

AHÍ TE ESTÁS: CONSTRUCTING BLACK IDENTITY AND A MULTICULTURAL
NARRATIVE IN ARGENTINA

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NARRATIVE IN ARGENTINA

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ABSTRACT

AHÍ TE ESTÁS: CONSTRUCTING BLACK IDENTITY AND A MULTICULTURAL NARRATIVE IN ARGENTINA

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Argentina's ethnic majority perceives the nation as white and homogeneous. Because of this, the black community struggles for recognition. Argentina's dominant narrative of *blanquedad*, or whiteness, provides the conditions that allow its citizens to ignore the presence and racial identity of non-whites. It also creates a racial classification system that categorizes people as black, white, or "other". Although people of African descendant are classified as black, their cultural and ethnic variability is ignored. The black Argentine community is comprised of historical blacks and black immigrants, but the discourse of whiteness removes the differences between these groups and places them into one category.

I observed and interacted with many organizations and members of the black Argentine community in Buenos Aires to understand how black self-identify and

construct identity in the country. My research shows that this community is actively constructing a counter-hegemonic narrative that emphasizes black presence and identity. This new multicultural narrative allows black Argentines to create three forms of identity: *negro*, *Afro*, and *afrodescendiente*. How these terms are used depends on who is speaking and the social context. The term *afrodescendiente* is used to promote a collective, unified black identity that encompasses all peoples of the African Diaspora. Furthermore, this multicultural narrative allows blacks to promote diversity and educates Argentine society about different black cultural forms in the country. It establishes legitimacy for blacks, which is useful for black immigrants who attempt to attain legal Argentine citizenship.

As black Argentines use the new discourse of multiculturalism to position themselves in society, numerous obstacles inhibit them. First, some black groups choose not to identify as *afrodescendiente* and instead choose unique identifiers that they believe are more socially valuable. Secondly, conflicts between black groups prevent them from collaborating and creating a collective identity. Despite the challenges ahead of the black Argentine community, the multicultural narrative is integral to the community's future attempts at attaining political and social recognition.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about the discourse of social identity and a multicultural narrative in Argentina. I collected data from May to August 2010 in the city of Buenos Aires, Argentina, with the intent of understanding how the black community identified itself among a population widely perceived to be monolithically white. Argentina is historically described as a *crisol de razas* [melting pot] (Sutton 2008:107) because many of its citizens are of Spanish, Italian, and Amerindian descent. Slavery (early 1500s – 1853) also introduced a significant African population to the country. However, Argentina supported immigration policies in the 19th century that advocated a whitening of the nation (Stubbs and Reyes 2006:11). The mass migration of European immigrants to Argentina in the 19th century changed the socio-economic and racial profile of the country, which became more homogenous. Furthermore, Argentine politicians argued that whitening through immigration, was one way to promote progress and civilization (Andrews 2004:119). In her historiography of Argentina, Julia Rodriguez also writes that European immigration was promoted because whiteness was associated with purity (2006:24-25).

Argentina's 1853 Constitution is often referenced as a government document that favors immigration policies that allow for racial whitening. Article 25 of this

Constitution states that the government will encourage European migration to Argentina and will not restrict entrance to those immigrants who enter the country with the intent of bettering the nation's culture. Giving preference to European immigrants with "desirable" traits suggests that this group would eradicate physical and cultural forms of "primitivism" and "barbarism" in the country, which were thought to be present in non-whites (Rodriguez 2006:13). My research shows that similar ideas persist today, as many Argentines believe the nation is predominantly white and perceive the non-white population as culturally backwards.

The title of this thesis, *Ahí Te Estás*, is a reflection of the racial discourse of Latin America's past and how racial discourse in general affects us now. *Ahí te estás* [here you are] was a racial category used to label someone whose parentage was a mulatto woman and a coyote mestizo, which was a man whose parentage was composed of varying percentages of Spanish and Indian descent (Levine 1980:129). However, I have appropriated this term to also mean where an individual finds him or herself according to any racial discourse. In this thesis, I reflect on where blacks are categorized in the midst of Argentina's discourse. This thesis demonstrates how discourse in Argentina diminishes the perception of phenotypic variability in the nation's citizens and institutionalizes the way in which people conceptualize race, their ancestry, and the history of Argentina. I specifically focus on how this discourse perpetuates ideas that blacks do not exist in the nation's history and emphasizes that there are no historically black populations in the country. This is manifested in racist speech, attitudes, and behaviors. Furthermore, I discuss how Argentine discourse supports the idea of a white nationhood and rejects racial diversity by presenting blacks as geographically and

temporally distant from the nation. By rejecting racial diversity, the national discourse essentially promotes a mono-cultural narrative of white homogeneity.

This thesis is also about the ways in which phenotypically black Argentines attempt to position themselves with respect to the Argentine nation. Despite efforts to ignore African descendants in the nation's history, several black movements have been created with the goal of increasing consciousness and awareness of blacks in Argentina. Most of the members of these movements are recent black immigrants or whites interested in Africa and African heritage. Their efforts have resulted in the formation of black organizations that promote black culture and diversity in Argentina. Furthermore, part of the movement to increase black awareness involves inter-organizational collaboration for cultural events, community meetings, and so forth. These interactions often generate discussions and conflicts that revolve around identity and culture.

My first trip to Argentina was in the summer of 2008 through a study abroad program sponsored by the Tomorrow People Organization. In preparation for this trip, I mined the Internet for information on blacks and black-white social interactions in the country. This was because my experiences with racism in the United States have made me overly aware of race relations anywhere I travel. For instance, when I was growing up, I never thought about how I was perceived as an African-American until I was 9-years old, when I enrolled in a school where I was the only child of color. There I realized how different I was from those around me. I was constantly teased and mocked. One classmate openly voiced his desire to compete against me academically to prove that he was better than me. At times, I was even asked to do things that "black people do" and my classmates often begged me to do impressions of black actors they saw on

television. I felt isolated and did not understand why I was treated differently in a society where I thought I belonged. Over time, I had similar experiences that only served to show that my race was always going to influence my social interactions with others, whether positive or negative.

When I arrived in Buenos Aires, I was instantly aware of being a black person in a predominantly white nation. I did not immediately see phenotypically black people in the airport or when I arrived at my hostel in Barrio Recoleta. After I met my study abroad group at the hostel, we walked through the city to find a restaurant. I could not help, but notice that there were no blacks anywhere I looked. Reading about Argentina before my trip prepared me for the lack of black presence in the country. However, it did not prepare me for the stares I received because of my blackness. When I told my program director, Laura Sala, about being stared at, she told me that few Argentines had ever seen a black person and sometimes blacks are mistaken for Brazilians. At the time, I accepted what she said, but I still did not entirely understand why blackness was treated like a novelty in this country.

One weekend, my group took a trip to Mar de Plata, a city in the province of Buenos Aires. At the time, it was difficult to ignore people who stared at me. Laura cautioned that it might be worse for me in Mar de Plata because few tourists visit the city in the winter and very few of the visiting tourists are black. When our group arrived, we decided to dine at a beachside restaurant. As we waited outside to be seated, I noticed that a few of the diners peered through the window at me. I attempted to ignore them, but it only became worse when we entered and were seated. I found myself the subject of many stares. People who waited in line for the restroom peered over the booth at me.

Although I did not know what they were thinking, it made me feel uncomfortable and I struggled to discern their thoughts. I restrained my anger as a pair of women examined every move I made as I ate. I felt like I was being inspected, that there was something wrong with me.

I began to scrutinize everything I did to make sure I was not violating social rules. I realized that I was not doing anything wrong. I was not dressed or acting differently than the others around me, but I was black. The stares I received when I was walking on the street registered as mere curiosity, but this was different. I felt odd and out of place. All of the emotions I felt when people used to treat me like it was a disgrace to be black, when they tried to see how many stereotypes I could perpetuate, came flashing back to me. I was more aware of my physical presence than was comfortable for me. I almost waited for people to approach me, touch my hair, and pull my skin. I was the only black person in the restaurant and the stares made me acutely aware of it.

During another weekend, Laura invited the study abroad group to visit her aunt and uncle's house outside the city. As the other students and I walked through the front gate of the property, Laura's grandmother approached and welcomed each of us. When she approached me, she put one hand on each of my shoulders, stared at me for a minute, and said, "¡Qué linda! ¿Sos puertorriqueña?" [You are pretty. Are you Puerto Rican?]. Although I initially blushed at her statement, she both exasperated and confounded me. Laura told me that her grandmother had traveled to the United States before, which I assumed meant she had seen or interacted with African-Americans while there. Her grandmother's comment suggested otherwise. It had not yet occurred to me that being raised in the United States, where black history is often celebrated and taught in public

schools, afforded me a unique experience that most people – black or otherwise – did not share.

When I brought my concerns – and rants – to Laura, she again claimed that some Argentines live their entire lives without ever seeing a person of African descendant. She said, “If you saw a purple person walking down the street, wouldn’t you stare, too?” I considered her question and thought that in such a circumstance, I would be different. I would not do to someone else, what was done to me. I certainly would look at them, but I would not follow them down the street. I would not stare at them as they waited on the corner, bought their groceries, or ate their food.

It took me some time to finally realize that part of the problem was the cultural differences between American and Argentine beliefs about staring in public. For example, in the United States, staring is a type of social activity and engaging in it is determined by social relationships. Staring at strangers is considered impolite and children are often taught not to stare. Because of this, I perceive it as a sign of disrespect if someone I do not know stares at me. However, this is different in Argentina. Staring or maintaining eye contact with someone is part of the culture and it is not seen as being offensive or inappropriate in most contexts. Nevertheless, I was still frustrated with Laura’s response because I did not think it completely explained the behavior I observed: an inability to treat social and ethnic diversity as a normal part of daily life.

My study abroad experience forced me to question why black skin was a novelty and a rarity in Argentina. I also wondered about the reasoning behind statements such as “Blacks do not exist in Argentina.” Neither of these issues was completely and satisfactorily resolved during my trip. I conducted literature searches and online research

about blacks in the nation, which showed that Africans who arrived in Argentina as slaves through the Atlantic slave trade became a substantial portion of the total Buenos Aires populace during the 19th century. A census conducted in 1778 showed that about 30% of the Argentine populace was of African descent (Fejerman et al. 2005:164).

While informal sources state that blacks were about 50% of Argentina's population, these numbers are not documented in any formal sources. However, this ethnic group was documented as less than two percent of the total population in 1887, which was the last year blacks were counted in the national census (Andrews 1979:21, Andrews 1980:66).

With my initial findings in mind, I returned to the country in the summer (Argentina's winter) of 2010 to conduct my graduate research on blacks in the nation. I knew that they existed because I eventually saw a few people of African descent during my first trip to Argentina. I wanted to understand what caused the historic decline of the black population and how that was reflected in the current population. However, I first sought to discover the discourse of identity among blacks and how whites in Argentina identified this group. I believed that by first understanding how blacks identified, I could later determine if this discourse influenced their population's decline.

While countries like Brazil have extremely complex racial classification systems, Argentina has what is essentially a ternary system with people categorized as black, white, or "other". Activists have sought cooperation within and promoted activities in the African descendant community to form a different classification system. Thus far, the following identifying terms have been proposed: Afro-Argentines, Afro-descendants, and member of the African Diaspora (Frigerio and Lamborghini 2009). While these identifiers are important, understanding the discourse of how and why identity is

constructed may help reveal inter-community schisms, relationships, and perceptions in the pursuit of a collective identity.

Understanding the discourse is important for two reasons. First, the multicultural narrative that black Argentines have created to identify themselves conflicts with the mono-cultural narrative established by whites, or Euro-Argentines. Understanding why this new discourse was formed ultimately reveals the ways in which blacks are perceived and the dynamics of social interactions in Argentina. Second, struggle over discourse, particularly over the role of African descendent people in Argentina's history is a critical element in the current black immigrant community's search for acceptance and power in Argentine society.

Presently, there are black movements occurring in Argentina. Their proximal goals are to increase awareness of African descendants in Argentina. However, their ultimate goal is to help black Argentines achieve a socially and economically equitable membership in Argentine society. Some of these movements involve the formation of black theatre companies, organizations, and associations. To understand the nature and construction of black identity in Argentina, I first identified part of the African descendant population. My research largely focuses around a sample of black individuals and organizations in Buenos Aires and their preparations for the October 2010 census in Argentina. These preparations provided a forum for the promotion of a multicultural narrative and showed the desire of black Argentines to create their own forms of identity as they strove for acceptance in a dominant, white society.

Organization of the Thesis

The chapters of this thesis address the history of blacks in Argentina, their current presence in the country, and the formation of black identity. I will use the term *black(s)* to refer to the general population of individuals who identify themselves as having African ancestry regardless of their ethnicity. *Afro-Argentines* and *Afro immigrants* are sub-populations of the black community. I will use the term *Afro-Argentine* to refer to those who understand themselves to be the direct descendants of African slaves brought to Argentina. I will use the term *Afro immigrant* to describe non-native blacks who have migrated to Argentina in the 20th and 21st centuries.

I use anthropological theoretical perspectives in my thesis and discuss them in chapter 2. I also discuss the claims that Afro-Argentines do not exist and blacks are not Argentines. I incorporate Foucault's theory of discourse to demonstrate how social actions in Argentine society: (1) minimize the black cultural contributions and (2) influence social structure. I also assert that the process of denial prevents the inclusion of blacks as part of Argentina's past and present. I discuss how this removes African characters and characteristics from written history so that *Argentinidad* [being Argentine] means being white. Additionally, I use Arjun Appadurai's notion of scapes, specifically ethnoscares to explain how the influx of African immigrants shifts ideas of blackness in Argentina. I apply Appadurai's theory to show that the incoming black population has generated identity conflicts between historical and non-historical black Argentines.

I review the previous research on blacks in Argentina in chapter 3. Literature on this subject largely focuses on the period of slavery and the subsequent decline of the Afro-Argentine population. Historian George Reid Andrews and anthropologist Lea Geler have conducted comprehensive studies on Afro-Argentines. Both authors primarily focus on Afro-Argentines in Buenos Aires, with discussion of their culture and history in Argentina. Other scholars also focus on African descendants in the country. Marvin Lewis (1996) describes their cultural icons and literary representations of black culture, anthropologist Pablo Cirio discusses cultural differences between the Afro groups, and anthropologist Alejandro Frigerio researches issues of identity.

In chapter 3, I also review the history of African descendants in Argentina from the 17th to the 20th centuries. I mainly discuss Afro-Argentines because they were the predominant black group during this period. Between the 17th and early 19th centuries, blacks were slaves who worked in domestic service, livestock, and agriculture. However, after freedom was granted in 1853, their employment opportunities were limited. Accounts of the black community of the 19th century are sparse and this may reflect a policy of institutional racism. The historic cultural impact of Afro-Argentines may have been strong, but by the second half of the 20th century, it was largely unrecognized by Argentine society in general. Starting in the last third of the 20th century, black immigrant populations from other Latin American, Caribbean, and African countries slowly moved to Argentina.

I discuss how the dominant narrative is a form of discourse that influences the construction of racial identity in chapter 4. I first show that the classification system established by Argentina's dominant narrative reduces the complexity of identity in the

nation. The narrative influences how blacks are identified and represented in the country. My analysis of black identity shows that the realization of the dominant narrative through the process of denial allows black presence and racial heritage to be ignored. While I apply Foucault's theory in the chapter 2 to show how discourse is used to establish power structures, I use his theory in this chapter to demonstrate how the narrative influences the ways in which blacks are identified and visually represented in the nation. I later show how the dominant narrative influences identity discourse in the black community.

As the nation's discourse suppresses black presence, the actions of black descendent groups make blacks visible by establishing a multicultural narrative. This new narrative is founded by the attempts of Afro immigrants to increase awareness of black ancestry in Argentina. By showing that blacks have history in the country, the incoming black population hopes to create leverage that can be used to combat racist ideologies and to pursue equal rights.

I also provide an ethnographic account of three black organizations and their perceptions of black identity and the 2010 Argentine census in chapter 4. The issue of identity was incorporated into census preparations as black organizations worked together to propose an identifier recognized by blacks and by the state. Moreover, the census was a pivotal event for the community because it fostered intergroup collaboration and allowed the black community to create a collective identity. However, I discuss the conflicts that arose among black individuals and organizations while establishing this collective identity. I show that these conflicts are an indication of the shifting ethnoscape present in Argentina's black community.

I conclude with a brief summary of the multicultural narrative in Argentina in chapter 5. I assert that an identification system among the black population may influence how it is able to gain awareness and acquire political power to combat racial discrimination. Attempts to elucidate the complexity of black identity and fight discrimination have resulted in the formation of the multicultural narrative. Additionally, I discuss how the nation's history and current interaction with blacks determines the social perceptions about this ethnic group and how the discourse of black identity counters these perceptions. I also discuss some of the problems with the multicultural narrative and their impact on the effectiveness of this discourse. Finally, I provide several suggestions for the black Argentine community and its continued attempts at cultural recognition and political power in Argentina.

Methodology

I conducted my research in Buenos Aires (Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires), the capital of Argentina. I chose the city as my primary field site because of time constraints and access to key populations. It is difficult to access black organizations that are based in provincial areas such as Tucumán and Santiago del Estero. The city, however, is home to a large number of organizations encompassing a range of burgeoning black descendant organizations, which are easily accessible. I could not study the black community in one specific area of Buenos Aires because there was no geographically located community I could investigate. To overcome this obstacle, I decided to focus on African organizations and their members. Many of these

organizations are created by people of a specific nationality, such as Cape Verdean, Afro-Argentine, Haitian, and Senegalese.

I was in communication with Argentine anthropologist Alejandro Frigerio before I began my field research. Frigerio researches Afro-Americans and racial categories in Argentina. He provided me with information about the various organizations that exist in Buenos Aires. Frigerio told me that some organizations have only one person in them, are organizations in name only, or are *fantasmas* – they do not exist. Being called a *fantasma* also means that these organizations do not have members, function, or exist beyond the name of the organization itself. Frigerio stated that the following were the only organizations active during the time of my research: Movimiento de la Diáspora Africana, Asociación Misibamba, África Vive, Asociación Caboverdeana de Socorros Mutuos, África y su Diáspora, and Movimiento Afrocultural.

Despite the information Frigerio provided, there is no conclusive listing of the different black groups in Buenos Aires and Argentina. The organizations he listed were not the ones I decided to observe. Organizations are hard to identify because members of the community disagree as to the number of members in each group, whether certain groups are active, and in some cases, whether a group is really a group at all. Given this problem I had to design criteria to choose organizations to study. I observed groups that had a minimum of five people. These groups also had to be currently active in the community at the time of my research or have been active within the last year.

I arrived in Buenos Aires, in the middle of the bicentennial celebration of Argentina's independence. An African-American researcher currently living in the city sent me an invitation to a celebration at a local cultural center. Attending the event was

my introduction into the black community. I was able to make contacts with many of the attendees, some of whom later became my informants and interviewees. I conducted participant-observation with members, including officers, from six organizations: Proyecto 34°S, el Instituto Argentino para la Igualdad, Diversidad e Integración (IARPIDI); la Organización de los Residentes Haitianos en la Argentina (ORHA), África Vive, el Movimiento Afrocultural, and la Diáspora Africana en Argentina. During my research, I conducted extensive observation of Proyecto 34°S and IARPIDI because I was openly invited to attend their meetings and events. Although I attended events sponsored by the other organizations I observed, I was unable to attend their meetings because either I was not welcome to or they did not have any during the time I conducted my research. Other black organizations fulfilled my criteria, however, I did not observe them because I was unable to locate their headquarters, contact them, or my requests for a meeting were not returned.

I conducted ethnographic interviews with both male and female informants. I used two types of interviews: semi-structured and unstructured. I created a question guide that I used as a reference to direct my questions, as well as to prevent me from asking leading questions. During the semi-structured interviews, I asked the interviewees where they were born, how they self-identified, and their perceptions of diversity in Argentina. I also asked them about the interactions between native Argentines and foreigners.

The data from semi-structured interviews allowed me to discern how people constructed ideas of identity, diversity, and racism in Argentina. I conducted semi-structured interviews with nine men and nine women. Some of their occupations were

college student, vendor, artist, and unemployed. Eight were white Argentines and the rest were blacks and non-black immigrants (Table 1). Three of the interviewees were contacts of friends and colleagues in the United States. While attending black cultural events and activities, I talked with people in attendance, some of which I later asked to interview. My other interviewees were vendors I regularly observed in a specific neighborhood or taxi drivers I met while taking cab rides through the city.

My unstructured interviews were primarily with members and officers of the black organizations I observed. I also interviewed people of African and non-African ancestry who were not formally affiliated with black organizations. These interviews included seven men and five women. Each of these individuals was actively involved in the black community (Table 2). I met them at community events or other interviewees referred them to me. I also chose individuals who had extensive involvement in black organizations and activities.

During unstructured interviews, I asked the interviewees about their organization's ideology, cultural activities, and nationality of its members; and how the organization interacted with blacks and the general community. I also asked questions about how they constructed their identity and the black community's preparations for the 2010 census. The most salient parts of these interviews were the discussions of organizational conflicts and experiences with racism in Argentina. I used these interviews to confirm how blacks constructed identity and how racism continues to keep this ethnic group ideologically and socially removed from society. At the end of each interview, I asked the interviewees if they could recommend someone else that I should

talk to or interview. This type of data collection methodology is called snowball sampling (Bernard 1995:97).

I recorded my interviews with a digital recorder and made handwritten notes. In most cases, I provided each interviewee with a consent form that detailed my project, intentions for the interview, contact information, and IRB application number (2010T158). The sheets were given in Spanish or English, depending on the interviewee's preference. Those who did not receive a consent form elected to only do verbal consent. Additionally, I transcribed two Spanish interviews and three English interviews. Candid Technology, Inc.'s transcription service transcribed ten of my Spanish interviews, which I later reviewed for accuracy. In addition to participant-observation and ethnographic interviews, I use auto-ethnography because my experiences as an African-American woman are important to the ways in which I have come to understand and define black identity in Argentina. I also incorporate my experiences with race in the United States to demonstrate how they influence my interpretation of black identity and how this relates to Argentina's multicultural narrative.

Table 1. Demographics of Semi-Structured Interviews. This is the demographic information of interviewees who participated in semi-structured interviews. All participants' names have been changed to protect their identity.

No.	Name	Sex	Ethnicity	Classification
1	Oscar	Male	Dominican	Black
2	Mateo	Male	Senegalese	Black
3	Franco	Male	Senegalese	Black
4	Juan	Male	Senegalese	Black
5	Anthony	Male	Ghanaian	Black
6	Pamela	Female	Senegalese	Black
7	Erika	Female	Paraguayan	Other
8	Lori	Female	Indigenous	Other
9	Elsa	Female	Argentine	White
10	Stefano	Male	Argentine	White
11	Marieta	Female	Argentine	White
12	Lisa	Female	Argentine	White
13	Manuel	Male	Argentine	White
14	Alba	Female	Argentine	White
15	Sabrina	Female	Argentine	White
16	Alice	Female	American	White
17	Roberto	Male	Argentine	White
18	Mark	Male	Canadian	White

Table 2. Demographic Information and Organization Affiliation of Interviewees who Participated in Unstructured Interviews. The names of some individuals (indicated by *) have been changed to protect their identity. The names of organizational founders, presidents, and prominent anthropologists have not been changed.

No.	Name	Sex	Ethnicity	Organizational Membership
1	Maria “Pocha” Lamadrid	Female	Afro-Argentine	África Vive
2	Pablo Cirio	Male	Argentine	Asociación Misibamba
3	Nengumbi Celestin Sukama	Male	Congolese	El Instituto Argentino para la Igualdad, Diversidad, e Integración (IARPIDI)
4	*Julia	Female	Argentine	El Instituto Argentino para la Igualdad, Diversidad, e Integración (IARPIDI)
5	*Grace	Female	Congolese	El Instituto Argentino para la Igualdad, Diversidad, e Integración (IARPIDI)
6	*Marcela	Female	Afro-Uruguayan	El Movimiento Afrocultural
7	Diego Bonga	Male	Afro-Uruguayan	El Movimiento Afrocultural
8	*Victor	Male	Afro-Uruguayan	El Movimiento Afrocultural
9	Federico Pita	Male	Afro-Argentine	El Movimiento de la Diáspora Africana de la Argentina
10	Alejandro Frigerio	Male	Argentine	El Movimiento de la Diáspora Africana de la Argentina
11	*Sergio	Male	Egyptian	No affiliation
12	Nikki Froneman	Female	South African	Proyecto 34°S

CHAPTER II

THE DISCOURSE AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF BLACKNESS IN ARGENTINA

Introduction

My thesis seeks to reveal the nature of black identity in current-day Argentina. The country's national ideology influences how black identity is expressed and how blacks are represented. The literature on blackness and whiteness in the country focuses on a dominant narrative of racial identity and what it represents. I apply Michel Foucault's theory of discourse to show how the dominant narrative explains black presence. This discourse allows white Argentines to determine the historical and contemporary representations of blacks. Essentially, Argentina promotes *blanquedad*, or whiteness as part of its national identity. This social process ignores cultural hybridizations and instead promotes the idea that Argentina is a white nation. Under the mandates of the dominant narrative, people cannot have Argentine heritage unless they are categorically white. Blacks have created a discourse that is countercultural to Argentina's dominant narrative. This discourse determines how they choose to represent themselves in relation to others in society. I also show how this discourse shapes, and is shaped by, the social and economic positions of blacks in Argentina.

Afro immigrants and refugees who relocated to Argentina increased the numbers of blacks in the country. However, I argue that this group has changed the black population in two ways. First, they have destabilized the preexisting black community, resulting in a change to the historical black identity in the country as perceived by white Argentines. Second, these incoming blacks have also changed the general Argentine understanding of the black community, altering what it means to be black for both white and black Argentines. I use Arjun Appadurai's concept of ethnoscape to demonstrate how the Afro-Argentine understanding of identity in Argentina became disrupted as Afro immigrants were incorporated into the nation. The changing ethnoscape may ultimately affect how black identity is manifested.

The Dominant Narrative as Discourse

Former Argentine president Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (1868 – 1874) often spoke of “*ambas Americas*”, or the “Two Americas”. This was the idea that Latin America would eventually embody the essence of development and socialization that Sarmiento believed was present in North America. As part of his idea of the Two Americas, Sarmiento also believed that it was important to rid Argentina of the barbarism he thought existed in the nation. For him, “barbarism” was a political term used to describe his opposition of *caudillismo*, or populism. It was also another word for the African and indigenous presence among the country's general populace. His ideas are a cornerstone of Argentina dominant narrative. This narrative is an ideological construct that shapes the nation's social, political, and economic structures. Frigerio writes:

Dominant narratives provide an essentialized national identity, focusing on the nation's external boundaries and internal composition, proposing the correct and orderly placement of its (ethnic, religious, gender) constituent elements, containing the present as they construct a legitimating past. Neither univocal nor uncontested, dominant narratives are confronted with counter-narratives or subjected to oppositional readings with different degrees of success or social acceptance in particular historical moments. [2002b:294-295]

The dominant narrative of Argentina advocates for the whitening of Argentine society.

This means that black characters and characteristics are ignored. In addition, this narrative requires that the history of the country remains “white” such that black historical presence is not included.

Frigerio (2008a) argues that the dominant narrative calls for the “invisibilization” of blacks in Argentina. He writes that the narrative makes blacks invisible by creating four conditions: (1) making ethnic and racial contributions and presences invisible, (2) placing non-whites in the distance, or temporal and geographic past, (3) ignoring cultural hybridization and the process of *mestizaje*, and (4) emphasizing the early disappearance of Afro-Argentines and the irrelevance of their contributions to the local culture (2008:119). I agree with Frigerio’s idea of the dominant narrative and its promotion of whiteness in Argentina. I contend that his conditions are true, but argue that blacks are not made “invisible”; rather, whiteness is simply socially valued and promoted. All connections between this historic black community in Argentina and the white population are erased, thereby removing any historical claim black people may have to the national identity. Furthermore, this narrative is the ideological basis for the structuring of Argentine society. It determines how people think and behave towards others with specific emphasis on maintaining the dominance of whiteness in this country. Although it is not directly stated in current literature on Argentina’s narrative, I argue that the

dominant narrative is a form of discourse as described by French historian, Michel Foucault. As discourse, the narrative determines social interactions and identity in Argentina. This is regularly experienced by blacks in how whites represent and perceive the identity of blacks in the nation.

Foucault introduced a theory of discourse, which was different from conventional ideas of discourse as speech. He critically analyzed the units of discourse and its formation (Foucault 1972). Foucault believed that an individual's identity was not static because it was shaped by social interactions. Argentina's dominant narrative is a form of discourse that influences how white Argentines understand blacks. Manifestation of this discourse in everyday interactions also shapes how blacks identify themselves and the ways they are presented in society.

In his analysis of knowledge and language, Foucault writes that knowledge is a form of discourse (1972:182). He also states that consciousness is a form of knowledge. Applying these two concepts, this means that discourse can shape our consciousness and ultimately, our reality and worldview. For Foucault, our perceptions of the world are determined by how we behave in relation to one another and how we behave in relation to objects. The meanings that we generate from these interactions shape the understanding that we have of the world in which we live. These meanings are formed through our personal experiences, childhood, education, and social context. The dominant narrative of Argentina is an example of a discourse that shapes Argentine reality and understanding of the world. The discursive formations of this narrative also affect African descendants living in the country. The discourse is manifested in

language, knowledge about the country's history, and in the social relationships between whites and blacks.

The Dominant Narrative Establishes Power

According to Foucault, discourse establishes power (1984:57-58). The way discourse is used can establish social, political, and cultural power. Foucault studied prisons and psychiatric facilities to understand exchanges of power. In an interview with Paul Rabinow, Foucault stated:

To put it very simply, psychiatric internment, the mental normalization of individuals, and penal institutions have no doubt a fairly limited importance if one is only looking for their economic significance. On the other hand, they are undoubtedly essential to the general functioning of the wheels of power. So long as the posing of the question of power was kept subordinate to the economic instance and the system of interest, which this served, there was a tendency to regard these problems as of small importance. [1984:58]

Thus, Foucault argued that how power is exercised within superstructures is partially determined by where the most benefit can be gained for the dominant group.

While psychiatric facilities and prisons are places where the relations of power are sometimes distorted and often negotiated, not much attention is paid to these institutions if they do not have a significant impact on the economy of a particular society. The same can be applied to the discursive power of Argentine social institutions. The dominant narrative is enacted through these institutions because it does not inhibit overall economic development of the country and also places blacks in a position where their economic endeavors do not compete with those of the majority group.

Foucault also believed that what was accepted as truth was a reflection of the power relationships between people. He stated:

“Truth” is centered on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement...it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, notwithstanding certain strict limitations); it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation (“ideological” struggles).
[1984:73]

Those who disseminate and control discourse determine what is acceptable (true) and what is not (false). The dominant narrative of Argentina is the form of truth that is promulgated throughout the country. It gives power to whites, allowing them to claim heritage in Argentina and have an identity and presence firmly grounded in the history of the country. It denies power to blacks, interpreting them as alien outsiders. The spread of this discursive truth through education and media removes African ancestry from Argentina.

The Dominant Narrative is a Form of Language and Knowledge

In his analysis of the interconnection between knowledge and science, Foucault stated, “Knowledge is that of which one can speak in a discursive practice, which is specified by that fact: the domain constituted by the different object that will or will not acquire a scientific status” (Foucault 1972:182). He later writes that knowledge is a compilation of the practices or ways of speaking within a particular subject and it is the product of integrating concepts. In addition, knowledge is a discursive practice because

it is created from our experiences with objects and people around us. Knowledge is the sum of our thoughts and experiences.

Discourse is also a form of language and knowledge because it is information that people transmit to one another through experiences. Because discourse is knowledge, it can make certain statements appear as truth in certain contexts. Foucault wrote:

Positivities do not characterize the form of knowledge – whether they are *a priori*, necessary conditions or forms of rationality that have, in turn, been put into operation by history. But neither do they define the state of knowledge at a given moment in time: they do not draw up a list of what, from that moment, had been demonstrated to be true and had assumed the status of definitively acquired knowledge, and a list of what... had been accepted as a common belief or a belief demanded by the power of imagination. [1972:181]

He argued that knowledge does not necessarily have to consist of scientifically proven truths; that in fact, such truths simply constitute a particular form of discourse.

Argentina's dominant narrative is an example of a form of knowledge that is based on social experiences and beliefs rather than historical facts.

Many Argentines deny that blacks exist in Argentina despite seeing blacks regularly. The knowledge disseminated in the country through education, the media, as well as their experiences dictate that Afro-Argentines only exist in the nation's history as slaves. As a result, current day blacks are understood as "other," and not part of Argentine society. This belief is contrary to the history of African slaves in Argentina, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 3. However, this belief is consistent with the narrative of *blanquedad*. Despite evidence of both a strong African influence in Argentine culture and the presence of a small black population with roots in slavery in Argentina, the prevailing discourse of Argentine society denies this population's

existence. I have provided evidence of this discourse in various forms, such as advertising and literature, in Appendix A.

One statement that is commonly accepted and repeated in Argentina's general discourse is "No hay negros en Argentina" [There are no blacks in Argentina]. This is powerful because it excludes historical black presence from the nation regardless of evidence that suggests that blacks exist. It is also part of the cultural process of *blanquedad*, which suppresses black images and cultural representations, and re-imagines African traits as being solely African and not influential in Argentine society.

Furthermore, Argentine discourse is consistent with a social system where whites have the power to determine who is and who is not Argentine. Because they are the dominant population and control the vast majority of wealth and political power in the nation, they are able to determine which parts of history are told, how different groups fit into history, and ultimately who is authentically Argentine and who is not. They do this through media, textbooks, cultural performances, and event rituals. This includes not only a whitewashing of Argentine history, but also the use of images that portray blacks both mythically and negatively. These portrayals emphasize the devaluation of blackness and further reinforce whiteness as central to Argentine identity (Appendix A).

Destabilizing and Emerging Black Visibility

As the black community increasingly desires recognition in Argentina's social and political spheres, the differences between Afro-Argentines and Afro immigrants have become clearer. This confluence of culture inevitably destabilizes the nature of identity

among blacks in Argentina. It is a reflection of the concept of ethnoscape as proposed by socio-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1990). Appadurai describes how cultural interactions are maintained by the expansion of social groups through commerce, migration, and other factors that reinforce cross-cultural bonds. He states that the global cultural economy is disjunctured because it no longer fits the center-peripheral models as proposed by world systems theorists like Immanuel Wallerstein. It is instead influenced by five cultural landscapes: technoscapes (technology), ethnoscapes (communities of historically similar people who live in different countries), financescapes (global capital, currency), mediascapes (media forms), and ideoscapes (ideologies) (Appadurai 1990:31).

Appadurai writes:

By ethnoscape, I mean the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree. [1990:32]

He implies that this shifting network of people changes the political and cultural landscapes of countries such that they no longer fit within their ascribed institutional frameworks.

I argue that on a social level, this shifting network can change the stability of interpersonal interactions and ethnic visibility. For example, Afro-Argentines have struggled to gain recognition in a country that has long denied its African heritage. For over four centuries, they have either been: slaves with no claim to Argentine identity, the descendants of slaves who were actively discriminated against and placed at the bottom of a racial classification system that marginalized them, or written out of the consciousness of Argentine history and thought to be non-existent. Additionally, this

sub-population has tried to establish a black Argentine identity by making the public aware of its historical roots in Argentina through various cultural performances and presentations that exhibit the African heritage of the nation. Afro-Argentines have actively sought to reestablish their historical connection to Argentina in a social and cultural atmosphere that has denied their importance. For instance, an Afro-Argentine from the black community is chosen to be a black representative in the Instituto Nacional contra la Discriminación (INADI – The National Institute Against Discrimination) to advocate for the rights of blacks and insure that their needs are addressed in society. Furthermore, attempts by Afro-Argentines to gain political power have resulted in the state recognition of two black groups, la Casa de la Cultura Afro-Indo-Americana (The Afro-Indian-American House of Culture) and Asociación Misibamba (The Misibamba Association). Both organizations are founded by Afro-Argentines.

Nevertheless, the Afro-Argentine fight for visibility is destabilized by the introduction of Afro immigrants, refugees, and guest workers. While some may argue that the core of today's black community originated with Afro-Argentines, the introduction of blacks from other countries suggests otherwise. By the 20th century, the Afro-Argentine population was very small. Frigerio writes, "Data about the black community in the first decades of the 20th century are very poor. There are no surviving newspapers that may give a glimpse of its life. There are, however, certain hints, which show that the community persisted" (2000:6). He later shows excerpts from various black newspapers to support his argument that blacks "still constituted a community which strived for public recognition" (Frigerio 2000:6). However, the evidence, or lack

thereof, strongly suggests that the Afro-Argentine community was numerically miniscule by the mid-20th century.

The infusion of Afro immigrants from other countries in the 1990s brought a large black population. Where there were two or three Afro-Argentine associations and no neighborhood that could be described as Afro-Argentine, the wave of Afro immigrants in the 20th and 21st centuries later resulted in Cape Verdean, Haitian, Dominican, African and other black communities, each with multiple organizations. Additionally, the influx of Afro immigrants, especially those from Africa have brought increased attention to blackness in the nation. Because these immigrants are in the forefront of white Argentine consciousness as being black, general black culture and identity is equated with Afro immigrant culture. This reduces the ability for Afro-Argentines to establish legitimacy in the nation's identity. Essentially, the ethnoscape of Argentina has changed and disrupted the ability of Afro-Argentines to awaken consciousness to their existence and undermines their claim to be a distinct black community. This new ethnoscape has instead provided a setting that brings more awareness to the conditions of Afro immigrants.

Conclusion

The dominant narrative of Argentina is a discourse that structures the political and social economy of the nation. The most overt effects of this discourse are seen in the interactions between whites and blacks. While the dominant narrative excludes blackness, blacks attempt to bring awareness to the black community present in the nation. Achieving recognition for past and present African cultural and social influences is difficult for black Argentines for two reasons. First, the national discourse denies the

role of blacks in the nation's history and has diminished the role blacks played in its development. Secondly, the influx of Afro immigrants is changing perceptions of what it means to be black.

The nature of blackness in Argentina is yet to be firmly established. This is not only because of the changing ethnoscape, but also because of the constant reinforcement of whiteness and homogeneity. The Afro immigrant population challenges the idea that Argentina is a white nation. The sheer number of immigrants has increased the visibility of blacks present in Argentina. Additionally, the political involvement and activism of this group is making it difficult for people to deny their importance to the nation. Many Afro immigrant organizations are actively addressing issues of race and discrimination by forming politically recognized anti-discrimination agencies and discussing their cause in the media. While their actions are a benefit to the general black community, they ultimately strain relations with historical black groups by changing the nature of black identity.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HISTORY OF AFRICAN DESCENDANTS IN ARGENTINA

Introduction

Argentina's development after independence paralleled that of other Latin American countries. The nation struggled to achieve economic, political, and social stability. This led to the development of class-consciousness and ideas of nationalism. These struggles also resulted in institutional crises, dictatorships, and failed social transformations. In addition, Latin America's history has exhibited a constantly evolving dynamic. While class is a significant component in any modern society, the political economy, race, and ethnicity are also important influences in this geographic area.

Despite the importance of race and ethnicity, the majority of works on Afro-Latin America do not focus on these subjects. Historian Pierre-Michel Fontaine writes:

The historians' concern has been generally with slavery, the slave trade, the abolition of slavery, and the effect of the "peculiar institution" on relations between the races. It might be argued that not enough historical work on postabolition Afro-Latin America has been done that was not directly related to slavery or its end. [1980:115]

The lack of historical work that focuses beyond issues of slavery may be the result of the low socioeconomic and political status of non-whites in Latin America. History is written for audiences and the audience for non-white Argentine history has been small and impoverished. In Argentina, the majority of historical literature on the nation does not emphasize the presence of the indigenous and African descendant population. However, the few historical works about these populations focus on their presence in the nation's past. This is because Argentina has long considered itself a white nation, a piece of Europe in Latin America.

The efforts to expunge the indigenous, Amerindian, and African populations of this country have been successful in that the current percentages of each group are dramatically smaller than what they were prior to the 21st century. This is demonstrated in the Afro-Argentine population, which is nearly invisible in the current Argentine nation. African descendants have slowly become a focus of interest in studies about Argentina. Anthropologists have emerged as the most prominent source of information about this group. The majority of research conducted on this subject focuses on the history and culture of Afro-Argentines prior to the 20th century. However, some researchers are also beginning to study genetic admixtures and the presence of African genetic contributions in the Buenos Aires population (Fejerman et al. 2005, Avena et al. 2006).

In this chapter, I provide a review of the literature about African descendants in Argentina. I discuss contemporary studies on black presence in this country from the 17th to the 21st centuries and provide a brief history of blacks in Argentina during this time. I will mainly focus on Afro-Argentines when discussing blacks because they were the

historical black Argentine population and were the predominant black group in the country during this time. I will also discuss their presence in the 21st century in chapter 4.

Literature on the History of African Descendants

The majority of literature on African descendants is about their history in Argentina, with emphasis on the 17th to the 20th centuries. A significant part of this body of work discusses their disappearance from society and the hypotheses that attempt to explain this population's decline. Among the literary contributions on this subject, historian George Reid Andrews and Argentine anthropologist Lea Geler provide the largest and most significant works.

George Reid Andrews' research focuses on issues of blackness in Latin America, with emphasis on Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay. Andrews (2004) studies Afro-Latin populations and culture from the 19th to the 21st centuries and shows how blacks have been influenced by the politics of whitening and "blackening". He published *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800-1900* (1980) as part of his graduate study in Latin American History at the University of Wisconsin. This was the first comprehensive work on the history of blacks in Argentina. Andrews dedicates the first half of his book to providing background information on Argentina, the slave trade, and the factors that caused the Afro-Argentine population to decline. He first briefly discusses the "process of vanishing" and the eventual disappearance of blacks in Argentina (1980:4). His objective is to analyze the different factors that are assumed to have caused the

disappearance of blacks. Additionally, the author provides historical context of the political and social environment of Argentina in the 1800s. This leads to his account of the forces behind the African Diaspora and the arrival of slaves in Latin America.

Andrews also documents the emancipation of Afro-Argentines and the change in their culture that occurred after the abolition of slavery. He briefly elaborates on race relations between African slaves and their owners, and later, on race relations between blacks, as legal citizens, and white Argentines. This provides historical context for what will later establish a racial caste system with remnants in the 20th and 21st centuries.

The most important part of this work is Andrews' analysis of how and why Afro-Argentines disappeared from the country. To understand how they disappeared, he examines census data and compares the figures with demographic information such as birth and migration rates to determine the possible causes of this population's numerical decline. The author argues that this ethnic group vanished from the Argentine population because of: (1) a racist ideology that prevented blacks from fully integrating into society and (2) the practice of racial whitening. Andrews also dedicates a few chapters to discuss some of the commonly accepted factors that may have caused the decline of the Afro-Argentine population, which are: the end of the slave trade, war, miscegenation, and low birth rates coupled with high mortality rates. These factors will be reviewed later in this chapter.

Andrews believes that the above four factors influenced the decline of Afro-Argentines. However, he posits that their disappearance was also the result of official neglect: the government did not keep records of this group. He discusses how blacks were under-enumerated in official censuses because of the areas they inhabited and the

fact that individuals may have declined to acknowledge their African ancestry. Andrews later concludes, “the demographic decline of the black population in Buenos Aires was artificially accelerated by the deceptive use of official statistics” (1980:93). He states that officials systematically undercounted the number of blacks that existed in the country. Furthermore, Andrews argues that the dominant racial attitudes of the 19th century caused historians, statisticians, and people in other influential positions to whiten Argentina by removing African characters and characteristics from written history. To support this claim, Andrews relies on arguments that state racism caused the near elimination of African contributions from Argentine history. He compellingly writes, “they [Afro-Argentines] were quietly written out of the record by census takers and statisticians, by writers and historians cultivating the myth of a white Argentina. Though it may be a hundred years too late, the time has come to write them back in” (Andrews 1980:112).

Generally, Andrews’ compilation of Afro-Argentine history has been well received. His work is a significant reference because it offers substantial historical information and adds to a miniscule body of literature on Afro-Argentines. Andrews’ work is essential to understanding the Afro-Argentines because he reconstructs a long-ignored and forgotten part of Argentina’s history. He also provides a discussion of black presence in Argentina’s social, political, and economic spheres. His work demonstrates that there is an undeniable black presence in Argentina’s history, a presence that is still visible in its present.

Although Andrews provides significant research to the body of literature on blacks in Argentina, some of his arguments require further support. First, he states that he is going to explicate the factors for the decline of the Afro-Argentine. However, he

lacks enough evidence to fully support many of his explanations. Secondly, Andrews should clarify his argument that official neglect is a cause of the Afro-Argentine population decline. He contends that the failure to count this ethnic group caused them to disappear. The systematic undercounting of Afro-Argentines led to the devaluing of their contributions from society. However, that does not mean that this population disappeared. They were still physically present and comprised a significant portion of the Argentine populace. People could not have been able to deny the existence of blacks and declare that they did not exist if this group was truly 20 to 30 percent of the nation's capital city. Nonetheless, Andrews' idea that racial classification affected Afro-Argentine population numbers is the most plausible explanation for this population's decline. More value should be placed on his explanation that the flexibility of the Argentine racial classification provided blacks with the opportunity to go from being *negro* to more "desirable" racial positions. This would provide African descendants with the social mobility that they could not attain by being classified as black.

Subsequent to Andrew's 1980 publication, Argentine anthropologist Lea Geler has produced the most current history on Afro-Argentines and their descendants in Argentina. Geler specializes in studying class, racial categories, and *afroporteños*, descendants of African slaves who are citizens of Buenos Aires. Her previous work focuses on the political power and representation of blacks in Argentina (Geler 2007). She wrote *Andares negros, caminos blancos: Afroporteños, Estado y Nación Argentina a fines del siglo XIX* (2010) with the intent of revealing a more in-depth perspective on the *afroporteño* community. Geler's book has been well-received and endorsed by several

influential members of Argentina's black community, including the leaders of African descendant organizations.

In the introduction, Geler mentions the "genocidal discourse" (2010:17) that occurred in Argentina, which is similar to Andrews' reference about blacks being written out of the nation's history. Geler's book builds on Andrews' work, but also offers information that he overlooked or was unable to incorporate. Her book is vastly different from Andrews' work. She is not focusing on the causes of the Afro-Argentine population decline, but is greatly emphasizing their cultural, social, and political history and development.

The first part of her book provides an overview of the *afroporteño* community and details how many of them existed and where they could be found in Argentina's past. She documents research that claims that the "*población de color*" [population of color] was about 26 percent of the Buenos Aires populace in the early 19th century, around 1836 and 1838 (Geler 2010:66). However, by the end of the century, they had virtually disappeared. The 1887 census recorded 421,553 whites out of 429,558 citizens in the city. The rest, 8,005 people, were classified as persons of *otros colores* [other colors]. It is unclear whether this category specifically references blacks or if people of Amerindian descent were counted as well. The second part of her book discusses Afro-Argentine culture and its relation to the world and popular culture, with specific reference to cultural influences in Argentina. The last third of the book reviews the conflicts, opportunities for blacks, and the possibility of unity.

Geler is able to draw on a number of primary and secondary historical documentation to demonstrate the existence of blacks in Argentina from 17th to the 19th

centuries. She primarily draws her evidence from several black publications, using data presented in the articles and the articles themselves as data points to map the existence of the black community over time. Similar to Andrews, she shows that early in the 19th century, blacks constituted as much as 26 percent of the total population. However, by the time of the 1887 census, blacks had declined to less than two percent (Geler 2010:66). In addition, where Andrews is unable to provide information, Geler fills in the gaps and presents a critical analysis on the position of blacks in the cultural, political, and economic spheres of the country. She thoroughly discusses the importance of black periodicals to this community and their role in helping this sub-population establish itself in a society that denies their existence. Black periodicals were first created at the beginning of the 19th century; however, Geler focuses on periodicals published between 1873 and 1882. The intent of these publications was to dictate the best ways for the black community to advance to modernity. Periodicals like *La Broma* brought awareness to the community about instances of racism and discrimination against blacks and mulattos. This was also the start of an atmosphere where Afro-Argentine intellectuals began to challenge white hegemony in the nation.

Geler's work is also unique in that she dedicates a chapter of her work to discussing *afroporteño* women. While the body of literature on Afro-Argentines is growing, the literature on women from this population is sparse. This subpopulation has often been overlooked. Emphasis is often placed on the participation of black men in Argentina's foreign and civil wars, but there is minimal discussion of what black women accomplished in their absence. Geler critically analyzes how Afro-Argentine women were often relegated to domestic service roles in white households (2010:173) and were

expected to reproduce and take care of their own children (2010:161-164). However, this changed when some *afroporteño* newspapers began to feature stories on black women and their value beyond domestic service. These articles served to generate interest and participation from black women in cultural events and the arts.

Literature on the Culture of African Descendants

The predominant idea about historical black Argentine culture in Argentina is that it does not exist. There seems to be a denial or unawareness of this historical black group by many whites because Argentina is generally presented with no emphasis on Afro-Argentine contributions. In my interviews with scholars and activists, some argued that African influences in Argentine culture are adamantly denied despite research demonstrating the contrary. Others state that Afro-Argentine culture is a phenomenon of the past and has no relevance in the future because of the physical absence of this population. Marvin A. Lewis, Pablo Cirio, and Alejandro Frigerio have contributed significant research studies to this subject.

Afro-Latinist Marvin A. Lewis provides a comprehensive analysis of Afro-Argentine contributions to literature and knowledge of the culture. Lewis agrees with the factors Andrews ascribes to the decline of Afro-Argentines, but provides additional contextual analysis of these factors. He references studies subsequent to Andrews' that acknowledge that immigration policies were responsible for the "extermination of blacks in Argentina" (Lewis 1996:12). Lewis' reference to the "extermination" of blacks is both polemical and indicative of a certain political agenda. The term is reminiscent of the

scholars Lopez (2006:279) and Corbière (2002) who argue that immigration and policies enacted to advance the whitening of Argentina are genocidal. However, this is not a reflection of the rest of his book as his primary objective is to show the role of Afro-Argentine literature in understanding black discourse. The book also provides examples of black literary artists and is evidence of their existence.

In the introduction, Lewis argues for explanations that attribute the decline of the black population to miscegenation between black women and white men. He writes:

Both learned and popular opinions point to miscegenation as an important factor in the diminution of the Afro-Argentine population. Socially and ideologically, interethnic unions were not frowned upon by the black population, given the negative status of blackness in society. Many willingly participated in the pigmentocracy that was established. [Lewis 1996:13]

Lewis shows how Afro-Argentines challenged postcolonial racist ideology. He does not include “African-based theories” because he believes that they did not appear in his analysis of Afro-Argentine literature (Lewis 1996:7). Additionally, these theories are not relevant to understanding the Afro-Argentine experience. This means that he is not using theories that focus on the political nature of blackness and creolization. Lewis implies that his work is political simply because he is focusing on Afro-Argentines, who through their literary contributions confronted a group “that seemed determined to reject them” (1996:7). He attempts to demonstrate how minority groups challenge concepts of power and otherness, which are created by the majority, through literature. Lewis states that there have been works that discuss the image of blacks in literature, but none discuss their contributions to literature. Therefore, his work is a survey of historical, sociological, and anthropological literature on blacks in Argentina.

Lewis discusses the prose of literary writers, such as Mateo Elejalde and Horacio Mendizábel and how these works are about concepts like the feminine ideal and Afro-Argentine struggles. The majority of his book is dedicated to analyzing the works of a small sample of Afro-Argentine poets, *payadores*, and other literary performers. The author features an individual or group of artists in each chapter alongside a sample of their contributions. His analysis offers a basic understanding of ideas about black ideology, class, and interactions in society. He also shows the different ways blacks depict these various aspects of black society. Lewis concludes that one of the reasons there is so little evidence of black contributions is the inability of blacks in Argentina to form a collective identity. He argues that their inability to construct an identity also means that they were unable to form a literary tradition. The author also states that blacks were unable to establish advocacy for their situation in Argentine society (1996:133). He believes that instead of trying to overcome their situation, blacks instead acculturated and sought miscegenation as the most viable solution.

Lewis is correct in his overall conclusion that the lack of national acknowledgement of black cultural contributions is the result of this population's inability to form a collective identity. Blacks were unable to form a concrete, collective identity or basic community because of two factors. First, the Argentine government and social hostility made it difficult for them to thrive. The government supported immigration policies to wipe out the "barbarism" they saw present in non-whites. Blacks were also not given the ease of social mobility that whites were given. Those with obvious African features were limited in the types of employment they could occupy. The inability of blacks to disseminate their cultural traditions and create an identity was

the result of constant suppression by the Argentine government and social interactions. Secondly, blacks who were able to most likely integrated into white society and assumed a non-black identity. With their limited social mobility as blacks, it was probably desirable to be part of the white society. Therefore, the absence of a black identity and community could be the result of a lack of black individuals who chose to identify as such. Third, by the end of the 19th century, blacks might have been such as small percentage of the population and so widely dispersed that forming a collective identity was logistically difficult.

Besides Lewis' work, Argentine anthropologist and activist Pablo Cirio has conducted several research studies that investigate Afro-Argentine culture. One of his central topics is *candombe*, an Afro-Argentine music and dance practice. He uses research on these traditions to prove the existence of African descendants in Argentina's past and present (Cirio 2003). In addition, Cirio (2003) analyzes primary literary sources and conducts interviews to gather data about the history and functions of *candombe*, as well as the symbolism present in the music and lyrics. The objective of this study, and others similar to it, is to demonstrate the various contextual uses and expressions of *candombe*. Candombe was performed in black dance halls, such as the Shimmy Club as an expression of black culture (Figure 1). Cirio offers a unique perspective on this cultural practice because he shows it has been practiced in the past and compares it to its use in the present. Furthermore, his studies on Afro-Argentine culture are important to the collective literature on this ethnic group, but Cirio presents a perspective that gives credence to both black and non-black groups that have been influential to this cultural

tradition. He also shows the connection between the expressionism of *candombe* and its symbolic connection to African descendants, blackness, and freedom.

Cirio's research is valuable in that he is adding to a small body of literature on Afro-Argentine culture in comparison to the extensive literature on this ethnic group's historical presence and perceived disappearance in the nation. He demonstrates this by creating a compilation of Afro-Argentine written and oral literature (Cirio 2007). This anthology provides evidence of the literature's various origins, such as the provinces of Santa Fe and Tucumán. The anthology of Afro-Argentine literature is vital to the overall evidence of black influence in Argentine culture, as well, as the existence of blacks in the history of the nation.

Argentine anthropologist Alejandro Frigerio has also contributed a significant body of research on Afro descendants and their presence in the 20th century. He has published several articles that discuss many aspects of black culture such as: (1) cultural influences, (2) the role of religion in the black community, and (3) the construction of black identity. Frigerio's research on black cultural influences focuses on historical representations of black culture and how they are shown in contemporary society. Similar to Cirio, Frigerio also studies *candombe* and its relationship to images of blackness in the past and contemporary Argentine society (Frigerio 1993). Additionally, his research also focuses on the contemporary presence of blacks in Argentina. He states that many of the works produced by historians focus on black slaves and freedmen in the 17th – 19th centuries. He also asserts that focus on these centuries only serves to further relegate blacks to the past (2008a:122). As a result, his research focuses on the presence of Afro-Argentines in the past, as well as their emerging presence in the 20th and 21st

centuries. He argues against claims that blacks did not and do not exist in contemporary Argentina. Frigerio's major research argument is that there is a dominant narrative promulgated in Argentina that promotes whitening and suppresses the expression of blackness.

Frigerio analyzes how Argentina has created a dominant narrative that seeks to ignore black identity (Frigerio 2002a, Frigerio 2008a, Frigerio 2008b, Frigerio and Lamborghini 2009). He provides an in-depth analysis of the forms in which blacks have presence in Argentina. He also argues that *negros* (blacks) have been a part of the past and contemporary culture. He provides a long list of contemporary blacks who are dancers, jazz musicians, rock musicians, writers, architects, and so forth (2002a:79). This is useful in that Frigerio demonstrates that blacks have diverse occupations in Argentina, but he does not actually provide names (or numerical data) for the black descendants who occupy each of these positions. Additionally, he discusses the different racial categories that have been in use during the majority of the 20th century. Frigerio says that the racial classification system has worked to assist in the disappearance of blacks in Argentine society and to produce social classes. However, he analyzes the processes that create racial identification and strives to present the strategies behind the construction of a black racial category. Furthermore, Frigerio discusses how the black community is disappearing in Argentina and how ethnic identity is being modified. He briefly introduces a system of classification for blacks: *el negro che*, *el negro vos*, and *el negro usted* (Frigerio 1993:5). Frigerio does not explain these identifiers, but the definitions of these terms suggest that they are used between blacks in casual, informal, and formal

situations, respectively. However, he does not elaborate on when these identifiers are used or if they remain in the current African descendant community.

Frigerio's research is important because he is not only contributing to the work on the history of blacks in Argentina, but he is pioneering a new area that focuses on their identity and on social interactions both in the black community and among white Argentines. Part of his research addresses issues about blackness and black presence in contemporary Argentina. Frigerio states that the category used to classify blacks depends on the society's racial classification. He argues that in North America, biology is important when determining someone's black identity, such that the "one-drop rule" applies. In Latin America, it is different (Frigerio 2002a:80). One drop of white blood automatically places individuals in a non-black category and color becomes the most important determinant in categorizing people within a racial classification system.

History of African Descendants in Argentina: 17th – 20th Centuries

Argentina is unique in that in comparison to other Latin American countries, it received relatively few African slaves. Argentine colonialists relied on indigenous groups during early colonial development of the country. Eventually, these populations began to dramatically decrease because of disease. Slave traders then shipped thousands of Africans to various ports in Argentina to substitute one ethnic group with another. At the start of the 17th century, Buenos Aires was the major port for slave trade in Argentina. Some of these historical still exist in Buenos Aires, such as Parque Lezama (Figures 2 and 3). Because this city had little use for the majority of the incoming slaves, the

interior regions of the country became the final destination for most slaves. The total number of African slaves brought to the country is unknown. Andrews writes that 22,892 registered slaves entered Buenos Aires from 1595 and 1680 (1980:24). He also claims that about 13,000 slaves arrived from West Africa from 1750-1830. These totals are only a fraction of the amount cited by Brown who states that about 100,000 African slaves arrived in Argentina through Buenos Aires between the 17th and 18th centuries (Brown 2003:40). The differences between these estimates indicate the difficulty with population data in this era.

Afro-Argentines and their descendants comprised a numerically significant portion of the Argentine populace in the 18th and early 19th centuries, perhaps as much as 20 to 30 percent of the total population. Reports vary as to whether these figures pertain to their population in the capital (Andrews 1979:21, Geler 2010:66) or several other regions in the country (Castro 2001:26, Brown 2003:69-70). However, census records show that this population suffered a dramatic decline in the 19th century. As mentioned in Andrews (1980), several factors have been attributed to the decline of Afro-Argentines: (1) the end of the slave trade, (2) their mortality and birth rates, (3) the effects of war, and (4) *mestizaje* and intermarriage.

Factor #1: The End of the Slave Trade

The slave trade was the source of the introduction of blacks to Argentina and its end is often cited as a factor in the decline, or “disappearance” of Afro-Argentines. When it was prohibited, some suggest that the lack of a slave trade prevented the black

population from replacing individuals lost to warfare and high mortality rates (Parish 1839:30, Andrews 1980:5). However, Andrews states, “Data contained in the censuses of 1810 and 1827 suggest, though they do not conclusively demonstrate, that the 1813 decree did have a significant retarding effect on the slave trade to the city” (1980:68). Instead, the end of the slave trade is responsible for disproportionately low numbers of blacks in the general populace. Moreover, the numerical data do not conclusively show that the end of the slave trade negatively impacted the black population. The end of the slave trade obviously did not result in a decline in the number of blacks present in country. This would have been possible only if the conditions in Argentina were too harsh for this community to reproduce itself. There is no evidence that suggests this. Thus, people of African decent had to have disappeared for other reasons.

Factor #2: The Effects of Warfare

Black participation in the various Argentine wars is also described as a factor that had a significant negative impact on this population. As earlier stated, blacks participated in several wars: the Argentine War of Independence (1810-1818), the War with Brazil (1825-1828), the intermittent civil wars throughout the 19th century, and the War of the Triple Alliance (1865-1870). While this may have been one of this group’s greatest contributions to the pursuit of nationalism, there is no evidence that warfare was deleterious to the overall Afro-Argentine population. Some of my informants stated that blacks were used as cannon fodder in these wars, but they did not indicate a basis for this

belief and there is no evidence demonstrating a demographic decline in this population because of their numerical overrepresentation in warfare.

The belief that the black population declined because of warfare has been widely referenced, but is often not supported beyond discussing the claim as a possible factor in their decrease. This belief is flawed in that it relies on the premise that the historical population declined because the males were killed in warfare, suggesting that a significant portion of the population was removed. Andrews relies on several age-sex pyramids to show the dichotomy between the demographics of the black and white populations (Andrews 1980:70-73) (Figure 4). He states that the pyramids are evidence of the decline in the number of black males because of the effects of war. There are two important problems with Andrews' argument and pyramid data. While Figure 4 does show that there were a disproportionate number of black males in comparison to whites, it also shows that there is a higher percentage of black women of childbearing age than white women. Women determine population growth, not men. Therefore, the black population would have increased rather than decreased. This instead suggests that children born of black women were not considered black. The presence of a racial classification system that allowed for fluidity between categories would have created the perfect environment for children of mixed heritage to claim non-black heritage, thus, decreasing the black Argentine population.

Factor #3: High Mortality and Low Infant Birth Rates

Coupled with the end of the slave trade in Argentina, high mortality rates and low infant birth rates among Afro-Argentines increased their chances for a population decline.

Andrews claims:

High infant mortality severely reduced the reproduction rates of the black community. In 1815 the city published a report on births of libertos since 1813, i.e., children born to slave mothers. The figures yielded by that report indicate a male infant mortality rate during the first two years of life of 399 per 1000 live births, a female infant mortality rate of 352 per 1000 live births. Similar figures are not available for the white population at that time, but research by the Argentine historian Marta Goldberg has demonstrated that infant mortality between 1827 and 1831 was significantly higher among the black population than the white. [1980:72]

Comparison of blacks and whites during the 19th century shows that although the black fertility rate was high, it could not compensate for the infant mortality rate. Andrews argues that the combination of high infant mortality rates and a fertility rate that was lower than their white counterparts, stunted potential population growth of Afro-Argentines. However, the lack of data that clearly illustrates high mortality rates among blacks does not make this a viable explanation for the decline of this population. Furthermore, the data cited is not convincing. Goldberg's analysis covers only four years and does not indicate if the cited infant mortality rate was typical. Without satisfactory comparative statistics, the data are not credible.

Factor #4: Mestizaje and Intermarriage

Another explanation for the decline of the Afro-Argentine population is *mestizaje*, or race mixing, and intermarriage between black women and non-black males. It is suggested that black women married and had children with non-black men since black males were killed in war. As Afro-Argentine women began marrying men from other ethnic groups, this led to a rapid decrease in the visible black population as their phenotypic representation was slowly diluted and lost. Additionally, Castro also cites miscegenation between black women and males from other ethnic groups as a factor in the decline of the black population (2001:32-33). He writes that their disappearance was partly a result of black males procreating with non-black females and black females procreating with non-black males, each for reasons other than sexual imbalances in the population (Castro 2001:37).

While intermarriage can be seen as a way for blacks to sustain their population, some researchers suggest that it was encouraged by the government as a way to eradicate the black populace. For example:

One will remember the concerns of the Generation of 1837 that blamed Blacks (and native Indians) for being one of the reasons the country was still 'barbaric' and underdeveloped...Race mixing was highly encouraged and black women were finding themselves giving birth to mulattos whose future in Argentina's society was brighter than that of their black parents. Miscegenation was a national policy and the rulers were so proud of it that Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (who was President of the country from 1868 to 1874) had to say in 1883, that one would have to go to the nearby Brazil to see Blacks in their pure originality. [Poosson 2004:87]

Being black carried with it a stigma that surely encouraged many to have children with non-black partners. This resulted in lighter-skinned children who were able to pass into

the white population and would be able to achieve the upward social mobility that their phenotypically black parents could not. Of the factors attributed to the Afro-Argentine population decline, this seems to be most likely responsible. Given the low barrier to interracial partnerships and the belief in the benefits for having children who could pass as white, blacks would be strongly motivated to have children with white partners.

In addition to these four factors discussed above, Andrews later concludes that official neglect is also a significant factor in the decline of the historical black population in Argentina. He argues that officials and historians under-enumerated blacks in official censuses. He states that this is partly because blacks inhabited areas that were less desirable and lived in homes that were hard to locate (Andrews 1980:80). Therefore, census-takers did not want to visit these areas. However, as I mentioned previously, Andrews erroneously correlates not being counted with not existing.

Additionally, Andrews claims that intermarriage created new racial categories to correlate with the added race mixture in the population. The fluidity of these racial labels made it difficult to take an accurate count of who was of African descent and who was not. For instance, Andrews discusses how the term *trigueño* was created to describe those who had wheat-colored skin and black or brown hair. Either blacks or whites can be *trigueño*. Most importantly, this term was often used in place of *negro* (Andrews 1980:84). Andrews later states that the use of this term allowed people, blacks and whites, to ignore their black ancestry. He argues that when included on the census, those who identified as black were counted as white. However, in the absence of personal testimony, there is no way to know how individuals self-identified a hundred years ago and given the advantages of whiteness in Argentina, it is far more likely that people of

African ancestry, whose phenotype gave them a choice, self-identified as white rather than black.

The ability for blacks to identify with a racial category, that is based on the color of their skin, and ultimately removes the stigma of African ancestry, could cause a decline in an identifiable black population. Andrews writes:

Besides the usual white, pardo, mulatto, negro, Moreno, Indian, mestizo, and trigueño, there is Indianish, dark brown, medium white, somewhat white, ugly black, zambo (a mixture of Indian and black), and others...As the race became more intermingled, racial barriers became increasingly ill-defined. [1980:87]

The racial classification system became so complex that it often became difficult to perfectly situate an individual within one category. The flexibility of the system also allowed blacks to move from one category to another and ultimately be counted as non-blacks on the censuses. However, without adequate statistics that clearly demonstrate blacks moving into other non-black populations, this is also difficult to substantiate.

Blacks were about 26 percent of the Buenos Aires population in 1838, but were later reported as being 1.8 percent in 1887. In this time, the historical black population developed into a vibrant community that thrived until the late 19th century. Slavery did not end in Argentina until 1853 when it was eliminated by Argentina's Constitutional government (Andrews 1980:57, Brown 1986:4). By the mid-20th century, the historical black population had virtually disappeared. It is most likely that the primary cause of this was intermarriage. By the 1950s, blacks were so few in number that they were no longer visible in the population. Black publications, social clubs, and other organizations had ceased to exist.

Conclusion

There is some legitimacy to the claims that Afro-Argentines are not as visible as they could be in Argentina. Researchers studying the history of blacks in this country have frequently cited the end of the slave trade, high mortality-low birth rates, miscegenation, and warfare as an explanation for this population's decrease. I have demonstrated in this chapter that, with the exception of interracial partnerships, none of these explanations is convincing without more supporting evidence. It is also unlikely that the decline of Afro-Argentines is completely explained by the combined effects of these factors. This ethnic group's population in 1838 was the largest it had ever been and was greater than it was in 1822, the year before the first decline. In 50 years, it declined to slightly less than half this total. However, this time span is hardly enough time for the effects of these factors to be expressed in the population. For instance, if miscegenation was a strong mechanism in the decline of Afro-Argentines, the rate of intermarriage and reproduction would need to be significantly high for the probability of African phenotypic expression to be too low to be observed in the general population. This would result in a black population that was exponentially smaller than it was at the peak of its growth. Moreover, this rapid decrease could instead be the result of: (1) European immigration that created a disproportionate number of whites in comparison to blacks, (2) neglecting to properly numerate the black population, and (3) blacks passing into white society.

Andrews' explanation of official neglect and the lack of statistical data supporting the theories of war, the end of the slave trade, and disease, suggest that blacks

disappeared because of false data records. However, under-enumeration does not cause the disappearance of an ethnic group. Even though the Argentine government may have falsified census documents regarding blacks, this would not have prevented blacks from being seen and existing in the Argentine state. Misrepresentation of the African descendant population would mean that blacks would not be numerically recognized on paper, but could be seen visually. Regardless of the inaccuracies in and the lack of research in general, the decline of the black population is important because it relates to the overall discourse about blacks in Argentina. Therefore, it is important to note these factors because they influence the current speech about blacks in the nation.

The information published on blacks in Argentina is important to preserving their history and acknowledges an ethnic group that has historically been denied presence in this country. While scholars continue to publish studies to prove the existence of Afro-Argentines, further research is needed on black culture and political influence in the 20th and 21st centuries. Moreover, it is important to note that while researchers are increasingly paying attention to the Afro-Argentines, this group is no longer the only black population in the nation. Argentina is also home to a growing body of Afro immigrants and refugees from other Latin American countries and from all over the globe. While in Argentina, they are establishing their own neighborhoods, communities, and organizations. As this population of African descendants begins to acclimate to the social and cultural environment, identity about what it means to be black in Argentina is changing.

Paralleling the introduction of white immigrants in the 19th and 20th centuries, black immigrants are now moving to Argentina in search of a new life. Some migrated

from other Latin American and Caribbean countries. Beginning in the late 19th century, few Africans migrated to South America to escape famine, poverty, and political persecution. Argentina experienced the largest influx of Africans during the 20th and 21st centuries. However, the statistical information on African immigrants arriving to Argentina is sparse. Immigrants from Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, and other African countries arrived to the country in the 1990s. Cape Verdeans are recorded as the first group to arrive to Argentina at the beginning of the 20th century (Maffia 2009:1). Nevertheless, this claim is unsubstantiated as Maffia's data are primarily anecdotal. She also states that there is no statistical data on the Cape Verdean community because some entered Argentina secretly and others entered as Portuguese citizens.

Although the initial black immigrant population to Argentina was small, it has slowly increased in number over the years. The exact number of African descendants in Argentina, both descendants of Afro-Argentines and immigrants, is unknown. Although blacks have not been included on the past national censuses, data from the 2001 census showed that 1,883 African immigrants were registered in the country. A pilot census conducted in 2005 showed that between 4 to 6 percent, about 2 million people, reported as being black descendants (Stubbs and Reyes 2006:11). The difference between these two figures is in the fact that only a small percentage of black immigrants actually register in Argentina. The 2005 pilot census included both registered and non-registered Afro-immigrants in Argentina. The exact figures of Afro-Argentines and Afro immigrants may not be known until the results of the 2010 Argentine census are published. It is likely that there are millions of blacks in Argentina, but the vast majority

are almost certainly Afro immigrants who arrived in the 20th and 21st century and their descendants.



Figure 1. Example of candombe in a Shimmy Club. This is a picture of *candombe* in a Shimmy Club in the Casa Suiza (Swiss House). The original photographer is unknown, but the picture was taken around 1960. Photo credit: Desaré Williams



Figure 2. Fería in Parque Lezama. This park in the San Telmo neighborhood of Buenos Aires was one of three slave trade sites in the city. Now vendors sell various goods, such as used clothing, books, and toys in the park. Photo credit: Desaré Williams



Figure 3. Parque Lezama. This is Parque Lezama in Buenos Aires, which is a former slave trade site in the city. Photo credit: Desareé Williams

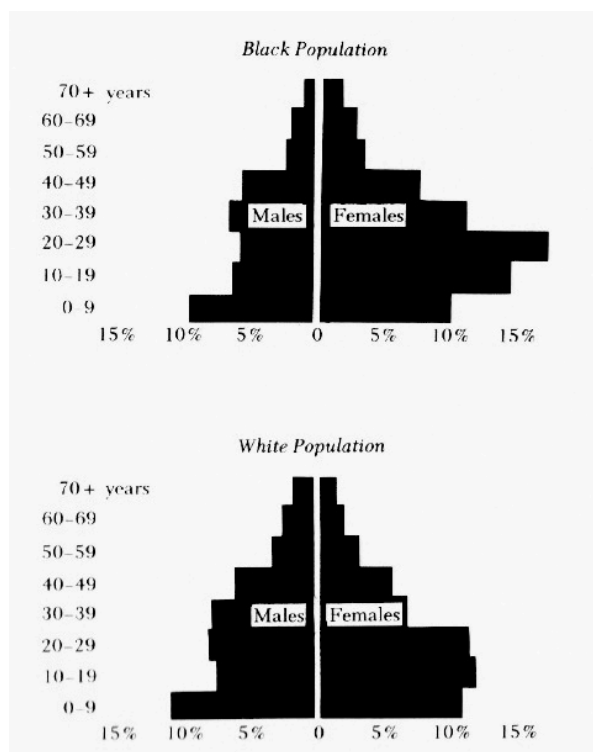


Figure 4. Age-Sex Pyramid of the Black and White Population from a Sample of the 1827 Census in Buenos Aires. Source: Andrews 1980:73.

CHAPTER IV

CONSTRUCTING BLACK IDENTITY IN ARGENTINA

Introduction

Identities emerge as groups collectively engage in a common action or pursue a shared objective. These identities differentiate groups from one another as they collaborate and compete for success. Identities can be both personal and social, with the context having some effect on which of these are expressed. For example, some of my personal identities are as a woman, a scholar, an athlete, and an African-American. Each of these is expressed independently or with others depending on the social situation. The expression of these identities is partially dependent on the image I want to convey. However, that expression is also linked to the conditions of my birth, the history of my society, and the physicality of my body. I can choose whether I want to portray myself as a scholar and I can determine the degree to which I want to emphasize my identity as an athlete. However, in American society, it is difficult to deny my identity as a black woman despite the degree to which I emphasize or suppress it. This dissonance is a result of the fact that identity is produced by both elements of choice and forced designation.

Identity politics create social movements that help the collective express and enact strategies towards the realization of their objectives. Sociologist Karen Cerulo writes:

Identities emerge and movements ensue because collectives consciously coordinate action; group members consciously develop offenses and defenses, consciously insulate, differentiate, and mark, cooperate and compete, persuade and coerce. [1997:393]

The formation of identities and their expression are one method for the collective to pursue its goals. This process and the resulting conflicts of identity expression are seen in the attempts of any group trying to establish its identity in the midst of a dominant antagonist social group. For blacks in Argentina, their movement to create new identities conflicts with the majority's ideas of Argentine identity.

In this chapter, I present how Argentina's dominant narrative influences the construction of racial identity. Identity, specifically black identity is influenced by remnants of the nation's colonial racial classification system, black representations in Argentine history, and social understandings of blacks. While past classification systems were diverse in that there were numerous categories to describe the different ethnic parentages and their amount of genetic contribution, the current classification system is not diverse. I argue that it only has three categories: white, black, and "other", with white being the only category with social value. In addition, blacks in Argentina construct identity in a social climate that promotes whiteness. In an effort to offset the discourse of the ethnic majority, this subpopulation has created three forms of identity that allow it to adapt to personal, social and collective contexts.

The dynamics of social interaction and race in Argentina have also created tension between white Argentines and blacks who are trying to establish or affirm their Argentine

identity. This is because the national discourse maintains ideas of white homogeneity and hegemony. As a result, many Afro-Argentines are unable to establish a historical claim to the nation and incoming Afro immigrants have difficulty claiming Argentine identity. The challenges they encounter in establishing themselves as citizens are partially the result of a discourse that encourages the removal of forms of blackness present in the country. One way Afro immigrants respond to this condition is by trying to construct a political discourse that brings attention to the historical black population of Argentina.

Additionally, I document the activities of three black organizations, their understandings of racial identity in Argentina, and their attempts to establish an Afro descendant category on the national census. The organizations' members believe that the recognition of blacks on this census is critical to creating a multicultural narrative of Argentine citizenship. Representatives from these organizations also discussed the conflicts that arose in establishing a collective identity.

Argentina's National Discourse: Creating a New Racial Classification System

The racial classification system widely used during the 18th century colonial era in Latin America depended on the amount of white, black, and indigenous blood an individual had inherited from their ancestors (see Levine 1980:128-129 for examples). This served to create a caste system and helped to determine social order. For example, two common classification terms used in Argentina were *pardo* and *trigueño*. A *pardo* was someone whose parents were white and black or Indian and black (Andrews 1980:8-

9, Levine 1980:102). A *trigueño* was someone who had brown or light brown skin, similar in color to *trigo* [wheat]. The terms of the racial classification system were used to describe perceived racial heritage. However, it is important to understand that they were also the names of social ranks. To call someone a *pardo* or a *trigueño* was not only to comment on his or her heritage and skin color, but also to assign them to a ranked social group. *Trigueño* was ranked higher than *pardo*, but both were ranked lower than white.

Todd Edwards, who has also studied issues of race and culture in Brazil, writes about race and ethnicity in colonial Argentina:

The social spectrum was a sort of continuum, with social degrees ranging from peninsula-born whites (called *peninsulares*) to whites born in the Americas (called *criollos*) through a gradation of mixed races—from *mestizo* (mixed Indian/white) to *pardo* (black/white) to *zambo* (black/Indian) and many more—to liberated blacks. Slaves were at the bottom, existing literally as chattel. [2008:188]

The racial classification system was a way to categorize individuals of different skin colors in a slave-based economy that depended on skin color to maintain rank. This was representative of issues of power because it demonstrated how the power an individual did or did not have was based on their heritage.

As I discussed in chapter 2, Argentina's national discourse influences how whites perceive blacks. It further serves to differentiate and categorize individuals who are non-native to the country and establishes whiteness as part of the national identity of *Argentinidad*. This discourse also creates a contemporary racial identification system in that people are either classified as white, black, or "other". Frigerio (2002a) explains that skin color perceptions in Latin America and North America differ. In Latin America, color is the primary determinant of racial classification and not parentage (Frigerio

2002a:80). He also states that people who have white ancestry or lighter skin complexions are classified as white. However, I argue that the expression of white phenotypes is what primarily classifies an individual as white. Individuals in the “other” category have neither white nor black characteristics. Immigrants from Asia or bordering Latin American countries are considered “other” because they are perceived as having no ancestral claim to Argentina and have non-white phenotypes.

The black category of Argentina’s racial classification system is more complex than the others. Frigerio writes that an individual’s ancestry is important in North America, with people who have African features or one drop of black blood classifying them as black (Frigerio 2002a:80). While this may have been true in the past, this is an antiquated idea. Black identity in North America is determined by having a black phenotype in combination with self-identifying as black or having parents who are black. In Argentina, blacks are further categorized based on complexion and hair curliness or texture. Contemporary daily interactions determine the category in which blacks are identified socially. Individuals with a dark complexion and curly hair are *pelo mota*. *Negro mota* is used to describe those who are undoubtedly black or “really Black” (Frigerio and Lamborghini 2002:4).

The dominant narrative presents a significant problem for individuals of African heritage who do not fall within the categories of *pelo mota* or *negro mota*. Because of the nature of the characteristics on which they are based, these categories do not account for the physical variation actually present among black Argentines. My own experiences serve as an example. For instance, during a semi-structured interview with a white Argentine woman named Elsa, I told her that my research questions were partially driven

by my need to understand why I am treated differently because I am a *morena* [dark-skinned woman]. Elsa responded that I am a *morena*, but not a *morena pura* [pure-blood, dark-skinned woman]. When I asked her to elaborate, she stated that I am not *morena pura* because “[I am] mixed with black and white like Obama.” This demonstrates the difference between the North American and Argentine classification systems. Because both of my parents classify themselves as African-American, I choose to do the same. The shade of my skin color or hair texture is not a key, determining factor in my self-understanding. However, the Argentine system stresses these elements. Therefore, Argentines like Elsa believe that I cannot be *morena pura* because of my skin color.

When I recounted my interview with Elsa to Frigerio, he stated that *morena pura* and *pelo mota* are the same. He believed that Elsa thought I was not *morena pura* because of my skin color and because my hair “was not curly enough”. Later in our interview, Frigerio said:

Hair curliness and skin color are important factors in determining racial classification in Argentina. Most people, even blacks, judge whether a person is black based on hair curliness. The interesting thing is that people can be black, but they are never seen as black-black *and* [emphasis added] Argentine.

Frigerio’s statement emphasizes the problem created by Argentine discourse. Placement within the racial classification system is such that non-whites, particularly blacks, are not considered Argentine. Therefore, in this understanding, blacks will never achieve *Argentinidad* even if their ancestral link to Argentina is socially affirmed.

Frigerio also writes that racial classification and identification fluctuate with an individual’s socio-economic status and situational context (2002a:80). This means that an individual’s skin color may dictate that they are in one racial category, but their social status may place them in another. For instance, I interviewed Grace, a black Ghanaian

woman who has lived in Argentina since 1980. We discussed Argentine perceptions of U.S. President Barack Obama. She said that many “white Argentine conservative racists” thought that Obama was not black because his mom was white, his (black) father left their family, and Obama lived with his white grandmother. Grace also said that Argentines did not think Obama was black because he grew up surrounded by white culture and went to white schools. Regardless of having an African phenotype, Obama’s mixed heritage and enculturation in “white” cultural settings are what would place him in the white category according to Argentina’s racial classification system. Although Grace claims that Argentines classify Obama as white because of his mixed racial heritage and upbringing in white culture, it is likely that his position of power is what also makes him white. Whiteness, however, is not extended to all people of mixed heritage raised in a white cultural context. Despite the possibilities of movement within Argentina’s current racial classification system, blacks are still placed in subservient racial, social, and cultural positions. The adoption of white culture by phenotypic blacks is evidence of the low value placed on black cultural forms.

Constructing a Multicultural Narrative

Constructing black identity is extremely important for black Argentines. It is almost necessary for the survival of blacks as a distinct social group. The promotion of black identity in Argentina is also a method for awakening black consciousness. If blacks want to preserve their identity as a separate ethnic group, they must construct a sense of self and increase general social awareness of their population. This is

accomplished by creating an identity that is recognized at the individual, collective, and social levels.

Blacks in Argentina should be interested in preserving their identity and making themselves more visible because the nation's discourse shapes power and knowledge in a way that constructs a cultural reality absent of black Argentines and full of Afro immigrants. Moreover, many blacks are plagued by the suppression of black culture and discrimination by the majority white population. While this is true for the general black population, it is particularly true for immigrants from Africa. African immigrants arrive as refugees and migrants who are not able to attain citizenship easily. Most are also blatantly representative of the *pelo mota* racial category. As a result, African immigrants have difficulty becoming established because being *pelo mota* places them in an undesirable social status. Therefore, African immigrants, as a non-historical black population, often desire to collaborate with historical blacks in order to create a discourse that is inclusive of all groups within the black community. For them, this new discourse is necessary to establish black legitimacy and social recognition, which later provides the foundation for African immigrants' attempts to seek Argentine citizenship. However, members of the historical black community may not have nearly so much to gain from this relationship. In fact, since their claims are based on the history of slavery and on the debt owed them for the imprisonment and unpaid labor of their ancestors, and since identification with recent immigrants dilutes or nullifies this claim, they may resist and possibly resent this attempt at collaboration.

Frigerio and Lamborghini (2009:16-17) write that "African Diaspora" was once proposed by a group of black activists as an identifying term. African Diaspora is a term

that is inclusive of blacks on a global scale and is politically useful for generating support across the international black community. While Pablo Cirio, an anthropologist and spokesman for the Afro-Argentine group Asociación Misibamba, did mention the term in our interview, I did not hear it used in my interactions and observations within the black community. Neither have I read any other research regarding this term. The new multicultural discourse creates three terms that are often used by individuals within the black community to describe themselves and others. These terms are: *negro*, *Afro*, and *afrodescendiente*. They provide space for black variability within a national narrative that condenses it.

The social context determines when these terms are used and who they are used to reference. Participants in my study community referred to themselves as *negro* when talking on the intimate or personal level. The term was also used when they were generally identifying another person of African ancestry regardless of being an historical or non-historical black Argentine. When talking intimately and informally with another person of African ancestry, the term *negro* was used in reference to both parties in the conversation. For instance, my informants and others I observed said, “Soy negro” [I am black] or “Él/ella es negro” [He/she is black] to refer to the ethnicity of themselves and that of someone else. *Negro* was used benignly when referencing blacks in general – as often was the case in my interviews and casual conversations with members in the black community. Using *negro* does not differentiate other blacks based on their nation of origin. It instead creates a unifying bond in the community. Despite the way black Argentines have appropriated the term *negro* for more positive uses, it is generally acknowledged that the term has a negative connotation, which is the result of the colonial

discourse of Argentina's past. Whites and people in the upper class used *negro* to describe the lower class. It was also used to refer to people of color in general, even if they did not have pure African ancestry (1979:37). Over time, *negro* was used to describe anyone, regardless of skin color, pejoratively.

I spoke with Nengumbi Celestin Sukama, President of el Instituto Argentino para la Igualdad, Diversidad, e Integración, about the meaning of the word *negro*. When speaking about people of color and blacks, he stated, "Some started to use *negro* in double connotation. It was used as a term of affection, but also as an insult". Nengumbi also told me a personal story of how *negro* was used in double connotation towards him. When walking to the subway station with a white Argentine friend, a passerby called Nengumbi *negro* in a very pejorative manner. Nengumbi's friend responded, "El negrito es amigo mio" [The black guy is my friend]. Although the passerby used *negro* in a negative manner, Nengumbi's friend retorted by using *negro* to demonstrate his friendship and affection for Nengumbi. Similar sentiments were echoed by Ivan, an Afro-Colombian actor, who stated that some white Argentines say *negro* without having bad intentions and sometimes may not realize the implications. Coincidentally, as he said this to me, a white Argentine man exited a store in front of us and shouted, "Hey, negro" as he approached and hugged a man of African descent that was standing on the corner.

The second identifier, *Afro*, is used in place of *negro* once identity changes from the personal to the social level. The term is used in both formal and informal settings. "Soy negro" [I am black] becomes "Soy Afro" [I am Afro]. I observed blacks using this term when bringing attention to someone's specific black nationality. For example, when with an informant, he or she would state, "Ella es una Afro de Haití" [She is an Afro-

Haitian] or “Él es Afro caboverdeano” [He is an Afro Cape Verdean]. When an informant or interviewee referenced someone I did not know or described an individual’s background to others, they would refer to the individual’s nationality as a way of creating context and, ultimately, a social identity for that person. Furthermore, in all of my interactions, I was always introduced as “Este es Desareé. Ella es afroamericana” [This is Desareé. She is Afro-American]. This allowed others to identify me as being part of the (international) black community, but still acknowledged the difference in my nationality and theirs. While attending several events, people were introduced to me with specific reference to their nationality as well. They were either identified as Afro-Argentine, Afro-Uruguayan, or Afro- in combination with any other country of origin. The term *Afro* also specifically references the African Diaspora while focusing attention on specific national origins within the Diaspora. Like *negro*, Afro is a general term that recognizes African ancestry, however, it lacks the negative connotation, or stigma that is often associated with *negro*.

When presenting oneself on the collective level or to someone who is not black, the term *afrodescendiente* [Afro descendant] is used. *Afrodescendiente* encompasses all people of African ancestry, regardless of nation of origin or ancestral lineage. It is used in a politically correct manner to refer to blacks collectively by de-emphasizing the differences among various groups of African descendent peoples. It is the equivalent of using, in the North American sense, African-American. The term *afrodescendiente* was proposed as a category of identification in 2000 at a conference in Chile (Frigerio and Lamborghini 2009:11). Although used throughout Latin America, Argentine blacks specifically identify as Afro descendants because it provides an avenue for them to

collectively represent an ethnic group that is phenotypically variable and socially invisible in Argentina.

Identifying as *afrodescendiente* in political settings can be used effectively to mobilize people of African ancestry under a single cause. The term was used in the mobilization efforts of the association África Vive (Frigerio and Lamborghini 2009:11). María Magdalena Lamadrid, or “Pocha”, created this non-governmental, Afro-Argentine organization with the objective of establishing an identity for the descendants of black Argentine slaves and other blacks in the nation. Over time, this term allowed black activists in Argentina to better collaborate and work towards promoting black identity and political power.

The term *afrodescendiente* has a further political purpose: it was featured on Argentina’s 2010 census. Although the census did not include an option that asked people of African ancestry for their specific background or culture, it provided a term that allowed blacks to be counted collectively. The realization of this term on the national census was an act counter to Argentina’s discourse of white hegemony and was the first step in establishing a multicultural discourse. The results of the 2010 census will demonstrate that blacks can at least be represented statistically. These results will be proof that there are blacks who are registered Argentine citizens. Moreover, this census will establish that there is a historical black population and further dispel the idea that there are no blacks in Argentina.

Challenges to Black Argentine Identity

The multicultural narrative is a social discourse that allows all blacks to be politically and culturally recognized in Argentine society. This is accomplished by expressing an important unifying identity: *afrodescendiente*. However, some of the black Argentine groups have differing positions regarding this identity. The drawback of being seen as *afrodescendiente* is that it does not account for cultural variability. The cultural and social longevity and perhaps the economic and political power, of two groups, Afro-Argentines and Cape Verdeans, is dependent on their ability to not claim an overarching identity that does not account for their unique cultural differences. Nonetheless, affirming a collective identity other than *afrodescendiente* is contradictory to the aims of Afro immigrants who believe that widespread acceptance of this identity is needed for their particular claim to Argentine citizenship and *Argentinidad*.

The Argentine discourse of whiteness suppresses the physical and cultural variability of blacks. Specifically for Afro-Argentines, it removes their ancestral link to the country and deconstructs their identity. Part of this deconstruction involves removing the differences between historic (i.e. Afro-Argentines) and non-historic blacks (i.e. Afro immigrants). Non-historic blacks have immigrated to Argentina for various reasons, such as political asylum and better economic conditions. As both historical and non-historic blacks collectively lobby for the recognition of black identity in Argentina and participate in anti-discrimination activities, identity conflicts divide these two groups.

Some members of the Afro-Argentine population have created an identity that distinguishes them from other blacks in Argentina: *afroargentinos de tronco colonial*,

which I will refer to as *tronco colonial*. Afro-Argentines are those who are direct descendants of African slaves brought to Argentina. Further identifying as *tronco colonial* only emphasizes one's identity as being a descendant of the original black population in Argentina. In our interview, Cirio stated that the term refers to those blacks who are the "trunk of a tree", with the trunk representing the common origin of blackness. Cirio and I further discussed the concept of *tronco colonial*:

It is a native category that they [Afro-Argentines], like that of the ancient Indians, they decided [to create]. It is necessary to respect them; it is their denomination, like that of the aborigines in any other era. This community does not subscribe to the concept of the African Diaspora like the common denominator of Afro culture that [believes] they are all one, everyone is equal in any place, in any time, but without trying to enrich [the culture by showing] what was done in history.
[Original interview in Spanish]

Cirio argued that the identifier *tronco colonial* is no different than the categories created by indigenous groups when they call themselves the *pueblos originarios*, or the original group native to Argentina. Cirio contended that this terminology is a way for Afro-Argentines to distinguish themselves from other blacks in Argentina. He further argued that this category is necessary for Afro-Argentines to reclaim their distinct history.

The term *tronco colonial* is a way for this sub-group of Afro-Argentines to self-identify on the social level. Identifying as such may help them reclaim their history. It is also beneficial in a political landscape because this historical claim would allow Afro-Argentine organizations to receive recognition from the government and possibly financial assistance for being a minority group in Argentina. Identifying as *afrodescendiente* removes the historical claim of Afro-Argentines and groups them with contemporary Afro immigrants who are not seen as having a role in Argentine history and do not have Argentine identity.

Although emphasizing the *tronco colonial* identity over *afrodescendiente*, does add more legitimacy to Afro-Argentine attempts at special recognition in Argentina's culture and politics, the *tronco colonial* identification serves to alienate blacks from each other. As a result, not everyone sees the *tronco colonial* identity positively. Several of my informants stated that the term was divisive and only served to inhibit efforts to promote black identity in Argentina. However, most of these were immigrants. An exception was Pocha, an Afro-Argentine and the current President of África Vive. She stated:

We are talking about the Afro-Argentines, yes, there is ignorance and it is mine. In one part of my family, when they say they are prepared [for the Census], they are not really preparing themselves. Today I spoke with some of my cousins and I asked them about the preparation, which they replied, "No, we are of *tronco colonial*". This makes me mad because it is ignorance. I am telling you this story because I have discussed this a lot with one of my cousins and I have closed him off, because, I say it's fine, it's ok, you are *tronco colonial*. But how many came from *tronco colonial*? He responds, "Ah, I don't know." No it is like this, I, we are all the same. I am telling you that we are all from the 20th century, we are all from the 19th century, but I am not telling you that we are from *tronco colonial* because I don't know what you [people from *tronco colonial*] are doing. [Original interview in Spanish]

Pocha believes that black Argentines who identify as *tronco colonial* do so in ignorance. She stated that while some of her family members choose to identify as such, she and others in the community do not. She advocates for inclusiveness and believes that all blacks are from the same time, same culture, and are fighting for the same cause. Therefore, there is no need to distinguish one black group from another. Pocha chooses not to identify as *tronco colonial* because she does see the purpose in doing so and instead questions the objectives of those Afro-Argentines who emphasize this as part of their identity. Her reaction to this category shows that this term divides even the Afro-Argentine the black community. It also shows that while *tronco colonial* does help

clarify ideas of blackness, it is a political tactic made necessary by this small section of the black Argentine community.

The identity of *tronco colonial* creates a separation between historically black Argentines and the non-historical black population. It alienates members from the Afro-Argentine population who do not choose this identity even though they claim and embrace their slave ancestry. It is likely that Afro-Argentines who de-emphasize their identity as *tronco colonial* are relinquishing progress they have made for Afro-Argentine identity and political power. This identity is also an unobtainable position for Afro immigrants, which only serves to put greater value on the blackness of Afro-Argentines than that of non-historical blacks. Moreover, the interests of those who identify as *tronco colonial* are not the same as the interests of Afro immigrants. Afro-Argentines who identify as *tronco colonial* want the government to acknowledge the influences historical blacks have had on Argentine culture. In particular, this population wants to be recognized as having Argentine citizenship instead of being perceived as immigrants.

Similar to Afro-Argentines, black Cape Verdeans in Argentina have a unique identity that emphasizes their historical roots. Cape Verde, an island chain off the coast of northwestern Africa, was once colonized and governed by Portugal. This gave black Cape Verdeans a claim to Portuguese identity and many maintained this identity even after the country became independent. A significant part of the black Cape Verdean community in Argentina identifies as Portuguese first and black second because Portuguese heritage gives its possessor greater social capital than black heritage in the country. This creates conflicts and further divides the black Argentine community. For example, Nengumbi (an African immigrant and naturalized Argentine citizen) said:

The Afro-Uruguayans are Black. The Haitian immigrants or Senegalese residents or Nigerians are black. There are no conflicts. There is conflict in the Cape Verdean community about identity. When the Cape Verdeans arrived here, Cape Verde was an island in Africa it was not yet independent. The Cape Verdeans traveled here with Portuguese passports because [the island] was a Portuguese colony. Then, they took this identity, “We are Portuguese”. When they arrived here, identifying as black was dangerous and very negative. So the Cape Verdeans identified as Portuguese and more came here with Portuguese passports. In the 1970s, some identified as African and others did not. There are some here who identify as Afro, but the others realize that to be black in this country is the worst way to live life here. [Original interview in Spanish]

Nengumbi also stated that there are other black groups, which do not identify as black because this identity is perceived as “super negativo” [very negative]. The choice of some Cape Verdeans to identify as *no negro* [not black] is a divisive issue in the black community. While Cape Verdeans do have the right to identify as Portuguese, choosing not to identify as black invokes ideas of denying blackness and black identity.

Unlike Afro-Argentines, Cape Verdeans may not have much to lose if they choose the unifying identity of *afrodescendiente*. This is because being *tronco colonial* provides a claim to Argentina that being Portuguese does not. Being Portuguese will not give Cape Verdeans more political power or influence in Argentina. It also will not give them the same claim to state recognition and assistance that being *tronco colonial* does for Afro-Argentines. Moreover, choosing a Portuguese identity does not necessarily exclude black Cape Verdeans from the stigmas associated with blackness if they have an obviously black phenotype. However, it may be an important identifier within the Cape Verdean community and the general black community. Although their Portuguese identity may not be obvious to outsiders, maintaining it may help them preserve their economic and social positions.

Afro immigrant groups want a unifying identity because it creates a larger social entity with which to establish a collective black identity and to create political power. The refusal to identify as black is an obstacle against the black community's attempts to create a counter-hegemonic narrative. It shows that some blacks choose not to acknowledge their African heritage. However, the refusal to identify as black overwhelmingly shows that members of these groups think that they will benefit more from choosing a different social status. This denial of black identity undermines attempts to deconstruct black invisibility and reinforces the Argentine national discourse of whiteness.

The Black Organizations of Argentina in the 21st Century

The pursuit of establishing black identity and political power became the foundation for the creation of several black organizations in Argentina. Despite the differing interests of some Afro-Argentine and Cape Verdean groups, many black groups support a unifying identity for all black Argentines. It was these types of organizations that granted me the greatest access to their communities.

Although I interviewed and met with several leaders of black organizations in Buenos Aires, only a few were able or willing to allow me to participate in their activities and interview their members. However, many of the cultural activities I attended were sponsored or hosted by multiple organizations, which provided me the opportunity to interact with some of the members who I did not have direct access to through their organizational leadership.

I intimately observed and documented the activities and interactions of three organizations: el Instituto Argentino para la Igualdad, Diversidad e Integración (IARPIDI); Proyecto 34°S, and el Movimiento Afrocultural. These groups are working towards raising awareness about black presence in Argentina. They actively celebrate different black cultural forms. Moreover, I worked closely with these organizations because they are working towards dispelling myths about blackness.

IARPIDI

IARPIDI [The Argentine Institution for Equality, Diversity, and Integration] is a non-profit organization. It was founded in 2007 by the current president, Nengumbi Celestin Sukama, who is a Congolese immigrant and naturalized Argentine citizen. I was not informed about the number of members in IARPIDI, but fourteen members form its directorship. This organization strives to obtain basic human rights for refugees, immigrants, and blacks in Argentina. However, it also provides services to immigrants from other countries such as Croatia, Germany, and Asia. This organization never hosts its own cultural events, but collaborates with other black organizations and co-sponsors their cultural events, such as folkloric dancing and percussion workshops (Figures 5-8).

Nengumbi told me that he is working on several initiatives to enhance the presence of blacks in Argentina. One of his initiatives is to establish an investigative team composed of black Argentines to address issues in Argentina's black community. Nengumbi also said that he is advocating for the establishment of a black university and the creation of a black history month similar to the one observed in the United States. He

hopes that this university will provide easily accessible education for black Argentines. Nengumbi also believes that the black history month will create more credibility for the black community through acknowledging Argentina's African heritage.

I witnessed IARPIDI's early attempts to create a black cultural space while I was in Argentina. The first black cultural center to be established in this country was la Casa de la Cultura Indo-Afro-Americana (Figure 9). This cultural center is located in the Santa Fe province in Argentina (Figure 10). IARPIDI collaborated with the Organización de los Residentes Haitianos en la Argentina [ORHA – Organization for Haitian Residents in Argentina] and la Diáspora Africana en la Argentina [The African Diaspora in Argentina] to obtain the first black owned cultural space in Buenos Aires. I had the privilege of photo-documenting this space for these organizations (Figures 11-13). The space was proposed as the headquarters for each of these three organizations as well as a space for black cultural events.

IARPIDI had several meetings to discuss how to prepare for Argentina's 2010 census. The officers and general members discussed the other organizations that were participating in the preparations and their designated roles. The IARPIDI officers also talked about the purpose of including black census takers and establishing a black category on the census form. At these times, topics of racism and discrimination in Argentina were invariably discussed.

A significant part of IARPIDI's promotion and sponsorship of black cultural activities emphasizes the influence of black culture in Argentina. The objective of this organization is not only to bring awareness to the physical presence of blacks in the country, but to also demonstrate that Argentina has multi-racial cultural forms. For

example, members often talked about creating black *candombe* workshops or teaching black tango classes. These classes would not be an attempt to teach blacks different cultural forms attributed to white Argentine culture, but would instead be a demonstration of blackness *in* Argentine culture. The dominant narrative of Argentine culture rejects the notion that any aspect of the culture has African origins. As a result, cultural expressions like tango are widely believed to be of white origin and without black influence. The members of IARPIDI strive to show that black cultural influences exist, which would provide evidence that would also help strengthen the developing multicultural narrative.

Proyecto 34°S

Proyecto 34°S was created in 2008 by the current president, a white South African woman named Nikki Froneman. The organization derives its name from the latitude line that connects Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Capetown, South Africa. It currently has 35 members who collaborate with other organizations and advisors to facilitate the development of its projects. This independent organization promotes artistic exchange between Latin America and Africa with a focus on contemporary performing arts. This means that Proyecto 34°S provides an audience for African plays, music, and so forth in Argentina, while providing a similar forum for Argentine art forms in Africa. Nikki told me that she designed this organization to facilitate diversity, tolerance, and to promote cultural awareness through the exchange. Because Nikki left for South Africa during the winter (my summer), the organization did not hold any meetings from mid-

June through July. However, officers and members from Proyecto 34°S continued to sponsor and host cultural activities throughout the summer, which I also attended.

During my interview with Nikki, I asked her about the public reactions people have to the African performances Proyecto 34°S hosts and how the public perceives blacks. She told me:

The other maybe like observation of Argentine society in general, is how little people know about Africa. I've had people walk out of my theatre festival, and we had three award winning plays, because it wasn't African enough. I mean, there were only two people in the whole festival after they walked out. People said, "It's not African". And I was like, "What is it?" "No it's more American." And I was like, really, people are very stuck in their like drums and loin cloths and tribal villages stereotype, which is more not so much of a reflection of them and more of a reflection on the education system in general here and in many other places.

Nikki later stated that the goal of her organization was to create more awareness about African art and to challenge Argentine stereotypes about Africa. She told me that Proyecto 34°S works with other black organizations, but tries not to become politically involved. She also said that her organization promotes diversity "and not necessarily the visibilization of the Afro-Argentine population".

Nikki created Proyecto 34°S with the intent of bringing consciousness about Africa and the contemporary African to Argentina. Although she is aware of discrimination against blacks in this country, Nikki said that her organization does not focus on this. Proyecto 34°S works to create awareness about black cultural contributions and presence in Argentine society. The extent to which this is accomplished is limited to promoting various black cultural forms and causes, such as the sale of African fabrics or fundraising for victims of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti (Figures 14-16). Her interest in removing the organization from the political sphere also meant

that many of its members did not participate in the census preparations. Nonetheless, Proyecto 34°S' objective to promote African cultural forms in Argentina and to bring awareness to black forms already present in Argentine culture shows that this organization is also working to promote a multi-cultural discourse.

El Movimiento Afrocultural

I interviewed Afro-Uruguayan Diego Bonga, the founder and current president of el Movimiento Afrocultural [The Afro Cultural Movement]. I was unable to gather information on when this group was founded and how many members it has. However, I do know that members from Diego's family oversee el Movimiento. The organization was previously evicted from an abandoned Argentine factory that was later reclaimed by its owners. The eviction further strained the existing tension between blacks and the Argentine government. The organization is currently located in a state-owned cultural center (Figures 17-19). El Movimiento offers many workshops in capoeira, art, music, and dance for its members and people in the community. Each Sunday, this organization opens its doors to the community, offering classes, and playing *candombe* and drums in the courtyard of the cultural center.

Diego stated that one of the reasons why he was inspired to create el Movimiento was to help children understand the nature of discrimination. It was also created to provide a place for "los pobres, Afros, y blancos" [the poor, Afros, and whites]. During our interview, he told me about racism in Argentina and how he believes it affects blacks. He later said that racism and ignorance plague everyone irrespective of their race and

gender. Although Diego acknowledged the place of “colectivo negros” [the collective black community] in Argentine society, a reference to the discrimination against and limited political power of this population, he stated that the focus of el Movimiento was on *candombe* and the importance of the *tambor* [the drum] in black identity. Diego said that the drum was a tool to change the community and to bring visibility to blacks. It was also an object that was symbolically represented in all of El Movimiento’s events (Figures 20-23). He lamented that many in the younger generation focus on their career and are obsessed with technology. He asserted that he wants to teach youth how to preserve their heritage in addition to pursuing a career.

When I spoke with others in the community about el Movimiento, there was a consensus that this organization is very hesitant to work with researchers, as well as other black organizations. I asked Diego if el Movimiento was working with other Afro groups to prepare for the census. He told me that it was not because the organization did not have resources to do so. He said that el Movimiento does not have an income because it does all its work for free. Diego also told me that it is necessary for people to stay and clean the center, run the classes, answer the phones, and organize activities. Therefore, they do not have time to work on the census. While I believe that this is part of the reason for El Movimiento’s absence in the preparations for the 2010 census, I think it is also the result of underlying conflicts that prevent many black organizations from collaborating with one another. These conflicts have often been the result of disagreements over organizational leadership, ideology, and membership, as well as suspicion of a group’s motivation for collaboration and reasons for sponsoring an event.

In the course of my observations, each of these organizations sponsored a number of cultural activities that brought more awareness of blacks in Argentina. However, when talking with members of the different organizations, many discussed conflicts that arise between the black organizations and outsiders attempting to seek membership within them. A common source of conflict was paranoia and suspicion of others. Some stated that it is difficult to attain membership within a few of the black organizations because members may be suspicious of an individual's motives for joining their particular group. For example, speaking about one prominent organization, Nengumbi said, "They are super closed. Super closed in the sense that they believe it is good to be isolated. It likes to work alone, and its members must be *negro negro*. That is their philosophy." He references the exclusiveness and racial heritage that one organization demands of its members. I also had a similar experience with this particular organization when I sent its officers an email to confirm my attendance at a future meeting. I received an email in response stating that I was not allowed to attend the meeting because no one knew who I was and I needed to meet with the president of the organization before I interacted with any of the members or officers.

Upon meeting with the president of this group, he apologized and stated that our preliminary meeting was not necessary, but only served to satisfy the paranoia of his organization's members. While I did not find evidence that directly suggested that people in the black community fear repercussions from the government or white Argentines, I have been to meetings where the whites in attendance were treated with suspicion or apprehension. From my own understanding, there is no real danger to the black community by white Argentines. However, part of the paranoia is a product of

fighting between the black organizations for the few rewards that may be available to them.

Another issue that causes conflict between black organizations is the need to attain recognition within the black community. In the interviews that I conducted with presidents of other black organizations, many told me that groups will disband because a conflict will arise between members who want to lead that particular group. Often the arguing members do not want to lead for leadership's sake or to advance a particular cause, but instead so that they can achieve the status and prestige that may come with being the president of a black organization.

Additionally, I was told that inter-organization collaboration is limited between black groups because of the belief that one group may try to receive more *fama* [fame] over another on their collaborative work or try to subvert the actions of the collaborating group. The most striking consensus was that while acknowledging that conflicts arise, most of my interviewees said that these conflicts threaten to hinder the cause to increase social awareness of the black population and instead create disharmony in the black community.

Conclusion

Because the majority of the population identifies as white European, the dominant narrative of Argentina makes different ethnic groups almost invisible as their existence is denied along with their cultural and genetic contributions. Black Argentines have constructed three forms of identity (i.e. *negro*, *Afro*, and *afrodescendiente*) to gain

recognition in the nation. The collective black community has begun to mobilize through various social movements to create a self-identity. These social movements provide blacks with the opportunity to increase consciousness of their existence and effectively create their identity in an environment that previously prevented them from doing so. Moreover, the construction of black identity in Argentina is an important tool for the black community because it is integral to fighting against the dominant narrative of whiteness.

The current black organizations in Argentina are the driving force behind the promotion of the multicultural narrative. The individual and collective action of these groups brings awareness to black culture in a way that further legitimizes blackness in Argentina. The actions of these organizations are one of the ways in which all Argentine peoples are becoming aware of blacks in the nation. The differing ideologies of these groups center around preserving black culture and bringing attention to the black population in Argentina. In part, these organizations create social forums that allow blacks to experience and reaffirm their cultural heritage. They also allow whites to learn more about the diverse cultural background of Africans and Afro-Latinos. Additionally, the collaborative efforts of these organizations are the driving force behind anti-discrimination movements in the black community. These groups are also a unifying body that allows people to accomplish the objectives that would otherwise be futile at the individual level. They are a symbol of *la lucha*, or “the fight” against black invisibility.

Despite the development of these black organizations and their attempts at collaboration, inter- and intra-organizational conflicts threaten to unsettle the advancements made by these groups. These conflicts will prevent the black community

from fully unifying and effectively implementing a multicultural narrative. During my research, I heard rumors that two prominent organizations were once united by a common ancestry, but they became divided because of conflicts over leadership and ideology. However, disagreements over identity and trust have caused, and will continue to cause, most of the conflict within the black community.

I observed these identity conflicts when I attended a caucus for Argentina's black organizations. The objective of this meeting was to organize a petition to have black census takers in the upcoming census and to discuss general census information. A variety of people attended this meeting. Some were people who did not claim membership to any group. Among the rest, I identified representatives from at least six different black organizations. The representatives argued over identity issues, specifically how to represent the black community on the census. Members argued that some organizations, while poignantly referencing the Cape Verdean group in attendance, fluctuate between the collective identity of *afrodescendiente* and their own separate identity. They also argued that members of this Cape Verde group had yet to fully commit to the collective identity. This situation became intense and led to repeated questioning of some members to hold to their promise to affirm this identity.

People were also suspicious of whites attending the meeting who other blacks did not know. For instance, one black member of *África y su Diáspora* stopped a speaker mid-discussion because he did not feel comfortable discussing the census preparations in front of whites who he did not know. His statement was supported by a few others and resulted in each white Argentine introducing his or herself and explaining why they deserved to attend the meeting. This serves as an example of the mistrust that some

blacks have for whites despite including them in their efforts to increase black awareness. Despite helping fight against black invisibility and for the support of black culture, white activists are subjected to the same discrimination that black organizations are trying to combat.

The conflicts that are present in most of the black organizations are a debilitating weakness that will inhibit these groups from existing for very long. On the individual level, these groups are a source of assistance for blacks and a forum for the celebration of their heritage. However, these groups must work collectively if they hope to establish a black identity and continue to bring visibility to blacks in Argentina. Because of the difficulties that many blacks face on an individual level, a collective effort is critical to the success to the black community. However, if it continues to give into selfishness, mistrust, and debilitating internal conflicts, the contemporary black community may follow the fate of its predecessors and continue to face poverty, discrimination, and an inability to pursue collective political goals that could improve their position.



Figure 5. Percussion Workshop. Many black organizations, such as IARPIDI and Proyecto 34°S sponsored bicentennial celebrations for Afro Americans in honor of Argentina's independence. During part of the celebration, Yamoussa Sylla (center), who is from Guinée Conakry, conducted a percussion workshop on how to play a certain type of drum called *djembe*. Photo credit: Desareé Williams



Figure 6. Folkloric Dance of Northern Argentina. Two dancers perform a dance from the Northern provincial area of Argentina. This was performed at the Archibrazo cultural space in Buenos Aires as part of the Afro-Americano Bicentenario celebrations. Photo credit: Desareé Williams



Figure 7. Folkloric Dancing during the Afro Americano Bicentenario Celebrations. Photo credit: Desaré Williams



Figure 8. Presentation of *Afro Argentinos*. Marie Edouard Carius, President of La Organización de Haitianos Residentes en Argentina, welcomes everyone to the movie presentation on Afro-Argentines. Photo credit: Desaré Williams



Figure 9. Casa de la Cultura Indo-Afro-Americana. Photograph of members in the first Afro cultural space. Photo credit: Norberto Pablo Cirio



Figure 10. Map of Santa Fé Province in Argentina. Santa Fé province (in green) is located in eastern Argentina and is surrounded by several Argentine provinces. It is the location of la Casa de la Cultura Indo-Afro-Americana. (<http://www.esacademic.com/dic.nsf/eswiki/964920>)



Figure 11. First Black Cultural Space in Buenos Aires. Leaders and members of IARPIDI, ORHA, and la Diáspora Africana survey their new cultural space. Photo credit: Desareé Williams



Figure 12. Entrance to the First Black Cultural Space in Buenos Aires. The new black cultural space in Buenos Aires is located in the basement of a building on Avenida San Juan. Photo credit: Desareé Williams



Figure 13. Representatives from Black Organizations. Members of IARPIDI, ORHA, and colleagues in the first Afro cultural space in Buenos Aires. Photo credit: Desareé Williams



Figure 14. African Fabrics. African fabrics were for sale by some of the black organizations during the Afro Americano Bicentenario Celebrations. Photo credit: Desareé Williams



Figure 15. Drums on Display. Percussionists stacked their drums near the walls before their performances during the Afro American Bicentenario Celebration. Photo credit: Desareé Williams



Figure 16. Feria por Haïti. People eat and drink food being sold as part of the Feria por Haïti. This event was sponsored by La Organización de Haitianos Residentes en Argentina, Proyecto 34°S, and other organizations to raise money for those affected by the earthquake that devastated Haiti in 2010. Photo credit: Desareé Williams



Figure 17. El Movimiento AfroCultural's Cultural Center. The center is located in the San Telmo neighborhood of Buenos Aires. Photo credit: Desareé Williams



Figure 18. The Courtyard of El Movimiento AfroCultural's Cultural Center. Photo credit: Desareé Williams



Figure 19. Inside El Movimiento Afro-cultural's Cultural Center. Children talk in the foyer and admire artwork on the interior walls of the cultural center before an event. Photo credit: Desareé Williams



Figure 20. Banner for Escuela Taller de Candombe. A man holds a sign for the candombe school during the opening ceremony for El Día de la Mujer in the cultural center. Photo credit: Desareé Williams



Figure 21. Candombe Drums. Specially made drums used for *candombe* crowd part of the entryway into the performance room of El Movimiento Afrocultural's cultural center. Photo credit: Desareé Williams



Figure 22. La Escuela Taller de Candombe. El Movimiento Afrocultural has a school-workshop that teaches *candombe* to men, women, and children. The school performs at the organization's cultural events. Photo credit: Desareé Williams



Figure 23. Tocando el Tambor [Playing the Drum]. A boy plays a drum during the opening candombe performance for El Día de la Mujer at the cultural center. Photo credit: Desareé Williams

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

I walked through a crumbling Buenos Aires neighborhood in search of Pocha Lamadrid's apartment. I was thrilled to interview a woman who was a pillar of the black Argentine community and a symbol of the struggles that blacks had to endure. Before I came to Argentina, I had been in contact with her through email. She was almost like a celebrity to me because of the way her reputation preceded her in the black community. For me, it was also a terrible irony that this iconic woman could only find work as a maid. Before I met Pocha, I already knew her story, specifically the time when she was detained by Argentine police. If she attended an event, others were often made aware of her presence with some reference to this trial. If I mentioned her name to members of the black organizations, they automatically told me her story or at least this particular part of it. It is a shame that because of this, I never asked her specifically to tell me about this experience.

The frequently recounted story is that in 2002, Pocha attempted to travel to Panama to assist at a conference on discrimination in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. However, on her way there, she was detained at Ezeiza International Airport in Buenos Aires for several hours. The immigration employees called the Federal Police and confiscated her Argentine passport because they believed that it was a forgery. The

police questioned her nationality and later demanded that she show her real passport because they believed that no one could be Argentine and black. Pocha's story is an example of how the strong national discourse of whiteness influences and permeates Argentine society. The identities of being black and Argentine inevitably collide because Argentine identity has historically become synonymous with being white. Incidences like this one resonate with the black community and help motivate its members to increase awareness of black culture and influence in Argentine society. According to Pocha, she wants to "demonstrate that there is a black Argentine here, that he lives here, was born here, resides in Argentina. And ... [I] want to show the poverty of the black Argentine and his way of life." [Original quote in Spanish]

Before I lived in Buenos Aires, I never thought about how my African-American identity changed given certain social contexts. From my perspective, I was always black, whether I was in the company of other black people or the only black person in the room. The only thing that changed in these contexts was my desire to emphasize this identity. When I was the only black person in the room, I only wanted to be seen like everyone else. To call attention to my ethnicity sometimes meant to separate myself from others. I did not want to discuss my blackness in a setting that made me appear to be alien from those around me. However, acknowledging my black identity when there was another black person present was a way of creating solidarity or finding familiarity in a situation.

It was in Argentina that I learned to express my black identity, regardless of the social context. My confrontations with racism in America initially made me realize that I was different. Over time, I learned to adopt an identity that allowed me to fit in and be accepted in different environments. In the U.S., I could have both black and American

identities. I found no contradiction between being black and being an American. I was not able to do that in Argentina because the national discourse placed me immediately in opposition to the white Argentines I encountered. Contrary to the U.S., the Argentine national discourse created the conditions where I could never be black and part of Argentine society. I could never have an identity that allowed me to escape scrutiny. Therefore, I was always going to have to face queries about who I was and where I was from. Furthermore, I was sometimes given an identity that did not belong to me, whether by white or non-white Argentines. People assumed that I was Cuban, Dominican, or even Haitian. I learned that to truly establish myself in society, I had to bare my African-American identity daily.

As a black woman in Argentina, I could not avoid racism. Walking down the streets of Buenos Aires, riding the subway, dining in cafés, or being in public in general I was immediately aware of prejudice: racial slurs, catcalls, and vulgar dialogue at my expense were my everyday fare. When in the presence of white Argentines I was *la morena*, *la morocha*, *la chica negra*, and any derivations of these words that could be used to compliment me, acknowledge my presence, or speak to me pejoratively. My encounters with racism, and the differences in the Argentine and American understandings of blackness have prompted me to affirm and reaffirm my identity on a daily basis.

My experiences in Argentina changed the way I think about myself. I am no longer concerned with trying to create an identity that is accepted in all social contexts. I am more concerned that my particular heritage is recognized. Similarly, black Argentines are trying to establish an identity that allows their individual ethnicities and

cultures to be recognized. The ability of black Argentines to promote a multicultural discourse would allow them to identify with the cultures from their country of origin, but also leave room for a black Argentine identity. However, to some extent, these are mutually contradictory goals.

Review and Contributions of this Research

My research has shown that there is a black community in Argentina. Despite the claims that blacks are not part of this country, I have demonstrated that there is a population of descendants of African slaves who were brought to Argentina. I also show that there is a growing Afro immigrant population that significantly contributes to the development of the black community. However, the currently available documents do not provide information on the population numbers of either black group. It is likely that the results from the 2010 census will provide a more accurate understanding of the total black population in Argentina, but there will be no distinction between the numbers of historical and immigrant blacks in the country.

Part of my research into the history of blacks in Argentina was based on George Reid Andrews' (1980) publication on this population. His work is very important to the overall understanding of black Argentine history. Andrews suggests that the end of the slave trade, high mortality and low birth rates, the effects of war, and intermarriage are factors in the decline of this population. However, my thesis demonstrates that there is not enough historical evidence that clearly demonstrates a correlation between these factors and the decline of the historical black population. However, it is likely that

Andrews' idea about intermarriage is the most relevant explanation for the decline of the black population. Because it was more socially valuable to be white than black, those blacks whose phenotypes allowed them to move into white society, most likely claimed a white identity. As a result, the number of self-identified blacks declined in Argentina.

In this thesis, I have also established that the past and present Argentine society has promoted a discourse of *blanquedad*, or whiteness that minimizes or denies black contributions to Argentine society. As I stated earlier, Argentine discourse does this in four ways: (1) making ethnic and racial contributions and presences invisible, (2) placing non-whites in the distance, or temporal and geographic past, (3) ignoring cultural hybridization and the process of *mestizaje*, and (4) emphasizing the early disappearance of Afro-Argentines and the irrelevance of their contributions to the local culture (Frigerio 2008:119). The conditions of this narrative suggest that Argentina has historically been a white nation and therefore, there is no place for black people in the country.

Through the process of *blanquedad*, expressed in government policies, media forms, and cultural representations, Argentine society promulgates the argument that the country has a white European history. It creates the belief that blacks only existed in the nation's history as slaves. It removes African slave descendants from Argentina's history and relegates blacks to a position where they are generally understood as immigrants or foreigners. My fieldwork in Buenos Aires has provided evidence that shows how white Argentines fulfill each of these conditions. For example, when I conducted semi-structured interviews with people in Buenos Aires, one of the questions I asked was "Are there Afros in Argentina". Of the respondents, 44 percent simply stated that there were *pocos* [some or few], but did not elaborate further. Thirty-nine percent said that there

were no blacks or did not know if they existed in the country and 17 percent said that the blacks presently in the country were African immigrants. When I asked, “Are there Afro-Argentines in the country”, 50 percent of the respondents said that Afro-Argentines did not exist or were not aware that they existed. Because of the national discourse of whiteness, Argentine identity has been removed from all blacks, including those who have legitimate Argentine citizenship.

I have also shown that there are competing discourses in Argentina. The multicultural narrative tries to create accurate understandings of blackness, while allowing blacks to establish an Argentine identity and affirm a collective *afrodescendiente* identity. The dominant narrative of whiteness directly conflicts with this new discourse because it continues to perpetuate negative understandings about blackness in the country’s past and present. Blacks are removed from contemporary media forms that describe Argentina’s history and culture. Historical information and current the current media relegate blacks to a non-existent and non-influential position. Black cultural contributions are discounted and disassociated from black culture. This discourse also creates images of blacks that are caricatures and farcical entities.

Before this study, there was sparse information on how blacks identified themselves in relation to one another or if such a classification existed at all. My work provides a platform for understanding the developing identity of the black community. Past research on the Argentine national discourse shows that it promotes whiteness and creates a dichotomous classification system in which people are either *blanco* or *negro*. I have shown that there are three categories in this classification system: white, black, and “other”. Within the black category, people are described as being either *pelo mota* or

negro mota. My research shows that the *negro* category in the Argentine classification system provides insufficient room for black cultural and phenotypic variability. This category gives lower social value to blacks and places them beneath white Argentines. The new identification system of *negro*, *Afro*, and *afrodescendiente* removes blacks from the categories established by the national discourse of whiteness. This new discourse helps blacks preserve their individual identity and culture while also establishing a collective one.

Each of the identifiers also helps to create new representations of blackness that are not the result of historical misunderstandings and stereotypes. As part of a multicultural narrative, the identities of *negro*, *Afro*, and *afrodescendiente* help dispel some of the misunderstandings about blackness in Argentina and allow for greater cultural and phenotypic variability. Additionally, the collective identity as *afrodescendiente* allows black Argentines to collaborate with intracontinental and international black organizations to fight against discrimination. This collaboration also strengthens their political power toward acquiring minority rights.

The identities of *negro*, *Afro*, and *afrodescendiente* attempt to create an identity for blacks in various social contexts. Is it possible to have all three of these identities and an Argentine identity as a black individual in Argentina? The mono-cultural narrative of Argentina stipulates that blacks cannot be Argentines and removes (or is uninterested in) variability within the black population. Under the conditions of a multicultural narrative, blacks can have each of these identities while providing room for an Argentine identity. However, the difficulty is encountered in identifying as *afrodescendiente*, but being recognized as a separate and recognizable black cultural group.

The Paradox of the Multicultural Narrative

A multicultural narrative is needed for blacks to claim Argentine identity and to gain political power and influence in Argentina. Promoting this narrative over *blanquedad* is the way to provide equitable citizenship and cultural presence to all ethnic groups in Argentina. This would allow Afro immigrants to gain a foothold in a society where they have been disparaged and ignored as Argentine citizens. However, there is a problem inherent in the multicultural narrative. Essentially this new discourse argues for the appreciation of the diverse black culture and ethnic groups in Argentina, but this is achieved through the collective unity and identification of these same black groups. The narrative allows blacks to advocate for respect, power, and cultural recognition, but at the same time asks blacks to forgo part of their individual group identities for the sake of black unity.

Argentine blacks maintain a problematic position as they try to make society accept their presence in Argentina. One of their main objectives is to have Argentine society, particularly the government, acknowledge that blacks are “native” to this country in that they were brought there as slaves and their descendants lived in Argentina afterward. However, most blacks in the country today are either immigrants or the descendants of recent immigrants. Thus, constructing a unified narrative of black identity means eliding differences between the historic and immigrant black populations. Not everyone in black community favors this. Additionally, this contradiction is nestled

within a further problem: promoters of the multicultural narrative want people to realize that blacks have the same identity as white Argentines and wish to deemphasize their cultural differences to achieve Argentine citizenship. Thus, Argentine blacks wish to simultaneously emphasize and de-emphasize ethnicity, depending on the context.

The paradox of the multicultural narrative is not unique to black Argentines and is an issue that all minority groups must address. Regardless of the consequences, a multicultural narrative is essential to combating Argentina's current dominant narrative. Having a nationally recognized term like *afrodescendiente* establishes this new discourse in Argentina because it implies that there is black variability beyond *pelo mota* or *negro mota*. It is an expression of acceptance – even at the most minute level – that not all of Argentina's black citizens fulfill the racial standards of the national discourse. Furthermore, the inclusion of *afrodescendiente* on the national census means that black Argentines have a positive identifying term, that can be effectively used to help establish black presence in the country's political, social, and cultural spheres.

The State of the Black Community in Argentina

The black Argentine community has made significant progress towards raising awareness of black cultural presence in the country. The inclusion of a black category on the national census is a response from the government that shows it is giving some recognition to this specific community. For this progress to continue, blacks must address issues regarding black identity on the social level. They must also find a way to redirect their focus such that they are not ignoring other opportunities for advancement and are utilizing black activism in the best way possible.

The first problems that need to be solved are the challenges to black identity from within the black community. Afro-Argentines and Cape Verdeans can choose to claim separate identities and pursue separate ideologies of what it means to have black heritage and nationhood. However, their understanding of black identity in Argentina must change to accommodate this changing ethnoscape. Afro-Argentines in particular can no longer expect to achieve the cultural recognition they were ideally hoping for once new ideas of culture and identity are introduced by Afro immigrants and refugees. If Afro-Argentines ignore the changing cultural and social dynamics caused by the influx of Afro immigrants, it is possible that their efforts will eventually become futile because they do not agree with the overall ideal of blackness that is seen by the dominant white society. As blacks from other countries immigrate to Argentina, the idea of blackness shifts from the historic black image to that of the Afro immigrant and refugee.

Similarly, Cape Verdeans who choose to emphasize their Portuguese identity need to realize that this identity may not provide much social gain to them in Argentina if the national discourse still dictates that their phenotype places them in the black category. They will continue to be treated as non-Argentine citizens and subjected to the same lack of cultural recognition and influence because in Argentina their skin color will be the major factor that determines what their social status will be. Like Afro-Argentines, Cape Verdeans can claim that they have an identity that separates them from other blacks in the population; however, just like the Afro-Argentines they will be met with the same response. Their unique identity will not be recognized and they will be seen as part of the Afro immigrant population. Thus, Afro-Argentines and Cape Verdeans can claim their unique identities, but it is an absolute necessity from them to establish a collective

identity that will also allow Afro immigrants to gain equitable rights, recognition, and Argentine identity.

The second problem that must be addressed is the focus within the black community. From my observations, it seems that many black organizations are not only centralized around trying to raise awareness of the historical black population, but they are also trying to confront discrimination against blacks. Discrimination and racism against blacks must inevitably be addressed to effectively implement the multicultural narrative. However, I think that the current focus on discrimination threatens to derail progress in the black community. I sympathize with the plight of blacks in Argentina and realize that acts of discrimination can prevent them from achieving economic and social mobility. However, I also recognize that despite the progress that was made with the inclusion of a black category on the census, black activism is stagnant because of this particular focus. The efforts towards the census were noteworthy and produced a significant result. However, each year will not be a census year. These organizations must begin to look to other forums that allow the black community's voice to be heard.

The non-growth among the black organizations is a result of remaining in the past. In the meetings I attended, much of the time was spent arguing about black invisibility and reliving acts of discrimination against blacks in the community. I believe that retelling these stories can be cathartic. When someone has used a racial slur against me or mistreated me because I am black, I have found an emotional release in expressing my anger and sadness. However, I do not dwell on these instances because there is no benefit in them. I know that repeatedly revisiting these acts can create a feeling of futility that does not cause positive change. Many black Argentine organizations suffer from

reduced growth because they have spent more time complaining about discrimination and the inaction of the Argentine government than actually moving ahead to overcome these obstacles. One way to use reports of discrimination to make progress is to actively document cases of discrimination and to create a database that clearly demonstrates that acts of discrimination against blacks exist in Argentina. From my own experiences in Buenos Aires and from the stories of my informants, I know that there is discrimination, and racism, against people of color. It is most likely that this discrimination is a result of the Argentine discourse of *blanquedad*. Those who do not fit within the conditions prescribed by the national discourse are socially undesirable. This is especially demonstrated in the black immigrant presence in Argentine society. However, without conclusive research that clearly illustrates a connection between discrimination and skin color, blacks will not be able to effectively combat racism.

The majority of evidence for discrimination against blacks is anecdotal. Few cases actually show that white Argentines discriminate against blacks, but these have been difficult to prove because few studies have data to support these claims. Well-recorded evidence will help blacks when pursuing legal action against discriminators or it can be used to support legislation in support of anti-discrimination laws. Documenting discrimination will be especially helpful to the black community because during at least some white Argentines I spoke with truly believe that “No hay racismo in Argentina” [Racism does not exist in Argentina]. Another researcher has also reported a similar claim (Sutton 2008:106). She stated that Argentina was not a racist country and argued that those who claimed racism existed were trying to defame the nation. I know racism exists because I have experienced it and I have seen it. However, my experiences are

purely anecdotal, as are the experiences of other blacks, unless they are systematically collected and recorded. Moreover, blacks must educate not only the black community, but also the entire Argentine community about racism and how it relates to the black experience in Argentina.

When I spoke with other black Americans who were living in Argentina, we came to the agreement that part of the racism we felt was a result of cultural misunderstandings. What is racism to me might not be racism to a white Argentine because their country does not have the same history and experiences with black slavery as in the United States. The same could be said for blacks immigrating to Argentina. What is racism to them may not qualify as racism to white Argentines. Therefore, they must educate the community about their culture, their history, and their rights and learn to appreciate the difference between the ways in which people recognize and express differences and racism. I do not doubt some of the racism blacks believe they experience is a product of cultural misunderstandings, but there is also real racism in Argentina, active discrimination and prejudice against blacks and other minorities. At least some of this racism is the result of Argentine notions of *blanquedad*. Therefore, it is important for blacks to develop a framework that allows them to combat racism on the national level and to promote national narratives that oppose *blanquedad*.

Additionally, I think that black activism is stagnant because the black community needs new ways to promote its identity and presence in Argentina. The organizations are a significant part of the black community and allow for collaboration that promotes a unifying identity. However, too many black organizations are disbanding and as new ones develop. They suffer from low support and struggles in leadership. Some activists

are diversifying the ways in which they strengthen the black community through other forums like black comedy theatres and film. Changing the focus and the ways in which blacks reach others in Argentine society is crucial to achieving success. It is time for the black community to act, to channel the anger of its members in avenues that allow for policy change and increased black activism at the grassroots level. This includes promulgating information about black history in Argentina to contradict an educational system that teaches children that blacks do not exist. Blacks must actively recruit white Argentines to attend black cultural events or, as one of my informants suggested, blatantly confront racism through short plays in public areas. Black Argentines need to be more active and more aggressive. Without this redirection, it will be impossible for the black community to achieve its overall goals of Argentine identity. Without moving forward and actually making changes, the multicultural narrative will never be fully realized.

The Specter of Discrimination in Argentina

A common claim I heard among my informants and members of black organizations is that Afro immigrants and refugees are not able to find employment beyond street vending. I was told that even if they enter the country with education greater than the high school level, many are not able to attain professional employment, such as working in an office or in administrative positions. This, according to my informants, is *cosas de negros* [things that blacks do]. Donald Castro also states that *cosas de negros* are things that make blacks appear foolish or ridiculous (2001:69).

Although there is no research on *cosas de negras* and how it translates into black-white interactions in Argentina, many blacks I interviewed believed that the nation's discourse establishes a relationship between manual labor and skin color. Because some of the jobs that contemporary Argentines have, such as working as vendors or in construction, align with employment historically associated with immigrants of all sorts, I suggest that what black Argentines describe as *cosas de negros* may be *cosas de inmigrantes* [things that immigrants do].

Manual labor is not only characteristic of blacks, but also of immigrants from other countries. For example, the employment situation for black Argentines is no different from that of Mexican immigrants in the United States. American condemnation of Mexican immigrants is undoubtedly a product of discrimination and discrimination sometimes limits the employment opportunities available to this ethnic group. However, Mexican immigrants are largely employed in low wage labor position, such as domestic service and manufacturing because these jobs are available to seasonal workers, day laborers, and people who are unskilled or have low education. Just as many wage labor opportunities for Mexican immigrants come from American disinterest (and stigmatization) of certain employment, vending and construction are similar, widely available opportunities for Afro immigrants in Argentina.

Additionally, it is possible that racism, as a product of promoting whiteness, has defined the lower and lesser-wage jobs for people of color. Immigrants from countries bordering Argentina are stigmatized because they do not fit within the conditions of whiteness as mandated by the country's dominant narrative. For example, in one of my interviews with Marieta, she stated, "Argentines discriminate against Bolivians,

Peruvians, and Paraguayans because of their skin color and [negative] perceptions about their culture.” [Original quote in Spanish] However, research on migration studies indicates that this may not be the case. Stigmatization of border immigrants also results from the employment positions they occupy in Argentina. Immigrants from bordering countries are believed to take jobs from Argentines and cause conflicts in society (Adaszko and Kornblit 2008:151). Juan Carrón (1979) researched the employment of immigrants from border countries, such as Bolivia, Chile, and Paraguay. He showed that between 1960-1970, immigrants from non-Argentine countries were represented in manual labor, such as agriculture and construction, in higher numbers than non-migrant Argentines.

It is difficult for immigrants, who earn higher education and technical skills in their country of origin, to find reciprocal employment opportunities in their destination. Many find themselves employed in wage labor and low paying positions. Although discrimination is certainly a factor, this is probably more a product of the job market, having applicable skills, and not having citizenship in the country where they are seeking employment.

Conclusion and Future Research

Our identities are not stationary, but are constantly changing because of our interactions with others. Identities allow individuals to establish a relationship with the world around them. They are constellations of symbols that we use to understand and influence how we perceive ourselves as individuals, how we see ourselves in relation to a

larger social body, and how we are seen by others. Black identity in Argentina has historically been constructed through a discourse of *blanquedad* that denies the importance, and sometimes even the existence of black Argentine heritage and culture. Black Argentines are attempting to break many of the stereotypes and misconceptions that are associated with black identity. In doing so, they are also redefining Argentine identity. The preparations for the 2010 census were one of the best ways black organizations helped clarify some of the representations that are negatively associated with blacks. The coverage surrounding the census largely focused on the fact that it was the first time in over a hundred years that blacks had been included on an Argentine census. This was the ideal opportunity for these black organizations to educate Argentines about blackness while simultaneously combating the current white hegemonic discourse. It also provided them the opportunity to exhibit their culture while also celebrating the African origin of many aspects of Argentine culture.

The use of the term *afrodescendiente* on Argentina's census was symbolically representative of a new multicultural narrative. It demonstrated that the country was including a population that has always been written out of its history. The effectiveness of this new discourse remains to be seen. Many blacks hope that the census results prove that there is a black population that deserves political representation and legitimacy amongst a society that continues to deny them. My research provides a new understanding of black Argentine identity, that when combined with results from the 2010 census, could help support the efforts of the black community. Having an established collective identity that is recognized on a larger political level will provide

more legitimacy to the black community and their efforts towards unity and political power.

The results from the census will certainly confirm that there is a black community. However, the results will most likely show that black Argentines compose a small minority in Argentina. Thus, it will continue to be difficult for blacks to obtain political power and representation. Therefore, the current black community must be prepared for a long, hard fight. This community must continue to find ways to bolster the progress it has already made.

My thesis results show that black identity discourse has become a central part of the black Argentine community. More research is needed on how this discourse will continue to shape identity issues in the black Argentine community. It is necessary to better understand how blackness is constantly being shaped by the changing cultural landscape in Argentina. As the black Argentine community continues to grow, more nationalities and cultures are redefining what it means to be black and Argentine. The issues with fluctuating identity will have a greater impact and black identity discourse will become a driving force for change within the black community and Argentine society. It is important to understand how this discourse is manifested as blacks forge new identities to create relationships between themselves and white Argentines. Furthermore, as blacks attempt to reinforce ideas about black history and culture in Argentina, researchers must now focus on how the discourse of black history and identity are present (or absent) in the black community's struggles for social recognition and political power.

APPENDIX A: EVIDENCE OF THE DOMINANT NARRATIVE

In many cases, Argentina's dominant narrative encourages *blanqueamiento* [whitening] such that blacks have been written out of the nation's history. This creates the appearance of a racially, socially, and culturally homogenous landscape. I have included some historical and contemporary examples of how whiteness is promoted through the nation's discourse, such that white characteristics are emphasized and black presence is deemphasized. These examples also show how blacks are often caricatured and treated as secondary characters in Argentina's present:

1. Anthropologist Alejandro Frigerio writes that several writers and scholars note the disappearance and decline of blacks in Argentina. He cites politician José Manuel Estrada who said:

Today there are almost no blacks in Buenos Aires.....Race mixture, on the one hand, and the gradual improvements of racial types by influence of the weather, cultural patterns and of the elements, as well as the influences of civilization in the development of the skulls, have caused genuine examples of the Ethiopian race to be lost among us. [2000:3]

Estrada proclaimed that blacks disappeared from Argentina by the mid-19th century. His statement also implies that blacks vanished because they were not strong enough to withstand social and environmental changes.

2. Darién Davis cites scholar Victor Gálvez, who also believed that blacks were disappearing from the Argentine nation (2007:72-73). In his 1883 essay "*La Raza*

3. *Africana en Buenos Aires: Recuerdos de otros tiempos* [The African Race in Buenos Aires: Memories of other times], Gálvez wrote that that blacks were disappearing and did not threaten the formation of the Argentine nation (1883:257). He also stated that the black population was so small, it could not compete with white Europeans for employment and other economic and social resources. This furthered prevailing ideas that there were very few blacks in the nation and they did not pose an economic or cultural threat to whites.
4. Writer and journalist Juan José Soiza Reilly wrote a 1905 article about blacks in Argentina, which appeared in *Caras y Caretas*, one of the nation's most influential political and social magazines. He stated, "Little by little this race dies out.... the black race of the sons of the sun walks towards death". [Original article in Spanish] This statement is significant because despite the lack of statistical or physical evidence that demonstrates this, Reilly is also claiming that blacks are near extinction.
5. Argentine diplomat Juan Bautista Alberdi often spoke about the politics of Argentina and thoroughly discussed his opinions of race and culture in the country. He elevated European culture in comparison to that of the lower-status Argentine classes. Alberdi wrote *Bases y puntos de partida para la organización política de la República Argentina* [Bases and Starting Points for the Political Organization of the Argentine Republic] (1923), which thoroughly discusses his policy on creating an ideal Argentine government. He created this document with the intent of influencing officials who were preparing to write the 1853 Argentine Constitution. Alberdi wrote:

For what reason have I said that in South America, to govern is to colonize, and how is this an unquestionable truth? To colonize, I repeat, is to instruct, to

educate, to give morals, to improve the race; it is to enrich, to civilize, to fortify and to affirm the freedom of the country, giving them intelligence and the teaching them the customs of government and what it means to use them. [Original translation in Spanish] [1923:17]

He also wrote, “But to populate does not mean to civilize, it is futile, when it [Argentina] becomes populated by the Chinese, Asian Indians, and blacks from Africa” (Alberdi 1923:18). Alberdi continued to discuss the advantages of Europeanization and its benefits to the culture and society of Argentina. He argued in support of race mixing because he believed that it was the only way for weak genes to be removed and for the dominant and superior European races to thrive in Argentina. Essentially, Alberdi argued for whiteness and the suppression of non-white influences.

6. Former Argentine President Domingo Sarmiento (1868-1974) promoted whiteness and the suppression of African, Amerindian, and other non-white characteristics in his book *Conflictos y armonías de las razas en Americas* [Racial conflict and harmony in the Americas]. He discussed racial conflict in Argentina and how the confluence of races prevented Argentina from creating its own identity and racial homogeneity. Sarmiento believed that European migration would erase the evidence of barbarism and primitivism in the nation that was present in the non-white populations. To Sarmiento, immigration would “correct the indigenous blood with new ideas ending the medievalism” (1953, vol.1:183).
7. In 1996, during his presidency, former President of Argentina Carlos Menem (1989-1999) declared, “En Argentina no existen los negros; ese problema la tiene Brazil” [Blacks do not exist in Argentina. This is Brazil’s problem] (Ruchansky 2005:3).

8. The whitening of Argentina and ideas that blacks had disappeared or were vanishing was supported by the way censuses were implemented. The eight censuses conducted from 1895 to 2001 did not include an option for blacks or Afro descendants. There was no way for people in the Argentine population to declare this part of their ancestry. Therefore, the publication of these census data supported ideas that blacks were not present in the nation's population. Over a century since they were last enumerated, an option for blacks was finally included on the most recent 2010 census. There was an option for Afro descendants on page one question six of this census (Figure 24).
9. The attempt to diminish black cultural contributions in the history of Argentina was made apparent during my visits to the country's national history museum. I visited each of the rooms and exhibits in the museum to determine if blacks are acknowledged or present in some form in the documentation of the nation. The museum clearly excluded the existence of blacks in the nation's history and development. I photographed and visually examined portraits, pictures, sculptures, and other display items. Blacks were not present in any form; however, there were a few miniature pictures of indigenous people and a photograph of Mexican president Benito Juarez. There was no mention of blacks in the entire museum. The museum is supposed to represent the national history of Argentina, yet it fails to represent a significant part of the population.
10. The Department for the Secretary of Culture produces the magazine *Nuestra Cultura* [Our Culture]. The fourth issue of the magazine, from May 2010, featured information on Argentina's culture in celebration of the 200th anniversary of the

nation's independence. Articles in the magazine discussed the indigenous population, development of the culture, diversity, and politics. However, none of the articles discussed blacks in Argentina's history or African influence in the national culture. A review of the covers of the magazine show two stereotypical images of blackness that further elevate and emphasize whiteness while continuing to draw negativity to blacks (Figure 25). One image is of a woman dressed as a servant holding the baby of a white Argentine woman who is extravagantly dressed. The second image is of a black woman wearing peasant class dress and selling empanadas, which is an employment position that is often attributed to blacks after their emancipation in the history of Argentina.

11. When I walked along the bookstore district of Buenos Aires in Avenida Corrientes, I visited 20 bookstores in search of literature on blacks. In each bookstore, I looked for information on black history, slavery, representations, and so forth. Several times, I asked a clerk or manager for assistance, but they were unable to find books related to these topics. The lack of information available for mass distribution about the black Argentine community suggests that there is not a great deal of interest in this subject. It is also an example of how blackness and black history have been written out of the nation, such that white homogeneity is promoted.
12. The Fiat automotive company in Argentina manufactured the Fiat Palio Groove, which is a sleek black vehicle. The company produced several commercials: "Parking", "Highway", "Route 86", and "Love Point", which promoted both the new Palio Groove and whiteness in Argentine society. (see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_SN5a0T0_yc,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9cgdimWK-c0>,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7MfOt9VDCNw>, and

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Wduy6zRuqU>. The original videos can be found on the Argentine Fiat automotive company's website: www.paliogroove.com.ar/).

Each commercial features a man of African descent wearing all black and a curly afro skating along the street as two white descendant individuals sit in his afro and drive him around town. The commercial demonstrates how being black is exotic and cool by using the man to represent the newest Fiat car model. However, the commercial also expresses the dominant narrative's conditions of white dominance and the position of blacks as secondary and subservient characters and as objects that can be manipulated.

13. The company Personalmusica.com created a commercial to promote a website and cellular phone that offers music for the consumer that fits his or her personality. The man in the commercial is slightly overweight and of obvious African descent. He is wearing many large, gold chains around his neck, hip hop style clothes, and has gold fillings on his front teeth, which follows the "hiphopero" theme of the advertisement. (see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sXZuMGn7yVw>). The way he is portrayed is a reproduction of the stereotypes of black men seen in American media as rappers and followers of hip hop trends. Portraying the man as such gives him a non-Argentine identity. Additionally, themes of whiteness are also perpetuated throughout the advertisement. The man rides a white horse, plays a white piano, lies on a white bed, and plays with white flowers.

14. Fashion and dress are important in Argentine culture. How people present themselves is a manifestation of Argentine identity. A review of modeling agencies in Argentina reveals that there are some models of color. For instance, AR Models Agency attempts to represent models of various ethnic backgrounds (<http://www.armodelsagency.com/home.htm>). However, models of color were conspicuously missing from the April 2011 Fashion Week in Buenos Aires, which featured some of the country's top designers and their models. A video of the fashion show demonstrates how *blanquedad* is promoted in fashion (see: <http://www.reuters.com/news/video?videoId=65668>).
15. A theatre company produced a play called “Máscaradas de Mayo”, which was performed in Plaza de Mayo. The performance was designed to discuss the role that blacks played in the revolutionary wars and history of Argentina. An Argentine artist was hired to create a promotional flyer for the play. The flyer was very controversial (Figure 26). The largest character in the flyer is a tall, black man playing the drums, who is representative of one of the characters in the play. His image is a caricature of blackness and his features are somewhat grotesque. The other black characters in the flyer are not drawn as dramatically, but some of their features are exaggerated. In an interview with Anthony, one of the actors in the play, he discussed the flyer, exclaiming:
- What the freak is this? This is wack. You know, I respect you [the artist], but I do not understand what you are trying to accomplish with this image. We are trying to bring black people up and is this how we are, is this the image that we want? You know? The black man playing drums, long and lanky, with the goofy smile on his face when we're talking about slavery! He's got a chain on his leg and he is smiling, playing the drum! He's got those big ol' lips, goofy eyes. And his teeth are all like crazy! And he looks like a fool.

- Anthony's reaction emphasizes how inflammatory this promotional flyer is. Furthermore, the poster romanticizes slavery in Argentina's history. It also exaggerates the physical features of blacks and makes them appear obviously different from the white characters in the advertisement. Moreover, the images represented in the advertisement are contradictory to the overall objective of the play.
16. *Blanquedad* is overwhelmingly promoted in the Casa Rosada [Pink House] in Argentina. The Casa Rosada is the American equivalent of the White House. It is where the current Argentine President, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, conducts her business, but she does not live here. While visiting the Casa Rosada, there were no pictures or portraits of people of obvious African descent. I photographed portraits and busts of Argentine political figures. Despite the influences of blacks in Argentina's revolutionary wars and politics, they were not represented in any form in this important political building.
17. A review of Argentina's government tourism website shows that tango is portrayed as having white Argentine roots. Although there is some information that states blacks and guachos had some influence on its development, all images related to tango feature tango dancers of white European descent (see: <http://www.turismo.gov.ar/esp/menu.htm>).
18. I visited the website www.argentina.gov.ar, which is a government sponsored website that provides information on Argentina's history, culture, government, and society. When I visited the page about the nation's history, it briefly discussed its period of colonialism and primarily focused on its history during the revolutionary wars and subsequent independence. As of April 10, 2011, there was no mention the role of

slavery or slave trade in the 15th to the 19th centuries. Moreover, the website information on culture reports that blacks became “extinct” because of war and disease epidemics.

6 ¿Ud. o alguna persona de este hogar es afrodescendiente o tiene antepasados de origen afrodescendiente o africano (padre, madre, abuelos/as, bisabuelos/as)?

☐ Sí Indique el N° de persona:

☐ No

☐ Ignorado

Figure 24. Part of the 2010 Argentine Census. This is page one of the 2010 Argentine census. Question six asks Argentine citizens if they are of Afro descent or if anyone in their family has African descent.



Figure 25. Section of the May 2010 *Nuestra Cultura* magazine cover. There were only two representations of blacks on the cover. Both of these representations fit stereotypes about blacks, specifically black women.



Figure 26. Promotional flyer for “Máscaras de Mayo”. This flyer was used to promote the play that discusses the role of blacks in the revolutionary wars and history of Argentina.

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VITA

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