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Publication Date

2022

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Census, Consensus, and Dissensus:

The Sense of Ethnoracial Demography in Mexico and Colombia (1778-2020)

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Sociology

by

Juan David Delgado

2022

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Census, Consensus, and Dissensus:

The Sense of Ethnoracial Demography in Mexico and Colombia (1778-2020)

by

Juan David Delgado

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2022

Professor William Rogers Brubaker, Chair

Since the transatlantic slave trade in the sixteenth century, people of African descent in Latin America have experienced different forms of demographic visibility in colonial and republican censuses: visible under the Spanish imperial rule, invisible after independence and much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and visible again during the last thirty years. Why did the majority of the Afrodescendant population in Latin America disappear from the censuses after independence and reappear again after the 1990 census round? To answer this question, the dissertation focuses on Mexico and Colombia as two different cases in the institutionalization of ethnoracial categories of people of African descent in Latin America. Whereas Blackness in Mexico was institutionalized as an

element extrinsic to the national imaginary of the population, in Colombia, Blackness was conceived as an intrinsic component of the national demography. The dissertation suggests that the statistical representation of people of African descent was neither the demographic fate of the under-politicized accounts that reify the numeric representation of the population nor the demographic instrument of the over-politicized accounts that fail to recognize the limitations of numeric manipulation. Instead, the demography of Afrodescendant populations in Mexico and Colombia is conceptualized as a relatively uncontrolled translation of the objectified outcomes of past and present political struggles that are then embedded in census words and numbers. Using a mixed-methods research design that combines data from archival sources, published materials, in-depth interviews, and ethnographic observations, the dissertation develops two comparisons: an intra-imperial comparison of the official categorization of Blackness in the Viceroyalty of New Spain and the Viceroyalty New Granada during the late eighteenth century, and an inter-national comparison of recent episodes of census politics in Mexico and Colombia during the last thirty years. The first comparison shows how the intra-imperial politics of extraction and coercion shaped the demographic representation of Afrodescendent populations, with enduring consequences for the future independent nations. The second comparison demonstrates how the configuration of the political space of categorization struggles in Colombia and Mexico shaped the demographic representation of ethnoracial inequalities affecting people of African descent in each country.

The dissertation of Juan David Delgado is approved.

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2022

Para Alicia y el futuro que nos espera

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was fortunate to receive the generous support of several institutions that allowed me to carry out comparative fieldwork abroad and complete this dissertation. I genuinely appreciate the funding I received from the National Science Foundation, the Inter-American Foundation, and the UCLA Institute of American Cultures. I also want to thank the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at UCSD for providing a collegial environment that supported the writing phase of this dissertation during the Covid pandemic.

The analytical and methodological toolkit developed for this dissertation was forged in the formal and informal academic exchanges that happened in the UCLA department of sociology. My deepest gratitude and profound admiration go to my mentor, Rogers Brubaker, a true *maestro* in the art of delivering brilliant and incisive critiques without disempowering the voice of his students. Thank you, Rogers, for accompanying me with patience and generosity during the difficult moments of this journey. I feel fortunate to have found in César Ayala an inexhaustible source of intellectual challenges and personal joys. El mundo necesita más profesores con falsa conciencia de clase como César. I am particularly grateful to Mara Loveman. Thank you, Mara, for your kind words, insightful support, and profound inspiration. Special thanks to Roger Waldinger for offering sharp feedback and thought-provoking contributions in different phases of this dissertation.

In my graduate school experience, I benefited from nurturing interactions and lively academic spaces. I will not forget the powerful discussions of the 237 Seminar, brilliant minds engaged with my work and provided critiques that improved my scholarship. Thanks also to Edward Walker and Lina

Stepick for creating a supportive space in the Contentious Politics and Organizations Working Group. My research also benefited from multiple conversations and feedback from several professors. Thank you to Jennie Brand, Rebecca Emigh, Jacob Foster, Kevan Harris, Rubén Hernández-Leon, C.K. Lee, William Roy, Ka-Yuet Liu, and Tanya Stivers for their feedback and amicable conversations. I am also grateful to Wendy Fujinami and Irina Tauber who helped me navigate all the bureaucratic procedures that made this dissertation possible.

This academic journey would not have been nearly as rewarding without the intellectual and moral support of my friends. I am especially grateful to Matías Fernández, who became an intellectual and moral company throughout the PhD program. *Te extrañamos Mato*. For their wisdom and resources, feedback on drafts, countless funding application reviews, and attentiveness through several rounds of practice presentations, I want to thank Marie Berry, Chiara Galli, Neil Gong, Zachary Griffen, Andrew Le, Saskia Nauenberg Dunkell, and Amy Zhou. I want to thank my fellow summer teaching instructors Wisam Alshaibi, Abraham Calderón, Eduardo Duran, Andrew Herman, MJ Hill, Oscar Mayorga, Kyle Nelson, and Daniel Zipp. I appreciate the strong friendship we built fighting for better working conditions in the Sociology Department. I received an outpouring of support from colleagues and dear friends throughout these years, Christina Chica, Pablo Geraldo Bastías, Nicole Iturriaga, Luis Manuel Olguin, Gabriel Suchodolski, and Eleni Skaperdas. I also had the fortune to share my academic milestones with my old friends, Alex Tate, Jessica Huerta, Ilan Goldstein, and Peter Catron.

This research will not have been possible without the trust and generosity of many people who opened their doors and answered my questions in Mexico and Colombia. In both countries, social movement activists, academic experts, and state officials welcomed me with genuine hospitality. It

would take me to write an additional dissertation just to thank each one of them for all the generosity they gave me. Although their names are not mentioned in this section, they are included in the second part of this dissertation with deep respect for the work that each one has done. A todos, mil gracias por haber recibido a este *güerito* (visto desde México) o *paisita* (visto desde Colombia) en sus hogares y lugares de trabajo. Espero de corazón que esta investigación refleje adecuadamente sus logros y desafíos.

Finally, I want to thank my family for being a constant source of love for all these years. I am forever grateful to my parents Luz Stella and José Alberto for having instilled in me the sensitivity for social problems that led me to sociology. Thank you for believing in me, and for not letting me fail in the most challenging moments. I thank my sister Marcela, mi persona favorita, for having been an unconditional support in this process and for reminding me that there is life beyond the academic world. My childhood friends have been tireless cheerleaders, even when they didn't understand why the heck I was still in school. Les agradezco de corazón haber mantenido la amistad de siempre a pesar de la distancia y el silencio. Finally, I thank Leydy for everything we have endured together, for all the achievements and struggles. In restropective, everything has been beautiful. This would not have been possible without you. Some people search the world to find something like what we have, and the road ahead is longer than the one we left behind.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2019, DANE, Colombia's national statistics institute, published the results of the 2018 census. Compared to the 2005 census, the Afrodescendent population had decreased by 1.3 million, a reduction of 30 percent. Although DANE acknowledged issues of coverage, its director also suggested that lack of self-identification was partially responsible for the results. The reaction of Afrocolombian organizations was immediate. They framed the results as "statistical genocide" and underscored the negative effects of the statistical undercount for public policies aimed at people of African descent in Colombia.¹ A coalition of activists and lawyers proceeded to sue DANE, arguing a violation of the right to equality and non-discrimination, but also the right to ethnic and cultural diversity.

Also in 2019, a group of Afromexican organizations summoned INEGI, Mexico's national statistics institute, to a hearing before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) in Kingston, Jamaica, about the "inclusion of racial criteria in the Mexico 2020 census." According to leaders from these organizations, there was a "lack of formal and effective participation of Afromexicans in the discussions of the 2020 census round." Afromexican organizations denounced a lack of transparency in the process and a lack of dialogue about the inclusion of a new set of ethnonyms or identification categories in the census question. Although representatives from INEGI did not attend, other Mexican officials disputed the "racial framing" of the session. According to them, "the Mexican state assumes that the racial criterion is not necessarily what defines the identity of

¹ El Espectador, "*Resultados del censo evidencian un 'genocidio estadístico:' organizaciones afro*" (November 19, 2019).

a community.” Additionally, Mexican officials also announced publicly for the first time that INEGI was planning to remove the category “Afromexican” from the census question it had included in 2015 (IACHR 2019).

These episodes in Colombia and Mexico show two of the recent developments in the politics of official categorization in Latin America. During the last thirty years, Latin American states that rarely or never included census questions on Afrodescendent populations began using official categories of Blackness to enumerate people of African descent.² Whereas in the 1980 census round only Brazil and Cuba made Afrodescendent populations demographically visible, by the end of the 2010 census round fifteen Latin American states included self-identification questions for these populations (Del Popolo 2019; Loveman 2014).³ The new census questions made some of the existing categorizations official, reshaping ethnoracial boundary making processes (Brubaker 2009; Wimmer 2013). The officialization of categories of Blackness represented a significant change in long-standing projects of nation-building that sought to weaken (if not eliminate) ethnoracial distinctions. For decades, nationalist ideologies of racial and ethnic fusion in Latin America discouraged the official use of categories of Blackness. Now, with the exception of Chile and Dominican Republic, most Latin American censuses include ethnoracial categories to identify people of African descent (Loveman

² I use the notion “categories of Blackness” to reference contested classifications that attempt to fix ethnoracial meanings in categorical representations of people of African descent. In this sense, I understand “Black,” “Afromexican,” and “Afrodescendant” as ethnoracial categories of Blackness. While I use the plural to be mindful about the disputed meanings that are at stake in classification struggles, I maintain the overarching reference to “Blackness.”

³ The fifteen countries are Argentina (2010), Bolivia (2012), Brazil (2010), Colombia (2018), Costa Rica (2011), Cuba (2012), Ecuador (2010), Guatemala (2018), Honduras (2013), Mexico (2015), Panama (2010), Paraguay (2012), Peru (2017), Uruguay (2011), and Venezuela (2011).

2021). Why did Afrodescendent populations become statistically visible and how were particular categories of Blackness made official?

The scholarship on official ethnoracial categorization in Latin America has highlighted the combined influence of social movement organizations and international agencies on the official inclusion of new categories (Andrews 2016; Angosto Ferrández and Kradolfer 2012; Angosto-Ferrández 2014; Antón Sánchez and Del Popolo 2009; Gonzalez Huaman, Moraes Silva, and Sulmont 2021; Htun 2004; Lennox and Minott 2011; Loveman 2014; Nobles 2000; Paschel 2013, 2016; Powell and Moraes Silva 2018; Saldívar and Walsh 2014; Urrea 2011). On the one hand, coalitions of local and global activist networks targeted national statistics agencies, organizing campaigns to demand the collection of ethnoracial census data. On the other, international agencies pressured Latin American states by supporting domestic activism, advising state officials, and developing new international standards on ethnoracial data collection. In sum, the literature has convincingly shown that the inclusion of ethnoracial questions and categories to enumerate people of African descent is attributable to the combined influence of multiple actors across local and global settings.

Yet while the multi-scalar collaboration between domestic and international actors is a crucial aspect of the recent census reforms, scholars have rarely developed longitudinal and comparative accounts of the conditions that made possible the current demographic representation of Blackness in Latin America. The demographic visibility or invisibility of ethnoracial boundaries is inextricable from the ongoing dynamics of state formation and nation building. The process of officially recognizing ethnoracial divides within the population confronts explicit nationalist ideologies (i.e., nationalism), as

well as implicit nationalist intuitions (i.e., nationhood).⁴ In other words, the officialization of ethnoracial categories involves the political projects of intellectual elites and state officials, but also the everyday assumptions of ordinary people exposed to those projects. In Latin America, imperial legacies, republican projects, recent crises, and contemporary negotiations have shaped the explicit and implicit representations of Afrodescendent populations. And yet, the methodological presentism of case studies has become an obstacle to analyzing the officialization of ethnoracial categories as an ongoing *process* that happens through multiple *timescales*.⁵ Two general questions on two historical junctures remain open regarding the evolution of official ethnoracial categorizations of Blackness in Latin America.

First, we need to understand *how* Latin American states transitioned from an imperial context of statistical visibility of Afrodescendent populations to a republican condition of relative official invisibility. Although some bureaucracies in the region continued classifying people of African descent after independence, most Latin American states avoided using ethnoracial questions to identify these populations in their national censuses (Loveman 2014:241).⁶ Despite the postcolonial rhetoric of color-blind republicanism, racialist and racist notions of development informed the public understanding of national populations during the nineteenth century in the region (Andrews 2004;

⁴ Research on these two domains has been extensive. Classic statements on the macro-historical origins of nationalism include Gellner (1983), Anderson (2006), and Hobsbawm (1992). Emblematic works on the micro-institutional foundations of nationhood include Billig (1995), and Edensor (2002). For recent attempts to bridge both literatures, see Brubaker et al. (2006) and Surak (2013).

⁵ For notable exceptions to presentist analyses of official categorization in Latin America, see Lovema (2014) and Emigh, Ahmed, and Riley (2021).

⁶ For example, during the 1890s, about ten Latin American states conducted national censuses, but only Brazil and Cuba gave visibility to people of African descent (Loveman 2014:241).

Appelbaum 2003; Larson 2004) . For decades, Latin American elites attempted to inculcate a unifying vision of the ethnoracial composition of their national populations. Different notions of Blackness were certainly part of elite projects that tried to institutionalize this vision. And yet, unlike countries like the U.S., many of these socially available ethnoracial categories *failed* to become official census categories to classify people of African descent.⁷ What, then, are the imperial legacies of the ethnoracial understanding of Latin American populations? Why did republican censuses avoid the enumeration of people of African descent? We lack comparative studies on the kaleidoscopic dynamics of classification and stratification during the European imperial rule in the Americas. We also know little of the consequences of imperial knowledge for future nationalist endeavors that envisioned without enumerating Afrodescendent populations.

Second, it is crucial to understand *how* nationalist understandings of national populations underwent a crisis and a reconfiguration of the demographic imagination during the last decades of the twentieth century, and with what consequences. By the end of the century, longstanding nationalist projects of *mestizaje* faced increasing challenges, and Latin American states were under pressure to recognize a restricted but legitimate *number* and *type* of ethnoracial categories to enumerate people of African descent. As a result of this problem of “legitimate classification” (Starr 1992:265), the official principles for ethnoracial enumeration have varied widely within the region. Latin American states have enumerated Afrodescendent populations by reference to ancestry, customs, identity, group membership, physical appearance, and race. For example, census takers in Argentina ask for “African-

⁷ For an analysis of the role of race in early U.S. censuses, see Nobles (2000:26–31), and Emigh, Riley and Ahmed (2016a:162ff).

origin ancestors,” but in Cuba, they ask for “skin color,” and in Ecuador, for “culture and customs” (Loveman 2014:253–63). The number of identification categories and the type of classificatory criteria have significant consequences for estimating group sizes and ethnoracial inequalities affecting people of African descent (Bailey, Loveman, and Muniz 2013; Loveman, Muniz, and Bailey 2012; Saldívar, Arenas, et al. 2018). Nevertheless, scholars have rarely focused on explaining the officialization of specific categories and notions of Blackness, as well as the underlying legitimization process that defines which social distinctions are recognized and which ones are ignored.

To address these two general questions, this dissertation focuses on Mexico and Colombia as two different cases in the institutionalization of ethnoracial categories of people of African descent in Latin America. Like other countries in the region, Indigenous peoples in Mexico and Colombia represented the presumed ethnoracial “other” of the nation (Wade 2010). Despite being comparatively more ambiguous, the representation of people of African descent has been equally constitutive of nationalist projects of *mestizaje*. Whereas Blackness in Mexico was institutionalized as an element *extrinsic* to the national imaginary of the population (Cohen 2020; Sue 2021; Vinson and Vaughn 2004), in Colombia, Blackness was conceived as an *intrinsic* component of the national demography (Appelbaum 2016; Arias 2007; Múnera 2005; Sanders 2004; Wade 1993). How did this happen? How did Mexicans learn to assume that “there are no Black people in Mexico”? Conversely, how did Colombians develop a sense of the “Black demographics” of their country?

Answering these questions is not as simple as it seems. Indeed, it requires breaking with nationalist habits of thought that for decades intuitively estimated the number of people of African descent against the presumed ethnoracial composition of Latin American populations. The lack of

Blackness in Mexico, for example, is an idea that dates back to the nineteenth century. The last colonial census reported 635,000 persons of African descent, representing 10% of the total population (Andrews 2004:41). And yet, by 1836, Mexican liberal elites decreed that Black people “will disappear completely within half a century” (Mora 1836:V1:74). Similarly, in Colombia, colonial records showed 306,000 persons of African descent, representing 39% of the total population (Andrews 2004:41). However, this did not prevent Colombian elites from imagining a nationalist future in which “the diversity of races will end, because the white race will absorb and destroy the Indian, the Black, the Yellow, etc.” (quoted in Jaramillo Uribe 1964:198). For both the Mexican and Colombian elites, whitening the population was part of the nationalist project of *mestizaje*. And yet, the persistence of Blackness in the demographic imagination of Colombia contrasts with its presumed disappearance in Mexico. Was demography a *destiny*—an obstacle to the Colombian elites’ nationalist project, one that their Mexican counterparts were able to overcome? Or was demography an *instrument*, a sophisticated tool serving apparently similar but fundamentally different projects of *mestizaje*?

The answer to these questions should avoid under-politicized accounts that reify the numeric representation of the population, but also over-politicized accounts that fail to recognize the limitations of numeric manipulation. As we will see, the demography of Afrodescendant populations in Mexico and Colombia is a relatively *uncontrolled translation* of the objectified outcomes of past and present political struggles that are then embedded in census words and numbers. Contested relationships between colonial authorities, republican intellectuals, state officials, international experts, and more recently, academic researchers and social movement activists shaped the conditions

of demographic visibility of people of African descent: visible under the Spanish imperial rule, invisible after independence and much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and visible again during the last thirty years.

To conduct this research, I developed a historical-comparative approach using a mixed-methods research design that combines data from archival sources, published materials, in-depth interviews, census counts, and ethnographic observations collected during more than eighteen months of multi-sited fieldwork in Mexico and Colombia. The longitudinal analysis unfolds in two parts and involves two different comparisons.

The first part of the dissertation focuses on the legacies of ethnoracial enumeration that Mexican and Colombian elites inherited from the Spanish empire. Here, I compare official categorizations *within* imperial domains (i.e., intra-imperial comparison) to understand how the demographic visibility of people of African descent varied according to the predominant imperatives of the Spanish crown in the Viceroyalty of New Spain (the colonial territory of Mexico) and the Viceroyalty New Granada (the colonial territory of Colombia). This part shows that the intra-imperial politics of extraction and coercion during the late eighteenth century shaped the official demographic representation of people of African descent within the Spanish empire, with enduring consequences for the future independent nations.

The second part focuses on the critical junctures at the end of the twentieth century that challenged different kinds of demographic invisibility affecting people of African descent, and the emergence of political spaces that made possible contemporary forms of census politics during the last twenty years. Here, I compare the officialization of new categories *between* national domains (i.e.,

inter-national comparison) to understand how similar crises of the nationalist project of mestizaje resulted in different trajectories in the enumeration of people of African descent. This part shows that Colombia and Mexico experienced similar critical junctures during the 1990s and 2000s that nonetheless resulted in different configurations of the space of categorization struggles and different demographic representations of ethnoracial inequality.

Politics of Official Ethnoracial Categorization in Latin America

The recent inclusion of ethnoracial questions in Latin American censuses to enumerate people of African descent is widely documented. Whereas most national statistics agencies consistently enumerated Indigenous populations during the twentieth century, Afrodescendent populations were no longer identified after the 1950s. During the 1940s, for instance, countries like Brazil, Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, and Peru rendered visible official categories of Blackness in national censuses, but by the 1980s, only Brazil and Cuba did. Beginning in the 1990s, however, the situation changed dramatically. Afrodescendent populations were demographically visible in two countries in the 1990s, then nine in the 2000s, and fifteen by the end of the 2010s (Loveman 2014:241, 253). Why did this shift happen? What are the sociogenetic, conjunctural, structural, and pragmatic conditions that made the enumeration of people of African descent possible?⁸

⁸ The reference to sociogenetic, conjunctural, structural, and pragmatic conditions is modeled on Sewell's invitation to reconstruct "eventful temporalities" (2005:100ff). As I understand them, they are epistemological resources to explain causal and constitutive relationships across timescales. From this perspective, sociogenetic conditions reconstruct long-term processes that shape social patterns and their representation, conjunctural conditions refer to the coincidence of independent series of events that help explain critical junctures, structural conditions point out to mutually oriented sets of

The enumeration of Afrodescendent populations in Latin America has been historically structured by the representational politics of state-formation and nation-building processes. However, there is scant research on the *sociogenetic conditions* of discursive representation of Blackness and its relationship with official census categories. Existing scholarship sometimes acknowledges the existence of multiple categories of Blackness used to enumerate Afrodescendent populations in contemporary censuses (Paschel 2013). Yet, we know little about the historical origins and trajectories of those categories. Despite the growing body of literature tracing legacies of imperialism and colonialism within contemporary forms of racial classification (Bortoluci and Jansen 2013; Quisumbing King 2019; Steinmetz 2014; Stoler 2020), only a few scholars have examined the impact of imperial enumeration approaches on republican censuses in Latin America (Loveman and Muniz 2007). More recently, scholars have begun to examine similarities and differences in racial classification across imperial projects and the effects of that classification on everyday forms of categorization (Emigh, Ahmed, and Riley 2021). However, we lack comparative studies that trace the historical evolution of categories of Blackness comprehensively from imperial to republican in Latin America.⁹ Although the imperial censuses of Spanish America counted people of African descent (Solano and Ponce 1988), the influence of such enumerations in the nationalist representation of Latin American populations has rarely been analyzed.

relationships that account for bounded interactions, and pragmatic conditions denote modalities of engagement that afford the analysis of ritualistic situations. On the utility of the Bourdieusian framework to analyze some of these timescales, see Steinmetz (2011).

⁹ For an emblematic exception to this trend, see Mörner (1970)

Regarding census politics of the last thirty years, the existing scholarship has described various instances of contested negotiations between state and nonstate actors over the inclusion of ethnoracial questions and categories (Kertzer and Arel 2002). However, the *conjunctural conditions* that made this dispute possible at any given merit more systematic attention. To be sure, scholars have underscored the role of democratic openings (Powell and Moraes Silva 2018), neoliberal reforms (Saldívar and Walsh 2014), and international policy norms (Htun 2004; Loveman 2014; Paschel 2010) in the emergence of political spaces to articulate and concede (at least rhetorically) ethnoracial demands. However, it is unclear how these background conditions challenge established practices of official enumeration. Likewise, while some of the literature notes the local and global pressure from social movement organizations and international agencies to collect official ethnoracial data (Htun 2004; Loveman 2014; Paschel 2016), we still lack analytical tools to understand which conditions of “state disequilibrium” (Paschel 2010:745) cause state actors to reassess existing categorizations. Since national statistics agencies strive for monopoly over the symbolic power of nomination (Loveman 2005)—maintaining constant a highly selective set of population categories— it is unclear why census politics emerge in the first place.

In reconstructing the census as a space of political dispute, existing research has fruitfully incorporated a growing variety of actors into the analysis. Most of this scholarship has focused on the contested interactions between state bureaucrats, social movement activists, and officials from international agencies (Angosto-Ferrández 2014; Loveman 2014; Paschel 2013). These accounts examine coalitions of civil organizations and international institutions to analyze locally organized and globally mobilized challenges to national statistics agencies. Beyond this analytic triangle, other

research has incorporated the role of additional actors such as academics (Htun 2004; Nobles 2000; Paschel 2016; Urrea 2011), technocrats (Powell and Moraes Silva 2018), and census-takers (Gonzalez Huaman et al. 2021), uncovering reciprocal paths for influencing the production of ethnoracial statistics. What difference does it make to incorporate a growing number of actors and strategies into the analysis?

While scholarly narratives have become more complex, they have yet to fully explore the *structural conditions* shaping patterns of interactions (and their representation) during episodes of census politics.¹⁰ To explain the inclusion of ethnoracial categories, scholars have distinguished between different types of claims-making (e.g., culturally-oriented or phenotypically-based) (Paschel 2013), various international influences (e.g., normative or coercive) (Loveman 2014), and sources of academic support (e.g., anthropological or sociological) (Htun 2004; Nobles 2000; Urrea 2011). However, we lack insight into the interests that make these alternatives possible. The literature describes various struggles over enumerating specific demographic categories, yet there is a dearth of research on *how* contending justifications are bounded and distributed. Although we know that state and nonstate actors often meet on a “political battleground” when competing for the inclusion of new categories (Kertzer and Arel 2002:20), there is less agreement on how to conceptualize the relationships of reciprocal influence and validation that emerge from this struggle (Emigh, Riley, and Ahmed 2020:299–307).

¹⁰ Following Bourdieu’s methodological structuralism, I refer to the notion of structure in an epistemological sense, avoiding ontological connotations. For a discussion of epistemological and ontological uses of the notion of structure, see Lizardo (2010).

Finally, existing scholarship has documented various kinds of ethnoracial distinctions that Latin American states have used to enumerate people of African descent. The set of categories of Blackness varies widely across national polities. Whereas in Colombia, “*Raizal*,” “*Palenquero*,” “Black,” “Mulatto,” “Afrodescendant,” and “Afrocolombian” are the official categories of Blackness (Paschel 2013), in Peru, these categories include “Black,” “*Moreno*” (Brown), “*Zambo*,” “Mulatto,” “Afroperuvian People,” and “Afrodescendant.” (Del Popolo 2019). Additionally, within each polity, the nature of the categories used has significant repercussions for estimating the group size and ethnoracial disadvantages affecting people of African descent (Loveman et al. 2012). In Brazil, for example, different classification schemes generate vastly different estimates of the size of the Black population, ranging from 10.8% (relying on interviewer classification) to 59.3% (classifying by ancestry, including all individuals who had at least one Black or brown parent). Moreover, relying on ancestry shows higher levels of income inequality as compared to other classification schemes (Bailey et al. 2013). Although the officialization of ethnoracial categories has wide-reaching repercussions for statistical analyses and policy interventions, the legitimization practices validating a particular set of ethnoracial categories have received little attention in the literature.

Scholars have described multiple cases of inclusion of ethnoracial categories, but we lack a conceptualization of *pragmatic conditions* that account for the modality of engagement in situations of confrontation or cooperation leading to the official recognition of categories. While we know that some official categories are negotiated, we need analytical tools to identify the type of legitimization practices that make such negotiation possible (Kertzer and Arel 2002:18–23). In cases outside Latin America, scholars have described category legitimization occurring through cognitive processes of

circulation across fields (Mora 2014a). However, the socio-political process producing official categories before they are widely circulated has not been scrutinized.¹¹ To advance our knowledge of the engagement that makes legitimation practices possible, we need to understand the process that turns situations of competition into situations of collaboration (Rodríguez-Muñiz 2017).

In sum, despite growing research in the study of Latin American census politics, we still have limited knowledge of different *timescales* through which the legitimation of official categories of Blackness becomes possible. The lack of systematic studies on the problem of “legitimate classification” (Starr 1992:265) is partially related to the lack of an analytical vocabulary to explain how relevant principles of classification and categories of identification become official. To reconstruct the *persistence* of nationalist representations, we can analyze long-term patterns of discursive representations that shape taken-for-granted intuitions about blackness. To understand the *timing* of the officialization process, we can identify the critical junctures that make states actors relatively open to the public debate over existing categories. To account for the *distribution* of interests and strategies of the actors involved, we can identify the structure of the relational space that shapes contending interests and justifications over new categories. Finally, to understand the *mode* of legitimation practices, we can analyze the modality of engagement that renders a selective set of categories official.

¹¹ This distinction is consequential as research on organizational institutionalism has shown the difference between cognitive and sociopolitical legitimacy. Whereas cognitive legitimation is associated with the “spread of knowledge about a new venture,” sociopolitical legitimation refers to the “process by which key stake-holders, the general public, key opinion leaders, or government officials accept a venture as appropriate and right” (Aldrich and Fiol 1994:648). While there are some studies in census politics about the former (Mora 2014a), there is less research on the latter. For a review of recent scholarship on the role of expertise in the production of numbers, see Berman and Hirschman (2018:259–60)

Developing this relational and processual account contributes to expand our knowledge of population politics.

Categorical Officialization as an Inter-Field Process of Legitimation

Drawing on Bourdieusian field theory (Buchholz 2016; Emirbayer and Johnson 2008; Hilgers and Mangez 2015; Krause 2017; Martin 2003), the sociology of knowledge production and expertise (Camic 2013; Eyal 2013, 2019; Medvetz 2012), and the political sociology of official statistics (Emigh et al. 2020; Mora 2014a; Rodríguez-Muñiz 2020), I propose conceptualizing the politics of official ethnoracial categorization as an *inter-field process of legitimation* in which political actors struggle with and over the official categorical representation of the nation and the state's authority to enumerate the national population appropriately.¹² Population politics, or the dispute over the public perception of demographic categories and demographic change (Rodríguez-Muñiz 2020), is fundamentally a struggle for symbolic power or the capacity to impose the “legitimate mode of representation of the social world” (Bourdieu 2018:73–74). The symbolic power to make classifications appear natural and inevitable is often conceptualized as the prerogative of modern states (Loveman 2005). However, understanding the exercise of symbolic power beyond state actors requires a broader perspective and a more robust analytic vocabulary.

¹² I understand categorical legitimacy as the presumed appropriateness of a categorical system within the boundaries of the state. Legitimation is the process through which appropriateness is constructed in reference to multiple sources of authority to obtain acceptability. This article focuses on sociopolitical rather than cognitive legitimacy (Aldrich and Fiol 1994). For a recent overview of research on legitimacy within organizational institutionalism, see Deephouse et al. (2017).

To account for the sociogenetic, conjunctural, structural, and pragmatic conditions that make this process constitutively possible (Abend 2020; Hirschman and Reed 2014; Pacewicz 2020), I suggest four different yet interrelated notions. First, I employ the notion of *ethnoracial nomos* to indicate taken-for-granted ethnoracial principles of vision and division institutionalized through nation-making projects sponsored by the state (Bourdieu 2014). Second, I introduce the notion of *crisis of nomos* to understand critical moments that expose the arbitrary limits of such principles previously taken for granted (Bourdieu 1998:53).¹³ Third, I use the notion of *interstitial space* to conceptualize relationships that emerge between fields, enabling actors with unequal but interdependent forms of authority¹⁴ to compete over the legitimate representation of ethnoracial categories (Bourdieu 2020:221–22).¹⁵ Finally, I suggest the notion of *symbolic exchanges of antagonistic cooperation* to account for legitimation practices that render official a new set of ethnoracial categories through collective bargaining (Bourdieu 1998:92–104).¹⁶

Institutionalization of an Ethnoracial Nomos

States regularly impose within their territory a *nomos*, a “shared principle of vision and division” that structures the cognitive and evaluative categories we use to make sense of the world

¹³ I follow Bourdieu in understanding *nomos* as a set of cognitive and evaluative principles of legitimate categorization widely recognized within the limits of the state (Bourdieu 2014). Assuming, for example, that national populations are divided into “ethnic groups” is a form of *nomos*. For a similar framing of this notion, see Berger (2011).

¹⁴ On the mutually constitutive relationship between authority and enumeration see Espeland and Stevens (2008).

¹⁵ For a recent conceptualization of the dynamics of inter-field spaces, see Eyal (2013).

¹⁶ The expression “antagonistic cooperation” comes from Sumner (1906). For a recent use of this notion in field analysis, see Medvetz (2012).

(Bourdieu 1998:53, 2014:173–74).¹⁷ National censuses are, by definition, the codified expression of taken-for-granted distinctions that are typically accepted as objective (Starr 1987). Before they appear in the objectified history of collective positions and the embodied history of individual dispositions (Bourdieu 1981), they must be articulated within the “classifying mind” of the state (Anderson 2006:165) and the intellectual elites that exercise their influence through it. The ethnoracial vision and division of the national *nomos* (in which Blackness is made intuitable) is a conceptual creation inherent in elite classification practices that projected an invented nationalist tradition (*a modus operandi*) (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), but also in ordinary identification practices that recreated an imagined nationalist community (*an opus operatum*) (Anderson 2006).

Census taking is enabled by categorical representations that are usually taken for granted. Census officials, for example, may not include a census question if they believe the average citizen will not understand it. Even if they include the question, census takers may not ask it if they anticipate respondents will feel uncomfortable; and if posed correctly, respondents might not answer it if it does not resonate with their own identification experience. Furthermore, even if some respond well, census officials may not feel comfortable presenting disaggregated census data that follow dubious or problematic categorical divisions. And even if they make that information public, academics, activists, journalists, and politicians (among others) might not use the disaggregated data if it does not fit

¹⁷ Although the notion of *nomos* helps identify the constitutive conditions of possibility of persistent ethnoracial categorizations, this does not suggest that it is “the cause” of such persistence. As the scholarship on everyday nationalism has shown (Brubaker et al. 2006:362–64; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008), taken-for-granted understandings of ethnic or nationalist distinctions can be publicly available (and even politically salient) without becoming effective in daily situations and interactions. Although a *nomos* may emerge from the historical modes of production of nationalist discourses and practices, the effectiveness of such *nomos* should be evaluated within the timescales in which it is institutionalized and internalized.

categorical expectations at stake in each specific field. From start to finish, our assumptions, and intuitions, about the national *nomos* largely determine the content and shape of censuses as well as the legibility of their findings.

The census, in turn, contributes to recreating the myth of the nation and its divisions. Censuses are constitutive elements of nation-building, state-making, and knowledge-production processes. Through censuses, states promote a totalizing image of nationally bounded populations (Patriarca 1996:7), create official categories and officialize categorical modes of thinking (Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004:34; Kertzer and Arel 2002:11), and reproduce dominant ideologies of ethnoracial difference or sameness (Clark 1998:186–87; Hirschman 1987:568; Nobles 2000:12; Simon 2012:1376). As a national ceremony that occurs every ten years, the census helps to institutionalize the well-founded fiction that “everyone is in it, and that everyone has one—and only one—extremely clear place” (Anderson 2006:165–66). At the same time, the enactment of censuses increases the bureaucratic capacity of the state to organize and recognize people’s daily experience (Clemens and Cook 1999:454; Scott 1998:81–83), create subjective processes of personhood aligned with official categories (Goldberg 1997:29–30; Hacking 1986; Urla 1993:820), and ultimately enhance the symbolic power of bureaucratic authorities to build consent around administrative practices (Lam 2011:49; Loveman 2005:1676, 2014:9; Mora 2014a:186–88; Rodríguez-Muñiz 2017:391–94). The census is, in this sense, a process that explicitly projects “the nation” as much as it implicitly naturalizes it.

Configuration of a Crisis of Nomos

The inclusion of new census questions and categories usually results from a specific kind of legitimacy crisis: a crisis of *nomos*. A crisis of *nomos* renders predominant modes of categorical representation arbitrary, framing existing categories as “suspect classifications” (Starr 1992:266). This type of crisis builds up through iconoclastic public events of nationalist representations (Zubrzycki 2013), but also through private experiences of rupture with nationalist assumptions (Surak 2013). Crises of *nomos* are inseparably “historical events” and “cultural transformations” that open a space to redefine “what really exists,” “what is good,” and “what is possible” (Sewell 1996:861). Coinciding critical events and critical discourses can thus “break the doxic relation to the social world” (Bourdieu 1988:182), questioning the legitimacy of the state to represent the national population objectively. As a result, census politics emerge as a nationalist form of “remedial political action” (Brubaker 1996:79) to address the categorical injustices of the past. Under a crisis of *nomos*, the composition of the national population appears not as a natural development but as a political deception.

If we consider the state as a “culmination of a process of concentration of different species of capital,” a crisis of *nomos* produces fragmentation of the “statist capital,” which loses symbolic power over other forms of capital (Bourdieu 1998:41–42). This significantly diminishes the state’s credibility and the ability to legitimately impose new categories for enumeration, affecting the primitive accumulation and routine exercise of symbolic power (Loveman 2005:1657–59). Under *nomic* crises, a plurality of authoritative nonstate actors openly and successfully challenge the legitimacy of the state to represent the national population. At this point, the “anomie of competing principles of legitimation” replaces dominant commonsensical understandings of *nomos* (Bourdieu 1991a:380).

As long as the legitimacy of the state remains in question, nonstate actors may legitimately dispute the official representation of the national population. A crisis of *nomos* is, in this sense, a crisis of “state boundary mechanisms” (Mayrl and Quinn 2016) in which the “limits of state” (Mitchell 1991) are also at stake. Trading symbolic capital with nonstate actors at a lower exchange rate (i.e., recognizing the critiques of previously marginalized actors as legitimate) blurs the dividing lines between the authority of the state and the authority of the rest. Symbolic boundaries that maintain the “functional autonomy” between fields—but also the “vertical autonomy” among them—are in flux (Buchholz 2016). Nonstate actors unequally equipped to dispute the enumeration of population categories in the census are now recognizable as valid interlocutors with legitimate concerns.

Emergence of an Interstitial Space

The critical moment opens a political space at the intersection of different fields where the struggle for the monopoly of the legitimate representation of the social world plays out. As circuits of legitimation expand (Bourdieu 1996b:382–89), census politics itself springs up as an *interstitial space* between fields (Bourdieu 2020:221–22). During this process, actors with unequal but interdependent forms of authority struggle over the “*official naming*” of ethnoracial categories (Bourdieu 1991b:239). Compared to consolidated fields, interstitial spaces are structured by multiple hierarchies (Bourdieu 1996a), unclear regulations (Eyal 2013), unstable symbolic exchange rates (Mudge and Vauchez 2012), and symbolic balancing acts (Medvetz 2012).¹⁸ In this space of interstitial emergence (Mann 1986),

¹⁸ The distinction between fields and interstitial spaces is analytical and requires empirical demonstration. Moreover, it is a distinction of degree and not of kind. Interstitial spaces may crystallize as fields (Eyal 2013:177–78).

legal experts, government bureaucrats, academic researchers, and social movement activists draw upon different forms of credibility and validation to do battle over the cognition and recognition of the “objective criteria” for enumeration (Bourdieu 1991b:225–26).¹⁹

Unequally equipped to impose and legitimize a given view of the social world, various agents wield an authority proportionate to the “symbolic capital” they have acquired in previous conflicts within different fields (Bourdieu 1991b:239–40, 2018:87ff). As legitimacy becomes fragmented, contending principles of legitimation give rise to a symbolic struggle over the “rightness of categories” (Starr 1992:273). The politics of census making thus unfolds across various institutional orders and scales (Thompson 2016). Contemporary debates over the official enumeration of population categories may require engagement with at least *four field-specific forms of symbolic capital*: 1) the legal authority of the juridical field, 2) the administrative authority of the bureaucratic field, 3) the activist authority of the social movement field, and 4) the scientific authority of the academic field (See Figure A).²⁰

First, census categorizations are bound up in the “power of naming” held by the juridical field (Bourdieu 1987:837ff). Whether the credibility of census categories emanates from the courts (Mora 2014b), constitutional reforms (Loveman 2014), or international human rights conventions (Clark

¹⁹ Following Peter Berger, Mora refers to this type of interstitial space between state and nonstate actors as a “plausibility structure” (Mora 2014b:13). Unlike Berger’s, Bourdieu’s notion of inter-field spaces helps account for the contested distribution of organizational trajectories and categorical position-takings.

²⁰ The number and type of inter-field relations structuring census politics might vary according to specific critical junctures and particular strategies of legitimation. Moreover, the standing of actors also changes according to their engagement with different sources of legitimacy. For a field-theoretic analysis of census politics reconstructing a different set of fields, actors, and strategies see Mora (2014b).

2017), it is derived from legal mandates and follows legal classifications.²¹ Although legally codified categories can be operative in different degrees, they are more likely to be enumerated by the census. Additionally, the language of rights makes it possible to demand the inclusion or justify the exclusion of new questions and categories.

Second, census classifications reflect the administrative capacity of state agencies to officialize categorization principles and govern populations and resources (Anderson 2006; Bourdieu 2014; Scott 1998). The census is one of the oldest forms of administrative calculation used to legitimize the power of the state (Mennicken and Espeland 2019). Administrative allocation processes are grounded in state agencies' ability to channel resources through categorical distinctions and justify these discretionary measures in terms of their "procedural correctness" (Jenkins 2008:188–89). As targets and instruments of census politics, administrative procedures orchestrate the interests of state actors around "defensible" categorical decisions (Eyal 2019:135–36).

Third, for social movement activists, census categories constitute crucial stakes in the political struggles over group-making representations. Activists refer to census categories to articulate categorical representations that satisfy their interests and the interests of those they claim to represent (Bourdieu 1991b). Through the collective mobilization of a sense of commonality, connectedness, and groupness (Brubaker and Cooper 2000), activists shape the public existence of actual or potential

²¹ Although it is often reduced to the territorial level of the state, I understand the juridical field as a multi-scalar global dimension that is embedded in, but relatively autonomous from, national configurations (Buchholz 2016, pp.40–43). On the international configuration of the legal field see Bourdieu (1996c), and Dezalay and Garth (1996).

census categories. Authoritative demonstration of a demographic of number, strength, cohesion, and visibility makes categorical claims politically effective (Urla 1993).

Finally, scientific claims about the “objective” existence of ethnoracial classifications shape the social reality of population categories (Bourdieu 2018; Foucault 2009; Hacking 2007). By providing a “certificate of realism,” or a “verdict of utopianism,” even the most arguably neutral scientific statements participate in symbolic struggles over public recognition (or misrecognition) of ethnoracial categories (Bourdieu 1991b). When it enters the public policy domain, scientific knowledge becomes a form of symbolic power that helps constitute and define that which it analyzes (Goldberg 1997; Hirschman 1987; Zuberi 2001). In population politics, scientific descriptions and political prescriptions overlap significantly, so that the science of the probable becomes intertwined with the politics of the feasible.

Enacting Symbolic Exchanges of Antagonistic Cooperation

Antagonistic cooperation emerges when various actors find themselves exchanging sources of symbolic power in a particular *economy of symbolic goods* (Bourdieu 1998:92–104). In a game where actors cannot legitimately impose their vision without recognizing that of their adversaries, cooperation emerges through the exchange of antagonistic claims of authority. In this manner, international human rights organizations permit state actors to assert legal authority if they also accept their recommendations; social organizations allow government officials to claim popular consent if they also validate their demands; and academic experts authorize social movement leaders to enlist scientific support if they also assume their perspective. In population politics, official categorizations

are likely to crystallize within exchanges of authority that are both scientifically reasonable *and* politically respectful.

New categories of national representation become officialized through a particular temporality of symbolic exchanges. The legitimation process unfolds in a time of *finite repetition* that avoids the reversible time of science and the irreversible time of politics (Eyal 2019:90). Symbolically effective exchanges of authoritative reasoning and empirical demonstration are conducted through “temporal tactics” that forecast, foreshadow, and forewarn demographic futures (Rodríguez-Muñiz 2021:11–13, 205–6). Following the twofold logic of the gift economy (Bourdieu 2000:191–202), the appropriate *temporal interval* between symbolic exchanges (which must be neither too long nor too short) allows participants to experience the exercise of unequal authority as “respectful,” “reasonable,” and ultimately, “objective.” Under these conditions of “symbolic alchemy”—which are also conditions of “symbolic domination” (Bourdieu 1998:99ff)—interstitial spaces may facilitate “rites of institution” through which new categories begin to be admitted without further examination (Bourdieu 2014:168–69).²² The “circular circulation” of legitimation strategies can inculcate a collective sense of self-confirmation, self-reinforcement, and self-evidence that turns actors of the interstitial space into prophets of an emergent categorical consensus (Bourdieu and Boltanski 2008). Although the emergent consensus is not a new *nomos*, it has the symbolic potential to become one. New categories take shape

²² According to Bourdieu, when the gift exchange is established between actors who are actually or potentially unequal, the exchange “institutes durable relations of symbolic domination, relations of domination based on communication, knowledge and recognition” (1998:100). In this sense, symbolic domination (or symbolic violence) rests on the misrecognition of inequalities and the recognition of their transfigured effects (e.g., respect, gratitude, fairness, reason, objectivity, etc.).

in the accumulating sediment of multiple struggles and challenges that give them a higher degree of defensibility (Eyal 2019).

As a new consensus emerges, actors may find themselves closer to each other and closer to the center of the interstitial space, the symbolic place where multiple sources of legitimacy converge (Medvetz 2012). Contingent upon a skillful exchange of symbolic capital, occurring at the right time and with the right tempo, “there is a moment at which you have to stop, and this place where you stop is the state” (Bourdieu 2014:68). The interstitial space tends to close down when the finite repetition of authorized justifications and factual validations ends. State actors, at this moment, have a renewed opportunity to recover their authority, appropriating the new categories of enumeration as official. To be sure, state officials may fail to assess this opportunity or the available degree of legitimacy (Hayden 2021; Loveman 2007). However, if symbolic exchanges are conducted appropriately, this process of bureaucratic legitimation can institute a higher “exchange rate” between statist and other forms of capital. The boundary between state and nonstate actors can also become more salient. The eventual result may be a new census, a black box made of accepted legitimation practices whose categories now belong to the state actors who appropriated them, as well as the nonstate actors who constituted them.²³

²³ As Alain Desrosières suggested, “This does not mean that these statistics are purely and simply the expression of dominant groups [...]. Rather, they formalize a historical configuration of these relations, by reducing, simplifying, and stylizing these through long and complicated mediations, according to forms which are very difficult to undo and to alter” (2014:355).

Comparative Rationale and Empirical Puzzles

Like many Latin American countries, Colombia and Mexico recently adopted census questions used to enumerate people of African descent. However, they did so in different ways and with different consequences. Whereas Colombia was one of the first countries in the region to resume the enumeration of Afrodescendent populations in the 1993 census, Mexico was one the last to start officially counting this population for the first time—in the 2020 census, after conducting an estimation survey in 2015. While the current self-identification question for people of African descent in Colombia includes an internalist reference to “culture” and externalist reference to “physical traits,” in Mexico, it includes only internalist references to “ancestors,” “customs,” and “traditions.”²⁴ Moreover, whereas in Colombia the question includes regional categories of Blackness or ethnonyms such as “Raizal” and “Palenquero,” in Mexico, regional categories of people of African descent like “Mascogo” were not included.²⁵ Although they may seem superfluous, these differences in the wording of census questions and categories of identification have important consequences, including the ability to estimate ethnoracial inequalities affecting the Afrodescendent population (Sue, Riosmena, and Telles 2021; Villarreal and Bailey 2020). While Colombian census data shows

²⁴ In Colombia, the wording of the census question is: “¿De acuerdo con su cultura, pueblo o rasgos físicos . . . es o se reconoce como:” [“According to your culture, people or physical features . . . do you are or recognize yourself as:”]. In Mexico, the wording of the census question is: “Por sus antepasados y de acuerdo con sus costumbres y tradiciones, ¿usted se considera...?” [“Because of your ancestors and according to your customs and traditions, do you consider yourself...?”].

²⁵ In Colombia, the identification categories of Blackness are: “Raizal del Archipiélago de San Andrés, Providencia y Santa Catalina,” “Palenquero(a) de San Basilio,” and “Negro(a), mulato(a), afrodescendiente, afrocolombiano(a).” In Mexico, the official categories are: “Afromexicano(a),” “Negro(a),” and “Afrodescendiente.”

significant socio-economic disadvantages for people of African descent, in Mexico, similar disadvantages are not observable at the national level.²⁶

But why should we expect a similar statistical visibility of Blackness in both countries? To be sure, there are important differences in the historical legacy of colonial institutions of Colombia and Mexico. For one, the colonial territory of Colombia received a significant population of enslaved Africans during the eighteenth century that was absent in the colonial territory of Mexico (Palmer 1976; Sharp 1975). And yet, both cases have enough socio-political conditions in common to make their dissimilar trajectories in the officialization of categories of Blackness puzzling. In the Latin American context, Colombia and Mexico have a similar postcolonial trajectory in the relationship between skin color and ethnoracial identification. Unlike other countries such as Argentina or Chile that institutionalized "*racial binaries*," Colombia and Mexico defined "*racial spectrums*" as the main vision and division of the national population. Whereas the first group of countries developed inclusive conceptions of Whiteness and Blackness by skin color, Colombia and Mexico developed inclusive conceptions of racial mixture by skin color. As a result, in both countries Blackness tends to be comparatively *less inclusive* by skin color (McNamee 2020:325–27). In other words, Colombia and Mexico shared a similarly institutionalized ethnoracial gaze (i.e., *nomos*) that demands higher levels of melanin in the skin to classify someone as Black.

²⁶ Consider, for example, the illiteracy rate in both countries. Whereas, in Colombia, the illiteracy rate is 10.1% for the national population and 14.3% for people of African descent (DANE 2019); in Mexico, this rate is 4.7% and 5.3% for each population, respectively (INEGI 2021).

It can also be argued that since colonial times the relative demographic weight of the Indigenous population was more significant in Mexico, creating the conditions to make people of African descent statistically invisible in a way that was not possible in Colombia. And yet, the comparative evidence suggests that the relative demographic weight of the Indigenous population is not a *sufficient condition* to explain the statistical invisibility of people of African descent. For instance, by 1800, colonial censuses in Peru and Ecuador showed similar proportions of Indigenous and Afrodescendent populations to those of Mexico. While in Mexico, the proportions of Indigenous and Afrodescendent populations were 60% and 10%; in Peru, they were 63% and 6%; and in Ecuador, 67% and 8%, respectively (Andrews 2004:41). And yet, among these countries, the trope of “Black disappearance” was successfully institutionalized only in Mexico. In fact, in Peru, people of African descent were made demographically visible during the 1820s, 1870s, and 1940s (Loveman 2014:241). To be sure, demographic realities are much more than their statistical representation. As it has been widely documented, ethnoracial boundaries are constantly expanded, contracted, transvaluated, crossed, re-positioned, and blurred (Wimmer 2008). However, assuming the persistence of ethnoracial boundaries without analyzing the specific mechanisms that account for such reproduction is a form of demographic determinism. In this research, I try to avoid this trap by focusing on the *politically sufficient conditions* that help explain the current statistical representations of people of African descent in Colombia and Mexico. Further research should account for the socially necessary conditions of ethnoracial boundary making that shaped statistical representations beyond (and beneath) the discursive struggles of state officials, international experts, academic researchers, and social movement activists.

Colombia and Mexico are then not obvious choices for a comparative analysis of Afrodescendent populations in Latin America. However, comparing their divergent trajectories of statistical visibility not only challenges existing accounts on census politics in the region but also affords the possibility of expanding the current literature in different directions. Two different but interrelated empirical puzzles, not answered by the current literature, emerge from this comparison.

First, the demographic record of enslaved persons of African descent forcefully brought to Colombia and Mexico presents intriguing similarities. Estimates suggest that colonial Colombia (i.e., the Viceroyalty of New Granada) and colonial Mexico (i.e., the Viceroyalty of New Spain) imported a similar number of enslaved persons (about 200,000) between the sixteenth and eighteenth century (Aguirre Beltrán 1944:431; Curtin 1969:46; Rawley and Behrendt 2005:48). Like other Latin American countries, Colombia and Mexico formally ended the slave trade during the 1820s,²⁷ and they are also notable for their lack of census records of Afrodescendent populations during the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century (Loveman 2014:241). In both nationalist projects of *mestizaje*, the representation of people of African descent was not the central element in nation-building discourses or narratives (Lomnitz 2001:52–54; Wade 1997:35–37). In this sense, Colombia and Mexico share a similar demographic stack of enslaved population, and a similar history of demographic invisibility during the republican era, and yet the contemporary statistical representation of Blackness is significantly different. *Why did similar imperial legacies and state projects of mestizaje*

²⁷ Whereas Colombia formally ended the slave trade in 1821, Mexico ended it in 1824. The final abolition of slavery, however, took more time. While Mexico formally abolished slavery in 1829, Colombia formally abolished it in 1852. And yet, formal abolition of slavery has not always represented substantive abolition. For a study of the persistence of slavery in Mexico after its formal abolition, see Díaz Casas (2021).

develop different conditions for the statistical representation of Blackness in Colombia and Mexico? (Post-Independence Puzzle)

Second, Colombia and Mexico experienced similar episodes of legitimacy crises during the early 1990s. In Colombia, the escalation of political violence in the late 1980s and the 1991 constitutional reform created a political opportunity to recognize ethno-racial demands (Agudelo 2005; Grueso 2000; Paschel 2010; Van Cott 2000b; Wade 1995). In Mexico, the controversial 1988 presidential elections and the Zapatista uprising in 1994 produced a similar legitimacy crisis (Labastida Martín del Campo and López Leyva 2004:759; Peschard 1993:111). Again, however, whereas Colombia was one of the first countries in the region to resume census acknowledgment of its Afrodescendent population in 1993, Mexico was one of last, in 2015. Moreover, in both countries state and nonstate actors relied on similar forms of expertise to legitimize the enumeration of people of African descent. Whereas the expertise of anthropologists was more prominent during the first enumeration—i.e., the 1993 census in Colombia and the 2015 intercensal survey in Mexico—the expertise of sociologists became more salient during the second census count (2005 in Colombia and 2020 in Mexico). And yet, the wording of the census question to identify people of African descent is significantly different in Mexico and Colombia.²⁸ Additionally, social movement organizations used similar frameworks of cultural difference and racial equality to demand the demographic visibility of Afrodescendent population (Hoffmann 2007; Hoffmann and Lara 2012; Lara 2012; Oslender 2008;

²⁸ While the census question in Colombia includes regional categories of Blackness (e.g., *raizal* or *palenquero*), in Mexico, regional categories of Blackness were excluded. In Colombia the question refers to “physical traits” as a proxy for racialized forms of identification, but in Mexico this reference was avoided.

Pardo 2001; Paschel 2016; Wade 1995). In both countries, the inclusion of more recent categories such as “Afrocolombian,” “Afromexican,” or “Afrodescendant” complemented existing demands to include the category “Black.” However, not all categories were granted the same degree of legitimacy to become official categories of Blackness. While “Afrocolombian” was successfully institutionalized, “Afromexican” almost disappeared from the last census. *Why did similar critical junctures, forms of expertise, and repertoires of ethno-racial claims-making produced a different demographic representation of people of African descent in Mexico and Colombia? (Contemporary Puzzle)*

Arguments and Structure of the Dissertation

In the first chapter, I analyze the genesis of *imperial imperatives* that constituted the imperial gaze and the colonial will of the Spanish Crown to enumerate Afrodescendent populations in the Viceroyalty of New Granada (the colonial territory of Colombia) and the Viceroyalty of New Spain (the colonial territory of Mexico). I retrace this process across three sections. First, I explore the evolution of colonial instruments of enumeration between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century. Second, I focus on the kaleidoscopic patterns of classification and stratification that inevitably obfuscated and overwhelmed imperial attempts to organize them. Finally, I analyze the eighteenth-century imperial attempt to produce an exhaustive enumeration of colonial populations, including categories of people of African descent.

The first chapter shows how different imperial imperatives across the colonial territories of New Spain and New Granada shaped the demographic visibility of people of African descent during

the last decades of the eighteenth century. Although both colonial domains were in a similar situation of intensified inter-imperial competition—especially after the loss of Havana to the British in 1762—and subject to a similar set of imperial imperatives—decisively oriented to increase *extraction* and enhance *coercion*—, the territorial response of metropolitan and colonial authorities in each case produced a different kind of demographic visibility of Afrodescendent populations. In New Granada, imperial bureaucrats responded to this juncture by attempting to increase the revenue produced by enslaved labor of people of African descent classified through categories of “pure Blackness” (e.g., *negros* or *esclavos*). In New Spain, colonial authorities tried to increase revenue by focusing on free people of color classified under categories of “mixed Blackness” (e.g., *mulatos* or *pardos*). As a result, the Spanish censuses of the late eighteenth century produced two different forms of legibility for people of African descent. While categories of “mixed Blackness” became the predominant categories for the numerical representation of Afrodescendent populations in New Spain, in New Granada, categories of “pure Blackness” occupied that position. Beyond the Latin American cases, this chapter contributes to the scholarship that explores the differences between mercantilist and imperialist censuses (Curtis 2002; Emigh et al. 2021), and to the research that analyzes the relationship between census enumeration and extraction (Emigh, Riley, and Ahmed 2016b; Starr 1987; Tilly 1990).

In the second chapter, I explore how the colonial enumerations of the Spanish empire in the last decades of the eighteenth century inculcated a sense of ethnoracial demography in the nineteenth-century elites of Mexico and Colombia after independence. While some scholars trace the nationalist representation of Blackness to twentieth-century projects of *mestizaje* (Paschel 2016; Sue 2013), I suggest that *doxic* understandings of the demographic weight of Blackness were forged in the

transition from imperial to republican forms of demographic knowledge. This chapter comprises two sections. The first section addresses the works of Alexander von Humboldt, a scientific traveler that visited New Spain and New Granada a few years before independence, and his role in shaping the understanding of ethnoracial demography in nationalist elites of both Mexico and Colombia. The second section focuses on the uses of Humboldt's knowledge by nationalist elites as they navigate a dual republican dilemma: On one hand, sustaining categorical restrictions on citizenship without using the colonial categories of the past; on the other, defending the future of the new nations in racialist terms without reaching at the pessimist conclusions of some European intellectuals.

The second chapter provides evidence of two different paths in the institutionalization of Blackness within the emerging nationalist *nomos* of Colombia and Mexico during the nineteenth century. Although nineteenth-century liberal elites faced similar dilemmas, their understanding of the role of Blackness in the nationalist project of *mestizaje* differed significantly. In Mexico, instead of focusing on the significant demographic representation of categories of “mixed Blackness,” nationalist intellectuals used the last imperial census to focus on the small number of categories of “pure Blackness” and proclaimed the disappearance of people of African descent from the nation. In Colombia, nationalist elites used imperial records to produce two distinctive categorizations of Blackness: the notion of the “Black savage” represented the colonial past of the lowlands, contrasted with the figure of the “good Mulatto” representing the republican future of the highlands.

In the third chapter, I analyze the legitimacy crisis in Colombia and Mexico during the 1990s and its connection to more specific episodes of *nomos* crisis. Then, I focus on various episodes of categorization politics that emerged among academics, activists, bureaucrats, and international experts

as they struggled with and for the enumeration of people of African descent. This chapter comprises four sections. First, I examine the critical juncture that emerged in Colombia during the late 1980s, showing how it progressively became a nomic crisis that challenged the predominant categories of national representation. Second, I analyze the interstitial space of classification struggles that emerged in Colombia's Special Commission, a political space in which state and non-state actors contended over the legal definition of "Black communities." Third, I explore the legitimation crisis in Mexico during the 1990s, examining how the delegitimizing effects of the Zapatista uprisings converged with the critical discourse of international human rights agencies to challenge some of the assumptions of the nationalist project of mestizaje. Finally, I analyze the interstitial space of categorical struggles over the enumeration of people of African descent in the 2015 intercensal census of Mexico. In this chapter, I use Correspondence Analysis (Greenacre 2017; Hjellbrekke 2019; Husson, Lê, and Pagès 2017; Le Roux and Rouanet 2004) to reconstruct the inter-field categorical struggles over the enumeration of people of African descent in Colombia and Mexico.

The third chapter seeks to provide two distinct contributions to the scholarship on official information gathering and the political sociology of demography (Emigh et al. 2020; Loveman 2014; Rodríguez-Muñiz 2020). On the one hand, it focuses on the conjunctural conditions that help explain the timing of categorization politics in Latin America. In Colombia, the analysis shows how the legitimation crisis of the late 1980s created an *endogenous* transformation of the category "Black savage" of the nineteenth century. In Mexico, it reveals how the Zapatista uprising created an opportunity for international agencies to *exogenously* challenge the notion of "Black disappearance." On the other hand, the chapter pays attention to the structural conditions that help account for the

distribution of actors, strategies, and interests in census politics. The domestically-driven logic of categorization struggles in Colombia contrasted with the internationally-driven dynamic in Mexico, creating different conditions for the demographic enumeration of people of African descent.

Finally, in the fourth chapter, I compare episodes of categorical politics in the period leading to the 2005 census in Colombia and the 2020 census in Mexico. Although the dynamics of contention happen several years apart, both cases have in common the expansion of political claims based on categories of Blackness that transition from “ethnic” to “racial” perspectives. From the point of view of census politics, new coalitions of actors blamed the “ethnic” framework of the census for demographic estimations that they considered distorted. However, the critique of the “ethnic” approach and the defense of the “racial” perspective produced a different statistical representation of ethnoracial inequality in each country. Unlike the 2005 census in Colombia, the 2020 census did not show significant disadvantages between the Afrodescendant population and the rest of the Mexican population. Why did similar repertoires of census politics produce different demographic visibilities of people of African descent in Mexico and Colombia?

The fourth chapter shows that the space of categorization struggles is an endogenous factor of ethnoracial identification. I suggest that the propensity to identify with a particular category depends not only on the individual-level *dispositions of “consumers”* that structure the *demand* but also on the collective-level *positions of “producers”* that structure the *supply* of ethnoracial categories. I then reconstruct the categorization struggles in Colombia and Mexico to understand how different configurations of the political space shaped different processes of ethnoracial identification. In Colombia, the logic of categorization struggles tended to be *socially* centered, creating categories more

likely to be perceived as *accessible* representations. On the contrary, in Mexico, the dynamic of categorization disputes tended to be *politically* centered, developing ethnoracial categories more likely to be perceived as *inaccessible* representations. Among other factors, I suggest that this divergent logic of categorization struggles helps explain why ethnoracial inequality was more likely to be visible in the results of the 2005 census in Colombia than in those of the 2020 census in Mexico.

CHAPTER 1

IMPERIAL WAYS OF KNOWING PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT

People of African descent have never been ethnoracial monoliths readily legible to imperial bureaucracies. The history of the demographic visibility of Afrodescendent persons is intertwined with the history of the imperial gaze and colonial classifications created both within and beyond its reach. Although the more exhaustive and consequential enumerations of people of African descent occurred in the last decades of the eighteenth century, at the peak of Bourbon rule, the Spanish monarchy had collected data in its colonial domains in the Americas since the early sixteenth century. This chapter retraces the genesis of imperial imperatives informing the colonial will to enumerate colonial populations in general, and people of African descent in particular.

The chapter comprises three sections. The first explores the evolution of the imperial gaze between the sixteenth and the seventeenth century in Spanish America. It shows how the will to enumerate was first shaped by attempts to register the population, before evolving toward an extractive agenda. The need to enumerate and the increasingly diverse categories of people inhabiting the colonies were mutually constitutive. The second section explores the kaleidoscopic patterns of classification and stratification that inevitably complicated, and sometimes defeated imperial attempts to direct them. This section considers four elements: 1) the multiple principles of perception and division that gave different meanings to *casta* categories, 2) the prevalence of heterogamous marriages practices across these categories, 3) the predominant levels of illegitimate births, and 4) the configuration of categorical but transient forms of inequality.

The final section explores the eighteenth-century imperial attempt to produce an exhaustive enumeration of the colonial population, including various categories of people of African descent. It focuses on the classificatory consequences of Spain's imperial competition with Britain for Afrodescendants in the Americas, showing how imperial imperatives of coercion and extraction shaped the Spanish monarchy's attitude towards different categories of Blackness. The intra-imperial politics of extraction and coercion during the late eighteenth century motivated the Spanish empire to craft official demographic representations of people of African descent, with enduring consequences for future independent nations. While categories of "mixed Blackness" (e.g., *mulatos* or *pardos*) became both needed and feared, categories of "pure Blackness" (e.g., *negros*) were persistently stigmatized and excluded. However, the configuration of this dichotomy was different across colonial domains. Whereas in New Spain pure Blackness seemed to disappear from official demographic records, New Granada regionalized it.

Imperative Knowing: From Recording to Extraction from Colonial Domains

During the early sixteenth century, the Spanish empire expanded from its Caribbean domains to its continental territories. Consolidating imperial rule implied not only knowing about colonized subjects and spaces but, perhaps more importantly, obtaining knowledge about them independently. That is, independently of the interested (and increasingly problematic) perspective of *conquistadores*. Although the Spanish crown still depended on colonizing campaigns by conquerors such as Hernán Cortés, metropolitan bureaucrats realized that these individuals were more useful to expand the empire than

to maintain colonial order. The need to create an autonomous and centralized view of growing imperial domains led Spain to a process of internal bureaucratic restructuring that involved the development of the first colonial instruments of data collection.

The first imperial imperative was not so much about extraction of resources as it was about *documenting* their existence. Developing a unified and centralized inventory of colonized peoples, spaces, and things became a prominent imperative for the Spanish crown during much of the sixteenth century. The need to assess novel resources independently of the accounts of individual *conquistadores* led Spain to restructure its own bureaucracy. This is the origin of institutions like the *Consejo de Estado* in 1522, and the *Consejo de Hacienda* in 1523. However, it was the creation of the *Consejo de Indias* in 1524 that triggered the systematic collection of data about colonial subjects and domains within the Spanish empire (Bustamante García 2000).

Spain sent one of the early *Reales Cédulas*, or royal orders, on March 11, 1530, to *Isla Española*, the current territory of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. This order requested “a *relación* [account] that describes the particularities of the land, the urban centers, public buildings and fortresses, demography, as well as tributes, officials, and *encomenderos*.”²⁹ Among other things, the *Consejo de Indias* wanted to know “what type of *indios* are there on that island, free and enslaved. What type of *negros*, and who are the owners of them and to whom they are *encomendados*. How much our *almojarifazgo* [customs tax], gold tributes, and religious tithes are worth.” (Solano and

²⁹ An *encomienda* (from Spanish *encomendar*, “to entrust”) referred to a number of indigenous persons given by the Spanish empire in the form of a concession to a *conquistador*, soldier, or colonial official with the aim of extracting tributes from them while instilling the Christian faith.

Ponce 1988:3). This royal decree shows the growing imperial motivation to develop a centralized inventory of colonial resources in Spanish America. It also reveals the need to render legible the relationship between enslaved peoples, colonial authorities, and religious tributes. Moreover, it shows not only the role of Blackness in the initial stages of the colonization processes but also the metonymic use of the category “*negro*” to refer to enslaved people of African descent.

However, Blackness does not seem to have constituted an overarching principle of bureaucratic legibility during the first half of the sixteenth century. After all, the licensing system for the slave trade in Spanish America, introduced in 1513, was mainly geared to satisfying demand in the Caribbean islands. Although free and enslaved people of African descent were part of the early voyages sponsored by the Spanish crown to the Americas,³⁰ the legal commerce of enslaved Africans to New Spain started in 1523 (Phillips 2011:333–34). During the first half of the sixteenth century the Spanish empire gradually incorporated more detailed criteria for data collection, yet since enslaved Africans had only recently been brought to the region, Blackness was not initially one of these criteria. In December 19 of 1533, for example, the Spanish crown issued another *cédula*. In this decree, the imperial bureaucrats stated:

“[W]e want to have complete information about the things of that land and its qualities. I command you to [...] make a very long and particular list of the greatness of that land, both in width and length, and of its limits, setting them very specifically by their proper names, [...] and likewise of the qualities and rarities that exist, specifying them for each village. And what type of *población de los naturales* [native population] there is, particularly including their rites and customs. And likewise, what kind of *vecinos* [neighbors] and Spanish residents are there, and where does each one live, and how many of them are married with Spanish and with

³⁰ There is historical evidence that people of African descent also participated as conquistadors of the Spanish empire. For an account of Africans as armed auxiliaries of the Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century, see Restall (2000).

Indian women, and how many are yet to be married, and what kind of ports and rivers do they have, and what type of buildings are made, and what kind of animals and birds are raised, and of what quality they are [...]. And along with this *relación* [account], you shall send it to us painted as accurately as possible in relation to what has been said and what can be painted.” (Solano and Ponce 1988:4).

The 1533 *cédula* was the starting point of a new model of data collection for the colonial domains of the Spanish empire during the first half of the sixteenth century (Bustamante García 2000:44–45). This concise set of commands expressed a geographic concern with territorial extensions and limits, a demographic interest in estimating the population of indigenous (“*naturales*”) and Spanish people (“*vecinos*”), an ethnographic preoccupation aiming to understand rituals and practices on both sides of the presumed demographic divide, including types of marriage, and also an economic interest in inventorying animals and their value. None of these criteria gave people of African descent a prominent place. Among the novelties of the 1533 *cédula* was the requirement of a visual representation of everything that could be painted. Inaugurating a practice that would extend across centuries, the 1533 *cédula* shows the early consolidation of an all-encompassing imperial gaze that included words, numbers and images.

Although the imperial commands of the first half of the sixteenth century show an economic interest in developing inventories of people and resources, such inventories had no direct connection to taxation. In fact, there is evidence that the Spanish crown was not interested in increasing the taxation of colonial subjects during this period. In 1551, for example, King Carlos V of Spain issued an order regulating the taxation of indigenous peoples in New Spain, New Granada, and Perú. In this decree, the King noted that *encomenderos* imposed on Indigenous persons “*más tributos de los que ellos*

podían buenamente pagar” [more tributes than they could pay in good will] and directed the colonists to limit tributes to what they could pay “*sin fatiga*” [without fatigue]. Moreover, he ordered to “tax them with said taxes or services, so that [tributes] are less than what they used to pay to *caciques* and lords who had them before coming to our obedience, so that they know the will we have to relieve them and do mercy.” (Puga 1878:108–9).³¹

Part of the concern about excessive taxation was due to the evident decline of the Indigenous population during the second half of the sixteenth century. For example, the *Real Cédula* of May 25 of 1577 requested more data with the intention of *registering* existing populations and resources, with particular emphasis on the demographic decline of Indigenous peoples. Unlike the categorical divide used in 1533, the main distinction of the 1577 questionnaire was the difference between “*pueblos de españoles*” [Spanish villages] and “*pueblos de indios*” [Indigenous villages]. Guided by ethno-territorial markers, the metropolitan bureaucrats were interested in the names of Spanish villages, the meaning of those names in Indigenous languages, the name of the “*descubridor y conquistador*” [discoverer and conqueror], and the quality of the weather and lands in these territories. Regarding Indian villages, they were interested in the distance between other Indian or Spanish towns, their language, the meaning of the name of the village, its internal organization, and its form of government. Tellingly, colonial authorities also wanted to know whether Indigenous villages “had more or less [Indigenous

³¹ It is also worth noting that a similar argument stating that indigenous peoples “*paguen lo que buenamente pudieren*” [pay what they can afford in good will] was used in 1556 to increase taxes (Puga 1878:276). However, making taxation contingent upon the good will of indigenous peoples was a distinctive rhetorical stance of metropolitan authorities during this period (Puga 1878:168–70, 215–16, 267–68). This was particularly true after the issuing of *Leyes Nuevas* [New Laws] in 1542, intended to prevent the exploitation of indigenous peoples by *encomenderos*.

people] before than they do now,” and also “if they enjoyed better or worse health before than now.” (Solano and Ponce 1988:80–86).

The 1577 questionnaire had fifty questions in total, requiring information mainly about territories and territorial resources (e.g., trees and plants, medicinal herbs, animals, mines, minerals, churches, and ports). They focused more on developing an updated inventory of colonial resources than estimating the demographic size of the population or extracting an appropriate amount of taxes and tributes. Although there is evidence in 1573 of a failed attempt by the Spanish crown to collect data using racial categories,³² the *Real Cédula* of 1577 include no reference to people of African descent. Although the situation might have been different for local colonial authorities, for the metropolitan bureaucracy of the Spanish empire, Blackness did was not a major organizing principle for their vision or division of people (or territories) during most of the sixteenth century.

In 1580, King Philip II of Spain secured the throne of Portugal, and he and his successors ruled both empires jointly until 1640. Due to the demographic decline of Indigenous peoples, and increasing demands to bring enslaved African persons to the Americas, the joint venture of Spanish and Portuguese traders created a new moment in the expansion of the transatlantic slave trade (Phillips 2011:334–35). Departing from the imperial imperatives of the sixteenth century, metropolitan authorities were no longer satisfied with mapping and recognizing colonial domains. By the 1600s the Spanish empire was explicitly interested in maximizing the economic benefits of more than a century

³² The 1573 decree, on which no data was collected, had 135 questions in total. One of the sections of the questionnaire was intended to develop a “*padrón general* [general census], in each city and neighborhood, according to the spiritual, racial, and social characteristic of the believers.” Questions in this section distinguished among *esclavos* [enslaved persons], *españoles* [Spaniards], *mestizos hijos de español e india* [miscegenated sons of Spanish men and Indian women], *aborrados* [self-manumitted persons], and *indios* [indigenous persons] (Solano and Ponce 1988:63).

of colonial rule. *Extraction*, rather than registration alone, became a prominent imperial imperative for the Spanish crown during the seventeenth century.

The extractivist impetus of the new century became evident in the design of royal instruments for data collection. Unlike the surveys of the previous century, the seventeenth-century questionnaires reflected an interest in identifying the tributary status of colonial subjects. For instance, the 1604 questionnaire included questions to identify the number of “*indios tributarios*” [tributary Indigenous persons], the kind of tribute and its price, but also the number who did not pay tribute (Solano and Ponce 1988:98–99). Beyond indigenous tributes, the Spanish monarchy was also interested in knowing about goods, services, incomes, rents, and commercial enterprises, among other taxable items. By the seventeenth century, the metropolitan bureaucracy had transitioned from data requests for general inventories of people and places to more detailed inquiries about the economic situation of colonial domains in the Americas.

As the economic gaze and bureaucratic apparatus became more sophisticated, identifying people of African descent also became more important for the Spanish empire. Some of the 355 questions of the 1604 questionnaire addressed “*cuantificación de la población*” [quantification of the population]. The categories used were “*blancos* [whites], *negros* [blacks], *mulatos (libres y esclavos)* [free and enslaved mulattoes] e *indios* [Indigenous persons].” This categorization introduced Blackness as principle of enumeration, but also distinct categories of Blackness. Whereas the census treated “*españoles*” [Spaniards], “*extranjeros*” [foreigners], and “*indios*” [Indigenous persons] as unified demographic categories, people of African descent were identified using two different questions. While question number 106 identified the number of “*mulatos and zambaygos*,” question number

107 identified the number of “*negros*.” In both cases, the questionnaire inquired about the number of men and women, and how many of them were free and enslaved (Solano and Ponce 1988:100–101).

Additionally, the 1604 questionnaire asked about the role of people of African descent in the maintenance of colonial order. Beyond mere demographic considerations, the Spanish crown was interested in identifying challenges Afrodescendent population posed to the imperial regime. Three questions shed light on this concern:

“111. How many *negros* and *mulatos* are *cimarrones* [runaways], up in arms, enslaved or free, and what damage do they do?

112. How and where do these *cimarrones* restore and defend themselves, and how are they sustained?

113. What kind of order is there for their punishment and the safety of the other slaves?”
(Solano and Ponce 1988:101).

The preoccupation of the 1604 questionnaire to delineate different kinds of Blackness reflects the Spanish crown’s concern about distinguishing between “pure Blackness” (usually associated with the category *negro*), and “mixed Blackness” (labeled with categories like *mulato* or *zambaygo*, among others).³³ Whereas *negro* was often used as a synonym for *esclavo*—drawing the line between Afrodescendant freedom and slavery— *mulato* and *zambaygo* held a more problematic place in the bureaucratic representation of Blackness. Both represented suspect population categories, yet *zambaygos* were perceived as particularly infamous. Juan López de Velasco, cosmographer and

³³ Whereas the category *mulato* was used by colonial authorities to designate the offspring of *negros* and *españoles*, *zambaygo* (also written as *zambaigo* or *zambo*) labeled the offspring of *negros* and *indios*. By the end of the sixteenth century, however, *Zambaigo* and *Zambo* were hardly used. Other zoologically inspired categories like *lobo* [wolf] and *coyote* were use also used to refer to the offspring of Black and Indigenous parentage (Aguirre Beltrán 1981:169–72; Seed 1982:572).

historian of the Spanish crown (Ruan 2019)—author of *Geografía y Descripción Universal de la Indias*—wrote the following about *zambaygos*:

“In addition to [*mestizos*] there are many *mulatos*, children of Blacks and Indians, who are called *zambaigos*. They are the worst and vile people that there are in those parts [...] because there are so many, they come to be in some parts in danger of unrest and rebellion [...]. (De Velasco 1574:43).

Velasco’s assessment shows the sense of threat that people of African descent elicited in the colonial authorities of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. The children of people of African descent—born of Spanish fathers and Black mothers (like most *mulatos*), or Black fathers and Indigenous mothers (like most *zambaygos*)—challenged the social and symbolic boundaries imperial authorities had defined since the early years of the colonization process. Their ability to navigate across the boundaries of freedom and slavery, but also across tributary and non-tributary status, made them not only unreliable but also a threat in the eyes of colonial authorities. The “danger of unrest and rebellion,” to use Velasco’s words, led the Spanish monarchy to prohibit the use of weapons by *mulatos* and *zambaygos*. For example, the Law of September 28 of 1534, reiterated on December 19 of 1568, established that “no *mulato* or *zambaygo* may carry weapons, and *mestizos* can carry them with license.” (Consejo de Indias 1841:35, 322).³⁴

³⁴ Similar decrees were issued to prohibit *negros* from carrying weapons. In 1552, for example, the Prince Francisco de Ledesma issued an order prohibiting Spaniards in the Americas to have “*negros con armas*” [Blacks with weapons]. According to him, “said Blacks go through the villages and with said weapons offend many people, even killing Spaniards and leaving Indians maimed. And because they are slaves of favored persons, their punishment is concealed, and the persons who are offended are left without justice.” (Puga 1878:171).

In the eighteenth century, the Spanish crown undertook a series of reforms to regain control over colonial domains. Spanish Bourbon Kings Felipe V (1700-1746), Fernando VI (1746-1759), Carlos III (1759-1788), and Carlos IV (1788-1807), issued rulings aiming to take better advantage of the transatlantic trade, limit the power of the church, make the colonial economy more legible for extraction, and develop coercive control of imperial territories in the Americas. These policy changes, also known as Bourbon reforms, began with the de-Americanization and re-Hispanicization of the imperial bureaucracy. For example, in the years 1687-1750, out of a total 311 *audiencia* appointees in America, 138 (44%) were creoles compared to 157 *peninsulares*. However, in the period 1751-1808, of the 266 appointments, only 62 (23%) went to creoles compared to 200 *peninsulares* (Lynch 1989:335, 339). Strengthening the imperial state also required the crown to curtail the power of the church without losing political legitimacy. Contemporary eighteenth-century scientific practices were thus enlisted by the Spanish monarchy to expand the reach of the state over its colonial resources, while developing new sources of consent among its imperial subjects (Cañizares-Esguerra 2006:56–60). The colonial censuses of the late eighteenth century served as part of an empiricist approach, functioning both as economic instrument and political justification in a new phase of imperial imperatives.

The Changing Meanings of Castas and Castizaje

As Spanish metropolitan authorities sought to modernize their bureaucratic instruments of data collection, they realized that socioeconomic and ethnoracial boundaries within American populations were much more complex than they had anticipated. Many historians have explored the configuration

of social categories in relation to intersecting dynamics of stratification (Chance 1978; Chance and Taylor 1977, 1979; Gonzalbo Aizpuru 2013; Lewis 2003; McCaa 1984; McCaa, Schwartz, and Grubessich 1979; Seed 1982; Twinam 2015). The emerging consensus among scholars seems to have consolidated the multiple shifting meanings of the overarching notion of *casta* in relation to other classification principles such as *calidad*, *clase*, *condición*, and *raza*. Since the sixteenth century, *casta* and *calidad* conceptually encompassed notions of honor, socio-economic standing, community status, and reputation.³⁵ During the eighteenth century, *casta* also became a correlate of *clase* and *condición*. While *clase* referred to socio-economic status, *condición* indicated phenotype and lineage. The relationship between *casta* and *raza*, however, is more complicated. From the 15th century to the early seventeenth century, it seems there was a conceptual overlap between *casta* and *raza*, both being used to draw distinctions based on lineage, nature, breeding, and purity; this usage was not necessarily associated with humans. During the seventeenth century, particularly in Spain, the notions of *casta* and *raza* became conceptually distinct. Whereas *raza* was associated with stigmatized religious lineages such as Judaism and Islam, *casta* designated noble origins. By the eighteenth century, however, *casta* and *raza* once again became homologous notions designating stigmatized origins or lineages (Martínez 2008:142–43, 247; Rappaport 2014:6–7; Vinson 2018:57–59). In 1737, the *Diccionario de Autoridades* of the *Real Academia Española* defined *raza* as “*casta* or *calidad* of origin or lineage. Speaking of men, it is taken very often in a bad way.” As a usage example, the *Diccionario* included the

³⁵ The notion of *calidad* officially referred to Aristotle’s discussion of the category of quality. According to the *Diccionario de Autoridades* of the *Real Academia Española*, “philosophers divide *calidad* or quality into various differences or species, which Aristotle himself limits to four: habits and dispositions, natural capabilities and incapacities, affective qualities and affections, and form and figure.” (RAE 1729)

following sentence: “Like crops and animals, the *raza* of men, and their *casta*, with the quality of Heaven and earth, and above all with time, changes and degenerates.” (RAE 1737).

The changing meanings of *casta* have led recent scholars to question the existence of a “system of *castas*” (Aguirre Beltrán 1981:265–67). There is abundant evidence, for example, that the systematic set of categories famously portrayed in *casta* paintings “never formally applied to the inhabitants of the viceroyalty and did not have a minimum probatory value reflective of the viceregal society” (Gonzalbo Aizpuru 2013:27). Scholars have questioned whether *casta* categories effectively constituted an “epistemological formation” of their own (Rappaport 2014:208), showing the lack of stability of these categories across colonial institutions (Carrera 2003, 2009; Deans-Smith and Katzew 2009; Katzew 2005; Martínez 2008). These works resonate with earlier analyses that showed that the symbolic status of *casta* depended on a complex configuration of factors (e.g., place of origin, appearance, clothing, occupation, wealth, and contacts, among others), and not necessarily on ancestry (Cope 1994:57, 83–84). Other scholars have noted that “people migrated in the course of everyday life from one category to another, depending upon the context of interaction and the status of an individual relative to other participants in a given scenario” (Rappaport 2011:604). The polyvalent use of *casta* categories has led some scholars to conclude that “without concrete, consistent categories there could be no real system—nor a coherent ideology of social rank that placed ‘race’ at its core” (Restall 2009:109).

The changing meanings of *casta* in relation to other differentiation principles reflects not only the absence of a unified principle of hierarchization, but also the proliferation of marriage practices that prevented the institutionalization of a single stable colonial hierarchy. Table 1.1 shows the

prevalence of exogamous marriages of *indios*, *españoles*, and *castas* across southern and northern regions. Although colonial church records are far from being consistent (Gonzalbo Aizpuru 2013), they are nonetheless useful to detect trends in marriage patterns. Consistent with previous research (Mörner 1967), those classified as *castas* show a higher preference for marriage outside of their category, significantly contributing to the total percentage of heterogamous marriages. Additionally, regarding the regional distribution of marriage patterns, the rate of heterogamous marriages of *castas* is higher in the northern regions of New Spain than in southern parts.

The persistence of *castizaje*, and its symbolic challenge to established hierarchies, is also evident in the percentage of illegitimate marriages. Just as in Europe, the eighteenth century in Spanish America was characterized by the increase in “illegitimate” children born outside marriage (Shorter 1971). Unlike European countries, however, illegitimacy rates in New Spain were higher, but also declining. Table 1.2 shows the percentage of illegitimate births in some regions of New Spain. Whereas in Mexico City the total illegitimacy rate remains relatively high and constant throughout the eighteenth century, in regions like Guanajuato the rate is comparatively lower, showing a marked decline in the second half of the century. The analysis of illegitimacy rates consistently shows that *mulatos* (most likely, children of women of African descent) had the highest percentage of illegitimacy. While the illegitimacy of *mulatos* seems to have increased in Mexico City by the end of the eighteenth century, in Guanajuato this rate significantly diminished.

As scholars have demonstrated, the kaleidoscopic configuration of multiple forms of stratification at various times, in different contexts, and with different consequences, shaped the dynamics of classification and identification in Spanish America. The abundant scholarship on socio-

economic patterns of stratification in New Spain has offers convincing evidence of clear-cut ethn racial distinctions both at the top and the bottom of the scale, with more ambiguity and social mobility in the middle. Whereas Spaniards held most of the higher-ranking positions in imperial bureaucracy and the colonial economy, modest positions such as manual laborers and servants were mostly occupied by Indigenous and Afrodescendent persons (Mörner 1967:61). However, in middle-ranked occupations like artisans, shoemakers, and tenants, the distribution does not abide by such distinct ethn racial boundaries. In different regions and at different moments, *castas* tended to occupy an “ambiguous middle layer” without a distinct occupational pattern (Chance and Taylor 1977:472–73; McCaa et al. 1979:431–32).

Data from the census of Mexico City, taken in the mid-eighteenth century, shows an instantiation of this general pattern. The 1753 census included six ethn racial categories: *Españoles* (Peninsular and Creoles), *Mestizos*, *Castizos*,³⁶ *Mulatos*, *Negros*,³⁷ and *Indios*. Occupations are divided into five larger categories: Elites (i.e., religious, civilian, and military bureaucrats; rural property owners, and mine owners), Shop owners (i.e., merchants), Artisans (i.e., owners of tools), Laborers, and Servants (Seed 1982:577–78). Table 1.3 shows the occupational breakdown by ethn racial category in Mexico City. Unsurprisingly, most members of the elite were of Spanish descent. While the Peninsular and Creole Spanish elite were high-ranking officials in governmental and religious institutions, Mestizo and Indian members of the elite occupied lower-level positions. Mulato elites were mainly the military leaders of their own segregated units. At the opposite end of the occupational

³⁶ *Castizo* referred to a light-skinned mestizo (Seed 1982:573)

³⁷ Only free people categorized as “Mulatto” or “Black” were included in these data.

distribution, the majority of laborers and servants were Indigenous and people of African descent. Whereas 47.8% of Indigenous people (202) worked as laborers, 49.5% of Mulatos (539) worked as servants. At the middle of the occupational ranking, Creole Spaniards were the most populous category among artisans. And yet, Mulatos and Mestizos also had an important presence within this occupational stratum. In fact, 43.7% of Mulatos (475) and 55.3% of Mestizos (269) were artisans.

The distribution of occupations by ethnoracial category during the second half of the eighteenth century in Mexico City differs in some respects from other regions in New Spain. In the city of Antequera (Oaxaca), for example, *Españoles Creoles* were more numerous among artisans and less among shop owners and the elites (Chance and Taylor 1977:474). And yet, the data from the 1753 census in Mexico City show stratification patterns also found elsewhere. Figure 1.1 shows a symmetric map with the results from Correspondence Analysis, using the data from the previous table.³⁸

Dimension 1 (horizontal axis) accounts for 65.2% of the variation and shows the main opposition between the Spanish descendants grouped around elite and commercial positions (on the left), and Indigenous and people of African descent clustered around laborer and servant occupations (on the right). Positioned at the center, *castas* like *castizo* and *mestizo*—closer to artisan positions—do not figure prominently in this opposition. They constitute an “ambiguous middle layer” that is also evident in other regions, such as Oaxaca and Guanajuato (Brading 1972:476–77; Chance and Taylor 1977:473). This finding is consistent with previous research showing that, after the seventeenth

³⁸ Correspondence Analysis is a geometric modelling technique that reveals structures in categorical data by projecting, in this case, ethnoracial categories (black typeface) and occupational positions (gray typeface) in a joint bidimensional space (Greenacre 2017; Hjellbrekke 2019; Husson, Lê, and Pagès 2017; Le Roux and Rouanet 2004). The proximity of ethnoracial categories indicates a similar occupational profile. The closer ethnoracial categories are, the more similar their occupational profile is.

century, the Spanish-*Casta* dichotomy became less salient (at least in Mexico City) (Cope 1994:22).

Figure 1.1 shows support for the emergence of a new principle of vision and division articulated around *gente decente* (respectable people) and *plebe* (plebeians), a lower class that included *indios*, *negros*, *mulatos*, *mestizos*, but also a small number of *españoles creoles*.³⁹

Dimension 2 (vertical axis) accounts for 24.5% of the variation and shows the main ethnoracial and occupational divide within the *plebe*. Whereas Indigenous people were strongly represented among laborers (on the top), people of African descent (i.e., *negros* and *mulatos*) figured prominently among servants (on the bottom). This ethnoracial division of labor among plebeians is attributable to the enduring consequences of urban slavery and serfdom in the economy of Mexico City. By the second half of the eighteenth century, slavery was mostly an urban institution in which people of African descent were typically house servants. On the contrary, the majority of Indigenous peoples were recent migrants to the city performing unskilled rural labor (Seed 1982:582). Figure 1.1 also shows that this ethnoracial division of labor had consequences for the social mobility of Indigenous and Afrodescendent *castas*. While *mestizos* (a category of Indigenous descent) were more likely to be laborers than *mulatos* (a category of African descent), *mulatos* were more likely to be servants than *mestizos*. Comparing the different trajectories between *indios-mestizos* and *negros-mulatos* also provide evidence of the greater difficulties that people of African descent had in relation to the “ambiguous middle layer” of other *castas*, such as *castizos*. And yet, it is also worth noticing that 43.6% of *mulatos* (475) were artisans.

³⁹ By the late eighteenth century, plebeians were also designated as *gente común* (common people) or *pueblo bajo* (lower people) (Garavaglia and Grosso 1994:78).

The evidence of impaired social mobility experienced by people of African descent is consistent with scholarship that shows how they developed recursive strategies to overcome social constraints and legal obstacles. Scholars in this line of research have studied Afrodescendent resistance to slavery through distinctive autonomous practices (Montoya 2016; Palmer 1976; Proctor III 2012; Silva 2018). They provided essential care in household and convents (Velázquez 2011), developed legal awareness to navigate imperial regulations (Bennett 2003), used religious institutions like confraternities to bolster social mobility within the Spanish world (Castañeda García 2011; Germeten 2006; Masferrer León 2011), established interethnic relations between Mayans and Spaniards to create ambiguous yet strategic spaces (Restall 2009), and ultimately found ways to skew interlocking forms of power and domination (Bristol 2012; Ireton 2017; Lewis 2003; Schwaller 2016; Vinson 2018).

So far, we have considered four elements in the kaleidoscopic yet stratified configuration of eighteenth-century New Spain, the main colonial domain of the Spanish empire in the Americas. The first is the multiplicity of principles of vision and division according to which the notion of *casta* evoked honor, socio-economic standing, community status, and reputation (closer to *calidad* and *clase*), but also phenotype, lineage, and genealogy (closer to *condición* and *raza*). Second is the prevalence of heterogamous marriage practices (most visible in norther regions) that hinder the institutionalization of stable colonial hierarchies. Thirdly, the predominance of illegitimate births (most likely among *mulatos*) continued to challenge imperial forms of stratification. Finally, a tripartite overlap of occupations and ethnoracial categories ensured that people of Spanish descent were mainly grouped in elite and commercial occupations, while people of Indigenous descent were significantly clustered in rural labor, and people of African descent mostly represented urban servants.

This configuration nonetheless emerged through a non-trivial degree of social mobility across socio-economic positions, and considerable symbolic fuzziness across ethnoracial categories.

And yet, as variegated as these stratification principles and practices might have been, scholars have also shown that, by the eighteenth century, notions of “impurity” associated with genealogical understandings of *raza* were frequently attributed to African ancestry (Martínez 2008:119). Although *casta* classifications cannot be said to have constituted a stable system (Gonzalbo Aizpuru 2013; Rappaport 2014),⁴⁰ there is evidence nonetheless of genealogical practices that attempted to quantify degrees of African descent, such as *tercerón* (one-third), *quarterón* (one-fourth), or *quinterón* (one-fifth) (Twinam 2015). In other words, the kaleidoscopic stratification of Spanish America coexisted with imperial attempts to fix particular categories of Blackness. The censuses of the late eighteenth century are examples of a series of Bourbon reforms attempting to delineate the boundaries of Blackness. Before we delve into census politics, it is important to situate the census within the broader imperial politics of honor, in which Blackness became an official principle of vision and division in the late eighteenth century.

To be sure, Spanish colonial discourse was ambiguous regarding people of African descent. Within the same colonial domain, Afrodescendent populations were perceived as inferior and subversive, yet at the same time, many were considered loyal vassals in the colonial militias (Martínez

⁴⁰ The status of *casta* classifications remains a subject of academic discussion. For some scholars, “if in practice the use of classifications tended to be anything but systematic, the sistema de castas was nonetheless a system, an ideological complex constituted by a set of underlying principles about generation, regeneration, and degeneration” (Martínez 2008:166). Martínez’s conclusion, however, might be influenced by her reliance on inquisition records. For a study of the relationship between skin color and purity of blood, using different sources and reaching different conclusions, see Ireton (2017).

2008:160). And yet, despite the variety of ethnoracial and socio-economic positionings, eighteenth century-colonial officials were highly concerned with distinguishing different kinds of Blackness (Vinson 2018:120).

In fact, the 1778 adaptation of the *Pragmática Sanción de Matrimonios* [Pragmatic Sanction of Marriages] for the Americas, two years after its first version had been issued in Spain in 1776, was an attempt by metropolitan authorities to regulate “unequal marriages.” The Spanish empire was particularly concerned with the “frequent abuse of contracting unequal marriages [...] without waiting for parental advice and consent,” because this type of unions was presumably “opposed to the honor, respect and obedience that children must pay to their parents in matters of such seriousness and importance” (Konetzke 1962:406). In the enlightened absolutist spirit of the Spanish crown in the late eighteenth century, the 1776 *Pragmática* sought to enhance the authority of the imperial state (vis-à-vis the Church), while also reinforcing parents' authority to challenge “unequal” unions. The legislative context of the *Pragmática*'s issuance shows it to be an attempt to enhance royal power through the avenue of parental authority, unifying colonial and patriarchal forms of rule (Saether 2003). And yet, when the 1776 *Pragmática* was adapted for Spanish America, Blackness became an explicit principle of vision and division.

On April 7, 1778, King Carlos III issued an adaptation updating the 1776 *Pragmática* for the Americas to exclude “*mulatos, negros, coyotes* and individuals from similar *castas* and *razas*” (Konetzke 1962:439). The exclusion of Afrodescendant *castas* exempted members of these categories from requesting parental approval before marrying. This exclusion, however, also depreciated their unions by excluding them from the state-regulated market of honor: the 1778 adaptation of the *Pragmática*

attempted to protect the privileged status of elite Spanish parents (Socolow 2015:186), reinforcing the stigma of slavery and the illegitimacy of marriages with Afrodescendent persons (Mörner 1967:38).

However, at the same time, the *Pragmática* did not exclude all people of African descent. Colored officers of the militia were subject to this law as much as Spaniards, including those that “distinguish themselves from others for their reputation, good operations and services” (Konetzke 1962:439). By the late eighteenth century, although colonial authorities were genuinely concerned with the “fatal mixture of *uropeos* with *naturales* and *negros*” (Konetzke 1962:625–26), they also recognized the existence of people of African descent with high occupational achievement and considered such credentials to justify their participation in symbolic exchanges of honor within the Spanish empire.

To be sure, the 1776 *Pragmática* and its 1778 adaptation were much more than royal attempts at policing ethnoracial boundaries. Along with ethnoracial differences, unequal marriages were also challenged on the basis of occupation, wealth, morality, and status. In fact, of 46 cases appealed before the Audiencia of Mexico between 1778 and 1817, only 13 of them (28%) featured parents objecting to marriages on grounds of *casta* differences (Seed 1988:207). And yet, colonial authorities were nonetheless interested in distinguishing between reputable and disreputable exchanges of “honor,” situating categories of Blackness on both sides of the symbolic divide. The official logic of the *Pragmática*, which that at once values and undervalues people of African descent,⁴¹ illustrates the puzzle of imperial motivations rendering visible people of African descent in the censuses of the late

⁴¹ This ambiguity is also evident in other Bourbon policies. For other examples see Twinam (2015).

eighteenth century. How can we explain the Bourbon bureaucracy's efforts to establish clear distinctions and make specific categories of Blackness statistically visible in a context where it was increasingly difficult to do so?

Quantifying Colonial Domains: Controlling through Extraction and Coercion

The story of the first colonial censuses of New Spain and New Granada should be understood in the context of imperial competition between the Spanish empire and Britain during the second half of the eighteenth century. At the end of the Seven Year's War (1756-1763), the siege of Havana (Cuba) in 1762 by the British had enduring consequences for the rest of the Spanish colonies. The loss of Havana, one of the strongest fortresses in Spanish America (Castillo Manrubia 1990), precipitated a series of reforms aiming to exercise more direct *control* of the colonial domain. In practice, however, the imperial imperative was an attempt to (1) strengthen authority within colonial territories to prevent additional losses, and (2) generate additional revenue to pay the war debt. The dual imperative to enhance *coercion* and increase *extraction* was not new to the Spanish empire. After all, Bourbon reforms since the early 1700s had attempted to revamp administrative rule and expand the economic income of the empire (Stein and Stein 2000, 2003, 2009). However, this dual imperative intensified after the occupation of Havana by the British, with particular consequences for the collection of demographic data and perceptions of people of African descent in the region.

After the loss of Havana in 1762 and its recuperation in 1763 through the Treaty of Paris, Spain began to remake its imperial project in the region. The siege of Havana had shown that Spain's

defenses were vulnerable. Moreover, under the year-long British occupation, Havana's economy thrived using enslaved labor (Stein and Stein 2003:51). Two imperial strategies thus developed in the face of British competition. First, in order to enhance *coercion*, Spain strengthened its military forces, increasing the role of people of African descent in its militias. Second, in order to increase *extraction*, Spain engaged in the transatlantic slave trade directly and forcefully. The growing incorporation of people of African descent in the colonial militias and the intensified pressures towards enslavement of Africans had consequences for other colonial domains in Spanish America during the eighteenth century (Schneider 2018:266–70).

With regard to Afrodescendent populations, imperial officials faced a political dilemma. On one hand, they faced pressures to promote the engagement of people of African descent in the militias. In Cuba, companies of “Mulatos” and “Pardos” had defended the Spanish colonial regime against the British invasion (Schneider 2018:239). On the other hand, imperial officials faced pressures to embrace the exploitation of people of African descent in a competitive slave trade. Spain viewed this as the only way to develop an expansive economy without relying on the much more experienced British slave traders (Schneider 2018:270). In Cuba, colonial elites resolved this dilemma by transforming the island into a plantation economy supported by enslaved labor; in other colonial contexts, like New Granada and New Spain, imperial officials resolved this dilemma by other means.

Categorizing Blackness in Eighteenth Century New Spain

The imperial attempts to officially categorize, and eventually enumerate, people of African descent are inextricable from the imperial imperatives of the late eighteenth century—that is,

enhancing both coercion and extraction. As we have seen, Afrodescendent persons figured prominently in multiple sectors of colonial society, and it was increasingly difficult for the colonial bureaucracy to draw sharp boundaries. And yet, concerted imperial efforts to officially categorize Blackness continued apace. The history of the official gaze to categorize people of African descent is the history of the selective incorporation of particular categories. It also reflects a history of drawing and redrawing the boundaries of slavery and the associated stigma. And, perhaps more importantly, it is the history of an imperial bureaucratic process which recast persons of African descent, not only as a commodity to exchange, but also as a population to be governed. As we shall see, the larger population estimates were, the more salient the political problems of legitimate government.

Ever since the sixteenth century, the Spanish crown had had an interest in developing a sugar plantation economy in New Spain using enslaved African labor. Although the first instructions given in 1535 to the first viceroy of New Spain, Antonio Mendoza, specified that he should exploit “a good number of Black slaves” to work the mines (De la Torre Villar 1991:86), the imperial interest in African labor rapidly moved to sugar plantations. From 1550 to 1653, the Spanish monarchy explicitly directed its viceroys to build sugar mills using African and not Indigenous enslaved labor:

“Furthermore, we are informed that in many parts of New Spain, there are very good and well-prepared lands to plant sugar cane and make mills, because they are temperate lands and have a lot of water, both near the North Sea and on the coast of the South Sea. You will try to get some people to take care of making some sugar mills, and you will favor them in what can be done well, giving them land where they can make the mills and plant the canes [...], provided that it is without prejudice to the *indios*. And these persons must understand that they must have *negros* to serve their mills. If they use *indios*, they will face serious penalties.” (De la Torre Villar 1991:130–31)

As we have seen, the category *negro* usually referred to enslaved people of African descent forcefully brought to the Americas as a commodity to solve the problem of Indigenous shortage. As the population of African descent grew, but also diversified in status, other categories came into use. The categories *mulatos* and *negros libres* [free Blacks] were used by viceroys to caution the King against possible threats by people of African descent. In 1580, the Viceroy Martín Enríquez congratulated the King for continuing to “send to this land some *negros*, so that they are distributed among the miners.” At the same time, Enríquez alerted the King about “the great sum of *gente menuda* [lower people], *mestizos*, *mulatos*, and *negros libres*. ... I do not think it is a sin to presume on them some evil in case of rebellion, as has sometimes been feared.” However, Enriquez also preferred to disguise this apprehension. In his words:

“It is convenient that these and no one do not understand that we are with such mistrust. I have always lived with it and I have tried to disable them from certain things without them noticing, and gradually weaken the strength they could have, by not allowing them to use any kind of weapons [...]” (De la Torre Villar 1991:184–85)

The sense of threat and mistrust that Enríquez manifested, and also the convenience of hiding those perceptions, reveal the growing necessity of imperial bureaucracies to regulate the behavior of Afrodescendent populations that were both needed and feared. Such a sense of threat often hinged upon stigmatizing representations that justified specific policies of extraction. In 1590, the Marquex of Villamanrique also alerted the Viceroy Luis de Velasco about people of African descent and suggested a particular course of action. According to Villamanrique, in New Spain there were “a large number of *negros* and *mulatos libres*,” who were “harmful and pernicious” because “they just play and wander as vagabonds, committing robberies and damages.” Villamanrique, however, was concerned not only

about public behavior but also about presumed tax evasion by people of African descent. In his view, “although they pay tribute to his majesty, most of them avoid doing so, because they are not registered as ordered.” To address this problem, Villamarique recommended directing people of African descent to register with the mayor in their local jurisdiction, and forbidding them to leave the area. He describes the dual purpose of such laws as follows: first, the king would “collect the taxes that they must pay,” and second, with local Afrodescendent individuals now “subject to the mayor without being able to leave that place [...], the land [would be] assured of the damages and robberies that these loose and vagabond people do in it, and the miners [would receive] notable benefit in having people on duty to replace the work of most Indians.” (De la Torre Villar 1991:237–38).

It is not clear that Villamarique’s advice was ever implemented. However, it vividly illustrates the role of population registries in the fulfillment of imperial imperatives. Registering, coercing, and extracting revenue from people of African descent seemed justified in light of colonial prejudices and imperial necessities. To be sure, colonial authorities’ contempt was not limited to people of African descent. By the seventeenth century, there was a growing sense of peoplehood around plebeian *castas*, including some *españoles*. In 1642, for example, Juan de Palafox, Bishop of Puebla, described the population of New Spain in the following terms:

“*Negros, mulatos, mestizos* and others, who due to the mixture of their blood have different names, are many. These and *indios* and some lost and rogue *españoles*, are the ones who form a people in these provinces. The fidelity of *blancos* and *nobles* is at risk amid so much diversity of colors, nations and conditions, all of them with little light of reason and no shame [...].” (De la Torre Villar 1991:237–38).

However, despite the growing salience of *plebe*, genealogical representations of *casta* persisted from the previous century, with an explicit interest in distinguishing between “pure” and “mixed” Blackness. In 1673, the Viceroy Antonio Sebastián de Toledo provided a clear description of the four population categories of the “plebian order,” namely *mulatos* and *negros criollos*, *mestizos*, *indios*, and *negros bozales*.⁴² According to Toledo’s description,

“The *mulatos* and *negros criollos*, of whom there is a great number in the kingdom, are similar to each other with little difference: they are naturally haughty, audacious and fond of novelty. It is very convenient to have them in respect and take care of their actions and endeavors; but without showing distrust, bringing a light hand in the exaction of their tributes. The *mestizos*, sons and grandsons of *españoles* and *indias*, make up a different guild and a number almost equal to the preceding one; they are not less presumptuous, but they follow a better path with a more orderly courage subject to reason. They pride themselves on having our blood [...]. The *indios* differ greatly from the two mentioned nations, for being a melancholy and pusillanimous people, but atrocious, vindictive, superstitious and mendacious: their clumsiness, theft and barbarity (and I do not know if also the negligence and avarice of their parish priests) give little evidence of their spiritual use [...]. The *negros bozales*, driven from Guinea, are reduced to a very limited portion; and even if it grows, I would never be alarmed given their docile and servile nature.” (De la Torre Villar 1991:584–85).

Toledo’s “plebian order” illustrates the divergent attitudes of imperial authorities toward distinct categories of Blackness. Although *mulatos* and *negros criollos* were portrayed in a comparatively positive light, they had to be subject to close but hidden surveillance that would not reveal imperial distrust. The greater the number of *mulatos* and *negros criollos*, the greater the threat,

⁴² While *negros criollos* refer to people of African descent who were born in the Americas, *negros bozales* usually referred to people of African descent who were born in Africa. The word *bozal* means muzzle or halter and was primarily used to refer to enslaved Africans. According to the *Diccionario de Autoridades*, the label was also applied to “*negros*” who were considered “uneducated” and that needed to be “polished.” For a study of *negros bozales* in the religious confraternities of New Spain see Masferrer León (2011).

and the more important to treat this population with a “light hand.” *Negros bozales*, on the other hand, were perceived as comparatively servile and docile, almost like a commodity that could be managed (by implication) with a heavy hand. The difference between the two categories of Blackness shows not only the persistence of the division between freedom and slavery, but also the importance of distinguishing between the government of populations and the instrumentalization of commodities.

In 1697, the Bishop-Viceroy Juan de Ortega Montañés expressed a similar vision and division of people of African descent. To the “numerous multitude” of the plebe, Montañés added that of “*negros* and *mulatos libres*, and *esclavos*.” Montañés seemed to be less concerned about *esclavos*. After all, he believed “their owners take care of them,” and he considered it appropriate to show them “a sure trust, treating them like sons.” Regarding extracting tributes from *negros* and *mulatos libres*, Montañés suggested a different approach. For him, it was convenient to treat them with “due moderation and temperance and without violence in execution.” From his perspective, “it is necessary that external actions make them believe [we have] a sure confidence in their behavior, but with the reservation that they do not use or carry any weapon.” Montañés labeled his approach “*suaviter fortiter*,” a Latin expression that means pleasing in form and powerful in execution; the type of unflinching firmness and seemingly inoffensive form of government colonial authorities had been advocating for people of African descent.

With the advent of the Bourbon reforms in the eighteenth century, imperial authorities further developed this dual categorization of Blackness. Whereas *negros* became progressively racialized and excluded, *pardos* (another *casta* of African descent) became simultaneously “needed but unwanted” (Booker 1993). The imperial imperatives of extraction and coercion contributed to this

continued distinction. In 1794, Juan Vicente de Güemes Pacheco de Padilla y Horcasitas, the second Count of Revillagigedo, who was also the Viceroy responsible for conducting the census of 1790, made explicit his concerns about *negros*.

“At the same time that the entry of *europeos* and *gente blanca* was prohibited in America, who would have in many ways improved the *raza* of *indios* ; [...] *negros* have in every way disfigured and worsened the *casta india* , and have been the origin and beginning of so many deformed *castas* , as seen in these kingdoms. They also drive away *europeos* from domestic service and some other tasks, because it is not easy for [...] those who come from Europe to dare to mingle with them.” (De la Torre Villar 1991:1056).

Revillagigedo’s racialized representation of *negros* as a *casta* -degenerating category contrasts with his approach to *pardos* actively recruited for the imperial militias. Revillagigedo was particularly concerned with “preserving the quiescence of villages.” “To this end—Revillagigedo wrote—, enlistments should only include *individuos blancos o de casta limpia* [white or clean caste individuals]. However, this rule cannot be followed in coastal and bordering jurisdictions, where it is indispensable to include *castas tributarias* [tributary castes],⁴³ relieving them from tribute in order to count on a competent number of militias capable of containing the first threats or insults from any enemies.” (De la Torre Villar 1991:1133).

Revillagigedo’s comment reveals the dilemma imperial elites faced by the end of the eighteenth century. As their understanding of colonial populations became increasingly racialized, imperial imperatives of extraction and coercion also became more relevant. Subdividing Afrodescendent populations according to supposedly different kinds of Blackness offered a way to solve this dilemma:

⁴³ By *castas tributarias* Revillagigedo referred to Indigenous and Afrodescendent people who pay tributes.

imperial authorities saw no contradiction in excluding *negros* while including *pardos* from a given tier of society. Nevertheless, the military recruitment of *pardos* created another problem: those employed in the militia were exempted from paying taxes. What, then, would be the appropriate level of *pardo* recruitment—sufficient to strengthen the military apparatus, but not so high as to substantially affect the fiscal coffers of the imperial state? The answer was in the colonial census of 1790.

Categorizing Blackness in Eighteenth Century New Granada

Neither New Spain nor New Granada ever became the kind of sugar colony that was developed in Cuba, but by the late eighteenth century, the importation of enslaved labor had significantly increased (Sharp 1975). At that time, though, New Granada also had a significant population of free people of African descent. How did elites address competing exploitative projects—namely, to incorporate part of the Afrodescendent population in the militaristic apparatus of the colonial state while keeping other parts of that population enslaved? As in New Spain, the use of distinct categories of Blackness allowed imperial elites to reify demographic divisions within this demographic in order to serve competing colonial interests without apparent contradiction. While the category *negro* designated the enslaved population, other categories of Blackness such as *pardos* and *mulatos* were used to classify and assign other authorized occupations to people of African descent.

In 1772, Pedro Messía de la Cerda, the outgoing viceroy of New Granada, conveyed to the incoming viceroy, Manuel Guirior, the following description of the state of the mines.

“[I]t is convenient, in my view, not only to give all help to the miners as vassals so useful to the State, but also to encourage others to do the same and provide them with the means possible to make this important job less bothersome. In this manner, it would be convenient to repair

roads and sidewalks for the transport of utensils and food; provide an abundant supply of *negros* for work at equitable prices, and in general promote commerce. In the Provinces of Chocó, so famous for their mines, there is an unfortunate shortage of food and everything necessary for work. The miners are buying food, iron, steel, *esclavos* and other things at high prices. And to make amends in some way for his indigence, following judicial proceedings, I granted that two ships could sail from Guayaquil each year for their provision.” (Colmenares 1989a:137).

This communication between outgoing and incoming viceroys of New Granada shows the importance of mining and miners for the functioning of the colonial state, but also the use of the category *negro* during the colonial juncture of the second half of the eighteenth century. For Messía de la Cerda, supporting the mines and meeting the needs of the miners was crucial to sustaining New Granada both economically and politically. In another passage he wrote, “[...] the first priority must be given to the work of the mines, particularly gold, since these are the ones that sustain and nurture the political body of the Viceroyalty of Santafé” (Colmenares 1989a:136). For the viceroy, it was clear that increasing colonial revenue implied expanding the extractive economy of mines, which were particularly profitable in the Pacific region of Chocó. In this context, *negro* was another word for *slave*. In fact, in the passage above the word *esclavo* can be substituted without altering any substantive meaning.

In another passage of his report, Viceroy Messía de la Cerda lamented the lack of weapons and military force to impose colonial mandates. He stated that New Granada had “two classes of enemies:” the “disobedient vassals” and the “rebellious barbarians who live in the interior of the provinces” (Colmenares 1989a:144). It was in this second group where Messía de la Cerda placed the non-reduced *indios* and the enslaved *negros*. As he wrote,

“In Chocó the Cunacunas frequently and repeatedly attack, set fire to Vigía de Atrato, kill people, steal what they find and put the Provinces in consternation, which is increased by the knowledge that they acquire dealing with foreigners; and it may be suspected that with this aid, they will ever try to create public disturbance caused by the disloyalty of the already reduced *indios* and the multitude of *negro* slaves, in whom no hope can be justified due to their servile condition and natural desire to shake off the yoke of slavery.” (Colmenares 1989a:146).

In Messía de la Cerda’s report, Blackness appears framed both as an opportunity and a threat.

Negros were fundamentally needed to support Spain’s expansion of the slave trade. Unlike other categories, *negro* designated a crucial population, one without which Spain could not maintain the economic revenue and political control of New Granada. Conceptualized more as a commodity than a population, *negros* were not “vassals” but an unredeemable category of people that also could not be trusted. This notion of the “Black savage,” informed by notions of both slavery and barbarism, was also circumscribed to a particular geography within the colonial imagination of New Granada. Although colonial bureaucrats mentioned several places, the region of Chocó, well known for its productive mining operations, was seen as one of the territories of preeminent concern about the population of *negros* and the management thereof.

And yet, *negro* was not the only colonial category to represent people of African descent. Colonial authorities also used *pardos* and *morenos* to refer to other members of the Afrodescendent population. In his 1789 report, the Archbishop of New Granada made this distinction clear. In his discussion of gold mines in the regions of Antioquia, Chocó, and Popayán, he repeatedly referred to people of African descent as *negros*. For example, he indicated that the mining operations of Antioquia had “more or less numerous gangs of *negros*” (Colmenares 1989a:434). Once again, the category *negro*

was used *in lieu* of *esclavo*. However, when his report focused on “military bodies,” he used other categories to describe people of African descent. The archbishop clearly indicated that “the most important expenses the Royal Treasury has to incur are undoubtedly the maintenance of the troops and the navy,” and proceeded to describe the different types of military units, mentioning the “*blancos* militia regiment.” However, he also described the “battalion of free *pardos*” (892 units), the “artillery companies of free *morenos* and *pardos*” (893 units), and “militia regiments of all colors” (893 units) (Colmenares 1989a:484–86). Although the Archbishop carefully detailed the ethnoracial composition of military units, the category *negro* was absent in this section of the report.

As other scholars have found (Herrera Ángel 2006; Twinam 2015), *libres de todos los colores* [free people of all colors] represented an important category in eighteenth-century New Granada. While *libre* implied autonomy from established powers (e.g., caciques, slaveowners, or lords), *de todos los colores* evoked a significant degree of mixture that defied existing classifications (Garrido 2005). As imagined members of this broader category, *pardos* and *morenos* were distinguished both by their ethnoracial indicia and their socio-economic positioning. To be sure, all categories of Blackness shared the *calidad* of being “of color,” which justified their exclusion from whiteness (Rappaport 2014:220).⁴⁴ And yet, the distinction was consequential. Unlike *negros*, *pardos* or *morenos* were not understood as barbarians or savages. On the contrary, they were often perceived as “loyal vassals” in

⁴⁴ According to the *Diccionario de Autoridades*, written by the *Real Academia Española* between 1726 and 1739, “White” [*blanco*] referred to a “white man, white woman. The same as an honest, noble person, of well-known *calidad*: because Blacks, mulattoes, Berbers and other people who among us are considered insignificant and despicable, they regularly lack the color white, which Europeans almost always have: being a white man or white woman is held as a prerogative of nature, which marks as well-born those who possess it: and for this reason it is usually said, ‘This is not done among white men,’ to denote that some action is bad, and common only among despicable people.” (RAE 1726).

charge of preserving the “order and tranquility” of New Granada (Colmenares 1989a:485). They also index a different ethnoracial geography. Whereas *negros* were often located in the inaccessible territories of the Pacific region, mentions of *pardos* or *morenos* appear in documents about integrated locations of the Atlantic region (e.g., Cartagena, Mompós, Loricá, and Santa Marta).

In sum, the dual colonial imperative of the eighteenth century that led the Spanish empire to increase *extraction* and enhance *coercion* rearticulated two different categorizations of Blackness in New Granada. Whereas categories of “pure Blackness” (e.g., *negro*) became synonymous with an enslaved population that had to be further exploited and subjugated to better compete against the British in the market for slave-produced commodities, categories of “mixed Blackness” (e.g., *pardos*, *morenos* and *mulatos*) were framed as Afrodescendent categories of *libres de todos los colores* who could be entrusted with armed protection of colonial domains against expansive British militarism.⁴⁵ These two different categorizations of Blackness not only refer to different degrees of ethnoracial mixture and socio-economic occupation, but also to different degrees of honor, trust and virtue, as defined by the colonial authorities. More importantly, distinct categories of Blackness were also associated with a heterogeneous ethnoracial geography, across which all these categorical meanings were spatially fixed.

Enumerating Blackness in Eighteenth Century New Spain

⁴⁵ To be sure, people of African descent had many other occupations in late eighteenth century New Granada (Aguilera Díaz and Meisel Roca 2009). And yet, they were overrepresented in the mines and the militia, two of the most important domains of investment and development of Bourbon period of the Spanish empire.

The 1790 census of New Spain, also known as the census of Revillagigedo, reflected the military and fiscal concerns the viceroy had in mind. As Revillagigedo wrote to the king, he wished to assess the real military strength of troops in New Spain, as well as the extent of tax evasion by those who enlisted in militias only to avoid paying tributes. According to the viceroy,

“Upon my arrival in these kingdoms there was a large number of troops of militias, both provincial and urban; but their existence was actually imaginary, and their strength even more so. Enlistment had been neglected for a long time, many officer positions were left unfulfilled, most of these troops had not been inspected, and they lacked all the necessary knowledge. In a word, they only served to deprive the king of the tribute that militiamen [would otherwise have had] to pay and hinder the proper administration of justice. [...] I issued the first providences to create a census in order to acquire a true knowledge of the *calidad* of people that could be counted on in each district [...]” (De la Torre Villar 1991:1131).

Revillagigedo’s motivations for conducting the census—which were also an expression of the imperial imperatives of the time— were about increasing *extraction* and enhancing *coercion*. As he implied, counting the population was an attempt to gain “true knowledge” of how many people could be counted on for military and fiscal purposes. Revillagigedo, however, was keenly aware that many people in New Spain would either avoid or lie to the enumerators. Following the *suaviter fortiter* approach of previous viceroys, Revillagigedo appealed to priests to use “gentle loving persuasion” to convince their parishioners that the census was harmless:

“As this kind of inquiries usually alarm people with little education and discernment, and because it can be poorly glossed or understood driving some people to avoid, hide, or withhold the truth, I have no doubt that the priests and their assistants will predispose in advance the spirits of their parishioners with gentle loving persuasion. This will bring important news to the Sovereign and to public happiness. People should not think that this would harm them in any way.” (Castro Aranda 1977:10).

The forms of the 1790 census included age, sex, but also *estado* (i.e., single, married, and divorced), *casta* (i.e., *europeos, españoles, indios, mulatos, and otras castas*), and *clase* (e.g., priests, students, military, laborers, merchants, miners, artisans, among others). Unlike previous colonial censuses, the category *negro* was absent. Before the enumeration displayed in a summary table (see Table 1.4), Revillagigedo requested narrative descriptions of each member of the family unit (Table 1.5). A typical description had the following information:

“Don Jacinto Gutiérrez, Hacienda owner, native *español* from Tehuantepeue, aged 61, married to Doña Teresa Medina, *española*, aged 55. He has five children, one 23 years old, another 19, another 17, another 11, and another 7. He also has a 32-year-old *español* overseer who is single, a 28-year-old *mulato* servant, a 14-year-old young *indio*, and two maids: a 40-year-old *negra*, and another 18-year-old *loba*. The *mulato* servant pays tribute.” (Castro Aranda 1977:49).

As we can see, the narrative descriptions of family units often have more *casta* categories than those included in summary charts. This shows that the 1790 census authorities had to reduce the number, diversity, and complexity of *casta* classifications. The streamlining of categories most likely occurred through a stepwise process of aggregation that summarized results by locality and province, before reaching the office of the viceroy secretary. Given the imperial imperatives of the late eighteenth century, colonial authorities were invested in gathering accurate, but also purposeful information about the population. Although numbers were necessary, authorities aimed to conduct the kind of enumeration that would do the job. In this regard, we may think of the 1790 census as a multi-level process of intra-imperial “critique and revision” (Castro Aranda 1977:11–12) that was enumerative as much as it was performative.

Despite Revillagigedo's insistence, the 1790 census could not be completed under his rule. In his report to the king, he wrote: "It does not matter how much effort I have invested and how many orders I have repeated, it has not been possible for me to conclude the census of the population of these kingdoms." However, this did not prevent Spanish authorities from estimating the total population of New Spain. According to Revillagigedo, "it can be inferred with a high probability that the population does not exceed three and a half million souls." (De la Torre Villar 1991:1055). Additionally, he provided a general summary of some of the categories of men who would be available for military enlistment. In his estimation of the number of men between 16 and 40 years, New Spain had 91,419 of *casta limpia*, and 31,890 *pardos*. For Revillagigedo, these numbers were "very small for the vast extension of this kingdom" (De la Torre Villar 1991:1132).

Criticism of the census results appeared immediately upon publication of its partial results in 1791. The priest Antonio Alzate Ramírez established a two-year correspondence with the viceroy Revillagigedo criticizing the results. According to Alzate, the data for Mexico City was "one of the most unfounded productions that have come out of the press" (Mayer Celis 2021:377). From Alzate's point of view, the census had overcounting and undercounting shortcomings. Regarding overcounts, he noticed that the 1790 census included 4,899 persons not included in the last fiscal census of the city. In this sense, he wrote: "either the judges, to whom the tribute is incumbent, are ignorant or the state is ill-informed." (Castro Aranda 1977:16). Regarding undercounts, he was convinced that the number of *uropeos* and *negros* was too small: "The number of *uropeos* expressed in the registry seems very small to me [...]. What I have said about the Europeans should also be understood about the *negros*, that is: their number is excessively greater than that expressed in the census." (Saborit

2018:108–9). Against these critiques, Revillagigedo maintained that the additional number of tributaries was real and that previous fiscal registries were undercounting the population. Although it is virtually impossible to assess who was right, it is easier to understand why Revillagigedo's version prevailed: it aligned with the imperial imperatives of the Spanish crown.

Despite its limitations, the 1790 census was useful for colonial authorities to find a compromise between increasing extraction and strengthening coercion. As Revillagigedo suggested, his solution to the imperial dilemma relied on both fiscal and geopolitical considerations that targeted Afrodescendent populations across several regions. On coasts and at the borders, Revillagigedo maintained militias of *pardos*, allowing fiscal exemptions among this category of people of African descent. For example, in coastal locales such as Veracruz and Yucatán, various military units of *pardos* remained unified (Bock 2013). However, in non-coastal and non-border regions, Revillagigedo was particularly invested in dismantling these militias of *pardos* (Barney 2006; Velázquez 1997:136–41). As a consequence, the number of Afrodescendent tributaries grew significantly in these regions. In places like San Luis Potosí, for instance, tributary persons of African descent increased at a higher rate compared to other categories (See Table 1.6).

Although it was not completed, the 1790 census seemed to fulfill its imperial function: rendering people of African descent legible for extractive and coercive colonial purposes. Unlike other *castas*, *pardos* were subjected to closer imperial scrutiny enabled through the systematic, albeit incomplete enumeration of the late eighteenth century census. The increased level of surveillance varied across regions, and despite the *suaviter fortiter* ideal of colonial authority, some *pardos* were subjected to a heavier hand than others. As Alzate suggested, one of the consequences of the 1790

census was the official disappearance of *negros*. Although it had been included in previous enumerations, this category of people of African descent did not feature in the Revillagigedo census. This omission would have important consequences for nineteenth-century readers and interpreters of the Mexican population.

Enumerating Blackness in Eighteenth Century New Granada

As in New Spain, the censuses of the late eighteenth century in New Granada also served the dual imperative of the Spanish empire: increasing *extraction* and enhancing *coercion*. They also influenced the diverse ways Blackness was statistically portrayed amid these competing imperial interests. Although the Spanish empire had conducted partial enumerations in some of the territories of New Granada from the first years of the colonization process (Gomez 1970), the most exhaustive general census is considered to be the one carried out in 1778.⁴⁶ Manuel Antonio Flórez, viceroy of New Granada, ordered the compilation of annual registers in compliance with the *Orden Real* issued in San Lorenzo on November 10, 1776, during the reign of Carlos III. This order mandated the enumeration of all inhabitants of the colonies “with due distinction of *estados*, *clases* and *castas* for all persons of both sexes, without excluding infants” (Solano 2015:44).

The 1778 census in New Granada was modeled after one conducted in 1768 in Spain by the Count of Aranda. The Aranda census initiated a transition to “modern” forms of enumeration (Solano 2013:159), and it was expected to follow the new bureaucratic practices of “clarity, simplicity,

⁴⁶ According to some scholars, José Solís Folch was the first viceroy who in 1758 created a special office within the colonial bureaucracy of New Granada to collect statistical data (Charry Lara 1954:9).

and truthfulness” designed by the Bourbons (Marchena 2005:54). Implementation on the ground, however, was very different. According to Viceroy Caballero y Góngora,

“From the unequal and scattered population of the kingdom arises the difficulty of enumerating its residents accurately, so that no matter how much care one wants to put into the formation of a general registry, we will never be able to know about the hidden settlements that are ignored. However, it has always been tried and has been achieved, at least [to the extent of] a prudential calculation.” (Rueda 2012:27).

Some of the initial results of the general census of New Granada had been compiled in Bogotá by 1780, four years after the *Orden Real* had been issued. Following this mandate, the census included distinctions by age, sex, *clases*, and *castas*. The main ethnoracial categories were *blancos*, *indios*, *libres de todos los colores* [free people of all colors], and *esclavos de varios colores* [slaves of various colors] (See Table 1.7).

In his 1789 *Descripción del Reyno de Santa Fé de Bogotá*, Francisco Silvestre, a Spanish advisor to the viceroyalty of New Granada, summarized the total population of the viceroyalty using data from the 1778 census. He asserted that New Granada had 1,412,010 inhabitants—although he added that this number “could be extended up to one and a half million.” Additionally, he calculated 474,443 *blancos* (33.6%), 430,910 *indios* (30.5%), 419,685 *libres* (29.7%), and 83,972 *esclavos* (5.9%). Silvestre was concerned about the population of New Granada. In his eyes, this was a “sparsely populated kingdom” that had remained as such since the beginning of the conquest. Silvestre explains this demographic stagnation by the fact that Indigenous peoples had not declined in number. On the contrary, they had *españolizado* [spanishized] or *blanqueado* [whitened] (Silvestre 1950:81–82). His interpretation of the demographic composition of the Atlantic region was nonetheless different.

According to Silvestre, in places like Cartagena and Santa Marta, and in contrast with Andean locales like Tunja or Santa Fé, “the number of *blancos* has not increased so much [...] compared to that of *morenos*, *pardos*, [and other *Castas*].” In his perspective, this happened because,

“[...] being close to the sea and working in farms like slaves, they have remained there. And where the mines are worked, such as Antioquia, Popayán and Chocó, a greater portion of these who, mixed with the Indians and half *castas*, have made stand out their black color and others that derive from it; or whitened when there has been no intermission or retrograde.” (Silvestre 1950:83)

The 1778 census, and Silvestre’s interpretation of it, shaped a demographic imagination of and for New Granada, which also laid the foundations for the demographic understanding of the future Republic of Colombia. More recent computations of the 1778 census offered a demographic composition similar to that presented by Silvestre: 25% “Whites,” 35.9% “Indians,” 33.4% “Free people,” and 5.4% “Slaves” (Gomez 1970:19). Until recently, these data led intellectuals, academics, and politicians to interpret the 1778 census as a valid proof of the “intense process of mestizaje” that was occurring in New Granada (Jaramillo Uribe 1989:165). Although Silvestre never used the word “mestizaje” in his text, and “Mestizos” appeared in a very few passages only,⁴⁷ scholars have often equated *libres* with *mestizos*, and argued that “[*m*]estizaje was the driving force behind population growth” (McFarlane 1993:34). The logic behind the 1778 census, however, was much more complicated.

⁴⁷ In fact, in one of those few instances, Silvestre use the category “mestizos” to designate members of the Revolt of the Comuneros, a popular uprising that occurred in New Granada in 1781.

For one thing, nineteenth- and twentieth-century analysts of the 1778 enumeration seemed much more willing to believe in the veracity of the census than Silvestre was. These readings not only anachronistically extrapolated later projects of *mestizaje* onto the colonial demography of New Granada, but also failed to inquire about the conditions of possibility of such enumeration. That this enumeration was affected by undercounts is a truism. Even eighteenth-century analysts—including Viceroy Caballero y Góngora—were acutely aware of the various blind spots of the 1778 census. What we need to know is why, after four years of data collection and processing, the census was published with limitations that colonial authorities considered reasonable—or, to use Caballero y Góngora’s word, “prudential.” What *sense of prudence* did the numbers of the 1778 census aim to convey?

The 1778 enumeration was, above all, a simplification of the many social and official categories available in New Granada in the late eighteenth century (Solano 2015). Although the final census count only included four categories (i.e., *blancos*, *indios*, *libres*, and *esclavos*), local and regional registries had a much greater variety of classification and identification categories. The city of Cartagena, located in the Atlantic region, is a revealing example. The final computation of the 1778 census showed a population of 13,690: 4,034 *blancos* (29.5%), 88 *indios* (0.6%), 6,745 *libres* (49.3%), and 2,584 *esclavos* (18.9%) (Aguilera Díaz and Meisel Roca 2009:22). However, local and regional reports sent to Bogotá in 1777 for census compilation reveal a much more complicated set of categories at stake in Cartagena (See Table 1.8).

The local registry of the city of Cartagena shows the difference between the local enumeration and the central computation. At least half of the records had *casta* categories that were more numerous than the four main categories that were reported in the census. Although *libres* was unsurprisingly the

more numerous category (44.5%) under the broader category “Free people,” it is worth noting that *mestizos* only represented 0.7%.⁴⁸ It is also interesting to remark that Afrodescendent categories such as *pardos* and *mulatos* represented 34.3% of this category. Moreover, *negros*—a term traditionally used to refer to enslaved populations— represented 14.8% of “Free people.” Regarding the category “Slaves,” the registry of the city of Cartagena also shows a wider variety of *castas*. As expected, *negros* and *esclavos* were the most numerous categories (56.8% and 29.5%, respectively). And yet, it is also interesting to note that the registry classified a significant portion of enslaved persons under other Afrodescendent categories such as *mulatos*, *zambos*, *pardos*, and *cuarterones* (13.7%).

Before considering the implications of the discrepancy between the local and regional categories of the 1777 reports and the reduced set of categories of the 1778 census, it is worth exploring how colonial authorities in Cartagena interpreted this larger set of *casta* categories in the eighteenth century. Jorge Juan Santacilia and Antonio de Ulloa were two Spanish scientists who visited Cartagena and published *Relación Histórica del Viage a la América Meridional* in 1748. In their book, they argue that the population of Cartagena was “divided into several *castas* produced from the union of Whites, Blacks, and Indians” (de Ulloa 1758:40). What follows is their description of the different “mixtures” (*mezclas*) between “Whites” and “Blacks” (which it is worth quoting *in extenso*):

“Among the other *especies de gente* [species of people], which originate from the mixture of *blancos* and *negros*, the first are *mulatos*, so well-known that there is no need of further explanation. Next are *tercerones*, which come from *mulato* and *blanco*, and begin to approach the latter, although their color still does not hide its origin and *calidad*. After these follow

⁴⁸ These percentages are calculated using the total number of reports with information on ethnoracial categorization.

quarterones, and as one can infer, they proceed from *blanco* and *tercerón*. And then are *quinterones*, from *blanco* and *quarterón*. This is the last one that belongs to the *castas de negro* [black castes]. When they reach this degree, the difference between *blancos* and them is not perceptible either by color or features; and they even tend to be whiter than *españoles* themselves.

The product of *blancos*, and *quinterón* is called *español*, and it is considered out of the *raza de negro* [Black race]; although their grandparents, who are usually alive, are not very different from *mulatos*. Every person is so jealous of the hierarchy of their *casta*, and so proud of it, that if someone inadvertently calls them by a degree lower than what they are, they blush and consider it an insult. They warn the mistaken person that they are not what they have been called, and that they do not want to lose what their fortune has given them.

Before reaching the degree or hierarchy of *quinterones*, there are several mixtures that throw them back; for between *mulato* and *negro* there is another *casta*, which they call *zambo*, owing their origin to a mixture between one of these with *indio*, or among themselves. They also distinguish themselves according to the *castas* where their parents come from. Between *tercerón* and *mulato*; *cuarterón* and *tercerón*, and so on, are the *tente en el aire* [suspended in the air], because they neither advance nor recede. Children whose parents are *cuarterones* or *quinterones*, because they are mixed with *mulatos* or *tercerones*, or these mixed with *negros*, have the name of *salto atrás* [jump back] because instead of advancing to being *blancos*, they have regressed, approaching the *casta de negros* [Black caste]. Also, all mixtures from *negro* to *quinterón* with *indio* are called *zambos, de negro, de mulato, de tercerón*, etc.

These are the best known and most common *castas*. There are indeed several others, proceeding from their intermarriages, and they are of so many *especies* [species], and in such great abundance, that not even they know how to distinguish themselves. They are the only people one sees on the streets of the city, *estancias*, and villages. For if any *personas blancas* [white persons], especially women, are met with, it is only accidental. The women, who are legitimately so, live with some retirement in their houses.” (de Ulloa 1758:40–42)

The narrative of Santacilia and Ulloa provides a vivid example of the intricate relationships between official *casta* categorizations in eighteenth-century New Granada. Although it is difficult to

assess from this document the extent to which its descriptions correlate with the everyday life of people in Cartagena, it helps us understand the putative meanings of the categories that emerge in local and regional registries of 1777, and the type of simplification undertaken by colonial authorities in the 1778 census. At least four implications can be drawn from this comparison. First, the 1777 records and the narrative of Santacilia and Ulloa show that colonial authorities were aware of the proliferation of categories during the eighteenth century. Rather than *mestizaje*, it would be more appropriate to say that imperial bureaucrats—at least those working at local and regional levels—officially recognized the existence of *castizaje*, that is, the understanding of multiple, non-linear, and ambiguous categorization processes including, but not limited to ethnoracial distinctions (Morales Cruz 2011; Vinson 2018:60–64).

Second, the comparison shows that Blackness played a significant role in the official classification of *castas*. Although there is no evidence that the Spanish empire enforced *casta* categories with the level of systematicity described by Santacilia and Ulloa (Gonzalbo Aizpuru 2013), it is worth noting that they conceived Blackness as a form of symbolic pollution that diminished the value of a bounded set of categories. Notions like *casta de negros* [Black caste] or *raza de negro* [Black race] indicate that, despite *castizaje*, there was a clear understanding of Blackness—at least within imperial elites of the period—as an overarching principle of vision and division that shapes the hierarchy of *casta* categories such as *mulato*, *pardo*, and *zambo*, among others.

Third, the comparison helps to understand the symbolic implications of the reclassification colonial authorities performed in the 1778 census. On one hand, the category “Free people”—later interpreted as “Mestizos”—rendered statistically invisible various categories of Blackness. Although

this broader category usually included higher-ranking categories such as *pardos* and *mulatos*, they were not recorded as persons of African descent. On the other hand, instead of recording the *casta* origins of *negros*, colonial officials made visible their “Slave” status only. Since the category *negro* was often equated with the status of *esclavo*, it is reasonable to say that the census rendered people of African descent visible only when they were also marked by the status of those who were enslaved.

In sum, the 1778 census contributed to objectifying a partitioned notion of Blackness in New Granada. Facing the dual imperative of increasing *extraction* and enhancing *coercion*, it seemed “prudent”—to borrow Caballero y Góngora’s turn of phrase—for colonial authorities to reinforce the framing of *negros* as enslaved persons while subsuming *pardos*, *mulatos* and other categories of people of African descent under the broader category of *libres*. The demographic map of eighteenth-century New Granada (See Figure 10) was less an inventory of the many categories of classification and identification within the imperial domain than a message of *urgency* and *deservingness* among colonial bureaucrats—a case the colony presented to the metropolis. Although *negros* were not the only people of African descent enslaved in New Granada, reducing Blackness to enslaved status helped colonists paint a picture suggesting they had only a small number of people working the mines, thus highlighting the need to increase the slave trade for Spain to compete with the British. While *pardos* and *mulatos*, among other Afrodescendants, constituted a significant population, recording them as *libres* portrayed an autonomous population willing to pay tributes and defend the empire. The categorical simplification was not only a bureaucratic technique of Spain under the Bourbons but also a strategy to portray New Granada as an imperial domain deserving of urgent reforms. The demographic gap between *libres* and *esclavos* can be seen as the discrepancy between what New

Granada was giving the metropole, and what it needed to receive. By prudently subsuming *negros* under *esclavos* and *pardos* and *mulatos* (among others) under *libres*, census-taking used Blackness as a significant but invisible token in the intra-imperial politics between New Granada and Spain in the late eighteenth century.

Comparative Conclusions

In this chapter, New Spain and New Granada are two instances of a similar process with divergent consequences across imperial domains. There are significant differences between these two colonial sites that could make their comparison problematic. One could argue, for example, that they were not comparable administrative units within the Spanish empire. After all, the viceroyalty of New Spain was created in 1535; the viceroyalty of New Granada was not established until 1723, and then reestablished in 1739. Moreover, one could argue that there are significant differences in the underlying demography of colonial populations within these two units. Unlike New Spain, New Granada received a significant population of enslaved Africans during the eighteenth century (Sharp 1975:471). And yet, as important as these differences might be, they remain differences of degree and not of kind. That is, the specificities of the colonial configuration of New Spain and New Granada crystallized within a similar context of imperial rule, a similar situation of inter-imperial competition, and a similar set of imperial imperatives. From a methodological standpoint, it is therefore more useful to study those differences as an endpoint, rather than the point of departure of the comparison.

By the late eighteenth century, at the apex of Bourbon reforms, colonial authorities of New Spain and New Granada were similarly trying to revamp the administration of colonial rule. As we have seen, after temporarily losing Havana to the British, increasing extraction and enhancing coercion became imperative for the Spanish monarchy, and this shift had consequences for people of African descent. In both domains, imperial bureaucracy seemed to give the benefit of the doubt to categories of “mixed Blackness” (e.g., *mulatos* or *pardos*), while openly excluding categories of “pure Blackness” (e.g., *negros*). This dichotomy, however, was managed differently across colonial domains. While in New Spain the categories of “mixed Blackness” remained demographically salient, in New Granada these categories were subsumed within the broader category of *libres de todos los colores* [free people of all colors]. The opposite was true for categories of “pure Blackness.” Whereas in New Spain the category *negro* disappeared from the late colonial census, in New Granada it became salient and expansive aggregating other categories of Blackness under the broader category *esclavo*. In other words, while “mixed Blackness” remained distinctive and “pure Blackness” vanished from the official records of New Spain, in New Granada “mixed Blackness” seemed to disappear from the census and “pure Blackness” became encompassing.

The reason for this divergence lies in each colonial domain's different ways of institutionalizing imperial imperatives of extraction and coercion. In New Granada, imperial bureaucrats aimed to enhance extraction by increasing the revenue produced through the enslaved labor of people of African descent working in the mines. The category *negro*, often used as a replacement for *esclavo*, was often inscribed in the rural geography of slavery on the Pacific Coast, and was usually represented with images of savagery and barbarism. Coercion, on the other hand, was

achieved through military units integrated by people of African descent usually classified as *pardos* or *morenos*. As enslaved labor of African descent became increasingly important for the expansion of mining during the eighteenth century, the category *negro* also became increasingly salient and expansive.

By the eighteenth century, the population of enslaved people of African descent in New Spain was less numerous and more urban compared to that of New Granada. Extraction, in this context, was mainly conducted by colonial authorities through taxation of tributary *castas*, including those of African descent. Unlike New Granada, *pardos* and *mulatos* were subject to closer imperial scrutiny—they could be enlisted in the militia to enjoy tax exemptions or expelled from the militia to pay royal tributes. In other words, New Spain set limits for both extraction and coercion within the boundaries of “mixed Blackness.” As imperial competition with the British increased, imperial authorities used data from the census to distinguish among different subnational forms of “mixed Blackness.” Whereas *pardos* and *mulatos* were targeted and excluded from the militia in some regions, in others they retained their military rank and tax-exempt status.

Despite broad similarities, the Bourbon reforms brought different categorical consequences for people of African descent in the Americas. The censuses of the late eighteenth century rendered visible distinct categories of Blackness, responding to a different configuration of imperial imperatives, and also to a different form of intra-imperial politics. The need to increase extraction and enhance coercion shaped the demographic visibility of people of African descent. By the nineteenth century, however, much of the fiscal and military purpose of these censuses was lost to new readers and interpreters. The demographic enumerations seemed to acquire an a-perspectival reality that they

lacked during the late eighteenth century. For the nationalist elites of the new century, colonial enumerations simply reflected the demographic reality of their new nations.

CHAPTER 2

NEW WORLD, NEW NATIONS AND NEW UNDERSTANDINGS OF BLACKNESS

With independence, republican censuses acquired a different meaning: unlike colonial censuses, they were not designed to extract resources and tributes from the population. These new censuses were intended to establish conditions of access to political representation within the republican state. They also became a public instrument that contributed to forging the representation of a population that was now considered nationally distinct (Ventresca 1995).

To be sure, census-taking during the nineteenth century in Latin America was infrequent. Nascent states lacked financial and logistical resources, bureaucratic infrastructure often did not extend beyond a few cities, and much of the population could not be effectively identified. In addition, the State lacked sufficient legitimacy in the eyes of the population to carry out the census enumeration (Loveman 2005). Inhabitants often avoided being counted in these censuses, thinking their only purpose was to “demand contributions and draw recruits” (Tovar, Tovar, and Tovar 1994:54).

However, even in the few censuses carried out during this period, the enumeration of people of African descent was rare. Nineteenth-century *caudillos* knew it would be impossible to win the wars of independence and maintain republican order without the political and military support of this demographic group. One of the first post-colonial measures was to declare the abolition of *castas* and drop questions of ethnoracial classification from official data collection instruments, including national censuses (Loveman 2014:233, 241). Nevertheless, nationalist elites' discourse on nation-

building projects had deeply racialist foundations. If republican censuses were incomplete or not available, how did elites develop a sense of the demography of the new nations? Moreover, what was the role of such demographic estimates in the consolidation of a *doxic* understanding of Blackness within the new nations?

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section shows how scientific travelers in general, and Alexander von Humboldt in particular, instilled a sense of ethnoracial demography in nationalist elites. Unlike other influential actors, Humboldt was uniquely positioned to access the wealth of numerical data from the Spanish monarchy, and he published it for the growing number of national publics in Latin America. Humboldt's intervention, however, had profound consequences for estimating the demography of Blackness in the region.

The last section focuses on the uses of Humboldt's knowledge by nationalist elites as they navigated a dual republican dilemma: sustaining categorical restrictions on citizenship without using the colonial categories of the past, and also defending the future of the new nation in racialist terms without resorting to the pessimist conclusions of some European intellectuals. In this section I compare the work of two liberal cosmopolitan elite authors, Mexican José María Luis Mora (1794-1850) and Colombian José María Samper (1828-1888), who sought to develop a new racialist justification for their emerging nationalist projects. This analysis shows the different ways projects of *mestizaje* in Mexico and Colombia articulated discursive notions of Blackness.

For many years after independence, emerging Latin American states lacked a clear numeric understanding of their population. Two elements contributed to this demographic blindness. First, most Latin American elites lacked access to the results of the last colonial censuses, which often remained unpublished.⁴⁹ The Spanish crown feared these data might fall into British hands, leading them to prohibit circulation of these materials. Imperial competition created an instinct for suppression within the Spanish monarchy that also paradoxically censored Iberian contributions to the European Enlightenment (Bleichmar et al. 2008; Cañizares-Esguerra 2006).

Second, Latin American states lacked the bureaucratic infrastructure, financial capacity or political authority to conduct national censuses. For the first half of the nineteenth century at least, the intra-national and international borders of the nation were unclear: the consolidated territory of the Mexican state was defended against Spain's reconquest attempts (1821-1829), armed challenges from Comanches, Apaches, Yaquis, Navajos and other indigenous groups (1821-1848), secession movements from Jalisco, Puebla, Oaxaca, Zacatecas, Texas, Tabasco, and Yucatán (1823-1843), and

⁴⁹ Even religious intellectuals, who latter would become very influential within the nationalist intelligentsia, lacked access to the systematic results of the imperial *padrones* and *relaciones* that had been submitted to the peninsular bureaucracy. As Mexican Jesuit and historian Francisco José Clavijero (1731-1778) put it in his famous *History of Mexico* (1780), "if we do not know hitherto the population of those countries in which the Europeans have established themselves, such as those of Guatemala [sic], Peru, Quito, Terra Fime, Chili [sic], who is capable of guessing the number of inhabitants of the numerous countries little or not at all known to the Europeans, such as those which are to the north and north-west of Coahuila, New Mexico, California, and the river *Colorado*, or Red River, in North America? (Clavijero 1780:421-22).

the territorial expansion of the United States (1846-1848). Under conditions of political and military turmoil, the Mexican state lacked valid demographic estimates of its population.⁵⁰

However, lack of direct access to colonial censuses and absence of bureaucratic means to conduct one did not prevent Latin American elites from estimating and imagining the national populations they still claim to represent today. Scientific travel writing in general, and the work of Alexander von Humboldt in particular, contributed to shaping the demographic imagination of the new nations. Humboldt's work benefited from access to the massive but hidden records of the imperial bureaucracy, and it seemed to provide the "optimistic image" creole elites needed to project the future of these new nations (Florescano 2002:282). His writings not only summarized the demography of New Spain and New Granada but also updated demographic estimates of what was now considered Mexico and Colombia. This new knowledge, expressed in the scientific spirit of the European Enlightenment, also lent legitimacy to the political claims of republican elites.⁵¹

Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) traveled extensively in Latin America at the turn of the century. After being granted generous access to crown officials and imperial documentation by King Carlos IV, Humboldt traveled to New Granada from 1799 to 1803, and then visited New Spain until 1804 (Brading 1991:517).⁵² Humboldt's travel was part of the broader opening of the Spanish empire

⁵⁰ Regarding the demographic weight of "the Spanish class," Lucas Alamán wrote in 1849, "its number and proportion within the total population of New Spain [...] is not possible to determine [...] and it is necessary to limit ourselves to mere approximations" (Alamán 1849:20).

⁵¹ Humboldt influenced but was also influenced by creole intellectuals in the Americas. As he noted, regarding his study of New Spain, "my own travels in the various parts of the Americas and of Europe have given me the advantage of being able to examine a greater number of Mexican manuscripts than could Zoëga, Clavijero, Gama, the Abbé Hervás, Count Rinaldo Carli (the insightful author of the *Lettere americane*), and other scholars who, following Boturini, wrote about these monuments of the ancient civilization of the Americas" (Humboldt et al. 2012:88).

⁵² As Humboldt acknowledged in one of his travel books that "never had a traveler been granted greater concessions and never before has a Spanish Government placed greater confidence in a foreigner" (De Terra 1955:84). Regarding his access

to scientific expeditions under the late Bourbon rule (Bleichmar 2012). Although his work is often presented as a strictly scientific endeavor, Humboldt's oeuvre had significant political overtones. In fact, as he returned to Paris to write and publish his work, the wars of independence were unfolding in Latin America. Two of his major works, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* (1811) and *Political Essay on the Island of Cuba* (1826), played a major role in the struggles for independence during the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Humboldt from New Spain to Mexico

Before leaving Mexico in 1804, Humboldt wrote a letter to Viceroy Iturrigaray summarizing his main findings. In his *Tablas Geográfico-Políticas del Reino de la Nueva España* (1803), Humboldt particularly underscored his demographic estimations and the role of the population in the “political strength” of the kingdom. He wrote:

“Your Excellency will find in the drawing and in my tables the size and political strength of all intendencias. One cannot judge whether a country is well or poorly populated without knowing the area over which its population is distributed. Data that I have obtained from the Archbishopric has provided me with the means to correct the errors in the enumeration of the Count of Revillagigedo and to update it to the year 1803, the time of the government of Your Excellency. My calculations based on the data of political arithmetic will give Your Excellency the comforting news that the population of these domains, so undervalued by various writers who are enemies of the Nation and the Spanish Government, now reaches more than five and a half million” (Humboldt 2005:33).

to the viceregal archives in Mexico City, he wrote: “On behalf of the Viceroy of José Iturrigaray, his secretary, Mr. Ximénez, made the archives available to me, so that I could extract very useful notions from them for the public. The viceroy liked this idea very much, to the point of ordering that I be allowed to take them home and copy everything I considered useful for the sciences, especially geography.” (Minguet 1999:18–19).

As he would later write in his *Political Essay*, Humboldt was interested in debunking the so-called “Black legend” of the Spanish empire according to which population in the Americas was experiencing a continuous decline. In his perspective, “we observe [...] that not only has the number of Indians been on the increase for the last century, but that the whole of the vast region which we designate by the general name of New Spain is much better inhabited at present than it was before the arrival of the Europeans.” (Humboldt 1811a:95). To support this assertion, Humboldt reviewed the census conducted by the Count of Revillagigedo. Although Humboldt believed that Revillagigedo was “one of the wisest and most active administrators” (Humboldt 1811a:96), he was keenly aware of the limitations of his census: it was never completed, and some intendencies, such as Guadalajara, Veracruz, and Cohahuila had not submitted their reports. He was also aware that “in the new continent, as well as in the old, every enumeration is considered by the people as a sinister presage of some financial operation. In the fear of an augmentation of imposts, every head of a family endeavored to diminish the number of individuals of his house [...]” (Humboldt 1811a:98).

With these considerations in mind, Humboldt considered that “a sixth or a seventh part ought at least to be added to the sum total.” Following this procedure, he concluded that the total population of New Spain in 1793 was estimated at “5,200,000 souls.” However, further computations were needed to update the estimate to the present. Humboldt was convinced that the population of New Spain had “made the most extraordinary progress. [...] the progress of agriculture and civilization [...] announc[ing] a rapid increase in every part of the kingdom” (Humboldt 1811a:99). Considering an approximate number of individuals not included in the count and an estimate of the excess of births,

Humboldt concluded that New Spain had a population of 5,800,000 inhabitants in 1803, and at least 6,500,000 in 1808 (Humboldt 1811a:109–10).

Regarding the main divisions within the population, Humboldt believed that the Mexican population was composed of “seven races” and “four castes.” From his point of view, the seven races were: “1. The individuals born in Europe, vulgarly called *Gachupines*; 2. the Spanish Creoles, or whites of European extraction born in America; 3. the *Mestizos*, descendants of whites and Indians; 4. the *Mulattos*, descendants of whites and negros; 5. the *Zambos*, descendants of negros and Indians; 6. the Indians, or copper-coloured indigenous race; and 7. the African negros.” Although some of these categories (e.g., *Zambos*) were often understood locally as *castas*, Humboldt conceived them as races. In a rather atypical use of the terms, Humboldt believed that the “seven races” could be synthesized in “four castes”: “the whites, comprehended under the general name of Spaniards, the negros, the Indians, and the men of mixed extraction, from Europeans, Africans, American Indians, and Malays” (Humboldt 1811a:130). Despite the unusual classification,⁵³ Humboldt was aware of the subtle classification into categories of “mixed Blackness” (e.g., *Mulatos* and *Zambos*) and categories of “pure Blackness” (e.g., *Negros*). In fact, Humboldt believed that “the mixture of the European and the negro everywhere produces a race of men more active and more assiduously industrious than the mixture of the whites with the Mexican Indian.” (Humboldt 1811a:235).

⁵³ Humboldt’s classification could be explained by his own interpretation of the work of German anthropologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840), of French naturalist Jean-Baptiste Pierre Antoine de Monet, chevalier de Lamarck (1744-1829). Whereas Blumenbach developed an understanding of four human types (e.g., Mongolian, American, Caucasian, and African), Lamarck defended the view that the environment could modify the inherited characters of an organism.

Humboldt's sensibility to the multiple categories of people of African descent also made him aware of ethnoracial forms of discrimination and inequality affecting them. He openly remarked that some of the laws of New Spain discriminated against Afrodescendent *castas*, reproducing the stigma of slavery:

“The castes, descendants of negro slaves, are branded with infamy by the law; and are subjected to tribute. This direct impost imprints on them an indelible stain: they consider it as a mark of slavery transmissible to the latest generations. Among the mixed race, among the mestizoes and mulattoes, there are many families, who from their colour, their physiognomy, and their cultivation, might be confounded with the Spaniards; but the law keeps them in a state of degradation and contempt. Endowed with an energetic and ardent character, these men of colour live in a constant state of irritation against the whites; and we must be astonished that their resentment does not more frequently dispose them to acts of vengeance.” (Humboldt 1811a:130).

Humboldt's insight recognized the kaleidoscopic diversity of people of African descent, which was much more complex than the official boundaries the Bourbon reforms sought to implement for fiscal purposes in the late eighteenth century.

Despite his appreciation for *mulataje* and his awareness of ethnoracial discrimination and inequality, Humboldt was convinced that New Spain was the Spanish colonial domain with the least amount of *negros*.

“The kingdom of New Spain is, of all the European colonies under the torrid zone, that in which there are the fewest negros. We may almost say that there are no slaves. We may go through the whole city of Mexico without seeing a Black countenance. The service of no house is carried on with slaves. In this point of view especially, Mexico presents a singular contrast to the Havana, Lima, and Caracas. From exact information procured by those employed in the enumeration of 1793, it appears that in all New Spain there are not six thousand negros, and not more than nine or ten thousand slaves, of whom the greatest number belong to the ports of Acapulco and Vera Cruz, or the warm regions of the coasts (tierras calientes).” (Humboldt 1811a:235–36).

Although Humboldt was convinced that Revillagigedo's total population count had to be amended and updated, he was less inclined to apply this logic to the population of *castas*, including those of African descent. It is unclear how Humboldt arrived at the conclusion that New Spain had less than 6,000 *negros*. After all, the category *negro* was not officially included in the general summaries of the 1793 census. And yet, Humboldt's estimation would become foundational in the configuration of the nineteenth-century notion of "Black disappearance" in Mexico.

Published in French only a year after revolutionary priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla declared Mexico's independence from the Spanish monarchy, Humboldt's *Political Essay* had a profound effect on Mexico's emerging demographic imagination. In fact, in 1823, priest and politician Servando Teresa de Mier Noriega (among others) wrote the *Plan de la Constitución Política de la Nación Mexicana* [Plan of the Political Constitution of the Mexican Nation]. In this document, Mier Noriega advocated for a federal constitutional project with proportional representation in congress for all provinces. Mier Noriega used and quoted Humboldt's calculations to demonstrate that the provinces of México, Puebla, Guadalajara, Guanajuato, Oaxaca, Mérida and Valladolid, were more populous than Zacatecas, Veracruz, San Luis Potosí, Durango, Sonora, Nuevo México, and the Californias.

According to Mier Noriega,

"Since 1803, when Humboldt made his calculations, there have undoubtedly been large mutations in the population. But if the population of some provinces has increased, that of others must also have increased. The results will always be demonstrative of the scandalous injustice of giving the minority more votes than the majority." (de Mier 1823:15)

Although Humboldt's *Political Essay* was not a trigger for the revolutionary insurgency in Mexico, it nonetheless shaped creole elites' optimistic portrayal of themselves and of the new nation.

During the first decades after independence, the *Political Essay* became a mandatory reference to justify the idea that new political projects were necessary and feasible in Mexico. As historian and politician Lucas Alamán wrote to Humboldt in 1824,

“The luminous writings of Your Lordship regarding America [...] have been generally received with the appreciation that your interesting subjects and findings produce. They form a complete concept of what Mexico could be under a good and liberal Constitution, for having within it all the elements of prosperity. Its reading has not contributed little to revive the spirit of Independence that germinated in many of its inhabitants, and to awaken others from the lethargy in which a foreign domination held them. The entire nation is filled with gratitude for the work of Your Lordship. The world now knows the aptitude and disposition of our nation to be happy on its own [...]” (Ortega y Medina 1960:25)

Humboldt from New Granada to Colombia

Humboldt’s estimations also had significant impact on the nascent demographic imagination of Colombia. Although Humboldt had traveled to New Granada before going to New Spain, he published his work on New Spain first (1811). In 1826, Humboldt published his *Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent*. By 1824, however, the republican government of Colombia had ordered the first census in 1825 (*Decreto del 27 de Octubre de 1824*). Unlike his *Political Essay*, which relied almost entirely on imperial sources, Humboldt’s *Personal Narrative* also involved a dialogue with the first republican sources of demographic data.

One of the first statements about the national population of New Granada was issued in 1808 by Francisco José de Caldas, a lawyer and self-taught naturalist. In his *Semanario del Nuevo Reyno de Granada*, Caldas asserted that the new republic of New Granada had “three million, including the barbarians.” Without providing a source for his estimation, Caldas divided the population into

“savages” and “civilized.” “The first are those wandering tribes with no arts other than hunting and fishing, with no laws other than their customs,” he wrote. “The second are those who, united in society, live under the gentle and humane laws of the Spanish Monarch.” Among the “civilized,” Caldas distinguished “three races of different origin,” namely “the indigenous Indian of the country, the European its conqueror, and the African introduced after the discovery of the New World.” (Caldas 1808:10–11).

Humboldt had met Caldas during his travels to New Granada and was aware of his work (Nieto Olarte 2010). Several years later, in Volume 6 of his *Personal Narrative*, Humboldt proposed Granada, and adjusting for the omitted population and the annual increase, he suggested that by 1800 the population should be “above two million.” Regarding Caldas’ estimate, Humboldt believed that “this learned writer greatly exaggerated the number of independent Indians.” After a “mature examination of the materials,” Humboldt believed that the current population of the republic of Colombia was 2,785,000. However, he also recognized that his estimate was “less than that of the president of the congress, who, in the proclamation of January 10, 1820, reckons 3 ½ millions.” At the same time, he also noted that his estimate was higher than the 2,643,000 inhabitants officially declared in the *Gaceta de Colombia* dated February 10, 1822 (Humboldt 1966a:135). By the time his *Personal Narrative* was published, Humboldt was aware that these estimates were not based on actual population counts but “on the reports made by the deputies of each province to the congress of Colombia, to settle the law of elections” (Humboldt 1966a:137). Cognizant of being involved in the emerging politics of demographic representation, Humboldt concluded:

“It is to be hoped, that an enumeration made with precision will soon dissipate the doubts we entertain on the statistics of Colombia. It appears to me probable, that, notwithstanding the devastations of war, the population will be found above 2,900,000.” (Humboldt 1966a:138).

Several elements help explain Humboldt’s hesitation in estimating the country’s population.

First, Humboldt’s access to the viceregal archive in New Spain seems more extensive compared to New Granada. For instance, Humboldt does not appear to have had access to the third census of the viceroyalty organized by Francisco Silvestre in 1789 (Colmenares 1989b:35–152; Rueda 2012:32).

Second, the territorial match between New Spain and Mexico was clearer than that between New Granada and Colombia. At the time of Humboldt’s writing, for example, it was unclear whether Caracas, Santa Fe, Popayán or Quito would be the capital of Colombia. Finally, the timing of the publication of his *Political Essay* was different from the moment he published his *Personal Narrative*.

Whereas the publication of *Political Essay* inaugurated the politics of national demographic representation in New Spain, *Personal Narrative* was one of several contributions to an ongoing debate.

Despite its tentative assessment of the total population of New Granada, the *Personal Narrative* had a broader comparative angle than that developed in the *Political Essay*. Unlike Humboldt’s previous work, it advanced a comparative analysis of the population and territorial extension of Mexico, Guatemala, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Peru, Chile, Buenos Aires, United States, and Brazil. “By comparing [...] the extent of the territory and the entire population, we should obtain the result of the connection of those two elements of public prosperity, a connection that constitutes the *relative population* of every state in the New World.” (Humboldt 1966a:185). In one of

his comparative statements, for example, Humboldt concluded that the “Republic of Colombia” was “six times larger than Spain,” and “nearly equal in extent to the United States, westward of the Mississippi.” (Humboldt 1966a:192). Statements like this, were intended to portray “public prosperity” (or its potential) in the “New World,” conceiving the new countries as equals in a world of nations. As the independence movements unfolded, Humboldt’s writings contributed to shape an image of Latin America as a region of multiple and distinctive nations that was no longer the arbitrary organization of imperial domains. Such an image was crafted in dialogue with the creole intelligentsia both for international and intra-national publics.

The demographic weight of Blackness was central for the new comparative imagination of national populations in the region. This time, Humboldt divided the population of the Americas in four “races”: “Natives” (“Indians, red men; copper-coloured America, or primitive race, without mixture of white and negro”); “Whites” (“Europeans, and descendants of Europeans, without mixture of Negro and Indian, the pretended race of Caucasus”); “Negroes” (“African race, without mixture of white or Indian, Blacks, free and slaves”); and “Black, white, and Indian mixed races” (“Mulattoes, Mestizos, Zambos, and mixture of mixtures”) (See Table 2.1). According to Humboldt, whereas 63.7% of whites lived in the United States, 24.3% of them lived in Spanish America. Within Spanish America, Humboldt believed that Mexico had the highest number of whites (1,230,000). Regarding indigenous peoples, he estimated that 87.5% of them lived in Spanish America, with Mexico being the country with the largest population (3,700,000). Humboldt considered that the population of people of African descent “without mixture” were evenly distributed between the Caribbean islands (30.5%),

Brazil (30.5%), and the United States (29.8%). From his perspective, the continental regions of Spanish America only had 387,000 "pure Black" persons (Humboldt 1966b:835–37).

Finally, Humboldt asserted that 82.9% of people of "mixed races" lived in Spanish America. The largest populations were located in Mexico and Colombia. While he estimated a population of 1,860,000 in Mexico, in Colombia, the presumed population was 1,256,000. Although these demographic estimates were incomplete, outdated, or even disputed, Humboldt provided one of the first authoritative representations of the continent's ethnoracial divides during the first decades of the new century. In Humboldt's eyes, the so-called "New World" was 38% White, 25% Indigenous, 19% Black, and 18% Mixed (Humboldt 1966b:835–37).

Although Humboldt often acknowledged the limitations of his sources, his demographic estimates nonetheless informed the sense of ethnoracial demography prevalent in the minds of creole elites. Regarding the demography of people of African descent, Humboldt's figures contributed to shape two assumptions prominent in later nationalist projects of the nineteenth and twentieth century.⁵⁴ First, he portrayed a continental geography of "pure Blackness" that was mainly circumscribed to the Caribbean, Brazil and the United States. Although he later recognized the difficulty of separating "pure Blackness" from "mixed Blackness,"⁵⁵ the notion that "Negroes" were a minority population (particularly in Spanish America) remained central to many nationalist projects in Latin America. As he wrote, "the number of Blacks spread over the vast continent of Spanish

⁵⁴ A more comprehensive assessment of Humboldt's estimates can be found in Lerner (1968).

⁵⁵ In one of his passages on slavery statistics, Humboldt wrote: "I do not give these statements as true, but as resulting from the *registers*. The distinction of whites, and free colored population, presents such great difficulties, that at the end of the year 1823, the Colonial Office was in possession of no precise information on that important point." (Humboldt 1966b:829–30).

America, is so small (below 390,000), that, happily, they do not form 2 ½ per cent of the continental population.” (Humboldt 1966b:838).

Second, Humboldt rendered categories of “mixed Blackness” demographically invisible. Although Afrodescendant categories figured prominently in the last colonial censuses, Humboldt’s estimations subsumed this type of categories into “Mixed Races” or “Whites.”⁵⁶ Aligned with the aspirations of independence movements in the region, Humboldt’s Spanish America was thus portrayed as a region whose population was 45% Indigenous (7,530,000), 32% Mixed race (5,328,000), 19% White (3,276,000) and 4% Black (776,000) (Humboldt 1966b:836). Considering that the boundaries of “pure Blackness” were often coterminous with those of slavery, Humboldt’s numbers seemed to assume an unproblematic connection between “mixed Blackness” and freedom and equality, two emblems of future mestizaje projects. As he concluded, “there is something serious and prophetic in these inventories of the human race: in them the whole future destiny of the New World seems to be inscribed.” (Humboldt 1966b:845).

Scholarly interpretation of Humboldt’s work has oscillated between his presumed attempts to render the “New World” legible for European powers (Pratt 1992) and his criticism of colonial forms of domination (Sachs 2003). As other works have shown, the interpretation of Humboldt’s work has also changed according to the historical context of his readers (Covarrubias 2009; Ortega y Medina 1960). Although Humboldt’s humanistic empiricism openly denounced the barbarism of the so-called western civilization being implanted in the Americas, he nonetheless maintained an overarching

⁵⁶ Fernando Navarro y Noriega held that Humboldt overestimated the number of Whites and Spaniards in New Spain (1820:13–14).

understanding of humankind as a series of categories evolving by a linear progression from barbarism to civilization. And yet, instead scrutinizing the colonial or anti-colonial elements of Humboldt's work, it could be useful to understand his ambivalence as a constitutive feature of the changing times of his travels and publications. Moreover, his readers were not passive consumers of his ideas.

Although Humboldt contributed to the perception of people of African descent as a demographic minority in Spanish America, nationalist elites were aware of the erudite, yet provisional knowledge he provided. As Simón Bolívar would put it in his famous *Carta de Jamaica* (1815),

“[...] Humboldt himself, with his universality of theoretical and practical knowledge, would hardly know it with precision; because, although a section of the statistics and revolution of America is known, I dare to assure that the greater part is covered in darkness, and consequently only more or less approximate conjectures can be offered, above all, in regards to the future fate and true projects of the Americans.” (Bolívar 1888:77–78)

Despite the legitimacy and authority of Humboldt's work, it is unlikely that his knowledge would have significantly altered the course of events in nineteenth century Latin America. And yet, his publications—particularly those sections related to ethn racial demography—did help set the boundaries of the possible. The boundaries of a reasonable vision and division of national populations often came many years *before* the first official census.

Using Humboldt to Navigate the Dual Republican Dilemma

After independence, creole elites faced a dual republican dilemma. From an intra-national point of view, elites were expected to show explicit commitment to the new sense of nationhood, breaking

noticeably with “the past.” Abolishing the use of *casta* distinctions became a useful repertoire to break with the colonial order. One of the first declarations to this effect occurred in Mexico. Miguel Hidalgo, leader of the rebel troops, proclaimed in his *Plan of the American Government* (1810) that “no one will be distinguished by their *calidad*, but all will be named Americans [...]. [F]or the same reason, no one will pay tributes and all slaves will be considered free” (Lemoine 2010:76). This would later be followed with similar proclamations by José María Morelos and Vicente Guerrero, both rebel leaders of African descent. At the same time, the specter of the Haitian revolution (1791-1804) was still very present in the minds of creole elites. The fear of *pardocracia* (the government of *pardos*) (Andrews 2004:92) or *guerra de castas* (caste war) (Florescano 1997:405), prevented creole elites from extending substantive citizenship rights to people of African descent. How to demonstrate a break with the official categories of the past without extending citizenship to all categories of the nation?

From an inter-national point of view, creole elites had yet to demonstrate to European publics and intellectuals that their national populations were not in a process of racial degeneration. After all, since the late eighteenth century, European philosophers and historians (among other “men of letters”) had sought to prove that the population decline of the Americas could be explained by their natural (including here racial) history. Works like those by Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon’s *Histoire Naturelle, Générale et Particulière* (1761), Cornelius de Pauw’s *Recherches Philosophiques sur les Américains* (1768), Guillaume Thomas Raynal’s *Histoire Philosophique et Politique des Établissements et du Commerce des Européens dans les Deux Indes* (1770), and William Robertson’s *The History of America* (1777), argued that the nature and people of the “New World” were inferior when compared to those of Europe. Writing almost a century before Charles Darwin’s *On the Origins of Species* (1859),

several of these authors believed that humans had a common origin that had degenerated over time due to environmental factors (Gerbi 2010). Although most creole elites shared the racialist assumption that civil history was dependent upon natural history, they nonetheless believed that their national institutions and populations were redeemable. How to demonstrate the bright future of the new nations in racialist terms without reaching similar conclusions of racial degeneration?

Most Latin American states responded to this dual republican dilemma by eliminating the use of ethnoracial categories and classification questions for people of Indigenous or African descent in nineteenth century censuses (Loveman 2014:233, 241). Many countries in the region lacked the bureaucratic infrastructure, financial capacity or political authority to conduct national censuses, but those who did avoided using *casta* categories. Thus, the first census of the republic of Colombia, in 1825, made no distinctions between *Blancos*, *Mulatos*, or *Libre*, unlike the censuses of New Granada. Many of these categories were now subsumed under “inhabitants.” However, categories such “Slaves” and “Indigenous,” continued to have a minority status. This can be seen in the words of José Manuel Restrepo when presenting the results of the census to Congress on February 16, 1827:

“At last, a Population Census of the Republic has been formed, which I have the honor of presenting to Congress. From it, one can infer that Colombia has 2,800,000 inhabitants, of which 103,892 are slaves. In addition to this reduced population, there are 203,835 independent indigenous people who live as wanderers in the forests and mountains. According to the latest reports, the population of Colombia grows in almost all departments and is now more numerous than when the Constitution was established. Most of the increase comes from the population itself because, although foreigners have been introduced, they are few if we compare them with Colombians” (Tovar et al. 1994:55).

Dropping the use of ethnoracial categories in the census seemed useful to address the first part of the republican dilemma. If nothing else, eliminating colonial *casta* classifications and equating the

category “inhabitants” with the category “Colombians” showed that republican authorities were interested in unifying the nation and creating a unified image of the population. As Restrepo would have it, the nation was created by the growing population of Colombians, for Colombians (without the interference of “foreigners”), with a small minority of “slaves” and “indigenous,” without *casta* distinctions. At a time when elites were called upon to show commitment to the overthrow of the viceregal regime, censuses seemed to become a symbolic space to redefine notions of difference and similarity within the nation.

However, conducting censuses without ethnoracial categories also became a convenient tool to hide inequalities inherited from the colonial period, particularly those affecting people of Indigenous and African descent. Despite proclamations of freedom and independence, substantive realities of stratification and social mobility had not changed much in Latin America. The fear of *pardocracia* is palpable in Restrepo’s insistence that “slaves” and “indigenous” were demographic minorities. In a context when the organized Afrodescendant population pressured liberal and conservative elites to end slavery and redistribute the nation’s resources (Guardino 1996:168; Sanders 2014), statistical invisibility was a way of minimizing their demands and hiding the persistent inequalities that justified them.

However, regarding the second part of the republican dilemma, Latin American elites still had to prove to their European counterparts that the new national institutions and populations were not degenerating. Following the work of Clavijero (1780), Humboldt’s writings were particularly useful to

demonstrate that the natural world in the Americas was not inferior to Europe.⁵⁷ And yet, Latin American elites still felt the need to justify in racialist terms the non-degenerative existence of the national populations they now claim to represent. Without having access to new census data disaggregated by ethnoracial categories, this task proved to be particularly difficult. Although colonial data became increasingly available during the nineteenth century—partially facilitated by Humboldtian synthesis—the creole intelligentsia was forced to engage in debate about the “New World” by appealing to other forms of knowledge. In this sense, during most of the nineteenth century, geography, not demography, was the main strain of disciplinary knowledge shaping nationalist discourses around Blackness.

At this critical juncture, Mexican and Colombian elites differed sharply in their responses regarding the place of Blackness in the new nation. Whereas the Mexican intelligentsia defended the trope of Black disappearance, Colombia elites articulated a regionally differentiated notion of Blackness. The main argumentative lines followed the demographic conclusions of Humboldt’s enumerations (Humboldt 1966b:835–37). In both countries, categories of “pure Blackness” were considered demographic minorities, destined to disappear. As for categories of “mixed Blackness,” while in Mexico they simply seemed to disappear from intellectual discourse, in Colombia they

⁵⁷ In his *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*, for example, Humboldt openly criticized Buffon’s conclusions: “It would be superfluous to refute here the rash assertion of M. de Buffon, as to the pretended degeneracy of the domestic animals introduced into the New Continent. These ideas were easily propagated, because, while they flattered the vanity of Europeans, they were also connected with brilliant hypotheses, relative to the ancient state of our planet. When facts are carefully examined, naturalists perceive nothing but harmony where this eloquent writer announced discordance.” (Humboldt 1811b:48). On similar ideas from Clavijero (1780), see Trabulse (1975), Maggio-Ramírez (2019), and Ramos (2021).

became embedded in a regionalized understanding of Blackness. The nineteenth century thus marked the origins of two different nationalist projects of *mestizaje* in Mexico and Colombia.

In the next section, I briefly compare the discursive approach of two prominent liberal intellectuals of the nineteenth century in Latin America: the Mexican José María Luis Mora (1794-1850) and the Colombian José María Samper (1828-1888). The two had many things in common: both were lawyers, politicians, writers, and figured among the most prominent ideologues of liberalism in their respective countries. But most importantly, both were embedded in European intellectual circles, where the future of the new nations was discussed. Their intellectual trajectory illustrates both the cosmopolitanism of their liberal ideas and growing dissatisfaction with its institutionalization in the nineteenth-century realities of Mexico and Colombia (Hale 1965; Martínez 2001).

José María Luis Mora and Black Disappearance in Mexico

Like other nineteenth-century Mexican intellectuals, José María Luis Mora begins *Mejico y sus Revoluciones* (1836) expressing appreciation for Humboldt's work. In his words, "of all that has been written on the subject, the only thing worthy of appreciation is Baron Humboldt's *Political Essay* on New Spain. This classic work will always be appreciated for the care, diligence, and accuracy of the collected evidence." However, Mora also believed it was time to update Humboldt's view about Mexico. He was convinced that, after 1804, Mexico experienced "changes of great size that [...] caused a total variation in its moral and political physiognomy" In this sense, he concluded that "if someone

pretends to know this nation using Humboldt's characterization, this person will incur serious errors that will distance them entirely from the truth" (Mora 1836:vi–vii).

In his description of the population, Mora acknowledged that its main components were: "the inhabitants of the old Mexican empire, the Spanish conquerors who defeated and subjugated them, and the Blacks brought from Africa to do the hardest jobs in the mines and the cultivation of the land." Mora used the notion of *raza* [race] to understand differences among *castas* [caste]. From his perspective, "each *casta* of known men has an organization that is peculiar to them. Each *casta* is in accordance with their character and influences not only the color of their skin but, what is more, their physical strength, mental and industrial faculties, and also in the industrial ones. So there is nothing strange about the difference between some races and others [...]." Thus, he believed that the "diversity of aptitudes and faculties" between the "tanned race to which Mexican indigenes belong" and "whites" was undeniable. And yet, he was also convinced that such differences did not entail the superiority of a given group. According to Mora, "diverse conformation is the basis of diversity in faculties, and no one can doubt this. But to deduce the superiority of some races over others from this diversity of aptitudes is an unforgivable error [...] [T]he truth is that races improve or worsen with the centuries ... and in this respect, education is everything" (Mora 1836:61–62, 64–65).

Mora embedded *casta* distinctions in a Lamarckian understanding of race (Burkhardt 1977; Jordanova 1984). *Casta* differences were now conceived to have profound consequences in physical and mental aptitudes. However, Mora believed that racial diversity could not justify the claims of moral superiority advanced by some European intellectuals. In Mora's liberalism, racial attributes were

more likely to be bodily dispositions that could change over time through different social processes such as education.

Regarding the indigenous population, Mora believed that “in their present state and until they have undergone considerable changes, they will never be able to reach the level of enlightenment, civilization and culture of the Europeans.” However, he considered that this subordination was a product of colonial domination by the Spanish monarchy, now abolished after independence:

“Though equality has been in vain with respect to the Indigenes, what this proves is not the bad faith of government nor of the rest of the Mexican nation, but the difficulty of repairing in a few days the evils caused by many centuries of abjection.” From Mora’s perspective, the current inequality affecting indigenous peoples was not a result of the republican regime but the inertial product of colonial rule: “today the Indigenes put a price on their work, nobody forces them to do it, they are admitted to all educational establishments, in a word they are not excluded from anything: if they have less influence than the other classes of society, and suffer more than them, we repeat that, for the time being, this necessary evil cannot be cause for complaint” (Mora 1836:66–68).

Mora’s liberalism implied a new understanding of the timeline of the nation’s existence, which was also a new justification for persistent forms of inequality. Although the new Mexican nation could eventually grant indigenous peoples access to a similar “level of enlightenment, civilization and culture” as Europeans, he suggested, they should patiently wait until the new republic reversed centuries of colonial exclusion. Nationalist resignation thus became a new virtue, a “necessary evil” that the new citizens should endure. It was no coincidence that Mora would list stoicism among the

“very appreciable qualities” of indigenous peoples, praising their “constancy and resignation in suffering the hardships entailed by their wretched situation” (Mora 1836:69).⁵⁸

This anticipated development of the nation, however, would reverse not only the exclusion affecting indigenous peoples but also their own indigeneity. “In spite of all the care lavished on the tanned race once the atrocities of conquest were over, [their number] is dwindling noticeably and they are being replaced everywhere by other [populations] that could almost be said to be white” (Mora 1836:72). For Mora, the Mexican nation was destined to evolve towards whiteness through racial mixing, and he pointed to the demographic decrease in the Indigenous population as a proof of this process.

Presumably following the data collected by Revillagigedo in 1793 and published by Humboldt in 1811, Mora believed that “there have always been very few *negros* from Africa in Mexico.” He was also convinced that in Mexico “slavery was unheard-of,” so it was “not difficult to abolish” (Mora 1836:73).⁵⁹ Then, Mora concluded:

“The number of *negros*, one of the elements that have come to make up the current population, has always been low and today has almost completely disappeared, since the small remaining population is on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. [They are] entirely insignificant to be able to inspire any fear for the tranquility of the Republic, nor have they (due to their class) any type of influence in the fate of their destinies: they will disappear completely before half a century, and they will be lost in the dominant mass of the white population due to the fusion that began more than twenty years ago and that it is now well under way.” (Mora 1836:74)

⁵⁸ This statement by Mora should be contextualized within elite fear of the expansion of *guerra de castas* [caste war] and other indigenous rebellions during the nineteenth century (Florescano 1997:352–57).

⁵⁹ Although slavery in Mexico was formally abolished in 1829, it substantively continued during the nineteenth century in regions such as Tabasco, Campeche, and Veracruz. In fact, since 1829 the Mexican territory of Texas was exempted from applying the law that abolished slavery in Mexico (Díaz Casas 2018).

Mora's dictum has several elements worth noting. First, he makes use of the category *negros* to substantiate his claim about the scarcity of Blackness. As we can now see, this statement was seemingly supported by Revillagigedo's census and Humboldt's computations based on it. However, what Mora does not tell his readers is that Revillagigedo was mainly focused on the number of *mulatos* and *pardos*, which were then subsumed under "Mixed Races" by Humboldt. It is this key misreading of the imperial imperatives behind Revillagigedo's census, and ignorance of Humboldt's conflation of "mixed Blackness" categories with other *casta* categories, that lend plausibility to Mora's statement about *negros*.

Second, Mora's statement reveals once again a narrative about time and the geography of the nation. A nation that seems to be getting rid of the "small remaining population" of *negros* left on the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. For Mora, the disappearance of people of African descent is only a matter of time: "Before half a century (...) they will be lost in the dominant mass of the white population." Once again, whiteness appears to be the inexorable destiny of the Mexican nation.

Finally, Mora's statement also reveals the fears of nineteenth-century elites about indigenous and Afrodescendent rebellions. For Mora, it was important to highlight the demographic "insignificance" of people of African descent to prove that they could not "inspire any fear for the tranquility of the Republic." Clearly Mora still had in mind the events of the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804), and he was convinced that people of African descent in Mexico, unlike the Caribbean Island, were in no position to mount such a challenge to the republic.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ On the impacts of the Haitian Revolution in Colonial Mexico, see Granados (2016). For a similar narrative of "Black Disappearance" in Argentina, see Otero (2006:361-65).

It is not surprising, then, that Mora would conclude his analysis of the Mexican population with the following statement:

“The white population is by far the dominant one today, by the number of its individuals, by its education and wealth, by the exclusive influence it exercises in public affairs, and by the advantages of its position compared to others. In this population the Mexican character should be sought, and it alone can forge the whole world’s understanding of the Republic.” (Mora 1836:75).

José María Samper and the Regionalized understanding of Blackness in Colombia

Jose María Samper, member of the ethnographic and geographic society of Paris, begins his *Ensayo sobre las Revoluciones Políticas y la Condición Social de las Repúblicas Colombiana* (1861) by denouncing the “erroneous notions in Europe about Colombia.” Samper complained about Europe’s neglect of “the noble words being spoken, the image of the beautiful figures appearing, nor the clear revelation of the good and fruitful deeds that are produced in Colombia!” On the contrary, Europe only focuses on “the thunderous, confused echo of our political storms.” Samper was convinced that for Europe, Colombia was just “the permanent scandal of civilization.” (Samper 1861:1).⁶¹ And then Samper concluded:

The European world has taken more interest in studying our volcanoes than our societies; it knows our insects better than our literature, the alligators of our rivers better than the acts of our statesmen; and it has much greater erudition regarding the cutting of quina and salting of hides in Buenos Aires, than regarding the vitality of our infant democracy! The contrast is very sad and humiliating [...] We do not know of a single European (after the admirable Humboldt, a man of universal genius) who has gone to study our *society* closely. (Samper 1861:3–4)

⁶¹ It is worth noting that Samper often refers to “Colombia” as “the portion of the New World going from Cape Horn up to the northern border of Mexico.” He uses, in this manner, the notion of “Colombia” to replace that of “America,” which he believes has been incorrectly promoted by the United States to refer to the whole continent (Samper 1861:xiii–xiv).

Samper's essay was thus an attempt to correct the European narrative about Colombian society. Samper wanted to demonstrate that the political institutions of the new nation were solid and viable. To this end, following the intellectual debates of his time, Samper also had to demonstrate that Colombia had a population with the appropriate natural aptitudes necessary to sustain a healthy and prosperous democracy. As we shall see, Samper locates the conditions for liberal democracy in the appropriate combination of racialized dispositions and environmental factors.

Samper considers the "New World" as a place where "all the major races of the globe have come together to mix blood, traditions, strengths and traits." Unlike the "Old World"—in which "international rivalries" become an obstacle for the "fraternal mix of races"—the New World is the "theater of the fusion and reconciliation of the races, thus inaugurating the foundations of a new civilization." Samper's new civilization was a "mestizo civilization" which was destined to "regenerate the world, through the practice of Christianity's fundamental principle: fraternity!" According to Samper, Colombia possessed all the prerequisites for the emergence of this type of civilization. And here Samper listed not only the "social conditions" and the "elements of progress," but also the "the novelty of the soil" and the "marvelous promiscuity of all weathers" (Samper 1861:78–79).

Like other nineteenth-century creole elites, Samper sought to promote the notion of racial mixing as a better path towards civilization. Against theses by Buffon and other European intellectuals, Samper's notion of *mestizaje* was conceived as process of racial regeneration, not one of degeneration. The fusion of races, in Samper's view, was actually the path through which the "New World" would develop a presumably better civilization than the one in the "Old World." In a strategy of symbolic

inversion, Samper attempted to discursively “win” the civilization game following the racialist standards of European intellectual circles.

How would this happen? According to Samper, this process of *mestizaje* would typically happen when the “European man [...] married a *criolla* [...] participating in the formation of a beautiful race, Mestiza but Caucasian, in which the heroic sentiment and vigor of the Hispanic-Colombian are allied with the positivist, individualistic, entrepreneurial and tenacious genius of the Anglo-Saxon, German, Dutch, Swiss, etc.” Even if we consider the “mixings produced by Zambos, Mulatos and Indo-españoles [...] a happy future must be expected in Colombia, prepared by the interbreeding of the White races” (Samper 1861:80).

Like Mora, Samper’s notion of *mestizaje* is not only compatible with whiteness; it also constitutes a path to whiteness. In this view, whiteness represents not only the end goal of miscegenation but also the underlying condition that would guarantee that other kinds of mixtures would produce similar whitening results. This racial teleology, however, was not strictly biological. For Samper, whiteness was also another word to lump together various personal-*cum*-nationalist attributes ascribed to some European countries.

Following Lamarckian insights according to which racial attributes are co-constituted through environmental conditions, Samper was convinced that the level of “civilization” of certain “races” was associated with their topographic circumstances of settlement. Samper believed that since colonial times “the most barbaric races [...] populated the vast regions of the maritime region,” and “the most advanced races in civilization were distributed over the high plains” (Samper 1861:294). He also associated higher altitudes and colder weather with higher levels of civilization. Racial variability could

thus be explained by the interaction between “climacteric influences” and “essential differences of races” (Samper 1861:296). Combining these ideas, he developed a racialized understanding of

Colombian geography:

“The European race settled almost entirely on the more or less elevated plateaus and the folds of the mountains; The African race, enslaved, was condemned to the exploitation of the mines and to the clearing of forests in the deep and burning valleys; and the Indigenous races, exploited and overwhelmed everywhere, remained in their respective regions. So, then, we have: civilization above, abandonment towards the middle, and violence and the horrors of slavery below.” (Samper 1861:299)

Additionally, from Samper’s perspective, the history of New Granada—but also the future of Colombia as a civilized nation— should be understood as a “double movement of descent and ascent:”

“Civilization had to descend into the foothills and valleys to spread there, exploiting the truly tropical gold-bearing soil. Barbarism had to rise towards the high plains in order to disappear or be profoundly modified. It is in this double movement that we can find the explanation of the crossbreeding that has taken place between the various races of New Granada.” (Samper 1861:299)

In this topographical hierarchy of racial differences, different categories of people occupied different socio-spatial positions associated with different civilizational opportunities. At this level of disaggregation, instead of *razas* [races], Samper preferred to use the notion of *tipos* [types] or racialized categorical sets of physical and moral attributes:⁶² “Among the different *tipos* of Granada (apart from the pure Europeans), we will choose as the most notable those of the *Criollo* Bogotano, the *Blanco* Antioqueño, the *Indio* Pastuso, the *Indio* from the Eastern Cordillera or Chibcha, the *Mulato* from

⁶² For a more extensive analysis of *tipos* in nineteenth-century Colombia, see Arias (2007).

the coasts or from the lower Magdalena, the *Llanero* [plainsman] from the Orinoco basin, and the *zambo* batelero called *boga* in the country” (Samper 1861:83).

Although Samper generally associated the highlands with whiteness and civilization, and the lowlands with Blackness and barbarity (Samper 1861:69), he nonetheless distinguished among different *tipos* of Blackness, stating that the “*castas mulatas* will be one of the safest and most fruitful elements of the civilization in the New World” (Samper 1861:90). Although this type of *casta* lacked “the double brake provided by education and well-consolidated interests,” the *Mulato* nonetheless had “the most beautiful qualities of *español* and *negro*.” Samper’s notion of the *Mulato* was in fact full of both racialized and paternalistic praise:

“Our *Mulatos* have the physical resistance, the fidelity, the tender love for family and the aptitude for hard work of the *negro*; the heroic sentiment, the spirit of gallantry, the highly poetic instinct, the chivalrous pride that does not tolerate any attack against dignity or honor, the impressionable genius, gossipy or talkative, boastful and expansive of the *español*; and the instinctive love of freedom and few sedentary tendencies of the *colombiano*”

“Docile and flexible in the face of benevolence and gently presented reason, he is harsh, insolent, turbulent, intractable, when he feels insulted, despised or roughly handled. Rich in fantasy, extremely accessible to poetic influences, keen on perfumes, luxury and novelties, he likes to make noise, to give people something to say. His generous and enthusiastic vanity predisposes him to political pretensions, to the desire to aim higher, to ennoble himself, almost always with disinterest. His intelligence is quick and clear, particularly for the fine arts, public administration business, jurisprudence, and commerce. His conjugal fidelity is problematic, his courage daring but not very resistant, his religious feeling very carefree. The *Mulato* is, therefore, an interesting *tipo* who, if well managed, is capable of offering not only appreciable but surprising results, thanks to the spirit of progress and emulation that distinguishes him.” (Samper 1861:90–91).

Zambos, however, were located in the opposite discursive space. In Samper’s conception, *Zambos* are “the worst *casta* or *raza* of the country” (Samper 1861:98). Unlike other *tipos*, Samper

believed that the offspring of people of Indigenous and African descent would bring “degradation.”

He viewed this kind of racial degeneration as even more likely given the topographic conditions

surrounding *Zambos*. From Samper’s perspective, the combination of racial and environmental

conditions would effectively cause the dehumanization of the *zambo*, which Samper does not hesitate

to characterize as a “*raza* of animals.” In his words,

“Strange type that of the *Boga* or *Zambo* of the lower Magdalena, of the Atrato, etc.! The evident inferiority of the original *razas* (the African *negra* and the coppery *indígena*), and their more or less profound degradation, aided by a climate that ferments everything [...], have produced in *Zambos* a *raza* of animals in whose forms and faculties humanity has repugnance in finding his image or a part of its great being.” (Samper 1861:95–96)

As an example of their presumed savagery, Samper describes the semi-nakedness of *Zambos* in the Magdalena river:

“On board a boat, going up the Magdalena, you see 20 or 30 figures the color of rosewood, shiny as grease, dressed like our father Adam, with the addition of a rag below the waist called *tapa-rabo* [loincloth], and summing up in their stupid, impassive, and coarse physiognomies, and their hair halfway between the speck of wool and the straight lock, the dominant features of the *negro* and the *indio*, more or less amalgamated or modified.” (Samper 1861:96)

Similarly, Samper does not save epithets to describe the moral character of the *zambo* as a savage indolent:

“But look at that miserable hut that stands out on the riverbank, on a sandy ravine, at the edge of the virgin forest and a small banana grove and a cornfield. Under a tree, a hammock [...] can be seen hanging: there rests the voluptuous prince of solitude, sleepy, indolent, free and wild as the tree that gives him shade.” (Samper 1861:98).

However, despite all these presumed barbaric characteristics, Samper is optimistic about the future of the *Zambo*. In his view, the *Zambo* will eventually attain a civilized state through economic and educational development, but also through racial mixture:

“the development of commerce, navigation, communication routes, agriculture, etc., will bring civilization, one achievement at a time, through jungles and valleys; and not too late these lower *castas*, mixed with the common movement, will receive instruction, they will be progressively educated, until they rise, thanks to freedom and equality, through the contact and fusion with the other *castas*. Their industrial participation will then be precious, due to the physical energy of the *mestizo*.” (Samper 1861:99)

Comparing the intellectual responses of these two authors to the republican dilemmas of Mexico and Colombia is useful to understand the type of nationalist doxa articulated during the nineteenth century. Both Mora and Samper suggested new *temporal framings* for the Mexican and the Colombian nations. Nationalist projects of *mestizaje* were conceived by these authors as genuinely civilizational processes in which all the presumed attributes of European whiteness could be achieved (if not surpassed) through racial mixing. Against the ideas of Buffon and other European intellectuals, Mora and Samper tried to develop a non-degenerative understanding of miscegenation presumed to provide solid foundations for the political and economic institutions of the new republics.

However, although Mora and Samper faced a similar dilemma, their understanding of the role of Blackness in the nationalist project of *mestizaje* differed significantly. Whereas in Mexico, the trope of “Black disappearance” located Blackness in the colonial past, in Colombia, different kinds of Blackness still figured prominently in the republican present of the nation. As we saw in the case of Mora, Revillagigedo’s census and Humboldt’s estimations were reinterpreted in racialist terms to demonstrate the supposedly inevitable disappearance of people of African descent. Instead of

articulating the national narrative around categories of “mixed Blackness” (e.g., *Mulatos* and *pardos*), Mora focused on the smaller numbers of categories of “pure Blackness” (e.g., *negros*) to presumably prove the limited presence of people of African descent in the new nation.

The racial hierarchy Mora envisioned sought to organize Blackness and whiteness, not so much around different spaces but in different times. While Blackness belonged to a colonial past that had almost ceased to exist, whiteness (and its fusions) belonged to a republican present that had begun and was still in progress. Mora's interpretation thus contributed to the idea of Mexico as a nation in a perennial state of whitening, racially mixing populations of European and Indigenous descent.⁶³ Locating Blackness in the past made possible to imagine the Mexican nation as an entity moving towards an ever whiter, homogenous future in an “empty time” (Anderson 2006:24).

As the case of Samper shows, in Colombia, Blackness had a different location in the nationalist temporality. Unlike Mexico, different categories of Blackness were located in different spaces *and* in different times. Whereas the notion of the “Black savage” represented the colonial past of the lowlands, the notion of the “good Mulato” represented the republican future of the highlands. In Samper's scheme, the Colombian nation should both eliminate the barbaric dispositions of categories of “pure (or degenerative) Blackness” (e.g., *Zambos*), and promote the civilizational aptitudes of categories of “mixed (or regenerative) Blackness” (e.g., *Mulatos*). Like the Mexican project, the Colombian nation is also envisioned as a perpetual process of racial merging toward whiteness. However, in this process, certain categories of Blackness were constitutive.

⁶³ As Mora's work shows, nineteenth-century celebrations of indigeneity are not incompatible with a nationalist teleology towards whitening. For an extensive analysis of the rhetorical uses of indigeneity in Latin America during the nineteenth century, see Earle (2007).

CHAPTER 3

LEGITIMATION CRISES AND INTERSTITIAL FIELDS

After several decades of statistical invisibility, in the last years of the twentieth century, Latin American states began to enumerate people of African descent. The demographic visibility of Afrodescendent populations expanded from two countries in the 1990s, to nine in the 2000s, and fifteen by the end of the 2010s (See Table 3.1). In Colombia, Afrodescendent populations remained demographically invisible from 1918 to 1993. In Mexico, the first official survey enumerating people of African descent happened in 2015, more than two centuries after the last enumeration by the Count of Revillagigedo in 1793.⁶⁴ The recent introduction of self-identification questions for people of African descent in both countries shows the erosion of nationalist projects of *mestizaje* by the end of the twentieth century. Why did this shift occur when it did? Why did only *some* categories of Blackness become official?

In this chapter, I develop a relational approach to *inter-field processes of legitimation*. This approach aims to account for conjunctural and structural conditions that made possible the first contemporary enumeration of people of African descent in Colombia (1993) and Mexico (2015). To understand the timing of the officialization process, I suggest the notion of *crisis of nomos* that helps identify critical junctures at which state actors become more receptive to public debate about existing categories. To account for the *type* of institutionalized categories, I propose the notion of *interstitial*

⁶⁴ Although federal governments in Mexico systematically avoided the enumeration of Afrodescendant populations in national censuses, some local governments counted them sporadically during the nineteenth century. A description of a regional census conducted by the state of Oaxaca can be found in Motta Sánchez and Duró (1997).

space that contributes to reconstructing the distribution of actors across different fields as they contend over the legitimate imposition of new categories. Focusing on different *timescales* of political struggle over various forms of symbolic capital helps explain why Afrodescendent populations became statistically visible, and how particular categories of Blackness were made official.

Despite their differences, the first contemporary enumeration of people of African descent in Colombia (1993) and Mexico (2015) offers enough *homological similarities* in the legitimation process to make both cases comparable and puzzling.⁶⁵ Colombia and Mexico experienced similar legitimation crises during the 1990s that questioned the nationalist project of *mestizaje*. Likewise, similar forms of claims-making, and similar forms of expertise, were invoked to legitimate new official definitions of Blackness. And yet, the early enumeration of Afro-descendants in Colombia in 1993 contrasts with the late enumeration in Mexico in 2015. Moreover, the enumeration of a single category of Blackness in Colombia (i.e., “Black communities”) also contrasts with the multiplicity of categories in Mexico (i.e., “Black,” “Afromexican,” and “Afrodescendant”). To be sure, understandings of Blackness in Colombia and Mexico were distinctly divergent before the critical juncture of the 1990s. As we have seen in Chapters 1 and 2, Colombia and Mexico’s respective colonial administrations left them contrasting criteria to enumerate people of African descent. While “pure Blackness” categories were more visible in New Granada, categories of “mixed Blackness” were more visible in New Spain. However, we still know little about how colonial legacies and republican ruptures and continuities shape different trajectories of statistical visibility of people of African descent in Latin America.

⁶⁵ From a process homology perspective, what makes these two cases comparable is not only a similar condition or a similar outcome, but more importantly a similar *process of transformation*.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section examines the critical juncture that emerged in Colombia during the late 1980s. It shows how the legitimation crisis⁶⁶ that led to the Constitutional Assembly of 1991 progressively became a nomic crisis that challenged the predominant categories of national representation. Three different moments of articulation symbolically transformed the nineteenth-century category “Black savage” into the twentieth-century category “Black communities.” The second section reconstructs the interstitial space of classification struggles that emerged in the Special Commission, a political space in which state and non-state actors contended over the legal definition of “Black communities.” This section analyzes debates that contributed to legitimizing the category in relation to administrative, scientific, and activist stances on cultural identity, territoriality, and development. The Correspondence Analysis of the minutes of the Special Commission shows the interstitial structure of different forms of authority within the fields of bureaucracy, academia, and social movements.

The third section explores the legitimation crisis in Mexico in the 1990s and its transformation into a nomic crisis during the 2000s. It shows how the delegitimizing effects of the Zapatista uprisings converged with the critical discourse of international human rights agencies. At this juncture, the

⁶⁶ I understand legitimation crisis as a sequence of events that violently disrupts predominant but inconsistent justifications and assumptions on the validity and propriety of the rule of the state. Unlike the notion of “crisis of legitimacy” advanced by structural functionalist and modernization theories of the late 1950s and early 1960s, this definition does not presume a normative integration around the values of the “political system” (Lipset 1959). Instead, it follows Weber when he suggested that actor’s “orientation” toward the “validity” of a legitimate order does not imply their “adherence” to its normative meaning (Weber 2019:108–11). Like other scholars who built on Weber’s perspective, I distinguish between “validity” and “propriety.” Whereas “validity refers to whether subordinates acknowledge the existence of a normative order; propriety has reference to whether they themselves approve of this order” (Dornbusch et al. 1975:39). This distinction is helpful to avoid an overly consensual interpretation of legitimacy (Mann 1970; Skocpol 1979; Tilly 1978). From this perspective, what goes into crisis are not “values” and “norms” but the sense of “validity” and “propriety” of predominant principles of interpretation anchored in state and political fields. The scholarship on legitimacy is vast. Recent summaries of the literature can be found in Suddaby et al. (2017), and Schoon (2022).

notion of “Black disappearance”—one of the basic assumptions of Mexico’s nationalist project of mestizaje—was fundamentally challenged, opening a debate over the predominant categories of national representation. The final section considers inter-field categorical struggles over the enumeration of people of African descent in the 2015 intercensal census of Mexico. The Correspondence Analysis of organizational documents, news reports and meeting minutes reveals that the three categories of Blackness (i.e., “Black,” “Afrodescendant,” and “Afromexican”) were justified by actors across the juridical, bureaucratic, social movement, and academic fields.

Critical Moment and Critical Discourse in Colombia (1991-1993)

The legitimation crisis of the late 1980s, the Constitutional Assembly of 1991, and the appeal to ethnic rights as a legitimation strategy of the Colombian government created the conjunctural conditions of possibility for a crisis of *nomos* regarding the official categories of Blackness in Colombia. While the political crisis created a broad legitimation deficit in Colombia’s state institutions, the Constitutional Assembly provided a scenario to validate what state and non-state actors alike called “a new social contract.” In this critical juncture, the Colombian state drew from a multi-ethnic discourse to grant group-differentiated rights to Indigenous peoples. And yet, against government’s intentions, a coalition of Indigenous and Black organizations expanded the new ethnic framework of the nation to include “Black communities” as a new official category of people of African descent. The progressive officialization of this category successfully challenged the predominant understanding of the “Black Savage,” questioning prevailing categories of national representation (*nomos*) and transforming statistical enumeration categories.

The history of the 1993 census enumeration of people of African descent in Colombia can be traced back to the *legitimation crisis* of the late 1980s, which in turn has roots in political dynamics among civil and armed actors since the 1970s. After a series of national protests that occurred in 1977, FARC and other guerrilla armed groups believed that a “revolutionary situation” was approaching. Based on this perception, guerrilla organizations adopted an offensive and militaristic stance, expanding their operations to new territories (Aguilera Peña 2014; Ferro Medina and Uribe Ramón 2002; Pizarro 2011).⁶⁷ This expansion coincided with the consolidation of new political actors on the left. After the National Front government lost power in 1974,⁶⁸ elites from the Liberal and Conservative party began to lose traction with their electoral base (Ayala Diago 1996). During the 1980s, left wing-political parties like Patriotic Union (UP) achieved modest but significant electoral victories (Carroll 2011). As a result of armed confrontation with guerrillas and political challenges from left-wing parties, local and regional elites connected with drug lords and members of military forces to form paramilitary groups (Vásquez et al. 2011). The United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), for example, originally emerged from paramilitary groups of the 1980s who fought to rebuff the expansion of guerrilla and left-wing organizations. Despite several attempts at peace agreements, guerrillas further consolidated their territorial expansion, local and regional elites continued

⁶⁷ During the 1960s and 1970s, a number of guerrilla armed groups emerged in Colombia: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, FARC) in 1965, National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*, ELN) in 1962, Popular Liberation Army (*Ejército Popular de Liberación*, EPL) in 1967, and the 19th of April Movement (*Movimiento 19 de Abril*, the M-19) in 1973. Other groups emerged in the 1980s. The Quintin Lame Armed Movement (*Movimiento Armado Quintin Lame*, MAQL) was an indigenous guerrilla group created in 1984.

⁶⁸ The National Front was a consociational regime in which only candidates from the Liberal and Conservative party could compete in national elections, intercalating the control of the state for four presidential terms.

supporting paramilitary groups, and new political actors on the left were killed en masse (González González 2014:398–391).

The convergence of these elements during the late 1980s created a wave of political violence in Colombia unprecedented in recent history: the armed takeover of the Justice Department by the M-19 guerrilla organization in 1985, the systematic killing of almost 1,700 members of the UP between 1984 and 1988 (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica 2018:110), the massacre of judicial officials by paramilitary groups, and the assassination of three presidential candidates between 1989 and 1990 by coalitions of politicians, paramilitaries, and drug lords.⁶⁹ Figure 3.1 shows the increase of violence in Colombia from the early 1970s to the early 1990s. In 1971, homicides numbered about 5,000 and the murder rate was 23 for every 100,000 inhabitants; in 1991, the number of homicides was over 28,000 and the murder rate close to 80 per 100,000.

Escalating violence created a *critical juncture* that publicly questioned the capacity of state institutions to effectively include citizens in the nation. Although the sense of crisis was widespread across several sectors of the political field, it was most clearly articulated by the student movement. After the killing of Luis Carlos Galán, the Liberal presidential candidate, a group of students submitted an initiative to the president pushing for a constituent assembly. In their request, they wrote: “Faced with the generalized crisis that the Nation is going through, and the incompetence of the political class to respond to the great problems of the country, it is necessary that citizens take responsibility for finding solutions that the circumstances require.” (quoted in Buenahora

⁶⁹ The three presidential candidates were: Luis Carlos Galán (Liberal Party) in 1989, Bernardo Jaramillo Ossa (Unión Patriótica) in 1990, and Carlos Pizarro Leongómez (M-19 Acción Democrática) in 1990.

1991:127).⁷⁰ The students' initiative became an extra ballot in the local and congressional elections, 1990 inviting Colombians to cast a vote in favor of a constituent assembly. The "seventh ballot," as it was known, obtained more than five million votes (86.6% of all votes) and provided a clear citizen mandate to reform the constitution (Dugas 2001). The National Constituent of Assembly, 1991 was symptomatic of a profound crisis of state institutions, but also of an opportunity to discuss the terms of inclusion within the nation.⁷¹

After all, this crisis was not only national, but nationalist in content. "The people" or "the Nation" were now electorally portrayed as the primary constituent, capable of going against the legally constituted powers. The 1987 ruling of the Supreme Court of Justice provided the legal framework for this interpretation:

"When the Nation, in the exercise of its sovereign and inalienable power, decides to rule on the constitutional statute that will govern its destiny, it is not and cannot be subject to the legal regulations that precede its decision. The primary constituent act is, in this sense, the expression of maximum political will [...]. The constituent Nation, [...] by the very strength and effectiveness of its political power, enjoys the greatest autonomy to adopt the decisions it sees fit in relation to its fundamental political structure. When the Nation is called upon and, in effect, makes its voice heard to constitute or reconstitute said structure, it adopts a decision of a political nature that is unappealable and not subject to legal review." (quoted in Buenahora 1991:151).

⁷⁰ Earlier, President Virgilio Barco, in a failed attempt to reform the constitution, had openly spoken about the lack of legitimacy of political institutions: "Our democratic institutions have continued to lose legitimacy. Faith in judges has been eroded. The credibility of the Congress has deteriorated. The people despair of public administration. Few believe that the oversight agencies are really looking out for the good performance of the State. With the referendum, the time has come to bring back legitimacy to the actions of the State and its institutions." Cited in Dugas (1997:296).

⁷¹ A more extensive reconstruction of the antecedents leading to the National Constituent of Assembly of 1991 can be found in Van Cott (2000a).

Invoking “the Nation,” however, would require making public the predominant visions and divisions of Colombia. Presidential Decree 1926, 1990, the legal instrument that authorized Colombian citizens to organize and participate in a constituent assembly, offered a first glimpse into the prevailing categorical divisions of the Colombian nation, and their political representatives. Among other categorical divides, decree 1926 included, for the first time in the reform process, a reference to “Indigenous and ethnic minority organizations.”⁷² Moreover, the decree suggested incorporating the “recognition of the multi-ethnic character of the Nation and respect for Indigenous authorities and culture, as well as Indigenous communities’ ownership over reservation lands.” (Buenahora 1991:151,207). Among the categorical divisions, however, people of African descent were not mentioned. Decree 1926 effectively reproduced a long tradition of giving Indigeneity and Blackness a different symbolic value within the representation of the Colombian nation (Wade 1993:33–37). As in other Latin American countries, when the idea of “the Nation” is politicized, Indigeneity appears to provide a distinctive historical depth that Blackness does not seem to supply.

The appeal to the multi-ethnic character of Colombia was clearly an official attempt to institute a renewed vision of the nation, but also the renewed authority of the state to represent it appropriately. The election of two Indigenous representatives became one of the most visible symbols of the new social and political order that the new constitution sought to institute. The participation of

⁷² The full list of representatives of political categories included: “guilds of the main sectors of the economy, civic and community organizations, indigenous and ethnic minority organizations, organizations student and youth organizations, feminist organizations and of women, organizations of retirees and pensioners, organizations of retired military and police officers, organizations of environmentalists and ecologists, organizations of human rights, professional associations, associations of public universities, associations of universities private, the Catholic Church and other churches.” Cite in Buenahora Febres-Cordero (1991:151,207). In addition to these political categories, the decree 1926 also included two seats for representatives of demobilized guerrilla groups.

Lorenzo Muelas, candidate of the Indigenous Authorities of the South-West (*Autoridades Indígenas del Sur-Occidente*, AISO), and Francisco Rojas Birry, candidate of the National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (*Organización Indígena Nacional de Colombia*, ONIC), was perceived by the Colombian public as the beginning of “a new social contract.” For some observers,

“At a moment when the country had been beaten down by violence and disorder, putting all its hopes in the renovation of its institutions, the presence of elected Indigenous persons at the side of other representatives of the guerrillas and civil society was offered to Colombian eyes as the tangible proof that it was possible to live together. It was the dreamed-of reality of a country respectful of differences, hospitable, and tolerant. The Constituent Assembly demonstrated, through its internal composition, that the separation between the real country and the formal country—so denounced as an essential ingredient of the restricted democracy prevailing in the country—was not as insuperable as it seemed.” (Gros 1993:9)

In this maneuver, the Colombian state attempted to appropriate at least *three discursive contexts of legitimation*. First, international human rights organizations provided a legal discourse to validate group-differentiated rights for Indigenous peoples. The use of international legal instruments such as the Convention 107 (C107) on Indigenous and Tribal Populations, issued by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1957, provided the legal basis to recognize ethnic rights on a constitutional level. Constitutional reforms in Panama (1972), Ecuador (1978), Canada (1982), Guatemala (1985), Nicaragua (1987) and Brazil (1988), were early instances of the “model of multicultural constitutionalism” that became widespread in the region (Sieder 2002; Van Cott 2000a:42).⁷³ Depending on the situation, the appropriation of this legal idiom was useful for state and

⁷³ During the late 1980s, the ILO’s Convention 107 was replaced by the Convention 169 of 1989, becoming one of the most influential instruments of legal argumentation in this period. The creation in 1982 of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) was also influential in the region.

nonstate actors to justify top-down projects or bottom-up demands.⁷⁴ While the framework of ethnic rights provided an opportunity for state actors to appear democratic, it also became an opportunity for nonstate actors to articulate legitimate demands.

Second, decades-old demands from Indigenous organizations created a legitimate repertoire of claims-making. In Colombia, three of the main contemporary Indigenous organizations emerged in the 1970s.⁷⁵ The Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (*Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca*, CRIC) was founded in 1971, and the Indigenous Authorities of Colombia (*Autoridades Indígenas de Colombia*, AICO) was created in 1977. By the 1980s, these two Indigenous organizations articulated two different modes of political action. Whereas the CRIC emphasized class-based forms of mobilization articulated to centralist organizations of the political left, AICO accentuated a politicization of ethnicity under autonomist forms of organization (Castillo 2007:143–47).⁷⁶ The National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia,

⁷⁴ The frame of ethnic rights of the 1990s has been criticized as a form of “neoliberal multiculturalism” (Gros 1997; Hale 2002) that prevented indigenous movements to organize beyond themes of cultural difference and develop broader coalitions around issues of social inequality. Although the official enactment of ethnic minority rights *can* become an elite strategy to avoid more radical challenges, it *can* also serve as an instrument of struggle against social and political exclusion. In this research, the political horizon of claims to ethnic difference is understood within field-specific configurations of material and ideal interests as they inform the concrete practice of ethno-political actors in specific moments and situations. In this sense, field-analytic perspectives are useful to avoid reading limitations of ideological stances as limitations of practical enactments.

⁷⁵ During the twentieth century, indigenous mobilizations can be traced back to 1914 when Manuel Quintín Lame, a member of the Nasa people, became well known for organizing an armed insurrection against the hacienda system in the Cauca region. The insurrection led by Lame can be summarized in five demands: collective land titling, recognition of traditional authorities, abolition of land serfdom, and vindication of indigenous culture (Castillo 2007:128–33). During the 1930s and 1940s, some of these demands were articulated by peasant organizations that included indigenous and nonindigenous sectors (LeGrand 1986; Zamosc 1986). By the 1980s, indigenous organizations were splitting between class-based or ethnic-based forms of mobilization, but also between autonomist and centralist forms of organization, vis-à-vis state agencies and other left-wing social actors (Castillo 2007:143–47).

⁷⁶ As we shall see, the axis of political differentiation within the indigenous social movement is crucial to understand the conceptualization of Blackness within Afrodescendent organizations.

ONIC) emerged in 1982 and combined both political strategies. Despite their differences, all Indigenous organizations claimed access to land or territorial rights, demanding the implementation of agrarian reform laws. These laws mandated the expansion of *resguardos*, collective titles issued by the Spanish Crown during the colonial era. By 1989, the Colombian state had created more than 200 new *resguardos*, totaling over 20 million hectares (49 million acres) (Gros 1991; Jackson 2019:39).

Third, anthropological knowledge of Indigenous peoples also legitimized the politicization of ethno-cultural difference. By the 1970s, the production of anthropological knowledge was divided between two conceptions of the discipline. On one hand, the Structural perspective aimed to preserve the cultural registry of Indigenous practices (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1968). On the other, Marxist analysis engaged scholars with the political struggles of Indigenous organizations (Vasco 1978).⁷⁷ During these years, the first perspective was known as “anthropology of rescue” or “anthropology of urgency,” and the second one as “engaged anthropology” or “anthropology of action” (Arocha and de Friedemann 1984:74,89; Jaramillo Giraldo 2017:19; Pineda Camacho 2004:69,77).⁷⁸ Despite heated debates, in both cases Indigenous peoples continued to be privileged objects of study and solidarity (de Friedemann 1984).⁷⁹

At this critical juncture, the legal discourse of international agencies around ethnic difference, the political repertoire of Indigenous organizations, and the academic knowledge of anthropology

⁷⁷ For a similar split in Colombian Sociology, see Cataño (1986), Jaramillo Jiménez (2017).

⁷⁸ The consolidation of engaged forms of doing Anthropology was supported by an ethical and political critique of the discipline in Latin America during the 1970s. For instance, the Declaration of Barbados, signed by several Latin American anthropologists in 1971, denounced Anthropology as an “instrument of colonial domination” (Bartolomé et al. 1973:269).

⁷⁹ According to Nina de Friedemann, from 1936 to 1978, only 5 of 271 professionally registered anthropologists (less than 2%) were advancing studies on people of African descent in Colombia (1984:538).

researchers provided the symbolic conditions of possibility to rethink the official categorization of Blackness in Colombia. To be sure, none of these contexts of legitimation positioned people of African descent as the central subjects of legal recognition, political mobilization, or academic research.⁸⁰ And yet, the extension of these symbolic axis to include people of African descent produced a “transvaluation” (Wimmer 2013:57) of normative principles of ethnoracial stratification that enabled the enumeration of people African descent in the 1993 census. In other words, the new legal, political, and academic understanding of Blackness—as analogous to another form of Indigeneity—helped normatively invert the racial geography articulated by José Maria Samper and others during the nineteenth century.

How did this transvaluation happen, and how did it lead to a *nomie* crisis? The legitimating context provided discursive resources, but they still had to be properly articulated to be symbolically effective. The normative inversion that transformed the nineteenth-century category “Black savage” into twentieth-century “Black communities” can be reconstructed through *three moments of categorical articulation*: first, as a political claim to demand collective land titling, second, as a discursive stance during the debates of the Constitutional Assembly, and finally, as a social manifestation of Black peasants demanding constitutional recognition.⁸¹

The *first moment of articulation* of the category “Black community” was a *political claim* during the late 1980s in the Pacific Coast lowlands. Legitimizing a new understanding of Blackness

⁸⁰ On the differential treatment of Blackness and Indigeneity during the constitutional reforms of this period, see Hooker (2005).

⁸¹ I use the notion of articulation to denote not only a symbolic expression of meaning but also a social connection across actors and fields. For a similar use, see Hall (2019b, 2019a).

became an opportunity for access to land titling at a time when extractive economies threaten to displace black peasant populations. After the abolition of slavery in 1851, settlements of free black peasants appeared in the lowlands of the Pacific Coast (Almario García, Mesa, and Gómez 2015; Aprile-Gnisset 1993; Barragan 2021; West 1957). During the twentieth century, as the gold economy retreated from the region and the diversified export economy moved to the Andes (Ocampo and Colmenares Guerra 2017:201), these Afrodescendent populations developed their own subsistence economies. They searched the rainforest landscape for locations providing timber, hunting, fishing, and small-scale mining (Leal 2018). However, the subsistence economies of Black peasants were ignored and made invisible by laws (e.g., Law 2, 1959) that declared these territories “*tierras baldías*” (empty lands) subject to state adjudication (Oslender 2008:146). This legal figure allowed the government to increase the number of concessions ceded to companies interested in exploiting the natural resources of the region. By the 1980s, a new wave of conflict emerged in the region when sawmill owners tried to expand the timber economy and appropriate territories that had been traditionally occupied by black peasants (Leal and Restrepo 2003:45–66; Restrepo 2013:46–53).

The Integral Peasant Association of the Atrato (*Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato*, ACIA), was officially created in 1987 for Black peasants to organize against the expansion of timber companies in the lowlands of the Atrato river (Cocomacia 2002:110–24). The initial organizational infrastructure of ACIA was comprised of Ecclesial Base Communities created by Catholic missionaries in 1982 influenced by liberation theology (Restrepo 2013). In 1988, in a “Forum on Land Titling,” the president of ACIA—along with the president of an Indigenous organization (OREWA)—signed a memorandum of understanding with representatives of local and regional state

agencies in charge of land redistribution (INCORA) and the administration of natural resources (i.e., CODECHOCÓ) (See Figure 3.2). The first point of agreement included the following statement:

“Consult the Council of State⁸² if the communities of black peasants settled in Middle Atrato can be assimilated to the tribal or semi-tribal denomination included in Law 31, 1967, aiming to conduct the Community Titling of the forest area for said peasants.”

This unpublished document is important because it shows one of the first attempts by an Afrodescendent organization in Colombia to legally associate Blackness and Indigeneity in order to have access to land titling rights. Law 31, 1967 made official the ILO Convention 107, 1957. This convention referred to “populations which are not yet integrated into the national community” and “whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions.” More importantly, the convention stipulated that “the right of ownership, collective or individual, of the members of the populations concerned over the lands these populations traditionally occupy shall be recognized.”⁸³ At a time when the Colombian state officially blocked any attempt at land reform and unofficially repressed peasant organizations (Arocha 1998; Sanchez et al. 1988), the ACIA and their legal advisors⁸⁴

⁸² The Council of State (*Consejo de Estado*) is the supreme tribunal with jurisdiction over administrative issues in Colombia.

⁸³ C107 - Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957 (No. 107) (https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C107)

⁸⁴ By the late 1980s, ACIA’s legal advisor had an extensive experience preparing cases of collective land titling for indigenous communities. As one of the lawyers that worked with ACIA recalled: “Legally there was Law 2 of 1959, but they had no rights because they were in a forest reservation. So, there was nothing to do, legally there was nothing to do with that Law. So we sat down and began to analyze. And we said ‘well, you have to follow by what the indigenous legislation brings. In other words, the indigenous legislation must be a teaching for you. What is your fight? You have to fight on the basis of whether you are an ethnic group. If you are an ethnic group, then you have to follow ILO Convention 107.” (Interview with Esperanza Pacheco, February 2018).

seemed to have found a way to protect the territories of “communities of black peasants” living in the lowlands of the Atrato River.

Although ACIA was one the leading organizations articulating this strategy, other emerging Afrodescendent organizations also participated. The National Movement Cimarrón (*Movimiento Nacional Cimarrón*) was legally constituted in 1982, and emerged from urban study groups that met in the city of Pereira since 1976. Their initial readings included the biography of Jesus, Malcom X, Martin Luther King, and Gandhi. By the late 1980s, Cimarrón had established study groups in at least fourteen Colombian cities including Cali, Cartagena, and Bogotá (Castro Hinestroza and Meza Ramírez 2017:88). Although Cimarrón had participated decisively in urban protests like the Civil Strike (*Paro Cívico*), 1986, they were also invested in the organization of Black peasants in rural areas. For example, the Peasant Association of the Baudó (*Asociación Campesina del Baudó*, ACABA) was organized by members of Cimarrón in 1988 (Castro Hinestroza and Meza Ramírez 2017:105–8).⁸⁵

Claiming ethnic rights for black populations, however, lacked any support within the existing legal framework of Colombia. After a meeting with the Council of State, one of ACIA’s legal advisors wrote a letter summarizing the possibilities of “collective forest titling.” In her letter, she wrote:

“We analyze the legal obstacle according to which in Colombia there is no law that mentions blacks as an ethnic minority and therefore they are not guaranteed any rights as such.

⁸⁵ Although ACIA and Cimarrón were some of the leading Afrodescendent organizations during the late 1980s, they were not the pioneers of the politicization of Blackness in Colombia. In the twentieth century, during the 1930s and 1940s, Diego Luis Córdoba created a political movement within the Liberal party that articulated racial and class-based categories to defend the political autonomy of the Chocó region (Rausch 2003). Other organizations began to question the ideology of mestizaje during the 1940s: Club Negro de Colombia (1943) y del Centro de Estudios Afrocolombianos (1947). Afrodescendent intellectuals such as Natanael Díaz, Marino Viveros, and Manuel Zapata Olivella articulated these organizing efforts. For a detailed description of the discursive stances of these intellectuals and their organizations, see Pisano (2012).

However, there are laws that, although they do not refer specifically to blacks, do guarantee that all Colombians have equal rights. The goal, then, is to achieve this recognition.” (Letter from Amparo Escobar, Quibdó, Septiembre 12 de 1989).

As other scholars have shown, from state actors' point of view, an ethnic understanding of Blackness was “unthinkable” in the late 1980s (Restrepo 2013:72). Following Horowitz’s distinction (1975:119–21), categorizing Blackness as another form of Indigeneity in order to claim territorial rights presented two concerns. First, the existing legal framework lacked the *criteria* to define conditions under which Blackness and Indigeneity had a similar claim to ethnic rights. Second, existing laws also lacked the *indicia* to operationalize the defining elements of belonging to a “Black community.” The unexpected emergence of the National Constituent Assembly in 1991 opened a unique discursive space to articulate this demand.

The *second moment of articulation* of the category “Black communities” occurred as a *discursive stance* within the Constitutional Assembly debates in 1991. Although the assembly was perceived as an opportunity to advance the social and political inclusion of people of African descent, advocacy organizations were divided. The main lines of division were not ideological but organizational.⁸⁶ Divisions emerged in reference to building coalitions with existing political actors. In

⁸⁶ At this time, the main lines of division were not structured around the politics of ethnic difference and racial equality (Cf. Paschel 2013:103–7). In fact, coalitions of Afrodescendent organizations, such as the National Coordination of Black Communities (*Coordinadora Nacional de Comunidades Negras*, CNCN), articulated *both* types of politics. In a pamphlet that circulated before the Constitutional Assembly, they drafted a political agenda that combined elements of ethnic difference and racial equality: “a) That Blacks be accepted as citizens of this country in the Constitution, recognizing that Colombia is a country of various cultures and various ethnic groups. b) We have the right to political, social and material equality as citizens with the rest of Colombians, through a historical indemnification by the State as forgers of wealth in this society. c) That the multinationality of the country be recognized, acknowledging that there are several nations within the country. d) That the Pacific zone be recognized as a nation within the country. e) Defense of human dignity by sanctioning racial discrimination and constitutional registration of international agreements against racism by the UN,

this regard, Afrodescendant organizations split around their relative independence from traditional parties (e.g., Liberal and Conservative parties), but also from the emerging political left (e.g., the M-19 Democratic Alliance, the political party created after the demobilization of the M-19 guerrilla organization).⁸⁷ For example, whereas ACIA decided to strengthen ties with Indigenous organizations like ONIC, Cimarrón first supported the M-19 movement and then the Communist party (Castro Hinestroza and Meza Ramírez 2017:114,131).⁸⁸ In the constituent assembly elections, the strategic alliance with Indigenous organizations prevailed. Francisco Rojas Birry, a member of the Embera-Wounaan people, represented the agenda of ACIA and other Chocó ethno-territorial organizations.

UNESCO, UNICEF, etc. f) Right to individual and collective possession of ancestral territories that Blacks have cultivated as family plots and other common areas. g) Right to the usufruct and control of the non-renewable resources of the subsoil for which the ancestral settled communities should participate in National and International agreements that regulate their control, management and exploitation. These agreements should not harm our interests and those of the indigenous communities.” (CNCN, Nociónes para el pueblo Chocoano sobre la Constituyente, Noviembre de 1990).

⁸⁷ The politicization of ethnicity had tense relationships with the traditional Left. As some scholars have noted, by the 1970s, the Latin American Left had developed a triple language: 1) democracy and social justice, 2) progress and modernization, and 3) national independence and the anti-imperialist struggle (Gros 1991:160). A populist interpretation of nationalist projects of *mestizaje* was a discursive stance common to all these languages. Although the Left had criticized imperialism and capitalism, their discourse lacked a critique of the nationalist project of *mestizaje* (Jackson 2019:36). Whereas for militants of the traditional Left the politics of ethnicity was reactionary, for indigenous activists the politics of popular nationalism was assimilationist. In Colombia, the scission between the indigenous and the nonindigenous Left had occurred in the late 1970s (Castillo 2007:147). A similar fracture occurred during the 1980s among and within Afrodescendent organizations.

⁸⁸ The different political alliances of these organizations contrasted with their similar ideological stances. Although Cimarrón’s agenda included stances against racism and discrimination, their demands also included references to “Black communities” and the “ancestral right to property.” By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the politics of ethnic difference and the politics of racial inequality were integrated in their political practice. For example, their proposal for the constituent assembly included the following five points: “—The National Constitution must recognize that the Colombian Nation is multi-ethnic and pluri-cultural. —The National Constitution must prohibit racism and all discrimination against black and indigenous communities. —The National Constitution must order the State to help the areas inhabited by black and indigenous communities to accelerate their economic, social, cultural and political development. —The National Constitution must recognize the ancestral right of property and usufruct that the black and indigenous communities have acquired over the lands they occupy. The State will support the exploitation of natural resources for the benefit of the communities. —The National Constitution must determine a national planning structure that promotes balance between the regions and eliminate the internal colonialism practiced by the most developed regions on the most marginalized regions.” (Sánchez, Roldán, and Sánchez 1993:184).

Although the sector represented by these organizations was strongly articulated around a clear demand, legitimating “Black communities” as an ethnic category was a daunting task within the Constitutional Assembly. The legitimation crisis had opened a discursive space to question the national project of *mestizaje*. And yet, what emerged from this critical juncture was a set of orthodox positions from the Right (i.e., Conservative party), but also from the Left (i.e., M-19 party). Both sectors had reservations about granting ethnic rights to Indigenous peoples, and these reservations were stronger for people of African descent.

One of the first debates in the First Commission of the Constituent Assembly showed the convergence of right- and left-wing nationalism.⁸⁹ On April 1, 1991, Francisco Rojas Birry, from the Indigenous organization ONIC, advanced a claim against the mono-cultural definition of the nation:

“[...] the constitutional recognition that we propose is the multi-ethnic and multicultural nature of the nation, which advocates abandoning the criterion of cultural uniformity imposed on all inhabitants by Colombian institutions [...]” (ANC, Transcriptions First Commission, April 1, 1991).

To that intervention, Otty Patiño from the M-19 party replied defending the unifying character of *mestizaje*:

“[...] it turns out that we are a composite, we are a *mestizaje*, a *mestizaje* that does not recognize itself [...] we are that composite, more than pluri-ethnicity, we are a composite of several ethnic groups, because if any of us is asked about our race, either we don't have it or we are all the same race [...] I think that the European world is basically a racist world, despite the fact that the European world somehow defeated racial hegemony [...] I think that here In Latin America there is the possibility of overcoming that in a much more natural way and without the bloodshed of Europe. So, I think we should assume ourselves as *mestizos*. I think this is

⁸⁹ The First Commission focus on constitutional principles, rights, duties, guarantees and fundamental freedoms. Members of this commission also discussed the mechanisms of democratic participation, elections, and political parties.

essential for us as Colombians and as Latin Americans without ignoring all that struggle of our ancestors [...]” (ANC, Transcriptions First Commission, April 1, 1991).

Patiño believed that codifying the multi-ethnic character of the nation in the new constitutional text would go against the notion of *mestizaje*. For Patiño, *mestizaje* was a unifying construct articulated by, but also beyond, its ethnic and racial components. *Mestizaje* figured as an essential element of the Colombian nation, making it similar to its Latin American counterparts, but also distinct from Europe’s racism. The anti-colonial implications of Patiño’s left-wing nationalism converged with the right-wing stance of Misael Pastrana Borrero, Colombia’s former president and representative of the Conservative party:

“[...] I believe that precisely what is fundamental about cultures is [...] the respect for all cultures, because those integrated and overlapping cultures are the ones that actually create their own identity [...] I highly commend the delegate Otty Patiño on what he says about the mestizo race. These days I was also reading in the Brazilian Congress [...] that they have been trying to create with all races a single race. That has happened a lot in Brazil. It is one of the great contributions of our continent to what we could call the multiple physiognomy of the world, *mestizaje* in all its expressions, in all its sectors. Is an attempt to prevent culture from being destroyed and, on the contrary, to be integrated.” (ANC, Transcriptions First Commission, May 9, 1991).

Although Patiño referenced *mestizaje* in a language of “unification” and Pastrana used it in reference to “integration,” in both cases the implication is that the nationalist project of *mestizaje* had to be preserved. In this respect, the Left’s popular nationalism converged with the Right’s elite nationalism.

The efforts to transvaluate the category “Black savage” (with its territorial connotations), and legitimize it as another form of Indigeneity, was forcefully advanced by Indigenous representatives during the discussions of the Second Commission.⁹⁰ During these debates, Francisco Rojas Birry, the representative of the Indigenous organization ONIC, explained why they were claiming ethnic rights on behalf of people of African descent:

“Why are we Indians talking about Blacks or Raizales? For us, Indigenous people, for the ONIC [...] since its birth it has stated [...] that we Indigenous people are poor, discriminated against, marginalized. [...] In this sense, we place ourselves alongside other groups that also live in the same conditions as the Indians, a subhuman condition, misery, and abandonment [...]. In the case of Chocó, for example, 99% are Black and Indian, and they share the hydrographic basin of the Atrato River, the San Juan River, [as well as other rivers on] the Pacific Coast. By this I mean to say that if we Indians have some values, some customs, some traditions, if we Indians have a disastrous history, if we have a different politics from the rest of the Colombian society, Blacks also live in those conditions. Blacks were brought as slaves when Indians were said to be useless [...]. History has not ended, [...] history has not remained in history, [...] history still continues. Today we have racial discrimination, not allowing Blacks the opportunity to progress, not allowing them to carry out their own development projects based on their cultural values [...]. Without counting on them, projects are designed from desks, from above, from centralism, and imposed against the will of these ethnic groups that exist in these marginalized regions. This is what has led us to say today that we Indians, and Blacks, have to maintain in unity. Nothing else unites us. Color does not unite us, hair does not unite us. A common cause unites us, which is the abandonment in which we live in a supposedly rich region, in this case the Chocó [...].” (ANC, Transcriptions Second Commission, April 11, 1991).

Following the agenda developed by Indigenous and Afrodescendant organizations in Chocó, Rojas Birry attempted to make the category “Black” symbolically assimilable to the category “Indian”

⁹⁰ The Second Commission discussed land use, territorial planning, and regional and local autonomy.

on at least three levels. First, they shared a common experience of territorial exclusion and inequality. For him, both categories had a similar experience of poverty, marginality, but also “racial discrimination.” Second, they also have a cultural distinctiveness vis-à-vis the Colombian nation. In his view, not only Indigenous but also Black Communities had distinctive “values,” “customs,” “traditions.” And finally, Rojas Birry suggested that “Blacks” also suffered political exclusion. For him, they had a different kind of “politics” but also a different vision of “development” that has been ignored by Colombian central state agencies.

Within the same commission, Cornelio Reyes, a representative of the Conservative party, had a different interpretation of Colombian history and the status of Indigenous people in it:

“[...] I want to mention the Republican era. When it is said that everything has been negative, I have to vindicate the attitudes of all rulers. The first provision is a decree from 1820, perhaps by the Liberator, Simón Bolívar, which orders the return of the reservation lands to the Indigenous people. And then we have [...] about 81 regulations that have been issued since then in favor of the Indigenous people. It is possible that all this was not perfect, but there is a process of improving those conditions. And Law 89 of 1890, which is the basic statute of Colombian Indianism, [...] despite the expression of ‘savages’ who must be incorporated into ‘civilized life,’ contains a series of protective provisions for the Indigenous [...]. What I mean by this is that this kind of repetition of the anti-Spanish and anti-Republican black legend amounts to say that we, all the rest of Colombians, have been antisocial. And here I also want to say that [...] we are all coffee with milk. Mestizaje, despite what Francisco Rojas says to the contrary, is predominant in the Colombian race.” (ANC, Transcriptions Second Commission, April 11, 1991).

Reyes’s intervention not only disputed the role of the law in the exclusion of Indigenous people but also minimized their critique by appealing to “mestizaje” as the demographic representation of the “Colombian race.” In other words, the emerging claims of ethnic subjects were

disputed in their legal reach but also regarding their social base. A similar counter-critique would come from left-wing positions within the Fourth Commission.⁹¹ Maria Teresa Garcés Lloreda, member of the M-19 party, was unconvinced about the cultural specificity of “Black Communities.” In her words:

“[...] when one really knows the Pacific Coast—for example, I know it quite well too—, one knows that what really exists are cohesive communities. Blacks have very beautiful customs. But they do not have a significant cultural tradition that makes them different from other people. On the other hand, it is clear that Indigenous communities have a legal tradition that should be protected [...]” (ANC, Transcriptions Fourth Commission, May 15, 1991).

Either by revalidating the notion of *mestizaje*, minimizing the existence of ethnoracial forms of inequality, or questioning the ethnic status of people of African descent, representatives of right-wing and left-wing parties remained unconvinced about the need to approve group-differentiated rights for “Black communities.” Although the category and the broader ethno-territorial agenda had reached the debates of the Constitutional Assembly, the extension of legal, political, and academic discourses of ethnic difference to understand Afrodescendent populations seemed an impossible goal. Although various political actors were now aware of the revindication, they were also unwilling to grant constitutional support.

The *third moment of articulation* of the category “Black communities” happened as a *social manifestation* of Black peasants demanding constitutional recognition. Nevaldo Perea, the representative of ACIA who was working with Francisco Rojas Birry in Bogotá, was almost certain

⁹¹ The Fourth Commission discussed reforms to the structure of the State, Congress, Police and Military Forces.

that the constitutional recognition would not happen and recommended that its supporters “make some noise” in Chocó and other regions. In a letter sent from Bogotá to members of ACIA and other ethno-territorial organizations in Chocó, he wrote:

“The constituent Fals Borda [M-19 party], who knows and has been working with ethnic minorities, said that he did not know where the settlements of Black peoples were.⁹² Diego Uribe [Liberal party] says that the only ones who are worth recognizing are the Indians because the rest of us are a mixture of coffee with milk. [Gustavo] Zafra [Liberal party] did say that, if the Indian claim was going to be recognized, the Black claim had to be recognized as well. In any case, the fight is very hard. Sometimes I feel pessimistic seeing so much resistance out there. [...] The problem is when the debate takes place in the territorial planning commission. If it doesn't pass in that commission, I doubt it will pass in the plenary session with all the constituents. [...] Make some noise about the disregard of Black people in the constituent assembly through radio stations, pamphlets, and letters to the communities.” (Carta, Nevaldo Perea, Bogotá, Abril 28 de 1991) (See Figure 3.3)

Nevaldo's fears almost came true. The demand to grant ethno-territorial rights to the category “Black Communities” was not supported in the Second nor the Fourth Commission. Lobbying with left-wing and right-wing parties was insufficient. At this point, ACIA and other organizations in Chocó resorted to direct actions and mobilized Black peasants in boats from the rivers of Medio Atrato to Quibdó (the capital of Chocó). They were committed to *demonstrate*—in both senses of the word—the social existence of the category “Black Communities” but also their political demands.

⁹² Nevaldo's account refers to the initial position of Orlando Fals Borda, one of the founders of the first Sociology department in Colombia and also one of the representatives of the M-19 party in the Constituent Assembly. Nevaldo's letter is consistent with other accounts that underscore the initial lack of support of Black organization by left-wing parties in general and the M-19 in particular (Arocha 1992; Wade 1993). Fals Borda later defended his interventions during the Constitutional Assembly on behalf of Black communities (Fals Borda 1993). Although Fals Borda and the Indigenous representative Lorenzo Muelas initially presented a “Report on Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Groups” that omitted references to group-differentiated rights for people of African descent (Comisión Segunda, Abril 4 de 1991), they later supported this legal claim during the constitutional debates. For a recent reconstruction of Fals Borda's intellectual trajectory and academic research, see Rappaport (2020).

The first strategy has been called the “Black telegram.” In the collections of the Archivo General de la Nación, there is evidence that almost 1,300 telegrams were sent to the presidency of the constituent assembly from April 30 to May 30, 1991 (See Figure 3.4).⁹³ Most telegrams had the following text: “Multiethnic and multicultural Colombia demands recognition existence and ethnic rights Black people” (See Figure 3.5). Although most of them were sent from Quibdó (80%), some people sent these telegrams from other cities like Cali, Medellín, and Bogotá.

The second strategy was more contentious. On May 22, 1991, a few weeks before closing the discussion commissions for the new constitution, nearly 300 people from ACIA and other ethno-territorial organizations in Chocó occupied the Mayor’s office, the San Francisco de Asís Cathedral, and the headquarters of the Colombian Institute of Agrarian Reform (INCORA) in Quibdó. Another group in Bogotá peacefully occupied the Embassy of Haití. This is how Nevaldo recalls this mobilization event:

“The strategy to mobilize the communities [...] was to invite them to a Chirimía dance in Quibdó.⁹⁴ Many people embarked in four very large boats. Everyone was happy because a dance had never been organized in Quibdó in which community members participated. When the boats [...] pulled up to the shore, everyone was told that there was no dance, but that there was going to be an occupation of the institutions to put pressure on the government to recognize us as an ethnic group with distinctive cultural peculiarities, and entitled to a territory that was ours since the slave lords said ‘you are free.’ We explained how important that moment was for us because there were only a few days left to finish the process of the National Constituent Assembly. And if the constituents did not recognize the rights of Black Communities in the Political Constitution of Colombia, we would lose all the fights that we

⁹³ This number of telegrams could be a sample of larger set of telegrams sent to other members of the constituent assembly. According to ACIA leaders, the total number of telegrams is close to ten thousand (Perea 2012:52).

⁹⁴ Chirimía is a wooden musical instrument predecessor of the oboe. The chirimía is a member of the shawm family of double-reed instruments. Some scholars believed that it was introduced to Central and South America in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by the Spanish clergy (McNett 1960).

had given for the defense of natural resources. A few said they did not want to participate. The majority said ‘let’s go for that.’” (Perea 2012:52–53)

The occupation lasted for five days and included the following demands: “ethnic recognition, titling of traditional territories; the declaration of economic and social emergency for Chocó, the reformulation of development plans for the Pacific region, the end of the extractivism of natural resources, and the immediate demilitarization of some territories” (El Tiempo, May 23 1991). Although the sit-ins were illegal, and some journalists framed the event as “guerrilla groups [...] taking over the Mayor’s office,”⁹⁵ the strategies proved to be effective.

First as a political claim, then as a discursive stance, and later as a social manifestation, the category “Black communities” finally made it to the constitutional text. On July 2, 1991, two days before the end of the constitutional assembly, the plenary session voted in favor of the text that would become Transitory Article 55 of the new constitution. Lobbying outside as well as within the assembly seemed to have worked out. Many delegates who had first opposed the wording of the article in their commissions, now approved it. With 49 affirmative votes, 1 negative, and 1 abstention,⁹⁶ the approved text stated the following:

“Transitional article. Within the two years following the validity of this constituent act, Congress will issue, after the study by a Special Commission that the Government will create for this purpose, a law that recognizes the Black communities that have been occupying empty lands, in the rural riverine areas of the rivers of the Pacific basin, in accordance with their traditional production practices, the right to collective property over the areas that will be

⁹⁵ Interview Nevaldo Perea (July 24, 2015).

⁹⁶ Cornelio Reyes, member of the Conservative party, abstained from voting. José María Velasco Guerrero, member of the M-19 party, voted “No” and added: “I see that for Blacks there is nothing but mud, humidity and cholera.” (ANC, Transcriptions Plenary Commission, July 2 of 1991).

demarcated by the same law. In the Special Commission referred to in the previous paragraph, representatives elected by the communities involved will participate in each case. The property thus recognized, will only be alienable in the terms established by law. The same law will establish mechanisms for the protection of the cultural identity and the rights of these communities and for the promotion of their economic and social development.

Paragraph 1. The provisions of this article may be applied to other areas of the country that present similar conditions by the same procedure, and previous study and favorable opinion of the Special Commission hereby established.

Paragraph 2. If at the expiration of the term indicated in this article, Congress has not issued the law to which it refers, the Government will proceed to do so within the following six months, by means of a regulation with the force of law.” (ANC, Transcriptions Plenary Commission, July 2, 1991)

Although it was approved late in the constitutional process, Transitional Article 55 (TA-55) created a nomic crisis in the official understanding the Colombian nation. TA-55 introduced at least three sources of normative ambiguity. First, it validated a category that lacked any type of legal support. Although the notion of “Black communities” bore family resemblance to the category “Black savage” of the nineteenth century, it lacked any legal antecedent in Colombian laws. The official definition of the category was not provided. Second, TA-55 instituted a form of territoriality that was unspecific. Both the geographic location and the territorial composition of “rural riverine areas” were undefined. Additionally, the conditions under which TA-55 might apply to “other areas of the country” were unclear. Finally, TA-55 recognized group-specific protections that were not legally defined. Although rights to “cultural identity” and “economic and social development” were included in the article, it was unclear how Colombia should protect them.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ For a more detailed reconstruction of the ambiguities and challenges introduced by the Transitional Article 55, see Sánchez, Roldán and Sánchez (1993:203–50).

Perhaps more importantly, TA-55 put into question the authority of the state to handle ambiguity and established a constitutional mandate that officially instituted the political representatives of “Black communities.” Due to the protracted legitimation process that began with the Constitutional Assembly, state officials were now forced by the Constitution to negotiate the provisions of a new law in a “Special Commission” with academics and activists. Although the constitutional text gave Indigenous people a legal status that Afrodescendent people lacked (Hooker 2005), the approval of TA-55 was nonetheless a legal *golazo* (Paschel 2016:106).⁹⁸ The wording of TA-55 provided the constitutional justification to transvaluate the racialized notion of rural blackness of the nineteenth century into the ethnicized notion of the twentieth century. TA-55 was specific enough to consecrate “Black communities” as a new official category for legal protection, territorial legibility, and political representation. However, it was also sufficiently ambiguous to open a political horizon of legal problems that could not be solved by state actors only. The Special Commission sessions would become a crucial political space of struggle over the legal reach of what would become Law 70 of 1993, the first legal instrument to give ethno-territorial rights to people of African descent in Colombia.

Classification Struggles, the Special Commission and the 1993 Census in Colombia

Before the enumeration of the category “Black Communities” in the 1993 census, the social bases, political reach, and legal affordances of such category were unclear. Although TA-55 had

⁹⁸ Here it is worth remembering that although the approval of group-differentiated rights for Indigenous people was part of the government’s agenda for the Constitutional Assembly (Van Cott 2000b), there is no indication of governmental interest to extend this type of rights to people of African descent.

provided a template for its interpretation, the political path to make it officially valid remained unclear and unsettled. After all, TA-55 stipulated the issuing of a law within the next two years, after discussing its formulations within a Special Commission. On April 1, 1992, the Ministry of Government issued Decree 555 to formally constitute this space of discussion.

State and Non-state actors were represented in the Special Commission. State agencies were represented by the Ministry of Government, the Colombian Institute of Land Reform (*Instituto Colombiano de Reforma Agraria*, INCORA), the National Planning Department (*Departamento Nacional de Planeación*, DNP), the National Institute of Renewable Natural Resources and Environment (*Instituto Nacional de los Recursos Naturales Renovables y del Ambiente*, INDERENA), the Agustín Codazzi Geographic Institute (*Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi*, IGAC), and the Colombian Institute of Anthropology (*Instituto Colombiano de Antropología*, ICAN). While the Ministry of Government was the presiding institution, ICAN acted as technical secretary. Social movement organizations were aggregated in regional advisory commissions from the four departments of the Pacific region: Chocó, Valle, Cauca, and Nariño. These regional commissions mainly represented grassroots organizations of Black peasants (See Figure 3.6).⁹⁹ Although the organization process was stronger in Chocó, the political space of the Special Commission also contributed to

⁹⁹ The inclusion of rural-based organizations reflected their organizational strength vis-à-vis urban-based ones (Cf. Paschel 2016:107–8). On one hand, urban organizations like Cimarrón split before the critical juncture in relation to making alliances with left-wing parties like M-19 (Castro Hinestroza and Meza Ramírez 2017:97-98,114; Escobar and Pedrosa 1996:253) (e.g., “*Comunicado a la opinión pública, Crisis en el Movimiento Cimarrón*,” 1989). On the other hand, the coalition established before the Constitutional Assembly did not last (Castro Hinestroza and Meza Ramírez 2017:130–33). By 1992, the network of rural-based organizations—and their coalition with state and non-state actors—was stronger and contributed to pressure to create the Special Commission (e.g., “*Petición de inclusión en la Comisión Especial Nacional a conformarse por parte del Gobierno, en desarrollo de lo establecido en el Artículo 55 transitorio de la Constitución Nacional de dos representantes de cada una de las organizaciones de campesinos y pobladores negros del departamento del Chocó, ACIA, ACADESAN, y OBAPO*,” 1991).

consolidate the organization process in Valle, Cauca, and Nariño.¹⁰⁰ Representatives of political parties and other anthropologists not associated with ICAN were also invited.

The Special Commission would become an interstitial space of contention over a legitimate definition of Blackness. Although the constitutional reference to the category “Black communities” gave it a particular prominence over other categories, its legitimacy was still under dispute. In the inter-field space opened by this commission, state and non-state actors mobilized field-specific forms of symbolic capital to define not only what “Black communities” were but also what type of claims could be advanced on their behalf. Although the Ministry of Government attempted to limit the time and resources assigned (Castro Hinestroza and Meza Ramírez 2017:143–45), debate proceeded contentiously. Debate over the legitimate meaning of this category among state officials, academics, and activists was structured around three issues: cultural identity, territoriality, and development.

The *first dispute* revolved around the question of whether the cultural identity of “Black communities” could be established.¹⁰¹ Anthropologists advancing either Indigenist or Afroamericanist perspectives engaged in this debate with representatives of Black organizations. On November 20, 1992, a group of anthropologists from ICAN were invited to provide an expert assessment of the

¹⁰⁰ Some of the main organizations that integrated the Advisory Commission of Chocó were the Integral Peasant Association of the Atrato (*Asociación Campesina Integral del Atrato*, ACIA), the Peasant Association of San Juan (*Asociación Campesina del San Juan*, ACADESAN), the Peasant Association of Alto Baudó (*Asociación Campesina del Alto Baudó*, ACABA), and the Organization of Popular Neighborhoods of Chocó (*Organización de Barrios Populares del Chocó*, OBAPO). Some of the activists from Valle, Cauca, and Nariño would later constitute the Process of Black Communities (*Proceso de Comunidades Negras*, PCN), an encompassing network of organizations extended throughout the country.

¹⁰¹ In his reconstruction of this episode, Rudecindo Castro, then commissioner of Chocó, writes: “Anthropologists perceived us as ethnopolitical opportunists. The meeting was supposedly intended as an opportunity to receive ideas from experts to clarify our claims. And yet, in reality, this colloquium seemed to have been organized to discuss the authenticity of Blacks.” (Castro Hinestroza and Meza Ramírez 2017:171).

notion of “cultural identity of Black communities” that had been included in TA-55. Although some anthropologists recognized that “most participants of this meeting do not work on issues related to Blackness” and objected to the premises of the conversation, the rest had fewer apprehensions about voicing their views. For some, the notion of “Black cultural identity” was almost nonexistent—and if, perchance, it were defined, it could only be an “identity creation project for the future.” For others, the problem with the definition of identity was that “anthropologists have worked longer with Indigenous people than with Black communities.” Myriam Jimeno, the anthropologist who presided the Special Commission, suggested that the notion of identity could be defined as a “list of features” but also a “set of representations.” Jimeno also told the other researchers that “communities consider that anthropologists have a racial prejudice because they didn’t recognize Blacks for their ethnicity.” To this, the anthropologist François Correa responded:

“The project of constructing an ethnicity of Black communities is a fallacy at this time. It is about building a space for rights recognition whose content is yet to be filled. And it is up to the Afro-Colombian population to do so, which does not mean that I have adopted a racist position, as some believe.” (Relatoría Concepto de Identidad Cultural, 20 de Noviembre de 1992).

A few months later, Indianist anthropologists from ICAN and Afroamericanist anthropologists from Universidad Nacional met with activists to continue the discussion on the notion of cultural identity. This time, the anthropologist François Correa recognized that in the previous meeting “there were no Afro-Colombians or people who had any experience working with the Afro-Colombian population.” However, Correa still maintained that “there are different cultural manifestations within the Afro-Colombian population, so it cannot be considered a culture.” From

his point of view, linguistic diversity within the Afrodescendent population was evidence of this. “The Afro-Colombian population does not speak the same language,” he said. Correa concluded by saying that “within anthropological, sociological, and other studies, there are not enough elements to define the Afro-Colombian identity.” (Acta 2, Subcomisión de Identidad Cultural, Febrero 26 de 1993).

Zulia Mena, one of the commissioners from Chocó, demanded that anthropologists “study the Black population before making academic statements” and “focus on the situation of the Black population and not on the Indigenous.” Saturnino Moreno, another commissioner from Chocó, argued that the “Black population c[ould] support, according to their traditional practices, being an ethnic group with its own culture.” The representative of INDERENA supported the perspective of activists. The state official suggested that some Indigenous groups currently lack their own language and “no one doubts that they are ethnic groups.” Zulia Mena intervened again to point out that “if we pigeonhole ourselves into the categories that already exist, surely the communities will not fulfill the expectations.” “What is necessary is to build other categories that are not known,” she said. Hernán Cortés, one of the commissioners from Nariño, referred to the African ancestry of Black communities. In his view, “Black communities in America have their own culture that preserves the traits of African ancestors. This culture has been syncretized in coexistence with other cultures and has been recreated in their territory and social context” (Acta 2, Subcomisión de Identidad Cultural, Febrero 26 de 1993).

Jaime Arocha, an Afroamericanist anthropologist associated with the National University, criticized the distance between academics and activists regarding the notion of identity. According to Arocha, it was no coincidence that Indigenous identity was so strong because “for 50 years, 90% of anthropological research has focused on Indigenous populations.” In his view, “the mirror that the

ethnographer of Black groups must build cannot be the same that is used for Indigenous groups.”

“The level of subtlety must be much higher,” he argued. From Arocha’s perspective, the appropriate “level of subtlety” would require paying attention to cultural customs that could be traced back to Central or Western Africa.¹⁰² Regarding the possibility of defining the notion of cultural identity, Arocha suggested paying attention to the literary works of Afrocolombian authors such as Candelario Obeso, Jorge Artel, and Manuel Zapata Olivella, among others. (Acta 2, Subcomisión de Identidad Cultural, Febrero 26 de 1993). From Arocha’s perspective, the academic approach of ICAN anthropologists was “deaffricanizing” (Arocha and De Friedemann 1993:162). François Correa clarified that ICAN’s anthropologists were not “questioning the possibility of constructing a series of features corresponding to an Afro-Colombian identity.” He also admitted that “the identity of the Afro-Colombian culture cannot be built from the comparison with the Indigenous population,” and concluded that this was a “discussion about the recognition of human rights in the political field.” (Acta 2, Subcomisión de Identidad Cultural, Febrero 26 de 1993).

In the struggle over the cultural meaning of blackness neither Indianist nor Afroamericanist perspectives in anthropology had the final word. While Indigenist anthropologists finally admitted the limits of comparison with the Indigenous notion of culture, Afroamericanist anthropologists also admitted that the research agenda on “traces of Africa” was underdeveloped in Colombia. The category of “Black communities” thus emerged as a liminal construct among competing academic

¹⁰² Arocha’s research perspective, which he would later label “afrogenetic” (Arocha 1996, 2005b), traces continuities of the cultural legacies of Africans in the Americans. This research agenda, articulated by Melville Herskovits (Bascom and Herskovits 1959; 1941), was later reformulated by Sidney Mintz and Richard Price (1992). In Colombia, anthropologist Nina S. de Friedemann was one of the pioneers of this perspective (1992; 1993). A detailed reconstruction of de Friedemann’s research agenda can be found in Velandia (2017).

forms of expertise to which some form of culture could be attributed. During the meetings of the Special Commission, it became clear that the cultural identity of “Black communities” could be established somewhere between anthropologically validated notions of Indigeneity and Afrodescendency.

The *second dispute* articulated competing understandings of the *territoriality* of “Black Communities.” Although TA-55 made a reference to the “rural riverine areas of the rivers of the Pacific basin,” the territorial reach of this reference was unclear. At the onset of the Commission, the position of academics and activists on this issue was at odds with that of the government. Anthropologist Jaime Arocha suggested that the 1991 Constitution had created an “asymmetry in the territoriality of Blacks and Indians by denying the former some territorial rights.” In his view, it was necessary to “reverse such asymmetry through the work of the Commission.” Similarly, Saturnino Moreno, one of the commissioners of Chocó, sustained that “the territorial problem between Indians and Blacks is the same.” For him, they were both “ethnic minorities, traditionally marginalized, who need a territory to develop their culture and traditions that differ from the rest of the Colombian people.” However, for the representative of the Ministry of Government, such equivalence was unwarranted. In his interpretation, the Constitution had granted a “different recognition of Indigenous problems in relation to the treatment given to Black communities.” And then, following this idea, he concluded: “The Government understands that since there are two different treatments, there are two different scenarios.” (Acta 01, 11 de Agosto de 1992). Whereas some anthropologists and activists advocated for expanding the notion of territorial rights to people of African descent, the official position of the Ministry of Government was to limit those rights to Indigenous people only.

For members of Black organizations, the approval of territorial rights was not an abstract issue of legal interpretation. For most of them, the recourse to territorial rights was envisioned as a concrete legal mechanism to stop the expansion of extractive economies—specifically timber industries—in the Pacific region. For example, the forestry concession Balsa II became a contentious case that illustrated the need of a new regulation. As territorial rights were being discussed, the regional government of Chocó granted a concession to a private timber company to exploit more than 23,000 hectares of forest. This concession aimed to produce more than 300,000 cubic meters of wood. According to ethno-territorial organizations, this operation clogged rivers, caused floods, and negatively impacted the local production and well-being of 25 communities, 1,307 families, and 8,965 persons. And yet, the impacts on their living conditions were not considered in this project. Having this evidence at hand, most members of the Special Commission signed a letter demanding the suspension of the forestry concession, Balsa II. Although a majority of state officials refrained from signing, this case became a clear illustration of the need to extend territorial rights to Black peasants living on this type of land (Acta de la Subcomision de Territorio y Recursos Naturales, 8 de Octubre de 1992).

As the Commission advanced, the category “Black communities” was progressively invested with a new notion of territory that resulted from the convergence of legitimation strategies from state and non-state actors. The commissioner Zulia Mena proposed an understanding of “the integrality of the territory of Black communities,” referring to patterns of settlement characterized by “semi-nomadism,” a “multiplicity of residences,” and an “economy of complementary activities.” This suggested that collective territory should include riverine areas, flood plains, and forest zones. Mena’s integralist perspective was consequential because property regimes in Colombia had different

regulations for each type of land. Anthropologist Jaime Arocha also supported this perspective. From his perspective, it was important to notice that “the economic system of Black communities [was] not based solely on agriculture,” and that these communities had “polyvalent” modes of production that included different combinations of agricultural, mining, and fishing activities.

The integralist thesis was also supported by official representatives from INCORA. Unlike the Ministry of Government, they believed that collective property rights were implied by the “spirit of legislators” who approved TA-55 in the Constitutional Assembly. Other experts ascribed to the ICAN also provided academic support to the territoriality of “Black communities.” According to sociologist Mónica Restrepo, such territoriality should be understood as a “unit that includes forests, plains, riverbanks, as well as towns, and all of this must be framed within the same title.”¹⁰³ This integralist perspective, almost inconceivable two years earlier, now formed a new spatial and cartographic imagination of Black territories defended by activists, experts, and state officials alike. As one of the state officials of INDERENA concluded: “The basic map that we need is the map of settlements of Black communities, river by river, creek by creek, and on this basis, we can define the collective territories.” (Acta de la Subcomision de Territorio y Desarrollo, 25 de Febrero de 1993).

While the main debates about cultural identity occurred among anthropologists, the question of territoriality divided state agencies. Deviating from the atomistic perspective of the Ministry of Government, representatives of INCORA and INDERENA perceived the granting of collective territorial rights as a broader issue that also involved the bureaucratic legibility of property regimes and

¹⁰³ Before becoming part of the technical secretary of the Special Commission, Mónica Restrepo had conducted research on processes of rural settlement and economic production of Black peasants living along the Atrato river (Restrepo 1992).

natural resource preservation. The integralist perspective, first advocated by Black organizations, and then supported by academics from the National University and the ICAN, was now invested with the authority of state agencies regulating land redistribution and environmental policies.

The *third dispute* was structured around contending notions of *development*. Pastor Murillo, a former member of Cimarrón and technical advisor to the ICAN, suggested the notion of “ethnodevelopment.” For Murillo, ethnodevelopment was the “exercise of the social capacity that a people has to build its future, taking advantage of the real and potential resources of its culture, according to a project defined in accordance with its own values and aspirations.” In his view, this type of development differed from existing models of development prevalent in Colombia, and offered one in which Black communities could participate actively. Similarly, Rudecindo Castro, a commissioner from Chocó, stated that “communities must have the possibility of defining as one of the topics of discussion and decision within the Black territories, [...] the type of development to be implemented.” (Acta de la Subcomision de Territorio y Desarrollo, 25 de Febrero de 1993).

Although discussion of this topic was often abstract, activists provided concrete examples of perceived problems with current development models. Carlos Rosero, a commissioner from Valle, provided an example of what he considered a failed development project on the Naya River. According to Rosero, the regional government designed a project to “improve the living conditions” of Black fisherman who lived near this river. However, “to raise their income levels, they could only sell outside the river.” As a result, Rosero concluded, in the areas where this project was in effect, “people can’t get fish anywhere.” (Acta de la Subcomision de Territorio y Desarrollo, 25 de Febrero de 1993). In Rosero’s view, the example of the Naya River illustrated development projects that not only

ignored the local modes of production used by Black people, but also undermined their basic food sources.

Defending “traditional production practices” as an alternative mode of development often clashed with official visions of development adopted by state agencies. Although that notion was explicitly included in TA-55, it still lacked legitimacy in the eyes of actors in the bureaucratic field. Representatives of INDERENA, for example, were apprehensive about recognizing and validating alternative modes of production in Black communities. As one of the officials stated, “there are traditional practices, however ancient they may be, that can threaten the conservation of biodiversity, as in fact occurs among some Indigenous communities.” To this position, the commissioner Zulia Mena replied: “We think [...] that it is a great abuse that after more than 300 years that we Black communities have settled in the Pacific developing traditional practices in harmony with ecology, today you question whether or not we should be granted collective territories. If the Government restricts the rights of these communities to manage natural resources, it is promoting the disappearance of the Black population,” she said. And then, Mena asked: “Can the law find survival mechanisms for the men and women who live there, and not only survival mechanisms for plants and trees?” (Acta 04, 31 de Marzo de 1993).

Luz María Angulo, a commissioner from Nariño, complemented Mena’s response referring to her own experience. She went on to describe the production practices of Black people living along the Patía river:

“If a sapote belongs to my family, we all eat it, it is not sold. We raise chickens for everyone; the cemetery belongs to everyone. On the river beaches, all women go down to do the laundry, and nobody says, ‘this beach is mine.’ There are some trees on the riverbank, where everyone ties

up the canoe, and no one says, ‘this tree is mine.’ Although land can belong to a family, it can also belong to another one. The land is transferred if another person needs to plant. If, for example, you grow rice, you pay the landowner with the product if you can. If someone needs to plant a banana tree and does not have land, she can plant it, and when the tree is producing, she will give me a bunch.”

She concluded:

“That has been our life for three hundred or more years. That is how we have lived, and now you want that to change.” (Acta 04, 31 de Marzo de 1993)

In a subsequent meeting, INDERENA modified its position on this subject. INDERENA’s new stance admitted that the longstanding occupation of Black populations in the Pacific lowlands was correlated with a larger preservation of forest areas. In their own words:

“The forests of the Pacific, located in areas inhabited by Indigenous and Black populations, have been conserved in an immensely greater proportion than those existing in other areas of the country, such as the Andean region. This outcome is largely due to traditions and customs and, in general, to the culture of these communities, which has allowed them to see the forest as their ‘habitat’ and not as an obstacle that must be removed.” (Acta 2 de Abril de 1993)

Following this reasoning, representatives from INDERENA now believed that “traditional production practices” could be a useful notion to distinguish patterns of territorial occupation that distinguished Black rural settlements. This notion would become the crucial marker validated among state and non-state actors to identify both the cultural identity and the territoriality of the category “Black communities.” Although legislative progress toward the bill that would become Law 70 of 1993 was still unclear and subject to bitter disputes (Castro Hinestroza and Meza Ramírez 2017:180–84), the conceptual transformation of the category “Black communities” had been achieved. The

majority of publicly involved state and non-state actors accepted the cultural distinctiveness, the territorial configuration, and the mode of development associated with this category of Blackness.¹⁰⁴

By the first half of 1993, the relational space that made possible an official understanding of the category “Black communities” had crystallized. Figure 3.7 shows the results of *Correspondence Analysis* (CA) in a symmetric map.¹⁰⁵ This geometric modelling technique reveals structures in categorical data by projecting organizational actors (uppercase black typeface), their use of ethnoracial categories (uppercase gray typeface), and their topic preferences (lowercase gray typeface) in a joint bidimensional space (Greenacre 2017; Hjellbrekke 2019; Husson et al. 2017; Le Roux and Rouanet 2004). The proximity of actors indicates a similar use of an ethnoracial category and a similar topic preference.¹⁰⁶ Dimension 1 accounts for 43.1% of the variation in the data and underscores the opposition between the majority of non-state actors (on the right) and state actors (on the left). Dimension 2 describes the remaining 25% of the variability and mostly represents the difference

¹⁰⁴ Accepting the integralist thesis on the territorial configuration of Black communities was different from accepting its territorial reach. Until the last sessions of the commission, several activists continued demanding that the Ministry of Government allow the expansion of these territories to other regions such as Atlántico, Antioquia, and Risaralda. Although TA-55 included a paragraph contemplating an expansive scope, the restrictive interpretation advanced by the Ministry of Government prevailed (Acta 6, 23 de Abril de 1993).

¹⁰⁵ To conduct this analysis, I coded the entire documental corpus of minutes of the Special Commission. This corpus includes 23 documents that summarize the discussions between activists, state officials, researchers, and members of political parties from August of 1992 to May of 1993. In each discussion, the organizational actor, the topic of intervention, and the *routine use* of an ethnoracial category was manually codified at the sentence level. For instance, the sentence “Oswaldo Giraldo, delegate of the Ministry of Government, [...] also stated that there is already clarity about some elements that culturally identify Black communities” was coded with the actor category “MIN GOB,” the ethnoracial category “BLACK COMMUNITY,” and the topic category “Cultural Identity.” This cycle of Attribute Coding (Saldaña 2013:69ff) resulted in over 1,500 coded segments distributed across 14 organizational actors.

¹⁰⁶ Symmetric maps display row profiles and column profiles jointly, although they belong to two different geometric spaces. Symmetric maps allow to interpret row-to-row and column-to-column distances directly but row-to-column distances indirectly. In this case, the closer actors are, the more similar their preference is for an ethnoracial category and a topic of discussion. However, the proximity between actors, ethnoracial categories and topics of discussion only suggests a general association (Greenacre 2017:70–72, 295–96; Hjellbrekke 2019:25; Husson et al. 2017:77–78; Le Roux and Rouanet 2004:50–51).

between actors that engaged in discussions about cultural identity and development (top) and actors that intervened in discussions about territory (bottom). Figure 3.7 also uses geometric symbols to represent the dominant form of authority exercised by each actor during this process (i.e., activist, administrative, and scientific).¹⁰⁷

The analysis of quantitative differences in the use of ethnoracial categories and engagement in topics of discussion shows the positions of actors and the distribution of different forms of authority within the interstitial space. Positions within the Special Commission were structured by the intersection of *three field-specific forms of symbolic capital*.

First, the scientific authority of the academic field (squares in Figure 3.7) was mainly divided between the Indianist perspective of anthropologists from the ICAN and the Afroamericanist perspective of anthropologists from the National University. As we have seen, anthropologists confronted each other over two different intellectual orientations: the professional *closure* of Indigenist anthropologists closer to the ICAN contrasted with the professional *openness* of Afroamericanist anthropologists closer to the National University.¹⁰⁸ As some anthropologists have

¹⁰⁷ Actors' interventions were coded based on the predominant form of symbolic capital they wield, which may or may not correspond to the field actors inhabit at a given time. For instance, while the Colombian Institute of Anthropology (ICAN) is embedded in academic and bureaucratic fields, the predominant form of authority observed during this episode was scientific and not administrative.

¹⁰⁸ Beyond the debates of the Special Commission, this academic debate continued in the pages of *America Negra*, a journal created by Nina S. de Friedeman and Jaime Arocha, two anthropologists that sustained the Afroamericanist perspective on this debate. For Arocha and Friedeman, the professional closure of ICAN anthropologists around Indigenist notions of cultural identity was "deafricanizing" (Arocha and De Friedemann 1993:162). For Friedeman, the academic stance of her colleagues revealed "the lack of familiarity of Indigenist anthropologists with the knowledge about Afro-Colombians and Afro-Americans. And in general, a sensitive ignorance of academic materials that exist on the periphery of our peripheral anthropology" (N. de Friedemann 1993:168).

suggested, “the 1991 Constitution undoubtedly included a large part of the agenda for which the profession fought for several decades” (Pineda Camacho 2004:81). In other words, from the point of view of the academic field, the 1991 Constitution represented public validation of the Indigenist canon, that was nonetheless contested. On one hand, interest in protecting a constitutionally consecrated canon may have led some anthropologists to perceive the legitimation of the category “Black communities” as a case of ethno-political opportunism. On the other, an interest in challenging the Indigenist canon may have moved other anthropologists to support the legitimation of the category on political grounds. Academic disengagement from political demands and political commitment to academic claims marked the two intellectual uses of anthropological knowledge during the interstitial space of the Special Commission.¹⁰⁹

Second, the administrative authority of the bureaucratic field (triangles in Figure 3.7) was widely distributed among state agencies that focus on issues of participation (e.g., MIN GOB), development (e.g., DNP), environment (e.g., INDERENA), and territory (e.g., INCORA). The radial distribution of state actors is indicative of the multiple legitimation standards that were at stake in the interstitial space. For instance, whereas for the Ministry of Government the recognition of the

¹⁰⁹ For Afroamericanist anthropologists, engaging in the struggles within the interstitial space also became an opportunity to advance their research agenda. In one of the versions of the bill that would become Law 70 of 1993, commissioners from Chocó, politicians from the Liberal Party, and the anthropologist Nina S. de Friedemann advocated for the creation of the Institute of Afrocolombian Research (Instituto de Investigaciones Afrocolombianas, INAC). According to them, “the Black community and the small number of its researchers, for more than twelve years, have publicly manifested to education and research authorities the urgent need of integrating into their planning a serious and general program within the national curriculum around the knowledge of Black people in Colombia.” The goal was for the INAC to be an autonomous institute within the Ministry of Education. The opposition of the Ministry of Government and the INA prevented the approval of this proposal. (“*Consideraciones respecto al documento de objeciones presentadas por el gobierno el 16 de junio de 1993 al proyecto de ley 329 aprobado en primer debate por las comisiones primeras de senado y cámara de representantes el 9 de junio de 1993, según acta no. 6 de la misma fecha,*” Junio 17 de 1993).

category “Black communities” was mainly an issue of extending *political rights*, for INDERENA it was about securing *natural resource preservation*, and for INCORA rendering legible *land property regimes*. The affinity of official interests was not preestablished. Although the multicultural policy “model” (Van Cott 2000a) or “alignment” (Paschel 2016) was emerging in the region, these policy reforms meant different things for different state actors whose authority had been challenged. Moreover, as state actors were forced to demonstrate their competence in dealing with a new official category, they often competed against each other. For example, the integralist territorial perspective that was adopted by INDERENA and INCORA clashed with the restrictive stance of the Ministry of Government. As the dynamics of the interstitial space evolved, Black organizations both suffered and profited from the episodic incoherence of state officials. The distribution of official standards of validation was multifaceted enough to control legitimation strategies in one direction, but also sufficiently dispersed to provide avenues for contradiction and contention.

Finally, the activist authority of the social movement field (circles in Figure 3.7) was split between the *organizing capital* of grassroots initiatives and the *mobilizing capital* of political intermediaries. The dynamics of the Special Commission allowed activists to articulate demands with their constituencies at the local level, but also to persuade state officials and professional politicians at the national level. Activists often located these two dimensions of their political practice either at the level of “the logic of the river” or of “ideological and political reflections” (Grueso, Rosero, and Escobar 2003:433). After the approval of TA-55, activists were increasingly expected to account for their social basis but also to comply with the expectations of formal politics. While organizing locally strengthened their political autonomy, mobilizing nationally secured their political efficacy. The dual

orientation of the social movement field often led activists to develop dual dispositions that were perceived as duplicitous. For activists closer to grassroots organizations, those who developed alliances with political parties were “*politiqueros*” (politicking). For activists building these coalitions, those who pursued an autonomous strategy were “*disingenuous*.”¹¹⁰ The *Realpolitik* of the Special Commission, particularly when it was running out of time to present a bill, led activists to find common grounds, despite their ideological differences and ethical apprehensions.

The centrality of the category “Black community” is indicative of its widespread use in the discursive stances and topics articulated by most actors in the interstitial space. As we have seen, the legal affordances of this category were constitutionally insinuated but politically ambiguous after the approval of TA-55. The Special Commission can thus be understood as an interstitial space through which those legal possibilities were settled politically. Although other ethnoracial categories (e.g., “Afrocolombian”) were also part of the discourse of some activists, academics, and state officials, the dispute around the category “Black communities” contributed to validate it from scientific, administrative, and activist perspectives. The legitimacy of the category “Black communities” emerged not so much from its *resonance* with existing models of policymaking but from the *defensibility*

¹¹⁰ Rudecindo Castro, often labeled as a “*politiquero*” for creating alliances with political parties, explains why he was perceived among activists as a duplicitous character: “Some fellow commissioners who were direct delegates of grassroots organizations held an apparent discursive clash not only with state officials but also with the politicians who integrated the commission, even if they recognized themselves as Black. In that supposed dichotomy, I was a kind of *bacalao*. In the jargon of organizational work in the Pacific, this is the name given to those who do not have a defined identity. It is a metaphorical figure of a fish that is not *dentón*, *charre*, nor *jurel* and is not considered good to eat. Likewise, a person who moves between different sectors is someone without identity and therefore seems to be easily co-opted by other bigger fish who use him according to his interests. Carlos and his allied commissioners from the southern Pacific saw me as a *bacalao*. Naturally, they were strongly opposed to anything I proposed at the time, but they were much less critical of the government’s dubious administration.” (Castro Hinestroza and Meza Ramírez 2017:179). For Libia Grueso, Carlos Rosero, and other activists of the southern Pacific, Castro had participated in a “manipulation of the process by Black politicians linked to the Liberal Party” (Grueso, Rosero, and Escobar 2003:433).

acquired by the category through the multiple struggles of authority and exercises of symbolic capital within the interstitial space.¹¹¹

By 1993, the growing legitimacy of the category “Black communities” within official state agencies was useful for Black organizations to demand its inclusion in the 1993 census. For activists like Pastor Murillo, the inclusion of the category “Black communities” in the census was closely related to the discussions happening in the Special Commission. According to Murillo:

“When the preparation of the census operation and the census questionnaire were being discussed, we were still at a very critical stage of the debates on what Law 70 would be. This situation served to unite us and propose to DANE and the national government the need to incorporate the Afro dimension in the census.”

And then he concluded,

“The criterion that prevailed, the conceptual point of view that was reflected in the census question, that is, the issue of ethnicity, was closely linked to the debates that we had within the Special Commission. It was a way of leveraging a position on an issue that was significant to us.”¹¹²

As Murillo suggests, the legitimacy contests occurring within the interstitial space of the Special Commission quickly expanded to other regions of the bureaucratic field. At a time in Latin America

¹¹¹ Here I follow Gil Eyal in his pragmatic understanding of legitimacy. According to Eyal, “Defensibility means that you lead your opponent into a maze, where all the road signs point towards the conclusion at which you’d like her to arrive, and all the other turns lead into blind allies, exits guarded by fearsome doorkeepers, long corridors where all the doors are closed, and interminable waiting rooms. And all the while the clock is ticking. Having tried her hand at some of these confrontations; exhausted herself in some of these runarounds; wasted time in the cul-de-sacs; having tried “enough” times; she ultimately follows the signposts and arrives at the appointed exit acknowledging that the conclusion is “valid.” The maze has no center. There is no Ur-source in which the capacity to persuade is stored. There are only walls and the cunning intelligence that built them.” (Eyal 2019:91).

¹¹² Interview with Pastor Murillo (February 14, 2022).

when census politics over categories of Blackness were incipient, Afrocolombian organizations made use of the growing officialization of the category “Black communities” to demand not only ethno-territorial rights but also statistical visibility.

Even before the official enactment of Law 70 in August, 1993, officials from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (*Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística*, DANE) felt normative pressure to include this and other ethnic categories in the 1993 census. For Yolanda Bodnar, an anthropologist who had been hired in 1992 to integrate the census direction, DANE at the time “had absolutely no interest” in enumerating ethnoracial diversity. “For them it was a hassle. They included Indigenous and Afrodescendent people in the census because they had to. When it became a constitutional mandate, there was nothing to do, the government had to assume it,” she said.¹¹³ Several years later, when DANE published the technical memoir of the 1993 census operation, the statistics agency acknowledged political pressure from Black organizations: “Considering the existence of movements tending to obtain an ethnic recognition for Black people, it was proposed to include their enumeration.” (DANE 1998:35).

Before the 1993 census, however, DANE had limited experience conducting national censuses with ethnoracial questions. Although the statistics agency had some experience with regional Indigenous censuses conducted in the 1970s and 1980s, they considered their own methodology and data unreliable (Fajardo 1971:38–39; Lopera Mesa 2012:108–9; Ruiz and Bodnar 1995:22–23). In 1985, for example, an official report recognize that existing data was insufficient to produce a general

¹¹³ Interview with Yolanda Bodnar (February 8, 2022).

study on the demographic dynamic of Indigenous peoples. In a telling metaphor, the report concluded that conducting demographic research on ethnic populations was akin to “putting together a puzzle in which many pieces are missing and the few available are defective” (Flores and Echeverri 1986:253). However, if the official demographic data on Indigenous populations was unreliable, official data on Afrodescendant populations was nonexistent.

Using self-identification criteria for the first time in a national census, DANE conducted a series of pilot tests. Regarding demographic estimation of the category “Black communities,” DANE conducted a pilot test in the municipality of Puerto Tejada (Cauca), a locality that was expected to show a significant concentration of people of African descent.¹¹⁴ The pilot test, however, showed a substantial lack of identification. According to DANE:

“In the pilot test carried out in Puerto Tejada, Valle [SIC], it was observed that for the recent claims-making movement of Black communities, identity does not have the same meaning as it has for Indigenous populations. After delivering a training course and applying the test, no one recognized themselves as belonging to Black, Afrocolombian or Afroamerican groups.” (DANE 1998:38)

The technical details of the test are no longer available in DANE’s archives to examine the design of the operation. However, state officials and activists have competing interpretations of the results of this test. For state officials, like Yolanda Bodnar, it was a problem of lack of self-identification. In her view, “people did not have the awareness of belonging to an ethnic group, they did not recognize themselves as a group. They were people who were called *morenos* [brown], but

¹¹⁴ Before the 1993 census, some scholars estimated that Puerto Tejada had at least 80% of Afrodescendent population (Aprile-Gnisset 1994:45).

there was no sense of belonging to a territory or to a community or a people.” For activists, like Pastor Murillo, the problem was not only about lack of self-identification but also a technical problem of the census operation. From Murillo’s perspective,

The example of Puerto Tejada shows that evidently there were flaws beyond the issue of self-recognition. Puerto Tejada was a city that had quite a remarkable Afro-descendant mobilization because it had hosted one of the most important meetings of the Afro-descendant social movement. The first assembly after the Special Commission took place precisely in Puerto Tejada, where the issue of political participation was defined. So, it was impossible that in a city like that, with the organizational dynamics it had, no one recognized themselves as an ethnic group or as a Black community. This shows that there were flaws in the census operation.¹¹⁵

By 1993, both the ethno-territorial process of Black communities and the official expertise to understand their self-identification were incipient. Activists and state officials alike now recognized organizational and technical weaknesses. In comparison with the episodes of census politics that would emerge in the 2000 and 2010 census rounds, discussion over the wording of the census question or the inclusion of ethnoracial categories was minimal or nonexistent. And yet, when DANE decided to ask in the 1993 census, “Do you belong to any ethnic group, Indigenous group or Black community?” the agency ended 75 years of statistical invisibility for people of African descent in Colombia. The inclusion of the category “Black communities” in the 1993 census inspired surprisingly little commentary given that the category did not even exist in the official language of state agencies until 1991. And yet, the legitimation process that started with the Constitutional Assembly,

¹¹⁵ Interview with Pastor Murillo (February 14, 2022).

followed by TA-55, and later culminating with the Special Commission, created the conditions of possibility for it to be taken for granted.¹¹⁶

Critical Moment and Critical Discourse in Mexico (1994-2008)

The challenge of the Zapatista movement and the emergence of a critical human rights discourse shaped the conjunctural conditions for a crisis of *nomos* in Mexico. Whereas the Zapatista uprising made public the persistence of Indigenous exclusion, international human rights organizations provided a critical discourse that framed this event in terms of racial discrimination. Despite attempts to control the development of the legitimation crisis, this critical moment created a need for validation within the bureaucratic field, giving renewed relevance to the terms of compliance with international human rights conventions. The convergence of the Zapatista challenge and human rights discourse created the conjunctural conditions to question one of the core premises of Mexico's ideology of *mestizaje*: the disappearance of blackness from the national imagination. The lack of data on people of African descent challenged the predominant categories of the national representation (*nomos*) and the official mode of statistical production.

This critical phase began on January 1, 1994, when the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) declared war on the Mexican state. The military incursion into four cities in Chiapas, the

¹¹⁶ To be sure, not all actors from the social movement field considered the interactions with DANE unremarkable. Activists like Juan de Dios Mosquera, who was absent from the legitimation process of the Special Commission, considered the inclusion of the category “Black communities” an “imposition” by DANE state officials (Interview with Juan de Dios Mosquera (February 18, 2022)).

government's violent response, and the mobilization of social organizations to support a peaceful solution made room in the public space for questioning Mexico's nationalist project of *mestizaje*. Although their insurgent practice since the early 1980s articulated discursive elements from Marxism and Liberation Theology (Estrada Saavedra 2016), by the 1990s the EZLN also mobilized around popular nationalism and Indigenous autonomism (Henck 2009; Pitarch 2004). In this manner, Zapatistas famously proclaimed themselves the "inheritors of those who truly forged our nation," while also denouncing "discrimination and racism" and demanding "cultural, political and judicial autonomy." "We, the Indigenous," the EZLN wrote, "represent the most humiliated and dispossessed sector of Mexico, but also, as you can see, the most dignified" (García de León, Poniatowska, and Monsiváis 1994:33,74,264). Claiming to be more patriotic and, at the same time, more excluded than most Mexicans, the EZLN made public for national and international audiences the contradictions of Mexico's nationalist project (Wimmer 2002).

The Zapatista challenge to Mexico's nationalist myth was twofold. First, the uprising in Chiapas demonstrated that Indigenous people were not completely assimilated into the mestizo population, even though the size of the Indigenous population had decreased from 15.27% in 1900 to 7.48% in 1990 (Saldívar and Walsh 2014:464). In addition, it showed that ethnoracial inequality had been perpetuated under the nationalist project of *mestizaje*. As the first editorial of Mexico's newspaper *La Jornada* acknowledged, one day after the uprising, "In Chiapas there has not been a true

agrarian reform; the most archaic and traditional chiefdoms exploit Indigenous communities, and the vast majority of these subsist in abject extreme poverty.”¹¹⁷

In the context of a growing internationalization of the Mexican economy through the North American Free Trade Agreement, events in Chiapas placed the Mexican state in a position of symbolic deficit. This reputational damage was evident at the international level of the juridical field, where the Mexican government unsuccessfully tried to validate its anti-racist credentials. Although the Mexican state signed the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in 1966 and ratified it in 1975, for decades, government representatives denied the existence of racial discrimination.¹¹⁸ Like many of its Latin American counterparts (Dulitzky 2005), the Mexican state argued that racial discrimination was absent in its country. During the 1980s, for example, Mexican officials stated that “Mexico’s government and people had great difficulty legislating on racial discrimination because the concept was alien to their philosophy and culture.”¹¹⁹ State reports thus concluded that “in Mexico, there is no racial discrimination.”¹²⁰

For years, this statement had passed uncontested during the sessions of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD).¹²¹ The Zapatista uprising, however, made this position untenable. In 1994, the Mexican state was still denying the existence of discrimination by “racial

¹¹⁷ “No a los Violentos,” *La Jornada*, Domingo 2 de Enero de 1994.

¹¹⁸ The Convention defines “racial discrimination” as “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition [...] of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life” (Art.1.1).

¹¹⁹ A/35/18 p.110

¹²⁰ A/44/18 p.23

¹²¹ For a list of organization acronyms and predominant forms of authority, see Appendix.

origin,”¹²² but this time, the UN rapporteur for Mexico was not convinced. As he observed, “racial discrimination, as defined in the Convention, is not only that which is institutionalized by a State but also that which is manifested by policies or practices that perpetuate marginalization and the impoverishment of certain ethnic groups, which seems to be just the case in Mexico.”¹²³ Furthermore, “the events that occurred in Chiapas seem to indicate that some Mexican Indigenous groups are victims of discrimination.”¹²⁴ He concluded by stating that “there is no doubt that the 56 Indigenous groups living in Mexico suffer discrimination silent but omnipresent. [...] However, it does not appear [...] the Mexican Government has perceived the racial character of this discrimination.”¹²⁵

In the next reporting cycle, the distance between the CERD and the Mexican state grew. By 1997, the committee considered that the Mexican government was systematically misinterpreting the Convention: “The Committee regrets the existence of differences with the State party over the interpretations of the Convention. These differences were noted during the consideration of previous reports, particularly about the persistence of racial or ethnic discrimination against certain social groups and the failure to fully implement the provisions of the Convention.”¹²⁶ After eleven reporting cycles, it became clear to the CERD that the Mexican state had signed a convention it was not willing to implement. Without acknowledgement that racial discrimination existed in the country, there was

¹²² CERD/C/260/Add. 1 p.37

¹²³ CERD/C/SR.1104 p.6

¹²⁴ CERD/C/SR.1104 p.7

¹²⁵ CERD/C/SR.1104 p.12

¹²⁶ CERD/C/304/Add.30 p.2

no point in reporting to the CERD. For almost ten years, the Mexican state stopped sending reports.¹²⁷

Mounting criticism from the CERD reflected the *symbolic devaluation* of the statist capital of Mexico in the international juridical field.

During Mexico's reporting gap (1996-2004), the CERD updated its normative criteria to include the collection and disaggregation of ethnoracial data as part of anti-discrimination policies (Clark 2017). International conferences in the early 2000s—like the “*Todos Contamos*” meetings organized by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank in Colombia and Peru, and the 2001 World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance organized in Durban— developed a new set of normative standards of ethnoracial enumeration for Latin America (Lennox and Minott 2011; Loveman 2014). Incorporating ethnoracial questions in the census and fostering greater participation of ethnoracial organizations in data collection were among the new regional criteria enforced by the CERD to evaluate state compliance with human rights.¹²⁸

Whereas the Zapatista uprising created a *critical moment* that challenged Mexico's nationalist project of *mestizaje*, the normative value of human rights conventions provided the legal elements to articulate a *critical discourse*. Although the racial discrimination framework was not central to the

¹²⁷ CERD's critical discourse is embedded in the broader international dynamics of the juridical field. A broader context of the international “shaming” actions against the Mexican state during the 1990s and 2000s can be found in Anaya (2012, pp.47–71).

¹²⁸ Normative statements by international human rights organizations were followed and reinforced by the normative example of nine Latin American countries (i.e., Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua) including self-identification questions for people of African descent in the 2000 census round (Loveman 2014, p.253).

Zapatista discourse, and their demands were broader than the CERD's mandate, the coincidence of both series of events was sufficient to trigger various reforms within Mexico's legal and administrative bureaucratic organization. First, the constitutional reform of 2001 modified several articles and introduced an anti-discriminatory clause conferring constitutional status on the prohibition of discrimination (Assies, Sevilla, and Patiño 2006). Second, the government enacted the Federal Law to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination (2003) and created the National Council to Prevent Discrimination (*Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación*, CONAPRED). CONAPRED became a governing body within the Secretariat of the Interior to coordinate anti-discrimination policies and implement international conventions like the ICERD.¹²⁹ Finally, in 2004, Mexican officials presented a new report to the CERD in which, for the first time, the state "acknowledges that racism, [...] racial discrimination, continue to exist at all levels of Mexican society." The report concluded that "efforts to combat discrimination are given the highest priority, and the Government of Mexico has sought to create an appropriate legal framework and competent bodies to prevent and punish discrimination that persists."¹³⁰

Despite the new official rhetoric, these reforms were watered-down versions of the agreements reached between Zapatistas and the Mexican government. Mainly designed to impress the international community, they lacked enforceable mechanisms to address racial discrimination

¹²⁹ The Federal Law to Prevent and Eliminate Discrimination invested CONAPRED with the following mandate: (1) contribute to Mexico's cultural, social, and democratic development; (2) carry out actions to prevent and eliminate discrimination; (3) draw up and promote public policies for equal opportunities and equal treatment for all persons in Mexico; and (4) coordinate action by the departments and agencies of the federal executive to prevent and eliminate discrimination (Art.17).

¹³⁰ CERD/C/473/Add.1 p.40

(Rincón Gallardo 2004:91). And yet, these reforms inaugurated a new relation of legitimation between state actors and international organizations. The Mexican government had to agree to blur the boundary between national sovereignty and international intervention to regain legitimacy. After the critical situation of the late 1990s, it was easier for the CERD to influence administrative decisions within the Mexican state, and harder for Mexican officials to demonstrate a credible commitment against racial discrimination. The creation of bureaucratic institutions like CONAPRED in the early 2000s represented the emergence of new state actors in charge of modulating and moderating the new set of transactions under conditions of symbolic deficit.

The protracted Zapatista disputes and the persistent human rights criticism configured a *nomie* crisis that made possible the enumeration of Mexico's Afrodescendant population. By 2006, the CERD welcomed the government's measures against discrimination but recognized that none of these reforms targeted people of African descent or addressed racial discrimination. Without conducting a new census, it was unclear why the Mexican delegation had suggested that "around 450,000 persons of African descent lived mainly in the States of Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Veracruz."¹³¹ Members of the Committee "felt that the State party had not provided enough information regarding the status of persons of African descent and, more specifically, about the effects of the discrimination against them in education and housing for their level of poverty."¹³²

In the concluding observations, CERD expressed "concern at the lack of statistics on communities of African descent in the State party's report. The Committee points out that

¹³¹ CERD/C/SR.1731 p.3

¹³² CERD/C/SR.1732 p.4

information on the composition of the population is necessary for evaluating the implementation of the Convention and monitoring policies that affect minorities.” For this reason, “the Committee recommends that the State party should provide information on communities of African descent, which are numerically small and vulnerable and should enjoy all the guarantees of protection laid down in the Convention.”¹³³ By 2007, the Mexican government admitted the lack of official statistics on Afrodescendant populations and suggested alternatives remedies. According to the 2007 report, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) was “exploring [including] the category of persons of African descent in the National Population and Housing Census of 2010 as a component of the Mexican population.”¹³⁴

The initial pressure to admit the existence of racial discrimination had turned into legitimate questioning of the predominant categories of national representation (*nomos*). What was now at stake was the credibility of the Mexican state to represent the Mexican nation appropriately. The devaluation of the nationalist project of *mestizaje* polluted the official mode of statistical production. The lack of disaggregated numbers on people of African descent called into question the Mexican state’s ostensible commitment to fight against racial discrimination. Under the new circuits of international legitimation, census making was no longer the exclusive domain of national experts and state officials. Counting ethnoracial diversity was now a technical problem of knowledge production as much as it was a political issue of human rights compliance.

¹³³ CERD/C/MEX/CO/15 p.2

¹³⁴ CERD/C/MEX/CO/15/Add.1 p.2

The need to obtain internationally valid anti-racist credentials threw the Mexican state into a process of bureaucratic restructuring. Amid attempts to control the tempo of the crisis, the convergence of the critical event of the Zapatista uprising event *and* the critical discourse of human rights led state actors to appeal to additional sources of legitimacy. Placed in a position of symbolic deficit, state officials sought to expand the number and reach of *circuits of legitimation* inside and outside the bureaucratic field. The inclusion of additional actors representing new validation criteria blurred the boundaries between the authority of the state and the authority of the rest. As a result, a new space of political contestation emerged from the interstices of convergent fields.

Classification Struggles and the 2015 Intercensal Survey in Mexico (2009-2015)

The space of competition for the monopoly of statistical representation appeared as the bureaucratic field lost control over the official principle of vision and division (*nomos*) to define the Mexican nation. As the struggle over the legitimate imposition of ethnoracial categories unfolded, the authority to decide what should be enumerated was fragmented among contending forms of authority and their representatives. Before the 2015 Intercensal Survey, three antagonistic stances summarized the interstitial space of categorical positions. First, a coalition of social movement and academic actors defended the legitimacy of the category “Black.” Second, a combination of state actors and international organizations defended the validity of the category “Afrodescendant.” And third, an alliance of social movement, academic, and local state actors supported the enumeration of the category “Afromexican.” In this way, inter-field categorical preferences were related to field-specific forms of symbolic capital and their trajectories of accumulation.

The *first categorical stance* was articulated during the second half of the 2000s around the category “Black” by social movement organizations México Negro and AFRICA (Alliance for the Strengthening of Indigenous Regions and Afromexican Communities or *Alianza para el Fortalecimiento de las Regiones Indígenas y Comunidades Afromexicanas*). In the Eleventh Meeting of Black Peoples (*Onceavo Encuentro de Pueblos Negros*) organized by México Negro in Juchitán (Guerrero) in 2007, participants “demanded” inclusion in the national census. “Since Mexico’s Black peoples still suffer different levels of marginalization and invisibility as a result of the slave trade, colonial legacy, and uneven economic, social and cultural development,” the declaration concluded, “it is necessary to make a national census of Black peoples and Afrodescendent families [...] to identify and address, [...] our economic, social and cultural needs.”¹³⁵

In 2007, AFRICA also held a forum for “the constitutional recognition of rights for the Black people of Mexico” in José María Morelos, Oaxaca. Discussions around the problem of “statistical invisibility” took center stage. Participants concluded: “It is necessary to add that those of us who participate in this forum intend first to initiate a movement to make Black People visible, to fight against discrimination, racism and xenophobia, [...] and therefore it is necessary for the official body in charge of counting in Mexico, INEGI, to establish specific criteria to conduct a census of the Black population of Mexico.” (Reyes, Rodríguez, and Ziga 2012:36, 85–86).

The preference of México Negro and AFRICA for the category “Black” reflected their trajectory in *cultural politics* within the social movement field. Since the late 1990s and early 2000s,

¹³⁵ Acuerdos resolutivos del XI Encuentro de Pueblos Negros (Marzo 15-18 de 2007, Juchitán, Guerrero)

both organizations had mobilized to make “Black Culture” visible. Portraying the cultural distinctiveness of blackness in dance, music, and language was central to their political repertoire (Lara 2010). From the point of view of these organizations, the human rights discourse against racial discrimination was refracted through strategies of “cultural promotion”¹³⁶ aiming to make a distinctive notion of blackness culturally visible.

The preference for “Black” further crystallized in 2009 with the creation of the Black Peoples Organizations Network (*Red de Organizaciones de Pueblos Negros*, RED). Under the leadership of AFRICA, RED also included the academic expertise of the Mexico Multicultural Nation University Program at UNAM (*Programa Universitario México Nación Multicultural*, PUMC) to promote the constitutional recognition and demographic visibility of Mexico’s Black people. As an active member of RED, PUMC participated in a series of local workshops in the coast of Oaxaca about self-denomination. As one of the leading researchers recalled, “when we asked them ‘how do you want to be named? Everyone (but women more decisively) responded ‘we are Black’.”¹³⁷ One woman they interviewed said: “We already assume a role, we accept ourselves, we don't need another name. We do not need them to tell us: you are Afrodescendants [...]. We are Black” (Reyes et al. 2012:18).

Through RED, the trajectory in cultural politics of social movement actors like AFRICA was bolstered by the *ethnographic knowledge* of academic actors like PUMC. In fact, during this “collaborative research process,” the participatory mobilization of ethnographic knowledge sought to de-stigmatize and re-valorize the notion of “Black,” making it a legitimate category of ethnic self-

¹³⁶ Interview with Sergio Peñalosa (March 2017). Interview with Israel Reyes (May 2017).

¹³⁷ Interview with Nemesio Rodríguez (December 2020).

identification and statistical enumeration (Rodríguez 2012:11,22). As one of the leaders from AFRICA asserted, “defending the category ‘Black’ is important, and it is necessary to remove what is bad from it. That term must be redefined. [...] We should not allow ourselves to continue with the idea that ‘Black’ is a discriminatory, racist, and colonial term because that is what they have imposed on us. For us, ‘Black’ represents the history of our grandparents, of our parents, represents our music, our dance. ‘Black’ represents colors, smells, flavors. ‘Black’ represents communal knowledge.”¹³⁸

However, despite domestic mobilization by RED and international pressure by the CERD, INEGI refused to enumerate people of African descent in the 2010 census. After conducting a pilot survey asking “Do you considering yourself Afrodescendant?,” INEGI concluded that people did not understand the term “Afrodescendant” and that it was too expensive to add additional questions (Reyes et al. 2012:12).¹³⁹ Moreover, INEGI officials justified the exclusion of the category “Black” arguing that a “racial optic” could not be applied to the census and that it “cannot include a question for the entire population based on the demand of a minority group.”¹⁴⁰ In the 2010 report to the CERD, the Mexican state suggested that INEGI’s main difficulty “is that the members of this small group of persons (less than 0.45 percent of the population) are scattered in towns of varying sizes in different federal entities and are generally a minority in the areas in which they live.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Interview with Israel Reyes (May 2017).

¹³⁹ A sector of the academic field shared INEGI’s refusal to enumerate blackness. A study by ethnohistorical researchers from UNAM and CONAPRED concluded: “it is considered rushed and probably counterproductive [...] to include an ethnoracial self-identification question for Afromexicans in the 2010 census since there is a risk of obtaining figures that, rather than making them visible in national statistics, produce inaccuracies in assessing their presence and importance for the national population composition [...]” (De la Serna, Chacón, and Salinas 2009:143). According to this study, the geographical dispersion and the lack of social identification would lead to a wrong count.

¹⁴⁰ <http://colectivoafrica.blogspot.com/2010/07/censa-inegi-comunidades-afromexicanas.html>

¹⁴¹ CERD/C/MEX/16-17 p.74

INEGI's reaction inaugurated the *second categorical stance* within the interstitial space. On one hand, INEGI aligned with the internationally validated category "Afrodescendant" to (paradoxically) defend the impossibility of enumerating people of African descent.¹⁴² However, INEGI refused to recognize the legitimation of "Black," which it framed as an attempt to "racialize" the national census. As in 1930, INEGI opposed including the category "Black" for allegedly invoking the "antiscientific concept" of race (Dirección General de Estadística 1930:xv–xvi). But by 2010, INEGI's orthodoxy was now significantly undermined, and attempts to legitimate it with the category "Afrodescendant" failed to mobilize the consensus of the past.

In response to INEGI's use of "Afrodescendant," RED and PUMC defended the use of the category "Black." According to them, "Black" does not represent a "racial optic" but a "cultural aspect" of the population. After INEGI's refusal, they replied: "the term BLACK is not circumscribed within a colonial category, [...] it is rather a self-affirmation term that the people of the Costa Chica of Oaxaca and Guerrero have decided to adopt."¹⁴³ The ethnocultural defense of the category "Black" articulated the cultural politics of a sector of the social movement field and the ethnographic knowledge of a sector of the academic field.

After INEGI's disavowal, RED joined efforts with PUMC to conduct a pilot survey in the Coast of Oaxaca. Their goal was to prove that the enumeration of Black people was socially demanded

¹⁴² Since the 2000 regional preparatory conference in Santiago de Chile for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance that would be held in Durban (South Africa) the next year, the category "Afrodescendant" became the international referent to articulate demands for data collection in Latin America. For an account of provisions on data collection included in the Santiago's "Declaration and Plan of Action," see Lennox and Minott (2011:265–68).

¹⁴³ <https://colectivoafrica.blogspot.com/2010/07/censa-inegi-comunidades-afromexicanas.html>

and technically possible. In 2011, 1,519 persons responded to a survey in 22 locations preselected by RED on the Oaxaca's coast. One conclusion was that "Black" was the preferred category among the population (Reyes et al. 2012:18–19). Data from this survey also showed that, on average, only one of three working persons in a household received a salary. It also revealed that 18% of respondents reported having experienced discrimination, 99% felt excluded from public policies, and 97% wanted to be included in the national census (Rodríguez 2012:23–24). The meta-enumerative character of this regional survey—enumerating the preference of wanting to be enumerated—constituted the first attempt to count people who self-identify with the category "Black" in Oaxaca since the 1890 census (Motta Sánchez and Correa Duró 1997).

The CERD was not particularly impressed with Mexico's progress. By 2012, six years had passed since the CERD's recommendation, and the Mexican state still lacked a demographic enumeration of people of African descent. Without empirical basis, the official estimate of this population remained at 450,000. CERD's concluding observations were clear: "the Committee notes with concern that, notwithstanding its repeated recommendations and requests, little light has been shed about people of African descent. The Committee regrets that the State party provided no detailed information on people of African descent in its periodic report, despite the Committee's request to that effect in 2006."¹⁴⁴ Although the CERD did not explicitly advocate for making official the category "Afrodescendant," this category became the central point of contention between the

¹⁴⁴ CERD/C/MEX/CO/16-17 p.2

Committee and state actors like CONAPRED to demonstrate compliance with the international convention.

As the pressure for enumeration grew, CONAPRED attempted to persuade INEGI by creating a consensus within the bureaucratic field around the internationally validated category “Afrodescendant.” By 2011, CONAPRED was leading the “National Movement for the Cultural Diversity of Mexico” (*Movimiento Nacional por la Diversidad Cultural de México*, MNDC), a group of eleven public institutions responsible for cultural and education policies. In a document targeting public institutions, CONAPRED recommended including “the self-ascription and self-identification variable for people of African descent in the next Population and Housing Count of 2015 and the 2020 General Population and Housing Census” (2011:60). By 2012, CONAPRED was also leading an intra-government working group to implement the CERD’s observations (GT-CERD). With support from the Secretary of Foreign Affairs (*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*, SRE), the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (*Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas*, CDI), and the Sub-secretary of Human Rights of the Secretariat of the Interior (*Subsecretaría de Derechos Humanos de la Secretaría de Gobernación*, SEGOB), the GT-CERD met twelve times with forty-three state agencies between 2012-2015 to “comply with the recommendations issued to the Mexican State in a coordinated manner.”¹⁴⁵ One of the goals of this governmental mechanism was to persuade INEGI to include the self-identification question in the census for people

¹⁴⁵https://www.conapred.org.mx/index.php?contenido=pagina&id=532&id_opcion=428&op=428&id_opcion=428&op=674

of African descent.¹⁴⁶ As the former president of CONAPRED recalled, “on one hand, we started a dialogue, and on the other, in some way, it was also a way of pressuring the National Institute of Statistics and Geography.”¹⁴⁷ The creation of intra-governmental coalitions like the MNDC and the GT-CERD mobilized the category “Afrodescendant” in an effort to persuade INEGI and expand the authority of *internationally-oriented state actors* within the bureaucratic field.

The use of the category “Afrodescendant” was also bolstered as CONAPRED strengthened its ties with academic sectors. Together with the National Institute of Anthropology and History (*Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia*, INAH), CONAPRED published the book *Afrodescendientes en México, una historia de silencio y discriminación* (Velázquez and Iturralde 2012).¹⁴⁸ This book built upon the long trajectory of ethnohistorical research at INAH (De la Serna 2010; Velázquez 2011; Velázquez and Correa Duró 2005) and represented their public intervention in the politics of categorization. As the authors suggested, “throughout the text, we use the term *Afrodescendants* instead of *Black*, *Brown* or other denominations to refer to collectivities of African origin since that term tells the story of the enslavement and contributions of African persons and their descendants on this continent while discouraging the reference to color and phenotype, both loaded with racist stigmas; in addition, it does justice to the struggles and demands of the Afro-Latin-American collectivities and political movements expressed at the Durban World Conference of 2001” (Velázquez and Iturralde 2012:14–15). The publication of this book contributed to validate the

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Mireya del Pino (April 2017)

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Ricardo Bucio (March 2019)

¹⁴⁸ Although the book was published in 2012, the alliance between CONAPRED and INAH began in 2011 (Interview with Maria Elisa Velázquez, November 2017).

category “Afrodescendant” by complementing the administrative support and the international validation it already had with the scientific credibility of years of *ethnohistorical research*.

As contending legitimization strategies unfolded within the interstitial space, other classification struggles emerged. A *third categorical stance* was articulated around the category “Afromexican.” In 2011, ECOSTA,¹⁴⁹ EPOCA,¹⁵⁰ and México Negro organized the event “The Black Villages of Mexico in Movement towards their Recognition” in *Charco Redondo* (Oaxaca). During the panel, “How do we want to be named?” participants discussed “the problem of the imposition of the denomination Afrodescendants” (in reference to INEGI’s position). For participants, “the right to decide about their rights and how they want to be recognized by the state” was at stake. Although some participants still defended the term “Black,” the panel settled on “Afromexican” insofar as this term “recognized the African past and vindicated the Mexican space and identity as an inclusive qualifier.” The panel concluded that “the term Afromexican would be only used for legal issues and claims to the state,” noting that this “does not mean that the population will stop defining itself as Black or Brown.” (ECOSTA 2011:16–18).

The use of the category “Afromexican” also reflected the political trajectory of organizations like ECOSTA and EPOCA invested in *development politics* within the social movement field. Working within the “community development” framework, both organizations have operated as intermediaries of state programs channeling economic resources to rural producers on Oaxaca’s coast. Since 1998,

¹⁴⁹ ECOSTA (*Ecosta Yutu Cuit*) is a civil organization founded in 1993 that promotes environmental conservation and community development on Oaxaca’s coast.

¹⁵⁰ EPOCA (*Enlace de Pueblos y Organizaciones Costeñas Autónomas*) is a civil organization created in 2003 as an intermediary before governmental institutions to manage community development projects.

Oaxaca's constitution has granted differentiated rights to "Afromexican communities" as an ethnic group. Being closer to the regional level of the state field, ECOSTA and EPOCA mobilized around the category "Afromexican" to take advantage of the bureaucratic implications of this reform (Lara 2014:167–68). Although local legislators had not publicly discussed the inclusion of the category "Afromexican" in Oaxaca's constitution, these organizations viewed that category as creating a political opportunity for policy implementation that other categories lacked. As one of the leaders of EPOCA expressed, "it has been decided what we should call ourselves [...]. In 1997 [sic], without consulting the Black People, it was decided to name them Afromexicans. This is how it appears in Article 16 of the Constitution of Oaxaca. [...] What we need is to take advantage of that window to advance legislation."¹⁵¹ By contrast, he was convinced that "they [would] never include 'Black people' in a constitution." For him, it was also a "logical issue:" "In America there are Blacks, and they are Afroamericans; in Colombia, they are Afrocolombians; in Brazil, Afrobrazilians. The important thing is that you let them know that we are at least "Afro" because the word "Afrodescendant" even feels tough for me."¹⁵²

The defense of the category "Afromexican" was also a reaction to the academic use of the term "Afrodescendant." As one of the leaders from ECOSTA recalls, "suddenly it caused many conflicts that academics talked about 'Afrodescendants,' and you reached out to the Black communities and asked them: 'Who are Afrodescendants?' And everyone looked around and said: 'Who are they? Who

¹⁵¹ <http://colectivoafrica.blogspot.com/2010/07/reunion-de-la-red-de-organizaciones-de.html>

¹⁵² Interview with Néstor Ruíz (May 2017).

knows?”¹⁵³ Although ECOSTA and EPOCA defended the category “Afromexican,” and disagreed with RED on the use of the category “Black,” both sectors of the social movement field shared their rejection of the official and academic uses of the category “Afrodescendant.” According to one of RED’s leaders, “whoever uses the term ‘Afrodescendant’ is, one, following the same patterns of the colonial conqueror of imposing a name; two, disguising and softening racism and discrimination; and three, preserving the umbilical cord to that sector of academia that uses the term.”¹⁵⁴

Later, a new coalition of actors emerged to strengthen the use of the category “Afromexican.” In 2013, a member of the House of Representatives from the Democratic Revolution Party (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, PRD) organized a coalition of social organizations (e.g., EPOCA), academic institutions (e.g., Metropolitan Autonomous University (UAM), and Veracruz University), and local authorities (e.g., Sub-secretary of the Afromexican People of the State of Guerrero) to demand the enumeration of Afromexicans. One of the first actions of the “Afromexican National Collective” (*Colectivo Nacional Afromexicano*, CONAFRO) was a “sensitizing campaign” around this category on the Guerrero coast. The campaign involved several local events, including a homage to Nelson Mandela with the presence of ambassadors from South Africa, Nigeria, Congo, and Cameroon.¹⁵⁵

Unlike other actors, CONAFRO decisively promoted identification with the category “Afromexican.” According to their campaign flyer, “the term *Afromexican* was defined after

¹⁵³ Interview with Heladio Reyes (May 2017).

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Israel Reyes (May 2017)

¹⁵⁵ <http://colectivonacionalafromexicano.blogspot.com/2013/07/inicia-campana-nacional-de.html>

numerous forums where social organizations, researchers, activists, and international organizations decided to name themselves this way to affirm the origin of their ancestors and, at the same time, the Mexican nationality to which they belong.” The legitimation of the category “Afromexican,” initially defended by a sector of social organizations, was now bolstered by the intervention of a member of the national legislature who also presented a reform bill aimed at recognizing group-differentiated rights for people of African descent in the Mexican constitution.¹⁵⁶ Within the social movement field, “Afromexican” consolidated as the category with most political currency, gaining support from actors closer to regional and national levels of the bureaucratic field.

By the end of 2013, the relational space enabling the first official enumeration of ethnoracial categories of blackness in Mexico had crystallized. Figure 2 shows the results of *Correspondence Analysis (CA)* in a symmetric map¹⁵⁷ with organizational actors (uppercase black typeface) and their use of ethnoracial categories (uppercase gray typeface) in a joint bidimensional space. Proximity indicates actors' similar preference for an ethnoracial category.¹⁵⁸ Dimension 1 accounts for 73.1% of the variation in the data and brings into focus the opposition between actors who use the category

¹⁵⁶ <http://gaceta.diputados.gob.mx/Black/Gaceta/Anteriores/62/2013/oct/20131002-V/Iniciativa-2.html>

¹⁵⁷ To conduct this analysis, I created a documental corpus of 180 pieces and includes newspaper articles, administrative records, official reports, meeting minutes, organizational archives, letters, websites, and blogs. I manually coded both the *explicit advocacy* for a category and the *routine use* by each organization at the sentence level. For example, in the sentence “One of the delegations, represented by the Africa AC collective, which heads the Professor Israel Reyes Larrea, demanded to be called ‘Black People!’ without subterfuges. No Afromestizos or Afromexicans,” I use the codes “AFRICA” to label the organization and “BLACK” to indicate their explicit categorical advocacy. Similarly, in the sentence “We seek that state and federal governments recognize Black People and break the barriers that prevent more support, said Reyes Larrea,” I also use the codes “AFRICA” and “BLACK” to identify routine uses of ethnoracial categories. This cycle of Attribute Coding (Saldaña 2013:69ff) resulted in over 4,600 coded segments distributed across 32 organizational actors between 2009 and 2015.

¹⁵⁸ As I mentioned before, symmetric maps allow to interpret row-to-row and column-to-column distances directly but row-to-column distances indirectly. In this case, the closer actors are, the more similar their preference is for an ethnoracial category. However, the proximity between actors and ethnoracial categories only suggests a general association.

“Black” more often (lower-right quadrant), and those who more frequently use the category “Afrodescendant” (lower-left quadrant). Dimension 2 captures the remaining 26.9% of variability and represents actors who more often use the category “Afromexican” (upper-center position). In Figure 3.8, geometric symbols show the dominant form of authority of each actor in this process (i.e., activist, administrative, legal, and scientific).¹⁵⁹

Figure 3.9 shows the results of *Agglomerative Hierarchical Clustering* (AHC), illustrating coalitions and alliances around the three main categorical stances at stake. AHC employs Ward’s algorithm to estimate clusters of actors with similar preferences for ethnoracial categories, estimating low within-cluster variability and high between-cluster variability (Husson et al. 2017). CA and AHC analyses complement each other. While CA shows general affinities between actors and categories, AHC reveals bounded constellations of actors for each category preference. As expected, predominant use of the categories “Afrodescendant,” “Afromexican,” and “Black” is significantly associated with Clusters 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Cluster 1 (lower-left quadrant) includes international institutions like CERD and CEPAL, internationally oriented state actors like CONAPRED and GT-CERD, and research institutions like INAH, among others. Actors in this cluster use the category “Afrodescendant” 72.3% of the time, compared to a total use of 39.1%. Cluster 2 (upper-center position) incorporates social movement actors like EPOCA, political parties like PRD, and locally laden state actors like SAICA, to name a few. In this cluster, the category “Afromexican” was used

¹⁵⁹ I coded actors’ interventions based on the predominant form of symbolic capital they wield, which may or may not correspond to the field actors inhabit at a given time. For example, while the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) is embedded in academic and bureaucratic fields, the predominant form of authority observed during these episodes was scientific and not administrative.

56.9% of the time, in comparison with a total use of 32.3%. Finally, Cluster 3 contains social movement actors like RED and research institutions like PUMC, among others. Actors in this clusters use the category “Black” 62% of the time, compared to a total use of 28.6%.

The analysis of quantitative differences in the use of ethnoracial categories of blackness reveals the stances of different actors and the distribution of particular forms of authority across the interstitial space. The positions adopted around the three main ethnoracial categories shows that the interstitial space was structured by the intersection of *four field-specific forms of symbolic capital*. First, the legal authority of the juridical field (squares in Figure 3.8), mainly represented by the human rights discourse of international institutions like CERD and CEPAL, crystallized in the category “Afrodescendant” (lower-left quadrant). This legal categorization anchored the critical discourse of human rights and opened up political space to articulate legitimate heterodox positions on the enumeration of people of African descent. As one of the most valuable positions within the interstitial space, it was also a site of struggle over the legitimate appropriation of symbolic capital by state agencies and academic institutions.¹⁶⁰

Second, the administrative authority of the bureaucratic field (triangles in Figure 3.8) was distributed between the internationally laden pole of the state, validating the “Afrodescendant” category, and the locally laden pole of the state supporting the “Afromexican” category. The diagonal distribution of the statist capital (from the lower-left to the upper-right quadrant) shows the dual

¹⁶⁰ Correspondence Analysis shows a strong association between the use of the category “Afrodescendant” and the position of human rights international organizations like CERD and internationally oriented state actors like CONAPRED and the SRE.

legitimation strategy of state agencies. On one hand, they privileged *internationally valid categories* responding to the normative pressures of human rights conventions. On the other, they favored *nationally valid categories* reflecting the political demands of social organizations. The position of INEGI at the center of this distribution shows the standing of the statistics bureau amid competing legitimation demands within the bureaucratic field.

Third, the scientific authority of the academic field (crosses in Figure 3.8) was divided: ethnographic expertise mobilized around the category “Black” while ethnohistoric expertise mobilized around the “Afrodescendant.” Researchers at PUMC mobilized ethnographic knowledge to support the enumeration of “Black” as a *practical category of self-identification* (lower-right quadrant). After all, their ethnographies had suggested that “Black” was the most prevalent category in everyday life. In contrast, researchers at INAH mobilized ethnohistoric knowledge to support “Afrodescendant” as an *analytical category for self-identification* (lower-left quadrant). Although they recognized that “Afrodescendant” was largely an unfamiliar category, they nonetheless considered it appropriate for official usage due to its lack of pejorative connotations and its reference to Africa. While other forms of academic expertise emerged (e.g., the Department of Political Science at UAM), the main divide occurred among anthropologists and political uses of anthropological knowledge.

Finally, the activist authority of the social movement field (circles in Figure 3.8) was split between the politics of culture supporting the symbolic inversion of the category “Black” (e.g., RED) and the politics of development supporting the political instrumentalization of the category “Afromexican” (e.g., CONAFRO). While organizations engaged in cultural politics defended local *categories of identification* (lower-right quadrant), organizations invested in development politics

focused on regional and national *categories for intermediation* (upper-center position). Although both camps opposed officializing the category “Afrodescendant,” they had different reasons for this position based on their political vocation.¹⁶¹

Before 2014, the actors involved exercised legitimation strategies at a distance, with very few face-to-face interactions. Although various actors reacted to INEGI’s refusal to include self-identification question in the 2010 census, repertoires of engagement were indirect (e.g., open letters and comunicués). During 2014, categorical politics became more salient, and legitimation strategies more personal. Different actors often operated in the same physical space, and relations of legitimation turned into *persuasive interactions*. Working at the interstices of various fields, “in the absence of an officially declared and institutionally guaranteed delegation,” actors exercised field-specific forms of symbolic capital by “creating a bond between persons” (Bourdieu 1990:129). The legitimation of official categories was now personally demanding and personally consequential for the actors involved.¹⁶² The interpersonal facilitation of working group meetings, punctuated by disputes about the wording of the questions and agreements on the statistical tests results, created a *temporal interval* of symbolic exchanges through which unequal exercises of authority began to be experienced as “respectful,” “reasonable,” and more importantly “objective.” Embedded in this economy of mutual

¹⁶¹ According to Correspondence Analysis, the category “AfroMexican” is strongly associated with social movement actors like CONAFRO. There is also a positive association between the category “Black” and the position of social movement actors like AFRICA, PÚRPURA, RED, and academic actors like PUMC.

¹⁶² As one of the INAH researchers recalls, “[the process] was exhausting, many people were fed up, but I think it had great value beyond the technical fact of conducting the [intercensal] survey” (Interview with Gabriela Iturralde, December 2020).

recognition, the use of pilot surveys became a temporal tactic to *foreshadow* (Rodríguez-Muñiz 2021:115) the new categorical composition of the Mexican nation.

Between August 2013 and June 2014, INEGI conducted the first four pilot surveys to estimate the level of understanding of different wordings of the future census question. These surveys constituted the first official attempts to enumerate people of African descent during the twentieth century in Mexico. Without consulting with social organizations, the first pilot survey asked:

*“According to your culture, traditions, and history, do any persons in this household consider themselves Afromexican or descendants of the Black People?”*¹⁶³ INEGI implemented this pilot survey in thirteen municipalities with minor variations. The number of people who did not understand the question ranged from 31.5% in the first pilot survey (August 2013) to 32.4% in the third (March 2014), and 67% in the fourth (June 2014).¹⁶⁴ INEGI also found that some respondents confused the category “Afromexican” with “Mexican,” as well as the category “Black People” with a territorial location (Galván Rivera and Pérez Moreno 2016:99–103).

RED had anticipated these issues and blamed the results on INEGI’s failure to include various identification categories. Since June 2013,¹⁶⁵ RED had proposed omitting the words “descendants” and “People” because the notion of descendancy had a “short-horizon” related to family, and the idea of peoplehood referred to a “geographic space.” Instead, RED had suggested including the categories

¹⁶³ In Latin America, the notion of “Black People” has an ethnocultural connotation of peoplehood. The Spanish version of the question was: “*De acuerdo con su cultura e historia, ¿Algunas de las personas de esta vivienda se considera Afromexicano o descendiente del Pueblo Negro?*”

¹⁶⁴ As we will see, the percentage of people who did not understand the question decreased once “Black” became the first category of identification within the wording of the question. INEGI conducted the second pilot survey in December of 2013. This test, however, only evaluated questions about migration (INEGI 2015:3).

¹⁶⁵ <http://colectivoafrica.blogspot.com/2013/06/propuesta-de-la-redrcpnm-sobre-la.html>

“Black” and “Brown” because they were “recurrent” in daily practices of self-identification. Thus, RED’s alternative question was: *“According to your culture, traditions, and history, do any persons in this household consider themselves Black, Brown, or Afromexican?”*¹⁶⁶ In an open letter, RED demanded INEGI “rectify their mistakes publicly” and include “various self-denominations,” including “Black” and “Brown,” but also ethnonyms like “Mascogo” and “Jarocho,” among others.¹⁶⁷

By June 2014, a year after the beginning of pilot surveys, INEGI realized that those tests were not fulfilling the technical and political expectations at stake. On a technical level, the percentage of people misunderstanding the question was increasing. On a political level, the question’s wording ignored the categorical preferences of several actors. On both counts, the statistical tests conducted up to this point had failed to produce the kind of aperspectival objectivity that would adjudicate between contested claims of categorical representation. Thus, less than a year from the beginning of the 2015 Intercensal Survey, INEGI lacked the technical and political means to enumerate blackness in Mexico legitimately.

In July 2014, INEGI joined CONAPRED and INAH to facilitate a working group that would collectively design, implement, and evaluate the results of a new set of survey questions within a bounded temporal framework. According to its proponents, “the working group wants to combine social, demographic, technical and rights-based approaches. It is about putting disciplines and actors in prolific dialogue, considering the rights-based perspective and the main methodological problems related to the question design. The idea is to leave the working group with a validated and consensual

¹⁶⁶ <https://colectivoafrica.blogspot.com/2014/05/inegi-debe-corregir-errores-para-contar.html>

¹⁶⁷ RCPNM “Carta Abierta,” Pinotepa Nacional, Oaxaca, 21 de marzo del 2014

question that shortens the distance between positions and perspectives.”¹⁶⁸ In summary, the creation of the working group recognized the existence of the interstitial space, the fragmentation of the state’s symbolic power into competing forms of authority, and the need to validate contested but legitimate forms of ethnoracial categorization in order to reach a consensus.

Forty-five persons from twenty-four institutions and organizations participated in the working group meetings. For the first time, the INEGI’s General Director, CONAPRED’s president, the Director of the National Research Program on Afrodescendants and Cultural Diversity at INAH, a member of the House of Representatives from PRD, and international experts from several countries sat together in front of activists, researchers, and local state actors to discuss the enumeration of people of African descent in Mexico. In the working group, the symbolic capital of participants was proportional to the stakes of the meeting.

After discussing ten different wordings of the question, participants agreed to test two questions in the next and last pilot survey. Both versions included “Black” and “Afromexican,” followed by a limited number of ethnonyms. Whereas the first version asked: *“According to your culture, history, and traditions, do you consider yourself Afromexican, that is, Black, Brown, Mascogo, Costeño, Jarocho?”* the second version was: *“According to your culture, history, and traditions, do you consider yourself Black, that is, Afromexican, Brown, Mascogo, Costeño, Jarocho?”* The category “Afrodescendant” was left out. INEGI also requested social organizations to submit a list of “Afrodescendent localities” to test the two new questions. According to INEGI’s Director, “the

¹⁶⁸ The reconstruction of this episode is based on the minutes of the meeting: “Mesa de Trabajo sobre la Incorporación de la Pregunta Afrodescendiente en la Encuesta Intercensal 2015” (Julio de 2014)

question that captures the most people of African descent will be included in the final questionnaire of the Intercensal Survey 2015.”

The setup of the working group and the collective design of two new survey questions in July of 2014 had several implications for the consolidation of an *economy of symbolic exchanges* within the interstitial space. By including the categories “Black” and “Afromexican” (as well as other ethnonyms), INEGI recognized the legitimacy of the two stances that characterized the social movement field: the preference for “Black” emerging from cultural politics, and the preference for “Afromexican” emerging from development politics. Additionally, by requesting a list of “Afrodescendant localities,” INEGI also recognized the symbolic power of nonstate actors to identify ethnoracial territories that had been rendered invisible by the Mexican state. In return, INEGI expected recognition of its technical ability to adjudicate between categorical preferences in a presumably objective and disinterested manner.

Moreover, the setup of the working group not only recognized some of the main stances but also organized a sequence of exchanges in which authoritative claims by different actors would be subject to statistical testing to arbitrate between competing categorical interests. The ritual crafting of *time intervals* between the collaborative design of the two questions, the implementation of the pilot survey, and the collective discussion of results created the conditions for a *symbolically effective exchange* of authoritative reasonings and empirical demonstrations that facilitated the officialization of ethnoracial categories of blackness in Mexico. The timeframe, however, was tightly constrained: pilot questions were discussed in July, the next pilot survey was scheduled for October, and the discussion of results was planned for November, four months before the beginning of the Intercensal Survey.

In October of 2014, INEGI conducted the fifth and final pilot survey. This test included “Black,” “Afromexican,” “Mascogo,” “Moreno,” “Costeño,” and “Jarocho” as categories of identification. A month later, INEGI, CONAPRED, and INAH held the second working group meeting with forty participants from twenty-five institutions and organizations to discuss the results.¹⁶⁹ INEGI compared the response rate of each ethnoracial category across Afrodescendent and non-Afrodescendent localities. Categories that worked “better” were those that yielded the highest contrast (i.e., numerical difference) between these two types of localities.

Under these criteria, the best categories were “Black” and “Afromexican.” While 65.4% of people in Afrodescendent localities identified as “Black,” only 7.7% identified with this category in non-Afrodescendent localities. Whereas 64.5% identified as “Afromexican” in Afrodescendent localities, only 8.3% identified as such in non-Afrodescendent localities. By contrast, categories like “Moreno,” “Costeño,” or “Jarocho” seemed more problematic. For example, people self-identified with “Moreno” at a rate of 76.3% and 74.7% in Afrodescendent and non-Afrodescendent localities, respectively (Resano 2015:31). Overall, the number of people who did not understand the question was 26.8%, the lowest rate of all pilot tests conducted (Galván Rivera and Pérez Moreno 2016:104).

Based on the survey results, INEGI would have included the categories “Black” and “Afromexican,” and excluded the rest of ethnonyms. And yet, INEGI also reported a lack of understanding of the term ‘Afromexican.’ “Informants—INEGI argued—only recall the word

¹⁶⁹ This episode is based on the minutes of the meeting: “Segunda Mesa de Trabajo sobre la Incorporación de la Pregunta Afrodescendiente en la Encuesta Intercensal 2015” (Noviembre de 2014). Quotations in the following paragraphs of this section belong to the minutes of this meeting.

‘Mexican’ and respond affirmatively ‘yes, I am Mexican.’” For this reason, INEGI proposed keeping the category “Black,” and removing the category “Afromexican.” However, going against its own statistical rule, INEGI also suggested including the category “Afrodescendant.” The new proposed wording of the question was: “*According to your culture, history, and traditions, do you consider yourself Black, that is, Afrodescendant?*”

The reaction from social organizations was immediate. For some of them, it was unclear why INEGI had removed “Afromexican” and included “Afrodescendant.” After all, at the first working group meeting, the category “Afrodescendant” had not been discussed, and this category was not part of the pilot survey. The various visions and divisions within the interstitial political field resurfaced. Removing the category “Afromexican” was particularly threatening for the social movement coalition actors at the upper-center position of the interstitial space (See Figure 2). Members of CONAFRO, for example, argued that “INEGI wants to impose a question,” adding that “Black is a discriminatory word,” and recalling that in “*Charco Redondo*” social organizations agreed to use the word “Afromexican.” Members of EPOCA argued that social organizations resorted to the term “Afromexican” because they were told by “[public] institutions” that “Black was discriminatory.” Furthermore, they concluded: “now INEGI says that we have to, once again, call ourselves ‘Black,’ and that is a regression.” Some members of México Negro argued that “the question should include ‘Afromexican’ or else the work by the organizations had been in vain.”

The social movement actors located at the lower-right quadrant of the interstitial space (See Figure 2) perceived the criticisms of including the category “Black” as an attack. Members of AFRICA affirmed that “the population wants to be named ‘Black’” and suggested that “whitening the question

does not solve the problem.” “‘Afrodescendant’ —they argued— can also be used to discriminate.”

Members of RED, who participated as observers during the application of the pilot survey in

Guerrero, also sustained that “the people’s main answer was ‘Black.’”

As INEGI sought to position its version of the question as a technical legitimation of ethnoracial categories beyond perspectival politics, it denounced criticisms as politically motivated maneuvers. According to INEGI’s Director of Conceptual Design, “the goal is to have a question that works independently of the politically correct terms.” The Deputy General Director said: “INEGI does not care about political correctness; it works to produce quality statistical information; this means capturing what people understand.” The General Director concluded that one of the problems INEGI had by including the term “Afromexican” was the “risk of overestimating.” Similarly, CONAPRED’s President argued that the final decision “does not necessarily coincide with the consensus over the terms because it is a technical issue.”

Contrary to INEGI’s position, academic and state actors situated at the lower-left quadrant of the interstitial space (See Figure 2) defending the category “Afrodescendant,” now also supported the inclusion of the category “Afromexican.” For some members of the MNDC, “returning to ‘Black’ or ‘Afrodescendant’ forgets the process developed since 2011.” Other members of the MNDC said: “we should not talk about what is politically correct, but about international and national normative frameworks.” From a similar point of view, an expert from INAH proposed including the category “Afromexican” instead of “Afrodescendant” because “the term ‘Afromexican’ will help incorporate the term into the legal recognition that is pursued.”

After a heated debate, INEGI finally agreed to incorporate “Afromexican” in the final question. The wording of the self-identification question for people of African descent in the 2015 Intercensal Survey was: “*According to your culture, history, and traditions, do you consider yourself Black, that is, Afromexican or Afrodescendant?*” Although the final version only had seventeen words, it summarized years of interstitial political disputes as actors struggled over the legitimate authority to enumerate blackness in Mexico. The strategic use of the last pilot survey embedded standardized quantifications into a sequence of symbolic exchanges that gave credibility to the authoritative claims behind the contested categorical stances at stake.

The officialization of ethnoracial categories was then a political and technical process of mobilizing consensus within the interstitial space. At the interpersonal level, this process required *demanding* the recognition of one’s authority while *accepting* that of others to objectify ethnoracial representations. For the coalition of actors located at the lower-right quadrant of the space (See Figure 2), the inclusion of the category “Black” represented official recognition of their authority to standardize an ethnocultural notion of blackness accumulated through their experience in cultural politics and participatory ethnography. Survey results reinforced their longstanding claim that “Black” was the most important category of self-identification. At the same time, it also meant agreeing to forego the enumeration of other ethnonyms like “Brown,” “Mascogo,” “Costeño,” or “Jarocho” because they could not pass the same statistical test under which “Black” had been admitted.

For the sector of actors situated at the lower-left quadrant of the space (See Figure 2), including the category “Afrodescendant” vindicated their authority to represent international human rights discourse and the scientific trajectory in ethnohistorical research. The inclusion of this category,

despite the lack of statistical tests, also reflected the prominent role of these actors in authorizing an internationally validated notion of Afrodescendency with roots in Mexico's long trajectory of ethnohistorical knowledge. Nevertheless, this inclusion also implied acknowledging that "Afrodescendant" was the category with the least support for political mobilization and dubious potential for social self-identification.

Finally, for the alliance of actors located at the upper-center position of the space (See Figure 2), the inclusion of the category "Afromexican" represented the official validation of their authority to coin a politically instrumental notion of ethnoracial difference aligned with their trajectory in development politics. The inclusion of this category meant recognizing that the statistical visibility of people of African descent had to be expressed in a bureaucratically consequential category of blackness. However, it also entailed admitting that "Afromexican" was the category with the most political salience and the least statistical support.

In March of 2015, INEGI conducted the Intercensal Survey and a year later reported for the first time that 1.2% of the Mexican population (1,381,853 persons) self-identify as Black, Afromexican, or Afrodescendant. Once the results were published, the fierce debates of previous years seemed to vanish. Although criticism never wholly disappeared, the critiques did not fundamentally question the enumeration. Even RED—one of the staunchest critics of the process— offered words of praise: "Despite not [...] having respected our categories [e.g., "Brown," "Mascogo," "Jarocho,"] we recognize INEGI's decision to include the identification question for the Afromexican population,

joining and responding to the demands of social organizations for our statistical recognition.”¹⁷⁰ The enactment of a symbolic economy of mutual recognition made possible a new demographic enumeration and an emerging consensus on the categorical composition of the Mexican nation.

RED’s statement also illustrates the temporal closure of the interstitial space. While INEGI seemed to recover the central authority to enumerate people of African descent legitimately, the statist capital could only be reconstituted by recognizing and appropriating field-specific forms of symbolic capital mobilized by nonstate actors within the interstitial space. Five years later, before the 2020 census round, a new interstitial dispute on the enumeration of people of African descent emerged. And yet, “Black,” “Afromexican,” and “Afrodescendant” continued to be the official categories of blackness. The history of categorization struggles before 2015 now seems to be forgotten. How those categories became official is no longer a matter of public discussion or scrutiny. The emergent consensus appears to have been consolidated for several state and nonstate actors who participated in the interstitial struggles. The results of these episodes of categorization politics are now presented as the official vision and division of blackness in Mexico. However, it is unclear to what extent the new official categories will be adopted in everyday life and with what consequences.

Comparative conclusions

¹⁷⁰ <https://colectivoafrica.blogspot.com/2015/12/inegi-cuenta-por-primera-vez-los-negros.html>

Two analytical insights and substantive findings summarize the contributions of this chapter to the study of categorization politics in Latin America, with broader implications for the scholarship on official information gathering and the political sociology of demography (Emigh et al. 2020; Loveman 2014; Rodríguez-Muñiz 2020). The first contribution is related to the notion of *crisis of nomos*. Identifying this specific type of critical juncture helps to account for the *timing* of categorization politics—why the enumeration of census categories becomes a public problem when it does. Given that the symbolic power of the state to enumerate its population is often taken for granted (Loveman 2005), it is crucial to understand under which *conjunctural conditions* the credibility of the state is publicly challenged and disputed. After all, official information gathering processes are routinized exercises of bureaucratic discretion that usually fail to create organized forms of confrontation. Focusing on nomic crisis helps explain when claims about categorical enumeration are made.

Comparing Colombia and Mexico helps expand the comparative evidence on the scope of conditions of *nomos* crises in the region. As we know from previous research, legitimacy crises can lead to new official population categories (Mora 2014b:88ff). However, the legitimacy of the state can be questioned without challenging predominant modes of categorical representation. Under what conditions do legitimation crises become nomic crises? Under what conditions do states lose control of the imagined national demography that is often taken for granted? The comparative analysis of the emergence of categories of Blackness in Colombia and Mexico reveals that new official categorizations arise when states lose control of their legitimation strategies at critical junctures of symbolic deficit. In both cases, the legitimacy of the state to represent the nation was called into question. In both cases,

states attempted to redefine the sense of nationhood by appealing to Indigeneity. And yet, as circuits of legitimation expanded, the crisis also polluted the state's capacity to represent people of African descent, challenging predominant categories of national representation (*nomos*) and disputing the official mode of statistical production.

In the case of Colombia, the first enumeration of people of African descent can be traced back to the legitimation crisis of the late 1980s. Amid a deadly wave of political violence, Colombian elites turned to the Constituent Assembly, 1991 in an attempt to redefine the basis of a “new social contract.” The inclusion of representatives of Indigenous people in the Assembly meant to legitimate a new sense of inclusion in the nation. Granting group-differentiated rights for Indigenous people validated the multi-ethnic discourse of international human rights organizations, decades-long claims of Indigenous organizations, and the anthropological knowledge of Indigenous ethno-cultural difference. As these sources of legitimation were subject to discussion through the debates of the Constitutional Assembly, the Colombian state progressively lost control of its own legitimation strategy. A coalition of Indigenous and Afrodescendent organizations appropriated this strategy to validate an ethno-territorial understanding of a new category of Blackness. First as a political claim, then as a discursive stance, and finally as a social manifestation, the multi-faceted articulation of the category “Black communities” effectively produced a normative inversion of the category “Black savage” of the nineteenth century. In the new framework, “Black communities” were no longer the irredeemable category of “pure (or degenerative) Blackness” of the Colombian lowlands. On the contrary, they became a constitutionally differentiated category of Afrodescendent people whose rights to collective property, cultural identity, and economic and social development should be

protected by the state. As “Black communities” became constitutionally validated but legally undetermined, a nomic crisis emerged. The Colombian state had a constitutional mandate that could not be fulfilled within the boundaries of the bureaucratic field. The authority of the state to officially institute a new category of Blackness was now distributed across competing legitimation strategies by state and non-state actors.

The analysis of the Mexican case revealed that the critical event of the Zapatista uprising in 1994 and the critical discourse of human rights converged to generate a legitimation crisis in which it became possible to question the notion of “Black disappearance,” one of the core premises of Mexico’s ideology of mestizaje. The nomic crisis also emerged progressively over time. As the Zapatista insurrection made public the persistence of ethnoracial inequality affecting Indigenous peoples, the Mexican state could not continue legitimizing its anti-discrimination credentials in international forums like the CERD. Facing a symbolic deficit, state officials sought to appropriate human rights discourse through a new set of bureaucratic agencies and constitutional reforms. Although, by 2004, representatives of the Mexican state felt better prepared to defend the new anti-discrimination measures, the CERD quickly recognized the lack of statistics on people of African descent. The initial pressure to admit the existence of racial discrimination had turned into a legitimate questioning of the predominant categories of the national representation (*nomos*). The legitimation crisis had transformed into a nomic crisis affecting the official mode of statistical production. The lack of demographic data on people of African descent called into question the authority of the state to represent this population and fight against racial discrimination. This critical moment diminished the symbolic power of the state and validated the authority of nonstate actors who demanded the

inclusion of new categories of Blackness. The expansion of the national and international circuits of legitimation progressively admitted as valid competing categorical claims by a growing range of non-state actors.

Viewed comparatively, it is now easier to see why the enumeration of people of African descent happened earlier in Colombia than in Mexico. Beyond long-term trajectories in the nationalist understanding of Blackness, the *tempo* of transformation of a legitimation crisis into a nomic crisis produced different conjunctural conditions in Colombia and Mexico. The legitimation crisis during the 1990s in Colombia was more profound than in Mexico. The Constitutional Assembly provided opportunities to legitimize Afrodescendent claims that were not available in negotiations with the Zapatista movement in Mexico. The official circuits of legitimation expanded faster in Colombia than in Mexico. In both cases, international human rights agencies provided discursive elements that were appropriated by state and non-state actors alike. However, in Colombia, the nomic crisis grew endogenously through the enactment of TA-55. In Mexico, the CERD intervened directly to produce an exogenous nomic crisis. In both cases, the state could not fully control the ramifications of the crisis. Official legitimation strategies often failed and created unexpected political spaces to discuss the predominant categories of national representation. At this juncture, crises could not be contained within the boundaries of the bureaucratic field; non-state actors were invited in and their demands were validated.

The second contribution is associated with the notion of *interstitial space*. Reconstructing inter-field spaces in which actors struggle over the legitimate imposition of official categories contributes to accounting for the *distribution* of contending interests and strategies. While scholarship

has focused on a variety of state and nonstate actors, we still need analytical tools to conceptualize social relations of reciprocal influence in the officialization of new categories (Emigh et al. 2020). The notion of interstitial space contributes to the systematic study of these relations by placing field-specific trajectories and inter-field categorical stances at the center of the analysis. As the symbolic power of the state becomes fragmented during critical junctures, it is crucial to reconstruct the *structural conditions* that shape authoritative interactions (and their representation) both within and beyond the bureaucratic field.

The comparison of Colombia and Mexico illustrates how different configurations of interstitial spaces shape the officialization of census categories. In both cases, the expansion of circuits of legitimation resulted in inter-field forms of antagonism in which state and non-state actors resorted to different forms of symbolic capital to legitimately impose their own categorizations. However, exercising different field-specific forms of authority resulted in the institutionalization of different categories with different cultural meanings, political possibilities, and legal affordances. Moreover, according to their configuration during the critical juncture, similar fields reacted differently to similar legitimation challenges. The position of the statistics agency within the bureaucratic field, the status of different forms of anthropological knowledge within the academic field, and the categorical disputes within the social movement field help explain the officialization of different categories of Blackness in Colombia and Mexico.

The analysis of the Colombian case showed that a similar categorical stance (i.e., “Black communities”) was justified through entangled legitimation strategies that expanded across three field-specific forms of symbolic capital: the scientific authority of the academic field, the administrative

authority of the bureaucratic field, and the activist authority of the social movement field. Given the constitutional validation of the category “Black communities” in TA-55, the interstitial dispute was mainly intra-categorical. State and non-state actors struggled to impose a politically valid and legally consequential definition. The category “Black communities” was thus legitimated as an academic middle ground between Indigenist and Afroamericanist forms of anthropological knowledge; as the bureaucratic intersection of political rights, natural resource preservation, and land property regimes; and as an activist compromise between the organizing capital of grassroots initiatives and the mobilizing capital of political intermediaries (See Figure 3.10).

In the case of Mexico, the analysis showed that three categorical stances (“Black,” “Afrodescendant,” and “Afromexican”) were justified through intertwined legitimation strategies across four field-specific forms of symbolic capital: the legal authority of the juridical field, the administrative authority of the bureaucratic field, the activist authority of the social movement field, and the scientific authority of the academic field. Whereas an alliance of internationally oriented state actors and ethnohistorical researchers validated the category “Afrodescendant,” a coalition of social movement organizations invested in cultural politics and academic researchers mobilizing ethnographic knowledge legitimized the category “Black.” The category “Afromexican” was supported by social movement organizations advocating for development politics and state actors close to the locally laden pole of the bureaucratic field (See Figure 3.11).

From a comparative perspective, several elements help explain why the first enumeration of people of African descent took different categorical forms in Colombia and Mexico. First, the constitutional validation of a single category in Colombia during the 1990s restricted the number of

categorical stances that were more visible later in Mexico. Moreover, the officialization of “Black communities” in Colombia transvaluated a preexisting category of Blackness that was not historically available in Mexico. Whereas the interstitial struggle in Colombia was intra-categorical, in Mexico, it was inter-categorical.

Second, the anthropological knowledge of people of African descent in Colombia during the 1990s lacked the scientific authority it had in Mexico during the 2010s. The peripheral position of Afroamericanist research in the official anthropological institute in Colombia (i.e., ICAN) contrasted with the central position of Ethnohistoric research in the equivalent institute in Mexico (i.e., INAH). While Mexican anthropologists could create alliances with international experts and state officials to institutionalize the category “Afrodescendent,” Colombian anthropologists had no such opportunities to officially designate afro-centric forms of knowledge.¹⁷¹

Third, Afrodescendent organizations in Colombia subordinated categorical politics to a broader and unifying political agenda that was absent in Mexico. The struggle for collective land titling for Black peasants in Colombia took precedence over categorical disputes among Black organizations. In Mexico, each categorical stance objectified different forms of representing Black, Afromexican, or Afrodescendent populations. Whereas in Colombia, the category “Black communities” reified different forms of doing politics, in Mexico, each category symbolized a different political agenda.

Finally, the prevalence of locally oriented state actors in Colombia contrasted with the predominance of internationally oriented state officials in Mexico. The endogenous origins of the

¹⁷¹ Later, during the preparation for the 2005 census, the statistics agency in Colombia introduced the category “Afrocolombian.” For a reconstruction of this episode, see Paschel (2013).

conomic crisis in Colombia and the exogenous roots of the crisis in Mexico challenged the authority of different sectors within the bureaucratic field. While in Colombia, the officialization of the category “Black communities” was framed bureaucratically as a problem of ethno-territorial rights, in Mexico, the visibility of “Black,” “Afromexican,” and “Afrodescendant” categories was understood bureaucratically as a problem of compliance with international human rights conventions. For this reason, the official categories of Blackness in Mexico have an international resonance that the category “Black communities” in Colombia lacked during the 1990s. Conversely, the officialization of this category of Blackness in Colombia has had national consequences that have yet to be seen in Mexico.

CHAPTER 4

DISPUTED CATEGORIZATIONS AND ELUSIVE IDENTIFICATIONS

After the first enumeration of people of African descent in Colombia and Mexico, the new ethnoracial data produced a new wave of categorical politics (Loveman 2021). In Colombia, results from the 1993 census showed 500,000 persons (1.5%) who self-identified as members of “Black communities,” primarily concentrated in the Pacific region. In Mexico, the 2015 intercensal survey showed 1,381,853 persons (1.2%) who self-identified as Black, Afromexican, and Afrodescendent. Although the first enumeration in each country occurred twenty years apart, the emerging dynamics of census politics showed remarkable similarities. In both cases, new coalitions of actors criticized not only the volume of the estimated population but also the conceptual basis of the census question. For some of these actors, the size of Afrodescendent populations and the extent of ethnoracial forms of inequality were significantly misconstrued. The “ethnic” framework of the census question was to blame. In Colombia, the ethnic wording of the question seemed to produce a ruralized image of Black populations (Paschel 2013). In Mexico, the ethnic framing seemed to obscure ethnoracial disadvantages. However, the critique of the “ethnic” framework and the defense of the “racial” perspective produced a different statistical representation of ethnoracial inequality in each country. Unlike the 2005 census in Colombia, the 2020 census did not show significant disadvantages between the Afrodescendant population and the rest of the Mexican population. Why did similar repertoires of

census politics produce different demographic visibilities of people of African descent in Mexico and Colombia?

This chapter is divided in four sections. The first section briefly examines the literature on the endogeneity of ethnoracial identification. It shows how the existing body of research has mainly focused on endogenous variables at the individual level and suggests an alternative perspective to analyze the endogeneity of ethnoracial identification at the collective level. The second section reconstructs the interstitial space of classification struggles that emerge in Colombia before the 2005 census. This section analyzes how the inclusion of new categories of Blackness afforded a labor of legitimation for state and non-state actors who obtained symbolic profits across multiple fields of action. The third section focuses on similar categorization struggles that occurred in Mexico before the 2020 census. It shows how the wording of the questions and the official categories of Blackness of the 2015 EIC were maintained despite the efforts of multiple actors to change them. Finally, I explore some comparative conclusions that can help understand the role of the politics of ethnoracial categorization in the endogenous process of ethnoracial identification.

The Space of Categorization Struggles and the Endogeneity of Ethnoracial Identification

Quantitative research that conceptualizes ethnoracial identification as an *explanandum* (an outcome to be explained) has shown that the propensity to self-identify as a member of a particular ethnoracial category is associated with people's socioeconomic status. Initially, scholars found that someone with higher socioeconomic status was more likely to identify as "White." As individuals' socioeconomic

status improves, there is evidence that they can rise to a higher level of a racialized hierarchy, usually represented by the category “White.” Research has found empirical support for the “money whitens” hypothesis in Venezuela (Wright 1990), Brazil (Schwartzman 2007), Puerto Rico (Loveman and Muniz 2007), the Dominican Republic (Howard 2001), Mexico (Sue 2013; Villarreal 2010), and also the United States (Saperstein and Penner 2012).

Despite the persistence of “whitening” in some countries, recent studies have found a more complex pattern of ethnoracial identification in which having a better socioeconomic status can “darken” (McNamee 2020; Telles and Flores 2013; Telles and Paschel 2014; Villarreal and Bailey 2020). Instead of “whitening” being associated with higher socioeconomic status, scholars now find evidence of “darkening” at higher status levels. For example, Telles and Flores (2013) found that highly educated respondents with similar skin tones in Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Peru, Mexico, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Colombia, and Venezuela were less likely to identify as “White.” This literature consistently shows that it is *education* and not economic wealth what lead people to self-identify with categories of Blackness (Telles and Paschel 2014). In this sense, to be precise, this body of research has found supporting evidence for the “education darkens” hypothesis.

These recent findings have profound consequences for understanding the relationship between the ethnoracial *identification* with categories of Blackness and the ethnoracial *inequality* affecting people of African descent. If the upwardly mobile are disproportionately inclined to identify as “White” (“money whitens”), then the data may *overestimate* the extent of ethnoracial inequality affecting people of African descent. In this case, those who are better off will no longer be recorded within the categories of Blackness. However, if the upwardly mobile are disproportionately inclined to

identify with categories of Blackness (“education darkens”), then the data may *underestimate* the extent of ethnoracial inequality affecting people of African descent. In this case, those who are better off will still be recorded within the categories of Blackness.

This body of research has also made evident the risks of conceiving ethnoracial identification as an *exogenous* factor in the dynamics of ethnoracial inequality. As findings from this literature suggest, analysts should avoid treating ethnoracial identification as an *independent* variable because the propensity to self-identify with a category of Blackness is *intrinsic* to the very dynamics of ethnoracial inequality. In the “education darkens” scenario, analysts should control for the effects of the educational level on the probability of self-identifying with categories of Blackness to have better estimates of ethnoracial inequality because, in this case, education is *endogenous* to ethnoracial identification and not exogenous to it.

And yet, a more robust understanding of endogenous conditions remains to be explored. Most research in this field continues focusing on individual-level characteristics as the main endogenous factors of ethnoracial identification. The predominance of survey analyses in this literature may have led researchers to conceptualize collective-level factors as plausible but post hoc explanatory contexts of statistical correlations only observed at the individual level (e.g., (Telles and Paschel 2014; Villarreal 2014)).¹⁷² Although individual-level attributes may be useful to identify subjective dispositions that

¹⁷² In both instances, researchers appealed to the recent context of multicultural policy reforms as a collective-level factor that helps explain statistical correlations between the identifications with categories of Blackness and higher levels of education (Villarreal 2014:801-802, Telles and Paschel 2014:895-899). And yet, both analyses lacked a direct observation of such a collective-level factor.

make categorical identification more likely, the full range of endogenous factors does not end at the dispositional level.

The analysis of categorization politics can offer some insights into collective-level factors that are also intrinsic to ethnoracial identification. While current research has focused on endogenous variables that shape ethnoracial identification from the point of view of the *individual* “consumption” of ethnoracial categories, the analysis of categorization struggles can shed some light on endogenous conditions that shape ethnoracial identification from the point of view of the *collective* “production” of those categories. In other words, what is endogenous in the process of self-identification are not only the individual-level *dispositions of “consumers”* that structure the *demand* but also the collective-level *positions of “producers”* that structure the *supply* of ethnoracial categories. Examining the mutually constitutive relationship between consumers’ dispositions and producers’ positions may offer a more robust understanding of the endogeneity of ethnoracial identification.

In which way is the space of categorization struggles *endogenous* to the process of self-identification with a particular ethnoracial category? As Bourdieu suggests, the symbolic relationship between people who are represented and the representation of themselves is mediated by the relationship of competition between their representatives. “The congruence between signifier and signified, between the representative and the represented, doubtless results [...] from the homology between the structure of the political field and the structure of the world represented” (Bourdieu 1991b:182). For our purposes, this means that the propensity to self-identify with a particular ethnoracial category is doubly determined by the relative affinity between the struggles of “producers” of categories in the political field and the struggles of “consumers” of categories in the social space.

The identification with ethnoracial categories of Blackness is then the endogenous product of two sets of interests that are in constant tension: the “esoteric aims” of the *internal* competition within the political field and the “exoteric aims” of the *external* competition within the social world (Bourdieu 1991:183). Two hypothetical scenarios can be expected from this constitutive contradiction. First, when this tension resolves *inwardly*, focusing on the internal struggles of the political space of “producers,” categories of Blackness may become relatively inaccessible to ordinary citizens (*esoteric representations*). Because categories produced in this state of the political field tend to require *more* cultural capital to be “consumed,” they are more likely to produce demographic estimates that *underestimate* the extent of ethnoracial inequality affecting people of African descent. Second, when this tension resolves *outwardly*, focusing on the external struggles of the social world of “consumers,” categories of Blackness could become easily accessible to most people (*exoteric representations*). In this state of the political field, the “consumption” of ethnoracial categories requires *less* cultural capital, which makes it more likely to *overestimate* the extent of ethnoracial inequality affecting people of African descent.¹⁷³

In this sense, the *political moment* in the relationship between producers and consumers of ethnoracial categories is a significant condition for understanding collective-level factors that are endogenous to ethnoracial processes of identification. What is the relationship between the politics of ethnoracial categorization and the economy of ethnoracial identification in Colombia and Mexico?

¹⁷³ To be sure, the level of cultural capital required to adequately understand the ethnoracial categories produced in the political space is not the only endogenous condition that shapes ethnoracial identification. And yet, considering the findings of the recent literature on the endogeneity of race, cultural capital constitutes a *nodal point* to understand how the dynamics of “production” and “consumption” of categories of Blackness shape the demographic representation of ethnoracial inequalities affecting people of African descent.

The following two sections will reconstruct the interstitial space of categorization struggles in each case to understand how different political moments shaped different processes of ethnoracial identification.

Adding the “Racial” to the “Ethnic” in Colombia’s 2005 Census

Once the ethnoracial statistics of the 1993 Census were published, DANE, the Colombia statistics agency, faced a new wave of critiques. By the second half of the 1990s, the space of categorization politics reopened with a new set of actors and claims. Within the academic field, a new coalition of national and international scholars articulated what they would later call a “materialist perspective of ‘ethno-racial processes’” (Barbary and Urrea 2004:30). A group of sociologists, anthropologists, statisticians, and geographers—supported by the Colombian government agency COLCIENCIAS,¹⁷⁴ the Colombian academic center CIDSE,¹⁷⁵ and the French research institute IRD¹⁷⁶—conducted two research projects on migrant mobility, segregation, and urbanization between 1996 and 2003.

Although both projects combined qualitative and quantitative approaches, a significant proportion of their research was based on two surveys that included, for the first time in Colombia, interviewer-ascribed “race” based on phenotypical characteristics. The first survey was conducted in the city of Cali in 1998 and included 1,880 households using two-stage random sampling. The second was

¹⁷⁴ Administrative Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (Colombia).

¹⁷⁵ Center for Socioeconomic Research and Documentation of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Economics from the Universidad del Valle (Colombia).

¹⁷⁶ Research Institute for Development (France).

implemented in 1999 in the same city, collecting data from 1,982 households and using a similar procedure. Whereas the first project was funded by Colciencias (the Department of Science, Technology, and Innovation of the Colombian government), the second project received support from the World Bank (Barbary and Urrea 2004:413-21). Many of the research findings of this project were published later in the book “*Gente Negra en Colombia*” (2004).

The first conception of this project emerged from the academic exchanges between Fernando Urrea (sociologist at CIDSE) and Michel Agier (anthropologist at IRD) in the Federal University of Bahia (Brazil) during the late 80s and early 90s. The initial idea was to conduct a comparative study between Cali and Salvador de Bahía. As Urrea recalls:

“During that experience of my stay in Brazil, I met my French anthropologist colleague Michel Agier. We became close friends because he was an office colleague of mine at the Human Resources Center, so I got to know his work. He was in Brazil as a researcher, and Michel invited me to see what he was doing. He was following up on all the identity constitution processes of the Black movement through the cultural expressions of Bahía, and I accompanied him to the field. He impressed me because he is a very fine anthropologist. So that really had a very strong impact on me. Later, Michel asked me to think about working together in Cali, and even the original proposal was about developing a comparative study Cali-Salvador de Bahía. So, when we decided to put together a project, we realized it was not very feasible to do a comparative study. So, we put together a proposal to do a study focused on Cali and all of southwestern Colombia to analyze the entire process of migratory mobility of the Black or Afro population in Cali. And there we decided to create a team between the Universidad del Valle that I led and the French group under the direction of Michel Agier, where Odile Hoffmann and Olivier Barbary were also present.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Fernando Urrea (March 2019).

Having Brazil as a model (through the research experience in Bahía) and Colombia as a laboratory (focused on Cali), the Franco-Colombian team developed a prolific line of research that disputed the results of the 1993 Census. For these scholars, the ethnic question of the census was a “heuristic failure” (Barbary et al. 1999:8). For example, in Cali—a city with a significant population of people of African descent—, only 0.5% responded affirmatively to the question of ethnic self-identification, 95.5% responded negatively, and 4% declined to answer. In their perspective, the low rate of response was not a methodological issue or operational problem but a conceptual one: the 1993 census attempted to measure a nonexistent reality. In their words,

“The result of the census question thus shows that there is no feeling of ethnic belonging shared and freely declared by significant groups of the population in Colombian society today. In its main purpose, the measurement of the demographic weight of Indigenous and Black minorities, the census experience was then a failure. However, this does not mean that there is no socio-racial discrimination in Colombian society in general and in Cali in particular, or that the victims of such discrimination, stigmatized as ‘Blacks’ or ‘Indians,’ are in such a small proportion.” (Barbary et al. 1999:10)

In order to account for patterns of “socio-racial” discrimination, this research group decided to focus on “Afrocolombian households” as one of central units of analysis. From their point of view, these were “households where at least one person from the primary family group, that is, the head of the household, spouse, or any of the children [...] show Black or Mulatto phenotypic traits.”¹⁷⁸ The main goal of this definition was to move away from “ethnic self-identification” (as it was included in

¹⁷⁸ Later, researchers from this group defined “Black” and “Mulatto” in reference to the degree of “African ascendancy” that is expressed in the phenotype, being “dominant” in the former and “combined” in the latter (Barbary 2004:63). However, they also recognized that “there is no clear border between “Mulatto” and “Mestizo” in any empirical situation, not even under exclusively emic considerations.” (Barbary and Urrea 2004:51).

the census question), using a “racial characterization” (based on phenotype) that was externally attributed by the interviewer. The new categorization, however, was not only individual but also collective, which implied classifying a significant proportion of mixed households as “Afrocolombian.”¹⁷⁹ In this sense, it was unavoidable to “include in the study the widest range possible situations of ‘mestizaje,’ in the biological sense (Mestizo and Mulatto population), as well as in the sense of household composition (‘racially mixed’ households, with individuals Black or Mulatto and individuals of other racial characteristics)” (Barbary et al. 1999:14-15).

The critical intervention of the CIDSE-IRD research team was both powerful and paradoxical. On the one hand, they were the first group of scholars to study the limitations of the 1993 census question systematically. Their use of census data for the city of Cali made evident the low rates of response by people of African descent in urban areas. On the other, they mobilized a significant amount of national and international resources to design and implement robust statistical instruments that could demonstrate a similar methodological rigor vis-à-vis official surveys. The publication of their results effectively discredited the ethnoracial numbers that emerged from the 1993 census. By the late 1990s, the capacity of the CIDSE-IRD researchers to objectivize a new understanding of the “Afrodescendent” population in tables and maps was unparalleled (See Figure 4.1).

The statistical estimates of Cali’s Afrodescendant population by the CIDSE-IRD surveys differed significantly from those of the 1993 Census. Using data aggregated at the level of

¹⁷⁹ Although the distinction between “Afrocolombian” and “Non-Afrocolombian” households was initially methodological (that is, a distinction for sampling purposes only), it also eventually became analytical (that is, a distinction for statistical observation) (Barbary et al. 1999:23). In this sense, the heterogeneity of household composition was considerable. Whereas in Afrocolombian households only 48% of persons were classified as “Black,” in the Non-Afrocolombian households only 63% was characterized as “White.” (Barbary et al. 1999:33).

“Afrocolombian” households, their estimates ranged between 27.5% to 37.2% of the city’s population. At the individual level, statistics also varied depending on the classification scheme. When respondents were externally classified, estimates ranged between 23.3% to 31.6%. When respondents self-identify, the estimate was 17.1% (DANE 2002:183). Despite considerable range variation, evidence from the CIDSE-IRD surveys seemed to demonstrate that the 1993 census data was significantly off the mark.

And yet, their revival of the “racial question” also represented the revival of categories of *castizaje* as renewed forms of Afrodescendency.¹⁸⁰ In a paradoxical move, the “racial characterization of the household” (Barbary et al. 1999:15) displaced the analytical focus from the “pure” to the “mixed” categories of Blackness. The category “Afrocolombian” was not only synonym with “Black” but also “Mulatto,” which, in turn, researchers admitted was difficult to distinguish from “Mestizo.” While operationally, the method shared some elements of the racist idiom—often employed to partition populations into a few categories using phenotypic characteristics—, substantively, the analysis included a wide variety of “racially mixed” households. Such expansive categorization of Blackness based on “race” would become a defining feature of the categorization politics of the late 1990s and early 2000s in Colombia. The growing attention to “race” (as opposed to “ethnicity”), or to “racial discrimination” (as opposed to “cultural difference”), coexisted with a growing salience of categories of “mixed Blackness.” Against the “ethnic” conceptualization of Blackness of the early 1990s based on culture, the “racial” understanding of the last 1990s based on phenotype promised to be statically accurate and categorically expansive.

¹⁸⁰ I understand *castizaje* as the polyvalent classifications around the notion of *casta* between the sixteenth and the early nineteenth century in Latin America. For a recent analysis of the notion of *castizaje*, see Vinson (2018:60–69). For a recent discussion of the notion of *casta* in eighteenth-century New Granada, see Rappaport (2014:224–37).

By the early 2000s, DANE, the Colombia statistics agency, had to admit the limitations of the census ethnoracial numbers. Having their technical authority significantly questioned, DANE officials realized that “there was a bias towards the indigenous, influenced by the constitutional changes.”¹⁸¹ “The way the question was formulated and codified—they acknowledged—did not allow us to differentiate between Blacks and Indigenous people. Many Blacks did not consider themselves as an ethnic group” (DANE 2002:82). Although DANE now recognized the bias in the wording of census question, they kept favoring the use of the category “Black” (as opposed to “Afrocolombian”), and also the principle of self-identification (as opposed to external classification).

Influenced by some principles of Cultural Anthropology, DANE officials wanted to preserve the way respondents think of themselves. The Anthropologist Yolanda Bodnar, then Director of Census and Demography at DANE, recalls that she “was opposed to asking for skin color.” “What mattered to me—Bodnar argued—was not how people were perceived by others, but how they think of themselves, and that was the cultural emphasis that seemed interesting to capture.”¹⁸² Bodnar was convinced that “the most accurate way to obtain census information related to ethnic groups is to use the criterion of self-identification of all people since it is the only one that starts from the recognition of the other.” In fact, Bodnar believed that “the characterization of people according to their physical features does not contribute to overcoming discrimination for these reasons but rather deepens it.” From her perspective, “when considering phenotypic traits [...] it should be taken into account that it

¹⁸¹ In addition to the criticism surrounding the publication of ethnoracial numbers, DANE was also criticized for excessive costs associated with data duplication issues (El Tiempo, “*Censo, del Afán Solo queda...*” November 24, 1994). The adjustment of the census data took several years. In 1996, the release of the official adjusted statistics showed an undercount of 11.7% (El Tiempo, “*Censo: Mas de lo que se decía,*” July 4, 1996).

¹⁸² Interview with Yolanda Bodnar (February 2022).

could strengthen concepts such as ‘race,’ which in the cultural order promotes discrimination.”

(Bodnar 2006:142–43).

For DANE officials like Bodnar, the use of external classification focusing on physical features could be helpful to measure racial discrimination in specialized surveys but not in the census. “When seeking to identify features of racial discrimination—Bodnar wrote—this criterion could provide valuable information in surveys and in-depth studies.” Despite the results of the 1993 census, DANE kept supporting the self-identification criteria and the ethnic framework to enumerate people of African descent. Unlike the CIDSE-IRD researchers, DANE officials believed that the undercount of the Afrocolombian population was not due to conceptual design but a lack of “ethnic consciousness” (Bodnar 2006:142–43).

Pressures on DANE to reconsider the 1993 census question came not only from national academic actors but also from various international agencies who opened regional spaces to discuss this issue. At least three different types of international actors were invested in the collection of census ethnoracial data. First, international development cooperation agencies like the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE), constituted in 1997 as the Population Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).¹⁸³ Second, international human rights institutions like the international agencies of the United Nations system.¹⁸⁴ And finally, multilateral development banks like the World Bank (WB) and the Inter-American Development

¹⁸³ The Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) is another example of international development cooperation agencies.

¹⁸⁴ Other examples of international human rights institutions are the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights that are part of the Organization of American States (OAS).

Bank (IDB).¹⁸⁵ During the late 1990s, CELADE took the initiative to organize regional events aiming to persuade national statistics agencies to reconsider the collection of ethnoracial data.¹⁸⁶ Later, the WB and the IDB joined and expanded CELADE's efforts in the region. Whereas CELADE's influence has focused on the technical aspects of census making process, the WB and the IDB have supported the financial aspects. The coordinated action of these actors shaped the international conditions that made possible the enumeration of people of African descent during the 2000 census round. By supporting domestic activists, providing direct logistical support for regional conferences, and developing new organizational goals for development projects, international human rights, and financial agencies effectively pressured national census bureaus to create a new wave of official ethnoracial numbers in Latin America (Loveman 2014:284-294). However, by the year 2000, it was unclear whether and how the census enumeration of people of African descent would be effectively implemented.

The WB-IDB-sponsored regional conference "Todos Contamos" (We all count) was one of the major international events of the 2000 decade that focused explicitly on the issue of ethnoracial census data collection. Co-organized by DANE in November of 2000 in Cartagena, the conference was oriented to discuss methodologies to estimate "ethnic membership" in the census, identify variables to measure the well-being of "ethnic groups," and define strategies to enhance the participation of "communities" in the census operation (DANE 2002:15). Representatives from

¹⁸⁵ Similarly, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) can be considered an example of a bilateral development institution.

¹⁸⁶ Some of the early regional events organized by CELADE included: Seminario Censos 2000, Diseño Conceptual y Temas a Investigar en América Latina (Santiago de Chile, 1998); Seminario Internacional, Censo de Población y Vivienda de 2000 (Cartagena, 1998); and Seminario Censo 2000 de Población y Vivienda de los Países Andinos (Lima, 2000).

twelve national census bureaus participated in the conference,¹⁸⁷ along with eight members of Indigenous organizations, eighteen members of Afrodescendent organizations, seven delegates from the WB, six from the IDB, and one from CELADE.

How did representatives of the WB and the IDB justify their interest and participation in “Todos Contamos”? Paulo Paiva, then Vice-president of Planning and Administration at IDB, argued that the “specter of inequality” kept haunting the region, with clear indications that there was a “relative concentration of poverty among specific racial, ethnic, and cultural groups.” Thus, from his perspective, “there is an enormous need to produce information about the socioeconomic conditions of different groups.” Among the different measures that IDB was planning to take against ethnoracial “social exclusion,” Paiva mentioned two: 1) the production of “new data and evidence to demonstrate the importance of the problem in the region and the need to pay explicit attention to racial and ethnic differences in order to achieve equitable growth.” And 2) the incorporation of “dimensions of race and ethnicity to the process of designing programs and policies in the context of Latin America and the Caribbean, in order to improve the possibilities of reaching traditionally excluded groups.” (DANE 2002:29-34).

Not only the IDB but also the WB joined efforts to discursively redefine the connection between “race” and “poverty.” According to Olivier Lafourcade, then Director of the Management Unit for Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela at the WB, there was also “increasing information from household surveys supporting the hypothesis that racial and ethnic factors play an important role in

¹⁸⁷ The twelve representatives came from Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, México, Panamá, Paraguay, Perú and Venezuela (DANE 2002:23).

the marginalization of Indigenous and Afro-Latin American populations” (DANE 2002:36). From the ethnically undifferentiated understanding of “the poor,” the WB was now transitioning to an ethnoracial definition of the same category. The statistical invisibility of “the poor” was now presented as the numeric invisibility of Indigenous and Afrodescendent populations. In Lafourcade’s words:

“A very important issue that has been discussed in numerous national and international forums is the ‘invisibility of the poor,’ especially when they belong to marginal ethnic or racial groups. In the inter-agency consultations,¹⁸⁸ sponsored by the World Bank, IDB, and the Inter-American Dialogue last July, several participants emphasized the issue of bias in national censuses, which frequently do not consider the racial and ethnic composition of the country.” (DANE 2002:37)

Both representatives of the IDB and the WB framed people of African descent through the unproblematic assimilation of poverty and ethnoracial difference. Without much data at hand, the invisibility of “the poor” was thus equated to the invisibility of “ethnic or racial groups.” In this narrative, the census appeared as a new strategic site of political intervention to solve both issues at once. For the same reason, the quantification of people by their ethnoracial differences also held the promise of achieving the “equitable growth” that had been so elusive in the Latin American region.

Beyond these general statements, it is unclear in the written record of the “Todos Contamos” conference what was the stance of IDB and WB representatives regarding the ethnoracial categories to be included in the census. Although the language of “race” was emerging as a discursive companion to

¹⁸⁸ The Inter-Agency Consultation on Race in Latin America (IAC) was a conglomerate of international development institutions that focused on issues of race discrimination and social exclusion affecting Afrodescendant populations in Latin America. The IAC was created in 2000, and included among its members the Inter-American Dialogue, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Pan-American Health Organization, the Inter-American Foundation, the Organization of American States’ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations (World Bank 2001).

the more familiar talk of “ethnicity,” it was unclear at the time if the former was articulated instead of or in addition to the latter. Similarly unspecific was their stance on the particular criteria of enumeration (i.e., external classification and/or self-identification). Although it was evident that these two powerful actors were invested in the collection of “ethnic” and “racial” census data, by the early 2000s, it was less evident what this type of enumeration would entail in each country.¹⁸⁹

The National Movement Cimarrón (*Movimiento Nacional Cimarrón*) had a more decisive stance toward a census enumeration focused on phenotypical characteristics. After the internal disputes of the early 1990s and the approval of Law 70 of 1993, Cimarrón focused more assertively (and unilaterally) on the politics of racial equality (Paschel 2016:65–68). As early as 1996, members of Cimarrón had taken to the Constitutional Court a case of lack of access to a local school district board on the basis of racial discrimination. The Constitutional Court accepted the “racial criteria” of the demand and granted the claim following principles of “positive differentiation.”¹⁹⁰

In the document submitted to the “Todos Contamos” conference, Juan de Dios Mosquera, leader of Cimarrón, denounced the lack of support from DANE. For Mosquera, “DANE has maintained a stubborn tradition of opposition to identifying the Afrocolombian population in national censuses with concrete and effective variables that allow determining their number and reality

¹⁸⁹ The IDB was one of the first international development organizations to focus on people of African descent in Latin America. The IDB supported Afrodescendent advocacy groups since 1992, including the Afrocolombian organization Cimarrón. The WB also began supporting Afrodescendent organizations in Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru during the early 1990s. The WB approved small-grants to these organizations with the goal of “improving their capacity to lobby and negotiate with their governments in terms of poverty reduction and social inclusion policies and strategies, as well as to plan, implement, and evaluate their self-managed community development programs” (World Bank 2003:9). For a more detailed discussion of the engagement of multilateral development banks with local Afrodescendent issues and organizations, see Lennox (2020:242–48).

¹⁹⁰ See Corte Constitucional, judgement no. T-422/96, September 10, 1996. (<https://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/relatoria/1996/T-422-96.htm>)

within the national population.” “DANE cannot pretend to continue deceiving the country and the Afrocolombian people,” he wrote. After all, Mosquera was convinced that “it is an undeniable reality that the Afrocolombian population is the majority of the national population, with a dominant influence on genetic factors and the cultural life of the nation.” Following this perspective, Mosquera proposed “the identification of the Afrocolombian population in the national census using the racial phenotype.” The suggested census question reads as follows: “What racial group does the family (or person) belong to? 1. Afrocolombian, 2. Black, 3. Brown (Moreno), 4. Mulatto, 5. Brunette (Trigueño), 6. Zambo, 7. Mestizo or Hispanic-Indigenous, 8. Indigenous, 9. White or Spanish-Colombian” (DANE 2002:223-224).

The perspective of Cimarrón encapsulated the expansive categorical stance based on “race” that had also been advanced in the academic field by the CIDSE-IRD team. On the one hand, Cimarrón demanded to focus on the “racial phenotype” as a remedy to the conceptual bias of the 1993 census. If the main problem of the census was understood to be its “ethnic” assumptions, the solution now seemed to be found in a “racial” perspective. On the other hand, such a stance should be nonetheless categorically expansive. Instead of subsuming all forms of identification into a single category, Cimarrón proposed to include a wide variety of categories of Blackness. As Juan de Dios recalls, “we wanted people to say ‘yes’ wherever they wanted [i.e., Brown, Mulatto, Zambo, etc.] and then add that as Afrocolombian.”¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ Interview with Juan de Dios Mosquera (February of 2022).

Although by the early 2000s, the stance of Cimarrón was getting traction, it was far from being dominant. Even within the social movement field, it was still unclear what could be the best approach to enumerate people of African descent in the next census. As it was recorded in the minutes of the “Todos Contamos” conference, “different representatives of the Afrocolombian population expressed some non-unified considerations regarding the enumeration of the diversity in the census.” For some members of Afrocolombian organizations, it was necessary to include three questions: “One on self-recognition with different alternatives; another one on ancestry and origin (what population group does the person come from?); and yet another one on the enumerator’s perception of the respondent. The latter is not formulated to the informant.” (DANE 2002: 236-237).

The “Todos Contamos” conference was a decisive event in defining the issue of ethnoracial statistics as a regional problem. While it was unclear how the enumeration of people of African descent would be conducted in each country,¹⁹² the conference set the discursive boundaries of the problem. Instead of providing ready-made solutions for the upcoming census round, it exposed participants to a range of dichotomic stances to argue for or against. One of such dichotomies was the difference between “ethnic” self-identification and “racial” classification. According to one of the conclusions of the conference, the self-identification criteria “was good to enumerate indigenous populations, but it could produce underestimation in cases of lower ethnic consciousness.” On the contrary, the classification based on phenotype “could be useful to enumerate Afroamerican populations but, at the

¹⁹² Of the twelve countries that were officially represented at the conference, only Colombia, Ecuador and Guatemala had carried out a census of the Afrodescendant population (DANE 2022:391). Several representatives of national statistics agencies argued that there was a “lack of demand” for these data by government agencies and civil society organizations (DANE 2022:235).

same time, could lead to discriminatory attitudes” (DANE 2002: 392). This dichotomy was often presented in reference to the recent census experiences in Colombia and Brazil, respectively. Although there was nothing inherently “ethnic” about self-identification or “racial” about classification, these enumeration criteria were labeled in this way, indicating their presumed appropriateness for Indigenous and Afrodescendent populations, respectively.

Responding to these national and international pressures, by December of 2000, DANE included for the first time a question on “racial self-identification” in one of its surveys. The 2000 National Household Survey was conducted in thirteen metropolitan areas asking respondents to self-identify according to four pictures (See Figure 4.2). The goal was to elicit responses based on phenotypic traits without using ethnoracial categories. However, for the CIDSE-IRD researchers, the four pictures represented 1) a “Black man,” 2) a “Black-Mulatta woman,” 3) a “Mestizo woman,” and 4) a “White woman.” Although the CIDSE-IRD team understood this survey as different from the “ethnic” perspective and similar to the “racial” approach they observed in Brazil (Barbary and Urrea 2004:69–70), researchers failed to discuss the conflation of gender and class attributes that were built into the instrument. According to their interpretation of this survey, people of African descent represented 17.9% of the national population (Barbary and Urrea 2004:79).

Later in the 2000s, a new set of regional and international events consolidated the pressures on national statistics agencies to collect ethnoracial data in Latin American censuses. The “Todos Contamos II” conference co-hosted by the WB and the IDB in Lima (November 2002); The Conference of the Americas organized in Santiago (December 2000); and the Third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in

Durban (August 2001) included statements advocating for the collection of ethnoracial data.¹⁹³ By 2003, many of the pressures from international human rights organizations and financial institutions were coordinated from regional inter-organizational spaces. The Inter-Agency Consultation on Race in Latin America (IAC) was one of those conglomerates of international actors that focused on issues of race discrimination and social exclusion affecting Afrodescendant populations in Latin America. The IAC was created in 2000 and included among its members the Inter-American Dialogue, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Pan-American Health Organization, the Inter-American Foundation, the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations (World Bank 2001).

In 2003, the Inter-American Dialogue, one of the members of the IAC, published a "Race Report" describing the goals of their "program on race." This program sought to "raise the visibility of Afro-Latin populations" and "promote the incorporation of race-related concerns in the development policy agenda of governments and international cooperation agencies" (IAD 2003:3). Additionally, the Dialogue had a clear conviction of the role of "race" on social inequalities in the region:

"With few exceptions, Latin American governments and international aid organizations (multilateral, bilateral, public, and private) have largely ignored race in designing and implementing programs, even though it is obvious to even the most casual observer that race is a key factor in the distribution of income, wealth, and social services in the region. Data on race is still scarce and unreliable in most of Latin America, and there have been few serious efforts to study the needs and challenges confronting Afro-Latin Americans." (IAD 2003:6)

¹⁹³ For example, one of the conclusions of the Conference of the Americas stated: "We urge States to collect and publish statistical data, disaggregated by race and ethnic group, on health, the criminal justice system, housing, education, and employment, in order to facilitate the analysis of policies or programs that have a disproportionate impact on these groups, and to provide support for the development of specific policies or programs to remedy this impact." Proyecto de Declaración y Plan de Acción, Conferencia Regional de las Américas (Santiago de Chile, 5 a 7 de diciembre de 2000), WCR/RCONF/SANT/2000/L.1/Rev.4, P. 43.

From the late 1990s to the mid-2000s, the international conversation had significantly shifted from the “problem” of using “ethnicity” to the “need” of using “race” to collect census data on people of African descent. The Colombian state, in general, and DANE, in particular, were not convinced that shifting from ethnic self-identification to racial hetero-classification was the best methodological move for the new census. Although governmental agencies were convinced of the need to enumerate people of African descent, they were not willing to change the enumeration criteria of the 1993 census. In a 2004 policy planning document from the National Council for Economic and Social Policy (*Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social* CONPES),¹⁹⁴ the Colombian government officially announced the inclusion of a new question to identify the “Black or Afrocolombian” population.

According to this document:

“The lack of reliable and recurrent statistical and sociodemographic information on the Black or Afrocolombian population has generated inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the formulation of public policies for this sector of the population. That is why the Administrative Department of Statistics -DANE- will include in the next census some questions on ethnicity and territoriality, which will allow the location, identification, and quantification of the Black or Afrocolombian population.” (CONPES 2004:13)

As late as 2004, in a context in which national and international actors advocated for using “race” as the enumeration criteria, DANE kept referring to “questions on ethnicity and territoriality” that resembled the wording of the 1993 census question. Despite their growing internationalization, DANE officials were ambivalent about incorporating “race” as a methodological criterion for data

¹⁹⁴ The CONPES was created by Law 19 of 1958. It is the highest national planning authority and the principal advisory body to the Colombian government in all aspects related to socioeconomic development.

collection. César Caballero, then Director of DANE, was critical of the early official surveys that attempted to enumerate people of African descent, including the National Household Survey of 2000.

In an interview, Caballero recalled with disgust the design of this survey:

“Regarding the ethnic framework of the 2005 census, there is a very important moment. It is a speech where I, as director of DANE, go to Cali to an event with Afro organizations. There I make a reconstruction of the questions that DANE has asked since the 1900 censuses, I apologize for the invisibility, and I also apologize for a survey known as the ‘black-o-meter’ [*negrómetro*]. It was a survey with photos of people, and it had a picture of a blonde woman and other Afro people. It was a horrendous thing that people at DANE called the ‘black-o-meter.’ So I went to Cali to apologize and promise that the census question would be different and that it would be negotiated.”¹⁹⁵

For other Afrocolombian organizations like PCN, the 2005 census was a “strategic event” with multiple implications for their organizing process. For PCN, engaging in census politics would afford the opportunity to expand the identification process among its bases, reveal the exclusion of people of African descent with numbers, show the victimization rates affecting this population, and improve their connections with international actors. In their words, the statistical visibility would allow to “boost a broad national campaign among Black people for them to recognize as such.” It would also show the results of the “historical process of exclusion of the Afrocolombian population,” revealing “the worst indicators in everything that refers to life quality.” PCN was also interested in showing that “Afrocolombians are the group most affected by the war in Colombia” (Castillo et al. 2013:140–41). Finally, PCN activists valued the census data because ethnoracial numbers would allow them to attract support and strengthen connections with international organizations. As one of its members put it:

¹⁹⁵ Interview with César Caballero (February 2022).

“Another thing that motivated the PCN a lot to get involved in the census is that in reaching out and seeking solidarity support from NGOs, from democratic parliaments, including those of the United States, they always handle things with numbers, facts and concrete data. So, every time you went to talk to them, the question was how many and where, and it was always a problem with those numbers. That has been a very important reason why the PCN has recognized the value of the census.” (Castillo et al. 2013:141)

By the early 2000s, not only Afrocolombian organizations like PCN but also state agencies like DANE were seeking support from international actors. Since 2002, it had been publicly known that DANE lacked enough funds to conduct the census.¹⁹⁶ In fact, the census was planned to be conducted in 2003 and, due to “fiscal reasons,” it was postponed to 2004.¹⁹⁷ The “strict austerity policy” of the government had significantly reduced funds not only for the census but also for other statistical operations.¹⁹⁸ According to Caballero, during his tenure, DANE received a budget cut from 24,000 to 8,000 million pesos (i.e., from 9 to 3 million dollars).¹⁹⁹ The census was thus postponed for a second time to 2005. The census had an estimated cost of 200,000 million pesos (i.e., 75 million dollars), and it was not included in the government’s development plan due to an “oversight” or just a “mistake.”²⁰⁰ The lack of financial support from central state agencies led DANE to look for external sources of funding to cover the redesign of the census question, and one of those sources came from the World Bank (WB).

¹⁹⁶ El Tiempo, “*Sin censo el país se queda rezagado: DANE*” (October 8, 2002).

¹⁹⁷ El Tiempo, “*DANE quiere el censo en el 2004*” (October 6, 2002).

¹⁹⁸ El Tiempo, “*El DANE sigue desinflado*” (March 29, 2003).

¹⁹⁹ Interview with César Caballero (February 2022). El Tiempo, “*El DANE corto de plata*” (March 28, 2003).

²⁰⁰ El Tiempo, “*El censo sigue embolado*” (March 24, 2003).

With support from the WB, DANE held in January of 2004 in Bogotá an “Evaluation Workshop of the Ethnic Self-Identification Question.” The goal of the workshop was to “generate a consensus” around the new question in order to evaluate it as a pilot in the 2004 National Household Survey (DANE 2004:12). The workshop was attended by members of Afrocolombian and Indigenous organizations (e.g., Cimarrón), state agencies (e.g., National Department of Planning), academic researchers (e.g., CIDSE-IRD), officials of other statistic agencies in the region (e.g., INEC Argentina), and representatives of United Nations agencies (e.g., UN Population Fund). Analyzing the dynamics of this workshop is crucial to understand the legitimization strategies that justified the ethnoracial question of the 2005 census.

Workshop participants were divided into four groups to discuss enumeration criteria, question wordings, and response options. Group 1 suggested simplifying the heading of the question and supported “Afrocolombian,” “Black,” “Palenquero,” and “Raizal” as response categories. Group 2 proposed a similar approach but suggested “Zambo,” “Mulatto,” “Trigueño,” and “Moreno” as additional categories of Blackness. Group 3 advocated for a minimalist approach reducing all categories to “Afrocolombian” or “Afrodescendant.” Group 4 recommended including two different questions, one to identify with “physical characteristics” and another with “customs and traditions.” Although “Black” was included as a response category in both questions, “Mulatto” and “Zambo” were only included in reference to phenotype, and “Raizal” and “Afrodescendant” or “Afrocolombian” in relation to culture (See Table 4.1). All groups had in common a preference for multiple categorizations of Blackness, but it was unclear how many categories could be included and what enumeration criteria should be used.

The debates and negotiations were first articulated around the enumeration criteria. The emerging consensus was to include two different questions, one about ethnocultural identification and the other about phenotypical identification. This decision favored the proposal of Group 4, which in turn was aligned with the opinion of the CIDSE-IRD research team (DANE 2004:36). According to this perspective, in order to avoid the “ethnic” bias of the 1993 census question, it was necessary to add a “race” question based on phenotype. Whereas the first question seemed more appropriate for Indigenous populations, the second appeared to be more suitable for people of African descent:

“The arguments were that the Indigenous and Gypsies fully identify themselves as an ethnic group, while the Afrocolombian population does not necessarily. For this reason, it is essential to ask separately about the phenotype. In addition, we are taking into account that it is necessary to understand if the discrimination and inequalities suffered by the Afrocolombian population are fundamentally based on physical traits.” (DANE 2004:18).

However, the need to pay more attention to racial discrimination did not convince DANE officials to shift from self-identification to hetero-classification as the criteria for census enumeration. The question of phenotype emerged in this manner as the *second dimension of internal identification* and not as an alternative principle of external classification. According to this emerging consensus:

“The question about phenotype should be conducted using the self-recognition criteria and not the interviewer’s observation, due to the subjectivity that this implies and the difficulty in standardizing interviewers on this subject.” (DANE 2004: 18).

By accepting to include a question based on phenotype, DANE validated the recommendations of the CIDSE-IRD team, the claims of Afrocolombian organizations like Cimarrón, but also the pressure of international organizations like the Inter-American Dialogue that

demanded to collect data on “race” or “racial phenotype.” And yet, accepting these claims as legitimate did not imply abandoning self-identification as the primary criterion for census enumeration. Going by the terms of the debate, asking respondents to self-identify according to physical characteristics amounted to redefining “skin color” or “racial phenotype” as markers of “ethnic” identity, presumably the main problem of the 1993 census question.

The debate about the inclusion of ethnoracial categories was much more contentious. Although for most actors involved, it was clear that the 1993 census category of “Black Communities” had to be replaced, it was less clear which categories of Blackness should be considered. Moreover, most Afrocolombian organizations were interested in including a broad set of categories. And yet, the categorical boundaries of their expansive notion of Blackness had not been discussed. If the self-identification process involved various categories of “mixed Blackness,” what were the limits of that set of categories?

By September of 2004, during the “First National Socialization Workshop for the Afro-Colombian Population of the National Population and Housing Census,” Afrocolombian organizations and DANE agreed on the wording and the response categories of the “ethnic” question but disagreed on the components of the “racial” one. Regarding the first question, the consensus was to ask respondents to self-identify, based on “customs and traditions,” with the categories “Afrocolombian” (or “Afrodescendant”), “Raizal,” and “Palenquero.” Regarding the second question, there was a lack of consensus on the categories that would designate the phenotypes of Blackness. For Afrocolombian organizations, the phenotypic categories that should be included were “Black,”

“Moreno,” “Trigueño or Mulatto,” and “Zambo.” For DANE, the appropriate categories were “Black,” “Mulatto,” “Zambo,” “Mestizo,” and “White” (See Table 4.2).

After this workshop with Afrocolombian organizations, DANE decided to include two pilot questions in the 2004 Continuous Household Survey. One question asked respondents to self-identify according to their “culture” and had the categories “Afrocolombian,” “Raizal,” and “Palenquero” as categories of Blackness. The other question made a reference to “physical characteristics” and asked respondents to identify with either “Black,” “White,” “Mestizo,” or “Mulatto.” (See Table 4.3).

Whereas the first question estimated 1.2% of people of African descent, the second question yielded 9.8%. In total, the results of this survey estimated a population that was seven times larger than that of the 1993 census (1.52%). Such an increase seemed to corroborate not only the limitations of the prior census but also the diagnosis of its main problem: the “ethnic” or “culturalist” framework of the question.

The wording of the pilot questions in the 2004 Continuous Household Survey made explicit the terms of the emerging consensus between DANE and the coalition of Afrocolombian organizations, but also the basis of the pending dispute. Regarding agreements, DANE seemed to accept the two-question approach that Afrocolombian organizations had suggested without abandoning the self-identification framework. In this emerging compromise, “Black” was no longer conceived as a category of “ethnic” identification—as it had been defined in the 1993 census question—and now it was understood as a “physical characteristic.” Given that people of African descent seemed to identify more with the “racial” than the “ethnic” question, the category “Black” was increasingly conceived as “race,” while the category “Indigenous” remained defined as “ethnicity.” In

his memories of the negotiation process with Indigenous and Afrodescendent organizations, César Caballero, then Director of DANE, summarized this emerging consensus in the following way:

“[Another] learning front is the distinction between ethnicity and race. The first gives special importance to cultural, linguistic, and religious elements that make a group identify itself as different from the rest of the population. The second tries to capture the phenotypic characteristics of the inhabitants.

From my experience in carrying out an experimental census and in the application of the modules in two surveys, as well as in the permanent dialogue with Indigenous and Afrocolombian authorities, parliamentarians, and academics, it is clear to me that the first adequately captures the Indigenous peoples while Afrocolombians identify better with the second.” (Caballero 2004:98–99).

However, regarding disagreements, DANE officials had decided to exclude the categories “Trigueño” and “Moreno” from the pilot question. From their perspective, the category “Trigueño” was related to a notion of mestizaje that was not exclusively part of Blackness. According to DANE, the category “Trigueño” had an “ambiguous meaning when it is used to estimate the ethnic membership of persons.” For the statistics agency, “in the country, people of Trigueño skin color—the product of the Indian and White mestizaje—considered themselves as such, without self-identifying for the most part as Afrocolombians or members of the Black population” (DANE 2008:19).

Although Afrocolombian organizations argued that the category “Trigueño” was used by the National Registry to label people on their citizenship cards, DANE officials were unpersuaded (PCN 2006:17).

Although the category “Trigueño” was finally excluded, Afrocolombian activists considered that “not including the term ‘Trigueño’ will not allow counting adequately and is an exclusion for the Afrocolombian population” (Estupiñan 2018:48).

A similar dispute occurred around the category “Moreno.” Although DANE had initially accepted to include it in the question—clarifying that “the term ‘Moreno’ has not been tested in surveys nor census pilots.” (PCN 2006:17, Estupiñan 2018:48)—, the statistics agency later decided to remove it. From DANE’s perspective, the category “Moreno” was also not an exclusive category of Blackness. In a letter responding to an information request from the Afrocolombian organizations, DANE argued that “Moreno” was also a category of mestizaje between “Indigenous” and “White” populations that would lead to an “overestimation” of the Afrodescendant population:

“Regarding the term ‘Moreno,’ it is used throughout the Colombian territory, especially the Andean zone where the majority of the population resides, to determine the color of the skin resulting from the miscegenation of Indian and White. Another problem that has been evidenced is that many Indigenous persons have a ‘Moreno’ skin color, as is the case of the Wayúu, which would imply introducing filter questions. In this case, the self-recognition as ‘Indigenous’ would prevail over ‘Moreno.’ Without this type of procedure, the Black or Afro-Colombian population would be ‘miscounted’ since it would be overestimated.” (PCN 2006:19).²⁰¹

On the contrary, for social movement organizations like PCN, the exclusion of the category “Moreno” created an “underestimation” of the Afrocolombian population, particularly in the Caribbean region (Rodríguez-Garavito, Alfonso Sierra, and Cavalier Adarve 2008:49). From their point of view, “the strong negative charge that the term ‘Black’ has had on the Colombian Caribbean Coast due to the history of slavery and discrimination has led people to avoid self-identifying as

²⁰¹ Later, in a 2008 report, DANE considered that “the term Moreno is used in a large part of the Colombian territory to designate people who have a darker skin than Trigueños—among whom are Indigenous and Mestizos—who do not recognize themselves as Black either” (DANE 2008:19).

‘Black.’ In identification processes, this term has been replaced, euphemistically, by that of ‘Moreno.’” (Castillo et al. 2013:144).

At that point in the negotiations process, César Caballero resigned from DANE,²⁰² and the new Director, Ernesto Rojas, decided to implement several changes to the census. Among several modifications, the census operation was extended from one day to twelve months, data collection was implemented with new electronic devices, and the units of enumeration were also expanded to include businesses. Several academics criticized the modifications. What worried the academic community most was that all the changes occurred simultaneously without much planning or testing (Uribe Mallarino 2007:98–99). Under the new administration, DANE was no longer interested in continuing with the discussion over the wording and the response categories of the census question (Castillo et al. 2013:148; Estupiñan 2018:49; Quintero 2011:98–99; Rodríguez-Garavito et al. 2008:48–50).

The new director of DANE disregarded the agreements with the Afrocolombian organizations and formulated a single ethnoracial self-identification question for the 2005 census. The new question was: “According to your culture, people, and physical characteristics, are you... or do you consider yourself as ...?” The response categories were: “1) Indigenous, 2) Rom, 3) Raizal from the Archipelago

²⁰² Caballero resigned due to the inconvenient results of a security survey for the then right-wing president Alvaro Uribe (Uribe Mallarino 2007:96). As Caballero recalls, he was about to present the results from the Household Victimization Survey, and Uribe asked him to “either change the data or avoid publishing the survey.” Caballero refused to do so and presented his resignation letter before the initiation of the 2005 census. The differences between Caballero and Uribe had grown since 2003 when Uribe lost the Constitutional Referendum he had openly supported. According to Caballero, Uribe pressured him to change the death statistics to modify the official estimate of the population. Since deaths often go unreported in Colombia, the new statistic would have produced a smaller estimate of the voting population, which in turn would have helped Uribe’s government pass the Constitutional Referendum of 2003. However, Colombians only approved one of the fifteen questions of the referendum promoted by Uribe, and Caballero refused to modify the death statistics after the referendum results were published (Interview with César Caballero, February 2022). For some observers, “the referendum was the biggest defeat to hit Mr. Uribe since he was elected to office” (New York Times, “Uribe Loses Ground in Colombia Voting,” October 27, 2003).

of San Andrés and Providencia, 4) Palenquero from San Basilio, 5) Black, Mulatto, Afrocolombian, or Afrodescendant, 6) None of the above” (DANE 2005a:6). Although DANE officials included “Mulatto” as a category of Blackness, other categories like “Moreno,” and “Trigueño” were finally eliminated (See Figure 4.3).

For DANE officials, the new wording of the question synthesized in a “neutral form” the “cultural or ethnic” and the “phenotypic” dimensions without “sacrificing” any of them (Estupiñan 2006:63). For CIDSE researchers, the question “did not settle the discussion,” and instead provided “an eclectic solution with clear negative implications at the conceptual level” (Viáfara López 2011:15). For PCN activists, DANE’s unilateral decision demonstrated that their motivations were not “technical” but “political:”

“DANE has always assumed that the issues of censuses and statistics are merely technical issues and that the organizations and communities do not have the technical capacity to engage in those debates. However, we tell them that this is merely a political discussion and that the political is what shapes the technical because it has been very well demonstrated that the political brings both technical and methodological modifications. And we saw it. Before starting the new census, they changed the director of DANE, and with that change, all the agreements that the Afrocolombian social movement had established with DANE ended. And that was a political decision.”²⁰³

The distance between DANE and Afrocolombian organizations became more apparent during the discussion of the sensitizing campaign. Although DANE had agreed in the 2004 negotiations to support a sensitizing campaign for people of African descent, by 2005, the campaign had not been launched (PCN 2006:23). A coalition of Afrocolombian organizations led by PCN,

²⁰³ Interview with Jáder Gómez, February 2022.

CNOA, and Cimarrón designed the campaign “*Las Caras Lindas de mi Gente ...*” (“The Beautiful Faces of my ... People”), a title inspired in a well-known salsa song by Ismael Rivera that focuses on Blackness.²⁰⁴ Using funds from international organizations like the Church World Service (a faith-based organization located in the US), but also national organizations like Planeta Paz (a Colombian peace-building think tank), the campaign created various audiovisual materials to promote the self-identification of people of African descent (See Figure 4.4).

The design of television advertisements was one of the central pieces of the campaign. The first commercial presented Afrocolombian children declaring not only their regional origins but also their territorial identities. “*Soy Caribe*” (I’m Caribbean) and “*Soy Pacífico y soy mar*” (“I’m Pacific and sea”) were some of the expressions presented in the first part of the video. The metonymic association between pronouns and regions suggest an ethno-territorial identification that goes beyond the mere indication of place of origin.²⁰⁵ This form of identification appealed to the ethno-territorial conception of Blackness that had been mobilized in the early 1990s. The second part of the advertisement focused on incentivizing self-identification with several categories of Blackness. Persons of African descent of different genders and ages were shown reading different sections of the same message: “It doesn’t matter if we are Blacks, Mulattoes, or Morenos, we are all Afrocolombians or Afrodescendants.” The commercial ended with the following sentence: “Counting us in the census is a life option” (See Figure 4.5).

²⁰⁴ Other organizations included Asociación de Municipios con Población Afrocolombiana (Amunafro), Fedempacífico, Orcone, la Red Nacional de Jóvenes Afrocolombianos, la Red Nacional de Mujeres Afrocolombianas y la Red para el Avance de las Comunidades Afrodescendientes (Red Afro) (Rodríguez Morales 2010:93)

²⁰⁵ Notice that by removing the preposition “*de*” (“from”), the commercial suggests that people of African descent *are* places and not only *from* places.

The second advertisement presented persons of African descent across different gender categories, age groups, and urban and rural contexts. Although this video lacked territorial references, people's attires, tools, or instruments revealed their social backgrounds. As in the other commercial, this video showed persons declaring their self-identification not only with the ethnoracial categories approved by DANE (i.e., "Raizal," "Palenquero," "Black," "Mulatto," and "Afrodescendent") but also with those that DANE had dismissed (i.e., "Zambo" and "Moreno") (See Figure 4.6). In the same spirit of expanding the categories of Blackness under a broader notion of Afrodescendency, the advertisement ended with the framing of all persons saying at once: "proudly Afrocolombian." In this manner, the commercial visually sought to position "Afrocolombian" as the main category of social identification.

The video also included a CD-ROM with a booklet that provided a framework for the campaign. The text reads as follows:

"In the case of Blacks, Mulattoes, Zambos, Morenos, Afrodescendants, Afrocolombians, and Raizales, that is, all those descendants of Africans in Colombia, each and every one of the Colombians to whom our ancestors left us with at least a drop of African (Black) blood, this census constitutes a historical possibility. In the almost 200 years of republican life, today, there are no data on the total number of people of African descent in Colombia, nor real indicators of the socioeconomic situation in which they live.

In the census, they will ask: according to your physical features, do you, your people, or your culture are... Black, Mulatto, Zambo, Afrodescendant, Afrocolombian, Palenquero or Raizal. Being aware that answering this question means facing self-denial factors that have their causes in the discrimination and racism to which this population group and its members have been subjected throughout history, Afrocolombian organizations are developing advocacy, education, and mobilization actions so that we, people of African descent who inhabit this homeland, can self-identify when answering the questionnaire for the next General Census [...]." (Arocha 2005a:33)

This framework illustrates the expansive categorical stance based on “race” that had been articulated by academic actors (e.g., the CIDSE-IRD team), social movement organizations (e.g., Cimarrón), international agencies (e.g., the IAC), and now other Afrocolombian organizations like PCN—who a decade before had distanced from the politics of racial equality (Escobar and Pedrosa 1996:251–55). The sentence “at least a drop of African (Black) blood” seemed to illustrate what can be interpreted as a reference to the hypo-descent rule of the US (Arocha 2005a:33; Estupiñán 2021:286; Paschel 2013:1555). And yet, a closer look shows that the similarity was merely superficial. Unlike the US meaning of the hypo-descent rule—where anyone with a “Black” ancestor is considered “Black,” admitting nothing in between (Harris 1964:56)—this rhetorical extrapolation uses the same imagery to opposite ends. It appeals to the blood metaphor to introduce a wide variety of mixed categories of Blackness that defies the very notion of “hypo-descent,” that is, the affiliation with the subordinate category rather than the superordinate one. If anything, this discursive maneuver shows how the expansive categorical stance based on “race” attempted to revive categories of *castizaje* in which racial and ethnic (but also class) connotations were inextricably intertwined.

Although DANE officials recognized the technical and aesthetic value of the television advertisement, they refused to use it. According to the Director of DANE, the advertisement not only included ethnoracial categories not approved by DANE but also, if used massively by the institution, it would create an “ethnic unbalance” in relation to Indigenous and Rom peoples who lacked similar audiovisual resources (PCN 2006:23).

Given the lack of common grounds, Afrocolombian activists turn to the streets. On November 5 of 2005, they occupied for several days the San Francisco Church in Bogotá, affecting the transportation flow of one of the main avenues of the city.²⁰⁶ Census activists were joined by community councils, grassroots organizations, and Afrocolombian teachers to demand that “the agreements regarding the issues of DANE’s national census be respected.” Delegates of central state agencies agreed to negotiate, and as a result, DANE officials accepted to transmit the commercials designed by Afrocolombian organizations through the official television time slots (PCN 2006:24). DANE also agreed to establish the National Afrocolombian Board (*Junta Afrocolombiana Nacional*, JAN), and Territorial Afrocolombian Boards (*Juntas Afrocolombianas Territoriales*, JAT) as official participation spaces to integrate Afrocolombian activists in the development of the 2005 census (Estupiñan 2006:65–66). According to DANE’s Resolution 786 of 2005, the JAN and the JATs were created to a) incentivize the use of census information, b) create a statistical culture, c) train Afrocolombian researchers, d) strengthen census operations in territories of Black Communities, e) hire Afrocolombian staff as census interviewers, and f) promote the collaboration of the Afrodescendent population in the 2005 census (DANE 2005b:2) (See Figure 4.7).

With the creation of the JAN and the JATs, DANE seemed to bureaucratically resolve its legitimation deficit with Afrocolombian organizations while avoiding technical discussions on the census design. The census question and its response categories remained unchanged, and the criticism of various Afrocolombian organizations tended to wane over time. Although Caballero was no longer

²⁰⁶ El Tiempo, “Caos en la Carrera Séptima por doble manifestación” (November 5, 2005). El Tiempo, “Fin de la protesta Afrocolombiana” (November 10, 2005).

DANE's Director at that time, his dictum helps explain the legitimacy that the 2005 census held by the end of the process:

“In terms of public policy, the data has to be legitimate. And the legitimacy work has to be performed before and not after the data is published because good data is not only rigorous but also legitimate. And I believe that having this balance, particularly in the case of a census, is very, very important.”²⁰⁷

The results of the ethnoracial question of the 2005 census showed that 10.62% of the Colombian population self-identified as “Raizal,” “Palenquero,” “Black, Mulatto, Afrocolombian, or Afrodescendant.” The results presented people of African descent as the second largest population of Colombia, which also became the second country with more Afrodescendant citizens in Latin America after Brazil. Moreover, the Afrodescendent population now appeared geographically distributed across rural and urban territories throughout the country. These results seemed to confirm the estimation of the 2004 Continuous Household Survey: compared to the population size of the 1993 census (1.52%), the number was almost seven times larger.²⁰⁸ The growth was also more significant than that of the Indigenous population, who have expanded from 1.61% in 1993 to 3.43% in 2005. The increase in the size of the Afrocolombian population was only comparable to the decrease of the population without “ethnic membership.” According to the new census data, this population decreased from 96.87% in 1993 to 85.94% in 2005 (See Table 4.4).

²⁰⁷ Interview with César Caballero, February 2022.

²⁰⁸ The size of the Afrodescendent population was nonetheless below the estimates of the CIDSE-IRD research team. According to their 2001 projections, the population was estimated in 7.6 million (18.6%). In this sense, this group of researchers considered that by 2005 the actual Afrocolombian population could be estimated between 6.5 and 8.5 million (15% and 20%, respectively) (Urrea-Giraldo 2010:772, 790).

Afrocolombian organizations, however, were not entirely satisfied with the census results. “Despite all our efforts—wrote the Afrocolombian organizations PCN and CNOA—, DANE committed a repeated, permanent and well-known chain of errors that led many Afrocolombians to be once again made invisible in this sort of statistical genocide” (PCN 2006:4). PCN and CNOA surveyed 1429 persons in five cities to evaluate the census operation. According to their survey report, only 42.1% of respondents had been asked the census question about ethnoracial self-identification (PCN 2006:33). Although some organizations like PCN prepared to “sue the Colombian state before international organizations” (Castillo 2013:148), their critique had lost the resonance of the past. This can be seen as an expression of the closure of the political field around the census and its results.

Figure 4.8 shows the frequency of news about the census as they appeared in *El Tiempo*, one of the leading Colombian newspapers with national circulation.²⁰⁹ Between 1999 and 2009, this newspaper published 304 articles that made some reference to the 2005 census process or census data. The majority of the articles (73%) were published between 2003 and 2007. By 2009, however, less than 1% of the news made some reference to the census. Even if some activists still believed that the 2005 census had significantly undercounted the Afrodescendant population, after 2007, there seems to be no audience for it. By 2007, DANE argued that the 2005 census “was characterized by being totally binding and participatory” (DANE 2007:31). And by 2011, that version of the process had been endorsed by CEPAL as part of a set of recommendations for the 2010 census round in the region.

²⁰⁹ The universe of news about the census includes all articles retrievable from *El Tiempo* website that make some reference to the census process or census data. First, I used the categories “censo” and “DANE” to conduct an automated search on the website. Then, I manually downloaded and read each resulting entry to make sure it referred to the 2005 census in Colombia.

According to CEPAL, “the 2005 general census was characterized by being binding and participatory. The question on the census form was negotiated with the ethnic groups, and once it was defined, operative, administrative, and sensitizing processes were carried out.” (CEPAL 2011:47).

The results of the 2005 census were significantly more criticized than those of the 1993 census. Still today, actors involved in those episodes of census politics can speak about the many disagreements they have with the census process. And yet, the results of the 2005 census also seem legitimate for many of them. As Carlos Rosero, a coordinating member of PCN mentioned in an interview, “we need to rely on the census, which despite all its flaws, we must recognize that it is a neutral instrument to resolve this conflict [between the government and the organizations]” (Martínez 2012:197). What is the source of such recognition of neutrality despite all the acknowledged interests and biases? Among other reasons, the results of the 2005 census *also* became valid because they afforded a labor of legitimation for state and non-state actors who obtained symbolic profits across multiple fields of action. Although most actors engaged in the expansive categorical stance around “race,” this discursive posture afforded different things in different fields.

For academic actors like the CIDSE-IRD team, it was an opportunity to consolidate a research agenda on ethnoracial inequalities from a “materialist” perspective. Studying the “racial component” often meant constructing research objects and developing research methods that had not been central to what they defined as the “predominant culturalist models of the Colombian social sciences.” To the existing emphasis on “ancestry” and “cultural diffusion,” CIDSE-IRD researchers counterposed a focus on “sociodemographic” and “socioeconomic” components of ethnoracial differences. Following this perspective, they often framed their findings to criticize academic approaches akin to cultural

anthropology and the “official multiculturalist discourse” (Barbary and Urrea 2004:30–34). However, criticizing this discourse not only amounted to challenging state actors like DANE, who have been informed by it, but also social movement organizations like PCN, who had articulated ethno-political claims around it. How to address the “difficult relationship between the crossroads of knowledge and the crossroads of identity,” CIDSE-IRD researchers asked? (Barbary and Urrea 2004:406). The expansive categorical stance around “race” helped to address some of these tensions by providing the means to develop innovative academic contributions, criticize existing public policies, provide a new agenda for ethno-political demands, and appeal to international agencies.

For DANE officials, engaging with this stance was an opportunity to recover the technical legitimacy that had been lost with the results of the 1993 census and gather support from national and international actors for the development of the 2005 census. By the early 2000s, DANE had a delegitimized authority before academic and social movement audiences and a subordinated position within the bureaucratic field of state agencies. In this context, DANE officials were interested in restoring their credibility nationally and securing symbolic and material support internationally without appearing to lose its technical autonomy. The expansive categorical stance around “race” allowed DANE officials to improve their status in various fields at once. DANE officials engaged academics and activists early in the census process, aiming to incorporate some of their demands and secure their consent. Such actions also helped improve DANE’s appeal to international agencies who supported materially and symbolically the census operation. However, despite promoting international influences, the discourse on “race” was ambiguous enough to preserve DANE’s stance

on self-identification, including phenotype as another source of self-identification, and ultimately defining “race” as another form of “ethnicity.”²¹⁰

For Afrocolombian organizations, defending the expansive categorical stance on “race” represented the possibility of strengthening its organization process among their bases and expanding their connections with international actors. As the armed conflict escalated by the early 2000s, engaging in census politics became an opportunity to maintain their activism nationally and persuade audiences internationally. And yet, for some organizations like PCN, the racist terms of the debate implied abandoning some of their former stance against the politics of racial equality. On the contrary, for other organizations like Cimarrón, creating alliances around this type of politics also risked blurring the organizational distinctiveness that had characterized this organization since the late 1990s. The engagement with the expansive categorical stance on “race” was malleable enough to advance political claims based on cultural difference *and* racial equality without apparent contradiction. While admitting multiple categories of Blackness as “race” was not incompatible with defending the right to difference, accepting phenotypic characteristics as an “ethnic” form of self-identification was not inconsistent with claiming the right to equality.

Finally, for international organizations, the expansive categorical stance on “race” was an opportunity to develop new mechanisms to influence Latin American states. The lack of ethnoracial data on people of African descent provided enough leverage for international organizations to demand

²¹⁰ As late as 2008, for example, DANE officially defined “Afrocolombian” as a “person who has a recognized African ancestry and who possesses some cultural traits that provide uniqueness as a human group. They share a tradition and preserve particular customs, revealing an identity that distinguishes them from other groups, regardless of whether they live in the countryside or in the city.” (DANE 2008:46).

higher compliance with international regulations. And yet, by the late 1990s, most international organizations decided to exercise their influence indirectly to avoid appearing imposing or imperialistic.²¹¹ By supporting intermediary actors in academic and social movement fields, international organizations risk spending material and symbolic resources on organizations without much academic or activist capacity to intervene in ethnoracial politics. Maintaining an expansive categorical stance on “race” was helpful for international organizations to reach a broad range of actors whose actions could be eventually orchestrated across academic, social movement, and bureaucratic fields.

Adding the “Racial” to the “Ethnic” in Mexico’s 2020 Census

By 2015, the inter-field space of census politics in Mexico was experiencing a juncture similar to Colombia’s in the early 2000s. The results of the 2015 Intercensal Survey (*Encuesta Intercensal*, EIC) were historic and significant. And yet, for many of the actors involved in earlier episodes of census politics, the results had failed to provide a realistic account of Afrodescendant populations and ethnoracial inequalities.

The 2015 EIC showed an Afrodescendant population of 1,381,853 (1.2% of the population).

In absolute numbers, the survey showed an Afrodescendant population mainly distributed in the states of Mexico (304,274), Veracruz (266,163), Guerrero (229,514), Oaxaca (196,213), and Mexico

²¹¹ Perhaps the criticism that emerged from the early intervention of the Inter-American Foundation and the Ford Foundation during the 1970s and 1980s on ethnoracial issues in Brazil prevented these and other international organizations from taking a more direct approach (Lennox 2020:267-270).

City (160,353). Relative to the population of each federal entity, the survey indicated, the Afrodescendant population was primarily concentrated in the states of Guerrero (6.5%), Oaxaca (4.9%), Veracruz (3.3%), Mexico (1.9%) and Mexico City (1.8%). Aggregate averages at the national level in the 2015 EIC did not reveal significant inequalities between the Afrodescendant population and the rest of the Mexican population. For example, the 2015 EIC reported average years of schooling of 9.2 years for the Mexican population as a whole and 9.0 years for the Afrodescendant population (CONAPRED, CNDH, and INEGI 2017:37).

The RED coalition (*Red de Organizaciones de Pueblos Negros*)—which included social movement organizations like AFRICA (*Alianza para el Fortalecimiento de las Regiones Indígenas y Comunidades Afromexicanas*) but also academic institutions like the PUIC (*Programa Universitario Diversidad Cultural e Interculturalidad*)²¹² viewed the problem of the 2015 EIC results as “conceptual” rather than methodological. According to Nemesio Rodríguez, one of the coordinators of the PUIC in Oaxaca, INEGI failed to “respect local self-denominations” since México was a “prejudiced society” structured by the “ideology of mestizaje ... [a] racist ideology” that prevented people from self-identifying appropriately. Failure to recognize this context, Rodríguez argued, led governmental agencies like INEGI to use categories that census respondents did not understand:

When they are asked in terms of ‘Afrodescendant’—people don’t understand— or ‘Afromexican’—they also don’t understand— or even ‘Black’—as the context is derogatory, they say: ‘No, I am not Black.’ That is to say, people do not assume their belonging with pride. Why? Because of a discriminatory context that is stigmatizing. For this reason, the important thing is not to discuss whether or not to include ‘Black’ but to use the local self-denominations. Because if on the coast of Veracruz people say ‘Moreno,’ that should be fine,

²¹² The PUIC was formerly the PUMC (*Programa Universitario México Nación Multicultural*) at UNAM.

we should include ‘Moreno.’ A Mascogo should be a Mascogo. We have to respect that self-denomination. That’s where the big problem lies, because I think the problem is much deeper than the categories. We have to use these categories because there is a conceptual problem behind them. And it is a conceptual problem that neither the government nor academia wants to deal with.²¹³

Rodriguez’s point echoed RED’s stance on the response categories for the census question. It is worth remembering that RED had been advocating since 2014 for the inclusion of the category “Black,” but also other ethnonyms like “Mascogo” or “Jarocho.”²¹⁴ In April of 2017, members of RED restated their position, organizing the national colloquium “¿Cómo queremos llamarnos?” (How do we want to name ourselves?) in Mexico City. The organizing members of RED believed that the 2015 Intercensal Survey was “discriminatory for not taking into account the different regional forms of self-definition.” The main goal of the colloquium was to “identify the different names used by the Black peoples of Mexico in their regions in order to have a catalog of self-denominations to be included in INEGI’s 2020 census” (See Figure 4.9).

As the organizers intended, one of the results of the colloquium was a list of self-denominations. The list included “Black”—the category that members of RED mostly advocated for prior to the 2015 EIC— but also others like “Afroindigenous,” “Afromestizo,” “Costeño,” “Jarocho,” “Moreno,” and “Mascogo.” In total the catalogue of self-denominations included at least eleven different categories, many of them designating “mixed Blackness,” distributed across several regions of Mexico (See Table 4.5). Academics at PUIC sent a letter to INEGI’s director with the list of self-

²¹³ Interview with Nemesio Rodriguez (December 2020).

²¹⁴ RCPNM “Carta Abierta,” Pinotepa Nacional, Oaxaca, 21 de marzo del 2014. See also Ch. 3.

denominations, restating that the 2015 EIC had produced an “underreporting of the cultural diversity of the country,” and also referencing the “legal obligation to respect and include the set of self-denominations of the Black peoples of Mexico.”²¹⁵

At this colloquium, members of RED advocated for an expansive categorization of Blackness. However, unlike their Colombian counterparts, this expansive understanding of Blackness was not based on “race” but “culture.” Although members of RED recognized the role of racism and discrimination in self-identification, their stance was articulated around anthropological knowledge and legal expertise on “cultural diversity.” As the director of PUIC put it at the beginning of the colloquium, their goal was twofold: to question the category “Mestizo” that previous anthropologists had “enthroned” as the “ethnic symbol of national identity”, and to facilitate a “juridical transformation... [of the] ... cultural dimension of citizenship.”²¹⁶

Another perspective was offered by members of the collective COPERA (*Colectivo para Eliminar el Racismo de México*).²¹⁷ Monica Moreno Figueroa and Emiko Saldívar, coordinating members of COPERA, were some of the first academics from international institutions to study the results of the 2015 EIC. During a 2016 visit to Costa Chica, both researchers were quoted in an interview suggesting that the survey results were a “tremendous blow’ for the organizations that

²¹⁵ PUIC-DG/097/17, Ciudad Universitaria, Cd. de México, 20 de abril de 2017, Resultados del Coloquio Nacional

²¹⁶ Intervention by the Ethnologist José del Val Blanco, director of PUIC.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4kWnzKUYCA>)

²¹⁷ The Collective COPERA was founded in 2011 by the researchers Monica Moreno Figueroa (University of Cambridge), Emiko Saldívar (University of California, Santa Barbara), and Alicia Castellanos (Universidad Autónoma de México, Iztapalapa) (<https://research.sociology.cam.ac.uk/profile/dr-monica-moreno-figueroa>). COPERA is now integrated by a wider group of academics and activists oriented to “promote and further the understanding and recognition of racist practices and the elaboration of an antiracist agenda in Mexico” (<https://www.anth.ucsb.edu/people/emiko-saldivar>).

promote the constitutional recognition of Afromexican peoples and communities ‘because they clearly show that this population is not in a state of poverty or marginalization,’ as they proclaim.” Moreover, Moreno Figueroa and Saldívar argued that “instead of asking how a person self-identifies according to their culture and their history, we should ask how they self-identify according to their skin color and appearance” (Añorve 2016b).

Social movement organizations that had participated in negotiations over the 2015 EIC question, reacted quickly to these statements. As Israel Reyes, leader of the social movement organization AFRICA, recalls:

Mónica Moreno and Emiko Saldívar said that everything is ok, that the Black people do not need a budget, because they are even above the national average in education, in health, in housing, and that we are great. So, we protest and force these two persons to retract from their position. We had a meeting in Pinotepa the day after the note came out. When we found out, we started talking with people who have accompanied us along the way to let them know about the situation, and they were willing to sign a document in which we expressed our disgust. So, it was signed, that note was exposed and well, these people did not like it and they had to retract.²¹⁸

The next day, another interview was published in which Moreno Figueroa and Saldívar clarified their evaluation of the 2015 EIC results. In their words,

It is important to emphasize that including the recognition question in INEGI’s survey is a great achievement, which reflects the work of several years of organizations, academics and INEGI to respond to the demands of Black people. More than a flaw in how the survey was carried out, we believe that these data are an opportunity for us to think about reformulating a question that better reflects the situation of discrimination and inequality in which Black people live. For example, one could think of the Colombian experience that by including appearance plus culture and history, the data was more successful (Añorve 2016a).

²¹⁸ Interview with Israel Reyes (December 2020).

The intervention of researchers at COPERA had been misunderstood by Afromexican activists. While Moreno Figueroa and Saldívar intended to criticize the framing of the 2015 EIC question, Reyes believed they approved its results. As we shall see, the relationship between COPERA and the Afromexican social movement organizations improved considerably over time. In fact, Emiko Saldívar was later invited as a panelist in the National Colloquium “*¿Cómo queremos llamarnos?*” And yet, this seemingly futile impasse helps highlight the new space of actors and stances that configured the new wave of categorization politics before the 2020 census.

On one hand, pushback from social movement organizations shows the effects of the legitimation process before the 2015 EIC. Questioning the wording of the question and the survey results challenged not only INEGI but also all the other actors who had been party to the contested negotiations. In other words, this impasse revealed that the 2015 EIC question belonged to state actors like INEGI as much as it belonged to non-state actors like AFRICA, who now came to its defense.

On the other hand, COPERA’s intervention was also one of the first attempts to frame discussion of the 2015 EIC results using the terms that Colombian researchers had used more than ten years ago. The reference to “skin color” and “appearance” represented an attempt to move the conversation on census classification from “culture” to “race.” As Emiko Saldívar suggested in her intervention at the “*¿Cómo queremos llamarnos?*” colloquium, it was important to go beyond the “terms that multicultural policies left us” in order to discuss “which question would make it possible to capture racial equality.” She was interested in exploring “how would talking about racial injustice, and not just about rights, change the terms of the discussion.” After all, she believed that

“empowerment is important but it is not the solution to racism.”²¹⁹ COPERA’s stance followed that of the CIDSE-IRD researchers in Colombia, and was reinforced by the fact members of both research teams had recently participated in the PERLA project.²²⁰ Like their Colombian counterparts, COPERA researchers faced the dilemma of changing the terms of the political discussion without undermining the political mobilization already formed around them. Unlike their Colombian counterparts, however, COPERA researchers lacked access to an independent source of statistical information to dispute the 2015 EIC results in “technical” terms.

That situation would change significantly with the publication of INEGI’s Intergeneration Mobility Module of the National Household Survey (MMSI). This survey was conducted in 2016 and, although it was administered by INEGI, the ethnoracial question was designed the Mexican sociologist, Patricio Solís, at COLMEX. The 2016 MMSI was a national representative sample of more than 25,000 households, allowing the survey to evaluate social mobility in reference to educational attainment, occupational status, and socioeconomic characteristics. The innovation of the 2016 MMSI was the inclusion of two queries: a self-identification question based on skin color and a self-identification question based on “racial origins.” First, following the methodology of the PERLA project, INEGI’s survey asked people to identify the color of their face on a chromatic scale. Then, the survey posed the following question: “People of multiple racial origins live in our country, do you

²¹⁹ Intervention by the Emiko Saldívar (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=elaYc1h-RJs>).

²²⁰ The Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA) was formed in 2008 by a multinational team of researchers interested in collecting and analyzing survey data on ethnoracial inequality in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. Fernando Urrea and Emiko Saldívar were members of the Colombian and Mexican teams, respectively. Both researchers support one of the findings from the PERLA project: “externally assessed ethnoracial classification results in greater inequality than relying on self-identity” (Telles and PERLA 2014:227-228).

consider yourself a ... person?” And the response categories were “Black or Mulatto,”²²¹ “Indigenous,” “Mestizo,” “White,” “Other Race.” (See Figure 4.10).

In contrast with the 2015 EIC, the 2016 MMSI question’s wording eliminated references to “culture,” “traditions,” or “history.” Instead, it added an explicit reference to “racial origins.” Regarding the response categories, the 2016 MMSI removed the categories “Afromexican” or “Afrodescendant,” kept “Black,” and added “Mestizo” and “White” in the context of “Other races.” If the 2015 EIC question had been INEGI’s first attempt to enumerate people of African descent based on culture, the 2016 MMSI question was the first attempt to do so based on race.

However, compared to the Colombian academics and bureaucrats who had attempted a similar turn in official statistics a decade earlier, the strategy of their Mexican counterparts was different. In Colombia, CIDSE-IRD researchers and DANE officials had adopted an expansive categorization of Blackness—adding new categorical references to the 2005 census question—whereas in Mexico, COLMEX researchers and INEGI officials used restrictive categorization, limiting the categorical options that had been included in the 2015 EIC. In both cases, there was an attempt to place the issue of racial inequality at the center of the debates of official data collection. And yet, the official revival of the racial understanding of Blackness meant different things in each country. While “race” in Colombia was *categorically expansive*, in Mexico, it was *categorically limited*.

²²¹ In the interviewer’s manual, INEGI defined “Mulatto” as a “person born to a White father and a Black mother or Black father and White mother,” and “Black” as a “person whose skin tone is darker than others called ‘White’” (INEGI 2017 Manual:70). Whereas “Mulatto” was defined by ancestry, “Black” was defined by skin tone. In the chromatic scale, however, it was by definition unclear what were the chromatic boundaries of Blackness.

Unlike the results of the 2015 EIC, the 2016 MMSI shows evidence of ethnoracial inequality. The use of the chromatic scale showed that people with darker skin tones had lower levels of educational attainment. For instance, whereas 28.8% of people identified with the darkest skin color (scale A) did not finish elementary school, 28.8% of people identified with the lightest skin color (scale K) completed high school (See Table 4.6).²²² The 2016 MMSI also showed skin color differences by occupational status. For example, in a tweet that circulated widely, INEGI's director, Julio Santaella, wrote: "People with lighter skin tones are directors, bosses or professionals; those with darker skin tones are craftsmen, operators, or support."²²³

Results from the 2016 MMSI were quickly picked up by the media with positive and negative reactions. "INEGI revealed our pigmentocracy," declared a news headline. "Skin color largely determines the education that we Mexicans receive and the jobs that we end up doing. Pigmentocracy exists in Mexico. Now there is no doubt about it," the article concluded.²²⁴ On the contrary, for other journalists, INEGI had gone too far. For them, Santaella had exceeded his functions and they demanded his resignation as INEGI's director. "It is and will continue to be unacceptable for the director to make an absurd, wrong, [and] exotic interpretation of an INEGI study. To make matters worse, the interpretation that Santaella makes is racist and deterministic," a journalist said.²²⁵

The debate around the results of the 2016 MMSI also had repercussions within the academic field. An emblematic critical response was published in an open letter by the academic group

²²² Figure 16 presents one of the first tabulations of the 2016 MMSI data published by INEGI in 2017. A more detailed analysis of the ethnoracial data of this survey can be found in Solís (2019).

²²³ <https://twitter.com/SantaellaJulio/status/875733323276062722>

²²⁴ <https://www.huffingtonpost.com.mx/leo-peralta/el-inegi-revelo-nuestra-pigmentocracia>

²²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=td8Pi-nx6dc>

INTEGRA, an “interdisciplinary research network on identities, racism and xenophobia in Latin America [...] constituted by 115 academics from 50 research and higher education institutions located in 15 states of the country.” Although INTEGRA researchers celebrated the fact that the 2016 MMSI stimulated the public debate on the relationship between skin color and social mobility in Mexico, they also lamented INEGI’s official use of the notion of “race.” From their perspective, INEGI had not taken sufficient precautions to remind the Mexican public that “races don’t exist, but racism does.” According to members of INTEGRA, the use of a racist language in the wording of the question and the response categories of the 2016 MMSI contributed to reify the notion of race:

It is worrying that the statistics of the Mexican State reproduce the category of race in their reports. The information presented by the MMSI equates ethnic self-ascription with belonging to a race. In its graphs, [the MMSI] classifies the Mexican population into the following races: ‘Indigenous, Mestizo, White and Others (Asian, Black and Mulatto).’ The way in which the category race is used here preserves the belief that races exist, and transforms the ethnic, cultural and physiognomic differences of human groups into races. (INTEGRA 2017)

In a tweet, Patricio Solís from COLMEX responded to INTEGRA:

Race does not exist from a genetic/biological point of view, but it does exist as a socially, historically and culturally constructed category based on socially relevant phenotypic traits. To say that ‘race does not exist’ is to pretend, with a discursive twist, to deny its ‘social existence’ and avoid making racism visible.²²⁶

The INTEGRA-COLMEX debate showed the various tensions that appeared within the Mexican academic field as new sources of ethnoracial data became available. Unlike the scholarly

²²⁶ <https://twitter.com/psolisaqui/status/878014050533167104>

debates that occurred prior to the 2015 EIC, the dispute was no longer contained within the boundaries of PUIC's *ethnographic* and INAH's *ethnohistoric* forms of anthropological knowledge (See Chapter 3). By 2017, the discussion had become more complex and the academic field more fragmented, with the inclusion of *race-centered* and *non-race-centered* forms of sociological knowledge.²²⁷ Whereas researchers at COPERA and COLMEX advocated for official data collection strategies focused on the notion of race, academics at INTEGRA demanded that INEGI move away from it.

Later, in 2018, academics from COPERA and COLMEX, together with other sociologists from the University of California, Santa Barbara and the University of Colorado, published a series of documents with recommendations for the 2020 census question. Comparing the results of the 2015 EIC with those of the 2016 MMSI, this group of researchers concluded that questions based on “cultural characteristics” or “cultural criteria” were associated with smaller population sizes and lower levels of ethnoracial inequality affecting people of African descent (Saldívar, Arenas, et al. 2018; Saldívar, Solís, and Arenas 2018). While the 2015 EIC estimated a population size of 1.3%, the 2016 MMSI estimated at least 2.6%. Moreover, whereas the 2015 EIC showed that the Afromexican population had, on average, 9.3 years of education, the 2016 MMSI showed 8.1 years at most (See Table 4.7). Two main recommendations emerged from these policy-oriented documents. First, academics proposed to “design and test questions that capture more reliably ethnoracial inequality using [...] skin color in a greater number of surveys carried out by INEGI, including the 2020 Census

²²⁷ Although research teams at COPERA, INTEGRA, and COLMEX are integrated by professionals from various disciplines, researchers trained as sociologists are some of the most prominent members of these organizations.

Expanded Questionnaire” (Saldívar, Arenas, et al. 2018:20). Second, researchers suggested that “more direct questions, without vague references to cultural origins, can [...] be useful for social and statistical visibility as well as to identify the conditions of social disadvantage affecting the Afrodescendant population.” (Saldívar, Solís, et al. 2018:52). Both recommendations were consistent with prior research from members of this group who found that “the emphasis on culture and cultural rights [...] over-shadowed demands for racial justice and equality” (Saldívar 2018:438–39).

Many of the findings discussed by this group of researchers were also disseminated through a series of conferences supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. In 2018, academics from COPERA, COLMEX, and U.S. Universities organized a series of events on statistics, racial inequality, and political reform in Guerrero, Mexico City, and Oaxaca. The goal of these conferences was to discuss the existing statistical data’s limited ability to reflect ethnoracial inequality in Mexico. These events were co-hosted by local universities such as Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero, Universidad Iberoamericana Ciudad de México, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores, and Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca; participants included researchers from other Latin American universities, e.g., Universidad del Valle (Colombia) and Universidad Católica (Perú).²²⁸ Beyond academic researchers, the organizers also invited activists from Indigenous and Afrodescendant organizations in Mexico, but also Colombia. For example, a member of Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN), the Afrocolombian organization, spoke at one of the conferences, sharing the

²²⁸ Many of the national and foreign academics who took part of these events had previously participated in or had connections to the team of researchers of the PERLA project.

experience of PCN in the 2005 Colombian census (Alvarado 2019). State officials from INEGI, INAH, and CONAPRED also took part in these conferences.²²⁹

This series of conferences was an attempt to publicize the perspective of this sector of the academic field among activists and state officials. Findings from surveys that used skin color classifications (e.g., PERLA or LAPOP) or racial identifications (e.g., the 2016 MMSI) to estimate social inequalities were compared to those of the 2015 EIC. The lack of evidence of ethnoracial inequality in the 2015 EIC was attributed to its reliance on “cultural criteria.” Much like their Colombian counterparts, these researchers advocated for the inclusion of two census questions: one based on physical traits, the other on ancestry and customs. Unlike the 2015 EIC question, researchers suggested including the category “Black” as a response category on its own—assuming that respondents would interpret it as a form of racial identification. The second category would then be “Afromexican or Afrodescendant,” followed by the categories “Indigenous,” “Mestizo,” “White,” “Other Origin,” and “None of the above.” (Saldívar, Solís, et al. 2018:52). With less than a year to start the census enumeration, this coalition of researchers supported by international agencies mobilized the new data to influence other actors within the fields of social movements and bureaucracy.

The dynamics of categorization politics also grew in complexity as other international actors intervened within the juridical field. In June of 2017, the Organization of American States (OAS) celebrated its 47th General Assembly in Cancun, Mexico. Prior to this event, the Institute on Race, Equality, and Human Rights (R&E)²³⁰ sponsored several Afromexican organizations to travel to

²²⁹ A more detailed account of these conferences can be found in: <https://censomx.wordpress.com/workshops/>

²³⁰ R&E is a US-based human rights organization created in 2014 with the aim of promoting the rights of Afro-Latinos, LGBTI people, indigenous peoples, women and other marginalized communities.

Cancun and take part in the Inter-American Forum Against Discrimination, a parallel event they organized. Acting as a broker between the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) and state and non-state actors, R&E invited sixty Afrodescendant and LGBTI organizations from Mexico and other Latin American countries to meet with Margarete May Macaulay, the IACHR's Rapporteur on the Rights of Afro-descendant persons and against Racial Discrimination (See Figure 4.11). Regarding Mexico, two main topics were discussed: "the work to improve census data collection ahead of the 2020 census—to better capture the full dimensions of Afromexicans' reality—and work to promote constitutional recognition of Afromexicans at the federal level."²³¹ Among the participants were state officials from INEGI and CONAPRED, academic researchers from INAH and the University of Veracruz, and several social organizations of the coalition that had previously supported the inclusion of the category "Black" in the 2015 EIC (e.g., AFRICA and UNPROAX), as well as those who defended the inclusion of the category "Afromexican" (e.g., MEXICO NEGRO, ECOSTA, MANO AMIGA, and PRD).

This event was significant for several reasons. For Afromexican activists, it was an opportunity to create international connections with agencies of the OAS system and other social movement organizations in the region. For some activists, the event represented the first step in articulating international pressure on INEGI to agree to a change in the 2020 census question.²³² Up to this point, the mobilization process of most Afromexican organizations had occurred at the local and national

²³¹ "The Institute Celebrates Inter-American Forum Against Discrimination in Cancun, Mexico" (<https://raceandequality.org/english/the-institute-celebrates-inter-american-forum-against-discrimination-in-cancun-mexico/>)

²³² Interview with Beatriz Amaro, member of UNPROAX (September 2020).

level. For the IACHR, it was an opportunity to contact Mexican state and non-state actors that could eventually support the approval of the Inter-American Convention Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, and Related Forms of Intolerance (A-68). As of 2016, only Costa Rica had adopted this convention. For Mexican state officials and academic researchers, it was also an opportunity to meet (and monitor) the network of international activism and advocacy emerging through this type of events. Researchers at INAH, for example, perceived the intervention of international actors like R&E to distort the dynamics of the census process.²³³ Finally, for R&E, the event was an opportunity to expand its influence over state and non-state actors in Mexico, while becoming a strategic enterprise within the OAS system. By 2017, R&E had experience supporting Afrodescendant organizations in other Latin American countries such as Colombia and Peru, and lobbying statistics agencies to include self-identification questions for people of African descent in national censuses.

From this point forward, at least two coalitions of actors emerged. The first coalition comprised Afromexican organizations (e.g., AFRICA, UNPROAX, Mano Amiga, and Petra Morga²³⁴) and academic institutions (e.g., PUIC and Universidad de Veracruz), closely aligned with international actors like COPERA and R&E. In terms of categorical stances previous to the 2015 EIC, this coalition mostly grouped actors engaged in mobilizing cultural politics and ethnographic knowledge around the category “Black” (See Chapter 3). This coalition brought together national actors committed to the politicization of Blackness as culture, and international actors interested in the politicization of Blackness as race.

²³³ Interview with Gabriela Iturralde, researcher at INAH (December 2020).

²³⁴ The organization Petra Morga was created in 2014 by Teresa Mojica Morga, a former PRD congressperson who was also part of CONAFRO (See Chapter 3).

The second coalition comprised another sector of Afromexican organizations (e.g., Mexico Negro, EPOCA, and ECOSTA) that were closer to academic researchers at INAH. The actors in this coalition were generally distant from COPERA and R&E, and their positions reflected a focus on concerns that were more national than international. Prior to the 2015 EIC, actors in this coalition had mainly mobilized development politics and ethnohistoric knowledge around the categories “Afromexican” and “Afrodescendant,” respectively (See Chapter 3). In a sense, this new moment in the political space reinscribed the categorical stances of the past upon a new international/national division that nonetheless did not clearly map onto the race-centered/non-race-centered visions of the academic sectors.

The different *modus operandi* of these two coalitions became evident in the different types of pressure they exercised against INEGI. In the months leading up to the 2020 census, members of the first coalition noted a change in INEGI’s attitude. Unlike the negotiation processes leading up to the 2015 EIC, this time the organizations were not invited to participate in the discussion of alternative questions, the design of the pilot tests, or the interpretation of their results. Additionally, some activists reported having heard unofficially from INEGI representatives that, due to budget cuts announced by the government, the Afrodescendant question might not be included in the 2020 census.²³⁵

Given this uncertainty, the first coalition of actors came together to summon INEGI to a hearing before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR). With support from

²³⁵Interview with Teresa Mojica Morga, leading member of Fundación Petra Morga (December 2020).

R&E and COPERA, in May 2019, Afromexican organizations from the first coalition attended the IACHR's 172 Period of Sessions in Kingston (Jamaica) with the aim of "bearing witness to the lack of formal and effective participation of Afromexicans to discuss the 2020 census round" (Letter to the IACHR 2019).

First, the coalition denounced the lack of transparency and dialogue. Although from September to November 2017, INEGI opened a public consultation through its website to receive suggestions for the 2020 census, its results were not binding. In 2018, INEGI reported a total of 932 proposals received, but did not clarify the implications they had for the census (INEGI 2018). Members of the coalition considered this process "undemocratic" (Letter to the IACHR 2019).

Second, the coalition pointed to the lack of formal and effective participation, stating that the lack of working-group meetings to discuss the wording of the question made this a "closed and non-transparent process" (Letter to the IACHR 2019). Although INEGI had participated in some academic forums, activists noted the lack of decision-binding spaces where they could participate in all stages of the process under equal conditions.

Third, the coalition highlighted the lack of discussion on the inclusion of ethnonyms. This point reinforced the stance of the RED coalition before the 2015 EIC. In 2014, INEGI had carried out a bias survey to assess the use of some ethnonyms, but no new evidence had been reported since

then.²³⁶ The organizations were concerned that “the results of the 2020 census did not reflect the reality and complexity of this population” (Letter to the IACHR 2019).²³⁷

Fourth, the coalition declared that they were unaware of the formulation of the self-identification question.²³⁸ They objected to the lack of clarity as to whether the question would be applied in the census at all; some of the organizations feared that the question would not be considered a priority, and believed it would be excluded from the 2020 census questionnaire.

Fifth, the coalition highlighted the separation of INEGI from other government agencies. Given their experience of dialogue in the pre-census phase of the 2015 EIC, the organizations noted an institutional disconnect and lack of leadership from INEGI on the issue of enumeration of the Afromexican population. To address this concern, the organizations emphasized, there was an urgent need for INEGI to “sensitize the different government sectors not only for the 2020 Census but to guarantee that the collection of this type of data continues constantly and permanently” (Letter to the IACHR 2019).

Finally, the coalition expressed concern about the lack of visibility of the socioeconomically disadvantaged condition of Afromexicans. Despite the achievements made in recent years in relation to statistical visibility, the organizations argued that “the results on the socioeconomic conditions of

²³⁶ Academics at the PUIC reported not having received a response from INEGI regarding the list of ethnonyms that resulted from the national colloquium “¿Cómo queremos llamarnos?” Interview with Nemesio Rodríguez, leading researcher at PUIC (December 2020).

²³⁷ By 2019, the concern about the lack of ethnonyms as one of the sources of the underreporting of the Afrodescendant population was defended by not only activist but also academic members of the coalition. Interview with Nemesio Rodríguez, researcher at PUIC (December 2020). Interview with Sagrario Cruz, researcher at Universidad Veracruzana (October 2020).

²³⁸ Interview with Juliana Acevedo, leading member of AFRICA (November 2020).

the Afrodescendant population are inaccurate because they do not reflect the marginality and poverty in which they live” (Letter to the IACHR 2019).

At the IACHR’s 172 Period of Sessions in Kingston (Jamaica), the representatives of the first coalition listed at least seven demands related to the 2020 census. They demanded guarantees on the inclusion of the question of ethnoracial self-identification, the allocation of the necessary budget to carry it out, the development of appropriate sensitizing campaigns, the inclusion of at least two ethnonyms, the organization of a permanent inter-institutional working group with the participation of Afromexican organizations, the dissemination of the results of public consultation and the pilot tests, and adequate training for pollsters, including participation of the Afromexican population in the polling (See Figure 4.12).

Summoning INEGI to the IACHR hearing highlighted the new coalition of actors in census politics ahead of the 2020 census. Compared to the process of the 2015 EIC, the dynamics of dispute included not only international actors but also internationally orchestrated repertoires of action. The interactions with actors like R&E made possible the diffusion of concrete forms of legal contention that were effective in regional and international human rights arenas. And yet, the categorical impacts of this new form of influence were still uncertain. For example, although the hearing at the IACHR demonstrated the strength of the relationship between Afromexican organizations and international actors like R&E and COPERA, it was unclear that activist demands were becoming increasingly race-centered. Despite the title of the hearing (“The racial criterion in the 2020 census of Mexico”), most of

the claims were geared to demand the inclusion of the question in the census, develop an awareness campaign, and establish formal channels of participation.²³⁹

The government agencies representing the Mexican state, however, had a different interpretation. Alejandro Encinas, representative of the Secretariat of the Interior (SEGOB), began his intervention admitting that the civil organizations “were right.” “Five centuries have had to pass in our country to begin to recognize and give visibility to the Afromexican or Afrodescendant population,” Encinas acknowledged. And yet, focusing on the title of the hearing, Encinas made clear his position regarding “the racial criterion:”

The Mexican state assumes that it is not necessarily the racial criterion that defines the identity of a community. The Mexican state—and this, I believe, is one of the advances we have in our country—does not admit the existence of human races, and recognizes the importance of including a self-identification criterion in its statistical activities and in the definition of public policies. In other words, differences between people are not due to race; although there is racism, prejudice and discrimination, which are precisely the issues we have to address (IACHR 2019).

Similarly, María Elisa Velázquez, one of the leading researchers at INAH, supported this stance:

We are obviously aware that there are serious problems of racism in Mexico. But the Mexican state cannot (nor much of the academy) recognize that races exist. That would go back to reproducing complicated concepts. Specific strategies and specific research are needed to fight against racism. One thing is the color of the skin, and another thing is the phenotype. In Mexico, we have many difficulties understanding what racism is, and we are fighting against that. But we cannot racialize a census where we measure skulls as was done in the 19th century.

²³⁹ According to one of the activists who participated in the writing process of the audience request letter, the title of the session was defined by the IACHR. The original title of the document was: “Request for a hearing on the lack of inclusion and effective participation of the Afromexican movement in the 2020 census process by INEGI and the inaccuracy of the data currently collected” (Carta Petición Audiencia CIDH). Interview with Beatriz Amaro, member of UNPROAX (September 2020).

We are asking for more intelligent and more adequate censuses. And, of course, they must have the participation of Afromexican organizations (IACHR 2019).

As representatives of the Mexican state before the IACHR, SEGOB and INAH's position echoed the concerns of the INTEGRA academic group and reinforced the Mexican state's long tradition of avoiding race as an official criterion for census enumeration. Although state officials recognized the existence of racism and racial discrimination in Mexico—a claim officially admitted within the Mexican bureaucratic field in the early 2000s— they nonetheless opposed using the notion of race in the census. This stance aligned with INTEGRA's concerns of reifying the notion of race in official instruments and also evoked INEGI's concerns of using the “antiscientific concept” of race in the 1930 census (See Chapter 3).

Although most of these claims were explicitly addressed to INEGI, the Institute did not appear at the hearing before the IACHR. It was through SEGOB and INAH that INEGI communicated its position, alleging “constitutional autonomy.” At the audience, state representatives reported that the question for the 2020 census had already been formulated.²⁴⁰ According to INEGI's message, the question would be stated as follows: “According to your ancestors and customs, do you consider yourself Afrodescendant or Black? Yes or No.” (IACHR 2019). This was the first time Afromexican organizations from both coalitions had heard about the official wording of the 2020 census question.

The question included several modifications with respect to the one that had been included in the 2015 EIC. The most significant change was the elimination of the category “Afromexican.”

²⁴⁰The full session can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IwjpsnimVOg>

According to INEGI, the results of a pilot test—which had not been published—showed that the term ‘Afromexican’ was a term the population did not understand. Therefore, INEGI had decided to eliminate it from the 2020 census question. This stance restated INEGI’s concerns with the category “Afromexican” that the Institute officials had expressed before the 2015 EIC (See Chapter 3).

Likewise, although INEGI recognized the need for a focused awareness campaign that would make the question of Afrodescendant self-identification widely known, it still refused to carry it out. According to state officials, “INEGI does not have the power to carry out campaigns [aimed at targeted population sectors] since they consider that it could affect the quality of the statistical data it produces.” (IACHR 2019). Instead, the statistics bureau proposed that other state agencies do it. SEGOB, for its part, mentioned the importance of opening a consultation working group to discuss the question, as well as the need for an awareness campaign.

After returning to Mexico, activists from the first coalition stated that they had not received a direct response from INEGI to the demands they had made through the IACHR.²⁴¹ A few days later, actors from the second coalition sent a letter to INEGI requesting access to the results of the pilot tests and the wording of the self-identification question. They requested “the results of the pilot tests and other methodological considerations that INEGI has related to ethnonyms and the self-identification question that will be used to count the Afromexican population in the 2020 Census” and asked for “an urgent meeting with the representatives of the various civil organizations and allies that make up the Afromexican National Movement.” (Letter to INEGI 2019). They asked to hold the meeting at

²⁴¹ Interview with Juliana Acevedo, member of AFRICA (November 2020). Interview with Beatriz Amaro, member of UNPROAX (September 2020). Interview with Teresa Mojica Morga, member of Fundación Petra Morga (December 2020).

Pinotepa Nacional (Oaxaca) with the aim of facilitating attendance for social movement representatives.

In July 2019, INEGI officials met in Pinotepa with Afromexican activists from the second coalition.²⁴² There, INEGI recognized the importance of “providing information that provides elements to make proposals or follow up on national programs or initiatives” (INEGI 2019b:11). Although INEGI had already participated in various academic forums on the inclusion of the Afrodescendant question in the 2020 census,²⁴³ this was the first time that it had a public meeting with Afromexican organizations.

At that meeting, INEGI presented the results of the thematic test, the pilot test, and the questionnaire test that the Institute had carried out for the 2020 census without the participation of civil organizations. According to these tests, the category “Afrodescendant” was not understood by the population; the category “Black” was more accurately understood, but the category “Afromexican” created confusion with the word “Mexican.” Likewise, INEGI found that the reference to “ancestors” was correct and that the question, in general, was understood by the majority of the population (See Figure 4.13).

As it was announced by SEGOB at the IACHR hearing, INEGI proposed several changes to the question used in EIC 2105. In the introductory clause, the new version eliminated references to

²⁴² According to some officials, INEGI representatives went to Pinotepa following a request from SEGOB. Interview with Jorge Guzmán López, coordinator of INEGI’s office in Oaxaca (December 2020).

²⁴³ Some of the academic forums included: “The Sustainable Development Goals: the development of Afrodescendant peoples” (Oaxaca, December 2017); “Challenges to measure indigenous and Afrodescendant ethnoracial inequality in Mexico” (Acapulco, February 2018); “Between Identity and Classification: Racial Inequality in the Americas” (Mexico City, June 2018).

“history” and “culture,” replacing them with “ancestors” and “customs.” Regarding the ethnoracial categories, INEGI kept the term “Black” but eliminated the term “Afromexican,” given the confusion it elicited. Although the term “Afrodescendant” was not fully understood either, INEGI decided to keep it to “focus on the Afrodescendant population born in other countries.” Finally, the statistics bureau also excluded the terms “*Costeño*,” “*Jarocho*,” and “*Moreno*” from the question, considering that they generated an “overestimation of the Afrodescendant population.” (INEGI 2019b:40). INEGI’s updated version of the question was: “Because of your ancestors and according to your customs and traditions, do you consider yourself Black or Afrodescendant? Yes or No” (See Figure 4.14).

Activists from the second coalition reacted negatively to INEGI’s presentation, criticizing not only the wording of the question but also its formulation process. First, they expressed their disagreement with the exclusion of the term “Afromexican.” For some activists who were at the meeting, eliminating the “Afromexican” category ignored not only the process of political mobilization that various organizations had been carrying out for years, but also the fact that many people did not feel identified with the category “Black” because of its pejorative charge:

There are people who, although they call themselves ‘Black,’ reject or do not accept the word because it historically implies discrimination, exclusion, marginalization, etc. And, although they know that they are Afrodescendants and that they have black skin, they do not accept it for those reasons. The word ‘Afromexican’ implies a much broader inclusion historically speaking, anthropologically speaking, and we have begun to work on the process of clarifying the meaning of that word.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Intervention by Sergio Peñaloza, member of Mexico Negro (Pinotepa Nacional, July 2019).

Second, activists denounced the lack of participation and expressed frustration over their exclusion from the process of designing tests and rewriting the question. Some felt that INEGI “[came] to present to us what they have already decided, when there have been many civil organizations who have not been invited to the process of building this.”²⁴⁵ They reminded INEGI of the need to create an inter-institutional working group with the participation of Afromexican organizations; this was requested before the IACHR but such a group had not yet been convened. They also noted that the consultation INEGI had enabled on its website did not adhere to the spirit of a prior, free and informed consultation, as established by ILO Convention 169:

There is a lot of talk about the right to free, prior and informed consultation and in this case, on the Afromexican issue, as always, it is not respected. The Afromexican People are not given their place. We have been talking about ‘Afromexicans’ for eight years, since the Charco Redondo agreements were adopted in 2011. Civil organizations made a commitment that we were going to socialize the term in our communities. This is how progress has been made, to the point that the term ‘Afromexican’ is already used in all the media. I see that there is a violation of a fundamental, primordial right of any people, which is the right to consultation.²⁴⁶

Third, activists were skeptical of the results of the preliminary tests. Some questioned the criteria used by INEGI to select the locations where the pilot tests were carried out. For example, they did not understand why one of the tests had been carried out in Jalisco—they felt that not considering sites where Afromexican organizations had a strong presence was highly problematic:

After several struggles, the word ‘Afromexican’ was included in the question of the Intercensal survey that was carried out. But we had to go against INEGI who was opposed to ‘Afromexican.’ Now I say, I’m not convinced by your statistical argument because you did a

²⁴⁵ Intervention by Mijane Jimenez, member of Mano Amiga (Pinotepa Nacional, July 2019).

²⁴⁶ Intervention by Rosa María Castro, member of AMCO (Pinotepa Nacional, July 2019).

count in Jalisco, and no wonder they don't know the term 'Afromexican.' However, there are organizations that for a long time have been carrying out a vigorous campaign to raise awareness. The contempt you may have for us is valid, but you shouldn't despise the labor we have invested in coining the term 'Afromexican.' And now you are going to remove it from the question. Well, that makes me angry.²⁴⁷

Fourth, activists underscored the contradiction between INEGI's removal of "Afromexican" from the census question and Congress's quasi-simultaneous inclusion of this category in the constitutional reform of 2019.²⁴⁸ For most activists from the second coalition, removing the category "Afromexican" from the census question represented a setback in their political representation process:

In Jamaica, we heard that INEGI was going to remove the word 'Afromexican,' and that worried us. That is why we are here because we heard in Jamaica that the word 'Afromexican' would not appear. We have worked hard to make our brothers, who are Black, understand this word. We tell them: 'look, here we are Black, but for the politicians in congress, for the state officials, we are Afromexicans.' Today, I want to say one thing: it is not possible that we have fought so hard to be included in the Constitution, and now, according to the INEGI, we are not going to appear as 'Afromexicans,' that is going backward.²⁴⁹

At Pinotepa, INEGI officials did their best to clarify that their position was "technical" and not "political." As one of them said, modifying the question was "a change that does not represent an

²⁴⁷ Intervention by Bulmaro García, former leader of CONAFRO, now member of Raíces de Identidad (Pinotepa Nacional, July 2019).

²⁴⁸ This reform amended Article 2 of the Mexican constitution to include a new section for "Afromexican peoples and communities." The new section, approved by congress in June of 2019, reads: "This Constitution recognizes the Afromexican peoples and communities, whatever their self-denomination, as part of the multicultural composition of the Nation. They will have the rights indicated in the previous sections of this article in the terms established by law, in order to guarantee their free determination, autonomy, development and social inclusion." Article 2 had been previously modified in 1992 to grant group-specific rights for Indigenous peoples.

²⁴⁹ Intervention by Nestor Ruiz, leading member of EPOCA (Pinotepa Nacional, July 2019).

imposition. We do not intend, in any way, to violate any rights of any person. The term [Afromexican] has caused us problems when we do statistical analyses. What we have is an increase or what we call an overestimation of the population.”²⁵⁰ For other officials, it was important to understand that the 2015 EIC question did not generate a “reliable answer.” And yet, by the end of the meeting, functionaries from INEGI had understood that considering the political aspect of the question was unavoidable. As one of INEGI’s representatives suggested, “the task we have now is, precisely, how to reconcile INEGI’s need to generate true statistics with the issue of the legal framework so that INEGI also does not ignore it.”²⁵¹

Members of Afromexican organizations understood that INEGI officials who attended to the Pinotepa meeting lacked the necessary authority to “fix the question.” One of the leaders made a proposal:

I want to ask all of you to commit to a meeting with the high decision-making levels of INEGI, if that possibility is not available here. I do want to tell you that we need this because we developed the [2015 EIC] question at the INEGI offices in Mexico City. If we have to go to Mexico City to discuss this, I think we would be willing to go.²⁵²

Representatives from INEGI accepted the suggestion, and a new meeting was scheduled for August 6 in Mexico City.

For INEGI officials, the meeting at Pinotepa had not gone as expected—the atmosphere evolved gradually from confusion to disbelief and anger. INEGI officials had hoped to convince

²⁵⁰ Intervention by Leonor Paz, INEGI’s director of conceptual design for the 2020 census (Pinotepa Nacional, July 2019).

²⁵¹ Intervention by Jorge Guzmán López, INEGI’s coordinator of Oaxaca office (Pinotepa Nacional, July 2019).

²⁵² Intervention by Nestor Ruiz, leading member of EPOCA (Pinotepa Nacional, July 2019).

activists to remove the category “Afromexican” through appeals to technical arguments. And yet, they left the meeting accused of bad faith, statistical manipulation, and political exclusion. What were the conditions that made this possible? Unlike the negotiations before the 2015 EIC, this time, INEGI avoided engaging in collaborative design of pilot questions and the ritual exchange of authoritative reasonings and empirical demonstrations around their results. In the prior round of negotiations, INEGI had used its technical capacity to engage in the interstitial space of categorical disputes from the start, whereas now the institute was appealing to its technical ability to disengage from categorical struggles. Moreover, INEGI officials seemed to ignore that their meeting in Pinotepa brought them together with the sector of the social movement field that was most deeply invested in the recognition of the category “Afromexican” (See Chapter 3). By failing to acknowledge the categorical stances at stake, INEGI officials had underestimated the strength of the consensus achieved before the 2015 EIC and overestimated their authority to modify the terms of that agreement. If anything, the meeting in Pinotepa showed state actors that official categories of Blackness were no longer the exclusive domain of state officials.

On August 6, 2019, in Mexico City, a second meeting was held between INEGI, Afromexican organizations, and academics (See Figure 4.15). Despite their differences, activists from both coalitions came together to demand the inclusion of the category “Afromexican.” From the point of view of one the participants, “what worked was the strategic alliance and knowing how to measure our differences at that moment and say: ‘Here we go for a single objective: the census question and the

Afromexicanness.”²⁵³ Carole Schmitz, INEGI’s director for the 2020 census, and Néstor Ruiz, an EPOCA activist, co-hosted the meeting. Schmitz spoke first, presenting the results of INEGI’s pilot tests, and explaining why INEGI recommended eliminating the category “Afromexican” from the census question. According to Schmitz, “when the wording of the question uses the term ‘Afromexican,’ the informant relates it to the fact of being born in Mexico or considering herself Mexican, a situation that does not occur with the word ‘Afrodescendant.’” She added that this category’s inclusion had been previously justified by the need to account for migrant Afrodescendant populations that settle in Mexico. For this purpose, Schmitz suggested using instead the compound term “Black Afrodescendant” (INEGI 2019a:3). Ruiz spoke next, advocating for the inclusion of the category “Afromexican.” According to him, this category was “the term established in the approved reform to the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States,” and also “underscores the progress in the sensitizing work that has been carried out for the recognition of ‘Afromexicans’” (INEGI 2019a:4).

At that point, several representatives from state agencies intervened to support the inclusion of the category “Afromexican.” For most state officials, it was unclear why including the category “Afrodescendant” would create less distortions than including the category “Afromexican.” “The problem with ‘Afrodescendant’ is that it is a term that nobody knows. Not even the Afromexican communities or the communities where sensitization has been done. So, in summary, I think we run into the same problem of bias with ‘Afrodescendant,’” said one of the representatives from INAH.²⁵⁴

²⁵³ Intervention by Mijane Jimenez, member of Mano Amiga (Pinotepa Nacional, July 2019).

²⁵⁴ Intervention by María Elisa Velásquez, researcher at INAH (Mexico City, August 2019).

Other researchers from INAH underscored the importance of aligning the categories in the Constitution with those in the census. For another representative from INAH, “it is necessary that there be coherence in agreement between the legal term that has just been approved in the Constitution, because the legal term has to do with the conformation of the subject of law in the country. It is not gratuitous; it is a subject of law and that has to be reflected in the minimum technical issues.”²⁵⁵

Along similar lines, one of the state representatives from CNDH recommended including both “Afrodescendant” and “Afromexican:” “if we take into account the immigration issue to ask a general question that includes Afrodescendants who are arriving, we also have to take into account what is happening with the constitutional recognition of the Afromexican population.”²⁵⁶ Similarly, a representative from CONAPRED reminded INEGI officials that “self-identification is a criterion that is framed within a rights perspective.” In that sense, she suggested: “it seems to me that it is not just looking at the methodological and technical aspects, because without a doubt this information will be relevant for decision-making that will affect and impact the lives of the populations.”²⁵⁷

As these interventions show, the “technical” and “political” visions regarding the inclusion of the “Afromexican” category reflected not only disagreement between INEGI and social movement organizations but also divisions among state actors in the bureaucratic field. While the “technical” understanding focused on measurement issues, the “political” interpretation focused on protecting

²⁵⁵ Intervention by Gabriela Iturralde, researcher at INAH (Mexico City, August 2019).

²⁵⁶ Intervention by Helen Peña, CNDH representative (Mexico City, August 2019).

²⁵⁷ Intervention by Mireya del Pino, CONAPRED representative (Mexico City, August 2019).

rights. Unlike the negotiations before the 2015 EIC, this time, INEGI lacked enough support from other state institutions like INAH, CONAPRED, and CNDH to mobilize a consensus around its perception of the issues of including the category “Afromexican.” The ongoing constitutional reform that granted group-specific rights to “Afromexican peoples and communities” had substantively changed the terms of engagement. INEGI’s technical argument now seemed obtuse and regressive to activists and state officials alike. In fact, the same debate was under way internally at INEGI. INEGI representatives from local and regional offices supported a “political” interpretation, clashing with central office representatives’ preference for a “technical” one, as stated by one of INEGI’s regional coordinators:

What convinced INEGI to include the category “Afromexican”? A very strong internal discussion that we had had at INEGI. The internal discussion was: we have to accept that there is a statistical bias. Yes, there is one. But from a legal point of view, the concept exists. It is incorporated in the documents of the Constitution. So, I remember a lot that in an internal meeting we said: ‘It is their birth certificate. This concept exists in the legal framework. So, since we owe ourselves to this legal framework, we have to incorporate it, despite the statistical issues it may cause due to bias.’ But the actuary Carole insisted that she wanted to statistically convince [the social organizations] of a possible error that the term could bring. [...] My colleagues from the central offices are more focused on seeing the technical issues, and that is why I would say that INEGI has been successful. INEGI has very good technicians, but INEGI also opens up to social movements, it is sensitive to social problems.²⁵⁸

And yet, after interventions of activists and state officials, the director of the 2020 census remained unpersuaded, claiming: “‘Afromexican’ is included when the word ‘Afrodescendant’ is included, which includes Mexicans and foreigners. If this is not understood in the communities, then

²⁵⁸ Interview with Jorge Guzmán López, coordinator of INEGI’s office in Oaxaca (December 2020).

we would have to assess how to do the measurement and see if it is convenient to put the question in the basic or in the extended questionnaire.”²⁵⁹

Noting that INEGI leadership did not seem willing to negotiate, one of the activists questioned the purpose of the meeting:

Is the question going to remain like this? If the answer is ‘no,’ and there is an option to change it and include the term ‘Afromexican,’ then this meeting had a purpose. But if the answer is ‘yes,’ then it is pointless to have invited us here. I personally perceive that there is no listening, there is no understanding on the part of the people who are here from INEGI. We do understand what is ‘Afrodescendant’ and we do understand what is ‘Afromexican,’ but we have an identity and we identify with that term.²⁶⁰

Additionally, Nestor Ruiz, the activist from EPOCA who was co-hosting the meeting, accused INEGI of “institutional discrimination” and invited the rest of the organizations to mobilize for the inclusion of the category “Afromexican” if INEGI failed to modify the question:

I just want to close this meeting by telling INEGI that we are here because we have been victims of human rights violations. And what is worse, we have been victims of institutional discrimination. And today, we do not want to be victims of discrimination by INEGI. The term ‘Afromexican’ is not something gratuitous. It is a struggle that we won in these offices, here in this place during the negotiations for the Intercensal Survey. We discussed it here, we agreed on it here with INEGI. [...] We would like to tell INEGI what we said in Pinotepa: ‘we want to work with you so that a real census comes out and that you count us one by one because we want public policies.’ We would like a response, we would like to hear that the question is going to be modified. If not, I dare to say that, starting today, we begin one more fight for the word ‘Afromexican’ to be recognized in the question. And we start today, in the next forum we have, where we are talking precisely of the rights of Indigenous and Afromexican peoples.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Intervention by Carole Schmitz, INEGI’s director for the 2020 census (Mexico City, August 2019).

²⁶⁰ Intervention by an unidentified activist (Mexico City, August 2019).

²⁶¹ Intervention by Nestor Ruiz, member of EPOCA (Mexico City, August 2019).

At this point, the meeting had reached a polarizing point and INEGI representatives from the central offices seemed to be alone in their position. Activists from both coalitions had come together to demand the inclusion of “Afromexican.” State officials from different institutions, who in the past had defended the inclusion of “Afrodescendant,” now also supported “Afromexican.” Even INEGI representatives from regional offices were convinced of the legitimacy of the category. The unplanned coalescence of interests around “Afromexican” reflected, among other things, the strength of the categorical consensus achieved before the 2015 EIC. For most of the actors involved, removing the category was perceived as a setback, if only in relation to the legitimation of categorical interests that had been consecrated then. Preserving the three categories of Blackness was perhaps the only option that INEGI officials from the central offices had at hand. Ultimately, they agreed to modify their original proposal to include the category. The final wording of the 2020 census question was: “According to your ancestors, customs, and traditions, do you consider yourself Afromexican, Black or Afrodescendant? Yes or No.” (INEGI 2019a:7) (See Figure 4.16).²⁶²

The 2020 census question showed that a total of 2,576,213 people, that is, 2% of the Mexican population, self-identified as Afromexican, Black, or Afrodescendant, an increase of 13.3% from 2015. The distribution by sex and by age ranges was similar to that of the national population. This increase is smaller than that observed in some parts of the region, such as Costa Rica (14.9% between 2000-

²⁶² It is worth noting that none of the visions and division that emerged in the academic field around race-centered and non-race-centered understanding of Blackness were part of these debates.

2011), but greater than in others, such as Brazil (2.5% between 2000-2010) or Ecuador (6.2% between 2001-2010) (Del Popolo and Schkolnik 2013:239).

As observed in the 2015 EIC, in absolute numbers, the Afrodescendant population is concentrated mainly in the states of Guerrero (303,923), Mexico (296,264), Veracruz (215,435), Oaxaca (194,474) and Mexico City (186,914). These five entities represent 46.5% of the country's total population that self-identify as Afromexican, Black, or Afrodescendant. However, the distribution across the national territory changed considerably: in 2015 it was estimated that these five entities represented 83.7% of the total of this population. Thus, the 2020 census reflects a greater dispersion of the Afrodescendant population across the national territory.

In numbers relative to the population of each federal entity, the Afrodescendant population is mainly concentrated in the states of Guerrero (8.6%), Oaxaca (4.7%), Baja California Sur (3.3%), Yucatán (3.0%) and Quintana Roo (2.8%). These last two regions, which in the 2015 EIC were below the national percentage, now appear in the 2020 census as two of the five locales where this population is mostly concentrated. This proportion increased in the states of Guerrero (+2.1%), Baja California Sur (+1.8%), Yucatán (+2.9%), and Quintana Roo (+2.2%). On the contrary, the percentage decreased slightly in the States of Oaxaca (-0.2%), Veracruz (-0.6%), and Mexico (-0.2%).

At the local level, the ten municipalities of the entire national territory with the highest percentage of Afrodescendant population are located in the states of Oaxaca and Guerrero. In Oaxaca, the main municipalities are San Juan Bautista Lo de Soto (95.7%), Santa María Cortijo (93.7%), Santiago Tapextla (92.9%), Santo Domingo Armenta (91.9%), Santiago Llano Grande (91.8%),

Mártires de Tacubaya (86.3%), San José Estancia Grande (81.0%), and Santa María Huazolotitlán (56.4%). Guerrero includes Cuajinicuilapa (79.9%) and Copala (58.7%).

Regarding the Afrodescendant population born in another country, the 2020 census reports a total of 42,475 people (1.6%). Although this figure is considerably higher than that reported by the 2015 EIC (close to twenty-four thousand people), the percentage is similar (1.7%). The United States continues to be the main country of Afrodescendants born abroad (27.2%), followed by Cuba (13.8%), Venezuela (10.9%), Haiti (9.3%), Honduras (7.0%) and Colombia (6.6%).

As with the 2015 EIC, the *national* aggregate averages of the 2020 census do not show significant inequality gaps between the Afrodescendant population and the rest of the Mexican population.²⁶³ In average years of schooling, for example, the general Mexican population has 9.7 years, and the Afrodescendant population 9.8. Comparatively similar levels are also observed in the percentage of the population that attends school, the economic participation rate, the distribution of the non-economically active population, and affiliation by health services.

As in other cases, the categorical politics of the 2020 census in Mexico was founded on a particular *illusio*: the belief that the number and type of ethnoracial categories included in the census question are consequential for the appropriate representation of people of African descent.

Advocating for the inclusion (or elimination) of one or several categories of Blackness constituted a legitimate stance within the interstitial space of census politics. Moreover, the *collision* of several actors contributed to produce a legitimate language to discuss (and a legitimate set of issues to argue over) the

²⁶³ The analysis of sub-national territorial units shows evidence of ethnoracial inequality at regional and municipal levels.

statistical representation of people of African descent. And yet, the confrontation between different representatives in the pursuit of their own representational interests also concealed different degrees of *collusion* against the interests of those represented.²⁶⁴ The gap between the categories of political representation and the categories of social identification was both recognized and tolerated by activists, academics, and bureaucrats alike. That some of the people represented ignored the categories of their own representation became a matter of fact in Mexico's census politics. And yet, the statistical representation of people of African descent in Mexico was only possible thanks to the sweat and tears of their representatives and their representational interests. Or, to put it more accurately, thanks to the social conditions of the interstitial space that allow them to satisfy their own interests while satisfying the interests of those they claim to represent. Closing the gap between political and social forms of statistical representation can only be done through the interstitial game of representatives—not in spite of it.

Comparative conclusions

Comparing the dynamics of census politics between the 2005 census in Colombia and the 2020 census in Mexico helps explain under what conditions a similar project of statistical representation can provide a legitimate vision and division of the national population. Despite being conducted fifteen years apart, both enumeration processes had several features in common. In both cases, these processes

²⁶⁴ As Bourdieu suggests, “it is a very general property of fields that the competition for what is at stake conceals the collusion regarding the very principles of the game. The struggle for the monopoly of legitimacy helps to reinforce the legitimacy in the name of which it is waged” (Bourdieu 1996a:166–67).

were the second census enumeration of people of African descent in recent years. Moreover, academic critics in both countries blamed the “ethnic” framework of the question for the limitations of the census results. Similarly, academic sectors in both countries advocated for the “racial” perspective as the best strategy to correct biases in the existing census data.

And yet, the race-centric moment in census politics meant different things in Colombia and Mexico. For academics, in Colombia, the racial approach meant advocating for a categorically expansive understanding of Blackness, whereas in Mexico, the same perspective meant promoting a categorically limiting approach to it. In Colombia, the race-centric perspective signified removing “Black Communities” and adding instead “Raizal,” “Palenquero,” “Black,” “Mulatto,” “Afrocolombian,” and “Afrodescendant” to the census question. In Mexico, the same perspective justified removing (or deemphasizing) “Afromexican” and “Afrodescendant” in order to place “Black” at the center of the statistical representation.

The race-centric moment also achieved different things in Colombia and Mexico. While in Colombia, the census question was significantly modified, in Mexico, the census question retained the same categories of Blackness. In both cases, there was an attempt to include “physical characteristics” as a central reference in the wording of the question. However, only in Colombia did this reference make its way into the census questionnaire. At least in terms of the census, the race-centric perspective in Colombia achieved a higher degree of officialization when compared to Mexico. If we consider that

these divergent outcomes happened through a similar repertoire of census politics, what are the inter- and intra-field conditions that made these outcomes possible?²⁶⁵

The dynamics of the academic field played a significant role in transforming the categories of Blackness in Colombia and preserving them in Mexico. The production of new quantitative ethnoracial data afforded Colombian and Mexican sociologists a different degree of leverage vis-à-vis the official statistics agency. Whereas in Colombia, the publication of ethnoracial data by the CIDSE-IRD team was symbolically effective in delegitimizing the authority of DANE, in Mexico, the publication of the 2016 MMSI results did not significantly jeopardize INEGI's image of competence. Within the boundaries of this comparison at least, the technical legitimacy of academic researchers to successfully criticize existing official estimates was proportional to the gap that could be demonstrated using the new ethnoracial surveys. While in Colombia, the difference between the population estimates of the CIDSE-IRD surveys and the 1993 census was 17.1 percent points (Urrea-Giraldo 2006:222), in Mexico, the difference between the 2016 MMSI and the 2015 EIC was at most 3.6 percent points (Saldívar, Solís, et al. 2018:49). One of the consequences of these divergent affordances was that academic actors viewed the results of the 1993 census in Colombia with a level of suspicion and critique that was absent when the results of the 2015 EIC were published.

However, the race-centered perspective faced a different kind of reception inside and outside of the academic field. In both cases, the critique of the “ethnic” framework of the previous census question—blaming this perspective for data limitations—pitted race-centered forms of academic

²⁶⁵ If we also consider that the “Colombian case” effectively became a *model for* the statistical representation of people of African descent in Mexico, this question is also equivalent to asking about the inter- and intra-field conditions that made possible (or not) the *diffusion* of the dynamics of one case in the other.

knowledge against non-race-centering ones. And yet, the public scholarly resistance observed in Mexico against officializing racialist principles of census enumeration was absent in Colombia. Despite some criticism, there was not a Colombian equivalent of the INTEGRA-COLMEX debate. In Colombia, the expansive categorical stance around Blackness was successfully projected into visions and divisions of social movement and bureaucratic fields without the need to publicly address academic debates. In Mexico, the labor of disseminating a restrictive categorization of Blackness to social movement and bureaucratic audiences was loaded with academic debates about their convenience. The public appearance of academic consensus among proponents of this perspective in Colombia was absent for their peers in Mexico. In Colombia, then, the race-centric perspective acquired a political currency and a degree of legitimacy beyond academic circles that was not achieved in Mexico.

International actors also had different degrees of success in orchestrating interests and strategies across several fields in Colombia and Mexico. During the first half of the 2000s, academic, activist, and bureaucratic actors in Latin America were exposed to a significant level of coordinated influence by international actors such as the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. By the 2010s, however, that level of international coordination among funding agencies had almost disappeared. For example, the Inter-Agency Consultation on Race in Latin America was a crucial coordinating space for international actors in the early 2000s, but by the turn of the decade, it had lost much of its former influence (Lennox 2020:349–50). As a result, the international orchestration of visions and divisions around race-centric perspectives across different fields was more effective in Colombia before the 2005 census than in Mexico before the 2020

census. Whereas in Colombia, a similar coalition of international foundations sponsored research, organized events, and subsidized the activities of the national statistics agency, in Mexico, a single international organization intervened, in a manner that was both sporadic and fragmentary. In Colombia, the race-centered perspective became a research agenda, a political repertoire, and a bureaucratic issue, while in Mexico this perspective hardly traveled beyond the boundaries of the academic field. Despite several efforts by national and internal actors to transpose the race-centric vision of the academic field into the social movement field, Afromexican organizations did not appropriate this framework of analysis as a framework of political practice.

The lack of alignment between academic researchers, international experts, and local activists in Mexico, as compared to Colombia, can also be explained by the different dynamics of the social movement field in each country. Whereas before the 2005 census, Afrocolombian activists organized around issues of social inequality exacerbated by the upsurge of violence, in Mexico, the debate around the 2020 census question was embedded within the issue of the political recognition of group-specific rights. In Colombia, the categorically expansive race-centered perspective was useful for activists to render internationally visible the situation of human rights abuses against people of African descent. Even Afrocolombian organizations who were not engaged in the politics of racial equality aligned with this perspective in the early 2000s. On the contrary, in Mexico, the categorically restrictive race-centered perspective clashed with the interest of Afromexican organizations in reinforcing the recently acquired space of constitutional recognition. From their perspective, the category “Afromexican” was too valuable to be abandoned over academic or bureaucratic concerns of demographic enumeration. Even Afromexican organizations who had advocated in the past for the inclusion of other categories of

Blackness aligned behind this stance. Despite being exposed to similar kinds of data, interpreted with similar political implications, Afromexican activists were not as predisposed as their Colombian counterparts to endorsing a race-centric perspective to census enumeration.

In sum, by 2019, the struggles of producers of categories in the Mexican political space were centrally structured around issues of *political representation* that paradoxically eclipsed concerns about the categorical representation of *social inequality*. Whereas in Colombia, the struggle over the implementation of a race-centric perspective in the census happened twelve years after the constitutional recognition of group-specific rights for people of African descent (Paschel 2016), in Mexico, the struggle for reforming the census and the constitution happened concurrently. At a moment when the substantive implications of the recently approved constitutional reform were unclear for academic researchers, social movement activists, and state officials, defending the political projects behind the official categories of Blackness seemed more important than evaluating to what extent those categorical projects reflected the categorical inequality of those who were represented.

In Mexico, for some academic sectors, defending the inclusion of the categories “Afrodescendant” and “Afromexican” constituted an attempt to avoid what they perceived was an attempt to “racialize the census.” For other academic sectors and international experts, including the category “Black” was the best way to promote a race-centric perspective in the census, although that meant excluding regional ethnonyms. Social movement activists—formerly divided between the inclusion of different categories of Blackness—now came together to demand the inclusion of “Afromexican” as a political strategy to presumably align the recognition of rights with the distribution of resources. For state officials, the inclusion of “Black Afrodescendant” was the best

compromise between fulfilling “international commitments” and producing accurate results. All actors involved in the categorization dispute were aware that the categories “Afromexican” and “Afrodescendant” were not understood by the majority of the population (INEGI 2019b; Resano 2015). Yet, the structure of opportunities and threats imposed on them by their own competition within the interstitial space led to the reproduction of the same categories of Blackness that had been officialized in the 2015 EIC.

The primacy of the internal struggles of the political space over the external struggles of the social world contributed to reproducing a categorical set of *esoteric representations* that were relatively inaccessible to the majority of people of African descent in Mexico. As has been shown in the results of the 2015 EIC (Villarreal and Bailey 2020), the lack of the demographic visibility of ethnoracial disadvantages affecting people of African descent in Mexico could be associated with the *higher levels of cultural capital* that were required to understand the census question, which in turn may have contributed to *underestimate* the extent of ethnoracial inequality affecting this population. The census question remained relatively inaccessible to the majority of the Afromexican population because the complexity of the space of categorization struggles was endogenous to its formulation. The contested space of categorization struggles was objectified in every little detail of the wording of the question. It was not the words but the social relations of political struggle embedded in the census question that structured an ethnoracial representation difficult to understand and difficult to identify with.

CONCLUSION

The recent statistical visibility of people of African descent in Latin America represents a significant change in long-standing projects of *mestizaje* that attempted to eliminate official ethnoracial distinctions. As we have seen, after the 2000 census round, at least fifteen countries in region modified their census questionnaires to identify this population (Loveman 2021). The inclusion of multiple categories of Blackness officialized limited but significant ethnoracial categorizations that had been absent from the census for decades, if not centuries. Why did Afrodescendent populations become statistically visible and how were particular categories of Blackness made official?

To answer this question, I have considered *two critical junctures* in the evolution of the official categorization of Blackness in Latin America. First, I focused on the transition from statistical visibility in the imperial context to relative invisibility in the republican period. If republican elites still resorted to racialist and racist notions of national development, why did most Latin American states avoid using ethnoracial questions to identify people of African descent in republican censuses? This *post-independence juncture* is of particular importance in understanding how imperial legacies informed the republican visions and divisions of Afrodescendent populations.

Second, I outlined the contemporary reconfiguration of the demographic imagination that created a new statistical visibility for people of African descent in Latin America in the late twentieth century. Latin American states were under significant domestic and international pressures to recognize the multi-ethnic composition of their population, yet they officialized some categories of Blackness rather than others. This *contemporary juncture* is crucial to understanding how current

statistical representations of population size and ethnoracial inequality are shaped by the particular categories of Blackness that were officially recognized.

Additionally, I have conceptualized Mexico and Colombia as two strategic cases useful for analyzing the configuration of these two junctures. To be sure, these countries are not identical Latin American polities; their historical trajectories differ in many ways beyond the institutionalization of ethnoracial differences. And yet, as I have tried to show, the Mexican and Colombian cases share enough socio-political conditions to beg the question of why they follow such dissimilar trajectories in officializing categories of Blackness. Contrasting the *extrinsic* status of Blackness in the national imagination of Mexico with its *intrinsic* status in Colombia allowed me to develop a comparative analysis of *divergent outcomes* in the demographic categorization of Blackness at each juncture.

The Post-Independence Juncture

Regarding the post-independence juncture, the demographic disappearance of Blackness in Mexico contrasts with its persistence in Colombia. As we have seen, imperial authorities imported to the colonial territory of Colombia (Viceroyalty of New Granada) and Mexico (Viceroyalty of New Spain) a similar number of enslaved persons—about 200,000—between the sixteenth and eighteenth century (Aguirre Beltrán 1944:431; Curtin 1969:46; Rawley and Behrendt 2005:48). Additionally, a few years before Independence, imperial censuses in the colonial territories of Mexico and Colombia registered significant proportions of Afrodescendent population—10% and 39%, respectively (Andrews 2004:41). Similarly, whitening the population was part of the nationalist project of

mestizaje in both countries, and Mexico and Colombia are notable for the lack of census records on Afrodescendent populations during the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century (Loveman 2014:241). However, only the Mexican elites managed to legitimize the notion of Black disappearance as a *fait accompli* in the national imagination. *Why did similar imperial legacies and state projects of mestizaje develop different conditions for the statistical representation of Blackness in Colombia and Mexico?*

To answer this question, I compared the official categorizations of Blackness within colonial domains of the Spanish empire at the end of the eighteenth century. In the first part of the dissertation, I aimed to understand how the demographic visibility of people of African descent varied according to the predominant imperatives of the Spanish crown in New Spain (the colonial territory of Mexico) and New Granada (the colonial territory of Colombia). Intra-imperial forms of rule and communication between metropolitan and colonial authorities such as the *Leyes de Indias*, *Reales Cédulas*, *Instrucciones a los Virreyes*, or *Memorias de los Virreyes*, allowed me to reconstruct the imperial gaze as it evolved from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, and to assess its limited but consequential attempts to quantify the kaleidoscopic patterns of classification and stratification in the Americas. Additionally, I explored the contributions of scientific travelers in general, and Alexander von Humboldt in particular, whose works helped inculcate a different sense of ethnoracial demography in the nationalist imagination of nineteenth-century elites in Mexico and Colombia.

This part of the analysis showed that intra-imperial politics of *extraction* and *coercion* during the late eighteenth century shaped the official demographic representation of people of African descent within the Spanish empire, with enduring consequences for the future independent nations.

In both New Spain and New Granada, categories of “mixed Blackness” (e.g., “Mulatos” or “Pardos”) were ambiguously praised, and categories of “pure Blackness” (e.g., “Negros”) were persistently stigmatized. And yet, the primacy of different *imperial imperatives* within the colonial domains—and the place of Blackness—resulted in two different forms of demographic visibility for people of African descent by the end of the eighteenth century. While the strengthening of the imperial *coercive* apparatus in New Spain gave demographic visibility to categories of mixed Blackness, the expansion of the imperial *extractive* economy in New Granada made categories of pure Blackness demographically salient.

This divergent quantification of people of African descent during the last decades of imperial rule informed the place of Blackness in the demographic imagination of republican elites of Mexico and Colombia. By the nineteenth century, the categories and numbers of imperial censuses were established as facts of “national history” without considering the fiscal and military purposes for which they had been created. For post-independence elites, the results of colonial censuses were no longer strategic instruments of the Spanish empire but precise descriptions of national demography. It is this *misreading* of imperial imperatives as national facts that shaped the demographic imagination of nationalist elites in Mexico and Colombia during the nineteenth century.

Lacking both direct access to colonial censuses and bureaucratic means to conduct one, Latin American elites found in Humboldt’s work a particularly validating justification to respond to the *dual republican dilemma*: sustaining categorical restrictions on citizenship without using the colonial categories of the past, and also defending the future of the new nation in racialist (and often racist) terms without resorting to the pessimistic conclusions of some European intellectuals. Mexican liberal

elites facing this dual dilemma avoided quantifying the Afrodescendent population in categories of “mixed Blackness,” rendered visible the small proportion of categories of “pure Blackness,” and institutionalize the trope of “Black disappearance” as a foundational demographic fact of the new nation. Their Colombian counterparts instead institutionalized two distinctive demographic representations of Blackness: the notion of the “Black savage” representing the colonial past of the lowlands, contrasted with the figure of the “good Mulatto” representing the republican future of the highlands. Whereas in Mexico, the trope of “Black disappearance” relegated people of African descent to the colonial past, in Colombia, different kinds of Blackness became constitutive of the republican present of the nation.

These findings show how the demographic representation of Blackness in Mexico and Colombia was neither an unavoidable *fate*—sufficiently prefigured by colonial classifications or population stocks—nor a manipulable *instrument*—fully exploited by the nationalist projects of republican elites. The comparison of imperial categorizations and their national misappropriations demonstrates that the contemporary demographic imagination of Blackness in Mexico and Colombia has crystallized as the *political byproduct* of two sets of double relations: the inter- and intra-imperial relations of competition of the eighteenth century, and the inter- and intra-national relations of legitimation of the nineteenth century. The imperial visibility of Blackness was not the work of enlightened intellectuals conscientiously pursuing objective demographic realities; it represented instead a hurried inventory by imperial bureaucrats under pressure to increase extraction and enhance coercion. The republican visibility of Blackness was likewise far more complex than a simple transfer of nationalist ideologies into census enumerations: it was produced through the mediated and

misconstrued appropriation of liberal elites who were both internationally delegitimized and nationally challenged. In sum, the contemporary demographic intuition of Blackness in Mexico and Colombia was not an automatic reflection of colonial realities or a deliberate manipulation of nationalist projects, but the product of the relatively *uncontrolled translation* of imperial imperatives into republican dilemmas.

The Contemporary Juncture

Regarding the contemporary juncture, the legitimacy of particular categories of Blackness such as “Afrocolombian” contrasts with that of “Afromexican” as a valid response category for census identification. As we have seen, Colombia and Mexico experienced similar episodes of legitimacy crises during the 1990s. In both countries, state and non-state actors mobilized similar forms of academic knowledge to legitimize the enumeration of people of African descent. The centrality of ethnocultural anthropological knowledge during the 1993 census in Colombia and the 2015 intercensal survey in Mexico was followed by the salience of ethnoracial sociological knowledge during the 2005 census in Colombia and the 2020 census in Mexico. Similarly, activists relied on frameworks of cultural difference and racial equality to demand the demographic visibility for Afrodescendent populations (Hoffmann 2007; Hoffmann and Lara 2012; Lara 2012; Oslender 2008; Pardo 2001; Paschel 2016; Wade 1995). However, not all categories of Blackness were granted the same degree of legitimacy, and the wording of the census question differed sharply. While the census question in Colombia included regional categories of Blackness (e.g., Raizal or Palenquero), in Mexico, regional categories of Blackness

were excluded. In Colombia the question referred to “physical traits” as a proxy for racialized forms of identification, but in Mexico this reference was avoided. Although these differences may seem superficial, changes in the wording of census questions and categories of identification have important consequences for measuring population sizes, ethnoracial divides, and social inequalities (Sue et al. 2021; Villarreal and Bailey 2020). *Why did similar critical junctures, forms of expertise, and repertoires of ethno-racial claims-making produced different trajectories in the enumeration of people of African descent in Mexico and Colombia?*

To answer this question, I focused on the critical junctures at the end of the twentieth century that challenged different kinds of demographic invisibility affecting people of African descent, and the emergence of political spaces that made possible contemporary forms of census politics during the last twenty years. In this second part of the dissertation, I compared the officialization of new categories in Colombia and Mexico to understand how similar crises in the nationalist project of mestizaje resulted in different trajectories in the enumeration of people of African descent. Using documentary sources and interviews with state actors, international agencies, academic researchers, and social movement activists in both countries, I reconstructed the contentious spaces that structured the distribution of interests and justifications proposed for the new categories of Blackness in Colombia and Mexico. The comparison of census politics in the period leading to the 2000 census round in Colombia and the 2020 census round in Mexico revealed that similar frameworks and repertoires of census politics produced different demographic visibilities of people of African descent.

This part of the analysis showed that Colombia and Mexico experienced similar critical junctures during the 1990s and 2000s that nonetheless resulted in different configurations of the space

of categorization struggles. In Colombia, the *internal* configuration of the crisis shaped the conditions for an intra-categorical struggle over the political affordances of the category “Black Communities.” In Mexico, the *external* configuration of the crisis shaped an inter-categorical struggle over the political possibilities of “Black,” “Afrodescendant,” and “Afromexican” categories. Whereas in Colombia, the overall logic of the categorical dispute was driven by *domestic problems* concerning land titling and violence, in Mexico, the debate was mainly structured by *international issues* of compliance with human rights conventions. This divergent configuration of the political space of categorization struggles had consequences for the demographic representation of people of African descent in each country.

The recent statistical visibility of people of African descent in Colombia and Mexico legitimized a set of categories of Blackness that had been absent from census records since colonial times. Considering the long-term patterns of demographic representation in both countries, the recent visibility can be seen as an (inadvertent) attempt to reverse the type of ethnoracial categorization that imperial authorities had quantified in New Granada and New Spain in the last imperial censuses of the eighteenth century. In Colombia, the inclusion of an expansive set of categories of “mixed Blackness” in the 2005 census reversed the emphasis on categories of “pure Blackness” that characterized the 1778 colonial census in New Granada. In Mexico, the pressure to include a restrictive set of categories of “pure Blackness” in the 2020 census reflected attempts to reverse the emphasis on categories of “mixed Blackness” of the 1790 census in New Spain. Without noticing, academic researchers, social movement activists, international experts, and state officials in Colombia and Mexico were officializing categories of Blackness directly opposed to the ones that were salient in the Bourbon

reforms of the eighteenth century. Two centuries later, the chances of demographically misrepresenting the Afrodescendent population of each country were considerable. And yet, unlike the 2005 census in Colombia, the 2020 census in Mexico did not show the Afrodescendant population to be substantially disadvantaged in relation to the rest of the Mexican population. Why?

To be sure, there are significant differences in the underlying demography of Afrodescendent populations in both countries that could account for this divergent statistical visibility. As we have discussed, it could be argued that Colombia has a historical legacy of colonial institutions shaping contemporary forms of ethno-racial inequalities in ways that are absent from the history of Mexico. New Granada received a significant population of enslaved African labor during the eighteenth century whereas New Spain did not (Palmer 1976; Sharp 1975). And yet, even if these colonial forms of ethnoracial inequality were reproduced over centuries, the experience of this disadvantage is fundamentally structured by the ethnoracial categories that shape the perception of disadvantage itself. Recognizing one's disadvantaged situation and self-identifying with a subordinated position does not occur in spite of available categories of interpretation but through them. The wording of the categories of a census question can either call out or ignore experiences of inequality like the persistent but unnamed advantages and disadvantages afforded by ethnoracial origin in Latin America. Analyzing the relationship between the political space of "producers" who make these categories available and the space of "consumers" who are predisposed to self-identify with them helps understand how the supply of ethnoracial categories shapes the demographic representation of ethnoracial inequalities.

The comparative findings of the 2005 census of Colombia and the 2020 census of Mexico suggest that the statistical visibility of ethnoracial disadvantages affecting people of African descent is

constitutively shaped by the relative openness of the political space to incorporate the categories of the social world. Whereas a political space that is oriented to the *external* dynamics of the social world tends to legitimize categories that are widely understood (i.e., *exoteric* representations), a political space that is oriented to the *internal* dynamics of its own struggles tends to legitimize categories that require specialized knowledge (i.e., *esoteric* representations). In Colombia, the logic of categorization struggles tended to be *socially* centered, categories of Blackness were more likely to be perceived as *accessible* representations, and the identification with these categories required *less cultural capital* to be meaningful and plausible. On the contrary, in Mexico, the logic of categorization struggles tended to be *politically* centered, categories of Blackness were more likely to be perceived as *inaccessible* representations, and the identification with these categories required *more cultural capital* to be meaningful and plausible. Unlike Colombia, the inward orientation of the political space in Mexico incorporated the complexity of classification struggles into a census question that was comparatively harder to understand.

Comparing the divergent representations of ethnoracial inequality in Colombia and Mexico shows that the statistical representation of people of African descent was neither the a direct *reflection* of immutable demographic realities nor a misleading *artifact* crafted by expert manipulators. The structure of the interstitial struggles imposed opportunities and threats on academic researchers, social movement activists, international experts, and state officials, resulting in the officialization of categories of Blackness that were not always of their choosing. In time, the closure of the interstitial space froze the correlation of forces between the esoteric and exoteric orientation of the political struggle. Without planning or anticipating, the objectified sediment of interstitial struggles became

endogenous condition of the demographic representation of ethnoracial inequalities. Thus, a census question incorporates, without revealing it, the relatively *uncontrolled translation* of a political space of struggle into a printed space of words and numbers.

FIGURES

Figure A. Field-Specific Forms of Symbolic Capital at Stake in the Interstitial Space

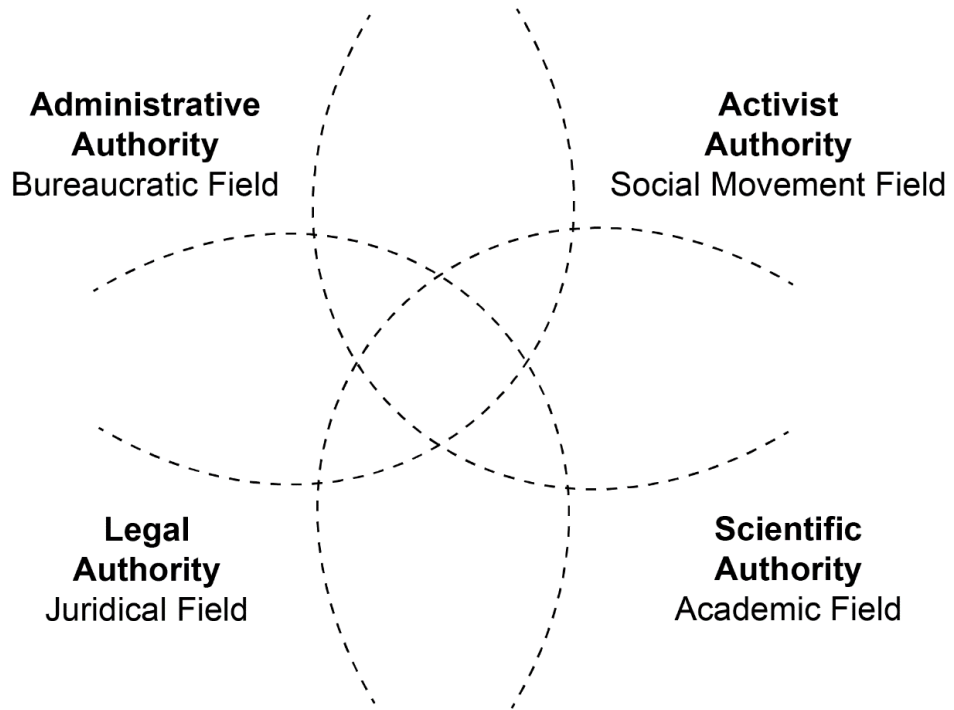


Figure 1.1. Correspondence Analysis of Occupations by Ethnoracial Category, Mexico City, 1753

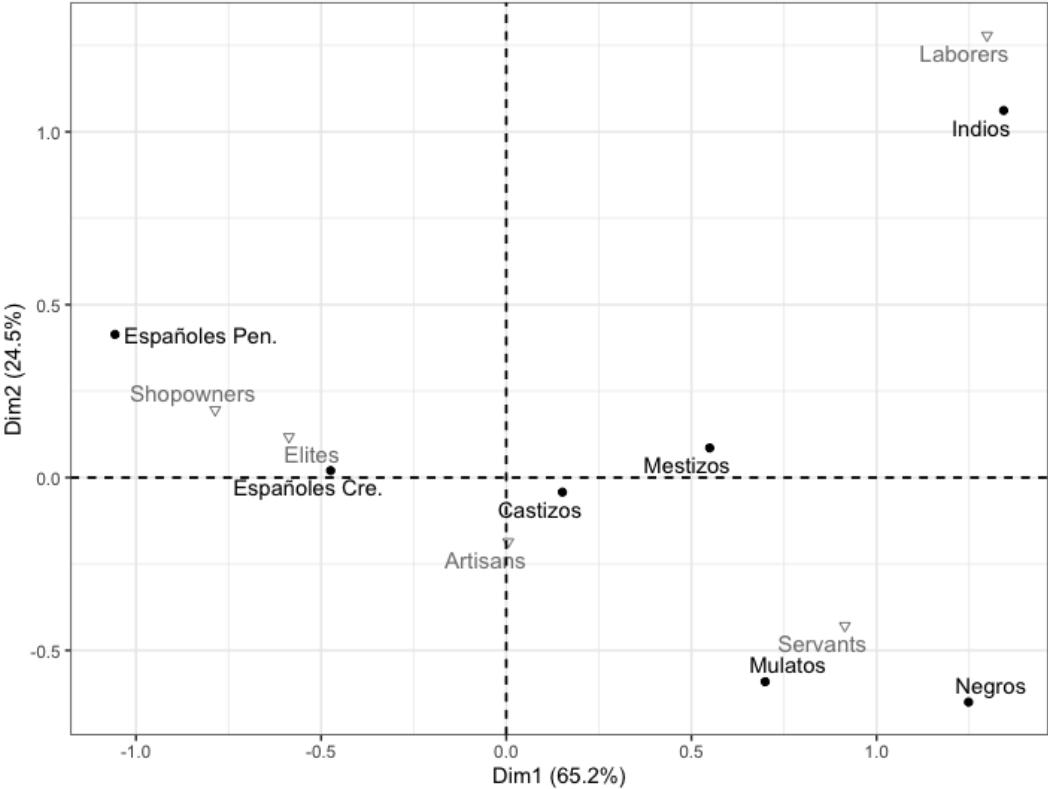
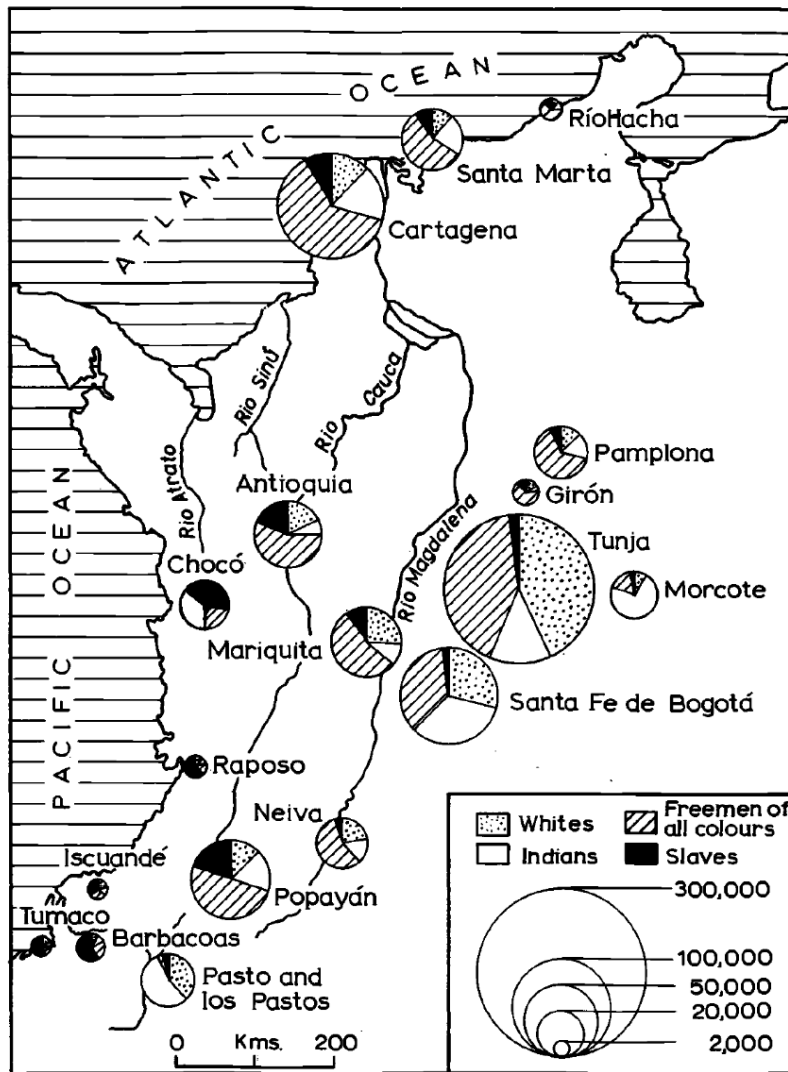
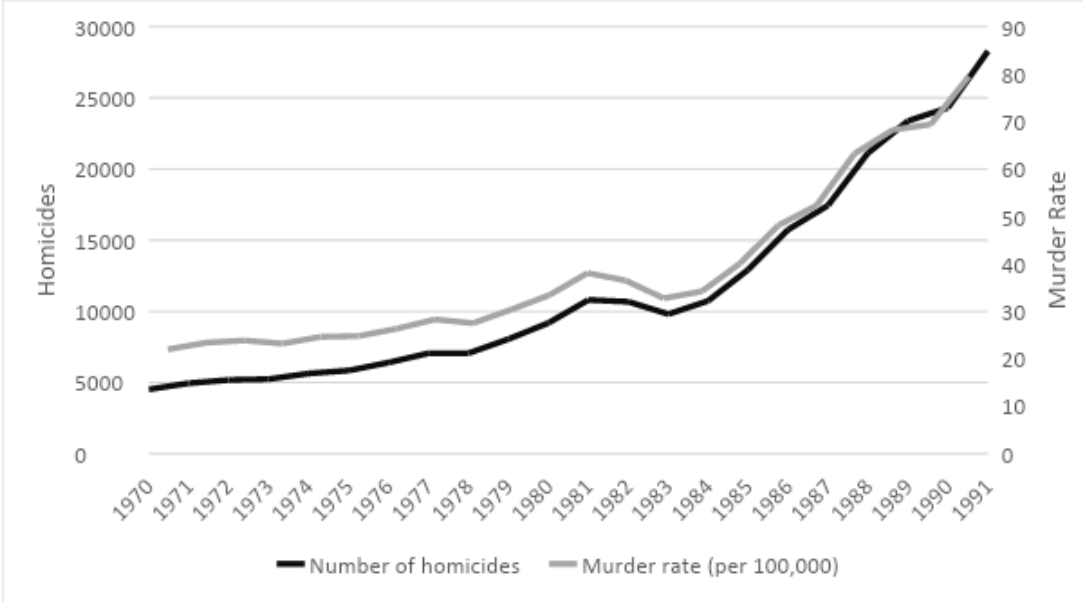


Figure 1.2. Map of the Population of New Granada using Data from the 1778 Census



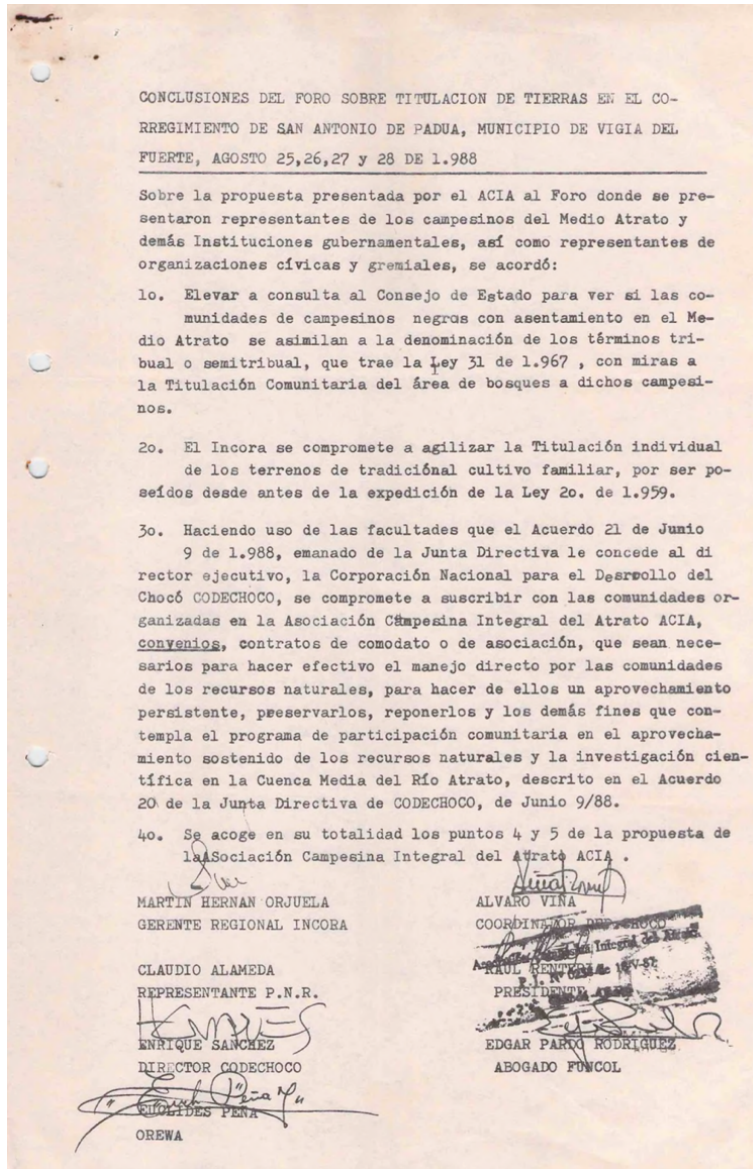
Source: McFarlane (1993:33)

Figure 3.1. Number of Homicides and Murder Rate in Colombia (1970-1991)



Source: (CERAC 2004)

Figure 3.2. Conclusions of the Forum on Collective Titling, San Antonio de Padua, 1988



Source: Organizational Archive, COCOMACIA

Figure 3.3. First Page of the Letter from Nevaldo Perea to ACIA, Bogotá, 1991

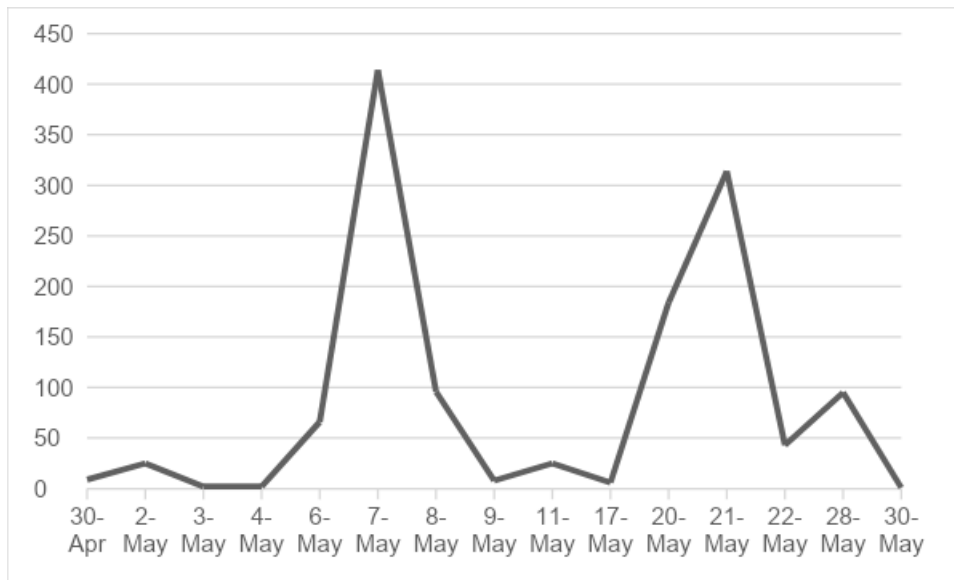
①
R. 5

Bogotá - Abril 28 / 91
STS

Junta Directiva ACIA.
Muy Distinguidos Compañeros.
Se Presenta es para Saludarlos deseándoles
ánimo en la lucha por nuestros Derecho de Pue-
blo Negro, olvidado y discriminado del Resto
de la Población Colombiana.
Pues si Compañeros yo estoy Regular mu-
cho trabajo. por que a uno le toca estar pri-
diente de lo que pasa en la Asamblea N.C.
hay días que la última Reunión termina a
las 10. PM esto por que si se da un debate y lo
tumban la propuesta en la Comisión tenemos
que Reunirnos a buscar otras Estrategias.
este caso se a dado en la propuesta de
territorialidad y en derechos generales de la mi-
norías étnicas.
El Constituyente fals Borda que conoce
y abenido trabajando lo de minorías étni-
cas y ego admitir que él no sabia donde
eran los Acentamientos de los pueblos Negros
Diego Uribe dice que a los únicos que se
Reconocen son los Indios Por que los
demas Somos una mezcla de Café con
Leche. SAFRA si dijo que si se iba
a Reconocer la Reintegración del ~~Indio~~ Indio
Pueblos Negros.
De todas maneras la Pelea esta muy

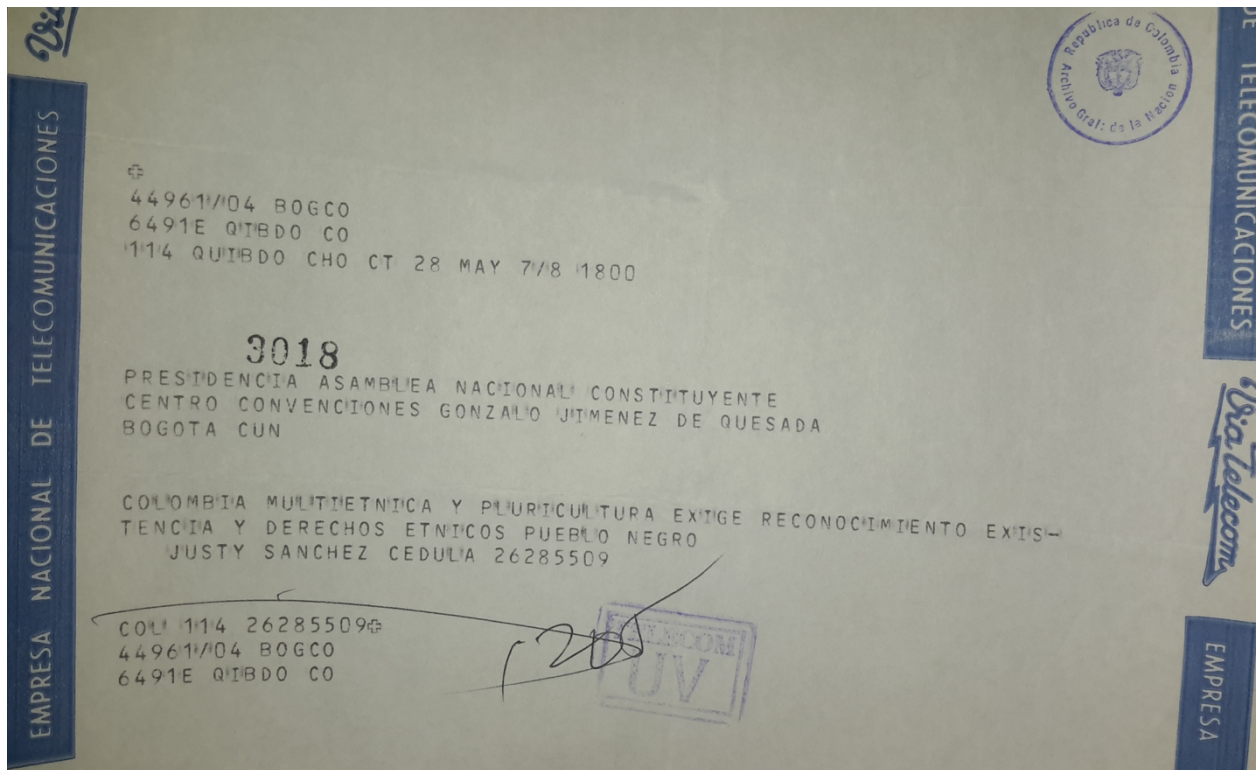
Source: Organizational Archive, COCOMACIA

Figure 3.4. Timeline of the “Black Telegram” Campaign, 1991.



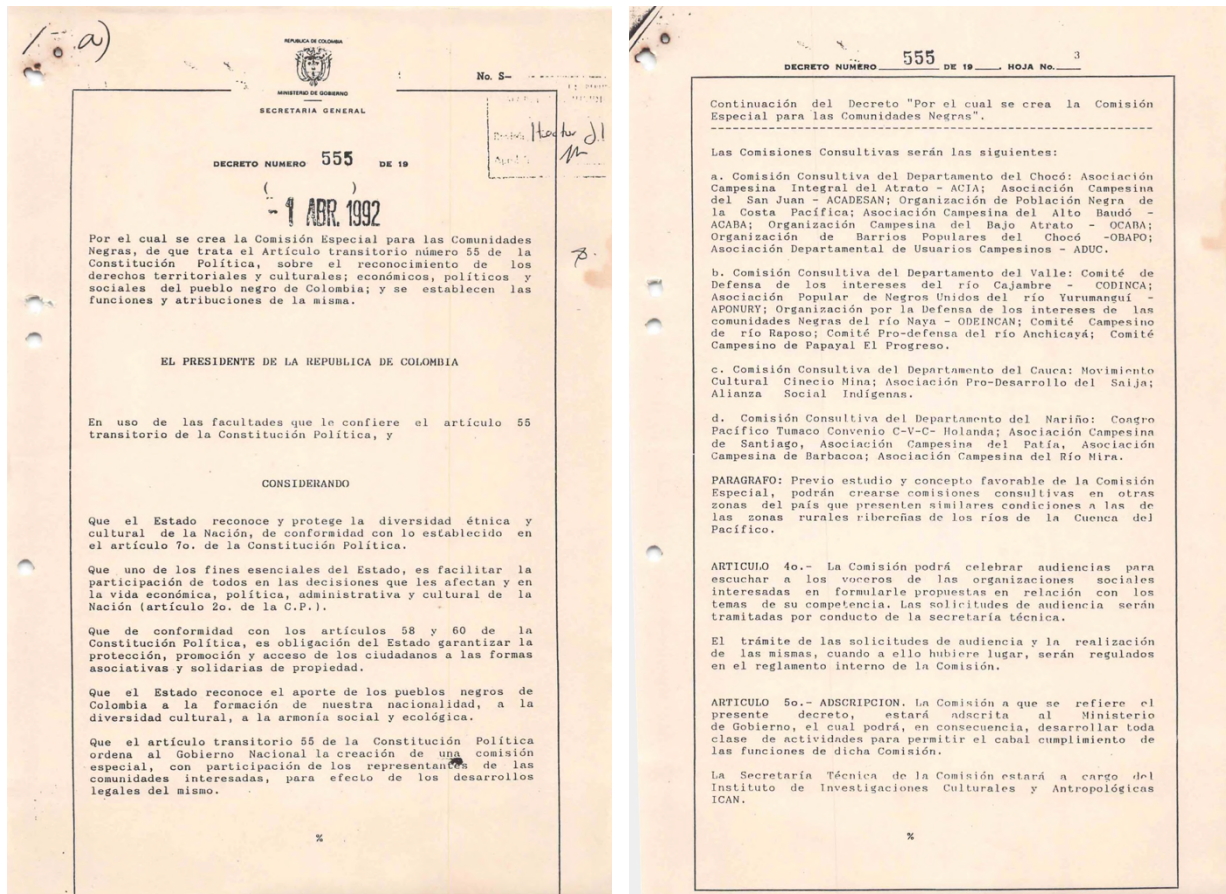
Source: Archivo General de la Nación

Figure 3.5. Sample of a “Black Telegram,” 1991.



Source: Archivo General de la Nación

Figure 3.6. Decree 555 (April 1, 1992), Special Commission of Black Communities



Source: Organizational Archive, COCOMACIA

Figure 3.7. Correspondence Analysis of Categorical Stances and Topic Preference by Actor and Predominant Field-Specific Forms of Authority in Colombia (1992-1993)

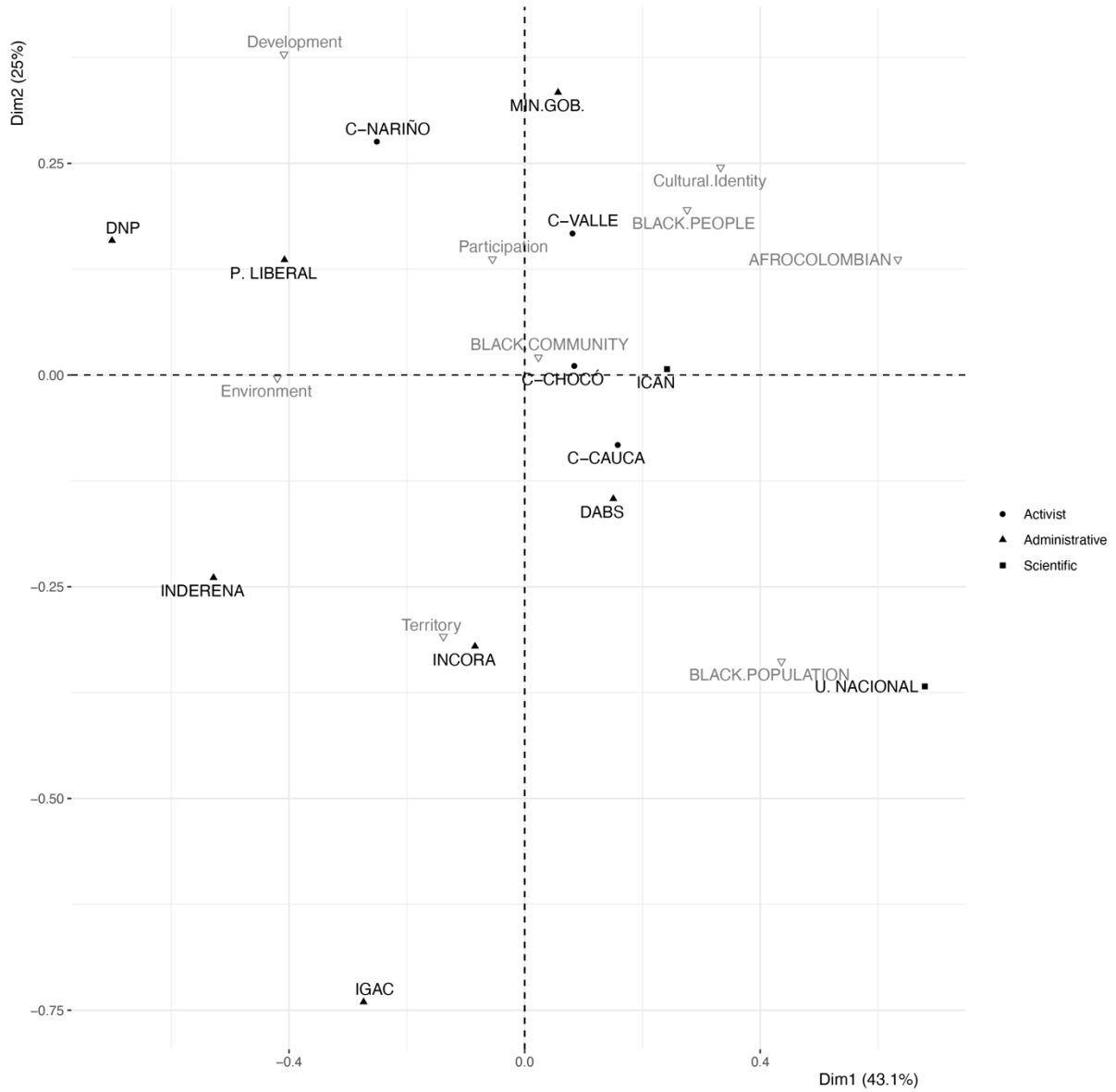


Figure 3.8. Correspondence Analysis of Categorical Stances by Actor and Predominant Field-Specific Forms of Authority in Mexico (2009-2015)

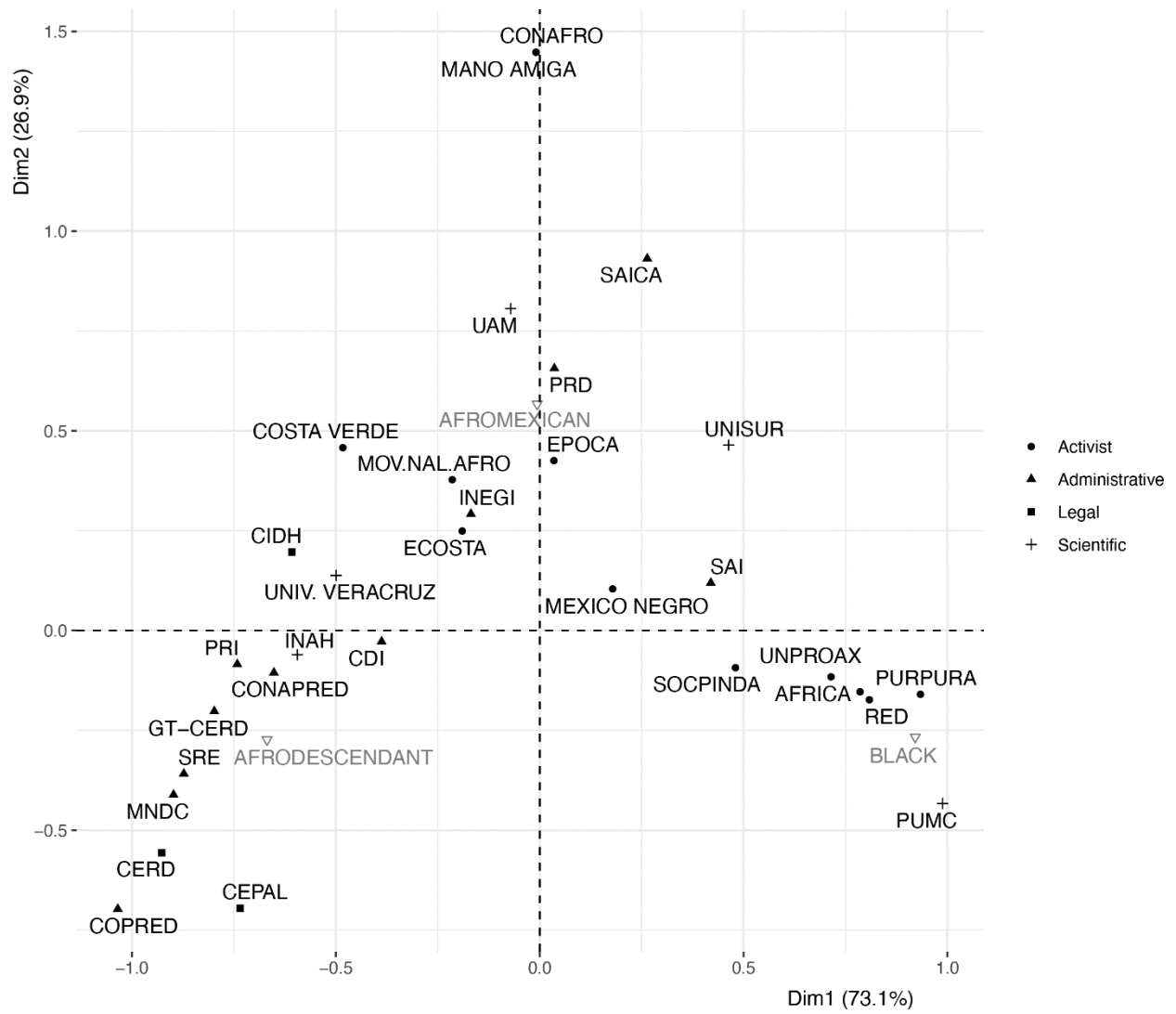


Figure 3.9. Agglomerative Hierarchical Clustering of Categorical Stances by Actor (2009-2015)

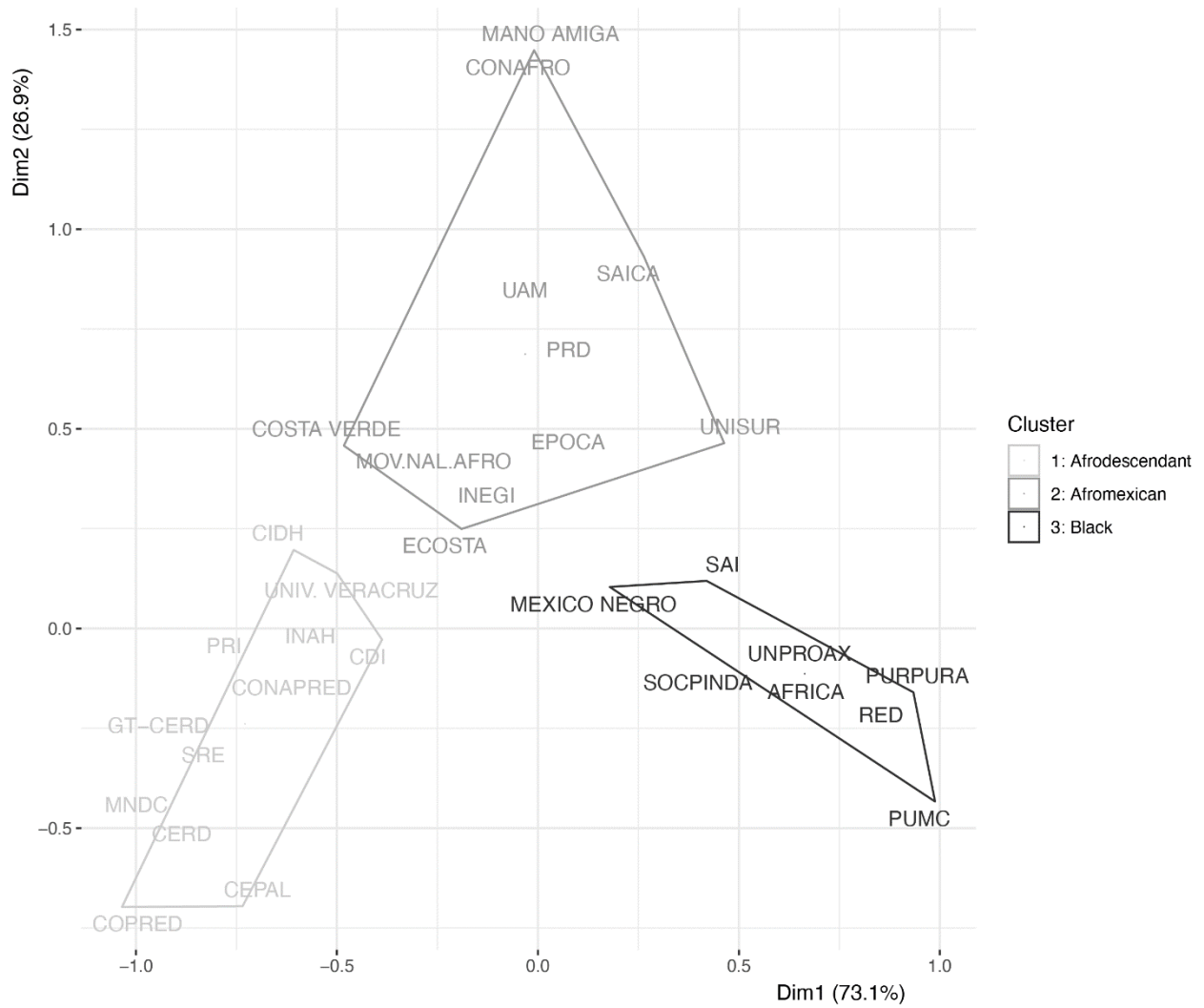


Figure 3.10. Field-Specific Forms of Symbolic Capital within the Interstitial Space in Colombia

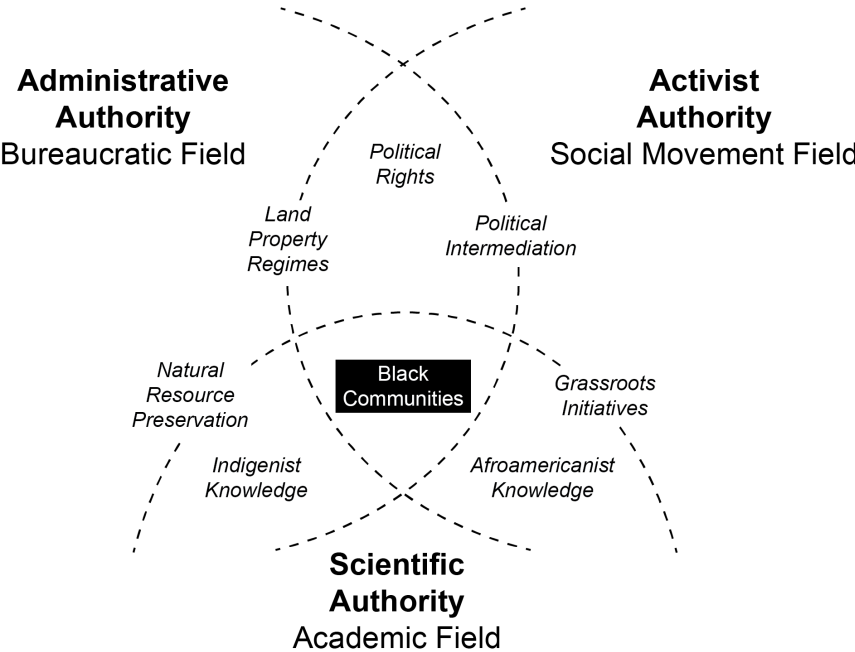


Figure 3.11. Field-Specific Forms of Symbolic Capital within the Interstitial Space in Mexico

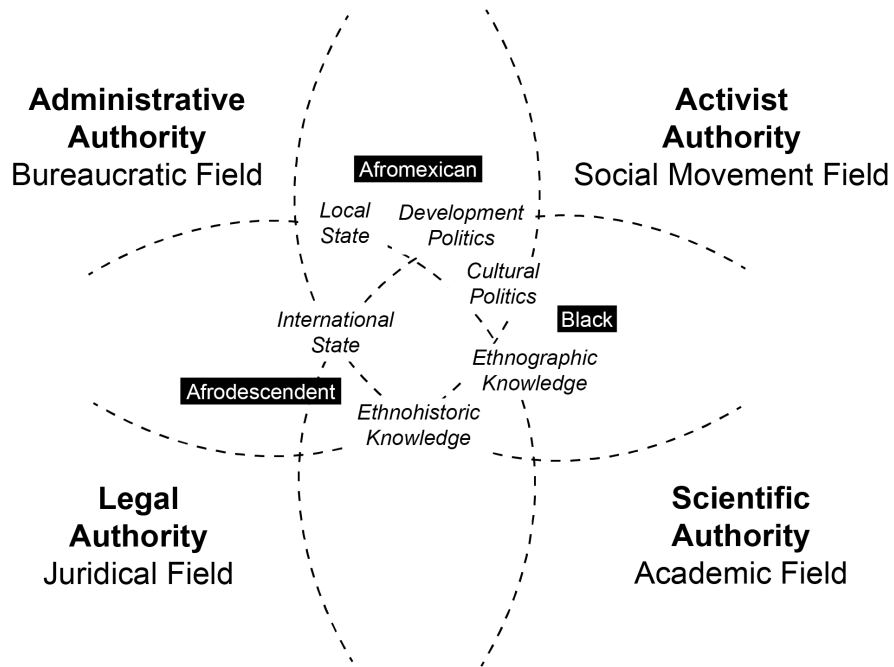
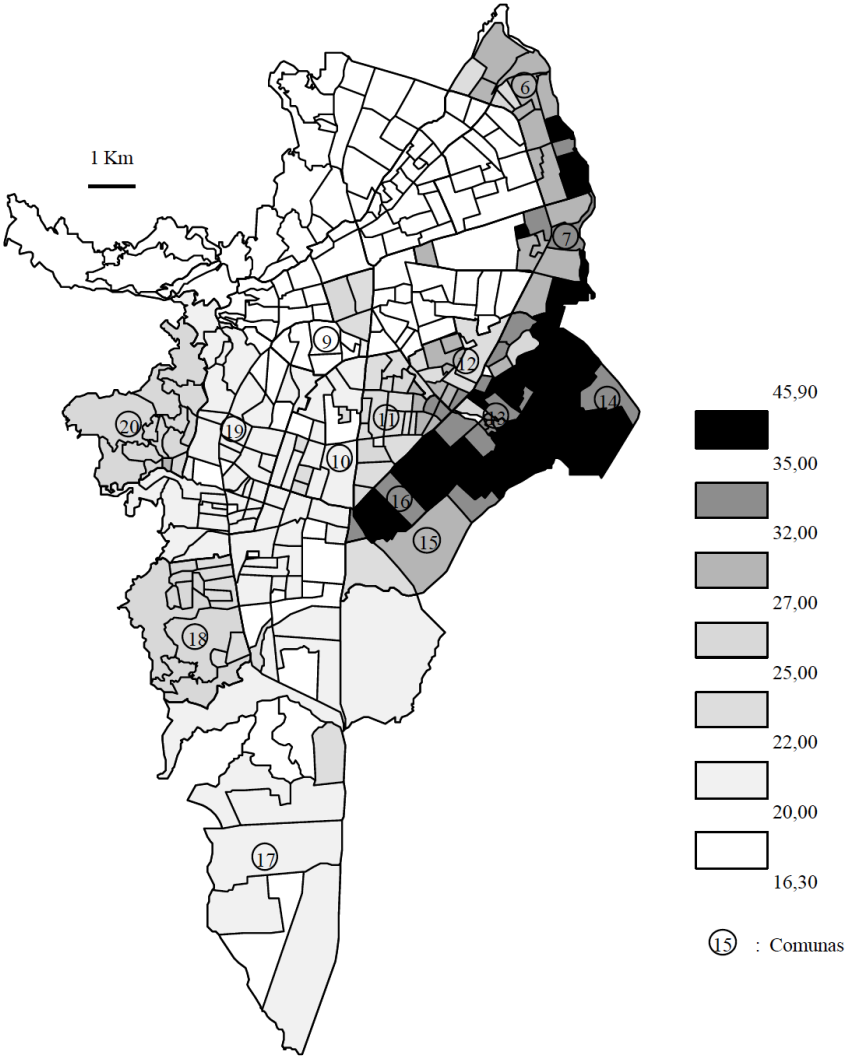


Figure 4.1. Estimated proportion of Afrocolombian Households in Cali by Cartographic Sector



Source: Barbary et al. (1999:36)

Figure 4.2. National Household Survey Question, December 2000



Source: Hernández Romero (2008:15)

Figure 4.4. Poster from “Las Caras Lindas de mi Gente ...” campaign



Source: PCN

Figure 4.5. Television Advertisement #1 from “Las Caras Lindas de mi Gente ...” campaign



Source: CNTV

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7AQZIPNXjs>)

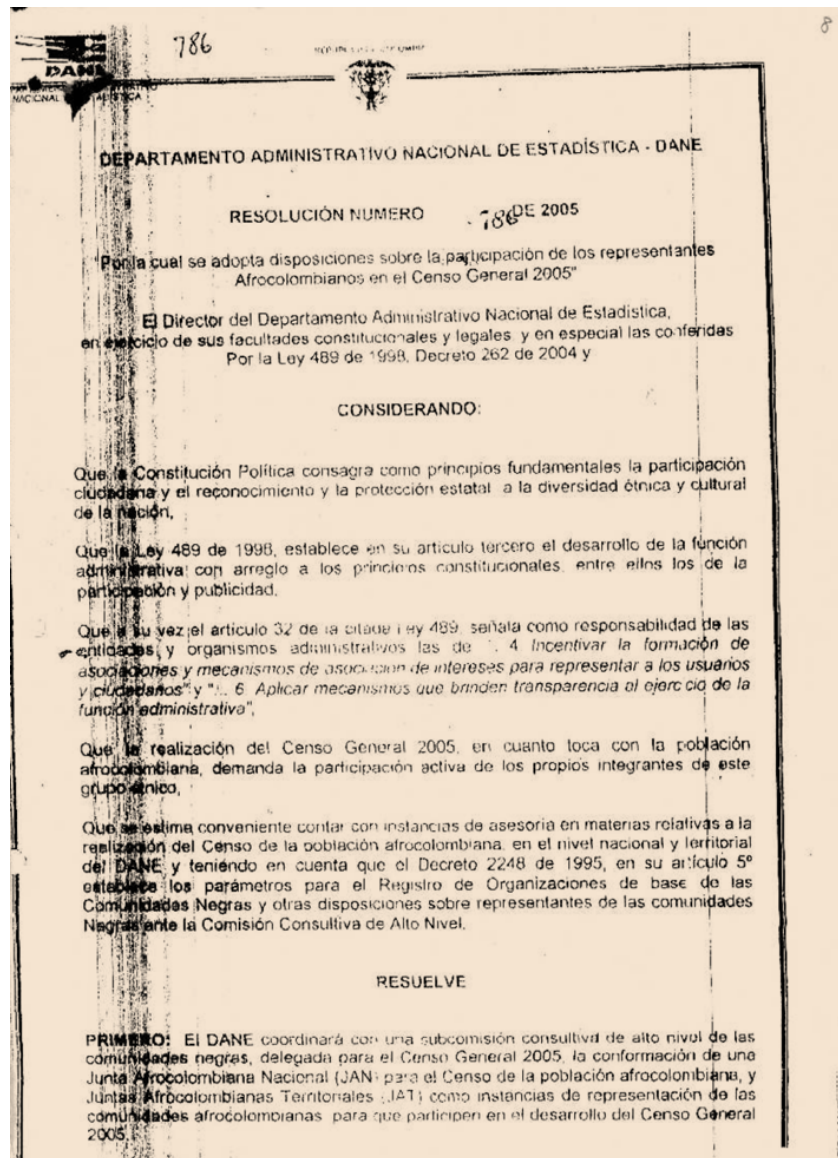
Figure 4.6. Television Advertisement #2 from “Las Caras Lindas de mi Gente ...” campaign



Source: CNTV

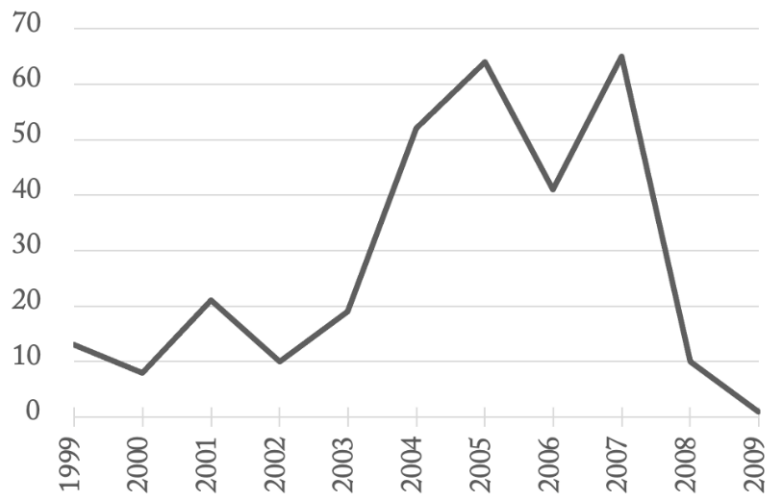
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aS26Kp4XIC8>)

Figure 4.7. DANE's Resolution 786 of 2005



Source: DANE (2005b)

Figure 4.8. Frequency of News about the Census in Colombia (1999-2009)



Source: El Tiempo

Figure 4.9. Poster of the National Colloquium “¿Cómo queremos llamarnos?”



DIVERSIDAD CULTURAL E INTERCULTURALIDAD
PROGRAMA UNIVERSITARIO

CONSEJO NACIONAL DE INVESTIGACIONES CIENTÍFICAS

Purpura

CASA DE LAS HUMANIDADES UNAM

COLOQUIO NACIONAL ¿CÓMO QUEREMOS LLAMARNOS? HORIZONTE CENSO INEGI 2020

**AUDITORIO
CASA DE LAS HUMANIDADES**
Presidente Venustiano Carranza 162,
Coyoacán Ciudad de México, CDMX

17 Abril de 9 - 18 hrs
18 Abril de 9 - 16 hrs

2017

¿Por qué la convocatoria? Pese a la inclusión, por primera vez, de los **pueblos negros de México** en las estadísticas nacionales se considera que la misma fue discriminatoria al no tomarse en cuenta las distintas formas regionales de autodefinirse.

¿Para qué se convoca? Identificar los distintos nombres que utilizan los pueblos negros de México en sus regiones; para poder tener un catálogo de autodenominaciones para que se incluyan en el Censo del 2020 del INEGI.

¿A quién se convoca? Organizaciones Sociales, personas y miembros de comunidades e investigadores.

Entrada libre. Cupo limitado.

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Figure 4.10. The 2016 MMSI Questions on Skin Color and Racial Origins

10.2 A partir de la siguiente escala de color (MOSTRAR ESCALA CROMÁTICA), ¿cuál considera que es el color de piel de su cara?

MUESTRE LA TARJETA CON LA ESCALA CROMÁTICA, ESPERE UNA RESPUESTA Y CIRCULE UN CÓDIGO



A B C D E F G H I J K

10.3 En nuestro país viven personas de múltiples orígenes raciales, ¿se considera usted una persona...

LEA LAS OPCIONES Y CIRCULE UN CÓDIGO

negra o mulata?1

indígena?2

mestiza?3

blanca?4

otra raza (asiática, eurodescendiente)?5

No sabe9

Source: INEGI (2016:12)

Figure 4.11. Participants at the Inter-American Forum Against Discrimination (Cancun, 2017)



Source: R&E

Figure 4.12. Demands of Afromexican Organizations at the IACHR's 172 Period of Sessions

- To the Mexican State:**
- Guarantee, through INEGI, the inclusion of the ethnoracial self-identification question, both for Afrodescendants and Indigenous people in the 2020 census.
 - Guarantee the necessary budget for INEGI to conduct the ethnoracial self-identification question, as well as post-census studies.
 - Develop awareness and information campaigns for the population in general and Afromexicans in particular about the application of the ethnoracial self-identification question for the 2020 census, which must guarantee the inclusion of ethnonyms with which these peoples are habitually recognized.
- To INEGI:**
- Organize a permanent inter-institutional working group with the participation of Afromexican organizations to discuss and define the self-identification question; as well as the inclusion of two or more ethnonyms.
 - Disseminate the qualitative results of the 2017 consultation, as well as the results of the pilot tests.
 - Provide training with a gender and human rights perspective to enumerators/interviewers and evaluate the correct application of the ethnoracial self-identification question.
 - Guarantee the participation of Afromexicans and Indigenous people in their communities as pollsters, and provide training to Afromexican organizations in data management.
 - Expressly include representatives of the undersigned organizations in an agreement regarding the 2020 census, which should be published in the Official Gazette of the Federation, establishing the bases for the coordination, participation and collaboration in the organization, survey, processing and publication of the 2020 Population and Housing Census.
- To the National Institute for Indigenous Peoples (INPI):**
- Guarantee, in compliance with its attributions, a constitutional and legal reform in which the Afromexican People is recognized as a

Source: IACHR (2019)

Figure 4.13. Main Conclusions of INEGI’s Preliminary Tests for the 2020 Census Question

<p>Main Conclusions of the Thematic Test:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The term “Afrodescendant” is not understood by the entire population.• The term “Black” is related to the color of the skin, except in Afrodescendant localities where they call themselves as such.• The inclusion of the term “ancestors” is correct, since among the main reasons why the population declared itself Afrodescendant was “because they descended from Afrodescendants.”• The formulation of the Afrodescendant question of the thematic Test did not include the term “Afromexican,” which could improve the capturing of this population in the sense of not confusing “Mexican” with “Afromexican” people.• It is considered convenient not to separate with the conjunction “or” the term “Afrodescendant or Black.” According to the reports of observers and interviewers, people thought they were asked about two different situations for “Black” or “Afrodescendant.” <p>Main Conclusions of the Pilot Test:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• According to the data from the observation guides, in 84.7% of the cases, the informant provided an answer without a doubt to Afrodescendant question. Likewise, 86.7% of interviewers applied the question correctly.• In the qualitative observations from the observation guides and in the field reports, it continues to be pointed out that the term “Afrodescendant” is not clear and is unknown. The population does not understand it. <p>Main Conclusions of the Questionnaire Test:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• When the term “Afromexican” is used in the wording of the question, the informant relates it to the fact of being born in Mexico or considering himself Mexican; situation that does not occur when talking about “Afrodescendants.”• The term “Black Afrodescendant” is the one that is best understood by the population, since it is related to descendants of the Black or
--

Source: INEGI (2019b:24-25,29,37)

Figure 4.14. INEGI’s Question for People of African Descent in the 2020 Census

Pregunta de Afrodescendencia del Censo 2020

2. AFRODESCENDIENTES

Por sus antepasados y de acuerdo con sus costumbres y tradiciones, ¿(NOMBRE) se considera negro(a) afrodescendiente?

CIRCULE SÓLO UN CÓDIGO

Sí..... 1

No..... 3

🏠 La pregunta de Afrodescendencia se incluye en el cuestionario básico y será aplicada a toda la población residente en el país.

🏠 Se utiliza el término “negro”, ya que es el etnónimo que más ayuda a la comprensión de la condición de afrodescendencia, sobre todo en zonas con presencia histórica de afrodescendientes.



Source: INEGI (2019b:39)

Figure 4.15. INEGI Officials and Members of Afromexican Organizations (Mexico City, August 2019)



Figure 4.16. Self-Identification Question for People of African descent in the 2020 census

2. AFRODESCENDIENTES

Por sus antepasados y de acuerdo con sus costumbres y tradiciones, ¿(NOMBRE) se considera afroamericano(a) negro(a) o afrodescendiente?

CIRCULE SÓLO UN CÓDIGO

Sí..... 1

No..... 3

TABLES

Table 1.1. Percent of Heterogamous Marriages within each category in selected regions of New Spain

		Españoles	Indios	Castas	Total
SOUTHERN REGIONS					
Cholula (Pue.)	1674-1691	25.0	—	49.0	37.0
	1692-1799	29.0	—	64.6	46.8
Jalapa (Ver.)	1645	7.0	3.5	21.5	10.6
	1715-1805	17.2	13.5	27.7	19.4
Atlacomulco (Méx.)	1696-1860	48.0	6.5	17.4	23.9
Taximaroa (Mich.)	1667-1823	18.5	3.1	33.5	22.1
NORTHERN REGIONS					
Charcas (S.L.P.)	1635-1723	20.8	28.1	63.4	44.0
San Luis (Gto.)	1720-1810	35.2	10.7	47.5	35.2
León (Gto.)	1782-1793	24.0	47.8	44.6	40.2
Aguascalientes (Ags.)	1602-1700	8.4	16.5	42.0	27.2
	1701-1800	19.4	20.5	62.0	41.0

Source: González Esparza (2018:100)

Table 1.2. Percent of Illegitimate Newborns in selected regions of New Spain

		Españoles	Mestizos	Mulatos	Indios	Total
Guadalajara	1698-1702	39.0	42.8	60.5	50.0	48.0
	1724	36.9	29.6	44.4	34.8	36.4
Mexico City	1753	27.7	30.5	34.2	31.6	31.0
	1762	17.3	29.0	30.3	31.6	27.0
	1782	23.7	35.7	53.0	32.6	36.2
Guanajuato	1645-1664	6.8	43.4	43.7	3.9	6.8
	1700-1719	9.2	21.1	33.3	12.6	14.5
	1750-1769	10.3	12.5	14.4	9.6	10.5
	1790-1809	10.5	11.5	6.6	5.7	6.9

Source: Twinam (2013:8)

Table 1.3. Occupational Distribution by Ethnoracial Category, Mexico City, 1753

	Elite	Shopowner	Artisan	Laborer	Servant
Españoles Pen.	35 7.4%	241 17.3%	12 0.6%	1 0.3%	1 0.1%
Españoles Cre.	387 82.0%	1,095 78.7%	1,196 55.8%	34 9.1%	134 14.0%
Castizos	13 2.8%	9 0.6%	126 5.9%	17 4.5%	11 1.2%
Mestizos	10 2.1%	21 1.5%	269 12.5%	83 22.1%	103 10.8%
Mulatos	17 3.6%	21 1.5%	475 22.2%	36 9.6%	539 56.5%
Negros	0 0.0%	1 0.1%	1 0.0%	2 0.5%	23 2.4%
Indios	10 2.1%	3 0.2%	65 3.0%	202 53.9%	143 15.0%
Total	472 100.0%	1391 100.0%	2144 100.0%	375 100.0%	954 100.0%

Source: Seed (1982:583)

Table 1.4. Distinctions of *Casta* and *Clase* included in the forms of the 1790 census

DISTINCION DE CASTAS

CASTAS	HASTA 7 AÑOS		DE 7 A 16		DE 16 A 25		DE 25 A 40		DE 40 A 50		DE 50 A ARRIBA		TOTALES	
	V.	H.	V.	H.	V.	H.	V.	H.	V.	H.	V.	H.	V.	H.
EUROP.														
ESPAÑ.														
INDIOS														
MULATOS														
OTRAS CASTAS														

Distinción de Clases

Curas
Beneficiados
Vicarios
Sacristanes
Ord. por Patrimonio
Id. de Menores
Depend. de Inquiz.

Id. de Cruzadas
Id. de Acordada
Titulos
Hidalgos
Letrados
Estudiantes
Empl. en RL. Hac.

Con fuero Militar
Escribanos
Depend. del Foro
T.
Labradores
Mineros
Comerciantes

Fabricantes
Artesanos
Jornaleros
Medicos
Cirujanos
Barber. y Sargn.

Source: Castro Aranda (1977:48)

Table 1.5. Sample of Narrative Descriptions of Family Units in the 1790 census

N^o 2^o 5

Padron de Familias de Españoles, Castizos, y Mestizos

Jurisdiccion de Tetzpano.

Pueblo de Tetzpano.	Famils.	Dobles.	Mayor.	Menor.	Dobles.	Almas.	Total.
<p>Dⁿ Lorenzo Santillan, y Mayorga, Español de 38 años, Encomendado de Justicia en este partido. Se casó con Mariela, Señalada, Guano, Española sin hijos; tiene consigo 2 huérfanos casados, una criada y un vacaon pequeño.</p>	1	1	1	1	1	1	4
<p>Dⁿ Juan Antonio Barba, Obrero natural de los Reynos de Andalucía de 36 años, Casado en esta Doctrina, se tiene una criada morisca, doncella.</p>	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
<p>Maxim Sánchez, mestizo de 60 años, se casó con Maxim Ignacia Rivera, mestiza, con 4 hijos, 2 criados pequeños, y 2 vacaons, uno de ellos Juan Antonio Sánchez, de 18 años, el otro se llama S. y el restante pequeño.</p>	1	2	1	1	2	2	6
<p>Juan Maria León, casado de 80 años, casado con India sin hijos.</p>	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
<p>José Antonio Wanges, Español de 78 años, casado con India casado, sin hijos, tiene consigo un huérfano Español pequeño.</p>	1	1	1	1	1	1	3
<p>Mig^l Ramirez, Español de 48 años, se casó con Juliana Perdon, Española con 2 hijos, una criada grande, y un vacaon llamado San Antonio Ramirez de 17 años, el otro se llama S. y el restante pequeño.</p>	1	2	3	1	1	1	5
<p>Jose Antonio Casera de Alcazar, Español de 48 años, casado con Rosalia Antonia Herrera, Española con 6 hijos, un vacaon, uno Ignacia Casera de Alcazar de 12 años, el otro se llama S. y el restante pequeño, y el vacaon se llama S. y el restante pequeño.</p>	1	3	1	4	1	1	8

Source: AGN

Table 1.6. Afrodescendant tributaries as percentage of total tributaries in 1794 and 1805

Province	Afromexican, 1794	Total tributaries, 1794	Afromexican, 1805	Total tributaries, 1805 ^a	% increase in Afromexican	% increase in total tributaries
Veracruz	1,284.0	30,706.5	1,330.5	33,867.0	3.62	10.29
Arizpe	—	—	2,369.0	4,345.0	—	—
Puebla	2,405.5	94,350.5	2,400.5	113,174.0	-0.21	19.95
Oaxaca	2,460.0	81,679.0	2,905.5	95,952.0	18.11	17.47
Guanajuato	7,701.0	47,328.0	8,086.0	62,874.0	5.00	32.85
Mexico	8,159.5	197,088.5	10,923.0	257,230.0	33.87	30.51
Valladolid	9,457.0	36,203.5	12,455.0	46,804.0	31.70	29.28
Potosí	3,760.5	15,157.5	10,212.0	32,004.0	171.56	111.14
Zacatecas	—	—	12,768.0	23,459.0	—	—
Guadalajara	2,101.0	14,107.0	14,885.5	46,682.0	608.50	230.91
Totals	37,328.5	516,620.5	78,335.0	716,391.0	109.85	38.67

Source: Gharala (2019:140)

Table 1.8. Cartagena Population by Ethnoracial Category, 1777

Category	Total
White	309
Free People	2,875
—Libres	1,278
—Pardos	564
—Negros	425
—Mulatos	422
—Cuarterones	84
—Zambos	79
—Mestizos	20
—Quinterones	1
—Pintas	2
Slaves	1,720
—Negros	977
—Esclavos	507
—Mulatos	138
—Zambos	61
—Pardos	34
—Cuarterones	3
Indian	15
Ecclesiastic	82
No information	5,469

Source: Aguilera Díaz and Meisel Roca (2009:35)

Table 2.1. Humboldt's Distribution of "Races" in Continental and Insular America

1. Whites	
Spanish America	3,276,000
West Indies, without Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Margarita	140,000
Brazil	920,000
United States	8,575,000
Canada	550,000
English, Dutch, and French Guyanas	10,000
	<hr/>
	13,471,000
2. Indians	
Spanish America	7,530,000
Brazil (inclosed Indians of Rio Negro, Rio Branco, and the Amazon)	260,000
Independent Indians, on the east and west of the Rocky Mountains, on the frontiers of New Mexico, the Mosquitos, etc.	400,000
Independent Indians of South America	420,000
	<hr/>
	8,610,000
3. Negroes	
West Indies, with Cuba and Puerto Rico	1,960,000
Continent of Spanish America	387,000
Brazil	1,960,000
English, Dutch, and French Guyanas	206,000
United States	1,920,000
	<hr/>
	6,433,000
4. Mixed Races	
Spanish America	5,328,000
West Indies, without Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Margarita	190,000
Brazil and the United States	890,000
English, Dutch, and French Guyanas	20,000
	<hr/>
	6,428,000

Source: Humboldt (1966b:836–37)

Table 3.1. Visibility of people of African descent in Latin American Censuses (1980-2010)

	1980	1990	2000	2010
Argentina				●
Bolivia				●
Brazil	●	●	●	●
Chile				
Colombia		●	●	●
Costa Rica			●	●
Cuba	●		●	●
Rep. Dominicana				
Ecuador			●	●
El Salvador			●	
Guatemala			●	●
Honduras			●	●
Mexico				●
Nicaragua			●	●
Panama				●
Paraguay				●
Peru				●
Uruguay				●
Venezuela				●

Source: Loveman (2014:253) (updated by the author)

Table 4.1. Questions Suggested by Groups for the 2005 census in Colombia

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	
Question Heading	Are you ...?	Do you consider yourself ...?	Do you consider yourself ...?	Based on your physical characteristics, do you consider yourself? Based on your customs and traditions, do you consider yourself?	
Response Option	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Indigenous * Afrocolombian * Black * Palenquero * Raizal from the Archipelago * Rom - Yubli - Gypsy * Mestizo * White * Other 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Indigenous * Rom - Yubli - Gypsy * Palenquera * Raizal Islander from San Andrés * Mestizo * Zambo * Afrocolombian * Mulatto * Trigueño * Moreno * Black * White 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Indigenous * Afrocolombian - Afrodescendent * Gypsy - Rom * None of the above 	Physical characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Indigenous * Black * Mulatto * Zambo * Mestizo * Other 	Customs and traditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Indigenous * Gypsy - Rom * Raizal from the Archipelago * Afrodescendent - Afrocolombian * Black * Other

Source: DANE (2004:17)

Table 4.2. Census Questions Considered in the Negotiation Process of 2004

	Organizations Proposal	DANE Proposal
Ethno-cultural question	<p>According to your customs and traditions, do you consider yourself ...?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Afrocolombian * Raizal or Native of the Archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina * Palenquero * Indigenous * Rom - Gypsy 	<p>According to your customs and traditions, do you consider yourself ...?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Indigenous * Raizal from the Archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina * Palenquero * Rom - Gypsy * Afrocolombian or Afrodescendant * None of the above
Ethno-racial question	<p>Are you ...?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Black * Moreno * Trigueño or Mulatto * Zambo 	<p>Are you ...?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Black * Mulatto * Zambo * Mestizo * White * None of the above

Source: PCN (2006:17)

Table 4.3. Pilot Questions included in the Continuous Household Survey (II Trimester 2004)

	Question Wording	Percentage
Ethno-cultural question	<p>According to your culture, are you ...?</p> <p>a) Afrocolombian b) Indigenous c) Rom d) Raizal from San Andrés and Providencia e) Palenquero f) None of the above</p>	1.20%
Ethno-racial question	<p>According to your physical characteristics, are you ...?</p> <p>a) Black b) White c) Mestizo d) Mulatto e) None of the above</p>	9.80%

Source: DANE (2008:18)

Table 4.4. Population Distribution by Ethnoracial Identification, 2005 and 1993

2005 Census			1993 Census		
According to your culture, people, and physical characteristics, are you ... or do you consider yourself as ...?	Population	Percentage	Do you belong to any ethnicity, Indigenous Group or Black Community?	Population	Percentage
Indigenous	1,392,623	3.43%	Indigenous Group	532,233	1.61%
Rom	4,858	0.01%			
Raizal	30,565	0.08%			
Palenquero	7,470	0.02%			
Black, Mulatto, Afrocolombian	4,273,722	10.52%	Black Community	502,342	1.52%
No Ethnic Membership	34,898,170	85.94%	No Ethnic Membership	32,003,340	96.87%
No information	860,976		No information	71,923	
Total	41,468,384	100%		33,109,839	100%












Source: DANE (2008:27)

Table 4.5. Catalogue of Self-Denominations suggested by RED

Self-Denominations	Region
Negro / Negra	Costa de Oaxaca
	Costa de Guerrero
	Estado de México
	Ciudad de México
	Yanga, Veracruz
	Algunos estados de la Unión Americana
Moreno / Morena	Costa de Guerrero
	Costa Chica de Oaxaca
Negros Mascogos	Municipio de Múzquiz Coahuila
Afromestizos	El Coyolillo, Veracruz
Negro	Laguna de Tamiahua, Veracruz
Negros / Morenos	Cuenca del Papaloapan
	Los Tuxtlas
Cocho	Tierra Caliente Michoacán
Costeño	Costa Chica, Oaxaca
Negro-Indio / Indio-Negro	
Afromestizos	
Costeño	Chiapas
Moreno	
Negro	
Boxio	Península de Yucatán
Rastafari	Nacional
Afroindígena	Costa, Oaxaca
Jarocho	Cuenca del Papaloapan, Tuxtepec
Jarocho	Veracruz

Source: PUIC (2017)

Table 4.6. Percent of Educational Attainment by Self-Identified Skin Color (2016 MMSI)

Autoclasiación de color de piel (Escala cromática de color de piel)	Nivel de escolaridad de la población de 25 a 64 años						
	Población de 25 a 64 años	Sin escolaridad	Primaria incompleta	Primaria completa	Secundaria	Media superior	Superior
Estados Unidos Mexicanos	61 827 469	3.3	11.3	14.6	33.1	16.7	21.0
 Escala A	102 180	7.2	28.8	23.0	20.6	15.5	4.9
 Escala B	337 657	8.7	26.3	13.3	32.0	7.7	12.0
 Escala C	647 234	4.3	24.0	20.9	32.0	10.7	8.1
 Escala D	1 836 641	7.3	17.2	22.6	33.1	14.6	5.3
 Escala E	1 698 975	4.3	15.3	16.6	34.9	14.3	14.6
 Escala F	8 039 572	4.6	15.0	16.7	34.4	16.1	13.2
 Escala G	18 555 566	3.3	12.0	14.9	34.6	15.9	19.3
 Escala H	23 106 220	2.4	8.3	12.5	32.5	18.4	25.9
 Escala I	3 193 781	3.0	10.1	12.9	29.9	18.2	25.9
 Escala J	3 037 897	3.2	9.9	17.3	30.8	14.3	24.5
 Escala K	1 271 746	3.8	11.0	13.9	26.9	15.6	28.8

Source: INEGI (Tabulados)

Table 4.7. Differences in Population Size and Socioeconomic Conditions of the Afromexican

Population according to the 2015 EIC and the 2016 MMSI

	Autoidentificación afrodescendiente en Encuesta Intercensal 2015 ¹		Autoidentificación en Módulo de Movilidad Social Intergeneracional 2016			
	No	Sí	Por origen racial ²		Por tono de piel ³	
			No	Sí	No	Sí
Promedio de años de escolaridad	9.4	9.3	9.7	8.1	9.8	7.3
Cuenta con refrigerador (%)	87.7	86.4	88.8	82.8	89.0	80.5
Cuenta con lavadora (%)	73.7	68.3	75.1	66.6	75.6	60.0
Cuenta con horno de microondas (%)	48.7	44.5	51.3	39.8	52.0	30.9
Cuenta con automóvil propio (%)	47.9	39.3	51.4	29.5	51.7	33.7
Cuenta con tv de pantalla plana (%)	47.5	45.3	71.9	71.9	72.2	65.0
Cuenta con computadora (%)	35.9	34.7	38.4	26.2	38.9	20.7
Cuenta con teléfono celular (%)	82.0	80.2	91.5	83.4	91.8	80.3
Cuenta con internet (%)	36.5	36.3	46.1	33.0	46.8	25.8
Cuenta con televisión de paga (%)	43.4	39.0	54.9	44.6	55.1	45.9
Porcentaje de población 25-64 años		1.3		2.6		4.9

Source: Saldívar, Solís, and Arenas (2018:49)

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