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Migration, Food and Cultural Production Across Changing Afro-Ecuadorian Geographies

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**Migration, Food and Cultural Production
Across Changing Afro-Ecuadorian
Geographies**

by

Amelia Swinton

Latin American Studies

Colby College

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Borne by many, this thesis eventually emerged. Mil gracias a todas.

Abstract

The human geography of Ecuador is changing. Urban Afro-Ecuadorians now outnumber those living in the two rural regions that have been the ancestral homelands of the population. This physical transformation assaults Ecuador's historically racialized geography, which conflated cities, modernity and white-mestizo identity. Though Afro-Ecuadorians living in the rural north had previously been physically and figuratively located outside of the national project, Ecuador's new constitution has sought to reverse this institutionalized exclusion. National belonging has been reframed through the concept of interculturality, which recognizes diversity and equality at the same time. I conducted two periods of fieldwork in the north-central Chota Valley, specifically in the Afro-Ecuadorian communities of La Concepción and Salinas. During this time, I observed cultural production through the lenses of agriculture, food preparation, gastronomic tourism, and ethnoeducation. In this thesis, I examine how these practices are contested by migration and interculturality. I suggest that interculturality narrowly defines diversity by ethnicity, which in Ecuador is tethered to specific geographic sites. The people left behind in the Chota Valley must therefore uphold traditions that qualify the authenticity of the entire Afro-Ecuadorian diaspora despite dwindling population and resources in the valley itself. Drawing upon my ethnographic fieldwork, I argue that women have been disproportionately saddled with preserving and generating Afro-Ecuadorian culture. This gendered burden

may have broader implications towards revealing the limitations and selectivity of the intercultural imagination.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

"That which is diverse is not disconnected, that which is unified is not uniform, that which is equal need not be identical, the unequal need not be unjust; we have the right to be different, as long as we are also equal. These are the rules, probably the most fundamental ones, to understand the moment in which we are living."

-Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 2007

The seven months I spent studying in the Andean nation of Ecuador were saturated in racial and ethnic awareness. On the most personal level, I experienced my own race with an active, unrelenting glare. Never before had I been so hyper-aware of my whiteness as when I walked through Quito's streets. At each corner, my race, gender, class, and age compounded me into an object of constant visibility. They reflected themselves back upon me through indiscreet catcalls and soft tugs of small hands on my pants, gazing up with dark eyes, crusty noses, and a case of fruit chews for sale. My own microcosmic experience of such heightened racial sensitivity was inserted between a historical legacy of race-based exclusion to nationhood and the exhilarating, inclusive political moment at which Ecuador was poised.

Ecuadorian citizens voted in support of a progressive new constitution in October 2008, just months before I arrived. While most Western media exclaimed that the constitution granted nature the right to exist and persist, this measure was by no means the extent of the constitution's progressive reforms. As regards cultural rights, the 2008 constitution built upon the 1998 Constitution to further guarantee the collective rights of indigenous and Afro

Ecuadorians. Most importantly, these guaranteed the right to preserve cultural identity, maintain ancestral and non-transferable ownership of community lands, and to be consulted on projects of resource extraction in these lands.¹ The constitution was printed and distributed en masse everywhere from street vendors to public hospitals to rural primary schools. I observed people everywhere paging through their own pocket copies of this constitution, awestruck as I pondered the implausibility of such an occurrence in the United States. The enthusiasm and genuine engagement with which Ecuadorian citizens were approaching political participation astounded me, and their inspired commitment to constructing a new type of political project was infectious. As a corollary to the mobilization I was observing across the city, my study program explored the many dimensions of plurinationalism in Ecuador, providing the historical circumstances, theoretical underpinnings, and issues at stake in the political moment. My hyper-exposure to themes of ethnicity, citizenship, belonging quickly generated questions that began to compound, expand, and eventually propelled me to engage in sustained research.

At its core, this thesis was conceived from my own embarrassment. While in the United States, my study of Latin America had focused considerably on ethnicity and national identity, and in particular the concept of racial mixture, *mestizaje*, that dominates the region. I had even written a

¹ Moreira, María Elena. "Human Rights in Ecuador's New Constitution" *HumanRightsMoreira*. Web. 26 Apr. 2010.
<<http://www.humanrightsmoreira.com/dhnceingles.htm>>.

seminar paper on evolving claims to nationhood by the indigenous movement in Bolivia, and considered myself to have a fairly thorough grasp on the politics of ethnicity in the region. I was shocked, then, to learn about the sizable Afro-Ecuadorian population contained within Ecuador. My study of blackness in Latin America had not expanded beyond Brazilian national borders, and I assumed (as do most people, I have come to learn) that the Latin American ethnic calculus was composed of the dominant *mestizo* ideal and its shadow, the oppressed indigenous person. The silence surrounding Afro-Latin Americans speaks to their ultimate exclusion.

As I began to reflect on what this exclusion meant in the context of the emergent constitution and the collective rights it guaranteed to indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian populations, I became entirely captivated by courage and determination of the Afro-Ecuadorian identity movement and one of its most charismatic leaders, Barbarita Lara. Though she lives in the small community of La Concepción in the northerly Chota Valley, Lara taught a course for my study abroad program, a job that required a four-hour commute on either side of class three times a week. She assumed this role in addition to a number of other full-time commitments so outrageous that I wondered constantly how she did not simply unravel, but over time I came to learn that her unwavering dedication to improving the lives of fellow Afro-Ecuadorian women superseded all exhaustion that must have accompanied her constantly.

At Lara's offer, I spent seven weeks living in between two small communities in the Chota Valley and volunteering with a regional office for the National Afro Women's Movement (CONAMUNE) during June and July of 2010. My duties as informal intern fluctuated considerably, echoing the far flung demands of the community and role played by the CONAMUNE office. The most consistent daily rituals were eating lengthy lunches at Lara's home, reading stories to a group of young people at noon on the church's steps, and teaching a literacy class to a group of older women every afternoon. Other duties that arose intermittently included grant writing for a summer camp, attending microbank meetings, teaching English, and coordinating the summer camp after it began. I felt consistently frustrated my inevitable under-preparation, as I knew that I could do a much better job with my tasks if I were informed of them more than five minutes before I was set to perform them, or provided with some materials. Over time, however, I came to realize that the reality of working in an under-resourced place meant that my (improvised) best stab at teaching English was considerably better than the nonexistent alternative.

I lived in the community of Salinas (population 2100) with the Pozo family and commuted each day to La Concepción (population 600), which was located 45 minutes walking and a half hour, 25 cent bus ride down the road. Though I am grateful to have known two communities, my relationship with my host family in Salinas was consistently strained and never moved beyond my role as privileged guest. I was always uneasy in the home, especially as I

was fed fried chicken and while the eight children were given bowls of slimy potato soup and plates heaped with long grain white rice. Living in Salinas, however, exposed me to the community tourism project that I analyze at length in Chapter 3. It also allowed me to participate in the dynamics of two remarkably different communities, which contextualized my observations. Walking and talking through both these towns, however, I was consistently struck by the unrelenting friendly dispositions of everyone except for my host family, and the disquieting number of vacant houses. Where had all the people gone, I wondered?

Speaking with residents of La Concepción, they reflected passionately and proudly on their culture, but also explained that it was under assault. But unlike past governmental policies that enslaved or indentured African descended peoples in the Chota Valley, this assault was not state-driven, at least not formally. In this case, the demon was called urbanization, and the speed at which it was dissociating Afro-Ecuadorians from their ancestral homelands was astonishing. Questions leaped into my brain faster than my junior varsity Spanish could articulate them, and I concluded that race, ethnicity, national belonging, and human movement had a fascinating intersection that an anthropological toolset would be well positioned to interrogate. My initial research questions were borne from this moment, and they were molded and melded to constitute the interest of this thesis.

Initial Questions, Research Methodology, and Limitations of the Approach

My research questions and intellectual trajectory have evolved considerably as this project has taken shape. Initially, I was curious as to how movement conditioned different identities, especially for Afro-Ecuadorians, who almost exclusively originated from two geographic areas in northern Ecuador. This question is especially loaded given the hyper-importance of land and property titles against a history of enslavement and indentured servitude in the Chota Valley. I began to wonder how cultural authenticity was contested and reconfigured via migration, and how the act of movement strained as well as expanded cultural frontiers. Applying that most basic lesson of introductory anthropology, that cultures are neither reified nor singular, but rather adapt to changed circumstances and the actors that produce them, I became curious as to how migration contested the influence of the rural homelands on Afro-Ecuadorian authenticity. Furthermore, the recent ratification of the constitution made me question how formal mechanisms of the state, like the census, oriented the incentives for belonging, and whether the criteria for citizenship were changing as the government became more accessible. But then, was it really more accessible? Or was it just differently elitist?

These questions led to my return to Ecuador in January 2010 under sponsorship by the Latin American Studies Program. The nature of my research questions demanded a multi-sited ethnographic approach, though the limitations of access forced me to conduct the majority of my fieldwork in one of the rural communities where I had already established myself. During

this time, I returned to La Concepción for three weeks, though this time around I lived with a woman, Cacilia, and her daughter, Sandra, in this north-central town in the Chota Valley of the mountainous Carchi province. My previous time in La Concepción volunteering with the CONAMUNE enabled my access to the community and expedited my acclimation to the local dynamics, which was crucial given the extremely short nature of my tenure in the community. At the same time, however, I cannot stress enough how friendly, open, and generous the people of La Concepción were to accepting me into their homes. I could scarcely walk down the street without an offer to come enjoy a ten-cent-popsicle on someone's front stoop. Much of my time was spent throwing rocks onto dusty hopscotch grids and incompetently bouncing around a basketball, and my friendships with the younger children helped me to gain access to the principal spaces in which I focused my investigation: the kitchens and agricultural fields. Cacilia and Sandra, 22, spent most of their lives in their kitchen, as they operated a dining hall of sorts for construction workers and other guests in town. This kitchen was a zone of constant activity.

Additionally, I relied upon interviews with local leaders, the transcripts for which conversations are located in the appendices of this thesis. I conducted eight formal interviews during my stay with town presidents, Afro leaders, local teachers, and my adoptive family. The dynamic of each interview was conditioned by the agenda of the interviewee, who variously tried to impress, insult, inform, enrage, and educate me. All

interviews were impacted to some degree by my presence as a North American, white, female, blonde-haired, student outsider. Since I was a guest in La Concepción and had such limited time to complete my fieldwork, my politeness generally overpowered my interest in probing. Quiteños in particular expressed extreme surprise when I informed them that I would be spending time in the Chota Valley. After an initial period of shock, they would crack a smile and ask me if I were going to find myself an Afro man. This question, as I will discuss in Chapter 2, is rooted in long-held associations between black bodies and sexual prowess.

The inescapability of my embodied self served as both a strength and limitation of my methodology. In certain circumstances, such as in cooking spaces, my gender qualified my entrance. But in other circumstances, such as my interview with Salinas' president Don Raúl Maldonado, I could feel the thick veil of sexism through which we conversed. Unlike my time in La Concepción during the summer, in January I had no formal role but to conduct research. Although I was enlisted to help with a few English classes and could attempt to contribute in the kitchen, I frequently felt like a full-time loiterer around people who were working extremely hard. I found this to be a highly problematic aspect of doing fieldwork not only because of my own boredom but because it framed me as a being of leisure and privilege that was able to live comfortably without working. It was not that certain types of work were privileged above others; on the days that I went to teach English, the people on my street would nod and smile with approval just as

they would when I said I was heading out to conduct an interview or walking down the street to assist with the bean thrashing. Rather, it was the absence of work that was problematic. Frequently, I would go on long walks or head off under guises of meeting a community leader in some modestly far-off community just so that I could avoid appearing so professionally lethargic. Because despite my best efforts to contribute to daily routines as much as everyone else, the shortness of my stay meant that I was unable to shake my reputation as esteemed guest. This was further compounded by the fact that I was renting a room from Cacilia and Sandra, which made them feel obligated to assume a subservient position to me.

As I began to enact the research questions I had outlined, I came to the realization that my questions were really only intelligible through The culturally important practices that I examine in this thesis must be framed in a brief summary of the African presence in Ecuador.

Africans and their Descendants in Ecuador

Afro peoples in the Chota Valley (*El Coangue*, during colonial times) are largely the descendants of enslaved peoples held by Jesuits on plantations throughout the region. Though the Jesuits had originally enlisted indigenous people to work their plantations at abysmal wages, the availability of African slaves caused a transformation in the hacienda labor force by the middle of the 17th century. One hundred years later, around 1779 and at the relative height of hacienda productivity in the Chota Valley, eight haciendas covered

1,152 acres of sugar cane and required the labor of more than 1,300 slaves.² Jesuits operated these haciendas until Pope Clemente XIV expelled the members of this Catholic order from Ecuador and the rest of Latin America in 1767. The Jesuits' expulsion, however, meant little for enslaved Afro-Ecuadorians as their *criollo* Jesuit masters (of Spanish blood, though frequently born in Ecuador) were merely replaced by Ecuadorian ones.³ Black people enslaved on haciendas were able to work small parcels of land for their own consumption, where they cultivated such crops as corn, cotton, wheat, and maintained small orchards of guava, papaya, and citrus trees. Historian Henry Medina Vallejo notes that while this policy enabled some degree of autonomy for enslaved blacks, Jesuits principally implemented it as a cost-saving measure so that they could decrease the already meager rations that were allocated for slaves.⁴

Slavery as a state-sanctioned institution lasted until 1854 in Ecuador, when the practice was outlawed by the newly ratified fifth Constitution. However, the abolishment of slavery had a minimal impact on the work lives of Afro-descendants, as new forms of servitude immediately replaced formal enslavement. Perhaps the only noteworthy quotidian improvement post-emancipation was the eliminated fear of family splintering, which had haunted family life under enslavement. Slave owners were compensated monetarily for the financial blow that abolition delivered, which meant that

² Vallejo, Henry Medina, 36.

³ Lipski, John M. "The Chota Valley: Afro-Hispanic Language in Highland Ecuador" *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1. 1987, pg. 158.

⁴ Vallejo, 37

they had the means to employ their former slaves to do the same labor that these people had performed while enslaved. "Post-abolition, blacks of the Chota Valley fell victim to new forms of service, which were similar to those that were implemented upon the indigenous population. Because wealthy landowners employed blacks for so little money, they soon became overwhelmed by unpayable debts that would accumulate as they were passed from generation to generation," noted Henry Medina Vallejo in his historical overview of the La Concepción plantation.⁵ Afro and indigenous laborers were paid next to nothing for their work, which caused them to accumulate debts as they attempted unsuccessfully to cover the costs of survival. These debts were passed from one generation to the next, snowballing into unmanageable sums that forced their bearers into an inescapable cycle of indentured servitude (*debt peonage*). Though Afro and indigenous Ecuadorians continued to grow food on small parcels of land, known as *huasipungos*, they were only able to tend to these areas after they had finished the grueling farm labor in their boss's (*hacendado*) fields.

Not until the Agrarian Reform of 1964 were Afro descendants freed from the oppressive land owner-peon bind. This act precipitated from US prodding via the Alliance for Progress, which sought to contain Cuba's socialist revolution and develop strong economic ties between North and South America by requiring that Latin American nations adopt a variety of

⁵ Vallejo, 40

privatization schemes dictated to them by the US government.⁶ Mandatory among these measures was land redistribution, as the US feared that the extreme social inequity that characterized many Latin American nations would lead to socialist takeovers. Thus Ecuador passed sweeping reform in 1964 in which the *huasipungo* system became formally outlawed, and parcels of land sized between one and five hectares were handed out. The implementation of the reform differed radically across Ecuador's diverse regions, and while expropriation in the Chota Valley was largely effective, the majority of land included under this redistribution had been previously undeveloped Amazonian rainforest. Thus it is important to note that the reform's execution was greeted contentiously, though my argument generally casts it as a liberating act that reframed relations between people and land in the Chota Valley.

Even in Chota, the reform's implementation was a gradual, unequal process, as redistributed lands were generally of poorer quality or location and very small in size. Despite these difficulties, by 1984 over 700,000 hectares had been distributed to 79,000 peasants across the country.⁷ The reform transformed the relationship between Afro-Choteños and the land they worked, reversing their role from land servant to land owner. This process importantly provided a legal articulation of an already central relationship between these people and this land. Furthermore, property

⁶ Sawyer, Suzana. *Crude Chronicles*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004): 44.

⁷ Coutsoukis, Photius. "Ecuador Land Use and Tenure." The Library of Congress Country Studies, 10 Nov 2004. Accessed 26 Mar 2010.

rights meant that Afro-Choteños (and other new land owners not included in this study, primarily indigenous peoples) were possessed of their own mobility, as the land was theirs to sell. But most fundamentally, ownership meant that Afro-Choteños had a reliable, state-recognized claim to their homelands, which legitimately indoctrinated the cultural practices that had been occurring for centuries into the Ecuadorian nation. State recognition of such practices as culturally unique or valuable, however, would not come for many years.

Afro-Ecuadorians Assault the Nation: Development of a People and a Movement

The Afro-Ecuadorian identity movement was borne in the 1970s of the pan-Africanist movements circulating throughout Europe and the United States at the time. Drawing heavily from the work of Frantz Fanon, this movement was developing a global discourse to dismantle the colonial empires still controlling much of the African continent and guarantee the freedom of the African diaspora across the globe.⁸ Young Afro-Ecuadorian intellectuals founded the Center for Afro-Ecuadorian Studies in Quito, but the movement suffered from internal fissures and insufficient participation. By the 1990s, however, the movement surged again. Inspired by the Afro-Colombian movement, Afro-Ecuadorian civil society was strengthened and achieved great success in 1998 when the constitutional reform granted Afro people collective rights for the first time. Briefly, these included recognition

⁸ Sánchez, Jhon Antón. *Afrodescendientes: sociedad civil y movilización social en el Ecuador*. (Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology, Vol 12:1, 2007): 237.

as a people with culture, the right to practice that culture, the right to live in a society free of racism, protections against racial discrimination, and the establishment of a department in the Ministry of Culture that focuses especially on the identity and cultural expressions of Afro-Ecuadorians.⁹ Prior to 1998, the Afro and indigenous movements had operated jointly, to a certain extent. However, after the constitutional reform of 1998, the two groups suffered a rupture due in large part to differences in how each group was recognized by the central government.¹⁰ Still, the indigenous movement's concept of interculturality continued to determine how both groups framed their claims to nationhood: through their ethnicities.

The 2008 Ecuadorian constitution institutionalized interculturality as the principal orientation for the national project, though it originated from the indigenous movement unlike similar movements of multiculturalism and plurinationalism. Catherine Walsh notes that to understand the full weight of the intercultural project, one must first posit the concept alongside these similar projects.

Multiculturalism is rooted in Western countries and is a cultural relativism that emphasizes the relational dimension of diversity and hides permanent social inequalities. Plurinationalism, on the other hand, is the term most commonly used in Latin America and describes the particularity and reality of a region where indigenous and black people have lived alongside white-mestizos, and where racial mixture has played a significant role. Finally, we come to interculturality, which does not yet exist. It is something to construct. It goes beyond respect, tolerance, and recognition of diversity to become a process and project directed towards constructing a new society.¹¹

⁹ Salazar, Juan García. *Cartilla de Derechos Colectivos de los pueblos Afroecuatorianos*. (Quito: Care Internacional en el Ecuador, 2001): 6-9.

¹⁰ Walsh, Catherine. *Dossier Actualidades: Lo Afro en América Andina*. (Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology, Vol 12:1, 2007): 204.

¹¹ Walsh, Catherine. *Interculturalidad, plurinacionalidad y decolonialidad: las insurgencias político-epistémicas de refundar en estado*. (Quito: Universidad Andina, 2008): 140.

María Elena García provides another insightful example of the distinction between multiculturalism and interculturality. She cites a Peruvian friend, who explains, “multiculturalism is to know that you have neighbors who are different from you, but interculturality is when you and your neighbors hold hands to keep each other up.” She expands upon this example to suggest that “multiculturalism is the recognition of reality; interculturality is the *practice* of a multiculturalism in which citizens reach across cultural and linguistic differences to imagine a democratic community.”¹²

The language of the intercultural project is noteworthy, as it introduces terms meant to dignify instead of degrade. The term “Afro-Ecuadorian”, or simply “Afro”, is the official label for black people living in Ecuador. I have therefore also chosen to use this term when referring to this group. Although *negro* (black) is also used prevalently in the Chota Valley, this term is somewhat pejorative when used by a non-Afro person.¹³ As cited in an official publication of the Afro-Ecuadorian Cultural Center, *Afro-Ecuadorians* are defined as Ecuadorians of African descent who share a common identity, history, and occupy ancestral lands in Esmeraldas or the Chota Valley. The 2006 census recorded that 5.5% of the Ecuadorian population self-identified

¹² García, María Elena. *Making Indigenous Citizens*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005): 3.

¹³ I did not focus on racial naming practices; another study might investigate this topic.

as Afro, a number that climbs to nearly 90% when geographically limited to the valley itself.¹⁴

Approximately 17,000 people live in the Chota Valley, and most dedicate themselves to agriculture. The salience of growing and preparing food in the Chota Valley was as influential in my decision to focus on food as a lens into cultural production as was my own passion for food cultivation and its consumption. This decision was also reached by questions of access, as the brief nature of my fieldwork mandated an analytical focus that could be effectively carried to fruition in a timely manner. Furthermore, as a female, I enjoyed relatively uncontested access to highly gendered kitchen spaces. However, I do not mean to imply that my focus upon food is the exclusive result of ethnographic convenience. Past ethnographies of food in Latin America, such as Mary Weismantel's *Food, Gender, and Poverty in the Ecuadorian Andes*, Emily Walmsley's *Blackness and Belonging*, and Sidney Mintz's *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom: Excursions into eating, culture, and the past* demonstrate how food and the processes that surround it are culturally communicative. Walmsley focuses on the body as site of cultural inscription, examining how nourishing food creates certain bodies that take on racial as well as the gendered and sexual dimensions that correlate with stereotypes. Furthermore, she examines the corporeal nature of preparation

¹⁴ Whitten, Norman E. and Arlene Torres, eds. *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean: Volume 1*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998).

to deconstruct the idea that “cooking skills are innate to black women.”¹⁵

Deborah Lupton considers the sensory dimensions of food.

The accessibility of food and its related processes must be underscored, especially as kitchens are spaces not only of food-based cultural embodiment but are also possessed of a generally social atmosphere. Spending time in kitchens provided me with access to conversations and routines that, in and of themselves, allowed me to better understand what it meant to be Afro-Choteño. In these spaces, I was able to chat casually with women about their own priorities: cultural, familial, and personal. I was privy to the centrality of kinship, which could be an analytical lens in itself but instead features only discreetly in this thesis. In fact, only through participant observation was I able to develop my two central arguments in this thesis, which I will now explain.

First, I assert that race and geography are constructed through one another in Ecuador. In this case, cultural production by Afro-Ecuadorians is located in either the Chota Valley or the province of Esmeraldas (though I focus on the former). This argument is considered in Chapter 1, where I examine Latin American racial and ethnic policies as well as claims to property rights. I use this conclusion to ground my second argument, which directly addresses the political project of interculturality and the actors that it implicates. I suggest that because Afro-Ecuadorian cultural authenticity is the exclusive product of the Chota Valley, these areas experience considerable

¹⁵ Walmsley, 33

strain as they are forced to uphold traditions for an entire diaspora living in the city of Quito and beyond. As advanced by the intercultural ideology, national belonging has been expanded, but the criteria for access remain the same: through ethnicity, even if more ethnicities now qualify. I argue that the failure of what David Graeber calls “liberation in the imaginary” has not erased exclusion but rather redistributed it.¹⁶ Graeber sources this phrase from his idea that people could actually decide their own identities and forms of organization for themselves, instead of being pigeonholed into frameworks determined through such oppressive legacies as colonialism, as is the case with race. The thought applies directly to the plight of Afro-Ecuadorian women, who assume the responsibilities of generating and preserving ethnic identity because that is what the state has deemed legitimate.

Beginning in Chapter 2, I ground these arguments in the history of race and ethnicity in Ecuador. I explain how *mestizaje* came to characterize national belonging across the region, as well as how it was produced at urban centers. The result of such an ideology was the marginalization of certain populations, namely indigenous and Afro-descendants, through their expulsion from both the city the nation. In this chapter, I also distinguish between the respective locations of indigenous and Afro people both before and after emancipation.

¹⁶ Graeber, David. *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*. (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004): 46.

In Chapter 3, I turn to my fieldwork in the community of La Concepción. By looking closely at two sites of identity production, *casa adentro* and *casa afuera*, I examine which types of identity are articulated (specifically, which *ethnic* identities are prioritized and which *other* identities are muted). *Casa adentro* seeks to streamline culture and unify Afro-Ecuadorians over shared practices so as to generate collective pride. I look at the cultivation and preparation of traditional food, especially of the bean, in La Concepción and in the town of Salinas. This enables insight into the cultural saliency of land and kinship. Then, I examine gastronomic tourism in Salinas and turn the focus *casa afuera*, which shares the Afro culture verified *casa adentro* with outsiders. I focus on this tourism program and its appraisals from the perspectives of tourists, community members, staffers, and the community president. Mediating across these discordant voices, I use the example of kitchen staffers' gross underpayment to demonstrate the failures, or at least shortcomings, of the intercultural imagination. Finally, I look into the ethnoeducational curriculum as the crystallization of identity: its function as a pedagogical tool means that it has been constructed according to the Afro movement's ideals of identity. My focus is not on the reception of this curriculum but rather on how it frames authenticity. I conclude that it appeals to a pan-Africanist identity while continuing to racialize the regions of Ecuador traditionally associated black people.

Chapter 4 looks at urbanization from the Chota Valley to the city of Quito. I provide a brief summary of the economic circumstances that

precipitated the migration before looking at what sorts of spaces Afro-Ecuadorians occupy in the city, and how these may condition strong associations with home. The concept of home is central: home as family, as land, as a geo-political determinant of national access, and especially relevant to this thesis: as taste.

Lastly, in Chapter 5, I consider how people left behind in the Chota Valley experience migration. I look especially at who bears the burden of cultural endurance, and what this reveals about interculturality. Briefly, interculturality prioritizes certain types of difference, based on race and ethnicity, and defines access to these spaces through cultural authenticity and historical roots. I argue that the work of postcolonial feminists, such as Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Chandra Mohanty, illustrates the need to examine forms of oppression jointly. Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of *intersectionality* defines this approach, which I argue should be taken by the intercultural movement. Crenshaw argues that, "the organized identity groups in which we and others find ourselves are in fact not monolithic but made up of members with different and perhaps competing identities."¹⁷ By recognizing that oppression's most salient feature is its overlap, Crenshaw emphasizes the importance of joint examination. I also examine past criticisms of state-mandated multiculturalism to locate interculturality within these conversations.

¹⁷ Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Intersectionality and Identity Politics: Learning from Violence against Women of Color." *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, ed. Wendy K. Kolmar and Frances Bartkowski. (New York: McGraw and Hill, 2010): 483.

I conclude that interculturality is founded on very specific notions of belonging that directly respond to the discourse of *mestizaje*. To participate in the intercultural nation, Afro-Ecuadorians are encouraged to develop authentic cultures from their roots, which are increasingly located in different places than is the majority of the population. As a result, rural Afro-Ecuadorians must maintain culture, and because authenticity is principally accessed through food and dance, women are responsible for far more than their half of the work. This conclusion, however, is intended to reveal the fractures in the intercultural imagination so that the ideology might be reengineered for a more inclusive future.

Chapter 2.

Historical Examination of Racial and Ethnic Hierarchies and their Application to Land Claims in Latin America and Ecuador

This chapter will provide an overview of the historical circumstances that gave rise to the specific manifestations of Afro-Ecuadorian identity, this thesis' subject. My aim is to introduce the foundational narratives that created the social and economic circumstances from which certain practices surrounding the cultivation, preparation, and consumption of traditional foods became culturally meaningful for Afro-Ecuadorians. My eventual argument on migration's disruption of land-based cultural practices is intelligible only through its histories. Afro-Ecuadorian lives and bodies were directed by racial hierarchy, which determined how and where people could express themselves culturally. The content of this chapter has been informed by sources that largely address trends within Latin America as opposed to Ecuador, though it has been my constant aspiration to use material that is as Ecuador-specific as possible. Broadly, I will introduce topics of colonialism, rebellion, agency, authenticity, and movement that inform and propel this project.

These themes will be analyzed through several lenses. I examine how notions of race and ethnicity constructed the foundational narratives for national belonging in Ecuador. Gazing historically, I analyze how evolving economic and social conditions oriented the criteria for citizenship across the region but primarily in Ecuador. The formal discourses emanating from the large cities of Quito and Guayaquil announced that national belonging was

created through a racially mixed (*mestizo*) identity, a policy that I will later argue caused the regionalization of race in Ecuador. This is a discussion that I put in tandem with a historical overview of Ecuadorian land rights and reform, interrogating the intersection to understand how and why certain land (the Chota Valley) acquired meaning to certain people (Afro-Choteños). Because cultural practices were allowed to exist only within the safe, rural spheres external to dominant state identity, strong linkages between Afro-Ecuadorians and specific rural places developed. In future chapters, I will consider how the regionalization of authenticity, compounded by rural population decline due to migration, has resulted in women bearing the responsibility of cultural production.

I also consider the respective roles of indigenous and Afro-Latin Americans, analyzing how the notions of race and ethnicity at the forefront of national identity became constructed and intelligible through these groups. In particular, I focus on the unique marginalization of each group, actively (indigenous) and passively (Afro). By introducing this dichotomy I mean to draw immediate attention to how *mestizaje* constructs itself relationally to indigenous people, through their active exclusion, while it excludes blackness altogether. The absolute erasure of Afro-Ecuadorians from popular notions of citizenship speaks to their ultimate exclusion. This will qualify my eventual analysis (in subsequent chapters) of culturally significant practices that percolate through expectations of ethnicity and gender. My analytical foci

are just a handful of the legacies alive in the Chota Valley, a few formal versions of a past that continues shaping the present.

Spanish Colonization and the Development of Racial Determinants

Spaniards arrived in what would later become Ecuador in 1531. The earliest account of an African presence in Ecuador records that a Lima-bound Spanish slaving ship ran aground on the coast of what is now the province of Esmeraldas in 1553. These enslaved people were believed to have originated in the Senegambian region of Africa. This group founded the country's first *palenque*, or community of freed people. Norman Whitten, an anthropologist who conducted fieldwork in Esmeraldas, notes that "the history of blackness in Ecuador is that of slavery and freedom existing side by side."¹⁸ As small communities of freed black people began to thrive in Esmeraldas, Spanish Jesuits enslaved Africans, their descendants, and indigenous Ecuadorians on sugar cane plantations in the Chota Valley. This labor was essential towards developing and maintaining the agricultural economy that Spain desired. To mediate and regulate this labor force, the Spanish colonists participated in the engineering of race. By ranking the skin color of their colonial subjects, Spanish colonists developed a sophisticated racial hierarchy to enforce their own superiority. Some scholars suggest that this system of domination and subordination was forged even prior to African presence in the Americas. Paul Gilroy, for example, argues that racialization first occurred during

¹⁸ Whitten, Norman Jr. "To Rescue National Dignity" in *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean: Volume 1*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998. Print

violence of Middle Passage, which was the voyage from Africa to the Americas to which enslaved Africans were subjected.¹⁹

Blackness and whiteness, however, barely scratch the surface of Latin America's vast continuum of racial difference. The considerable presence of indigenous populations makes race in Latin America considerably more complicated than it is in North America, where the black/white binary dominates. As a result of the enormous racial mixture that arose from the colonial encounter in Latin America, European colonists developed a complex racial hierarchy. While this system of classification privileged visibly European color, it also organized and ranked permutations and mixtures of white, indigenous, and black. Sociologists Nancy Applebaum, Anne MacPherson, and Karin Alejandra Roseblatt define racialization as "the process of marking human differences according to hierarchical discourses grounded in colonial encounters and their national legacies."²⁰ Precisely this concept was used to justify the enslavement crucial to converting Latin America into an engine for Spanish growth.

¹⁹ See: Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic*

²⁰ Applebaum, Nancy, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Roseblatt, eds. *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003): x

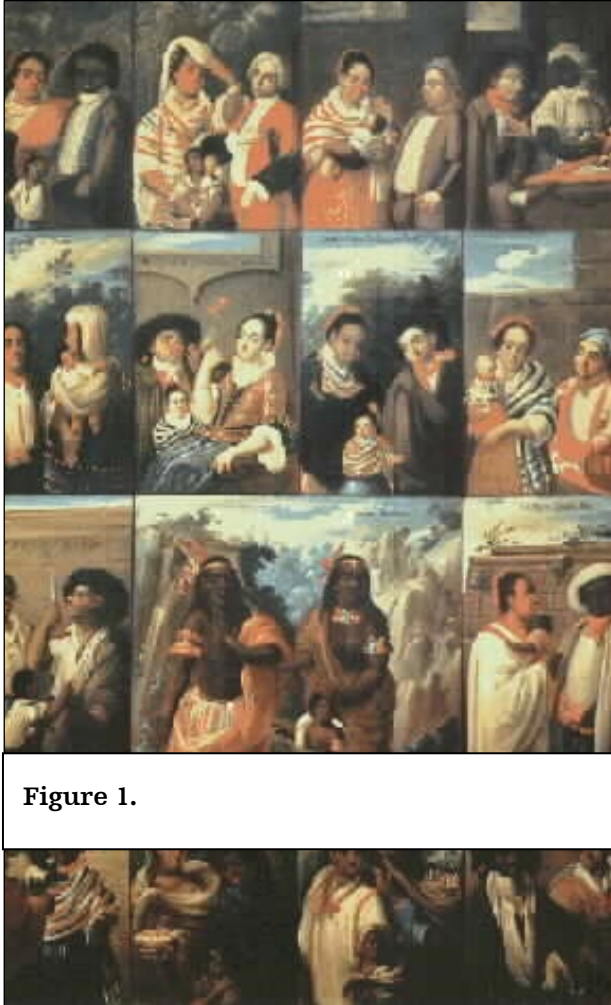


Figure 1.

Spain itself had a vested interest in promoting the racialization of its colonies, as Spain had defined and unified its own national identity through its power over its colonies. Revolutionary thinker Aimé Cesaire articulated the perversion of this mentality through which Spain assessed its own worth according to its domination over

its colonial subjects. Cesaire noted that colonization was inherently decivilizing towards the colonizer, who is defined only through the dehumanization of people living in its colonies.²¹ His perspective should remain central as the discussion of racial hierarchy unfolds, as it serves to reappropriate agency and power to those voices silenced by history's authors.²²

Latin America under Spanish rule developed a complex, pyramidal means of classifying race that would enforce the *pigmentocracy*,²³ in which skin color was formally equated with socioeconomic position and mobility.

Figure 1 shows a Mexican casta painting of the eighteenth century. The

²¹ Césaire, Aimé. *Discourses on Colonialism*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1955): 35.

²² Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past*

²³ Hill Collins, Patricia. *Black Sexual Politics* (London: Routledge, 2004): 98.

artist sought to maintain the *pigmentocracy* by applying a fixed hierarchy to the constructed idea of race and its permutations. In this portrait, therefore, race evolves along a regimented continuum. To depict sixteen examples of potential racial hybrids, this artist began at the top with examples of human “purity” (i.e. whiteness) and progressed to the bottom where he showed the offspring of African slaves and indigenous people.²⁴ Generally speaking, those with the whitest skin are at the top, those with the blackest at the bottom, indigenous peoples are placed slightly above Afro-descendants, and the middle tiers of the pyramid are occupied by mixed phenotypes. In this case, whiteness is defined by European ancestry, blackness by African ancestry, and indigenous as those people native to the lands that became known as Latin America. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that race was not the singular determinant in this system of classification; race, class and honor were very much constructed through one another, with higher social rank having a “whitening” effect.

The hierarchy exhibited in this early painting was implemented to serve the economic needs of Spain and others parts of Europe, but the Catholic Church was similarly influential in justifying the hierarchy’s permanence. By conflating whiteness and Christianity, with followers of the latter achieving eternal salvation, non-Christian natives were ultimately damned and thus remained inferior to pious Europeans. Even those indigenous peoples who were successfully converted were forever indebted to

²⁴ Katzew, Ilona. *Casta Painting: Identity and Social Stratification in Colonial Mexico*. (New York: New York University, 1996).

their perceived saviors. African descendants, on the other hand, were so associated with their physicality that their status as slaves in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries approximated that of able-bodied animals. As such, they were not targets for conversion within the context of the Spanish empire.

By the nineteenth century, scientific racism had become dominant in elite European circles, as had the broader quest to label and categorize all forms of life. This technique became profoundly influential to the legitimization and sustenance of racial hierarchies. Prominent natural scientists such as Charles Darwin, whose *Origin of Species* was published in 1859, developed the general belief that the scientific method was the surest path to truth. In this way, scientific racism gained momentum as it provided the kind of proof that was so desperately needed by advocates of slavery and racial hierarchies. The abolitionist movements that prevailed during the latter half of the nineteenth century were particularly responsible for the diffusion of scientific racism, which responded by offering a supposedly “scientific” justification for whites’ supremacy over blacks.

The incorporation of humans into nineteenth century scientists’ compartments of everyday life was easily accomplished through their racialization. In this quest, “everything living thing had its place and all places were ranked,”²⁵ which invited the logic that looking different meant inherently *being* different. In this way, European scientists resurrected the

²⁵ Hill Collins, Patricia, 99

racial hierarchy even after slavery had been abolished, subjecting African-descended peoples to its horrors to enable the development of Latin America's fledgling export economy of raw natural resources. This eugenicist approach sought genetic proof for the institutionalized racism that upheld the economic and political status quo across the Spanish empire.

In *The Hour of Eugenics*, Nancy Leys Stepan offers a compelling historical analysis of eugenics in Latin America. Stepan asserts that during the nineteenth century, "the eugenicists aimed to use hereditary science to produce a biologically consolidated nation."²⁶ In this way, racial distinctions were used to create "objects of difference" that could be molded and selectively employed.²⁷ Though racial categories have since been exposed as social constructs, their acquired importance from erroneous scientific discourses on race continues to mediate very real inequalities.

An oft-cited definition of nationhood is Benedict Anderson's, who famously described the nation as an "imagined community" defined by the ideas of the political elites of the time.²⁸ Anderson examined nations as engines of cultural representation designed to induce and privilege certain identities. In Latin America, as ideas about identity and belonging began to evolve, so too did popular the conceptions of scientific racism. The ideas diffused by Europe scorned interracial coupling, but this rejection was utterly incompatible with the racial landscape of Latin America. The region was

²⁶ Stepan, Nancy Leys. *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender and Nation in Latin America*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991): 106.

²⁷ Stepan, 13.

²⁸ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London: Verso, 1983).

characterized by a lengthy racial continuum instead of a principally white population.

As a result, *mestizaje*, the socio-racial system that excluded blackness altogether, was introduced as the Latin American application of eugenics.²⁹ Fusion, aspiring towards whiteness, became the criterion for national belonging. In this way, the eugenic design was tailored to the racial landscape of Latin America to ensure that that the racial hierarchy would endure. Stepan discusses the experience in Mexico, which, like Ecuador, was flooded with elitist notions of *mestizaje*. "The eugenic goal was not to give value to the variety of biological and cultural types that make up the Mexican nation but to eliminate heterogeneity in favor of a new homogeneity, the Europeanized mestizo."³⁰ Indeed, the adoption of *mestizaje* merely tweaked the eighteenth century racial caste system. Now, the pyramid's apex was occupied by light(est)-skinned mestizos, as opposed to Europeans. Darker phenotypes persisted as inferior to light ones, as dictated by the Aryan eugenics that became increasingly influential during the nineteenth century. Those *mestizos* that lived in urban zones of modernity and fusion, far from the primitive villages of their extended families, were most revered.

***Mestizaje* across Latin America**

²⁹ Walmsley, Emily. *Blackness and Belonging: race, representations, and embodiment in an Ecuadorian city*. (England: Manchester University, 2004): 14.

³⁰ Stepan, 150

In Colombia, Peter Wade describes a “dialogical relationship between blackness and mestizaje.”³¹ Though *mestizaje* was conceived as a homogenizing ideal, its very existence is predicated upon a degree of difference from which point homogenization can occur. In this way, *mestizaje* is a political strategy that relies upon discordant racial and ethnic origins for meaning. By conflating differences under the umbrella of *mestizaje*, the identity constructs itself as singular against a heterogeneous past. Wade’s description of racial and ethnic identifications in Colombia as “partial, unstable, contextual, and fragmentary” thus becomes particularly salient.³² The fluid nature of racial constructions differs significantly from conceptions in North America.

“Blackness” as a category exists more pluralistically in Latin America than it does in the United States, where hypodescent dominates and quantifies blackness according to any trace of African coloring or physical characteristics in a person’s phenotype.³³ Race in Latin America is approached through a much more sophisticated system of difference that was described visually by **Figure 1** and is articulated here by anthropologist Norman Whitten Jr.

The offspring of a *negro* and *blanco* produced a *mulatto*, the offspring of a *negro* and *indio* produced a *zambo*, the offspring of an *indio* and *blanco* produced a *mestizo*.

³¹ Wade, Peter. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 239-257. (United Kingdom, 2005): 250.

³² Wade, Peter. *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*. (London: Pluto Press, 1997): 20.

³³ Davis, James F. *Who is Black?* (College Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989): 5.

The remainder of the racial calculus proceeds according to percentages of whiteness, with people noted as “five parts white,” “four parts,” etc. according to both appearance and ancestry.³⁴

Whitten’s brief summary of some of the racial categories demonstrates how each was conceived with respect to whiteness, which is particularly striking given the enormous minority of European-descended people in Latin America. The system, therefore, subordinated the majority. Of additional note is that the term *mestizo*, if traced back to its origins in the *cuadros de castas*, originally described a person of indigenous and white descent. As previously noted, this definition points to the exclusion of African descendants from the *mestizaje* equation after it was adopted as the Latin American eugenicist adaptation. Former president of Ecuador General Guillermo Rodríguez Lara once stated that, “we all become white when we accept the goals of national culture.”³⁵ Indeed, the concepts of modernity and cultural progress influencing Latin American political development during the 19th and 20th centuries were constructed and accessed through whiteness, a golden standard to which all citizens aspired. Not until 1998 did the Ecuadorian constitution officially recognize the black and indigenous populations living in the country; the nation was defined explicitly as *mestizo*. The most recent Ecuadorian constitution, approved in 2008, granted collective rights to indigenous, Afro, and *montubio* (coastal agriculturalist)

³⁴ Whitten, Norman Jr. *Black Frontiersmen: Afro-Hispanic culture of Ecuador and Colombia*. (Illinois: Waveland Press, 1974): 175.

³⁵ Walmsley, 19

groups, marking an enormous step towards creating a nation state founded upon simultaneous progression of difference and equality.³⁶

The Indio/Afro Dichotomy

Though both located squarely outside of the white-mestizo concept of nationhood, people of indigenous and African descent experienced their ethnicity and race in distinctive ways. Wade notes that “Indians and Africans had different locations in the colonial order: Indians were to be protected as well as exploited, [whereas] Africans were slaves and... the main concern was with control, rather than protection.”³⁷ Some scholars, particularly those focused on quantitative analyses of social exclusion, have equated the two groups on account of their common disenfranchisement.³⁸ However, such studies mistakenly collapse the complicated and group-specific tactics used by the Ecuadorian nation-state to deny access to each group. Similarly, the present-day identity movements that each group has developed react to their unique experiences. The corpus of anthropological scholarship on Latin America is in itself an indicator of the distinctive ideological spaces occupied by indigenous peoples and African descendants. Extensive work has been done on indigenous peoples across the region, while Afro-Latin American studies have gone largely unaddressed.³⁹ Apart from a small handful of

³⁶ Walsh, Catherine. *Interculturalidad, Estado, Sociedad*. (Quito: Abya Yala and the University of Simón Bolívar, 2009)

³⁷ Wade, Peter. *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*, 27.

³⁸ See: Behrman, Gaviria, Székely, *Social Exclusion in Latin America: An Overview* or Cardoso and Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America*

³⁹ See: Cholas and Pishtacos, *Crude Chronicles* _____ (insert more sources/bibliographic information)

exceptions, scholars have only recently begun to address this research gap.⁴⁰ Furthermore, scholarship on indigenous peoples has generally focused on ethnicity, whereas the study of race has engaged Afro populations.

This differentiation speaks to the signifiers implicit in the terms “indio” and “Afro”. Anthropologist Peter Wade articulates the distinction between race and ethnicity clearly, contextualizing each with its respective population.

Blacks tended to be seen in cultural terms as ordinary citizens, if second-class ones in economic and political terms... This is partly why the study of blacks was generally institutionalized as the study of **race-with the difference signaled by physical features**, while the study of Indians was that of **ethnicity- with the difference signaled by cultural features**...However, it is clear that cultural features were important in constituting [blacks'] differences perceived as racial: stereotypes of blacks all over Latin America commonly included ideas about their supposed laziness, happy-go-lucky attitudes, disorganized family life, taste for music and dance, and so on.⁴¹

Wade sets up the dichotomy as ethnicity/indigenous and racial/Afro. The relevance of each to *mestizaje* is crucial, as it reflects how each group was able to participate (or not) in the nation. For indigenous people, becoming *mestizo* meant donning modern, European-influenced clothing, restricting their practice of traditional religious rituals, and successfully navigating life in a new, probably urban, center of commerce. On the other hand, the marginalization of people with apparent African traits in their phenotypes demonstrated how mobility was exclusively accessed through light skin, thereby framing political participation in colonial terms. The racial hierarchy continued to operate within blackness itself, demonizing those with

⁴⁰ Norman Whitten was one of the first anthropologists to study Afro-Ecuadorians (1965, 1981)

⁴¹ Wade, Peter. *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*. 76.

the darkest skin. Summarily, blacks and indigenous people held very different positions: legally, *indios* were included in the nation, albeit through their oppression and its romanticization.⁴² Indigenous people were the shadow of the *mestizo* ideal, loudly existent as their destitution gave meaning to *mestizaje*. Their forms of social organization, especially through town councils, were recognized by the national government, if in a patronizing manner. Blacks, on the other hand, were positioned entirely outside of the *mestizo* ideology, an erasure that highlights their ultimate exclusion.

However, as Wade notes, it is just as erroneous to assume that indigenous people do not experience race as it is to believe that Afro people are immune to ethnicity. Rather, as I will argue through this thesis, the ethnic dimensions of Afro-Ecuadorian identity have been fastidiously cultivated by the Afro movement in order to develop the national pride and reputation of Afro-Ecuadorians. Through this process of ethnic recognition, linkages between authenticity and geographic place have been reinforced. Wade observes that “ethnicity is, of course, about cultural differentiation, but it tends to use a language of *place* (rather than wealth, sex, or inherited phenotype)...’ Where are you from?’ is thus the ‘ethnic question’ *par excellence*.”⁴³

Regionalizing Blackness in Ecuador

Emancipation in Ecuador occurred in 1854, but it failed entirely to improve quotidian life for Afro-Ecuadorians. This is unsurprising given the

⁴² Walmsley, 20

⁴³ Wade, Peter. *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*. 18

contradictory discourses emanating from Europe at the time. While the French Revolution had touted social equality as the trademark of a civilized nation, such a definition of equality was very specifically interpreted. Humanity, and who qualified, was a philosophical discussion with extraordinarily high stakes: its verdict would determine the morality of colonialism.⁴⁴ Michel-Rolph Trouillot discusses how Europe's incredulity towards the Haitian Revolution highlights black peoples' exclusion from Enlightenment-era definitions of humanity. "The events that shook up Saint-Domingue from 1791-1804 constituted a sequence for which not even the extreme political left in France or in England had a conceptual frame of reference. They were "unthinkable" facts in the framework of Western thought."⁴⁵ This concept of *unthinkability* draws from the European belief that black people more closely resembled draft animals than humans. Though emancipation took place in 1854, this event caused no substantial change in Afro-Ecuadorians' standard of living. In the United States, emancipation signaled an end to the practice of familial splintering at the auction block, and while this may be the case in Ecuador as well, no scholarship can substantiate this theory. Thus despite the fact that racial inequality became the grounds for egregious class inequalities, which the purportedly influential French revolution sought to address, the economic function of Afro-Ecuadorians was too great to risk true liberation.

⁴⁴ Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995): 75.

⁴⁵ Trouillot, 83

As such, Afro-Ecuadorians toiled as indentured servants following emancipation. Newly freed blacks had no means of pursuing alternative livelihoods, as they owned no property, were usually illiterate, had no familial connections to fall back upon, and had little sense of the world outside of the hacienda where they had been enslaved.⁴⁶ Such structural impediments to movement outside the Chota Valley meant that Afro people were forced to sell themselves once again as agricultural workers, and subsequently fell victim to a new form of enslavement. In strictly vocational terms, emancipation may have even worsened the situation of Afro-Ecuadorians, as slave owners no longer provided their slaves with basic, albeit inadequate, sustenance. Freed Afro-Ecuadorians were expected to grow all of their food on tiny plots of land that they could work only after they had finished with the *hacendado's*, (landowner's) fields. Furthermore, the accumulation of debt as a result of insufficient resources meant that multiple generations were quickly implicated in this cycle of grueling manual labor that so closely mirrored slavery.

Debt, a lack of resources, and nonexistent infrastructure meant that Afro-Ecuadorians were highly localized in the Chota Valley. Such associations between race and place were reinforced by the discourses on *mestizaje* that emanated from urban centers, which constructed themselves through the distance between themselves and the rural locations of the very peoples they sought to exclude: Afro and indigenous. For the Afro

⁴⁶ Vallejo, Henry Medina. *Comunidad Negra y Cambio Cultural*. (Quito: Centro Cultural Afro-Ecuatoriano, 1996): 40.

community, this ascribed additional meaning to the rural homelands where they lived. Externalized by the mainstream, such lands became safe havens from the dehumanizing, exclusionary national discourses and were claimed as cultural spaces for Afro-Ecuadorians. Henry Medina Vallejo, an Ecuadorian anthropologist, explains how these national discourses denigrated Afro people, as well as how they engendered rebellion. “[As a result of being] considered inferior beings by the classes located at the top of the social pyramid, blacks were establishing themselves in the interior of the nation, their own communities, geographic-social-cultural spaces that were in large part ‘exclusive’ for those located at this specific intersection of race, culture, and class.”⁴⁷ Indeed, Norman Whitten comes to a similar conclusion in his work on peripheral Afro-Ecuadorian communities. According to the Ecuadorian state, Afro and indigenous peoples were inferior. To maintain their cultural currency amidst such blatant marginalization, Afro and indigenous peoples ascribed authenticity in rural spaces where the hegemonic tentacles of the nation-state could not penetrate.

The Land Reform of 1964 was a crucial step towards the development of a space for resistance, though as I noted in the introduction, not one that was free of its own injustices and agendas. One elderly resident of the town of Carpuela, Don Octavio Zumárraga, described the change. “The change was drastic. In the first place, the workers had already been taught to live with under the overseers and owners, so this was a very good change because now

⁴⁷ Vallejo, 120.

they could just live off of the sweet land themselves."⁴⁸ Plantations were replaced by land cooperatives, in which people worked the land together and reaped benefits collectively. This transformation of land rights formalized the long-standing relationship between Afro-Choteños and their land. Reform recognized that land was more than terrain for economic productivity; it was at once a space of identity and resistance, and one that was fundamental to sustaining life. "Territory produces feelings in the Chota Valley," noted Afro-Ecuadorian scholar and schoolteacher Iván Pabón. In this way, ownership of land consolidated, strengthened, and ultimately legitimized cultural practices that had long taken place under alternative owners.

Peter Wade's description of the geographic dispersal of Afro descendants in Colombia also holds true in the Ecuadorian case. "Blacks have nucleated and congregated together, partly through choice and partly through the actions of the non-black world, and in these situations they have created and maintained cultural forms that are identified as black culture, whether or not this has some traceable African derivation."⁴⁹ As such, practices such as preparation of certain authentic foods and oral story telling are celebrated and exchanged in these places despite their relative erasure from collective national consciousness. Cultural embodiment and geographic place thus became necessarily connected to ensure the former's survival and make the latter meaningful.

⁴⁸ Pabón, Iván. *Identidad Afro: Procesos de construcción en las comunidades Negras de la Cuenca Chota-Mira*. (Quito: Abya Yala, 2007): 64

⁴⁹ Wade, Peter. *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*, (London: Pluto Press, 1997): 6.

Conclusion

Richard Graham offers a concise summary of the racial conundrum. “Latin Americans faced a difficult intellectual dilemma regarding race. On the one hand, racial heterogeneity characterized most of their societies. On the other hand, many Latin Americans aspired to an even closer connection to Europe and sought to follow its leadership in every realm.”⁵⁰ As I have demonstrated, discourses on *mestizaje* that excluded blackness from the national imagination caused Afro-Ecuadorians to develop unique strategies to resist and transmit knowledge. Blackness became encoded in physical location in such a powerful way that geographic place superseded color to become the principal determinant of blackness. To comprehensively understand the importance of geography in producing authentic blackness, it will also be critical that this geographic space be understood as a generator of gendered and class-specific identities that contribute to and mediate the racial dimensions. For example, *la fanesca*, a special Easter soup, is exclusively prepared by women, whose agency is compromised as they are required to perform this culturally significant ritual. The subsequent chapter turns to the inner-workings of this food-based cultural production in a localized setting of the cultural homogeneity: the Chota Valley. I draw upon my ethnographic fieldwork to focus on two loci of production, *casa adentro* and *casa afuera*. Because the two paradigms are designed to engage different

⁵⁰ Graham, Richard. *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990): 2.

audiences, an analysis of both provides a comprehensive examination of how Afro-Ecuadorian identity is framed, rehearsed, performed, and consumed.

Chapter 3.

Localizing identity: Cultural Production through Food and Agriculture, *Casa Adentro* and *Casa Afuera*

"They have always told me that my knowledge was not knowledge, that my land does not belong to anyone, things to make me think I'm not a real person."

–Juan García, Afro-Ecuadorian intellectual activist.⁵¹

Juan García, the Afro-Esmeraldeño folklorist and founder of the Afro-Ecuadorian movement for rights and identity, famously distinguished between two locations at which ethnic identity construction must occur. Primarily, he identified *casa adentro* practices, which are those that strengthen identity on a localized scale in the Chota Valley and province of Esmeraldas where Afro-Ecuadorians have traditionally lived. *Casa adentro* practices aim to standardize and transmit Afro-Ecuadorian culture so that it may become a force of pride and unity for the community. To learn *casa adentro* is to recognize certain practices as culturally unique so as to “awaken the sense of belonging as a black person, and retake a power vital to putting ourselves on equal terms [with the rest of the nation],” said García⁵².

Practices such as traditional dance, dress, story telling, and means of preparing and consuming food are embodied informally, while instruction on

⁵¹ Walsh, Catherine. *Dossier Actualidades: Lo Afro en América Andina*. (Journal of Latin American Anthropology, Vol 12:1, 2007): 204.

⁵² Comentarios en el Taller sobre Etnoeducación, Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Quito, 22 de febrero de 2001. By Walsh, Catherine. “Colonialidad, conocimiento y diáspora afro-andina: Construyendo etnoeducación e interculturalidad en la Universidad.” *Conflicto e (in)visibilidad. Retos en los estudios de la gente negra en Colombia*, E. Restrepo y A. Rojas, editores, Popayán, Editorial Universidad del Cauca, Colección Políticas de la Alteridad, 2004.

Afro-Ecuadorian history and diasporic studies are learned via formal mechanisms organized by various arms of the Afro movement.

Casa adentro knowledge may also be defined by what it has not been: historically recognized as a form of learning or intellect. Therefore by asserting that everyday practices are culturally situated and intellectually valuable, and by demanding that certain parts of the past be reclaimed and acknowledged as part of national history, Afro-Ecuadorians have unified over how and where their space within the nation and its history will exist. As was discussed in the previous chapter, such identity construction practices directly reacted to the historic valorization of cultural hybridity. National discourses of mestizaje “whitened” people of indigenous ancestry and erased African descendants.

Casa adentro processes indubitably foundational to the Afro-Ecuadorian identity movement because they establish the axes of self-awareness and pride that are central to cultural mobilization. But *casa afuera* processes, as García describes, are the essential corollary to *casa adentro*. These seek to share Afro wisdom with non-Afro people, thereby challenging and denaturalizing certain types of knowledge as inherently superior to others. Disseminating information, however, is just one half of the *casa afuera* equation: crucial as well is opening intercultural dialogues in such a way that non-Afro people may also have equal opportunity to share their cultural practices. In this way, the very idea of knowledge may be transformed to

include all those voices whose stories have been silenced by exclusionary discourses on what constitutes learning.

This investigation has sought to examine *casa adentro* food processes.⁵³ My research findings result from three weeks of fieldwork in La Concepción, Carchi, Ecuador during January, 2010. My earlier time spent working in this community during June and July, 2009, which I described in the introduction between June and July, 2009, contributed significantly to the research questions I was able to develop. To guide this discussion, I ask, how can food processes be read as cultural productions, and subsequently used to better understand how migration initially disrupted but has now become internalized by residents of the rural homelands. Overwhelmingly, the research on food practices that I will detail reveals that land and kinship are the two most foundational aspects of cultural life in La Concepción, and their confusion as a result of urbanization explains why this it garners such a unanimously negative reputation in the rural community.

From Fieldnotes: January 20, 2010

⁵³ This research direction was largely determined by my own strengths as an ethnographer, as my fortes are much more evident in the kitchen and fields than in the dance salon. However, future studies might instead focus on cultural production through *la bomba* dance, in which a woman balances an empty glass bottle on her head while she moves her hips to a seductive three-beat drum rhythm. Most Afro-Choteños with whom I spoke were quick to note this as their premiere cultural performance (José Chalá Cruz focuses a chapter on the the dance in his ethnography of the Chota Valley, *Chota profundo: Antropología de los afrochoteños*). For example, the beauty pageant in Salinas culminated in a bomba dance-off to determine the town queen. Such an investigation could focus more on the means by which sexuality and race have been jointly conceived and embodied through this dance, which is an area of inquiry into which this study does not delve deeply. Barbarita Lara, intellectual leader in the Afro-Ecuadorian movement, once mentioned to me that “it’s in our blood.” The deep embodiment of this ritual would therefore be a productive analytical focus for future scholarship on sexuality, gender, and Afro-Ecuadorians. Future work may also want to examine cultural transmission through oral storytelling or the act of women braiding one another’s hair.

Over a breakfast of coffee, rice, and two very fried eggs, I ask Cacilia about her plans for lunch. As usual, she and her daughter, Sandra will be cooking for 25 construction workers, and as such I thought that perhaps she would have put some thought into the menu. “Fuyyyy, I don’t know. I’ll have to see what we have in the kitchen,” Cacilia says. She leans her head against the table top, catching a few minutes of rest before attacking the piles of breakfast dishes that the men have left behind. Lunch, I think, is not quite as uncertain as Cacilia’s ambiguous response might have led me to believe. My experience eating at her table leads me to believe that today’s lunch will follow some established trends. Rice always fills up most of the plate, and there is likely to be a scoop of soft, brown kidney beans that were grown by Cacilia on her land. The first course will inevitably be a soup of boiled potatoes, flavored with green onions and heaping spoonfuls of salt. Since the avocado branches started drooping low in the courtyard, heavy with ripe fruits that dangle in the dust, avocados have become a consistent addition to the culinary repertoire. So indeed, Caci probably has a decent notion of what will be prepared, but it is so obvious that it doesn’t seem worth mentioning. By lunchtime, she has diced up mollocos (small relatives of the potato) and has them simmering away in a pot with onions and oil, while Sandra stands slicing tomatoes into generous red disks. The other aforementioned items bubble expectantly in thin aluminum pots.

Living with Cacilia Tadeo and her 22-year old daughter, Sandra, I participated first-hand in large-scale cooking. The two women prepared three meals a day for 25 construction workers from the border city of Tulcán who were assigned to a state-sponsored housing improvement project in La Concepción. As such, food preparation, presentation, consumption, and

clean-up were the constant axes around which the house operated. My participation in these activities gradually increased as I became a more comfortable presence in their home, though until the last week, Cacilia and Sandra had little confidence in my ability to do anything in the kitchen and often met my offers to help in the cooking with a skeptical shrug and a request that I go set the table instead. However, my time in and around the kitchen permitted me to investigate how culinary practices can illuminate gendered, racial and cultural identities. My intent was not study the cuisine, but rather to understand how behaviors surrounding food provide important indicators about cultural priorities. This is a study very concerned with the production and preparation of food, and less with its consumption though the significance of that final stage will not be entirely ignored. The acquisition of foodstuffs is of central importance, both symbolically and materially, and I will later use my research findings regarding this connection to argue that urbanization is negatively conceived primarily because it ruptures the intimate relationship between people and land.

The brief nature of my fieldwork meant that I was not able to gain full access to kitchens because I was unable to master the dishes that enable cultural entrance. As such, I focused on participating where I could, which typically meant serving meals to the construction workers and tending to minor tasks, such as juicing limes or slicing avocados. But my own unfamiliarity with the traditional methods of preparing the food, as well as some of the ingredients themselves, made clear how culinary knowledge is

equated with cultural authenticity, at least for women. To be a woman of La Concepción is to know how to prepare beans in a certain way, never explicitly noted as a recipe or called by any name other than “beans” (*fríjoles*), but universally understood to be one exact method of preparation. Thus my culinary illiteracy made evident the requisites for belonging as an Afro woman. The gendered dimension of this cultural practice also reveals how women preserve it, even though men and women alike claim traditional food and its manner of presentation as a cultural hallmark. When I asked a woman, Blanca Folleco, whether or not there were any men in La Concepción that cooked, she laughed heartily before responding, “Well, there is Don Alonso, but he is a widow, so he is forced to cook.”⁵⁴

Cuisine in La Concepción is trademarked by one product: the bean (*frijol*). Other ingredients such as manioc root, white corn, tomatoes, and sugar cane make up the bean’s supporting cast, but no crop even approaches its dominance. Every family, including Cacilia and Sandra, grows beans on at least part of their land. Their omnipresence is particularly evident when walking through the town’s streets, an experience I will describe from fieldnotes.

From Fieldnotes: January 14, 2010

Squeezed between the gaps in the wide streets of La Concepción are hundreds of beans, some wrinkled and dejected while others, the freshest, retain their deep purple hue. It is nearly impossible to walk anywhere without running into a roadblock of beans, crackling

⁵⁴ Folleco, Blanca. Fieldnotes, 1/21/2010

in their pods as they dry out in the baking afternoon sun. Indeed, one has just to stroll about the town streets to get a notion of what food dominates local plates. Carmen, who teaches at a nearby elementary school, relays the process to me. “The beans are left on the stalks to dry, and when they have finished drying, they are cut and taken by truck to the town. Here, the person will spread out the beans across large areas of pavement while they are still on the stalk and in their pods, so that they can finish drying completely. When they are completely dry, people begin thrashing the beans with sticks to get the beans out of the pods. The people sweep away the big pieces of stalk, and the wind blows away the smaller bits. Then they gather all the beans together in the center, and sift out the bits of pod and stalk that remain.”

Consumed at most meals alongside rice as the principal dietary staple, beans are the everyday staple on plates in La Concepción, as was indicated in the earlier excerpt of fieldnotes on lunchtime menus. Schoolchildren consistently respond to inquiries about their lunches with anything that is not rice or beans, any slight anomaly like an egg or slice of avocado, before lapsing into a comedic drone of “well, obviously rice and beans.” But unlike rice, which is grown on the coast, beans are produced right in La Concepción, and each family’s respective plot of land provides them with the beans they need to nourish themselves. The association between bean production and cultural authenticity became particularly salient during a conversation I had in the town of Salinas, where I lived during the summer.

From Fieldnotes: January 12, 2010

Early in January, I sit in Salinas eating lunch in the home of the Pozo family in disappointing, though unsurprising, silence. Six months ago, I lived in their home for nearly six weeks, and so I have returned to visit despite the fact that our relationship never quite blossomed into the friendship that I had hoped it would become. Thus after exhausting all of the conversation topics I had brainstormed before arriving, I resign myself to quietly spooning heaps of long grain white rice and pan-fried chicken into my mouth. In a final effort to get a rise out of someone in the family, I ask patriarch Alfredo about what does not grow in Salinas. He gripes, "you can't grow beans or corn here because of the salt in the soil. Here, we can only grow sugar cane, and sometimes some onions, beets, and tomatoes. Beans, however, are the most important food in this region so it is bad that we cannot grow them here."

Alfredo expressed that his inability to cultivate beans was an assault on his cultural participation, especially as it related to providing his family with beans grown from his own land. Such strong ties between Afro-Ecuadorians of the Chota Valley and their land likely precipitates from a historical legacy of enslavement and indentured servitude, as described in the previous chapter.⁵⁵ Indeed, the ties between authentic food and its production are extremely strong, to such an extent that tourists in Salinas articulated them on numerous occasions. Laura, a 22-year old university student from Quito, said that "The food is different than Quito- it is somehow more flavorful, and more delicious, though it is simple. I don't know how

⁵⁵ Another investigation might probe more explicitly into a historical analysis of how and why land has acquired such value and examine

they do it, but something about the manner of preparation is different. Of course, we ate the beans, which are traditional to here.” Her cousin, Esteban, echoed these sentiments, noting that “people here seem like happy. I would come back again if they made that same food! They always eat beans here, and they make beans in such a delicious way.” Though Laura and Esteban both focused on the culinary simplicity of Choteño food, they did so in such a way as to emphasize its deliciousness as a fresh, local product.

Food in the Chota Valley is emphatically rural, delicious because of its ingredients and classic preparation. To be extrapolated from these Quiteño appraisals is that Afro people and rural life are one in the same, as culinary authenticity is entirely wrapped into food produced on local lands. Hector, one of the construction workers who eats his meals with Cacilia and Sandra, puts it this way. “The food here is not really very different than in [my hometown of] Tulcán, or in other parts of [highland] Ecuador. The small difference is that they eat much a lot more beans, manioc, and corn here. Everyone eats what the earth gives, and that is what the earth gives here.”

Embedded in food processes are sensual undertones on the pleasures of food prepared by women. I was hyper-exposed to such associations because the audience of the food I served was a rowdy group of men single men. The act of service was intimately linked with the joy of eating; evidently, gender, sexuality, and race converged on the plates that were delivered to the eager tables of men. Regardless of the frugality of a meal, the men would exclaim that “what matters is not what you serve us, but the manner in which you

serve it." This effusion was succeeded on several occasions by a reflection on how poor people were actually much better off than rich people, who were assumed to have substituted monetary comforts for genuinely human care and love. The poor, on the other hand, were possessed of considerable wealth in terms of human connections. This dialogue is significant in a number of ways, principally because it indicates the centrality of family and community.

What is eaten is just as important as who it is being with, and another crucial axis of food processes are their equation with family networks. Eating with people is knowing them, and for women, cooking with other women, particularly one's daughters, sisters, mothers, or cousins, is to experience being a woman together. Violating the fastidious intimacy of food preparation through disrespectful eating assaults the cook's pride as woman and woman as cook. For example, one of the many groups of men that has eaten meals in Cacilia's home decided to dine and dash after racking up a \$450 tab over several weeks of three meals/day. This exercise in patriarchal privilege not only delivered a staggering financial blow but also insulted Cacilia's dignity as a cook and woman. "I am a poor single mother who cooks," she said. "It is a grave sin to do that to a poor person like me." By rejecting the commoditization of food, these men were implicitly saying that Cacilia, as an Afro-Ecuadorian woman, had the responsibility to cook for them. In fact, the workmen's grave transgression destabilized Cacilia so considerably that they nearly achieved the opposite effect. When her delicate finances were seriously jeopardized, Cacilia's role as authentic Afro-

Ecuadorian food preparer was also threatened. In this way, the percolation of gendered exploitation continues to inform cultural authenticity. Women are corralled into spaces of domesticity so that urban Afro-Ecuadorians may reinsert themselves into an authentic ideal that is firmly located in the past. The present is therefore narrated through a romanticized past in which some actors (male) stand on the heads of others (female).

Casa afuera

Casa afuera processes, as described by Juan García, are the essential corollary to those behaviors recognized to be culturally meaningful *casa adentro*. The primary aim of *casa afuera*, examined in this chapter through the lenses of ethno-tourism and the Afro-Ecuadorian ethnoeducational curriculum, is to share traditional Afro-Ecuadorian cultural practices and systems of learning with non-Afro people. Disseminating information, however, is just one half of the *casa afuera* equation: crucial as well to effective intercultural exchange is the concept of reciprocity. This means that non-Afro people must have equal opportunity to share their own practices in addition to gaining exposure to the culturally salient features of Afro-Ecuadorians. By opening such channels for intercultural dialogue, these processes denaturalize the concept of a singular “Ecuadorian cultural heritage” that was founded upon the homogenizing discourses of mestizaje discussed in the previous chapter. Instead, *casa afuera* practices introduce alternate methods of learning that begin the process of reframing such macro-level concepts as collective history and national belonging. President Raúl

Maldonado of Salinas, a town of 2000, described the process succinctly.

“Once I know my own identity (i.e. *casa adentro*), then I must share it with others and also learn about others, such as indigenous people.”⁵⁶ In this way, the very idea of knowledge is being transformed from the grassroots, a methodological reflection of *casa afuera*'s goals.

This investigation has focused upon two case studies to better understand *casa afuera*: the emergent ethno-tourism project in Salinas and the Afro-Ecuadorian ethnoeducation curriculum. An analysis of these *casa afuera* case studies is relevant to the argument of this thesis because it enables a more comprehensive understanding of how certain practices are *and are not* considered sufficiently culturally important so as to merit public consumption, in this case quite literally as the investigation maintains a principal focus on food and agriculture. By looking analytically at cultural practices that are marketed to outsiders, it will be possible to map the criteria for belonging. As this section seeks to prove, *casa afuera* processes sustain associations between Afro authenticity and the physical region of the Chota Valley. Additionally, by examining the actors implicated in these performances, I will probe the inclusiveness of interculturality.

Ethno-tourism in Salinas, a community of 2000 on the edge of the Chota Valley, was initiated in March of 2008. Historically, Salinas was considered one of the most valuable areas in colonial Ecuador thanks to its generous deposits of salt. At the height of the mining industry's productivity,

⁵⁶ Maldonado, Raúl. Personal Interview. 01/18/2010.

around 1879, it yielded somewhere around 300 tons of salt annually. The extractors were predominantly indentured servants of African descent.⁵⁷ Some indigenous peoples of the valley worked in the mines as well, receiving payment in the form of salt. Amilcar Tamayo, who wrote a brief history of Salinas, notes that “[indigenous laborers] worked from dawn til dusk for one fistful of salt, which was their compensation for an arduous day’s labor. This demonstrates the value of this precious mineral,” or conversely, may be more demonstrative of labor devaluation.⁵⁸

Because of its economic function, Salinas’ connection to roadways was prioritized. Urbanization, therefore, has not affected the community as profoundly as it has other, more isolated towns because daily commutes from Salinas to the city of Ibarra take an easy 40 minutes and cost somewhere between \$0.50 and \$0.75. In the city, many of Salinas’ women are employed as maids and many men work in construction or as security guards, but because of their proximity to Salinas, they are able to return home each evening.

While commuting has inhibited full urbanization to the larger cities of Quito and Guayaquil, economic opportunities are nonetheless scarce in Salinas itself, which has driven its transformation into a sort of low-income suburb of Ibarra. Aside from its noisy, bustling grade school, the town is nearly deserted during the day to bake in the blinding valley sun and await

⁵⁷ Tamayo, Amilcar Tapia. *Vision Histórico Geográfica: Parroquia Salinas*. Ibarra: Pontífica Universidad Católica del Ecuador, sede Ibarra, 2006.

⁵⁸ Tamayo, 7

the return of its residents. Not until the evening, when buses return commuters to their homes, does the town once again become animated. As a means of relocating residents' labor within Salinas itself, not to mention a tool for learning and disseminating the town's significant heritage with outside visitors, its governing body established an ethno-tourism program.

Much of Salinas' present-day cultural program focuses on the community's historic identity as a salt mine. A "Museum of Salt" is situated next to three open mine shafts, from which salt was extracted before undergoing an extensive refinement process. The materials in this museum recognize both the economic fortunes that the industry brought to the community as well as the system of enslaved labor that was essential in maintaining such modest prosperity. Though the salt mines ceased to be economically viable more than 50 years ago, a community project recently pioneered "artisan" salt mining, and small bags of authentic Salinas salt are sold in the Gastronomic Center. This restaurant and the town's resurrected railway comprise the most significant spaces experienced by Salinas' tourists.

As an emergent program, tourism in Salinas exhibits a considerable distance between theory and practice. Don Raúl Maldonado, president of the community, is a verbose man with grand ideas, a sizable ego, and boundless pride for his town and its people. The tourism program, he feels, represents a direct implementation of the ideals enshrined in Ecuador's new constitution. "With tourism, we are starting to create these spaces of cultural exchange, as specified in the constitution. The words of the constitution die if these sorts

of spaces aren't created, and the state should be interfering to establish them. Otherwise, the constitution will remain unpracticed, a dream."⁵⁹ In his words, the tourism program will evolve into "an international project that has twelve components so that we can address the problems that we have as an oppressed sector of the population. We must establish public political organizations around three themes: identity construction, economic/social/environmental/cultural development, and the encounter'."⁶⁰ This 'encounter' stage is where tourism enters the equation, providing the space in which cultural exchange can take place. But much of this vision remains purely theoretical, and the reality of the tourism project contrasts starkly with his grandiose vision.

From Fieldnotes: January 18, 2010

Though Don Raúl had agreed to meet with me at 10 a.m., I was unsurprised to arrive in his office and see him busy with other matters. I'll wait, I told him, and he blurted that he would be just a half hour longer. Waiting nearly two hours for him to finish with other engagements, I became intimately acquainted with the decore of his waiting room. Taped to the walls were posters of Ché & Fidel, several condemning domestic violence, even more extolling the virtues of putting one's trust in the hands of God, and two independent posters written from the perspective of unborn fetuses, hypothetical letters from the womb that begged their young, prospective

⁵⁹ Maldonado, Raúl. Personal Interview. 1/18/2010

⁶⁰ Maldonado, Raúl. Personal Interview. 1/18/2010

mothers not to abort them. A radio sat on a desk, blasting cumbia dance music, and amps, speakers, and piles of electrical cords lay discarded around the office. When Don Raúl finally emerged from his meeting room, he greeted me with exaggerated attention and charm, though never apologized for his tardiness. Thus the interview progressed in this environment of tension, having acquired unfair value due to its delay. Throughout the length of the interview, Don Raúl was consistently intent upon sensationalizing, providing me with dramatic descriptions of his agenda and its future trajectory. Indeed, his spiel on the twelve components of his international plan was so peppered with calculated, stale jargon that I found my heading spinning from its grandiose ambition while simultaneously unclear as to what it actually entailed. When I inquired about the salary of the women in the kitchen, he set his deep, brown, presidential eyes upon mine and said that I would have to go lower down the food chain to find the answers to such logistical matters, which could not concern him. It was clear, in that glance, that he knew exactly how much money those women were (not) making, and I didn't call him out on it. "Their salaries are private matters," he said. "If you want to know more about that, you will have to go talk to David."

The issue of the fair pay for the women who worked in the Gastronomic Center's kitchen arose on multiple occasions as I talked with members of the community about their opinions on the tourism program. A woman named Carmen told me that they were paid \$8/day, which generally implied more than six hours of constant work. "[The kitchen workers] usually

receive some small tip from the tourists, but they are grossly underpaid and this is a huge problem,” said Eliana Pozo, the young woman in charge of arranging trips on the tourist railroad. Lunch at the Gastronomic Center cost \$9/plate for international tourists and included an enormous, four-course spread of salad, quinoa soup with plantain and yucca chips, a main dish of trout, chicken, or beef with rice, fresh vegetables and beans, and then a dessert, such as ripe papaya with guava mousse. When asked about the authenticity of this so-called “special Afro-Ecuadorian cuisine,” compared with what people in Salinas usually ate, Eliana thought for a minute before answering. “The most important part of the food here is the bean (frijol), and we share that with tourists. But it’s a different style of preparation for the tourists, and it tastes a lot better! They use many more ingredients (as opposed to the traditional method of preparation which includes just oil and green onions), such as green *and* white onion, tomato, pepper, oregano, and other spices.”⁶¹ Other residents of Salinas echoed Eliana’s glowing review of the gastronomic center’s food. Generally speaking, therefore, it was evident that they would have liked to prepare the beans in this way but lacked the funds to do so. The beans themselves were culturally important, but the manner of preparation was a function of available resources.

In this way, the tourism program promotes cultural identity selectively, and while it appeals to intercultural discourses on national identity that celebrate the diverse customs of Ecuador’s varied ethnic groups,

⁶¹ Pozo, Eliana. Personal Interview. 1/17/2010

its simultaneously oppressive attitude towards women makes its value ambiguous. Charles Hale writes about how neoliberal proponents mobilize a limited definition of cultural rights so as to make their policies palatable to a broad, ethnically diverse population just as they naturalize structural inequality. Hale terms the concept *neoliberal multiculturalism*.⁶² Elizabeth Povinelli discusses similarly perverse incentives for multiculturalism in Australia. She explains, “multicultural postcolonial power seems to work by inspiring subaltern subjects to identify with the impossible object of an authentic self-identity.” In both these cases, ethnicity is lauded as the qualifier for national access.

Therefore both Hale and Povinelli provide crucial theoretical underpinnings for the exclusion of Afro-Ecuadorian women: as these women participate in the project of interculturality, they simultaneously naturalize their own domesticity and accept their economic marginalization as the unfortunate reality of the fledging project. Participating in the nation means elevating one identity while sacrificing another, the present inevitability of which injustice speaks to how cultural projects engender certain cultural performances. This analysis is not intended to remove agency from the women themselves, who are well aware of their mistreatment but lack the means and legal know-how to lobby for their own rights. Community members like Daniela Pozo agreed that their mistreatment was considerable, but like most people I spoke with, she gave an exasperated sigh but accepted

⁶² Hale, Charles. *Más que un Indio: Racial Ambivalence and Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Guatemala*. (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2006): 20.

the inevitability of their mistreatment. Instead, she chose to discuss the program's fortes: "it has brought jobs, and the tourists will give some business to the shops here."⁶³

The tourism program itself is standardized for all audiences, though it may be tweaked depending upon how much participants are willing to pay. This excerpt from my fieldnotes describes the most decadent program I observed. Generally speaking, one or more of these elements may be eliminated to when performing for groups with more modest means.

From Fieldnotes: January 15, 2010

Tourists arrive on the ferrocarril, which is a renovated tourist railway that transports guests along a winding, scenic, hour-and-a-half-long railway from the city of Ibarra to the town of Salinas. The journey is rife with gorgeous, Andean scenery, and memorable photos are eagerly taken aboard the slow, plodding train. Many years ago, this railway carried Salinas' salt to marketplace. Upon arriving in Salinas and disembarking from the train, usually around the hour of 1pm, the group of tourists is greeted by the collection of various young instrumentalists that comprise the Salinas band. Blaring brass instruments maintain the three-beat rhythm of la bomba, while tourists laugh, mingle, and generally try too hard to have fun. After fifteen or so minutes of this performance, the tourists are herded down Salinas' main street, which is paved with well-fitted bricks and lined by houses washed with pretty pastels. A few shopkeepers hoist dripping bottles of Tesalia brand

⁶³ Pozo, Daniela. Personal Interview, 1/17/2010

water over their heads, and several tourists are lured away from the group by the prospect of cool refreshments.

After a brief stop at the salt museum, where Salinas' own Eliana Pozo provides a brief history of salt mining operations in Salinas, the group turns towards the Gastronomic Center. The Center gleams with newness; it was constructed just last year and is charmingly furnished with blonde wood and decorated with fresh cut flowers. The tourists select one of the two soups on offer, which the waitresses are trained to offer in either English or Spanish. The second course consists of a small green salad and a basket of fresh chifles (fried plantain chips), cancha (toasted corn) and canguil (popcorn). Everyone munches happily, experiencing the strong gusts that sweep across the valley as just mild breezes thanks to expertly designed windows. After salad, the tourists' wrangler announces to everyone that there will be a performance, and everyone claps loudly while a group of young girls jogs into the room carrying a glass bottle and wearing traditional full skirts. Once the bomba music has begun, the girls place the bottles on their heads and swivel their hips sensually while maintaining the bottle's stability. The performance ends with much clapping, verbal accolades, and the arrival of the main course: beef or chicken, served with a portion of the trademark Chota beans, a heaping pile of rice, and a ripe avocado half. As everyone murmurs about their remarkable fullness, the waitresses exchange empty plates for dishes of guava mousse, and the collective groan is as unanimous as the dishes are to become empty.

The Salinas seen by tourists is selective and partial. It shares certain culturally significant practices, such as beans and *la bomba* dance, but the community does not acknowledge the enormous social inequity between the tourists and the residents. This “encounter” that tourists find with Afro culture is simplified in such a way as to inhibit any sort of reciprocated cultural exchange between tourists and locals. The efficacy and ethics of ethnic tourism has been the subject of considerable scholarship, some of which suggests its potential towards advancing the intercultural ideals expressed by President Maldonado. Past research on ethnic tourism has drawn upon Michel Foucault’s work, namely his metaphorical invocation of the “panopticon,” a prison design in which guards could perpetually supervise their charges without prisoners knowing that they were being watched. Foucault used this prison to symbolize how observation had become normalized and served to enforce a society of inequality. Tweaking Foucault’s argument to substitute “surveillance” for “making spectacle,” John Urry juxtaposed this theory against another of Foucault’s, namely his examination of madness as spectacle in *Madness and Civilization* (1967). Urry proposed that host communities were made into spectacles as tourists gazed upon them as if they were mad, which these communities internalized and subsequently modified their cultural performances to reflect their perceived notions of tourist expectations.⁶⁴ He draws support from the

⁶⁴ Urry, John. *The Tourist Gaze “Revisited.”* (American Behavioral Scientist, Volume 36:2, Nov 1992): 170.

similar conclusions of Dean MacCannell, who termed the phenomenon “staged authenticity.”⁶⁵

However, in response to this Urry and MacCannell’s findings that tourists approach host communities with a monolithic gaze of subordination, Edward Bruner developed the theory of the questioning gaze. This questioning gaze supports the potential of the ethno-tourism project in Salinas that Presidents Maldonado has enacted, as it acknowledges tourists as agents with “doubts about the credibility, authenticity, and accuracy of what is presented to them in the tourist production.”⁶⁶ Bruner writes that “to be a tourist is not a fixed slot to be occupied but is a role to be fashioned and performed.” This plural definition of tourism invites debate regarding how and which types of authenticity are produced and conditioned, a discussion that should engage both the tourists and the host community. It is this type of tourism that has the potential to transcend the cultural commoditization that has been at the forefront of past scholarship of ethnic tourism. This is a tourism that can foster intercultural conversation and result in the democratization of exchange.

At the same time, however, the success of this program is entirely contingent upon the willful participation of the tourists themselves in the process of exchange. While this may be possible for certain groups, especially

⁶⁵ MacCannell, Dean. *Staged Authenticity: Arrangements of social space in tourist settings*. (American Sociological Review, Volume 17, 1973): 598-603

⁶⁶ Bruner, Edward. *The Maasai and the Lion King: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Globalization in African Tourism*. (American Ethnologist, Volume 28:4, Nov 2001): 899

of students, an intercultural exchange cannot be taken for granted. If tourists are truly seen as independent agents, then they are entitled to determine, for themselves, the extent of their participation. Indeed, I observed groups that vacillated between the two poles of participation: a student group from Quito eagerly joined in the dancing, while two elderly Virginian tourists wanted nothing more than to return to their tour bus for a nap. Of course, the language barrier makes cross-cultural communication especially tricky, and likely explained some of the North American tourists' hesitancy to involve themselves in the performances. Thus the presumed linearity of interculturality, the assumption that participation will be enthusiastically universal, reveals the project's fractures. Just as was suggested through the women's experience with abysmal salaries for long hours of work, the suppression of discussion claws at the intercultural apparatus to by ignoring its foundational concepts of voluntary participation and liberation.

Identity through ethnoeducation: By Afro-Ecuadorians, For Afro-Ecuadorians?

"For many of us that participated in this first workshop on [Afro-Ecuadorian] ethnoeducation, it was the first time that we became truly aware of our origins and our ancestors. Through this curriculum, we hope that...future generations of Afro-Ecuadorians can learn of the Afro people in the Chota Valley and Afro descendants in general, thereby strengthening our identity and self-esteem."⁶⁷ In this introductory passage of the Afro-

⁶⁷ Pabón, Iván, et al. *Nuestra Historia: Documento Didáctico Pedagógico De Etnoeducación*

Ecuadorian ethnoeducational curriculum, *Nuestra Historia*, its authors outline their principal goals and motivation behind the curriculum's publication. *Nuestra Historia* is the product of the first ethnoeducation workshop to occur in the Chota Valley. In June of 1999, various Afro-Ecuadorian leaders in the Chota Valley congregated in region's largest city of Ibarra.⁶⁸ Out of this workshop was born the Ethnoeducation Commission, which produced the first edition of the curriculum in May 2003. As a pedagogical tool conceived of, produced by, and intended for the Afro-Ecuadorian community, the curriculum traces a specific Afro-Ecuadorian history and identity that is engineered for transmission and empowerment.

Implicit in the very genesis of this ethnoeducational curriculum is its opposition to the educational status quo, which ignores Afro-Ecuadorian history and culture. Aurolyn Luykx employs the concept of a "hidden curriculum" to describe the unchallenged hegemony of certain discourses on nationalism and identity. This force "subtly and selectively guides educational practice, structuring classroom interactions in ways that seem natural but are in fact culturally determined, so that students from different cultural backgrounds experience frustration and failure at a disproportionate rate."⁶⁹ As such, the curriculum presents new content that exposes this hidden curriculum for failing to depict a comprehensive, multivocal history.

In this way, *Nuestra Historia* instills dignity in Afro-Ecuadorian

Afroecuatoriana. (Federación De Comunidades Y Organizaciones Negras De Imbabura Y Carchi. Ministerio De Educación: Ecuador, 2008).

⁶⁸ *Nuestra Historia*, 5-6

⁶⁹ Luykx, Aurolyn. *The Citizen Factory: Schooling and Cultural Production in Bolivia* (Albany: State University of New York, 1999): xxxiii.

schoolchildren by teaching their ancestors' history and culture in the classroom.

To these ends, my examination of this curriculum offers an analysis specific to this stated intention and does not seek to critique, for example, the credibility of its sources or the reception of the curriculum by schoolchildren. Rather, I focus on the curriculum as a politicized, cultural document. I argue that the conceptualizations of Afro-Ecuadorians espoused in this curriculum valorize certain identities that tether authenticity to geographic origin, thereby transmitting specific notions of identity and belonging. I will begin by examining the curriculum's glowing descriptions of Africa and its diaspora, and then examine how this rationale is applied to the Ecuadorian case, whereby Afro-Ecuadorians are described exclusively within the context of their ancestral homelands. The analysis will then proceed at a structural level to ask how dominant discourses on education qualify certain types of knowledge as they regard the ethnoeducational curriculum. Finally, I will discuss how restrictions on this curriculum both reflect and promulgate structural racism, through which practices associations between Afro-Ecuadorians and rural environments become reinforced.

Placing People: Geography as the Principal Agent of Legitimacy

"All things considered, we come to the conclusion that modern man originated from a small population in Africa, from which point he dispersed himself worldwide," determines the curriculum at the end of the first chapter,

entitled “Africa: The Great Mother of Humanity”.⁷⁰ The chapter begins with a brief sketch of human evolution before passionately articulating its proclamation, which is that Africa is the cradle of life. In addition to making a claim to physical land, the chapter provides a comprehensive run-down of African kingdoms, prominent leaders, mineral resources, cultural objects, and religions of Africa, thereby introducing readers to the many capabilities of this continent and its people.⁷¹ The full weight of these declarations must be considered within the circumstances of their production. This is to say, glorifying Africa rebels against a dominant historical legacy of *mestizaje*, which is an ideology of whitening that “was conceived as much in terms of education, cultural practices, and social behavior as in terms of biology.”⁷² Insertion of Africa into the educational narrative thus becomes a subversive and liberating practice.

By framing Africa as a motherland with much natural bounty and incorporating inspiring narratives from across the African diaspora, the curriculum places tremendous emphasis on place. This focus is an active rebellion against centuries of erasure from collective national memory; it is a provision of roots where none previously existed. After creating firm linkages between terrestrial Africa and its diaspora, the chapter tackles local experiences of this diaspora in Ecuador. “It is should be emphasized that we blacks who were born in America are not Africans, because we were not born

⁷⁰ *Nuestra Historia*, 13

⁷¹ See: *Nuestra Historia*, 17-26

⁷² Walmsley, Emily. *Blackness and Belonging: race, representations, and embodiment in an Ecuadorian city*. (England: Manchester University, 2004): 15.

on that continent; each one of us belongs to the countries where we were born. In this way, we can be Afrochoteños (from the Chota Valley as well as including black communities that have immigrated to cities) and Afroesmeraldeños (from the province of Esmeraldas).⁷³ Everyone Afro-Ecuadorian, accordingly, is tied either to the Chota Valley or to Esmeraldas, at least originally. Compounding this emphasis on place are the traditional dances, cuisine, clothing, and hairstyles of the Chota Valley.⁷⁴ Relying on locally available materials, crops, and ingredients, authenticity becomes entangled with access. In this way, deterritorializing Afro-Ecuadorian identity offers practical as well as symbolic challenges. Identity performances in rural and urban contexts will be considered at length in a future section when I turn towards a focused examination of *la bomba* dance, food preparation and presentation, and agricultural vocations. For the time being, it is my intent to probe the ethnoeducation curriculum's structure.

Denaturalizing Structure: Power and Who Learns What, Where, How, and Why

At a structural level, this curriculum does not dismantle methods of knowledge acquisition; the written format, complete with comprehension quizzes and suggestions for group projects, mirrors that of other topics included under the umbrella of national education. The crucial approval of the Ministry of Education, which was necessary to authorize the inclusion of this ethnoeducational curriculum in public schools in the Chota Valley,

⁷³ *Nuestra Historia*, 46

⁷⁴ *Nuestra Historia* 48-50

demonstrates how certain methods of learning are privileged over others. The format of text, quiz, class discussion is the standard to which prospective curricula must conform in order to be considered legitimate. "We must reconceptualize socialization, not as a set of skills and knowledge unproblematically transferred to the next generation, but as a dialogic process in which hegemonic structures are absorbed, resisted, and transformed," notes Aurolyn Luyxk.⁷⁵ Students are not merely learning material, but in fact learning how to think and formulate distinct worldviews. In certain ways, therefore, this structural authority subverts the ethnoeducational project because the same forces that have silenced Afro-Ecuadorian voices in the past continue to conceive of education institutionally. For example, oral tradition is a central feature of Afro-Ecuadorian knowledge transmission.⁷⁶ However, instead of being applied methodologically to the curriculum, orality is reduced to a handful of references under pretenses of "cultural importance."⁷⁷ In this way, specific discourses are reinforced as dominant (i.e. text-based learning), while others are excluded from state-sponsored pedagogy.

Silence as Violence

Nuestra Historia is a powerful pedagogical tool, particularly in its detailing of the Afro experience in Ecuador since enslavement, and yet it is approved only to teach Afro-Ecuadorians their own history. "In Ecuador as in

⁷⁵ Luyxk, 124

⁷⁷ For example, see *Nuestra Historia* (47, 110, 115)

many Latin American nations, it is very common to see students with African origins who are forced to memorize a part of Spanish history, which is the history of the 'motherland' as they have always taught us. But these same black students were never taught anything about African people, nor able to learn about these cultures as transmitters of our ethnic and cultural origins."⁷⁸ This excerpt from the curriculum demonstrates the implausibility of reciprocated learning. The authors completely disregard any possibility of using the ethnoeducational curriculum to teach non-Afro-Ecuadorians; the very fact that it is excluded from the imaginative spectrum proves just how deep-seated certain narratives have become.

For these very reasons, education is poised to become a central space for rebellion, and indeed this preliminary curriculum represents a courageous, if flawed, first step. Sociologist Catherine Walsh articulates the character of education, therein revealing the potential and dangers of its power. "More than a pedagogical sphere, education is a political, social, and cultural institution: the space of construction and reproduction of values, attitudes, and identities and of the historically hegemonic power of the state."⁷⁹ Reclaiming education as a space for and by those that it previously excluded, therefore, not only assails an exclusionary legacy but also creates a space for articulating the cultural histories that have become such central tenants of patriotism.

⁷⁸ *Nuestra Historia*, 37

⁷⁹ Walsh, Catherine. *Interculturalidad, Estado, Sociedad: Luchas (de)coloniales de nuestra época*. (Quito: Abya Yala and La Universidad de Simón Bolívar, 2009), 51

A statement from the Minister of Education, Raúl Vallejo Corral, prefaces the ethnoeducation curriculum. Corral champions the notion of interculturality, in fact using the exact term to describe the Ecuadorian educational system. "Our commitment, as the Ministry of Education, is to contribute to the construction of a plurinational state. This means that all Ecuadorians, particularly those who are associated with educational institutions and communities, are obligated to include the study of history and culture of all of the groups within Ecuador in curricular materials."⁸⁰ Corral's words echo the political discourse of President Rafael Correa, but their application to this curriculum and its potential remains purely rhetorical. Neither Afro-Ecuadorian students living in the city nor mestizo and indigenous children have any avenue through which to learn the history of their African-descended fellows. This absence of educational discourse causes stereotypes to replicate, and Afro-Ecuadorians come to experience identity differently in urban spaces. For an intercultural education to succeed nationally, educational scholar Sheila Aikman remarks that "[it must] focus on the interface between different dynamic cultural traditions, powerful and otherwise."⁸¹

I have demonstrated how the Afro-Ecuadorian ethnoeducation curriculum creates selective identities, particularly tying authenticity to place. Similarly, the structured nature of education imposes strict guidelines

⁸⁰ *Nuestra Historia*, 3

⁸¹ Aikman, Sheila, "Interculturality and Intercultural Education: A Challenge for Democracy," in *International Review of Education*, Vol. 43, No. 5/6. (Springer, 1997), 474.

on learning, which in turn prevent some types of knowledge acquisition from entering classrooms. In both these ways, individuals are encouraged to identify with certain characteristics (homeland, clothing, food, and traditional dance,) more than others (oral tradition and urban living).

Chapter 4.

Urbanization: Outlining a New Geography of the Chota Valley

"Cultural identity is a process of "becoming" as well as "being". It belongs to the future as much as to the past."

-Hall in Ifekwunigwe, 1999, 50

"Before, people did not know where the roads leading out of La Concepción went. Now, they know the way to Quito far too well."

-Rosa Suarez, La Concepción, January 2010

Residents of La Concepción are quick to recall that twenty years ago, their community's population was nearly double the 600 residents that inhabit the town today.⁸² Back then, every person farmed his or her own plot of land, and made enough money to support a family on agricultural wages. Don Ángel Chalá, president of the entire county of La Concepción, an area possessed of 2,014 voters, noted that "twenty years ago, the only people that left were young people who went to the cities to continue with their educations. During that time, the agricultural situation was better. People worked for intermediaries, who took care of selling their goods, but increasingly this system began to break down and families started to go hungry. That is why they started leaving to go to the cities."⁸³ Furthermore, Chalá noted a demographic shift in the migrants themselves. "Only about 60% of the migrants over the last ten years have been young people, whereas earlier everyone who migrated was young. Increasingly, entire families have

⁸² Fieldnotes, 01-17-2010

⁸³ Chalá, Ángel. *Personal Interview*, 01/20/2010

been leaving."⁸⁴ This chapter engages with the experience of migration, examining its impetuses, actors, and degree to which (some kinds of) connections to the Chota Valley persist.

Through discussions on migration with residents of La Concepción, it became clear that the large-scale urbanization that now characterizes the Afro-Choteño population is a relatively recent phenomenon. Urban sociologists Douglas Butterworth and John K. Chance study urbanization in Latin America and offer generalized 'push' and 'pull' factors that may outline some of the motivations that characterize the migration of people from the Chota Valley to the city of Quito. "Insufficient or poor land and lack of economic alternatives are usually cited as primary reasons for out-migration from rural communities...whereas employment and educational opportunities are generally ranked foremost among urban attractions."⁸⁵ While this rationale generally describes the trends of the Chota Valley, it fails to provide any sort of case-specific appraisal. The difficulty of pinpointing a specific cause indicates that urbanization likely results from several coordinated factors. Both scholars and residents of the Chota Valley alike offer several convincing theories that answer the puzzle of how and why for migration became such a salient feature within this part of the Ecuador. Most of these hypotheses, ranging from depressed agricultural prices to exhausted farmland and lack of vocational diversity in the rural homelands, can be

⁸⁴ Fieldnotes, 01/20/2010

⁸⁵ Butterworth, Douglas and John K. Chance. *Latin American Urbanization*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 40, 47.

included as subcategories under the likeliest motivator behind migration: Ecuador's economic crisis at the end of the 20th century, and the nation's accompanying dollarization.

At the end of the 1990s, Ecuador suffered a devastating economic collapse that left the country's macroeconomic institutions in a state of destitution. The collapse itself was triggered by a steep decline in oil prices as well as diminished agricultural production thanks to the effects of El Niño., both of which caused a considerable drop in export revenues for Ecuador. To restore some stability, then President Jamil Mahuad decided to default on Ecuador's \$20 billion foreign debt. This action, however, did little to relieve the crisis, and by December 1999, the country's ten largest banks had all failed.⁸⁶ The collapse of the banking system and exponentially growing inflation rate led Mahuad to dollarize in January, 2000.

Though the effects of dollarization on rural Ecuadorian communities have not been the subject of significant scholarship to date, academics have addressed the socioeconomic ramifications of currency conversion in other parts of Latin America, such as Tower and Borzutzky's 2004 study of El Salvador. This study concluded that dollarization had a negative impact on the rural poor by increasing inequality despite facilitating investment and international financial institutions.⁸⁷ An article in Ecuador's national newspaper, *El Comercio*, came to similar conclusions regarding dollarization

⁸⁶ Jacome, Luis I. "The Late 1990s Financial Crisis in Ecuador: Institutional Weaknesses, Fiscal Rigidities, and Financial Dollarization at Work." (International Monetary Fund, 2004)

⁸⁷ Tower, Marcia and Silvia Borzutzky. *The Socioeconomic Implications of Dollarization in El Salvador*. Latin American Politics and Society, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Autumn, 2004): 29.

and societal inequality. In Latin America, the most unequal region in the world where the poorest 20% of the population account for just 3.5% of income while the rich hold 56.9%, this conclusion is particularly striking.⁸⁸ Furthermore, this article noted that “since dollarization began about 2 million Ecuadorians have emigrated, most of them of working age.”⁸⁹

While this study limits its examination of migration and cultural preservation within Ecuadorian borders, a considerable amount of critical scholarship on the ramifications of Ecuador’s macroeconomic collapse examines transnational migration. Because of the robustness of the literature on this topic, I have included a brief section that outlines international migration, and how its dynamics provide an opportunity to reflect upon this thesis’s themes of geography, interculturality, migration, and cultural authenticity. However, more importantly, I have also included transnational migration so that I might engage with Paul Gilroy’s work, *The Black Atlantic*, which outlines identity formation outside of the race/geography stranglehold.

International Migration: Transforming the Racialized Geography

Transnational migration, particularly between Ecuador and Spain and Ecuador and the United States, is an increasingly salient feature of the Ecuadorian population, and it has resulted from many of the same impetuses as urbanization. According to the Spanish Ministry of Work and Immigration,

⁸⁸ “Gap between rich and poor in Latinamerica is largest in the world, says UN” MercoPress: Latin American New Agency, 27 March 2010. Accessed on March 31, 2010.

⁸⁹ “Dollarization is a factor of stability” 6 June 2004. Accessed at <www.elcomercio.com>

Ecuadorians represented the third largest community of foreigners living in Spain at the end of 2009, behind Morocco and Romania.⁹⁰ These 440,304 Ecuadorians holding residential paperwork for Spain represent nearly three percent of the entire Ecuadorian population.⁹¹ Ecuadorian emigration to Spain far exceeds population flow to the United States, with a Spain-US ratio of 2.3⁹². By the end of the 1990s, Spain had surpassed the United States to become the uncontested favorite destination for Ecuadorian emigrants.

Ecuador suffered a large-scale macroeconomic collapse at the end of the 1990s. This crisis resulted in uncontrollable, spiraling inflation that forced the state to dollarize in 2000. It also caused a dramatic spike in emigration. While wage differentials constituted the primary impetus for the migration itself, the choice of host country was influenced by several variables. Proximity, defined through the independent lenses of geography, language, and culture, were certainly influential components of the emigration decision. However, these factors alone cannot explain how and why Spain suddenly became so drastically more popular than the United States as a destination for immigrants. Instead, Bertoli et al suggest that the radical differences between Spain and the United States' immigration policies

⁹⁰ Secretaría de Estado de Inmigración y Emigración. "Extranjeros según nacionalidad." Accessed 29/03/2010. <<http://extranjeros.mtin.es/es/InformacionEstadistica/>>

⁹¹ U.S. Census Bureau. "International Data Base: Ecuador." Accessed 28/03/2010. <<http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idb/glossary.php#MYP>>

⁹² Bertoli, Simone, Jesús Fernández-Huertas Moraga, and Francesc Ortega. "Immigration Policies and the Ecuadorian Exodus." Discussion paper. (Germany: Institute for the Study of Labor, 2010): 7.

provide the most convincing evidence for why Spain commanded such unusually high rates of Ecuadorian emigration.⁹³

In short, legal emigration to the United States was unfeasible because of severe restrictions upon who was allowed to enter the country. Unless Ecuadorians could demonstrate that they had close relatives who were US citizens, they were refused legal permanent residency. As such, after the economic crisis, most Ecuadorians who entered the United States did so without documentation, which entailed a perilous and unreliable journey across the US/Mexican border. Spain's policies on international immigration, on the other hand, encouraged Ecuadorians: Spain waived its visa requirement for a person's first three months so long as emigrants could provide certain documentation and proof of financial stability. Furthermore, this three month admission could be easily extended.⁹⁴ As a result, Spain arose as a significantly more attractive option for emigrants.

Ecuadorians' overseas emigration has been examined by numerous scholars, whose research has ranged from the gender dynamics of transnational families⁹⁵ to internationalized experiences of ethnicity,⁹⁶ the impacts of remittances upon rural services,⁹⁷ and individualized accounts of

⁹³ Bertoli et al, 19

⁹⁴ Bertoli et al, 15

⁹⁵ See: Pribilsky, Jason. *La Chulla Vida: Gender, Migration, and the Family in Andean Ecuador and New York City*. (Syracuse University Press, 2007)

⁹⁶ Miles, Ann. *From Cuenca to Queens: an anthropological story of transnational migration*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004)

⁹⁷ Acosta, A., S. López and D. Villamar. "Las remesas y su aporte para la economía Ecuatoriana." In: *La migración Ecuatoriana: Transnacionalismo, redes e identidades*, G. Herrera, M. Carrillo and A. Torres, Eds. (FLACSO-Ecuador, Quito, 2005): pp. 227–252.

indigenous peasants' northbound journeys.⁹⁸ But of most direct relevance to the type of theoretical future suggested in this thesis is the challenge that transnational migration makes to the racial-spatial order. In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy contends that the terror of slavery must be repositioned at the very heart of modernity and progress. Though his work engages with the Atlantic Ocean and Ecuadorian colonialism occurred on the Pacific, his radical suggestions that identity arose not in Africa or in America but rather at the site in between: Middle Passage. This claim confuses geographical claims to identity. In this way, Gilroy employs the concept of transnationality to explore the "flows, exchanges, [and] the in-between elements that call the very desire to be centered into question,"⁹⁹ asking why geographic origin became the principal criterion for authenticity. Applied to Afro-Ecuador, as well as across other landscapes in which race and place are conflated, Gilroy deregionalizes race by challenging the assumption that authenticity is produced at a geographic place.

Paul Gilroy's work offers promising insight into the complicated transformations involved in human movement, but while possessed of much potential for articulating cultural authenticity in a globalized world, his refutation of "race=place" does not dissociate the two. On a similar note was Peter Wade's wary disclaimer in *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*: "The notion that races are social constructs does not mean that they are

⁹⁸ Kyle, David. *Transnational Peasants: Migrations, Networks, and Ethnicity in Andean Ecuador*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000)

⁹⁹ Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993): 190.

unimportant- 'merely ideas', as it were. Clearly, people may behave *as if* races did exist and, as a result, races do exist as social categories of great tenacity and power."¹⁰⁰ In Ecuador, everyday life operates under the equation of race and place, but the act of migration redirects, incrementally, this logic. The ever-growing Afro neighborhoods of Quito in many ways put into practice the [ethnic] intercultural discourses articulated in the constitution: migration confuses the racial-spatial order, physically presenting those people who the state once sought to erase but who have now become formally recognized as Ecuadorian nationals. The city of Guayaquil is now home to the largest Afro population in Ecuador, most of whom have roots in the coastal province of Esmeraldas, noted Afro feminist leader Barbarita Lara.¹⁰¹

In the cities, specifically Quito, Afro-Ecuadorian women work as maids, while men work as security guards. Don Raúl Maldonado, president of the community of Salinas, noted that "the people that prepare themselves, which is to say, that get an education that allows them to get a gratifying job, they usually do not return. For them, Quito becomes home. But the people that go without an education and have to work as a maid or a guard tend to return frequently and still consider the Chota valley to be their principal home." But Ángel Chalá, president of La Concepción, contributed that "just 4% of people who migrate do so for educational reasons. Most people live in the city only because of the jobs and return here as often as they can, for holidays and important events." Because migration is such an economically-

¹⁰⁰ Wade, 14

¹⁰¹ Fieldnotes, 18/01/2010

driven phenomenon, which is to say that most people who migrate do not wish to do so, the Chota Valley is preserved as home. To sustain this notion, traditional foods are consolidated and exported from the valley by migrants so that they can continue to observe traditions.

“People who live in Quito will frequently visit La Concepción during the harvest and take beans and yucca from their family’s land with them to the city. In this way, they continue eating the food from here,” said Chalá. Indeed, during visits to homes in La Concepción, it was not uncommon to see sacks of beans set aside for family members’ next visit home. Edith Lara, a young woman who lives in both La Concepción and Quito, said that her siblings in Quito always requested that she bring them beans and yucca from La Concepción. “It’s not really that you can’t buy these things in Quito, but you can’t buy the beans that my grandfather grows,” she said.¹⁰² My own departure from the community was acknowledged through the gifting of three hefty bags of beans, which Blanca Folleco told me I would use to remember La Concepción. Memory was thus established as a multi-sensory activity, engaging not only the sights but also the tastes and smells that evoke La Concepción.

Conclusion

The changed racial landscape of Ecuador has been met with antagonism and resistance, not only by those who seek to maintain the city as white-mestizo terrain, but also by Afro-Ecuadorians who locate their cultural

¹⁰² Fieldnotes, 01/21/2010

authenticity in the Chota Valley. Migration relies upon the existence of a rural community against which to define itself, as well as from which to source the products and services that preserve “home.” Afro-Choteños living in the city return home for major holidays and family occasions, including Christmas, Carnival, Easter, and harvest. At these times, they fill up on home-cooked favorites, such as salty sweet *morochó* corn pudding, manioc cooked in coconut, or skewers weighted down with fatty pork and ripe plantains. For the vast majority of Afro-Choteños in who remain in La Concepción, urbanization is experienced as a violent exercise of abandonment that wrenches people and land apart. Anadelisa Folleco, a life-long resident of La Concepción, believes that migrants *only really live* during the four or five weeklong stints of return that punctuate each year. Indeed, this view reflects the enormous responsibility forced upon people who remain in La Concepción: they must not only preserve the traditional Afro lifestyle for themselves, but also maintain it for those who have left. Authentic La Concepción must be ready for migrants’ return, and it must exist when they are gone as a place from which migrants derive a legitimate claim of belonging while they exist temporarily in a foreign environment. Compounded by expectations that people in La Concepción will teach ethno-history in homes and classrooms, prepare traditional meals, and exchange their culture for tourists’ dollar bills, it is unsurprising that the strain of migration generates an ambivalent response among those who remain in La Concepción.

Chapter 5.

Immobilized by Migration: Abandonment and Cultural Endurance in La Concepción

“Return is the hunger for all the things you once enjoyed or the yearning for all the things you never enjoyed...It is the elsewhere of insurrectionists.”

- Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*

“There is almost no one left in our towns. But I’m not leaving!”

–Carmen Suarez

Walking around the tiny town of La Convalescencia, empty, abandoned houses nearly outnumber those that are occupied. Just 19 families remain in town, the rest having migrated to the cities of Quito and Ibarra in search of stable salaries with which to support their families. Overgrown orchards and fallow farmland subtly hint at this mass absence, but perhaps the eeriest reminder of the alarming decline in population can be found at the local school. Classrooms, typically hubs of colorful creativity and boundless energy, have fallen into complete disrepair as fewer and fewer students return each year. Most windows are broken, and clumps of moss creep under doors and across cracked cement floors. A sole computer perches in the center of one of these classrooms, looking lonely and particularly alien against a backdrop of natural encroachment. All educational activities have been relegated to one room, which has been cheerfully decorated with whatever materials the single teacher managed to accumulate. This teacher says, “everyone has left out of poverty. I am the only teacher here, and I have

just a handful of students spread across many grades. So I teach them all in just this classroom. [Ecuadorian president Rafael] Correa does not know the reality of schools like this one. How can we have excellent education without basic services?"

Estimates vary on just how many people have migrated to the cities, but consensus is certainly reached on a general level: people are leaving, quickly, and that rate is only increasing. Don Ángel, president of La Concepción, reckons that nearly 50% of the town's residents have left over the last ten years, and more choose to depart each day. Anita Álvarez, who teaches math at a school in the nearby community of Santa Ana and runs a small store out of her family's house, says, "out of my graduating high school class of 13, two of us remain in La Concepción."

As was the subject of the previous chapter, migration is fundamentally altering the experiences of nationhood and belonging for migrants as well as the urbanites they encounter in the city, for whom the influx of Afro-Ecuadorians to Quito represents a physical confrontation with the intercultural rhetoric that citizens voted into constitutional law. In this chapter, I will focus instead upon how migration has transformed local dynamics in the communities left behind, especially in La Concepción. I examine my ethnographic findings against the work of anthropologists Charles Hale and Elizabeth Povinelli, who examine how the neoliberal economic order and nation-state, respectively, have commandeered multicultural discourses to advance their own agendas.

I explain why migration is understood as a monolithically negative phenomenon in La Concepción. I also I suggest that a distance with both literal and figurative dimensions has arisen between migrants and the home communities on which they must stake their identities. As the past cultural nationalism of *mestizaje* has been replaced by *interculturality* and its fervent respect for the ethnic and racial diversity possessed within the Ecuadorian state, the engines of cultural production have been put under tremendous strain. For Afro-Ecuadorians, whose cultural authenticity has been constructed through the valorization of a diasporic, pan-Africanist identity forged at the site of enslavement, this situates authenticity geographically in the Chota Valley where enslavement itself took place. Therefore the new criteria for national belonging is ethnic pride, accessed by Afro-Ecuadorians through a cultural heritage that is located in a historical time and place that no longer characterizes the majority of the population. This means that the dwindling population left in the Chota Valley must not only maintain their own difficult lifestyles (after all, people are migrating because life is *hard*), but are also burdened with maintaining the cultural infrastructure to support the entire Afro-Ecuadorian diaspora. Using lenses of food and kinship, I examine how local dynamics are transformed. I also investigate the means by which migrants sustain authenticity in the city and lastly turn to development projects in the Chota Valley and the city of Quito geared towards cultural sustenance.

Family, kinship and importance of proximity

Walking back on the dusty uphill road to La Concepción after a day spent elsewhere, I run into Cacilia, the woman with whom I've been living. She is sweaty and overheated, having walked the whole two miles from La Concepción to its bus stop. Usually, it is easy to hitch a ride with one of the lumbering trucks loaded with sugar cane, pigs, beans, or some other raw good, but today Caci was unlucky. "Three cars passed me by," she complains. "How rude!" I ask her where she is headed this afternoon, and she says that is going to the city of Ibarra to buy chicken for dinner, because they are running low on food and 25 construction workers will be arriving in a few hours for a meal, as they do three times a day. She also says that she needs to pick up her monthly welfare check of \$30, which must be picked up on exactly the same day every month. "Come on, we'll go together," says Cacilia, and I agree. Within five minutes, a pick-up truck with some government employees comes rumbling along, and they stop abruptly to offer us a lift. It is impossible for me to know if this was just good luck, or if my presence made us an attractive pair. As an obvious foreigner, and a young, female one at that, I usually have more trouble fending off prospective rides than flagging them down. Regardless, we hop in the truck bed, and we're off on a windy, 45-minute ride to the market in Ibarra. When we near Ibarra, we hop out over the side and offer two outstretched dollars to the driver as fare, but our money is brushed aside by a hand emboldened by its own charity. Such generosity is commonplace for me but likely not for Caci, a frustrating irony given her extremely tight budget.

When Caci and I arrive at the market, I ask how much the chicken will cost. "Five dollars per chicken," she says, "and I need to buy 6." As we walk around the market, we run into a cousin of hers, who Caci embraces and introduces to me. A few minutes later, we meet her nephew, who moved to the city for university several years but now teaches school in a small community outside of town. "You two should get to know one another," Caci coaxes, nudging me towards her tall, married nephew who is perhaps five years my senior. "I'll finish the shopping, and Nilson can drop you off at the bus station." As Nilson and I stroll away, relaxing into a very familiar conversation on where I learned to speak Spanish, we run into two more family members of his. Everywhere we go, it seems, we run into family, an occurrence that is certainly conditioned by large family sizes but also underlines the loose interpretation of biological family as a determinant of kinship. After a pleasant walk around town, we arrive back at the bus station, where we see Caci loaded down with heavy bags of chicken and fruit.

The omnipresence of family is one of its most salient features. Because I was just one year younger than Cacilia's daughter, Sandra, I entered the family dynamic in a daughter-type role, albeit one with none of the responsibility that normally came with the title. The ease at which Cacilia passed me off to Nilson hinted that trust was not simply a pleasant reflection on Nilson's character but in fact represented a practical necessity for parents

in a place with scarce resources and too many responsibilities.¹⁰³ A similar occurrence is described in *All Our Kin*, Carol B. Stack's classic ethnography on kinship in an urban black ghetto in the Midwestern United States. Stacks notes that "local conditions formed from networks of kin and friends are mobilized with domestic networks; domestic organization is diffused over many kin-based households which themselves have elastic boundaries."¹⁰⁴ In much the same way, biological parents are not the only parents agents in La Concepción, and especially not in cases of domestic abandonment, such as Cacilia's. Rather, children are reared by an extended 'family' defined through geographic proximity and shared values. In no place were family and kinship as obvious as on the bus to La Concepción.

After shopping in Ibarra with Cacilia one afternoon, we arrive at the terminal to board to the dusty bus bound for La Concepción. A vendor shuffles down the aisle, advertising his sweets as authentic products of the Chota Valley, while another man fans out pirated soap operas in each hand and announces the deal is wants to offer to "very special people on this bus," a deal which he likely offers to the "very special people" on board every bus in the terminal. As we inch down the aisle towards the back, Cacilia enthusiastically greets nearly every person seated on the bus, swapping inquiries into health and family with the people packed tightly into sagging seats. She throws back her head with laughter as various slices of gossip are

¹⁰³ This study has not focused on the dynamics of parenting or made a thorough assessment of kinship networks outside of their application to everyday activities and especially those concerning the cultivation, preparation, and consumption of food. A future study might examine the reconfiguration of family and kinship as a result of migration.

¹⁰⁴ Stack, Carol B. *All Our Kin* (New York: Harper & Rom, 1974): 105.

confirmed and disproved, and a full ten minutes elapse before we have finally slipped into seats near the back of the bus. The atmosphere of kinship and comradery is all encompassing: I am greeted not as an oddity, but as a guest welcomed into this extended family. Don Alfonso, one of the four older men who spend their days sitting in the town's plaza and shooting the breeze, asks me why I have come to Ibarra. "We were shopping," I say, pointing towards Cacilia, who is engaged in conversation. "What brought you to the city," I ask him. He smiles before responding, "Oh, I just like the ride. Gives me something to do."

The bus to La Concepción is a mobile community, a microcosmic slice of the Chota Valley hurtling down aggressive mountain switchbacks as people relax into the timeworn cushions and social routines to pass the hour and a half-long journey home. The atmosphere contrasts starkly to the anonymous efficiency of Quito-bound buses, which depart from Ibarra with reliable punctuality every hour. Indeed, with just two buses a day making the trip to La Concepción, travel is inevitably synchronized. Quito is located approximately 75 miles from Ibarra, and the trip down the Pan American highway takes two and a half hours and costs \$2.50. The trip is defined by its efficiency: any stops or periods of deceleration generate collective grumbling from the passengers, and depending upon their duration will result in shouting matches between angry passengers and the *cobrador* (ticket collector/charger). Extra baggage is unwelcome, and stops between Ibarra and Quito are unwanted. Buses to La Concepción, on the other hand, charge

\$1.50 for a journey that is barely 25 miles but takes a minimum of an hour and a half, though usually more depending upon what people have stored in the cargo hold beneath the bus. With rare exception, some shop owner will have loaded flimsy plastic crates with scores of empty beer bottles to return in Ibarra, knowing that s/he can save a couple dollars by hiring a pick-up from the bus station instead of all the way from La Concepción itself. Unloading these crates takes a few minutes, provided none of them have broken during the bouncy ride.

The buses themselves serve as a metaphor for migration and access. La Concepción's spatial isolation is compounded by its temporal inaccessibility: infrequent, slow buses are the only way for those without private transportation to gain access. Knowledge of these bus schedules, which are unpredictable and difficult to understand without insider tip-offs, therefore becomes a form of belonging. In *The Railway Journey*, Wolfgang Schivelbusch explains how the advent of the railroad transformed concepts of distance by shrinking the temporal space between previously disparate areas of France.¹⁰⁵ In similar fashion, the practical accessibility of Quito informs the relational positioning of non-Quito places such as La Concepción. The distinct journeys between Ibarra and Quito and Ibarra and La Concepción elucidate how each has acquired a meaning to contradicts the other's: Quito is efficient, fast, and open (though perhaps not accessible) to those who can

¹⁰⁵ Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *The Railway Journey*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977)

afford the bus fare. La Concepción is far away, sweaty, and experienced through kinship.

The disruption of geographically bounded kinship networks, metaphorically reflected through bus travel, is a central feature of migration. This wreaks havoc upon traditional lifestyles in the Chota Valley for reasons that are cultural as well as economic. Carmen Suarez, who teaches English at the school, expressed her feelings on family. "Family is absolutely my top priority. Parents, brothers, cousins, it's as if we were just one person. This is why we don't want to leave this land, but because agriculture is so hard and the prices are so low, people go to the city. They want a stable salary, but they want to live here." Carmen's sentiments were echoed by other residents of La Concepción such as Sandra Folleco, who mentioned, "five of my seven children live in Quito. I feel like part of myself is not here."

Migration and local transformation

The scale of the migration means that traditional dynamics within the rural lands have been reconfigured, as there are no longer sufficient people to sustain many of the practices that are memorialized as central to cultural identity. Most of the small, 5-10 acre plots owned by each family in the La Concepción subcontract for certain services, such as preparing the land for seeding. The piece of land owned by Cacilia and Sandra Tadeo was prepared and fertilized by their neighbors for a fee. Cacilia noted that with all of the cooking that she had to do, there was not sufficient time to ready the land, so she was forced to pay someone else to do it. Before her husband abandoned

her, the family was able to complete the labor without outside assistance.¹⁰⁶ As is evidenced by Cacilia's experience, dwindling population has compounded her own economic hardship, in effect reinforcing the impetus behind migration in the first place. Furthermore, as Cacilia's daughter Sandra can testify, the labor shortage now effecting La Concepción has meant that young people are increasingly unable to complete school or continue their education both because of domestic demands and insufficient funds. Though Sandra graduated from high school, she will not attend university because she must help her mother cook and clean three meals a day for visiting workers and, in a hypothetical future, tourists.

A significant burden of migration on La Concepción, as well as the local development that I will now outline, is therefore borne by the women responsible for supplying the domestic labor that sustains the community. As described by Charles Hale in the context of Guatemalan multiculturalism, these types of multi-ethnic political discourses at once expand and contract the criteria for national belonging. In Guatemala, the cultural project of neoliberalism includes a minimal package of cultural rights to legitimize the outright exclusion of the rest.¹⁰⁷ By applauding certain types of indigeneity in the Guatemalan case, the state effectively created a hierarchy of identity. Hale's conclusions have distinct parallels to context of interculturality in

¹⁰⁶ Fieldnotes, 1/14/2010

¹⁰⁷ Hale, Charles. "Does Multiculturalism Menace? Governance, Cultural Rights and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala." *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 34 (2002): 485.

Ecuador regarding how some identities are elevated to the detriment of others.

As mentioned in the introduction, the constitution of 2008 recognizes collective rights for indigenous, Afro, and *montubio* (coastal agriculturist) populations, through which action it fosters and encourages identity under these specific criteria. But the actual reality of generating Afro culture across a changing human geography has been to the particular detriment of women such as Sandra, for whom cultural maintenance has meant sacrificing an education. Though interculturality is purported to be a liberating discourse celebrating diversity within the context of equality, the individual communities responsible for fueling it may be perversely affected by its specific discourse of progressivism. As Hale notes, by valorizing certain cultural practices such as traditional dances, more serious social crises and demands are overlooked.

Elizabeth Povinelli's research in Australia similarly complicates and enriches an understanding of multiculturalism, though she focuses not so much on who is excluded but rather on how multiculturalism advocates salvage identity, elevating *the way things were* above *the ways things are now*. In her critique, she demonstrates how "multicultural postcolonial power seems to work, in contrast, by inspiring subaltern subjects to identify with the impossible object of an authentic self-identity- in the case of indigenous Australians, a domesticated, nonconflictual, "traditional" form of

subjectivity."¹⁰⁸ This may be problematic for a number of reasons, such as how the present reality becomes interpreted as a bastardization of the pristine culture of the past, or how this presumes that people should be interested in participating in their ethnic traditions. However, I want to draw attention to how reclaiming the past propagates patriarchy by assuming that women will eagerly accept their appointment as agents of cultural preservation. This problem, as I have argued, is compounded when cultural authenticity is only accessible in the Chota Valley. To move beyond this, it will become crucial to ask why Afro-Ecuadorians in Quito are presumed to be less authentic than those of the Chota Valley, and which discourses informed this point of view. Povinelli recommends deconstructing the liberal subject in order to understand how its good intentions may manifest into exclusionary discourses. Methodologically, she analyzes the legal discourses that engendered certain identities.¹⁰⁹

As I have argued in thesis, this specific narrative of cultural distinctiveness that locates authenticity in the Chota Valley is legitimized by the national project of interculturality. I will now examine several of the new approaches taken to sustaining cultural traditions across the changing geography of Afro-Ecuador, considering their contributions as well as their contradictions to interculturality.

Combating versus assuaging migration:

¹⁰⁸ Povinelli, Elizabeth. *The Cunning of Recognition: A Reply to John Frow and Meaghan Morris*. *Critical Inquiry*: Vol. 25, No. 3 (Spring, 1999): 633

¹⁰⁹ A legal analysis was too ambitious for this project but future scholarship that seeks to expand the criteria for intercultural belonging should examine whether ethnic identity is privileged by legal documents, be they property deeds, land rights, etc.

Development projects in La Concepción and Quito

“The new modules of the ethno-education curriculum are adapting to the changing geography of Afro-Ecuadorians. We have a map entitled ‘Where are we?’ and below, sections of the country are highlighted. These include not only Chota and Esmeraldas but also Quito and Guayaquil,” explained Iván Pabón, who holds an M.A in Latin American Studies from Quito’s Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar and is a member of the ethnoeducational curriculum development team. During the school week, he teaches automotive mechanics at the only public school in Ecuador approved to instruct the Afro-Ecuadorian ethnoeducation curriculum, the Colegio Valle del Chota, but he noted that the curriculum’s extremely limited range is its greatest limitations. “We are trying to get the curriculum to be taught in the entire provinces of Imbabura and Carchi (which encompass the entire Chota Valley), but it is a long and difficult process with a lot of resistance from people in power who do not want our history taught to everyone.” Pabón’s initiative with the ethnoeducational curriculum indicates a new approach to migration: rather than combating it, as had been done in the past, projects are cropping up across the entirety of the Chota diaspora that accept its changing geography as a pedagogical point of departure.

As discussed in Chapter 2, tourism offers a one method through which cultural preservation and economic development may coexist. La Concepción is in the process of constructing an Intercultural Museum that will function both to educate tourists and local people on the area’s history by means of

antique pieces of farming equipment and performances of *la bomba* dance. Though President Ángel Chalá hopes that La Concepción may one day open a gastronomic center similar to Salinas', there are presently neither plans nor funds for such a project. Like Salinas' president, Don Raúl Maldonado, President Chalá is optimistic about the type of tourism that the project could generate. "This is an intercultural center, so we hope not only to share our own culture but also learn about the culture of the people who visit us." As tourism has been recognized to be both an income generator and an educative tool, it has followed the changing geography of Afro-Choteños. The Chota Valley is no longer the only site at which Afro-Choteño culture is offered for foreign consumption (an act which should theoretically be reciprocated by the tourists themselves).¹¹⁰

Unlike the majority of Quito-based Afro-Ecuadorian organizations operating to combat racism and educate racial consciousness, the Fundación Azúcar is focused primarily on commercial initiatives. Though Azúcar functions as a community center for Afro-Ecuadorians as well as an educative facility where non-Afro people may learn more about the history and culture of Esmeraldas and the Chota Valley, the center also organizes dance groups that perform for commission. The two groups perform the dances traditional to the Chota Valley (*la bomba*) and the province of Esmeraldas (*la marimba*). A museum space showcases traditional instruments and farming equipment, and the recorded dance music blasting throughout the house ensures that

¹¹⁰ This project has focused exclusively upon the Chota Valley and Quito; the cities of Ibarra and Guayaquil also constitute major hubs of Afro-Choteño that are unaddressed in this investigation.

everyone's feet tap lightly as they go about their work. On January 30, the foundation was preparing to open a restaurant and bar that would serve food from across the Afro-Ecuadorian homelands, through primarily from the province of Esmeraldas as the region is famous for dishes combining fried plantain, fresh seafood, and tropical fruits. The inclusion of "jugos afrodisiacos" plays upon (and, I would argue, propagates) associations between Afro-Ecuadorians, female exoticism, and sexual prowess, even if intended casually.¹¹¹ Emily Walmsley notes that "this tension between agency and objectification points to the inherent fluidity in racial identity formation: the subject and object positions are constantly shifting in changing contexts, producing the ambiguity that is so often used to define race in Latin America."¹¹² Therefore though the original association between hypersexuality and blackness may not have been the advent of Africans and their descendants, their assumption of such an identity does not necessarily indicate passive objectification. The rest of the menu is dominated by items that rarely appear on tables in La Concepción, which endorses the generally accepted belief that food in the Chota Valley is exceptional not for its flavor but rather for the manner in which the food is acquired and prepared by Afro women.

Though the Afro-Ecuadorian Cultural Center serves as the primary hub for this action, other Quito-based organizations without an explicitly Afro orientation are beginning to develop strategies to promote and maintain Afro-

¹¹¹ See: Hill Collins, 2004, Taussig 1987, Wade 1993

¹¹² Walmsley, 30

Ecuadorian culture as a empowering exercise. Patricia de la Cruz, who works for a Quito-based Jesuit migrant assistance center, is specifically focused on methods of cultural preservation for migrants from the Chota Valley. She noted that “little by little, [the new generation of migrants] are learning their history. For example, I identify with the Chota Valley (specifically my parents’ home town of Carpuela) even though I was born and raised here. This is achieved through community workshops where we talk about what it means to be Afro-Ecuadorian, and make young people proud of their homelands.” She went on to explain that the reality of economic migration means that most migrants from the Chota Valley have a very minimal education, most having dropped out of school to care for babies, and thus the unskilled jobs that they find in the city typically demand long hours for low pay and thus leave little time for ethnoeducational pursuits. However, the consistency with which migrants returned home offers an alternative means by which young people can learn about the traditions of their ancestors: through conversations with elders. De la Cruz was adamant about the tragic detachment between elders and youth that precipitated from migration. “The elders are dying, and the young people are all in the city, and so the oral stories and traditions are not being transmitted to future generations. Soon there will be no way for young people to learn these wisdoms.”¹¹³ To counteract this phenomenon, de la Cruz has begun a program that encourages

¹¹³ Fieldnotes, 1/24/2010

young people to become folk historians, collecting the stories of their elders when they return to their home communities in the Chota Valley.

In these ways, intercultural exchange is changing not only the types of knowledge and practice recognized as cultural, but also remapping the landscape of the Chota Valley by celebrating the cultural practices that exist in tandem with Afro-Choteños, regardless of geographic place. However, the distance between those who enact and those who consume constantly shadows these initiatives.

Cultural Production in the Kitchen: Afro-Choteño Foodstuffs in the City

What has become of food, that lens which was purported to be central to this investigation? With regards to cultural preservation in the city, food operates as a site of tension because the symbolic, cultural, and material dimensions of Afro-Choteño cuisine are inseparable. “Frejol is a way of feeling home. Frejol is home,” said de la Cruz, and indeed, the inherently embodied experience of growing, preparing, and consuming the foods traditional to the Chota Valley cannot be transported outside of this geographic zone. Instead, migrants travel home for the harvest, helping their family members with the arduous tasks of cutting, drying, thrashing, and collecting the beans, as well as digging up scores of manioc roots. When they prepare to return to the city, they will take burlap sacks bulging full of beans. As its general exclusion from the menu at the restaurant for Fundación Azúcar would indicate, the cuisine is generally unremarkable, fairly similar to the food eaten in other parts of the Ecuadorian highlands. What matters,

therefore, are the practices *surrounding* its consumption, which are confirmed through the physical action of carrying beans to the city. Mass-producing authentic food thus becomes a veritable impossibility because it contradicts the two most salient features of the food: that it comes from specific, family land and that it is produced by people who care about both the food and the people eating it. The food is invested with meaning only through its place of origin and the circumstances of its preparation. "It is culturally important to grow beans and yucca, so those are the only things that people want to grow," President Chalá told me of agricultural practices in La Concepción. But as this chapter has discussed, those people who maintain the farmlands and kitchens capable of producing such culturally authentic food upon migrants' return are equally responsible for keeping things going in the months in between visits. Shrinking resources mean that these tasks become increasingly burdensome.

Moreover, the intimate linkages between food, gender, and authentic preparation mean that serving a plate of food is an act encoded with meaning. One of the construction workers living in the house where I stayed remarked, "the poor eat much better than the rich because our food is prepared with care so that it nourishes us while we are working. The rich eat breakfast at 10am and pay someone to prepare their food, and they are lazy." The hypocrisy of Hector's comment strikes right at the heart of food and authenticity. His remarks reveal the deep inequity regarding expectations for

cultural authenticity.¹¹⁴ Hector and his twenty comrades were, in fact, supposed to be paying for their food but had not yet settled their bill, which amounted several hundred dollars. In this case, as in most, it was Cacilia who bore the burden of their audacious tardiness. Not only was she weighted by the cost of buying food she could not afford without guarantee of reimbursement, she also bore the responsibility to prepare and serve the food with “love” and “care” to a group of men who reciprocated none of those sentiments.

Hector’s experience illuminates this central conundrum of cultural production of food in the Chota Valley: those that participate in its consumption (literal and figurative) are, in many cases, unwilling to invest in the infrastructure and people that maintain these practices in the first place. But as was discussed in Chapter 2, maintaining cultural practices against an increasingly reconfigured landscape of race and geographic place relies upon the existence of group of people willing to keep the traditions alive. In the case of food, that means that women in both the Chota Valley and Quito have assumed the responsibility of producing platters of Choteño food authenticate both themselves and those who will consume. This is an obligation that reinforces the patriarchal structure of society: women’s tasks are taken for granted, despite being in addition or in opposition to other commitments they may have.

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In this chapter, I have focused on how migration is experienced by the people that it leaves behind. More generally, I have examined how ethnicity, food, land, and kinship are powerful forces of human cohesion. In my conclusion, I want to put my findings in conversation with the work of several postcolonial feminist theorists as their perspective has been a weighty influence on this work.

Chapter 6.

Conclusion: Expanding the Intercultural Imagination

"Imperialism emerged as a contradictory and ambiguous project, shaped as much by tensions within metropolitan policy and conflicts within colonial administrations- at best, ad hoc and opportunistic affairs- as by the varied cultures and circumstances into which colonials intruded and the conflicting responses and resistances with which they were met. For this reason, I remain unconvinced that the sanctioned binaries- colonizer-colonized, self-other, etc- are adequate to the task of accounting for, let alone strategically opposing, the tenacious legacies of imperialism. Such binaries run the risk of simply inverting, rather than overturning, dominant notions of power...At the crossroads of contradictions, the strategies for change may best be found."

- Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather*

The Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Negras (CONAMUNE) arose from the first Congress of Afro-Ecuadorian women in September, 1999, where participants unanimously agreed on the need for a gender-specific approach towards societal equality. The women involved in the CONAMUNE's conception were intimately aware of the illiteracy, poor working conditions, unfair pay, and general underdevelopment that affected Afro-Ecuadorian women more severely than Afro men. As a response, the CONAMUNE founded a central office in Quito and branches in ten provinces across the country, such as the office in La Concepción where I volunteered as an intern. In every CONAMUNE "refuge," as they are called, Afro women have a place for education, coordinated action, microlending operations, and connecting with other women in a safe space. This kind of organization responds directly to the problems specific to Afro-Ecuadorian women, recognizing their needs as distinct to both Ecuadorian women as a whole and to Afro men. This intersectional approach to empowerment is exactly what Anne

McClintock so eloquently articulates in the selection that begins this section: that thinking beyond, around, and in between binaries is the only way to dismantle and redistribute power.

Other feminists, particularly those who identify as postcolonial, have identified the need to examine forms of discrimination jointly. Like the women of the CONAMUNE, they draw upon their lived experience surviving at the fringes of societal belonging. bell hooks, a prolific scholar and activist, noted that, “it is essential for continued feminist struggle that black women recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter-hegemony.”¹¹⁵ Audre Lorde’s famous invocation that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” warns of the methodological delicacy of constituting new forms of power that reject the corrupt institutions of the past. These women envision a liberated world, where people are defined by their potential instead of their oppression, and where people are genuinely possessed of the power to decide their own identities. The theoretical framework that they have developed has much relevance towards understanding the exclusion, and subsequently envisioning the inclusion, of Afro-Ecuadorian women in the Ecuadorian nation.

As I have discussed at length in this thesis, ethnicity, food, land, and kinship are powerful forces of human cohesion. In the Chota Valley, I have

¹¹⁵ hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center*. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1984): 16.

attempted to map their intersection, and then critically examine how Afro-Ecuadorian women are implicated in its preservation. This project has made several substantial conclusions that may be helpful towards rethinking interculturality. Ethnicity is regionalized in Ecuador, and national belonging is a function of ethnic authenticity. This means that urbanization drains rural hometowns of their people but not of their value, and causes strain for those who are left behind to cultivate crops and culture. The people who remain in the Chota Valley uphold the traditional way of life despite fast-dwindling resources and people. More specifically, however, the people more implicated in this mandatory cultural production are women, who are corralled into spaces of domesticity as their roles as nurturers become naturalized as culturally authentic. Food is a powerful marker of identity, particularly because it physically embodies the strong relationship between people and land in the Chota Valley. Though my research briefly examined how this relationship was conditioned by a historical legacy in which Afro-Ecuadorians were excluded from land ownership, future studies might delve more comprehensively into how land acquired such intimate value.

Within Ecuador, this research suggests the need for development programs in the Chota Valley to combat migration, because this is a phenomenon that the people of the Chota Valley consider to be destroying their communities. Blanca Folleco, a 60-year resident of La Concepción, conveyed this sentiment while scooping out a bag of beans for me to take to the United States. She remarked, “I give away far more beans than we eat at

home. It is so awful, you know, with everyone living so far away in Quito."¹¹⁶

To make farming a more economically viable livelihood, crop and soil scientists could help by developing high-yielding varieties of culturally important crops such as the bean and manioc. Another tactic towards generating employment in the Chota Valley, which has already been enacted in some places, is the community tourism model. Tourism programs also offer a promising marriage of cultural production and financial gain, though as the case in Salinas demonstrates, it is crucial that they be transparent and accountable.

My research has targeted the unsustainability of conflating human and physical geography. Ethnicity and race must be deregionalized in Ecuador, and this is a goal that may be achieved only through the coordinated action of many policy instruments. This project examined the limitations and potential of the ethnoeducation curriculum; the latter becomes exponentially greater if the curriculum is taught outside of the Chota Valley. Afro-Ecuadorian schoolchildren in the city outnumber those in the countryside, and their schools continue to erase Afro-Ecuadorians from formal classroom instruction.

I hope that my research illuminates research gaps that future scholars might address. In particular, I should stress that my research has been predominantly ethnographic and as such has not thoroughly considered how legal discourses or state economic policies condition forms of collective

¹¹⁶ Folleco, Blanca. Fieldnotes, 1/24/2010

identity. My argument is founded in Latin America's history of ethnic and racial hierarchies, which I suggest have conditioned the ethnic structure of interculturality. Other scholars, such as Elizabeth Povinelli, have criticized similar multicultural movements but using a radically different methodology. Povinelli researches legal documents to examine how the criteria for citizenship are calculated through individual and group claims to land, material compensation, welfare, tax breaks, healthcare, and more.¹¹⁷ Thinking beyond disciplinary boundaries is similarly crucial towards comprehensive understanding.

The thesis is the product of my observations and time spent listening to people whose stories ignited in me a desire to contextualize and understand more completely. After observing intersecting narratives of national exclusion, cultural sustenance, gendered spaces, interculturality, and urbanization, I attempted to situate these themes in the historic discourses of Latin American race and ethnicity. Through this act, I located the rhetoric of interculturality so that I could examine how it has recreated much of the exclusion that it claims to assuage. At present, the development of a more pluralistic interpretation of ethnic belonging has been to the detriment of other forms of identity. Though this research has identified the exploitation of women as a prominent contradiction of interculturality, future scholarship could deconstruct its heteronormativity or question whether ethnicity and

¹¹⁷ Povinelli, Elizabeth. *The Cunning of Recognition: A Reply to John Frow and Meaghan Morris*. *Critical Inquiry*: Vol. 25, No. 3 (Spring, 1999): 633

class are conflated, and how this alienates and makes assumptions about groups such as poor mestizos.

But at its core, interculturality is about possibility, progress, and inclusion of formerly disenfranchised populations. It is also extraordinarily new, achieving constitutional inclusion as recently as 1998. Because of this stated commitment to open-mindedness and change, I conclude that interculturality's flaws are not irreparable but rather indicate that the ideology is still very much a work in progress. At its core, interculturality is inherently hopeful; it "reveals and formulates new perspectives in places that had previously failed and deceived us."¹¹⁸ Thus interculturality must continue to expand its criteria for national belonging, unsettling and dismantling constructions of normalcy that imperil and devalue certain lives. Its greatest and most beautiful strength is that it rises from the people. As people change, so must interculturality.

¹¹⁸ Walsh, 13

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