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# Disrupting the Rhythms of Violence: Anti-port Protests in the City of Buenaventura

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## Abstract

This contribution draws on rhythm analysis and the political economy of assemblage to provide a framework for understanding the productive spatio-temporal effects of physical violence on urban rhythms. The paper explores how Buenaventura, Colombia's biggest port city, is transformed both by the growth in container turnover, and through recurring, spatial and temporal practices of violence. What role does violence play in the relation between trade-driven acceleration through the port, and the aquatic, tidal rhythm that historically shaped the city? The contribution mobilizes the notion of disruption to analyse the frictions emerging between infrastructural nodes of acceleration, inhabitants' movements, and urban space. I argue that while recurring violence provides urban rhythm itself, social movements may employ the temporal instrument of disruption as a means both of political articulation and transformation within the logics of accelerated accumulation and in a context marked by violent rhythms and forced mobility.

## Policy Implication

- Urban violence needs to be addressed both at the city and global levels in order to mitigate the problematic effects of accelerated trade on the urban context. Policy measures need to recognize the linkages between a range of actors that directly and indirectly result in violence.
- Policy measures must be planned with the participation of people experiencing the effects of physical violence.
- Participatory tools which range from participatory budgeting to architecture initiatives 'from below', can strengthen community initiatives and thus help overcome violence. They are preferable to top-down measures.
- The disruption of trade flows through strikes can illustrate how interwoven logistics workplaces and their surrounding cities are. In urban policy plans for infrastructure hubs, this intertwinement should be taken seriously.
- Integrating an analysis of urban rhythm into urban planning at infrastructure hubs may offer new perspectives on urban movement, the built environment, and the nature of global-local connections.

## The 2017 strike

In May 2017, 89 grassroots organizations blocked the entrance to the ports of Buenaventura, Colombia's most important Pacific port-city. They declared a 'civic strike' which they upheld for 22 days, demanding a socio-economic investment programme from the Colombian government. Buenaventura is one of the most violent municipalities in Colombia, and one of the poorest in the Cauca region (Fedesarrollo-Cerac, 2013; Medicina Legal, 2017). Both port businesses and protestors continually framed the protest as a disruption of the global supply chain running through the port (Comité del Paro Cívico, 2017; *El Tiempo*, 2017). Yet while the former perceived it as a threat and claimed their losses amounted to roughly US\$10 million in the first five strike days alone (Patrón, 2017), the latter centred its positive impacts on urban social relations in a context of physical violence.

This contribution complements methodological and conceptual elements of rhythm analysis with the urban political economy of assemblage (Brenner et al., 2011) to reveal the productive spatio-temporal effects of physical violence on

urban rhythms. Through rhythm analysis, I analyse frictions between infrastructural nodes of acceleration, inhabitants' mobility, and urban space. Empirically, I ask how both the growth in container turnover, and spatial and temporal recurring practices of violence have transformed Buenaventura, Colombia's largest port. What role does violence play in the relation between trade-driven acceleration through the port, and the aquatic rhythm that historically shaped the city?

I argue that the global port assemblage, defined by acceleration, disrupted the tidal, aquatic rhythm the city was built on. Economic boom and physical violence resulted in an imposing rhythm of forced disappearances-displacement-port expansion. While recurring violence itself provides and imposes urban rhythm, social movements can mobilize disruption, a temporal instrument, as a means of political articulation and transformation within the logics of accelerated accumulation and in contexts marked by violent rhythms and forced mobility. For Buenaventura's social movements, the strike disrupted rhythms of violence; it allowed them to underscore their temporal impact on the logics of accelerated accumulation. Through this impact, social movements opened up a horizon of potential, premised on an

emancipatory understanding of urban politics instead of violence. Dockworker mobilizations and civic strike organizers such as Afro-Colombian and indigenous civil society initiatives complemented each other.

Buenaventura, as both a city of violence and a global trade hub, is an exemplary case of contrasting rhythms. The port makes it a crucial site of acceleration. Buenaventura belongs to the under-researched intermediate cities in which over half the world's population lives (IADB, 2015; UN Habitat III, 2015). While it represents a great number of intermediate cities facing similar, if less acute contradictions, Buenaventura illustrates that labour precarity (Neilson, 2019) is only one possible expression of such frictions.

Perpetuated rhythms of urban violence are unlike those of cities at war (Harb, 2017), but the resulting fatalities often exceed the number of fatalities in armed conflicts (Glebbeek and Koonings, 2015). Yet, usual imaginaries of cities of violence refer to megacities such as Rio de Janeiro (Arias, 2006). Uneven patterns of safe and unsafe spaces and experiences of insecurity which shape daily rhythms are interpreted as security bubbles (Hentschel, 2015), security archipelagos (Amar, 2013) or zig-zag patterns of insecure mobility defined by markers of class (Monroe, 2016). Important scholarship has shown how racialized security regimes 'govern through death' (Alves, 2018, p. 246; see Willis, 2015). This literature does not conceptually include rhythmanalysis, while rhythmanalysis seldom focuses on violence.

This contribution is based on content analysis of two national newspapers' perspectives (*El País*, *El Espectador*) on the civic strike during May 2017 and the following months. I analysed two samples of 42, respectively 30 articles through iterative coding, particularly attentive to discursive patterns. I add qualitative content analysis of radio, video, and print interviews with local actors (political activists, human rights lawyers, business representatives, and local officials), sampled according to function and timeframe (2015–2018). The topic of rhythm emerged as a major theme from analysing those interviews. Additionally, I relied on NGO reports for crosschecks and numbers not provided by official sources. Research notes from my prior research project on security sector reform in Colombia and Mexico (2009) provided background knowledge.

A brief theoretical section combines rhythmanalysis with an urban political economy of assemblages, which complement each other in revealing the relational and temporal dimensions of acceleration, repetitive and routine violence, and disruption. The second section contextualizes Buenaventura's historical urbanization in the interplay of the aquatic rhythm and the political economy of the port assemblage. The third section explores the frictions emerging between the port as a node of acceleration, driven by a global assemblage of agents and materialities, inhabitants' mobility, and the aquatic rhythm of the city. The fourth section explains the rhythm of disappearance, displacement, and expansion that developed. The fifth section posits the disruption of global flows as urban protestors' means of opening up political potential against the rhythm of acceleration. A short conclusion summarizes the insights a

rhythmanalytical perspective provides for understanding violent urbanisms.

## Rhythm and temporal dimensions of violence

Both urban and postcolonial research explore how temporalities are indeed dynamic, plural, and hierarchized across social stratification (Edensor, 2016; Mignolo, 2008; Vogelpohl, 2012). Similar research exists in the field of mobilities (Brand and Dávila, 2011; de Boeck, 2015; Lombard, 2013; Sheller and Urry, 2016). Recent work recognizes that, beyond Lefebvre, specific spatio-temporal relations are imbued with asymmetrical classed, racialized, and gendered power relations (Reid-Musson, 2017).

This contribution adds another layer, bringing the primarily methodological, but also conceptual aspects of rhythmanalysis (Lefebvre, 2004) and the urban political economy of assemblage (Brenner et al., 2011) to bear on research on urban violence. The focus on 'rhythm' integrates a temporal dimension into analysing urban spaces defined by repetitive violence (as opposed to a single outburst or temporally limited war).

I employ rhythmanalysis as a tool for mapping temporal-spatial conditions and relations (Chen, 2016). Temporal-spatial aspects of social relations can be bundled into rhythms; the lens of rhythmanalysis is to render vivid, for instance, the rhythmical effects radical transformations may have on social relations, grasping both sensory and structural elements (Chen, 2016). The researcher not simply observes social action, but 'recognizes [...] the temporalities in which these activities unfold' (Lefebvre, 2004, pp. 87–88).

To illustrate the rhythmanalytical method, I identify acceleration, violence, and disruption, which I explain below. Rhythmanalysis research has analysed the 'slow violence' of structural processes like gentrification rather than physical violence (Degen, 2010; Kern, 2016). In several ways, however, violence and urban rhythm co-constitute each other. This contribution expands Lefebvre's idea of rhythm, stressing the rhythmical qualities physical violence acquires, which accompanies acceleration, beyond transformations of rhythmical social relations through capitalist work rhythms (Lefebvre, 2004). Most generally, 'collective rhythm is determined by the forms of alliances that human groups give themselves' (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 94). Social contradictions can imply highly unequal experiences of rhythm, and the alliances of different groups that form society are driven by power asymmetries which critical scholarship has shown to be violent (see Reid-Musson, 2017). Second, the violence of racialization often assigns Afro-descendant Colombians both a naturalized feeling for rhythm and 'traditional', 'slower' rhythms; constructing 'them' as an 'other' to modernity (Laó-Montes and Dávila, 2012; Oslender, 2016).

In this contribution, I focus on a third, specific relation, namely rhythmical qualities of physical violence, its effect on everyday rhythms of spatial practices, and the structuring of urban space through violence. The latter refers to the destruction of public spaces and other material changes resulting from violent acts. When places are 'usually

stabilised by regular patterns of flow that possess particular rhythmic qualities whether steady, intermittent, volatile or surging' (Edensor, 2016, p. 3), the intensification of violent rhythms can either destabilize these or establish new patterns. Violence as the 'the extra-everyday rhythms the everyday and vice versa' (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 95). Violence itself can imply the disruption and transformation of social interaction. Agents of violence impose social codes and orders; violence results in new behavioural norms (Zeiderman, 2016). This productive character of violence has been lacking from rhythmanalysis.

Acceleration has been defined as a key notion of contemporary lives in general (Rosa, 2015). In this contribution, I use acceleration to exemplify rhythm, in the literal sense of accelerated global trade and capital flows. Deepening logistics' impact on urban space, the logics of accelerated capital accumulation have often radically changed urban rhythms. The need to accelerate trade imposes pressure on procedures, transport, and work relations. Acceleration is visible in the homogenization and rationalization of urban space, the serial architecture of planned housing, and the uniform, ordered urban in planning visions. Lefebvre's (2004, p. 6) insistence that 'no rhythm' exists 'without repetition' implies that visions of future cities, such as the modern port-city of Buenaventura, set a specific rhythm for urban space. The rhythms of such urban logistics hubs are only comprehensively assessed by recognizing the accelerated rhythms of global trade, that is, container turnover, reduced quay times for ships, and faster loading processes through automation.

Social movement literature increasingly stresses the 'disruptive agency' of unions, civil society organizations, and grassroots mobilizations (Bailey et al., 2018; Huke et al., 2015; Trommer, 2019) that can unsettle even the vast assemblages of energy trade (Brown and Spiegel, 2017). A central term of global logistics literature, disruption stands for the fundamental role logistics play for capitalism (Cowen, 2014), such as harbours. Workers and others with access to cargo networks possess considerable power, as industrial disputes of this kind affect the whole chain (Cole, 2018) and thus its central product, the service of delivery (Cowen, 2014). As this rhythmic effect is temporary, disruption's transformative power should not be overestimated. However, in logistics, disruption marks an agency-focused counterpoint to the accelerated flows of goods in the global economy, so acceleration and disruption need to be conceptualized in conjunction. The power of disruption indeed *depends* on the need for acceleration.

While recognizing the disruptive power of violence and its rhythm-producing qualities, I explore the temporal aspects of disruption as a potentially emancipatory tool for social movements in violent contexts. Social movements produce, modify, and contest spatio-temporal conditions. Like the grassroots strikers in Buenaventura in 2017, they can disrupt distribution, depending on their 'network of social relations that . . . targets the quality of space' (Brenner et al., 2009, p. 202).

Rhythms are illustrations of social relations, with actual agents. While accelerated rhythms are often thought of as a structural imposition, I stress the power of agents that shape

such acceleration (similar to disruptions), through the concept of 'political economy of assemblages' (Brenner et al., 2011). The latter, as 'methodological extension of urban political economy' (Brenner et al., 2011, p. 231), enables me to think accelerated rhythms, disruption, and violence in terms of entangled local and global actors, flows, and structures, which all shape the local context. Considering the Pacific's place-bound particularities, 'aquatic urban rhythm' adapts Oslender's (2016, p. 12) notion of an 'aquatic sense of place' as human/non-human assemblage in a 'landscape characterized by diverse aquatic features'. This understanding of assemblage offers me a sense of place and space beyond urbanites adapting to a new environment – a 'spatial sensitivity' rather than place-less identity-based theorizations of contentious politics (Oslender, 2016). Without reproducing the space place-discussion, it provides a place-specific context for the enactment of political agency through disruption (Oslender, 2016).

After I describe the historical context, thinking through the rhythmic qualities of acceleration, violence, and disruption in the following sections allows me to sketch out spatio-temporal relations of a specific place, recognizing the global assemblages implicated in these conditions.

## Making Space between Violent Tides, Aquatic Space, and the Port Assemblage

little by little, people claimed ground from the sea.  
(CMH, 2017)

In his rhythmanalysis, Lefebvre contrasts Mediterranean towns to oceanic towns 'governed by the cosmic rhythms of tides' (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 91). Tidal movement is essential to understand Buenaventura's history, and instrumental for a slow communal urbanization process driven by Afro-Colombian fishermen communities. They *made* Buenaventura city. They won land by continually adding alluvial material to build houses, bridges, and the ground they stood on. Neighbours used sea-shells, waste, parts of mangroves, and their firewood bark to fill up terrain at the lowest tide line until it formed a solid ground (Estupiñán, 2017). Collectively, they 'made land' (CMH, 2015, p. 44). The attraction which the small, but dynamic port generated for fishermen resulted in slowly expanding the central Cascajal Island in the 20th century, which grew not just in terms of population density, but in terms of its surface (CMH, 2015; Estupiñán, 2017; Machado, 2018). Wooden bridges and pathways link 'houses and dwellings back to their distribution in' urban aquatic space (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 97). Tidal rhythms, due to shallow waters, defined river travel even far upstream.

Contemporary frictions are not new. Local dominant fractions' interest in Buenaventura as a gate to the Pacific date back to the 19th century. Violent social relations are integral to Buenaventura's 'history of space' (Lefebvre in Brenner et al., 2009, p. 229). Urban space evolved in dialectical interaction, between rural-urban communities in dispersed

settlements along river shorelines and the Pacific, and the extractive and trade-oriented economic activity of dominant fractions who often lived elsewhere (CMH, 2015).

From 1961 onwards, state-owned port operator Colpuertos largely shaped the city's rhythms. Strongly unionized, Colpuertos bound whole segments of Buenaventura's population to the expanding port as workers, contributing to upward social mobility and the emergence of an Afro-Colombian elite in Buenaventura, and in turn to social distancing towards non-unionized, non-port inhabitants in Buenaventura (CMH, 2015). Urban settlement patterns continued to resemble rural livelihoods, as families defined themselves according to their ancestors' riverside settlements and spatially reproduced hydrographic formations, but also because a considerable percentage of Buenaventura's inhabitants were forcibly displaced from surrounding departments (CMH, 2015). The idea of the aquatic space, opposed and prior to the violence, defines the rhythms of Afro-Colombian social movements on the Pacific coast in many self-definitions (Oslender, 2016; PCN and FUNDEMUJER, 2011), essential to understanding violent urban space on the coast.

A real change of pace impacted Buenaventura when the Colombian state privatized Colpuertos during the 1990s 'economic opening'. Socially, the union partly broke away as an organizing principle when it accepted to enter the new Sociedad Portuaria de Buenaventura as a shareholder (Delgado Moreno and Martínez Sander, 2012). Changes in labour relations were radical. The majority of workers were laid off, and some re-employed on precarious contracts (Fox-Hodess, 2019). While the Work Ministry later imposed sanctions on 30 port operators that had ignored labour laws for years, automation made port workers partly superfluous, decoupling the port from urban space, local political authority, and the hinterland (Findeter, 2015, p. 90). Spatially, 'the privatization produced dual territorial dynamics which abruptly separated Afro-Colombians and indigenous [...] from the port's profitability' (CMH, 2015, p. 54). New port gates prohibit access to city areas. Major national planning instruments such as Agenda Pacífico XXI now described the Pacific region as a raw materials dispense which infrastructure investments would 'develop' into a major logistics hub for accessing Pacific markets (CMH, 2015). Making delivery, distribution, and transport the central product, the logistics turn aimed at overcoming the region's boom-and-bust-cycles of extractive economies.

Disturbing rhythms of violence during the 1990s seemed to hamper such projects. When peace negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas failed at the end of that decade, this was partly due to surges in (paramilitary) violence in many regions. Critical scholarship interprets this violence as a reaction to the negotiations which paramilitaries saw as detrimental to their interests, fearing potential concessions to guerrillas (CMH, 2015). In consequence, paramilitary groups turned the Pacific region, relatively untouched by armed conflict, into a hotspot of forced displacement and violently drove people from community land. Many 'black communities' had only recently

acquired collective land titles through article 55 of the progressive 1991 constitution and subsequent Law 70 (PCN and FUNDEMUJER, 2011).

While new movements emerged based on territorial protection, Buenaventura then experienced man-made ebbs and flows of violence in 2003, 2006–2007, and 2011 (Fedesarrollo-Cerac, 2013). In a spike of homicidal violence in 2013 and 2014, attributed to disputes between so-called criminal gangs, 13,000 Afro-Colombians became victims of intra-urban displacement. This repeated many experiences of forced displacement from rural areas of Chocó or Valle del Cauca (HRW, 2014; Humanas, 2016). Government assistance to displaced persons was scarce, allowing waves of mass displacement to happen (HRW, 2014) – one expression of violent rhythms. This awarded criminal gangs relative power in shaping Buenaventura's everyday rhythms. To grasp the relation rhythms of violence have with the city, I turn to the transformative, accelerative power of the port assemblage.

### Assemblages of conflicting rhythms: acceleration, the port and its other

References to (past) aquatic rhythms (Oslender, 2016) provide emblematic contrast to the rhythms of the port assemblage (that transcend the local scale) and of violence. By combining rhythmanalysis and the political economy of assemblage (Brenner et al., 2011) in this section, I turn to the assembled actors, policies, and imaginaries that drive acceleration, through Buenaventura's port. Buenaventura port handles 80 percent of exported coffee and 60 per cent of all Colombian imports (Cámara de Comercio Buenaventura, 2015). Five ports with multiple terminals fragment the rhythms of urban movement. The Buenaventura Port Society holds terminals on central Cascajal Island, as does TCBUEN group, dominated by Catalan Puertos de Barcelona Grup Maritim, which Dutch logistics giant Maersk acquired in 2015 (ASCRI, 2015).

The notion of assemblage helps me theorize actors, infrastructure plans, spatial policies, and imaginaries in relation to each other (Brenner et al., 2011; see Watts, 2012). The various ports in Buenaventura form a complex assemblage of agents, processes, materialities, and power relations connecting various scales. Ports are characterized by the 'mobilities that course through' them (Edensor, 2016, p. 5), illustrated by ships coming and going, containers being off-loaded, trucks dropping them off or taking them on. There is a regulatory dimension organising this rhythm (Edensor, 2016), through customs searches, security measures separating port terminals from a city that lies between the port and the connecting motorway, and trade laws that define the flows of goods through the port.

The quest for competitiveness defines the ports' dominant temporalities. The symbol of the accelerated rhythms of global circulation is the shipping container, shipping making up 90 per cent of global trade; intermodal infrastructures increasingly facilitate its accelerated transport across rail, road, and sea (Cowen, 2014). Logistics multinationals like Maersk, Evergreen, or Elequip, together with Colombian



exporters and transport companies, coordinate the accelerated flows through the port. Yearly, 20 million tons of goods arrive at Buenaventura, and its capacity is 1.5 million TEUs (TEUs measure container units). Port turnover has grown exponentially with investments in new terminals to export oil and liquid gas. In 2014 alone, container turnover in Buenaventura port grew by 13.2 per cent (Cámara de Comercio Buenaventura, 2015).

A host of actors produces this fractured space linked to the global economy's circuits. While inhabitants live close by, others are involved in its trade rhythms, loading and unloading containers from ships, coordinating their transport or investing in goods flows and construction. Since 2017, the Philippine and Singaporean conglomerates PSA and ICTSI operate the giant terminal Aguadulce in cooperation with the Colombian Pacific Businesses Group which unites 200 local shareholders (Findeter, 2015). Two more port projects and the free trade zone *Celipa* are under construction (*El Tiempo*, 2016). Financial services, namely, by Dutch, US or UK-based funds, petrol stations, or hotels catering to management and construction firms, form the assemblage's ramifications. The Buenaventura Chamber of Commerce represents local businesses. Agencies such as Invest Pacific, which promotes investment and Colombian business on the coast, and the public-private Findeter, which finances and plans infrastructure, shape the port-city. Colombian producers' federations exert regular influence over regulatory issues in the port (Delgado Moreno and Martínez Sander, 2012). They expect the Pacific Alliance of trade, which declared Buenaventura its capital in 2013, to bring expanded trade with Peru, Chile, and Mexico (*El País*, 2014).

Particular frictions emerge between accelerated flows and their imposition of difference as a defining trait of socio-spatial ordering (Cowen, 2014). Temporally, the separation of port and workforce from the city meant that port rhythms shaped the city less by imposing strict working rhythms on the city's inhabitants, and instead through acoustic and spatial impositions: container ships drone past their houses, up to 3,000 trucks daily (Cifuentes, 2017) rumble by on the one route to the port, causing frequent traffic jams, new roads cutting through community space or access restrictions change their movement patterns.

Port growth unsettles and reshapes social arrangements by simultaneous acceleration and exclusion. Urban rhythms shift with local economies' insertion in the global economy, and locals see the port assemblage expanding rapidly beyond their control, encroaching on everyday livelihood practices of fishing, river and sea-related activities and housing onshore (Bedoya, 2017): 'The port is a sacrifice of the Buenaventurans to the rest of Colombia' (Vidal, 2017). The repetitive offloading of heavy containers, and heavy vehicles transiting through the immediate proximity cause cracks and fractures in houses and accelerates the rhythm in which owners need to repair these (Estupiñán, 2017). Telluric movements caused by artificial, heavy machinery vibrations have become a 'cyclical force that, by being systematic and repetitive, can modify the physical conditions of the ground' (technical report cited in Estupiñán, 2017, p. 19). For

instance, TCBUEN terminal replaced the natural swimming pools at La Loma, where neighbours would gather on Sundays for refreshments (Estupiñán, 2017).

The port assemblage imposes serial rhythms and rationalized spaces on the city through planned urban restructuring: The Masterplan 'Buenaventura 2050' aims to restructure the urban transport grid and housing. Corresponding laws add institutional layers: In 2013, the Colombian congress declared Buenaventura a special industrial, port, biodiverse, ecotourist district through Law 1617, and a large area north of the city an integral development zone with special jurisdiction to accelerate its development into an industrial complex. The National Planning Program *Nuevas Ciudades* aims for the same (DNP, 2016; Esteyco and Findeter, 2015).

I recognize the Masterplan institutionalizes specific spatio-temporal relations, shaped by the port assemblage. It aims to further separate the port from the urban poor while integrating urban society very selectively. 568 residential units were inaugurated in 2015 for internally displaced persons in Ciudadela San Antonio (Mundubat and JyP, 2015). Producing a repetitive, uniform space, these 45 square metre houses in a rural area south of Buenaventura are 40 minutes from the sea (Taula Catalana, 2016/2016); planning agencies (Esteyco and Findeter, 2015) later recognized that this isolated populations, uprooting their daily rhythms defined by living close to the sea. Planners ignored the tropical, humid bioclimatic conditions producing standard, prefabricated houses that lacked ventilation (Mundubat and JyP, 2015). The national government envisioned 4,052 serially planned housing units but developed less clear plans for health centres or schools (Mundubat and JyP, 2015). Urban redevelopment exerts urgency on informal settlements on territory 'claimed from the sea'. Pressure on aquatic rhythm intensifies, as 'you can't fish here anymore, because the tide is contaminated' (CMH, 2017), and housing prices rise. Official numbers confirm the accelerated growth of housing prices in Buenaventura and expect future growth rhythms (IGAC, 2016).

Acceleration and exclusion became ordering principles for urban space. According to protestors, the secure spaces created around different terminals replicate this exclusion through acceleration. Greater parts of Buenaventura's population, with a now astonishing 90.3 per cent partly relying on informal income (DNP, 2018), increasingly represented the 'supposedly wasteful rhythms of the long term unemployed' (Edensor, 2016, p. 11). Their rhythm became an 'other' to the port they had shaped as dockworkers or fishermen. The exclusion of certain groups from the benefits of accelerated trade is nothing new. This asymmetrical relation to some extent conjures up imaginaries from Colombian history when Afro-Colombians were either unfree or hardly allowed to own private property (Safford and Palacios, 2003).

The gradual production of city dwellers as an 'other' to the port has rhythm-analytical dimensions: I interpret the confrontation of logistical acceleration and aquatic rhythm, based on the tide, as conflicting rhythms, as arrhythmia (Lefebvre, 2004), and now turn to the resulting, productive role of violent rhythms.

## A violent rhythm of disappearances, displacement and expansion

The acceleration of capital flows into Buenaventura and the intensification of violence are intertwined. This section deals with the conflicting and contrasting rhythms of the port assemblage and city dwellers, and the violent frictions that emerge from trade acceleration, which a focus on rhythm can foreground. I ask how people navigate through space-time while patterns of order and violence both imposed rhythms of violence on everyday life and shaped interactions.

The port expansion has not led to more security or to more predictable, serial rhythms for city dwellers. Local organizations claim the opposite (Castillo, 2018; Celeita, 2018; Estupiñán, 2017). The city's greater attractiveness for global investment simultaneously signaled an intensification of violence, a rhythm defined by torture houses and curfews imposed by re-emerging paramilitary or, so-called 'criminal' groups.

I argue that accelerated investment interests and state planning themselves led to or at least contributed to a rhythm of disappearances – displacement – port expansion. Local activists claim that an intensification of violent rhythms took place every time a new harbour project was planned (Machado, 2018). Political activists and inhabitants state that patterns of homicidal violence changed from selective murder and massacres in the early 2000s to torture and forced disappearances in the 2010s; frequently, dismembered bodies are found in the mangroves.

There was an intensification, because they started with normal murder.... I think they never thought that after this situation people would stay in the territory, they don't comprehend how after such atrocity, such damage [...], people still live here. (CMH, 2015, p. 336)

A new wave of violence came in 2017, but forced disappearance made it less visible (*El Espectador*, 2017a).

The nature of the actual relation between perpetrators, the state, and inhabitants is disputed. The Defence Ministry defines the perpetrators in Buenaventura as 'criminal gangs' that in some instances meet criteria for organized armed groups (Refworld UNHCR, 2017). International organizations describe dynamic alliances and confrontations, particularly during 2013 and 2014 (Refworld UNHCR, 2018). Nongovernmental organizations define them as 'narcoparamilitary structures' which reproduce traits of former paramilitary groups and have established links to some officials (INDEPAZ, 2017). For instance, six Colombian marines were detained for links to the group Los Rastrojos in November 2017 (UNHCR, 2017).

The intensification of violence has transformed 'rhythmically apprehended routines' (Edensor, 2016, p. 8) in the city, making urban navigation a precarious endeavour, particularly for lower social strata. According to available data (CMH, 2015; *El Espectador*, 2017a), they visit public spaces

less, impose strict schedules on family members, and avoid certain areas, lengthening what might have been a short distance to cross, or shortening appearances in public (Machado, 2018). Spatio-temporal practices such as regular movement, is fractured and limited, having changed in differentiated ways for different social segments (see Graham and Marvin, 2001; Monroe, 2016).

Inhabitants are caught between what Ritterbusch (2016) calls 'mobilities at gunpoint', as violence displaced thousands of inhabitants towards other neighbourhoods at different moments in time (Fedesarrollo-Cerac, 2013) and containment, as 'criminal gangs' frequently prohibited inhabitants from crossing into other neighbourhoods or imposed curfews (FIP, 2014). Other inhabitants choose not to move through the city anymore for fear of being disappeared or tortured (Epalsa, 2015). This absence of movement, or its forced version, defined daily rhythms.

Violence disrupts social relations. Not just an individual experience, such violence within the very own neighbourhood upsets the experience of community, a notion regularly mobilized by Pacific social movements referring to the existing urban social net of Buenaventura (PCN and FUNDEMUJER, 2011). If 'collective rhythm is determined by the forms of alliances that human groups give themselves' (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 94), violence now determines this collective rhythm, inflicted by 'criminal gangs' who recruit soldiers from among the inhabitants themselves (Rentería, 2017).

The former habitability of space, in which river and sea (an aquatic rhythm) were instrumental in defining work and livelihood practices and family ties, related to an 'aquatic sense of place' (Oslender, 2016; CMH, 2015), transformed through violence, the absence of the disappeared and the impacts of global port activity. Practices such as having neighbours with a quasi-family status watch the children while doing household chores disappeared (CMH, 2015). In the partly matrifocal society of Buenaventura (CMH, 2015), forced disappearances of women who act as the base for household and community increased. Armed actors have both co-opted and fractured river shore social spaces, where people would gather to have a chat, take a walk, or have dinner together (see Oslender, 2016). Now, *acuafosas* (water graves) mark the sea (CMH, 2015; Machado, 2018). Fishermen testify that in the estuary of La Loma, the former bathing outlet, they regularly find human remains (Estupiñán, 2017). Inhabitants started to avoid such places which used to form part of their daily rhythms.

Inhabitants themselves name the rhythms of violence both in media interviews and testimonies for Human Rights reports. They argue that disappearances, dismemberments, or torture would surge when and where a new port project was underway (Castillo, 2018), as part of the struggles for appropriation (Lefebvre, 2004). Violence would pave the way for these projects by introducing fear and causing people to flee, and thus facilitate port acceleration (Bedoya, 2017; Celeita, 2018; Mundubat and JyP, 2015). For instance, in La Immaculada neighbourhood, 'there was no violence, nothing like that, but when we heard they would build this new

terminal, strange people started appearing and this became hell' (testimony in Estupiñán, 2017, p. 8).

Rhythms play a major role in navigating violent urban space, appreciable, for instance, in activists' strategies to protect themselves from violence by not disclosing their timeframes (as the activist who arrives hours later to conceal his patterns of movement (Machado, 2018)). This goes far beyond port infrastructure destroying places of encounter.

Buenaventura's rhythms of violence are hardly understood without taking into account capitalist expansion and acceleration which combine legal and illegal trade (see Nordstrom, 2007). 'Criminal gangs' or narcoparamilitary structures form an integral part of the port assemblage, as they are involved in transporting illegal goods. 'The blurring of the lines between the state and the non-state' (Monroe, 2016) is particularly salient in the co-presence of state forces (military, navy), private port security, and illegal armed actors. Access to the port is central for the transit economy and a step in the value chain for cocaine brokers. What scholars term graduated sovereignty (Ong, 2000), or changing unofficial networks (Grajales, 2016) had tangible results in Buenaventura. The state's infrequent intervention allowed criminal gangs to order material and social space, yet violence never truly affected projects of economic expansion.

Violence lets us understand the Buenaventura Masterplan as a spatio-temporal project, coercive towards deviant populations. Communities on Cascajal Island claim coercion and urgency to be characteristics of state-led relocation (CMH, 2015). Pressures talk of hurrying up to make way for future prosperity. 'They say that if we don't leave now we will be left with nothing, because they will get us out here anyhow [...] other more honest officials told us they need this to construct buildings with balcony, hotels, houses for the rich' (San José inhabitant, cited in *El Espectador*, 2013). Masterplan temporalities thus continually clashed with inhabitants' hopes not to move.

In the above paragraphs, I illustrated how rhythms of violence intertwine with capitalist acceleration. Not only did violence acquire rhythmical qualities, but agents located in the port assemblage produced violent rhythms, transforming urban spatio-temporal practices.

### A disruptive moment: Blocking the Port, Halting Violent Rhythms

In mid-May 2017, 89 grassroots organizations, among them the well-known Afro-Colombian organization Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN), the National Afro-Colombian Council on Peace (Conpaz), and the Association of Terrains Won from the Sea (Asociación Terrenos Ganados Al Mar) declared a peaceful strike. Their 'civic strike', a mass protest of diverse social groups with overlapping political aims, as Kane and Celeyta (2019) defined it, was an organized mobilization rather than spontaneous collective upheaval.

This section explores the strike as the deliberate disruption of global flows of goods, but also of rhythms of violence. The organizations explicitly demanded social, health, and educational policy solutions (instead of selective military

operations shown to fail) to the structural conditions of violence, and directed part of their actions towards the port assemblage, blocking access to port gates completely for 22 days (Vidal, 2017). They 'paralyzed' the rhythm of the port and its daily commercial movements, blocking principal roads and closing down trade and public transport in town (*El Espectador*, 2017a; *El País*, 2017a). Barricades inhibited the movement of vehicles. Heavy truck after truck was stuck for weeks on the outskirts of Buenaventura, the drivers immobilized for fear of losing their vehicles (*El Espectador*, 2017b). Protestors' means were limited given the context, but they temporarily modified city space. They declared 11 strike meeting points where they met every day to coordinate community care (Kane and Celeyta, 2019), and established working groups which oversaw the free transit of food, the administration of Buenaventura's water services schedule and intra-urban transport (Comité del Paro Cívico, 2017; Riascos, 2017).

The mobilization is a prime example of the political nature of rhythm. I argue that this disruption not only affected the global flows of the port, defying their imposing linear space-time. Instead, the political mobilization disrupted the rhythms of violence. It gave activists a platform to claim that dispossession close to port terminals was systematic and that disappearances-displacement-port expansion formed an integral rhythm (CMH, 2017). A city shaped by forced mobility and even its outright inhibition turned the disruption of goods mobility into its primary resource of mobilization, to flesh out the spatio-temporal effects of violence.

Beyond providing 'alternative modes of spending time' (Edensor, 2016, p. 16), these grassroots organizations converted disruption into a means of political articulation. They achieved what global economic agents perceived as the principal threat (Cowen, 2014), the disruption of the supply chain, which potentially 'cascades' into distant sites. Disruption was effective due to the Buenaventura city road network, often described as a bottleneck. The lack of multiple lanes make it vulnerable to such mobilizations (*El País*, 2014). Protests disrupted the logics of the port assemblage, based on acceleration, reduced turnover time, and just-in-time-networks of production and distribution. The reliance on speed in transport denotes a dominant rhythm. Cowen (2014) describes how the quest for 'seamlessness' dominates international port spaces; the circulation of goods is supposed to function 'as frictionless as possible'. Indeed, during the first five days of the strike, Colombian businesses alone claimed losses of 3.8 million pesos in export products such as coffee; the port economy reportedly lost 25 million pesos (Patrón, 2017). The local chamber of commerce representative, Micolta (2017), urged the government to reach a negotiation quickly, but the protestors held up the strike for 22 days until both sides signed an agreement. Strikers themselves demanded 'immediate' but lasting measures to relieve the city's social emergency. 'Government can take immediate decisions' (Vidal, 2017). While both statements transport urgency, the contradictions between a logic of accelerated accumulation and the city as a social space are apparent.



Businesses clearly see blockages such as closing port access as threats; labour mobilization generates short-term costs which some corporations have likened to the effects of terror attacks (Cowen, 2014). This perception of disruption as a threat partly explains why access to the port terminals in Buenaventura is so highly selective, a selectivity that dramatically changed the rhythms of the aquatic space. We can see it replicated in Colombian media focusing their reports on the strike on lootings and chaos supposedly caused by protestors. These reports securitized the strike's peaceful spatial strategies of rhythmic intervention as a threat. Anti-riot police forces and the military once again made their appearance in the city (*El País*, 2017a, 2017b), and paradoxically, an official curfew after 6 pm 'inhibited people from mobilizing, while riot police then accompanied lorries to the ports to leave their cargo' (Ruiz, 2017) in 'caravans of 15 trucks' (Cifuentes, 2017). Protestors themselves claimed at least 10 people suffered bullet wounds by police during anti-strike operations (Ruiz, 2017), denied any participation in lootings, and condemned the quick repressive state response (Riascos, 2017) and threats by reorganized paramilitary groups (Bedoya, 2017; Comité del Paro Cívico, 2017; *El Espectador*, 2017a).

In a context where public space could no longer 'spontaneously become 'a place for walks and encounters ... deals and negotiations' (Lefebvre, 2004, p. 96) because of the imminent threat of violence, the civic strike mobilization in 2017 implied a 'use of time' through which 'the citizen resists the state'. Protestors mobilized disruption, a temporal instrument, as a means of political articulation within the logic of accelerated accumulation. Torture and disappearance do not disrupt container shipments as much as a blockage of this kind. A strike spokesperson explained this: 'if they keep killing, but it doesn't affect port activities, nobody cares, so we had to block the port to be heard' (Vidal, 2017).

The strikers succeeded in disrupting, and temporarily halting rhythms of violence, and opened up a horizon of potential, not premised anymore on violence and precariousness, but on an emancipatory understanding of urban politics. Its effects, organizers hoped (Vidal, 2017), would be public services such as water provision from the nine river basins and a functioning hospital based on the funds Buenaventura contributes to the state via the port. An NGO activist called it 'a victory because the people saw that they could hold the city for that long and that the streets were not just for capital ... before only big trucks passed by, these became public spaces. And so even if in the end those victories are not complied with, it's a victory' (Celeita, 2018).

Afro-Colombian and indigenous civil society initiatives organized this biggest strike in the port's history, not dockworkers, but dockworker mobilizations and civic strikes did not contradict each other. These are not separate groups, but one heterogeneous urban society. 'We all got together, women's and youth organizations, traders, transporters, unions' (Riascos, 2017). The strike gave dockworkers the potential to call on the effects of their own precarious conditions (Fox-Hodess, 2019), and those dockworkers that are

dwellers also suffered the violent urban rhythm. The strike is a deliberate intervention into rhythmic regularity. For the movements, instead of instability and anomie (Edensor, 2016), it uprooted rhythms imposed on them. The potential of disrupting the rhythms of accumulation (Edensor, 2016) give those that control access to crucial nodes such as Buenaventura's terminals considerable power, not only the dockworkers.

Historically, and during the strike, social movements' mobilization of disruption referenced tidal rhythm. Activists speak of the mangroves, estuaries, the river delta, and the sea as integral to the city (Bedoya, 2017), illustrating their protest narratives are spatially and materially embedded in aquatic rhythms (CMH, 2017; *El Espectador*, 2017b; Oslender, 2016). It is telling that fishermen supported the strike (Bedoya, 2017). The reference to aquatic rhythm allowed for solidarity from other port-cities. The economic networks wrought by global flows brought disparate groups into relation (Celeita, 2018). Civil society organizations in other places accompanied the strike. These references imply that beyond temporalities (Tilly and Tarrow, 2007) or place (Escobar, 2008) in their own right, it is the temporalities of place that contribute to social movements' contentious politics. They represent a 'quest for a counter-space' (Oslender, 2016, p. 129).

The strike did have long-term rhythmical effects, illustrating how, despite violent rhythms, Lefebvre (2004) reminds us that emancipatory horizons are integral to everyday life in capitalism, and his understanding of moments of surprise, the appearance of difference in regularity, and self-awareness implies that these events cannot be commodified (see Edensor, 2016). The government and strike committee reached an agreement after 22 days, agreeing on future participatory spatial transformation with funds of 408 million euro destined for sanitation, a hospital and health centres, additional teachers, and electricity supply (Alcaldía Buenaventura and Comité Paro Cívico, 2017). Rhythms of violence and accelerated port logistics persist, disruption was temporary, and unidentified actors have exercised violence against strike organizers (Celeita, 2018; Riascos, 2017). However, Buenaventurans elected a mayor from among the strike organizers for the term starting in January 2020, who repeatedly stressed the necessity to change the 'historical, structural problems of abandonment and inequality' as his motivation for protest (Vidal, 2017).

This section explored the rhythm analytical qualities of disruption, such as moments of awareness and surprise (Lefebvre, 2004), understood as opening up the potential for transforming the violent everyday. This simultaneously grasps how disruption serves as a temporal tool for social movements, making a rhythm analytical contribution to social movement studies.

## Conclusion

This contribution argued that the lenses of rhythm analysis and the political economy of assemblage complement each other to reveal the productive spatio-temporal effects of

physical violence on urban rhythms, in the case of the port city of Buenaventura.

Three sections explored the rhythmical qualities of logistical acceleration, of violence, and disruption. First, during the last decades, the ever-accelerating logic of accumulation transformed Buenaventura's urban rhythm. The acceleration of global flows and the subsequent restructuring of urban space according to the envisioned modern port-city, produces particular frictions, arrhythmia, in Lefebvre's (2004) terms, with historic rhythms defined by the tide.

Second, the contribution expanded Lefebvrian ideas of arrhythmia by carving out how physical violence, in conjunction with acceleration, acquired rhythmical qualities and impacted everyday urban rhythm. The repetitive flows that characterize the movement of shipping containers, goods, and trucks through Buenaventura and repetitive waves of homicides and forced displacement had, over years, formed an integral rhythm which included disappearances-displacement-port expansion. The political economy of assemblage allows me to depict the local and global actors, flows, and structures as agents that shape such spatio-temporal relations.

Third, I have argued that in the context of violently imposed urban rhythms and the logics of accelerated accumulation, social movements in Buenaventura's civic strike in 2017 used disruption to underscore their temporal impact, and enhance their political articulation, in fact opening up a horizon of positive incremental change. An entire city shaped by forced mobility and containment, turned the disruption of goods flows into its prime means of mobilization to flesh out the spatio-temporal effects of violence.

The article contributes a rhythmanalytical perspective on disruption and brings spatio-temporal urban analysis into social movement studies in global supply chains. The power of disruption to ripple through the whole supply chain, rhythms of distribution and production at distant localities, draws attention not only to logistics unions but to cities as sites of logistics struggles.

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