"Afro-Colombian Women's Collectives as a Tool of Agency in the Montes de María Region"

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Abstract

This study focuses on Black women's collectives in the Montes de María region of the Atlantic Coast of Colombia. Women serve as agents of change who improve the lives of their families and communities, as seen in the work of Vicenta Moreno Hurtado, who develops the idea that in response to trauma, Black women tell their stories as active agents of recovery and betterment. In this essay, the work of women's collectives demonstrates the willpower to move through trauma and overcome daily and lifelong hardships. Data from interviews will link current-day practices to ancestral memories, to show how the application of women's work and societal traditions support community survival from the period of enslavement to current times of harsh injustices. This essay will present how art functions as therapy, as a unifier, as a messenger, and as a form of income that allows Black women to accomplish their goals and dreams, and how working in unison allows Black women to become agents of change for themselves and others.

Black Women's Work

I am a proud Black woman, a fan of blackness everywhere, and I hold a high respect for Colombia's blackness which I was introduced to in 2005, through 5 remarkable Afro-Colombian women educators. They were on a U.S. tour to discuss the state of Afro-Colombians and their objectives with Etno-Education: Dorina Hernández Palomino[1] and Miladis Vanegas Batista[2] hailed from the Montes de María region - Palenque de San Basilio and María la Baja, respectively. They discussed the legacy of enslavement, the cultural heritage maintained in the Afro-Colombian regions, and the importance of working collectively to resolve issues of racism, discrimination, exclusion, and violence through fair and inclusive education. Each of them talked of participating in their communities via various groups and organizations, such as the Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN), a national organization that acts as an anchor for collectives and communities of African descent. As members of community collectives, these women represented the voices and cultures of their regions. I learned from these women that Black Colombian womanhood is inherent to the embodiment of pride, dignity, community, heritage, culture, intelligence, and drive which inspired a larger research project which is the source of this essay.

1 Dorina is an educator, cultural activist, community leader, and politician. She has participated in many committees for the political, educational, and social advancement of Palenqueros, raizales, Afro-Colombians, and negros. In 2022, she won the vote as the first congresswoman from Palenque de San Basilio.

2 Miladis is the coordinator and academic leader of the Ethno-educational Technical Agricultural Institution for Rural Development, an elementary school in María la Baja. She is also the financial director of the Manuel Zapata Olivella Institute of Education and Research, one of the few institutions in the country that has a program to train future teachers in ethno-education.

For the women of the collectives in the Montes de María region, generational and ancestral forms of resistance shape their inclination to protect by any means necessary. They embody the label of builder, creator, keeper of the culture, and healer - all elements of resistance. These women have been traumatized both individually and ancestrally (their mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, etc.), and have been taught ways to resist and to pass down such practices. In her master's thesis, "Between Dignity and Death: Black Women, Patriarchal Domination and Geographic Strategies of Resistance in a Working-Class Neighborhood in Santiago de Cali", Vicenta Moreno Hurtado discusses Black Women's resistance through agency. Black women employ "collective resistance" and "put at stake their life-creating bodies, their ancestral traditions, their games, artistic expressions, their capacities for dialogue, their solidarities, to create other dynamics in the streets divided by invisible borders dominated by state and para-state masculine power" (Moreno Hurtado 17). In this article I examine Afro-Colombian women's agency amidst trauma and delineate their "collective resistance" as it is demonstrated in ancestral traditions, artistic expressions, solidarities and communication with each other and non-participants.

In *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, Dr. Joy DeGruy Leary explores the manifestations of generational trauma throughout the African Diaspora in the individuals and families of descendants of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. She defines "Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome" (PTSS) in her book as "a condition that exists when a population has experienced multigenerational trauma resulting from centuries of slavery and continues to experience oppression and institutionalized racism today" (125). While Dr. DeGruy Leary discusses the "issues of abuse, ineffectual parenting, violence, and educational disillusionment in the African American[3] communities", this article will present what has been created, built, and passed down by these women, as children of the enslaved to resist violations and effects of trauma (124,125). As the Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome applies to the Afro-Colombian populations of this work, the article looks to highlight the solution-based activities of the collectives of women who have been affected by multigenerational trauma as a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and colonialism.

Continuity of African knowledge

As a result of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, Colombia received and retained several million captured Africans through the main port of Cartagena de Indias, making it one of Latin America's blackest countries. For four centuries, men, women, and children were brought to Colombia from West and Central West Africa, and they brought along their cultural traditions. Each generation of African descendants in Colombia, now popularly identified as Afro-Colombians, has fought for freedom and survival both physically and mentally. Physically, they planned and executed revolts and escapes, consequently forming sites of independence known in Colombia as "palenques." Mentally, they found solace in their beliefs, cultural practices, and metaphysical connections with the spirit world. Much of the psychological survival and liberation was carried out physically through dance, music, song, and other cultural manifestations, which still exist today. The West and Central West Africans[4] held on to their knowledge,

3 I apply African American and Black in a Diasporic sense to represent African descendants of the that were captured and enslaved in the Americas and beyond during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

4 "These enslaved people initially came from cultures such as Cape Verde, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Arará, Mina, Carabalí, Congo and Angola … many of which corre-

beliefs, and traditions, and passed them on for centuries, resulting in a mixture of cultures, languages, rhythms, and philosophies now witnessed in the cities, "pueblos," and "palenques" of Colombia.

The African impact and influence permeate through Colombian culture in the sounds, aesthetics, movement, philosophies, and much more. This is observed in the knowledge of nature, plants, lunar cycles, flora and fauna, and waterways which have lent to the cultivation of food, agricultural planning, creation of instruments, and construction of shelter that have nourished and protected thousands of people. Some examples are: knowing when to cut wood for making a drum based on the lunar cycle; understanding when and where to plant crops based on the quality of the land and water; creating tools from nature; and knowing the quality of the air for precipitation and cultivation. The beliefs are infused in the singing, the music, the dancing, the daily, weekly, and yearly rituals, ceremonies of prayer, mourning, and celebrating life and people. The infusion of beliefs can be heard in the cries of the Lumbalú of Palenque de San Basilio during mourning and observed in the use of amulets for protection worn by children and adults in San Basilio de Palenque and María la Baja.

Bernice Reagon Johnson, an African American freedom singer, composer, social activist, founding member of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and founder of the women's a cappella group Sweet Honey in the Rock speaks to women's work in sustaining traditions in her chapter "The Making of Cultural Workers",

> Within the story of the African diaspora, there is the opportunity to see a process of continuance and transformation at work among women defining their people and their children in new ways. That definition disrupted and threw into severe trauma the cultural practices that had been nursed in African societies. Mothering, therefore, required a kind of nourishing that would both provide the food and stamina for survival within a cruel slave society and the passing on of traditions that would allow for the development of a community that was not only of, but also beyond, the slave society. These women had to take what they were given from their mothers and fathers and make up a few things. Nurturing was not only reconciling what was passed to them with the day-to-day reality but also sifting and transforming this experience to feed this child, unborn, this new African American community, in preparation for what it would face. (273)

The culture of working as collectives, of using skills and traditions along with the determination to repair what is broken, has been the source of survival allowing Black women to resist racism, sexism, violence, exile, rejection, neglect, and other forms of harm. This concept is found in my statement that "African traditions have lasted for reasons of memory, resistance, and survival in the hearts and minds of Africans[5] in the Diaspora." (Walton 151) Furthermore, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn has found in her research on the lives of enslaved women of African descent that they had two consistent goals, "developing survival strategies and encouraging self-reliance through female networks" (217). We can see that "through oppression, invisibilization, and trauma, they remain steadfast in expressing who they are in all

sponded to the cultural traits of the Bantu linguistic family that has many linguistic traits such as the palenquera language (Hernández Cassiani 97).

5 I use the term "Afro-" interchangeably with African to discuss Afro-Colombians, defined by Ali Mazrui as "Africans of the Blood but not of the soil" (185 Adibe). This refers to those whose ancestors are from Africa and especially those whose ancestors were enslaved during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

aspects of society" as prevalent in the lives of these women in Colombia (Walton 151).

The resistance that undergirds Afro-Colombian culture continues after the state-mandated abolition of slavery, in the ongoing battle for human rights and social justice.[6] Afro-Colombians have been living on territories of their ancestors who many times remained near plantation lands or in maroon towns and the legal struggle for land rights has been difficult and violent. Regarding the collective of Mampuján, as their African ancestors from centuries before, they were forced from their lands, violated, and traumatized. But their resolve to survive and to protect carried them to a place of healing and restoration. They never forgot who they were and moreover used this as an impetus for building and rebuilding a life in their new spaces. Not only did they rebuild but they healed themselves and others concurrently. This healing was necessary to move forward and beyond the space of victimization to a space of agency. This space of taking control of their destinies.

This article is a product of my fieldwork as a U.S. Fulbright scholar during the 2021-2022 academic year. I wanted to learn more about Afro-Colombian communities that aren't popular in scholarly publications, videos, and books. I wanted to highlight the rich history and voices of the myriad of communities borne of maroonage, resistance, cultural preservation, and triumph. Thus, in 2021 I embarked on fieldwork involving participant observation and interviews in the communities of María La Baja, San Onofre, and Palenque de San Basilio. These towns are located on the Atlantic side of Colombia more often referred to as the Caribbean coast in the two departments of Bolívar (María La Baja & Palenque de San Basilio) and Sucre (San Onofre). They are one to two hours southeast of Cartagena which is the nearest large city and anchor of the colonial and post-colonial history of the region.

My selection of these three towns is directly linked to liberation routes and the intentional preservation of Africana thought and culture in maroonage. Initially I did not know that the three towns I selected were part of a maroon network and was informed that they are part of Los Montes de María (the María Hills) where many maroon towns were founded. I was informed of this connection by historian and Palenquero, Alfonso Cassiani Herrera, author of several key texts and articles such as, *Palenque Magno: Resistencias y luchas libertarias del Palenque de la Matuna a San Basilio Magno de 1599 a 1714 (2014)* and *De la historia negra: símbolo, cosmovisión y resistencia*, (2014). In the first book mentioned, Cassiani Herrera states that "The maroons of the María hills were the ones who individually and collectively made the constitution of Palenque [de San Basilio] possible" (50). He further concludes that "San Basilio de Palenque, formed out of a nucleus of a population in the ancestral territory of the Montes de María, with descendants in Cartagena, Barranquilla, Maicao, and Caracas, is one of the main strongholds of the diaspora of African descendant communities in the world. Its historical, political, economic, social, cultural, and linguistic legacy constitutes one of the vital riches of the memory of the communities of African descendants" (Cassiani Herrera 164-165). The history of maroonage in the area has been documented by several authors[7] outlining

6 According to the World Report for Colombia 2022, "Civilians in various parts of the country suffered serious abuses at the hands of National Liberation Army (ELN) guerrillas, FARC dissidents, and paramilitary successor groups. Human rights defenders, journalists, Indigenous and Afro-Colombian leaders, and other community activists face pervasive death threats and violence. The government has taken insufficient and inadequate steps to protect them." Human Rights Watch https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/colombia

7 As listed by Cassiani Herrera, historian María Cristina Navarrete Peláez has numerous texts that discuss maroons, palenques, and Blacks in Colombia, as well as the historian Borrego Plá, who "in 1973, gave the first

the connection between Cartagena de Indias and the route of liberation to the palenques or maroon towns of the Montes de María (María Hills).

I spoke with many individuals and groups that were involved in maintaining the history and cultural traditions of their towns and a portion of my visits were with women's collectives. The three collectives are: (1) Asociación de Mujeres Tejiendo Sueños y Sabores de Paz, (2) Mujeres Productoras del Puerto Santander, y (3) Asociación de Mujeres para el Desarrollo Integral de Palenque: Kasimba de Sueños. The women of these three groups are leaders, thinkers, and self-determined individuals. They set out to protect their families and in doing so applied their cultural norms of working together to resolve their problems.

Moreno Hurtado describes the Afro-Colombian women of the Aguablanca district in Cali, Colombia, whom I associate with the Afro-Colombian women of the Montes de María region. In my interviews, the women shared doing the same things as the women in Cali as forms of resistance, protection, and survival. Though these groups are in different parts of the country, there very well could have been some sharing between the groups as they organized, and I suggest a further connection to their African societal structure of communal life as part of the reasoning for this semblance of activities between the women's collectives:

> …women permanently rebuild alternatives of life, creating bonds of solidarity, recreating the streets through art, games, and oral tradition; fostering spaces for conversation, twinning with one another, proposing forms of solidarity economy, challenging individualism and fostering collective constructions, mingas (community labor paid in food); as well as embracing their ancestry (x, author's translation).

Similarly, the women of the Montes de María region fortify and rebuild the lives of their families and communities by applying ancestral methods, establishing sisterhood, and employing 'solidarity economy' in varied ways of protesting injustice.

Ancestral Memory: What They Knew and Remembered

According to Moreno Hurtado, Afro-Colombian women pull from Ancestral Memory to organize collectively, and they make use of their creativity to produce art. By working in unison, they are able to affect change towards the injustices of their community:

> The different strategies of resistance proposed by the women not only account for creativity and ability to transform their realities, but also the close ancestral bond that traverses each of their proposals, giving off a connotation of political autonomy to reconstruct the contexts of injustice. The women recognize that the organizational processes that they themselves have built, has given them the possibility of transforming their collective imagination, recovering their memory, and recognizing themselves as people who contribute to the construction of their communities (164, author's translation).

The organizational processes - as a collective, allow them to have power in numbers. Through sisterhood and creativity, they transform their realities by pulling on Ancestral Memory.

"What they knew and remembered" (Walton 156) shows up in local customs beyond socioeconomic survival and

version of the history of maroonage in the María mountains in his work, "Palenques de negros en Cartagena de Indias a fines del siglo XVII" (38 Cassiani Herrera).

resistance. For example, this comes through in the songs of the Lumbalú ceremony in Palenque de San Basilio and in the movement of the hips in the Bullerengue dance of María La Baja, two traditions that mark death and birth respectively. Both Lumbalú[8] and Bullerengue originate from Palenque de San Basilio, a maroon town inhabited by Africans who were able to maintain many ancestral traditions. Traditions upheld and passed down by the women linked to proclaiming and remembering (Lumbalú) and physical and psychotherapy during pregnancy (Bullerengue). These rituals and dances were created for more than the sound of the songs and the enjoyment of the dance. They were and are functional in connecting to the spirit of all realms of life whether not yet born, alive, or deceased. By simply being in community, the women of these collectives look within their culture to create a means of maintaining and surviving. Based on the research of Niara Sudarkasa, in West Africa's "precolonial times…it was almost invariably the case that African women were conspicuous in the economic life of their societies, being involved in farming, trade, or craft production" (73). Sudarkasa also suggests that "many of the activities and attributes" of Black women have their roots in Africa such as "leadership in the community as well as in the home; prominence in the world of work; independence and pride in womanhood" (86). As the women come together, they continually look for ways to support their families financially such as selling art based on their traditions and psychologically such as ritualizing stages of puberty, birth (Bullerengue), and death (Lumbalú).

8 Lumbalú is a ceremonial way to grieve the recently deceased. Women sing and warble a cry connecting the spirits of the living and the dead. In Bullerengue, in the movement of the women circling their breasts and womb, they communicate intentionality and massage the organs for optimal health in the generation of offspring. Bullerengue's song, dance, and music has been passed down for centuries and can be observed in maroon towns of Colombia's Caribbean coast and as far as Darién in Panama. As it originated in Palenque de San Basilio, Bullerengue would be one of the oldest dances of Afro-Colombians on the Atlantic Coast.

La Asociación de Mujeres Tejiendo Sueños y Sabores de Paz (Weavers)

La Asociación de Mujeres Tejiendo Sueños y Sabores de Paz (Women Weaving Dreams and Flavors of Peace Association) represents the community of Mampuján, a small town within the municipality of María la Baja in the department of Bolívar, which is about 45 miles southeast of Cartagena off the Atlantic coast of Colombia. Mampuján was a largely Afro-Colombian town surrounded by ongoing conflict and violence for decades. On March 10th, 2000, a group of paramilitaries[9] violently forced 245 families to abandon their homes in Mampuján. Many of the families now live in Mampuján "nuevo" or New Mampuján, on the outskirts of the town of María La Baja.

I interviewed several women that form part of the association, Mujeres Tejiendo Sueños y Sabores de Paz, including two of the founders, Juana Alicia Ruiz Hernandez and Gledis López Masa. Juana shared that they started working together as a group in 2004 and later developed the name and formalized the group. She explained that a woman from the United States, "Teresa Geisser[10],

9 "Ask anyone in the Montes de María, on Colombia's Caribbean coast, about the years from 1997 to the early 2000s, and they will refer to *la violencia* (the violence). During this traumatic period, the right-wing paramilitary group, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), battled the guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) for territorial control of strategic drug trafficking routes. Local communities were stuck in the crossfire." Quilts of hope: Sewing the story of displacement. https://mcccanada.ca/centennial/100-stories/quilts-hope accessed Nov. 30, 2022

10 Teresa Geisser is a psychologist and artist who volunteered with the Mennonite Central Committee through a non-profit, Sewing Seeds of Peace/Sembrando Semillas de Paz in various countries. "The experience with a North American woman in the midst of Afro women was

arrived and taught us the strategies to overcome trauma and increase resilience through quilting or the art of patchwork… from what she taught us plus the art that we had[11], this idea was born in 2006 and we strictly began to do this [tapestry work]" (Asociación de Mujeres Tejiendo Sueños, AMTS). Juana described their work as "weaving cultural tapestries of happiness, hope and protection" (AMTS). This is experienced in the activity of weaving, in the meaning behind each tapestry, and in the aesthetics of the final product.

Happiness is also what they realize as they work together, raise each other's spirits, complete beautiful art, and celebrate each other. Through quilting together, they build bonds that allow them to look out for each other's families thus providing protection. Juana explained that the group was created "to have a space to talk, to get rid of pain, to tell what was happening without words as a way of narrating what happened because it [was] forbidden to discuss". Instead of trying to put into words what they were feeling, they use art to express and communicate pain, sadness, grief, nostalgia, love, etc. The quilting allows them to move past the physical pain and have beautiful pieces that tell their stories.

Women as Healers/Art as Therapy

A part of women's work in the community is that of healing which takes on many forms. Juana explained the meaning and purpose of their work, "…this work is therapy. Initially it was therapy to heal the mourning, to go through catharsis, to remember what happened…". The work of healing is linked to nature and intuition and as women take on the task of healing the soul, they apply what they know - working collectively, sharing stories, passing on knowledge, the therapeutic vibrations of singing, etc. In the case of the women of Mampuján, after a period of space of shock and trauma, they began to tap into ways of healing through memory. Here, Juana explained their beginnings:

> …the first tapestries that we began to make were out of pain, the idea was to process our mourning through it, but as time went by, we decided to return a little to the memory of that beauty that was our territory and how the conflict disrupted it, and also what we think about the future, how we were dreaming it. So, this has a meaning of memory, it has a meaning of healing, it has a meaning of preserving art and culture. Through art and culture, we have been overcoming grief and also rebuilding that social fabric that Keila said, which was broken by the conflict, that is what it means to work with art to heal (AMTS).

As a group, the women have taken on the role of leading and teaching healing workshops nationwide and in other countries. With these experiences of helping others, their own healing continues. Today the women still use the tapestry work as therapy, and they now teach others[12] how to use art to heal. As

very important, beautiful, harmonious and enriching, as expressed by the Women Weavers…" (La experiencia con una mujer norte americana en medio de mujeres afros fue muy importante, bella, armónica y enriquecedora, así lo expresan las Mujeres Tejedoras…). Mujeres Tejedoras de Mampuján: Un tejido con sabor a paz. Accessed Nov. 30, 2022. https://repositorio.unicartagena.edu.co/bitstream/handle/11227/10127/Un%20Tejido%20con%20Sabor%20a%20Paz.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

11 The women had the African heritage of sewing patchwork quilts and the oral tradition, so they perfected the Quilting technique with the story in primitivist art, as a means to commemorate and overcome mourning, thus they began to weave true stories" (Vivensías 26).

12 The group has been invited to lead healing workshops for widows, women, and men affected by violence, and larger communities in the towns and departments throughout Colombia of Arauca, Tierralta (Córdoba), Istmina (Chocó), Cundinamarca and Bogotá to name a few of the places. Workshop themes have been: "How to manage collective pain", and "What resignification of life and dignity can the victims achieve from the spiritual realm" (Vivensías 204)

a collective, they were doing the work for their community and understood the importance and financial impact of their work. She confides that during the violence of the armed conflict[13], "three of us women like crazies went out with a backpack of oils, threads, and needles and we taught women to sew and give massages, to breathe to minimize the pain, and that it also serves as an income generation for the people" (AMTS).

Another member, Keila Masa López, has traveled with the group to many communities to demonstrate and share how they use art as a tool for healing. As a witness to how it has helped her, her family, and her community, Keila hopes to be able to reach more communities that have experienced conflict to be emotional support for people "who have suddenly felt that the world is closing in on them and that many times they have looked for answers and have not found them" (AMTS). She also wants people to visit and see what they do as a collective in Mampuján. Years ago, Keila was in a similar position as her daughters are now when she began working with the group as a youth, thusly making her a witness to the power of "the process" of healing through art. She shared that as children, they also felt the effects of the violence in their community and the tapestry work allowed them to heal the pain and to begin to think of dreams for the future. She dreams that her daughters will be a part of a similar group that creates change from within to better the society.

Another young member, Juana's daughter, Elizabeth Villareal Ruiz shared how she hopes others use the art as a tool for healing:

> I want more people to be able to know this art, and not just as tapestries but as something that is going to help you heal what you feel because the conflict is not only experienced from the paramilitaries displacing us, there are many types of conflicts, within the family, pains that you have, a relative died; you can express it through this, so I want many more people to see this as [a way] to heal; to see this as an alternative to heal their grief, any type of pain you can represent through this art and begin to heal…to plant their dreams and when they come true look at the tapestry and one day say I made this and today my dreams are being fulfilled, then it is like healing, but also capturing their dreams through tapestries (AMTS).

As a representative of the next generation, Elizabeth expressed how she has observed the power of their artistry, their work, and how it can be applied to any type of healing process. In voicing her alignment with the process, she assumes responsibility for continuing to pass on what they have learned and what they carry on from their ancestors.

Afro-Colombian Exile

These women, and the people of Mampuján, are in exile due to being abruptly removed from their territories. Moreno Hurtado contextualizes this abrupt removal as follows:

> If during colonization the black body was kidnapped and banished from Africa, now history repeats itself with the banishment to urban space. For the authors, speaking of exile is not synonymous with displacement, since for them this last aspect refers to the voluntary transfer or a decision of the people, who have the option of returning to their places of origin, while exile implies the abrupt removal (uproot) of a group of people or communities from their territories, without

13 The armed conflict is still active in the Montes de María region and other parts of Colombia between paramilitaries, the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), and guerilla groups which has resulted in thousands of civilians missing, being exiled, and killed.

giving them the possibility of returning. This implies cultural fractures, deaths and uprooting. (16, author's translation)

In this article, as the term "displacement" is quoted from interviews and sources, it will be understood as 'exiled' as defined by Moreno Hurtado and Arboleda Quiñonez.[14] Arboleda uses the term 'forced displacement' taken from the legal language of international human rights, and argues that displacement is used to describe a temporary condition (6 months or less), thus requiring a different term for those who are eternally 'displaced'(472, author's translation). In the case of the people of old Mampuján and Afro-Colombians, who have not been able to return home, they are exiled people.

As shared by Gledis, due to the banishment from their farmlands and without daily agricultural work, they found themselves with idle hands, forced to adjust and change their customs. Having been uprooted from the lands that provided sustenance and income, the tapestries now make it possible to return to a sense of self-sufficiency for the women and their families. The women, joined by some men and children, make tapestries more focused on telling the history of their community, on remembering. Now they are less focused on healing from the violence and more on showing the beauty that was their community. As stated in their name, they weave dreams and hopes for the future. There are up to 74 families currently represented within the group.

One of the most recent adjustments of their association was due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Juana shared that due to the pandemic, they were no longer able to meet in person to create the tapestries and thus had to work from home. As a result of this, many of the men took an interest and began to help create tapestries. This became especially helpful as they were met with increasing demands for their unique handcrafted tapestries, which they used to make face masks with the iconography of Mampuján. Today, the tapestries and now the face masks are the main source of income for many of the women, who have been able to support their families financially. As stated by Juana, "These masks were the salvation for many people…" (Weavers).

Hopes & Dreams

The women also shared past, present, and future dreams for themselves, for their work, and for healing their community. Juana recalls when the district attorney's office came to record a documentary some years ago and the women were asked about their dreams. Juana's dream was to have their tapestries displayed in the National Museum of Colombia in the capital, Bogotá, and today, they have a commissioned piece on permanent display in the Hall of Memory and Nation. In essence, by doing the tapestry work to heal, they have created space to move on to hopes and dreams which are now being realized. As their work stands in the National Museum it tells their story, affirms their presence, their importance in the country and the world as people of Mampuján, as women, as Africans.

I had an opportunity to go to the museum and view the piece titled *Travesía 2* meaning *Voyage 2* or *Second Voyage* which is dedicated to the many African descendants of Colombia and the world. The tapestry depicts a scene largely set on the ocean featuring a slave ship with Africans in chains in the bowels of the ship. Above deck, some Africans escape down a chain, some fight Europeans, some are being lynched, and some are being thrown overboard. On the side of the ship is a boat with captives and

14 The delineation of terms is important in the reconciliation and repatriation of the people in the court of justice as well as the complete recounting of their history.

Europeans headed to land. The land depicted is bright, diverse, and lush with trees and vegetation that has protected and nourished each generation. With this tapestry, the collective uses their art to show the history of trauma and survival that has been carried through generations. They reflect on ways of resistance on the ship and on land, and the transfer of the spirit of resistance to their current struggles. They look at their past as a connection to the present in finding methods to heal and survive having been uprooted and traumatized for generations.

Juana continued, "We did *Ma Jende mi Prieto*, which is also very beautiful, there we tell a little about this voyage, when our ancestors arrived and were auctioned, when they rebelled on the slave plantations, and escaped and how they arrived in Montes de María. [We tell] how Montes de María is populated, how the conflict came, and how we got here. They are memories, well, with great affection, moments of hunger, because when we did them, we were in bad shape still, we weren't where we are now" (AMTS). The term, 'Ma Jende Mi Prieto' is interpreted to mean 'My Black People' in the Palenquero language which is a mixture of English, Portuguese, and Bantu languages maintained in Palenque de San Basilio. For the women of the Association to employ the language, they are making a connection to their roots as African people and as part of the network of Palenque settlements of the Montes de María region. This connection speaks to the strength and resilience of the people and the importance of remembering ancestral practices. The knowledge and methods that were used in the Palenques are still applicable to today's struggles for autonomy and peace.

The women of the Association described their daily lives before being exiled as centered on farming and having been banished to more urban spaces has created cultural fractures within the societal norms of the practices, traditions, and livelihoods of the community. Santiago Arboleda and Aurora Vergara also describe the burden [of displacement and forced exile] produced by racial discrimination as, "a second trade" in reference to a second Slave Trade (Moreno Hurtado 16). This connection to hundreds of years ago, during colonialism and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, should be observed in the discussion on exile. As the conflict is described, the violence is based on capitalist goals leading to invasions on territories ancestrally inhabited by Africans since the Slave trade. Santiago Arboleda refers to this in his work titled *Muerte, Destierro y Simulacro Estatal: La Consulta Previa Entre Los Afrocolombianos* in explaining that this modern exile is not a new attack on Afro-Colombian people, their land, and livelihoods. It is a continuation from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in racial discrimination, corruption, genocide, and oppression. He states that "linked to neo-extractivism, the greatest ethnocide against Afro-descendants in America, is taking place in Colombia" (np). The descendants of the Africans who were forced to the lands during the Slave Trade are now being uprooted again. The need for the women and families to create items to sell stems from the continual infringement on their lands and the contamination of their land and water. These women's collectives attempt to make inroads on violations and injustices that have been occurring for over 400 years. What has been passed down ancestrally through practice and spirit are the tools that have sustained them while battling for their right to live a free and equal life in the 'new' land of Colombia.

As Juana shared her realized dream that their tapestries are now on exhibit in the National Museum of Colombia, Gledis López Masa, one of the group's co-founders, nodded and agreed that they have realized many of

their most extraordinary dreams. Juana shared that having a piece in the national museum was a far-flung dream and she continues to dream. She would like to have a museum in the community where people can come to seek healing from grief through art. The museum would serve as a permanent place for their work to tell the story of Afro-Colombians, those affected by violence, and anyone who is on a journey of healing.

As the women work on their tapestries, Gledis shared another community member's dream realized:

> ...someone once had said: I saw Mampuján turned into an urbanization, I mean it was something crazy, it had paved streets, and cars were circulating in the streets and there was normal light, and there was gas and, well… that is Mampuján so different from what it was back then, but God had promised great things. Juana says that many people would come to Mampuján, and I believe that many people have already arrived (AMTS).

In a text created by the community titled *Vivensías*, or "Experiences" there is visual and narrated evidence that Mampuján has seen improvements and that citizens have returned and visited. Here Juana described the contents of the book, "...we tell what the community was like since its foundation, how the conflict began, about the process of conflict and justice and peace, which was a process of transitional justice, it was like a small peace process of reparation and this community was the pilot of this process in Colombia") (AMTS). The fourth fulfillment of the agreement from this process is that victims receive compensation for damages based on the legal plan created under Law 975 for Justice and Peace (185)[15]. Article 55:56.1 of the law states, "[To] settle and pay the legal compensation referred to in this law within the limits authorized in the national budget" (60). This would be the calculation of losses and a monetary payment and/or payment for a home. When we look at the history of the destruction of communities of marginalized peoples, what is lost is the power of community. The daily communication, camaraderie, the exchange of money, the maintenance and building of community businesses, the perpetual creation, the positive reinforcement of the spiritual connections, and the protection and security of the group. A place of solace. When the indemnities are paid without a plan to rebuild in the same space with the same people this impedes true reparation. In Colombia's hinterlands, many community members live as farmers and a loss of land means a loss of a circular system of economics, ecology, physical and mental wellness, etc. Financial compensation and the purchase of new housing cannot replace what was truly lost without a complete effort to rebuild the community. The mourning of what was lost is demonstrated in the tapestries of the women and in their description of what was of Mampuján.

Paula López described the tapestry that she and her daughter made that metaphorically describes nature's response to their displacement calling it "a bit of nature's return". She explained that when they were displaced, nature was also displaced as "the streams stopped [flowing], the fruit trees were like dying and you could see it was no longer the Mampuján that was" and when people returned, so did nature. Again, the realization of the dreams of the women, and the community, woven in the tapestries as prayers and affirmations has been a part of their therapy and motivation

15 Law 975 for Justice and Peace was decreed in 2005 by the Colombian Congress and states in Article 1 Objective of the Law, "The purpose of this law is to facilitate peace processes and the individual or collective reintegration into civilian life of members of illegal armed groups, guaranteeing the rights of victims to truth, justice, and reparation." (2)

to do the work. These women are truly living the name of the group, "Women weaving dreams…" and continue to realize their dreams as individuals and as a collective.

Mujeres Productoras del Puerto Santander (Santander)

Mujeres Productoras del Puerto Santander (Women producers of Santander Port) has been active for less than one year (at the time of the interview) and is based in the fishing community of Puerto Santander, an extension of María La Baja, next to the Ciénaga de Maria la Baja or Maria la Baja swamp that has provided the livelihood of generations of fishermen. I initially went to the area to interview members of the fishermen's association ASOPEPUSA (Asociación de Pescadores de Puerto Santander). There, I met Diana Contreras, who provided the food for the interview. She showed me photos of beautiful, beaded earrings and necklaces as well as dolls that the women's collective had been making and selling, prompting me to subsequently interview the collective.

In explaining the name of the collective, Mujeres Productoras del Puerto Santander, Diana emphasized that they are not simply entrepreneurs, but producers, *productoras*. Here she shared how they began as a collective:

When we started, we wanted to build home gardens, a space where we could plant peppers, tomatoes, vegetables, [and] things like that. But since we didn't get the site and we don't have the help of any entity… [I thought], well if we can't do that, let's do *this* (Mujueres Productoras, MP).

To generate income for their families, they began to make jewelry and items from discarded materials, realizing that they had tapped into hidden potential where each person had a particular skill to create something. Their focus has been on using their traditions and reusable items such as tires, bottles, and calabashes to create. They create hanging planters from old tires, in the shape of "guacamaya," or macaw parrot, painted with bright colors like the bird's feathers. They make dollsout of painted "totumo," or calabash fruit, and add earrings and a headwrap for female dolls, or a hat for male dolls. They paint the dolls brown to mirror the dark skin tone and race of the community and to show pride in their African ancestry. The female dolls hold a bundle on their head, and the male dolls wear a typical farmer's hat. They also have cups, bowls, and spoons made from the totumo fruit. Soft and fluffy rugs and pillows are made from scrap fabric and patterned into designs. Lastly, a tradition that they are bringing back to life is the adorning of girls' underwear with ruffles on the back, which is a tradition passed on by their grandmothers. When I arrived, they had sold all the beaded earrings and other jewelry, indicating that there is a demand for their crafts.

Luzneida, a mute woman from Puerto Santander, shared that the work has been a great help to her and her family. Diana added that Luzneida is "in charge of making the rugs and cushions, [from] recyclable fabrics that we no longer use" (MP). Yarlis, a mother of two from Puerto Santander, spoke about not only working for her family but also caring for the community: "I work because I will still have to provide for my children later on, and more than anything we work for the community. We have worked a lot in the community, cleaning the streets, cleaning the swamp a bit, doing community activities" (MP). The group formed during the pandemic, and their product sales are a way to support the local fishing industry that is under siege due to pollution and government disregard.

The fishing industry as one of the main sources of income for the town of María la Baja is an ancestral practice and an important part of the heritage of the people. The men of ASOPEPUSA spoke about the fishing techniques of their grandparents' era, the variety of flora and fauna that existed, and how large the fish were in the past. They shared that today, fishing is less artisanal and more industrial where fishing is done with larger nets, and there is no respect for seasonal fishing which allows for the reproduction of each species thus lessening their draw of large and plentiful catches. ASOPEPUSA has been pushing to implement changes from within and outside of the community to stop overfishing and pollution as well as garnering agreements to ban the use of pesticides and other contaminants that run off into the lake.

The women's association Mujeres Productoras is responding to the decrease of income from fishing along with the Covid-19 pandemic with their innovative art and sales. The carry-over of traditions in the fishing industry and of the artisanal crafts that are being sold conjoins with the collective work to produce and survive from the land, the water, and the biosphere. They work to raise the consciousness and ownership of the people to the land and water, to clean the water, and with that to join forces to influence the municipal and larger governments to protect the water from poison runoff, sewage, blockages, and industrial fishing that harms the reproduction. In the larger picture, by making art from the trash collected from the land and water, the Mujeres Productoras demonstrate that this is the result of neglect and that something beautiful can be created with trash instead of discarding it, creating traps for animals, and introducing poisons to the ecosystem.

Diana shared her vision for the future of the collective and mentions how their art has reached large cities hundreds of miles south of Puerto Santander such as Medellín and Bogotá:

> ...we want to promote all that we do, and to have a place where tourists will come, where whoever arrives will say wow! In a little corner of Colombia look at everything those people can do! Well, thanks to God so far we have sent orders to Medellín, Bogotá, Cartagena … I am grateful because God is blessing us (MP).

The Mujeres Productoras Collective reinforces a positive association with being Black and local. A future goal of some community members is to create a mini tourist attraction to bring people to Puerto Santander, and to host activities surrounding the lake as a new source of income, as foreshadowed by Diana. This goal demonstrates the importance of land to the community in conjunction with ownership and pride of place. Diana added that those who have the desire, and the ability, are welcome to join the group. There are currently 18 women and two youths.

During my interview with the fishing association, Miladis Vanegas Batista, my colleague and a well-respected educator and leader of María la Baja urged them to use Law 70[16] in their appeals to the government. She informed us that she was "at the table when Law 70 was being debated" and is a witness to the power of collective work of those committees of research, writing, meeting, etc. having realized many positive outcomes in the town, region, and Colombia. She spoke about the importance of unity in the fight for communal rights, "Above is the community, when it is organized. There are the associations, the community councils, which are, by law 70 of 1993,

16 Law 70 was passed in 1993 "In Recognition of the Right of Black Colombians to Collectively Own and Occupy their Ancestral Lands". This law is used to support many policies for all African descendants in Colombia such as territorial rights, identity rights, inclusion in curriculum, and ethnically aligned pedagogy.

who have the last word. Everything that these community councils or associations do is consulted with the community." This drives home the importance and power of women's collectives in Afro-Colombian communities as a continuation of their ancestors' unity in creating and maintaining palenques. By working together, they implore others to take heed of community law.

Asociación de Mujeres Palenqueras para el Desarrollo Integral Comunitario-Kasimba de Sueños (Kasimba)

This collective is located in Palenque de San Basilio, in the department of Bolívar. Palenque de San Basilio[17] is one of the longest surviving palenques or maroon towns of Colombia. Out of the four currently recognized palenques of Colombia, this particular palenque is known as the first officially free town in the Americas and has maintained many traditions of its African ancestors. This palenque has the benefit of being closely connected to the African cultural values and practices of the past, which grounds this collective in a long tradition of sisterhoods primarily seen in the 'Kuagro',[18] a social formation of male and female age groups.

Asociación de Mujeres Palenqueras was established in 2018 by 12 Palenquera[19] women and currently has 35 women participants. One of the co-founders, Gladys Esther Hernández Cassiani, shared that the group "fights to reclaim women's rights". One of their projects is researching the contributions of the women of Palenque throughout the history of Palenque to reverse the invisibilization of women in the community. This recognition, she said, will "allow the [women] a guarantee of rights" (Hernández Cassiani).

Another project is an awareness activity with 10th and 11th-grade girls to prepare them for life as a student/worker outside of Palenque to be able to be successful while away from their protected community. Many Palenqueros have shared that they are met with discrimination when they leave Palenque and go to Cartagena for work or school. Their way of speaking is ridiculed, they are barred from entering clubs or are not hired for positions based on their skin color. Being a small, unique, and protected town of Afro-Colombians, Palenqueros aren't faced with the normalcy of racial discrimination and sexualization of Black women found in the cities of Colombia. Gladys explained that the culture shock of coming from Palenque and not having the community's eyes and support could lead one down the wrong path by getting lost in the vices of the large city.

To be invisible in society keeps Black women in danger of being mistreated, excluded, and muted. However, Kasimba is working to reverse this by helping women thrive and excel. Solbay Cecilia Cáceres Cabarcas, a wife and mother of five daughters, explained, "We are the women who hope to diminish and cease all acts of violence and discrimination against Palenquera women and ultimately, towards other women". She then described the reason they are called

17 Will also be referred to as Palenque.

18 Kuagros are groups divided by gender and age in Palenque de San Basilio. Each kuagro has a name and are age mates for life. Each group has duties to each other and their community. They are friends, they can marry, they organize within the community and they support each other upon death. Strength in sisterhood stems from the formation of kuagros in this community.

19 In this essay, Palenquera/o refers to a person born in or of the people of Palenque de San Basilio. In a larger context, the term is applied to people from four officially recognized palenques found in the North Coast of Colombia:San Basilio de Palenque (Mahates – Bolívar), San José de Uré (Córdoba), Jacobo Pérez escobar (Magdalena) y La Libertad (Sucre). Currently in Colombia, the ethnic labels for African descendants are negras, afrocolombianas, raizales and palenqueras. "Comunidades negras, afrocolombianas, raizales y palenqueras." *Unidad Para las Victimas*, 26, nov. 2022, www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/es/comunidades-negras-afrocolombianas-raizales-y-palenqueras/277.

the “Kasimba of Dreams”:

Because the kasimba is a hole that the Palenquera woman traditionally makes with her fingers, with her nails, she opens the sand that is around the stream… we dig and dig with our nails, our fingers, with the hope of finding water with a good smell, good taste, and good color. That is transparent water. So, we are those kasimberas with all the dreams and hopes that decrease, that make all the acts of violence and discrimination against women disappear (Cáceres Cabarcas).

This metaphor that the women have chosen of the Kasimba, the act of looking for the purest and clearest water, Solbay illustrated here within the woman’s work of managing the home. She explained that while men use the cistern or water tank, the women are responsible for managing all the water for the home. They find the natural water source at a river or beach and dig a hole to create a kasimba, resulting in potable water to bring home for the needs of the family. According to Solbay, the women would do this process two to three times a day to be used for cleaning, cooking, and housework. The water tank is a modern addition that uses water brought in by the municipality for the town.

The use of the word ‘Kasimba’ taps into the maintaining of traditions by the women out of necessity, while utilizing a word that is soon to be in disuse.[20] Kasimba distinctly connects to their ancestral culture, and to the importance of women in providing for and sustaining the family and community. It also speaks to the cultural & societal norm of working together as women in a collective to achieve what needs to be done to protect and provide for each family and the community as a whole.

The daily act of going to the stream for various chores allows for the passing of information, telling of stories, singing of songs, and more, amongst women, which is a continuum of many African societies, which I observed on many occasions in Palenque de San Basilio. Though this activity is done less and less with the arrival of indoor plumbing, cultural traditions continue to exist within new spaces and opportunities. The women continue to share information, pass on skills and sing their joys and sorrows. They also continue to collaborate as they are doing with this collective under the idea of the “kasimba” they recognize the importance of remembering their traditions, language, African roots, and uniqueness.

Asociación de Mujeres Palenqueras is essentially an empowerment group for women to be visible in the home and community as well as in other communities. Solbay called out the generations of Palenqueras for allowing “machismo,” or male chauvinism and patriarchy to develop in the Palenquera home and community, negatively affecting Black women in various ways:

It is the woman, who despite herself, as the backbone, is the one who cares for, protects, (guides) the children, it is the same woman, who turns the man into (a) macho being and another element that we have here is that patriarchy has been very strong in this community. (Cáceres Cabarcas)

Solbay shared that for decades, women have been empowering themselves within and outside of the home. Her generation’s push to eradicate patriarchy builds on what their mothers and grandmothers did to make life

20 When asked what language the word was, Solbay said she didn’t know but thought it was African. In the Real Academia Española dictionary, the word is listed as ‘cacimba’ with a note that it could have derived from the quimbundo Bantu language from the word ‘kišima’ “possibly through the (trade/slave) port”. https://dle.rae.es/cacimba#2oODeDW

amenable within the societal structure of the community. She noted the successes of the group thus far in diminishing the negative acts, "Since we began the Kasimba process, we no longer attack each other or we no longer violate each other, we immediately have a talk, a dialogue of empowerment, and today the Palenquera women from a young age knows who they are and what they are for". This collective loudly proclaims the importance of women in protecting the girls and women that work in the streets and travel to vend, work, and procure education.

The women's collective of Cali in Moreno Hurtado's study similarly learn about their rights and how to defend them, enabling them to "participate actively in the fight against gender violence, racism, and other injustices" (169, author's translation). In discussing the history of patriarchy that this group aims to erase, Moreno Hurtado includes a larger context in stating that "violence against black women obeys a systemic exercise of intersectionality and has a direct link with the historical place that patriarchy, racism, and developmentalism have given to black and female bodies" (viii, author's translation). The Kasimba collective along with numerous other groups are up against these systemic structures of society that have been built and maintained over hundreds of years. Nonetheless, as their ancestors resisted and protected, this generation and subsequent generations will tap into their ancestral memory to work against patriarchy, racism, and developmentalism that affects the Palenque community.

From Invisibilization to Visibilization

Solbay discussed how respect and recognition of their efforts along with the agency that lies within the Palenquera woman has begun to reverse the invisibility of women in the community. She shared that Palenquera women make banners and shout in the streets when a girl is violated and though they weren't respected before, now they are listened to.

> …the palenquera woman in her definition is history, it is power, it is intelligence, it is being a warrior, empowerment (empowered), the palenquera woman is a businesswoman, the palenquera woman I have always said, is the backbone of this society; transmitter of knowledge, directs, manages, reorients everything that is around her. Why do I tell you this? I am a palenquera woman, I take care of my five daughters, my husband gets up to go to the fields, and returns in the afternoon and he does not ask me what they did or did not do, I resolve everything that should be done in the house (Cáceres Cabarcas).

Though she mentioned the activism of the collective for protecting all women in the community, the respect and recognition of women's work in the home is of first importance according to Solbay. She further shared that this agency, this understanding of power and operation of women has always been there and will continue as part of their ancestry.

> Palenque would not have been what it is without this wonderful being [of a woman], it would not have been able to remain…we don't need a monument like Benkos's[21] because the less visible they make us, the more powerful we are because internally we have always understood that our function and our functionality in this community is part of our social duty, hopefully, we can give high recognition to Guiga, Orika, Benko's daughter and Benko's wife, but if at the time of telling and narrating,

21 The Benkos Biohó monument is located in the Plaza de Palenque de San Basilio, Bolívar, in Colombia, in honor of the revolutionary leader y the maroonage movement in the Montes de María region.

they do not mention us, we continue to be the powerful, the wonderful as an indispensable being in this society, that is the Palenquera woman (Cáceres Cabarcas).

The mention of the daughter and wife of Benkos Biohó is rare when hearing the story of the founding of this maroon town. Yet as Solbay said, Palenque would not have been without women and their role in escaping to, establishing, and maintaining the liberated space. She added, "we are taking actions to make ourselves visible and for our daughters to understand that history does not reflect what it is, we understand that this happened to Guiga and Orika…" Thus, reversing this invisibility begins in the home and will expand to larger circles of the society. Solbay explained that the collective wants to continue to empower women. She added that "it's not to make men enemies but to assert that women need to be respected by our men, by our children, by our brothers, by our husbands…" (Cáceres Cabarcas). Here we return to the argument of Moreno Hurtado that violence against Black women stems from the systemic exercise of patriarchy, which as clearly expressed by Solbay, must cease, and desist.

Solbay spoke of their experience as a community in Palenque de San Basilio with the armed conflict of the Montes de María region. She explained that since Palenque de San Basilio is such an insular community that keeps to itself, they didn't expect the armed conflict to touch them. However, outside of the safety of the nucleus of Palenque de San Basilio, the violence does and did affect them. Solbay told the horrendous story of two Palenqueras who were caught in the armed conflict while selling sweets in a nearby town. One woman was kidnapped and the other murdered.

Walking the streets and calling out their goods for sale in a singsong, the women of Palenque have been selling their wares in the same way for generations. They have been traveling to other towns to sell in groups and especially in the tourist areas of Cartagena. So much so, that the image of the Palenquera with a bowl of fruits atop her fabric-wrapped head, dressed in a colonial-style wide skirt and ruffled shirt is used to represent the city. Thus, being this ubiquitous symbol[22], the Palenquera should be known to all in the region as a saleswoman which is why Solbay expresses the hurt and shock of this murder - that the "tourist image would be assassinated". On the streets of Cartagena, the Palenquera woman is not treated as the ambassador she is painted to be on the brochures and products. She represents the Palenqueros who still struggle for equality, respect, and opportunities in the larger society. Though touted as part of the cultural heritage and plastered all over the city, the actual Palenquera woman is still invisible and subjected to racism. Moreno Hurtado discusses a similar situation for the Afro-Colombian women of Cali:

> The fact that their proposals have not been taken into account by the rulers for the construction of public policies, nor by the academics for the recognition of their contributions in the construction of knowledge, are a symptom of black female invisibility in the public, academic and state agenda. (17)

The Black woman's contributions are not recognized, and her invisibility is observed in many ways with the Palenquera: the cases of the two women have not been thoroughly investigated; the treating of the Palenquera women simply as a symbol for advertisement; the ignoring of the Palenquera as a key contributor to the culture and heritage of

22 https://theculturetrip.com/south-america/colombia/articles/how-palenqueras-became-the-symbol-of-cartagena/

the region; and the overall discrimination of Palenqueros and Blacks in Colombia. Returning to the idea of agency, the women in the Kasimba collective are beginning within the home to change the levels of respect and recognition of their place and voice in all spaces.

In Kasimba, Gladys states that the collective 'has been a big blessing for many women' and that they have given financial and psychological support to women and children that have been victims of violence. To support their projects and activities they have a company called Kutú where they sell "t-shirts with identity" whose objective is that anyone in the world can feel what it's like to be a Palenquera and to identify with her experiences and life. The shirts become a message of collectivity, vigilance, and awareness for others to know that they are working together to create change.

Conclusion

This study builds on my work on Ancestral Memory and the African cultural traditions used as forms of survival and resistance that re-create and transform "not from 'that which was lost' but rather what they knew and remembered" (Walton 156). The women's collectives pull from what they know and were taught to create and find ways that can sustain their families such as the weaving of hammocks learned from the fishermen who weave fishing nets in Puerto Santander. They recall what their grandparents taught them and make use of this in creating art, crafts, cuisine, and other items for sale. What they "knew and remembered" becomes a form of socioeconomic survival and resistance. The women of Palenque de San Basilio tap into the memory of their great-grandmothers and generations before them by making candies that are usually made around holidays. When the women of Palenque de San Basilio go to the streets to sell their sweets and produce, they lean on the power and resilience of their ancestors to show up as powerful and resilient in the face of indifference and discrimination.

In closing, Black women are gifted with the memories, and forms of resistance from their African ancestors learned on the plantations along with their given nature of womanhood. There is a natural agency in mothering, in the instinctual push to protect and provide, and in the case of African descendants in post Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade spaces. Returning to the idea of the PTSS of Dr. DeGruy Leary, Black men and women in the Americas experience trauma both known and unknown, and the work continues in more ways than one. Though this article focuses on women, I want to recognize the equally important place of men in the family and community, especially within the context of African descendants.

Much of the work of these women's collectives in conjunction with the work of the men is in response to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and its ramifications. Their African ancestors were brought to Colombia, forced to work the land, escaped, built new communities, and fought to maintain autonomy over body and soul while holding on to their traditions and using them to manage life. Much of their struggle is to hold on to what they 'have'. While there have been no reparations for African descendants of Colombia, much of their work uses Law 70 as the groundwork in the campaign for the sovereignty of ancestral territories which we see as a concurrent issue within each women's collective of the Montes de María region. They campaign for the sovereignty of their Africanity, to be recognized as equal citizens, and to be included in history, the school curriculum, politics, media, and all spaces. The continued racism and discrimination blocks much of the growth of these communities yet

the collectives create ways to be visible through art for healing, traveling to share their stories, creating art from refuse to display the harm happening to the fishing industry; and standing together to visibilize an act of violence that would normally be forgotten about due to the invisibilization of Afro-Colombians.

The three collectives have more in common than the fact that they are located in the Montes de María region. They formed for the same reasons that connect them beyond their geography: because they have been disenfranchised, and one solution is to continue in their ancestor's path of resisting the ideals and standards of racism, classism, colorism, and sexism. Each of these women's collectives also demonstrates the ways women provide for and protect their families.

In accordance with Moreno Hurtado's explanation of her method of research, this creates a level of vulnerability for the populations and the women have responded and reacted in the way they ancestrally knew how to (15). They are working to climb above these disharmonious and unjust societal structures. They lean on ancestral memory and become healers, protectors, and nurturers for their families and communities. While dealing with various forms of trauma, they choose to use their art and voices to improve the lot of their communities. These collectives of today apply similar strategies as their mothers, grandmothers, and women ancestors. They produce items to sell for the sustenance of their families; they go to the streets in networks for protection and companionship; they share information and knowledge, and they help each other mutually. This statement from Moreno Hurtado sums up the work of women in Mampuján, Puerto Santander, and Palenque de San Basilio, which can also be witnessed in Cali and other Diasporic spaces:

> The women participating in the research exercise sovereignty over their bodies and territories through oral tradition, the recovery of memory, art, spaces for conversation, research, study, collective work, and networks of affection. They have an autonomous political proposal in which they combine the link between ancestrality, art, and the investigation of their own realities, in favor of the dignity of their territories. In this sense, cultural expressions do not have value by themselves, but to the extent that it allows the liberation of them as subjects and of their peoples (185, author's translation).

The women of Cali have been exiled from their spaces and their work and struggle surround the loss and rebuilding of what is needed to live an autonomous life. In the collectives of the Montes de María, the women also emphasize the dignity of their territories in conjunction with their political proposals. The Weavers collective of Mampuján looks to heal the wounds of trauma from the conflict as well as the effects of being exiled from their ancestral territory. The Santander collective is working against the deterioration of the fishing industry on their ancestral territory. The Kasimba collective's efforts are part of the larger aim to maintain their ancestral land as a sovereign space that is protected and safe from outside conflict as they have done for centuries.

The sovereignty that Moreno Hurtado outlines in Cali is the same agency that the women of Montes de María demonstrate through strategies of resistance as the women in Cali.

They pass on their history, stories, and knowledge through oral tradition and the recovery of memory. They use art as a way to heal, share stories, make a living, and protest. They research their traditions, techniques, sales market, and apply that to their activities. They use their spaces

for “conversation, collective work, and networks of affection” (185). The themes of ancestral memory, art as a healer, women’s collectives, and invisibilization in this paper represent the power of women’s agency that supports community survival. By working in unison and carrying on societal traditions, each collective and individual is an agent of change for their family and community as well as themselves. They find voice and power in unison while realizing they can heal, be seen, affect change and create new paths of revenue through art.

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