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Blackness, Gender and the State: Afro Women's Organizations in Contemporary Ecuador

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Abstract

This dissertation presents an ethnographic analysis of the Afro women's social organization CONAMUNE (Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Negras del Ecuador), the political thought and praxis of its members and their entanglement with myriad ethno-racial political spaces in contemporary Ecuador. CONAMUNE is an umbrella organization comprised of Afro women's grassroots organizations from different provinces of Ecuador. In addition to their activities within CONAMUNE, many of the women with whom I worked have sought out positions of government employment or political representation (as teachers and principals, as employees of government ministries or programs, as local municipal councillors, etc.), through which they bring their lived experience into state spaces. In this context, I carried out a political ethnography among CONAMUNE members that focuses on Black women as political subjects and knowledge producers through fieldwork conducted in the Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi, in the northern Ecuadorian highlands, from May 2018 - May 2019.

Drawing on three bodies of literature – anthropology of the state, Black feminism, and Afro-Latin and African diaspora studies – my research is an attempt to think with and alongside Afro women who shared their lives and stories with me. By focusing on those debates that resonate with the political practices, discourses and lived experiences of Afro-Ecuadorian women, the reflections presented here emerge from a process of thinking together as Afro women about ourselves as subjects of our own history and particular experiences and as political subjects and thinkers. Paying attention to how Afro women make sense of their lives by resignifying their past, theorizing their present and imagining their future offers an opportunity to understand the cultural construction of African diaspora identities in the Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi as well as interrogate the textures of the political from the perspective of Afro women. Afro-Ecuadorian women have been redefining the "political" and the racial state not as white-mestizo or indigenous and masculine spheres but rather as spaces for Afro women to occupy, navigate, lead, and transform. CONAMUNE members are building their own

social organization while simultaneously advancing their gender and ethno-racial projects in different political spheres.

Keywords:

Summary for Lay Audience

This dissertation analyses Afro women's social organizations in contemporary Ecuador, based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the provinces of Carchi, Imbabura and Pichincha in the northern highlands of Ecuador, between May 2018 and May 2019. This dissertation focuses on the lived experiences and political practices of members of CONAMUNE (Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Negras del Ecuador, National Coordinator of Black Women in Ecuador), which is an umbrella organization comprised of Afro women's grassroots organizations from different provinces of Ecuador that was founded in 1999 in the First National Congress of Black Women of Ecuador in Ambuquí, Chota-Mira Valley, Imbabura. CONAMUNE aims to promote gender equality and to strengthen Afro women's identity and pride as a strategy to eradicate poverty, sexism and racism but also gain political participation. This ethnographic research shows how Afro women move through the obstacles of racism, political exclusion and marginalization, and gender violence to imagine, create and transform lives for themselves and their communities by advancing projects such as the Ancestral Territory or Ethnoeducation from a gender perspective. This research also shows the multiple ways in which Afro women engage with and participate in "the state" by using several strategies and taking on diverse roles. In doing so, they are weaving together webs of relationships, institutions and projects rooted in their lived experiences and evolving political program.

Co-Authorship Statement

Chapter six is based on a co-authored chapter written with my research collaborator and CONAMUNE leader Barbarita Lara reflecting on a community project to recuperate collective memory of an old cemetery. Through phone call conversations in August and September 2019, Barbarita gave me more context and information about her experience in this process. Some of the material drawn upon and cited in the analysis is based on conversations that Barbarita had with family and community members that pre-date my fieldwork in the Chota Valley. I initially drafted the chapter, and she provided me with feedback about my interpretations of her work and involvement in this process. This co-authored chapter will appear in the edited volume *Antropología y Arqueología Afro Latina*, edited by Daniela Balanzategui and Edizon León, to be published in Spanish in Ecuador in 2021.

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I want to express my most sincere gratitude to so many different people who have contributed in special ways to my personal growth and academic success. This would require thinking beyond my doctoral program and going back to those days when I was in Venezuela at IVIC, planning to apply for the PhD program at the Department of Anthropology in the University of Western Ontario. It would also require thanking all the wonderful people in Ecuador I have had the honour of getting to know. Working as an anthropologist at the Center of Anthropology in Venezuela, my colleagues Hortensia Caballero and Krisna Ruette encouraged me to pursue a career in academia. They helped me to search for different anthropologists who were working on political anthropology in Latin America and led me to Kim Clark.

Coming to Canada and to Western University to work with Kim has been a life-changing experience. Kim has been the most wonderful and supportive supervisor and mentor. She has not only provided me with a stimulating and inspiring intellectual environment to learn and develop my thinking but also she has prioritized my needs as a Afro Venezuelan woman who left her family in an especially complex situation in Venezuela. *Gracias infinitas, Kim, por tanto amor y apoyo siempre*!

Tania Granadillo has not only supported me since the first day I arrived in London in August 2016, but also became my mentor and my sister. Our daily conversations about how to navigate North American academia allowed me to survive so many changes and challenges during my doctoral program. *Gracias, Tania, por tanto*! Special thanks to my colleagues Abdulla, Katya and Caro from the Anthropology Department who always believed in me and my work, who through hugs or smiles filled with joy and understanding the tough first years of my doctoral program. My doctoral experience was also shaped by the invitation to participate in Amanda Grzyb's research project "Surviving Memory in Post-Civil War El Salvador," which gave me the opportunity to apply my skills and learn new ones alongside a team of colleagues who provided so much friendship and support. Thank you, Amanda. Randa Farah was a great support to me

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my uncle Rómulo, an Afro-Venezuelan teacher and state agent who fought so hard for a better future and passed away on September 3rd, 2018 while I was doing my fieldwork.

To Delfina, Lucía and Barbarita

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Legend
- La Concepcion Parish
- Afroecuadorian Ancestral Territory (Parishes)
- Provincial Border
- Rivers
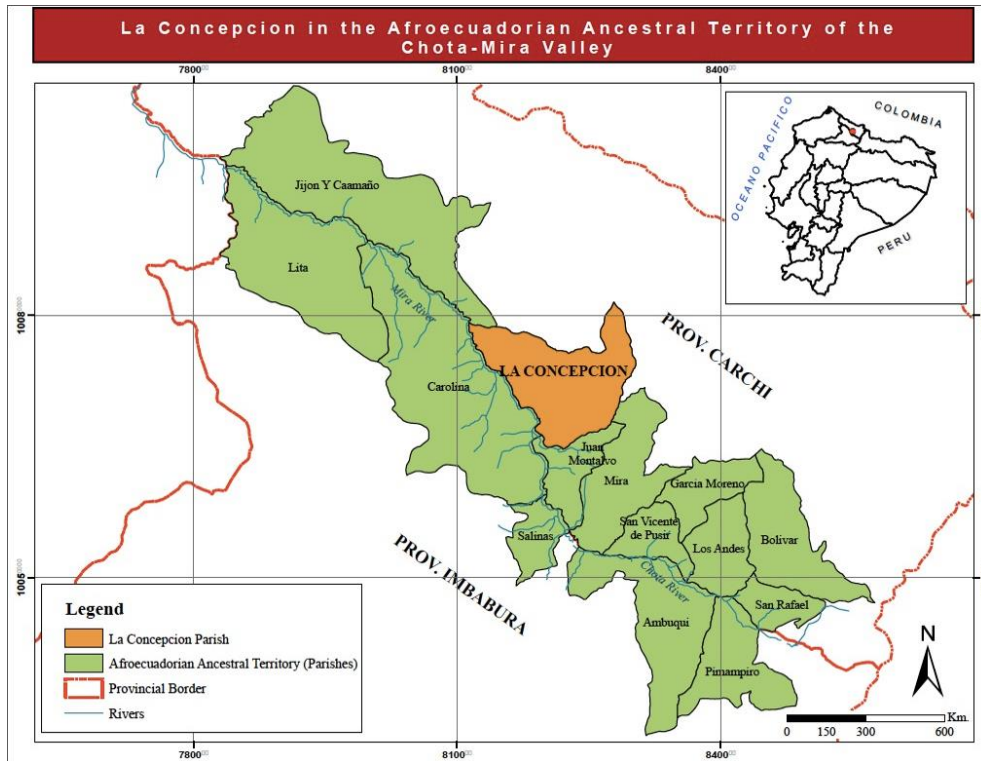
Balanzategui 2017

Chapter 1

1 Introduction

On March 8, 2019, Barbarita Lara and I arrived at Ecuador's presidential palace Carondelet in the capital city Quito to attend an event called "homenaje a las mujeres que construyen el Ecuador", a tribute to the women who built Ecuador, held by the national president Lenín Moreno. Catherine Chalá – one of the co-founders and the first national coordinator of the Afro women's movement Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Negras del Ecuador (CONAMUNE, National Coordinator of Black Women of Ecuador) – was waiting for us at the main gate. After greeting us she went on to say, "it is great that you came, it is important to be here representing the women of the Black movement." And Barbarita replied, "I came here dressed as an Afrochoteña", while smiling and showing us the traditional clothing, a pleated skirt and white blouse from the Chota-Mira Valley. While we continued talking about the relevance of being in this institutional space and attending this political event as Black women[1], Barbarita[2] said: "I came here for the first time when Correa was the president because he opened the state for us [Black people and women in particular], he allowed us to come in and be part of it". After a pause, Catherine said:

> I am working in the sub-secretariat for the prevention and eradication of violence against women, girls, children and adolescents [as part of the new Office for Human Rights] and we are going to carry this law on violence back to the territory [Black communities] and to cross it with our political agenda [of CONAMUNE].

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[1] I use Afro (as prefix of a national identity such as Afro Ecuadorian or Afro Venezuelan) and Black as interchangeable identity categories because both are used by all my collaborators to identify themselves and their organizations. In Ecuador the term Afro, Negro or Negra, Afrodescendant or diaspora have been used depending on individual and collective experience and the context. Many of my collaborators recognize themselves as Black and use this term in family social gatherings, community and social organization meetings. Afro or Afro Ecuadorian were most often used in meetings or encounters with state agents or in institutional spaces. The official use of Afro Ecuadorian since the constitutional reform of 1998 represents an achievement of the Afro-Ecuadorian social movement.

[2] I use first names when citing interviews, following the preferences my collaborators expressed when filling out the consent form to participate in my research. In some cases, I refer to certain collaborators in the way that people in the community and in the social organizations refer to them.

This conversation with two of the principal figures of CONAMUNE, which took place near the end of my doctoral fieldwork, has meaningful layers of analysis that condense issues of self-representation, Afro women's social movements and the state, and points towards some of the questions that are at the core of this dissertation. These include how Afro-Ecuadorian women represent themselves as identarian and political subjects and how they navigate and open up spaces for negotiation and political action in different political arenas and with multiple political actors in contemporary Ecuador. The encounter between Barbarita and Catherine reveals how CONAMUNE members have been navigating institutional spaces and articulating their bureaucratic position within the echelons of the state and their duties as state agents with their collective goals as social organization members. Moreover, this dialogue shows how CONAMUNE members think critically about their own political engagement with the state by highlighting their active role in seizing some political opportunities to present an image of themselves as Afrochoteñas in political spheres as part of their politics of representation, while positioning themselves as members of CONAMUNE in the national political scene and their role. It also revels their awareness of the limitation of neoliberal multicultural policies (Hale 2002) and their role in addressing racial and gender violence by "implementing" and articulating state policies to their local realities and political agendas. Political events such as this one, which could be seen as strategy of "the state" to depict "itself" as progressive, multicultural, plurinational and feminist, are used by CONAMUNE's members as political spaces to advance their project of visibilization and political participation. During this political event, Barbarita also spoke to two national television channels which allowed her to position herself as a Black woman from the Ancestral Territory of the Chota-Mira Valley and to subtly address the state's historical debt to the Afro people in the country. This ethnographic event also points towards the paradox of visibility/invisibility and inclusion/exclusion that has shaped the lives and political participation of Afrodescendant populations in the multicultural turn in Latin America (Gordon 1998; Safa 1998; Hooker 2005, 2008; Restrepo 2004, 2007; Anderson 2007, 2009; Paschel and Sawyer 2008; Wade 2010; Greene 2012; Ng'weno 2007; Cardenas 2012) and in particular in Ecuador (Whitten and Torres 1998; Rahier 1998,

2011, 2012; Walsh, León and Restrepo 2005; Antón Sánchez 2008; de la Torre and Antón Sánchez 2012).

Barbarita's reflection on former president Rafael Correa's inclusion and opening of the state to Afro-Ecuadorian participation, and Catherine's comment on her role as a state agent in implementing the law by "*bajar al territorio la ley*" (carrying the law to the territory, to the Black communities) and linking it to CONAMUNE's political agenda, emerge in a context of political transition. The change from the Citizens' Revolution advanced by Correa to the "restauration of the institutionality" proposed by his successor Lenín Moreno posed a political scenario of institutional instability and economic crisis which CONAMUNE members and my collaborators were navigating while advancing their collective projects. In this context, Afro women – members of CONAMUNE and state agents – were constantly reflecting on their role as political subjects, which led them to radicalize their actions and establish a critical position before the state as a political space wherein to effect changes. How they did so through different projects and in diverse venues can be further appreciated through the evocative ethnographic stories analyzed in the chapters of this dissertation.

This dissertation presents an ethnographic analysis of the Afro women's social organization CONAMUNE and the political thought and praxis of its members in contemporary Ecuador. Specifically, I carried out a political ethnography among CONAMUNE members that focuses on Black women as political subjects and knowledge producers based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi, in the northern highlands of Ecuador, between May 2018 and May 2019. CONAMUNE is an umbrella organization made up of Afro women's grassroots organizations from different provinces of Ecuador. It was founded in 1999 in the First National Congress of Black Women of Ecuador in Ambuquí, Chota-Mira Valley, Imbabura.

This introductory chapter describes the theoretical debates that have inspired and informed my analysis, and most importantly, those that resonate with the political practices, discourses and lived experiences of Afro-Ecuadorian women. This dissertation

is an attempt to think with and alongside Barbarita, Olguita, Ofelita, Catherine and many other Afro women who shared their lives and stories with me. All of the reflections presented here emerged out of a dialogue and process of thinking together as Black women about ourselves as subjects of our own history and particular experiences and as political subjects and thinkers (Hooks 1981, 1994, 2003; Collins 2000; Carneiro 2005; Curiel 2007; Werneck 2007). Hence, I connect the main arguments of my dissertation with scholarly debates in Black feminism and Afro pessimism, Afro Latin and diasporic studies and the anthropology of the state. Then, I briefly describe the racial landscape and multicultural state in contemporary Ecuador that Afro women's organizations have been navigating. Finally, I describe my research process and how it is linked to broader feminist and decolonial debates. I also explore how being an Afro-Venezuelan woman shaped my experience and ethnographic analysis among Afro women's organizations in the northern highlands of Ecuador.

1.1 Theorizing the State and Afro Women's Organizations

This dissertation draws on a critical approach that understands Black social mobilizations in relation to multicultural state projects in Latin America (Anderson 2007; Andrews 2004; Appelbaum 2005; Restrepo 2007; Antón Sánchez 2008; Wade 2010; Hooker 2012; Walsh, 2012; Telles 2014). Multiculturalism and its politics of cultural recognition have been implemented as state policies in many Latin American countries since the 1980s and 1990s. The development of multicultural legal framework coincides in time with the implementation of structural adjustment policies in the region but these policies are not uniform across Latin America (Van Cott 2006). Some countries have recognized specific constitutional rights for Indigenous people, but only three of them (Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador) have acknowledged and defined rights for Afrodescendant populations (Van Cott 2006; Hooker 2009; Ruette-Orihuela 2011). The waves of multicultural constitutional reforms which provided Indigenous people with legal recognition as distinct ethno-racial groups with specific rights before the nation state began in the 1991 with Colombia, following the World Bank's emergent Policy on Indigenous People. In this context, Afrodescendants were mentioned or included later, as

in Colombia's Law 70 in 1993 – which granted collective rights to Afro communities in the Pacific coast of the country – or "Ecuador's inclusion of collective rights in 1998" (Walsh 2012, 18).

Many scholars have explored the role played by multicultural policies in shaping ethno-racial movements (Van Cott 2000; Hale 2002, 2005; Speed and Sierra 2005; Hooker 2005; Postero 2007). Yet, Black social movements do not passively engage with multicultural neoliberal policies (Escobar and Alvarez 1992). Scholars in Peru (Greene 2012), Honduras (Anderson 2009), Colombia (Wade 1993; Restrepo 2002; Ng'weno 2007), Ecuador (Rahier 2012), and Venezuela (Ruette-Orihuela 2011) have shown how Black social mobilizations produce and deploy cultural and political meanings seeking to contest, negotiate, and articulate with multicultural state discourses. Recent debates on the dilemmas faced by Black social movements under multiculturalist reforms in Latin America emphasize institutionalization as one of the principal forms of political engagement between Afro mobilizations and the state (Hooker 2005, 2008; de la Torre and Antón Sánchez 2012; Rahier 2011; de la Torre and Arnson 2013), although authors disagree on whether cooptation is unavoidable (Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Della Porta and Diani 1999; Rahier 2012; de la Torre 2002), or whether institutionalization opens up new paths for local contestation and political engagement and transformation (Foweraker 1995; Launsbury 2005; Ruette-Orihuela and Caballero-Arias 2017). However, less is known about Afro women's organizations and their political practices (Carneiro 2005; Werneck 2007; Perry 2012, 2013) and how these practices are engaging with and/or challenging those processes of institutionalization in multicultural contexts (Moreno Zapata 2014). And even less is known about how Afro women's organizations are navigating institutional spaces to address their own collective goals to combat racism and sexism. Taking a critical approach to the binary of inclusion/exclusion that underlies the debate on processes of institutionalization (Walsh 2012), this dissertation aims to analyze the political practices and lived experiences of Afro women members of CONAMUNE as political subjects and their entanglement with myriad ethno-racial political spaces and projects in contemporary Ecuador.

As a political anthropologist, I have found inspiration in the debates on state formation and social movements in Latin America, in particular those approaches that analyze the mutually constitutive relationship between the state, nationalism and subordinated ethno-racial subjects (Alonso 1994; Gilroy 1987; Hall 1986; Williams 1991), and those that see the state as a key actor in processes of social mobilizations (Foweraker 1995; Tarrow 1998; Della Porta and Diani 1999; Edelman 2001; Hale 2005; Speed and Sierra 2005; Becker 2008; Ruette-Orihuela 2011; Ruette-Orihuela and Caballero-Arias 2017). While these studies have been questioning the understanding of the state as monolithic, this dissertation draws also on scholars who have revealed the ongoing processes of state effect that undermine any notion of state and society as separate and monolithic entities, bringing them together as a set of power relations that are culturally and historically grounded (Abrams 1988; Mitchell 1991; Joseph and Nugent 1994; Coronil 1997; Das and Poole 2004; Painter 2006; Sharma 2006; Clark 2012a; Krupa and Nugent 2015).

By taking approaches that privilege ethnographic analysis of the state and emphasize the role of practices in order to undermine reified approaches to the state and its power (Painter 2006; Sharma 2006; Krupa 2010, 2015; Schwegler 2012), in this dissertation state projects and policies are understood as diverse sets of assemblages and everyday practices enacted through relationships among individuals, social organizations, cultural and political practices in multiple sites (Painter 2006; Sharma and Gupta 2006).

Krupa's understanding of state power in terms of "claims and recognition that insinuate state power into the material relations of everyday life" (2010, 324) invites us to observe and analysis the multiple ways in which the state comes to appear as a tangible, material force within everyday social relations and interactions. In that sense, Catherine's comment about her role as state agent and Barbarita's observation of the presidential palace as a "space" to which the "state" invites you to "come in" are part of the social interactions and narratives that evoke "the state" as claim and material relations. By drawing on Bakhtin's notion of heteroglissia and polyphony (many voicedness), Painter has argued that the state "emerges as imagined collective actor partly through the telling of stories of statehood and the production of narrative accounts of state power" (2006,

761). The underlying idea of "many voicedness character" proposed by Painter is relevant to challenging "all authoritative monological master subjects" (2006, 760) or homogenizing categories such as the state, social movements and women.

Moreover, Painter's insights based on Bakhtin's arguments on the mundane and ordinary are also relevant to understand state institutions, state effects and the implementation of policies. For instance, he argues:

> passing legislation has few immediate effects in itself. Rather, its effects are produced in practice through the myriad mundane actions of officials, clerks, police officers, inspectors, teachers…. The act of passing legislation… also depends on the prosaic practices and small decisions of parliamentary drafters, elected politicians,… lobbyists, academics and others (2006, 761).

Painter's arguments point us toward an understanding of the complex social and political landscape that emerges out of the ethnographic data and participant observation of the process of negotiation among multiple actors from Afro teachers, national congressmen, to NGO members that takes place in, for example, the elaboration and passing down of the legislation on Ethnoeducation as well as its implementation by Afro women state agents in schools and official government offices in Quito (see chapter four).

Following these approaches, this dissertation undertakes an off-centered perspective on both the political as fields or spheres in which everyday state practices can appear as well as the location of my ethnographic analysis (Krupa and Nugent 2015). I wonder to what extent might an ethnographic analysis of Afro women's organizations and their political practices and thoughts shift our understanding of the "political" (Collins 2000) and particularly of the role of Afro women in advancing and engaging in processes of state formation and political transformation in the current multicultural neoliberal context in Ecuador? In other words, what is the role of Afro women's organizations in conceiving and transforming racial projects of the state?

Recent anthropological studies of state formation, rules and governance have demonstrated that there is not a uniform and homogenous process of governance but rather multiple processes of governance and ruling in different cultural, social and political contexts, and have opened the analysis of state formation "in terms of prosaic, everyday activities that entangle different social groups in a variety of ways" (Clark 2012a, 11), and that goes beyond formal political projects (Clark 2012b; Krupa 2012; Coulter and Schumann 2012; Schwegler 2012; Erazo 2013; Krupa and Nugent 2015). These approaches to processes of governance that focus on the articulation of people's subjectivities, individuals' desires in multiple social positions, and the ambition of larger political projects, allows us to grasp the slippery and complex terrain upon which Afro women (government officials, teachers, and members of CONAMUNE) are simultaneously engaging in the multicultural rhetoric and projects of the state while advancing their own ethno-racial projects such as Ethnoeducation within different government sites (schools in rural areas and institutional offices in Quito, for example).

In this sense, the work of Schwegler is particularly relevant for this research. In her ethnographic study of the Mexican government, she points out that paying attention to government officials could reveal the active role of state agents in navigating "the complex topography" of the state and in making sense "of the political fields" while discovering "viable pathways through which to advance their agendas" (2012, 25). While Schwegler's work focuses on "exploring the process of reading the government bureaucracy and the vital political role it played in" the development of new legislation in Mexico (2012, 22), her ethnographic analysis not only informs my "reading" of the political practices of Afro women state agents during my field research in government buildings but it also inspired me to ask how Afro women members (and non members) of CONAMUNE make sense of the political-bureaucratic landscape? and to what extent this shapes their actions and experiences within institutional spaces created to manage cultural diversity in the multicultural Ecuadorian state?

The focus of these questions – that drives part of this dissertation on Afro women's organizations, their political practices and multiple ways of engaging in state projects – also connects with more recent Afro-Latin American studies that have been

addressing the role of race and ethnicity in their understanding of nation-state formation and processes of governance in the Americas (Yelvington 2001; Goldberg 2002; Andrews 2004; Restrepo 2007; 2009; Hooker 2008; Wade 2006; Anderson 2007; Antón Sánchez 2010; Paschel and Sawyer 2008; Dixon and Burdick 2012; Rahier 2012; Paschel 2016). Afro Latin studies have been framed within strong comparative perspectives focused on racism and racial discrimination, slavery and race relations, and Black culture. Understandings of Afro-Latin experiences have grown from the classic comparison between U.S. racial politics and Latin American racial democracy, especially in Brazil (Fry 2000), intra-national comparative studies between regions in a single country such as in Brazil (Telles 2004) and Colombia (Cunin 2003), or those that bring together Afro and Indigenous people into the same analytical framework (Wade 2010) as in Venezuela (Ruette-Orihuela 2011), to international comparisons and analysis of Black rights in Latin America (Hooker 2005, 2008; Paschel and Sawyer 2008; Paschel 2016; Telles 2014). Particularly important for this research is Paschel's work on Black political subjects in Brazil and Colombia. By taking a comparative approach, Paschel examines the rise of ethno-racial rights in these two countries. In so doing, she argues that Black social movements succeed "in bringing about specific legislation for Black populations" (2016, 3) and make changes in the state and popular discourse, due to the alignment of national and international political fields. While Paschel's works differs in analyzing the "process through which blackness became legitimated as a category of political contestation in the eyes of the state and other powerful political actors" (2016, 2), her ethnographic exploration of what she calls the "ethno-racial state apparatus" (2016, 154) becomes relevant to this dissertation.

> The recognition of Black and Indigenous rights in Colombia and Brazil came with a plethora of institutions designed to ensure that the state could move beyond symbolic recognition and toward the design, coordination, and implication of these policies. This set of institutions – made up of local and regional agencies within the state, as well a number of important consultative bodies, including advisory councils, state-civil society committees, and working groups – make up something that I call the ethno-racial state apparatus (Paschel 2016, 154).

Her analysis of everyday political practices in these new contexts of the "ethno-racial state apparatus" highlights the complex political field, local and global, in which Black activists and social leaders are immersed. Moreover, her work points towards an understanding of Black political subjects as a result of a process that operates within the "material and discursive boundaries of multiple fields of contestations" (2016, 3) in multiple political spheres. In this sense, I wonder how Afro women members of CONAMUNE engage in these multiple political spheres and field of contestations? As the ethnographic stories presented in this dissertation will illustrate, Afro women members of CONAMUNE engage in and navigate a myriad of institutional spaces that are not just those created to manage "ethno-racial issues". Many of the Afro women with whom I worked have sought out positions of government employment or political representation, as teachers and principals, as employees of government ministries (i.e., Education, Public Health, Culture) or programs, as local municipal councillors, as *tenientes políticos* (political lieutenants in *parroquias* or parishes, the smallest political administrative unit in Ecuador), secretary or president of *juntas parroquiales* (community governing councils), through which they bring their lived experience into political spaces. Thus, what does this engagement say about Afro women's role as political subjects, and their ways of advancing anti-racist projects in relation to the role of the state? In contrast with Paschel's account, my understanding of Afro women as political subjects does not begin and end with their recognition by or engagement with the ethno-racial state apparatus. Rather, it is related to a long historical process of resistance and struggle forged through centuries of slavery and colonial exploitation as well as the racist modern nation-state, as argued by Afro-Brazilian feminist Jurema Werneck (2009).

The implication of Schwegler's and Paschel's insights for this dissertation are twofold. First, they point towards the active role of state agents in their daily practices and their ability to make sense and thus transform the "complex topography" of the state. Second, this leads to questioning the centrality of the state as a coherent and unified entity as well as to seeing the limitations of corporatism/co-optation perspectives for understanding the complex entanglement between state projects and Afro women's organizations' political agendas. Hence, this dissertation aims to show that the ways in which the Afro women of CONAMUNE carry out their projects allow them to move

beyond the tension between state co-optation and social movement autonomy. Although CONAMUNE's members are questioning their ways of engaging with state projects, transnational governmental institutions and NGOS, they advance their projects by weaving a web or network across different "fissures" of the "complex topography" of the state and a myriad of different nonstate political spaces and actors, local and global, by advancing their logic of "*hacemos lo que nos da la gana*" (we do what we want), while they keep "*hilando fino*" (weaving together) different actors and venues within which they can act.

1.1.1   Afro Women as Political Subjects and Knowledge Producers

Although there are several narratives in this research, Barbarita Lara became "the pivotal directional subject" (Lugones 2003), the point from which most of the stories and events begin and where they interconnect. It is Barbarita's recurrent phrase of "*en la CONAMUNE hacemos lo que nos da la gana*" (in CONAMUNE, we do what we want) and Ofelita's invitation to *hilar fino* (weave together) the logics that together lay the foundation for the *Cochita amorosa* (loving social gathering, see chapter three) as political practice and for the construction of an Afro-epistemology of Afro-Ecuadorian women that are developed across the chapters. Barbarita uses the phrase "*hacemos lo que nos da la gana*" to describe the tendency of members of CONAMUNE, Afro women leaders and members of grassroots organizations to think and act as *cimarronas* (female maroons, escaped slaves).

In the context of the Chota-Mira Valley and its history of slavery and resistance to it, Barbarita's understanding of maroonage refers to collective actions, historical strategies and tactics deployed and enacted by female ancestors in their everyday lives that points towards a matrix of liberation. These actions of resistance to slavery carried out by female slaves ranged from everyday forms of protest and resistance based on partial control over their bodies, for instance as expressed in self-induced abortions as self-care as Albert (2003) registered in the Dominican Republic, to collective actions such as being part of rebellions or marching by foot to Quito to denounce mistreatment as showed by Chaves (2010) in La Concepción Hacienda during the eighteenth century in Ecuador.

Barbarita's understanding, shared with many members of CONAMUNE, of these actions as maroonage takes in account an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw 1991; Viveros 2016) that recognizes the multiple oppressions that situate Afro women at the bottom not only of the occupational ladder (Hooks 2015) but in the lowest social status in the ethno-racial hierarchy of the nation. The women of CONAMUNE and other social organizations in the Chota-Mira Valley have been and still are fighting against the triple oppression of class, gender and race (Davis 1981; Hooks 1981; Collins 2000). But as they have recognized, Afro women of the Chota-Mira Valley also face a fourth oppression: being rural. This positionality as "woman, Black, poor and rural" as Ofelita Lara, Barbarita Lara, Catherine Chalá, Sonia Viveros, Inesita Folleco, Olguita Maldonado and many other collaborators would say, and the resistance to these multiple oppressions (Lugones 2003), has shaped the conditions of non-existence as Afro-Ecuadorian women in the rural area of the northern highlands in Ecuador and informed their social struggles and political discourse and projects of re-existence. It is due to this positionality – that makes it more difficult for them to act politically and to utter their discourse – that CONAMUNE members have been developing and enacting a *cimarronaje* as collective action of opening spaces of dialogue and negotiation with multiple actors. In that sense, Barbarita's *hacemos los que nos da la gana* is a sharp principle that guides CONAMUNE's practices towards a formulation of liberatory politics (Hooks 1994).

In the same vein, Lugones' (2003) argument about resistant emancipatory intentionality that refers to people struggling together by "creating a coalition against multiple oppressions" (224-226) invites us to move away from dichotomous logics toward the recognition of ontological multiplicity. Hence, one of the arguments in this dissertation is that the *Cochita amorosa* and *hilando fino* are complex and rich aspects of Afro-Ecuadorian women's politics composed of an entanglement of cultural and traditional objects, spirituality and memory, as well as of small corporeal gestures that speak for themselves and are driven by anger, love and passion, that could be read as resistant intentionality within an alternative "world of sense" created and recreated by Afro women of CONAMUNE.

Drawing on Black and Afro Latin feminist works that place the ideas, experiences, histories, emotions, thoughts and political actions of Black women at the center of their analysis (Davis 1981; Hooks 1981; Walker 1983; Collins 2000; Lugones 2003; Carneiro 2005; Curiel 2007, 2009; Lorde [1984] 2007; Werneck 2007, 2009; Perry 2012, 2013; Moreno Zapata 2014; Hernández Reyes 2019), this dissertation focuses on the lived experiences of Black women as agents of their history, as thinkers and political subjects. I do not aim to theorize about feminism. Indeed, CONAMUNE's members and other Afro women's organizations are not organized collectively around the label of "feminism" and many of them do not even use the term. But their lived experiences, their political actions and everyday activities are rooted in oppressive situations from which they have developed strategies of resistance and forms of solidarity. In this sense, this dissertation aims to register a series of projects, practices and rationale that Afro-Ecuadorian women are advancing as part of their struggles against sexist, classist and racist oppressions (Hooks [1984] 2015).

Black feminism has pointed out the implications of the insistence on "common oppression", "shared identity" and "sameness" among women for the development of a critical understanding of Black women's politics and lived experiences (Collins 2000; Hooks 2015). In this dissertation, "Black woman" is not understood as a homogenizing category founded on a universal notion of women or essentialist notion of "Black". Rather, it is understood as an ethno-racial identity that takes into account the "multiple intra- and inter-gender contradictions brought about by racial issues" (Carneiro 2016, 30). Following Tania Murray Li's definition of indigeneity in Indonesia, in this dissertation ethno-racial identities are understood as "contingent products of agency and the cultural and political work of articulation" (2000, 151). This anti-essentialist understanding that recognizes the fluid, contingent and shifting character of identity as inherently multiple, articulates with our understanding of "Black" as argued by Rahier (1998) as a personal, social, cultural, political and economic process in a particular temporal and spatial context with local, regional, national and transnational dimensions rather than as an essentialized identity.

As mentioned above, this dissertation is addressing Black women as political subjects. In this sense, Werneck's analysis of Black social movements and their political strategies is particularly relevant (2007, 2009). From a decolonial and historical perspective, Werneck analyses the political strategies of Black women's social movements by tracing a genealogy that contextualizes and links Black women's struggles in the diaspora to African cultural traditions and female goddesses. In so doing, she locates Black women and their struggles in a diasporic and decolonial perspective that points us towards an understanding of Black women's political struggles and practices as longue durée processes that emerged before feminism as theory (Werneck 2009), that are challenging principles of individualism and private property, and that are fostering a community of knowledge and circulation of ideas. From this loci of enunciation, she invites us to understand Black women as "identarian and political subjects" that "are the result of an articulation of heterogeneities, resulting from historical political-cultural demands of confronting adverse conditions established by Eurocentric western domination throughout the centuries of slavery, colonial expropriation and racialized and racist modernity in which we live" (Werneck 2009, 151-152). By highlighting heterogeneities, she points towards the diversified and political character of Black woman as category that gathers "diverse temporalities, worldviews, forms of representation, that are constitutive of the way in which we present ourselves and we are seen throughout the centuries of Western diasporic experience" (2009, 152). Hence, Black women are "immeasurably diverse but also targets of inequalities that stem from inferiorization and exploitation" (Werneck 2007, 100). This reflection resonates with CONAMUNE members' understanding of themselves as Black women which is tied to "a violent history of slavery, exploitation and plunder" but is also linked to an African diaspora identity based on maroonage and spirituality enacted by the ancestors and passed down across generations through oral tradition. Werneck's arguments also point us towards an understanding of the African diaspora from a feminist perspective, that is based on the diverse, heterogenous and multiple struggles of Black women, struggles against "the violence of annihilation – racist, heterocentric and Eurocentric", which aim to guarantee Black women's participation and agency of "the living conditions for ourselves and for a major group to which we are linked" (2009, 152).

Linking the discourses and practices of CONAMUNE with the approaches of North American Black feminism and Afro-Latin feminism reveals that in the political practices of CONAMUNE, "the personal is political" (see chapter three), the local is linked to the global (see chapter five) and the past is revisited to cast light on the present and guide the future (see chapter six). Fighting violence against women is one of the main problems confronted by CONAMUNE. Nonetheless, the anti-racist and anti-sexist struggles are often uneven and not always easy to achieve in practice given the complexities of these entangled dimensions of the "modern/colonial matrix of power" (Quijano 2000; Curiel 2009; Laó-Montes 2016). Thus, CONAMUNE members face limitations in their agency marked by the liberal principles of hierarchy and equality that underlie multiculturalist policies.

CONAMUNE leaders' political thought is influenced by a decolonial perspective promoted in la Universidad Andina Simón Bolivar in Quito by Catherine Walsh, along with the anthropological thinking of Juan García Salazar, an important Afro intellectual and anthropologist in the country. The decolonial posture practiced by CONAMUNE's members resonates with a decolonial Afro Latin feminism such as that proposed by Ochy Curiel:

> a political position that crosses individual and collective thought and action, our imaginaries, our bodies, our sexualities, our ways of acting in the world and that creates a kind of "intellectual maroonage", of social practices and the construction of our own thought grounded in particular experiences (2009, 3).

CONAMUNE, in particular CONAMUNE-Carchi in the northern highlands, advocates to "think from the territory, from a *casa adentro* [within the house] gaze, from our own knowledge that comes from our ancestors" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018). Thus, the political thought and practice of CONAMUNE members materializes in the joint effort between the individual and the collective, which aims to foster an Afro epistemology of Black women, that validates itself, where Black women are assumed as knowledge producers, as thinkers and theorizers.

This *accionar fronterizo* echoes and articulates Chicano feminism, from the border, communitarian feminism that prioritizes self-managed and autonomous political action (Laó-Montes 2016). This *accionar fronterizo* aims to create spaces of political transformation and produce its own theory and body of thought by questioning a unique, universal, white, Eurocentric thought (Walsh 2007). Thus, CONAMUNE's leaders and members act simultaneously from outside, from within, from the margins of political institutions and spheres as well as opening and strengthening community spaces, negotiating with NGOs, with community leaders but also with landowners, with the church, with various social and political actors who allow them to weave a network of action that is self-supported and grows, that adapts and takes shape.

This *accionar fronterizo* of CONAMUNE, is also connected to the *pensamiento fronterizo* posed from Chicano Feminism, in particular by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), which problematizes and points out the limitations of essentialist identities that she proposes in order to break with sexual binaries by posing the new mestiza, a politics of hybrid and mestizo identity that supports their own political thinking that crosses, breaks, deconstructs borders. In the North American context, this posture aims to reinvent itself as Latin as an act of resistance, far from the idea of miscegenation as a racist ideology that allowed the construction of the Latin American nation states based on a dominant and homogenizing identity (Anzaldúa 1987; Curiel 2007; Keating 2015; Laó-Montes 2016).

Particularly relevant for this dissertation is the decolonial and ontological "Coyolxauhqui imperative" and Nepantleras advanced by Anzaldúa in her "light in the dark" (2015) which resonates with CONAMUNE's discourses and practices. Coyolxauhqui is "both the process of emotional psychical dismemberment, splitting body/mind/spirit/soul, and the creative work of putting all the pieces together in a new form" (2005, xxi). This process of pulling together, of deconstructing and reconstructing that is rooted in the acknowledgement of a painful fragmentation and the potential of "transformative healing", echoes CONAMUNE's process of healing that is embedded in all their projects as well as the principle of *desaprender para reaprender lo nuestro*

(unlearn in order to relearn our own knowledge), as articulated countless time by many of my collaborators.

Black feminists and Afropessimists have devoted great attention to how Blackness and Black bodies have been intrinsically tied to captivity, violence and the pleasures of non-Blacks (Davis 1981; Spillers 1987; Hartman 1997; Hartman and Wilderson III 2003; Wilderson III 2010). This understanding of blackness as the product of the violent trans-Atlantic slave trade is at the core of political discourse of CONAMUNE's members. In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe", Spillers investigates the gender-making process in relation to the historic character of bonded slavery and the colonial "maneuver" that rendered subjects dominant and subordinate (2003, 22). In so doing, Spillers explains how the captive body, "as captured physical and biological expression of 'otherness'" (1987, 67), was produced and marked by violence during slavery, which is seen as a dehumanizing, ungendered and defacing project of African persons. Hence, she shows how the captive Black body was deprived of its "subject position", "its motive will" and "its active desire" (1987, 67). Under this "rule of dominance" one is "neither female, nor male, as both subjects are taken into account as quantities" (Spillers 1987, 72). These "captive bodies" lost gender difference and became "a territory of cultural and political maneuver" (67). As a product of this violence, the Black body became a "kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color" (67). The violence inflected on the "flesh" of the captive body registered the wounding; wounding that has been passing down across generations.

In this same vein, the work of Saidiya Hartman is pertinent to this dissertation. As she navigates us through the contradictions of the condition of "humanity" of the slave, its "captive's bifurcated existence as both an object of property and a person" (1997, 5), she examines diverse scenes of subjection during slavery and its aftermath, the role of rights in facilitating relations of domination, the limits of emancipation, the exclusions constitutive of liberalism, the ambiguous legacy of universalism and the ways in which "recognition of humanity and individuality acted to tether, bind, and oppress" (1997, 5). In her account for the recognition of the humanity of the slave that did not deny the

abuses of slavery but rather highlighted it as a complement "to the arrangement of chattel property" (1997, 6), she recognizes a "pained body", a "wounded body" or "mortified flesh" (1997, 94). It is this condition of being "wounded" that gives the slave the condition of subject, of person: as the designation of person was bound to violence inscribed in the law created to regulate the abuses of slavery. While she explains the pain of the "captive body" that shapes Black identity, she also argues for possibilities of the restitution of the body.

> The recognition of loss is a crucial element in redressing the breach introduced by slavery. This recognition entails a remembering of the pained body, not by way of simulated wholeness but precisely through the recognition of the amputated body…. In other words, it is the ravished body that holds out the possibility of restitution (1997, 74).

These insights on the "pained body", "wounded body", a "captive body" that have shaped the condition of existence/nonexistence of Black people but that hold a possibility of restitution, resonates with the political practices and discourses of CONAMUNE's members. In the majority of the actions and projects that they undertake there is an imperative of reconstructing, remembering and resignifying their past which was marked by the institution of slavery in the Chota-Mira Valley. Thus, in their projects (such as African dress, prevention of gendered violence, Ethnoeducation, ETOVA, the reclaiming of an old cemetery and the community museum), they are actively recreating and circulating narratives and interpretations of their own past that aim to redress the captivity and enslavement, the historical violence that has made their stories of resistance, struggles and culture invisible. Thus, memory is a fundamental principle upon which CONAMUNE's discourse and political actions are forged and built (Balanzategui, Lara and Morales 2015).

These contributions and reflections on the condition of being Black from Afropessimists and feminists (Hartman and Wilderson III 2003) point us towards an understanding of the implication of multiculturalism and reparations rhetoric, which, as an international political framework, have fallen short of helping us to understand Black

people's condition of existence and "possibilities" of their struggles for racial and social justice. They invite us to racialize any analysis of the "possibilities" from an ontological condition and perspective of Black bodies shaped and marked by slavery (Hartman and Wilderson III 2003). In this sense, Wilderson's critical observation on reparation is illuminating.

> The reparations people present the issue to blacks as though slavery is an essentially historical phenomenon that ended.… If reparations were thought of not as something to be achieved, but as weapon that could precipitate a crisis of American institutionality, then it could be worked out a lot differently from the way it's presented (Hartman and Wilderson III 2003, 198-199).

This argument resonates with how CONAMUNE is thinking about and advancing the Ethnoeducation process and other projects. For CONAMUNE, reparations are necessary, but they have taken a critical position to this discourse as well as multiculturalism that has allowed them to recognize their limitations but keep advancing actions that "could precipitate a crisis" of Ecuadorian institutionality. Moreover, their arguments about multiculturalism as a perspective "that assumes we all have analogous identities that can be put into a basket of stories, and then that basket… can lead to similar interest" (Hartman and Wilderson III 2003, 184), was an underlying insight in multiple reflections and voices of social leaders during my fieldwork. Some of them were problematizing multiculturalism and state agents' understanding of interculturality that have failed them in their struggle for cultural recognition and political participation. It is this analysis that is driving some of the political actions of CONAMUNE and underlines their logic of "*hacemos los que nos da la gana*".

As the ethnographic stories and events will show, this dissertation is not about an "awakening" of Black consciousness among Afro women in highland Ecuador. Rather, it examines the political practices and narratives of Afro women in relation to the changing circumstances that have configured and are still configuring the ongoing and dynamic formation and transformation of a unified discourse of Afro women as political subjects.

Throughout the chapters, I show how CONAMUNE's leaders and members are producing and circulating a Black female identity of the Chota-Mira Valley that is articulated to a transnational Afro diasporic identity.

1.1.2   Afrodescendants' In/Exclusion in Contemporary Ecuador

"Really? You are going to work on Afro issues in la Sierra? And not in Esmeraldas?" This was the first reaction of some of my Latin American and Ecuadorian friends when I told them I was going to embark on my ethnographic journey among Afro women's organizations in the northern highlands in Ecuador, rather than on the northern coast. Despite the fact that within Afro-Latin studies, the Afro-Andean theme has grown in recent decades, addressing "the Afro" in the Andean world is still seen as a peculiarity (Walsh 2007, 2009). As Barbarita Lara said in a conference on land and territory in the Chota-Mira Valley in August 2018, "people don't believe that we are here, that there are Blacks in the highlands". In fact, the population in the Andes and in particular the Ecuadorian Andes is imagined as mestizo and Indigenous. This invisibilization of Afro populations in the cultural scene in the highlands of Ecuador reveals the racialized cartography in which the social landscape in the Andes is configured.

This invisibilization and exclusion is related to two socio-historical processes: the strong role of the Catholic Church during the colonial period in the importation of enslaved populations to work on their plantations in the Chota-Mira Valley and the political project of building the nation based on the ideology of mestizaje. During slavery, the Jesuits played a crucial role in fostering an image of Black people as slave and non-human and in the negation and fragmentation of the African spiritual and religious legacy of the Afro highlanders. During the independence movements in the nineteenth century and the formation of Ecuador as a nation, the prototypical national culture was being forged and imagined by national elites as mestizo identity. *Mestizaje* in the Ecuadorian context refers to a particular form of racial mixing and cultural hybridity between mostly Europeans or Spaniards and Indigenous people, commonly with the exclusion of Afrodescendant culture and contributions (Stutzman 1981; Whitten and Torres 1992, 1998; Whitten 2007). During this longue durée process of nation-state formation and racial fixity in Ecuador, Afrodescendants have not been incorporated into

what Rahier calls "the ideological biology of the national identity" (Rahier 1998, 2012b), unlike Indigenous people who have been integrated in the imagination of nation, even though only "as ingredient in need of transformation or whitening" (Rahier 2014, 2). Hence, in Ecuador Black people have been constructed as "ultimate others" (Walsh 2007; Rahier 2014) in the "structure of alterity" (Wade 1995). In this context of unequal position of Blacks and Indigenous people in the historical constitution of national identities and the historically less institutionalized relationship and marginal visibility of Black people in contrast with Indigenous populations (Gordon, 1998; Safa, 1998; Whitten and Torres, 1992, 1998; Hooker, 2005, 2008; Restrepo, 2004, 2007; Wade, 1995, 2010; Greene 2012; Rahier 1998, 2011, 2012, 2012b, 2014), when Black people's presence is recognized or mentioned it is "in the shadow" of Indigenous people (Walsh 2007).

The June 4, 1990 nationwide uprising of Indigenous people organized by CONAIE (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) and its aftermath of mobilizations and political actions contributed to their recognition as important social and political actors (Walsh 2007; Becker 2011). Afrodescendant community organizing in Ecuador has been different from Indigenous processes of organization. Indigenous people's political activism at the national level can be traced back to the 1964 agrarian reform, when they were demanding a more just distribution of land and developing an ethno-racial political discourse "linking them, as authentic owners of the land" (Rahier 2012b, 202) to what they were calling their ancestral territories. This struggle for their land brought together different Indigenous ethnic groups from the coast, the Andes (highlands or Sierra) and the Amazonian forest (east or Oriente) regions of the country. In 1986, Indigenous regional organizations founded a national confederation, the CONAIE (Becker 2011; Pallares 2002). The centrality of demands for landownership did not play the same role among Afrodescendants as they did among Indigenous. With the exception of the Afrodescendant population in the Chota-Mira Valley – where the lands of some *haciendas* were distributed among cooperatives of Afrodescendant *campesinos* (peasants) during the agrarian reform (discussed further in chapters two and five) – the reform had little impact on the realities of Afrodescendants in the forested sector of Esmeraldas or in

urban areas such as Quito or Guayaquil and their forms of social organization and demands on the state.

Moreover, the historical trajectory of Afro Ecuadorians has been narrated, since the 1980s and 1990s, by government officials and Indigenous leaders by foregrounding the notion that Afrodescendants came from the faraway land of the African continent and, as a result, they are not seen as "indigenous to the land". This narrative, that has contributed to the formation of a sort of "Indigenous hegemony" (Walsh 2007, 2009), is part of a hegemonic discursive framework of ethnicization of otherness, within which Afrodescendants do not fit with what Greene (2007) has called the "*holy trinity* of multicultural peoplehood" (Greene 2007, 345). This is at the heart of the difference between Indigenous people and Afro-Ecuadorian mobilizations and claims in the multicultural state.

In this context of long history of Black exclusion from the dominant Ecuadorian understanding of the nation and the formation of social organization of ethno-racial groups, Afrodescendants have experienced a double subalternization: "a subalternization exercised by the dominant white-mestizo society, but also a subalternization exercised by Indigenous peoples and movements" (Walsh 2007, 204). It is this double subalternization that has been shaping the political and racial landscape that Afro social organizations have had to navigate both in the context of "monocultural mestizaje" (Rahier 2012) and multiculturalism.

While multicultural legal reforms in the past three decades are evolving in different ways in Latin American states, something distinct seems to be at play in the post-neoliberal states in Latin America (Cameron and Hershberg 2010; French 2009; Goodale and Postero 2013; Oxhorn 2009; Weyland 2009), where anti-imperialist rhetoric and liberal ideas of equality and hierarchy merge, coexist, and continue to surface in a range of complex and conflicting rationalities and ethno-racial policies (Fernandes 2010; Paschel 2016; Wade 2017). In the academic and public debate on the politics of Latin America's twenty-first century turn towards the left, anthropologists (Escobar 2010; French 2009; Gustafson 2010; Martínez Novo 2012; Postero 2007) have used the term

post neoliberal (or post liberal) regimes for those governments self-identified as leftist or socialist. These include the projects of Bolivarian Socialism in Chavez's Venezuela, Correa's Citizens' Revolution in Ecuador or Evo Morales' political program in Bolivia, which were engaged in processes of state formation that involve the strengthening of the state apparatus, the deepening of democracy toward participatory democracy, the high use of public funding for social welfare, and the active role of ethno-racial mobilizations, among others.

In the context of the multiculturalist reforms and ethno-racial mobilizations of the 1990s, in Ecuador Afrodescendants have been formally recognized as an ethnic group in the constitution of 1998 and later, during the government of Rafael Correa, gained legal recognition as having collective rights in the constitution of 2008. During the political project called the Citizens' Revolution, which had been framed within the socialism of the twenty-first century (Rahier 2012; Walsh 2012), Afrodescendants not only became relevant political actors demanding political participation and cultural recognition, but also drove forward processes of political democratization (Antón 2018). It is in the national constitution of 2008 that the notion of "interculturalism" was enshrined and strengthened, a notion that emerges from "the intent to establish a socially harmonious governance" (Rahier 2013, 2). This constitution and its policies of ethno-racial inclusion are considered to be one of the best laws concerning the rights of Afrodescendants in the world, but Ecuador has not strongly implemented anti-racist policies in practice (Rahier 2012; Laó-Montes 2016; Antón Sánchez 2018), and even less intersectional policies to address gender violence and the complex reality of subordination of Black women[3].

It is in the midst of this racial and political landscape still marked by "the matrix of domination" (Collins 2000) that Afro women's organizations in Ecuador have emerged and strengthened their struggles and claims. In this context of ongoing Afrodescendant exclusion and struggles for political participation, this dissertation aims

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[3] For an-in depth analysis of the ethno-racial policies of inclusion in Ecuador and Afrodescendant political participation during the Citizens' Revolution period in Ecuador, see Antón Sánchez (2018), and for the role of Afrodescendants in constitutional reform processes, see Rahier (2011, 2012).

to examine the role played by Afro women's organizations in fostering a transformation of their historical reality of exclusion and subordination in the "structure of alterity" of the nation, social organizations and local communities.

It is worth noting that few scholars have paid attention to Afro-Ecuadorian women as political subjects. With the exception of the work of León (2009) and Moreno Zapata (2014), the studies on Afro-Ecuadorian women have been focused on them as members of Afro social movements in urban areas (de la Torre 2002; Fernández-Rasines 2001), or highlighting their role in fighting against hyper sexualization of their bodies and racism (Rahier 1998, 2013; Hernández 2010), or as one more element of the Afro-Ecuadorian social movement (Antón 2011, 2018). This study aims to provide new insights into their political agency as Black and as women.

1.2   Research Process

1.2.1   Ethnography among Afro Women's Organizations in the Afrodescendant Ancestral Territory in the Northern Ecuadorian Highlands

Conducting field research in Ecuador was a challenging experience in the current context of global crisis of neoliberal capitalist globalization and the ebbing of the leftist governments (Laó-Montes 2016). Specifically, these came together in the significant flow of Venezuelan migrants traveling by foot through Carchi, Imbabura and Pichincha provinces where I was conducting my fieldwork. As an Afro woman, I was able to engage with the Afro organizations and to develop deep connections with Afro women as we share similar personal experiences regarding self-care of our bodies and hair and the social experiences of racism and hypersexualization of our bodies, as well as the profound wound inflicted on and passed down from our male and female ancestors due to slavery. Nonetheless, as an Afro-Venezuelan woman I found myself navigating sexual and racial stereotypes which are now circulating in Ecuador, namely around prostitution. My positionality as an Afro-Venezuelan woman, lower middle-class, anthropologist, university student and with a left-wing orientation opened up some possibilities such as spontaneous conversations and interest in my personal life, but it also closed others. Many people I encountered casually never believed that I was a student or researcher and

for them I was just another Venezuelan who came to take their jobs. Also I was perceived as a Black migrant in some urban contexts such as in Quito or Ibarra, as a *mulata* with privilege due to my light dark skin in the context of the rural communities in the Chota-Mira Valley, and a few times I was categorized as a *gringa* because they knew I was studying in Canada and speak English.

In the midst of this political context, I conducted my ethnographic fieldwork over one year from May 2018 to May 2019. Four days after my arrival in Quito, I attended a lecture about "The Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi" by Iván Lara, an Afro-Ecuadorian leader and municipal councillor in Carchi province, who became my friend and guide during my first month in Ecuador. This conference was part of the congress on land tenure and territoriality in the Universidad de las Americas and he was addressing an ethno-racial territorial project fostered by CONAMUNE. I introduced myself and explained to him that I was interested in Afro women's organizations. He interrupted me to say: "you have to talk to Barbarita Lara! She is a municipal councillor with me in Mira *cantón* (county) and she is a leader of CONAMUNE-Carchi." A few days later, he invited me to Ibarra city to attend a meeting on health and nutrition that was going to be held by NGO members, Afro leaders of Imbabura and Carchi, state agents and CONAMUNE leaders. On that day I met Barbarita Lara, who entered the room wearing a white blouse and a colorful turban. Everyone was waiting for her. She looked around the room, greeting all the attendees with love. After taking a seat at the head of the table she said, "we have to *encender la luz*" and she lit a green candle that was on the table. Everyone introduced themselves, starting with me. I introduced myself as an Afro-Venezuelan woman and as an anthropologist who was interested in learning from and sharing with the women of CONAMUNE, and I asked permission to enter the Ancestral Territory. Barbarita introduced herself as a municipal councillor and member of CONAMUNE-Carchi. She went on to say:

> I've been dreaming about this space, because CONAMUNE is now promoting and thinking of public policies and that's the reason for this working group [*mesa de diálogo*] with the state. CONAMUNE has its political agendas and the last one is supported by the constitution of 2008, guaranteeing our rights. Since 2012 we

decided to seek the state [*buscar al estado*] and this *mesa* is for finding solutions to structural problems. It is 500 years and many ancestors who tell me to speak because I have my own voice. I am full of hope because before it was impossible to think about having these meetings, but now it is possible.

And looking at me, she went on to say: "we need you, you are here to contribute, we give you permission to enter the territory" (Barbarita, public speech, Ibarra, June 2018). From that day, Barbarita became a central figure in my life and in my research.

Barbarita became so significant in this research for several reasons. She was one of the first CONAMUNE-Carchi women I met, and we developed a family-like bond. At the time, she was municipal councillor representing Alianza País (Correa's political party) and as a result she was on a work leave from the 19 de Noviembre school where she teaches, but she was still involved in some Ethnoeducation activities at the school. She was one of the founders of CONAMUNE and had served as provincial coordinator of CONAMUNE-Carchi for several years. She had also been national coordinator of CONAMUNE from 2006 to 2009 and had been a member of the provincial and national commissions of the Ethnoeducation process since 1999. All of these experiences gave her not only an experiential overview of the entire dynamic of Afro social organizations, but also positioned her as a central political and community leader of the Ancestral Territory. In addition, Barbarita's family, including her sisters and extended network of female cousins and nieces, were members of diverse grassroots organizations and part of CONAMUNE. All of them had different roles, aspirations and experiences within the social organizations and the communities. As I grew closer to Barbarita, I also got to know other women who were part of her family circle and were CONAMUNE members. The Lara family provides a grounding for the lived experiences of many of my collaborators.

My ethnographic experience was based on collaboration and horizontal dialogue with CONAMUNE members and non-members. In a deep relationship of complicity and solidarity, interpreting and analysing Black women's experiences requires a collaborative practice among those who participate (Collins 2000). Although I could not develop an

equally deep connection with all of my research collaborators, my conversations undoubtedly relied on my position as a Black woman and as an ally. I got involved in different projects of CONAMUNE and I became an ally who worked with them writing and editing public talks, as well as becoming a friend to laugh at and with, and a daughter to teach. I also got involved in the organization of social and religious events with my host families.

I was continually involved in community-based projects that aimed at strengthening solidarity and empowering Afro women's social organizations' advocacy for social justice as well as overcoming economic dependency among Black women. For example, I worked alongside CONAMUNE-Carchi members in a project on ancestral knowledge of medicinal plants in La Concepción parish-Carchi, in which we carried out collaborative participatory action research and developed community workshops based on Freire's pedagogy of liberation to teach elderly and young Afro-Ecuadorian women and girls to become co-researchers in the community projects. During these workshops, I accompanied them in the complex social construction of reality, and we reflected together about the relevance of collective processes of knowledge production in order to promote and support their Afro Ancestral Territory claim process (see chapters five and six). Through getting involved in this project I could see and learn from their ancestral knowledge and participate in CONAMUNE's ongoing process of building capacity and fostering pride among Afro women in the communities of Carchi and Imbabura provinces.

Upon arriving in Quito, I enrolled as an associated researcher at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, where I carried out documentary research in the *Fondo Documental Afroandino*, Afro-Andean Documentary Collection, which aims to preserve audio-visual and archival collections on oral tradition, memory, Ethnoeducation, culture, social organization and history of Afro communities of Esmeraldas, Imbabura and Carchi, collected by the Afro-Esmeraldeño Juan García Salazar. This *Fondo* also aims to promote research on Afro-Andean history to strengthen the process of Ethnoeducation. In this major institution that is housing Afro local production of knowledge, I collected historical and contemporary documents addressing Afro-Ecuadorian culture and social

organizations in the Chota-Mira Valley and listened to interviews with elderly people of La Concepción community and audio-recordings of some social organization meetings from the 1990s.

In Quito, I also enrolled in a seminar on the African Diaspora with the professor and anthropologist Jhon Antón Sánchez in the Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales (IAEN, National Institute for Advanced Studies, created for post-graduate training of government employees), that brought together a group of Afro-Ecuadorian female teachers and state agents. This experience informed my understanding of the process of Ethnoeducation (promulgated as public policy in 2016) as a terrain in dispute and of the Ministry of Education as a venue in which Afro women were effecting change. In this context, I got involved in the activities and lived experiences of the Afro women state agents who work in the Ethnoeducation office in the Ministry of Education, who were also members of social organizations in Quito. I carried out life history interviews and had multiple conversations with them regarding their duties, goals and trajectories as well as their everyday experiences and their inter-subjective relationships with other state agents. I also was able to get involved in their duties and activities by visiting them in their offices or traveling with them to carry out workshops and hold meetings about Ethnoeducation in the Chota-Mira Valley. Moreover, I got involved in academic conferences and conversations with sociologists and anthropologists on the current political situation in the country and the problems facing the Afro-Ecuadorian social movement as a whole. This also allowed me to observe the underrepresentation and invisibilization of the work of CONAMUNE members and their participation in the everyday process of strengthening social movements in the country and advancing processes of political transformation.

Between July and December 2018, I lived in La Concepción community with my host family, the Tadeos. From January to April 2019, I stayed in Mascarilla community with the Lara family. Throughout this time, I traveled back and forth to Quito to carry out different fieldwork activities such as documentary research, visiting the extended family of my host families, conducting interviews and getting involved in multiple political, academic and cultural events. There is an organic relationship between Quito and the

Chota-Mira Valley. In the 1960s and 1970s, there were socioeconomic transformations in the rural areas as the result of the agrarian reform advanced by the state. This deepened the lack of land and led many young people and families to migrate to the city of Quito looking for better living conditions and access to education and the job market (Guerrero 1996; Hernández Basante 2005, 2009). There is a considerable Afro population in Quito, particularly in sectors such as Carcelén Bajo and Alto, La Roldós, Carapungo, La Bota, El Comité del Pueblo, Ferroviaria Alta and Baja, Pusili, and Llano Grande (de la Torre 2002). Although authors such as de la Torre (2011) and Fernández-Rasines (2001) do not consider the existence of "only Black" neighbourhoods, emphasizing poverty and class over race as determinant factors of this racial configuration of the urban space, these sectors are not just racialized ones where Blacks, Indigenous and poor mestizos coexist. Rather, these also have turned into coexistence spaces for the Black families of the Chota-Mira Valley and niches for political action where their cultural practices are reproduced. For example, Carapungo, on the northern outskirts of Quito, is one of the sectors par excellence to celebrate the National Day of Afrodescendant population in Ecuador. They hold meetings and events where members of CONAMUNE-Pichincha and grassroots organizations that belong to FOGNEP (Federación de Organizaciones Negras de Pichincha, Federation of Black Organizations of Pichincha) come together in joint activities. "In Pusuli, Carapungo and Comité del Pueblo there are quite a few blacks, we live there like herds, we live all together, we celebrate parties, masses and we live in a sense of community, right?" Barbarita commented to the children, grandchildren, nephews and nieces of La Concepción families who were visiting in August (as part of a vacation plan) at the CONAMUNE-Carchi house (Barbarita, public speech, La Concepción, August 2018).

Many members of the Afro population in Quito whose origins are in the Chota-Mira Valley form a social network of support and political action where agricultural products, information (gossip, news, death notices) and festivities constantly circulate between Quito and the Valley. Afrodescendant families in Quito are usually supplied with agricultural products from their relatives' *huertas* (agricultural plots) in the Chota-Mira Valley as is the case of the Lara family. Members with slightly more secure economic positions tend to help and collaborate in the maintenance of the homes of their

family members in the rural communities of the Valley, such as the Tadeo family. Thus, I could observe how kinship and social organizations were interwoven and form a key element of their notion of territory based on social mobility, social relations, circulation of goods and information, memory and spirituality.

I found myself navigating multiple field sites in cultural and political circuits linking Quito and the Chota-Mira Valley. I was moving between La Concepción community and Mascarilla community on the border between Carchi and Imbabura provinces while regularly returning to Quito for interviews and meetings with Afro women working and living there, as well as attending conferences and events organized by different allies and members of the Afro-Ecuadorian social movement. In doing so, I was following the footsteps of many of my research participants, who move circularly through these spaces that together are considered important nodes in their ancestral territory. For many members of CONAMUNE, the Afro population in Quito is considered and named the African diaspora in Quito (Barbarita, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019; Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, October 2018; Toita, personal communication, Quito, January 2019) or an extension of their community (Ceci, personal communication, La Concepción, December 2018; Ñaño Rolando, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018).

At the same time, I connected with Afro-Ecuadorian women and men who were involved in a variety of political roles and social positions, such as candidates for municipal government in Carchi, Imbabura and Pichincha provinces, social organization leaders, teachers, religious and community leaders, municipal councillors in Carchi and Pichincha, cleaning staff in schools, high school students and master students of the *red de jóvenes* (youth network), NGO agents, state agents and authorities of the *junta parroquial* in La Concepción, musicians. All of these social actors are involved, to some extent, in the process of documenting, researching, revitalizing and promoting their own cultural identity and history in both collective and individual efforts to redress racial and social injustice and misrepresentation of Afro-Ecuadorians in the country. Moreover, some CONAMUNE members have been working since the 1990s in different positions as state agents in the Ministry of Public Health within the directorate of Intercultural Health,

or in offices for Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian advocacy such as COMPLADEIN (Consejo de Planificación y Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas y Negros, Council for Planning and Development of Indigenous and Black Peoples) and then CODAE (Corporación de Desarrollo Afro Ecuatoriano, Corporation for Afro-Ecuadorian Development), also some of them have worked in the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Cultural Heritage in the office in charge of the program to address racial discrimination. Alexandra Ocles was Minister of Pueblos y Nacionalidades, and Gissela Chalá is currently the vice-mayor in the municipality of Quito, the first Afro woman to ever hold that position. By paying attention to the different duties and actions of these social actors in their various positions in the structure of the state, currently and in the past, I gained insight into the ways that institutional spaces offer both opportunities and constraints for Afro state agents to exercise agency as they engage, promote, use, implement and transform state programs and spaces to advance their community's goals and projects. From these multiple social and political positions, Afro women inform their political actions and employ multiple forms of engagement to negotiate with state projects. Through their actions in these multiple and simultaneous positions, they create webs of connection, evoking practices of interweaving they call *hilando fino* (see chapter three).

During my fieldwork, I carried out participant observation in different contexts in which both community and social organization members were negotiating with national, regional and local state agents and community authorities. I registered Afro women's multiple forms of negotiating political visibility and financial resources with the mayor of Mira or candidates for provincial and municipal government positions. In addition, I witnessed numerous conversations, meetings and political encounters among Afro women leaders, social organization members and state agents where I could capture and observe details of forms of political activity and subjective interactions that reveal how decision making processes are constructed and contested by diverse social actors (Joseph, Mahler and Auyero 2007; Schatz 2009; Forrest 2017). Furthermore, I participated in diverse community assemblies, in organizing cultural events (such as the launching of two books as part of ETOVA, School of Oral Tradition the Voice of the Ancestors) and political encounters, as well as taking part in informal social gatherings in order to grasp Afro women's everyday interactions and activities.

I also traveled with CONAMUNE members to Esmeraldas province on the coast to participate in the First National Encounter of Ethnoeducation. In addition, I accompanied them to Cali, Colombia to attend an international meeting, the "Foro international: a cuatro años del decenio: Alcances y desafíos del observatorio de la plataforma política de las mujeres afrodescendientes," held in order to create a report evaluating the scope and limitations of the United Nations' International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024). During this continent-wide encounter of Afro Latin women I could get involved in CONAMUNE as a political bloc and to observe the way Afro Latin women are creating transnational solidarity as well as producing and circulating a political performance based on an Afro aesthetic of clothes, turbans, ways of speaking, dancing, and moving through different spaces.

In this sense, I found myself conducting ethnographic fieldwork in a way that has been called political ethnography (Auyero 2006; Joseph, Mahler and Auyero 2007; Baiocchi and Connor 2008; Schatz 2009; Forrest 2017). This approach to ethnography is focused on participant observation but most importantly on being immersed in political communities that allows one to capture and observe details of forms of political actions and subjective interactions that can reveal how modes of governance and decision making processes are constructed and contested by diverse social actors (Auyero and Joseph 2007; Forrest 2017). Immersing myself in the political and social processes I was studying allowed me to problematize reified categories such as the state, civil society and social movements (Baiocchi and Connor 2008; Caballero, Ruette-Orihuela and Juárez 2018).

Afro women in this research are not viewed as objects of study that foster a false dichotomy between thinking and doing (Curiel 2009). In contrast, I worked alongside them as subjects and agents to think with, and in this dissertation I examine ideas and actions of Afro women as subjects of their own lives – not as victims but as agents of their own history, as subjects with particular experiences of resistance, struggle and theorization. In our everyday dialogues there was always the latent question of "and what we lack", with which Barbarita was questioning the colonial legacy that constructed Black women as deprived of body, intelligence, actions, knowledge and histories (Collins

2000), that our practices and thoughts were not "academic flight" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). This questioning led me to constantly reflect on my role as an ethnographer. This was blurred from the beginning as I presented myself as an Afro Venezuelan interested in learning from them as political subjects, with a commitment to social justice, both for Black women as a collectivity and for other oppressed groups (Collins 2000).

Anthropology as a discipline and ethnography as its hallmark methodology (Velasco and Diaz 1999; Ghasarian 2002; Atkinson and Hammersley 2005), as essential practice and research method that grants legitimacy, authority and scientific validity (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Abélès 2002; Clifford 2001; Ghasarian 2002; Ingold 2014), have been criticized for their role in reproducing Western epistemological and political hegemony and in the construction of difference (Krotz 1993; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Mignolo 2000; Walsh 2004, 2006, 2009). A critical engagement with ethnographic research methods is important to undermine this academic representation and knowledge production (Lara 2011). Feminist anthropologists have challenged the homogenizing categories of women, sex and gender (Di Leónardo 1991; Geller and Stockett 2006) and interrogated issues of representation, the body and work (Lamphere, Ragoné and Zavella 1997). Interrogating structures of power and coloniality as part of an enterprise of developing new ways of analysing and mobilizing Black politics is work that has been undertaken by Black feminists and Afro Latin feminists (Hooks 1981; Davis 1981; Collins 2000; Carneiro 2005; Werneck 2007; Curiel 2007) and Black feminist anthropologists in North America (Davis 2006; Ulysse 2007; Harrison 2008; Perry 2013; Cox 2015), who have highlighted the intersection of multiple oppressions (Lugones 2003) that shape the lives of Black women within a matrix of domination (Collins 2000). Particularly relevant for this research are feminist works that have been including, from an ethnographic perspective, the voices and experiences of those women who do not see their necessities and expectations of a *vida justa* (just life) fulfilled within the framework of individual liberal citizenship (Suárez, Martín and Hernández 2008). Also the work of Afro Latin feminists (Wernerk 2005; Carneiro 2005; Curiel 2007, 2009; Viveros 2016) who have developed a "decolonial feminism" contextualized in Afrodescendant populations and realities in Latin America (Laó-Montes 2016) is particularly relevant in

the context of this research, given my positionality as an Afro-Venezuelan anthropologist from the south doing a PhD in an institution in North America and my commitment to contribute to an anti-racist and decolonial Afro Latin feminism that both focuses on the political struggles of Black women (Wernerk 2005) and aims to register the knowledge production and praxis of racialized and subaltern women (Curiel 2009). Hence, my research and my ethnographic journey were inspired by and deepened my positionality as an Afro-Venezuelan woman. As such, I aim to establish and foster links among Afro women, Afro women's organizations and academia, where Black sisterhood and solidarity are the driving forces towards a collective effort for advancing anti-racist and anti-sexist struggles and social justice projects.

Far too many Afro-Ecuadorian women, intellectuals and leaders have labored and fought without recognition and my writing cannot do justice to so many life histories and lived experiences I came to know, heard or was part of. Nonetheless, this research aims to be part of a collective effort to shed light on the complex and diverse Black women's political thought and praxis traditions that have been obscured (Curiel 2007; Laó-Montes 2016). Maintaining the invisibility of Black women and our ideas has been key in supporting ongoing social inequalities (Collins 2000). In this context, I examine CONAMUNE's political practices and thoughts from a political position that nurtures a dialogue with the plurality of Afro women's social organizations, feminist and grassroots organizations understood as "a field of collective actions and communication that constitutes an assemblage or constellation of discourses and practices uttered and performed by a diversity of individual and collective actors in a variety of spaces at local, national, and translocal scales" (Laó-Montes 2016, 6).

1.3   Outline of the Chapters

Throughout its chapters, this dissertation presents an ethnographic analysis of the Afro women's social organization CONAMUNE, the political thought and praxis of its members, and their entanglement with myriad ethno-racial political spaces in contemporary Ecuador. In chapter two, I set the stage by interweaving the historical and cultural landscape of the Chota-Mira Valley and presenting some of the Afro women who are central to CONAMUNE and became my closest research collaborators through

multiple dialogues in *Cochita amorosa*. After describing the geographical landscape of Chota-Mira Valley marked by the history of slavery and resistance in the Jesuit sugarcane plantations, I show the relationship between political and economic changes, agrarian transformations and the formation of the Afrodescendants' sense of belonging to their territory. In doing so, I describe the cultural landscape and social organizations of the two communities where I carried out my fieldwork while presenting also an extended network of female relatives to better understand the diverse ways in which racism, inequality and resistance have marked and stimulated Black women in the Chota-Mira Valley to embark on a path of personal and collective political struggle. In chapter three, I describe the founding of CONAMUNE, and the development of its structure and its political vision using the metaphor of *hilando fino* and analyzing the *Cochita amorosa* – an Afro-Ecuadorian ancestral cultural practice – as a source of ancestral wisdom that illuminates, guides and articulates CONAMUNE's political practices and spiritual healing process. I argue that while CONAMUNE's members navigate and articulate different political spheres (institutional spaces of the state, community, NGOs) they are imagining, creating and enacting spaces as a catalyst for new ways of being and thinking as Black female political subjects. In so doing, CONAMUNE's members are formulating liberatory politics and practices (Hooks 1981) that place Afro-Ecuadorian women's everyday practices at the center of the political. Thus, I show the connection between lived experience and political consciousness that constantly shapes the lives of Afro-Ecuadorian women. In chapter four, I analyze how Afro women – political officials, teachers, and community leaders, many of whom are members of CONAMUNE – navigate, engage with, become part of and challenge the Ecuadorian state through creating, advancing, participating in and teaching Ethnoeducation programs. Ethnoeducation is a site around which local struggles for historical and cultural recognition, and processes of production and reproduction of consent that sustain the underlying categories of Blackness, Indigeneity, and interculturality, take place and interact in complex ways. By paying attention to Ethnoeducation as a knowledge production process, where diverse Black and Indigenous leaders, Black and mestizo teachers, and state agents contest each other, this chapter explores Black women's struggle for creative expression and self-determination. I argue that Black women are

creating and challenging state programs through Ethnoeducation as an ancestral and collective knowledge production of Afro-Ecuadorians, while simultaneously they are recreating and circulating narratives of being/occupying and acting – as Black subjects – in this world. In chapter five, I analyze the process of building the Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi as a political project of CONAMUNE in the northern Ecuadorian highlands by focusing on the intersection of memory, territory, spirituality, ancestrality and Afro women's agency. In the process, I show how CONAMUNE members are interweaving actions and discourses and simultaneously creating consent among NGOs, community members, researchers, state agents, political leaders and social organizations. In that sense, by centering the analysis on Afro women's practices and discourses, this chapter reveals the constitution of a communal hegemonic process that is shaped by multiple processes of negotiation among diverse actors. I argue that as part of CONAMUNE's political practice of creating spaces of dialogue between social organizations and the state, the Ancestral Territory becomes a subaltern racialized cartographic project that aims simultaneously to reinforce African diaspora identities and reconfigure an imagined Afro-Ecuadorian political community based on narratives of land struggle, collective memories of resistance, spirituality and ancestrality in the northern Ecuadorian highlands. In chapter six, I examine the Garden of Memory Martina Carrillo as a case study that shows how historical memory and political actions are interwoven in the Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territorial political project advanced by CONAMUNE. Based on a collaborative paper written with Barbarita Lara, in this chapter I explore how CONAMUNE-Carchi and members of Afro-Ecuadorian communities are reconstructing the memory of slavery, through a process of local memorialization, which consists of bringing the slave past into the present, by preserving and commemorating the memory of collective struggles and agency of their ancestors. This process of memorialization is focused on the revalorization of Martina Carrillo – a former slave woman of La Concepción Hacienda – and on collective processes of healing, which form part of the political practices of CONAMUNE's members, in particular CONAMUNE-Carchi, to challenge state exclusionary and racist political projects. In the concluding chapter, I present some general remarks on how Afro women as thinkers and political subjects in the Ecuadorian highlands are working in networks with multiple actors, in

myriad political spaces, in order to advance their anti-racism and anti-sexism projects in relation to a African diaspora identity of Afro women based on solidarity. Bringing together the central arguments of the dissertation with the ethnographic data, I show the relevance of the anthropological study of Afro women as political subjects in the multicultural state in Ecuador.

Chapter 2

2 Setting the Stage: The Cultural and Historical Landscape of the Chota-Mira Valley and Afro Women

In this chapter I will interweave the historical and cultural landscape of the Chota-Mira Valley and introduce some of the Afro women who became my closest research collaborators through countless conversations in *Cochita amorosa*. First, I will briefly describe the geographical landscape and how it is configured by the history of slavery in relation to the Jesuit sugarcane plantations and the resistance of Afrodescendants. In doing so, I show the relationship between political and economic changes, agrarian transformations and the formation of the Afrodescendants' sense of belonging to their territory. Second, I will depict the cultural landscape and social organizations of the two communities where I carried out my fieldwork, La Concepción and Mascarilla. Third, I will I show how the different lived experiences of Afro women who are central to my research and CONAMUNE – Barbarita, Ofelita, Olguita and Ceci – intersect and shape their political practices. In the process, I will also show how the history of the *haciendas*, the agrarian reform and the formation of Mascarilla community have configured their leadership and engagement with social organization. I also briefly describe an extended network of female relatives to present more context about the diverse ways in which racism, inequality and resistance have marked and stimulated Black women in the Chota-Mira Valley to embark on a path of personal and collective political struggle. This chapter presents descriptive material that will help contextualize the analysis presented in the following chapters, by providing the reader with an image of the geographical and historical landscape where my research was carried out, and some of the life experiences, which underlie and shape their praxis in CONAMUNE, of the main figures who are central to my narrative.

2.1 Cultural and Historical Landscape: The Chota-Mira Valley

The region known as the Chota-Mira Valley in the northern highlands of Ecuador was a complex of sugarcane plantations controlled and administered by the Jesuits since the seventeenth century (Coronel Feijóo 1991; Chaves 2010). The Chota-Mira Valley owes its name to the Chota-Mira River and covers an extension of 80 km^2 from the vicinity of Pimampiro (Imbabura province) to La Concepción (Carchi province) and is composed of a series of basins that cut across Ecuador's inter-Andean highlands (Lucas 2000). The region is made up of more than 40 communities populated by Afrodescendants, many of whom are the descendants of enslaved Africans who were violently brought to this land to labour in the sugarcane plantations during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Coronel 1988; Coronel Feijóo 1991; Noboa 1992; Chaves 2010; Lara and Ruggiero 2016). The Chota-Mira River begins as the Blanco River. Descending the western slope of the Ecuadorian Andes' eastern chain, the river takes on the name of Chota at the confluence of the Mataqui and Escudilla rivers. The Chota becomes the Mira River where it merges with the waters of the El Ángel River. The Mira River flows westward across the inter-Andean highlands and crosses the western chain of the Andes near the communities of Santa Lucía and Cuajara. Then it traverses the coastal lowlands before depositing its waters into the Pacific close to Tumaco, Colombia (Coronel Feijóo 1991; Lucas 2000). The Chota-Mira Valley is located 90 kilometers northeast of Quito and 55 kilometers southwest of Rumichaca, at the Colombian border. The region encompasses low and warm areas located in the valleys near to the rivers as well as high altitude areas characterized by cold weather. At the lower elevations, the Valley has a semi-arid tropical climate. There is no wet season and important variations in rainfall are observed across the Valley. The central portion from El Chota community to Salinas receives the lowest amount of precipitation and these variations affect the types of crops that are grown by local communities such as: avocados, sugarcane, cucumbers, mangos, tomatoes, *aji*, plantains, *ovos*, among others (Lucas 2000).

The Chota-Mira Valley was occupied by two Indigenous groups, the Caranquis and Pastos, when the Spanish arrived in this region in the sixteenth century. After the colonial *encomienda* system was established, the Pasto and Caranqui chiefdoms collapsed (Coronel Feijóo 1991; Balanzategui 2017). Forced work on the ranches and sugarcane plantations led Indigenous people to flee to the Amazon region east of the Andes to avoid the exploitation of colonial administration and construction work on the colonial city of Ibarra (Coronel 1998; Balanzategui 2017). The Jesuit sugarcane plantations were first settled using Indigenous labour until the introduction of enslaved Africans due to the decline of the Indigenous population. In 1584 the government of the Real Audiencia promoted "el buen gobierno de los indígenas" by banning forced labour by Indigenous people and introducing enslaved Africans to work alongside the scattered Indigenous population (Coronel 1991, 84). By the 1660s, the Indigenous population of the Valley had declined by 95 percent (Coronel 1991; Lucas 2000). In 1680, the Jesuits secured land for a sugarcane plantation in the Chota-Mira Valley which would be the foundation of La Concepción Hacienda[4] (De Ron 1696 in Balanzategui 2017). A decade later, 28 enslaved *bozales* were purchased and became the first labour force in the *hacienda* (Cushner 1982). The *bozales* imported into the Audiencia of Quito (between 1560 and 1660) could have come from any of the West African coastal sources of the slave trade but most of the population was made up of Bantu, Congos, Angolas, Mandingas from the Gambia region (Tardieu 2006; Gomez Jurado 1999; Pabón 2009; Balanzategui 2017). Between 1670 and 1681 the Jesuits purchased enslaved Africans locally in Ibarra, Quito or Popayán (Gómez Jurado 1999). As the origins and names of the enslaved population were the result of European representations of Africa or refer to slave trade ports and ships rather than sociocultural or linguistic groups (Hall 2005; Balanzategui 2017), we cannot confirm the origin of the Africans forcibly brought to the region. However, there is evidence that the Jesuits purchased enslaved Africans identified as Carabalí (Biafra), Congos (Central Africa) and Lucumí (Golf of Benin). Other Spanish names such as Pavón, Padilla, Méndez, Espinoza, Ogonaga along with the African names

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[4] An *hacienda* is a large agricultural estate operated with a dependent labour force.

persist into the present in the Chota-Mira Valley (Gómez Jurado 1999; Balanzategui 2017).

To intensify their productivity, the Jesuits gradually increased the enslaved population as labour force, acquiring 114 slaves in the Villa de San Miguel de Ibarra and dedicating themselves to the buying and selling of Blacks within the Audiencia of Quito (Coronel 1988, 1991). By the eighteenth century, Jesuits had consolidated a complex of sugarcane-producing *haciendas*. The sugarcane productive complex was constituted by the diverse *haciendas* such as Chalguayacu, Caldera and Carpuela in the Chota river basin; Tumbabiro and Santiago de Monjas in Salinas Valley; and La Concepción, Cuajara, Chamanal and Pisquer in the Mira river basin (Coronel Feijóo 1991; Chalá 2006; Chaves 2010). Each of these *haciendas* was linked with smaller properties called *hatos* located in different ecological zones. These *hatos* supplied the sugarcane *haciendas* with agricultural products, livestock and their derivatives, and salt. In this way, the Jesuit sugarcane productive complex was highly sustainable.

This organizational structure of production was maintained over time. After the expulsion of the Jesuits from Spanish America (1767), the sugarcane *haciendas* were administered by the colonial government through the *Temporalidades* and then passed into the hands of elite families from Quito in the 1780s (Chaves 2010). These changes in land tenure and the local power structure from the Jesuits to elite families of Quito generated changes in the dynamics and quality of life of the enslaved population who during the half-century 1770-1820 rebelled various times in defense of their customary rights. As Chaves explains, the enslaved population of Chota-Mira Valley "defended their right to remain on the territory, violently protested against the extraction of families and demanded recognition of access to land and activities of trade and exchange of goods" (Chaves 2010, 135). This is revealed by historical studies of Afrodescendant resistance to slavery in the Audiencia of Quito (Rueda Novoa 2009) and, in particular, the rebellions on La Concepción and Cuajara Haciendas during the 1780s and 1790s (Chaves 2010).

The first act of resistance of the enslaved population in the Chota-Mira Valley registered in the historical archival was in 1778. Seven female and male enslaved individuals, among them Martina Carrillo (see chapter six), traveled by foot to Quito and presented a petition to the Real Audiencia against the administrator of La Concepción Hacienda, Francisco Aurreocochea, for abusive workload and other mistreatment (Savoia and Ocles 1999; Chaves 2010). According to the testimonies in the historical archive, when they returned to the *hacienda*, Aurreocochea punished the seven leaders of the group with three hundred lashes, especially Martina Carrillo. The Real Audiencia recognized the claims of the enslaved of La Concepción and removed him from his position, confiscated his goods, and demanded that he pay a fine of 200 pesos. The most important result of these events is that due to the agency of these seven enslaved people, the colonial government recognized customary rights of slaves by regulating and limiting their workday and workload, as well as protecting their basic rights to food and care. This recognition by the Audiencia constitutes the first legal code to regularize slave labour in the region, prior to the regulations issued by the crown in 1789 (Chavez 2010; Balanzategui 2017). This historical episode was recovered by Combonian father Rafael Savoia in the 1980s. Since the 1990s, Afro social organizations, social activists, Afro leaders and Afro teachers have linked this insurgency to their political discourses of racialized struggle as part of their collective process of cultural revitalization (Chalá 2007). CONAMUNE's members, in particular, have highlighted the participation of women such as Martina Carrillo in this rebellion, connecting it to gendered political discourse about Afro women's struggles, resistance, bodily suffering and social oppression as part of their political project of mapping an imagined African diaspora regional genealogy of resistance against racial and gender exclusion (see chapter six).

The Chota-Mira Valley and the neighbouring Salinas Valley in the northern provinces of Imbabura and Carchi is an area known as "El valle del Chota" (Pabón 2007). As stated above, La Concepción community was the largest and most productive Jesuit *hacienda* of the complex sugarcane economy in the Mira basin along with small *haciendas* known as Chamanal and Santa Lucía, Pisquer and Huaquer, which were ascribed to La Villa de San Miguel de Ibarra (Medina 1999). In these *haciendas* corn, chickpeas and tobacco were also produced (Coronel Feijóo 1991). In Ecuador, slavery

was abolished in the constitution of 1852 during the mandate of General Jose María Urbina. The previously enslaved population found itself without access to land or any other economic resources. Many of them continued working in the same *haciendas* in a debt peonage system known as *concertaje* (which refers to inheritance of debt or the status of being tied to the *hacienda* through a relationship of debt). The structure of the nineteenth century *haciendas* remain unbroken well into the twentieth and *hacendados* (large landowners) had unlimited authority over Black communities located on their properties, even corporal punishment was common. While this internal labour force was not equivalent to slavery, debt peonage was similar in that the debt could be passed to the next generation and while Blacks and Indians could not be bought and sold, their services could be (Waters 2007). In 1918, debt peonage was abolished and the agrarian system (until 1964) in the highlands was based on obligatory rural labour arrangement known as the *huasipungo* system. Under this system, the *huasipungero* and his family worked on the *hacienda* in diverse agricultural tasks, domestic labour in the *hacienda* residence and/or additional tasks called *faenas* (which were common in La Concepción and Mascarilla Haciendas). In return, the household received access to a small plot of usually marginal land for subsistence farming within the *hacienda* (Waters 2007). In the twentieth century the *huasipungeros* were considered part of the *haciendas'* assets and mentioned in advertisements for the sale of the estates. The *huasipungo* system was legal until the agrarian reform of 1964 (Medina 1999; Chalá 2006; Waters 2007; Rapoport 2009).

With the Ley de Comunas of 1937, the peasant tenants within the *haciendas* were called communities but the members had limited ability to negotiate with landlords and the state (Waters 2007). However, Afrodescendants were not passive observers of these changes. They participated in regular acts of resistance as exemplified by the leadership of Barbarita's father Victoriano Lara in Mascarilla Hacienda. Victoriano was a *melero* (worker in the sugar mill of the *hacienda*), and one of his tasks was to be in charge of throwing away the "*japa*" (the green surplus after milling, which is fed to pigs). Instead of doing this, Victoriano organized the members of the community, especially women and children, to help him to get the purest syrup that they could use to make the *dulce* they sold in the *cambeo* (a circuit of mobile vending). At carefully-timed moments the

women and children brought large pots that he filled with syrup and covered with *japa* (Papá Salomón, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019; Barbarita, personal communication, Juncal, March 2019). Moreover, they organized themselves to fight for their land and to build their communities in Calderas, Chalguayacu, Carpuela, El Chota and Mascarilla (Pabón 2007), to get rural schools and churches. In doing so, they were building a sense of belonging to their territory.

Agrarian reforms are a set of policies promulgated in the 1960s and 1970s in the continent. They were promoted as part of the Kennedy development project known as the Alliance for Progress (Waters 2007), which was a political initiative of the U.S. to promote limited reforms in land distribution in order to avoid more profound social revolution in the region after the Cuban revolution of 1959-1960. The agrarian reforms are part of prolonged political, social and economic processes of agrarian transformation and struggles across Latin America (Waters 2007) in the mid-twentieth century (with the exception of Mexico which pioneered an earlier agrarian reform process) that exemplify how agrarian people are both shaping and shaped by political economic processes (Alonso 1994; Mallon 1995; Edelman 2001; Clark and Becker 2007).

The agrarian reforms were not homogenous processes and evolved in different forms and had diverse objectives and a gradual and uneven implementation in each country. Some of them were focused on redistribution of land or colonization of new land, others were focused on modernization of rural sectors (Pallares 2002). In this context, the Ecuadorian agrarian reform is not exceptional but rather an example of the complex relationship between changes in the economic, political and racial order and the Afrodescendant organizations.

In Ecuador there were two agrarian reform laws, in 1964 and in 1973. In 1964, in a military government, the first Ley de Reforma Agraria y Colonización, the Agrarian Reform and Colonization Law, was promulgated. This law aimed to "eliminate archaic forms of labour (particularly *huasipungo*) and to revitalize the production process through modernization and improved technology" (Waters 2007, 126). The *huasipungo* system was officially abolished and former *huasipungeros* were to be granted or sold

small plots of land in proportion to time served on the *hacienda*. Nonetheless, there were exceptions to this law and landowners with less than 100 hectares could avoid making land grants, as was the case of Chota Chiquito Hacienda, for example (Benedicto, personal communication, El Chota, February 2019). The Ecuadorian state became present in the highlands through the creation of the Ecuadorian Land Reform and Colonization Agency, IERAC. In 1973, a second reform law was passed, and it aimed to protect from expropriation some land judged by IERAC to be productive (Waters 2007). The premise of social equity and redistribution of land as necessary condition for economic growth was not fulfilled (Pallares 2002).

The agrarian transformation "defined as the joint effect of land reform and subsequent supplementary agrarian development policies" (Pallares 2002, 38) was not homogenously implemented in all the *haciendas* and regions in the country, but transformed dramatically the social landscape of Indigenous peasants in Ecuador (Pallares 2002) as well as the Afrodescendant population in the Chota-Mira Valley (Guerrero 1996; Medina 1999; Chalá 2006; Pabón 2007). In the political and identity discourses on land and territory that circulate in Chota-Mira Valley among leaders and community members, they argue that they were finally freed after the agrarian reform (Don Justo Méndez, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018; Papá Salomón, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019), although this policy did not solve issues of land scarcity.

An extensive analysis of the agrarian reform and its consequences is beyond the scope of this research. However, the land reform brought at least three main changes in the Chota-Mira Valley. First, it redefined the relationship between Afro populations and the state marked by the role of the state now as provider of resources to upgrade and advance socioeconomic development in the region such as: water, machinery, agricultural credits, roads, technical support and supervision. Second, it precipitated a transformation of local power relations, reconfiguring the power of traditional landowners and promoting the organization of the *exhuasipungueros* and *cooperativas*. This deepened power relations and social organization among community members who decided to organize themselves in *asociaciones* and *cooperativas* and those who did not, as was the

case in Mascarilla community (Barbarita, personal communication, Dos Acequias, January 2019; Papá Salomón, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019) and Carpuela community (Pabón 2007). It is noteworthy that the organization in *cooperativas* marks an important moment in the history of the struggle of Afrodescendants for their land, their communities and their territory. In Mascarilla, for example, the first organization to fight for the land was comprised of *exhuasipungueros*, and Marta Acosta was the only woman involved (Barbarita, personal communication, Dos Acequias, January 2019; Rubí, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019). Then, 11 men (Hernán Folleco, Asael Acosta, Norberto Minda, Miguel Viveros, Juan Méndez among others) "organized ourselves into a cooperative to fight for our piece of land in what is called Sabilar" (Hernán, personal communication, El Ángel, February 2019). During the 1970s, the previous organization plus new members – among them Papá Salomón, Berta Acosta and Jeorgina Mina – formed the *cooperativa* called "Asociación Agrícola de San Pedro de Mascarilla" (Papá Salomón, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019).

Finally, these gradual and uneven changes to land tenure and the local economy provoked an unprecedented migration of Afrodescendant workers to highland towns and Quito (Guerrero 1996; Hernández Basante 2005). Land reform opened up a process of land redistribution that transformed the agrarian structure of the Chota-Mira Valley, now constituted by the coexistence of *haciendas*, small plots (one or two hectares) belonging to *exhuasipungueros*, and agricultural working families without access to land. Those who had been peons in the *haciendas*, after the agrarian reform became day laborers in the *haciendas* that were left in private hands or workers in the *Tababuela* sugar mill (Guerrero 1996; Medina 1999). This was the case of some members of the families in La Concepción community I interviewed during my fieldwork. As explained by Pallares (2002) in her analysis of Indigenous resistance, in Ecuador race was one of the principles upon which the institutionalization of the agrarian production system was organized. As a brief glance at the consequences of the agrarian reform on the Chota-Mira Valley suggests, the land reform produced an agricultural social landscape consisting of wealthy white and mestizo producers, mestizo landowners of mid-sized plots, and Afro peasants who produced substantially less profitable grains or sugarcane on small plots (or who

worked for others). This racialization of production was evident in the lack of development policies and technical support offered by the state to the *exhuasipungueros* in this region as well as in the uneven incorporation into (or exclusion from) the internal market economy (Chalá 2006).

As part of the national development program and modernization policies of rural areas, the Pan-American Highway was built in the 1970s. The Pan-American Highway crosses Quito and then goes to Ibarra and then on to Tulcán. It travels the Chota Valley communities of El Chota, Carpuela, and Juncal, crosses the Chota River and passes alongside Piquiucho, before beginning its ascent toward the Colombian border. This highway turns north one kilometer west of El Chota community, passes through Mascarilla and continues north to Mira, San Isidro and El Ángel (Lucas 2000). Both routes of the Pan-American Highway are locally known as "la Pana". The construction of this highway in the 1970s generated a reconfiguration of the cultural landscape giving simultaneously the incorporation of local customs with the arrival of more tourists, a shortening of the distances between cities, and the introduction of agricultural technologies and basic services such as electricity, water, sewage systems and educational centers (Pabón 2007). In many communities these services were requested and constructed through *mingas* (collective work parties) by the members of the communities. This is the case of Dos Acequias and Mascarilla community and the youth organization Juventud de Acción en Progreso (JAP, Youth of Action in Progress), to which Barbarita belonged. Anita, like Doña Rubi, remembers how everyone went to dig the ditch so that the water could pass, how everyone looked for resources to buy the tubes to pipe the water. Barbarita also remembers when they finally had, due to the sewage system, bathrooms in the courtyards of the houses and they no longer had to use latrines. Thus, the development and modernization of these communities have been due more to the work of social leaders (worker leaders as *huasipungeros*, then as *exhuasipungeros* and *cooperativas* members) as well as to the new generations of leaders who have organized locally to benefit the communities. For example, achieving the installation of the rural schools in La Concepción and El Chota during the 1950s was the result of the social mobilizations and organizations of their members. The official construction of the first education centers in the region, "Núcleo para el Desarrollo Rural del Valle del

Chota", which became Colegio Nacional Técnico del Valle del Chota in Capuela community and the Nucleo Educativo para el Desarrollo Rural "La Concepción" in 1976 and 1977 respectively, were the result of local petitions to President Guillermo Rodríguez Lara as well as the national project of modernization of the rural areas of the country (Pabón 2007). These two schools became the cradle of the Ethnoeducation project of the 1990s and 2000s (see chapter four).

The Chota-Mira Valley is made up of Afrodescendant communities, the vast majority of which are related to the history of the *haciendas*. Some of them owe their name to the *hacienda* of which they formed part. In the Mira basin and Salinas Valley we find Salinas community, Tapiapamba, San Luis, La Victoria and Cuambo. Continuing down the Mira River, one encounters Estación Carchi, La Concepción, Santa Ana, Cabuyal, Santiaguillo, La Loma, El Empedradillo, Chamanal, Santa Lucía, Hato de Chamanal, El Rosal, Naranjal and Naranjito, San Juan del Hachas, Río Blanco and Tablas, all of them in Carchi province. In the mountains facing these communities (crossing the Mira River) there are Cuajara, Guadual, El Limonal, Guallupe, San Pedro, Collapi, Rocafuerte, and Parambas communities. Following up the Chota River we find alongside the "Pana" the Tababuela sugar mill, then Mascarilla (in the intersection of the "Pana" that goes all the way up to Mira city and El Ángel), San Vicente de Pusir, Tumbatu, El Chota, Ambuquí, Carpuela, Juncal, Chalguayacu, Piquiucho, Apaqui and Caldera, some of them in Carchi province and others in Imbabura province, depending on the side of the river where they are located (Pabón and Carabalí 2014).

Their origin and sociohistorical trajectory distinguish the Afrodescendants of the Chota-Mira Valley from the coastal Afrodescendant population of Esmeraldas province (Lucas 2000; Lara 2011). The Bomba, for example, is nationally recognized as a signifier of a particular Black ethnic identity of the Valley (Lara 2011). The Bomba refers to a drum, dance genre, rhythm and music. The Bomba "represents our cosmovision, it is our territory, it is our identity" (Plutarco, personal communication, Quito, April 2019). As Ofelita, a CONAMUNE leader, put it, "the Bomba with its circularity unites us, it encloses our spirituality and its dance is a ritual that we sketch out with our body" (Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, October 2018). The Bomba is the connection

with the ancestors, it is a form of resistance that "reveals its counterhegemonic potential" (Lara 2011, xii) and it is central to the *Cochita amorosa*, an ancestral practice that is revitalized by CONAMUNE-Carchi, -Imbabura and -Pichincha as a ritual of negotiation with state agents, NGO members, community members and social leaders, as a pedagogical practice and as a practice of healing. The Black women's bodies are central to La Bomba dancing and it is common to hear this music everywhere in the Chota-Mira Valley and to see little girls and teenagers – members of the various cultural and dancing groups – practicing their choreographies in the middle of the street in Mascarilla or El Chota, La Concepción, Juncal or Santa Ana.

2.2　　La Concepción Community

CONAMUNE-Carchi and -Imbabura work to advocate for an Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of the Chota-Mira Valley (discussed in greater detail in chapter five). This Ancestral Territory is made up of mestizo and Afrodescendant communities with a dynamic and historical relationship between them since colonial times. All these communities are interconnected by kinship, political relationships and shared memories of slavery and maroonage. Around 25,400 Afrodescendants live in the two northern provinces (Carchi and Imbabura) and comprise 4% of the total Afro-Ecuadorian population (Balanzategui 2017). La Concepción was established as a *parroquia* (civil parish) in April of 1884 and it was part of Tulcán *cantón* (county). In August of 1980 Mira was elevated to *cantón* and La Concepción was included as part of this new political-administrative space. Today, La Concepción parish includes sixteen African-descendant and two mestizo communities and is considered the rural parish with the most population in Mira *cantón*. By 2013 the population was 3,379 inhabitants (Moreno Zapata 2014).

The town of La Concepción is the administrative and political center of the parish and was, as stated above, the center of the largest (out of eight) eighteenth century Jesuit *hacienda* in the Chota-Mira Valley, where the majority of the enslaved population worked in the cultivation and processing of sugarcane (Coronel 1991). Three hundred years later, the Afro women, men and children whose ancestors survived slavery and fought for their freedom and their territory have a complex relation with their past and

their African traditions. Today, in La Concepción community some architectural structures and objects related to the Catholic religion and the time of the Jesuits are preserved. Upon entering the community, one can see the main square (*el parque*) with houses around it. At the top of the hill is the reconstructed colonial-era church, which is still the main church of the parish. This church was the only one in the parish, as was the cemetery. Various inhabitants of La Concepción commented on how all the communities had to come here to attend mass, to bury their beloved dead and to celebrate Semana Santa (Easter). Today these practices are preserved (Señorita María, personal communication, La Concepción, November 2018; Don Guilo, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018; Hermencia, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018). In the church one can see sculptures of the Quito school of the eighteenth century along with contemporary sculptures of saints (Balanzategui 2017). La Concepción is well known for the devotion of its inhabitants. Semana Santa is one of the most important festivities in the community. Behind the church was the *campo santo*, a place that some people believe was a cemetery (Hermencia, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018). The majority of the people I interviewed recalled the time of the *hacienda* and the *mayordomos* (estate foremen) which might correspond to the long historical period from the expulsion of the Jesuits to the agrarian reform. Don Juan Chalá remembers the houses made of *paja* (straw), the cots that they used as beds, the first school and a public oven that was close to the church where some people used to bake bread (Juan, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). The *hacienda* residence was gradually destroyed but the house and the mill next to the Church were more visible until the 1990s. In this lot three buildings were erected in the 2000s: the *junta parroquial* (community council) building, the CONAMUNE-Carchi house called "Oshun Refuge" and the community Museum "Casa de los Abuelos". The only visible part of the *hacienda* now is a wall and some segments of the mill that are hidden in the bush behind CONAMUNE's house.

With the gradual urbanization of the community, its inhabitants organized it into neighbourhoods, some of which are dedicated to a saint. The neighbourhoods where Olguita and Barbarita live, Alfonso Herrera and 8 de Diciembre, are consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The neighbourhood where I lived in Doña Ceci's house is

consecrated to Santa Marianita. There is also the San Francisco neighbourhood and the Mercedes neighbourhood, which owes its name to Mercedes Méndez, leader of the community who fought to preserve the community as the seat of the parish in the 1980s (Don Justo, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018). The women of each neighbourhood are organized informally and gather to hold their saint's celebration or to fix the street. Each neighbourhood has its own uniform consisting of a pleated skirt and a white shirt (Hermencia, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018; Señorita María, personal communication, La Concepción, November 2018; Don Guilo, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018; Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). In the community there are some Afro women's formal organizations: CONAMUNE, Inmaculada Concepción which is made up of about a dozen Afro women of La Concepción community, Nuevos Horizontes which is Olguita's and Hermencia's grassroots organization, and las Madres Jefas del Hogar Esperanzas del Mañana[5] or Madres Guadalupanas. The last one was promoted by Carlota Chalá as part of a housing project that is still in negotiation with the state (Carlota, personal communication, La Concepción, May 2019). Other forms of social organization are related to La Bomba dancing, the Catholic religion or sports. There are several dancing groups, female and male soccer teams which play almost every Sunday, the *cursillistas*, la Pastoral Afroecuatoriana[6], the *animadoras de la fé*, the community banks and las *cantoras*. The *cantoras* of *salves* during Easter, the mass and *velorios* (wakes) are considered the first form of Afro women's social organization. The women in La Concepción are the leaders of the *cantoras* and they have taught women in the communities of El Chota, where we can hear a similar *canto* (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). This community has experienced a high migration to Quito due to the lack of land after the agrarian reform and the difficulty of

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[5] For a more detailed explanation of the formation of this social organization, see Moreno Zapata (2014).

[6] Usually called the Pastoral Afro, this is a Catholic religious organization led by Comboni missionaries, since the 1980s, who played an important role in boosting Afro-Ecuadorian identity and organization. For more detailed explanation of the Pastoral Afro and its role in the formation of Afro-Ecuadorian organizations and cultural identity, see Antón Sánchez (2007, 2009), de la Torre (2002, 2006), and Antón Sánchez and de la Torre (2012).

conserving and producing on the land for those few families who did manage to get access to some (Guerrero 1996; Hernández Basante 2005).

2.3 Mascarilla Community

The founding of Mascarilla community and its internal dynamic is different from La Concepción. It was part of the Pampa and Mascarilla Haciendas but Mascarilla is the only community where 100% of the *hacienda*'s land passed on to its inhabitants (Barbarita, personal communication, Dos Acequias, January 2019). Mascarilla is part of Carchi province and it is considered an urban community of Mira *cantón*. In 2014 it was made up of a total of 800 inhabitants. Its formation as a "*sentipensante* [feeling and thinking] political community" as Barbarita proposed (in dialogue with the concept proposed by Fals Bordas in his reflection with the communities *rivereñas*) dates back to the 1960s when the *huasipungeros* organized and presented charges against Carlos Puga, the owner of the *hacienda*. Through litigation in the provincial capital Tulcán, they demanded the deeds and the right to keep the lands they had worked. Several times the army intervened to control the revolts when the *hacienda* owner felt threatened. In this way the community managed to obtain the donation of the plot of land called Dos Acequias to build the Civic Center of the nascent community. "This was the first step in the recognition of the political community, it was no longer like the corral that the *patrones* shifted whenever and wherever they pleased" (Barbarita, personal communication, Dos Acequias, January 2019).

San Pedro de Mascarilla was formed as a religious and social community by its inhabitants before the agrarian reform. Manuel el Sabroso, Barbarita's grandfather, made an offering (*limosneó*) to San Pedro at the request of Mama Dominga, her mother who came from La Concepción, where it is said that there were more images of saints than people. So, Manuel went to San Antonio in Cotacachi to look for the image of San Pedro and through the efforts of the residents of Mascarilla they got the Bishop of Tulcán to bless the image. At first this image was protected with a *paja* roof but later the members of the community organized themselves and built the first church (Barbarita, personal communication, Dos Acequias, January 2019; Anita, personal communication, Mascarilla, January 2019). Another important factor in the formation of the Mascarilla

community was a migration of workers from Pampa Hacienda, in search of land to work and survive (Papá Salomón, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019). While the history of Mascarilla is yet to be written, it can be said without doubt that its formation is an example of the work of the social organization of its inhabitants. Currently, there are several formal organizations in the community such as FECONIC (Federación de Comunidades Negras de Imbabura y Carchi, Federation of Black Communities of Imbabura and Carchi), la Cooperativa Asociación Agrícola de San Pedro de Mascarilla that was created to get access to land, Grupo Artisanal Esperanza Negra (GAEN) that has been focused on revitalizing an African aesthetic mainly through crafts, María del Carmen (organized around Catholic activities and productive projects such as community bakery), Gotitas de Esperanzas that is formed by Afro women who are mothers of children with disabilities (physically or developmentally), Grupo las Cabras de Mascarilla (focused on the production of milk and cheese), and Grupo Juvenil de Mascarilla that is made up of girls and boys who focus on sport, dance and educational activities. The majority of these organizations are made up of Afro women and some of them are part of CONAMUNE-Carchi. Plutarco Viveros, the coordinator of the famous bomba music band Marabu, is from this community. Thirty-five years ago, he created the band called "Nueva Generación" that later became Marabu. He is also the president of the Red de Gestores Culturales del Territorio Ancestral (Network of Cultural Managers of the Ancestral Territory).

2.4   The Lara Family and CONAMUNE's Members: My Principal Research Collaborators

2.4.1   Barbarita

It is Barbarita Lara's analysis and life history that weaves together the arguments of this research. Barbarita introduces herself to diverse audiences as a daughter of the African diaspora but also as an Afro-Ecuadorian woman who belongs to the Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi. She is an Afro teacher specialized in social sciences, a member of CONAMUNE, a member of the Ethnoeducation national commission, and a municipal councillor of Mira *cantón*.

Barbarita was born in Mascarilla community, specifically in Dos Acequias. She has four more sisters: Eremita and Anita are older than her, and Ofelita and Toita are younger.

I never carried out a life history interview with Barbarita; instead, I spent most of my time living, talking, working and sharing with her and Olguita as my friends, mothers, *compañeras de lucha* and allies. One day, after a long day at the seminar on land and territory held in Piquiucho community, we returned at night to Barbarita's house in La Concepción community. Upon entering the house, she turned on the television to watch and listen to the soccer game while we settled down to prepare dinner. I asked her if she always liked soccer, which led to a beautiful story about her life, her family, her childhood and her leadership.

Barbarita was very close to her mother, whom she calls "my *mamita*" and her maternal grandmother, "*la mamita*". With them she found refuge, love and understanding. Being the middle child, she always felt very alone. Overwhelmed by the beauty that everyone professed about her older sisters, marking a difference between her and them due to her darker skin color and her pimples, "I was the *negra renegrida* [darkest black]" she commented to me many times, and "I was very afraid of speaking up". When she managed to go to school, after insisting on it to her father and with the support of her *mamita* and *la mamita*, her world began to change. She lovingly remembers a teacher who explained everything about soccer including English words like "corner" and "penalty". She has always loved soccer, and says "I was like the center, the one who coordinated, and played alone too" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). This is an apt metaphor that brings together her style of leadership and her role as coordinator at CONAMUNE, her ability to have a general perspective, to know how to manage larger groups and delegate, but at the same time move and lead on her own to mobilize the entire game.

School involved theory in the morning and practice in the afternoon. It was the era of the slate board. She remembered that she had the best slate board since her father gave them the best to go to primary school. The school was in El Chota and went up to second grade. There was a *camino real* that connected Mascarilla and El Chota, where

they say Simón Bolívar walked. She always wanted to be the best in her studies, and she used to go to the *acequia* (stream) to study: "I put my feet in that cold water, because people used to say that it refreshes the brain," she said to me while laughing. On another occasion she recalled her teacher Luis Alberto Valles, who taught her about Latin American countries through music and the influence of the descendants of Africans. Thus, she remembers learning – at the early age of eight – that Colombian cumbia had a marked Afro influence, as well as Argentine tango. This was feeding her understanding of Afro-Choteña Black culture in relation to Black cultures in other parts of Latin America.

She grew up, like her sisters and most of the women of the Chota Valley, under the masculine authority and oppression reflected and normalized to this day in phrases like "*calle, vos que sabeis?*" (shut up, what do you know?), where the woman is not only verbally abused, but intellectually underrated and politically invisible. "Here if they [men] see a woman leader, they seek to do her harm," reinforcing the imposed silence (Hartman 1997; Spillers 2003) on Black women's experiences and life. In her childhood, Barbarita had fun riding the donkeys and catching *churos* on the hills. She also loved radio soap operas (*novelas)* and dreamed of getting married and having her hair blow in the breeze. At a young age, she had breast cancer and one of her breasts had to be removed. This increased her feeling of isolation and rejection of her femininity by others: "I was the sick woman, the one that cut off one *chichi*, the most *renegrida* [the blackest one]." But thanks to the invisible work and daily support, knowing glances, words of encouragement, transmission of love and self-care by her *mamita* and *la mamita*, she not only lost her fear of speaking, of expressing herself, but also of strengthening her identity as a Black woman. After overcoming cancer, she went on to complete high school when she was 21 years old at the Colegio Señoritas de Ibarra school in Ibarra city. She was the first of her siblings to go there. After that, she decided to go to the university in Quito to become a teacher.

> I went to Quito where I learned what it is like to be in need. I lived in a
> room on the outer edge of the house where the dampness was so strong
> that it percolated the walls. My younger sisters came to live with me so

they could study, and I had to work as a domestic servant to support us. We never had enough money. I used to buy animal bones to give some meat flavor to our soup (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018).

While she was living and studying in Quito at the Universidad Central, she got involved in the Movimiento Afroecuatoriano Conciencia (MAEC, Afro-Ecuadorian Movement 'Conciencia') which was coordinated by the Combonian father Cevallos as part of the Pastoral Afro. As part of this organization she shared experiences and strengthened friendship and/or alliances with Plutarco Viveros from Mascarilla, Irma Bautista (current coordinator of CONAMUNE), and Renan Tadeo (from La Concepción and founder along with Salomón Chalá of FECONIC). In this space of social organization were circulating narratives about Martina Carrillo and histories of Afrodescendant struggles from the perspective of the Combonians. "At that time I only listened to the interpretations that they gave us," she told me. But later, she began with her sisters to develop their own narratives about Martina Carrillo, reading historical documents and mobilizing new interpretations about the actions of Black women in national history. This, in turn, encouraged them to resignify their identity as Black women, to revalue their actions and struggles as descendants of Black women beyond their local family nucleus, as part of an imagined Afro-diasporic community (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018; Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, October 2018; Toita, personal communication, Quito, January 2019). From these encounters and meetings of the MAEC and their conversations with Father Rafael Savoia, she and her sister Ofelita decided to create the Centro de Investigación de la Mujer Negra de Carchi, Imbabura y la Diáspora en Quito, Piel Africana (African Skin) which is Barbarita's and Ofelita's grassroots organization. They along with Eremita, Charito, Rosario Minda and Toita, founded this organization through which they conducted research to get a better understanding of their past as Black women: "we were looking for content, nurturing ourselves, researching about ourselves" (Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, October 2018).

Since then, they have been producing and disseminating narratives about Black women as *luchadoras* (fighters) but most important as spiritual beings who embody a female wisdom that allows them to connect with the ancestors. This wisdom and connection are the driving forces of Black women's political practices. Later on, as part of CONAMUNE and the Ethnoeducation process, they promoted two intertwined projects – African dress and Martina Carrillo – with which they were resignifying Africa as an identity marker (Werneck 2007) and reconfiguring the historical representation of Black women's participation in Afrodescendant struggles for freedom. In 1990, Barbarita went to the U.S. as part of a United Nations program run by USAID that aimed at capacity building of Afrodescendant youth leadership. She spent three months in Maryland and California. This experience allowed her to better understand the differences and similarities that made up the diversity of African diaspora communities in the Americas. She was exposed to African American history and experiences in the economic and educational system as well as the experiences of Latin American migrants in the U.S. Her involvement with Ethnoeducation, her conversations with the *maestro* (teacher) Juan García, her experience as a founding member of CONAMUNE, have allowed her to foster political practices and develop an Afro-epistemology (García 2006) of Black women that is based on historical memory, spirituality and *cimarronaje* (maroonage) as driving forces.

The Afro-Esmeraldeño and anthropologist Juan García Salazar, *el maestro* Juan García as many Afro leaders call him, is a central actor to understand CONAMUNE's political vision. Juan García defines Ethnoeducation as "the process of teaching and learning *casa adentro*, to strengthen *lo propio* (that which is ours) about which the ancestors speak to us" (Juan García in Pabón 2007, 96). In Ecuador, Ethnoeducation is a political strategy to fight against structural violence, racism and discrimination based on a collective process of reflection that Juan García divided in two phases or *momentos*: *casa adentro* time and *casa afuera* time. He describes *casa adentro* (within the house) time as "autonomous spaces for strengthening *lo propio*… using collective knowledge (culture) and the right to be autonomous (politics)". The *casa afuera* (outside the house) time refers to "shared space to teach others (state and society) about what we are" (Juan García in Pabón 2007, 96). These notions of *casa adentro* and *casa afuera* (which are

developed also in Colombia and Venezuela) are fundamental for understanding CONAMUNE's political practices and thought. The *casa adentro* time is based on decolonial practices that highlight the wisdom of the ancestors and elders to strengthen and recreate Afro-Ecuadorian culture and ancestral rights (Walsh and García 2015). It is also a process of "unlearning" colonial practices that have denied and invisibilized Afrodescendants' existence. This double logic of political actions permeates CONAMUNE's projects, which focus simultaneously on revitalizing and strengthening the identity of Afrodescendants, and in particular Afro women's pride, and opening up dialogue and forms of negotiation with diverse political and social actors. It is important to emphasize the simultaneity of this double logic in the actions of CONAMUNE, because this is what has led them to act as a network, opening and occupying political and social spaces and connecting various actors in different spheres.

At the same time, Barbarita's interpretation of *casa adentro* perspective is focused on Black woman as a producer of meaning and as a fundamental actor in the process of restructuring the existence and recognition of the Black people based on principles of equality and equity that challenge hierarchical structures. Moreover, Barbarita told me on countless occasions that "*casa adentro*, we do what we want and as we please". By this she refers, for instance, to the ability of CONAMUNE's members to redistribute and reorganize the resources of a project, where money and objectives were limited by the interests of the NGOs or the state and they managed to carry out more activities, reach out to more people and have a greater impact with the same resources. This ability to move stealthily within a structure that constrains you in search of spaces of autonomy, mobility and action in freedom, is what has led them to recognize themselves as female maroons. For CONAMUNE, *casa adentro* is based on the logic of maroonage as a collective action that has been transmitted from the ancestors. However, this maroonage is not only reflected in their actions but it is also echoed in their decolonial thinking.

Eremita passed away two decades ago but she is still present in Barbarita's life by shaping her actions and projects (see chapter six on the Garden of Memory). Eremita was the first to get married and go to live in La Concepción community, as years later Barbarita would do when she married Don Guilo in 1997. Eremita and Anita used to

carry out the *cambeo* together. Their route of exchanging goods and agricultural products was between Mira, San Isidro and El Ángel towns. Victoriano Lara, leader of the Mascarilla community, and father of the five Lara sisters, would lead them towards the hill in the early morning so that they could embark on their exchange route. "Pray to the aurora!" he used to yell at them as they disappeared from sight among the hills. The song to the dawn (*el canto a la aurora*), that their father learned from his mother, gave them a spiritual and loving guide that protected them.

Anita is married to Don Hernán Folleco, who was born in Santiaguillo, but he moved to Mascarilla community when his mother gave him to an aunt who had no children (following practices of child circulation among kin). Anita and Don Hernán had seven children: Noemí, Silvianita, Inesita, Isabelita, Pedro, José Luis and Letty. Some of them migrated to Quito and they live in Carapungo and La Bota, two of the main poor Black neighbourhoods of the city. Pedro passed away in a very unexpected way. After coming from *la zafra* (cutting sugarcane) and drinking water from the river, he said he felt weird. They took him to the hospital, and he died. They think he died from drepanositosis, a common disease in the Black population.

The family Folleco Lara became my host family in Mascarilla community from January to May 2019. During this time, I was able to immerse myself in the everyday life of "el valle del Chota", getting involved in the daily routine of selling products such as mangoes, avocados and cucumbers that women practice along the Pan-American Highway, in strategic locations such as "el cruce" (the crossing) which is the intersection point where you continue towards the Chota Valley or cross to Salinas and La Concepción. Inesita, one of Anita's older daughters, allowed me to accompany her numerous times to sell avocados and mangoes in Salinas or "el cruce", by bus or car when Don Hernán lent it to me. Also, due to the confidence that I gained as a driver, I was able to accompany Anita to El Ángel local market and carry out with her the circuit that she used to follow with Eremita by donkey more than 40 years ago. My participation in the economic activities of the women of the Folleco Lara family not only allowed me to understand the centrality of women in the economy of the valley and *cambeo* as an ancestral practice in the area, but also to discover and learn more about the Ancestral

Territory which they define – in relation to spiritual practices and collective memory – by the footsteps that a Black woman takes when she is performing the *cambeo* (Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, February 2019; Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018; Anita, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019).

Anita also has a community mini market (*tienda*) where she sells goods ranging from vegetables to nutritional treatment for Afro hair and runs an informal diner at home where NGO members and workers of the health clinic (*subcentro de salud*) stop by to get lunch. Isabelita, Anita's daughter, works for the NGO Ayuda en Acción and is an active member of CONAMUNE-Carchi. She also used to work in the *junta parroquial* in La Concepción community for more than five years. By living in Mascarilla and spending time with her I gained new insights into CONAMUNE's projects in La Concepción and how NGOs played a key role in shaping the terrain upon which Afro women's organizations could act.

2.4.2 Ofelita

Barbarita's younger sister Ofelita also loved going to school and learning. She used to be the president of the class, she was always giving orders, directing and supporting her classmates. She thinks this is why she got involved in social organizations: "I never tolerated an injustice, I was fighting all the time in the school and defending my sisters and friends" (Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, October 2018). She was part of Legión de María and then she joined the JAP. She got pregnant when she was a teenager. She experienced the stigmas of being a young Black single mother. She felt the judgement in the eyes of all the members of the community and she was constantly told that she had ruined her life and her family's reputation, that she could not study and "become someone in life". Her *mamita*, *la mamita* and her father support her. *La mamita* and her mother were *parteras* (midwives) and they helped her to give birth to Dieguito, her oldest son. They also taught her how to be a *cimarrona*, how to fight against racism and sexism. From them, she learned that despite being labelled "witch", the power of the woman who knows how to heal lies in giving love, in understanding what the other person needs and feels. The healing power comes from respect when you cut the plant and connect with the ancestors so that they help you to see, feel and heal. She studied

public health as part of the program Escuelas Promotoras de la Salud promoted by OMS (World Health Organization). She went to Cuba as part of this program and when she returned to Ecuador she worked as a *promotora de salud* (health promoter). Since that moment, she has been healing in *Cochita amorosa*. As *promotora de salud*, in the late 1990s she worked in all Afrodescendant communities of Carchi and Imbabura. Seventy women were trained to work in hospitals and rural *subcentros de salud* but for Ofelita this program was most importantly about working together with Afro women to address issues of domestic violence, self-esteem and self-confidence of Afro women.

> It was a moment to demystify the stereotypes about Black women, that seemed key to me to eradicate gender violence. There we talked about the importance of talking with sons and daughters, not resorting to violence with children out of frustration, about why it was considered a sin to be a single mother in these communities, about why at 19 you were already considered old (Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, February 2019).

Many of the women who were part of this program are now CONAMUNE members or leaders in their communities. For example, Ximena Padilla was the first Afro woman to be elected as municipal councillor in Mira *cantón* (right before Barbarita). Maribel Padilla, current coordinator of CONAMUNE-Imbabura, told me that she remembered when Ofelita visited her community and how she moved her and encouraged her join the social organization. Señorita María from La Concepción, Doña Rubí from la Loma, Doña Olivia from Santa Ana and Doña Narciza from Chamanal were also part of this program and they are all social leaders in their communities. During my interviews with Afro women leaders and CONAMUNE members, I heard how Ofelita was a reference point in their decisions to join social organizations and she planted a seed of hope about the possibilities of different futures for Afro women. She has been the coordinator of CONAMUNE-Pichincha and is part of Mujeres de Yemanya Organization in Quito. She also worked in the NGO CARE-Ecuador and from there she advanced projects to strengthen the social organization of the Chota-Mira Valley. She also worked in the Ministry of Public Health with Irma Bautista as part of the "cartilla de salud

afroecuatoriana" project. Ofelita got married to her beloved husband Jorge and had one daughter named Candy, who became the coordinator of children and teenagers in CONAMUNE during the last National Congress in 2016.

2.4.2.1   Mi papacito and mi mamita

Victoriano Lara was the "*papacito*" (daddy) of the five Lara sisters. He married Luzmila Calderón, Barbarita's mother, known as "*mamita*". He also has another family, as was a common practice in the Chota-Mira Valley in the twentieth century. Victoriano is "the most important leader we have had in Mascarilla" (Papá Salomón, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019). He was the son of Manuel, who went by the nickname Manuel *el Sabroso*. Manuel "was a nice, handsome, imposing Black man, well dressed and well fed, who danced like a god and sang and played guitar like an angel" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). Manuel's mother, Dominga, worked as a *concierta* (debt peon) in La Concepción Hacienda. When Manuel was five years old, Dominga was transferred to Pusir Hacienda. Manuel worked as a peon in Mascarilla Hacienda under the *huasipunguero* system. He worked his small land plot and had some livestock. He married Cornelia and had eight children including Victoriano Lara and Pablo Lara (Pablo is related to two more of my research participants: he is Olguita's grandfather and Sonia Viveros' great grandfather). He also had a lover, Celina, and had eight children with her; these children used her last name Ogonaga, not Lara. All his children worked the land.

> That was where his power lay, he was a leader in all the communities of the Valley and he had family everywhere. When they had big celebrations like baptisms, or marriages, he gathered all his children and all the mothers. Relations of godparenthood [*compadrazgo*] between siblings was common, and a way of creating kin relations among all the different lovers, the extended family. For example, Ofelia [Barbarita's sister] is Celina's goddaughter (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018).

Through these brothers, sisters and cousins, Sonia Viveros, Mercedes Acosta, Oberliza Ogonaga, and other members of CONAMUNE-Carchi, -Imbabura and -Pichincha are all relatives, who constantly appeal to their kinship in search of alliances when proposing and advancing projects.

Barbarita's maternal grandmother, *la mamita*, was born in Santiaguillo. When she was eleven, she went to Chota Chiquito Hacienda to work as domestic labour in the *hacienda* residence and in the *hacendado*'s urban home in Ibarra city. Barbarita describes her as a "*distinguida*" woman from "the house", highlighting the distinction between outside agricultural labour and domestic labour as markers of the identity of the work force in the *hacienda*. Barbarita's mother, Luzmila, "*mi mamita*", was born in El Chota. She was well dressed with European fabrics not with *gabardina* as the rest of the workers in the *hacienda*. She married Victoriano too young. When she got married, Victoriano "ruined her so that no one would look at her, he married her to dominate her, that violence is a pattern adopted from the *patrones* of the *hacienda*, but my *mamita* defended herself" (Barbarita, personal communication, Dos Acequias, January 2019).

Barbarita's lived experience, the history of leadership in her family and the central figures of her *mamita*, *la mamita* and her father have marked her political practice which is nurtured daily. Upon entering Barbarita's house it was very common to see on the table in the living room a book by Fernando Ortiz or the archival document of Martina Carrillo next to a book by *el maestro* Juan García. The television tuned to the sport channel playing the soccer game as a soundtrack was never missing, as well as an image of Oshun or the virgin of charity to whom Barbarita is devoted. Becoming part of the world of the Lara family and of Barbarita and Ofelita in particular is to be surrounded by an ancestral wisdom that is guiding the movement of Black women in the Ecuadorian highlands.

2.4.3 Olguita

Olguita Maldonado was born and raised in Ibarra city. She is the daughter of Josefina Maldonado and granddaughter of Elodia Chalá. Her grandmother is from Mascarilla community and she had a child with Victoriano Lara and a daughter, Josefina,

with Pablo Lara. Through this connection, Olguita's mother is Barbarita's cousin. Olguita was the only Black person, "like a *lunar* [a black mole on a white face] at the school in Ibarra city". Her mother migrated to Ibarra when she was pregnant, seeking better living circumstances to support her daughter. "It is difficult to be the daughter of a single mother, it is difficult to be a Black woman," Olguita repeated to me during our conversations. Her five siblings do not consider themselves Blacks or Afrodescendants, she feels that their mother instilled in them the idea of becoming mestizos, whitening themselves as a strategy of social mobility. However, there is a marked difference in this process according to gender (Wade 2005), and as she explains it: "this process of becoming mestizo is different in men than in women. It refers to the way of walking, you have to hide the buttocks, your breasts, the way of speaking and behaving" (Olguita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). When she went to drink tea with the high society ladies of Ibarra, they always commented to her "you are not Black like those of the valley, you are different". She grew up washing clothes for the wealthy families of Ibarra, weaving fine wool blankets, and working in a book-making factory to pay for her studies as an English teacher while she shared tea and games with the society ladies and spent summers in Mascarilla. There she was part of Legión de María and confronted her blackness with her feeling of belonging to Ibarra city. Thus, Olguita's life was marked by a double consciousness (Du Bois 1903) as she worked to reconcile being a Black woman from the Chota Valley and the racist gaze and interpretation of her blackness made by white mestizos from Ibarra city. Her self-development was shaped by this dichotomy as well as by a deep process of whitening.

Her relationship of sisterhood and complicity with Barbarita was always present and upon graduating as an English teacher she did not hesitate to accept a job at the 19 de Noviembre school in La Concepción community. Olguita arrived at La Concepción in 2000. Barbarita was the principal of the school and CONAMUNE had recently been established. It is from this moment that Olguita began to participate in social organization and joined CONAMUNE and the Ethnoeducation process. It was a shock for her to start living in a rural Afrodescendant community like La Concepción. As she recalled, the students were "a bunch of little Black people talking very loudly" but this contrast, and the daily conversations with Barbarita, allowed her to understand how racist ideologies of

miscegenation and whitening had undermined her soul and identity. As a result, she deepened her Afrodescendant consciousness, as a Black woman from the Chota Valley.

These contrasts and reflections have marked her path through the social organization, both her role as member and coordinator of CONAMUNE-Carchi and as an Afro teacher in the Ethnoeducation process. When she joined CONAMUNE, it was a third degree (national level) organization. In 2002-2003 she was part of the team who worked to create CONAMUNE as a second degree (provincial) organization in Carchi. After this, she was in charge of legally registering the Afro-women's grassroots organizations of the province such as: Nuevos Horizontes (La Concepción community), Las Mercedarias (la Loma community), Asociación de Mujeres de Santa Lucía (Santa Lucía community), Amistad (Estación Carchi community), Las Africanas (Mascarilla community), María del Carmen (Mascarilla community). All of these grassroots organizations existed since the 1990s but in order to get access to resources from the state they had to be formally registered or get *personería juridica*, legal identity. This process of legalization allowed CONAMUNE to become stronger as the national coordinating body, getting more funding for local projects and so having greater impact on the realities of more women in different communities of Carchi.

As a teacher in the 19 de Noviembre school, Iván Pabón y Barbarita invited Olguita to participate in the second workshop of Ethnoeducation that was held in Hostería Aruba in Ambuquí. Since then, she became an active member of the Ethnoeducation process and a founding member of ETOVA, La Escuela de la Tradición Oral La Voz de los Ancestros (Oral Tradition School the 'Voice of the Ancestors'). Her role as an English teacher along with her life experience in the city of Ibarra, and her dialogues with Barbarita during their time enrolled in graduate courses in the Universidad Andina in Quito, led her to develop a cultural self-awareness of how language patterns and ways of speech play a crucial role in shaping Afro-Ecuadorian identity in Carchi and

Imbabura provinces[7], a topic that she would develop years later and would become one of the books published by ETOVA.

Olguita was school *inspectora* for 10 years and the principal for two years and two months. Holding these administrative positions allowed her to integrate Etnoeducación into her daily work at the 19 de Noviembre school, become more familiar with the multiple realities of the students and their families as well as to confront institutional racism marked by imposed silence, disproportionate criticism, and denial of permits and projects. Olguita with Barbarita form a duo of support, work and companionship that has allowed them to promote Ethnoeducation projects at the November 19 school, carry out the work of revitalizing oral memory as part of the work at ETOVA, and propose and carry out CONAMUNE-Carchi projects. This relationship of sisterhood, solidarity and unconditional support between Barbarita and Olguita has allowed them to navigate the multiple oppressions imposed on them by working together on strengthening their pride and self-respect as Black women as well as building a strong sisterhood.

2.4.4 Doña Ceci

Doña Cecilia Tadeo and Sandy, her daughter, were my host family in La Concepción. Ceci is a single mother of two children, Sandra and Darwin, and the granddaughter of Mercedes Méndez, an important leader in La Concepción community in the mid-twentieth century. Sandra is also a single mother of Josue (8 years old) and Danixa (2 years old). Darwin does not live with them. He works as a labourer in a construction company in Ibarra. Ceci runs an informal community kitchen and officially provides the food to the kindergarten of the community. Although Ceci and Sandy are not the central figures of this dissertation they were crucial to my understanding of Afro women's lived experience as well as the cultural dynamic of La Concepción community. By living with them from July to December 2018, I was able to immerse myself in everyday activities of this family, working in the kitchen, serving food to her customers

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[7] For an analysis of Afro-Choteño speech, see Lipski (1982, 1986, 1987, 2008).

or delivering food to the kindergarten, attending many festivities and political celebrations, and becoming an ally of informal and religious organizations that are not part of CONAMUNE. In doing so, I could recognize the different gaps and nuances between the lived experiences of Afro women who are organized and those who are not. I could also understand privileges related to colourism and kinship that are shaping the political and economic dynamics of La Concepción community. While I am not developing these aspects of my fieldwork across my chapters, they have informed my arguments and understandings of Afro-Ecuadorian women's reality in the Chota-Mira Valley. By spending time with my two host families, I was able to engage in multiple networks and activities that were central not just to CONAMUNE's practices and projects but to the communities' everyday life in the Chota-Mira Valley, and their links with family members in Quito.

Having set the scene by introducing the landscape of the Valley and some of the most important participants in my research, I turn now to their organizational work in CONAMUNE and the practices and philosophy that underlie and orient this social organization.

Chapter 3

3   The Cochita Amorosa: CONAMUNE's Political Thought and Practices

> This is why I am telling you my personal life, because it is why we work in CONAMUNE and fight for our rights (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018)

The *Cochita amorosa* or loving social gathering evokes a way of being and a form of social interaction among Afro-Ecuadorian people in the northern highlands. It refers to an ancestral practice and a form of solidarity carried on in the family and in the community, where people get together and sit in a circle to learn and work, collectively. This chapter aims to show how individual life histories, grassroots organizations and larger political processes intersect from the perspective of Black women in the highlands in Ecuador. Placing the lives of Black women and their political actions at the center of the analysis (Collins 2000; Hooks 1984; Carneiro 2005; Werneck 2007; Curiel 2007; Perry 2013), I explore their potential to challenge and transform the racial political landscape and, thereby, its effects on public policies and social realities. By exploring Black women's political practices and navigation of the political landscape I shed light on the intersection of race and gender in everyday life and collective struggle. I show how Black women (specifically CONAMUNE members) are creating and navigating spaces to challenge racist and sexist domination by negotiating simultaneously with state agents, NGO members, political leaders, intellectuals, researchers and community members.

First, I describe the founding of the umbrella organization CONAMUNE, National Coordinator of Black Women in Ecuador, and the development of its structure and its political vision. In doing so, I describe how and why Black women decided to organize themselves and what were their objectives. Second, I also analyze the political agendas, conferences and symposia that they have held over the past two decades to explore and identify changes in Afro-Ecuadorian women's political goals and practices for claiming rights in dialogue with the state's rhetoric of inclusion and interculturality.

Third, I analyze how CONAMUNE members have been and still are creating a political practice and a discourse to make sense of their social process, collective goals, encounters and relationships (Mallon 1995). The *Cochita amorosa* is an Afro-Ecuadorian ancestral and cultural practice that CONAMUNE revitalizes and nurtures as a source of ancestral wisdom that illuminates, guides and articulates its political practices and spiritual healing process. CONAMUNE is resignifying the *Cochita amorosa* as a political ritual, a performance of Blackness (being Black female as spiritual and political being), a healing exercise and pedagogical practice enacted though their bodies, voices and pain (Black subjectivities). I conclude that Black women's struggles against racism and sexism in Ecuador open up paths of potential transformation. While they navigate and articulate different spheres (institutional, community, NGO, and state spaces) they are imagining, creating and enacting spaces as a catalyst for new ways of being and thinking as Black female political subjects. These practices not only problematize the binary assumption of the state and society as separate entities, but also challenge the racial state by formulating liberatory politics and practices (Hooks 1981) that place Afro-Ecuadorian women's everyday practices at the center of the political.

3.1   CONAMUNE

Sitting in *Cochita amorosa*, like so many times in the kitchen of her home, Barbarita told me how she joined CONAMUNE. In her story, her marriage, her moving to a new community and her new position as principal of the 19 de Noviembre school were intertwined together with her sorrows and sadness shaped by machismo and multiple forms of gender violence.

> I came to live in La Concepción when I married Guilo in 1997. And a month after we got married, his brother Edmundo married. The party was here at my house, we put awnings at the entrance, and everyone started dancing. And with all the intention of humiliating me, Guilo singled out his ex-girlfriend and danced all night with her, he didn't even look at me. Everyone commented on it, I felt a lot of pain and sadness and I remember that my nephew Diego took me out to dance and said to me, "smile, aunt." It was one of [Guilo's] ways of publicly humiliating me.... And when I started working

at the 19 de Noviembre school, he told me: "pass me your cheque, I control the budget".... For that and many other things, when I talk about my fight for a world without violence and for the economic independence of women, I do it from my own personal experience [*lo hago desde mi lugar de enunciación*] (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018).

The last sentence as well as the epigraph that begins this chapter expressed a recurrent theme of Barbarita's. Many stories about acts of micro violence, sexual, physical and psychological abuses and other varying degrees of oppression permeated the lives of most of the Black women members of the CONAMUNE with whom I lived and worked during my fieldwork, and shaped their political practices as citizens, teachers, state agents and social leaders (Collins 2000; Parham-Payne 2017).

The way in which Afrodescendants have organized themselves in Ecuador has occurred in a complex racial political context impregnated by identity conflicts and particular economic and political interests. In Ecuador, the regional conditions are shaping the country's ethno-racial and political cartography and the political relations of dependence on the central power of the national government and the regional hegemonic elites. This political configuration of Ecuador, where the local, regional and national spheres define historically configured political ties and conflicts, has an impact on the structuring of social organizations, which are divided into first, second and third degrees or levels (Antón 2007). This way of organizing in different levels, the local (first degree), the regional or provincial (second degree) and the national (third degree), has generated a situation where social movement organizations have "relative ties of independence, fragile coordination ties and different ideological approaches" (Antón 2007, 236). This has created a diverse organizational landscape characterized by multiple social organizations with several interests and foci: land and territory in rural areas, poverty and discrimination in the cities, gender and/or productive labour, among others (Antón 2007).

During the 1970s, young Afro-Ecuadorian intellectuals and students decided to create *El Centro de Estudios Afro Ecuatorianos* in Quito, which functions as a centre of political formation about African culture and Afrodescendant realities in the Americas.

An important factor in the strengthening of the local Afro social organization at this time was the participation of some leaders in the Congreso de Cultura Negra en las Américas (Congress of Black Culture in the Americas) in Cali, Colombia in 1977. In the 1980s, the Catholic Church, in particular the Combonian missionaries, boosted the Afro-Ecuadorian identity discourse and social organization by creating the Movimiento Afro Ecuatoriano Conciencia (MAEC) and the Centro Cultural Afroecuatoriano (Afro-Ecuadorian Culture Centre; Antón 2007; de la Torre 2011).

> At that time I, along with Plutarco, my sisters, and many more who were in Quito studying, were part of the MAEC. I remember that at that time we did not question the discourse of the Pastoral. Now we resignify it, for example, we have been working on the image of Martina Carrillo (Barbarita, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019).

In the context of the multicultural constitutions of the 1990s and the emergence of Afro and Indigenous social movements that were challenging the national discourses of mestizaje of the elites and the negative effects of neoliberal programs (Escobar and Alvarez 1992), the social organization Proceso de Comunidades Negras (PCN, Black Communities Process) in the Colombian Pacific had an influence on the Afro-Ecuadorian social organization in Esmeraldas province in Ecuador (Wade 2010). Proceso de Comunidades Negras and Afro-Ecuadorian social organizations held bi-national conferences where they shared and unified their political agendas around Ethnoeducation, political participation, territory and collective rights (Antón 2007). As a result, they succeeded in making themselves heard by the state and some of their claims were recognized in the constitutional reform in 1998.

The organization of Afro Latin women in the broader region played a central role in the ethno-racial organizational landscape in the local and global context. In 1992, the Red de Mujeres Afro Latinoamericanas, Afrocaribeñas y de la Diaspora (Red MAAD, Network of Black Women in Latin America, the Caribbean and the Diaspora) was founded when Black women organized the Primer Encuentro de Mujeres Negras Latinoamericanas y Caribeñas (the First Encounter of Black Women from Latin America

and the Caribbean) in the Dominican Republic to discuss the political agenda for the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. The MAAD network (Red MAAD) is still an important space of articulation of Black women's organizations in the region and marked a politic of Black women's agency. This is a part of the pre-Durban national and regional organizational process of Black women's networks that reveals not just their role identifying race at the center of the feminist movements and discourses (Laó-Montes 2010), but places gender and women's demands at the core of Afro social movements in Latin America (Paschel and Sawyer 2008; Perry 2009)

In this context, some Afro women in Quito – Sonia Viveros, Irma Bautista, Catherine Chalá, Alexandra Ocles, Vero Pujol and Pilar – all of them with their grassroots organizations, founded Movimiento de Mujeres Negras (MOMUNE, Black Women's Movement) in 1997, and a few months later in 1998 the First Encounter of Black Women in Quito was held (Moreno Zapata 2014). "We began to work in the Afro organizational process in the 1990s: the Black women's movement of Quito, the MOMUNE, as we still refer to it today" (Catherine, personal communication, Quito, September 2018). Some of them were already involved in the Pastoral Afro or in a cultural organization in Quito and were focused on making visible Afro populations, their cultural practices and history, as well as the specific realities, demands and needs of Black women. As Sonia put it, they aimed:

> to make ourselves visible as Black women and fight for our specific rights as Black women because we realized that national and continental social movements did not take our rights into account. Feminism spoke of other things and they had other objectives, and the realities of the Afro women, violence due to racism and discrimination, did not enter into those objectives, much less the issue of rural Black women and marginal urban women. That is why we entered the process (Sonia, personal communication, Quito, February 2019).

Sonia's reflection resonates with Black feminists who, since the 1980s, have pointed out that while patriarchal domination impacts all women, Black women are

especially impacted and marginalized due to the simultaneous oppression of gender and racial discrimination, as well as invisibilized by the earlier days of the feminist movement (Davis 1981; Hooks 1984; Collins 2000; Crenshaw 2003). As part of MOMUNE's struggle against racism and sexism in the 1990s, its members carried out a protest in a central street in Quito against a racist and sexist advertisement of an alcoholic beverage whose slogan was: "*cola negra, placer líquido*" (black soda, liquid pleasure) beneath a photo of the buttocks of a naked Black woman lying down. This is a play on words: "cola" means both a carbonated beverage and a tail, used colloquially to refer to a bum.[8] During the protest, women threw paint on the ad and carried posters saying: no racism, no sexism! After that, along with other Afro leaders and politicians, they managed to reduce the exposure time of the advertisement by 50 percent (Catherine, personal communication, Quito, September 2018). As part of their political actions they got involved in the commission organized to promote the declaration of the National Day of Black People in Ecuador, held annually on the first Sunday of October. They also participated in meetings and workshops to draft the proposal led by Juan García and Oscar Chalá (who was Congressman by that time), among others, to be included in the constitutional reform in 1998 (Catherine, personal communication, Quito, September 2018; Sonia, personal communication, Quito, February 2019).

As coordinator of MOMUNE, Sonia attended a meeting of Red MAAD in Costa Rica. Since that moment, she and MONUNE are part of the MAAD network. The network (political platform), as a space of articulation of Afro women organizations and political instrument of reflection that seeks to strengthen Afro women's identity and stimulate the development of Afro women, influenced the creation of CONAMUNE. After two years of active political participation in the Black social movement and in their local communities in Quito, a group of Afro-Ecuadorian women contemplated the possibility of forming a national network based on the existing Afro women's grassroots organizations in the country.

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[8] For an analysis of the hyper-sexualization of Black women's bodies in Ecuador, see Rahier (2011).

As organized Black women, we became a very visible axis in the struggle of the Afro-Ecuadorian people for the new constitution of 1998, and then in the constitutional reform in 2008. We were an articulating axis of the 2010 census process. There has been a strong exercise of political influence from the social and citizen work of Black women since the 1990s (Sonia, personal communication, Quito, February 2019).

In this context, one Saturday morning, Barbarita received a telephone call. It was Marianita Minda[9], an important community leader from Guallupe, who called Barbarita to invite her to participate in a meeting that she and some other women were organizing. The meeting was going to be held in September 1999. "I remember that one morning, I was just reeling with all that I told you was happening in the first two years of my marriage and living here and working as the principal, and she called me and invited me to go to the meeting" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). A few days later, Barbarita got another invitation. Renan Tadeo (an important figure of the Afro social movement in Chota Valley and at the time a municipal councillor in Mira) called to invite her to attend a meeting with Juan García, organized by FENOCIC in Ibarra. She was very confused, she remembered: "I did not understand what the calls were about. I had been lost in La Concepción" (Barbarita, personal communication, Salinas, October 2018).

The first phone call was for organizing and unifying Afro-Ecuadorian women and the second one was for organizing the Ethnoeducation process as one of the priorities of Afro-Ecuadorian social organizations. The year 1999 was an important one for the Afro social movement marked by the recent reform to the national constitution in 1998 when the pluri-ethnic and multicultural state was declared. While this reform recognized to some extent the rights of Afrodescendants as a *pueblo* (people), alongside Indigenous

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[9] While I was writing this chapter, Marianita Minda passed away on May 24, 2020 in Guallupe. She played a central role in the organization of Afro women in the Chota-Mira Valley from the 1980s and in the foundation of CONAMUNE in the 1990s. During my fieldwork Barbarita and I wanted to go to visit her. Barbarita told me "she is a wonderful woman, Bachita [an affectionate form of the name Beatriz], and she is very sick right now, you should meet her and feel her energy." In the end, we couldn't arrange this visit, but her presence and ideas were part of many voices of CONAMUNE members and Afro women in the Chota-Mira Valley.

peoples and nationalities (Art 83), it was not in itself enough to guarantee rights and redress social exclusion and racial discrimination. In this context, in March of 1999, the Primer Congreso Unitario del Pueblo Negro (the First Unitary Congress of Black People) took place in Quito. In this congress the Confederación Nacional Afroecuatoriana (CNA, National Confederation of Afro-Ecuadorians) was created as a third-degree organization that aimed to unify all the local and regional organizations in the country.

In September 1999, CONAMUNE was founded during the Primer Congreso de Mujeres Negras (First National Congress of Black Women), which took place in Ambuquí, Valle del Chota, in the province of Imbabura. This congress was motivated by the recognition of Afro populations as a *pueblo* or distinctive people in the national constitution of 1998 (Sonia, personal communication, Quito, February 2019). A total of 140 women participated from eight Ecuadorian provinces: coastal provinces Esmeraldas, Guayas, El Oro, and Los Ríos; highland provinces Imbabura and Carchi; and eastern (Amazonian) provinces Sucumbíos and Orellana (CONAMUNE-Agenda Política-2017-2020). Señorita María, a religious and social leader, and Carlota, a political leader from La Concepción, were also invited to participate in this meeting. Jobita Borja Pavon from Piquiucho, Jobita Borja Lara from Mascarilla, Mercedes Acosta from Chota, Rubi Lara from Mascarilla, are some of the Afro women leaders from Imbabura and Carchi who also attended the congress. The meeting was at the Hostería Tierra del Sol in Ambuquí. It lasted two days, September 11-12. The congress was funded by UNIFEM (now ONU-Mujer). It was divided into five workshops on health, education, racism, organization and violence. Catherine Chalá was elected as national coordinator and Barbarita Lara and Jobita Borja were named coordinators of Carchi province (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018; Catherine, personal communication, Quito, September 2018).

CONAMUNE is a network of social organizations formed by Afro-Ecuadorian women that aims to address the dual impact of sexist and racist oppression on the social status of Black women (Hooks 1981). Thus, they work to promote gender equality and to strengthen Afro women's identity and pride as a strategy to eradicate poverty, sexism and racism. They also aim to gain political participation by opening up spaces of negotiation

with state agents, NGOs, local and regional political leaders and, simultaneously, creating and advancing diverse national and local projects. Since its foundation, CONAMUNE has struggled to overcome social inequality, fighting against racism, discrimination, violence and exclusion and at the same time, working on the cultural revitalization of the Afrodescendant people and, in particular, for the rights of Black women (Agenda politica de las mujeres Afro Ecuatorianas CONAMUNE, 2017-2021; Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018; Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, October 2018).

> In 1999, the organization was born. The rights we demand are: 1) education with identity, Ethnoeducation that we, Afro women, promote together with FECONIC; 2) territory with identity and free from violence; and 3) health that takes into account the specificity of women and the Afro people (Barbarita, public speech, Piquiucho, August 2018).

CONAMUNE has been facing and resisting "the matrix of domination" (Collins 2000, 18) and its multiple mechanisms that assault and oppress individuals based on their race, social class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality and age (Praham Payme 2017). As Barbarita would say, "it is that triple burden of being women, black, poor and in our case also rural" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). Aware of their positionality – which goes beyond the recognition of fixed positions but to how they have been racialized and marginalized and how they are reconfiguring their identities and their positions within hierarchies of power and privilege (Crenshaw 1991; Hooks 2015) – they have been working in strategic areas such as education, health, territory and political participation, by deploying a multilayered matrix of actions.

This first congress in 1999 aimed to "analyze our problems, such as poverty and access to education from the perspective of poor, rural and Black women" (Barbarita, personal communication, Salinas, October 2018). They decided to organize themselves because of the patriarchal norm that exists within many Black social organizations (Hooks 1984; Davis 1981; Sonia, personal communication, Quito, February 2019; Catherine, personal communication, Quito, September 2018).

In the First Afro-Ecuadorian Unitary Congress... they left women aside, only Alexandra Ocles was there as secretary... and FECONIC was the face of the Afro organization in the highlands. Their important work is recognized because they, Chalá, Douglas Quintero, Jose Arce and the university organization in Quito with Juan García, positioned the term Afro-Ecuadorian when they went to the conference in Durban (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018).

Due to the systemic oppression since slavery that Black women experienced in their everyday lives, Black women have always found themselves not only "on the receiving end of discriminatory actions grounded in sexism and racism" (Parham-Payme 2017, 3), but also facing the need to find and open up spaces to visibilize their realities by challenging the system of domination that encompasses the domestic and the political spheres (including social movements and the state). From their lived experiences they have been questioning, challenging and resisting the unequal political, social and economic valuation of being Black and female, in contrast to being white and female or being Black and male. CONAMUNE members have been constantly challenging the role assigned to their mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers and the social reproduction of some subjective valuations that place their lives as Black girls and women at the bottom of their communities. The social movement context has not been an exception and within this sphere they have challenged masculine authority (Collins 2000b), fought to visibilize their claims, supported each other and worked together to overcome economic dependency, political exclusion and the multiple degrees of oppression. As Barbarita put it, their goal was:

To speak with our own voice, in response to the inequality that existed within the organizations, because the voices of women and our demands were lost because all those organizations were managed by men. Thus, it was necessary to form our organization and work together on our problems; at first we were alone, but we are alone no more (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018).

3.1.1 The Structure of CONAMUNE, its Philosophy and Political Agendas

CONAMUNE operates at the national level with regional affiliations. It does not have official status as an organization registered with the state, which was a decision democratically made to avoid competitions and misunderstandings as a result of having just one person legally responsible for its operations in the eyes of the state. CONAMUNE as a third-degree organization is constituted by provincial and grassroots organizations, which do have legal status. For the members of CONAMUNE, the provincial and local organizations nurture the national organization (Irma, personal communication, Quito, January 2019). Once CONAMUNE was constituted, its members expressed the organization's objectives in a declaration that would later, in a national encounter of Black women in 2000 in Quito, become their first political agenda. As Catherine Chalá, the first coordinator of CONAMUNE, explains "by that time we held workshops on strengthening the grassroots organizations. We met frequently, every three months. I worked in the Pastoral Afro and we had some resources [available to us] such as the pastoral retreat house" (Catherine, personal communication, Quito, September 2018). CONAMUNE's first political agenda was focused on education and capacity-building training of Black women as well as on social traditions and cultural and economic development of Afro-Ecuadorian communities and people (Agenda Política de las Mujeres Negras del Ecuador 2000). The objectives of all its political agendas are articulated in the national congresses and the quarterly national encounters or meetings among provincial coordinators, where they meet and work together through workshops to analyze their local-provincial realities and problems and propose goals and strategies to find solutions (Las Memorias de los Encuentros Nacionales-1-Mujeres Negras, 2007). In doing so, they articulate and give meaning to a national political agenda that is based on and emerges out of local realities and perspectives. The organization is divided into "chapters" that correlate with each province: CONAMUNE-Carchi, -Imbabura, -Esmeraldas, -Guayas, -Pichincha, -Los Ríos, -El Oro, -Orellana. By 2016, more provinces had joined (Chimborazo, Azuay, Santa Elena and Santo Domingo de los Tsáchilas), each with relative autonomy that allows them to implement the general objectives of the agenda according to their priorities and dynamics at the local level.

CONAMUNE has held five congresses, which constitute a space of encounter to evaluate their activities, analyze their realities, select and renew through voting the leaders of the organization, assert themselves as organized Black women, assess the role of the provincial coordinators and make the organization visible at the national level. In each congress they run elections for the new national and provincial coordinators. The voting process is similar to that of the MAAD network (in which I participated as an observer, participant and researcher in the delegation of Ecuador carried out in Cali in 2018). Each province must reach a consensus among its members in order to have one vote per province (Las Memorias de los Encuentros Nacionales-1-Mujeres Negras, 2007).

The second congress was in 2003, in Tonsupa, Esmeraldas province. María Luisa Hurtado assumed the national coordination. In this congress, they started to articulate rules of procedure to guide their activities and meetings (Las Memorias de los Encuentros Nacionales-1-Mujeres Negras 2007, 53). During this period, they obtained the first seed funding from the European Union that allowed them to develop a project about leadership that was financed a few years later. Jobita Borja, Barbarita Lara and Carlota Chalá took the position as joint coordinators in Carchi. In December of 2006, the third congress took place. It was again held in Tonsupa, Esmeraldas province and Barbarita Lara was elected national coordinator. At that time, the European Union and COOPI (Coorporazione Internazionale) funded their project on Black women's leadership called "Consolidación de liderazgo y empoderamiento de mujeres negras organizadas en Ecuador" (Consolidation of leadership and empowerment of Black organized women in Ecuador). This project is one of the most important milestones in CONAMUNE's history because it allowed them to grow, position and make themselves visible in the region as a well-known and strong social organization, make alliances with NGOs, and strengthen their organization by advancing a multilayered project that encompasses political participation, identity and territory[10]. During this period, the support of the NGO COOPI

[10] In the second and third meetings, the historical organizational strength of the coast and the national imaginary of Black communities as located only in the coast and not in the highlands stand out. "Before, we were not known, people only talked about the fact that there were Afrodescendants in Esmeraldas because not even the country itself knew that there were Afrodescendants in the two provinces of the Chota Valley" (Barbarita, personal communication, Piquiucho, August 2018). The internal organization of the event and the ways of working were based on cultural practices and political discourses of the coast, such as *palenques de trabajo* and *mentidero* (social gathering of Afro women that is

played an important role in shaping the structure of the organization. Although CONAMUNE elaborated and presented the leadership consolidation project as a strategy to strengthen its organizational process, this NGO provided them with technical support that guided the structuring of the agendas and resolutions of the national meetings. During this period, they held four national meetings of provincial coordinators and the third national congress in 2006, four national meetings in 2007, and in 2008 two national meetings of provincial coordinators plus the fourth national congress.

The fourth congress took place in the Hostería El Prado in Ibarra in 2008. Livis González from Los Ríos province was elected as national coordinator. As many members of CONAMUNE recounted, this was a period when the organization weakened due to the lack of support (from the provinces) for the new national coordinator, lack of funding since they did not manage to carry out some local projects and the incorporation (and some feared cooptation) of several Afro-Ecuadorian leaders into the state apparatus[11]. During this period, Olguita was the coordinator of Carchi. In this congress they put more emphasis on incorporating Black girls and young women into CONAMUNE. After eight years of ups and downs in the national coordination, in 2016 the fifth congress took place in Pichincha. It was funded by CARE-Ecuador. Oberlisa Ogonaga and Alejandra Palacios were elected as joint coordinators of Carchi.

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called *Cochita amorosa* in the highlands) It is worth mentioning that the coast-highlands tension has been a political and cultural division in particular in the history of the Afro-Ecuadorian organizations. This division and tension have been managed by the members of CONAMUNE, who assume a diasporic vision of historical, political and cultural connection with different regions of the country and the continent. Historical ties, consanguinity and culture are shared but there are different perspectives and ways of doing things (Olguita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018; Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018).

[11] During this period, the Citizens' Revolution strongly incorporated Afro leaders into the state apparatus, but beyond the co-optation/corporativist perspective, the political engagement of leaders of CONAMUNE with the state apparatus was complex. They found ways to take advantage of this opportunity and opened up spaces for promoting and mobilizing concrete projects from the state that benefited their communities and Afro population in general. For instance, they actively participated in the Constituent Assembly process in 2008, where they focused on including a gender perspective (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018). Another example is Irma Bautista's work in the National Office of Intercultural Health, where along with other members of CONAMUNE (especially Ofelita), she advanced and published the textbook "Cuidemonos para vivir bien" (2011), a didactical material focused on health, midwives and sexual and reproductive rights from an Afro-Ecuadorian perspective. CONAMUNE members were navigating and creating this institutional space in order to advance and align CONAMUNE objectives on health and sexual and reproductive rights and intercultural rhetoric and public policies of the state.

These congresses have served as a reflection of the process of political maturity of CONAMUNE and its members. They were a way not only to get to know each other but to overcome historical regional ethnic conflicts. They are also a space for training and learning through presentations and workshops that allow them to deepen knowledge in different areas such as the national and international legal framework that protects them, their rights as women and as Black women, political participation, leadership, etc. Most of the congresses end with a summary that provides guidance for their collective work and activities and the conclusions are shared. For example, in the third congress, six commissions were established and the responsible provinces were assigned. The responsibilities of the commissions were: compiling information about Afro-Ecuadorian identity to be able to develop Ethnoeducation textbooks; strengthening ancestral medicinal practices; following up on the Constituent Assembly process; compiling the legal framework and public policies regarding public health; advancing Ethnoeducation projects; and analysing issues about migration (Las Memorias de los Encuentros Nacionales-1-Mujeres Negras 2007, 74). Furthermore, in the national encounters of provincial coordinators in 2007, the emphasis was placed on the political formation of Black women for their effective participation in the 2008 constituent assembly.

In the context of these national congresses and encounters, one can observe the important role played by the Red MAAD, the NGO COOPI and the international organization UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) in shaping CONAMUNE's objectives and activities. Since 2006, these transnational entities not only funded key projects of CONAMUNE in Imbabura, Carchi, Pichincha, Esmeraldas, Guayas, El Oro and Los Ríos, but also promoted alignment between their national agendas and the broader regional agenda of MAAD. In addition, they worked on increasing the number of Black women with leadership capacity and political participation and supported the legalization of Black women's organizations in the Andean countries: Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia and Venezuela (Guía de mujeres y organizaciones de mujeres afrodescendientes de la region Andina, Red MAAD 2010).

Their most recent political agenda (2017-2020) shows CONAMUNE's political maturity. It is structured in seven thematic axes: political participation and advocacy;

human mobility; health, sexual and reproductive rights, gender violence and ancestral medicine; culture, identity and cosmovision; territory, dwelling and food sovereignty; education and Ethnoeducation; and childhood and youth (Political Agenda CONAMUNE, 2017-2021). The vision of CONAMUNE-Carchi is focused on six interconnected axes – land and territory, production and employment, political participation, health and nutrition, education with identity, and culture and heritage – all aimed at achieving a life without violence, where Black women enjoy economic autonomy and the full exercise of their rights as human beings and citizens (CONAMUNE Imbabura and Carchi Political Agenda, 2015; Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018).

> In CONAMUNE we have an international perspective, we work with the international, not isolated. We have a document that has been strategic, the political agenda, to negotiate with NGOs, the state and transnational institutions. We work along different axes. **Ethnoeducation**, which is now a public policy, has been an effort of the organization and the international cooperative... it has been the sacrifice and hard work of the teachers.... **Health**, we seek to heal our diseases, products of the wrath of colonization... we are healing. Life without violence, which is so naturalized.... We were the consultants for the violence project.... Oh, how painful is to see how we are violated and sometimes violent.... **Culture-identity**, with our dance, La Bomba. **Land and territory**... because we want to live with dignity in our Ancestral Territory with food security. We also fight for **political participation** (Barbarita, public speech, Piquiucho, August 2018).

3.1.2   "*Hilando Fino*", Spinning and Weaving Together: A Metaphor that Evokes CONAMUNE's Political Practices

A hallmark of "mujeres de la CONAMUNE", the women of CONAMUNE, as they refer to themselves, that defines their multiple forms of political engagement with state agents, politicians, NGOs and community members and social organization, is that "our philosophy is based on a sense of belonging not of affiliation" (Olguita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). Working together out of a sense of

belonging and not affiliation is an organizational philosophy that has allowed them to maintain a unified national front that nurtures all the provincial coordinating bodies and their grassroots organizations, who elaborate their political agendas in articulation with the national agenda. A sense of belonging as their motto was something that all my interlocutors and collaborators told me about repeatedly. But it was not until I got personally involved in the everyday lives, personal histories, family dynamics and activities of CONAMUNE-Carchi members that I could understand what they meant. A sense of belonging refers to the empathy, pride, love and recognition of your subjectivity as a Black woman that passes down from your ancestors to you. It refers to a spiritual community of Black women that resonates directly with your existence as a Black female subject and body. As Ofelita explained,

> This is why we are organizing ourselves, to give life, our culture is life-giving... it is a need to tell the importance of our history for the new generations.... Organization is an inherent part of the life of the human being and the love for helping each other, to give, to learn. It is hope for change and for moving forward, communicating and transmitting, dancing through ritual and spirituality, *hile fino…*

And evoking the voice of her grandmother, she added, "*hilamos fino*, we are spinning and weaving together the wisdom of the Afrodescendant people…. We must fight like a female maroon... to confront violence and discrimination" (Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, October 2018). This orientation goes beyond the organizational structure: it is the foundation of their cultural practice that mobilizes their political actions and allows them to act as individuals in the name of the social organization without legal ties but from the connection with diverse projects designed to strengthen Afro-Ecuadorian culture and overcome the conditions of oppression of Black women.

Hilando fino, as Ofelita would say, is part of Afro creative acts of reimagining their culture by resignifying their past and *hilando* (spinning and weaving together) their ontological and identity principles after centuries of dispersion and cultural destruction as

a result of slave trade (Mintz and Price 1984; Antón 2007). This concept acknowledges the connection between the landscape and material culture and their bodies and souls (Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, October 2018), but also the political construction of African diasporic identities in Ecuador (Balanzategui 2017).

Making and transforming spaces through their practices and bodies (Cox 2015) is an important element of Black women's political actions. It has been an imperative of organized Black women in Ecuador. These practices of making spaces and transforming them, occurs in powerful but subtle ways such as gestures and ways of speaking, ways of carrying their bodies in and through space, acting in a conciliatory way among social leaders, or in their organization of turn-taking for conversation, as I observed countless times. For example, in a conference on Land and Territory held in Piquiucho in October of 2018, Barbarita began her speech by breaking the protocol. By using a group dynamic similar to those that teachers use in schools, she began saying: "to talk about women's experiences, we have to be willing". She started moving around the space, filling it with her presence, her voice and energy. She did not use a microphone. She made everyone stand up and feel and move through their bodies. By doing so, she was making room for integration, breaking the ice, and creating connection and empathy and preparing the audience for a mindful listening section of what she wanted to say about CONAMUNE. She continued:

> The Black woman has been the most invisible, she fights for life, freedom, dignity, land and territory in peace and respect. Black women have been fighting since the beginning in Ecuador. In 1778, in the national archive there were women, María Caldera... for example, not only Martina Carrillo, women have always fought.... In CONAMUNE, we are here by belonging, not by affiliation.... From a seed a female maroon is born and from a female maroon a hope is born.... Maroonage is a symbol of freedom, to be able to do what we want.… Powerful women such as Catherine Chalá, Alexandra Ocles, María Luisa Hurtado, Inés… are part of CONAMUNE (Barbarita, public speech, Piquiucho, August 2018).

During my fieldwork, I could observe and participate in many acts or performances of this kind, which were carried out by leaders or members of CONAMUNE-Esmeraldas, Pichincha, Carchi or Imbabura. In different contexts such as community meetings, CONAMUNE meetings, meetings between Afro women and state agents, Ethnoeducation encounters, or meetings among social organization members and NGOs, before giving a speech they prepare themselves and the audience, connecting their bodies and souls with the ancestors and African goddess and gods asking for permission or guidance. These ritualized practices symbolize "the connection between people who form the *Cochita amorosa*, the glances, the hugs, the gestures define and connect us, dancing is our rituality, it is spirituality, I look with my body" (Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, October 2018).

Through mixed experiences of failures and successes, CONAMUNE's political perspective and practices evolved, most importantly, since the Gender Violence Project when they began to work on strengthening and expanding a network, by weaving connections among diverse social and political actors to confront the systemic problem of anti-Black racism and exclusion, as this chapter will show. "Since 1999 we were advancing a process alone without many results, but we are alone no more. Now we work in network and we have stopped thinking about micro, no more micro projects like those that NGOs and the state want to sell us" (Barbarita, personal communication, Ibarra, June 2018). Members of CONAMUNE-Carchi, -Imbabura and -Pichincha truly believe in the potentiality of working together in networks beyond dichotomies such as men and women, state and social organization, and community and schools, to advance their project in their Black communities.

Since 2014, the women of the CONAMUNE, especially CONAMUNE-Carchi, have been working and proposing a profound practice of healing as Black people that is the axis of their multilayered political practices.

> We propose to erase the limits, work together in network, work with
> NGOs, healing exercises in *Cochita amorosa*, national and international
> dialogue, public policies and financial education. We have a political

proposal to negotiate and work for peace among us, to heal internally as a people, to work from love. After being raped, our mothers hugged their newborn children and forgave the rapist... that is a sign of their strength and love.... Racism is a strategy to make you believe you are stupid, but it is also the failure to recognize the other (Barbarita, public speech, consejo de igualdad, Quito, February 2019).

The wide range of inequalities, aggressions and forms of oppression imposed from their enslavement, the commodification of their reproductive labour (Parham Payne 2017), and sexual assaults, have marked the lived experiences of Black women (Davis 1981; Collins 2000). This has required that they act as advocates for themselves and their communities, as political subjects. This is the case of the women of CONAMUNE, who have been fighting together since 1999 for their rights as Black women in a country with a strong mestizaje ideology that highlights the mixing of white and Indigenous people.

From their first political agenda down to the present, the women of CONAMUNE have deepened their political actions and philosophical thought. From their first focus on education and capacity building training, they have delved into the causes of gender violence, the political and historical roots framed in a colonial context, which have marked their existence as Black women and configured the structural violence they continue to experience. Thus, they have been working to sharpen their own perspective on their local reality, education and violence from a gender, race and class perspective. Since 2009 and 2010, with the COOPI project and within the framework of the national political project of the Citizens' Revolution, CONAMUNE has been deepening Ethnoeducation as a social and political project as well working on violence prevention. Thus, CONAMUNE-Carchi and -Imbabura, in 2010 launched the project called "Iniciativa para combatir la violencia contra las mujeres afrodescendientes del Valle del Chota" (The Initiative to Combat Violence against Afrodescendant Women in the Chota Valley). This resulted in an analysis from the perspective of local Black women of the history of their communities in relation to the sugarcane *hacienda* and slavery and how reflecting on that legacy allows them to understand the historical and structural violence they have always suffered.

This same project was extended in a new stage called "Haciendo visible y enfrentando la violencia contra las mujeres Afroecuatorianas del territorio Ancestral Valle del chota, Salinas, La Concepción y Guallupe" (Making Visible and Confronting Violence against Afro-Ecuadorian Women in the Ancestral Territory Valle del Chota, Salinas, La Concepción and Guallupe) supported by the Azúcar Foundation and the NGO GIZ. In this phase of the project more communities of the ancestral valley were included as well as Afrodescendant communities in Quito. In this phase a statistical analysis was incorporated to complement the qualitative research. *Ni pensar en derechos mientras haya violencia* (don't even think about rights while there is still violence) was the motto that motivated them to turn the results of this project into an instrument of political participation in 2012. A few years later it would be incorporated into the electoral campaign of Barbarita Lara for municipal council in Mira, Carchi, and the public policy on gender violence that she proposed during her term. "With this project we realized that violence was not a problem of the organization, nor of the NGO, but of the state" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018).

A very important feature of this project is that it was developed entirely by Black women from the communities who, as researchers, carried out the interviews and analyzed the data. As Barbarita explains: "The idea was not to be the object of study but to be active subjects of the process centered on the Black woman, mistreated three times over for being black, poor and rural" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, November 2018). During this process, a transition and transformation can be seen in the political actions and thought of CONAMUNE-Carchi and -Imbabura, who began to think of the integral Ancestral Territory without borders as a political project, to involve an inter-generational perspective in their projects and the structure of the organization, and to look for ways to involve the political officials in addressing gender violence in the Chota Valley since they understood that gender violence was a state problem that could not be solved only from the social organization due to its intersection with historical and structural violence (Haciendo visible y enfrentando la violencia contra las mujeres Afroecuatorianas, 2012).

3.2 The *Cochita Amorosa*, Loving Social Gathering as a Liberatory Practice

> It's 500 years and a lot of ancestors who tell me to speak, since I have my own voice (Barbarita, meeting, Ibarra, June 2018).

The *Cochita amorosa* does not have a single and easy definition. It is a ritual, it is a political practice, but it also is a way of being. The *Cochita amorosa* is an ancestral practice that evokes Afro-Ecuadorian woman as political subject and spiritual being. "The *Cochita amorosa*, you can't ask what it is!" I was told. You have to live it, be part of it in order to understand, and more than anything, to feel it. It is an ancestral, cultural practice of coming together, communing, it is spirituality and rituality of the Black woman.

> The ancestors were practical, not theoretical, they were do-ers if there was a crisis, they began to sow, and in *minga* you see, they helped to plant yucca here, then in *minga* they sowed something else there, and so on, in solidarity. The ancestors were maroons and *palenqueros*. And I insist, Ethnoeducation is practical, just like the *Cochita amorosa* (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, May 2020).

During my fieldwork and in countless moments of sharing with Barbarita, she invited me to reflect on the *Cochita amorosa* by allowing me to be part of it, to feel it, to embody it. From my arrival in Ecuador in May 2018 and later in La Concepción that July, without realizing it, I was participating in innumerable *Cochitas amorosas*. I did so when I was attending a CONAMUNE meeting in Quito or having dinner with my host family in La Concepción community. I did so in spontaneous conversations with elderly women sitting on the sidewalk of the community or in the living room of my host family while they were combing each other's hair. But it was not until almost the end of my fieldwork, when I was not trying to make sense out of every act and gesture I saw, when I could finally feel the subtlety and power of the *Cochita amorosa*.

I was there, sitting in a circle with the women of the Lara family – Anita, Inesita, Toita, Barbarita, Ofelita, and their daughters – threshing *guandul* (a legume) in the living room of Anita's house in Mascarilla community. It was the end of a long day, after an event organized by CONAMUNE called "Sembrando una cultura de paz" (Sowing a culture of peace) and walking back and forth to the *huerta*, when I understood that the *Cochita amorosa* was a praxis of Black women that seeks to heal, to connect, to reflect, to feel, to teach and to transform their realities by paying careful attention to each other, by listening and reflecting together about what has happened, whether it was a few minutes or 500 years ago. During this mundane and spontaneous *Cochita amorosa* we analyzed the new project of CONAMUNE "Sowing a culture of peace" in the context of structural violence experienced by Black women and men in the Chota-Mira Valley as a consequence of state-sanctioned violence. We talked about police brutality as a way the state engages and targets Afro-Ecuadorian populations and how the white-mestizo society still perceives Black people as criminals, as violent, as non-human, and Black women as sexual objects. They also talked about intra-community violence and implicit biases in how this topic is approached by social organizations and the state. They highlighted the importance of unlearning certain things in order to relearn. By talking and reflecting on these topics from a sharp but subtle angle they were making space for their three-year-old granddaughter to learn about how to thresh *guandul* and for their nieces to listen to stories about *guandul* as the "plant of the maroons" and as part of Afro-Ecuadorian culture. It was also a moment of contemplation and mindful listening where all of us were sharing and learning. This kind of mundane *Cochita amorosa* is not planned, and it is associated with collective work (or *mingas*), with the solidarity of families and community members that is based on reciprocity. It is part of the ancestral economic practice called *cambeo*, where Black women used to walk long distances to exchange diverse commodities in local markets with Indigenous people (Anita, personal communication, Mascarilla, January 2019). Thus, we were sitting in a circle threshing *guandul* that Ofelita and Toita would take to Quito, the same *guandul* that Anita would sell in the market the next morning in El Ángel, and the same that we would cook during the week. This is an example of *Cochita amorosa* as a mundane and everyday practice among Black women in the Chota-Mira Valley.

The first *Cochita amorosa* I was part of was held on June 16, 2018 in Quito. It was a meeting of Afro-Ecuadorian women who had participated in the first phase of the project "La escuela de formación política y liderazgo de la mujer negra" (school for political training and leadership of Black women). It was an initiative of CONAMUNE, and its goal was to strengthen the identity and pride of Black women and to build their capacity as leaders with tools for effective and efficient political participation. The Azúcar Foundation, an Afro women's organization in Quito, took it up and moved it forward. The courses and seminars were held during the second semester of 2017. The purpose of the meeting I attended the next year was to launch the textbooks that synthesize the courses as well as to debrief about what did and did not work, what could be improved, and what the next steps should be.

The meeting took place in the Daniel Comboni Centre, in Carcelén on the northern edge of Quito at 10 am. I went with Gaby, a member and founder of Azúcar Foundation, and the sister of Sonia. Along the way, she told me that the experience of the school and workshops was problematic, that many women complained about the organization, the locations and the food. That was her way to warn me about the possibility of conflict during the meeting. With that in mind, we entered the locale. There were tables and chairs arranged in U-shape, and in the middle were drums and a table with the video projector. The participants began to arrive. Meanwhile I was talking with Gaby about our Afro hair (she had removed her extensions 15 days before and was letting her natural hair grow). She explained to me how our Afro hair is classified in A, B, C according to the "motocidad" of the hair texture and as a scale of hardness and dryness (Gaby personal communication, Quito, June 2018). (Motozo contains a negative meaning associated with the coarse fibre or texture of certain fabrics.) While we were talking about the products we should avoid using, Alejandra, a coordinator of CONAMUNE-Carchi and member of the youth network of the Chota-Mira Valley, approached us and commented that the Roxabara, a traditional plant from the valley, was excellent for Afro hair.

While we talked about the particularities of our bodies and their representation, and how this was a central part of their Afro Choteña identity, Luzmila, the coordinator

of CONAMUNE-Pichincha (and Barbarita's cousin), entered the room. She greeted all of us with love and began to walk around the room in a circular way. I kept talking with Gaby and Alejandra when I observed that Luzmila was staring at the empty center of the room and she began to bring in some of the decorations that were arranged on a table in the hall where the snacks were located. Without saying a word, she began to place a container with water on the floor, then she put some flowers making a circular shape and added soil that she gathered from the patio. She put the drums on one side and La Bomba instrument at the center of the circle. She placed fruits and colorful fabrics, lit candles, and when she finished, she took a seat. Sonia, who led the meeting, welcomed the attendees and gave the floor to Luzmila and Irma, the current national coordinator of CONAMUNE. Luzmila got up and said: "Let's open the door for Elegua, let's allow him to come in! Let there be light! When I arrived, I noticed that something was missing in that center and look! There it is, with its colors, it was that. We must start this meeting by asking permission to do this. Come closer to start the ritual!" We all went to the center; she began to say Afro-Brazilian prayers and began to invoke the gods to lead the way and bless this meeting and us. Each of the participants introduced themselves and said a few words. I identified myself as Afro Venezuelan; I thanked them for the invitation and asked permission to do my research about CONAMUNE, by connecting myself as a Venezuelan Black woman with them as Afro-Ecuadorian women. They smiled and nodded. After we all introduced ourselves, Luzmila asked us to say a few words to the person to our right. I had to say: "I respect and admire you, for me you are important." And my partner replied: "thank you for saying I am important to you." Then we hugged each other and held each other's hands. Then we stepped forward and raising our hands we said aloud axé, axé, axé[12]! We repeated this three times. This moment was not only to introduce us but also to recognize ourselves as women connected to each other and with the whole, with our own light that would illuminate the meeting with wisdom. Next, Irma Bautista recited her famous poem "I want everything with you" and explained why, when

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[12] In the context of Afro-Brazilian religious communities and the diaspora, axé "means strength in the existential sense; axé is the basis of existence, what makes it move. Axé can also be defined as power of engendering and achievement. Without axé, existence would not be" (Werneck 2007, 112).

and where she wrote it. And then Amada Cortez, from CONAMUNE-Esmeraldas (San Lorenzo), sang the *décima* "brothers and sisters, do not go to Europe," highlighting the phrase "a world where skin color does not matter".

After this ceremony, the meeting proceeded. The discussion focused on highlighting how CONAMUNE is working on Ethnoeducation and political participation as the central objectives of the organization: "We want to participate in the post-secondary education policy-making process, that is the aim of the proposal of the *cátedra* [a faculty position], which is not just lobbying. The universities have a duty to fulfill with affirmative action, scholarships and quotas" (Sonia, public speech, Quito, June 2018). At the same time, they outlined the steps to be taken within the Ministry of Education, through the agency of the Afro women employees who work in the Ethnoeducation office, which is a space for political participation marked by "the Indigenous hegemony that our Afro women comrades experience there daily" (Sonia, public speech, Quito, June 2018). I further discuss the dynamics that Sonia alluded to in chapter four below.

Thus, the *Cochita amorosa* not only marks the beginning of their meetings but also channels energies so that communications flow and illuminate the steps that they must take as agents of change in the reality of Black women and the Afrodescendant population. In turn, the *Cochita amorosa* as a ritual at the beginning of an event is led by one of the leaders, which is an occasion for reaffirmation of her leadership. But while this could be seen as a logic of verticality, it is resignified by them as an opportunity for the transmission of ancestral knowledge and, therefore, the formation of new leaders.

The *Cochita amorosa* is conjured as a cultural practice, political ritual, research methodology, pedagogical device to advance Ethnoeducation in schools, but also as a central political practice of CONAMUNE in diverse social spheres. It is used as a ritual to begin CONAMUNE's meetings by asking permission from the ancestors and African gods or goddess Elegua, Oshum or Yemanya, and as a political ritual to begin meetings between CONAMUNE and state agents. During some political events about Ethnoeducation they enacted a certain way of being Black and women that allows them to legitimize themselves as Black political subjects based on some elements of their

African diaspora identity and their ancestral ritual before the state. Hence, it is part of their political strategies that they deploy during processes of negotiation with the state. But it is also activated in mundane practices such as chatting on the street or in the front entrance of their house, which shows us that the *Cochita amorosa* encompasses diverse spheres of the lives of Black women and girls of all ages.

3.2.1   The *Cochita Amorosa* as Practice of Freedom

Cochita amorosa is an ancestral and maroon practice used by the ancestors to transmit their knowledge, "used by our ancestors to teach and to learn," as Barbarita told me. It evokes those moments where the elders used to sit together to transmit their culture, to tell stories, myths, legends, to transmit the stories of their people, to plan how to survive. It was a space of love and tenderness (Chalá 2007). The *Cochita amorosa* is a space where people gather to share life experiences; it can be under a tree, at the shore of the river, in the community park. They are gatherings with family or friends around a campfire where stories are told[13]. As Papá Salomón says:

> In the time of the huts, the straw houses, the parents came home from working
> on the *hacienda*, we all sat around the *tulpa* (hearth), in the center of the house,
> at that time there were no separated rooms, and sitting there all together as a
> family we ate and we shared our experiences (Papá Salomón, personal
> communication, Mascarilla, February 2019).

It is an ancestral practice of encounter, respect and "union of people for a coexistence of peace and harmony where all knowledge was transmitted" (Barbarita, public interview, La Concepción, February 2020). As a place of encounter, it fosters intergenerational relations that allow the transmission of ancestral wisdom. Later on, the *Cochita amorosa* was developed more as a practice of women "when we would gather, there were lots of us and we would form a *Cochita amorosa* to talk together, to share the

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[13] This social gathering around a campfire has been resignified as political practice of the Afro-Ecuadorian Youth Collective since its organic foundation in 2012 (Diego, personal communication, Quito, February 2019; Iliana Carabali, personal communication, El Chota, February 2019; Fernanda, personal communication, La Concepción, November 2018).

neighbourhood news when we were going to be *comadres*" (Anita, public interview, Mascarilla, February 2020).

The resignification of the *Cochita amorosa* as the central practice of CONAMUNE is part of a turning point in the actions and political thinking of CONAMUNE. It occurred during the workshops that formed part of the research process of the Gender Violence Project (2012), where the participants explored together, in *Cochita amorosa*, their individual experiences of violence in order to heal themselves collectively, in sisterhood. In this context, CONAMUNE-Carchi began to consolidate the idea that "each project of the organization, at the local, regional or national level, had to be articulated with public policies and to do that we formed the *mesas* to dialogue with the state" and the NGOs (Barbarita, meeting, Ibarra, June 2018). This openness and articulation with the state and its public policies comes from a maturing process of CONAMUNE marked by a political position that Afro Ecuadorians are not a minority that challenge the limitations of national demography. Responding from a 'minority' position diminished them: "because we aren't a minority, we reject the discourse of being a minority and being treated in micro – no more micro projects, no more micro discourses" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018).

> In CONAMUNE we have always had a political agenda, in 2000, in 2003, 2006. Then there was the 2015 territorial political agenda, Carchi and Imbabura. The Sucumbios, Esmeraldas, and Pichincha agendas, which are the basis for the national agenda under the framework of the 2008 constitution, which is the guarantor of rights. CONAMUNE worked on the project to make gender violence visible in 2012 and we decided to seek out the state. We made a document to deliver to decentralized and local governments. We no longer think of **micro** because they "**micronize**" us, they treat us as less, like children and minimize us with micro projects, we do not want $200 projects, we want them to add three more zeros to that amount, we already think about public policies. We have already started with Ethnoeducation, that has now been launched as law (Barbarita, meeting, Ibarra, June 2018).

As political practice, the *Cochita amorosa* has been the result of processes of negotiation among CONAMUNE members, showing the tensions and disagreements between the coastal region and the highlands on political representation and leadership. This practice of loving social gathering is known as *Mentidero* in Esmeraldas, in the northern coast of Ecuador, but it is also based on love and the female energy of nurturing and connection between human beings, the environment and the spirits. Despite conflicts between some members of CONAMUNE about the use of the name *Cochita amorosa* to designate this practice, it is deployed by the majority of members of CONAMUNE as an international hallmark of the organization. For instance, this was evident in their participation in the last Red MAAD conference held in October 2018 in Cali, Colombia, where CONAMUNE presented themselves in different events as a unified bloc. Nonetheless, during this conference I could observe the tensions and division within CONAMUNE, based on conflicts between female leaders from the coast and the highlands. However, as part of the process of organizational development and political maturity, the members of CONAMUNE have tried to overcome these conflicts that intersect regionalisms and generational gaps through their daily practice of *Cochita amorosa* as a political and spiritual practice that opens dialogues between equals. Thus, the *Cochita amorosa* has become an essential part of CONAMUNE's political practice that focuses on strengthening their cultural practices, the connection with and respect for ancestors and the pride in being a Black woman, by highlighting their healing abilities as a metaphor for their collective political capacity to transform and have an effect on their own realities.

3.2.2   The *Cochita Amorosa* as Healing Practice

The CONAMUNE resignified this ancestral practice of sharing, in a "strategy to heal ourselves, not the racist or the abuser. And we heal by studying and understanding our culture but also by understanding the other, by coming to know the other through love" (Barbarita, conference, Quito, July 2018). The *Cochita amorosa* as a CONAMUNE proposal focuses mainly on healing women, girls and elders in order to heal families and communities. This healing process implies loving what we are, loving the territory, loving Afro-Ecuadorian history. "It is there in that process of getting to know each other,

through sharing, that is where the episteme of the wisdom of the Afro people is generated" (Barbarita, conference, Quito, July 2018). The *Cochita amorosa* is an episteme that emerges from the collective, from solidarity, from the understanding and recognition of the points of encounter and disagreement with the other. Hence it has a deeply intercultural and emancipatory meaning. The *Cochita amorosa* raises and promotes horizontal relationships between the people who participate in it, creating a non-hierarchical setting that enables women, young girls and elderly women to move away from competing hierarchies that foster inequalities.

As stated above, the Gender Violence Project led CONAMUNE to implement the *Cochita amorosa* as a methodology for working together and healing the violence that Black women have been suffering. The *Cochita amorosa* never ceased to exist but the CONAMUNE revitalizes it as a practice of healing women's pain, in order to heal collectively as men and women. This resonates with Lorde's (1984, 2007) ontological and political distinction between pain and suffering. She states that pain is an experience that has to be named, processed and used in order to transform it "into something else, strength or knowledge or action" while suffering is an "unscrutinized and unmetabolized pain" (Lorde 2007, 171). In this sense, the experience of working together in *Cochita amorosa* among Black women led them to work on their pain, recognize it, name it, understand it, metabolize it, in order to channel it as a practice of healing and as a political practice of Black women. This collective healing process has a liberating and transforming potentiality, a political potentiality for individual and collective change that CONAMUNE has been developing.

The *Cochita amorosa* is light, it is a space of spiritual connection between the present bodies, between the earth and its elements – water, soil, air, light – which gives way and opens the paths of communication and action, of permission to the ancestors so that through you their wisdom is transmitted and penetrates the hearts of those present. Thus, past pain, sadness and wounds are channelled and transformed into power that nourishes and guides their social struggle (Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, October 2018). By delving into the pain they have been experiencing, Black women are aiming to foster an ontological healing of the Black being that allows them to open up

possibilities "for mutual support and connection between Black women" by exploring the angers that "keep us from realizing the power of a real Black sisterhood" (Lorde 2007, 153). As Barbarita and Ofelita would say, "we – Black women – are in a deep process of healing and that is where our strengths come from, the love, the love for the child who resulted from rape" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018).

3.2.3 Political Ritual and Performance of Afro Women of CONAMUNE

The role of ritual practice as a key element of social mobilization has been central in the literature on social movements (Kertzer 1988; Taylor and Whittier 1995; Goodwin et al 2001). From a Durkheimian approach, scholars have argued for the importance of rituals as producing and sustaining solidarity among members of the social movement. Authors such as Taylor and Whittier (1995) demonstrate the importance of rituals and performance in women's movements. However, few studies have explored the ritual dimension of political practices of Black women's organizations in Latin America (Werneck 2007, 2009).

The *Cochita amorosa* as a ritual of Black women is a political space and practice where CONAMUNE members reassert their solidarity with each other, promote cultural and political visibility of Black women in the community and the state, accumulate and exchange local political capital, and create and reinforce political and symbolic alliances. The rituality of CONAMUNE's women has been changing over time but they maintain a logic marked by their faith and Catholic practices. Reciting "Our Father" followed by *El canto a la mujer negra* (Song to the black woman) were recurring acts in CONAMUNE meetings during the first decade of its formation (Las Memorias de los Encuentros Nacionales-1-Mujeres Negras, 2007). Due to the influence of the Catholic religion in the formation of the Afro organizations in the Chota-Mira Valley, reflected in the importance of religious organizations such as the Legión de María, the Pastoral Afro and the Combonian missionaries, for some members of the first generation of CONAMUNE, the mass and Catholic religious rituals mark their ceremonies and form the central axis of their political actions (Mercedes, personal communication, El Chota, March 2019). The *Cochita amorosa* has not only been part of the ritual of the Black woman but has become

a political act in itself, loaded with symbolism of Afro-Ecuadorian culture informed by African diasporic elements channelled through objects and bodily movements of Black women, as the next description of the *Cochita amorosa* will illustrate.

Sowing a Culture of Peace is a project of CONAMUNE-Carchi and -Imbabura organized by Ofelita Lara. The idea was to bring together all CONAMUNE members of these two provinces in order to reorganize and boost the organization. It was developed in the context of the International Women's Day in March 2019. Sowing a culture of peace evokes the political act of healing the environment and simultaneously challenging state-sanctioned violence through an embodied political act of Black women. The event began with an Afro-Catholic mass in Juncal community. During the mass, the priest blessed the water, the soil, the drums, and the flowers that were going to be part of the *Cochita amorosa*.

At the end of the mass, we walked towards the main road where the ceremony would take place. The idea was to enact the *Cochita amorosa* as close as possible to the territorial boundary between the provinces of Imbabura and Carchi as an act that symbolizes CONAMUNE's political proposal to erase the borders and limits imposed by the state on the ancestral Afro-Ecuadorian territory. All the participants were dressed in white clothes. The current coordinators of CONAMUNE Carchi and Imbabura, Oberlisa, Alejandra and Maribel, as well as the founding leaders of CONAMUNE such as Mercedes Acosta and her daughters and Barbarita Lara, and many other members of CONAMUNE and the Afro youth collective participated in this *Cochita amorosa*.

Ofelita, with the help of some women, placed all the elements of the *Cochita amorosa* in the center of the street. A yellow fabric intertwined with flowers formed a circular shape. Inside the circle were placed water, soil, a candle and La Bomba, the traditional drum of the Chota Valley. Alongside it, two members of the Afro youth collective were going to *repicar* the drums to start the ceremony. In the center there was a red sign saying Happy Women's Day and above it a clay pot with a small tree. As in all *Cochitas amorosas*, these elements are arranged according to the four cardinal points. The fresh water evokes Oshun (African goddess of fresh water) and the river that unites

the ancestral territory, the flowers represent the colors and life of its inhabitants, the soil and fire represent the power of Afrodescendants, and La Bomba, its percussion, power, vibration, rhythm and dance of Afrodescendant people (Iliana, meeting, Salinas, February 2019).

On one side, an awning (*toldo*) with chairs was arranged, on the adjacent side was the liquor and food store. In front of it were some stands. Access to this area of the street was delimited by a billboard in the shape of an inflatable arch in white and red colors that said: "*Ibarra cerca de nuestra gente! Alcaldía de Ibarra!* [Ibarra close to our people! The mayor's office of Ibarra]." A peculiarity of this *Cochita amorosa* is that the current mayor of Ibarra, who was a candidate for re-election, funded the event. The ceremony was held a few weeks before the elections for mayors and municipal councillors. It was also seven months after the murder of Andrés Padilla, a young Afro Ecuadorian who was shot in the back and killed by the police in the police station of Mascarilla. Ofelita began the ceremony.

> Sitting with my grandmother in the *Cochita amorosa*… I felt unworthy to represent them because they had great knowledge. In the *Cochita amorosa* they transmitted their knowledge, they fed us, in the *Cochita amorosa* they gave us the advice to be good women and men, there we sat to share what little we had, in poverty. The orishas, our mothers, grandmothers, ancestors and we, women, will make this *Cochita amorosa* today. Because they are the ones who have taught us to respect the *Cochita amorosa* because it is the identity of the Afro Choteño people, without *Cochita amorosa* we would not know how to differentiate ourselves from the 'other', the *Cochita amorosa* is our pride of belonging, the *Cochita amorosa* is pure love, there is no violence in *Cochita amorosa*, and in it we are strong (Ofelita, ceremony, Juncal, March 2019).

While Ofelita began the ceremony explaining the meaning of the *Cochita amorosa*, the members of CONAMUNE formed a circle around to give life to the *Cochita amorosa*. Fifteen of us had bouquets of yellow flowers that we would place,

during the ceremony, in the center of the *Cochita amorosa*. The first 10 minutes involved a reflection about the *Cochita amorosa* as a symbol of the identity of the Afro-Choteña woman and as a symbol of the connection between Catholic religiosity and spirituality transmitted from female ancestors. By doing this, Ofelita was not only reasserting and teaching new generations and members of CONAMUNE about the logic behind the *Cochita amorosa* but she was also challenging the racist stereotypes about being Black in the Chota-Mira Valley. During this ceremony, Ofelita was reinforcing Black women's pride and collective feelings of belonging among CONAMUNE members (Della Porta and Diana 1999).

> In the church, is where we believe in the god of life, and here [in *la Cochita amorosa*] is where we believe in our mother, our grandmother, sister, aunt and daughter. It is where we find the connection, it is identity, it is spirituality, it is a different culture because we, the men and women of the Ancestral Territory, not only know how to dance and wiggle our hips and jump and scream and get angry. No! we also have spirituality and it is that spirituality that made our grandmothers live 103 years, by believing in the divine connection [pointing to the church] and in the human connection [pointing to the *Cochita amorosa*]. And they always did it, it did not matter if the sun beat down, or if they were taking *churos*, or *jalando la caña*, they always carried out the *Cochita amorosa* (Ofelita, ceremony, Juncal, March 2019).

She continued explaining that this *Cochita amorosa* was a symbol of justice for Andrés Padilla, who was killed as a result of discrimination. It was a ceremony to sow peace, justice, human rights and resiliency among Afro-Ecuadorians and to heal all, together with Andrés' mother. And at that moment, Andrés' mother arrived at the ceremony. "We still do not have justice, there are no rights for us, and that is why we are here to say to the media that we are not just 'violence', we are love and that we demand justice, and that together we fight for our rights" (Ofelita, ceremony, Juncal, March 2019).

The drums began to beat and Ofelita got up. We started to move and lift up the flowers. Thus, we begin to walk and dance around the *Cochita amorosa* to the rhythm of the drums. Ofelita identified the four godparents or sponsors of the ceremony and asked us to do the ceremony: German Villota, Barbarita Lara, Bachita (me) and Erika (a representative of the mayor of Ibarra). I took the water along with the queen of the carnival – a young and beautiful Black girl. German Villota took the soil and Barbarita the candle. Andrés Padilla's mother placed her flower at the center, Villota put a handful of soil while we approached the center with the candlelight to pour the water as a symbolic act of sowing peace. The drums began to beat louder, and we started to shake the flowers in the air. Then, we fell silent to pray "what the grandmothers taught us". Ofelita shouted "axé" and we replied "axé pa sha!" While we shook the flowers towards the *Cochita amorosa*, we moved closer to Andrés' mother to cover her with our energy and Ofelita went on to say: "We are here to support each other, that is the purpose of us, the women of CONAMUNE from the Ancestral Territory Imbabura and Carchi" (Ofelita, ceremony, Juncal, March 2019). Then Mercedes Acosta, leader of CONAMUNE-Imbabura and founder of various organizations in the Chota community, offered a few words. Following that, we placed the messages of peace that we had written before the ceremony in the center.

At the end of this part of the ceremony, different members of CONAMUNE took the floor to reiterate Ofelita's feelings and the meaning of the *Cochita amorosa* for the women of CONAMUNE as an identity marker. But this moment also served to express resentments and conflicts for the lack of support from the CONAMUNE members for the current coordinators. For example, Alejandra, a young leader of the Piquiucho community who is also a member of the Afro youth collective (Red de Jóvenes del Territorio Ancestral), showed her discontent by arriving late and sitting apart from the others. Thus, she was re-affirming and showing how young Black women – members of CONAMUNE – can feel at the margins of CONAMUNE's political practices. Maribel, current coordinator of CONAMUNE-Imbabura, had already told me in previous conversations how difficult it has been for her to mobilize CONAMUNE and integrate the organization activities into her political position: "I have not had the support of some of them, there is a power struggle, and they put up many obstacles" (Maribel, personal

communication, Urcuqui, March 2019). Thus, during her intervention, Maribel made subtle comments about the need to make CONAMUNE more visible in the parish where she holds the local political administrative position of *teniente político* (political lieutenant), in order to strengthen grassroots organizations in communities such as La Victoria. (Weeks later, Ofelita went to the La Victoria community to make a *Cochita amorosa* as part of a political event organized by Maribel.)

During Barbarita's speech, she opened up the dialogue from the voices of the ancestors by recognizing the intergenerational gaps and the need to yield spaces to young women so that they could be the ones to ensure continuity of the actions and projects of CONAMUNE: "from heaven they are guiding and accompanying us so that we can advance the task that they entrusted to us" (Barbarita, public speech, Juncal, March 2019). Germán Villota, candidate for municipal councillor of Mira, also spoke. As part of his political campaign he highlighted his support for the initiatives and policies of the women of the Ancestral Territory and CONAMUNE, in particular. Then Iliani, member of the youth organization, recalled that the struggle for social justice has an intergenerational dimension, and she went on saying "this *Cochita amorosa* aims to understand that young and old women have worked hard to get to where we are, because women together with men make this world better" (Iliana, public speech, Juncal, March 2019). During each intervention, I could observe how some attendees (members of CONAMUNE) used body language or made explicit comments showing their support or disagreement about what was being said. For example, while Maribel was talking, I could see how some members of CONAMUNE-Imbabura stood up and walked away or turned their backs on her, showing a conflict around the leadership. It is worth noting that following the last two CONAMUNE congresses, an emphasis has been placed on including new generations and Maribel showed herself as that face of a young woman, of La Victoria – a community that is on the margins of the Chota valley as an imagined community of Blackness. Hence, within the social organization there is a production and reproduction of hierarchies of racial power associated with the community and the family

(last names)[14] to which you belong, which during the *Cochita amorosa* are simultaneously made manifest and balanced.

These hierarchies are evidenced through gestures, glances and body postures that show displeasure and tensions among them but are also balanced during the performativity of each one during the *Cochita amorosa* as a spiritual space of horizontal relations of connection with the ancestors. In this sense, during the ceremony, it is essential to dance to the rhythm of the Bomba. Usually, a group of female dancers from the communities does a presentation. In this case, they were Las Choteñitas, comprised of the daughter of Mercedes Acosta (traditional leader of the Chota and CONAMUNE-Imbabura) and other women of Chota community. During the dancing presentation with the traditional bottle on their heads, other members of CONAMUNE began to join the dancing and – through bodily movements – opportunities were created to connect with each other and reaffirm their leadership. As Mercedes put it at the end of the ceremony, "it is thus that in these events we strengthen ourselves and I thank Ofelita for organizing it" (Mercedes, personal communication, Juncal, March 2019). Usually, there is a person who channels it, in this case it was Ofelita, who pulled in – with her body, her smile and energy – the tension towards the center of the *Cochita amorosa*. By doing so, she interacts with each of the women who is dancing, inviting them to look at each other, sense and respect one another. Between circular movements of their hips and arms, they look at each other with their bodies, they feel each other with their bodies, "I look at you with my body, I talk to you with my body" (Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, October 2018). In the *Cochita amorosa* as choreography of the political of Black women of CONAMUNE in the Chota-Mira Valley, the body as "an ongoing process of performance" (Wade 2002, 12) becomes a space of negotiation and interaction (Cox 2015) among CONAMUNE members, members of different social organizations, state agents, community leaders and political leaders. Black women are at the centre in this

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[14] Political power and symbolic capital of the leaders of the Chota-Mira Valley are associated with the historical leaders of the communities and the surnames that are strongly linked to the history of the *haciendas*, the role of leaders during the agrarian reform and the land struggles in the Chota-Mira Valley.

social and political space where they nurture and create spiritual connections, social relationships and political community.

La *Cochita amorosa* is a space where political ties between the leaders of CONAMUNE are reaffirmed, but also it is a space for visibility of Black women as political subjects and for raising awareness about their reality. At the same time, the *Cochita amorosa* is a space or source of political capital that promotes their community leadership and political capital as state agents. It is a strategy for gaining visibility and state recognition as well as seeking resources and allies.

A week after the *Cochita amorosa* described above, CONAMUNE-Imbabura held an event in La Victoria community. Maribel, as political lieutenant in the Juan Arenas parish, has been planning different strategies to make more visible the Afrodescendant population that lives in the parish and develop capacity-building training for women in order to strengthen their grassroots organizations. The idea was to hold a cultural night (*noche cultural*) in the community to reactivate the activities of its grassroots organization at the Ancestral Cultural Meetings of Women in the Community of Victoria (ECAMCV). During this activity, local crafts and hand-made jewelry were sold and various cultural presentations took place. The central idea was to make a *Cochita amorosa* as part of the International Women's Day celebrations.

All the participants were dressed in yellow, the colour of Oshun. Most were girls and teenagers belonging to community Bomba dance groups. The *Cochita amorosa* was held at the community park. As described above, a yellow fabric formed a circular shape. Inside the circle were placed water, soil, candle and La Bomba. This time, a man from the community was at the center of la *Cochita amorosa* playing the drum while Ofelita guided the ceremony. Maribel was active participating in this *Cochita amorosa*. Right beside Ofelita, she was directing the girls and young women on what to do during this *Cochita amorosa*. Ofelita had the lit candle and all the ladies were holding a white rose. A particularity of this ceremony was that they were dancing the song "decenio para la vida de los afrodescendientes" in an act of recalling but simultaneously challenging the International Decade for People of African Descent. While it is a key international legal

framework that was an achievement of Afrodescendant struggles, it has had very little impact on the daily life of the Afro-Ecuadorian people and, in particular, of Black women. Thus, during this *Cochita amorosa*, not only were Ofelita and Maribel strengthening their ties, but Maribel was also visibilizing and reinforcing her role as *teniente político*, as state agent and as CONAMUNE leader. Hence, in this *Cochita amorosa*, they were aligning CONAMUNE's actions to their grassroots organizations and the objectives of the International Decade for People of African Descent as a way to promote new projects within this legal framework.

As Ofelita says, "the *Cochita amorosa* is the people, it is made up by the people who are part of it" in connection with each element. Thus, water, soil, flowers and light are integral parts of its cultural landscape, which they reaffirm and celebrate in an act of creativity that they adjust according to the social and political context, as a strategy to communicate their objectives as an organization but especially as:

> a practice of total freedom, of struggle for our land, for our culture, but for that we must *hilar fino*, unite each element. They [society] call those who heal, witches, but it's just that they nailed it [*dan en el clavo*], they hit right in the center of what the sick need, which is to give love, to ask for the plant's permission to use it (Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, October 2018).

The *Cochita amorosa* as a political space opens up paths for negotiation and dialogue among social organizations and community members centered on the pride, value, and respect for Black women's abilities to heal and fight for their rights.

3.2.4   The *Cochita Amorosa* as Pedagogical Practice

The *Cochita amorosa* as praxis is dynamic and evolving every day. It is an ongoing process that changes as the members of CONAMUNE sharpen their strategies to achieve their collective goals. An ancestral practice among Afro-Ecuadorians in the highlands to transmit the knowledge of ancestors and elders, CONAMUNE-Carchi has resignified it as pedagogical practices to be implemented in schools and communities as

part of the Ethnoeducation project. It goes beyond an institutional and Western vision of pedagogy and education.

As pedagogical practices in the school, it has been deepening and evolving as a "space for encouragement, resilience and peace"; it is a "didactic and pedagogical tool to work with students to live together in peace" (Barbarita, personal communication, February 2020). Thus, Barbarita proposes the *Cochita amorosa* as the central axis of the philosophical principle of Ethnoeducation.

> It is a pedagogical proposal from which the Afro-Ecuadorian episteme is generated and sustained. A didactic tool aimed at facilitating meaningful and decolonial learning through culture and our own knowledge. It is a space for spiritual healing, seeking inner peace, learning to manage problems, where resilience is a daily practice or as Walsh says it is a space to (re)exist and (re)live. It is a space of appreciation, through the recognition of women (Barbarita, conference, Piquiucho, October 2018).

As Barbarita returned in February 2019 to teach in the 19 de Noviembre school of La Concepción, after finishing her tenure as municipal councillor in Mira, Carchi, she began to reinforce the *Cochita amorosa* as pedagogical practice among students. In doing so, Barbarita, with the support and help of her colleagues Olguita and Jorge, proposed to build a community oven in the school. During this process of collective work or *minga*, Barbarita brought together members of the community and their students in a *Cochita amorosa* to learn how "to live together in peace across our differences" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, February 2020). Barbarita and some teachers, as well as the school workers, brought to life this *Cochita amorosa*. "The construction of the oven took a month, first they made a platform, then the walls, and then the students went to get glass, tiles and the sand to shape the oven" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, February 2020). The idea was to make tangible the *Cochita amorosa*, and the oven became the metaphor of the collective work, warmth and solidarity of the Afro-Ecuadorian people: "it was at the oven where people were called together to learn and make bread in La Concepción at the beginning of the twentieth

century. There they learned to be generous and supportive" (Barbarita, video clip, La Concepción, February 2020). Thus, through the construction of a traditional wood-burning oven, the students learned about the history of the community by making and living the *Cochita amorosa* as a space for intergenerational dialogue.

The *Cochita amorosa* as a cultural, political and pedagogical practice links the projects of CONAMUNE, which branch out and adapt to the particularities of the communities in which the members of CONAMUNE live. The underlying meaning of this *Cochita amorosa* was intertwined with the Sowing a Culture of Peace project described above. The pedagogical work of Ethnoeducation that Barbarita has been advancing since 2000 in the school (see chapter four) is intertwined with other CONAMUNE projects, which they are constantly updating and deepening according to current events and needs of Afro young people. Hence, CONAMUNE members are weaving together (*hilando fino*) their collective goals and diverse projects – that take place in different times and places – through the *Cochita amorosa* as praxis[15]. The *Cochita amorosa* is a "strategy to develop the culture of peace and the resilience that we Afrodescendants of the diaspora need after having been painfully and violently brought from Africa to this ancestral land" (Barbarita, social media public interview, La Concepción, February 2020).

La palabra está suelta (the word is free) is a phrase that evokes that the collective memory and traditional knowledge of the ancestors is alive and lives through community elders, that it belongs to everyone and it has been freed. This is the motto of the *Cochita amorosa* as pedagogical practice and ritual of returning the voices/wisdom of the ancestors to the communities. It is the hallmark of every project of CONAMUNE-Carchi, where Barbarita and Olguita, along with women of diverse communities, link past, present and future. As part of ETOVA (Escuela de la Tradicion Oral la Voz de los

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[15] I could observe how the *Cochita amorosa* – as a workshop methodology, where women and men sit in a circle and everyone can see and dialogue without establishing hierarchies of command – was suggested, promoted and implemented by Afro teachers as a strategy to advance all the activities and workshops during Ethnoeducation meetings and encounters.

Ancestros, School of Oral Tradition the Voice of the Ancestors), CONAMUNE-Carchi held an event called "Devolución de los Saberes" (Return of Knowledge). It was the launching of two community books written by Olguita Maldonado, member of CONAMUNE-Carchi, and by Hermencia Chalá, community leader and member of Inmaculada Concepción social organization that is part of CONAMUNE-Carchi. Throughout this event, the *Cochita amorosa* played a central role. The whole event took place around the *Cochita amorosa*. First, Ofelita, Iliana and I placed white, red and pink flowers in the shape of a circle, inserting between them the books of Olguita and Hermencia. In the middle of the circle we placed water, soil, lit candles and La Bomba. Once the *Cochita amorosa* was set up, the chairs were arranged around it so the attendees were sitting in circle, creating in this way another sphere of the *Cochita amorosa* that allowed people to see each other. This was an event where CONAMUNE-Carchi was bringing together different allies: local political leaders such as municipal councillors and members of the Junta Parroquial (teniente político and the president), academic researchers, Afro women staff of the Ethnoeducation office in Quito, members of CONAMUNE-Pichincha, Imbabura and Carchi, members of the Afro Youth Collective of the Ancestral Territory, members of FECONIC and community members as well. As mentioned above, the *Cochita amorosa* is made of the people that are part of it, so they can bring new elements into it to create new meanings. In this sense, Germán Villota, a municipal councillor and Barbarita's colleague, brought photos of himself with Juan García, Barbarita Lara, Catherine Walsh, Iván Lara among others as an act of reinforcing the relationship between these people but also showing his trajectory and involvement in CONAMUNE's project and Ethnoeducation process.

While the event was going on, various layers of political negotiation were happening between members of CONAMUNE-Pichincha and -Carchi or between CONAMUNE-Carchi and political leaders who a few days earlier were negotiating the use of the space where the event was taking place in the community of La Concepción. However, here I just want to highlight the *Cochita amorosa* ceremony that took place at the beginning and at the end of the event. These two moments were led by young leaders Alejandra Palacio and Iliana Carabalí. Alejandra is a member of the youth network and current coordinator of CONAMUNE-Carchi. Iliana is a founding member of the youth

network, leader of El Chota community and co-founder of the tourist initiative "Doña Evita". Although their participation flowed organically and without conflict in the eyes of the attendees, it was the result of previous conversations between CONAMUNE-Carchi and the Youth Network about the importance of opening more spaces for intergenerational dialogue in order to overcome the constant criticism directed at CONAMUNE and other women's organizations in the region about holding on to *sacred cows*, leadership that does not yield space to future generations (Alejandra, personal communication, Quito, April 2019; Iliana, personal communication, El Chota, February 2019; Nieves, personal communication, Quito, September 2018; Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, November 2018; Olguita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018).

Alejandra began by saying "Everything that has happened in this territory, life and death, is part of this ritual of *Cochita amorosa*," as she asked the drums to beat louder. Then she asked all the participants to stand up to feel the territory "allow yourself to feel the territory in your bodies, La Bomba is playing, an element of the Afro-Choteña culture, and let those drums sound!". As she began to move with more energy, she went on to say, "and let our voices be heard!" The drums became louder and everyone started to move, "feel, love and live the territory". Alejandra motioned for the drums to beat slower and began to clap and move slowly. People started following her and she said, "now you are feeling the ancestral territory". And so, the ceremony began. After shouting several times all together "ashé, ashé, ashé pa shá!", Alejandra went on to ask "that Elegua, that Oshun, allow La Concepción to rise, that the ancestors present themselves, that the territory belongs to each and every one." Each phrase was said with long pauses marked by the rhythm of palms and drums. After an "ashé!" she asked the attendees to send their energy to the *Cochita amorosa* so that all the energy would concentrate on it in order to allow the guardians of ancestral knowledge – the elders who are still here with us – to transmit their wisdom to us, so that it passes down to these new generations. "Ashé! Ashé! Ashé!" Alejandra approached the *Cochita amorosa* and picked up the books and went on to say:

so that in this way [raising up the books] we can rescue and continue cultivating, valuing, loving all that maroon wisdom of the guardians of knowledge, ashé! [the participants repeated Ashé]. The word is free, but the struggle continues and hope continues, let the voice of the Afro people not fade for any reason and ashé to you! (Alejandra, ceremony, La Concepción, September 2018).

In this context, not only are generations being articulated but also through this kind of ceremony a rhythm and logic is being built in the organizational process of the Chota-Mira Valley. Discourses on the Ancestral Territory and the Afro-Ecuadorian identity, and African diasporic identity of the Valley, are aligned along with the corporality and rituality of Black women as a political practice of the youth network and CONAMUNE. Thus, Alejandra was connecting with the ancestors and honouring the presence and wisdom of the older women.

After the speeches of political leaders, researchers, members of the Afro-Ecuadorian organization, members of the community and the authors of the books, the event closed with the baptism of the books by students of the 19 de Noviembre school. It was followed by a *Cochita amorosa* created by older women and led by Iliana and some girl members of the youth network. Many of them were wearing coloured turbans or braids. Thus, Iliana invited everyone to get up and to the rhythm of the drums the girls began to say the names of different African gods and goddesses. After a god or goddess was named, the attendees said: "axé pa shá!" The rhythm of the drums was increasing and with them the movements of Iliana inviting older women to come to the center and dance.

The *Cochita amorosa* as praxis becomes not only a space for dialogue between social organizations and reinforcing Afro identities among members of the communities, but also opens up spaces for negotiation with state agents and researchers who promote and strengthen the proposals and projects of the women's social organizations. In the *Cochita amorosa* the body, voice, clothing and energy of the Black woman are praised as

gestures and elements of Afro diaspora identity that promote respect and solidarity among Black women of all generations in the Chota-Mira Valley.

3.3 Weaving Together the *Cochita Amorosa*: Building Transnational Solidarity and Afro Women's Diasporic Communities

As Angel-Ajani (2006) has argued, African Diaspora Studies have failed to address Black women's praxis and thought at the center of the analysis. It remains a challenge to bring together Black Feminist and African Diaspora studies (Werneck 2007; Perry 2009). The *Cochita amorosa* allows us to decenter the political by thinking about it from the experience of Black women and the centrality of their bodies in their ritual and political practices. The *Cochita amorosa* "is a distinctive perspective, to open paths to unlearn and relearn in a new way, recognizing where I come from and where I am going, and the place from which I am thinking – paths that must be opened with subtle steps" (Walsh 2013). As Barbarita would say: "it allows us to walk along the borders and cuchitos", which evoke a process of navigating interstitial political spaces and creating new ones (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018).

With the *Cochita amorosa,* CONAMUNE members have been developing a political consciousness – which allows them to navigate the existing tensions between the coast and the highlands – shaped by the spiritual as a thread with which they are weaving together diasporic elements in order to strengthen their political actions, their goals of social change and their struggles against racism and sexism in diverse political spaces. Thus, they move back and forth between racial local regional borders and horizons that challenge ideas of nation and region as they are building political communities of Black women (Perry 2007). The *Cochita amorosa* is a practice that allows them to navigate and simultaneously articulate institutions, communities, NGOs and state political spheres. They are opening pathways to be visible as Black women in a nation where the mestizaje ideology has denied their existence. "Some do not believe that there are Blacks here, in the highlands. But in all the provinces of Ecuador there is an Afro presence, as in the entire continent" (Barbarita, public speech, Piquiucho, August 2018). Hence, they are opening paths as political agents in order to have an impact on different institutions and

spheres where they live and work: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, the municipality, schools and Afrodescendant communities. They are creating their own political discourse to articulate and negotiate with multiple social actors in different political spheres through their voices (breaking personal and historical silence), through subjective acts of resistance to objective experiences of racism, through spiritual practices of healings (acting) and through performativity of their bodies and non somatic features such as dress, turban, hair, and ways of speaking.

La *Cochita amorosa* is an ancestral practice of encounters and dialogue among Afro-Ecuadorian women based on love, respect and solidarity. It is the transverse axis of CONAMUNE's political thought and actions. It is a practice that fosters horizontal relationships between human beings and a deep connection with their Ancestral Territory that is activated as strategies to eradicate racism, sexism and all forms of domination and discrimination. Hence, from the ancestral Afro-Ecuadorian territory of Imbabura and Carchi, the *Cochita amorosa* is being promoted as a political and pedagogical strategy for the struggle of Black women that aims at solidary coexistence (Barbarita 2020), equality between various epistemic traditions (Mbembe 2015) and the construction of a political community of women that challenges monolithic ideas of the nation-state. The *Cochita amorosa* is a circle of sisterhood, Black feminine ritual, with a transforming political potential of being and politics (Collins 2000). As a praxis it is in permanent dialogue with a racial politics of Caribbean and diaspora Latin American Black women (Laó-Montes 2010, 2016).

During my conversations with some of the members and non members of CONAMUNE, in particular with Barbarita, Catherine, Sonia, Olguita, Fernanda, Betty, Anita and Yadira, they pointed out repeatedly that national and international trips and meetings of Black women's organizations opened up spaces where they were weaving networks between organizations that not only allowed them to learn about Black history but also strengthen their political identities. As these networks are woven, they collectively create and recreate elements of the African diaspora. These meetings allowed them to put in dialogue their local cultural practices and ancestral knowledge in relation

to a context of diasporic, collective and diverse racial politics (Perry 2009; Laó-Montes 2010, 2016). To illustrate this point, let's explore one final example.

The women of the Lara family, all members of CONAMUNE, grew up with the dawn song (*el canto a la aurora*) that their great-grandmother on their father's side recited every morning. This song encompasses the African spirituality of devotion to the elements of the earth, which was transmitted from generation to generation, as part of the rituality of women at the start of their daily tasks. In their everyday life in the Chota-Mira Valley, in the context of the *hacienda* and the *zafra* (sugarcane harvest), women and men intertwined these elements with Christian Catholic elements. But it was not until these international meetings that Barbarita, like other members of the family, began to understand this belief from a diasporic perspective of racial politics of being Afro Latino and Afro-Ecuadorian. Thus, the devotion and spirituality centered on the dawn and the voice and hands of the great-grandmother of the women of the Lara family became resignified.

Trips to Brazil, for example, stimulated and deepened an idea of Africa as a referent for Afro intellectuals such as Barbarita or Ofelita who promote CONAMUNE projects focused on an Afro diaspora identity. An example of this is the African ethnic dress project and the emphasis on the Coangue Carnival since 2006. The local historical narratives of Africa as origin began in the 1970s and 1980s with the work of Juan García (Balanzategui 2017). Thus, this diasporic awareness is evident in its organizational process and the name of Barbarita's and Ofelita's grassroots organization Piel Africana, African Skin. As Anita put it, "It is that we were aware that our ancestors came from far away" (Anita, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019). Thus, the (re)creation of an African and Catholic religious imagery was encouraged and promoted among CONAMUNE members who know and feel they are the daughters of Yemaya and Oshun.

By attending national and international meetings of Black women with CONAMUNE, I could observe that although the *Cochita amorosa* is a distinctive feature of CONAMUNE's political practice, it is in constant dialogue with the ways of being and

political practice of Black and Afro Latin women from the continent. In the most recent meeting of the Red MAAD, I could observe how the politics of Black women has certain distinctive features, malleable and subtle, that are part of a diasporic consciousness in constant transformation. Not only the clothing, hair styles, turbans that we typically see in political gatherings, but a way of being, of speaking, of feeling and making the attendees feel, of moving around the space with their wisdom and sweetness, with their strength and vigor. An energy that is accentuated in the decoration of the rooms where they meet or in aesthetics of the ceremonies that take place during the congress. For example, at the closing of the third day of the event, a ceremony was held where the majority of the women members of the directive of the organization participated (which would be voted on the following day). It was a ceremony that started with the sound of the drums, around a center made up of flowers, water, candles and drums.

The act revolved around two women, Dorottea Wilson, at that time president of the network, and the host of the ceremony, the Colombia link with the network. She was evidently the candidate to assume the new presidency. And in an act that took place between *cantos de decimas*, videos and body movements, political relationships also were dancing between the national *enlaces* (links) who aspired to be regional coordinators. Without delving into the conflicts and tensions among members of the Red MAAD that I could observe and hear during the meeting and during the election of the new board of directors, which I attended with the permission of CONAMUNE-Ecuador, I noticed how diverse women leaders from different countries were navigating their spirituality with African references together with Catholic devotion as part of their political and symbolic capital before starting an intervention during the event. I could also observe how this political capital was encompassed in their body movements or in sharing their stories of violence, pain, love and reflection among Black sisters. For instance, "these international meetings allowed me to understand a diasporic context, to see the similarities between our dance of La Bomba and our clothing with some Garífuna women" (Fernanda, personal communication, La Concepción, November 2018). Thus, the Red MAAD, its encounters and objectives, becomes a space for dialogue among Black women where local demands become aligned with international projects, and also ways of being Black women as political subjects are created, stimulated and fostered.

The *Cochita amorosa* creates spaces of conflicts and alliances. It evokes a spiritual community of Black women, but it also sets the scene for a reproduction and construction of communal hegemonic process (Mallon 1994). The *Cochita amorosa* is an ongoing process where power and meaning among Black women within CONAMUNE, and between them and other social organizations, NGOs, state agents, local leaders and intellectuals are contested, redefined and legitimated (Mallon 1995). The *Cochita amorosa* as praxis allows CONAMUNE members to create a persuasive discourse where diverse people can see and identify themselves.

Chapter 4

4 Navigating the Racial State in Ecuador: Afro Women and the Ethnoeducation Project

Ethnoeducation[16] is an ethno-racial political project of Afro social movements in the Andean countries in South America, especially in Colombia, Ecuador, and Bolivia (Pabón 2011; Rojas Martínez 2011; Angola Maconde 2011; Medina Melgarejo 2015). In Ecuador, Ethnoeducation emerged in the 1970s as a key goal of Afrodescendant organizations but it has been central to Afro women's organizations' political agendas since the formation of CONAMUNE in September 1999. Thus, it is a central point for analyzing and understanding Afro women's demands and claims, their objectives and actions, their political agenda and goals. Indeed, it is at the heart of their political practice.

While I was writing this chapter, I received a message with a link to a video. It was from Olguita, saying: "Bachita, we are in Quito at a national meeting of Ethnoeducation, and Barbarita just finished her talk. She gave a speech that made the walls shake" (Olguita, personal communication, Quito, November 2019). I opened the link and watched the video. Barbarita was talking about the meaning of Ethnoeducation from a rural Afro woman's perspective and she started by explaining the beginning of Ethnoeducation as an Afrodescendant grassroots process.

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[16] Throughout this work I use the term Ethnoeducation because it is the category used by the majority of my collaborators (members and non-members of CONAMUNE). However, there is a heated debate on how to name the Afro-Ecuadorian pedagogical process: some Afro-Ecuadorian leaders and intellectuals, in dialogue with the process in Colombia, propose Educación propia, Educacion cimarrona (José Chalá, public speech, Quito, April, 2019), educación liberadora, educación Afro-descendiente, Ethnoeducation, pedagogía desobediente (García Rincon 2015), or Insumisas (Medina Melgarejo 2015; Caicedo Guzmán and Caicedo Ortiz 2015). On the relevance of pedagodías insumisas in Latin America social movements and education, see Medina Melgarejo, Verdejo Saavedra, Calvo López (2015). On racism, childhood and education see Mena (2016). On Otra educación or education as ethnic-political project of social movements in Latin America see Ruiz (2010) and Medina and Baronet (2013).

I am going to tell you a short story about how Ethnoeducation was born. And that's why Juan García found fertile ground when he arrived in the Valley. There was a 7-year-old girl who wanted to go to school, and one day her father picked some avocados, picked some guavas, made charcoal and packed it up to go buy her a basket. In those days there were no backpacks but there were baskets made from *juco* – I'm talking about in my territory – they made us those baskets with covers, and those were our backpacks. The father came home loaded. In that basket he brought the slate, the stone pencil, the book that was called the jilguerito (you must remember those reading books, they were so cute). So beautiful was the jilguerito that had the letters to learn to write mom, dad, but usually they did not include the figure of the Afrodescendant mother, and then the Afrodescendant girl did not see herself represented in that textbook, that beautiful textbook. She did not find herself because she did not find her mother who was Afrodescendant or her grandmother who was also Afrodescendant. But not to detract from it, in that textbook there was a figure of a mestizo family, it was a mestizo mother. And in "El Escolar Ecuatoriano" (another textbook), there was the battle of Pichincha and the hero was an Indian child who bled to death and ripped off his legs, arms and hands and with his teeth he took the flag.[17] And the girl learned about all of the Indigenous people, she learned about Ruminawi, Guainacapa, Tupacamaru, but the girl could not find her story, even though she already knew she had a story because her grandmother told her. The girl returns to the house and tells her father: "Daddy, at school they teach us very nice things." "Ele!" said daddy, "and what do they teach you?" "They taught me that an Indigenous boy had had his legs torn off, that his hands were torn off and that he took the flag with his teeth and that he kept going and yelled at the others. That textbook teaches us purely about Indians, pure Indians, about Guainacapa, Rumiñawi, Atahualpa." "Ele!" her daddy said, "Good! Learn,

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[17] This refers to the legendary story of Abdón Calderón, who continued to fight for Independence even when he was wounded in his legs and his arms, taking the flag between his teeth.

learn *mija* (my daughter), learn from the 'other', because you already have the opportunity to learn from yourself here at home. It does not matter, learn from the other, learn from the white, learn from the Indian, for that we send you to school. But do not worry because at home your mother and grandmother are already teaching you, your grandmother is here." And the grandmother also says to the girl: "that's why I'm here! Never mind." "But I would like my mommy to be there," says the girl, since she looks like her. "But it doesn't matter," says the mother, "you have me, you have your aunts and your entire extended family, that family that will teach you in the community." And Juan García arrives in this context, in this concern about why we do not find ourselves in the textbooks, why we do not see our people in the readings (Barbarita, public speech, Quito, November 2019).

In this narrative, Barbarita Lara, an Afro leader and teacher, invites us to reflect on various interconnected points such as: the narratives of the mestizo nation state, official narratives about *otherness*, national representation of the Indigenous as the principal other, and the underlying invisibilization of Black populations and their position within the national "structure of alterity" (Wade 1995, 2010). It is noteworthy that this speech was made as part of the institutional plan for the relaunching of Ethnoeducation in 2019 and that Barbarita's audience was not just Afro teachers involved in the Ethnoeducation committee, but also mestizos and Indigenous state agents of the Intercultural Bilingual Education program, many of whom were male. In this context, the story about this little Black girl who wanted to see herself reflected in the textbooks becomes a subversive and strategic practice through which Barbarita's voice and self reflection about her life, and the lives and voices of other Black women in the highland region of Ecuador, challenge biases in curriculum that reinscribe systems of domination such as racism and sexism, while she simultaneously interrogates the institutionalized multicultural notions of *otherness* and *interculturality*. During my year-long ethnographic work, I heard different versions of the same passage in distinct socio-cultural sites such as community meetings, interviews in local and national media, meetings among Afro teachers, national meetings of Ethnoeducation workers, and political meetings among Afrodescendant, Indigenous and mestizo state agents. All of them highlighted the same

concern: the omission and erasure of Black people from the official records and narratives about the historical formation of the Ecuadorian nation and the resulting process of invisibilization and devaluation of Afro-Ecuadorian culture.

This chapter aims to analyse how Afro women – political officials, teachers, and community leaders, many of whom are members of CONAMUNE – navigate, engage with, become part of and challenge the Ecuadorian state through creating, participating in and teaching Ethnoeducation programs. Ethnoeducation is a revealing case study to address this concern since it is a site around which local struggles for historical and cultural recognition, and processes of production and reproduction of consent that sustain the underlying categories of Blackness, Indigeneity, and interculturality, take place and interact in complex ways. Black women's political thought and collective action in Ecuador have received scant scholarly attention. By paying attention to Ethnoeducation as a knowledge production process, where diverse Black and Indigenous leaders, Black and mestizo teachers and state agents contest each other, this chapter focuses on Black women's struggle for creative expression and self-determination. In doing so, Black women seek to position their Afro epistemology, based on performativity, storytelling and *oralidad*, at the center of their political actions, of their approach to engaging in processes of negotiation with state agents and of their ways of fostering an intercultural state. I will explore how Black women are creating and challenging state programs through Ethnoeducation as an ancestral and collective knowledge production of Afro-Ecuadorians, while simultaneously they are recreating and circulating narratives of being/occupying and acting – as Black subjects – in this world.

First, I will explain the historical background of Ethnoeducation as an Afro grassroots project promoted by Afro-Esmeraldeño intellectual Juan García and his influence on CONAMUNE's political discourses and actions. Then, I will delve into the processes of negotiation between Afro social movements and the multicultural state in order to highlight how Afro leaders and state agents were navigating and challenging the racialized corporatist logic of engaging with the Ecuadorian state by positioning Ethnoeducation as a public policy. Second, I will map out multiple scenarios that constitute the complex socio-political processes of Ethnoeducation. Third, I will analyze

how CONAMUNE's members are conceptualizing, developing and advancing Ethnoeducation program in schools and in Afro-Ecuadorian communities as part of their political actions to address gender and racial inequalities and foster better futures for Afro-Ecuadorians. Fourth, I analyze the everyday practices of Ethnoeducation as public policy from the perspectives of Afro women state agents who have been working at the Ethnoeducation office at the Ministry of Education since 2017. In so doing, I will show how individual dialogues and relations shape the ways that Afro teachers and state agents use, transform and take advantage of institutional spaces while they manage to bridge their goals as members of different social organizations, their political positions and their collective goals as Afro-Ecuadorian people.

4.1 Ethnoeducation as an Afro Grassroots Political Project in Ecuador

Diverse social organizations and their political and social leaders have shaped the collective narratives about the process of Ethnoeducation. Ethnoeducation as a social project of Afro-Ecuadorians is not homogeneous and each province has its own dynamics. Nonetheless, there is consensus on the fact that Juan García Salazar, an Afro-Esmeraldeño anthropologist, was the pioneer of this process in the country. The *Obrero* (worker, in the sense of constructor) of the social process of the Black communities, as people refer to him, Juan García started gathering, recording and systematizing the oral memory of the Black communities in Ecuador. He then returned to different Black communities in Ecuador to share the knowledge he had collected.

All of my collaborators, members of the Afro social movements in Ecuador, Afro state agents, and Afro teachers from the provinces of Imbabura, Carchi, Pichincha, and Esmeraldas, agreed that Ethnoeducation has been a fundamental part of the process of social organization of Afro communities since its foundation in the 1970s in Quito (Antón Sánchez 2011; De la Torre and Antón Sánchez 2012). It has been a central concern around which diverse organizations and leaders converge and diverge. In the late 1970s in Quito, a group of Black male university students (from diverse provinces) started meeting to talk about their experiences as Black men in the capital city. Their conversations were about the origins of their Black communities, their culture, and their

identities. These reflections and intellectual meetings had a common and recurrent topic: the national educational system and how they, as Black people, were absent from it, erased from the textbooks, and invisible in the narrative of the Ecuadorian national past and nation-state formation. These intellectual meetings were formalized with the foundation of the Centro de Estudios Afroecuatorianos (CEA), one of the first Afro organizations in Quito. At the beginning, the process of Ethnoeducation was driven by the necessity to fight for the right to be present in the textbooks so that all Afro-Ecuadorian children could find themselves in the educative programs (Pabón 2011).

In 1999, Juan García Salazar visited the Chota Valley in the northern highlands. In alliance with FECONIC (Federación de Comunidades Negras de Imbabura y Carchi, Federation of Black Communities of Imbabura and Carchi), he organized a series of workshops and meetings with community leaders and Black teachers in Ibarra, at FECONIC's office. During these meetings in *La casa de retiro Obispo Luis Oswaldo Pérez*, Juan García addressed topics such as the history of Black communities in the country, the historical figure Illescas, the formation of *palenques* (communities of escaped slaves), and the contribution of Black communities to the construction of the nation.

> It was a very special day when Juan García Salazar arrived in the territory of Chota Valley carrying a backpack. But what did Juan García bring in that backpack? He had a written package! *La palabra escrita*, the written word that he had been collecting for 30 years of having visited all Black communities (Barbarita, public speech, Quito, November 2019).

During these meetings and workshops, with more than 60 attendees, some of the teachers present started to question their role as Afro teachers, to interrogate themselves as Black subjects about the implications of being an Afro teacher in a Black community, about whether they were endorsing hegemonic narratives (in the classrooms) that were erasing them from the historical record of the nation and granting them no political voice, and how they – as teachers/state agents – could have an active role in challenging and transforming the structure of the educational system. These political and reflexive

questions circulated widely during these meetings. As a member of the Ethnoeducation commission pointed out during a political meeting at the Ministry of Education office in Imbabura provincial capital Ibarra:

> There we learned about our history and asked ourselves: why didn't they teach us this in school? They only taught us about [independence hero] Sucre but not about the Afro leaders nor about our ancestors! They didn't teach us about their contributions and their struggles! (Pabón, private meeting, Ibarra, June 2018).

Every time members of CONAMUNE-Carchi and Afro teachers who belonged to the Ethnoeducation commission gave a public speech or spoke to me, they described these meetings and workshops as a moment of acknowledging the extent to which white-mestizo ideology informs and permeates every aspect of their everyday lives, including the way they have learned, what they have learned about themselves, how they were teaching, and the content they were imparting to students. This does not mean that previously they were not aware of their racialized position as individuals in the country. In fact, since the 1970s all these leaders and social actors were participating in diverse social and political activities and meetings with the Pastoral Afro, the MAEC (Movimiento Afro Ecuatoriano Conciencia, Afro-Ecuadorian Movement Conciencia), and the CEA, where they problematized and addressed problems they were facing such as racism, violence, and exclusion while they were researching the history of their communities. The 1980s and 1990s was a historical moment when demands of Black populations shifted from a class-based claim to racial and ethnic dimensions of the discriminations, marginalization and oppression suffered by Afro Ecuadorians (Antón 2011; Johnson III 2012; de la Torre 2002). As many CONAMUNE members and Afro teachers recounted during my fieldwork, this moment – when Juan García arrived in the Chota Valley – gave impetus to their personal processes of self-recognition and awareness of their agency as Afro teachers and leaders. Hence, this historical moment can be understood as a milestone in the social process of awakening of Black consciousness in the Ecuadorian highlands.

During these workshops, Juan García "returned *la palabra escrita*, the written words of Black culture, back to the Black communities through us as teachers" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, July 2018). After these meetings, some of the teachers organized themselves in a working group to research and write down their own history, based on the materials that Juan García had already collected. Alicia Muñoz, Jorge Espinoza, Iván Pabón and Barbarita Lara, all Afro teachers from Imbabura and Carchi, were the pioneers of this working group. After regular meetings, they produced the first Ethnoeducation textbook and pedagogical guide called *Nuestra Historia* (Our History, 2005) to be used in grade 10. They call them *módulos* or pedagogical guides to teach in schools. This first *módulo* was used as a pilot project in the school 19 de Noviembre in La Concepción community-Carchi, where Barbarita was the principal, and in the school Valle del Chota, in Carpuela community-Imbabura.

> We committed to this project as a life project because it also changed our mentality as Afrodescendant teachers. We understood how memory should be shared and that we should create a pedagogy based on knowledge from our territory. At the beginning we thought about applying this *módulo* in two schools, Valle del Chota, in Carpuela and in 19 de Noviembre in La Concepción, because we were mostly teachers at these two schools (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, July 2018).

This process of local awakening, visibility and strengthening of Afrodescendant movements, as an historical moment, was shaped by different transnational spaces wherein Afrodescendant people from diverse countries of the region could organize and collaborate in the design of strategies to engage with multilateral organizations (World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank) and national organizations at the regional level. In the late 1990s, Afro leaders and activists from different countries were planning and organizing the conference in Santiago, Chile, and then the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa (August 31-September 8, 2001), which marked a turning point for Latin American Afrodescendant identities, struggles, discourses and organizations (Walsh 2012; Hooker 2005; Laó-Montes 2010).

The multicultural constitutionalism (Van Cott 2000) or new policies of inclusion, as well as the emergence of identity-based social movements as political forces, marked the political landscape of the 1980s and 1990s in Latin America (Escobar and Alvarez 1992; Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998; Van Cott 2000; Rahier 2012). The Afro-Ecuadorian social movement proposals and actions during the 1990s were in dialogue with and informed by the Indigenous movement's political proposal in Ecuador and Afro social movements in Colombia. The Ethnoeducation project, in particular, has been advanced in both countries. Although these two countries share similar histories of struggle and negotiation with the state and its multicultural policies, focused on indigeneity as a paradigm of cultural and ancestral difference, in Colombia Law 70 was thought from and for Afro Colombians and Ethnoeducation was made official early on (Walsh, León and Restrepo 2005). In Ecuador, in contrast, the drafting of collective rights has been carried out from an Indigenous framework, which has subtly reconfigured the political landscape of Ethnoeducation that Afro-Ecuadorians have to navigate.

The Indigenous movement's proposals and actions were central to the development of bicultural and bilingual educational programs in Ecuador, which have had an influence on Afrodescendant Ethnoeducation as a political project. During the 1980s, Indigenous movements, NGOs, and state agents promoted reforms to national education policies and fostered the implementation of the EIB (Educación Intercultural Bilingüe, Intercultural and Bilingual Education). The previous Bicultural and Bilingual Education program based on an integrationist perspective of state policies was substituted by a new political perspective focus on interculturality, "multilingualism and multi-ethnicity" (Instituto Indigenista Interamericano 1982 in Walsh 2007, 49). The notion of interculturality is an Indigenous proposal that reflects the cosmovision of Indigenous people of Andean countries. It aims to promote the recognition of Indigenous people on equal terms with the mestizo population of the nation. In Ecuador, in the reforms made to the constitution of 1983, interculturality is mentioned in relation to Quichua as an official language to teach in schools that are located in geographic areas with predominantly Indigenous populations. The adoption and administration of EIB as a state program was a response to Indigenous demands that resulted in the institutionalization of interculturality as a political discourse of the state.

As a case study, Ecuador has distinctive characteristics because the creation of the Dirección Nacional de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (DINEIB, National Directorate of Intercultural and Bilingual Education) in 1988 was established on a model of co-management by Indigenous social movements. This meant a legal framework within which Indigenous organizations and leaders could regulate, with relative autonomy from the Ministry of Education, the activities, personnel and resources of this institutional space. However, the EIB as an educational political project that aimed at transforming the historical hegemony of a (white-mestizo) dominant culture over subaltern others, remained at the margin of the national educational system (Walsh 2007). Therefore, since the beginning, EIB has been a terrain in dispute where the notion of interculturality has been associated with political realms of governance of difference and collective rights, cultural autonomy and the nation.

Interculturality and education have been integral to the political struggle of Indigenous movements. In the uprising of June 1990, the Indigenous social movements challenged the discourse of *mestizaje* and the highly contested and fluid racial and ethnic category of *mestizo* as the definition of "the national" in Ecuador (Walsh 2007). Among the Indigenous demands presented by the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE, Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) were bilingual and bicultural education, the resolution of land conflicts, cultural rights and economic rights (Pallares 2002; Becker 2011). The Indigenous political proposal aimed to transform the mono-cultural national state, which they describe as exclusionary, anti-democratic and repressive, by promoting a pluri-national state. By doing so, Indigenous demands hit at the center of how elites had structured the racial state (Becker 2011). Since then, interculturality, as a central principle of the political agenda of CONAIE, has shaped the national debate, and with it, the political terrain upon which ethno-racial groups produce, circulate and mobilize their demands.

In this context of multicultural constitutionalism and ethno-racial social demands, different institutional spaces to manage the demands of Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorians were created by diverse sectors such as: the state, international cooperation agencies, civil society and NGOs. In 1994, the Secretaria Nacional de Asuntos Indígenas y Minorías

Étnicas (SENAIN, National Secretariat for Indigenous Affairs and Ethnic Minorities), was created to address Indigenous and to a lesser extent Afro-Ecuadorian demands. In 1997, this space was replaced by the CONPLADEIN (Consejo Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas y Negros, National Council for Planning and Development of Indigenous and Black Peoples), whose goals were the development of Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian populations. However, Indigenous leaders managed the institution and the majority of the projects and funding were aimed to support Indigenous proposals (Floril Anangonó 2011). With the implementation of the PRODEPINE (Proyecto de Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas y Negros del Ecuador, Project for the Development of Indigenous and Black Peoples of Ecuador), a project funded by the World Bank, Indigenous demands were prioritized and the conflicts between Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian leaders over resources (funding for community projects and institutional spaces) became more visible. Due to this and the Afro-Ecuadorian demand for "a space of our own, with resources to address our own problems as Afro people" (Sonia Viveros, personal communication, Quito, February 2019), in 1998 the Corporación de Desarrollo Afroecuatoriano (CODAE, Corporation for Afro-Ecuadorian Development) and the Corporación de Desarrollo de Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas (CODENPE, Corporation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples) were created as separate entities. Although the inequality in access to and distribution of resources between Indigenous and Afro people remained, sharing these institutional spaces also opened up places of dialogue and political influence between the Indigenous project of EIB and their political actions and the Afro Education project. These fractured and changing institutional landscapes regarding ethno-racial affairs were marked by the political instability of the country during the 1990s as a result of neoliberal policies, but also by Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian historical struggles against discrimination and exclusion and their demands for political participation and inclusion in the decision-making process.

While CODAE and these other institutional spaces that were promoted to bridge the state and the ethno-racialized minority populations have been analyzed as examples of corporatist engagement between the state and social movements (Floril Anangonó 2011; Rahier 2012; de la Torre and Antón Sánchez 2012; Antón Sánchez 2018), they

have also opened up political spaces for new (unforeseen) political actors (such as new Afro women state agents) and Afro leaders to challenge the state by supporting and advancing the Ethnoeducation project, as this chapter will show.

4.2   Ethnoeducation as Public Policy

Ethnoeducation as an educative and political project has been central to Afro-Ecuadorian social organizations (CEA, Familia Negra, PCN, CONAMUNE, among others) due to their effort to unify themselves and to develop a shared language to engage and negotiate with state agents and policies (Pabón 2009; Barbarita Lara, personal communication, La Concepción, July 2018). Ethnoeducation is and has been a project of Afrodescendant populations to make structural changes (*incidir)* to the state. In March of 1999, they held the Primer Congreso del Pueblo Negro (First Congress of Black People) where they proposed to reform the national curriculum to include Ethnoeducation as a way to *dar a conocer* (make known) Afrodescendant culture and cosmovision (Fondo Documental Afro Andino, Audio recording archives July 2018; Pabón 2011).

Ethnoeducation as a social process is shaped by social mobilizations and informed by processes of negotiation among diverse state agents, politicians, Congressional representatives (*diputados*), and Afro leaders. In this context, Afro teachers and leaders organized themselves into commissions: the provincial commissions and later the national commission to carry out Ethnoeducation as a cultural and educational project (*casa adentro*, "within the house") and to negotiate with state agents (*casa afuera*, "outside the house"). Afro teachers who work in provinces historically known for having numerically significant Afrodescendant populations comprise the provincial commissions. They have deployed diverse strategies to be heard by the state such as: writing and sending letters to the Ministry of Education to get *una audiencia* (a meeting) proposing the creation of the Directorate of Ethnoeducation, holding national workshops and meeting among social leaders and Afro state agents, and meeting with politicians. The provincial commissions are encounters where Afro leaders and teachers create consent among diverse social and political actors and social organizations while producing and circulating a shared language with which they can negotiate with state agents and policies. These encounters and associated negotiations are the product of

constant overlapping of their experiences as both state agents and social leaders and their range of diverse social positions, political proposals and life histories.

The commissions of Carchi, Imbabura, Esmeraldas and Guayas provinces were established in 1999. Since then, the members of the provincial commissions of Ethnoeducation of Imbabura and Carchi have been playing a key role in the configuration of a shared language and political practices about Ethnoeducation as a political project. One of the goals of this commission has been to produce and distribute didactical and pedagogical materials, design new educational curricula, carry out training for teachers in Ethnoeducation and bridge the commission and its goals to the community and educational institutions (Commission of Imbabura and Carchi meeting, July 2018). As a part of their commitment, their effort and their passion, Afro teachers such as Iván Pabón, Barbarita Lara, Olga Maldonado, Jorge Espinoza among others, who met every Friday in Ibarra to research and write down stories, *saberes* and cultural traditions of Afro-Ecuadorian communities of the Chota-Mira Valley, produced and printed the textbook (*módulo*) *Nuestra historia* in 2005. It was used as a guide to teach[18] Ethnoeducation at the 19 de Noviembre school at La Concepción community, Carchi province and in Valle del Chota school in Carpuela community, Imbabura.

Workshops or intellectual *mingas*/encounters have shaped the ways in which Ethnoeducation has developed and evolved over the past 20 years as a grassroots political project and as public policy. These workshops have also been held for Afro leaders who were state agents/officials at different echelons of the state apparatus with access to diverse resources such as: institutional spaces, budget (economic resources), human resources (alliances with Indigenous state agents or officials), memos, political (institutional) rumours, political meetings and prestige. In 2003, when Ethnoeducation as a political project was blossoming and Afro social organizations were strengthening as

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[18] After years of formal petitions, some state agents from the Ministry of Education visited the schools in the Chota Valley and approved the implementation of this textbook (Iván, personal communication, Ibarra, June 2018).

well, members of the CODAE[19] organized workshops that aimed to map out the actors involve in the process as well as unify their goals into a consensus-based political proposal. Even though they did not fulfill this goal (Pabón 2012), it was an opportunity to produce and circulate discourses about the different purposes of Ethnoeducation and its political meaning.

CONAMUNE members and Afro teachers organized in commissions have also mobilized Ethnoeducation as a way to gain political participation. "Ethnoeducation is a device for creating spaces that allow us, Afro-Ecuadorians, political participation" (Barbarita Lara in Pabón 2011, 24). Hence, they have been engaging in processes of negotiation with state agents in order to position Ethnoeducation as a public policy and therefore become part of the national process of decision-making.

The underlying political concern about becoming visible in the educational system and national curriculum was not just about appearing in the textbooks or in the historical accounts as an object/commodity in the economic system, as slaves or as a martyrs in the independence movements, but rather as social, cultural, and political subjects in the everyday practices of the Ecuadorian nation state. Hence, the aim of Ethnoeducation was and still is an essential component of the Afro-Ecuadorian struggle for their cultural and political rights. It is a way to contribute to eradicating forms of historical exclusion and to make visible the Black population's contribution to the process of nation-state building.

> The Afrodescendants of the various communities, we have gone and are going from crying, from complaining, from the heroic resistance historically maintained since the conquest, to the proposal, to the different modalities of insertion in the current political scenario, to share spaces of governing and power (Chalá 2010, 27).

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[19] CODAE is an institutional space (as part of the Office of the President) that is the result of different political processes such as: political and economic instability in the country, institutional changes, and constitutional amendments that gave Afro-Ecuadorian populations recognition as a people and declared Ecuador a multiethnic and pluricultural country, the emergence of Indigenous people and Afro-Ecuadorian population's demands and mobilizations, and Afro social organizations' demands for institutional spaces (Antón Sánchez 2007; Floril Anangonó 2011).

After more than a decade of working and advancing Ethnoeducation projects in Afro-Ecuadorian communities, in 2012 the members of the commission produced new textbooks and they managed to have 1000 copies printed. With the financial support of UNESCO as part of its project on Ethnoeducation in Colombia, Ecuador, Perú, Bolivia and Venezuela, five provincial commissions held a workshop in the Oasis[20] in Imbabura province and invited state agents of the Ministry of Education so they could formally submit a petition to create an Ethnoeducation proposal. After years of requests, they organized a meeting in Imbabura, and Alexandra Ocles (co-founder of CONAMUNE and a well-known politician) invited Augusto Espinosa who at that time was the Minister of Education. As Pabón Chalá later recounted, Espinosa came and "he was the most attentive student, and after I finished talking he said: 'I want to apologize to Afrodescendant people for my ignorance… this must be implemented immediately'" (Pabón Chalá, meeting, Ibarra, June 2018). After that important meeting, a pedagogical commission was created to participate in the reform of the national curriculum and "since then, the doors of the Ministry of Education were opened" (Pabón Chalá, meeting, Ibarra, June 2018). Indeed, the ministerial accord #00045-A that set Ethnoeducation as an educative program to be implemented in the educational system was one of the major acts of the state undertaken by Minister Espinosa, in response to Afro-Ecuadorian demands.

4.3   Ethnoeducation and Interculturality from an Afro-Ecuadorian Perspective

In the recent political history of Ecuador, Afrodescendants have become relevant and more visible political actors. Since the constitution of 2008, "we became visible. With the constitution of 1998 we were recognized [as a people] but without rights: from the constitution of 2008 we became subjects with rights" (Barbarita, personal communication, Mascarilla, January 2019). During the decade of the Citizens'

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[20] The Oasis is a hotel and recreational center located in the Chota Valley, Imbabura province, which has functioned as a conference center for important events of the Afro social movements such as Ethnoeducation encounters, the foundation of CONAMUNE, among others. It is also a symbol of conflicts around the territorialization and deterritorialization process in the Chota Valley (Mercedes, personal communication, El Chota, March 2019).

Revolution, President Rafael Correa's political project, Afrodescendant people and concerns were made visible. More significantly, discrimination and racism were named, collective rights were offered, and notions of social inclusion, equality and interculturality were assumed as central objectives of the state and its political project (Walsh 2012, 16). In this political context, public policies of inclusion were created such as: the constitution of 2008, the national decree 60 in 2009, Plan Plurinacional para Eliminar la Discriminación Racial y la Desigualdad Étnica y Cultural (Plurinational Plan to Eliminate Racial Discrimination and Cultural and Ethnic Inequalities) that focuses on affirmative action for *pueblos* and *nacionalidades*, the formation of the Consejo Nacional de la Igualdad de los Pueblos y Nacionalidades (National Council for Equality of Peoples and Nationalities) in 2014, the Agenda Nacional para la Igualdad de los Pueblos y Nacionalidades (National Plan for Equality of Peoples and Nationalities) (2013-2017), and the decree 915 in 2016, in which the Ecuadorian state declared it a national policy to fulfill the objective of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) (de la Torre and Antón Sánchez 2012; Antón Sánchez 2018). These new pieces of legislation gave a wide legal framework and opened up diverse institutional spaces for Afrodescendant people's advocacy[21]. The analysis of these policies goes beyond the scope of this chapter but it is worth noting that this new legislation and associated institutional spaces are the result of Indigenous and Afro social struggles and mobilizations and also illustrate the robust legal framework upon which Afro women elevate their discourses and actions regarding Ethnoeducation and shape the way they negotiate with state agents and interact with academics/researchers.

One of the principal goals of the negotiation between the national commission and state agents has been to modify the Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural of 2011 (LOEI, Intercultural Education Law). Afro-Ecuadorian leaders, intellectuals and politicians have pointed out the overly narrow perspective of the state about interculturality. Interculturality has been seen as a concern of the Indigenous population

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[21] For further analysis of the new constitutions and special laws regarding Afrodescendent populations in the Latin American multicultural turn see Walsh (2007), Rahier (2012), and Antón Sánchez (2018).

that highlights the underlying assumption of the lack of ethnic distinctiveness of the Afro population (Green 2012, 2014). From political dialogues and negotiations between different cultural, social and political actors, Afro leaders called for an understanding of Ethnoeducation not just as an Afro-Ecuadorian process that takes place at the community level but as a process that has the potential to open up spaces for critical interculturality. "It should be seen as a path of dialogue to express social conflicts and problems as well as to understand how the 'Others' perceive us and how we [Afro-Ecuadorians] want them to perceive us in order to establish connections that allow us to address such conflicts" (Chalá 2011, 29).

This critical interculturality from an Afro-Ecuadorian perspective involves demanding the acknowledgement of the unequal position of Blacks and Indigenous people regarding the historical constitution of "national identity" and the historically less institutionalized relationship with the state and marginal visibility of Black in contrast with Indigenous populations (Gordon 1998; Safa, 1998; Whitten and Torres 1992, 1998; Hooker 2005, 2008; Restrepo 2004, 2007; Wade 1995, 2010; Greene 2012; Rahier 2011, 2014; Gordon 1998; Hooker 2005, 2008, 2009). Hence, for Afro-Ecuadorians the Intercultural Education Law not only has to include Afro-Ecuadorians but also it must differentiate between the cultural rights of Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian populations (Pabón 2011). "It only mentions intercultural education, it doesn't say anything about Ethnoeducation" (Pedro, meeting, Ibarra, July 2018).

The members of Imbabura and Carchi commissions understand Ethnoeducation not just as a political project but also as an epistemological proposal that aims to deepen Afro-Ecuadorian knowledge and ways of thinking and occupying the world based on intercultural dialogues with other cultural knowledge, to offer a vision of Afrodescendants as thinkers in their own right. Afro and some mestizo teachers constituted this commission "since Ethnoeducation is not just for Black people. It is for all Ecuadorians" (Pabón, meeting, Ibarra, June 2018). Therefore, for the members of Carchi and Imbabura commissions, Ethnoeducation is "a political and epistemic Afro-Ecuadorian project, it is a tool to get access to *conocimiento propio* [our own knowledge]. It is a device to achieve interculturality on equal conditions" (Chalá 2011,

27-28). Interculturality from an Afro perspective is promoting an educational and political project that respects and promotes horizontal relations among diverse epistemic traditions. In so doing, Ethnoeducation as an Afro-Ecuadorian project challenges the racial structure of the nation state by questioning the "uniqueness" of the national identity and at the same time the Indigenous hegemony as the framework of the Andean (Walsh, León and Restrepo 2005).

Education is not isolated from the economic and political terrain. As Bourdieu pointed out, the educational system as a realm of reproduction of legitimate culture is a political institution where some "cultural practices are recognized and taught" (Bourdieu 1984, 1). Hence, education is a cultural, social, political space of reproduction of values, identities and the historical power of the state (Walsh 2007). Indigenous social movements have integrated the educational demand and their land struggles. The same happened with the Afro movement in Colombia with their law 70 and in Ecuador with the Ley de Derechos Colectivos de los Pueblos Negros o Afroecuatorianos in 2006. Both Indigenous and Afro social movements' proposals went well beyond the narrow goals of identity politics: their demands aimed not only for recognition and redistribution but also for the transformation of the colonial, racist and classist state. Hence, Afro and Indigenous proposals and demands in the recent history of Ecuador make visible the principle that the management and governance of difference is not just an ethnic problem but a structural axis of the racial state (Goldberg 2002; Quijano 2000; Walsh 2007). By advancing Ethnoeducation as political project, Afro Ecuadorians and CONAMUNE members, in particular, are acknowledging that "our ways of knowing are forged in history and relations of power" (Hooks 1994) marked by domination, inequality and discrimination.

The national discourse of the Ecuadorian racial landscape has been shaped by *mestizaje* as a discourse of power (Sanjines 2005), as an intellectual political project forged in relations of domination where the category of race (referring to the racial mixing of European and Indigenous) plays a role legitimizing such relations and shaping the discourse of the Ecuadorian state (Rahier 1999; Walsh 2007, 2009). In this framework, Blacks are not only excluded but ideologically constructed as "ultimate

Others" (Rahier 1999, 2003). Interculturality as part of the Indigenous political agenda and as part of the Ethnoeducation program of Afro social movement is challenging the discourse of the racial landscape in Ecuador, where the mestizo is elevated as the representative component of the nation and therefore of the power of the state. Afro movements are contesting how social inequalities are organized and structured in contemporary Ecuador.

4.4 Ethnoeducation Legal Framework: The Ministerial Accords

The year 2016 is a significant historical moment in the contemporary process of Ethnoeducation. After years of bargaining back and forth between the provincial commissions (populated by Afro teachers and social leaders) and state agents, after years of historical research and production of Ethnoeducation textbooks (*módulos*), the ministerial accords #00045-A and #00075-A were promulgated. Those accords are the legal framework for implementing and regulating Ethnoeducation as public policy and marked a new momentum for Ethnoeducation in Ecuador: "with the 00045 agreement we became visible to and positioned ourselves within the educational system" (Amada, public speech, Esmeraldas, November 2018). These ministerial accords – like any state project – were the results of human agency and political struggle, in this case among racialized and subordinated actors (Abrams 1988; Goldberg 2002; Gupta 2005; Painter 2006; Clark 2012a; Schwegler 2012). State agents, NGO workers (CARE-Ecuador) and members of the provincial commissions of Ethnoeducation worked together on drafting these accords for more than a year. They were also the result of personal sacrifices, personal financial investment, social commitment and time-consuming work (Clark 2012a). One of the legal frameworks of the accord #00045, as Afro leaders referred to it during different social and political meetings, is the political constitution of Ecuador. The articles 11 and 21 refer to the rights of individuals and collectivities, the adoption of affirmative actions by the state in order to promote "real equality" and the rights of people to build and promote their cultural identity, historical memory and cultural heritage. The articles 26 and 27 mandate the right to education. Most importantly, they specified the right to a participatory and intercultural education. The article 343 goes on

to declare that the educational system must undertake an intercultural perspective according to the geographical, cultural and linguistic diversity of the country. The Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural *(*LOEI) is another legal framework upon which the accord is sustained. Phrases and categories such as "education with cultural relevance", the "value of cultural diversity" and "educational equity" shape the discourse of the accord, which is centred on interculturality conceptualized from the standpoint of and for the Indigenous cultural reality. Ethnoeducation is not mentioned.

The accord is also based on the international legal framework specific to Afro populations such as the international convention against racial discrimination of 1969 and the International Decade for People of African Descent. These legal frameworks support "the recognition and implementation of Ethnoeducation in the national educational system" (Ministerial Accord 00045-A May 2016). It mandates the creation of the *Mesa de Etnoeducación Afroecuatoriana* as a device of dialogue between the Afro social movement and the authorities of the Ministry of Education through the institutional space of the EIB. Also, it specifies the inclusion of Afrodescendant professionals as part of the personnel of the EIB to coordinate and elaborate didactical and pedagogical materials for implementing Ethnoeducation as educational policy in some schools. The responsibility for monitoring and coordinating of Ethnoeducation, as public policy, is granted to the EIB. The accord MINEDUC-ME-2017-00075-A was also framed under the narrow perspective of cultural diversity centered on Indigenous people. This accord establishes the recognition of 53 intercultural and bilingual schools as *Guardianas de la lengua y de los saberes* (Guardians of language and knowledge) and of 8 schools as *Guardianas de los Saberes* or knowledge keepers in Afrodescendant communities. This accord allows the development and implementation of Ethnoeducation pedagogical books and strategies along with the implementation of the national curriculum. Although the accords recognize Ethnoeducation as pedagogy to be implemented, it is considered at the margin of the national educational system.

The institutionalization of Ethnoeducation as public policy, the establishment of these ethnicized and racialized staff positions at the Ministry, and the creation of a new political organization of the Afro social movement to dialogue and negotiate with the

state, recreated the powerful illusion of the state as separate entity from the society (Abrams 1988; Mitchell 1999). This also has deepened the fissures among Afro leaders and organizations regarding the implementation of Ethnoeducation as transversal axis or academic subject (*asignatura*), as well as the conflicts and competition over state resources not only among Afro leaders and teachers who compete with one another for jobs at the Ministry of Education but also among Indigenous leaders and Afro leaders over the resources and funding of the EIB office.

4.5　　Mapping out Ethnoeducation as a Research Site

By carrying out my political ethnography among Black women's organizations I got involved in multiple scenarios or spheres that constitute the complex socio-political interconnected processes of Ethnoeducation as a grassroots cultural, educational and political project and as a public policy. Ethnoeducation involves tensions and conflicts among diverse groups (factions). As a political field, it is a temporal-spatial abstraction composed of state agents and social organization members, schoolteachers and administrators, community leaders and members, students, and academics and researchers. The projects and paths of racialized state agents and multiple social actors converge and diverge in complex ways.

On the one hand, multiple state agents play a role in Ethnoeducation as an everyday administrative and bureaucratic process that takes place at the Ministry of Education in Quito and at the provincial/district zone, including the Minister, Vice Minister, Directors, front-line state staff, and mid-ranking state staff. On the other hand, several social actors such as Afro social organizations (CONAMUNE, FECONIC, Afro-Ecuadorian Youth Collective), NGOs, teachers, community members, and students interact with each other in the everyday practices of Ethnoeducation as lived experience and as a racial political grassroots process. These actors and groups are neither homogenous nor are they separate entities. They are defining and moulding one another in the context of a complex political project shaped by conflicts, tensions, rivalries, and alliances. All of these groups play a role in the process of de-racializing, re-racializing and gendering the Ecuadorian state.

Ethnoeducation is a complex cultural and institutional terrain in which many dialogues, negotiations and discussions are happening simultaneously as this cultural and political project evolves. Ethnoeducation is a terrain in dispute where symbolic, economic and political powers are at stake. It is an institutional/bureaucratic, cultural and political realm. From a theoretical approach, Ethnoeducation allows us to reveal ongoing processes of state effect and state affect as it permeates everyday practices, political actions and life histories of racialized state agents, teachers, social leaders, and community members (Clark 2012a; Mitchell 1999; Krupa and Nugent 2015). As a political project, Ethnoeducation can be understood as a set of assemblages and everyday practices enacted through dynamic relationships among social and political agents, including social organization members, Afro teachers, NGO workers, community members, and cultural and political practices in multiple sites (Sharma and Gupta 2006). From a methodological perspective, Ethnoeducation has three different but interconnected spheres where those dynamic processes of negotiation take place: the institutional (state offices and institutional spaces), the organizational (social movements/organizations) and the community sphere (grassroots processes). All of these spheres are shaped and informed by one another and are configured by multiple assemblages of cultural and political practices and racialized agents/subjects/actors.

Afro teachers are the main socio-political agents involved in all the spheres of Ethnoeducation. Nonetheless, other Afro state agents such as the mid-ranking state staff at the Ministry of Education in Quito, Afro assemblies and Afro intellectuals are also crucial in shaping the political dialogues and discussions about Ethnoeducation, along with Indigenous leaders. Members of CONAMUNE and FECONIC are the principal social organizations mobilizing Ethnoeducation as a political project and connecting local leaders, political leaders, community members and researchers/academics in the provinces of Imbabura, Carchi and Pichincha. These dynamic processes of negotiation driven by those diverse actors happen in multiple institutional spaces such as offices at ministries and municipalities, schools, classrooms and universities as well as in community spaces such as the living room or the kitchen of a house, the *junta parroquial* and recreational centres (*coliseos*).

The life history, memories, and subjective experiences of racism and sexism of all the Afro teachers and CONAMUNE members shape Ethnoeducation as one of the most important spheres of Afro women's claims. Their remembrance of their childhood, their feeling of not being included, their struggles with their body shapes, their hair textures, and their skin color (darker or lighter) inform their political practices and discourses and define the way they engage with state agents and state projects. These multiple dynamic processes of negotiation and discussion were happening simultaneously, as my ethnographic work unfolded. In many of these venues, I participated as an attendee, as an ally, as a friend, as a researcher, as a student or as a member of CONAMUNE-Carchi.

Encounters among diverse political and social actors are political sites where I captured and observed micro-interactions, gestures, the minutiae of discursive practices, ways of speaking, silences, and details of forms of political actions, that account for the multiplicity of social positions and intentions that shape Ethnoeducation as a complex cultural and political project. These encounters were diverse. Some encounters were official and national events held by the Ministry of Education, specifically by the state agents of the office of Ethnoeducation in Quito (the *planta central*), others were held by the Afro teachers organized into commissions in Imbabura and Carchi provinces, or were held by professors and researchers of the IAEN (Instituto de Altos Estudios Nacionales, National Institute for Advanced Studies, created for post-graduate training of government employees).

The notion of encounters as political realms encompasses the institutional, the organizational and the community spaces that constitute Ethnoeducation. For example, the office of Ethnoeducation at the Ministry of Education in Quito is an institutional space where various micro encounters and meetings happened daily among Afro state agents, Afro leaders, Indigenous leaders, academics/researcher/professors and/or members of the National Assembly. The school in La Concepción community is another example of an institutional space where crucial actors of Ethnoeducation interact and contest each other, including students, Afro teachers, white-mestizo teachers, social organization members (FECONIC, CONAMUNE, Inmaculada Concepción), community leaders and local politicians. In those interactions different layers of negotiation take

place. Therefore, encounters are political spheres where these simultaneous and dynamic processes of negotiation intersect and Afro state agents' everyday experiences and inter-subjective relationships reconfigure the dynamic and parameters of the debates, discussions and negotiations.

My encounter with Ethnoeducation was shaped by my involvement with CONAMUNE-Carchi and informed by the organic interconnection of these processes. The institutional space is marked by bureaucratic logic or "the time/temporality of the state" (Pedro, intervention in a meeting, Ibarra, June 2018) and the everyday practices of racialized state agents including Indigenous, Blacks and mestizos. Meanwhile the historical political practices and ancestral knowledge of Black communities (*mingas*, kinship, linguistic practices such as using particular registers) and political dynamics and projects of social leaders and Afro teachers configure the organizational and community spheres.

From a political ethnographic perspective, the complex interconnection of these (apparently separated) spaces allow me to analyze the simultaneous and multiple political actions and practices of state agents and social leaders (considering these categories as fluid, interconnected) in the context of political negotiations between social actors associated with the national state and social organizations to position Ethnoeducation as a public policy and to transform the educational system. By doing so, I will explain the multiple and organic ways in which state effects shape and are shaped by political relations among an Afro women's organization (CONAMUNE), Afro women and Indigenous state agents, and Afro and mestizo teachers (who can also be considered state agents) in Ecuador. Paying attention to emotions, desires and sacrifices (Joseph, Mahler and Auyero 2007) of those political subjects will provide a more nuanced understanding of their political capital building and their political actions and goals in order to analysis the process of political contention and contestation that are taking place in these spheres (Joseph, Mahler and Auyero 2007). Focusing on the social backgrounds and life histories of diverse actors that together play a key role in the constitution and development of Ethnoeducation as a racialized and political project, I show the complex, sometimes blurry, but significant aspects of the ongoing reality of politics and state effects that

weaves together all spheres (institutional, organizational, community) and challenges the clear and easy state-community distinction.

My first encounter with Ethnoeducation was in June 2018. I had recently arrived in Ecuador, and one of my first research activities was to join a class on the African diaspora in the Americas with Professor Jhon Antón in the IAEN, in Quito. The first day of classes, I arrived earliest and after few minutes, an Afro woman came in. I introduced myself as an Afro Venezuelan anthropologist doing my Ph.D. focusing on Afro women's organizations in Ecuador. She reacted with surprise and told me that her family was from Estación Carchi and her sister was a central figure of Afro women's organizations in Ecuador. A few minutes later, three Afro women arrived. They introduced themselves to the class and at that moment I realized that they all were Afro women state agents working in the office of something called Ethnoeducation, which was part of the sub-secretariat of Bilingual Intercultural Education at the Ministry of Education. They started talking about the difficulties they were facing at the office due to the rumours about the elimination of the sub-secretariat. This encounter introduced me to the institutional and bureaucratic space of Ethnoeducation, its practices, meetings, struggles, and rivalries in the context of the everyday work activities of Afro women state agents. This encounter furthermore occurred at a national government educational institute established to provide advanced training to government employees. As my ethnographic work evolved, I found myself immersed in blurred spaces where both overt and subtle connections between state agents, researchers, social leaders, and community members (as well as off-the-record meetings and encounters) occur and shape the political practices that configure Ethnoeducation as a site of political contestation and as a set of cultural and social assemblages.

The second encounter took place two weeks later (June 28th) in Ibarra, with the leaders of the Imbabura and Carchi provincial *mesas* of Ethnoeducation and members of the Ethnoeducation National Commission. Barbarita Lara, Olga Maldonado and Iván Pabón (members of CONAMUNE and ex member of FECONIC, respectively) comprised the commission along with the entire corps of Afro teachers of the two provinces. They were about to have a meeting in the *zona distrital* of Imbabura province at the office of

Educación Intercultural Bilingüe. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the institutional status of Ethnoeducation, its advances and challenges. It was held with the director of the EIB and his staff, all of whom were Indigenous. Iván Pabón and Barbarita Lara introduced them to the grassroots formation of the Ethnoeducation project, its historical context, and how and why they had started to work collectively as a *pueblo*. This encounter announced the meetings and activities that the commission would hold during the year (2018) and revealed some of the central tensions around the Ethnoeducation project. These included: 1) how to understand and implement interculturality from an Afro-Ecuadorian perspective, 2) what would be the institutional/legal status of Ethnoeducation, and 3) how to bring together the everyday activities and practices of Ethnoeducation in the context of Afro communities and classrooms and the bureaucratic logic of the state.

These two encounters were crucial for me to begin to understand Ethnoeducation as a site of contestation and political negotiation among ethno-racialized groups – mestizos, Black people and Indigenous leaders – who are competing with each other to access the redistribution of state wealth as well as to seize the state as an institutional and powerful space (and to fill it with symbolic and tangible resources). Together these encounters demonstrated that Afro women teachers and leaders are the main actors who are driving Ethnoeducation simultaneously as a grassroots process and as an institutionalized policy.

In the following discussion, I highlight two research sites that are part of the complex interconnections of all spheres mentioned above. The first is the school, in La Concepción community, a political site (Hooks 1994) where CONAMUNE's actions and discourses through Ethnoeducation program take place. The second is the office of Ethnoeducation at the Ministry of Education in Quito where, after accord #00045-A, a small staff of Afro-Ecuadorian women was hired to advance Ethnoeducation as public policy. Afro-Ecuadorian female teachers and state agents move constantly through these spheres that become spaces of reflection and political action wherein they can share experiences, create strategies and consent, while also producing a shared language with which to engage other social leaders, Indigenous state agents and state policies. This

shared language is contingent and was evolving and changing as political situations and opportunities did.

4.6 The Ethnoeducation Project in La Concepción Community: CONAMUNE-Carchi Members, ETOVA and the 19 de Noviembre School

In the province of Imbabura and Carchi there are two principal schools which have served as pilot projects of Ethnoeducation: the 19 de Noviembre school in La Concepción community in Carchi and El Valle del Chota school in Carpuela community in Imbabura[22]. As stated above, Ethnoeducation has different but complementary scenarios of actions and discourses where myriad actors intersect. At first glance, all of them were playing a crucial role in the processes of Ethnoeducation as public policy, as institutional space and as grassroots project, but if we look more closely, Afro female state agents (CONAMUNE members and the Afro teachers who are members of the provincial commissions) become the principal agents involved in Ethnoeducation in all of its different assemblages. They are the ones who catalyze Ethnoeducation as a social, cultural, educational, institutional and political project. In schools, they – as teachers – are responsible for raising awareness among students, for engaging them in cultural projects, for motivating them to learn about their Black culture.

CONAMUNE-Carchi/Imbabura members and teachers emphasize *oral tradition* of Afro-Ecuadorians as a mean to construct and transmit their cultural values and knowledge through legends, myths, stories and religious practices (signing and praying). As part of this effort, in the Afro-Ecuadorian communities, they research their historical past and collective/historical memory, and they advanced culturally relevant projects through the ETOVA, the alternative school that is formed by ancestral memory keepers (*los 144arto f144s de los saberes y la memoria*, community elders), Afro teachers and Afro leaders. "We – as teachers – are an instrument to write down the ancestral knowledge and compile the historical memory of our communities" (Barbarita, personal

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[22]These two schools are recognized as *Guardianas de los Saberes* in the ministerial accord #0075-A.

communication, La Concepción, August 2018). As a part of this collective process, Barbarita published the first community book called *La Buena Mujer y el Chivo*[23] (2007). The second book was *La Vida de Don Perfilio Lara, el Animero Mayor* by María Elena Chalá, a member of La Inmaculada Concepción social organization (145arto f CONAMUNE-Carchi). *Vocábulos AfroChoteños* and *El Huesito Sasonador,* by Olga Maldonado and Hermencia Chalá respectively (who also are members of Nuevos Horizontes social organization and CONAMUNE-Carchi), are the most recently published books (2018). "All these books have the same structure: historical context of the Afro Ecuadorian in relation to the topic the book is addressing and at the end there are pedagogical activities and questions for the readers" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). The preparation and publication of these community books are part of CONAMUNE members' and teachers' efforts to revitalize and recognize their ancestral knowledge and wisdom. In so doing, they promote a deep respect for non-Western epistemology and develop other ways of thinking based on historical memory and oral tradition of Afro Ecuadorians.

In this context, CONAMUNE members advanced Ethnoeducation as *bandera de lucha* (symbol of their fight) in asserting/building their claims for cultural and political recognition as a means to break silence and make visible the Afro-Ecuadorian history in the country. Hence, by compiling their local history and "sharing the knowledge of the ancestors" they are producing information and didactical tools (textbooks) to make available their cultural traditions and to help Afro teachers to advance and teach Ethnoeducation in schools of the Chota Valley.

The political actions of CONAMUNE-Carchi members are organically linked to the objectives of ETOVA (Escuela de la Tradición Oral la Voz de mis Ancestros, The School of Oral Tradition the Voice of the Ancestors): compiling and promoting the

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[23] This community book was produced as part of the CONAMUNE project called *Consolidación de liderazgos y empoderamiento de mujeres negras organizadas en Ecuador 2006-2008* during a period when Barbarita was the national coordinator of CONAMUNE. One of the objectives of this project was "to support and promote the public participation of Black women through publications of documents, book, memoirs and reports produced by Black women of the Afro-Ecuadorian Cultural Center (CCA in Spanish) and CONAMUNE" (*Consolidación de liderazgos y empoderamiento de mujeres negras organizadas en Ecuador*, CONAMUNE, CCA, COOPI, Unión Europea, 2007).

historical memory of Afro-Ecuadorian communities. They work together to advance Ethnoeducation in the school by carrying out pedagogical projects. Many of the members of CONAMUNE are teachers and since the foundation of CONAMUNE in 1999 it has been a cornerstone of Afro women's organizations at the local level in Carchi province. Barbarita Lara and Olga Maldonado, members of CONAMUNE-Carchi, have been advancing various Ethnoeducation projects such as *El Palenque de la Salud*, *La Huerta de la Abuela* and *El Museo de los Abuelos*.

Since 2000, when Barbarita became the principal of the 19 de Noviembre school, she has been advancing Ethnoeducation as an alternative pedagogical practice. One of the first projects was *La Huerta de la Abuela* (the garden of the grandmother), which consists of the cultivation of different variations of plantain and beans, which are key elements of the traditional diet of Afrodescendant communities in the Chota Valley. Barbarita was teaching social science and there was a unit focused on agricultural practices in modern Ecuador. She proposed to the students to work together in a productive project that would allow them to learn how to grow and harvest these important crops for the economy of their families and communities. She also called for the participation of community members who came into the school to teach about the variety of plantains and beans as well as show how to cultivate them. During these processes the students worked collectively (in *mingas*) to clean and prepare the terrain for cultivation.

The second project was *El Palenque de la Salud* (the Palenque health project). Due to the precarious situation of these rural communities, the lack of public health care and nutritional deficiencies, many students get sick, and Barbarita and Olguita proposed to create an infirmary based on traditional healing practices rooted in love and self-care. Once again, they brought the students together to work collectively on the construction of the infirmary. While doing so, Barbarita and Olguita were teaching them about the medicinal plants that have been used for generations in these Afrodescendant communities. They were also bringing together elements of their local past and linking it to a historical memory of African diaspora. *El Palenque* is the term for runaway slave settlements and a strategy of survival and resistance of enslaved populations in Spanish America early in the colonial period (Andrews 2004; Herrera Salas 2004).

The implementation of these projects at the school involved contested processes of negotiation among some Afro and mestizo teachers, who disagreed with this alternative pedagogical practice by arguing that these projects were not part of the curriculum or that it was not appropriate or important to teach these topics to the students. They were also concerned about the time and money invested in these projects.

> Some teachers do not perceive these projects as something good. For them, Ethnoeducation means more workload and very few teachers are willing to get involved in this process because they have to do some research about Afrodescendant culture and history, get involved in activities with the communities, and they prefer just to follow what the textbooks and the traditional curriculum say (Jorge, phone call communication, Mira, March 2020).

Through the implementation of these two projects, Barbarita and Olguita have been explaining the importance of getting involved in the everyday life of the community in order to understand the reality, needs, and problems that students face as a strategy to orient them and help them to move forward as Black subjects in a society that ignores them and holds them back.

> These projects are a burden for some teachers, they cannot see the meaning of these projects: the garden of grandmother is a symbol of the past, it is a way to commemorate the ancestors, showing them how the ancestors cultivate different plants to feed themselves, protect themselves and heal themselves. The *Palenque de la salud*, it is a space of refuge, it is a space for healing their soul and spirit, it is a space of reflection, but they don't see this. Few of us [teachers] are thinking about this new model of education (Jorge, phone call communication, Mira, March 2020).

A third local Ethnoeducation project was the creation of a complex of community museums: The House of History *Refuge of the Ancestors* and The House of the Grandparents. This project started in 2002. It began as a pedagogical proposal launched by Barbarita focused on the creation of thematic rooms or houses:

The idea was that the student moved, not the teacher, as it is in the western educational system. It was for teachers to have a house, a space to learn and teach and for the student to visit that space, that house (Barbarita, phone call communication, La Concepción, March 2020).

This project, named *El estudiante en movimiento a través de las aulas temáticas,* aimed to "alleviate the problem of students' disinterest in learning, which is related to the precarious and bad physical conditions of the classroom. The project focused on the free mobility of the students" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). They would visit these spaces of the teaching-learning environment that were welcoming, engaging, and supportive.

The classrooms are usually sheds that burn in the hot sun, and in those spaces there are crowded together an average of 35 to 40 students, static during seven or eight hours of classes. In addition to these spaces of inhumane agglomeration, the actions of the teachers are restricted, they are closed in, without time to interact with the community and the natural and social environment from which the students come. In this context, teachers are unaware of the culture and cosmogony of the students (Barbarita, personal communication, Piquiucho, October 2018).

Hence, the project aimed to transform the surveillance logic of the educative system and the control over students' bodies and the ways that knowledge is reproduced and circulated in the classrooms (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, April 2020). The classrooms were reconfigured into spaces to transform minds and beings (Hooks 1994). This resonates with Ranciere's (1991) ideas of pedagogy of equality and equality of intelligence, where the author challenges the relationship of power between teachers and students by promoting a student's self confidence to learn in a political process of mutual emancipation among students and teachers.

Based on this principle, Afro female and mestizo teachers created five thematic rooms or houses, including: the computer room, the sport (*cultura física*)

room named for Ulises de la Cruz[24], the music room, and the social science room[25]. The Ministry of Education, private donors, local government or CONAMUNE members financed some of these rooms. This project of thematic rooms did not continue due to conflicts among teachers and principals. In 2006-2007, Barbarita who was in her second term as principal and at the time also the coordinator of CONAMUNE, proposed to the local authorities and community members to continue the social science room as a part of a CONAMUNE project of community museums and strengthening of leadership. The local government donated the terrain behind the *junta parroquial* to CONAMUNE to build three houses: Oshum CONAMUNE House, the House of History "Refuge of the Ancestors", and the House of the Grandparents. The objective was to open these spaces to the public and incentivize tourism in these communities.

The creation of this museum required historical research about the material culture of the Afro-Ecuadorian population and the construction of a traditional house made of adobe with a thatched *paja* roof. In this museum, Barbarita and her students collected different objects and material culture such as old photos from family albums, stones and ceramics from the old *hacienda* and traditional musical instruments such as La Bomba (drums). This project became an interpretive space to teach students and to open up dialogues between Afro-Ecuadorian community members, state agents, politicians, researchers and social leaders about the African diaspora in Ecuador.

All these projects of Ethnoeducation aim at advancing a *nuevo modelo educativo*, whose objectives go beyond the national curriculum. For example, by bringing together community members, students and teachers in the school in order to develop the Garden of the Grandmother project, Barbarita and Olguita were promoting forms of solidarity based on their traditional collective ways of working.

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[24] Ulises de la Cruz is a famous Afro-Ecuadorian soccer player from the Chota Valley.

[25] The social science room had Pasto material culture, old photographs of the communities and the *haciendas*, maps, books, and diverse artifacts representing the Afro diasporic culture of the communities.

By making physical changes to the school (building a small house, cultivating land) they were also creating spaces for alternative ways of learning and teaching based on their cultural knowledge. At the same time, they were humanizing the spaces in the school and making education a practice of freedom and liberation. Hence, the school – as political site – is a venue in which teachers and CONAMUNE-Carchi members are challenging the national curriculum and effecting changes to institutional spaces and transforming the everyday life of the students. Overall, by compiling, acknowledging and writing down the knowledge/*saberes* and philosophy of Afro community elders, CONAMUNE-Carchi members, ETOVA members and teachers are together advancing intercultural and decolonial practices to revitalize, rebuild and strengthen the Afro-Ecuadorian existence as people with ancestral rights (Walsh and García 2015), not only through textbooks and written sources. Most importantly, they are using traditional learning and historical memory as praxis (Alarcon 2014) to create a shared collective memory of insurgence, resistance and freedom as Afro-Ecuadorians and thus breaking "the historical silence to which we were subjected and that made us learn in such a way that we would continue to be invisible" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). Hence, the Ethnoeducation project in the schools is a local response of Afro teachers and local leaders against the historical exclusion and narrow notion of inclusiveness of the state. But as this account suggests, these projects were also locally negotiated and contested even within the school, where Afro teachers and local leaders are crucial in shaping and constructing the local politics (Mallon 1994).

4.7 Becoming Present in the State: The Ethnoeducation Office at the Ministry of Education

Within the Ministry our fight is against the invisibility of the Afro in the presence of the Indigenous (Gaby, personal communication, Quito, June 2018).

The epigraph that begins this section draws attention to the complex social and political landscape in which political goals and claims of Afro and Indigenous movements can align but also compete. Like any state project, the accord #00045-A has shaped the terrain on which Afro leaders and state agents could act, enabling certain

possibilities and constraining others (Clark 2012a). This accord mandates the incorporation of Afrodescendant personnel to work on the implementation of Ethnoeducation as public policy. This accord also establishes that Ethnoeducation and its personnel are part of the EIB managed by Indigenous leaders of CONAIE. This creates a particular dynamic that Afrodescendant state agents must navigate: their everyday work experiences are framed by, and sometimes squeezed by, the strong presence of Indigenous political power and the underlying legitimization of a "certain version of cultural rights" (Hale 2005).

As stated above, the accords were the result of human agency and struggle. They also illustrate the consolidation (always fragile and malleable) of a *common material and meaningful framework* through which different social groups can share and confront their aspirations (Gramsci 1971; Mallon 1994; Roseberry 1994; Clark 1998). As any state project, for this accord to become realized in practice to bring to life the policy documents require personal sacrifices (Clark 2012a), everyday work and constant negotiations among state agents, intellectuals, professors and politicians, all of them with their different political position and projects. Three Afro women state agents comprise the personnel of Ethnoeducation at the office of EIB: Luisa, Nieves and Sayra. Each of them is committed to advance Ethnoeducation as a political process of the Afro-Ecuadorian social movement and as public policy. Two of them have been active members of different social organizations in the coastal city of Guayaquil. Although their life histories and trajectories are different from one another, class, race and gender violence have shaped them all.

Luisa is from Esmeraldas province and at early age she had to move to Guayaquil. She got married and had two children. After years of experiencing domestic violence she found shelter and emotional support as part of a social organization run by Señora Lucetti: "she helped me go through my personal problems and move forward to keep studying" (Luisa, personal communication, Quito, September 2018). Luisa became a teacher and managed to create her own social organization named Fundación Afroecuatoriana Santa Rosa, named after the town of her birth. The goal of this organization is "to promote Afro-Ecuadorian culture and support women, children and

elders". As she explained, "all my social work with the social organizations has been based on my life as an example" (Luisa, personal communication, Quito, September 2018). As a teacher and social leader, she was part of the provincial commission of Ethnoeducation of Guayas and took part in the process of drafting the accord #00045-A. Her co-worker Nieves is from Guayaquil. As a teenager she got involved in the Pastoral Afro and since then, she has been an active member of this religious organization. She worked with Father Savoia, a figure who has had a strong influence in the Afro social movement in Ecuador (de la Torre 2002), in the Centro Cultural Afro-Ecuatoriano in Quito. As member and provincial coordinator of the Pastoral Afro, she developed strong symbolic and political capital, expanding her social networking as regional coordinator of the Andean region in the Pastoral Afro. She also earned a master's degree in Gender Inequality at the University of Barcelona. As she put it "since my girlhood I have been involved in social initiatives that we know today as Ethnoeducation" (Nieves, personal communication, Quito, September 2018). Finally, Sayra is the youngest member of the Ethnoeducation staff. Her family is from the Juncal community in the Chota Valley. Her mother was a well-known community leader who advocated for the religious and social well-being of the community. Her oldest brother, Pedro de Jesús, was a member of La Pastoral Afro and has become a well-known Afro politician who participated in drafting the accord #00045-A among other political projects that advocate for Afro-Ecuadorian rights. These Afro women's social circumstances and positioning were shaping their duties at the institutional state and the different ways they were able to pursue them and at the same time, articulated with the political goals of the social movement.

Since 2017 when they started working in this institutional space, Luisa, Nieves and Sayra have been advancing Ethnoeducation from an institutional standpoint. As stated in article #3 of the accord #00045-A, "coordinating and supporting the elaboration of culturally-relevant curricular and didactical materials as tools to support the educational system" (MIN-EDUC-ME-2016-00045-A, 2) are the principal duties of the Afro women who comprise the Ethnoeducation staff. They organize encounters and workshops to advance Ethnoeducation as a state program among Afro teachers of the provinces of Guayas, Esmeraldas, Imbabura, Carchi and Pichincha. Organizing and carrying out these duties also involves bureaucratic practices such as writing memos to

Indigenous authorities asking for authorization, funds or other state resources that are necessary for these activities. They are also in charge of coordinating the elaboration and printing of new Ethnoeducation textbooks. In their everyday work they have to attend unexpected bureaucratic meetings about funding or organize political meetings, sometimes off-the-record, to negotiate and help to maintain Ethnoeducation as an institutional space. Hence, their actual everyday work goes beyond bureaucratic activities (Schwegler 2012) as it opens up opportunities for Afro women state agents to dialogue, make alliances and negotiate with Afro teachers, Afro politicians and local authorities as well as advancing grassroots proposals within the state. Negotiating with Afro-Ecuadorian intellectuals to be their advisors in their internal process of negotiation with the vice minister is an example of the political work they do. It is worth mentioning how information circulates within the ministry and how they are "reading the governmental bureaucracy" and the political environment (Schwegler 2012, 22) to hunt for some information, finding ways to keep track of documents or gossiping with other state agents from diverse offices in order to access information. They also play the role of advisor to the vice minister regarding Ethnoeducation and its political leaders before his meeting with the *mesa nacional*. These are "unwritten" duties that can go unnoticed, but they are relevant and fundamental to carry on their political work.

To illustrate how their duties at the Ministry and the political goals of the social leaders intersect, I will recount a meeting I attended that was held by CONAMUNE members, NGOs, Afro state agents and Afro youth organization in Ibarra to address the problem of lack of land tenure in the Ancestral Territory. It was at the beginning of July 2018. The participants – Barbarita Lara, Pedro de Jesús, Iván Lara, Iván Pabón, among other members of CONAMUNE, the GADs network (Gobiernos Autónomos Descentralizados, see chapter five) and Afro Youth collective – heard about the reform to the organizational chart where the EIB office would return to being a Directorate. After this political decision made by the President of Ecuador to give back some political power to the CONAIE, Afro leaders were wondering what this would mean for Ethnoeducation as an institutional space. Afro social movements have been demanding the creation of the Directorate of Ethnoeducation, as a separate administrative and institutional space from EIB, for more than 20 years. In the midst of this political

opportunity, members of the provincial commission of Imbabura sent a proposal to the Ethnoeducation staff in Quito. During this meeting, Pedro decided to call his sister, Sayra, to talk to her and Nieves about the political situation and to follow up on the status of the document the national commission sent to the ministry. Nieves and Sayra were in Guayaquil *de comisión* (on a fieldwork trip to dialogue with educative authorities and teachers in some schools). On the phone, Nieves explained the internal dynamic and bureaucratic logic that would enable the reform to the organizational chart of the institution:

> The directorate of Ethnoeducation is within the reform 0-20 of the organization chart of the Ministry. A plan was made, we do not know if they approved it, with the personnel that would belong to Ethnoeducation department and what their profile would be. The idea is that they include us in this reform. So far, this is where things are at, and they say it has been passed on to the finance ministry. And that was it (Nieves, phone call meeting, Guayaquil, July 2018).

This reform did not proceed and a few weeks later the personnel of Ethnoeducation was moved to another institutional space: Fundamentos de la Educación, on the seventh floor of the ministry. Being displaced from the EIB and moved over to another department implied being in institutional limbo, not only slowing down their daily work but requiring them to adjust to a new dynamic. Nevertheless, they were still under the responsibility of EIB due to the legal framework of the ministerial accord.

The office of Ethnoeducation represents a historical achievement for the Afro-Ecuadorian social movement. As an institutional space, it constitutes a step forward in securing participation, visibility and inclusion within the nation state. However, as an institutional space it is also a site of negotiation, encounters and confrontation characterized by fragility and limited achievements (Ruette 2011). The fragility and malleability of the institutional space is illustrated by how political contingencies of bureaucratic changes such as changes to the authorities of the state or political decisions generate modifications to the echelons of the institution that change the terrain upon

which they can act. Hence, the demand for a Directorate of Ethnoeducation got more urgent as an everyday struggle within the Ministry. Nieves, Sayra and Luisa have worked on strategies to maintain Ethnoeducation as an institutional space within the structure of the institution – with its own budget and personnel. I will illustrate this point by describing two ethnographic moments: a meeting between financial staff and Ethnoeducation staff about the budget of Ethnoeducation, and an initiative that Nieves, Luisa and Sayra undertook a few months later.

During my recurrent visits to the Ministry of Education to understand what was happening with the institutionalization of Ethnoeducation, I could observe the everyday work of Nieves, Luisa and Sayra and their interactions with other state agents. I also could notice how they were constantly called up and had to defend themselves and their position within the Ministry and the office: "In the Ministry of Education, they don't believe in Ethnoeducation. What is that for? they ask me all the time" (Nieves, personal communication, Quito, June 2019). In the midst of the political contingency of restructuring of the EIB and the institutional limbo they were facing, I went to the Ministry to interview Luisa after her work hours. When I got there, she called me to explain to me that she was still working, and she would have an important meeting about Ethnoeducation in few minutes. She asked me to wait for her at the back door of the Ministry. While I was there Pedro de Jesús came in and, addressing the receptionist, he said: "I have a meeting with the chair of the EIB."

Pedro turned and greeted me. I explained to him that I was waiting for Luisa. He called Sayra over the phone. She came down to meet him and she invited me to come in, after she and Pedro exchanged glances and he nodded his approval. I asked them if Luisa's meeting was the same one that Pedro would attend, and he answered: "no, this meeting is political and you cannot attend." We arrived at the fourth floor, where the EIB is located and where they used to work. When we got out of the elevator we saw an Indigenous man passing by and Sayra whispered in my ear: "that is Wilson Añapa, the head of the EIB with whom Pedro has the meeting." We continued walking. Luisa came out of the room where they were gathered to greet me and commented: "hi Beatriz, we are in a meeting with *finanzas*, they want to take away what little we have in

Ethnoeducation" (Luisa, personal communication, Quito, September 2018). I entered the room, they introduced me and continued talking to each other about the budget. They mentioned amounts of money and the activities they would undertake with that money. The meeting was with a mid-ranking staff member from the financial office. He was sitting in front of his laptop. Sayra was behind him and Nieves at his side. All of them were staring at the screen. There was money only for some activities. Sayra placed her hand on the right shoulder of the man, and pressing down commented, "I will not move until we fix this." And Nieves went on saying: "yes, *compañerito*, the problem is the time, and we need to print the four textbooks not three, we already promised that to the teachers." During the meeting, they were strongly articulating why they were trying to proceed with the initiatives to develop textbooks of Ethnoeducation as didactical tools to implement Ethnoeducation in the schools and to convene national meetings which aimed to strengthen the participants' identity as Afro teachers. He said that he could readjust the budget, and he went on to say: "I heard that they [the personnel of EIB] are working on the organizational chart and you should demand a meeting with the chair to ask to be included as part of the EIB again." To which Luisa replied: "why insert us in another directorate instead of having our own!?". These micro interactions that configure this process of negotiation, where gestures of subtle threats (hand on the man's shoulder), sitting next to him very close, speaking with a firm tone but also with jokes and laughter about the organization chart of the ministry, show how they operate within the institutional framework, and how they are shaping it. These micro interactions also show how they understand their ability (or not) to effect changes, and how despite not being the decision makers, they still have a certain capacity to negotiate demands and create change within the state. After these strong but also often subtle micro processes of negotiation, they managed to retain the money, and with it to continue advancing Ethnoeducation.

As an example of how they interweave the fine and sometimes invisible threads of the political plot (moving physically from one office to another one, finding the right person to talk with, knowing the dynamics of the institution), while they were demanding to have this meeting with the finance personnel, Sayra called her brother and explained the situation. Pedro, as a politician who at that time was the *coordinador de gestión de la politica zonal 1* in Ibarra but who also has been a key actor for advancing Ethnoeducation

as public policy, requested a meeting with the Indigenous leader Wilson, the chair of the EIB. The fact that these two meetings happened at the same time was the result of the women's agency and ways of navigating the institutional environment and its bureaucratic logic. After his meeting with Wilson, Pedro stopped by the room where all of us were still talking about the problems Ethnoeducation was facing due to the political contingencies and malleability of the accord and the conflicts between them and the Mesa Nacional of Ethnoeducation. The meeting between Pedro, an Afro state agent, and Wilson, an Indigenous state agent and member of the CONAIE, was "private and political" (Pedro, personal communication, Quito, September 2018). Pedro came in and without providing details gave a brief and sharp analysis of the political situation: "the funding for the next year is 21 million for the Indigenous people and 11 million for Ethnoeducation. We can only get access to that money if you are moved back into the EIB" (Pedro, personal communication, Quito, September 2018). To achieve this, he explained that the Afro social movement would have to negotiate with the Indigenous social movement CONAIE, not just with the vice minister, by first sending a letter to the president of CONAIE negotiating the possibility to be incorporated again into the EIB office as stipulated in the accord. Pedro continued explaining that "the vice minister will be removed from office. We have to sit with a new vice minister who will be from Quito or Guayas…. let's hope he is from Guayas so we can negotiate better" (Pedro, personal communication, Quito, September 2018). This ability to interpret the political landscape that they have to navigate shows cartography of political power at the national level (the highlands and the coast) and within the social movements (background and history of political negotiation of certain Afro leaders). In this meeting they together thought of possible Afro leaders "with the capacity to negotiate with the Indigenous people" and "who do not speak only from the perspective of the northern highlands" (thus Barbarita and other leaders from that region were being ruled out). After writing down a few names and making some decisions, Nieves commented: "We negotiate here with personnel in the legal department, that's our responsibility, and you Pedro negotiate there with who knows who" (Nieves, personal communication, Quito, September 2018). Pedro replied: "yes, we have to negotiate with CONAIE before the end of October, if you leave EIB you will lose access to the budget" (Pedro, personal communication, Quito, September 2018).

The result of these negotiations between Afro and Indigenous leaders and state agents was that the Ethnoeducation staff were indeed moved back in to the EIB office, but the changing and malleable institutional landscape continues reconfiguring their everyday work.

A few months later in January 2019 – a different institutional moment marked by the presence of a new vice minister and Ethnoeducation's move back into the EIB) – Nieves, Sayra and Luisa proposed a funding project to invest in Ethnoeducation and the reform to the ministerial accord 00045-A. These proposals aimed:

> To finance the activities of Ethnoeducation until it is institutionalized, it was for this that the work guidelines that were approved in the Ethnoeducation meeting in Esmeraldas were incorporated, while in the reform to 00045 we propose to delegate the responsibility of Ethnoeducation to educational foundations, the need for more staff, and request the creation of the directorate (Nieves, personal communication, Quito, February 2020).

As their everyday work was increasing, their internal conflicts were deepening. To advance this initiative they deployed individual strategies to get the information needed such as keeping track of memos demanding meetings with key state agents or contacting influential social leaders as well as seeking advice from different allies from academia. Despite conflicts among them and between them and the *mesa nacional*, they managed to advance the proposal that ended up with the political event of the relaunch of Ethnoeducation in April 2019.

These decisions and actions were not made secretly or separately from the social movement. Indeed, these decisions were taken, promoted and developed by Afro leaders and politicians. The *mesa nacional* and commissions were sending letters of negotiation to the minister and had been holding meeting with authorities of the Ministry of Education since July 2018. Congressman Pepe Chalá was leading the reform process of the LOEI in the national assembly. The provincial commissions of Imbabura and Carchi were holding meetings to strengthen the grassroots process. These are some of the multiple spheres where Afro state agents and leaders navigate and deploy their strategies

to advance the Ethnoeducation project. Doing so, they are creating a network of alliances but also rivalries, through which power relationships are legitimized and redefined (Mallon 1994).

During many of my conversations with Afro teachers and CONAMUNE members about the difficulties of implementing Ethnoeducation, they highlighted that the most difficult challenge they have been facing in pursuing Ethnoeducation as a political and educative project has been the negotiation process with state agents and their narrow vision. As Barbarita commented,

> The most difficult work has been *casa afuera*. When proposing Ethnoeducation as a public policy, it has been difficult to reach and sensitize the authorities who are representatives of the public education policy because they are people who are not trained, do not know, they aren't familiar with the Afrodescendant people. It is that from the institution they still look at us as if we were outsiders, and it is not their fault but the educational system because it is incomplete. The history of Indigenous nationalities was taken into account, and they talk about the conquest and the wars of independence… (Barbarita, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019).

With the accord 00045-A and the creation of the Ethnoeducation personnel to carry out its duties, it was contemplated that these staff members would be Afro-Ecuadorian people. Indeed the personnel of Ethnoeducation, as described above, are Afrodescendants committed to advancing Ethnoeducation. Although they are not *gente ajena* (people from the outside) and are, to some extent, part of micro processes of decision-making, they are neither part of the highest level of state power nor are they well-known social leaders of the process. Since the implementation of the accord 00045-A, the constitution of the Afrodescendant personnel and the *mesa nacional* there have been some conflicts and misunderstandings that have generated a sort of underestimation on the part of the members of the *mesa nacional* of the work that the Ethnoeducation staff carry out. "They told us that it was dangerous for us to make

decisions and that we are playing the system's game" (Nieves, personal communication, September, Quito 2018).

As stated above, the national *mesa* was created as a device of dialogue between the Afro social movement and the authorities of the Ministry of Education through the institutional space of the EIB. The members of the national *mesa* are Amada Cortez, an important member of CONAMUNE-Esmeraldas who is more recognized as a local leader and artist (poet and singer) than as a political negotiator, Iván Pabón, Afro teacher and member of the provincial commission of Imbabura, Ibsen Hernández, a very well-known Afro leader and intellectual from Guayas, Barbarita Lara from CONAMUNE-Carchi, Carmen Corozo, Ketis Barrios, Geovana Vallecilla, Jorge Espinoza, Yolanda Caicedo and Wendy Mosquera. The *mesa* is an example of how social movements along with NGOs and state agents create a matrix/legal framework through which social leaders can act, enabling certain possibilities and constraining others. As an institutional sphere, the *mesa* has a specific duty: "it is an instance of *interlocución*, consultation and permanent dialogue with the national educational authority via the EIB" (MINEDUC-2016-00045-A 2016, 3). However, its political function becomes ambiguous by overlapping the logic and dynamics of the committees and the *mesa nacional*, which used to work with autonomy from the state.

> They operate according to another logic! Ibsen said it: we are autonomous, but no! They have to understand that they are not independent, that once the ministry got involved in this, they are no longer independent. They knocked on the doors for the ministry to assume this responsibility and when the ministry assumes its responsibility, it does so from its own structure, with its parameters and norms, and they [members of the *mesa*] have to accept that and look at us, not as a superior organism but as an instance with a vision and objectives.... Well, maybe I too am institutionalized (Sayra, personal communication, Ibarra, September 2018).

This shows not only how the state tends to foster a new logic to govern (Scott 2009) but how the state in whose name officials function is not a "separated reality

behind them, but a symbolic resource on which they draw to produce their effects" (Painter 2006,758). Thus as Sayra put it, they are also "institutionalized" and use their position as officials to advance Ethnoeducation from an institutional standpoint, too. It also shows the malleability and limitations of multicultural politics of recognition, which create a terrain of political mobilization where ethno-racialized groups find themselves in the administrative and political negotiation for resources and political power under the parameters of a racial state (Hale 2005; Goldberg 2002), which is based on the denial that race is a problem (Paschel and Sawyer 2008). In doing so, the rules of the process of negotiation are changing as well as the internal political hierarchies that leaders and state agents must control, manipulate and even make invisible (Erazo 2013).

Despite all these conflicts there is a consensus among Afro teachers and leaders of the Ethnoeducation process on the fact that to be/become part of the state is a central political goal: "we want to enter, being inside we can fight, outside we do nothing! We have fought from the outside and now we need to be on the inside" (Afro female teacher, personal communication, Esmeraldas, November 2018). This notion of the state as a structure or box you can come into or come out of (or be taken out of) is shaping the ways Afro teachers are framing their discourses of negotiation with state agents. As Barbarita put it, we need to "enter, even if it's through the window, but enter" (Barbarita, personal communication, Esmeraldas, November 2018).

Afro Ecuadorians have been legally recognized as a distinct ethnic group with collective rights and have managed to open up spaces within the institutional structure of the state. But their demands for a well-defined space within the state have not been fulfilled. They still aim to occupy the physical and symbolic spaces of the (legislative) power of the state. In the midst of this very contested process of accessing the state in the context of multicultural struggle for recognition and political participation, Afro and Indigenous people still face the ideological barrier of the myth of national mestizaje while the state becomes an arbiter among cultural and racialized social groups "defining legitimate and undeserving subjects" of political power (Hale 2005).

Chapter 5

5   Spirituality, Memory and Territory: CONAMUNE-Carchi's Political Project of the Ancestral Territory

> Freedom of the soul, of the being, of the ancestors
>
> (Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, October 2018)

> Where a woman steps and follows her route of *cambeo*, that is territory for us
>
> (Barbarita, personal communication, Ibarra, July 2018)

"This is the valley with its hills and mountains, with its plants, *el muelle* pier, the thorns…. With this plant I cure the *mal aire*, with this one I sweep and clean my house, this one sucks my blood, this other one heals me… this is the heart of the territory," Barbarita said as we passed the sugar refinery Tababuela heading to Mira city. And she continued, "we have the work of healing ourselves, we have to heal the soul to confront racism. From the times of slavery, what strength and love our ancestors had! This is the ancestral territory." We were crossing the bridge over the Chota River towards Mascarilla, which marks the official border between the provinces of Imbabura and Carchi. "These are the *huasipungos*, these lands along the riverbank belong to the cooperative, the lands higher up were owned by the *hacienda*…" (Barbarita, personal communication, June 2018).

With these words, Barbarita introduced me to the Ancestral Territory while we travelled in Iván Lara's car to a meeting they had in the municipality. It was noon on a June day in 2018. It was my first visit to the Chota-Mira Valley. In the morning we had been at a meeting with NGOs, state agents and social leaders on health and nutrition, and land and territory in Ibarra city. Iván Lara, an Afro-Ecuadorian municipal councillor of Mira, whom I had met two weeks before at a conference on land and territory that he gave in Quito, invited me to this meeting. This is where and how I met Barbarita and after asking her for permission to work with CONAMUNE, my journey through the Ancestral Territory began.

The land struggle in the Black communities of the Chota-Mira Valley has deep historical roots (Coronel Feijóo 1991; Guerrero 1996; Medina 1999; Rapoport 2009; Zambrano Murillo 2011). However, the participation of women in these struggles has been invisibilized and denied. The history of the land struggle is beyond the scope of this chapter, as it would require a deep analysis of the different moments in the peasant struggle for land tenure, the history of the *haciendas*, and agrarian and political reforms in Ecuador. Nonetheless, during my fieldwork, land tenure in El Chota, Juncal and Mascarilla communities was a recurrent concern that came out during interviews with men and women. While some men denied women's participation in the organization around the land struggle, some women recalled how their mothers supported the community's struggle in different ways. These ranged from cooking and delivering lunch, clearing the land with their daughters so that measurements could be taken and the borders between plots delimited, to visibly participating in the struggle as was the case of Señora Marta Acosta, "who was a leader, singer and *priosta* of the Virgen de la Dolorosa" (Barbarita, personal communication, Dos Acequias, January 2019; Rubi, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019). The central aim of this chapter is to explore the collective construction of a political discourse with a gender perspective on the Ancestral Territory in the Chota-Mira Valley promoted by the women of CONAMUNE, which is analyzed as a moment of change and restructuring of the social and political actors that constitute and weave together the narratives of the Ancestral Territory.

This chapter analyzes the process of building the Ancestral Territory as a political project of CONAMUNE in the northern Ecuadorian highlands by focusing on the intersection of memory, territory, spirituality, ancestrality and Afro women's agency. First, I describe the political project of the Ancestral Territory as part of the political practices of CONAMUNE-Carchi and Imbabura. In doing so, I show how CONAMUNE members are interweaving actions and discourses and simultaneously creating consent among NGOs, community members, researchers, state agents, political leaders and social organizations. Second, by centering the analysis on Afro women's practices and discourses, I analyse the constitution of the *Red de Gobiernos Autónomos Descentralizados del Territorio Ancestral Afroecuatoriano de Imbabura y Carchi* (the

Network of Decentralized Autonomous Governments of the Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi) advanced by CONAMUNE-Carchi and -Imbabura, as a communal hegemonic process that is shaped by multiple processes of negotiation among diverse actors and dialogue with other Indigenous and Afrodescendant Ancestral Territory projects in Ecuador. Third, I explore the process of naming the territory to show the conflicts that are shaping the ongoing project of building the Ancestral Territory as political project in the Chota-Mira Valley. I conclude that the Ancestral Territory is an ongoing process of reterritorialization from below and a central political strategy promoted by CONAMUNE to challenge nation-state limits by claiming to be part of diverse African diaspora communities. As part of CONAMUNE's political practice of creating spaces of dialogue between social organizations and the state it becomes a subaltern/alternative racialized cartographic project that aims simultaneously to reinforce African diaspora identities and reconfigure an imagined Afro-Ecuadorian political community based on narratives of land struggle, collective memories of resistance, spirituality and ancestrality in the northern Ecuadorian highlands.

5.1   CONAMUNE and the Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi

"The *Cochita amorosa* is based on the knowledge of the grandmother and on recognizing the territory" (Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, February 2019). The *Cochita amorosa* as philosophy and political practice of CONAMUNE focuses on the knowledge of the female and male ancestors in deep communication with the territory. The territory is a space of production and reproduction of social, political and economic relations. Kinship relations marked by the dynamics in the *haciendas* intertwined with economic practices of women (often invisible), where land as a means of survival for which one had always to fight, are central elements of the social life of the Chota-Mira Valley. The river and its biodiversity, La Bomba and its dance, constitute the territory. However, what makes it ancestral is the love of the ancestors that has been passed down from generation to generation, that "love that our ancestors had," as Barbarita comments in the vignette that begins this chapter. She evokes the love for and deep connection developed by the ancestors with the trees, plants, soil, river, hills and mountains of the

Chota-Mira Valley in the context of inhumane exploitation during slavery in the Jesuit sugarcane *haciendas* (Coronel Feijóo 1991; Chaves 2010).

In 2010, CONAMUNE-Carchi promoted and advanced a Gender Violence Project funded by GIZ that aimed to make visible violence against Afro-Ecuadorian women. This project had two phases. The first phase was called "Iniciativa para combatir la violencia contra las mujeres afrodescendientes del Valle del Chota" (Initiative to Combat Violence against the Afrodescendant Women of the Chota Valley). In this project, 15 women carried out research on gender violence in the Carchi and Imbabura provinces. As a result, they produced a document with the history of the communities in order to visibilize the structural and historical violence that Afro women have been suffering (Lara in "Haciendo visible y enfrentando la violencia contra la mujer afroecuatoriana" 2012). The second phase of the project was launched one year later and it was called "Haciendo visible y enfrentando la violencia contra la mujer afroecuatoriana del territorio ancestral del Valle del Chota, Salinas, La Concepción y de Guallupe" (Making visible and confronting violence against the Afro-Ecuadorian woman of the ancestral territory of the Chota Valley, Salinas, La Concepción and Guallupe) funded by GIZ and carried out with the support of Azúcar Foundation and 20 Afro women. During this phase, they resignified the *Cochita amorosa* as a practice of healing during every workshop about gender violence. One of their research outcomes was the creation of a database with the multiple types of violence inflicted on Afro women and a statistical analysis of the findings. The idea was to create a political instrument to open the dialogue with social organizations and the local, regional and national state institutions (Lara in "Haciendo visible y enfrentando la violencia contra la mujer afroecuatoriana" 2012).

The anti-violence project and its resulting document illustrate the political actions that CONAMUNE has taken in the past few years. By opening and interweaving spaces of political negotiation in order to advance their collective goals as Black women, CONAMUNE members transform spaces and healing practices into paths of political struggle. Thus, they connect with NGOs or local state institutions to open up spaces through which they can advance and support CONAMUNE's project and collective goals. The experiences of Ofelita and Barbarita, along with many other CONAMUNE

members such as Irma Bautista, Gissela Chalá, Catherine Chalá, illustrate their ability to enact and imagine spaces without deferring to the restrictions of boundaries so that they become "adept jugglers" (Anzaldúa 1996 in Cox 2015, 25). Ofelita worked in the NGO CARE-Ecuador from 2013 to 2016 in the project called "democratización de los derechos" (democratization of rights) with Rosa Mosquera from Casa Oshun, a social organization in Quito (Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, February 2019). In this context, Ofelita simultaneously participated as a CONAMUNE member in the violence project and worked in the NGO as coordinator of the agendas of the social organizations of the Chota-Mira Valley, elaboration of the textbooks of Ethnoeducation, drafting public policies (Protección de Derechos, Mira, Canton intercultural, Symbolic and Material Cultural Heritage, and Gender Violence) along with the social organizations and supported the constitution of the Afro youth network and the Red de Gobiernos Autónomos Descentralizados (GADs, Decentralized Autonomous Governments) network (Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, February 2019). It was in this period that CONAMUNE stopped thinking about micro projects and began to propose projects that would become public policies. As Barbarita put it,

> in CONAMUNE we propose to work in a network, to bring together social organizations, state agents and NGOs. And from Juan García's experience, we knew that NGOs can be like a "mafia," and those that exist here are the same, so since then we only turn to them strategically (Barbarita, personal communication, Mira, February 2019).

This statistical and qualitative work on gender violence helped boost their struggles against racial discrimination and gender violence. The data was showing the violent practices that have marked their everyday conditions of existence as women, black, poor and rural ("Haciendo visible y enfrentando la violencia contra las mujeres afroecuatorianas" 2012), and how they have been coping and resisting the combined oppressive realities of gender and race (Crenshaw 1991). With this document in hand, they met with the presidents of the *juntas parroquiales* and showed them the everyday reality of gender inequality. Thus, in 2014, as a result of negotiation processes, CONAMUNE members managed to get the GADs to sign a letter of commitment

focused on working together for the rights of the Afro-Ecuadorian people[26], in particular, for the rights of Afro-Ecuadorian women ("Plan estratégico de la Red de GADs" 2016).

> CONAMUNE's dream was to sit down and talk with the presidents of the *juntas parroquiales*. Alone we could not walk, we realized that we were not going to be able to continue alone and hence the idea of the GAD network arose. Thank you, Don Raúl, as you said "those of CONAMUNE are sloooowww…" Now we are no longer slow. Now we are offering men the opportunity to accompany us on this journey and this is our proposal (Olguita, public speech, Salinas, August 2018).

This was the result of joint actions between members of CONAMUNE. On the one hand, Ofelita, from her work at CARE-Ecuador, aimed to articulate each project together with the objectives of CONAMUNE and, on the other hand, Barbarita participated from her position as a state agent. This political project of CONAMUNE, based on working in a network from a gender perspective rooted in their daily lived experiences, led them not only to seek allies with local authorities, but also to promote and motivate Barbarita's decision to become a municipal councillor at the cantonal level. Their research document, which they call the *cartillas de violencia*, served as a catalyst to enter into dialogues with the state but also to strengthen the political participation of Black women. Thus, as part of the CONAMUNE-Carchi strategy and the need to make structural changes, Barbarita ran as a candidate for a municipal government position as councillor in Mira, along with Iván Lara, in 2013. As Barbarita said, "we began to think not in micro, not in small projects, but in public policies, all articulated in the territory" (Barbarita, public speech, Salinas, August 2018).

> I arrived with all that impetus and knowledge thanks to the years of work
> with CONAMUNE addressing issues of violence, I had all the information
> to propose ordinances articulated with our realities as Black and rural

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[26] The first project that worked well as a collaborative project among NGOs and different social organizations in the Chota-Mira Valley was the elaboration of Ethnoeducation textbooks and the draft of the ministerial accord 00045-A, in which Ethnoeducation is officially recognized as public policy.

women. I learned the CONAMUNE agenda and used it as a rosary for political negotiation (Barbarita, personal communication, Mascarilla, January 2019).

This is an historic moment in the development of CONAMUNE's political practices and thought. First, the resignification of the *Cochita amorosa* as a healing practice with transformative political potential was promoted and endorsed. During the multiple workshops held by the members of CONAMUNE Carchi and Imbabura including Inesita Folleco, Isabelita Folleco, Sonia Viveros, María Folleco, Barbarita Lara, Olguita Maldonado, Señorita María Elena, Mercedes Acosta, Hipatia Guidiño, Gina Anangono, Teresa Calderón, Karla Espinoza, Oberliza Ogonaga, Ofelita Lara, among others, they concluded that since violence is a state problem, they could not continue working alone in the territory. "Work alone, never again!" was a recurring phrase of Barbarita and other members of CONAMUNE in various contexts. This led them to take the initiative of "convene the different political actors that made up the territory, the GADs, community leaders and social organizations, along with NGOs, to work together in a network" (Barbarita, personal communication, Salinas, October 2018). This networking has become a key element of CONAMUNE's actions, which weave together spheres with apparently antagonistic interests such as NGOs and community members, state agents and social leaders. This logic of working in a network promoted by CONAMUNE has not only involved taking actions in multiple scenarios but establishing long-term strategic alliances with various actors: researchers, local intellectuals and teachers, community leaders, social organizations, state agents, NGOs. The unifying nucleus of this logic of networking (which is an extension of the cultural practice of collective work in *mingas*) fostered by CONAMUNE is the notion of ancestral territory. Thus, the Ancestral Territory and the *Cochita amorosa* are fundamental aspects of the ethnic-territorial project in defense of dignified life (Escobar 2014) of Afrodescendants endorsed by CONAMUNE.

5.2 The Ancestral Territory from a Gender, Diasporic and Spiritual Perspective

CONAMUNE-Carchi and -Imbabura are the umbrella organizations that articulate and "open up the path of dialogue and negotiation with the NGOs and the state" (Barbarita, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019). They are constituted by grassroots organizations, some of them with legal status (*personería jurídica*) in the eyes of the state and some of them without it. Gotitas de Esperanza (Mascarilla community), Asociación de Mujeres Nuevos Horizontes (La Concepción), Asociación de Mujeres Amistad (Estación Carchi), Inmaculada Concepción (La Concepción), Luz y Vida (Chamanal), María del Carmen (Mascarilla), among others in Carchi, along with Imbabura province's Grupo Amas de Casa Nuevos Horizontes (Ibarra/El Chota), Grupo Santa María de Guallupe (Guallupe) and Juantas de Agua de Guallupe (Guallupe), together constitute CONAMUNE. Some of them are no longer part of CONAMUNE, as they have the autonomy to decide if they belong or not to the umbrella organization. All of them have diverse goals and strategies to advance their projects. For example, Grupo Amas de Casa is one of the first social organizations of Afro women in El Chota community. They had been part of CONAMUNE, at least they were part of the project *Consolidación de Liderazgos* (2006-2009), but now they are part of FECONIC (Mercedes, personal communication, El Chota, March 2019). One of the leaders is Mercedes Acosta who was coordinator of CONAMUNE-Imbabura at its foundation along with Marianita Minda and Matilde Méndez. Some of their members were part of the Legión de María religious organization and then of Pastoral Afro. This has marked their collective actions which have been focused on organizing the International Women's Day celebrations, promoting Afro mass, commemorating CONAMUNE's anniversary in September, and Family Day (Mercedes, personal communication, El Chota, March 2019). The members of Asociación María del Carmen were also members of Legión de María. Indeed, many Afro women leaders initiated their experiences of social organization and their political consciousness as part of Catholic organizations (Ofelita, personal communication, Quito, October 2018; Mercedes, personal communication, El Chota, March 2019; Anita, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019; Barbarita, personal communication, Dos Acequias, January 2019;

Olguita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). As Barbarita would say, the *cantoras* (singers) of *Salves* at mass, *velorios* (wakes) and Easter are the first social organization of Afro women in the Chota-Mira Valley (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018; Mercedes, personal communication, El Chota, March 2019).

As stated above, the grassroots organizations that make up CONAMUNE are diverse and dynamic but CONAMUNE's political agenda guides them and unifies their objectives, all of which focus on women's rights, education, gender violence, health and sexual reproduction, racial discrimination and economic and productive rights (Guía de mujeres y organizaciones de mujeres afrodescendientes de la region Andina 2010; CONAMUNE political agenda 2017-2021). Although all these organizations have experiences with economic projects such as bakeries, fruit tree planting, tourism projects and community inns, and local community banks, all funded by diverse NGOs or state programs, it is the macro projects such as Consolidación de Liderazgos or the Gender Violence project that have allowed them to mobilize joint actions to advance their objectives in their communities and establish a common political discourse. In this context, configured by an archipelago of grassroots organizations, the project of Ancestral Territory started among Black women.

CONAMUNE leaders have played a key role in producing, reproducing and mobilizing discursive frameworks (Benford and Snow 2002) and narratives about the Ancestral Territory based on ancestrality, collective memory and spirituality from a gender perspective. "From ETOVA and the beginnings of CONAMUNE, we have been thinking about rights with a perspective rooted in the territory" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). While CONAMUNE members and projects have been focused on the idea of territory as space of political actions and cultural practices, since the Gender Violence project, they have been developing a project of Ancestral Territory as a political and cultural landscape linked to broader regional diasporic communities (Gilroy 1993; Laó-Montes 2010) and collective land tenure, as a strategy to strengthen their struggles over land rights.

This territorial political project emerged out of the Gender Violence project. From a deep reflection on their existence as Black women, organized, fighters, maroons and capable of transforming gender inequalities, members of CONAMUNE-Carchi, -Imbabura and -Pichincha began to structure a project of freedom and equality. It is materialized in each political action of members of CONAMUNE, who in their struggles for social justice, gender equality and against racial discrimination, seek to transform the *status quo* from the margins and from the center of political power.

> We needed to enter the belly of the beast. As Juan García told me when I ran as a candidate for municipal councillor, be careful because you will be in the belly of the beast. But after that experience and what was achieved, I realize that many other things can be done from the margins (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, March 2019).

CONAMUNE's actions have been focused on opening paths for dialogue with the institutions, on opening spaces for action within the instances of power that manage economic and political resources. This strategy of thinking in a network allows them to deploy multi-sited actions where the *Cochita amorosa* becomes an essential practice of teaching and encouraging the love for the territory transmitted by the ancestors, and of Afro spirituality. Hence, Black women of the northern Ecuadorian highlands are thinking of the Ancestral Territory from a spiritual connection with the ancestors.

> It is spirituality that unites the duality of the soul and the body, connects men and women with the earth, it is the articulating arm, the dorsal fin to maintain balance and survive in this diaspora. They are the ancestors who are always present, who are the guide and the engine, they are the ones who orient us for the dialogues and make us resilient, from them we learned to assimilate and draw strength from our pain (Barbarita, conference, La Concepción, June 2020).

The Ancestral Territory from the perspective of the women of CONAMUNE is connected to and part of broader African diasporic communities and identities in the Americas, which share a memory of crossing the Atlantic (Gilroy 1993) and the memory

of the plantations (Glissant 1997; Hall 1991). From a diaspora perspective, the Ecuadorian La Bomba is linked to the Esmeraldas *marimba*, forming part of the Black Pacific, a geo-conceptual space that Feldman proposed, building on Gilroy's Black Atlantic (Feldman 2005; Lara and Ruggiero 2016). For example, for Barbarita and CONAMUNE members, La Bomba is a key element of the Ancestral Territory and the *Cochita amorosa,* and it is also connected by the name and meaning to the Puerto Rican *bomba*. In addition, the typical dresses of the women of the Chota-Mira Valley, with their pleated skirts, their *anaguas* and blouses, resonate with Garifuna clothing from Honduras (Barbarita personal communication, Salinas, July 2018; Fernanda, personal communication, La Concepción, November 2018). This diasporic and ancestral vision is central to the idea, experience and coexistence of the Ancestral Territory from which CONAMUNE members are challenging the narrow vision of the nation-state by reconfiguring notions of belonging and territory (Dixon and Burdick 2012).

> We are not accepted as a people, although we existed before the nation state, and the non-acceptance is tangible because these profound inequities exist. From the perspective of the Ancestral Territory we are not disconnected and despite the limits that they imposed on us [from the nation-state], there is a connection with all ancestral territories such as that of San Lorenzo. When we geo-reference the territory, it is not just as far as Lita, our proposal is that it follows the Mira River, crossing Esmeraldas, going to Tumaco, Colombia and finding the route of our ancestors. All of this is spirituality (Barbarita, conference, La Concepción, June 2020).

The Ancestral Territory project seeks to erase the provincial boundary that separates Imbabura and Carchi, as well as the national one that separates Ecuador and Colombia. The Chota-Mira River, which has been the mark imposed by the state to delimit the two provinces, is for the Afrodescendant communities of the Chota-Mira Valley life itself, the umbilical cord. "The river was the guide that led the maroons. The river does not divide us, it unites us. It forms part of our knowledge, it is life itself, it gives us firewood and food" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). This territorial political project resonates with the relational, dynamic and

rhizomatic identities of the Afrodescendants as argued by Glissant (1997), through which one can understand the complex and diverse processes of formation and reconfiguration of Black identity within cultural and historical narratives of belonging to African diaspora communities in relation not to Africa per se (Feldman 2005), but to the Ancestral Territory imagined and created in the Afro-Ecuadorian diaspora (Balanzategui 2017).

The Ancestral Territory fostered by CONAMUNE-Carchi is thought of as a way to generate alternatives of local development, fighting against gender inequality so that men, women and the new generations can coexist in the territory, without necessarily migrating to the city. The Ancestral Territory is promoted by the women of CONAMUNE as a space for coexistence and sustenance: "we have not stood idly by, as teachers concerned with the young people who leave, who graduate in the morning and in the afternoon they leave without looking back. We have tried to make them fall in love with the territory" (Olguita, meeting, Salinas, August 2018). It is a feminist proposal that seeks equal conditions for possible futures. In turn, it is an intercultural project that is fostering a deep Afro-Indigenous relation within a mestizo culture. "We think of the territory considering the other. To get to know each other, and that the other knows us, the Awa, Afro and mestizo culture…" (Barbarita, public speech, Quito, February 2019).

5.2.1 The GADs Network: Promoting the Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi

This is how the idea of forming a network with all the local authorities emerged: "since we live far from the central institutions of the state [Quito], we decided to approach the local GADs" (Barbarita, personal communication, Mira, February 2019). The Network of Decentralized Autonomous Governments of the Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi embraces the political agendas of the three major social organizations of the Chota-Mira Valley: CONAMUNE, the Afro-Ecuadorian Youth network and FECONIC (Plan estratégico de la Red de GADs 2016).

The GADs network is the result of a dialogue space created and promoted by CONAMUNE since 2013. "We were always talking about that, about the Ancestral Territory from a gender perspective, and Don Raúl gave it shape and formed the network

of GADs" (Olguita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). The Ancestral Territory is a political proposal that is born out of the Afro-Ecuadorian organizing process, from a history of fighting for the land and struggles against racial inequality in the Chota-Mira Valley (Benedicto, personal communication, El Chota, February 2019). However, the Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi fostered by the GADs network and CONAMUNE is also the result of a particular historical and political moment in the contemporary history of Ecuador, the Citizens' Revolution promoted by President Rafael Correa (2007-2017). In the literature on Afro social movements and the state in contemporary Ecuador, some authors have highlighted corporatism and co-optation of social organizations and their leaders as a form of political engagement with the multicultural state (de la Torre and Antón Sánchez 2012; Rahier 2012; Antón Sánchez 2018). However, this political period of Afro in/exclusion also opened spaces for dialogue through the promulgation of public policies in search of the constitution of a multinational and intercultural state. "African descendant peoples and concerns are not only made visible, but, more significantly, racism and discrimination are named, individual and collective rights are proffered, and equality and social inclusion are assumed as the central axis of the state" (Walsh 2012, 16). Still, we can ask in what ways do these legal advances go beyond liberal notions of equality and hierarchy that assume racism could be overcome through inclusion – or what Laó-Montes (2010, 310), building on Hale's idea of the *indio permitido* (2002), calls *negro escogido* or *afrodescendiente civilicado*. It would be worthwhile to think beyond the binary logic underlying the in/exclusion debate of Afrodescendants in the multicultural state (Hooker 2007) that leaves out of the analysis the "struggles of existence" (Walsh 2012, 32) and focus on Afro women's organizations, specifically CONAMUNE members who were and still are navigating these legal frameworks, politics of inclusion and political opportunities to advance their collective goals and challenge the racist and exclusionary state.

> The GADs network is due to individuals like Barbarita, who has more
> than 30 years in the organizational process. It is indebted to the dreams of
> Raúl Maldonado, it arises from a process and people who were forged in
> the social struggle. All these actors got together in an electoral political

scene and began to make people fall in love with this territorial idea, no longer just the individual actions that used to prevail (Iván, personal communication, Quito, June 2018).

CONAMUNE's political practice of weaving together (*hilando fino*) different groups and initiatives and working in a network is clearly reflected in the GADs network project and the Ancestral Territory they promote, which is born and continues to be reconfigured from the simultaneous action of the women of CONAMUNE operating in different political spheres by making alliances with NGOs, state institutions including municipalities and *juntas parroquiales* and social leaders, land owners, researchers and university authorities (see the next chapter on the Garden of Memory). CONAMUNE-Carchi as a social organization is articulated around emergent debates related to public policies and laws. They are not only thinking and reacting in relation to public policies, but also drafting and promoting them. This is illustrated not only by the project "Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi: Collective Construction of Public Policy" but also municipal ordinances such as Mira: Intercultural Canton, Protection of Rights, and Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy and Premature Common-Law Unions[27], which were promoted by the joint work by members of CONAMUNE-Carchi, Imbabura and Pichincha as part of NGOs, municipal government and the GADs network all at the same time.

As CONAMUNE mandates, and as many actors involved used to say during public and private meetings, the network of GADs and the project of the Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi represent new momentum in the struggle for the recognition of the Afrodescendant people in Ecuador with a strong gender perspective. As Raúl Maldonado, the first president of the GADs network put it, "it was them, those maroon women [*cimarronas*], warriors who gave birth to this project of life that is the territory, which is not only for the Afro but for the mestizo, the Indigenous person, too" (Raúl, public speech, Salinas, August 2018). The GADs network

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[27] An intersectional perspective of race, gender, generation and culture shaped the elaboration of these municipal ordinances which aim to encompass the multiple cultural and racial realities of Mira *cantón*.

has four central axes which are: access to land and territory; water for human consumption and better distribution of irrigation water; production, commercialization and generation of employment; and reduction of inequities from a gender and generational approach (Plan estratégico de la Red de GADs 2016; Iván, personal communication, Quito, June 2018).

The problem of control over and unequal distribution of resources such as land, water, access to education and employment is linked to gender inequalities in the Chota-Mira Valley. "Women are over-represented in the poorest groups, they receive less support than men for productive activities and it is more difficult for them to access credit and technical assistance, which makes them less productive" (Plan estratégico de la Red de GADs 2016, 19). Thus, in this territorial project, CONAMUNE articulates racial and gender-based claims to rural spaces as part of their strategy to gain recognition and amplify their struggles for racial and social justice. Since the foundation of the GADs network, the members organized themselves in *mesas de trabajo* (working groups) that are linked to the four central axes mentioned above. These *mesas* are divided into topics or working areas: health, nutrition and food sovereignty; culture and heritage; access to land and production; and Ethnoeducation.

During my fieldwork, I had many opportunities to attend these meetings and observed that all of them were interwoven with two principles that drive this territorial political project: the revitalization of Black identity in all the Afro communities that constitute the Ancestral Territory and the collective construction of the Ancestral Territory as a space of production, peace-building and intercultural coexistence (Iván, personal communication, Quito, June 2018). The gender perspective is central to all *mesas de trabajo*, where equal opportunities between men and women for access to land, water, productive projects and political participation are the driving forces. "The territory is the key and priority element to talk about women's rights, health, employment and productivity, children's rights, nutrition and food sovereignty" (Iván, public speech/meeting, Mascarilla, October 2018). For example, the health and nutrition *mesa* has as its main topic research on drepanositosis, a common disease in the Chota-Mira Valley that has not been treated as an important public health issue. The debates in this

mesa aim to create public policies that allow single mothers, care givers and elderly people to receive financial support for medical treatment and care. For these meetings they invite state agents from the Public Health ministry as well as social leaders and organizations to think and work together in the drafting of public policies, seeking allies, possible funding and the legal framework that could support their actions and claims. Also this *mesa* and the discussions that take place in it are linked to the axis of production and employment, because "many products rich in nutrients are produced in the territory, but they do not remain here" (Iván, personal communication, Quito, June 2018).

A diasporic perspective is also a key aspect that shapes the project of the Ancestral Territory and the dynamic of its *mesas de trabajo*. For example, as part of the culture and heritage *mesa*, members of the Afro-Ecuadorian Youth network, CONAMUNE-Carchi and Imbabura, FECONIC, the Network of *gestores culturales* (cultural managers) NGOs, and leaders of the GADs network worked together during 2018 and 2019 in a project called Patrimonialización de La Bomba, to declare La Bomba – as a drum, a music and dance genre, a rhythm, and a socio-musical event (Lara and Ruggiero 2016) – as an official element of national cultural heritage. In this regard, CONAMUNE and members of the GADs network held private meetings among their members: Barbarita for CONAMUNE, Iván Pabón as an Afro teacher and local intellectual, Iván Lara as president of GADs network, Jorge as a member of Humberto Padilla Association (who had been leading the process since 2014 by himself), Plutarco Viveros as president of the *red de gestores culturales del territorio*, and myself as a researcher. A recurrent debate during these meetings was about autonomy, identity and Afro knowledge production in the process of claiming the *Bomba* as Afro-Ecuadorian cultural heritage.

At the same time, a team comprised of professors and researchers of UPEC (Universidad Politécnica Experimental del Norte-Ibarra) was advancing a research project on La Bomba in order to build a case for the declaration of this cultural manifestation as cultural heritage. This university project was being advanced in parallel and without the consent of local leaders. In this context, the members of the culture and heritage *mesa* decided to make visible their grassroots process and demanded a meeting

with the authorities of the National Institute of Cultural Heritage in Quito as well as with the local authorities of the five cantons of the Ancestral Territory. During these processes of negotiation with different state agents and university authorities, the Afro youth network, CONAMUNE, the GADs network, allied researchers and FECONIC not only represented themselves as a unified and well prepared social movement but also treated it as an opportunity to bring social leaders together in alignment by reinforcing a persuasive narrative of La Bomba as cultural expression that evokes the cosmovision of the Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi as part of the African diaspora in Ecuador. Thus, they succeeded in meeting with national authorities in August 2018 in Quito, who weeks later came to La Concepción community to follow up on the process started by the social organization. In addition, after meetings with local authorities, they managed to obtain funding from the municipality of Mira. In January 2019, in an official public ceremony, the mayor of Mira, Walter Villegas, together with the councillors (including Iván and Barbarita) made it official and allocated resources to advance the process of patrimonialization of the *Bomba*. This project is linked to the Garden of Memory Martina Carrillo which has been advanced by CONAMUNE-Carchi since 2014. That project involves intersecting processes of claiming a cemetery as part of the African diaspora in Ecuador, disputes over land, and engagement of cultural heritage policies as well as a strong process of negotiation between state agents, researchers, local leaders and community members (see next chapter).

The Ancestral Territory is comprised by two provinces (Carchi and Imbabura), five municipalities (Mira, Bolivar, Urcuqui, Ibarra, and Pimanpiro) and 11 *juntas parroquiales*, where mestizos are those who occupy and share administration of political power. One afternoon in El Chota community, after a meeting about the tourist ventures of women's groups such as the Aroma Caliente from Juncal community and Hospedería Doña Evita in El Chota, Barbarita, Iván, Benedicto and Doña Evita discussed the ancestral territory, the political-administrative division and local authorities. Over lunch, they were analyzing the racialized cartography of the Chota-Mira Valley and its discrepancies. They problematized the situation faced by El Chota community that is part of the Ambuquí parish, highlighting that despite the fact that most of the surrounding communities were Afro, the political power of the parish (*cabecera parroquial*) was

mestizo and did not represent them. Thus, they pointed out the need to promote Afro candidates for the political positions of the local state and join efforts to consolidate the project of ancestral territory. While some of these leaders were not part of the GADs network, in these kind of meetings I could observe the polyphony with which the discourse on Ancestral Territory was being constructed, as well as see how leaders were building a common discourse through which they could strengthen political negotiation with local authorities about the autonomous Ancestral Territory and the GADs network.

In the same vein, La Concepción parish is also an illustrative case of racialized cartographies and tension between state construction of territories as naturally bounded and fixed (Alonso 1994; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2005), as part of its project of legibility (Scott 1998), and subaltern narratives and practices of territorialisation (Escobar 2008; Manzanal 2007). La Concepción parish is part of the periphery of the administrative power that is located at the Mira municipality, mostly administered by mestizos. However, since the 1990s, leaders from La Concepción and Mascarilla communities such as Don Guilo, Edmundo, Gilberto Tadeo, Papá Salomón have struggled to gain spaces of power, by achieving a seat in the municipality during the 1990s. Although, as they themselves commented, "we did not administer economic resources", they managed to influence and advocate for the improvement of the communities of La Concepción parish, by making possible some basic services such as lighting, paving the streets and arrangements for the cemetery (Gilba, personal communication, La Concepción, November 2018; Edmundo, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018). Later, in the political context of the Citizens' Revolution, actors such as Plutarcos Viveros and Iván Lara, Ximena Padilla and Barbarita Lara, held positions as political lieutenant and municipal councillors. Currently, Renan Tadeo (FECONIC member) and Nelson Folleco, both from La Concepción community, are municipal councillors in Mira.

In this context of racialized cartography of power (Restrepo 2006) marked by a mestizo hegemonic politics (Walsh 2012), CONAMUNE and other members of the GADs network have opened up paths of negotiation based on *mesas de trabajo* among different political leaders to build consent around the economic, racial, gender, and

political inequalities and cultural diversity that make up the ancestral territory. "Not all of the political authorities understand where we are trying to go with the territorial project, and we have created opportunities to get together with them to explain what are the key points related to the territory" (Iván, conference, Quito, June 2018). Hence, the *mesas de trabajo* also represent a dispute over spaces of power that are the result of dialogue among different social and political leaders, state agents and NGOs.

Another action deployed by CONAMUNE and members of the network of GADs as part of the land and production *mesa* has been the proposal to create the National Land Fund – contemplated in the 2014 Land Law – and the elaboration of the map of the ancestral territory. Evidence of the existing historical debt of the Ecuadorian state with the Afrodescendant population is seen in the wide range of legal frameworks that protect and recognize the Afro people and Indigenous nationalities but that do not have the economic resources to mobilize them, that do not have a budget as part of public spending. Given this reality, CONAMUNE and the GADs network, with the technical and financial support of SIPAE, the research system on agrarian issues in Ecuador, and two NGOs (FEPP Social Group and *Ayuda en Acción)* have been carrying out joint and complementary strategies.

For instance, they petitioned national President Lenín Moreno to create the regulation to operationalize the land law and for the creation of a national land fund for the purchase of land by peasants and the analysis of the structure of land tenure in Mira *cantón* (Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory Imbabura and Carchi 2018). To develop this proposal, meetings were held between community leaders and local authorities in order to study land law and write the letter to be delivered to the president of the republic. During these meetings, the political landscape and the most appropriate time to deliver the letter were analyzed. The letter was delivered to the president at an event in Manta on July 12. No responses were obtained and in March 2019, Barbarita, Iván, Raúl Maldonado, Melisa, I and peasant leaders from Urcuqui, went in commission to a meeting at the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture and Fishing in Quito. In this meeting, they spoke with the vice minister and three demands were presented: that access to the land should belong to whoever lives and works it, that a diagnosis be made

of the land available in the five cantons that make up the Ancestral Territory, and that a National Land Fund be established with 1% of the national budget. After listening, the vice minister reaffirmed that there were no resources to carry out such activities but that he would follow up on the letter delivered to the president. Beyond the unproductive words of the vice minister, this type of meeting shows the vitality and strength that the GADS network, CONAMUNE and its territorial proposal have been establishing as a political discourse of negotiation with national authorities but also as a territorial ethnic-racial project at the local level.

Another complementary strategy to the previous one advanced by CONAMUNE and the GADs network has been the coordination of the first meeting of women of the ancestral territories and the subsequent elaboration of the map of the Ancestral Territory (Territorio ancestral Afroecuatoriano Imbabura y Carchi 2018). Since 2013, there have been a series of meetings and encounters between Indigenous and Afrodescendant women's organizations funded by two NGOs: German cooperation and GIZ. These meetings are related to the anti-violence work carried out by CONAMUNE with the support of these two organizations. Arising from that, an intercultural dialogue between organized women began and the First Encounter of Women from the Afro-Ecuadorian and Cayambe Ancestral Territories organized by the GADs network in July 2018 took place, bringing together Afro and Indigenous women from the northern highlands.

From these meetings, CONAMUNE members were inspired to work on their territorial map. As Barbarita put it, the Indigenous women "showed us their map, that led to the Chota River, here! And I, what?!! And us [Afros], where are we?? This inspired us to take action to build and define our Ancestral Territory" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018). Thus, in alliance with the GADs network, CONAMUNE members promoted and started a series of workshops called "awareness about our ancestral territory" led by anthropologist Jhon Antón and geographer Marcela Alvarado, in March 2018. During these workshops, they identified ancestrality, spirituality, and the river as central axes of the territory along with the history of the *haciendas* and memories of slavery. A second phase of these workshops began in July 2018 with the dissemination of the results of the workshops and the

digitization of the cultural and participatory map that had been created. One of the elements that makes this mapping project so special is the convergence and divergence of the hegemonic narrative about the Ancestral Territory of the Chota Valley, Salinas and La Concepción promoted since the 1990s by FECONIC and the narrative about the Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi that is currently promoted and built by CONAMUNE and the GADs network. From this second phase, I was able to participate in the workshops on the geo-referencing of the map in October led by Marcela Alvarado and then follow up on subsequent meetings, through which this continuous and dynamic process of the Ancestral Territory is changing and transforming.

Taking as a reference point the proposal of the Ancestral Territory promoted by the Cayambe Indigenous women, who use language and toponymy as key elements to define their territorial proposal, the women of CONAMUNE propose the *cambeo* and the route of the ancestors along the river as criteria. These criteria of displacement and mobile territoriality, based on economic practices dynamized by constant human mobility, resonate with African diasporic identities that are not fixed, but fluid, dynamic and relational (Glissant 1997).

> To conceptualize the territory from the standpoint of CONAMUNE, from the angle of women, is to think about it from the diaspora that arrived in this land and got organized to live, to fight for the land and freedom.... From the *Cochita amorosa* we propose to erase borders and strengthen resilience, to no longer be targets of violence, to be on the border [*ser fronterizas*], looking for spaces within which we are able to work. We are conceptualizing and mapping the territory – the first map is the one made by FECONIC and it is everywhere, the one made by Iván Pabón. But since 2018, we are rethinking it. The territory is comprised of African and Spanish surnames, the routes of the ancestors, of the maroons, Afro and mestizo and Indigenous communities, the history of the *haciendas* (Barbarita, public speech, Salinas, February 2019).

A relevant aspect that has been recurrent in the discourse of some women from CONAMUNE-Carchi and -Imbabura during some meetings about the territory and the map is its potentiality as a pain-healing practice. While pointing out the *haciendas* near to the Chota community, Mercedes Acosta, a member of CONAMUNE-Imbabura, told us how the women of her family had fought for these lands. "In this land there is sweat and tears of the women of my family" (Mercedes, workshop, Salinas, October 2018). Barbarita constantly comments that one of the principles that is driving various CONAMUNE projects such as the Garden of Memory Martina Carrillo and the ancestral ethnobotanical knowledge in the territory is the healing potential of themselves as women, as well as of the land. "Here in La Concepción there is a lot of pain, the 300 lashes that Martina Carrillo received, all that blood is still here, and we have to heal that" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, February 2018). This healing process is evoked in the *Cochita amorosa* at the beginning of each encounter, hence the importance of the soil and water, of the flowers and La Bomba that always comprise it. As Iliana explained when starting a *Cochita amorosa* in the workshop of the Archaeological Route of the African Diaspora, advanced by CONAMUNE-Carchi and archaeologist Daniela Balanzategui,

> The fresh water represents Oshun who governs the waters, also the fresh water unites our territory. The flowers represent color and life, people say that here there is no life, that is an arid valley and does not breed anything but here we are, with the earth and the fire that represents the power of us, La Bomba and its percussion, the power of vibration (Iliana, ceremony, Salinas, February 2019).

The healing process promoted by CONAMUNE and its political practice of *Cochita amorosa* is driving the Ancestral Territory project, which is anchored in Black women as political subjects and thinkers who are producing and mobilizing alternative practices of liberation (Hernández Reyes 2019). These practices are linked to land struggles, healing processes and spirituality, and notions of territory and belonging that are fostering an Afro women's epistemology. In this Afro women's epistemology that validates itself, CONAMUNE places women at the center of their thought and political

action, as the articulating and unifying subject of the ancestrality and spiritual practices of the territory. CONAMUNE members represent and recognize themselves as subjects that mobilize, produce and circulate material goods, collective memories of resistance and struggle as part of their political practice of breaking with the imposed silence (Hartman and Wilderson III 2006).

For CONAMUNE-Carchi, working in a network and in working groups is a way to "push the hulk that is the state". They are not waiting around for political changes to occur, they decided to be part of the state, navigate it as teachers, municipal councillors, administrative workers, and from social organizations as a venue to effect changes in the state. Territory from the perspective of Black women is conceptualized from a gender and diasporic perspective, where spirituality and ancestry intertwined with narratives and experiences of maroonage are formulated in terms of racial political project and discourse articulated by Afrodescendant subjects and organizations in Ecuador. This project illustrates the power of Black mobilizations that are intersectional (Perry 2012, 2016) and invigorated by spirituality and organized around rural territories (Dixon and Burdinck 2012). Indeed, the territorial political project fostered by CONAMUNE and its relation to Black identity is linked to historical and contemporary Afro-Ecuadorian struggles for social and political equity based on struggles for land and cultural recognition.

5.3   Naming the Ancestral Territory: Conflicting Narratives of the Cultural and Historical Landscape of the Chota-Mira Valley

How are we [Afro women] thinking about the territory? The territory has been named by those who have political power, in the 1960s it was called the Valley of the Coangue, of fever, malignant, or of the last ring of hell. Then it was called by the geographical references of the Chota-Mira River that crosses it, the Chota Valley or the Mira river basin (a river that we share with Colombia), the upper and the lower Mira basin. It has also been called Ancestral Territory Chota, La Concepción and Salinas, and Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi. These last two

names have been given by us, by the organizations that are part of the territory (Barbarita, conference, Piquiucho, August 2018).

This quote is part of a speech that Barbarita gave, entitled "How is CONAMUNE conceptualizing the territory?" It was part of a panel on "Strategies for the Approval of the Afrodescendant Ancestral Territory in the Chota Valley" in which Iván Lara and Jhon Antón also participated, as part of the conference "Segundo seminario internacional: tierra, territorio y comunidades" (Second international seminar: land, territory and communities). During this conference, various narratives about the ancestral territory, and how it has been named by different umbrella social organizations of the territory, were circulated[28]. After the various interventions by allies of the GADs network that support the current proposal for the Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi, I was able to talk to Papá Salomón, president and founder of FECONIC. At several moments addressing not only me but several other participants, he stressed that the territorial proposal was not something new, that it was a project promoted since 1997 by FECONIC. In turn, talking to members of the Afro Youth Network, I was able to understand the tensions between some members of this organization and the two main umbrella organizations and their speeches as well as their positions regarding the territorial project: "we young people need sources of employment and production to be able to make a life in the territory" (Renato, personal communication, Piquiucho, August 2018). This conference opened up a conflicting landscape, in which Barbarita tried at every moment of her interventions to open spaces for dialogue with Papá Salomón, por example, by including him in the speech, by mentioning him or even by inviting him to say a few words, showing that the project of Ancestral Territory is a space of disputes among social organizations in the Chota-Mira Valley.

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[28] It is worth noting that this conference began with the ceremony of the *Cochita amorosa*, led by Ofelita who, on a yellow cloak and surrounded by a circle of pink flowers, explained and showed all the different plants that make up the Ancestral Territory and that are used by healers and midwives since the time of slavery. Once again this ratified the role of the Black woman as an articulating subject of the spirituality, rituality and ethnobotanical knowledge of the Ancestral Territory.

"'Valle sangriendo', 'Valle del Coangue', 'Valle del Chota-Mira' or just 'Valle de los negros andinos' are the different names that this northern valley has received in recent history" (Coronel Feijóo 1991, 17). From below, the members of the communities of the Chota-Mira Valley call it the Chota Valley or just "el valle". Although this project was born as a renewed and political proposal of CONAMUNE through its dialogue with organized Indigenous women from Cayambe, certainly it is a historical project where various actors have been articulating it from different perspectives and social positions, including community leaders, social organization leaders, and local authorities. It is also related to the local land struggle that begin in the 1930s and 40s with a gradual process of disintegration of the *haciendas* in the area that created continuing transformations of land ownership, which intensified during the agrarian reform in the 1960s and 70s (Rodríguez 1994; Pabón 2007).

The notion of Ancestral Territory has been central to the Afro-Ecuadorian social organizations. It has been a cornerstone of their claims for political and cultural recognition since the 1970s (Walsh and García 2002). It is a strategy to reclaim the land that has been stolen from them and to reaffirm their identity shaped by memories of slavery, maroonage, and ancestrality (Walsh and García 2002). This has been particularly important to the Afro communities of the Ecuadorian Pacific in Esmeraldas province since the 1990s. The Confederación "Comarca Afro Ecuatoriana del Norte de Esmeraldas" (CANE) is an ethnic, political and territorial project in defense of ancestral territories created and promoted by Borbón community in Esmeraldas province (De la Torre 2012). It is:

> formed by the local *palenques* and other organizations of the Afro-Ecuadorian People, to achieve the human development to which we have a right, based on land tenure, administrative organization, ancestral management of our territories and the sustainable use of natural resources that exist there (Walsh and García 2002, 321).

This territorial project already had a marked diasporic perspective reflected in the idea that the limits of the region should be drawn in relation to the African and Black

blood spilled on the continent (Walsh and García 2002). The concepts of territory and identity associated with the terms of *comarca* and *palenque* are part of the process of re-creation and strengthening of the Black movement in Esmeraldas. However, this proposal was in dialogue with the proposal of the Chota-Mira Valley and the leader of FECONIC and the Familia Negra organization that led the social process at that time. Although it was not a concrete proposal like CANE's, at the end of the 1990s and early 2000s they were working on a proposal based on notions of ancestry and the collective rights of *Circunscripciones Territoriales* (territorial circumscriptions) established in the 1998 political constitution. During a conversation with Papá Salomón at his house in Mascarilla, about FENONIC, the land struggle in the Chota Valley and the Ancestral Territorial Project, he told me that since 1997, FECONIC has been carrying out research on the history of the territory and made a map of it in order to strengthen their territorial project. In this research they identified 38 communities: "in the territory, these communities share the same history, memories of our ancestors, how to forget what our ancestors went through and that tangible and intangible heritage that they left us" (Papá Salomón, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019).

As a communal political project, the Ancestral Territory is a terrain in dispute upon which confrontations and discrepancies among social leaders, community leaders and social organization members take place. An illustration of this point is in how members of CONAMUNE-Carchi usually explain in each meeting on land and territory the naming process of the Ancestral Territory produced and circulated by women. It was in the context of the project on Gender Violence. They were composing the final report to be delivered to the international agency that funded them. During this process, they began to problematize the idea of Ancestral Territory and the communities that were visible in the hegemonic discourse promoted by FECONIC since 1997.

> The name was Ancestral Territory of Chota, Salinas and La Concepción, but in a meeting with Señora Marianita, a female maroon *bien verraca* (courageous, outspoken) from Guallupe got up and said: 'and where are they leaving Guallupe?' So we added it: Ancestral Territory of the Chota, Salinas, La Concepción and Guallupe. And then Señora Isabel from Lita

said: 'and Lita? We are also part of the territory!' And that got very complicated and we decided to leave it Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi, but that is only in the political discourse, for negotiating. We must avoid the political discourses of discrepancy (Barbarita, public speech, Salinas, June 2018).

This discourse of Barbarita was recurrent and aimed to show and explain how the visibility/invisibility of the communities in the process of naming the territory began to be questioned by women. In turn, she was strengthening the role of CONAMUNE as an umbrella organization that articulates and links grassroots organizations and NGOs and the state (Barbarita, personal communication, Mascarilla, February 2019). As part of CONAMUNE's political maturing, its members have focused on establishing a *discurso negociador*, "it is only a political discourse". In meetings with state agents such as the one held with the vice minister of the MAG in March 2019, Barbarita introduced "the Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi, better known as the Chota Valley," as a political strategy in order to be heard by the state, framing her proposal within the hegemonic mestizo representation of the Afros from the highlands that is limited to the Chota Valley, as part of the racialized cartography imposed by the state. CONAMUNE is in a process of collecting various local narratives about the Ancestral Territory in order to establish a common discursive framework (Roseberry 1994; Mallon 1994). This negotiating discourse that CONAMUNE is circulating along with the network of GADs continues to generate conflicts between social organizations.

This issue of the Imbabura and Carchi territory encourages the divisions imposed on us and threatens the project of thinking about self-government, which is what leads us to see La Concepción, Salinas and Chota as key points in the formation of the territory in political and historical terms (Diego, personal communication, Quito, February 2019).

This discourse of Diego, a young leader of the youth network, is built in dialogue with the voice of Pepe Chalá, current *diputado* in the national congress, anthropologist and founder of the first organization of El Chota community *Familia Negra*, and active

member of FECONIC. On repeated occasions, such as political speeches in the Chota Valley or in meetings among researchers, he has indicated disagreement with the name of the Ancestral Territory "Imbabura and Carchi" because it obeys the "political-administrative division of the territory and says nothing about the cultural identity of the people who live in these communities" (Pepe Chalá, conversation, Mascarilla, July 2018).

The foundations of the discrepancies over naming the territory refer to the collective memories of the historical and cultural landscape: the history of the *hacienda* and slavery associated with La Concepción, for example, and narratives of maroonage and freedom associated with the communities of Chota and Juncal.

> The valley has been an invisibilized territory and suffers from poorly healed wounds produced by the colonial economic system... with the *haciendas* of Caldera, Piquiucho, Carpuela, Santiaguillo, La Concepción, Cuajara.... El Chota and Juncal are not from *haciendas*, they are from *cimarrones* (maroons), but in La Concepción is the genesis of the Black people (Barbarita, conference, Piquiucho, August 2018).

These historical narratives that weave together the past of slavery, the *hacienda* and the maroon have their origins in the 1970s and 80s when the Afro-Ecuadorian movement in Quito (Antón Sánchez 2007) began to consolidate with Afro intellectuals from Esmeraldas and the Valle del Chota. In these narratives, promoted mainly by Juan García, the ancestral is linked to memory giving life to the territory and with it to the Afro-Ecuadorian identity. Memory is embodied and embedded in the territory and becomes a means to revitalize identity, as Rappaport (1990) argues for the Colombian Andes case. In this sense, kinship and last names such as Lucumi, Carabalí, Congo and the history of the *haciendas* denote, on one hand, the violence of slavery and brutality of the master, and on the other, the strategies of resistance and political struggle of the enslaved (Barbarita, public speech, Salinas, February 2019).

These narratives of resistance and maroonage in a context of violence imposed first by the Jesuit *haciendas* and the colonial state (Colonel Feijóo 1991), and then by the

republican state, circulate among the members of the Youth Network. "We are a people that is created by people in resistance, those of Carpuela rebelled.... White-mestizos with their political power, from ink on paper, created a rupture of the Ancestral Territory by means of their territorial ordering" (Henry, personal communication, Carpuela, February 2019). From a position that seeks to revindicate and highlight the resistance, history and productivity of the communities of El Chota-Mira Valley, young leaders openly question the name proposed by CONAMUNE.

> For me it is the ancestral Afro-Ecuadorian Territory: Chota, Salinas, La Concepción and Guallupe. El Chota is a *palenque* community, it is a free space, Chota means having freedom in the context of slavery. La Concepción is a benchmark for slavery linked to the *hacienda*. In Salinas, salt was produced in interaction with the Indigenous people and economic autonomy was maintained.... From its founding, Guallupe has worked in mining (Iliana, personal communication, El Chota, February 2019).

The fact that naming the territory is central to CONAMUNE's political proposal provides insights into the negotiated and constructed process of building an African diaspora identity and the role of social leaders in articulating those narratives of imagined community (Anderson 1994). Thus, with this project of mapping and naming the territory proposed by CONAMUNE, more than 30 additional communities that had been made invisible in the 38 that made up the 1997 map were incorporated. Although these advances are recognized by many social leaders, the conflicts surrounding the Ancestral Territorial project as a political discourse is still ongoing.

Naming the Ancestral Territory as Chota, Salinas, La Concepción y Guallupe, or just Imbabura and Carchi, illustrates the local historical narratives and strategies that are deployed to assert rights over cultural, socio-economic, ecological, historical and political space (Lunch 2016). During this process of naming the territory, certain engagements and discourse are legitimized while delegitimating and invisibilizing others. For example, there is a strong narrative from members of La Concepción community of not belonging to "El Valle del Chota". These different perspectives and ways of conceptualizing the

territory, how to name it, and the number of communities that do or do not belong to it, is a discourse among members of the social organizations CONAMUNE, FECONIC, the Youth Network, and GADs network that seems in turn to make invisible and even marginalize local narratives associated with local identity markers of self and other.

The communal project of naming and mapping the Ancestral Territory sheds light on how Afro women's organizations and leaders are contesting the power of the state "to name, to create and print maps with state sanctioned labels" (Roseberry 1994, 361), by not just refusing and problematizing the official name but advancing and promoting their own territorial project grounded in the construction of alternative historical narratives of slavery, the Ecuadorian nation and resistance. However, in the context of a hegemonic process of domination, CONAMUNE articulates its territorial project and discourse within the "common material and meaningful framework for living through, talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by domination" (Roseberry 1994, 361).

While this chapter has focused on broader political processes of defining the Ancestral Territory through building networks and ongoing dialogues and negotiations, in the next chapter I reflect alongside Barbarita on a specific local project where territory and historical memory are brought together.

Chapter 6

6 Gendered Memories of the Past and Commemoration of Resistance: The Garden of Ancestral Memory Martina Carrillo[29]

> "The stories of our peoples, their acts of resistance to be different, do not start with us. Our current lives are inheritance of the lives of the men and women who preceded us, but also reflections of their acts of resistance, therefore, our duty is to know them and transmit them to the new generations so that they do not die, so they do not" (Abuelo Zenón, in Walsh and García Salázar, 2017: 21).

> A Rosita (1930-2003) y Eremita (1942-2003)

Sweet and loving, Rosita, Barbarita's mother-in-law, and Eremita, her older sister, always stopped by Barbarita's house to talk about their lives, but there was a specific day that Barbarita will never forget. It was noon. Eremita and Rosita were sitting at the kitchen table across from each other while Barbarita prepared lunch, the typical beans with rice, and they began to talk:

> … I have just come back from looking for a donkey in the tolas of Guayaquil. I was going around, going around, I followed the trail, it went to the old pantheon, I was scared going into the bush to get him out, said Rosita, to which Barbarita asked in a voice of wonder and curiosity: "Old Pantheon? Is it a real pantheon or is it just the name?" "It's really a pantheon! and there are still graves with crosses, and there are also engraved tombstones, but no one knows when they stopped burying people there", Eremita replied (personal communication to Barbarita 1997).

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[29] This case study is adapted from a chapter co-authored with Barbarita Lara, that will be published as part of the edited volume *Antropología y Arqueología Afro Latina*, edited by Daniela Balanzategui and Edizon León, to be published in Spanish in Ecuador in 2021. Some of the material drawn upon and cited in the analysis is based on conversations that Barbarita had with family and community members that pre-date my fieldwork in the Chota Valley.

The *Panteón Viejo* (old cemetery) has meaning and cultural-historical relevance in the Afrodescendant communities of the Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi provinces, and in particular in La Concepción community; it is central to the history of their communities and the everyday life experience of Black women. "When I came to live in La Concepción in 1997, the old Pantheon was always talked about as part of the community, a space for feeding animals, collecting firewood and hunting, a community space where people went to gather *churos*, *pitijallas* and *tunas*" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2019). The *Panteón Viejo* was not just a space that people used for daily subsistence but it was also a sacred place that people visited and passed by with respect and love because of the local historical narratives about the community ancestors buried there.

These narratives circulated constantly among the inhabitants of the community. While these stories have always been part of their oral history, knowledge kept in the memory of the elderly, it was not until 2006 that Barbarita Lara and Olga Maldonado, members of CONAMUNE-Carchi, began to see the cemetery with other eyes, listen with more attentive ears, and remember with their hearts the words of Rosita and Eremita about the *Panteón Viejo* and its graves with crosses and tombstones.

In honour of the Black women in the communities of the Chota-Mira Valley, this chapter analyzes the collective process of production and circulation of memory of slavery in La Concepción community, in highland Ecuador, led by CONAMUNE-Carchi. From a local, rural, and Afro-Ecuadorian highland context we examine how the historical memory, rituality and spirituality of Afrodescendant people is articulated and plays a central role in the processes of reformation and mobilization of African diasporic political identities in Ecuador and in shaping an imagined political community in the northern highlands.

The *Panteón Viejo* is a case study that allows us to reflect on memory as praxis in an African diasporic context. These reflections emerged from the dialogues between Barbarita and other women of CONAMUNE, and myself in La Concepción during my fieldwork. These conversations in *Cochita amorosa* became processes of exchanging

voices and knowledge, of secrets and personal stories, of healing of our family histories and of our bodies and souls. Hence, our lives converged, and our collaborative projects were born.

The political actions of Barbarita as leader of CONAMUNE encompass the whole Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi (the Chota Valley), in the northern highlands of Ecuador. A multiplicity of voices of Black women, connected by words and actions, by memory and spirituality, are combined in this chapter. Voices that were intertwined in different times and spaces, in family and academic meetings, in moments of pain and joy, voices that were articulated in La Concepción and continue to be intertwined with each other through struggles and actions to achieve social justice and political and economic equality for the sons and daughters of the African diaspora in the Americas.

In this chapter, I examine historical memory and political actions around the *Panteón Viejo* as an Afro-Ecuadorian territorial political project that simultaneously opens up spaces for intercultural dialogues and resistance to practices of cultural homogenization, invisibility and historical injustice. Hence, I explore how Afro-Ecuadorian communities are constructing the memory of slavery, through a process of *local memorialization*, which consists of bringing the slave past into the present, by preserving and commemorating the memory of collective struggles and agency of their ancestors. I will show how the process of memorialization, focused on the revalorization of a former slave woman (Martina Carrillo) and on collective processes of healing, forms part of the political practices of CONAMUNE's members, in particular CONAMUNE-Carchi, to challenge state exclusionary and racist political projects.

6.1   Collective Process of Recovering the Historical Memory of the Panteón Viejo

The communities of La Concepción parish are located in the Chota-Mira Valley in the provinces of Imbabura and Carchi, in the Afro-Ecuadorian Ancestral Territory in the northern highlands of Ecuador. The parish is made up of sixteen communities with a majority of Afrodescendant population and two communities with a majority of mestizo

population. La Concepción community is the political-administrative center of the parish and it was also the center of the Jesuit *hacienda* of the same name, administered by the Jesuits from the 1600s until their expulsion in 1776 (Coronel Feijóo 1991). These communities have been interconnected since colonial times by kinship, economic practices and political relationships. The Afro populations of this region were involuntarily transported by the Jesuits to work in their sugarcane plantations in the seventeenth century. Hence, the past and the present of these communities are marked by the expansion of the sugarcane political economy and the productive practices, social relations and land tenure that grew up around the *hacienda*.

The interest in recovering the historical memory of the *Panteón Viejo* emerged out of the creation of La Escuela de la Tradición Oral, La Voz de los Ancestros (ETOVA, the School of Oral Tradition, the Voice of the Ancestors) as part of the Ethnoeducation process that Afro-Ecuadorian people have been carrying out for more than three decades. In 2005, at the launch of "Our History," the first Ethnoeducation textbook, at the Gran Colombia Theater in Ibarra, the Afro-Esmeraldeño anthropologist and intellectual Juan García Salazar urged the Afro-Ecuadorian teachers who were present to begin a collective process of compiling and writing the oral tradition of the Chota-Mira Valley. To do so, he proposed to create a school based on ancestrality and the principle of respect. The next year, on October 27, 2006, a group of Black women leaders from La Concepción parish met with Juan García Salazar and formed a collective group to investigate and compile the ancestral knowledge of the elderly. Thus, ETOVA was born.

The ETOVA is a space for reflection on the collective memory transmitted from the ancestors and safeguarded by the elderly. It is a community school "based on tradition and the elderly, those jealous guardians of memory" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, July 2019). The school is based on a process of collective learning and the principle of learning by doing that rejects the hyper-specialization of Western scientific culture (Bourdieu 2007) and fosters horizontal relationships that aim to create an environment of freedom and respect for one's own knowledge, and valuing and revitalizing Afro-Ecuadorian culture. It is a playful and autonomous, supportive and

liberating school that places at the center the knowledge held by the men and women of the African diaspora in Ecuador.

The school was founded with the active participation of Black women leaders, youth and elderly of La Concepción parish, such as María Elena Chalá, Hermencia Chalá, Carlota Chalá, Barbarita Lara, Olga Maldonado, Silvia Congo, Jacqueline Polo, Marcia Padilla, Frandila Suárez, Ofelita Lara and Candy Mosquera with Juan García Salazar, Mónica Márquez and Iván Pabón. This group of people is committed to develop collective memory based on central themes such as gastronomy, clothing, life stories, myths and legends and historical figures, among others, which continue to serve as guiding strands of research.

With this commitment and remembering the voices of Rosita and Eremita, Barbarita Lara and Olga Maldonado embarked on a tour of the *Panteón Viejo*. In this regard Barbarita comments:

> We went to the pantheon but it was a tangle of thorns, flycatchers, holy stick, white leaf, tunos, pitajayas, espadilla, coronaillas, especially many thorns, because they say that when a hawthorn grows on a grave it is because the person was a worker... and there were so many thorns we could not see anything. It was going to get dark and we were tired, we were about to leave when I decided to ask Martina: "Martina, give us a signal, we do not want to interfere for anything bad, we want to make sure this is respected and remembered," I said. I summoned her and when I finished saying this, I stumbled on a stone! It had a marked cross, I was almost standing on it! It was like a revelation! Seeing this, I thought there must be more graves, probably to the south because our ancestors had that spatial logic and I found it, I found their logic! There were more tombs to the south, north and east, the Southern Cross became visible, which guided them from Africa across the Atlantic! (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, September 2019).

From their encounter with this place of connection between the past and the present, between the spirituality of a people and their material culture, between this life and the afterlife, Barbarita with other members of CONAMUNE-Carchi, began to have long and respectful conversations with the elders about the *Panteón Viejo*.

> Yesterday we were in the old cemetery of La Concepción – Barbarita says – and looking around and around, there were still graves, and a wall with writings and crosses. Uncle Germán, do you remember someone who was buried there?
>
> Of course I remember – Uncle Germán answers in a firm and lucid voice – when they buried the mother of Don Juan José Espinoza de la Loma, I was about seven years old, I was born in the year of 1925, I remember that we accompanied them and I along with Pancha, my grandmother, with fear, with fear, we were walking, walking. You know the typical fear of the dead, because at that time the body was buried wrapped in a mat, on the same mat it was veiled and that made it scary. I also remember that they buried a man from La Convalecencia community, at that time it was called La Burrera, from there they brought him, the name I do not remember but he was called by his nickname, Trintareales (Barbarita and Germán, personal communication, 2006).

In the collective memory of La Concepción parish, the last burial that people remember took place in the *Panteón Viejo* was more than 80 years ago, at the beginning of the 1930s[30]. At that time, the elders comment, it was decided collectively to move the cemetery to a closer place and funeral rituals and burials at the *Panteón Viejo* ceased, giving way to a process of forgetting and remembering.

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[30] The death certificates that can be accessed at the local archives, which are located in *la casa parroquial* of the church in La Concepción community, date from the mid-1930s. Death certificates prior to that date were lost in a fire in the city of Ibarra (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2018).

From the narratives about and encounters with the *Panteón Viejo*, some members of the community and the CONAMUNE-Carchi, in particular Barbarita, began to understand history not as a past finished and isolated from the national context, but as a past that lives in and has consequences for the present and for the local and national future (Popular Memory Group 1982; Alonso 1988). For these community members, the past is a lived experience from which they give meaning to their daily practices.

> Thinking metaphorically in lines that fork, in paths that cross, that open and change, the past is the beginning of those lines, the present is children and the future is something unknown, those roads lead us to a dark world, but memory illuminates like a beacon those paths so we can reach out without difficulties towards the future (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, August 2019).

Following this interpretation of the past and the use of memory to illuminate or make sense of the present and future, memory is mobilized as a spiritual and political guide that provides the community with a basis on which to build a collective consciousness and sense of belonging (Cardoso 1983; Alonso 1988; Trouillot 1997).

For CONAMUNE-Carchi, memory is understood as "flowers, memories are like roses with their varieties of pretty colours, varieties that let us cultivate our identity and heal our bodies and our souls" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, March 2019). The collective process of recovering the memory of the *Panteón Viejo* is a way to commemorate and recognize the agency of ancestors, who fought for the survival of communities. In addition, it is part of the political actions of CONAMUNE-Carchi that seek "to keep alive the ancestral cultural values, that are still part of our experiences and our existence" (Barbarita, personal communication, 2018).

6.2   Memory of Struggle and Resistance: Processes of Negotiation

The *Panteón Viejo* is a cemetery of the African diaspora, which is presumed to have been used as a place of holy burial of the enslaved population in the eighteenth

century and continued to be used for such purposes until the early twentieth century (Balanzategui 2017). Archaeological studies of the sacred site showed 192 areas identified as burials "by the presence of rectangular or square depressions in the ground, with or without headstones… some of them with marks displaying Christian crosses, characters, and iconography that has been referred as part of a local tradition" (Balanzátegui 2017, 53-54).

The critical appropriation of the cemetery as a sacred site, as a historical, spiritual and material place, has been a continuous political and spiritual process that seeks to revitalize Afrodescendant identity in La Concepción. It has also been a part of CONAMUNE's organizational mandate to know and interpret their past, that allows them to act based on their own understanding of the place and contribution of Afrodescendant populations to the global and local historical processes (Rappaport 1990).

This process of self-knowledge, this process of reinterpreting the past *casa adentro* – from us and through us – aims to resignify the slave past, "healing our souls from that damage caused; there is much pain, much pain and it's been 500 years and a lot of ancestors that encourage us to talk since we have our own voices" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, September 2018). This local, collective, and ongoing process of recognizing their own voices, of speaking and of being heard, has led CONAMUNE's members to consolidate their collective claim for the recognition of this sacred site for the African descendant communities of La Concepción parish.

6.2.1 Processes of Negotiation and Conflicting Narratives of the Past

Historical memory and narratives about the local and regional past have been mobilized to create imagined communities. These narratives of the past are informed by different processes of negotiation, in which subjectivities are shaping and modeling, and by individual and collective representations rooted in historical experiences. In La Concepción community, different historical narratives co-exist. The *Panteón Viejo* as a narrative about the Afrodescendant past, as a rural and local political project, is a place of racialized memory (Balibar 2002; Gilroy 1993) impregnated by conflicting

interpretations and disputes between power factions (Sider and Smith 1997), which are informed by the dominant history and embedded in a dynamic of resistance and struggle against hegemonic silence and oblivion (Díaz de León, Llorente and Salvi 2015).

The historical memory of the cemetery and the life of the ancestors buried there is part of the process of mutual re-signification between local and national historical memory, where encounters between actors with different conceptions about the past and hegemonic discourses of the present take place. Asymmetric power relations between the community members and the owner of the land where the *Panteón* is located, between the community members and the authorities of the university, between the CONAMUNE-Carchi and the Instituto Nacional del Patrimonio Cultural agents, and among the members of the community have marked the identification and future of the *Panteón Viejo* as a sacred site to be safeguarded as a national heritage site.

6.2.1.1 "*Casa Adentro*" Processes of Negotiation: A Dialogue with Ourselves

The social production of memory is informed by competing constructions of the past in which "everyone participates, although unequally" (Popular Memory Group 1982, 3). Paul Ricouer (2004) points out that memory is mediated by narratives. It is always selective and it is built in relationship to the past that is updated in the present (Araujo, 2010). In this process of updating the present by recalling the past, diverse and contradictory narratives emerge. At the community level, contradictory interpretations about the history of the cemetery are circulating; its use and its historical value is a matter of political debate. The *Panteón Viejo* initiates a process of negotiation that depends on narratives of slavery, and memories of the plantation: the recovery and preservation of the memory of the struggle of women and men who were slaves, despite hegemonic narratives about the lack of agency of the enslaved. For some members of the community, to talk about the *Panteón Viejo* and the *hacienda* is to talk about the brutal system of slavery to which their ancestors were subjected, which is felt to be a traumatic memory that they would prefer to be forgotten. On the other hand, among the members of the ETOVA, antagonistic narratives about whether or not Martina Carrillo was buried in the *Panteón*, about whether she lived in the *hacienda* or not, about from when and until

what decade the *Panteón Viejo* was used as a cemetery, are examples of these local tensions. However, the spirituality of the Afrodescendant people, their rituality and respect for their deceased, has allowed them work together with community members, social organizations, local authorities and researchers around the historical value of this sacred site (Lara et al 2017; Balanzátegui 2017). In fact, in 2015 community members assumed the control and protection of the *Panteón Viejo* as a place to honour their ancestors and have been carrying out activities there along with the Church.

6.2.1.2   "*Casa Afuera*" Processes of Negotiation: A Dialogue with the "Other"

The land on which the *Panteón Viejo* is located – called the hills of Guayaquil – was part of the Pasto-Caranqui territory in the northern highlands (Lara et al 2017). In the sixteenth century, with the arrival of the Jesuits, it was incorporated into the property of the Hacienda La Concepción. After the expulsion of the Jesuits (1776), the *hacienda* was divided and these lands become part of the Hacienda Santa Ana, which adjoined the lands of the Hacienda La Concepción (Coronel Feijóo 1991). In the 1960s and 70s with the agrarian reform the *huasipungeros* gained access to some lands, but the land of the hills of Guayaquil became part of the Herrera family's properties (Lara et al 2017).

In 2005, when CONAMUNE-Carchi, members of ETOVA and some members of the community found the site and began to delve into the memory of the *Panteón*, they began processes of negotiation with different factions. The first negotiation was held between the current owner of the land, Dr. Vergara, and members of the organized community. In 2006, Dr. Vergara loaned the land to the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Ecuador (PUCE) under the mandate of working in liaison with the communities to promote employment opportunities. The ETOVA members never imagined that this land would be awarded, donated or sold to someone else. When meeting with Dr. Vergara, he was formally requested not to include that space within the boundaries of land to be donated to the university: "we told him to give us that space because there were graves of our ancestors," but he ignored the community's claims (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, September 2018). Thus, the dialogues with the authorities of the university began. The officials did not properly control the space as

they were supposed to and there was considerable looting in the *Panteón* in search of gold teeth and any other valuable objects. Due to this episode, the pressures of CONAMUNE-Carchi, and the failure to honour the university-community engagement, Dr. Vergara revoked the PUCE permit. Based on this experience, in 2012, the president of the *junta parroquial* proposed that the permission should be granted to the Universidad Politécnica Experimental del Carchi (UPEC) with the condition that they must protect the land on which the *Panteó*n is located. Negotiations and tensions with UPEC continue until today as ongoing agricultural activities affect the state of conservation of the archaeological site.

From the collaborative work among CONAMUNE-Carchi, archaeologists and anthropologists, and members of the community, a first proposal was made in 2014 for the Garden of Memory Martina Carrillo (Jardín de la Memoria Martina Carrillo), which recognizes (from the academy) the historical, archaeological, and cultural value of the site and its relevance at local, national and international levels. This validation of the local history, from a Western knowledge perspective, gave impetus to the local process of revitalizing African diasporic identities based on the historical memory of the *Panteón*, and it has been used by the community as a negotiation strategy in the dialogues *casa afuera* that they have maintained with various agents of the state and political actors such as officials of the INPC.

The Garden of Memory Martina Carrillo (2014) proposal was presented to UPEC, and the university officials agreed to manage the project as the governing authority of the area where this sacred site is located. However, the deterioration of the archaeological site has been deepening. On August 28, 2018, the proposal was presented to INPC's agents, at a meeting held between the Afro-Ecuadorian movement of the Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi, representatives of the municipality of Mira-Carchi, the technical team of the INPC, and the members of the Archaeology and Anthropology of African Diaspora in Ecuador research team (AADA). At this meeting, the Afro-Ecuadorian movement, under its principle of *derecho sobre lo nuestro* (right over what is ours) delivered an official proposal for the patrimonialization of the Fountain and the Garden of Memory Martina Carrillo and demanded a technical inspection of the *Panteón*

(by the Bureau of Inventory and Conservation of INPEC), in order to continue the process of safeguarding this heritage of the African diaspora in Ecuador. On September 6th, the INPC team toured the *Panteón Viejo* and the Museum of Memory "La Casa de los Abuelos" (The Grandparents' Home), where the archaeological and ethnographic studies carried out there were explained to them along with the importance of revitalizing this sacred site for the Afro-Ecuadorian people. A month later, CONAMUNE received the inspection report entitled "*Panteón Viejo* Archaeological Site Garden of Memory Martina Carrillo" (2018) which stated that the INPEC evaluated the state of conservation of the site and endorsed the heritage status of the archaeological site. Thus, CONAMUNE-Carchi is promoting the visibilizition of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of Afro-Ecuadorians and positioning their local history within the national historical discourse.

6.2.1.3   Spirituality and Ancestrality in the Panteón Viejo

Spirituality is a means used by Afrodescendants in the Americas to recreate their cultures (Mintz and Price 1992; Ugueto 2017). The historical memory that has been produced around the *Panteón Viejo* focuses on the cult and commemoration of the deceased, the ancestors. Since the end of the nineteenth century, in La Concepción this spiritual practice has existed based on Catholic-Christian beliefs about human life as a continuum between this world and the other world, the afterlife (Peters 2005).

> La Concepción has always been known, from what my father recounted about my grandfather, for the practices of spiritual rites. It was known because they did strange things here, mainly funeral rites, the burial of loved ones and Holy Week (Easter). When a relative or friend died, it was and is until today an ancestral mandate to accompany the passage from this life to the other. For this reason, conversations and anecdotes were always told about how in La Concepción they honoured their dead (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, March 2019).

When a relative or extended family member dies, the church bells announce it. Silence as a symbol of respect prevails throughout the community and the inhabitants

help with the preparations for the wake. The wake is a sacred space-moment, where the *cantoras* of the different communities gather around the deceased to sing *salves*, which are laments and cries that connect the community with the divine, with the ancestors and gods. The whole community accompanies the deceased and they sing the *salves* all night long. The next day, the corpse is carried from the house and the *cuerpo presente* mass is performed. When leaving the church, the coffin is presented before the main cross, and a man or a woman directs three or four genuflections around the cross. Ringing a small bell, the *animero* leads the procession to the cemetery and four or six people carry on the coffin on their shoulders. On the way to the cemetery, they stop three or four times to recite *padre nuestro* (Our Father) and passages from the Bible. At the entrance of the cemetery, they stop, genuflect again and say some prayers. Upon entering the *tierra del olvido* (land of oblivion), the coffin is presented again to the Holy Cross and family members say goodbye to the deceased for the last time and proceed to burial (Chalá 2009; Peña 2011).

This ritual, in which we participated during 2018 and 2019 in various communities of the parish, is an ancestral tradition that was practiced in the *Panteón*, which was one of the few cemeteries in the area to which, from the farthest communities, people came to bury their loved ones (Lara et al 2017). Part of the collective process of recovery of this sacred site has been the implementation of ritual and spiritual practices, where orality and memory are intertwined to remember and commemorate their ancestors through syncretic rituals where mass, songs and prayers, water and fire, earth and air are interwoven in a circle of spirituality.

6.2.1.4 Commemoration of Resistance: Commemorating the Ancestors Martina Carrillo and Simón Tadeo

On the morning of July 19, 2018, a group made up of members of CONAMUNE-Carchi, members of the community and of the Church, and researchers and teachers, met at the *Panteón Viejo* in a public ceremony to commemorate the ancestors. The ceremony focused on the installation of two gravestones. One commemorates Martina Carrillo, who represents the Afrodescendant leaders of the eighteenth century; the other headstone symbolizes Simón Tadeo, a member of the community who personifies the ancestors of

La Concepción that rest there. Before placing the headstones, the site was cleaned up in *minga* (collective work party) and fire was lit to purify the air and allow the connection with the afterlife, with the spirits "because fire is life and ancestors are spirits" (Barbarita, personal communication, 2018). Flowers were placed in circles around the fire. At the north of the circle, Martina Carrillo's gravestone with the inscription 1731-1805 was placed facing south, following the direction of the southern cross that guided the ancestors and respecting the logic of ancestral burials. A few meters to the west of Martina's gravestone, Simón Tadeo's gravestone was placed. All participants made a circle around Martina Carrillo's gravestone. The godmother and the godfather of the ceremony, Señora Olivia and Don Chavo, elders who represent the guardians of memory, were placed on each side of the grave with the priest between them. The ceremony began with the sign of the holy cross and a liturgical song. Then, the priest invoked the holy spirit to bless the water that would be spilled on the graves of Martina Carrillo and Simón Tadeo. The water was blessed and spilled on the two graves while the participants were singing the following *salves*:

> *Que bonita está la tumba, que bonita está la tumba, no hay cadáver dentro de ella, no hay cadáver dentro de ella. Solamente le acompaña, solamente le acompaña, de luto las cuatro velas, de luto las cuatro velas.*

The Our Father was prayed and the *salves* continued while the participants put out the fire. Then, everyone in the circle remained silent, honouring and respecting the memory of the ancestral spirits. The Mass, the Christian Catholic act of celebration of the Eucharist, is central to the spirituality of the community. Both to honour the deceased and the saints, all local events and festivities usually begin with the Catholic liturgy permeated by their own spiritual practices, where water, flowers, earth, song and fire are connecting channels to the divine and the sacred.

Memory is political and informed by social, cultural, and religious frames (Halbwachs 1996). This ceremony, where memory is also performative and ritualized, not only opens up a space of social gathering where past narratives are produced, reproduced, strengthened and circulated among community members, but also

simultaneously reinforces their identity and collective feelings of belonging (Della Porta and Diani 1999) and recreates the spiritual bond with their collective past. Thinking of rituality as political acts (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993) we could observe that in the commemoration of the ancestors described above, different layers of political negotiation took place between factions of the community and between leaders of the CONAMUNE and Catholic leaders, for example. In this regard, during the commemoration a mutually constituted relationship between memory and political action is recreated, where the collective recovery of memory provides a framework of shared meanings that serves to strengthen the local discourse that demands recognition and protection of this sacred site by local authorities (Farthing and Kohl 2013). The *Panteón* is a place where historical memory is revitalized, preserved and transmitted (Balanzátegui 2017) by these acts of symbolic and material commemoration. Gravestones – as material culture – symbolize the absent body and materialize the presence of ancestors. Orality, the word that is sung, recited, ritualized, is a spiritual link. In this syncretic ceremony where the fire purifies, the water blesses, and the *salves* comfort the souls of those absent and present, the memory catalyzes the spiritual and allows transformation of the narratives of slavery into healing practices. This commemoration, the act of placing the gravestones, blessing and chanting to them, resignifies the lives of the enslaved ancestors, repositioning them as subjects with rituals and cosmovision, where they seek to "recover the good spirit that the ancestors left us and continue cultivating the resilience of the Afro-Ecuadorian people" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, July 2018).

Following the politics of memory approach, we understand historical memory as an unfinished, dynamic and relational process between the past and the present carried out by community members, community leaders and political actors in the process of reconstructing their own and collective vision of its history and of the cultural meanings of its past (Caballero 2014). Hence, historical memory has mobilized political identities at different times as well as regional genealogies of struggles against social oppression (Ruette and Soriano 2016).

In this case study, the historical memory of this African diaspora cemetery has as semantic nodes the struggle for freedom, resistance, and spirituality of the ancestors

enslaved during the colonial era and it has been focused on Martina Carrillo's life. The figure of Martina Carrillo emerges in the Afro-Ecuadorian historical imaginary through the publication of a document produced by the Afro-Ecuadorian Cultural Center in the 1980s. Currently, the discursive frameworks that are produced and circulated among the members of Afro social organizations of the Chota-Mira Valley are focused on the fact that Martina lived as a slave at La Concepción Hacienda in the eighteenth century and was part of a commission that marched to Quito to denounce the violation of their rights as slaves, before the president of the Real Audiencia. This case was heard and the administrator of the *hacienda* was arrested, fined and his assets were confiscated (Lara et al 2017; Balanzátegui 2017). This knowledge has been validated and disseminated by Afro-Ecuadorian leaders and intellectuals, who have reviewed the archives with the complaint and litigation process found in the National Historical Archive of Quito, in the Audiencia Real archives, Slaves section. Thus, Martina Carrillo and her struggle for freedom and dignity has been circulated and interpreted by CONAMUNE, and in particular, by CONAMUNE-Carchi.

> We commemorate Martina Carrillo to recognize that great woman who is the reference point to undertake our struggles as women for our collective rights as Afro Ecuadorians and for Black women's rights, knowing that in 1778 she had the strength and ability to march for the collective rights and she sets the tone for us to dance and to reach for our rights (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, September 2018).

The leaders of CONAMUNE are producing identity discourses – from a gender perspective – and creating a genealogy of struggle for the dignity and rights of Afrodescendant populations based on the recovery of the *Panteón*'s past and its meaning in the slave context of the sugarcane *hacienda*. By honouring and commemorating the female slave as ancestor, as hard-worker and an *active resister* subject, CONAMUNE members are reconfiguring her and the slave ancestors as historical agents with voice and dignity and as active members in the process of formation of the nation state. Thus, the local narratives of struggles seek to break with the silence and the hegemonic and stereotyped image of Black women without history, without agency, without knowledge

(Rahier 1998) and transform and re-signify them into spiritual subjects that guide the struggle for human rights in the present.

6.2.1.5   By Honouring the Ancestors, We are Healing our Souls

Black feminist and Afropessimist approaches have pointed out how the Black body is marked and shaped by the violent process of transatlantic slavery (Davis 1981; Hooks 1981; Spiller 1987; Hartman and Wilderson 2003). Some authors argue that this violence inflicted on the body of the slaves has generated innumerable marks on the body through generations (Spiller 1987). On the other hand, Hartman (1997) argues that the body in pain – that pain that was a product of captivity, of slavery, which has been silenced – has a restorative potential. This reflection on the body that can heal from pain, resonates with the discourse and political actions of the women of CONAMUNE-Carchi, for whom any local proposal of cultural revitalization and claim assertion must be anchored in ancestrality and oriented to the healing of "black" bodies and (people's) self.

> Ancestrality is the essence of our life as Afrodescendant people, it is the compass that marks and guides the route, it is the permanent light that illuminates us. Ancestrality is articulated with spirituality. Both are energies that vitalize the being, they are shields for survival, they are a whole (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, September 2019).

One of the central reasons for commemorating the ancestors is "to heal the wound of slavery. We research the African diaspora, the origin of our surnames, and slavery to heal that wound and that pain caused by the violent dispersion to which our ancestors were subjected" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, October 2018). Thus, memory plays a crucial role in the collective healing practices of the organized members of La Concepción, by allowing a spiritual connection with the ancestors. Hence, by commemorating them through the act of placing the gravestones, blessing and singing to them "we are healing the soul and body of enslaved ancestors and ourselves" (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, July 2018). The *Panteón* is a site of memory (Nora 1989) where narratives of healing, cultural landscape, and particular ideas about heritage converge, where social struggles of the past and a critical understanding of

current living conditions are intertwined. The *Panteón* is an interpretive space in the history of the African diaspora in Ecuador, through which the inhabitants of the community assume their material past, their heritage and celebrate it as a foundation of their resistance against racist practices that silence and make invisible their past (Rappaport 1994). This claim and agency over their past have allowed them to propose and implement public policies for the protection and management of tangible and intangible heritage of Cantón Mira, Carchi. In 2016, *the Public Policy of Gestión, Promoción y Patrocinio Cultural del Cantón Mira* was promulgated and aimed at "protecting and promoting cultural diversity, social memory and cultural heritage" (OM-GADM-002-2016 2016). This intercultural public policy, proposed by CONAMUNE-Carchi and Afro-Ecuadorian municipal councillors, not only aims to redress the lack of legislation regarding the protection of the heritage of the African diaspora in Ecuador but also articulates claims for a sovereign ancestral territory. This process of memorialization marks a historical milestone within the white-mestizo hegemonic political landscape in the Mira *cantón*, by making visible the Afrodescendants of the *cantón* as historical agents in the process of social formation of the municipality and its political dynamics. This process of memorialization as spiritual healing practices of the communities of La Concepción (which range from the appropriation and reinterpretation of their past, the proposal and execution of intercultural public policies, to the creation of research and productive community projects) seeks to navigate, understand, and resist structural racism in Ecuador.

6.3 Healing the Wound and Weaving the Fabric of Liberation

Five years have passed since the proclamation of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) and so far, national governments have only taken timid steps such as the signing of national decrees and ministerial agreements, and apologetic speeches (Greene 2012). Poverty, lack of access to education, and lack of employment opportunities continue to mark the lives of Afrodescendants in the Americas (Antón Sánchez 2018).

In Ecuador, given the lack of interest and national political will, at the local level CONAMUNE members are actively participating in the decision-making processes and the elaboration and implementation of public policies aimed at going beyond the *truncated justice* as Nancy Fraser calls it (2001), thinking about public policies from the logic of the complementarity between recognition and redistribution. In addition, Afro-Ecuadorian organizations have taken advantage of the situation of the Decade to set their own agendas around the objectives of recognition, justice and development set out in the International Decade for People of African Descent (Antón Sánchez 2018).

In this regard, Afrodescendant women's organizations in Carchi and Imbabura are developing local responses to the International Decade for People of African Descent to advance historical reparations for Afrodescendants, such as public policies that not only fill the lack of legislation regarding the tangible and intangible heritage of the African diaspora, but also give historical and cultural value to their past, to their traditions. In turn, they have breathed life into a Museum of Memory *La casa de los abuelos* as part of their process of recovering their past and have led negotiation processes with state institutions such as the INPC. All of these actions are articulated with the axis of recognition proposed in the International Decade for People of African Descent – Ecuador Chapter, which aims to overcome the racialized matrix of colonialism and neo-colonialism, to promote the empowerment of people of African descent, and to visibilize the active role they have had and continue to have in the construction of the nation (Antón Sánchez 2018).

From the local, from the everyday life of the communities of the Ancestral Territory of Imbabura and Carchi, Black women are thinking about the International Decade for People of African Descent from themselves and for themselves and proposing to give it a reading in a Black women's code, whose principles are focused on the decolonization of the Black female self.

> The International Decade (*el decenio*) has been given a masculine
> perspective and no, we must stop thinking about it in this way. We must
> think about it from ourselves and for ourselves as Black women and adopt

it as a political-legal strategy to boost our projects in search of not only recognition but the valorization of knowledge, secrets and actions of Black women (Barbarita, personal communication, La Concepción, September 2019).

The members of CONAMUNE-Carchi, aware of the deep traces of slavery in the soul and body of Afrodescendants, are producing and circulating their own narratives about slavery. Their actions and discourses aim at understanding the ontological self of the Black woman, healing the wound inflicted on the flesh and the enslaved body (Spiller 1987) and redressing the double process of an imposed inferiority complex that is epidermalized (Fanon 1968, 13). The collective process of recovery of the historical memory of the *Panteón* and the associated commemoration of freedom and resistance aims at promoting a local process of re-humanization of the people who were de-humanized and racialized as enslaved Blacks (Fanon 1968), while resignifying themselves as socio-cultural beings, with their own traditions and knowledge, and reconfiguring themselves as political subjects. The collective act of remembering the *Panteón*'s past is a political project that goes beyond the discourse of reparation as limited reforms based on a "liberal scheme that rests upon the notion of commensurability" and on the idea that "slavery is a past phenomenon that ended" (Hartman and Wilderson III 2003, 196-198). It is a conscious political practice of fighting against oblivion and the hegemonic history that has erased, ignored and silenced the Afro-Ecuadorian past. The *Panteón* is a site of the memory of the ancestors, of the life and struggle of the enslaved, where memory is mobilized to weave the fabric of liberation against the chains of gender, class, and race oppression (Laó-Montes 2015).

7   Conclusions

7.1   Weaving and Working Together: Afro Women as Political Subjects

The first time I heard Ofelita's phrase *hilando fino*, it was as an invitation to me to do so. She was talking to me about the connections between our bodies, the moonlight, the river, the ancestors and La Bomba in the *Cochita amorosa*. She was inspired, and she moved me. She was pushing me to think and connect with her and our ancestors. This dissertation has been an attempt to *hilar fino*, to think with her and all Afro women who decided to collaborate with my research. In order to do so, I placed the lived experience of Black women and their political practices and thoughts at the center of the analysis (Hooks [1984] 2015; Collins 2000; Carneiro 2005; Werneck 2007; Curiel 2007). The focus of this analysis was inspired by Black women's actions to face racism, discrimination and exclusion but also by their defense of lived experience as a basis for fostering their political identity and pride in being Black women and undertaking political organizing in all levels. For Black women of CONAMUNE, their everyday life experiences are the sources for creating new projects to advance their anti-racist and anti-sexist struggles in their communities.

As explained in chapter three, *hilando fino* means spinning and weaving together the wisdom of Afrodescendants, reimagining their past and reconfiguring their present to promote a future of racial and social justice. In that sense, CONAMUNE is advancing ETOVA (a key program in the Ethnoeducation process) as a strategy of preserving the wisdom of elders, which allows them to reimage their past while transmitting their knowledge to new generations. By weaving together the elements of the wisdom of the elders and the ancestors, CONAMUNE's members find inspiration and strength to resist and fight against oppression as *cimarronas* (female maroons) did. *Hilando fino* is part of Afro creative acts of reconstructing their ontological and identity principles after centuries of violent dispersion as a result of the slave trade. Moreover, *hilar fino* is a metaphor that evokes their political engagement with the state agents and political spaces. They are knitting or spinning a web that connect different political actors and spheres that allows them to act simultaneously from diverse fronts.

7.1.1   Working in a Political Network beyond the State

As explained throughout the ethnographic chapters, CONAMUNE-Carchi and Imbabura are working in networks ("we are alone no more!") with multiple actors in myriad political spaces in domestic, community, social organization, and state spheres. From the different spaces in which they have participated, they themselves have sought out ways of bringing different actors together. Working for NGOs like Ofelita, or the *junta parroquial* like Isabelita, or serving as municipal councillor like Barbarita, allowed them to connect conflicting actors from diverse political spaces. For example, when Isabelita was working in the *junta parroquial* she was also working on a project with CONAMUNE-Carchi, and she was able to open up paths for negotiation between some members of CONAMUNE and some members of the *junta parroquial,* who are part of different factions and do not necessarily share similar ideas about producing and circulating historical narratives of slavery and resistance among members of the community. Nonetheless, these tensions are mitigated by the ways in which Isabelita introduced the CONAMUNE project to the *junta parroquial*. In the case of Ofelita, while she worked for CARE, she advanced and supported the formation of the Youth Network and the *red de gestores culturales* as well as their political agendas. At the same time, Barbarita was elected as municipal councillor in Mira, a mestizo town. As members of CONAMUNE, they used these political spaces, their materials and symbolic resources and allies to advance the project of Ancestral Territory and to create the GADs network. Thus, their positions of government employment, NGO employment or political representation have played a central role in the ways they have been able to carry out their projects. Their enrollment and participation in these multiple political arenas demonstrates the scope of their actions and the affirmation that Black women's struggles and political practices "are avenues to bring about transformations to Black people's lives" (Werneck 2009, 99) and to advance the future of the Black communities that are part of the diverse archipelago of the African diaspora in the Americas.

7.1.2   Deploying the *Cochita Amorosa*

CONAMUNE's projects and political agendas are strategies for addressing Black women's specific needs as the most marginalized, but they organized themselves based

on love, spirituality and solidarity rather than oppression. As the literature on Black women's organizations in Latin America demonstrates (Perry 2009; Mohanty 2003; Safa 2006), "Black identity" is not a "natural" basis for developing political alliances and organizing. Rather, gender, class and other aspects of racial difference are always at play in group solidarity. As shown in chapter three on *Cochita amorosa*, CONAMUNE's members are working together out of a sense of belonging that allows them to maintain a unified national front that connects their grassroots organizations. Thus, a sense of belonging, of empathy, pride, love and recognition of our subjectivities as Black women that passes down from your ancestors to you, allows CONAMUNE's members to build a community of Black women that resonates directly with one's existence as a Black female subject and body. *Cochita amorosa* is a praxis of Black women that seeks to heal, to connect, to reflect, to feel, to teach and to transform their realities by paying careful attention to each other, by listening and reflecting together about what has happened, whether it was a few minutes or 500 years ago, and about what the next steps are. *Cochita amorosa* is associated with collective work, with the solidarity of families and community members that is based on reciprocity.

The *Cochita amorosa* is conjured as a cultural practice, political ritual, research methodology, pedagogical device to advance Ethnoeducation in schools, but also as a central political practice of CONAMUNE in diverse social and political spheres. It is used as a ritual to begin CONAMUNE's meetings and as a political ritual to begin meetings between CONAMUNE and state agents. In particular political contexts such as Ethnoeducation meetings and workshops they enact a certain way of being Black and women that allows them to legitimize themselves as Black political subjects based on some elements of their African diaspora identity and their ancestral ritual before the state. Hence, the *Cochita amorosa* is part of their political engagement with the state.

Moreover, the *Cochita amorosa* is a central political and spiritual practice within CONAMUNE that aims to overcome conflicts that intersect regionalisms and generational gaps and open up dialogues between equals. Hence, the *Cochita amorosa* focuses on strengthening their cultural practices, the connection with and respect for ancestors and the pride in being a Black woman, by highlighting their healing abilities as

a metaphor for their collective political capacity to transform and have an effect on their own realities. The *Cochita amorosa* raises and promotes horizontal relationships between the people who participate in it, creating a non-hierarchical setting that enables women, young girls and elderly women to move away from competing hierarchies that foster inequalities. Thus, the *Cochita amorosa* is a space where political ties between the leaders of the CONAMUNE are reaffirmed, but it is also a source of political capital that promotes their political power as state agents or community leaders. It is a strategy for gaining visibility and state recognition as well as seeking resources and allies. CONAMUNE members are *hilando fino* (weaving together) their collective goals and diverse projects through the *Cochita amorosa* as praxis, which in turn allows CONAMUNE members to create a persuasive discourse where diverse people can see and identify themselves. Hence, *Cochita amorosa* can be understood – following Werneck's arguments about Black women's political struggles as historical feminist praxis (2007, 2009) – as an "everyday feminist practice" based on the valorization of maroonage and spiritual collectivity that is claiming and making spaces of liberation, that celebrates and praises our Black body. It is a practice that is rooted in a connection between the body and the mind that allows a dialogue with the ancestors.

As the ethnographic analysis of *Cochita amorosa*, the Ethnoeducation project, and the Ancestral Territory reveals, Afro women of CONAMUNE have been advancing their projects by "reading" the diverse political enviroments, acting as *cimarronas* by opening spaces of negotiation and deploying *Cochita amorosa* as praxis. These political practices have allowed them to move beyond the tension of institutionalization/state co-optation and social movements' "autonomy". Their ways of engaging with state projects, transnational governmental institutions and NGOS, are based on weaving webs or networks across different "cracks" in the "complex topography" of the state as well as myriad different nonstate political spaces and actors by advancing their logic of "*hacemos lo que nos da la gana*", we do what we want, while they keep "*hilando fino*".

When Walsh (2012) invited us to problematize the relationship between Afro social movements and the state in multicultural Ecuador by asking to what extent a social movement stops being a movement when its members enter the state, the political

ethnography among Afro women's organizations presented here supports the claim that by advancing their web-like actions, CONAMUNE's members and their political practices take place simultaneously inside the state, outside the state and against the state. Hence, the actions of Afro women as political subjects do not begin and end with their recognition by or engagement with the ethno-racial state apparatus. Rather, CONAMUNE members are fostering a political subjectivity that is related to a historical process of resistance and struggle forged through centuries of resistance to slavery and colonial exploitation as well as the modern racial nation-state.

Nonetheless, as shown in the Ethnoeducation case, the Ecuadorian multicultural project continues to constrain Afro-Ecuadorian social movements and, in particular, to invisibilize and exclude Afro women as political subjects in the "hegemonic organizing frame of indigeneity" (Walsh 2012, 20). While the increase in access to the state apparatus during the Citizens' Revolution is undeniable (i.e., symbolic recognition, commissions, meetings), Afro women's social organizations, as the broader Afro social movements in the Americas, still face sexism and the ideological obstacles of racism and mestizaje (Wade 1995; Telles 2004; Hooker 2005, 2009; Paschel and Sawyer 2008; Ruette-Orihuela 2011; Rahier 2012; Antón Sánchez 2018). The Afro-Ecuadorian movement has experienced internal fragmentation due to the degrees of institutionalization of Afro leaders within the state (Antón Sánchez 2011; de la Torre and Antón Sánchez 2012; Rahier 2012; Antón Sánchez 2018). Nevertheless, CONAMUNE's members have been navigating the state and the political landscape in a way that has allowed them to advance their political agendas and projects. The ethnographic analysis presented here supports the idea that CONAMUNE's interests and projects have not been subordinated to those of the state.

Further research is required in order to examine "ordinary" women that are not members of social organizations and their role played in transforming their communities and challenging the state. Comparative studies with other Afro women's organizations in different nation-states in Latin America would enhance and deepen the reach of this study. Moreover, a study on how Afro-Ecuadorian girls and women are building new African diaspora identities based on elements such as body care, hair style, and dress,

would add a more nuanced understanding of the intersection of Afro aesthetics and emotions in the construction of political subjectivities among Afro women in Latin America.

7.2 Ethnoeducation, Interculturality and the State: Afro Women as Thinkers in their Own Right

Accessing education has been a priority for Black people in the Americas, in particular, for Afro women (Davis 1983, 101-102). As Hooks reminds us, since slavery and during the reconstruction era in the U.S., "teaching and educating was fundamentally political because it was rooted in antiracist struggle" (Hooks 1994, 2). Therefore, learning has been a form of resistance. As Davis reminds us during the post emancipation period, Black people learned that emancipation was not a guarantee for their rights, and that "they would have to fight for land, they would have to fight for political power. And after centuries of educational deprivation, they would zealously assert their right to satisfy their profound craving for learning" (Davis 1983, 101). In Black people's historical struggle for education in the United States, Black women have played a crucial role. Nonetheless, their experiences and contributions have received sparse attention (Davis 1983; Hooks 1994, 2003).

In the case of Ecuador, not only has the role of the Black women been overlooked as daily workers in the schools (whether as teachers or administrative or cleaning staff) but also their active political participation in the creation and promotion of a new educational system has been ignored. In Ecuador, Afro women teachers (many of whom are CONAMUNE members) are advocating for the right to education. But the processes outlined above bring to light what kind of education they are looking to assert. It is not just about acquiring knowledge anymore; it is also about producing and recognising their ancestral knowledge and wisdom. This process of acknowledging their own knowledge is guiding CONAMUNE's political actions to build their path toward epistemic freedom (informed by their contemporary interpretation of slavery and female slaves' struggle).

The relationship between Ethnoeducation as a political and educative program and CONAMUNE's political goals emerged organically. Since 1999, when CONAMUNE

was formed, access to education has been one of the organization's collective goals. In addition, many of CONAMUNE's members are teachers who were already involved in diverse social organizations struggling for the collective rights of the Afrodescendant population in the country. Barbarita Lara, Olga Maldonado, Ines Morales, Amada Ortiz, María Quiñonez – just to mention some of the members of CONAMUNE – were part of the commission of Ethnoeducation as well. In all of the CONAMUNE's political agendas from 1999 up through 2018, education and knowledge are pivotal to their struggle against racism and sexism. They consider structural racism and *machismo* to be two intertwined factors that must be taken into account when explaining the lack of opportunities for Black women to access education (Political Agenda Ancestral Territory 2015). Up to now, it is common to hear members of the communities in the Chota-Mira Valley ask "*para que? si va a parir?*", inscribing the idea that letting women get access to education is a waste since their role in society is to have babies and take care of their families.

Some of the actions that have been taken on in relation to the topic of gender equality and access to education by Afro women are Ethnoeducation projects and activities in the schools advanced by CONAMUNE's members as strategies to contest the multiple discrimination that they experienced as woman, Black, poor and rural. Thinking about the possibilities of better Black futures, CONAMUNE members emphasize Ethnoeducation activities for Afro-Ecuadorian girls and boys in primary school and high schools.

For CONAMUNE members, Ethnoeducation is not just a way to make education better; it is a commitment to education "as the practice of freedom" (Hooks 2003, 108): "we are fighting to have a different society with a different education" (Amada, public speech, Esmeraldas, November 2018). Ethnoeducation is a way to support interculturality by engaging differences and confronting tensions as they arise and by debunking racism, sexism and any unjust hierarchy and form of domination.

> We as Afro-Ecuadorians are thinking about possibilities to create
> epistemic freedom, yes, that's what we want, yes, because there is still
> not epistemic freedom to talk about what we want and from our own way

of speaking, [we want] the authorities and the system to allow us to do so, too (Barbarita, personal communication/public speech, La Concepción, May 2019).

This reflection resonates with Catherine Walsh and Juan García's definition of Ethnoeducation as "the acquisition and development of knowledge, values, and attitudes for the exercise of Afro thought and decision-making capacity" (Walsh and García 2002, 9). Hence, the Ethnoeducation process is a way of fostering an Afro epistemology based on decolonial and gendered diasporic perspectives that is evolving alongside CONAMUNE's political thoughts and actions. In this collective goal of recreating themselves as a *pueblo* (a people with a culturally distinct heritage) through a process of knowledge production, members of CONAMUNE celebrate and value *conocimientos* and *saberes* (knowledge) that can be and are shared in oral as well as written narratives. In turn, bringing theory and practice together is a political practice that shapes CONAMUNE's view of education as liberatory. For CONAMUNE's members Ethnoeducation is a way of claiming their radical struggle as Black women to theorize their subjectivities, to affirm their right as a subject *in resistance* to define their reality (Hooks 1994). In so doing, Ethnoeducation becomes part of the political and collective strategy of CONAMUNE's members to strengthen their identity as Afro-Ecuadorians, enacting the emancipatory role of oral tradition and la *palabra hablada*, the spoken word (Laó-Montes 2007).

From a *casa adentro* perspective, Ethnoeducation programs and actions carried out by CONAMUNE – the recovery of the old cemetery the Garden of Memory, the Casa de los Abuelos community museum, the Garden of the Grandmother, the *Palenque* medicinal practice – are political projects that are producing and circulating narratives of their own history based on their collective memory and their contemporary cultural practices. Such *knowledge-making practices* echo Sylvia Wynter's ideas of the production of *orders of truth* (Wynter and McKittrick 2015, 32). In doing so, they are moving forward to create a decolonizing pedagogy centred on *el ser Afro*, the Afro being, particularly, on the Black female being. Hence, they are addressing the dual impact of sexist and racist oppression on their social status. The Ethnoeducation project

mobilized different Black stories to expand Black futures. Telling different stories (from different gendered perspectives and based on oral traditions) has the potential to reignite historical memory by weaving together the pieces of Black lives and local stories that have been silenced. Therefore, from the perspective and actions of CONAMUNE-Carchi, Ethnoeducation and the *Cochita amorosa* are central to the process of healing the wound of racialized subjects (Hartman 1997) and of fostering a African diaspora project of decolonization and liberation (Laó-Montes 2007) .

As the Ancestral Territory case study suggests, CONAMUNE's members are advancing a process of constructing a local imagined community in relation to global African diaspora communities and struggle for racial and social justice. In doing so, they are fostering a connection between Black women and the urgency of transnational gendered anti-racial movements and alliances (Perry 2009). Moreover, CONAMUNE's project of the reclaiming a cemetery and recovering the memory of Martina Carrillo are ways of advancing a project of building political memories of gendered racial struggles from which they, Black women, had been erased (Werneck 2009; Perry 2009).

Finally, this dissertation is not concerned with the roots and routes discussion that has shaped diaspora studies (Gilroy 1993; Clifford 1997). Rather, the use of diaspora presented here reveals the intersubjectivity and ongoing process of constructing Africa diaspora identities as a decolonial project that has diverse silhouettes and takes place in cultural practices, social movements and political actions (Laó-Montes 2007). I reflect on diaspora as a fluid concept that is not fixed but imagined (Angel-Ajani 2006). Most importantly, I use diaspora as a way of acknowledging and amplifying CONAMUNE's use of it as a political instrument of building connections between Afro women's identities, political actions and a transnational political agenda based on solidarity in order to support the intellectual and political project of moving forward a Black feminist agenda in the Americas (Perry 2009). Moreover, for CONAMUNE, the diaspora is not about "returning to home" that is located abroad in Africa as the motherland. Rather, it is a means of claiming a permanent space within a nation state but at the same time fostering a sense of belonging and connection to the diverse archipelago of Black

communities that make up the African diaspora in the Americas (Glissant 1997, 2002; Laó-Montes 2007; Werneck 2007; Perry 2009).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Acronyms and Abbreviations

AADA   The Archaeology and Anthropology of African Diaspora in
                    Ecuador research team

CEA   Centro de Estudios Afroecuatorianos (Afro-Ecuadorian Studies
                    Center)

CODAE   Corporación de Desarrollo Afroecuatoriano (Corporation for
                    Afro-Ecuadorian Development)

CODENPE   Corporación de Desarrollo de Nacionalidades y Pueblos
                    Indígenas (Corporation for Development of Indigenous
                    Nationalities and Peoples)

CONAIE   Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador
                    (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador)

CONAMUNE   Cordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Negras en Ecuador (National
                    Coordinator of Black Women in Ecuador)

COMPLADEIN   Consejo de Planificación y Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas y
                    Negros (Council for Planning and Development of Indigenous
                    and Black Peoples)

COOPI   Coorporazione Internazionale

CNA   Confederación Nacional Afroecuatoriana (National Afro-
                    Ecuadorian Confederation)

EIB	Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (Intercultural and Bilingual Education)
ETOVA	Escuela de la Tradición Oral, La Voz de los Ancestros (School of Oral Tradition, the Voice of the Ancestors)
FECONIC	Federación de Comunidades Negras de Imbabura y Carchi (Federation of Black Communities of Imbabura and Carchi)
FOGNEP	Federación de Organizaciones Negras de Pichincha (Federation of Black Organization of Pichincha)
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IERAC	Instituto Ecuatoriano de Reforma Agraria y Colonizacion (Ecuadorian Institute for Agrarian Reform and Colonization)
INPC	Instituto Nacional de Patrimonio Cultural (National Institute of Cultural Heritage)
JAP	Juventud de Acción en Progreso (Youth of Action in Progress)
LOEI	Ley Orgánica de Educación Intercultural (Intercultural Education Law)
MONUNE	Movimiento de Mujeres Negras (Black Women's Movement)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OMS	Organización Mundial de la Salud (World Health Organization)
PCN	Proceso de Comunidades Negras (Black Communities Process)
PRODEPINE	Proyecto de Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas y Negros del Ecuador (Project for the Development of Indigenous and Black Peoples of Ecuador)

PUCE Pontificia Universidad Católica de Ecuador (Catholic University of Ecuador)

MAEC Movimiento Afro Ecuatoriano Conciencia (Afro-Ecuadorian Movement Conciencia)

SENAIN Secretaria Nacional de Asuntos Indígenas y Minorías Étnicas (National Secretariat for Indigenous Affairs and Ethnic Minorities)

Red MAAD Red de Mujeres Afrolatinoamericanas, Afrocaribeñas y de la Diaspora (Network of Black Women in Latin America, the Caribbean and the Diaspora)

UPEC Universidad Politécnica Experimental del Carchi (Experimental Polytechnic University of Carchi)

Appendix B: List of the research collaborators mentioned in the dissertation (in alphabetical order by first name)

Alejandra Palacios	Current Provincial Coordinator CONAMUNE-Carchi, member of Red de Jóvenes Afro Ecuatorianos
Anita Lara	Member of CONAMUNE-Carchi and my host family in Mascarilla
Barbarita Lara	CONAMUNE-Carchi, ex municipal councillor, teacher, former national coordinator of CONAMUNE
Catherine Chalá	Co-founder of MOMUNE, member of Pastoral Afro, state agent in Secretaria de Pueblos, currently in the Office for Human Rights.
Carlota Chalá	Community leader, ex-president La Concepción *Junta Parroquial*
Diego Palacios	Co-founder of Red de Jóvenes Afro Ecuatorianos
Henry Méndez	Member of Red de Jóvenes Afro Ecuatorianos
Hermencia Chalá	Member of Nuevos Horizontes social organization and CONAMUNE-Carchi
Iliana Carabalí	Community leader, co-founder Red de Jóvenes AfroEcuatorianos
Inesita Folleco	CONAMUNE-Carchi, co-founder of Gotitas de Esperanza organization
Isabelita Folleco	CONAMUNE-Carchi, NGO-Ayuda en Acción worker, former state agent in the Junta Parroquial de La Concepción

Irma Bautista	Current National Coordinator of CONAMUNE, state agent in the Ministry of Health
Iván Lara	Afro leader and former municipal councillor in Mira Cantón
Luisa Ortiz	Afro state agent-Ethnoeducation Office
Maribel Padilla	Current Coordinator CONAMUNE-Imbabura and state agent in Urcuqui
Mercedes Acosta	Former provincial coordinator of CONAMUNE-Imbabura
Nieves Méndez	Afro state agent-Ethnoeducation Office and member of the Pastoral Afro
Ofelita Lara	CONAMUNE-Carchi and Pichincha, NGO CARE-Ecuador worker
Olguita Maldonado	CONAMUNE-Carchi, teacher, former provincial coordinator of CONAMUNE-Carchi
Papá Salomón Acosta	Co-founder of FECONIC, ex municipal councillor in Mira Cantón
Pedro de Jesús	Afro state agent in la Secretaria de Gestión de la Política-Ibarra
Plutarco Viveros	Community leader, director of Marabu Bomba music band and president of Red de Gestores Culturales
Raúl Maldonado	Ex President of Salinas *Junta Parroquial* and co-founder of Red de GAD
Renato Capriles	Co-founder of Red de Jóvenes Afro Ecuatorianos
Sayra de Jesús	Afro state agent-Ethnoeducation Office
Sonia Viveros	Co-founder of MOMUNE, Fundación Azúcar, international liaison with Red MAAD

Appendix C: Research Ethics Approval Form

Date: 16 May 2018

To: Dr. Kim Clark

Project ID: 111587

Study Title: Afro communities and the state in contemporary Venezuela and Ecuador

Application Type: NMREB Initial Application

Review Type: Full Board

Meeting Date / Full Board Reporting Date: 06/Apr/2018

Date Approval Issued: 16/May/2018

REB Approval Expiry Date: 16/May/2019

_____

Dear Dr. Kim Clark

The Western University Non‑Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. All other required institutional approvals must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
111587_Areas for Observation_Institutional_Spaces_20_March_2018	Participant Observation Guide	20/Mar/2018	
111587_Areas_for Observation_Rural_Communities_20_March_2018	Participant Observation Guide	20/Mar/2018	
111587_Interview_Topics_Community_ Members_20_March_2018	Interview Guide	20/Mar/2018	
111587_Interview_Topics_Institutional_Actors_20_March_2018	Interview Guide	20/Mar/2018	
111587_Letter of_Information_Consent_3_May_2018	Written Consent/Assent	03/May/2018	
111587_Letter of_Information_Consent_Host Family_3_May_2018	Written Consent/Assent	03/May/2018	
111587_Letter_of_Information_Consent_Host Family_Spanish_3_May_2018	Written Consent/Assent	03/May/2018	
111587_Letter_of_Information_Consent_Spanish_3_May_2018	Written Consent/Assent	03/May/2018	
111587_Participant Observation Anthropology 17August2017	Participant Observation Guide	17/Aug/2017	
111587_Verbal_Consent_Script_20_March_2018	Verbal Consent/Assent	20/Mar/2018	
111587_Verbal_consent_Spanish_20_March_2018	Verbal Consent/Assent	20/Mar/2018	

No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written approval from the NMREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri‑Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered

Curriculum Vitae

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Education

PhD Anthropology. University of Western Ontario (UWO). Ontario, Canada. 2014-2020.

MA Anthropology. Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas, IVIC. [Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Research]. Caracas, Venezuela. 2011-2014.

BA Anthropology. School of Anthropology. Central University of Venezuela (UCV). Caracas, Venezuela. 2001-2007.

Honours and Awards

Ontario Trillium Scholarship (OTS). Government of Ontario. 2016-2020.

Western Humanitarian Award. 2018. For the SSHRC funded project "Surviving Memory in Post-Civil War El Salvador." Led by Professor Amanda Grzyb. Faculty of Information and Media Studies. University of Western Ontario. Canada.

Related Work Experience

2020-. Assistant Professor. Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Carleton University. Ottawa, Canada.

2017-2019. Research Assistant. SSHRC funded project "Surviving Memory in Post-Civil War El Salvador." Professor Amanda Grzyb. Faculty of Information and Media Studies. University of Western Ontario. Canada.

2017-2020. Teaching Assistant. Department of Anthropology. University of Western Ontario.

2014-2016. Research Assistant. Applied Research Project: "Cultural and Organizational Processes Shaping Post-Harvest Practices among Afrodescendant Cocoa Producers of Barlovento, Venezuela". Anthropology Center. Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Research, IVIC.

2013-2015. Research Assistant. PEII-Fondo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología [National Science and Technology Fund]. Anthropology Center. Venezuelan Institute for Scientific Research (IVIC).

Publications

Juárez Rodríguez, Beatriz and Barbarita Lara. "Panteón Viejo Jardín de la Memoria de los Ancestros Martina Carrillo. Una apuesta político-territorial de la diáspora africana en el Ecuador" ["The Garden of Ancestral Memory Martina Carrillo. A Political-Territorial Project of the African Diaspora in Ecuador]. In *Antropologia y Arqueologia AfroLatina*, eds Balanzategui, Daniela and Edizon León [Forthcoming].

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