Más allá del fútbol: La Bomba, the Afrochoteño Subaltern, and Cultural Change in Ecuador’s Chota-Mira Valley

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

Based on a 2007 Fulbright funded documentary film project; this dissertation concerns the highland Afro-Ecuadorean communities of the Chota-Mira valley. The *afrochoteños* are the direct descendents of enslaved Africans brought to the region by Jesuits to labor the local sugar-cane plantations during the seventeenth century. Their particular history, cultural traditions, beliefs, customs, and ways of life distinguish them from Ecuador’s indigenous, *mestizo*, and coastal black population. Despite their contribution to the nation’s development and identity as a pluri-cultural state, the *afrochoteños* face extreme social, political, and economic marginalization as a result of their displacement and origins with the trans-Atlantic slave trade, subjugation and oppression as slaves, uneven integration, and continued exploitation and discrimination post emancipation. As such, the *afrochoteños* are made invisible in representations of the nation’s history and culture, save only for their presence on the national soccer team.

While academic interest in topics concerning Afro-Hispanic and Afro-Andean communities is growing, much work remains in not only documenting, but critically exploring these subaltern histories and traditions in terms of the stories of oppression, struggle, resistance, and hope they tell. I thus examine the *afrochoteño* song and dance genre known as *La Bomba* in relation to the socio-historical development and struggles of the *afrochoteño* communities as a means of illuminating *afrochoteño* culture and their condition as subalterns. Though marginalized for much of the twentieth century, *La*
Bomba is today recognized nationally as a symbol of afrochoteño identity thanks in part to a revival spurred by the cultural preservation efforts of the Afro-Ecuadorian socio-political project and movement known as etnoeducación. This initiative seeks to validate and strengthen afrochoteño identity in reclaiming local traditions and educating afrochoteño youth about Afro-Ecuadorian history and culture. Renewed interest in La Bomba is introducing stylistic changes, however, as afrochoteño youth incorporate foreign instruments, rhythms, and genres such as congas, salsa, and reggaeton. While some afrochoteños see such changes as a threat to the integrity of La Bomba and afrochoteño identity, others, in particular the youth who listen to and produce these newer Bomba fusions, see no such conflict and strongly identify with La Bomba as an expression of their distinct cultural identity.

Though La Bomba’s recent development raises questions concerning the impact of globalization on afrochoteño culture, it also provides a means of seeing how the afrochoteños’ struggle as subalterns is implicated in the process of cultural change. Building on post-colonial and subaltern theories, I explore the ways in which La Bomba registers the afrochoteño experience of and response to racism, exploitation, and marginalization in Ecuador. In its revival and transformation, we can see how afrochoteños resource tradition and engage memory and global flows in their contestation of the epistemological hegemony that produces their subalternty. I argue that La Bomba’s transformation is best approached in terms of agency rather than cultural loss or retention. Examined in this way, we can begin to understand change in this context not
as an inevitable consequence of globalization, but as the means by which *La Bomba* and *afrochoteño* identity persist.
Dedication

For Francisco D. Lara and Noah Lara, my family, and Shiva Keesari, my brother.
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I also want to thank all of my students for making me the teacher I am today, and all those who were in my life and made it better while working on this project. I hope to touch your lives someday as you have touched mine.

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Chapter 1: Race Relations: From Racial Purity to Mestizaje to Interculturalism in Ecuador

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Introduction

Based on a 2007 Fulbright funded documentary film project; this dissertation concerns the highland Afro-Ecuadorian communities of the Chota-Mira Valley. The *afrochoteños* are the direct descendents of enslaved Africans brought to the region by Jesuits to labor the local sugar-cane plantations during the seventeenth century. Their particular history, cultural traditions, beliefs, customs, and ways of life distinguish them from Ecuador’s indigenous, *mestizo*, and coastal black population. Despite their contribution to the nation’s development and identity as a pluri-cultural state, the *afrochoteños* face extreme social, political, and economic marginalization as a result of their displacement and origins with the trans-Atlantic slave trade, subjugation and oppression as slaves, uneven integration, and continued exploitation and discrimination post emancipation. As such, the *afrochoteños* are made invisible in representations of the nation’s history and culture, save only for their presence on the national soccer team.

While academic interest in topics concerning Afro-Hispanic and Afro-Andean communities is indeed growing, much work remains in not only documenting, but critically exploring these subaltern histories and traditions in terms of the stories of oppression, struggle, resistance, and hope they tell. I thus examine the *afrochoteño* song and dance genre known as *La Bomba* in relation to the socio-historical development and struggles of the *afrochoteño* communities as a means of further illuminating *afrochoteño*
culture and their condition as subalterns. Though marginalized for much of the twentieth century, *La Bomba* is today recognized nationally as a symbol of *afrochoteño* identity thanks in part to a revival initiated by the cultural preservation efforts of the Afro-Ecuadorian socio-political project and movement known as *etnoeducación*. This initiative seeks to validate and strengthen *afrochoteño* identity in reclaiming local traditions and educating *afrochoteño* youth about Afro-Ecuadorian history and culture. Renewed interest in *La Bomba* is introducing stylistic changes to the genre, however, as *afrochoteño* youth incorporate foreign instruments, rhythms, and genres such as *congas*, *salsa*, and *reggaeton*. While some *afrochoteños* see such changes as a threat to the integrity of *La Bomba* and *afrochoteño* identity, others, in particular the youth who listen to and produce these newer *Bomba* fusions, see no such conflict and strongly identify with *La Bomba* as an expression of their distinct cultural identity as *afrochoteños*.

Though *La Bomba*'s recent development raises legitimate questions concerning the impact of globalization on *afrochoteño* culture, it also provides a means of seeing how the *afrochoteños*’ struggle as subaltern is implicated in the process of cultural change. Building on post-colonial and subaltern theories, I explore the ways in which *La Bomba* registers the *afrochoteño* experience of and response to racism, exploitation, and marginalization in Ecuador. In its revival and transformation, we can see how *afrochoteños* resource tradition and engage memory and global flows in their contestation of the epistemological hegemony that produces their particular subalternity. As such, I argue that *La Bomba*’s transformation is best approached in terms of agency rather than cultural loss or retention. If examined in this way, we can begin to understand change in
this context not as an inevitable consequence of globalization, but as the means by which

*La Bomba* and *afrochoteño* identity persist.

**Blackness, Subalternity, and Cultural Change**

This dissertation stems from a documentary film project on *La Bomba* by the same title. My motivation and intent in producing the documentary was to provide a space for representing and making visible the *afrochoteños* and their culture beyond soccer. That the idea of producing such a documentary was so well received by the Fulbright commission in Ecuador speaks to the relevance of this topic not only for academic discussions of race and racism in Latin America, but for the current social and political dynamics in Ecuador as well.

Despite claims to the contrary, racism very much exists in Ecuador. Only recently and as a result of long standing social tensions are Ecuadorians acknowledging and engaging the deep-seeded inequalities of power that marginalize the indigenous and black communities. This much is evident in the revised 1998 constitution which for the first time recognized the existence and autonomy of the nation’s diverse ethnic groups and proclaimed Ecuador a pluri-cultural state. Despite the popular rhetoric of *interculturalidad* which now dominates political and cultural debate in Ecuador, Afro-Ecuadorians remain marginalized, discriminated against, and exploited by the dominant white-*mestizo* ruling elite. Their continued absence from history texts, museums, academic literature, and positions of social and political power and influence, make them
more than “other,” they are non-existent, invisible, and migrant subjects within the nation. In short, they are subalterns.\textsuperscript{i}

To recognize Afro-Ecuadorians as subalterns, however, is more than to label them as yet another minority group among others in Ecuador’s diverse population.\textsuperscript{ii} It is rather to recognize the ways in which the dual historical moments of slavery and colonialism continue to act upon the formation and articulation of blackness in Ecuador.\textsuperscript{iii} The displacement and disjuncture created by the trans-Atlantic slave trade along with the relations of power and knowledge represented by Western thought introduced and imposed on the Americas in the act of enslavement and colonization produced a distinct subaltern in “el negro” wholly negative and contingent in its construction.\textsuperscript{iv} Neither here nor there, they are the ultimate “other,” Walter Benjamin’s “barbarians at the gate” upon whose backs and image the foundations of modern Latin America (literally and figuratively) are built. As such, they exist (or are visible) only in so far as they support the hegemonic structures of power and knowledge that produced them. Indeed, it is this reality which leads Frantz Fanon to state “the Negro is not. Any more than the white man” (231).

Such is the case with the Afro-Ecuadorians and \textit{afrochoteños} specifically. Referred to as \textit{piezas}, enslaved Africans arriving in the \textit{Audencia de Quito}, as elsewhere in the Americas, were considered sub-human, objects to be bought, sold, and consumed for the express purpose of advancing the wealth and power of the \textit{audencia}, viceroyalty, and imperial crown. The very necessity of their labor-power, spurred by the New Laws of the Indies,\textsuperscript{v} positioned them in a strata below, or perhaps more accurately entirely
outside of the continuum of humanity represented by the *indio* and European. The continued exploitation, discrimination, and invisibility of the Afro-Ecuadorian communities post-emancipation and up through the present day in the name of nation building and modernization speaks to the legacy of slavery and colonialism in Ecuador, what Walter Mignolo describes as the coloniality of power.

Within this subaltern context developed the distinct regional hybridities represented by the *afrochoteño* and *afroesmeraldeño*. The cultural differences between these two communities speak to their divergent origins and experience of blackness in Ecuador and the ways in which the particulars of their respective struggles inform the expression of their distinct cultural identities. While the *afroesmeraldeños* of the northwest Pacific region of *Esmeraldas* originate in the free-black republic founded by the *ladino* Alonso de Illescas and his fellow marooned slaves in 1553, the *afrochoteños* are the direct descendents of enslaved Africans brought to the *Chota-Mira* Valley by Jesuits in the sixteenth-century. Stereotypes popular in Ecuador pertaining to the disposition of coastal blacks as “hot-blooded” and rebellious and of highland blacks as passive and submissive reference these historical differences. These, as well as other, more general stereotypes concerning blacks in general—as lazy, overly-sexualized, violent, uneducated, and uncultured for example—reflect and serve to reinforce the hegemony of thought that positions the white-*mestizo* and the notion of modernity and progress they represent opposite Afro-Ecuadorians.

Given this context, it is little wonder that serious scholarly treatment of the Afro-Ecuadorian population and its culture did not begin until after the mid 1960s and even
then with the work of foreign scholars. Indeed, when North American anthropologist Norman E. Whitten Jr. first wrote on the coastal black population in 1964 and 1978,\textsuperscript{xii} the term Afro-Ecuadorian, let alone \textit{afroesmeraldeño}, did not yet exist.\textsuperscript{xii} Only recently and with the impetus of the indigenous uprisings of the 1990s did regional differences in black culture begin to be conceptualized and expressed explicitly in terms of blackness. The growth in academic interest in Afro-Ecuadorian, and specifically \textit{afroesmeraldeño} and \textit{afrochoteño} history and culture, reflects this development.\textsuperscript{xiii} Most telling, however, is the fact that to this day, much of the research dealing with Afro-Ecuadorian communities is carried out by non-Ecuadorians and by Afro-Ecuadorians themselves. Within this small but increasing body of literature, few major studies exist pertaining to \textit{afrochoteño} history and culture specifically and even fewer treating \textit{La Bomba}.\textsuperscript{xiv}

Though perhaps on account of the need for documentation at this early stage in the literature, these studies fail to consider the ways in which the cultural traditions of the Afro-Ecuadorian communities evidence the tensions and ambiguities inherent in their subalternity. Too often they focus on the content and substance of black identity and culture as though these were given to reality in the same way as the identity and culture of the Waorani, Napo Runa, Cayapas, Otavalos, and other autochthonous peoples of Ecuador.\textsuperscript{xv} This tendency, evident also in the broader literature dealing with black identity in the African Diaspora, has led to a predominant concern with processes of culture contact, of acculturation or transculturation and the degree to which black culture is either distinctly American, African, or somewhere in-between.\textsuperscript{xvi} Yet if we consider for a moment the origins of blackness in the disjuncture of slavery and epistemological
violence of colonialism, we understand blackness to be a construct whose essence can be neither here nor there, nor even in-between. It is, rather as Jean Rahier astutely comments borrowing from Edouard Glissant, *a metissage sans limite* in its particular subaltern hybridity (“Blackness” 292).

As Rahier implies, to speak of cultural change in this context would thus be misleading if not entirely misguided. As Rahier implies, to speak of cultural change in this context would thus be misleading if not entirely misguided. I therefore choose to not to examine *La Bomba* and *afrochoteño* identity in and of themselves *per se*, but the ways in which *La Bomba* as an expression or articulation of *afrochoteño* identity indexes or registers the subaltern tensions that constantly move through, or continually inform *afrochoteño* identity. In this regard, I follow Homi Bhabha in his approach to the study of cultural difference rather than of cultural diversity “as an epistemological object” (34). Cultural difference, he states “is the process of the enunciation of culture as ‘knowledgeable’, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification” (34). This allows us to understand the articulation of *afrochoteño* identity as a form of agency which challenges the very epistemological hegemony that would seek to negate, or subjugate its existence. It also allows us to sidestep the issue of authenticity and cultural change in addressing *La Bomba* and *afrochoteño* identity in their current temporal and cultural contradictions. As Homi Bhabha notes:

The enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address. It is the problem of how, in signifying the present, something comes to be repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition, in the guise of a pastness that is not necessarily a faithful sign of historical memory but a strategy of representing authority in terms of the artifice of the archaic. (35)
The current efforts among the Afro-Ecuadorian and indigenous communities to reclaim their cultural heritage and thereby reinvention and (re)present their identity as a political act reflects the above observation. As I show in this dissertation, this process of reinvention, which inheres the subaltern condition of the afrochoteño communities, has significant implications for La Bomba in terms of its value, representation, and form. As such, to speak of La Bomba is at the same time to speak to the particular subaltern condition of the afrochoteños. Illuminating this relationship and condition is my express purpose in this dissertation.

**Representing La Bomba and Afrochoteño Identity**

As noted previously, this dissertation is based primarily on ethnographic research conducted in the Chota-Mira Valley, Ibarra, and Quito while filming a documentary film on the same topic. This much reflects the necessities and limitations imposed by the topic itself. As a result of the colonial difference that marks the Afro-Ecuadorian’s subalterity within the nation, academic scholarship on afrochoteño history and culture, let alone La Bomba, is scarce. The few and growing studies that have emerged since the 1980s only briefly address and thus only marginally treat La Bomba, failing to articulate its relation to the current lived realities of the afrochoteño communities. As an oral tradition, La Bomba, its history and meaning, resides in the collective memory of the community and in its current practice. My research on the history and development of La Bomba thus necessarily consists of oral histories collected from various commercial and non-commercial Bomba musicians, youth dance group members, festival and event
organizers, record producers, community leaders, Afro-Ecuadorian organization members, local scholars, and other community members with knowledge of local traditions. In addition, I draw on my personal experiences and observations while living among and participating in the ongoing daily activities of the *afrochoteño* communities.

In this regard I differ in my approach as a student of literature and culture and approximate methods generally associated with the social sciences, specifically anthropology and sociology. My use of ethnographic research and of film as an investigative tool in particular complicate my position vis. a vis. my chosen field of study. Yet, as Huarcaya points out and Canclini urges, such interdisciplinary methods are necessary if we are to examine the depth and complexity of the processes of hybridity and, I would add, subalterinity at work in Latin America.

It is worth emphasizing that though ethnography originally emerged within cultural anthropology during the early part of the twentieth century as a means of interpreting and representing cultural meaning, it has since been adopted by scholars in other related fields, including ethnomusicology, sociology, communication, and cultural studies. And though the specific investigative tools and questions employed in ethnographic research vary with each area of study, they nonetheless now share a common foundation in the assertion that cultural meaning is produced and interpreted through social (inter)action (i.e., discourse, performance, text, etc.).

Ethnography as a method in pursuit of cultural meaning thus transcends disciplinary boundaries in addition to forms of representation.
My own approach to ethnography and film in ethnographic research follows that of Sarah Pink. In *Doing Visual Anthropology*, Pink defines ethnography as follows:

… [ethnography is] an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture and society that informs and is informed by sets of different disciplinary agendas and theoretical principles. Rather than a method for the collection of data, ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge (about society, culture and individuals) that is based on the ethnographer’s own experiences. It does not claim to produce an objective or truthful account of reality, but should aim to offer a version of the ethnographer’s experiences of reality that are as loyal as possible to the context, negotiations and intersubjectivities through which the knowledge was produced. (22)

Of particular significance is the notion that ethnography is a creative process that actively involves the ethnographer in the production of knowledge. With this in mind, I set out to capture and convey in film and writing what my particular field research experiences had revealed to me about *La Bomba* and *afrochoteño* culture. In the process, I also hoped to provide not only a platform from which to present *afrochoteño* history and culture to a broader audience, but also a space within and through which *afrochoteños* could represent themselves, and thus allow them to engage in the critical discussion of their own culture. Indeed, as I show in the third chapter, the creation of *Más allá del fútbol* was truly a collaborative endeavor the product and conclusions of which reflect the intersubjective ways in which they were conceived. As such, I make no false pretense as to the objectivity of this film or dissertation.

Rather, I situate the numerous and often contesting histories, interpretations, and practices of *La Bomba* collected and represented in this project in relation to the socio-historical and socio-political context within which they arise. In this way, I place emphasis on the ways in which *afrochoteños* resource, or make meaningful and relevant
La Bomba in their daily lives. How such self-representations engage local and global ideologies, discourses, and representations of blackness is the focus of my analysis. I am therefore not here concerned with discerning fact from fiction, truth from myth, and thus establishing a definitive interpretation of La Bomba and afrochoteño identity. Rather than dwell on the issue of authenticity, lament the loss of local cultural identity in the wake of globalization, and police contesting claims to local cultural knowledge, I focus on the ways in which such discourses and representations inform and mobilize identity. In this regard I follow Heidi Feldman in my intention to discuss afrochoteño identity, cultural traditions, and history not so much in terms of what they are or ultimately mean, but how, and I would add why, they come to be and are made thus meaningful in the present day (12)."xxi

Chapter Outline

The following dissertation is divided into four main chapters followed by a brief conclusion. While the first two chapters situate the afrochoteño communities in relation to the particular socio-historical processes resulting in their current marginalization, chapters three and four consider the ways in which La Bomba and its recent development specifically index the afrochoteño struggle as subalterns.

Chapter one situates afrochoteño identity in relation to the current dynamics of race and racism in Ecuador as a means of illuminating their present struggle as subalterns and the structures of power that seek to marginalize them. Specifically, it considers how indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian responses to the discriminatory ideology of mestizaje
are informing black identity in Ecuador and the Chota-Mira Valley. In addressing how race and nation intersect in the formation of afrochoteño identity, we can begin to understand how La Bomba, as an articulation of the colonial difference, reflects this dynamic and discursive relation.

Chapter Two examines the socio-historical processes that define the specific hybridity and subalternity of the present day afrochoteño communities. It does so through an overview and discussion of the development of the afrochoteño communities from their origins in seventeenth century trans-Atlantic slave trade to their independence from the hacienda system in the 1960s. For comparative purposes, I situate this history in relation to that of slavery in Latin America and in Ecuador specifically. An understanding of this history of oppression and exploitation allows us to understand the current struggles of the afrochoteño communities as the most recent manifestation of their subaltern condition.

Chapter Three addresses La Bomba and its relation to afrochoteño identity as presented by the afrochoteños themselves in my documentary film, Más allá del fútbol. La Bomba is today perhaps the most prominent and celebrated signifier of afrochoteño identity. Más allá del fútbol documents this tradition and explores its cultural significance through interviews, music, and dance recorded while residing and conducting research in the Chota-Mira Valley in 2007 and 2008. In this chapter I discuss the film and its content, analyzing discourse about La Bomba and afrochoteño identity, as a means of showing how La Bomba is resourced in the current struggles of the afrochoteño communities. Considering the central role of this film project in the making
of my dissertation, I also consider its relevance as a form of social advocacy and academic representation.

Chapter Four situates *La Bomba’s* revival and transformation in relation to the development and struggles of the *afrochoteño* communities since the 1960s. In particular, it considers the impact of modernization on local cultural traditions as well as the role of *etnoeducación* in mediating the experience of globalization. In *La Bomba’s* recent development, we can see how the *afrochoteños* engage the African Diaspora in the formation and expression of a distinct, transnational black cultural identity. In this way, *La Bomba’s* transformation implicates the *afrochoteño* struggles and, subsequently, their condition as subalterns in the process of cultural change.

The conclusion summarizes the findings of this study, rephrases the significance of my approach, and briefly considers the limitations of the current strategy adopted by the Afro-Ecuadorian communities as a means of underscoring the theoretical basis of this study.
Notes

i I make reference here to the founding statement of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group which recognizes the shifting and dynamic nature of subalternity in its conflictive and discursive relation to the nation (142).

ii Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak makes me particularly sensitive to this distinction in her criticism of the broad application of the term subaltern (37).

iii I draw on Walter Mignolo’s work on the geopolitics of knowledge and the coloniality of power, a phrase borrowed from Alberto Quijano, which seeks to illuminate the epistemological violence of colonialism in Latin America. See Mignolo, “Coloniality of Power”, Local Histories, Global Designs, and his interview with Catherine Walsh, “Las geopolíticas de conocimiento y poder” for an overview of his thoughts with regards this topic. See also Catherine Walsh, “Interculturalidad y colonialidad de poder” for an application of these theories to Ecuador and the ideologies of interculturalidad and etnoeducación specifically.

iv I use negative here in the sense used by Ranajit Guha in Elementary Aspects to refer to the relational quality of subalternity in its alterity (18).

v Enacted in 1542 as a result of the debates over the treatment of the colonized indigenous peoples of the Americas initiated in part by Bartolome de las Casas, these new laws limited the use and enslavement of colonized Indians and granted them certain protections against abuse.

vi See Walsh, “Interculturalidad y (De)colonialidad” 5.

vii See Mignolo, “Colonialidad del poder” for a discussion of this concept in relation to subalternity in Latin America.

viii For an overview of the origins and history of the Pacific black communities, see Tardieu; and Walmsley. For the afrochoteño communities, see Rosario Coronel Feijóo; Lourdes Rodríguez Jaramillo; Iván Pabón; and José Chalá-Cruz.

ix Stereotypes commonly overheard while conducting research in Ecuador.

x See Jean Rahier, “Racist Stereotypes” and “Mami, ¿qué será lo que quiere el negro?” for discussion of stereotypes and its impact on perceptions of blackness and black identity in Ecuador.

xi See Norman E. Whitten Jr., Class, Kinship and Power and Black Frontiersman.
To my knowledge, the labels *afroesemeraldeño* and *afrochoteño* did not emerge in the academic literature until the 1990s.

Since the 1990s, there has been a marked increase in academic interest and scholarship on Afro-Ecuadorian history and culture as evidenced by the recent growth in publications and development of such repositories and forums for continued research as the Centro documental afroandino in the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar of Quito and various other Afro-Ecuadorian cultural organizations.

For *afrochoteño* history and culture, see José Chalá-Cruz; Iván Pabón; Federica Peters; John Lipski; Henry Medina; Jaramillo Lourdes-Rodriguez; Rosario Coronel Feijoó; Fernando Jurado Noboa; Rafael Savoia and Alexandra Ocles; Rosaura García de Pólit; Julio Bueno; John Schechter; and Segundo Obando. For studies addressing *La Bomba*, see Carlos Alberto Coba Andrade; Julio Bueno; and Schechter.

Granted we can just as well question the authenticity of indigenous cultures knowing full well the movement, contact, and intercultural exchange of pre-Hispanic communities as most notably seen in the indigenous empires of Central and Latin America. Nonetheless, for the purposes of this dissertation, I maintain that the violence of the disjuncture created by the slave trade distinguishes and foregrounds this problem for black communities in the Americas.

This much is acknowledged by other scholars focusing on the dynamics of identity in Diaspora and in Latin America such as Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, and Nestor García Canclini.

No known historical documentation of *La Bomba* exists save a descriptive account in an 1867 travelogue in which Hausserek describes a performance of a mimetic dance known as *alfonçoque* accompanied in this instance by a group of vocalists, a person playing a shaker, and a *Bomba* player (344).

See Antonio C. G. M. Robben and Jeffrey A. Sluka for an overview of ethnographic fieldwork in anthropology. See also Robben, “Beginnings” for an overview of the origins of ethnography.

See Clifford Geertz; James Clifford; and Sarah Pink.

Feldman discusses her approach in terms of memory projects, which refers to the creative and strategic ways in which individual and communities use memory in the
Chapter 1: Race Relations: From Racial Purity to *Mestizaje* to Interculturalism in Ecuador

As a means of contextualizing the present discussion of *La Bomba* and *afrochoteño* identity, this chapter addresses the dynamics of race and race relations in Ecuador that circumscribe the revival, current practice, and transformation of *La Bomba*. Such a discussion acknowledges the need to examine black cultural identity and cultural traditions within a national as well as a diasporic framework. It also reflects the understanding that cultural traditions not only represent cultural identity but speak to the particulars of time and place informing their use and meaning. In other words, *La Bomba*, as an expression of a distinct highland black cultural identity, responds to the lived realities and immediate necessities of the *afrochoteño* communities. To speak of *La Bomba* in this regard is to speak of race, racism, national identity, and the *afrochoteño* struggle as subalterns in Ecuador.

To this end, the following discussion, which is divided into three sections, examines how local and national representations of *afrochoteño* identity engage the ideologies of *mestizaje* and *interculturalidad* currently shaping discourse on race and national identity in Ecuador. The first two sections of this chapter explore the ideologies of *mestizaje* and *interculturalidad*, as well as their implications for race and race relations in Latin America and Ecuador. The third section addresses the significance of these two
ideologies in the specific formation and representation of afrochoteño identity. This chapter concludes with a brief anecdote that considers how this particular case study potentially problematizes our understanding of black cultural identity, tradition, and the question of cultural change. How afrochoteños engage La Bomba in the negotiation of their identity will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

**Afro-Ecuador: The Nation’s Invisible “Other”**

During the summer of 2006, while a resident director for The Ohio State University’s study abroad program in Quito, I witnessed a most telling phenomenon with regards to the dynamics of race and race relations in Ecuador. Ecuadorians throughout the nation took to the streets and celebrated as the national soccer team advanced, with a series of impressive wins, to its second round match with England in the FIFA World Cup. The team’s unprecedented performance made international headlines that summer, bringing unexpected attention to yet another aspect of the team: its racial makeup. The majority of the team’s players, including its starting lineup, were black.

While constituting only eight percent of Ecuador’s population, Afro-Ecuadorians took center stage during the World Cup, representing the Andean nation on an international scale. With the image of the nation inverted and reflected back, many Ecuadorians began to question long held assumptions about national identity and reflect on issues of race and racism. That the nation would be mistaken for an “African” one, meaning black, was a concern voiced on more than one occasion. “So long as they win,” was the common response. I found this exchange to be highly indicative of the racist attitudes generally left unspoken among many Ecuadorians. Such perceptions did not
stop the Ecuadorian nation from rallying around their team and celebrating its stars as national heroes, however. Yet it seems that blacks are only valued and taken seriously far their ability to handle a soccer ball and place it into a net. When it comes to more serious matters, they remain invisible.

The marginalized status and place of blacks in Ecuador until recently ensured their absence in representations of the nation’s history, development, and constituency. Though now present in both rural and urban areas throughout the nation, Ecuador’s black population is historically descended from two separate black settlements: one situated along the Pacific littoral of the northwest province of Esmeraldas, and one along the rivers Chota and Mira traversing the northern provinces of Imbabura and Carchi. These two regions and their respective populations are distinct in terms of their origins, historical development, cultural beliefs, traditions, and ways of life. While Esmeraldas was founded by marooned slaves shipwrecked off of the Pacific coast in the sixteenth century, the Chota-Mira Valley was populated by enslaved Africans brought by Jesuits during the seventeenth century to supplant indigenous labor in the local sugar cane and coca industry. The relative isolation of the black Pacific communities and the particular experience of slavery among those of the highlands circumscribed and informed the development of their respective cultures. As a result, the local traditions of each region reflect these historical differences in their type, form, aesthetics, practice, and meaning. Despite the divergent historical trajectories of these communities, both afroesmeraldeños and afrochoteños share a common challenge in overcoming racism, seeking social equality, and in affirming, documenting, and maintaining their cultural heritage and
identity. This struggle, in turn, has significantly impacted local traditions such as *La Bomba*.

The highland song and dance genre known as *La Bomba* is today perhaps the most prominent signifier of *afrochoteño* identity. Originating sometime during the colonial period among the region’s enslaved black population; *La Bomba* connotes a particular drum, rhythm, song form, dance, and performance event most likely of West African origin. Its development, however, reflects years of cross-cultural interaction with neighboring indigenous communities and the predominant *mestizo* population. While celebrated today among *afrochoteños* for its cultural ties to Africa, *La Bomba* was once nearly forgotten as *afrochoteño* youth, emigrating to Ecuador’s urban centers in search of opportunity from the 1960s through the 1980s, turned to more upbeat and modern rhythms such as *salsa*, *cumbia*, and *merengue* hailing from Colombia, the Caribbean, and the United States. *La Bomba* and its knowledge remained in the collective memory of Chota’s elders and in the hands of a specialized few until renewed interest sparked its revival in the late 1990s. Today, *La Bomba* thrives as numerous *afrochoteño* folkloric, commercial, and local musicians and dancers interpret this regional genre throughout Ecuador.

As alluded to above, both *La Bomba’s* revival at the turn of the twenty-first century and its sudden emergence as a symbol of *afrochoteño* identity may be understood in relation to the particular dynamics of race and race relations informing perceptions and representations of blackness in Ecuador. As elsewhere in Latin America, the concept of *mestizaje* (miscegenation) predominated in Ecuador during the greater part of the
twentieth century as an ideology of national identity. This led to a stratified social hierarchy wherein citizenship and the potential for social and economic progress were determined by race. Upward social mobility for many Afro-Ecuadorians in this context involved strategies of whitening (blanqueamiento), either through interracial marriage or cultural distanciation. Since the 1990s, however, the inherently racist ideology of mestizaje has been challenged by the more pluralistic and egalitarian notion of national identity known as interculturalidad, first introduced and promoted by grassroots indigenous organizations within Ecuador. The following sections address how these opposing ideologies have informed perceptions and representations of Afro-Ecuadorian and afrochoteño identity.

**Mestizaje and Race Relations in Latin America and Ecuador**

The issue of race and racism in Ecuador, as in most of Latin America, is a complex and contentious one, involving nationalist ideologies of modernization and notions of social and economic progress inherently discriminatory in their conception and language. *Mestizaje*, or the concept of race mixture, most aptly conveys these still prevalent, though changing attitudes concerning ethnic relations and national identity operating in many Latin American countries. While the term originally emerged as a celebration of the unique cultural makeup of Latin America’s republics during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, post World War II mestizaje connotes the homogenization of cultural difference and the gradual erasure of ethnic identity in the name of social and economic progress (Walmsley 14). Put simply, to be black or indigenous in such a social model is to be backward, uneducated, and therefore
antithetical to the goals and aspirations of modernization. As a result, the black and indigenous populations are marginalized if not entirely excluded from discussions concerning the nation, its direction, and their place therein.¹

Citizenship in such a context means the negation of racial/ethnic identity and its defining cultural markers. This is done through biological mixture and/or through the appropriation of dominant social norms and behaviors. Thus blacks and indígenas can potentially better their social and economic position, or “mejorar la raza,” (“Better the race”) through strategic mixing and by approximating white-mestizo culture. Many scholars have since dubbed this social strategy blanqueamiento, or whitening, and have noted that the subsequent association of whiteness with modernization has led to an internalized form of racism that conflates race with class (Walmsley 15). Thus, racial tensions and racism in Latin America tend to be understood in terms of class rather than race.² Latin America’s claim to racial democracy, denial of racism and backlash against ethnic mobilizations stems from this particular form of discrimination.

This is not to say, however, that the indigenous and black populations passively submit to the ideology of mestizaje. On the contrary, there are numerous documented and celebrated instances of social and political resistance and activism throughout Latin America.³ That these movements are mobilized around particular ethnic identities suggests a response, in part, to the homogenizing aspect of mestizaje as well as a positive awareness of ethnic/racial identity. Yet while individuals may identify with one particular collective (e.g., indígena or negro/afro), they may choose to self identify in
other ways at other times. In this way, they may ultimately participate in or pursue the project of *mestizaje*.4

Far from producing a homogenizing and hegemonic social structure, then, *mestizaje* presents a complex system in which sameness and difference coexist. The dynamics of this relationship are thoroughly explored by Peter Wade in the context of Colombia. He suggests we understand *mestizaje* in terms of a dialogue between homogeneity and heterogeneity, noting that the idealized *mestizo* exists only in relation to an “other” through which it is conceptualized and constructed (*Blackness* 7, 19). In other words, difference, or “otherness” in this context, can be understood as a necessary condition of *mestizaje*. As Wade concludes, it is in the exploitation of the tension between homogeneity and heterogeneity inherent in *mestizaje* that individual agency exists (*Blackness* 11).

**Mestizaje and Blackness in Ecuador**

Within Ecuador in particular, the dynamics of race and race relations until the late 1990s were likewise conceptualized in terms of the social and economic aspirations of *mestizaje*. As elsewhere in Latin America, the strengthening of Ecuador’s economy and its growing participation in the global market as a producer and exporter of bananas during the 1940s and oil in the 1970s exacerbated a political concern with modernizing the nation (*Walmsley* 18). The scope of this project extended beyond the nation’s economy and infrastructure to encompass questions of culture and national image. The language and emphasis of this discourse and its projects made explicit its objective: the assimilation of the nation’s “uncultured” indigenous population (*Clark* 193; *Stutzman* 23)
That indígenas were considered uncouth, unclean, backwards, and uneducated is still evident in contemporary stereotypes. To this day common popular insults include indio sucio, or simply indio (a pejorative term for an indigenous person) and the use of patronizing diminutives continues among many mestizos directly addressing indígenas. Just as in other parts of Latin America, this particular notion of modernization meant that the citizenship and meaningful participation of Ecuador’s indigenous population depended on their successful transformation and subsequent integration into the dominant mestizo culture. This particular social model prevailed through the late1990s, officially making Ecuador a mestizo, Andean nation.

Yet while the ideal Ecuadorian mestizo was conceived in opposition to the highly stylized, patronizing, and racist image of the indio, the nation’s black population was excluded altogether. This leads to the popular notion among many academics such as José Chalá, Jean Rahier, and Ronald Stutzman that Afro-Ecuadorians are invisibilizados, or made invisible within academic, political, and popular discourse and analysis. Indeed, the absence of Afro-Ecuadorians in representations of the nation’s history, development, and constitution is by now well documented. Perhaps most telling in this regard is John Antón’s survey of Afro-Ecuadorian representation in the museums of the Banco Central del Ecuador (Central Bank of Ecuador). He found that while museum branches located on the outskirts of Quito and outlying provinces displayed minimal representation of Afro-Ecuadorian identity and culture, the largest exhibit being in Esmeraldas, the main museum housed in the Casa de La Cultura contained none (124-125). As Antón and others acknowledge (127), this absence of representation in national spaces is in part due
to the lack of scholarship on Afro-Ecuadorian history and culture. Indeed, with a few notable exceptions, academic scholarship in Ecuador prior to the 1990s often overlooked Afro-Ecuadorian communities in favor of topics relating to indigenous or mestizo culture, history, and social and political issues. This fact and the exclusion of Afro-Ecuadorian communities in national representations of Ecuadorian history and culture reinforce and propagate the ideology and project of mestizaje, ultimately maintaining the marginal status and place of Afro-Ecuadorians as non-citizens (125-127).

For Jean Rahier ("Blackness, the Racial/Spatial Order, Migrations, and Miss Ecuador"), the particular dynamics of race and race relations in Ecuador and the extreme marginalization of Afro-Ecuadorians is additionally constituted and further reified by the relative isolation and remoteness of the historic Afro-Ecuadorian settlements of Esmeraldas and the Chota-Mira Valley from the nation’s political and economic centers of power (Quito and Guayaquil in particular). Race, place, and power inform one another in this case to produce a particular “racial/spatial order” reflective of the existing social hierarchy in Ecuador (Rahier, “Blackness” 422). Indeed, while Afro-Ecuadorians are now present in urban centers throughout the nation, to this day blackness in Ecuador is intimately associated with Esmeraldas and the Chota-Mira Valley, places remote, foreign, and “other” to urban white-mestizos. In Ecuador, then, Afro-Ecuadorians may be understood as the ultimate “other,” a subaltern identity within a subaltern space.

Yet, as Adolfo Albán points out, it is not so much the lack of visibility suffered by Afro-Ecuadorians as the lack of positive and constructive representation that is most disconcerting (60). As the 2006 World Cup scenario indicates, Afro-Ecuadorians are
indeed visible insofar as they conform to dominant stereotypes. This negative visibility, argues Albán, silences Afro-Ecuadorians, essentially invalidating their identity and cultural knowledge. In this way, blackness is objectified to such an extent that it places Afro-Ecuadorians outside the boundaries and scope of mestizaje. Rahier in particular documents the extent to which such misrepresentations reify racist and sexualized stereotypes concerning blackness as well as how they inform both Afro-Ecuadorian and non-black sensibilities about race. In the popular imagination, black men and women are portrayed as highly sexualized, aggressive, and violent beings, to be desired as sexual objects while simultaneously repulsed for their base moral character by the more civilized, conservative, and demure mestizo. Likewise, blacks are seen as naturally athletic and hard working, while at the same time inept and lazy. As Rahier notes, many Afro-Ecuadorians, especially those living in the nation’s urban centers, negotiate their identity in part through the appropriation or rejection of these racist stereotypes. Thus, a disproportionate number of Afro-Ecuadorians make their living in what may otherwise be considered stereotypical jobs and roles for blacks, such as policemen, military personnel, security guards, soccer players and other athletes, domestic servants, and prostitutes. More recently, the social and economic challenges facing increasing black urban populations, sensational news media representation, and the increasing influence of a hip-hop and gangsta-rap culture additionally introduce the stereotypes of blacks as thieves, rapists, and drug dealers/users.

As a result of this negative visibility and the abounding stereotypes, Afro-Ecuadorians encounter blatant and conspicuous forms of racism on a daily basis. Many
of these experiences emerged in my formal and informal discussions with afrochoteños. While often reluctant to discuss their experiences in terms of racism, they reveal various instances of differential treatment and disrespect. One particular individual shared that while taking a seat on a bus, the woman next to him got up and moved. Many others note that they have been treated poorly or spoken to in a condescending and patronizing manner while conducting official business. The use of the word “negro” by non-blacks in particular bothered many afrochoteños with whom I spoke. One woman defiantly stated that she does not allow anyone to refer to her as “negra,” preferring the term “morena” instead. As an insult, “negro” is especially heard during soccer games as either opposing or disgruntled fans shout overtly racist comments at Afro-Ecuadorian players on the field. In a now infamous incident in Ecuadorian league soccer, Barcelona de Guayaquil was fined $2,000 by the FEF (Ecuadorian Federation of Soccer) for racist comments and expressions its fans made toward opposing players during the 2008 championship game against Deportivo Quito. More innocuous, though no less disrespectful, is the tendency on the part of many mestizos to essentialize blackness and to patronize Afro-Ecuadorians through the vocalization of stereotypes and the use of diminutives. Yet, as noted earlier, the tendency to discuss race in terms of class and the negation of black ethnic identity in the consciousness of many Ecuadorians makes blackness and racism particularly difficult to locate.

A 2004 study, however, shows that Ecuadorians are now beginning to recognize and confront the issue of racism. Put together by the Sistema de Indicadores Sociales del Pueblo Afroecuatoriano (SISPAE), Racismo y Discriminación Racial en Ecuador
assesses the perception of racism among rural and urban Ecuadorian citizens (both black and non-black) through a series of direct questions concerning acts and locations of racism, perpetrators and victims of racism, the relationship between race, racism, and poverty, anti-racist legislation, and governmental responsibility. While the survey shows that an awareness of these issues is highest among Afro-Ecuadorians themselves, it nonetheless indicates that urban white-‐mestizos in particular are also taking notice (57-‐63).\footnote{National support for the tri-‐color (Ecuador’s national soccer team) during the 2006 World Cup, the recent FEF ruling on the Barcelona club de Guayaquil and Deportivo Quito incident, and the ensuing public debates over race and racism in Ecuador support these findings. These trends indicate that mestizaje and its implicit assumption of white-‐mestizo superiority are currently being questioned.}

**Seeing Blackness: Interculturalidad and Etnoeducación**

The current dynamics of race relations in Ecuador may be changing as the indigenous and black social and political movement, begun in the 1980s and 1990s, continues to grow in political strength, demanding the transformation of the political and social structure of the nation so as to recognize, validate, and give voice to the nation’s diverse constituency. The increased presence of indígenas and Afro-Ecuadorians in governmental positions, the formation of the national indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian organizations CONAIE and CODAE, the proliferation of local social and political organizations, and the 1998 and 2008 constitutional revisions further recognizing the citizenship, rights, and relative autonomy of Ecuador’s indigenous and black communities are a testament to the success of this movement over the past twenty years.

alone. Giving shape to and guiding this movement and its transformational projects is an ideology known as *interculturalidad* (interculturality).\(^{12}\)

A central tenet of the Confederation of the Indigenous Nations of Ecuador (CONAIE), *interculturalidad* emerged during the 1990s as an ideology, organizing principle, and method for social, economic, and political transformation.\(^{13}\) As opposed to *mestizaje*, it takes difference as the fundamental unifying aspect of the nation and the means by which just and equitable social and economic progress may be attained. The social and political goal of *interculturalidad* is the creation of a plurinational state that recognizes, respects, represents, and reflects the particular values, concerns, beliefs, social, economic, and political models, and ways of life of the nation’s diverse constituent population. More importantly, all these things are also discursively engaged as among equals. This ideology and model differs from that of multiculturalism which, while tolerating diversity, subsumes difference within a Eurocentric hierarchical framework that consequently delegitimizes ways of knowing and being voiced from beyond the periphery or margins of Western thought.\(^{14}\) Thus *interculturalidad* necessarily implies the transformation of existing structures of power, and presents a subaltern, counter-hegemonic and de-colonizing ideology, discourse, and practice (Walsh 4).

Despite these advantages, *interculturalidad* is nonetheless formed in relation to the dominant ideology of *mestizaje*, such that the very subaltern space from which *interculturalidad* is enunciated is made possible by, or is a condition of, colonialism and *mestizaje*. The relative strength of Ecuador’s indigenous movements as well as the
ability to organize around ethnic identity, therefore, is predicated in part upon a conception of ethnic identity made possible by *mestizaje*. This is significant in that *interculturalidad*, in its conception, is not itself entirely immune from the discourse of power to which it responds. While arising from the socio-historical experience of colonialism and its legacy, *interculturalidad* nonetheless reifies the “otherness” of Afro-Ecuadorians in its emphasis on indigenous-*mestizo* relations and the indigenous struggle (Walsh 6). Indeed, Afro-Ecuadorian organizations are reluctant to take up the banner of *interculturalidad* as it is largely associated with the indigenous struggle, choosing instead to consolidate and fortify their own identity through a process and project known as *etnoeducación*. Yet as Walsh makes clear, *etnoeducación* and *interculturalidad* represent two instances of the same process in that the former is a necessary precondition for successfully engaging in the outward inter-cultural dialogue of the latter (9).

Though Afro-Ecuadorians yet remain marginalized and excluded as the ultimate “other,” the recent challenges to the dominant, discriminatory ideology of *mestizaje* and the social and political inroads made by Ecuador’s indigenous and black organizations underscore the degree to which Ecuadorians are reflecting on such issues. Ecuadorians, it seems, are now beginning to *see* race, and if not yet recognize racism, then they are at least confronting the question of blackness and its relation to national identity. As such, the *indígena* and *afro* social movement and the ideology of *interculturalidad* may yet potentially transform notions of national identity, race/ethnicity, and racial dynamics in Ecuador.
The Chota-Mira Valley, Blackness, and Afrochoteño Identity

When I first decided to visit the Chota-Mira Valley, several mestizo Quiteño friends attempted to dissuade me for fear that I might be raped or even killed. Discussion of my research project with other mestizos in Quito and Ibarra likewise prompted curiosity and alarm. “¿Chota?” they would ask quizzically, then commenting “harto negros (full of blacks)” as if to say “why would anyone possibly want to go there.” Others attempted to convince me La Bomba was not a worthwhile project, steering me either toward what they considered more “authentic” black cultural traditions or other aspects of Ecuadorian culture entirely. It was clear from these experiences that the Chota-Mira Valley was feared and misunderstood by many mestizos as an “other” space and entity within Ecuador, its people and cultural traditions relegated to the past and entirely excluded from conceptions of the modern nation. Thus, the Chota-Mira Valley conforms to Ecuador’s racial/spatial order noted above. Among the few positive associations voiced in my discussions with urban mestizos was soccer.

Despite this marginalization, Afrochoteños since the 1960s have begun to question their own regional and ethnic identity. As Paloma Fernandez-Rasines notes in Afrodescendencia, this awareness grows out of the Afro-Ecuadorian struggle for land tenure during the 1960s and 1970s (81). The agrarian reform acts of this time effectively ended the huasipungo era, redistributing land ownership among its workers and inhabitants. Though slavery was effectively abolished in 1851, these acts mark the end of a long history of black subjugation, dependence, and servitude in the region. For many
afrochoteños, the right to land ownership hails the true end of slavery. It is no wonder, then, that a strong sense of regional identity rooted in place emerges during this time.

The studies of Lourdes Rodríguez Jaramillo and Rosario Coronel Feijóo dealing with the agricultural development of the Chota-Mira Valley underscore this regional association. Though not concerned with questions of identity, be it ethnic or regional, Jaramillo and Feijóo nonetheless establish an intimate connection between the inhabitants of the Chota-Mira Valley and the land itself in their emphasis on land ownership and use. For them, the unique character of the region, including its current demographic and culture stems from the transformation of its agricultural activity (from coca and cotton to sugar-cane) and the gradual development of a plantation system (Jaramillo 123; Feijóo 125-131). Jaramillo in particular roots the distinct culture of the local black population to their African heritage and experience of hacienda life (123). The latter is significant for Jaramillo in that even today, the land “constitutes the principle and perhaps only source of work” for many of the region’s youth. Implicit in both studies is the notion that the identity of the local population is rooted in sense of place implicating both slavery and the afrochoteño struggle for social equality in its construction. When considering the history of slavery and the current social dynamics in Ecuador, it is little wonder that issues such as land ownership and local agriculture play a significant role in perceptions of identity in the Chota-Mira Valley.

This connection to the land is also evident in scholarship dealing with afrochoteño cultural traditions prior to the mid-1990s. Segundo Obando and John Schechter, for example, likewise understand local identity in terms of regionalism rather than of
ethnicity per se, citing the confluence of indigenous, European, and African elements in La Bomba specifically, Obando (40) sees the culture of the region as an “indo-hispanic-indigenous” hybrid. Schechter goes so far as to suggest that ethnicity as a concept may not be applicable to the black population of the Chota-Mira Valley in that they themselves do not conceive of their identity in such terms (298). Instead, Schechter (299, 300) notes a transcultural, regional identity reflected in the music and culture of the Chota-Mira Valley that supersedes ethnic or racial identity and connects it with a general Ecuadorian “highland ethnicity.” In emphasizing regionalism over ethnicity, Obando and Schechter (as well as Rodríguez and Feijóo) reflect the degree to which mestizaje, as a dominant ideology of national identity, impacts perceptions of identity.

The effort to define this identity in ethnic terms, however, has increased, taking on a greater sense of urgency since the indigenous and afro movements of the 1990s and in light of the emerging counter-hegemonic discourses, ideologies, and processes of interculturalidad and etnoeducación. Indeed, much of the current literature on the Afro-Ecuadorian communities of the Chota-Mira Valley emphasizes Africa as the source of contemporary Afro-Ecuadorian culture and identity. Federica Peters and native Chota anthropologist José Chalá Cruz in particular establish continuity between contemporary Afro-Ecuadorian and West Africa culture and cultural traditions, situating their respective studies in relation to West African cultural forms and aesthetics.

Peters, for instance, interprets the significance of afrochoteño salves (liturgical songs sung during Holy Week, on the Day of the Dead, and at wakes) in relation to general West African beliefs and aesthetics concerning life, death, and the relationship
between the natural and supernatural world, including the ways in which those relationships are mediated. For Peters, the salves express an integral aspect of afrochoteño identity and spirituality fundamentally rooted in West Africa. Peters believes that it is this continuity that endows the salves with their social and spiritual significance and allows for their efficacy in mediating afrochoteño experiences “between life and death,” or joy and suffering, as a form of “communal healing” or therapy (171).

Thus while enslaved, afrochoteños managed to retain ways of knowing and being fundamentally African in nature that have not only shaped contemporary Afro-Ecuadorian cultural traditions, but have helped them to survive in the face of extreme subjugation and marginalization.

This perspective is reiterated by Chalá-Cruz, who in particular emphasizes the West African cultural origins of the Afro-Ecuadorian communities and the history of black resistance in the Chota-Mira Valley as a means of affirming afrochoteño identity. Perhaps most striking is his assertion that the community of Chota itself, located along the river Chota, was originally founded as a palenque, or a community of runaway slaves (137). His emphasis on cimarronaje (flight or escape, in reference to runaway slaves) may be understood as a response to the popular association between the Chota-Mira Valley and slavery and its potential negative impact for identity formation among afrochoteños. As such, Chota Profundo presents a didactic history of the black communities of the Chota-Mira Valley that celebrates, rather than negates, the African origins and cultural heritage of the afrochoteños. This perspective, as well as the increasing academic literature and use of the terms “Afro-Ecuadorian” and “afrochoteño”
in place of *negro*, marks a significant shift in both local and national perceptions of identity among the black communities of the *Chota-Mira* Valley.

This positive self-affirmation through knowledge of local history and an emphasis on ethnicity is in keeping with the project of *etnoeducación*. The efforts by scholars and community members such as Cruz to educate fellow *afrochoteños* about their own history and traditions include workshops and publications such as *Nuestra Historia*, a textbook assembled by FECONIC (the Federation of Black Communities and Organizations of *Imbabura* and *Carchi*). Covering Africa, slavery, racism and the struggle for social equality in Ecuador and the greater African diaspora, the text reaffirms *afrochoteño* identity through informative texts, activities, and quizzes. Ethnic identity, grounded in the African cultural origins and heritage of the *afrochoteño* communities, is here explicitly conceived of and emphasized as a response to the homogenizing ideology of *mestizaje* (36-38).

The recent and fierce claims by *afrochoteños* to an ethnic identity grounded in Africa and in the experience of slavery can be seen as an imperative and default form of social and cultural resistance. Long denied a history and identity beyond that of slavery, the *afrochoteños* are rewriting their place in Ecuador. With the image of Africa foregrounded in contemporary *afrochoteño* culture, traditions such as *La Bomba*, with its clear link to similar African musical traditions, are now celebrated rather than shunned and are becoming emblematic of *afrochoteño* identity. Yet this emphasis on Africa and tradition as central and defining aspects of *afrochoteño* identity is further complicated by the fact that it is founded primarily on cultural forms, materials, and aesthetics that are
more and more incongruous with the contemporary experience of daily life for many afrochoteños.

The once remote and enclosed communities of the region are increasingly becoming part not only of the nation-state, but also of the global community. The construction of a railway and later the Pan-American highway allowed the flow of afrochoteños to and from the nation’s major urban centers. Many afrochoteños make daily trips to Quito and Ibarra either for business, education, or entertainment purposes. Likewise, afrochoteños in Quito and Ibarra maintain contact with family in the Chota-Mira Valley and make occasional trips back to the region, especially during festivals such as Semana Santa (Holy Week). The accessibility of the region also brought outsiders, especially international aid agencies, scholars, international volunteers, entrepreneurs, and more recently tourists and mestizos eager to experience Carnaval (a pre-Lenten celebration) in Chota. The introduction of electricity brought televisions, radios, and now computers and telephones. afrochoteños watch soap operas telecast from Colombia and Nicaragua, surf the internet, access information, images, and music around the world, call relatives in Quito and even internationally. As a result of the recent flow of people, ideas, technology, and money, afrochoteño ways of life, and consequently their traditions and perception of identity, is changing. Hospitals, prescription drugs, and Western-trained medical doctors take precedent over local medicinal herbs, curing rituals, and healers, which many see as superstitious and old-fashioned. The clay and straw houses once characteristic of the region give way to concrete and iron. Ceramic plates, glass cups, and silverware replace the once spun wooden dishes, drinking vessels, and utensils.
now considered the work of artisans. Giant plastic tubs are now favored over the large hollowed gourds among women carrying laundry and goods atop their heads. Oral traditions such as songs, dances, and games are giving way to national and international popular music, dances, and sports. *Salsa*, Hip-Hop, *Reggaeton*, Reggae, *Samba*, *Capoeira*, *Santeria*, and other musical forms are now heard alongside *La Bomba*. Dusty soccer fields worn with use reflect the dreams of many *afrochoteño* youth longing to wear the yellow, red, and blue jersey in international competition. The *Chota-Mira* Valley is now a part of the global community.

A fundamental change in communication is taking place, argues *afrochoteño* scholar Iván Pabón (*Identidad Afro* 70). Along with it is the potential end, or at least transformation, of a particular knowledge and way of knowing distinct to these communities and central to their sense of being (identity). And while this fact is deplored by some, giving a sense of urgency to the project of *etnoeducación* and its goal of documenting and preserving local culture, it is clear from interviews that many *afrochoteños*, especially youth, maintain a strong sense of regional and ethnic identity despite these changes. In fact, there is arguably a stronger and more acute awareness of local ethnic identity now than prior to the 1970s. It may be argued, then, that *afrochoteño* identity emerges at the turn of the twenty-first century amidst great social, historical, and political change. This realization, however, has significant implications for the very way in which we begin to approach and discuss questions of identity and cultural change.
Culture Revisited: Identities and Traditions in Transformation

In the spirit of *interculturalidad*, the Ecuadorian museum of ethnohistoric artisan-work, *Mindalae*, located in Quito’s bustling *Mariscal* district, presents a space for the “exposition, development, and valuation of the traditional artisan work of the indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian, and *Montubio* population of the nation.” Four floors and eight circular halls display the museum’s vast collection of clothing, body adornments, ritual tools, weapons, baskets, instruments, masks, and other such material culture in exhibits designed to emphasize their cultural meaning and value. The arrangement of the displays likewise conveys the notion of intercultural contact and exchange. The coastal *marimba* of the *afroesmeraldeños* shares the same space as an indigenous highland *charango* (a guitar-like instrument), and an Amazonian violin-like instrument. Indeed, it is the express purpose of the museum to create a space for the dynamic encounter and exchange of cultures, drawing inspiration from the pre-hispanic figure *Mindala* whose function is the negotiation of commercial or trade relations between the four cardinal points. Despite the egalitarian vision of *Mindalae*, it likewise fails to represent Afro-Ecuadorian identity adequately in its oversight of the artisan contributions of the highland communities of the *Chota-Mira* Valley. What is most interesting in this case, however, is not the misrepresentation of Afro-Ecuadorians, their invisibilization or negative visibilization by the dominant *mestizo* society, but the reason why.

I had the rare occasion to pose this question to the museum’s director, whom I happened to meet by chance as I was exiting the museum. He seemed genuinely
surprised by my suggestion that the museum poorly represented Afro-Ecuadorian culture, noting the few items they did have on display: the marimba (a wooden-keyed xylophone), conunos (a conical drum), bombo (large double-headed drum), guasa (a shaker), and the costumes, hats, and carved wooden smoking pipes emblematic of the coastal black population. When pressed about the absence of afrochoteño cultural materials, such as the bomba, he made a point of “correcting” my supposed misunderstanding of the Afro-Ecuadorian communities. According to him, Ecuador’s black population does not constitute a culture per se, but a sub-cultural ethnic group, linked by common origin and spread throughout the nation in various communities. Despite the differences between the coastal and highland black communities, the marimba is thus justified as an adequate representation of the Afro-Ecuadorian population as a whole.

Mindalae’s representation and the director’s conception of Afro-Ecuadorian identity, flawed as they may be, illuminate the very problem encountered in my study of cultural change. As this chapter has shown, the recent emergence of a subaltern consciousness among the Chota-Mira Valley’s black population, mobilized and represented in terms of black ethnic identity, disputes the claim that afrochoteños in and of themselves do not constitute a cultural entity distinct from that of Esmeralda’s black population. Yet, the effort to consolidate and represent this cultural identity nationally in terms of its transregional and transnational diasporic dimensions, as evident in this discussion, threatens to essentialize and reify the “otherness” of Afro-Ecuadorian and afrochoteño identity, ignoring the heterogeneous, divergent, and often conflicting
experience of blackness in Ecuador today. Given the contradictions inherent in the current discourse on and representation of Afro-Ecuadorian identity, how do we understand the recent transformation of *La Bomba* and its significance for contemporary *afrochoteño* identity? The following chapters take up this question, each addressing a specific aspect of *La Bomba* while threading the themes of race, racism, and national identity in its story of struggle, renewal, and transformation.
Notes

1. See Appelbaum et al.; Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*; and Whitten and Torres for an overview of *mestizaje* in Latin America.

2. See Appelbaum et al.; Fiola; Viotti da Costa; Wade, *Race and Ethnicity* 45-57 and *Blackness and Race Mixture*; and Whitten and Torres 1-33.

3. For a discussion of contemporary indigenous movements in Latin America, see Escobar and Alvarez; Langer and Muñoz; Postero and Zamosc; and Yashar. On Ecuador and indigenous politics specifically, see Clark and Becker; Martin; Selverston-Scher; and Whitten, *Millenial Ecuador*. See also Chalá-Cruz; Lara and Tenorio; Medina and Castro; and Sovoia and Ocles on Afro-Ecuadorian uprisings and movements.

4. See Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture*; Rahier, “Racist Stereotypes”; and Whitten and Torres for a thorough exploration and discussion of *blanqueamiento* as a social strategy for upward mobility.

5. The absence of Afro-Ecuadorian representation in national museums, commercial news media, educational texts, and academic scholarship has been examined and criticized by Antón; De Saá; FECONIC, *Nuestra Historia*; and Walsh, “Interculturalidad and Colonialidad del Poder” among others.

6. See for instance Segundo Obando; Carlos Alberto Coba Andrade; and Norman E. Whitten Jr.

7. Quijano, Mignolo, Walsh, and other scholars understand this extreme marginalization as the lasting legacy of colonialism and slavery in Latin America. Their consideration of modernity in relation to colonialism in particular illuminates the historically constituted asymmetrical power dynamics informing social relations and black ethnic identity in Ecuador today. It is this dimension of modernity, which Quijano refers to as the “coloniality of power,” that leads Mignolo and Walsh to consider the epistemological value of subaltern ways of knowing that emerge from the differential experience of colonialism, or what Mignolo understands as the “colonial difference.”

8. See Rahier, “Racist Stereotypes” and “Mami, ¿qué será lo que quiere el negro?”

9. These stereotypes were frequently encountered in casual conversation with mestizos living in Quito in particular during my research and previous time in Ecuador as a study abroad resident director.
A revealing documentary on the topic of racism in the Ecuadorian soccer league was produced shortly thereafter, titled *Tarjeta Roja* by director Rodolfo Muñoz.

It is interesting to note that this perception decreases outside of the urban context and is especially low among Ecuador’s rural indigenous population: those most likely to have little to no contact with Ecuador’s black population.

While *interculturalidad* may be understood in a broader Andean and even global context, its articulation and social/political manifestation takes on a unique character in Ecuador as a grassroots phenomenon responding to the particular socio-historical and socio-political conditions of the nation’s indigenous communities. For a discussion of *interculturalidad* in Ecuador specifically, see Walsh; see also Puente. For an overview of its development in postcolonial theory, see Rodriguez.

See Walsh, “Interculturalidad y colonialidad del poder” for a thorough discussion of *interculturalidad* in Ecuador and its relation to the indigena and afro movements.

Multiculturalism is by now thoroughly critiqued by many academics such as Sizek that take it to be yet another colonizing, hegemonic ideology imposed by the West. For a further discussion of its relationship to *interculturalidad*, see Puente; Rodriguez; and Zambrano. See also Puente for a consideration of state co-option in the use of *interculturalidad*.

See for instance Peters; and Chalá.

While to date there is no known existing documentation substantiating this claim, there is indeed evidence of slave resistance and flight in the region. See for instance Savoia and Ocles.
Chapter 2:  
Afro-Chota: Black Subjugation, Servitude, and Resistance in Ecuador and the 
Chota-Mira Valley, Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century

Spanning the valleys of Chota, Salinas, and La Concepción located along the river 
Chota-Mira in Ecuador’s northern highland provinces of Imbabura and Carchi, the 
Chota-Mira Valley is home to a substantial black population distinguished by their 
unique history and culture. The afrochoteños, as many in the region self-identity, are 
direct descendents of the enslaved Africans who once labored the Jesuit owned and 
operated sugar-cane haciendas that characterized the Chota-Mira Valley during the 
seventeenth and eighteenth century. Their beliefs, practices, cultural traditions, and ways 
of living are informed by the memory of their cultural heritage as well as by their socio-
historical experiences. As such, a discussion of La Bomba necessitates a consideration of 
the history and development of the afrochoteño communities.

To this end, this chapter provides an overview of afrochoteño history from the 
origins of the Chota-Mira Valley’s black communities in the seventeenth-century through 
the end of the huasipungo era in the mid 1960s. Though slavery was effectively 
abolished in Ecuador by 1854, many afrochoteños consider the Agrarian reforms begun 
in 1964 to be the true end of black servitude and dependence in the region. Afrochoteño 
history up to the 1960s has therefore been characterized by many scholars of Afro-
Ecuadorian history and culture, such as José Chalá-Cruz and John Antón, in terms of struggle. Indeed, as will be shown in this chapter, the dual experience of subjugation and resistance resonate throughout the history of the afrochoteño communities. Their shared struggle for freedom, land, family, and, more recently, for social equality unites them and, thus, arguably constitutes a central aspect of their cultural identity as subalterns.

In the following three sections, I trace this dual experience of subjugation and resistance in the history of the afrochoteño communities. The first two sections provide an overview of the history of slavery in Latin America and the Audencia de Quito for comparative purposes and as a means of contextualizing the present discussion. The third section outlines the history and development of the afrochoteño communities, paying particular attention to their struggles. How these experiences inform afrochoteño culture and La Bomba specifically will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

**Afro-Latin America: Origins and Slavery, 1500-1800s**

It is well known that Afro-Latin American history begins not with the trans-Atlantic slave trade per se, but with the first exploratory missions of the Spanish conquistadores in the New World. Though also enslaved, these Africans differed from the majority of those exported to the New World after 1518 in that they were educated in the language, customs, and religion of their captors. Known as ladinos, these “Europeanized” Africans provided domestic services and skilled labor for predominantly urban Spanish and Portuguese aristocrats, professionals and institutions (Klein and
The presence of ladinos on prominent expeditions to the New World is well documented by chroniclers and conquistadores, and it can be said with little doubt that these were the first Africans to arrive to and settle Latin America.

While originally preferred, the ladino was shortly replaced by the bozal, or slave shipped directly from Africa, as the colonial economies developed and the demand for slave labor increased. A precedent for the colonial plantation system and the use of African slaves for agricultural purposes had already been established in the century preceding the colonization of the Americas with the short-lived sugar industries of the east-Atlantic islands.\(^1\) Between the mid-fifteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries, the Azores, Madeira, Cape Verde Islands, São Tome, and the Canary Islands became the predominant producers and suppliers of sugar for Europe. Experimenting with the direct importation of African slaves during this time, the Portuguese gained direct access to the West African coast with their political ties with the Kingdom of Kongo and their settlement of São Tome in the Gulf of Guinea and the inland port of Luanda. This eventually led to the possibility of supplying the American colonies with the massive numbers of African slaves needed to support their growing export industries.

Over a period of nearly four-hundred years (1500-late 1800s), approximately 10 to 12 million enslaved Africans were brought to the New World as a part of the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Klein and Vinson 119).\(^2\) Of these, more than half landed in the Caribbean, Central, and Latin America. This mass importation was fueled, in part, by a labor shortage created by the rapid decline and decimation of the native inhabitant
population, as well as by the gradual integration of the New World colonies into the European market economy. So great was the demand for labor that even as late as 1830, African slaves accounted for the vast majority of immigrants to the Latin America (Klein and Vinson 17). A boom in production and an inability to sustain the necessary slave population led to an increase in the number of slaves imported in the eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century. This period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade alone accounts for over three-fourths of the total estimated slave population brought to the New World (Klein and Vinson 120).

Though the majority of the Africans shipped to Latin America over the course of the slave trade were destined for Brazil, Venezuela, and the West Indies, a significant number were also taken to Mexico, Central and South America. Indeed, Mexico and Peru were among the first to import slaves alongside Hispaniola in the early 1500s, and the development of Peru’s mining industry in the second half of the sixteenth century would significantly increase the number of African slaves in Peru by the end of the 1600s.³ The Caribbean coastal city of Cartagena de Indias, Portobello on the Pacific side of Panama, and Buenos Aires in the southern Atlantic became major ports supplying slaves, both overland and by sea, to Peru. This opened the possibility for the trading and selling of slaves in Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile Argentina, and Uruguay. Yet other overland routes extending from Mexico and Cartagena as well as major ports in Honduras, Guatemala, and Panama similarly supplied Central America with African slaves during this period.⁴
The relative number of slaves imported to each colony reflects the respective labor needs and activities of their local economies. Brazil and the West Indies developed large-scale plantation economies requiring vast quantities of slaves. With close to 200 sugar mills by 1600, Brazil was well on its way to importing more slaves than all of Spanish America combined (Klein and Vinson 46). The West Indies soon followed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These two regions dominated the slave trade, and provided European markets with products such as sugar, tobacco, coffee, cotton, and cacao. Though plantation agriculture of this kind was practiced throughout Spanish Latin America during this time, nowhere did it attain the level of importance that it did in Brazil, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. As noted above, it was mining that created a need for slave labor in the economies of Peru and Mexico. Though comparatively smaller in size, Peru and Mexico nonetheless accounted for the majority of slaves brought to Central and Latin America.

Aside from large scale agricultural production and mining, however, African slaves participated in a variety of skilled and unskilled occupations in both rural and urban areas throughout the New World. In urban centers, slaves could be found working as domestic servants, couriers, metalworkers, tailors, textile workers, artisans, construction workers, fisherman, bakers, vendors, porters, stevedores, and even armed guards, to name a few occupations. There were yet other slaves who worked in commercial agriculture for local consumption, such as in dairy and livestock industries. African slaves could be found working as cowboys on cattle ranches in Argentina, Brazil,
Uruguay, and other parts of Latin America, for example (Andrews, *Afro-Latin America* 15; Klein and Vinson 25). Regardless of the differences in economic activity and slave population, all of the Spanish and Portuguese colonies relied on African slave labor to develop and sustain their local economies and infrastructure.

The institution of slavery was challenged, weakened, and eventually broken in the nineteenth century by persistent slave resistance, a growing free black population, and the wars of independence. Slave uprisings and instances of escape were frequent occurrences throughout the Latin American colonies during the slave trade. Communities of runaway slaves, known as *palenques* or *quilombos*, emerged from the very beginning of the colonial period, and some such as those of Ecuador’s northwest coastal region, San Basilio in Colombia, and Nirgua in Venezuela, managed to resist defeat to become self-governing municipalities recognized by the colonial governments. Perhaps the largest and most renowned *cimarron* community was that of *Palmares* in the northeast Brazilian mountains of Alagoas, which grew to a population of some ten- to fifteen-thousand runaway slaves by the mid 1600s (Klein and Vinson 177).

Though little tolerated, the threat of open rebellion and of flight resulted in growing state intervention in the affairs of slave owners and their slaves. The Bourbon reforms of the eighteenth century introduced new legislation concerning the education, treatment, and use of slaves, including the *codigo negro carolino*, and *la Intrucción* of 1789. The latter in particular attempted to stipulate and clarify, for example, days for the instruction of slaves in the Roman Catholic faith, hours of work and rest, age limits for
labor, free-time for slaves, care for the sick and elderly, marriage among the slaves, the comportment of slaves with respect to their masters, the appropriate punishment for runaway and insubordinate slaves, as well as the sanctions against slave owners who violated these laws. As a means of enforcing these regulations, representatives appointed by the Procurador Sindico were to visit haciendas several times a year and take note of any violations (Salmoral 35-38). Though met with resistance and ultimately rejected by slave proprietors in the Spanish viceroyalties, these laws nonetheless had a significant impact on the institution of slavery. By the end of the eighteenth-century, slaves could petition secular courts and royal officials for the right to personal protection, marry and maintain a family, work small plots of land for personal use, change owners, and purchase their own freedom. This provided a legally sanctioned, albeit largely ineffective, outlet for slave grievances and served as yet another form of resistance.

The ability of slaves to attain freedom through manumission in particular provided a significant means of undermining the institution of slavery. Slaves could be freed either through purchase or by will of the master. This meant that slaves engaged in a number of strategies for liberation, including growing and selling crops during leisure time as mentioned above, seeking benevolent benefactors, gathering funds among family members or groups of slaves, and, for women in particular, engaging in illicit relationships with their owners. As a result, women involved in such affairs and the mulato children born thereof were among the highest granted freedom (Klein and Vinson 200; Andrews Afro-Latin America, 42). In all instances, however, black slaves born into
captivity had an advantage over African slaves (*bozales*) in attaining free status as a result of their knowledge of the Spanish language and colonial law. Though a right recognized by the Spanish crown, manumission in Brazil was contingent upon the recognition of the slave owner. Yet despite efforts by slave owners to prevent or stall manumission, the free black population grew substantially even as new African slaves were shipped across the Atlantic. Indeed, by the end of the 1800s free blacks by far outnumbered African slaves, and both could be found working alongside one another in a wide variety of skilled and unskilled occupations in rural and urban settings throughout Latin American. These free blacks and their struggles would eventually pave the way for the integration of slaves in Latin American society post independence.

It was the independence movements of the nineteenth century, however, that eventually brought the trans-Atlantic slave trade to an end. Abolitionist perspectives existed since the beginning of the colonial period, gaining greater popularity during the eighteenth century with the American, French, and Haitian revolutions. As revolutionary forces swept through the colonies, they recruited slaves for conscription, granting them freedom for their service and loyalty. By this time, Britain was already taking measures to halt the slave trade, pressuring the French, Spanish, and Portuguese to do the same (Klein and Vinson 229). Though many of the newly formed Latin American republics quickly followed suit and stopped importing slaves within the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the process of abolishing slavery and facilitating the transition from slavery to freedom would span the better part of the century. Indeed, it was not
until 1888, with the abolition of slavery in Brazil, that slavery would ultimately come to an end in Latin America. Emancipation would mark only the beginning, however, of a much longer struggle for social acceptance.  

**Afro-Ecuador: Slavery in the Audencia de Quito, 1524-1854**

The first blacks to reach Ecuador were slaves accompanying Francisco Pizzaro and Diego de Almagro in their exploration and settlement of the South American Pacific coast in the years 1524 to 1528. This much is known through the writings of sixteenth century historians, conquistadores, chroniclers, and missionaries such as Antonio de Herrera, Piedra Cieza de León, and Miguel Cabello Balboa. It was in 1527, during Pizzaro’s and Almagro’s second expedition, that the Spanish, and the first blacks, set foot in Ecuador at the site of present day Esmeraldas (Tardieu 15-18). The harsh natural environment of the region, with its dangerous coastline, complex system of estuaries, dense mangrove forests, and disease carrying mosquitoes, prevented the Spaniards from permanently settling the region. These very conditions, however, facilitated the escape of twenty-three marooned slaves who fled inland after their ship was destroyed south of the Bahia de San Mateo in 1553. Among them was the ladino known as Alonso de Illescas, who would eventually gain control of the region and establish an autonomous “zambo” republic within the *Real Audencia de Quito* that would last the better part of the colonial period. Though remarkable, *Esmeraldas* presents a unique chapter in Afro-Ecuadorian history far removed from the reality of the slavery in the remainder of the *Audencia*. 

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As previously noted, the dynamics of slavery in the Spanish viceroyalties were shaped by the particular needs of its local economies. Unlike the plantation-economies of Brazil and the Spanish West Indies, the viceroyalty of Peru generated its wealth and engaged the European market primarily through mining and the export of precious metals. Though labor needs in the mines and other sectors of the Peruvian economy were initially met through the *encomienda* and *mitayo*, which obliged native inhabitants to provide tributary labor to Spanish and Criollo *encomenderos*, disease, abuse, and royal disapproval of the system led to a demand for slave labor. Yet the cost and difficulty of importing black slaves, along with the availability and extended use of indigenous labor in Peru, meant that relatively fewer black slaves were imported to the viceroyalty of Peru during the course of the slave trade. Such was the case in the *Audencia de Quito*, which accounted for 8,000 of the 151,000 black slaves estimated in the Andes region by the end of the eighteenth century.¹³

Within the *Audencia de Quito* specifically, the discovery of gold in the southern mines of Zamora, Loja, and Zaruma in the mid-sixteenth century led to the exploitation of the region’s native inhabitants and a demand for black slaves.¹⁴ Disease and abuse decimated much of the local indigenous population, forcing miners to bring laborers from neighboring highland communities. The inability to sustain this labor force, along with increasing royal disapproval of the *encomienda* system, however, led mine owners in the south of Ecuador to petition the *Consejo de Indias* for black slaves. This much is confirmed by archival documents relating to the request, sale, and purchase of slaves,
referred to as piezas, which indicate that blacks were sought after and brought to labor the mines of Zaruma as early as 1570 (Savoia, “El hombre negro” 206; Tardieu 136). These slaves were typically purchased from markets in Popayan and Buga in the northern part of the Audencia, where they were brought across land from Cartagena de Indias, or directly from Portobelo, Panama, from where they were taken by ship (Savoia, “El hombre negro” 207).

Yet while mining was a significant aspect of the economies of the viceroyalty of Peru and Nueva Granada, it would account for a relatively small portion of the number of slaves in the Audencia de Quito itself.\(^\text{15}\) The extended journey to the south of Ecuador augmented the price of the slaves, which on average cost between 300-500 pesos.\(^\text{16}\) This, along with a bust in the mining industry in the mid-eighteenth century, meant that despite the initial high demand for slaves, few were actually brought for the purpose of mining. Indeed, only the mines of Barbacoas and Zaruma maintained black slaves full-time. Other mines relied on temporary slave labor occasionally provided by slaves absorbed from other areas of commerce, such as agriculture and textiles (Salmoral 96-97). The majority of black slaves brought to Ecuador, then, were destined for either agricultural work or domestic servitude.

The distribution of black slaves in Ecuador during the colonial period reflects the predominance of these two activities as well as the relative availability of and dependence on indigenous labor. By the end of the eighteenth century, the greatest concentration of black slaves could be found in the northern Andes (Ibarra, Quito, and
Otavalo) and in the southwest coastal region (Guayaquil, Loja, and Cuenca).\(^{17}\) Though black slaves were present in the northern highlands since the latter part of the sixteenth century, their mass importation began only after the arrival of the Jesuits to the Chota-Mira Valley in the 1620s and the subsequent development of the region’s sugar-cane industry. The exact number of slaves brought to the Chota-Mira Valley during the course of the slave trade is unknown, yet it is estimated that 2,615 slaves remained on the haciendas once owned by the Jesuits at the time of their expulsion in 1767 (Feijoó 88). This number is matched only by the 2,000 black slaves documented in the major port city of Guayaquil in 1784 (Tardieu 228). In contrast to the Chota-Mira Valley, black slaves in Guayaquil worked primarily as domestic servants, artisans, and jornaleros, or wage-laborers rented out by slave owners. The high concentration of black slaves in Guayaquil may be explained in part by its geographic location and economic role in the Audencia as a major port city. In both regions, it was an inability to sustain an indigenous labor force and the nature of their respective industry, namely sugar-cane production in the north and mining and shipping in the southwest that generated such a high demand for black slaves. Together, these two regions account for over half of the total 8,000 black slaves thought to be present in the Audencia de Quito in the late eighteenth century.\(^{18}\)

The abolition of slavery in Ecuador, as elsewhere in the Americas, was a gradual process spanning the better part of the nineteenth century. As noted previously laws instigated by the Spanish crown in the late eighteenth century that were intended to curb slave rebellion and improve productivity through state regulation of slave management
hastened the manumission process. By the end of the eighteenth century there were an estimated 30,000 free blacks in the Audencia de Quito alone (Klein and Vinson 274). The war of independence further increased the number of manumitted blacks as Simón Bolívar’s forces liberated those willing to join their fight against Spain. The official end of slavery would begin only after independence, however, with the declaration of the Ley de Vientres in 1821, which guaranteed free-status to children born of slaves and prohibited the importation of slaves and extradition of blacks from then Gran Colombia with the purpose of selling into slavery. This law superseded a previous declaration in 1814 stipulating free status to children born of slaves only after the age of 18, up to which time they must work for the slave owner. The womb law of 1821 is also significant in that it liberated any black upon entering the region. In the wake of this declaration were established Juntas de Manumission, which were responsible for overseeing the manumission process and gathering funds for the purpose of hastening the transition. In July of 1851, Jose Maria Urvina, then president of the newly formed Republic of Ecuador, officially declared the end of slavery in Ecuador and ordered the emancipation of all blacks. Availability of funds, however, stalled the process until 1854.

**Black Subjugation and Resistance in the Chota-Mira Valley, 1620-1964**

**Slavery and the Jesuit Haciendas, 1620-1767**

The arrival of the Jesuits to the Chota-Mira Valley in the seventeenth century and the subsequent transformation of the region’s agricultural economy marks the beginning of afrochoteño history. Between the years 1620 and 1728, the Jesuits purchased nine
haciendas in the jurisdiction of Ibarra and Otavalo, including Caldera, Chalguayacu and Carpuela in the Chota Valley, Tumbabiro and Santiago de Monjas in the Salinas valley, and Cuajara, La Concepción, and Chamanal in la Concepción Valley. At the peak of their production toward the end of the eighteenth century, these haciendas maintained between 93 and 380 slaves, and produced sugar-cane and derivative products for consumption in the markets of Ibarra, Otavalo, and Quito. By the time the Jesuits were expelled from the Viceroyalty of Peru in 1767, they left behind an estimated 2,615 black slaves in the Chota-Mira Valley. These are the ancestors of today’s afrochoteño population.

As previously mentioned, the need for black slaves in the region was created by an inability to sustain indigenous laborers. The Jesuits initially relied on tributary workers from local and neighboring highland communities, including those of San Pablo, Cotacachi, Tumbabiro, Salinas, and Urcuquí (Feijoó 83). Yet death, rebellion, and flight gradually led them to experiment with the importation of black slaves (Feijoó 79, 83). During the early part of the seventeenth century, the Jesuits used both indigenous laborers and black slaves. As sugar-cane production intensified, however, so did the Jesuit’s demand for and reliance on slave labor. This is corroborated by existing research of archival documents that show a marked increase in the purchase of slaves by the Jesuits after 1660. By the end of the seventeenth century, the Jesuits were depending almost entirely, though not exclusively, on black slaves to fulfill their labor needs. It was thus
that the hacienda of Cuajara had 264 black slaves while only twelve indigenous *jornaleros* by the time of the Jesuits expulsion in 1767 (Feijoó 152).

The expense and difficulty associated with importing slaves to the *Audencia de Quito* proved unproblematic for the Jesuits who possessed the finances and contacts necessary to bring black slaves directly from Africa via Cartagena de Indias (Feijoó 87). The average price of a black slave, between 300 and 500 pesos, represented a significant cost that greatly limited the total number of slave owners and slaves in the *Audencia*. Yet the diverse economic activities of the Jesuits and their efficient organization provided them with sufficient funds to fully invest in the slave-trade. In 1637, the Jesuits purchase 114 slaves in Ibarra for a sum of 42,180 pesos. Among the slaves were 24 adult men, 24 adult women, 37 boys, 29 girls, and four infants born at the time of the exchange (Feijoó 86). In 1700, the Jesuits received 126 black slaves in Cartagena de Indias, for which they paid 46,620 pesos (Feijoó 87). In addition to the purchase price, the cost of transporting and maintaining a slave represented a significant expense few but the Jesuits could afford in such large quantities. Thus it was that the Jesuits became perhaps the single-most significant importer of slaves in Ecuador during the colonial period. Such access to slaves allowed the Jesuits to maximize their sugar-cane production and establish their dominance in the regional market (Feijoó 83).

Contributing to the Jesuit’s success was the efficient organization of their diverse economic activities in the *Audencia*. In addition to sugar-cane plantations, the Jesuits maintained textile and brick factories, flour mills, and cattle ranches located throughout
the Audencia. The Jesuits coordinated the activities of these different operations, forming a complex network of mutual support between them. Though each hacienda/obraje within a given network was autonomous with respect to its particular production and finances, they were nonetheless intimately connected. Thus Jesuit owned brick and textile factories, flour mills, and cattle ranches provided the building materials, clothing, and food necessary to sustain the sugar cane-plantations and their massive work force in addition to producing products for their own respective markets. Such diversification allowed the Jesuits to minimize overhead expenses and maximize profits while establishing control of local and regional markets in the Audencia.\textsuperscript{23} At the heart of these operations, however, were the sugar-cane haciendas and the black slaves that operated them.

As throughout the Americas, the exact origins of the black slaves brought by the Jesuits to the Chota-Mira Valley remains uncertain. Though records were kept of all legal transactions involving slaves in the New World, the name and origin of these slaves were rarely recorded. Instead, they were referred to as piezas: a term reflecting their status as objects. The few names documented were either given by the Spanish slave traders or where adopted by the slaves themselves and often make reference to ports of origin or to a general ethnic group that served to represent a broader region such as Congo, Mandinga, and Carabali (Klein and Vinson 141). It is also known that yet other slaves took or were given the names of their masters. Indeed, the most common last names documented among the remaining slaves on the hacienda of Cuajara eleven years
after the expulsion of the Jesuits include Congo, Minda, Mina, Padilla, Espinosa, and Arce among others (de Pólit 168). What can be known from a study of existing last names, however, is that the majority of the slaves most probably originate from the Congo-Angola region, which includes the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Angola and the kingdoms of Bakongo, Lunda, Luba, and Mondo. Yet other regions of possible origin cited in existing studies include the Guinea, the Gulf of Benin, and Senegambia.²⁴

Life on the plantation revolved around the agricultural cycle of the sugar-cane. Both enslaved men and women performed a variety of non-gender specific tasks depending on the particular stage of the crop, including preparing and maintaining the soil prior to planting, planting the crop itself, irrigating, weeding, and maintaining the sugar-cane once planted, and cutting, trimming, gathering, and washing the sugar-cane at the time of harvest. From there, the sugar-cane was taken to the trapiche where it underwent yet another labor intensive process whereby the sugar-cane was converted to molasses, sugar, liquor, and other derivative products.²⁵ Requiring numerous laborers performing a variety of tasks, this phase of the sugar-cane production, described below, could last anywhere from three days and nights to an entire week.

_Aquí [in the trapiche], los “moledores” eran los encargados de colocar las cañas maduras en la trituradora hidráulica o movido por animales, mientras otros, con grandes “purus”, semejantes a cucharones, limpiaban constantemente la espuma del caldo con la finalidad de que el canal que lo conduce a las pailas no se obsture. Una vez que el caldo entraba a cocimiento, varios hombres provistos de largos palos, a cuyo extremo se ha colocado un “puru” (calabazo silvestre), cortado transversalmente, “el calambombo”, retiran las impurezas del caldo en_
cocción. A medida que el calor aumenta y la cocción avanza, se realiza el reparto en los diferentes recipientes del trapiche, hasta llegar al último, cuando la miel está en “punto”. A quienes desarrollaban esta tarea específica se denominaba “mieleros”.

Dos o tres esclavos fuertes baten la miel con palos hasta que éste tome consistencia: son los “batidores”. Concluida la faena, la miel se encuentra lista para entrar en los moldes.

Mediante grandes calabazos, los “molderos” retiran la miel del último recipiente donde ha sido batida y la colocan en hileras de molde perforadas para dar forma a las “tapas de dulce”. Luego del conveniente enfriamiento y la solidificación de la miel en los moldes, se entregan las panelas a las “empapeladoras” y los moldes son limpiados de residuos depositándolos en grandes recipientes de agua.

Mujeres e hijas desempeñan el trabajo de “empapeladoras”: éste consiste en envolver dos tapas de panela, unidas entre sí, con delgadas corteas de plátano, para así formar los “atados”. Este trabajo requería paciencia y sobre todo habilidad, por lo cual los capataces de hacienda se leccionaban para realizarlo únicamente a las mujeres que podían efectuarlo con mayor destreza. (Vallejo, Comunidad Negra 45-46).

Here [in the sugar mill], the “grinders” were in charge of placing the mature cane in the hydraulic grinder or animal operated grinder, while others, with great “purus”, large spoons, continually cleared the foam from the broth with the end of clearing the canal that takes the cane to the large bowls from obstruction. Once the broth came to a boil, various men with large sticks, the ends of which were attached a “puru” (a natural gourd) cut transversely, “el calambombo”, clear away the impurities in the cooking broth. Based on the color and the progression of the coction, the task of partitioning in the different receptacles of the mill begins, until reaching the end, when the molasses is “just so”. To those who labored this task were given the nickname “molasses-makers.”

Two or three strong slaves beat the honey with sticks until it takes consistency: they are the “beaters.” When finished, the molasses is then ready to go into the molds.

By means of large gourds, the “grinders” remove the molasses from the last container where it has been beaten and they place it in rows of perforated molds to give shape to the “pieces of candy”. After the appropriate cooling and solidification of the molasses in the molds, they bring the cane-sugar to the
“wrappers” and the molds are cleaned of residue by placing them in large water tanks.

Women and children undertake the work of “wrappers”: this consists of wrapping two pieces of cane-sugar, joined between them, with thin pieces of banana leaf, so as to make the “tied-pairs”. This work requires patience and above all ability, the reason for which the overseers of the *hacienda* selected for the task only women that could do it with the most skill.

Only the elderly, sick, and children under the age of seven were exempt from these responsibilities. As elsewhere in the Americas, Sundays and feast days were the only regularly observed times of rest.

Beyond daily responsibilities, little is known of slave life during the time of the Jesuits. What is known, however, is the general conduct of the Jesuits with regards to the slave’s general well being, education, family, and property. The Jesuits were obligated to provide their slaves with clothing and food as well as instruction in the Roman Catholic faith. As noted previously, the complex networks formed by the Jesuit’s diverse commercial investments provided much of the clothing and food for the *hacienda’s* slaves. The evangelization of the slaves was overseen by chaplains who taught portions of the bible and other catechisms through the use of sociodramas and music, and made the slaves memorize specific prayers such as the Ave Maria, Our Father, and the Credo (Peters 139). They were also mindful of maintaining the unity of slave marriages and families, going so far as to even purchase and sell slaves by entire families (Rasines 70). This much is due, in part, to the Jesuit’s desire to uphold what they considered a distinctly Christian moral and ethical value, namely that of monogamy. It also reflects
the much more pragmatic agendas of maintaining racial purity and slave complacency. As was common in many parts of the Spanish viceroyalties, slave families lived in their own houses and were often allotted a small plot of land often referred to as a pongo or chacra for their own personal use during their free-time. Slaves used these plots not only to grow food for consumption within the household, but for sale in the local markets as well. Such commercial activity provided slaves an important avenue for manumitting.27

Though mistreatment of slaves was widespread, it is uncertain to what extent black slaves in the Chota-Mira Valley suffered such abuse at the hands of the Jesuits. Considering the expenses associated with purchasing and maintaining slaves, it is generally assumed that it was not in the interest of the Jesuits to punish their slaves so severely as to kill them or incite open rebellion. This is not to say, however, that there were no instances of abuse and mistreatment or of resistance and flight.28 Indeed, oral testimony, such as the following, suggests that the Jesuits did in fact use excessive force and torture as a means of coercion and punishment. At the age of 100, an afrochoteño referred to only as N. Chalá relates the following memories imparted to him by his grandmother, who had been a slave on the hacienda of Carpuela during the time of the Jesuits:

. . . Negro que se retrasaba en los trabajos recibía dos o tres azotes. Cuando alguno trataba de huir y le descubrían a tiempo, soltaban grandes perros hasta dar con él, si es que era la primera vez por cimarrón de daban 50 azotes, desnudándole la espalda, una vez que ha recibido el castigo, le salaban en las heridas, todavía frescas y recién abiertas por el látigo con sal molida quedando boca abajo echado al sol, algunos morían agusanados o volvían a las faenas, todavía con las carachas de las heridas. Si intentaban escapar por segunda vez,
le cortaban el corvejón y las orejas para luego encerrarle en un cuartito chiquito que tenían todos trapiches, llamado infiernillo, dejándolo en el cepo.

Este cepo decía mi abuelo que era terrible, porque le hacían sentar al negro en cuclillas y le cruzaban los brazos bajo las piernas y allí le metían un palo a través y le amarraban los dedos gordos con piolas y luego los guardias le volteaban de lado, en esta dolorosa postura estaban dos o tres días oyéndose hasta los galpones los quejidos y gritos del pobre negro. Esos dos días no se les daba de comer ni beber nada, de suerte que regresaba al trabajo sin fuerza, apenas para pararse.

El cabresto muy grueso y con nudos, dizque usaban para azotar lo mismo la roseta, el rebenque y hasta el garrote.

Cuando volvía a huir por tercera vez lo azotaban hasta dejarlo por muerto, luego sobre las heridas le echaban cebo hirviendo derretida y antes de que pudiera reponerse le cortaban los compañeritos (los castraban). Estos negros bambaros, me contaba mi abuelito, se les mandaba a los lavaderos de oro del río Mira o a las minas de sal de la hacienda Cachiyacu o a Chalguaycu . . . (qtd. in Chalá 79)

. . . The black man who fell behind in his work received two or three lashes. When someone tried to escape and they discovered him in time, they released large dogs after him, if it was the first time fleeing they gave him 50 lashes, stripping the clothes off his back, once given the punishment, they salted his wounds, still fresh and recently open from the whipping, with ground salt placed face down left out in the sun, some died infested with worms or returned to work in the fields, still with the scabs of the wounds. If they tried to escape a second time, they cut his hamstring and his ears to later shut him in a small room filled with mills, called infiernillo, leaving him trapped.

This jail said my grandmother was terrible, because they made the person squat and they crossed his arms under his legs and there they stuck a stick and they tied his thumbs with rope and later the guards would knock him over, in this painful posture they were left two three days listening to them as far as the dormitories the moaning and screaming of the poor man. Those two days they weren’t given anything to eat nor to drink, by luck they returned to work without strength enough to even stand.

The rope, very thick and with knots, they say was used to lash as well as the water hose, ratlin and even the club.

When [the slave] attempted to run for the third time they whipped him until nearly dead, they later threw melted boiling animal feed and before he could recover
they cut his “little companions” (they were castrated). These poor blacks, my grandmother used to tell me, they sent to the gold sifters of the Mira river or to the salt mines of the haciendas of Cachiyacu or Chalguaycu . . .

Such testimonies provide crucial insight into a part of afrochoteño history otherwise undocumented. Yet how common such treatment was in the region and how often it was administered remains speculative. The fact remains, however, that documented complaints put forth to the Audencia against slave owners in the Chota-Mira Valley occur after the Jesuits were expelled.

**Transition and Emancipation, 1767-1820/1854**

The expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 effectively halted the importation of slaves to the Chota-Mira Valley, marking the beginning of a period of turbulent transition in the region. Shortly after the Junta de Temporalidades assumed control of the former Jesuit haciendas in 1775, they began the process of downsizing the total slave population and selling the plantations, along with their remaining slaves, into private ownership.29 An inventory taken by the Junta upon arriving at the Chota-Mira Valley revealed the presence of 2,615 remaining slaves: 1,364 slaves dedicated to hard labor, 508 designated as borriqueros, 181 conductores, 94 elderly and liciados, and 488 under the age of ten (Feijoó 88). Approximately half of the 1,300 field slaves were located on the haciendas of La Concepción and Cuajara alone. Wary of rebellion, the Junta determined the haciendas had in excess 151 slaves and would ultimately sell 60 in 1780 and another 39 in 1781 (Chalá 89). Between the years 1784 and 1802, the Junta de Temporalidades sold all eight of the former Jesuit haciendas along with the remaining slaves to local
individuals and families, thus completing the fifteen year long transition from Jesuit domination to private ownership in the region.

Abuse at the hands of the Junta administrators and the new owners as well as continued attempts to split families through sale or transfer, however, led to slave resistance, including formal complaints placed before the Audencia. As previously noted, regulation of slave treatment had greatly increased throughout the Spanish viceroyalties during this period, which empowered the slaves and provided them with a significant, though often ineffective, legal outlet. Thus it was that a delegation of slaves from La Concepción, headed by a slave known as Pedro Lucumí, went to Quito in 1778 to denounce the Junta de Temporalidades’ appointed administrator of the hacienda, Francisco Aurreco Echea, for failure to provide sufficient clothing and food as well as for administering harsh treatment and forcing slaves to work on Sundays (Chalá 88; Savoia and Ocles 17). The procudador investigating the allegations ultimately determined in favor of the slaves, and the administrator was condemned to serve time in jail as well as pay a sum of 200 pesos, 100 of which were for the slaves who brought the case (Savoia and Ocles 20).

Other such cases were not as successful, however, leaving slaves with little other recourse than flight or rebellion. The sale and transfer of slaves on the hacienda of Cuajara between 1779 and 1793, for example, led to numerous failed attempts to denounce the owner, Carlos Aruajo, as well as to revolt, escape, and the formation of a palenque near the hacienda. This palenque, known as Turupamba, was short lived,
however, as the slaves were recaptured by their owner with the help of the *corregidor* and 24 soldiers from Quito and Ibarra (Chalá 90). Similar instances of slave flight and revolt occurred on the plantations of La Concepción, Caldera, and Chamanal. Seventy slaves and their families fled La Concepción for six months in 1789, while a slave revolt in Caldera and Chamanal in 1811 left the hacienda’s *mayordomo* and *capitán* gravely injured. Runaway slaves from these haciendas during this time formed yet another *palenque* in the region, the site of which may be the present day community of *Chota* as suggested by José Chalá in *Chota Profundo* (121).

The instability created by the transition to private ownership, the sale and transfer of slaves, and the increase in slave uprisings in the *Chota-Mira* Valley would subside in the early nineteenth century with independence and the abolition of slavery. As noted previously, the emancipation of black slaves in Ecuador was a slow process spanning the years between 1820 and 1854. Whether or not black, slaves from the *Chota-Mira* Valley participated in the wars of independence remains uncertain, though plausible considering the frequency of escape during this period. Black slaves in the region did, however, take advantage of the womb laws of 1814 and 1821, which granted freedom to their unborn children.\(^\text{32}\) How many blacks in the region were still enslaved by the time President Urvina officially declared the abolition of slavery in 1851 is also unknown. What is certain, however, is that abolition changed little for the *afrochoteños* who would continue to serve their former masters in a position of servitude and dependence for yet another century.
**Huasipunco era, 1854-1964**

In the wake of abolition emerged a system of debt-peonage known as *concertaje* that would maintain the former slaves in a position of dependence until the Agrarian reforms of the 1960s. Emancipation presented *hacienda* owners with a need to find new ways of exploiting labor. It also presented a dilemma for former slaves who, though free, had no legal access to the land which they had labored and come to know as home. Taking advantage of this situation, the *hacienda* owners solved their problem, in part, by exchanging plots of land, known as *hausipungos*, for labor. *Haciendas* supplemented the work provided by *huasipungueros* through the use of wage-laborers drawn from surrounding communities. Low wages and a dependence on goods produced by the *hacienda* likewise maintained these workers in a position of servitude as they often paid their debts in the form of work. As the *haciendas* controlled access to much of the region’s farmable and irrigable land, and water supplies as well as provided much of the basic-goods for the *hausipungueros* and neighboring communities, the *afrochoteños* found themselves relying on the *haciendas* to subsist.33 Thus, while no longer forced to work the land as slaves, many *afrochoteños* continued to labor the sugar-cane plantations and depend on the *hacienda* owners from whom they were liberated.

Central to the operation of the *haciendas* during this time was the *huasipunguero*. While the use of *jornaleros* and *partidarios* depended on the size and labor needs of the specific *hacienda*, *huasipungueros* were a constant labor force on the plantations. Unlike
the other wage-laborers who lived in the communities surrounding the haciendas, the
*huasipungueros* lived on the plantation itself, and participated in all aspects of the
plantation’s activities, including the cultivation of crops, the processing of sugar-cane,
property maintenance, and domestic work. Little had changed in the way sugar-cane was
cultivated and processed since the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and the difficult
nature of the work ensured that mainly blacks occupied these positions. The
*huasipunguero* worked between four and six days a week while his family cared for the
crops on the *hausipungo*, what animals they may have possessed, and helped in the field
and with domestic service on the *hacienda* whenever required. In this way, the hacienda
exploited the labor of the entire family, making the *huasipunguero* a valuable asset to the
*hacienda*. This gave *hausipungueros* certain leverage, however, that would contribute
to the eventual dissolution of the *hacienda* system.

The *huasipungo* arrangement that was so crucial to the livelihood of the *hacienda*
depended on access to usable land. Yet limited availability and the tendency to withhold
the best land for the *hacienda* led to increasing tension between the *hausipungueros* and
the *haciendas*. This resulted in the formation of the region’s first worker syndicates in
the 1950s. Organizations such as *La Colonia Agrícola Carchense* in Caldera, *La
Federación Campesina* of Carchi, and the *Asociación de Trabajadores Agrícolas La
Esperenza* of Carpuela demanded access to more and better quality land. They also
petitioned for payment of wages owed and better treatment (Jaramillo 49, 51). In one
particular instance, workers in Caldera went on strike for eight months until the *hacienda*
owner relented and negotiated the terms of their petition (Jaramillo 51). Though not always successful, these unions played an important role in the *afrochoteño* struggle for land and anticipated the transformation that would take place in the 1960s.

In 1964, the state effectively ended the *hacienda* system with the declaration of the *Ley de Reforma Agraria y Colonización* and the *Ley de Tierras Baldías*. Though similar laws addressing the colonization of unused lands were passed in the 1930s, these new set of laws were significant in that they sought to restructure the nature of and relationship between land tenure and agricultural production in hopes of increasing productivity and, therefore, enabling modernization (Gondard and Mazurek 15-17). In the *Chota-Mira* Valley, the *Instituto Ecuatoriano de Reforma Agraria y Colonización* (IERAC) oversaw the redistribution of the *haciendas*, which were divided and granted to the *hausipungueros, partidarios*, and *jornaleros* (Jaramillo 50-52; and Chalá 52). These changes marked the beginning of a major transition in the region that would have significant implications for the development and economic activities of the *afrochoteño* communities. More importantly, however, the reforms hailed the end of a long era of servitude and dependence that characterized the region since the seventeenth century.

**Conclusion**

The history of the *afrochoteño* communities is one of struggle and resistance. Faced with extreme subjugation and marginalization in the form of slavery and exploitation, the *afrochoteños* fought for their freedom, family, and right to land. Flight,
rebellion, manumission, organized protest, legal petitions, and other more subtle forms of resistance were their weapons. Their perseverance contributed to the dissolution of the hacienda system and led to the formation of a distinct community united as much in their common struggle as in the color of their skin. Through these struggles emerged a distinct culture, the dynamic resilience of which may be the greatest triumph of the afrochoteño communities over the horrors of slavery and subjugation. The following chapter explores this culture and the process of its documentation.
Notes

1 Klein and Vinson 11-14; see Cabrera for a more thorough discussion of the East Atlantic slave trade; for a specific discussion of the Portuguese involvement in the East Atlantic slave trade and early activity in West Africa, see Vogt.

2 For a general overview of slavery in Latin America, see Klein and Vinson; Andrews, Afro-Latin America; and Mellafe.

3 Klein and Vinson 24-31; for a discussion on slavery in Mexico, see Backwell, Silver Mining; on slavery in Peru see Backwell, Miners of the Red Mountain.

4 For Klein and Vinson 31-39; for a specific discussion of the internal slave market and slave routes in Latin America, see Mellafe, La introduccion de la esclavitude negra en Chile.

5 See Klein and Vinson 49-118 for an overview of slavery in Brazil and the Spanish West Indies; for a more specific discussion of slavery in the plantation economies of Brazil, see Freyre; and Malheiro; on the Spanish West Indies see Ortiz, Hampa Afro-Cubana; Kiple; and Soler.

6 Klein and Vinson 26-30; Andrews 15; for further discussion of slave occupations in urban centers see Hunefeldt 97-128; and Bowser; for occupations in non-agricultural settings, see Hunefeldt 37-52; Deive 341-50; and Andrews, Afro-Argentina 4-29.

7 For an overview of slave rebellion and flight, see Klein and Vinson 174-83, 183-192; Andrews, Afro-Latin America 37-40; Price; Reis; and Guillot; for specific case studies of maroon communities, including those of Palmares and Esmeraldas see Reis and Flavio; Freitas; Ennes; Carneiro; Navarrete; and Rueda Novoa.

8 Klein and Vinson 165-171; Andrews 33-37; Salmoral 23-47; Petit Muñoz et al. 181-269; see also Malagón Barceló for a specific discussion of the Black Codes.

9 See Andrews 33-37, 42-43, 65; Klein and Vinson 169, 196-205; Bowser, 272-301; and Hundefeldt 167-179.

10 For general discussion of impact of wars of Independence on slavery in Latin America, see Klein and Vinson 190-192; also Andrews, Afro-Latin America 54-67.

12 Tardieu 29-33; Savoia, “*Esmeraldas*” 20; for a more thorough discussion of the maroon communities of *Esmeraldas*, see Rocio Rueda; see also Cabello Balboa.

13 Klein and Vinson 24-28, 273; for an overview of slavery in the viceroyalty of Peru, see Backwell, *Miners of the Red Mountain*; see also Bowser. For an overview of slavery in the *Audencia de Quito*, see Tardieu; and Salmoral.

14 Tardieu137-167; Salmoral 97; Savoia, “la Presencia.”

15 See Tardieu; and Salmoral 96-107 for an overview of slave occupations in the *Audencia de Quito*.

16 For a general discussion of slave prices in the *Audencia de Quito*, see Salmoral 64-69; see also Barona; and Tardieu; on the purchase and sale of slaves in the northern highlands see Noboa, “Una vision global” 150-52; Feijoo 76-81; and Zevallos; for Guayaquil see Arellano.

17 For the distribution of slaves in the *Audencia de Quito* specifically, see Salmoral 55-64; and Tardieu.

18 See chart in Klein and Vinson 273 for total number of blacks in Ecuador; see also Salmoral 57-64 for total slave population and their distribution in the *Audencia de Quito*.

19 On impact of the Black Code and the Instruction of 1789 on slavery in the *Audencia de Quito* see Salmoral 17-51. For an overview of manumission and slave resistance in the *Audencia*, see Tardieu 317-360; see also Salmoral 116-170.

20 On the participation of blacks in the war of independence, see Arteaga “Alfaro y los negros,” 75-80; see also Chiriboga 132-134.

21 Coba Andrade 49-59; and Peters 158-159.

22 On *haciendas* and estimated number of slaves, see Feijoó 88; and Chalá. 76-77.

23 See Feijoó 95-123 for a thorough discussion of the organization of the Jesuit haciendas in the region.
For a discussion of slave origins and last names in the Chota-Mira Valley, see Chalá 81-83; Kapenda; Noboa; De Pólit; and Peters 129; for a general discussion of slave origins in the Audencia de Quito, see Tardieu; and Salmoral; see also Klein and Vinson 139-143 for a general discussion of the problem with linking last names with places of origins, and specific ethnic identities.

For description of work on the Jesuit haciendas see Feijoó 76-78; Coba Andrade 34-35; and Peters 136-139.

See Peters 138-140; Feijoó 110-111; Rasines 51, 71; Chalá 87; and Coba Andrade 35-36. See also Salmoral on general obligations of slave owners and treatment of slaves in the Audencia de Quito.

See Feijoó 110-111; Chalá 87; Peters 140; Coba Andrade 35-36; and Vallejo.

On the abuse of slaves on the Jesuit haciendas see Peters 140-142; Chalá 78-80; Coba-Andrade 36-38. See also Salmoral 155-170; and Tardieu 317-320 for general discussion of slave mistreatment in the Audencia de Quito.

See Feijoó 88 on remaining slaves; on the sale of the Jesuit plantations and slaves see Jaramillo 45; Feijoó 150; Noboa 152-53; Chalá 89; and Peters 142-143; see also Peters 150-158 for a discussion of the significance of land and family for slave rebellions.

For specific cases in the Chota-Mira Valley see Savoia and Ocles 17-34; and Peters 150-158.

For a discussion of specific instances of slave rebellion and flight in the Chota-Mira Valley see Savoia and Ocles 17-34; Peters 150-158; and Chalá 85-94.

See Chalá 95-98; and Peters 158-159.

See Jaramillo 45-50; Chalá 98-121; Peters 158-161; and Vallejo for a discussion of concertaje and huasipungo.

See Jaramillo 46-50; Chalá 98-103; and Vallejo.

See Jaramillo 45-52; and Chalá 104-105.
Chapter 3: Más Allá del Fútbol: (Re)presenting the Subaltern

As a cultural expression, La Bomba is unique to the communities of the Chota-Mira valley. Any discussion of La Bomba is therefore also implicitly a discussion of afrochoteño culture and identity. This much became apparent over the course of filming Más allá del fútbol as my experiences and interviews revealed more about how and why La Bomba is so significant for afrochoteños today rather than about the genre itself. This chapter analyzes the discourse presented in the film in relation to the current socio-political context within which it emerges. As the film reveals, perceptions about the origins and meaning of La Bomba center round its African heritage and value as a signifier of afrochoteño identity. Yet, as shown in the first chapter, only recently have afrochoteños begun to identify themselves in terms of ethnicity and only recently have they begun to represent their culture in terms of its African heritage. I thus consider the ways in which this particular discourse about La Bomba and afrochoteño identity invokes the current struggles of the afrochoteño communities and thus registers their subalternity.

Considering my own role in the construction of this discourse as the director and editor of Más allá del fútbol, I additionally discuss the process of filming and editing the documentary for the sake of transparency and as a means of problematizing the issue of representation. As subalterns, the afrochoteños have long been silenced and made
invisible within the nation. To the extent possible, I allowed the afrochoteños to represent themselves through my filming and editing techniques. The platform provided by film thus became a form of advocacy which I consider to be in keeping with the process and goals of etnoeducación. I thus open this chapter with a discussion of Más allá del fútbol and then analyze and discuss the discourse presented therein. Understanding the significance of La Bomba for afrochoteño identity and what it represents within the context of this greater struggle further illuminates the debate concerning La Bomba’s recent transformation and complicates the question of tradition and its relation to change.

The Making of Más allá del fútbol

I initially set out to explore La Bomba and what it means for the people of the Chota-Mira valley as a means of bringing their culture and history to a broader audience. For the purposes of the dissertation, I also intended to assess to what extent outside cultural influences were changing local traditions. To this end, I set out to interview musicians, community leaders, elders, and others with knowledge of La Bomba and afrochoteño culture with the help of a respected and well-known local filmmaker, Alex Schlenker. During the course of a year, we interviewed over 30 individuals, attended and recorded various community events and festivities, many involving Bomba, and collected over 40 hours of video and audio footage in the communities of Chota, Juncal, Santa Ana, La Concepción, Mascarillas, Carchi, Carpuela, Pimampiro, and Chalguayco in the Chota-Mira valley. My research also led me to the urban centers of Ibarra and
Quito where I conducted additional interviews with afrochoteños who have since emigrated, scholars of afro-Ecuadorian history and culture, and afrochoteño social and political leaders. I also attended and recorded cultural events involving performances of Bomba put on by the afro-Ecuadorian cultural centers of Azúcar and the Centro cultural afroecuatoriano. The Fulbright Commission of Ecuador and the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar provided additional support for my research.

The interviews were designed to allow the interviewees to develop and express their thoughts on the subject rather than to simply collect data. The specific questions posed during the interviews varied depending on the individual being interviewed. For instance, Bomba musicians spoke more specifically to the music and dance while community leaders addressed broader cultural and social questions. The focus of all the interviews, however, remained La Bomba. Among the questions posed to all the collaborators, for instance, were the following:

Name?
Occupation?
How long have you lived in the community?
What do you know of La Bomba, its origins, and what does it mean to you?
When and why do you listen to La Bomba?
Do you think La Bomba has changed over time and why?

As the questions above indicate, I was more concerned with the perceptions of the individual interviewed rather than with discerning an objective “truth” about the origins and meaning of La Bomba. This also allowed for flexibility in terms of the direction of the interview, which in turn impacted the shape of the overall project. Interviewees not
only answered questions, but additionally posed questions, thereby engaging me in critical dialogue. These experiences challenged my original assumptions and forced me to rethink many of my initial thoughts and questions regarding *La Bomba* and *afrochoteño* culture. In this sense, *Más allá del fútbol* represents a collaboration between myself and those interviewed, reflecting the widely accepted view of ethnography as a creative process and intersubjective production.¹

During the filming of the documentary, I lived in the community of *Chota* in the province of *Imbabura*. Its central location and proximity to the Pan-American highway allowed for greater mobility within the *Chota-Mira* valley as well as between the region and the urban centers of Quito and Ibarra. *Chota* was also significant in that it was the home of FECONIC and the site of the major regional pre-Lenten carnival celebration known as *Carnaval Coangue*. *Chota* also held personal significance as it was my initial encounter with the communities of the *Chota-Mira* valley and the home of several individuals and families I had befriended in my previous trips to the region. Toward the end of my project, I moved to Ibarra so as to gain even greater mobility as all of the communities of the *Chota-Mira* valley are connected by the city’s main bus terminal.

Filming occurred mainly during the weekends as many in the communities worked during the week. While off-camera, I explored the region, attended local events, developed friendships, engaged in countless conversations, played and took care of children, and otherwise participated in ongoing daily life in the community of *Chota*. What I learned from these more informal interactions proved invaluable to my
understanding of *La Bomba* and *afrochoteño* culture and likewise informed the course and shape of the film and dissertation.

After the interviews and filming were completed, I began the process of editing the footage. As noted above, it was my intention from the outset to allow the *afrochoteños* to represent themselves to the extent possible. Rather than impose my own narrative and structure on the film, I allowed the story to emerge from the content and direction of the interviews and ethnographic experience itself. I coded the interviews then edited and arranged the relevant segments according to topic. The juxtaposition of the individual voices resulted in a dialogue of sorts that propelled the narrative forward. The discussion takes the viewer from a general overview of the region and *afrochoteño* culture to a specific discussion of *La Bomba*: its origins, practice, recent change, and meaning for the people of the Chota-Mira valley. As a means of contextualizing the content of the interviews and illustrating certain aspects of *afrochoteño* culture, I additionally interspersed footage of *Bomba* performance and dance, as well as life-stories, and images of people and of daily life in the region.

In keeping with the notion that the ethnographer/filmmaker plays an integral part in the intersubjective production of knowledge, I decided to include myself in the film and its dialogue. I appear at times in the margins of the film, often off camera asking questions so as to maintain transparency and remind the viewer of my involvement in the interviews. At other times, I may be seen interacting with members of the community as they carry on with their daily routines. During two key transitions in the film, I
foreground my own presence. Rather than impose an authoritative perspective, however, I use these occasions to provide the viewer with relevant contextual information and to pose broader questions informing the film’s production. As such, my presence in the film serves as framing device and as a means of situating myself in relation to the afrochoteños and their representation in this film.

My decisions as a filmmaker and editor in terms of how to represent La Bomba and afrochoteño culture distinguishes Más allá del fútbol from other documentaries about Afro-Ecuadorian culture made during the twentieth century. As a collaborative endeavor, the film intends to not only document La Bomba, but to provide a space in and through which afrochoteños could represent and meaningfully discuss their own culture and traditions. In this regard, Más allá del fútbol is in keeping with the ideology and objectives of etnoeducación, which seeks to empower afrochoteños through knowledge of their cultural heritage. Afrochoteño scholar Iván Pabón explains etnoeducación as defined by the movement’s founder, Juan García Salazar:

. . . [etnoeducación es] el proceso de enseñar y aprender casa adentro, para fortalecer lo propio del que nos hablan los mayores. Este aprendizaje se fundamenta en la transmisión oral y en la memoria colectiva, que constituyen un legado identitario desde nuestros ancestros; de allí que, la Etnoeducación tiene que ser entendida como un proceso de permanente reflexión y construcción colectiva. (“La etnoeducación” 3)

. . . [ethnoeducation is] the process of teaching and learning in-house, to strengthen that of our own of which our elders tell us. This learning founds itself in oral transmission and in the collective memory that constitutes a legacy of identity from our ancestors; from there, Ethnoeducation has to be understood as a process of permanent reflection and collective construction.
By “casa adentro” (“in-house”), Garcia alludes to the notion that Afro-Ecuadorians must reclaim and take ownership of their cultural heritage if they intend to engage others in a meaningful, intercultural exchange as equals. Pabón outlines these objectives as follows ("La etnoeducación" 4):

**LA ETNOEDUCACIÓN AFROECUATORIANA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>¿Qué es?</th>
<th>Apuesta</th>
<th>Problemas que ayuda a resolver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Herramienta que permite acceder al conocimiento (propio) para fortalecer la identidad y llegar a la interculturalidad en igualdad de condiciones y conocimientos.</em>&lt;br&gt;Es un proyecto político y epistémico.&lt;br&gt;Es historia, cultura, economía...</td>
<td>La Etnoeducación apuesta a conocer más de nosotros para equilibrar con lo que nos han enseñado de los otros. Y que los otros también conozcan de nosotros para desde esta base conocernos y respetarnos todos/as los/as ecuatorianos/as.</td>
<td>Bajar los niveles de discriminación y racismo en la sociedad ecuatoriana&lt;br&gt;Elevar el autoestima de los afroecuatorianos.&lt;br&gt;Tener más y mejores oportunidades,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Afro-Ecuadorian Ethnoeducation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is it?</th>
<th>Proposal</th>
<th>Issues it helps to resolve</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tool that helps access knowledge (of the self) to strengthen identity and reach interculturality in equality of conditions and knowledge. It is a political and epistemic project. It is history, culture, and economy. ...</td>
<td>Ethnoeducation proposes to know more about ourselves so as to balance that which they have taught us about others. And that others also know about us so that from this base we come to know and respect ourselves all Ecuadorians</td>
<td>To diminish levels of discrimination and racism in Ecuadorian society&lt;br&gt;To raise the self-esteem of Afro-Ecuadorians&lt;br&gt;To have more and better opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As Pabón notes, a significant aspect of this process is speaking “con la propia voz,” or “with one’s own voice.” This statement reflects the silencing and denigrating impact of the discrimination long felt by the Afro-Ecuadorian communities. To reclaim their heritage is to assert their cultural, and therefore social and political will. As reflected in my filming and editing decisions, my intentions were to allow the afrochoteños to do exactly that: to let the afrochoteños speak for themselves and represent their own culture and traditions. Though a cultural outsider, I nonetheless lend my support to this process in enabling an internal dialogue about La Bomba through the creation of this film. For me, the decision to undertake this project was thus clearly not simply a matter of furthering my own personal career and scholarly agenda but of engaging in a form of advocacy for a culture and people I have come to know, respect, and admire.

*Según los ancestros . . .*

When I first began investigating and documenting La Bomba, I was struck by the lack of information concerning its origins and history. To date, no written documentation as to the origins and practice of La Bomba exists prior to the late nineteenth century. The few archives available to the public with documents concerning slavery in Ecuador during the colonial period contain no mention of the musical genre, instrument, or dance. What the Jesuit archives contain remains a mystery. Their reluctance to release documents concerning the sugar cane plantations and the ownership and treatment of slaves in the Chota-Mira valley anger local Afro-Ecuadorian scholars desperate for
written accounts of their ancestors. Much of what can be known about La Bomba remains in the collective memory of the afrochoteños themselves.

Más allá del fútbol attempts in part to fill this gap in knowledge by documenting oral testimonies about La Bomba’s origins, development, practice, and significance. Its necessity alone speaks to the subalternity of the afrochoteño communities. Yet the testimonies collected and interwoven in this film likewise reference the subaltern condition of the afrochoteños in the story they collectively tell. More than remembrances and facts about La Bomba, the film reveals a particular discourse about afrochoteño identity. As I show in the following, this discourse is rooted in the current Afro-Ecuadorian counter-hegemonic efforts to legitimate and reaffirm black cultural identity in its emphasis on Africa and black ethnicity. The reinterpretation and (re)presentation of La Bomba and afrochoteño identity relative the social and political agenda of etnoeducación shows how memory and tradition are engaged by afrochoteños in their struggle as subalterns.

As discussed in Chapter One, there is a growing perception and awareness of ethnic identity among the afrochoteños fostered in part by the project of etnoeducación and the ideology of interculturalidad. Youth educated in Chota’s schools are now taught from an early age about their African roots, history, and customs as a means of rescuing, as they put it, their cultural traditions and instilling a sense of pride in their local heritage. In this way, the leaders of this socio-cultural movement hope to move Afro-Ecuadorians and the issues they face from the margins to the foreground of national social and
political debate. As pointed out in chapter two, this is only the latest manifestation of a much longer struggle in the socio-historical trajectory of the *afrochoteño* communities that have been fighting for social and political acceptance within the nation since their forced immigration to Ecuador in the seventeenth-century. The discourse surrounding *La Bomba* and *afrochoteño* identity presented in the film is circumscribed and informed by this socio-historical and socio-political context and must therefore be understood as such.

Despite the ambiguity of its origins and the hybridity of its development, *La Bomba* is significant for many *afrochoteños* today in part because it serves as a representation of their African cultural heritage. Often invoked in terms of “ancestors” by many with whom I spoke, this connection with the past makes *La Bomba* a vital resource for *afrochoteño* identity as represented today. I now consider in what ways Africa is invoked in the film’s testimonies about *La Bomba* as well as how this association is resourced in the representation of *afrochoteño* identity. Though drums are in themselves now considered a general identifying marker of African influences in the musical traditions of black communities in the African Diaspora, it is in *La Bomba*’s symbolism and social significance that the *afrochoteños* in the film most project their African heritage and thus distinguish themselves from other cultural groups in Ecuador.

As we learn in the film, *La Bomba* is unique in its construction and playing technique. Made entirely of materials found in nature, the *bomba* requires the work of a knowledgeable and skilled artisan. Segundo Barahona of the community of Juncal is among the few still practicing this tradition. As he explains, the process of making the
drum, with all the necessary materials in-hand, requires approximately two weeks for its completion. A hollowed trunk of *balso* or *ceibo* (a tree common to the region) is covered on both ends with cured goat skin, preferably one side female and the other male. The skins are affixed and tightened using arcs of *pigüa* (a supple branch or vine) and thread made of *cabestro* or *cabuya* (a plant commonly found in the region), though more recently nylon. While only played on one side during a given performance, two basic complementary rhythmic patterns known as *sol* (sun) and *tierra* (earth) are ideally used in symmetrical alternation. In contrast, the drums of the neighboring highland indigenous communities are larger and are made of wood and cow hide. They are also played with a stick and strapped across the shoulder, whereas the *bomba* is placed between the thighs and played with both hands. *La Bomba* is likewise distinguished from the coastal drums of *Esmeraldas* primarily by construction and type. The hand drums of the *afroesmeraldeño* communities are long, conical drums made of wood and are covered on only one end. The rhythm and playing style of *la bomba* additionally mark *bomba* as a cultural tradition unique to the communities of the *Chota-Mira* valley.

In its construction and performance, *La Bomba* is thought to embody the cosmology of the *afrochoteño* communities. As Plutarco Chalá explains:

> ... la bomba es un instrumento hecho de cuero de chivo y chiva. Tenía que ser exclusivamente de cuero de chivo y chiva porque allí se expresa el matrimonio, la creación, se expresa la cosmovisión mismo de lo que viene siendo la cultura afrochoteña. (Personal interview. 10 Jan. 2008)

> . . . *la bomba* is an instrument made of male and female goat hide. It had to be exclusively of male and female goats because therein is expressed maternity,
creation, it expresses the very cosmology from which *afrochoteño* culture comes to be.

The relationship between male and female expressed in the dance is here symbolized in the drum itself. As Plutarco Chalá points out, however, matrimony, or this male-female relationship, symbolizes something much more profound for the people of these communities. Taken alongside the alternation of the *sol* and *tierra* rhythmic patterns, the drum more broadly represents the coexistence and negotiation between opposing yet complementary forces. This idea is corroborated by Julio Bueno’s earlier organological study of *La Bomba*, in which he notes that “*sintetizando, en los diferentes ritmos (de base o variaciones), generados por el instrumeno bomba, encontramos la dualidad cósmica cielo, suelo*” (“synthesized, in the different rhythms (basic or variations), generated by the instrument *bomba*, we find the duality heaven, earth”; 176). While the notion of balance and harmony between opposites and its symbolism in musical instruments are not uncommon among African beliefs and musical traditions, especially those involved in healing or religious rites, they are also evident in Andean indigenous cultural traditions. Ethnomusicologist Dale A. Olsen points out, for instance, these ideas are often expressed in both the sound and construction of the instrument as in the highland *Aymara sikus* which are made of two interlocking gendered rows of pipes (44). Thus, the exact origins of the beliefs expressed in *La Bomba* are inconclusive and are more likely a confluence of different cultural influences.

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Allusions to Africa are also evident in perceptions concerning the function of the song texts and of the role of the bombero (person who plays Bomba). For Plutarco Chalá, former director of the renowned Bomba group Marabú, the song texts, which draw and comment on daily life in the Chota-Mira valley and now more generally in Ecuador, convey the intimate struggles, aspirations, joys, and sorrows of the afrochoteños:

_Porque las letras dicen de traiciones, que sería un poco duro decirlo, pero es la realidad, la pobreza, se nota de las alegrías, se notan del trabajo, es decir de una gran cantidad de vicisitudes que el hombre, que el hombre ciudadano, que el hombre Choteño, el hombre negro, el hombre que vive en la Cuenca del río Chota-Mira vive. Entonces todas esas letras son compuestos de acuerdo al momento y estado de ánimo que esta esa persona._ (Personal interview. 10 Jan. 2008)

Because the lyrics speak of betrayals, which would be a little harsh to put it, but it is the reality, poverty, they make note of the joys, make note of work, that is to say of a great quantity of vicissitudes that man, that the citizen man, that the Choteño man, the black man, the man that lives in the Cuenca of the Chota-Mira valley lives [experiences]. So all those lyrics are composed according to the moment and mood that person is in.

Recalling childhood memories of _La Bomba_, lead singer PlutarcoViveros reinforces the idea expressed above that _La Bomba_, through its lyrics, encompasses and expresses the lived realities of the afrochoteños:

_Se reunían, como repito los antiguos, se reunían en fiesta le cantaban al rio, le cantaban al amor, al alegría, a la tristeza, a la cosecha, cantaban inclusive a el sol. Entonces, para poder encadenar un poquito más esto, la bomba es un expresión cultural afro descendiente._ (Personal interview. 20 Dec. 2007)

They would gather, as I repeat, the elderly would gather during celebrations. They sang to the river, they sang to love, to joy, to sadness, to the harvest, sang including to the sun. So, to bring this all together a little more, _la bomba_ is an afro-descendent cultural expression.
Milton Tadeo’s now famous Bomba “Linda Carpuela” exemplifies the La Bomba as an index of local historical events and concerns:

*Linda Carpuela*  
*Yo ya estoy cansado de este Carpuela*  
*Porque lo que tenia se llevo el rio (bis)*  
*Ya me voy yo ya me voy*  
*Ya no hay donde trabajar*  
*Ya me voy yo ya me voy*  
*Al oriente trabajar*

Beautiful Carpuela  
*I am tired of this Carpuela*  
*Because everything I had was taken by the river*  
*I am now leaving*  
*There is nowhere to work*  
*I am now leaving*  
*To the jungle to find work*

Referencing an actual flooding that occurred sometime during the early 1970s, the song documents the devastation caused by the river Chota. In so doing, it also comments on a reality faced by many *afrochoteños* over the years. To this day, the constant fluctuation of the river remains a concern for the communities located along its banks. As noted in Chapter two, exploitation of the land by private hacienda owners up through the 1970s prevented many *afrochoteños* from obtaining decent land. Often, they were left with plots difficult to farm and prone to flooding due to their proximity to the river. Milton’s song reveals why land and the issue of the river itself became such an important struggle for the *huasipungueros* during the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries: land was necessary for the survival and reproduction of the community. In this way, as is the case with oral traditions, *La Bomba* serves not only as a means of recording and transmitting history and cultural knowledge, but as a form of social and political commentary as well. It is perhaps for this reason that many *afrochoteños* with whom I spoke compared the role
of the Bomba musician to that of the West African griot, hereditary praise singers renowned for their ability to record and recite local history through song as well as to interject social commentary. This comparison likewise serves to validate La Bomba as a form of resistance and afrochoteños as active and defiant agents of change rather than passive and submissive victims within the context of slavery and subjugation in Ecuador.

Yet while many contemporary Bomba lyrics do openly address social and political issues facing the communities of the region, there are no documented Bombas known to be of the colonial period to validate the claim made by some that La Bomba from its inception played a form of resistance for their ancestors. To the contrary, in a conversation with one prominent Bomba musician it was suggested that the patrones, or plantation owners and masters, encouraged the slaves to play music as a diversion so as not to become disgruntled and consider revolting. Whether or not this is true, it is possible that Bomba lyrics may have contained meanings known only to the participants themselves. If so, these hidden transcripts, to borrow a concept from James C. Scott, would have served to undermine the dehumanizing treatment of the slave owners, bolster moral, and further unite the slave community. It should be noted, however, that La Bomba, as a communal event and social gathering, would have accomplished these goals regardless of whether or not they were intended as a diversion or as a form of resistance.

The perception shared by many today that La Bomba is and always was a form of resistance has significant implications for how afrochoteños see and understand their own history, place therein, and, subsequently, themselves. Emphasizing La Bomba's
continuity with African musical traditions provides a means of asserting this image. Such beliefs and attitudes reflect a conscious awareness among afrochoteños of the need to cultivate and reclaim their cultural heritage and identity as a social and political act. This much is particularly evident in the strong association between La Bomba and afrochoteño identity expressed in the film’s testimonies. Perhaps the most profound statement of this relationship came from a close friend and collaborator from Chota, Nelly Calderon:

-La Bomba para mi es vida, porque un negro que no baila Bomba o no se identifica con eso no es negro, eso sí, lo único. Nosotros aprendemos a bailar La Bomba desde chiquititos. Con eso incluso aprendemos hasta a hablar y a cantar pues. (Personal interview. 26 Feb. 2008)

La Bomba for me is life, because a black person that does not dance Bomba or who does not identify with it is not black, that for sure, is all. We learn to dance La Bomba from a very young age. In so doing, we also even learn to speak and sing.

For Nelly, La Bomba is synonymous with blackness and local cultural identity. Through song and dance the children of the region first engage the world and learn what it means to be afrochoteño. At least this is how I interpret Nelly when she states that they (the afrochoteños) learn to speak and sing through La Bomba. Yet another young afrochoteña, Karla Aguas from the community of Chota, reaffirms this perception in her discussion of the significance of La Bomba as a dance:

-La bomba es una música que nosotros bailamos para sentir lo de los ancestros, de los antepasados, porque eso viene consecuencia van creando y van bailando la bomba y es para sentir porque son bombas que uno no se baila por bailar, la bomba es para sentirle lo que, la letra, lo que dice. (Personal interview. 18 Mar. 2008)
La Bomba is a music that we dance to feel that that of our ancestors, of our forefathers, because that comes as a consequence, they grow and dance La Bomba and it is so to feel because they are Bombas that one does not dance for the sake of dancing, La Bomba is for feeling that which, the lyrics, what they say.

As Karla notes above, La Bomba is much more than a representation of afrochoteño culture, it is an intimate way of knowing or embodying a significant part of that cultural heritage and identity. So crucial is this intangible aspect of afrochoteño identity described by Karla that no “negro,” as Nelly adamantly emphasizes above, could consider him or herself afrochoteña/o if they did not dance or identify with La Bomba. Thus, to maintain the integrity of La Bomba is to validate and reaffirm the cultural authenticity of afrochoteño identity.

Such perceptions of La Bomba and its relation to afrochoteño identity are reflected in the more general and widespread notion in Ecuador that only afrochoteños are capable of properly dancing La Bomba. As many of my mestizo friends in Quito shared with me, La Bomba (the dance) is an innate birthright of afrochoteños, something which is simply “in their blood.” The dance in particular draws many such comments due to the remarkable feature of dancing with a bottle balanced on top of the head. When and with whom this practice first originated is as uncertain as the origins of the genre and the drum itself, yet it is today a defining characteristic of the dance as performed by women. The difficulty of this task leads some to speculate that it is a trick of some sort. Responding to criticism that the bottle is somehow fixed to the head, one young dancer by the name of Marisela related the following story about a performance in which she
was challenged to dance with a flat-bottomed beer bottle rather than with the wine bottle with which she was accustomed to dancing:

. . . [Otra danzante] decía que no podía bailar con la otra botella, y digo yo “¿y ahora?” Digo “presta, presta.” En fin me puso una botella de cerveza y con esa bailé. Y yo dije que tal vez se me resbale porque esa [botella de vino] si tiene fondo y se sostiene allí, pero la botella de cerveza no. Y entonces, si pude bailar, digo para mi no hay problema bailar con cualquier botella. (Personal interview. 23 Feb. 2008)

. . . [A fellow dancer] said that she could not dance with the other bottle, and I say “and now?” I say “give it here, give it here.” In the end, I put on the bottle of beer and with that I danced. And I said that maybe it would slip because that [bottle of wine] does have a base and it stays there, but not the beer bottle. And so, I was able to dance, I say, for me, there is no problem dancing with whichever bottle.

Yet others, including some afrochoteños, conclude that the ability to dance La Bomba is a natural talent. Karla, for instance, maintains that afrochoteños are born with this ability:

Nosotros ya nacimos con eso, con el “swing” de ponernos la botella en la cabeza. Porque, supuestamente dicen “hoy las negras se pegan la botella en la cabeza” y es mentira, es el equilibrio que uno se tiene. (Personal interview. 18 Mar. 2008)

We are already born with that, with the “swing” of putting the bottle on the head. Because, supposedly they say ‘today the black women fix the bottle to the head’ and it is a lie, it is the balance that one has.

Intrigued by the idea that La Bomba may somehow be a birthright, I pressed Marisela about whether or not an outsider could learn to dance like an afrochoteña:

Diana: do you really believe that La Bomba is something that one has in the blood?
Marisela: I believe so because I feel it.
Diana: Is there a genetic code?
Marisela: No.
Diana: one can come to learn, no?
Marisela: One learns, yes. He/she who wants to learn learns, yes, it is just that we are already born like this.

Marisela’s insistence that afrochoteños are born with the ability to dance La Bomba despite her acknowledgement that it is not genetic reinforces the notion alluded to by Nelly above that afrochoteño identity is constituted in part through La Bomba. While anyone could potentially learn to dance La Bomba, afrochoteños learn to “speak and sing,” as Nelly puts it, through La Bomba. Furthermore, La Bomba allows them to connect with their culture and heritage in an intimate way: to “feel” that of their ancestors as Karla insists.

Considering the relationship between La Bomba and afrochoteño identity, it is little wonder that many afrochoteños are concerned with maintaining the integrity and authenticity of the genre. Though La Bomba has incorporated additional instruments over the years such as the acoustic guitar, congas, timbales, and electronic instruments, the genre has remained largely unchanged in its rhythm and form. More recently, however, Bomba groups such as Soneros del Barrio, Sol Naciente, Poder Negro, and GDR have been fusing Bomba with other rhythms and musical styles such as salsa, bachata, and hip-hop. There are many who believe these changes are a direct result of the genre’s commercialization. The concern, As Gualberto Espinoza points out below, is
not so much with changes in instrumentation and style as with the potential implications of those changes for the deeper cultural meaning and significance of La Bomba:

Ahora La Bomba ha tomado otros matices. Ahora está dirigida más bien al mercado. Está muy manipulada por la gente que hace mercado con la música. Como ven que es algo que está pegando muy bien, pues le están explotando para beneficio particular de las empresas disqueras. . . se le está quitando el sentido comunitario, el sentido identitario que tiene la bomba. Pero felizmente hay esa conciencia de que eso está sucediendo, y queremos prevenir esa situación. (Personal interview. 16 Dec. 2007)

Today La Bomba has taken on other forms. Today it is directed more so toward the market. It is very much manipulated by the people who market music. As you see, it is something that is sticking very well, of course they are exploiting it at the particular benefit of the record companies . . . it is taking away its [La Bomba’s] communal sentiment, the sense of identity that La Bomba has. But, happily, there is an awareness that this is happening and we want to pre-empt that situation.

As Gualberto notes, there is awareness among many afrochoteños that, as a cultural resource, La Bomba must be preserved. While many Bomba groups now incorporate the latest trends in commercial popular music, others make the maintenance and dissemination of La Bomba and afrochoteño culture their express purpose. Marabú’s lead singer and co-founder Plutarco Viveros shared that the popular Bomba group was founded specifically with this objective in mind: “Marabú,” notes Viveros, “nace con la intención de que la gente vaya sabiendo que esto [La Bomba] no se puede dejar perder” (“Marabú emerges with the intention that people go on knowing that this [La Bomba] cannot be allowed to be lost”). Since they first started in the early 1990s, Marabú has become among the most recognized and most sought after Bomba groups in Ecuador. They perform regularly at private parties, social functions, cultural events, and
festivals throughout the country, and have travelled as far as Korea to share their music and culture. In adhering stylistically to traditional Bomba, Marabú celebrates and promotes afrochoteño culture. Marabú’s lyrics convey a sense of pride rooted in the afrochoteños’ cultural heritage and lived experiences as made explicit in the following song titled Vivencias:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vivencias</th>
<th>Lived experiences</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Con el permiso de los patrones</td>
<td>With the permission of our masters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>celebramos el santo de nuestra devotion</td>
<td>Let us celebrate the saint of our devotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y les ofrecemos nuestra cultura</td>
<td>And we offer you our culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>porque se siente que es nuestra identidad</td>
<td>Because we feel it is our identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mujeres negras danzando en procesión</td>
<td>Black women dancing in procession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sacando a flote lo que es la tradición</td>
<td>Bringing out what is our tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y con los vestuarios queremos demostrarle que fueron vivencias de nuestros ancestrales</td>
<td>And with the outfits we want to show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>That these were the lived experiences of our ancestors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Through such songs, Marabú not only preserves and passes on La Bomba, but also reaffirms and validates afrochoteño identity. It is the concern with the potential loss of cultural identity, as suggested by Gualberto Espinoza above, which drives and instills a sense of purpose and urgency in the work of such individuals and groups as Plutarco Viveros and Marabú. Yet such efforts also reveal a greater underlying social and political agenda rooted in the history and struggles of the afrochoteño communities.

The invocation of the “ancestors” and the description of La Bomba as a distinctly African cultural heritage and expression of blackness represent a discourse that while
reifying the otherness of *afrochoteño* identity serves to subversively articulate its subaltern position relative the nation. It emerges from the necessity to reclaim their identity and inject it with a dignity long denied it by the coloniality of power which seeks to subjugate blackness in Ecuador. Regardless of whether or not there is any objective truth to the claims made in the film and represented in this chapter, *La Bomba* is so meaningful and contested today precisely because of the agency invested in this particular (re)presentation of *afrochoteño* identity. As Homi Bhabha notes, the articulation of such cultural differences are:

> not simply given to experience through an already authenticated cultural tradition; they are the signs of the emergence of community envisaged as a project – at once a vision and a construction – that takes you ‘beyond’ yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political *conditions* of the present. (3)

Indeed, it is the *afrochoteños*’ condition as subalterns that demand such a revision and reconstruction. In asserting their identity in such terms, they hope to illuminate and overturn the false logic of modernity and progress imposed on Ecuador’s subaltern populations by the ruling elite. *La Bomba* comes to be a significant resource in this struggle. Through its representation of *afrochoteño* identity, we can see how the legacy of slavery and colonialism continue to impinge upon the identity and culture of Ecuador’s black subalterns.
Conclusion

In solidarity with the ideology and objectives of etnoeducación, Más allá del fútbol documents La Bomba as a means of celebrating afrochoteño culture and cultivating an awareness of the social and political issues facing their communities today. To the extent possible it presents La Bomba and afrochoteño culture as understood and represented by the afrochoteños themselves. In this way, Más allá del fútbol gives voice to a people and culture long silenced and made invisible by racial discrimination.

Though not intended to be an ethnographic film per se, the film was conceived and used as an integral part of the research design for this dissertation. The ethnographic research conducted in the Chota-Mira valley as a part of this documentary was crucial for my understanding, interpretation, and representation of afrochoteño culture. Many of the nuances I am able to share in this dissertation might otherwise have been lost to me without the depth of knowledge provided by my own personal experiences living among the afrochoteños. This said, I do not pretend to represent an objective reality of La Bomba and afrochoteño culture. Rather, the film, in allowing the afrochoteños to represent themselves, provides a means of exploring how La Bomba and afrochoteño identity relate and why this relationship is so important for them.

In the end, what emerges through the film’s exploration of La Bomba is a particular discourse that serves as an affirmation of afrochoteño culture, heritage, and identity that defies the history of marginalization that has sought to invalidate the afrochoteños’ self-worth and place within the nation. As alluded to in the film and made
explicit in this chapter, the discourse surrounding *La Bomba* and *afrochoteño* identity responds to the socio-historical struggles and current lived realities of the *afrochoteño* communities and thus emerges as a counter-discourse to the discriminatory ideology of *mestizaje*. In this regard, *Más allá del fútbol* not only documents a particular tradition, but provides a glimpse into a particular moment in *afrochoteño* history and into the history and state of race and racism in Ecuador today. As the following chapter will show, this understanding has significant implications for how we might approach the question of tradition and cultural change in the *Chota-Mira* valley.

In keeping with my approach to the documentary, I give the final word to Plutarco Chala, former manager of *Marabú*, who most clearly expresses my own intent in producing this film as well as our shared desire to illuminate the depth and beauty of *afrochoteño* culture beyond soccer:

*Quisiéramos que en otros lados también, que esta música Bomba sea difundida, que nos ayuden a difundir. Porque otro tipo de música lo han difundido, hay gente que se especializa en difundir música de otros, pero parece que la música bomba no les interesa. ¿Será porque somos minoría en este país? A lo mejor porque esa música no les llega con su letra porque yo creo que las letras que acá se dicen hablan de una verdad, hablan de una vivencia tal que si nos pusiéramos a pensar un ratito nos haría reflexionar. Así, quien está con esa cámara ojalá Dios quiera que esta música lo lleve hasta los confines de otros lugares de la patria y fuera de esta patria y lo haga conocer que en el Ecuador hay un pueblito chiquitito que se llama el Chota y se practica la música bomba, una música riquísima, una música que le permite a los danzantes mover un poco de su cuerpo, combinar todo lo músico en su cuerpo, y aquellas personas que miran bailar bomba siempre se quedan admirados de la belleza de las mujeres negras y de quienes hacen la bomba.* (Personal interview. 10 Jan. 2008)

We would like that in other parts too, that this music, *Bomba*, be spread, that you help us to spread [*La Bomba*]. Because other types of music have been
disseminated, and there are people who specialize in disseminating the music of others, but it appears that the music Bomba does not interest them. Could it be because we are a minority in this country? Maybe because that music does not reach them with its lyrics, because I believe that the lyrics that here they say speak a truth, they speak of a living such that if we were to stop and think for a moment would make us reflect. So then, whoever is with that camera, hopefully god wishes that you take this music to the corners of other places of this country and beyond and that you make known that in Ecuador there is a very small town by the name of Chota and that they practice the music Bomba, a very rich music, a music that permits dancers to move their bodies a little, combine all that music in their body, and that those other persons that watch dance Bomba always admire the beauty of the black women and those who make La Bomba.
Notes

1 I refer here to Clifford Geertz’ assertion in the *Interpretation of Cultures* that ethnography is in essence an interpretive process. See also James Clifford; and Sarah Pink.

2 Here I refer to documentary shorts produced by Ecuadorian social and cultural organizations dealing primarily with issues of poverty and health. While these films document and expose relevant social and cultural issues, they do so using filming techniques that impose the interpretation and agenda of the filmmakers, such as off-camera narration and little or no use of interviews. A catalogue of these films as well as many of the films themselves may be found in the Centro cultural afroecuatoriano and the Fundacion de desarrollo social y cultural afroecuatoriana, “Azucar.”

3 My unsuccessful attempt to locate references to *La Bomba* during the course of my archival research reflects the experiences of other scholars of Afro-Ecuadorian history and culture such as Rocia Ruedes of the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar who, in an informal conversation, noted that she herself had not found any description of *La Bomba* or any other aspect of *afrochoteno* culture in her own investigation of the relevant archives. The lack of information may be due to the general perception and treatment of black slaves as objects and not as human-beings capable of having or producing culture.

4 Personal correspondence with Gualberto Espinoza, José Chalá-Cruz, and Henry Medina.

5 See Berliner for a detailed discussion of the significance of the *mbira dzavadzimu* (mbira of the ancestors), a specific type of *mbira*, or “thumb-piano,” found among the Shona of Zimbabwe. Used in spirit possession ceremonies, the *mbira dzavadzimu* is believed to be crucial for maintaining balance and harmony between the living and the ancestors.

6 See Coba Andrade for further examples of *Bomba* song texts that document and comment on local history and events.

7 See Arntson; Hale; Charry; and Eyre for detailed studies of the West African *griot*.
See James C. Scott. Hidden transcripts refer to the covert discourses of marginalized communities. Hidden from public view, this discourse serves to subvert the dominant or public discourse while maintaining the status-quo.
Chapter 4: Emergent Hybridities: *La Bomba, the Afrochoteño Subaltern, and Cultural Change.*

This chapter considers the question of cultural change in the *Chota-Mira* Valley through an examination of *La Bomba*'s recent development. In its revival and transformation, *La Bomba* reflects not only the increasing presence of outside cultural influences, but the ways in which racism and the *afrochoteño* struggle for social equality have informed local conceptions and representations of black cultural identity. As shown in the previous chapter, the movement known as *etnoeducación* in particular has played a significant role in shaping discourse about black cultural identity in Ecuador since the late 1990s. While its’ dual objective of cultural preservation and social and political empowerment are indeed helping to maintain local traditions such as *La Bomba* and instill a sense of pride in local black cultural identity, it is also enabling a transregional and transnational dialogue between *afrochoteños* and other black communities in the African Diaspora that may inadvertently be further propelling cultural change. In approaching *La Bomba* and cultural change in the *Chota-Mira* Valley in this way, we can see how such innovations reflect not the inevitable loss of cultural identity in the wake of globalization, but the creative ways in which tradition and global flows are engaged in the struggle for racial equality. Such an understanding challenges our understanding of cultural change and the relationship between tradition and modernity. In an effort to show how race and racism are informing *afrochoteño* identity and *La Bomba*’s
development, the following discussion, divided into four sections, considers the socio-historical and -economic factors following the 1960s Agrarian Reform responsible for the changes today evident in the region, the recent transformation of La Bomba specifically as a result of these factors, the ways in which these changes are informed by the current struggles of the afrochoteño communities, and the implications of La Bomba’s transformation for afrochoteño culture and identity today.

Since the 1960s, the communities of the Chota-Mira Valley have experienced rapid social and economic changes with significant cultural implications as a result of various state imposed modernization projects. An examination of these projects shows more specifically how the racist ideology of mestizaje underlying these projects contributed to the neglect of La Bomba up through the 1980s as well as to its revival in the late 1990s. Likewise, a consideration of the appropriation of outside cultural elements in La Bomba’s recent manifestations show how afrochoteño responses to racism are informing conceptions of afrochoteño culture and its representation. While incongruous with respect to the actual history and development of afrochoteño culture, these changes suggest an affinity with other black communities in the African Diaspora which is supported by other non-musical representations of Afro-Ecuadorian identity. The third section explores this connection and its implications for afrochoteño identity through an analysis of a recent museum exhibit of Afro-Ecuadorian history and culture titled Afrodescendientes. In situating the regional history and culture of the afrochoteños within the context of the African Diaspora, Afrodescendientes seeks to legitimate the history, culture and struggles of Ecuador’s black communities. In so doing, however, it
also enables a transregional and transnational dialogue that allows local communities such as those of the afrochoteños to re-invent their identity. I conclude with a consideration of how La Bomba’s recent development implicates the afrochoteño condition as subalterns in the process of cultural change.

The Chota-Mira Valley 1964-Present

As noted in chapter two, the agrarian reform laws of the 1960s mark a significant shift in the history of the afrochoteño communities. The dissolution of the haciendas, the redistribution of land, and the subsequent end of the huasipungo system brought about the end of an era of obligatory labor. Afrochoteño’s after this time owned the very land which they and their ancestors had once been forced to labor. No longer were they subjected to the oppression of slave owners or the mistreatment of hacenderos (hacienda owners). For this reason, many in the Chota-Mira Valley understand this particular period of their history today as the true end of slavery in the region.

Yet land reform also introduced new challenges in the development of the region that would bring rapid economic and social change of significant consequence for afrochoteño culture. Specifically, modernization projects such as agricultural reform, the construction of the Pan American highway, the introduction of electricity, and the building of educational centers would further marginalize afrochoteños and lead to the stigmatization of local cultural traditions and ways of life as a result of their discriminatory agenda. This section addresses these factors and examines the ways in which they have impacted afrochoteño culture.
Scarcity of land and a crisis in the local sugar-cane industry in the decades following the 1960s agrarian reforms resulted in increased emigration and the transformation of the local agricultural economy. In a study of land tenure in the Chota-Mira Valley, Lourdes Rodriguez Jaramillo notes that the redistribution of land left many families with relatively small plots which they then had to subdivide as their families grew (54). The 1980s saw a spike in the local demographic which placed a strain on the availability of land. This problem, along with decreased production and demand for sugar-cane by the region’s sugar-cane processing factories, led to a search for new modes of production and additional sources of income. With the encouragement of outside developmental organizations operating in the region, many afrochoteños turned from planting sugar-cane to growing commercial crops of a shorter cycle, such as tomatoes, avocados, beans, and prickly-pears for sale in the markets of Ibarra, Quito, and even Colombia (Jaramillo 52-55). As Jaramillo notes, it was the women of the household who were responsible for traveling and selling the crops (76). During periods of poor crop yields, crops were often purchased for the purpose of resale as a supplemental form of income. Yet others, primarily women, sought work opportunities outside of the Chota-Mira Valley to help support the household, often finding work as maids and servants for families in Quito and Ibarra. Scarcity of land and the need to find work meant that many individuals and families would eventually leave the region, settling primarily in Ibarra and Quito (Pabón, Identidad Afro 75).

Facilitating the flow of people and commerce out of the Chota-Mira Valley was the construction of the Panamericana Norte (Pan American North). Built between 1972
and 1975, this section of the Pan American highway extends from Quito to Tulcán, passing through Ibarra and the Chota-Mira Valley along the way. As Ivan Pabón notes, the highway allowed for trade and commerce on a transregional scale, created job opportunities such as in the form of transportation cooperatives, increased access to basic necessities and building materials otherwise difficult to obtain, and improved communication and trade between communities within the region itself (Identidad Afro 70). In short, the construction of the highway, along with the changes brought about by land reform, made possible the further integration of the Chota-Mira Valley within the national market economy, and therefore the nation and its project of modernization.

As alluded to in chapter one, modernization within the context of this particular period in Ecuadorian history involved an ideology of national identity racist in its conception of social and economic development. In espousing the mestizo as the ideal Ecuadorian citizen, mestizaje invalidated and sought to negate local indigenous and black historicities, cultural beliefs, traditions, epistemologies, and ways of life. As such, efforts on the part of outside cultural organizations to facilitate the transition to a market agricultural economy and to educate the communities of the region failed to take into consideration local needs and cultural differences. Thus, economic developmental projects introduced and encouraged destructive practices as short term solutions to local agricultural challenges while national textbooks taught afrochoteño children the history of Ecuador from the sole perspective of the white-mestizo.¹

As Pabón notes, however, afrochoteños early on recognized the importance of education as a means of bettering their social and economic condition and took it upon
themselves to build schools and centers of learning for their communities (Identidad Afro 81). Few afrochoteños prior to the agrarian reforms of the 1960s had the opportunity to attend school and learn to read and write as a result of the demands of hacienda life. It is little surprise, then, that the decades following the end of the hacienda system witnessed the creation of the regions first formal schools and school districts, including the districts of San Rafael-Monteolivo, La Concepción and Valle del Chota in the provinces of Imbabura and Carchi in the mid 1970s (Pabón, Identidad Afro 77). As Pabón notes, education during this time became “una herramienta para salir de la marginación, de la ignorancia y del analfabetismo en el que vivieron muchos de los adultos mayores y la mayoría de nuestros abuelos” (“a tool to escape the marginalization, the ignorance, and the illiteracy in which many of the older adults and the majority of our grandfathers lived”; Identidad Afro 81). Yet in privileging literacy and preparing afrochoteño youth for work in areas outside the field of agriculture, education weakened interest in local cultural traditions and ways of living and further encouraged emigration to the nation’s urban centers (Pabón, Identidad Afro 81).

Though land reform and the Pan American highway created the conditions for social, economic, and cultural change in the Chota-Mira Valley, it was the arrival of electricity that perhaps most drastically impacted and continues to affect afrochoteño culture. The process of bringing electricity to the region was not a homogenous one and would take nearly ten years to complete, specifically between 1975 and 1984 (Pabón, Identidad Afro 84). With electricity arrived electro-domestic products and, most significantly, mass communication technology such as televisions, radios, telephones,
and more recently computers. The flow of outside cultural influences already enabled by the Pan American highway significantly increased with the introduction of electricity. Afrochoteños watch their favorite soap-operas from Mexico, Brazil, and Nicaragua. National and international news is readily accessible via television, radio, and the internet. Radios tune into stations playing a mixture of música tropical, música popular nacional, música folclorica, Bomba, and North American hip-hop and pop. Afrochoteño youth today download movies and music from around the world while playing video games and chatting with friends online. For this reason, notes Pabón, many afrochoteño elders consider this moment the true arrival of “modernity” and the single most significant factor in the break with local cultural traditions in the region (Identidad Afro 84, 87).

Perhaps most impacted by the changes brought by emigration and modernization was the cultural knowledge contained in and passed on through the oral traditions and customs of the afrochoteño communities. As Pabón notes, the events of the latter half of the twenty-first century significantly disrupted the process of oral transmission vital to the maintenance of local cultural knowledge (Identidad Afro 70). Emigration broke family ties and communication across generational lines while mass communication technology, literacy, and access to outside materials debilitated the use of and need for oral traditions. Furthermore, modernization efforts privileged literacy to such an extent that they consequently marginalized the epistemological value of oral traditions and reinforced strategies of whitening in the pursuit of upward social and economic development. As a result, knowledge and practice of afrochoteño cultural traditions were
not only replaced in the decades following the agrarian reforms, but were altogether neglected, abandoned, and even stigmatized by afrochoteños themselves.

Afrochoteños would ultimately reject such negative associations and come to embrace their cultural heritage during the 1990s, however, as a result of shifting social and political dynamics within the nation and the etnoeducación movement. As discussed in chapter one, the latent racism of Ecuador’s modernization project, idealized socially in terms of mestizaje, was increasingly challenged by the organization of the nation’s indigenous and black population. Interculturalidad emerged within the indigenous movements during this time as a counter-hegemonic discourse demanding the equal recognition, validation, and representation of Ecuador’s diverse cultures. As a result, the 1998 Ecuadorian constitution for the first time recognized these differences in its description of the nation as a pluri-cultural state. Within the context of this changing social and political climate, Afro-Ecuadorians such as etnoeducación founder Juan Garcia, recognized the need to actively preserve and pass on Afro-Ecuadorian history and culture. Afrochoteños took up this initiative in 1999 with a series of workshops leading to the formation of la Comisión de etnoeducación (“Commission of Ethno-education”; Pabón, Identidad Afro 98). As noted in chapter one, these efforts succeeded in renewing interest and pride in afrochoteño culture and in reviving such cultural traditions as La Bomba. Yet they have not been able to prevent or slow the rapidly increasing presence of outside cultural influences.

The Chota-Mira Valley and afrochoteño culture today reflect the impact of these influences. Houses made of concrete and iron stand in place of the traditional straw and
mud chosas (huts) once characteristic of the region. Afrochoteñas now transport clothing to and from the river for washing in plastic tubs instead of in hollowed gourds. No longer found are the hand crafted wooden plates, eating utensils, and furniture pieces that afrochoteños once depended on daily. More and more afrochoteños turn to clinics, hospitals, and pharmacies in Ibarra and Quito for medical assistance rather than rely on traditional parteras (mid-wives), medicines, and curanderos (healers). Traditional pastimes such as sharing stories, rhymes, and riddles have given way to more passive forms of entertainment like watching television, browsing the internet, or playing video-games. The increasing use of commercially manufactured musical instruments such as congas, timbales, and bongos threaten the continued practice and knowledge of traditional bomba construction. Bomba groups fuse the genre with other musical rhythms and styles heard over the radio and internet. Afrochoteño youth dance to salsa, practice capoeira, listen to reggeaton and hip-hop, and dress in the latest fashions imported from China. Yet despite these changes, afrochoteños still identify with and celebrate their cultural heritage and traditions.

_**La Bomba post 1964**_

Just as with other aspects of afrochoteño culture, La Bomba underwent significant changes following the agrarian reforms of the 1960s. Though initially marginalized as a result of the inherent racism of Ecuador’s agenda of modernization, the genre found limited commercial success during the 1980s and early 1990s with the recordings of pioneering artists and groups like Milton Tadeo, Segundo Rosero, los Hermanos Congo,
Los Hermanos Espinosa, and Juventud del Valle. With the commodification of the genre, however, came notable changes in the genre’s musical instrumentation and style. This trend has increased significantly following the revival of *La Bomba* as a result of its growing commercial success, emigration, and globalization. In the following, I consider in what ways *La Bomba* has changed since the agrarian reforms and to what extent such innovations are altering the genre.

The lack of written documentation concerning *La Bomba* makes a discussion of its development difficult. No doubt *La Bomba* has experienced numerous changes since it was first practiced. Yet, for the purposes of this investigation, it is possible to talk about a “traditional” *Bomba* as understood by *afrochoteños* and as documented in the academic literature and first *Bomba* records of the late 1970s and early 1980s. These sources show that at least up through the 1980s, *La Bomba* was practiced using a combination of different instruments. First and foremost was *La Bomba* itself, on which was played the defining rhythm of the genre. As noted previously, the drum was traditionally made entirely of natural materials found in the surrounding area and was thought to hold symbolic significance for the communities of the region. The drum accompanied paired phrases known as *coplas* sung either by the *bombero* or another vocalist. The drum and voice alone were sufficient to perform *La Bomba* and, in fact, may well have been the way in which it was practiced when the tradition first began. Though not known exactly when and how, other melodic and rhythmic instruments such as the orange-leaf and the guitar were introduced over the course of time. These instruments complimented the *bomba* and voice and became characteristic of the genre.
by the late 1970s and early 1980s as evident in the early recordings of Milton Tadeo and Los Hermanos Congo. These larger ensembles modified and expanded the sound of La Bomba, but did not fundamentally alter its rhythm or style.

Emigration to the nation’s urban centers, the arrival of electricity to the Chota-Mira Valley, and commercialization, however, brought more notable changes to La Bomba. Urban life, radio, television, and the internet greatly increased exposure and access to such popular genres and rhythms as salsa, cumbia, merengue, and more recently bachata, reggaeton, vallenato, and hip-hop. These have influenced much of the Bombas produced and recorded since the 1990s. For instance, the music of the Bomba groups Los soneros del barrio, Raíces negras, and Sol naciente often incorporate such instruments as timbales, congas, bongos, cowbells, shakers, the electric bass and guitar, the tiple (a type of guitar with metal strings), and keyboards. They also use rhythms and stylistic elements associated with salsa and Afro-Cuban son like the clave, a montuno section, call and response, and the layering of complex rhythmic patterns. More recently, these and other Bomba groups, as well as DJs producing Bomba remix CDs, are fusing Bomba with other rhythms such as reggaeton. These fusions are especially popular among afrochoteño youth now accustomed to listening and dancing to son, salsa, and reggaeton.

These changes have so altered the genre that it leaves open to debate whether or not this music can still be considered Bomba. Indeed, the defining characteristic of La Bomba—the drum and rhythm from which the name of the genre is derived—is often obscured or entirely left out in these fusions: bongos and congas are now frequently used
in place of *la bomba* while the basic rhythm, when used, is often only implied in the music. Likewise, the traditional *coplas* are replaced by song forms better suited to the incorporated genre. For many in the *Chota-Mira* Valley, the absence of the *bomba* (drum and rhythm) as well as the adoption of these different instruments and styles places this music in a category apart from what may be considered “traditional” *Bomba* as described above.

As noted in chapter three, the recent development of *La Bomba* raises concerns among *afrochoteno* about the loss of cultural identity. With the abandonment of the *bomba* (the drum), for instance, comes the loss of the knowledge of its construction and of its symbolic meaning. Indeed, there remain few *bomba* makers in the region and perhaps none as specialized in the craft as Segundo Barahona of the community of Juncal. He emphasized this point during one particular interview, noting rather casually that when he passes, there will be none left to carry on this tradition. Likewise the social value of *La Bomba* for the *afrochoteno* communities is in danger of being lost as the genre is displaced from its roots by the commercial recording industry. While *La Bomba* is still used in the *Chota-Mira* Valley for local celebrations, gatherings, and events, it is also being consumed by Ecuadorians and travelers dancing to *Bomba* in night clubs and purchasing *bomba* mixes from street vendors in Quito and Ibarra. This trend, argues local *afrochoteno* scholar Gualberto Espinoza, is particularly detrimental in that it shifts the focus from the significance of *La Bomba* as a communal event to the music itself as a commercial product. As a result, notes Gualberto, market trends or “what sells” now dictate the changes evident in *La Bomba.*
Despite the concerns over the loss of cultural identity, the fact remains that *La Bomba* is today more identified with among *afrochoteños* than ever before. Indeed, thanks to the efforts of the *etnoeducación* movement, *afrochoteño* are now actively reclaiming their cultural heritage and identity and proudly representing their culture and concerns at the regional, national, and even international level. Changes to *La Bomba* may therefore reflect not only the negative impact of commercialization and globalization, but the ways in which *afrochoteños* understand and wish to represent their own identity. Indeed, considering the predominant trends in the current practice of *La Bomba*, the changes in instrumentation and style suggest an affinity with the music of other black communities in the Americas. While this may arguably be a reflection of the commercial popularity of these genres, as suggested by Pabón (*Identidad Afro* 56), it may yet also be indicative of the ways in which *etnoeducación* is informing *afrochoteños* about their identity and place not only within the nation, but within the greater African Diaspora as well.

*Afrodescendientes: Afrochoteños and La Bomba in the Diaspora*

Thanks in part to the cultural preservation efforts initiated by the *etnoeducación* movement, much of the knowledge represented by *La Bomba* is now being documented for future generations. This information is incorporated in the local educational curriculum by way of the text *Nuestra Historia* and is additionally passed on through workshops, cultural programs, collections, and various audio–visual projects produced through such organizations as FECONIC, the *Centro Cultural Afroecuatoriano, Azúcar,*
and the Fundación Piel Negra to name a few. The history and significance of La Bomba is thus maintained and passed on if no longer through lived experience.

In its emphasis on Africa and the African Diaspora, however, the etnoeducación movement may also be inadvertently informing the types of changes evident in La Bomba today. The significance of its discourse for afrochoteño culture became apparent during a visit to a traveling exhibit of Afro-Ecuadorian history and culture titled Afrodescendientes put on display at the Centro cultural (Cultural Center) of Ibarra in 2008. Co-sponsored between the United States Embassy and the Banco central del Ecuador, Afrodescendientes was put together under the supervision of Afro-Ecuadorian scholar John Antón in response to the lack of representation of Ecuador’s black communities in national museums. As noted in chapter one, Antón argues that such misrepresentations marginalize Afro-Ecuadorians in invalidating their contribution to the nation’s history and culture. Afrodescendientes therefore seeks to rectify this in creating a substantial and permanent space for the equal representation of Ecuador’s distinct black communities. It also serves as a space for Afro-Ecuadorians to learn about and reflect on their own history, culture, heritage, and identity. As such, Afrodescendientes provides a means of approaching how afrochoteños are currently thinking about their cultural identity and its relation to the nation and the African Diaspora.

Afrodescendientes is unique in that it surveys not only afrochoteño and afroesmeraldeño history and culture, but also presents and makes direct links with the history, culture, and struggles of the black communities of the African Diaspora, specifically of those of the United States. It does so through informative and interactive
displays divided between three distinct halls: *Cultura e identidad* (Culture and Identity), *Diaspora Africana en America* (African Diaspora in America), and *Construcción de Ciudadanía* (Building Citizenship). As suggested by their respective titles, the first concerns *afrochoteño* and *afroesmeraldeño* culture while the latter two bridge Afro-Ecuadorian history and culture with that of other black communities in the African Diaspora though information about the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the shared experience of slavery, and common social and political struggles.

The connection between Afro-Ecuadorian culture and history and that of African Americans are made through comparison. Maps and graphs illustrating slave origins and routes emphasize common origins and the scope of the African Diaspora, for instance. Displays containing archival documents and artifacts relating to slavery as well as posters with key dates and the names of important figures relating to Afro-Ecuadorian and African American history such as Alonso de Illescas, Nelson Estupiñan Bass, W.E.B. Dubois and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. likewise give patrons a sense of unity in the shared struggle for social and political equality. Cultural similarities are implied through interactive displays illustrating the diversity and creativity of Afro-Ecuadorian and African American culture.

In juxtaposing *afroesmeraldeño, afrochoteño*, and African American history and culture, the exhibit fosters not only a sense of national unity among Ecuador’s distinct black communities, but also among other black communities in the Americas. Indeed, the notion of a transnational identity is suggested in the very title *afrodescendientes*. As the exhibit pamphlet explains, the term specifically makes reference to all the
communities that originated in the Americas as a result of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The political dimensions of this discourse are likewise recognized by the exhibit’s creators:

*Al examinar la relación entre los pueblos afrodescendientes del Ecuador y de los Estados Unidos de América es posible encontrar interrelaciones sobresalientes y manifestaciones comunes en el campo cultural. Pero, más allá de ellas, existen estrechos vínculos en el escenario político. No se puede desconocer un movimiento social afroamericano compartido en la lucha por la conquista de los derechos ciudadanos, que se ha constituido en la vivencia más fuerte y fraternal.*

In examining the relation between the *afrodescendent* communities of Ecuador and of those of the United States of America it is possible to find outstanding interrelations and common manifestations in the cultural sphere. But, beyond these, there exists broad links in the political scene. One cannot deny a social Afro-American movement shared in the struggle for the conquest of citizen rights, which has resulted in the strongest and brotherly livilihood.

Such links thus serve to legitimize and strengthen the Afro-Ecuadorian struggle for social and political equality. This is significant considering the conspicuous form of racism that has long marginalized and silenced the Afro-Ecuadorian communities. The denial of racism has until recently effectively allowed Ecuador’s *mestizo* population to dismiss the concerns and protests of Afro-Ecuadorians. These grievances are difficult to ignore or deny, however, when voiced from such an internationally recognized socio-political locus as that represented by the label *afrodescendiente*. Indeed, under this banner, *afroesmeraldeños* and *afrochoteños* have already begun to participate and represent the Afro-Ecuadorian communities in national and international forums, conferences, and workshops dealing with black culture, racism, and other issues facing black communities in the African Diaspora. Such a dialogue enables Afro-Ecuadorians from the *Chota-Mira*
Valley and *Esmeraldas* to engage the concerns of other black communities in the Diaspora in the pursuit of their own social and political aims.

In keeping with the goals and objectives of *etnoeducación*, *afrodescendientes* invites *afrochoteños* and *afroesmeraldeños* to reflect on the socio-historical and cultural parallels that unite them with one another as well as with other black communities in the African Diaspora. In so doing, it allows Afro-Ecuadorians to reconceptualize their identities beyond their regionalisms and nationality. Indeed, Antón himself suggests this possibility in his call for an understanding of Afro-Ecuadorian culture as “. . . *un gran contexto de significados que implican la complejidad no sólo del mundo ecuatoriano, sino del contexto regional y global*” (“. . . a great web of significations that implicate not only the Ecuadorian world in its complexity, but also the regional and global context”; Sanchez 130). The juxtaposition of *afrochoteño, afroesmeraldeño*, and African American history and culture forces *afrochoteños* to at once to confront the distinct regionalism of their own identity while at the same time transcend its limitations and share in the struggles and triumphs of their brothers and sisters in the greater African Diaspora.

The current changes to *La Bomba* may be understood as yet another manifestation of the transnational linkages engendered by *etnoeducación*. That *afrochoteños* strongly identify with and reproduce such music as *son, salsa, reggeaton*, and hip-hop, let alone attempt to combine them with *La Bomba* suggests such a possibility. Though such fusions do indeed entail a fundamental change resulting in the loss of certain “traditional” cultural elements as is the case with *La Bomba*, they also point to the emergence of new paths and possibilities in the way *afrochoteños* conceive of their culture and identity. In
incorporating instruments, rhythms, and styles from the music of the African Diaspora, *afrochoteños* express not only their solidarity with other black communities, but an awareness of the transnational and sociopolitical dimensions of their identity as *afrodescendientes*.

**Conclusion**

In its neglect, revival, and subsequent transformation, *La Bomba* reflects the *afrochoteño* experience of and response to racism and the colonial difference from which their condition as subalterns derive. As shown in this chapter, efforts to modernize and integrate the once isolated communities of the Chota-Mira Valley within the nation resulted in the decline of local traditions and ways of life. Land reform, the promotion of agricultural change, the construction of the Pan American highway and schools, and the installation of electricity further marginalized the *afrochoteño* communities in introducing outside cultural elements and ways of being conflictive with *afrochoteño* culture. In particular, these came to interrupt and delegitimize the process of orality central to the maintenance of *afrochoteño* identity. Local beliefs, customs, and ways of living came to be seen as antithetical to the aspirations of modernization as represented in the ideal of *mestizaje*. As a result, cultural traditions such as *La Bomba* were neglected, abandoned, and even stigmatized.

*Etnoeducación* emerged in the late 1990s as a direct response to the discriminatory logic and marginalizing tendency of *mestizaje*. Recognizing the epistemological value and legitimacy of their particular cultural traditions and ways of being, *afrochoteños*, just as the indigenous communities during this time, began to
organize and demand not only their input with regards to their social and economic development, but their autonomy as well. Thus the proliferation of ethnic based social and political organizations since the 1990s and the formation of CODAE. As evident by these socio-political organizations, this struggle has necessitated the consolidation of otherwise heterogeneous identities and the disparate needs and concerns they respectively represent.

While these identitary movements have led to the revitalization of local cultural traditions such as La Bomba, they have also enabled transregional and transnational dialogues along ethnic lines. The recent appearance of such labels as afrochoteño, afroecuatoriano, and afrodescendiente is indicative of this intercultural dialogue. The creative ways in which these identities converge, overlap, and conflict are enabled and made manifest in part through such representations of identity as music. Thus, while La Bomba today does indeed signify a distinct regional black identity, it also reflects the discursive relation between this particular local black identity, the nation, and the African Diaspora.

Considering the current struggles of the afrochoteño communities, the new stylistic trends evident in La Bomba today are best understood in terms of agency rather than in terms of authenticity and cultural change. Indeed, the particular subalternity of the afrochoteño communities, which derives in part from the displacement and disjuncture created by slavery and colonialism, emphasizes the hybridity of afrochoteño identity and foregrounds the tensions that inform its very existence and articulation. Cultural continuity is thus here defined in terms of dynamic and discursive change. That
such change reflects a form of agency is particularly supported in this case by the recent struggles of the afrochoteño communities and the ways in which they have engaged memory, or rather Africa and the African Diaspora, and creatively resourced tradition in the articulation of a distinct black highland subaltern identity. It is worth recalling that the black communities of the Chota-Mira Valley have only recently begun to define themselves in terms of ethnicity. Afrochoteño youth strongly identify with La Bomba, despite the fact that its more modern manifestations have little connection to the actual socio-historical and cultural development of their communities, precisely because it articulates their identity and experience as subalterns.
Notes

1 See Jaramillo for a more specific discussion of agricultural change in the Chota-Mira Valley and its impact on the development of the region; see also José Chalá-Cruz 105-109.

2 See for example the 1984 LP El Valle del Chota y su música featuring Milton Tadeo and Segundo Rosero as well as the 1985 LP A bailar la bomba con los Hermanos Congo.

3 Personal interview. 10 February 2008.
Conclusion

The Afrochoteños are subalterns as a result of disjuncture and epistemological violence of slavery and colonialism in the Americas. The consummate “other,” they are made invisible and migrant subjects relative the nation. Their history and identity are thus defined by conflict, struggle, and resistance. As an articulation of afrochoteño identity, La Bomba registers the tensions that inhere in their particular subalternity. Its decline and revival speak to the ebb and flow created by these conflictive dynamics as well as to the ways in which tradition and memory are resourced in the mediation of this process of hybridity. In its more recent manifestation, I argue La Bomba likewise reveals how this struggle and process contribute to the reinvention and (re)presentation of afrochoteño identity. As such, La Bomba presents a unique means of glimpsing the subaltern condition of the afrochoteño communities today.

In light of my approach, I have thus far chosen to focus on the tensions and agency indexed in the revival and development of La Bomba rather than on the validity and potentially destructive consequences of its transformation. I maintain that such a perspective shifts the academic lens away from the question of authenticity toward an examination of the structures of power that produce the need to ask such questions in the first place.
As I have shown, the Chota-Mira Valley presents a unique case study that most clearly problematizes this issue in its illumination of the impact of subalternity on the constitution and expression of afrochoteño identity. It must be remembered that a clear and conscious articulation of black ethnicity in Ecuador did not emerge until the 1980s. Labels distinguishing the highland and coastal black communities in terms of black ethnicity appeared even later. How then, are we to speak of afrochoteño identity and the notion of cultural change when only twenty years ago the afrochoteños, per se, did not exist?

The same may be asked of their cultural traditions. With the exception of the work of North American anthropologist Norman E. Whitten Jr., it is only after the consolidation of black identity that we begin to see substantial scholarly treatment of black culture in Ecuador with the work of Carlos Alberto Coba Andrade and Segundo Obando. Most remarkable in this literature is their perspective of highland black culture as distinctly hybrid, leading Coba Andrade to describe La Bomba as an afro-indigenous-hispanic mixture (59). The question of authenticity and La Bomba’s integrity therefore clearly arises only after and precisely because of the need to define and distinguish a highland regional black cultural identity. Again, my question is not what La Bomba is and how it has deviated from its origins, but why La Bomba and this question are so relevant to begin with.

As shown in this dissertation, La Bomba and the question of authenticity are so meaningful and relevant today precisely because of the agency invested in afrochoteño identity and its urgent necessity for the afrochoteño communities. Yet while I choose to
celebrate this agency, I am well aware of the limitations inherent in the particular identititary discourse adopted by the Afro-Ecuadorians in their current struggle. In (re)presenting, or reclaiming, as they see it, their identity in terms of blackness, Afro-Ecuadorians engage in a strategy that while located on the margins of the dominant hegemonic discourse, nonetheless inheres within its boundaries. This has the effect of reifying the “otherness” of Afro-Ecuadorian identity and the relations of power which make its very existence possible.\(^2\) That this is the case is evident by the continued marginalization, discrimination, and misrepresentation of the Afro-Ecuadorian communities despite the political adoption (or co-option) of pluri-culturalism and inter-culturalism in the nation’s constitution and governmental agenda. In the same vein, however, the articulation of a distinct Afro-Ecuadorian and *afrochoteño* identity nonetheless serves its purpose in illuminating and thereby challenging the epistemological hegemony which seeks to invalidate “other” ways of knowing and being.
Notes

1 Norman E. Whitten Jr. is perhaps the first scholar to do extensive academic research among Ecuador’s coastal black communities during the 1960s.

2 This critique reflects Zizek’s critique of multiculturalism. See for instance “Multiculturalismo” 172.
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