



# Swiss human geographies lecture 2019 tourism troubles: feminist political ecologies of land and body in Panama

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**Abstract.** On the Panamanian Caribbean coast and the Bocas del Toro Archipelago, foreign direct investment via residential tourism development drives land displacement. As land insecurities grow, particularly for local Indigenous and Afro-Panamanian peoples, ongoing dispossession is not simply about land, but rather simultaneously about land, people and their bodies. In Bocas, foreign land enclosures are infused with imaginaries, which take for granted Black female servitude and Black landlessness. Such imaginaries seemingly lock economically “poor” Afro-Panamanian women into particular kinds of work. To illustrate, I entangle feminist political ecological assertions that struggles over nature are embodied struggles, with intersectional and relational understandings of land and body. To do so, I draw insights from postcolonial, decolonial and Black feminist critiques of coloniality and settler colonialism. Building from this literature, I seek to show how a logic of elimination operates within the legal geographies of residential tourism development. In doing so, I highlight the historical and contemporary ways in which Afro-Panamanian women are naturalized as *criadas* (maids), a process that accompanies land enclosure. Blending ethnographic and historical data collection, I seek to illuminate how Afro-Panamanian women’s livelihood struggles reflect both their acquiescence to residential tourism development, and their resilience in the face of Bocas’ anti-black patriarchal coloniality. Thus, I argue that Afro-Panamanian women’s desires for inclusion and belonging in Bocas’ tourism enclave – a project that seeks to eliminate Indigenous and Black relations to coastal lands and foster their embodied subjection to foreign nationals – simultaneously reflects their struggles for the right to remain on the coast.

## 1 Introduction

On the Atlantic coast of Panama and the Bocas del Toro Archipelago, (pop. 18 000) Angelo Martinez and his family, proud Afro-Panamanian people, own and operate a small marina on the shore of the family’s private cay. Each Saturday, Angelo’s marina is the site of Afro-Panamanian hospitality where Liala, Angelo’s 28-year-old daughter leads her family in hosting a long-running weekend BBQ where patrons enjoy grilled lobster, conch, octopus and beloved *catacones* (fried plantains). With Afro-Caribbean music bellowing across the calm waters of the Caribbean Sea, the Martinez’s weekend BBQ attracts a largely white, affluent and foreign commu-

nity, many of whom own significant land, homes and hotels throughout Bocas.

Panamanian law provides the legal pathways for foreigners to purchase land throughout the country (Spalding, 2017). In contrast, over the last 20 years, domestic populations across the archipelago, like the Martinez family and many of their Indigenous, *mestizo* and Black neighbours, experience land tenure insecurities and shrinking access to nature. In defence of their place on the coast, local *Bocatoreños* are forced to square off against increasing pressures from foreign land developers, affluent migrants-cum-“residential tourists”, and the Panamanian state (Spalding, 2011; Thampy, 2013; Mollett, 2016). For example, during one of their weekend BBQs, a Canadian couple, returning marina tenants, asked Angelo

to borrow some land behind the dock to grow fruits and vegetables. Angelo agreed to loan them a small parcel and he and his sons cleared the land and mulched the soil for planting. Then, the couple asked Liala to plant and maintain the garden. In addition to a list of vegetables, the Canadians asked Liala to plant two packages of wildflower seeds previously purchased in Canada. Liala notes, “they asked me to plant a little Canada in Bocas”. During their 10-month stay, Liala tended to the garden and regularly hand-washed the couple’s laundry as she claims, “[the woman doesn’t] know how to do laundry without a machine and says it’s too heavy to take into town!” (Mollett interviews, 2011). While Liala received the standard USD 3 per hour, for washing, her work in the garden went un-remunerated. Then, after many months, Angelo abruptly instructed her to remove the plants from the garden. According to the local municipality, the Canadians were attempting to purchase his “borrowed” plot, seemingly without his knowledge or benefit. After their failed attempt, Angelo expressed relief in protecting his land “against *gringo* land invasions”. Indeed, since the early 2000s many local *Bocatoreños*, particularly Indigenous Ngäbe and Afro-Panamanian residents, have lost hundreds of hectares of land as affluent migrants, predominately from North America and Europe, use a variety of legal and extra-legal tactics to grab land and “settle” in Bocas (Mollett field notes, 2012, 2013; Mollett, 2016; Impacto Films, 2011; Spalding, 2011).

Critical geographers maintain that in many locales, colonial logics of power underpin contemporary tourism development (Kothari, 2015; Emard and Nelson, 2020). These logics privilege affluent foreigners through incentivized land policies while disenfranchising domestic local populations from family lands and common resources (Devine, 2017; Ojeda, 2012; Kothari, 2015; Hayes, 2015; Emard and Nelson, 2020; Loperena, 2017). Residential tourism development is a case in point. In fact, residential tourism, namely “a mix of permanent and temporary mobilities” (van Noorloss, 2013:571), describes a process whereby foreign migrants travel to places like Panama, with the purpose of establishing permanent and supplementary homes and real estate investments (Hayes, 2015; McWatters, 2009; Mollett, 2016). This tourism model is sanctioned by global development organizations and presented as an effective method to attract foreign direct investment, spur land markets, and generate employment, often rhetorically pitched “in the name of the poor” (Panama, 2009; Gómez et al., 2009). While “poverty reduction” is a common justification for many kinds of tourism development, there is a paucity of research attentive to how residential tourism development is complicated by extant settler colonial power relations embedded in both policy and place (for exceptions see Mollett, 2016, 2017; Loperena, 2017). It is in this way, for Indigenous Ngäbe and Afro-Panamanian residents, *tourism troubles*.

Indeed, Latin American countries are settler colonial landscapes (Poets, 2021; Zaragocin, 2019; Correia, 2022; Mollett, 2021b; see also Speed, 2017; Castellanos, 2017; Gott,

2007). I understand settler colonialism, in borrowing from Morgensen, as “the social processes and narratives that displace Native people while granting settlers belonging to native land and settler society” (Morgensen, 2010:117). I am particularly interested in the “logic of elimination” posited as a central organizing principle in settler landscapes which according to the late Patrick Wolfe not only “strives for the dissolution of native societies” but “destroys to replace” (Wolfe, 2006:388). While in Bocas, a logic of elimination works to displace both Indigenous Ngäbe and Afro-Panamanians, I focus on Afro-Panamanian women. I do so for at least two overlapping reasons: first, I seek to complicate the reproduction of settler–native binaries in geographic scholarship on settler landscapes (see Day, 2015; King, 2019; Pulido, 2018). In so doing, I acknowledge Lowe’s insistence that “the operations that pronounce colonial divisions of humanity – settler seizure and native removal, slavery and racial dispossession, and racialized expropriations of many kinds – are imbricated processes, not sequential events” (Lowe, 2015:7). Second, following Indigenous, Black and decolonial feminist scholars writing on the Americas, “a logic of elimination” does not only play out on the land, but on subaltern bodies, *including* Afro-Panamanian women (Goeman, 2009; King, 2019; Simpson, 2016; Zaragocin, 2019).

Research for this paper blends ethnographic and historical data collection to demonstrate how intersectional power structures people and place in enduring ways across time and space. This paper combines ethnographic and semi-structured interview data (collected from 2011–2013) with archival and historical data collection conducted in the Archive of the Indies in Seville, Spain, the Benson Bee Latin American Library at the University of Texas Austin and the Panamanian National Library in Panama City (collected from 2011 to 2017) and supplementary travel to Panama in 2017. These findings are contextualized alongside Afro-Latin American historiographies, which help reveal the ways in which colonial spatial relations are historically woven into the social fabric of Bocas. Captured in ethnographic testimonies and vignettes, Bocas, as a place, is imbued with multiple racial and gendered ideologies (Mollett field notes, 2011–2013, Mollett, 2017). Through reading ethnographic data alongside Afro-Latin American historiographies and archival data, the weaving of past with the present punctuates the workings of what Stoler calls “recursive logics” (2016). Through this entanglement, I aim to illustrate how contemporary Bocas is shaped by a “sort of history [that] is marked by the uneven, unsettled, contingent quality of histories that *fold back on themselves*” (Stoler, 2016:26 emphasis in the original), offering an optic of blurred temporalities. Such blurred temporalities defy seeing history as linear and may suggest that these racial, gendered and carnal relations, while structural and persistent, are neither fixed nor settled. As historical geographers maintain, attention to histories of place effectively capture the “lingering effects of European expansion on environments and environmental epistemologies”

as seen through “the continuity of material and discursive forms of resource control” (Offen, 2004:28, 2012). Furthermore, attention to how the past, as both temporal and spatial, shapes the present affords “alternative stories of belonging” (Schein, 2011; see also Saldaña-Portillo, 2016). In this vein, I wish to highlight the particular case of Afro-Panamanian women, as domestic service providers, and demonstrate the co-constitutive ways in which anti-blackness and patriarchy intimately weave within the eliminatory processes of (settler) colonialism at work in residential tourism in Bocas, complicating the where, how and for whom settler colonial histories tell a story.

In Bocas, settler land control, and concomitant land displacement for Indigenous and Black residents are not simply about land, but rather simultaneously about land, people, and their bodies (Mollett, 2021b; Naylor et al., 2018; Zaragocin, 2019). This land and body entanglement is infused with imaginaries that reflect conventional histories, which take for granted Black female servitude and Black peoples’ landlessness. Such imaginaries yoke economically “poor” Afro-Panamanian women into particular kinds of work. To illustrate, I entangle feminist political ecological assertions that struggles over nature are embodied struggles, with intersectional and relational understandings of land and body (Doshi, 2017; Sultana, 2011; Mollett, 2021b). To do so, I draw insights from a fusion of anticolonial, Indigenous and Black feminist critiques of coloniality and settler colonialism (Simpson, 2016; Zaragocin, 2019; King, 2016; Mollett, 2017, 2021b; Radcliffe, 2015). Through this lens, I seek to show how a logic of elimination operates within the legal geographies of tourism development. Next, I highlight the ways in which Afro-Panamanian women are naturalized as *criadas* (maids), a process that accompanies land enclosure and illuminates Afro-Panamanian women’s livelihood struggles through their acquiescence to, and resilience in the face of Bocas’ anti-black patriarchal coloniality. To demonstrate how land dispossession involves more than what happens to the land, I draw upon the concepts of postcolonial intersectionality and *cuero-territorio* to highlight the co-constitution of land and body within colonial imaginaries and the concomitant role that gender and race play in the extractive-development enclosures shaping life in Bocas. Finally, I argue that Afro-Panamanian women’s desires for inclusion in Bocas’ tourism enclave – a project that seeks to eliminate Indigenous and Black relations to coastal lands and foster their (domestic) servitude to foreign nationals – reflects enduring Afro-Panamanian relations to the lands of the Bocas Archipelago and their embodied struggles for rights to remain on the coast.

## 2 Feminist fusions: postcolonial intersectionality

I situate this examination of Afro-Panamanian women’s livelihood struggles at the entanglements of feminist polit-

ical ecology and a fusion of anticolonial, Indigenous and Black feminist thinking, woven within the concept of postcolonial intersectionality (PI) (Mollett, 2017, 2021b; Radcliffe, 2015; see also Cho et al., 2013). PI acknowledges the ways “patriarchy and racialized processes are consistently bound in a postcolonial genealogy that embeds race and gender ideologies within nation building and international development processes” (Mollett and Faria, 2013:120). In doing so, I aim to make visible multiple structures of power, demonstrating the messy and myriad forms of rule at work in the colonial spatial formations imbued in contemporary development practice (Christian and Namaganda, 2018; Mollett and Faria, 2013; Lugones, 2007; Patil, 2013; Radcliffe, 2015). Across the Americas, Indigenous feminist thought articulates how Indigenous women’s bodies are a collective site of settler colonial violence during and after conquest and the scale upon which multiple forms of power sear (Daigle, 2018; Simpson, 2016; Goeman, 2009; Razack, 2016; Women’s Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network, 2016). Maya–Xinka feminist, Lorena Cabnal conceptualizes this entanglement as “*cuero-territorio*”, an embodied ontology that centres people and territory as a, single, unique and mutually constituted subjectivity. *Cuero-territorio* challenges the ways both historical and contemporary forms of conquest are constitutive with extraction, to enclose and control women’s bodies, like territory (Cabnal, 2015; Zaragocin, 2019). Similarly, in thinking through the terrain of Indigenous women’s life and death in settler-governed Canada, Simpson articulates how Indigenous women’s bodies represent a “threat” to settler power. She writes,

like the lives of all Indian women in Canada is an anomaly because since the 1870s they have been legally mandated to disappear, in various forms . . . Because as with all bodies, these bodies were more than just ‘flesh’ – these were and are sign systems and symbols that could effect and affect political life. So they had to be killed, or, *at the very least subjected because what they were signaling or symbolizing was a direct threat to settlement* (Simpson, 2016, emphasis added).

Black feminist scholars also entangle bodies and colonial expansion (i.e. land) in research on the transatlantic slave trade – a key temporal moment marking black dehumanization. Indeed, the objectification of the captive black body legitimated and sustained African slavery (Spillers, 1987; McKittrick, 2006). Moreover, “the black female body [acts] as a historical signifier” and is a symbolic site for slavery’s reproduction (Santos de Araújo, 2016:150; Smith, 2016; Morgan, 2004; Hartman, 2016). Such symbolism is exemplified in European male travel writing depicting “black women as simultaneously unwomanly and marked by a reproductive value that was both dependent on their sex and evidence of their lack of femininity”, a presupposition made

ever more salient as European–American slave owners used black women’s bodies “to produce both crops and other laborers” (Morgan, 2004:14; see also Lugones, 2007). These presuppositions fuel settler desires, making “[the] discovery of new lands [ ] inextricable from the language of sexual conquest” (Morgan, 2004:17). In the face of such violence, and in spite of it, the black female body also represents fugitivity and possibility, which collectively enables a “breach in the system to which Blacks [are] morally submitted” offering hope for freedom from an enduring colonial racist patriarchy (Nascimento, 1985:91 cited in Smith, 2016:84; McKittrick, 2006, 2013). Hence, a focus on the entanglement of land and body helps demonstrate how settler land accumulation structures Afro-Panamanian women’s livelihood struggles and their concomitant resilience in the face of racial, gendered and carnal colonialities shaping both Black female subjectivities and access to land for *Bocatoreños*.

### 3 Historical racial geographies of land control in Bocas

Bocas’ history is part of the contemporary fabric of the archipelago and its allure. The region’s largest resort, the Red Frog Beach Island Resort and Spa (2018) invites tourists and prospective foreign residents to visit Bocas just as Christopher Columbus did in 1502. The website reads,

Columbus [“an innovative explorer”] was immediately captivated by the beauty and abundance on Isla Bastimentos... *Just as Columbus did...* discover a New World for yourself in Bocas del Toro. We consider it fortunate that the heritage, Caribbean lifestyle, enduring culture, and nature-given “provisions” are *much like the scene several hundred years ago* (RedFrogrealestate.com, author’s emphasis, 2018).

This invitation to “discover” Bocas through the spatial image of “several hundred years ago” is not benign. This historical-geographic representation remakes Bocas as *terra nullius*, imagined to be waiting for settler discovery and innovation, in a place seemingly stuck in time where cultures and nature “are much like the scene several hundred years ago”. While this use of colonial history in tourism advertising suggests an availability of land and nature, ever more salient are the constant and pervasive celebrations of Boca’s twentieth century past as a United Fruit Company stronghold.

Throughout the archipelago’s main islands, namely Colon and Bastimentos, many of the interior walls of hotels and restaurants on the main street of Bocas Town feature photos depicting the “boom days” of the United Fruit Company’s (UFC’s) Bocas Division and plantations. These photos forward images of Afro-Caribbean harvesters and their deplorable housing often in contrast to the images of the UFC’s white administrators and the fancy homes and lawns of the

“White zone”, a place off limits to former Afro-Caribbean workers. As Bourgois writes “the luxury of the white zone contrasts violently with the squalor of the overcrowded barracks area, likewise the unpaved roads, and walkways are either covered with ankle-mud or engulfed by clouds of dust” (Bourgois, 1989:4). Such images of the past compiled in photographs, postcards, posters, pamphlets and books celebrate the historical role of the UFC and the making of Bocas (Stephens, 2008). Today, Bocas is a place filled with the embodied histories of Euro-American settlement and imperial desires; a place layered with histories of land dispossession and free and unfree labour that often culminates into a celebration of Panama’s key infrastructural projects, The Canal, The Railroad and in particular, the United Fruit Company (Lasso, 2019; O’Reggio, 2006).

Yet, the images of the UFC’s “boom days” and their celebration are more complicated for some *Bocatoreños*. US racial segregation under Jim Crow organized the life and labour of the UFC. From the late 1800s to the early 1930s, the United Fruit Company, under the auspices of the Chiriqui Land Company, shaped land, labour and daily life along the Caribbean coast from Bocas del Toro, Panama to Talamanca, Costa Rica (Bourgois, 1989; O’Reggio, 2006; Putnam, 2002). While many different ethnic groups worked as labourers for the UFC, including Guna and Ngäbe Indigenous peoples; in the early years, Afro-Caribbean migrants comprised a disproportionate role as harvesters (Bourgois, 1989; O’Reggio, 2006). By the mid-19th century, impoverishment and ongoing anti-black discrimination followed the decline of the sugar trade and the abolition of slavery across former British and Spanish colonies. As a result, the well-publicized labour shortages facing the UFC targeted and attracted primarily Black men from Jamaica and Barbados, and later Martinique to the Isthmus (Newton, 1984). Black men, as harvesters, cleared swampland, snakes and faced plagues of mosquitos all in the face of debilitating and often fatal disease (Stephens, 1997, 2008). According to Bourgois (1989), the Bocas division was “structured by a complicated and hierarchal productive process, subdivided into dozens of job categories involving different degrees of technological skill, as well as physical and mental stress”... what he calls “a *defacto* apartheid occupational hierarchy” (Bourgois, 1989:331). In fact, while many Afro-Caribbean migrants were able to establish small family farms adjacent to the plantation and to sell bananas and cacao as independent producers, their entrepreneurialism was used by UFC administrators to justify exploitatively low wages (Bourgois, 1989).

In Central America, the UFC orchestrated an enormous land grabbing operation throughout the early 20th century. Importantly, the materiality of such land accumulation was made possible with an embedded and embodied racialized labour operation. Company officials sought “suitable” labourers to fill its ranks. In Panama, the imperial desires among UFC American administrators involved a very de-



tailed search for the strongest and healthiest Afro-Caribbean (Black) men (Bourgeois, 1989; Stephens, 1997). As Newton (1984) writes,

as the men came up they were formed in a line around the wall... all those who looked too old, or too young, or too weakly, were picked out and sent away. Then [the doctor], he went over the whole line again for trachoma, rolling back their eyelids and looking for inflammation... Then he made them strip, and went over them round after round for tuberculosis, heart trouble and rupture (Newton 1984:76).

Afro-Caribbean men lived in the small cramped space of the UFC barracks. But a lack of formal work for women on the plantation often meant that Afro-Caribbean women lived in the port towns. It was along the railroad lines that black social reproduction stretched between plantations and port towns on both sides of the Panamanian–Costa Rica border (Putnam, 2002; Bourgeois, 1989). The exclusionary logics of Latin American nationalist thinking under *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento* imbued in Panamanian nationalist movements reinforced US racial ideologies on the plantation (Mollett, 2016; Milazzo, 2012). These narratives employed a variety of anti-black policies that targeted Black people for deportation and subjugation in the early 20th century and reified anti-blackness by disavowing Black humanity in Panama (Stephenson Watson, 2012; Lasso, 2019). These histories of labour and embodied dispossession are important to understanding how overlapping racial projects thread within residential tourism development in the present.

#### 4 Sustainable tourism and the legal geographies of indigenous and black land dispossession

In Panama, since the 1990s, successive state “Master Tourism Plans” continue to promote tourism as a development strategy. The content of these plans, particularly the emphasis on attracting foreign direct investment, is part of a global trend led by the United Nations, World Tourism Organization, and the World Bank who together along with numerous environmental and development NGOs celebrate “Sustainable Tourism Development” (UNWTO, 2018; World Bank, 2017). This global tourism strategy argues that sustainable tourism is a vehicle for “poverty reduction”, a “critical sector for women’s economic and social advancement” and a tool for “inclusive growth” through “efficient and effective” job creation (UNWTO, 2018; World Bank, 2017:19; Klytchnikova and Dorosh, 2012). Over the last 20 years, tourism is one of the main drivers of exceptional growth, facilitating Panama as a leader among Latin American countries in generating foreign direct investment (Benson, 2013; Jackiewicz and Craine, 2010; Spalding, 2011). An attractive place for visitors, Panama’s economy is dollarized, English

language is widely spoken and political stability helps bolster investment seen most visibly in infrastructure, real estate and both large- and small-scale residential tourism development (Velásquez Runk, 2012; Spalding, 2011). It is estimated that Panama receives approximately 2.3 million tourists annually, which accounts for 16.2 % of the nation’s GDP. Of that, beach and leisure tourism accounts for 70 % of tourism receipts (Mach and Vahradian, 2021:132). With a priority on inclusive growth, the World Bank reports that in Panama “the tourism sector was found to have higher multipliers than any of the country’s seven other principal sectors. With a multiplier of 2.87, tourism was more than twice that of textiles at 1.3 and maize at 1.4” (World Bank, 2017:16). Thus, tourism development is touted to benefit large numbers through its multiplying power to produce employment.

Nonetheless, despite the success of tourism’s contribution to Panama’s economy, tourism benefits are unevenly distributed (Koehler-Geib et al., 2015; Gómez et al., 2009). While the state relies on Afro-Panamanian and Indigenous cultures to “sell” cultural and bio-diversity, Panama’s wealth from tourism is concentrated in elite enclaves and special economic zones within urban areas. Even when visitors travel to the cultural and biodiversity-rich regions largely located in the rural parts of the country, tourism benefits often bypass those “where agriculture is the main sources of livelihood” and where economic need is already dire, namely in Indigenous and Afro-Panamanian communities (Klytchnikova and Dorosh, 2012:4; Velásquez Runk, 2012; Guerrón-Montero, 2014).

In Bocas, impending land insecurities and dispossession facing economically poor Indigenous and Black residents evinces tourism’s maldevelopment. Indigenous Ngäbe peoples claim the lands of the Bocas del Toro Archipelago as part of the Ngäbe–Bugle homelands. Still, for more than 500 years, people of African descent have shared this coast with the Ngäbe (and other Indigenous peoples) (Bourgeois, 1989; Diez Castillo, 1981; Reid, 1987; Wickstrom, 2003). The state’s *comarca* system only partially acknowledges these histories (for Indigenous peoples only) (Herrera, 2012; Jordan, 2008). Moreover, Black land and territorial rights, by contrast, enjoy no formal collective protections at all. Furthermore, since the early 1990s, Panama has formalized a business-orientated “sustainable tourism model” that continues to rely heavily on designing “ecologically balanced” accommodations and tourism amenities through a foreign direct investment (FDI) (Guerrón-Montero, 2005, 2006; Spalding, 2011). For local *Bocatoreños*, this vision has materialized into a number of land grabs. In 1988, the Bastimentos Island National Marine Park (13 360 ha) managed by the National Environmental Authority (ANAM) enclosed a sizeable portion (13 360 ha) (1630 terrestrial and 11 730 is marine) of island territory and marine resources. A consortium of state agencies, international and national NGOs and settler residents (US, European and Canadian retirees and Latin American elites) spurred the Park’s creation all the while excluding

Afro-Panamanian and the Ngäbe peoples from consultation (Guerrón-Montero, 2005).

Additionally, Afro-Panamanian residents insist that tourism development also disrupts their access to all kinds of natures, beyond just land. For instance, reports of decreased air flow and compromised air quality as a result of the advance of hotels built along the coast are ubiquitous (Mollett field notes, 2011). *Bocatoreños* lament that the plethora of hotel construction obstructs “[their] God-given sea winds that used to enter homes freely” (Mollett field notes, 2011, 2012). Others report that sea air is a mix of “salt water and the smell of restaurant garbage” (Mollett field notes, 2011, 2012). The irony that locals are compelled to smell refuse from a restaurant they could never afford to enter is not lost on *Bocatoreños*. Betsy, a town artist, reports that “bad air” and ongoing construction of hotels along the coastline “kills my soul to not see the shore, its just not right man” (Mollett field notes, 2011). Fervently, many *Bocatoreños* lament how their dwindling access to nature greatly differs from the rights afforded to settlers. *Motorista* operator Nelson insists that “we [*Bocatoreños*] are constantly blamed for destroying the coral and *stealing* the region’s protected red turtles, while foreign developers are granted construction permits to build hotels and luxury homes in mangrove areas on the archipelago” (Mollett interview, Bocas, 2012). For example, in 2006, the Red Frog Beach Island Resort and Spa was established adjacent to the Park. This USD 400 million dollar development boasts not just a hotel and spa, but two marinas, plans for 900 condominiums and 30 villas, *each with private swimming pools* (Mollett field notes, 2017). The property encloses some of the archipelago’s best beaches and beachfront land and makes neighbouring Afro-Panamanian and Ngäbe villagers feel “that they are not welcome to enjoy the trees and animals, the water and the land on [their] own island” (Mollett field notes, 2011; Guerrón-Montero, 2005; Shors, 2007).

Numerous laws exist to promote the state’s vision for attracting FDI in tourism development. Established in 1994, Law 8, known colloquially as the “tourism law” grants incentives for FDI (i.e. tax exemptions; residency). In recent years, Law 80 also entrenches the state’s tourism plan (Panama, 2009). Under law 80, which was part of a multi-million dollar World Bank funded land regularization project, PRONAT (2001–2009), foreign nationals hold the same rights to own island lands as Panamanians, including Indigenous and Afro-Panamanian citizens (Mollett field notes, 2011). As a result, Law 80, along with many other legal tools, intensifies domestic land dispossession and effectively re-orders land access through multiple forms of enclosure (Spalding, 2017; Thampy, 2013; Mollett, 2016). The legal geographies of tourism and the shifting property rights they enable disrupt customary forms of land tenure in Bocas. Throughout the archipelago, *Bocatoreños* rely upon a system of *derechos posesorios*, (ROPs) or rights of possession. ROPs are a kind of land holding embedded in the coun-

try’s first Civil Code in 1917 “which established a process through which individuals had the right to possess land as long as they could demonstrate ‘use’ and were not trying to claim rights over inalienable government land” (Spalding, 2017:547). Currently many ROPs remain unregistered, and thus there exists no formal record of the holding nor its holder either in the local municipality or in the ANATI (The National Authority of Land Administration) office in Panama City. While recent land regularization seemingly sought to make legible land holdings and bolster land markets, many Afro-Panamanian and Ngäbe residents find their tenure security eroded (Mollett field notes, 2011–2013, Mollett, 2016, 2017; Panama, 2009). Land formalization renders holders of customary ROPs vulnerable to land fraud as many settlers make claims, in legal and extra-legal ways (Thampy, 2013; see Mollett, 2016). In fact, recall my opening story of Angelo and Liala. The Canadians attempted to steal Angelo’s plot but the plan failed because Angelo is known in the community and the cadastral office intervened on his behalf. Nevertheless, such extra-legal moves, in the words of Angelo, make it likely for those who “have money to pay tax on the land to end up owning it” (Angelo interview, Bocas, 2011). Indeed, part of a process to convert ROPs to land titles (under law 80) requires payment of the taxes on the market value of the land. For most local residents, an inability to afford the tax is what prohibits them from legally owning (fee simple) their customary-held lands (Mollett field notes, 2011). The Canadians assumed Angelo’s land tax was unpaid likely because this has been one of the extra-legal ways that land theft occurs in Panama, and throughout region (Mollett, 2011, 2016). The foreign enclosure of land throughout the archipelago means access to land and other natures are dwindling, prompting many Afro-Panamanian residents to ask “what’s in it for us?” (Mollett field notes, 2013)

## 5 Embodied political ecologies: in search of “dignity” and “respect”

It’s not just our land that makes Basti our home. We are Afro-Caribbean and we are workers . . . this is our place too” (Maxine Williams, resident of Old Bank, Bastimentos Island, Mollett interviews, 2011).

A recent report focused on the perceptions of Black identity and development in Panama cites the need to protect Black land rights (UNDP, 2013). Indeed, many Afro-Panamanians and their struggles for land and housing echo such sentiment (Swaby, 2014; UNDP, 2013). In Bocas, similarly, many Afro-Panamanians make claims to land based on their historical presence on the coast and familiar links to the early days of the UFC plantation. But for some, embedded within discursive claims to land are Afro-Panamanian collective histories of work and identities as “workers” (Mollett field notes, 2011, 2012, 2013). These histories also punc-

tuate Afro-Panamanian land claims (Impacto Films, 2011; UNDP, 2013). Many Afro-Panamanians insist they too, and not just their Indigenous neighbours, have intimate relations with nature in the archipelago, and such it is as “workers” on the lands and waters of the archipelago that they seek commitments from the state in its promise of employment as a “trade-off” for their increasing displacement from land and nature (Mollett field notes, 2011, 2012, 2013). But it is what these trade-offs entail that reveal the multiple power relations embedded in tourism development. Afro-Panamanian women maintain that despite state promises of employment and the mutual benefits of tourism (supposedly for developers and residents alike) the opportunities afforded to them lack “dignity” (Mollett interviews, 2012). While “grateful” for income, they seek employment that comes with “respect” (Mollett interviews, 2012). Undignified work conditions are a common target of scorn particularly among Afro-Panamanian women who work in domestic service (Mollett, 2017). *Afro-Bocatoreñas* report that in spite of possessing a secondary level education and even some with 1–2 years of university, the work opportunities beyond domestic service are severely limited (Mollett interviews, 2012). A bartender for a local hotel, Kenya, explains, “I went to Changuinola for Business school (2-year program). I wanted to work in hotel reception. But after I graduated, there were no jobs in Bocas so I moved to Panama City . . . I worked as a maid . . . but it was like Bocas, where I worked there were already two Indian girls from Salt Creek” (Mollett interview, Old Bank, 2012). Cara, one of the few Afro-Panamanian women working the front desk in a hotel in the archipelago explained a similar journey:

After university, I spent 2 years in Panama City working as a maid. Then, thanks to God I got a front desk job at [an American owned hotel]. They trained me to work in their smaller hotel in Bocas . . . it was just opened. I work in reception . . . but I am so lucky . . . God helped me in my journey . . . most women like me are maids . . . sometimes it’s the only way we can stay home in Bocas (Mollett interviews, 2012).

Like Cara, many women are content to have employment however precarious and undignified because work roots them to a place on the coast (Mollett field notes, 2012). Still, overwhelmingly, all participants ( $n = 30$ ) argue that the work expectations for housekeepers are excessive (Mollett interviews, Bocas, 2012). I illustrate with ethnographic testimony from Simona.

Simona explains how her *limpiadora* job “consumes her”. At Palmas Property and Realty, a vacation home and property management company, a typical workday officially extends from 07:00 to 15:00, five days a week (Mollett interviews, 2012). However, because her boss requires that the all-women domestic staff perform “special” errands for guests, she sometimes works everyday. Simona recounts that after

about 3 months into their stay, long-term guests asked her to help with preparations for the couple’s family arriving from the United States. Her female employer (Daisy) needed her to cook the welcoming dinner. Simona explains, “because [Daisy] wanted fresh, really fresh fish, the next day I woke up at 3 a.m. to go with my father. He is a fisherman, and I needed to catch a ride on his boat to the fish market in Almirante . . . I waited for two hours for the market to open and then another two hours before my father could come pick me up . . . I had to work in Bocas Town . . . They were happy with what I provided for the dinner: lobsters, crabs, beautiful fish and conch. So a few days later, [Daisy] asked me to help with a farewell dinner . . . so I once again woke up at 3 a.m. to catch a ride from my father”. According to Simona, since then, there was always extra work. Simona has shuffled Daisy’s guests from the airport and to beaches on the other end of the Colon Island. She cared for Daisy’s family member, cleaned Daisy’s friend’s home because the housekeeper quit, and even bathed Daisy’s 80-year-old father visiting from overseas. According to Simona, she regularly made trips in the middle of the night to buy fish in Almirante. While Simona was remunerated for all of these chores, including her “regular job” she was never paid for the extra travel time to obtain fish nor for her dad’s labour and connections. Simona maintains that Daisy treats her “like a machine some days and the rest like an animal”. When she finally found the courage to ask the property manager if he could assign her to a different house, he refused and told her “extra work is expected and *you* come with the house” (Simona interview, 2011, 2012).

## 6 Servicing desire in plantation landscapes

Afro-Panamanian women insist there is an “attitude” among tourists and settlers (often also perpetuated by national elites) that underpins the material relations of service between locals and foreigners (Mollett field notes, 2012). The opining of an American restaurateur witnessed at an opening ceremony of a new hotel and restaurant on Colon Island serves as an example. He notes,

What we are doing is good for the people of Bocas. *Bocatoreños* have jobs because we [foreigners] are here building homes, hotels, doing business, eating in restaurants, starting schools . . . we fund conservation; we raise money for poor Indian kids, and drive the sustainable tourism economy. Without us, without us, Bocas would be a dead zone, we don’t just bring the jobs . . . we bring [cultural] sophistication and a global awareness of modern life (American Restaurateur, Colon Island, Public Event, Bocas Town, Mollett field notes, 2017).

Such presuppositions and entitlements not only fuel land enclosure but, it seems that settler land control comes with affordances that extend, not just over the land, but over local people and their bodies. For Afro-Panamanian women

being a *criada* is “dirty” work. It is not just because they spend all day cleaning up after strangers. Rather every single participant ( $n = 30$ ) reported experiencing some form of sexual abuse or harassment while working as a housekeeper (Mollett interviews, 2012, 2013, see also Mollett, 2017). According to many participants, it is common “if your boss is a man, he will try to have sex with you” (Mollett interviews, 2012). But “especially the gringos and *rubio blancos* (white Panamanian elite) they believe that you are *supposed* to have sex with them” (Mollett interviews, Dixá, 2012)! While some women explain that the assaults and harassment began on their first day and usually (not always) meant that they quit, many express that sex with their male employers or male co-workers was a natural extension of the impossible expectations of their male AND female employers (Mollett interviews, 2012, 2013; see also Mollett, 2017). I illustrate with the ethnographic testimony from Dixá.

Thirty-two-year-old Dixá is from Old Bank, Bastimentos Island. When she was younger, she used to work at a popular bar in Carenero (an island in the archipelago). She notes the money was great and she and her boyfriend were able to build a two-room house on his family’s property. After a few years, the couple had a baby. When her son was about four months old, she approached her former boss about how soon she could go back to work. To Dixá’s surprise, he claimed that the only position available for her was as a *criada* in his hostel business in town. According to Dixá, “He said I was too fat to be behind the bar, that I’m not sexy . . . not youthful anymore”. Dixá, insulted by the prospect that he only saw her fit to be a *criada*, insisted “I am a great bartender, I speak English [Spanish and Creole] and tourists love me . . . they really do, when I go by them on the street they say, Dixá, Dixá are you working tonight? I deserve a better job. I am more than a maid”! (Mollett interview, 2012). Determined, Dixá found employment as a personal assistant working for an American woman’s clothing store in Bocas Town. Dixá recounts,

[A]t the beginning I unpacked the new merchandise, helped customers and kept the inventory organized. After about three weeks, Miss Kathy started to ask me if I could pass by her house in Bocas del Drago (approximately 30 min bike ride) and let out her dogs into their yard. She would say, ‘and while you are there can you make lunch for Timmy (her husband)’ . . . so I started riding my bike there everyday to let the dogs out and make lunch for her husband and sometimes for her (Mollett interview, 2012).

Dixá describes how her job description continued to grow. One day while at the store where she earned no more than USD 3 per hour, Miss Kathy offered her USD 50 extra to spend the afternoon cleaning her home and doing laundry because their regular “girl” was sick. Dixá insists that she was *always* paid for the extra chores but that eventually she

was doing “*everything, everything*”. Dixá explains, “one day she asked me to clean the *mierda* from the dog’s ass, it was humiliating. I did it but I told her. I am not here to clean the dog, Miss Kathy” (Mollett, 2021a). According to Dixá, Miss Kathy replies, “I am sorry, dear, but sometimes I need your help with other parts of my life and not just the store”. After about a year, business was slowing in Bocas for the low season and Kathy told Dixá that she could not offer her full-time work but, if she wanted to clean her house and help Mr. Tim; she could be their “maid”. Dixá agreed to the work, she reports, because Mr. Tim is nice to her. Dixá would clean the house, feed the dogs and clean their pen, do laundry and make lunch. After lunch, she would deliver packages by bike to Mr. Tim’s clients in Bocas Town. Dixá adds, “I also cook lunch for the couple and sometimes give Mr. Tim massages. When Miss Kathy goes to David or Panama City to buy merchandise for the store, I go with her to help carry things and speak Spanish to the wholesalers who do not speak good English . . . When Miss Kathy visits the US, she pays me extra to stay at the house to help Mr. Tim. [What do you do? Where do you sleep when Mrs. Kathy is away?]. After a pause, Dixá replies, “sometimes, I sleep with Mr. Tim.” Dixá explains that Mr Tim is “always kind” “respectful” and that sharing his bed, “its just part of [her] job” (Mollett interviews, 2012). Such expectations are normalized in Bocas. Many women like Dixá report a prevailing settler expectation that domestic labourers – often referred to as “girls” – are available for sex (Mollett interviews 2012). Settlers however often dismiss these critiques – as well as *Bocatoreño* complaints of land theft and fraud – through the same expression, “This is Bocas”. The ubiquitous frequency of this phrase and similar ones (i.e. this is Panama) suggests that the limits to employment, land and bodily appropriations by foreign nationals, are “just how it is” on the archipelago (Mollett field notes, 2011, 2012).

## 7 Histories in the making of place in the present

The taken for grantedness of foreign land control and Black women’s servitude in Bocas has a history. The stories of Liala, Simona and Dixá illustrate how colonial logics of race, gender and sexuality structure space in Bocas. Black feminist scholar, Saidiya Hartman (1997, 6) in theorizing black women in the “afterlife” of the transatlantic slave trade, explains that “the fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others’ feelings, ideas, desires and values” (Hartman, 1997:21). Similarly, King, in contextualizing Black women in settler landscapes, argues that “blackness” . . . “as expansion and spatial possibility, becomes a constituting feature of the spatial imagination of the conquistador/settler rather than just another human labourer exploited as a mere technology to produce space” (King, 2016:1023). To be clear, I am not equating contemporary livelihood strug-



gles to slave life. However, Bocas' history on the Caribbean re-emerges in the contemporary as partial and incomplete legacies, re-writings and discontinuities from the past (Stoler, 2016). Thus it is important to highlight that while Liala, Simona and Dixa were paid for their assigned tasks, none were remunerated for their time that it took *to do* many of the other tasks; weeding gardens, travelling by boat to buy fish, using family labour, biking to deliver parcels, giving massages, companionship etc., such embodied labour and familial connections were taken for granted. Furthermore, the paucity of employment opportunities outside domestic service reflects an enduring imperial-colonial stereotype or "imperial debris" (Stoler, 2013) that in the context of Euro-American land accumulation continually imagines Black women's subjectivity as bound to hard labour, sexually available, "less-than-human" and "disposable" even as free Black women (Morgan, 2004:12; Hartman, 1997; Razack, 2016). The repetitive and fungible way Black women serve as "*criadas*" (maids) in the homes and businesses of foreign settlers and elites embodies a collective geographic imaginary that not only assumes that specific kinds of labour are meant for particular people, but that some of their labour must go unpaid. In Bocas, "the plantation evidences an uneven colonial-racial economy that, while differently articulated across time and place, legalize[s] black servitude while simultaneously sanctioning black placelessness and constraint" (McKittrick, 2011:948). Perhaps counter intuitive for some, for Afro-Panamanian women, such unequal power informs their collective imaginaries, as they see (and hope) that their work makes legible their place on the coast even when their embodied histories of survival and resilience seem not to reverse impending land dispossessions.

The devaluation of Black women's labour, via poor pay and undignified working conditions in the kinds of jobs they are expected to perform, materially and symbolically reflect space and time in the *longue durée* of the Atlantic coasts' ontological becoming. As Stoler explains, "the social terrain on which colonial processes of ruination leave their material and mental marks are patterned... by the racial ontologies they called into being, and by the cumulative historical deficiencies certain populations are seen to embody..." (Stoler, 2013:23). In Bocas, racial, carnal and gendered ontologies link settler land accumulation to embodied subjectivities that naturalize Black women as domestic workers. As previously mentioned, such imaginaries and the era from which they are plucked – the boom days of the UFC land expansion and banana production – are continuously celebrated. Afro-Caribbean women migrants arrived to the Atlantic coast of Central America in pursuit of economic opportunities and tended to live in Puerto Limon (southern Costa Rica) and the junction towns along the railroad. It was there that many women performed the daily tasks of social reproduction on behalf of UFC plantation workers. For Afro-Caribbean women migrants domestic labour often incorporated more than cooking and cleaning. Domestic ser-

vice, namely "[h]ot meals, [laundry service] sliced fruit, a close dance and sex were just some of the goods and services that female migrants might profitably offer for sale in Limon" (Putnam, 2002:92). Furthermore, many women in the *zona bananera* were "clandestine prostitutes", namely a woman who "in addition to being occupied in the various duties appropriate to her sex, also traffics in her body" (Stern, 1995:320 in Putnam, 2002:92). Women who worked in paid occupations such as dressmaking, cigar making and food preparation dabbled in commercial sex "sequentially or simultaneously as need and opportunities arose" (Putnam, 2002:92). And while these particular moments of the past and present (early 20th and 21st centuries) align, history reveals that this conflation of Blackness and servitude limited to domestic labour in the context of Euro-American land expansion is not a given. In fact, the past also complicates the common refrain of "This is Bocas" with settler assumptions seemingly drawn and reinforced from this temporal moment, which assumes "what we are doing here is good for the people of Bocas" (see above).

Archival data collection and Latin American historiographies suggest that while the coast was at times a place of Black and Indigenous unfreedoms, this was not always the case. In sixteenth century Spain, Spanish settlers sought permission from the Crown to travel to the Americas and in particular to *Tierra Firme* (Panama). Because the Crown "officially" prohibited non-Christians from travelling to the Americas, many enslaved Africans in Seville and Castile underwent baptisms in order for would-be settlers to obtain licences (*licencias*) to travel with enslaved people (Ireton, 2017; Pike, 1967). *Negros y mulatos* travelled officially as *criados*. The term *criado*, included a variety of contractual labour arrangements for men and women (Ireton, 2017). For the enslaved, assisting settlers travelling across the Atlantic often meant freedom in Spanish colonies and for free Africans, a *criado* contract meant escaping discrimination and concomitant impoverishment in Spain (Pike, 1967).

People of African descent and their services made them pertinent to European travel to, and settlement in, *Tierra Firme* (Wheat, 2016). However, it would seem that *criados* were rightfully more than labour, but represented spatial possibilities not just on behalf of settlers, but for themselves (see King 2019). For instance, in 1627, Diego del Poyo, the owner of a fleet of sailing vessels (*patache*) called *Nuestra Señora de los Reyes* applied for a *licencia* for his pilot, Juan Gomez. In this application, Diego del Poyo asked for permission to take his slave Maria, due to his ill condition:

I say that I am very ill and I have been healing for many days in Sevilla and because I have a *mulata* slave, named Maria and so that in the said trip I may have some comfort to heal and go to the rest of my service. At your mercy, I beg and beg you to give me permission to take her in my service...

I ask for justice” (Archivo General de Indias de Sevilla, 2016b).

As a condition of this *licencia*, Poyo could not abandon Maria in the Americas. Abandoning her there would mean a debt to the Crown, namely to pay a fee plus “the value of the said slave” (Archivo General de Indias de Sevilla, 2016b). While Maria was undoubtedly under his control, it is important to note that *he also needed her*. Despite the strict racial religious coding structuring freedom and captivity in the colonial period, women of African descent as *negro* and *mulato criados* experienced myriad degrees of freedom in ways that complicate the continuities of the colonial spatial imaginaries that link blackness and “servitude” so taken for granted in Bocas and throughout Latin America (Wade, 2013). Afro-Latin American historians explain that because Spain struggled to control its territories in the early centuries after conquest, enslaved men and woman enjoyed a considerable degree of mobility and freedom (Wheat, 2016; Pike, 1967). Indeed, as described in a letter from an official of the *Audiencia de Panamá*, a *negra* slave, named Dominga Jolofa, while working as a *criada* in Panama City in 1620, was out looking for firewood (*lena*) in the *monte* (rural area) and came upon a bar of silver. When she returned to the city, an Iberian settler took the bar and accused Dominga of theft. While the details of her interrogation are unclear, what is clear is that Dominga moved freely from city to *monte* unaccompanied, even if monitored, by other *vecinos* (Archivo General de Indias de Sevilla, 2016c).

These brief archival examples of captivity, freedom and emancipation in the histories and geographies of slavery, combined with the critical historical work on Afro-Spanish America in early 15th and 16th centuries, disclose how women of African descent occupied a variety of jobs, ran businesses, owned property and were bequeathed *vecina* status (Ireton, 2017; Wheat, 2016). The label *vecina/vecino* once thought to exclude people of African descent from the benefits of *vecindad*, was in part determined by conversion to Christianity, and the adoption of Catholicism, a combination that assumes “clean” blood (Ireton, 2017; Wheat, 2016). Furthermore, despite racial/religious hierarchies, Black women did become *vecinas* and travelled on their own across the Atlantic (Ireton, 2017; Wheat, 2016). For instance, in 1614, Leonor de Espinola and her daughter Catalina de Espinola, both “*mulatas*” applied for a *licencia* to *Tierra Firme*. Leonor sought to travel to live with her husband an Iberian el Maestre, Miguel Benitez, who was in Peru. It would seem that Leonor and her daughter (ages 46 and 24) were previously enslaved as the archival scripts note them to have “*con una señal de herida al lado del ojo derecho*” (a branding wound on the side of the right eye) (Archivo General de Indias de Sevilla, 2016a). In many ways, colonial spatial imaginaries linking blackness and domestic servitude and its endurance through the present is complicated by the various forms and different temporal moments of emancipatory free-

dom (beyond manual labour) and the porosity of unfreedoms among *negro* and *mulato criados* in early Spanish America. These complexities problematize the way that the symbols of plantation slavery, imbued in the “boom days of the UFC” only slightly removed from the end of slavery in Colombia in 1851 (Panama was a province of Colombia until 1903) advance representations of structural fixity and unwavering cultural practices in such a way that fuels contemporary imaginaries and devalues and yokes Black women’s labour to servitude (see Bennett, 2007). These spatial imaginaries and relations are embedded in the refrain “This is Bocas”, which emerges from a “particular reading of the past that enshrines foreign white control over land and people, as a “natural” and the “only” way of being” obscuring prior freedoms of another temporal moment (the 15th and 16th centuries) and its possibilities (Mollett, 2021a:393).

## 8 Final thoughts

In this paper, I configure complexity into geographic scholarship on settler colonial landscapes and demonstrate how land dispossession is not only about land itself, but rather about the entanglements of land and people. Building upon the insights from critical feminist thought and in particular, the concepts of postcolonial intersectionality and *cuerpo-territorio*, land dispossession as it unfolds on the Bocas Archipelago is a material and embodied process. I centre Afro-Panamanian women in the context of residential tourism development in Bocas as a way to disrupt native-settler binaries common among geographic research on coloniality, settler or otherwise (Day, 2015; Mollett, 2021b; Pulido, 2018). In addition, a focus on the blurred temporalities of the plantation via both past and present with an eye to the future (Afro-Panamanian desires to remain on the coast) holds at once the “violence of the plantation and it’s afterlife while simultaneously acknowledging the ongoing capacity for making and remaking of Black life in the midst of plantation violence” (King, 2016:1033). I illustrate these racial regimes of land control through ethnographic testimonies blended with Afro-Latin American historiographies and archival data to disclose the naturalization and devaluation of Black women as *criadas*, in a context where simultaneously Indigenous and Black lands and territories, along with women’s bodies, seem apt for settler exploitation. Of course, this is not where the story ends, similar to the conditions of Black women *criadas* in the 16th century, as racial and patriarchal authority shape the contours of Afro-Panamanian women’s livelihood struggles in the present, the coast serves as a place of “freedom” and “possibility”. Such cracks in the co-constitutive colonialities of settler colonialism and the plantation-cum-residential tourism appear in the way some Afro-Panamanian women use their agency to pursue dignified livelihoods and social mobility beyond domestic service, to orient their lives towards a future that they hope

secures their right to remain on the coast (Mollett field notes, 2011, 2012, 2013; Mollett, 2017).

At the time of writing, the Panamanian State has announced a new Master Tourism Plan (2020–2025) organized around the notion of a “community centric and [an] environmentally minded industry” that invites conscious minded visitors to “Live for More” and where they insist that “instead of doing branding around the visitor only, we put the tourist... and the Panamanian at the centre of the brand” (Girma, 2021). While more promising than a model that seeks FDI through the dispossession of economically poor domestic populations and offers of undignified work as a trade-off, how the future of tourism makes better or worse the lives of *Bocatoreños*, and particular Afro-Panamanian women, remains unclear. For now, it seems that the way “colonial relations are disparately and partially absorbed into social relations and ecological disparities” (Stoler, 2016:25–26) remains constitutive of residential tourism development in Bocas.

Finally, returning to the women of Bocas, Simona no longer works for Palmas Property. She now sells fish for her father and other fishers to small hotels and restaurants throughout the archipelago; life seems better. To cope with less income she eats once a day, grows more food in her garden and drinks coffee to suppress her appetite when there is no food. Like Simona, Dixa has also changed jobs. She left “the store” and works as a part-time teacher in a small private school run by a settler. Liala and her family raised the rent on the marina slips, charge double for the BBQ, and it would seem, disallow foreigners to “borrow” family lands (Mollett field notes, 2013, 2017). Disclosing the ways in which a logic of elimination unfolds in Bocas through Indigenous and Black land enclosure and Black women’s servitude-as-subjugation, not only questions “tourism” as a development strategy, but challenges geographers and political ecologists to complicate understandings of the where, how and for whom settler colonial histories tell a story. Lastly, attending to how blurred temporalities inform tourism development, how a particular moment of the past continues to inform the present in the name of the future, at once *troubles* the assumptions embedded in “sustainable tourism” and punctuates for geographers how histories of place are always incomplete.

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