A POLITICS OF MEANS:

FARMING, ORGANIZING, AND LIVING ALONG A LATE LIBERAL SEAM

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ABSTRACT

Farming, in the lives of some Ngäbe campesinos in Nidrini, Panama, is a political practice. It is a locus of relationships among humans and nonhumans, a practice that imbues these relationships with life, a means of enacting an emplaced way of being in the world. Colonization is remembered here; it continues to have density and exert force in the present. The landscape is doubly occupied, as people continue to live against the grain of a world which makes their continued living into a project of being otherwise. The state, when it appears, is alien and unpredictable, a strange composite of roads and health clinics, schools and transnational mining capital, bulldozers and military police. Policing here works to maintain existing distributions of visibility, rendering desires otherwise as noise rather than politically meaningful speech. Simultaneously, agroecological disruptions and the local impacts of climate change bring farming into relief as a space of collective decision-making and transformation; in relation to histories of colonization and the modern state, this space is an intensely political one. To explore specifically how its politicality is taken up I focus on two Ngäbe environmental organizations, AAMICRO and OPAMO, and propose a politics of means both as a description of their work and as a basis to elaborate projects otherwise.

Pour certains paysans Ngäbe de la region de Nidrini, au Panama, être agriculteur est un geste politique. Les pratiques agricoles sont en effet au coeur d'un ensemble de rapports et de relations entre humains et non-humains. Elles passent ainsi par la cultivation d'un rapport étroit à la vie, ainsi que d'une manière d'être-au-monde qui ancre les personnes qui s'y adonnent à l'espace environnant et fait que celles-ci peuvent s'y sentir proprement chez elles. On pensera ici aux traces encore vivantes de colonisation occidentale ou Nord-Américaine; celle-ci garde, nous le verrons, encore aujourd'hui une densité non négligeable, et continue de se faire sentir au quotidien. Nous verrons ainsi comment le paysage qui nous intéressera ici est doublement occupé, dans la mesure où les gens qui y vivent le font encore et toujours, en dépit des projets qui viennent remettre en question leur présence sur place. L'État, lorsqu'il se fait sentir, est imprévisible, et les traces qu'il laisse prennent des allures étranges: celle d'un composé insolite où se superposent la construction de routes, de centres de soins, et d'écoles, à l'imprégnation des capitaux internationaux, des bulldozers, et de la police militaire. Dans cet endroit, le rôle de la police devient une affaire de maintien d'une visibilité pré-existante, avec ses distributions spécifique, et de maintien sous silence ou sous contrôle de toute revendication politique ou sociale de la part des populations locales. À cela s'ajoutent les répercussions qu'auront les changements climatiques planétaires au niveau local, et qui mettent en branle ou menacent les perspectives d'auto-gestion au sein des pratiques agricoles locales. L'espace dont il sera question dans ce travail est un espace politique intense, à mettre en lien tant avec son passé colonial qu'avec l'état moderne. Il s'agira ici d'effectuer une analyse de fond des enjeux politiques qui se jouent au sein des pratiques agricoles locales dans cette region. Pour ce faire, je me propose de me centrer sur deux organismes environnementaux Ngäbe: AAMICRO et OPAMO, que j'observerai sous l'angle d'une politique des moyens, dans une perspective qui se voudra à la fois descriptive de leur travail actuel, et à même de proposer des solutions pour l'élaboration de projets à venir.

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INTRODUCTION

What is it to farm as a Ngäbe campesino in Panama in 2016? The work is hard, back-breaking. Living in the Comarca Ngäbe-Buglé means living with limited access to electricity, running water, medicine, and education. It means exposure to weather, snakebite; it means vulnerability to drought, crop failure, landslides, lightning. From the perspective of many people—the Panamanian teachers and health workers, the missionaries and volunteers and students from North America—it is often only understood as tradition, ignorance, or, most generously, endurance. Yet there is also great beauty here. To continue farming in place is not a matter simply of inertia. Farming is about more than food. It is a locus of relationships among humans, between humans and nonhumans, between people and place; it is a practice through which these relations are continuously enacted and made to live. It cultivates, rehearses, and repeats embodied memories of smell and taste, of landscapes, rhythms of days and seasons. As repetition is never exact, and social and ecological conditions change, continuing to farm is not a matter simply of reproduction but rather an ongoing remaking of relations. It requires farmers to tack between present and future, to imagine possibilities and deliberately enact them. One answer to the opening question, the answer that I will propose and elaborate here, is that for some people in this place campesino farming is a political practice.

In writing about the politicality of farming in the foothills of Nidrini, my interest begins from the grammatical and conceptual assertion that life consists of living. Whereas history is often thought in terms of *events* and politics in terms of *ends*—the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, stopping climate change—here I work towards a politics of means,

a politics rooted in living (a verb, a process, a path, "living *and* dying") rather than in life (a noun, a thing, a binary, "life *or* death"). While end-oriented work can be important, it also underpins modernist ideas of progress in which life (the biological, and biopolitical, fact) as an end, can come to justify means which are violent towards living, the ongoing processes and experiences of living beings.

A politics of means affords an attention to forms of suffering and harm that do not surface as events, which do not result in dying dramatically (Li 2014). It can attend to what Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) describes as ordinary "cruddiness" which does not register as a crisis, to what Lauren Berlant (2011) terms "slow death"; to the way a changing climate gradually forecloses on the existence of a sensory world, a slow starvation as the taste of new rice becomes ever more tinged with mourning for past abundance and *pifá* fruits (peach palm) shrivel before they ripen. Yet a politics of means would also attend to the quiet ways in which people continuously remake their worlds, to an alter-politics of organic farming existing alongside the oppositional politics of roadblocks against mining and the Barro Blanco dam (Hage 2015). By focusing on means, on living, it takes note of already-existing forms of alterity, how living is never completely capitalist, colonized, or modern. Expanding neoliberal or late liberal capitalism, ongoing coloniality, and state-sanctioned modernist projects do indeed impact living here, but they do not structure or encompass it. As Anna Tsing writes referring to the space of commercial mushroom collection, "This is no place to search for utopia. Yet noticing the seams is the place to begin." (2012:153) When someone decides to leave a well-paid job as an electrician in the city to make a life as a campesino farmer because the air is clean, the nights are tranquil, and the fabric of social life is dense, even though it means living with a dirt floor, no

electricity or running water, and hours of walking to reach a grocery store, they enact a politics of means that refuses a modernist, capitalist imaginary of accumulative ends.

Defining Politics

In order to discuss how farming can be understood as political, and to imagine a politics of means, I use as a starting point the sense of "politics" that comes from J. K. Gibson-Graham, as "a process of transformation instituted by taking decisions in an undecidable terrain" (2006:xxviii)[1]. To act in and on the world in relation to other beings is to engage in politics, for the undecidable terrain that is a world is always shifting, and living is a process of transformation with others. Yet what is decidable or not, what is terrain? Alongside the process of decision and transformation is a process of encounter and imagining that conditions what is decidable, and what decisions are possible. Given the orientation of politics towards the future ("transformation"), to take decisions involves an interplay of historical and personal memory, imagination and experimentation to establish or contest the boundaries of what is collectively considered possible. Politics, then, involves two continuous, distinct but tightly interwoven processes: one of encountering and cocreating the limitations of terrain, and one of transformation.

Both of these are conditioned by contact, by relations through which terrain and the possible are encountered and cocreated. The word "terrain" is deliberately open in meaning. It could possibly refer to the conditions of living, things known variously as history, politics, ecology, the state, without supposing that neat distinctions among these things can be made. Here, it is meant to include those conditions of living that exceed, or seem to exceed, the agency of individuals, that which is beyond what a person has decided

[1] They reference Laclau and Mouffe by way of Torfing.

or can decide, limits to what is or appears to be possible; also things like values, stories, memories, experiences, which may be received and cannot be easily described as "real" or "imagined" but which make up the complex field of the world in, through, and by which people navigate, by drift, decisions, and intuitions, by love, violence, and accident, as they go about living.

Because of its collective nature, a second layer of "politics" involves boundary work, which reading Povinelli could be understood "as the transformation of *phonos* [noise] into *logos* [what is visible, sayable] and a subsequent emergence of new distributions of visibility and sayability" (2011:50). While this is a question of intelligibility and "claims on public rationality", the work of creating "new distributions of visibility and sayability" is also a process of imagination and possibility; what is visible and sayable is a question of what (and whose) activities register as meaningful, and also of what futures are imaginable. Looping back to Gibson-Graham, then, what can be seen or said also entails a collective process of defining what can be imagined as possible transforming decisions, what and who is beyond the limits of conversation, and what is undecidable terrain.

Here I take "politics" to refer to these processes, and to their contents, such that there can be a "politics of means", a "feminist politics", a "modernist politics", etc., where "politicality" is descriptive; it refers to *how* a process is political, how it comes to be politically meaningful. To describe the politicality of farming, how it is political, using the above definitions, requires at least a sense of two elements—the "undecidable terrain" and the "process of transformation instituted by taking decisions"—which entails a discussion of how people imagine what futures are possible, questions of history and memory, of contact and relations among people and places.

Method and Setting

This thesis is a result of four months, July-November 2016, spent living in the region of Nidrini in the Comarca Ngäbe-Buglé, Panama (map 1). In Panama, a *comarca* is a semiautonomous area of collectively titled indigenous[2] land, of which there are five. From here, I will refer to the Comarca Ngäbe-Buglé as "the Comarca", which is how the people with whom I work there refer to the place where they live. Ngäbe and Buglé people today are differentiated mostly by the languages they speak—Ngäbere and Buglere—which are related but distinct. The history of the relations between the two groups is not documented; currently, they live together in the same communities, often intermarrying and speaking both languages. Ngäbere is far more widely spoken. Belonging, here, is in some ways fairly fluid and based more on ways of living than on genetics; often the full name of the Comarca is given as the "Comarca Ngäbe-Buglé y Campesino", including *mestizo* smallholder farmers living alongside Ngäbe and Buglé people who face the same struggles against land appropriation for cattle ranching, industrial plantations, mining, state conservation, and hydroelectric projects. The word "Ngäbe" as used by Ngäbe and Buglé people, then, commonly includes Ngäbes and Buglés, and sometimes also campesinos; Ngäbe literally means "people", making "Ngäbe people" redundant. From here, I will use Ngäbe in this broader political (rather than linguistic or genetic) sense, and, taking into account the redundancy, will use "Ngäbe" rather than "Ngäbe people".

[2] Here I use the word "indigenous" specifically to describe a historical position in relation to colonization. I do not capitalize it, as such, because the people with whom I work generally reject *pueblas indígenas* (indigenous people) in favor of *pueblas originarias* (something like original people), and as a category prefer to describe themselves not as *indígenas* but rather as Ngäbe, taking up "indigeneity" as far as it relates to lateral translocal solidarity and claim-making in national and international fora but not as a description of who they are, not as a nationality, as "Indigenous" would suggest.

Nidrini is one of the more densely populated areas of the Comarca, on the Pacific slope of the Sierra de Talamanca, and although the terrain is quite rugged it is comparatively accessible; a road was built in the 1970s by the government of Omar Torrijos to give mining companies access to the copper deposit under Cerro Colorado. This road is paved from the Pan-American Highway at San Félix up to Hato Chamí, and there are other dirt roads which branch off to some larger villages, passable when it is dry. *Chivas*, public transit in the form of vans or pickup trucks, run back and forth along the paved road during the day such that San Félix and the highway are within a day's travel for many people who live in the region.

While in Nidrini I worked with and was supported by two Ngäbe organizations, the Asociación Ambientalista Mironomo-Cronomo para la defensa de los territorios y recursos naturales renovables y no renovables (AAMICRO) in Nole Duima and the Organización de Productores Agrícolas con Métodos Orgánicos (OPAMO) in Mironó. It was possible for me to learn of and make contact with these organizations from Montréal with the help of Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, a history professor at McGill, Celestino Mariano Gallardo, the president of AAMICRO, and Octavio Rodríguez, a member of OPAMO currently living in Panama City. Projects for each organization complemented my own work, pushing my focus to shift from struggles against extraction in the form of mining and hydroelectric projects to broader questions about farming, livelihoods, and politics. I stayed in the homes of members of these organizations: Nico Aguirre[3] in Boca del Monte and Isabel Morales in Molejón for the two months working with AAMICRO, and Alvaro Bejerano near Hato Dupí

[3] Names have been altered, except in cases where people specifically wished to be identified by name in my work. However, as most of the people to whom I will refer by name specifically wished to be identified in my work, from here I will note only when a name has been altered.

for the two months with OPAMO. I also spent a week with Nico in Caracol, hosted by Bernardo Montezuma, a visit which was cut short as a result of illness.

My principle method of research was participatory observation, "being there" to interact with people and participate in their lives, albeit as an outsider occupying a very different position within social structures of power and access. This meant being around my host families, helping with household and farm work as possible, as well as visiting neighbors, going to churches, funerals, and meetings, and participating in public life as much as I could. Work for AAMICRO also involved a number of farm visits and interviews in Boca del Monte, Cerro Dios, Cerro Tula, Cabacera Santiago, Hato Chamí, Molejón, Oma, Sardina, and surrounding areas, for a report to document the current agroecological situation in Nidrini and how it has changed since 2000. The project with OPAMO was to document the history of the organization through a series of more in-depth interviews with each of its current members, with a particular attention to its conceptual work and the ways it has managed relations with outside institutions. Work with and for these two organizations was also an integral part of my own research; spending time learning the histories and the desires from which their projects emerge profoundly influenced the sense of "politics" around which this thesis is structured. Conceptually, I am particularly indebted to Celestino, Nico and Rufina, Isabel, and Alvaro and Meliko for their patience and interest during extended conversations.

It is important to note the limitation posed by language barriers. Many people with whom I work speak Spanish as a second or third language, preceded by Ngäbere and sometimes also Buglere. Over the time I spent in Nidrini I learned words and phrases in Ngäbere and Buglere, but did not become conversational. Among younger to middle-aged

people this did not constitute a problem, as, through schooling and media, Spanish has become the language many people speak most often. However, not speaking Ngäbere did limit the conversations I could have with some older people, especially older women, who are generally least likely to have had access to any formal education. Nico, Isabel, and Alvaro were immensely helpful in translating at times, especially in the context of interviews, but more informal interactions with certain people were difficult to establish at times for this reason.

It is also important to note the limitation posed by language barriers in a less literal sense. People speaking the same language are not always speaking the same language, and language is more that knowing what words mean. The work of trying to understand others is always murky, partial, and experimental, but dramatically so when the worlds and histories that we inhabit are so vastly different. We are sitting on someone's porch and a child walks in with a bundle of herbs. I ask what they are used for, imagining medicine or food, and the answer is "sweeping the floor".

In terms of conceptual methodology, Lisa Stevenson's conception of "image as method" heavily influences the approach I take in this work (2014). What is at stake in thinking through image is attending to a "something" that escapes the register of fact. Her notion of image as I would take it up here is broad enough to include the visual, the sonic, and the verbal. But what is distinctive about images *methodologically* is their capacity to "capture uncertainty and contradiction without having to resolve it." (2014:10) Working through image "means listening for those moments when the formulation of a fact…does not satisfy...what we want, perhaps, is the opacity of an image that can match the density of our feelings." (2014:13) The facts of colonization and climate change are clearly important,

and allow for a certain kind of political work that is urgently needed. But a politics of means requires a method that is oriented not towards life as a fact, survival, life as the counterpart to death, but rather to the living and dying that make up a life, living in which the "something" that holds cannot be resolved into fact. For this reason, my approach to ethnography is oriented towards these gaps or knots, things that hold and refuse to go away, while trying always to respect their ordinariness.

Yet this "ordinary" is not mine, even as I am implicated in it. The lives I write about are lives of people who have come to be defined through centuries as indigenous, on the constitutive outside of the white settler society within which I live and write. While rural Panama and urban North America are worlds apart, they are within the same "New World" structured and sustained by spaces of death, by the cultural elaboration of fear, by a rationality that validates some bodies and destroys others. It is not by chance that no Ngäbe student has ever been welcomed into my own farming community in Virginia to write about the meaning of our deeply political forms of agriculture. If I wish to write about things like coloniality, modernity, and politics in the register of someone else's ordinary, I can only present what those someone-elses tell me. To then explain that, to resolve it into fact with my own kind of sense-making, is to perpetuate the colonizer's exclusive claim to rationality. Of course, I proceed to explain. Yet, while the form of my work is structured by colonial relations, I hope that its content can at least work against the grain of the authority of authorship, to present pieces inevitably partial, ordered and refracted through my mind but not explained, resolved, or legitimized by it. To this end I would work through image and association, surrounded by theory as a form of attention, not to make a whole, a system, or an order.

Chapters

The architecture of my thesis follows Gibson-Graham's definition of politics, while throughout my attention is guided by an interest in a politics of means. The first three chapters describe features of the undecidable terrain inhabited by these farmers, while the fourth focuses on decisions and transformation in the context of the two organizations through which I was able to work in the Comarca, AAMICRO and OPAMO.

The first chapter, "Memory", takes as a theme the way that history which is beyond the direct experiences of living individuals is remembered and has force in the present. The context of this history is deeply colonial, as Ngäbe have been subjected to invasion and occupation for over five hundred years. The form of the description is inflected through an attention to living, less to the events and narrative of that history than to the ways that its great weight continues to be felt. In order to develop this attention, while setting the historical context of this place, I draw on a sense of history that comes from Walter Benjamin, and particularly the ways his thinking is taken up by Kathleen Stewart to consider history "as an occupied space…in which people roam" (1996: 90). Thinking of history not as events but as occupied space, and working through image (as opposed to fact), is intended as a way to surface some of the subtle ways that coloniality pervades contemporary living in this context, as well as the deep ambivalence people express towards colonization.

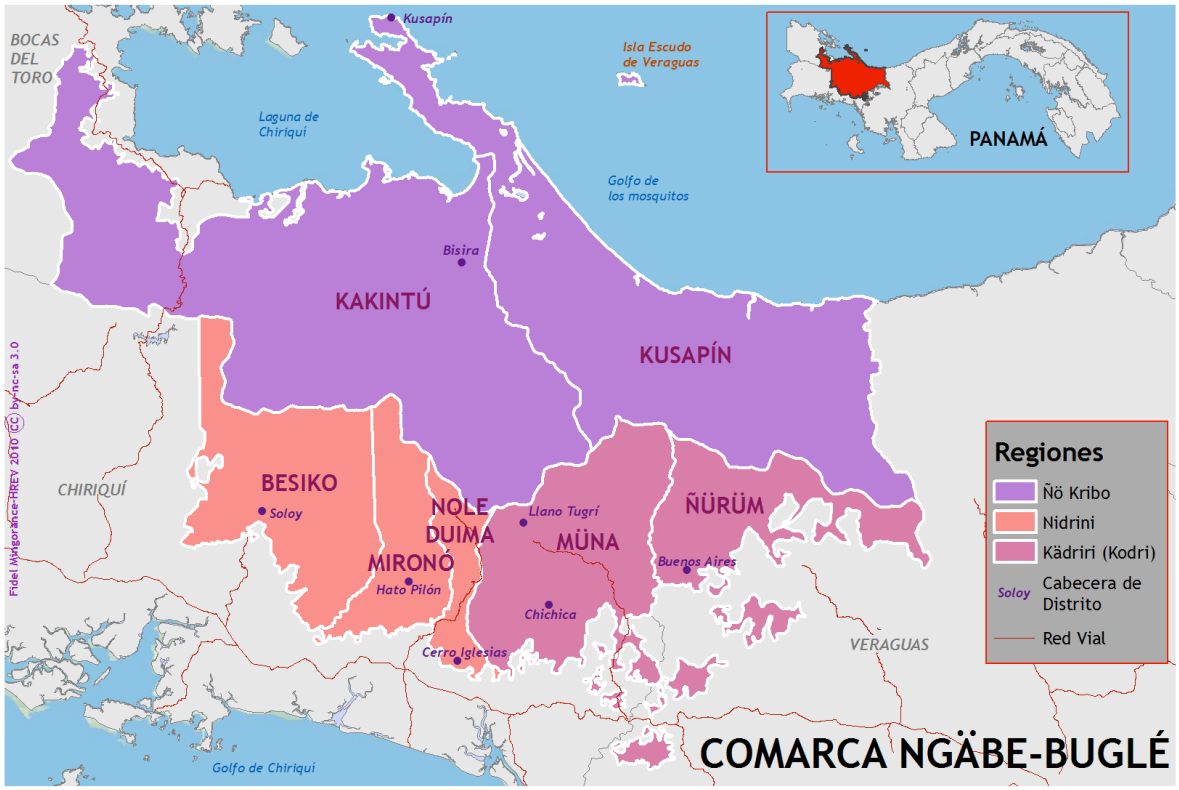
The second chapter, "The State", continues the approach of working through image and focusing on living to discuss interactions with the state within living memory. It takes up stories that circulate about life under Omar Torrijos and the dictator Noriega, about past and ongoing political mobilizations, and about day-to-day interactions with government

workers, in order to build a sense of how the state is thought of, what its presence or absence can mean in people's lives, and how historical interactions with the state accrete into particular ways of being a citizen and imagining possible forms of political engagement. It also departs in places from image to event, as some narrative understanding of recent moments is helpful in describing this accretion. Throughout, it works to build up a sense of what conceptual work "modernity" might do in this context, drawing on Arturo Escobar and Povinelli. Povinelli's sense of politics as the work of moving from *phonos* to *logos* is also helpful here, in attending to the deeply irrational and uneven context for making claims to public rationality, and to the limitations of who and what is visible and sayable. The underlying motivation, again, is to understand how the state and modernity fit into the terrain which conditions possible decisions and imbues them with political meaning.

The third chapter, "Farming", discusses people's livelihoods in the present and in memory, how places or environments participate in life, and the pressures which are emerging from agroecological disruptions, notably climate change and changes in the density at which people inhabit the landscape. Conversations about making a living in Nidrini today often follow an arch from remembered abundance and to slow disintegration, as people remark on the changes in the sensory landscape and the ways their bodies register loss; this trajectory suggests slow death as old ways of living become impossible. But undercutting, or at least complicating, this sense of linear decline are other stories people tell, fragments of memory that suggest not nostalgia but deep ambivalence both to the way things have been and the way things are. Attending to this ambivalence is not to obfuscate the seriousness of the ecological disruptions people are facing; people who in

living memory subsisted mostly if not entirely on their own crops are now depending more and more on white rice, sardines, and soda, changes with profoundly disruptive implications. But it is important to respect the ordinariness of people's lives, for even as bearing violent disruption deeply shapes lives it does not contain or define the experience of living as a human. There is also beauty here. Running throughout the chapter is an attention to how the environment and its changes participate in living, how they are manifest as terrain, and particularly how agroecological changes force processes "of transformation instituted by taking decisions" into relief *as decisions*, such that even continuing as one had requires transformation.

The final chapter focuses on AAMICRO and OPAMO in order to discuss the collective work of deciding and transformation, that is to say politics, within the context elaborated in the previous three chapters. Tsing's notion of "noticing the seams", Escobar's conception of the ways that sites on the constitutive outside of the complex of Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality (MCD) can hold the potential for emancipation, and Gibson-Graham's approach to economic alterity guide my interest in understanding the politicality of these organizations' work as it relates to and operates through farming. The idea, drawn from Asef Bayat's work, of a politics that works through the "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (2010:43) is helpful here. Ultimately, discussing each organization grounds the idea of a politics of means in the pragmatics of transformation envisioned and enacted in the work of living by farming in a particular time and place.



Map 1. Comarca Ngäbe-Buglé. The border between Ño Kribo and the regions to the south follows the continental divide along the top of the Sierra de Talamanca; the Atlantic slope is steeper, wetter, and more densely forested, while the Pacific slope is drier, a mix of seasonal wet forest and natural savannah. I worked in Nidrini, for two months in the district of Nole Duima and two months in Mironó. The road shown on the map running north-south through Nole Duima is the road built in the 1970s to access the Cerro Colorado deposit; the town of San Félix is at the intersection of this road and the Pan-American Highway, the only east-west road on the map. From http://cicada.world/partners/indigenous-groups/ngabe-bugle/.

CHAPTER 1. MEMORY

> *The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. (Benjamin 1968:255)*

We had been in town for church, it was Saturday afternoon, after the service. It was Saturday because they are Seventh Day Adventists. Heavy dark clouds were gathering. Evangelito invited us to his house. (Evangelito is Osvaldo's grandfather, one of the oldest people in Alto Guayabal. He remembered a time when his family and two others were the first three to come back to the area, living on Cerro Mesa before they moved farther down the valley, travelling to the coast to make salt). We sat in his patio, down the hill from his house which is new and light blue. Alvaro was curious how he had made the sheet rock covering the bottom half of the walls, thinking about improving his own home. We sat under a zinc roof, open walls to the town on one side and forest sloping down on the other, served *chicha*[4] in blue plastic cups dipped from a five-gallon bucket. Evangelito on a shiny plastic chair, the flimsy plastic of August porches, Meliko and Alvaro together on a bench, me on a low stool half-crouching in front of Evangelito. Waves of rain were starting to pass through. Alvaro asked Evangelito about Magadá, saying we had been talking about the story the night before (he had been explaining to me why Magadá seemed like an odd name for a local cattle-raising collective) but that he hadn't been able to remember all of it.

We talk about weather, *chicha*, children, are served more *chicha*. Evangelito switches from Spanish to Ngäbere, remembering in greater detail, as Alvaro translates into

[4] In this context, a drink made by mashing fruit or grain, perhaps roasting it, and letting the mash sit in water. It is most often made from corn but also sometimes from yuca, *pifá*, or *nance*, among other crops; it is fermented to varying degrees, or not at all. Here the *chicha* was made from new corn and had not fermented noticeably.

Spanish in fragments for me. He said this had happened soon after the occupation began, when the Ngäbe were still actively at war. A Ngäbe man, Magadá, overcome with rage, caught fire or set himself alight, ran through a Spanish settlement torching buildings, and threw himself into the ocean to extinguish his burning. In the water, he became a snake. He became a danger, wild, uncontrollable, eating settlers and Ngäbe alike, eating ships, islands, mountains, valleys. The Spanish with their ships and guns were powerless, and eventually a Spanish priest came to a Ngäbe *sukia*[5] asking for help. Hesitantly the *sukia* agreed. The *sukia* went away for a time and formed a plan. Four Ngäbe men were given a boat to travel to Magadá, intent on being swallowed and killing the snake from the inside. The *sukia* said that Magadá would find medicine for his stomach, which would kill the men inside unless they hid. The *sukia* would know when Magadá went to look for medicine and would use storms to warn the men inside, so when they heard thunder they must take cover. The four Ngäbe men went in the boat, travelling through storms to the place where Magadá was. They could not bring much food, and were very hungry—one of them died of hunger before they reached Magadá—the remaining three were swallowed. Inside Magadá they saw ships, islands, mountains, valleys, a world. They began cutting into the wall of his stomach, trying to cut out and through and kill the snake.

The work was slow. When they heard thunder they would hide, as floods of different medicines went by—yellow, red, purple. After the medicines passed they kept digging into the stomach, weakening of hunger. Two more men starved, but the fourth eventually cut his way out of the snake. He poured out with a flood of stomach contents. He travelled back, was greeted as a hero, and brought with him two eagles that crowned Magadá's head, one

[5] Loosely equivalent to a shaman, in a context where distinctions between medicinal, spiritual, and political forms of leadership are not neatly separable.

of white gold and one of red gold. One of these became animate and killed him. Magadá did not die but disappeared, saying he would be back in four days. Like Jesus, like other *caciques*[6]. The four days is a metaphor, Evangelito explains. Alvaro is intrigued by the importance of four and pushes for an explanation, which Evangelito does not have.

He says that the Ngäbe and their *sukias* had had magic, witchcraft, but that God must have taken it away because the Spanish and the Ngäbe needed to live together in peace. He says that on the plain stretching south to the sea there were other people who spoke other languages and made pottery, but they were killed long ago and gone now. He says there used to be many people here, but that a little man on a donkey came through and everyone fell ill and many people died. The man on the donkey is the sickness, he says, there wasn't really a man on a donkey. There were mostly only children left, and they couldn't bury everyone. He says the bodies were left in the open, they were eaten by vultures, they rotted. We are quiet. Alvaro and Meliko thank him for the *chicha*, and we step out into the rain. We walk home quietly, stopping by a *tienda* (here, a small dry goods store) for sugar, and Alvaro wonders about making sheetrock and about the number four.

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For a politics of means, the tacking between concept and life must be tight. History is what is remembered. Colonization is a little man on a donkey, a morally ambiguous enormity, bodies unburied. The heroes die not in battle but of hunger. The past is not something to either continue or reject, as theories of (non/alter)modernity would suggest. It is there, a monster made of violence upon violence, a monster which will come back, like Jesus, waiting, absent and present.

[6] Here refers to a leader, often with spiritual powers but with stronger connotations of political and martial power than *sukia*.

It is this history of colonization to which I would attend in this chapter. Within the framework of a politics of means, a politics oriented around living, history is felt in the present not through events, through collections of dates and names, but through its affective holds, the stories through which it lives, memories of human bodies which can be narrative, imagistic, sensory, embodied.[7] The history which makes up the undecidable terrain of Gibson-Graham's politics, which conditions the possible and the boundary between speech and noise, is not events but their residue. It is the wreckage, and the dream of awakening the dead.

We could note that European records show the first Spanish invasions of the mountains where Ngäbe live today began in 1516. In 1537 it was deemed in a letter sent to the *Consejo de Indias* that "the conquest had not been effective" in the mountains (Young 1970:52), yet "the considerable Indian population of the Isthmus declined abruptly during the early years. Tens of thousands were killed", predominantly on the plains along the Pacific, under a Spanish leader known as "the Timur of the Indies" (Weil 1972:11). Missionaries picked up the project of conquest here in 1581, continuing sporadically through the eighteenth century. They used a method known as *reducción*, "whereby a number of Indians were gathered together in one place to form a town (this was frequently accomplished with military aid when the natives displayed a reluctance to comply with the wishes of the friars) and were then instructed in Christian doctrine…after a series of

[7] Another way to think this would be with the distinction that Berlant (2011) draws between event and happening, in which a happening is an event that has not, or not yet, found a genre. Making happenings into object-like events, finding their genre, rarely if ever happens as they are lived. If events are a way of making sense of what happens, thinking through them does not capture all of the more subtle ways that history persists in the present, holding and refusing to resolve.

unpleasant [sic] experiences under Spanish domination, more than 9,000 Guaymí[8] burned their houses in the new mission towns and returned to their native way of life." (Young 1970:53) According to documented history and its negative spaces, after these initial waves of military and religious invasion (over the course of two centuries), "for the most part, [they] lived their own lives…they rebuilt their devastated population, adapting traditional ways to new circumstances". (Gjording 1991:39)

Yet to understand history as terrain, to attend to some of the ways that five hundred years of colonization condition politics, politicality, and the work of imagining possible futures, it helps to follow Stewart: "Imagine history not as an accomplished fact or a formless tendency but as an occupied space of contingency and desire in which people roam." (1996:90) Building a description of this space works less through fact than through image, because history is manifest in ordinary living insidiously, as something that holds not because of its factual content but in spite of it, something that refuses to resolve simply into what has happened, and that holds so powerfully precisely because of this refusal.

//

Memories and history live on in the present and well up from places and bodies, as people go about living and life-making within an occupied landscape. When Isabel found out I had eaten squirrels before, he decided that we would go hunting in the valley along the Rio San Félix. Now, more people live along the road, which follows a ridge, but before they lived mostly in the valleys where there is water and richer soil; there are old stands of *pifá* in the valley that are now frequented by squirrels. We walk by a place where his

[8] A name previously used to refer to Ngäbe and Buglé people. Its origin is unclear, but Ngäbe who I asked about the word thought it might come from the name of a particular group of Ngäbe, noting that there were "tribes" which used to be listed on people's birth certificates but that these are no longer considered to be relevant categories.

grandparents had lived, which today is marked by two trees they planted at their doorway and a stand of palms used for thatching. He tells me that this was an old cemetery before they built their house here, and I ask if that made them hesitant to live here. The question doesn't make sense to him.

We walk by a stream, and he tells me that before, when he was a child, a huge mango tree grew here, and when it died the spring welled up from its roots. He talks about his parents' house near here, where they lived when he was young. He tells me that when they first set up a house here they hardly had enough to eat, but after the first year came to have a stable supply of corn, *pifá*, rice, and yuca, enough to share, which they did.

Later we stop to wash yuca and ourselves in the spring we had passed before. Isabel finds a handful of potsherds in the water, and tells me that the people who made them must have been his ancestors, but that now no one knows how the pots were made. He says that these fragments were probably dug up by the crews building the road for the mining companies in the 1970s, that the workers dug up and destroyed the records of this history, dumping it down into the valleys on either side.

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Alvaro and I visited Rafantonio's farm when I first came to Mironó. We went along with three engineers from IDIAP who were there to check on a variety of corn they had brought him to test, and to see a spot that OPAMO was considering for a model hoop house, and so the visit was "professional" rather than open-ended, but in passing Rafantonio mentioned being the only archaeologist in Dupí.

Some weeks later, he brought out some of the artifacts he had collected. He explained that sometimes he finds them through other people, sometimes while working

the land; sometimes after finding one he digs more to see if he can find others nearby. He wonders about markings he sees on them. He says his grandfather told him that, before people had writing, there were conventions of how to leave messages where trails crossed. How to make or read those markings is forgotten.

He made a wooden chest to store the objects he finds. There are fragments of clay—vessels, figures, something with holes that was maybe an ocarina. There are stone axes. There are round stones with concentric circles, each with eight smaller stones set in a ring. He wonders about time, clocks, the stars. He talks about making a museum in the town. He would like to know what these objects mean, who made them, how, why.

//

History here is the trees that remember an old house; it is the house built without pause on a cemetery. It is mysterious objects, and it is the alienation between a person and their own unknown ancestors who made them. It is markings that remain in the landscape but have become unintelligible. It is fragments, buried and then brought to the surface through violence, love, or accident, fragments which speak of a life that escapes memory.

Attending to this kind of history makes room for noticing forms of colonial violence, and how histories of violence do not go away but hang on as something on the edges, waiting, something absent and present, something which will come back, not something apprehensible in the register of events. For the Christian god has taken away magic and the war is over. History tells us that, for a few centuries after the eventful ruptures of colonization, "for the most part, [they] lived their own lives in their remote regions" (Gjording 1991:39). The occupying nation composes itself in an absolving mythology of

mestizaje[9], a mythology in which indigenous people have not been killed or subjugated but simply dissolved, their "culture" celebrated in ads in the airport alongside the spectacular mountains and forests of the Republic of Panama even as their lands are flooded for hydroelectric projects and expropriated for gold mining.

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It is not arbitrarily that bodies which are inscribed as the outside of colonial society come to be exposed to death differently, that the edges between living and dying here are fragile. But, because the war is "over", dying is only rarely dramatic. It is more likely to be at the hands of doctors or careless drivers than the police, and even more likely to be in the hands of families who watch new and unexplained illnesses take people they love. It is slow, routine, the wearing down of bodies that happen to be stuck in occupied territory and surrounded by other bodies less likely to be malnourished and exposed to agrochemical toxins, less likely to be struck by cars, less likely to slip in the mud and never heal.

On hearing that an older relative had just died unexpectedly, a boy in whose house I was living asks if people die this much in Canada.

We visit houses where middle-aged people have fallen ill with unfamiliar symptoms and slowly waste away—sometimes biomedical care is simply inaccessible, sometimes it is

[9] It is important to note that race and coloniality work very differently and have a different conceptual history here than in Anglophone North America. Further complicating notions of both race and coloniality is the history of US imperialism in Latin American in general and especially in Panama, in which Euro-Panamanians also come to be racialized as other by white northerners. There is also a long history of peaceful cohabitation between Ngäbe and some *mestizo* campesino farmers living on adjacent lands, reflected in that one of the full names of the Comarca is the "Comarca Ngäbe-Buglé y Campesino". But, nonetheless, the divide between indigenous and "Panamanian", as *mestizo*, white-er, less brown, is a structuring one, that is to say one that to some extent shapes political visibility, policing, media coverage, and the imaginaries of indigenous and non-indigenous people in Panama. Gjording (1991), tracing the history of political organizing from the Mama Tatha movement of the early 1960s through the struggle against mining in the 70s, shows the tensions that underlie seemingly peaceful coexistence, as Ngäbe land continued to be invaded by cattle ranchers, and Latino farmers, seeing the large (and peaceful) gatherings of Mama Tatha adherents, stockpiled firearms.

avoided because of the stories that circulate of the impersonal and at times murderous forms it takes, sometimes people go to clinics and are refused help.

After a week of not being able to eat or drink I go to a free clinic run by the Ministry of Health and return with electrolytes to help retain water, in powder and liquid forms, a few different medicines to sooth gastrointestinal unrest, a round of polyantibiotic-resistant *Bacillus clausii* spores, and cough syrup (just in case?), all for free, and Nico's family tells me their own children, suffering the same symptoms as me, have never received such care from the same clinic.

There are stories of children taken to hospitals with a cough and killed anonymously through the inattention of the doctors.

One of the *chiva* drivers in town of Las Lajas, just south of San Félix, recently struck and killed a Ngäbe girl. He continues to drive, unpunished.

A conversation with Meliko about using salt water to treat fungal infections during the rainy season turns to her memories of nursing her uncle for five months with porridge, liquor, and salt water baths after a mysterious fall broke his body and mind. Eventually, he healed.

Nico and I went to a funeral for a man who had succumbed to an unknown illness. After burying him, some women from his family served us all rice in *bijao*[10] leaves and we sat or stood around eating. Nico suggested that I take advantage of the opportunity to interview one of the deceased man's family members about the current agroecological situation, but I hesitated because of the funereal context of the gathering. Both Nico and the man to be interviewed found my hesitation unnecessary.

[10] An understory plant, the large leaves of which are often used to wrap food, as pot lids, and as plates.

Each of these moments when continuous exposure to death breaks the surface are eventful to me, but they unfold as thoroughly normal and routine. People take note, pause, and continue to live. This is not a crisis. Through five centuries of colonization, life within a space of slow dying has become the ordinary condition of living; rupture has long since ceased to be eventful, mostly, and the present is not "an exception that has just shattered some ongoing, uneventful ordinary life that was supposed to just keep going on and with respect to which people felt solid and confident." (Berlant 2011:10)

It is the past that is the scene of the extraordinary. It is the space of war and magic, beyond individual memory, both wreckage and a dream. Yet, in the present, the possibility for a life that feels "solid and confident" is a distant one. Life today unfolds within a condition of continuous alienation in which normalcy is on the edges of memory, where history is at once pervasive and just beyond reach. And yet "being treads water; mainly, it does not drown. Even those whom you would think of as defeated are living beings figuring out how to stay attached to life from within it…" (Berlant 2011:10) Living continues, in a place where continuing to live contradicts the rationality of the governing settler colonial society.[11] Being is at once politically loaded and thoroughly ordinary.

We could think of this as slow death, which Berlant describes as "the structurally induced attrition of persons keyed to their membership in certain populations…neither a state of exception nor the opposite, mere banality, but a domain where an upsetting scene of living is revealed to be interwoven with ordinary life". (2011:102) To make sense of the

[11] This is not to say that suffering, poverty, cruddiness, and slow attrition are restricted to indigenous people in Panama. But, it is also true that the suffering of indigenous people in Panama is uniquely invisible and externalized, such that even their very existence can be strategically denied. In 2011, when the Martinelli government sought to justify mining the Cerro Colorado copper deposit, it argued not simply that resources from the mine would support development, or that the scale of the impacts would be small relative to the benefits, but also that *no one lives* where the mine would operate, which is objectively false but was treated as a credible claim.

terrain I would describe, it is important to keep intact the seemingly contradictory nature of Berlant's concept of "crisis ordinariness" (2011:101), neither exception *nor* the opposite, for people are never merely object-like; they live with history but are not contained by it.

The events of colonization and the ongoing condition of coloniality continue to have density and exert force within everyday life, structuring the terrain of the possible within which politics unfolds (Stewart 1996; Gibson-Graham 2006). Yet history is not *only* rupture. The continuity of emplaced relations among living beings, the ways that farming cultivates, rehearses, and repeats embodied memories of the rhythms of landscapes, days, and seasons, are an important counter to the narrative arch of colonization, to be taken up in greater depth in the third chapter. Broken fragments of pottery show up alongside the trees that mark the dooryard of an old house, the smells of new rice and the cycling rhythms of rain and harvests. Isabel's remembering of the destruction wrought by the uninvited road crews comes in the same breath as his memory of hunger and abundance in his childhood, and the ordinariness of these latter recollections in no way diminishes the strength of their hold. The way to read or make the markings left at crossroads is lost, but it *also* matters that people still walk these same dirt paths, worn deep into the land.

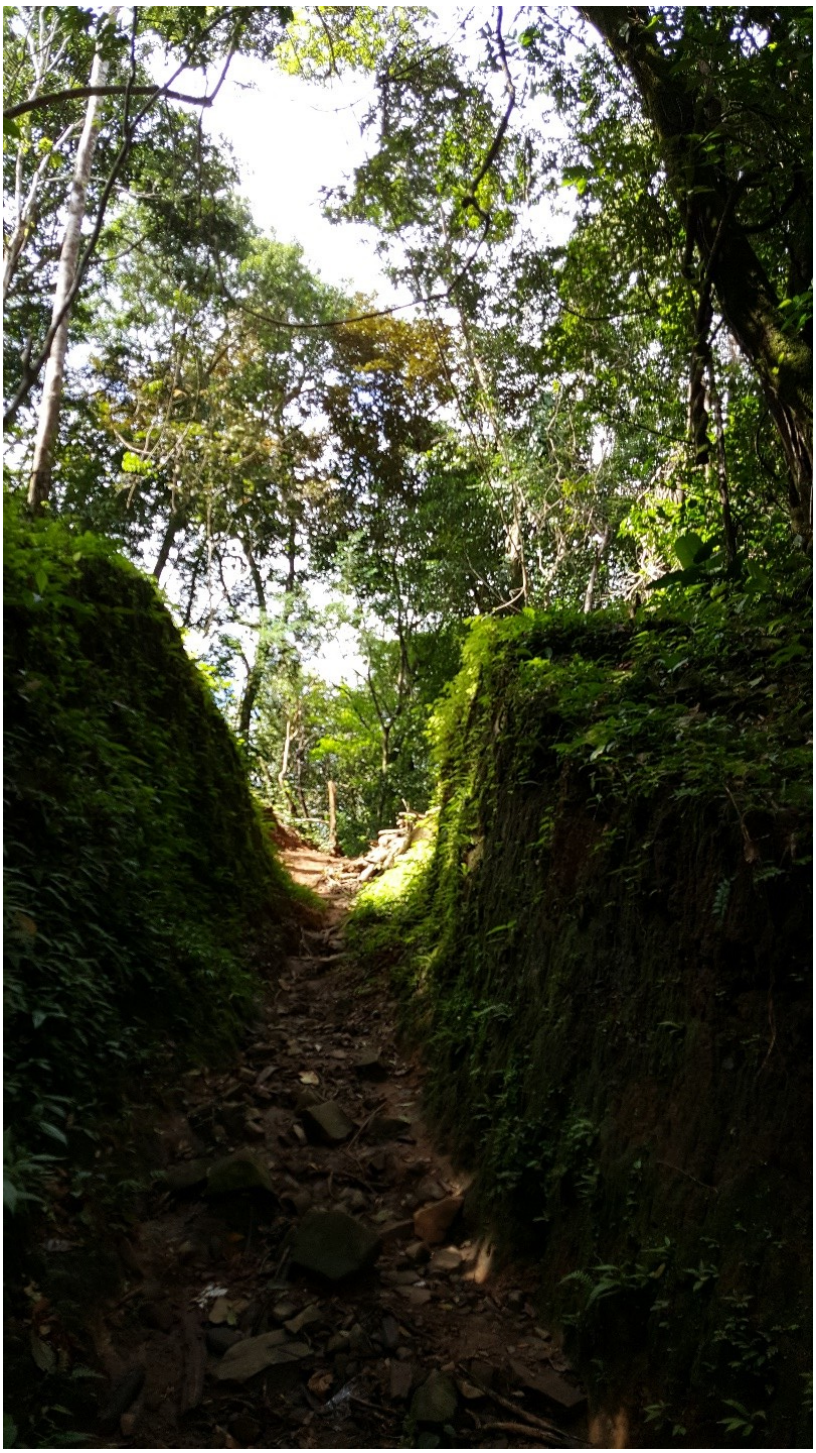
The point here is not that coloniality is all-encompassing, but that it does continue to have force in the present in such a way as to imbue ordinary life with political meaning, sometimes. History is at once absent *and* present, easy to ignore for a time but impossible to escape. It wells up unexpectedly, from places, in moments when the fragility of the edges between living and dying is felt—registered as an interruption, perhaps, but not an extraordinary one. The fragments of history emerge sometimes through violence, sometimes love, sometimes accident, but together in their contingency they come to

condition the political and the possible as people go about making their lives within undecidable terrain.

Potsherds Isabel found in the stream.

Some of the objects collected and cared for by Rafantonio. The two circular ones on the lower right were especially mysterious to him, having no obvious utilitarian purpose and suggesting the temporal and the celestial.

Nico by a house where his grandparents had lived, surrounded by yuca, *pifá*, bananas, one kind of palm used for thatching, and one used for weaving.



A footpath north of Dupí, worn perhaps 10 feet deep into the soil.

CHAPTER 2. THE STATE

In school children learn the national anthem. They practice for months with snare drums and trumpets for the parades which celebrate the founding of the Republic of Panama—in the relative quiet of the Comarca, you can hear the drums for miles, week after week, on all sides.

In school, dress code is very rigidly enforced. Julio was sent home multiple times because he fell on the slick dirt road and got thick red clay on his pants—he would try to wash it off in the river, but the stain stuck. Boys must have short hair; Silvano was sent home early when his hair came over his ears.[12]

In school the teachers usually don't hold classes on Friday, saying they have other commitments. During the week, they often arrive late and leave early, so classes last just a few hours.

A teacher explained to me that people in the Comarca have good land, but they are lazy and don't want to work. This is why they are poor, why their children show up to school not meeting dress code. It is sad, but it is the way things are.

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It is late afternoon. Alvaro and I are walking down the road to Dupí, having taken a *chiva* up from San Félix as far as Alto Guayabal.

It had been raining and the road was bad. The truck would normally have dropped its passengers when the road got steep and turned back, but today many people were coming back from shopping with tanks of propane, sacks of rice, and other bulky objects, so

[12] Pseudonyms.

we all had gotten out and pushed through a rough section, becoming covered in red mud sprayed up by the spinning tires.

Now, walking back, we run into two teachers heading the other way. Seeing us, one of them asks "Did you fall?" No, we were pushing the truck.

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There is a deep ambivalence to the state, to colonization, to modernity. People tell stories of hard work, sharing, and solidarity, of exposure, uncertainty, fear, and death. They are glad their children have access to school, yet also feel how the schools alienate their children from their own lives. A voice of modernity asks "Why are you covered in mud? Did you fall?" The answer might be yes or no, but, regardless, being covered in mud is not a statement on modernity. Sometimes you might be covered in mud because the state half-built a road, and now prefers to spend its resources on more visible projects for which the governing party can take credit. So you make do with the terrain in which you find yourself. Being covered in mud is not really the point. All that the teachers see, though, is that you cannot keep yourself clean.[13]

This chapter picks up a narrative, image-oriented approach, previously used to think about colonization and history, as a way to understand the state ("*el gobierno")* as part of the undecidable terrain within which the political takes shape. Its underlying motivation is to build a sense of how something called "the state" comes to appear as an entity in people's lives, how remembered interactions accrete into specific modes of political engagement while foreclosing on others. Attending to the ways these interactions

[13] These statements are of specific instances, specific teachers, specific schools, not to accuse all teachers and all schools in the Comarca of operating in the same way. I am sure there are very dedicated teachers, mitigating circumstances, etc.; these statements are intended to depict the way that schools appeared in the places and the lives of people where I spent time.

take place will gesture towards the complex of modernity/coloniality/decoloniality (Escobar 2008), as well as the edges between policing and politics in this particular place. The account of this history is inevitably partial in both senses of the word, especially given the temporal and spatial constraints of this thesis, but some context is necessary to understand specifically how farming here, for some people, comes to be political.

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Meliko lives around Dupí now, with Alvaro, but she grew up near Hato Chamí. She remembers being a child when the construction crews who built the mining access road arrived in the area. She and most of her neighbors did not speak Spanish. They couldn't have communicated with the workers, and had not been informed that the road was coming until it was announced by the bulldozers and the unknown men who drove them. She had never seen machines like those before, and fled.

Before reaching Hato Chamí, those same bulldozers would have passed through what is now Molejón, scattering the fragments of pottery that Isabel found in the stream. They came uninvited, unannounced, without consent. They built the road as though in an uninhabited landscape, carving the most direct way possible along ridgelines up to Cerro Colorado, creatures of a world where "resources" exist in empty space waiting to be extracted by those with the capital to do so.

While the bulldozers themselves were unannounced, for people who were more involved in politics than Meliko had been as a girl the road came within a time of ongoing mobilization which is genealogically connected to labor organizing on United Fruit

Company banana plantations.[14] Energy from these experiences carried forward into a specifically Ngäbe movement in the early 1960s, with the visions that lead to the founding of the Mama Tatha faith[15] and the calls for legal autonomy that grew from it. In 1965, a group of religious leaders and political activists had declared an independent Ngäbe republic.[16]

In 1969 the stakes of these struggles were brought into relief abruptly. Canadian Javelin, a Montréal-based mining company, won a concession to the copper deposit under Cerro Colorado, a mountain along the continental divide on the northern edge of Nole Duïma (map 1). The formation is one of the largest unmined copper deposits in the world, also containing quantities of gold, silver, and molybdenum. Exploiting it would have meant a massive open pit mine impacting three major watersheds of the region that is now the Comarca: the San Félix and Tabasará, on the Pacific side, and the Cricamola on the Atlantic. (Gjording 1991)

The mobilization that took place around this was an important moment in forming the identity of Ngäbe-Buglé people as a political body within the modern state (Young and Bort 1979), and that this took place through interactions with Omar Torrijos' government continues to shape how people imagine the state and their relationship to it. The details of these events are meticulously documented by Gjording (1991) and Jordan (2011), among

[14] While important in laying the groundwork for contemporary Ngäbe political consciousness, this activity was concentrated around banana plantations in Bocas del Toro and so has less gravity in the present in the region where I worked than do the struggles against mining at Cerro Colorado and later hydro projects. For more discussion of this, and its relation to subsequent political mobilizations, see Young (1971) and Gjording (1991).

[15] A syncretic religious movement formed around two women who had had prophetic visions in the early 1960s, which, among other things, called for Ngäbe to turn away from increased contact with Latino society and turn inward. (Gjording 1991; Jordan 2011; Young 1971)

[16] A unit of the National Guard commanded by Omar Torrijos was sent out in response; Torrijos turned the confrontation into a dialogue for recognition that would stretch over the next 32 years to the eventual establishment of the Comarca in 1997. (Jordan 2011)

others; here my intent is not to discuss them thoroughly but only to call attention to some of their elements in order to attend to their residue.

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Omar Torrijos emerged as the *de facto* head of the Panamanian state following a coup in 1968, at which time he had been a lieutenant in the National Guard. He would remain in power until his death in a somewhat mysterious plane crash in 1981, governing what he called the *dictadura con cariño* (dictatorship with tenderness). (Jordan 2011) His policies were anti-colonial in their explicit opposition to US imperialism, particularly in the Canal Zone, yet structurally colonial in their pursuit of foreign investment in extractive megaprojects, mines and dams that were to be the material basis for domestic modernization. His mode of governing was personal, corporatist, and clientelistic.

During the 1970s, as Torrijos pursued parallel projects of modernization and extraction, the state presence in Ngäbe areas increased markedly. The first schools and health clinics were built here, at the same time as the mining access road, houses for hypothetical mine workers, and exploratory excavations on Cerro Colorado.[17] Torrijos' style of government was very much based in personality, and he visited Ngäbe communities both before and following his ascent to political power. He had already established relationships with some Ngäbe leaders following the events of 1965, showing a willingness to engage in conversation rather than resorting immediately to military repression, yet Lorenzo Rodriguez, a more explicitly political, rather than spiritual, Ngäbe leader, was nonetheless arrested two or perhaps three times by the Torrijos government as a "communist subversive". (Jordan 2011:119-120; Gjording 1991:52-66)

[17] See Gjording (1991) for a discussion of these events.

Stories of Torrijos continue to circulate, stories of promises, patronage, and a personal, patriarchal mode of governance. He is said to have visited a community and given them several cows. When he returned several years later, expecting them to have multiplied into a herd, he was purportedly enraged to find that they had been eaten instead. He left, saying he would never return to this particular community. In turn for a promise (which would remain unfulfilled for decades) to formalize and demarcate a Comarca, Ngäbe leaders worked to register as many people as they could with Torrijos' party, the Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD). Many Ngäbe continue to register with the party and support its candidates, despite the fact that it has shown little concern for their interests since Torrijos' death.

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Stories of the first mobilization against the mine continue to circulate alongside stories of Torrijos, bringing the thread of struggle against the Spanish from memories of earlier colonization into the context of the modern Panamanian state. This connection is often made explicitly; in spite of the narratives of postcoloniality and *mestizaje*, from the perspective of many Ngäbe the experiences of the past five centuries make up a continuous, if not steady, struggle simply to be able to go on with their lives under occupation.

I met Felicia Guerra shortly before leaving Cerro Dios, and spoke with her in her house on a hill above the road. She remembered walking to political gatherings in the 1970s, walking across the Cordillera, hungry, exposed to heavy rains, to go to meetings in Bocas del Toro, walking three times to participate in protests against the mine. She said that she just wanted to live in peace, and for her children to live here, in peace. Having seen films of strip mines in other countries, she did not want that here, and so she participated,

walking, going hungry. "*Por ese nosotros, también ese Nico, luchamos, siempre luchamos, pero ahora yo estoy mal de salud, no camino, estoy en la casa no más ahorita mismo. Pero antes…yo participaba, a donde sea yo caminaba. Pero ahora no, ya me enfermó y no puedo caminar*." / "For this we, Nico too, are struggling, always struggling, but now I am in bad health, I don't walk, I'm in the house and nothing more right now. But before…I participated, I walked wherever. But now no, I've gotten sick and can't walk." But she continues going to meetings when she can, participating in AAMICRO, and two of her daughters and her grandson went to the protests against the mine in 2011.

The contemporary struggle is more ambiguous than the memories of war and occupation in the previous chapter—the state appears in the form of unannounced bulldozers which would be coming to take metals and the land above them but could just as easily be bringing schools and health clinics, which people generally welcome. In either case, though, "modernity" is something imposed from outside, by occupying forces, and the state imposing it is governed by an unpredictable logic which exists in someone else's language.

This impression of the state as alien and unpredictable accrued new layers in the years following Torrijos' death. People remember the years of the Noriega dictatorship as a time when people were disappeared, when conventional political engagement with the state became lethal. People tell stories of Ngäbe who were forcibly conscripted to the police, who laid down their uniforms and went home when the US bombed and invaded the city they had been brought to. These years are described as a time of generalized fear, in which the condition of ongoing occupation was manifest in sudden as well as slow death.

In the 1990s, following the US invasion in 1989 and Noriega's imprisonment, the state began transitioning to an aggressively neoliberal mode of governance, emphasizing private capital over state projects and policing over welfare.[18] The expansion of services in the form of schools and health clinics has slowed, supplemented by a proliferation of small, uncoordinated, and short-lived development projects that are often the result of specific partnerships between the state, international aid programs, and NGOs. State projects, when they do happen, often emphasize news-making over long term benefits, while frequent restructurings of government ministries that are the result of patronage also inhibit continuity.[19] This means that, in general, the state's presence here is quiet and somewhat disjointed, except for moments of political mobilization and protest in response to extractive designs which are met with excessive policing. Here I briefly discuss two of those moments—protests against mining Cerro Colorado in 2011 and 2012, and organizing to oppose the Barro Blanco hydroelectric project in 2016—in order to consider how the residue of these events lingers in the present and imbues living with historical meaning. Along the way are gestures towards the relationships between policing and politics, and coloniality and modernity, within late liberal Panama. A recurrent concern is how the ways the state is present and absent come to bear on the specific forms of a politics of means.[20]

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[18] For thoughtful and thorough discussion of these changes in modes of governing, and their implications for Ngäbe, see Jordan. (2011; 2014)

[19] An exception to this is in the area of conservation, where the Ministry of the Environment (MiAmbiente, MA) is sporadically but increasingly involved. This will be elaborated in the subsequent two chapters.

[20] The details of these events are documented elsewhere, and again my intent here is to provide context for subsequent discussion, not to describe their details fully. For more adequate descriptions of what, specifically, happened, and of the details of the laws in question, see Jordan 2014; Dill et al 2012; Studnicki-Gizbert 2013; Montezuma 2012; Anaya 2014:16

In 2010 and 2011 the government of Ricardo Martinelli passed a series of laws to facilitate extractive projects in Panama in general and within the Comarca Ngäbe-Buglé specifically. These reforms included a restructuring of the electoral system within the Comarca, which favored leaders friendly to extraction, and changes in the mining code to allow foreign companies to invest directly in mining within the country. Both of these were seen as clearing the way for Cerro Colorado to be mined.

In February 2011, hundreds of people gathered to protest, confronting militarized police armed with teargas and shotguns to block the Pan-American Highway at San Félix for six days. To diffuse the protests, the government signed the San Félix Accords on the 27th of February, agreeing to prohibit mining in the Comarca and to take steps to better regulate hydroelectric projects. However, in the subsequent legislation intended to enact these promises, the provision pertaining to mining and hydroelectric projects was dropped. Protests were organized again in February 2012, closing the highway for six days. This time the police responded even more aggressively, arresting over a hundred people, injuring dozens, and killing two. Cell phone service was cut off in San Félix, and police targeted foreign journalists who were present. The government signed a second agreement on the 7th of February, the Accord of San Lorenzo, initiating a series of dialogues with Ngäbe representatives including the *cacica* Silvia Carrera (the leader of the Comarca following the 2010 electoral reforms). The eventual results of these meetings included both a ban on mining and the cancelation of some, but not all, hydroelectric concessions, within the Comarca. Notably, an agreement signed in 2010 between the previous *cacique* Máximo Saldaño and the hydroelectric company GENISA for a project on the Rio Tabasará, Barro Blanco, was not among those cancelled.

The protests of 2011 and 2012 are illustrative of the distinction between "policing" and "politics" made by Povinelli— "policing as the management of a given distribution" of visibility and sayability, politics as altering this distribution (50: 2011). Here, rendering claims in a way that is visible means demanding to be policed, confronting the police, shutting down the highway. Only by becoming exposed to the violence of repression were people able to refuse the invisibility that allowed the state to proceed with extractive projects as though the land were uninhabited. The police were not only trying to clear the highway—shutting down the phone service and targeting foreign journalists were very literally intended to manage existing distributions of visibility. A horrible irony here is that, if Jeronimo Rodríguez and Mauricio Méndez had not been killed by the police, I would not know their names.

But Panama since its inception as "Panama" has been structured around colonial violence and resource extraction, as a central point in the flow of capital and material first between the occupied Americas and Spain and now between the North Atlantic and East Asia. The technologies and topographies of wealth and power have changed in the past five centuries, but this is perhaps more strategically than experientially relevant to those whose lands are the object of capital's extractive desires. How are these moments distinct within the larger arch of centuries of colonization? In this particular moment, what is the difference between "coloniality" and "modernity"? Or, put another way, does thinking through modernity really show anything about what is happening here?

We could think of Torrijos. Very flatly, "modernity" is the dream of developing a nation, the dream in which he worked to include campesino farmers and indigenous people largely ignored or at least marginalized in previous nationalist projects. This dream is

oriented around a particular notion of "progress", a linear *development* of human societies. It is the dream of schools and health clinics, a dream in which indigenous people are welcomed…as long as their alterity does not extend into a desire to be in the world otherwise, a desire which might manifest in a valorization of emplaced livelihoods over the extractive megaprojects which are to fund those schools and clinics. To be modern is to place yourself within a particular structure of desire, a desire for a conception of progress that claims to be universal.

"Coloniality", on the other hand, is the structure of political-economic relations such that strip mining by a Canadian company seems to be the appropriate, logical means to enact these dreams. Of course metals are a resource, of course they will be extracted, of course this is how wealth is made. Of course these are decisions that can be made in Panama City, regardless of the specific histories, dreams, and lives of the people living on the land above and around those metals. The assumptions about places and people that undergird the dream of modernity are anything but a break from colonial history.

Materially and historically, modernity and coloniality are inextricable; in Escobar's work one cannot think one without the other, as "the proper unit for the analysis of modernity is modernity/coloniality" (2008:168). Modernity, in order to claim to be universal, must subjugate specifically those spaces made "exterior" by *colonial* difference, an outside "that is precisely constituted as difference by a hegemonic discourse." (2008:169) Yet, to be clear, saying that modernity and coloniality are inextricable is not to say that they are the same thing. Thinking them together also calls attention to a gap between them, a gap through which certain ways of being in the world can be made

unsayable and certain people can be made invisible, can become stuck, made to wait indefinitely, perhaps dying in the meantime.

Most simply, this gap emerges where modernity claims to be a universal project, a structure of desire so natural as to include everyone, whereas coloniality is a structure of racist appropriation, built on a Eurocentric conception of the human which only came about through colonial encounters with people whose very humanity was denied (Escobar 2008; Taussig 1987). But because everyone should want to be modern, to desire otherwise is neither "culture", a form of alterity which the state purports to recognize, nor politics, the space of acceptable contestation, but rather an individual act of intransigence subject to policing. The space of desire that is modernity is so deeply naturalized as "human" that to find yourself living and desiring on its outsides is an apolitical, oppositional, act, even if you were there all along and just want to go about your life in a place where the air is clean, the nights are tranquil, and the fabric of social life is dense.

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In August of 2016 an emergency meeting of the Congreso Tradicional[21] was called in Buabiti (in Spanish, "Llano Tugrí") to mobilize opposition to the accord just signed between the president of Panama Juan Carlos Varela, the *cacica* Silvia Carrera, and the company GENISA, allowing the Barro Blanco hydroelectric project (almost entirely built but facing

[21] According to Gjording (1991), in the 70s, as access to formal education has improved for some people and as Ngäbe political leaders began to be incorporated into the system of national politics and political parties, a gap began to emerge between older leadership, seen as more closely aligned with the lived realities of many Ngäbe, and a younger generation of leaders more open to compromising with extractive companies and the state. This gap seems to have grown, and since the formation of the Comarca its leadership has fragmented into as many as seven different governing bodies. Today, the state recognizes the Congreso General of which Silvia Carrera is the head, which exists as a result of the electoral reform made 2010. It continues to negotiate with this group in spite of a recent court ruling that found the reform to be in violation of the founding documents of the Comarca. The Congreso Tradicional is a governing body elected through the system that existed prior to this reform, and in the eyes of many of my interlocutors is a more legitimate body; it is generally opposed to extractive projects within the Comarca. For more detailed discussion, see Studnicki-Gizbert (2013) and Anaya (2014:16).

legal and financial challenges) to be completed. While the dam itself is just outside the Comarca, most of the people living on lands that would be flooded by it are Ngäbe, and the hydrological changes that would result would impact the entire length of the river, much of which is within the Comarca. A dam on the Tabasará was first proposed in the 1970s as part of the infrastructure supporting an open pit mine on Cerro Colorado (Gjording 1991), and this particular moment of struggle is situated within the larger arch of decades of mobilization.

The meeting began early and stretched over the course of the entire day. In the time between the signing of the accord and this meeting there had already been protests in Buabiti, Gualaquita, and in Pacora along the Pan-American Highway, and newspapers were being passed around with pictures of Ngäbe bodies bloodied and bruised by the police. This is the atmosphere in which Silvia Carrera appeared in the early afternoon, along with a professor from a nearby university and some of his students.

The professor spoke to the assembly on the role of universities here: "More than to pursue an objective or take a position, or incline ourselves one way or the other, we feel that our role is to work always for truth, which is justice, and, most importantly, over all, the rights of the majority. And in this sentiment, we dedicate ourselves to continue working for the wellbeing of the majority. Generally, this is what we believe; the good of the majority is what should be privileged, the wellbeing of the majority, not of just one group or a few groups. Always we have to consider how the majority of the people will benefit."

Three representatives of the Congreso Tradicional then spoke briefly, recalling the ongoing role of universities and professors in supporting their struggles and saying they were saddened to hear that this particular professor did not consider his institution's role

through the lens of human rights. Carrera responded that they should not be sad, she does not understand why they are sad, because the university is working to preserve "*nuestra cultura*" in the forms of language and traditional dress.

In order for the majoritarian claims made by the professor to hold, first the body of people in question, the nation, must be assumed to be sufficiently homogenous that social goods can be understood quantitatively. Desires must be similar enough, consensual enough, to be able to make arguments assuming the commensurability of certain goods and certain harms, to think of them economically, to weigh them against each other quantitatively, to adjudicate among them disinterestedly. The violence of assuming the universality of a particular structure of desire is so obfuscated by the naturalization of progress in modernity that it does not even register. The historicity of claims to alterity, the possibility of something like a right to continue to be otherwise, is rendered unsayable, as the good of the majority must prevail over the wishes of "a few groups". The difference that remains legitimate, the difference that falls within what the state can recognize, exists only in alienable, portable (extractable) forms—language, clothing—and doesn't extend to something like an emplaced, historical way of being in and with the world.

But beyond the majoritarian register of these claims, there is also an operation we could think of through social tense. The gap between modernity and coloniality, the assumption of commonality made in a world that continues to be colonially structured, is justified within late liberalism specifically in part through temporal obfuscation. The following summary of social tense in Povinelli's writing in no way contains the intricacies of her thinking, but is meant to gesture toward another way to think this gap.

Briefly, she illustrates how, in state forms of late liberalism, "specific configurations of tense, eventfulness, and ethical substance…legitimate differential belonging…making sense of pockets of abandonment" (2011:29). Three tenses figure prominently in this discussion: past perfect (had been), future anterior (will have been), and durative present (is). In late liberal governance, indigenous people and at times alternative social projects more broadly can be relegated to the past perfect, while state projects and their effects on lives are justified through in the future anterior. Falling into the space between them is the durative present, where most living takes place. For instance, in the Australian context which makes up part of her writing, Indigenous ways of living differently belong in the past. Indigenous Australians may not be "modern" yet, but the future anterior, when Indigenous people will have become modern, justifies the dissolution of social services in the present *even though* this is openly acknowledged to cause suffering, because this suffering will have been justified in the future. This is how a politics of ends comes to legitimize means which are violent towards living.

In the context of the exchange about Barro Blanco, indigeneity as enacted through emplaced ways of living together is relegated to the past. Flooding the land will be justified, as it will have provided electricity and funds for state projects. The ongoing reality of lives on that land and the desires of the people living them fall out of the conversation altogether, becoming invisible. Coloniality is the past. Modernity is the future. In the meantime, the durative present, Felicia Guerra has grown too ill to walk, too old to the protest against the mine, and so her daughters and her grandson go instead. In the meantime, students are sent home for having mud on the cuffs of their pants, even though the road is still red clay. In the meantime, groups of men come together to chip away rocks

and fill in ruts to make the road passable, and a youth slips in the rain and is crushed between the mud and a spinning tire.

The school in Buabiti. The pine trees behind it, and similar stands often seen around schools in this part of the Comarca, are non-native and were said to have been planted in the 1970s as part of a mining corporate social responsibility initiative.

A photograph taken by Marian Ahn Thorpe at a protest against the Barro Blanco hydroelectric project in 2016, later circulated around Nidrini with the verbal caption "*Para el gobierno ese es el desarrollo*" / "For the government this is development."

CHAPTER 3. FARMING

August and September are the months when the corn and rice sown at the beginning of the wet season bear fruit. Ripe rice has a light sweet smell; sometimes, when the wind is right, it permeates the damp night air. One such night, Alvaro and I had gone to visit Osvaldo. It had rained earlier, and now the sky was clear and the air still. On all sides we could hear night insects, replenished rivers, and the distant thuds of people pounding rice in *pilones*.[22] When we came to Osvaldo's, he and his daughter were milling their own new rice, falling into an alternating rhythm with each other, raising and dropping heavy pestles to break the hull from the grain. Meanwhile Desi,[23] who is married to Osvaldo, roasted cacao, and Alvaro and I joined her and two of their young sons to peel off the husks and grind the beans into a fine paste, making thick, smoky, bitter hot chocolate. Each process was slow; after a few hours we ate bowls of earthy, floral new rice and then sat drinking cacao, talking softly, about weather and crops and the stars and going to Costa Rica in November to harvest coffee, which Osvaldo had done for a number of years.

New rice grown in Nidrini has a flavor much more complex than the industrially-produced white rice sold in *tiendas* and grocery stores. It is rich, oily, almost musky. There are dozens of endogenous cultivars of various colors, suited to different growing conditions and with different textures and flavors. Kept in the husk, it lasts up to a year, even in the inescapable humidity. When exactly people began growing it here seems to be unrecorded and unremembered, maybe as late as 1900 according to Young (1971), but by now it is a staple, an integral part of the seasonal rhythms of work, sounds and smells in this place.

[22] Here, a large mortar usually carved from a section of tree trunk about a meter high, used today mostly to break the chaff loose from grains of rice.
[23] A pseudonym.

The relationship between people and cacao here is much older. People remember its importance in kinds of healing that are no longer practiced, now called "*brujería*" (witchcraft), and it plays a role in some ceremonies of the Mama Tatha faith. Sitting and drinking cacao is also important as hanging out, making a social space to share news, stories, dreams, and memories.

All this to say, neither farming nor food itself is just about food. Farming is a locus of relationships among humans, between humans and nonhumans, between people and place; it is a practice through which these relations are continuously enacted and made to live. It cultivates, rehearses, and repeats embodied memories of smell and taste, rhythms of work and growth, days and seasons.

In this chapter, my intent is to show how current flux in the agroecology of the region, which is being profoundly shaped by climate and other ecological changes, brings farming into relief as a space of decisions, for even continuing as one had before has come to require transformation. After introducing a sense of historically-accreted ways of being in and relating to a place—the rhythms, sensoria, and modes of attention that hold people and orient them, the specific conditions of ways of being "otherwise"—the discussion will move into the agroecological changes that are taking place and the ways that they are registered, at times foreclosing on the possibility of *continuing* to be otherwise. Both are ongoing; historical alterity and its foreclosure are both, among other things, conditions for imagining a *future* that is otherwise; that is to say, they at once demand and constrain transformative decisions. Things are at once beautiful, cruddy, and getting cruddier, and also people imagine possible futures. The second half of this sentence will be taken up more in the following chapter, but it is important to remark that people are not only inert,

not living in a past-perfect world waiting to see what will have been; they continue to live, and to engage in collective social projects and decision-making oriented towards the future. Because of the materiality of bodies, their ongoing necessity for subsistence, these projects are inevitably means-oriented, built in the durative present that falls outside of the political tenses available through the state.

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Nidrini seems to be rural, but North American notions of the "rural", derived from the emptied landscapes of industrial agriculture and extractive frontiers in a settler colonial society, obscure the density of dwelling here. In some ways, it makes more sense to think of the landscape as an urban socionatural community[24], densely populated by a collective of human and nonhuman bodies.

From above, the terrain looks like a dense patchwork of forest and differently colored fields. But seen from the ground, those edges become much more fluid and complex. The "forest" is full of plants that are known and cultivated to varying degrees. There are patches of coffee, cacao, and *pifá* of varying ages planted beneath the canopy, patches of *ñame* and *ñampí*, tubers whose vines climb forest trees; there are small palms and other plants that are sometimes planted by people and sometimes grow wild and are used to weave bags, hats, and thatch; in less intensively-cultivated areas people come to hunt, to find *bodá* (edible flower buds of a palm), various kinds of *jiraca* (edible leaves), and medicinal plants, some of which grow only in a few places that are known and returned to; there are patches of natural savannah where cattle are sometimes pastured, where grasses used for thatch grow; there are patches of young forest planted by people along streams;

[24] Drawing on Natasha Myers' (2017) work, in the context of oak savannah in the Great Lakes region.

pastures dotted with trees; fields in various stages of fallow, fields of corn and rice and yuca and *guandúl* (pigeon peas), patches of bananas and plantains. Around houses there are clusters of bananas, citrus trees, palms for thatch, turmeric for dye and medicine, gardens with tomatoes, peppers, beans, squash, and medicinal plants, mango trees, *guabo* (ice cream bean), *nance* trees whose fruit is made into *chicha* and popsicles. Chickens forage through yards and fields. People fish in the streams and catch shrimp and crabs; children hunt for birds and squirrels with slingshots. Along the streams are trees whose bark is used for rope, also used for bark cloth before textiles became widespread. Edible *olo* fungi grow in damp places, often along streams, often on old cacao plants. Taro and *otoe* (a native plant closely related to taro) are planted in many places, and grow best along streams. There are hives of bees and stingless bees, harvested for honey to eat or to make something like mead.

This is by no means an exhaustive list of the different ways that livelihoods here are emplaced, nor do I mean to suggest that utility is the only way in which people relate to the landscape. What I do mean to illustrate is just the density of beings, the intimacy and richness of emplaced knowledge from generations of living with and participating in a landscape. These relationships with places are not genetic, not some mystical capacity that inheres in certain (indigenous) bodies and not others. Rather, they live on only through work and attention, through time spent living and making a living in specific places with other beings, human and nonhuman.

Inhabiting this landscape, making a life within it, demands modes of attention and ways of moving that are very different from those where food comes from a supermarket. You are never passing through empty space between one point and another, because there

is no empty space. The landscape is densely populated; it can both sustain and kill you. Being exposed to it means vulnerability but also the possibility of attuning. Moving through it demands what Anna Tsing refers to as "open, focused attention"—being open to signs and traces, being focused and present to notice them. Walk too linearly and you might miss a chance to eat honey, or you might step too close to an *equis* (a kind of pit viper), or you might slip on a patch of algae-covered mud and break your arm. Isabel, Jebe and I stop and look for crayfish with cell phone lights as we cross a stream, even though it is night and raining and we have a steep, muddy climb ahead. Ariel brings the PVC pipe that he finds on the beach in Las Lajas back with him on the bus, even though the other passengers, from elsewhere, look at him like he is crazy. Alvaro, Silvano and I stop to gather breadfruits washed up along the river after a heavy rain, carrying the seeds home in a plastic bag also deposited by the river.

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There are several layers of interlocking rhythms in the ways campesino swidden agriculture has been practiced in Nidrini in the experience of people with whom I spoke. The longest cycles are the periods of fallow; after a few seasons of cultivation, people would leave a plot for as long as eighteen years, letting the *monte* (here, second growth trees and bushes) build up and restore the soil. Following this period, they would typically begin to prepare plots for cultivation towards the end of the dry season, in February or March, cutting down the *monte* and letting it decompose and dry for a month or so. Then, just before the first rains at the beginning of April, the *monte* would be burnt off, fertilizing the soil and clearing the land to plant corn, rice, and beans. Planting would take place over the course of April and May. People would then have to weed once or sometimes twice

during the season, and harvests would begin about three to four months after planting, around the beginning of August. After the first harvest, people would sometimes sow corn and beans again, for a second harvest in December, at the end of the rainy season. The timing of gardens, bananas, and tubers is more variable; it is the cycling of corn, rice, and beans that more broadly inflects a collective rhythm of work and food.

In the past several decades, many people have also supplemented their livelihoods with cash by working outside the Comarca for a few months a year, often as agricultural laborers on banana, sugarcane, or coffee plantations in Panama and Costa Rica. Sometimes entire families travel together, but more often only one or a few people go while the rest of the family stays home year-round and continues to farm. Many people who work outside seasonally still live in the Comarca and maintain close family and community ties, farming their own land for much of the year. Emplaced seasonal rhythms continue to be both collectively meaningful and materially important as the basis for contemporary livelihoods. But one of the various impacts of climate change already noticeable is that the arrival of the first rains has become more variable, and in general is later in April; this, in turn, pushes the first harvests from the end of July to mid or late August. July, already known as the hungriest month, stretches longer and longer; when the first harvests do come there is a palpable shift in mood, a release of waiting.

It was in mid-August that Harmodio[25] brought back the first new corn of the season, from a field he and Nico had planted farther down the valley below Cerro Dios. He had gone down to see if the corn was ready in the afternoon, and came back hours later, sweaty and tired from the walk up the mountain, with a sack of fresh corn. Immediately there was a

[25] A pseudonym.

burst of activity, as we husked the corn, broke the kernels from the cobs, and took turns grinding it with a hand mill into a mash for *chicha.*

Later that night, Edilma[26] and I take turns stirring the mash in a pot over the kitchen fire, the last step before pouring it into plastic five-gallon buckets with water to steep. She begins asking me "What do we do next?" to make *chicha*, asking if I know how to cook new corn, new rice, *guandúl*, and *habichuela* (another kind of bean), telling me different ways that she likes to eat them. New beans in a stew with garlic and peppers, new rice on its own or in a porridge with milled new corn. She tells me how they used to dry so much corn on the rafters over the fire, some to eat, some for feeding the chickens, the best grains for sowing the next year. But things aren't abundant any more. Crops are failing, succumbing to drought, malnutrition, and disease. Things are becoming more dangerous. A few years ago some people showed up in the area trying to abduct kids, although warnings about them had circulated and no one was kidnapped; a few years ago some people from outside began keeping some kind of drugs in a shack down the road. A baby was born with horse feet and a dog's head down the valley in Caracol, conceived perhaps by Satan. The bad harvests, the danger, the deformities, are punishment for peoples' disobedience, she says. New and unexplained illnesses are not of this world, beyond the power of humans to cure. "*Ya estamos en los últimos días*" (now we are in the last days), say the preachers and the evangelical radio stations. The only hope is beyond this world.

Things can seem to be falling apart, proliferating, simultaneously in dearth and excess. The rivers are low, and yet the floods have become wilder. There is less rain, and yet when it does rain it comes in torrents. There will be days of no rain in the rainy season,

[26] A pseudonym.

when young crops can dry out in the sun, followed by downpours with thunder and wind that are no less destructive to new plants. As the arrival of the first rains becomes unpredictable, and late, people burn and then the fires spread out of control because there is nothing to quench them. The embodied rhythms of work, smells and sounds, of hunger and abundance, through which people are oriented and places become collectives, are falling out of sync. It is impossible to find the beat.

At the same time, the number of people living and farming here has grown significantly since the 1970s, constrained within a set area by the legal limits of the Comarca which excluded large areas of Ngäbe land. How long the land can be fallowed depends on how much land a family has and how much they need to grow to support themselves; as land has been split among children and the available area in general has become smaller, people have been compelled to reduce the fallow period from as long as eighteen years to as short as two. This means that more land is in cultivation more often, and also that at any given moment there is a consistently higher density of crops on that land than there would have been in 1970, and a correspondingly smaller amount of fallow land and forest. The increase in density is true not only for staple crops like corn, beans, and rice grown in cleared areas, but for cultivated plants across the landscape. People are well aware that this is agroecologically detrimental, but find themselves with little alternative.

As the soil becomes less healthy, crops are less resistant to extreme weather and disease, and less able to compete with weeds better suited to harsh conditions. At the same time, a higher density of crops means that plant predators and diseases which had before been isolated and occasional problems are now increasingly widespread and consistent.

Crops are often stunted, and weeding which before needed to be done once or twice per season now is a constant challenge. Corn is often full of worms and fungi; rice is eaten by moths. *Pifá* flowers normally, but the fruit shrivels and desiccates before it ripens. Monilia, a fungus that attacks cacao, is becoming pervasive, as are *ojo de gallo* and other fungi in coffee. One year in the 1990s, people harvested rice as usual, only to find, after going through the labor of preparing it and cooking it, that a fungal infection had made it inedibly bitter. Today this fungus is widespread, as is another that attacks rice late in its growth, when the seed head is already formed, reducing the grain to a bit of dry powder in an empty husk. Fields of rice seem to be growing healthily and then yield almost nothing. The rivers are low and they are flooding.

On top of all this, people are told they can no longer burn off fallowed fields to clear the land and fertilize the soil. They are forbidden to cut trees they have planted. Seeing the image of forest fires and fewer trees through more "modern" eyes, the Ministry of the Environment (MiAmbiente, also still referred by its previous name ANAM, the Autoridad Nacional del Ambiente) has banned burning outright, regardless of its impacts on peoples' livelihoods. It has also forbidden the felling of trees, unless people pay a fee and obtain written permission, even though many of those trees were actually planted by the people who would fell them to maintain their houses. MiAmbiente sees the environment as "nature", oblivious to the long history of close interrelations, how the landscape here is not a mix of fields and forests, but rather an urban space, densely and vibrantly populated by humans and nonhumans with a long history of living together, following rhythms that are becoming increasingly unsteady. It forbids people from pursuing their livelihoods, without providing an alternative.

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One way of making sense and holding together here is found in religion. However stories of babies conceived by Satan might register to the audience of this thesis, what really is the difference between my understanding of global climate change and someone else's understanding of living in the end times, other than that at least through prayer it is possible to gain a foothold and to build some kind of collective project? The thin hope afforded by something like the Paris agreements is hardly less otherworldly and intangible than that of salvation in another world.

But in the meantime, the durative present that is the space of living, people also need to eat, to support their families. This is a space of slow dying, of literally being malnourished, but not a catastrophe—people survive, mostly, and life continues to be both beautiful and cruddy. Some people leave to work outside for longer and longer periods of time, moving to Panama City or David to find work, often in construction or security. Others stay within the Comarca but move away from where they had farmland to build shacks along the side of the road, to make traveling to work outside easier, while keeping small gardens and a foothold in their communities. Not everyone continues farming; not everyone wants to, and not everyone who would like to, can. Here, though, my focus is limited to farming and the various ways that people go about doing so in the terrain in which they find themselves.

Faced with less fertile soil from shorter fallows, a ban on burning, and the proliferation of pests, disease, and weeds, one of the ways people try to stay in place is to turn to chemicals. Herbicides are used *para quemar la monte* ("to burn the brush"), clearing land for planting. Chemical fertilizers are used to try to make up for a lack of fallow time,

and to strengthen crops in hopes that they will be better able to withstand adverse conditions. Some people also use pesticides and fungicides, but these are more expensive and harder to find; herbicides and fertilizers seem to be more available, and herbicides are especially widely used as a way to replace fire. But no one has protective gear, and everything here is reused and repurposed; an empty bottle becomes a drinking vessel even if it had had poisons in it. Many people rely on untreated water from streams and springs for drinking, cooking, and bathing. One of the most popular herbicides is paraquat, known by its brand name Gramaxone, banned in the EU because it has been shown to be harmful to human health and linked to Parkinson's disease (Wang 2011; Costello 2009; Dinham 2004). It lingers in the soil; people recognize yuca from fields where paraquat was used because it has a distinctly bitter taste.

Many people recognize the problems with using chemicals. They create a whole new kind of expense and dependence on outside markets; people are wary of Monsanto and of taking up temporary solutions that might threaten the possibility of emplaced living for future generations. And, apart from that, many people who are already in precarious situations simply cannot afford to use agrochemicals. But for those who can, confronted by laws against using fire and watching their fields yield almost nothing, chemicals can be a way to hold on, in place, for now.

Another way some farmers try to stay in place, in spite of no longer being able to grow everything they need to subsist, is to shift from extensive subsistence swidden agriculture to intensive market-oriented agriculture, that is to say changing how farming fits into their livelihoods from being the source of food to being a source of cash, which can then be used to buy the white rice, sardines, and chicken necks and feet that are coming to

be staples. Some people grow coffee and cacao to sell what they grow within their communities.[27] A few people I met specialized in produce to sell locally; Federico, a member of OPAMO, has planted large plots of tomatoes and peppers for this purpose, while Ariel, who works on a tiny plot of very fertile ground by a stream, specializes in growing culantro.

People also work towards intensifying their land use with explicitly organic methods; in the past twenty years the word *orgánico* has become familiar through a few different projects, perhaps most notably in places where I worked through capacity-building programs by Jesuit and Ngäbe technicians working through Nuestra Señora del Camino in San Félix. People say that they have always been farming organically, that what their ancestors ate was *puro orgánico*, but that now they are having to experiment with new techniques like making compost. The spread of the word "organic", though, is not the same thing as the spread of enough information and experience to be able to make up for the rapidity of the agroecological and political changes impeding swidden techniques. Workshops by outside organizations have been helpful in introducing bits of ideas and in sparking people's curiosity, but without long-term engagement the temporal and spatial scale of their impact is inevitably limited.[28] It is local sharing of techniques and applied experimentation that seems to be offering more meaningful alternatives.

[27]In the 1990s, some people grew coffee and cacao for export, forming cooperatives or selling them to Latino traders who would come into the Comarca to buy them. In the past decade, though, a combination of lower prices and widespread fungal pathogens has made export less viable, but people do still grow and sell these locally.

[28] Capacity-building and development-oriented projects here are numerous and varied. A few institutions have engaged in long-term commitments with certain farmers; notable instances are programs run by Nuestra Señora del Camino and work by a few engineers at the Instituto de Investigación Agropecuaria de Panamá (IDIAP). However, the landscape is full of the residue of projects that are short-lived and arguably make little difference beyond introducing a specific language of conservation and development.

This can and does happen informally. Continual experimentation and conversation are integral parts of campesino agriculture; it is only through long-term, collective, experimental engagements with plants and places that there has come to be the rich array of different cultivars and crops that people grow here, the intimate attunement to the sensoria and rhythms that characterize this way of living. But, against the backdrop of sudden and dramatic ecological changes, organizing formally to share information and to learn about intensive agricultural techniques from other places in the world has also become important, alongside ongoing, emplaced forms of creativity.

At the same time, the challenges faced by farmers here are not only technical; they are also deeply political. Ongoing presence, enacting ways of living otherwise within a state whose logic and temporality deny the existence of those ways of living, is already politically meaningful. But more narrowly, specific regulations impinge on the viability of these ways of living such that organizing politically to oppose them can come to be necessary, while simply continuing to live as you had before is now an act of civil disobedience. Organizing both to share information and to make this civil disobedience legible as politics is the subject of the next chapter, which deals directly with the ways that, for certain people, farming itself is a politically meaningful project, a way of enacting a kind of politics that is oriented around means, where those means are also the process of living.

But before going on, what is important to understand from the previous chapters is that colonization is remembered; it continues to have force in the present. The landscape here is saturated with memory. It is doubly occupied, as people continue to live against the grain of a world which makes their continued living into a project of being otherwise. The

state is alien, unpredictable, a strange composite of mines and roads, schools and health clinics, bulldozers and police. To engage with it is often costly and occasionally lethal.

A desire to continue to be otherwise here is also expressed as a desire to continue to be emplaced in a particular way. Refusing to want as modernity imagines people should is framed as a desire for clean water and clean air, for tranquility, for the smells and tastes and rhythms that make up a way of dwelling in a specific place. Yet those rhythms are being disrupted, becoming impossible to feel together; people are caught in a double bind of working harder and still not being able to hold on. A green field of healthy rice yields only empty hulls. Life is still beautiful, yet the conditions of holding on become cruddier and cruddier. This is the space in which AAMICRO and OPAMO engage in their respective projects.

Olo fungi gathered along a streambed.

Sabino Bonilla, beside a watering can inhabited by a hive of stingless bees.

The three ears of corn Nico’s family kept for seed from the sack harvested in mid-August.

A field of seemingly-healthy rice, afflicted with a fungus that had reduced much of the grain to powder.

CHAPTER 4. POLITICS

Near the end of an AAMICRO meeting held in Boca del Monte to celebrate the group's anniversary and to discuss the work ahead, a man in his thirties who had so far been quiet came forward to speak. He said that he lives near Cabacera Santiago, on the side of Cerro Dios, about an hour's walk below the road. A few days ago, people representing MiAmbiente had come to his farm and told him that he wasn't allowed to keep livestock, cut trees, or clear land for planting on the slopes near the stream, that he would have to move his cow or be fined. He didn't know what to do. He said he knew protecting the stream was important, but he didn't have much land; if he didn't farm there he couldn't support himself and his family. He didn't have any other place to keep his cow, and he wouldn't be able to pay the fine. He was distraught. He said he had never been involved in politics before, but now he had no choice, so he asked AAMICRO what to do. They conferred, and told him that he should keep farming as he had been, and if people from MiAmbiente came again he should tell them that he has the support of AAMICRO and is not simply refusing alone.

The founding laws of the Comarca recognize its inhabitants' collective, inalienable title over the surface of their lands, and Ngäbe authorities are responsible for internal regulation. But the Ley 41 of 1998, which created the Autoridad Nacional del Ambiente (ANAM, now MiAmbiente) shortly after the formation of the Comarca, gives that body regulatory authority over forested lands throughout the Republic of Panama. This is how it was possible for the government, in the name of conservation, to appropriate the lands that would become the site of the Petaquilla gold mine in Colón. This is also how it is possible for MiAmbiente to require Ngäbe campesinos to pay a fee prior to felling any trees on their

land, and to prohibit burning within the Comarca. AAMICRO sees this law as a direct contradiction of both the founding laws of the Comarca and the principles of indigenous sovereignty and free, prior, and informed consent. Working to change it has become one of their principle concerns; under the conditions of a fragmented Comarca leadership and an unfriendly national government, one of the ways to do this is to refuse to be policed, or to make policing political. Facing laws and legal frameworks that would impose one way of being in the world over others, simply being present and continuing to farm becomes politically meaningful.

In the perspectives articulated by AAMICRO and many Ngäbe with whom I spoke, MiAmbiente cannot be trusted because its work takes place in relief against the colonizing society's ways of relating to its environment, which from a Ngäbe perspective are much more destructive than their own. They are told not to cut trees or burn the land, yet they ask, "Where are the forests?" Not outside of the Comarca, where land on all sides has been cleared for cattle ranching and plantations of bananas, oil palm, and sugar cane. They are told to protect the streams, yet watch as the government supports large hydroelectric dams and strip mines. Stories circulate of the Ngäbe and campesino people whose lands were appropriated in the name of conservation only to become the site of an open-pit gold mine.

A second, related Ngäbe critique of MiAmbiente is that its project of conservation rests in an alienated notion of "nature" that empties the landscape of humans. People who drink from and bathe in a stream, whose sustenance depends on the health of the soil, know that caring for land and water are important. They see, before anyone else, what it means when soil erodes and streams dry up, but their answer is not to disappear from the land. Nico and I were walking up from the Rio San Félix near Caracol, passing through fields

of yellow and stunted rice and talking about how he remembered the area ten years ago, when he asked me to record our conversation:

> *"…es mejor reservar, reservar, como que la idea de ANAM, que viene que nosotros reforestamos, pero ellos prohíban totalmente, ya, pero no hay apoyo…ahora, multiplicando poblaciones, entonces cada tiene su cuadrito para trabajar entonces no hay, o como decir pues buscar la forma como reservar una parcela para utilizar el próximo año, ya. Tienen que darle constantemente porque si no lo van hacer entonces ¿cómo que van a sobrevivir? Es el problema que se ve ahorita mismo."* / "…it is better to reserve, like ANAM's idea, coming to get us to reforest, but they prohibit completely, but there is no support. Now the population is multiplying, so everyone has a bit of land, there isn't a way to reserve some to use the next year. They have to use it constantly, because, if not, with what will they survive? This is the problem we are seeing now."

MiAmbiente comes and prohibits people from using the land to support themselves, but provides no alternative, no support for other methods that might allow people to continue to live here as they had been. Instead, people are sometimes fined for cutting trees they had planted themselves, while outside the Comarca no one comes and prohibits the cattle ranches, industrial plantations, and strip mines from using the land.

The problem is particularly immediate in the communities near Cerro Dios because MiAmbiente may be taking steps to form a protected area around that mountain, which would be entirely within the Comarca. Cabacera Santiago, the home of the man at the AAMICRO meeting, is within the proposed protected area, as are several other communities whose distance from the road renders them politically invisible. As should be clear from the previous chapter, even the areas that look like "forest" are intimately connected to ways of living here, but MiAmbiente prohibits without providing support. People say that if you really cared about the health of a man's wife and children, you would help him to support them, not take them away. With the backdrop of centuries of occupation, four

decades of struggle against mining, and the stories about more recent events around Petaquilla, people find it implausible that this appropriation in the name of conservation is really about conservation.

So presence, in relation to policing, comes to be politically meaningful. It is a matter of refusing to be invisible, denying the emptied notion of "nature" underlying MiAmbiente's sense of conservation. While the context is quite different, this could be thought in relation to the "art of presence" in Bayat's work in the urban Middle East; that is, "the courage and creativity to assert collective will in spite of all odds, to circumvent constraints, utilizing what is available and discovering new spaces within which to make oneself heard, seen, felt, and realized…the fundamental moment in the life of nonmovements, in life as politics." (2010: 26) Here, this is less a matter of discovering *new* spaces than of making already-existing spaces explicitly political, a matter of altering the distribution of what is visible and sayable, transforming *phonos* into *logos*. This, in part, is why it matters for the man from Cabacera Santiago to refuse policing *and* to identify himself with AAMICRO. It is a matter of making oneself "heard, seen, felt, and realized" *as a political actor*, as engaged in a self-conscious project of alterity, refusing to be simply policed as noise, as an ignorant dirt farmer degrading the land.

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But being present, living, is always enfleshed, and in Nidrini in 2016, climate and agroecological changes make simply holding on, simply sustaining a body, increasingly difficult. Even staying in place, *not* transforming, is coming to require transformation; this calls for the elaboration of collective projects oriented around livelihoods, finding ways for people who want to stay in place to be able to do so. Staying in place is never the same as

staying in time; it is not a matter of relegating people to some past-perfect world, but rather of working together to continue in the durative present, finding means of living otherwise. In this context, AAMICRO articulates a common project and politics, seeks ways to strategically draw in support from outside, and builds connective tissue between various local campesino and artisanal organizations and cooperatives. The space between AAMICRO and one of these groups, the Asociación Durin Krüna de Productores de Granos Basicos (ADK), is an especially rich one for the articulation of a politics of means enacted through farming.

ADK is a small group of farmers living around Sardina and Oma who have come together to plant *poroto* (a kind of bean) and corn, pooling resources to save seeds and to sell their produce together. Its members are mostly older, and together they have a deep historical knowledge of this place, of wild plants used in medicine, artisanal work, and for food, of how to gather honey from different kinds of bees, how the landscape has changed over the course of their lives. Most of them have had little access to formal education and have spent little time outside of the Comarca.

In early September, just before I left to work with OPAMO in Mironó, AAMICRO held a meeting in Sardina with the members of ADK. Isabel borrowed a speaker, a microphone, and a television screen from neighbors, which we loaded into a *chiva* and brought up the road to Sabino's house just under a communication tower along the top of a ridge. The meeting was open to anyone, and young people specifically were encouraged to come. People gathered into the night, sitting on benches and upturned buckets under an awning, as Celestino explained AAMICRO's work and specifically the legal issues around ANAM/MiAmbiente. He also spoke about AAMICRO's relation to other places, specifically

its connection to the Centre for Indigenous Conservation and Development Alternatives (CICADA) in Montréal. He showed a short video of First Nations dancers performing at a CICADA conference held at the end of August in Quebec, and talked about indigeneity as a translocal historical and political position. Then I briefly explained my project, having already met with many of the people there, and the discussion moved into what the stakes of sovereignty and land ownership might be. I described some of the long-term impacts of mining on communities in the Appalachians near where I am from, while Celestino spoke on what had happened to Ngäbe and campesino people around the Petaquilla mine. Two films were screened, one showing the impacts of a mine in the Siria Valley in Honduras and one about community organizing among Colombian campesinos. Then followed conversation about the potential impacts of mining here, local politics around land conflicts and mining interests, and the problematic of being able to live by farming in the face of climate and agroecological changes.

In the meeting and the conversations around it, the members of AAMICRO engage in the slow work of building up a collective project, a politics, that is rooted in a particular place—most of the members of ADK have lived where they do now all their lives—while also building lateral connections across places with common or related struggles. By building a frame of how living and farming in this place is a way of enacting particular futures *in the durative present*, and placing it in relation to other possible futures and to other ways of being in the present, it articulates already-existing solidarity and alterity as politically meaningful, existing in the present, and having a future. By working with ADK, and with other livelihood-oriented groups such as the Organización Artesania Jeyi Meyiko Ükötubti, AAMICRO grounds this politics in living, in means, in *how* living continues in the

durative present, rather than in life, survival, and the temporal structures available in the discourse of the state, in which ends, like electrification and public funding, justify means, like open pit mines and large-scale hydro projects, which are violent towards living.

This is a politics that spreads and grows through slow and deliberate work; meetings like the one described above are important in bringing groups of people together and in visualizing a "we", but much of the work itself also takes place as people go about living, informally, in conversations on porches, at *tiendas* and churches, where people like Celestino, Nico, and Isabel remember the history of struggle and exploitation, connect it to present realities, spread news about events like those around the Barro Blanco accord, and build through conversation a collective project, an imaging of how ways of being in the world otherwise can continue and why.

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At first glance, OPAMO works very differently. Its stated intent is to share and spread organic methods; its work is rooted in the problematic of specifically *how* to farm in a durable way, in relief against the challenges of the current moment. Where AAMICRO's name refers to Mironomo Cronomo, a figure in Ngäbe oral history, OPAMO makes no reference to the Ngäbe identity of its members in its name. Nor does it identify itself with "tradition"; the methods it embraces are exogenous and experimental. Rather than position itself in opposition to the ways that the Panamanian government is impinging on living here, it strategically seeks out support from various government institutions, most notably IDIAP, with which it has partnered for a two-year-long participatory research project on ways to make farming more resilient to climatic changes. It works within the confines of

existing laws, and frames its concerns as a matter of sustainable livelihoods, of producing food that is healthy for people in ways that are not environmentally damaging.

At the core of its work is producing and sharing knowledge. Its members research, go to workshops and capacity-building programs, experiment on their own farms, and discuss together what they learn to apply it to each other's work. They talk about biocontrol and integrated pest management, about different crops and how to care for them, different ways of making compost and insecticides, how to propagate fungi which attack the insects that eat their crops. Their interests are framed in terms of conservation, human health, and technical knowledge. But underlying, motivating, this work, is a very pragmatic, means-oriented politics of autodetermination, of emplaced livelihoods and building a local economy that rejects a modernist teleology, enacting alterity while neither militating nor selling it.

When OPAMO works with governmental institutions, it does so only as far as working together is actually helpful to its own project. Since its formation in 2007, it has sought out connections with a variety of groups, without hesitating to break them if the relationship is not fruitful. For instance, in 2010 the group participated in a fair of artisans and farmers organized by Proyecto Ngäbe Buglé in San Félix. They were interested in the idea and its potential, but frustrated by administrative issues, so they separated from the group and organized the first of their own annual fairs in Hato Dupí in 2011.

This fair, which brings together members of OPAMO and other local artisanal organizations to display their work within their own community, is the most eventful

instance of the organization's underlying prefigurative politicality.[29] By working organically on their own farms, spreading information, and organizing the fair, OPAMO intends to demonstrate that other futures are possible. Thinking through Gibson Graham's definition of politics as "a process of transformation instituted by taking decisions in an undecidable terrain" (2006, xxviii), OPAMO makes explicit that farming can be a process of transformation, while questioning the boundary of what is or is not decidable. Its members say that, through the fair and through their own farms, they want to show young people that leaving to work outside the Comarca is neither the only future nor the only way to alter the conditions of their living. They engage in an alter-politics oriented around the *means* of living, working to make other futures visible and sayable in the present.

It is late afternoon, and Alvaro, Osvaldo and I are picking corn in a field the two of them had planted together. The field is on top of a mountain; out to the south we see patches of sun, backlit bands of rain, and the distant ocean. This is where their families will spend New Years' eve, drinking cacao and watching fireworks. As we sort the corn into sacks and pause before going down the mountain, Alvaro says "*Lo que no entiendo es porque la gente cree que la mina es la única forma de desarrollo*." / "What I don't understand is why people think that the mine is the only form of development".

In an interview with Alvaro and Sixto Monterro, the president of OPAMO, the conversation turns to how "there is money within the community"; it is a matter of finding ways to build up a local economy. The organization's philosophy is to grow first for the household, then to sell within the community, and only then to grow for wider markets. This is a matter of practicality, for it is expensive to rent a horse to carry products to roads

[29] The sense in which I refer to "prefigurative politics" is inflected through Hage's (2015) work thinking about the relationship between oppositional politics and prefigurative or alter-politics.

passable to trucks, and from there to market in San Félix or Las Lajas, but it is also deliberately framed as a part of what farming *organically* means to OPAMO; everything cycles, and the smaller the scale of the cycle the better.

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If modernity can be understood as a particular structure of desire which naturalizes a narrative of progress as universal, both AAMICRO and OPAMO articulate desires otherwise. Their politics are oriented around notions of well-being grounded in place and community, insisting that life consists of living and living is always in a place, with others. People with whom I spoke often expressed an ideology of sufficiency over one of proliferation, a concern for having enough rather than having more and more. It matters to be able to keep walking the same paths worn deep into the soil, to live in places that remember. This is not simply nostalgia; *what* those places remember might be beautiful or monstrous. To live here means being exposed differently, which is a condition of both vulnerability and possibility. Exposure means sheltering in a shack on the side of the mountain at night in a thunderstorm, in the thin light of flashlights with no fire; it also means clean fresh air, clean water from a spring, and peaceful nights of insect songs and visiting neighbors. Nico would often say that "the government says we are poor, but we aren't. We are rich," with the abundance of living things, sun, rain, clean air. He would also often say that "the government says we are already developed, but we aren't. Look at my house," three dirt-floored shelters of zinc, boards, cinderblocks, tarps, and thatch huddled together in a small space on the side of the road.

As some kind of seam, this is simultaneously a place of creativity and of "the structurally induced attrition of persons". (Berlant 2011:10). Finding oneself on the outside

of the complex of modernity/coloniality can perhaps afford conditions of being otherwise (decoloniality), but being there is hardly more volitional than is being subjected to five centuries of occupation. When groups of men who live around Hato Dupí come together to repair the road, they enact a radical form of solidarity which builds on Ngäbe traditions of work parties to be meaningfully noncapitalist and collectivist. They are also doing unpaid labor for the state, and that the state will not allocate resources to maintain the road specifically here is deeply political and sometimes deadly, shaping an uneven distribution of lethality. The men work together to fix the road, and still a youth is crushed by a truck.

There is no double bind here for the people who come together to repair the road, or to the man advised by AAMICRO to continue farming as he had been. What is more fraught is the relationship of my writing around it—what is it *for me* to find, to seek out, hope (the potential for a radical otherwise) in what is also a space of slow dying, exhaustion, chronic attrition? To the extent that it may be important to call attention to ongoing ways of being in the world differently, to the politicality of farming for instance, it is also important to recognize their location within fields of differential belonging and abandonment, fields in which I occupy a very different position than do the Ngäbe whose lives are the basis of my writing. There is no satisfactory answer. Both, and. Drawing on Kelsye Turner's (2017) thinking in relation to Povinelli, "resilience should be mourned, not celebrated… existing beyond representation isn't fun." Yet living continues.

CONCLUSION

This account is inevitably partial, fragmented, and incomplete; it comes from an approach to questions as openings or forms of attention, rather than as demands for an answer. But I hope that, if I have described anything clearly, it is how living by farming in a specific place and time comes to be politically meaningful and how it is sometimes articulated at such. Theory here is meant to work as a way of organizing descriptions and calling attention to certain associations among them. Here, I will restate a few notions that I hope have become enfleshed over the course of the previous chapters.

A sense of politics articulated by Gibson Graham, as "a process of transformation instituted by taking decisions in an undecidable terrain," is the basis for the structure of these chapters; the first three focus more on describing features of a terrain, while the last is dedicated to processes that are deliberately transformational. (2006:xxviii) The idea of "terrain" remains vague, but through use perhaps accretes meaning; it is meant to be sufficiently open and nebulous to refer to the context of a person's world while avoiding the construction of persons, categories, societies, places, or ideas as neatly bounded. Things like history, the state, and the environment all have density and exert forces that can be felt as people go about living, but they are never separate from each other, and that they exist as categories is obviously historical and contingent. I use these categories organizationally nonetheless, but as ways to describe a terrain that is neither only a whole nor only partial. The idea of "transformation", while perhaps clearer than "terrain", also remains undefined and is somewhat nebulous. As repetition is never exact and the world is always fluid, being in the world is inevitably a process of transformation. But, in thinking about politics, I have

focused on forms of transformation that are collective and self-consciously articulated in relation to possible futures.

Transformation, then, comes to assume a temporal orientation towards the future. But what relation that future bears to the present is variable, and how this relationship is understood is not insignificant; this is why grammatical structure and tense receive the attention that they do. Throughout, I use the grammatical distinction between "life" and "living" as a way to describe different temporal orientations. Life is a noun; a "what"; a fact; it can become object-like; it entails a binary, life/death. Living is a verb; a "how", perhaps; a process. Life, as object-like, can become a political *end*, an *object* to be worked towards; living is a process, it is happening in the present, it is ongoing. Life, clearly, also happens in the present, not just the future, while living, if it is to continue, also implies a future, but how future and present relate can be different.

Think of the Ngäbe who live in lands that are to be flooded by the Barro Blanco dam. If the police perform their role adequately, no one will die in the flood. No one is being killed, at least as long as they leave their homes peacefully. Hypothetically, they will have been resettled and they will receive electricity from the project, while some of its revenue will go towards schools and health clinics. This is development, progress; if a few people have to give up a certain nostalgic connection to specific places, it is a sacrifice that will have been justified. Nothing will really have been lost; some money from the project may even go towards collecting and documenting Ngäbe language and dress, "*cultura*" in the forms that can exist within a modern world.

But what of living? What will living be like, how will all of this take place? Emberá people displaced by the flooding of Lago Bayano (in eastern Panama) in the 1970s are still

waiting for the electricity they were promised decades ago. But even if the promises of the state in this case were to be enacted in the future, the reality of the present is the forced relocation of indigenous people, suffering, and the foreclosure of ongoing emplaced alterity, of a vibrant socionatural system that cannot be recreated by simply by building houses and planting pine trees elsewhere.

The argument in favor of the dam makes use of what Povinelli describes as a temporal and grammatical structure of late liberalism, in which alternative social projects (emplaced alterity, desiring otherwise) can be relegated to the past-perfect, a motion related to the "governance of the prior" in colonial states, while suffering in the durative present (forced relocation) caused by hegemonic projects (the Barro Blanco dam) is justified through the future anterior, when the Ngäbe who are displaced will have become modern. The *end* of modernity, progress, comes to justify *means* which are violent towards living as an ongoing project.

This is the context in which I propose a politics of means, as a project and a form of political attention, but also as a description of the forms of politics being enacted by AAMICRO and OPAMO. As a project, a politics of means is oriented towards how; temporally, it operates in the durative present. "Means" imply an end, just as transformation implies a future. An orientation towards means is not a denial of ends; people involved in a self-conscious process of transformation are continuously engaged in imagining a future and working towards it. But *how* is given primacy; means must be conducive to living, rather than subordinating the present to ends in the future. This is in part a matter of pragmatics. People making a living by farming, all too often barely making a living, do not have the luxury of not being pragmatic in the durative present. But that

does not mean they do not also engage deliberately in politics, in transformation; what it does mean is that transformation, politics, must be grounded in living in the present. Is it enough? Will it have been enough? It is hard to say, but that question is hardly useful for people as they go about staying attached to life from the inside, trying to make a future otherwise, living on in the present.

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