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Introduction

Ana María Díaz Pinto and Juan Diego Díaz

THE Hemispheric Institute on the Americas (HIA) is the University of California, Davis's hub for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latinx studies. This volume presents the conference proceedings of the 2024-25 Graduate Student Conference, celebrated on November 14, 2025, and featuring the work of five recipients of the HIA Summer Fellowships. Spanning five distinct disciplines (history, Spanish literature, linguistics, economics, and design), and five countries across Latin America (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru, and the United States—yes, Latin America is also present in this country) the contributions gathered here share a common concern: the ways people, communities, and institutions navigate and reimagine structures of power. Individually, the essays demonstrate the thematic and methodological diversity that characterizes contemporary hemispheric inquiry; they move across historical, ethnographic, visual, institutional, and theoretical approaches about belonging, governance, communication, memory, and mobility. These texts ask how inequality coexists with practices of adaptation, resistance, and collective world-making. In this way, the contributions here explore contemporary and historical communities and institutions that reimagine society under conditions of scarcity and fear.

A first group of contributions examines how communities build collective structures of self-determination in the face of dispossession, racism, and political violence. From an historical perspective, Nicholas Osoro-Yoder offers a narrative about the formation and expansion of indigenous assemblies in Peru's Selva Central between 1975 and 1995—a period marked by the dual pressure of Sendero Luminoso's Maoist insurgency and the aftermath of settler colonization. Drawing on the legacy of Victor Hugo Green and his *The Negro Motorist Green Book* (1936), Latrell Broughton develops the BlueBook Magazine, a multimodal platform dedicated to documenting the African Diaspora in Cali and Medellín, Colombia, and Accra, Ghana, through art, activism, and travel. His essay offers a guide for "Black Travel Movement" directing visitors to communities in Colombia that affirm and celebrate their blackness through music, visual art, design, and modeling.

A second set of essays focuses on the multiplicity of knowledge and aesthetic practices that surround power structures. Leigh Houck's work analyzes representations of horses in literature and iconography of the Spanish invasion of Peru. Through a close reading of the chronicles of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega and pictorial representations of a post-invasion ceramic bowl, Houck explores indigenous resistance and adaptation in the face of the colonial encounter. Her essay offers fresh perspectives on the ways horses were understood by indigenous peoples in the Andean region: as mythical creatures, as

instruments of colonial power, and ultimately as adaptable tools that could be enacted for resistance. From a contemporary perspective, Angélica González-Bastidas analyzes how institutions across Latin America apply plain language as a model to develop bilingual materials in California's Latine Co-Lab. Through a comparative study of institutions and practices in Chile and California, her article advocates for linguistic access, community belonging, and collaborative research focused on public communication. Finally, drawing on economic modeling, Inés Badin analyses the welfare effects and capacity constraints of social transfer programs, with a focus on Brazil's flagship federal social welfare *Bolsa Família* program. Badin proposes a model that incorporates uncertainty about program benefit receipt and shows that the intervention improves welfare only when the gains from lower social costs are strong enough to compensate for an individual's loss.

Latin American scholars are increasingly challenged to make sense of a political climate where democracy and citizens' safety and rights are under threat. This situation, compounded by the urgency of climate change, economic dispossession, and unchecked extractivism, has led many scholars to characterize the region in terms of crisis (Escobar 2020 and 2025; Mignolo, Segato, and Walsh 2024), catastrophe (Echeto 2014, Fonseca 2020), collapse (Castro, Selgas, and Benson 2025), and even extinction (Heffes 2023). Yet, the emergence and persistence of progressive initiatives, together with historical examples of social organization and resistance, continue to offer grounds for hope and collective well-being. The essays in this volume invite readers to reflect on both emerging and ongoing fields of experience in which community power navigates, and at times transforms, the structures of knowledge and colonial legacies that shape contemporary Latin America.

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Manipulation and Resistance: Horses in the Literature and Iconography of the Spanish Conquest of Peru

Leigh Houck

THE prevailing historical view in early literary and iconographic reports is that horses were essential to the Spanish conquest of the Americas. Prominent twentieth-century historians, including Robert Denhardt and Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham, reiterate this understanding of the horse as indispensable. In *The Horse of the Americas* (1947), Denhardt quotes conquistador Pedro de Castañeda de Nagera, "Horses are the most necessary things in the new country because they frighten the enemy most, and after God, to them belongs the victory" (Denhardt 1980, 33). Other conquerors and chroniclers of the time made similar claims, highlighting the importance of horses in intimidating the natives and conquering the Americas (Abbass 1986, 21–22). Denhardt goes so far as to assert that "Obviously the great conquest would have been impossible without horses" (Denhardt 1980, 33). Graham agrees in *The Horses of the Conquest*, declaring that the Spaniards "Scarcely could have conquered empires as great [...] as Peru, without their horses to assist them in the task" and that "Numerous accounts of the fear the Indians had of horses are to be found in all the accounts penned by the conquerors" (Graham 1949, 11–30) Like Denhardt, Graham refers to conquistadors and chroniclers to support his claim. However, more recent scholarly work challenges this notion. Authors including D.K. Abbass, Marcy Norton, and Christopher Valesey all suggest a more nuanced explanation of the role of horses in the conquest.

To begin with, Abbass opposes this historical narrative, arguing that the importance of the horse in the conquest revolves around a myth originating with the conquistadors themselves and perpetuated by Eurocentric views. Besides the Spaniards' obvious relationship with horses (stemming from a history of chivalric romances and mounted combat against the Moors), Spaniards had practical motivations to emphasize the role of horses in the conquest. In their written correspondence with royal audiences in Europe they requested authorization of more horses to be sent to the Americas (Abbass 1986, 39). She also explains that despite the common narrative that the native Americans were afraid of the horses, "There are many reports of stalwart native American resistance to horses and descriptions of incidents in which they [horses] were useless or even a disadvantage to the Spaniards" (ibid., 21). Valesey asserts the same: that the horse's vulnerabilities were identified and taken advantage of by native combatant (Valesey 2019, 13). Valesey also goes on to cite studies on Mesoamerican

manuscripts showing that "Spaniards' Indigenous allies immediately fought alongside men on horse" and "Nahuas' general response to horses could be better characterized as one of fascination and partnership rather than fear" (ibid., 13). Norton reiterates the limits of equine power: "The ability of horses to assist in battle was largely dependent on attacks taking place on optimal terrain: open, dry, level ground," and points out that "In regions where horses could not be used effectively, Indigenous people had the advantage" (Norton 2024, 81–82). She also mentions that the traps and weapons invented by the Indigenous people to take down horses were as novel to the Europeans as the horses were to the Indigenous people (ibid., 82). These studies show that the historical notion of horses as virtually invincible military weapons is questionable.

This paper will further investigate the veracity of the historical understanding of horses as crucial to the Peruvian conquest. To do so, I will examine literary and cultural products from the initial colonial period by *mestizo* authors and Indigenous Peruvians. The objects of study are the oral testimonies from a 1571 trial, Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's written works *Comentarios Reales de los Incas* and *Historia General del Perú*, and the pictorial art on a four-handled bowl from the Vilcabamba region, Cusco. Joining contemporary scholarship, this paper suggests a more complicated view than what historians have traditionally espoused. While much of Spanish literature does represent horses as indispensable in the colonial project, other literature and indigenous cultural products of the time suggest that the initial phase of intimidation was brief. Indigenous Peruvians quickly overcame fear and fought back, eventually even using the Spaniards' prized equine bioweapon against them.

Horses in the Conquest According to Indigenous Peruvians 1571 Testimonies

In *Versión Inca de la Conquista* (1974), Edmundo Guillén Guillén compiles eighteen testimonies from indigenous Peruvians given during a 1571 trial against Francisca Pizarro and Hernando Pizarro. While the testimonies aimed to determine whether the Pizarros had misused funds during the Incan uprisings, the testimonies serve as a valuable first-person indigenous account of the Spanish conquest of Peru that reveals an initial native view of the horse.

Among the eighteen testimonies compiled by Guillén Guillén, five mention the Spaniards' horses and their "*poder supernatural*" (supernatural power) (Guillén Guillén 1974, 7). Witnesses Francisco Caroallaille, Don Gonzalo Zapayco, García Tocari, Hernando Curi Huaranga, and Don Diego Cayo Inga all recalled the horse in their testimonies. In all, except for Curi Huaranga's account (which focused on the tactical advantage of the horse on certain terrains), mystical beliefs surrounding the horse are central. In the following section, I will examine those beliefs—from believing they had

monstrous powers, to conflating horse anatomy with Spanish weapons, to misunderstanding that horses ate metal—and their associated implications.

Several beliefs conflated the horses' bodies with the Spaniards' weapons. Don Gonzalo Zapayco reveals fantastical impressions of the horse in his testimony: namely, that horses breathed fire and could cut men in half with their tails (Guillén Guillén 1974, 7).[1] Similarly to Zapayco's testimony, Don Diego Cayo Inga reiterates the belief that the horses' tails were arquebuses[2] or swords, and adds that the horse and human rider were thought to be one centaur-like creature. Cayo Inga explains how even Atahualpa, the great Incan emperor, was initially intimidated by these animals.[3]

Three testimonies (those of Caroallaille, Zapayco, and Tocari) reference an important belief: that horses ate precious metals, specifically gold and silver. Caroallaille mentions that the Spaniards themselves, as well as their mounts, supposedly ate these metals (Guillén Guillén 1974, 41). Similarly, Zapayco refers to the "sheep" that ate gold and silver, and how the fear of them provoked the natives to gather all the treasure they could for the Spaniards.[4] Finally, García Tocari mentions that the Spaniards explicitly furthered this belief, asking for the precious metals to "feed" their horses.[5] Inca Garcilaso de la Vega corroborates the above in *Historia General del Perú* (1617). De la Vega records how the natives noticed the horses' metal bits, the part of the bridle that goes in the horse's mouth and mistakenly took this to mean that the animals ate metal.[6]

This belief, clearly beneficial to the Spaniards in their imperial project, was actively encouraged. Guillén Guillén cites Garcilaso de la Vega: "The Spaniards, seeing the simplicity of the Indians, told them that they should give them lots of it [gold and silver] if they wanted to appease the horses and make them their friends"[7] (Guillén Guillén 1974, 101). This credence, prevalent in the 1571 testimonies, is more than a mere erroneous understanding by a group of people unfamiliar with equines. It is a significant

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[1] "*Cómo aquellos hombres que le habían preso al dicho Ataualipa que traían unas ovejas en que ellos se metian y que de un soplo echaban fuego y mataban muchos indios aunque estuviesen lejos donde estaba(n) y que con la cola cortaba un hombre por medio*" (Guillén Guillén 1974, 79).

[2] Merriam-Webster defines the arquebus as "a 15th century matchlock gun which was portable but heavy"

[3] "*El dicho Atabalipa ni la gente que con él iba hiciese resistencia alguna de armas ni de otra cosa porque luego se rindieron porque decían que el hombre y el caballo eran todo uno y que sacando el caballo la cola mataban los indios que pensaban que el arcabuz era la cola del próprio caballo y lo mismo la espada*" (Guillén Guillén 1974, 79).

[4] "*Aquellas ovejas comían oro y plata y así con el gran miedo de esta nueva luego los dichos caciques e indios de esta provincia vio que juntaron todo lo que pudieron de joyas*" (Guillén Guillén 1974, 79-80).

[5] "*Pedían que le diesen mucha más cantidad porque de ello tenían muy gran necesidad que sus caballos no comían otra cosa*" (Guillén Guillén 1974, 101).

[6] "*Viendo los caballos con frenos de hierro, entendiendo que era manjar de ellos, trajeron mucho oro y plata en tejos para labrar, y los pusieron en las pesebreras, diciendo a los caballos comiesen de aquello que era mejor pasto que el hierro*" (Guillén Guillén 1974, 101).

[7] *"Los españoles, viendo la simplicidad de los indios, les decían que les diesen mucho de aquello si querían aplacar los caballos y hacerlos sus amigos."* This and other translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

example of how the Spaniards used the horse to actively manipulate the natives to further their own economic, military, and social interests.

RECORDS BY INCA GARCILASO DE LA VEGA

Inca Garcilaso de la Vega was of Incan ancestry and Spanish upbringing. This uniquely positioned him to be a cultural mediator, translator, and historical witness. He was able to record Incan history, passed down orally, in the written word in his *Comentarios Reales de los Incas* and *Historia General del Perú*. Both the initial and later native views of the horse can be traced throughout these works.

In *Comentarios Reales de los Incas* (1609), Garcilaso de la Vega details the arrival of the Spaniards and the rebellion of the natives in territory that is now Chile. Similar to the 1571 testimonies, in this text, the chronicler recorded the Indigenous people's doubts about the horse and mystical theories. However, here, rather than believing that the horses ate silver and gold, both the horses and their riders were suspected to be immortal and made of iron and steel.[8] In this passage, the natives contemplated the reason for their defeat despite their far greater military forces and wondered whether the Spaniards might not be mortal like themselves. Significantly, they also had this same doubt about the Spaniards' horses. The natives of what is now Chile were, at least at first, quite impressed by the military power of these animals, which was so exaggerated that they thought that both horse and rider might be otherworldly. This supposition suggests that, contrary to D.K. Abbass' theory—that the importance of the horse in the conquest was overstated—the natives of what is now Chile were at first, quite impressed by the military power of these animals, which was so exaggerated they thought that both horse and rider might be otherworldly.

The horse was represented repeatedly in the Peruvian context as a bioweapon: an instrument of violence wielded against the native people by the conquering Spaniards. Again, seemingly in contrast to Abbass's thesis, Garcilaso de La Vega emphasizes this violence and the associated extreme fear or *grandíssimo miedo* of the horse that the natives initially experienced in a later passage of *Comentarios Reales*.[9] This passage emphasizes the fear that the horses instilled in the natives, here related to the sheer size of the animal and the prospect of being trampled underfoot. The natives of South

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[8] "*Entre otras muchas preguntas les havía hecho éstas: Si aquellos españoles eran hombres mortales como ellos o si eran immortales como el Sol y la luna; si sentían hambre, sed y cansancio; si tenían necesidad de dormir y descansar. En suma, preguntó si eran de carne y huesso o de hierro y azero; y de los cavallos hizo las mismas preguntas*" (Inca Garcilaso de la Vega 1943, Volume II, 135).

[9] "*Comúnmente los indios tienen a los cavallos; en viéndolos correr, se desatinan de tal manera que, por ancha que sea la calle, no saben arrimarse a una de las paredes y dexarle passar, sino que les paresce que dondequiera que estén (como sea en el suelo) los han de trompillar*" (Inca Garcilaso de la Vega 1943, Volume II, 254).

America were unfamiliar with horses before the conquest and lacked autochthonous animals of this size.

However, another passage of *Comentarios Reales* reveals a crucial shift in the Indigenous perception of the horse. Garcilaso de la Vega mentions a letter sent to him by the priest Diego de Alcobaza in 1601, which stated that "And the Indians [are] so skilled and hardened in war that there is no Indian who, with a lance and on horseback, cannot defeat any Spanish soldier, no matter how valiant he might be"[10] (1943, Volume II, 143). This passing comment in a larger paragraph about the general state of affairs in Chile reveals that by 1601, some Indigenous people had overcome the previously mentioned fear of the horse as a mystical, fearsome beast to adopt it as a weapon of war in the fight against the invading Spaniards. This passage is particularly illuminating because it suggests that the initial fear of the horse turned into recognition of its mortality and, crucially, usefulness. The Indigenous warriors not only started to ride but rode so skillfully that they could bring down Spanish soldiers who had centuries more experience in mounted warfare.

Unfortunately, Garcilaso de la Vega does not explain exactly how or why the perception of equines changed. Most likely, it had to do with proximity: "Because native Americans commonly performed the various chores to care for horses, they had easy access to the animals and the related cultural complexes of riding, including Spanish gear, terminology, and equestrian habits" (Abbass 1986, 35). However it came to pass, it is clear that native Peruvians quickly overcame their initial fear of the horse and adopted it as a powerful ally in their fight against the Spanish.

LATE 1500S CERAMIC PIECE

In the 2019 article "Los fragmentos de Vilcabamba, Perú: un testimonio iconográfico excepcional de la visión andina sobre el enfrentamiento entre indígenas y españoles," Bat-ami Artzi and other researchers meticulously analyze the different human and non-human animals depicted on an unusual post-Conquest, late 1500s ceramic piece. The *Cuenco de Cuatro Asas* or four-handled bowl was found in Vilcabamba, a town in the Cusco region of Peru (Artzi et al. 2019, 158), and is an important pictorial representation of equines by the native Peruvian people, in contrast to the written representation of the horse seen in Garcilaso de la Vega's writings and the oral testimonies recorded in Guillen Guillen's book. The following analysis first outlines the article's findings before focusing more closely on the horses' representation.

[10] "*Y los indios [son] tan diestros y resabiados en la guerra, que no hay indio que con una lança y a cavallo [sic] no salga a cualquiera soldado español, por valiente que sea*" (Garcilaso de la Vega 1943, Volume II, 143).

Figure 1. Rendering of the iconography on the *Cuenco de Cuatro Asas* done by Arturo Rivera. Reproduced from Artzi et al. (2019, 161).

Figure 2. Rendering of a rider on a black horse done by Arturo Rivera. Reproduced from Artzi et al. (2019, 163)

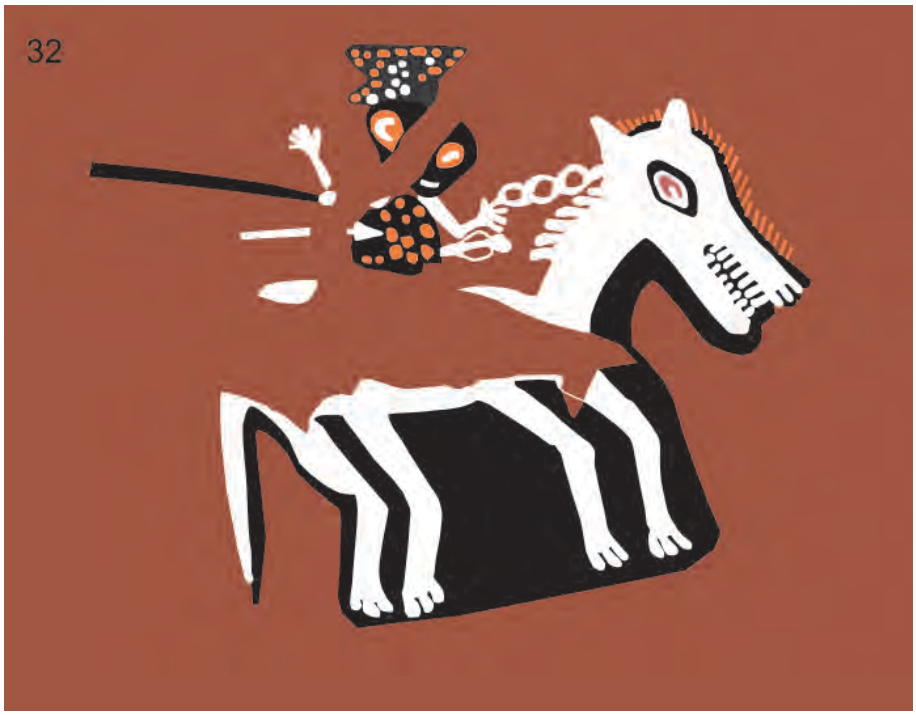

Figure 3. Rendering of a rider on a white horse done by Arturo Rivera, Reproduced from Artzi et al. (2019, 164).

In the article, Artzi and company identify 39 humans and 57 animals depicted on the post-conquest ceramic bowl (Figure 1). Of those 57 animals, two are horses being ridden by Spaniards (see Figures 2 and 3). These two horses, one black and one white, are crucial to the meaning of the piece. Researchers interpret the overall iconography of the piece as representative of a hoped-for future in which the conquest is reversed and the "Vanquished are the Spaniards and the victors are the Incas"[11] (Artzi et al. 2019, 173–174). The researchers identify pictorial representations of both powers, Spanish and Inca, via two animals on the *cuenco*: horses and felines (ibid., 173–174). While the felines symbolize the Incas, the horses represent the Spanish (ibid., 173–174). The fact that the horses and the felines are approximately the same size suggests a balanced "Lucha de dos poderes" or fight between two powers (ibid., 173). This equivalence in scale challenges the traditional narrative of Spanish dominance. Inca warriors also appear to fight against the horses (ibid., 166). Horses, alongside the sword and the invention of writing, were the three key elements the natives saw as crucial to the Spaniards' success, as they recount the invasion from the Indigenous point of view (ibid., 173). Both figures depicted riding the horses are holding swords, and one is holding what appears to be a piece of paper or a book. From this ceramic piece and the

[11] "*Vencidos son los españoles y los vencedores son los incas*" (Artzi et al. 2019, 173–174).

accompanying article, we can glean an understanding of how horses were seen and represented by Indigenous Peruvians post-Conquest in the late 1500s.

John Lopez, a specialist in Art and Architecture of the Ancient Americas and Latin America, points out that the Incas did not have a figural tradition before the conquest, only geometric.[12] Consequently, it is clear that the artist(s) of the Vilcabamba piece have acquired an understanding of the European figural tradition and are using it to resist colonization.[13] As Lopez asserts, the artist is using the artistic language of the Europeans (figural representation) to "engage with the powers at play in this historical moment."[14]

I argue that, in addition to the importance of the horse as an animal symbolic of the Spanish, it is also seen by the native Peruvians as a violent, threatening being. This visual representation of the horse as violent is similar to the written representations found in some of de la Vega's writings. On the ceramic piece, several details of the horses suggest that the Indigenous artist(s) saw them as malevolent creatures. Several of these details have to do with the horses' facial expressions, and one pertains to their tails. Beginning with their faces, both horses are depicted with open mouths filled with rows of menacing, bared, gleaming white teeth. Additionally, both horses' eyes appear to be narrowed, a potential anthropomorphizing that could express anger and hostility. Moreover, the artist(s) also took special care to draw each horse's nostrils, a very specific detail in an otherwise rather stylized depiction. A possible explanation for this detail is that the horses are represented in an agitated state. Since horses are obligate nasal breathers and can't breathe through their mouths, their nostrils flare when they breathe heavily and with physical exertion. Perhaps the artists had observed charging horses and recorded this detail faithfully in their artistic rendering. Moreover, while not a facial expression, both horses' tails appear to be pointed at the end. This could be a mere stylistic choice, but I believe it could also be a reference to the mystical beliefs around the horse's tail being a weapon that were also seen in the 1571 testimonies. Perhaps the Vilcabamba artist(s) were unfamiliar with horses and still held this misconception about their physicality.

Finally, both horses are depicted with three-toed hooves instead of the single-toed hooves that those familiar with equines would expect to see. Perhaps the Vilcabamba artists were influenced by the two-toed camelids common to the region (llamas, alpacas, etc.).[15] In any case, this anomaly suggests that this particular

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[12] López, John. Personal communication, UC Davis, October 14, 2024.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] "*Los dos jinetes montan caballos con extremidades flectadas, lo que para las convenciones visuales inkaicas supone presentar movimiento, formando un conjunto que se mira mutuamente. Los caballos muestran unos agresivos dientes y un* rasgo que resulta muy sugerente: en sus patas tienen tres dedos o lo que semeja pezuñas de camélidos. Esta es una primera llamada de atención a que el proceso

indigenous group in Vilcabamba was not familiar with the horse or at least had not had up-close and personal experiences with horses in the late 1500s, unlike the groups further south mentioned in *Comentarios Reales* that were reported to be skilled warriors on horseback by 1601. To conclude, the representation of the horses on the *Cuenco de Cuatro Asas* can be understood in at least three different ways. First, as Artzi et al. explained, the Indigenous artist(s) saw the horses as a symbolic animal representative of Spanish power as a whole. Second, as Lopez points out, the figures on the *cuenco* are part of an artistic tradition that was new to the Incas- the mere fact that horses and other animals (both human and non-human) appear on the *cuenco* constitutes an anticolonial commentary expressed via a colonial methodology. Third, the images of the horses suggest that the artists in Vilcabamba still viewed the horse in and of itself as a threatening creature and source of violence.

CONCLUSION

The 1571 testimonies, Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's writings, and the *Cuenco de Cuatro Asas* are multimedia puzzle pieces that illuminate how the horse was viewed in the Conquest and immediate post-Conquest periods. In the 1571 testimonies, the Indigenous Peruvians remembered horses as fearsome beasts who were believed to possess supernatural powers. Similarly, testimonies and passages from Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, who would have heard the oral histories of the Incas, detail initial misunderstandings of the horse and great fear, suggesting that contrary to Abbass's theory, the horse's importance in the Peruvian conquest was not overstated and that the native people were in fact quite intimidated—at least at first. However, the letter mentioned in *Comentarios Reales* suggests that horses were adopted by the Indigenous people as early as 1601. From analyzing the representations of the horse in these cultural products, we can understand that it was a powerful living weapon employed first by the Spaniards and later by the natives in the struggle for control. The same animal that was a tool of manipulation and intimidation employed by the Spaniards was used against them by their Indigenous adversaries. In the *cuenco de cuatro asas*, Indigenous Peruvians embraced the European artistic figural tradition to push back against colonization and represent an alternative outcome where the Incas emerge victorious. Similarly, texts like *Comentarios Reales* indicate that they also embraced the European view of the horse as a weapon of war—an entirely new concept to a group of people who had no such animal previously—in order to resist colonization through mounted combat.[16] Considered together, the aforementioned texts and cultural pieces

intelectual andino puesto en juego para construir estas imágenes, sin previos referentes conocidos, pudiera haber sido autónomo respecto de las proposiciones visuales europeas importadas a América" (Martínez 2020, 62).

[16] Future investigation could consider how these shifting perceptions of the horse reflect broader Indigenous strategies of adaptation and agency in the early colonial period.

reveal not only evolving views of the horse, but also the conquest itself as a site of contestation, reinterpretation, and ultimately, resistance.

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Co-Creating Accessibility: How Latin American Plain Language Initiatives Inspired California's Latine Co-Lab

Angélica González-Bastidas

INTRODUCTION

IN California, where more than one in four residents (28.3%) speak Spanish at home (U.S. Census Bureau 2022), many institutions face ongoing challenges in providing consistent, meaningful communication in Spanish. Although legal frameworks such as the Plain Writing Act of 2010 and California's Dymally-Alatorre Bilingual Services Act (California Government Code 1973) require accessible public information, implementation often falls short (Micheli 2020). Spanish-speaking users frequently encounter documents that are incomplete, overly technical, or translated word-for-word, without attention to meaning, cultural context, or usability. In some cases, no Spanish version is provided. These language gaps are especially evident in public-facing documents related to education, healthcare, and financial services (Proctor et al. 2020). When language is unclear, individuals may struggle to take informed action, navigate procedures, or feel recognized by the systems designed to support them (Lin 2022).

In response to these challenges, this project began as a doctoral research initiative focused on Plain Legal Language (PLL) in Spanish in the U.S., with particular attention to financial and educational contexts. With the support of the UC Davis's Hemispheric Institute on the Americas (HIA), I conducted fieldwork in Chile, Argentina, and Colombia in summer 2024, observing how institutions apply plain language principles across different varieties of Spanish. These experiences helped me explore how communication can be more transparent and more aligned with community needs.

This research in Latin America, along with these broader reflections, inspired the initial proposal for the Co-Lab—a cross-campus collaboration among Ph.D. students, faculty, and community members from UC Davis, UC Riverside, UC San Diego, and UC Berkeley. The Co-Lab focuses on redesigning institutional documents through participatory processes and adapting insights from linguistics, plain language, and legal design[1] to the California context. By combining document analysis, collaborative writing, student participation, and peer review, the project supports the creation of bilingual materials that are easier to understand and more responsive to their intended

[1] Legal design applies user-centered design principles to make legal documents and services more accessible. This approach combines professional knowledge with visual techniques to transform complex information into texts that are understandable without specialized training (Jiménez and Hagan, 2019).

audiences. This article presents the origins, methodology, and early findings of the Co-Lab. It contributes to broader conversations on linguistic access, community belonging, and the role of collaborative research in improving multilingual public communication.

Observations from the Field: Lessons from Chile to California

This research included fieldwork in Chile, Argentina, and Colombia, countries where strong regulations promote the use of plain language in public institutions. The initial goal was to explore how legal, financial, and institutional entities in Latin America apply plain language and legal design principles in their official documents. The aim was to identify strategies that emphasize clarity, usability, and empathy across different Spanish varieties. These visits provided opportunities to learn from institutions that have developed human-centered approaches to legal communication and community outreach. These observations from Latin America raised an important question: How might similar principles be adapted to address the linguistic accessibility needs of Spanish-speaking communities in California? The answer would require a collaborative approach that bridges academic research with community engagement.

In Chile, the *Corporación de Asistencia Judicial de Valparaíso* (CAJVAL) provides free legal services to workers in the region and works to simplify legal communication for the public. Their use of plain language in processes such as family law demonstrates how language can build trust and understanding between professionals and the communities they serve. Working closely with the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso (PUCV), CAJVAL helps workers understand their employment rights—rights enshrined in legal codes like the Labor Code that workers must otherwise decipher on their own. CAJVAL develops visual infographics explaining: “What is termination?” with a simple definition, “How should it be done?” with required steps, and “Where can I get free legal help?” with direct contact information. They disseminate these materials through social media to reach people who need them in accessible formats.

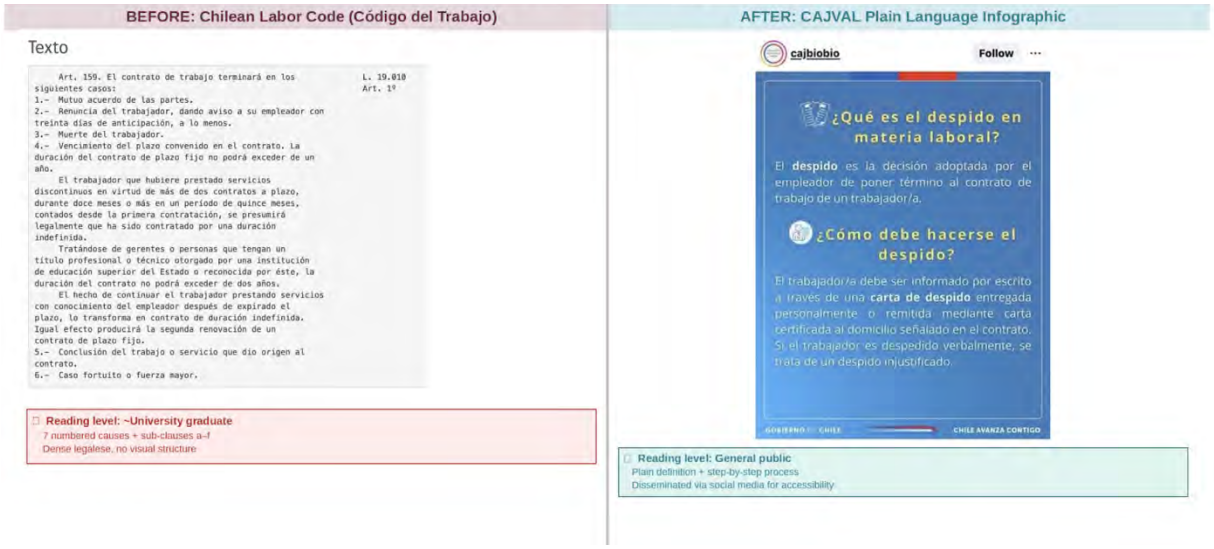

Figure 1. Contrast between Art. 159 of Chile's Código del Trabajo (left) and CAJVAL's plain language social media infographic on dismissal (right). The legal text lists seven numbered grounds for termination without indemnification, using complex subordinate clauses and legal terminology. The CAJVAL infographic defines "despido" in accessible language and explains required notification procedures. Available on www.suseso.cl; CAJVAL @cajval_oficial (Instagram).

Figure 2. Plain legal language materials on labor dismissal developed by Chile's Corporación de Asistencia Judicial (CAJ), illustrating accessible language and user-centered design on social media to reach communities through the platforms they actively use. Source: Instagram @cajbiobio and @cajval_oficial.

In collaboration with community advocates, CAJVAL produces texts that are both accurate and accessible to individuals without legal training. They also include the community in the document transformation process through training and participatory workshops, and they recognize outstanding plain-language text transformations—such as clearer forms, procedures, and community information materials like brochures or notices—with small awards.

At PUCV, the Núcleo de Lenguaje Claro y Derecho, directed by Professor Claudia Poblete, brings together students, faculty, and legal professionals to co-create accessible legal materials. The Núcleo fosters interdisciplinary training in plain language and design, framing clarity not only as a legal skill but also as a civic responsibility that strengthens democratic participation. Building on this vision, Poblete's research explores the regulatory developments of the "right to understand" (derecho a comprender) as a fundamental pillar of democratic access, providing a comparative analysis of plain language standards across Spanish-speaking countries (Poblete Olmedo 2021; Poblete Olmedo et al. 2022). Furthermore, the Co-Lab's approach is informed by technical frameworks developed in Chile that provide specific methodologies for transforming complex legal discourse into accessible text (Núcleo de Lenguaje Claro y Derecho 2022).

In Argentina and Colombia, public agencies are also advancing plain language policies to promote clear communication. This research included interviews, document reviews, and site visits that revealed recurring themes: the importance of testing documents with users, involving audiences (students in our case) in redesign processes, and tailoring plain language strategies to local linguistic and cultural contexts. Notable examples include Bancolombia, a financial institution that actively promotes the use of plain Spanish and legal design in its client-facing materials.

These case studies show that effective communication goes beyond word choice. It reflects a shared commitment to making legal and institutional systems more accessible and transparent. These insights helped lay the foundation for adapting plain language and legal design practices to California's context, while recognizing the importance of regional variation and lived experience in shaping meaningful communication.

From Comparative Insight to Collaborative Action: Creating the Latine Co-Lab

The observations gathered during fieldwork helped shape the vision for a collaborative initiative to improve how institutions in California communicate with Spanish-speaking communities. These insights highlighted the value of working with scholars and students, listening to users, and approaching language accessibility as a

shared responsibility. Building on those ideas, the Co-Lab was proposed to bring together academic, linguistic, and community perspectives within the University of California system.

The Co-Lab's primary goal is to support our local community in rethinking the way core documents are designed and shared in Spanish. Rather than relying on word-for-word translations, the Co-Lab encourages participatory redesign, drawing on plain language principles, legal design approaches, student input, peer reviews, and user feedback to create content that is easier to understand and more aligned with people's needs. This initiative also reflects a commitment to student engagement, especially those in the Spanish for Heritage Speakers Program at UC Davis. Students, along with Professors Agustina Carando and Claudia Sánchez-Gutiérrez, and Lead Teaching Assistant Ana Ortega (co-founder of Latine Co-Lab), provided key support in shaping the Co-Lab's early structure. Their contributions helped connect academic theory with practical application and opened new spaces for collaboration between campuses and communities.

The Co-Lab employs a mixed-methods approach that aligns with California's Plain Language Equity Standards, which require state departments to provide information using common words, avoid jargon, and keep sentences simple. While balancing plain language with technical accuracy presents challenges, these standards recommend starting with high-impact documents (California Department of Technology, n.d).

Methodological Framework: A Scaffolded Approach to Document Transformation

Co-Lab participants select and transform relevant documents for their local communities using a scaffolding process that integrates plain language, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), and service-learning. This combination challenges linguistic disparities while making institutional materials accessible by fostering critical consciousness, advocacy, and systemic change that shifts language from a barrier into a springboard for equity. Below are the ten scaffolded stages that structure the document transformation process:

1. *Critical Awareness*:[2] Students identify core documents and reflect on their impact and accessibility for Spanish speaking communities.

[2] Critical Language Awareness (CLA) emphasizes the role of language in maintaining and challenging power structures in society by empowering individuals to resist dominant discourses and promote social change. Jennifer Leeman, "Critical Language Awareness and Spanish as a Heritage Language: Challenging the Linguistic Subordination of US Latinxs," in *The Routledge Handbook of Spanish as a Heritage Language*, edited by Kim Potowski (2018).

2. *Plain Language Training*: Principles and practical service learning.
3. *Mystery Shopper Fieldwork*: Students experience language barriers firsthand
4. *Strategic Document Analysis*: Participants identify structural linguistic obstacles
5. *Transformation Workshops*: Students apply plain language, SFL, and design principles in collaborative labs
6. *Peer Review*: Collaborative refinement builds linguistic equity
7. *Community Validation*: Stakeholders review transformed documents
8. *Advocacy*: Students present their work to inspire change
9. *Recognition*: The campaign celebrates participants' achievements and awards the best transformations
10. *Ongoing Impact*: Transformed documents spread across institutions.

To illustrate the framework in practice, a heritage Spanish student transformed the UC Davis Code of Academic Conduct from a dense, single page policy organized as 47 bullet points and framed in legalistic terminology into an accessible Spanish infographic structured around six thematic categories, supported by visual icons and concrete examples. Her analysis showed that barriers were not limited to vocabulary or sentence length. She also identified the document's punitive stance as a significant obstacle to usability and engagement, noting that "sentía que el documento me estaba regañando" (I felt the document was scolding me).

Original Sentences of the UCD Academic Code of Conduct	Student transformation example (Spanish, with translation)
"Students who violate the Code of Academic Conduct are subject to disciplinary sanctions that include censure, probation, suspension, deferred separation or dismissal from the University of California."	*"La integridad académica existe para protegerte a ti y a tu comunidad. Si tienes dudas sobre qué está permitido, pregunta antes—tienes derecho a pedir orientación."* (Academic integrity exists to protect you and your community. If you are unsure about what is permitted, ask first—you have the right to seek guidance.)

Table 1. Transformation of excerpts of the UC Davis Code of Academic Conduct to plain language by a Spanish-speaking UC Davis student.

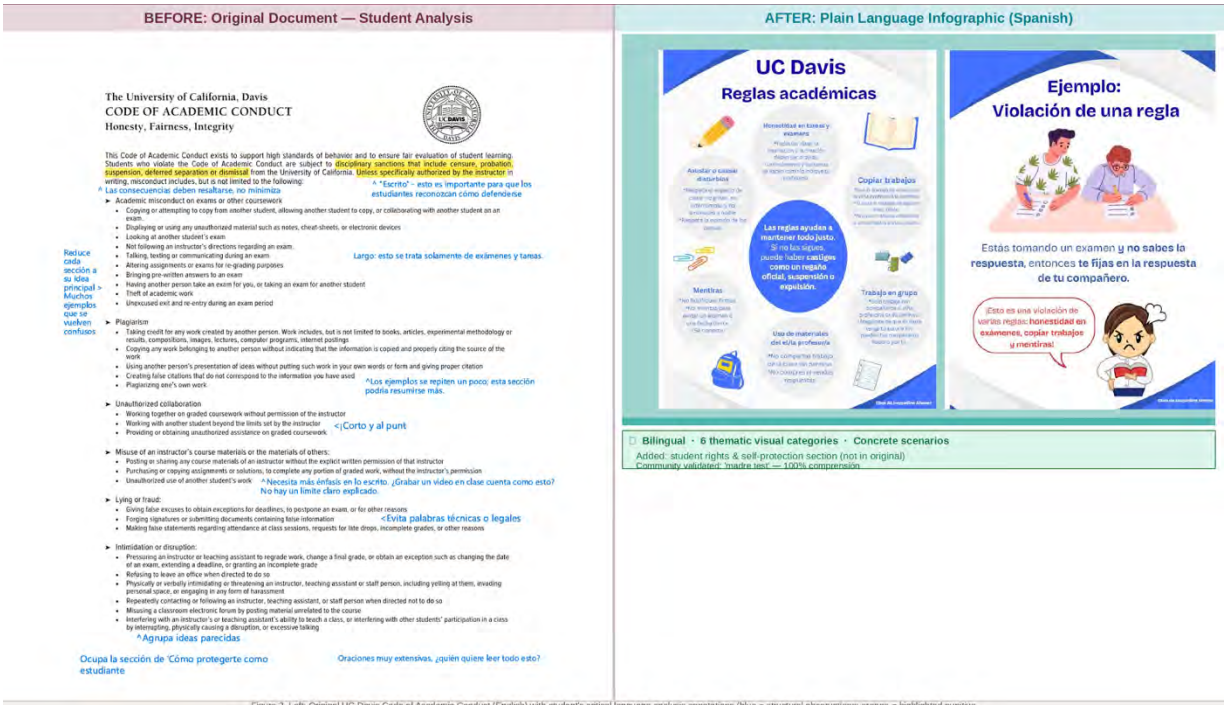

Figure 3. Left: Original UC Davis Code of Academic Conduct (English) with student's critical language analysis annotations. Right: Plain language bilingual infographic (Heritage Spanish Program, SPA031, UC Davis, 2025). The transformation reorganized 47 bullet points into 6 thematic visual categories, added concrete scenarios, and introduced a new student rights section. Community validation was conducted through an iterative comprehension check with a Spanish-speaking family member.

The revision process was iterative and user-tested. Through community validation, she refined the text based on an authentic comprehension check: "le pregunté a mi madre si podía leer el documento y luego explicármelo [...] Repetí este proceso hasta que el documento fuera comprendido al 100% por mi madre" (I asked my mother to read the document and then explain it to me [...] I repeated this process until it was 100% understood by my mother). In addition to reorganizing and simplifying the original content, she expanded the scope of the document by adding an entirely new section on student rights and protection strategies, thereby shifting the communicative purpose from listing violations to supporting informed action. The resulting text functions not only as a clearer institutional message, but also as an empowering community facing resource.

Her reflection further underscores the framework's consciousness-raising dimension and its relevance for heritage speaker pedagogy: "Este proyecto fue algo que utilicé para conectarme más con mi herencia cultural y especialmente con mis padres. Aprendí sobre la empatía, 'Plain Language' y cómo podemos ayudarnos los unos a los

otros" (This project helped me connect more with my cultural heritage, especially with my parents. I learned about empathy, Plain Language, and how we can help one another). Together, these outcomes show how the ten-stage scaffold operates as both a document transformation method and a participatory model that links clarity, usability, and linguistic equity through community validation.

This methodological framework evolves as a space for building community, learning to make texts more precise and more meaningful, reflecting critically, and taking informed action. Its methods combine document analysis, peer review, collaborative workshops, and feedback from institutional partners and content experts. This approach allows teams to test ideas in context, adapt to different audiences, and work together toward more accessible and respectful communication practices.

Implementation and Immediate Impact in the Classroom and Community

Student Involvement in the Heritage Spanish Program

A central element of the Co-Lab's approach is the active involvement of heritage speakers, especially undergraduate students, as analysts and co-designers in the document transformation process. These students bring valuable insights as individuals who regularly navigate university systems while often serving as informal translators and advocates for their families and communities.

Through guided workshops, students examined institutional documents—such as financial aid forms, tuition communications, and other essential UC services—and proposed revisions to improve clarity while maintaining accuracy. This participatory process enhanced both the quality of the documents and students' awareness of how language shapes access and belonging.

Students from the Spanish for Heritage Speakers Program at UC Davis received training in plain language and legal design and worked in small teams to revise real documents. Their proposals were refined through dialogue with peers, tutors, and bilingual educators, who supported the technical and syntactic adjustments. Through this process, the classroom experience revealed that clarity is not just about word choice. Layout, formatting, and visual structure also influence comprehension. For instance, dense text became more accessible when organized with headings, spacing, and simpler sentence structure.

Importantly, students shared personal reflections about how unclear Spanish-language documents had affected their families and shaped their roles as informal translators. These lived experiences informed revisions that were not only linguistically accurate but also empathetic and user-focused.

Feedback from both students and institutional partners has been positive. Students reported gains in confidence, vocabulary, and real-world application of their bilingual skills. At the same time, campus partners valued the collaborative and practical outcomes. Several UC campuses have expressed interest in adapting the model for other services, including housing and admissions.

Reflections and Future Directions

The first phase of the Latine Co-Lab showed that institutional change can begin with small, focused actions. Student-led document redesign, peer review, and collaboration across campuses created a practical, adaptable structure.

Students reported increased confidence in navigating technical vocabulary and contributing to real-world solutions. Their reflections often connected the work to family experiences, highlighting how these documents impact daily life in bilingual families. Faculty and mentors also noted how the project strengthened links between academic training and public service.

The Co-Lab's model—participatory and flexible—has sparked interest across other UC campuses. Several teams have expressed a desire to adapt the approach to documents in admissions, housing, and student support services. As the project moves forward, the focus will remain on improving institutional communication in ways that are respectful, collaborative, and easy to understand. Future efforts may include bilingual transformation guides, glossaries, shared tools, and faculty workshops.

While this work began in Spanish, the methods developed by the Co-Lab can support other language communities facing similar barriers. At its core, this project invites institutions to rethink how they communicate with the people they serve—and to do so with clarity, shared responsibility, and empathy.

Conclusion

The Latine Co-Lab was made possible through research support from the Hemispheric Institute on the Americas (HIA). Fieldwork in Latin America provided not only comparative insight but also inspiration for collaborative action in California. By learning from institutional practices in Chile, Argentina, and Colombia—and adapting them to the University of California system—this project highlights how international academic exchange can inform more effective communication practices and foster a stronger sense of community belonging.

The Co-Lab invites institutions and departments to rethink how they engage with multilingual populations—not only through translation, but through participatory transformations and student-led collaboration. While this work began with Spanish, its

methods can be extended to other language communities facing similar barriers. At its core, the Latine Co-Lab reflects a commitment to clarity, shared responsibility, and meaningful connection across linguistic and geographic contexts.

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Self-Selection Under Uncertainty: The Role of Capacity Constraints

Inés Badin

MANY transfer programs around the world face capacity constraints that prevent all means-eligible individuals from accessing benefits. These constraints may stem from budgetary limitations, logistical challenges such as inadequate storage facilities or inefficient transportation systems, and institutional barriers, including corruption that diverts funds. Capacity constraints can arise *de jure*, as in non-entitlement programs where assignment to benefits is not strictly tied to eligibility. Examples include Brazil's *Bolsa Família*, where a fixed number of slots is allocated independently of the number of eligible families, and subsidized housing programs that, due to limited supply, distribute benefits through lotteries or waitlists. Alternatively, capacity constraints may emerge *de facto* in entitlement programs in which all individuals who meet the statutory eligibility criteria are legally entitled to receive benefits, yet in practice, insufficient resources prevent full coverage. This is observed, for example, in India's Public Distribution System (PDS) and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS).

These capacity constraints are often viewed as suboptimal because they prevent intended transfers from reaching all eligible individuals. However, such constraints may, in fact, serve as a targeting mechanism when individuals' true income or needs are not directly observable to the government. Intuitively, these limitations reduce the probability of program entry conditional on individuals choosing a level of earnings that makes them eligible to receive the benefit. This uncertainty about program participation weakens the incentive for less disadvantaged individuals to become eligible, thereby leaving more resources available to be distributed among those most in need.

Understanding how such constraints shape individual behavior is crucial for the optimal design of transfer programs. In this paper, I first present the case of Brazil's *Bolsa Família*—a prominent example of a non-entitlement social welfare program in which eligibility is necessary but not sufficient for receiving benefits. Second, following the framework of Finkelstein and Notowidigdo (2019), I propose a model that incorporates uncertainty surrounding program benefit receipt and analyze the welfare effects of an intervention that reduces the probability of receipt (i.e., increases capacity constraints) while raising the benefit amount. I show that, under risk aversion, changes in the probability of benefit receipt and in the benefit size are not equivalent in terms of expected utility and, therefore, in targeting. I calibrate the model using *Bolsa Família* parameters to illustrate this point. Finally, I show that such an

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intervention improves welfare only when the gains from lower social costs are strong enough to compensate for individuals' welfare loss from greater income risk.

The main contribution of this paper is to the literature on self-selection mechanisms in transfer programs. Existing work has largely focused on imposing barriers that are more costly or less appealing for high-ability individuals, highlighting the value of such "ordeals" as screening devices that improve targeting and enable greater redistribution (Nichols and Zeckhauser 1982; Besley and Coate 1991; Alatas et al. 2016; Finkelstein and Notowidigdo 2019; Anders and Rafkin 2022; Rafkin et al. 2025; Deshpande and Li 2019; Homonoff and Somerville 2021). In contrast, comparatively little attention has been given to the role of uncertainty in program participation itself as a potential targeting mechanism—even though capacity constraints that generate such uncertainty are a widespread challenge in transfer programs around the world.[1]

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 presents Brazil's *Bolsa Família* program, highlighting its non-entitlement feature. Section 3 presents the model and briefly discusses its main insights and Section 4 concludes.

CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS IN PRACTICE: THE CASE OF *BOLSA FAMÍLIA*

One of the clearest examples of capacity constraints in transfer programs is Brazil's *Bolsa Família* Program (PBF for its initials in Portuguese), where budgetary limitations prevent universal coverage even among eligible households. PBF is one of the most extensive conditional cash transfer programs in the developing world and serves as the primary social assistance mechanism for low-income families in Brazil. As of 2018, it reached 13.8 million families—approximately 43 million individuals. A defining institutional feature of PBF is its quota-based allocation system, which introduces a non-entitlement structure to the program: access to benefits is constrained not only by individual eligibility criteria but also by the limited availability of program slots.

Bolsa Família is a means-tested program, with eligibility determined by self-reported household income per capita.[2] Eligible families are classified into "poor" and "extremely poor" categories based on two income thresholds. "Extremely poor" families are eligible for an unconditional monthly benefit (the "basic benefit"), the benefit for overcoming extreme poverty[3], along with additional monthly child-related transfers conditional on school attendance and health check-ups (the "variable benefits"). "Poor" families are

[1] Exceptions include Alatas et al. (2016), who discuss how uncertainty can discourage participation among higher-income households, and Finkelstein and Notowidigdo (2019), who incorporate participation uncertainty into their framework.

[2] For more information about the program, see Lindert et al. (2007) and Gazola Hellmann (2015).

[3] The value of the Benefit for Overcoming Extreme Poverty (BSP) is calculated individually for each family, ensuring that their per capita income exceeds R$70.

eligible only for the conditional variable benefits, as shown in Table 1. In December 2012, the poverty line was R$140 per capita per month (~US$70), and the extreme poverty line was R$70 (~US$35).[4]

	Extreme Poor	Poor
Income threshold, monthly per capita	Up to R$70	R$70 - R$140
Benefits provided	Variable benefit: - R$32 per child (3 max) - R$38 per youth (2 max) Basic benefit (R$70) Benefit for overcoming extreme poverty	Variable benefit: - R$22 per child (3 max) - R$33 per youth (2 max)

Table 1: PBF income threshold and benefits in 2012.[5]

Registration for PBF is conducted locally through in-person interviews at registration posts known as CRAS (Social Assistance Reference Centers), as illustrated in Figure 1. Household information is recorded in '*Cadastro Único*', a centralized social registry used not only for PBF but for a broad set of social programs. Families are considered eligible for PBF if (i) their registration in Cadastro Único has been updated within the past 24 months and (ii) their reported per capita income falls below the relevant poverty thresholds.

Figure 1. Images of the exterior and interior of CRAS offices (Photo by the author).

[4] In this paper, the details and summary statistics refer to the program in 2012, as this was the period when municipal quotas were most binding.

[5] The exchange rate in December 2012 was 1 USD = 2.05 BRL. Variable benefit per child also includes pregnant or nursing woman.

Although eligibility is well defined, enrollment in PBF is not automatic. The federal government funds the program and determines the overall number of slots based on poverty estimates from the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD). It then allocates these slots to municipalities. The total number of slots was initially set in 2003 at 11.2 million and subsequently revised in 2006 (11.1 million), 2009 (13 million), and 2012 (13.7 million).

Newly available slots—either unfilled or reopened when families exit—are first allocated to municipalities according to a priority ratio.[6] Within each municipality, families are selected for PBF through an impersonal computerized ranking system. Families are first prioritized based on a set of vulnerability criteria.[7] The remaining eligible families are then ranked according to (i) lowest family income per capita, (ii) highest number of children or adolescents aged 0 to 17, and (iii) longest uninterrupted registration period. As a result, PBF functions as a non-entitlement program: families can only become PBF beneficiaries if there are available slots assigned to their municipality.

	All families		*Extreme poor*		*Poor*	
Number of families	24,778,517		12,914,855		4,289,734	
Number of individuals	78,021,196		43,390,632		15,645,239	
Number of individuals in PBF	14,008,492		9,804,476		2,881,574	
Share of families in PBF	0.57		0.76		0.67	
Receives PBF	*Yes*	*No*	*Yes*	*No*	*Yes*	*No*
Avg. share urban	0.76	0.86	0.72	0.77	0.84	0.86
Avg. family size	3.6	2.5	3.6	2.6	3.9	3.0
Avg. per capita income	64.1	247.8	32.2	30.2	104.3	105.3
Avg. total income	229.1	505.0	112.5	79.7	411.7	323.6
Avg. months registered in *Cadastro Único*	74.3	36.8	73.7	35.8	73.5	43.8
Avg. months of last update in *Cadastro Único*	8.4	8.0	8.5	6.5	8.6	7.5
Share of newly registered in *Cadastro Único*	0.07	0.49	0.07	0.55	0.08	0.45

Table 2. *Cadastro Único* and PBF beneficiaries in December 2012. Source: *Cadastro Único*, 2012. The table provides summary statistics for families registered in *Cadastro Único* in December 2012. Monthly per capita income (excluding PBF benefits) is used to classify families as extremely poor (below R$70) or poor (between R$70 and R$140). Monetary values are reported in nominal terms. The exchange rate in December 2012 was 1 USD = 2.05 BRL. Newly registered are those registered in the last year.

Table 2 displays descriptive statistics for three groups of families using publicly available *Cadastro Único* data from December 2012: all families, families below the poverty line, and families below the extreme poverty line. The top panel shows that

[6] Number of PBF beneficiaries divided by the municipal quota (with the lowest values receiving priority).
[7] These include families with members involved in child labor, those freed from conditions akin to slavery, families from traditional communities, and families with members who are recyclable material collectors.

Cadastro is not exclusively used for PBF, as it includes many families that are not PBF beneficiaries: around 57% of all families registered in December 2012 were receiving PBF benefits. The table also illustrates the program's non-entitlement nature. Approximately 33% of eligible families below the poverty line were not PBF beneficiaries, and among families below the extreme poverty line, this share was around 24%.

The lower panel compares the demographic characteristics of PBF families with those registered in *Cadastro Único* but not in PBF, within the same income per capita brackets. Within each bracket, families enrolled in PBF tend to have, on average, larger family sizes, lower per capita incomes, and longer uninterrupted registration periods. This pattern reflects the criteria used to prioritize families for the program. PBF families also update their information less frequently: only about 8% of PBF families had registered within the past year, compared to more than 45% of non-PBF families.

This quota system introduces uncertainty about whether—and when—registered and eligible families will receive benefits. In this setting, expanding the program's slots to include more families, thereby increasing the probability of access, may also encourage households above the PBF income threshold (and even those not registered in the *Cadastro Único*) to underreport income to qualify. In the next section, I show theoretically how such constraints could enhance targeting.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK[8]

Based on the welfare program participation framework developed by Finkelstein and Notowidigdo (2019),[9] I examine how capacity constraints can enhance targeting and enable greater redistribution in welfare programs. In particular, I analyze the welfare effects of a policy that lowers the probability of receiving the transfer while raising the benefit amount.

MODEL SETUP

The population consists of two types of individuals, low and high ability, denoted by $j \in \{L, H\}$. Each individual has an unobserved income-generating ability, represented by their wage rate θ_j, where $\theta_H > \theta_L$. This is the key source of heterogeneity in the model. I assume that there is a unit mass of each type of individual. Individuals choose hours of work h_j, which produce labor income $h_j\theta_j$. Income is subject to a tax schedule $\tau(h_j\theta_j)$, so net income is therefore given by $y_j = h_j\theta_j - \tau(h_j\theta_j)$.

[8] For proofs and extensions, contact the author at mibadin@ucdavis.edu

[9] Finkelstein and Notowidigdo (2019) formalize a framework that incorporates uncertainty surrounding program participation to study how interventions that reduce ordeals can affect take-up and targeting in the presence of potential behavioral biases.

There is a government transfer program that provides benefits B if income is below an earnings cutoff denoted by r^*. Assume that benefits are provided with exogenous probability p. This probability can be interpreted as reflecting capacity constraints.[10] Assume the government can perfectly observe individuals' incomes and that there is no cost to apply for the program—individuals with income below r^* are therefore means-eligible to receive benefits.[11]

Individuals share a common utility function: $u(x_j) - v(h_j)$, where they get utility from consumption (x_j) and disutility from hours worked (h_j). Assume that $u(\cdot)$ is increasing and strictly concave, which represents individuals' risk aversion, and $v(\cdot)$ is increasing and strictly convex, reflecting the idea that the marginal disutility of labor rises with hours worked. In addition, individuals face an extra utility cost c if they need to distort their labor supply considerably to become eligible for the program. This distortion cost can capture, for example, the time and effort required to search for or negotiate a job with fewer hours, or the implicit penalty associated with working significantly fewer hours than required in their current job. The cost c is heterogeneous across individuals and is drawn from a type-specific distribution with density $f_j(c)$.[12]

Individual Choices and Private Welfare

Individuals make labor supply choices to maximize private utility. Denote the optimal hours choice for type j individuals who are eligible as h_j^E and for those not eligible as $h_j^{\neg E}$. For low-ability individuals, assume that any optimal choice of hours would yield labor earnings below the income threshold r^*; hence, they are always eligible and choose not to distort.[13] Their hours choice is given by h_L^E. For high-ability individuals, I assume that the optimal hours choice if they do not distort places their income above the eligibility threshold r^*. If they distort, assume their hours choice is given by $h_H^E = \frac{r^*}{\theta_H}$, so that they are exactly at the income threshold, with $h_H^E < h_H^{\neg E}$.

[10] For simplicity, I assume that p is a policy parameter independent of the type and number of eligible individuals; that is, among the total means-eligible population, benefits are assigned *randomly* with probability p. This is the main difference from the empirical setting presented above, where the probability of accessing *Bolsa Família* benefits is neither exogenous nor unique: it depends on the number of eligible individuals in the program and varies with family characteristics.

[11] Throughout, I use "eligible" and "means-eligible" interchangeably.

[12] The core assumptions build on the framework of Finkelstein and Notowidigdo (2019), with a few key deviations. First, I assume there is no take-up decision: the government can fully observe individuals' income, and if income is below the threshold r*, individuals are eligible to receive benefits B with probability p. Second, I treat p as a policy parameter that the government can adjust along with the benefit level. Finally, I abstract from ordeal costs and behavioral biases to simplify the intuition.

[13] If, instead, I assume that some share of low-ability individuals chooses to distort—given that they are always means-eligible—this does not affect my main results.

Individuals of type H will choose to become eligible for the transfer program if the expected utility from being eligible (given their optimal hours choice, h_H^E) is greater than the utility from not being eligible (given their optimal hours choice, $h_H^{\neg E}$). I define c_H^* to be the threshold level of c such that a type H individual is indifferent between becoming and not becoming eligible. For $c < c_H^*$, the type H individual chooses to become eligible. This threshold is defined as follows:

$$c_H^* = p[u(h_H^E\theta_H - \tau(h_H^E\theta_H) + B)] + (1-p)\left[u\left(h_H^E\theta_H - \tau(h_H^E\theta_H)\right)\right] - v(h_H^E) - u\left(h_H^{\neg E}\theta_H - \tau(h_H^{\neg E}\theta_H)\right) + v(h_H^{\neg E}) \quad (1)$$

For type L individuals, total private welfare equals their expected utility:

$$V_L = p[u(h_L^E\theta_L - \tau(h_L^E\theta_L) + B)] + (1-p)\left[u\left(h_L^E\theta_L - \tau(h_L^E\theta_L)\right)\right] - v(h_L^E) \quad (2)$$

For type H individuals, I use the application decision rule in equation (1) and integrate across the distribution of private costs to get the total private welfare:

$$V_H = \Pr(Eligible) * E[u(\cdot)|Eligible] + \Pr(\neg Eligible) * E[u(\cdot)|\neg Eligible]$$

$$= \int_0^{c_H^*} \left\{p[u(h_H^E\theta_H - \tau(h_H^E\theta_H) + B)] + (1-p)\left[u\left(h_H^E\theta_H - \tau(h_H^E\theta_H)\right)\right] - v(h_H^E) - c\right\} dF_H(c)$$

$$+ \int_{c_H^*}^{\infty} \left\{u\left(h_H^{\neg E}\theta_H - \tau(h_H^{\neg E}\theta_H)\right) - v(h_H^{\neg E})\right\} dF_H(c)$$

Social Welfare

I adopt a utilitarian social welfare function in which total welfare is defined as the sum of individuals' private welfare minus the program's social costs. These costs consist of the mechanical cost of providing benefits (pB per eligible individual) and the fiscal externalities generated by individuals' labor supply responses. I consider the standard fiscal externality, where reductions in labor supply induced by eligibility for transfers lower income tax revenue and thereby impose an additional cost on the government. When such externalities are present, individual choices that maximize private welfare need not align with the social optimum, and too many H-type individuals may choose to become eligible.

Total social welfare is the following:

$$W = \underbrace{V_L + V_H}_{\text{Private Welfare}} + \underbrace{pB(E_L + E_H)}_{\text{Mechanical Program Costs}} + \underbrace{E_L G_L^E + E_H G_H^E + (1 - E_H) G_H^{\neg E}}_{\text{Fiscal Externality from Program}} \quad (4)$$

Define E_j as the expected number of eligible type-j individuals; this is equal to $E_L = 1$ for type L and equal to $E_H = F_H(c_H^*)$ for type H. I denote the net government revenue from eligible individuals (i.e., $\tau(h_j^E \theta_j)$) by G_j^E and equivalently for non-eligible individuals.[14]

Relaxing the Incentive Compatibility Constraint

As can be seen from equation (1), an increase in either the probability of accessing the program p or the benefit level B raises the threshold c_H^*, thereby increasing the fraction of type H individuals who find it optimal to distort their labor supply to become eligible, E_H. However, because individuals are risk-averse, changes in p and B are not equivalent even when they generate the same change in expected benefits ($EB = pB$). Due to the concavity of $u(\cdot)$, increasing (decreasing) the probability of receiving the transfer raises (lowers) expected utility more than an equivalent increase (decrease) in the transfer amount conditional on receipt. As a result, for a fixed change in EB, a change in p produces a larger change in c_H^* —and therefore a larger effect on E_H —than an equivalent change in B. That is, where $dEB = d(pB) = \frac{\partial(pB)}{\partial p} dp = \frac{\partial(pB)}{\partial B} dB$.

$$\frac{\partial E_H}{\partial p} dp > \frac{\partial E_H}{\partial B} dB \quad (5)$$

This relationship can also be observed in Figure 2, which reports the results from the calibration of the model.[15] The figure plots, for different values of B (horizontal axis) and for two probabilities of receiving the transfer ($p_1 = 0.9$ in green and $p_2 = 0.8$ in red), the threshold level of c at which a type-H individual is indifferent between becoming and not becoming eligible. For each combination of (p, B), if $c < c_H^*(p, B)$, the type-H individual chooses to become eligible. For instance, when $B = \$100$ and $p = 0.9$ (so that $EB = \$90$), we obtain a $\bar{c}$ that yields $\bar{E}_H = F_H(\bar{c})$. As the horizontal line in the figure illustrates, an equivalent expected number of eligible type-H individuals could be

[14] This formulation assumes that the fiscal cost of the program is effectively borne by an individual with the average marginal utility of consumption in the population.

[15] Calibration is based on parameters broadly consistent with labor supply, disutility of work, and program access conditions in Brazil's *Bolsa Família*. The eligibility threshold is set to \$140, matching the 2012 program value. The wage rate is θ=9, within the range observed for low-income workers, and hours are restricted to h(0,173), corresponding to monthly work hours. The tax rate is τ=0.05, and the disutility of labor parameter is d=1.5×10-4. Risk aversion follows a CRRA coefficient σ=1.5, consistent with standard micro and public finance estimates. The probability of receiving the transfer captures administrative rationing. I compare a high-access case, p1=0.9, with a lower-access case, p2=0.8. Utility functions are $u(x) = (x^{(1-\sigma)} - 1)/(1 - \sigma)$ and $v(h) = dh^2$.

obtained by lowering the probability to $p = 0.8$ and increasing benefits to $B = \$120$, which results in $EB = \$96$. Intuitively, because changes in p and B are not equivalent in terms of expected utility, it is possible to reach the same level of eligibility among high-type individuals by reducing the probability of program entry while raising the benefit amount—effectively offering higher expected benefits to the desired type-L population.

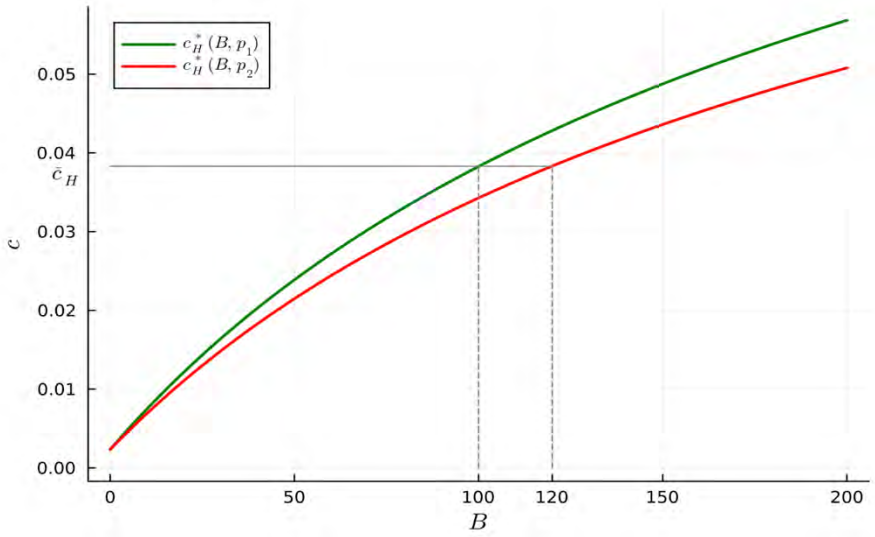

Figure 2. H-type Individual Incentive Compatibility Constraint. The figure plots, for different levels of B (horizontal axis) and probabilities of receiving the transfer ($p_1 = 0.9$ in green and $p_2 = 0.8$ in red), the threshold level of c such that a type-H individual is indifferent between becoming and not becoming eligible.

WELFARE EFFECTS OF CHANGES IN $\boldsymbol{p}$ AND $\boldsymbol{B}$

Define $\mu_j^p \equiv u\left(h_j^E\theta_j - \tau\left(h_j^E\theta_j\right) + B\right) - u\left(h_j^E\theta_j - \tau\left(h_j^E\theta_j\right)\right)$, and $\mu_j^B \equiv pu'\left(h_j^E\theta_j - \tau\left(h_j^E\theta_j\right) + B\right)$. The μ_j^p term denotes the difference in utility for type j between receiving the transfer and not receiving it, and the μ_j^B term denotes the probability of receiving the transfer multiplied by the marginal utility of consumption when receiving the transfer.

If we consider a marginal reduction in the probability of receiving the transfer ($dp < 0$), accompanied by a marginal increase in the transfer amount ($dB > 0$) such that the change in expected benefits is zero ($d(pB) = 0$), then the resulting effect on welfare is given by:

$$dW = \left[\underbrace{\left(\mu_L^p - \frac{B}{p}\mu_L^B\right) + \left(\mu_H^p - \frac{B}{p}\mu_H^B\right)E_H}_{\text{Net Change in Private Welfare}} \underbrace{- pB\left(\frac{dE_H}{dp} - \frac{B}{p}\frac{dE_H}{dB}\right)}_{\substack{\text{Net Change in} \\ \text{Mechanical Program Costs}}} + \underbrace{\Delta G_H\left(\frac{dE_H}{dp} - \frac{B}{p}\frac{dE_H}{dB}\right)}_{\substack{\text{Net Change in} \\ \text{Fiscal Externality from Program}}} \right] dp$$

$$= \left[\underbrace{\left(\mu_L^p - \frac{B}{p}\mu_L^B\right) + \left(\mu_H^p - \frac{B}{p}\mu_H^B\right)E_H}_{\text{Net Change in Private Welfare}} + \underbrace{[\Delta G_H - pB]\left(\frac{dE_H}{dp} - \frac{B}{p}\frac{dE_H}{dB}\right)}_{\substack{\text{Net Change in Fiscal Externality and} \\ \text{Mechanical Program Costs}}} \right] (6)$$

The expression above shows that changes in the program's parameters affect social welfare through three distinct channels. First, they directly modify private welfare by altering the expected benefits that individuals anticipate receiving. Second, they influence welfare mechanically by changing the program's fiscal cost. Although the intervention is designed so that the government continues to disburse the same expected amount pB per eligible individual, changes in p and B affect the decision of high-ability individuals to become eligible differently (as shown in equation (5)), thereby altering the total number of disbursements. Finally, changes in p and B affect welfare indirectly through fiscal externalities, which arise from the difference in tax revenue between eligible and non-eligible high-ability individuals, $\Delta G_H = \tau(h_H^E \theta_H) - \tau(h_H^{\neg E} \theta_H)$, multiplied by the net number of newly eligible individuals.[16]

To evaluate when reducing the probability of receiving the transfer while increasing the benefit amount—holding expected benefits constant—is welfare improving, we must identify the conditions under which the term in equation (6) is positive. Because $dp < 0$, the term in brackets must be negative. The concavity of the utility function implies that the net change in private welfare is positive, Risk aversion implies that the net change in the number of marginal high-ability individuals who distort their labor supply is also positive. Since $\Delta G_H - pB < 0$, the combined mechanical costs and fiscal externalities components are negative.

For the policy to improve welfare, the net reduction in mechanical costs and fiscal externalities must be sufficiently large to outweigh the positive private welfare effect. Intuitively, a policy that lowers the probability of benefit receipt while increasing the transfer amount could enhance welfare only if the gains generated by lower mechanical

[16] For simplicity, I abstract from potential income effects of the intervention on inframarginal high and low ability eligible individuals. Incorporating these effects would introduce additional terms in the fiscal externality without altering the main insights.

costs and reduced fiscal externalities are strong enough to compensate for the additional income risk faced by program participants.

CONCLUSION

Capacity constraints are a pervasive feature of transfer programs worldwide, arising from budgetary, logistical, or institutional limitations. In some cases, these constraints manifest in non-entitlement programs where assignment to benefits is not strictly tied to eligibility. In others, they affect entitlement programs in which all individuals who meet the statutory eligibility criteria are legally entitled to receive benefits, yet insufficient resources prevent full coverage in practice.

Although often viewed as suboptimal, capacity constraints may also serve as an implicit targeting mechanism. By introducing uncertainty around program entry, they can discourage participation by less disadvantaged individuals, effectively prioritizing access for those with the greatest need. Understanding how such constraints shape individual behavior is therefore crucial for the optimal design of transfer programs.

This paper contributes to this question in two ways. First, it documents a clear example of capacity constraints in a major transfer program—Brazil's *Bolsa Família*—in which eligibility is necessary but not sufficient for receiving benefits. Second, it develops a framework that incorporates uncertainty surrounding program benefit receipt and analyzes the welfare effects of an intervention that reduces the probability of receipt while increasing the benefit amount. I show that, under risk aversion, changes in the probability of benefit receipt and changes in benefit size are not equivalent in terms of expected utility and, therefore, targeting, and that such an intervention improves welfare only when the gains from lower social costs are large enough to compensate for the greater income risk borne by program participants.

These results highlight the need for further empirical work to measure the extent to which real-world capacity constraints shape take-up decisions—and how policy reforms that alter them may improve the targeting of transfer programs.

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Council of Rivers: Indigenous Assemblies and the Shining Path in Peru's *Selva Central*, 1975-1995

Nicholas Osoro-Yoder

IN 1995, the Asháninka Emergency Commission appeared for a press conference on Peruvian and international news channels. Ten indigenous representatives were present, marking the official occasion by wearing their striped *cushmas* (a traditional floor-length tunic) and *coronas* on their heads (a feathered wooden crown). A white banner with block letters stretched out in front of them: "PEOPLE OF PERU: WE URGE AN END TO THE GENOCIDE OF THE ASHÁNINKA PEOPLE!" The banner referred to *Sendero Luminoso's* Maoist revolutionary campaign, which, together with the smaller *Movimiento Revolucionario Túpac Amaru* (MRTA), had taken the lives of at least six high profile indigenous leaders in the Peruvian Amazon's *Selva Central* since the late 1980s.[1] Headed by Guillermo Ñaco Rosas, the commission reported that the war had left three to five thousand Asháninka dead and 10,000 displaced across central *Amazonía*. Throughout the decade, the notorious Asháninka Tragedy was portrayed in grizzly photos of malnourished orphans and refugees circulated by the national press and human rights organizations (Ñaco Rosas 1995, 5).

What most observers did not understand was the Asháninka Emergency Commission's place within a broader movement that extended far beyond the moment of tragedy that they were currently reporting on. Ñaco's commission had been appointed by a pan-Asháninka assembly composed of ten regional congresses, councils, federations, fronts, and other assembly-based organizations, all engaged in decolonization efforts that had begun before the war and would carry on afterwards. Dating back to the late 1970s and early 80s, these assemblies organized agricultural cooperatives, trained bilingual teachers and healthcare workers, campaigned for environmental protections, and petitioned for communal titles, with their greatest achievements coming to fruition in the 1990s. Rather than helpless survivors or independent activists, the indigenous leaders appearing in the 1995 press conference acted as representatives of a robust network of local indigenous assemblies, which constituted a powerful revolutionary process of their own, competing against guerrillas and the state alike over the future of the Amazon. "The aggression against us is historic," explained Mishari, "our rebellion must also be historic with a view to long-term

[1] The two groups' full names in English are: 1) The Peruvian Communist Party-Shining Path, led by Abimael Guzmán Reynoso. 2) The Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement, led by Victor Polay Campos.

objectives so that our self-determination, our freedom, our indigenous identity, our territories are respected" (Mishari 1990, 246).

COLONIZATION & DECOLONIZATION, 1960-1989

So far, this topic has remained within the purview of journalists and anthropologists, who witnessed colonization and war firsthand as they took place in the Selva Central. Alberto Chirif, Richard Smith, Soren Hvalkof, and others have provided an overview of Amazonian politics in *Towards the Conquest of Self-Determination*, based on their fieldwork from the 1970s and 80s. In this section, I build on their detailed reports with historical methods to reconstruct the creation and spread of indigenous rights campaigns chronologically, with special attention to the role of indigenous assemblies at the local level. To this end, I use publications and internal reports from various indigenous organizations and human rights groups, alongside several key interviews conducted by anthropologists in the following years (Chirif 2021).

The crises of colonization and warfare in the Selva Central originated with a land crisis in the coast and highlands of Peru. Regarded by many as a "semi-feudal" system with roots in Peru's three centuries of Spanish colonialism, extreme inequality between hacienda owners and landless peasants continued to intensify throughout the republic's first century of independence, prompting two radical solutions in 1960s political discourse. One called for armed revolution, taking the State and breaking up the haciendas by force as in Russia, China, and Cuba, while the second school of thought proposed moving landless peasants out of the mountains into the Amazon, where they would settle new farmsteads of their own. In 1963, President Fernando Belaúnde began construction of a highway cutting directly through the middle of the rainforest and designated 5-10 kilometers on either side for colonization, setting in motion a combination of planned and informal mass migration that carried on throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (Swenson 1985, 23).

During this period, indigenous people of the Selva Central became increasingly experienced at dealing with a wide range of non–indigenous social and political systems. The charismatic *corneshas* of the Yánesha and *sheripiaris* of the Asháninka—traditional chiefs or priests—were joined by formally trained health promoters, bilingual teachers, lieutenant governors, and merchants. Building on existing traditions of village councils and new administrative capacities, indigenous communities began to organize a patchwork of regional assemblies independent of government control. Some of the earliest regional assemblies were the *Organización Central Asháninka del Río Ene* (OCARE) in 1975*, Central de Comunidades Nativas de Selva Central* (CECONSEC) 1978, and the *Central Asháninka del Río Tambo* (CART) in 1979 (Villasante 2022, 104; CECONSEC 1980, 11).

The primary purpose of these assemblies was to secure land rights, but many more ideas and initiatives emerged from them, including farming and forestry cooperatives, bilingual education, and culturally integrated healthcare. The first clear indication that this was not just a local movement, but an Amazon-wide "revolution" came in 1980, when leaders formed the *Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana* (AIDESEP) as an umbrella organization to coordinate campaigns and projects shared by all existing assemblies (Veber 2009, 150). That same year, Abimael Guzmán's Sendero Luminoso launched its "people's revolution" in the Ayacucho highlands south of the Asháninka homeland. As has been well documented elsewhere, the violence rapidly spiraled as the insurgency grew and the Peruvian military responded with overwhelming force. Still, all except the slightest trickle remained restricted to the highlands for the first half of the 1980s (Degregori 2012; La Serna and Starn 2019). As Sendero Luminoso grew in the Sierra, the rapidly growing patchwork of indigenous assemblies had developed into another kind of revolution: an Amazon-wide decolonization campaign. Indigenous leaders spent the rest of the 1980s traveling around the Amazon by bus, boat, bush plane, and foot, inscribing communities into existing assemblies or advising them on forming their own (Colectivo Copal 1980, 6).

In one major campaign, indigenous assemblies successfully petitioned the World Bank and USAID to freeze funding for a major jungle highway project through the Pichis-Palcazú cloud forest, redirecting a portion of the money to demarcating Yánesha and Asháninka territories and investing in indigenous-run forestry cooperatives before construction could resume (Swenson 1985, 23). In another campaign, AIDESEP secretary Miqueas Mishari uncovered extreme conditions of dispossession and coerced labor or "slavery" in the Ucayali lowlands, inflicted by *hacendados* and lumber *patrones* descended from the old families of the nineteenth-century rubber boom. Mishari helped organize local communities into a regional assembly, the *Organización Indígena Regional de Atalaya* (OIRA), and secretly compiled testimonies of the abuses. In 1986, with laborers already abandoning the haciendas in droves, the government agreed to send an investigative commission (AIDESEP 1988, 5; Veber 2009, 161).

Having already charted their own internal pathways to dignity and justice, these assemblies would serve as a formidable space for building consensus against the political violence of Sendero Luminoso. By the mid-1980s, Sendero Luminoso had suffered major defeats in the highlands, pressuring the party to search further afield to keep the revolution alive. The same was true of the smaller Lima-based MRTA, with both armed groups shifting towards the rainforest by the end of the decade. Militants from one group or the other approached at least nine of the most prominent assembly leaders throughout the Selva Central, inviting them into the "new future" they were building. "Not only is there fighting in the Sierra but also in the *Ceja de Selva* [upper jungle]" declared a 1986 Sendero Luminoso communiqué, "in the Apurímac [river valley] where the regions of Cusco, Apurímac, Ayacucho and Junín strategically

converge [...] The people's war is spreading to the Highlands, Rainforest, and Coast, marching vigorously, building the new, and opening the future" (Comité Central/PCP 1986).

Despite violence escalating around them, indigenous assemblies never ceased their campaigns for territorial, political, and cultural autonomy. Miqueas Mishari's reports on Asháninka enslavement along the Ucayali River had convinced authorities in Lima of the need to roll back colonization. In late 1988, OIRA and AIDESEP secured a US$1 million grant from the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) to support a massive demarcation project. With government approval, OIRA and AIDESEP would survey and demarcate extensive communal land titles for indigenous communities in the forest around Atalaya over the course of four years, from 1989 to 1993 (Gray and Hvalkof 1989, 18).

Yet in a time of war, indigenous assemblies and their allies faced a dizzyingly complex set of stakeholders who stood to lose from the project. "It is well known that several of the patrons are producing cocaine-paste," explained the first IWGIA report in 1989. It continued, "A special problem in this connection is the Sendero Luminoso (SL) - cocaine-mafia link. The SL is now obliging the peasants in the area to grow coca, which Shining-Path sells to the mafia for cocaine production" (Gray and Hvalkof 1989, 18). That same year, the OCARE president, Isaias Charete Quinchoker, was captured and killed by Sendero Luminoso, showing just how dangerous the work of an indigenous assembly leader could be (Rufina 2002, 93; Charete 2002, 3). OIRA would soon be forced to organize itself into community self-defense patrols against the *senderistas*, even as it continued to struggle against powerful landowners and local authorities capable of committing severe abuses of their own. "The work was very difficult, as well as dangerous, because just that year there was a major clash with terrorism" explained the assembly president Bernardo Silva, "As president I ran many risks because I was helping confront the narco-terrorists, loggers, and *patrones* (bosses)" (Veber 2009, 271).

Amid a climate of corruption, harassment, and war, over the next three years, AIDESEP and OIRA slowly but steadily demarcated thousands of hectares of the Selva Central, with more and more formerly enslaved Asháninkas living free from bondage on their own communally titled soil. Significantly, the project did not simply redistribute private plots to landless families, but decolonized vast swathes of land containing fields, forests, rivers, and mountains, where communities could freely hunt, fish, plant gardens and groves, erect libraries and schools, and whatever else they felt necessary to reclaim their independence. The success of indigenous assemblies in carrying out such a life-changing campaign instilled a profound self-confidence in the Asháninka communities. However, *patrones* sent *sicarios* after Mishari as many as three times, and growing *senderista* activity threatened to bring everything to a halt. Still, Mishari could already

sense the power shifting as thousands of indigenous people "understood that we ourselves were making justice. They saw with their own eyes and they believed" (Veber 2009, 159).

WHEN REVOLUTIONS COLLIDE, 1990-1995

In the years that followed, the remarkable achievements of the decolonization project described above would coincide with a period of unspeakable tragedy, as the indigenous assemblies of the Selva Central found themselves lined up against the Shining Path in the region's deadliest moments. In the book *La Guerra Interna entre los Asháninka,* Peruvian anthropologist Mariella Villasante has provided a thorough account of the human rights violations committed against the Asháninka people, based primarily on the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (CVR). In this section, I have used testimonies collected by the CVR, focusing on those involving indigenous assembly leaders, and have combined them with a variety of indigenous rights publications from the period. In this way, I show the role indigenous assemblies played in helping Asháninka communities to cope with the violence with dignity and hope, while also serving as the most solid bulwark against the guerrilla organizations aiming to attract new recruits and revive their movements in the Amazon (Villasante 2022).

In early December 1989, the Amazonian political revolution suffered an intensely unsettling setback with the disappearance of Alejandro Calderón Espinoza. A close friend of Miqueas Mishari, Calderón had been among the Asháninka leaders most active in the early days of CECONSEC, AIDESEP, and finally the *Asociación de Nacionalidad Ashaninka del Pichis* (ANAP), where he had just completed his term president when he went missing that December (Benavides 1991, 51; La República 1990, 30). Soon afterwards, the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) took credit for the disappearance, charging that twenty-five years earlier Calderón and two other Asháninka men had cooperated with police investigations into a well-known Leftist revolutionary named Máximo Velando. "For these crimes," stated a guerrilla communiqué, "an MRTA Revolutionary Tribunal proceeded to judge and later execute these reactionary agents" (La República 1990, 54).

Calderón's assassination set in motion a series of events that ultimately dragged the indigenous assemblies into a bloody war not of their making. First, ANAP and the neighboring *Organización Asháninka del Gran Pajonal* (OAGP) organized self-defense forces and took control of several major highways and towns in the Selva Central. In some cases, they ordered that all "terrorists" and their sympathizers evacuate, and went house to house searching for enemies, capturing and executing dozens of known and suspected guerrillas (Pancorvo 2002). Eventually, the MRTA commander met with Mishari to formally apologize and retreat from the region. At the same time, *senderistas* dug their heels in, declaring the indigenous assemblies a reactionary enemy and a stooge

of foreign powers. “Yankee imperialism conceives that to achieve [control] they must rely on minorities” charged a 1990 Sendero Luminoso communiqué, “with the current government they are promoting armed peasant patrols as a complementary army; composed of a part of the Ashaninkas who have formed an ‘Ashaninka Army of the Gran Pajonal’” (CeDeMA 1991).

Over the next three years, *senderistas* repeatedly attempted to co-opt local chiefs and assembly leaders, or when that failed, to seize entire communities. Both Isaias Charete and Alejandro Calderón had rejected such advances and paid with their lives. Some others who turned down *senderista* approaches were more fortunate. In the Gran Pajonal plateau, *senderistas* kidnapped OAGP president Miguel Camaiteri and commanded him to supply them with fighters, but despite his refusal, ultimately cut him loose in the wilderness. In the cloud forests of Satipo, *senderistas* entered the home of Luzmila Chiricente, of the *Confederación de Nacionalidades Amazónicas del Perú* (CONAP). They told her to convene an assembly to appoint a revolutionary committee for the guerrillas. She declined, and although the *senderistas* threatened to return the next day, she never saw them again (Chiricente 2002, 49).

In the most notorious case, a secret Sendero Luminoso sympathizer, Hernán Poyentima, was elected president of CART. However, by this time, Emilio Ríos, Pablo Santoma, and several other assembly members were discussing the possibility of organizing a community patrol to defend themselves against the guerrillas. As president, Poyentima made sure none of these plans got far. But when Santoma was elected CART president in 1990, consensus against Sendero Luminoso began to consolidate within the assembly, ultimately pushing Poyentima out entirely. In late July, during a joint congress of CART and CONAP representatives on the Río Tambo, a column of some sixty masked *senderistas* arrived in the middle of assembly proceedings, guided by Poyentima himself. The *senderistas* abducted the CART president and two others, executing them two days later (Anonymous CVR 2002b, 56; Marcos 2002, 87).

The crisis shook both assemblies. “The armed violence [...] with a genocidal character provokes the shedding of innocent blood, native and colonist,” responded CONAP. “This kind of targeted assassination will not intimidate our leaders. On the contrary. The example of the ‘Martyrs of the Río Tambo’ serves as a stimulus [...] to realize the world they fought for” (CONAP 1990, 5). The remaining CART members called a special assembly and formed a self-defense committee further downriver in Poyeni, led by Emilio Ríos with support from Atalaya’s naval base.

Already rejected by most indigenous leaders, from 1990 to 1993 *senderistas* expanded a strategy of forcibly evacuating Asháninka communities into remote guerrilla bases, compelling them to collaborate as laborers, as fighters, or be killed. By the time Sendero Luminoso’s leader Abimael Guzmán was captured in September 1992, up to

5,000 Asháninka had already been killed and 10,000 displaced. Early on, Mishari saw comparisons to genocidal violence against indigenous people past and present: “What is happening now is just a new phase of that violence which, for us, is a historical, genocidal violence, which has been seeking, under any pretext and with any flag, the extermination of the indigenous population” (Veber 2009, 245). As military patrols and indigenous defense forces closed in, however, Sendero Luminoso jungle camps were constantly forced to hastily relocate, with Asháninka captives taking the opportunity to escape into the wilderness in droves (Anonymous CVR 2002a, 38; Ñaco Rosas 1995, 21). Many took refuge with the CART self-defense forces in Poyeni, with the small riverside community becoming the site of many emotional reunions between friends and family separated by war, as recounted in one Asháninka song from the era:

> *NOVESHIRIAC NARORI NONIAVJIRI NOTOMI…*
>
> Now we will sing a song
> For the arrival of my son.
> He has come here,
> He has arrived here in Poyeni…
>
> In harmony
> We have received him,
> And offer him everything to eat,
> And we will drink masato,
> To be joyful
> With mother-in-law, son, and relatives.
>
> (Fabián Arias and Espinosa de Rivero 1997, 36).

Unlike the coast and highlands of the country, for the indigenous communities of the Selva Central, there was never any precise moment in which they could definitively say the war was over. In fact, some small *senderista* cells remain active in the Peruvian Amazon to this day. Yet by the mid-1990s, even with the new leader “Comrade Feliciano” refusing to surrender, it was becoming increasingly clear that Sendero Luminoso had little hope of reviving itself among the indigenous communities, and Asháninka leaders like Miqueas Mishari were already declaring major victories in their own revolutionary movement. By the end of 1992, AIDESEP and OIRA’s decolonization project had demarcated 1.5 million hectares of the Selva Central, and the following year, they secured approval for a second phase, demarcating an additional 1.5 million hectares by 1995. “The native communities’ dream of being free was crystallized,” reflected Mishari. “The [settler] estates were titled in the name of the communities. And no small amount! 30, 40, up to 57 thousand hectares!” (Veber 2009, 163; Gray 1994). Six thousand Asháninkas formerly enslaved by *hacendados* and logging *patrones* could

now live free from bondage on their own communally titled soil, earning public recognition from Anti-Slavery International.

From 1993 to 1995, assembly representatives from across the Selva Central organized the Asháninka Emergency Commission to address the crisis of wartime disease and displacement, but also took the opportunity to call on delegates and solidarity networks to build upon these decolonization victories proactively: "To not give up even one centimeter of native communal land temporarily depopulated by violence and currently occupied by Sendero Luminoso, Drug Traffickers, or ill-intentioned settlers who take advantage of the pacification process in the area to invade" (Ñaco Rosas 1995, 32). This atmosphere of power and proactivity reflected the Asháninka Emergency Commission's place within a broader movement. It was a movement that emerged and expanded before and during the "Asháninka Tragedy," and which helps to explain why Sendero Luminoso's revolution in the Amazon faded away while the indigenous assemblies drew more recognition and greater strength than ever.

Abbreviations

OCARE	Organización Central Asháninka del Río Ene, 1975-1995
CECONSEC	Central de Comunidades Nativas de la Selva Central, 1978-present
CART	Central Asháninka del Río Tambo, 1979-present
AIDESEP	Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana, 1979-present
CONAP	Confederación de Nacionalidades Amazónicas del Perú, 1986-present
OIRA	Organización Indígena Regional de Atalaya, 1986-present
OAGP	Organización Asháninka Gran Pajonal, 1979-present
ANAP	Apatyawaka Nampitsi Asháninka Pichis, 1984-present

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BlueBook Magazine: Documenting (an) African Diaspora in Colombia

Latrell Broughton

INTRODUCTION

BLUEBOOK Magazine is a multimodal platform dedicated to documenting the African Diaspora through the themes of art, activism, and travel. The project was first conceptualized in 2019 during a six-month study abroad in Ghana. Supported by the University of Ghana and under the mentorship of Associate Professor Dr. Ɔbenfo Ọbádélé Bakari Kambon, I conducted interviews with African American tourists and immigrants residing in Accra, Ghana. As a young photographer, I also collaborated with local creatives and entrepreneurs, capturing both everyday life and artistic production (see Figure 1). A recurring theme across these interactions was the desire for a stronger transnational community, tempered by linguistic and cultural gaps that required careful negotiation.

These early observations are best situated within the framework of Black Studies, particularly transnational thought. Paul Gilroy (1993, 1-4) argues that Black cultural identity transcends any singular geographic location, conceptualizing the Black Atlantic as an intercultural space shaped by transatlantic encounters, shared histories, and collective memory. Brent Hayes Edwards (2003) further emphasizes the importance of language, noting that diasporic individuals often operate across linguistic differences. Through translation (both literal and cultural), press movements and other forms of media have historically articulated these differences while shaping a global Black identity.

BlueBook Magazine builds upon these foundational ideas by creating a platform in which intercultural dialogue can unfold. By documenting personal narratives, artistic expressions, and international encounters, the magazine functions as a living archive of contemporary Black life. The project embraces linguistic, social, emotional, and aesthetic translation as essential to diasporic connections, reflecting the dynamic nature of their identities. At the same time, the magazine enacts Gilroy's vision of the Black Atlantic, using media and storytelling to traverse national boundaries and foster meaningful connections among artists, activists, and travelers across the globe.

Figure 1. *Betty in Accra.* Photo by the author, Accra, 2019.

Vernacular Photography and the African Diaspora

As a photographer, I am invested in the question of how archives are generated and sustained. Each image can be read as a data point in the broader "story" of a place yet photographs often risk being misinterpreted when removed from their social and historical contexts. In *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe*, Tina Campt (2020) traces a tradition of Black European self-expression through family portraiture. By examining Black German family photographs from 1900–1945 and images of the West Indian community in Birmingham, England, from 1948–1960, Campt demonstrates how Black subjects used the photographic frame to signal aspirations of national belonging. These portraits were not merely records of likeness; they were intentional performances of selfhood, in which pose, dress, and composure became visual assertions of value and inclusion.

This tradition of African Diasporic subjects employing photography as a tool of self-imagining has been examined by numerous scholars in Black Studies. Richard J. Powell (2008) argues that Black portraiture occupies a distinct position within the broader genre of portraiture because of the historical and social realities of racism. He notes that what makes Black portraiture unique is the "artistic contract" (18) between the portrayer and the portrayed, a negotiation through which subjects, by means of self-adornment, composure, and intentional performance, unsettle dominant representational paradigms. For Powell, this creates a particular "sharpness" within Black portraiture: a visual strategy that "cuts into consciousness" by insisting on dignity, presence, and complexity where stereotypes might otherwise prevail (10). In this sense, the very act of self-imagining in the photographic frame becomes a radical intervention against hegemonic perception.

Figure 2. Photography as a medium to produce work that cuts through consciousness. *Portrait of Jeff Kabrera.* Photo by the author, Medellín, 2024.

BlueBook Magazine positions itself within this tradition by seeking to reframe African Diasporic self-identification through contemporary photographic practice. In dialogue with the legacies explored by Campt and Powell, the magazine approaches photography not simply as documentation, but as a critical site of cultural assertion and collaborative authorship. Each portrait is co-constructed with its subject, foregrounding their intention, aspiration, and presentation. By situating images within the stories, places, and relationships that shape them, the project resists passive consumption and instead invites viewers into a deeper engagement with lived experience. Following Powell's notion of "cutting a figure," these portraits use pose, fashion, and gaze as strategies of self-definition, challenging reductive narratives of displacement or marginalization and instead foregrounding dignity, aspiration, and the richness of Diasporic selfhood.

Current Trends and Ideological Ancestors

Discourses of travel and safety have long occupied a significant place within African American cultural history. During the Jim Crow era, the freedom of mobility spurred by the invention of the automobile was both materially restricted and symbolically contested. Segregation laws, coupled with the pervasive threat of racial violence, rendered the seemingly ordinary act of travel an inherently political and precarious action for Black Americans. In response to these constraints, Victor Hugo Green, a postal worker based in Harlem, began publishing *The Negro Motorist Green Book* in 1936. Circulated annually until 1967, the Green Book provided African American travelers with carefully curated listings of hotels, restaurants, service stations, and leisure establishments where they could expect safety and dignified treatment. Greene relied on a grassroots information network, collecting recommendations through flyers distributed along his postal route. The Green Book thus functioned as both a pragmatic survival tool and a cultural artifact of Black self-determination in the face of systemic exclusion.

The *Bluebook* can be conceptualized as a modern iteration of this tradition, extending its geographical range into the domain of international travel. While the Green Book addressed the needs of domestic African American travelers under legalized segregation, the Bluebook arises in the context of globalization, digital connectivity, and the continuing negotiations of race, identity, and belonging abroad. This continuity underscores what scholars such as McKittrick (2006) as well as Nicholson and Sheller (2016) have described as the "politics of mobility": the uneven ways in which freedom of movement is structured by race, class, and geography.

The emergence of the Bluebook coincides with what has been termed the "Black Travel Movement." Since approximately 2011, scholars and industry researchers have observed the increasing visibility, organization, and cultural impact of Black travelers. In 2019 specifically, Black Americans represented 13.1% of the U.S. leisure travel

market, generating an estimated $109.4 billion in spending. Yet, as important as these economic figures are, they tell only part of the story. The New Black Travel Movement is equally characterized by the proliferation of online communities, primarily organized through Facebook and other digital platforms. Groups such as *Brothas and Sistas of South Korea*, *Nomadness Travel Tribe*, and *Black Travel Alliance* serve as vibrant counter publics (defined as parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs) that enable members to exchange information, articulate shared concerns, and cultivate solidarity in the global travel sphere.

These online collectives can be understood as digital descendants of the Green Book, continuing its function of mapping safe and welcoming spaces. However, the affordances and limitations of digital media complicate this analogy. Much of the knowledge shared within these groups is locked behind privacy settings, creating what could be described as "semi-closed knowledge economies." Furthermore, mainstream travel media continues to privilege narratives of foreign expenditure, often marginalizing the perspectives of local communities and overlooking the racialized dynamics of tourism.

Bluebook Magazine positions itself within this landscape as an intervention. By curating freely accessible information and intentionally incorporating perspectives from locals, visitors, and travelers, the Bluebook not only democratizes knowledge but also disrupts dominant travel discourses. In doing so, it extends the legacy of the Green Book into the twenty-first century, foregrounding Black mobility as both a practice of freedom and a site of cultural production.

Radical Cartographies: Travel and Social Change

Travel is not only a means of self-fashioning but also an embodied practice through which Black intellectuals have historically cultivated new forms of political imagination, community, and social change. There are well-researched histories of how journeys of African American thinkers, writers, and artists across the Atlantic often opened spaces of possibility that were previously unavailable in the United States (Kandahl et al. 2014). By moving abroad, Black travelers accessed alternative publics in which they could articulate critiques of American racism while simultaneously participating in broader dialogues about colonialism, democracy, and human rights.

Figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois and James Baldwin exemplify this dynamic. Du Bois's time studying at the University of Berlin in the late nineteenth century profoundly shaped his intellectual development, exposing him to European philosophies of culture and society that he later mobilized to criticize racial inequality in the United States. His

internationalism would become foundational to his advocacy for Pan-Africanism and to his insistence on linking the struggles of African Americans with those of colonized peoples worldwide. Similarly, Baldwin's relocation to Paris in the mid-twentieth century afforded him both physical distance from the suffocating racism of Jim Crow America and the creative freedom to develop his voice as a novelist and essayist. In works such as *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), Baldwin reflects on the paradox of finding greater personal liberty abroad while remaining tethered to the urgent political struggles unfolding in the United States. Both Du Bois and Baldwin embody the pattern highlighted in *Anywhere but Here*, that Black intellectuals have historically leveraged transatlantic mobility to generate critiques that reverberate across national and racial boundaries.

This interplay between travel and activism continues in contemporary contexts. Social movements such as Black Lives Matter demonstrate how struggles rooted in local experiences of anti-Black violence resonate globally, inspiring protests and solidarities in cities from London to Seoul to São Paulo. Likewise, cultural forms such as hip-hop function as transnational vehicles of critique, enabling communities across the world to link their own struggles with those of African Americans through a shared aesthetic and political vocabulary. In this way, travel and cultural exchange serve as conduits for the circulation of political ideas and solidarities that transcend borders.

The central artifact of this project is the map. Yet, as both history and theory remind us, maps are not neutral. Historically, cartography has functioned as a colonial instrument, naturalizing domination by rendering territory, resources, and populations legible to imperial powers. When reimagined through the perspectives of locals, activists, and travelers, maps can become instruments of radical cartography: tools for envisioning alternative geographies grounded in equity and solidarity. By "redrawing" the world with an emphasis on lived experience rather than imperial abstraction, such practices resist inherited geographies of oppression and open new possibilities for imagining and enacting just and interconnected futures.

METHODS

In the summer of 2024, I conducted two months of field research in Colombia as part of the Hemispheric Institute of the Americas' Latin American & Caribbean Summer Fellowship Program. Most of my time was spent in Medellín, with a shorter trip to Cali to attend the *Petronio Álvarez Festival*, a major celebration of Afro-Colombian musical and cultural traditions.

Figure 3. Documenting the African Diaspora in Colombia through photography, video, and interviews. *Inside the RetroSoul Tienda.* Photo by the author, Medellín, 2024.

This project was carried out in collaboration with my friend and fellow photographer, Angie Tatiana Caicedo Ortiz. Together, we sought to document a contemporary snapshot of the African Diaspora in Colombia through photography, video, and interviews (see Figure 4). We began with a chain referral interview method, initially connecting with creatives in our personal networks. By sharing documentation on social media, we generated visibility and interest in the project, which expanded our reach to include a broader pool of collaborators—artists, activists, and travelers, both local and international. This iterative process of networking reflects James Clifford's argument in *Routes* (1997) that diasporic life is best understood as a set of circulations, connections, and relational encounters, rather than as fixed identities.

Interviews were central to the method and were structured in three parts:

- Part I: *Biographical Foundations*. Participants shared their name, background, professional or creative trajectory, and places where others could support their work. This stage served to situate each collaborator within their social and professional networks.

- Part II: *Perceptions of Safety*. This portion explored how marginalized groups experience Medellín. Participants reflected on what the city is like for Black people, queer people, and women, and whether they personally felt safe. This section highlighted the layered negotiations of race, gender, and belonging within urban space.

- Part III: *Mapping Experiences*. Participants recounted personal experiences tied to specific locations in Medellín. Prompts included: "Where is a place you had a romantic experience in Medellín?" or "Where did you experience racism in Medellín?" These geographically situated narratives served as data points for constructing an experiential map of diasporic life in the city. This practice aligns with what Clifford calls "traveling cultures," where stories and movement become crucial ways of theorizing place and identity.

In addition to interviews, Angie and I worked as photographers and videographers, documenting events, artistic projects, and community gatherings. The camera functioned not only as a recording device but also as a methodological tool of collaboration. As Sarah Pink (2020) argues, visual methods do not merely represent social life but actively participate in it, creating opportunities for dialogue and shared authorship. Similarly, Tina Campt's (2020, 129-136) notion of "listening to images" underscores how photographs can be understood as affective and sonic objects that resonate beyond the visual frame. By engaging participants through portraiture and video, our methodology foregrounded this collaborative authorship, allowing subjects to assert self-representation and agency within the frame. These photographs were dispersed to the community and collaborators free of charge.

The resulting body of work combines interviews with visual documentation to produce a multimedia snapshot of the African Diaspora in Medellín. While necessarily partial and situated, this approach captures a constellation of experiences that reflect both the richness and the contradictions of diasporic life in Colombia today. The integration of oral testimony, mapped experience, and visual collaboration creates a methodological framework that not only records but also re-imagines diasporic geographies in ways that challenge hegemonic narratives of displacement and marginalization.

PROJECT TIMELINE AND SELECTED IMAGES

July 7, 2024 – Arrival in Medellín

Lodging in the Belén neighborhood; initial observations and planning for fieldwork and photographic projects.

July 18 - August 8, 2024 – Street Photography Session in Poblado Park

Collaborated with key assistant Angie Ortiz to refine her photography skills while capturing candid street scenes and daily life in Medellín.

Figure 4. *American Tourists in Poblado Park.* Photo by the author, Medellín, 2024.

Figure 5. *Street Photo in Poblado Park.* Photo by the author, Medellín, 2024.

July 30- August 4, 2024 – Photography at Insiders Foundation

Insiders Foundation is an organization that provides meals and educational support to youth in Comuna 13, one of the most historically underserved areas of Medellín. To help INsider Foundations' Founder Sergio Moreno secure additional funding for the foundation, Angie and I contributed by photographing the students during their classes.

Figure 6. Insiders Foundation is a non-profit organization serving disenfranchised youth in Medellin's Comuna 13 through education and artistic enrichment. *English Class at Insider's Foundation.* Photo by the author, Medellín, 2024.

Figure 7. *Battle Rapper at Comuna 13.* Photo by the author, Medellín, 2024.

August 1, 2024 – Rap Battles in Comuna 13

Despite Comuna 13's turbulent past, its residents have reclaimed and redefined their narrative through the arts. Hip-hop culture plays a major role in this transformation, with weekly rap battles held in the park every Thursday night. Angie and I went to document the energy and expression of the event.

August 4, 2024 – Katharsis De la Soul Photoshoot

Our first narrative collaboration was with Katharsis de La Soul, a rapper known for his boom-bap style. He joined us at Angie's place in Belén, where we planned an interview and a photoshoot to capture his story and presence.

Figure 8. *Portrait of Katharsis de la Soul.* Photo by the author, Medellín, 2024.

August 9, 2024 – RetroSoul Opening

As our work in the community grew, we began receiving invitations to cover local events. The first was the opening of RetroSoul Tienda, a pop-up curated by Yudis Rivas. Yudis styled the models using secondhand clothing, transforming each look with creativity and care. It was incredible to witness so much beauty, energy, and style gathered in one place.

August 9, 2024 – Feria Esmeraldas with Esmeraldas de la Selva

One of the most meaningful collaborations of the summer was with the artist collective Esmeraldas de la Selva. Las Esmeraldas supports local creatives and entrepreneurs through branding, community building, and live events. One of their first events of the

season was a live music gathering called *Feria Esmeraldas*.

Figure 9. *Models at RetroSoul Opening.* Photo by the author, Medellín, 2024.

Figure 10. *Portrait of Jhon Cordoba.* Photo by the author, Medellín, 2024.

Figure 11. Latrell Broughton. *Feria Esmeraldas.* Photo by the author, Medellín, 2024.

August 15- August 18, 2024 – Travel to Cali, Colombia

Angie and I took a trip to Cali, Colombia, to attend Petronio Álvarez, a major Afro-Colombian music festival. Cali is a city of salsa music, stunning landscapes, and a strong communal spirit. We were moved by the kindness of locals who welcomed us into their jam sessions, the vibrant energy of the festival, and the breathtaking views of the city from atop its hills.

August 27, 2024 – Interview with Entrepreneur Yudis Rivas

After returning from Cali, we continued our work deepening connections within the community. Our second major interview was with Yudis Rivas, where we had the chance to learn more about her background and creative philosophy. We photographed her in her store to properly capture the spirit of her work.

Figure 12. *Family at Petronio Alvarez Music Festival.* Photo by the author, Cali, 2024.

Figure 13. *Footballers in Cali.* Photo by the author, Cali, 2024.

Figure 14. *Portrait of Yudis Rivas.* Photo by the author, Cali, 2024.

August 28, 2024 – Ostual Serna Jr. Photoshoot

An unexpected experience was joining the video shoot for Ostual Serna Jr.'s single "Si Te Vuelvo Amar". We had originally planned to interview another artist but ended up photographing this event instead. I even made a cameo in the video!

September 1, 2024 – Interview and Photoshoot with Sean Penny

We followed up with Sean Penny, whom we first met during *Feria Esmeraldas*. Originally from Virginia, Penny moved to Medellín full-time three years ago. For our shoot, he wore a custom-made jacket designed by Liviti Style.

Figure 15. *Portrait of Ostual Serna Jr.* Photo by the author, Cali, 2024.

Figure 16. *Portrait of Sean Penny.* Photo by the author, Cali, 2024.

September 2, 2024 – Creative Meetup

After gaining experience with street photography, Angie felt confident enough to organize her own meetup with models and photographers. The event took place in Poblado. Many of the models were professionally affiliated with the organization Negrofest Models, while others were complete amateurs with no prior experience.

September 5, 2024 – Insiders Foundation Fruit Tour

Sergio Moreno of Insiders Foundation had one more request for us before the summer ended: to document his exotic fruit tour at Plaza Minorista. We tasted over 30 different fruits while learning about Colombia's incredible biodiversity. I invited Angie's mom to join us on the tour as a small way to repay her for the kindness she had shown me throughout the summer.

Figure 17. *Model Meetup in Poblado Park.* Photo by the author, Medellín, 2024.

Figure 18. *Mangosteens at Plaza Minorista.* Photo by the author, Medellín, 2024.

Figure 19. *Fruit Stands at Plaza Minorista.* Photo by the author. Medellín, 2024.

September 14, 2024 – La Koncha Music Festival

Esmeraldas de la Selva hosted *La Koncha*, an international music festival featuring artists from Brazil, Colombia, and the United States. The night was electric with performances that flowed from the evening into the early morning.

September 20, 2024 – Returning Home

Concluded fieldwork in Colombia, preparing materials for dissemination and post-production.

Final Map

I generated this map using the app GPS tracks on my phone. Through this app, I was able to keep detailed records of my travels through GPS locations and time stamps. This personal archive was essential for me developing the digital cartographic element in my project, which will be elaborated on in the preceding section.

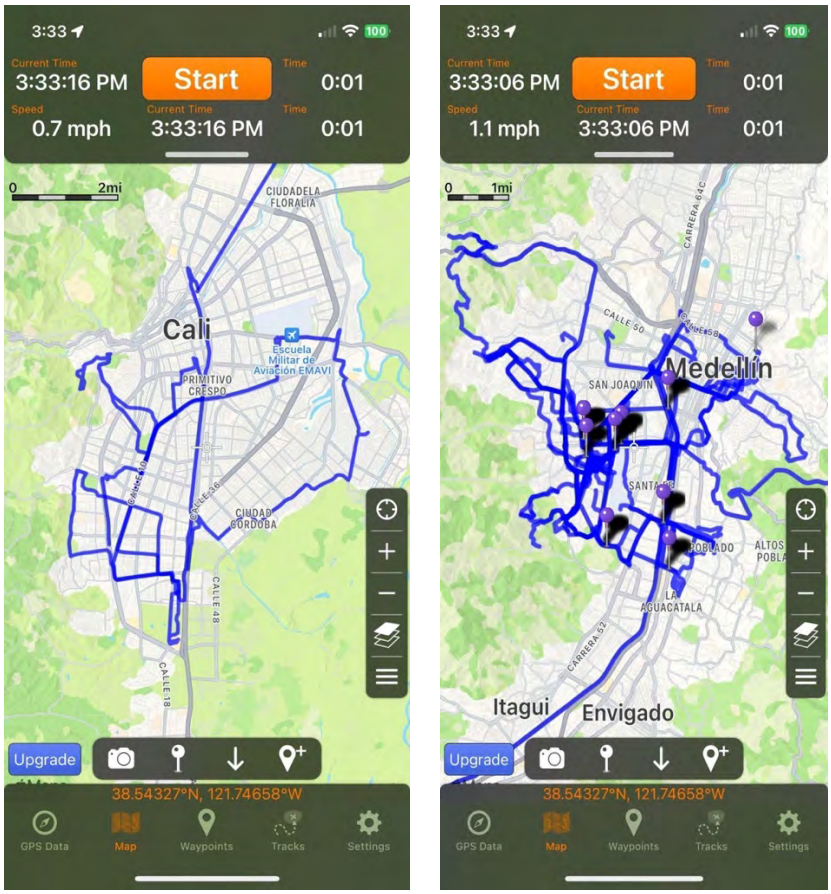

Figure 20. Personal Map of Summer Travels.

DISSEMINATION

The interdisciplinary scope of this project creates multiple pathways for engagement, ensuring that the research and creative outputs are accessible to diverse audiences. Currently, the content is disseminated through three primary forms:

1. Narrative Features: Biographical excerpts from participant interviews are transcribed, edited, and published on the BlueBook Magazine website (www.bluebookmag.com) as narrative-driven features (see Figure 21). These narratives foreground individual experiences while situating them within broader social, cultural, and diasporic contexts. By presenting participants' stories in their own words, the platform facilitates nuanced engagement with the lived realities of the African Diaspora in Medellín.

2. Digital Cartography: Location-specific reflections on personal experiences are visualized through a digital map of Medellín, designed according to principles of critical cartography and informed by digital humanities methodologies (see Figure 22-24). This interactive map highlights Black presence and visibility across the city by plotting geographies of memory, resistance, and desire. Each mapped point represents a narrative intersection, providing a spatialized archive of diasporic life that emphasizes relational and experiential knowledge rather than abstract or hegemonic representations of urban space. Audiences can access the map through hosted Github link (https://trelldot.github.io/BlueBookMap/#)

3. Photographic Exhibitions and Publications: Complementing the digital and textual components, traditional photographic outputs—including exhibitions and photobooks—offer additional modes of dissemination. These formats reach new audiences while honoring participants by foregrounding their images and stories within established cultural spaces. By situating diasporic experiences within visual and material culture, these outputs extend the impact of the project beyond the digital sphere.

Through this multi-modal approach, BlueBook Magazine functions not only as an archival project but also as an active site for intercultural dialogue and community building. By integrating narrative, spatial, and visual strategies, the project engages audiences in the ongoing negotiation of diasporic identity, belonging, and transnational connectivity, ensuring that the work circulates across both local and global contexts. (See figure 25).

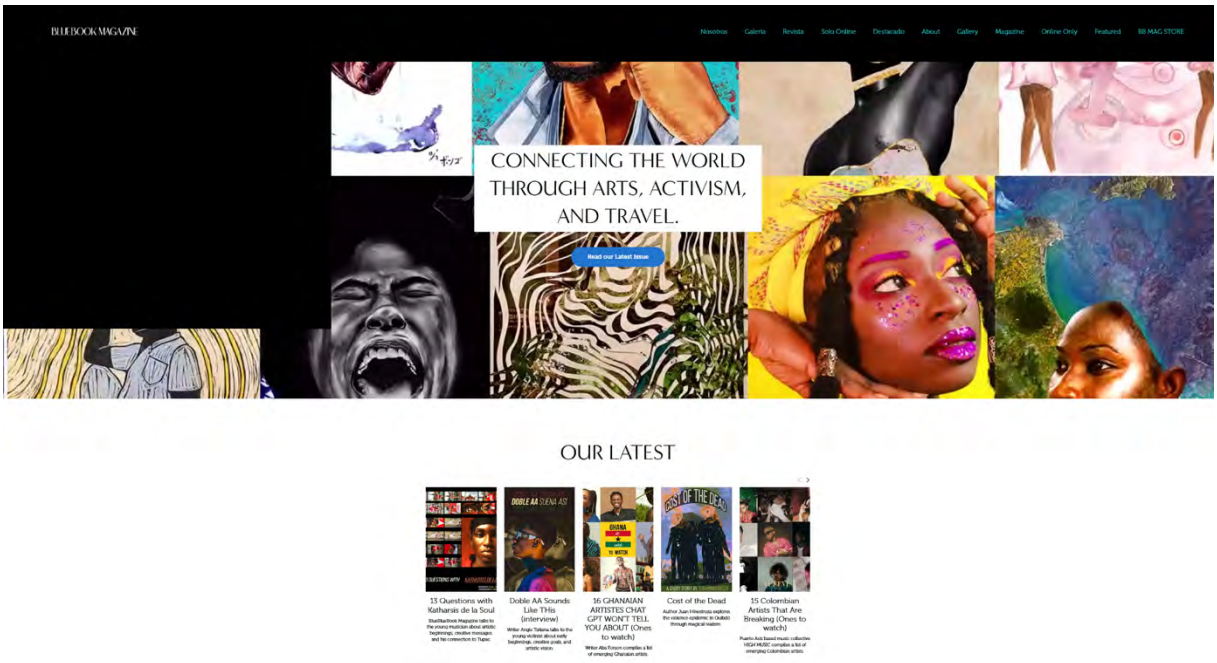

Figure 21. BlueBook Magazine website Homepage.

Figure 22. BlueBook Map Landing Page.

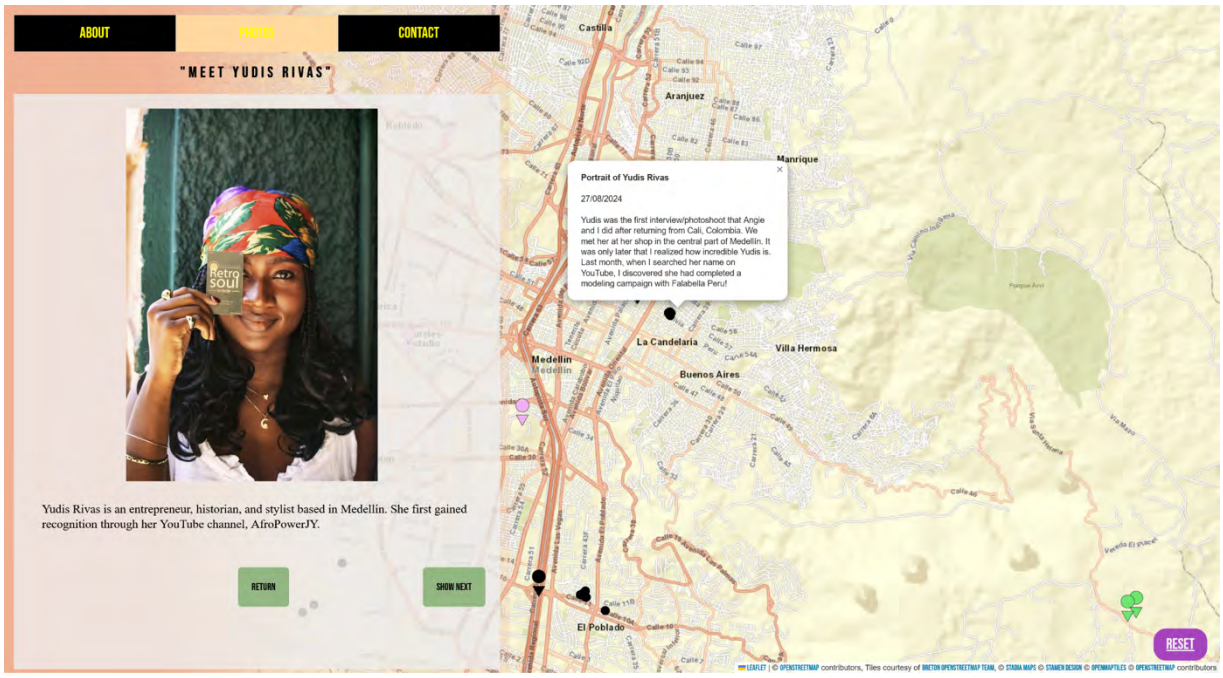

Figure 23. Each photograph on an interactive map is tied to location and narrative content.

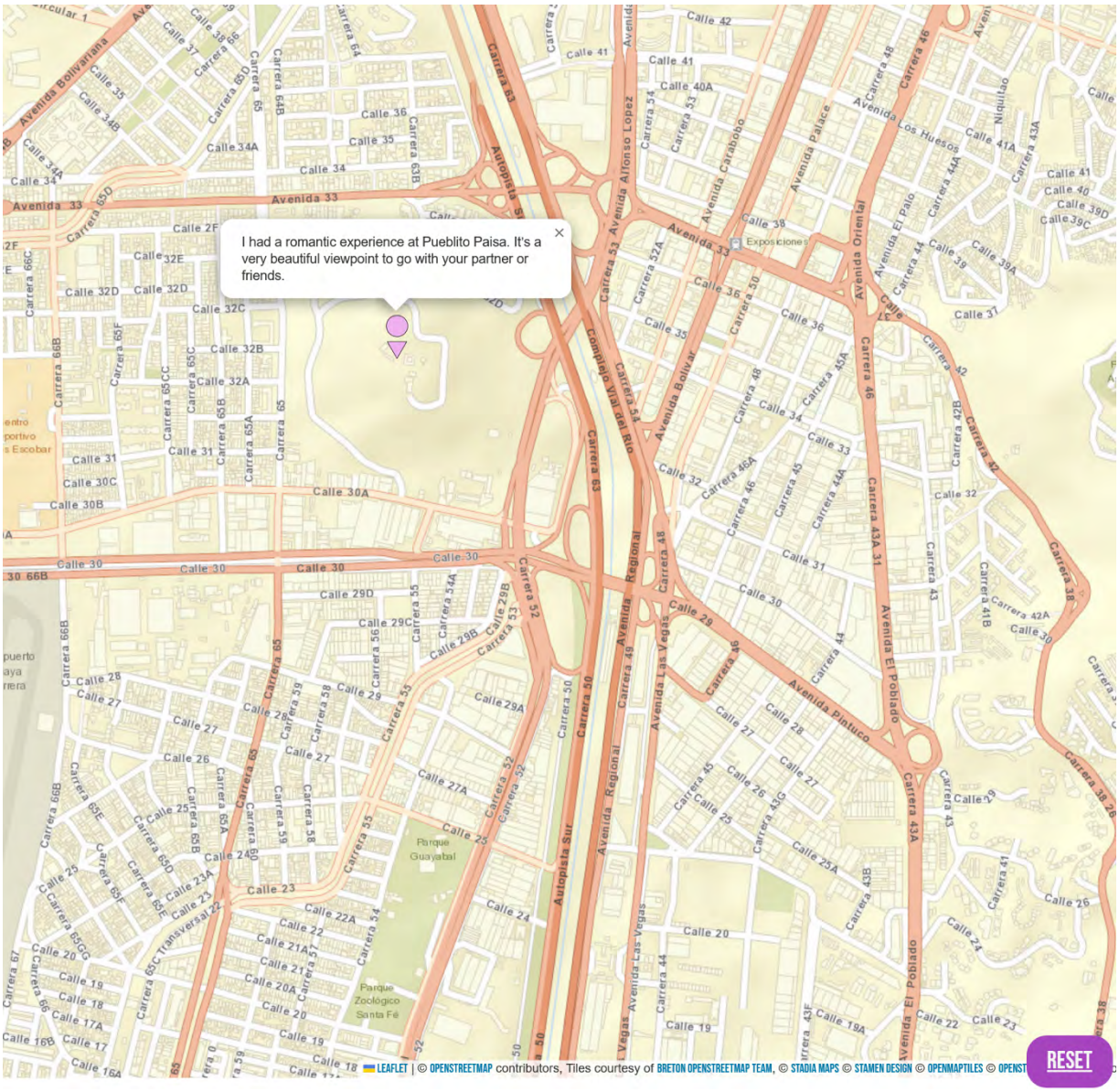

Figure 24. Content from part 2 of the interviews was also entered into the map, identifying information removed.

Figure 25. Photo exhibition image.

CONCLUSION

BlueBook Magazine demonstrates the potential of interdisciplinary, multimedia approaches to document and activate the experiences of the African Diaspora. By combining photography, video, narrative interviews, and critical cartography, the project not only archives individual and collective stories but also fosters transnational dialogue and community-building. Grounded in Gilroy's concept of the *Black Atlantic* and Edwards' insights on diasporic identity, the magazine situates local experiences within global frameworks, emphasizing how identity, belonging, and cultural expression are continuously negotiated across borders.

Looking forward, this project suggests multiple avenues for expansion and impact. The integration of digital mapping, interactive storytelling, and participatory photography offers a replicable model for other cities and diasporic communities, allowing similar projects to document underrepresented perspectives and foster intercultural understanding. Future iterations could incorporate collaborative workshops, augmented reality mapping, or expanded social media engagement to further connect local and international audiences.

Beyond documentation, BlueBook Magazine points to the possibilities of using creative and scholarly practice as a form of social intervention. By centering diasporic voices and fostering collaborative authorship, the project challenges dominant narratives of marginalization and displacement while modeling new forms of cultural exchange and community solidarity. Ultimately, it underscores the role of design, media, and the arts not only in representing the world but in actively reshaping it, by building connections, cultivating empathy, and imagining a more inclusive and interconnected future for global African Diasporic communities.

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