous people to work there as curators and conservators in charge of its collections, of its budgets and planning departments, or leading the education, programming, or communications teams.

We have learned that, since the 1990s, the logic of multiculturalism and acknowledgment of difference and diversity has ruled Colombian museums' strategic and development plans, budgets, and timelines. However, for reparation to take place, the damage done needs to be talked about openly and explicitly. Because 'we cannot change what we do not face' (Chevalier, Jennings and Phalen 2023: 273), museums need to ask first how they have contributed to the existence and reinforcement of racism, for example by protecting and disseminating what Mosquera Rosero-Labbé referred to as the 'neutral national memory' (2007). This imaginary guided tour has shown why multiculturalism must move forward—or step aside—to really open up space for restorative and anti-racist forms in museum and exhibition settings. It is about time.

1. 'Black' [*negro*] was a racial category inherited from the colonial period later used to allude 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-descendant.' '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 under the labels 'Afro-Colombian' or 'Afro-descendant.'
2. 'From about 1990, most countries in Latin America went through some variant of an official "multicultural turn," which opened space for talking about and recognizing cultural diversity and gave various rights to Indigenous and, to a lesser extent, Black minorities' (Moreno Figueroa and Wade 2022: 16).
3. The National Statistics Department estimates that in 2018 in Colombia, there were 4,671,160 Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, and Palenquero people, or 9.34 percent of the total population (DANE 2022). According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC 2020: 108), Colombia has the highest rate of poverty among Afro-descendant people in Latin America (41 percent). Colombia's Truth Clarification, Coexistence and Non-Repetition Commission's report on violence and damage against ethnic groups (Comisión de la verdad 2022) acknowledges that the violence produced by the armed conflict between guerrilla paramilitary groups and state armed forces in the 60 years before the 2016 Peace Agreement has disproportionately affected ethnic groups, which include Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal, and Palenquero communities as part of a 'continuum of violences' against them that goes back to the sixteenth-century Spanish colony and the transatlantic slave trade.
4. These lowlands include regions, provinces, cities, and villages with higher numbers of Afro-descendant populations mentioned throughout the text. Most of them are located near Colombia's Pacific and Caribbean coasts—Chocó, Cauca, Bolívar, Valle, Northern Cauca, San Andrés, the Providencia and Santa Catalina Islands, Bojayá, Buenaventura, Tumaco, Quibdó, Guapi, San José de Uré, and San Basilio de Palenque.
5. Translations from the Spanish, unless otherwise noted, are my own.
6. Currently this video is only available in Spanish at [facebook.com/MuseoIndependenciaCasa.del.Florero/videos/1083205915537003](https://www.facebook.com/MuseoIndependenciaCasa.del.Florero/videos/1083205915537003) (17/02/2024).
7. Chocó Province, located on Colombia's Pacific coast, has the highest percentage of Black and Afro-Colombian population in the country: 79 percent (DANE 2020: 25).
8. At the time I write this article, the Museo Afro project's curator is artist Liliana Angulo, the author of *Un Caso de Reparación*. Currently, the Museo Nacional hosts the project, but no physical final venue has been designed or established for it (see [museoafro.gov.co](https://museoafro.gov.co), 24/10/2023).
9. In the Colombian Pacific region, people use the word *tumba* [tomb] to refer both to the place where a deceased person is buried and the altar arrangements built during funeral 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.
10. [web.archive.org/web/2022071022123/sinic.gov.co/sites/velorios/veloriospre.html](https://web.archive.org/web/2022071022123/sinic.gov.co/sites/velorios/veloriospre.html) (12/03/2024).
11. In this context, 'sacred' encompassed quiet, conventional, reserved protocols for commemorating death and Catholic saints. 'Profane,' on the other hand, meant unorthodox, explicitly emotional, and defiant procedures that question or disobey the Catholic Church's rules. The exhibition was divided

into two areas following that distinction, but the objects, altars, and practices exhibited combined both sacred and profane characteristics in the sense I just defined.

12. See note 4.

13. The words *renaciente* [renascent] and *libre* [free] are used in Colombia's Pacific region to refer to Black or Afro-Colombian people, by themselves and by others. *Libre* was a colonial category for people of African descent who were not slaves because their mother was free when they were conceived, or because they bought their own freedom (a process known as 'self-manumission') (Restrepo 2013a: 238; Arocha 2008: 12).

14. The travelling exhibition's website is also active while I write this article: [museonacional.gov.co/sitio/Velorios\\_site/Index.html](http://museonacional.gov.co/sitio/Velorios_site/Index.html) (24/10/2023). It is also possible to download the banners that circulated around the country [museonacional.gov.co/sitio/Velorios\\_site/queviaja.html](http://museonacional.gov.co/sitio/Velorios_site/queviaja.html) (24/10/2023).

15. This library and the gallery inside it, like the Museo del Oro, belong to the Cultural Division of the Banco de la República [Bank of the Republic], the Colombian central bank. The Banco's Cultural Division owns the two biggest art galleries in Bogotá: the Republican House [Casa Republicana] in the Luis Angel Arango Library, and the Museum of Art of the Bank of the Republic Miguel Urrutia just across the road in the colonial center of the city. The Museo del Oro was created in the beginning of the twentieth century and focuses on indigenous people because they produced many gold artefacts, but it does not show that enslaved and free Black people also did so.

16. Another version of this curatorial text is included in the exhibition catalogue (Angola and Cristancho 2006).

17. See note 4.

18. 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 2002: 16). 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.

19. The Viceroyalty of New Granada was the name of the Spanish Crown's territory in South America, part of which became the Republic of Colombia in the nineteenth century.

20. *The Comunidades afrocolombianas* exhibition catalog is available online at [babel.banrepultural.org/digital/collection/p17054coll18/id/406](http://babel.banrepultural.org/digital/collection/p17054coll18/id/406) (18/09/2023).

21. Arocha (1999) explains that in the Baudó River region, in Chocó province, *obligada* consists of the burial of the umbilical cord and placenta, after birth takes place, under a seed. The tree that grows from that seed will become one's *ombligo* [navel]. Also, in the healing newborn's navel, the parents will add pulverized minerals, animals, or plants

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### Author's bio

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