

THE MULTICULTURAL POLITICS OF RACE AND IDENTITY:
AFRO-ECUADORIAN ACTIVISTS IN QUITO

By

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To my mom, Debbie Jo

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CCA	Centro Cultural Afroecuatoriano
CEA	Centro de Estudios Afroecuatorianos
CODAE	Corporación Desarrollo Afroecuatoriano
CONAMUNE	Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Negras
CPM	Corporación Promoción Mujer
Daniel Comboni	Daniel Comboni Church of the Heart of Jesus
FOGNEP	Federación de Organizaciones y Grupos Negros de Pichincha
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
INPA	Instituto Nacional de Pastoral Afroecuatoriana Monseñor Enrique Bartolucci
MAEC	Movimiento Afro-Ecuatoriano Consciencia
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOMUNE	Movimiento de Mujeres Negras de Quito
OAS	Organization of American States
OED	Servicio Austriaco de Cooperacion para el Dessarrollo
Pastoral Afro	Departamento de Pastoral Afro de la Conferencia Episcopal Ecuatoriano
PROPEDINE	Development Project for Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian Peoples
SENDAPLES	Secretaria Nacional de Planificación del Estado
SPCC	Secretaría de Pueblos, Movimientos Sociales y Participación Ciudadana
UN	United Nations
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
WCAR	World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance

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This thesis explores the relationship between race, politics and black identity in Quito, Ecuador. Since 1998, the Ecuadorian state has recognized Afro-descendants as a distinct ethnic group. This change departed earlier eras, when legislation and discourses on Ecuadorian nationalism were based on racial homogeneity. This research analyzes how Afro-Ecuadorian activists negotiate ethnic and race-cognizant identities in the context of recent shifts in Ecuador's racial politics. The materials used include ethnographic observations from two months of participation with black social movement organizations in Quito. The analysis also draws on interview data with 35 key informants from Quito's black activist community. These individuals represent the state, grassroots and NGO Afro-Ecuadorian organizations, and a local order of the Catholic Church.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: LOCATING BLACKNESS IN ECUADOR

In 2006, I was ready to travel the world. I was a senior year undergraduate student and, after spending my life in school, I kept my eye on the prize: graduating and getting out of my college town. Graduation came and went and I worked several jobs for a year to raise the money to pay for a one-way ticket to Quito, Ecuador. I made arrangements to complete an exchange program to live with a host family and take Spanish courses at a local school. I wanted to improve my Spanish skills somewhere in Latin America and Quito was the cheapest option I found. The little I knew of the country came from such university courses as Incas and their Ancestors, so I naively assumed that I would be living in a cold, mountainous environment surrounded by a stereotypical indigenous citizenry. Quito was cold and mountainous, but I discovered that it was far more ethnically diverse than my textbooks and light reading led me to assume.

A few days into my stay I was walking through town when I passed a black man unloading kegs of beer from his delivery truck to a nearby bar. I had to look again. This man was obviously an employee of the beer distributor because he was wearing a uniform but this did not make sense--black people in Ecuador? The first night I went out with my classmates at the language school in Quito my middle-class *mestizo* host family, after explaining to me the particulars on how to jiggle the key to open the door when I returned, offered me some blunt advice. The father gave me his safety talk consisting of two rules: always take a cab and stay away from *negros*. My jaw must have dropped because my host mother laughed and assured me that "*negro*" is not the same as "nigger" in English, as if that were the issue.

That was certainly not the last time I received good-intentioned advice to avoid blacks, particularly in the tourist district. I was amazed by how locals of all ages openly used racial stereotypes. My naiveté was only partially responsible for my surprise. Regardless, I wanted to know more about the history of Afro-descendants in Ecuador and the function of race in Ecuadorian society. This research is the answer to my questions.

Blackness and Andeanism. Blackness has maintained an ambivalent position in dominant constructions of Ecuadorian national identity. Until recently, blackness (as a social category and as a mode of ethno-racial identification) was largely denied in official discourses on Ecuadorian nationalism and the significance of race was diminished when Ecuadorians explained social inequalities. Of course blacks live in Ecuador, but blackness was not associated with the Andean country. In other words, blackness was incongruent to *lo andino*, that which is Andean. *Lo andino* is historically constructed by Ecuadorians, foreign anthropologists, and tourists. Just as my notion of Ecuador conjured images of indigenous peoples in traditional clothing doing “indigenous things,” this is a classic representation of Andeanism, which does not reflect life as it truly is in Ecuador. Simply put, blacks do not fit into the Andean stereotype constructed from various sources and accepted by many. This inaccurate version of who or what is Ecuadorian or Andean has real world implications, not least of which is the exclusion of being black in Ecuador. This is especially true in the “modern” highland capital of Quito.

Long held as the epicenter of progress and the embodiment of the racial and sexual history of the nation, Quito was and remains a predominately *mestizo* metropolis.

Residents display phenotypes and cultural assumptions representative of the blending of indigenous and Spanish-European people. This configuration overlooks the experiences of citizens who are considered racially “black” or *negro* in the city.

Over the past several decades, blacks in Quito have worked against the assumptions that Quito, like the nation in general, is a *mestizo* place. Groups of black activists and cultural brokers have joined forces to contest hegemonic principles that assume that racism does not exist at the same time that Afro-Ecuadorian histories are absent from formal spaces and while anti-black racial stereotypes are rampant in the city. For example, Afro-Ecuadorian activists are just now beginning to formally denounce white supremacist ideologies in their society that favor *mestizo* over indigenous and black phenotypes and cultural forms. In fact, some Afro-Ecuadorians still encourage their children to marry a partner with lighter features so as to “*mejor la raza*” (better the race). The following thesis puts these individuals--black activists in Quito--at the center of the investigation. I uncover how activists understand blackness and work within and around ideologies that discount the importance of race in Ecuadorian society.

Who is black in Ecuador? This question runs throughout this study. Blackness is situational and layered and therefore impossible to isolate in social theory. This is all the more difficult in a society with markedly ambiguous definitions of blackness. The category itself lends itself to common sense logic, yet it is necessary to interpret how blackness becomes common sense and under what circumstances this idea is complicated by members of society. Moreover class, place, sex, and culture affect who

is black. In sum, determining who or what is black is not as simple as quantifying who checks “*negro*” on a census form.

Nonetheless, for the purpose of presenting demographic data to provide a social landscape of the city, I will refer to this data while acknowledging the flaws.

According to the last Ecuadorian national census held in 2001, roughly 5% of the total population identified as either black or *mulato* (black and *mestizo*). The country’s black population has historically inhabited two areas: Esmeraldas, a province on the Northwest Pacific coast and the Chota-Mira Valley in the northern Sierra.

The Racial and Spatial Landscape of the City

Moving Through the City

The spatial dimension of race and skin color is visible while travelling through the city. Take a ride on the metro bus from northern to southern Quito and you will notice that skin color and phenotypes change along the route. At either end of the line, residents have darker skin tones and indigenous and Afro-descendant features, while in the middle of the trip, around La Mariscal or the business district, people have lighter skin color and more European features.

Quito has the third largest population of Afro-Ecuadorians in the nation. Around 64,220 out of a total 1.6 million residents in Quito claimed Afro-descent on the 2001 census. This number represents about 3.1% of the city’s population (De la Torre 2005:62). The majority of black Quiteños (residents of Quito) are concentrated in *barrios populares* (lower-class neighborhoods), located in the very north of the city. These neighborhoods do not have the same amenities that are enjoyed in many other parts of Quito. For example, few Afro-descendants own homes. A study conducted by the Municipal Government of Quito found that only 12,109 homes are headed by Afro-

descendants. This number shrinks when females are isolated in the data (Secretaría de Desarrollo Social 2008:47).

Furthermore, I was told that public housing utilities and public transportation in these areas are unreliable. Some majority black neighborhoods are located on the steep mountain slopes that form the valley in which Quito sits. Building structures in this environment are unstable due to the steep incline and the battered city buses often break down or simply do not travel to these areas.

Several majority black neighborhoods like La Bota, Carcelén, Carapungo, and Atacucho became ethnic enclaves in the 1980s as structural adjustment programs forced people off their agricultural lands in rural areas and drew the rural population to the cities during the industrialization process. Esmeraldas and the villages in the Chota-Mira Valley were affected by this urbanization (Fernández-Rasínes 2001). Since Afro-descendant rural migrants come from northern Ecuador, they often make use of previously established social networks by settling in northern *barrios* in Quito. This makes transportation back home by bus more convenient than it would be from other parts of the city and some residents say that this is a way to retain the “flavor” of their home towns.

Urbanization and Racialization in the City

The historical process of racialization has culturally constructed blackness and black bodies as strong, dangerous, rural, and criminal (Rahier 1998). For this reason, the tens of thousands of Ecuadorians of at least partial African descent that have migrated to urban Quito from the two areas typically associated with blackness in Ecuador are often viewed as foreign invaders that threaten the spatial organization of race in Ecuador. This is the case even though Afro-descendants have lived in Quito

since the sixteenth century. The urbanization of the black population impacts the formation of black identities, particularly in the current era of multicultural citizenship.

Afro-Ecuadorians partake in this stereotype that equates black culture exclusively with these two traditional racialized areas. For example, Afro-Ecuadorian activists privilege the traditional rural areas as the holders of the ancestral ethnic culture. This is significant because in the contemporary multicultural era, activists are motivated to identify the essential Afro-Ecuadorian culture as they seek cultural recognition and collective rights for the population of African descent, yet this puts activists at a disadvantage because those in Quito are virtually de-territorialized since they no longer inhabit their native lands.

In addition, Afro-Ecuadorians in Quito are viewed as out of place in the city because blackness has historically been associated with Esmeraldas or the Chota-Mira Valley. While it is common to see blacks in those areas, blacks are more visible in Quito, where the population is predominately *mestizo*. Afro-descendants are racialized in *Quiteño* society as a homogeneous “black” category, without ethnic or regional distinction. This impacts how Afro-Ecuadorians are monitored, and blackness restricts individuals with Afro-descendant phenotypes from entering certain social and physical spaces. I heard accounts of blacks being denied from hotels if they were invited to spend the night with a friend. I learned that it was also common for people to lock their car doors if a black individual passed by, or for store clerks to watch black customers more closely than other patrons. I also found blacks were racially profiled by police, who held numerous stereotypes associated with criminality, sexuality, level of intelligence, motivation, and physicality.

Furthermore, the job market is very restricted for black Ecuadorians. Black men usually take jobs as security guards or delivery truck drivers because of the stereotype of the strong and intimidating black male body. Paradoxically, there is also an assumption that blacks are lazy and do not seek employment, which is supposedly why they rob and engage in illicit activities.

Return of the ethnographer. This research draws on two months of ethnographic fieldwork in Quito during the summer of 2009. Prior to my arrival in Quito, I had experienced the city as a tourist and as a volunteer, living in the city for seven months in 2007. During this time, I participated in volunteer and internship projects, including a human rights internship with a local university and another internship through a Quito-based NGO. These experiences helped familiarize me with the city and were a precursor to my field site research.

As part of my human rights internship, I conducted interviews with female inmates at a local women's prison to compile information on habeas corpus violations. I was jarred by the disproportionate number of dark-skinned individuals contained there. I noticed a similar situation in my other internship position as an English and ceramics instructor in a boy's juvenile detention center. Many of the boys housed at the center had darker skin than the majority of Ecuadorians where I lived, in a more affluent district near the center of the city. Furthermore, a large percentage of these adolescents were Colombian. Through our daily conversations I learned several boys had been displaced by the civil unrest that plagued that country. Some were separated from their parents at young ages, and life in Ecuador was not easy for jobless, orphaned Colombian youth.

Both of these experiences led me to question the significance of skin color in Quito and how culture and race are tied to citizenship, legality, and space.

My everyday experiences with Ecuadorians in Quito sparked my interest in color and race in the country. I am a fair-skinned, blue eyed, white heterosexual female. I was raised in a middle class family in the United States, and I graduated from a US university. While Ecuadorians did not always know all of these factors, individuals often assumed some combination of them, which apparently made it “safe” or socially acceptable to make anti-black racist remarks to me. For example, I was often warned by mostly middle class *mestizos* to avoid the tourist areas at night and to avoid blacks because they were either *ladrones* (robbers), prostitutes, or drug dealers. This overtly racial discourse made quite an impression on me and prompted my interest in racial discrimination in Quito. Shortly after concluding my work in Quito, I entered graduate school and decided to make my interest in the topic official by focusing on Afro-Ecuadorians and race relations in Quito for my master’s research.

Recent State Developments

Racism is now a topic that appears in mainstream newspapers and magazines in addition to events organized by black activists in Quito. The government now recognizes how racism permeates the structures of Ecuadorian society, in addition to personalized, face-to-face acts of discrimination against blacks. In other words, racism is an issue of public concern. One achievement over the last several decades of black activism in Ecuador, orchestrated primarily from Quito, is that in 2009, Ecuador’s President Raphael Correa declared racial discrimination a hate crime. To date, several

workshops have been offered about how to identify and denounce race-based discrimination, yet attendance at these events remains sparse (Escobar 2010).

Moreover, Afro-Ecuadorians are included as a distinct ethnic group in the 1998 and 2008 constitutions, which codify a series of collective rights. The 1998 constitution also recommended official recognition of the *Día Nacional de Afroecuatorianos* (National Afro-Ecuadorian Day), formation of national government agencies like CODAE (*Cooperación de Desarrollo Afroecuatoriano*) and local agencies such as the *Programa de Desarrollo Afroecuatoriano*, which operates within the municipal government of Quito.

In addition to his recent denouncement of racial discrimination in Ecuadorian society, President Correa's administration has offered new ways of conceptualizing development. For instance, the National Development Plan (2007-2010) outlines strategies for the social and political inclusion of ethnic minorities. One of these initiatives is the formation of the Ministry for Public Politics. This government ministry operates as an intermediary between the state and social movements. Within this institution there is a focus on Afro-Ecuadorians social movement organizations. The Ecuadorian state has made other important legislative changes, particularly with official recognition of racial discrimination as a hate crime, implementation of affirmative action policies and reparations for Afro-descendants, and the inclusion of an ethnic question in the 2001 and 2010 national census (Escobar 2010).

Scholarship on Race in Ecuador. Few works investigate race relations in Ecuador. This is most likely connected to the nationally held belief that Ecuador is a raceless society and that Afro-descendants do not constitute a distinguishable ethnic

group, in contrast to the local indigenous population. Social science research in the country is almost always concerned with the indigenous population. There are several reasons for this pattern. First, is the impact of *mestizaje* on Ecuadorian thinking about racial identity. A second reason is the relatively small population of Afro-descendants in the country, who did not conceive of blackness as a social category apart from dominant society. Third, foreign academics have until recently accepted local beliefs that indigenous peoples are the country's only ethnic group. This is particularly important for anthropologists. Limited by the state of the discipline at the time, anthropologists throughout history did not consider race as an appropriate domain for investigation. Instead, this was the territory of sociological inquiry.

There are notable exceptions. Whitten (1986 [1974]) and his understudy Stutzman (1981) conducted ethnographic research with black communities in San Lorenzo and Ibarra, respectively. This research, grounded in Marxist structural frameworks, focused on the expansion of market capitalism and its effects. Whitten and Torres (1998) and Walsh and García (2002) have contributed to edited volumes on blackness in Ecuador, but these were not book-length ethnographies. Whitten and Torres (1998) were concerned with placing Ecuadorians within an Afro-Latin American and Caribbean diasporic frame, while Walsh and García (2002) addressed shifting political subjectivities among the Afro-Ecuadorian population using postcolonial theory.

There are a few scholarly works that focus on the lives of blacks in Quito. Fernández-Rasínes (2001) produced a detailed ethnography on gender and sexual identities among Afro-Serrano residents in a northern barrio in Quito. De la Torre (2002) made a valuable contribution to the canon with his investigation on racial

discrimination. This work highlighted the structural components of discrimination in the city and emphasized the relationship of clientalism that marked interactions between black civil society organizations and the state.

Studying Blackness: Race, Ethnicity and Identity.

Contemporary research on race and ethnicity accepts that these concepts are social constructs while noting these ideas are lived realities. To paraphrase Harrison (1995), Greenbaum (2002:7) recalls that “ideas about race and ethnicity cannot be separated from their political context, in which groups and individuals are differentially endowed with economic power and social and cultural capital.” Several authors also maintain it is impossible to study the two categories separately.

Taking account of the nuances of blackness, social science scholars stress the importance of empirical investigation and suggest that ethnographic fieldwork is most suited for the study of blackness. This argument is best illustrated by Wade in his book *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*. In the book’s final chapter, Wade (1997:113) states that a postmodernist approach to the study of blackness might show how “blackness has been constructed discursively, in different, changing ways by different sets of people and that discourse involves power relations.” Yet the author suggests that a better approach would be “to see how- and this can only be done through ethnographic fieldwork- the discursive construct of blackness is constantly recreated in social practices of colonization and urban migration, of development plans and political processes such as constitutional reform, of sex and marriage, of music and sport” (Wade 1997:113). Finally, he remarks that “these processes are connected to, but not simply derivative of, issues of economics and politics” (Wade 1997:113).

When I employ the term “race,” I am talking about those ethnic, subnational, culturally distinctive groups that have experienced the legacy of slavery, racial exclusion, and racial stratification. Like Fernandez-Rasínes (2001), I take the notion of race to avoid euphemistic terms that perpetuate its invisibility. I agree with the author’s use of race as a “term that appears in the discourse at a historic time in obedience to socio-political needs and although the content is ever-changing, has remained as an ideological construct that justifies a system classified by hierarchy, that conceives of differences to invent inequalities” (Fernandez-Rasínes 2001:31).

As a researcher, I attempted to provide the nuanced interpretations of race, color, gender and class that operate on the ground in Quito because there are particular constructions and ways of dealing with structurally sustained racialized inequalities. I also added local nuances that warranted the use of the concept of race. I used the term “racialization” to denote the practical and processual nature of race-making--the making of differences based on hierarchies grounded in colonial formations of racial subordination. Specifically, I referred to populations that have been ranked and stratified by cultural and physical differences historically and in the present, or placed in hierarchies of natural or biological differences. Although these formations have changed over time, significant continuities still exist and have real world significance in contemporary Quito.

Following Harrison (1995), I believe culture can be invoked in racialized forms and forms one pivot for organizing difference. In popular discourses, people still refer to culture and race as though these concepts and lived realities are unchanging over time. That is why they retain importance and why my interpretation of their significance is

warranted. I make my best effort to see how these categories are engaged and understood in specific situations and by certain people.

Field Site Description and Methods

The materials used to support this research include two months of participant observation with self-identified black and/or Afro-Ecuadorian activists who participate in black social movement organizations (SMOs) in Quito. I collected interviews with individuals representing the state, Afro-Ecuadorian NGOs, and the grassroots sector. I also conducted archival research on relevant texts and state policies towards Afro-descendants in Ecuador as a means to compare my ethnographic observations and my interview data.

Before arriving to Quito, I contacted individuals in my initial research site, the Afro-Ecuadorian cultural center NGO *Hijos de Ebanos*, to see if I could observe the activities that took place at the center. I was surprised to get an immediate response from the generic email address. The staff worker who responded to my email informed me that I was welcome to visit the center. The respondent may not have realized how much time I would actually pass at the center and for what length of time, although I did state this information in my original email.

During my stay in Quito, I became a regular figure at the cultural house. Most of my time was occupied by reading relevant literature, taking notes on events that took place while I was present or talking with the staff over tea. I completed small tasks around the center such as sweeping the floors, assisting groups of visitors, and sometimes babysitting the small children of female staff members who were not able to find or pay for child care while they were working.

After a few weeks of observing activities and events at the center I decided to pursue other contacts. I asked the administrators if they could introduce me to acquaintances that might be willing to help me with my research project. I followed the networks of contacts received from *Hijos de Eban* and their affiliates, such as the *Centro Cultural Afroecuatoriano* and CODAE (*Corporación de Desarrollo Afroecuatoriano*). The interviews I selected in this study were therefore justified, based on my personal judgment. I wanted to interview people who were aligned with black social movement organizations and to employ snowball sampling. Snowball sampling provided insight into personal and collective connections between various groups and also made clear where fragmentation existed between organizations.

Research Questions

The following thesis is guided by three principle questions. First, I was concerned with identifying the main factors that contribute to ethnic and racial identity formations among self-identified black and/or Afro-descendant social movement activists in Quito. Within this first general question, I set out to answer why Afro-descent has become a salient category in contemporary Quito. What roles have transnational actors such as NGOs, the United Nations, the Inter-American Development Bank and the Catholic Church (along with local and central government) played in this process? Second, I asked how and under what circumstances have black activists organized around race-cognizance. I wanted to know how activists negotiate race-based identities in light of the pervasiveness of the ideology of *mestizaje*. To what extent does the identity claimed by the activists resonate with the identities within their constituent communities? Finally, I asked what it means to be a black subject in Quito? How do

activists interpret dominant discourses on race and ethnicity? How are these concepts lived and understood in everyday life?

Methodology

I drew upon traditional qualitative ethnographic methods to answer these research questions. I believe it is important to conduct one-on-one interviews with self-identified Afro-Ecuadorian activists because their narrations provide insight into the process of political and race-cognizant subject formation. These individuals are not representative of the majority of blacks in Quito.

In-depth interviews

In total, I interviewed 35 people. I tried to get a distribution that would allow me a window into the workings of various community-based organizations, the state, and NGOs. While my initial proposal was to interview only self-identified black or Afro-descendant individuals associated with Afro-Ecuadorian organizations, I did interview individuals who did not identify this way. I interviewed non-Afro-descendant state employees from the Ministry of Culture and the *Consejo Provincial de Pichincha*, a *mestiza* woman who taught dance lessons at *Hijos de Ebano*, and two consultants that identified as *mulato/a*. I also held an informal interview with an elderly gentleman who identified as *moreno*. To supplement this data, I had numerous conversations with people or overheard bits of dialogue along the way that added layers of ethnographic information to my analysis. These informal experiences enriched my knowledge of the socio-political field of Quito's black activist community and helped build a foundation for friendship between myself and my research consultants.

Archival Analysis

Interview material was integrated with archive material from relevant organizations and government aggregate data. I reviewed various texts in local libraries, popular newspapers, and Afro-Ecuadorian cultural centers. This research strategy gave me a sense of the social life in Quito, in addition to how activists represented themselves and how blackness was represented in government statistics, cultural brochures, and socio-religious texts. For example, I collected and analyzed several books, pamphlets, and newsletters published by two local orders affiliated with the Catholic Church, the Daniel Comboni Church and the *Pastoral Afro*, in order to understand the ideology of the Church and the way that race, blackness, and identity are represented by that institution.

Ethical Dilemmas

During my research, I encountered certain ethical dilemmas that are addressed here. First, there was an issue with intellectual property rights. On one occasion, I was invited to a friend's house to celebrate a family get-together. After the relatives left, the host saw that I had my audio recorder with me, so she asked to hear my interviews with other research consultants. I explained to her this was not possible because under contract, I was not able to share any information with others. She became visibly angry and accused me of stealing the knowledge of her people. This was certainly a difficult situation to navigate, and I restated my intention to give my research consultants a copy of the thesis once completed, for its potential use as a reference or resource for black activists in Quito. The woman still questioned my motives. Fortunately, her university-aged daughter was present, and she deflated the situation by explaining the

confidentiality agreement to her mother. Still, this experience illustrated the highly sensitive nature of the research I was conducting.

The research was also problematic at times because of the difficult and contradictory nature of race itself. I made my best effort to silence my US-centric conceptualization of race, working hard to offset my presumptions of race and blackness. For instance, this issue raised a conceptual spatial dilemma for me as a researcher. At times, it is not obvious where blackness begins and ends. As an anthropologist I was forced to learn the cultural grammar and the conceptual associations Ecuadorians make in regards to race.

A Note on Terminology

Throughout this thesis I use the terms “Afro-Ecuadorians,” “blacks,” “Afro-descendants” and “Ecuadorians of African origin” to refer to persons of African descent, some of whom may not self-identify in this way. I realize that these are socially and politically constructed categories, and I recognize that they are problematic. However, much of the literature on Afro-descendants in Latin America and official discourses on race and ethnicity in Ecuador reflect this lexicon. Each of these signifiers is entangled with personal, historical, class, generational and gendered tones. My aim was to instantiate some of these dimensions in this thesis and to demonstrate how they are applied on-the-ground in Quito and in what circumstances.

Some of these terms are based on local vernaculars. However, some come from my analytical context as a researcher. I made my best effort to merge both understandings of the concepts at work, so these terms are part of the situated knowledge of my research participants and my own situated knowledge as social

scientist. I had to speak between the literature of social science and the language of the people in situ in real life, everyday situations.

Outline of the Study

In Chapter 1, the introduction, I discussed the purpose of the study, why I chose the topic, and why this research is significant to a broader audience. I stated the questions to be answered in the following pages, presented a brief introduction to the study site and explained the methodology I used to answer my guiding questions.

Chapter 2 evaluates the national and international factors that contribute to black identity formation in Ecuador. I take a diachronic approach to trace the history of Afro-descendants in what is today Ecuador. I use this strategy because Afro-Ecuadorian intellectual-activists (Afro-Ecuadorians who are both scholars and activists) in Quito include all Afro-descendants as part of their racial lineage in their contemporary revisionist histories. This explains why I present a somewhat narrow track of “Afro-descendants” through time, to reflect the socio-political practices of the intellectual-activists in this study.

Chapter 2 is divided into two parts. The first part of the chapter begins with the origins of slavery and colonization and the formation of racial hierarchies in colonial Ecuador. I demonstrate how there were various social layers of what researchers today call “blackness.” During the colonial era racial hierarchies were in formation that were rooted in the dehumanization of individuals with Afro-descendant phenotypes and cultural formations. For this reason, social mobility was restricted for peoples who were racialized in this way. Later in the section I discuss the role of *mestizaje* (racial and cultural mixture) in Ecuadorian racial ideologies. I move my analysis to the twentieth century to review the connections between race, development, modernization and the

ideology of *mestizaje*. This concept has a continued effect on social relations in Ecuador today.

This negation or exclusion of blackness as an ethnic and political category from Ecuadorian nationalism sets the stage for my discussion on the emergence of blackness as an ethno-political category in the late twentieth century. I outline some of the race-cognizant mobilizations that took place on the international scale and how these events set off a dialogue about race and racial discrimination in Latin America amongst some urban intellectuals. I also review local struggles for political democratization during this period which opened up civil society and created a more heterogeneous space to make demands on the state.

After this discussion I bring in the importance of structural adjustments in Latin America and Ecuador during the 1980s and 1990s and the effect of these policies on increasing poverty along racial and color lines. I also outline scholarly discussions on the relationship between new social movements, neoliberal structural adjustment and multicultural reforms. Later, I factor in the institutions and international development agendas that have impacted black identity formation, particularly the Catholic Church, and “global governance” agencies like the World Bank, Ford Foundation, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the United Nations.

In the last section of the chapter, I return to the importance of human rights, the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR) in Durban and the preceding conferences because these events had a significant impact on race-cognizant individuals across Latin America. In particular, these events

were the first to establish Afro-descent as a transnational socio-political category that changed personal understandings of race and African heritage in local contexts.

Chapter 3 zooms in on Quito. I sketch out the various sites where black identities are created, and offer a background on my research groups. Later, I turn to interview material with Afro-Ecuadorian activists, cultural workers, and state employees to understand how these individuals interpret and negotiate ethno-racial identities in the context of recent constitutional reforms, ethno-cultural development projects and international development projects today. I also discuss the efforts of Afro-Ecuadorians to promote the ethnic or racial question on the 2010 national census and how this is linked with the recognition of difference and the politics of international funding.

In Chapter 4, I analyze some of the important dimensions that arise when black activists engage with multiculturalism and interculturalism as both practices and ideas. Specifically, I focus on the interplay between culture, race and politics, seen through the lens of ethnographic examples and individual testimonies prompted by two events: an intercultural education program and a workshop organized by activists to discuss the election of U.S. President Obama.

After highlighting the relevant scholarly literature on multiculturalism, neoliberal multiculturalism, and interculturalism, I weave in individual testimonies on the efficacy of state policies that relate to these concepts. Following this discussion, I demonstrate how these issues operate in practice. I review some ethno-development projects in Quito in which the state and the Inter-American Development Bank exercise some control over program content and the cultural politics involved in the process. For example, funders usually prioritize dance and music performances. I present my

observations from a state-funded intercultural program held at an Afro-Ecuadorian cultural center NGO, *Hijos de Ebanos*, as a way to address how these programs reduce Afro-Ecuadorian culture to music and dance and reproduce stereotypes that “authentic” blackness can only exist in the two areas traditionally associated with Afro-Ecuadorians: the Chota-Mira Valley and Esmeraldas.

Chapter 5, the conclusion, ties the arguments together. I discuss the major findings of my research and offer the implications of these findings for the study of race and blackness in Latin America while stating the caveats. I noted that due to the small sample size and the particularities of my research site, I cannot extrapolate my research findings beyond the study population. However, I place these findings in a broader context of Latin American social movements for the purpose of discussion and comparison. Lastly, I recommend areas for further investigation and describe my research goals for the future.

CHAPTER 2 FORMING BLACK IDENTITIES IN ECUADOR

Peoples of African descent in Ecuador, some of whom identify themselves as Afro-descendants are now recognized as a distinct ethno-cultural and political group in international human rights discourse, the national constitution, and increasingly, the everyday lives of black activists. This is by no means a natural or inevitable phenomenon. Similar to other parts of Latin America, blackness in Ecuador has not typically been associated with political capacity. In this chapter, I address why this has been the case and provide historical insights into how black activists have organized around a shared history of racialization and a common Afro-descendant identity.

So why have race and African heritage emerged today as important institutional and organizational modes of experiencing and expressing blackness? Why are there thousands of social movement organizations throughout the hemisphere which focus on “black” or “Afro-Latin American culture,” anti-black discrimination, and collective land titling for “black communities?” Why have these elements emerged as ways to manage and/or contain blackness from the vantage point of NGOs and states?

Chapter Overview

In the first part of this chapter, I discuss the systematic erasure of African origin in conventional Latin American historical narratives of national identity. Then I describe the rise of black social movements during the last half of the twentieth century which respond to neoliberal globalization, social exclusion, the activities of the Catholic Church, and the international development agenda. I detail how these sources impact racial difference-making and race-cognizance. Later in the chapter, I focus on the multicultural constitutional reform processes in Latin America, and how legislative

changes have affected black subject formation. Finally, I sketch the particular path towards black identity formation in Ecuador and the creation of contemporary social movements in Quito that position blackness and African origin as key hinges that unite race-cognizant peoples of African descent across Latin American societies. The quote below, made by an black intellectual activist not closely affiliated to NGOs or Afro-Ecuadorian government agencies, addressed a point that was central to this research. Diego's comments stood to correct those activists who identified as Afro-Ecuadorian.

We are Black. Ecuadorian. Like you are American, not European American.

–Diego¹, black Ecuadorian Activist

Why is this comment worth analyzing? First, this educated male activist used a racial term to identify himself and my racial identifier (white-Anglo) was left absent. As Diego points out, I do not identify as European American and Europe is not an important part of my everyday life. Second, Diego was curious why self-identified Afro-Ecuadorian activists adopt a hyphenated identity that is rooted in African heritage. After all, he later explained, that is history that occurred over 500 years ago. I will look back to the arrival of Africans in the Americas to see how this history began.

Origins: Colonization and Slavery

Enslaved Africans arrived to the Americas upon the authority of Spanish colonists beginning in the sixteenth century. Africans were forced to work on plantations, on large haciendas and in gold mines to develop the “new found” colony. The enslavement of Africans was justified by contemporary philosophical and scientific beliefs which

¹ Throughout this thesis I use pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of my research consultants. However, I use the real name of an individual when they are public figures. All interviews were conducted in Spanish and translated to English by the author.

deemed the people of that continent subhuman. Native peoples of the Americas, in turn, were protected by the Catholic Church because they were granted a special minority status. This relationship was one of dependence in that native peoples in the Americas were seen as minors in need of protection. Therefore they could not be enslaved like Africans.

Africans in the Americas represented numerous ethnic groups and spoke different languages. While this population was colonized by Spanish colonists in similar ways, there was not an all-encompassing black or African category which activists point to today. Historians who have conducted archival research in colonial and national registries note that during the colonial period peoples born in the continent today known as Africa, and their descendants were identified by various categories, among them *bozales*, *libres*, *pardos*, *esclavos*, *castas* or *zambos* (Fernández-Rasínes 2001). This practice differs from the rule of hypodescent that characterizes race relations in most of the United States. Color, gender, and slave status impacted the lives and social positions of Afro-descendant peoples.

There are several incidents of resistance to slavery both in pre-republican and post-revolutionary Ecuador. In some cases, enslaved Africans formed fortified colonies of runaways known as *palenques* or maroon societies. For example, a maroon colony formed in the area today known as Esmeraldas². Tardieu (2006) details this legacy in a recently published book on the history of “*el negro*” in the Real Audiencia de Quito. The

² Afro-Ecuadorian intellectual-activists state that this history set the stage for today’s black liberation struggles within the Afro-Latin American social movement. For instance, the so called *Reino* or King of the aforementioned maroon colony, Alonso de Illescas (1553-1582), is now named the official hero of the Afro-Ecuadorian people and is recognized in the Ecuadorian constitution (Sánchez 2008).

author states that following a ship wreck off of the coast of Esmeraldas, enslaved Africans on the vessel seized the accident as an opportunity to escape into the wild brush. Guided by an individual named Alonso de Illescas, this group established the Zambo Republic, named for the practice of *zambaje* or racial mixture between indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples. Tardieu's (2006:33-42) research also found that Spanish and Creole elites during this time referred to the "tiranía" (tyranny) and stupidity of Illescas. Additional comments describe Illescas as a strong figure that represented the untamable coast of Esmeraldas. These ideologies undoubtedly worked together to form racialized stereotypes about the area and its people.

Other acts of black resistance to slavery and related forms of subordination include legal partitioning for emancipation and Afro-descendant participation in the wars of independence due to the promise of freedom offered for those who joined the Creole army against Spain. This promise was not fulfilled. After fighting for independence and helping to establish the republic of Ecuador, blacks remained enslaved. In fact, formal emancipation in Ecuador would not come until 1853. Even then, slavery was still practiced de facto for decades after the ordinance was established (Fernández-Rasínes 2001).

Elsewhere in the Americas with larger populations of Afro-descendants the formal practice of slavery continued well into the late 1800s. In Brazil and Cuba, the material and ideological connection with Africa continued. This is especially the case during certain historical moments and socio-religious circumstances as Matory (2005) explains with the Afro-Brazilian religion of *candomblé*. This association was lost in the Andes. African origin waned in significance during the process of creating Spanish American

republics as elites were focused on forming a cohesive national body that stood united against Spanish colonization. The modes of nation-state formation that followed relied on the ideology of mixture and assimilation (Andrews 2004). For example, Lasso (2007) argues that the wars of independence had a deep impact on social relations and state-forming processes and that the national modernizing formulas aimed to wash out the African connection by assimilation to a *mestizaje* people.

Mestizaje and Blanqueamiento

Ecuadorian national ideologies and dominant historical narratives on *Ecuadorianidad* (Ecuadorianness) have played a key role in racial identity formation and social relations in Ecuador. *Mestizaje*, the idea of racial and cultural mixture, was the dominant mode of nation-building and social structuring in many Latin American nations. National development agendas during the period that the ideology of *mestizaje* was created and consolidated (from the early twentieth century until the 1990s) were based on political, economic and cultural modernization and blacks and Indians were seen by white and *mestizo* elites as presenting obstacles to this process (Becker 2007).

Underlying these efforts was the ideology of *blanqueamiento* (social and cultural whitening). Racial and cultural whitening was promoted both through white-European immigration policies and social norms based on Euro-centric ideas of progress. In an effort to theorize this policy, Whitten and Torres (1998:8) define *blanqueamiento* as “the processes of becoming increasingly acceptable to those classified and self-identified as “white.” This reading simplifies the issue. There are still nuances that Whitten and Torres ignore. For instance, some indigenous and black Ecuadorians are subject to criticisms for whitening within their own communities. Thus, whitening is not always

desirable in Ecuadorian society. Rather, this was a dominant ideology and traditional spaces of power were mostly reserved for white and *mestizo* culture and phenotypes.

Most scholars of Ecuadorian racial identity have conceptualized *mestizaje* as a hegemonic framework. It has often been argued that *mestizaje*, as an ideology works by a false sense of inclusion or belonging (Wade 1993; Whitten and Torres 1998; Stutzman 1981; Friedemann and Arocha 1986). In reference to Colombian *mestizaje*, Wade (1993:3) posited that because the Colombian project of modernization aligned with a *mestizo* national identity, both blacks and Indians could either be excluded as non-*mestizo* or “included as potential recruits to mixedness.” In this way, *mestizaje* is an ambivalent discourse and social practice. This viewpoint is best articulated by Stutzman’s (1981) words, and also the title of his essay in *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador*, that *mestizaje* is an “all inclusive ideology of exclusion.”

Although *mestizaje* appears on the surface to celebrate the nation’s African, European, and Indian roots, this ideology intends to whiten the body politic, and thus in the minds of dominant society, modernize it. Rahier (1998) and Whitten and Torres (1998) insist that in Ecuador, blackness and indigeneity are believed to fall off of the path to modernity, or be left behind in a hermetic seal of primitivism. Hence, while racial and cultural “others” are included in the dominant ideology, often through “folkish” cultural representations, they are excluded from important social and political arenas. Furthermore, in most cases, structural racism restricts the upward socio-economic mobility of blacks in everyday life.

Other scholars, such as Sansone (2003), emphasize that *mestizaje* is not simply an elite creation imposed from the top down. This author insists that *mestizaje* is a

social fact that complicates race relations throughout Latin America. Many people who are excluded from *mestizaje* in practice, due to their blackness or lack of racial mixture, are still invested in the principle of *mestizaje*. This is a principle reason why activists who fight for respect from society at large regardless of the amount of whiteness they demonstrate, are seriously questioned by their co-nationals of all ethnic backgrounds who do not interpret racial divisions. In fact, many Latin Americans uphold the idea that race-based activism will only create social fissures that do not otherwise exist (Sansone 2003:196). I will demonstrate how these ideas, specifically related to their ambiguities, function in practice later in this thesis.

Race, Development and Nation Building in the Early 20th Century

Similar to other Latin American contexts, in Ecuador, national development agendas have been intricately tied to the ideology and practice of *mestizaje*. In the first half of the twentieth century, the developmentalist attitude of the Ecuadorian military government inspired nation-building projects that spanned the entirety of the national territory. This era was marked by the need to protect the growing nation both economically, through import substitution industrialization and in defense of imperialist encroachment, sometimes under the guise of the threat of communism (Andrews 2004). Disputed national boundaries with neighboring nations were a fundamental concern to the Ecuadorian government during this period. Precisely because the Ecuadorian government was unsure in its control over the forming borders with Colombia, Brazil and Peru, the military launched a series of programs to track, record and map the territory of Ecuador (Radcliffe 2010). This included gaining control of the predominately black region of Esmeraldas, situated on the Colombian frontier.

Before this time, Esmeraldas had been largely ignored and remained under the control of *cimarrones* (the descendants of maroon rulers). As mentioned earlier, this area was racialized through biological and cultural narratives. For example, there are several elite references to the “blood” from the coast during the Liberal era, which created threats of contamination through biological assimilation (Tardieu 2006). When assimilation was necessary, these beliefs became an obstacle for Ecuadorian elites.

To the twentieth century modernist elite mind, the Northwest Coast was crystallizing as the uncivil, anti-modern racialized region that national elites hoped to leave behind on the path to national development. Development in this area had to be undertaken through the creation of infrastructure and institutions such as roads, schools, and churches. Due to infrastructural weaknesses, the Ecuadorian state relied heavily upon Catholic missionaries to maintain order and Christianize locals so that they would become recruits to the national body politic. As a result, Christian missionaries had a large impact on the region. I will return to this point later on in the chapter, because the Church has played a significant role in the formation of black identities in Ecuador.

The Emergence of Blackness as a Racial and Political Category

In this part of the chapter, I focus on the formation race-cognizant identities in Ecuador and outline the social, economic and political conditions that led to the formation of race-cognizant identities in Ecuador. Over the course of the last decade of the twentieth century, several Latin American countries adopted multicultural constitutions that recognized the multiethnic and pluricultural characteristics of the nation. This legislation conferred various important collective rights to ethnic and cultural minorities. It is argued that multicultural reform made ethnic identities political in

an official sense, and increased the regional dialogue on blackness. This would not have been possible had there not been a system of institutional networks already in place. However, the black social movements that consolidated in the 1990s and were recognized by the state during the decade marked a new phase in black identity politics in Ecuador and the region in general. What is significant to this research is the fact that some Afro-descendants mobilized under a racial identity, which was previously thought impossible.

Late 20th Century International Developments

The civil rights struggles in the United States and the liberation movements in Portuguese and South Africa during the middle of the twentieth century intensified processes of race-cognizant identity formation for certain Latin Americans of African origin, although some more than others. During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, primarily urban intellectuals in Latin America that self-identified as *negro* began to study the black movements and black intellectuals of this period (Sánchez 2008). In response, organizations formed in recognition of anti-black racism. For example, in Brazil, the *Movimento Negro Unificado* formed in 1978 (Hanchard 1994)³. This predominately urban middle class movement was influenced by the racial and color based discrimination that peoples with African phenotypes experienced as they attempted to enter higher socio-economic spaces.

Aware of what was happening in other parts of the hemisphere, beginning in the 1970s, blacks in Colombia and Ecuador began to research the *Negritudé* movement, which was based on the valorization of blackness. Through this research, black

³ This was not the first black-identified movement. Prior to 1978 there were intellectual-centered race-identified black movements. The editors of *No Longer Invisible* (1995) provide a summary of this history.

intellectuals began to associate their experiences with Afro-descendants in their country and abroad. Andrews (2004) notes that while black intellectuals in the area were aware of African American struggles of the 1950s and 1960s to dismantle racial discrimination and obtain affirmative action policies, it was during the 1970s that Afro-descendants embraced the works of black thinkers and political actors like Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and the Black Panthers, adopting them into the “local political lexicon” (Andrews 2004:183).

However, the influence of the civil rights movement in the United States and of struggles against colonialism and later apartheid in Africa should not be overstated. Racial identification was not as developed as it is today and the United States was still held as a point of comparison for why race is not as significant in Latin America. Furthermore, racialized struggles were only relevant to *certain* Afro-Latin Americans.

The Opening of Civil Society

What aided the formation of ethnic and racial cognizance was the opening of civil society. Ecuador, like many Latin American nations, underwent a period of democratization during the 1970s and 1980s. In 1979, Ecuador’s authoritarian government model was displaced by a democratic form of governance. The dismantling of authoritarian rule created space from which citizens could make claims against the state, whereas they were previously suppressed in the context of brutal authoritarian dictatorships.

Scholars such as Escobar and Alvarez (1992) and Yashar (2005) suggest that the democratization of Latin American states since the 1980s, and the opening of civil society, created the proper socio-political context for new social movements to form. These movements are characterized by their organization around identity. Many social

scientists who subscribe to new social movement theory cite the increased poverty and social inequality that resulted from neoliberal structural adjustment reforms as an impetus for these social movements. It is argued that the aforementioned reforms disproportionately affected women, Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples (Escobar and Alvarez 1992). In other words, neoliberalism became a common enemy against which racial, cultural, or gendered “others” formed a combined front. I will discuss this dynamic in the following section.

Structural Adjustment, Neoliberal Development

During the 1980s, Ecuador implemented structural adjustment programs which led to privatization, market deregulation, political liberalization, and decreased state spending. Structural adjustment policies have often been described as the “bitter pill to swallow” in which case it is necessary but uncomfortable for civil society to adapt. In Ecuador, structural adjustment coincided with a tumultuous period of political instability, weak state institutions, and high rates of corruption. During this time, several Latin American governments went bankrupt because of their inability to repay international loans that had been borrowed for various public works, new enterprises, and state development projects. As was the case throughout much of the region, the Ecuadorian state was not able to provide for civilians who were struggled in a tough political and economic climate (Sánchez 2007).

First World nations developed a social, political and economic repayment strategy for struggling Latin American governments. Multilateral institutions like the Inter-American Development Agency and the World Bank stepped in to send money to these nations under the condition that they adopt structural adjustment measures.

Furthermore, the neoliberal economic system accelerated in Latin America during the

1980s. Neoliberalism loosely refers to an open-market economic system in which the size of states diminish while the private sector expands. The underlying philosophy is that market deregulation will lead to increased productivity and less government spending. This order makes it easier for companies to establish the “rules of the game” because they are not under strict government control. Third World countries are particularly vulnerable to this order because of the disproportionate economic and political power that First World countries exert over these nations.

These policies, which are linked to global integration and the expansion of neoliberal policy and ideology, have exacerbated inequalities and worsened racial discrimination (Harrison 2005; Mullings 2008b). The combination of exacerbated racial inequality, a shrunken state, and the rise of transnational race consciousness led blacks in Latin America to mobilize in a united front to gain recognition, and demand rights and resources. Accommodations once provided by the state were transformed into rights to be won. Paradoxically, the same pains experienced by these minorities are those which bring them together. It could be argued that the largest accomplishment of this collective resistance culminated in the multicultural constitutional reform.

Multicultural Reform

Multiculturalism is based on the principle that due to ethnic diversity within nations, it is necessary to delineate specific rights for ethnic minorities. This body of legislation emphasizes issues of land rights, citizenship reforms, economic improvement, and affirmative action. The relationships between the political mobilizations of “new” social movement actors, neoliberal economic reforms, and multicultural reforms have been analyzed by social scientists of various disciplines. Yashar (2005) and Van Cott (2000) argue that multicultural reforms are the result of a combination between certain

preceding factors, including the demilitarization of Latin American governments, the dismantling of authoritarian rule and political liberalization, that created the right social and political conditions for ethnic movements. These movements, in turn, pressured local governments into constitutional reform. These factors include the demilitarization of Latin American governments, the dismantling of authoritarian rule and political liberalization.

Other analysts place more emphasis on the role of multilateral development agencies and the state in the move towards multicultural reforms. These researchers, including De la Torre (2002) and Hale (2002) suggest that multicultural reforms in Latin American governments are not completely the result of subaltern pressures. In fact, Hale (2002) suggests that multiculturalism can work jointly with neoliberal economic policies and ideologies.

NGOs and the Development Agenda

The restructuring of the state, which entailed the decentralization and reallocation of state functions to other sites of governance has led to an increased role of NGOs, “global governance agencies” like the United Nations and World Health Organization (Hale 2004) and the Church in Latin America. Whereas the state was previously responsible for tending to the needs of its citizens, new actors have come onto the scene to take on this responsibility. The formation of grassroots organizations in Ecuador and other Latin American countries was facilitated in collaboration with domestic and international NGOs and the Catholic Church.

The global and regional development agenda calls for the ethno-development of ethnic minorities. Ethno-development is premised on the idea that ethno-cultural groups should modernize in their own ways, which are separate from dominant society.

Policies include the separation of ethnic education such as bilingual education for indigenous peoples and self-reliant ethnic curriculum. Read from Hale's neoliberal multicultural perspective, ethno-development is essentially the state's way of outsourcing development to communities and NGOs in order to relinquish this initiative from the state (De la Torre 2002). Furthermore, NGOs often focus on cultural rather than social initiatives. What is important to note is that both NGOs and the contemporary development plans reaffirm ethnic differences and have thus contributed to thinking about the significance of these differences in Latin American societies.

The Catholic Church

While the Catholic Church has always had a significant presence in Latin America, it is important to consider the Church's function as an institution that provides social assistance and influences the formation of black identities. Catholic orders throughout the region have collaborated closely with Afro-descendants to form faith-based organizations (FBOs) that work within the multidimensional framework of spiritual, socio-economic and ethnic development. Reforms made by Pope Paul VI as part of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) altered the contemporary social development agenda of the Catholic Church. For instance, the Church is motivated to work with Afro-descendants not only because of an evangelization agenda but also due to guilt that it admits for the colonization of African and indigenous peoples.

One particular order of the Catholic Church operates in this framework in Ecuador but also in other parts of the globe including Africa, North America, and Central and South America. This society within the Church, the Daniel Comboni of the Heart of Jesus, is guided by the philosophy of living among the Afro-descendant people, because they are among the poorest and most subordinated groups. Daniel Comboni

was an Italian missionary who travelled to Africa in the nineteenth century on a religious mission. Later, he formed a separate order based on his experience in Africa. Today, there are thousands of Daniel Comboni Churches. Daniel Comboni missionaries, who base their work on ethno-racially identified black peoples, have played a key role in generating black identities in Ecuador's Afro-descendant population.

Human Rights

The global human rights agenda has also been a major factor in the creation of race-cognizance and a fundamental impetus for anti-racial discrimination movements in Ecuador and the African Diaspora in general. Since the end of World War II, human rights have been an important item on the global social justice agenda. This body of standards, regulations, and laws delineate universal protections for all human beings. The United Nations coordinates the international human rights effort and is linked to international NGOs that are committed to social, economic, cultural and ethnic rights of Afro-descendant peoples.

For some time now, Ecuador has been officially committed to several individual and collective human rights that apply to Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples. Unfortunately, many of these rights have not been realized in practice. For example, several countries have adopted civil rights protections that are supposedly defended by anti-discrimination prohibitions yet the small number of court cases that prosecute racial discrimination claims in each country attests to how ineffective these measures are in practice (Wade 2006). This appears to be true in Ecuador, where many Ecuadorians are not even aware of human rights, let alone the formal processes to denounce race-based violations. Nonetheless, human rights contribute to racial identity formation and encourage a sense of political and racial community at the local and international level.

Mobilizing for rights evokes a sense of empowerment, has the potential to lead to social change, and produces a language of rights that is incorporated into national legislation and local social movement vernaculars. In the next section, I discuss how these factors have influenced the Afro-Ecuadorian social movement in Quito.

The Formation of Black Social Movement Organizations in Quito

The literature on Afro-Ecuadorian social movements in Quito suggests that the contemporary movement is rooted in organizational efforts made during the 1970s. Informal black organizations and study groups were first established in Quito during the late 1970s (Tadeo 1998). Initially, middle-class black university students congregated to exchange ideas and literature with a Marxist-Leftist ideology. Over time, Daniel Comboni missionaries aided this small community with organizational matters and provided financial support to the cause of black resistance to Eurocentric social norms which devalued blacks in Ecuador. Below, I present a basic summary of this history in order to provide a context for the efforts of black activists and institutions in Quito today.

1980s-1990

The Daniel Comboni Church was very involved in the initial formation of black organizations in Quito. In later years, secular NGOs have also stepped in to support branches of the initial grassroots black organizations affiliated with Daniel Comboni and the Pastoral Afro, a black inculturation program found in black communities throughout Latin America. There are conflicting accounts of who, when and what created black social movements in Quito. Tadeo (1998) insists that the first black cultural center was formed in 1979 by a group of university students from four different Ecuadorian provinces. This group was organized around the populist principles of the *Frente Unitario de Trabajadores* (FUT). This center, the *Centro de Estudios Afroecuatorianos*

(CEA) provided a space for raising black consciousness by investigating and identifying the Pueblo Negro. The group conducted archival research and catalogued oral histories that the students recorded during interviews with blacks in rural Ecuadorian provinces (Tadeo 1998:68-70).

According to Tadeo (1998), during the 1980s, Daniel Comboni missionaries stepped in and began to fund the center and assist with the consolidation process. For example, the Combonis helped to create the *Movimiento Afroecuatoriano Conciencia* (MAEC). The MAEC provided the impetus for the First Conference of Black Women in the Americas in the year 1983. The relationship between the Combonis and these first black organizations and transnational forums is unclear. In fact, De la Torre (2002) maintains that the Comboni missionaries were involved in supporting the center from the beginning.

However, Tadeo (1998) and De la Torre (2002) agree that the Combonis helped to form several black organizations from 1985 to 1990. The Combonis sponsored a generation of black social movement leaders in Quito, many of whom are missionaries, state workers, or activists at the grassroots or in NGO sectors today. Comboni priests and nuns also helped to create several important institutions, organizations and works of literature relevant to Afro-Ecuadorians in the country. For instance, the Combonis facilitated the formation of the Afro-Ecuadorian pastoral order under the *Conferencia Episcopal Ecuatoriana*, which locals refer to as the *Pastoral Afro*. One important institution that arose from the collaboration between the *Pastoral Afro* and the Combonis was the INPA (National Institute of Pastoral Afro-Ecuadorian Monseñor Enrique Bartolucci). INPA employs black pastoral agents to collect data and conduct

research on Afro-descendants in Ecuador and in other parts of the region. The material collected is not strictly related to black spirituality (De la Torre 2002). In sum, the activities that took place during this period were primarily educational and were not necessarily political or racialized.

1990s: The Multicultural Turn and the Formation of Black Identities

The 1990s marked a turning point in black identity formation and mobilization in Quito. During this period, the Ecuadorian government embraced neoliberal economic development in a greater degree than previous eras, the global discourse on multiculturalism increased, and the government experienced a massive economic crisis that was related to a drop in oil prices (Sánchez 2008). Specifically ethnic or cultural demands arose in this broader context of economic structural adjustment and increased poverty across the region (Yashar 1998). Furthermore, it was during this period that ethnicity became a principal focus of political concern.

Participation in Afro-Ecuadorian organizations increased significantly with the constitutional process. Activists were influenced by the fact that black identity had already been institutionalized in other Latin American contexts. The move towards the legal recognition (and formation) of the black community in Colombia during the early 1990s, for example, was a major referent for Afro-Ecuadorian social movement leaders. Based on this expanded level of ethnic consciousness, Afro-descendants in Quito and throughout the Americas offered a significant presence to the event that consolidated a transnational, Afro-Latin American identity amongst black peoples in the region: the Third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Other Forms of Intolerance (WCAR).

The importance of WCAR for Afro-Latin Americans and Afro-Ecuadorians

While counter-hegemonic struggles have a long history in Ecuador and throughout the region, the 2001 WCAR event was a landmark event for black identity politics in the region. This conference is considered a key shift in the recognition of transnational solidarity based on a collective “black” or Afro-descendant identity.

Some activists with whom I spoke during my fieldwork in Quito underscored the significance of WCAR for their understandings of race and politics at the global and local levels. This conference and its parallel NGO activities were attended by over 8,000 participants representing governments and grassroots sectors from all over the world (Mullings 2008a:193). Safa (2005) states that one major achievement of the organizing process for Durban was the Latin American regional conference held in Santiago, Chile in 2000. During this meeting, Latin American and Caribbean governments acknowledged for the first time that slavery was a crime against humanity and the effects of slavery that were still experienced at the turn of the 21st century, through pronounced poverty and social exclusion of Afro-descendants in the region.

Reflecting on the implications of the WCAR, Harrison (2002:53) points out that a growing threat to human rights, particularly those of racially subordinated peoples, are the violations emanating from the global apartheid. Mullings (2008b) and Harrison (2002) draw on the earlier definition of Booker and Minter (2001:5) and conceptualize global apartheid as “an international system of minority rule whose attributes include: differential access to basic human rights; wealth and power structured by race and place; structural racism, embedded in global economic processes, political institutions and cultural assumptions; and the international practice of double standards that

assume inferior rights to be appropriate for certain 'others,' defined by location, origin, race and gender" (Mullings 2008b:16).

Today, the political discourse on global apartheid has been appropriated by black activists in Quito. Intellectual-activists, some of whom attended WCAR and the preparatory meetings, now envision social injustice in terms of historical racial inequities. Instead of simply referring to class differences, race-cognizant activists link limited opportunities for health, education and social advancement to the processes of racialization that occur locally and globally.

Discussion

Ethno-racial identities are linked to social and racial policies of the state, which change during periods of national reconstruction. It is important to analyze state policies towards Afro-descendants in a historical context to understand the particular circumstances that shape racial identities and use technologies of the state to maintain the hierarchies of power and racial stratification. Over the course of the last decade of the twentieth century, several Latin American countries adopted multicultural constitutions that recognized the multiethnic and pluricultural characteristics of the nation, and outlined various important collective rights for ethnic minorities. The recent rise in political activism from black Latin American NGOs, spurred by the politics of multicultural citizenship that have emerged under the neoliberal regimes of the 1980s and 1990s has created new voices that both critique neoliberal multicultural forms of government and are subject to state and international tendencies towards neutralizing their efforts.

Daniel Comboni missionaries, urban intellectuals, and the grassroots organizations formed in collaboration with both of the latter had already begun the

process towards categorizing blacks as a discrete ethno-racial group. This process was consolidated on one hand by pronounced inequalities rooted in racial differences. The racialized social gaps were partially the result of neoliberal structural adjustment measures, and the intensification of capitalist global economic integration. The international development and global human rights agenda also influenced race-cognizance among blacks in Quito. These factors helped to create avenues for blacks to alleviate inefficiencies in the new order and to assess the importance of race in Ecuador and the meaning of blackness in a crumbling “racial democracy.” It is in this socio-historical context that the ethnographic material in Chapter 3 is situated.

CHAPTER 3 ARTICULATIONS OF BLACKNESS: IDENTITIES, IDENTIFICATIONS AND CULTURAL POLITICS

In the months before my field research proposal was due, I perused the internet to find information on Afro-Ecuadorian cultural organizations in Quito. I was particularly intrigued by one organization that posted pictures of members dressed in traditional West African garments, standing in front of red, black and gold banners. The organization referred to the African diaspora or a collective Afro heritage. I did not expect to find this overt Africana display. I questioned what this meant to the individuals pictured on the website and how this was a performance of black identity.

Today, some Afro-descendant activists in Quito have adopted the hyphenated “Afro-Ecuadorian” identification. This change reflects similar “Afro” appropriations by Afro-descendants throughout the hemisphere. As I explained in Chapter 2, the term “Afro-Latin American” or “Afro-descendant” was first used during the 2001 WCAR Conference in Durban and the earlier preparatory meetings. In considering the importance of the Afro-descendant identification, Safa (2005) suggested that the shift represented a reclaiming of African cultural roots and the politicization of black identity. The collective name “Afro-Latin American” demonstrates newfound recognition of black commonalities (whether political or not) across the region. These commonalities are identified “from above,” by multilateral agencies and academics as well as “from below,” by individual activists.

In this chapter, I present activist narratives on race, identity and blackness. I also give examples of how activists react to imposed identities and address thematic issues on the connection between racialization and black identity politics. The narratives included here were situated within a socio-historical context in which blacks in Quito

have access to an array of resources not previously available. New spaces are thus created for the expression of identity while opening a discussion about rights, needs, and world views particular to this sector of the population. This is partially because international and local power holders and cultural brokers are linked to the struggles of black people in Quito, but it is also the result of decades of black activism. This chapter sheds light on the ambiguities of blackness that arise from this relationship. My aim is to show how various subjectivities form the Afro-Ecuadorian activist community at the focus of this research.

Chapter Overview

The chapter begins by reviewing the scholarly literature on ethno-political identification. Next, I turn to interviews with activists from various positions within Quito's black social movement community. I try to understand how these individuals interpret the Afro-Ecuadorian identity, and I provide information on the associations, institutions and agencies with whom they are associated. Interview material is broken into three clusters. The first group of interviews is with activists who hold leadership positions, including intellectual-activists, state employees and cultural workers. Narratives from grassroots sector activists constitute the second sample. The grassroots activists with whom I spoke represented two separate organizations: *Perlas de Africa* and *Panela*. Low-income, female domestic workers compose the majority of both organizations. *Perlas de Africa*, is affiliated with the Daniel Comboni Church. The other organization, *Panela*, is directed towards socio-economic development and does not have external affiliations. Daniel Comboni is the focus of the third grouping. Only one interview, with an Afro-Esmeraldeño male, was included but I complement his testimony with a review of certain texts printed by Daniel Comboni and an affiliated

institution, the *Pastoral Afro*. This allows me to show how Combonis emphasize the importance of Africa. In the final section of the chapter, I address thematic issues that arise from the interplay between race, culture and politics.

Research on Assuming Political Identities

During her fieldwork with Afro-Brazilian female grassroots activists in Brazil, Caldwell (2007) found that her research consultants made a conscious effort to assume a political identity through embracing the term *negra*, which literally means black. In Portuguese, she explains, the verb *assumir* “signifies personal assumption of a political identity that an individual takes on and adopts” (Caldwell 2007:102). Robin Sheriff, another anthropologist who works with black women in Brazil, also noted that women referred to the politicization of identity as a process of assuming oneself. She writes that to become a *negra assumida* “is to reject the polite discourses and miscegenated identities associated with intermediate racial terms (*moreno, mulato, pardo, etc.*) in favor of an unambiguous, unsoftened, and unqualified *negro* identity. It is to make a psychological leap into what activists sometimes call Negritudé and to undergo what they describe as something akin to a conversion experience” (Sheriff 2001:27).

Other scholars recommend analyzing state policies and shifts in local identity formations to appreciate the construction of politicized and racialized identities. Wade (1999) suggested that tracking the evolution of nomenclature over time provides useful insights into identity politics, particularly historical contexts. Taking Colombia as his example, the author states that the perception of blackness, both inside and outside of Afro-descendant populations, can be periodized in rough correlation to name changes. For instance, use of the term *comunidades negras* (black communities) in Colombia’s Law 70 of 1993 initiated a restructuring of blackness in Colombian society. On the

ground, this meant that groups previously considered black peasants were then considered a distinct ethnic bloc. Also referring to the Colombian reform process, Restrepo (2002) emphasized the role of the state, missionaries, and non-governmental advisors in the articulation of black political identities. Moreover, both authors suggested that these parties were instrumental in the adoption of the Afro-Colombian identifier among certain Afro-descendant communities in the last decade.

The Evolution of Black Identification in Ecuador

Whitten (1986[1974]) and his understudy Stuzman (1979) noted that during their research in the 1970s with populations they classified as *negro* in San Lorenzo and Ibarra, research participants did not consider themselves as a distinct ethno-social category. Stuzman (1979) wrote that his study population was puzzled when he explained his intent to research the black population because they did not think of themselves as a discrete socio-cultural group that could be investigated in this way. Moreover, their research consultants preferred to be called *moreno* (brown) instead of *negro* because this former term was considered more polite (Whitten 1986:53).

While *negro* is a fairly common identifier in Quito, much of the older generation continues to identify themselves in terms of class or color. De la Torre (2002) found that based on life histories, his black *Quiteño* informants over the age of 50 had only recently thought of themselves in ethno-racial terms. This did not mean that they were not politically active, however. In fact, the older generation of black research participants had been quite active in popular struggles in their neighborhoods during the 1970s, but this was premised on populist or class-based motivations.

Afro-Ecuadorian Activists in Quito

My research consultants self-identified as either black, Afro, Afro-Ecuadorian, or *mulato/a*. I only spoke with gentleman while waiting for coffee outside a bakery, who did not identify as such. This man, Ernesto, was in his early seventies and earned a modest wage looking after cars that were parked on the street in front of the building where he sat. Ernesto identified himself as *moreno*. Based on our conversation, I estimated that his age, place of origin (Juncal, a town in the northern Sierra), and his informal, service industry occupation were primary factors that contributed to his decision to be addressed as *moreno*. Furthermore, Ernesto was not affiliated with any black organizations in Quito. While I frequently heard *mestizos* use the terms *moreno* or *morenito*, this practice was criticized by my research consultants who self-identified as either black, Afro-Ecuadorian or *mulato/a* (a person of *mestizo* and Afro-descendant heritage) because they considered the term to demeaning.

When explaining the shift towards the Afro-Ecuadorian identification, some respondents said that including the “Afro” was a way to take ownership of their history and to re-signify the meaning of blackness. Black activists have identified as Afro-Ecuadorian since the late 1990s, and some groups pushed to include this category in the 1998 constitution. However, I was told that there was a striking increase in the use of the terms “Afro-Ecuadorian” and “Afro-descendant” among the intellectual-activist community after the 2001 Durban conference and the preparatory meetings. For example, one common testimony for participants of these groundbreaking events is “We left Durban as Blacks and came back as Afro-descendants” (Falcón 2008:671). This demonstrates how these events created a transnational dimension to black identity.

Being Black and Becoming Afro-Ecuadorian: Intellectual-Activist Subject Formations

Other activists experienced similar episodes of ethnic awakening after events held at home in Ecuador. In this section, I provide narratives of the ethno-political conversion experience among activists in Quito. The material I use is based on in-depth individual interviews with black activists, state employees, and cultural workers who are affiliated with Afro-Ecuadorian social movement organizations. Their views do not represent the general Afro-descendant population in Quito but rather their personal experiences as activists who self-identify as Afro-Ecuadorian social movement actors.

Angelina Elena. Angela Elena is a self-identified Afro-Ecuadorian woman in her thirties who is originally from Esmeraldas. In addition to her work with the black women's movement in Quito, she is employed in the Department of Afro-Ecuadorian Social and Economic Development in the City of Quito. I met with her after a meeting held by the black women's movement of Quito to discuss her experience with the movement. I was particularly interested in her personal path towards ethno-political identification.

Angelina Elena told me that meeting with a large organization of women from various provinces of Ecuador made a profound impact on her Afro identification. She recalled how she underwent a transformation during the *Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Negras* (CONAMUNE) assembly that was held in the Chota Valley in 1999. This event was supported by an Austrian NGO, *Servicio Austriaco de Cooperacion para Desarrollo* (OED), *La Corporacion Nacional de Mujeres Negras* (CPM) and the multilateral development agency United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) (Castro and Torres 2006:145).

She explained to me that “Before I was *negra*, because of my skin, my nose, my hair, but now I am Afro.” Angelina Elena adopted a socio-political identity that stepped away from the racialization of phenotype. Angelina Elena went on to say that this was a process of internal reflection and awakening of the real, empowered her. When I asked her to explain her conversion from *negra* to Afro, she simply stated, “When you look for yourself, you find yourself.” This comment led me to believe that for Angelina Elena, finding identity took a conscious effort. She was now Afro because of her social experiences and her ethno-political consciousness.

It is interesting that Angelina Elena did not mention African heritage or Afro-descent in her narrative. Her political conversion was from *negra* to Afro, but Afro did not necessarily relate to Africa or African descent. The shift was from an imposed *negra* identity to an assumed socio-political identity.

It is important to note that Angelina Elena “found herself” at an event hosted by an Austrian NGO and the United Nations based development agency UNIFEM. Therefore, while the conference was significant to Angelina Elena because it provided an occasion to connect with other Afro-descendant women in her country, outside agencies guided the process. The agenda intentionally focused on gender and ethnicity.

Rita. Rita is the director of the Afro-Ecuadorian dance and music group *Chango*. She is also from Esmeraldas and migrated to Quito “because the dream of every mother is for her children to have a good education.” Rita described her political identification in a way similar to Angelina Elena’s in that both women were interested in finding themselves. Her comments also alluded to the conscious recognition of ethnic difference, a process that typifies social dynamics under the multicultural model.

I asked Rita about her use and meaning of the Afro-Ecuadorian identification. She revealed, “I do not know how to say it for *mestizos*, but like the indigenous, you are looking for your own group. So that is where the word segregation [Afro Ecuadorian] comes up ... We call ourselves Afro-descendants because we come from Africa. That is the concept and so that is why we call ourselves Afro-descendants or *Afro-Esmeraldeñas*.”

In addition, Rita noted that how one assumes or identifies herself can correlate with her social movement affiliation or ethno-political consciousness. For instance, she differentiated herself from those who were not “conscious.” These included, Rita explained, Afro-descendants who did not conceptualize themselves as black or privilege this aspect of their identity. She explained to me, “They just say I am Mariana..., Ecuadorian. Period. Nothing else. The ones that are in this thing, we feel identified with the Afro-descendants because we descend from Africa.”

Rita objectified the Afro-Ecuadorian social movement identity. She consciously sought out her ethnic difference on the path to “find her group.” The reason I interpreted Rita’s use of “group” to mean “ethnic group” is because she referred to the two other primary ethno-racial groups in Ecuador: *mestizos* and *indígenas*. The search for one’s ethnic group is a keystone of multicultural politics, premised on the recognition of difference. Since the Ecuadorian government has officially recognized ethnic differences in the nation, citizens are confronted by questions regarding where one fits within this structure. Furthermore, the illusion is that ethnicity is something to be found, as though it existed unchanged for time immemorial. In this way, ethnicity and in turn, ethnic differences, form as common sense.

Claudia. Claudia is the director of an Afro-Ecuadorian cultural center NGO, *Hijos de Ebanos*, and an administrator of a socio-cultural development foundation named *Tambor*. While *Hijos de Ebanos* was funded by the Inter-American Development Bank, *Tambor* received small support from the government and to a lesser degree, the *Centro Cultural Afroecuatoriano*. Claudia was born in Quito, but her family is from the northern Sierra. She was a very bright, educated woman who has dedicated most of her life to improving the life situations of Afro-descendants in Quito, particularly children.

Claudia emphasized the cultural aspects of her Afro-Ecuadorian identity. She explained to me, “I am Afro not just because of the melanin in my skin. It is because of my traditions and because of the way that I was educated. For the way I was raised. That is what marks your identity. Not the color of your skin. So the way I assume myself is the way I will die: Afro-Ecuadorian.”

Later in our conversation, she detailed the relationship between Afro-Ecuadorians and Africa. In doing so, she alluded to the justification for the Afro-Ecuadorian social movement. “We are Ecuadorians with African roots, and that is what we are assuming and recognizing. So we think we have a bit of each continent. We are Afro-descendants and Ecuadorians because we were born in this land. We are Ecuadorian citizens, recognized in the constitution.”

While Claudia assumed a political identity, she emphasized that ethnic criteria, culture and education, mark her Afro identity, not biology. Like Brazilian *negra* activists in Caldwell’s (2007) study, Claudia assumes a political identity but it is based on her culture and traditions. She also outlines the geo-historical elements that compose her Afro-descendant identity and places herself as a rights-bearing citizen recognized in the

Ecuadorian constitution. This is a conscious act of removing herself from the imposed biology of racialization that she has experienced as a dark skinned woman in Quito.

José. At the time this research was conducted, José Chalá was the director of CODAE (*Corporación Desarrollo Afroecuatoriano*), the main Afro-Ecuadorian government agency. He was born in El Chota came to Quito to attend university, following his father's encouragement. José frequently referred to the re-signification of African heritage in our interview and in the discourses he employed during workshops, political campaigns and the like. In his opinion, adopting an Afro-Ecuadorian identity was an act of cultural reinvention or political agency. He explained to me that this shift in identification was a way of demonstrating that Afro-descendant are subjects of knowledge, subjects of history, and rights-bearing citizens. He chose the Afro-Ecuadorian identifier "to be recognized as a full human being."

José was adamant that to be politically and ethnically conscious meant rejecting the word *negro*. He explained that to abandon the term was necessary because it was linked to racialized colonial subordination and dehumanization, linking, back to the sixteenth century.

Later in our conversation, Mr. Chalá used the concepts of family and African heritage to form his main discourse on the African Diaspora family during the campaign leading up to the 2010 national census. He hoped the association between the "great diasporic family" and the Afro-descendants of Ecuador would encourage black Ecuadorians to identify according to African heritage on the census. The results of the census in turn, would have great significance for social and public policy in the Afro-Ecuadorian community.

The Grassroots

Now I turn to interviews with individuals who represent the grassroots sector. In general, their narratives of “Afro-Ecuadorian identity” place more emphasis on class and gender than the accounts of intellectual-activists and cultural workers above. The majority of these research consultants are female domestic workers. Many of these women had histories marked by displacement or “uprooting.” Specifically, nearly all of the women moved to the city at early ages to find work. When they arrived, they were confronted with a severely restricted job market and few opportunities for economic, social or political advancement. Several women gave similar testimonies of accepting this way of life because it was how people lived around them. This made it easier to maintain the status quo because it was simply a fact of life. This changed when the women began to participate in black organizations.

Perlas de Africa. In this section I include interview material with women from *Perlas de Africa*, a grassroots organization composed of 13 females and one male from the northern Sierra. As with the intellectual-activists and cultural workers interpretations above, I asked the women how they interpreted the Afro-Ecuadorian identity. The results of these interviews are detailed below.

Marta. I asked Marta what it meant to be an Afro-Ecuadorian woman. Her response below defines her sense of identity.

Let me see... for me to be an Afro woman means first to keep my color. To maintain my color. Second, our skin is not the same as, for instance, yours. Because they always say that your skin is a little more delicate than ours. So sometimes we have to work like blacks. But I still feel proud of what I am.

Marta associates “Afro-Ecuadorian identity” with skin color and race, which interpolate class and gender. This is a phenotypic or biological association that departs from the

political identifications of the intellectual-activists. Furthermore, Marta links her skin color with hard work and manual labor. The social connotations that mark her skin color are different than those that mark mine. She is aware of my whiteness and how my fair skin color is associated with social narratives of privilege or delicacy.

Tatiana. I also asked Tatiana, Marta's neighbor, about her experience living in *Perlas de Africa* and how she interpreted the Afro-Ecuadorian identity. Like Marta, Tatiana worked as a domestic employee. She said that worked every day from six o'clock in the morning until seven o'clock in the evening. Her daily bus ride to work lasted 40 minutes but it could be longer, depending on traffic. Like Marta, Tatiana immediately brought up biology. She remarked:

My blood, my people, my being, my life, my surroundings, my environment. [and the identity of Afro-Ecuadorian women]...the identity of the Afro-Ecuadorian woman is difficult, but what I feel, I feel cohabited. But sometimes a little crunched down. I would not know how to explain it.... I feel like the role of women, as women, we have to fight, to get up in the morning, to help your husband to have everything ready for them, and then go to work and follow the same routine. To come back from work and to keep doing the same in your own home.

Gender, class and race were highlighted in Tatiana's testimony on Afro-Ecuadorian, specifically female Afro-Ecuadorian, identities. Her comment that she felt a little "crunched down" suggests that these components of her identity are visceral. She embodies this identity. Tatiana lives class and race in her everyday activities. As a domestic worker, she finds herself completing the same tasks at home and at work, in private or in professional environments. Perhaps this continual cycle of attending to the demands of others is a primary contributor to her perception of being pulled down.

It was also clear she experienced solidarity or connection with other women based on gender, class and neighborhood. She mentioned that life is hard, but there are not major differences between the women in *Perlas de Africa* and other women in the surrounding area. For instance, women in that sector of Quito also worked as domestic employees and most shared the similar routines including long work hours and large domestic responsibilities. Tatiana went out of her way to stress this point to me and informed me that all of the women from the general neighborhood participated in neighborhood projects and meetings, similar to *mingas* (collective work projects).

Daniel Comboni. During my field research, I participated in several events hosted by the Comboni Church. I attended workshops, read the literature and socialized with Comboni priests and members of the constituent community. I also took part in a children's ethno-education summer program organized by the Combonis. During this time, I tried to help out in any way possible. Along with six or so of the camp mentors, I prepared snacks for the children, accompanied the fathers on the car rides to pick up food donations from local bakeries, and I attended administrative meetings on two occasions. I found this to be a very welcoming environment. Members were enthusiastic about speaking with me, and overall, they were very positive about their experience with Daniel Comboni.

I reviewed some of the key texts and underlying philosophies of the Comboni missionaries and the *Pastoral Afro*. While it is important to analyze the materials produced by these institutions because they are circulated within Afro-Ecuadorian social movement organizations in Quito, it cannot be assumed that the ideas they convey are understood in the same way or that participants agreed with these teachings. For this

reason, I also provide formal interview data with a Comboni member to demonstrate how that individual interpreted the concepts described in the texts.

Texts. The Combonis and the *Pastoral Afro* publish several small educational pamphlets and booklets throughout the year. The general formats of the texts begin with a brief introduction on the history of the Afro-Ecuadorian people, followed by information on the contemporary living conditions of this population. The handbooks also describe the activities of the *Pastoral Afro* to help the Afro-Ecuadorian community “rescue their identity,” by participating in Christian base projects and embarking in ethno-education curriculum through the black church. These works generally conclude with a word on the future objectives of the *Pastoral* and the ideological trajectories, which are often placed in the framework of a greater Afro-Diasporic community.

There are several instances of Africanist language and references to Afro-descent in the literature. One booklet published in 2008 often referred to the “Afro community” and “Afro brothers and sisters.” African phrases were also included in the literature. One book began with the Bantu phrases, for example, “*Umoja ni Nguvu*” (unity is the force) and “*mtu ni watu*” (the human being is human beings) (Pastoral Afro de Quito 2009:3). These references can be interpreted as evidence for the construction of an Afro community. The texts also presented information about the religions and cultural practices in Africa.

Pan-Africanism was a central theme in one of the books that I reviewed titled *Talleres de Identidad* (Identity Workshops). This topic is discussed in the section on instruments of political, economic and religious liberation of Africa. The definition of Pan-Africanism given is “that current or socio-cultural and political movement that

promotes African brotherhood, the defense of the rights of African people and the unity of Africa.” The development of the Pan-African movement is attributed to three primary factors: (1) the exploitation and enslavement of African peoples in the Americas, (2) the intellectual and political interaction between the US and Antillean born intellectuals in the United States, and (3) the motivational ideological and cultural-political work of black intellectuals like W.E.B. DuBois and Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah (IFA 2008:40-45).

Black spirituality. Africa was also invoked in discourses on black spirituality. The Combonis enforce the idea that blacks in Ecuador are somehow estranged from their true land, which is Africa. Thus, they are foreigners in their own country. For instance, a pamphlet titled *Espiritualidad Negra* (Black Spirituality) states that blacks in the diaspora are at a disadvantage because they live in exile. This life in exile makes it harder yet necessary to practice black spirituality. The book states that Afro-descendants must seek liberation through spirituality because “*vivimos la fe en una tierra extraña* [we live the faith in a strange land] ... and have the desire to return to “*nuestra tierra ancestral* [our ancestral land].” For the Combonis, this objective must be met symbolically, through spiritual commitment and devotion to Jesus Christ. Now that I have presented some of the underlying Comboni philosophies, I will include interview data with a Comboni member to provide a more nuanced and personalized understanding of these teachings.

Jonathan. Jonathan is a 28-year-old male from the city of Esmeraldas. At the time this research was conducted, he had lived in Quito for slightly less than a year. I had the opportunity to get to know Jonathan when he visited the Afro-Ecuadorian cultural center *Hijos de Ebano*. He sometimes taught dance lessons at the center but

he often came to just socialize. I asked Jonathan how he understood Africa during our sit-down interview that took place in the upstairs library at *Hijos de Ebanos*. He responded:

Our true reality is Africa. It is love. It is black love. It is the land that we do not know, but we know that one day all of the blacks are going to unify in our land... Africa is tradition. It is the tradition of the black tribes of Africa... In Africa, traditions are still preserved from 500 years ago before the blacks arrived here. Here, we black people have already changed. We did not preserve all the traditions.

In Jonathan's understanding, cultural practices in contemporary Africa have remained the same since before the slave trade. Moreover, he makes it clear that Africa is an important part of his identity. Jonathan sees important differences between Afro-descendant peoples in the Americas and those in Africa. These differences are explained by more or less cultural and racial mixture. This is why Afro cultures in the Americas vary according to geo-political and socio-historical context. Jonathan reasoned since African traditions were lost due to admixture in the Americas, it is necessary to rescue them in Afro cultural groups.

This issue arose when Jonathan explained to me that his ethno-racial "Afro" social movement identity was different from other African descendants in Ecuador who were not involved with the Afro-Ecuadorian socio-cultural movement. His comments are similar to Rita's, the female director of *Chango* whom I mentioned in a previous example. Jonathan differentiated the black vs. Afro identity in the following words:

It is not the same to be black and to know you are an Afro-descendant. Afros are the people that really feel in their heart and soul that they are black and that they are the descendants of an African person, someone who comes from Africa. The other blacks do not want to know about their reality. You cannot tell them 'Stop! You are black!' They can feel whatever they want because they have their own ideas... [Or] they say 'I am black' but they do not say 'I am Afro-descendant.' People like me who say I am Afro-descendant are the ones that have followed the traditions. The people

that have been in an Afro group, we feel we represent Africa. And here I am African. My ancestors are African so I am Afro-descendant. But it is just people that belong to a group, and we are trying to teach people the African traditions.

Jonathan's statement points out how certain blacks in Ecuador do not acknowledge their African heritage or their blackness as an ethno-political category. For him, Afro-descendants must study their heritage to awaken their inner ethnicity. By not doing so, the other blacks are avoiding their "true reality." This viewpoint complements the Comboni philosophy on black spirituality. Individuals must awaken their spirituality and blackness through a certain form of ethno-cultural restoration, yet, only the people in Afro cultural groups recognize their African lineage. Furthermore, there is always the risk of losing one's black consciousness. For this reason, Jonathan thinks that ethno-cultural maintenance is necessary.

I asked Jonathan if his friends from Esmeraldas shared his views. He told me that for the most part, they did not. When I asked why, he offered a few scenarios. Jonathan suggested that "it may be education. It might be because of racism, because people do not want to believe they are black. And when you talk to them like 'what's up black friend', they get offended." He also said that it could be due to the high number of mixed racial families in Esmeraldas or because "in Esmeraldas, there is a stronger feeling of being black but not Afro-descendant." In other words, blacks in Esmeraldas conceptualize their blackness in mainly racial terms and do not privilege African heritage.

Panela. *Panela* is a grassroots organization of low-income black women. These women are distanced from the intellectual-activist discourses on ethnicity and I was not aware of any members affiliated with the *Pastoral Afro*. That is one way that *Panela* is

different from *Perlas de Africa*. Members of *Perlas de Africa* participated in the *Pastoral Afro* and FOGNEP (*Federación de Grupos y Organizaciones Negros de Pichincha*). In addition, *Panela* was a relatively new organization. I was created in 2006, four years prior to my field research. *Perlas de Africa*, on the other hand, formed in the mid 1990s, with assistance from Comboni priests.

Housing was the primary motivation for *Panela* because almost none of the women owned their own homes. A high percentage of these women were low-income single mothers. They constituted a severely marginalized sector of society in Quito, and received little support from sources outside of the group. The organization had three principal aims, as explained by Hipatia, the group administrator. *Panela's* mission was first, "to have a dignified house," second, "to have a more dignified life," and third, "to have a physical and symbolic space to call our own." Hipatia informed me that racism had impinged their ability to acquire these relatively modest desires.

Apart from the group administrators, many of the members of *Panela* were quite forward about their economic interest with the group. Based on my observations and conversations with the women, it seemed that poverty rather than ethnicity brought the members together. In fact, one woman pointed out that the women seldom hung out together outside of the meetings, and even the meetings were difficult to attend because of additional responsibilities or lack of interest. In addition, while certain individuals spoke about social inequality in Ecuador, social disparities were almost always defined in terms of class; inequality was seldom described by racial or ethnic language. In general, I noted an ambiguity in their narratives on race and class.

I was told the need was to alleviate poverty. This included immediate concerns like housing, better education for their children, and decent clothing.

An Outing with Panela

During one outing with *Panela*, I observed the interplay of culture and politics in Afro-Ecuadorian identity. Slightly fewer than 180 group members assembled on a Sunday afternoon to walk together to the site of their newly built, government-funded houses in northern Quito. This event proved to be a good opportunity to speak with the women. Usually, their time was limited because of work and domestic responsibilities. I warmed up to the crowd and briefly explained the general topic of my research to a few listeners. Compared to my other research consultants who were pleased to be interviewed, most of these women were more hesitant to speak to me about the topic of identity or blackness. I was able to formally interview a bubbly young 30-year-old woman named Brenda.

Brenda. Although Brenda was fairly boisterous with a healthy sense of humor, she seemed nervous when I started to ask her questions. For instance, when I asked Brenda how she self-identified, she said *negra*. Immediately, Hipatia, the director of *Panela*, stepped in to correct her: “It is *Afro-Ecuadoriana*.” Brenda appeared to know this term, but she did not like how it was imposed. She and I continued our conversation in a more private setting because I quickly hopped on a bus that she was taking back to her neighborhood. She explained to me about her “*tierra*” (land) in San Lorenzo and her “*comida*” (food) such as *encocado de pescado*, *ceviche de camarón*, fish and shrimp dishes typical to the coast. After our interview, I continued to think about the incident with Hipatia.

Etsy. A few days later, I interviewed Etsy, a 42-year-old female from Carchi, a province in northern Ecuador. She was one of the coordinators of *Panela*. Etsy⁴ explained to me that in her neighborhood, the term Afro-Ecuadorian is hardly ever used. However, the organization *Panela* at times consciously employs this signifier during meetings, events and dialogue with other social movement or state actors. She expressed to me that the members were skeptical of this language. In fact, Etsy confided that members of *Panela* would ask the administrators what the term Afro-Ecuadorian meant, but, they could not give a detailed response because the term itself was unclear. Perhaps this is why Brenda hesitated over her response. It is possible that Brenda did not realize that how she identified during interviews with anthropologists and in situations where nomenclature is significant (i.e. in this state-funded housing development project), could influence the way *Panela* was categorized. Perhaps Hipatia encouraged the women to self-identify as Afro-Ecuadorian because she wanted for the group to appear politically astute and ethnically conscious.

Identity and cultural politics were a focus that Sunday in another way. Earlier, I explained how I accompanied *Panela* to the site of several houses built for some of the group members. The development project was financed by CODAE, the *Consejo Provincial de Pichincha*, the City of Quito, and a special bicentennial government agency. The project proposal was directed at low-income Afro-Ecuadorian women in *Panela*. This ethno-cultural specification brought up the issue of who was Afro-Ecuadorian in the group. Apparently there were a few women in *Panela* that did not

⁴ The issue of place and generational differences in terms of naming and ethnic identification came up during our interview. When I asked Etsy if her parents identified as Afro-Ecuadorian, she laughed and said with confidence that "They are will be blacks until death! In the sense of characteristics they are black but they do not care about Afro-Ecuadorian. They are not part of that".

identify in this way. Therefore, it was somewhat awkward when Hipatia, the group leader, said that only Afro-Ecuadorian women were included in the housing project. This is one way that multicultural differences, state policies and development are problematic. While I did not discuss this issue with the women, it is likely that “proving” who is Afro-Ecuadorian and who is not according to the state and the project’s definition would be a difficult task.

Cultural Revival

As Trouillot (1995) noted, the past is a dynamic resource for identity. Efforts made by Afro-Ecuadorian activists to “rescue” their cultural and ethnic identity are an important way to re-historicize black identity and to root this identity to a national context. Based on my observations and conversations with locals, the majority of blacks in Quito are not interested in researching the history of African descent. This is not an important part of their identity. As Diego said in Chapter 2, blacks in Ecuador are just that—Black Ecuadorian. Their history began in Ecuador.

Many black Ecuadorians, particularly from the popular class, do not want to recall the past of slavery or an ancestry based on what one individual called the “poor, black continent of Africa.” This individual, Carlos, a young black man in his late 20s, explained to me his opinion on the matter. He said that the Afro-Ecuadorian identity points to the past, not the future. Furthermore, it gave him negative images of poverty and backwardness that he associated with Africa. Thus, Carlos opted to identify as *negro* because Afro and its link to Africa brought him sadness. When I asked him to explain, he told me that he thought of slavery and “the atrocities of disuniting the African people,” which is the reason, he argued, that Africa is underdeveloped today. Africa

was linked to a negative stigma and he wished to disassociate himself from this connection.

Other activists are interested in cultural and historical revival restoration projects. One project was the study of genealogy and surnames. Afro-Ecuadorian social movement activists have attempted to discover from what part of Africa they originate. For example, at the first black woman's group meeting in the late 1990s, sponsored by UNIFEM, the Ecuadorian government, and an Austrian NGO, female activists engaged in ethno-education and cultural-historical revival by studying their family names. People researched the origin of their surnames such as Congo, Chalá, and Angulo. One female grassroots activists in her forties was nearly brought to tears when she explained to me how her slave ancestors were stripped of their names and given Spanish last names. She said that this was the case for her family because her surname is a common Spanish name. Thus, identifications are not only political because of their use in state and international legislation or when used as a strategic act of political representation and as a sign of racial solidarity. They are also very personal and laden with racial and historical significance that some activists relive during their path to ethno-racial awakening or subject formation.

Racial and Spatial Dimensions of Afro-Ecuadorian Identity

In this section, I describe the place of Afro-Ecuadorian identity and how region is tied to blackness. As I explained in Chapter 1, blacks in Quito are seen as de-territorialized and "out of place" in the city. I sketch what Rahier (1998) calls the spatial/racial construction of blackness in Ecuador, which is linked to historic ideas of race, biology and place. After describing this context, I insert Afro-Ecuadorian interpretations of the association between blackness and the two traditional "black"

areas of Ecuador. I show how these constructions are tied to the idea of *blanqueamiento* (social and physical whitening). These notions are tested when blacks from rural areas are “uprooted” from their native lands as they migrate to Quito, where they are faced with the threat of whitening. This issue is particularly important for social movement leaders because of their aim to valorize blackness.

In Quito

Ethno-racial identity largely overlaps regional identity. In fact, these modes of identity are so connected that they harden into the logic that true blackness or Afro-Ecuadorian ethnic traditions cannot exist outside of “the communities” of Esmeraldas and the northern Sierra. This was clear when research consultants discussed culture and Afro traditions. The following example demonstrates this point.

One time I asked an *Afro-Choteña* woman who lived in Quito for about thirty years, if she taught her daughter about the Afro-Ecuadorians traditions. She said that she did not because her daughter always travelled with her when she went to “her land.” The reason she did not teach her daughter about “Afro-Ecuadorian traditions” is because she learned them when they travelled to her land, which was twice a year for Easter and *Semana Santa* (Holy Week). Therefore, it can be inferred that the traditions were in her land, not Quito, despite the fact she had lived in the city for several decades. This woman had lived in Quito for several decades yet her land was still outside of Quito.

Urbanization and the Fight to Keep One’s Blackness

Afro-Ecuadorians in Quito are in a particularly hard predicament because due to the spatial construction of race in Ecuador, blackness is not associated with urban Quito and therefore “black culture” can logically only exist away from the city in the two traditional areas associated with blackness: the northern sierra and Esmeraldas.

Migration to the city and *blanqueamiento* are causes for concern for certain activists because there is a fear of losing one's blackness. Distance from the traditional black communities somehow parallels weakening ethno-racial identification. Furthermore, there are more possibilities for cultural and biological whitening in the city. I will refer back to Jonathan and Rita who touched on these issues during our separate interviews.

Jonathan, the 28-year-old male from Esmeraldas, explained to me about the racial/spatial dynamic in Quito and the threat of socialization on black culture.

Here in Quito for instance there are not many black people. There are more white people. And blacks in Quito started to socialize with white and *mestizo* people. From being socialized with them since they were children, they were raised with the white or *mestizo* way to be and they forgot their black ways. Even more so if they are *mulatos*.

Rita on the other hand, was one activist who argued that it was possible to keep one's blackness when they migrate but it takes effort and self-assurance. She said that Afro-Ecuadorians often migrate internally to the cities as well as outside of the country. People migrated from their land in search of better social services but with effort, Afros can stay true to their land and their traditions. Like Jonathan, Rita clearly separates herself from whites and *mestizos*. This was apparent when she explained the advice her mother gave her when she was raised. This instruction was tested when Rita moved to Quito, as she explained:

My mom was very proud of being black and she would not ask for any knowledge from white and *mestizo* women. And that is what she would try to always teach us. We had to be proud of being black and of all your traditions.

[We migrate] to have a better education, good health care, better housing, and we start leaving our homeland. But somehow our land stays in our heart and in our blood. We know that we are from there. We cannot just abandon the place where we come from. Because it is your own community that gives you that ancient wisdom so we can share it with the different places where you end up living and developing. If you move to

another country, never forget your language and your way of dressing and your food, the way you eat. Those are the most important things. If you stop going around with Afro people and you start hanging out with *mestizos* or whites and you start learning their traditions, you stop feeling proud of to be black. But when you have your identity very clear, you can hang out with whoever you want and their traditions do not stick to you. Because wherever I go, I always talk about my food: *encocado de pescado*, my *encocado de cangrejo*, *encocado de camarón*. Because that makes me feel proud and I feel identified with what I do and with what I eat.

Rita made reference to her food, language and land. Protecting and strengthening these bits of her culture were what allowed her to remain herself in any situation. If blacks do not make a conscious effort to keep their cultural traditions when they come into contact with whites and *mestizos*, they may lose their pride in their blackness. The issue of pride and self-esteem is present in Afro-Ecuadorian efforts to regain confidence and value in a society where blackness is viewed negatively. I will discuss this topic in the section that follows.

Female Body Politics

Female activists spearheaded an initiative to valorize Afro phenotypes. I had the opportunity to observe some of these activities in cultural organizations and every barber shops. In this section, I describe some of these efforts. I begin with a brief background on gendered racialization and the embodiment of race. In what follows, I describe Ecuadorian notions of beauty, and address the unique position of women within this order.

In Ecuador, black women have an ambivalent position in dominant constructions of power, race, and sexuality. The bodies of black women are hypersexualized in socio-historical narratives in Ecuador, stemming from sexual partnerships in colonial Ecuador and the image of the voluptuous and curvy black female. It is also said that black women have abnormal sexual prowess. Other stereotypes scrutinize black hair into two

categories: good or bad. “Good” hair is straight and long while “bad” hair is coarse and unruly. These stereotypes affect the everyday lives of black women in Quito. For example, the majority of my research consultants told me about how employment adds requiring “good appearance” restricted Afro-Ecuadorians from entering these positions. “Good appearance” often meant blacks need not apply. This is a structured way that Afro-descendant phenotypes are excluded from certain spaces of Ecuadorian society.

This structure was apparent in a conversation I had with Tatiana about “appropriate” hair. Tatiana, a middle aged Afro-Ecuadorian woman of the popular class, said that the way she styles her hair depends on her environment. Tatiana believed that she should modify her hair according to where or whom she will be around. For example, she told me that she preferred to wear a hat to work if her hair was not braided or pulled because otherwise it would not be appropriate.

This statement reveals a few interesting points. First, Tatiana believes that blackness and natural black hair is associated with being unkempt and/or poor. Second, her comments signify that in her opinion, there is a proper place for blackness that exists outside of the supposedly non-black social arena of the workplace. However, Tatiana did not seem to acknowledge this as a problem in racial or gendered terms but rather as a social fact. Her demeanor and language was straight-forward, lending me to believe that this information was commonsense. Tatiana’s opinion was not unique. While she was the only person who adhered to this belief in an interview, the more politically identified Afro-Ecuadorian women were quick to denounce anti-black social norms.

Another research consultant recalled an overt act of racial violence that took place at her child's school. Marta, a member of *Perlas de Africa*, gave me an example of gendered racial discrimination in the public school system. This event occurred in 2009.

She told me what the teacher said:

A teacher in the school of my daughter said, in front of forty students, she said to them 'look young people, you have to come with your hair well groomed and clean, especially the blacks because I notice that the ones who stink the most are the blacks.' And my daughter is lighter than me but she has coarse hair. So, she came home and told me what the teacher said. Well I said 'Oh my god' and I went right to the school and I just complained. I told them it was not right that the teacher just dropped that racist seed in front of all the students and I said that every person in the world has a smell. Not only black people. It is a natural thing.

In response to such forms of anti-black racism, Afro-Ecuadorian activists have made efforts to uplift the self-esteem of the black community through re-signifying the meaning of beauty and instilling values that valorize blackness. For example, the director of *Hijos de Ebano*, Claudia, proposed to have a beauty salon or *salon de belleza* dedicated to black aesthetics in the cultural center. The idea was that the center could employ Afro-Ecuadorian stylists and at the same time provide beauty services to their clientele. The salon had services such as braiding and hair coloring and also offered hair extensions. However, the project was not successful, as a former stylist told me. She explained that there were not enough clients. One reason why there were not many patrons is because the center was located in the middle of the tourist district. This location is at least a forty five minute bus ride from most of the predominately black neighborhoods in the north.

However, there was another project organized by female black activists. The name of this project was *Caras de Belleza*. I did not attend the event but I saw many pictures of the activities and spoke with some of the attendees. Rita, the director of

Chango to whom I referred in previous examples, was part of this project and she described her interpretation of the significance of the event. She recounted:

Everything represented something in the way we were dressed and the way of making our braids. We are representing our inner and external beauty because it makes us feel good and it represents our identity when we are wearing our braids and our African outfits. There are a lot of women from different communities that are very proud of being *Afro-Esmeraldeña* or Afro-Ecuadorian.

For instance, what I am wearing is a loose braid that represents a whole cultural baggage from a community. If you have knitted braids, it represents the roads that you walked to arrive to America. If you wear the leaf you are representing the natural forest that our community comes from. If you wear a crab you represent food. So yes, you represent everything with your hair. The cultural baggage that every community has is different. You send a very important message depending on what you wear and what you do with your hair.

As Rita discusses, hair is an important element of the embodiment of blackness.

At least for her, hair style and the re-valorization of Afro-descendant aesthetics is a way to challenge dominant conceptions of beauty in Ecuador, which favor *mestizo* looks.

Thus, the body was a site where activists negotiated black identities.

Discussion

The act of naming is an important part of forming social categories. To consciously ascribe oneself with an ethno-racial identification can be an overt performance of cultural identity politics and personal re-definition. The state plays a key role in the formation of identities and social categories. The multicultural state is organized around multicultural citizenship and the formation of ethno-cultural identities. Today, many black activists in Quito use socio-political identifications that privilege their African heritage. The state promoted this practice in the 1998 and 2008 Constitutions and other legal works that refer to the “Afro-Ecuadorian” population. Since 1998, state legislation has employed the ethnically essentialist language of collective identity and

outlines ethnic and cultural group rights to “Afro-Ecuadorians.” Thus, it could be surmised that state language used in Afro-Ecuadorian policy is an incentive for some to identify as Afro-Ecuadorian because in social programs, this is how the state identifies the population. This practice is also tied to class and affiliation with black social movement organizations.

Race, ethnicity, and culture are pronounced in different social settings and these social realities are lived through multiple identities. This is clear within my research population. Speaking to an NGO affiliate, such as Claudia from *Hijos de Ebano*, ethnicity is accentuated. These subjectivities are further varied between all-female grassroots groups like *Perlas de Africa* and *Panela*, for whom the black movement and their understandings of black identity are experienced through a gendered, racialized and classed lens. For example, *Panela* received assistance because of their lack of housing and the project money they received was specifically earmarked for black women.

As demonstrated in this chapter, activist understandings of black identity differ. Those with close ties to the government or NGOs, specifically intellectual-activists typically use ethno-political terminologies in their narrations of black identity. In contrast, women from the grassroots organizations employ racialized concepts to define blackness. Whereas intellectual-activists turn away from color or phenotype, as they move towards a geo-political lexicon, my research suggests that female activists of the lower-class grassroots organizations do not feel a shift away from these elements of their identity. This is not to say that these women are not empowered by their activism.

In fact, many female research consultants said that they were more inclined to embrace a black identity because of their involvement with the black social movement.

While legislation and institutional affiliation play a role in how one identifies, activists also exert some control of their history by drawing upon their own subjectivities. For Angelina Elena, Claudia, Rita and José Chalá, the Afro-Ecuadorian identification is a reinterpretation of history whereby blackness is re-signified as a socio-political identity which in some ways transcends the contemporary and the personal context.

CHAPTER 4 THE POLITICS OF RACE AND IDENTITY WITHIN AND AROUND INTERCULTURALISM

Strategies black activists use to engage with certain concepts and policies promoted in Ecuadorian multiculturalism are discussed in this chapter. I reviewed the wider panorama of multiculturalism and interculturalism, specifically how these policies raise issues around race, politics, and culture in theory and practice. My objective was to show how activists navigate between multicultural hegemony and racialization, and the ambiguities in between.

Chapter Overview

The first part of this chapter focuses on interculturalism. I reviewed the relevant scholarly literature on the key concepts and frameworks attached to this term, including activist and cultural worker's testimonies about interculturalism and intercultural ethno-education. After analyzing these testimonies, I consider how neoliberalism and multiculturalism encourage the commodification of race and culture. In what follows, I include activist and cultural workers' testimonies on interculturalism and intercultural ethno-education. After analyzing these testimonies I consider how neoliberalism and multiculturalism encourage the commodification of race and culture, leading to the neutralization or routinization of the political demands of black activists and their activities.

Having addressed the personal and theoretical perspectives on interculturalism, I then demonstrate how this ideology works in practice by detailing a series of programs devoted to intercultural education. These programs took place at *Hijos de Ebano*, a non-profit Afro-Ecuadorian cultural center. Funding for the event was provided by the Ministries of Culture and Education, the City of Quito, and a special bicentennial

government agency. I refer to the culturally friendly aspects of this program and how staff members at *Hijos de Ebanos* attempted to diversify the straightforward multicultural agenda which was outlined by the organizational agencies. After describing this program, I question whether this plan reflects the indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian movements' original intention of the intercultural model.

In the second part of the chapter, I turn to another event that was held at *Hijos de Ebanos* after the election of U.S. President Obama. Drawing on Rahier's (2008) work, I contend that this event was a transruptive ethnographic event that created a dialogue on race and blackness in Quito. I argue that this occasion was a true intercultural event because it brought Ecuadorians of all racial and cultural backgrounds to the center based on a collective interest in the politicization of blackness. This event also prompted a discussion about race and politics as they are involved in the co-optation of social movement leaders. I include pieces of this discussion to instantiate demonstrate how activists interpret Obama's election. Specifically, I provide examples of how activists positioned themselves in a transnational black political community employ activist testimonies that suggest Obama's election could be used to weaken black rights activism.

Background

Today, Afro-Ecuadorians are included in official representations of Ecuadorian nationalism and in state policies. As discussed in Chapter 2, now that the 1998 and 2008 constitutions recognize Afro-Ecuadorians as "a people" with entitlement to a package of rights, several programs have been established to grant recognition and bolster the social, cultural and political inclusion of Afro-descendants in Ecuador. This effort has been played out primarily through cultural representations like dance and

music festivals and intercultural ethno-education programs. While these programs call attention to blackness, they simultaneously reinforce stereotypes that blacks are only good for dancing and music.

Multiculturalism and Interculturalism

During my fieldwork I attended several Afro-Ecuadorian cultural events that were funded at least partially by the state. These programs were the product of a shifting paradigm in Ecuador towards interculturalism. “Interculturalism” is a concept that was created by the indigenous movement during the 1990s in response to the divisive effects of neoliberal policies (Walsh and García 2002). In its most basic form, interculturalism refers to cross-cultural learning. The creators of the concept, indigenous leaders, intended for it to become a way of life or a re-invisioning of Ecuadorian society, where instead of simply co-existing, citizens interact with one another based on the principles of respect and appreciation.

In recent years, the Ecuadorian state has appropriated this concept and adopted it into national legislation and public policy initiatives. The state contends that this is a rupture from previous years of divisive strands of multiculturalism that did not generate intercultural understanding. Along with Almeida (2005) and Rahier (2008), I questioned if state-sponsored interculturalism departed from the previous multicultural agendas, which attempted to gloss over deep histories of racialization through the provision of ethno-cultural recognition.

In reference to Cohen and Bains (1988:12-13), Rahier (2008:148) suggests that “the multicultural illusion is that dominant and subordinate can somehow swap places and learn how the other half lives, whilst leaving the structures of power intact. As if

power relations could be magically suspended through the direct exchange of experience, and ideology dissolve into the thin air of face-to-face communication.”

Neoliberalism’s Cultural Project

Hale (2006:269) insists that neoliberalism's cultural project "contributes both to the rising prominence” of indigenous and Afro-descendant activists and at once curbs their “transformative aspirations.” In his understanding, the desired outcome of this project is to deflate opposition to the state by including certain indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples into the state, while ensuring that their agendas are de-politicized. I think that this conceptual framework applies to certain components of Ecuador’s ethnic policies, particularly intercultural programs, such as the one I described in this chapter. In effect, the plan is to celebrate cultural difference, to quiet the dissenting voices by disbursing cultural rights and intercultural program funding, but these programs do not guarantee respect for other cultures, nor center the realities of race in Quito.

Activist Perspectives on Interculturalism

Now I shift gears to call attention to the intellectual-activist voices regarding this important issue. Some black activists follow these programs with a critical eye. While most of my research consultants told me that intercultural ethno-education programs were an improvement over the complete absence of black experiences in the school system, they are aware of the empty promise for change. José Chalá spoke about these issues during our interview. He recalled that...

We always speak about interculturalism as an academic concept but it is very strange because the people who created the concept are indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian. They created the concept from their quotidian way of living. How can some random experts speak about something that we created ourselves? I mean how do I remove this ventriloquist that has been speaking for me and telling me that this is good for me? So I always say

that if interculturality is a dialogue between two cultures, I am not going to make a dialogue in an asymmetric circumstance.

If the interculturality, as they say in the academy, is about tolerance, I do not want to be tolerated, I want to be respected. So, the citizens executing their rights and the creation of public policies are two faces of the same coin. You cannot have a dialogue with another person in an asymmetric circumstance in which the other ones have all the access to health, education, housing, employment, while my people are poor. That is not a dialogue. I will feel in a dialogue when all those historic gaps are resolved. That is the respect I demand.

If we start saying that we need resources for public policy, money for reparations and affirmative action, then ok we can sit down. And that is when we start talking about equal levels of dialogue. Those are effective levels of citizenship and interculturality. If it is not like that, then it will just be one big speech; just a big event, and I will not participate in that.

Mr. Chalá addressed the politics of knowledge and inequality imbedded in Ecuadorian interculturalism. There are fundamental issues that need to be addressed before Ecuadorians can truly appreciate cultural differences and the experiences of those defined by the state as cultural minorities.

I also spoke to Jonathan, the *Afro-Esmeraldeño* male from Chapter 3, about how he understands interculturalism and the need for these programs. Jonathan stressed that these programs are necessary because unlike Ecuador's true "other" ethnic group, the indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorians never learn about their culture or their history in formal school systems. He explained to me that,

The indigenous are different because they are Indians in their country. They have education, they go to school and in school they are taught about the Chapala. They talk about traditions. They learn to speak Quechua. It is not the same with us. We learn math, we learn language, we learn biology but we do not learn African history in our schools.

First, Jonathan notes that indigenous Ecuadorians are "in their own country." While he considers himself a full citizen of Ecuador, his words lead one to believe that he feels like a second class citizen at times, particularly in the case of history and education. To

remedy this situation, he posits that the state should fund programs that recognize and valorize Afro-Ecuadorian history and culture as they do indigenous peoples. His comments justified the proliferation of ethno-education and intercultural education programs because unfortunately, nothing was being done to include Afro-Ecuadorians in mainstream curriculum.

On the Commodification of Culture and Race

Afro-Ecuadorian cultural organizations gain recognition from state campaigns to promote black culture. The state finances Afro cultural groups as a way of representing the cultural and racial equality of the state. Since the urbanization of the black population and the recognition of Afro-Ecuadorians as a distinct ethno-cultural group, the demand for “black” music and dance has increased. This is particularly true in the context of globalized capitalism and neoliberal multiculturalism because culture is objectified (Wade 1998). Thus, there is a market for “ethnic” cultural forms like *bomba* and *marimba*. To add to this dynamic, the *bomba* and *marimba*, the principal musical styles that represent Chota and Esmeraldas respectively, are ways of representing and talking about blackness, race and culture in a de-politicized way. Busdiecker (2006) observed this same de-politicization of blackness through the Afro-Bolivian performance of *saya*.

There are several Afro-Ecuadorian cultural groups in Quito. Many of these organizations or associations put on musical performances throughout the city. The styles of music performed are typically either *bomba* or *marimba*, with influences of other genres like *bae*, reggae, hip hop, salsa, *andarele* or romantic. Often the musical workers dress themselves in clothing associated with traditional or folk forms of black culture in Esmeraldas or Chota. For example, women wear long, free-flowing skirts

typical of these communities. The skirts are intentionally oversized so that dancers can pinch the fabric between their fingers and make long, swooping motions to the rhythm. Women also perform dances while balancing a bottle on their heads. This practice is also associated with Chota and Esmeraldas. Men wear basic, loose-fitted woven cotton shirts and pants, which differ from the everyday styles. It is important to note that these cultural forms take on new significance according to where they are performed and for whom. The state commissions *Afro-Esmeraldeño* or *Afro-Choteño* music and dance groups to come to Quito to perform for a predominantly *mestizo* audience during national celebrations. I witnessed this transpire during the bicentennial celebrations that took place during my fieldwork. Dancers in “traditional” Afro attire perform on national stages at times of national identity formation, as a way to display the historically deep and ethnically rich character of a multicultural nation. Their dance and their ethnicity are commodified under the hegemonic neoliberal multicultural system.

A related result of the commodification of black culture is that culture has emerged as a way of life (Wade 1999). There are professional musicians and dancers who travel around Ecuador or other countries where they represent Afro-Ecuadorians on the global stage. These events translate into funds for social movement activities. As a result, dancing became a principal means to support Afro groups. As one astute woman put it, “We have to dance for money.” Her grassroots organization realized the effectiveness of music and dance performances to raise money for housing. This woman recalled that when the members were trying to raise money to purchase building materials to construct their homes, often micro-credit projects failed. Thus, the women had to rely on public dance performances to fund their project. In this way, the stereotype of the

black performer is reproduced within the black community and to Ecuadorian society as a whole.

As Rahier (2008) points out, the problem is not that Ecuadorians value Afro-Ecuadorian music and dance. Rather, these cultural displays are one of the only virtues publicly granted to Afro-Ecuadorians. Furthermore, the state appears to prefer presentations that perpetuate stereotypes and folklore so there is little potential for the audience to perceive Afro-Ecuadorian performers beyond his limited view. To complicate this dynamic, there is strong competition among Afro music groups over cultural authenticity. His rivalry has led to fragmentation between music groups, tied to black social movement organizations. In the following section an example of a state-sponsored intercultural program illustrates how these types of programs function in practice.

Mes del Niño

Hijos de Ebanó is one of the only black organizations in Quito that received funding from an international NGO, the Inter-American Development Agency. This organization hosted a month-long campaign called *Mes del Niño*. The aim of this event was to promote children's intercultural education. Funding was provided by a special bicentennial committee, and the Ministries of Culture and Education. These agencies also designed the agenda for the staff of *Hijos de Ebanó*, which was to bring groups of children from low-income public schools to the center to learn about Afro-Ecuadorian culture. The staff at *Hijos* was told to give a brief introduction, teach the children a dance, and then instruct them how to play Afro-Ecuadorian musical instruments. At the end, everyone was to share a snack and then depart back to their "normal" lives.

Eight separate groups partook in the program and there were thirty to forty students per school group. In total, 255 students participated, of which four appeared to be of Afro-descent. This observation was confirmed by the center employees that self-identified as Afro-Ecuadorian or *mulatto*. I was a participant observer during these events, so I helped the staff members with small tasks like organizing the visitors into groups, handing out snacks, and answering questions.

On each occasion, the children arrived in school buses, accompanied by two to three of their teachers. As soon as the buses parked, the kids barreled down the exit and were then funneled through the main entrance of *Hijos*. As they entered the center, the kids oohed and aahed over the giant, colorful posters and memorabilia that covered the walls. These items represented over a decade of black activism such as cultural workshops, political demonstrations, and participation in international conferences. It seemed that both students and chaperones were entering a world unknown to them.

Once seated, Glenda, one of the administrators of *Hijos*, greeted the group and asked general questions to test their knowledge of Afro-Ecuadorian history and culture. Glenda first asked the children if they could name a few national heroes and second, if they had ever learned about any Afro-Ecuadorian individuals in their school books. The children named all male national heroes: the Indian military leader Rumiñahui, the Inca emperor Huáscar, and the revolutionary independence leader Simon Bolívar. They were not able to name a single Afro-Ecuadorian individual, most likely because blacks were either not included or marginalized in the formal school curriculum. For this reason, black activists have advocated for the government to include Afro-Ecuadorian subjects in the education system.

When Glenda inquired about Afro-Ecuadorians in their textbooks, there was usually an awkward pause from the group. In general, there were three reactions from the school chaperons. On certain occasions I observed teachers steady their focus on the floor so as to avoid any potential disapproving looks from myself and/or the staff. On a couple occasions, the visitors mumbled something about Esmeraldas or Chota, or someone shouted out a mock answer. Overall, however, no one was able to produce a satisfactory response. At certain times, I noted approving smiles on the teacher's faces. I interpreted this reaction as their way of acknowledging the importance of the silence and the value of that moment for adults and children.

After this introductory exercise, groups of children were shown an animated video produced by the Ministry of Education. This video illustrated the ideology of multiculturalism: to accentuate difference and separation while at the same time providing "proof" of inclusion. For instance, the animated characters represented Ecuador's three primary racial groups: Indians, *mestizos*, and blacks. This video seemed to flatten each group onto a color pallet. In the film, the male Indian character wore a poncho as his ethno-racial marker, and the female black character had an overabundance of tightly-curved ringlets as her ethno-racial marker. However, the *mestizo* figures were not marked in any way, leading one to believe that they represented dominant ideas of racial normalcy.

During the second part of the presentation, the program changed slightly. Staff members of *Hijos de Ebanos* were able to exercise some variety from the original agenda assigned by the organizers. For instance, staff member discussed the contributions and political struggles of Afro-descendants throughout the region. For

example, Agustín, a 30-year-old man from Esmeraldas, spoke about Alonso de Illescas, the sixteenth century *Cimarrón* leader of the Zambo Republic, an independent maroon colony in the coastal region of Esmeraldas. While Illescas' contributions are not common knowledge to the typical Ecuadorian citizen, he has been adopted as the national hero of the Afro-Ecuadorian people. Other times, the speaker discussed the civil rights struggle in the United States or made reference to an act of anti-black discrimination that had recently taken place. For instance, the center director Claudia spoke about an incident where a black soccer player was kicked out of a restaurant in Guayaquil because the owner thought he was a drug dealer. When asked why, the owner of the restaurant said that the man was talking on his phone excessively.

After these discussions, the children were taught an Afro-Peruvian song, as a way for them to learn about "Afro" culture in neighboring Peru, then led through the center's Diaspora room where there was display of flags representing the countries of the Afro-Latin American and Afro-Caribbean Diaspora. A collection of African dashikis and batik paintings hung next to these items. Finally, they learned how to play the *bomba* and the *marimba*, two musical instruments associated with black culture in the Chota-Mira Valley and Esmeraldas, respectively.

Although the children were again getting a version of blackness that was at times reduced to cultural artifacts, an Afro-Ecuadorian program volunteer told me that she saw this event as an opportunity to fill the void of Afro-Ecuadorian histories in Ecuador's education system. Furthermore, teaching instruments associated with two culturally distinct "black" regions of Ecuador offered the students a more dimensional representation of blackness in Ecuador and the Diaspora.

Obama: A Transruptive Ethnographic Moment

Afro-Ecuadorian reactions to the election of President Obama are discussed in this section. Obama's election prompted a discussion about politics and black identity in Quito. Specifically, this event created a forum for activists to invoke race in their dialogue. Ecuadorian activists have stressed the importance of respect and interest in order for Ecuadorian interculturalism to be effective. The Obama panel marked one such event where Ecuadorian co-nationals were drawn into a predominately black space because of their interest in Obama's election and the way that activists connected their experience of blackness, as Afro-descendants, with this event.

I employ Rahier's (2008) concept of multicultural ethnographic" transruption," based on his readings of Hesse (2000), and Hale's (2006) use of neoliberal multiculturalism to interpret these events. This framework has purchase to interpret the events that took place in the period following Obama's election because they momentarily shook the Ecuadorian racial order.

Afro-Ecuadorians spread awareness of Obama throughout his presidential campaign during workshops and through media reports. After the US president's victory, there was an upsurge of celebration. This ethnographic moment created a space for discussion about race and transnational racial identifications. At least in the case of one Obama panel that was held at *Hijos de Ebanos* after the election, this was a true intercultural event between Ecuadorians but also the greater African Diaspora. This event contrasts with the typical state-funded intercultural programs because non-blacks were brought to the center out of their own interest in the positive racial connections between their Afro-descendant co-nationals and the symbolic black leader of the United States.

Reactions to the Election of Obama

The staff of *Hijos de Ebanos* organized a panel to discuss the relevance and the meaning of Obama's election for blacks in Ecuador. This time, the event was financed by the cultural center and was open to the public. I was not present for this event, because it took place before I arrived in Quito, but I conducted interviews with several of the participants. I was told there was a significant turnout of roughly forty black, indigenous and *mestizo* participants. The opinions expressed during interviews reflected the work of several years of black social and political organization in Quito, during which time race-cognizance has increased significantly for a particular sector of black activists in Quito.

The tones of these comments were varied but it was clear that Obama was a powerful symbol for the people with whom I spoke. There was a general feeling of motivation and inspiration for Afro-descendants and non-Afro Obama supporters, particularly in terms of encouraging Afro-Ecuadorians to get involved in local organizations and continue their formal education. A prominent Afro-Ecuadorian intellectual-activist male in his mid-40s told me that "Obama is a referent for the self-esteem of the Afro population, to tell them [success] is possible with effort and preparing ourselves by studying."

This was surely a sign of encouragement, but this comment is strikingly similar to the pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps mentality that denies the greater structural issues restricting blacks from certain educational areas. A younger, university-educated single black father who taught Afro dance lessons at *Hijos de Ebanos* to support his 10-year-old-daughter was less optimistic about the possibility of such social and economic mobility after completing further education in Quito. He explained that "Over there [in

the US] a black person that gets educated can get out of poverty. Here, if blacks try, they may still be in the same situation.” This comment may have been based on perceptions of anti-black racism by employers and structural discrimination in Ecuadorian society as well as his interpretations of class. His comments reflect his position as a black man in the global south, which is economically marginalized by the global capitalist system.

Others told me that Obama’s election was evidence that blacks could obtain the presidency in Ecuador. Referring to his own political career, which included a mayoral campaign, one 53-year-old Afro-Ecuadorian male named Osvaldo said,

I felt the effects of racial discrimination but I could not see it clear enough so as to break the pattern. I saw it as an everyday thing in which a black person just could not be the president of the nation. Because if he achieved the presidency, he would be killed.

Osvaldo was referenced the assassination of the former black Ecuadorian presidential candidate Jaime Hurtado that occurred in 1999. Many black activists with whom I spoke suspected this was a racially motivated act of anti-black violence.

Glenda, the co-administrator of *Hijos de Ebanos*, explained that the idea behind intercultural programs is to awaken the curiosity of the “other” and that personal interest will motivate people to attend these events. The Obama panel hosted by the center was one such event that attracted a diverse crowd of Ecuadorians considered “others” from the co-director’s point of view. Her language suggested that the Obama event was “other” to non- Afro-descendants, because although “We [Afro-Ecuadorians] are in Ecuador and that [the election of a black president] happened in the United States, it is still *our* history because he is the first Afro-descendant to be president of that country [emphasis added].”

I asked her opinion about the success of the Obama panel in drawing such a diverse crowd. She said, "It depends on the way you attract people and make them interested in what is being done." In her personal understanding, this was a true intercultural moment because non-blacks came to the center out of their individual interests in Obama, which she generally interpreted as an achievement for all Afro-descendants.

Other research consultants did not share the same opinions. For example, I asked Marta, a 60-year-old black woman who had worked as a domestic employee in the same home for the past 23 years, about whether she had been impacted by the election of President Obama. She replied, "No. He is a president we do not know. We have just seen him in the newspapers and on television." She did say she was affected by this event at work, however. Marta noted, "I hear my bosses talk to their friends. They talk to people in the United States, and I feel they are mad to see a black getting power." While Marta did not see an immediate connection between the election of Obama and increased opportunities for blacks in Ecuador, her words allude to a possible rise in anxiety that blacks are overcoming socio-economic inequality, which could translate to increased tensions with her employers and in Ecuadorian society in general.

Juan Ocles, former president of the FOGNEP (*Federación de Grupos y Organizaciones Negros de Pichincha*) and current director of the Afro-Ecuadorian social development office in the *Municipio de Quito*, was skeptical about the effects of Obama's election. While he said that personally, Obama's election seemed like a victory, it could be used as an example of progress that stunts the drive of black

activism in Quito. Linking Obama's election with black politics in Ecuador, Ocles argued that black representatives are intentionally allowed entrance into social and political spaces as a way to suppress claims from civil society that social exclusion and inequality are still major problems. He opined this as follows:

I believe the Afro movement these days is going through some sort of inertia because the very fact of Obama's election seems to have undermined his speech and his actions. Here in Ecuador, the same fact that an Afro minister was nominated, or like Roberto Cuero, the currently named governor of the most conservative city of Guayaquil, in Guayas province.

We are experiencing this here in Quito with [a city administrator]. These are elements that kind of stop the mobilization of the population. As if their discourse vanishes. As if there is no longer a need to fight for inclusion. I say it is the other way around because these characters on occasions are used to stop the mobilization of the Afro movement. And it is another way to say 'calm down, we do not have racism here. Look, we have a black administrator.'

Juan Ocles' overt skepticism about the rise of prominent Afro-Ecuadorian people in places of social and political power could conceivably be based on a perception of other Afro-Ecuadorians as threats or competitors. However, this did not appear to be the case as he provided an example of this same process ("the Obama effect") in his own term in office. He explained as follows:

For instance, with this space that we have won through the organization of black groups of Pichincha and the movement of black women of Quito. This space was created in February of 2001; nevertheless, this space has not fulfilled the hopes of the Afro population. Supposedly, what we do from here is organizational support, but we do not even have a means of transportation to go late at night and meet with the people. How can we work in organizational strengthening when we do not have the necessary resources to work on it? That is also part of the decorative speech of the authorities. So the authorities have the license to say 'Do not complain, we are supporting.' Here we work for the promotion of the Afro values and we create these spaces, but in the long-term, it is not like that.

Looking at Neoliberal Multiculturalism from Below

In this section, criticisms of the multicultural model from within the Afro-Ecuadorian social movement are reviewed and accounts by activists are analyzed. Their testimonies provided on-the-ground insight about complications within the movement, particularly those connected to the multicultural system. Their accounts complement the theoretical arguments made by Hale (2002), Rahier (2008), and Almeida (2005) regarding the neutralization of ethnic social movements due to cooptation. This process, derived from power discrepancies within the movement, produced fragmentation resulting from conflicts over adequate and respectful representation of Afro-Ecuadorians.

Diego. One of the most vocal opponents of the “cultural turn” of black politics was a gentleman named Diego, in his mid-forties. Diego was more affluent than other consultants in this study because of his line of work, as a legal advisor to a multilateral agency. I presented excerpts from our interview because he is a key critic of what I conceptualize as the neoliberal multiculturalism’s cultural project (Hale 2004). It was important to include the voices of individuals on-the-ground who spoke out against the ethnicizing of political discourses in Quito to present the diversity in activist opinions but also because they paralleled many opinions held by Afro-descendants not affiliated with social movement organizations.

In reference to the political discourses used by CODAE, academics and certain NGOs, Diego took Afro-Ecuadorian leaders to task, exposing corruption among them and the racism still rampant in Ecuadorian society.

We are Black. Ecuadorian. Black Ecuadorians. We are Ecuadorian like you are American, not European. The word ‘black’ is forbidden here. They are confusing the word ‘black’ for ‘nigger.’ Actually, it is the word ‘nigger’

that is bad, not black. Some people think that it is a huge achievement for people to say Afro-Ecuadorians but in reality that is bullshit. Society still hates the color of our skin. We must stop fooling ourselves. I will be happy when blacks in this country are well off and have achieved a lot. Only then will there be change. We have to be more intelligent... Afro-Ecuadorian leaders should encourage others. Instead they talk about slavery and take advantage of that. They need to change their speech. They think about their own pockets.

Diego was clearly disgruntled by the neoliberal multicultural politics in which black leaders were engaged. He stated that black activists occupy themselves with a change in nomenclature instead of working towards true social and political change. This is a common tenet of the neoliberal multiculturalism critique. From this perspective, the state, NGOs and NGO-like institutions work towards cultural recognition and cultural reclamation when some of these efforts could be directed towards dismantling discrimination and the structures that perpetuate racial disparities, particularly those related to skin color.

Diego also commented on the commodification or professionalization of black activism in Quito. When I asked him about the cultural and political relationship between Afro-Brazilians and Afro-Ecuadorians, he responded,

The connection is those who use black people as a ticket to travel world. They are connected to travel, have jobs, take advantage of the majority. But the majority does not care... They care about food, money, life. Before we were called black, now we call ourselves Afro-Ecuadorian. But just because you change the name does not mean that things change. We need to stop letting people fool us.

Diego was very critical of highly ranked government agents in Quito. He opined many abused their position to fulfill personal aspirations instead of tend to the needs of the poor. He believed socio-economic needs had to be met before activists travelled to conferences to discuss “Afro-Latin American” culture. He spoke openly about these issues because he did not gain anything from playing it safe. With an independent

income and ability to often travel outside of the country, there was little need to alter his tone because he was not dependent on or in close contact with the individuals addressed in his narrative. Perhaps other research consultants did not feel comfortable speaking in an open manner because they were part of the social and cultural network of black activists in Quito. In the next subsection I turn to an interview with someone from the grassroots sector who also critique government politics towards grassroots activists and civil society organizations.

Perlas de Africa. Power structures affected the experiences of all Afro-Ecuadorian activists in Quito's black social movement community. This was particularly the case when grassroots activists interacted with NGOs and state agencies. Funding and representation are constant concerns for activists. The distribution of funding for organizations goes through CODAE (*Corporación de Desarrollo Afroecuatoriano*). The *Centro Cultural Afroecuatoriano*, affiliated with the Daniel Comboni Church, is also a source of funding for organizations and on rare occasions, international agencies like the Inter-American Development Bank has contributed to social movement organizations.

Members of the grassroots also made critiques that the state and NGOs were not interested in the poor. For example, some of the women from *Perlas de Africa* said that these institutions did not refer to them for advice or suggestions for policy change. They were excluded from certain events, perhaps not directly, but indirectly because of social or physical location. Sometimes events were held on the opposite side of the city, which made it difficult for many grassroots activists in the north to attend these functions. In general, they told me that there was a significant gap between Afro-

Ecuadorian government agencies and “*la gente*” (the people). The women were critical of black activists in leadership roles and state agents because they did not make an effort to understand the lives and living conditions of the economically marginalized black community. In addition, two of the women said they felt abandoned by the Comboni Church because representatives no longer prepared programs that they considered important. Apparently the leadership in earlier years reached out to these women and actively recruited them into the mission.

Mira. Mira struggled for respect and recognition from intellectual-activists and members of the government agency CODAE. She voiced this concern as follows:

Here our governments use us but never help the poor. For example, if I go to ask for help from the state [CODAE] they will not even permit me to talk to the secretary. You have to talk to the security officer and pass the message but the message will never get there.

Today, with the black organization, we realize that we are not objects. We are people that are able to support ourselves with your work, our ideas, our studies, our forces, we are people with a living mind and we have the right to have our necessities. We are no longer conformists, the wishful blacks that wait for the patron to tell us what to do. No. Now we are our own voice and our own vote, free to express and explore what we feel and we do not have to keep our voice hidden.

Mira felt that the government does not support the black and poor sectors so civil society organizations are necessary. Mira also made claim to her rights as an Ecuadorian citizen. In her testimony she and fellow activists had shed their stigmatization as “objects” in order to gain a new identity as rights bearing subjects. The movement is a source of power and motivation, which is felt at the personal level. However, grassroots activists were still aware of the power and politics that restricted their access to official political spaces. In sum, while Mira found political subjectivity,

she is denied true citizenship rights because she is excluded from certain spaces, such as state offices.

Discussion

The Obama event hosted by black activists at *Hijos de Ebanos* pulled indigenous and *mestizo* groups into a space of politicized blackness. In doing so, these activists re-articulated the meanings of blackness in Quito based on their racial identification as members of the African Diaspora within a society that has historically excluded them. Many individuals understood blackness as a powerful political tool that momentarily commanded the attention of a racially and culturally diverse crowd of *Quiteños*. Furthermore, as Ecuadorian blacks related to the political movements of Afro-descendants throughout the Diaspora, the political weight of the black identity increased.

This event stood in contrast to typical state-funded intercultural programs that make blackness in Ecuador an event, not a norm. While there are improvements for social inclusion today and regulations for affirmative action policies intended to lead to positive social changes, it is clear that change is a work in progress. Ecuador's current national development plan delineates certain regulations for Afro-descendants to be added into the curriculum while instituting quotas for admittances of Afro-descendants in higher education.

Although the Obama event at *Hijos de Ebanos* momentarily shook the Ecuadorian racial system, it is best understood as an opportunity to understand processes for racial identity formation. The narratives I recorded after this event provide insight into the shifting significance of blackness in Quito. Some activists connect the social struggles at home with a globalized form of racialization that places peoples of African descent in

disadvantaged social positions. However, the conversations I had with activists in the summer of 2009 convinced me that black activists in Ecuador are making an effort to work against the hegemonic tendencies of the state that try to neutralize their claims to social justice.

Finally, it seems that there needs to be some middle ground needs to be established between the constant celebration of blackness in isolated multicultural or intercultural events and the previous model of outright exclusion of blacks from official national spaces. Thus, while music and dance performances allow visibility for the black population, they might also be used by the state and non-blacks as evidence that Ecuadorian society has overcome discrimination and social exclusion. It could be said that whereas a decade ago blacks were excluded from representations of national identity, today representations of blackness is a stand in for social equality.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

This thesis explored the ambiguities of race, blackness and identity in Quito. It sought to understand the meanings, expressions and configurations of black identity constructed by black activists in Quito. I analyzed the particular experiences of blackness and subject formation in the context of Ecuadorian nation-building. Whereas blackness and Africanity have long been silenced in official narratives of the nation, today blacks are recognized as a distinct ethno-cultural group. These changes have prompted important discussions about who is black or Afro-descendant in Ecuadorian society, which has historically been structured around hegemonic ideologies of *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento*. Blackness was not simply denied in official discourses, but in social relations. Quito's black activist community contests this order by mobilizing around a collective black or Afro-Ecuadorian identity.

Major Findings in the Study

The findings detailed here imply that black identities and the experience of blackness in Quito are highly nuanced. Blackness and black identity are invoked differentially according to particular socio-historical circumstances and positionalities within the black social movement. In Chapter 2, I delineated the specific conditions and processes that led to the formation of black identities in Ecuador. I demonstrated that international factors (i.e. the civil rights movements and liberation struggles in Africa, the creation of multilateral agencies and human rights discourses, and the Catholic Church) and local adaptations (structural adjustment reforms, the activities of Daniel Comboni missionaries, multicultural Constitutional reform, and increased social inequalities) contributed to the formation of race and ethnicity-cognizant identities in Quito.

In Chapter 3, I demonstrated differences in how individuals interpret Afro-Ecuadorian and black identity. I found that knowing the cultural and political language of the state and international agencies has its rewards. For example, those who are versed in the discourse of rights and ethnicity are often the ones who are able to attain important spaces in the black social movement and ethnic government agencies.

Afro-descendant activists in Quito live variegated lives and blackness is not necessarily a principle component of their identities. This is especially true when comparing the narratives of the grassroots research consultants with those of the Afro-Ecuadorian intellectual-activists. Those in socially and politically powerful positions have a different speech than the grassroots sector, which in turn affects their mobility within the Afro-Ecuadorian social movement and in the social/racial topography of Quito in general.

In Chapter 4, I explored how activists negotiate blackness and identity in hegemonic state-funded multiculturalisms. I found that at least for my ethnographic case study, state-funded programs have the tendency to reduce Afro-Ecuadorian identities and histories to cultural artifacts and aesthetic representations. Afro-Ecuadorian activists are forced to negotiate their identities against these tendencies and diversify the meaning of blackness. This objective was met during the Obama panel, which I argued, provided an ethnographic transruption that opened a forum for discussions of race, culture, nationality, and transnationality.

Caveats and Limitations

These findings cannot be extrapolated beyond the small sample size. My research does not represent the views or actions of all Afro-descendants in Quito. Nor do they represent all Afro-Ecuadorian activists in Quito. I interviewed 35 individuals

from different types of organizations and levels of activity that compose the general Afro-Ecuadorian social movement community. Some felt more or less identified with black organizations and others were more committed to gender based organizations. For instance, two of the women whom I interviewed told me that given the choice, they would rather attend an all female women's movement meeting instead of a mixed gender black movement organizational event. Finally, I have strong reason to believe that Afro-descendants in Quito who are not affiliated with social movement organizations do not privilege blackness over other aspects of their identity, as is often the case with members of the community with whom I spoke.

Implications for Future Research

Race, culture and politics will continue to be important topics in Latin American societies and social science research. We have gained only glimpses of phases of this cycle. Therefore, this research is only the beginning of greater scholarly and activist trajectories. These findings are important for the study of social movements and identity formation because they demonstrate the complexities of racial identities in the context of unequal power relations. There are several possibilities for future research. For example, it will be important to understand how black activists and discourses on blackness are shaped over time in accordance to changing state-formations and international developments. This is particularly true in the present moment in Ecuadorian history. The Ecuadorian government claims to be "post-neoliberal" and there have been notable alterations towards the democratization of politics. The increased visibility of Afro-Ecuadorian agencies and the relationships between the government and Afro-Ecuadorian social movement organizations will produce unpredictable results. This changing dynamic could lead to fissures within the black

social movement and with others fighting for limited resources. On the other hand, this relationship might bring about positive changes towards addressing racial inequalities.

Furthermore, I am particularly interested in understanding the dynamic between various layers of black subjectivities and nationalities in Quito. The number of Afro-descendant immigrants in Quito is steadily rising. The majority foreign-born Afro-descendants in Quito are Colombian while Nigerians, Kenyans, and Cubans populations are also significant. These groups experience discrimination from various fronts: for their nationality, for the color of their skin, their class, culture or occupation. Women bear the brunt of this discrimination because they are subjected to particular forms of subordination and shifting stereotypes that work to maintain gender and racial inequality.

The Ecuadorian government does not grant citizenship to the vast majority of immigrants that come from poor countries. They are criminals according to state legislation. These groups face intense racial discrimination and experience race in specific ways, related to their nationality, class, and “illegal” status and social narratives around them. To the best of my knowledge, there are currently no partnerships between black Ecuadorians and black immigrants in the struggle against anti-black discrimination. Based on my fieldwork in Quito, it seems that there are in fact, tensions between these various ethnic and racial groups that collectively compose blackness in Quito. Therefore, I am interested in the particular relationships and discussions around race, nationality and citizenship in Quito that will arise in the years to come.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Meredith Main is originally from Columbus, Ohio. She moved to Gainesville, Florida at age 12. Ms. Main attended several schools in Gainesville, North Carolina, and Massachusetts before entering the high school dual enrollment program at Santa Fe College. Her interest in Anthropology grew after completing several anthropology courses with Professor Stuart McRae. She travelled to Honduras and Peru with her anthropology classmates. These experiences sparked her interest in Latin America.

Meredith graduated from the University of Florida with summa cum laude distinction in 2006. She travelled to Quito, Ecuador the following year to complete a language program and to participate in internship opportunities. It was during this trip that she realized she wanted to know more about the Afro-Ecuadorian community in that city. Ms. Main graduated from the University of Florida with a master's degree in Latin American Studies in 2010 and plans to enter a doctoral program in anthropology in fall of 2011.