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Refusing to Be Governed: Urban Policing, Gang Violence, and the Politics of Evilness in an Afro-Colombian Shantytown

What is the role of policing within urban contexts marked by economic dispossession, crime, and gang violence? This article grapples with this question by examining both policing practices and the strategies of resistance embraced by residents of El Guayacán, a predominantly black neighborhood in the outskirts of Cali, Colombia. I argue that policing is not only about repression but also about enforcing spatial-racial boundaries and administering social death. On the one hand, targeting black bodies and black places as the problem of urban security provides police a spatial fix (to borrow from critical geographers) for broad anxieties around crime. On the other hand, the discursive and material production of unruly bodies and ungovernable spaces justifies state disinvestment, social abandonment, and police aggression against racialized others. [antiblackness, gangs, police, governability, Colombia]

Two police officers passed by on a motorcycle, turned around, and stopped in front of the junkyard where Victor¹ worked with other local youth as recycling dealers. They asked him for proof of identification. Victor refused to show his ID card but yelled at them, “You will not get into my business! Do you have a search warrant?” The officers pushed him aside and started searching the business, supposedly for a gun. The women playing cards at the bingo game in the sidewalk nearby ran to Victor’s, crying out, “Morons, half-wits” to the police. Members of La Quinta, the local gang,² joined other residents gathered in front of the junkyard and closed down the street. Everyone was shouting at the police meanwhile teenagers recorded their actions on their cellphones. When the cops were backed up against the wall, they called for help. Quickly, two more officers arrived on motorcycles and forced their way through the crowd. They rescued their fellow officers and all left under verbal cursing and a physical hail of rocks.

I had the opportunity both to witness and hear about several similar accounts of open confrontations between local residents and police officers in El Guayacán, a predominantly black neighborhood located in the densely populated and poverty-stricken borough of Aguablanca in Cali, Colombia. Accounts of retaliation against the police abound: an officer badly hit in the head by a rock while patrolling streets; a woman throwing a pot of urine on an officer while her son was aggressively frisked in front of his home; a child hitting an officer with a stick to help rescue his mother from being arrested, and the list goes on. The residents tell the stories as revenge against police brutality, whereas the police use them to justify their use of force against the ungovernable and uncivilized residents of El Guayacán. While the police are seen as the main face of the neglectful Colombian state in the impoverished neighborhood, there are several narratives about heroic acts of resistance by members of La Quinta protecting residents against rampant police violence and holding their ground against constant threats of rival gangs’ invasion of the *barrio* (neighborhood).

Within this territorial contest, in which the state is experienced as both an overtly present, repressive force and an absent social provider,³ the work of policing acquires a much broader meaning than law enforcement. Policing is also about enforcing spatial-racial boundaries and administering social death. On the one hand, by targeting black bodies and black places as *the* problem of urban security, police provide a *spatial fix* (to borrow from critical geographers) to broad anxieties around crime in Cali. On the other hand, the discursive and material production of unruly bodies and ungovernable spaces justifies state disinvestment, social abandonment, and police aggression against the predominantly black eastside of the city. The functionality of such an intertwining strategy of control is well pronounced in the mixing roles of the police in facilitating gang violence, enforcing urban development, and creating conditions for further stigmatization of these marginal geographies. For instance, the city government is deploying the police to enforce the relocation of the homeless from downtown Cali to El Guayacán. Despite protests, the only green area in the barrio was developed into public housing projects to shelter the homeless who are unwelcome in the city's prime area. State disinvestment turns El Guayacán into a depressing urban geography that authorizes abandoned authoritarian urban planning and aggressive policing. This form of policing adds to a practice of "letting die" that residents experience through officers' deliberate withdrawal from their functions and support of rival gangs. As residents are dehumanized and the neighborhood is disinvested, gang violence is energized by police corruption and by local youth disputes over the infrastructure and material resources that the state is unable to provide. Specifically, various disputes between the two local gangs erupted over the use of the poorly equipped soccer field and the basketball court in the public park, which, as just noted, were shut down to become a housing project for the homeless.

As I elaborate below, such policing strategies are functional for producing *orderly disorder*; imagining civic communities and giving spatial coherence to civil society's economic and social anxieties around the black urban poor and other racialized bodies (Penglase 2009; Roussel 2015). When I first arrived in 2013, residents of the wealthy districts in the south of the city introduced me to the geography of fear and crime by discouraging me from going to the *barrio de los negros matones* (the district of the black killers). Patricia, a light-skinned woman in her thirties, was particularly incisive: "You're not going to get into the eastside. There it's hot." She nostalgically compared the past when the city was "safer" and "cleaner" to the present "dirtiness" brought by "these people from Chocó and Nariño," the Colombian states on the Pacific coast. Cesar, my next-door *mestizo* (neighbor), was more polite: "I know it may sound like prejudice, but look at Cali's bad reputation. Before Cali was clear and healthy, now [there's] poverty and crime." Both Patricia and Cesar also blamed the residents of Aguablanca for the city's elite political corruption. Patricia lamented that Cali was losing ground to Bogotá and Medellín (the largest cities) due to a supposed lack of political consciousness of Aguablanca residents, who "exchange their votes for food," and argued the district should be a municipality on its own. "They do not know how to vote, don't like to work. . . . What they like is the *corrinche* [to party]." In fact, almost two years after my first arrival, I continued to receive recommendations to avoid that particular part of the city "infested with *malos* [evil]," as the owner of a hostel advised me. When I told him I work in the district and have not seen this generalized criminality, he told me "rats do not eat rats," referring to his belief that Aguablanca residents do not rob each other but rather come to steal in *his* part of the city. This racialized imagination had a profound impact on the lives of Aguablanca residents, not only for the obvious frontiers racism creates (and the legal entitlements and expectations of who has right to the city) but also for the ways it produces ungovernable spaces that justify state aggression.

How does one account for police violence when policing is not only the repressive branch of the state but also, in Michel Foucault's (1991, 12) terms, "a project for governing territory"? In this article, I look at the broad discursive and economic practices that policing mobilizes to govern urban life. While I am mindful that bringing together an expansive understanding of policing (as multiple tactics of territorial governance and as officers' coercive practices) may raise objections from some readers, in this article I take both the work of the police and the rationality for governing that policing provides as objects of inquiry to understand how race is mobilized in what William Garriott (2013, 3) has crafted as the *police-as-governance–governance-as-police* paradigm. How does a focus on race help to understand the broad political-economic work police do?

This question is particularly important within the Colombian transitional context—following the 2016 peace deal between the insurgent FARC guerrilla and the state—where the army has been deployed to "pacify" urban peripheries. Adding to the community policing approach called *policia por cuadrante* (policing by block), the city government and international donors have funded projects to integrate "trouble" youth in the city's service economy and educate them around notions of civic engagement and a "culture of peace." Nevertheless, the same areas targeted by these soft projects are undergoing enduring forms of police violence and army occupation, which suggests a peculiar feature of state sovereignty in dealing with racialized bodies: brutal and *raw* violence that can be translated into abandonment, incarceration, and death. Thus, without denying other converging projects of urban governance, a focus on the police as a rationality of state-making may help to unveil its hidden work in racialized contexts where "power is experienced close to the skin" (Aretxaga 2003, 396).

When considering "governing-through-police" as a hegemonic project of state control, it is possible to see police violence as functional in the making of urban life. As I argue, this is particularly true for Cali, where the police play an important role not only in giving spatial form to racist imaginaries of crime and order (and thus defining who belongs to the [il]legal city) but also for the ways racialized and/or outlawed populations respond to policing. That is to say, if in the Foucauldian framework police violence is more than "violence" itself (and a rationality of governance), it may be reasonable to argue that confrontations with the police are more than "confrontations" (and a refusal of being governed). I insistently ask then: What are the terms of engagement with the state in places where the state attempts to govern through an apparently counterintuitive approach of producing disordered spaces and unruly bodies? For instance, how might one make sense of the convergence between the police's investment in the rhetoric of El Guayacán residents as "uncivilized" (thus inviting bodily violence) and the rhetoric of legality and humanitarianism that accompany other state interventions? What are the meanings of everyday refusal to comply with policing in contexts where state governmentality operates not so much through discipline as through the state's decisiveness over life and death? I draw on intermittent fieldwork in El Guayacán—between January 2013 and June 2018—to argue that in Cali's racial order, local residents' refusal to comply with the police and their support of gang members' spatial claims of the neighborhood as a police-free zone are attempts to redefine black urban life; a life lived through everyday humiliation, spatial confinement, and (social) death.

Unruly Bodies

Crafted as the problem of insecurity in the city, the borough of Aguablanca has been at the center of Cali's ongoing crime fighting strategies. Internationally known for its high rates of homicide, in the last couple of years, the city has launched several security strategies to curb urban crime, among them the widely advertised 2010 plan "*policia por cuadrante*."

The plan, which focuses mainly on the philosophy of community police, also includes gun control, the banning of male *parrilleros* (literally meaning male passengers sitting on the backs of motorcycles), the closing of nightclubs at 2:00 a.m., and the improvement of the police structure. These techniques are clearly part of a long running attempt to exercise state sovereignty in troubled areas of the city said to be controlled by criminal and/or insurgent groups (Guzmán Barney, 2018). Less obvious, however, are the roadblocks to “urban peace” historically posed by the alternative political order that emerges from Cali’s predominantly black and poor outskirts. In these areas, the state attempts to govern by mobilizing neoliberal notions of citizenship—crafted as fighting urban underdevelopment—and by “inviting” residents to cooperate with the police by turning in “criminals,” watching neighbors, and attending security meetings. Concomitantly, the state also participates in producing ungovernable spaces by holding the residents captive in a poverty-stricken territory under constant police raids, ongoing checkpoints, and preventive arrests of “suspect” youth.

Such a program of urban governance is well articulated in the police’s rhetoric of engagement with the local community displayed in monthly meetings known as *rendición de cuentas* (accountability meetings), when residents are updated on urban security matters. I attended several meetings with Maria, an activist black woman in her fifties, who was the leader of the local organization I worked with in El Guayacán. On this given day, as usual, the event took place in the local public school. Very few people attended: some officers, NGO representatives, shopkeepers, and churchgoers. The majority of attendees were light-skinned or racially ambiguous individuals who, in Colombia’s mode of racial classification, are seen as *mestizos*. After we listened to the Colombian national anthem, the officers presented the agenda and displayed a slideshow with statistics on arrests and seizures of marijuana. Then, a teacher in her forties asked the police to visit schools because gang members were selling drugs at the gates. A shopkeeper complained that instead of supporting the police, many residents stand by gang members. An elderly man agreed but also complained that the police were not doing enough. Better strategies were needed to catch the gang members off guard. While the police welcomed the information, they also complained that very few residents attended the meetings, and even fewer had the courage to call and report a crime. “Everybody wants security but when we come to do our work very few people are on our side,” said the officer. Another officer noted:

One has to worship God or the devil. If we want to clean up El Guayacán, we have to help the police. See what do we have here—these people are uncivilized. They curse us [and] threaten to throw hot water. What is that? Whoever fears the police is a delinquent.

Contrary to the mostly mestizo attendees, who were asking for more police, Maria, one of the few dark-skinned individuals in the room, interrupted the officer to argue that many youth had complained about the abusive attitude of the police toward them. I joined in, recalling how the two of us intervened in a fight between two officers and one young black man only minutes before the meeting. The youth refused to be frisked, and the officers pushed him to stand against a wall. When the young man cried out, many residents ran toward him and stood together, forming a protective barrier between him and the police. We asked the officer why this youth was a suspect if he was not wearing a shirt (thus, with no ability to hide a gun) and had been sitting on the curb with other youth in front of his own house. People started to shout at them, so the officers left. In the meeting, however, one of the officers involved in the incident suggested that the youth was dealing drugs

and that those who defended him were “suspicious individuals.” When he was challenged to explain the matter, the officer in charge went into the police victimization narrative by telling the story of one officer who was hospitalized after being assaulted while patrolling the streets of El Guayacán: “He went to attend a call and someone threw a rock that broke his head. These people must be brought to justice. These people are obstructing the law. . . . To raise a hand against the police is a crime.” He then resumed the meeting by saying that peace would come when El Guayacán’s youth learn how to respect police authority: “They are undisciplined. They see the police as an enemy.” On the way home, I asked my friend Maria what she thought of the police’s complaints about the local youth being drug dealers. She corrected me, stating that the youth were a scapegoat, but the police saw the whole black population of El Guayacán as potential criminals. This generalized criminalization of the community, Maria suggested, was what explained the dark-skinned residents’ refusal to participate in the meetings and their antagonism toward the police.

The meeting was a public arena in which the terms of engagement proposed by the state came into sharp focus. Very few residents attended the community meetings because the very constitution of the community as a legal-civic body required producing most El Guayacán residents as unruly criminals, against which the disciplinary power of community-policing was not enough. This process bears striking similarities with other ethnographic contexts where the neoliberal state is able to mobilize the notion of community through myriad biopolitical projects to secure life and promote citizenship, all while incarceration, killings, and disappearances endure as institutional and everyday practices against black and indigenous populations (see Alves 2018; Mora 2016; Roussell 2015). In the case of El Guayacán, how do the residents make a *community* out of bodies and spaces considered unruly? What purpose does unruliness serve in this context? The constitution of El Guayacán as an “anti-community” (Roussell 2015) served the dual purpose of further disinvesting and exercising greater violence over the barrio. This is exemplified, for instance, through the previously mentioned state abandonment of its residents and the police-enforced housing projects.

The racialization of spaces and bodies was crucial to the discursive production of El Guayacán as an ungovernable anticomunity, and its residents as unruly subjects. This process did not always rely on an overtly explicit racial rhetoric, however. The racial language was coded as “backwardness,” “rurality,” and “un-civility”—in this case, words meant to describe the territorial origin of most of El Guayacán’s residents. The police dehumanized black youth by using a metaphor of “cats against the rats” to convey their persecution of gang members. Meanwhile, Raul, a representative of the city government, used a civilizational discourse to explain to me that “the lack of a moral authority at home” and “the lack of adjustment of the people from the *orilla del rio* [from the river basin] to the city” would explain the state’s failure to pacify the borough. When situated within Colombian’s “geography of race” (Wade 1995)—in which the Pacific coast and the Amazon basin lowlands are imagined as predominantly black and indigenous territories—it becomes clear how these spatial narratives of blackness served as discursive strategy to blame (black) immigrants from these particular regions for increasing crime in Cali (see Moncada 2010). Here, dominant narratives of race, crime, and space serve as an apparently counterintuitive tactic of governmentality. At the same time that moral panic and civilizational discourses converged with police tactics in producing a population in need of saving, this intertwining technique also produced outlawed populations against which bio-disciplinary power and necropolitical governance mesh and feed each other. In the next section, I outline some disorderly spaces produced by policing and explore the ways residents embrace unruliness as spatial-political agency.

Ungovernable Spaces

The state is most present in the borough of Aguablanca through officers policing the streets and through the pedagogical work of NGOs supported by what local residents call *politiquería* (i.e., the clientelist relationship between state officials such as Raul and local powerbrokers). This is nowhere more pronounced than on the weekends, when the police distribute *sancocho de gallina* (a national dish made with chicken soup) to youth and warn them to stay out of trouble while state-sponsored NGOs offer outdoor aerobics and salsa classes to teenagers and children. On Sundays, the main streets become crowded with barefoot black children dancing to Shakira's "Hips Don't Lie" or improving their *salsa choke* (a mixing of traditional salsa and electronic music) skills. While *sancocho de gallina* and salsa are sold as social programs aimed at bringing in the state and reducing gang violence, its residents are deprived of basic services such as schooling, public health care, and sanitation. The main public hospital in a borough of approximately seven hundred thousand people is known as *la carnicería* (the butcher shop), a fair picture for an overcrowded hospital with black bodies lying in the corridors waiting for doctors that never come. According to a national census, blacks comprise 26.5 percent of Cali's population and 70 percent of Aguablanca residents; at least 60 percent of the city's population live below the poverty line; and the district has the highest rates of youth illiteracy and unemployment. Homicide rates are 95 out of 100,000 in Aguablanca, while in the city's wealthy districts the rate is 13 out of 100,000 people. The victimization rate for blacks is two times higher (153.5 out of 100,000 inhabitants) than the victimization of whites (65.9 out of 100,000 inhabitants), and the same can be said for incarceration. The rate of black incarceration is 469.95 out of 100,000 inhabitants whereas non-blacks account for 252.73 out of 100,000 inhabitants (Urrea-Giraldo 2012; Hurtado and Mornan 2015).

Most residents in Aguablanca are unemployed or work low-paying jobs. For instance, due to discrimination in a job market that favors light-skinned individuals, black women predominantly work as domestic servants. Ester, a black woman in her early fifties and a migrant from Tumaco off the Pacific coast, explained to me, "Domestic worker or the *rebusque* (work informally) in the street. These are my options." When I first met Ester, she was making a living selling *fritangas* (street food) in front of her house. She had quit working as a domestic servant in the homes of local white mestizos to take care of her children, but her economic conditions deteriorated and she is now back working in the homes of Cali's elite. Ester contends that while she was taking care of someone's children, her family was destroyed by violence. Ester was referring to constant police harassment of her older son Pablo, and to the fate of Gustavito, her sixteen-year-old son, who was stoned to death by members of a rival gang. In 2017 I invited her to participate in an international meeting of a black mothering network against state violence in Brazil, but her *patrona* (boss) threatened to fire her if she missed a day of work. While Ester continues to work as a domestic servant, Pablo lives in the shadow of death. He cannot work because he is wanted by both the police and paramilitary-based vigilantes who are "cleaning up" El Guayacán. Ester is raising Pablo's four-year-old daughter, along with her other two children. Pablo is one of the members of La Quinta, a gang formed mostly by unemployed young black men, some of whom have criminal records.

La Quinta is one of the one hundred broadly defined *pandillas* (street gangs) city authorities have identified in Santiago de Cali. Comprised mostly of marginalized youth, the *pandillas* have long been regarded as a pressing problem for the threat they pose to the international image of Cali as the *sucursal del cielo* (the branch of paradise). In the aftermath of the peace deal with the FARC guerrillas, the *pandillas* now have been identified as the main threat to postconflict security for their supposed links with the so-called *bacrim* (emerging

criminal bands) formed mostly by former paramilitary groups (Pérez and Montoya 2013; Vinasco 2018). While the state missed the opportunity to incorporate street gangs into the peace process, bacrim has been successful in co-opting them to its profitable drug business and to its infamous *oficinas de cobro* (contract killings). From my interlocutors, I learned a youth can be hired for three hundred dollars US in a killing contract, twenty times less than the middleman's share. In the sinister economy of contract killings, poor youth are expendable soldiers readily replaced by others when killed or arrested. Those who resist joining gangs or the killing business have very few opportunities. Twenty-two-year-old Steve told me that since being released from prison—after serving sixteen months for robbing a bus—his only options are to continue stealing on the streets of the wealthy districts of south Cali, selling pineapples at the traffic light with his father, or working as a drug dealer. I suspected Steve was dealing drugs when we met.

La Quinta's members who were not dealing drugs were exploited in jobs in brick-making factories or engaged in sporadic robberies outside of El Guayacán. Leaving the barrio has been increasingly difficult because of the police's and bacrim's more aggressive tactics against gangs that refuse to surrender. Indeed, gang members who did not die or get incarcerated depended on their family, relatives, and neighbors emotionally and financially, which put extra stress on a community with already high levels of violent deaths, unemployment, and poverty. Expressing their spatial consciousness, La Quinta members constantly framed the city as a place inaccessible to them. Stigmatization of the neighborhood as a crime zone made it impossible to get a job, aggressive policing turned the barrio into a jail, and a new bus system with officers on board made it difficult to evade bus fare to travel to other parts of the city. "We can't even play soccer anymore. They will gun you down from nowhere," Juan explained, referring to rival gangs and vigilantes shooting at youth in the soccer field. He was particularly distressed. Because he was wanted by the police, he relied on local residents' goodwill for shelter. Without money to fund his drug addiction, he smoked smashed antidepressants provided by the owner of the local drugstore.

The stresses of being asphyxiated within the tiny space of El Guayacán (the neighborhood is less than ten blocks) generated further gang confrontations that "justified" state interventions. Police framed their action as "protecting the community against delinquents," but this was a hard argument to sell as the community itself was constantly terrorized by police raids. For instance, the homes of residents are randomly invaded during the night to bring young men to the police station to check their criminal status. Even grieving families are subjected to police delinquency. When David, a young black man, was mysteriously killed in yet another targeted killing against La Quinta, residents started blaming two local police officers for working with the rival gang La Zeta. Afraid of retaliation, the two officers responsible for surveilling the block vanished as the population mourned David's death. Still, the next evening, while relatives and friends were at the funeral, other police showed up, threw tear gas inside the home, and fired shots in the air. As people ran from the gas and random shots, La Quinta members came to defend the community. David's cousin, Pedro, a twenty-two-year-old black man, was killed during La Quinta's battle with the police. The community was now mourning two deaths. In this situation, the community was targeted as a collective enemy and was therefore subjected to a *collective* warrant, a metaphor for the de facto actions of the police, which would be an unthinkable violation of *individual* rights in the wealthy parts of the city.

The outright and indiscriminate violence against El Guayacán also produced conditions for the emergence of alternative forms of community and control. Like in other contexts where scholars have regarded gang territoriality as localized forms of governance in

response to state abandonment (see Gutierrez 2010; Rodgers 2006), in El Guayacán the state has forced La Quinta to respond in kind, thus precipitating alternative socio-spatial practices. For example, while the police try to govern by dividing the barrio into policing blocks based on maps crafted in some state office in Bogotá, La Quinta redefines this territory based on the moral responsibility to protect the barrio and the emotional-spatial bonds its members retain with residents terrorized by the police. In the next section, partially inspired by James Scott's (2009) theoretical proposition on the *art* of escaping from the state, I propose that gang territoriality and its outcomes should be analyzed as a *refusal to be governed*.⁴ To do so, I look at their self-embrace of evilness, their refusal to comply with police, and the relations that emerge from a shared vulnerability to state abandonment among gang members and local black residents. I prefer to read gangs as ungovernable subjects—not to suggest a lack of order making but rather to highlight the ways they are interpellated as unruly and how their unruliness poses a challenge to the very project of order-making that the state represents and the police embodies.

Evilness

The officers blamed the *malos* (evil) and “rats” gang members, and the “uncivilized” residents of El Guayacán for the police's failure to control the territory. However, the residents saw the police as the main challenge for urban peace. Although some wanted gang members arrested and saw them as the main problem of the barrio, this was not the overall opinion among residents. Contrary to the few attendees in the monthly police meeting, and contrary to the view of inhabitants of the wealthy neighborhoods who saw gang members as the enemies of Cali and the barrio as an evil place, residents warned me several times “not to pathologize” the local youth as malos in my writing. Although beyond the scope of this article, such warnings demonstrate my interlocutors' awareness of the role and implications of knowledge production in the demonizing of places and populations (Graham 2005; see also Moncada 2010). In fact, community organizers told me that even the term *pandilla* has been used as a catchword to blame the racialized youth for Cali's urban security problems. As a community organizer named Jorge told me, “If something bad happens, this is not the state, this is not the paramilitaries. This is a *pandilla*'s fault.” Although I could relate to their concerns (not all members of La Quinta engaged in criminal activities), on several occasions many of my interlocutors did express pride of being malo, and admitted deploying deadly violence against rivals. While I was meeting with Pablo one afternoon, I directly asked him, “Do people respect or fear you?”

Pablo responded, “Look at my scars,” and showed me the bullets he endured for the barrio. However, gang members rejected any association with repressive powers in El Guayacán, arguing that the reason for their very existence was to protect the community against the imminent threat posed by the police and the other gangs. The popular sayings “one has to be malo to do well” and “one has to be malo to not suffer” were constantly used by my interlocutors to make their points clear. Whether they were just performing the intimidating and common practice of grimacing and shouting, which I noticed on many occasions, or reproducing an all too common masculine performance of toughness and badness (see Baird 2017), their reclamation of *evilness* indicates a different script from the racialized one utilized by the police and society at large.

Whereas black and racialized bodies and spaces are marked as malos in Cali's moral economy, the gang members consciously embraced evilness as a political strategy to reclaim control over their lives and territory. Sebas, a gang member, admitted, “One pretends to be evil to be respected, but deep down inside, even the *sicario* [contract killer] has some feelings.” He concluded by telling me how Pablo became evil: “He became malo when

they killed his brother. Sometimes one is not evil; one is made evil by the situation.” In consonance with my interlocutors’ interpretation, and in dialogue with an incisive scholarship on black radical protest, I take evilness as “the ungovernable intent of impeding and negating governmentality or [negating] the organized practices that render subjects governable” (Quan 2013, 121). Here, refusing to be governed takes the form of refusing to participate in the police’s monthly meetings; refusing the spatial division of residential blocks established by the city government and the police; refusing the moral codes of conduct of civil society; and refusing the technologies of self that NGO, church, and state projects deploy to produce a *community* in El Guayacán.

In my call for understanding gang territoriality as black ungovernability, I do not wish to overlook the ways black youth reproduce and reinforce other forms of violence. For instance, residents of El Guayacán are usually caught in the crossfire between gangs, resulting in children missing school and adults missing work, and in fatal injuries. Although women were not passive victims (and some even participated sporadically in the turf wars among La Quinta, La Zeta, and the police), they were particularly affected by these male-dominated violent interchanges. Thirty-five year-old Laura showed me the scars on her shaved head after being dragged by her hair by an officer. The limited mobility of gang members within El Guayacán fueled these gender dynamics, as it deepened women’s vulnerability to police and gang violence. Nineteen-year-old Cris spent six months in the juvenile detention center after joining her boyfriend in robbing bus passengers. Cris told me she resisted her boyfriend’s insistence “to do a *vuelta*” (robbery), but she ultimately capitulated: “The bus was approaching and I gave the sign to stop. He jumped in. . . . I was coming home when the police caught me in the street. Someone told them a black girl had stopped the bus.”

Other residents clearly disapproved of the police but also disapproved of the violence gang members used against the officers. Doña Julia, the owner of the bingo game where I held most of my ethnographic encounters, told me that she “didn’t fear and didn’t see them as malos” but felt their antagonism toward the police brought further violence to the community. “They [the police] are malos but I have said to Daniel [her grandson] if you raise a stick against the police I will hit you with the same stick.” In this case, Julia navigated through the territorial contest by strategically complying with the police, whereas other residents (as in the case of the police’s attempt to invade Victor’s junkyard) openly confronted them. In both cases, however, La Quinta was recognized as a legitimate authority to maintain order and protect residents, a legitimacy built on the shared vulnerability to both police brutality and state abandonment. Although a few participants in the *rendición de cuenta* were vocal against La Quinta and saw them as “rats,” La Quinta’s outlawed practices were accepted by most of El Guayacán because they were, in Aldo Civico’s (2012, 17) nicely crafted puzzle about gang governance in yet another context, “illegal but not illegitimate.” Within this context, legitimacy was also built on a common spatial-social location illustrated in Pablo’s take on Pedro’s murder. First, he showed his anger: “Fuck the police.” Then, Pablo evoked the status of Pedro as a worker to highlight the absurdity of his death: “I’m so sorry for this guy, this poor young man with the hands full of calluses of working for his little child. The police killed him—one child.” How do these blurred lines between workers and bandits enhance an anthropological understanding of alternative forms of political life in racialized contexts such as El Guayacán, where life is lived through daily criminalization and death?

If the argument developed so far is correct—that in El Guayacán the state attempts to govern through the calculated production of chaos, abandonment, and racialized policing—then the everyday legitimacy of La Quinta offers not only a diagnosis of state delinquency but also another way of conceiving sovereignty beyond the deployment of death. In her

study of “hedonopolitics” in a Port-au-Prince, Haiti, shantytown, Chelsey Kivland (2014, 694) shows how male subjects mobilize pleasure and force in what she terms “affective repertoires.” Kivland shows that within the intertwining context of economic precarity, state abandonment, and excessive disordered presence of foreign NGOs, *affect* works as a political resource that enables localized performances of governance.

Following this, one can say that *malos* is the performativity of manliness, benevolent power, anger, frustration, and respect. This program of feelings is manifested not only in the display of pleasure and prowess they call *vida loca* (crazy life), but also in a sharp spatial consciousness of oppression, in the defiance of the police, and in the unapologetic challenge of white/mestizo civil society’s codes of morality. Unlike Kivland, however, I see my interlocutors’ (spatial) praxis not so much as state mimicry but rather as an attempt to fend off the program of control represented by the state and embodied by the police, notwithstanding the complications their investment in territory-based gender and/or sexual domination poses to transformative politics.

Still, one would do well to pay attention to the affective community produced as a result of collective abandonment, rage, and frustration. I witnessed several moments when affective ties between gang members and local residents were established. Children would, for instance, shout at gang members, “There come the *aguacates*” (avocado, within this context a pejorative word for the police in their green uniforms), giving La Quinta members notice of the police entering the neighborhood. On the sidewalk of Doña Julia’s bingo parlor, gang members would drink with elderly players, teasing the losers and taking money from the winners to go buy more beer. In these spaces of socialization, they would celebrate New Year’s Eve and the birth of children, cry and drink to the honor of the dead, and curse the police. In moments of violence, the affective community would come out in full display. During the funeral for Pedro, his family closed the street and set chairs in front of the house to receive friends and relatives. Meanwhile, La Quinta guarded the streets to make sure they could retaliate if the police or rival gangs appeared, and fear hung in the air as cars and motorcycles passed by. In one of these moments, a man arrived on a motorcycle, and members of La Quinta ran toward him, guns blazing, forcing him to take off his helmet and identify himself. The rest of us ran away, fearing another confrontation like the one that resulted in the killing of Pedro during David’s funeral. In the end, the person on the motorcycle was an elderly man with a bottle of liquor who wanted to join us in remembering the deceased.

With the help of the community, La Quinta has managed to keep El Guayacán out of the control of the police and of the other gangs. When the barrio was in imminent threat of being invaded, some local residents helped La Quinta “hold the ground” by giving them money to buy ammunition. I was even asked for money a few times by members but evaded donating by showing them my empty pockets. Most residents helped La Quinta, not because they were coerced to, but because gang members provided a sense of certainty in a territory under constant dispute. Esther asked me, “Why do you think the ones from La Zeta haven’t invaded here and started charging *vacunas* [bribes] yet?” I asked Esther about a storeowner who complained about local youth dealing drugs at her doorstep. She argued, “The storeowners are the ones that should not be against La Quinta at all because sooner or later the bacrim will come to charge *vacunas*, and who will protect them?” Indeed, this was not a rhetorical question. Although in critical moments other residents joined gang members to defend the territory, most of this work was done by La Quinta. Within the territorial disputes and space-based structural violence the residents of El Guayacán were subjected to, their shared vulnerability became a political resource to build an affective

community in opposition to the criminalizing project of anticomunity endorsed by the state.

The Greedy State

Cali's government has tried multiple times to solve the problem of gang violence. In some cases, gangs were de-mobilized with promises of state protection and guarantees for financial resources to begin a new life. Most of the individuals who turned in their guns and accepted the peace agreement were later killed by ex-rivals or by the police. Since gang violence was viewed as a socio-ecological problem, to curb gangs and rehabilitate their members would require environmental and cultural changes in the city's marginal areas (Guerrero 1999).⁵ Among the current initiatives are training programs to insert former gang members into the job market and workshops on human rights and teaching youth about a "culture of peace." Meanwhile, police brutality, arrests, and assassinations endure as legal and extralegal practices. Despite this multifaceted war on gangs, the 105 gangs currently active in Cali indicate that these attempts are a resounding disaster. Gang members' marginal position in the city's economy, their parents' subaltern location in the racialized division of labor, and youth who "choose" illegal activities over other jobs (such as working as dealers) are examples of individuals with no prior place in society, whom these failed antigang resocialization programs target as subjects to be "reintegrated."

David Brotherton (2008) argues that, although the scholarship on street gangs has moved beyond theories of crime and deviancy to reframe this form of social organizing as social reproduction and/or political protest, it continues to focus on too narrow a definition of resistance. Gang practices are seen as a consequential response to social marginalization rather than a political action capable of producing broad collective agency. Such a paradigm, Brotherton argues, presents gang resistance as "opposition without the possibility of any political or cultural transcendence, any meaningful link to larger movements of the marginalized, or any indigenous self-renewal, innovation or discovery in which consciousness is changed, agency is redefined and other worlds are imagined (61)." While I do recognize some important interventions that have analyzed racialized gang practices beyond self-serving forms of resistance (see Bourgois 2003; Gardner II 2004), Brotherton's call is particularly relevant for an anthropology committed to locating and interpreting political forms of life (e.g., gang membership) that threaten hegemonic projects of social control such as the penal state.

I join his call to argue for the importance of an ethnographic sensibility to understand gang membership in relation to the current predicaments of black urban life. In that sense, La Quinta's context-specific case can be seen as a form of *transcendental politics* that calls into question the white/mestizo's loyalty to the anti-black regime of law. To regard their practices as transcendental does not mean they are not tangible and material-based. They are informed by everyday encounters with the police and structural violence at large. Take, for instance, the highly suggestive association between policing and economic dispossession posed by Juan, Sebas, and Pablo. I was at Doña Julia's improvised bingo parlor when she began cursing the city government because of increases in her utility bills. The difference, which seemed modest to me, was difficult for her because she was already struggling to raise two grandchildren. She makes a living by purchasing ice cream and beer in advance to resell for a higher price on her doorstep. She complained that her profits were eaten by the government. It was not the first time I saw residents complaining to each other about the price of utilities, unemployment, and corruption in the city government. They were particularly vocal against a new federal law that increased the value-added tax included in the cost of most goods.

Gang members also joined in their complaints. Sebas noted, “The problem is that the government is greedy and wants everything.” He called my attention to the fact that the police and the tax collectors were the only faces of the state in the borough, and sometimes the police performed both roles. For instance, while the officers prevented the extortion (the *vacunas*) of shopkeepers by La Zeta and other gangs in the borough, in El Guayacán they collected bribes from youth caught with small amounts of drugs in their pockets and, according to him, received money from *los duros* (the bacrim). La Quinta did not charge residents with *vacuna*, but they did think that there was very little difference between extorting shopkeepers and the state taxing residents on services and food goods. “Everything, everything is to the government. Imagine every home they charge bills, imagine how much money, there are so many houses here. . . . Imagine how much money they charge,” Juan explained, as he rubbed his hands. Pablo added, “[It’s] a lot of money, it’s not a single bill— energy, water, gas.” In their understanding, corrupt officers were as delinquent as the government, which charged residents for every basic service that was supposed to be free (e.g., electricity, water, sewage services). As Juan stated, “They collect the money and keep the people in misery.”

This collective understanding of police as enforcers of economic and social orders offers important insights to understand how policing relates to other mundane practices of urban governance. This includes, for example, the abandonment of El Guayacán by the state, its stigmatization by the media as a crime zone, its avoidance by Cali’s white/mestizo civil society, and its target as a “deposit” location for the homeless population displaced from a downtown development project. La Quinta’s critique of the greedy state for officially extorting residents through taxes and unofficially extorting gang members through policing provided further example of the legalized and extralegal forms of spatial and structural violence promoted by the state. Supposedly neutral economic policies and aggressive policing converged in producing spatial violence and eviscerating conditions of (social) death. In Juan’s words, “The problem is that they [the state] want everything for themselves, while the people are *aguantando hambre* [suffering from hunger].” In fighting against La Quinta, the state not only reclaimed for itself the right to extort through corrupt officers but also through legalized taxes identified by the residents as extortion for precarious and at times unavailable services. Why would they be loyal to a state to which they were legible only as taxpayers and as objects of gratuitous violence? Their critiques of the state may indicate different expectations about what the state can and cannot do for them, thus corroborating the scholarly debate on the diverse and at times contradictory ways the state is conceived and experienced (e.g., Aretxaga 2003; Kivland 2012; Ramírez 2011). Or perhaps it was understood that in Cali’s racialized regime of citizenship, the state would not do anything for El Guayacán residents except enforce an unjust social order fed by mutually constituted criminalization, economic marginalization, and violent policing practices.

Finally, as the greedy state produced racialized geographies of dispossession—by controlling material resources, territory, and populations—it also produced racialized zones of ungovernability that challenged its strategies of controlling El Guayacán. Embracing ungovernability has long been a part of the repertoire of resistance in contexts as diverse as the underground black liberation army in the United States, the struggle for black urban life in postapartheid South Africa, and even the controversial retaliatory violence against the police in favelas of Brazil. In the case of South Africa, Kerry Chance (2015, 399) argues that burning road blockages, setting shacks on fire, and producing chaos were valid strategies for “colored” and indigenous people to make conflictive claims and to be legible to the state, even if as *ungovernable subjects*. In El Guayacán, the residents’ refusal to cooperate

with the police and their tacit support of La Quinta's transgressive practices—including selling drugs on street corners, confronting the police when officers harass local residents, and granting protection against the rival gangs—were deployed not so much to bring the state in but rather to keep it out. El Guayacán may not be a *Zomia*—again, in James Scott's (2009) rather historical and contextual account, a place of refuge from the state—but it is certainly a *zone of insubordination* to this particular project of state making.⁶ At least from the perspective of my interlocutors, while there was a clear understanding that the greedy state was not willing to share, there was also a shared desire to escape from the structure that policed their lives.

Conclusion

At least twenty youth have been murdered in El Guayacán since my first arrival in 2013, and the targeted killings continue as I write this article. This depressing scenario calls into question the relevance and impact of scholarly work in response to the urgency of everyday life. In analyzing the challenges of an anthropology of policing, some colleagues have moved beyond “just” denouncing police violence to investigating the ideological work accomplished by policing, as well as how society may reclaim democratic control of the police (Garriott 2013; Mutsaers, Simpson, and Karpiak 2015). In this article, I join them to argue that street gangs can offer some important insights on the matter. A public anthropology of policing must be politically sensitive to the controversial political agency of those racialized subjects embracing ungovernability as a way to retain some control over their disgraced lives and demonized communities. In that sense, to move beyond the obvious explanations of gang's antagonism with the police (as a war between “bad guys” and officers) and gang territorial control over populations (as coercive power), scholars must consider the ontological and spatial locations of those ungovernable subjects in society. What are their terms of engagement with the state? Will they bring about a radical transformation in the structural conditions of black urban life? I am pessimistic. However, pessimism does not authorize one to ignore those who seek “to transport life from the state's dominion” (Quant 2013, 121), no matter how ephemeral it can be. Fleeting, indeed. With the killing of La Quinta members, residents have voiced concerns over the barrio possibly falling into the hands of neoparamilitaries that are extending control over Cali's periphery. The gang is disappearing, and with it the precarious form of community that provided some territorial autonomy to El Guayacán. At the half-empty bingo parlor, Doña Julia started naming the ones killed (Pedro, Juan, Gustavito, Sebas, and now Pablo) while I was counting them with my fingers. “Don't count the dead. It brings misfortune,” as she slapped my hands. As sinister as it is, La Quinta's defeat restates the challenge in this article: Is there a possibility for reinventing black life outside the domains of the state?

Notes

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1. All names are pseudonyms. The name of the neighborhood is changed to preserve anonymity for particular sites within the borough of Aguablanca where I did fieldwork.

2. La Quinta is conformed by a small group of young men, not all of them engaged in criminal violence. Among local residents, it is at times regarded as a *parche*, a Spanish word for innocent gatherings of friends. This fluid definition (from a crime-related *pandilla* to a *parche*) invites caution not to pathologize local youth. Here, I follow the scholarly definition of “gang” as an association of individuals holding a spatially-based identity, retaining territorial control, and engaged (even if sporadically) in criminal activities in a given geographic area. See for instance Valverde (2017).
3. The ambiguous ways that the state has been “experienced” by marginalized populations caught in the middle of the Colombia’s armed conflict has been theorized by Ramírez (2011) among others.
4. Although my thinking is informed by James Scott’s critique of the state, my engagement with his concept of *Zomia* is admittedly provisional. I further develop his concept in relation to black criminality in yet another context in Alves (2018), 175-207.
5. For a balance of the failed approaches to curb gang violence in Cali in the last three decades (1980s-2000s), see Guzmán Barney (2018).
6. The political implications of these claimings is theoretically under-appreciated, particularly regarding black radical politics within the anti-black urban context in which to access the city blacks have to engage in acts of spatial insurgency that challenge the state, such as stealing electricity, occupying informal urban settlements, dealing, holding gang membership, and so on (see Alves 2018; Gardner II 2004; Hurtado and Mornan 2015).

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