

## IRIS Summer Fieldwork Award- Research Report

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The 2023 IRIS fieldwork award enabled me to spend most of the summer in Colombia doing research in archives in Bogotá, Montería and Cartagena, as well as two research trips to Ayapel. Although I planned to spend more time doing fieldwork in the Ayapel Ciénaga, the security situation has been deteriorating over the course of the last years due to a conflict between drug cartels for the control of illegal mining in the region. I had to limit the time I spent in the region, concentrating on interviewing 15 local farmers and fishermen about their relationship with the swamp, rice cultivation and fishing. Some of the preliminary results of this fieldwork research were:

- **Conceptions about contamination and "the toxic" include, but are not limited to new biological agents.** Most of the interviewees mentioned that they restricted their circulation through the bodies of water and the consumption of certain species of fish at the height of the conflict. The reason given was that they felt that the marsh waters were "cursed" and that the fish species eliminated from the diet could consume the human remains that reached the river.

- **Rice bonanza, but also tourism and fishing.** The rice bonanza of the 1970s is related in the memory of the inhabitants to other "bonanzas": that of tourism, coming mainly from Medellín, Colombia's commercial capital and second most important city; and that of fish, associated with the opening of a highway in the 1950s - a memory that coincides with early studies by INDERENA, the Institute for the Development of Natural Resources.

- **Local groups promoting and creating their own history.** There is a community group dedicated to the promotion and safeguarding of local history, the "Ayapel History Center". I am currently working to contact the group.

On the other hand, my archival research focused on the General Archive of the Nation, the National Library of Colombia, the National Agricultural Library, the Historical Archive of Cartagena and

the Regional Documentation Center-Orlando Fals Borda in Montería. Based on previous research trips, during this trip I had the opportunity to access documents recently released by the national government on the history of land allocations between the 1960s and 1980s and the history of HIMAT, the Colombian institute in charge of the "adecuación de tierras", which was the term used by the national government to talk about the different technical interventions that were made on the agrarian landscape. In the archives I found the following preliminary results:

- **Agrarian Reform Budget:** More than 50% of the budget designated to the Agrarian Reform Institute corresponded to technical interventions such as irrigation districts and flood control.

- **Agricultural Research Budget:** The bulk of the national research budget between 1965-1973 was allocated to the Colombian Agricultural Institute, in charge of agricultural research.

- **Increased awareness of environmental issues, specially in relation to water (1965-1984).** In the regional press (produced mainly in Cartagena, Barranquilla and Montería, but with sections about Ayapel region and other rural regions of the Caribbean Coast) there was a growing concern about natural resources, especially water. One of the preliminary hypotheses about this is that the technologies for agricultural modernization increased productivity via "toxic technologies" such as pesticides and species that brought with them new types of pests, which produced a toxic transformation of the environment. On the other hand, water claims could be linked to the developmentalist project of Colombia's government between the sixties and seventies, where the state invested heavily in the production of social infrastructures.

These findings are of key importance for the development of my doctoral thesis, where I am investigating the environmental and technological relations at the heart of the agricultural modernization project in Colombia during the second half of the 20th century. After this summer I already have an empirical basis to argue that we have not paid attention to one of the fundamental components of agrarian reformism, which is the technological intervention of the agricultural landscape. At the same time, I find new elements to deepen the link between pollution and violence, which occupies the last part of my doctoral thesis project (1984-2000).