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OVERCOMING THE HURDLES: THE JOURNEY OF THE AFRO-COLOMBIAN WOMAN

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ABSTRACT

Afro-Colombian women are marginalized in their society for a variety of reasons. This research aims to address the disparities they face when compared to white or mestizo women in Colombia. Background information about slavery, Colombia's abundant resources, Colombia's Pacific Coast, and the Colombian Conflict are introduced to provide a complete understanding of the prevailing discrimination and marginalization experienced by this segment of the population. The Department of Chocó in the Pacific Coast hosts a large population of Afro-Colombians, it is therefore a central component of this discussion. The fight over the Pacific Coast's lucrative resources has produced damaging effects on Afro-Colombian survival; it has contributed to problems such as: poverty, higher illiteracy rates, shorter life expectancies, high rates of displacement, intimate partner violence, and gender-based violence. Afro-Colombian women have been the most affected by the previously mentioned obstacles because of their connection to the Chocó. Lastly, this research highlights humanitarian work by Afro-Colombian women, in order to demonstrate their perseverance and willingness to affect change in a volatile society.

INTRODUCTION

Nations of the Americas embody a unique history of colonization derived from the explorations, conquests, and battles of the early European explorers and settlers. An amalgamation of European, African, Native American, and Asian influences can be observed in the culture, gastronomy, music, interactions, and physical characteristics of today's American citizens. Owing to inception, Colombia is one of the countries that presents the cultural fusion previously described. It is steeped in a history of Native American Indian heritage; integrated with European, most specifically Spanish, and African ancestry. This merging of ethnicities largely stems from the early exploration of Rodrigo de Bastida, in 1500-1501 who likely followed the work of Christopher Columbus (“*The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica*”). Although, Bastida is the first Spaniard to land in Colombia, it is named after Columbus. It is explained that Colombia is the only country of the Americas to display what some may consider an honor to Columbus. In keeping with the discussion of heritage, Colombia is said to have a strong linguistic connection to Spain, with little deviation seen in their Spanish. Colombia is also notably “the most Roman Catholic of the South American countries” (“*The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica*”). These features highlight the strong emphasis on Spanish traditions and values manifested in their culture. These descriptions of Colombia inspired me to question the place of Afro-Colombians in their prospective society.

Researching this country goes far beyond studying its cosmology, in fact many sources explicate the importance of its rich soil and natural wonders found throughout the nation. Colombia is most known for: the Andes Mountains, beautiful savannas, tropical rainforests, coffee, fruits, lush soil, coca, and exotic wildlife found in the Department Chocó situated along the Pacific coast. Its fertile terrain and lengthy periods of precipitation creates an advantageous

location for cultivation of crops, especially coca. Paramilitary groups, as well as illegal armed forces are attracted to the location, terrain, and development of coca given that this resource is the plant used to make cocaine. Consequently, illegal lucrative economic gains have yielded a domestic struggle known as, the Colombian Conflict. This fight for territory and resources, which began in the mid 1960s, has claimed the lives of over 220,000 people and has displaced numerous citizens, many of whom are Afro-Colombian or indigenous women (Kraul 2016).

When contemplating resources of this country, Chocó becomes a significant aspect in the discussion. This Department's desirable land primarily belongs to the Afro-Colombian population following their marred history of enslavement. It is understood that colonization, which incited years of slavery, is largely to blame for the plight of the Afro-Colombian citizens. African slaves were first brought to Colombia in the 1520s, arriving in New Granada ("*AfroColombian.org*" 2014). Over the next three centuries, African slaves revolted, intermarried with European descendants and American Indians, until slavery was abolished on May 21, 1851. The legal end of slavery did not automatically translate into prosperity for Afro-Colombians who currently continue to face discrimination. Countless Afro-Colombians have been forced to flee to remote jungle like areas such as Chocó to seek sanctuary. It is described as sacred land for Afro-Colombians; nonetheless, its abundant resources create tension between: government, guerrillas, paramilitary groups, and its lawful owners, Afro-Colombians. Regulations such as Law 70 "which recognizes the right of black Colombians to collectively own and occupy their ancestral lands" are in place to protect Afro-Colombians (McDougall 2010). This legislation not only aids a vulnerable group in the Colombian society, it serves as a positive indicator of the efforts made by the government for its citizens.

It must be explained, “Colombia boasts the second largest population of African descendants in Latin America with Brazil being the first” (“*AfroColombian.org*” 2014). Notably, while hosting such a sizable population of African descendants, research shows that their conditions today have not improved far beyond the days of slavery. In fact, many sources share a common theme of despair towards the Afro-Colombian circumstances. For example, “...today’s income per-capita of the Chocó is 40% of the national level, in 1960 it was 30%. So, Chocó was even poorer relative to the rest of the country historically” (Bautista 2014). Besides a history of oppression, lack of infrastructure is a significant factor contributing to the poverty experienced by residents of Chocó. “The poverty of its people is disheartening. It is Colombia's poorest state, a rain-sodden land with no paved roads, where four of five families have no electricity or running water” (Haven 1995). The conditions described make Afro-Colombian survival and prosperity a challenge, especially for Afro-Colombian women. It is a fact that:

Between 2000 and 2010 the Colombian government increased its military capacity by 41%. Eighty percent of the U.S. assistance to Colombia between 2000 and 2010 was devoted to the military component. During that period in municipalities where the internal armed conflict and military presence was more obvious, 149 women were victims of sexual violence per day, 6 hourly. (PCN 13)

It is necessary to underline the conditions that these women face daily, especially upon reading the previous statistic which emphasizes the marginalization of the Afro-Colombian woman.

The purpose of this research to call attention to the turmoil and triumphs of Afro-Colombian women. It is equally important to highlight efforts and organizations such as, Law 70, Black Communities’ Process, and Proceso de Comunidades Negras (*PCN*), that have been in existence since the 1990’s demanding constitutional rights for Afro-Colombians. Placing these

matters on a platform is one of the many ways that the men, women, and children who are voiceless can be heard and inspired.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

As mentioned, Colombia's land and resources are an essential topic in the discussion if the country's historical and racial dynamic are investigated. If the focus of the conversation is Afro-Colombians, specifically Afro-Colombian women, Chocó and Buenaventura are significant territories to be addressed. It has been established thus far, Colombia has the largest population of African descendants next to Brazil; interestingly, a sizeable percentage of that group resides in The Department of Chocó and Buenaventura. According to Wouter, "the subject of territorial rights for the Afro-Colombian population is especially relevant in the Department of Chocó where 85 percent of the approximately 500,000 inhabitants consider themselves to be black" (502). The size of Chocó's African descendant population has a direct link to colonization by Spaniards, slavery, and emancipation. Shortly following colonization, the slave trade entered Colombia. The pressures of slavery forced many runaway slaves to seek sanctuary in remote jungle-like territories such as Chocó. The location and privacy of the land provided hope for a better existence. As the years passed and slaves were emancipated they followed their brethren to those wooded regions and formed a tightknit community which has lasted for many decades. Presently, these communities continue to exist in Chocó and have deemed it their respective territory.

Resources of the Pacific Coast.

It was previously noted, Colombia's Pacific Coast, specifically the Department of Chocó, is an area rich in resources. "It is one of the world's wettest and most biodiverse habitats and holds many species at risk of extinction" ("worldlandtrust.org"). Chocó's climate

and land is advantageous for crop cultivation, mining, woodlogging, and ecological research on the enormous variety of unique species in its verdant rainforest. It should be noted, although Chocó is filled with natural resources and a diverse ecological system it is "...the poorest region in Colombia with a rudimentary infrastructure, high illiteracy and mortality rates" (Wouter 502). It appears that the thirst for riches has dominated governmental conversations about Chocó. One might argue, the value of the resources outweighs the value of the people. Improvement efforts necessary to advance the lives of the current population are therefore hindered, given that interest in Chocó comes from many different directions. Nationally and globally: scientists, zoologists, miners, wood loggers, pharmaceutical companies, and armed forces, both legal and illegal, seek to monopolize the region and strip the resources for revenue. It is not the intention of the above-named parties to advance the Afro-Colombian population residing in poverty. "The damaging results of woodlogging has already become clear in Urabá, the northern part of the Chocó where these companies had almost completely destroyed the natural forest" (Wouter 503). If these groups gain control and remove the resources, it will be at the expense of the livelihood of Afro-Colombians.

The fight for control.

Offences against the territory and its population have alarmed both national and global audiences; especially where the fight for dominance and control exerted from armed forces, illegal armed forces, and paramilitary groups are concerned. The previously mentioned groups have created a dangerous rippling effect of displacement and violence that has been catastrophic for Afro-Colombian men, women, humanitarians, and other vulnerable members of the population in Chocó and cities with high Afro-descendant populations. Among the issues surrounding appropriation of resources is the prevalence of violence towards

humanitarians. Cases such as the fatal November 1999 attack on a boat in the Atrato river that transported several charitable aid personnel is now becoming a common occurrence. “Their boat had arrived at the town of Quibdó in the Kennedy neighbourhood when it was suddenly and purposefully rammed by a *panga* (fast boat) ...” (Wouter 506). The Afro-Colombian community and those who attempt to support them are often faced with danger. Residents who have little financial prosperity and upward mobility live in fear of volatile groups who constantly threaten their safety. There are many documented incidents of violence toward members of the Afro-descendant community and their allies. For example, “a paramilitary group threatened to kill the 500 residents of Las Mercedes and ‘burn down the entire village’ if they did not abandon the village that very day” (Wouter 506). Colombia’s Pacific coast is at the forefront of exploitation which attacks their territory, aid works, and creates a displacement situation that is internationally recognized.

The well-known guerrilla group Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, *FARC*) is among the most aggressive threat to the safety of Chocó’s residents. The close of March 2000, communities like Vigía del Fuente and Bellavista felt the wrath of *FARC*. Wouter explains, “this attack, carried out by mortars and explosives by *FARC*’s frentes numbers 5, 34, and 57, left a death toll of 21 policemen and eight civilians, including two babies and the mayor of Vigía” (506). Protecting citizens is now a growing concern because of the many years of control that various armed forces have enjoyed without interruption from authorities. According to Wouter, “*FARC*’s front 57 in particular had been present in the region for more than fifteen years” (508). The homicides and displacement are not exclusive to the Pacific Coast; nonetheless, cities such as: Carmen Del Attar, Quibdó, Bojaya, and Ríosucio are relevant to the discussion. “In September 1999 more than 8,000

displaced persons were from Quibdó alone” (Wouter 507). There are other districts in Chocó that have experienced displacement with numbers ranging between 14,000 -17,000. As mentioned previously, the epidemic of displacement in Colombia has become a source for national and global concern, “the internal conflict in Colombia has led to the displacement of between 2,650,000 and 4,360,000 people, making it the country with the largest Individually Displaced Person (*IDP*) population after Sudan” (Carillo, 2009). The rate of *IDP* comprises 8.6% of Colombia’s population” (Carillo, 2009). Carillo’s research cites, the lack of involvement on the part of the government as a reason for such astronomical numbers.

Parallels between Buenaventura and Chocó.

The violence and displacement of Afro-Colombian communities is not specific to Chocó; as mentioned, Buenaventura, a significant port along the Pacific Coast, is significantly impacted by racial tension and turmoil. The topic of gainful revenue resurfaces when discussing Buenaventura; “more than half of the country’s international commerce passes through its shipyards,” rendering it a lucrative asset for the government (“*afrocolombian.org*” 2014). Buenaventura’s port is profitable; nevertheless, “80% of Buenaventura’s majority Black population lives in poverty...” (“*afrocolombian.org*” 2014). In fact, running water is deemed a luxury in this section of Colombia. The parallels between Chocó and Buenaventura are striking; the pursuit of financial gains for the nation’s economy has created a toxic environment for vulnerable residents. Buenaventura’s port “generates tens of millions of dollars in revenues;” nonetheless, the article “International Rally Against Violence in Buenaventura,” cites that Buenaventura is among the murderous place in the world (Herrera 2012). *Afrocolombian.org* states, 87 murders took place in a four-month span in a district with a population of about 400,000 citizens. In the chaos, women are randomly abducted and murdered, to which the term,

“femicide” has been employed to depict the gender effects of this crisis (“*afrocolombian.org*” 2014). Although *femicide* is not specific to Buenaventura, Chocó, or Colombia, the term helps to magnify the Afro-Colombian woman’s story.

AFRO-COLOMBIAN WOMEN

Women of African descent in Colombia face marginalization in a society that only recently, in 1991, acknowledged itself as a diverse nation. According to Wouter, “In the new constitution of 1991 Colombia recognized that it was a multiethnic and multicultural nation instead of the homogenous country consecrated in the old carta politica of 1886” (499). Women of African descent are chronically displaced, the subject of Gender-Based Violence (*GBV*), and often overlooked in the midst of Colombian’s internal conflict given the statistics on violence and displacement. According to protectionline.org,

Considering that in the context of geo-economic and political warfare fought in the territories inhabited by Afro-descendants, they are the most affected, and that more than half of the affected population are women, the impact on women is disproportionate. (PCN 7)

Afro-descendant men face many challenges; however, they enjoy the privilege of living in a *machismo* society. According to “Beyond Machismo,” “the term has been widely adapted as a reference point for describing sometimes favorable but mostly offensive behaviors associated with male abuse of sanctioned social prerogatives” (Beattie 303). Afro-descendant women; on the other hand, fight racial and gender discrimination in the above-mentioned societal climate. “Afro-descendant women, due to their subordinated status in their communities, are at a disadvantage compared to Afro-descendant men and are therefore more prone to physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence” (PCN 5). As a result of the conditions

discussed, Afro-descendant women face higher rates of illiteracy, lower rates of achieving higher education, higher rates of unemployment, and shorter life expectancy when compared to non-Afro-descendant women (white/mestizo). In 2005, “illiteracy rate for Afro-Colombian women is 16.90% as compared to white/mestizo women at 11.70%, while 13.5% accesses higher education compared with 19.7% for white/mestizo women” (PCN 11). According to protectionline.org, “the unemployment rate for Afro-Colombian women is at 20.4% as compared to non-Afro-Colombian women at 17.6%” (PCN 11). The “life expectancy of an Afro-Colombian woman is 11 years shorter than a white or mestizo woman” (PCN 11). The vulnerability of Afro-descendant women is further compromised by the surge of displacement growing in Colombia.

The Colombian Conflict.

This rise in *IDP* and violence has proliferated due to the increasing value of the coca plant which is one of the main causes of the Colombian Conflict. As previously stated, Colombia’s Pacific Coast is an ideal location for crops to flourish given its near perfect farming terrain and climate. Chocó, has been utilized by many paramilitary groups, illegal armed forces, and guerrillas as the prime location for production. The illegal armed forces have the financial means to sustain their existence in these areas because of the enormous revenue gained from coca.

In the case of narco-trafficking, the Pacific region [*sic*] unique characteristics have allowed illegal armed groups to secure land for coca cultivation in departments such as Chocó where coca crop cultivation are nine times larger today that what they were in 2004 (UNODC 2011); and open routes for drug’s [*sic*] distribution and export (e.g. the Port of Buenaventura) while people’s lack

of employment has motivated their involvement in illegal activities (coca cultivation, and illegal extraction of natural resources) and criminality (trafficking drugs and arms). (Herrera 93)

Herrera's research explains, conflicts that have arisen along the Pacific coast are largely intentional, "...they have argued, that purposely bringing conflict to the area was a strategy to take over a region that became very important for particular economic and political interests" (Herrera, 91). The information given in the above-mentioned citations lends credibility to the argument of intentionality. The idea is, where the institution of violence and displacement are most prevalent, residents will flee instead of fight. The repercussions of paramilitary groups, guerrillas, and illegal armed forces have forced many communities to succumb to the pressure and abscond. It must be noted, fleeing has not produced a solution to the problem of violence, displacement, and oppression in Chocó.

The Facts Surrounding Displacement

The meaning of displacement entails more than simply moving to a different location. It is a psychological form of oppression geared toward the destruction of vulnerable communities. When families or individuals are displaced, their lives are dramatically changed because they are now exposed to further hostilities and marginalization. The disregarded members of society are more impacted given their limited outlets for counteraction. As discussed earlier, Afro-Colombian women are widely considered inferior members of society according to the statistics presented earlier that highlights disparities in literacy, life expectancy, and unemployment when compared to white or mestizo women. Their subordinate status in Colombia has propelled them to be the likely recipients of adverse brutality. A phenomenon known as Gender-Based Violence (*GBV*) is often associated with displacement. The article "Gender-Based Violence in Conflict

and Displacement: Qualitative Findings from Displaced Women in Colombia,” indicates that *GBV* is prevalent in times of conflict and displacement. Women are most affected by *GBV*,

Additionally, Afro-Colombians status as internally displaced has increased their risk from [*sic*] vulnerable conditions especially among women and youth. This sector of the population constitutes the vast majority of internally displaced people as women account for almost 50% of internally displaced households and almost 40% are children under eighteen. Women and the youth are at a higher risk of sexual abuse, exploitation and forced recruitment by illegal armed groups.

(Herrera 105)

The effects on women who are displaced are inhumane: “women and the youth are at the higher risk of sexual abuse, exploitation, and forced recruitment by illegal armed groups” (Herrera 105).

The abuses can include other atrocities besides sexual exploitation such as: mental control, physical abuse, forced abortion, menial labor, forced prostitution, rape, kidnapping, domestic violence, and forced marriage. “In the first half of 2014, 11 women were killed as a result of gang activity. They were all found dismembered” (“*NPR.org*”). The political climate in Colombia has paved the way for this kind of violence to successfully perpetuate.

Typical methods of *GBV* during displacement are rape and outside violence from guerrillas; however, domestic violence is also a significant problem. Qualitative findings from numerous displaced women in Colombia highlight, “intimate partner violence (*IPV*)” as a common attribute of *GBV* (Wirtz et al. 2014). According to Wirtz, financially strained displaced households have more incidents of domestic violence. The tension can result in female partners experiencing, “physical violence included tactics that ranged from hitting, punching, kicking, throwing/pushing, pulling by the hair, to violence with weapons including

machetes, guns, and knives” (Wirtz et al. 2014). The article also reports, many women who endure *IPV* chose not to abandon their relationships because they fear the loss of financial stability and negative repercussions on their children. These qualms often prolong their circumstances and foster vulnerability. The complexity of *GBV* as it pertains to *IPV* witnessed in Colombia is a phenomenon that is impossible to ignore.

A Narrative Account of Displacement

Countless stories from survivors recount intimate tales of sexual violence. The recollections of various survivors from Garcia et al.’s article, “The Displaced Black Women in the Armed Conflict in Colombia: Some Memoirs of the Victims,” offers a detailed account of the transgressions faced by Afro-Colombian women. One women’s story will be highlighted below, she will be referred to as Survivor 104 in an effort to conceal her identity. Survivor 104 explains that during her displacement she was taken to a location that housed other *IDPs*. She was subsequently restrained and raped by two men in her seventh month of pregnancy. This became a forced abortion given the brutality of the attack. Survivor 104 fought her predators because she wanted to protect her unborn child, she was subsequently cut deeply in her genital region. Interestingly, one of the guerrillas holding her captive was a woman. Survivor 104 witnessed tears from the female guerrilla who could not continue to watch the assault as it worsened. Upon trying to set Survivor 104 free, the female guerrilla was shot in the leg. This single account of *GBV* serves as an example of the violence experienced by displaced Afro-Colombian women. According to Garcia et al., “37,000 of the 342,000 of the [*sic*] displaced people are African descendants” (Garcia et al. 2012). The disparities are highlighted by this statistic, “violence against Afro-descendant women is 41.1%, in contrast to the national rate of

37%” (PCN 9). The fact that Afro-Colombian women are at a disadvantage based on their race, gender, and social status is a serious issue in the country; especially in Chocó.

EFFORTS FOR CHANGE IN COLOMBIA

The narrative recollections and statistics are alarming; nonetheless, it is essential to the integrity of this research to include the many efforts that are in place to aid minority groups such as Afro-Colombian women and Afro-Colombians in general. There are laws, organizations, and countless humanitarians, many of whom are Afro-Colombian women, that fight for progress in Colombia. It may appear that the Colombian government has done little to support Afro-Colombians; however, Wouter suggests that, “Colombian legislation regarding the rights of ethnic groups is, on paper, one of the most advanced in Latin America” (499). As mentioned previously, after years of debate Colombia acknowledged themselves as a country with a diverse ethnic background given their history of colonization and slavery. In 1991, a new constitution was created which incorporated the essence of the above-mentioned acknowledgement. This stems from numerous Black awareness campaigns nationally and globally that called attention to the climate of discrimination against Afro-Colombians. The new constitution led to the creation of a committee formulated to draft protections and rights for Afro-Colombians. In August 1993, Law 70 was enacted to protect Afro-Colombian communities. This law, which is also known as “the Law of the Black Community” has been passed with the intention of defending the rights, territory, and culture of Afro-Colombians (Wouter 499). As stated previously, Chocó is one of the departments designated under this law. The law was meant to combat the guerrillas, paramilitary, and armed forces who sought to control the region by granting land titles to members of the Afro-Colombian community. Article 1 of Law 70 quoted below highlights its purpose;

“The objective of the present law is to grant the black communities who have begun to occupy fallow lands in the riparian rural areas around the Pacific river deltas, the right to collective property in accordance with their traditional production practices ...” (Wouter 499).

However, my research shows that this law is not being respected; as a result, many organizations and humanitarians have joined the fight to properly implement the constitution and prevent obstructions of civil rights.

Organizations, and Humanitarians of Colombia

The Black Communities Process (Proceso de Comunidades Negras (*PCN*)) is a collaborative group of humanitarians united to combat Afro-Colombian human rights violations. *PCN* is comprised of over one hundred advocacy groups and individuals primarily of African descent, who strive for the empowerment of their community. It has been their goal to defend the rights of this community through campaigns against racial discrimination. They are most notably known for founding Law 70 in 1993. Law 70 has been one of their most significant contributions to the enhancement of the lives of Afro-Colombians. *PCN* is also credited with imparting a racial demographic section in the 2005 census which created numerical data about Afro-Colombians. This group has been instrumental in the battle for equality in their respective communities as well as creating the global awareness necessary to tackle this problem.

Amongst the discussion of humanitarian efforts to end oppression of Afro-Colombians, it is important to recognize that individuals in these organizations risk their lives for human rights and justice. One such activist, Emilsen Manyoma, frequently made headlines for her courageous activism; nonetheless, the most recent news report detailed her tragic death. Her

body, along with the body of her partner Joe Javier Rodallega were discovered on Tuesday, January 17th, 2017. The bodies were badly abused revealing evidence of stabbing and gunshot injuries. It is suspected that the couple was murdered because of Manyoma's role as known as activist. It has been mentioned earlier, humanitarians can face violence as a result of their work. Her role as the leader of Comunidades Constuyendo Paz en los Territorios (CONPAZ) was brave and sought to restore human rights in various underprivileged communities. CONPAZ members generally reside in areas of turmoil such as Chocó, Buenaventura, and several locations outside the scope of this paper. This network of humanitarians support each other's communities and find ways to thrive in spite of obstacles. They work together to reaffirm their rights to life essentials such education, healthcare, and equal treatment. Manyoma will be remembered for her contributions to the quest for human rights.

All humanitarian efforts in Colombia do not result in fatalities; many are successfully orchestrated and have accomplished great progress in the community; however, it is important to note, although fatality is not the standard outcome of humanitarianism it can be a realistic consequence. Violent threats are synonymous with humanitarian efforts in Colombia, when those efforts threaten to thwart the profits of groups such as: illegal armed forces, miners, woodloggers, and *FARC*. It was the case for concerned citizen, Francia Marquez who quickly learned the importance of Colombia's resources to the above-named parties. "An Afro-Colombian leader who traveled to Bogotá to denounce illegal mining in the southwestern province of Cauca told EFE she fled her home after receiving death threats from armed men" (EFE News Services 2015). According to Marquez, in November 2014 she joined a March to Bogotá and faced numerous threats until governmental officials were able to bring her to safety. In spite of dangers associated with human rights efforts in Colombia, Afro-Colombians

have not shied away from the task. They persevere and continue to inspire other fearless leaders to create an endless network of humanitarian fighters.

The issue of *femicide* has motivated a team of three Afro-Colombian women to stand in solidarity against *GBV* in spite of dangerous threats and violent outcomes. Gloria Amparo, Maritza Asprillia Cruz, and Mery Medina are commonly known as “*The Butterflies*” (Preston, 2014). Their organization is officially named, “Butterflies with New Wings Building a Future” (Red Mariposas de Alas Nuevas Construyendo Futuro). All three women have endured discrimination, fear, and *GBV* in their prospective districts. Their work entails aiding women who are victims of *GBV* by reporting their individual attacks while teaching them about the laws of their country against such crimes. The group operates in Buenaventura where it has already been established that poverty and crime are common place. This volunteer outfit of approximately 100 members has supported more than one thousand families and women in crisis. It is not uncommon to learn that many of the volunteers allow battered women to seek refuge in their personal dwelling. The Afro-Colombian population is not alone in their fight because this organization has made a vow to seek peace and justice regardless of the hurdles they must cross.

Bravery, as we learned by reading about Manyoma and the fatal November 1999 Atrato river attack, can result in tragic consequences. These murders are among the many that have been the result of thwarted humanitarian efforts. When the price of justice in Colombia does not yield murder, it can; however, carry dangerous threats against volunteers and their families. A Butterfly activist known as, Luz, protected her 10-year-old daughter from the threat of rape only to be victimized in her place. She was subsequently raped following her act of protection and refusal. This incident was the catalyst for her sudden move to Buenaventura to work with

the Butterflies. According to npr.org, this organization is in the process of prioritizing education efforts in their community as well as creating a shelter for battered women. Fortunately, *the Butterflies* won the Nansen Refugee award which was accompanied by \$100,000. According to unhcr.org, in 1954 the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (*UNHCR*) Nansen Refugee Award was established in honor of Fridtjok Nansen, a Nobel Peace Prize winner who was renowned globally for his charitable work. The award honors the outstanding work of inspirational humanitarians worldwide. This award has been instrumental for *the Butterflies* and has helped them achieve their dreams for the program.

CONCLUSION

The multifaceted conflicts plaguing Colombia's Afro-Colombian community has no quick remedy. Their history of Colonization created an environment which perpetuated a class system based on racial identity. The institution and termination of slavery further segregated and divided the nation forcing Afro-Colombians to form their own communities. The Pacific Coast became a friend in the chaos and provided unity against a society that oppressed and marginalized them throughout their existence. Coincidentally, their sacred land is filled with resources that incited people and companies to pillage without regard for the consequences. Over the decades, resources, land rights, narcotics, and aggressive political agendas have been the main ingredients of turmoil detrimental to the prosperity of the Afro-Colombian community. Among the suffering, women have had to bare the heaviest burdens of being undervalued in Colombian society. Displacement of individuals, violence, and poverty have resulted in lack of resources for many African Descendants. It has become commonplace in Colombia's Pacific Coast to witness a high rate of illiteracy, subpar health care, and a high rate

of GBV. Despite Law 70 granting land rights to Afro-Colombians, the struggle continues, particularly for Afro-Colombian women, as evident throughout this paper.

Today, the Afro-Colombian population is fighting and thriving because of heroic crusaders who have vowed to fight for equality. Humanitarians, such as Emilsen Manyoma, have become martyrs in the quest for justice; as a heroine she preached her message at the risk of losing her life. She worked up until her untimely death in order to create a better environment for her community. Other courageous groups, organizations, and individuals have also joined the fight and have implemented change because of their valiant efforts. *PCN* was successful in producing Law 70 which gave land rights to Afro-Colombians and *the Butterflies* have battled for women's rights by reporting crimes and taking victims into their own home. They are instrumental in the efforts to protect and teach victims their rights. The Afro-Colombian community has not taken their injustices they face lightly; they are outspoken and determined in their journey. Their work cannot be ignored because they are a voice for vulnerable citizens. The enormous stage that they have created has gained global recognition and support. Along with activism, conducting research of pressing issues is another method of voicing the concerns for disadvantaged communities. It is crucial for researchers to address their concerns with accurate information in order to increase national and global awareness. While it is often difficult to discuss the realities faced by oppressed members of society, hiding it is an obstruction of progress. In recognition of the valiant citizens, victims, survivors, and humanitarians this research highlights their remarkable journey to overcome unfathomable adversities by exposing information that details their many courageous battles.

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