

# Multicoloured Black

Power relations, identity processes and  
Afro-Ecuadorians' identity formation  
in the Chota-Mira valley



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© The picture on front cover was taken by the author

The text on Mateo's shirt reads: *Children/guys, we can change the world.*

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***“One needs to work in order to gain power.  
If we refuse to do so we are condemned”<sup>1</sup>***

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<sup>1</sup> José Chalá Cruz, cited by Salomon Acosta during a meeting of FECONIC in Chota, 9 february 2014.

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## Foreword

*“Those blacks are criminals! They’ll kill you! It is dangerous out there, especially for a white girl like you!”*

I was shocked by this racist and stereotyping attitude of people I met on the street or in the bus, while travelling through Ecuador in 2005. At the time I had no idea about the existence of African descendant communities in Ecuador. Only until several people, independently from one another indicated that I should not go to places where “Afro’s” lived. They were said to be “*criminals, poor, violent, dangerous!*” I was taken aback by their stereotyping and shocked that they depicted these people in such a way (without me having said anything negative about them). Where did this attitude and mindset come from? And what were the stories of the Afro-Ecuadorians these people were talking about? I wanted to gain a varied insight into the livelihood of the inhabitants of the Chota valley, in North-eastern Ecuador, but had no opportunity to get there that time. Upon my arrival back home I dedicated some time on the internet and in the library to read about the (slavery) history and discrimination and inequality of Afro-Ecuadorians within the country ever since. It was then that I decided I wanted to go back to Ecuador in the near future, either to work on a project or to live in the area where Afro-Ecuadorians live. In this way, I would gain a more varied and insightful view of their way of life, their characters, dance, music, opinions, relation to the rest of the country and more. My bachelor thesis has enabled me to go on fieldwork to the Chota valley to cure my curiousness. The little village of Chalguayacu does not appear on Google maps so I was surely unable to arrive with preconceived images.



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## Introduction

The worldwide trend in neoliberalism has changed power relations. By building new practices, perspectives and subjectivities, people involved in identity formation and development projects are contesting and changing contemporary power relations. Within these relationships people are not directly dependent on the state but rather have developed ways of exercising agency parallel to or within the central and regional government, often supported by international organizations.

Cultural production and issues of identity are now at the core of a new political economy. Cultural difference itself has become a commodity. In this new political economy, the economical, the cultural and the political interconnect, but do not coincide in a fixed structural fashion (Moore 2003 *In* Moore and Sanders 2006:447-448). As a result of a change in international laws and constitutional legislation, indigenous people and other ethnic minorities have become more visible in their struggle for territorial and cultural recognition and their subsequent role in neoliberal governmentality in many (Latin-American) countries (Ng'weno 2007). Yet culture (and claiming cultural recognition or difference) is not only related to meaning. It is also power: who defines what the cultural norm, value or belief is? Asad, Abu Lughod and Keesing (1979; 1991 and 1987 subsequently *In* Moore and Sanders 2006) emphasize that the existence of both hegemonic discourses and discourses on the margins should be acknowledged and analyzed. This critical movement within anthropology arose within a wider world that also gave rise to civil rights movements, feminism, post-colonialism and other movements that criticized and questioned power relations and subsequent systems of knowledge. Throughout history culture has wrongly been used as a means to categorize people hierarchically (Abu Lughod 1991, Ferguson and Gutpa 1992). The existence of power relations in the categorization of cultures should be acknowledged and, rather than studying culture, Abu Lughod (1991) proposes to thus study how certain aspects or processes (within a particular place, society and even discipline) come into being.

The people we study as anthropologists have used culture more and more as an important aspect of their own identity. Since they are the object of our studies we should try to define what is real to them without reifying culture and its subsequent discourses. In line with this current movement within anthropology, this Bachelor

thesis on power relations and Afro-Ecuadorian identity formation will illustrate the importance of identity and culture (formation) at a local level.

In Latin America Afro-American movements have become important actors in the contemporary formation of multicultural nations (Sanchez 2008). Whereas, like Afro-Colombians, Afro-Ecuadorians had not been recognized as a cultural category formerly, the definition of them as a separate social category at the end of the twentieth century has enabled the framing of cultural claims (Ng'weno 2007 and Sanchez 2008). Since neoliberalism, both indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian movements have contested the national ideology of *mestizaje* (in which their existence was denied or depicted as backward). Thereby they have proposed a change in the role of the central state and citizenship, towards a more inclusive multicultural nation through governmentality (Sanchez 2008). That is: “[...] *a particular mentality, a particular manner of governing, that is actualized in habits, perceptions, and subjectivity*” (Lemke:54 *In Read*: 2009:34).

This worldwide trend towards neoliberalism and the rise of multiculturalism, in which minorities claim human and collective rights based on cultural recognition, provides a relevant and interesting research area for anthropologists. It is this that I have investigated in the Chota-Mira valley of Ecuador amongst Afro-Choteños, predominantly amongst the inhabitants of the village of Chalguayacu, Juncal and Chota. The local dimension of identity formation and contestation within existing power relations provides insight into the specifically local political, social and cultural adaptations and expressions. It is through the analysis of discourses on identity (mostly cultural citizenship and indigeneity) and identification and identity expressions in practice, that my research has been set up. Over the past decades the call has become more prominent for recognition of a cultural citizenship in which Afro-Ecuadorians are recognized alongside indigenous populations in Ecuador. As in other countries, identity differentiation has become “*a principle characteristic of citizenship*” (Hall 1996:19 *In Sanchez 2008*).

Through ethnographic research I have analyzed how particular discourses and practices help Afro-Chotenõs negotiate larger questions on citizenship, power, identity, indigeneity, and inequality. While simultaneously trying to unravel legal, institutional, political, economic, cultural and other structural impediments to and possibilities for the full realization of cultural citizenship. Throughout an eleven week

period, from the end of January until 15th April 2014, I conducted ethnographic research in the village of Chalguayacu and other villages in its proximity. This village and surrounding areas within the Chota Mira valley are mostly inhabited by people who have African ancestors. Through my research, I wanted to gain insight into the local workings of power relations and the role of both governmental institutions and international and regional organizations therein. Simultaneously I took into account initiatives outside governmental “control” in shaping identities and striving towards recognition and realization of full (cultural) citizenship of Afro-Ecuadorians in the Chota-Mira valley through neoliberal governmentality. I have gained insight into attempts made by members of the community to enable the implementation of civil rights and other laws. Alongside that I have observed governmental strategies being put into practice, either independently or in cooperation with the local community. Another method has been for local inhabitants to work their way around these initiatives and set up projects independently to strengthen the region and obtain a means of living for themselves and for future generations. The central question of my research that follows from the theoretical framework is: *How do Afro-Choteños shape their identities and what influence do governmental and (inter)national discourses and practices have on this process?* In order to answer this central question, I first had to understand the power relations at play and the different organizations that operate locally (their interconnections, goals and objectives). What are the impediments to the full realization of equal individual and collective rights for Afro-Choteños, both with governmental support and through individual initiatives that operate outside any organization. In addition I looked into the multiple ways in which social relations and practices take shape and influence Afro-Choteños’ daily lives.

### **Thesis set-up**

On the next pages the first chapter is dedicated to the theoretical framework that has helped me define my main question and research questions. Thereafter, the context provides historical, contemporary, geographical and legal insights into the location of my fieldwork. It also contains background information on the organizations that work in the Chota valley. After having given insight in the research location and my main focus, the chapter on methodologies and reflection reveals my position and the data obtained in the field. Thereby a lot of attention is given to power relations, also bearing in mind that an anthropologist in the field is part of these as well. I have

mentioned the methods used, both in the field as well as in the structuring of the data obtained in this thesis. Out of this explanation follow the empirical chapters which have been divided into three case studies, using 'event analysis and structuring'. Situations are described thoroughly in an ethnographic way, supported by quotes and analysis. 'We have a dream' focuses on organizational structure, discourses on multiculturalism, and representation. 'Ubuntu: I am because we are' is dedicated to the regional youth organization and the (re)capturing and (re)appreciation of ancestral history and collective identity. The last empirical chapter 'Identify yourself' describes and analyses identity formation as lived and expressed locally in Chalguayacu. It illustrates an informal discussion on identification in terms of ethnicity, music and land relations. In the last chapter I conclude what power relations play an important role in de Chota valley, and how these shape and influence identity processes.

## Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework will predominantly pick up on Foucauldian authors to illustrate the possibility of negotiating, and the rejection of a belief in the absolute power of the state. Power relations and subsequent neoliberal governmentality related to *mestizaje* and multiculturalism will be set out. This is in order to facilitate the explanation of identity politics and agency in identity formation, and governmental and (international) organizations in practice.

### Power relations

#### *The hegemonic discourse of mestizaje in Ecuador*

Within the Social Sciences, the Foucauldian switch to the analysis of power structures through the study of power relations has lived up till today. In academia power is no longer perceived as something that is absolute, something that one (institution) holds. Instead we should study the manifestation of power relations. Foucault was convinced that in order to study this one should look into “*relations of subjection and the resulting formation of subjectivity*” (Maiolo, 2013:1 and Xavier 2005). Scholars like Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller stress the importance of political reasons for government and show that the possibility of governing “[...]depends on the elaboration of specific language that represents and analyzes reality in a manner that renders it amenable to political programming” (Xavier 2005:8). All forms of knowledge and their subsequent discourses “are historically relative and contingent upon the workings of power” (Maiolo 2013:2). The adaptation of the existence of power relations enables us to question the ways in which knowledge and power (through discourse) operate (Downing 2008 In Maiolo 2013). It is through the analysis of the *mestizaje* discourse in Ecuador that I will unravel the particular power relations at play.

From 1857 until beyond the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, the discourse of *mestizaje* dominated the debate about the ideal Ecuadorian citizen and was said to enable the formation of one national identity in which, through social and cultural assimilation, different ethnicities would no longer be recognized. In this discourse, elitist white and mestizo citizens can be depicted as the hegemonic category who portray the Other as inferior, as if this were a natural, legitimate racial categorization (Rahier 1999). On the basis of

race/ethnicity a boundary between the Self and ‘*The Ultimate Other*’ is drawn. Unraveling this discourse reveals the importance of recognizing how knowledge operates and how power relations take shape. The “claiming” of a discourse that pretends to be concerned with a national ideal has been used to obscure radicalization (Foote 2006 and Roitman 2009). Indigenous inhabitants of the Andes had to assimilate and were depicted as imperfect citizens whereas Afro-Ecuadorians were portrayed as no citizens at all, as ‘*The Ultimate Other*’, whose subsequent incorporation as a national citizen was impossible (Foote 2006 and Roitman 2009).

The use of discourse should explicitly be seen as framing a worldview, not reality, in which identity formation takes place and the expected behaviour of groups or individuals is set out (Xavier 2005 and Rahier 1999). “*States represent themselves as reified entities with particular spatial properties [...] by doing so, they help to secure their legitimacy, to naturalize their authority, and to represent themselves as superior to, and encompassing of, other institutions and centers of power*” (Ferguson and Gutpa 2002: 981-982). Yet a hegemonic discourse and its possible outcome in practice is not the only discourse. It is not power as a singular unit in the shape of a dominant discourse that is the only one apparent. As will become clear in the following chapters, the above-mentioned hegemonic discourse on *mestizaje* has and is still being contested by other (marginal) discourses. Alongside dominant discourses many discourses exist on the margins which reject the hegemonic hold on power and knowledge (Maiolo 2013; Merlan 2009 and Roitman 2009).

## **Neoliberal governmentality**

### **and multiculturalism discourse(s)**

#### *The multiple discourses of multiculturalism in Ecuador*

Throughout Latin America (and the rest of the world) the end of the twentieth century has been characterized by a formal recognition of ethnic and cultural diversity, as a result of a switch to multiculturalism in many countries. This has opened up more contestation space through discourses and practices on the margins. In Latin America this has resulted in ten countries adopting a new constitution (Ng’weno 2007 and Simon Thomas 2013). Since the 1980s and 1990s, under neoliberalism, both indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian movements have contested the national ideology of *mestizaje*. These movements have proposed a change in

citizenship and the role of the central state, towards a more inclusive multicultural and multiethnic nation characterized by neoliberal governmentality (Sanchez 2008 and Simon Thomas 2013). This points towards the assumption that “*individuals can and do negotiate the process to which they are subjected*” (Xavier 2005:11). The state holds no absolute power but is one of manifold institutional bodies.

#### THE ART OF GOVERNMENT AND BIOPOWER

It is through the rejection of power as universal and held by a single body that scholars have come to question the conceptualization of power and sovereignty in the state (structures). Whereas formerly the nation-state was held to be sovereign, important social changes. The breakdown of feudal institutions as a result of the formation of the modern state (resulting in centralization) and the (Counter) Reformation led to a “*shift from the sovereign notion of power held by the state to an art of government*” (Xavier 2005:3). Unlike sovereignty and its relation to territory, ‘the art of government’ rejects the sovereign notion of power over a territory and its people. Instead it emphasizes the importance of men and their relations to each other and their environment, of which territory is only one aspect. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards the recognition of knowledge of the population becomes an important consideration for effective governing (Xavier 2005).

In order to understand ‘the art of government’ we must introduce another important term, namely *biopower* (Foucault 1980:143 In Xavier 2005:5). “*Biopolitics denotes a specifically modern way of exercising power*” (Foucault 1980 In Lemke 2010:429). The concept of *biopower* can be divided into *biopolitics* and *discipline*. The former relates to the politics that concerns the collective body of the population and is aimed at regulating life. *Discipline* refers to the management and disciplining of individuals who make up the population. Whereas politicist and naturalist conceptions of *biopolitics* presume the separation of life and politics; according to Foucault’s development of the conceptualization of *biopolitics* in the 1970s, politics and life of the (knowledgeable) population are closely interlinked (Foucault 2000 In Xavier 2005 and Lemke 2010).

#### **(Neoliberal) Governmentality**

In his analysis of modern government Foucault adopted the term *governmentality*. “*Governmentality enables an understanding of how power is exercised in society*



*through different bodies*” (not reducible to “the state”) (Gutpa and Sharma 2006:25). Unlike public debate and even the assumption by some scholars, globalization has led to a new role of the central state, however not necessarily its weakening (Jessop 1999 and Trouillot 2003 *In* Gutpa and Sharma 2006:6). Ferguson and Gutpa (2002) propose the extension of Foucault’s conceptualization of *governmentality*, in times of neoliberalism and the subsequent change in governing structures, to ‘neoliberal governmentality’. Modern government goes beyond the body of the state and includes “*manifold actors, organizations and entities that exercise authority over the conduct of individuals and populations*” (Xavier 2005:1,2). Rather than a mere change in governing structure, it has also been depicted as “*a technique of governance*” in which many of its former functions are outsourced (Lemke 2001:201-202). *Governmentality* combines techniques of domination and discipline with technologies of self (government), thereby enlarging the space of governance (Gutpa and Sharma 2006:25).

Whereas formerly the national state was thought of in terms of territory and sovereignty, in a transnational era the role of the nation-state as well as understandings of sovereignty and territoriality have changed. Sovereignty is no longer bound to the nation-state and its territory but also includes supranational and nongovernmental organizations (Gutpa and Sharma 2006:7). Ferguson and Gutpa (2002) are convinced that former analysis of neoliberal governmentality have failed to move beyond the assumption of governmental practices related to territory. Not only have claims of hierarchy of power by the central state been challenged and undermined, neoliberalism has brought about the outsourcing of governmental practices to grassroots participants, as well as (and influenced by) transnational organizations (Ferguson and Gutpa 2002). No longer are individuals mere puppets of the political game. Both individuals and groups influence and shape politics and vice versa (Lemke 2010). This neoliberal governmentality has been depicted, in line with Lemke’s convictions, as “*a restructuring technique for government*” (Lemke 2001:201-202). This has taken place through the outsourcing of former state functions: “*the introduction of systems of negotiation, mechanisms of self-organization, and empowerment strategies*” (Lemke 2003:10). In many Latin American countries which were involved in a severe economic crisis in the 1980s, restructuring programmes through decentralization and reduction of public spending were developed. This has partly turned out to be a means for the central government

to maintain power (over redistribution of power relations at least). Alongside this, neoliberalism has also empowered the autonomy of local institutions (Cervonne 2012:236 In Simon Thomas 2013:53).

Institutions and the daily interactions of civil society interchangeably determine the outcome of neoliberal discourses and their result in practice (Gupta and Sharma 2006:9). However “*We cannot know beforehand whether the localization of neoliberal discourse will produce stable effects in reproducing hegemonic understandings of the state or not, or how it will transform the forms and institutions of governance*” (Gutpa and Sharma 2006:29). Globally, the concept of ideologies based on the recognition of multiple ethnicities has played an important part in the changing role of the central state over the last decades (Green 2007). In Latin America Afro-American movements have become important actors in the actual formation of multicultural nations (Sanchez 2008). Whereas, like Afro-Colombians, Afro-Ecuadorians had not been recognized as a cultural category, the definition of them as a separate social category at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has enabled the framing of cultural claims (Ng’weno 2007 and Sanchez 2008). It was not until changes in the Ecuadorian constitution were adopted in 1998 and the subsequent recognition of Ecuador as a “multiethnic and pluricultural nation”, that the (central state’s) discourse of *mestizaje* was replaced by *multiculturalism*. As a significant political actor, CONAE<sup>2</sup>, has played an important role in this constitutional change (Simon Thomas 2013:71), which is a clear example of neoliberal governmentality.

### **Identity (Politics): Cultural citizenship**

Even though many minorities have been able to frame claims in terms of cultural difference, opinions on cultural citizenship differ both for people concerned and for scholars. Kymlicka (1995) proposes cultural citizenship as a means to overcome violent conflict around cultural difference, as cultural diversity constitutes an important aspect of many contemporary states. In contrast, it is suggested (by Hooker 2005, amongst other scholars), that potential negative consequences exist when group rights are based on the assertion of cultural difference. In this way “*states distribute rights and inequalities on the basis of difference*” (Postero 2013:115). In the era of multiculturalism this might lead indigenous groups and Afro-Latinos to privilege issues of cultural recognition over questions of racial

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<sup>2</sup> CONAE stands for Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador.

discrimination as bases for political mobilization (Hooker 2005). A second persistent argument against the increased attention for cultural citizenship is the depiction of a community as having a singular identity. The claims for cultural rights based on traditional, ancestral practises do not resemble those of all individuals within a community (Postero 2013). This is what makes my case study of the conceptualization of identity among Afro-Ecuadorians in the Chota-Mira valley so relevant and empirical research all the more necessary in order to depict internal contestation and differences.

It is important to take into account contestation within a community on matters of culture, belonging, identity, etc. Bello and Rangel (2002) propose cultural citizenship as a tool to overcome persistent marginalization of indigenous people and Afro-Ecuadorians. Even though Afro-Ecuadorians have constitutionally been recognized as a cultural group, in daily life the hierarchical state structure and prejudices against Afro-descendant people have remained serious issues throughout Ecuador (Simon Thomas 2013 and Bello and Rangel 2002). Sanchez' article on multicultural nations and citizenship (2008) brings forward proposals by several Afro-Ecuadorian movements for cultural citizenship, the rights of ethnic minorities, and the need to recognize the possibilities of multicultural citizenship. According to these organizations, cultural citizenship should guarantee collective rights based on cultural difference, combat racial discrimination, and enable political inclusion.

### **Identity (Politics): Governing bodies and civil society**

Identity formation often has an international dimension, rather than solely a local dimension. Afro-Ecuadorian movements, for example, have been influenced by the Negritude Movements in the United States and Afro-descendant organizations in Colombia and Brazil, amongst others (Sanchez 2007 *In* Sanchez 2008). This should not be perceived as a single aspect only related to global forces, which reduces individuals to mere objects, but also as a conscious local process in which agency is apparent (Hall 1996:19 *In* Sanchez 2008).

Global developments are reshaping the territory of government simultaneously. Many responsibilities of governments have been outsourced by modern states through an “*emerging system of transnational governmentality*” and international

laws and regulations (Lemke 2003). “*Transnational networks*”<sup>3</sup> concerned with local indigenous (rights) issues try to force national governments and multinationals to adopt new regulations to seriously address the issues raised by local communities (Keck and Sikkink 1998 *In* Gutpa and Sharma 2006:6).

The granting of rights (even though internationally ratified), and the implementation of international laws is bound to specified national borders, however (Gutpa and Sharma 2006; Kymlicka 1995 and Merlan 2009). Although this is an era in which many actors are involved in governing and other power relations, the actual adaptation in practice of acknowledged claims of recognition, citizenship, territory etc. by ethnic minorities takes place within a nation-state. This can lead to external protection being halted by internal restrictions.

The Ecuadorian state has a big impact on the way in which people identify themselves. The negotiations between the central state and civil society have resulted in a realignment of (ethnic) identities. CONAE’s main objectives have been “*to consolidate the indigenous identities and other groups in Ecuador; to fight for land, education, cultural identity, and dignity; and to combat the oppression of the state, the church, and colonialism*” (Simon Thomas 2013:69). Afro-Ecuadorians are nationally represented by CODAE, an institutional body that was set up by the government to strengthen Afro-Ecuadorian communities throughout the country through development projects and consciousness-raising. Many academics and practitioners have pointed towards the lack of sufficient finances to support the projects. This has affected more local and regional organizations not aligned to the government but often dependent on (international) funds (Merlan 2013 and Sanchez 2008).

## **Identity and liberation**

When analyzing identity formation in Latin America, apart from cultural citizenship, the impact of religion and the Church is also important. Some scholars argue that popular religiosity is central to the identity of poor Latin American people. It is said to constitute an aspect of their cultural heritage. That is why it is important that religious processes are taken into account when looking at identity processes (Boff and Boff 1987). The foundations of liberal theology were laid after the 1960s, a decade in which development and underdevelopment came to be seen as two sides of the

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<sup>3</sup> *Transnational networks* is defined as a web of transnational organizations by Keck and Sikkink 1998.

same coin. Development in the First World could only take place because of the periphery, the Third World. This change in theoretical thinking also had its influence in churches. Priests and other religious leaders gradually developed a theology based on justice, particularly justice for the poor and marginalized. The periphery was to break away, to liberate itself. In this light, popular groups and religious groups joined hands in political and social liberation efforts. This was very much focused on cooperation between the Church and society, actually taking into account people in society and their daily struggles. During gatherings of theologians in Latin America the relationship between Faith and the poor, social justice, and the gospel became important. The new liberation theology originated in this periphery and questioned the evangelic message the Church had preached earlier (Berryman 1987 and Smith 1991).

Rather than merely a set of religious ideas on liberation, liberation theology also is a movement that aims at (social) change through social action. *“The movement is an attempt to mobilize a previously immobilized constituency for collective action against an antagonist to promote social change”* (Gamson 1990:12-15 In Smith 1991:53). Religion was to provide a means for the poor to liberate themselves, to negotiate power relations (Candelaria 1990). This development took place in the midst of social changes, as an urge to react to social and political changes. Some scholars have stated that several liberation theologies existed alongside one another. But all have a *“reality of social misery”* as its starting point and liberation of the oppressed as its goal (Boff and Boff 1987:24). *“Liberation theology is a reflection on Christian Faith and its implications”* (Berryman 1987:4). It is both a critique on society and its dominating structures as well as the hierarchy within the Church itself and its insufficient eye for the poor (Berryman 1987). The discourse of liberation theology is a break away from the portrayal of ‘Church’ and ‘world’ as separate entities, instead they are seen as interwoven (Levine 1988:244). Whereas Christianity stood up for the poor long before liberation theology set the stage, what is new is the way poverty is explained and the role marginalised people can play in the Church as well as in society and politics. Liberation theology, according to Levine (1988:250) provided an explicit legitimization of standing up for those oppressed by the system and the *“prophetic role”* the Church could play in it. Besides that the discourse of justice and solidarity came from the popular, rather than from the hierarchy within the Church and society. It was to signal active grassroots participation (Levine 1988).

Poor people were encouraged to be active agents in changing their own lives and societal structures. The Church was to help these active subjects in the setting up of their own organizations (Berryman 1987 and Candelaria 1990).

Liberation theology emerged alongside the emergence of base ecclesiastical communities (CEB's). These are church-related community organizations that have their origin at the base, "*either the faithful at the base of the church's hierarchy or the poor at the base of a class and power pyramid*" (Levine 1988: 251). Pastoral agents bridge the gap between people and the Church and are often involved in the creation of CEB's. With religion as a starting point, these CEB's may eventually cover broader social issues and problems, since religious, social and political issues are seen as intertwined. These organizations provide new insights and ideas on social organization and change. Links between these authentic organizations and a broader level are not always made. But Levine (1988:259) argues it is necessary: "*local situations are the product of relations of power which transcend local boundaries and capabilities - allies and connections are needed.*" She touches upon the paradox of liberation theology. The very point at which it started, supporting and acknowledging popular agency of the marginalized and the potential of new forms of organization and leadership. However there is a possibility of failure of justice and change if these local grassroots groups do not take into account greater power relations and organize at a regional or world level (Candelaria 1990 and Levine 1988).

### **Identity (Politics): Indigeneity**

Apart from religious incentives and social movements in the 1970s, social movements that arose in Latin America during the 1980s attempted to oppose the sovereign power claimed by the central state. Despite the above-mentioned disagreement over the effectiveness in practice of plurinational states, we can recognize that the development of neoliberal multiculturalism from the 1980s and 90s onwards has brought indigeneity on to the stage. Fabiola Jara Gomez (2013) emphasizes that indigeneity has a twofold meaning. On the one hand it depicts the way individuals and groups can exercise agency and shape their identities. On the other hand, it implies subjectivation, which through colonization has shaped the world. In this way indigeneity has been instigated from "outside the self".

Indigeneity "*emerged as an important way of claiming citizenship, rights and justice*" (Canessa 2006; Postero 2007 and Webber 2012 *In Postero* 2013: 109). "*Full*

*citizenship may hinge on how political actors deploy particular definitions of indigeneity*” (Postero 2013:115). As “new” political actors, whose political and socio-economic inclusion within the nation-state had been ignored for centuries, indigenous people have claimed local autonomy on the basis of ethnic and cultural recognition of ancestral territories (Postero 2013:110). Ng’weno (2007) describes how a change in conceptualization of indigeneity based on ethnicity as a result of multiculturalism’s recognition of legal rights for cultural groups has taken place in Latin America (in Colombia specifically). Thereby ethnicity has become an important aspect of determining who belongs to a certain ethnic or racial group and subsequently territory’s role therein. As a result of a change in constitutional legislation, indigenous people and other ethnic minorities have become more visible in their struggle for territorial and cultural recognition and their subsequent role in neoliberal governmentality (Ng’weno 2007). It has enabled indigenous people to become political actors in their claims for recognition and inclusion in society.

Indigeneity, apart from its local dimensions and national contestation, can be connected to international institutions as well, all *differently* affecting and inflicting “*indigeneity’s dimensions, constraints, and possibilities.*”<sup>1</sup> Neoliberal governmentality, through local and (inter)national political organizations, has enabled the contestation of the functioning of dominant state structures and its institutional practice. It is the negotiation of citizenship that determines in what way indigenous people and other ethnic minorities can engage in society. Through the use of discourse and representation, disagreements over the meaning of indigenous citizenship in specific areas can contest *state’s “hegemonic hold on indigeneity”* (Postero 2013:116). Pelican (2009:52) similarly argues that discourses of indigeneity are “*highly politicized*” and can be paradoxical. Indigeneity is thus a discursive framework that is supported by and produces specific forms of power and knowledge (Foucault 1979 *In* Postero 2013). Rather than a static identity, indigeneity is a changing “*relational field of governance, subjectivities, and knowledges that is constructed and contested by both indigenous and non-indigenous people*” (De la Cadena and Starn 2007: 3 *In* Postero 2013:117). This points towards the necessity of analysis of its particular manifestations at a local level and its international dimension. On the basis of the Mbororo people, Michaela Pelican (2009) illustrates the difficulties surrounding the adaptation of indigeneity locally, as inhabitants are not recognized as indigenous nationally, but seen as migrants. Whereas the Mbororo

are recognized as indigenous by the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People. This is based on the recognition of distinctive cultural groups, which may also have a close relationship with the land as a means of survival. In practice, on a national and local level their indigeneity and political rights are not recognized (Minde 2008 and Pelican 2009). It is through the contestation of conceptualization of indigeneity that relations between the central state and local communities take shape (Postero 2013).

## **Conclusion**

As a result of a change in constitutional legislation, indigenous people and other ethnic minorities have become more visible in their struggle for territorial and cultural recognition and their subsequent role in neoliberal governmentality (Ng'weno 2007). Indigenous people and other ethnic minorities continue to struggle for political recognition and the transformation of constitutional legal articles. This occurs through the invention and challenging of new modes of identity (legal, cultural, artistic, economic) (Minde 2008). *“Identity is constantly redefined and negotiated in relation to the power relations at play at particular moments”* (Postero 2013:115). It is with this in mind that I had decided to concentrate on the identity formation of Afro-Choteños during my ten-week fieldwork in Ecuador.



## Context

### Slavery history in the Chota valley

As early as the time that Columbus arrived in what came to be known as Latin America, African slaves were brought along to enable its colonization. It is not until 1513, however, that more slaves were needed and large-scale slave trade was legalized by the Spanish Crown, to compensate insufficient indigenous labour. Under Spanish colonial domination black people were not recognized. Afro-Ecuadorians, however, created their own niches in which to express their ideologies, values, etc. As manual labour developed as an important economic incentive, the Chota-Mira valley became an important agricultural (sugar) production area for which slaves from Africa had to be imported (Martínez 2008 and Whitten 2008). “*From 1568 until 1767 Jesuits were the landowners who ruled the harsh labour conditions for indigenous and African-descendant slaves*” (Whitten 2008:304). Although sugar cane had been cultivated formerly, under Jesuit control the region yielded twenty percent of the total sugar production of Ecuador. Most African slaves had been baptized in their mother country and were Catholic before their arrival in the Americas. It was through their religious and oral traditions that they shaped niches in the existing power structures in order to pass on their knowledge and create spaces of resistance (Martínez 2008 and Whitten 2008). After the expulsion of these Jesuits, the enslaved people got new owners, known as *hacendados*<sup>4</sup>. This changed power relations between authorities, elites and those enslaved. Previously Jesuits had held social, political and economic control over the region. The plantations came under colonial administration until 1780, when they were granted to elite families from Quito (Chaves 2010:131). During that time, Coronel (1991) approximates the number of African enslaved people in the Chota-Mira valleys at around 2615.

Under Jesuit control the territory had been isolated as it was self-sufficient. Enslaved people were usually kept on a particular *hacienda*<sup>5</sup>, thereby creating a sense of community between those enslaved. Once the region became part of the *Royal Audiencia of Quito*<sup>6</sup> and some *haciendas* were disbanded, displacing enslaved people, several rebellions broke out. Those enslaved protested and claimed they had a relationship with the territory their ancestors had been working for decades.

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<sup>4</sup> *Hacendados* meaning private landowners.

<sup>5</sup> *Hacienda* meaning private estates.

<sup>6</sup> *Royal Audiencia of Quito* was a territory much larger than present-day Ecuador

'*Palenques*' were created as areas of rebellion and descendants of previously enslaved Africans. One important incident that took place in La Concepción was the flight to Quito of Marina Carillo and her family. There they claimed to have been treated badly by their patrons. This incident sparked rebellions that grew bigger once the *haciendas* were given to elites in Quito. These new owners were in debt to the authorities and were therefore not recognized as legitimate owners by the workers (Martínez 2008). The new administrators from Quito regularized slave labour after several enslaved people, amongst them Marina Carillo, had won their case. Working hours, work load and required sustenance for the enslaved were regulated from then on.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century wars between the *Royal Audiencia of Quito*, Peru and Nueva Granada (later on partly Colombia), resulted in the Chota region becoming semi-autonomous and able to develop mechanisms of resistance. Whenever they were sold, many slaves pointed out that they were being deterritorialized, deprived of their land, their origin. It is this discourse that continued to be used by those enslaved, referring back to the time in which they had belonged to a landowner and had had a direct relationship with the land. It was during the Jesuit domination that they had developed this, since they had lived in the same area for generations (Chavez 2010). However, it was not until 1854 that slavery was abolished in Ecuador ( Baud *et. al.* 1996). This did not, however, lead to the actual abolition in practice since socio-economic dependence of former enslaved people persisted.

Current structural problems often still have their roots in the area's colonial history. Until this day land is owned by influential landowners. It was not until after the Agrarian Reform in 1946 that former enslaved people finally were legally able to buy their own piece of land; but those with most money got the best sites. It was not until 6th January 1955 that Chalguayacu's *hacienda*, owned by Luis and Manuel León Rurales, was bought by the Juncal-Chalguayacu community with financial support from the Ministry of Social Prevention.<sup>7</sup>

## **Liberation and social organization**

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<sup>7</sup> Legal document on the political and legal formation of Juncal-Chalguayacu (I borrowed it during my fieldwork in Chalguayacu from Iben Santos, the current president of the community)

Liberation theology arose in the 1970s in Latin America out of a necessity to acknowledge the position of the poor and their right to justice, to be seen as fully human, free like everyone. In the light of their history as slaves, agricultural reforms and the current situation in the Chota valley in which my research was located, this theology needed to be investigated in order to place some (organizational) formations and leadership skills in historical perspective. The Church brings forward the need to become organized, as Afro-Ecuadorians, to combat poverty and to stimulate development (Sanchez 2009:153). In 1965 the Afro-Ecuadorian pastoral movement was set up by *comboniano*<sup>8</sup> missionaries. These again inspired the MAEC<sup>9</sup> to be set up in the 1980s; it aims to inspire young activists and stimulate local leadership and organization, rather than the community projects set up by the Church (Sanchez 2009:146). The 1990s are an important decade for the start of specifically Afro-Ecuadorian social organizations being set up thanks to the Church's efforts. In this initial process Afro-Ecuadorian organizations are very much related to those of Afro-Colombians. One important aspect is the cooperation during the PCN<sup>10</sup> by which Ecuador and Colombia, supported by NGO's, drew up an agenda. The main issues to be covered were: collective rights, obtaining territory, ethno-education, and (public) spaces of participation. This stimulated aspects of the 1998 constitution in which collective rights were acknowledged (Minde 2008:10 and Sanchez 2009: 155).

### **Social organization and means of survival**

Within the valley manifold agriculturiers, women's, youth and socio-cultural organizations exist, of which PRODECI and FECONIC<sup>11</sup> are the biggest (Acosta 2013 and Sanchez 2008). The main aims of these different organizations are the ancestral territory, protection and control over natural resources, and strengthening of cultural identities. In line with the promotion of multiculturalism constitutionally, many NGO's, amongst which PRODECI<sup>12</sup>, focus on identity formation and promotion of cultural uniqueness. Local organizations like *Palenque*<sup>13</sup> are dependent on governmental subsidies and focus on cultural identity in order to gain funding. As they live in an isolated place with little means of survival most Afro-Ecuadorians are farmers, cultivating sugarcane, bananas, manioc, avocados, tomatoes and tropical

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<sup>8</sup> Misionaries from a Catholic religious congregation.

<sup>9</sup> MAEC: The Afro-Ecuadorian Consciousness Movement

<sup>10</sup> PCN: Process of Black Communities

<sup>11</sup> FECONIC (Federation of Black Communities in Imbabura and Carchi) is a regional NGO located in Chota.

<sup>12</sup> PRODECI is a national NGO located in Ibarra working in cooperation with Spain. They have specially designed projects on citizenship and development in the Chota valley.

<sup>13</sup> *Palenque* is a social organization that works with school children on Afro-identity formation.

fruits (Regus St Louis *et al*). Apart from agriculture, local communities have turned to craftsmanship (José Chalá 2013 and Regus St Louis *et al*). Existing hotels are mostly owned by either Colombians or people from places outside the valley such as Ibarra and Quito. Many women have taken to selling the cultivated products on the markets. Others are involved in buying and selling of shoes and textiles from Colombia in the cities of Ibarra, Quito and Guayaquil.

### **National and regional support for Afro-Choteños**

Over the past decades the call for the recognition of cultural citizenship has become more prominent, in which Afro-Ecuadorians are recognized alongside indigenous populations. In Ecuador, as with other countries, identity differentiation has become “*a principle characteristic of citizenship*” (Hall 1996:19 *In* Sanchez 2008). The protection of indigenous peoples via recognition is increasingly adopted in new Latin American constitutions, focusing on the self-determination of indigenous peoples “*attached to some degree of self-governance*” (Sanchez 2007:241). Afro-Ecuadorians have officially been recognized as culturally distinctive citizens in the 1998 constitution. As a result of the recognition of multiculturalism and the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-Ecuadorians have been recognized and included in the national census as recently as 2010 (Pulso Politico 2013). Therein their right to ancestral territories has also been acknowledged (Leye Vaugan 2005 and Sanchez 2008:216). However “*on a political and legal level multiculturalism has led to the question of how to bring the formal recognition of cultural pluralism into practice*” (Simon Thomas 2013:47). Green (2007) emphasizes the need to recognize the local dimension of multicultural ideologies and likewise questions to what extent multiculturalism has improved the visibility and opportunities of Afro-Ecuadorians. Possibly the adaptation of multiculturalism masks a very different reality, as many aspects and structures of inequality that took shape under colonial rule are still apparent today (Postero 2013). Despite many rights which are included in the constitution, law and practice remain incongruent. Regional inequality and racial discrimination remain a serious problem (Pulso Politico 2013; Roitman 2009 and Sanchez 2008). It was not until 2006 that Congress approved inclusion of Afro-Ecuadorians in the national census. Marc Simon Thomas (2013:281) puts forward that in order for multiculturalism to work, mutual dialogue and a change in both thinking and practice through politics of recognition and redistribution is needed.

In terms of financial support, the national Afro-Ecuadorian representative political body, CODAE, receives insufficient money to effectively raise consciousness amongst Afro-Ecuadorians. This has impeded the ability to support the struggle for equality and recognition of their socio-cultural, economic and political rights.<sup>14</sup> CODAE could only be formed as a result of multiculturalism, but still remains unable to change political practice successfully. This is in contrast to the important political actor CONAE, that the Correa government can no longer ignore (Marc Simon Thomas 2013 and Sanchez 2007).

### **Ethno-education**

Salomon Acosta (2013) and José Chalá Cruz (2013) state that the incorporation of African history should become part of the education system throughout the country. This seems to indicate that multiculturalism should include mutual recognition of one's particular history and suggests a changed direction of educational structures through neoliberal governance. *"Because if we did not know our own history, how were younger generations supposed to know?"*<sup>15</sup> It was not until 2005 that the Ethno-education Commission published its first booklet *'Our history'* that was to be used for children around fourteen years old. Between 2007 and 2011 modules were developed for the other grades at secondary school. These were financially supported by the Ministry of Education. Recently the publication has been realized of thirteen subsequent modules that are used from primary school up to the end of secondary school. The modules have five focal points that are well talked about both within and outside schools: 1) Arrival in Africa; 2) African Diaspora; 3) Territory and *Palenque*; 4) Collective memory and ancestral knowledge; and 5) Knowledge of curative practices.

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<sup>14</sup> [www.codae.ec](http://www.codae.ec)

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Ivan Pabón, a teacher and initiator of the ethno-education project at Carpuela's secondary school.

## Methodology and reflection

A distinguishing feature, and important aspect of its theory, is the methodology used by anthropologists. Despite the use of quantitative data, qualitative data's goal of "*understanding the nature of phenomena*" (rather than its quantity) dominates anthropological methodology (de Walt and de Walt 2011:3 and Robben and Sluka 2012). Although qualitative data is used in other disciplines as well, long-term fieldwork is a defining feature of anthropology (Moore 2003). Despite the possibly even more challenging task of studying one's own society, I have chosen to conduct my fieldwork far from home (Moore 2003). I have ultimately chosen to study Afro-Ecuadorian identity formation, identity processes and power relations at play: amongst these dominant and marginal discourses on belonging and (cultural) citizenship. For the purpose of my research I conducted fieldwork in the Chota valley, a rather isolated valley amongst the lower Andes in North-Eastern Ecuador. For three months I lived with Matilde Mendez and her family, in the village of Chalguayacu.

Throughout my research I have intended to build a relationship of trust and cooperation with my informants in order to gain a better understanding of the local situation and people's points of view, but also to try to grasp '*the native's point of view*' as much as possible. Whereas Tylor and other armchair anthropologists at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century mostly acquired information on societies from second-hand information from missionaries, travellers and others, Malinowski has been depicted as the father of modern anthropology. He is seen as an important figure in fieldwork and the related development of participant observation (Austin and Seaman 2007; Stalenhoef 2013 and Tylor 1871). Participant observation has often been depicted as an oxymoron, as participation requires subjectivity but pure observation would assume objectivity and emotional detachment (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011:28-30). Scientific objectivity might also be impossible because an anthropologist is a prisoner of his own time and culture, with all its prejudices (Austin and Seaman 2007 ). Especially because I did research on power relations I was very aware of my own position and the need to be clear about my intentions. As Powdermaker (1969) states: "[...] recognition that the fieldworker is herself an inherent part of the situation studied and her personal as well as her scientific reactions are an important part of

*the research project*” (Powdermaker 1969:422 In Robben and Sluka 2012:8). I could not avoid being part of the power relations present locally and I did try to investigate what people thought about my intentions. Besides that, my informants regularly asked for my opinion on a certain aspect of their social organization or musical performance for example.

## **Power relations**

Throughout my research I have wanted to gain insight into the workings of power relations, through discourses and practices, and the formation of identities. I have tried to unravel these by both conducting interviews and informal conversations, as well as participating and observing during tasks in daily life. I had informal conversations with local inhabitants and conducted some semi-structured interviews and life histories. Besides that, I attended and participated in manifold more formally organized events such as meetings of local organizations and regional NGOs. Apart from these formal meetings, many informal gatherings or happenings also provided insight into local beliefs, customs and discourses. The use of discourses could be seen during meetings and whenever I used focus groups, for example. Rather than strictly sticking to these ‘organized’ events, in order to study discourses, I also consciously observed and analyzed what happened outside the active use of discourses to see in which ways discourses were apparent in ‘ordinary’ life. *“The reality that Malinowski observed was not at all the same as natives had told him it was like. He realized that to understand people you cannot rely on what they say they do, instead you must rely upon yourself watching and using your own insight to comprehend what they do”* (Austin and Seaman 2007 and Mommersteeg 2013). I also discovered that what people say is definitely not always the way they act in reality, or in different situations. People would take on different positions and identities depending on the situation they found themselves in. During a meeting on local politics or an informal evening around the bonfire with friends and family members, one could have two different salient identities.

Objectivity and subjectivity are combined and the results of the research and the way in which data are acquired are thus related to the anthropologist, who him or herself is the instrument that acquires the data (Robben and Sluka 2012 and DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). Because it is the researcher’s experience and interpretation of data that forms the basis of ethnographic analysis, transparency requires that the

researcher considers possible biases in his or her own position and makes these clear to the informants and the reader of a possible ethnography or thesis. This requires a sophisticated degree of reflexivity, not only about one's practice but also about the construction of knowledge (Ferguson and Gutpa 1992 and Moore 2003). I took into account that I, as a researcher, a Western white girl and outsider, would be part of the power relations. Some villagers looked at me as the all-knowing subject and the rich white girl with infinite possibilities. Whereas some questioned my intentions, others asked for my contribution in the setting up of a youth organization, a musical performance or other activity. I was interviewed and asked what my recommendations for the improvement of the regional youth network were and how formal meetings took place in the Netherlands. Secondly a local documentary-maker asked me about my perspectives on the future in the valley and recorded me on video after I had interviewed him. I found it very interesting to see how people would also change their attitude towards me, rather than solely the other way around. I reminded them regularly I was doing research on them, wanting to grasp their opinion, their point of view, wash clothes the way they did so. Nevertheless many considered me to be someone to discuss problems and ideas with and to ask what I actually thought, both as a student and as an individual. In terms of engagement many villagers recognized that I was trying to become slightly like them. "*The first Dutch Afroecuadorian*"<sup>16</sup>, as Edwin Congo García said. But I would never fully become an insider of course, even though I caught myself wanting to be more like them sometimes, in order to understand them from within.

The importance of the abovementioned reflexivity is what I find a challenge within anthropology. "*It is a strain to try to sympathize with others and at the same time strive for scientific objectivity*" (Paul 1953:69 In DeWalt and DeWalt 2011:28).

During my stay in Ecuador I tried to become aware of my own possible biases, as well as people's expectations in terms of my research and the possibility to be engaged in people's struggles for recognition. Since I sympathized with the organized attempt to gain governmental acknowledgement, I constantly evaluated my data (gathering) to try not to obtain a too one-sided view and lose my role as a researcher. Besides engaging with local inhabitants, I consciously conducted interviews with people working for the government and did archival research, in order to include the

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<sup>16</sup> Interview Edwin Congo García, agriculturer and father of three children, in his living room in Chalguayacu, 28 March 2014.



government's discourse as well (Scheper-Hughes 1995). Jairo turned out to be a great friend and informant who could help me out whenever I was not sure of my findings or best ways to approach people for example. He grew up in the valley but moved to the nearby city of Ibarra. I have found out that talking to both people from the village and those interested in its development, provided a more varied insight. Some people in Ibarra or Quito interested in the valley, for example, knew more about politics of "multiculturalism" and its presumed result in practice in the cities, municipalities and villages. Other informants in Chalguyacu provided insight into their lived experience in a rural, marginal village. Some of my informants in Ibarra and Quito might knew more about laws; while some inhabitants who had running water and who got a *bono* from the government as a pension might consider the advances of the government extraordinary (since previously they washed in the river and received no governmental support at all). I have tried to gain as much information from a wide range of people, in terms of occupation, family, interest, background, position within the village, etc.

### **Negotiating positions**

During my stay in the village I directly lived through the importance of subtle, implicit communication and my subsequent position as a researcher. A slight difficult phase I went through illustrates my position as both an outsider and my obligations and needs as a researcher. Simultaneously the possible impediments and difficulties in reaching my goals while maintaining trust and respect amongst the local inhabitants.

At first I had been grateful that I could stay with Matilde and her family but I quickly realized that my house was not quite the paradise and the ideal place she had told me it was. She told me that people always stayed with her and not any other family in the village because she knew how to cook, had a big heart and liked sharing and being around different people. I met many lovely people who said I should come and stay with them. During my stay my host mother did not let me. She told me I had to be careful, not trust anyone "*because there are some people who have not got their heart in the right place...*" I was never allowed to stay over late or sleep over with friends. This was quite a difficult fact for me, since it gave me the feeling I could not tell her that I had hung out with them, had become friends and did think they were very trustworthy and that I considered it perfectly fine and even great to stay over

with them. It gave me the feeling I had to tell her I appreciated her concern and the fact she treated me like a daughter. Unfortunately in my position and in terms of local values and customs I could not explain that I considered myself capable of judging people on my own terms after having lived a considerable length of time in Chalguayacu. I had the feeling I should not take it too far and just hang out with friends openly during the day. I did not question her judgments directly and said I would respect her decisions. It did feel like an impediment. Since outside the house I learnt so much more and felt much more comfortable. Matilde's attitude gave me the feeling that she wanted me to associate only with her family, benefit her family, so that all would say "*they always stay over at her place, because she knows how to host people, etc.*" But also to make it seem that I was investigating her family and that they were important in the village. I was very interested in her family but had come to investigate the whole village (and beyond). Whenever I did not visit a family member every other day they would call me "*ingrata*" (ungrateful). Family relations are very important in the village but I could not visit all of them every day. In order to keep a sense of trust and not cause a crisis in the family and gossip in the village I decided not to switch families, even though I would have loved to, also for the sake of obtaining (good) data and not have the whole village think I was a traitor. Family relations and neighbor's behaviour are very sensitive subjects when something negative happens so I decided to leave it at that.

### **Structuring my data**

In order to structuralize my fieldwork findings I have chosen to concentrate on three case studies of different situations I witnessed or took part in while I was in the Chota valley and thereby use '*thick description*'. I have consciously chosen some activities that were 'planned' (by an organization), as well as other happenings that took place in a more informal or spontaneous setting. The inclusion of these different settings in which identities were apparent I considered very important to my research. I have also intended to portray these specific events, especially because in my opinion their description and analysis as well as evaluation by (non)attending members provides a greater insight into local society and the problems and opportunities these people face on a broader scale. The *thick description*, which Geertz depicted as including culture in all its aspects to not only give insight into the more tacit knowledge present but all that is expressed outside explicit language use as well. Besides that I find that a thorough description of a situation can provide broader insight into the situation

(Robben 1995). Not only are settings described in detail, but interaction between those present and exact word use sometimes are brought forward in the empirical chapters which follow. Like Kapferer (2010:1) describes: see the “[...]event as central to anthropological analysis rather than the concept of society.” The event is used to “substantialize the abstract or to provide a means of grasping foundational organizational principles of society”(Kapferer 2010:1). Because I find the word ‘event’ has a sense of being directed I have chosen for ‘situation’. Since I have chosen both planned and more ‘spontaneous’ happenings I would not want to speak of ‘event’. The three chosen cases all describe different aspects that I considered important to the process of identity formation locally. I have specified my own role in being there in order to provide the reader with insight into my findings and analysis based on the information gained whilst in the field. This should provide the reader with a source of ‘evidence’ on how I have ultimately come to my structure and conviction. The situations described are analysed and in addition similar or contrasting information or insight (from informants or archival research) are added. For more clarification I have chosen a grey colour for the situational description and a standard black for information obtained outside the described case.

# Vamos a sacar la negra adelante



Vamos a sacar la negra adelante (bis)

<sup>17</sup>We are going to bring the black woman forward

Le canto a mi tierra con amor,  
Porque la llevo en el corazón,  
Sabroso me siento por estar aquí  
es la tierra donde nací

I sing to my land with love,  
Because I carry her in my heart  
I feel good for being here  
It's the land where I was born.

Padeces en el olvido  
desde el momento de tu creación (bis)  
representar la pobreza,  
la pena y la marginación (bis).

You fell into oblivion  
From the moment of your creation  
Representing the poverty,  
The misery and the marginalization.

Has vivido resignada ahogado en la ilusión  
sabiendo negra que eres muy digna de  
admiración (bis).

You have been living resigned,  
drowned into delusion , knowing black  
woman that you are admirable.

Tiene tierras muy fecundas  
Eres muy bella y es más (bis)  
posees riquezas inmensas en oro, platino y mar  
(bis).

You are very beautiful and even more  
You possess immense richness in gold,  
platinum and sea (bis).

Toda tu naturaleza es fuente de producción (bis)

All your nature is a fountain of  
production (bis)

Entones ¿Por que no sales de tanta marginación?  
(bis)

So. Why don't you rise out of such  
marginalization? (bis)

Tus hijos son tan humildes y humilde tu  
generación (bis)  
dotados de inteligencia sin libertad de expresión.

Your children are so humble and humble  
is your generation (bis)  
Gifted with intelligence, without freedom  
of expression

¡Adelante!, despertemos compañeras del futuro  
(bis)  
salgamos del conformismo nos espera lo más  
duro (bis).

Forward! Let's wake up, partners of the  
future (bis)  
Let's leave conformism, the hardest is  
awaiting us (bis).

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<sup>17</sup> Translated into English by the author

# WE HAVE A DREAM



In this first empirical chapter the meeting of PRODECI is described thoroughly. The first aim at the end of the previous PRODECI meeting had been the setting up of a counteraction to structural discrimination of Afro-Ecuadorians in the media. The second aim was to register all individuals involved in cultural activities in order to set up a national cultural network focused on Afro-Ecuadorian identity and culture. Today's meeting aims at realizing that. Through an illustration of the setting of the meeting I aim to give an impression of the organization. Thereafter the focus on several aspects that became apparent there are connected to its importance outside the meeting as well. After the 'setting' paragraph, discourses and practices on 'multiculturalism' in Ecuador are laid bare. The discourses are mainly connected to the creation of cultural spaces to express and illustrate 'multiculturalism'. The last paragraph is dedicated to (rhetoric on) political representation, and the (leadership) role and position of women in the Chota valley.

## Setting

The meeting takes place in the cultural centre of Juncal. It was built three years ago, by the Ministry of Culture, after persistent local pressure to acknowledge the need to do so. For the purpose of this reunion, seats are positioned in rows of ten chairs in the middle of the room, facing the beamer. Upon entering the light, warm yellow coloured cultural centre, one sees different pictures decorating a wall of the main room. Another side of the wall portrays an immense painting of the lush green Chota valley; an Afro-Ecuadorian woman in traditional long colourful skirt and apron with a bottle on her head in the foreground. A guitar is painted in such a way that its strings slowly transform and melt into the river that runs through the centre of the landscape. A portrayal of the past and the present? Today's meeting includes all those cultural promoters, artists, local politicians and community leaders, and individuals interested in and involved in Afro-Ecuadorian cultural activities nationwide. Some leaders are wearing a neat shirt and trousers, while members of a music group in Esmeraldas wear their traditional, colorful African garbs. Still others have put on their casual shirts and slippers.



## True multiculturalism?

*“We were born as rebels. We have become rebels in our mother’s womb already!” exclaims Gisella Chalá Reinozo.<sup>18</sup> “In the workshops that governmental institutions sometimes give, or items that appear in the media, the language of power is present. We should be conscious of that, using their language in order to get there<sup>19</sup> and say what we ourselves want.” She is asked to present the recommendations her working group has come up with, in order to strengthen regional organization amongst Afro-Ecuadorians. Limberg Valencia<sup>20</sup> takes over: “So in order to gain a voice we propose to start with one of the causes of dispersion within organizations. We have adopted this classic view on organizational structure, which is vertical.” Limberg claims that many leaders have become ‘todologos’: trying to solve everything by themselves. They move to the ministry, the capital, trying to reach the highest functions. He thinks that organizing should be more circular, as a symbol of leadership. “Like when one used to listen to grandparents telling stories. I do not know if they tell stories nowadays. But people used to gather around to listen. You, Zoila<sup>21</sup>, do you still tell stories?” “Excuse me? Yes!”, she states firmly, once she becomes conscious that he is referring to her in the public. “Like something symbolic, ancestral.” Limberg includes all those present and points out the visible circular shape all have gathered in, for the purpose of collectively coming up with solutions to overcome the obstacles that resulted from the first meeting. He suggests that within an organization one could apply this circular structure, symbolically. In order for the organization to become more participatory and so that responsibilities will be shared. “As I see here, one is secretary, another is technician.[...] all of them have their own post, all feel responsible for that.”*

Javier<sup>22</sup> emphasizes that all present should take into account those values that portray one’s cultural identity and promote it. He, as well as Limberg, state that they should make it well known (inter)nationwide. *But that does not mean that we should devalue our culture, and ancestry. That does not mean that I will dress Gloria in a*

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<sup>18</sup> Gisella is a member of a youth organisation in Quito and at the time of the meeting involved in political campaigns for the President’s party, list 35.

<sup>19</sup> There refers to governmental institutions.

<sup>20</sup> Limberg Valencia is a cultural promoter working with Afro-Ecuadorian artists. He enabled the legal set-up of *The Three Maria’s*, who had sang for decades already but under his guidance became juridically recognized.

<sup>21</sup> Zoila Espinoza is cultural promoter and the ‘queen of *bomba*, dancing with a bottle on her head.

<sup>22</sup> Javier is the main person responsible for the community house in Juncal. He is present as a technical today but speaks up whenever he has to say something that comes up in today’s discussions.

*short skirt, that the Three Marias will start wearing miniskirts.*” Limberg has caused a relaxed, informal atmosphere. Gloria’s shrill laughter is by far the loudest amongst those laughing at his joke. Gisella adds that music groups should not make dance into something folkloric, not dancing just to dance. Instead these cultural groups are to bring development to the region and take ancestral knowledge with them. Don<sup>23</sup> Cristobal Barahona<sup>24</sup> is very willing to teach the younger generation how to do this and how to play the instrument: “*You can ask me whatever. I am here to serve. Since I always say that when I pass away, all my knowledge will go with me.*” All loudly applaud and some whistle as Cristobal thanks everyone for the valuable minute he spoke.

Often elderly people are referred to as knowledgeable. Those who lived during slavery and learnt so much from their parents. All those involved in education projects or NGO projects on identity stressed that this knowledge should not be lost. They were depicted as a rebellious generation and some claimed that themselves. Besides the importance of ancestral knowledge Gisella pointed out the need to use the government’s language in order to become visible, to become heard. She stated that by using that discourse the right to recognition and cultural expression can be put into practice. The national government declared Ecuador a multicultural, pluri-national country in the 2008 constitution. The related *Plan Nacional para el Buen Vivir 2013-2017* (2013) was set up under the Correa government, claiming to uphold the conservation of diversity and the possibility of cultural expressions and diversity on the basis of equality. This strategic plan proposes to create a national identity characterized by diversity, and political spaces to express this. It includes the conservation of cultural expressions, and both tacit and less visible knowledge. This is illustrated in the document concerning the proclaimed need to conserve collective memories and cultural expressions. Spaces for encounters between different ethnicities to exchange knowledge, prevent stereotyping, and violence are some of its main targets. Spaces that demonstrate and enable knowledge about cultural diversity and identities include libraries, theaters, museums, etc. according to the government's objectives. Cultural expressions are seen as constantly in flux, changing through social interaction. It is through both individual and collective exploration

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<sup>23</sup> I have decided to use ‘Don’ rather than Mister, as I find the translation has a different feel to it, does not cover its content.

<sup>24</sup> Cristobal is almost treated as a legend. He can be found in Juncal’s cultural centre almost daily, as he is making *bomba* and teaching children interested how to play it. He has recently been recognized as important figure and a cultural promoter of Afro-Choteños by the Ministry of Culture.

and expression of cultural values and habits that “*citizens no longer are subjected to domination and colonization but instead are enabled to shape their own identities more freely*” (Plan Nacional para el Buen Vivir 2013:16). Governance is no longer bound to the state as a single, dominant body. The abovementioned (cultural) spaces can become sites for neoliberal governance in which individuals and groups of people can make claims of cultural recognition and contest former portrayals and discourses (Ng’weno 2007).

All regional organizations focus on strengthening and promoting collective organization to represent Afro-Ecuadorian territory. Recognition and promotion of collective rights taken up in the constitution, opening a space in which Afro-Ecuadorians represent themselves. The cultural house in Juncal is an example of greater inclusion and recognition of different cultures. Employees have only been paid the first year, however. Those politically conscious people I spoke to in the Chota valley, are convinced that this apparently has been a facade by which the government is said to have formally recognized Chota. Employees at the cultural centre, as well as members involved in cultural organizations complained that the government every now and again builds a cultural house, in order for those organized, claiming it, will stop making claims. I often heard similar phrases like “*We’ll hang up some pictures and then they will be satisfied.*” When talking about the lacking ‘real’ willingness of the government. Many active members within the communities in Chota were frustrated that ‘multicultural’ Ecuador was not living up to its promises.

*“They talk about Ecuador multicultural, multi-ethnic, so they should construct and develop a ‘cultural house’ from that point of view. And that point of view of interculturalism means ‘getting to know and appreciating all diversity’. And from that point of view inter-cultural encounters should take place and be enabled [...]. The government, with the USA embassy in this case has decided upon the exhibitions. And the actual construction of a cultural centre is a classist view. Because who are the ones who go to these sites?”*, says Iliana. Milady takes over: “*Exactly, the higher class, the richer people who go to ballet, museums, etc. So the local population often has never entered these places. Thus we cannot speak of actual, successful intercultural knowledge and*



*performances.*<sup>25</sup>

### **(Political) representation**

As the end of the day comes nearer those who have come in during the lunch are asked to present themselves. Those who had been sleepy because of the heavy lunch seem to awake again at this more dynamic part of the meeting. Some people have been active in the municipality and intend to appeal to the public by using more understandable, simple language:

*“We have to socialise these problems. And think of how to attack the jealousy amongst ourselves. I also noticed envy amongst us. Is that resistance, given the past? Please help me out on this one”,* states Miguel<sup>26</sup>. Rather unclear whether he really wants those who have gathered in a circle to actually take part and answer his posed question. Mercedes Acosta takes the silence as an opportunity to present herself. She is a member of the management team of both CONAMUNE and FECONIC. *“What are we doing? Why do we, us women, not reach these power structures? Many women have no time to attend meetings, to become active because they have too many occupations. But others do not want to join. But we can and have the opportunity: men are not that capable. We should not be held down anymore. Our husbands and children have to take up household tasks and while we are not around!”* Judith acknowledges that women have been brought up to face up to the vision of the other, be it father, grandfather, brother, husband, children. *“But we should also acknowledge that we are advancing. Think of the use of braids, as a form of resistance during slavery. We always find a way to resist, to react to the situation.”* Zoila sighs in agreement and adds that one has to have the will to move forward and serve others. *“Learn jokes in order to defend oneself”*.

We have spoken about men and women’s divisions and I see this as a recapturing of an important theme. Miguel points out that they have to support one another, as *‘negros and negras’*<sup>27</sup>. *“We have to empower our colour. If we do not move out of our misery we will not advance.”* He states that women have taken up leading positions and appreciates those women who have been able to make it to this

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<sup>25</sup>Informal conversation with Iliana and Milady Carabali and their two other sisters and mother, in their living room in Chota, 21 February 2014. They were the initiators of the local youth group *Jarid* in Chota.

<sup>26</sup> Miguel once was a chosen candidate in the municipality in Esmeraldas.

<sup>27</sup> Black men and women

meeting. “In order for them<sup>28</sup> not to mess around with us we should not only be visible, but also speak up. The role of housewife, family father, we as black people can be someone! Our ancestors also did it, to maintain employed.” He emphasizes that often Afro-Ecuadorians close down their own spaces, their own opportunities.

Limberg’s brother drops in and questions what has happened to Afro-Ecuadorians on a political level. Why give the local post to a mestizo, to an indigenous person? He looks around the room as if to include all: “Should we support them? Have them represent us? I think we should represent ourselves!” He explains how he thinks those in the room and outside seem to fear speaking up, taking up an important political post. “It is time to wake up with our very own wishes!” Plutarco Viveres, a regionally politically active person and member of the music group in Mira follows his rhetoric: “We, like Martin Luther King, have a dream, that one day in the near future we as Afros, as black people, will reach the national assembly representing ourselves rather than being represented”

The tone of voice seems to have set in motion an atmosphere of openness in which many people want to give their opinion on the situation of Afro-Ecuadorians politically and in terms of leadership positions. As Liseth looks slightly worried at this sudden energy that seems to have filled up the room, she asks whether all can please finish off. “We do take all of you into account, but since it is quite late already, I kindly ask you to all speak up quickly.”<sup>29</sup>

“It is hard to make people believe that we need to stand up for our rights and claim these collective rights that are present in the constitution. But they are not acted upon. We should tackle this problem and make the younger generation more conscious. People believe all that appears on television. Our homework is tell that these representations are often false...”<sup>30</sup>

During FECONIC’s meeting<sup>31</sup> Renán Tadeo<sup>32</sup> also stated that Afro-Ecuadorians should open up their political spaces. “We should insist in order for them to recognise our rights, to bring these laws into practise.” It was alright to work together with NGO’s but people from the communities were to make proposals, develop strategic plans,

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<sup>28</sup> *Them* refers to the government

<sup>29</sup> Liseth de Jesus is president of CONAMUNE (National Coordination of Black Women) and an employee at PRODECLI.

<sup>30</sup> Limberg Valencia

<sup>31</sup> Meeting FECONIC, Chota, 9 February 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Renán Tadeo is FECONIC’s economist.

have the decisions in their own hands, rather than being dependent on others. Many members both within FECONIC, CONAMUNE and the youth network have stated that educated members of the Afro-Ecuadorian society should stay in close contact with their communities while and after they have been to university and obtained important positions. FECONIC's president Salomon Acosta<sup>33</sup> cited José Chalá: "*one needs to work in order to gain power, if we refuse to do so we are condemned.*" Several people working for the municipality, national government or FECONIC have stated that the Cruz brothers, Oscar and José, have indeed come very far.<sup>34</sup> Their rhetorics were seen as beautiful but the significance and support of their communities was doubted by many. They emphasized that this was not a commonly accepted or talked about opinion. Little had changed in the valley since they had left, according to many who preferred to be anonymous. Doña<sup>35</sup> Olivia<sup>36</sup> firmly states that the government has not supported the region. She states that no development was brought to the actual people and that many inhabitants have been expelled from their ancestral territory: "*And even the hotels in the area are too expensive and belong to people who are not from here.*" Olga Palacios<sup>37</sup> has set up a women's organization in el Juncal dedicated to community tourism. This is seen by members as an alternative. In the big *hotels*, Afro-Ecuadorians from the region are said to be exploited as employees. Money flows out of the region towards Quito or Colombia instead of bringing benefit the region. *Association Aroma Caliente* would like to set up community tourism, consisting of cultural projects, art, performances and family hosting. Those involved should benefit directly while the richness the region has to offer is being exposed. This initiative has come up since those women involved stress that very few leaders have actually made a change. "*For someone to really understand the local situation and problems, one has to live and experience the particular community and really make a change, an effort.*"<sup>38</sup> She adds that Barbarita Lara from Caldera is an example of a woman who has made a change since she lives in the community and people are organized to face and analyse existing problems. Many have concluded that those who have gained the opportunity have

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<sup>33</sup> Salomon Acosta is FECONIC's president.

<sup>34</sup> José Chalá Cruz Works as applied anthropologist and as CODAE's (Afro-Ecuadorian Development Cooperation) executive secretary and is originally from Chota. His brother Oscar Chalá was Ecuadorian ambassador in Venezuela.

<sup>35</sup> I have chosen to use Doña rather than Mrs., for I find this translation does not give an exact impression of the local word use.

<sup>36</sup> Dona Olivia is an elderly lady, farmer and actively involved in community work. FECONIC meeting, 9 February 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Olga Palacios, attending *Aroma Caliente* meeting in Juncal and informal conversation in her house, 24 and 31 March 2014.

<sup>38</sup> Olga Palacios, short interview in the cultural centre in Juncal, 7 April 2014.

often moved away and obtained individual benefits only, forgetting their heritage and need to support the communities their ancestors were born in.

In terms of goals and decision making I noticed a similar concern. The meeting ended with the conclusion that a network would be formed, rather than asking if all agreed on this. Political consciousness and representation is minimal and many cultural promoters stated younger generations did not fill that gap either. *“Only recently has Liseth entered as president in CONAMUNE, but the rest of the team has been present almost since the beginning!”*<sup>39</sup> Renán Tadeo<sup>40</sup> emphasized the need to unite in order to be heard (inter)nationally. *New visions have to come from the youth. Also for political candidates to find broad support.* Not only should youth make a firmer stance, they should also show this to the authorities, those working in or outside the territory. This was also heard regularly during youth network meetings: *“We have the capacity to say that we agree or not. It is now time that they give us a space.”*<sup>41</sup> While Iliana makes a firm fist, beating into her own hand: *“It is time to intrude these spaces. Now we know that it is our space as well”*.

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<sup>39</sup> Theresa Calderon, World Doctors meeting on ancestral knowledge and medical plants, Chota, 26 February 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Renán Tadeo at FECONIC meeting, 9 February 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Diego Palacios Ocles, initiator *Yoruba a todo color*, youth Group in Juncal. Gathering in Juncal’s cultural house, 30 March 2014.

# Soy... caminando hacia adentro

(Mr. Chalá feat Diggy Nagó)<sup>42</sup>

Soy África desde la madre hasta la madre

De los hijos de los padres de los abuelos y nietos, de los ancestros Víctimas de un secuestro que la ley y policía no han podido (querido) resolver

Han pasao' quinientos años y se archiva el caso no es que sea un fracaso porque soy

Yoruba del Ubuntu soy Ubuntu del bantú tengo axe y soy ashente de los Congo soy de allí Chalá Anangón soy Mina Carabalí.

Soy de África perdido en este país Que a raíz de mi llegada le entregue mi corazón le entregue mi alma aunque con la desilusión de la discriminación, De un imaginario que denomine racismo

De sangre derrama' y de cierto conformismo De una torre social que me condena a pasar hambre Y a pesar de todo pana yo soy de Coangue soy del río, Soy del sol, de calenturas malignas Soy de Esmeraldas y lucho por la vida digna.

Soy creyente curandero cuidao' por los Orishas saco males de los cuerpos sembrando buena semilla, bailo sonriendo bailo como matamba caramba dios a dios que me voy caramba

Traje en mi mente mi bomba y mi marimba conservo intacta mi memoria colectiva los cuentos de los abuelos y hasta mi forma de habla tengo raíz africana

aquí soy Salomón Chalá. Aquí yo soy Juan García, Marabú y Papa Roncón soy Alonso de Illescas, soy Martina, soy Antón yo soy Sixto Chalá, Juan Ocles y Rubén Congo soy Afroecuadoriano, identidad que yo propongo.

Yo soy Afroecuadoriano

Y soy este negro que vos te inventaste. Este negro que come carne, chupa sangre. Este negro Multi imaginario

Yo soy Afroecuadoriano con cultura, con educación

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<sup>42</sup> Juan Chalá and Diego Palacios. I got their permission to use this song in my thesis. They were important, influential members in Juncal's youth organization *Yoruba a todo color*. In the following empirical chapter they will be presented further. I have used this song to illustrate the diverse identity and the importance of ancestral history and proud with which they sing about this rich culture.

# UBUNTU: I AM BECAUSE WE ARE

In this chapter the meeting of the regional youth network<sup>43</sup> in Caldera will be described. Firstly the youth network set up is connected to my theoretical framework on neoliberalism and governmentality to provide some background. Secondly the differences and similarities compared to other regional organizations will be mentioned. Therby focussing on organizational structure. In the following paragraph the youth's focus on identity through recapturing 'their' culture and ancestral history will be illustrated. All points are illustrated through additional methods to place the description in a broader perspective and highlight the (efforts to enable) processes of identity formation and representation.

## Background

When I ask Juan Chalá<sup>44</sup>, why there are so many organizations in the region he touches upon my theoretical framework. He explains that structural governmental help is lacking and that therefor they, as Afro-Choteños, are forced to look for alternative means to organize themselves. Also to try and realize structural change in terms of income generation in the valley in order to be able to develop the region. Both he and members of all regional organizations, call it “*ancestral territory*”. This relates to the fact that this region has a shared history of slavery and *haciendas* on which enslaved people worked, and families have lived together for generations.

*“Our youth network has revaluation and recognition of that what they have taken from us and what we have forgotten about our ancestors, Africa, as its main objectives. The only way in which we could educate ourselves was through Catholicism. And little by little we would like to rediscover what they have taken away from us, but also to make people more consciousness of the need to organize ourselves to gain a voice, politically.”<sup>45</sup>*

The initial aim of the network was to reach young people and improve regional development. During the interviews and gatherings with youth, the theme of culture and ancestral heritage was always emphasized. Both in terms of representation, the

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<sup>43</sup> Officially called *Red de jóvenes*

<sup>44</sup> Juan Chalá, one of the initiators of the network and almost a graduated physical education student

<sup>45</sup> Juan Chalá, member of *Yoruba a todo color*, informal conversation/interview as we were walking through Ibarra, 17 February 2014. We accidentally met each other as we stepped out of the bus coming from Changuayacu.

name of the organization used, and the activities planned. Those involved always emphasized the need for all of it to come from the self, not imposed from outside. It was regularly mentioned that people from outside the Chota valley would depict their activity and language use as weird, negative, and that therefore it was even more necessary to hold on to this local, unique accent and word use that characterized the (young) locals.

## **Setting**

The community house overlooking the main square will be today's site, where Caldera will probably unite itself with the already existing youth network in the Chota and Mira valley. The one-story building has a corrugated iron roof, upheld by a red painted iron construction. The concrete walls once would have been painted in a colourful yellow. Today both the walls and big cement tiles on the floor are covered in dust. Alongside both walls, a reddish stone bench stretches across the length of the building. Light comes in through a few high windows. Beer cans and bottles cover the stone benches, beer caps lie across the floor and two big amplifiers show this building must have been used for some kind of celebration. Robert<sup>46</sup> says that indeed there was a party on last night. Since those who have arrived already feel like doing something, neighbours are asked for a broom and plastic bags so that the place will be a little cleaner before the rest of the group comes in.

Little by little the communal house changes from this odd, slightly dark and dusty place into a more lively and colourful space. *"We have gathered here with you guys to look into our wish and possibilities to join the youth network,"* says Robert. Those who have taken place on the benches are mostly teenage girls, some have brought their little child or cousin along, who occasionally run around, distracting and amusing those who intended to listen.

## **Collective identity: organization and inspiration**

Iliana<sup>47</sup> gives an example of their way of working with other organizations. She proudly tells the youngsters in Caldera how their organization has already become an organization referred to often as exemplary in terms of structure and focus. They

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<sup>46</sup> Robert Delgado is the coordinator of the local youth network in Caldera.

<sup>47</sup> Iliana Carabalí was one of the initiators of the local youth group *Jarid* in Chota. She studies tourism and is contracted by PRODECI for a project on Identity promotion.

might agree to work together with other organizations but only from their own point of view and their focus: *“For example if we were to do a workshop on one’s identity but I brought around a mestizo and he talks about identity, interculturalism, but from the dominant point of view. No, I do not want people to continue feeling dominated. A workshop like that is not for us. We want to do it in the correct way and from the point of view of our necessities. We give a pioneering proposal, ‘cimarrona’<sup>48</sup> one could say.”<sup>49</sup>* Iliana talks about the objectives of the youth network. So far they have been to several communities and looked into alternative approaches they use to reach youth, and to learn from them and stay in contact. Many people in the room look slightly lost when she sums up the different communities that make up the territory and she herself needs Juan to help her with the names of some of them. Getting to know the different communities has also been one of the objects of the network. *“And it is not like some people in Ibarra for example say: ‘these people are like...whatever...like that...’But I come here and see active people, who want to work! These are completely different things to what they say (about us). That is part of our work: getting to know the reality in all communities, not leaving out anyone.[...] ‘Diego said we can also do it in the river. For us four walls does not mean anything. If we gather in the river, even better, because we there we directly experience nature. In that way we can get even closer to our ancestry, through our Gods’”, states Iliana*

Their aim is to reach people, make them conscious. Rather than implementing things top down, they promoted a bottom-up approach. They stated they focused on the local situation and looked into things or structures needed, from the point of view of the very people involved or affected. Even though they consider themselves independent, inspiration about organizing oneself or choosing a focus is sometimes inspired by former or current projects that other organizations in the region like PRODECI or FECONIC have on. Even though the network was initiated due to bigger international and national processes like the CUPA, their aim is to reach even the most isolated community and to organize a meeting there, rather than asking people to travel to another location. Rather than the hierarchical structure with president and secretary, the network intends to have a more horizontal structure. All

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<sup>48</sup> I have decided to maintain the spanish word *Cimarron(a)* rather than the English translation *runaway slave* as for me runaway slave does not cover it’s rebel/free fought character that those people I have spoken to have wanted to emphasize when using the word.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Iliana Carabalí Méndez, in their living room in Chota, 21 February 2014.



youth groups that make up the network have a local contact person or representative. These are people “*who have the capacity to give their opinion, to decide and to propose initiatives.*”<sup>50</sup> Together with the different coordinators or representatives the theme of the reunion is decided upon.

Whereas some members and people who joined meetings in CONAMUNE and FECONIC consider the youth not active enough and unappreciative of the struggle their grandparents went through, FECONIC’s president, Salomon Acosta, is very fond of the youth organization. José Chalá Cruz also supports their efforts but told me that the youth sometimes wants to “[...] ‘run’, they want to reach it all in one go, quickly. They do not always realize that not all can be changed that quickly, only little by little, step by step. But young people are often idealistic and it is good that they intend to move forward.”<sup>51</sup>

Iliana presumes that people from outside see Afro-Ecuadorians as people who are not very active and organized. The use of ‘us’ and ‘depiction by others’ is often used within the different meetings I attended, both amongst youth groups and other organizations. Besides a different organizational structure, main members of the network emphasize that the organization brings forward the need to include the perspective of youngsters, which can be different from adults and elderly people involved in the regional organizations. Iliana tries to get those present involved by stating that they as youth do not like total formality, as opposed to other organizations in the area. The predominant organizational structures are those in which meetings are formal and all sit and listen on chairs, set up in rows, in order to face and listen to the spokesperson. Iliana and Juan tried all youth to realise how they were consciously not formal but wanted to approach those present in a more relaxed and all inclusive way. This inclusion did not have to take place in a formal way in which all are present, sitting on comfortable seats. The fact that the floor was dusty and the seats unclean was not to change anything

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Iliana Carabalí Méndez, in their living room in Chota, 21 February 2014.

<sup>51</sup> José Chalá Cruz is currently working as the executive secretary for CODAE (Cooperation for Afro-Ecuadorian Development). This is the department set up by the government. Information obtained during a telephone call in April 2014.

## Capturing ancestral culture

Diego<sup>52</sup> takes the floor and emphasizes that they have come here today as members of the youth network, as Afro-Ecuadorians. *“They call us savages, life and death is not separated for us. They call us subculture[...].”* Diego starts off by introducing the African roots of these young people. He regrets that so much of the culture was lost, right from the start, right as they arrived in Ecuador. Especially since knowledge was mostly transmitted orally by the elderly and the majority of the people who were enslaved were young. However the surnames indeed have been preserved and refer to our ancestral roots. *“We are all brothers of cimarrona. Collectively they have done this harm to us. We have started to recapture this history and to unite ourselves”.*

This emphasis on collective identity and the need to unite has been proclaimed in many occasions that I was part of, both during the youth gatherings and in other local organizations. Diego clearly can continue this dedication and conviction for hours but his intent was to awaken the collective spirit and to get those present to start thinking about this shared past. The importance of African Gods that Diego and Iliana touch upon is widespread in the valley. This is one aspect of Afro-Ecuadorian culture, which many said should not be lost and always be salient. Within all organizations in the valley this was very much present and used to unite people as a means to create a collective identity to be proud of, sometimes as related to the position of “the Other(s)” also. This is illustrated by the focus on culture that Iliana stresses in her talk: *“As afro descendents we have loads of aspects that make us authentic, unique. And we should never leave that aside. Even more so if we decide to move to another place [...]. We will always be from Caldera. And that should not make us feel pity. We should be proud of where we are from. It should not be a heavy load we carry on our shoulders.”*

Iliana makes this conviction more personal for those present, by giving the example of being from Caldera. The collective identity and ancestral roots are something that all active members agree upon. It was through this talk that she referred back to the importance of realizing where one is from, both by acknowledging the uniqueness of

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<sup>52</sup> Diego Palacios Ocles is one of the initiators of the youth Group *Yoruba a todo color* in Juncal. He is an active member, besides his public policy studies in Quito and the rap songs he composes in his spare time.

one's culture and territory as related to ancestors. She did so by referring to the slavery history and ancestral and current values in the valley. The loss of ancestry in music and dance groups was also mentioned in CONAMUNE and PRODECI meetings. Youth's ignorance was caused by 'garbage' provided by the media, schools and the church that empty its content of culture.

Aside from individuals who took up their own research in discovery of their cultural heritage and the different African gods, the theme was also touched upon in the ethno-education books at the high school in Carpuela. A ritual of earth, water and fire was held at the initiation of the CONAMUNE meeting<sup>53</sup> as well, related to the Orishas. Theresa Calderon<sup>54</sup> walked across the room with a small container filled with soil: "*it is here that I present to you the ancestral territory, witness of the afro descendants' struggles.*" Gloria<sup>55</sup> follows: "*Water helps our fruits grow, and purifies our ancestral land.*" Zoila Espinoza<sup>56</sup> stated that *the Orishas point towards the need to work for one's fellowmen, as a mission. Through that we reached a level of consciousness, we created knowledge amongst ourselves.*" The ancestral history and unique culture was to be emphasized. Not only by those organizations already formed. Simultaneously the very youth that had inherited this richness was to represent itself, rather than being represented by adults. "*The cultural revitalization of historic collective memory, is an imperative for Afro-Ecuadorians, in our fight to construct our identity process, our socio-political rhetorics, and express our own voice through revitalization.*" (Chalá 2007:246).

## **(Re)creating a collective identity**

While Iliana, Diego and Juan talk about the birth of the network and its main activities more people walk in. Some stand by the door as if they are curious to see what is going on but too shy to join. "*Come on in, sit down*". Some walk in quietly and shyly sit on the sofa at the furthest end of the room. As she explains how important it is to let one's voice be heard she asks whether anyone can guess why they have called the organization *i Alas ponete pilas!* (come on guys!). *Has anyone ever heard the word 'alas'? Who hasn't, right? That is something very much ours. It is*

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<sup>53</sup> CONAMUNE meeting in the coliseum in Chota, 08-02-2014.

<sup>54</sup> Theresa is a well-known and appreciated community worker involved in many social initiatives, both with CONAMUNE as well as pastoral work and medical plants.

<sup>55</sup> Gloria is a member of CONAMUNE's management board.

<sup>56</sup> Zoila Espinoza comments during PRODECI meeting described in former chapter.

*part of our stubbornness.* This name was chosen to gain attention and to get people to become involved in a relaxed way. Not by asking people to join and sit down in a formal way but in a playful manner and by using words that are commonly used by young Afro-Choteños.

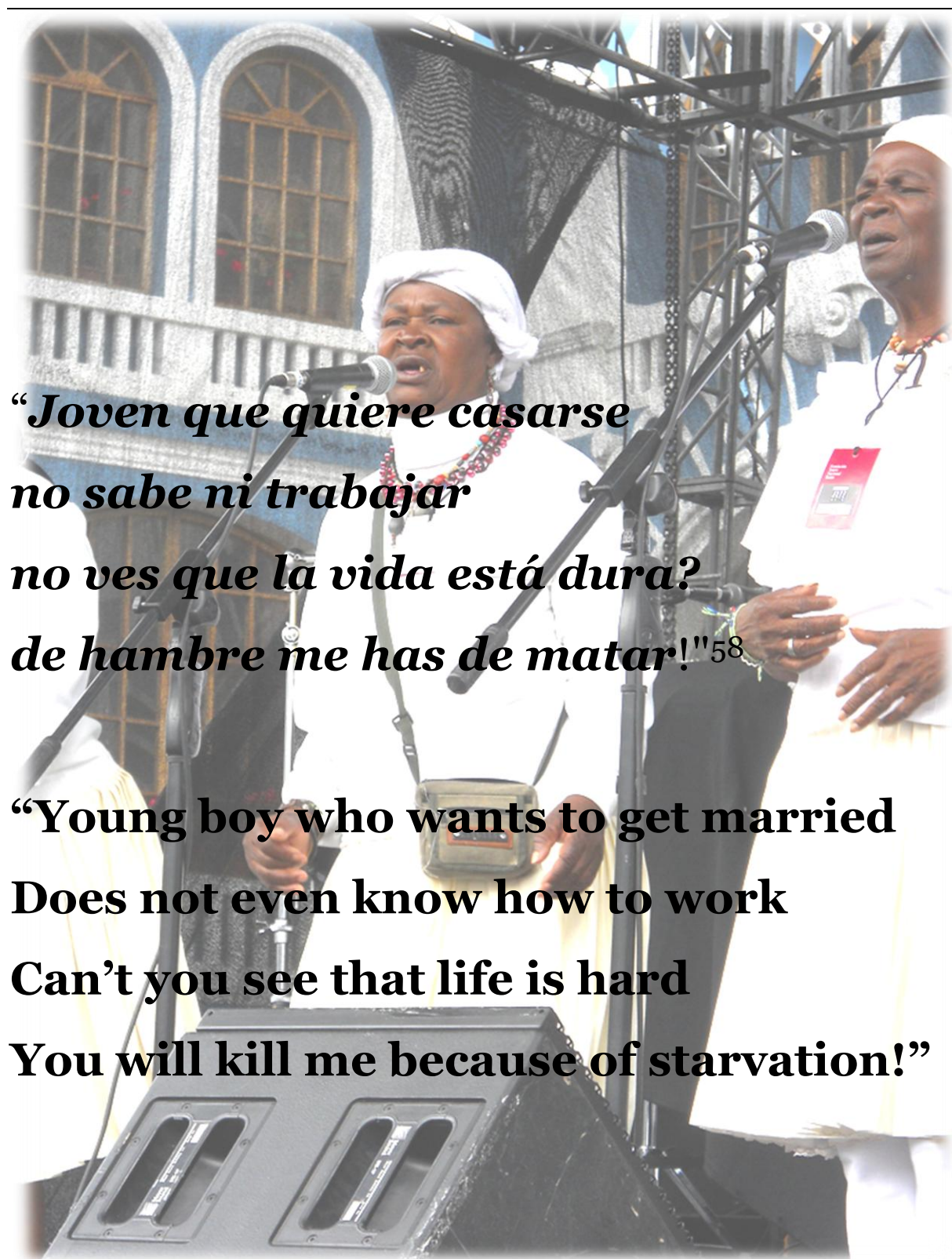
*And what does being Afro-Ecuadorian mean to you?* asks Iliana as she looks around the room. Everyone stares at her but seems too shy to say something, or not sure what to respond. She states that maybe she had been talking for too long and had not created a space for people to feel at ease yet to speak up and give their opinion. In other meetings I attended people had been a little more talkative. Some state the bomba and dance characterize them. Others point towards soccer or the way the guys dye their hair. Little by little members emphasize how broad their cultural characteristics are, more extensive than dance and soccer. To get people to relax more and get to know each other in a fun way Iliana and Juan introduce a game they often play during meetings. Everyone has to get up and form couples, while standing in a big circle. Connected at the elbows all have to simultaneously circle around their partner while moving their feet, singing “*One step here and one step there, it’s just one step..*” . Then repeating the words while circling in the opposite direction. *Lala lalalalá, hé!, lala lalalalaláh hé!* Finally all have to quickly move over to the next person in line and start all over again. First slightly hesitant but ultimately joyful and free from fear, girls and boys start running in circles more quickly. Few people leave and halfway through the game a few guys who had been sitting down quietly, not actively participating but just observing, have clearly changed their facial expression from shy and serious to rather amused and willing to jump around too. It was this playful and inclusive atmosphere that the youth network had hoped to create. Having told what activities and focus points they hoped to keep up, it was now up to Robert and the rest of the youngsters from Caldera to decide whether they would like to join and spread the word.

Apart from the above mentioned games, an important aspect to get people involved in the youth groups was the use of campfires, which formerly were an important place for the passing on of knowledge orally. Grandparents would tell stories around the fire while all present listened. This reference to ancestors and the power of fire and connection with the African Gods is used to strengthen the youth groups. Through

these gatherings a relaxed, open atmosphere is created in which all can take their part and through which in a subtle but strong way, ancestral connections can be made and felt. The use of these campfires is an important icon to work on the theme of identity. In this way Iliana, Diego and Juan said they hoped to get the youth to become accustomed to these different Gods. What I noticed was the recapturing of ancestral history, rituals and symbols. Simultaneously as they depicted some outside influences by which traditional cultural aspects were lost or underappreciated they used internet to discover their 'lost' history and culture. Thereby they sometimes used names and symbols they had never heard about and would not always know the background of. *"Often we leave out what characterizes us, sometimes because we do not know what cultural aspects are valuable or what they even are".*<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Juan Chalá, member of *Yoruba a todo color*, informal conversation/interview as we were walking through Ibarra, 17 February 2014. We accidentally met each other as we stepped out of the bus coming from Chaguayacu.



***“Joven que quiere casarse  
no sabe ni trabajar  
no ves que la vida está dura?  
de hambre me has de matar!”<sup>58</sup>***

**“Young boy who wants to get married  
Does not even know how to work  
Can’t you see that life is hard  
You will kill me because of starvation!”**

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<sup>58</sup> *Amorfino* (romantic poetry containing daily life’s issues) cited by Gloria during one of *The Three Maria’s* performances

© Picture of Gloria(L) and Maria Magdalena (R) during their performance as *The Three Marias* in Quito, in March 2014. Picture was taken by the author.

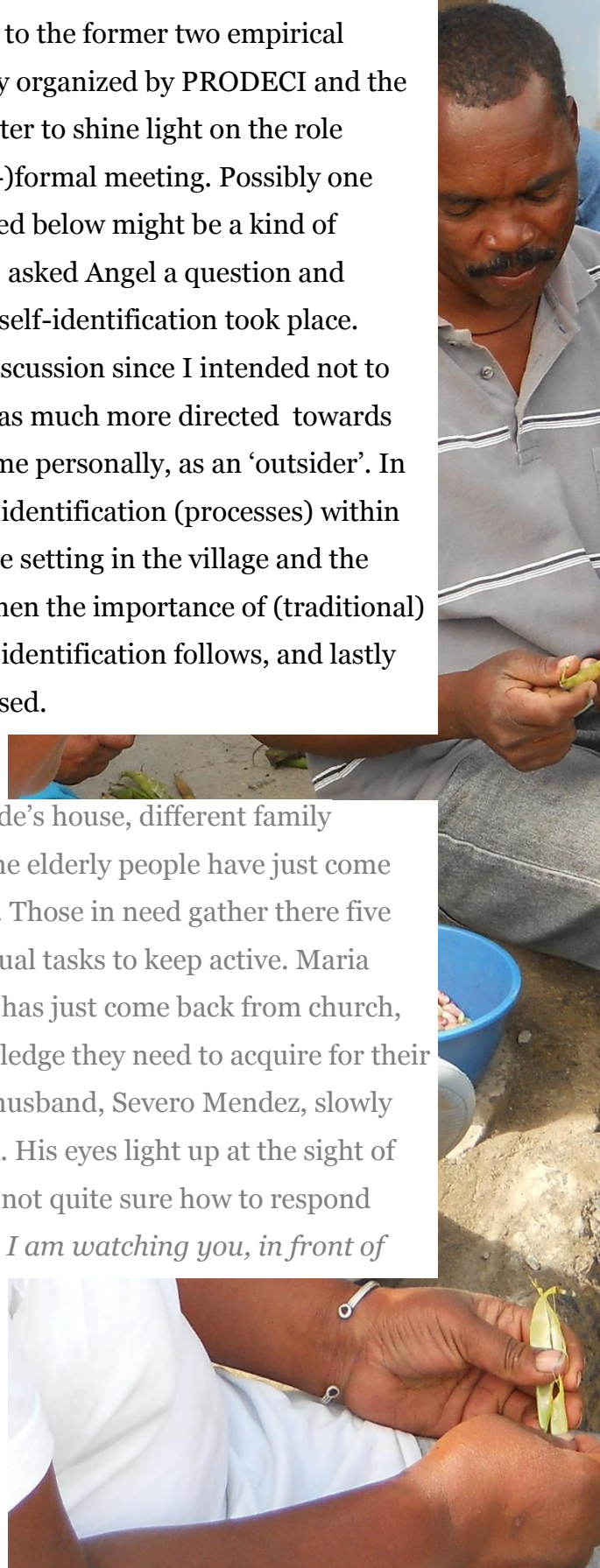
# IDENTIFY YOURSELF



In this last empirical chapter I will describe a ‘regular’ day in Chalguyacu, whereby I focus on identity formation at a local level, and take into account the different perceptions of those I sat around with. As opposed to the former two empirical chapters in which the ‘event’ described was actually organized by PRODECI and the youth network respectively, I wanted this last chapter to shine light on the role identity plays on a day to day basis outside any (in-)formal meeting. Possibly one could state that part of the situation I have described below might be a kind of ‘intervention’ from my side, as an anthropologist. I asked Angel a question and subsequently a discussion on the 2010 census and self-identification took place. However, I would not consider this as a directed discussion since I intended not to interfere too much during the discussion. Also it was much more directed towards members present rather than a specific answer to me personally, as an ‘outsider’. In the situation described I want to draw attention to identification (processes) within Chalguyacu. The main focus points thereby are the setting in the village and the (atmosphere of) social gatherings and greetings. Then the importance of (traditional) music is described. A paragraph on (ethnic/racial) identification follows, and lastly identification with the land is illustrated and analysed.

## Setting

As Rosa and Gloria peel *guandules*<sup>59</sup> outside Matilde’s house, different family members and neighbours sit down beside them. The elderly people have just come back from the auditorium further down the village. Those in need gather there five times a week to get lunch and work on simple manual tasks to keep active. Maria Magdalena, settles herself on the stone bench. She has just come back from church, where she teaches thirteen- year- olds all the knowledge they need to acquire for their first communion. While she lights a cigarette, her husband, Severo Mendez, slowly but steadily walks up the hill with his walking stick. His eyes light up at the sight of his new granddaughter he has just met. And she is not quite sure how to respond when he dedicates an *amorfino* to her. “From here I am watching you, in front of



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<sup>59</sup> Guandul or pigeon peas are typical of the valley and eaten often.

*one another, face to face, without being able to diminish what my heart feels.” As I get slight blushes on my cheeks everybody starts to laugh.*

The telling of these ‘*amorfinos*’ is something done regularly. It is romantic poetry which involves joys and daily habits and is often recited out loud as a means to grab someone’s attention, to entertain people or, as a mean for couples to strive for one another. Gloria does it whenever trying to animate the public in between songs while performing as *The Three Marias*, together with her sisters Maria Magdalena and Rosa. This bench in front of the house seems to be a perfect spot to stop, relax and have a chat after a day’s work when people are on their way home. It is a spot to socialise, gossip and get an up-date on all happenings in the village. Rosa’s house, which serves as a selling point for ‘*punta*’<sup>60</sup> and cigarettes, is just opposite. Those who want to buy a cigarette do sometimes join those relaxing on the bench. All who pass by are greeted. Children are expected to greet their grandparents, aunts and uncles with ‘*la bendicion*’ (the blessing). After which they respond: “*may God bless you*”. This is such an automatic greeting that those who forget are looked down upon for not showing respect to their family members.

### **Local identity: music**

Rosa and her sons regularly occupy the bench, after having watered the capsicums, to relax while enjoying another ‘*punta*’. Tomas<sup>61</sup>, alias ‘*pura crema*’, puts on the newest CD of his mother and his aunts, *The Three Marias*. As the sounds of the bomba and ‘*güiro*’<sup>62</sup> mix with their voices, Gloria starts to sing along.” *The ripe pineapple, get up to get it, the thick pineapple juice is ready to make alcohol from[...]*”

*The Three Marias* have only become a legally recognised music group around 2005 and occasionally perform together with Zoila. “*Our father, Luis Pavón, was the initiator of the Banda Mocha and has always taught us to sing*”<sup>63</sup>, explains Maria Magdalena as we sit in her daughter’s kitchen. They sing popular songs and resistance songs related to the slavery period whereby Gloria is the clarinet, Rosa the trumpet and Magdalena the bass. They have become more famous thanks to cultural promoter Limberg Valencia, who took them as far as Cali, Colombia. “*Those who saw us performing there were so enthusiastic. They identified with us. One woman*

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<sup>60</sup> *Punta* is the local popular strong alcoholic drink made of sugarcane.

<sup>61</sup> Tomas is a member of the Three Marias and plays the orange leaf. He is one of Rosa’s sons.

<sup>62</sup> Musical instrument, rectangular shaped and made of metal or wood. Notches along the side which are scraped across with a stick to produce a warm sound.

<sup>63</sup> Informal conversation in Chalguayacu, February 2014.



*called me 'her sister'! They are descendants from slaves too and they looked just like us you know.”<sup>64</sup>*

Santiago explains how the bomba musical rhythm was brought from Africa, as ancestral knowledge. *“But the instruments were not brought along, so these were eventually made here in Ecuador.”<sup>65</sup> “And dancing with the bottle on her head was also typical [during the slavery period]. One was not supposed to spoil anything.”*

As we drive back from the musical performance in Quito, Zoila Espinoza<sup>66</sup> enthusiastically talks about dancing the bomba with a bottle. The one who danced with it on her head had an important position. She was in power in the sense that she decided who could drink and gave those a sip out of the cup she held in her apron.

*“We want to maintain the culture here in Chalguayacu, we have to fight and preserve. The music brings joy to the body, spirit and soul. It expresses one’s happiness, one’s state of being.”<sup>67</sup>* Recently, interest in other types of music has also grown. Isidro Minda, one of the ‘heads’ of the band, tells me that music groups from outside the village are invited to local festivities and events, where amplifiers are used and they can play for hours on end. The Banda Mocha consists of elderly men who cannot stand up for hours (with their heavy instruments) and *“who have to use the power of their proper lungs”<sup>68</sup>*. The Banda Mocha of Chalguayacu, which consists solely of men, has existed for over a hundred-and-twenty years. Many members were taught how to play their handmade instruments by their father. The current problem is that most members are between sixty and eighty years old and there is therefore a risk that the band may no longer exist in the near future. Some former band members have already passed away and the younger generation is not always interested in or willing to join the band. Many people in the village consider it a loss of ancestral history and traditions if the band were to discontinue. *The Banda Mocha San Miguel of Chalguayacu* is the only music group in the Chota valley that holds true to the name *“Banda Mocha”*, which means a band that uses instruments made out of natural plants and fruits native to the region. They do not use amplifiers but the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibidem

<sup>65</sup> Santiago Mendez, plays the ‘bombo’ in the *Three Maria’s*. Youngest son of Matilde Mendez. Informal conversation in the bus from Ibarra to Chalguayacu where we coincidentally met, 27 March 2014.

<sup>66</sup> Zoila Espinoza, bomba ‘queen’, who is well known all over the country for her young and enthusiastic character and great bomba dancing. Informal conversation and singing as we drive back from Quito, 24 March 2014.

<sup>67</sup> Isidro Minda, member of the Banda Mocha San Miguel Chalguayacu, informal conversation in front of his house, overlooking the main square, Chalguayacu, 22 February 2014.

<sup>68</sup> ibidem

natural sound and volume of the instruments. Isidro Minda, states that in Chota and Caldera some instruments like the guitar, trumpet and clarinet have been introduced, which he considers more like military bands. They continue to use the ‘*bombo*’ made out of goat’s skin and wood; ‘*el puro*’ made from a vegetable similar to the calabash; the leaf of the orange or lemon tree as a flute.

Apart from this loss of musical heritage in terms of cultural expression, the representation of music and dance groups has been towards an external audience, according to people who attended the PRODECI meeting. These cultural groups are said to have lost their connection with their (ancestral) history. Members wear miniskirts of which the only purpose is to satisfy the audience, no longer truly in touch with the African heritage. Many people attending this meeting agreed that contemporary music groups have also seen a loss in ancestral roots. “*Original music and rhythms have been influenced externally, firstly by the introduction of other instruments but also by a mixture with salsa, son and even reggaeton rhythms. Reggaeton music combined with the sounds of the ‘bombo’ is no longer autochthonous.*”<sup>69</sup>

### **Ethnic/Racial Identification**

One of Rosa's sons, Angel, wears a t-shirt with the text ‘*Family, identify yourself, proudly, as Afro-Ecuadorian.*’ I suspect this is related to the 2010 census in which people could finally identify themselves as Afro-Ecuadorians. I ask him where he got it. “*I do not know, they gave it to me, they just gave it to me as a present, that’s all.*” He, like some others I have met in the village, sometimes seem not completely conscious of what they are wearing or at least not wearing it with a strict purpose. Flavio, Gloria’s husband and a member of the Banda Mocha, is wearing a t-shirt with ‘*All, All 35*’<sup>70</sup>. He does not seem to wear it because he necessarily agrees. Instead he states he is wearing it because he was given the t-shirt.

My question seems to have sparked a discussion, since everyone present starts debating the words written on the Angel’s t-shirt. Tomas says “*I identify myself as black and Ecuadorian, and that’s that!*”<sup>71</sup>. Angel and my host mother Matilde say

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<sup>69</sup> Iliana Carabali, as she sums up the conclusion of the last PRODECI meeting, during the second meeting in Juncal, 2014.

<sup>70</sup> Not completely like the nicer Spanish *Todo, todito 35*. A t-shirt from the president’s political party, used in these political campaigns.

<sup>71</sup> Translated from “*Yo me identifico como negro y ecuatoriano, y punto.*”

that the t-shirt is about identifying themselves as Afro-Ecuadorians. Magdalena is ill and has been sitting quietly with her head bent, facing downwards. Since she is rather deaf it seemed as if she had not picked up the whole conversation, but suddenly she interrupts: “*We can no longer say ‘morenos’, no, we are black people*”. Nobody seems to have been listening to her. Eduardo Rea directs his attention to me:

*“ I am from the black race, and you are from the white race, the pure race like we say. And still racism exists, but far less than before. And we are fighting like our ancestors used to do, to obtain more land from the landowner up on the mountain there. And so that those from Pimampiro don’t take our water supplies. Sometimes we have no running water for days.”*

Paula Anabilen drops in “*They have taught me that we are not to say race, because race is something used for dogs. We should not say that we are from the black race. We are Afro-Ecuadorians.*”

When talking in a hierarchy of races, Eduardo Rea himself is reproducing the discourse on hierarchical differences and the existence of race. I find it hard to react to this, since this is a discourse stuck in the mind, reified, that I will not be able to change quickly. This is present amongst many other members in the village; since they have been taught this dominant discourse for generations some are convinced this discourse is reality. The 2010 census was the first in which people could identify themselves as Afro-Ecuadorians. Through a campaign, initiated in cooperation with CODAE, it was stimulated to identify as such. Since only recently Afro-Ecuadorian has been recognized as a separate identity, many villagers still call themselves ‘negros’<sup>72</sup>. Some do so because they are not conscious of ethnicity and the census, others are conscious but have always called themselves ‘negro’ and see no need in changing that. Many said they felt “*negro*”. *And why change that if I feel that way? It is only of concern in what way the word is used. Often it is used in an affectionate way, but it could also be used in a negative way, being discriminating*”, says Flavio.<sup>73</sup>

*“Being Afro-Ecuadorian I identify myself as yet another black person. With the thought of having to be sociable and honest with people. A community does not*

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<sup>72</sup> Black people

*have to be backward because of social reasons, having faith and with the will of God develop the village. The community has to have sweat on its forehead in order to achieve something, with integrity and honesty, like I have learnt from my parents. My mother was proud to be a black person. From one's birth day God holds one tight but does not let us suffocate.”<sup>74</sup>*

### **Local identity then and now: territory**

*“In 1945 the hacienda was abandoned and people started to work their own land. But rather than getting a piece of land for free, they had to pay for it! Those with the most money got the best pieces. The land division took place stupidly and blindly!”,* says Severo Mendez as he beats his stick firmly onto the ground. Others sitting on the bench overlooking the village make a confirming humming sound as a sign of agreement. *“But the people here are fighters, they want to advance, all are like that”,* says former president of the community of Chalguayacu-Juncal, José Congo Garcia.

During an interview his brother, Edwin Congo had a similar opinion: *“Chalguayacu has changed because of the exigencies of the village rather than by reclaiming our rights through politics. Who knows how long they will let us live in marginality.”*

While watching a cartoon, Julian García tells me how the slavery history still has its influence. Slaves had come from the hacienda in Pimampiro. Chota was the first village which claimed independence and consisted of ‘*cimarronas*. After the Agricultural Reforms in 1964 Julian's grandfather Manuel García Pozo had been an important player in the division of land in Chalguayacu, because he stimulated inhabitants to unite. Both Julian García, Iben Santos<sup>75</sup> and Segundo Severo told me that those in Chalguayacu did not have the money to buy the land. Those in Chota were more advanced, had been working in the sugar factory *El Ingenio* and had gained a stable income. The land division took place in which mostly those in Juncal sold the land to those who paid the most (and thus received the best pieces of land) and they let people from outside the region buy land also. Marcelino Santos agrees that Chota is more prepared. *“Others use the village in a corrupt way, taking the money to the cities, far from their land, working with politicians.”*

<sup>74</sup> Interview Edwin Congo García, in his living room in Chalguayacu, 28 March 2014.

<sup>75</sup>Iben Santos is the current president of Chalguayacu-Juncal, interview at night in his courtyard, 11 April 2014.

Bolivio Congo<sup>76</sup>, spokesperson from ATACH<sup>77</sup>, explains that they have been an organization for over twenty years. For six years they have been able to work part of the land that belongs to the 'hacienda'. *“But we have not managed to buy the land yet[...]. The owner is very powerful, he has a lot of money and it is a lot of paperwork...”* Whereas Julian is a member of ATACH too and had worked for an agricultural organization (FECONIN) formerly, he did not continue working for them since people were corrupt and products were being stolen. *“Also because the project leaders were Spanish and I refuse to ever again work for them. They enslaved us and now they were doing the same thing again with their projects!”* He insisted that he would never work for anyone again and preferred to work the land by himself.

In contrast Carlos<sup>78</sup> states that nowadays people no longer appreciate the land they have inherited, *“they no longer have a strong connection with nature. Many have migrated to the cities and have sold their terrains.”* Gloria and Maria, like many other women in the village, emphasize their relation to the land and the dependence on agricultural products. Many times a week they harvest fruit and vegetables to sell on the markets in Otavalo, Ibarra and Quito. With little means of generating an income, agricultural products remain a needed means of survival for many and the elder generation has personally been involved in the land division and have obtained their part. Most elderly people hoped the younger generation would learn to appreciate the land they had fought for.

*“My parents lived in a dark world, if they<sup>79</sup> can no longer hear us we should scream out louder. We should move onto the streets and make our claims as agriculturiers. If we do not (re)claim, nothing will happen. I have learnt this for thirty years already, from TV, from politics.”<sup>80</sup>*

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<sup>76</sup> Informal conversation outside his house, Chalguyacu, 14 February 2014.

<sup>77</sup> ATACH stands for *Autochthonous' Workers Association in Chalguyacu*.

<sup>78</sup> Carlos lives in Juncal and Works as a farmer on land he both inherited and bought. Informal conversation on his land, 29 March 2014.

<sup>79</sup> They refers to politicians

<sup>80</sup> Interview Edwin Congo García, in his living room in Chalguyacu, 28 march 2014. Interview Edwin Congo, in his living room in Chalguyacu,

## Conclusion

Neoliberal worldwide trends have made their way to the dusty streets of Chalguyacu. A place that might not exist on Google maps but bustles with identity processes trying to become more visible. The definition of Afro-Ecuadorians as a separate social category in the 2008 constitution has enabled a louder scream for attention and recognition (Ng'weno 2007 and Sanchez 2008). Neoliberal governmentality has resulted in local initiatives and governmental changes towards recognition of cultural citizenship. But this gain 'on paper' is to become worked out in practice, according to local expectations I encountered in the field. Many Choteños claim to have a dream that they will be known by their collective identity whose most important characteristics are ancestral history; oral traditions and musical performances, as well as a strong relationship with the land that makes up the *ancestral territory* of Chota, Salinas and Guallupe.

Apart from recognition of a shared past and present, the locally created collective identity is in need of being recognized nationwide and beyond, according to local people I interviewed. Thereby co-creating and co-constructing identities. Afro-Ecuadorians are involved in the process of becoming included, in a nation that does not always uphold its promise to be multicultural and plurinational. The possibility to make cultural claims on the basis of 'legally' being a separate social category has shifted power relations, however. Neoliberal governmentality has enabled a negotiation of citizenship. Politically active Afro-Ecuadorians have unravelled the hegemonic discourse of the Ecuadorian state. Subsequently these actors have proposed to mould the discourse for their own benefit, backed up by the constitution and laws protecting collective rights of Choteños alongside indigenous people within the country. Hegemonic discourses are being contested and unravelled publicly on a local level as well, in order for inhabitants of the Chota valley to become more conscious of their negotiation possibilities. All Afro-Ecuadorians were to "[...] *make a strong fist in order to reach power, to come out of [...] marginalization*".<sup>81</sup> Thereby the role of women can be seen to have changed as well. Some have taken up leading positions and a gradual recognition of the importance and decisive role of women within a community and organization is gradually being recognized by Afrochoteños

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<sup>81</sup> Miguel once was a chosen candidate in the municipality in Esmeraldas. This quote comes from his presence during the PRODECI meeting, described in the first empirical chapter "We have a dream".

as well as local NGO's and government who are characterised by a substantial number of female employees.

According to individuals and regional organizations, cultural citizenship should guarantee collective rights based on cultural difference. But reification of one's culture might sneak in. Just as Abu-Lughod (1991) is trying to convince anthropologists not to analyse culture in such a way, dispersion is captured in a claimed collective identity that 'all' in the region are said to share. Cultural difference itself has indeed become a commodity (Moore 2003 *In* Moore and Sanders 2006:447-448). In practice I noticed that many (political) leaders involved in the Chota valley used a rhetoric in which culture was reified and individual characteristics and needs (of children, teenage mothers, women, agriculturists, etc.) were not considered as important as the collectively and proclaimed ultimate goal. Simultaneously these locally used narratives are imposed on 'all', which are said to be descendants of a rebellious movement that is to make a structural change. Inhabitants not conscious of their history and (negotiation) position either drift along this stream or are left in oblivion.

Besides local initiatives to maintain and create a collective identity, governmental niches and NGO's both influence local perspectives and are being influenced by these very local processes. The regional youth network states that young people would not work together with governments and NGO's, unless they themselves would start from 'their vision' rather than repeating the point of view of 'the Other'. This 'Other' repeats the discourse of *mestizaje*, which through the claiming of "encouraging" cultural and social assimilation obscures racialization. This discourse ignores the fact that all Ecuadorian citizens should be granted the same rights. However governmentally supported organizations working on identity and the strengthening of leadership skills and personal development can also be seen to decide upon the focus. PRODECI, the regional organization with special programmes in the Chota valley, states it will only finance local initiatives that focus on cultural identity and gender in a positive way. The financing of Carnival is neglected since heavy drinking and the subsequent probability of domestic violence are considered serious problems. Yet the independent women's organization *Aroma Caliente* considers selling handicrafts during Carnival as a means to earn some money while promoting one's cultural richness and all the ancestral territory has to offer to the outside world. Many

people in the village considered it a loss of ancestral history and traditions if the local bands and dance groups were to discontinue or use mini-skirts to dance in. Others enjoyed the rhythms of *salsa choque* and *reggaeton* more than the proclaimed autochthonous, acoustic music of *The Banda Mocha San Miguel of Chalguyacu* and the *The Three Marias*.

Amidst multiple initiatives and projects in the region some members focus on Afro-Ecuadorian identity, while others do not hold onto race or ethnicity but their relationship with the land as agriculturists. All however seem to have a dream that the village will change socio-economically. With little means of generating an income, agricultural products remain a needed means of survival for many. Most elderly people hope the younger generation will learn to appreciate the land they have fought for. Some members of the community who have gained important posts are either seen as heroes or depicted by some as not having done enough, having forgotten about 'their' people and been taken up by personal interest only. Chalguyacu was said to have risen from severe marginality thanks to local efforts rather than (solely) political, structural programmes to support the region. "*For someone to really understand the local situation and problems, one has to live and experience the particular community and really make a change, an effort.*"<sup>82</sup>

The importance of realizing where one is from, both by acknowledging the uniqueness of one's culture and territory as related to ancestors is widespread amongst individuals either independent or related to local organizations. "*We are all brothers of 'cimarrona'. Collectively they have done this harm to us. We have started to recapture this history and to unite ourselves*".<sup>83</sup> References to ancestors and the power of fire and connection with the African Gods ('*Orishas*') is seen to strengthen local organizations through campfires. Thereby the presence of these *Orishas* is being felt and the telling of stories by elderly people is encouraged. Zoila Espinoza<sup>84</sup> states that *the Orishas point towards the need to work for one's fellowmen, as a mission*. Through this she states Afro-Ecuadorians have reached a level of consciousness and have created knowledge amongst themselves. The circle of

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<sup>82</sup> Olga Palacios, short interview in the cultural centre in Juncal, 7 April 2014.

<sup>83</sup> Diego Palacios Ocles is one of the initiators of the youth Group *Yoruba a todo color* in Juncal. He is an active member, besides his public policy studies in Quito and the rap songs he composes in his spare time.

<sup>84</sup> Zoila Espinoza comments during PRODECI meeting described in the first empirical chapter "We have a dream".



a campfire represents strength, ancestry and horizontal organization rather than hierarchical top-down management that some organizations were said to have.

In the Chota valley ancestral history is being recaptured through rituals and symbols. Simultaneously as some outside influences are depicted as having contaminated traditional cultural aspects causing their loss or under appreciation; internet is increasingly being used by Afro-Ecuadorians to discover one's 'lost' history and culture or to come into contact with initiatives and ideas on identity formation outside the region. Multiple identities present on a small scale provide evidence of how diverse political, social and cultural expressions are. Worldwide issues are taking place on a local level and one village is never homogeneous and not the same as the one that can be seen across the Chota river. The region has manifold areas in which local and (inter)national power relations and identities present have not yet been investigated. Since different villages may have many aspects in common, formation histories, family relations and survival mechanisms, amongst others, may be very different. Multi-sited fieldwork or investigation of yet other villages in the region that do not appear on the world map would provide broader support or contestation of the conclusions I have been able to draw after this relatively short period of fieldwork. Possibly other villages are even more diverse or use other discourses on identity and state relations for example.

On all scales people's attitudes are intertwined with the nation's (colonial) history. The gap between law and practice still is very big and people's mind(sets) are seen not to have changed through constitutional modifications. If international organizations and national governments are to recognize the identity processes and issues of recognition which Afro-Ecuadorians are facing, the sun might appear closer to the equator, illuminating the multiple colours interwoven in black.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.indigeneity.net>, visited in November 2013.



## **Negro colorado**

Tendencias neoliberales han llegado hasta las calles polvorientas de Changuayacu. Un lugar que no existe en Google Maps pero que sin embargo está involucrado en procesos de identidades que tratan de hacerse más visibles. Éste lugar y las relaciones de poder, procesos de identidad y formación de identidades ha sido el objetivo de mis estudios, para obtener la licenciatura de antropología cultural. Durante tres meses de trabajo de campo, desde Enero hasta finales de Abril 2014 viví entre gente Afro en el valle de Chota. La definición de Afro-Ecuatorianos como una categoría social en la constitución de 2008 ha permitido un grito fuerte para la atención y el reconocimiento de este grupo que había sido negado durante más de 500 años (Ng'weno 2007 y Sanchez 2008). La gubernamentalidad neoliberal ha causado iniciativas locales y cambios gubernamentales hacia el reconocimiento de ciudadanía cultural. Pero este derecho 'en papel' debe ser puesto en la práctica, según expectativas locales que encontré durante mi trabajo de campo. Muchos Choteños reclaman que sueñan con una identidad colectiva que sea reconocida internacionalmente, cuyas características más importantes son la historia hereditaria, tradiciones orales de los ancestros y música tradicional. Otra característica que muchos desean ver cumplida es el verdadero reconocimiento de su territorio ancestral Salina, Gualupe y Chota.

Aparte del reconocimiento en el valle del Chota mismo de un pasado y presente compartido que caracteriza la identidad colectiva, líderes y políticos locales desean reconocimiento más allá del valle, a nivel nacional e incluso internacional. Los Afro Ecuatorianos están implicados en el proceso de hacerse incluidos en una nación que no siempre mantiene su promesa de ser multicultural y plurinacional. Pese a todo, la posibilidad de hacer reclamaciones culturales desde la base de 'legalmente' ser una categoría social ha cambiado las relaciones de poder. La gubernamentalidad neoliberal ha permitido una negociación de ciudadanía. Afro-Ecuatorianos activos políticamente han desenredado el discurso hegemónico del estado Ecuatoriano. Posteriormente estos actores han propuesto moldear el discurso para su propia ventaja, sostenida según la constitución y leyes que protegen los derechos colectivos de Choteños junto a la gente indígena y otras minorías dentro del país. Discursos hegemónicos están siendo impugnados y desenredados públicamente también, para los habitantes del valle de Chota, para hacerse más conscientes de sus posibilidades de negociación. *"Tenemos que hacer un puño para alcanzar el poder, salir de esta marginalización. Tenemos que empoderar nuestro color."*

Según individuos y organizaciones regionales, la ciudadanía cultural debe garantizar derechos colectivos basados en la diferencia cultural. Pero la reificación de cultura de alguien podría moverse en dirección peligrosa, según Abu-Lughod (1991). Ella trata de convencer a antropólogos de no analizar la cultura de tal modo, la dispersión es capturada en una identidad reclamada colectiva que toda la región, como se dice, comparte. La diferencia cultural sí ha llegado a ser una comodidad (Moore 2003 *En Sanders* y Moore 2006:447-448). En la práctica me di cuenta de que muchos líderes (políticos) implicados en el valle de Chota usaban un discurso en la cual la cultura era de verdad reificada y necesidades individuales no fueron consideradas tan importantes como la identidad colectiva. La identidad colectiva era el objetivo más importante. Simultáneamente estas narrativas usadas en la zona fueron impuestas a todas sus habitantes. Mucha gente dijo ser los descendientes

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de un movimiento rebelde que tenía como objetivo final llegar a un cambio estructural. Los habitantes no conscientes de su historia (y la negación de ella) son llevados por la corriente de la concientización o están dejados en el olvido. Además de iniciativas locales de mantener la identidad colectiva, organizaciones no gubernamentales influyeron en los procesos de base. La red de jóvenes decía no trabajar con organizaciones sin poder darle su propio toque. Trabajar en conjunto significaba no repetir el punto de vista del 'Otro' como siempre, sino usar el punto de vista de los Afro descendientes. Entre múltiples iniciativas y proyectos en la región, algunos miembros enfocan la identidad Afro Ecuatoriana, mientras otros no sostienen en la raza o la identidad étnica pero su relación con la tierra como agricultores. Algunos miembros de la comunidad que han ganado postes importantes son vistos como héroes y representantes, mientras otros son vistos como no haber hecho nada, habiendo olvidado 'su gente'.

Este conjunto de identidades muestra la diversidad política, social y cultural en una escala tan pequeña como Chalguayacu, que cuenta con un par de mil habitantes. Los procesos mundiales que ocurren a nivel local y a nivel de pueblo nunca son homogéneos, ni iguales que otros pueblos a poca distancia. El valle de Chota se caracteriza por diversas áreas en las cuales se manifiestan las relaciones de poder. Sobre todo las actitudes de la gente son entrelazadas con la historia colonial del país. El hueco entre la ley y la práctica todavía sigue siendo grande, y la mente de la gente ha de ser aún más difícil de cambiar en el futuro cercano. La actitud, la mente, no se puede cambiar con cambios constitucionales desgraciadamente. Organizaciones internacionales y gobiernos nacionales deben reconocer los procesos de identidad y formación de identidades en el valle del Chota. Si el sol apareciera más cerca del ecuador podría iluminar los múltiples colores matriculados en negro.



© Thomas, alias '*pura crema*', playing the orange leaf, at a musical performance of *The Three Marias* in Quito, march 2014. Picture was taken by the author.