AFRO-ARGENTINES AND THE 2010 CENSUS: A PATH TOWARD VISIBILITY?

By

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To my parents, Baldomero and Carmen Castillo, who taught me that education was the key to opening doors and opportunities that could have otherwise remained locked.
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<tr>
<td>ACO</td>
<td>Afro-Argentines of Colonial Origins Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADA</td>
<td>African Diaspora of Argentina Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>INDEC</td>
<td>Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Censos – National Institute of Statistics and Census of Argentina</td>
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While most Latin American countries acknowledge that their cultural and demographic composition is a result of a history of conquest that relied heavily on the exploitation of indigenous peoples and an African slave trade as well as mestizaje (racial mixing) between these two groups and European colonizers, Argentina has historically rewritten its history and attempted to erase its indigenous and African past, marketing the myth that Argentina is a superior, European descended society. Through leaders and politicians that have explained the “disappearance” of its once large Afro-Argentine population as the result of a series of wars and disease epidemics, Afro-Argentines have essentially been rendered outsiders in their own nation.

In 2010, as part of the process of acknowledging and counting the Afro-descendant population of countries that were signatories to the 2001 Durban Conference against Racism, Argentina took its first step toward obtaining an official enumeration of its Afro-descendant population. This event was hailed as an opportunity for Afro-Argentine movements to make a push toward visibility and inclusion in the greater Argentine society. This work examines the process of formulating the census question and looks at other spaces such as the internet, which many groups within the
Argentine African diaspora have used to push toward this visibility and inclusion on their own terms.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: AFRO-ARGENTINES – REAL OR NOT?

My relationship with Argentina began in September 2006 when, after wrapping up a year of living and teaching in Korea, I decided to pursue a TEFL certification in Buenos Aires. I chose Buenos Aires because I had carried aspirations of visiting the country, but having lived in a society that was so linguistically and culturally different from my own for the previous year, Argentina seemed almost a homecoming with its native Spanish tongue and Latin American location. Adapting to life in Buenos Aires was relatively easy, and because of my unique living arrangements where I shared a house with several Argentine students from both the capital and the interior of the country, I was able to quickly pick up the porteño¹ slang and the lunfardo² which is such an integral part of Argentine identity.

Che, Negra!

As my friendships grew stronger with local Argentines and we developed trust in one another, I soon noticed that many of my new friends had begun referring to me as “negra”. The use of this term directed at me caught me by surprise, since for most Latin American Spanish speakers, negra tends to mean “black woman.” As a light to medium skinned Mexican American mestiza of Spanish and indigenous decent, I was greatly

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¹ Porteño is a Spanish term that generally refers to anyone inhabiting a port city, but is most commonly understood throughout Latin America and Spain to refer to anyone originally from the city of Buenos Aires, since it is usually evoked to convey a message about the attitudes, customs or habits of the people of Buenos Aires.

² While lunfardo was originally a dialect that originated in the lower classes of Buenos Aires in the late 19th and early 20th century, many of the words have been widely adopted throughout Argentina as well as Uruguay, and the word is most commonly used to describe the speech of Buenos Aires. Because so much of lunfardo is derived from word play such as reversing syllables to form new words (for example, in lunfardo “hotel” becomes “tel-ho”) as well as words that are unique to both tango and gaucho culture, most native Spanish speakers from outside the region of Rio de la Plata have a difficult time in deciphering both the meanings and intentions behind many commonly used phrases in Argentina.
confused by the use of this word to address *me*, and this prompted me to ask more questions the next time I heard the term used. However, I remember being even more confused by my friend’s explanation than by the use of the word in the first place. My friend, a young man of white skin, light green eyes and light brown hair explained to me that I shouldn’t worry about the use of the term because it was meant as a term of endearment. He explained that since “Argentina had no real black people” the term was affectionately used to refer to anyone with dark brown or black *hair*. He explained that in the Argentine context, the word had many uses and that this was just one of them, but I was to rest assured that the term was a sign of affection. Coming from an American background and understanding of race and race relations, and knowing that the majority of Latin America countries owed much of their past economic developments to the slave trade just as the United States had, I found the idea that “Argentina had no real black people” more than a bit dubious. I was keen to find out what the other various uses of the word *negro*.

Amongst my friends and throughout Argentine society as a whole, I soon discovered that the use of the term negro was not as benevolent as my friend had suggested. While it is used by some in an affectionate context in reference to brunettes, it is more commonly used to make social class distinctions and is used as a pejorative term toward immigrants and native Argentines that occupy the lowest economic and social class. Commonly use variations of this term are cabecitas negras (literally meaning little black heads) or negro/a villero which translates to “black person of the villa” (villas, or villas miserias, are the Argentine equivalent of Brazil’s favelas or the United States’ “hoods” or “housing projects”). This is another example of
appropriating a word that is generally used to indicate race or color to describe someone that is viewed as undesirable not only because of their low socioeconomic status, but because of the social implications that are associated with living in the villa. Contemporary scholars of class relations in Argentina have dubbed this phenomenon of “inscribing racialized bodies and cultures into social class the ‘racialization of class relations’” (Sutton 2008, Margulis & Belvedere 1998). The general assumption held by most Argentines is that people living in villas are not only low class, but are social deviants that prefer to engage in criminal behavior and activity rather than engage in honest work performed by gente decente (moral people). The implication is of course, that negros living in the villas are not moral people. This racialization of morality is interpreted by scholars as an essential component in establishing white dominance and the creation of culture, nation, and empire (Dyer 1997, Stoler 2002). These scholars have shown that “colonial and contemporary representations of virtue, honesty, and benevolence have been a historical foundation of whiteness” and how ascribing these values to whiteness simultaneously infers that blackness is devoid of any of these qualities (Srivastava 2009). In lieu of actual experience of villa life and culture, most Argentines make these assessments of life in the villa from cumbia villera, a popular type of music amongst all classes in Argentine society whose lyrical content could best be compared to the gangster rap of the United States. Ironically, many middle and upper-class Argentines who use the pejorative term negro villero have intimate day-to-day interactions with individuals that reside in villas since it is usually these people that fill the city’s sanitation positions or that are employed privately as domestic workers.
As I continued my daily life in Buenos Aires, I became increasingly confused by my friends' comment that “Argentina had no real black people.” The neighborhood where our house was located was a working-class neighborhood known as Almagro which housed a large array of immigrants of varying social classes from all over the world. Centrally located, Almagro was home to many successful textile businesses owned and operated by Hasidic Jews as well as wholesale suppliers for boutiques throughout the city which were usually operated by Chinese, Korean, or Japanese immigrants. Immigrants of lower socioeconomic means also occupied this space in the form of street vendors – there were usually food vendors hailing from Peru, Bolivia, and Paraguay that sold cheap homemade Andean dishes as well as cheap jewelry and watch vendors that were almost exclusively of African descent. Most of this commerce took place on or around Corrientes Avenue, one of the largest and busiest streets of the city. Since accessing public transportation either by bus or subway required us to travel to Corrientes Avenue because it was the closest place to catch public transportation to and from our home, it was puzzling to me how anyone could say that there were “no real black people in Argentina” when I passed them on the street every day.

Partly as a reaction to this comment, I noticed my heightened awareness of the presence of black individuals within the city, and as my awareness of Afro-descendants grew, it became apparent that while Afro-descendants in Buenos Aires participated in the economy and occupied the same space as white Argentines, they did so in the periphery of society. Anthropologist Judith Anderson takes this observation a bit further in her own work in which she states that “inside the city limits, black goods, services, and bodies were consumed, but not otherwise integrated into Argentine life” (Anderson,
Anderson employs sociologist Mimi Sheller’s theory of consumption, “a way of understanding a broad set of relations that are at once economic, political, cultural, social and emotional” (Sheller 2003) in the Argentine context because she sees Sheller’s theory as “useful in understanding… historic racial/spatial relationships and how they reveal the legacy of slavery through patterns of economic exploitation” (2012: 272).

Both this economic exploitation and the white Argentines’ inability to “see” black people in their society are reflections of Argentina’s legacy of slavery, which differs from that of other countries in Latin America. Because Buenos Aires is one of the largest ports in South America, it became a major hub for the Spanish slave trade into the lower part of the continent since the only other approved slave port in South America had been in distant Lima, Peru. As a result, many Argentine ranchers and agriculture workers had relatively easy access to slave labor, and many enslaved Africans were also purchased by urban businessman that used this slave labor to provide the everyday services that the city needed in order to function properly. In 1806, Afro-Argentines accounted for as much as thirty percent of the population of Buenos Aires (Andrews 1980). Fearing that Argentina would grow to be a country of inferior people if steps were not taken to “improve” the society, leaders such as Argentine president Domingo Sarmiento sought a solution to the “African problem”. Similar to Brazil, Sarmiento led Argentina to embark on a project of mass immigration in the late 19th century in an effort to achieve “blanqueamiento”\(^3\), the whitening of the population which,  

\(^3\) *Blanqueamiento*, literally means “whitening”. While Argentina and Brazil were two of the countries that underwent the most extreme efforts to entice Europeans to migrate to their respective countries, this strategy was used in many countries throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. The result of *blanqueamiento* in Argentina has been a population that is largely comprised of descendants of Italian,
it was believed, could be achieved through the miscegenation of Afro-Argentines and white European immigrants (Andrews 1980, Lewis 1996, Cottrol 2007, Sutton 2008). Along with blanqueamiento, Afro-Argentines were disproportionately conscripted to military service in two distinct ways. For many enslaved Africans, military service was the only path toward manumission that was available. Often times, however, enslaved men were sent to take the place of and represent their owners when the latter had been drafted to fight. Because the ongoing Paraguayan War from 1864-1870 and the bouts of yellow fever during the same period resulted in significant casualties for the Afro-Argentine population, Sarmiento publicly declared that the Afro-Argentine population had been exterminated. A particularly well-documented and often repeated quote from Sarmiento is his address to the leadership of the city, in which he stated: “I come to this happy Chamber of Deputies in Buenos Aires, where there are no gauchos, or black, or poor” (Lewis 1996). This rhetoric, first espoused by Sarmiento in the 19th century, continues to be the most commonly used rhetoric employed by white Argentines today when attempting to explain how Argentina “has no real black people”. Clearly a product of its history with slavery, the creation of a white Argentina not only reinforces white colonial dominance that is still performed today, but it also serves to deny Afro-Argentines of a claim to full citizenship in their own country.

Determined to find more information about the contemporary reality of Afro-descendants living in Argentina, I turned to the internet. A quick search yielded a few

Spanish, French, and German immigrants. Since many Argentines can directly trace their roots to these European countries, most Argentines hold double nationalities with countries that they have never visited or whose language they cannot speak in the case of those descending from countries other than Spain. This has led to complex identity issues within the white Argentine population as well, and, many Argentines have jokingly expressed to me that these identity issues based on European nationalities are one of the reasons that Argentina has the largest number of psychiatrists and psychiatric patients in the world.
forums and websites that had been formed by different groups of Afro-Argentines and African diaspora in Argentina. Not surprisingly, the goals of these groups ranged from achieving visibility in Argentine society as well as addressing issues of social justice and racial inequality in Argentine society. The dialogues on these forums provided a far different view of contemporary Argentine society than the one projected on a global scale by the white elite. Visitors to these forums are presented with a view of contemporary Argentina that is strikingly different from the image globally projected by the white elite, of a population that, although divided by social classes, is racially homogeneous and free of racism.

**Conceptualization of the Research**

Many white Argentines during my initial period in Buenos Aires in 2007 all spoke of the country’s black population in historical terms and expressed that, like its indigenous population\(^4\) the black population had been exterminated. However, as I encountered Afro-descendants on a daily basis working throughout the city and had discovered communities of thriving Afro-Argentine social movements on the internet, I was always troubled with trying to understand how Argentines reconciled these two clearly different versions of reality. At the same time, white Argentines seemed to almost unanimously accept the idea that because of this supposed absence of a black population, Argentina was not plagued with the problem of anti-black racism that existed in other parts of Latin America and the United States. The failure to acknowledge the

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\(^4\) The erasure of indigenous groups from the Argentine story is just as problematic and as much a product of white-dominance resulting from colonialism. The Complementary Survey of the Indigenous Peoples of 2004, a survey carried out by the Argentine government, indicated that there were at least 35 different indigenous groups that had been identified. While most are concentrated in the North along the borders with Bolivia and Paraguay, several are scattered throughout the country stretching as far south as the province of Santa Cruz.
black individuals in Argentine society and the belief that Argentina did not participate in anti-black racism were two ideas that seemed to be largely at odds with one another. Analyzing the situation through an American lens, the contradiction seemed reminiscent of the highly controversial and now-defunct American military policy of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” regarding the presence of homosexual individuals in military service.

Surprisingly, after generations of denying the existence of blacks in Argentina, both in everyday language as well as in the national discourse (Cottroll 2007, Sutton 2008), 2010 marked an obvious departure from this rhetoric when the Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos (INDEC), Argentina’s bureau of the census, introduced a new question designed to identify and count the very Afro-descendant population that the country had previously denied existed. The question asks “Are you, or is any other person in this household an Afro-descendant or have ancestors of Afro-descendant or African origins (father, mother, grandparents, or great grandparents)?” The wording hints at knowledge of a legacy of an Afro-descendant population in the country that stretches back further than the recent 21st century immigration that is usually the explanation for the presence of any black bodies in Argentine society.

The simple decision to add a new question to the census, however flawed the wording of the item may be, marked a significant turning point if only because a previously ignored sub-group of the country’s population would now show up in official statistics, which, after all, are the life blood of the modern state. With respect to my own interests, the decision to change the content of the 2010 enumeration, made within the confines of one of the bureaucratic arms of Argentine state, represented an “entry point” for exploring the race-related issues that had puzzled me since my first experiences in
the country. More specifically, my research agenda is driven by the assumption that an analysis of the motivations, debates, and pressures that prompted a state agency to change its policies, together with an analysis of reactions to the decision by the Afro-Argentine community, is an efficient way to generate new insights into a range of current issues that affect the Afro-descendant population, its relationship to state and its perception of itself. Further, by using Judith Anderson’s research with the African diaspora communities in Buenos Aires as a “pre-census” investigation, my own research aimed to uncover any changes (either positive or negative) in self-identification or racial awareness that the census may have brought about both within the Afro-descendant community as well as amongst white Argentines.

**Structure of the Thesis**

This research uses a mixed-method, multiple site approach. While multiple site research usually takes place in two or more physical locations, for the purposes of this research, and because so much of the participation and identity construction takes place online, the two “sites” of my research are the physical location of Buenos Aires, Argentina and the online terrain used by the social groups themselves. This includes personal group forums, Facebook, and YouTube.

Chapter two explores the existing literature on Afro-Argentines and gives a much richer historical context than what I have provided in this brief introduction. Chapter three focuses on my physical site of Buenos Aires, Argentina and will employ a variety of methods used in the field. These will be explained in greater detail in that chapter but are comprised of participant observation as well as semi-structured interviews. Chapter four focuses on internet discourses centered on both the census as well as forums used by three main social groups of the African diaspora in Argentina. The methodology of
the fourth chapter is largely content analysis and also focuses on identity formation through social media and cyberspace. As with the previous chapter, four will also include a brief explanation of the methodology used for this virtual ethnography or "netnography". Chapter five will conclude this work and will aim to recap and synthesize the field work ethnographic study with the virtual ethnography chapter. I will conclude the final chapter by introducing further questions that arose from this project as well as providing recommendations for future investigation on the subject.
CHAPTER 2
A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A History of Afro-Argentines through the Literature

Despite evidence that as late as 1806 thirty percent of the population of Buenos Aires, Argentina was of African descent, the collective memory of the nation has throughout the centuries consistently denied the existence of this racial group (Andrews 1980:66). Denial of Argentina’s legacy of African slavery was publicly echoed by former president Carlos Menem as recently as 2004 when he declared that, “in Argentina, blacks do not exist, that is a Brazilian problem” (Cottrol 2007:140). The same racist disposition was expressed as late as 2008 on the Argentinean Secretariat of Tourism’s website which described the Argentine people as 95 percent white, 4.5 % mestizo of indigenous and white composition, with the pure but rare indigenous groups comprising the remaining 0.5% of the Argentine population (Sutton 2008:110). By adding to 100 %, the racial profile that Argentina presents to the world expunges Afro-Argentines entirely from the record. Public and official statements of this sort make it easy to understand why there is so little literature focused around the Afro-Argentine population.

This population is generally not included in the official discourse of the country, and when it is, it has usually been in historic terms which many times only serve to reinforce the belief that this community no longer exists. This is slowly changing however as Afro-Argentines continue to make their voices heard and scholars begin to pay closer attention. While the change has not been fast enough and there still exists a large gap in the literature as compared to other well studied racial groups in Latin America such as Afro-Brazilians, there have emerged a small number of scholars who have attempted to break out of the practice of only writing about the historical presence
of Afro-Argentines. This literature review highlights some of the main authors and ideas that have focused on the Afro-Argentine community and will chronologically examine works that exist in terms of history, Afro-Argentine presence in and contribution to the arts, literature and national identity, works that focus on their “disappearance” and demographic changes, as well as on the emerging but minimal discourse focusing on contemporary invisibility and racism. This review concludes with a summary of what appears to be lacking in the scholarship and the implications for further research on the subject of the African diaspora in Argentina.

While there is an already limited number of works devoted to this subject, it is important to note that there have been criticisms from outside of Western academia about the work that has been produced and reproduced by western institutions. Citing a regurgitation of generalizations and what he describes as “an intellectual hegemony a la Michel Foucault,”\(^1\) because of the lack of access to research carried out by non-American and non-European scholars, historian Roberto Pacheco compiled a list of academics dedicated to the scholarship of Afro-Rioplatenses from Latin American and African institutions. In becoming familiar with the most commonly cited material on the subject, Pacheco’s critiques become unmistakably clear, and it is with the objective of breaking with this tradition of “intellectual hegemony” that the majority of the authors for

\(^1\) Roberto Pacheco, a historian and senior library technical assistant at Florida International University carried out a quantitative study of the available literature on the subject citing the complaint that there was very little written on Afro-Rioplatenses in 2008. In his study, he illustrated that while the body of literature on the subject was not immense, it was even smaller to Western academics because of the inaccessibility to research done by prominent scholars resulting from biases that exist in Western academia publication toward non-American or non-European educated scholars that do not publish primarily in English. Through his quantitative research, Pacheco shows that the origin of an author plays a crucial role in the distribution of his/her research and states that, “Both the origin of the author as well as the language in which his/her work is published has implications for what may be termed “intellectual hegemony” by Michel Foucault and his followers. There is a kind of imperialism in terms of production and global distribution of knowledge” (Pacheco: 18, translation my own).
this review were chosen. While they may be neither the most cited nor the most accessible, they are among the voices that have attempted to offer a fresh perspective to the available material on the African diaspora in Argentina.

**A Brief History of Afro-Argentines**

The majority of literature available on Afro-Argentines is historic in nature. Jean Arsène Yao, a professor of Latin American Civilization at the University of Cofody-Abidján in the Ivory Coast has written extensively on the history and political participation of Afro-Argentines in colonial and post-colonial Argentina. In 2009, he published his most extensive book on the subject, *Los afro-argentinos: su lucha por alcanzar una definición política, una afirmación cultural y una integración social*. Yao’s work is a departure from many other texts on the subject because through his analysis of archival records, media, and art from the eighteenth through twentieth century, he composes a holistic image of the Afro-Argentine of the period. While other works focus only on the Afro-Argentine plight as an enslaved person and thus inadvertently create a one-dimensional image of Afro-Argentines of the era, Yao is keen to call attention to the political agency as well as the levels of social and economic autonomy enjoyed by enslaved and free blacks alike. Further, by doing separate comparative analyses of the interior of the country and the capital, Yao is able to refute previous claims that Argentina was an example of Frank Tannenbaum’s “benevolence of Spanish slave law” and, instead, shows that it was the unique economic and geographic composition of the interior and the urban needs of the capital that created a more “lucky” existence for enslaved Afro-Argentines.

Through an analysis of Argentine archives, Yao illustrates how the slave trade in Buenos Aires was contested from its inception. Because of the economic competition
that slave trading in the port city created for the sanctioned slave trading port of Lima, the seventeenth century saw many limitations to and the prohibition of slave trading through the port of Buenos Aires. As a result, by 1672 Buenos Aires had become a hub for a fast-growing illicit slave trade, and, in an effort to save face, the Spanish crown instituted a system to legalize and streamline this trade and to recognize Buenos Aires as an official port of entry for slave inventory (2009: 26-27). This change in the law, Yao argues, accounts for one of the greatest surges in the African population in Argentina.

Because of the urban setting and economy of Buenos Aires, the experience of enslaved people in the capital differed from the picture that comes to mind of enslaved Africans within the American setting. The absence of large cotton or sugar plantations in most of Argentina meant better conditions for enslaved Afro-Argentine than those in the American (or even those within the Brazilian and Caribbean settings) had to endure, but this was not a reflection of a more benevolent class of slave owners in Argentina. In fact, Yao finds evidence that “in the face of frequent violations of the rights of enslaved persons there was a need to establish a judicial assistance” to ensure that these individuals were treated humanely (2009:44, translation my own).

As a result of laws set up to prevent inhumane treatment, enslaved Africans in Argentina were afforded a level of human rights that may not have been available to enslaved Africans in other colonies of the region at the time. Among these, Yao cites the use of a document called the papel de venta, a document that provided an enslaved individual a degree of self-autonomy. In the event that an enslaved person no longer desired to live with or be owned by his master, he or she could request a papel de venta
(literally sales paper), a document that summed up both the good and bad qualities of the enslaved person, the age, a general evaluation of the enslaved person’s health and his or her monetary value. The enslaved person could then take this document in search of another master that could offer better living conditions. There did of course, still exist a degree of power in the hands of the original master, as he could inflate the value of the enslaved person to make him or her appear as an undesirable purchase or an unsound economic investment (2009:63).

Yao also finds evidence of a degree of economic freedoms that were afforded to enslaved Afro-Argentines. Because of the unique set of skills that accompany urban living, many enslaved people in the capital city of Buenos Aires became trade apprentices and practiced their trade as a way to make money for their owners. Some of the trades taught to enslaved men were shoemaker, tailor, bricklayer, blacksmith, and carpenter while enslaved females were taught domestic duties such as washing, ironing, cooking, and child-rearing. In his book Buenos Aires Negra: Arqueología histórica de una ciudad silenciada archaeologist Daniel Schávelzon also finds supporting evidence of enslaved Afro-Argentines participating in these trades through some of the trade wares found in historically black neighborhoods in archaeological excavations throughout Buenos Aires (Schávelzon 2003).

What is interesting to note is that although these individuals were enslaved, they were allowed time off on Sundays, holidays and late evenings – essentially once their duties to their masters were complete. During this time, enslaved people were able to use their skills to generate their own income. While many of the men rented out their skills, the women offered their housekeeping services and often took in laundry or
cleaned houses. Culturally, Schávelzon believes that these women should be credited for the present-day acceptance and popularity of achurras, or the organ meats that were generally discarded or saved for the dogs but now compose an integral part of an Argentine asado\(^2\) (2003:81-82). Because these portions of the animal were readily available, the women would roast or grill these meats on spits and sell them as street vendors, known as achuradoras. Similarly, Shávelzon finds evidence of enslaved people working as vendors of pickled olives, candies, alfajores, and other homemade snacks through lithographs of the period (2003:104).

The jobs that enslaved Argentines held gave them access to economic resources that they could use to eventually purchase their freedom. While Yao points out that the ability to purchase freedom was easier for women due to the greater diversification of the income-earning activities that women performed, it nonetheless allowed many enslaved individuals to enter into an agreement with their owners known as coartación. This agreement enabled enslaved people to set up a “payment plan” of sorts, which allowed them to purchase their eventual freedom in installments (2009: 61-62). Yao further notes other more well-known paths to manumission, such as voluntary inscription in military service or through the execution of a will that granted freedom upon the death of a master. Important as such paths to freedom undoubtedly were, it is through the economic roles that enslaved people filled, and through the institutional arrangements such as the papel de venta and the coartación that we encounter in

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\(^2\) *Asado* is the national dish and literally translates to barbecue. It is common for many Argentines to spend their Sundays and holidays at the home of a family member where they will roast beef for a big family dinner. Among the common steaks and sausages, many Argentine families, both black and white, prepare achurras, or intestines, sweetbreads, and brain.
Argentina an agency, however constrained it may have been, that is rarely discussed in the literature.

**Arts, Literature, and National Identity**

Donald S. Castro was a professor of history at California State University Dominguez Hills that until his sudden death in 2007, centered his research on the Afro-Argentine experience through literature and artistic expressions of pop-culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In his book, *The Afro-Argentine in Argentine Culture: El Negro del Acordeón*, Castro focuses on the presence of Afro-Argentines in the widely popular gaucho theatre art form known as the *payada* as well as in the puppet theater and in the *milonga* (the lyrical accompaniment to the tango).

Castro relies on programs of these performances as well as printed literature to make an argument not only for a strong African presence, but in some cases, African origin art forms that have come to be adopted as symbols of national Argentine culture. Time and again, Castro finds that the main protagonists of the *payadas* were Afro-Argentines, although their participation in them has been largely erased from the record as the various artistic expressions came to be seen as a symbol of the Argentinean national identity (Castro 2001). What is unique about Castro’s analysis is his comparison of two distinctly Argentine art forms (the payada and the milonga) that gained national reverence to that of the puppet theater, which is also distinctly Argentine but that never achieved the same level of national glory as did the payada and the milonga. In his comparison, Castro presents convincing evidence that the increasing popularity of the payada and milonga was accompanied by the progressive disappearance of key Afro-Argentine actors who had authored the theatrical art forms.
In contrast, Castro notes that the puppet theater does not endure the same whitening process since it never reaches the level of a national identity marker (2001).

Castro’s work points out that the whitening of art forms associated with the national identity was not the only way in which Afro-Argentines were marginalized during the nineteenth century. With the goal of the Generation of 1837 led by Juan Bautista Alberdi and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento to recast Argentina as a white country, Castro points out that ostracizing Afro-Argentines politically was of paramount importance in achieving this end goal. Through analyzing the negative depictions of Afro-Argentines in José Mármol’s novel *Amalia*, Castro shows how Mármol not only attributed undesirable qualities to Afro-Argentines but also tied them politically to the Rosas regime (which was, at the time of the *Amalia*’s publishing only one year away from being overthrown). Mármol was thus able to tarnish Rosas’s already precarious image through his association with an undesirable class, and simultaneously paint Afro-Argentines as traitors to the nation through their perceived allegiance to the fading dictator (Castro 2001).

Another author who notes the literary link between the Rosas regime and Afro-Argentines is Ricardo D. Salvatore. A professor of history at the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella in Buenos Aires, Salvatore’s work, *Integral Outsiders: Afro Argentines in the Era of Juan Manuel de Rosas and Beyond* focuses specifically on this relationship between Rosas and the black community. While Castro argues that the relationship between the two has been over-exaggerated and that substantial portions of the black population of Argentina at the time were not loyal to Rosas, Salvatore counters with compelling evidence to support this relationship. One example that Salvatore shares is
a poem titled “¡Viva la Patria!” which was published in a July 1833 newspaper called *La Negrita*. Juana Peña, the author of the piece, professes her black federalist pride and her loyalty to Rosas and calls for her male counterparts, who, as she states, are “the ‘true patriots’ who will kill or die in defense of ‘Don Juan Manuel’ (2007: 64). The poem not only reflects the political engagement of Afro-Argentines, but also points to the often neglected presence of a strong female voice active in the political discourse of the time.

Another example that Salvatore uses to highlight this relationship presents itself in song form. In “Hymn to Da. Manuela Rosas,” women of Congolese descent sing their praise for Manuelita, Rosas’ daughter. What is striking about this example is that the Congolese women celebrate the Rosas regime for its benevolence to Afro-Argentines as well as invoke Manuelita’s skin tone in their praise:

The song presents the federation as the true fatherland of Africans, the place where they had found solace, freedom and peace. Rosas’s daughter is credited with having thrown to the abyss the ‘diabolical Union.’ Manuelita is a ‘moon’ that radiates beauty, joy, and light, guiding felices morenas throughout their journey. While the elite deprecated Manuelita’s trigueño complexion, Congo women celebrated her skin tonality, asking the sun not to ‘eclipse the color.’ (2007:64)

What is compelling about this historical evidence is that it comes from the black community itself rather than being interpreted or extracted from literature meant to further marginalize the Afro-Argentine community. It demonstrates to an extent the level of participation that Afro-Argentines enjoyed in politics even before the abolition of slavery in 1853. Further still, it illustrates the use of the term trigueño, a muddled identifier that historian George Reid Andrews credits for some of the inaccurate census counts that are partially responsible for the gradual historic disappearance of Afro-Argentines from public records.
“Disappearance” of and Changes in the Afro-Argentine Demographic

George Reid Andrews, a professor of history at the University of Pittsburgh has focused mostly on the African diaspora in Latin America and was one of the first scholars to focus on Afro-Argentines. In The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800-1900, Andrews devotes a chapter to explain how the Afro-Argentines “disappeared” from Argentine society. Andrews is critical of the importance given to the well-cited causes of the decimation of the black population: the abolition of the slave trade, high mortality rates and relatively low fertility rates among the Afro-Argentine population, very high death rates among black males as a result of war, and miscegenation due to the imbalance in the male to female ratio (1980:68). While he acknowledges that these factors played an important role in diminishing the numbers, Andrews argues that they are attributed more responsibility than they merit, and looks, instead, to inaccurate census data and arbitrary racial assignment in the census to account for the erratically fluctuating numbers of the Afro-Argentine population. By reconciling census data with public records and accounts of the Afro-Argentine population size of the period, Andrews is able to determine that there are gross discrepancies in the censuses that lead to an inaccurate representation of the Afro-Argentine community by 1887.

Beginning with census data from 1778, Andrews shows that the percentage in the Afro-Argentine population held steady until 1838, with an inexplicable period of extreme decline during a 50 year period (1838-1887) in which data were unavailable. While acknowledging that there is incomplete data for the 1806, 1810, 1827, and 1838

3 While George Reid Andrews falls into the category of the Western elite that Roberto Pacheco critiques in his work, Andrews is widely accepted by both scholars within and outside of Western academia as a leading expert on Afro-Rioplatenses. Pacheco cites Andrews as one of the highest regarded scholars on the subject – this may partially be due to the fact that Andrews has published many of his works in Spanish as well, making them widely available to scholars outside of the English academic system.
censuses, Andrews highlights a generally consistent and healthy trend in the Afro-
Argentine percentage population until 1887, when the percentage of Afro-Argentines
drops to nearly zero. (see Table 2-1 for detailed information)

Andrews summarizes that “use of the official demographic records available
would inevitably lead us to conclude that the Afro-Argentines should have disappeared
completely by the 1850s or 1860s, if not earlier” (1980:76-77). However, Andrews
points to examples as late as 1900 to illustrate that this was not the case. Through
photographic evidence, Andrews is able to find images of a prosperous Afro-Argentine
community at the beginning of the twentieth century. From 1900, Andrews finds photos
of an injured black firefighter, of a black New Year’s Day newborn, and a black political
candidate running for office. Andrews also notes that it wasn’t even until the end of the
nineteenth century that many of the popular black newspapers such as La Igualdad and
El Tambor began to flourish (1980:78). With this photographic and journalistic evidence,
Andrews makes a compelling argument for other factors that explain these low
numbers.

The primary basis of Andrews’ argument rests on a gross undercounting of
blacks by the census. Using the United States as an example, Andrews points out that,
even as bureaucratic and administratively efficient as the American census tries to be,
there has been “a consistent tendency to underenumerate black people” (1980:79). As
early as 1890 the U.S. census was found to have undercounted the African American
population. Andrews states that “post census surveys have revealed that, as recently
as 1960, African Americans were underenumerated by about ten percent” and that
“larger miscounts occurred in 1920, 1940, and 1950” (1980:80).
Andrews attributes miscounts to the types of undesirable housing and racially segregated neighborhoods that African Americans have historically been forced to occupy and sees the same issue as a possibility in the Argentine context:

Census takers often found it difficult to locate these out-of-the-way, ramshackle housing units. Reluctant to venture into the noisome alleys of the black neighborhoods and unwilling to face the hostility of the inhabitants, they missed many residents of such areas. (1980: 80)

Because many of the years of inaccurate census data occurred when Argentina was at war, Andrews contends that the undercount can also be attributed to the reluctance of black males to respond to the census data for fear of forced enlistment into the military, or in the case of deserters, being discovered. Finding that the 1813 and 1820 census had the sole objective of determining the enslaved male manpower available for war, and finding records that indicate that the desertion rate was much higher than the death rates among Afro-Argentines and white Argentines alike, Andrews' conclusion seems reasonable (1980:81).

Finally, Andrews shows that understanding the racial dynamics of Latin America and their link to class and mobility is important in understanding why all Afro-Argentines might not have been counted in a census that tallied citizens in terms of black or white. What has been described as “the mulatto escape hatch” in terms of Brazilian racial politics also existed in Argentina, although this practice was wrapped up in the use of the word trigueño, literally meaning of wheat complexion. Puerto Rican writer Elena Padilla gives an explanation of the meaning and usage of the term:

*The term ‘trigueño’ … is applied to both white persons who have brown or black hair and tan or light olive skin color, and, by extension, to persons whose physical appearance would place them as Negroes if that were the only criterion of race. This not being so, trigueño is used to avoid the term ‘Negro’ for persons of respect, because, besides race, there are other social and personal factors, such as wealth and education, which determine*
a man’s worth and social position. It is not proper to call persons of respect 'Negro.' (Andrews 1980)

As Afro-Argentines gained social mobility and achieved entrance into sectors of society normally reserved for white Argentines, it would seem reasonable that the term _trigueño_ would apply to them, and as Andrews points out, they would be called such in their presence. This being the case, any census taker would feel compelled to identify the individual as _trigueño_ on the census, which would lead to an inaccurate count of individuals that would earlier have been classified as black, leading to a perceived disappearance of the Afro-Argentine population, at least on paper (1980:85).

**Contemporary Afro-Argentine Scholarship**

While many contemporary scholars focus on Afro-Argentines in the modern arts (most notably _candombe_\(^4\), _tango_, _payadas_, and _carnaval_), there are a few scholars that focus on the marginalized position that Afro-Argentines still hold in society and on the institutional and structural racism that keeps them at a disadvantage. In his work _Como los porteños se volvieron blancos: Raza y clase en Buenos Aires_, Alejandro Frigerio, an anthropologist at the Latin American School of Social Sciences looks at the racial categories used by _porteños_ and the ways in which they contribute to the continued disappearance of Afro-Argentines and social differences between races in contemporary Buenos Aires (2007:61).

Frigerio begins his analysis by focusing on the substantial number of famous Afro-Argentines in music, dance, sports, film, literature, and politics in contemporary Argentine society. He goes on to point out that negating the existence of an Afro-

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\(^4\) _Candombe_ is a popular cultural dance performed and passed down through generations amongst the Afro-descendant community of Uruguay and Argentina. _Candombe_ troupes are composed of various drummers and dancers, all dressed in traditional Afro-Argentine costume. Some have compared these colorful costumes to those worn by the women in Bahia, Brazil during Carnaval.
Argentine community even though present in the public eye, as well as encouraging individuals that can “pass” as white to negate their afrodescendancy, are subversive forms of racism that allow porteños to continue to perceive themselves as an all-white society (2007:64-65).

Through a content analysis of several of Buenos Aires’ major newspapers, Frigerio is able to demonstrate how the media reproduces racism in the public sphere. Using as an example a headline in the popular newspaper Clarín, Frigerio recounts how the newspaper devoted an entire page to the story of a woman who found out through a blood test that she was adopted and that her birth mother was black. What is revealing, for Frigerio, is not that the woman was able to pass as white without knowing her true ancestry, but rather the immense amount of coverage that leading newspapers in the city gave to the discovery that she was black. Frigerio argues that if “her ancestry was not reflected in her persona, if the fact that her mother was black did not change her into another type of person in the eyes of society, the situation would not have been as newsworthy” (2007:68, translation my own).

Frigerio also illustrates how the image of Africans and Africa continues to hold a negative connotation in the mind of Argentineans. Focusing on news articles following the economic collapse of 2001, Frigerio highlights a growing trend by journalists toward an “Africanization” of Argentina through the media’s choice of words and comparisons. In several newspapers, Frigerio finds examples of Argentine reporters who compared the fate of Argentina to that of Africa, a depiction that simultaneously served to paint “becoming Africa” as the most undesirable of outcomes (2007: 80-81).
Frigerio likens the Argentine aversion to tackle the race issue to the North American aversion to the discussions of class. Anthropologist Sherry Ortner has shown that the dominant discourses in the United States have been those of race and ethnicity while the discourse on class has remained relatively silenced (Frigerio 2007). Though acknowledging the intersectionality that exists between race, ethnicity and class, Frigerio suggests that, in Argentina, the opposite is true – that the principal discourse has continued to center on class while dialogue on race has remained hidden.

Barbara Sutton, an assistant professor of women’s studies at SUNY Albany is another voice that has given treatment to the contemporary position of racism in Argentina. Sutton’s work, *Contesting Racism: Democratic Citizenship, Human Rights, and Antiracist Politics in Argentina*, focuses on the broader issue of racism and contested citizenship in the country, but her thesis holds relevance for the Afro-Argentine community. Sutton focuses on the ways that the media, the state, and politics have disseminated racist attitudes and misconceptions in a way that leaves marginalized groups struggling for full citizen recognition in what in many cases, is their country of origin.

To fight the invisibility faced by the Afro-Argentine community Sutton proposes a unique approach. Recalling the recent history of human rights abuses during Argentina’s dirty war, Sutton suggests that Afro-Argentine social groups employ a framework of human rights. Because of the momentum that human rights discourse has achieved, Sutton believes that it can “also foster public understanding of racism, particularly since the language of human rights is increasingly familiar to people because of the activism of human rights organizations” (2008:114). Citing the success
of a popular Afro-Argentine social movement that used this framework, Sutton concludes that it is successful because “this way of framing the plight of Afro-descendants calls attention to the parallel between the erasure of Afro-Argentines and the disappearance of groups also labeled ‘Others’ (i.e. subversives) during the dictatorship” (2008:114). While this is only one of many emerging contemporary examples, the continued success of this framework, as well as the ongoing struggle for visibility endured by the Afro-Argentine community, could provide a productive focus for new research on the Afro-Argentine diaspora.

Perhaps the most in-depth treatment given to modern day Afro-Argentines and the continued negotiation of recognition and space in Buenos Aires comes from anthropologist Judith Anderson. Anderson’s doctoral dissertation, *Converging and Diverging Diasporic Identities in Buenos Aires, Argentina*, is the product of her year-long experience as a participant observer amongst the urban population of colonial Afro-Argentines and more recent diaspora from various African countries. Anderson’s work is insightful because as an African American scholar, she has the unique ability of noticing, recording and analyzing subtle racially motivated behaviors and transgressions which previous scholars (most of whom hail from European-Argentine or white backgrounds) either didn’t notice or chose to ignore.

Anderson does an excellent job of critically analyzing racism and race relations in Buenos Aires, Argentina while simultaneously exploring the nuances of identity and identity formation that exist within the Afro-Argentine community itself as well as in relation to other African diaspora residing within the country. Anderson goes further than many other scholars in her analysis as she explores the intersection of race,
gender and class within Argentine society and how these intersections work together in
the formation of the identity of many Afro-Argentines, ranging from those that show
explicit phenotypical signs of Afro-descendancy to those with no physical signifiers of
“African appearance” but that possess a rich historical knowledge of African roots within
their respective family trees.

Summary of the Literature

Despite the growing interest in the African diaspora in Latin America, there still
exists a trend of continued scholarship among diasporic groups in countries where
these communities are a highly visible part of the larger society. This trend only adds to
the continued marginalization and invisibility of communities that have struggled to
regain the noticeable positions that they once had in Latin America. In the contexts of
Argentina, there is a large gap in the literature between the historic and the
contemporary. There exists a need for original research, as many scholars working on
the topic have had the tendency to quote and regurgitate the same material that is
already readily available.

The most engaging and groundbreaking projects on contemporary Afro-
Argentines have been carried out by scholars outside of Western academia, and
unfortunately, this has meant that much of this literature remains unavailable to Western
scholars. Frigerio, Sutton, and Anderson are three scholars that have attempted to
hurdle past the overwhelming body of repeated historiographies to understand the
issues that exist for contemporary Afro-Argentines. Their work, and that of scholars like
them, not only attempts to move society away from the myth of the disappearance of
Afro-Argentines, but they also reflect the reality that this community has remained
neither static nor unchanged. While the literary contexts that I have examined are
crucial for an understanding of the history of the Afro-Argentine diaspora, as well as in understanding the moments of agency that Afro-Argentines exercised throughout their nation’s history, it should merely serve as a starting point for comprehending the issues of a dynamic group that has endured and is still struggling to overcome centuries of marginalization and invisibility.

Anderson’s fieldwork took place in 2009, just prior to the decision to reintroduce the racial identifier into the 2010 census. Her detailed analysis of racial identity and racial politics in the capitol city is therefore a resource of extraordinary value to my focus on the process and the consequences of the state-led initiative to count the Afro-descent population in Argentina in 2010. Anderson’s work is a wonderful point of departure because it allows a loose type of “before” and “after” analysis in relation to identities and identity formation. Moreover, the various African diaspora advocacy groups in Buenos Aires are so small and so interconnected that, despite the fact that Anderson changed the names of her informants to protect their anonymity, some of the people I interviewed willingly identified themselves as people who contributed to Anderson’s research. With Anderson’s findings in hand, the information I collected through follow-up contact with the same people with whom she had interacted, provided unique insights into the complex interplay between census data collection and the politics of racial identity.
Table 2-1. Results of eight censuses of the city of Buenos Aires, 1778-1887

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Indians/Mestizos</th>
<th>Afro-Arg</th>
<th>Unspecified</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% Afro-Arg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td>16,023</td>
<td>1,104</td>
<td>7,236</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24,363</td>
<td>29.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1806</td>
<td>15,078</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>6,650</td>
<td>3,329</td>
<td>25,404</td>
<td>30.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>22,793</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>9,615</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32,558</td>
<td>29.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1822</td>
<td>40,616</td>
<td>1,115</td>
<td>13,685</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>55,416</td>
<td>24.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>34,067</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>8,321</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>42,540</td>
<td>19.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1836</td>
<td>42,445</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14,906</td>
<td>5,684</td>
<td>63,035</td>
<td>26.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1838</td>
<td>42,312</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14,928</td>
<td>5,717</td>
<td>62,957</td>
<td>26.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>425,370</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8,005</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>433,375</td>
<td>1.80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: George Reid Andrews, (1980: 66)
CHAPTER 3
AFRO-ARGENTINES AND THE CENSUS

I arrived in Buenos Aires to begin my fieldwork in June of 2012, coincidently just days before the results of the 2010 census pertaining to Afro-descendancy were to be released. This was a fortunate event because it brought the census, which was the purpose of my research, back to the forefront of conversation and debate amongst Afro-descendants and leaders of Afro-based social movements. While there had been many arguments about the method of data collection and skepticism about the validity or the accuracy of the census count, the general public had not yet received the final enumeration of the Afro-descendant population to either refute or reinforce their skepticism.

Living in a country with government agencies that negated its black history and a department of tourism that still reported on its website that Argentina was an almost completely white country, it is no wonder that most Afro-Argentines regarded the efforts of the INDEC (the National Institute of Statistics and the Census), another government agency, with just as much skepticism. In fact, when I arrived, Afro-Argentines were not the only citizens who regarded INDEC with distrust and cynicism. Argentina, after all, had been in the midst of an economic crisis in the previous few years, and 2012, with its high rate of inflation was no exception. The economic situation put INDEC at the forefront of people’s concerns if only because, as the national institute of not only the census but of the country’s statistics, INDEC is responsible for measuring the cost of living and the unemployment rate. In the summer of 2012, it concluded that the inflation rate was 12%, a number which was rejected by various media outlets that reported the
actual figure to be closer to 25%. As my previous visits to Argentina had been relatively cheap and affordable due to the USD conversion rate, I was now struggling just to meet the everyday cost of food. Along with other critics, I too thought that the 12% inflation rate was much underestimated. Around the same time, the INDEC released a report stating that the average person could eat three full, nutritionally sustaining meals at a cost of $6 pesos/day, a pronouncement that caused even greater outrage at the institution, and resulted in protests throughout the country over the next few weeks while I conducted my research. The purpose of this research was to gain insight into the perceptions held by leading members of the African diaspora community about the quality of the data collected by the INDEC in attempting to enumerate the Afro-descendant community of Argentina and the impacts that they felt this data would have on both Afro-Argentines and Argentine society as a whole. Specifically, through interviews and conversations with members of Argentina’s black community, I hoped to understand the perceptions that people in this community held about the ability of this addition to the census to increase visibility of the Afro-Argentine population. One of the greatest challenges to my research, I soon found out, would be to get members of the Afro-descendant population to engage in reasoned discourse concerning an institution that still continues to be greatly mistrusted by Argentines in general.

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1 This was documented in several pieces run in El Clarín and La Nación, two of Argentina’s largest newspapers that have consistently engaged in public battles with INDEC over the past few years.

2 At the time, the conversion rate from pesos to dollars was around $4.25 pesos/dollar, meaning that, according to the INDEC, the average person could eat on roughly $1.40 USD/day. The average cost of an empanada, which is normally considered one of the cheapest street foods one can find in the country is $4 pesos.
Methodology and Research Design

For this portion of my research I adopted a mixed method approach that combined participant observation with semi-structured interviews in collecting qualitative data. I chose this approach because of the different actors with which I worked and their willingness to participate in my research and it was also an attempt to maximize efficiency in my short time on the ground. I employed these methods using the guidelines set by anthropologist H. Russell Bernard. For example, my interpretation of participant observation was “a strategic method… [that] puts you where the action is and lets you collect data… any kind of data you want, narratives or numbers” (2011: 257). While participant observation can yield quantitative data, Bernard also explains that “a lot of the data collected by participant observers are qualitative: field notes taken about things you see and hear in natural settings… transcriptions of taped, open-ended interviews, and so on” (2011: 257). These specific methods listed were the ones that I used the most.

I also registered for a weekly seminar on the history of Afro-Argentines and the African diaspora in Latin America that was held at the headquarters of the African Diaspora of Argentina (ADA). This experience allowed me to regularly interact with members of the organization, including the president of the group. In this setting, my participant observation focused less on the course content, since that was in the format of a university graduate seminar, than on the conversations that I had with individuals before and after the class. I was clear to identify myself as a social scientist but expressed to them that my purpose there was to gain a historical understanding of the African diaspora in Latin America from a non-Western perspective while hanging out with an organization that I held in high regard.
While hanging out may not be viewed by many as a valid research endeavor, Bernard sees it as integral to good participant observation: “hanging out builds trust, or rapport, and trust results in ordinary conversation and ordinary behavior in your presence. Once you know, from hanging out, exactly what you want to know more about, and once people trust you not to betray their confidence, you’ll be surprised at the direct questions you can ask” (211: 277). Apart from hanging out, I was also fortunate that Francisco, the president of ADA, was very familiar with many of the issues concerning immigration, race relations and racialization in the United States. By identifying myself as Mexican American from the border state of Texas, and with Francisco’s knowledge of the racist laws that had been recently passed throughout the American Southwest, Francisco understood that the empathy and understanding that I had of being treated as an outsider within one’s own country came from a place of shared experience and sincerity. Again, this entry point was only possible in this situation because of Francisco’s interest and knowledge of the social issues of the United States.

While participant observation was appropriate to that particular setting, I also had the opportunity to interview four different individuals in various institutions and settings. On these occasions I used semi-structured interviews since “in situations where you won’t get more than one chance to interview someone, semi-structured interviewing is best…. Semi-structured interviewing works very well in projects where you are dealing with high-level bureaucrats and elite members of a community – people who are accustomed to efficient use of their time. It demonstrates that you are fully in control of what you want from an interview but leaves both you and your respondent to follow new
leads” (2011: 158-159). Semi-structured interviews, in these cases were most effective since I was interviewing the director of populations and the census from INDEC, a representative from the National Institute Against Discrimination (NIAD), the leader of a human-rights focused NGO, and the leader/spokesperson for the Afro-Argentine of Colonial Origins group (ACO). It is important to note that Margaret, the representative from NIAD, was a self-identified Afro-Argentine and that Omari, of the human rights organization, was originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Interviews with them reflect the intersection of their professional positions and their personal experiences as members of the African diaspora within Argentine society.

Finally, as a result of the information that I gathered from these semi-structured interviews, I decided to also conduct eight structured interviews in the form of self-administered questionnaires. All participants in this portion of my study were white Argentines with half of them, aged 18-20, having graduated from high school during 2010-2012 (or, after the 2010 Census), and the other half being approximately 10-15 years older. My purpose for selecting these two distinct age groups was to discover the extent of the educational changes that had been made in an attempt to make visible the country’s African diaspora. This was important to gauge changes that may have been made since changes in the education curriculum had been one of the touted benefits repeatedly emphasized by Margaret from NIAD. A copy of this questionnaire is attached at the end of the chapter.

**Origins of the Census’ Afro-descendant Identifier**

I could hardly get any of the participants that I interviewed to agree on anything except for the reason behind the addition to the census. Although the Argentine government has tried to sell the changes to the census as its way of embracing the
multicultural legacy of the country, it seems that very few afro-descendants believe in the benevolence of the government, especially after so many years of exclusion. One can hardly blame this community for its skepticism since the widely-accepted belief that they don’t exist has led to the sentiment of “ser negra en la Argentina es ser de otro país” or “to be black in Argentina is to be from another country” (Corrêa: 2006).

All of the leaders of the black social movements with whom I spoke, as well as Margaret from NIAD and Omari from the human rights organization agreed that the motivation for adding the question to the census was due to the obligation that Argentina had as a participating nation and signatory at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa in 2001. For Pedro, the spokesperson for ACO, it was clear that the change to the census was not only Argentina’s moral responsibility, but a legal one as well. In regards to the legal claim, he may be right since Argentina has also ratified the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination, as well as other key international conventions focused on the rights of children and of women. Further, Argentina has written these conventions into its constitution which also states that these treaties and conventions are hierarchically superior to the nation’s own laws in the case of a conflict between the two (Constitución de Argentina, Artículo 75.22).

The only individual that had offered a different explanation for the addition to the census was Rogelio, the director of population and the census at INDEC. He simply stated that INDEC felt that it was necessary to have an accurate count of all of the country’s ethnic and racial groups. He suggested that INDEC had been approached by
leaders from local black social movements who wanted an accurate enumeration of their community, and after brief discussion, INDEC agreed that this was the right thing to do. Rather than shedding any real light on the process, I think Rogelio’s explanation speaks more to the bureaucracy’s need to preserve itself and the way in which it perceives itself and its role within the country.

Throughout the conversations that I had with different Afro-descendants within the community, one of the issues that seemed to cause the most tension and frustration was the framing of the question and who was involved in its formation. There seemed to be a general consensus that the INDEC had added a question that for some seemed too all-encompassing while others felt it deviated from physical negritude and would include individuals that did not suffer daily from structural racism that physical markers caused and who felt would unfairly benefit from any type of forthcoming affirmative action. Regardless of why these individuals felt the question to be inappropriate, all individuals of African descent that I spoke to felt that the question had been added without any input from the community that it was ultimately designed to count.

While different organizations felt that they were not allowed a seat at the proverbial table, the reality is that there were several efforts to include different members of the African diaspora in the conversation. In many instances, inter-group rivalries and personal political agendas between groups kept groups from participating in the process. There was also a sentiment among various black movements that those groups that did take the government and the INDEC up on their offer to be part of the process were working against the community and for the benefit of the bureaucracy against which many of these groups saw themselves fighting.
Anthropologist Laura López has focused her dissertation work on precisely this moment in Afro-Argentine history and has well-documented accounts of the process from its inception. López marks 2003 as a starting point for negotiations that involved international agencies (mostly from Spain), representatives from the INDEC, and afro activists to produce a question or set of questions that would be introduced on the following census. According to López, these negotiations were funded by the international agencies as well as the World Bank (2006: 266). Omari, an African immigrant originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo recalls that “it was difficult to get cooperation because of individual politics. This was in part because particular groups established themselves as representatives of all Afro-descendants and worked closely with INDEC while pushing their own agenda, which also served to alienate other groups” (personal interview, translation my own). López’s work sheds light on this reality since the negotiations were slow-moving and yielded little if any real substantive material for the census, but she also finds that the conflict was not only among the black activists, but also between the NGOs and the state. The first round of negotiations was held in May 2003 with two representatives from the World Bank, a spokesperson for the World Bank’s division on strategies for Afro-descendant communities, and twenty-three representatives from fifteen different black social movements of the time. The second round of negotiations was held exactly a year

3 While this number of organizations may seem striking, it is important to note that many registered black social movements are little more than individuals families who for some reason or another have splintered off from other existing social groups. In her own research, Judith Anderson found that these personal politics kept many of the groups perpetually locked in states of distrust and in some cases she was accused of being a spy for one group or another. This inability to work together toward a shared common goal as well as a refusal in some cases to even define what the mission of a particular group is has caused alienation among the black community in the country which has led these individuals to renounce any association with black social movements.
later in May 2004 but had fewer participants (two World Bank representatives, two INDEC representatives, and ten individuals from eight black social groups) due to what many perceived as a lack of progress.

It was during this round of talks that the World Bank proposed to finance a pilot project that would give the state a rough indication of the size of its Afro-descendant community. Because of the patterns of marginalization of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples throughout Latin America, the World Bank has refocused on addressing the needs of these vulnerable populations as an effective strategy for development. The mission of this pilot project was to illustrate to the government that the Afro-descendant population was substantial enough to warrant the costs that such a census change would incur. During our interview, Margaret from NIAD explained that 10,000€ had been allotted for this project, a number that Omari confirmed. The pilot project was established to collect a sample of the population in the cities of Santa Rosa de Lima and Buenos Aires since these were the two cities believed to have the largest populations of Afro-descendants in the country. In Buenos Aires, this mini-census focused around the neighborhood in Monserrat, since this particular neighborhood had the most visible presence of black bodies in the city. A similar neighborhood was chosen in the city of Santa Rosa de Lima as well. Since the data collected was only a sample of the population, it was expanded to include the rest of the country. This yielded a population of roughly two million Afro-descendants in the country, or 5.5% of the Argentine population at the time.\(^4\)

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\(^4\) The 2001 National Census reported a total of 36,260,130 inhabitants in the country.
Rather than demonstrating that there existed a sizeable population of Afro-descendants in the country, the results of the pilot project only caused greater controversy. On the one hand, because it was a project that had been sanctioned by the World Bank as well as several NGOs, several black social movements accepted that the information was accurate and used this as evidence that a considerable proportion of the population had previously been marginalized and made invisible. On the other hand, because the sample population that had been used was not a random sample of the general Argentine population and had been specifically targeted areas where the Afro-descendant community lived in greatest numbers, the Argentine government refused to accept the accuracy of the results, citing that a lack of a coherent sampling method produced overinflated numbers that didn't reflect the demographic reality. While the intentions of this pilot project may have been honorable, because it was perceived by government officials and professional statisticians within the INDEC to be the victim of bad research design and implementation, the results were ultimately disregarded.

**Census Administration and its Criticisms**

Unlike other identifier questions such as gender, age, and income, the questions pertaining to the enumeration of Afro-descendants and indigenous people were not asked to all members of the Argentine population. Similar to the United States Census, Argentina administered both a short version as well as a longer, more comprehensive questionnaire. These versions were known as Plan A ("A" standing for "amplia" or full-scale) and Plan B (where "B" stood for *basico* or basic). However, unlike the United States Census in which individuals are asked to provide their racial/ethnic identity on all versions of the census, the INDEC only included questions regarding Afro-descendancy
and indigenous origins on Plan A. This was perceived by members of both the Afro-descendant and indigenous communities as problematic because Plan A was administered only in areas where the size of the population was roughly 50,000. Ninety percent of the households in areas where the population was either less than or greater than 50,000 (such as Buenos Aires) would receive Plan B. In these areas, PLAN A would only be administered in a few randomly selected blocks (equaling the remaining 10% of the population).

Several Afro-descendants expressed to me that they believed this method to be problematic because they were never asked the question that they spent so much time raising awareness to promote. Nicolás, a member of the ADA expressed the frustration he felt with spending so many months in raising awareness and touting the importance of the census addition to the city’s African diaspora community only to have many of the individuals that he spoke with respond that they were never even asked the question. Nicolás explained that this method of carrying out the questions has caused many more individuals within his community to doubt that the INDEC was truly trying to gain an accurate count of the country’s Afro-descendant population. Rogelio from the INDEC explained to me that the method used is a common method used in most censuses that are undertaken because it allows the INDEC to get a true random sample of the demographics that can then be amplified on the national level and produce the most accurate picture of the nation’s ethnic makeup. This method has nevertheless led to anger and distrust of INDEC since many individuals felt that this was just another way for the government to ensure that their population continues to be underrepresented.
When I asked Rogelio from the INDEC about this, he was adamant that the INDEC had done its job correctly and that if there had been any discrepancies, the burden of resolving this lay on the black social movements:

Black social movements keep talking about 2 million Afro-descendants within the country. INDEC was anticipating closer to 300,000, so we were not surprised when we learned that the Afro-descendant community only comprised 0.37% of the population and that there were only a little under 150,000 of them in the country (please see attached Tables for further information). The number given by the organizations is not one that is based on quantitative findings or on a properly administered census. Those of us that dedicate ourselves to statistics and quantitative interpretations related to minority groups know that these groups tend to always believe that they are bigger than they really are. We saw the same thing with the indigenous groups that challenged our data collection methods and say that we didn't properly administer the census in order to underreport the indigenous populations. In the case of Afro-descendants, it may be that there are more in the country than what was recorded in the census. This is where the responsibility again falls on black social movements to do the legwork to promote self-identification. If the census didn't properly reflect the population of Afro-descendants, the problem wouldn't be with the census or the way in which it was administered, but rather would reflect the unwillingness of individuals to self-identify that technically qualify as Afro-descendant but choose to respond to the question in the negative. Black social movements should adapt their missions to removing the stigma from self-identifying as Afro-descendant.

Rogelio’s response illustrates the bureaucratic reaction to any contestation to its purpose for existing and its methods. The irony of his comments is that the stigma of being an Afro-descendant is one that is imposed by the white elites and the institution which he represents. While the black social movements can attempt to raise awareness about the importance of self-identification, it is ultimately the image of what it means to be black that exists in the white mind that causes this stigma to exist. Blackness can only be defined in its relation to whiteness, and when the white population chooses to either perpetuate the myth of “no blacks in Argentina” or continues to equate blackness with an absence of morals, work ethic, ambition, and
civilization, (as is the case in Argentina with the aforementioned meanings of the word ‘negro’) it is ultimately they who create the stigma that surrounds the self-identification as anything that signifies and embraces blackness.

Later in my conversation with Rogelio, I asked him if all citizens received the same census or if a special set of questions was administered to those that identified themselves to be immigrants. Rogelio assured me that all individuals received the same questionnaires (with the exception of the distinction between Plan A and Plan B). His comments on the matter, however, were revealing about his interactions and his personal feelings toward many of the members of the black social movements that he had encountered:

Yes, everyone gets the same Census. However, there were two census sheets used - Plan A and Plan B. This has led to many criticisms from both black social movements as well as indigenous groups since the questions regarding the ethnic/racial identification of both groups was only present in Plan A. These criticisms however seem to be more a reflection of a lack of knowledge of statistical analysis since Plan A yields an accurate sample of the population, one which gives you a representation of the demographic makeup of the country and that can be expanded to a national level. Since we’re dealing with samples of the population, it would not be necessary to include the question on both Plan A and Plan B since the methods used would still yield an accurate snapshot of the country's demographic composition. The criticisms that arise have to do more with the fact that the census unveiled that there really are not as many Afro-descendants as these social movements had anticipated in the country. Again, this seems to be more of a reflection of the need for these social movements to raise more awareness about the importance of self-identification, as this would have had more of an effect on the sample data than the claim that there were many Afro-descendants that were left uncounted.

Rogelio’s comments homogenize the Afro-descendant and indigenous community while simultaneously implying a lack of education. In fact, throughout our interview, Rogelio mentioned how it was his professional training as a sociologist and his extensive understanding of quantitative methods that left him confident that the
INDEC had done its job correctly and that that criticisms of members of the Afro-
Argentine community were a way of looking outwardly to place blame. Rogelio seemed
to be unable to see past his own lens of the Argentine African diaspora and he
admittedly has only interacted with Afro-descendants through conversations, forums
and appointments which Afro-Argentine leaders have sought with him.

Among the leaders that have approached Rogelio is Francisco, the president of
the African Diaspora of Argentina (ADA). Francisco was also trained as a sociologist at
the University of Buenos Aires, the country’s top university and confided in me that he
had completed a course-load that was packed with quantitative methods. Francisco felt
that because of what he had learned in his own professional training about population
sampling he could see problems with the methods used by the INDEC, mainly believing
that the question should have been treated as an identifier question much in the same
way that gender is treated and that this would have ensured that the question had been
included on all versions of the census. He felt that even if the methodology used by the
INDEC was indeed accurate as Rogelio stated, including the question on both census
versions would have provided transparency and that it would have been instrumental in
building a much needed confidence within the black community that it has historically
lacked in the INDEC and other governmental institutions. He had sought an
appointment with Rogelio to mention these issues to him because he wanted to ensure
a better census experience for the black community on the next census – one that
would lead to more faith in the INDEC and its process. Ultimately however, Francisco
stated that while he was not completely sure that the INDEC had carried out the
sampling correctly, he still viewed the change in the census as a tremendously positive first step.

One last criticism to note: Pedro felt that the death of former president and the husband of the current president, Nestor Kirchner was also problematic for an accurate census count because his death coincided with the day on which the census was administered. He cited that several members of the government called for mobilization in the Plaza de Mayo in downtown Buenos Aires in honor of the death of the president. He called this irresponsible on the part of the Argentine government since he believed that it caused inaccuracies because thousands of people responded to this highly emotional event in the nation and left their houses without having first been administered the census. However, throughout my conversations with Afro and white Argentines alike, the consensus was that most individuals, aware of the importance of the census, chose to participate in the census before participating in the vigil held at the Plaza de Mayo. In fact, when I interviewed Omari, who worked as a census administrator on that day, he confirmed that in the area to which he was assigned, which was generally understood to be one of the neighborhoods most loyal to Kirchner's Peronist Party, he was able to fully administer the census and was able to get 100% cooperation from all thirty-eight houses which he approached.

Why does it Matter, Anyway?

One of the questions that I consistently asked my participants was “why?” I wanted to understand what was to be gained from gathering an accurate enumeration of the country’s Afro-descendants. Would this information be used by the government to attempt to rectify the social inequalities experiences by Afro-descendants in a society that has denied its existence for so long? Would there be an allocation of state
resources for this group? Why it matters depends very much on who is being asked the question.

In her article, López highlights that the motives of the World Bank for participating in the census project was based on its beliefs that “the state must give some solution to ‘real’ social problems (exclusion/racism), establishing a relationship that is not problematized by ethnic-racial classifications and socio-economic variables” (2006: 278). During this meeting, the World Bank representatives advised Argentina to begin thinking about Afro-descendancy amongst the criteria used to administer social help based on its findings in other Latin American countries where the Afro-Latino population is largely marginalized and experiences disproportionate social inequality.

While creating social and economic equality was favorable to the self-identified Afro-descendants that I interviewed, there seemed to be greater emphasis placed on changing and rethinking the public discourse on race and racism in the country. Omari in particular gave the most inclusive and explicit list of benefits to be gained from asking this question:

Because of this question, Argentines can begin to talk about the presence of afro-descendants both in contemporary society as well as historically. The census opened a dialogue to begin talking again about a population made invisible through history. More importantly, in respect to Afro-Argentines in particular, the census question is the first step to re-instilling a national identity to Afro-Argentines since this sector of the population is routinely treated as foreigners within their own society. There is something that is gained by an individual in being able to say “I am Afro” and “I am Argentine” in the same sentence and it not be questioned. The census can also serve as a gateway to beginning a serious and open dialogue about racism in the country, one that challenges the Argentine notion of no racism within a seemingly homogenized population. Finally, this change has had the effect of bringing more social scientists and academics into the country that are interested in finding out what happened to Afro-Argentines. This is important because no one likes to feel that an outsider knows more about their own society than they themselves do, and this serves to make the
larger society question their own history as more outsiders come in looking for a population that nationals themselves fail to see. However, there doesn't seem to be the political willpower to ensure that Afro-Argentines have adequate access to social, economic, political and civil rights. That being said, this should be seen as the first steps on a path toward that goal.

Omari’s list of reasons is important because it does not focus on material gain or wealth. For Omari, there is no monetary value to be placed on the ability for an individual to feel at home in his own society, to feel that he or she belongs. Since his arrival in Argentina decades ago, Omari has continuously faced discrimination or racial insults on an almost daily basis. Because the overwhelming image of African immigrants that Argentine society seems to acknowledge is that of the street vendor, Omari says he is always treated as if he is ignorant or as if he doesn't speak or understand Spanish, although in his native country, he had a prestigious career as a lawyer. He takes it with a grain of salt because he sees the unquestioned public discourse of a white nation as the real harbinger of Argentine racism. However, as an immigrant himself, he is doubly outcast by a nation that places him at the very bottom of the social and racial hierarchy. Understanding the extent of the xenophobia that most Afro-descendants feel regardless of their country of origin, Omari sees it as that much more important that Afro-Argentines begin to be incorporated and allowed to have a national identity outside of their negritude, since, unlike African immigrants such as himself, they have no other claim to an alternative identity when their mother country marginalizes them.

Pedro of the ACO group similarly believes that it was important for the census to take place because of the impacts that an enumeration of the Afro-Argentine population would have specifically for the Afro-descendants of Argentina’s colonial line:
At the Durban Congress in 2001, it was asked that participant countries that had engaged in the slave trade begin steps toward implementing positive policies for a better social well-being of its Afro-descendant population. Because of this, Argentina has not only a moral obligation, but a legal one as well to do this since Argentina as a country, and even well before it was a country when it was still a colony, participated in and benefited economically from the presence of its enslaved African population. Therefore, what Argentina has today, a good portion of both its cultural and material wealth, is due to the trafficking of enslaved people – and this is a debt it must repay.

This is also partially the reason he finds fault in the way that the census question was framed. Pedro believes that the census question was incorrectly worded and should have only been used to count the Afro-descendants of colonial roots since the terms of Durban require participant countries to rectify the inequalities caused by its own legacy of slavery. This in turn refers to a smaller portion of the population and should not include those that immigrated by their own volition. While Pedro understands that the rest of the Afro-descendant population in the country suffers the same humiliations and marginalization as Afro-Argentines (a group that doesn’t exist in the collective memory), he believes that the responsibility of the state lies in rectifying its mistakes toward its own slave-descendant population and that it is the responsibility of other countries to which the ancestors of today’s Argentine immigrants may have been forcibly taken as a result of that country’s legacy with slavery to rectify any inequality that these immigrants may have experienced in their homeland. In other words, Pedro feels that counting Afro-Colombians for example, among the Argentine population is erroneous because they were not historically marginalized by Argentina, and that any reparation of their own personal history of marginalization is the responsibility of Colombia, their nation of origin, regardless of the xenophobia that they may encounter in their present conditions in Argentine society.
What is revealing is that Pedro seemed unaware of the shared contemporary experiences of Afro-Argentine and African diaspora immigrants in Argentine society. This may be a result of his own unexamined white privilege as well as his narrow focus as an anthropologist that works strictly with Afro-Argentines and the traditional dance form of *candombe*. The irony is that for a country that continues to insist that Argentines are European-descendants, the general encounters of racism and xenophobia in society are the same, regardless of whether the individual is an immigrant or an Afro-descendant with a two hundred year lineage in Argentina.

While Omari outlined the benefits to the Afro-Argentine community of developing a national identity as well as a sense of belonging, he had a much more synthesized understanding of the importance for ALL members of the African diaspora in the country:

There is importance in identifying Afro-Argentines descended from slavery as well as the other groups of African immigrants, mostly as a way of returning a national identity to those that are descended from slavery. This is important for curtailing the rejection felt by Afro-Argentines by their own society and bringing them out of marginalization. However, as immigrants, we too are made invisible in this society and are subject to racism. White Argentines pass us on the street every day, but they don’t see us. There is more to be gained in working toward a larger visibility of the African diaspora as a whole than to debate who should get what from this process and continue to splinter ourselves to the point of ineffectiveness.

The views of both Omari and Pedro are a snapshot into the daily struggles and tensions that exist between the black social movements themselves. While the goal of all Afro-descendants living in the country is to be included into the larger Argentine society, the difference in priorities and strategies between the groups is continuously acting as more of a hindrance toward social change than as a catalyst for it.
Margaret of the NIAD, a self-identified Afro-Argentine, had a slightly different interpretation of the benefits to be gained by the addition to the census, and spoke in terms of the positive changes that she had already begun to see as a result of the question:

Many individuals, both Afro-descendants and white Argentines alike, were aware that the question had been added to the census and commented to me whether or not the question had been administered to them, so this shows a level of awareness that had not previously existed about this segment of the population. More importantly many more people are beginning a process of self-questioning and of reevaluating their own self-identification. I have many individuals that come here to NIAD to ask how they can find out more about their family history because they have questions in their mind about their own family tree and a previously accepted and unquestioned whiteness but recognize that there are holes in their own family trees that may be explained by the presence of an Afro-descendant family member that has long been hidden. Among Afro-descendants with obvious phenotypical markers that have previously tried to run from it, there has been a noticeable increase in their own self-identification as black or Afro-descendant and some have come to see the census as a step toward integrating them into the larger society.

Like Omari, Margaret sees the census as much more than just a first step toward possible material or social reparations. There is an understanding of the importance of reconnecting contemporary Argentina with the country’s past, and of forcing the government to reject the whitewashed history it teaches, since this history that presents an enslaved African population that is now extinct is largely responsible for the continued invisibility of Afro-Argentines. For her, continuing changes in the country’s education curriculum seemed to be in the forefront of potential achievements that awareness from the census could bring. Margaret proudly spoke about the changes in the curriculum that began to speak of Afro-Argentines in a contemporary manner:

When I was in high school, I began to understand why we were so invisible in our own society. Even though my classmates and my teacher knew that I was Afro-Argentine, and that my family had been here for hundreds of years, the teacher continued to teach the class about Afro-Argentines.
through a limited history that included vignettes about how they sold *empanadas*, danced *candombe*, and how they eventually all died off from yellow fever or died in military service in the war with Paraguay. Today we are more visible because the census has caused schools to ask for more information, and we supply them a curriculum that teaches of the historic achievements of Afro-Argentines but that also highlights their roles in contemporary society.

Curious by this and interested to find out more about this from white Argentines, I created a survey which included a question regarding the educational experience of white Argentines in regards to learning about Afro-Argentines. Although I recognize the limitations of such a small sample of participants, the results were interesting to note. The question reads: “Remembering your educational experience outside of the university level, can you recall having a curriculum at any point in primary, middle or high school about the African history of Argentina?” Of all the individuals asked, none of them could recall ever having taking any course material regarding Afro-Argentines or an African based history of the country. This seemed at odds with what Margaret had told me, since at least four of these individuals would have completed their high school education after the 2010 census.

**The Framing of the Question**

A source of contention for many individuals within Argentina’s black community was the way in which the question was framed. The question asks the head of household whether anyone residing in the household is Afro-descendant or if anyone in the household has an ancestor that was Afro-descendant or African. As discussed earlier, Pedro from the ACO group perceived this framing to be problematic because it included all Afro-descendants, regardless of their country of origin or migration pattern. Similarly, Omari felt that one of the benefits from any visibility that the census question could generate was the restoration of a national identity for Afro-Argentines in particular
although the question does not necessarily acknowledge the presence of Afro-descendants in the country as a result of the nation’s slavery past.

Another critique of the question’s wording that seemed to come up indirectly was that the identification of an Afro-descendant in a family tree did not necessarily equate to racial discrimination or exclusion that many leaders in the black community hoped the census question could one day address. Omari gave me an example of this when he described an interview that he had with a leading Buenos Aires anchorwoman about the addition prior to the census being administered. Omari described the woman, a highly public figure, as having blond hair and clear, light green eyes and white skin. He recalled how she had exclaimed in surprise after he explained the meaning of the question because she could answer in the affirmative since she had had a great, great grandmother that was black. She had left the interview assuring Omari that she would answer ‘yes’ to the question since she had now discovered that she too was Afro-descendant.

The criticism that arises from this example is that if “obtaining data on race and ethnicity [are] fundamental to enforcing desegregation and affirmative action and to monitoring the progress of minority groups”, as Carvahlo, Wood, and Adrade point out in their analysis of the stability of census-based ethnic and racial classifications in Brazil (2004), then the framing of the question as it is does not only include minority groups since individuals that can “pass” are counted within the number of Afro-descendants. Put another way, the example of the news anchor, a woman who has benefited socially and economically from her perceived whiteness and who has never experienced the racism, discrimination, and exclusion that comes with being phenotypically black, can
still technically identify as Afro-descendant. Since information about a person’s household income and standard of living are also gathered in the census process, the way in which the question is currently framed has the potential of including people that because of their perceived whiteness have been socially and financially successful, and this could lead to inaccurate calculations if the purpose of this question is indeed to “monitor the progress of minority groups.”

Framing the question in a way that asks specifically about color, however, can be even more problematic in Argentina than it has historically been in the United States. Reframing the question in a way that would ask the individual to self-identify as black, brown, white or yellow (as is the model that has most often been used in the Brazilian context) would seem to eliminate the aforementioned issue of phenotypically white individuals identifying with and falling into a category meant to enumerate a minority group. However, the ways in which race and socioeconomic status intersect in Latin America may also lead to less than accurate results if this model were applied in Argentina, as Carvahlo et al point out in the case of Brazil, “subjective identity in Brazil is therefore based on physical appearance in combination with other factors, such as income, education, and related insignias of social rank” (2004: 333). This is also true within Argentina: it is not uncommon for an individual of darker skin color or prominent African features to be considered lighter shades of brown and in some cases, even white, if they navigate daily life in an upper class. As a result, individuals that fall within a minority group of black or brown may feel more inclined to identify with white if they have attained a higher social rank or are part of an upper economic class. In Argentina, since the term ‘negro’, the direct translation of black, is understood to refer to a person
of low morals or low socioeconomic status, the probability that black individuals of middle or upper classes would choose to identify with the word would seem to be low. Both of these criticisms to the question’s framing were voiced within the discussions held with the INDEC, World Bank, and the social groups, but a consensus as to what would be the most appropriate way to frame the question seems yet to have been reached.

**Concluding Thoughts**

While Argentina pushes toward embracing its “multiculturalism” on an international scale, leaders such as Omari ultimately feel that there is an absolute lack of interest or sincere will to celebrate its African heritage. The United Nations declared 2011 to be the year of Afro-descendants, a recognition that was praised and celebrated worldwide. However, Omari cites that there were no celebrations or events organized to commemorate this by the state. This indicates to him that as an activist there is work to be done to be sure that all variables treated as demographic identifiers be included in both plans in the future. Since Plan A is normally for the purpose of establishing quality of life in households, the perception by many is that including questions that determine the demographic markers of the population exclusively on this form seems inappropriate and is akin to only asking about gender on Plan A as well. Ultimately, regardless of how accurate the methods of the INDEC may be, if the perception of the black community is that the census was administered incorrectly, the faith in both the INDEC and the ability of the census to garner visibility for the Afro-descendant community falls short of the expectations that the community had cautiously held.

However flawed many people may have perceived the census and its undertaking to be, the general consensus is that it is still a step in the right direction.
Self-identification and the ability for Afro-Argentines to be able to fully embrace their national identity without being questioned are among the most important effects that the black community have hoped that the census could have. As many Afro-Argentines have stated, the widely-accepted belief that they don’t exist has led to the sentiment of “ser negra en la Argentina es ser de otro país” or “to be black in Argentina is to be from another country” (Corrêa: 2006). For this population, visibility and inclusion would be the first step to bringing serious discussions to the table about Argentina’s legacy of slavery and its unwillingness to acknowledge the racism that exists in a society that fails to see individuals that do not fit the country myth that “Argentines are a European population that just happens to be located in South America”. However, because the 2010 Census has fallen short in bringing the visibility and awareness of Argentina’s black community that many leaders and organizations had hoped for, these groups are looking outside of the nation-state for ways and forms to increase its visibility. In an era of social networks and a heightened interest in the African diaspora, the internet has appeared as a space to increase a global visibility as well as a global solidarity that ultimately has the potential of leading to a change in the national discourse about its Afro-descendant history.
### Table 3-1. Afro-descendant population by gender and birth country, Argentina 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth Country</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>70,088</td>
<td>67,415</td>
<td>137,503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Continents &amp; Countries</td>
<td>5,976</td>
<td>6,014</td>
<td>11,990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMERICAS</td>
<td>4,804</td>
<td>5,378</td>
<td>10,182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>1,070</td>
<td>1,052</td>
<td>2,122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>787</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>1,642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>969</td>
<td>1,444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>1,140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other Countries in Americas</td>
<td>1,225</td>
<td>1,340</td>
<td>2,565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFRICA</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>1,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASIA</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EUROPE</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>76,064</td>
<td>73,429</td>
<td>149,493</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Argentina National Census 2010, INDEC*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-14</td>
<td>18,872</td>
<td>18,064</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-64</td>
<td>51,920</td>
<td>49,645</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>5,272</td>
<td>5,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>76,064</td>
<td>73,429</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Argentina National Census 2010, INDEC*
CHAPTER 4
THE INTERNET: A SPACE FOR CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP AND RACIST DISCOURSE

Many leaders within Argentina’s black community hoped that the 2010 Census would be the fastest path toward visibility and inclusion since asking the question would at least lead to an awareness of an Afro-descendant population in the country amongst the majority of the white population. However, since both versions of the census did not include the question and many cities did not experience the same level of public service announcements about the addition of the question that Buenos Aires did large percentages of the white population were never even aware that the question was added. This coupled with the skepticism and disillusionment that many members of black social movements feel with the INDEC and the government over perceived inaccuracies in the manner in which the census was carried out has led these social movements to focus on other paths toward visibility outside of the nation state.

While the previous chapter is based on interviews and participant observation with two of the better organized social groups within Buenos Aires’ Afro-descendant community, the reality is that the majority of the groups and organizations throughout the country are little more than a registered group name and a purchased internet domain. Though the internet may pose an obstacle for groups and organizations in other Latin American countries that are less developed, Argentina is one of the most technologically connected countries in the world. With dozens of internet cafes on every street, cheap and easy access to smartphones, and virtually all restaurants and coffee shops offering free Wi-Fi connectivity to its patrons, even individuals who don’t own personal computers are increasingly becoming more integrated into the online world. Indeed, Argentina ranks 12th in the world in Facebook users by country, with
nearly 50% of the country using this social media. It is through this social media, as well as through other forums such as YouTube, blogs, and chat rooms that different members of the Afro-Argentine community participate and interact with members of the African diaspora around the globe. Through this solidarity, Afro-Argentines have been able to achieve a level of visibility within cyberspace that they hope will eventually translate to visibility and on-the-ground inclusion in their own society. In some instances, the use of internet media and space also provides a forum for individuals to voice concerns and opinions in a space that seems less confrontational and that provides greater neutrality than direct face-to-face interactions.

Methodology and Research Design

For this portion of my research, I chose to hone in on specific areas of the internet where there was greater participation and performance of identity amongst Argentine Afro-descendants. These include Facebook, newspaper articles, and YouTube videos.

Choosing Content for Analysis

Although several groups have individual websites that offer general information such as mission statements, goals and calendar events, the forum and message board sections of these sites have all been replaced with Facebook pages that allow easier connectivity and participation. For this reason, Facebook is one of the primary sources of information that I use for this analysis. YouTube also provides a similar sort of environment to Facebook. However, since YouTube centers on videos that have been

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1 This information is provided by Social Bakers, a web analytics website designed to discover social trends based on the manners in which individuals use social media. This information is public access and is available for any country. The information on Argentina was found at the following address: http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics/argentina.
posted either by members of the Afro-Argentine community or other Argentines in general, the video comments are much more synthesized to the individual reactions that viewers have toward the content in the video on display. In an attempt to gather material from individuals that may not be engaged in these forms of social media, I also examine two articles from popular online Argentine newspapers. The two articles found are telling in terms of the protection of anonymity since the content of the commentary to the articles differs between the two since one newspaper, in an increasingly common fashion, requires individuals to log in through Facebook to comment while the other allows the individual to create a new username with little to no identifiers in order to participate in discussion.

My purpose for focusing on this online content produced by the Afro-Argentine social groups themselves is because virtual spaces have in many ways, replaced physical meeting spaces, especially in instances where face-to-face meetings have led to growing inter and intra group tensions. While there tends to be infighting between different leaders and members of some of the largest Afro-descendant organizations in the city of Buenos Aires, Facebook seems to provide a neutral forum in which individuals are willing to interact with one another. Some of the leaders that were immediately forthcoming about their distrust or dislike for some of the other organizations are still “Facebook friends” with one another and participate in a dialogue on varying topics posted on their respective Facebook pages in a way that has been impossible to achieve in a face to face manner.

Methodology

For this chapter, I employ what anthropologist H. Russell Bernard terms “an interpretive analysis – the search for meanings and their interconnection in the
expression of culture” (2011:415). Bernard advises that “this method requires deep involvement with the culture, including an intimate familiarity with the language, so that the symbolic referents emerge during the study of those expressions” (2011:415). For the purposes of this chapter, I am interpreting culture to mean both Argentine culture in physical terms of culture as well as “internet culture” in a more virtual definition of culture. Particularly, I engage in what Bernard outlines as “discourse analysis” in which texts are systematically chosen based on certain criteria, namely that (a) the texts had to be produced after the 2010 Census, (b) had to be Argentine in origin, and (c) were centered on issues pertaining to the Afro-Argentine community. Bernard goes on to explain the process by stating that “a chunk of text is laid out, followed by commentary involving all the wisdom and understanding that the commentators can bring to the effort” (2011: 423).

Because so much of the interactions and discourse that takes place in the Afro-Argentine community happens online, fieldwork alone cannot fully uncover the dialogues that these groups employ in attempting to achieve greater visibility in their society or the manners in which individuals perform their cultural identity in virtual spaces. Anthropologist Johannes Fabian elaborates on this idea within his own work: “That documents created by blogs and chat groups devoted to themes anthropology is interested in deserve our attention is by now widely recognized; Internet-based ethnography has become accepted as a legitimate alternative for, or complement of, traditional fieldwork and the concomitant literature on research methods is bound to grow” (2008: 122). Bernard thus provides us with methodologies that can be readapted for use in an online space.
Afro-Argentine Cultural Citizenship and Responses by White Society

As we continue to move further into a globalized world in which communication and interaction with one another is no longer contingent on time or place, we also see a shift in the concept of citizenship as groups and individuals that have previously been marginalized or denied full citizenship in the nation-state see a growing opportunity to renegotiate their terms of inclusion through more globally visible spaces, such as the internet. Better stated, in the words of anthropologist Aihwa Ong, “the confluences of global flows, by forming new spaces and entanglements of possibilities have a mutated effect on citizenship” (Ong 2005). Ong argues that the classic understanding of citizenship is predicated on membership in the nation-state, but acknowledges that as different actors within the boundary of the nation-state seek to participate in transnational networks, there is undoubtedly an effect on the condition of national sovereignty. This is true in the case of Afro-Argentines. As the small Afro-Argentine community struggles for full citizenship and visibility, they increasingly turn to the internet’s global reach to find the external support needed to put pressure on the nation-state for full inclusion in Argentine society. In this way, as Ong states, “the (re)combinations of globalizing forces and situated elements produce conditions of possibility for articulating political claims on the grounds other than legal citizenship” (2005: 697).

However, just as the Afro-Argentines have looked outside for support, so too have emerged the voices of those that would see their white privilege challenged if this lack of visibility and prohibition from full-participation were to be acknowledged. In allowing the voices of a marginalized minority to be heard, there too comes a type of acknowledgment that the dominant majority must make that it has been responsible for
the marginalization of this group. This is a hard pill to swallow, especially for inhabitants of a country that prides itself on racial homogeneity and the absence of racism. Because the Internet allows not only for a global flattening in the sense that we can all be interconnected to one another at any given time regardless of distance, it too can afford a certain level of anonymity and protection to any individual who chooses to engage in discourse on the web. In this sense, criminologist James Banks believes that “the anonymity, immediacy and global nature of the Internet has also made it an ideal tool for extremists and hate mongers to promote hate” (2010:233).

While anonymity, as Banks shows in his analysis, affords a safe cover for individuals to express their extremist views, others have shown that, if there exists even the slightest chance of being identified, individuals will adhere to many of the social cues that exist in face-to-face dialogue, and this will in turn curb the extreme rhetoric (Coffey & Woolworth 2004, Christopherson 2006). Both of these levels of social interaction exist in the rhetoric and dialogue expressed in different global platforms used by Afro-Argentines and supporting diasporic groups. Through an analysis of commentaries made in response to news articles from Argentina’s two most popular newspapers, *La Nación* and *El Clarín* as well as commentaries to YouTube videos, all with the shared purpose of making visible the Afro-Argentine population, this chapter aims to show how the Internet can serve not only as a global stage for claiming cultural citizenship by the Afro-Argentine community but also as a global platform for a localized racist discourses which, in turn, vary in their degree of extremism depending on the degree of anonymity that online newspapers and YouTube afford the participant.
Cultural Citizenship and Belonging

Cultural citizenship in the social sciences was first coined by cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo in the late 1980s and was expanded upon by Aiwha Ong in the early 1990s. Rosaldo defines cultural citizenship as “the right to be different (in terms of race, ethnicity, or native language) with respect to the norms of the dominant national community, without compromising one's right to belong, in the sense of participating in the nation-state's democratic processes” (Rosaldo 1994). Ong, finding Rosaldo’s definition of cultural citizenship a bit one-dimensional, prefers to think of the concept as a process “of self-making and being-made in relation to nation-states and transnational processes” (1996:737). As a theory, Rosaldo’s definition acknowledges the agency and resilience of marginalized groups and examines how this marginalization and alienation leads to the creation or proliferation of validating cultural expressions that claim a cultural space or haven for the group. Ong, on the other hand, acknowledges that marginalized individuals “can[not] escape the cultural inscription of state power and other forms of regulation that define the different modalities of belonging” (1996:738).

Through a similar lens as that provided by Rosaldo and Ong, Luke Goode, professor of Film, Television and Media Studies at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, examines the “evolving role of the Internet as a site of cultural agency” (Goode 2010). While understanding the propensity for the Internet to be used as an anonymous source of hate, Goode looks to distinguish his analysis by showing “how pivotal the Internet, from the early days of Usenet newsgroups to the subsequent mushrooming of the World Wide Web, has become for sub-cultural, diasporic and variously marginalized cultural groupings in terms of organizing, mobilizing, developing
solidarity and intra-group communication, as well as in communicating to the wider global public sphere” (2010:531). His analysis focuses on the Maori tribes of New Zealand, but it is relevant to the use of the Internet by the Afro-Argentine community.

**Facebook and Personal Websites**

Through the internet, the Afro-Argentine community has managed to accomplish a degree of intra-group solidarity and communication that it still strives to achieve on the ground. As anthropologist Judith Anderson discovered in her recent ethnography of the Afro-Argentine population, there has been little to no coherent communication nor on-the-ground mobilization, due mostly to infighting, different end goals, and internal politics between the different social groups within the community (Anderson 2010). However, through the use of Facebook pages, members of this community have managed to come together for shared interests, most recently in an effort to save an important landmark of Afro-Argentine history (Romero 2012). In this way, the Internet has served as a catalyst for solidarity, even if this solidarity is temporary and circumstance-based.

Further, by creating and maintaining websites dedicated to increasing visibility of Afro-Argentines such as the one founded by the African Diaspora of Argentina group (ADA) and a similarly popular website founded by the Afro-Argetines of Colonial Origins (ACO) group, Afro-Argentine groups have been able to define and increase their visibility in a global arena on their own terms. Through this virtual space, they have not only been able to personally define what it means to be Afro-Argentine or an Afro-descendant in Argentine society, but have had the ability to connect with, gather ideas, and engage in dialogue with other African diaspora groups throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. These sites enable the Afro-Argentine community to negotiate their
citizenship and define their cultural group in ways not possible within the nation-state. Hence, the increasing prominence of online platforms has made it possible for the Afro-Argentine community to negotiate its initial terms of inclusion in the larger scale Argentine society. This is evident in the campaign to raise awareness of the new questions that was added to the 2010 Census. ADA was one of the few organizations that created YouTube videos on its channel to reach a wider population of Argentines and raise awareness of and answer questions about the change. A few of its members were also involved in the door to door polling of the Afro-Argentine community in an effort to ensure that the people of that community were aware that they would be counted for the first time.

Different subgroups within the Afro-Argentine community have similarly used the global reach of the Internet to paint a larger picture of the culture and traditions that make up the African diaspora in Argentina. Some groups have used the internet to connect with other diasporic groups throughout Latin America, where, in contrast to North America and Europe, a shared language makes it easier to communicate and gain support. This is evident in the web-based promotion of visiting black rap and hip-hop groups and the encouragement by community moderators to participate in these events. Through a sharing of ideas, especially with afro-descendants from other countries throughout Latin America, it seems that the Afro-Argentine community engages in dialogue with other communities as a means to construct a locally relevant model for further solidarity and cooperation.

ADA has been particularly successful in using Facebook to define itself in terms of a pan-Africanist alliance with other social movements throughout the Western world.
and in adopting a black performance culture centered on modern day rap and hip-hop. In 2012, ADA launched a campaign called “No! To Racism,” that successfully united hip-hop artists from around the globe, some from as far away as Spain. The series of performances in alliance with local Afro-descendants brought visibility to Argentina’s African diaspora and engaged Argentine youth through a common language of hip-hop.

The most notable of these performers was Chuck D from the famous American hip-hop duo Public Enemy. The events were highly publicized on both ADA’s website as well as its Facebook page, and the international artists who participated shot a music video in Buenos Aires that has since received thousands of views on YouTube. This is a departure from ACO, a group very much centered on a cultural identity in which the traditional African dance of candombe is the driving force. Many of the members of ACO are famous candomberos, and their Facebook page is also used to advertise upcoming performances throughout the country. Though both hip hop and candombe are an intrinsic part of Afro-Argentine identity, differences in the art forms (often times generational), leaves both groups fighting to assert legitimacy in the tangible sphere of Buenos Aires life in a way that does not appear to be as prominent in the Facebook forums and discussions.

What is interesting about these sites is that, although they function as blogs and evenhold Uniform Resource Locator (URL) addresses that identify them as such, the ability to comment on any of the new additions to these sites has been removed. In the particular case of the two websites mentioned above, the ability to “like” the page through Facebook and to interact with the moderators through Facebook has replaced the function of commenting on the actual page itself. The restriction may serve as a
way to fully assess the impact of the site by counting the number of individuals who visit
the webpages. However, it is also likely that the purpose of the restriction is to ensure
that the user/commenter understands that, by accessing the information through his/her
Facebook profile, they have lost a certain level of anonymity and in doing so, that the
user will self-monitor his/her comments. As Goode reminds us, however positive as the
Internet can be for cultural citizenship, “another challenge to cosmopolitan optimism…
is, namely, the enduring seductions of cultural and political parochialism, which often…
manifest as xenophobia and hate speech” (Goode: 530).

Newspaper Analysis

The analysis of online newspapers was different in many ways to that of
YouTube videos, mainly in that there were far fewer newspaper articles than YouTube
content. Much of this can be attributed to the business nature of a newspaper.
Because the sale of papers is fueled by stories that will catch the larger interest,
spending print space on a social group that is largely considered non-existent in
Argentina might not be seen as “good for business.” In this sense, despite an
occasional story that devotes space to Afro-Argentine issues, the media is very much
an active part in the proliferation of the myth of a homogenous European-descendant
Argentina. In a search of the country’s two major newspapers, only one article devoted
to the topic of Afro-Argentines was found in each newspaper over the past five years
which allowed active participation and comments from the public.

The first article, which is also the most recent (published in January of 2012),
comes from El Clarín and centers on the proposed demolition of a site that was once
historically known as “The Shimmy Club.“ The place is well-recognized by historians as
the only location in Buenos Aires that was open exclusively to the Afro-Argentine
community. From the 1920s to the late 1970s, The Shimmy Club served as a reunion point for Afro-Argentines celebrating New Year's Eve, weddings, parties, and other important events (Yao 2008). While the club has since disappeared and the building has been renamed “La Casa Suiza” (the Swiss House), its historic importance is still recognized by both members of ADA and ACO. In the article, *El Clarín* points not only to the historical importance that the house holds for the Afro-Argentine community, but also its significance in Argentine history as a whole. In this way, the newspaper seeks to convey the importance that the building holds for a collective Argentine history instead of just for a particular marginalized minority. The content and angle of the article is worth noting in light of Coffey and Woolworth’s observation that “there was a significant correlation between the content of the stories… and the tone and content exhibited in the web forum posts” (2004:10). This correlation seems present in the small discussion that was carried out in response to this article. While most commentators agreed that the demolition of the club was a loss, only a few engaged the racial aspect of the story, and when they did, it was in a positive manner. Andrés, a sympathizer comments:

Blanqueando Buenos Aires. Además de preservar el edificio, lo más importante es preservar y desarrollar la cultura afro argentina. [Whitening Buenos Aires. More than just preserving the building, the most important thing is preserving and developing the Afro-Argentine culture].

Going further than just the content of the article, *El Clarín* links the comments to the Facebook profile of the commentator, allowing no room for anonymity. This lack of anonymity also plays a part in determining the content and language used by the commenter. In their same study, Coffey and Woolworth found that that extreme racism and xenophobia was toned down, and in some cases not expressed at all, when there
was face to face interactions or no protection of anonymity (2004). This measured way of framing one’s comments is evident in the comments by a user named Guillermo:

Ojalá se encuentre la forma de hacer las dos cosas, conservar el edificio histórico y construir el nuevo. Existen ejemplos en los que se logran combinar ambos objetivos. Imagino que dependerá también de cuestiones técnicas. A propósito, se estima que existen entre 1,5 y 2 millones de descendientes de africanos en la Argentina, más los nuevos inmigrantes. La diversidad es siempre algo para celebrar.

Because this comment is linked to the user’s Facebook profile, one quickly discovers through just a couple of clicks that Guillermo holds an important job with the Argentine Ministry of International Relations. Not only is there an absence of anonymity, but also the commentator’s governmental position is on display, presumably leading to a more measured and thought out response to the article. This is not to suggest that this individual would have responded in a more negative manner had his identity been withheld, as we have no idea what Guillermo’s prejudices might be or if they exist at all. The example nonetheless calls to mind the idea that the tone and content of a comment that an individual posts may be shaped by the degree to which his or her identity is divulged.

In contrast to *El Clarín* and its method of stripping away the anonymity of the commentator, Argentina’s other widely read newspaper, *La Nación*, allows users to create site specific usernames that reveal nothing about the individual. In an article published in 2010 entitled “Las raíces africanas de la Argentina” [The African roots of Argentina], writer Alicia Dujovne Ortiz aims to outline the history of the invisible Afro-
Argentine community in a very public forum. Her objective is met with indignant replies as many Argentines that accept the myth of a “white Argentina” and benefit in this society from their whiteness are forced to confront a reality in which their privileged state comes at the oppression of another group that was once physically prominent in day to day society. This is illustrated in the commentary by one particular user by the username of “jaiduk”:

Esta nota es un cúmulo de fantasías. La negritud en Argentina, fue básicamente ‘absorbida’, por cruzamiento con el resto de la población. De allí la presencia de genes ‘africanos’ en el 75% de nuestra población. Si este hubiera sido un país racista y segregacionista, eso nunca hubiera sucedido, y los negros seguirían viviendo apartados en ghettos. Otro tanto podemos decir de la ‘raza criolla’ hija del europeo y del aborigen americano. No inventen racismos donde no existen. Es muy humano que lo que salga de lo común nos llame la atención, eso no es ‘Racismo suave’ ¡Qué va! Es natural reacción ante lo diferente. La mayoría de los negros en el país, son inmigrantes recientes. Lo original, es que sea una persona de hondas raíces en el país. Porque por lo antedicho, se han diluido entre nosotros. No creemos fantasmas o mitos. Y los Rosas y Brown, son consejas, son leyendas en todo caso, sin ninguna validez histórica. Además, no podemos medir actitudes sociales del S XIX, con ideas del S XXI. [This writing is an accumulation of fantasies. The black population in Argentina was basically ‘absorbed’ through miscegenation with the rest of the population. From there we get a presence of ‘African genes’ in 75% of our population. If this had been a racist and segregationist country, that never would have happened, and the blacks would still live separated in ghettos. We can say the same about the ‘creole race’ and the indigenous American. Don’t invent racisms where they don’t exist. It’s very human that anything out of the ordinary would call our attention – that isn’t ‘soft racism’. Furthermore, it’s natural to react to that which is different. The majority of the blacks in this country are recent immigrants. The original would be to be a person of deep roots in this country, because as aforementioned, they have been diluted within us (the white population). Let’s not create ghosts or myths. And the Rosas and Brown (past historians devoted to the subject) are concessionaries; they’re legends in any case without any historical significance. Anyway, we cannot measure social attitudes from the 19th century with ideas from the 20th century].

Without fear of being identified, the user is able to continue the proliferation of the oft-quoted Europeanization of Argentine history. Linguistic anthropologist Jane Hill
notes that, “seemingly simple tenets of racist practices are far from irrational and seldom the result of ignorance. Rather, these practices are often complex and deliberate forms of maintaining a privileged status in society” (Hill 2008, Josey 2010). By publishing a story focused on the African origins of a seemingly non-African country, *La Nación* is forcing its readers to acknowledge not only that there was and still is an African presence in the country, but also that the dominant white population holds a responsibility in marginalizing this group by promoting the myth of a European Argentina. It is also worth noting as well that the commentator’s assertions are all a regurgitation of the same ‘disappearance’ of the Afro-Argentine population story and that it essentially functions as covert racism in propagating the very myth of the non-existence of Afro-Argentines that the author is attempting to dispel. Also, by challenging the story in this way rather than by using blatantly racist language, the commentator is attempting to ensure that his voice is not censored since there is evidence of *some* moderation through the deletion of an earlier comment that seemed to be deemed unacceptable.

**YouTube Analysis**

Because of the participatory nature of YouTube, there is a greater amount of potential content for analysis. In order to attempt to maintain consistency, I have chosen to analyze the commentaries associated with two videos that have been recognized by Afro-Argentine groups either through linking them back to their principle web pages, or by posting the videos themselves. One video that sparked debate is simply titled “Afro-Argentines” and is nothing more than text appearing on a backdrop of the Argentine flag and accompanied by tango music. The point of this video is to act as a general “crash course” on the history and continued presence of the Afro-Argentine
community. The global reach of the video is enhanced by the fact that the text is posted in English as well as Spanish. The response of most Argentines has been to reject the accusation of a ‘racist nation’ and to attribute the label to ‘a few individuals’ or the mentality of the ‘big cities,’ as exemplified by the comments from a user named “huseca”:

I’m Argentinean and I don’t feel proud saying ‘in Argentina there are not black people’. We’re a nation made of nations, and most of people are concerned about that. It’s true that there are racist people, so in big cities, as well as there are racist people in other countries ... we’re not all like that, I’m proud of being a mixture of cultures... We can’t deny African influence... our most typical dance, Tango, is mostly based in African rhythms.

Another example of this comes from “infinitenostromo”:

Argentina is a multiracial and multiethnic and multicultural country, I feel lucky to live in a country like this. The other day I was walking around in my small town and I’ve met two guys from Senegal, I think that’s great, that people from places such as Senegal are coming to live in my country.

By choosing to embrace the “multicultural awareness” of their country that the video is denying them, the two users hope to convey a more positive image of Argentina to the rest of the world. Further, by identifying themselves as Argentine but posting their commentary in English rather than Spanish, the users hope that their vision of Argentina will reach a greater global audience than it could have if they had chosen to post in their native language. In this sense, one identifies that the audience of these comments is not solely the Argentine population, or even just the Latin American population, but rather a larger, Anglophone global community that may “get the wrong idea” of Argentina from the information portrayed in the video (which, is, historically and factually accurate if not a bit generalist).

The irony of the second comment about meeting Senegalese men in Argentina is that the author does not acknowledge the level of marginalization that African
immigrants experience in the country. This is the topic of the second YouTube video, a special report on the conditions of Afro-descendants living in Buenos Aires. The video, entitled "Reportaje America TV Argentina – Afroargentinos" focuses on the human rights abuses and subjugation that African immigrants encounter upon arrival in Argentina. The video is completely in Spanish and is a clip from a news station that broadcasts domestically. This seems to set the tone for the comments, as the commentators seem to engage in an internal dialogue, unconcerned about YouTube’s global forum. The notion that this video will not reach a larger audience combined with the incriminatory nature of the report seem to invite individuals to hide behind the anonymity afforded by YouTube and make extremely xenophobic and racist remarks:

NEGRO HUEVON TE METES EN ARGENTINA SON UNAS CAGADAS LOS MIRA NEGRO LARGATE DE ESA MIERDA DE PAIS ESTA BRASIL PERU COLOMBIA NO SEAS HUEVON SINO SERAS CARNE DE CAÑON EN LAS MALVINAS. [Lazy negro, you come to Argentina and you are pieces of shit. Get out of this country and go to those shitty countries like Brazil, Peru, and Colombia. Don’t be lazy; otherwise we’ll turn you into cannon fodder in the Falkland Islands].

The commentator suggests that the black population should relocate to countries such as Brazil, Peru and Colombia presumably because of the largely recognized Afro population that resides in each of these countries. Curiously, one has to wonder if the immigrant nature of this group of Afro-Argentines allows the commentator to express racist views that may not have been as widely accepted in the previous video that focused on the colonial Afro-Argentines brought over through slavery. This seems to be the case in the following comment by "pensatoreseneca":

¡Menuda mierda! Por si no fuera poco con los peruanos y bolivianos ahora invaden los jodidos negros a Argentina. En la Avenida Corrientes te venden hasta su puta madre y en la terminal de Mendoza solo se juntan ahí a no hacer nada, cual vil manada deorangutanes. [Worthless shit! As if it wasn’t enough that we have to deal with the Peruvians and Bolivians, now the
fucking blacks invade Argentina. On Corrientes Avenue they will sell you even their fucking mom and in the Mendoza terminal they just get together to do nothing, the herd of orangutans].

Capitalizing on the immigrant aspect of this diaspora, and again, taking refuge in the anonymity that YouTube provides, the commentator is able to readily deny these individuals a sense of belonging – something that could not be done as easily to the colonial Afro-Argentine population. Seizing on the already extreme nature of the previous comments also allows the commentator to continue the vitriolic nature of his/her rhetoric without the need to feel apprehensive. Indeed, the comments that follow, whether for or against, are just as vulgar since the tone has already been set by the original commentators. This reinforces what Coffey and Woolworth determined in their study: “When people see others expressing extreme or outlandish views they may be less inhibited in expressing their own sentiments in equally strong terms. This appears to be particularly true for short-term forums where no sense of ‘virtual community’ develops since participants do not have the opportunity to get to know one another over an extended period of time” (2004: 12).

Conclusion

The Internet can serve as a positive arena in the face of globalization in many ways - most especially in that it can provide a voice and neutral safe space for historically marginalized groups. It can serve as a space to engage in cultural citizenship, as has been demonstrated by the Afro-Argentine community members themselves. Indeed, the Afro-Argentine community has not only been successful in using Internet forums for engaging in and practicing cultural citizenship, but groups such as ADA have used the internet to create transnational diasporic projects such as their recent campaign of “hip hop against racism” that engaged hip hop artists from all over
the world. Further, this internet space should be treated as a research site since the majority of member interactions, dialogues and group participation take place in this space. In a society where many individual social movements are comprised of very small numbers, and where there are political and personal tensions between and within these groups, the internet creates a space for cooperation and solidarity that is not present on the ground.

However, because of the anonymous nature of many of the forums available, it can also foster a backlash against this online cultural citizenship from the dominant group that feels threatened by these claims to citizenship that are made in a space far outside of the control of the nation-state or its controlling groups. Both of these uses of the internet may be interpreted as new manifestations of cultural preservation (positive as well as negative) from both marginalized groups as well as the dominant group. Ultimately though, the conversations that these forums stimulate can lead to positive change when the government engages the Afro-Argentine community in decision making processes as in the case of the inclusion of Afro-Argentine leaders in framing the groundbreaking question of racial identification in the 2010 Argentine Census illustrates.
While many people within the Afro-diaspora community in Argentina originally believed that the Census would be a definite path toward greater visibility of Afro-Argentines and the African diaspora, the negative perceptions and skepticisms toward the INDEC and the Census have led Afro-descendant groups and their leaders to believe that increasing visibility must come by other means. Although there is still a general consensus amongst Afro-descendants that the census is a step in the right direction and an overall sense of hope that one day it will be administered in a manner that the Afro-descendant population perceives as accurate, Argentina’s African diaspora seems to agree that a path toward visibility is best found outside of the hands of the nation-state. For this reason, social networks and online spaces seem to be the mechanism of choice by many Afro-Argentines in reaching a much more global audience and increasing solidarity with and visibility for Argentina’s African diaspora.

For some of the most prominent groups, this has translated to global solidarity with other members of the worldwide African diaspora through channels such as Facebook and YouTube. Through these self-administered spaces, Argentina’s black community has been able to not only increase its struggle for visibility and inclusion, but has managed to define itself on its own terms. This has led to a larger understanding of what it means to be black in Argentina, and a greater inclusion of different cultural manifestations within the community ranging from *candombe*, to tango, to hip hop.

One of the overwhelming issues that both the INDEC and the black social movements themselves had with the census was that a lack of self-identification amongst Argentines as Afro-descendant may have led to a lower enumeration of the
population than is accurate. Ultimately, by increasing visibility through online spaces and by inviting transnational dialogues to occur both in virtual spaces and in Buenos Aires through cultural and musical collaborations, Argentina’s black social movements are redefining what it means to be black in Argentina. This has the potential of eliminating some of the stigma that is associated with blackness in Argentine society, and can ultimately lead to greater levels of self-identification, particularly among the youth that are more open to embracing Argentina’s multicultural history.

**Afternoons at Mandiyu**

While I conducted my fieldwork in Buenos Aires in the summer of 2012, I developed an almost daily habit of having lunch at a small café that sat at a busy intersection just two blocks up the street from my house. Ever the people-watcher, this tiny café in the neighborhood of Monserrat allowed me to observe people as they went about their day. This habit allowed me to see the racial diversity that existed in this neighborhood as I watched individuals pass by that ranged in color from “café con leche” to “trigueño” to “carbon”. It also made me privy to the interactions, or rather, the lack thereof, which existed between white Argentines and black Argentines of various hues on the color spectrum. I would watch as white Argentines would busily pass by black Argentines without ever even giving them a glance. At first I thought that this may be a characteristic of the ever-hustling, always-in-a-hurry porteño, but I quickly realized that there was always at least a quick nod of the head and in some cases a quick kiss on the cheek between white Argentines. While this greeting was obviously between individuals that knew each other in some capacity, I also noticed that there was at least some type of acknowledgement of one another as white Argentines passed each other. Whether or not this was a conscious effort to ignore the black individuals, or if it was so
engrained that it was an automatic reaction I could not say. However, regardless of which was the reason, both are reflections of a larger problem that exists in a society that while taking steps toward making Afro-descendants visible, still has a long way to go.

Although Afro-descendant individuals did not pass by as often as white Argentines, I did notice that on the few occasions that I saw Afro-descendants cross each other’s path, there was a concerted effort to acknowledge one another, even if it was just the tip of a hat to a fellow Afro-descendant on the opposite side of a busy intersection. During my time in the neighborhood, I got to know some of these individuals, and almost all of them were immigrants from the Dominican Republic. For several of them, negotiating race and adjusting to Argentina’s racialization was hard. Ironically, Dominicans emigrate from a country that like Argentina shies away from identifying anyone as black. Dominican or Afro-Argentine, the manner in which they are treated by white Argentine society remains the same. Some could argue that the situation for Dominicans (and for other immigrants for that matter) is slightly better than it is for Afro-Argentines, because at the end of the day, when they feel rejection from Argentine society, they still have a national identity to which they can cling and which offers them a sense of belonging. Afro-Argentines in contrast, have a country that says they were exterminated in the Paraguayan War and the bouts of yellow fever that followed.

One afternoon, while finishing my lunch, Ramón the waiter struck up a conversation with me. He had been my waiter every day since I’d arrived and we had said little more to each other than hello and goodbye. Ramón was in his late forties and
bore a striking resemblance to the actor Chazz Palminteri who had made a name for himself playing Italian American mobsters opposite Robert DeNiro. As we continued our conversation, he asked me what I was doing in Buenos Aires. I briefly explained my research project to him and told him about my interest in working with the Afro-descendant community. I remember he flashed me a big grin and said “Good luck. We don’t have Afro-descendants here in Argentina. They all died in the war and those that survived that died of yellow fever.” He didn’t specify which war, but I was all too aware that he was repeating the white Argentine mantra.

As I was contemplating how a waiter who saw and served several Afro-descendants on a daily basis could truly believe that this was the case, that there were no black people in his country, he came back to my table and added, “You know, my grandmother was an Afro-descendant”. Being completely baffled by this revelation, I couldn’t muster anything more than just an “Oh, really?” He explained that her family had descended from slaves and had migrated from Paraguay to Argentina before the borders between the two countries had been solidified. He described her as being about as dark as coffee with a tiny splash of milk and that her hair was jet black and curly and close to the scalp. This left me with an array of questions that I never worked up the courage to ask him. Did he get the census question asked of him? How did he answer? Did he consider himself to be an Afro-descendant? How did he identify himself? If ever the opportunity arises to return to that café and if he’s still employed there, I will not leave without asking him to tell me more.

**Implications for Future Research**

While I didn’t seize on the opportunity to ask Ramón these burning questions, they did lead me to think about possibilities for future research. While several of the
people that I interviewed focused on the importance of creating awareness about self-identification, it seems that this is not always necessary in order to get an affirmative answer to the question. Based on my conversation with Ramón, and his belief that Afro-descendants had died out, I would be inclined to say that he personally did not identify as Afro-descendant, and from his appearance there would be no reason for the dominant society to ever question his whiteness. Because he could “pass”, he had all the benefits of white privilege bestowed upon him. This led me to question that if the motives for the census question are what my participants explained them to be (social/economic reparations, inclusion in society, visibility, and awareness), shouldn’t the question have been worded in another manner? Does the wording allow for benefactors of white privilege to benefit from identifying as Afro-descendant if ever a time came when programs such as affirmative action were introduced in Argentine society (as is currently the cause of great racial tensions in Brazil’s affirmative action programs)? How does one reconcile the two ends of the spectrum, since presumably one does not have to display phenotypical markers to be proud of their Afro-descendant history? These would be questions that I would ask and around which I would center any future research in this area.

I also, lamentably did not address the intersection of race, class, and gender at any point in this project. Since my project was designed as an entry point into Afro-Argentine society, and focused so explicitly on the census, I did not ask any questions that could have revealed differences in perception about racism and self-identification on the basis of class. Also, since historically, women of color tend to be the most
marginalized in society, a comparison with the ways in which invisibility and racism affect women and men differently is worth undertaking.

Finally, as I looked at Afro-descendants in a homogenous manner, any further study that I would do would focus on the dynamics of relationships between Afro-Argentines and other groups within the African diaspora in the country. I would also be interested in doing a comparative study between African Americans and their relationships with African immigrants and Afro-Argentines and African immigrants to Argentina since Afro-Argentines have often been referred to as the Argentine equivalent of African Americans.
APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CHAPTER 3

Questionnaire

1. Does racism exist in Argentina?
2. If you answered 'yes,' what are the ways in which racism is displayed in your society?
3. When you hear the word 'negro' what are the images that come to mind? What does this word mean to you?
4. What is your interpretation of the word Afro-descendant? What is it that you understand this word to mean?
5. Does Argentina have an African or Afro-Argentine population of any kind?
6. Are there any Argentine foods or cultural traditions that you can think of which have African roots?
7. In the months before the 2010 Census was administered, did you see any advertisements in print or on television or hear any on the radio that publicized the addition of a question regarding Afro-descendant identification?
8. If you answered 'yes', can you remember which organization or group sponsored it?
9. What are your opinions or perceptions about an Afro-descendant population living in Argentina?
10. Remembering your educational experience outside of the university level, can you recall having a curriculum at any point in primary, middle or high school about the African history of Argentina?
11. If you answered 'yes,' in which year were you taught this material, how much time was dedicated to the subject, and what were some of the key themes that were covered about Afro-Argentine history?
Figure B-1. Political map of Argentina (Source: http://www.vidiani.com/?p=6636)
Figure B-2. Neighborhoods of Buenos Aires, Argentina (Source: http://www.argentinatravelgroup.com/regions/buenos-aires)
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Florence Emilia Castillo is a self-identified Xicana of Mexican American origin and a native of Dallas, Texas. Her experience as the daughter of a formerly undocumented immigrant and a Mexican American in a border state where immigration and issues of identity and inclusion continue to be contentious topics have greatly contributed to her critical understandings of race, racialization, and identity. Due to financial reasons, she began her academic career at a local community college. Through hard work and a pursuit of academic excellence, she was able to earn several scholarships which allowed her to study for a semester at the University of Sevilla in Sevilla, Spain, and later to transfer to Eckerd College, a private liberal arts college in St. Petersburg, Florida. During her time at Eckerd College, Ms. Castillo developed strong academic relationships with her professors of political science, which led her to pursue degrees in both International Relations & Global Affairs and Spanish. Her education at Eckerd instilled in her the importance of being a global citizen and shortly after graduation she moved to Suwon, South Korea to work as an English teacher.

After completing a year in South Korea and choosing to pursue TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) certification that she decided to move to Buenos Aires, Argentina to complete her certification in South America. It was during this period that she began to notice and question the marginalization of members of the African diaspora. Though she returned to Argentina for professional purposes in 2009, Ms. Castillo completed her fieldwork in the country in the summer of 2012 through a generous grant from the Tinker Foundation and the UF Center for Latin American Studies. She graduated from the University of Florida with a Master of Arts in the spring of 2013.