

AFRO-MEXICANS: A SHORT STUDY ON IDENTITY

BY

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## ABSTRACT

Up until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, blacks outnumbered white Spaniards in most major Mexican cities (Vaughn 2008). Nowadays, the black population has been localized to two areas: Veracruz and the Costa Chica. This study looks at whether Afro-Mexicans in the Costa Chica region had developed a racial consciousness, and if so, to what extent. Data gathered about Afro-Mexicans was analyzed using the Minority Identity Development Model (Atkinson et al 1983) which captured the complexities of minority-majority relations in a multi-ethnic society. Not all Afro-Mexicans had developed a strong sense of Afro-Mexican identity, but instead accepted their classification into the dominant *mestizo* group. Others see themselves as Afro-Mexicans in their own right, possibly due to having been influenced by activist group in the U.S. and elsewhere. The latter group sees itself and others in a positive yet autonomous light, corresponding to the final stages of the Minority Identity Development Model.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background**

“I didn’t know there were black people in Mexico.” When I tell people about my plan to study Afro-Mexicans, I am usually met with either an inquisitive look or a rather uninterested “That’s nice.” I did not know that either until fairly recently. Shortly after I entered graduate school, I made friends with several people who happened to have come from Mexico. We spent so much time together that I soon developed a keen interest in Latino culture. As a person of African descent, naturally, I began to wonder about the existence of black Latinos, since none of my friends were black, and I had never heard of or met any blacks from Mexico. Eventually, this interest led me to research the topic.

Mexico is quite a diverse country. Blacks included in the category of “other” accounted for less than 1% of the Mexican population or around 500,000 people (Schwartz 2008), while various indigenous groups, such as the Mayans and Zapotecs, accounted for some 30% of the population in 2008 (according to the CIA World Factbook: Mexico 2008). People from other racial groups greatly outnumber blacks, which perhaps explains why blacks are overlooked. Serving as an important point of entry for slave ships, Mexico at one time had a large African population (Rodriguez and Gonzales 1996; Sue 2006). “In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, an estimated 60,000 slaves were brought to Mexico” (Bernand 2001:49). In the 17<sup>th</sup> century slave imports doubled to about 120,000, however in the

following century, the volume of slave imports dropped sharply to about 20,000 (Valdés 1978:171). Some estimates claim that over the course of the slave trade some 200,000 slaves reached Mexican shores (Vaughn 2005:118). In colonial Mexico, Africans far outnumbered Europeans (Rodriguez & Gonzales 1996; Tuckman 2005). Indeed, no other place in the Americas received more African slaves than Mexico between the mid-16<sup>th</sup> and -17<sup>th</sup> centuries (Vaughn 2005:118). A superficial glance at the Mexican population today does not reveal that there were once more blacks than whites in Mexico. What happened to the large black population that once lived there? Mexico has long claimed that the *mestizo* population is the result of the blending of Spanish and indigenous blood, a theory that does not include the African presence in the mixture (Schwartz 2008). Some scholars continue to assert that the Africans did not disappear (Rodriguez & A superficial glance at the Mexican population today does not reveal that there were once more blacks than whites in Mexico. What happened to the large black population that once lived there? Mexico has long claimed that the *mestizo* population is the result of the blending of Spanish and indigenous blood, a theory that does not include the African presence in the mixture (Schwartz 2008). Some scholars continue to assert that the Africans did not disappear (Rodriguez & Gonzales 1996). Rather, they assimilated and contributed to the racial mix that comprises Mexico's population today.



## MAP OF MEXICO



Figure 1. Map of Mexico (2008).

Note: from Lovett Middle School 7<sup>th</sup> Grade World Geography Class website

Since there is neither a historical record of any epidemic in which large numbers of Africans died, nor any mass outward migration of Africans, nor any evidence of genocide, it is not difficult for the reader to conclude what became of them. Traditionally, beginning in the colonial period, blacks resided in three areas in Mexico: the northern Mexican states, such as Coahuila and Chihuahua, Veracruz, and the Pacific coast, specifically the Costa Chica (Vaughn 2001; Mobely 2006; Cruz-Carretero 2009). The blacks in the northern states were either escaped slaves or free blacks who immigrated from the U.S. to Mexico because it forbade slavery (Kelley 2004). While there is nothing in the collective consciousness linking the northern states with blackness, such is not the case for Veracruz. Many of the studies on the blacks of Mexico have been based on the black population living in that state. Rowell's (2006) bibliography concerning blacks in Mexico reveals that nearly half the listings have some connection to Veracruz. Curiously, while Veracruz remains Mexico's blackest state in the nation's popular imagination, the blacks of Veracruz are not thought of as real Mexicans. Perhaps because of the state's proximity to Cuba or other Caribbean islands, the blacks are largely thought to be immigrants or descendants of immigrants (Vaughn 2001). On the opposite coast lies the Costa Chica, where its black inhabitants have a different history. Some accounts of the African presence in the region tell of a slave ship which crashed off the coast and whose passengers swam to land and eked out an existence for themselves, fusing their African traditions with those from the new land in which they occupied (Palmerlee & Bao 2003; Lewis 2001;

Iliff 2002). All of the interviews and most of the articles used in this work were taken or based that region.

After having read studies and articles on Afro-Mexicans, I decided to travel to one of the areas in Mexico generally identified with people of African descent. I went there to discover if Afro-Mexicans had developed a consciousness of their blackness, and if so, to what extent had this consciousness been formed? Were they creating political groups that addressed their needs or were they content to live as they had been in the past, isolated from the general society?

#### *Description of a black town--Corralero*

The journey on the way to the answers of the questions posed above began here, in Corralero. Perhaps one of the most striking things that I noticed when I first stepped foot in Corralero was the undeniable disparity between it and Pinotepa Nacional, the municipal head. Although Pinotepa would hardly be described as urban, it did have some amenities that one would find in large cities—a bank, hotels, boutiques, and a town square. Corralero on the other hand, was an interesting contradiction. While it was certainly less developed than Pinotepa, one could see Corralero modernizing in ways that were not apparent in Pinotepa.

It took 45 minutes to get to Corralero from Pinotepa. One has to stand outside at the bus stop and wait for a *colectivo* ‘a communal taxi’ bearing a sign with the name of the town to which it is going. The journey gives you a

spectacular view of the beautiful Mexican countryside. It is not uncommon to see children playing on the side of the road, farmers walking their donkeys, or people waiting to catch a *colectivo*. The road is dusty, not as well paved as the one we took to get there from Pinotepa Nacional. Most of the houses are single storied, made of concrete, rectangular shaped, not the round *redondo* 'round' style which Vaughn (2008) and Lewis (2001) mention in their writings. There was one school located in the middle of the town and all the houses surrounded it. Quite a few of the houses that I observed lacked partitions inside. Thus there appeared to be one big common room where family members slept. Bathrooms and kitchens are located outside. Along with not being able to put toilet paper in the toilet, one has to fill the bowl with bucketfuls of water in order to flush.

There are no restaurants, only very small shops selling sweets, sodas, and other small items. There certainly aren't any grocery stores, but that was probably due to the fact that residents are self-sufficient. Many have their own chickens and other animals that they used to feed themselves and their families. Also, each morning a truck drives around the town blaring an announcement from its loudspeaker to let everyone know that it is selling tortillas. In order to make calls, residents go to the *caseta telefónica*. The *caseta* is a small shop where the owner essentially gives permission to place a call to anywhere and then bills the caller the end of the call.

If tourists do visit Corralero, then it is probably for the beach, *Playa Corralero*. The beach was on a small island separated from the town by a small

lagoon. It is sparsely occupied, frequented by a few locals and the occasional tourist. Many residents had boats, *lanchas* which they used to fish and go to the island.

Chapter 2 contains the terms central to this thesis. In Chapter 3, I expound on the methodology that I used. Chapter 4 presents my analysis of the data and Chapter 5 explores possible implications of my research and suggestions for future study.

MAP OF COSTA CHICA



Figure 2: Map of Costa Chica  
Note: Based on Vaughn's (2008) map.

## CHAPTER II

### KEY CONCEPTS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Research about Afro-Mexicans, particularly on the Pacific coast of Mexico, is still in its nascent stages. Little is known about this group that so often goes unrecognized even by the Mexican government. While many studies have been conducted about indigenous groups and their place in Mexican history and contemporary society, relatively few studies have been conducted about Afro-Mexicans and their place in the Mexican narrative and mosaic. This section explores different theories dedicated to understanding identity, ethnicity, and race. I frame the analysis of my findings with Atkinson et al's (1983) theory of minority identity formation in which I frame the analysis of my findings.

#### **Ethnic Identity**

Weber's classic definition of an ethnic group describes it as a "human collectivity based on assumption of common origin, real or imagined" (Pettigrew 1977:14). Adding more detail, another definition of an ethnic group is:

An ethnic group consists of people who conceive of themselves as being of a kind. They are united by emotional bonds and concerned with the preservation of their type. With few exceptions, they speak the same language, or at least their speech is intelligible to each other, and they share a common cultural heritage (Shibutani & Kwan 1965:97).

Similarly, an ethnic group can be defined as "a social group based on ancestry, culture, or national origin" (Yang 2000:40). Closely mirroring that definition is the understanding that "an ethnic group is defined here as a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared

historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood” (Schermerhorn 19 cited by Cornell & Hartmann 1998). The authors avoided referring to the term “race” presumably because it is a complex, culturally laden term, and because there may be many ethnic groups within the same race or vice-versa. However, Gordon claims that an ethnic group is “any group which is defined or set off by race, religion, or national origin, or some combination of these categories” (Hutchinson & Smith 1993 33). Clearly there is no single working definition of ethnicity that suits everyone. The definitions seem to be variations of Weber’s original understanding of the term “ethnic group” and it is with that same understanding that this term is used in the present work.

Patterson (1994) perhaps devotes the most amount of space to explicating the nature of ethnicity and the different types of ethnic groups. He traces the history of ethnicity from its origins in the “kin-hegemonic pristine state” to its ultimate embodiment in nationalism. He describes various ethnic groups, such as the *revivalist* and *adaptive*. The first alludes to those groups who have already been or are close to being wholly absorbed by the dominant group, but whose members seek to keep the ethnic identity alive using “empty symbols” (ibid: 57). The symbols lack “structural meaning,” only serving to conjure images or folklore of the group’s past (ibid: 57). In the United States, one can see revivalist ethnicity at work in the way various whites claim some kind of ethnic European ancestry like Greek, Italian, or Irish among a few. These groups have already been



accepted as white, so all that really remains of them are “largely sentimental cultural patterns with little vitality or relevance to the absorbed group” (ibid: 57).

In the case of “adaptive ethnicity,” groups do not become conscious of their distinctive identity until they find themselves in an alien setting. Patterson notes that this type of ethnicity is temporary, a transitional state experienced before the group is fully incorporated into the larger society. This type is particularly interesting with regard to recent Afro-Mexican immigrants to the United States. Do they only begin to see themselves as an ethnic group once they leave Mexico? Furthermore, once the second or third generation of Afro-Mexicans is born in the United States, do they begin to identify themselves solely as Hispanic? As black? More research could reveal the answer.

How ethnic identity is formed or assigned has occupied anthropologists for nearly two centuries. The current thesis makes use of an integrative approach to understanding ethnicity, following Yang (2000). He rejects primordialist approaches to ethnicity (Morgan 1997), and combines elements of constructionist and instrumentalist approaches<sup>1</sup> to view identity as partly assigned and partly constructed, for one cannot overlook the impact of race on ethnicity. People do

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<sup>1</sup>For constructionists, ethnicity is a “socially constructed identity” (Yang 2000). Furthermore, while the primordialist school holds that ethnic boundaries are static, the constructionist view is that they are dynamic. Under this school, “ethnic identity is not a fixed categorization, but rather is a fluid and dynamic understanding of self and ethnic background” (Trimble and Dickson 2005:1). Followers of the instrumentalist school believe that ethnicity is a socially constructed phenomenon used to gain access to limited material resources or psychological satisfaction (Hutchinson & Smith 1993; Yang 2000:47). Contrary to primordialists and constructionists, instrumentalists hold the view that people “‘cut and mix’ from a variety of ethnic heritages and cultures to forge their own individual or group identities” (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996:9).

have a certain amount of freedom in choosing their ethnic identities, “but the freedom to choose is not absolute” (id.: 49). Therefore, a person of pure African descent would raise eyebrows if he chose to identify himself as Chinese, white, or another ethnicity that seemed at odds with how he looked (ibid 49).

I agree with Yang’s (2000) argument, as it most thoroughly accounts for how ethnicity occurs in society. Ethnicity can be used as an instrument to gain power, status, or an economic advantage. One need only look at the backgrounds of some people who on forms ranging from college to job applications check “Native American” or another minority group that they don’t appear to belong to (physically or culturally). The boundaries between race and ethnicity are not fixed, and often are not clearly defined. Whatever distinction that can be made between the two, becomes important when looking at Afro-Mexican attitudes towards African Americans, two different ethnic groups who by most accounts, share the same race.

## **Race**

The concept of race has long played a part in human categorization of both self and the “other.” In the early sixteenth century, race dealt more with lineage than with a set of more or less defined physiognomic characteristics used to differentiate individuals or groups from one another. At one time, appearance was not necessarily considered a signifier of race (Wade 1997). Before what we now know about race became common knowledge, physical anthropologists, scientists and other academics speculated that race had some biological basis.

Such was the belief championed by the likes of British physician Charles White and French aristocrat Arthur Gobineau who worked during the 18<sup>th</sup> and mid 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, respectively (Gossett 1963). Then, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, physical anthropologists dedicated themselves to pursuits such as determining the origin of races and which races were more advanced (Caspari 2003). Banks (1996) cautiously refers to race as having to do with “phenotypically dissimilar groups” (id.: 54). Gordon echoes this claim saying that “race... refers to differential concentrations of gene frequencies responsible for traits which...are confined to physical manifestations such as skin color or hair form” (Dashefsky 1976: 33). In present times, the term race is often used to distinguish people on the basis of these physiognomic characteristics.

Nevertheless, most scientists now admit that there is no biological basis to race (AAPA 1996). Still “the notion of races exist with definable physical characteristics and, even more so, that some races are superior to others” perseveres (Wade 1997:14). He attributes this to the “result of particular historical processes which, many would argue, have their roots in the colonization by European peoples of other areas of the world” (ibid).

Still, even after reading the definitions of ethnic identity and race, a question still persists. What is the difference between the two? Ambiguous definitions blurring the separation between the two have been offered: “Ethnicity is used more vaguely [than race]—sometimes as a less emotive term for race. The general consensus is that ethnicity refers to the ‘cultural’ differences, whereas,

as we saw above, race is said to refer to phenotypical differences” (Wade 1997:17). Yet, “some draw no real distinction between race and ethnicity” (ibid:17).

Racial and ethnic identifications do, however, overlap, both in theory and in practice. At an abstract level, both race and ethnicity involve a discourse about origins and about “the transmission of essences across generations. Racial identifications use aspects of phenotype as a cue for categorization, but these are seen as transmitted intergenerationally– through the ‘blood’ - so that ancestral origin is important; likewise ethnicity invokes location in a cultural geography....” (Wade 1997: 21). On a practical level “ race” here specifically refers to physical appearance, and is used to place people into an ethnic group. In America it would be difficult for a person of apparently East Asian descent to classify himself as black, and even more difficult to have the rest of society accept his decision. On the other hand, a person of West Indian descent who looks like he is of African descent could classify himself as black without raising eyebrows. This is certainly in part due to the way he looks. In the minds of most, the ethnicity “black” is intricately bound to the idea of having a set of features typically identified as black. Consequently, ethnicity and race sometimes converge, making it difficult to distinguish the two.

After having looked at several definitions of ethnic groups, how membership into them is assigned, and the evolution of the meaning of the term

race, we can now look at ethnicity and race as it functions in the Latin American context.

### **Race in Latin America**

The distinctiveness of race in Latin America<sup>2</sup> from race in North America can be seen by how blackness is perceived in each region (Wade 1997). In Latin America, only those who look “quite African in appearance” are classified as black (id.: 14). However, in North America, the “one-drop” [of blood] rule applies. Thus, if someone has one black ancestor, he or she is considered black. Because racial dynamics are markedly different across the two geographical regions, Latin America has long contended that racism does not exist in the region as it does in North America because everyone is of mixed race to a greater or lesser extent. “The intellectual and political elite [of Latin America], in many ways has made the United States the paragon of racial hatred against which all other societies must be measured” (Dulitzky 2001: 22). In a meeting attended by various South American presidents and heads of state of in 2000, representatives composed a statement denouncing racism, while at the same time casting it as something foreign to the Latin American way of life: “The Presidents [of South

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<sup>2</sup> There is uncertainty about when the term "Latin America" first came into use (McGuinness 2003:87-8). Technically, the geo-cultural region of Latin America includes all of the countries in Central and South America where any Romance based language is spoken (ibid:88). In common usage however, "Latin America" usually refers to only those countries whose inhabitants speak Spanish or Portuguese, excluding French speaking countries such as Haiti, Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, and French Guiana (Chasteen 2001). This was not always the case. In fact, Napoleon III extended the geographical range from not just those countries in the Caribbean, Central and South America where a Romance based language was spoken to include the French speaking regions of North America: Quebec, Louisiana, and the islands St. Pierre and Miquelon off Newfoundland, Canada (ibid). Nevertheless, this work relies on contemporary understanding of the term which refers specifically to those countries in the Americas where Spanish and Portuguese are spoken.

America] view with concern the resurgence of racism and of discriminatory manifestations and expressions in *other parts of the world* and state their commitment to preserve South America from the propagation of said phenomenon” (id.: 39).

During the 19<sup>th</sup> and up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many South American countries promoted European immigration to the exclusion of immigration from other parts of the world (Dulitzky 2001:49). Almost every single country in Latin America had at one time sought European immigrants (ibid). Argentina restricted the immigration of blacks and Asians while encouraging the settlement of whites in the 1860s, thereby allowing large numbers of Italians to settle there.

Interestingly, at one time, blacks comprised 30% of the Argentine population, but what happened to them between 1778-1887 remains a mystery (Ackerman 2005).

There was another wave of European in the 1940s and 1950s after World War II.

This time, Germans—both Jews and even ex-Nazis—sought refuge within Argentina’s borders (Goñi 2003; Baily 2003; Richter 2003). Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay also accepted ex-Nazis fleeing from their war crimes (Reel 2007).

Around the same time period of the 1940s, Dominican dictator Rafael Trujilo, himself a mulatto, also engaged in this policy of *blancamiento* ‘whitening,’ by extending a welcome to European Jews fleeing from the Holocaust, in the hopes of making his country whiter (Derby 2000; Strauss 2008). In addition to promoting European immigration, interracial unions were encouraged to whiten the population (Dulitzky 2001; Van Dijk 2005; Morales 2002).

Since Europeans began intermarrying and procreating with the indigenous and black populations living in Latin America, a caste system was expanded to categorize the offspring of these unions (See Figure 3, Castas; Cruz 2009). Whereas in the United States, one drop of non-European blood effectively makes one a minority, in Latin America, people are judged on a color continuum (Wade 1997). Hence, it is not surprising that many Latin American countries have several words to describe the hues between black and white, the races at the two bookends of the spectrum. In Cuba for instance, there are at least seven words to describe someone who would automatically be classified as black in the United States (Miami Herald 2007). In Brazil, a 1976 census revealed 134 terms used to describe skin color. They included *alva-rosada* ‘white with pink highlights’; *café com leite* ‘coffee with milk’; *quase negra* ‘almost black’; and *tostada* ‘toasted’ (Chu 2006; Ash 2007).

People of African descent outnumber peoples of indigenous descent in Latin America (Hooker 2005). Nevertheless, indigenous peoples have had and still continue to have in many countries more legal rights than their black compatriots (Wade 1997). Illustrating the preferential treatment received *de jure* by the indigenous at the hands of the Spanish, Wade quotes a Mexican legal document from colonial times: “The Mexican Audiencia, reviewing these regulations, commented on marriage between [I]ndians and blacks or mulattoes, recommending that parish priests be ordered to warn the [I]ndian and his parents of the serious harm that ‘such unions will cause to themselves and their families

and villages....” (30). The document goes on to say that the product from such a union would be barred from holding any position in government. Still, this disparity continues. In the 1980s and 1990s, fifteen Latin American countries enacted reforms ranging from collective property rights to recognition of indigenous customary law benefiting certain indigenous groups (Hooker 2005).



## LAS CASTAS



Figure 3. Anonymous, Las Castas, 18th century. Oil on Canvas, 58 1/4" x 40 15/16". Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán, Mexico.

However, Afro-Latinos as a whole, did not benefit from these new reforms (ibid).

Why is this so?

More than attesting to the colonial mentality still held by many Latin American countries, these examples bear witness to something else. The way Latin Americans have conceived of indigeneity fundamentally differs from the way they conceive of blackness. Beltrán (1970) drew upon this difference in his explanation of why blacks were better able to integrate themselves into Mexican society than their indigenous countrymen. Essentially apart from certain somatic features, blacks do not have a different culture from their countrymen. They eat the same foods, share the same style of dress, live in the same type of housing (albeit in humbler abodes), and possibly most importantly, speak the same language (Beltrán 1970; Hooker 2005). There remains no specific definition of indigeneity pervasive throughout the region. Rather the category rests upon an unstable ground of a shifting set of features chiefly physical appearance, language, customs, and community, the combination necessary to be classified as indigenous varying throughout the region.

Though the two groups occupy different positions in Latin American society, one sees a striking similarity in their social conditions. Even a cursory search will reveal the extent to which race or color is linked to class in Latin America. Van Dijk (2005) supports this claim in his book *Racism and Discourse in Spain and Latin America*

Latin-American racism is closely associated, and hence often confounded (and excused) with classism. The general tendency is that class

hierarchies often correspond with ‘color hierarchies’: The more African or Amerindian looking peoples are often also the poorest and more generally have less access to and control over scarce social resources. However, although this is the general tendency, ‘race’/ethnicity and class do not always run parallel, and there are many discontinuities and contradictions in a very complex system of social forces that may vary from country to country and from region to region in each country. (84)

Dulitzky (2001) also points out that many of the inequities in socioeconomic class among Latin Americans are due to race. He traces racial discrimination in the labor market to “inequities in the education sector,” noting that blacks and indigenous peoples are the ones who suffer disproportionately on account of poor education or lack of education altogether (ibid:41; Hooker 2005). Quite bluntly, “almost all poor people are colored” (ibid:44).

### **Race in Mexico**

In 2005, then Mexican president Vicente Fox spoke about the indispensability of Mexican immigrants to the U.S. economy, stating that they take the jobs “that not even the blacks won’t do” (CNN 2005). His statement bore the implication that blacks occupied the bottom rungs of American society. American civil rights activists quickly and roundly criticized him, but he was met largely with a telling silence on the Mexican front. Unfortunately, that was not the last time something Mexico did sparked criticism from the United States.

A few weeks after Fox’s infamous remarks, Mexico committed another *faux pas*, at least in the eyes of its northern neighbor. The country released a set of commemorative stamps celebrating the beloved Mexican caricature, Memein Pinguín. Created in the 1940s by Yolanda Vargas and still being published today,

the comic centers on Memin, a mischievous Afro-Mexican boy and his group of three friends. Although the storyline of the comic advanced, its title character still retains features characteristic of drawings of blacks from the era in which it was created-- huge lips, an exaggeratedly broad, flat nose, and little hair. His simian appearance provoked the ire of many civil rights activists in the United States who condemned the stamps as racist. Mexican leaders argued otherwise.

One more story can help shed light on the issue of race in Mexico. In 2001, Lázaro Cárdenas, grandson of a former Mexican president bearing the same name, ran for governor of Michoacán. His story caught the eye of a New York Times writer because of the alleged racism that plagued his campaign (Thompson 2001). His opponent, Alfredo Anaya, was accused of exploiting the fact that Cárdenas' wife was a black Cuban, insinuating that she was communist and anti-Catholic. Some residents of Michoacán agreed with Anaya that Mrs. Cárdenas was someone not to be trusted, with one woman even saying: "It's one thing to be brown. The black race is something different" (id). In defending himself against accusations that he was racist, Anaya declared that his attacks against his opponent had nothing to do with racism conceding, much to his chagrin that they "had their own little dark people," undoubtedly referring to the numerous indigenous people that lived there (ibid). Besides serving as examples of the differences between how the two countries deal with race, the above stories present an image of the way Mexicans view race, or certainly blackness.

Mexico, perhaps more so than any other Latin American country, has embraced the concept of *mestizaje*, the mixture of white European blood with indigenous blood to the exclusion of other races. Popular Mexican accounts attribute the origin of the Mexican people to the product of the union between Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés and his indigenous consort, la Malinche. Feelings toward Malinche vary from utter disdain to unabashed admiration, the latter particularly by Chicano feminists (Alba 2005). It is said that she gave birth to the first *mestizo*, a son (González 2005). However, whatever good she did has been offset by the belief that she betrayed her people by translating for Cortés and thus allowing him to conquer Mexico (Nevárez 2004). This dualistic opinion that Mexicans have about Malinche neatly embodies the conflicting sentiments—both appreciative and antagonistic at once—*mestizos* bear towards indigenous people.

The history of indigenous peoples in Mexico sheds light on the issue of race and class in that country. When Cortés and his men landed in Mexico in 1519 only to conquer the land two years later, they found it occupied by indigenous groups such as the Mayans in south east Mexico, the Aztecs in central Mexico, and the Zapotecs of Oaxaca (Knight 2002). Contrary to popular belief, the pre-contact cultures living in Mexico were just as complex as the Spanish, with some groups having built enormous temples, constructed ball courts, and introduced calendars (Spinden 1922). Since the conquest, indigenous Mexicans have been subjected to abject poverty and all the ills that usually accompany it

such as high illiteracy and unemployment (“Requieren Indígenas” 2007; Uscanga 2008; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2008).

Traces of Africa’s influence can be found throughout Mexico.

Hé Hernández-Díaz (2008) writes that blacks first arrived in *Nueva España*, colonial Mexico, soon after the conquest in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century accompanying the conquistadors as slaves and domestic servants. Moreover, Mexico was an important slave port in the New World, harboring slaves brought by Spanish before they were sent to other parts of Latin America and the Caribbean (Vaughn 2005). Blacks from other parts on Latin America also arrived in Mexico at this time (Hé Hernández-Díaz 2008). Skipping ahead a few hundred years, one finds the arrival of many ex-slaves and free blacks from the U.S. into northern Mexican states such as Chihuahua, and Coahuila (Vinson, 2004; Durham & Jones 1983).

Nowadays, there are only a few areas in Mexico with an undeniable black presence. Most blacks live in the state of Veracruz, on the Atlantic coast, or in the 200-mile stretch from Acapulco, Guerrero to Puerto Angel, Oaxaca known as the Costa Chica. Largely isolated, the blacks in the Costa Chica region have been able to maintain almost the same subsistent lifestyle as their parents and grandparents. To support themselves, they engage mostly in fishing and from what I observed, animal husbandry (Vaughn 2007).

Mexican anthropologist Gonzalo Beltrán’s seminal 1958 work, *Cuijla: Esbozo etnográfico de un pueblo negro* paved the way for the study of Afro-Mexicans (Vinson and Vaughn 2004). In his study, he went to the area of Costa

Chica and explored the pueblos with a visible presence of Afro-Mexicans. He documented poems, folk songs, and other pieces of aspects of Afro-Mexican culture. Since his study, others have looked at these groups. Bobby Vaughn's 2001 doctoral dissertation, *Race and Nation: A Study of Blackness in Mexico*, a comprehensive work on the topic spanning ten years of research, explores not only how Afro-Mexicans choose to construct their identities, but how these identities intersect with those of their mestizo and indigenous compatriots. I am indebted to his work because it provided me with information about such things as where and how the majority of Afro-Mexicans lived and how their dialect of Spanish differed from other Mexican dialects. Many of the questions that interested him have also interested me. Finally, his ethnographic style influenced mine and was one of the factors that convinced me to visit the region myself.

### **The Minority Identity Development Model**

Influenced by 20 years of counseling minorities, psychologists Donald Atkinson, George Morten, and Derald Wing Sue developed a model that mirrored the stages that many of their clients experienced before reconciling their status as a minority living among the majority (Atkinson et al 1983; Martin 1999). They used the model to determine whether a patient would prefer a counselor of his own race or not (Morten & Atkinson 1983). Since its creation, it has been used by academics in other fields ranging from sociology to law (Young 2005). Some scholars have criticized this model, however, many models

proposed to counter this model have tended to look very similar to that of Atkinson et al's (1983).

There are models that deal with collective identity, however I found those models to be too focused on collective identity with respect to nationhood to really help me answer my questions. In reading the model, some questions may arise such as what motivates the progression from stage to stage? I have decided not to attempt to answer this question, instead I leave the answer to be found in the many publications put out by the Atkinson et al.

Atkinson et al (1983) posit five distinct phases an individual might go through in forming his identity: *Conformity, Dissonance, Resistance and Immersion, Introspection, and Synergistic Articulation and Awareness*. Each stage has four components that remain the same for each stage: the individual's attitudes towards self, his attitudes towards his respective minority group, his attitudes towards other minority groups, and his attitudes towards the dominant group (see chart). I modified the model due to time restraints. Instead of including the first component of each stage, attitudes towards self, I removed it and focused on the remaining four components.

Under the first stage of Atkinson et al's (1983) identity development model, *Conformity*, "individuals show an unequivocal preference for dominant cultural values over those of their own culture" (35). In this stage, individuals in the minority groups choose role models from the dominant culture and follow the dominant culture's lifestyle. The individual looks upon himself, others within his



minority group, and other minorities with disdain. However, he maintains positive feelings towards members of the dominant group. In relation to the original purpose of this model, to identify whether a minority would have a preference for a counselor of a certain race, Atkinson et al (1983) say that individuals at this stage would prefer a counselor from the dominant group over one from his own minority group.

In the *Dissonance* stage, members try to reconcile the negative attitude they have towards themselves and their ethnic group with newfound feelings of self and group appreciation. Their views of the dominant group have also undergone a shift. Rather than seeing the dominant group's culture as unequivocally positive, they now start to question it. Furthermore, the ideas that they held in Stage 1 towards other minority groups undergo a change. Whereas before, they held a negative view of other minority groups, during Stage 2 these ideas are challenged by a feeling of sympathy towards other groups who may potentially share the same experience.

In Stage 3, *Resistance and Immersion*, the conflict initially felt concerning the minority individual's attitude towards himself and his ethnic group is resolved. Instead, the individual develops an interest in discovering the history and culture of said group. Yet, he still has not resolved how he views other minority groups. On one hand, he feels a sense of solidarity, yet on the other hand, he feels a sense of "culturocentrism" (sic) (Atkinson et al 1983:37). Eventually, the positive

feelings harbored towards the dominant group change from ambiguity in Stage 2 to “distrust and dislike” in Stage 3 (ibid:37).

In Stage 4, *Introspection*, the individual “experiences conflict between notions of responsibility and allegiance to the minority group and notion of personal autonomy” (38). With respect to attitudes towards the group, the individual begins to worry about the group taking away his individuality. Attitudes towards other minority groups begin to change. Now, the individual begins to challenge the way he perceived other groups and feels a greater affinity to those groups sharing the same struggles as his group over those groups with a different struggle. Again, group members begin to question the opinions they formed in Stage 3 regarding the dominant group. They come to realize that not everything about the dominant group is negative and begin to navigate between what they feel for the dominant group as a whole and what they feel for certain individuals within the dominant group.

Finally, in Stage 5, *Synergetic Articulation and Awareness*, some resolution is reached. The individual begins to appreciate himself, his group, and other minority groups. It is only the view of the dominant group that does not fare as well. “The individual experiences selective trust and liking for members of the dominant group who seek to eliminate repressive activities of the group” (39).

## MINORITY IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT MODEL

<b>Stages of Minority Identity Development Model</b>	<b>Attitudes toward self</b>	<b>Attitudes toward others of the same minority</b>	<b>Attitudes toward others of different minority</b>	<b>Attitudes toward the dominant group</b>
<b>Stage 1: Conformity</b>	Self depreciating	Group depreciating	Discriminatory	Group appreciating
<b>Stage 2: Dissonance</b>	Conflict between self depreciating and self appreciating	Conflict between dominant held views of minority hierarchy and feelings of shared experience	Conflict between dominant held views of minority hierarchy and feelings of shared experience	Conflict between group appreciating and group depreciating
<b>Stage 3: Resistance and Immersion</b>	Self appreciating	Group appreciating	Conflict between feelings of empathy for other minority experiences and feelings of culturocentrism	Group depreciating
<b>Stage 4: Introspection</b>	Concern with basis of self appreciation	Concern with nature of unequivocal appreciation	Concern with ethnocentric basis for judging others	Concern with basis for group depreciation
<b>Stage 5: Synergetic Articulation and Awareness</b>	Self appreciating	Group appreciating	Group appreciating	Selective appreciation

Figure 4: The Minority Identity Development Model proposed by Atkinson et al (1983).

Note: from Minnesota Department of Human Services 2009

MINORITY IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT MODEL--REVISED

<b>Stages of Minority Identity Development Model</b>	<b>Attitudes toward others of the same minority</b>	<b>Attitudes toward others of different minority</b>	<b>Attitudes toward the dominant group</b>
<b>Stage 1: Conformity</b>	Group depreciating	Discriminatory	Group appreciating
<b>Stage 2: Dissonance</b>	Conflict between dominant held views of minority hierarchy and feelings of shared experience	Conflict between dominant held views of minority hierarchy and feelings of shared experience	Conflict between group appreciating and group depreciating
<b>Stage 3: Resistance and Immersion</b>	Group appreciating	Conflict between feelings of empathy for other minority experiences and feelings of culturocentrism	Group depreciating
<b>Stage 4: Introspection</b>	Concern with nature of unequivocal appreciation	Concern with ethnocentric basis for judging others	Concern with basis for group depreciation
<b>Stage 5: Synergetic Articulation and Awareness</b>	Group appreciating	Group appreciating	Selective appreciation

Figure 6: The version of the MIDM used in this work.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

This was a short-term research study based on opportunistic sampling that looked at the attitudes of Afro-Mexicans concerning race and ethnicity. Because I was interested in gauging people's opinions and feelings, I employed qualitative techniques such as participant observation and interviews. Whereas quantitative research focuses on answering the question "how many," qualitative research focuses on answering the questions that statistics can not: Why are people doing x? How do they do x? What is x? (Hoepfl 1997). These questions can be answered using qualitative research methods such as conducting interviews, doing ethnography, and engaging in participant observation which a number of researchers have defended as yielding valid results (Kirk & Miller 1986; Coates 1999). These particular methods allowed me to gather data quickly, yet accurately. The three interviews taken were constructed in open interview style guided by a list of questions. Subjects were opportunistically chosen, but specifically picked because they possessed prototypical black features: kinky hair, dark skin, and wide noses (Trei 2006; Montagu 1998; Shelby 2005).

During the first two weeks while in Oaxaca City, I gathered necessary information about Costa Chica. The INEGI, *Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía*, an agency part of the Mexican government, branch for Oaxaca provided me with demographic, economic, geographic information and statistics on municipalities located on the coast for the year 2005. I also collected maps of

this Costa Chica region of Oaxaca. Although Mexico does not take race into account in its census, I did find that the number of people living in Pinotepa Nacional, the municipality in which two of the towns that I visited were located, totaled 44,441 and the median age for males was 20 and for females, 22. I also met with another researcher who was also studying Afro-Mexicans and we exchanged information about which places to visit, how to get around once there, and how to find people to interview. Moreover, I met with a professor from UABJO, *Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca*, who gave me an article that he intended to publish on the history of blacks in Mexico. In addition to my meeting with the aforementioned people, I went to the *Instituto Welte para Estudios Oaxaqueños*, the Welte Institute, which had a number of journals and articles that I still have not been able to access in the United States. Finally, I also established contacts in these *pueblos negros* while in Oaxaca City.

In Oaxaca City, I met an anonymous collaborator, a bilingual coordinator of special interest tours, who knew Afro-Mexicans living in the Costa Chica. After completing my research in Oaxaca City, we traveled to the Costa Chica region where we spent a little less than two weeks. I specifically interviewed people from the Costa Chican towns of Corralero, El Ciruelo, and Cuajinicuilapa. The first two are small towns in the Mexican state of Oaxaca and the latter, a town in the state Guerrero. According to the people of the region, these are

known as *pueblos negros* “black towns<sup>3</sup>,” since a visible percentage of their population is of African descent. Once we got into Corralero, the first of the black towns that we visited, we immediately set about to find interviewees. At the time, I was only interested in Afro-Mexicans who had lived in the United States for over six months. Thus, my guide and I went about looking for who looked black according to generally accepted U.S. societal perceptions blackness (Wright 2002). I found three people who fit this description and were willing to be interviewed.

The first person we met, who later became our host, had lived in the United States for over a year. The second person that I met was introduced to me by some young girls who had seen me sitting outside on a park bench writing some notes. They asked me what I was doing in Corralero (it is a very small town, so outsiders do not go unnoticed). I informed them about my thesis<sup>4</sup> and the type of subjects that I needed, and they introduced me to a woman who had lived in the United States for more than 10 years. In El Ciruelo, my guide happened to make friendly conversation with someone who turned out to fit the criteria I needed.

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<sup>3</sup> In Mexico and many parts of Latin America, people are often given nicknames based on salient physical characteristics. Referring to someone by his skin color is not as taboo as it is in the United States. One could refer to a fair skinned, blond as a *güero* or a darker-skinned person as *moreno/a* without being offensive. Interestingly, the words *negro/a* “black” are often used as terms of endearment, regardless of race. Thus, it was acceptable to refer to these towns as *pueblos negros* because a salient characteristic of the towns was its larger than average black population. Nevertheless, referring to one using skin color could be deemed offensive depending on the tone and the accompanying adjectives.

<sup>4</sup> Verbal consent from all participants was acquired as approved by the University of Kansas Human Subjects Committee in the spring of 2008.

For the formal part of the interview, I relied on my colleague to ask the interviewees a list of questions that I had composed (see Appendix B). I then recorded the answers by hand in Spanish and later translated them into English.

In addition to conducting interviews, I also collected newspaper articles in both English and Spanish in which the writers had interviewed Afro-Mexicans. I reviewed them for ideological statements on race and ethnicity. The articles supplemented the interviews and were used to give a broader picture of identity among Afro-Mexicans. All the articles were written between 2000 and 2008 and all the Afro-Mexicans had some connection to Costa Chica. The articles were found online in such papers as *La Jornada Guerrero*, *The Guardian*, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The Chicago Tribune*. They were all written by staff writers with no obvious political, ethnic, or racial bias. I also used quotes from books such as *Afro-México*.

Using participant observation and interviews, I was able to gather data about Afro-Mexicans which I then analyzed using the MIDM. The *modi operandi* employed were primarily constrained by the time that I spent in the field, roughly two weeks.



## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I look at the interaction between power, prestige, and ethnicity. In order to better recognize these elements, I have drawn upon data from different sources ranging from articles that I have read to my own interviews. Some statements may be surprising, revealing issues of racial bias that may not often be openly discussed in other countries. All the translations are mine, unless otherwise noted.

#### *Conformity*

In the modified Atkinson et al's (1983) model, the first part of the Stage 1 involves how the individual sees his or her ethnic group. In an interview that I conducted in Corralero, I was speaking with an Afro-Mexican, Don Morocho, who was about 50 years old and while referring to an African-American, he used the term *negro feo* 'ugly black' as a way to intensify the man's blackness. Specifically, he said that he attended a church with an African-American and when I questioned him to make sure that we were both clear about the race of his friend, he assured me that his friend was black, "Yeah you know, *negro feo*." Thus, there is still an association of blackness with ugliness and therefore negativity. Regarding the manner in which Afro-Mexicans saw *mestizos*, I saw no evidence neither affirming Atkinson et al's claim that the minority group would see the majority only in positive light. One clear example of the denigration of oneself is something that a mother told her daughter: "Now you are old enough to

marry, but please don't marry *another* black. Just imagine what that would mean for your children" (López 2005 emphasis added). Afro-Mexican activists insist that the belief that one must *mejorar la raza* 'improve the race' by having offspring with someone of a lighter complexion still persists (Dellios 2005:2). An older Mexican *moreno* 'person with dark skin' and ex-governor of Cuajinicuilapa, Guerrero reasoned that intermarriage was good because "pure black blood is lazy; I think that pure blacks, they compare with animals" (Samuels 2005). Such statements almost beg to be censured by many a sensitive North American ear. Yet, race and its implications are more freely discussed in Mexico.

Atkinson et al's Stage 1 thought can be particularly easily applied to the way that some Afro-Mexicans conceptualize indigenous people. Vaughn (2004) notes that they internalize and reproduce the generally pejorative view of indigenous people so easily found in the discourse about indigeneity in Mexico. Afro-Mexicans accept that they are more culturally advanced than their indigenous compatriots (ibid 80). In an interview with another researcher, an Afro-Mexican woman from Collantes, Oaxaca explained why the indigenous had to work so hard: "*Es que muchos indios no tienen nada y tienen que trabajar para comer. Nosotros por lo menos tenemos maíz y no estamos tan jodidos como ellos*" [It's that many Indians don't have anything and they have to work to eat. We, at least, have corn and are not as screwed as they are] (Vaughn 2004:81). Encapsulated in this woman's remarks is the idea that the blacks are better off than the indigenous people. Another conversation from the same town but with a

different woman led to this declaration: “*Yo no soy india para estar comiendo frijoles todos los días*” [I am not Indian, therefore I do not eat beans every day] (ibid:81). She betrays her belief that as poor as blacks are, it is the indigenous groups who occupy the bottom rungs of the social hierarchy and are thus the object of ridicule. Interestingly, indigenous peoples receive more government services and other kinds of help than blacks (Hooker 2005; Graves 2004).

When one compares their feelings regarding the indigenous population with those held by *mestizos*, one sees very little difference. Imagine, in a country where a group that accounts for some 30% of the population is hardly represented in *telenovelas* ‘soap operas’, billboards, or any other media outlet. Such is the case with indigenous peoples in Mexico. Even the term *indio* which alludes to indigenous peoples, has a negative connotation. Phrases like “*no seas indio/a*” meaning ‘don’t be stupid or ignorant’ or the question “*somos indios?*” a reprimand literally asking ‘are we Indians?’ chastising someone who has been caught trying to dupe someone else (Arora 1995) convey the common understanding of the indigenous peoples’ lowly place in society. Even today, *indio* is considered one of the most insulting epithets in Mexico (Kearney 2004). Hence, there it is easy to see from where many Afro-Mexicans get their attitudes about indigenous people.

### *Dissonance*

I found very little evidence to support the Stage 2 argument because I was not looking at individuals over a long period of time. Thus, I could not gather

data that showed where their ideas about being black conflicted with each other. I did however find a particularly useful quote from one of my interviewees which elucidates the conflict that occurs in this stage. One of the first things that Don Morocho mentioned was that he considered himself black. Until that remark, I had gotten used to hearing blacks being identified and self-identifying by the somewhat more euphemistic term, *moreno*, which could be used to refer to anyone with dark skin. I had both read and heard that the term *negro* was impolite, so I took his use of the term as a somewhat self-affirming way to identify himself. I saw it as a kind of embrace of his blackness. Yet later on in the conversation, he applied the unnecessary epithet *feo* ‘ugly’ to emphasize someone else’s blackness. Specifically, he was talking about a black American guy that he went to church with and he was pointing out the man’s race and said, “You know *negro feo*.”

In Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Afro-Mexicans hold attitudes toward African Americans ranging from indifference to interest. A young Afro-Mexican couple befriended an African American couple with whom they work. The pair expressed interest in getting to know their coworkers and even attended dinners at their house sometimes (Vaughn and Vinson 2007). Marta, an Afro-Mexican professional also living in Winston-Salem worked toward integrating the Afro-Mexican and the African American communities. Still attitudes such as these are not typical of the Afro-Mexican community living in that area, nor elsewhere in

the U.S.. One Afro-Mexican resident statement that “[he] didn’t think about [African Americans] very much... We don’t really talk too much.” (ibid 233).

### *Resistance and Immersion*

During this Stage 3 Resistance and Immersion of Atkinson et al’s schema, the individuals begin to take pride in their own racial or ethnic group. At times, this newfound interest in one’s own ethnicity takes the form of learning about the history of the minority group of which the individual forms a part, or learning about different culture traditions associated with said group. In the case of Afro-Mexican in the Costa Chica, recent years have brought a surge of interest in traditional dances associated with this group. Many pueblos in Mexico in the Costa Chica such as Collantes still dance *La Danza de los diablos* (Hernandez-Diaz 2008; Ortiz 1996). This ‘Dance of the Devils’ bears similarities to dances performed in West Africa where the men sport extravagant costumes including masks (Glazier 2001).

Furthermore, these newfound feelings of pride about being a certain minority can be seen in the Afro-Mexican’s resistance to outsiders dictating how they pursue running their own organizations. After seeing a need for an organization that encouraged pride in Afro-Mexican culture, Father Glyn Jemmott, along with other activists, established *México Negro* in 1997 (Hernandez-Diaz 2008; Mitchell 2008). *México Negro* has been an active voice promoting the interest of Afro-Mexicans in the region since its inception. Eduardo Añorve, a community activist, expressed wariness in regards to “black *gringos*” English-

speaking foreigners, offering help to Afro-Mexicans on the condition that they follow their vision of how to develop their identity (Dellios 2005).

### *Introspection*

In Stage 4 of the Atkinson et al model, we expect to see a resolution in the way the group views other minority groups. Yet, the individual experiences a conflict between him- or herself and the group because he feels as if the group is usurping his individuality. Lastly, group members supposedly realize that not everything created by the dominant group is negative and the individual begins to look with a fine-toothed comb at the very traditions of the dominant group that they had deemed as negative in Stage 3. But I could not find any that showed anything resembling Stage 4 in either the interviews I conducted or the newspaper articles I collected concerning Afro-Mexicans. In my interviews with two other Afro-Mexicans, a woman from Corralero in her early thirties and a man from El Ciruelo around the same age, they told me how they had lived with and among mestizos when they lived in the United States. For them, they told me, race was never an issue. The man from El Ciruelo spoke about how his compatriots helped him cross through the desert into the United States. He was the only black among them, yet race was not an issue when they were facing such a great challenge. The woman from Corralero who had lived in California for more than 13 years, chose to live among other Mexicans, not just black ones, not because she had to, but because she wanted to. In fact, she made enough money to buy a house in a comfortable neighborhood in a presumably more Anglo area. Nevertheless, she

chose to stay among other Mexicans. Finally, as I took a *colectivo* from Santo Domingo Armenta to Cuajinicuilapa, I met an older Afro-Mexican gentleman who warned me about running into *hijos de la chingada* ‘sons of bitches’ telling making no distinction between races. Thus, for him, being *mestizo* did not equate to being bad as it would have had he been thinking at the preceding stage.

#### *Synergetic Articulation and Awareness*

This stage (5 in Atkinson et al’s model) in particular requires in-depth analysis of the individual. Since I was not in the field for very long, and because the articles that I included also did not include a lengthy study on Afro-Mexicans, I can not give any examples of individuals occupying Stage 5.

#### *Conclusions*

I used a rather simplified form of Atkinson et al’s (1983) original model to provide a snapshot of where different members of the Afro-Mexican community fall on this continuum. I did not offer evidence for every component of each stage because I did not have the data or that data I had did not fit the model. I did not stay a long time in the Costa Chica; it is possible that further interviews or newspaper articles would have yielded more evidence. Nevertheless, there emerges a fairly well-developed image of the diversity within the Afro-Mexican community. Far from being the monolithic group that I had expected them to be, there was evidence that some members viewed themselves as being solidly part of the *mestizo* group as defined nationally, whereas others viewed their Afro-Mexicanness with pride and autonomy. Viewed through Atkinson et al’s model,

one can say that the latter group had progressed from an earlier stage to a later one, while the former group just remained in the earlier stages.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

#### **Discussion**

The aim of this study was to determine how Afro-Mexicans perceived of themselves ethnically and racially. In order to achieve this, I analyzed newspaper articles featuring Afro-Mexicans who talked about race or ethnicity as it related to them either individually or as a group; I also collected my own data. As I mentioned in the Methodology chapter, I initially went into the field in order to interview Afro-Mexican migrants who had gone to the United States, lived there for at least a year, and then returned to Mexico. I wanted to find out how their views of race had changed since living in the United States. I naively believed that they did not experience racial strife or racism in Mexico, and so I thought, any difference that I saw between someone who had gone to the United States and someone who hadn't must be due to the U.S. influence. I didn't properly plan how I would execute that study. I realized that during an interview, sometimes the researcher has to relinquish control. I consequently found myself drifting into conversations where the topics ranged from religion to migration stories--- interesting topics, but completely out of the range of what I had gone there to study.

Unfortunately, I was not able to explore these other areas, or even my original idea very much. At the end of my fieldwork, I realized that I had interesting vignettes that did not fit into a cohesive story, vignettes that didn't

elucidate any problem. So, I faced the challenge of finding another question for my thesis. Fortunately, an idea came to me: had Afro-Mexicans formed a racial consciousness, and if so to what extent? Several things became apparent by the end of this thesis. Somewhere in the middle of writing it, I got the impression that I was looking at a group, an ethnic group, a racial group as a whole. It was not until I was almost writing it that one of my advisors had pointed that in fact, it seemed like I was looking at not the group, but at individuals and where they fell on the spectrum portrayed by the Minority Identity Development Model (Atkinson et al 1983).

### **Strengths**

In undertaking this study, I had to combine sources that had not been combined before into hopefully what will prove to be a useful source for further research on Afro-Mexicans or identity. Furthermore, this was an opportunity to use the MIDM outside of its field and test it. It was useful in distinguishing and categorizing the different phases that each participant reflected.

### **Limitations**

Admittedly, only spending one summer with a group of people is not enough time to fully comprehend their ideas about themselves. However, it is enough time to gather some preliminary information that can serve as a basis for more in-depth research. Also, I only managed to conduct three formal interviews, though I had a number of conversations with people. Another limitation that surfaces is the fact that participants, both those that I interviewed, and those

interviewed by the newspaper reporters, may have said things that they thought the interviewer wanted to hear. With any study depending on people to report their opinions or feelings, the researcher can only take what participants say at face value until presented with contradictory information. Only once presented with this new information that doesn't fit, must the researcher find a new way to analyze her data. Certainly in subsequent studies, more interviews could be conducted to render the data as close to accurate in reflecting the sentiments of the general populations as possible.

### **Further research**

Apart from sheer interest in Afro-Mexicans as a group, one of the reasons that this topic was particularly interesting to me is because it can give an insight into black and Hispanic relations in the United States. In some ways, the Afro-Mexicans, particularly those living in the United States were a representative of many people who don't easily fit into one category. In Mexico, they are not indigenous, but they are not *mestizo* either. In the U.S., Afro-Mexicans are both "Hispanic" and "Black", two groups that are often at odds with one another (Hernandez 2007). Almost ten years ago, Hispanics became the largest minority group in the U.S., taking away that long held title from African-Americans (de Vries 2003). By 2042, demographers predict that Hispanics will comprise the largest ethnic group in the country (Anonymous 2008). While there are some Hispanics claim to be either white or black, others lament that they can not choose just one category. Thus the current dichotomous model through which U.S.

Americans analyze race relations, black and white, will be outdated. Perhaps it will be replaced with another, such as Hispanic and other. In any case, seeing race relations between *mestizos* and blacks in Latin America, may give us a clue of what to expect in the future.

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APPENDIX A



Corralero, Oaxaca 2008. Some inhabitants of the Costa Chica along with the researcher.

APPENDIX B



Cuajinicuilapa, Guerrero 2008. "The haircut"