ESTAMOS ACÁ: AFRODESCENDANT YOUTH ACTIVISM, EDUCATION, AND RACIALIZED CITIZENSHIP IN ARGENTINA

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ABSTRACT

For young people of African descent in Argentina, their belonging and claim to the nation are largely negated by public denial of their existence. While the concept of *mestizaje*, or cultural and ethnic mixing, was prominent in the nation-building projects of many other Latin American countries (Sutton 2008), Argentina remains profoundly shaped, both demographically and ideologically, by nineteenth-century "*blanqueamiento*" policies aimed at "whitening" the nation by encouraging European immigration and obscuring its Afrodescendant and indigenous populations (Gordillo and Hirsch 2003). In the last decade, however, transnational Afrodescendant social movements and Argentina's adoption of multicultural policies and rhetoric (Rahier 2012, Geler 2016) have fueled local activism and led to hard-earned achievements for Argentina's Afrodescendant communities, such as the addition of an "*afrodescendiente*" category in the census of 2010. Within this context of shifting national policies and racial ideologies in contemporary Argentina my dissertation examines Afrodescendant young people's civic-identity formation across institutional and community-based educational environments, where youth are emerging as key interlocutors in the relationship between the state and their diasporic communities.

As students, Afrodescendant youth spend much of their time within Argentine educational institutions—institutions founded with the explicit mission of cultivating a "civilized" citizenry within a culturally and ethnically homogeneous nation (Ocoró Loango 2016). In 2005, the Argentine state promulgated a "*Plan nacional contra la discriminación*" (National Plan against Discrimination) that denounced the predominance of ethnic nationalism in education, but this has led to few institutional changes.

Classrooms remain principal sites where Afrodescendant youth encounter various forms of racialization and exclusion, from peer bullying to Eurocentric history textbooks (INADI 2015). Meanwhile, outside the classroom, growing Afrodescendant social movements have opened up new spaces for youth to develop critical consciousness and advocate for their cultural belonging and political rights. I draw on a year of observations, interviews, and youth participatory action research (YPAR) with an Afrodescendant youth organization in Buenos Aires to illustrate how diasporic community-based activism provides Afrodescendant youth with a type of counter-classroom—a space for an alternative civic education that enables them to "imagine their social belonging and exercise their participation as democratic citizens" (Levinson 2005). While formal educational environments are imbued with racializing practices and national narratives that circumscribe citizenship in ways that place Afrodescendants outside the nation, young Afrodescendants are learning to craft broader definitions of Argentine citizenship through counter-storytelling (Solórzano and Yosso 2002) and praxis-based learning (Freire 1970; Ginwright and Cammarota 2007) in their diasporic community. Ultimately, this dissertation traces, contrasts, and connects the diverse educational experiences of Afrodescendant youth, both within their schools and in their diasporic communities, in order to provide a nuanced examination of how these young people are engaged in what Ong (1996) has called the "dual process of self-making and being made" as citizens.

For Derek

and

para todos que luchan por un mundo más justo.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: *AFROARGENTINIDAD* RISING

In a small café in downtown Buenos Aires in April of 2017, I anxiously awaited Elena's arrival. Elena,[1] a young Afrodescendant law student, had previously agreed to an interview through a series of exchanges on social media, but this would be our first face-to-face meeting. I had settled into a relatively quiet and isolated spot on the upper level of the café, hoping for some semblance of privacy for our interview. There were just a handful of patrons quietly enjoying their late-afternoon coffees and *meriendas*[2] of toasted cheese sandwiches.

A slender young woman in her early twenties came up the stairs and I immediately recognized her from the photographs in her Facebook page, which was where we had communicated previously. She had a light-tan complexion and her face was sprinkled with dark freckles, but it was her tight, dark curls that most clearly alluded to her African ancestry. Having just gotten off work at an office nearby, she was sharply dressed and the cat-eye tilt to her glasses gave her a distinctly stylish look.

Elena greeted me warmly and we sat down for the interview. For some time, we chatted casually about our mutual contacts and the research that had brought me to Argentina. I explained that I had recently arrived in Argentina to document and better

[1] Except for a few adults who elected to have their real names used, participants in my research have been assigned pseudonyms. All participants under the age of eighteen have been assigned pseudonyms.

[2] *Meriendas* refers to late-afternoon snacks or small meals.

understand the experiences and activism of Afrodescendant youth, both as unacknowledged citizens of their country and as members of a global diaspora. Only in recent years had Argentina officially begun to recognize its Afrodescendant population and heritage in public policy and law. Elena assured me that she would be happy to contribute to any study that would shine light on Afrodescendancy in Argentina. After turning on my audio-recorder, I opened the interview with the broad question, "¿Cómo describes tu identidad?" (How do you describe your identity?). Elena began:

> *Ahora, yo reconozco como **muy** afroargentina. Hace tiempo no reconocí así porque acá, en mi país, lamentablemente no te hacen sentir como sos de este país. Sino más bien dicho siempre cuento de que yo, en mi mismo país, siento extranjera porque siempre me preguntan, "¿Sos de Brasil?" "¿Sos de Cuba?" "¿Sos de todos los países menos de la Argentina?" por la creencia de que "en Argentina no hay negros."*
>
> *Entonces, parte de lo que me enseño a crear mi identidad fue mi papá, conocer a mi familia, conocer experiencias de otros chicos afro que me hizo reconocerme, hoy en día, como afrodescendiente y también entender que soy parte de Argentina también y no sentirme tan extranjera.*
>
> Now, I identify as **very** Afro-Argentine. Some time ago, I didn't identify in this way because here, in my country, unfortunately they don't make you feel like you're from this country. Rather, I always say that I feel foreign in my own country because they always ask me, "Are you from Brazil?" "Are you from Cuba?" "Are you from all countries except Argentina?" because of the belief that "there are no Blacks in Argentina."
>
> So, part of what taught me to create my identity was my dad, to know my family, to know other *Afro* kids who made me recognize myself, today, as Afrodescendant and also to understand that I am part of Argentina too, and to not feel so foreign. [3]

[3] I shall use the following conventions for quoted speech and text: ellipses indicate a pause in the natural flow of conversation; bracketed ellipses indicate that the transcriber has omitted something; bracketed words are words that the transcriber has added for clarification; and boldface indicates words that were emphasized by the speaker in the natural flow of conversation.

Elena continued recounting how she came to embrace her African heritage by connecting with her Afro-Argentine family and by becoming involved in her Afro-diasporic community and local activist networks. When I asked her why, she thinks, so many fellow Argentines assume that she is foreign, she explained that there are popular historical narratives, still formally taught in schools, that maintain that Argentina's entire Afrodescendant population was practically annihilated by "las guerras y las plagas" (wars and plagues) early in the country's history as an independent nation.[4] It is a myth that Elena knows well and regularly works to dispel, citing her own family's history as evidence. Elena's family—one of the more established and prominent Afro-Argentine activist families in Buenos Aires—can trace their lineage directly to enslaved Africans brought to Argentina during the colonial period. She acknowledged that it sometimes annoys her to have to recount her whole lineage to make this point; still, she felt that it is important to educate others.

About five minutes into our conversation, a short, graying man of seemingly European descent[5] approached our table and interrupted her mid-sentence. "He había escuchando la conversación, discúlpame" (I've been overhearing your conversation,

[4] Myths about the "disappearance" of Afrodescendants from Argentina will be more fully addressed in Chapter 2.

[5] Many *porteños* (residents of Buenos Aires) trace their lineages to European migrants who came to Argentina around the turn of the century. Many Eurodescendant *porteños* have stereotypically "European" features such as light-colored hair and eyes. It is important to note, though, that this is in no way uniform. As I will go on to discuss in more detail, the ideologies underpinning racial identification in Argentina default to whiteness in the case of racial admixture, such that many who identify as "white" may have mixed heritage and non-white features.

forgive me), he interjected with a grin, “nunca he había escuchando la expresión ‘afroargentina’” (I have never heard the expression “Afro-Argentine”).

With a gentle, unfazed smile, Elena calmly replied, “¿No? Se empezó a implementarlo hace poco” (No? It has recently begun to be used).

The man pressed on, saying, “¡Pero es **extraño**! Porque vos, ¡sos argentina! ¿Por qué **afro**argentina?” (But it’s **strange**! Because you, you are Argentine! Why **Afro**-Argentine?)

“Afroargentina porque soy…” (Afro-Argentine because I am…), Elena began in response, but the man spoke over her again, saying, “No, eso puedo entender, pero ¿por qué hacer esa?” (No, that I can understand, but why do this?)

Elena continued, “La aclaración es para que se sepa, más que nada, que soy descendiente de africanos” (The clarification is so that it is known, more than anything, that I am a descendant of Africans).

Pero también, ¿estoy… soy inca-argentino, por ejemplo?” (But also, am I… am I Inca-Argentine,[6] for example?), the man asked.

Elena smiled again, tilted her head to the side, and responded, “No sería malo. Creo que es una manera de auto-reconocerse. Como yo, me auto-reconozco como afro

[6] Here, the man references his own possible Indigenous heritage. Interestingly, he explicitly names the Inca, whose empire once stretched to parts of northwest Argentina. In doing so, he echoes nationalist narratives that privilege the “civilized” Inca (a colonizing group) over Argentina’s many other Indigenous groups, who, historically, were labeled “barbaric” and considered antagonistic toward the modern state, and whose existence in Argentina, unlike that of the Inca, extends to the present (Gordillo and Hirsch 2003; Logan 2009).

pero **también** argentina" (That would not be bad. I think it's a way to self-recognize. For me, I self-recognize as *Afro* but **also** Argentine).

"Pero básicamente sos blanca" (But, basically, you're white).

"Sí, porque la mezcla que yo tengo con mi mamá*"* (Yes, because of the mixture that I have with my mom).

"¡**Es raro**! Nunca he escuchado esa […] Soy argentino y nunca he escuchado 'afroargentina'" (**It's strange**! I've never heard this […] I am Argentine and I have never heard "Afro-Argentine"), he said, with a tone of mixed exasperation and bewilderment.

Twice more the conversation circled back to his confusion over the term *afroargentina*. When Elena offered *afrodescendiente* (Afrodescendant) as an alternative, the man exclaimed, "¡Sos afrodescendiente y blancodescendiente!" (You are Afrodescendant and white-descendant!)

"Sí también," (Yes, that too) Elena replied, "pero creo que la distinción es la gente no se reconoce a los negros como argentinos" (but I think the difference is that people don't recognize Blacks as Argentines). To this, the man agreed, lamenting that people are ignorant and that Argentines should do more to acknowledge that their country's heritage is "mezclada" (mixed). The two would go on to talk for nearly ten minutes, with Elena politely educating the stranger on aspects of Afro-Argentine history, about which the man appeared genuinely interested to learn more. Afterward, the man thanked her for her time and apologized once more for interrupting us. As he left, Elena assured me that such an extensive interrogation was not a regular occurrence, but she also

said that the responsibility of educating others was one that, she felt, frequently fell upon her as an increasingly vocal member of her Afro-diasporic community.

I open my dissertation with this ethnographic vignette because it is singularly illustrative of the alterity that young Afrodescendants regularly experience in Argentina, and that I witnessed and documented over a year of fieldwork in Buenos Aires. So complete is the coupling of whiteness and Argentine-ness that asserting one's *afroargentinidad*—a simultaneously Afrodescendant and Argentine identity—creates the sort of dissonance witnessed in the exchange between Elena and the stranger at the café. For Afrodescendant youth, claiming *afroargentinidad* is a radical act and an assertion of the reality of racialized citizenship in Argentina. In this dissertation, I set out to answer the question: How do Afrodescendant youth come to understand and practice their cultural belonging and political rights as citizens of the nation that is still widely regarded as the whitest in Latin America?

Regardless of their legal status as Argentine citizens, Afrodescendant youth face a barrage of false historical narratives, institutional discourses, and quotidian interrogations that undermine their sense of national and cultural belonging in Argentina. For the youth I came to know, the seemingly benign question "De dónde sos?" (Where are you from?) was an oft-cited source of frustration and feelings of de-legitimization. In their daily lives, stereotypically *Afro* phenotypic features such as dark skin, wide noses, and *pelo muy rizado* (very curly hair) or *rulitos* (tight curls) elicit immediate labels of "other" and "foreigner." Conversely, visible markers of whiteness can invalidate their claims of

African heritage. For Elena, her dark curly hair, somewhat dark complexion, and racially ambiguous features resulted in her continually being mistaken for an immigrant from Cuba or Brazil, but her relative whiteness made her claim of *afroargentinidad* incomprehensible to the man at the café.

Underlying the man's confusion over why a "basically white" young woman would want to self-identify as *Afro* are deeply entrenched racial hierarchies that establish whiteness as central and dominant in the event of racial mixing, permitting the denial and obfuscation of Afrodescendant heritage within Argentine families for generations (Geler 2016). Argentina's early nationalism campaign created and sustained, more successfully than those of any of its Latin American neighbors, the myth of a homogeneous, Eurodescendant citizenry. This myth continues to be bolstered by prominent historical discourses, which Elena alluded to in our conversation, that inaccurately assert the "disappearance" of the country's entire Afrodescendant population in the post-colonial period. As I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, the early Argentine state embraced *blanqueamiento* (whitening) in both ideology and in policy, believing that whitening the Argentine public was essential to the young nation's path to civilization, prosperity, and modernity. For example, strategic immigration policies were crafted with the intention of diluting the country's existing racial diversity by enticing mass European immigration. Erased as a census category and relegated to the margins of Argentine colonial history, Afrodescendants were denied formal state recognition for much of the past century.

The widespread and deeply ingrained belief that Argentina is a white nation continues to render invisible both the country's Afrodescendant population and the

diverse everyday forms of racial discrimination that pervade in the lives of young people, particularly in their schools. As students, Afrodescendant youth spend much of their time outside of their communities and within educational institutions, where they encounter various forms of racialization and exclusion—from peer bullying to history textbooks that typically depict Afrodescendancy only in terms of slavery (INADI 2015).

In contrast, outside the classroom, in their Afro-diasporic community, Afrodescendant youth are beginning to develop critical consciousness and learning to advocate for their cultural belonging and political rights. Afrodescendant activism in Buenos Aires has been gaining momentum since the 1990s (Lamborghini and Frigerio 2010), spurred on by transnational Afrodescendant movements. Activists have also found new avenues for claims-making within the Argentine government's adoption of a multiculturalist agenda, which has expanded in recent decades under the increasing political and financial influence of multinational organizations and entities, such as the World Bank, NGOs, and the United Nations (Rahier 2012; Reiter and Simmons 2012). As a result, the last decade has seen several hard-earned achievements for Argentina's Afrodescendant communities—from the addition of an *afrodescendiente* (Afrodescendant) category to the 2010 census to the passing of a law in 2013 that established November 8th as a national holiday celebrating Afro-Argentines and African culture. Conceivably, Afrodescendant youth like Elena are coming of age in a decisive moment of expanding Afrodescendant visibility and rights in Argentina. Emergent Afrodescendant organizations, events, and spaces are providing opportunities for young people to learn about and to participate in Afro-diasporic culture and community, engendering new forms of identification and civic practice among Afrodescendant youth.

This was evidenced when Elena told me that *afroargentina* was a term that she had only recently started using when describing herself, and in numerous other shifts within *Afro* youth culture in Buenos Aires that I documented throughout my research.

During a year of ethnographic fieldwork with Afrodescendant youth activists, I found that young people are participating in alternative forms of citizenship education embedded in Afro-diasporic community organizing at local, national, and transnational levels. Community activism provides youth a kind of *counter-classroom*—a space where alternative histories can be learned and new understandings of citizenship can be crafted and practiced. As Elena discussed at the beginning of our interview, for a long time, she did not feel that she belonged to her country; her self-recognition as Argentine was achieved through deepening her connections to her family, her peers, and her Afro-diasporic community. Challenging conventional discourses that portray diasporic communities as crafting allegiances and identities located outside their "host" nation (Brubaker 2005), young Afrodescendants in Argentina are learning to make national citizenship claims through (not despite) their belonging and connections to larger transnational Afrodescendant networks and movements.

In this dissertation, I trace, contrast, and connect the diverse educational experiences of Afro-descendant youth, both in their schools and in their Afro-diasporic community, in order to provide a nuanced examination of how these young people engage in what Ong (1996, 747) has called the "dual process of self-making and being made" as citizens. As I explain in this first chapter, such an examination positions Afro-descendant youth as key interlocutors in the relationship between the state and diasporic communities, particularly in regard to the crucial subject of education. Although their

formal educational environments are imbued with institutionalized national narratives and pedagogical power dynamics that circumscribe citizenship in ways that racialize and exclude Afrodescendant youth, youth like Elena are increasingly called upon and empowered to educate their peers, their teachers, and society at large. As they are socialized to take on these roles as educators and activists, young Afrodescendants are emerging actors in the decolonial work of their communities.

The African Diaspora and Racialized Citizenship in Argentina

In this dissertation, I explore how Afrodescendant youth negotiate their cultural belonging and practice their rights as both citizens of Argentina and members of the African Diaspora. In such an investigation, it is necessary first to define what is meant by *diaspora*—a term that has survived several re-theorizations and such broad applications that it has become somewhat amorphous in academic literatures (Brubaker 2005; Cho 2007). "Diaspora" was first used to describe groups of involuntary migrants, conceived of as bounded entities connected to an ancestral homeland and juxtaposed with their host nations (Clifford 1994; Cohen 1996; Dufoix 2008). Postcolonial scholars have advocated against such essentialism, particularly when applied to the African Diaspora, a case in which colonial histories and processes disrupt and complicate diasporic orientations toward a homeland. They have argued that Afro-diasporic identities and experiences are not tethered to some African past, but are deeply embedded in transnational dialogues and differentiated by local social contexts (Gilroy 1991; 1993; Hall 1994; Yelvington 2001).

In the chapters that follow, I examine how young Afrodescendants engage in what Hall (1994) describes as a process of "becoming" diasporic through integrating

themselves into the cultural as well as the *political* practices of their Afro-diasporic community. By emphasizing the political, I recognize the African Diaspora as both a theoretical framework for understanding processes of collective cultural identification and a political "project of decolonization and liberation embedded in the cultural practices, intellectual currents, social movements, and political actions of Afro-diasporic subjects" (Laó-Montes 2007, 310).

In recent decades, a growing field of scholarship has explored the cultural politics and social movements of Afrodescendant peoples amid shifting social, political, and economic policies and conditions of emergent multiculturalist frameworks across Latin America and the Caribbean (Thomas and Clarke 2013; Dixon and Burdick 2012; Minority Rights Group 1995; Cárdenas 2012; Reiter and Simmons 2012; Thomas 2004b). Adding to this scholarship on contemporary Afrodescendant political and cultural mobilizations, my dissertation bridges the concepts of citizenship and the African Diaspora, particularly as they pertain to Latin America. Following such scholars as Clarke (2013), I position citizenship as a central analytic for understanding acts of claim-making and interactions between Afrodescendants and various state and non-state actors that both re-inscribe and challenge borders of national political and cultural belonging. Rejecting the notion that citizenship is simply a legal or political category defined by the state, I draw upon anthropological theories of citizenship as a "lived experience" (Oboler 2006) and as a "subjectivity" (Ong 1996) that is shaped through everyday practices and engagements with state institutions, officials, and narratives (Gálvez 2013; Rosaldo 1994; 2003). By using the term "racialized citizenship" (M. D. Perry 2015; Bauer 2018), I underscore how "citizen" is a deeply racialized subjectivity within narratives and

practices of nationhood in Argentina that normalize and centralize whiteness within *argentinidad* (Argentine-ness, i.e. Argentine national identity). This dissertation reveals various means by which racialized citizenship is institutionalized, particularly in formal educational environments; however, this is not to say that ideologies of citizenship are static or unidirectionally handed down to Afrodescendant youth. Rather, citizenship is an active field of contestation and renegotiation. In the following chapters, I trace how Afrodescendant youth experience, resist, and redefine citizenship in their country.

Educating Citizens Inside and Outside the Classroom

Educational environments have long been theorized as sites where social hierarchies and the cultural worldviews that sustain them are actively reproduced (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Early scholarship focused on schools as sites of social-class reproduction; more recent scholarship has explored "schools as race-making institutions" (Lewis 2003, 188) that reinforce the "normativity" of whiteness and police the behaviors, practices, and speech of non-white students (Allen 2017; Lee 2005; García-Sánchez 2014). Renewed interest in the cultural workings of citizenship has led anthropologists of education to investigate schools as influential socializing institutions where civic identities and national ideologies are instilled through both formal instruction and everyday practices, from social studies and civics classes to the "everyday nationalism" (Abu El-Haj 2015) embedded in ritualized pledges of allegiance and in students' quotidian interactions with their teachers and peers (Bellino 2017; Chun 2013; Levinson 2011). This scholarship has revealed how the educational contexts that youth are encounter in schools re-inscribe paradigms of acceptable citizens in ways that often exclude minority youth (Abu El-Haj 2015; García-Sánchez 2014).

However, education is a domain that is not limited to formal institutions of learning. Taking this into account, I provide an analysis of young people's experiences of racialized citizenship in their schools and use this as a point of comparison to, and dialogue with, those less explored forms of citizenship education and political socialization that occur outside the classroom. I build on the understanding that "[s]chools are not, nor have they ever been, the sole places of learning for youth. Community-based spaces within marginalized communities of color, in particular, have been intentional about educating beyond the borders of the school due to racial stratification and structural inequality" (Baldridge et al. 2017, 396). Indeed, communities of color have lengthy histories of developing independent educational institutions and community-centered pedagogy, from the Black Power movement's liberation schools (Rickford 2019) to Zapatista autonomous education (Baronnet and Breña 2008). Research carried out in community institutions (Rosario-Ramos and Johnson 2013), arts programs (Abu El-Haj 2009; Fine et al. 2000; Rosario-Ramos, Tucker-Raymond, and Rosario 2017), and youth organizations (Ginwright 2010a; Kwon 2013; O'Donoghue 2006) has shown that active community involvement provides youth of color with an informal citizenship education that, as Solís et al. (2013, 179) describe, "counters experiences of exclusion and marginalization, and can help shape [their] sociopolitical engagement." Much of this research has drawn on the foundational work of critical pedagogues, such as Freire (1970, 1974, 1997, 1998), Horton (1979), hooks (1994, 2003, 2009) and Giroux (2001, 2011, 2013), in order to examine how a citizenship education based in community dialogue and action can promote marginalized youth "critical consciousness," broadly defined as the ability of individuals to "critically analyze their

social conditions and act to change them" (Watts, Diemer, and Voight 2011, 43). I follow this tradition of scholarship and examine how Afrodescendant youth participate in community-based "ways of knowing and being" (Marin 2019, 41) as citizens through Afro-diasporic activism.

I also engage with recent ethnographic studies that have examined how diasporic youth navigate national "politics of belonging" in and outside of schools as they construct understandings of citizenship in their daily lives through diverse interactions with teachers, peers, community members, and various state and non-state actors (Abu El-Haj 2015; Tetreault 2013). My dissertation adds to and departs from these studies in two important ways. First, I work to disrupt a diaspora/host nation dichotomy in which youth navigate conflicted belongings to both the diaspora and the nation. In the case of Afrodescendant youth in Argentina, I find that their civic development and understandings of themselves as Argentine is actually enmeshed and entangled with "becoming" diasporic. Second, by locating citizenship education within Afro-diasporic activism, I illustrate how young people's emergent civic identities operate within, and directly engage, larger national and transnational power struggles and movements.

Youth as Socio-Political Actors and Agents of Decolonization

In the chapters that follow, I explore how the alternative citizenship education that Afrodescendant youth receive through community organizing influences their civic and diasporic identity formation. To clarify, I do not attempt to trace an idealized teleology of individual youth civic development that necessarily sees youth as not-quite-yet realized citizens and social actors (O'Loughlin and Van Zile IV 2014; Tuck and Yang 2014). Such a perspective reduces the complexity of youth subjectivities and denies how

intersecting processes of "becoming" citizens and Afro-diasporic activists are ongoing, messy, and non-linear; as Tuck and Yang (2014, 7-8) assert youth "resistance is real, not ideal [… it] cannot be generalized" or neatly plotted along a clear developmental trajectory. I focus, instead, on ethnographically examining how Afrodescendant youth come to understand themselves and *act* as citizens through their integration into the collective resistance of their Afro-diasporic community. Western paradigms of civic education have focused on the production of individual national selves; in contrast, the civic identities that youth craft through Afro-diasporic activism are constituted through "community talk and civic practice" (Whitman 2007, 35). I describe how Afro-diasporic activism exposes young people to intergenerational, international, and intersectional exchanges that enable them to understand their struggles as situated within broader systems of oppression and their actions as situated within community legacies of decolonial resistance.

Over the last few decades, paradigmatic shifts in scholarship on youth have challenged previous theorizations that restricted young people's social worlds to the realm of the "private" and restricted their agency to the "local" level (Best 2007). Following this tradition, I propose that Afrodescendant youth should be taken seriously as social and political actors, equally affected by larger social systems and capable of effecting change to those systems. Recent research in the field of Critical Youth Studies has highlighted how youth actively engage in debates and discourses in the public sphere and participate in national and global systems, processes, and movements (Skelton 2010; Ibrahim and Steinberg 2014). Youth are neither passive bystanders nor naïve neophytes on the public stage. I document how Afrodescendant youth in Buenos Aires took on roles

as community organizers, researchers, and educators in their Afro-diasporic community. Furthermore, on the topic of education, youth frequently asserted themselves as experts based on their lived experiences in schools.

As Tuck and Yang (2011) observe, there is a tendency in academic literature to romanticize youth agency and resistance in ways that partition youth from larger social and political struggles; I work against this tendency by directly embedding Afrodescendant youth citizenship claims and educational activism within broader diasporic and national politics. As Kristen Buras asserts in *Youth Resistance Research and Theories of Change* (2014, 137), "[w]e cannot afford to be romantic" when it comes to the very real challenges faced by young people and the imperative changes that they seek. The young activists who will be introduced in the pages of this dissertation saw their various efforts to make their communities visible and their schools more just as crucial to initiating meaningful social change for Afrodescendants in Argentina. As I will discuss in my final chapter, youth activists occupy a powerful position as mediators between schools and community-based educational contexts; they are thus meaningful agents of decolonization working to unsettle "the coloniality of power and knowledge" in their schools (Laó-Montes 2007, 238).

Fieldsite and Methods

This dissertation is based on twelve months of ethnographic research carried out from December 2016 to December 2017 in the greater metropolitan area of Buenos Aires (*Gran Buenos Aires*), which comprises the autonomous city of Buenos Aires and the surrounding urban sprawl of adjacent cities and towns. According to the most recent

census data, nearly a quarter of the country's self-identified[7] Afrodescendant population lives in Gran Buenos Aires. Hosting the highest concentration of Argentina's Afrodescendant population, Gran Buenos Aires is home to a diverse array of established Afrodescendant communities and organizations, from Afro-Argentines who identify as descendants of enslaved Africans brought to Argentina during the colonial period to groups who arrived in subsequent waves of immigration from countries such as Uruguay, Brazil, Cape Verde, and Senegal. The capital city of Buenos Aires, which houses key government institutions and serves as a central site of Afrodescendant organizing, provided the ideal logistical base for studying youth sociopolitical mobilization and civic-identity formation at the intersections of the state and local activism.

My approach to this study integrated traditional ethnographic methods such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews with youth participatory action research (YPAR) (Cammarota and Fine 2008). In the first phase of research, I began interviewing young people and community members whom I identified though snowball sampling, relying on networks of Afrodescendant families and activists to construct a corpus of interviewees representing various ages and demographics and various affiliations with Afrodescendant community organizations. Over the course of the year, I conducted audio-recorded semi-structured interviews with Afrodescendant youth, organization leaders, and community members across Gran Buenos Aires. I completed twenty in-depth interviews with Afrodescendant youth, averaging about an hour in

[7] It is important to note that the 2010 census was the first to have the category *afrodescendiente* as an option for self-identification. Many activists speculate that, despite public-awareness campaigns, the term remains unfamiliar, particularly in rural areas, to many Argentines to whom the term could apply.

duration and ranging from approximately thirty minutes to three-and-a-half hours. The youth who were interviewed were between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five, in accordance with local ideologies and practices in Argentina, where the category of "youth" (*joven*) extends to the early thirties. Most of the youth interviewed for this research, however, were twenty-five years of age or younger. In these interviews, youth were invited to narrate and reflect upon their experiences across formal/institutional and informal/community-based educational settings, illuminating processes of racialization, political socialization, and experiences of inclusion and/or exclusion in their civic-identity formation. I also conducted seven interviews with Afrodescendant adults who helped me to contextualize youth perspectives and practices within the sociopolitical landscape of their Afro-diasporic community; I spoke with the leaders of prominent Afrodescendant organizations and the parents of Afrodescendant youth to gain insights into the intergenerational networks and relationships youth navigate in their activism and how youth are viewed by adults in their community.

In designing my research, I had originally hoped to conduct participant observation with a state-sponsored youth media project targeting Afrodescendant youth and run by the program "Afrodescendientes," under the Ministerio de la Cultura (Ministry of Culture). Under the consecutive leftist presidencies of Néstor Kirchner (2003–2007) and then his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007–2015), multiculturalist policies and programs "gave greater visibility to indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, mestizo, and Latin American immigrants" (Citro 2017, 56). However, not long after the election in 2015 of Mauricio Macri, the country's first right-leaning president elected since 1916, the Afrodescendientes program disappeared from the

Ministry's website, and there was much community concern over the future of Afrodescendant initiatives within the state apparatus. Arriving in Buenos Aires in late 2016, I knew that I had to find a new primary site in which to observe firsthand Afrodescendant young people's political and social engagements with the state. After about a month of chasing down leads given to me by young people, activists, and local scholars, I managed to arrange an interview with Carlos Álvarez, a charismatic and assiduous activist involved in multiple Afrodescendant organizations, whose name I had seen in multiple press releases related to the topic of Afrodescendant visibility and rights in Argentina. Prior to our meeting, I had learned that the Afrodescendant activist organization that Carlos had founded, Agrupación Xangô (Xangô Group), had a new, active youth section. My goal for the meeting was to seek an invitation to meet the youth and to participate in their upcoming activities.

In person, Carlos was a tall and striking figure with a generous smile and long braided hair that extended halfway down his back. As I nervously explained the aims of my research to him, at one point I mentioned that my project was "sobre los experiencias y movilizaciones de los jóvenes afrodescendientes en Argentina" (about the experiences and mobilizations of Afrodescendant youth in Argentina). Carlos listened to my extended description and then zeroed in on my use of the word *sobre*, which can translate to "about," "on," or "over," depending on the context. "No estamos interesados en los investigadores que quieren estudiar '**sobre'** los jóvenes como sujetos" (We are not interested in investigators who want to study "over" the youth as subjects), he said, elevating his hand over his head at the word "sobre." He went on to tell me that what they wanted instead was "colaboración" (collaboration). My heart skipped a beat. Much of my

focus in my graduate studies had been in participatory methodologies and I had been hoping for just such an opportunity. I eagerly rushed to explain my training and desires for collaborative research. Carlos said that the youth had already been talking about wanting to carry out research on racism in their schools, which struck me as both immediately relevant to my own research questions and significant in that this was already a youth-generated research inquiry. Before I knew it, I was at a meeting and being introduced to group of young people as "Eryn, ella va a ayudarles con la investigación sobre el racismo en el aula" (Eryn, she is going to help you all with the research on racism in the classroom). This is how I became a participant observer, collaborator, and unofficial volunteer adult coordinator with the Jóvenes Promotores de Agrupación Xangô (Youth Promoters of Agrupación Xangô).

Collaborating with Agrupación Xangô

The Jóvenes Promotores de Agrupación Xangô was the official name given to the youth section of Agrupación Xangô, but the truth was that there was little distinction or hierarchy within the Afrodescendant activist organization. Youth and adults alike referred to themselves as members of "la Agrupación"; following suit, this is how I shall refer to the organization throughout much of this dissertation. Over the span of ten months, I was present at their weekly meetings, their coordinated activities and events, and in the continuously unfolding daily dialogue of their WhatsApp group messaging. Though the organization was "horizontal" in its ideology, much of the financial, material, and institutional logistics were coordinated by three adults: Carlos; his sister, Lujan Álvarez; and Marcela Lorenzo, the Agrupación's president at the time. At the time of my research, the youth section of the Agrupación had approximately ten regularly active youth

members whose ages ranged from fifteen to twenty. Both Marcela and Lujan's daughters, Ana and Delfina respectively, were active members of the Agrupación and several of the youth were cousins of theirs. In keeping with their organizational philosophy of *horizontalidad* (horizontality), the adult members actively resisted any appearance of nepotism, despite such familial connections being quite common, in my observations of Buenos Aires's Afrodescendant organizations—activist networks often mapped onto kinship networks in a city where Afrodescendant heritage has been largely submerged by centuries of *blanqueamiento* ideologies. Nevertheless, the organization actively sought to recruit Afrodescendant youth of diverse backgrounds and communities in the city.

The Agrupación's website described the organization as promoting "respeto por los derechos humanos, la igualdad, y la justicia social de los afrodescendientes y la comunidad en general" (respect for the human rights, equality, and social justice of Afrodescendants and the community in general) and, under this broad mission, the organization's activities constantly evolved in response to local events, concerns, and opportunities. Working alongside the youth as a volunteer coordinator allowed me to conduct extended ethnographic observations as they ambitiously planned and carried out workshops, retreats, film screenings and debates, and in-school presentations. Audio-recording and, when permissible, video-recording the planning and execution of the organization's activities provided a corpus of data on (a.) what understandings of citizenship were taught and promoted through community-based activism, (b.) what counter-stories and critical discourses were circulated in this counter-public space (Fraser 1990), and (c.) how youth extended and applied citizenship education and decolonial activism outside the organization and within their schools and communities.

In my initial meetings with Carlos and the youth of Agrupación Xangô, it was established that I would collaborate with the youth on a project about racism and education, and we adopted and adapted youth participatory action research (YPAR) models to fit the needs of our evolving project. From the beginning, youth participatory action research was less of a research strategy that I was introducing from the "outside" than an integrated part of the already existing activities and ambitions of the youth organization. Youth participatory action research is an approach to research that recognizes young people as uniquely capable of studying the social problems that affect their lives, and of determining actions to be undertaken by youth and their community to address these problems directly (Cammarota and Fine 2008). YPAR builds on existing Participatory Action Research (PAR) models, in which the power of knowledge production is distributed among participants as co-researchers and research is conceived as an ongoing conversation (Fals Borda 1981; Torre and Fine 2006) As Fine has emphatically stated, "PAR is not a method" (2008, 215); rather, it represents an epistemological shift in how knowledge is conceptualized, practiced, and produced. Through collaborative methods, YPAR provides a means of extending the "right to research" (Appadurai 2006) to youth participants, who are recognized as citizens meaningfully invested in their communities and able to speak to their own concerns (Cammarota and Fine 2008)

My collaboration with the Agrupación youth unfolded in unpredictable ways that, admittedly, caused me much anxiety at the time. Looking back with a deeper understanding of collaborative research and some humor, I can borrow from Fals Borda (1991) and call the process "organic." Ambitious initial plans and timelines were made,

only to be tabled as more pressing community concerns and projects emerged. The youth began with the concept of wanting to distribute and collect a survey on racism in their schools, and I was eager to help them, though I am very much a qualitative researcher. After seeing their first attempt at the survey, which they had crafted with some social-work students, I noticed that the open-ended questions that they wanted to ask did not align well with a survey as a methodological tool for data collection. I spoke to the youth about their questions and what they wanted to learn from their research, and we settled on crafting both a survey and youth-led focus groups. Having used collaborative photography in past research, I raised the possibility of a Photovoice project and soon that was brought into the scope of our research as well. I brought my anthropological background to introducing certain methodologies to the youth members, training them to design research questions and conduct peer-led focus groups. The young people, in turn, adopted roles as "masters of inquiry" (Freire 1970) and "organic intellectuals" (Fals Borda 1991), insightfully analyzing the contexts of their lives.

Working with the youth in this way made meta-research insights possible for me. In her research with urban children of color in the United States, Chin (2007, 279) had young people conduct peer-led interviews and found that "allowing children to construct their own interview guides, for instance, can provide a window into the ideas and issues that kids themselves find important or interesting." Collaborating with youth to study racism in their schools provided me with a means of understanding how these young people envisioned and promoted social change in their schools and communities.

Throughout my fieldwork, I used data-management software to compile and code audio-recorded interviews, my fieldnotes from community events and weekly meetings

with the Agrupación, survey and focus-group results and analyses produced in collaboration with the Agrupación youth, scanned material data (flyers, newspapers, etc.), and more. Undoubtedly, there are countless productive ways in which these data could have been organized, analyzed, and presented. Ultimately, I took an inductive and iterative approach to data-gathering and analysis, drawing on principles of "grounded theory" (Charmaz 2014) in order to follow emergent lines of inquiry and adapt to fluid conditions, opportunities, and collaborations. I want to resist, though, the tendency for grounded theory to be conceived of as "data leading analysis," as if data have some independent non-human agency in the research process. For this reason, I refer to my data-collection and analysis process as *collaboratively grounded theory*. When young members of Agrupación Xangô selected themes for workshops that they were organizing, when we created survey questions, when they debated a mission statement for their youth section, themes and issues most salient to the youth arose repeatedly and organically. The codes and memos that I generated during my fieldwork and the themes around which I ultimately organized this dissertation are inseparable from my discussions with the Agrupación youth and our collaborative analyses, both formal and informal, of their social and political worlds.

Fotovoz (Photovoice):

Visual Storytelling with the Agrupación Youth

As part of my collaboration with the Jóvenes Promotores de Agrupación Xangô, we carried out a Photovoice project. Photovoice is an established participatory methodology for research and community action that involves the use of photography to identify community needs and resources (Gubrium and Harper 2013; Wang 2008). Photovoice

has been used in participatory action research across a broad range of disciplines, contexts, and topics—from multiculturalism in U.S. high schools (Johansen and Le 2014) to environmental health disparities in Hungarian Romani communities (Gubrium and Harper 2013). It is a particularly popular method in youth participatory action research because of both the appeal and the familiarity of photography for youth researchers. We selected the method after considering our time frame, equipment, and the skill sets present in our group, as well as the interests of the young people who were involved in the project.

Our Photovoice project unfolded over a series of four workshops with youth before or after our regular youth-section meetings. Over the course of these workshops, youth were introduced to Photovoice and trained in its methods, and the youth identified themes that they wanted their project to explore. Marcela convinced a local photographer to come and lead a photography workshop that introduced the youth to foundational principles of photographic composition, lighting, and style (Figure 1). I led the youth in a

Figure 1: Agrupación youth listen to a local photographer in a Photovoice workshop. Photograph by author.

discussion of photographic and research ethics to ensure that these photographs would be taken with respect for the rights of both the photographers and their photographic subjects. During this workshop, one of the young people, Julieta, joked that she was going to take candid photos of "todos los racistas" (all the racists). I reminded her that we needed to obtain informed consent and encouraged Julieta and the other youth to consider various symbolic means through which they could represent experiences and sentiments that are difficult to document explicitly. This kind of symbolic representation is seen in several of the young people's images; for example, Catalina used an image of an empty classroom to represent school drop-out in her community.

After the workshops, the youth went out and took photographs in their schools and communities on group-identified themes—Education, Community, Culture, and Health—using digital cameras and their cellular telephones. After taking photographs, we convened to discuss their photographs and to identify central issues and concerns facing Afrodescendant youth, as well as what resources, or assets, already existed in their communities. After engaging in their own critical analysis, we hosted a public exhibition at a local community center, titled "La Juventud Afroargentina: Buenos Aires a través de los Ojos de Jóvenes Afroargentinxs" (Afro-Argentine Youth: Buenos Aires through the Eyes of Young Afro-Argentines), that displayed the youth's photos along with their commentaries about the photos as a means of engendering community dialogue (Figure 2).

In writing the pages that follow, I was presented with a decision. I could include the youth's images and commentaries in one chapter or section, so that the reader could understand them as a whole; certainly, there would have been several advantages to this

approach. But I chose instead to weave their Photovoice images throughout, understanding them to be visual narratives through which the youth spoke clearly and authoritatively about the conditions of their lives and community. Following Goessling (2018), I position the images and commentaries that the youth crafted as "counter-stories" through which they challenged narratives of Afrodescendant invisibility, youth disempowerment, and Black community deficit. As such, I did not want the youth's stories and commentaries to be segregated into a single section. Instead, I present them in the more expansive way mentioned above so as to recognize the youth's roles in shaping the themes and structure of this entire dissertation.[8]

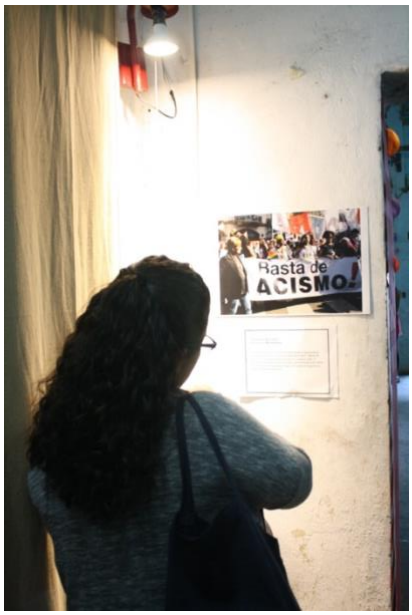


Figure 2: Photovoice exhibit, "La Juventud Afroargentina" (Afro-Argentine Youth). Photograph by author.

[8] Unfortunately, not every image of the project appears in the body of this dissertation, though all can be found in appendix material (Appendix A). Ultimately, it was I who made the decisions as to which images to include and where, as this dissertation was written many months after my work with the Agrupación youth had ended. I accept any criticisms of this curation. Additionally, the youth commentaries that appear alongside their images in the following chapters are presented exactly as written by the youth collaborators in this project.

"¿Sos Afro?" Responding to a Necessary Question

When concluding interviews with Afrodescendant youth and community members, I often asked whether they had any questions for me. "Creo que es justo" (I think it's fair), I would say, "compartiste tanto conmigo que también deberías hacerme preguntas" (you shared so much with me that you should get to ask me questions too). Most often, the questions that I received in response centered on my own racial identity, sometimes through indirect questions about my own heritage and sometimes quite directly with, "Sos afro?" (Are you *Afro*?). To these questions, I would always answer honestly that, no, I am not Afrodescendant; my family traces most of its known lineage to Germany, but I am likely a "New World" amalgam of European descent.

Put more simply, I am white. With my light skin and dark-blonde hair, the question of any possible African heritage had never in my life been raised prior to my research in Argentina. In the United States, my whiteness has always been an unquestioned fact, no matter what social circles I moved in, what work I did, what or where I studied. Yet, despite my visible whiteness, when the young people I interviewed posed this question to me, it was often asked with an honest curiosity as to how I would respond.

I believe that this curiosity can best be understood in two ways. First, it is important to situate these questions about my racial identity within critical discourses present in Argentina's Afrodescendant communities that decouple the necessity of "looking *Afro*" from the ability to claim African heritage. The Argentine state's "whitening" policies left behind a legacy of racial denial that continues to permeate Afrodescendant families and obscure Afrodescendant heritage. A popular narrative that

circulated within the activist community held that many "white" Argentines have an *abuela negra* (Black grandma) whom their family does not talk about.[9] At community events that I attended, individuals sometimes shared personal testimonies of rediscovering Afrodescendant ancestors who had been intentionally forgotten or omitted from their family histories. There was a strong movement within activist circles that encouraged the reclamation of African heritage despite phenotypic markers of whiteness, and it was likely in this vein that youth suspended assumptions about my racial identity.

The second reason why I believe the question of my race consistently and necessarily arose is because it precedes another important question: Why was I doing this research? Though the young people I interviewed were often too polite and conscientious to state it outright, the question often hovered in the space between us: How did I, a white woman from Texas, get involved in conducting research with Afrodescendant youth in Argentina?

This was a more complicated question to answer. Though my response was never a static script, I often traced the impetus of my project to my first visit to Buenos Aires in 2012. After my first year of graduate study, I flew to Buenos Aires for the International Sociology Association's annual conference, where I was surprised to learn of recent waves of Senegalese immigration to the city. I had studied abroad in Senegal as an undergraduate, and, at that time, I was planning on returning to West Africa to carry out my doctoral research. One evening of the conference, after a late panel, I found myself

[9] This discourse of the hidden Black grandmother is common in several Latin American countries with histories of *blanqueamiento.* In fact, "The Black Grandmother in the Closet" is the title of an episode in the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) television series *Black in Latin America,* hosted by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

sitting with colleagues at a bar (as one does at such conferences) and, having attended some presentations earlier that day on recent African immigration to Buenos Aires, I thought to ask an Argentine scholar about race relations in her country. The response that I received from this self-proclaimed activist-scholar surprised me. Without a moment's hesitation, she told me that Argentina doesn't really have a problem with racism because "todos somos blancos" (we are all white).

The brief time that I had spent in Buenos Aires at that point had already provided me with enough evidence to recognize the falsity of her assertion. In the streets of this large, cosmopolitan city, West African immigrants sold their goods, Chinese family-run businesses abounded, and individuals with dark skin and Indigenous features could be seen throughout the city, particularly in the poorer neighborhoods and unofficial *villas.*[10] Even a newcomer such as I could begin to sketch out the racially stratified topography of the city. Yet, she made her statement with unproblematic ease, revealing to me two essential characteristics of racial discourses in Argentina with which I would later become well acquainted: first, the conflation of Argentine-ness with whiteness; and, second, a national "common sense" that denies racial diversity and, hence, racial tensions (Sutton 2008).

Returning home from the conference, I found myself driven to better understand Argentina's peculiar racial paradigms. I read of the strategic whitening policies of the early state, which sought to eradicate and obscure the country's Afrodescendant and

[10] The term *villas* (short for *villas miserias*) is used in Argentina to describe unofficial shantytowns, many of which occupy space within the Buenos Aires city limits, particularly near the railroad tracks. According to a 2016 study, approximately three million Argentines live in *villas.*

Indigenous communities, and I discovered that there were growing movements within the country to claim previously denied racial identities and rights. In 2013, I made the decision to return to Buenos Aires for two months to conduct preliminary research on Afrodescendant activism, during which time I was able to attend community events, establish contacts, and develop research questions.

It was during this preliminary fieldwork that I attended a play at Movimiento Afrocultural, an Afrodescendant cultural center in the historically Black *barrio* of Monserrat, at the southern end of Buenos Aires. The play, titled *Afrolatinamericanas: De Voces, Susurrus, Gritos, y Silencios* (Afro-Latin American Women: Of Voices, Whispers, Screams, and Silences), was a powerful performance put on by an Afrodescendant theatrical company, Teatro en Sepia; it dramatized the experiences of Afrodescendant women, past and present, in Argentina.[11] After the play concluded, the organizers encouraged the audience to move their chairs into a circle and then opened discussion to reflect on the play and the themes that it raised. I recall being struck by young people in attendance who did not sit idly by but were encouraged to participate and did so. At one point, a boy, perhaps thirteen years old, took the microphone and spoke about what he had learned at the event. I started to wonder about the kinds of education that young people receive in their schools and in their communities, and slowly a dissertation project began to take shape.

[11] Teatro en Sepia (TES) has been the subject of many articles authored by Argentine anthropologist Lea Geler (2012a; 2012b; 2014).

If that begins to answer the question of how I came to study the topic of Afrodescendant youth's community-based education in Argentina, the question remains: Should I have done so? I can say that, as a white woman, my racial identity has at times raised challenges to my research, challenges that required respect and introspection to navigate. There were spaces in which my presence was unwelcome or at the very least questioned. This at times meant recognizing that there were limits on the kinds of participant observation that I could carry out, such as when a friend gently told me that her "Afrodescendant women only" dance class was meant to be a cultural and spiritual refuge from the dominant whiteness of public space in Buenos Aires and, this being the case, I would not be welcome. One young woman whom I interviewed warned me that there would be people in the community who might not want to talk to me.[12] She spoke directly to valid critiques against the discipline of anthropology that recognize the exploitation inherent in white researchers' extracting the stories, struggles, and knowledges of non-white peoples for their own gain in the name of academic inquiry. "Still, you should do it," she told me, adding that it was important that these questions be asked and youth experiences documented. I do not purport to have any authority to speak *for* the youth whom I interviewed and alongside whom I worked; rather, I have attempted to present a dissertation that privileges and centers Afrodescendant youth perspectives in my methodologies and in the analyses that will unfold in the chapters to follow.

Ultimately, it cannot be ignored that I entered my research as a white, relatively young woman, and this has undoubtedly shaped the research that I conducted and the

[12] I can only speculate on the truth of this, but it should be noted that not everyone to whom I reached out agreed to participate in this research.

story that I will tell about it. Though my racial identity did present some challenges, I found that my relative "youthfulness" at age twenty-nine largely worked to my advantage over the course of my fieldwork, making it easier for me to relate to the youth activists with whom I worked and allowing me to be perceived as an unthreatening student by many adults. Indeed, Agrupación Xangô's leadership would often refer to me as a student with a *pasantía* (internship) when introducing me to community members. My efforts to interject that I was doing doctoral research, not an internship, were most often met with a shrug that suggested, "Same thing." Although this made me uneasy at times, I began to understand that I fit into a pre-existing mold of study-abroad and local university students who would come and work with Afrodescendant organizations for school credit and projects. Whether or not I enjoyed the association, it certainly influenced the ease with which I was integrated into the organization and community spaces. Over the course of months with the organization, I strove to set myself apart from the revolving door of students who would enter and then swiftly leave; however, in the end, I think that the expectations and understandings of our relationship were conditioned in large part by the presence of these preceding student "interns."

Along the journey that has led to this dissertation, perhaps the greatest resistance to my research that I encountered had nothing at all to do with my identity. Over the years, I have had a host of experiences in which I was repeatedly told that Afrodescendants don't *really* exist in Argentina, at least not in numbers that warrant serious academic inquiry. During an interview for a prestigious research grant, an Argentine scholar on the review committee asked me to explain my use of the term "Afrodescendant" when really "these are immigrants you are talking about, right? And a

small number at that." At an invited talk on "Race in the Americas" at my university, I posed a question about Afrodescendancy in Argentina. The guest speaker dismissed my question, citing census numbers as evidence of a lack of Afrodescendant presence in the country, despite the fact that the census data that he was referencing predated the introduction of an *afrodescendiente* census category. In a most peculiar and frustrating exchange at an event hosted at an Afro-community center in Buenos Aires in 2013, a white attendee told me that, if I was truly interested in studying the African Diaspora, I should go to Brazil. I found that these repeated assertions that Argentina's Afrodescendant populations were too small to be academically meaningful reflected the very same power dynamics and discourses that continue to render Afrodescendant communities invisible, in Argentina and elsewhere. The resistance that I encountered only deepened my resolve and commitment to this project.

An Overview of the Chapters to Come

In the following chapter, I sketch out a brief overview of the historical processes and narratives of nationhood that have obscured Argentina's Afrodescendant populations; and then I discuss contemporary mobilizations of Afrodescendants to resist invisibilization and advocate for political and social inclusion and rights. Moving chronologically from the colonial period to the present, I trace the historical transition from "whitening" policies to "multiculturalism" in Argentina. Multiculturalist policies and funding have provided new opportunities for Afrodescendant visibility. Multiculturalism has also been critiqued for fetishizing non-white cultural forms, continuing to cast non-white citizens as "other" and blurring important cultural and political distinctions within the Afro-diasporic community. I locate contemporary Afrodescendant activists' strategies and

struggles for visibility amid national shifts in state discourses, policies, and "political economies of culture" (Thomas 2004).

After outlining, in the second chapter, the sociopolitical landscape and historical context that shape Afrodescendant young people's social worlds, I explore, in the third chapter, how youth narrate various racializing encounters and practices in their schools and the effects of those experiences on their civic-identity formation. I consider classroom instruction and school-based rituals of nationhood as re-inscribing racialized citizenship in ways that systemically either cast Afrodescendants outside the nation or trap them in the colonial past, with no bearing or place in the Argentine present or future. I avoid a deterministic, top-down reading of classroom power dynamics by taking into consideration the role of peer-to-peer racialization (García-Sánchez 2014; O'Connor 2016). The chapter brings together personal and often emotional narratives in which youth recalled for me instances of peer bullying in classrooms, which they framed as formative experiences that introduced them to the race-based politics of belonging in Argentine society and influenced their self-images. I conclude the chapter by using Afrodescendant young people's experiences to ground a discussion of the importance of critical race education and interventions in the classroom.

In the fourth chapter, I contrast young Afrodescendants' institutional education with what they learn and, just as important, how they learn in their Afro-diasporic community. Viewing Afro-diasporic activism as offering a *counter-classroom* for alternative citizenship education, I explore how the integration of youth within Afrodescendant organizations, events, and spaces provides young people with *herramientas* (tools) to resist racialized citizenship and cultivate a sense of national

belonging. Through a series of ethnographic vignettes and interviews with the Jóvenes Promotores de Agrupación Xangô, I describe various means through which young people learn community histories and cultivate "critical consciousness" that allows them to recognize and speak to systems of power and oppression (Freire 1970; Ginwright and Cammarota 2007; Johnson and Rosario-Ramos 2012). I find that the organization, by fostering active dialogue and youth leadership, engenders a citizenship education that results in tangible social action within youth's schools and community.

The fifth chapter provides a deeper examination of the role of gender and intersectionality in the education that young people receive in their Afro-diasporic community. Studies of Afrodescendant youth in Latin America have largely focused on male participants and male-dominated forms of youth culture, such as hip-hop, as vehicles for youth resistance and identity formation (M. Anderson 2009; M. D. Perry 2015). This chapter departs from this literature by centering the "missing Black girl" (Cox 2015) in research on Afrodescendant activism and citizenship in Latin America. I document how *feminismo negro* (Black feminism) and "intersectional consciousness" (Terriquez 2015) are embedded in the praxis-based learning that takes place within the caring, diverse, intergenerational relationships that are cultivated through Afro-diasporic activism.

In the sixth and concluding chapter, I question what it means for young Afrodescendants to become educators within their schools and in the public sphere more broadly. I describe how young people are encouraged by organization leaders and their peers to assume identities as educators though activities such as leading in-school workshops, and I explore the empowering potential of this pedagogical reversal for

young people, their communities, and their schools. However, I also consider the state's responsibility to support and institutionalize changes to educational practices in Argentina. In doing so, I draw from critiques of neoliberalism that decry shifting the responsibility for educating youth and effecting social change from the state to disenfranchised communities that lack adequate resources and support.

CHAPTER TWO

FROM *BLANQUEAMIENTO* TO *MULTICULTURALISMO*: HISTORICIZING AFRO-DIASPORIC (IN)VISIBILITY AND POLITICS IN BUENOS AIRES

Parque Lezama is one of Buenos Aires's oldest and most beautiful public parks. It is on the southernmost edge of San Telmo, a historic neighborhood popular with tourists in the south of the *capital.*[13] Running along one side of the park is Calle Defensa, an old cobblestone street that hosts the famous Feria de San Telmo every Sunday, when the street's entire fifteen-block length is transformed into an expansive outdoor market. Inconspicuously nestled into the western side of the park is the Museo Histórico Nacional (National History Museum), a former mansion that now houses artifacts and paintings, most relating to Argentina's War of Independence.

Tall shade trees line the paved walking paths that wind throughout the hilly park. With gazebos, rows of large urns, and Greco-Roman-inspired sculptures, the park is emblematic of the influence of "Old World" aesthetics and design on the city's early planners and landscapers, who sought to make Buenos Aires the "Paris of South America." On sunny days, Parque Lezama is an idyllic setting where families picnic and lovers lounge, limbs entwined. For locals and visitors alike, it is a calm refuge in the bustling, modern city.

[13] The term *capital federal* (*capital*, for short) is used to refer to the city of Buenos Aires proper, distinguishing it from the sprawling suburbs that surround it in the *Provincia de Buenos Aires* (Province of Buenos Aires).

On a Sunday in the spring of 2017, I sat down with Joaquin in Parque Lezama for an interview. At the age of nineteen, Joaquin was the eldest active youth member of the Jóvenes Promotores de Agrupación Xangô at the time of my research. That Sunday, he was dressed casually in stylishly faded jeans and red Air Jordans, but I most often saw him at the youth section's meetings sharply dressed in business attire after coming off work at an upscale car dealership. Confident and earnest, he always seemed to speak with a sense of urgency and purpose that commanded attention. As we sat on a park bench, he told me that what he most wanted for his community was visibility—public recognition of the historic and current presence and contributions of Afrodescendants in Argentina. "Nosotros nos nacimos acá. Formamos parte del país" (We were born here. We are a part of the country), he said, later adding that, without Afrodescendants, "Muchas cosas en este país no serían lo que son hoy" (Many things in this country would not be what they are today).

Joaquin paused and looked out across the park and then gestured for me to follow his gaze. Staring into the distance, he told me,

> *Ahora, estamos sentados en este momento, estamos en el Parque Lezama que fue un centro de comercialización esclavista. Que acá se colgándose esclavos, se vendían esclavos, los colgaron en los arboles. Acá hubo mucha consideración sobre el tema de los esclavos. Es una plaza histórica, se puede decirlo. Con mucha gente que viene hoy, se sienta, toma mate, viene con el perro…pero hay que, me parece, hay que concienciar* ***qué es en realidad*** *Parque Lezama. Entendés?*
>
> Now, we are sitting in this moment, we are in Parque Lezama, which was a slave market. Here, slaves were hanged, slaves were sold, they hanged them in trees. Here, there was much consideration of the subject of slaves. It's a historic plaza, you can say. Many of the people who come here

> today…they sit, they drink *mate*,[14] they come with their dog…but there needs to, I think, there needs to be awareness about what Parque Lezama **really is**. You understand?

As I looked around at all the park-goers casually enjoying their Sunday afternoon, it was difficult to reconcile the imagery that Joaquin had just provided with the tranquil scene before us. That so few Argentines recognize the history of this place or, more broadly, recognize that African people were brought over through violent force to help build this country—Joaquin considered it a "falta de respeto" (a lack of respect).

Parque Lezama stands as a reminder of the early nation-state's European aspirations and romanticizations of colonial gentility. The park can be viewed as what French historian Nora (1989) calls a *lieu de mémoire*, a site of memory. It reinforces a particular abstract remembering of Argentina's past—a narrative of a great southern white nation that continues to give shape to national identity in the present. As several scholars have noted, public space is just one of many powerful tools through which states can influence the collective memories of the nation (Halbwachs 1992; Legg 2007; Nora 1989; Wertsch 2008). Significantly, Joaquin's description of the park also reveals it as a site of collective dismemory (Hepworth 2014). For him, it is a space marked by the active denial of Afrodescendants, past and present. This disremembering of Afrodescendants is essential to the maintenance of racialized citizenship and the myth of the white nation in Argentina. As Renan (2018) states in his powerful lecture, "What is a Nation?,"

[14] *Mate* is a caffeine-containing tea-like drink, traditionally served in a hollowed-out gourd and drunk with a metal straw. It is both iconic and ubiquitous in Argentina, where it is consumed at all times of day, often communally.

"Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation."

The racially selective historical amnesia and public invisibility that Afrodescendants like Joaquin encounter with frustration and resistance is not unique to Parque Lezama; it permeates Argentine society. In a telling public statement, former Argentine president Carlos Menem once remarked, "En Argentina no existen los negros; ese problema lo tiene Brasil" (Black people do not exist in Argentina; Brazil has that problem) (Cottrol 2007, 140). In one short sentence, Menem both denied Argentina's Afrodescendant citizenry and framed Blackness as a "problem" facing other nation-states. As I will illustrate in this chapter, Menem's statement is not exceptional. Rather, it is deeply embedded in a national imaginary and collective memory that remains profoundly shaped by the racial ideologies and strategic policies promoted by the state during Argentina's first century as an independent country. In this chapter, I provide a brief sketch of the historical processes and policies that led to the "disappearance" of Afrodescendants from the public sphere in Argentina. From there, I trace the re-emergence of Afrodescendant activism over the last quarter-century and then conclude by discussing the state of Afro-diasporic politics and visibility in the country today. Ultimately, this chapter provides a portrait of the nationalist narratives and political landscape that Afrodescendant youth encounter and negotiate in their activism and daily lives as members of their diaspora and as citizens of their nation.

Slavery in Colonial Argentina

The Spanish colonized the territory now known as Argentina in the sixteenth century. They first established Buenos Aires in 1536, but Indigenous resistance drove the

colonists to abandon the settlement. The Spanish returned to re-establish it in 1580, though Indigenous resistance continued, and the first enslaved Africans were brought to Buenos Aires shortly after that. Historical accounts have often downplayed the economic, cultural, and political influence and importance of enslaved Africans and Afrodescendants during Argentina's colonial period, but critical historians working since the 1980s have countered such accounts (Andrews 1980; Castro 2001; Cirio 2009; Edwards 2014; Farberman 2005; Grosso 2008; Picotti 1998; Schávelzon 2003). As noted by historian Erika Edwards (2017), "[F]rom 1580 to 1640, the main commercial activity for Buenos Aires was the slave trade." Enslaved Africans[15] were trafficked from Central and West Africa via Portuguese traders to Buenos Aires, where they were sold and sent into the interior of the continent and as far west as the coasts of Chile and Peru. Buenos Aires's increasing economic and sociopolitical prominence during the colonial period can largely be attributed to its position as a key port in the region's slave trade (Andrews 1980; Edwards 2017).

Enslaved Africans and their descendants provided domestic and skilled labor in emergent urban areas and manual labor for the *estancias*, the grand ranches of the Argentine countryside. They worked as servants in households in Buenos Aires, where having enslaved attendants became an important status symbol among the growing elite class. They also provided necessary labor as artisans and as skilled workers in bakeries and meat-salting factories; these occupations were considered by white colonists to be

[15] Like Afrodescendant activists and scholars in Argentina, I intentionally use the adjective "enslaved" rather than the noun "slave," thus recognizing and acknowledging that people were enslaved by force and against their will, not born as "slaves" into an agentless system of racial inequality.

undesirable, degrading, and unhealthy (Andrews 1980). Buenos Aires elites viewed enslaved Afrodescendants trained as artisans as solid investments, as they would sell their wares in the streets and generate income, mostly for their masters (Andrews 1980).[16] As I will discuss further in the next chapter, the image of Afrodescendant *vendedores ambulantes* (street vendors) would become iconic of Argentina's colonial period. Afrodescendants also had considerable influence on the territory's expansive rural interior, particularly in the small towns and cities that lined the routes along which enslaved Africans were trafficked. The famed *gauchos*, cowboys of the Argentine countryside, are often described as *mestizos* of mixed Indigenous and European descent; however, many *gauchos* had African heritage. In the vast *pampas*[17] and in the desert to the west, Afrodescendants were valued by ranchers for their ability to carry out the risky and demanding work of cattle-tending in the often inhospitable terrain (Mayo 2004). It is important to note that critical historians have dispelled the myth of "benign slavery" that formerly prevailed in historical discourses about the nation's colonial origins (Rebagliati 2014). To recognize the importance of Afrodescendant labor in both urban and rural life in Argentina is not to negate the violence of slavery.

During the colonial period, African traditions, languages, and religions were carried over by enslaved persons to Argentine soil and influenced the development of the nascent country's cultural identity. Many dishes now considered to be "traditionally"

[16] Enslaved persons were allowed, under Spanish-colonial law, to keep any income earned on their own time, once their masters' labor demands were met. This "free time" was largely at their masters' discretion. Still, it meant that they were able to save their private earnings, and some were able to purchase their freedom.

[17] Expansive grassy plains of the South American lowlands.

Argentine were the contributions of enslaved Africans, who made, for example, *puré de zapallo* (pumpkin puree) and *mondongo* (tripe stew) (Pite 2016). Linguistic studies have revealed that several common Argentine words have etymological roots in African languages, especially terms connected to folk dances and music, such as *milonga*.[18] Indeed, some historians have argued that Argentina's most popular cultural export, the *tango*, originates in the dance, music, and language of enslaved Africans (Picotti 1998).

When the revolution against Spanish rule began, in 1810, thousands of enslaved and freed Africans and Afrodescendants were recruited, often forcefully, to fight for the cause of independence. Their role in the War of Independence was decisive. For example, General San Martín's crucial victories as he crossed the Andes to liberate Chile and Peru would not have been possible without his battalions, half of which were made up of formerly enslaved soldiers. Contrary to popular lore, Argentina's independence was followed by a gradual, not immediate, emancipation. Afrodescendants who served in the military for a stipulated number of years, typically five, were awarded their freedom at the end of their service. The "Free Womb Act" of 1813 established that children born to enslaved mothers would be freed upon reaching adulthood. The country declared its independence in 1816; however, it was not until 1853 that slavery was officially abolished in the country's constitution, and many scholars have noted that vestiges of slavery and the systems of dependency on wealthy white patronage that were established

[18] In Argentina, *milonga* may refer to either a high-tempo genre of music popular in the 1870s or a tango-dancing event.

through slavery continued long after emancipation (Andrews 1980; Cottrol 2007; Edwards 2017).

"Disappearing" Acts: *Blanqueamiento* and the Early State

According to a census taken in 1778, near the end of colonial rule, enslaved Africans and Afrodescendants made up forty-six percent of the population of what is now Argentina ("El Origen Afro de La Argentina" 2018). Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Afrodescendant population radically and precipitously diminished in the public records of the new Argentine nation. By the mid-nineteenth century, racial categories were gone from the census and it became widely believed that Afrodescendants had "disappeared" altogether. Their public disappearance has long puzzled historians and Afrodescendant communities worldwide. So notable was the apparent absence of Afrodescendants in Argentina that *Ebony*, the African American magazine, sent a reporter to Buenos Aires in the early 1970s to investigate the issue, resulting in a story titled "Argentina: Land of the Vanishing Blacks" (Thompson 1973).

So, what *did* happen to Argentina's Afrodescendant population? Several popular explanations are routinely offered for its curious "disappearance." One explanation contends that the end of slavery meant that fewer Africans were being brought to Argentine shores; however, this explanation does little to account for the drastic decline of Afrodescendants in the existing population. A few phenotypically white Argentines whom I casually asked about the matter simply and dismissively told me that, once freed, perhaps Argentina's formerly enslaved people left the country (where they went apparently was not a subject of much interest or thought). The explanation that Argentines most often provide is that the country's Afrodescendants died from "las

Figure 3: Cropped section of "Revista de Pancagua" by Juan Manuel Blanes, 1872. Museo Histórico Nacional, Parque Lezama, Buenos Aires. Photograph by author.

guerras y las plagas" (wars and plagues) early in the country's history as an independent nation. This explanation maintains that a large portion of the Afrodescendant population was lost when they were placed on the front lines of battle as cannon fodder in Argentina's successive and bloody nineteenth-century wars, fought first for independence against Spain and then against Paraguay, Brazil, and Indigenous peoples in the country's interior (Figure 3). Informing this narrative is the belief that Afrodescendant communities suffered from poor health and high mortality; an epidemic of yellow fever in 1871 is blamed for killing the majority of the remaining Afrodescendants of Buenos Aires. The Afrodescendants remaining at the end of the nineteenth century are believed to have merged into the white population through miscegenation. A popular metaphor has described the remaining Afrodescendant heritage as "una gota de café en una taza de leche" (a drop of coffee in a cup of milk)—a view that highlights how Afrodescendancy

is considered inconsequential and "virtually lost" in the dominant white race and culture of Argentina (Cirio 2011, 25).

Though it is true that many Afrodescendant men were lost to the wars of the nineteenth century, and that the yellow-fever epidemic disproportionately affected Black communities that were quarantined in the southern half of Buenos Aires,[19] research has shown that these events do not accurately account for the drastic population declines recorded in the nineteenth century. In his foundational work on Afro-Argentine history, George Reid Andrews (1980) has compellingly claimed that these popular explanations are myths that strategically bolstered Argentina's emergent self-image as a white nation in Latin America. Though loosely tethered to actual historical events, these myths radically distort the past and obscure the decisive role of the early state's aggressive *blanqueamiento* (whitening) policies (Andrews 1980).

In the nineteenth century, the Argentine government embarked on a nation-building project "geared toward making Argentina more economically powerful, white, and 'civilized'" (Sutton 2008, 107). The government's turn toward more closely aligning the country with "modern" white Europe was, in part, the product of Argentina's civil wars of the mid-nineteenth century, which pitted the elites in the powerful and important port city of Buenos Aires, the Unitarians, against the military leaders of the country's interior provinces, the Federalists. From 1831 to 1852, the short-lived Argentine

[19] The yellow-fever epidemic that hit Buenos Aires in 1871 had a lasting impact on the racial and class-based geography of the city. Wealthy families left their mansions in the south of the city, a region near the port that was deeply affected, to relocate further north. The result of this shift was that the older, southern *barrios* of San Telmo, La Boca, Monserrat, and Barracas became predominantly Afrodescendant and working-class.

Figure 4: "Candombe Federal" by Martin Boneo, 1836. Museo Histórico Nacional, Parque Lezama, Buenos Aires. The painting features Juan Manuel de Rosas, seated on the left.

Confederation was led by Juan Manuel de Rosas, a general who has often been described by historians as a dictator. Rosas allied himself with the poor Afrodescendants in Buenos Aires and, to the dismay of many urban elites, Afrodescendants in the city enjoyed greater political power and public presence during Federalist rule. Rosas and his daughter, Manuelita, were known to attend community performances of *candombe* (Figure 4), a style of drumming and folk dance created by enslaved Africans and Afrodescendants in the Río de la Plata basin (present-day Argentina and Uruguay). When the Unitarians regained control from the Federalists, they feared that uprisings from the country's racialized lower class would disturb the existing social order (Andrews 1980). Argentina's new Unitarian leadership, influenced by the growing eugenics movement in the United States, viewed Argentina's early civil conflicts as the product of the country's inferior racial composition and looked to pave a path toward modernity by "regenerating"

the Argentine race through an infusion of white European immigration (Germani 1966, 165).

Immigration policies were designed to attract European immigrants in order to bolster the country's relatively low population[20] and dilute the large Indigenous, African, and mixed-race populations. The Immigration and Colonization Act of 1876 offered incoming European immigrants food, shelter, and support in finding work once they landed on Argentine shores. European immigrants were immediately granted status and rights that differed minimally from those of native-born Argentine citizens (Bastia and vom Hau 2014). From the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, over six million Europeans immigrated to Argentina, mostly from Italy, Spain, France, England, and Germany. This would have a lasting impact on the Argentine population and conceptions of national identity. A popular Argentine expression, "Descendemos de los barcos" (We descend from the boats), asserts an exclusively Eurodescendant vision of national heritage connected to this period of mass European immigration.

Accompanying the nation's efforts to whiten itself through immigration policy were efforts to obscure and diminish its undesired Afrodescendant and Indigenous communities. From the 1870s to the 1880s, a campaign known as the "Conquest of the Desert" was launched against the Indigenous peoples of the country's interior; Afrodescendants were among those enlisted to fight in what is now recognized by many as a genocide thinly veiled in rhetoric of "driving back hostile Indians" (Sutton 2008). In addition to such direct measures to reduce the country's ethnic minorities, other

[20] Nineteenth-century Argentina's population was lower than those of other emergent nations such as Mexico and Brazil.

mechanisms, such as the census, were used systematically to obscure them. Benedict Anderson (1983, 243) has called the census an "institution of power" through which states define their subjects and imagine the body politic. For the nineteenth-century Argentine government, the census was an "important site of post-colonial nation-making" (Loveman 2014, 82)—it provided a means of asserting their new statehood and supplying evidence of Argentine "civilization" and "progress" on the international stage. Argentina's 1895 census, for example, proudly reported that Argentina had the fastest-growing population of any nation in the Americas and Europe. It also asserted that women of the "African race" were less fertile than white women and their children were more likely to die during infancy, drawing from pseudoscientific theories of Social Darwinism to explain how a "natural" progression toward a whitening Argentine population was underway (Andrews 1980; Loveman 2014). Interestingly, the 1895 census report lacked any census question about racial identification that might have supplied data to support its claims about Afrodescendant fertility or infant mortality; it justified this absence of a race question by stating, "The Asiatic and African races clearly exist only in diminutive proportions, such that their influence with respect to the country's development is null. The same can be said with the respect to the Indians" (*Segundo Censo de la República de Argentina*, cited in Loveman 2014, 192).

The census thus became a vehicle for promoting and quantifying a vision of Argentina as a powerful white Latin American nation. Yet, careful comparisons of the census and historical records from the nineteenth century reveal disparities that call into question narratives of Afrodescendant "disappearance." Andrews (1980) notes that photographs, news reports, and foreign-visitor accounts of Buenos Aires during the late

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries paint a very different picture of racial demography than do census records; Afrodescendants appear with a frequency and regularity that contradict the state's assertions about race. For example, scholars have documented how the Black press operated several newspapers in the city throughout the early twentieth century, in part through the patronage of political parties that were recruiting the Afrodescendant vote (Cirio 2009; Andrews 1980). During the 1820s, a time when the white population was consistently recorded as over two-thirds of the population, an Englishman who lived in Buenos Aires reported that "pure whites are not numerous. And the most common is a caste of white, Indian, and black, so mixed it would be difficult to fix its members' true origins" (quoted in Andrews 1980, 78).

Several scholars (Andrews 1980; Edwards 2014; Farberman 2005) have maintained that such discrepancies in the historical record can be partially explained by shifting racial categories and ideologies in the late nineteenth century. During the colonial period, persons of African descent were commonly labeled according to Spanish *castas* (categorizations based on descent and associated degrees of racial "mixing"); for example, as *negros* (only African descent), *mulatos* (mixed European and African descent), and *zambos* (mixed Indigenous and African descent). By the turn of the century, Afrodescendants who previously had been labeled *negro* or *mulato* in state records became increasingly identified as ambiguous *pardos* (persons of mixed race),[21] and light-skinned Afrodescendants were given a new title, *trigueños* (wheat-colored), and were counted as white by census officials. Shifting racial categories allowed the state to

[21] In her research, historian Erika Edwards (forthcoming) has shown that Afrodescendant individuals labeled *negros* in earlier censuses became *pardos* in later censuses and official state documents.

quantify a "whitening" population and, at the same time, offered mixed-race Afrodescendants distance from stigmatized Blackness and entry into whiteness, resulting in greater social mobility (Andrews 1980; Edwards 2017).

As the twentieth century progressed, it became common knowledge that Argentines are white; and within this white population, class became the "only admissible paradigm of difference" (Geler 2016, 215). Even the term *negro* became de-racialized in this class-centric system of social classification. Terms like *cabecitas negras* (little black heads), *negro de alma* (black inside), [22] and *negros de mierda* (shit blacks) were increasingly mobilized as insults against working-class and rural Argentines, particularly by anti-populist middle- and upper-class *porteños*. [23] Indeed, in Buenos Aires, the terms *negros* and *villeros* are used almost interchangeably to describe poor residents of the city's *villas miserias*, or unofficial shantytowns. Though such uses of *negro* are not considered racist (or even racial) by most Argentines, it is impossible to ignore the ways that social class continues to reproduce racial hierarchies first established during Argentina's colonial period. Whether Indigenous, Afrodescendant, or of mixed-race heritage, those on the receiving end of such insults are typically persons who are poorer and have darker skin than the persons doing the insulting. Moreover, the use of *negro* to describe moral and intellectual deficiency and incivility perpetuates a racial paradigm in which whiteness is centered in civil society and Blackness is continually cast as antithetical to the modern state.

[22] *Negro de alma* can also be translated roughly as "black of soul"; it suggests deficient moral character on the inside, despite outward appearances.

[23] *Porteño* is a term used to refer to residents of Buenos Aires.

Overall, it was the ideological whitening of Argentina that proved more critical in crafting the "white" nation than the actual demographic changes that the country experienced. *Blanqueamiento* ideologies and policies promoted by the early state established a narrative of the nation's European origins and racial categories that defaulted to whiteness where admixture was present. Blackness was denied and eventually supplanted with a social-class position that nonetheless continued to stigmatize *negros* as undesirable members of the lower class. Afrodescendants in Argentina did not "disappear" but were, as activists and scholars have contended, actively "invisibilized" by the state (Geler 2016). This invisibilization obscured the continued presence of Afrodescendant communities throughout the twentieth century and penetrated the self-imaginings of the Argentine citizenry—including Afrodescendant citizens. The racial ideologies woven into the fabric of the young nation continue to influence mixed-race individuals and families to obscure their African ancestry in favor of a Eurodescendant self-image that aligns with the myth of the white nation that was so intentionally constructed through *blanqueamiento*.

Afrodescendant Activism in Argentina at the Multicultural Turn

The young Afrodescendants I met and worked with in Buenos Aires inherited a social context that denies their existence, but they were born in a time of great change and hope for Afrodescendant communities in Argentina. In the 1990s, Argentina saw a public resurgence of Afrodescendant activism in Buenos Aires, fueled in part by the growing influence of transnational entities, networks, and flows of people and ideas that spanned Latin America. In particular, multiculturalism became a prominent national ideology and

policy framework across the region, challenging assumptions of national homogeneity and providing Afrodescendants new avenues for advocating for their interests and addressing race-related grievances. In what has been called Latin America's "multicultural turn" (Rahier and Prosper 2014), countries began adopting multiculturalist rhetoric and policies, with many revising their constitutions in the 1990s to officially acknowledge national ethnic diversity and to provide protections and rights to historically marginalized ethnic groups. Argentina's 1994 Constitution defined the country as a multiethnic nation and included explicit rights for Indigenous peoples (vom Hau and Wilde 2010); notably, though, Afrodescendants were not directly acknowledged in this constitution. Around this time, Argentina's government also founded new government agencies and institutions, such as the Instituto Nacional contra la Discriminación, la Xenofobia y el Racismo (National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism, colloquially known as INADI), established in 1995; and initiated legislation in 1998 that would allow legal recourse for victims of racist hate crimes (Sutton 2008). This shift toward multiculturalism in Argentina can be seen as partially influenced by internal factors, such as the rise of human-rights discourses after the fall of Argentina's military dictatorship[24] in 1983; however, many scholars have attributed the regional embrace of multiculturalism to the increased economic, political, and cultural influence of international entities such as the World Bank, the United Nations, the Inter-American Development Bank, and various NGOs, some of which made loans to support

[24] From 1974 to 1983, Argentina was ruled by a military dictatorship. During this period, 30,000 suspected leftist political dissidents (many of whom were students, academics, journalists, and trade unionists) were "disappeared" by the government.

Argentina's struggling economy that were conditioned on the country's adherence to the multiculturalist ideologies that they promoted (Geler 2016; Sutton 2008).

Furthermore, these international entities and agencies began to directly promote and fund the efforts of Afrodescendant activists throughout Latin America. In the 1990s, Afrodescendant organizations such as the Organization of Africans in the Americas began to emerge and to form transnational networks to advance the economic, political, and social rights and interests of Black people. International development banks and academic institutions were influential in supporting various Afrodescendant conferences and projects that enabled international dialogue, collaboration, and the development of strategic plans for addressing racism in the region (Davis, Paschel, and Morrison 2012).

In Argentina, local Afrodescendant mobilization was encouraged by these growing transnational movements and began to capitalize on emergent multiculturalist policies, international attention, and social currents toward "re-ethnification" (Logan 2009). Africa Vive (Africa Lives), founded in 1997 by activist María Lamadrid, became the country's first legally recognized Afrodescendant organization and the first to attempt a census of Afrodescendants in the country in over a century. With the support of the Buenos Aires municipal government and international development funding, they organized a small unofficial census of Afrodescendants in Buenos Aires that established the presence of Afrodescendants after years of invisibilization. Early groups such as Africa Vive cut a path for other Afrodescendant organizations, making it possible for them to form and begin to make demands on the state (Frigerio and Lamborghini 2011).

At this time, Afrodescendant activism in the city was also bolstered by increased Afrodescendant immigration from neighboring Latin American countries, notably Uruguay and Brazil, as well as by immigration from Africa, largely from Senegal. It is important to recognize that such immigration was not wholly new, and that Argentina's Afrodescendant communities continued to be "fed by new tributaries coming from different parts of the Black Atlantic" (Frigerio 2008, 119)[25] throughout the twentieth century. For example, there was a significant Cape Verdean migration to Buenos Aires during the 1930s and 1940s that established communities near the city's ports. But the 1980s and 1990s saw the beginnings of an even greater and more diverse surge of new African and Afrodescendant immigrants, many of whom became involved in local organizing and even founded their own organizations to support immigrants from their home countries, promote their cultural heritage, and fight for equal rights in Argentina.

Notably, Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Uruguayan immigrants brought with them Afro-diasporic cultural forms from neighboring countries that grew increasingly visible and popular in the capital city. Afrodescendant immigrants began offering classes on *capoeira*, percussion, and dance to middle-class *porteños*. Meanwhile, once-prominent Afro-Argentine cultural forms such as *candombe* music and dance were increasingly practiced primarily *en casa* (in private family or small-community events). This was likely the result of a combination of factors, including the downfall of Rosas and the Federalist regime, the prohibition of carnival celebrations during the dictatorship, and ideologies of race that stigmatized African heritage and culture. Across the border,

[25] My translation from the original Spanish.

though, in Uruguay, *candombe* had flourished as a public Afrodescendant art form. When Afro-Uruguayan immigrants settled into Buenos Aires's historically Black, working-class southern neighborhoods—neighborhoods where Afro-Argentine *candombe* was once openly played—they began to practice and perform *candombe* parades (called *llamadas*) in Parque Lezama and in the streets of San Telmo, drawing public attention and interest to African heritage and culture (Frigerio 2008). [You need at least one more sentence here—something to close off your remarks on this rather interesting (because somewhat ironic?) phenomenon.]

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Afrodescendant mobilization and public visibility in Argentina were rising, and they would continue to be fueled by the growing influence of transnationalism in the region. In 2001, the United Nations held a World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa (popularly known as the Durban Conference), which two Afrodescendant representatives from Argentina attended. In what Cárdenas (2012) calls the "Durban effect," there emerged at the conference an understanding among geographically separated Afro-diasporic communities that their localized issues and histories could be viewed as intersecting and intertwining with the transnational antiracist agendas being put in motion in Durban. The conference had a ripple effect that was felt across Afro-Latin America, establishing a sense of unity and creating a strategy and a language for claims-making couched in human-rights discourses. It was at the Durban Conference that the term "Afrodescendant" was adopted as an alternative to racializing

colonial terms and discourses, and as a means of asserting a collective political identity for articulating demands at both national and international levels.

After Durban, the international community began to place greater pressure on nations to address race-based inequalities and to implement development programs for Afrodescendant communities. In 2009, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution to designate 2011 the "International Year for People of African Descent"; and then, in 2013, it declared 2015–2024 the "International Decade for People of African Descent." With these designations came international oversight of each nation's implementation of the proposals put forward during the Durban Conference. With states' needing to submit evidence of Afrodescendant "development" in reports to supranational entities like the U.N. and the World Bank, channels were opened for local Afrodescendant activists to put forward community-led programs and initiatives.

New Visibilities and Political Economies of Culture in Buenos Aires

In the last decade, Afrodescendant activism in Argentina has made important advances as local activists have drawn on the strategies and discourses of the transnational Afrodescendant movement in order to capitalize on emergent Argentine multiculturalism and international attention. Afrodescendant activists successfully lobbied state officials to add an *afrodescendiente* (Afrodescendant) identification category to the 2010 census, marking the first time that Afrodescendants were documented and recognized by the Argentine government in an official national census. Another key success was a law passed in 2013 recognizing November 8th as the "Día nacional de los afroargentinos y de la cultura afro" (National day of Afro-Argentines and *Afro* culture). The national holiday's date was chosen to recognize the largely forgotten revolutionary hero, María

Remedios del Valle, an Afrodescendant woman who fought as a soldier and tended the wounded in Argentina's War of Independence. For her efforts in the war, Remedios del Valle was recognized as a captain at that time by the famed revolutionary, General Manuel Belgrano, and given the moniker "Madre de la Patria" (Mother of the Homeland). As will be discussed further in Chapter Four, Remedios del Valle is one of several dis-remembered Afrodescendant historical figures who have been resurrected in Afrodescendant activism and advocacy.

Over the past five years, activists have partnered with the state to promote various public-education and public-awareness projects aimed at increasing the visibility of Argentina's Afrodescendant population, both past and present. Notable in such initiatives is the intention to put forth a broad and inclusive portrayal of Argentina's Afrodescendant communities. For example, the state sponsored a four-part documentary series, *Argentina También es Afro* (2015), that aired on Canal Encuentro, a television channel operated by the Ministry of Education. The twenty- to thirty-minute videos that made up the series explored the country's Afrodescendant heritage and history by featuring various Afrodescendant communities across Argentina, from the descendants of enslaved Africans in Córdoba to second- and third-generation Cape Verdean immigrants outside Buenos Aires.

For another example, Afrodescendant activists launched a national awareness campaign (Figure 5) to introduce the term *afrodescendiente* to the Argentine public prior to the 2010 census. They did so with funding from the World Bank and in collaboration with Argentina's National Institute Against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism (INADI). A short video from the campaign aired on public television and offered an inclusive and broad representation of Afrodescendancy in Argentina. The video begins with a rapid series of extreme close-ups featuring a diverse cast of Afrodescendants of a range of skin tones. Layered voices in the background simultaneously utter variations of "Soy afroargentina" (I am Afro-Argentine), "Soy afro" (I am *Afro*), and "Estoy orgulloso de ser afrodescendiente" (I am proud to be Afrodescendant). Then there is a cut to a wide shot of a group of Afrodescendants standing in Plaza de Mayo, the historic city center of Buenos Aires. Collectively, the group proclaims, "Yo soy afroargentina/o. Estoy

Figure 5: Flyer for "Soy Afroargentina," awareness campaign prior to the 2010 census.

orgulloso" (I am Afro-Argentine. I am proud). A light-skinned Afrodescendant young woman steps out in front of the group and informs the audience about the new racial category in the upcoming census. When she concludes, drumming plays and the group breaks out in dance as the video ends.

By portraying Argentina's Afrodescendant community as diverse, vital, and spanning generations, the census campaign countered many of the myths of Afrodescendant disappearance in Argentina. Shot in an iconic national space in the heart of Buenos Aires, the video presents a powerful image of Afrodescendants asserting their continued existence and claiming their national belonging. Breaking with racial ideologies that delegitimize and stigmatize the Blackness of mixed-race individuals, the lighter-skinned Afrodescendants in the video claim their African heritage with pride. Further, the video challenges the ways that more recent African and Afrodescendant migrants are denied full citizenship and entry into *argentinidad*. Standing side by side, Afrodescendants of various different historical experiences in the country declare themselves both Afrodescendants *and* Afro-Argentines, thus blurring the meanings of these terms.

Such intentional inclusivity adopted by activists in the census-awareness campaign and similar initiatives can be viewed as a form of "strategic essentialism" (Spivak 1980). The concept of strategic essentialism was first introduced by Spivak to describe the intentional deployment of a unified, shared identity as a political strategy for marginalized groups. In the context of Argentina, activists' decision to adopt the encompassing term *afrodescendiente* can be viewed as a method for increasing their numbers and strengthening their political representation and force in the public sphere. It

presents a move from more origin-specific forms of identification. In a discussion about shifting language of local activism, a member of Agrupación Xangô described to me how a prominent community activist had changed her terms of self-identification over the last decade—first identifying as *caboverdiana* (Cape Verdean), then *afroargentina*, and then, most recently, *afrodescendiente*. According to local definitions and understandings, she is simultaneously each of these, but her changing use of the terms over time illustrates moves within the community to mobilize under broader, shared identities. By adopting *afrodescendiente*, activists build common ground across varied historical and geographical experiences and ultimately align with the decolonial objectives and strategies put in motion during the Durban Conference. Furthermore, deploying the term *afroargentina/o* (Afro-Argentine) at times alongside *afrodescendiente*—as seen in the census-awareness video—asserts Argentina's various Afrodescendant communities as citizens in the national context.

While strategic essentialism provides political benefits through unification, it has also been argued that it reproduces harmful ethnic tropes and silences intracommunity difference and dissent (Espinosa 2003). Unfortunately, Afrodescendant activism is operating within a multiculturalist framework that is largely uninterested in pluralities of Black experiences, and that rewards and ultimately reinscribes familiar, reductive understandings of Blackness. State-sponsored projects and events promoted as part of the government's multiculturalist agenda have been criticized for centering almost exclusively on "folkloric" celebrations of Afrodescendant culture in order to increase public visibility, while doing little to address the systemic racism and invisibilization experienced by Afrodescendant citizens (J. M. Anderson 2012; Frigerio and Lamborghini

2011). By supporting Afrodescendant visibility, the Argentine state benefits from a perception of global cosmopolitanism; indeed, Afrodescendant *candombe* is featured in the city of Buenos Aires's English-language tourism website ("Discover the Rhythm of the City's Roots" 2018). Yet, such visibility offers few structural changes for Afrodescendants who are experiencing racial discrimination and stratification. For example, INADI, the governmental body charged with addressing racism, receives formal discrimination complaints and makes legal recommendations but ultimately has little judicial power or influence. As J. M. Anderson (2012) remarks, its role is largely symbolic and it primarily oversees the dispensing of funds to underrepresented groups for development projects.

In this way, multiculturalism has given rise to "political economies of culture" (Thomas 2004) within which Afrodescendant organizations navigate and compete to realize their initiatives. Anthropologists researching the rise of Afrodescendant activism in Argentina over the last decade have observed a relationship between increased state and international support of Afrodescendant movements within the country and internal community tensions over funding, authority, and representation (Lamborghini and Frigerio 2010; Otthenheimer and Zubrzycki 2011; J. M. Anderson 2012). In his critique of neoliberal multiculturalism, Hale (2005) has asserted that multiculturalist policies position the state as arbiter of cultural rights and, in the process, as arbiter of ethnic authenticity and authority as well. Moreover, as Hale (2005, 13) writes, "[C]ultural rights, when carefully delimited, not only pose little challenge to the forward march of the neoliberal project but also induce the bearers of these rights to join them in the

march." Expanding multiculturalism throughout the region has raised legitimate concerns over state co-optation.

J. M. Anderson (2012, 286) argues that neoliberal multiculturalism has entrenched divisions between Afrodescendant organizations that prevent successful advancement, and criticizes community leaders who "often" indulge in self-dealing. In my experience, community activists adamantly resist such a portrayal of Afrodescendant politics in Buenos Aires. At an event, the leader of one organization spoke directly about the dangers of allowing scholars to reproduce, in his view, racist narratives of "negros desorganizados" (disorganized Blacks). My own observations align with those of Lamborghini and Frigerio (2011), who emphasize the agency of Afrodescendant political actors to operate within the constraints and opportunities of expanding multiculturalist policy. I found that, despite tensions created and limitations set by multiculturalism, Afrodescendants are coming together and mobilizing within and beyond state institutions and structures. At a state-sponsored forum for Afrodescendants in 2013, I witnessed an elderly gentleman break through a moment of debate to interject, "Todos somos afrodescendientes!" (We are all Afrodescendants!). His announcement was met with applause and a shift in the conversation. The Comisión Organizadora del 8 de Noviembre (Organizing Commission for November 8th), known more colloquially as Comisión 8N, was a pan-organizational entity that brought together members of various Afro-Argentine, Afrodescendant, and African migrant organizations in the country to promote African culture and Afro-diasporic community rights. The group was instrumental in organizing events around the new national holiday recognizing Afrodescendancy in Argentina and, beyond the holiday, it also facilitated intracommunity communication and

action. As I will document in the chapters that follow, Afrodescendant youth activists enter a political sphere where they are exposed to moments of debate and tension over identity, resources, representation, and authority, but they also learn from adults and peers who seek conciliation and collaboration within a shared struggle for racial justice and equality.

Quilombo in the Park

"¡Ay! ¡Qué quilombo!" is an expression that one often hears in the streets of Buenos Aires, particularly on hectic days when the streets are shut down because of a protest or accident. The term *quilombo* may also arise in a conversation with a *porteño* about Argentina's tumultuous economy, recent workers' strikes, or a particularly disastrous soccer match. In Argentina, the colloquial meaning of *quilombo* is "a mess," "a disaster," "chaos"; less commonly, the term is also used to mean a brothel. Its use is so ubiquitous that Argentine semiotician José Luis Fernández has been quoted as saying, "No sos porteño si no decís quilombo" (You are not from Buenos Aires if you do not say *quilombo*) (Barreiro 2017).

Most Argentines do not consider the term's racist origins: *quilombo* dates from the colonial period in Latin America, when it was used to refer to maroon communities of formerly enslaved persons. Along with the routine pejorative uses of *negro* discussed previously in this chapter, the term *quilombo*, in Argentina, is part of what Jane Hill (2008) calls "the everyday language of white racism." Slurs like *negro de mierda* and recontextualized terms like *quilombo* are not considered overtly racist; nevertheless, they reference and reproduce racist stereotypes and ideologies that stigmatize Blackness. Hill suggests that this kind of "covert racist discourse" is perhaps more powerful than overtly

racist language, owing to its ability to go unnoticed and unchallenged in the public sphere.

In 2016, Afro-diasporic community activists crafted a powerful response to existing racial doxa in Argentina when they chose to reclaim the term and organize a large public event called "Quilombo: Festival de Herencia Afro" (Quilombo: *Afro* Heritage Festival). As part of the third annual celebration of National Day of Afro-Argentines and African Culture, members of various Afrodescendant and African organizations and communities came together in San Telmo's Parque Lezama for a day recognizing all things *Afro* in Argentina. Held on November 12, 2016, the festivities included food vendors representing various African cuisines, booths for various activities (such as African hair braiding and games), and demonstrations of *capoeira*, *candombe*, and *tango*, popular Argentine cultural forms with African roots. The large stage constructed for the event hosted multiple musical acts by Afrodescendant performers that went on throughout the evening. The objective of the festival, as advertised on the Ministry of Culture's website (2016), was to "visibilizar diversas prácticas y manifestaciones culturales de la comunidad afro y de esa manera concientizar sobre la importancia del afro en nuestra historia" (visibilize diverse practices and cultural manifestations of the *Afro* community and, in this way, raise awareness of the importance of *Afro* [peoples and cultures] in our history).

In several ways, the Quilombo festival directly confronted public dismemory of Afrodescendant history and culture in Argentina. By holding the event in Parque Lezama, a former slave market, located in San Telmo, a historical *barrio del tambor* (drumming neighborhood), organizers reasserted African heritage and belonging in the historical and

social landscape of Buenos Aires. The performances rendered obscured Afro-Argentine histories visible and undeniably human. A parade procession included community members dressed in clothing representative of the various regions of Africa from which enslaved Africans were taken; some of them enacted the roles of enslaved Africans and revolutionary soldiers who helped construct the nation. Marcela Lorenzo, the president of Agrupación Xangô, marched into the park dressed as María Remedios del Valle in full uniform, the Argentine flag hoisted in front of her. Showing me a video of the festival months later, Marcela remarked on what an incredible moment that was for her and her community. She smiled proudly while pointing out her children and other young members of the Agrupación who could be spotted participating in the festivities at various points in the video.

The festival provided a means of challenging the erasure of Afrodescendant histories, bodies, and cultures in Argentina. In many ways, the Quilombo festival can be viewed as a prime example of the successes of Buenos Aires's Afrodescendant activists in organizing collectively, in the context of new multiculturalist policies and frameworks, to promote the public visibility of African heritage in Argentina. Several different Buenos Aires activist organizations came together to plan the event and worked with both local and national government entities, from the municipal-level Gobierno de Buenos Aires (Government of Buenos Aires) to the national-level Dirección de Diversidad (Directorate for Diversity), Ministerio de la Cultura (Ministry of Culture), and Secretario de los Derechos Humanos (Secretary for Human Rights). Underscoring the importance of transnational networks and entities to on-the-ground Afrodescendant activism, local activists successfully secured support for the festival from the embassies of various

African and Latin American nations, such as Colombia and Ecuador. Academic institutions and organizations such as the Buenos Aires–based Grupo de Estudios Afro-Latinoamericanos (Afro-Latin American Studies Group) also contributed to the organization of the festival.

Overall, Quilombo was considered a great success by many, including Marcela and several of the young people to whom I spoke who had attended and participated in the event. Even so, the festival highlights several constraints on the new visibility accessible to Afrodescendant communities within local political economies of culture in multiculturalist Argentina. With its emphasis on African foods, dance, and music, the event aligned with an essentializing culturalist vision of inclusion that privileges a folkloric, commercialized "visibility" over actual structural changes to race-related political, economic, and social conditions in Argentina. Moreover, this emphasis on African cultural forms appeals to the "negrophilia" that has attracted many young white *porteños* to Rastafarianism, *candombe*, and African religions in recent decades (Gayles 2019; Lamborghini 2016; Frigerio and Lamborghini 2011).

Within the Afro-diasporic community, there existed disagreements about how the event was organized and whom it purported to represent. In an interview that was video-recorded at the event and later published on YouTube (Ávila 2016), one activist in attendance lamented what she called the invisibilization of Afro-Argentines in the programming, proclaiming the festival "totalmente, enteramente diasporico" (totally, entirely diasporic). To support this claim, she pointed out the prevalence of Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Colombian, and Afro-Uruguayan music and cultural practices being featured in the day's events. She went on to assert that the Argentine state preferred

working with the "más oscuro*"* (darker) Afrodescendants from more recent migrations to the country over working with the "más claro" (lighter) and more "mesclado" (mixed) Afro-Argentines of colonial heritage. I cannot know who else may have shared her sentiments, but her words echo similar perceptions and whispered intimations that I heard voiced elsewhere about who gets to represent *afroargentinidad*. Ultimately, her voiced criticisms indicate the strain that competition for funding under multiculturalism puts on Afro-diasporic community ties in Buenos Aires.

Events like Quilombo highlight the tremendous gains achieved by Buenos Aires's Afrodescendant activists in recent decades, but they also reveal the limits of the visibility that can be achieved within current multiculturalist frameworks. The day-long festival provided an opportunity for members of the Afro-diasporic community to come together to publicly denounce the erasure of their heritage and to celebrate what it means to be *Afro* in Argentina. In my interviews, youth cited events like the Quilombo festival as important for connecting to their community and developing pride in their heritage. Yet, the celebration also revealed some intra-community tensions and was ultimately an impermanent redress of Afrodescendant erasure. The event was not held again the following year, despite community discussions and interest in doing so. After the festival ended and the stage was taken down, the park returned to the idyllic, white-washed space of dismemory that Joaquin had laid bare in our interview. On all other days of the year, there is no official acknowledgment of the park's connections to Afro-Argentine history.

Conclusion:

Contexts of Invisibility and Emergent Visibility

In the vignette that opened this chapter, Joaquin drew upon the physical and social environment around him in Parque Lezama to illustrate for me the importance of visibility for Argentina's Afrodescendant communities. To be dis-remembered, strategically forgotten by the nation-state, is to be denied respect and belonging as full citizens of their country. Though proven inaccurate by critical historians, the myth of Black disappearance remains a stable pillar of "common sense" that provides a foundation for racialized citizenship in Argentina. As Argentine anthropologist Alejandro Frigerio (2002, 304) writes, denying the Afrodescendant past has made possible the ongoing "pervasive discrimination of the many Others that do not fit into the country's ideal self-image as a white, European country in Latin America." Yet, over the last quarter-century, Afrodescendant activists have won considerable victories, working within expanding multiculturalist policies to resist the narrative of the white nation and to promote Afro-Argentine culture and heritage in the public sphere. At the same time, multiculturalism has created challenges for Afrodescendant organizing and local identity politics. Ironically, in order to advocate for their cultural and political belonging, activists must creatively navigate policies and institutional relationships in which support is predicated on their cultural difference; they must maneuver for resources while avoiding co-optation and fetishization. Young Afrodescendants coming of age in this contemporary moment move between contexts of invisibility and emergent visibility. As I will discuss in the following chapters, in schools they are immersed in institutional narratives that deny their existence and belonging, while Afrodescendant spaces,

organizations, and events provide them unprecedented opportunities to learn about their history and to develop civic and diasporic identities.

CHAPTER THREE

"ME INVISIBILIZAN": AFRODESCENDANT YOUTH NARRATIVES OF RACIALIZATION AND INVISIBILIZATION IN THE CLASSROOM

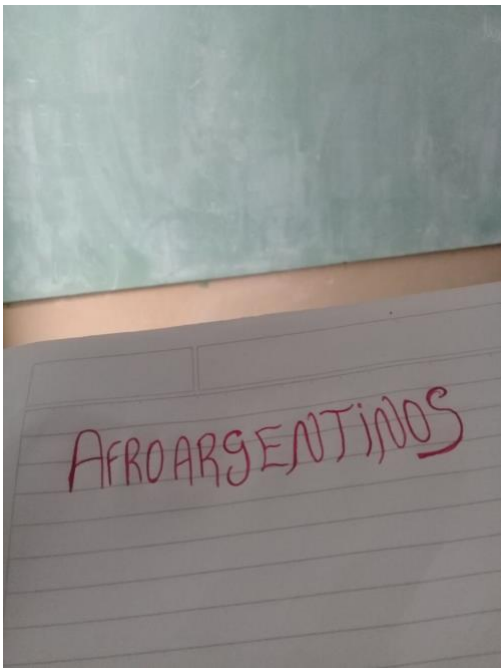


Figure 6: "Visibilización." Photograph and commentary by Julieta, age 18.

Como podemos observar en la foto, en el pizarrón del aula no hay nada escrito. Esto hace referencia a como la educación argentina invisibiliza a la comunidad afro, a sus próceres, a su historia, y a su aporte hacia de la cultural e independencia argentina. Sugerimos que en base a esta problemática que mayormente sufrimos los jóvenes afrodescendientes capacitaciones para docentes sobre la historia afroargentina y como abordar el racismo y la discriminación en las aulas.

As we can observe in the photo, on the classroom's chalkboard there is nothing written. This references how Argentine education invisibilizes the *Afro* community, our heroes, our history, and our part in creating Argentine culture and independence. We suggest that, based on this problem that young Afro-descendants suffer from most, teacher training on Afro-Argentine history and how to address racism and discrimination in the classroom.

When I met Julieta in 2017, she was a passionate and vocal seventeen-year-old and an active member of Agrupación Xangô. Julieta's family had migrated from neighboring Uruguay, but she was born in Argentina and identified strongly as Afro-Argentine. "Nací acá. Soy de acá" (I was born here. I am from here), she told me emphatically in a thick *porteño* accent that buttressed her claims of national belonging. Exceptionally tall, outgoing, and frequently outspoken in our youth-group meetings, she had never struck me as someone who struggled to have her presence and opinions known. Yet, in an interview on an October afternoon, Julieta confided to me that she often felt invisible at school.

"Me invisibilizan" (They make me invisible), she told me. She explained that Afrodescendants are drastically under-represented in her school's curriculum, and she connected this to how her citizenship is constantly called into question.

> *Si yo no digo que soy afroargentina en el colegio, a mí, nah, nah* […] *me tienen como "no, es la hija uruguaya por ser negra." Entendés? Porque me dijeron, mi profesora me ha dicho, "¿Vos sos? ah, ¿pero vos sos hija de*[26] *que? ¿De dónde es tu mamá, de dónde es tu papá?"*
>
> *Pero no puedo ser argentina y ya está.* ***¡A ver, ya esta! ¡Sí, argentina!*** *No, no, no, no, no me busques una descendencia o ascendencia…para justificar mi negritud. Eso es lo que pasa. Que acá te, te buscan tu historia pasada para justificar que vos sos negra en Argentina. Eso es lo que pasa. Como que no puede ser, no puede ser negra en Argentina porque supuestamente la Argentina es una Argentina* ***blanca*** […] *Voy al colegio tanto el día con literatura europea. Bueno, toda cultura europea. Y, yo, me siento mal a veces. ¡Toda Europa, Europa! No saben toda la historia de lo que hizo Europa o que hizo todos los países de arriba*.
>
> If I don't say that I'm Afro-Argentine in school, […] they take me as, "No, she's Uruguayan because she's Black." Understand? They tell me,

[26] *Hija/o* (daughter/son) or *hija/o de* (daughter/son of), when followed by a nationality or the name of a country, is a colloquial reference to nationality.

> my teacher told me, "You are, ah, but where are you from? Where is your mother from? Where is your father from?"
>
> I could not be Argentine and that's it. **Look, that's it**! **Yes, Argentine**! Don't […] look for a descent or ancestry…to justify my Blackness. This is what happens. Here, they look at your past history to justify that you're Black in Argentina. Because supposedly Argentina is a **white** Argentina. […] I go to school all day with European literature. OK, all European culture. And, me, I feel bad sometimes. All Europe, Europe! They don't know the whole history of how Europe was created or how all the northern countries were created.

In this poignant statement, Julieta described how the Eurocentrism of the Argentine history that she encounters in schools contributes to a context in which she feels that she constantly has to defend her existence as a Black Argentine in "white" Argentina. Furthermore, she connected the erasure of Afrodescendants and the privileging of Europe in her classroom to broader hemispheric power dynamics that obscure the complex global histories that gave rise to powerful "northern" countries. Julieta had independently arrived at, and managed to put into her own words, concepts that I had struggled to get college students to grasp while teaching Eric Wolf's (1982) *Europe and the People without History*.

Later in our conversation, she added, "Estamos invisibilizados con todo lo que sufrimos […] nuestros ancestros fueron esclavizados y nosotros, nosotros seguimos siendo invisibilizados" (We're invisibilized with all that we have suffered […] our ancestors were enslaved and we remain invisibilized). Julieta's decision to juxtapose the state of being "enslaved" with that of being "invisibilized" asserts a relationship between the two—a link connecting past and present racial injustices. For Julieta, being made invisible in the classroom is a continuation of colonial power dynamics that have denied Afrodescendants agency and belonging as full citizens in Argentina.

This chapter delves into various forms of racialization and invisibilization that Afrodescendant youth experience in schools and the role that those experiences have in shaping their understandings of themselves as Argentine citizens. I explore racialization and invisibilization together in my analysis because, like Julieta, I find these processes dually constitutive of the racialized citizenship to which Afrodescendant youth are introduced in their schools. Beginning from the premise that there are no biological races, the term *racialization* refers to the process by which racialized groups are formed and are understood to be innately distinct from one another (Hochman 2019). As influential socializing institutions (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), schools have been studied as sites of racialization that reinforce the "normativity" of whiteness and that police the behaviors, practices, and speech of non-white students (Lee 2005; Lewis 2003; Vaught 2012; García-Sánchez 2014; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011; Werito 2010; Abu El-Haj 2015; Allen 2017). In this chapter, Afrodescendant youth describe experiences of racialization occurring through inaccurate and limiting representations of Argentine history and the interrelated presumptions of foreignness and alterity that follow visible markers of Blackness in Argentina. As their community's historical contributions and continuity are denied, young Afrodescendants are inescapably positioned as "other."

Afrodescendant students experience hypervisibility as racialized Black "others" while simultaneously experiencing invisibility as citizens. As Afro-Caribbean novelist Jamaica Kincaid sums up this complex paradox, "[T]he blackness is visible and yet it is invisible" (1983, 43). *Invisibilización* was the term most often used by youth activists and community members for this pervasive denial of the nation's Afrodescendant population. Increasingly used in both activist rhetoric and academic research in Argentina

(Annecchiarico 2012; Kleidermacher 2011; Ocoró Loango 2016a), invisibilization can be understood as the process by which hegemonic "nonrecognition" (Taylor 1994), or the perceived public absence of subaltern social groups, is created and maintained (Bastidas and Torrealba 2014). Theorizations of Black invisibility are far from novel; in *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison (1952, 3) famously penned, "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me." As discussed in the previous chapter, in Argentina there was a strategic refusal to see, to remember, or to recognize the country's Afrodescendant population. Documenting the invisibilization that persists in contemporary Argentine classrooms elucidates how this ongoing historical process of refusal continues to deny the legitimacy of Afro-Argentine history and identities. Invisibilization provides the context that allows seemingly explicit forms of racialization to pass covertly beneath the surface of public consciousness. As Lewis R. Gordon (1997, 74) observes, "[B]lacks disappear and so does responsibility for blackness." When Afrodescendants are rendered invisible, it is possible to evade responsibility for past and present racial injustices, both in and outside the classroom.

This chapter explores educational experiences of racialization and invisibilization through the narratives of young Afrodescendants whom I met over the course of my fieldwork—some with whom I met regularly and came to know as friends, and some with whom I simply shared a cup of coffee and a couple hours of conversation. My reasons for taking a narrative-based approach to young people's educational experiences is twofold. First, for demographic reasons, classroom observation would have made it difficult to collect the data that I sought. Most of the youth whom I interviewed remarked on being one of the only, if not *the* only, Afrodescendant young person in their classrooms and, in

some cases, in their entire schools. When Anny Ocoró Loango (2010) conducted observational research on representations of Blackness in three primary schools in Buenos Aires, only one of those schools had self-identifying Afrodescendant students (a total of two) whose participation and perspectives could be documented. In order to collect a corpus of data that would have both depth and range of Afrodescendant youth experiences in educational environments, I had to find students outside the classroom. I met youth in their communities and through Afrodescendant organizations, events, and diverse networks of activists and families across Buenos Aires.

More important than these logistical concerns, attending to the ways that Afrodescendant youth narrate their experiences of racialization and invisibilization in schools provides important insights into how youth interpret their own experiences and puts youth voices at the center of my analyses. Feminist anthropologists have long attended to narrative and narratives as a means of resisting the cultural essentialism and illusion of objectivity that are characteristic of traditional ethnography (Hurston 1935; Behar 1993; Abu-Lughod 1991). The Chicana tradition of *testimonio*, for example, positions the personal narrative as a method of knowledge production that challenges official, ostensibly objective histories through the practice of witnessing (Acevedo 2001; Huber and Cueva 2012). By sharing their individual, subjective educational experiences with me and others, Afrodescendant young people render visible covert processes of racialization and invisibilization and contribute to their communities' resistance to those processes.

Narrative has been explored as an important means for understanding the discursive production of identities. As bell hooks (2010, 50) cogently states, "The stories

I tell about who I am constitute the me of me-as-I-see-it." Borrowing from a constructivist view of narrative (Bruner 1987; Ochs and Capps 1996), I take youth narratives to be acts of "self-making" through which these young people position and make meaning of life events that shape their racial identities and understandings of the nation. In the process of sharing their narratives with me and others, Afrodescendant youth (re)construct and interpret their educational experiences and what it means for them to be Afrodescendant in Argentina. Finally, recognizing ethnography itself as a particular kind of storytelling (Bruner 1997; Maggio 2014), I strive to present youth narratives with the sort of "tactical humanism" (Abu-Lughod 1991) that gives context and character to these young narrators and, I hope, collapses the distance between them and you, the reader.

Taken collectively, the youth narratives woven together in this chapter reveal how Afrodescendant youth interpret their educational experiences and the racialized citizenship that they encounter in schools. Documenting and analyzing youth narratives of racialization and invisibilization in the classroom contributes important insights into the impact of historical erasure in education on youth civic-identity formation. In their narratives, young people identify these processes in pedagogy (instructional content, educational activities, etc.) as well as in diverse quotidian interactions with their instructors and peers. It must be stressed that Afrodescendant youth are not passive within white pedagogical spaces; they critically interpret and challenge discourses of race and nation in their schools. Youth narratives reveal various strategies employed by Afrodescendant youth and their advocates to navigate and resist the normativity of whiteness, in the classroom and beyond.

Educating a "Civilized" Citizenry:

Citizenship, Race, and Argentine Education

In Argentina, education has long held a central role in how the democratic nation is envisioned and practiced. The early state promoted public education as a critical site of political socialization, necessary for political and social stability and liberal camaraderie among citizens. As Szuchman (1990, 112) writes, "Schooling was seen as an instrument capable of engendering the unity of Argentines." Despite moves toward privatization that have followed the country's turn toward neoliberal governance since the 1990s (Narodowski and Moschetti 2015), Argentines continue to uphold a self-image of a democratic, well-educated public and the country boasts some of Latin America's leading public institutions of higher education, which are tuition-free and attract high numbers of international students from neighboring countries. Nonetheless, as I shall discuss in this chapter, the educational democracy of Argentina is illusory for Afrodescendant young people, whom the system was never intended to serve. In order to understand the racialized citizenship that Afrodescendant youth experience in schools, it is important first to explore the historical relationship between racialized notions of the ideal citizenry and how education has been conceptualized in Argentina.

Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, whose term as president of Argentina ran from 1868 to 1874, is considered the "Padre del Aula" (Father of the Classroom) for his efforts to institutionalize democratic education in Argentina. Sarmiento, a schoolteacher turned writer and politician, considered public education instrumental in shaping an intelligent and civil citizenry, prepared to contribute economically, socially, and democratically to the nation (Korkatsch-Groszko 1981). He established Argentina's first effective

educational policies, founded on a liberal pedagogy that promoted a secular, public education to "elevate" the culture and character of the nation (Puiggrós 2006).

Politically, Sarmiento was a central figure in the Unitarian party and a vocal critic of the Federalist rule of General Juan Manuel de Rosas (López 2000), who had allied himself with Afrodescendant communities in Buenos Aires. While in exile in Chile, Sarmiento wrote his magnum opus, considered a classic of Latin American literature. First published in 1845, *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie* is a history of Argentine independence and the nation's early civil wars that sets up a fundamental conflict between the backwards "barbarism" of the rural countryside and the "civilization" of the educated urban elite (Villavicencio 2010). For Sarmiento, the distinction between barbarism and civilization was not just a political or cultural matter; his conceptualization was steeped in scientific racism. In *Facundo*, Sarmiento (1965, 63-64) described Argentina's Indigenous peoples as "hordas salvajes" (savage hordes) and wrote of "el negro incapaz de elevarse a las altas regiones de la civilización" (the black unable to rise to the higher levels of civilization). Alongside other prominent Argentine elites, Sarmiento espoused a worldview in which Europe and the United States were exemplars of civilization that Argentina should emulate on its path to democracy through whitening the Argentine "race." His works influenced the pro-European immigration policies that I discussed in Chapter Two, and the dichotomy between barbarism and civilization that he posited became foundational to the national imaginary.

For Sarmiento, education alone would not be sufficient to produce the ideal citizenry; the "barbaric" races needed either to be elevated through miscegenation or exterminated (Yao 2002). Education was intended as a tool to create modern citizens of

incoming European immigrants and civilize mixed-race mestizos (Ocoró Loango 2016b). Black children were never included on this path to modernity that education would provide. Indeed, in Sarmiento's time Black children were not permitted to attend the same schools as white children (Yao 2002, 4). Ultimately, one cannot divorce Sarmiento's racialized understanding of "civilization" from the nation and citizenry that he sought to construct through education.

In schools today, the teaching of Argentine history that is used to shape national identity and instill civic values remains founded on the nationalist narratives that Sarmiento extolled (Ocoró Loango 2016b). Sarmiento's ideologies and their impact on Argentine educational systems were not lost on the Afrodescendant youth activists with whom I worked. As Diego, a bright, twenty-four-year-old college student, expressed to me,

> *Sarmiento es un personaje nefasto que odia al individuo mestizo, es alguien que lo odia, es alguien que no quería una Argentina con negros y mestizos, pero como él fue el impulsor de la escuela pública, se lo toma como un prócer. Pero, no sé […] ¿Por qué? El es la antítesis, la antitética de, del proyecto de educación que tenemos—"Emancipadora Popular" … Entonces cómo que chocar mucho. […] Son las contradicciones que generan... pero yo… ¿qué lo que hago? Te digo eso y no me permito a dialogar…*
>
> Sarmiento is a nefarious character who hates the mixed-race individual, is someone who hates him, is someone who didn't want an Argentina with Blacks and mixed-race people, but since he was the promoter of the public school, he is taken as a hero. But, I don't know […] Why? He is the antithesis, antithetical to the educational project that we have— "Popular Emancipator" … So, it's really irritating. […] These are the contradictions they generate… but I…what do I do? I tell you that and I don't allow myself to talk…

Diego rightly points to the grand contradiction of Sarmiento's vision—how could education truly "emancipate" a public composed of diverse populations that were viewed

as inherently, biologically unequal? Moreover, what does it mean for Afrodescendant youth to have such a figure upheld as the unchallenged "Father of the Classroom?" Diego acknowledged with some frustration that he did not allow himself to speak up in class about Sarmiento and other problematic historical figures because he feared that any response he made would be reduced and understood only in relation to his racial identity.

As sites of political socialization and civic training, schools instill "foundational myths" in order to craft a common history and worldview among citizens (Astiz 2007). In Argentina, the myth of the white nation has maintained a foothold in the national imaginary despite efforts in recent decades to promote educational policies that reflect emergent multiculturalist and human-rights discourses. Following Argentina's multicultural turn, education reforms in the 1990s promoted a vision of a "new" Argentina—a pluralistic and participatory democracy that rejected all forms of discrimination. Diversity and equality were ideals written into education policy, with specific references made to cultural and linguistic rights of Indigenous students; but these same laws were absent of any "effective or affirmative" inclusion of Afrodescendants (Astiz 2007, 37). Afrodescendants remained outside of official descriptions of the ideal Argentine citizen that education would produce.

Argentina's National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism (INADI) published its *Plan Nacional Contra la Discriminación* (National Plan Against Discrimination) in 2005 that decried the continued hegemony of ethno-nationalism in schools. In 2014, the Secretaría de Derechos Humanos (Secretary of Human Rights) published *Afrodescendientes y Derechos Humanos* (Afrodescendants and Human Rights), a compilation of documents and recommendations that more specifically proposed

curricular changes to include Afro-Argentine history and anti-racist pedagogy. Educational reforms and state-published plans and recommendations have yet to yield systemic changes to educational systems and practices with regard to Afrodescendants. For example, both the education reforms of the 1990s and state-published documents in the 2000s targeted textbooks as reifying ethnonationalism and discriminatory stereotypes of racialized groups, but still the trend continues. A recent study of school textbooks conducted by INADI (2015) found that thirty-five percent of the school textbooks sampled provided zero representations of Afrodescendants in their pages. Furthermore, of the textbooks that did represent Afrodescendants, the vast majority portrayed them as enslaved, and the portrayals were limited to illustrations of the colonial period. Only five percent of textbooks made reference to Afrodescendants or African heritage as an aspect of contemporary Argentine society and culture.

This was a theme repeated throughout my research: many Afrodescendant youth see themselves reflected in their classrooms only through the paradigm of slavery, in the margins of colonial history. As one young woman, Lucía, phrased it, "Nuestra único lugar en la historia argentina, por lo menos la que te enseñan en el colegio, es las personas esclavizadas de la época colonial; después, nunca más existimos" (Our only place in Argentine history, at least the one that they teach you in school, is the enslaved people of the colonial period; after that, we no longer exist). Erased from the present and confined to the colonial past, young Afrodescendants are positioned as irreconcilable "others" in their classrooms.

Performing "Los Negros" in the Colonial Imagination

¡Ya se acercan tamboriles y los negros a bailar! …Vendo yo, vendo yo todo lo que necesita, llámenme, siempre voy por estas callecitas.

The drums are approaching and the blacks dance! ...I sell, I sell everything that you need, call me, I always go through these little streets.

- The opening and chorus of "Pregones," a song sung during school Independence Day celebrations

The 25th of May is a national holiday in Argentina celebrating the May Revolution of 1810, an event that marked the beginning of Argentina's War of Independence from Spain. On this day, primary schools around the country put on Independence Day plays that commemorate the revolution and, more broadly, memorialize Argentina's colonial era. Young children participating in these plays are often dressed as generalized "personajes" (characters)—gentlemen, ladies, and various street vendors meant to represent everyday life during the colonial period.

Far from peripheral, the street vendors feature prominently in these school performances as personified romanticizations of a bygone way of life in the bustling cities of early-19th-century Argentina. Students dressed as various street vendors perform dances, sing songs, and call out *pregones* (street vendors' cries) to advertise the goods that they are mock-selling. As Ocoró Loango (2010) observes, the representations of colonial street vendors in these school plays reproduce racist stereotypes and historical inaccuracies that serve to reinforce the myth of the "white nation." Educational materials and classroom art routinely depict the street vendors as Afrodescendant, often through minstrel-like parodies of Blackness. Students assigned the roles of street vendors typically have their faces painted black, and little girls are often dressed in red polka-dot

skirts and head-wraps, such that they bear a striking resemblance to the "mammy" caricatures of the Jim Crow Era in the United States. Indeed, the persistence of "mammy" and "sambo" imagery and blackface performance within popular culture throughout Latin America are beginning to more deeply interrogated by academic scholarship (Gontovnik 2019; Roper 2019).

Though presented as educational representations of a historical period, these plays can more accurately be viewed as performances of Argentina's "colonial imagination" (Caldwell and Leroux 2017); they portray colonial power relations in ways that support and sustain the colonial project and the nation that was built upon it. Common street-vendor characters, such as the *escobero* (broom vendor), the *vendedor de velas* (candle vendor), the *lavandera* (laundress), the *mazamorrera* (pastry vendor), and the *vendedora de empanadas* (empanadas vendor), function as racialized archetypes that maintain a historical narrative about "benign slavery" in Argentina (Rebagliati 2014). In doing so, these representations infantilize Afrodescendants and obscure the enslaved status and lived realities of the majority of Afrodescendants at that time. Afrodescendants are rendered as amiable peddlers of everyday goods, eager to sell you, as the song goes, "everything you need." Typically, their central role in the play is to call out their *pregones* and to perform a dance for the amusement of the crowd.

The first time the youth members of Agrupación Xangô described the Independence Day plays to me, at a youth-group meeting, I was, admittedly, shocked. For me, coming from the United States, the legacy of minstrel shows had marked the practice of blackface in my mind as irrevocably and unmistakably racist. "¿Y esto todavía pasa en las escuelas? ¿Pintan las caras de los chicos?" (And this still happens in schools? They

paint kids' faces?), I asked incredulously. Without missing a beat, Julieta looked at me and let out an exasperated sigh. "Síííií, Eryn" (Yeeeees, Eryn), she replied, jokingly rolling her eyes at me. The implication appeared to be that obviously this practice continued and that my question only underscored my inability to completely comprehend the social contexts that she and her peers navigate as Afrodescendant youth in schools.

In interviews, I would discover that racist portrayals of street vendors in school Independence Day plays were prevalent and, for many of the young people, they were the only representations of Afrodescendants that appeared in their formal Argentine history education. This was true of Reina, who sat down with me at a coffee shop on the day before her twenty-first birthday. Decidedly cool in dress and demeanor, the young woman had already enjoyed considerable success as a professional singer. In our interview, she told me that she could not recall being taught anything in schools about Afrodescendants in Argentina, though she did remember references to Indigenous peoples. She explained:

> *Realmente aprendí muy poco en el colegio sobre la historia afrodescendiente. Creo que aprendí mucho más cuando me interesé y empecé a frecuentar personas afro que estaban dentro de la cultura y que estaban interesadas y aprendí mucho más interesándome por mi cuenta, digamos, que en el colegio. En el colegio se hablaba incluso un poco más acerca de los pueblos originarios que los afrodescendientes. Lo único que recuerdo del colegio en haya mencionado algo afro era cuando teníamos que hacer los actos, teníamos que actuar de la época colonial y yo hacía la negrita que vendí empandas porque soy la única.*
>
> Really, I learned very little in school about Afrodescendant history. I think I learned a lot more when I became interested and started to visit *Afro* people who were within the culture and who were interested, and I learned a lot more by becoming interested on my own, let's say, than in school. At school, there was even a little more talk about Indigenous peoples than Afrodescendants. The only thing I remember from school when something *Afro* was mentioned was when we had to do the plays, we had to act out

> the colonial period, and I played the Black girl who sells empanadas because I'm the only one [Black girl in her class].

I asked Reina whether she remembered how she felt about being made to play this part. Taking a moment to think before responding, she said, "La verdad es que no lo todavía he puesto pensar pero es como muy loco...es extraño... ¡es **terrible**! ¡Realmente!" (The truth is that I never put thought into it but it's like very crazy…it's strange…it's **terrible**! Really!) At the beginning of our interview, Reina had told me that she had not suffered much discrimination, though she recognized racism as prevalent in her country and said that her mother had faced considerable discrimination as a Black woman. Yet, as Reina addressed her memory of the play, she actively began to modify her response. With each pause, she extended her initial reaction of "crazy" to include "strange" and eventually "terrible," with "terrible" receiving the greatest emphasis. Such modifications illustrate how the telling of past events has the power to transform the meanings of experiences for speakers in the present (Wortham 2000). Through the act of narrating her role as *la negrita* in her school's play, Reina began to reconsider and reposition the experience in her retelling.

Like Reina, many of the young Afrodescendants whom I met recalled being made to play a racialized street-vendor role in school plays. Though the plays occurred early in their childhoods and their memories of these events were sometimes blurry, Afrodescendant youth frequently referenced the plays in our interviews, and they were a common topic of discussion among the youth activists of Agrupación Xangô. Some young people positioned the plays as key moments in the stories about their school experiences that they shared with me. This was the case for Elena, the young

Afrodescendant law student who found herself defending her Afro-Argentine identity to a stranger in a café in the anecdote that opened Chapter One. After the interloper had moved on and our interview resumed, I asked Elena to describe what she felt were important experiences that she had had while growing up as an Afrodescendant young person in Argentina. She recalled for me her first memories of discrimination:

> *En el jardín, tuvo una experiencia con la maestra que tal vez ahora lo tomo como discriminación y tal vez ella, en su ignorancia, no lo hacia por discriminarme, sino que, en los actos escolares, siempre yo quería ser la dama antigua,*[27] *la que estaba con el vestido…*
>
> In kindergarten, there was an experience with the teacher that perhaps now I take as discrimination, and maybe she, in her ignorance, didn't mean to discriminate against me; but, in the school plays, I always wanted to be the colonial lady. The one with the dress…

Elena paused to make a gesture with her hands as if unfurling a large skirt to reference the dresses that "colonial ladies" wore, and then continued:

> *Siempre en todos los actos me tocaba ser la negrita…que repartí empanadas. Yo me recuerdo de que siempre les decía la maestra que debía ser. La dama antigua, nunca me toqué ser el papel.*
>
> *Pero todavía yo no me daba cuenta de los problemas que iba tener como afro recién en la primaria. Me empezaban a cargarme por mi pelo, por mi color de piel, me cargaban porque mi papa era negro. Entonces allí fue donde lo mas que sufrí porque yo tenia vergüenza en mi color…*
>
> Always, in all the plays, I played the Black girl…who delivered empanadas. I remember the teacher always told them [the other students] what I should be. The colonial lady, I never played the role.
>
> But still I was not aware of the problems I was going to have as an *Afro* in primary school. They started to mock me for my hair, for my skin color,

[27] "Dama antigua" literally translates to "old (or old-fashioned) lady," but in this context it is the name most often given to popular characters in these plays that represent the aristocratic ladies of Argentina's colonial period.

> they mocked me because my father was Black. So, it was there where I suffered the most, because I was embarrassed of my [skin] color…

Elena thus presented the Independence Day play in which she had participated as a child as her first racializing experience—an experience that she now views as a precursor of further racialization and discrimination that were to come in her educational experiences. Similar to Reina, Elena began by underplaying this racializing incident, as evidenced in her use of "maybe" to make ambiguous any racist effects and intentions. As her story progressed, Elena's voice began to quaver with emotion and her commentary on racialization in school grew more direct. Still, the gravity of the play appeared rooted less in Elena's memory of the event itself than in the racial awareness at which she arrived later, when she realized what those plays had represented. For Elena, it was the realization of why she was never allowed to be the *dama antigua*. As a Black student, Elena was told what she "should be," and that excluded the possibility of being an aristocratic lady. Being made to play the part of the *negrita* within Argentina's imaginary of the colonial era places racial boundaries around citizenship in ways that exclude young people, like Elena, from full national belonging and subjecthood. As Ocoró Loango (2010, 154) asserts, in these plays, "Blacks do not exist as subjects, they are only a character, there is no Black citizen, just containers for your stereotyped representation."

Some of the young activists with whom I worked, such as Catalina, rejected these stereotypes outright as "lies." Catalina recalled for me being made to play the part of the *mazamorrera* (pastry vendor) in her school play. Responsible and smart, collected and assertive, the nineteen-year-old was a natural leader among the youth of Agrupación Xangô. Catalina did not hesitate when discussing her criticisms of her educational

experiences and of the broader society in which she saw them as embedded. In reflecting on the limited representations of Afrodescendants to which she was exposed in school, she told me,

> *Entonces, nos enseñaron que eran los negros esclavos, eran africanos esclavizados, eran "los negros esclavos." Entonces hablaba de que las trajeran de Europa y de África y los trajeron para América y los vendían y nada más. Y cuando se hablaba de la historia que participaran, de que los afros participaran en la historia argentina era porque...Estuvieron en la guerra, los mataron a todos, murieron se agarraron fiebre amarilla y murieron y ya está. Y en los actos escolares, eran el negro vende velas, la mulata que lavaba la ropa, la mazamorrera, la que vendía empanadas, la ama de casa, la sirvienta...No tenían papeles importantes. Como…Nunca, nunca nos contaron de María Remedios del Valle que fue "la Madre de la Patria," que luchó con San Martín en las guerras libertadoras, que, sé, que fue un soldado y de soldado a capitana. Nunca, nunca nos contaran eso. La escuela miente.*
>
> So, they taught us that they were Black slaves, they were enslaved Africans, they were "black slaves." So [the teacher] talked about them being brought from Europe and Africa and brought to America and sold and nothing more. And when talking about the history that they participated in, the *Afros* participated in Argentine history, it was because ... They were in the war, they killed them all, they died, they caught yellow fever and died and that's it. And in school plays, they're the black man selling candles, the mulatto woman who washed clothes, the *mazamorrera*, the one who sold empanadas, the housekeeper, the maid ... They never had important roles. Like…Never, they never told us about María Remedios del Valle who was the "Mother of the Homeland" who fought with San Martín in the liberating wars, that, I know that she was a soldier and from soldier to captain. Never, they never tell us that. The school lies.

The young Afrodescendants whom I came to know in my fieldwork were not provided affirming, positive representations of Afro-Argentines in their formal educational experiences. As Catalina remarked in our interview, Afro-Argentine historical figures, such as Remedios del Valle, were absent from classroom instruction. Instead, the students were presented with caricatures, distortions of history that reproduce

and reinforce racialized citizenship in Argentina. Afrodescendants are quite literally cast as affable, entertaining foils to the white protagonists of Argentina history. Ultimately, these school plays serve as important rituals of nationhood through which a racist social order is normalized and depoliticized. In young people's educational experiences, *negros* exist only in the periphery of history, never with agency and never playing a meaningful role in constructing the nation.

Alterity and Hostility in White Pedagogical Space

As students, Afrodescendant youth experience invisibilization broadly through the erasure of their community's history and simultaneous racialization through the limiting, colonial representations of Afro-Argentines they do encounter in schools. In this way, the classroom can be seen as a kind of "white public space" (Hill 1998) that reinforces whiteness as the default, normative positionality of the student body and broader Argentine public. And, as Hill explains, white public spaces are continually reproduced through enculturated racializing practices embedded in the everyday. Many young people spoke to me about such quotidian interactions with their instructors and peers that positioned them as "other" in the classroom. Afrodescendant young people's recollections of racializing incidents presented a spectrum ranging from routine, covert micro-aggressions to violent macro-aggressions (Pérez Huber and Solórzano 2015). Catalina described growing frustrated with racist assumptions that she must be good at sports. Diego recalled that his Blackness elicited taunting as "feo" (ugly) by his peers and simultaneous sexualization as "un fetichismo" (a fetish[ism]). Youth described both verbal and physical blows hurled at them in the classroom. Collectively, their stories portray hostility and alterity in white pedagogical space.

Lucía was a twenty-year-old college student whose contact information had been given to me by her aunt, a prominent activist and scholar of Cape Verdean descent and a leader in Buenos Aires's Afrodescendant political circles. Lucía told me that her aunt had a great influence on her, instilling in her a sense of responsibility for representing her community. I was sure that it was that sense of responsibility that had convinced her to be interviewed by me, a complete stranger. Early in our interview, Lucía described her first experiences of peer-led racialization. Before the age of ten, Lucía recalled, she was aware of no distinctions between herself and her peers in the suburb of Buenos Aires where she still lives with her family. However, as she began to attend class with students from outside the circle of friends and families with whom she had grown up, she started to experience discrimination from her new peers. She told me, "Ellos tenían sus prejuicios que venían de sus casas. Yo creo que entre chicos tan pequeños los únicos prejuicios que pueda haber son los que uno como adulto les inculcan" (They had their prejudices that came from their homes. I believe that among such young children, the only prejudices that may exist are those that one as an adult instills in them). Lucía does not blame her peers; rather, she proposes that their views had been "instilled" by adults. She was not alone in this view; Afrodescendant young people frequently attributed the racist beliefs and attitudes expressed by their peers to adults and to Argentine society more broadly. In this way, youth understandings of racism are more nuanced than what Hill (2008, 6) has referred to as the "folk theory of racism," which positions racism as the product of individual moral failing and malevolent intent. Rather, they saw racism as a collective problem perpetuated by white adults, culture, and institutions.

When I asked Lucía to share an example of the discrimination that she had faced, her response further elucidated the social contexts in which peer-to-peer racialization occurs in schools.

> Por lo general estas cosas yo no contada en mi casa así que me las olvidé, yo misma me las olvidaba como para no decírselo a mi familia, mis padres. Pero me recuerdo de una vez en la clase de geografía una profesora había traído una fotocopia que comparaba la vida de una mujer negra muy pobre en África y la vida de una mujer blanca muy rica. Entonces, lo idea era como una historieta. Los diálogos eran similares empezaban similares y cada uno terminaba con un remate diferente. Empezaba diciendo, "Bueno mis hijos siempre comen porquerías…" y bueno, una mujer blanca decía como papas fritas, chizitos, gaseosas, esas cosas. Y la mujer negra decía, bueno, como lombrices o insectos o basura que encuentran. Era como comparando dos realidades claramente contrarias. Como era, como para hacernos abrir los ojos acerca de las desigualdades que hay en el mundo. Bueno resulta que mis compañeras no toman o no interpretaron eso y interpretaron como que es… me cargaban como diciendo que esa mujer era yo. Que era la mujer negra de la fotocopia era yo. Y me molestaba porque no eran los mejores ejemplos, no es la calidad de la persona que yo quiero ser. Sí, me molestaba.
>
> I usually don't talk about these things at home, so I forgot them, I forgot them myself so as not to tell my family, my parents. But I remember once in geography class, a teacher had brought a photocopy that compared the life of a very poor Black woman in Africa and the life of a very rich white woman. So, the idea was like a cartoon. The dialogues were similar, they started similar and each ended with a different ending. It began by saying, "Well my children always eat junk…" and, well, a white woman saying like fries, cheese puffs, sodas, these things. And the Black woman said, well, like worms or insects or garbage they find. It was like comparing two clearly opposite realities. It was to make us open our eyes about the inequalities in the world. Well, it turns out that my classmates did not take it or did not interpret it like that, and they interpreted it as… they mocked me, saying that I was that woman. That the Black woman from the photocopy was me. And it bothered me because they weren't the best examples, it's not the quality of person I want to be. Yes, it bothered me.

I interjected to ask Lucía whether her teacher said anything when the kids were mocking her.

> Nunca decía nada… No recuerdo que haya, que haya intervenido fuertemente. No recuerdo si yo se lo dije bien a la profesora que me estaban cargando por esto. Yo era chica igual. Estaba primer año de secundaria, yo creo. Y mis compañeros me cargaron por esto y yo creo que me puse a llorar en ese momento. Cosas así siempre fueron.
>
> [The teacher] never said anything…I don't remember that [the teacher] intervened strongly. I don't remember if I told the teacher that they were mocking me for this. I was still young. It was the first year of high school, I think. And my classmates mocked me for this and I think I started crying at that moment. Things like that were always happening.

Lucía presents this memory from her geography class as typical of the kinds of discrimination that she routinely confronted in school—experiences that she kept from her parents and willfully forgot. She acknowledges the teacher's well-meaning intention to teach students about global inequalities, even though this misguided exercise reproduced reductive and ahistorical colonialist representations of African poverty. Still, Lucía's narrative highlights how, regardless of intention, the assignment provided a context of racialization that her classmates drew upon to create negative associations. Furthermore, she describes a lack of response from the teacher to the bullying that occurred in the classroom. In this part of her narrative, Lucía hesitates to directly call out her teacher by admitting that she does not remember seeking the teacher's help. Yet, she also cites her young age and the fact that she was crying in the classroom—additions that highlight how her vulnerability in that moment should have been readily apparent to her teacher. In this way, Lucía's story exemplifies tensions within youth's narratives around the limited agency of young Afrodescendants as students in white pedagogical spaces. While sharing their stories, Lucía and other young narrators often seemed to grapple with the workings of power in such classroom exchanges, and they actively questioned what role or responsibility they had within them. Youth often resisted casting themselves as

passive victims but still highlighted the effects of intersecting marginalizations associated with their ages and racial identities.

Omar was another young person whose story about his school experiences offered insights into youth's perceptions of their agency (or lack thereof) in hostile educational environments. I first met Omar when he attended an event organized by Agrupación Xangô in the spring of 2017. Initially, his height and reserved demeanor made him appear older than his nineteen years; but, when he opened up to the group, a warm smile and instantly endearing youthfulness emerged. Omar was passionate about music and, before our interview commenced, he excitedly showed me a few of his favorite Rhianna music videos. I was somewhat surprised when, later in the interview, he told me that his school years had been colored by immense anger. Omar said that he had grown increasingly frustrated with the representations of history that were taught in schools and got into arguments with his teachers and peers that left him feeling isolated. He described to me how these experiences drove him to act out in anger.

> *Estaba muy enojado con la gente blanca por todo el racismo que he sufrido en todo este tiempo. Estaba **muy, muy enojado**, pero al hecho de que me volví un racista contra los racistas. Yo discriminaba a gente y me discriminaban a mí, pero de igual o peor manera [...] Yo dije, "Yo voy a luchar a todos" [...] Sobre la violencia es la única solución porque a mí, cuando me hacían reaccionar, la única forma de-- la única defensa que pude tener fue la violencia porque si entablé a les nadie me hacía acoso.*
>
> I was very angry with white people for all the racism I had suffered all that time. I was **very, very angry**, to the point that I became a racist against the racists. I discriminated against people and they discriminated against me but in an equal or worse way […] I said, "I'm going to fight everyone" […] Regarding violence, it is the only solution for me because, when they make me react, the only form… the only defense that I could have was violence. Because if I started with them, no one would mess with me.

Becoming "racist against the racists" and pre-empting racist attacks were Omar's way of reclaiming some agency within a white pedagogical space that rendered his community, and racism against it, invisible. But Omar also acknowledges the asymmetry of being "racist against the racists" when he says that they still discriminated against him "in an equal or worse way." Like many Afrodescendant young people, Omar dropped out of school.

According to a recent World Bank report, Afrodescendant young people across Latin America have higher drop-out[28] rates and significantly lower levels of educational attainment than their white peers (Freire et al. 2018). In specific regard to Argentina, the report states that "classroom dynamics have been found to create an environment hostile to Afrodescendants, contributing to early dropouts" (Freire et al. 2018, 93) This is consistent with studies carried out in the United States that have similarly found that Black students who experience racist bullying and violence have an increased likelihood of dropping out of school (Peguero 2011). This is not to say that racism in the classroom is the sole driver of school drop-out rates; economic realities for working-class Afrodescendant youth, such as needing to work and financially support their families, certainly also factor into decisions to leave school. However, the interrelationship of economic, cultural, and racial issues must be considered when research finds strong correlations between low levels of educational attainment and low-income levels among

[28] The term "drop-out" has been critiqued for placing responsibility for leaving school on students rather than recognizing the failings of educational institutions, leading some scholars to favor the term "pushout" (Luna and Revilla 2013). However, "drop-out" provides an accurate translation of the similarly colloquial and problematic Spanish terms, *deserción escolar* (school desertion) and *deserción estudiantil* (student desertion).

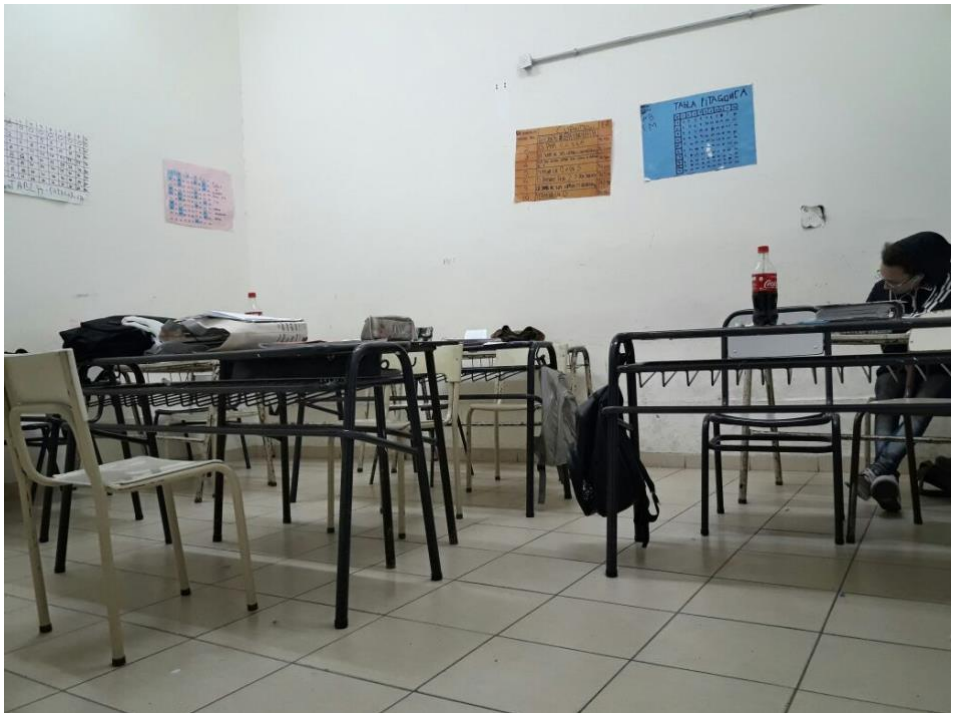


Figure 7:"Deserción estudiantil." Photograph and commentary by Catalina, age 19.

Afrodescendants in Latin America, contributing to significant race-related wealth gaps in the region.

High drop-out rates among Afrodescendant youth were a central concern for the activists in Agrupación Xangô and were often cited as demonstrating how Argentine institutions fail young Black people. For our Photovoice project, Catalina captured an image of an empty classroom and titled it "Deserción estudiantil" (Figure 7). In it, black desks stand out against stark white walls, creating a negative space that dominates half of the photograph. Notebooks sit on desks, school bags hang from chairs, and a single student sits, body half out of the frame. Catalina's commentary for the photograph reads, "El aula vacía representa la deserción estudiantil en nuestra comunidad. El racismo institucional afecta la trayectoria escolar de lxs jóvenes afrodescendientes" (The empty

classroom represents student drop-out in our community. Institutional racism affects the academic trajectory of Afrodescendant youth).

In an interview with me, Catalina shared that she had considered dropping out of school herself. As the only Black girl in her school, she recalled, she was constantly being teased and called *la negrita* in the schoolyard. She felt that, beyond her treatment from her peers, racism had affected the ways that her performance as a student was perceived by her teachers. She recalled in our interview that she was forced to repeat the first grade when her teacher claimed that she did not have the same abilities, or "capacidad," as the other students.

"¿Ella lo dijo?" (She said that?), I asked her.

"Sí" (Yes), Catalina responded, "le dijo a mi mamá, 'Pero ella no tiene la misma capacidad que otros chicos,' entonces me hicieron repetir y nada, igual. Después la tuve en tercer grado y no me dijo nada. Me hizo un pase re-alto con buenas calificaciones." (she said to my mom, "But she does not have the same ability as other kids," then they made me repeat [the grade] and, nothing, the same. Later I had her in third grade and she didn't say anything to me. She passed me with really good grades.)

No Safe Space:

Estefanía's Story

I met Estefanía for the first time on a sidewalk in downtown Buenos Aires, where I waited for her as she wrapped a weekly taping of a podcast on Afrodescendancy that she produces along with her sister. She came bursting out of the building, introduced herself with a warm hug, and encouraged me to follow her to her apartment for the interview that

we had planned over text messages. As we walked, she talked confidently and insightfully about the current state of political affairs in Argentina from her perspective as a 29-year-old Afrodescendant, feminist, queer woman and animal-rights activist. Once at her apartment, she made us ginger tea and then invited me to sit at her dining table and enjoy some of the vegan treats that she makes and sells through her own small business. I had just explained the purpose of my research and had begun to pose questions for her when she took easy command of the conversation and shared with me a profound account of her childhood and teen years.

Born in Uruguay to an Afro-Brazilian mother, Estefanía moved to Argentina with her family at the age of three. She spoke to me of the complicated sense of belonging that this engendered, stating, "I am not from anywhere. I am not from Uruguay. I am not from Brazil. I am not from Argentina. Where am I from?"[29] Although she considers Argentina, where she is a citizen and has lived most of her life, to be her home, she feels at times like an outsider there.

Estefanía's school years were particularly hard for her, and she shared with me how her peers teased her:

> When I was young, more young, like a child, I came crying every day from my school because they said mean things to me—about my hair, about my color, my skin color, about how I am not from here. Everything. They just took everything. You know how children can be mean.

[29] Throughout our interview, Estefanía shifted between her native Spanish and English, in which she is also fluent. She began by speaking in English, as she knew that this was my native language; but, as the interview progressed and went deeper into her personal experiences, she spoke more in Spanish.

She paused for a second, reconsidered what she had just said, and then declared emphatically, "But it's ***not*** just that children can be mean. Children repeat everything they hear in their house."

In this statement, Estefanía called into question and recast her original explanation of her peers' behavior. Like Lucía and many of the youth with whom I spoke, she now considers the teasing that she endured to be part of something larger and more structural in nature than is suggested by the commonplace observation that "children can be mean." She connects the racial discrimination that occurred in school to the households from which the other students came and, by extension, to the society in which they are embedded.

Shifting into her native Spanish, Estefanía explained to me that the cumulative effect of the racial discrimination that she faced in school was that she often felt alone, isolated from her peers.

> *Cuando a mí, me hacían bullying*[30] *no tenía nadie que me defendiera. Por más que eran mis amigas, no recuerdo ningún momento que se metiera en el medio de la persona que me agredía y…y yo. Me tenía que defenderme sola […] y aprender sola.*
>
> When they were bullying me, I had no one to defend me. Although they were my friends, I don't remember a single time when one of them got between a person who was attacking me and…and me. I had to defend myself alone […] and learn alone.

When I asked Estefanía whether her teachers ever intervened in the taunting that occurred in the classroom, she replied,

30 *Bullying* is a loan word from English that is regularly used in Argentina. The Spanish terms *acoso* (harassment) and *acoso escolar* (school harassment/bullying) are also used.

> *En la primaria intervinieron muy poco. Sí, me decían que tenía razón. Sí, me decían que estaba mal lo que ellos hacían. Pero no iban y creaban espacios en los cuales yo me sintiera segura.*
>
> In primary school, they intervened very little. Yes, they told me that I was right. Yes, they told me that what they [the other students] were saying was wrong. But they didn't go and create spaces where I felt safe.

"¿Sí?" (Yeah?), I prodded, and she continued,

> *No pedían reuniones de padres donde decir, "Bueno, los chicos están haciendo esto a **esta** compañera en particular y me gustaría saber qué pasa en su casa porque…Fulanito viene con tal comentario" porque entienden más de eso no. Entonces, ¿si intervenían? Digamos que intentaban.*
>
> They didn't call for parent meetings where they could say, "Well, the kids are doing this to ***this*** student in particular, and I would like to know what's going on in your house because…so-and-so comes [to class] with such a remark" because they understand more than that. So, did they intervene? Let's say that they tried.

In high school, she found that her teachers were a bit more direct in putting a stop to racist teasing, but this was also where she began to experience what she called "hipersexualización" (hypersexualization). Many of the young women whom I interviewed described their high-school years as a time when they began to encounter discourses in which their Black female bodies were treated as sexual objects. Estefanía provided an example of this racializing hypersexualization from her first year of high school.

> *Sólo un día que llevé mi desodorante, esto no me olvido más, llevé mi desodorante. Lo saqué y me puse a poner automáticamente. **¡A verla! ¡La forma fálica! ¡Mi desodorante!** Empiezan a decían consolador, que yo ya consolar al colegio. Y, además, se plantearon durante todo el primer año decirme yo era la "chica consolador," que claro como yo era negra, como iba a estar caliente todo el día, que me saqué, y que a nadie diga "no." **¿What? ¿Que?** ¡Digo es un **desodorante**! Nah, todo me decís magneto de consolador. Y ya de ahí en más… ¡Ah, no! ...empezaron con*

> *toda! ¡Que yo era una **prostituta**! ¡Que vivía pensando de **sexo**! ¡Que lo que me interesaba **coger**! ¡Que me **saqué**!*[31]
>
> So one day I brought my deodorant, I'll never forget this, I brought my deodorant. I took it out and automatically started to put it on. **Look at her! The phallic shape! My deodorant!** They started to say dildo, that I had used a dildo at school. And then they brought it up throughout the whole first year, calling me the "dildo girl," that of course since I'm a Black woman, I'm horny all day, I get off, I don't tell anyone "no." **What? What?** I mean, it's **deodorant**! Nah, they all called me a dildo magnet. And from there on…Ah no!... They started with everything! That I was a **prostitute**! That I was always thinking about **sex**! That what interested me was **fucking**! That I **got off**!

Estefanía recalled and performed this memory vividly for me, acting out how she had used her deodorant in the classroom and shifting her tone when voicing her peers. At times, she laughed softly to herself and shook her head as if in disbelief that her peers could have been so ridiculous and so mean.

Over the course of three and a half hours, Estefanía continued to share deeply personal and painful experiences with me. As Ochs and Capps (1996, 24) note, "[N]arratives often do not unfold parallel to the chronological ordering of events." Tangents, details, and new directions can emerge as the narrator actively creates meaning for past events. Estefanía's stories did not follow a neat chronology; they poured forth as a stream of consciousness, flowing over and between complex emotions. She described feeling abandoned and alone when her father died of cancer. She recalled becoming increasingly introverted and isolated as she moved through her school years. She told me, "Me volví antisocial, reservada, y bajaron mis notas, por contexto, donde estaba" (I became antisocial, reserved, and my grades dropped, for context, [from] where I had

[31] Many of the words that Estefanía uses in this part of her narrative are slang terms.

been). She was sent to a school psychologist because her teachers had noticed that her grades were falling and that she did not have friends in school. She described how her meetings with the school psychologist became a "refugio" (refuge). "Necesitaba tanta atención y que, que alguien se preocupara lo que a mí me pasaba...porque no tengo con quién hablarlo" (I needed so much attention and that, that someone cared what happened to me…because I have no one to talk to).

Eventually, Estefanía found a friend group outside of school, a group who shared her interests in video games. When she came to understand her sexual identity, she began to make gay and lesbian friends. Within this queer community, "No me sentía discriminada y al contrario sentía que eran mi familia*"* (I did not feel discriminated against, and to the contrary, I felt they were my family), she said. Her world seemed to exist outside of school; eventually, she dropped out. As a young adult, she told me, she considered going back to finish high school and even registered once, but then dropped out.

> *…lo dejé porque no me sentía cómoda tampoco. Era como...no sé. Nah, nah… me arrepiento un montón de haberme quedado libre de la secundaria es algo que no digo casi nunca porque no me gusta porque siento que ahí sí soy menos. Porque tengo tanta gente letrada y con tantas capacidades de desarrollador que yo siento que no soy capaz. […] Soy consciente que tengo que terminar y que es un trámite, porque hoy en día es un trámite, pero las herramientas que se me están dando no me complacen. No, no me siento cómoda.*
>
> …I dropped out because I didn't feel comfortable either. It was like…I don't know. I almost never say that I really regret being free from high school because I don't like it, because I feel that I'm less there. Because I have so many literate people with so much ability to develop that I feel like I'm not capable […] I'm aware that I need to finish and that it's a process, because today it's a process, but the tools that I'm provided don't suit me. I don't feel comfortable.

When we concluded our interview, I was somewhat awed that this confident, smart young woman could also have been the girl whom she had described. For her part, Estefanía said that she was surprised by how much had come up for her emotionally as she recalled these moments from her youth that she had not thought of for so long. As she sat across from me at her dining table, she began to consider whether perhaps these experiences were why she had never returned to school, as she had so often thought of doing. "Maybe that's why I never went back," she mused, now returning to English. "I never felt safe. The classroom was never a safe space for me."

The next time I saw Estefanía, at a community event, she threw her arms around me and jokingly declared me her "therapist" to those around us. I recall smiling somewhat nervously, as I was unsure how to feel about this faux title. For I felt that, in reality, I had done little during our time together but listen and attempt to communicate my empathy nonverbally as she unfolded the story of her experiences in the space between us. Struggling to know what to say, I had felt woefully inadequate as a witness to her story, much less her "therapist." I had found myself wishing that she had a more qualified interlocutor, and wishing even more that, in her younger years, there had been others who had asked how she was doing, and who had seen a young person who did not feel safe in the classroom because of the color of her skin, her hair, her heritage, and her sexuality.

Affirmative Interventions

If Estefanía's story highlights how a lack of effective adult response can shape a young person's educational experiences, other young people's stories illustrate the power of

affirmative interventions in how youth view their schools and themselves. Among the young people whom I interviewed, those with close family members involved in local Afrodescendant activism were more likely to have had such an intervention and to have positive reflections on their educational experiences.

Lucía's older sister, Martina, was a twenty-five-year-old architecture student living and working in the capital. We met for an interview in a small historic café in San Telmo one afternoon after she got off work. Like her sister, Martina resembled her aunt, a prominent Afrodescendant activist of Cape Verdean descent, in both demeanor and appearance. Sincere and intelligent, she had a relatively fair complexion, dark curls, and round eyes. As she began telling me about her educational experiences, Martina recalled a response to a school incident that was wholly different from what Estefanía and many other young Afrodescendants described. She began,

> *En la escuela, me ha pasado un episodio que—tenía más o menos diez años—en el que me peleo con una chica, era un grupito, un grupito se peleó contra otro por una cuestión tonta… y, eh, bueno… Estábamos en el aula y entra una mamá de una de las chicas entra la escuela, no sé como cualquier entró. Sí, estaba muy enojada porque nos habíamos peleado con sus hijas, que eran mellizas, y entró y me apunto a mí directamente y me dijo que era una negra villera, era una negra, y no sé cuánto que me había comportado como una negra porque me había peleado con las hijas. Imagínate para un chico de esa edad que entre una persona ajena a la escuela. Interrumpa la clase cuando estás tranquila—era muy aplicada—y te descoloca totalmente. Un chico de esa edad. Mi reacción fue absolutamente nula. No sé nada. Creo que no llegué a reaccionar, pero en mi caso se dieron cuenta que algo me pasaba. Sé que me quedé mal. Yo ahora no lo recuerdo mucho. Recuerdo el episodio y recuerdo todo lo que pasó después; pero, lo más raro, no recuerdo que sentí en ese momento.*
>
> In school, an incident happened to me that—I was about ten years old—in which I fought with a girl, it was a small group, a small group fought against another for a dumb reason…and, eh, well…We were in the classroom and a mother of one of the girls enters the school, I don't know

> how she entered. Yes, she was very angry because we had quarreled with her daughters, who were twins, and she entered and took aim at me directly and told me I was a black slumdog, I was a black girl, and that I don't know how much I had acted like a black girl because I had fought with her daughters. Imagine for a child of that age to have a person enter from outside the school. Interrupts the class when you are calm—I was very hardworking—and totally takes you out of it. A child of that age. My reaction was absolutely non-existent. I know nothing. I think I did not get to react, but in my case, they knew something was happening to me. I know it didn't sit well with me. Now, I don't remember much. I remember the episode and I remember everything that happened after; but, the strangest thing, I don't remember how I felt in that moment.

Martina begins her story by describing a racializing incident from her early school years, when the mother of a child with whom she had quarreled entered her classroom and verbally accosted her with racist epithets. Twice, she calls my attention to her age at the time, as if to highlight the obvious power disparity between her, a child, and an adult hurling insults in an educational setting. This incident that Martina shared with me was consistent with experiences that other youth shared; where it differed was in the events that followed. Martina continued,

> *Pero mi mamá se dio cuenta que algo me pasaba y cuando le cuento me dice, "Tenemos que hablar con tu tía [name omitted]" Bueno, hablan con mi tía. Mi tía cita una reunión en la escuela. Citó una reunión en la escuela porque me habían dicho que esta cuestión, no solo por… bueno, sí, porque me habían dicho negra y porque también hablamos de la circunstancia en la que esta mujer entró al aula. Y entonces—fue muy gracioso—hace la reunión con la directora y la madre, la madre de la chica que me había insultado. Bueno mi tía explicándole y educando a estas personas. Claro, también lo que sucede en las escuelas, las profesoras, los docentes o las autoridades no están preparados para estas cuestiones. También suelen naturalizarlas también. Buena discúlpate y termina allí. Es mucho más profundo la cuestión. Bueno, mi tía explicándole cuáles eran sus orígenes, a qué se dedicaba esa queja en el tema de los derechos humanos, específicamente de los africanos y afrodescendientes. Toda su tarea y el porqué estaba mal lo que había la situación, la que había sucedido y terminó todo. Se pusieron a llorar de la emoción y que tan orgulloso en mi tía y que no sé qué bueno. Pero más allá de eso, yo creo que esa persona le quedó en su memoria y no estuvo*

bien lo que hizo y lo que dijo y cómo me refirió. Yo creo que no sé si en algún momento que se le vuelva a cruzar por ahí lo va a pensar dos veces cuando diga eso.

But my mom realized something had happened to me and when I told her, she told me, "We have to talk to your Aunt [name omitted]." Well, they talk to my aunt. My aunt schedules a meeting. She had the meeting in the school because they were telling me that this issue, not only about… well, yes, because they had called me "negra" and because we also talked about the circumstances in which this woman entered the classroom. And then—it was very funny—she set a meeting with the director and the mother, the mother of the girl who had insulted me. OK, my aunt explained it and educated these people. Of course, also what happens in the schools, the professors, teachers, or authorities are not prepared for these issues. "OK, I'm sorry," and it ends there. The issue is much deeper. OK, my aunt explained what origins are, what she was doing about human-rights complaints, specifically for Africans and Afrodescendants, all of her work and why it was bad what happened in this situation, what had occurred, and she ended it all. They started crying with emotion and I was so proud of my aunt and, I don't know, how great. But, beyond that, I think that this person, it stayed in her memory and that it wasn't good what she did and what she said and how she referred to me. I think that, I don't know, if in some moment she'll be crossed again, she'll think twice when saying that.

Martina proudly recalled her aunt staging an intervention at her school following the racializing incident in her classroom. Her recollection of the event at the time of our conversation, years later, was that it was funny to see this adult being educated so thoroughly by her aunt; the incident had been transformed into a moment of learning for the adults and the other young people present. Martina concluded her story with a brief reflection on what that intervention had meant for her.

Yo no me sentí mal, sino que lo tomé como...como que… como que me sentí bien por el otro lado. Lo aprendió, digamos. Aprendió que estaba mal, o por lo menos eso demostró en su momento. Esas son las cosas que, también desde chica, yo creo es… como cápsula, o viste, mucha ... Toda de esta educación fue peor. Más bien mi tía… bueno, mi mamá no es afro, pero mi mamá aprendió muchísimo de mi tía, particularmente. Mi mamá también me preparó muy bien, digamos, impresiona con una autoestima, no es una autoestima "me siento lindo," sino una autoestima que yo no soy menos que nadie porque soy negra. Entonces eso desde chica esta,

> *esta situación particular, yo creo que me, me dio, me clickea...Me hizo un "click" en la cabeza.*
>
> I didn't feel bad, just that I took it as…like, like I felt good on the other side. She learned it, let's say. She learned that it was wrong, or at least it was proved [wrong] at that time. Those are things that, since I was a girl, I think is… like a seed. You see, a lot…all of this education [in school] was worse. Rather, my aunt… my mom is not *Afro*, but my mom learned a lot, particularly from my aunt. My mother also prepared me very well, she impresses with self-esteem, it's not a self-esteem that "I feel pretty," but a self-esteem that I'm not less than anyone else because I'm Black. Then since I was a girl, this, this situation especially, I think it gave me…it clicked… It gave me a "click" in my head.

Martina ends her narrative of the classroom incident and the intervention that followed it by analyzing it as a formative educational experience, and she drew comparisons between what she learned in school and what she learned from her mother and her aunt. Throughout our conversation, Martina referred to Black consciousness as a "semilla" (seed) or "cápsula" (seed pod) that needed to be planted or nurtured. What her aunt had done in this intervention was plant a seed for her self-esteem and sense of belonging.

Similar to Martina, Ana also had family members who were active in local Afro-diasporic community activism. Ana was the seventeen-year-old daughter of Marcela, the president of Agrupación Xangô. She described an educational experience that differed greatly from those of most of her peers in the Agrupación. "Nunca me discriminaban" (They never discriminated against me), she said of her early school years at a private Catholic primary school. In fourth grade, she transferred to a public school in La Boca where, she said, she experienced discrimination only one time, when another student called her *negra.* Like Martina, she told her mother of the encounter and it was quickly addressed at the school. "Después el chico me pidió disculpas, la profesora habló. No me

discriminaron nunca más" (Afterwards, the boy said that he was sorry, the teacher talked. They didn't discriminate against me anymore). When I asked Ana about the Independence Day plays so often cited by her peers in Agrupación Xangô, she said that she had played the *dama antigua*—the role of colonial lady that Elena had been denied.

> *Cuando yo era chica y a mi mama le mandaron una nota de qué, de qué tenía que actuar, mi mamá se dijo, bueno, porque soy negra me van a dar para vender empanadas, pero le sorprendió porque bien dijo que yo tenía que actuar la dama antigua.*
>
> When I was little and they sent my mom a note that, that said what I had to play, my mom said well, because I'm Black they'll give me [the role] of selling empanadas, but she was surprised because it said that I had to play the colonial lady.

Ana provided this memory to me as an example illustrating the absence of racism in her school. Being assigned the role of the *dama antigua*, she acknowledged, was contrary to her mother's expectations and different from the experiences of many of her peers in Agrupación Xangô. Still, she earnestly assured me that she had not encountered racism at school. "**¡No me discriminan!** No siento que me discriminan. No sé porque... ¿que no soy negra? **¡Mira! Soy muy negra.** Que no sé que...Pero no, no me discriminan. Capaz que en la calle, sí, pero dentro de un aula... no" (**They do not discriminate against me!** I don't feel that they discriminate against me. I don't know why…I'm not Black? **Look! I'm very Black.** I don't know… but, no, they don't discriminate against me. Maybe in the streets, yes, but inside the classroom…no).

When I spoke to her mother, however, Marcela laughed and shared a different version of events leading up to Ana's experience in the Independence Day play. According to Marcela, Ana was originally assigned the role of the *negrita vendedora de*

empanadas (black empanada vendor). Marcela had spoken to Ana's teacher and demanded that her daughter be given the role of the *dama antigua*; that was how Ana had ended up with the part. That Ana's recollection of the event was incorrect is not in itself surprising, considering that the play had occurred when she was in primary school. More interesting is the relationship between what she thought she remembered and how she felt about her educational experiences more broadly. In contrast to Elena, who saw performing *la negrita* in her school's play as a primary racializing encounter, Ana believed her classroom to be a space free of discrimination.

Conclusions:

"Le decían 'Obama'"

On the first day of November 2016, a thirteen-year-old boy found his father's gun and committed suicide in a barrio of Zarate, a small city at the northeastern edge of the province of Buenos Aires. His mother came home that day to find him lying on the floor, dead from a gunshot to the head. The few short news stories that aired in the days that followed reported that he had been a victim of bullying at school, where the other students "le decían 'Obama' porque es morochito" (called him "Obama" because he is dark-skinned). According to his brother, the boy had recently changed schools, in part because of the teasing and "maltratamiento" (mistreatment) he had been receiving from his peers.

Tellingly, much of the news coverage was conspicuously devoid of any commentary on the racial nature of this taunting; neither did it make connections to a larger context of racial discrimination in Argentina. To much of the Argentine audience

observing this coverage, it was another sad tale fueling growing public concerns over school bullying and institutional handling thereof. To the Afrodescendant youth with whom I worked in Buenos Aires, it was rare public evidence of a lived reality too often left unaddressed in their schools and communities. When I first began meeting with the young people of Agrupación Xangô in the early months of 2017, this story was still fresh in their minds as both a tragic confirmation and a call to action for the young activists. In their meetings, the young people spoke earnestly about needing to address the discrimination that they witnessed and experienced in their schools. Although news reports did not indicate whether the boy or his family identified as Afrodescendant, the young activists often referenced the story to foreground the urgency of the problems that they faced in schools.

I close this chapter with this story in order to underscore the high stakes of racial discrimination in the classroom, as understood and experienced by some of the Afrodescendant youth whom I came to know in Buenos Aires. The news coverage of this event echoes the interconnected racialization and invisibilization that so many young people expressed in their narratives. In a social context in which Blackness is institutionally rendered invisible and unimportant, the racism that underlies being ridiculed as "Obama" passes beneath public awareness. A 2010 study conducted with eight- to eleven-year-old students found that deemphasizing racial distinctions in education conditions young people to be less sensitive to recognizing discrimination when it occurs, hampering student reporting and adult intervention (Apfelbaum et al. 2010). The erasure and distortion of Afro-Argentine history and the denial of

contemporary Afrodescendant communities cultivates hostile environments for young Black people in Argentina.

In this chapter, I have presented the narratives that young people shared with me over the course of my fieldwork in order to illuminate the politics of belonging that Afrodescendant youth navigate and resist in their schools. It is a reality that receives little, if any, public attention or concern. The photographs taken by Julieta and Catalina that are included in this chapter (Figures 6 and 7) reveal the challenges of rendering visible that which is absent. An empty classroom. A blank chalkboard. These were the symbolic means through which the girls attempted to bring into focus the forms of racialization and invisibilization that they encounter in the classroom. By providing their *testimonios* in their interviews with me, Afrodescendant youth countered the hegemonic "common sense" that Argentina is a country where *no hay racismo* (there is no racism). Their experiences speak directly to the need for critical race education in schools. In the chapters that follow, the sharing of educational narratives will be revealed as a critical means through which young people enact activist identities and politics.

Chapter Four

Activism as Counter-Classroom:

Citizenship Education in the Afro-Diasporic Community

Tamara sank into an oversized couch at the community center where the Jóvenes Promotores de Agrupación Xangô met one or two times a week. She and her cousin Ana had arrived early that day with their younger siblings in tow, and Tamara sat down for an interview with me while the others entertained themselves. The fifteen-year-old had been involved in the activist organization Agrupación Xangô for almost two years, having been recruited to participate in the youth section by Marcela, the president of the organization at the time of my research. The reserved teen was a bit nervous at the beginning of the interview but found her footing when I asked her to describe the Agrupación to me. "La Agrupación Xangô es un lugar donde hablamos sobre la discriminación y el racismo" (The Agrupación Xangô is a place where we talk about discrimination and racism), she began. "Yo me informan muchas cosas que no sabía y esto me ayudó, me ayuda. Ahora para salir adelante si me preguntan algo como '¿De dónde sos? ¿De dónde venís?,' sé a responder. Antes quepas no les respondía […] Más confiada estoy ahora" (They taught me about many things that I didn't know, and this helped me, it helps me. Now, if I go out and they ask me something like "Where are you from? Where do you come from?," I know how to respond. Before, maybe I didn't respond […] I'm more confident now). Now, as an active member of the Agrupación, she tells them that she is "afroargentina" (Afro-Argentine).

Tamara went on to tell me about the *charlas* (talks) that the Agrupación youth had given at schools to educate other young people about Afro-Argentine history and how to speak out against the discrimination that they routinely face. Such initiatives, in her view, were critical to deconstructing the myth of Black disappearance that persists in schools.

> *En la educación, o sea, nosotros, los negros, no existimos. Como que todo, todos, todos los negros murieron de una fiebre amarilla y la guerra.* ***¡Y existimos! ¡Hay afroargentinos en Argentina!*** *Ellos dicen que no, que no existimos y por eso ese concepto de que estemos en la educación de meternos. O sea que estemos reconocidos porque nosotros hicimos mucho acá. Más que nada, las guerras las ganaron gracias a los antepasados de nosotros que nos mandan primero como bala cañón decían. Y más que nada ganaron las guerras es gracias a los negros antepasados. Y es como que no estábamos reconocidos y eso como que te duele. ¿Como se dice que los negros no existen?* ***¡Existimos!*** *¡Ya, en cambio,* ***estamos acá!*** *Y ellos me a decir no existen ni estamos acá. Y* ***esa*** *es la parte que nos incluyan en la educación. De que cuenten la* ***verdadera historia****.*
>
> In education, I mean, we, Black people, we don't exist. Like, all the Black people died of yellow fever and war. And **we exist! There are Afro-Argentines in Argentina**! They say no, we don't exist and that is why there is this idea for us to be involved in education. In other words, that we be recognized because we did a lot here. More than anything, the wars were won thanks to our ancestors who were sent first into battle, like cannon fodder, they say. And more than anything, the wars were won thanks to the Black ancestors. And it's like we weren't recognized, and that kind of hurts you. How can you say that Blacks don't exist? **We exist!** Or rather, **we're here**! And they tell me that they didn't exist and we're not here. And **that** is the part we include in education. We tell **the true (his)story**.[32]

Throughout our conversation, Tamara repeatedly credited the Agrupación with giving her the confidence to speak up for herself and her community in the classroom, and with teaching her the "true history" of Afrodescendant contributions to Argentina. Tamara was not the only young person with this perspective. Tamara's cousin, Ana, often

[32] The Spanish word *historia* can be translated as either "history" or "story."

described herself as “tímida” (shy) but credited the organization with helping her to become “más fuerte” (stronger), particularly in asserting her *afroargentinidad*. Joaquin and Julieta both described how the Agrupación had taught them about their history and rights as citizens. Indeed, most of the Agrupación youth testified to having never been exposed to Afro-Argentine history before their involvement with the organization. Becoming activists with the Agrupación provided them with, in their words, “herramientas” (tools)—critical consciousness, strategies, and resources for countering the discrimination and racism that they encounter each day in their schools and, more broadly, their country.

Baldridge et al. (2017, 286) found that young people often frame their participation in community-based educational spaces “by contrasting their experience in these spaces with negative experiences in schools.” This observation held true for the Agrupación youth. In the previous chapter, youth *testimonios* revealed that their schools reproduced dominant narratives that limit Afrodescendant young people’s sense of belonging. Youth like Tamara described how Afro-diasporic community activism, conversely, provided them with alternative ways of seeing themselves and acting as citizens. This chapter is told through a series of ethnographic vignettes from my fieldwork with Agrupación Xangô. These vignettes follow youth activists as they move through and between various community spaces and contexts. I propose that this diverse field of Afro-diasporic community activism provides youth with a *counter-classroom* for critical citizenship education.

Levinson (2005, 336) has defined citizenship education as “the efforts to educate members of social groups to imagine their social belonging and exercise their

participation as democratic citizens." "Taking the study of citizenship education outside the school walls," Abu El-Haj (2009, 2) explores how community spaces can provide an "alternative site for citizenship education." Following the lead of a growing body of research on community-based citizenship education, this chapter examines activism as a *counter-classroom*, calling attention to both *what* youth learn and *how* they learn through activism that counters dominant paradigms of citizenship. In their Afro-diasporic community, youth activists engage as active participants in a form of citizenship education that is based in dialogue and praxis. By hearing and sharing each other's *historias*—their stories and their histories—youth learn to counter hegemonic narratives that perpetuate Afrodescendant invisibility in Argentina.

Community Activism as Citizenship Education: Counter-Storytelling and Praxis

Research on youth civic engagement and civic-identity formation has traditionally centered on formal citizenship education in classrooms and activities such as volunteering, community service, voting, and participating in representational politics in schools and organizations (Nenga 2012; Nenga and Taft 2013; Rubin 2007; Youniss and Yates 1997; 1999). Utilizing such models to gauge youth civic engagement has led some scholars to conclude that minority youth are less likely to be civically active (Kelly 2009). Structural barriers faced by youth of color have been shown to impede their access to these traditional civic-development opportunities and to inhibit their sense of belonging and "social trust" in civic institutions (Flanagan, Levine, and Settersten 2007; Ginwright 2010b; Kelly 2009; Morimoto 2013).

Yet, scholarship has also highlighted the implicit white normativity of previously studied modes of youth citizenship education and engagement and have questioned the understandings of citizenship that they engender (Bocci 2015; Mitchell, Donahue, and Young-Law 2012; Morimoto 2013). For example, Morimoto's (2013, 165) research on white youth civic engagement found that volunteerism often reduced civic activity to "helping the disadvantaged" and did not lead youth to pursue broader institutional or social change. Similarly, Collins (2009, 28) has asserted that the education that young people receive in schools does not support or foster critical youth political activity; rather, students and teachers alike "become passive consumers of schooling, as opposed to active citizens of their school communities."

Youth researchers have also challenged deficit models that position youth of color and their communities as civically disengaged, disenfranchised, or otherwise in need of "development" (Noguera, Ginwright, and Cammarota 2006; O'Donoghue 2006). As Rubin (2007) has asserted, outside the classroom, racialized young people's everyday lived experiences of citizenship influence their civic-identity formation in profound ways. Scholars have ethnographically explored the social worlds of youth of color in order to broaden understandings of youth civic engagement to include a range of activities, from spoken-word poetry to protesting the expansion of juvenile-detention centers (Ginwright and Cammarota 2007; Cammarota 2008). The communities of color to which young people belong are not lacking in civic-learning possibilities; they have proven historically to provide critical educational contexts for young people to develop and act politically and civically (Noguera, Ginwright, and Cammarota 2006; Rickford 2019).

In this chapter, I examine Afro-diasporic community activism and spaces as a *counter-classroom* that provides Afrodescendant youth with opportunities to participate in a form of citizenship education that challenges the narratives of racialized citizenship that are reproduced in schools. O'Donoghue (2006, 231) uses Fraser's (1990) concept of "counterpublics" to theorize community-based youth organizations as necessary spaces for young people to learn to articulate political critiques and "become public actors." Fraser (1990, 67) defines "counterpublics" as discursive arenas "where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs." Extending these previous analyses, I define a *counter-classroom* as an alternative educational space in which young people can learn critical civic practices and cultivate oppositional structures of belonging. By using the term *counter-classroom*, I index both the political and pedagogical dimensions of youth civic development that occur through participation in community activism. Furthermore, I emphasize the alternative mechanisms of that pedagogy. I find that Afro-diasporic activism, in contrast to the education that youth receive in schools, which limits their agency and belonging as Argentine citizens, offers young people a praxis-based, dialogic citizenship education through which they learn to challenge dominant narratives.

Over the last fifteen years, activist educational anthropologists and social-justice-education scholars have drawn on the fields of critical pedagogy and popular education (Freire 1970; Giroux 2001; hooks 2010) to examine how activist organizations and community spaces promote youth civic development by fostering young people's "critical consciousness": their understanding of systems of oppression and their ability to

act upon that knowledge to promote social change. This conjoining of critical reflection and action is what Freire (1970) called *praxis*. In the Freirean tradition, a praxis-based pedagogy is one founded in a process of learning and knowledge production through critical analysis of oppression and social action against it. This kind of education is not passively received; rather, critical consciousness is arrived at through dialogic learning and action. As Ginwright and Camarota (2007) discuss, critical consciousness is developed when youth participate in collective intergenerational dialogue and civic praxis through local community organizing. Indeed, dialogue is central in Freire's critical pedagogy, for "it is in speaking their word that people, by naming the world, transform it" (Freire 1970, 88).

Critical race theory (CRT) has similarly framed this "naming the world" as storytelling, drawing on marginalized communities' use of stories, such as *testimonio* and Afro-diasporic oral traditions, to foster cultural resilience, critique systems of oppression, and promote social change (Delgado and Stefancic 2013; Solórzano and Yosso 2002). As Delgado (2013, 71) asserts, "Stories, parables, chronicles, and narratives are powerful means of destroying mind-set—the bundle of presumption, received wisdom, and shared understandings" that anchor racism in public consciousness. Following CRT scholars in the field of education, I draw on the concept of "counter-storytelling" as a method of using personal experiences and community histories to subvert "majoritarian stories" and "master narratives" that sustain racism and white privilege (Solórzano and Yosso 2002). I find that Afro-diasporic activism provides what Rosario-Ramos and Johnson (2013) call "counter-storytelling contexts": educational spaces through which youth learn and co-construct community knowledge and resistance. In this sense, "community becomes a

classroom that fosters knowledge and skills, as well as enables critiques of, and action against, unequal and oppressive social and economic conditions" (Rosario-Ramos and Johnson 2013).

Agrupación Xangô:

Training Youth "for Inclusion and Social Justice"

> Xangô era el dios de la justicia, el dios del fuego, el dios de la percusión, el dios del trueno […] el es un dios de la cultura africana, de la matriz religiosa […] Xangô es el dio de la balanza, del equilibro.
>
> Xangô was the god of justice, the god of fire, the god of drums, the god of thunder […] he is a god of African culture, of the religious matrix […] Xangô is the god of scales, of balance.
>
> Carlos Álvarez Nazareno, Member of Agrupación Xangô

On the Agrupación Xangô logo, next to the words "por la inclusión y justicia social" (for inclusion and social justice), is the double-headed axe that is emblematic of Xangô, an *orisha* (Yoruba deity) associated with justice and resistance who historically has been widely venerated in Afro-Latin American religions. Carlos explained to me that selecting the name Xangô was intended to reference many of the Agrupación's collective aims—they wanted to create a "horizontal" civic association for promoting social justice and destigmatizing Blackness and Afro-diasporic culture in Argentina. He went on to say that they chose the name Xangô as a form of resistance against the colonial erasure of African heritage and identity.

> *Le pusimos también Xangô con "X" porque también tenía que ver con esta cuestión de la búsqueda de la identidad, ¿no? Bueno, Un poco también en honor a este movimiento de los derechos de liberación que se vio en Estados Unidos con Malcolm X. Decía, bueno, nosotros tenemos el nombre de nuestros esclavistas. Mi nombre es Carlos Álvarez Nazareno, o sea, nada que ver... O sea que esos apellidos no tienen nada que ver con*

> *mi historia ancestral. Sí, obviamente tienen que ver con esta historia contemporánea, producto de la trata esclavista de mis abuelos. Pero son los nombres, los apellidos de los esclavistas.*
>
> We also put Xangô with an "X" because it also had to do with this question of the search for identity, right?[33] Well, a little bit also in honor of the liberation rights movement that was seen in the United States with Malcolm X. He said, well, we have the name of our enslavers. My name is Carlos Álvarez Nazareno, that is nothing to do…in other words, those last names have nothing to do with my ancestral history. Yes, obviously they have to do with this contemporary history as a result of the slave trade of my grandparents. But they are the names, the surnames of the enslavers.

Agrupación Xangô, as an activist organization and informal educational space, was fundamentally crafted in opposition to systems of oppression and dominant narratives of Blackness in Argentina. Founded in 2010 by Carlos and other Afrodescendant activists, their activities have ranged from organizing conferences on media representation to protesting in the streets against institutional violence. The Agrupación was heavily involved in such community-wide projects as petitioning for legislative changes and organizing the Quilombo festival. Carlos told me that, early on, the organization held some educational events on African dance and *candombe* to promote Afrodescendant culture, but it was really when Marcela began to be more involved in the organization that education and youth projects became a more central objective. At the time of my fieldwork, Marcela was a kindergarten teacher studying for her Profesorado de Nivel Primario (teaching credential in primary education); she had three young children and a passion for making education more inclusive and just. As an educator, she spoke to me about the invisibility of Afrodescendants in education and how she had witnessed teachers wholly unprepared to address racial exclusion and bullying in

[33] The name of the *orisha* is more commonly spelled Shango or Changó.

the classroom. In 2014, the Agrupación collaborated with a local teachers' union to create *Afroargentin@s: Guía para Docentes sobre Afrodescendientes y Cultura Afro* (Afro-Argentines: Guide for Teachers on Afrodescendants and *Afro* Culture), a teaching guide providing readings and lesson plans that could be used to educate students about Afrodescendant history and culture in Argentina.

In the Agrupación, she told me, "nos preocupaba de qué manera como nosotros como colectivo podíamos ayudar a nuestros jóvenes en el tema de la deserción escolar" (we were concerned about how we as a group could help our young people on the issue of dropping out of school). The Agrupación began to focus on youth projects in order to help young people, as Marcela phrased it, "creerse que pueden llegar a más" (believe that they can be more). In 2015, the Agrupación coordinated with a local community development center, a Centro Integrador Comunitario (CIC),[34] to organize a youth community-health project aimed at HIV and sexual-health education and awareness. During their meetings on health in the Afro-diasporic community, conversations shifted to issues of racial discrimination and Afrodescendant heritage. As Catalina described it, "Empezamos a hablar más sobre el tema de la cultura y ahí fue cuando me interesaba más todavía" (We started to talk more about culture and that's when I was even more interested). It was through this project that many of the youth members with whom I worked came to the Agrupación, as did Lujan, who became the official coordinator of the youth section. Lujan was Carlos's sister but had not been heavily involved in the organization until her daughter, Delfina, participated in the community-health project.

[34] Centros Integradores Comunitarios (CIC) are community centers run under the Ministerio de Desarrollo Social (Ministry of Social Development).

Over the next year, the Jóvenes Promotores de Agrupación Xangô began to take shape as a core group of young people became interested in advocating for their rights and learning more about their culture.

When I entered the organization, the Jóvenes Promotores de Agrupación Xangô met weekly on Thursdays and often got together on other weeknights or on the weekends for various events and activities related to their work. The learning that took place extended beyond their physical meeting space; the meetings were often a staging ground for actions that the youth took both within and outside of their communities. In their meetings, the youth planned their participation in public and community events; for example, they crafted a presentation to give at Festival Mandinga, a three-day event celebrating Afrodescendant culture held at the Centro Cultural de la Memoria Haroldo Conti, a cultural center run by the national Secretary of Human Rights. As Taft (2011, 100) observed in researching girl activists across South and North America, "the vast majority of their political events and activities are designed to educate." The youth organized *encuentros* (events) to bring Afrodescendant young people together in order to build community and to educate them about their community's history and resistance. As Tamara mentioned in the interview excerpt that opens this chapter, the youth also organized *charlas* (talks) at local schools to introduce the Afro-Argentine history and discussions of racism that they knew to be absent from the official curriculum. The adult members of the Agrupación helped to coordinate these activities and events but encouraged the youth to take on responsibility and leadership in their projects. As Carlos phrased it, the adults were providing a form of activist "capacitación" (training) that was responsive to the young people's own interests and commitments.

> *…queríamos capacitarles para que ellos siguieran capacitando y fortaleciendo a nuestra comunidad desde su aprendizaje, de su compromiso comunitario […] los jóvenes fueron llegando, llegando con su impronta con ellos y nosotros, los no tan jóvenes, nuestro rol es, fue y es digamos, impulsar proyectos de empoderamiento de esos jóvenes.*
>
> …we wanted to train them so that they could continue training and strengthening our community from their learning, from their community commitment […] the young people were arriving, arriving ready to make their mark and we, the not as young, our role is to, was and is, let's say, promoting empowerment projects for these young people.

During my time with the Agrupación, the scope of the youth section's activities was ever broadening as the adult organizers sought to craft meaningful "empowerment" opportunities and the youth members introduced their own ideas for initiating change in their schools and communities.

One Thursday evening in July, I found myself sitting with Catalina, Julieta, Ana, and Emilia, a young social-work student who had been working with the Agrupación. We chatted casually as we waited on more of the youth to arrive for our weekly meeting. We would be starting late, but this was an established norm for our group. In fact, I had come to enjoy this time before the meetings when the youth would sit together, passing around a bag of cookies or chips purchased from the grocery across the street and sharing stories and ideas with one another. Earlier that July day, we had been notified through our group WhatsApp chat that Carlos and Lujan would not be at the meeting and Marcela would be running late. In other words, the youth were encouraged to take responsibility to move forward on the organization's projects without any of the Agrupación's adult coordinators in attendance. And so, after some idle chatting, Julieta pulled a notebook from her backpack, signaling that it was time to get to work.

Catalina and Julieta took the lead, laying out the youth's top priorities for the coming weeks. Much had been planned. The Agrupación was organizing an event to bring together and *capacitar* (train/educate) other local Afrodescendant youth on Afrodescendant history, culture, and rights. The youth were also planning a series of *charlas* (talks) to be carried out in four different schools in the capital with the help of Emilia and two other social-work students, for whom the project was part of their coursework. When the topic of the *charlas* came up, Emilia retrieved a proposal that she had been working on with her classmates in order to go over it with the youth. The young people discussed giving all of the teachers in the schools a teaching guide that the Agrupación Xangô had created. Created in 2014 in collaboration with a local teachers' union, the guide provided readings and lesson plans that could be used to teach about Afrodescendant history and culture in Argentina. They wanted the teachers to be involved in the *charlas* so that they could continue incorporating insights and aspects of Afro-Argentine history into their classes. Emilia described how she imagined these *charlas* as dynamic conversations rather than didactic lecturing, and the youth nodded in agreement. Catalina suggested that perhaps they should include some kind of role-playing activity, so as to engage students in a discussion through acting out everyday micro-aggressions and talking through them.

At this point, Julieta launched into a story about a recent racist incident at her school in which a student had used a racial slur in the classroom. From there, the conversation quickly evolved into a broad discussion among the teens about discrimination; they debated whether or not Afrodescendant youth encounter more racialization in public or private schools and lamented the seeming willful public non-

recognition of Afrodescendants. In the midst of this discussion, Julieta stated emphatically, "Puedo pararme en el medio de la calle, en el Congreso, y gritar, '**¡Estoy acá, existo, hay racismo**!' y la gente sigue pasándome" (I could stand in the middle of the street, in the Congress [plaza], and scream, "**I'm here, I exist, there is racism!**" and people would keep passing me by). In response, Catalina jumped up to enact the scene Julieta described. "**¡Hay afrodescendientes! ¡Hay racismo!**" (**There are Afrodescendants! There is racism!**), she called out to the imaginary pedestrians as the other youth laughed. The youth began to consider what kinds of visibility strategies could work to penetrate public nonrecognition. They discussed making and sharing YouTube videos about the forms of discrimination that they encounter daily. Julieta at first wanted to secretly record racist offenders, but I suggested that, for reasons of ethics and her own personal safety, this might not be the best approach. Another of the teens put forward the idea of re-enacting these encounters, and a few started play-acting various scenarios. Around this time, Marcela arrived, and the group refocused to the immediate tasks at hand for the week and returned to discussing their upcoming activities.

In this brief vignette, it is possible to recognize several means through which the education that Afrodescendant youth participated in as activists in the Agrupación counters the experiences that they had in their schools. The young people engaged in discussions about pedagogy and often took on roles as educators. In this way, the Agrupación youth were invited to reimagine educational processes and see themselves and their communities as possessors of critical knowledge. For our Photovoice project, Delfina chose to photograph publications authored by the Agrupación and other Afrodescendant activist organizations and scholars, and her commentary identified these

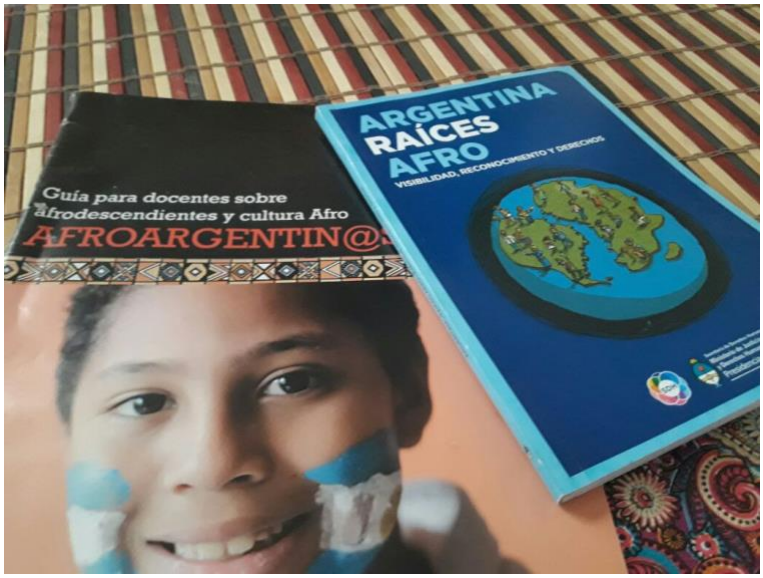


Figure 8: "Educación." Photograph and commentary by Delfina, age 15.

publications as critical community assets (Figure 8). In the image is the Agrupación's teaching guide and *Argentina Raíces Afro: Visibilidad, Reconocimiento y Derechos* (Argentina's *Afro* Roots: Visibility, Recognition, and Rights), a book published by the Secretary of Human Rights as the product of an Afrodescendant conference that Agrupación Xangô helped to organize in 2013. Her commentary for the photograph reads, "A través de libros, guías, se trata de visibilizar la historia Afro en Argentina para poder dar a conocer y enseñar la historia que no todos cuentan acerca de los Afroargentinos y la historia Afro... conocimiento, cultura, historia, educación, comunidad" (Through books, guides, it is possible to make *Afro* history visible, to publicize and teach the story that not everyone tells about Afro-Argentines and *Afro* history…knowledge, culture, history, education, community). Youth learned to mobilize Afrodescendant histories and resources that "filled the silences left by the official curriculum" (Rubin and Cervinkova 2019, 9).

More broadly, as a context for counter-storytelling, the Agrupación provided a necessary arena for youth to openly discuss, debate, and critique systems of power and oppression in their schools and communities. In our meetings, the youth shared and reflected on their experiences and, just as important, worked to transform them into social action. A discussion among the teens about Julieta's racializing experience in class created a space and context for conceptualizing modes of resistance and promoting social change. In contrast to the invisibilization that youth experienced in school, the praxis-based pedagogy of the *counter-classroom* cultivated youth possibility and agency.

"Hermanxs" and Movimiento Afrocultural:

Learning in Community Counter-Storytelling Contexts

Unlike many community-based "alternative" sites of citizenship education that have previously been studied, Agrupación Xangô was not an after-school program. Although the group's activities occurred outside of school hours, the very term "program" implies a structure and plan unlike the fluid and ever-adapting relationships, practices, and projects that characterized the Agrupación and the community spaces that the youth inhabited. In a very real sense, the youth were part of an activist organization; they played an integral role in planning their organization's initiatives and shaping its pedagogy. The young members of the Agrupación moved within and among various community spaces, building intergenerational relationships and participating in dialogues from which they learned and to which they contributed. The entire Afro-diasporic community, not just the Agrupación's meeting space, was their counter-classroom.

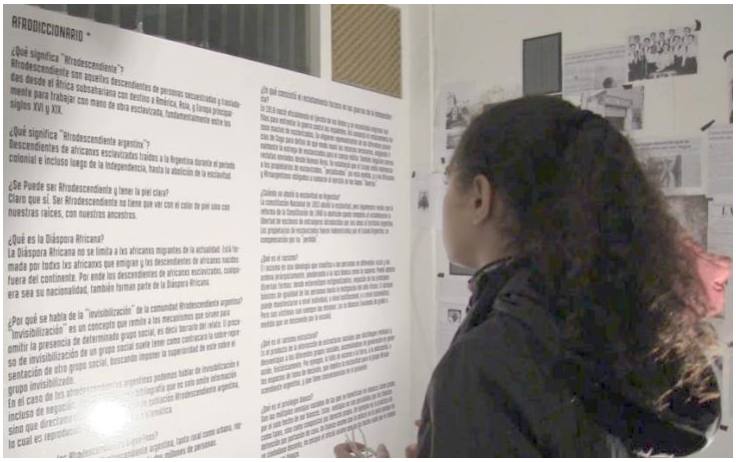
One Monday in June, I got a brief message from Carlos via WhatsApp telling me that on Wednesday the youth section would be visiting an exhibit titled "Hermanxs" (Brothers/Sisters) at a cultural center run by "neonazi antiracistas" (anti-racist neo-Nazis). As one might imagine, I was perplexed and curious about everything relating to this event. On Wednesday, I dutifully showed up at the address provided to me and immediately thought that I must be in the wrong place. I had walked up to what appeared to be a boxing club. Eventually I spotted a sign saying "La Cultura del Barrio" (The Neighborhood Culture), the name that Carlos had given to me, and I went inside. After hesitantly asking about an event, I was directed to a steep staircase, at the top of which was a large room that served as a gallery space.

I later learned that this multi-purpose center was run not by neo-Nazis, but by a group of self-proclaimed "skinheads antiracistas" (anti-racist skinheads). A member of the club told us that they wanted to reclaim the term, bringing *skinheads* back to its working-class, dissident roots. They positioned themselves as "parte de la escena cultural alternativa" (part of the alternative cultural scene), and their blog proclaimed, "Nos organizamos contra el machismo, el patriarcado, la heteronorma, la discriminación a disidencias e identidades sexuales y genéricas. Como antifascistas nos plantamos contra la xenofobia, el racismo y la violencia institucional" (We organize against machismo, the patriarchy, heteronormativity, discrimination against sexual and gender identities and non-conformity. As anti-fascists, we stand against xenophobia, racism and institutional violence). The exhibit that I had come to see was a collaboration among artists, the cultural center, and Afrodescendant activists.

When I reached the top of the stairs, I immediately saw Lujan, the youth section's adult coordinator, and five of the youth members of the Agrupación, Catalina, Julieta, Delfina, Ana, and Tamara. Together, we talked and ambled through the room. The exhibit took up the three walls facing you when you entered the room. The long wall to the right was entirely covered with a life-size mural of Afrodescendant boxers, standing shoulder to shoulder against a dark-gray background. Above them was painted a banner that read, "Luchamos contra el racismo. Justicia por Massar Ba" (We fight against racism. Justice for Massar Ba). I felt a pang in reading it. Massar Ba was a prominent activist and leader in the Senegalese community of Buenos Aires whom I had met in 2013 during preliminary fieldwork. A passionate promoter of African heritage and rights in Argentina, he generously invited me to attend community events and introduced me to several activists. In March of 2016, Massar was found brutally beaten on the street; he later died in the hospital from his injuries. Massar had been a vocal and tireless advocate for Senegalese immigrants, particularly vendors who were suffering escalating confrontations with the Buenos Aires police, including evictions and seizures of property that many people viewed as racist and unlawful. Out of suspicion that his activism and public profile had made him the target of violence, the Afro-diasporic community demanded a full investigation. The banner painted on the wall of the exhibit replicated a banner that had been carried by the activists who took to the streets to protest Massar's murder and to decry state violence against Africans and Afrodescendants (Figures 9 and 10).

The wall to the left of the entrance displayed a grid of white t-shirts in black frames; each t-shirt bore the name of an Afro-diasporic community figure, past or

present, printed in bold black lettering. While staring at the framed shirts, I leaned toward Julieta and asked whether she knew all of the names displayed. She shook her head no and then said, “Yo reconozco Massar” (I recognize Massar). This was not surprising. Many of the Agrupación youth had participated in the activism following Massar’s murder. Just a few months earlier, I had attended a march organized outside the Palacio del Congreso Nacional Argentino (Argentine National Congressional Palace) in which Catalina had carried a sign that read “Justicia por Massar” and had responded to



Figures 9 and 10. Agrupación Xangô youth visit the “Hermanxs” exhibit, Bueno Aires. Photographs by author.

questions about his death from passersby. Continuing to look at the framed shirts on the wall, I spotted a few familiar names. "¿Y esa?" (And that one?), I asked Julieta, pointing to a shirt that read "Remedios del Valle"—for María Remedios del Valle, the Afro-Argentine woman who had fought as a soldier in the country's War of Independence. "Ah, sí claro" (Oh, yes of course), she replied, and then realized, upon further inspection, that she recognized more of the names on the wall.

Covering part of the back wall was an "Afrodictionario" (*Afro*-Dictionary) that defined and differentiated terms such as "afrodescendiente" (Afrodescendant), "afroargentina" (Afro-Argentine), "invisibilización" (invisibilization), "racismo estructural" (structural racism) and "privilegio blanco" (white privilege). The exhibit cited the source of the definitions as *El Afroargentino*, a newspaper produced and published by the activist group Diáspora Africana de la Argentina (DIAFAR). The rest of the back wall was covered with framed photos of Afrodescendant activists and news stories, many about violence against Afrodescendants and African immigrants. A television set up in one corner played short videos that had been created in recent years about Argentina's Afrodescendant communities. Tamara and Ana giggled when an interview with a visibly younger Tamara came onto the screen.

The young people made their way through the exhibit, chatting but still taking the time to read all of the information displayed. Before we left, someone from the center invited the girls to go downstairs and see the boxing ring. Once there, they jumped in immediately, put on gloves, and pretended to box with one another. They had me take several photos of them posing, gloves held in front of their faces as if poised to strike. After playing around for some time, we left.

A few weeks later, a few of us returned to the "Hermanxs" exhibit for a book release and *cine-debate* (film screening and discussion). This time, when I entered the room above the gym, there were rows of chairs filling the space and a projector was aimed at the one empty wall. The room was considerably more crowded for this event, but I found myself a seat next to Lujan, Delfina, and Julieta. Two speakers sat facing us, both of whom appeared to be Eurodescendant. On the left was a woman from La Cultura del Barrio and, on the right, a man holding a book. He introduced himself as Ezequiel Gatto and explained that he had compiled a book on Black social movements in the United States, titled *Nuevo Activismo Negro* (New Black Activism), which featured the works of authors including Michelle Alexander and the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement. In talking about his book, he proposed that strategies currently being mobilized by Black activists in the United States might be transferrable to the Argentine context, particularly in light of intensifying confrontations between police and Black immigrants and citizens. After some discussion, the organizers began a screening of *The Black Power Mixtape 1967–1975* (Olsson 2011), a documentary that weaves together found footage on the rise of the Black Power movement in the United States (filmed at the time by a Swedish journalism team) and interviews with contemporary African American intellectuals and artists on the legacy of the movement. As the 100-minute-long film was projected on the wall before us, the girls, sitting next to me, watched with full attention, particularly to the scenes in which a young Angela Davis spoke passionately about revolution from a jail cell.

After the screening concluded, there was some discussion of the film and then the lights were turned on and the crowd was free to mingle in the exhibit space. A

merchandise table had been set up to sell the book, and also on offer were several free posters, flyers, and stickers relating broadly to the exhibit, Black activism, and social movements. While I purchased a copy of *Nuevo Activismo Negro* for the Agrupación's growing *Afro* book collection, Julieta and Delfina made their way to some posters of Angela Davis. When I asked the girls what they thought of the film, they both nodded in approval, telling me that they had enjoyed it and that it was "empoderante" (empowering). Showing me their posters, they said that they had been particularly moved by Davis in the film, since so much of what they had heard about the U.S. Civil Rights Movement centered on male activists such as Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr. Julieta added, though, that she disagreed somewhat with the speaker's assertion that strategies used by Black social movements in the United States could translate to the Argentine context. She explained her disagreement by differentiating the histories of the United States and Argentina and the forms of colonialism that had existed in each. Nevertheless, as we left, she reiterated how much she had enjoyed the *cine-debate*.

Taken together, these two visits to the "Hermanxs" exhibit illustrate the multivocal nature of the community counter-storytelling contexts into which youth activists enter and in which they participate. The exhibit itself can be read as a counter-storytelling "text" (Rosario-Ramos and Johnson 2013), crafted at the cross-section of Afro-diasporic community activism and the self-proclaimed "alternative culture scene." Though the exhibit featured artists from outside the community, many of the primary sources came from collaborations with Afrodescendant activists and addressed community issues—for example, the "Afrodictionario," which spoke directly to desires to educate people about the "language" of Afro-diasporic activism and identities.

For the Afrodescendant young people entering this space, the mural of boxers and the framed t-shirts bearing the names of historical figures invited the youth to see themselves not as victims of racism, but rather as *luchadores* (fighters) for social justice and racial equality. Figures like Angela Davis and Massar Ba provide contemporary models of Afrodescendant agency in the face of dominant narratives that criminalize Black resistance and Black existence. In the *cine-debate*, the young people were provided opportunities to participate in counter-storytelling through dialogue among community members. Collectively, those present discussed activist strategies and transnational connections between Black social movements in the United States and Argentina. This educational experience was far from passive for the youth—not just a "depositing" of knowledge into their minds (Freire 1970). Julieta's comments with her peers reveal how young people imbue community spaces and dialogues with their own knowledges, experiences, and positionalities.

The "Hermanxs" exhibit was just one of many community spaces through which youth moved as they became involved in local Afro-diasporic activism. Movimiento Afrocultural, a local Afrodescendant cultural center, was cited by several young people in interviews as an important community asset and social space, one that they identified as having taught them about Afrodescendant culture and what it means to be *Afro* in Argentina. Located on historic Calle Defensa, where the famed Feria de San Telmo is held each Sunday, Movimiento Afrocultural was the most publicly visible, dedicated Afro-diasporic community space in the capital. On Sundays, the large courtyard was opened up to tourists and passersby and there were concerts featuring Afro-Latin American and Afro-Caribbean music. During my preliminary fieldwork in 2013,

Movimiento Afrocultural was my first point of entry into Buenos Aires's Afro-diasporic communities. The cultural center offered classes on African dance, *capoeira*, and *candombe* drumming in addition to hosting film screenings, plays, and other community events. The building's exterior was decorated with bright murals and inside was a single large room lined with African drums and historical artifacts. For the Photovoice project organized with the Agrupación Xangô youth, Mariela, a sixteen-year-old new to the organization, took a photograph of the Movimiento Afrocultural building (Figure 11). Movimiento Afrocultural had been the backdrop of much of Mariela's childhood; her family was active at the center, leading and participating in classes and events. She described Movimiento Afrocultural as an important space for educating people about the Afrodescendant past and making the Afrodescendant community visible.

Figure 11:"Movimiento Afrocultural." Photograph and commentary by Mariela, age 16.

> *El movimiento afrocultural visibiliza la comunidad afro a través de talleres y clases como de candombe, capoeira angola, y regional danza afro. En este lugar se encuentran charlas, proyectos, proyecciones que concientizan a la gente y conmemoran a lideres como Zumbi (líder del Quilombo de Palmares), María Remedios del Valle, y otros. En días festivas o importantes para la comunidad se encuentran distintos referentes.*
>
> Movimiento Afrocultural visibilizes the *Afro* community through workshops and classes like *candombe*, *capoeira angola*, and regional *Afro* dance. In this place, there are talks, projects, screenings that raise people's awareness and commemorate leaders such as Zumbi (leader of the Quilombo of Palmares),[35] María Remedios del Valle, and others. On holidays or important days for the community, different leaders come together.

Mariela's commentary for the photograph presents an illustration of forms of community counter-storytelling practices that occur within this space. Although Movimiento Afrocultural is largely dedicated to the promotion of African heritage and cultural forms, the organization's role is inherently political. In this space, young people view films and plays and participate in events that offer alternative tellings of history that valorize African heritage and challenge the foundational nationalist myth of Black disappearance. The cultural forms to which youth are exposed at Movimiento Afrocultural can also be viewed as embodied forms of community storytelling and resistance. In another of Mariela's photographs (Figure 12), her younger sister practices *capoeira* and her commentary for the image recounts the history of *capoeira* as a means of physical preparation for escaping colonial enslavers.

[35] Zumbi was the Afro-Brazilian leader of the Quilombo dos Palmares, an autonomous state established by maroons (persons who had escaped from slavery) in the seventeenth century. In Brazil, Zumbi is an Afrodescendant folk hero who "embodies the strongest resistance to the slave-based colonial regime, and, consequently, the struggle for economic and political justice today" (R. N. Anderson 1996).

Figure 12: "Capoeira Angola." Photograph and commentary by Mariela, age 16.

> *Esta foto es de mi hermana* [name omitted] *practicando capoeira angola. Los africanos esclavizados crearon la capoeira, hacían movimientos lentos, como los capoeira angola demuestra. Los esclavistas creían que era tipo de danza, cuando en realidad ellos lo que hacían era prepararse físicamente para defenderse y así poder escapar a los quilombos, lugares donde se encontraban personas que se habían escapado y liberado del esclavismo.*
>
> This photo is of my sister [name omitted] practicing *capoeira angola*. The enslaved Africans created *capoeira*, making slow movements, like those that *capoeira angola* demonstrates. The enslavers believed that it was a kind of dance, when in reality what they were doing was preparing themselves physically to defend themselves and thus be able to escape to the *quilombos*, places where they could find people who had escaped and freed themselves from slavery.

Mariela identified *capoeira* as a historical means of resistance for her community. Some scholars have distinguished between "trabajadores culturales" (culture workers) promoting Afro-diasporic culture and "militantes negros" (Black militants) within Buenos Aires's Afrodescendant activist community (Lamborghini and Frigerio 2010).

Mariela's commentary calls into question such a distinction by underscoring the politics of survival and resilience embedded within Afro-diasporic cultural forms in colonial contexts. As Rosario-Ramos et al. (2017, 223) observe, diasporic art can provide a means of cultural reclamation and collective identity formation "for communities whose cultural traditions and practices are often made invisible by mainstream narratives." Movimiento Afrocultural does not just teach drumming or dance; it teaches the revalorization of community heritage, knowledge, and belonging from which political resistance can grow (Rosario-Ramos, Tucker-Raymond, and Rosario 2017).

Across these two community contexts, the "Hermanxs" exhibit and Movimiento Afrocultural, multiple modes of storytelling emerge that challenge hegemonic narratives of Afrodescendant erasure and expose youth to strategies and resources as they develop their own activist practices. At "Hermanxs," political art and the facilitated discussion of Black social movements provided strong social and political critiques, particularly of the criminalization of Black bodies. The exhibit was facilitated through collaborations with groups outside the Afro-diasporic community and prominently featured North American situations and actors, which Julieta and other teens viewed with some skepticism. Movimiento Afrocultural, in comparison, was more concretely situated within Afro-Latin American culture and community. It offered youth affirmation of Afrodescendant historical and cultural continuity. Though distinct from one another, both community spaces serve as "mediating institutions" (C. A. Flanagan and Christens 2011) that youth activists draw upon in crafting civic-political identities and alternative structures of belonging.

“Nuestros Héroes”:

Reclaiming the Afrodescendant Past

María Remedios del Valle, *la Madre de la Patria* (the Mother of the Homeland), lay in pieces spread across a table in the community center where the youth met. Catalina, Julieta, Ana, Delfina, and Joaquin worked meticulously to put her together, carefully lining up edges and gluing her to a flattened cardboard box used to provide a steady backing. Soon an image of Remedios del Valle emerged—staring forward, seemingly caught in motion, striding into battle in full uniform.

The Agrupación youth had set out to create a mural for an upcoming event celebrating International Afro-Latin American and Afro-Caribbean Women’s Day, to be held at a national history museum. Inspired by their trip to the “Hermanxs” exhibit, they originally wanted to create a mural similar to the one with the Afrodescendant boxers that they had seen, but with Afrodescendant women standing side by side instead. The logistics of either taking or Photoshopping a large group photo, and the printing expenses for a wall-sized mural, prompted the youth to reconsider their plan. They settled on creating large posters of María Remedios del Valle to bring to the event. To learn how to create the enlarged prints, Catalina met with an artist from the “Hermanxs” exhibit, who showed her a computer program that they had used to convert large-scale images into files that could be printed on standard paper and then pieced together. After printing the images at a local cybercafé, the young people put Remedios del Valle back together with scissors and glue (Figure 12).

A few days later, on July 25th, the day of the International Afro-Latin American and Afro-Caribbean Women's Day event, I awaited the youth at the museum. The Museo Histórico Nacional del Cabildo y la Revolución de Mayo, referred to locally simply as the Cabildo, was historically a government building that housed the town council during the colonial era; it now serves as a national history museum commemorating the May Revolution of 1810. The museum had provided a long salon hall for the event and the organizers, members of the Comisión 8N, lined the walls of the room with chairs to create a large open space for dialogue.[36] Eventually, Catalina appeared, carrying one of the posters of Remedios del Valle that we had created, complaining about what a pain it had been to avoid damaging it on the bus ride to the museum. She propped the poster up to the left of the small table set up for the event's facilitators. For that day, Remedios del Valle—forgotten hero of Argentina's revolutionary war—would preside over a main hall in the national history museum.

As the event began, one of the organizers stood and welcomed the group of Afrodescendant women who had come to participate in it. She introduced the purpose of the gathering, saying, "Estamos acá para compartir, para dialogar, para crecer juntas" (We are here to share, to dialogue, to grow together). But before opening the floor to discussion, the organizers chose to lead the room in singing the Argentine national anthem in "homenaje" (homage) to María Remedios del Valle. "¿Quien no conoce María Remedios del Valle? Está acá, en esa imagen" (Who does not know María Remedios del

[36] As described in Chapter Two, the Comisión Organizadora del 8 de Noviembre (Comisión 8N) is an activist organization that brings together members of various Afrodescendant, Afro-Argentine, and resident African communities in Argentina in order to promote *Afro* heritage and rights.

Valle? She is here, in this image), the speaker said, gesturing to the poster that the young people had made. “Esa figura que luchó mucho, mucho con San Martín” (This figure who fought a lot, a lot with San Martín), she continued, referring to the famous General San Martín, who led the revolutionary army. “Fue una gran mujer” (She was a great woman).

Throughout the event, the organizers introduced various topics for discussion and passed a microphone through the room so that attendees could share their thoughts and experiences as Afrodescendant women. Looking around the room, I recognized several prominent community activists from diverse Afrodescendant organizations, such as the Asociación Caboverdiana (Cape Verdean Association) and Movimiento Afrocultural. In addition to youth members of Agrupación Xangô, I saw other familiar faces from my previous interviews, including Lucía and Estefanía.[37] Collectively, the women and girls present responded to various prompts put forward by the organizers around the broad established themes of “Racismo y Sexismo” (Racism and Sexism), “Género y Política” (Gender and Politics), and “Educación e Inclusión” (Education and Inclusion). At various points, speakers evoked Remedios del Valle, particularly on the subject of education and the need to include Afrodescendant histories in schools.

When Lucía took her turn with the microphone, she made a compelling case for the “vindication” of Afrodescendant historical figures.

> *Yo creo que el principal problema que tenemos es la representación en la sociedad. Yo creo que no me siento representado como mujer afro en la sociedad. No me veo en las políticas públicas que se llevan a cabo. No me veo representada en publicidades e los carteles en la escuela. No me veo representada en los medios masivos ni en los noticieros. No me veo en*

[37] My interviews with Lucía (age 20) and Estefanía (age 29) were presented in Chapter Three.

> *ninguna conductora afrodescendiente que aparezcan en los "Vecinos" o un oportuno programa que es más visto. Tampoco me veo representada en el deporte. Cuando veo no sé [...] en la tele, algún deporte, tampoco me veo identificada en las mujeres que veo. No sentí porque no puede llegar a esos lugares, se no llega. Tampoco me veo representada en la historia. En el colegio, lo único que la única palabra que escuché estaban el único momento donde escuché mencionar la palabra negro fue en la trata esclavista. Solamente había personas negras en la época colonial que fueron traídos de África por ser esclavizados y mueran en nuestra historia. Nunca más volví a escuchar nuestra influencia en la cultura afro o en la cultura argentina. Sino que hace falta que nos visibilizamos más, no solo, no solo en la política, sino en la educación, en la historia. Hace falta que nuestros héroes sean vistos y sean reivindicados.*
>
> I think the main problem we have is representation in society. I believe that I do not feel represented as an *Afro* woman in society. I do not see myself represented in advertisements or posters at school. I do not see myself represented in the mass media or in the news. I do not see myself in any Afrodescendant lead character who appears on "Vecinos" or on a timely program that is more watched.[38] I also do not see myself represented in sports. When I see, I don't know, […] on TV, any sport, I don't see myself in the women I see [there] either. I do not feel [it] because you can't get to those places, you don't get there. Neither do I see myself represented in history. At school, the only, the only time I heard the word "black" mentioned was in the slave trade. There were only Black people in colonial times who were brought from Africa to be enslaved and died in our history. Never again did I hear [of] our influence on *Afro* culture or on Argentine culture. But it's necessary that we make ourselves more visible, not only in politics but in education, in history. Our heroes need to be seen and vindicated.

Lucía's testimony in the Cabildo echoed what I heard from many young people who likewise considered the invisibility that they encountered in the public sphere to be directly connected to the institutional denial of the Afrodescendant past. For this reason, there was a strong movement throughout Afrodescendant activist circles to reclaim historical figures, particularly those who had fought as revolutionaries in Argentina's War of Independence and subsequently had been either white-washed or written out of

[38] Lucía references "Vecinos" (Neighbors), a popular television show.

history. These figures included Antonio Ruiz, "el Negro Falucho," a Black soldier who famously died rather than raise the Spanish flag after a defeat; and Capitán Andrés Ibáñez, born in Africa and elevated to the rank of captain in the revolutionary army. Afrodescendant activists and some historians have asserted that Sargento Juan Bautista Cabral, who famously saved the life of General San Martín in battle, was Afro-Argentine as well (Brión 2016). There was even strong belief within the Afrodescendant community that the first president of Argentina, Bernardino Rivadavia, had some African ancestry. Although he was designated as *blanco* (white) in the census, he was rumored to have had a darker complexion and was called "Doctor Chocolate" by his political rivals (INADI 2016). But of all of these reclaimed heroes, none was more visible at the time of my research than la Capitana María Remedios del Valle.

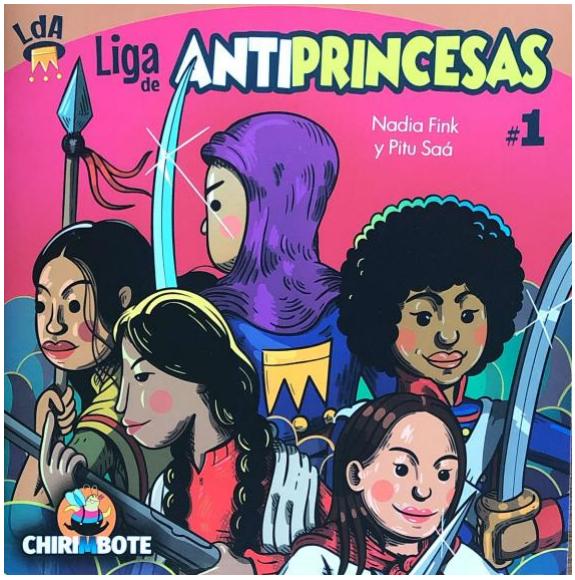
Historical accounts of Remedios del Valle can be traced back to official state documents from the early 19th century, but she has been conspicuously absent from narratives about the country's War of Independence (Brión 2016; Guzmán 2016). The story of Remedios del Valle resurfaced in the public record around the 1930s, when there was growing fascination with African cultural forms in Argentine popular culture. But then she again disappeared from public consciousness (Guzmán 2016)—until an article about the "Madre de la Patria" (Mother of the Homeland) was published in the Argentine news magazine *Veintitrés* on Mother's Day of 2008. Miriam Gomes, an important Afrodescendant activist and intellectual, appeared on the magazine's cover in revolutionary-era uniform, dressed as Remedios del Valle. Afrodescendant activists in the country embraced the story of Remedios del Valle, eventually leading to the designation of November 8th as the National Day of Afro-Argentines and African Culture in her

honor. As Guzmán (2016, 14–15) remarks, "[I]n this publication, they found a cohesive argument for defending, in the public arena, their status as children of the homeland, which they had defended with their blood during the Wars of Independence."[39] Remedios del Valle became a symbolic anchor for claims of citizenship and national belonging for Afrodescendants in Argentina.

In community spaces and events, the story of Remedios del Valle—Afrodescendant woman, soldier, mother, and patriot—was routinely recounted. Interpretations of her likeness appeared on websites, posters, t-shirts, and in the logo of Comisión 8N. At the time of my research, she was the subject of recent academic publications, community art, and even feminist children's literature (see Figure 13). A poster given to me as a gift by Lucía (Figure 14) portrays a dark-skinned Remedios del Valle in revolutionary uniform, hair pulled back in a bun, a spear with the Argentine flag tied around it resting against her shoulder. Framing her image are golden scrolling embellishments in the classic style of *fileteado porteño*, a local form of lettering and decorative art found on historic buildings and signs in Buenos Aires. Taken together, these design elements present Remedios del Valle, *la Madre de la Patria*, as both clearly *Afro* and patently Argentine.

Community counter-storytelling around historical figures such as Remedios del Valle "challenges the silences" that persist in the "official" histories and national civic

[39] My translation from the original Spanish.



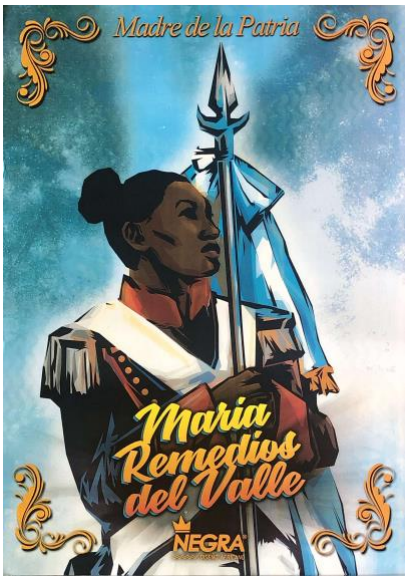


Figure 13:(Left) Cover of a feminist children's book featuring María Remedios del Valle as an "antiprincesa" (anti-princess).

Figure 14: (Right) Poster of María Remedios del Valle created by Negra Diseño Africano, a design group run by Afrodescendant designer and illustrator, Rogério Rocha.

narratives taught in schools (Rubin and Cervinkova 2019). For example, youth and adult activists circulated images of Remedios del Valle on social media around May 25th to counter the racialized representations of street vendors in school Independence Day plays (Figure 15). The promotion of Afrodescendant revolutionary heroes invites Afrodescendant young people to see themselves as protagonists of history rather than as the colonial caricatures propped up in their schools. Through reclaiming Argentina's Afrodescendant past, youth can forge a sense of pride in their Afro-diasporic heritage and ground their historically based claims of national belonging. As Joaquin put it, "Esos esclavos lucharon por su libertad. Gracias a ellos hoy estamos acá en un país […] Hay mucha gente importante afrodescendiente que lucho por este país" (Those slaves fought for your liberty. Thanks to them we are today in a country. There are many important Afrodescendant people who fought for this country).

Figure 15: Image published publicly on Chirimbote's Facebook page on May 25, 2017 and circulated on social media by Afrodescendant activists.

Telling Their Own Stories:

Mobilizing Educational Narratives as Activism

Shortly after I had begun working with Agrupación Xangô, Marcela, Carlos, Lujan, and four youth members prepared to leave Argentina for a much-anticipated *intercambio* (exchange trip) to give presentations at universities in the United States. The *intercambio* was an important success for the Agrupación; they regularly accepted youth "interns" from U.S. study-abroad programs and had worked diligently with U.S. institutions to organize a "true" exchange whereby the Agrupación's youth likewise could experience another country and culture.

In a meeting a few weeks before their trip, Carlos had the teens practice the speeches that they had been preparing with the study-abroad interns. Catalina, Julieta, Joaquin, and Delfina took their turns delivering brief introductions in stilted English, stumbling occasionally on less familiar words. Carlos smiled and encouraged them when they faltered, but when they finished, he looked at them expectantly, clearly thinking that

they had prepared more. The young people looked at one another hesitantly and appeared confused about what more they should say.

Carlos began to explain that they needed to be prepared to talk about what it is like to be an Afrodescendant young person in Argentina; their audiences in the United States would want to hear about their lives. He told them to think of specific examples of discrimination or racism that they had each experienced. The youth just stood there, still looking lost about what to say. Eventually, Catalina got exasperated with Carlos's pressing. On the verge of tears, she exclaimed that they faced discrimination every day. She went on to explain that racism is all around them and it is extremely difficult to pull out just one representative example from their daily lives. Carlos looked at her with understanding and Lujan nodded her head in agreement. The room seemed to pause for a moment.

Carlos began again slowly by providing examples of what they could say. Soon they were sharing their own experiences. The teens began broadly, discussing the high drop-out rates among youth in their community and how "los negros sólo son esclavos" (Black people are only slaves) in the history taught in their schools. Joaquin mentioned the representation of Afrodescendants as street vendors in Independence Day plays. Julieta shared an experience of being stared at as the only Afrodescendant student in her class when colonial slavery was discussed. Catalina raised the topic of teachers' racial biases and shared her experience of being held back a year in primary school for lacking the same "capacidad" (ability) as her white classmates. Delfina mentioned how irritating it was to have your citizenship continually questioned with "De dónde sos?" (Where are you from?). She recalled a party that she had recently attended where a boy refused to

believe that she was Argentine. After talking collectively about these kinds of everyday discrimination, the teens broke down their stories into themes and divided them up among themselves to create talking points to be developed for the presentations that they would give in the United States.

In the Agrupación and throughout the Afro-diasporic activist spaces that I witnessed, youth were encouraged to publicly share their personal experiences in order to raise awareness of the educational inequalities and institutional racism faced by young Afrodescendants in Argentina. In the youth meeting before the *intercambio* trip to the United States, Carlos positioned the young people's *testimonios* as important to their trip's activist mission of visibilizing and humanizing Afrodescendants. Identifying and framing stories for sharing was a skill that youth learned and a practice into which they were socialized in community counter-storytelling contexts. Acknowledging this process of socialization does not detract from the authenticity of youth's narratives or the agency of youth to share their experiences; rather, it is a matter of recognizing that multiple voices, considerations, and contexts structure the individual stories (Fleetwood 2004; Soep and Chávez 2010). Storytelling can be viewed as an important activist strategy and as a means of knowledge production that is taught to young Afrodescendants in the counter-classroom of community activism.

Afrodescendant youth trained to share their educational *testimonios* in community spaces and at public events, at foreign universities and in workshops organized in local schools. Within the Agrupación, the adult coordinators made a point of asking different youth to speak at such events, viewing it as a valuable skill-building opportunity for the young activists. At a public event celebrating November 8th, the Día Nacional de los

Afroargentinos y de la Cultura Africana (National Day of Afro-Argentines and African Culture), reserved Tamara sat on a stage next to prominent community activists, holding in her hands a spiral notebook in which she had written a speech. When it was her turn to speak, she told the audience a personal story of discrimination in school.

> *Yo como joven afro viví una experiencia de discriminación que hacía una profesora a mí. Que estamos haciendo una charla sobre que queríamos ser y les preguntó a todos y a mí no me preguntó. Y preguntó a otra compañera y dice "Y Tamara también. ¿Por qué no le preguntó?" Y a mi decía bueno. "Y vos que querés ser?" Yo digo que quiero ser criminalista. Me miró y se rio. Me dice, "No vas a hacer nada" porque soy negra. Y yo le digo si con estudio y esfuerzo voy a apoyarme [...] Cuando yo tengo algún título, voy a venir a mostrarte.*
>
> As a young *Afro,* I had an experience when a teacher discriminated against me. We were having a discussion about who we wanted to be, and she asked everyone [else] and did not ask me. And she asked another student who says "And Tamara too. Why did she not get asked?" And to me [the teacher] said, "Ok and what do you want to be?" I say that I want to be a criminal lawyer. She looked at me and laughed. She says, "You are not going to do anything" because I am Black. And I told her yes, with study and effort I'll support myself […] When I have a degree, I'll come [back] to show you.
>
> When she concluded her speech, the room erupted in applause.

This was not my first time hearing Tamara's story; I had heard it before, but from a couch in the youth section's meeting space. I discovered that young people eventually developed familiar, flexible scripts that could be mobilized across a spectrum of occasions and venues. Their stories, in turn, became referential frames for other young people's storytelling practices. For example, when explaining her own educational experiences to me, Ana stated that she did not feel discriminated against in her school, but she referenced her friends in the Agrupación, saying, "Como dicen las chicas que ellos todavía en el colegio les siguen discriminando" (As the girls say, they still

discriminate against them at school). In discussions and at events, Julieta frequently recalled the news story of the young boy who had committed suicide in Zarate after being teased as "Obama."[40] Although these were not the girls' own experiences, as Werstch (2008) has described, narratives can be "cognitively distributed" across groups. Collectively, young activists' stories of racism and discrimination get "told, retold, and collaboratively interpreted," creating "a rich, variegated narrative common sense that is capable of competing with the hegemonic one" (Polletta et al. 2011, 122).

Turning stories of discrimination and racism into a form of civic praxis allowed young people to re-imagine themselves as meaningful political actors. In the presentations that the youth prepared for the *intercambio*, Joaquin elected to talk about *deserción estudiantil* (dropping out of school) in the Afrodescendant community. For Joaquin, the subject was extremely personal, as he had left school to start working and supporting himself. His early teens were a difficult time for the independent young man, who expressed to me that he had not had much parental guidance from his busy working parents. In an interview, he admitted to stealing and using drugs, but claimed that becoming a part of the Agrupación had given him a new perspective on his life. He found a job that he liked at an upscale car dealership, but, like many young Afrodescendants who left school, he still felt conflicted about having dropped out. Presentations such as those that the youth crafted for the U.S. universities offered opportunities for Joaquin and his peers to redefine their experiences within the broader context of the struggles of their communities. Through sharing their own counter-stories in their communities, the youth

[40] This story is discussed in the conclusion of Chapter Three.

learned to view and to represent themselves more broadly as representatives of Argentina's Afrodescendant communities and as important voices in Afro-diasporic activism.

"Encuentro de Jóvenes Afrodescendientes": Between Learning and Leading in Community Activism

In September of 2017, Agrupación Xangô organized a youth retreat in Tigre, a popular tourist town just north of Buenos Aires, on the Paraná Delta. On an island in the delta, they reserved a camp-style bunkroom and dining area that served as classroom, debate floor, and dancehall at various points over the weekend of the retreat.[41] The "Encuentro de Jóvenes Afrodescendientes de CABA y Provincia de Buenos Aires" (Meeting of Afrodescendant Youth of the City and Province of Buenos Aires)[42] brought together youth from across *Gran Buenos Aires* as well as a few young people who came from as far away as Misiones, a province in the northeastern-most tip of the country. In the sunny spring weather, the youth explored the outdoors, built relationships, and came together to discuss important issues facing their community.

When I first began collaborating with the Agrupación, the retreat was one of many large, ambitious projects that the organization wanted to realize that year. At various points, a national conference of Afrodescendant youth was discussed, as was a

[41] Throughout this section, I refer to the "Encuentro de Jóvenes Afrodescendientes" as a "retreat." The word *encuentro* broadly translates as "meeting"; it can also be a "gathering," "get-together," "event," or "conference." I use the term "retreat" to characterize the multi-day educational and recreational event that brought the young people together.

[42] CABA is an acronym for *La Cuidad Autónoma de Buenos Aires* (the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires).

national survey about racism in schools that the youth wanted to create. Sometimes these ideas were overwhelming to me; I had trouble grasping how I could help them carry out the various proposals that were being put forward and that, at times, I was helping them to craft. I would discover that the retreat, like many of their projects, would be willed into existence in one form or another through dedication and resourcefulness. The Agrupación pooled their funds, I contributed some of my grant funding that was designated for collaboration, and the adult organizers dipped into their own personal funds in order to ensure that event materials and meals were provided for all of the participating youth.

The youth members of the Agrupación, for their part, devoted countless hours to tasks leading up to the event, including publicizing it, recruiting other young people, maintaining contact lists, and drafting a schedule for the retreat. It was extremely important to the Agrupación's adult organizers that much of the planning for the event be youth-led. We also decided that the retreat would be an ideal opportunity for realizing the young people's ambition of carrying out collaborative research on "racismo en el aula" (racism in the classroom), as so many Afrodescendant youth would be in the same location. In preparation for the retreat, I worked with the youth to prepare a survey and focus-group questions.[43] In a group discussion, the youth drew on their expertise as students as we designed questions about racist language, peer discrimination, instructor interventions, and representations of Afrodescendants in schools. Carlos added his perspectives as a sociologist to the phrasing of the survey, and I trained the youth in leading focus groups.

[43] The survey can be found in Appendix C.

On the Saturday morning of the retreat, the attendees were to meet at the train station to depart for Tigre. The Agrupación youth moved through a growing crowd of arriving young people, checking off names on a roster that they had printed. In all, twenty-two young people participated, as did a few prominent community activists and several young adults in their late twenties and early thirties who attended in the role of *referentes* (mentors). The young members of the Agrupación had chosen to define "youth" as persons 12 to 25 years of age, and they had intentionally limited the number of adults from the community who were to be invited, because they wanted to ensure that the retreat would be a youth space for youth voices. They received some pushback from some local Afrodescendant activists and community members over this decision, but, as the youth asserted in one of the meetings leading up to the event, "¡Es un encuentro **para jóvenes**!" (It is a meeting **for youth**!).

When we finally arrived in Tigre, the weekend's schedule was packed with activities for the youth attendees. The Agrupación had planned a series of workshops to span the two days. On the first day, Carlos led a collective discussion on the topic of "discriminación y racismo" (discrimination and racism). Tables were pushed to the corners of the common room and chairs were arranged facing inward so as to create a large open space for dialogue. Guided by Carlos, the youth shared personal experiences of discrimination and discussed possible means of addressing it. One young man, Federico, proposed that teachers should be required to take classes on cultural competency and ethics.

> *Un punto muy bueno ese punto de conocimiento cultural para los profesores, porque el conocimiento cultural es entender cuáles palabras*

> *son innecesarias a la hora de enseñar o cuáles palabras son, pueden afectar a una estudiante. Cada profesor debería tener una clase de ética y protocolo. ¿Por qué? Porque vos tenés una clase de ética y protocolo, sabes cómo dirigirte a los estudiantes sin denigrar a nadie.*
>
> A good point is this point about cultural knowledge for teachers, because cultural knowledge is understanding what words are unnecessary when teaching or what words can affect a student. Each teacher should have an ethics and protocol class. Why? Because if you have an ethics and protocol class, you know how to address students without denigrating anyone.

Throughout the weekend, the topic of teacher education was repeatedly raised, as young people felt that their teachers lacked understanding of how to address racial difference and discrimination. Carlos related Federico's comments to the need for affirmative-action policies to combat institutional racism.

> Hablamos de acciones afirmativas para la comunidad afro, porque lo que buscamos no es como un concepto de, bueno, igual de políticas sociales para todos. Por ejemplo, la Asignación Universal por Hijo para todos, el más rico, el más pobre y buenísimo eso. Es lo que buscamos en nuestra comunidad afrodescendiente viene arrastrando años así, siglos, digamos, ya más de 500 años de opresión, de pobreza, de estigmatización y de racismo. Entendemos que lo que tiene que hacer el Estado es pensar una política dirigida directamente hacia nosotros. Por ejemplo, como lo hizo Brasil.
>
> We are talking about affirmative action for the *Afro* community, because what we're looking for is not like a concept of, well, equal social policies for all. For example, the Universal Child Allowance for all, the richest, the poorest, and that's great. It's what we seek in our Afro-descendant community that's been dragging on for years like this, centuries, let's say, already more than 500 years of oppression, poverty, stigmatization and racism. We understand that what the State has to do is think of a policy directed directly at us. For example, as Brazil did.

Carlos's statement references and draws comparisons between two existing policies: an Argentine policy for universal child support, which makes no considerations of race or ethnicity, and Brazilian affirmative-action policy, which is intended to increase

Afrodescendant enrollment in higher education. He grounded his call for such Afrodescendant-centered policies in the "more than 500 years of oppression" that Afrodescendant communities have suffered globally due to slavery. Over the next few hours, Carlos continued to encourage the youth to reflect on how policies and laws could be created to address the discrimination that they faced—from educational inequalities to police persecution and negative media representation.

The next workshop on Saturday was on sexual health and was led by two community-health workers whom Carlos had invited. They got the youth up and out of their seats to play games involving answering questions about safe sex. Amid a discussion of sexual health, the teens also introduced topics of sexuality and racialized gender discrimination into the conversation. After the workshops concluded, the day's scheduled activities drew to a close. A few of the older boys started up a fire to grill hamburgers and *choripan* (sausage sandwiches) for dinner, and eventually the room in which we had spent the whole day transformed into a lively dancehall.

On the second day, after breakfast, Marcela led a workshop on education. She began with a presentation on institutional racism in Argentine education past and present, leading the young people in a discussion of the racism inherent in Argentine literary "classics" such as *Martín Fierro* (written in the 1870s) and Sarmiento's *Facundo: Civilización y Barbarie* (1845). Pulling up quotes and sections of text in a PowerPoint presentation, she laid bare the racial ideologies of Sarmiento, founder of Argentina's educational system. The discussion on this topic quickly became deeply emotional and heated as those present shared personal experiences and perspectives. Some in the room had immigrated to the country as adults; they compared their experiences of racism in

education in countries where Afrodescendant communities are more visible and perhaps more overtly stigmatized than in Argentina, where invisibilization is pervasive. This frustrated many of the youth, who felt that discussion should center on the Argentine context and resisted any insinuation of "better" or "worse" racisms. Dropping out of school was a particularly sensitive topic, and the discussion of it brought many in the room to tears. At one point, Karina, a young Afro-Colombian journalist who was attending the retreat as a *referente* (mentor), spoke passionately about the influence of parents on youth persistence in education; she credited her own successes as an educated woman to her mother's firm insistence and perseverance as a poor working mother. While many nodded in agreement as she spoke, one young man, Omar, grew visibly upset. Omar himself had dropped out of school, and emotions seemed to well up in the quiet young man as the conversation went on. Abruptly, he left the room with tears in his eyes, and a few young people followed to talk to him.

Eventually, the decision was made to take a break and let the tension in the room subside. When we came back, the youth were divided by age into four groups and the Agrupación youth, in pairs, led focus groups. Each pair had a copy of the focus-group questions that they had created, a brief informed-consent script, and a large, colorful poster with a T-chart dividing it into two halves labeled "desafíos" (challenges) and "acciones concretas" (concrete actions). They guided their respective groups to different corners of the room, which was soon filled with lively chatter as the young people spoke openly with their peers and filled in their posters with their reflections on racism in their schools and their ideas for addressing it. Before this, sixteen-year-old Ana had told me that she was nervous about leading a focus group. She told me later that it had been her

favorite part of the retreat because she had been able to talk with people her own age without adults or older youth intervening or speaking over them.

After each group gave a summary of their discussion and their proposals for *acciones concretas*,[44] the Agrupación youth distributed the survey and the workshops officially ended. The youth went outside to eat lunch and relax before packing up to leave the island. I sat with Marcela and Karina as they discussed the debate that had unfolded during the education workshop. They both agreed that the emotionally charged debate had been a valuable learning experience for the young people. "Es bueno que los chicos vean esto. Nosotros, **somos afros**. Debatimos con pasión, luchamos, **alzamos nuestras voces**… pero al final estamos unidos" (It's good that the kids see this. We are *Afros*. We debate with passion, we fight, we raise our voices… but, in the end, we are united). In this conversation, Marcela and Karina directly countered a critique of Buenos Aires's Afrodescendant activist communities that had become all too familiar: the view that "Blacks from different blocs had varied opinions and positions, but let these get in the way of presenting a united front when necessary" (J. M. Anderson 2012, 287).

As the weekend drew to a close, the Agrupación had realized an ambitious goal of bringing together youth from throughout Gran Buenos Aires and beyond in order to promote youth critical consciousness and build community through a series of dialogue-based activities and workshops. Yet, the critical dialogue that took place cannot be fully understood without attention to the "relational messiness" that comes with

[44] The results of the youth focus groups are discussed in Chapter Six. An chart with the focus group results can found in Appendix B.

intergenerational activism (Bent 2016). The youth members of the Agrupación navigated intergenerational relationships and power dynamics as they negotiated multiple roles as activists, leaders, researchers, students, friends, and family over the course of the weekend. Both in principle and in practice, the Agrupación promoted *horizontalidad* (horizontality) among its members, youth and adults alike. Toward this end, Marcela, Carlos, and Lujan encouraged the youth to take on responsibility for organizing several aspects of recruitment and planning and for leading activities, such as the focus groups. However, to say that the retreat was entirely (or even mostly) "youth-led" would be misleading.

As Kirshner (2006, 39–40) notes, "[A]lthough the 'youth led' notion is politically appealing because it affirms the capacity of young people to be capable democratic actors, it leaves unexamined the critical roles that adults can, and often do, play." Adult *referentes* at the retreat and throughout the Afro-diasporic activist community certainly "serve as role models and mentors, helping youth develop their own political selves" (Earl, Maher, and Elliott 2017). As Nenga and Taft (2013) remark, "[A]dults both expand and contract young people's civic and political participation." At times, youth had to push back when they felt that older voices were dominating the conversation. In dialogues with their peers throughout the weekend, they commiserated, comforted, encouraged, and criticized one another, independently of the adults present. These experiences built community among the young people, as well as their personal and community resilience to manage conflict. Ultimately, the binarily opposed concepts of verticality and horizontality are inadequate for describing the interactions in intergenerational community relationships.

Before we left Tigre, I sat down and spoke with Omar. He was now laughing and enjoying himself with the other young people as they listened to music outside.

"¿Qué pensás del encuentro?" (What do you think of the retreat?), I asked.

"Es increíble. Me encanta. ¡Es la primera vez que he pasado tiempo con tanta gente negra!" (It's incredible. I love it. It's the first time that I've spent time with so many Black people!), Omar responded, a grin spreading across his face.

Later, in an interview, Omar would describe how the discussion of dropping out of school had been extremely personal for him, making him both hurt and angry in that heated moment. He told me, "Me hacían sentir mal hijo porque decían que los padres tienen que estar a full y si son, son buenos padres es porque el hijo está estudiando y bla bla bla…" (They made me feel like a bad son because they said that parents had to be [involved] and if they are good parents the son studies and blah blah blah…). Omar testified that he *had* studied, but he wanted to be a musician. Music had been a "refugio" (refuge) in his turbulent years of feeling isolated and bullied in school. The debate had summoned memories of struggles with his parents, who wanted him to be an electrical engineer like his father. Yet, Omar also described how speaking with the youth who came to comfort him had made him feel understood and had calmed his anger. Over the weekend of the retreat, he had the opportunity to build relationships with young Afrodescendants like himself, "al escuchar todas las historias de gente que también las vivió y ver cómo la solucionó" (listening to all the stories of people who have also lived it [racism] and seeing how they solved it). Ultimately, he told me, "No puedo decir nada

mal del encuentro. En realidad, que fue tan bueno por mí, me cambió mucho" (I cannot say anything bad about the retreat. In reality, it was so good for me, it changed me a lot).

It took half a day for our group to make the trek back to Buenos Aires's Retiro Station from the retreat in Tigre. We took a ferry from the island, walked about two miles with all of our things, and then boarded the train to head back to the capital. The young people were a special kind of deliriously tired—both invigorated by the themes and fellowship of the retreat and exhausted from the weekend and travel. To liven up the train ride, someone in the group played music from a portable, but powerful, speaker.

As the passengers on the train stared and smiled at the dancing teenagers, Marcela encouraged a few to stand up and dance with them. A stout middle-aged white woman grabbed her fellow traveler, another white woman, and joined in the dancing. When the song ended, Marcela gave her a welcoming side hug, and the woman leaned in and loudly asked, "De dónde son?" (Where are you all from?).

I could see some of the young people's eyes dart toward the speaker. Without a moment's hesitation, Marcela spun around to face the woman and announced loudly, "¡De acá! ¡Somos **afro**argentinos!" (From here! We are **Afro**-Argentines!). The emphasis on *afro* was exaggerated and her point was clear. She let it hang in the air for a moment as the woman nodded her head, looking somewhat embarrassed.

"¡Todos **afro**argentinos!" (All Afro-Argentines!), Marcela reiterated pointedly before returning to dancing and being her usual jovial self. The other woman seemed to say "Bueno" (OK) or something similarly affirmative and kept dancing with the group for a bit longer. In our next meeting, the Agrupación youth recalled the train ride and how

incredible it had felt to occupy that space, visibly *Afro*, visibly proud, asserting their belonging.

Conclusions:

Herramientas

After the youth retreat in Tigre, I sat down with Ana for an interview. Ana reiterated what many young people had told me about the invisibilization of Afrodescendants in her school's curriculum; but, in offering me the following example, she also underscored how her involvement in the Agrupación provided her with knowledge and resources to counter such erasure.

> *Viste que en el encuentro de Tigre mi mamá habló sobre Sarmiento. Bueno, mi profesor el lunes habló de eso y no, no...solo dijo de los pueblos originarios y de los indios. No dijo de los afros. Nada. Cuestión que yo le hablé, le dije, "profe, pero pueblos originarios e indios son lo mismo," son lo mismo porque son de los pueblos originarios. Pero vos estas olvidando de los* ***afros*** *también. Y nada. Como que se quedó "****wow****" ...nadie, nadie le estaba prestando atención, yo tampoco lo estaba presentando porque habló tan largo [laughter], pero justo escuché* ***Sarmiento*** *[…] Igual mientras, mientras el profesor estaba hablando yo estaba grabando audio para que mi mamá escucharla.*
>
> Remember in the retreat in Tigre, my mom talked about Sarmiento. Well, my teacher on Monday talked about it and no, no…he only talked about the native peoples and the Indians. He said nothing about the *Afros*. Nothing. The issue that I spoke about to him, I told him, "Teacher, but native people and Indians are the same, they are the same because they are native peoples. But you are forgetting about ***Afros*** too." And nothing. Like, he stood there "**wow**"… nobody, nobody was paying attention to him. I wasn't paying attention either because he spoke so long [laughter], but I just I heard **Sarmiento** […] At the same time, while the teacher was talking, I was recording audio for my mom to listen to.

Ana went on to tell me that she returned to class with the teaching guide that the Agrupación had created. I asked her how her teacher had responded, and she laughed,

saying, “Se quedó sorprendido **porque no sabía**. No sabía y tampoco esperaba que yo hable porque nunca hablo en el colegio” (He stood there surprised because **he didn’t know**. He didn’t know, and he wasn’t expecting me to speak because I never speak at school). Soft-spoken Ana was able to educate her teacher.

Youth participation in Afro-diasporic activism and in organizations such as Agrupación Xangô promotes their “civic courage” (Giroux 2001), emboldening them to challenge structural inequalities and disrupt nationalist narratives that render them invisible. Joaquin spoke to me of this courage that he had gained through community activism as a “herramienta” (tool).

> *Yo en ese momento, antes de estar en la Agrupación, yo no tenia, no tenía esa herramienta o esa fuerza o esa actitud de decirle, quién me acoso. “Acá estoy. Acá estoy. Soy yo. Estoy orgullosa de lo que soy.” Trato de transmitir lo que yo siento hacia la otra persona. Pero antes de estar nervioso, no sentía eso. No tenía esa fuerza y esa energía. Siempre me achicaba. Me ponía nervioso. [...] Hoy por hoy. Tengo esa herramienta, esa voluntad. De salir adelante diciendo quién soy. Gracias a la Agrupación.*
>
> Me at that time, before being in the Agrupación, I didn’t have, I didn’t have that tool or that strength or that attitude of telling those who harassed me. “Here I am. Here I am. I am who I am. I’m proud of what I am.” I try to get across to the other person what I feel. But before, I was nervous, I didn’t feel that. I didn’t have that strength and that energy. I always shrank back. It made me nervous. [...] Day by day. I have that tool, that will. To go forward saying who I am. Thanks to the Agrupación.

This notion of “herramientas”—of tools, which connotes some form of action—was often evoked by the youth to describe what they had gained from the Agrupación. Julieta, for example, described her new knowledge of her rights and of laws against discrimination as “herramientas” that she had not acquired in school. In the praxis-based

pedagogy of the counter-classroom, youth learn to use "herramientas" acquired in their community to act upon oppressive conditions in their schools and communities.

Counter-storytelling was one such tool. Counter-storytelling in activist networks exposed youth to alternative histories and critical discourses that they could use to assert their belonging as Argentine citizens. The tales of historical figures, such as María Remedios del Valle, became resources for youth national identification and symbolic resistance. Counter-storytelling provided a repertoire of stories, knowledge, and resources that could be marshalled against Argentine "common sense," which maintains that all Afrodescendants died in "las guerras y las plagas" (the wars and the plagues) and that Argentina is a country of whites where "no hay racismo" (there is no racism).

Through Afro-diasporic community activism and dialogue, youth were also introduced to activist strategies of resistance and community-building. For example, after the youth retreat, the Agrupación youth decided to host their own *cine-debate*. They discussed showing *Loving* (2016) and *Get Out* (2017)—interestingly, both films are about interracial couples in the United States, one a love story and the other a horror movie. However, they decided that they wanted the first film in their series to be more overtly political; they chose to screen *The Black Power Mixtape 1967–1975*, the same film that they had seen at the "Hermanxs" exhibit. Following the screening, a heated debate arose when Joaquin suggested that Afrodescendant activists in Argentina needed to be radical and critical of the state, like the activists of the Black Power Movement. Some agreed and others adamantly opposed the implicit suggestion of docility, asserting that the U.S. and Argentine contexts were drastically different. Marcela took the discussion as an opportunity to share her knowledge of the historical struggles of activists in Argentina. In

this *cine-debate*, the youth learned more about activist histories and also learned, once more, how to manage debate and derive solidarity from disagreement.

As Rubin (2007, 477) asserts, "[Y]outh craft civic identities from the materials at hand." Community activism provided young people with strategies and concepts that informed their own civic praxis. How the youth conceived of citizenship and acted as citizen-activists was predicated on the various contexts, stories, and experiences to which they were exposed in their community. Afrodescendant youth activists in Argentina are learning to use the *herramientas* that they have gained through Afro-diasporic activism and community dialogue to make their own citizenship claims.

CHAPTER FIVE

BECOMING *AFROARGENTINA*: *FEMINISMO NEGRO* AND INTERSECTIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN YOUTH CIVIC-IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

¡Chico, repique, y piano,
Rompiendo las cadenas del patriarcado!

¡Mujeres negras, vivas por la lucha!
¡Mujeres negras, que tu voz se escucha!

Chico, repique, and *piano,*
breaking the chains of the patriarchy!

Black women, live for the fight!
Black women, may your voice be heard!

Sprawled on blow-up mattresses in a mostly empty guest room, Catalina, Julieta, Ana, Tamara, and Valentina shared with me their favorite chants from the march earlier that day so that I could write them in my field journal. It was October 2017 and we were in Resistencia, the capital of the northeastern Argentine province of Chaco, for the *Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres* (National Women's Conference). I had traveled by bus from Buenos Aires with a group of over thirty Afrodescendant women and five girls from Agrupación Xangô to this annual event, which brings together activists from throughout the country to discuss, organize, and create resolutions addressing the diverse struggles of women in Argentina. It was the thirty-second such conference but only the second in which workshops led by and for Afrodescendant women were officially included in the programming—a fact indicative of both the struggles of Afrodescendants for recognition

in Argentina and the struggles of Black feminists within white feminist spaces. After two days of workshops and a demonstration march through the city, we were exhausted. To our great luck, a local activist welcomed a group of us into her home, and that night I found myself in a borrowed sleeping bag, between teenage girls looking at the photographs on my camera that we had taken over the weekend.

Earlier that day, I had followed this boisterous group of teen girls as they marched through the streets of Resistencia alongside their elders in the Afrodescendant community, chanting loudly and proudly behind a banner that read: "¡Mujeres Afroargentinas!" (Afro-Argentine Women!). Amid an estimated 5,000 women who were marching that day (*La Nación* 2017), this intergenerational collective of Afrodescendant women joined together, shouting, "¡Mujeres negras, vivas por la lucha! ¡Mujeres negras, que tu voz se escucha!" (Black women, live for the fight! Black women, may your voice be heard!). The young women, arms linked, bouncing alongside me, would belt out "¡Negras!" at the top of their lungs each time the word came up in the chant. With drums beating and steady chanting, this group of Afrodescendant women walked, shouted, and danced their way through the city within a sea of female activists from across Argentina.

At one point in the march, we merged with an all-female *candombe* troupe. The drummers enthusiastically welcomed a girl from our group, Julieta, who borrowed a drum to join them. Julieta had recently begun learning to play the *candombe* drums, though drumming is traditionally considered a male activity. After the march, Julieta would tell me that her favorite chant from the day was one that mentioned the three drums played in Afro-Uruguayan *candombe*—the *chico*, the *repique*, and the *piano*. Taking my field journal into her hands, she wrote out the chant for me: "¡Chico, repique,

y piano, Rompiendo las cadenas del patriarcado!" (*Chico*, *repique*, and *piano*, Breaking the chains of the patriarchy!) It struck me as noteworthy, in part, because Julieta had previously told me that she used to be "machista" before joining the Jóvenes Promotores de Agrupación Xangô.

> *Antes, era machista, yo. Era una persona me críe con un papá machista, muy machista* [...] *Y me fui inculcada con todo de eso y siempre pensé que la mujer era sumisa al hombre. Que ella lavaba y limpiaba y el hombre, ¡no sé!* [laughs] ... *y ahora yo pienso totalmente diferente.*
>
> Before, I was *machista*. I was a person [who] grew up with a *machista* dad, very *machista* […] And I was instilled with all of that and I always thought that the woman was submissive to the man. That she washed and cleaned and the man, I don't know! [laughs]… and now I think totally different[ly].

Julieta now described herself as a feminist but distinguished that she was "con el feminismo negro más que nada" (with Black feminism more than anything). She felt that she was still learning how to defend her rights as a Black woman—an education that, she said, was furthered by her participation in events such as the National Women's Conference and by her learning from the women who led Agrupación Xangô, Marcela and Lujan.

> *Yo sabía que me iban a ayudar a identificarme más con mi cultura, con mi afroargentinidad digamos. Porque yo no sabía nada. Solo sabía que era negra y tenía que enfrentarme a la sociedad sola con eso y ya está.* […]
>
> *Y aprendí muchas cosas. Primero, que estoy empoderismo gracias a la Agrupación. Que me tengo, tengo que defenderme hasta esta sociedad capitalista, heteropatriarcal. Y* [laughter] *que yo soy yo, y que primero que me acepté y yo, eran aceptarme. Y segundo que, que, yo también tengo que luchar por mis derechos como afrodescendiente.*
>
> I knew they [the organization] were going to help me identify more with my culture, with my Afro-Argentine-ness, let's say. Because I didn't know anything. I only knew that I was Black and I had to face society alone with that and that's it. […]

> And I learned many things. First, that I'm empowered, thanks to the Agrupación. That I have, I have to defend myself against this capitalist, hetero-patriarchal society. And [laughter] that I'm me, it was the first time I accepted myself and they were accepting me. And second that, that, I also have to fight for my rights as an Afrodescendant.

Many of the young women whom I came to know over the course of a year of fieldwork shared similar sentiments of isolation and non-belonging prior to their involvement in Afrodescendant activism. Despite growing regional Afrodescendant visibility, asserting oneself as an *afroargentina* (Afro-Argentine woman) remains a radical act that challenges deeply racialized and gendered ideologies and practices of citizenship in their country. Integration into intersectional and intergenerational activist networks is influencing how young women are coming to understand and advocate for their rights as Black women and Argentine citizens. As Julieta described, joining an activist group helped her to develop her *afroargentinidad*—a simultaneously Afrodescendant and Argentine identity. She now feels capable of recognizing herself and of defending herself against a "capitalist, heteropatriarchal society."

In this chapter, I consider the role of Black feminism and intersectional activist networks in shaping Afrodescendant young people's emergent civic identities and political consciousness in Argentina. Within activist spaces and networks, young people are socialized into critical perspectives, political discourses, and embodied (self-)knowledge through caring, diverse relationships with adults and peers alike. These relationships and experiences provide them with skills to conceptualize and to actively seek change to interlocking systems of oppression. I focus primarily on the young women of Agrupación Xangô in order to attend to the gendered dimensions of Afrodescendant youth civic-identity formation. In doing so, I draw on the interdisciplinary fields of

Critical Youth Studies and Girlhood Studies, centering young Afrodescendant women as meaningful political subjects who actively contribute to the broader political projects of their Afro-Diasporic community. As Laó-Montes (2016, 16) observes, a "new generation" of Black feminists is emerging in Latin America and, within this generation, "decolonial feminism and intersectional analyses and methodologies are rising and shining." Confirming Laó-Montes's observations, I provide an illustration of how this new generation is taking shape and of the role of intergenerational and intersectional activist networks in fostering young women's critical civic praxis, or their "individual and collective capacity to struggle for social justice" (Ginwright and Cammarota 2007, 693).

Gender, Intersectionality, and Racialized Citizenship in Argentina

In this chapter, I explore how integration into Black feminist and intersectional discourses and networks affects youth's understandings and practices of citizenship. Within this frame, I center the experiences of young women and the particularities of gendered civic-identity formation. In Agrupación Xangô, young women were by far the majority and often led the co-ordination of the group's activities, consistent with what Taft (2011) found in her research with girl activists across the Americas. For the girls, this was natural. As Martina explained to me, "En nuestra cultura, la mujer como la que es la transmisora del conocimiento" (In our culture, the woman is the one who transmits knowledge); girls often described educating others as a significant part of their activism. I recognize that young men also actively participated in, and contributed to, intersectional activist networks, and I do include the young men of Agrupación Xangô in parts of my analysis. Nonetheless, I consider it important to bring into focus the "missing Black girl"

(Cox 2015) in scholarship on Afrodescendant social movements and the social construction of citizenship in Latin America. Research on Afrodescendant youth in Latin America has largely focused on male participants and male-dominated youth cultures, particularly hip-hop, as vehicles for youth resistance and identity formation (Anderson 2009; M. Perry 2015). The centrality of young men within this literature perpetuates the invisibility of Afrodescendant girls and also ignores the critical leadership and intellectual contributions of Black women of all ages in Afrodescendant activist mobilizations across the Americas (Goett 2017; K. Perry 2016; Smith 2016).

For Afrodescendant girls in Argentina, their "lived experience" (Oboler 2006) of citizenship is qualitatively different from that of their white peers as well as that of young Afrodescendant men. They face dual narratives that make them at once invisible and hypervisible in the public sphere. As we saw in Chapter Three, as Afrodescendant youth, they are confronted with the historically rooted and still pervasive belief that Argentina is "a white nation"—a narrative that renders invisible the racialization that occurs in the classroom. The Afrodescendant girls with whom I worked are also coming of age in the country that has the highest rates of femicide in Latin America. It is estimated that a woman is murdered every thirty hours in Argentina (Artazo and Bard Wigdor 2016). As Black girls, they are particularly vulnerable—their bodies elicit immediate assumptions of exotic foreignness and hypersexuality, which are rooted in colonial legacies of racist exploitation. As many young women shared with me, and as other scholars have documented (Gayles 2019), Black women in Argentina are routinely harassed on the street as presumed prostitutes. Girls described to me simply walking down the street and being approached by men who solicited them, asking "¿Cuánto cobrás?" (How much do

you charge?). Such encounters make clear that "the innocence of childhood is a racialized construct" (Gilmore and Marshall 2019). Afrodescendant young women move within the public sphere as both invisible citizens and sexualized others.

Like the activists with whom I worked, I draw on transnational Black feminist thought in theorizing the layered and intersecting ways that racism, sexism, and ageism constrain the citizenship and belonging of young Afrodescendant women. In defining the concept of intersectionality, Crenshaw (1991) states that compounded forms of "subordination are mutually reinforcing" and constitutive of "multiple dimensions of identity." Afro-Latin American feminists have theorized these intersections of multiple identities and deepened exclusions as "knots of diversity" that cannot be disentangled or addressed as separate political issues or identities (Rivera Lassén 2016). Rivera Lassén portrays this as a "complex spiderweb" for the Afrodescendant woman to navigate and learn to inhabit. Layers of constraining inequalities can make the web a trap, but she challenges her reader to consider whether the web could also be "the house that shelters us with all our identities, the house that protects and gives us strength to challenge exclusions" (Rivera Lassén 2016, 66). Through their involvement in local activist networks, young Afrodescendant women in Argentina are learning to occupy these webs and practice citizenship at the intersections.

In her work on Black girls in foster care in the United States, Cox (2015, 19) contends that Black girls are "illegible" citizens in the public imaginary and that "citizenship and everyday acts of political engagement undergird all aspects of Black girlhood." Fundamental to Cox's assertion is a call to reconceptualize citizenship and what constitutes civic engagement. As mentioned in the last chapter, desired forms of

youth civic engagement, as promoted by governments and institutions, has often centered on activities like volunteering, youth clubs, service learning, and participating in representational politics (Nenga 2012; Nenga and Taft 2013). However, racially marginalized youth, Black girls in particular, often have limited entry into, and are disillusioned with, these predominantly white, middle-class forms of civic engagement and political socialization. Ginwright (2010b, 81) suggests that a "broader array of skills, experiences, and social settings must be examined to understand that social processes through which civic socialization occurs." Understanding Afrodescendant young women's civic development means exploring the everyday, the personal, and the embodied means through which these youth citizens learn to challenge interlocking systems of oppression.

Healing Pedagogies:

Learning in Diverse Communities of Care

In an empty school auditorium in Resistencia, roughly fifty women sat in a circle, some in chairs and others on the cool concrete floor, for a workshop led by and for Afrodescendant women at the National Women's Conference. Collectively, the women represented manifold identities, experiences, and histories as Black women and as activists in Argentina. Youth intermingled with community elders. Women who trace their heritage to enslaved Africans trafficked to colonial Argentina spoke alongside Afrodescendant women who had migrated from Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay and the United States (many of whom were naturalized citizens). They passed food and *mate* among themselves as they took turns sharing their stories and perspectives.

The topics that they covered ranged from mobilization strategies to the invisible, quotidian forms of racism that permeate everyday life. During a discussion of racialized hypersexualization, one young woman described how her race-gendered body is seen as readily accessible to others. She stated, "Pero este cuerpo mío parece que tiene una condición de acceso por ser jugada, es como cuando tocas algún animal o a un niño, como alguien que no se puede defenderse" (But this body of mine seems to have a condition of access to be played [with], it's like when you touch an animal or a child, like someone who cannot defend them self). Some of the older women in the circle shared their personal histories of activist struggle, including years spent organizing for Afrodescendant women's rights and recognition within, but largely apart from, white-dominated feminist discourses and events.

In that large open room, the girls whom I had accompanied to Resistencia deepened their understandings of local histories of resistance and participated in transnational dialogue among Black feminisms from across the Americas. The women discussed the harm caused by white patriarchy and white feminism alike, the erasure of the Afro-Argentine past, and xenophobia in the country today. The community knowledge co-produced in this space was mediated through the "subjective knowledge base" (Collins 1989) of the women present, who shared personal, emotional stories with one another. In her research on Black feminist education, Richardson (2018) calls such exchanges among Black women "healing circles" and identifies them as belonging to a "Black feminist pedagogy" that validates personal experience and pain as knowledge. In the dialogic education in which the girls participated through the workshop, Afrodescendant women's subjective experiences coalesced to form a communal rebuttal

to official histories and dominant narratives in Argentina. This form of community counter-storytelling also provided opportunities for those present to reflect on and heal from racial trauma. As Ginwright (2010b) suggests, "[T]he power to speak about painful experiences related to racism, sexism and poverty facilitates healing because the act of testifying exposes the raw truth about suffering and releases the hidden pain that is the profound barrier to resistance."

Care and healing have long been theorized by Black feminists as profound political acts of resistance within societies that denigrate the social, physical, and emotional well-being of Black women and girls (Collins 1989; hooks 1994a; Jordan 2002; Lorde 1970). Recently, scholars have begun to theorize the importance of healing and care for Black youth civic development and critical consciousness (Baker-Bell, Stanbrough, and Everett 2017; Cox 2015; Ginwright 2010b; Richardson 2018; Sánchez Carmen et al. 2015). Ginwright (2010a) has put forth "radical healing" as a means through which Black youth can identify collective oppression within individual experience and begin to act for social justice and community well-being. Within this framework, to acknowledge suffering is not to be made a passive victim; rather, the communal catharsis achieved is agentive and transformative. The purpose of healing "is not to erase these injuries, but rather to allow the youth-agent to engage in a process of critical analysis around the conditions that cause the injury; transforming how agency, subjectivity, and identity are understood in the face of a history in which positive subjectivity has often been denied" (Sánchez Carmen et al. 2015).

The National Women's Conference provided a venue for the Afrodescendant young women present to participate in a process of healing and transformation through

exchanging testimony and formulating resolutions and strategies for addressing the oppressive conditions that they face as Black women in Argentina. Furthermore, the young women were able to deepen relationships with caring adults and peers. Care is often relegated to a gendered realm of individual emotion, but it can be profoundly political in contexts of oppression and racialized isolation. In such contexts, building caring intergenerational relationships and ties provides youth with community and with positive means of Black identification that function as "cultural armor" (Ginwright 2015, 68).

Care manifested within community spaces in many ways. On one afternoon at the conference, the Agrupación Xangô girls struck out to explore the city with Marcela, Lujan, and I trailing behind them. It was a warm spring day and a few of the girls had changed into shorts for our walk. With bare legs, dark skin, and full, natural hair, they were a spectacle to men sitting on the street, who stared and muttered at the girls as they passed in front of them. From behind the group, Marcela called out loudly to the men, "¡¿Qué?! ¡¿Nunca has visto mujeres negras tan altas y bellas?!" (What?! You've never seen such tall, beautiful Black women?!). The girls immediately joined in mocking the men and strode off, laughing confidently among themselves. In this act of care, executed in her signature humorous style, Marcela transformed a racializing experience into a master class in how to resist quotidian racial and sexual aggressions in the public sphere.

Throughout the weekend, the young women witnessed and participated in various acts of care—sharing food, braiding hair, creating designs with henna on one another's skin. The adults in our group watched over and provided for the teens, and they, in turn, took turns carrying and playing with Marcela's three-year-old son, Ali. During one of the

workshops, Marcela and Teresa, another Afrodescendant activist from Buenos Aires, got into a heated debate over the terminology in a resolution that the group was crafting. Marcela wanted it to read "Mujeres Afrodescendientes" (Afrodescendant Women), so as to include equally all of the women's experiences and contributions to the weekend's collective discussion; Teresa considered it important to foreground "Mujeres Afroargentinas" (Afro-Argentine Women) in order to situate the claims being made and to avoid co-opting the important work of Afro-Argentine communities that have been mobilizing in the country for decades. Despite their long and passionate disagreement, the two quickly moved past the argument and were seen a day later dancing together at the large outdoor concert that ended the conference. These intimate moments of closeness and caring create spaces where it is safe for Afrodescendant young people to cultivate a sense of belonging and community necessary for imagining a collective social identity and struggle (Ginwright 2010a).

Being part of the Agrupación also introduced Afrodescendant young people to diverse communities of care that extended beyond their immediate Afrodescendant community. In Resistencia, the local activist who welcomed us into her home was not Afrodescendant, but a white feminist. Back in Buenos Aires, the Agrupación was involved in various activities, events, and networks that forged connections with LGBTQ organizations,[45] immigrant-rights groups, public-healthcare advocates, teachers' unions, and many others. Young people collaborated with and learned from activists whose positionalities intersected, overlapped, and diverged from their own. Across distinct

[45] LGBTQ is an acronym for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans Queer, used to describe sexual orientation and gender identities of individuals and communities.

spaces and intersecting social movements, resources and knowledge were shared within these activist networks.

When I first began working with the Agrupación, the youth section met at the offices of an LGBTQ activist organization in bustling downtown Buenos Aires. They gathered weekly in a large open room with clean white walls and colorful square ottomans that could easily be moved into any needed formation. The back wall was covered with the names of prominent queer activists, artists, and scholars. In this space, Afrodescendant youth met and worked alongside gay and lesbian activists. Later in my research, the youth group sought a new meeting space and found another temporary solution[46] in the form of a community center affiliated with a leftist political party in the southern *barrio* of La Boca, much closer to where most of the young people lived and attended school. The community center had an eclectic, bohemian vibe, with mismatched furniture that included oversized lounging sofas that the young people would sink into before our meetings. It also had bookcases filled with used books, a small kitchen, and a large mural of the famed Argentine revolutionary Che Guevara presiding over the common room. At the community center, the youth shared *mate* and talked politics with the young white activists who ran the space. One weekend, Marcela, Lujan, and the young women of the Agrupación were invited to speak at a women's event organized by the center. In these spaces, not directly connected to their Afrodescendant community,

[46] The need for a permanent meeting space for the youth group was a persistent problem for the organization's leadership. Lacking sufficient funding, they relied on the good will of other activist organizations. This will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

the young people nonetheless had their identities and perspectives as Afro-Argentines welcomed, valued, and validated.

Auto-Reconocimiento:

Embodied (Self-)Knowledge and Resistance

Figure 16: "Fenotípicamente negro." Photograph and commentary by Ana, age 16.

> *Es una foto de una abuela y su nieto. Esta foto demuestra que no ser fenotípicamente negro para ser afro. Mucha gente piensa que, si una persona no es negro, no pertenece a la comunidad* ***AFRO****.*
>
> It is a photo of a grandmother and her grandson. This photo shows that you do not need to be phenotypically black to be *Afro.* Many people think that, if a person is not black, they do not belong to the ***AFRO*** community.

Throughout our collaborative research, youth activists routinely cited "falta de auto-reconocimiento" (lack of self-recognition) as one of the principal issues facing young Afrodescendants. In Ana's Photovoice image (Figure 16), "Fenotípicamente Negro"

(Phenotypically Black), the teen resists a reductive equation of skin color with racial identification and belonging. As outlined in Chapter Two, nineteenth-century *blanqueamiento* (whitening) policies and ideologies in Argentina asserted a racial teleology "advancing" the Argentine "race" toward whiteness; the resulting system of racial classification viewed whiteness as "stronger" and dominant in the event of miscegenation (Briones 2002; Geler 2016). Distinct from "one-drop" policies in the United States, interracial mixing provided an exit from stigmatized Blackness for Afrodescendants, and this legacy of *blanqueamiento* led many families to minimize any non-European heritage. The young people with whom I worked lamented that many of their peers either did not know or chose not to recognize their African roots.

Like many of the young women whom I came to know during my fieldwork, Delfina came from a mixed-race family. Soft-spoken and small of stature, the fifteen-year-old was often considered the baby of the Agrupación. Delfina told me that, before her involvement in Agrupación Xangô, she had not identified as Afrodescendant. As the only Afrodescendant girl in her class, she had distanced herself from associations with her African ancestry, both in the terms that she used for self-identification and in her appearance. She told me that she used to tell people, "Soy morena, no soy negra" (I am dark-skinned, I am not black). With some embarrassment, she connected this denial of her Afrodescendancy to memories of straightening her hair. When I first met her, Delfina no longer straightened her hair but instead frequently pulled it back tightly into a low ponytail. By the end of my year in Buenos Aires, when we sat down together for an interview, she styled her natural hair loosely and tossed to one side. Her mother, Lujan, an Afro-Uruguayan immigrant and community activist, credited this transformation in

her daughter's appearance and demeanor to her participation in the Agrupación and her spending time with other, "más segura" (more self-confident) Afrodescendant girls.

Delfina's relating of her hair-straightening to her denial of her Afrodescendancy was quite similar to what other young women told me. Many described having previously straightened their hair in attempts to negate one of their most visibly *Afro* features. They considered embracing their natural hair to be part of their personal journey to self-awareness and pride as Afrodescendants, and of their adoption of an activist identity. Far from just cosmetic, such bodily practices can perform a sort of "knowledge-in-action" (Van Wolputte 2004). Through their integration into activist networks, Afrodescendant girls come to understand certain bodily practices as embodied knowledge of self and community. They navigate within a white patriarchal society that denies Afrodescendant belonging while simultaneously objectifying and commodifying their Black female bodies. In such a context, these young women's embodied practices can be an important aspect of their political dissent and performance of citizenship (Parkins 2000).

In the commentary for her photograph "Auto-Reconocimiento" (Self-Recognition), Julieta explicitly describes how embracing her natural hair became a part of her resistance to Eurocentric beauty norms. In her self-portrait (Figure 17), she is posed leaning against a railing with her dark curly hair dominating the lower half of the frame. In the background, other young people play in the distance at the Afrodescendant youth retreat that Agrupación Xangô organized in Tigre. The description that she wrote for her photograph reads:

Figure 17: "Auto-Reconocimiento." Photograph and commentary by Julieta, age 18.

> *Mi pelo es parte de mi reconocimiento ya que representa mi afrodescendencia. La gente siempre quiere tocarlo y plancharlo ya que en la sociedad tiene una estética implantada Eurocentrista.*
>
> *¡¡¡Viva sentirse vivo siendo uno mismo y no como te imponen!!!*
>
> My hair is part of my [self-]recognition since it represents my Afrodescendancy. People always want to touch it and iron it since society has an instilled Eurocentric aesthetic.
>
> Live to feel alive being yourself and not what they impose on you!!!

For Afrodescendant young women like Julieta, the choices that they made in styling their hair constituted an embodied resistance to hegemonic beauty ideals that uphold white normativity and supremacy. This is not to say that natural hair is inherently self-affirming; rather, this was how it was interpreted by these young women within the social and historical contexts of their lives (Banks 2000).

In an interview, Catalina spoke to the historical importance of hair within her Afrodescendant community.

> *Las trenzas, o sea, los hacían caminitos. Las trenzas pegadas para ver el camino hacia la libertad. ¿Entendés? También fue una forma de revolución cuando se empecen a usar el pelo afro en los setenta. Fue una forma de revolución, de empoderamiento, y protesta.*
>
> The braids, like, they made routes. The braids were fixed to show the route toward freedom. Do you understand? It was also a form of revolution when they started using *Afro* hair in the seventies. It was more of a form of revolution, of empowerment and protest.

In this statement, Catalina connected hair-styling practices to Afrodescendant histories of resistance. Her discussion of braids draws from reports and oral histories that recall how enslaved Afro-Latin American women used braided designs to communicate hidden messages and to draw maps to escape enslavers (Brown 2011). As Fassin (2011, 431) has asserted, such histories are not solely in the past; "the embodiment of racial memory is not a metaphor" when Black bodies continue to be stigmatized and systematically devalued in the present. For Afrodescendant young women, embracing historically situated and culturally significant hairstyling practices can be a means of embodying agentive Black female identities.

Dance was another embodied practice often cited by young women and activists as facilitating Afrodescendant self-recognition and community knowledge. During my time in Buenos Aires, several organizations, including Movimiento Afrocultural, and independent activists offered classes on African and Afro-diasporic dance. A young Afrodescendant activist from the United States began offering a class exclusively for Afrodescendant women that was well attended by young women from Buenos Aires's Afrodescendant community. She told me that it was important that her class be *only* for

Black women so that it could be a place where these women would be able to express themselves openly, free of white gazes. Dance classes were spaces in which Afrodescendant girls could both learn and lead within their community. After leaving Argentina, I learned that Catalina and Julieta went on to host their own workshop on *candombe* dance. Many of the young women in the Agrupación participated in their family's *candombe* troupes, primarily as dancers and occasionally as drummers. For our Photovoice project, Ana captured several photographs at one of the small *llamadas* (*candombe* parades) that take place almost every Sunday in the *barrio* of San Telmo, when *candombe* drummers and dancers march from Parque Lezama down several blocks of Calle Defensa. In one of her images (Figure 18), titled "Las Calles de San Telmo" (The Streets of San Telmo), the sixteen-year-old described how dancing *candombe* connects her to her history and identity as an *afroargentina*. Her commentary read, "*Cuando bailo, me autoreconozco como afro. Esta foto fue sacada en las calles de San*

Figure 18: "Las Calles de San Telmo" Photograph and commentary by Ana, age16.

Telmo, un barrio históricamente negro" (When I dance, I recognize myself as *Afro*. This photo was taken in the streets of San Telmo, a historically Black neighborhood).

In the photo, two of her friends dance on the edge of a *candombe* troupe that is barely visible on the right-hand side of the frame. The girls dance before a crowd of tourists and onlookers who follow the *candomberos* down the street. Ana's description of the photograph calls attention to the relationships among this embodied practice, community, and place. By specifically locating her practice of *candombe* dance within San Telmo, "a historically Black neighborhood," Ana situates her African ancestry and identity within the history and geography of Buenos Aires.

Through embodied practices such as hairstyling, dance, and *candombe*, Afrodescendant young women cultivate knowledge of self and community, crafting both ethnic and civic identities. Self-recognition is a political act in a social context that denies Afrodescendant heritage and discourages Afrodescendant identification, and hair and dance become political mediums. Embodied practices and discourses learned and shared within local activist networks provide mediums by means of which young women resist conceptions of citizenship and belonging that limit and constrain them.

Talking like Activists:

Enacting Civic Identities and Building Intersectional Fluencies

Throughout Afrodescendant community spaces, race-related terms and racist language were continually subjects of discussion and criticism. The Agrupación helped to organize a conference in 2016 to educate about, and to object to, pejorative uses of *negro/negra* that were prevalent in local media. In educational presentations in schools and

universities, Carlos frequently spoke about the history of racial terms in Argentina, describing to the audience the significance of the term "afrodescendiente" as a political identity with origins in the Durban Conference and transnational Afro-diasporic social movements. Not surprisingly, many conversations in our youth-section meetings also revolved around racist everyday language embedded in Argentine colloquial speech. On an afternoon before a youth-section meeting, Julieta, Catalina, and Ana were discussing some of the Agrupación's major upcoming projects when Julieta shared a story of a recent incident at her school. Her teacher was having the class watch a film set in colonial Argentina when a boy referred to an enslaved character as "morocho" (dark-skinned). Julieta described being angry at his word choice, telling the boy that he should have used *africano* or *afrodescendiente* because these terms were more accurate. A debate followed in which the other student insisted that terms such as *morocho* and *negro* were not racist. The girls began to discuss their frustrations with how the self-evident racism of pejorative uses of *negro/a* could be so flatly ignored by their peers. Julieta said that she had had to distance herself from friends who used *negro/a* in regular conversation. "Cada vez dicen negro, digo basta. Negro. Basta. Negro, negro, negro. Basta, basta, basta!" (Every time they say *negro*, I say enough. *Negro*. Enough. *Negro, negro, negro*. Enough, enough, enough!).

At some point, one of the girls suggested, "Por qué no blancos de mierda?" (Why not shit whites?). The teens started laughing. "Blancos de mierda! Imagínate!" (Shit whites! Just imagine!). Julieta leaned toward me and said with a mischievous smile that she wanted a shirt that read "blancos de mierda." She paused, waiting for my response; I just laughed and agreed that she should make one. Such wordplay and humorous testing

of boundaries were means through which the girls learned to challenge dominant racial ideologies. A few years later, in 2019, Agrupación Xangô created a video for social media that humorously expanded upon this concept of substituting *blanco/a* so as to reveal the inherent racism of pejorative uses of *negro/a.* Young people recorded themselves subverting common expressions by saying, for example, "Un blanco de mierda me pidió monedas en el tren" (A shit white asked me for spare change on the train) and "Ay que paja, labure como un blanco" (Oh I'm so tired, I work like a white).

In her research with girl activists across the Americas, Taft (2011) asserts that the radical leftist politics in Latin America provide young women with intellectual resources and spaces to develop "political vocabularies and critical knowledges." Similarly, I found that involvement in the Agrupación and participation in broader activist networks provided young women with exposure to the terminology and discourses that they needed in order to understand, dissect, and enter into dialogue with interlocking systems of power. As the young people moved within activist spaces, they came into contact with new people and new ideas and were socialized into new ways of speaking and thinking—not just about race, but also about gender and sexuality.

Resisting racial, gendered, and heterosexist hegemonies embedded in language was critically important to the leadership of Agrupación Xangô. Carlos, for one, always emphasized the use of gender-neutral language within the Agrupación—a challenge in Spanish, in which nouns, pronouns, articles and other determiners, and adjectives are gendered either masculine or feminine. The youth were often encouraged to use "x" as a gender-neutral, inclusive plural form. For example, when Catalina showed him a flyer that she was designing for a youth-section event, Carlos suggested changing the wording

from “Jóvenes Afroargentinos” to “Jóvenes Afroargentin**x**s” (Afro-Argentine youth). In another instance, Carlos interrupted a female professor from a local university to encourage her to use “nosotras” (we; cf. the conventional *nosotros*, with its masculine ending) to describe those present in the meeting, where Carlos was the only male in the room. After all, why should they use the masculine form when the group was primarily female? The professor shrugged and nodded in agreement. Over time, I noticed the young people mirroring Carlos’s attention to gendered language in their own speech practices. Most often, this occurred in talk about the Agrupación or initiatives that they were organizing. One of the youth members might say “los/las”—that is, both gendered forms of “the”—or “con *x*” (with an *x*) after a plural word, so as to make clear that they were using a gender-inclusive plural form.

In another example, one Sunday afternoon, I accompanied youth members of Agrupación Xangô as they went to be interviewed in Parque Lezama by some visiting Colombian film students who had reached out to Carlos, wanting to create a short film about Afro-Argentine youth. The young people took turns being interviewed in pairs by the film students, while the rest of us watched from just outside the frame. To pass the wait time between interviews, the teens staged a photoshoot with my camera, asking me to take photos of them striking silly poses or borrowing the camera to take photographs themselves.

Catalina and Tamara were the first to be interviewed by the film students; they chose to talk about their personal experiences of racism in their schools. The girls shared stories of isolation, hurtful racist stereotypes, and prejudice in the classroom. The stories that the girls told were familiar and practiced, having been repeated in interviews and

shared as personal testimony in various community spaces and educational events. When their turn came, Ana and Julieta talked more broadly about the effects of invisibilization on the Afrodescendant community and the presumptions of foreignness that they encountered in public spaces. Joaquin and Mateo elected to be interviewed together on the topic of Agrupación Xangô's mission and current projects. Seventeen-year-old Mateo was the most recent addition to the core group of youth members; he had decided to become more involved in the organization after participating in a youth retreat organized by Agrupación Xangô. Though he was new, he was not shy, and he immediately began speaking when the camera was on him.

> *Somos la Agrupación Xangô. Somos parte de la agrupación de los jóvenes. Los temas que básicamente discutimos como referentes son el racismo, la discriminación, la xenofobia, y la hemo…homolesbo…blah blah blah…tengo que decirlo de vuelta, no?*
>
> We are Agrupación Xangô. We are part of the youth group. The themes that we discuss as representatives of the organization are basically racism, discrimination, xenophobia, and hemo…homolesbo…blah blah blah [Mateo jokingly emphasizes his mistake and laughs] … I have to say it again, right?

As Mateo struggled to get the word out, Joaquin smiled and expertly pronounced, "Homolesbotransfobia" (Homolesbotransphobia). Mateo laughed again and said that they would have to start over again from the top or it would be "re-malo" (very bad). The boys started from the beginning, but Mateo fumbled again.

Mateo: *Nosotros, básicamente, estamos trabajando sobre el tema de la discriminación, el racismo, la xenofobia, y la hemolesbotransfobia. **¡No! Homo**lesbotransfobia.*

We, basically, are working on the topics of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and hemolesbotransphobia. **No! Homo**lesbotransphobia.

Joaquin: *Sí, homolesbotransfobia* (Yes, homolesbotransphobia). […] *Tratamos de…* (Let's try…).

Mateo: *¡**Pero no**, decí vuelta! Tengo que decirlo de vuelta. ¡**Boludo**! Sino no me sale bien la ultima palabra como boludo*

No, I said it again! I have to say it again. **Idiot**! I don't get this last word right, like an idiot).

Joaquin: ***Homo-lesbo-trans-fobia.***

[As Joaquin breaks down the word, the girls, watching and listening, begin to laugh]

Mateo: *Bueno…shhh…Bueno. Como les dijimos, somos parte de la Agrupación Xangô, en la parte de los jóvenes. Nuestro objetivo es básicamente, en la Agrupación es, trabajamos en el tema de la discriminación, el racismo, la xenofobia, y la hemolesbotransfobia. ¡**La homolesbotransfobia**! No sé por qué me sale "hemo." "Hemo"…boludo.*

OK…shhh…OK. As we told you, we are part of Agrupación Xangô, the youth group. Our goal is basically, in the organization it's, we work on the topic of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and hemolesbotransphobia. **Homolesbotransphobia**! I don't know how I get "hemo." "Hemo"…idiot.

Joaquin: *Homo, homo.*

It took four takes for Mateo to pronounce successfully what he wanted to say. Joaquin never forcefully interjected, but consistently reinforced the correct pronunciation for Mateo. Mateo was not the only young person to struggle to say this word on the first attempt. I witnessed a few of the girls similarly fumble when practicing speeches to be given at a university event to which Agrupación Xangô had been invited. Still, this example of peer socialization between the two boys provides an important example of how, within the Agrupación, expectations of inclusive language were shared and reinforced across genders. *Homolesbotransfobia* was not a term regularly used in their everyday conversations as teenagers, but it was one that they all grew to understand and use through their participation in the organization.

Through their involvement in the Agrupación and broader activist networks, Afrodescendant youth learned to question various aspects of conventional language use and to adopt new, more inclusive ways of speaking. Everyday talk thus became an integral part of how they practiced alternative civic identities. Their word choices became political statements, affirming their positions as Afrodescendants, feminists, and allies. At activist events and in community spaces, they engaged in discussions and debates, modeled their own speech on that of adults and peers alike, and became increasingly proficient in local political discourses. They learned to formulate and express social critiques and to link them under broader conceptual domains, such as colonialism and capitalism. Embracing activist identities, the Agrupación girls called for "breaking the chains of the patriarchy" in protest chants and decried the colonial roots of their "capitalist, heteropatriarchal society."

"Acompañando la Lucha":

Intersectional Consciousness and Expanding Civic Praxis

On a warm day in November, Catalina borrowed my beat-up DSLR camera and took photographs at the Buenos Aires Pride March for our Photovoice project. Accompanied by several of the young women from the Agrupación, she marched alongside the Afro-LGBT association with Carlos and other queer-community leaders and allies. She moved among the crowd, carefully framing her shots to tell her own story of the event. In Catalina's image from that day, "Basta de Racismo" (No More Racism), Afrodescendant women march behind the banner on which her title is based (Figure 19). Her commentary for the photograph reads:

Figure 19: "Basta de Racismo." Photograph and commentary by Catalina, age 19.

> *Esta foto fue sacada en la marcha del orgullo y representa la unidad que tenemos como comunidad para decir "¡Basta de Racismo!" Esta relacionado con todo en nuestras vidas, la sociedad en la que vivimos es racista y discriminadora en todos los sentidos. Lo que podemos seguir haciendo al respecto es seguir luchando contra esto.*
>
> This photo was taken at the Pride March and it represents the unity that we have as a community to say, "No More Racism!" It is related to everything in our lives, the society in which we live is racist and discriminatory in every sense. What we can do about it is keep fighting against this.

She titled another photograph taken at the march "Acompañando la Lucha" (Sharing the Fight). In this image (Figure 20), an Afrodescendant boy, perhaps nine or ten years old, stands staring directly into the camera, his gaze partially obstructed by a Pride March balloon. He wears a rainbow tie and has a pair of bright-green sunglasses resting on his head. Catalina's description of the photograph reads, "*Esta foto la saque en la marcha del orgullo. Para mi, la foto representa que los chicos acompañan a sus familias en esa edad y forman parte de la lucha*" (I took this photo at the Pride March. To me, the photo represents that kids accompany their families at this age and form part of the fight).

Figure 20: "Acompañando la Lucha." Photograph and commentary by Catalina, age 19.

Catalina's image commentaries reference the importance of community unity and youth involvement in "la lucha" (the fight, or the struggle). Across diverse and dispersed Latin American communities, *la lucha* is often evoked in activist rhetoric in order to represent collectively various struggles against injustice. In Catalina's use of the term, *la lucha* extends beyond fighting racism to encompass fighting against all forms of discrimination; it provides a "bridging frame" (Benford and Snow 2000; Terriquez, Brenes, and Lopez 2018) that connects the overlapping social movements within and among which she moves. Local Afrodescendant community activism teaches youth to view racism as intrinsically connected to broader workings of power in society. As a result, there is "spillover" in youth civic praxis as it expands beyond single-identity politics and social movements (Terriquez 2015). For youth like Catalina, to *acompañar la lucha* is to fight to transform a society that is "discriminatory in every sense."

Afrodescendant girls' expanding civic praxis manifests across the varied social worlds that they inhabit, blurring public/private dichotomies. During my fieldwork, the girls participated in public marches and demonstrations to celebrate gay pride and protest an Indigenous activist's suspicious disappearance after a violent police encounter. In school, Julieta challenged her friends and peers' use of racist terms. When Delfina befriended a trans student, her mother, Lujan, remarked on how her daughter and the other girls did not exhibit the same prejudices that had characterized her experiences while growing up.

> *Entonces se mezclan y nos dicen ellas no se sienten incómodas. No tiene que andar explicándole nada, porque ya es así. Entendés? Y en el LGBT, fue a la marcha con Catalina, yo no fui, fue ella. Tan bueno que esté en un círculo de diversidad.*
>
> So, they mix and tell us they don't feel uncomfortable. There is no need to have to explain anything, because that's the way it is. You understand? And in the LGBT, [Delfina] went to the march with Catalina, I didn't go, she went. So great to be in a circle of diversity.

Indeed, the girls' political activities and identities were continually being shaped by growing networks of relationships and exposure to critical discourses within these "circles of diversity."

At the time of my research, the *Ni Una Menos* (Not One Less) movement was growing in Argentina as a feminist response to gender-based violence. The girls in the Agrupación participated in the movement by sharing via WhatsApp the images and stories of young girls who had been reported missing or murdered. A couple times during my research, the girls changed their profile images to an image of one of the missing girls, in solidarity. When I inquired about their changed profiles, the girls told me that the

police do little to stop violent men and the news outlets barely cover stories of sexual assault and femicide, even less when the victims are poor or non-white girls.

The teens were constantly messaging their friends through WhatsApp, and they used the platform and their communication networks to raise political awareness. They shared the stories of the missing girls, videos of police brutality against Senegalese immigrants, and flyers for upcoming activist events. When Argentina's Senate considered landmark abortion legislation, the streets became a "color-coded battleground" with pro-choice activists donning green and anti-abortion activists, light blue (Newman 2018). As girls in the Agrupación became more invested in the debate, they began to signal their stance using green hearts in their everyday WhatsApp messages.

As discussed in preceding chapters, a significant means through which young people expressed their agency and critical consciousness was through sharing their experiences in schools. At both public and private events, young women's educational *testimonios* became important features of the collective activism of their community. Rosario-Ramos and Johnson (2013, 114) write that "as youth become more active participants in community struggle, their voices become part of the legacy of resistance and social change of the communities they inhabit." This was particularly true in regard to the topic of education, one on which the young women could assert themselves as experts within feminist circles and debates in which they participated. This could be seen near the end of one of the workshops at the National Women's Conference, when Catalina interjected into the collective discussion. Among this group of passionate women, it was sometimes difficult for the young people to find room to speak, particularly for respectful, collected Catalina, who rarely talked over others. After she

had made a few points summarizing her reflections on the unfolding debate, an older woman cut Catalina off mid-sentence. “No terminé” (I haven’t finished), Catalina stated flatly. Her statement hung in the air for a moment, and some of the other women began to hush the crowd in order to allow Catalina to continue.

> *Con el tema escolar, Julieta y yo y todas las chicas que estamos en la Agrupación Xangô vivimos constantemente el acoso escolar, el racismo, y todo lo que abarca la discriminación. O sea, los vivimos en el colegio porque todavía estamos. Entonces, es una lucha desde la sociedad hacia afuera y desde la sociedad en el colegio.*
>
> On the subject of school, Julieta and myself and all the girls in Agrupación Xangô constantly live with bullying, racism and everything that encompasses discrimination. That is, we live with them in school because we are still there. So it’s a struggle that comes from society outside [of school] and from society in school.

After affirming her authority on the subject, Catalina and some of the other young women began to talk about their experiences in schools, broadening the discussion and inserting their experience-based expertise.

Conclusion:

Entangled Becoming

One afternoon, before a youth section meeting, Catalina, Julieta, and I sat on the pavement outside our meeting space and awaited Lujan’s arrival with the key. We were chatting casually when I noticed Julieta’s new bracelet, a leather cuff covered in rows of red, yellow, and green beads. When I complimented her on it, her eyes lit up and she proudly held her wrist out in front of me, telling me, “Es de Africa” (It’s from Africa). As I sat with the two teen girls, I was struck in this moment about how their emergent political consciousness manifested in various accessories and cues that accented their

self-presentations. Julieta's bracelet sported the colors of African nationalist movements, and her loose, natural hairstyle was part of her resistance to Eurocentric beauty norms. On the teenagers' backpacks were buttons from an LGBTQ organization and brightly colored bandanas used to signal political affiliations and causes; in many cases, these bandanas were mementos from various marches that they had attended. A year after my fieldwork ended, I would see a photograph posted on Catalina's Facebook page of Julieta and Catalina displaying matching tattoos on their forearms: an image of the African continent with a tiny heart at its center. Across their bodies were written entangled processes of becoming, knotted "assemblages" of multi-layered identities (Nash 2013, 13).

Stuart Hall (1994, 225) famously describes Afro-diasporic identity as both a state of being and a continuous state of "becoming" that "belongs to the future as much as to the past." This processual understanding of identity rejects essentialism and instead considers how Afro-diasporic subjects position themselves in relation to their historical and contemporary contexts, and how they resist dominant discourses and forces that oppress and constrain them. The young Afrodescendant women whom I came to know in Argentina were "becoming" Afro-diasporic as they co-constructed community knowledges and histories and became invested in legacies of resistance. Paulo Freire also uses the notion of "becoming" in setting forth his critical pedagogy. He writes that "education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming—unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality" (Freire 1970, 84). This unfinishedness does not represent lack but rather possibility. Writing on Afro-diasporic futurity, Fanon describes the reclamation of Afro-diasporic identity as "directed by the

secret hope of discovering, beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others" (Fanon 1963, cited in Hall 1994, 223). In this sense, "becoming" is evidenced as Afrodescendant young women work to craft a more caring, just future for themselves and others. I find that "becoming" can be understood as an ongoing, entangled process of individual and community transformations through civic praxis. Youth are becoming Afrodescendant, becoming feminists, becoming activists, becoming citizens.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: "YO EDUCO A MIS DOCENTES"

In the Museo Histórico Nacional del Cabildo, Julieta took her turn to speak to a room filled with Afrodescendant activists. One of the event's organizers had put forward the question, "¿Cuales son, en tu opinión, las principales dificultades que enfrentan los y las afrodescendientes en la educación?" (What are, in your opinion, the principal difficulties that Afrodescendants face in education?). With other teens from the Agrupación siting on either side of her, she took the microphone into her hands and began to share her insights on the topic of education, drawing on her experiences as an Afrodescendant student and activist.

> *Hola, mi nombre es Julieta y estoy con la Agrupación Xangô, muchos me conocen. Creo que, como, durante mi último año de secundaria llegué una otra mente y sintiéndome negra, cosa que hace años no me ha pasaba. Y la dificultad entre el aula es la invisibilización que hay en Argentina que los afros no existimos. Y creo que también me siento mal a veces.*[47] *Y yo también, al estar empoderada, aunque todavía me falta, estoy aprendiendo muchísimo. Puedo también pelear... Estoy acá, estoy, que existo y no morí, que estamos acá. Y que puedo pelear también porque existió una mujer que me representó...se llama María Remedios del Valle. También es una forma de que yo educo a mis docentes, a mis compañeros. Que también hay que trabajar en el tema de educación. Nosotros, por ejemplo, vamos a dar charlas en los colegios y los chicos salen con otra mente. […]Creo que nosotros, los jóvenes estamos empoderados, nos estamos empoderando cada vez más. Gracias a esto. Gracias a que presenciamos los debates, y, no sé, a los más grandes nos enseñan. Los escuchamos y tenemos personas que tienen la voluntad también de enseñarnos y de decirnos, "¡Estudí, estudí!"*

[47] Julieta used "que también" and "también" often to fill pauses in her speech. For the sake of clarity, some instances have been removed from the translation.

> Hi, my name is Julieta, and I'm with the Agrupación Xangô, many of you know me. I think that, like, during my last year of high school I arrived at another mindset and [began] thinking of myself as Black, something that years ago had not happened for me. And, the difficulty in the classroom is the invisibility that there is, that we *Afros* don't exist. And I think I feel bad sometimes. And I'm being empowered, though I'm still lacking. I'm learning a lot. I can also fight... I am here, I am, that I exist, and I didn't die, that we're here. And I can fight because there was a woman who represented me ... her name is María Remedios del Valle. [...] It is also a way for me to educate my teachers, my classmates. We must work on the subject of education. We, for example, are giving talks in schools and the kids come out with another mindset […] I think that we young people are empowered, we're empowering ourselves more and more. Thanks to this. Thanks to witnessing the debates, and, I don't know, the elders who teach us. We listen to them and we have people who have the resolve to teach us and say, "Study, study!"

In her speech in the national museum, Julieta provided a powerful illustration of the transformative potential of community-based civic learning and activism for Afrodescendant youth in Argentina. Here and elsewhere, Julieta described that, before her participation in the Agrupación, she neither identified as Afrodescendant nor felt a sense of belonging to her country. She felt invisible. By means of the counter-stories, histories, and practices that she learned in her community, Julieta forged an identity for herself as a fighter—a young woman "empowered" to resist the invisibilization that she experiences in the classroom. She acknowledges that this process was facilitated by "elders" from her community who taught her, listened to her, and encouraged her to envision new possibilities for herself and her community. She also recognized María Remedios del Valle as a source of strength and national identification as an *afroargentina* (Afro-Argentine woman) who fought for Argentina's independence. Julieta concluded her speech in the museum by saying, "Yo siempre te digo lo mismo, pero te prometo que la lucha va a seguir y que no se cambiar nunca" (I always tell you the same thing, but I promise you that the fight will continue and that will never change). In this final

statement, Julieta affirms herself, as she did in her introduction, as a known Afrodescendant youth activist in her community and as a fighter in *la lucha*.

Julieta's simple statement "yo educo a mis docentes, a mis compañeros" (I educate my teachers, my classmates) was the one that I found most profound; it clearly and cogently describes the powerful pedagogical reversal that is rendered possible for youth through Afro-diasporic community activism. In previous studies, youth have been mobilized as "peer-educators" in participatory action research, and scholars have found that taking on this role builds youth confidence, skills, and organizational capacity (Goto et al. 2010). But what does it mean for youth to educate their teachers?

In asserting themselves as educators of their teachers, youth like Julieta challenge the power dynamics of their Eurocentric classroom and Western paradigms of knowledge production. Through Afro-diasporic community activism, youth learn to position themselves as experts, researchers, and educators capable of contributing critical perspectives and community knowledges across various contexts. Beyond transforming how youth view themselves and act as citizens, youth as educators work to transform educational environments and institutions in meaningful ways. Educating their teachers and their classmates is a form of civic praxis that connects the Afro-diasporic community and the classroom.

Bridging the Afro-Diasporic Community and the Classroom

In this dissertation, I have outlined how Afro-diasporic community activism provides youth with an alternative citizenship education, a counter-classroom in which young people learn from and engage in community counter-storytelling and redefine the

parameters of citizenship and belonging in their country. My research offers a vision of citizenship education that decenters the classroom and locates the production of critical knowledge and the learning and practicing of citizenship within local communities. By analyzing Afro-diasporic community activism as a counter-classroom, I am also positioning what youth learn as activists in their communities in direct relation, or rather, in response, to the exclusion that they face in their classrooms. These community-based "fugitive acts of learning," as Patel (2016, 400) has described them, must be viewed "in their dialectical relationship to formal, oppressive structures of schooling."

As with Fraser's (1990, 67) concept of the "counterpublic," the counter-classroom can "expand the discursive space" around formal educational by confronting "assumptions that were previously exempt from contestation." In Afro-diasporic community activism, youth participate in critical discourses that expose and disrupt the racialized citizenship perpetuated in their schools and the myth of the white nation at its foundation. As Baldridge et al. (2017, 389) assert, "Community-based spaces, thus, serve as sites to connect and interrogate academic learning" within broader sociopolitical structures and historical contexts. Activism provides youth with opportunities to reflect on and to reframe their educational experiences of isolation, racialization, and invisibilization as the products of power dynamics and ideologies with deep roots in colonialism.

In this dialectical relationship between schools and community, youth also bring to their classrooms repertoires of community knowledge and counter-stories learned through Afro-diasporic activism. Youth accomplished this in myriad ways. The most apparent of these methods were their *charlas*, the talks that the youth gave in schools to

educate other young people about Afro-Argentine history and racial discrimination. These *charlas* were made possible through the Agrupación's connections to a network of educational institutions and progressive educators in the city, as well as through collaborations with other Afrodescendant activist groups. I was able to attend one such *charla* during my time in Argentina, when I accompanied Julieta and a social-work student, Emilia, to a local secondary school. The young women's presentation followed that of an Afrodescendant community activist associated with Movimiento Afrocultural, who spoke about Afro-Argentine history to an assembly of over two hundred students. When he finished, Julieta stood before the crowd and delivered a presentation that the Agrupación youth and social-work students had prepared on racism, anti-discrimination legislation, and student rights. In that moment, Julieta was able to provide the critical education that she had so often described as necessary but utterly absent in schools.

Beyond organized events like the *charlas*, youth activists found other ways of educating their teachers. They mobilized community assets like the Agrupación's teaching guide to educate their teachers on Afro-Argentine history, as Ana did in Chapter Four. On more than one occasion, Julieta entered the community center in La Boca with a story to tell the group about a confrontation with one of her teachers over a history lecture or with one of her peers over racist language.

But not all of the youth were so direct. During one of the Agrupación meetings, the group was making plans and discussing some of the obligations that the youth had for the coming week when Marcela exclaimed, "Eryn, sos antropóloga?" (Eryn, you're an anthropologist?). I nodded. "Bueno, vos podés ayudar a Delfina. Tiene que hacer un informe sobre la raza para la escuela" (Good, you can help Delfina. She has to do a report

on race for school). I happily agreed and met the teen at her house later that week to help her with what turned out to be a short paper for a class. She explained that she wanted to write the "truth" about race. "No es real" (It is not real), she told me, "somos humanos, todos somos iguales" (we're humans, we're all equal). For the next few hours, we discussed her paper and I pointed her toward information about human biological variation and the social construction of race. At one point, I asked her what the directions for the assignment were; she shrugged her shoulders and told me that it was just a research paper. She had chosen to write about the concept of race because she thought that her teacher should know this information; she hoped that it might influence how her teacher thought and taught. While teens like Julieta were outspoken, quiet Delfina's civic praxis manifested in more subtle ways.

The counter-classroom both resists and expands educational institutions and discourses, serving as a bridge between community and classroom. Youth are the ones who traverse that bridge. Through various deliberate actions like those described here, young people positioned themselves as educators and worked collectively and individually to use the critical consciousness gained in their community to transform oppressive social realities in their schools.

The Power of Education, The Power of Youth

"Educación es lo mas importante" (Education is the most important), asserted one of the Agrupación youth as we discussed possible workshop topics for their upcoming youth retreat in Tigre. This sentiment was repeated throughout my time in Argentina. In interviews, youth-section meetings, and public events, education was held up as the single most important issue for Afrodescendant youth activists. As Julieta stated in the

vignette that opens this chapter, “We must work on the subject of education.” Within the Agrupación and their broader Afro-diasporic community, this impetus to organize around education was twofold—activists saw a need to address racism and discrimination in schools and to educate the public about “la verdadera historia” (the true history), as Tamara phrased it. Education was seen as both an important battleground for *la lucha* and a paramount means of crafting social change.

Education has long been an important aspect of activist practice and social movements in the Americas—examples include agroecological education in the Brazilian Landless Workers’ Movement, mass education in socialist Cuba, Zapatista autonomous education in Mexico, and the liberation schools of the Black Power Movement in the United States (Baronnet and Breña 2008; Griffiths and Williams 2009; Rickford 2019; Tarlau 2014). Freire’s “pedagogy of liberation” had its origins in grassroots educational movements in Brazil (Jara 2010). The conceptualization of education as a means of resistance and of achieving freedom that can be found in contemporary activist cultures has developed in conversation with the works of popular educators and scholars such as Freire (1970), Horton (1975), hooks (1994b; 2010), and Giroux (2001). Drawing on Freire, Rigal (2008) asserts that education has occupied a central role in Latin American social movements because collective recognition of oppression is the first step toward active citizenship and meaningful social action. Education in this sense provides the “building points of resistance to the dominant hegemony” (Rigal 2008, 35).

If education is understood to be a primary driver of social change within community activism, Afrodescendant youth are not just the subjects of collective action, but critical agents of it. Much of the research on youth citizenship education speaks to the

benefits of civic development for youth as individuals; less acknowledged are the ways that youth benefit their community by taking on meaningful roles as educators, community researchers, and political actors (Strobel, Osberg, and McLaughlin 2006, 197). The youth activists whom I came to know in Argentina were not passive members of their Afro-diasporic activist community. In the counter-classroom of their community, they learned to assert themselves in intergenerational dialogues and debates, inserting youth perspectives, interests, and experiences into critical conversations about education. At community and public events, they shared their counter-stories, their *testimonios*, and brought into relief the lived experiences of racism and invisibility that were so thoroughly obscured and denied in the public sphere.

It is impossible to draw a causal line, but it appeared, around the time of my field research, that education was moving increasingly toward the center of Afrodescendant activism and community organizing. For example, youth often spoke on the subject of the Independence Day plays and proposed an official denouncement of the practice of blackface in their schools.[48] In 2019, the Comisión 8N put out a statement denouncing the representations of Afrodescendants in school plays. Its opening was clear and powerful:

> *…solicitamos al Estado Argentina, la academia, docentes de nivel inicial, primario, secundario y universitario, que deseen reivindicar la presencia negra en nuestro país, que eviten recurrir al "blackface" (el vejatorio y humilitante corcho quemado que utilizan año tras año) y a los estereotipos del esclavizado/a feliz con su condición de subalternidad. Es una conmemoración ridiculizante y mentirosa.*
>
> …we request that the State of Argentina, the academy, teachers at the initial, primary, secondary and university levels, who wish to claim the Black presence in our country, avoid resorting to "blackface" (the

[48] See the *Propuestas* section of this chapter for more on youth proposals.

> degrading and humiliating burnt cork that they use year after year) and the stereotypes of the enslaved as happy with their condition of subalterity. It is a ridiculous and lying commemoration.

The statement went on to offer alternative representations of Afrodescendants for these celebrations, such as María Remedios del Valle and Sargento Cabral. Using the hashtag #NoBlackFace, the statement and images created by Afrodescendant designers (Figure 21) were circulated widely on social media. Soon an article was published in *Clarín*, a major Argentine news source, with a title and subtitle that read, "Un 25 de Mayo sin blackface: el pedido de los afrodescendientes a los colegios. Esa comunidad realizó una campana en las redes sociales que apuntó a los actos escolares" (A May 25th without blackface: Afrodescendants' request to schools. This community carried out a campaign on social networks that targeted the school events) (Clarín 2019). Several news sites picked up the story, and Marcela even wrote an article for *Revista Amazonas*, an international feminist online magazine, for which she interviewed two schoolteachers

Figure 21: Graphic circulated on social media in May 2019. Designed by Jenniffer Mayren Urrutia, CEO of AfroUp and Afrodescendant activist.

about the practice of blackface in the Independence Day plays. In this example of the campaign against blackface in schools, it is possible to see the interrelationship between community mobilization and the experiences that youth voiced in community spaces.[49]

Ultimately, education was not the only topic of great community concern and conversation; racist violence, hypersexualization and gendered racism, media representation, cultural appropriation, affirmative-action legislation—these were all important issues that were being discussed. But education was viewed as a key mechanism for the "decolonizing of mentality" (Cabral 2016, hooks 2010), both for Afrodescendant youth and for the Argentine public. In this context, youth activists play an important role in the project of decolonization. Within their community, youth activists organized youth events and were key actors in the political socialization of their Afrodescendant peers, modeling Afro-Argentine identification and intersectional consciousness. They actively disseminated Afro-Argentine histories and counter-stories in and beyond their classrooms. They aspired to expand our collaborative research on racism in schools to a national scale, believing that research could visibilize the effects of school-based racism on Afrodescendant youth academic trajectories, and I helped them to draft grant proposals to that end. The young people's educational activism was not confined to any neat binary of local/global or public/private. They envisioned education as a powerful and broad means of enacting social change and themselves as experts and agents of that change.

[49] This relationship is likely reciprocal in many ways. Youth activists were exposed to ways of framing their experiences in the plays through their activism and, in turn, their activism propelled the conversation about the plays.

The Responsibility to Educate

Becoming educators of their peers, teachers, and even their parents was something that youth spoke of with pride. For many of them, education was not just an important aspect of their civic activism; it was a responsibility to their community. This was a view often reinforced in Afro-diasporic community spaces and events. At the youth retreat in Tigre, Karina, an Afro-Colombian activist, spoke to a roomful of Afrodescendant young people, urging them to "implementar una educación que es boca a boca […] se han dado cuenta que pueden difundir la comunidad afro contándole a sus amigos, a los que les molesta" (practice an education that is word of mouth […] you've realized that you can promote the *Afro* community by talking about it to your friends, to those who harass you). Karina's words express a perspective that I heard on several occasions in community spaces: the belief that youth were particularly capable shapers of other malleable young minds because they could speak to other youth "en su lengua" (in their language). Youth were encouraged to consider themselves representatives and educators of Afrodescendancy as they interacted with peers and with the Argentine public more broadly.

However, there were also times when youth and community members questioned the role of Afrodescendants in educating the public at large. At the National Women's Conference, one activist who had traveled with our group spoke of her exhaustion with constantly having to educate a racist society. "No es **productivo** el educación de personas que discriminan" (It is not productive to educate people who discriminate), she stated, adding, "¿**Cuantos horas** de nuestras vidas tenemos que pasar educando?" (How many hours of our lives do we have to spend educating?). In an aside to Julieta and myself,

Catalina murmured, “Veinticuatro horas al día” (Twenty-four hours a day), nodding her head in agreement with the speaker. Collectively, the women talked about their frustrations of continually being called upon to educate.

As young activists and their communities organize interventions in educational systems, it is important to recognize the emotional, mental, and physical labor, the time, and the resources dedicated to this *lucha* and to ask, whose responsibility is it to educate against racism? Who is ultimately responsible for dismantling the “epistemology of ignorance” that enables “white misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race” (Mills 1997, 18–19)? Critical educators have warned against equating white “ignorance” with white innocence.[50] This assumption, Leonardo (2009, 207) writes, “constructs them as almost oblivious to the question of race and therefore obscures their personal and group investment in whiteness (Lipsitz 1998), as if racial oppression happens behind their backs rather than on the backs of people of color.” In order for education to lead to truly transformative social justice, Freire (1970) asserts, the oppressed must be central to a humanizing pedagogy. With that said, making educational environments just, inclusive, anti-racist, and humane cannot be the sole responsibility of society’s most marginalized (Cabrera 2012). The responsibility must be shared, just as the realities of race are shared by both those who are racially marginalized and those who benefit from racial privilege. Put more bluntly, oppression does not exist

[50] I place “ignorance” in quotation marks here because whites are not truly “ignorant” of race (Leonardo 2009); rather, there is, as Mills (1997, 19) has described, “a certain schedule of structured blindnesses and opacities in order to establish and maintain the white polity.”

absent of oppressors, and the responsibility of educating against racist oppression must be actively and systematically shared by white people.

In reality, I observed that this responsibility to educate is progressively being taken up at the community level and must be analyzed with regard to the many demands that are increasingly being placed on racialized communities by neoliberal governments. Neoliberal narratives of personal responsibility and community empowerment mask receding state engagement in, and funding for, many issues that disproportionately affect racialized communities. Within the ethos of neoliberalism, educating against racism is cast as a local problem of changing individual minds rather than a systemic problem requiring institutional redress. In the United States, youth researchers have critiqued the ways that neoliberal governance increasingly shifts the provisioning of social services for, and the education of, racialized youth from the state to community non-profits and other such organizations (Kwon 2013; Tilton 2010). Community-based educational spaces are then often placed in a position of "precarity and forced reliance on the state, foundations, and other agencies for financial support, which subsequently enforces narratives that may not be aligned with the organization's purpose or methods for engaging youth" (Baldridge et al. 2017).

In the year that I spent with the Agrupación, I observed them navigating this precarity. Sustaining the organization's initiatives, funding, and membership was a struggle shared by adults and youth alike. Carlos was highly successful at mobilizing a broad network of activists, educators, academics, and various state actors to help the youth realize ambitious projects, but this meant that the youth section was constantly having to adapt their work to fluid sets of contingencies and opportunities. In any given

meeting, youth might suddenly be asked to shift their focus to attending an upcoming embassy event, giving a talk at a school, or meeting with students from U.S. study-abroad programs. Diverse opportunities for collaboration and networking were quickly seized upon in order to promote the youth section's work, always with a view to the implicit possibility of securing funding to sustain that work. At the time of my research, through no fault of their own and certainly not for lack of effort to secure it, the youth lacked access to essential structural support and meaningful integration into formal institutions of learning that, if available, would have provided stability and consistency for their projects.

Adding another layer of precarity, the level of commitment asked (if not required) of Agrupación members, both youth and adults, was significant; as an organization, they had to balance the determination to realize their ambitious, important projects with the potential for member burnout. The last meeting that I attended with Agrupación Xangô was at the end of 2017, shortly after our Photovoice exhibit. In that meeting, Marcela spoke candidly of her exhaustion. Before our Photovoice exhibit, the youth section had been informed they would not be able to hold the event in the community center where they had been meeting, and Marcela had scrambled to find a new location. The event was eventually held in a space run by a leftist political group. (It appeared to have been used previously as a gym and storage space.) Marcela, Lujan, Catalina, Ana, Mariela, and I spent hours cleaning and organizing the space in order to make it presentable. Like many of the Agrupación's undertakings, the event was a success, but the time-consuming labor that it had required left several of those involved worn thin. Though it was not voiced, there also existed the inevitable problem, as other scholars have noted, of young people

"aging out" of youth initiatives and projects as they grow older and as other demands and interests take precedence for them. Lacking reliable structural support, the Agrupación had to work diligently to entice youth to become members, and to ensure that some took on leadership positions, in order to sustain the organization's initiatives.

Youth educational activism is embedded in "relations of power and conditions of possibility that both enable and limit young people as political actors and democratic subjects" (Kwon 2013, 126). I believe that it was with this understanding that Carlos and Marcela continually impressed upon the youth the importance of affirmative-action policies and legislation specifically crafted to meet the needs of Afrodescendant communities. It cannot fall on youth and their communities alone to address racism and its deleterious effects, but they can critically examine their lived realities and use what resources and knowledge they have available to them to mobilize for institutional change. Along these lines, a final product of my collaborative research with the youth members of Agrupación Xangô was a set of *propuestas* (proposals) for state and community action.

Propuestas: Youth Proposals for Action

After the retreat in Tigre, I sat down with the Agrupación Xangô youth and we discussed the results of the survey that they had distributed and the focus groups that they had conducted with the other young people. Almost as soon as this discussion began, the youth became passionate, talking over one another and playfully sparring with one another, making teasing jokes and jabs. Worried that the youth were not providing one another equitable space in which to share their thoughts, I interjected, trying to calm the discussion and encourage active listening. They quickly resisted my stepping in as moderator. "Estamos **debatiendo**" (We are **debating**), Catalina retorted. "Estamos

debatiendo, no discutiendo" (We are debating, not arguing), Mateo assured me calmly. "Eryn," Catalina began somewhat indignantly, "¿dijiste que está mal al estar debatiendo?" (you're saying that it's wrong to be debating?). As I began to utter something about sharing space in which to talk and reflect, Joaquin jumped in, and then the youth carried on as they had before my interruption.

Looking back, I find resonance in what Marcela and Karina discussed after the heated debates at the youth retreat in Tigre, as described in Chapter Four. The youth were learning, better than I, to manage the difficult conversations and heated emotions that arise in community-based activism and to see debate as productive, even unifying. In that moment, the youth asserted themselves, as Freire puts it, as "masters of inquiry."

> The silenced are not just incidental to the curiosity of the researcher but are the masters of inquiry into the underlying causes of events in their world. In this context research becomes a means of moving them beyond silence into a quest to proclaim the world. (Freire 1982, 30–31)

The youth compared notes and the filled-in poster-size charts that they had created during the focus groups[51] and discussed emergent themes, such as the lack of representation of Afrodescendants in the history taught in schools. The survey results[52] ended up containing few surprises for the youth researchers, as they were largely in accord with their own experiences. From the survey data, we found that nineteen of the twenty-two youth surveyed responded that they had personally experienced or witnessed racial discrimination in their schools, albeit at varying frequencies. All responded that they had heard discriminatory language used in their schools. In going through the data,

[51] A compilation of focus-group results can be found in Appendix B.

[52] The survey can be found in Appendix C.

we observed gender disparities on the topic of dropping out of school. In response to the survey statement "He considerado dejan mis estudios" (I have considered dropping out of school), all of the girls surveyed answered "No" but four of the seven the boys answered "Sí" (Yes). A nested question asked those who had marked "Sí" to identify their reasons for wanting to drop out; the most common response selected was "No me siento cómodo en el colegio" (I do not feel comfortable in school), followed by economic and familial reasons.

I asked the Agrupación youth what they thought about this gendered pattern in the survey results, and Joaquin quickly asserted that males and females experience different forms of racism. He began, "Porque las mujeres siempre las ven como algo lindo, pero al mismo tiempo las discriminan pero, por otro lado, las usan como un objeto sexual" (Because women, they always see them as something pretty but, on the other hand, they use them as a sexual object). Another of the boys affirmed what he said, but many of the girls protested his statement as implying that they somehow suffered less. Tamara interjected, saying that more boys dropped out because "Ellos ayudan a sus familias […] ¿Por qué no van al colegio? Porque **necesitan trabajar**" (They help their families […] Why don't they go to school? Because **they need to work**). Most of the youth seemed to agree with this reasoning. Alejandro, a relatively new member of the youth section, spoke up to question the data that had been collected. "Hay mujeres que también dejan" (There are also women who drop out), he stated, and the girls agreed, citing teen pregnancy as a key factor. After some more discussion about the various causes for drop-out rates in their community, Joaquin concluded, "Creo que le parece más fácil la vida (I think life seems easier). "¿A quién?" (For whom?) Catalina asked pointedly. "Al hombre" (For

men) he stated, going on to say that finding a good job without an education was easier for men. Through debating with one another, the youth arrived at nuanced analyses of the data.

Over the course of a wide-ranging discussion, at times serious and other times injected with humor, the youth thoughtfully analyzed the data that we had gathered through the survey and focus groups. We eventually came up with a list of the *desafíos* (challenges) that Afrodescendant young people face in their schools and communities, and we formulated various *propuestas* (proposals) for action to address those challenges. These proposals had multiple audiences. Most of the proposals were addressed to state entities and policymakers who might be able to create institutional changes in schools through policies and government programming. A few of the proposals were a matter of continuing efforts already underway in the community to address institutional failings, such as teaching guides and *charlas* in schools; the youth wanted such initiatives to be regularized and supported by state institutions. Finally, they took the ideas and perspectives that they had gained from leading the focus groups and created a list of actions that they could take as young activists in the Agrupación.

Below are the complete lists of the challenges and proposals generated by the youth through our conversation, unedited and unabridged.

Desafíos Reconocidos (Recognized Challenges)

Reconocemos los siguientes como problemas críticos que enfrentan los jóvenes afrodescendientes en la actualidad:

1. Invisibilización institucional de la historia afroargentina en nuestra educación, instituciones, y cultura nacional.
2. Racismo y discriminación en ámbitos educativos y, en conexión, en la sociedad en general.
3. Deserción estudiantil en nuestra comunidad.
4. Falta de auto-reconocimiento en la juventud afrodescendiente.

We recognize the following as critical problems that Afrodescendant youth face today:

1. Institutional invisibilization of Afro-Argentine history in our education, institutions, and national culture.
2. Racism and discrimination in educational environments and, in connection, society in general.
3. School drop-out in our community
4. Lack of self-recognition among Afrodescendant youth.

Propuestas y Sugerencias (Proposals and Suggestions)

Presentamos las siguientes proposiciones y sugerencias para abordar los problemas que enfrentan los jóvenes afrodescendientes:

1. Talleres y capacitación anuales para docentes sobre la historia afroargentina y cómo ellos pueden abordar el racismo y la discriminación en las aulas.
2. Creación de una guía sobre discriminación racial y étnica y estrategias para abordarla en las aulas.

3. Creación de materiales educativos para estudiantes (carteles, libros, etc.) sobre la historia afroargentina que están presentes en las escuelas durante todo el año.
4. Institución de talleres regulares, donde los miembros de la comunidad afrodescendiente son invitados a dar charlas y educar a los estudiantes sobre su cultura e historia.
5. Denuncia institucionalmente la práctica de pintar caras en los actos de 25 de Mayo en las escuelas. Estas representaciones de las personas esclavizadas deberían ser reemplazadas por representaciones más precisas y diversas de los afroargentinos de esta época.
6. Capacitación de educación sexual integral en nuestras escuelas y comunidad afro.

We present the following proposals and suggestions to address the problems that Afrodescendant youth face:

1. Annual workshops and trainings for teachers about Afro-Argentine history and how they can address racism and discrimination in the classroom.
2. Creation of a guide about racial and ethnic discrimination and strategies to address them in the classroom.
3. Creation of educational materials for students (posters, books, etc.) about Afro-Argentine history that are present in the schools throughout the year.
4. Institution of regular workshops, where members of the Afrodescendant community are invited to give talks and educate students about their culture and history.

5. Institutional denouncement of the practice of blackface in the May 25th plays in schools. These representations of enslaved persons should be replaced with more precise and diverse representations of Afro-Argentines in this period.
6. Integral sex education in our schools and *Afro* community.

Acciones Concretas para Nosotros Agrupación Xangô

(Concrete Actions for Agrupación Xangô)

1. Crear un canal de YouTube y empezar a hacer videos para educar a otros jóvenes y fomentar el auto-reconocimiento.
2. Crear una campaña visual / social media contra las representaciones de afrodescendientes en los actos de 25 de mayo.
3. Dar charlas en los colegios sobre la historia afroargentina, la discriminación racial, y los derechos humanos de afrodescendientes.
4. Crear una guía para docentes para los colegios
5. Realizar un estudio nacional sobre la discriminación racial en las aulas.

1. Create a YouTube channel and begin to make video to educate other young people and encourage self-recognition [as Afrodescendant]
2. Create a visual/social media campaign against the representations of Afrodescendants in May 25th plays.
3. Give talks at local schools about Afro-Argentine history, racial discrimination, and the human rights of Afrodescendants.
4. Create a guide for teachers in schools.
5. Carry out a national study on racial discrimination in the classroom.

The young people's proposals were printed and shared during the Photovoice exhibit that we organized at a community center in La Boca. Later, I posted the proposals alongside the youth's Photovoice images and commentaries on the Agrupación's blog. There was some discussion after I left of having the young people's images exhibited in other venues in Argentina, such as a local museum, but I have yet to hear that these plans have been actualized. Tellingly, many of the institutional demands put forward by the youth remain unfulfilled, highlighting the barriers to social change faced by youth activists. Some of their proposals, though, have been realized or at least partially realized. The Agrupación has begun to produce short "viral" videos and they continue to give talks at local schools. Thanks in part to social-media campaigns originating within their community, public awareness is growing regarding the inherent racism of representations of Afrodescendants in school Independence Day plays.

Ultimately, the young people's proposals provide a powerful example of youth civic praxis. These youth researchers, in dialogue with other youth, critically reflected on systems of oppression that structure their lived reality and sought systemic change to that reality. Their proposals also underscore the limits of youth civic praxis, or at least call into question the immediacy and scalability of the social change that is accessible to them. The kinds of social change that may come of their educational initiatives and public awareness work may not yet be visible. I am reminded here of a conversation between the critical pedagogues Myles Horton and Paulo Freire in which Horton describes his critical educational work with the Highlander Folk School and likens the process of effecting social change to planting a garden.

> Someone criticized Highlander workshops, saying, "All you do is sit there and tell stories." Well, if he'd seen me in the spring planting my garden, he would have said: "That guy doesn't know how to garden, how to grow vegetables. I didn't see any vegetables. All I saw was him putting a little seed in the ground. (Satterfield and Reid 2003, 99)

Such a perspective suggests that more longitudinal research is needed in order to fully analyze the relationship between youth educational activism and broader social movements.

Afrodescendant Youth, Education, and the Decolonial Project

In the growing literature on Afrodescendant social movements in Latin America, Afrodescendant citizenship, land autonomy, transnational organizing, and cooptation via neoliberal multiculturalism have been robustly analyzed (Rahier 2012; Brondo 2016; Reiter and Simmons 2012; Goett 2011; Hooker 2008; Laó-Montes 2017), but the roles of youth actors and education within these social movements remain understudied and undertheorized. The only significant exceptions appear to be recent research on affirmative-action policies in institutions of higher education in countries such as Brazil and Colombia—notably, both countries with large, visible Afrodescendant populations (Mato 2011; Murakami-Ramalho and Lima Dias da Silva 2011; Cottrol 2013). Most of these studies, though, focus more on collective organizing and policy implementation and less on the experiences of Afrodescendant students entering these racially stratified educational environments or on the relationship between the students and their Afro-diasporic communities. Afrodescendant youth have been objects of international development initiatives (Freire et al. 2018) and local activists' agendas, but young people themselves are underexamined as actors in Latin American politics (Wolseth and Babb 2008; Coe and Vandegrift 2015). Coe and Vandegrift (2015, 147) explicitly point to this

gap, writing that research on Afrodescendant youth politics in Latin America is lacking "despite consistent growth of mobilization regarding ethnic and racial identities during the last two decades involving strong youth elements."

In this dissertation, I have examined how youth develop civic identities and practices through an alternative education embedded in Afro-diasporic community activism. Through interviews with young people, participant observation within activist spaces, and youth participatory action research carried out with the youth members of Agrupación Xangô, I have analyzed how Afrodescendant youth experience racialized citizenship in their schools, how they learn to craft alternative definitions of citizenship and belonging in their community, and how they aim to mobilize interventions in educational environments as a means of bringing about broader social change for their community. Youth narratives revealed their schools to be white pedagogical spaces that reproduce and reinforce the invisibilization and racialization of Afrodescendants in Argentina. Fieldwork with the Agrupación revealed the diverse ways that community-based activism is and can be an Afro-diasporic pedagogical space for marginalized Afrodescendant youth. In these spaces, youth activists participate in the co-construction of their community's collective memory, belonging, and resistance through counter-storytelling and critical civic praxis. From there, Afrodescendant youth's civic praxis expands outward, spilling out into the classroom and across activist networks and intersecting social movements.

I conclude this dissertation by advocating that scholars take seriously the role of Afrodescendant youth and education in the decolonial project of their diaspora.[53] As Tarlau (2014, 383) asserts, "Not only is social movement participation undeniably a pedagogical experience, […] intentional spaces for learning based in radical educational models are also critical for building stronger social movements." In other words, young people learn through their active participation in community organizing and, when mobilized intentionally, education can provide the foundation necessary for collective social action. It is important to recognize here that proponents of critical pedagogy do not theorize critical consciousness at the level of individual self-awareness and action; rather, they locate it within the collective, for critical consciousness is collectively and continually constructed through dialogue (Freire 1970; Giroux 2001; hooks 1994b; Satterfield and Reid 2003). In this sense, it is not just individual students who gain from their engagement with the counter-classroom; "a community's collective consciousness can transform through engagement with alternative educational spaces" (Tarlau 2014, 386).

As mediators moving between institutional and alternative educational spaces, Afrodescendant youth are key actors in the relationship between the state and Afro-diasporic social movements. In schools, Afrodescendant youth are still confronted with racialized citizenship that denies their full cultural and political belonging—what Alvarez et al. (2017, 14) have called "the coloniality of modern citizenship." But youth

[53] In discussing the "decolonial project," I draw on Laó-Montes's (2007, 310) definition (cited in Chapter One) of the African Diaspora as "a project of decolonization and liberation embedded in the cultural practices, intellectual currents, social movements, and political actions of Afro-diasporic subjects."

community organizing and research, both in and outside of schools, can be understood as contributing to the "decolonizing of mentality" (Cabral 2016, hooks 2010) and the "decolonization of knowledge" as youth learn to mobilize community knowledges and lived experiences as "organic intellectual" activists (Fals Borda 1991). Taking youth seriously as agents of decolonization means exploring the potentials of "cognitive liberation" (McAdam 1982, Tarlau 2014) for social movements, and exploring the roles that young people have in educational processes and knowledge production across diverse contexts. As Julieta urged in her speech in the Cabildo, "We must work on the subject of education."

"¿Qué vas a hacer?" (What are you going to do?)

Considerations for Activist Youth Researchers and Educators

Near the end of my year with the Agrupación, Joaquin asked me what I had learned from my research. "¿Qué vas a hacer cuando llegas a los Estados Unidos? ¿Qué es lo primero que vas a hacer con tu información, tu información y todo lo que viviste acá en Argentina?" (What are you going to do when you arrive in the United States? What's the first thing you're going to do with your information, your information and all that you've experienced here in Argentina?), he asked.

"Qué buena pregunta" (What a good question), I responded, taking a moment to think. I started by telling him that I would write my dissertation, conference papers, and articles, with the hope of bringing visibility to his community and to the activism of Afrodescendant youth in Argentina. I could sense that Joaquin was unsatisfied or, at the very least, uninterested in this answer.

As I thought more on his questions, I began to tell him about how I also wanted to become involved in youth activism in the United States. While living in Philadelphia in graduate school, I had volunteered with a youth media organization. In a city where local media portrayed urban youth as dangerous and "at risk," teens involved in the organization created news stories to educate other youth on their rights and to promote stories of the positive contributions of young people in their communities. Perhaps, I mused aloud to Joaquin, I could join another youth organization in Texas, my home state, where I would be returning after fieldwork.

Joaquin immediately interjected, "Eso, eso te voy a preguntar. No sé, ¿qué pas de integrarte con una organización en los Estados Unidos?" (This, this [is what] I'm asking you. I don't know, what about involving yourself in an organization in the United States?). He went on to say how interested he was in the political activism of Afrodescendant youth in the United States and to tell me of his desires to build transnational relationships and mobilizations. He hoped that I would be able to help him connect to activist youth in the States when I returned. Joaquin was not alone in being more interested in activist networks to which I might be able to connect the youth than in the academic works that I would produce. This may have been due in part to the continued presence of study-abroad students who entered the organization, asked the youth questions, wrote research papers that the youth never read, and were never to be heard from after the end of their semester abroad. When I told them about conference papers that I planned to deliver or the dissertation that I would eventually write about our collaborative research, the general sentiment was that it was good that I was doing it, and occasionally someone might joke that they would be famous. By and large, their

reactions made me acutely aware of how abstract the world of academia was for them, and how distant it was from their everyday lives and immediate concerns as activists.

Since leaving Argentina in December of 2017, my thoughts have often returned to this conversation with Joaquin. "¿Qué vas a hacer?" His question lingers. Considering the question broadly, it prompts me to ask, what are youth researchers obligated to "do" as they leave the "field" with the knowledge that they created with young people? What ongoing commitments do we make if and when we proclaim ourselves activist scholars? As Mangual Figueroa (2014) observes, personal narratives of entry into one's fieldsite, or "arrival tropes" (Pratt 1986), are popular inclusions in ethnographic writing; less common and less theorized are accounts of leaving the field. In considering the complexity and ethics of "departures," Mangual Figueroa (2014, 129) writes, "Have we acknowledged and fulfilled our responsibility to the communities who have welcomed us? Have we—in both our own opinion and the opinion of the participants—fulfilled the commitments we made at the beginning of our study?"

For myself and my own research, I do not have tidy answers to these questions. Collaborative research, much like the human relationships that ground it, is messy, nonlinear, and lacking in clean breaks and end dates. When I entered into my relationship with Agrupación Xangô, we agreed that I would carry out collaborative research with the youth, but the outcomes of that research were unspecified. I imagined co-publishing articles with the Agrupación in Spanish; I still aspire to do so, and I have had many conversations with the Agrupación's leadership over the last few years about realizing this mutual ambition. Similar to what I experienced during my time with the organization, though, emergent opportunities and urgent needs have often taken priority

over collaborative publishing ventures. Throughout 2018, the Agrupación put considerable effort and resources into organizing another *intercambio* (exchange) trip for the youth to visit and present talks at U.S. universities. When a deadly novel coronavirus, COVID-19, resulted in a global pandemic, they organized a local response to ensure that lower-income Afrodescendant families could have access to essential resources while under a government-mandated stay-at-home order. This is not to say that academic knowledge production is not important to the members of the Agrupación. In conversations with Carlos and other activists, it was often impressed on me just how imperative it was for Afrodescendants to have self-determination and agency in producing knowledge about their own communities, cultures, and experiences. I suggest, rather, that writing for academic journals and other such formalizations of community knowledge compete with the rapidly shifting demands of activism "on the ground." Such is the nature of collaborative research; it does not operate in some hermetically sealed bubble.

In collaborative activist research, co-researchers outside the academy, both youth and adults, have needs, desires, and structural constraints that cause them to place varying degrees of importance and priority on the production of academic publications. Recognizing this, activist researchers advocate for making immediate mutual benefit an inherent part of research design, rather than relying on academic publications to result in a "trickle down" effect (Nygreen 2006, 19) in which awareness and understanding results from public engagement with published works. Youth Participatory Action Research asserts a direct pedagogical benefit for youth researchers, who gain analytic skills and "critical consciousness" from their participation in a research project (Cammarota and

Fine 2008). As Irizarry and Brown (2014, 77) assert, "The skills that emerge through participation in PAR have not only pedagogical but political implications, engendering more politically savvy individuals armed with an array of data collection and analysis tools that can be applied across a variety of contexts." For example, in our collaborative research, the Agrupación youth learned research strategies and methods and received practical training in photography. Ultimately, by articulating and sharing a list of concrete proposals through our collaborative work, the youth created a tool that could be used and expanded upon in future activist endeavors.

For me, being an activist educational researcher meant becoming embedded in the communities of care and spaces of learning that I documented. It meant taking on responsibilities tangential to my research; for example, I managed the Agrupación's website for some time, I worked with activists to improve the English translations for YouTube videos they were putting out, I helped youth with their homework, and I watched Marcela's three-year-old son so that she could focus on community events that she was leading. Just as the youth learned to mobilize across networks in order to access and share resources, I learned to use the connections and funding that were available to me as a U.S.-based academic to help realize the youth section's initiatives. We stretched every available dollar of my grant funding in order to pull together resources for the youth retreat in Tigre. A year after my fieldwork in Argentina had ended, I helped with fundraising and coordinating for the second youth *intercambio*, through which a cohort of Afro-Argentine youth activists visited Temple University and three other institutions in the northeastern U.S. as invited speakers and guests. As a graduate student, I appealed to several departments and student organization at Temple and set up a GoFundMe page in

order to cobble together enough funds to make the trip possible. In coordinating the youth visit to Temple and their stay in Philadelphia, I encountered various complications and setbacks and dedicated more time than my doctoral-advisory committee would have liked to the project; still, the obstacles and labor lost for me, a graduate student at a large university in the United States, were but a small fraction of what is undertaken by the youth activists and advocates in Buenos Aires with whom I worked. Anthropologists often express discomfort with any admission of the transactional nature of researcher–participant relationships, as if acknowledging it would fracture "genuine" rapport. This discomfort with openly acknowledging power differentials, particularly in regard to resources and funding, is a vestige of colonialist ethnography and a principal source of a deep distrust of academic researchers in marginalized communities. As Smith (1999, 1) remarks, "From the vantage point of the colonized […] the term research is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism" and it is well known that researchers will build careers upon the knowledge and experiences of the communities that they study. Obscuring funding and financial privilege is fundamentally disingenuous and perpetuates legacies of extractive research. Activist scholars working with youth and their communities should consider transparent, shared decision-making around funding to be crucial to the decolonization of research practices; and they should consider it, in pedagogical terms, an important opportunity for inviting youth to gain understanding of, and to participate in, collective resource management.

My experiences with the Agrupación and youth activists have also challenged me as an educator and education scholar to examine more deeply the messages and *silences* that are embedded in the "hidden curriculum" (Giroux 2001, 60–61), and that persist in

the spaces of learning in which I enter and the classrooms that I lead. Earlier in this chapter, I provided a comprehensive list, crafted by the Agrupación youth, of specific actions that they wanted to see realized in their schools and communities. In what follows, I attempt to extrapolate from my research and from the youth's specific proposals some broadly applicable actions for fellow educators. These actions are not comprehensive; they are an invitation to educators to consider some first steps toward challenging white racism, historical erasure, and colonialist structures of Western pedagogy in their classrooms and courses.

1. Unsettle White Normativity through Direct Discussion of Race, Racism, and Antiracism

There is no "colorblind" classroom; indeed, the ideology of colorblindness only serves to re-center whiteness as "normal" while rendering acts of racialization and racism "invisible" and unacknowledged. As seen in the third chapter of this dissertation, the unwillingness of adults to specifically name racism and racist bullying contributed to youth's feelings of isolation and non-belonging. Singleton and Hays (2008) submit that "courageous conversations" about race, racism, and antiracism that are honest, uncomfortable, and ongoing are necessary in order to unsettle and disrupt white pedagogical space.

2. Build Youth and Community Dialogue and Knowledge into the Curriculum

The Agrupación youth proposed regularly inviting community leaders into their schools to guide talks and workshops. Educators can use diverse and creative means for similarly initiating community partnerships and dialogue with their students that recognize and welcome community histories and ways of knowing into the classroom. Lipka and

McCarty (1994) have described the benefits of classroom visits by local Native elders in their work; Sleeter (2008) has proposed involving students in selecting readings and designing assignments that allow youth to introduce their communities, backgrounds, and racialized identities and experiences into classroom dialogue; and numerous activist educational anthropologists have explored how community-based YPAR can be integrated into school curricula (Cammarota and Fine 2008).

3. Ground Decolonial Learning in Local Histories and Places

Scholars of Indigenous and decolonial education have advocated for the grounding of student learning in local land and in histories of colonization. As is evidenced in the narratives shared in this dissertation, the misrepresentation of colonization and the erasure of post-slavery Afrodescendant history in schools inhibits Afrodescendant young people's sense of belonging as full citizens. This experience is not unique to Afrodescendant youth in Argentina; it is shared among Indigenous and Afrodescendant students in numerous settler states. Indigenous and Afrodescendant scholars have asserted oral histories and land-based learning as means of reclaiming spatial belonging and community (Dei and Lordan 2016; Tuck, Smith, and Tuhiwai 2019).

"¿Qué vas a hacer?" In the end, Joaquin's question was, for me, a call to action and a challenge to consider what responsibility researchers, like myself, have to apply our work in meaningful, direct ways that benefit the communities that we study and that extend beyond our studies. In this last section, I have outlined some ways that I believe this work can inform activist research with young people and educational practices. I am still working with Agrupación Xangô and seeking other methods and means of "doing

good" (Childress 2006) with this research. In this way, I end on metaphorical suspension points, not a period.

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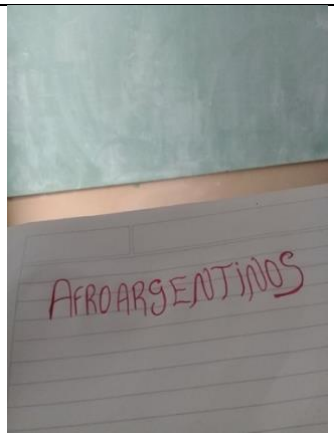
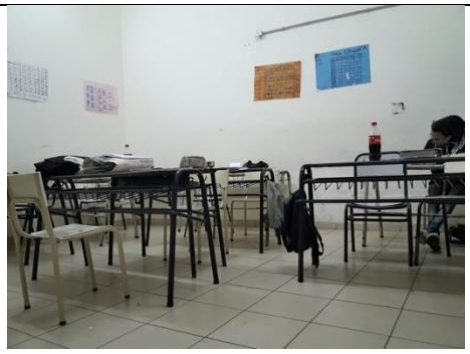
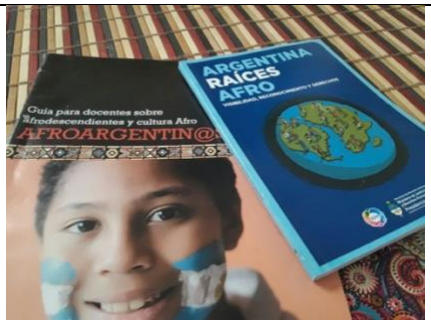
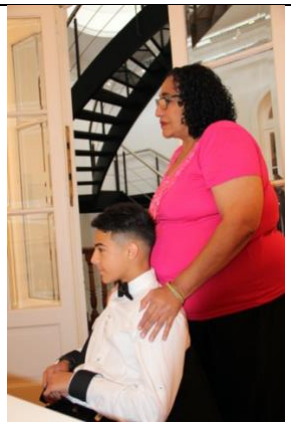
APPENDIX A:

PHOTOVOICE IMAGES AND COMMENTARIES

	"Visibilización" Julieta, age 18. Como podemos observar en la foto, en el pizarrón del aula no hay nada escrito. Esto hace referencia a como la educación argentina invisibiliza a la comunidad afro, a sus próceres, a su historia, y a su aporte hacia de la cultural e independencia argentina. Sugerimos que en base a esta problemática que mayormente sufrimos los jóvenes afrodescendientes capacitaciones para docentes sobre la historia afroargentina y como abordar el racismo y la discriminación en las aulas.
	"Deserción estudiantil" Catalina, age 19. El aula vacía representa la deserción estudiantil en nuestra comunidad. El racismo institucional afecta la trayectoria escolar de lxs jóvenes afrodescendiente.
	"Movimiento Afrocultural" Mariela, age 16. El movimiento afrocultural visibiliza la comunidad afro a través de talleres y clases como de candombe, capoeira angola, y regional danza afro. En este lugar se encuentran charlas, proyectos, proyecciones que concientizan a la gente y conmemoran a lideres como Zumbi (líder del Quilombo de Palmares), María Remedios del Valle, y otros. En días festivas o importantes para la comunidad se encuentran distintos referentes.

	"Capoeira Angola" Mariela, age 16. Esta foto es de mi hermana [name omitted] practicando capoeira angola. Los africanos esclavizados crearon la capoeira, hacían movimientos lentos, como los capoeira angola demuestra. Los esclavistas creían que era tipo de danza, cuando en realidad ellos lo que hacían era prepararse físicamente para defenderse y así poder escapar a los quilombos, lugares donde se encontraban personas que se habían escapado y liberado del esclavismo.
	"Educación" Delfina, age 15. A través de libros, guías, se trata de visibilizar la historia Afro en Argentina para poder dar a conocer y enseñar la historia que no todos cuentan acerca de los Afroargentinos y la historia Afro... conocimiento, cultura, historia, educación, comunidad.
	"Auto-Reconocimiento" Julieta, age 18. Mi pelo es parte de mi reconocimiento ya que representa mi afrodescendencia. La gente siempre quiere tocarlo y plancharlo ya que en la sociedad tiene una estética implantada Eurocentrista. ¡¡¡Viva sentirse vivo siendo uno mismo y no como te imponen!!!

	“Las calles de San Telmo” Ana, age 16. Cuando bailo, me autoreconozco como afro. Esta foto fue sacada en las calles de San Telmo, un barrio históricamente negro.
	“El Candombe” Ana, age 16. El candombe es una forma de sentir y transmitir nuestra identidad afro.
	“Fenotípicamente negro” Ana, age 16. Es una foto de una abuela y su nieto. Esta foto demuestra que no ser fenotípicamente negro para ser afro. Mucha gente piensa que si una persona no es negro, no pertenece a la comunidad AFRO.
	“Acompañando la lucha” Catalina, age 19. Esta foto la saque en la marcha del orgullo. Para mi, la foto representa que los chicos acompañan a sus familias en esa edad y forman parte de la lucha.

	"Basta de Racismo" Catalina, age 19. Esta foto fue sacada en la marcha del orgullo y representa la unidad que tenemos como comunidad para decir "¡Basta de Racismo!" Esta relacionado con todo en nuestras vidas, la sociedad en la que vivimos es racista y discriminadora en todos los sentidos. Lo que podemos seguir haciendo al respecto es seguir luchando contra esto.
	"La felicidad. No. 1 y No. 2" Ana, age 16. Esta foto demuestra la felicidad que hace tocar el tambor. El tambor es único representativo de la cultura afro que surge de los ritmos ancestrales.
	

	"Raíces rioplatenses" Julieta, age 19. Esta foto la saque en la llamada de candombe uruguayo "Lindo Quilombo". Uruguay y su candombe representa a mi familia materna. "Cuando yo siento un tambor, Yo no se lo que me pasa, La sangre se me alborota" Hace 5 años bailo y toco candombe uruguayo en las calles de La Boca con la comparsa de mi familia "África Ruge"
	"La Juventud Tiene Derechos" Catalina, age 19. Tenemos derechos a expresarnos, a saber, a aprender y enseñar, pero esto hay veces que no es posible gracias a que no tenemos una buena educación, ya sea educación sexual, de la historia, etc.
	"Información errónea en las instituciones" Mariela, 16. Es una foto de un afiche de mi colegio donde dice diferentes tipos de métodos anticonceptivos. Esta foto muestra la mala información que se da en algunas instituciones. Se necesita capacitación de Educación Sexual Integral (ESI). Es muy necesario informarse/capacitarse perfectamente para poder brindar información importante como la del afiche, ya que en este coso esta en juego la salud de las personas que sean ignorantes al tema y se fíen en esta información. Mala capacitación es una de las razones por la cual existe el embarazo adolescente.

APPENDIX B:

YOUTH-LED FOCUS GROUP CONCLUSIONS

Edades 13-15:

Desafíos	**Acciones Concretas**
• Experiencias de inseguridad, violencia, miedo, angustia en las aulas. • Falta de representación de los afrodescendientes en las aulas. • Ser hecho para jugar a los personajes esclavistas en los actos de la escuela. • Hipersexualización de los cuerpos afro.	• Educación – Informar, dar talleres, crear materiales antirracistas. • Empoderarse, Autoidentificarse • Enviar a agresor al consejo de convivencia. • No seguir con el circulo. • Rescatar de la historia a los referentes afroargentinos. • Sacando los estereotipos y prejuicios sociales.

Edades 16-18:

Desafíos	**Acciones Concretas**
• Racismo en las aulas hizo depresión y deserción escolar.	• Implementación de programas para concientizar el “racismo”

• Invisibilización de nuestros próceres • En la mujer – ser prostituto, lavandera, empleadas domesticas. • En los hombres – tener respeto o miedo al saber como pueda llegar a reaccionar esa persona, ser vendedor ambulante, metrosexual.	• Defenderte desde la palabra, otorgándole información desde quienes somos como comunidad. • Incluir a los Afroargentinos en la historia y cultural en general.

Edades 19-22:

Desafíos	**Acciones Concretas**
• Falta de reconocimiento de la participación de los Afros en la historia argentina. • La idea de una vida “normal” • Falta de autoreconocimiento y aceptarse como afro. • Normalización del racismo	• Jornadas anuales de sensibilización y concientización docente sobre temas de discriminación. • Materia sobre historia y cultura afro en un año del secundario dictada por un docente afro.

	• Jornada de ESI* borrando estereotipos sobre las personas afro.

Edades 23-30:

Desafíos	**Acciones Concretas**
Nada escrito.	• Demostrar educación, respeto, entendimiento, humanidad, tolerancia, y valores • Utilizar todas las herramientas que ya tenemos (por ejemplo, en las leyes) • Dialogo en la comunidad para encontrarnos y organizarnos.

APPENDIX C:

YOUTH SURVEY ON "RACISM IN THE CLASSROOM"

Edad: ____

Tipo de escuela: ☐ **Publica** ☐ **Privada**

Genero: ☐ **Mujer** ☐ **Varón** ☐ **Transgénero** ☐ **Otro**

En el colegio, me hacen sentir avergonzado o incómodo por el color de mi piel.

☐siempre ☐casi siempre ☐a veces ☐casi nunca ☐nunca

He visto o sufrido discriminación racial en mi colegio.

(Por ejemplo: bullying o tratamiento diferente por mis docentes.)

☐siempre ☐casi siempre ☐a veces ☐casi nunca ☐nunca

He escuchado comentarios negativos o términos discriminatorios raciales en las aulas.

(Por ejemplo: "*cabecitas negras*" o "*negras de mierda*".)

☐siempre ☐casi siempre ☐a veces ☐casi nunca ☐nunca

Cuando hay episodios del racismo en las aulas, mis docentes intervienen.

☐siempre	☐casi siempre	☐a veces	☐casi nunca	☐nunca

La discriminación racial afecta mi rendimiento académico y mi confianza cuando estoy en el aula.

☐siempre	☐casi siempre	☐a veces	☐casi nunca	☐nunca

He considerado dejar mis estudios. Sí ☐ No ☐

Si es así, ¿por qué? (marque todo lo que corresponda):

☐ Razones familiares	☐ Razones económicas	☐No me siento cómodo en el colegio.	☐ Otro *por favor, describa:* _____ _____ _____ _____