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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Zusammenfassung	i
Acknowledgments	ii
 1. CHAPTER 1: Introduction and project description	 5
1.1 Introduction	5
1.2 Background	8
1.4 Research questions and objectives: Overall and specifics	11
1.5 Methodology	12
 2. CHAPTER 2: Between Dichotomies: Exploring Black Communities in the Colombian popular imagination	 25
2.1 Negotiating Identity and Space in the Colombian Pacific black communities in Colombia and the implication in territory	26
2.1.1 Criticism toward Law 70 of 1993: The law of black communities	28
2.1.2 Black communities, Afro-descendants and Afro-Colombians and the concept of ethnicization	29
2.2 Territoriality, insecurity: Buenaventura the violent city	31
2.2.1 Political mobilization for sovereignty and identity	34
 3. CHAPTER 3: Charting the Course: Buenaventura's Port Development Journey	 36
3.1 Historiographical interventions in the Colombian Pacific	37
3.2. Colombia's economic policy and trade agreements	42
3.3 Historical and geographical context: How did the Buenaventura port emerge?	44

3.4 Deep Dive into the Buenaventura port: Stakeholders and logistics	48
3.4.1 Port Expansion and the Bajamar territories	51
3.5 Buenaventura's Port Expansion: Review of Plans Since the 1990s	52
3.5.1 Buenaventura Master plan 2050	55
3.6 Megaprojects and the previous consultation to ethnic groups: Law 70	58
3.6.1 The legal framework for prior consultation for implementation of projects in Black communities' territories	60
4. CHAPTER 4: Building Theoretical Groundwork: Unpacking Anthropological Perspectives on Infrastructure	62
4.1 Defining large-scale infrastructure projects or megaprojects	63
4.2 Anthropology of Infrastructure	65
4.3 Anthropology of Infrastructure reflections for the port expansion of Buenaventura	66
4.4 Navigating the anxiety within large-scale infrastructure projects	73
5. CHAPTER 5: Journey Through Buenaventura's Port Expansion: Life and urban transformation	76
5.1 Life in the most important port of Colombia	76
5.2 Communities Fate: Unexpected Revelations on the Shores of Aspirations	84
5.3 Territorial boundaries, Security concerns, and the Vision for 2050: A Battle over Autonomy and Identity	93
5.4 Envisioning the Tomorrow: The City of 2050	97
6. CONCLUSION	101
7. REFERENCES	105

Abstract

The MA thesis delves into the Pacific coastal city of Buenaventura in Colombia, examining an ongoing port expansion project and its profound impact on the identity and sense of belonging within local Black communities amidst the rapid modernization spurred by this initiative. It investigates how Buenaventura, historically marginalized, has come to occupy a significant national position, the aspirations and concerns elicited among residents by the project, and their strategies for navigating evolving identities.

Drawing on extensive literature reviews and expert interviews, the study offers an analysis of the societal dynamics surrounding the "*Buenaventura 2050*" project. Enriched by the interviewees' experiences, it contextualizes these challenges within broader scholarly debates, utilizing the anthropology of infrastructure to decipher underlying power dynamics. Contrasting narratives of hope and anxiety emerge, underscoring residents' intricate negotiations of belonging and identity amid the tide of modernization.

Zusammenfassung

Die Magisterarbeit befasst sich mit der Pazifikküstenstadt Buenaventura in Kolumbien und untersucht ein laufendes Hafenerweiterungsprojekt und dessen tiefgreifende Auswirkungen auf die Identität und das Zugehörigkeitsgefühl der lokalen schwarzen Gemeinschaften inmitten der durch diese Initiative vorangetriebenen raschen Modernisierung. Die Arbeit untersucht, wie Buenaventura, das historisch marginalisiert war, zu einer bedeutenden nationalen Position aufgestiegen ist, welche Hoffnungen und Sorgen das Projekt bei den Bewohnern hervorgerufen hat und welche Strategien sie verfolgen, um mit den sich entwickelnden Identitäten umzugehen.

Gestützt auf umfangreiche Literaturrecherchen und Experteninterviews bietet die Studie eine Analyse der gesellschaftlichen Dynamik rund um das Projekt '*Buenaventura 2050*'. Gestützt auf Erkenntnisse aus Experteninterviews kontextualisiert sie diese Herausforderungen innerhalb breiterer wissenschaftlicher Debatten und nutzt die Anthropologie der Infrastruktur, um die zugrunde liegende Machtdynamik zu entschlüsseln. Es entstehen gegensätzliche Erzählungen von Hoffnung und Angst, die die komplizierten Verhandlungen der Bewohner über Zugehörigkeit und Identität inmitten der Flut der Modernisierung unterstreichen.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT DESCRIPTION

1.1 Introduction

Buenaventura, a port city along Colombia's Pacific coast, has historically been marginalized and peripheral within the popular nation's imagination. However, since the 1990s, the city has witnessed a significant transformation, with an ambitious port expansion project exposing the city into the national spotlight. This MA thesis aims to explore the project's profound impact on the notions of belonging and identity within the local black communities of this city (which constitute 73% of the total population), set against the backdrop of rapid modernization and the complexities of their identity vis a vis the Colombian government's vision.

Guided by specific questions, this inquiry commences by investigating how Buenaventura, once on the periphery of the Colombian state's attention, has risen to prominence. I delve into the hopes and anxieties stirred among the local population by an ongoing megaproject called "*Buenaventura 2050*" which targets the expansion of the port with the aim to remake the city to match global port activities, and how the population navigate their evolving sense of belonging and identity under this context. The research touches upon the 1970s recognition of 'black communities' as an ethnic group, endowed with distinctive cultural and territorial rights, which marked a significant milestone in Colombia's social and political landscape (Restrepo, 2013). This thesis explores how this recognition intersects with development visions for the city and influences the experiences of belonging and identity within these communities. Through an analysis of historical processes and contemporary dynamics, this research aims to shed light on the complex interplay between development initiatives, ethnic identity, and territoriality in this city of the Colombian Pacific.

Central to this exploration is also the broader context of Colombia government's ambition to modernize and establish the country as a global player, particularly through initiatives such as Free Trade Agreements, as well as the formation of the Pacific Alliance, where Buenaventura and its port play a crucial role.

To provide a comprehensive understanding, my methodological approach relied on a combination of a literature review with expert interview-based insights. This thesis taps into the social

geography of exclusion and development discourse, complemented by data from national sources, newspaper articles and grassroots organization's reports. The expert interviews with key actors offered diverse perspectives on the different experiences faced by the population of this city.

Beyond formal methodologies, my visit to Buenaventura in December 2022 included observation, informal interviews, and engagement with the local communities. These experiences coupled with my knowledge of Buenaventura as the daughter of one of its residents, significantly enriched my contextual comprehension.

The MA thesis is situated within the broader theoretical insights of the anthropology of infrastructure. Infrastructures are often understood as built networks enabling the flow of people, goods, and ideas. Infrastructures play a central role in shaping the nature of social networks and have significant implications for the population's identity and belonging (Anand, Gupta & Appel, 2018). Traditionally, anthropology has focused on ethnographic analysis of specific local contexts, yet recent developments within the discipline highlight the importance of studying infrastructures as central to understand certain societal dynamics (Anand, Gupta & Appel, 2018; von Schnitzler, 2016).

Anthropological approaches to infrastructure have evolved beyond mere physical structures to encompass their symbolic, cultural, and political dimensions. Scholars like Larkin (2013) have emphasized the need for an ethnographic retooling to understand technological systems not just as physical objects but as complex networks involving several actors such as technocrats, engineers, politicians, and end-users. This approach recognized that infrastructures such as ports bleed into multiple fields, shaping community dynamics, practices of government, sociality, and religion (Anand, Gupta & Appel, 2018; Larkin, 2013).

Moreover, infrastructures are not just technical systems but also concrete aesthetic and semiotic vehicles that embody forms of development, fantasy, and desire, constituting subjects and addressing national aspirations (Jamali, 2013; Harvey & Knox, 2015). As Arturo Escobar demonstrates in his analysis of development discourse and practice (2001), infrastructure projects are not merely physical constructs but also mechanisms of control that shape socio-political

landscapes. The discourse on development, originating in industrialized nations, has historically portrayed North America and Europe as models for post-World War II societies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. This discourse, fueled by the concept of "development," has perpetuated power imbalances and reinforced colonial legacies, leading to the categorization of regions into the so-called Third World and First World, as Escobar explains (Escobar, 2001).

Arturo Escobar's critique highlights the widespread impact of development policies and the economization of various social aspects such as food production. These policies often resulted in unintended consequences, such as increased poverty and hunger (Escobar, 2001).

Ashley Carse's book, "Beyond the Big Ditch: Politics, Ecology, and Infrastructure at the Panama Canal." (2014). Carse's work offers a historical and ethnographic study of the conflict between global transportation and rural development as they intersect at the Panama Canal. Carse's analysis demonstrates that infrastructures like the Panama Canal do not merely "conquer" nature but deeply reshape ecologies to serve specific political and economic priorities (Carse, 2014, pp. 15). This perspective informs the approach taken in this MA thesis, emphasizing the need to understand Buenaventura's port expansion not merely as a physical development project but as a complex socio-political process that reshapes the city's local identities, senses of belonging and ecological landscapes.

In the following chapters, I embark on an exploration of Buenaventura, unraveling the confluence of historical marginalization, urban transformation, and the aspirations of black communities within the port expansion project vis a vis their territories. Through diverse experts insights, this MA seeks to offer a grasp of how Buenaventura's evolving identity is in the current day.

1.2 Background

The Pacific region of Colombia is characterized as one of the territories with the most significant presence of ethnic groups in the country. For instance, 90 % of its population is black, 6% comprises indigenous ethnic groups such as the Embera Dobida, Embera Chami, Embera Katio, Eperara Siapidara, Wounaan, Awa, and Tule., and only 4% is made up of mestizo population (CNMH, 2015). The characteristics of its population, the ethnic territorial claims made since the

1991 constitution, and the high biodiversity recognized in the tropical rainforests make almost 60% of the region legally excluded from the land market, as they constitute collective territories of black communities, indigenous reserves, and national parks (CNMH, 2015).

Buenaventura is the largest city in the Pacific region by population, reflecting the demographic makeup of the region, with mainly black people, most referred to as - Afro-Colombians - (Restrepo, 2013). The black population comprise 73% of the total population in the region and are organized into 46 Community Councils and have developed their own culture, including their own forms of exchange and relationship building (CNMH, 2015., Restrepo, 2013). The black population of Buenaventura traces its origins to the forced migration of Africans as slaves to the Spanish colonies in the 16th century (Agudelo, 2002). Black individuals were brought as slaves into the Pacific region, specifically to replace the indigenous people who died due to inhumane working conditions (Restrepo, 2013). Black individuals were obliged to work in gold mines of the Pacific region under the direction of inland country elites (Arocha, 1992., Gisbert et al., 2015). Over time, these individuals adapted to the geographic environment, carving out their own society and identity based on their own cultural practices, social relations, and modes of production (Friedemann, 1974).

For centuries, the black communities were marginalized and excluded, but they began to assert their cultural identity and resistance through a long struggle for ethnic-territorial rights, culminating in the 1991 Constitution, which recognized the diversity of Colombia's ethnic and cultural groups. Specifically, draw on 1993 law 70, "Law of black communities." (Restrepo, 2013). Today, the black communities of Buenaventura continue to face various forms of marginalization and exclusion, particularly in the face of economic development plans that threaten their lands. However, they remain resilient and continue to fight for their rights, using their cultural practices and social organizations as a foundation for resistance and resilience (CNMH, 2015).

The communities in Buenaventura have maintained historical grievances against the Colombian state since the country's inception, giving rise to various social movements and protests. According to Jenns (2020a), in recent years, these tensions have been exacerbated due to the Colombian government's efforts to advance large-scale economic development projects supported by

international corporations. In particular, the government's plans to expand Buenaventura's port have turned it into a site of contestation, exacerbating local rivalries and displacing black and indigenous peoples (particularly the ones residing along the coastline close to the port facilities) (Gisbert et al., 2015). These communities perceive the government's plans as a strategy for dispossessing them of their lands and coastlines, and as a result, over the years, they have launched a series of protests and advocacy campaigns to protect their rights and territories (Gisbert et al., 2015).



Figure 1. Retrieved from Posada & Sandino (2010).
Buenaventura is situated at the center of global flows and fixed sites.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, Buenaventura has garnered the attention of Colombian policymakers and international private stakeholders owing to its strategic geographical position. Buenaventura's ports link Colombia to markets in Asia, North America, and beyond, facilitating the movement of goods on a global scale. In recent decades, the city has become a crucial trade hub for Colombia's agricultural and mining exports and its industrial imports, positioning it at the center of global trade networks and fixed infrastructure sites (Jenss, 2020a). Consequently, for decades, Buenaventura has been molded by structural factors immanent in capitalist expansion and contraction, closely connected to the circuits of the global economy (Zeiderman, 2016; Jenss, 2020a).

Many authors argued that urban governance in Buenaventura embodies many of the principles of neoliberal urbanism, including market-oriented policies, decentralization, and a strong focus on private sector-led development involved in the port expansion (Lombard et al., 2021). For instance, in 2015, urban redevelopment plans for the city were framed in the private-public Master Plan

"Buenaventura 2050". This megaproject intends to modernize the city and Cascajal Island (where the port facilities are located), mainly to increase its competitiveness in global port operations by 2050. The project emphasizes the port surrounding areas and gives them new functionalities, such as tourist quarters, upmarket residential spaces, and logistic industrial zones (DNP, 2018; Esteyco & Findeter, 2015).



Figure 2. Intervention areas of the 2050 Master Plan. Retrieved from Esteyco & Findeter (2015).

However, the local political leadership and citizens in general have been significantly excluded from crucial decision-making processes concerning the development and future of the Buenaventura Port. Consequently, the port has become a focal point of contention between the population, political activists, and the Colombian government. For instance, since the 2010s, Buenaventura experienced a significant increase in social mobilization through protests and strikes. According to Jaramillo et al. (2019), these movements were driven by factors such as the displacement of rural populations into urban areas, inadequate public services and increasing levels of violence. Despite government efforts to address these issues, including the development of several agreements to improve basic infrastructure systems in the city, the situation did not substantially improve. In 2017, a general strike lasting 22 days disrupted the port operations and

led further negotiations between the government and the strike committee (Lombard et al., 2021). However, once again the state failed to fulfill its commitments, leading to ongoing disputes between activists, the government and port management until now.

1.4 Research questions and objectives: Overall and specifics

The Colombian ambition of becoming a modern country with world-class cities and infrastructure has always been frustrated and delayed. Currently, the Colombian government's development plans envision extractivist and developmentalist modernization, framed along the lines of the Free Trade Agreements signed with countries such as the US, Canada, South Korea and the European Union (CNMH, 2015). Additionally, for the Pacific region, this vision aligns with the formation of the Pacific Alliance¹, where Buenaventura and its port play a crucial role.

In 2013, Findeter, a Spanish mixed-economy company affiliated with the Ministry of Finance tasked with financing key components of the National Development Plan of Colombia, commissioned the Master Plan 2050. This plan aimed to organize and provide coherence to the growth of both the port and Buenaventura in the horizon of 2050 (FDIPacifico, 2016). This company relied on a team of urban planners who held positions in previous governments of the Barcelona City Council and the Generalitat de Catalunya to produce the aforementioned master plan.

Amidst this backdrop of intense and rapid modernization, the residents of Buenaventura experience anticipation, anxiety over what this transformation will entail, and the uncertainty about reaching their aspirations. In the meantime, what unfolds in reality are fragmented geographies and temporalities. In many cases, places get transformed but not in the way they were planned and thought by policymakers, private investors, government officials, and the inhabitants directly affected by it. Given this context, it is then important to highlight the structure of the inhabitant's experiences in spatial, temporal, and emotional dimensions.

¹ is an initiative of regional integration by different Latin American countries, officially established in 2011.

In this manner, the overall question of this master's thesis is: ***How does the Buenaventura's port expansion project affect the sense of belonging and identity of black communities?***

Specific questions as follow:

1. How does a distant place like Buenaventura - a place that has been historically considered as peripheral and being marginalized by the Colombian state - became to occupy an important place in the public imagination?
2. Based on insights from experts, what hopes are kindled among the local inhabitants of Buenaventura by the port expansion project, and what fears and anxieties do these transformations produce in their lives?
3. According to experts, how do ordinary residents of Buenaventura, whose aspirations and life trajectories are intertwined with Buenaventura's evolving landscape, navigate this transitional space, negotiating their senses of place, belonging, and identity in the process?

1.5 Methodology

The methodological approach employed for this MA thesis encompasses a comprehensive literature review, which delves into the intricate social geography of exclusion, development discussions, as well as alongside examining the inhabitant's aspirations, feelings of anticipation, anxiety and perceptions of control that emerge as a consequence of their involvement with infrastructure development projects and its associated externalities. To enrich further understanding of Buenaventura's context, this literature review was supplemented with documentation from national academic sources, state institutions at both national and local levels, as well as grassroots social organizations pertinent to the case study.

Moreover, this MA thesis employed an interview-based methodology to capture the perspectives of key actors and stakeholders involved in the Buenaventura's port expansion project. These interviews were crucial sources of insight, shedding light on diverse viewpoints, stories, anecdotes,

and life experiences concerning the project's impacts on the local population. Specifically, these interviews explored the hopes, fears, and anxieties that the black communities experienced and continue to experience with regards to the implementation of the megaproject and the social, cultural, and economic repercussions it brought to the population. It is worth noting that most of the interviews were conducted online due to my location in Austria; however, some preliminary interviews were conducted in person in Buenaventura in 2022.

Additionally, while observation and informal interviews, as well as the review of newspaper articles were not formally integrated into the methodology of the MA thesis, I engaged in those during my visit to Buenaventura at the end of December 2022. Some of these insights have subsequently enriched the discussion and results sections, as will become evident. In my role as "observer", I acknowledge that time constraints prevented me from fully immersing myself in a group to the extent that participants would revert to their "normal behavior" (Bernard, 2011). However, I was able to observe, participate in, and document certain aspects of the locals' lives. This involvement primarily occurred during walks along coastline of the city, in various neighborhoods, and around the port's logistical areas (as I was able to conduct one interview inside the port's installations in my interview with the general manager of the port). I also had the opportunity to participate in one social gathering and political activity from the Buenaventura Civic Strike Committee as part of one of my expert interviews.

Throughout the observation process, I seized the opportunity to engage in informal conversations. For instance, I followed the advice of Rutakumwa et al. (2020) in which they argue that in certain circumstances, refraining from using recording devices may be the optimal approach. Indeed, as Rutakumwa et al. (2020) argued, the conversations went smoother and yielded more authentic conversations, as they involved less performance on the part of myself and the participants.

1.5.2 Expert interviews

Therefore, given the time constraints and distance limitations, this research rely mainly on expert interviews. Expert interviews are seen as a valuable complement to the literature review for several reasons. Firstly, expert interviews establish a relationship with the literature review by providing

firsthand perspectives and insights from individuals who possess valuable knowledge and experience in the field concerning this thesis. These experts, with their lived experiences and specialized field knowledge and understanding of the field, provide unique insights that are not available in the existing literature regarding Buenaventura. By engaging experts such as workers of Buenaventura's port, government officials and members of relevant social organizations and groups in Buenaventura, this research can identify potential research gaps as its the goal of this thesis.

The use of semi-structured and in-depth interviews will allow for a comprehensive understanding of each participant's unique perspective and the organization or group they represent.

1.5.2.1 Steps of the interview process

Identify relevant experts	Conduct semi-structured and in-depth interviews with the identified experts	Design interview questions	Transcribe the recorded interviews	Analyze the interview data using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns.
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1.5.2.2 Research participants

In most cases, ethnographic work does not involve random sampling for research participants. Instead, groups or individuals are selected based on their relevance to the study's goals (Scandroglio et al, 2017). In this sense, following the purpose sampling strategy, I identified relevant individuals, organizations, and groups in Buenaventura that are of interest to this study.

I have conducted interviews with the following individuals:

1. Tomas Quinonez, Civil Engineer, Former worker of the Sociedad Portuaria de Buenaventura.,
2. Liborio Cuéllar Araújo, General Manager of the Sociedad Portuaria de Buenaventura.,

3. Yolanda Echeverry, technical secretary of the Buenaventura Civic Strike Committee.,
4. Leonard Rentería, a young social leader from Buenaventura and member of the Buenaventura Civic Strike Committee.,
5. Felipe Fernández Lozano, Postdoctoral Researcher, Institute for Latin American Studies, Freie Universität Berlin. Author of the Phd thesis entitled: *“Violent Flows State and Water Infrastructures in the Port City of Buenaventura, Colombia”*.,
6. Andres Medina, Architect involved in the Master Plan Buenaventura 2050 (from 2015 onwards).,
7. Angélica Mayolo Obregón, Former Minister of Culture of Colombia (2021) and Former Executive President of the Chamber of Commerce of Buenaventura (2020).,
8. Jesús Alfonso Flórez López, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Arts, Universidad Autonoma de Occidente, anthropologist with a focus on ethnic rights and territory.,
9. Daniela Mosquera Camacho, PhD Candidate at the Department of Geography at Rutgers University, one of the authors of the article: Marín, J. J., Pardo, É. P. P., & Camacho, D. M. (2020). El Paro cívico de 2017 en buenaventura, Colombia. Protesta social y transformación del poder político {"The Civic Strike of 2017 in Buenaventura, Colombia: Social Protest and Transformation of Political Power"}. Analisis Politico, 33(98), 136-166. <https://doi.org/10.15446/anpol.v33n98.89414>.,
10. Adriel Ruiz, community leader, coordinator of the Foundation for Coexistence and Social Development (FUNDESCODES), member of the Buenaventura Civic Strike Committee and advisor to the Commission Interetnica de la Verdad del Pacifico (Interethnic Truth Commission of the Pacific).,

Some of the interviews were conducted in Buenaventura, while others were conducted online. However, due to time constraints and the fact that I am based in Austria, I could only conduct two interviews in person during my visit to Buenaventura in December 2022. Unfortunately, despite my efforts, it was difficult to coordinate with other people from other organizations during the period I visited Buenaventura as many individuals had prior commitments. Although my time in Buenaventura was limited to just a few days, I was able to establish valuable contacts with relevant organizations and groups that contributed to this research project.

1.5.2.3 My positionality

Positionality as described by Boswell (2021), is a concept that considers the intricate roles of race, class, sexual orientation and gender, and other socially constructed identifiers in shaping our understanding of the world and our place within it. As a Colombian mestiza woman originating from Cali, the third biggest city in Colombia, my research on Buenaventura carries with it a tapestry of personal experiences and perspectives deeply rooted in my background. This perspective is shaped not only by familial ties to the city but also by the specifics of my upbringing and education. Importantly, I am the daughter of a middle- class Black man from Buenaventura's urban area.

Growing up in a Catholic, middle-class household, I was privileged to have access to education and various opportunities. However, my journey was marked by instances of racism directed towards Black and Indigenous individuals within my family, community, and city. My interactions with Black individuals were predominantly limited to my father's side of the family and academic-related exchanges.

My academic journey led me to Europe, where I am exposed to predominantly global north academic perspectives. Despite having pursued my bachelor's degree in Cali, where I had the opportunity of studying alongside Indigenous and Black students, the exposure to global north influences significantly shaped my worldview and theoretical frameworks.

During my engagement with black individuals for my MA thesis, I recognized the importance of continuously repositioning myself. This involved employing reflective lenses outlined in the selected articles to mitigate biases and establish trustworthiness in my interactions with research participants. Recognizing how we positioned each other as central figures in the dominant narrative was a crucial aspect of this MA thesis.

Furthermore, As Jacobs-Huey (2002) pointed out, native anthropologists need to raise important questions about their positionality and accountability, which emphasized the need for reflexivity and critical self-awareness. Therefore, my positionality as a mestizo person within the research context was crucial, considering that I belong to the majority ethnic group in Colombia and there are existing dynamics and tensions within ethnic groups in the country. During the research process, I recognized potential power dynamics and the impact of my positionality on accessing the field, interviews, interpretations, and relationships with my interviewees and the community, especially when portraying Black individuals in the discussion sections.

One of the main challenges I faced throughout writing this MA thesis, and that the readers will notice in the analytical chapters, is the evolving narrative character and the shifting voice of my narration as the story of Buenaventura unfolds. The narrative voice has transitioned from a relatively analytical and historical tone to one that is more politically engaged as well as more narrative and storytelling. This transformation is partly rooted in my positioning vis a vis with my interviewees, although I did not explicitly address it.

As someone hailing from an upwardly mobile family in Cali but daughter of a black man from Buenaventura, I have strived to align myself with the political movements that challenge the exploitation of black communities, particularly those in the margins, all while navigating life as a brown woman from the country's interior. This experience resonates with many scholars from the global south and minority students in Europe and elsewhere, who bear the weight of multifaceted expectations.

These expectations encompass many dimensions. First, there is the imperative to establish oneself as a knowledgeable student, lest one be accused of being overly emotional or strident. Second,

there is the responsibility that fellow Colombian scholars and activists, including my interviewees, place upon me in shedding light on the exploitation of the black communities in the Pacific and challenging their misrepresentation in academic and popular discourse. Third, the obligation to stand in solidarity with the communities, activists and convey their stories authentically.

However, it has been crucial for me to acknowledge the inherent tensions in these diverse sets of expectations. While I endeavor to bridge these worlds and fulfill these roles, I remain aware that, at the end of the day, I can return to a life of comfort in a middle-setting in Vienna, Austria. In contrast, those I stand in solidarity with continue to confront the daily injustices vividly depicted in this thesis back in my country, Colombia.

1.5.2.4 Ethical considerations

Throughout the research process, I was committed to uphold the research ethics outlined by the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Vienna, in addition to abiding to ethical requirements imposed by the social organizations I engaged with during the research process.

To ensure ethical conduct in the interviews, I prioritized the principles of anonymity and confidentiality unless participants explicitly requested otherwise, which in this case, the majority did not want anonymity, and this openly expressed and stated in the interview's recordings and transcriptions. In so, transparent communication was upheld, and I explained to participants the research's objectives, their selection as participants, and the significance of their cooperation in achieving comprehensive representation across various participant profiles.

A recurrent ethical consideration was the decision to gather particular types of information (Bernard, 2011). Throughout the research, I continually reflected on the ethical dimensions of the MA thesis, aiming to safeguard my interviewees from emotional burden stemming from the content discussed during interviews and conversations.

Prior to initiating interviews, I prepared emails in which I requested for the expert interviews, and in these emails, it was explicitly articulated the research's objectives and data handling procedures. Participants were granted the right to withdraw from the interview at any point. Additionally, participants were informed of granting permission for citation, request rephrasing of statements in transcripts and voice records, and provide feedback on the MA research project's draft.

1.5.2.5 Data Analysis Methods

In this section, I will delve into the data analysis process, which played a crucial role in extracting meaningful insights from the collected data from the ten expert interviews conducted. Coding, a fundamental component of this analysis, was employed to identify and categorize patterns, themes, and recurring concepts within the interview transcripts.

1.5.2.5.1 Data Analysis Software

To facilitate the systematic analysis of the expert interviews, MAXQDA, a specialized software tool for qualitative research, was utilized. MAXQDA is a software that provided me with a structured environment for managing and organizing the extensive dataset, meaning the transcripts, streamlining the coding process, and ensuring the rigor of the analysis. Another reason for choosing this software was its affordability, as it can be purchased at a reasonable price with the student discount at the University of Vienna.

Furthermore, MAXQDA played a crucial role in managing and organizing the codes, data excerpts, and memos. Its features, such as data linking, memo creation, and the ability to visualize data relationships, were instrumental in maintaining the integrity of the analysis and the creation of a story.

1.5.2.5.2 Coding Process:

The coding process started after a critical review of the interview transcripts. Codes were formulated to gather key themes and concepts aligning with the research questions and theory.

These codes served as the building blocks for structuring and interpreting the data and tell the story of Buenaventura and its inhabitants.

1.5.2.5.3 Explanation of Codes:

After a carefully analysis of the interview transcripts and in alignment with the research questions, below a detailed exposition of the codes developed during the analysis:

- *How does a distant place like Buenaventura - a place that has been historically considered as peripheral and being marginalized by the Colombian state - become to occupy an important place in public imagination?*

Code 1: Economic ambitions and development projects

Examines the overarching economic goals and the implementation of development projects in the city. Examines aspirations for growth, modernization and prosperity through initiatives aiming at attracting investment. The code highlights the strategic vision that guides the city's development efforts that contribute to its economic transformation.

Code 2: Buenaventura's strategic importance

Refers to the recognition of Buenaventura's crucial role as a strategic location in global trade.

Code 3: Public perceptions

This code focuses on highlighting how different segments of the public perceive the ongoing changes and developments in Buenaventura. It examines the opinions, attitudes, and feelings of residents, stakeholders regarding the city and its transformation expressed in the expert interviews.

Code 4: International players in the Buenaventura's port

Focuses on the involvement of international actors, such as countries, multinational corporations, and global organizations, in the operations and development of Buenaventura's port. This code highlights the external entities that have interests in leveraging the port's strategic location for their own political, economic, and commercial benefits.

Code 5: Regional competition for Buenaventura's port

Explores the competitive dynamics between different countries in the South American region that seek to assert control or influence over the port dynamics. This competition often revolves around securing access to trade routes, investment, and gaining prominence as an important hub for regional and international trade.

Code 6: Megaprojects

The code sheds light on the nature, scope, and impact of these projects on the city's overall development trajectory.

Code 7: Neoliberal turn

The code refers to the adoption of neoliberal economic principles and policies within the city's development strategy.

Code 8: Nationalist aspirations

Highlights the emergence of regional or local nationalist sentiments and aspirations within Buenaventura as well as Colombia's government officials' aspirations for the city and its port.

Code 9: Port investment challenges

Focuses on highlighting the complexities associated with investment in the port. It examines the various obstacles and issues that arise during the process of securing planning, funding and executing the development of the port. The code provides insight into the intricacies in realizing the potential of the port as an economic asset.

- ***Based on insights from experts, what hopes are kindled among the local inhabitants of Buenaventura by the port expansion project, and what fears and anxieties do these transformations produce in their lives?***

Code 10: Optimism and Expectations regarding port expansion projects

This code highlights the expectations and aspirations driving the commitment to realizing the full potential of the master plan regarding the port expansion project.

Code 11: Reluctant Relocation

Sheds light on the human side of urban redevelopment and the tensions between progress and the preservation of ways of life and the threatening of associated livelihoods.

Code 12: Unfulfilled Promises

It delves into instances where promises made by government authorities and port stakeholders regarding the benefits and outcomes of development projects in Buenaventura have not been realized as expected. This code highlights the gap between the initial commitments and actual outcomes, exploring feelings of frustration experienced by those affected who had hoped for positive changes but have yet to see them materialize.

Code 13: Economic challenges

This code sheds light on the complex financial landscape surrounding Buenaventura's population in regard to the port development efforts.

Code 14: Disillusionment and Criticism

This code explores the growing disillusionment and critical voices that emerge as development projects unfold in the city. It highlights the evolving discourse of questioning, criticism, and skepticism that challenges the dominant narratives of progress and development surrounding port expansion.

Code 15: Government perception of Buenaventura's population

This code examines how the Colombian government perceives and characterizes the city's population within the context of development projects in the Pacific region. It explores how these perceptions influence the government's approach to development projects in the city.

Code 16: Militarization and displacement

Explores the intersection of militarization (paramilitary, guerrilla groups and Colombian military) and displacement and other dynamics in Buenaventura's development projects. The code delves into the complex relationship between militarization and the social consequences of port's

development initiatives.

Code 17: Ambivalent Desires for Modernity

The code delves into the ambivalent desires for modernity that emerge within the context of port expansion projects in Buenaventura. The code sheds light on the complex negotiations and trade-offs involved in seeking modernization while safeguarding black communities' social and cultural practices.

- ***According to experts, how do ordinary residents of Buenaventura, whose aspirations and life trajectories are intertwined with Buenaventura's evolving landscape, navigate this transitional space, negotiating their senses of belonging, and identity in the process?***

Code 18: Ambivalent Desires for Modernity

This code examines the complex mix of hope and apprehension experienced by the local population, as they grapple with the promises of progress and modernity brought about by development projects like the port expansion.

Code 19: Discrepancy between reality and vision

This code highlights the contrast between the grand visions and promises of development, such as transforming Buenaventura into a modern city, and the actual state of infrastructure, construction, and amenities on the ground.

Code 20: Landscape of abandonment

This code points to the sense of abandonment and neglect evident in the physical environment of Buenaventura, with lack of appropriate infrastructure and an overall feeling of stagnation and decay.

Code 21: Environmental impacts of port expansion

This code points out the environmental consequences of port expansion projects.

Code 22: Ineffectual Official Visits

This code highlights the skepticism and disappointment among the local population regarding

official visits by government authorities, where promises and assurances are made but often not fulfilled.

Code 23: Delayed Promises

This code underscores the discrepancy between promised development and its actual realization.

Code 24: Symbolic foundations

This code highlights the symbolic gestures and actions taken by government authorities to create an impression of progress in the city.

Code 24: Politics of Spectacle and Bureaucratic Maneuvering

This code highlights the strategic use of symbolic events and displays, often involving government officials and port stakeholders, to create an impression of progress.

1.5. 3 Exploring the answers: A Narrative journey.

In the pursuit of understanding the research questions, my journey took me on a narrative expedition, one that involved insights from the interviews and the extensive body of existing literature on Buenaventura and the implication of large-scale infrastructure projects and its implementation on ethnic territories. Rather than presenting dry facts and isolated findings, I aimed to unfold the answers to my research questions in a storytelling way, where the voices of my participants, my observations, and informal conversations during my visit in Buenaventura, as well as the literature reviewed intermingled to create a cohesive narrative.

CHAPTER 2: Between Dichotomies: Exploring Black Communities in the Colombian popular imagination.

This chapter explores the complex world of Pacific Black communities in Colombia, focusing on their negotiation of identity and territory within the Pacific region. I begin by analyzing the impact of ethnicization of black communities and its connection to Law 70 of 1993. This law aimed at recognizing and protecting black communities, is critically examined using relevant authors. I also delve into the issues of territoriality and insecurity, particularly within Buenaventura, marked by rapid modernization and violence. The chapter concludes by discussing derived political mobilization efforts of the city's inhabitants, driven by their pursuit of sovereignty and identity within the broader context of Colombia.

2.1 Negotiating Identity and Space in the Colombian Pacific: The ethnicization of black communities in Colombia and the implication in territory.

In popular Colombian imagination, Buenaventura, and by extension the Pacific, is perceived as a land of strategic significance and economic potential whose realization will not only benefit the black and indigenous communities residing there, but the entire Colombian nation. They believe that these communities are hindered by an anachronistic social structure, where lack of emphasis on formal education and self-serving tribal leadership prevents them from enjoying the benefits of development and contributing to the national prosperity of the country (Restrepo, 2013). This section aims to narrate the evolution of black communities residing in the Pacific region into an ethnic group in Colombia. It further explores issues and perspectives on development, examining how “development” is viewed as a solution to address the challenges of the region and how they are imposed by the traditional Colombian social system on these communities.

“The Ethnicization of Blackness: The Invention of Black Communities as an Ethnic Group in Colombia” (translated from Spanish to English) is the title of Eduardo Restrepo’s book (2013), currently considered the most completed book in discussing how the Colombian state recognized ‘black communities’ as an ethnic group, granting them territorial and cultural rights distinctive to the rest of the Colombian population.

As of August 2023, thirty years had elapsed since the enactment of Law 70 of 1993. With this law, the Colombian state recognized that `black communities` in the Pacific region constitute an ethnic group, recognizing them as political subjects (Escobar, 2020). According to Restrepo (2013), for many activists from ethnic organizations, this law is seen as the most significant political and legal milestone of the 20th century, comparable to the abolition of slavery in Colombia in the mid-19th century. These activists consider law 70 a clear triumph of their organizational process, despite the delays and limitations introduced by the government at that time. From this perspective, the law appeared to be an important step for the social movement.

However, many authors such as Ó Loingsigh (2013), Ramirez (2006), Agudelo (2002) and Restrepo (2013) argued that this achievement is part of a broader process known as the turn to multiculturalism, which goes beyond both the Colombian state and `black communities` and their organizations. In the context of Latin America, countries who have adopted a multiculturalist institutional framework, indigenous people are recognized as “the Other”. Black populations, on the other hand, have been included among the “undifferentiated” citizens who since the abolition of slavery, are subject to dynamics of segregation and racial discrimination (Agudelo, 2002). In countries such as Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia, the specific rights granted to black populations are conditioned by historical and cultural factors (Wade, 2013). Agudelo (2002) argues that the emergence of the ethnicization of black communities for instance, has been due to a source of rights and a political instrument that align with the significance of the Pacific region, recognized as an important reservoir of biodiversity and one of Colombia’s priority areas for environmental protection. Therefore, these concepts of sustainable development and environmental protection are also in hand in the most recent Colombian political constitution of 1991.

By the time Law 70 was enacted, the concept of `black communities` as an ethnic group with its own culture and differentiated identity (in contrast to mestizo, white and indigenous peoples inhabiting Colombia) had gained prominence due to a process of ethnicization as Restrepo calls it (2013).

Before this law, such ethnicization was unthinkable, and the people living in the Colombian Pacific were typically conceived to as peasants. The law's enactment and the subsequent ethnization

process represented a shift in how these communities were perceived and recognized legally and politically in Colombia (Agudelo, 2005).

However, these authors point out that the political discourse surrounding this ethnicization process has become polarized between those celebrating it as empowering and those criticizing its limitations.

2.1.1 Criticism toward Law 70 of 1993: The law of black communities

Some critics, particularly urban black intellectuals from the Pacific region, considered law 70 to be regressive and even racist. They believe that granting collective land ownership hinders progress and development, associating it with primitive forms of property found in prehistoric societies (Restrepo, 2013).

Valencia (1998) argued that the Law's emphasis on collective ownership was a vestige of colonial models, which he believed were inappropriate for the Pacific communities. Valencia compared the law's racist characteristics with the apartheid in South Africa, claiming it creates racial segregation and territorial expropriation.

Another vocal critic of the law was the priest Herbert Valencia, who denounced it for purportedly promoting racial discrimination as well. He argued that the law could jeopardize individual property rights and impede economic and technological advancements. Additionally, Valencia also accused the proponents of the law of imposing an "African identity" on these communities, which he argued denied their Colombian identity and citizenship rights (Restrepo, 2013, pp. 123).

Furthermore, disputes regarding Law 70 extended beyond its enactment, revealing conflicting views on the communities' identity and development. For instance, Restrepo (2013) discussed how historically, upper class and educated black people from the Pacific looked down upon rural communities' knowledge and their way of life. Even after the culturalist discourse emphasized the recognition of their traditional knowledge gained attention, tensions continued. Some believe that only the educated individuals should represent the communities in legal discussions, questioning

the participation of rural individuals who, in their view, lacked knowledge and understanding of such issues. However, Restrepo argues that the discourse began to change in the late 1980s when the process of ethnicization began to recognize the contributions of rural black communities and their traditional knowledge.

In general, the perspectives regarding law 70 of 1993 are complex and diverse. Different opinions emerged during the process, reflecting conflicting views on identity, development, and representation within black communities themselves. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the implications of law 70 in the implementation of megaprojects in the region and explore how these divergent perspectives have shaped the ongoing struggles and challenges faced by black communities in Buenaventura.

2.1.2 Black communities, Afro-descendants, Afro-Colombians and the concept of ethnicization

For Restrepo (2013), the concept of “ethnicization” refers to the process through which certain populations are constituted as an ethnic group, with political implications and specific subjectivities. The concept does not imply a homogeneous process, and different individuals or contexts may be affected in varying ways.

Restrepo emphasizes that ethnicization is not an objective nor a fixed truth but a political construction that involves disputes and power relations among different actors. It examines how the idea of “ethnic group” is contested, imagined, and legitimized through discourses, practices, and policies.

In Colombia, two semantic fields have operated historically to define an ethnic group. One encompassing diverse geo-population units as part of the national identity and uses terms such as “white”, “black” and “indigenous” populations, associating it with the idea of “race” or “population”, and another restricting it to culturally distinct and territorialized ‘traditional communities’, often represented as “Others” to Western and modern values. Agudelo (2002)

highlights that the process of ethnicization involves complex negotiations and technologies of representation that produce the subject of ethnicity.

Therefore, ethnicization is not a uniform or universal process as it involves multiple actors and contexts with different interpretations and outcomes. It is not limited to explicit actions or plans by state entities and non-governmental organizations towards black communities but extends to include local appropriations, interpretations, and rejections of the ethnicization process (Restrepo, 2013). These disputes and interpretations are essential to the formation of ethnicity and play a role in the interventions and negotiations of power relations (Restrepo, 2013).

In this MA thesis, I will employ the term “black” and “black communities” to emphasize black identity, rather than using alternatives such as “Afro-Colombian”, “Afro-descendants” or “Afro”, which have surfaced in intellectual, political, and governmental discourse in recent years (Restrepo, 2013). These terms represent specific and relatively contemporary articulations within the genealogy of blackness or *negritud* (Restrepo, 2021). For instance, “Afro-descendant” emerged in 2001 during the preparatory meetings for the world conference against racism in South Africa, emphasizing a sense of collective identity within the African diaspora. In the Colombian context, “Afro-Colombian” is a much older term and focuses on the African legacy of descendants of enslaved Africans within the Spanish colonization of the 16th century in the context of the nation. Some prefer one term over the other due to various reasons, including political implications and historical context.

I believe that avoiding race-related terms may undermine the analysis of racial discrimination and its historical impact in the Pacific and Colombia, and therefore, I will use the terms “*black*”, “*blackness*” and “*black communities*”. These terms are relevant for the aims of this MA thesis as “black communities” is a notion propagated by activists, ethnic-territorial organizations, the state, academia, and NGOs since the 1990s. For instance, the most important social organization in the Pacific is called the *Proceso De Comunidades Negras (PCN)*² (Process of Black Communities)

² The PCN is a coalition of black individuals, encompassing more than 140 grassroots organizations and community councils in the Pacific region of Colombia. According to their website, their central mission is on advocating for the rights and transformation of black, Afro-descendant, Raizal, and Palenquera

founded in 1993. The name of this organization, etched in history, relates to the significance of acknowledging and embracing the specific racial dynamics at play. Furthermore, this thesis also aims to explore the various manifestations of racial discrimination against ethnic minority groups, which have become deeply embedded in societal perceptions. These issues are relevant in the context of large-scale infrastructure projects and their implications for Buenaventura's population. In essence, to embrace these terminologies, my MA thesis seeks not only to honor the legacy of past struggles but also to elucidate the present complexities that demand attention and action.

2.2 Territoriality, insecurity: Buenaventura the violent city

The envisioning of Buenaventura as Colombia's most important trade hub on the periphery of the Colombian nation-state has its own unique challenges. In regions like the Pacific that straddle the inside/outside of the nation, complex dynamics of strategic security concerns and economic interests emerged. Untangling this intricate web could illustrate how the notions of nation and territory are both imagined and constructed in the country.

Throughout the entirety of Colombia's history, violence has been a pervasive phenomenon. The 20th century experienced a long-term civil war, mainly marked by political violence between the Liberal party and the Conservative party. The assassination of liberal presidential candidate Jorge Elieser Gaitan in 1984 led to a bloody conflict known as "La Violencia", which lasted four years. The subsequent National Front agreement between the two political parties rotated power and shared bureaucracy but did not entirely end violence (Del Río, 2015).

During the 1960s, left-wing peasant guerrilla groups emerged in different parts of Colombia, as a response to ongoing inequalities and political climate, with the FARC becoming the most prominent one. At the same time, landlords and agribusiness companies funded counterinsurgents to combat guerrillas, and regional armed groups eventually united under the umbrella organization called Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC). The state and the army played a crucial role in

communities across political, social, economic, and territorial domains (PCN website: [Quienes somos – Proceso de Comunidades Negras de Colombia \(renacientes.net\)](http://Quienes somos – Proceso de Comunidades Negras de Colombia (renacientes.net))).

supporting the AUC paramilitary structures, especially during the command period of former president Alvaro Uribe Velez. The conflict intensified in the 80s and 90s, with guerrilla groups engaging in drug trafficking to finance their activities, leading to the expansion of counterinsurgency paramilitaries, and causing mass internal displacement, especially of rural communities (Del Río, 2015; Rivera, 2007).

According to Rivera (2007), in the 1990s, Buenaventura and the Pacific region underwent a transformation in their role within the ongoing conflict, as the guerrilla group FARC expanded their influence into the area, involving themselves in the lucrative economies of drug trafficking of the region. The AUC, backed mainly by Colombian elites and politicians, countered the FARC's presence, leading to massacres and further displacement in the region. The armed conflict disrupted the Pacific's development agenda which at the time was focused on the recognition of ethnic minorities groups, specially, the black community's recognition, and environmental protection (Rivera, 2007).

In 2004, a peace agreement with the paramilitaries AUC was signed, however this did not completely end their operations. Armed groups entered urban areas like Buenaventura, controlling commerce, and imposing fear. Buenaventura's strategic location for drug trafficking and the plan expansions for the port contributed to a peak increase in violence. Urban development plans and the interest of private capital and transnational and national companies also played a crucial role in the escalation of violence (Rivera, 2007).

Furthermore, in 2014, the US NGO, Human rights Watch conducted a comprehensive investigation in Buenaventura for a little less than a month. The objective was to verify information regarding recent waves of violence in the port city, including rumors of torture centers, and human rights abuses. The NGO conducted over 70 interviews with victims, judicial authorities, police officials, social leaders, and other relevant actors (Schoening, 2014).

The resulting report, confirmed the existence of human rights violations in the city, including disappearances, dismemberments, forced displacement, forced recruitment, and social control. The NGO condemned these crimes and criticized local authorities, the Colombian government and

national institutions for their inadequate protection and lack of accountability addressing such crimes (Schoening, 2014).

Regarding the Master Plan 2050, Jenss (2020a) argued that the Bajamar areas are seen at a “risk” to phenomenon such as tsunami and seismic movements. She claims that this depiction of the Bajamar areas serve to support urban development plans that aim at redeveloping and renewing these areas, thereby justifying the displacement of these populations. She argues that this ongoing displacement is leading to the transformation of the inhabitant’s livelihoods, exclusion, fear, and erasure of spatial memory and reproducing racialized stereotypes. Therefore, for her, the port’s global flows further exacerbate the violent social relations in Buenaventura (Jenns, 2020a).

Although supporting the claim that there is a direct correlation between violent groups and capital interests poses challenges, various social activists and studies have highlighted the interconnectedness of economic elites, development strategies and violence (Alves et al. 2020 in Fernandez, 2019, pp. 73)

The city and the port are interconnected but also disentangled. Urban plans for development and port expansion contribute to violence and displacement in particular areas of Buenaventura, specifically in Cascajal Island where the port infrastructure is located. Therefore, there is an interlocking nature between capital interests, development plans, and violence in the city.

Fernandez (2019) points out that the situation in the city resonates with the concept of offshore oil enclaves of Hannah Appel in her work in Equatorial Guinea (2012), where infrastructures serve as boundaries between production sites and the rest. *“Here, infrastructures (walls, roads) serve as boundary-making technologies between western production (or logistic) sites and the “rest”. However, these sites (including their structure, politics, and material relations) are deeply entangled in the everyday life of people living beyond the walls by means of dispossession, colonization, and violence”* (Fernandez, 2019, pp. 85)

Fernandez (2019) argues that the racialized population of the city faces *infrastructural violence* in various ways due to the complex entanglement of urban development, port activities and violence.

According to Lombard et al (2021), territory holds profound significance for black communities representing collective memory and a fundamental aspect of their ancestral heritage. Hence, *territory* transcends mere property relations and encompasses issues of identity, legitimation and autonomy. Ethno-territorial movements in Buenaventura such as the Asociación de Territorios Ganados al Mar (Association for Land Claimed From the sea), which opposes the displacement of people from the Bajamar territories, advocate for extending ethno-territorial rights to communities inhabiting urban areas. As previously discussed, the law 70 presents limitations, granting only collective land rights in rural areas, thereby excluding the rights of urban black communities.

Furthermore, violence in Buenaventura can be traced back to the dismantling of the paramilitary AUC. Afterwards, new armed groups emerged with ties to regional drug cartels. These groups engaged in a territorial dispute over control of urban areas in the city, leading to further human rights violations (Rivera, 2007). The violence spiraled out of control, and by the time Human Rights Watch visited the city, the situation was dire (Schoening, 2014).

2.2.1 Political mobilization for sovereignty and identity

In this section, I will provide an overview of the historical waves of social protest and political mobilization in Buenaventura.

As previously discussed, the Pacific region's main urban cities were established mainly due to resource extraction centers, port expansion projects, and political-administrative factors. Racial disparities between mestizo and white elites and black populations led to marginalization of the latter in power structures (Restrepo, 2013). This was evident in abandonment, segregation, low investment, and weak institutions in the Pacific's urban spaces. Strikes and social movements in the city emerged as port economies and urbanization grew in the 20th century, amid ongoing structural inequality (Fernandez, 2019).

According to Archila (2018), in 1964, Buenaventura experienced its first strike between November 9th to 12th. At that time, it was considered the poorest city in the Valle del Cauca department and had faced traumatic events such as a fire that destroyed half of the city in 1955 and a tsunami in

1957. The 1964 strike started with the blockage of cargo transit to the port, and the Colombian military intervened with threats of violence. The conservative party governing at that time, promised to implement a development plan called “Plan Buenaventura” which included various projects and improvements for the city, however, many of these promises were not committed (Archila, 2018).

Another strike took place in 1998, with demands ranging from overdue payments to public sector employees to measures to address the economic and social crisis of the city. Negotiations with the government led to the end of the strike, with agreements made on a development plan for the city based on the strike’s demands. The fulfillment of these demands was minimal, and the strikers’ efforts were challenging. However, this strike brought some positive outcomes, such as raising awareness among communities about local sociopolitical dynamics and directly demanding changes to the development model imposed on the city. Despite this partial success, the lack of follow-through on the agreements and the government's lack of compromise toward the city led to a sense of frustration among social leaders and participants of the strike (Corporacion Manos Visibles, 2017).

These demands resurface during the period of 2010 to 2017. Movements during this period were a response to the increased waves of violence, the lack of public goods, and deficient infrastructural networks in the city. The social mobilizations aimed to address the interwoven issues of violence and infrastructure in the city (Fernandez, 2019).

Between 2010 and 2017, several social mobilizations took place leading to the formation of the Comité Interorganizacional. This committee included a wide range of movements, and in 2014, massive protests and strikes occurred, demanding attention to the pressing issues faced by the city. Despite government promises, the conditions in the city did not improve, and the preparations for a general strike began to take place in 2017 (Jaramillo et al., 2019). The general strike was a pivotal event this year, supported by several grassroots organizations, advocating for enhancements in security, education, employment, and basic infrastructure. Following over 20 days of protests, negotiations between the government and the Buenaventura Strike Committee led to an agreement

addressing various concerns and allocating resources for development initiatives (Jaramillo et al., 2019).

The social mobilizations brought visibility to social activists in Buenaventura. It also led to the election of social leaders to political offices in the city (Jaramillo et al., 2019).

Buenaventura thus became an important symbol of black communities' resistance against displacement and dispossession and fight for ethno-territorial rights in the Pacific and the rest of the country. It contributed to the resurgence of their identity and opposition to the development projects taking place in their territories (Jaramillo et al., 2019).

CHAPTER 3: Charting the Course: Buenaventura's Port Development Journey

In this chapter, I embark on a journey through the tapestry of Buenaventura's port development, guided by the threads of the city's history, economics, politics, and its geography. I delve into the emergence of the port, tracing its colonial roots and how it is embedded into Colombia's economic policies and trade agreements. Further, I explore the stakeholders and logistics that underpin its operations, review expansion plans spanning decades, and examine the interplay between megaprojects and the previous consultation process with black communities as stated in Law 70 of 1993. Additionally, I cast my gaze forward to Buenaventura's aspirations, encapsulated in the Master Plan "Buenaventura 2050". This section hence aims to navigate the complex narratives that have shaped Buenaventura's maritime destiny.

3.1 Historiographical Contributions to the Colombian Pacific

An important question in the historiography and ethnography of the Pacific region of Colombia has been the creation of people and space-time under the system of colonial governmentality. Which persisted into the post-colonial era of nationalist governance (Ó Loingsigh, 2013; Restrepo & Rojas, 2004). Many authors suggest that colonial governmentality operated unevenly, failing to completely displace earlier forms of governance and spatial-temporal understandings among inhabitants. Recent scholarship on the Pacific region has highlighted the limitations of colonial authority in relation to coastal populations including fishermen and piangua collectors (Rojas, 2004., Restrepo & Rojas, 2004).

Within this context, intersecting geographies of the black communities in the Pacific region unsettle conventional notions of frontier regions as isolated "peripheral spaces". Drawing on Colombian scholars, I argue that the discursive construction of "tribal people " occurred as part of the Spanish colonizers attempts to regulate the resistant subjects inhabiting colonial Colombia (Restrepo, 2013). This regulation was achieved through the demarcation of boundaries, practices of Indirect rule, and the introduction of slavery, specially targeting black individuals for labor in the mining sector and in the manual labor for the construction of development projects such as the port. The spatial and discursive frameworks were initially established through frontier and ethnic

peoples management policies implemented by the Spanish colonizers in the 16th century, including the *encomienda* system, missions and evangelization, slavery, labor force, tribute and taxation among others (Leon, 2004). Through these representational strategies, the Spanish imagined and governed the Pacific as a lawless frontier space.

However, the indigenous peoples who have long inhabited the Pacific region, predating Spanish arrival, continued to undermine colonial authority by maintaining their own languages and social customs. Similarly, black individuals introduced to the region through the transatlantic slave trade, maintained their distinct cultural identities. This MA thesis aims to interrogate the (post)colonial narrative of progress and development around Buenaventura's Port by showing the city's history through interviews with key stakeholders and how their perspectives inform the outlook of the city's present and future.

The Pacific region of Colombia covers one-third of the country's coastline and 6% of the country's territory, extending from the Western Andes to the sea. Encompassing approximately 71.000 square kilometers, it includes portions of the departments of Cauca, Nariño, Valle del Cauca, Choco, and a strip of marine surface area of 400.000 square kilometers (CNMH, 2015).

Due to its history and geography, this region has remained disconnected from the prevailing development model implemented in the rest of the country. It is characterized by being fragmented and economically depressed, with low coverage in basic services and infrastructure and above average poverty indicators (by 2020, 82% of the population was living in a state of extreme poverty according to a study made by Buenaventuracomovamos (2020). However, it possesses significant environmental and cultural potential and has a strategic location for future national development, especially within the context of the Pacific Basin.

For instance, the Pacific region of Colombia has been constantly targeted as a development region. When one reads national planning instruments such as Agenda Pacifico XXII refers to this region as a "raw materials/ commodity dispenser" in which urban redevelopment projects and other large-scale infrastructure investments would transform the region into a prominent logistic hub for reaching Pacific markets (CNMH, 2015., Gisbert et al., 2015).

The region has been invaded countless times, making it almost impossible to count occasions. In this context, invasion refers to the violent arrival (with and without weapons) of economic forces aiming to dominate the area and exploit its resources. For over two centuries, these invasions relied on enslaved labor (Restrepo, 2013). During the era of slavery in Colombia in the early 16th century, the economy of the region was predominantly dominated by white people. Regrettably, this pattern persisted even after slavery was abolished in the mid-19th century. Large mining companies continue to be owned by individuals residing outside the region, a situation that remains unchanged to this day. While the workers lived in the area, including those involved in artisanal mining, the financial benefits mainly went directly into the pockets of external interests. The early 20th century experienced an economic boom due to the export of platinum and gold, but these mining companies were not local or even Colombian-owned (Ó Loingsigh, 2013).

Following Agudelo (2002), after the abolition of slavery in 1852, throughout law 21 of May, 1851³. The Pacific region experienced economic growth due to the exploitation of black rubber and tagua (a type of palm seed). However, the method of extracting rubber, which involved cutting down rubber trees, led to depletion, and this economic prosperity came to an end in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This decline is evident in the reduced rubber exports from Buenaventura in the 1870s (Agudelo,2002).

It was expected to bring change, but in reality, the economic exploitation continued. Although the law declared equal rights for former slaves, it failed to address their wellbeing. The government established a manumission fund to compensate slave owners for their losses, treating slavery as a financial operation rather than a moral issue (Agudelo,2002).

The end of slavery did not bring a power shift, and black communities remained marginalized. Education access and job opportunities hindered their equality in society. The historical legacy of slavery persists, evident in the enduring disparities faced by black people in education, income, and overall well- being (Leon, 2004).

³ Law 21 of May 1851 Art. 1

Large-scale extraction activities promoted by traders lead to the integration of black workers into their controlled labor and commercial networks, resulting in clientelist relationships that extend to politics. The extraction, whether ecological like tagua or destructive like mining and black rubber, reinforces the dominance over the black population even after emancipation. The Pacific has experienced a constant influx of invaders seeking natural resources, and the Colombian state has consistently proposed extraction as a solution to poverty and “lack of development” (Leon, 2004).

The invasion of timber companies, such as Carton de Colombia,⁴ caused cultural and environmental damage to the region, leading to the impoverishment of both the people and the tropical forest. The loss of natural resources affected the diet and health of the communities (Hoffmann, 1999).

Despite companies like Carton Colombia leaving the region, other timber companies persist as a threat to the community and the environment (CNMH, 2015). The government frequently shifts responsibility, attributing issues to illegal activities, however, it is worth noting that legal or registered timber companies play the major role on environmental degradation and the displacement of local population (Hoffmann, 1999).

Despite the promise of equality after the abolition of slavery, black communities continue to face challenges in education, health, and economic opportunities. The exploitation of natural resources, such as rubber and tagua, led to a brief economic growth that benefited external interests while local communities impoverished (Hoffman, 1999). The timber industry further degraded the region, impacting the local culture, economy, and health. The reliance on external companies and foreign capital has perpetuated economic dominance by mostly white elites, further marginalizing black people (Ó Loingsigh, 2013).

According to CNMH (2015), in the past two decades, the region continues to experience intense colonization, resulting in conflicts and the depletion of natural resources and cultural heritage. This phenomenon is accompanied by growing political and social violence, driven by the presence of

⁴ According to Ó Loingsigh (2013), the American company called Cartón de Colombia, currently operates under different names, received a concession of 15,000 hectares from the Colombian government, later expanded to 61,600 hectares by 1974. The company is still operating in the country.

guerrilla and paramilitary groups⁵ that have violated human rights and caused mass displacement of the population.

Currently, the Pacific also faces pressure from palm oil businesses who exploit lands collectively titled to black communities under Law 70 of 1993. These lands, excluded from commercial transactions, have become targets for expropriation, forced displacement, and improper appropriation by these businesses (CNMH, 2015).

According to Restrepo (1993), despite the regulations of Law 70, companies encountered restrictions to obtaining permits for the exploitation of natural resources in black communities. In certain circumstances, these companies independently facilitated the establishment of community councils as a tactic to secure permits through “negotiations” with the communities (Oslender, 2008). For example, Alenpac, a canning and palm heart exporting company, organized the Community Councils in some territories of the Pacific. Furthermore, the Incore (Colombian institute for Agrarian reform) supported the establishment of some community councils in Valle del Cauca, hiring consultancies that clashed with the perspectives and pace of existing ethnic organizations and beyond the framework of regional committees. As a result, these new councils entered into disputes for the representation of black communities, at least at the local level, leading to tensions among these councils.

The lack of comprehensive vision from the Pacific’s leadership has led to traditional patterns of clientelism, with locally elected mayors and representatives disengaged from their municipalities and constituents (Ó Loingsigh, 2013).

Despite having a legacy of cooperative and collective action, the communities have struggled to establish effective forms of organization that can bridge their interests with the state and the rest of civil society. Consequently, the limited investment resources allocated to the Pacific region tend

5 Right-wing paramilitary groups in Colombia, opposing Marxist–Leninist guerrilla forces and their allies, have a significant presence in the illegal drug trade, controlling the majority of cocaine and other substances. The Colombian National Centre for Historical Memory estimates that from 1981 to 2012, paramilitary groups caused 38.4% of civilian deaths, with guerrillas responsible for 16.8%, Colombian Security Forces for 10.1%, and non-identified armed groups for 27.7% (CHMC, 2015)

to concentrate in a local and regional elite that prioritizes its interests over poverty and marginalization that goes through the region (CNMH, 2015).

3.2 Colombia's economic policy and trade agreements

Colombia's economic policy and free trade agreements are shaped by complex interrelationships of different global factors. For the Colombian government, the promotion of new business creation and support for entrepreneurship has been essential. Former governments have established measures to support business formation through national and local programs and organizations. The establishment of an economic and industrial public policy addresses both formal and informal challenges in the creation of entrepreneurial capacity and new businesses, aiming to enhance competitiveness internally and internationally.

Within the context of Free Trade Agreements, Colombia has consolidated trades with several countries (Botero, 2014). Currently, Colombia has agreements with the Andean Community (CAN) (1969), Nicaragua (1985), Mexico (1995), Caribbean Community (CARICOM) (1995), Cuba (2001), Chile (2009), El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras (2009), Venezuela (2012), Canada (2011), USA (2016), Pacific Alliance (2016), Costa Rica (2016), South Korea (2016), European Union (2014), Mercosur (2017), and lastly with Israel (2020) (Ministerio de comercio, industria y turismo, TLC Colombia Agreements, n.d.).

The country's approach to internal trade policy aims to address sectoral encapsulation and promotion of national development based on economic growth and social progress. This policy recognizes that trade dynamics are influenced by the achievements of the agricultural and industrial sectors. Several entities and efforts, including the National Planning Department, FENALCO's Indicative Plan for Internal Trade, Chamber of Commerce initiatives, and a CONPES document designed by the Ministry of Economic Development, emphasize the significance of the trade dynamics (Botero, 2014).

Therefore, Colombia's pursuit of economic growth has historical implications for its port industry. Free Trade Agreements, such as the one with South Korea and its participation in the Pacific

Alliance⁶, are seen as new avenues for internalization and domestic development. For instance, countries like South Korea are seen as a promising market for the country, due to its substantial population and high per capita. As an industrialized economy, South Korea is seen as a way to facilitate technology transfer and investment opportunities in the country. On the other hand, the Pacific Alliance, another important focal point, holds promise for the port of Buenaventura as an investment hub. Although, according to scholars such as Rojas (2022), there are concerns regarding Colombia being able to fully realize the Pacific's strategic importance. This alliance aims to foster integration, economic growth, competitiveness, and social inclusion among the member nations. The country's ambition is to become an economic success in Latin America, facilitating trade and investment among other countries, with expected economic growth, investment, and job creation (Rojas, 2022).

Furthermore, a study made by Rojas (2022), concluded that the impact of the Colombia-USA Free trade agreement, implemented in 2016, brought a 23% reduction in trade. The supposed tariff preferences did not guarantee a strong dynamic trade, and Colombia's export concentration in oil created economic vulnerabilities for the country. While the USA diversified its exports to the country, the latter lack of domestic substitutes hindered export growth.

As described before, Buenaventura illustrates the contradictions of implementing these free trade agreements in Colombia, a city with ongoing internal armed conflict, internal displacement, high levels of poverty, and low worker protections due to the privatization of the port in the 90s. According to Zeiderman (2016), these extensive development plans dominate the vision for Buenaventura's future, overshadowing alternative pathways for the city's development. Despite these grand aspirations, the local population's well-being and equal share of benefits remain elusive, raising questions on the environmental and social implications of the implementation of such trade agreements together with the necessary ongoing megaprojects which are necessary to put in place for these trade agreements negotiations.

⁶ The Pacific Alliance is a Latin American integration initiative aimed at fostering cooperation and economic integration among the member countries. Founded in 2011 by Colombia, Mexico, Peru and Chile, its main goal is to promote trade, economic growth, and political alliances among these four nations. See: [What is the Pacific Alliance? – Alianza del Pacífico. \(alianzapacifico.net\)](http://alianzapacifico.net)

3.3 Historical and geographical context: How did the Buenaventura port emerge?

Historically and geographically, the emergence of the port of Buenaventura is intricately woven into Colombia's Pacific region.

According to Salazar & Lilia (2008), the conquest of the Pacific side of Colombia by the Spanish colonizer Vasco Nunez de Balboa on the 18th of January 1514 marked an important historical event. Several years later, in 1533, another Spanish conquistador named Sebastian de Belalcazar, under orders of the Spanish crown, to explore the lands on the north of Ecuador, embarked on his expedition in the Andean region. Starting his journey from Peru until the south of what is now known as Colombia. In the process of founding new cities along the Andine region, Belalcazar privileged strategic sites with potential for urban development. Consequently, Cali (see map) emerged in 1536 due to its excellent location within the interior of the country and its proximity to the Pacific Ocean. Consequently, Cali emerged as a highly significant city within the Andean region of Colombia, solidifying its status as one of the oldest cities in the country (Salazar & Lilia, 2008).

In addition to Popayan and Pasto, Belalcazar explorations led to the establishment of other notable cities. As a result of this interconnected network of cities, Buenaventura has become the pivotal port for Colombia's Pacific region (Salazar & Lilia, 2008).

A parallel journey was undertaken by Spanish conquistador Pascual de Andagoya along the Pacific coast during the same period as Belalcazar. In 1540, de Andagoya arrived at the area we now know as Buenaventura, a land inhabited by indigenous Buscajaes people. As a result of Andagoya's recognition of the natural attributes of a sheltered bay with calm waters, the city was given the name "Buenaventura". During his explorations, he discovered abundant mineral wealth in the surrounding regions, especially gold. The discovery of this wealth of precious metals paved the way for the founding of the city, leading to the establishment of urban areas. Due to a variety of political factors, Buenaventura eventually became part of Cali's administrative council (Espinosa, 2005).



Figure 3: Map of Colombia. Retrieved from [IFOR stands with human rights defenders and addresses the case of Buenaventura in Colombia, at the 46th Human Rights Council — IFOR](#)

Espinosa (2005) noted that as a result of factors such as indigenous resistance, high humidity, elevated temperatures, and dense jungle, the establishment of a full city and population in Buenaventura was a very lengthy process. Historians have highlighted the remarkable success of sustaining a population over a period of two and a half centuries (Lopez & Suarez, 2009).

Due to this challenging environment, Buenaventura served mainly as a conduit to the country's interior for many years (Perez, 2007).

In the 19th century, the cities of Popayan and Cali began to play an increasingly important role as crossroads between the southern regions and the Pacific coast. A south-west-bound highway “Simon Bolivar” was created from Bogota, Colombia's capital, traversing important regions like Huila and Cauca (see map above). This highway was notably linked to Popayan, while its continuation led to Pasto in the south and Cartago in the northern side. Popayan's strategic location at this intersection conferred it with a privileged position in social, administrative, political, and territorial aspects (Salazar & Lilia, 2008).

The 20th century brought newfound significance to the city with the construction of a train route connecting it to Cali (Salazar & Lilia, 2008). In 1824, Buenaventura was assigned and referred to as a “Puerto franco”, granting import and export privileges and property rights to the residents, particularly the ones in Cascajal Island, where the port infrastructure was settled. At this phase,

Buenaventura encompassed the areas now known as Cascajal Island, later expanding its boundaries (Salazar & Lilia, 2008).

By 1921, Buenaventura's port was integrated into the country's interior through an intricate network of the "Simon Bolivar" highway and the railway lines. The port boasted both a small and a large pier, with the former inaugurated in 1920, eventually evolving into a modern dique in 1930 (Perez, 2007).

Between 1959 and 1993, the Colombian state's created a monopoly over the port sector through the entity "Puertos de Colombia" – Colpuertos -, encompassing major terminals like Cartagena, Barranquilla and Santa Marta on the Caribbean coast, and Tumaco and Buenaventura on the Pacific Coast (Fainboim & Rodríguez, 2000). Under Colpuertos' administration, the Colombian state successfully centralized port operations, aligning with the import substitution development model and adopting a state enterprise approach. Prior to the establishment of Colpuertos, maritime and river terminals were originally managed by private entrepreneurs, and then by the National Railway company. Due to several factors, including mismanagement in administrative, labor and financial areas, Colpuertos faced a structural crisis during the 1980s (Viloria, 2000). Consequently, Colpuertos experienced fluctuating periods of losses, profits, and balanced financial statements over seven years. In 1989, the company faced its most challenging financial statement of the 80s decade, with losses surpassing \$14.3 Colombian billion. Despite a 35% reduction in the workforce between 1982 and 1989, salary costs increased by 23% in real terms from 1986 to 1989 (Viloria, 2000).

Combined with changes in port public policy under a new neoliberal economic model, these internal challenges culminated in Colpuerto's liquidation in the early 1990s and the privatization of port activities through Law 01 of 1991, which was enacted during the government of former Colombian President Cesar Gaviria (Viloria, 2000).

According to a study conducted by the ECLAC (UNDP) (2009), inefficiencies in the Colombian port sector and Colpuertos's financial crisis in the late 1980s were the main causes of the financial crisis in the country (Sanchez & Perez, 2009). Along with the ongoing collective labor agreement, these issues were linked to the company's administrative structure and management model. Regarding the administrative structure, the report highlighted the involvement of major production

associations, such as the National Federation of Coffee Growers, in the board of directors' decision-making process, which was authorized by a 1980 decree (Sanchez & Perez, 2009). They were therefore able to serve both as judges and parties, which was reflected in aspects such as freezing tariff structures for a large part of the 1980s, effectively providing implicit subsidies to exporters and importers. The study also highlights that despite the tariff freeze, the rates remain very high when compared to international standards (Sanchez & Perez, 2009).

Several researchers have argued that among the consequences of Colpuertos's liquidation, additional costs, delays. And administrative anomalies increased the total cost of Colpuertos' retirement plan to \$ 72 billion. The pension liability increased from \$ 612 billion in December 1991 to \$2.5 trillion in December 1999 as a result of irregular pension payments and settlements with former employees (Viloria, 2000).

In the opinion of Fainboim & Rodríguez (2000), this situation is one of the most significant political-administrative corruption processes of recent years, both in terms of the mechanisms used and the long-term fiscal impact it has generated and will continue to generate for Colombia.

Upon the passage of the Law 01 of 1991, the Colombian state monopoly over ports was abolished, and the management and operation of maritime and river terminals were transferred to the private sector under a concession agreement. Specifically, this law stipulated that Colpuertos be liquidated within two years and that Foncolpuertos be established to assume responsibility for its pension liabilities (Fainboim & Rodríguez, 2000)

As a result of the privatization of the port sector, Buenaventura port was modernized both in terms of infrastructure and information systems due to funding of private enterprises (Viloria, 2000). According to Fainboim & Rodríguez (2000), in terms of cargo processes and vessel rotation, these advancements contributed to an increase in efficiency indicators.

According to Sanchez & Perez, (2009), this modernization process led to the following results by 2004: A decreased in port tariffs of up to 60% compared to Colpuerto's rates, leading to a 10% increase in the number of vessels and an 11% increase in the volume of cargo handled without expanding the operational area., a new tariff model that incorporates economies of scale., an investment of \$ 11 million focused on enhancing security measures, including stricter control and

inspection of goods in relation to the issues related to drug trafficking in the country., systematization of user data at the port, allowing for greater efficiency in the procedures for unloading and loading goods, and finally to the planning and management of physical space for container storage, among others.

The modernization process of the port, along with the new management model of the port sector and the labor reform of 1990, created new scenarios regarding employment conditions of port workers, involving shifts in labor demand, remuneration and quality of employment conditions (Fainboim & Rodríguez, 2000).

Despite the aforementioned impacts of modernization in terms of efficiency and competitiveness, the port continues to face congestion problems as well as strong competition from ports located in the region, particularly with the Guayaquil Port in Ecuador (Sanchez & Perez, 2009).

3.4 Deep Dive into the Buenaventura port: Stakeholders and logistics

The strategic location of Buenaventura, along with its efficient water system, has elevated it to become the country's primary maritime port in the Pacific Ocean. Notably, the city's proximity to the Panama Canal and the coast of Ecuador further enhances its significance. However, its importance goes beyond geographical proximity, as the port serves as a vital connector between Colombia and the Asian and North American markets. Additionally, the city is also equidistant from the ports of Vancouver (Canada) and Valparaiso (Chile) (Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social, 2006).

The Buenaventura port complex aims to establish itself as a key commercial link between the country's interior and high-growth regions such as China, India and South East Asia, the US, which collectively represent almost one-third of the world's GDP and have over two billion USD potential consumers. Currently, the port of Buenaventura connects with 17 Asian countries: 19 in the South Pacific and 13 in the Americas, handling about 23% of the country's exports and 77% of its imports (SuperTransporte, 2022., Palau, 2017).

In 1961, the state-owned company Puertos de Colombia (Colpuertos) was established to oversee maritime terminals in cities such as Barranquilla, Cartagena, and Santa Marta on the Atlantic coast, as well as Buenaventura and Tumaco on the Pacific coast. The economic dynamics of the port

significantly influenced the political, social, and labor landscape of Buenaventura. This relationship enabled the formal employment of over five thousand local workers, strengthened the rise of local political elites, and promoted a robust labor union organization (CNMH, 2015).

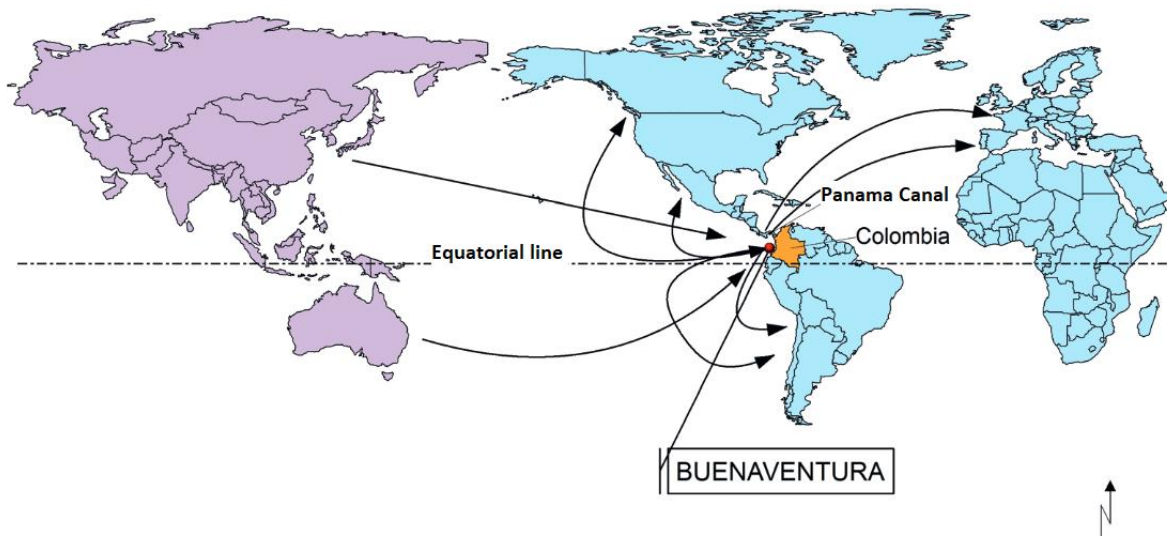


Figure 4: Buenaventura, International Maritime Port in the Pacific Ocean. Retrieve from: Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica - CNMH (2015)

However, during former President Cesar Gaviria's term in the early 1990s, Colombia initiated its path towards economic openness and globalization, which required the development of suitable infrastructure to facilitate the flow of goods and raw materials (CNMH, 2015).

To ensure the integration of Colombia into the global economy, the Colombian state has focused on the extraction of natural resources from the Pacific region, known for its abundance of minerals, timber, and land suitable for agro-industrial exploitation. This led to the creation and implementation of regional development plans like Plaidecop, Plan Pacifico, and Agenda XXI, which focused on infrastructure development and establishing new state institutions in the Pacific region (CNMH, 2015). With the adoption of neoliberal policies, Colombian ports were restructured to meet the demands of global trade, resulting in their privatization during the 1990s. Colpuertos was dissolved, and the Colombian ports were handed over to regional port societies and private operators, leading to the formation of the Sociedad Portuaria Regional de Buenaventura S.A.

This process was accompanied by technological modernization and changes in the port management system, including significant employee downsizing and wage reductions. The number of workers has decreased from 10.000 in 1990 to 4.000 in 1996. Labor unions in port companies ceased to exist, and many acquired labor rights were eliminated. The use of Cooperativas de Trabajo Asociado (CTA) as a means to hire labor resulted in a shift from labor contracts to service contracts, leading to a dramatic decline in employment quality and labor rights (Ó Loingsigh, 2013).

Currently, port operations in Buenaventura are led by Sociedad Portuaria and the Terminal de Contenedores de Buenaventura (TCBUEN). The managerial structure of these operations is summarized as follows: Sociedad Portuaria is led by the Harinera del Valle group, owned by the Bautista family; Parody group, owned by the Parody Decheona family; and Ciamsa group, an international trader of sugars and syrups, comprising 12 sugarcane mills from Valle del Cauca. Additionally, there are three public entities involved: the Buenaventura city with a 15% share, the Ministry of Transport with a 2% share, and the Ministry of Agriculture with a 0.5% share. Three former unionists are minority partners. On the other hand, TCBUEN is composed of Edel Pacifico S.A, a port company of Catalan origin, which has docks in Spain, Brazil, Turkey, and Cuba, and Grupo Portuario S.A. It is worth noting the participation of COMPAS S.A. - Compania de Puertos Asociados - an enterprise resulting from the 2012 alliance between Muelles El bosque, owned by the Echavarria Obregon family, the Spanish Erschip Group - the Alvargonzalez family from Asturias - and the Grupo Argos (SuperTransporte, 2022).

3.4.1 Port Expansion and the Bajamar territories

The economic growth of the Buenaventura's port led to a shift in population dynamics, attracting a wide range of migrants including traders and foreign population from England, USA, Germany, Syria, Lebanon and especially China who were involved in export and import activities. At the same, this growth led to waves of rural black population's migration to Buenaventura, drawn by the labor opportunities in cargo handling and merchandise transportation (CNMH, 2015).

According to Mosquera & Aprile-Gnisset (2018), this settlement of exporters and importers in the city gave rise to socio-spatial segregation. On the one hand, there were warehouses, trading houses,

and the residences of exporters and importers. On the other hand, there was the modest palafito housing of fishermen and farmers. During this period, there was already an initial attempt by these traders to displace the fishermen and settlers who had been in Cascajal Island since the beginning of the 19th century.



Figure 5: Palafito housing in Buenaventura. Retrieved from Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (2015, pp. 151).

Following Aprile-Gniset (1993), migrants who arrived in the city for business purposes utilized conspicuous consumption to further distinguish themselves from the local population. Consequently, the city growth was primarily neighborhood driven rather than driven by urban infrastructure. By 1891, the population of the previously small Cascajal Island settlement, with about forty palafito houses, had expanded to nearly 2.000 residents in approximately two hundred structures.

The migration of black people from rural areas to Buenaventura, attracted by the port's economic dynamics, reinforced the rural-urban interconnection between the neighborhoods of fishermen and farmers and the river networks in the coastal areas of departments such as Valle del Cauca, Cauca, Choco and Nariño (Aprile-Gniset, 1993). According to Mosquera & Aprile-Gniset (2018), the urban expansion of Buenaventura since the middle of the 20th century extended the spatial limits of Cascajal island, especially in the southern part, where a process termed “territorios ganados al mar” in English: “territories reclaimed from the sea” occurred.

In these areas of low tide, known as “Bajamar” territories or “territories won from the sea”, the population-maintained connections with their communities of origin while transforming and inhabiting the territory in accordance to their cosmovision and cultural practices (Mosquera & Aprile-Gnisset, 2018). For instance, the ancestral ritual of “la ombligada”, involving the burial of a newborn's umbilical cord in a secure location, continues to bind the population to this territory (Mosquera & Aprile-Gnisset, 2018).

The territories established by these communities experienced the most significant impact of the armed conflict that has affected Buenaventura since 2000 (Jenns, 2020a).

3.5 Buenaventura's Port Expansion: Review of Plans Since the 1990s

Before delving into the main discussion on this section, it is important to underscore the socially constructed terms attributed to coastal areas, where the reach of the sea extends and where some individuals from black communities reside and constructed palafitos housing. These areas are often referred to as “Territorios de Bajamar”., other notions include “territories reclaimed from the sea” have been used to describe these areas due to social processes that made them habitable.

One of Buenaventura's most noteworthy neighborhoods within Bajamar territory, is “La Playita” which stands as a connection point between rural and urban areas, symbolizing the link between settlement and countryside. Making emphasis in these territories is crucial for the objectives of this MA thesis, as some of these territories are located right next to the port logistic zones and are therefore the most directly impacted by the implementation of the megaproject.

Since 1991, the Colombian agency of National Council for Economic and Social Policy (CONPES) has developed ten plans to expand the port of Buenaventura, with financial support from the World Bank via the International Finance Corporation through two loans (Mundubat & CIJP, 2015). The port's privatization has altered the capital-labor dynamics, resulting in labor outsourcing, job cuts, and the dissolution of worker unions, thereby worsening working conditions (Mundubat & CIJP, 2015).

Additionally, the countries along the Pacific coast have prioritized foreign policy, leading to trade agreements with nations like South Korea and more recently, the Pacific Alliance⁷. These agreements enable 92% of products to circulate tariff-free between Colombia, Mexico, Chile and Peru (Mundubat & CIJP, 2015).

As a result, the Colombian government has prioritized strategic planning and created new departments to tackle the challenges stemming from its integration into the Pacific economy (Mundubat & CIJP, 2015).

Among the most ambitious initiatives presented by CONPES are megaprojects in port, road, tourism and housing infrastructure. These megaprojects serve as the cornerstone of public policy, aiming to stimulate national competitiveness. Examples of these megaprojects include the Aguadulce Industrial port, the Buenaventura Container Terminal (TCBUEN), the Internal-Alternate Road, the Malecon Bahia de la Cruz, and the San Antonio Citadel, all of which are associated with port activity.

“Aguadulce” is a multipurpose port project that specializes in the handling of coal and containers. It is the oldest project of its kind, having been created over 26 years ago. It belongs to the industrial Port Society of Aguadulce, SPIA155, and moved over 400.000 containers in its first operational stage ended in 2016. To achieve this, the construction of a 21.5-kilometer access road was necessary, built by the Cali-based company Conalvia. In recent years, Aguadulce has gained significant momentum with the entry of the Filipino company “International Container Terminal Service Inc. (ICTSI),” a global leader in the maritime sector. ICTSI initially acquired 70% of the shares following the incorporation of the Port Authority Singapore (PSA), considered a giant in the world of port terminals which holds a 45.6% stake in the project (Mundubat & CIJP, 2015).

The TCBUEN megaproject is a privately-owned specialized public maritime terminal primarily designed for container handling. It covers a 27-hectare area, a 490 meter dock, and related dredging works. The terminal, owned by various stakeholders, commenced operations in 2011. However,

⁷ The Pacific Alliance is trade bloc in Latin America comprising Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru, all of which have coastlines along the Pacific Ocean. [Alianza del Pacífico. – El poder de la integración \(alianzapacifico.net\)](http://alianzapacifico.net)

despite its positive impact on international trade, TCBUEN has faced criticism due to its lack of social and community management. Communities surrounding the area have experienced adverse effects such as loss of livelihoods, environmental and noise pollution, and concerns about potential impacts on local territories (CNMH,2015).

The Internal-Alternative Road was an infrastructure project that complements the port activity of SPRB and TCBUEN by providing an alternative route that circumvents heavy vehicle traffic through the urban area of Buenaventura. This road project was included in the state policy presented in documents CONPES 3410 of 2006 and 3422 of 2007 and it had a total cost of 126 billion pesos. Currently, the road is utilized by 2,500 heavy vehicles per day and was inaugurated on June 11, 2006 (CNMH,2015).

In 2013, The Malecon Bahia de la Cruz project was commissioned. This project involved the creation of a tourist boardwalk aimed at revitalizing the urban and landscape areas. Stretching approximately four kilometers along the southwestern side of Cascajal Island; the project received financial contributions from the municipality of Buenaventura, the Valle del Cauca governorate, the Ministry of Foreign Trade, and the private sector (CNMH, 2015).

Parallel to Malecon Bahia de la Cruz, the Ciudadela San Antonio, a housing project, was developed. This project sought to provide housing for the people residing in the Bajamar areas (coastal territories socially constructed) of a couple of neighborhoods on Cascajal Island. The project involved the relocation of approximately 3.400 families and comprised a total of 4.052 social housing units. This housing project is considered to be part of a strategy to relocate palafito settlements in the Bajamar territories to make space available for the Malecon. Nonetheless, numerous residents have expressed worries about insufficient essential basic services, such as water, sewage, and electricity. Reports of security issues, including violence and the presence of armed, have also been noted (CNMH,2015). Additionally, the displacement of people from the Bajamar areas endangers the livelihoods of those dependent on fishing and piangua (edible shellfish) collection. This forced relocation deeply affects the social and cultural dynamics vital to the Bajamar communities.

In 2014, the former president of Colombia Juan Manuel Santos established the Pacific Management Office, one of whose objectives is to implement the “*Todos somos Pacifico*” plan, which formulates the long-term development of the Pacific region. This plan will be financed through a \$400 million loan from the World Bank. Furthermore, since that year, the Andean Development Corporation (CAF), along with the Barcelona City Council and the Territorial Development Financial Corporation (Findeter), had initiated studies based on this plan to transform Buenaventura and the Pacific (Mundubat & CIJP, 2015).

3.5.1 Master plan Buenaventura 2050

The High Council for Competitiveness of Colombia has placed an important emphasis on integrating with Asian markets via the Pacific and the enhancement of conditions for further foreign trade. In line with this objective, it launched a Strategic Plan for the socio-economic and competitive development of Buenaventura, which emphasized three main issues: a) the competitiveness agenda, b) the 2050 Master Plan, c) the ZIDES (Comprehensive Zones for Economic and Social Development) Law project (Mundubat & CIJP, 2015).

The Spanish firm Esteyco played a role in designing the Master Plan as a territorial planning instrument. The plan aimed to envision Buenaventura in the year 2050 and establish the process to achieve that vision. It focuses on four main areas, with institutionalization being an important element: a) Buenaventura Viva - social, cultural and sports; b) Buenaventura territorio - urbanism, infrastructure, and environment; and c) Buenaventura activa - economic promotion (Esteyco & Findeter, 2015).

Following the District's Territorial Planning Plan, strategic projects were scheduled for execution over the next 12 years. These projects included the Malecon Bahia de la Cruz⁸, preferred development areas, urbanization processes, and infrastructure for economic development (CAEB

⁸ According to Buenaventura's 2001 territorial plans, one of the city's strategic urban projects was already considered to be the construction of the Malecón along the coast, which would become the most important urban space in the city, with service areas, recreation, leisure, recreation, and recreation areas. the city's most important urban space with service, recreation and leisure areas, urban equipment and tourist development.

The Master Plan has generated a lot of skepticism especially among the communities residing in the Bajamar areas. The project's socialization process involved meetings with institutions, entrepreneurs, and associations, but crucially, there was no direct engagement with the communities themselves. The Bajamar residents are therefore concerned about the type of city being planned and whether it will genuinely address the needs of their ancestral communities and their territories. According to the CHMA (2015) a study made by Taula Catalana per la Pau i els Drets Humans a Colombia with the collaboration of the communities, questioned the reason behind their current settlements being labeled as mere "settlements" and why this term is juxtaposed against the city concept, perceiving it as a bias against their traditional ways of life and connection to the territory.

According to the study, the Master Plan- raises mistrust because the residents feared it might replace their traditional palafito housing with a pre-designed model, without seeking their input and consent, potentially leading to forced displacement as the same results produced in the San Antonio Ciudadela project. Their main concern is whether they will be able to remain in the Bajamar areas or near the sea. This study highlights that the company Esteyco considers the traditional palafito lifestyle to be outdated and not necessary to include in the consultation processes (CNMH, 2015).

Following European examples, especially that of Barcelona, there is a rising trend in Latin America of reclaiming coastal areas, as observed in Puerto Madero in Buenos Aires, Malecon 2000 in Guayaquil, Ecuador, and the riverfront recovery in Rosario, Argentina. These projects have opened up large coastal areas to real estate businesses (CNMH, 2015).

As such, this homogenizing city model, designed by individuals who do not reside in Buenaventura, nor come from Colombia, and have no knowledge of its inhabitants' culture, seeks to present an attractive facade while generating greater social inequalities and community disintegration (CNMH, 2015). It disregards and aims to destroy ways of life and worldviews different from a global-north perspective. In contrast, the popular neighborhoods of Latin America, manifest a much more intense social life compared to the bourgeois districts of cities proposed by projects such as the Master Plan Buenaventura 2050.

The imposed urbanization through Territorial Ordering Plans (POT) in Colombia has turned the city into a commodity, a tradable asset, thus eroding its primacy characteristic: being a space for encounters among different individuals, groups, and cultures, and a place for enjoyment for meeting human needs. The Master Plan does not deviate from this POT model but aligns with the continuity of megaprojects in the city (Mundubat & CIJP, 2015).

3.6 Megaprojects and the previous consultation to ethnic groups: Law 70 of 1993

This section aims at discussing the implications of Law 70 of 1993, as previously mentioned, a Colombian law that aims at recognizing collective land titles and protecting the rights of black communities. While the law marks a significant advance in recognizing their territorial rights, it includes provisions that facilitate ongoing and future territorial invasions and internal displacement. For instance, Article 6 of this law, explicitly states that *"Except for soils and forests, collective land grants made in accordance with this law do not include... c) Renewable and non-renewable natural resources."* (Law 70 1993), leaving the communities vulnerable to exploitation by external parties.

Concerning mining activities, the law provides vague guidelines, allowing for potential exploitation by large corporations. Despite recognizing the right to prior consultation, law 70 lacks enforcement and fails to prevent the displacement caused by mining and other projects. For instance, large corporations can still obtain licenses, disregarding the communities' pre-emptive rights. The lack of clear guidelines and enforcement makes it difficult for communities to effectively engage in decision-making processes related to mining (Ramirez, 2006).

Moreover, the law's focus on rural territories excludes urban black communities from its protections, a crucial aspect in regard to projects related to port expansion and in particular, the current implementation of the 2050 Master Plan. If black communities were allowed to manage urban areas with their own democratic and participatory scheme, it would also grant them economic power and capacity from where they could challenge the State in terms of economic and social policies, setting an example different from the rest of the country. This argument against extending these rights to black communities in urban areas is based on a misconception that these

communities do not possess ancestral culture and practices. However, Ó Loingsigh (2013) argues that cultures are dynamic and evolve over time, and urban black communities also have their distinct cultural expressions. The limited view of black identity associated only with the rural-fluvial-Pacific paradigm, which overlooks the diversity and multiple forms of racial and cultural mixing within black communities living in various regions, including the urban areas (Ó Loingsigh, 2013).

As Eduardo Restrepo (1993) states:

“The 'black communities' are the subject of the law [70] in a double sense. On one hand, they are specific 'communities' recognized for their right to 'collective ownership' as they have been 'occupying,' according to 'traditional practices of production,' certain types of 'lands,' specifically, 'wastelands,' 'rural,' and 'riverbank' lands”. (pp. 114)

These definitions embedded territories of the Pacific basin, rivers of the Pacific basin, rural riverbank areas, waste lands considered the places where collective occupation and traditional practices of production take place (Restrepo, 2013).

Another significant issue is the absence of support for Community Councils, the local authorities within these communities. These councils, the local authorities within these communities. These councils lack clear jurisdictional control, making it challenging for them to protect their territories against invasion and exploitation. The influence and presence of paramilitary groups and guerrillas further weakens their authority. The lack of administrative, technical, and legal support from the state undermines the council's capacity to defend the communities' rights and resources effectively (Ó Loingsigh, 2013).

3.6.1 The legal framework for prior consultation for implementation of projects in black communities' territories

Prior consultation is a fundamental right of ethnic groups to participate in decision-making processes (legislative and administrative) and implement actions of plans, programs, and projects

that impact their territories or areas used for their subsistence. The International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention No. 169 serves as the foundational document for prior consultation. In the Colombian case, this convention was ratified through Law No. 21 of 1991. It recognizes the distinct characteristics of these groups and makes emphasis on the principle of self-governance and self-recognition as a crucial criterion for its application.

Decrees 2 through 5 of the ILO convention urge national governments to safeguard these rights. Article 2 mandates that *“governments shall assume the responsibility of developing, with the participation of the interested peoples, a coordinated and systematic action aimed at protecting the rights of these peoples and ensuring respect for their integrity”* (International Labour Organization, 1989, Article 2). The convention’s article 6 states the guarantees to be provided for participation to these groups. In this sense, this provides a normative framework for the involvement of these groups in processes affecting their occupied or used territories, without trespassing their citizen rights. It is clear then, that participation is to occur prior to the intended process, recognizing their right to decide on their own development and advocating for studies to discuss potential impacts of the implementation of such projects (ILO Convention 169, 1989, Article 7 p.510).

It is clear then, that government decisions must be consulted with these groups from the very beginning of formulation to prevent impacts on their social practices, spatial memories, culture, economy, and resources. The consultation is then, not just about informing decisions of projects but establishing a horizontal conversation to shape strategies that determine the feasibility of actions, considering the previously mentioned aspects.

The term “territory” then becomes crucial here, as it reflects the habitat of these communities. This acknowledges their right to occupy and use lands for their sustenance, including spaces they use without necessarily residing in them. The right to property and possession of ancestral territories is also recognized (ILO Convention 169, 1989, Article 14, pp. 514).

Recognition of these rights aligns with ensuring their permanence on the lands. Displacement, relocation, and expropriation should then be avoided at all costs in order to preserve the ways of

life of these communities. The convention states that If relocation is deemed necessary, it must be carried out with their consent and through appropriate procedures and measures. In this regard, the convention aims to safeguard their rights and ways of life, emphasizing long-term sustainability (ILO Convention 169, 1989, Article 16, pp. 515).

In the 1991 Colombian political constitution, it acknowledged the ethnic and cultural diversity within the country (Constitución política de Colombia, 1991, p.14). This recognition is coupled with the responsibility of both the State and individuals to protect the nation's cultural and natural properties. Building upon the framework provided by Law No. 21 of 1991, the country established a regulatory framework for prior consultation (Law No. 21 of 1991).

The emergence of the concept of prior consultation in Colombia can be traced back to the 1993 Law No. 99, which introduced the concept in the context of natural resource exploitation. It states that it must also consider the cultural, social, and economic integrity of indigenous and black communities (Law No. 99 of 1993).

However, Decree 1320 of 1998, which had as a goal to develop Law No. 21, restricts prior consultation to resource exploitation projects, neglecting then, other actions that could affect these communities. In this sense, prior consultation applies when projects, works, or activities are designed and planned to be implemented in collective territories of black communities and indigenous territories, or even untitled areas inhabited by these communities. One requirement is that it must take place before the project begins and be certified by either the Ministry of the Interior and Justice or, for legally established territories, the Colombian Institute of Rural Development (Law No. 99 of 1993).

The limitations of Decree 1320 of 1998 led to presidential directives for legal actions to refine and extend the consultation process. The president Directive No. 01 of March 26, 2010, stipulated the Minister of the Interior and Justice responsibility for directing the consultation process, with project proponents covering all the necessary costs. It highlights that consultation should occur before project execution and upheld the right to consultation while acknowledging that projects could potentially proceed.

In summary, the process of prior consultation involves several phases, such as pre-consultation, opening the process, assessments of potential impacts, pre-agreements, protocolization meetings, systematization, and closure. In theory, it recognizes the communities' role in decision-making and emphasizes long-term measures to sustain their well-being and self-development, however in practice is a different story (Corte Constitucional, 2011, p.81).

In 2011, the Constitutional Court declared that prior consultation is an important responsibility for any initiative impacting ethnic territories, emphasizing informed consent. If a project can have the potential of causing harm to the communities, the protection of their rights takes precedence under a *pro homine* principle (Corte Constitucional, 2011, p.81).

However, despite legislation advances and court rulings, challenges continue for implementing prior consultation processes in the Pacific region.

CHAPTER 4: Building Theoretical Groundwork: Unpacking Anthropological Perspectives on Infrastructure

4.1 Defining large-scale infrastructure projects or megaprojects.

This section provides an overview on theoretical explorations regarding large-scale infrastructure projects or megaprojects⁹, which have emerged as transformative forces in the realm of urban management and planning since the 20th century.

Infrastructure investment is one of the essential elements of the 2030 Development Agenda¹⁰. Large-scale infrastructure projects or megaprojects are considered crucial drivers of economic development and environmental assurance for the sustainable development of national social economies. For instance, by 2030, the world is expected to require more than 50 USD trillion in infrastructure investment, mainly targeting the building of mega-projects (Agarwal et al., 2016). These ambitious undertakings have led to a reevaluation of conventional urban development practices and have left an indelible mark on cities' urban fabric. This theoretical overview of megaprojects aims to provide a nuanced understanding of their multifaceted nature and how they intersect with various dimensions of urban life.

Megaprojects as described by Vainer (2012, pp. 190), constitute a group of urban interventions that bridge the gap between strategic urban planning theories and concrete actions on the ground. This type of project involves a confluence of efforts by urban planners, real estate developers, and decision-makers to operationalize visions of the city within the ever-evolving dynamics of the global economic landscape. Corral & Cuenya (2011) further elaborate that megaprojects serve as mechanisms for generating economic profit and capturing rents, necessitating intricate coordination between public and private actors.

⁹ Some authors use other terms such as large interventions and urban operations, structuring projects, and macro-projects (Vainer, 2012)

¹⁰Infrastructure investments are a crucial element of the 2030 Development Agenda. Infrastructure is explicitly mentioned in 3 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and the UN considers large-scale infrastructure projects crucial to achieving many other SDGs in its agenda.

This correlates with the origins of megaprojects, with Vainer (2012) highlighting various cities in the global north such as Paris and Barcelona as markers of a transformative shift in urban management. These cities serve as symbolic milestones in the rupture of traditional urban planning paradigms, heralding the advent of a new era characterized by large-scale infrastructure projects. The megaprojects of this era disrupt prevailing notions of urban space, forging new institutional arrangements, reshaping urban landscapes, and sparking dynamics within the real estate market (De Oliveira, 2012).

Vainer's (2012) definition of megaprojects as interventions with great potential for disruption underscores the profound impact these projects have on the urban environment. The implications of megaprojects are embedded in a multitude of dimensions, including economic, political, institutional, urban and cultural realms. These interventions instigate shifts in governance structures, engender spatial discontinuities, and recalibrate the distribution of land use patterns. Politically speaking, megaprojects reshape coalitions, challenge established structures, and engender new representations of the modern city on both local and global scales.

The intertwining of megaprojects with ethnic-cultural dimensions introduces another layer of complexity. The heterogeneity of urban territories engenders unique dynamics that interrelate with specific characteristics of different ethnic groups. This interaction brings to the fore questions of recognition, identity, and the interrelation between communities and their surrounding environments. Furthermore, the implementation of such large-scale projects, can have impacts on their life plans and/or management plans that these groups have collectively designed according to their cosmovision and needs. In this context, the repercussions on the effective fulfillment and enjoyment of rights recognized both in international and national legislations. Authors such as Leal, De Oliveira & Novais (2012) argue that often the rights of communities are endangered in order to impose the global economic interests that are built upon their territories. These authors argued then, that megaprojects are in this sense, intricate collaborations between private and public actors, tied to specific territories, and initiated to overcome governmental limitations and involve the private sector including transnational companies. Furthermore, these projects are embedded by a contemporary worldview that privileges global interconnections and seeks to develop resources to stimulate economic growth and induce restructuring within cities, benefiting several

stakeholders. In their implementation, megaprojects then disrupt both social and physical spaces across several dimensions, leading to shifts in socio-spatial dynamics and resulting in varied development impacts at the local level. Therefore, they often challenge the rights and practices of these communities, thereby an inclusive approach to urban planning in decision-making becoming essential (Leal, De Oliveira & Novais, 2012).

4.2 Anthropology of Infrastructure

The theoretical framework for this MA thesis incorporates key concepts from the anthropology of infrastructure to unravel the complex interplay between Buenaventura port expansion project, experiences of belonging and identity, and the socio-political context of black communities in relation to the Colombian government's plans and visions of development.

The anthropology of infrastructure offers a valuable perspective for examining the intricate interactions between societal structures, power dynamics, and the lived experiences of communities impacted by large-scale infrastructure projects. Infrastructure far beyond mere physical structures, gathers the socio-political, economic, and cultural systems that underpin the development and functioning of our societies. In the context of Buenaventura's project, this perspective becomes particularly relevant, offering ways to understand how the built environment shapes, and is shaped by, the identity, belonging, and aspirations of historically marginalized black communities.

According to Brian Larkin (2013), two significant insights have emerged from the anthropology of infrastructure that have contributed significantly to anthropology as a discipline. Firstly, by centering the analysis on the system rather than just the technology, a more holistic perspective is gained, incorporating non-technological elements into our understanding of infrastructure. Secondly, the focus on system building highlights how technical systems originate in specific contexts but must adapt and translate as they expand into networked infrastructure across varying conditions and regulations. This approach emphasizes practices of routinization, extension, and translation as inherent to system development. Larkin highlights how scholars, influenced on this

perspective, drew on actor-network theory to trace associations between heterogeneous networks and account for translation processes.

Furthermore, scholarly literature on anthropology of infrastructure has highlighted how modern Infrastructural systems are shaped by liberal governance principles (Anand, 2017; von Schnitzler, 2016; Anand et al., 2018). For instance, Joyce (2003) describes how urban infrastructures emerged in the 19th century Britain and France aligned with liberal governance ideals, where technical and political realms were strictly separated, yet urban infrastructures had significant political implications, shaping relations between states, corporations, individuals and capitalist circles (Anand et al., 2018). Van Laak & Butler (2023) describes infrastructures as “spaces of flow ” crucial for modernization and progress within a liberal framework.

Ethnographic studies reveal that the distribution of modern infrastructure among colonial, class and racial lines is uneven, serving some while excluding, bypassing, or even harming others (Graham & Marvin, 2001). Infrastructure, far from solely symbolizing development and progress, functions as material arrangements that differentiate populations and individuals (Anand et al., 2018).

The overlapping histories of liberal and colonial governance, especially during the 19th and 20th centuries, resulted in the construction of infrastructures in colonized areas in the Global South, which served both to integrate and to segregate and marginalize these regions (Anand, 2017). For instance, Anand (2017) study on Mumbai’s water infrastructure, illustrates how colonial-era infrastructures discriminated between those deemed worthy of colonial city membership and those excluded from citizenship promises. This exclusion was fueled by fiscal restrictions, resulting in underinvestment in urban infrastructures for public goods delivery. While public works aimed to enhance capitalist networks and productive subjects, they also marginalized and excluded colonized individuals, expelling them from the progress promised by liberal rule (Graham & Marvin, 2001).

The enduring legacy of infrastructural segregation persists globally in urban spaces, leaving some populations partially disconnected from essential infrastructural systems (Howe et al., 2016;

Graham & Marvin, 2001). A prime example is Buenaventura, where despite promises of improvement from the national government, water infrastructure deficiencies endure due to inadequate public investment, weak institutional frameworks, and ineffective governance. This situation mirrors a history of partial abandonment and exclusion of racialized populations, profoundly shaping urban development in the Colombian Pacific (Fernandez, 2022).

4.3 Anthropology of Infrastructure reflections for the port expansion of Buenaventura

The anthropology of infrastructure has emerged as an important field of study, delving into the multifaceted relationships between societies and the systems that underpin their functioning. Keywords in this area show the complex tapestry of societal structures and power dynamics inherent in transformative infrastructural developments.

Von Schnitzler's work, *"Democracy's Infrastructure: Techno-Politics and Protest after Apartheid"* (2016), similar to Anand's (2017), explores water supply as a lens for understanding citizenship, in her case, in post-apartheid South Africa. However, her focus on the water meter reveals a distinct approach. She traced the technocal history of the water meter from its British origins and examines its introduction to South Africa not only as a means to regulate water usage but also to shape a new type of citizen. Von Schnitzler then argues that water meters, beyond regulating water provision, are instruments of government strategy and ethics formation. City officials sought to reform township residents' behavior by fostering a "calculating subject" through moral-pedagogical language and practices. She shows how seemingly neutral technologies, such as water meters, become arenas for contesting citizenship and intertwine with religious and political domains.

Von Schnitzler, uses concepts such as Techno-Politics and Protest, which explores the entanglement of infrastructure works with political processes, serving as a site for social and political contestation. Furthermore, von Schnitzler uses the concept of "democracy's infrastructure", where she examines the implications of infrastructure in shaping democratic narratives and expressions of citizenship. This concept provides a critical lens to understand how

the port expansion project became not just a physical transformation but a contested space where power dynamics and political agency are negotiated. The concept of “Democracy’s infrastructure” helps analyze how Buenaventura’s evolving infrastructure contributes to or challenges democratic ideals within the context of the city. It helps setting up the stage for researching the socio-political dimensions of the project, shedding light on the narratives intertwin into the very fabric of the expanding port.

Furthermore, von Schnitzler introduces the concept of techno-politics, where infrastructure becomes a contested space entwined with political processes. This lens provides a critical perspective to understand the Pacific region’s struggles, where the cities, including Buenaventura, were established due to resource extraction centers, port developments, and political-administrative factors. Racial disparities led to the marginalization of black populations, evident in abandonment, segregation, and weak institutions in the Pacific’s urban spaces.

The historical and ongoing waves of strikes and social movements in Buenaventura align with von Schnitzler’s exploration of techno-politics. Buenaventura’s citizens engaged in contestation, resisting the imposition of infrastructure that intersected with their daily lives and identity. The strikes of 1964, 1998 and 2021, with demands ranging from the lack of public goods, and deficient infrastructural networks in the city such as adequate water infrastructure to addressing the economic and social crisis, exemplify the citizens’ resistance and negotiation with the Colombian government. The promises and subsequent frustrations echo von Schnitzler’s emphasis on the contested nature of infrastructure projects.

Moreover, Buenaventura’s citizens, particularly during the 1998 strike, demonstrated an awareness of local sociopolitical dynamics. This aligns with von Schnitzler’s exploration of how infrastructure shapes democratic narratives. The Buenaventura citizens ‘demands were not immediate; they were challenges to the broader development model imposed on the Pacific and city, showcasing their engagement with democratic narratives intertwined with infrastructure.

The formation of the Comité Interorganizacional in Buenaventura and the election of social leaders to political offices resonate with von Schnitzler’s exploration of citizen agency and political activism. The mobilizations brought visibility to social activists, emphasizing the role of grassroots

organizations in negotiating with the government and pushing for changes in development plans for the city.

As stated in chapter II, Buenaventura emerged as a symbol of black communities' resistance against displacement and dispossession, aligning with von Schnitzler's exploration of contested spaces where identity is negotiated. The opposition to the "Buenaventura 2050" redevelopment plan for the city contributed to the resurgence of the identity of black communities, igniting their determination to assert and gain recognition for their ethno-territorial rights. This movement echoes the intricate socio-political dimensions examined in "Democracy's infrastructure".

Harvey and Knox work *"Roads: An Anthropology of Infrastructure and Expertise"* (2015), in infrastructure and expertise, explores the entanglements between infrastructure projects and the expertise shaping their design and implementation, in this book, they investigate the societal implications of a road-building project in Peru, considering how it influence local narratives and community dynamics. The insights provided in this book bring expertise into focus, enriching our understanding of how external knowledge shapes local perceptions and narratives. This multidimensional analysis unveils the intersections of external expertise, local identity, and community dynamics. It helps to shed light into the examination of social impacts and guide my exploration of how the communities of Buenaventura experience the changes brought by this infrastructure project.

Harvey and Knox discuss how infrastructure projects are not just technical endeavors but are deeply embedded in power relations and political dynamics. In Buenaventura, the historical waves of social protest and political mobilization reveal a techno-political dimension where infrastructure, such as the ongoing port expansion, becomes a site of contention for power and resources. In their book, they also emphasize how infrastructural development can lead to socio-spatial segregation. In Buenaventura, the growth of the port attracted a diverse range of migrants leading to spatial divisions between areas occupied by stakeholders, traders, exports and importers, and the palafito housing of fishermen and piangua pickers, and in general the communities inhabiting the Bajamar territories. This echoes with their work regarding the social dimensions of infrastructure, including how it contributes to spatial inequalities. Knox and Harvey, discuss how infrastructure is a social and political space, for instance, the port expansion project involves

multiple stakeholders, including government officials, policymakers, private sector stakeholders, and the local communities. The ongoing expansion reflects broader political and economic agendas, making it a contested space where various interests converge.

In their reflection of infrastructure and their cultural and symbolic meaning, one can state that the port expansion in Buenaventura carries cultural and symbolic meanings. Ports are often symbols of economic growth, global connectivity, and national development. This expansion is seen as a symbol of progress by government officials and private stakeholders, while black communities interpret it differently based on their historical experiences and cultural perspectives and their ongoing marginalization as highlighted in chapter 2.

The port expansion in Buenaventura, aligns with Harvey and Knox's examination of the expertise involved in infrastructure development. The strategic importance of the port in connecting Colombia with Asian and North American markets highlights the role of technical expertise in planning and executing such projects.

The historical overview of Buenaventura's port expansion and its impact on the Bajamar territories provides insights into the materiality and spatial implications of infrastructure. The changes in the labor dynamics, privatization of the port, and the subsequent socioeconomic shifts demonstrate the tangible effects of infrastructure on the lives of the local population.

Furthermore, the Buenaventura case illustrates the global and local dynamics of infrastructure, with the port being a crucial link between Colombia and international markets. The complex network of stakeholders involved in port operations, including private entities, public institutions, and international players, reflects the multilayered nature of infrastructure governance and its impact on local communities.

In Chapter 3, the section on Buenaventura's port expansion plans since the 1990s aligns with Harvey and Knox's argument on the temporal dimensions of infrastructure. The evolving plans over the years, influenced by global economic trends and policy shifts in Colombia, emphasize the dynamic and contingent nature of infrastructure development.

"Infrastructures and Social Complexity: A Companion" another book by Penelope Harvey together with Casper Jensen, and Atsuro Morita published in 2016, looks at the political ecology of infrastructure standards, examining how infrastructure standards intersect with political and ecological considerations. Analyzing the political and ecological implications of these standards provides a broader context for assessing the socio-cultural impact of the infrastructure. Another concept used in this book is called "infrastructural Events", which investigates significant moments that shape and define the impact of infrastructure. This concept is particularly relevant for the case of Buenaventura, as pinpointing significant infrastructural events helps reveal how these events contribute to the overall narrative of change. It assists in identifying critical moments that shape the community's experiences of belonging. Additionally, the study of temporalities of Infrastructure examines how infrastructure development progresses over time, offering insights into the long-term effects of the port expansion project on Buenaventura's social fabric. It enables the exploration of how the community's sense of belonging and identity evolves over different phases of the port project.

"Beyond the Big Ditch: Politics, Ecology, and Infrastructure at the Panama Canal" by Ashley Carse (2014), focusing on the Panama Canal, offers perspectives on the intricate relationships between politics, infrastructure and ecology. Carse's book explores the Panama Canal's multifaceted relationship with nature and society, showing its pivotal role in shaping environmental governance, infrastructure development, and local livelihoods. Contrary to viewing the canal as a static engineering monument, Carse portrays it as a dynamic entity deeply intertwined with ecological and social systems. Carse echoes anthropologist Clifford Geertz's notion that advanced technologies bind us to a world of our own making, underscoring how infrastructure shapes demanding environments and yields varied experiences based on people's positionalities and their connection to the nature around them. This notion of infrastructure creating demanding environments and fostering interdependence applies to Buenaventura, where the port expansion project not only influences the physical environment but also impacts the livelihoods and interrelations of local residents, as we will see in Chapter 4 of this MA thesis.

Furthermore, Carse explores the concept of Political Ecology of Infrastructure, in which the political dimensions of infrastructural development consider how power dynamics and political processes shape infrastructure projects. Carse points out the ecological impact of infrastructure

projects, examining how they intersect with environmental concerns. This concept becomes relevant in assessing the ongoing environmental impacts of the infrastructure and their implications for the local communities in Buenaventura the political ecology and ecological considerations bring depth to the understanding of the project's socio-cultural and environmental implications.

Another work by Carse and Kneas (2019), entitled "Unbuilt and Unfinished, delves into the temporal aspects and complexities of infrastructure projects that are either incomplete or remain unfinished. This concept challenges the conventional understanding of infrastructure as static and complete, highlighting the dynamic and ongoing nature of infrastructure development and its implications for society.

Carse and Kneas, proposed a typology of heuristics for analyzing the temporalities of unbuilt and unfinished infrastructures, including *shadow histories*, *present absences*, *suspended presents*, *nostalgic futures*, and *zombies*. Each heuristic offers a different lens through which to understand the temporal dimensions of infrastructure projects. For instance, "*Suspended Presents*" examines the intricate social experiences and emotional states linked to delays in infrastructure projects. It introduces the concept of "suspended presents" as a tool for understanding the diverse temporal contexts and potentialities arising from these delays. This heuristic shed light on the anticipation, hope, anxiety, and disillusionment experienced by the black communities awaiting the completion of projects like the Buenaventura port expansion. As the port development extends over time, residents navigate an indefinite period characterized by promises of transformation, leading to the emergence of suspended social processes and the reconfiguration of future imaginaries. Buenaventura's residents oscillate between hope and anxiety as they grapple with the uncertainty surrounding the project's completion and its implications for their lives and identities. Additionally, the concept of "*suspended presents*" highlights the social experiences that create alternative interpretations of project completion, providing a framework to explore how infrastructure transforms social, political, and economic landscapes during extended delays.

Brian Larkin's "The politics and Poetics of infrastructure" (2013): Larkin's work challenges conventional perspectives on infrastructure, positing it as a dynamic area where political and symbolic meanings are incessantly negotiated. This conceptual shift has fundamentally influenced

the understanding of how infrastructure becomes entwined with societal identities and power structures. As the field evolved, Larkin's research helped scholars view infrastructure not merely as a logistical necessity but as a domain rich with political and cultural implications. Understanding the politics of infrastructure is crucial in deciphering the power dynamics involved, revealing how different stakeholders influence and negotiate the trajectory of such projects.

For instance, Larkin mentions that infrastructure can be viewed as technological systems, involving the analysis of networked machines, infrastructure as financial instruments, practices of accounting and budgets, or management structures, social perspectives, which involves practices of visiting, social interactions, and investments in sociality. Media infrastructures and value production, in which Larkin briefly mentions media infrastructures and their role in value production.

Natalia Buier's "The Anthropology of Infrastructure" (2022) provides foundational insights guiding the overall approach to studying transitional spaces and evolving landscapes. This is crucial for comprehending Buenaventura's changing socio-cultural fabric, particularly in the negotiation of belonging and identity amid rapid modernization intended under the "*Buenaventura 2050*" project. Buier advocates for a critical deconstruction of the contemporary infrastructural moment rooted in historical geographical materialist. Her approach challenges the prevailing perspectives within the field of anthropology of infrastructure, which according to her, often emphasize the analytical lens of infrastructure, particularly in terms of relationality and materiality. Using her perspective, a critical deconstruction of infrastructure as a study for this MA thesis, would involve analyzing not only the physical construction of the port expansion, but also the underlying power dynamics, economic interests, and social implications. Buier, also suggest that theoretical dialogues, such as the Marxian-Foucauldian dialogue, can enrich the analysis of infrastructure. On this line, For Buier, it's important to position infrastructure in the reproduction of capital within capitalist systems. The exploration of alternatives is encouraged by her. But Buier warns against naturalising a language and form intimately tied to processes of expropriation and domination. She argues that the violence of financial capitalism is linked to the violent rematerialization of surplus capital as infrastructure, emphasizing the need for critical engagement with the contemporary infrastructural moment and the proliferation of extraction through infrastructural development.

This is an interesting and relevant point of view for the case of Buenaventura, Analyzing the expansion of the port within the context of capitalist dynamics would involve examining how it serves the interests of capital accumulation, both locally and globally. This could include investigating issues such as land expropriation, labour exploitation, and the prioritization of profit over social and environmental concerns in the planning and implementation of the project.

These background studies on the anthropology of infrastructure provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding the complexities of large-scale infrastructure projects such as Buenaventura's ongoing port expansion. Scholars like von Schnitzler, Harvey, Knox, Jense, Morita and Carse among others, have offered valuable insights into the multifaceted relationships between societies and infrastructure including the entanglement of infrastructure with political processes, the socio-cultural implications of infrastructure projects, and the temporal dimensions of their development. Buier's critical perspective further questions existing paradigms in the field, highlighting the necessity for a detailed analysis that takes into account power dynamics, economic interests, and social implications, specially within capitalist systems. By drawing on these diverse theoretical frameworks and approaches, this section lays the groundwork for a comprehensive examination of the goal of this MA thesis, shedding light on its socio-political dimensions and the lived experiences of local communities amidst rapid changes in their surrounding built environment.

4.4 Navigating the anxiety within large-scale infrastructure projects.

Furthermore, megaprojects are often considered the projections of aspirations of nationhood, and large-scale infrastructure projects such as highways and ports often become indirect representations of the nation itself. Most countries in the global south aim toward industrialized western standards in terms of material wealth, physical infrastructures, and other aspects characterized as the ideals for "high quality of life and well-being" (Harvey, 2018 in Anand et al., 2018). These ideals have provoked an exponential increase in large-scale infrastructure projects throughout the global south since the 20th century (Gurara et al., 2017).

Ferguson (1999) posited that economic development programs and projects, championed by both nationalist and global elites, promised a vision of a "better life" for middle and working classes beneficiaries. Nonetheless, it is clear that the communities affected by these large-scale initiatives frequently endure an uneven share of social, economic, and environmental burdens (Gellert & Lynch, 2003, Jenss, 2020b). Such major infrastructure undertakings fundamentally disrupt the fabric and rhythm of social life, often leading to confusion, and even perceived threats among local residents. Several academics argue that while such projects are often framed as matters of "national interests" by governing elites, the realities on the ground reveal that it is typically the working class who bears and deals with these costs (Jamali, 2013; Baviskar, 1995).

Examining case studies from various regions, such as Jamali's (2013) ethnographic work in Gwadar, Pakistan during the implementation of a megaproject in Balochistan territory, in which he analyzed its social impact. He discussed how, for example, fishermen experienced new aspirations for the future of the city but also faced increased security control, which led to exclusion and fear. He argued that the implementation of the megaproject disrupted the fishermen's experiences of place and sociality and introduced elements of exclusion. Similarly, Baviskar (2005) conducted a study among the Bhilala Adivasi indigenous group in India, from 1990 to 2003, and described the displacement of several villagers due to the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam over the Narmada River. She explained that despite protests from this indigenous group through the "Save Narmada" movement, the Indian government proceeded with that development project, justifying it in the name of "national interest". Baviskar emphasized that large-scale infrastructure projects often burden the working class and the most marginalized populations of society with their excessive costs, leading to expectations that indigenous peoples are forced to make sacrifices for the "development" of the nation (Baviskar, 2005).

Kaushik Ghosh's ethnographic research (2006) on the Munda Adivasi communities in Jharkhand India, examines the strained dynamics between the Indian government and these indigenous groups in relation to the large-scale hydroelectric project Koel Karo Hydel Project (Ghosh, 2006). Ghosh highlights how Indian middle classes and government officials viewed indigenous peoples as primitives that obstruct the nation's development. Furthermore, the displacement of these

communities and the disruption of the ways of life have been major concerns and called for international attention.

In this sense, development through megaprojects can highlight issues such as power imbalances related to wealth, political influence, and expertise, which often advance the agendas of nationalist and transnational elites (Jamali, 2013).

Furthermore, concepts such as "landscape," "place," and "social geography" are frequently used in contemporary studies of globalization to explore the significance of spatial dynamics in the aforementioned transformations (Escobar, 2001). These concepts encapsulate the intricate relationships between individuals and their environments, characterized by new prospects for social advancement, patterns of consumption, and access to new civic services. However, these projects often entail the risk of territorial dispossession, worsening livelihoods, and the breakdown of social structures and trust. They can also lead to state-sanctioned violence, the erasure of spatial memories, and the alteration or disappearance of familiar material and moral elements within evolving social landscapes (Jamali, 2013., Jenss, 2020a., Baviskar, 1995., Geller & Lynch, 2003).

CHAPTER 5: Journey Through Buenaventura's Port Expansion: Life and urban transformation

In this chapter, I explore Buenaventura's complex social landscape, delving into how the Master Plan "*Buenaventura 2050 project*" has transformed the lives and identities of its residents, particularly those within the black communities. My exploration is guided by the research questions posed by this thesis, in which I employed a combination of literature review with insights and lived experiences from my interviewees. Beyond formal research methods, this section also benefits from my personal visit to Buenaventura in December 2022, where I engaged in observation and conducted informal interviews with local people as well as my insights while walking the streets of the city.

5.1 Life in the most important port of Colombia

In Colombia, the discussion of large-scale infrastructure projects, or megaprojects, began to influence political conversations in the early 1990s, aiming to capture the benefits associated with late modernity (Rodriguez et al, 2000). Typically, megaprojects are characterized by their high cost around USD 1 billion – and their involvement of numerous stakeholders. Including international and national implementation agencies, financial institutions, and both local and national governments (Agarwal et al., 2016). Since the 1990s, Colombia has seen the construction of large-scale infrastructure projects throughout the past three decades. These include projects such as the Santuario-Caño Alegre highway, the new Cartagena airport, the Buga-Buenaventura highway, Canal del Dique works, and the Puerto Salgar-Barranca Bermeja highway (KPMG, 2021). Additionally, several similar initiatives are planned, including the 4G Project, a comprehensive road infrastructure plan aimed at connecting the entire country (KPMG, 2021). This plan envisions over 7,000 kilometers of new roadways to be developed over the upcoming years with an investment of USD 50 billion. Since the 1970s, megaprojects such as hydroelectric plants, highways, ports, dams, and planned cities have consistently featured in Colombia's urban policy agenda (KPMG, 2021). Currently, there are over USD 6 billion allocated for road infrastructures across 328 strategic projects, including the Bicentennial 5G Concessions and 4G regional Corridors (KPMG, 2021). The Fourth Generation (4G) Road Concession Program

exemplifies Colombia's neoliberal shift., following von Schnitzler's (2016) concepts, there was an effort to shift traditional welfare programs to workfare initiatives for the unemployed through collaboration between government and private sector. Initiated in 2014, the 4G program sought to enhance Colombia's road infrastructure by utilizing private sector skills and resources. This initiative required private entities to handle the design, financing, construction and management of road projects, with revenue generated from user tolls (Duque et al., 2021)

Another prominent example was the liberalization and expansion of the telecommunications sector in the 90s. Colombia embarked on a series of reforms aimed at introducing competition, attracting foreign investment, and increasing access to modern communication services.

As Duque et al (2021) points out, the construction of the 4G program and similar infrastructure projects, as endeavors that are more visionary than feasible. As the 4G program proved unsuccessful as a financial venture. The burden of toll payments on users is often a problematic issue, and there are worries that high toll fees could deter usage, and therefore, lead to a reduction in revenue generated for the private companies. However, many Colombian commentators, market observers and analysts viewed this positively, believing that the arrival of new highways symbolized the future of Colombia and provided the nation with a tangible goal for potential development (Duque et al, 2021).

According to Rojas (2009), a shift in policy was driven more from Colombia's elite's urgently seeking to appease the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund for crucial loans rather than by an authentic reassessment of the country's economic development strategies. By leveraging resources from these international institutions, Colombian politicians could strengthen their support base for electoral victories across urban and rural populations, thus reinforcing the ongoing system of political favoritism. Moreover, Alvarez (2016) argues that over the years, this externally driven policy shift paralleled and mirrored the rise of other cities such as Santiago de Chile and Mexico City which capture the collective imagination as to what to aspire to. Within this framework and redefined landscape of economy, governance and territory, Colombian political leadership envisioned the Pacific region as an area of untapped wealth, envisioned as a catalyst to lift the country's economy from stagnation to so-called modernization.

These economic maneuvers coincided with a deliberate obfuscation of the economic governance and political landscape in the country. Following the 1990s, successive elected and non-elected governments in Colombia announced various “guiding principles and visions” (Alvarez, 2016). During former president Cesar Gaviria, it was announced his vision of governance included significant national economic reforms, including privatization, trade liberalization and deregulation. According to Alvarez (2016), these reforms marked the initial signs of the country’s shift towards neoliberal economic policies.

Despite the rhetoric of political paradigm shifts, these initiatives primarily reveal Colombia’s dependence on external funding and Western ideological frameworks, highlighting a lack of effort for domestic innovation and self-reliance within Colombia's political leadership (Alvarez, 2016).

In this context, these neoliberal strategies, practices, and policies associated with such visions reached their highest point during the presidency of Cesar Gaviria, who inherited the presidency from Virgilio Barco Vargas in 1990 (Lopez & Suarez, 2009). Gaviria’s presidency marked a significant period of economic liberalization and structural adjustments in Colombia. Symbolically, Gaviria opened Colombia's economy in order to attract foreign investment amid shifting domestic and international dynamics (Lopez & Suarez, 2009).

Cesar Gaviria made the Pacific Region a focal point in his developmental vision. This vision known as “La Revolucion Pacifica”, emerged during a period of significant national and international change. This plan emphasized financial sector flexibility, infrastructure, improvements, and investment in key areas such as transportation, and education to boost production in sectors such as agriculture and industry (Lopez & Suarez, 2009., CNMH, 2015).

On this instance, Dr. Felipe Fernandez declared during the interview:

“Although there is a lack of basic infrastructure such as constant water services, there is an over representation of the government in Buenaventura and today the budget for development of Buenaventura is far bigger than other cities in Colombia, all megaprojects are being constructed in Buenaventura: Coastal Highway, the Port, a highway to the interior of the country”

(Interview with Hernandez, 2023)

In their report entitled “Buenaventura un Puerto sin comunidad” (Buenaventura a port, without community), the Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (National Center of Historical Memory) (2015) pointed out the limited positive impact of megaprojects on the broader population of Buenaventura. Despite such critiques, they did little to dissuade the mainstream Colombian public, who continued to pursue the nationalist aspiration of developing a local counterpart to cities like Barcelona. Colombian policy makers and citizens saw the Pacific as a vital resource hub and considered Buenaventura to be “Colombia’s gateway to the Pacific”, viewing it as a valuable asset in the nation’s portfolio.

Regarding the most recent megaproject designed for the city (in 2015) called “*The Buenaventura we deserved*”, Alke Jenss a researcher at Arnold-Bergstraesser Institute, articulates:

“The Master plan Buenaventura 2050 seeks to remake the city, and Cascajal Island in particular, to match global port activities. The plan particularly targets Cascajal’s next-to-port spaces and assigns different functionalities to Buenaventura’s urban area, such as a logistics-industrial zone, a tourist quarter, and upmarket residential spaces. It declares the Northern half of the city a future industrial complex, modifying its tax regime on berthing ships, quay dues, and storage.” (Jenns, 2020a, pp. 6)

Shortly after the announcement of the megaproject, a flood of bureaucrats, private entrepreneurs, industrialists, and real estate agents descended upon Buenaventura. With the help of local intermediaries and corrupt revenue officials, they began investing in purchasing land from locals and converting it into commercial and residential properties (Jenns, 2020a). In television commercials and newspaper ads, urban residents depicted using ecological modes of transportation such as bicycles and modern transportation modes like latest trains.



Figure 7: Images of an official presentation portraying Buenaventura's future urban redevelopment plans. Retrieved from Esteyco & Findeter (2015)

Numerous investors from the USA, Canada, and China flocked to Buenaventura, enticed by promises of lucrative opportunities. The Esteyco and Findeter group, promoted the city as a place where modest beginnings could evolve into prosperous ventures, boasting the appeal of long-term tax exemptions on goods and services. Without considering many factors, as discussed in Chapter 2, purchasing land in Buenaventura required navigating the complexities of Law 70 of 1993 and the prior consultation and collective decision-making stated under this law. This process led to numerous corrupt practices aimed at evading the law's processes, resulting in many people losing their homes, as we will explore in this chapter, in later sections.

On the one hand, the images of the master plan "*Buenaventura 2050*" serve as symbolic representations of the official visions for transforming Buenaventura's territory and unlocking new opportunities. As if linking global trade networks, the plan envisions Buenaventura, alongside cities like Panama City and Shanghai, becoming pivotal nodes in an enhanced flow of goods, commodities, and capital. In 2013, former president Juan Manuel Santos declared Buenaventura a Special, Industrial, Port, Biodiverse, and Ecotourism District under Law 1617 of Special districts. This announcement, along with ambitious plans to develop the city into a major port hub, sparked widespread public discourse that bordered on national fantasy, both within Colombia and among Colombians living abroad.

In essence, by 2013, Buenaventura had become a source of national pride in Colombia. It represented a vision of development and progress for bureaucrats and politicians in the country, a lucrative prospect for real estate agents and developers in the Pacific region and the country, an aspiration of upscale living. The idealization of the city entailed a vision for the future, summarizing a shining tomorrow - already manifested in places like Colon in Panama. This vision enabled Colombian leaders, such as former President Santos (in office from 2010 to 2018), to gloss over current realities and temporarily ignore the neglect and poverty experienced by the city's residents, with some lacking even basic access to potable water.

On the contrary, the local population of Buenaventura reacted differently to the announcement of the megaproject aiming at expanding the port. Completely aware of the direct impact the project would have on their lives, the population found it challenging to comprehend the developments without proper explanations and access to the proposed Master Plan "Buenaventura 2050" and clear insights into the motives behind the port's expansion (Interview with Adriel Ruiz, 2nd of August 2023). Local activists such as Adriel Ruiz, community leader in Buenaventura and Yolanda Echeverry, technical secretary of the Buenaventura Civic Strike Committee, along with other experienced activists, perceived the megaproject as an exploitative initiative harmful to the long-term interests of the black communities, specially to the ones residing in the Bajamar areas (Interview with Adriel Ruiz, 2nd of August 2023).

These activists intensively opposed the project in public meetings and wrote articles in the local newspapers condemning the ongoing port expansion projects and the implementation of the megaproject (See more on Chapter 2.2). However, during the interviews, both Adriel and Yolanda, express that the response from the majority of the population, many of whom were illiterate or semi-literate, was more ambivalent.

According to Adriel Ruiz, by 2015 the initial excitement and cautious optimism surrounding the port expansion project in Buenaventura had given way to a sense of fear and disillusionment (Interview with Adriel Ruiz, 02.08.2023). The port faced significant challenges, including connectivity issues, such as delays in the construction of the Simon Bolivar highway, which would

link Buenaventura with the country's interior, and the need for dredging to compete with nearby ports like the Guayaquil in Ecuador (Interview with Tomas Quinonez, 02.06.2023). Furthermore, the port required deeping to 16.5 meters to accommodate larger vessels for international trade without encountering setbacks (Portafolio, 2023).

The proposal for continued port expansion, “*Buenaventura 2050*”, introduced by former President Santos, generated more murmurs than the anticipated impact. After Santos left the Colombian political scene in 2018, the country entered a period of political uncertainty. During this transition, the political class as well as other actors, grappled to establish a new way of moving forward, leaving Buenaventura once again neglected (Interview with Adriel Ruiz, 02.08.2023).

Many local Buenaventurenses when inquired about the future of the port, there were concerns that the expansion project would lead to more displacements and relocation of Bajamar settlements surrounding the Port areas. There were rumors of criminal bands formed by demobilized paramilitaries. Rumors were that it was a war strategy to generate uncertainty, fear and distress with the intention of making people leave their territories (Interview with Yolanda Echeverry, 02.12.2022).

The development and ongoing expansion projects of the port have made Buenaventura a target for various criminal groups in the region. These groups have been involved in territorial conflicts over areas where port companies are currently operating or planning to operate (Jenss, 2020b).

For Yolanda Echeverry, many people in the city felt that the megaproject was develop with its back turned to the city. She argued that there is a significant disconnect between the port economy and the local economy, she argued: *"Poverty and corruption are part of the landscape of the port city in Colombia. Despite the fact that more than 40% of the country's international trade moves through there, the basic needs of the majority of its inhabitants are not met. This has fostered these criminal groups and fear in the city. Among other projects, a high-level tourist boardwalk has been planned in a very disadvantaged area. Therefore, the criminals see a business opportunity in displacing people, as they can later take over those lands and sell them at a very high price"* (Interview with Yolanda Echeverry, 02.12.2022).

Therefore, the news of the megaproject sparked a significant buzz of conversation and a sense of fear within the population of Buenaventura. This development led to an opinion division among the locals, each expressing their concerns and viewpoints. On the one hand, a portion of the local residents contended that the port was beneficial for the city. As they asserted that without the port, employment opportunities would be even more scarce. And on the other hand, the fear of displacement and threat to livelihoods, especially for the ones surviving on fishing and piangua collection, is one of the main worries (Interview with Yolanda Echeverry, 02.12.2022).

Drawing on concepts from various scholars of the anthropology of infrastructure, the discussion above illuminates the multifaceted implications and relevance of the Buenaventura port expansion project. Through the lens of von Schnitzler's techno-politics and protest (2016), it reveals how the project became a contested space embedded in political processes, driven by aspirations towards late modernity and influenced by international financial institutions. The temporal dimensions of infrastructure are evident in Colombia's historical shift towards neoliberal economic models, reflecting long-term impacts shaped by external forces. Criticizing the project as neo-colonial endeavors harming local communities' echoes Carse's political ecology of infrastructure (2014), emphasizing the ecological implications intertwined with political dimensions. Furthermore, it exposes power dynamics and economic interests driving this infrastructure development, exemplified by the involvement of multinational banks and international financial institutions in shaping economic policies (Buier, 2023). Lastly, the discussion reveals societal dynamics influenced by this project through the ambivalence and fear among locals regarding the port expansion, illustrating the social and economic impacts on Buenaventura's population.

5.2 Communities' Fate: Surprising Revelations Amidst Aspirations

Despite the communities' concerns about the government's intentions, some residents of Buenaventura initially embraced former President Santos's call for "progress" in the city. However, it is important to emphasize that activist groups in the city have consistently opposed such projects. Although the local people were skeptical of the authorities and port expansion

stakeholders, they were also cautious of the Pacific elites, given their marginal status within the black ethnic group.

As already mentioned before, in the ongoing megaproject in Buenaventura, the national government embarked on a big endeavor aimed at offering residences to the communities who have been uprooted from their palafito housing in the Bajamar areas, particularly the ones located next to the port areas or where there are intentions for the port to expand. This undertaking involved the construction of more than 4.000 housing units across a sprawling of 200 hectares within the center of the Pacific Forest Reserve. It is a designated National Park, located 40 kilometers inland from the coast of Buenaventura (CNMH, 2015).

The initiative is known as Ciudadela San Antonio and it traces its origins back to the Spatial Development Plan of 2001, as designed by the Buenaventura City Council in 2013. Over time, it became an essential part of the mega project “Buenaventura 2050”. The inaugural phase started in 2015 in which more than 500 housing units were completed, each with 45 square meters of dimension (ICJP & Mundubat, 2015, pp.30). The reactions from the communities living in the Bajamar neighborhoods, which were slated for further port expansion and the proposed waterfront project, highlight the challenges they face and the life decisions they have had to make. In 2013, during the development of the megaproject, the communities initially refused to leave their coastal palafito housing out of fear of losing them permanently. The agreement required them to sign a document authorizing the demolition of their existing homes. However, after persistent efforts by the city and port administration to gain their trust, including promises of alternative housing and land titles, they eventually agreed to relocate. The government also undertook to provide basic infrastructure such as hospitals nearby. This intricate balance between development and displacement shows the complex dynamics of megaprojects, highlighted by Baviskar (2015) in India and Jamal (2014) in Pakistan. Adrien Ruiz, vividly commented during the interview the perplexing blend of anticipation and apprehension that swept through Buenaventura’s residents in 2013:

“It was a situation where consensus was divided in the community of Bajamar – half of the community consented while the other half was compelled to disagree. People kept asking: Why not finish the city’s water supply systems in our palafitos? If there’s money, why not complete the

schools around? Why not establish a hospital nearby? The question is, why not design institutions that allow people to live with dignity in the most important place in the country's economy? People deserve it, but politics says no, simply because you're Indigenous or Black, you don't deserve it, you know. Therefore, the state doesn't perform well in delivering services, there's always an obstacle, there's corruption, people said” (Interview with Adriel Ruiz, 02.08.2023).



Figure 8: Buenaventura’s palafitos. Retrieved from: Wilford,J (2022).[Buenaventura: Palafitos para la esperanza, un relato ante la discriminación desde una postura de privilegio - Arquine](#)

However, by 2023, the residents of the San Antonio Housing project felt increasingly neglected by the government. They encountered numerous challenges stemming from the lack of necessary social spaces for their social and economic development. For example, these communities are significantly distant from their previous traditional palafito housing areas, which led to conflict as families used to reside in the Cascajal Island sector. This allowed both men and women to meet their basic needs through nearby commercial opportunities, the tourist area, and the fishing and piangua zones. These communities leveraged various economic sectors to their advantage. However, those still engaged in fishing and relied on piangua collection have been forced to seek alternative economic activities (Interview with Jesús Alfonso Flórez López, 31.05.2023).

In this context, Jesús Alfonso Flórez López explains, the profound connection between the Bajamar communities and the sea, as well as their palafito settlements:

“that's one of the expressions of high conflict in the urban area, because the people who inhabit those lower tide zones or lands won from the sea maintain a permanent economic relationship

dynamic with the aquatic environment, fishing, and trading that catch within the city area. There have been relocation projects for these people, with the argument that these are unsafe zones, that accidents can happen at sea. For instance, there was a San Antonio Project where they relocated them to the outskirts of Buenaventura, far away from the sea... but the people didn't want to go there because it ultimately severed their connection to the everyday life by the sea, putting them in a situation where they had to travel from that place to the sea, kilometers away in practice, and pay for transportation. So, that's what the concept of lands won from the sea refers to.” (Interview with Jesús Alfonso Flórez López, 31.05.2023).



Figure 9: View of the planned San Antonio housing project. Retrieve from: Buenaventuraenlinea (08.2018)
<https://buenaventuraenlinea.com/proyecto-todos-san-antonio-se-busca-fortalecer-tejido-social-comunitario-buenaventura/>

Furthermore, another issue arose due to the limited operating hours of public transport from San Antonio to Cascajal Island. Unfortunately, Buenaventura's growth did not keep pace, leaving the main city's offices, health centers, tourism and businesses concentrated on Cascajal Island while residents of San Antonio remained marginalized on the city's outskirts. As an illustration, Leonard Renteria noted that when a resident of San Antonio needs medical attention, they are frequently forced to pay high taxi fares to reach to nearest hospital on Cascajal Island because of inadequate public transport system. Leonard added that this financial burden also impacts families' abilities to cover basic expenses such as a transport to send children to school, exacerbating their challenges (Interview with Leonard Renteria, 03.12.2023).



Figure 10: Google. (2023). Screenshot of Buenaventura, Colombia. Distance from Ciudadela San Antonio to Cascajal Islandmak [Screenshot]. Retrieved from Google Maps

According to Adriel Ruiz, many residents of San Antonio have persistently appealed to the local government to improve their living conditions, but their efforts have largely been in vain. Despite social initiatives and attempts to engage with the then- mayor Mr. Bartolo Valencia Ramos, their concerns appear to have been overlooked. In contrast to the broader Pacific region, where Buenaventura is viewed as a symbol of progress, residents of San Antonio feel abandoned by the state, left to navigate many unfulfilled promises. This sense of neglect reflects the frustrations, unmet expectations, and stagnant conditions endured by this local population, as discussed in more detail in section 2.2.1 on Political Mobilization for Sovereignty and identity of this MA thesis. During the interview with Angelica Mayolo, former Executive President of the Chamber of Commerce of Buenaventura, reflected on this matter, emphasizing the reasons behind the prolonged delay in the city's development and improvement of living conditions:

“No, what is truly expensive is the state's failure to establish basic conditions such as access to water, sewage, electricity, and security. Without these fundamental functions of the state in place, no investment will flow into Buenaventura. Secondly, there is evident inefficiency within local administrations and rampant corruption. Unfortunately, in Buenaventura, one is charged for every step of the process, from obtaining licenses to implementation. This institutional culture of inefficiency and corruption severely hampers progress. Thirdly, the lack of regulation regarding

prior consultation and collective decision-making is a significant obstacle. Many investors hesitate to invest in areas where they know prior consultation is required due to the complex limitations it imposes” (Interview with Angelica Mayolo, 10th of April 2023).

Buenaventura’s political activists, among them Adriel Ruiz, Yolanda Echeverry and Leonard Renteria, voiced their criticism of the port expansion project and its repercussions on the Bajamar residents. Adrien as a long-term political activist in the city, spoke with palpable frustration and indignation as he recounted the growing disappointment of the Bajamar locals with the developments in Port expansion in Buenaventura:

“The State operates in a disorderly, illegal, corrupt manner to seize these lands from people, to expand its mega projects, to develop its legal or illegal economies... What matters least are the communities that end up subjected to this. So, these lands are the way people have shaped the territory. They might be ugly – that's their aesthetic. They're not meant for one to live there, but for them to live there, but they belong to them. Moreover, they're by the sea. Who wouldn't want to live by the sea? Mobility, the economy is theirs... I can't be a fisherman living on the 10th floor of an apartment [referring to San Antonio housing complex]; it's their relationship, their cosmogony. It's everything for the people. Obviously, if they were in better conditions, better scenarios, better roads ... It's racist that the government is incapable of improving a house and instead of accepting it as a first step, it considers that people are there illegally” (Interview with Adriel Ruiz, 02.08.2023).

In addition, Yolanda Echeverry stated that the financial aid provided mainly in form of the purchasing of the palafitos housing by the government to the residents of Bajamar for their relocation to the proposed new San Antonio housing project was far from equitable.

When asked about the grievances voiced by locals in San Antonio, Angelica Mayolo, conveyed that the mayor’s administration dismissed these concerns as unfounded complaints originating from ungrateful and undereducated individuals. She noted that many government officials held the belief that residents of Buenaventura had become reliant on government handouts and would perpetually remain dissatisfied regardless of the assistance already extended to them.

This reaction is linked to the emergence of opportunistic land speculators during the initial phase of the estate boom caused by the proposal of the masterplan. These speculators thrived by leveraging political connections to secure preferential treatment, while community members of the black communities under law 70 sought to expedite prior consultation and collective decision-making processes. However, this does not account for why the collective demands of the Bajamar locals residing now in San Antonio, voiced through organizations such as PCN (Process of Black Communities) and the Buenaventura Civic Strike Committee, were dismissed (Interview with Yolanda Echeverry, 02.12.2022).

Adriel highlighted that the Bajamar communities were perceived as composed of people lacking education, organization, and awareness, leading them to believe that the residents were incapable of understanding their own best interests (Interview with Adriel Ruiz, 02.08.2023).

Adriel who sympathized with the plight of Bajamar people and was critical of government policies, exemplified this prejudice: *“ the government just said that the people want everything for free, they don't see how is racist that the government isn't capable of improving a house and instead of accepting it as a first step. The government said that the Bajamar territories are “illegal”. They say: “That's subhuman; I wouldn't live there” but they do live there because the state doesn't assist, doesn't build a boardwalk for people to live better, because what they want is to build a boardwalk for businessmen, restaurants...things for profit”*. (Interview with Adriel Ruiz, 02.08.2023).

This suggests that governmental authorities, even those within the local Buenaventura administration, who may have been sympathetic, dismissed the claims of the Bajamar residents. To less sympathetic officials, the protests and claims were viewed as a form of political manipulation.

However, as Leonard Renteria, noted during the interview, one advantage for the San Antonio community is that, unlike the Bajamar areas surrounding the port, they have thus far avoided armed conflict. The Bajamar areas have faced increased violence from various actors seeking to control these areas due to their proximity to the port. Instead, they enjoy a relatively calmer environment, though coexistence is not perfect. Leonard stated that there have been instances of violence, armed

actions, or threats within the new housing development, affecting the families' peace as well. Some residents expressed relief from the gunfights and explosive violence they would experience in their previous Bajamar neighborhoods, this being one of the few positive aspects of residing in San Antonio (Interview with Leonard Renteria, 03.12.2023).

In Buenaventura, the residents' dissatisfaction was intensified by the pervasive control exerted by Colombian soldiers and private security hired by the port. Upon arrival at Cascajal Island, one is met not only by port personnel but also Colombian military soldiers. Colombian soldiers patrol the coastal areas flanking the city, and the port itself is a tightly guarded security zone. Additionally, as previously mentioned, the areas surrounding the port are also heavily militarized by paramilitary groups (far-right oriented) and other violent factions seeking territorial control for drug trafficking purposes using the port. The Simon Bolivar highway which links the Port to the country's interior is lined with soldiers and military security checkpoints, this as part of my observations during my visit to Buenaventura in December 2022.

The new port expansion projects, along with the commodification and armed intervention and control of Buenaventura, have closed many local places that residents used to visit for leisure or social activities. During the interview with Yolanda Echeverry, she described how this regime of terror restricts people's daily movements and argument further elaborated by Jenss in her paper *"Global flows and everyday violence in urban space: The port-city of Buenaventura, Colombia."* (2020). Armed actors, for instance, forbid the local population from traveling between certain areas, creating an atmosphere of fear that deters people from venturing into specific parts of the city. This has led to the fragmentation of space, erasure of spatial memory, and disruption of everyday mobility (Jenss, 2020b). Under such conditions, locals are confined to certain areas and unable to move freely.

Daniela Mosquera narrated a personal encounter with the Bajamar communities that took place a few years back during her fieldwork research to illustrate this point: *"... one topic that I remember people talking about a lot during my fieldwork in Buenaventura, was the issue of the disappeared of people and how the expansion of the Port implied, especially in the San Antonio Bajamar area, a re-victimization. Families were relocated to another neighborhood also called San Antonio; they*

are still struggling to redefine the place where they were. I think these Bajamar territories are now areas where the Port is expanding, but there were many disappearances by paramilitary groups. So, the structures of the Port not only manage to somehow expand economic misery and inequality, but they have also signified for many people a re-victimization of the paramilitary violence that occurred. Furthermore, it extends to the denial of the people's ability to honor or search for the disappeared and the dead who were in the Bajamar areas". (Interview with Daniela Mosquera Camacho, 11.07.2023).

Overall, the narratives from Echeverry and Mosquera, show the complex interplay between urban development and social dislocation. The port's expansion, while economically significant for the country's economy, has come at a substantial social cost, revealing a dark side of progress where the human impacts have been overlooked.

5.3 Territorial boundaries, Security concerns, and the Vision for 2050: A Battle over Autonomy and Identity

The vision of creating a Barcelona-like hub on the periphery of the Colombian within the territories of black communities faced significant hurdles. In frontier regions such as the Pacific, where the nation's boundaries are both defined and contested, security concerns and economic interests intertwined in a complex manner (Jamali, 2013). Understanding this entanglement is crucial to grasp how nations and territories are conceptualized and shaped in countries like Colombia.

To ensure national stability and prosperity, Colombian authorities recognized that mere visions and aspirations for a changed geography were inadequate. Given the Pacific black communities' long history of resisting external rule - dating back to the colonial era and more recently during their struggle for Law 70 of 1993 - officials sought to secure both themselves and their concerned public about the security of the Pacific region. They emphasized that the displacement of the black communities in Bajamar, as part of Buenaventura's reorganization, was not only beneficial for these communities but also important for the nation's long term survival and economic growth. The public was led to believe that foreign interests of countries such as Spain, China, the USA, South Korea, and other trading partners was important for the country's economic development. This narrative framed Buenaventura as a valuable, albeit previously underdeveloped, location with

immense potential, thus providing a justification for its militarization and the accompanying violence to safeguard this “treasure” (Jenss, 2020b).

Indeed, Colombian military forces ramped up their control over Buenaventura by justifying the appropriation of Bajamar lands in the name of the megaproject “Buenaventura 2050”. Scholars and activist groups, including CHMCH (2015), Jenss (2020a; 2020b), Lombard et al. (2021) and Zeiderman (2016) and the PCN have analyzed the link between violence crime, and the port expansion plans. The Bajamar territories with their palafito housing surrounding the port, have become battlegrounds for economic, ecological, and political forces. The characterization of these areas as “informal”, “dangerous” and “inhabitable” due to their racialized positionality as “Others” have justified urban plans like the Master Plan 2050, which aims to relocate the coastal population (Zeiderman, 2016).

In tandem with promoting Buenaventura as a commercial trading hub in the Colombian Pacific, there was a marked increase in militarization across the Pacific Coast. Beyond the existing military check points and naval facilities, former Minister of National Defense Juan Carlos Pinzon announced in 2014 the deployment of additional Urban Special Forces units and further militarization efforts in specific port sectors and areas of the region (Ministro de Defensa Nacional, 2014). When some locals questioned the discrepancy between official rhetoric and reality on the ground, the Ministry of Defense provided nuanced explanations. One argument made was that additional military installations would actually support the socio-economic development of Buenaventura.

An article by Radio Nacional de Colombia in 2014, stated that in this year, the Defense Minister Juan Carlos Pinzon made the decision to send over 700 uniformed personnel to militarize the port of Buenaventura. The article described the move followed a Human Rights Watch report highlighting the difficult situation. The article shows the complexity of urban militarization and its limited effectiveness, while Human Rights Watch emphasizes the need for social investment over military intervention.

This security- focused development strategy and the resulting armed control of the region stemmed from a historical legacy of colonial policies and the exploitation of the Pacific region's abundant resources. Colonial infrastructure projects such as mining infrastructure, such as gold mines and processing facilities, the development of Buenaventura as a port in order to send gold back to Spain, contributing to the empire's economic power (Friedemann, 1974) (see Chapter 3, 3.3 section).

Spanish authorities historically regarded the Pacific region and its indigenous inhabitants – along with the Africans brought as slaves- as an uninhabited and barbaric territory (Friedemann, 1974). They believed these communities needed to be either peacefully integrated or subdued through force for the broader imperial agenda (Friedemann, 1974). For instance, on the ceremony for the handover of the Buenaventura Maritime terminal to the private company: Regional Port Society and announced investments of US\$24.8 million in the port in 1994¹¹, former president Cesar Gaviria Trujillo urged the black communities to embrace the presence of multinational companies and foreign investors as essential for the economic wellbeing of the Colombian nation. This sentiment is echoed in an article of Soy Buenaventura newspaper (2012), which includes the following quote:

“Without any triumphalism, I would dare to affirm that the city of Buenaventura is entering a new stage of progress. In the new arrangement, the municipality will not only participate with 15 percent of this partnership but will also receive 20 percent of the consideration paid by the Regional Port Society of Buenaventura for the use of beaches, an amount that totals \$465,000 annually for 20 years,” emphasized the president. Nations who received with open arms foreign investment succeed” (Soy de Buenaventura, 2012, April 11).)

During the interview, Yolanda stated that black communities' leaders and activists at the time, were not deterred by former president Gaviria claims. His warning to the black community's leadership provoked a strong civic strike, she stated:

¹¹ This ceremony marked the end of a chapter in the history of Colombian ports. At the time, the Buenaventura Terminal was the last one in Colombia to remain in state hands after the government had transferred the management of the ports of the country to the private sector, in compliance with Law 01 of 1991.

"I believe it's because of the significant disparity compared to other cities in the country, and because wealth flows through here, so that has caused discomfort. There have been expressions of this since 1968, the year of the first civic strike. Then came the one in 1998 after the privatization of the port..." (Interview with Yolanda Echeverry, 02.12.2022).

Yolanda and Adriel as social leaders of Buenaventura argued that the government's vision for developing Buenaventura was an effort to undermine the identity of black communities and to solidified the control of both government and private interest over their ancestral territories. Their concern focused on the deliberate strategy of encouraging a massive influx of people from the interior of Colombia and other countries into Buenaventura as industrial and maritime laborers and workers. For instance, Tomas Quinones, one of the interviewees for this thesis, born and raised in Buenaventura and former employee of the port pointed out that the majority of executives in the port came from regions in the interior of the country or even from other countries. He emphasized that he believes that if there were more executives from Buenaventura itself, it could have a positive impact on reducing the frequency of civic strikes and contributing to a sense of belonging, he explained:

"And most likely, for example, I am fully convinced that if the quota of executives in the port terminals were more from Buenaventura, it could influence fewer protests. Because when there is more representation from the people of Buenaventura, and people, for example, in the case of Victor Julio Gonzales [Former General Manager of the Buenaventura Regional Port Society by 2014], who is someone that people really like because he started from scratch, then Victor Julio becomes a reference for a resident of Buenaventura who fights for their rights... even when he's not the manager of the port society, he's still concerned about Buenaventura's issues."

The argument in this quotation suggests that leadership with deep connections to the communities - leaders who share their history and aspirations - might cultivate greater trust and cooperation between the residents of Buenaventura and the organizations managing the city's development. *"No, normally they come from the interior of the country for the case of the Port Society. In the last year, they brought in 1 or 2 people from outside the country, I think one from Costa Rica and*

another from Panama, and some young people from Panama. I say, 'Wow, those young people from Panama.' But in Buenaventura, there are people who can do it, even for positions that aren't even executive, they are high-level operational positions that can handle it" (Interview with Tomas Quinonez, 02.06.2023)

Adriel also cautioned that if the Buenaventura port were to develop as envisioned by the government and the Sociedad Portuaria, the black communities might end up as a minority in their own territory due to demographic shifts. He demanded that the black communities should be given full control of their own territories and coastline, as well as natural resources and sovereignty over the governance of their territories (Interview with Adriel Ruiz, 2nd of August 2023). Buenaventura thus became an important symbol of black communities' resistance in the Pacific for the defense of their territories. While the developmental model persists in the city, the opportunity for exploring and implementing alternative visions of territory and community is more feasible than ever (Lombard et al., 2021).

Utilizing von Schnitzler's concept of "Democracy's infrastructure," (2016) sheds light on the socio-political dimensions of the port expansion project and its influence on democratic narratives, underscoring the intricacies of democratic decision-making amid this infrastructure development. Moreover, Harvey and Knox's (2015) analysis of infrastructure expertise and power relations are discernible in the responses from the Bajamar communities to the proposed megaproject, revealing power dynamics and socio-spatial segregation. The cultural and symbolic significance linked to the port expansion project is evidenced by the disruption of the San Antonio community's connection to the sea following relocation, presenting varying interpretations and cultural perspectives regarding the impacts of development projects. The temporal aspects of the project are depicted through the initiation and progression of the Ciudadela San Antonio project, illustrating ongoing effects on community dynamics. Lastly, the concept of "suspended presents" by Carse and Kneas (2019) encapsulates the residents' experiences of anticipation, hope, anxiety, and disillusionment regarding government promises and subsequent neglect, emphasizing the uncertainties faced by these communities. These concepts provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics of infrastructure development as discussed in this section.

5.4 Envisioning Tomorrow: The City of 2050

Drawing on insights from Carse & Kneas (2019), contemporary Buenaventura's landscape offers an illustration of the temporal complexities embedded in infrastructure processes. By my visit in December 2022, it became evident that the disparity between Colombia's aspirations to transform Buenaventura into a Barcelona like - with a developmentalist model and the reality of its multi-ethnic landscape, as outlined in the 1991 Colombian constitution, remains too vast to overcome. The presence of unfinished structures and abandoned projects such as redevelopment of hospitals and recreational areas such as green zones serve as a tangible reminder of the temporalities inherent within infrastructure endeavors. Just as Carse & Kneas argue, infrastructure projects unfold across many temporal scales, encompassing visions of progress, present social realities, and historical legacies.

Not to my surprise, during my visit, it was obvious that the juxtaposition of grand aspirations for urban transformation with the stark realities of incomplete infrastructure highlights the disconnect between temporal imaginaries and lived experiences on the ground. While Colombian politicians and stakeholders may envision a future similar to global cities, the unfinished state of infrastructure reflects the enduring challenges and complexities that shape the local context. During my visit, I witnessed numerous incomplete residential projects, the emergence of craters and potholes that have developed in the newly constructed, wide-lined avenues and roads in Buenaventura, for instance in the main Simon Bolivar highway. I suppose, likely attributed to low quality materials for these endeavors. Additionally, in certain areas, accumulated garbage and materials from the beach and these suspended infrastructure initiatives within the Master plan "Buenaventura 2050", carried by the wind, have engulfed unused dual-carriageways, rendering it difficult to cross under such massive mounds of materials. It is clear then, that former president Santos and his supporters overlooked the fundamental realities that Colombia neither mirrors a Barcelona-like city nor counts with optimal living conditions for the population.



Figure 11: San Juan River flooding in Buenaventura. Q'hubo Cali (2022). Retrieve from: <https://www.qhubocali.com/asi-paso/via-a-buenaventura-cerrada-por-desbordamiento-del-rio-dagua/>

The streets of the city remain in dire condition due to prolonged neglect and suspended infrastructure projects. In October 2022, the San Juan River flooded, rising 1-5 meters above its usual level, and inundated neighborhoods, affecting almost 190 black and indigenous families. The flooding turned areas in cesspools, exacerbating by newly constructed roads and buildings that blocked natural drainage paths. Emergency response measure was inadequate to handle this crisis (Q'hubo Cali, 2022; Semana, 2022).

This year 2024, heavy rains in February caused the Yurumangui River to overflow, displacing almost 700 families and damaging several homes. The persistent neglect of infrastructure in low-lying neighborhoods, where many Bajamar communities still reside despite the ongoing pressures, has led to repeated humanitarian crises. The combined impacts of these events highlight the urgent need for stable infrastructure planning and implementation to prevent such crises.

Since the initiation of the megaproject in 2017, Adriel Ruiz observed how swiftly time seems to pass with each colossal cargo vessel docking at the port, spiking intense activity throughout the city. The ongoing construction by 2022 at the time of our interview, of a new dual carriageway for the Buenaventura port access road, has intensify the congestion. Heavy trucks with driver facing

significant delays exacerbated by an unfinished highway meant to connect the port with the Simon Bolivar main highway. Land use disputes with black communities around the areas meant to the construction of the highway, further complicate the situation, as stakeholders must go through Law 70 processes. In this year, 2017, the restrictions during this period, caused daily losses of millions of pesos for transporters. Furthermore, during the period, landslides on the Buga-Buenaventura route have added to the chaos, rerouting approximately 1.000 stranded trucks through Cali, leading to additional traffic jams (El Tiempo, 2017, March 14). In that year, the port's storage capacity reached its limit exceeded by 36% and ongoing issues were attributed to both inadequate infrastructure and environmental challenges. By my interview with Former Chamber of Commerce Executive President Angélica Mayolo Obregón in 2023, she highlighted that both local and national populations are anxiously awaiting the promised developments for the city, which even by six years later still remain stalled (Interview with Angélica Mayolo, April 10, 2023).

Occasionally, high-profile government officials, such as the former Colombian Vice president, German Vargas Lleras and the Minister of Finance and Public Credit Mauricio Cardenas Santamaria, would visit Buenaventura with great fanfare. They delivered inspiring speeches about the city's future but would return to the capital city, Bogota, the following day (El Pais, 2017).

For example, Adriel recalls that during the “Buenaventura 2050” official inauguration in 2015, importers were reluctant to book cargo for Buenaventura due to the inadequate size of the access channel, particularly for TCBUEN port. This issue was compounded by growing size of ships and the ongoing expansion of the Panama Canal's larger access channel which took place on June 26th, 2016. Adriel recounts that in this inauguration of the megaproject, Alvaro Rodríguez, president of the Ventura Group¹², Colombian organization in charge of the external commerce of Buenaventura. Stated that once the Simon Bolivar highway is done, things will greatly improve for Buenaventura's ports, and that thanks to the former Colombian Vice president and his office in expediting the projects in the city, Buenaventura will become a major port hub, and would feature five port terminals.

¹² The Ventura Group comprises firms such as Inatlantic S.A and OPP Graneles S.A (both port operators); Sociedad Portuaria Grupo Portuario S.A, BGP Logistics (cargo transporter), and the Etikaverde Foundation.



Figure 12. President Santos, accompanied by Governor Dilian Francisca Toro, inaugurated the Aguadulce Port. A port equipped with four cranes for 'super-postpanamax' ships¹³ (El País, 2017). Retrieved from: <https://www.elpais.com.co/valle/presidente-santos-inauguro-puerto-maritimo-de-aguadulce-en-buenaventura.html>

Finally, by the end of 2017, former president Juan Manuel Santos inaugurated the Aguadulce port in the city, in order to solve the issue above. With an investment of over 650 million Colombian pesos, the port is now equipped with four cranes for handling “super -postpanamax” ships, at the time, it was expected to handle 600.000 containers annually and accommodate vessels of up to 14.000 containers per trip. In this inauguration, Santos gave a public speech emphasizing that the port will enhance the Pacific’s economic opportunities and stimulate international trade, making Colombia more competitive (El Pais, 2017).

This narrative of progress for Buenaventura, continued in my interview with Liborio Cuellar, current General Manager of the Buenaventura Port Society (Sociedad Portuaria de Buenaventura) mid of 2023, when he stated that : *“For example, in the past month of May (2023), through negotiations and meetings with the shipping line Hapag-Lloyd, we managed to bring the new service of this line, which is the MSW (Mediterranean, Caribbean, Central America, West Coast South America Express). This line service enables Buenaventura to have a connection with European countries. These types of efforts have contributed to significant recognitions. Have you seen? We were recently acknowledged from the World Bank, naming it one of the 20 most*

¹³ Super-postpanamax' refer to large container ships that are large to go through the original Panama Canal locks but can fit through the newer, larger locks of the expanded Panama Canal completed in 2016.

efficient ports in Latin America. This achievement makes our port operations as an international benchmark and puts Buenaventura on the map.” (Interview with Liborio Cuella, 20.07.2023).

The flooding of these rivers and the traffic jams as well as the struggles of the port to be truly competitive to improve the economic and social conditions serve as concrete examples of the consequences of infrastructure development on vulnerable populations. This aligns with the examination of power relations and socio-spatial segregation by Harvey and Knox (2015). The floodings not only highlights the physical risks posed by this ongoing infrastructure project but also exposes underlying power dynamics that influence decision-making processes and resource allocation in Buenaventura.

Brian Larkin's (2013) perspective on infrastructure as a dynamic area where political and symbolic meanings are negotiated offers a framework for understanding the complexities of Buenaventura's development trajectory. The delayed completion of critical infrastructure projects, such as the promised highway, illustrates how political negotiations and power struggles can shape the implementation of infrastructure initiatives. It underscores the importance of considering the political dimensions of infrastructure development beyond technical considerations.

Finally, Adriel Ruiz's account of ceremonial events such as the visit of the former president Santos surrounding megaproject inaugurations resonates with Carse and Kneas's (2019) concept of "suspended presents." The discrepancy between grandiose promises of future development and the persistent challenges faced by local communities reflects a broader pattern of unfulfilled expectations and disillusionment. This highlights the gap between government narratives of progress and the lived realities of Buenaventura's residents, emphasizing the need for a critical examination of development discourses and their impact on marginalized communities.

6. CONCLUSION

The continuing narrative of infrastructure development in Buenaventura reflects a reality where the process of “development” through megaprojects, strays from expected outcomes. The Colombian government officials, similar to their peers in other nations, frequently seek to recreate idealized neoliberal visions, often to the detriment of local communities. They orchestrate elaborated public events such as inaugurations intended to captivate the public imagination, showcasing grandiose efforts to persuade citizens of their capability to bring nationwide prosperity.

However, the consequences of such megaprojects in Buenaventura extend far beyond the spectacle of grand gestures and empty promises. They tend to sow the seeds of political and social turmoil, exacerbating pre-existing ethnic, class, and racial divides. These disparities endure long after these megaprojects have disappeared from public attention, imposing significant hardships on local communities. The impact of these development efforts persists, leaving behind a legacy of inequality and the disruption that its perpetuated to affect residents (Jamali, 2013).

The story of Buenaventura shows the harsh reality of development policies in many parts of the global south. The people and places affected by these large scale infrastructure projects do not merely conform to a simplistic narrative of progress. Instead, they are dynamic actors who respond to changing circumstances, attempting to protect their interests and preserve their identities in the face of globalization.

This narrative of development challenges us to question not only the promises made by those in power but also the broader frameworks through which we understand and analyze these complex processes. It necessitates a closer look at the human and social costs linked to the execution of large-scale projects and underscores the persistent challenges faced by communities affected by these initiatives. This serves as a reminder that impacts of development are frequently more complex and lasting than the grandeur of the projects themselves, as Ferguson highlighted in 1999 (Ferguson, 1999).

During the literature review, the narratives of infrastructure development in places such as Gwadar (Pakistan) (Jamali, 2023), Narmada Valley (India) (Baviskar, 2015) and Buenaventura, collectively show a broader pattern of socio-political dynamics surrounding the narrative of megaprojects. It is evident that across diverse cultural and geographical contexts, aspirations for modernization and progress are in alignment with displacement, inequality, and ecological degradation. Political elites influenced by western neoliberal ideologies, organize schemes to appease global capital, at the expense of vulnerable communities. Yet, as evidenced by the resistance and ambivalence among local communities, the promises of prosperity remain confusing, and the legacies of these large-scale projects endure long after they fade from public discourse. Cases such as the ones in Pakistan, India and Colombia serve as reminders of the intricate interplay between society, economy, and power in shaping trajectories of development in the contemporary globalized world.

Moreover, the examination of Buenaventura's port expansion project through the lens of the anthropology of infrastructure yields profound insights into the complex interplay between development initiatives, societal structures, power dynamics, and the lived experiences of marginalized communities. Leveraging the perspectives of scholars such as Brian Larkin, Ashley Carse, Penelope Harvey and Hannah Knox, and Natalia Buier, this thesis delved into the question: *How does the Buenaventura port expansion project impact the experiences of belonging and identity of black communities?* While the thesis falls short of providing definitive answers amidst its analysis, it utilized insights from the anthropology of infrastructure to shed light on the factors such as colonial legacies, global economic trends, and regional dynamics that provided a nuanced understanding of development discourses and their impact on marginalized populations such as the black communities of this city.

Brian Larkin's (2013) perspective on infrastructure as a dynamic arena for negotiating political and symbolic meanings offers a valuable framework for understanding the complexities of Buenaventura's development trajectory. The delayed completion of critical infrastructure projects, such as the promised highway, serves as a poignant illustration of how political negotiations and power struggles can shape the implementation of such initiatives. This underscores the importance of transcending mere technical considerations and delving into the political dimensions of infrastructure development.

Furthermore, the social leader Adriel Ruiz's examination of inflated rhetoric and ceremonial events surrounding the "Buenaventura 2050" megaproject inauguration, resonated with Carse and Kneas's (2019) concept of "suspended presents," highlights the stark disparity between grandiose promises of future development and the persistent challenges faced by local communities. Such analyses emphasize the critical need for an understanding of development discourses and their impact on marginalized populations.

Utilizing von Schnitzler's concept of "Democracy's infrastructure" (2016) sheds light on the socio-political dimensions of the port expansion project, illustrating its influence on democratic narratives and decision-making processes. Similarly, perspectives from Harvey and Knox (2015) regarding infrastructure expertise and power relations illuminate the responses of Bajamar communities to the proposed megaproject, revealing underlying power dynamics and socio-spatial segregation.

Moreover, the cultural and symbolic significance attached to the port expansion project, as evidenced by the disruption of the San Antonio community's connection to the sea following relocation, underscores the importance of considering diverse cultural perspectives and interpretations in development initiatives. The temporal aspects of the project, depicted through the initiation and progression of the Ciudadela San Antonio project, further emphasize its ongoing effects on community dynamics.

Drawing on literature and expert interviews, this thesis uncovered the multifaceted responses of local communities to the port expansion project. While some residents view it as a chance for economic growth and improved infrastructure, others fear displacement, loss of identity and their livelihoods. Although this developmentalist model continues in the city, there is now greater potential for exploring and realizing alternative visions of territory (Lombard et al., 2021).

By examining the socio-cultural implications of the port expansion project, including its impact on community dynamics, identity formation, and social cohesion, this thesis delved into the lived experiences of ordinary residents. Insights from the anthropology of infrastructure revealed the complex ways in which individuals and communities navigate the changing landscape of

Buenaventura, negotiating their sense of belonging and identity amidst the rapid modernization changes proposed by the “*Buenaventura 2050*” project.

In synthesizing these perspectives, it becomes evident that Buenaventura's development landscape is characterized by a myriad of complexities and contradictions. The concept of "suspended presents" encapsulates the experiences of anticipation, hope, anxiety, and disillusionment faced by residents, underscoring the uncertainties inherent in government promises and subsequent neglect.

By thoroughly examining these research questions and drawing on insights from the anthropology of infrastructure and related ethnographic studies, this MA thesis has contributed to understanding Buenaventura's port expansion project and its implications for the local communities. By addressing the hopes, fears, and lived experiences of residents, this thesis has shed light on the complex dynamics shaping Buenaventura's development landscape.

One of the key contributions of the anthropology of infrastructure to this MA thesis is its emphasis on the agency and voices of affected communities. By focusing on the experiences of marginalized groups, this approach questions prevailing narratives and promotes a more inclusive and equitable perspective. In the case of Buenaventura, insights from the anthropology of infrastructure have shed light on how the port expansion project affects the livelihoods, identities, and aspirations of local black communities, highlighting the need for a more participatory and community-driven approach to infrastructure development.

Moreover, the anthropology of infrastructure has provided valuable insights into the broader socio-political, economic, and environmental contexts in which infrastructure projects are situated. By examining the historical legacies of colonialism, the dynamics of power and inequality, and the interconnectedness of societal structures, this approach offers an understanding of Buenaventura's development landscape.

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