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## Maximizing Citizenship with Minimal Representation: An Analysis of Afro-Argentine Civil Society Organizing Strategies

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Maximizing Citizenship with Minimal Representation: An Analysis of Afro-Argentine Civil  
Society Organizing Strategies

by

Prisca Suárez

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
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## **DEDICATION**

Dedico este trabajo al pueblo afroargentino y a la Cátedra Libre de Estudios Afroargentinos y Afrodescendientes de la Universidad Nacional de la Plata que me acogieron con los brazos abiertos, que me dio recursos infinitos, y que sigue luchando por el mejoramiento de la comunidad afroargentina.

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With eternal gratitude,

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the organizing strategies and successes of Afro-Argentine civil society organizations (CSO) in Buenos Aires. I argue that despite low representation, Afro-Argentines have strategically designed their initiatives in ways that draw on national discourses of identity rights and nationalism; and, as well, have used cultural inclusion to influence state actors, creating agency and increasing visibility. Afro-Argentines are a highly understudied population due to the common belief that they do not exist in Argentina as a group. This thesis not only dispels that myth with a history of the long hidden importance of Afro-Argentines contributions to the formation of the Argentine nation and culture, but also provides a contemporary analysis which shows that they are a vibrant group which faces marginalization and exclusion on a daily basis.

The central argument is that civil society is a viable method by which Afro-Argentines can combat institutionalized racism. I show this with an analysis of the various theories on civil society, focusing strongly on Putnam's (1996) argument that strong voluntary organizations are vital to making democracy work. This assessment lends to the argument that civil society places Afro-Argentines in a discursive space in which they can communicate with state actors to make claims for cultural and citizenship rights. This argument is followed with concrete examples which show that the successful organizing of three Afro-Argentine CSOs in Buenos Aires have increased the visibility and agency of the Afro-Argentine community.

Overall I provide a contribution to the argument for civil society as a crucial component of functional democracies, contribute to academic discussion of the black diaspora in Latin America, and provide an in depth analysis of a highly understudied demographic.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

#### *No blacks in Argentina?*

I spent the summer of 2012 interning with the Institute for Afro-Argentine and Afrodescendant Studies at the University of La Plata in Argentina. Because of this I had the good fortune to attend many events hosted by Afro-Argentine civil society organizations. At one such event Carlos Alvarez, a member of the organization *Agrupación XANGÔ*, gave the welcome. He spoke passionately about the importance of taking on the plight of Afro-Argentines because this is the first time in history that we are in an open space to discuss the history and importance of Afrodescendants. Carlos was absolutely right. Race and racism has become one of the most important contemporary issues in the modern world. This discussion has been especially important in Latin America and the Caribbean regarding issues of development and exclusion in the region (Bucinivic et. Al. 2004). Myths of multiracial and raceless nations have been dispelled as it has become increasingly evident that blacks and indigenous groups experience higher rates of poverty, hunger, joblessness, and violent death their white and meztizo counterparts. As a result, scholars and activists have dedicated a great deal time to the study of how these marginalized groups can successfully create agency and have a better experience of citizenship and democracy.

While these studies are readily available in countries where there are a significant number of Afrodescendants there is a lack of information on Afrodescendants in Argentina, a country that had one of the most successful processes of whitening in the region. This is an important void to fill. Political issues, historic and present, such as social justice and democratization are incomplete

without a discussion of Afro-Argentines. According to Argentine scholar Barbara Sutton scholars of Argentina, “tend to overlook racism and focus exclusively on other important issues such as economic crisis, party politics, poverty, and the legacy of state terrorism. . . many of these studies would benefit from attending to the way racism intersects with the problems under examination.” (Sutton, 2008:106). There needs to be an ongoing project to create a concrete history and analysis of Afro-Argentines from the past to the present. I seek to fill this gap in understanding of Argentine politics by analyzing the ways in which Afro-Argentines can have a better experience of citizenship.

Although Afro-Argentines still share a relative experience of invisibility, in my time there I noticed a positive engagement between the state and civil society towards correcting this issue. This further sparked my interest in the study of how Afro-Argentine civil society functions in Argentina. While it is important to continue addressing the myth that there are no blacks in Argentina it is also important to move forward with the ways in which their lives can be bettered. In this thesis I focus on civil society as the answer to that question. While social movements are hard to ignore, civil society usually has to have strong organizational skills and a significant constituency to make claims to state powers. Afro-Argentine civil society organizations are relatively young and lack a sizeable constituency. This makes it important to study what experiences and strategies have led to the positive outcomes that they have experienced. The question guiding my study is; how have black Argentinian organizations been able to influence the state to take action for their demands in spite of their low representation in the society? I argue that Afro-Argentines have strategically designed their initiatives in ways that draw on national discourses of identity rights and nationalism; and, as well, have used cultural inclusion to influence state actors, creating agency and increasing visibility.

### ***Importance of study***

This research is important not only in regards to the larger discourse on the black diaspora but also has profound implications for Afro-Argentines. Afro-Argentines have an extricated identity experience. This means that the notion of a black identity is completely removed from the notion of an Argentine identity. If a person is black and in Argentina it is automatically assumed that he or she is from somewhere else as if it is impossible for blackness and *argentinidad* to simultaneously exist. As an African American, I was able to experience this extrication while living in Argentina. The question, *¿Y de dónde sos?* (and where are you from?) whether spoken or thought immediately evokes a feeling of being in a space where you are not welcome or at the very least not expected to be. Even my fluency in Spanish did little to create a space of a welcomed identity because while many people thought that I was from another Latin American country they would never assume that I was Argentinian. Afro-Argentines live daily with the same experience but on a much more difficult level than I could ever experience because they live with this struggle daily and in their own country (Fortes and Ceballo 2002). Secondly, this study is important because of the relative success of Afro-Argentine activists. Because Afro-Argentines have had many successful campaigns it is important to analyze their strategies for increasing black visibility and creating a comfortable space of existence for Afro-Argentines. Thus, this thesis seeks to contribute to an Afro-Argentine project of increased visibility and to the project of black activists to isolate better ways to organize.

### ***Black Diasporic Studies***

Because this thesis adds to the broad range of literature on the black diaspora in the western hemisphere it requires revisiting the populations studied in this literature. There are many ways in

which the African Diaspora is described in the current literature. Diaspora is usually described as a process involving dispersement, displacement, and resettlement. Furthermore, a collective memory is cultivated around this similar experience of transference from a homeland to another place. It is a term that initially referred to the dispersal of the Jews. This conceptualization was useful in the early twentieth century as Pan-Africanists sought to create consciousness and solidarity between the various groups of Afrodescendants (Padmore 1956; Nkrumah 1970). More recently diaspora has been defined as “any population which is considered ‘deterritorialized’ or ‘transnational’ -- that is, which has originated in a land other than which it currently resides, and whose social, economic and political networks cross the borders of nation-states or, indeed, span the globe.” (Vertovec 1997: 277). This definition moves beyond simply describing diaspora as a community of dispersion. It essentializes the networks of social, economic, and political similarities useful for transnational efforts which previous definitions lacked. It does not, however, offer a useful tool for conceptualizing or theorizing the processes that effect what is known as the black diaspora.

Stuart Hall (1990) provides a useful analysis of how to think about diaspora in ways that allow for a more profound conceptualization and theorization of the process. Furthermore, his analysis is specific to African descendants so it is useful to my study. He posits that in defining diaspora as some sacred homeland to which blacks must feel connected gives the term diaspora an essence and purity that is reminiscent of the old imperialising, the hegemonising, form of “ethnicity.” Therefore we must think of diaspora as “the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.” (Hall 1990: 225). In a world of

continual miscegenation, increasing globalization, and voluntary dispersal if we limit the “black diaspora” to those descendants of forced dispersal we can no longer effectively represent communities or efforts to raise consciousness and solidarity.

Afro-Latin America plays a significant role in the in the discourse on black diaspora. The presence of Afrodescendants has undeniably shaped the region. George Reid Andrews defines Afro-Latin America as the Spanish and Portuguese speaking nations in Latin America and the Caribbean who played a role in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and have at least five percent of their population belonging to Afrodescendants (Andrews 2004). This definition can be problematic as it excludes important countries where there is not only an affected black population but also a vibrant black movement such as in Mexico, Argentina, and Peru, all countries who reportedly have less than five percent Afrodescendants (See Appendix A). Andrews, however, notes that countries where there was a deliberate campaign to whiten the population should also be included in the definition of Afro-Latin America. This clarification not only includes Argentina in the discussion but makes it of great importance because before the whitening process almost one third of the nation was Afrodescendant making Argentina the country with the most successful whitening campaign (Andrews 1980). In the early 1800s, blacks constituted as much as 50 percent of the population of Buenos Aires, the capital (Andrews 2004). More than eleven million slaves were brought to the Americas with 38.5 percent ending up in Brazil and 17.5 percent in Spanish America (Appiah and Gates 1999). Thus Afrodescendants in Latin America have also played a crucial role in political, social, and cultural transformations in the region and form a major component of black diasporic studies.



### *A note on Positionality*

Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater (1996: 115) correctly commented that “all researchers are positioned whether they write about it explicitly, separately, or not at all. . . .researchers are positioned by age, gender, race, class, nationality, institutional affiliation, historical personal circumstance, and intellectual predisposition.” In social sciences it is important to not only be cognizant of this positionality but also to understand how it affects research and possible outcomes of research. Caldwell (2007) has also pointed out that this is crucial for black American scholars who have been accused of accessing foreign experiences of blackness with African American notions of what it means to be black.

I first took an interest in black diasporic studies while studying abroad in Cuba. My interest in the Afro-Argentine population results from a one month study abroad program I participated in the summer of 2012. Because my examination involves a personal experience of “blackness in Argentina” it is important that I address my positionality as an African American woman living in the country. I have dark chocolate colored skin and at the time that I was in Argentina my hair was in braids. I also constantly dressed in bright colors, as I always do, simply because I enjoy them. I am sure that my appearance shaped my experiences there in a way that was different than my white peers and affected my outlook in a different way than if my analysis had been informed by secondary research alone. My experiences in day to day interactions were a confirmation of the common myth that “there are no blacks in Argentina.” On one occasion someone asked me if I was wearing “Afro colors.” Many times when I engaged in conversations with people I had just met they would begin by asking where I was from or inquiring if I liked Argentina implying that I could not be from the country. The fact that I was asked this question before I spoke, potentially revealing a foreign accent, led me to conclude that this question had less to do with my demeanor

hinting at the fact that I was a foreigner and more to do with the color of my skin, my hair style, and the way that I dressed. When I told people where I was from they often responded that they had believed that I was from the Dominican Republic or Cuba. A couple of people had also asked if I was from Jamaica or Haiti despite our conversation being completely in Spanish. The very assumption that I was from a country known to have a larger percentage of Afrodescendants shows that the impossibility of me being from Argentina was more about my skin color than anything else. This experience led me to be more aware of my blackness in ways that I have not experienced elsewhere.

My experience and reactions were also undoubtedly influenced by the intersections of gender, class, and language. In taking into account my own subjectivities I attempt to approach each analysis of my encounters with this in mind. As an international student intern my position offered benefits and setbacks. My internship with the Institute for the study of Afro-Argentines and Afrodescendants at the University of La Plata placed me in a unique position of gaining the trust of the activists with whom I worked merely through association with the Institute. At the same time, the very fact that I am a U.S. student made my colleagues wary of taking me to the areas where the majority of the Afro-Argentine community lived due to the lack of safety in the region. This setback did not allow me to form questions and analyses of how Afro-Argentine CSOs interacted with the communities they represent, which is an important part of civil society. It is a worthwhile adventure that I hope to pursue in the near future.

### ***Research Design & Methodology***

In this thesis I argue that civil society can serve as a conduit for social change for minority or oppressed populations. To make my case, I use a case study of Afro-Argentine CSOs to

demonstrate how they have used an effective strategy of discourse and culture to influence state actors, creating agency and increasing visibility. To show how this process occurs will provide concrete examples to show that the CSOs have a deliberate and organized plan to carry out their initiatives. I also will show that these initiatives have resulted in a more substantive experience of citizenship for Afro-Argentines and have helped them to move toward a more inclusive society. The best way to prove this will be to show that the achievement of visibility and space in the public sphere is attainable no matter how the organization is set up (politically, culturally, or multi-culturally).

To show the move toward substantive citizenship, I will follow Sutton's (2008) model, which analyzes the different ethno-racial discourses of the state, the media, and self-representations of Afro-Argentine civil society. While drawing on Sutton's study, my study will differ in many ways. Sutton uses personal interviews to analyze self-representations of blackness. Due to a lack of resources to perform extensive interviews, I focus on the proclamations of representative organizations. This method will also allow me to access how these representations are received by the state. The assumption here is that goals are more likely to be attained through the efforts of organizations because individuals do not interact with the state in the way that civil society organizations can. I will use webpages, newspapers, and government sites to examine the crossing of discourse between Afro-Argentines and the state.

I draw further inspiration from the working paper "So What Difference Does It Make: Mapping the Outcomes of Citizen Engagement" by John Gaventa and Gregory Barrett (2010). After mapping 830 possible outcomes of citizen engagement Gaventa and Barnett narrow down four areas where citizen engagement can have an influence on state-society relations. They are; construction of citizenship, practices of citizenship participation, government accountability, and

inclusive and cohesive societies. I intend to focus on the third and the last of these outcomes. Positive outcomes in inclusive societies would include greater sense of inclusion of previously marginalized groups and a greater sense of social cohesion across groups. An important measure of inclusion was citizen's sense of dignity. In Gaventa and Barrett's study, inclusive societies was among the measures with the least positive results (Gaventa and Barrett, 2010: 26 Fig. 5.1). Because this is an area where Afrodescendant civil society in Argentina seems to be making progress, it will be especially important to look at how they are doing so. Finally, after showing that citizen engagement does have an overall positive effect on experience of citizenship, Gaventa and Barrett challenge scholars to move beyond the previous question and ask under what conditions positive outcomes occur. Thus, my thesis offers a case study that provides possible answers to this question.

There are many reasons to use a country specific case study in a country where the nationally recognized percentage is only four percent. The study of Afrodescendants should not be limited to those countries with high percentages of Afrodescendants as communities with lower percentages may have a harder time asserting a voice in the public sphere. This is a practice that many scholars are taking up (Andrews 1980; Golash-Boza 2011). Furthermore, unique experiences often shed light on processes that are not evident in other situations.

### *Concepts and Definitions*

Throughout this thesis, I use the terms Afro-Argentine, Afrodescendant, and civil society quite often. Because these words can take on different meanings, depending on the author I wish to clearly define how they are here. Afro-Argentine is a term that is contested today even among black Argentines because Afrodescendants in Argentina belong to different waves of immigration,

some forced and others not. Afro-Argentines of the *tronco colonial* refers to living descendants of the slaves of the colonial era. There are also many Afro-Argentines of Cape Verdean descent who immigrated in the first wave of immigration of the late 1800s and early twentieth century. The most recent wave of Afrodescendants arrived in the 1990s and continues to grow. Mostly coming from the Caribbean and Brazil, this group is currently finding a place within the Afro-Argentine community as well (Fortes and Ceballos 2002). While recognizing that each of these groups has unique experiences, because of the shared experience of exclusion of blacks in Argentina I used the term Afro-Argentine to refer to any person with Argentine citizenship with phenotypes characteristic of blacks. In the case that I am referring to a specific group I will specify that I am doing so. My assessment will not include to a large degree the experience of Afrodescendants without citizenship or the recent growing community of African migrants. Although I recognize they face issues of racism and xenophobia my analysis concerns experiences of citizenship so I will focus on those blacks with Argentine citizenship.

The term Afrodescendant is increasingly replacing the word “black” and a descriptor of African descended peoples. At the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa in 2001 participants decided to use the term Afrodescendant to represent any member of the group of people who “continue to suffer racial discrimination as the historic legacy of the transatlantic slave trade.” (United Nations 2011). This definition includes those who are not descended from slaves but are still subjected to racism due to their skin color and other phenotypes. It also includes those people of mixed ancestry who have visible phenotypes characteristic of blacks including, skin color, facial features, and hair type. Throughout my thesis Afrodescendant is used in this way and used interchangeably with the word black.

Civil society is somewhat more difficult to define due many ways in which academics have used the term. I have found the most useful definition to be Michael Edwards'. In noting that civil society is "a concept that seems so unsure of itself that definitions are akin to nailing jelly to the wall." (Edwards 2004:4). Edwards (2004) considers three main schools of thought of civil society; the world of associational life, and ideal society, and civil society as the public sphere. He suggests that the best approach is best approach is to embrace a holistic approach that incorporates elements of all of these. Thus civil society is a "healthy associational ecosystem [which] is vital to the public sphere, since it is usually through voluntary organizations and the media that citizens carry on their conversations. .... the achievements of the good society are what make possible the independence and level playing field that underpin a democratic associational life - by reducing inequality, for example, and guaranteeing freedom of association." (Edwards 2004: 83-86). Civil society itself is "distinct from society in general in that it involves citizens to express their interests, passions, preferences and ideas" as a part of interest formulation in order to attempt to improve state accountability and functionability (Diamond 1997: 6). Civil society's positionality is "between the private sphere and the state." (Diamond 1997: 6). This means it "excludes individual and family life, inward-looking group activity...and the profit-making individual business firms." (Diamond 1997: 6). It includes associations such as neighborhood watches, mutual interest societies, labor unions, and others that are motivated by a common cause among the members. This definition provides a clarity in the conceptualization without leaving out vital elements of civil society nor giving to much weight to others.

This thesis looks at how civil society organizations combat racism, a critical factor affecting the agency of Afrodescendants. Racism is often denied in Argentina on the basis that racism cannot exist in a country where there is no one to be racist against (Sutton 2008). This

proclamation itself is a product of the effects of racism. Racism is a social phenomenon that has been institutionalized to the point that it pervades and influences social relationships and structures, government institutions, and is accepted as normalcy (Reiter 2009). While racism limits the agency of Afrodescendants and indigenous groups it confers special capabilities to whites perpetuating unearned privileges and advantages that they have over marginalized groups (Reiter 2009).

### *Organization of the Thesis*

Chapter 2 gives a brief history of Afro-Argentines beginning in colonial Rio de la Plata, before Argentina was consolidated as a nation, and concluding with an assessment of the contemporary situation of Afro-Argentines. I examine Argentina's role in the slave trade and review the scientific and social processes of whitening that have led to the current notion of Argentina as an all-white nation. The history provides evidence of the long hidden importance of Afro-Argentines contributions to the formation of the Argentine nation and culture and further dispels the myth that Afro-Argentines no longer exist. It also shows that racism is an ongoing battle with which Afro-Argentines are presented on a daily basis.

Chapter 3 makes the argument that civil society is a viable method by which Afro-Argentines can combat institutionalized racism. I consider relevant literature on racial hegemony and Universal Rights and Multicultural Rights as they illustrate the situation in which Afro-Argentines live and present the dominant discourses in which Afro-Argentine civil society finds itself. I conclude with an analysis of the various theories on civil society and suggest that civil society places Afro-Argentines in a discursive space in which they can communicate with state actors to make claims for cultural and citizenship rights.

Chapter 4 provides examples of how Afro-Argentine civil society organizations (CSO) have used the state discourse as the state to procure rights for Afro-Argentines. The primary way they have done this is by gaining space to proliferate knowledge about Afro-Argentine heritage, culture, and social situation. I focus on the three organizations that I made contact with in Argentina in the summer of 2012, namely *Agrupación XANGÔ*, *Asociación Misibamba*, and *Casa de la Cultura Indo-Afro-Americana*. These organizations have different purposes in terms of organizing behind cultural and/or political strategies but have all had a relative amount of success with their initiatives. These CSOs show that despite different organizational mechanisms civil society can be a viable option for creating democratic conditions for all citizens.

Chapter 5 revisits the current status and the national mythology surrounding Afro-Argentines and summarizes how civil society has been able to achieve a move toward visibility and rights. I conclude with some policy suggestions and areas for possible future research.



## **CHAPTER II**

### **Retracing the Mysterious Disappearance of Afro-Argentines**

#### ***Introduction***

Afro-Argentines are an ethnic group that has had a unique experience from the dominant social groups in Argentina. The most noted is that during the nineteenth century Argentina carried out one of the most successful whitening campaigns in all of Latin America, effectively getting rid of its sizable black population. Another more recent distinction is that Argentina is now a society which is highly open to the discussion of human rights and activism providing a rare opportunity for group specific organization. Invisibility due to whitening is a subject that is highly discussed among scholars (Andrews 1980, 2004; Cottrol 2007; Schávelzon 2007; Wade 2010). The attention to the latter, human rights activism, is also rife not only in scholarly literature but also in popular discourse. The disadvantage to this popular discussion of human rights, however, is that it rarely takes into account the Afro-Argentines right to identity. As a result, the Afro-Argentine experience is one of continuing invisibility in contemporary popular discourses about Argentine nationhood. Despite the current trend to study race and identity as one of the most pressing contemporary issues, race relations in Argentina are rarely mentioned in discussions by academics of Afro-Latin America. This is a subject that should hold importance for any scholar of the social and political processes of identity and nation formation. Not only because of how the overvaluation of European contributions have shaped how Argentine identity has been defined, but also because the

subsequent devaluation of the non-white/non-European population has had and continues to have a profound impact on the experience of Afro-Argentines.

George Reid Andrew's book, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires: 1800-1900* (1980), has sparked enough scholarly interest so that we now know a great deal more about the history of Afro-Argentines through the work of other scholars (Frigerio 2000; Solomianski 2003; Peñaloza 2007; Lewis 1996; Castro 2001). These texts cover a historical period beginning with slavery up to the early 1900s and conclude with very short one or two chapters on the twentieth century and the current state of this group. While the 100 year gap from 1900-2000 is a difficult one to fill due to the complete erasure of Afro-Argentines from national statistics by deleting ethnic designations of blacks, it is a worthy challenge. Furthermore, the ten or so pages dedicated to their current state by these authors does little to move beyond a narrative perspective and offer concrete suggestions for policy change. With this chapter I intend continue the counter-narrative to the national myth that "there are no blacks in Argentina." I will accomplish this by reinserting the history of the African presence in Argentina, bridging the gap in the chronological narrative of Afro-Argentines by identifying their contributions, and providing a more profound analysis of the contemporary conditions of Afro-Argentines.

### ***A Concise History of Colonial Afro-Argentina: Slavery to 1900.***

There is no denying that Argentina played a role in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Due to its proximity to the western coast of Africa, it is surprising that the port of Buenos Aires was not a major port for the importation of slaves. The Spanish Crown sought to minimize the number of importation ports to maintain control over the slave trade and Buenos Aires, was not chosen as one of the main ports (Andrew 1980). This does not mean that no slaves were brought to Argentina.

Buenos Aires was used as a port for the arrival of other goods. Many of these ships contained slaves that would be transported to other parts of South America (Romero 2002). As a stopping point on the way to other destinations throughout the Americas, Buenos Aires was a port through which many slaves entered as illegal contraband. In fact, Andrews shows that more slaves entered Argentina illegally than through legal recourse (1980:23-24). The entry of slaves in this way was so significant that for much of colonial history Afro-Argentines formed a large part of the demographic makeup of Argentina. In the late 18th century as many as 33 percent of all Argentine residents were of African descent. In Buenos Aires this percentage was higher, reaching as many as 50 percent at times. (Andrews 2004). Although the slave trade was abolished in 1812, it was not until 1853 that Argentina emancipated the slaves.

These numbers coincide with other information about Afro-Argentines role in Argentine culture. Slaves must have played a vital role in Argentine society and the development of Argentine culture by default. In fact, they were prevalent in agrarian culture, urban society, and the military for much of the nineteenth century. As agricultural workers slaves played a role in developing various types of Argentine cuisine, including the famed *asado* (Reel 2005). As a tenet of the labor force in urban sectors slaves dominated a major part of the workforce especially in the areas of domestic service and as street vendors. The role of street vendors merits special attention because it was in this position that slaves were most likely to earn the funds to buy their freedom. Street vendors also contributed to a dialect that is specific to Buenos Aires, called *lunfardo* (Schávelzon 2003). It is important to note that although blacks monopolized the artisan markets, few could break the barrier of the lowest level of vocational positions. But slaves who were able to buy their freedom were important community organizers. They opened some of the first Nations, which

were loosely organized ethnic groups whose primary function was raising the funds to provide manumissions (Andrews 1980).

Lastly, the importance of the Afro-Argentine presence in the wars of the nineteenth century is well known. Marching from Corrientes, Viceroyalty of Río de La Plata (now Argentina), Afro-Argentines often fought with General José Francisco de San Martín, the famed liberator of much of South America (Harvey 2000; Lewis 2001). In fact, half of the men in General San Martín's army when he invaded Chile in 1816 were ex-slaves who were granted their freedom for military service (Andrews 1980). This is a stark example but the prevalence of black and mixed soldiers in the military is by no means a limited to specific examples. From 1813-1860 black and *trigueño*, meaning mixed-race, enlistees far outnumbered white enlistees (Andrews 1980: 120, Table 7.1). Overall, Afro-Argentines slaves, in their roles as workers, craftsmen, and soldiers played a crucial role in the formative years of the development of Argentina as a nation state.

These contributions continued as slaves bought, fought for, and were eventually granted their freedom. Emancipation for Afro-Argentines was a slow process. Andrews marks the seventeen years from 1810-1827 as the period of greatest improvement in the legal status for Afro-Argentines. One reason for this assessment is that it frames the time in which the most Afro-Argentines were granted freedom due to military service. Another crucial advancement during this time frame was the *Ley de libertad de vientres*, the free womb law of 1813 (Andrews 1980). Although these years were very important, it would be a long time before Afro-Argentines were truly free. National abolition did not occur until 1853. Emancipation came even later for the slaves of Buenos Aires, which did not free the slaves until rejoining the Confederation of Argentine States in 1861 (Edwards 2007). Newly freed blacks experienced a circumscribed freedom. Furthermore, although slavery was a dying institution there is evidence that it was still practiced openly in

Buenos Aires. My own archival research conducted for this thesis in Buenos Aires, Argentina in 2012 uncovered classified ads from an 1865 Buenos Aires newspaper, *Diario de la Tarde*, which openly advertised the sale of responsible *criadas*, housemaids, along with household furniture. These advertisements were accompanied by caricatures of robust black robust women (See Appendix B)(Avisos 1865).

Many Afro-Argentines died in the wars of the nineteenth century. While this representation is dangerous because it reinforces the myth that most Afro-Argentines died during the wars of independence and the Paraguayan War, it is also a testament to Afro-Argentine men who fought and died as soldiers and heroes of the wars in Argentina (Peñaloza 2007). More importantly it means that the task of preserving the population and culture fell to Afro-Argentine women. Another explanation that explains the “disappearance” of Afro-Argentines at home are the yellow fever epidemics. While my research did not unearth the number of women living in Argentina during the independence wars it is evident that they did not all die in the epidemic. “Of the 23,748 people who died that year, 17,729 had race listed, and of these, an unusually small number, only 268, were listed as Afro-Argentines.” (Andrews 1980:91-92) Most of the historical work makes a brief mention of this, but to date there has been no significant historical work done on the importance and role of Afro-Argentine women in the colonial and neo-colonial era. This would be an important study for if that many black men gave their lives for Argentina’s freedom one would assume that a significant amount left behind their spouses, sisters, mothers, and daughters.

Pre-abolition records show that women were more successful than men at purchasing freedom (Andrews 1980). As domestic workers, street vendors, and washer-women they demonstrated an entrepreneurship that deserves mention. This also has implications for the role of women to the Nations and mutual aid societies in helping to purchase the freedom of other slaves.

Andrews (1980, Appendix D) lists over fifty three nations present in Buenos from 1740-1900. Due to the high rates of mortality for Afro-Argentine men women must have form part of the nations and mutual aid societies, with the exception of those that were exclusive to men. Post-abolition many of these women married immigrants in the late 1800s as it was more likely for a white man to take on a black partner than the other way around (Andrews 2004). Although this is a fact that is rarely mentioned it explains the heavily mixed nation witnessed by foreign visitors in the early 1900s, by such travelers as Alexander Gillespie, Samuel Haigh, John and William Robertson and others (Andrews 1980). Afro-Argentine women undoubtedly contributed to the development of the Argentine nation, yet there remains a gap in what we know about this demographic.

Part of the explanation for the invisibility of Afro-Argentines is due to the dissolution of the black press. The Afro-Argentine press is arguably one of the most crucial resources to reconstruct the history of Afro-Argentines. It provides the researcher with an illustration of the Afro-Argentine experience from the eyes of Afro-Argentines themselves. Furthermore, there were different papers related directly to different classes who were often at odds with each other. Although this was a point of division in the Afro-Argentine community it also provides a view of the black middle class as well as the working class. The first two products of the black press, the *Raza Africana* and the *Proletario*, were published in 1858. The names of the newspapers are important as they show that an awareness of class and race inequality was prevalent in the community (Cirio 2010). Afro-Argentines realized the process of invisibility and the need to establish a black identity within the confines of a counter-hegemonic identity long before the *Generation of 1880*, a group of conservative elites, began an official whitening campaign despite class differences.

Despite the numerous contributions of Afro-Argentines to the society and their substantial proportions by 1900, popular discourse proudly professes that there were no blacks in Argentina. According to official census data the percent of Afro-Argentines in Buenos Aires decreased from 30.1 percent in 1806 to 1.8 percent in 1887 (Andrews 1980: 66, Table 5.1). The only explanation of such a drastic demographic change in such a short amount of time is the successful whitening campaign carried out by the state, as mentioned previously, as early as the 1700s Buenos Aires elites sought to hide any evidence of blackness. The systematic process of whitening occurred under the direction of the *Generation of 1880* who enforced a public pressure for the nation to “become white.” The *Generation of 1880* consisted of a highly conservative group of governing elites who held power in Argentina from 1880 until 1916. Their goals were to make Argentina the greatest nation in the south by transforming it into a nation more like Europe and the United States both physically and ideologically. Although the *Generation of 1880* carried out the *blanqueamiento* project the intellectual seeds had been planted since the early 1800s. Intellectual leaders such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and José Ingenieros actually were part of another group of intellectuals known as the *Generation of 1837*. Their racist ideologies, which were so internal to the leaders at the end of the nineteenth century, had been fomented in progressive literature such as *Facundo, o civilización y barbarie* by Sarmiento and *Sociología argentina* by Ingenieros. The Generation of 1837 is credited with massive education reform and progress in the country. The reforms suggested by these intellectuals, however, were racist in nature. They encouraged massive European immigration and used Western ideals of social Darwinism to exclude blacks from the advancement of the nation (Romero 2002).

The political power behind the whitening project of the *Generation of 1880* in Argentina included Bartolomé Mitre, Julio Roca and José Uriburu. During the presidencies of Roca, 1880-

1886 and 1898-1904 and Uruburu, 1895-1898 Afro-Argentines experienced the greatest the "underenumeration" of their population due to statistical transference. This statistical transference was made possible through the use of *trigueño*, or wheat colored, on the census. According to Andrews, "the extensive use of this term would inevitably result in a decrease of an officially documentable Afro-Argentine population. When individuals were labeled *trigueño*...they had succeeded in passing over to an intermediate category." (Andrews 1980: 84) The option of *trigueño* on the census, only appeared as a census category after the Independence Wars, provided an escape for light skinned Afro-Argentines from the stigma of blackness. The process of statistical transference also speaks to the pervasiveness of the whitening mentality which was so powerful that even Afro-Argentines denied that they were black.

This phenomenon was exacerbated by massive European immigration. 1887 was the drastic year in which the census reported that Afro-Argentines made up only 1.8 percent of the national population. The most recent statistic before then was 26.1 percent in 1838, but curiously the censuses in the years between 1838 and 1887 did not include race as a category, so there is no data (Andrews 1980). The census data that is present is highly flawed. The most contestable part of the census was the way in which it defined who was black and who was not. Many Argentines with visible African ancestry could pass for white. An example is that former president Bernardino Rivadavia passed as white, although he still acquired the nickname "Dr. Chocolate." Afro-Argentines who could take advantage of the opportunities that accompanied shedding the black racial category almost always did (Edwards 2002) Andrews (1980) also pointed out the importance of the word *trigueño* which appeared as a category after the independence wars.



### ***Whitening: Sarmiento and the Plan for Progress and Civilization***

Crucial to the understanding of how Argentina's whitening campaign was so successful is an understanding of the philosophy and importance of Domingo F. Sarmiento. The whitening campaign, also known as *blanqueamiento*, was an informal and formalized process to erase the presence of blacks with the suppression of black culture and the enactment of policies that courted white immigration (Coniff and Davis 1994). At the critical points of the formation of Argentina Sarmiento and Rosas were the two representations of the country, so much so that they were referred to them as the "theses and the antithesis of national life." (Goodrich 1996: 3) Rosas represented the Federalist sentiment, the desire for equal power among all the provinces of Rio de La Plata. The Federalists were associated with gaucho life and what is referred to as Americanism. Rosas specifically was also associated with Afro-Argentines and participating in their culture and life. Sarmiento represented the Unitarians, a group who sought to unify Argentina under a central government in Buenos Aires. They also wanted the modernization of Argentina to occur in a similar fashion as it had in Europe and the United States. Aside from the fact that this system is still present today, the fact that Sarmiento has been called the father of modern Argentina and is known for his immeasurable contributions to the formation of Argentine society and culture leaves no doubt as to which representation of Argentina was victorious in the end. This victory however came with gloomy implications for the Afro-Argentine community.

As mentioned before, Sarmiento was one of the most influential of the group of Positivists and Social Darwinists known as the *Generation of 1837*. In the 1840s, while in exile, he began a world tour to examine different educational and political systems. Another goal of this tour was to prove the racial theories of the genetic inferiority of the indigenous and Africans that he posited in *Facundo*, one of the most read Argentine books. Much of Sarmiento's writing includes overt

racism in the form of justifying colonial violence and supporting ethnic cleansing. After travelling to Algeria in 1846, he wrote that African reality is characterized by blood and crimes. His writing on Africa, however, was more affected by foreign accounts than his own experiences. Ben Bollig provides various examples of how this played out in Sarmiento's *Viajes*. Sarmiento begins to praise the African horsemanship that he witnessed in his time there. This comment however is immediately rebutted by his disdain at the lack of trains and steamships. His praise of Arab poetry is overshadowed by the accusations of barbarism that he had read in the writings of his French contemporaries (Bollig 2009).

Sarmiento was unable to escape his deeply-rooted belief in the biological inferiority of non-whites. His travels to Paris from 1845-1846 further convinced him of the existence of two types of people, civilized and barbaric. For Sarmiento, European cultures and people were progressive, educated, and civilized. Anything else, *criollo*, indigenous, and Afrodescendant was by default archaic and barbaric (Katra 1994). So, although he cannot be discredited for reforming the education system and improving the social status of many Argentines, it is also important to note the underlying exclusion of non-Euro-descended peoples. For example in *De la educación popular*, his work noted for progressive ideas of education for women and children and thus progress for the population, indigenous groups were excluded for their "ineducability." Afro-Argentines, still slaves at the time the work was written, had even less of a place in Sarmiento's extremely liberal vision for progress and modernization (Katra 1996). To say that Sarmiento was an extreme liberal does not imply a promotion of democracy and equality but refers to a specific organization of the state and its economic practices. Katra outlines these principles as; "1) a progressive authoritarian regime guided by a small educated elite; 2) laissez-faire economic activities with an international orientation; and 3) full religious liberty."(Katra 1994:79)

Ironically, Sarmiento, in his criticism of barbarism was often barbaric himself suggesting that in order to rid itself of the *caudillo* “problem” the Argentine elite would have to become more ruthless than the *gauchos* and *caudillos*. *Gauchos* and *caudillos*, cowboys and charismatic landowners respectively who usually aligned with the Federalists who argued for a decentralized Argentina. During the civil wars in Argentina they were marginalized and portrayed as ruthless and uncivilized fighters (Romero 2002). Sarmiento proposed outright repression positing that Argentina would be lost in an archaic retrograde if it could not rid itself of the rustic image of the gaucho (Sarmiento 1998). He saw himself as a mediator to Argentina’s development as a “civilized” society. A major importance for him was that his writings served as political propaganda. All of his writings were primarily political and reflected his desire to transform Argentine society. The United States was his main inspiration and he sought to promote a similar system of expansion and public education in his own country (Crescenti 1993). It is important to note here that U.S. expansion was from European countries as well as in emulating the United States Sarmiento also saw European immigration as the answer to progress. Georgette Dorn (1993) posits that Sarmiento's experience in the United States occurred primarily among circles of northern intelligentsia and abolitionists which is why he was uncritical of U.S. slavery. She further suggests that criticisms of racism on the part of Sarmiento in this respect are overly harsh. But it was precisely his racist views that prevented him from bringing ideals of abolition back to Argentina along with those that he brought back for educational reform. It is clear that as the mediator and founder of modern Argentina Sarmiento did not envision *gauchos* and Afro-Argentines as part of the new society. Thus, it is not surprising that the *Generation of 1880* sought systematic ways to eliminate Afro-Argentines who were seen as less than the *gauchos* and *caudillos* that, “at least could be educated.”

### *Eugenics in Latin America: the Europeanization of the Western Hemisphere*

The ideology of whitening is explicitly racist and would not amount to racial genocide in contemporary racial discourse. But upon what premises was such a widespread ideology accepted in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries? If Sarmiento's and later Argentina's acceptance of such racist views as not only the norm but also necessary to the development of the nation seem far-fetched, it is important to note that such notions were heavily supported by the science of the times. Scientific racism was the means by which imperial powers justified slavery's racial prejudices and injustices. The first comprehensive account of the science of race from its origins in the late 1700s to the twentieth century was written by Nancy Stepan. In *The Idea of Race in Science* (1982) Stepan traces the development of physical measures of "superiority" and "inferiority." According to the dominant scientific findings, blacks filled the evolutionary link from apes to white Europeans. Although Stepan does not explicitly state so, the driving factor behind scientific racism was not an innate belief in racial hierarchies but rather economic desires. At first linked to justifying the slave trade and then to postcolonial desires of the elite to maintain a concentration of wealth, scientific racism has always functioned for specific economic goals, as demonstrated by Stepan (1982). *The Idea of Race in Science*, although the book focuses on scientific racism in Great Britain, is important for establishing the malleability of racial arguments. Over time racial bias stayed the same while the form by which it was justified changed (Gilroy 2000). Thus when phenology and craniometry were disproven eugenics was developed.

The most popular form of scientific racism at the turn of and well into the twentieth century was eugenics. Eugenics is based on the belief that biologically "unfit" individuals should not be allowed to procreate, given their inferior racial makeup. The term was coined by Francis Galton,

a scientist and cousin of Charles Darwin in 1883 (Wade 2010). Eugenics applies Darwin's theory of natural selection to different ethnic groups and further exacerbates this error by attempting to aid nature along with the implementation of social policies that reduce the so called "inferior races." Sarmiento, with the publishing of *Facundo*, established in the minds of Argentines that European countries and the United States were the symbols of civilization and advancement. As the "child of Europe" Latin American elites sought to emulate Europe in every way. An example of this is the quip which I heard often in Argentina that "Argentines are Italians who speak Spanish and think they are British people living in France." While only a popular saying, it still points at the notion of *argentinidad* employed by Argentine elites during the period of intellectual growth and institutional advancement from 1880-1930. The educational system in the early 1900s was very similar to the system in the United States. This was a product of Sarmiento's fascination with U.S. education and the modernity that he witnessed while there which was a product of the industrial revolution. He was able to carry out this project during his term in the Argentine presidency from 1868-1874. His racial ideas were also influenced by a need to emulate the United States as there, miscegenation was not as common as it was in Latin America (Crescenti 1993).

In *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* Nancy Stepan (1991) charts the evolution of eugenics discourse in Latin America in the twentieth century. The comprehensive history she provides is crucial to understanding the mindset with which Argentine elites approached the possibility of being viewed as a non-European society. Stepan describes eugenics as the "science" based movement of improving the qualities of a human population by prohibiting the reproduction of persons having genetic defects or thought to have undesirable traits. I use the term science in quotations not because the leaders of the movement were not real scientists but because although eugenics is based upon the premise of natural selection, the policies

instituting such beliefs were implemented by hegemonic powers to mold the society to their ideals of superiority. Such a process is not natural at all. Furthermore, Stepan shows that eugenic practices around Latin America were not uniform. While in Argentina eugenists pushed for a purely white race, in Mexico eugenists upheld the strength of *mestizaje* as the best way to improve the race. Another example is the change in eugenics discourse within specific countries. At the turn of the twentieth century Argentina encouraged eugenic Europeanization through immigration. Decades later, however, amidst economic turmoil, these same immigrants were redefined as being the cause of the low class image of the country. The malleability of eugenics disproves its practice as a worthy science. The driving force was instead cultural and political. It also shows that nations did not simply adopt eugenics, but that their particular method for applying the principles of eugenics were dependent on their racial demographics and relations. So Eugenics, according to Stepan, was a scientific and a social movement geared toward the enactment of specific, race-based, politics.

Stepan points out that the discourse of Eugenics was shaped by cultural, political, and institutional environments, which, in turn, shaped them. She also effectively shows that although the eugenic practices in Latin America were more passive than the Anglo-Saxon traditions, they were just as insidious and served the same purpose of racial exclusion (Stepan 1991). The case of Latin America is arguably more dangerous because implicit racism became normalized as natural. This is an example of Stuart Hall's (1990) conceptualization of racial hegemony in full effect. Eugenics questioned the capacity of minority cultures to contribute to the society. It provided a scientific explanation and solution to a social problem in Argentina and most of Latin America. Elites believed that the poor were in a degenerative state due to a hereditary propensity to be dirty, ignorant, and unhygienic, while ignoring the effect of hundreds of years of repression through slavery.

With these beliefs Argentina was able to carry out one of the most successful whitening campaigns in all of Latin America. The whitening campaign or *blanqueamiento* is referred to as such because it describes a systematic process, a set of policies which “sought to diminish the Black presence if not eliminate it, by favoring white immigration and suppressing Black culture.” (Coniff and Davis 1994: 223) In Argentina, these policies included erasing the black, moreno, and pardo categories from the census, excluding blacks from history books, encouraging immigration from Europe with special tax and citizenship privileges for Europeans only, and banning black cultural forms of production (Andrews 1980). However, despite a successful whitening campaign up until the end of the nineteenth century the Afro-Argentines left such an imprint on the Argentine culture that we can assume that their contributions lasted well into the twentieth century. This presence was especially felt in Buenos Aires. In the first half of the nineteenth century *afroporteños* constituted thirty percent of the population of the city of Buenos Aires. Many articles and customs were preserved such as drums, remnants of African religious practices, burial rituals, and even African influenced cuisine (Cottrol 2007). The most notable of these Afro-Argentine contributions is the Tango. Tango, in its contemporary form, is actually also a product of the whitening process. As such, a focus on Tango allows for a showcasing of the processes that occurred in the nation at large.

### ***Tango Negro, Argentina Blanca: Tracing the Black Roots of a “White” Dance Form***

Throughout much of Latin America during the height of *blanqueamiento*, the whitening ideology, black cultural forms were at first shunned, then legally banned, then whitewashed, that is stripped of its black components, before being absorbed as fundamental facets of the national identity. Similar undertakings occurred, for example in Brazil, where Capoeira, an Afro-

Brazilian dance and martial art form was banned from 1890-1918 before being named the national Brazilian sport in 1953 (Assunção 2005). Other black cultural forms such as Samba music in Brazil and Son in Cuba were similarly ostracized before becoming national symbols of the culture. Tango in Argentina was no exception to this pattern. It was as much a part of the European whitening process in Argentina as were the botched census statistics, the formalized immigration preference for European immigrants and the exclusion of Afro-Argentines from school textbooks, ideology and national identity. In fact, the tango was a dance of stigma to the Argentine elite culture of the country until the black features of the dance form had all but disappeared (Guerrera 2008). So although African elements of the Tango were rendered invisible to the unlearned spectator, there is a wealth of evidence that shows that Afro-Argentines played a crucial role in the development of the musical and choreographic forms of Tango. Even the word tango originally denoted Afro-Argentine dance forms (Karush 2012a). This history is very important to Afro-Argentine communities, as Tango is undoubtedly one of the most visible symbols of national pride in Argentina.

There are many points where we can link the tango with the ethno-musicological remnants Afro-Argentine cultural forms. The very presence of “blackness” in song titles of famous tangos shows that Afro-Argentines were very much a part of the development of the phenomena. Popular song titles, for example, included “Black Maria,” “Mulata Temptress,” and “The Happy Negro” (*Maria Negra, Mulatada, El negro alegre*) and many more. In addition to this, the tango was originally popularized in the marginalized neighborhoods of the poor. It was not until brothel patrons brought the dance form back to France that it acquired more European characteristics and then became popular in Argentina (Cirio 2004).



As previously mentioned, the Afro-Argentine influences on the Tango exist in the music and dance components of the genres, *candombe* and *milonga* respectively. These are music and dance forms that originated amongst Afro-Argentines and Afro-Uruguayans. The first of these musical and dance form to develop was the *candombe*. The primary music is played by two drums; the lead or call drum and the secondary or response drum. Together they dictate the pace and motion of movement along with the song that is sung. The *candombe* developed among slaves in Uruguay and Argentina although today the *candombes* played in Entre Rios and the San Telmo district of Buenos Aires are mostly Uruguayan Tangos (Cáceras 2010). There has been a recent effort to revitalize those *candombe* players who play the Argentine *candombe*. This effort will be discussed more in chapter three.

The *milonga* is a dance which preceded the Tango. It is quite similar in style although the movement is “more raw” according to the dance instructor at a tango disco I attended while in Argentina who described the *milonga* to me as “*más crudo*.” The rhythmic beats of the *milonga* are closely related to *candombe* while the movement resembles a more syncopated version of the Cuban Habanera. Some of the most famous composers of *milongas* were Afro-Argentines, including Enrique Maciel (1897-1962) and Gabino Ezeiza (1858-1916) (Cirio 2012). Over time the *milonga* acquired different dance steps and musical influences resulting in what is today the tango (Cirio 2004, 2010). Thus, while on the surface the tango appears to be a dance primarily influenced by the waltz, to the learned ear of an ethnomusicologist it is evident that it is the result of the influence of African heritage as well.

I must make note of an important distinction pointed out to me that while interning with the Institute for Afro-Argentine and Afrodescendant Studies at the National University of La Plata in Argentina. In a conversation with my supervisor Professor Pérez Guarnieri and Carlos, a

member of *Agrupación Xângo*, they let me know explicitly that the project of presenting the black roots of Tango is not to claim the cultural form for blacks or to infer that it is a cultural form that was stolen from blacks. The project is actually to suggest that Afro-Argentines are part of the creolization of Tango to reassert them into popular conceptions of the national identity. To avoid any confusion with the many definitions of the word creolization, I use the word here to describe a process by which “participants select particular elements from incoming or inherited cultures, endow these with meanings different from those they possessed in the original cultures and then creatively merge these to create new varieties that supersede the prior forms.” (Cohen 2007: 369) In that sense, some contemporary Afro-Argentine movements to pursue racial uplift through an inclusive process of nation building that considers multiple groups regardless of origin.

***Hidden in Plain Sight: Reappropriated Blackness in the Popular Music of the Twentieth Century.***

Andrews (1980) notes that Argentine intellectuals professed that there were no blacks in Argentina at the turn of the twentieth century. Despite the science of eugenics, the ideology of *blanqueamiento*, and the powerful clout of the *Generation of 1880* we need not look very much further than the popular culture of the early 1900s to find that images of blackness were all but invisible in Argentina. In the first half of the nineteenth century the modernization of the entertainment industry changed the way in which international communities interacted. In Argentina this transnational mass culture included images of blackness. The area where this is most visible is in cultural forms such as movies, music and propaganda. As an example, Jazz became so popular that it often contended with Tango for national popularity.

Matthew Karush, a historian of modern Argentina, points out that, “In the case of jazz, particular racial images accompanied the music, including the idea of blackness as a source of primitive authenticity and of black people as a noble and long-suffering race. Under the powerful influence of this prestigious and ultra-modern import, tango composers and performers rediscovered the black roots of their own national music.” (2012a: 217) Aside from the primitive authenticity associated with black cultural forms such as Jazz, Argentina also received Jazz as a progressive and modern cultural form and sought to cater to societal desires for North American modernity by emulating its forms (Karush 2012b). The societal desires for North American modernity that Karush speaks of is a result of the lasting effect of the northern gaze of Argentine elites typified in the previously mentioned writings of Domingo Sarmiento.

But what did transnational cultural influences mean for Afro-Argentines? Was the absorption of Jazz into mainstream popular culture appropriated in the black community as a sense for pride in a black identity? Interestingly, mainstream Argentinean media and public intellectuals embraced the influences of transnational cultural exchange while simultaneously cementing the whitening campaign that had taken place since the end of the 1900s through reforms that encouraged European immigration. As a result, Argentines still accepted their own version of Jazz although they admitted that authentic jazz was a black cultural form. While in the U.S. the biggest names in 1920s jazz were African-American artists, Paul Whitman, a white American jazz musician, became the greatest jazz star in Argentina. As the popularity of Jazz grew in the 1930s, however, Argentines could no longer deny African-American talent; still, published articles about Duke Ellington and Coleman Hawkins did not mention their ethnicity (Karush 2012a).

Furthermore, there was a dominant discourse that simultaneously embraced the authenticity of black cultural forms yet equated blackness with savagery and a distant past. An

example of this is the images of blacks that famous white artists portrayed. The all-white and famed jazz band of the Compañía Argentina de Broadcasting displayed a primitive looking caricature of a black man on the front of the bass drum (See Appendix C). Another example is the appearance of singer Lois Blue in “Blackface.” (See Appendix D) Blackface characters have been recognized as a cultural form of entertainment that perpetuates racist stereotypes of blacks as backwards, disheveled, and lackadaisical (Lott 1993). However, as mentioned, Jazz was not the only musical form where there was an admonition of black authenticity in the roots of the musical form. The same admonition occurred in regards to the Tango. One would think that this would certainly have a positive influence on the Afro-Argentine community in terms of visibility and a valorization of blackness. Furthermore, the claims to the black roots of the Tango are well founded. As the recognized national music and dance of Argentina this could have had profound implications for blacks in the 1920s when this information was first proliferated. The proof that the tango was immensely influenced by Afro-Argentines is an area blacks can insert themselves into national constructions of identity. In the early 1900s, however, the space between black and Argentine was enlarged more so than it had been at any other point in the history of. The importance of Tango as a point of contestation of the notion that blackness and *argentinidad* cannot be juxtaposed or encompass the same space merits further examination. Chapter 3 will examine how Afro-Argentines are using the tango in this way.

Thus, despite transnational influences suggesting a possible area of progress for blacks, specifically in the music industry, Argentina was able to maintain black invisibility. Because the presence of a black identity remained hidden in the early twentieth century to the point that many black organizations and productions dissolved, there was not development of a black racial

consciousness and certainly not a movement. There is still some evidence of the Afro-Argentine community during these “lost years.”

Despite the harsh effects of *blanqueamiento* and the cultural appropriation of Afro-Argentine musical forms the black community persisted in other ways. Specifically, in Buenos Aires, the most prominent installation of *afroporteños* was the presence of mutual aid societies and social clubs. While the black press had more or less faded into nonexistence, these organizations maintained a support group for Afro-Argentines and sought to strengthen what little resources the community had. The most successful of these was the “Shimmy Club,” which was open from the 1920s until the military dictatorship. The “Shimmy Club” hosted its events at the Casa Suisa in Buenos Aires. It was famous for holding dances that were so popular that even whites attended. Whites were not, however, allowed to participate in some of the dances that included more African elements. These dances were described by Medina as having distinct call and response drumming rhythms. The Casa Suisa was a rented space owned by Swiss immigrants but became so popular that it was known as an Afro-Argentine installation. Aside from being a place where Afro-Argentines wielded power the “Shimmy Club” also represented a small and open space where Afro-Argentine culture survived (Medina 2008).

### ***The Impact of “The Process” on Mobilization in Argentina in the 1970s and 80s.***

In many Latin American countries the Black Power Movement gained considerable ground in terms of achieving solidarity in the 1970s due to the success of the civil rights movement in the United States (Mullings 2009). In Argentina this experience did not materialize. This was in part due to the low number of Afro-Argentines living in the country at that point, but also due to the rigidness of the ruling military junta. The closing of the Shimmy Club in the late 1970s is an

example of this stifling of any racial consciousness among the black community. The political history of Argentina in the 70s and 80 shaped the lives not only of Afro-Argentines but of the entire nation. In fact, the events of the second half of the twentieth century were so crucial that no examination of contemporary Argentine society would be complete without revisiting this history. The first dictatorship of Colonel Juan Domingo Perón came to an end with a coup d'état in 1955. This coup was the first of many that led to years of authoritarian rule in Argentina by military dictatorships and military juntas. The most infamous, however, came in 1976. After the death of Perón his second wife Isabella took power. Following, a series of crises in Argentina created the conditions for the acceptance of the coup that took place on March 24th, 1976. All three factions of the military participated in the coup so rather than a military dictatorship under the rule of one official, Argentina came under the rule of a military junta. The new military junta made substantial promises. They promised to first begin a Process of National Reorganization, which would bring stability to the economy. Another promise was to restore order and ensure a state monopoly on violence, as many dissident organizations had begun to violently protest the deplorable conditions resulting from crisis and corruption. A third promise was to enact the National Security Doctrine (Romero 2002). This was a doctrine that was a product of the United States which purported to defend the hemisphere against the spread of communism through eradication of dissidents and communist “subversives.”

The Process of National Reorganization, or simply “El Proceso,” did not restore stability. In contrast, the junta unleashed a brutal regime that terrorized its citizens. The dictatorship and state oppression was not unique to Argentina. It was one country among several in Latin America that witnessed the emergence of military dictatorships in the 60s and 70s, supported by the United States as part of their global war on communism of the oppression that occurred throughout Latin

America in the mid to late twentieth century. The period of Argentina's last dictatorship, 1976-1983, came to be known as the "dirty war." It was a clandestine war that the state waged against its own citizens.

In the Southern Cone, nation-states actually worked together to inculcate terror in the hearts of its citizens. This violent system of oppression was called "Operation Condor" Under this operation dissidents who were in danger could not even seek the asylum of another country because they would be detained if found in any of the countries (McSherry 2005). The victims were abducted, tortured, and most were executed extrajudicially. The state justified its actions by claiming to be ridding the country of leftist militants and subversive ideologists. In reality, anyone who the government thought was susceptible to leftist ideologies was in danger. This included students, teachers, artists, volunteer workers, and anyone with liberal ideas (Romero 2002).

The actions of the military junta during the last dictatorship in Argentina left one of the bloodiest stains in the history of Argentina. In just eight years over 30,000 people were disappeared and clandestinely abducted. They were detained and tortured at one of the 340 clandestine centers around the country. Although there was a guerilla movement, the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), most victims of the state terror that occurred in Argentina from 1976-183 were not *guerilleros* nor were they affiliated with the guerilla movement. The majority of the ERP had already been decimated by the end of 1976 (Levinson 2012b). The junta that was supposed to return stability to the country was actually an industry of terror, a systematic machine that attempted to tactically destroy an ideology. Under these conditions it is clear how neither Afro-Argentines nor any other group could mobilize. To mobilize behind a black identity would have implications of race and class inequality that would fall within leftist ideology.

After eight years it became clear that “El Proceso” was not improving the economy. Furthermore, activists such as the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo brought international attention to the egregious human rights abuses of the state. The legitimacy of the junta began to unravel fast. The military sought to reclaim their power in 1982 with an attempt to reinstate their sovereignty over the Falkland Islands, which had been claimed by the United Kingdom. However, the Argentine military was no match for the British Armada and within 72 short days had to surrender. This major blow to the legitimacy of the military led to the junta resigning and the civilian government of Raúl Alfonsín to take over in December of 1983 (Romero 2002).

The transitional government along with the assistance of many international actors began to adapt a strong human rights discourse in response to the discontent and shame of the abuses of the regime. In time this discourse would have positive implications for the Afro-Argentine community in terms of racial consciousness and set the tone for the development of the many civil society and cultural organizations that exist today. Although the Afro-Argentine community remained dormant throughout the twentieth century, today there are various groups who proudly assert their *afroargentinidad*.

### ***Contemporary State of Afro-Argentines***

The Afro-Argentines of today can be separated into three distinct groups. *Afroargentinos del tronco colonial* refers to Afro-Argentines who are the descendants of slaves. Many of those who are aware of this heritage embrace it and have formed cultural communities. Others, although they do not deny it, prefer not to discuss their race at all (Fortes and Ceballos 2002). Another relatively visible community are the Cape Verdean immigrants. Cape Verdeans came looking for mostly sea work or work at the ports at first in 1869-1870. During this time of high sea trade, many



came on whaling boats. Greater numbers arrived after World War II, seeking jobs and opportunities. This second wave of immigration stopped in 1960. Of the 12,000-15,000 Cape Verdeans in Buenos Aires in 2006 only about 300 were born in Cape Verde (“Cabo-verdianos” 2006). An overwhelming majority are second and third generation Argentineans. Cape Verdean Afro-Argentines are aware of the exclusion of blacks in Argentina. They have had a functioning mutual aid society since 1932. The most recent wave of blacks in Argentina arrived in the 1990s and continues to grow. Mostly coming from Senegal, Mali, Congo, and Nigeria, this group is currently finding a place within the Afro-Argentine community. Although many are not citizens, they are also victims of the marginalization experienced by blacks (Fortes and Ceballos 2002). During my time in Argentina locals most often mistook me to be from the Dominican Republic on numerous occasions which suggests another possible and more recent migration pattern.

Today, we know that Afro-Argentines are “emerging from the shadows” and becoming more visible in their nations culture and history. The work of Marta Goldberg, Ricardo Molas, George Reid Andrews, and Leslie Rout on Afro-Argentines in the 70s and 80s was followed by increased attention to demographics (Castro 2001; Peñaloza 2007; Schávelzon 2007). In 2010, for the first time in over 100 years Afro-Argentines were included in the census. The reported number of Afro-Argentines is 3.9 percent, roughly 1.5 million, of the nation’s 41 million inhabitants. This census, however, gives somewhat of a misleading idea of the current situation of Afro-Argentines according to the many activists who claim that the results are not accurate. They have responded with their own campaigns to document present day conditions (Minority Rights Group 2011). Despite recent moves towards visibility, Afro-Argentines remain at the extreme margins of society living in harsh conditions and are constantly the subjects of crude jokes and discrimination, (Fortes and Ceballos 2002) suggesting a need for policies tailored to this ethnic group.

Some scholars have suggested that the decline in Afro-Argentine visibility continued as a result of the last military dictatorship. There is very little research that questions or examines the ramifications the dictatorship had on the black Argentine community. There is evidence, however, that in the environment after the dictatorship a new sense of pride in blackness in the 1990s emerged. An identity emerged among the black community which was accompanied by a political agenda concerned with a connection to African roots. An example of this is the organization, Africa Vive, which was founded in 1997 (Figaro 2000). Since the 1990s a number of similar organizations have sprouted up. They will be given great attention in chapter three as their experience forms the crucial argument of this thesis. These organizations have sought to create an open space for participation and the promotion of a strong black identity. They also tried to be representatives of the social, cultural, and political black thought in Argentina. One of the biggest barriers of these organizations has been to strengthen the historical connections with Africa without being perceived by the greater Argentine society as foreigners (Anderson 2012). Such a barrier has not led to defeat. Today we continue to see the growth of organizations as well as new transnational initiatives working towards increased visibility and mobilization of the black community. In July of 2012, I attended an art show that celebrated black women. The show was hosted by various Afrodescendant civil society organizations and state funded research institutes who support the movement.

### ***Conclusion***

The myth of the inexplicable disappearance of Argentina's black population has been dispelled and is continuing to become a part of the rewritten history of the nation. Blacks didn't just disappear; they were systematically erased from the nation's history. Andrews shows that as

early as the 1780s Buenos Aires elites sought to keep the slave market away from town so that slaves were not a visible part of the city. Nevertheless colonial Buenos Aires presents the spectacle of a society utterly dependent on slave labor. For that reason the *Generation of 1880* launched a highly systematized and successful process of whitening, resulting in the common notion today that there are no blacks in Argentina. This process was fueled by the nationalist characteristic of Argentine independence and the desire of the state to consolidate a white national identity. The state accomplished this by establishing skin color as a criterion for recognizing Argentine citizenship. Reiter (2008) describes a similar process that occurred in Portugal whereby the systematic construction of a nation that is European in character creates the sentiment that blacks living there are foreigners when many of those blacks are as much a citizen as any other member of the society.

As much as this identity was constructed there was also a systematic process of physically eliminating Afro-Argentines (Frigerio 2000). Slaves were promised freedom to fight on the front lines of the independence wars and newly freed blacks formed a large part of the the Triple Alliance War, also known as the Paraguayan War (1864-1870) (Andrews 1980). When cholera and yellow fever epidemics broke out, the state did little to address the illnesses among the poorer black populations. The state also simultaneously encouraged the immigration of Europeans, while erasing Afro-Argentines from the history books and statistical data of the country (Levinson 2012). So the argument that Afro-Argentines do still exist is not to say that their numbers didn't diminish drastically, just not as much as the metanarrative purported.

In fact, George Reid Andrews' central arguments in *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires* is not that blacks in Argentina did not rapidly decline but rather that it was not at a rate or on as large a scale as the Argentine historians of the late 19th and early 20th century purported. These

false statements were further supported by state discourses. Politicians such as José Manuel Estrada and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento were writing that there were no more blacks in Argentina as early as the beginning of the 1880s (Andrews 1980). This is interesting because the “whitening” of the population that was supposedly due to mass immigration from Europe didn’t actually begin until the late 1880s (Romero 2002). These same historians also commented on racial mixture but only to note its success in “purifying” the race. However, the visits of European historians on numerous occasions produced evidence that miscegenation produced a visibly mixed race in Argentina (Andrews 1980). One could argue that as a socially constructed concept, foreigners do not have the right to ascribe racial descriptors to members of another society. It is important to note, then, that although these *trigueños* and *morenos* were not recorded as black on the census, they were never able to reach the social status of pure whites. While we cannot label this intermediary group as black we can certainly say that they were not white. Thus we can include them in the categorization of racially excluded groups.

Today, attempts to accurately document the situation of Afro-Argentines presents skewed results. Activists and institutions who attempt to document the presence of Afro-Argentines have admitted that many people of African descent are unaware of this heritage or simply prefer not to describe themselves in that way (Minority Rights Group 2011). The interest that has developed among scholars has been very important to not only the “revisibilization” of Afro-Argentines but also to the recognition of a heritage long denied. According to Robert Cottrol, the efforts of scholars who have been influenced by North American and Brazilian scholars on race relations has led to a “new willingness among Afro-Argentines to publicly and vocally resist traditional patterns of marginality and invisibility and to press the case that their group’s history be added to

the national narrative.” This is a campaign that has had a positive response from the state (Cottrol 2007:141).

Despite these positive conditions, it is clear that they do not suffice to give Afro-Argentines access to public spheres, let alone the spheres of power. They are still not part of the common notions of national identity and face discrimination on a daily basis in both public and private sectors (Fortes and Ceballos 2002). This presents the need to examine the conditions under which Afro-Argentine activists can be successful. In the last decade a number of Afro-Argentine civil society organizations have been founded, despite the common misconception that they are a group of people who “do not exist” in Argentina. They have, for the most part, had success with their initiatives. This includes, but is not limited to the government creating institutions to monitor racism and discrimination, government provision of public spaces for cultural activities, inclusion in the national census for the first time in nearly a hundred years, and government acknowledgement of the Afro-Argentine presence in the national heritage and identity. Despite a small constituency, minimal funding and differences between the organizations, they have been more effective than previous ethnically organized bodies at achieving goals of cultural integration. Thus it seems that the answer to invigorating the Afro-Argentine identity is found in the organizing strategies of civil society.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **An Argument for Civil Society as a Viable Method for Discursive Engagement with Hegemonic Actors**

#### ***Introduction***

The central argument of this thesis is that Afro-Argentine civil society has used innovative organizing techniques to influence state actors, creating agency and increasing visibility. In order to do this, it is necessary to outline the various theories that have affected not only Afro-Argentines but are socially occurring processes throughout Afro-Latin America. I will begin with a review of the literature on racial hegemony as it outlines the fundamental issue with which Afrodescendants must struggle. Then, I will discuss the relevant discourse on citizenship experiences of marginalized groups. I will also situate Afro-Argentines within the literature concerning Argentina's approach to universal human rights as well as group and multicultural rights. Next, I will discuss the theory of communicative action and how it serves as a tool to ensure gains when subaltern activists are confronted with more powerful actors. Finally, I will argue that civil society has been an effective means for democratic engagement and participatory citizenship. This argument is supported using existing theories of civil society provided by Robert Putnam (1996) and others. As a final task I bring the existing theories together to describe the situation of Afro-Argentine civil society and to prescribe communicative civil society as a method of creating

agency and to promote a more profound experience of citizenship and democracy for marginalized groups.

### ***Racial Hegemony: Mythology as Common Sense***

The processes by which the dominant powers hinder the development of a strong black identity are a central component to my analysis of the Argentine case. In *Orpheus and Power*, George Hanchard (1994) argues that by neutralizing racial identification through the myth of racial democracy Brazil has diffused the probability of a strong and common black identity. He calls this process racial hegemony. Hanchard uses a neo-Gramscian approach applying the concept of hegemony to racial politics. This was a good approach especially due to his analysis of hegemony as a combination of the coercion and leadership of the dominant group. It is also valuable to my analysis because a similar process occurred in Argentina although the myth was not racial democracy but rather nonexistence. Hanchard's analysis is limited, however, in that he does not fully develop his analysis of Gramsci. If Gramsci's main concerns were political and class centered, it is not enough to merely append a prefix of "neo" to Gramscian concepts to apply them to racial hegemony. The theory must be further examined to apply it to more generalizable social processes.

In 1986 Stuart Hall produced an analysis of Gramsci's theory as it applies to race and ethnicity which provides a good examination of how hegemony plays out in regards to race (Hall 1986). An important start to his argument points out the common errs of scholars to overestimate the levels at which Gramsci's concepts are applied. As Gramsci was not a general theorist, his theory must be further developed before serving as a blanket for all social studies. At the same time, to limit an analysis of Gramsci to Italy and socialist constructions in Europe would be err on

the side of literalism. Gramsci's theoretical contribution operates within a Marxist frame of thought. He does not write about race but his concerns greatly focused on the complex relations between social strata. Thus his concepts, with further clarification, can be applied to race, ethnicity, nationality, and gender. Hall points out that the multidimensional character of hegemony is able to achieve desired results through winning a substantial amount of popular consent. The resulting command in social and moral authority is perhaps how we can best explain racial relations in much of Latin America where such an authority is garnered that blackness becomes discombobulating for the society as a whole. Perhaps Hall's most important analysis of Gramsci's concept of hegemony is that it, "is not exercised in the economic and administrative fields alone, but encompasses the critical domains of cultural, moral, ethical and intellectual leadership." (Hall 1986: 17) It is amidst these exact social commonsensical processes that Argentina was able to perpetuate black invisibility despite the presence of Afro-Argentines and amidst black cultural production and consumption.

### ***Universal Rights versus Multicultural Rights: Where do Afro-Argentines fit in?***

In arguing that universal rights are complimentary and useful to multicultural rights I do not intend to assert that I disagree with the assumptions made by Iris Marion Young (2000; 2007; 2011). In fact her ideas are particularly valuable for this study. In *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, (2011) she offers a strong critique of formal equality, meaning the writing of equality into law and constitutions. The creation of a homogeneous public does not take into account that exclusion of different groups is institutionalized so that group differences are continually suppressed. She argues that new democratic publics should employ group-differentiated policies. Young makes a valid argument in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* yet fails to acknowledge



that formal equality, especially when made part of public policy, gives marginalized groups a legal and discursive tool to claim previously denied rights.

Young's critique of universal citizenship is echoed in her essay contribution to *Theorizing Citizenship* (2007). Here Young's argument is less geared toward gendered differences and focuses on multicultural citizenship. She posits that universal rights provide an indirect protection of cultural minorities while acting as a substitute for minority rights. The modern political assumption of equal moral worth spurs the inclusion of the oppressed in full citizenship status (Young, 2007). Here again her work is important in establishing the importance of groups but is decidedly anti-universalism. There are, however, scholars who support the positive relationship between group differentiated rights and universal rights, namely; Will Kymlicka (1995), Joseph Carens (2000), and Christian Joppke (2003). These authors take a liberal approach to minority rights.

Kymlicka (1995) provides an in depth analysis of multicultural citizenship, outlining three types of multicultural rights; self-government rights, poly-ethnic rights, and special representation rights. He focuses on the importance of group specific rights as much as Young does, noting that the failure to acknowledge cultural differences can lead to conflict. However, his point of departure is in showing the historical relationship between liberalism and minority rights. Kymlicka, although he doesn't pursue the concept of universal rights in great detail, provides a useful definition of group differentiated rights. He supports a comprehensive theory of justice that includes both universal rights and group differentiated rights. His main argument is that multiculturalism should be promoted as culture is a crucial element of autonomy, an inseparable tenet of liberal theory (Kymlicka, 1995). Carens, also a liberal theorist, also makes the argument for recognition of minorities and cultural groups by liberal democrats (Carens, 2000).

Joppke elaborates on the various works of Kymlicka, Carens, and Young. He posits that multicultural citizenship in theory is a “mechanism to accommodate ethnic, national and other minorities.” (Joppke, 2003:245) He concludes that this concept, in practice, becomes vague and multifaceted. He also shows that while the overlying themes in Young’s argument are pertinent, universal rights and multicultural rights are not necessarily at odds with each other. He provides the alternative that multicultural rights serve as an extension of universal rights. Joppke states that the “earlier confrontation between liberal defenders of universal citizenship and radical proponents of multiculturalism and group rights has lost its basis: it is not a radical critique of existing institutions, but those liberal principles on which existing institutions are built that require multicultural citizenship.” (Joppke, 2003:247)

The above discussion shows how universal rights and multicultural rights interact but does not provide an analysis of how the concepts relate to the case at hand. For that we can turn to the literature on universal rights and its relation to human rights which provides for a discussion of how these have become the hegemonic discursive concepts in Argentina. In *Universal Human Rights in Theory*, Jack Donnelly (2003) tackles the homogeneous ascription of social values as a process that reinforces hegemony and exclusion. He argues that universal human rights is a feasible concept with global potential if it is pursued with an engagement of liberalism. He uses the rhetoric of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights such as, “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” to illustrate the applicability of the concept (Donnelly, 2003: 265). Donnelly (2003) is also sensitive to cultural issues positing that cross-cultural dialogue fits into the discourse of human rights. Although, this sensitivity is accompanied by caution because issues of cultural rights often produce tension within universal claims.

After a period of egregious human rights abuses came to light in many Latin American countries the state response of many countries has been to use the framework of human rights as guiding principles in the formation of democratic regimes. As these governments transitioned to democracy, truth, justice, and memory became part of the rhetoric of human rights as nations tried to reconcile events of the past. Argentina is an example of one of the countries at the forefront of this process (Nino, 1990; Jelin 1994, 2007; De Brito et al., 2001). An interesting critique of this notion is that the naked constitutionalized human rights does not necessarily translate to implementation or acknowledgement of deeper issues related to identity and other internal problems (Levit, 1998). Knowing that Argentina has formally embraced the discourse of human rights and justice for those who are victims of human rights abuses, the logical next step would be to analyze how civil society interacts with the state to procure these rights. I posit that these organizations use the hegemonic discourse of the state to their advantage.

In “The Politics of Memory” Elizabeth Jelin (1994) provides a useful analysis of the continuum of human rights discourse. She posits that it began as a social movement that gradually came to dominate the political and public discourses. During the military dictatorship in Argentina (1976-1983) and under the auspices of transitional government the movement was very strong. With a new democracy the task of the human rights movement changed although the basic goal of defending human rights stayed the same. As the primary aim of the human rights social movements were attained, namely to bring the dictatorship to an end, the theme of human rights remained forever etched in the minds of Argentinians (Jelin 1994). What remains is no longer a social movement but rather various organizations of society with different goals that all in some way fall under the overarching theme of human rights. It is within this context where we find Afro-Argentine civil society groups. Although they do not have the same numerical power as their

counterparts in other Latin American countries, they have gained a foothold in the move towards progress for the represented community. This presents us with a positive way that Afro-Argentines can interact with policy-makers but does not negate the negative experiences characteristics of any marginalize group.

In his chapter in *Theorizing Citizenship*, Michael Walzer (1995) discusses some of these issues and then asks in what situation can civil society flourish and create a good life for citizens? Walzer examines the importance of civil societies as the procurer of goods for the communities that they represent. A necessary condition for the proper and fruitful functioning of the societies is that the associations are voluntarily formed around family, faith, interest, and ideologies. He places an emphasis on the cultivation, preservation, and remembrance of a national heritage. These assertions hold great importance for Afro-Argentine civil society organizations (CSO). As Afro-Argentines have been excluded from the national heritage for so long the emphasis on this as a necessary component of a fruitful society presents itself as an issue for them. Walzer argues that civil society is the core place where democracy can renew itself. It does this with a balance between political power and organizing associations who can produce a more favorable environment in civil society than the government can establish by itself. Walzer also notes that while this is the goal of civil society, the reality is that a large state does not always have the citizens' best interest in mind (Walzer 1995).

### ***Communicative Action***

This argument for how to achieve group rights is very useful especially when read in context with Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Action* (1985). This theory argues that communication in the form of free, moral, and deliberative discourses between citizens is the most

important factor for liberation. Communicative action has the power to renew cultural knowledge and form identities. In his discussion of the concept of the "life world" he notes that, "what binds associated [*sic*] individuals to one another and secures the integration of society is a web of communicative actions that thrives only in the light of cultural traditions, and not systemic mechanisms that are out of the reach of a member's intuitive knowledge." (Habermas 1985: 148-149) Thus there are two communicative actors in a socially integrated society; the prevailing oppressive system and the citizens themselves. Habermas also provides us with a useful analysis of the relationship between citizenship and national identity, concepts which are crucial to the current discussion. Although his analysis concerns the integration of the European Union, his conclusion that a political culture can remain without abandoning individual identities lends to the argument. Habermas makes a crucial argument that nationalism is an imagined community. In the case here this means that Afro-Argentines can be integrated into the national identity in a way that is conducive to nation building (Habermas 2007). Thus the theory of Communicative Action serves as an important tool to examine how Afro-Argentine civil society can use a hegemonic discourse to their advantage to claim group differentiated rights.

### ***On Civil Society***

The previous discussion states the problem of racial hegemony that exist throughout Latin America and suggests that through communicative action Afrodescendants can create agency through inserting their voices in the public sphere. It further suggests that they do so by maximizing on the popular discourse of universal rights for all mankind. These rights include social services, representation and the right to identity. While these concepts are crucial to the argument I propose in this thesis they do not alone encompass the central argument I make. Using the Afro-Argentine

civil society as a case example I posit that civil society has crucial role in the process of achieving a more full experience of democracy. Furthermore, it has been through the efforts of civil society that despite minimal representation there have been significant gains for Afrodescendants. It is therefore necessary to spend a considerable amount of time discussing the relevant theories that support and refute this claim.

As there are various scholars who give different definitions of civil society, it is necessary to first outline a clear definition to the term. John Ehrenberg provides one of the most comprehensive surveys of the origins and many controversial meanings of civil society from which to craft a meaningful definition (Ehrenberg 1999). He locates the historic origin in Ancient Greece during Plato's Republic. However the foremost thinkers with whom he credits with developing the notion of civil society during this era are Aristotle and Cicero. He credits Aristotle with fathering the politicized concept of the 'good life' and Cicero with conceptualizing civil society in political terms. He notes that Cicero "hoped for a man-made civil society where reason and civilization would be safe." (Ehrenberg 1999: 27) The emphasis on 'man-made' as opposed to 'state-made' adds to the definition of a fruitful civil society. Ehrenberg continues with the history of the development of the civil society in relation to the church. He notes that it was Cicero's "hope against which the Fathers of the Church, and St. Augustine most importantly set themselves." (Ehrenberg 1999: 27) Thus they argued for church supremacy. Ehrenberg accurately points out that the fatal flaw of this process of civil society was the church's argument for church supremacy. Thus the debate between the church and other rulers came to be inspired by the desire for personal and institutional accomplishments while neglecting the constituency that these leaders purported to represent. Not only were they inspired by personal desires, they were also decided by political or military power rather than logic (Ehrenberg 1999).

It is in the sections that Ehrenberg writes on civil society and modernity and the transition to modernity that we are able to obtain a more optimistic idea of what civil society should be. Thomas Aquinas, he notes, viewed civil society as the corrective to the wars and injustice that the church and the state perpetuated. This civil society was created by people and provided an opportunity for true freedom (Ehrenberg 1999). This distinction combined with the notion of a civil society organized around interests begins to create a full picture of civil society. Although there is a danger of seeking on personal gains when citizens organize around specific interests such a component is also essential to maintain the passion and perseverance needed to combat institutional norms and hegemonic powers.

In the second part of *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea* Ehrenberg focuses on one of the most prominent discussions of civil society in the contemporary setting, the relationship of civil society to the state. Drawing from the thought of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and their contemporaries, the relationship of civil society to the state is determined by the market. This is because the interests of civil society are either private economic interests or a product of those interests. Not sure what you are trying to say here. Therefore any social relationship that develops does so around this quintessential fact. It is not enough, however to define the relationship by the market. Ehrenberg notes Smith's perception that "every 'improved and modern society' would necessarily throw 'the laboring poor' into a greatly debased state unless the government took measures to ameliorate their condition" (Rubenstein 2000). Equally important is the government's, and not civil society alones, role in taking steps to enrich the lives of the underprivileged.

An important part of Ehrenberg's discussion on the relationship of civil society and the state is his discussion of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Hegel was the first to systematically envision the private sphere of self-interest and the commitments of the nation-state as separate

entities. Both were separate stages of human development. Civil society as a separate “system of needs” was not a contradictory formation of the state but a method of intervening between the family and the state (Stillman 1980). Important to Hegel’s discussion was the relationship between civil society and capitalism. Having emerged as a way to protect private interests and individual rights civil society falls within the realm of capitalism (Ehrenberg 1999). Hegel’s revolutionary way of thinking about civil society is crucial to my conceptualization of the term. He shows that civil society does not have to be radically opposed to the state to perform successfully. As long as the principle goals of any civil society organization revolve around the interests of the group it represents it can intervene with the state on behalf of the intended constituency. At times those interests will counter state goals and interests. For certain organizations they would even counter what one would consider the “greater good.” This is yet another critique of civil society. However, Hegelian thought would counter that argument by arguing that it is the varying inequalities in the system of civil society which allow for each station of difference to be filled leading to a more efficient system of democracy on the whole. Although de Tocqueville follows Hegel’s conception of civil society Ehrenberg concludes the second section of his book with a critique of the Tocquevillian notion of the equality of conditions because it does not leave a space to access the role of the market in democratic critiques.

In the latter section of *Civil Society: The Critical History of an Idea* Ehrenburg examines the present images, purposes, and the relation to the state of civil society. Through his analysis and critique of civil society Ehrenberg provides a way to conceptualize the term. At present civil society is supposed to guarantee a constitutional republic through the active participation of citizens seeking civil rights for its constituency. Furthermore it should be characterized by voluntarism, and social organizations that are autonomous from political parties. This is not to



argue that CSO's be non-partisan but that they do not become co-opted agents of the state. Civil society should never be defined as a necessarily democratic substitute for political action. Rather the CSO should think more humanely than the state and influence those decisions that the state makes on policies affecting national and international actors.

Ehrenberg is not an enthusiast of the present notions of civil society. He believes that they are a strategic tactic of conservative sociologists who wish to convey the notion of the move toward functioning democracies. He also believes that there is a hidden agenda behind the notion of civil society at present. Namely, the intense focus in the group and individual interests of civil society relocates attention from the increasing undemocratic economic relations which have permeated every section of everyday life. But his principle argument is not against civil society simply that in its present state it lacks the radical activism needed to carry out its true purpose. He writes that "it is no longer possible to theorize civil society as a site of democratic activity and counterpoise it to an inherently coercive state without considering how capitalism's structural inequalities constitute everyday life. . . . maybe revitalizing civil society requires heightened levels of political struggle over state policy rather than good manners and 'civil discourse.'" (Ehrenberg 1999-248-249) This assertion is important because instead of completely refuting civil society Ehrenberg implies that there is a role a revitalized civil society can play in changing the lives of citizens. In this sense Ehrenberg does provide a useful contribution to the notion of civil society as conceptualized for my analysis in addition to providing a comprehensive history and analysis of the term.

Despite his many critiques, for the conceptualization of civil society that I have outlined, Alexis de Tocqueville provides an ideal place to examine the role of civil society in democracy (Tocqueville 2000). In 1835, he published *Democracy in America* in which he examines the

American system of democracy using France as a comparative case. With a rich collection of data and observation of U.S. government, cultural politics, and society he is able to examine the historical and functional processes of American democracy. He compares the data he collected to the French experience and also draws upon the English example at times to illustrate how and why democracy flourished in the United States. He makes an argument that the United States has a better experience of liberty and democracy which differed from traditional, which is to say European, experiences of democracy.

This book, however, goes far beyond a comparison of democracy and liberty in the United States and France. By studying a nation in which democracy was highly successful de Tocqueville has made some important contributions to the study of democracy and citizenship. Perhaps the most common critique to *Democracy in America* is that it produces and reinforces American exceptionalism (Barone 1995). Although this is true, de Tocqueville does provide a comprehensive depiction of democratic institutions and sentiments that are useful for any society. Among these are his notion of the importance of associations, family, individualism, and self-interest rightly understood (Tocqueville 2000). Another critique is the over reliance of de Tocqueville on equality (Pope and Pope 1986). These critiques however emphasize de Tocqueville's misinterpretation of the amount of equality present in the United States at the time of his study. Such a critique may lead readers to overlook the importance of de Tocqueville's major contribution. The equality of conditions is an essential component of democracy and the lack thereof leads to crime and other social ailments.

Despite the many critiques, de Tocqueville outlined the major components of a successful and functional democracy. An imperative part of such a democracy must be the presence of associations. Many scholars have used these guidelines to examine the ways to move toward a

fuller experience of democracy for all citizens in a nation, not just those who are privileged. One of the most important of these studies was Robert Putnam and Robert Leonardi's study of democratic institutions in northern and southern Italy. In *Making Democracy Work* (1993) they examine the ways in which political culture are connected to democracy. This task is quite a challenge. While political culture is operationalized through historical political traditions democratic indicators are very much concerned with the present (Tarrow 1996). Putnam also looks at how traditions of association and civic engagement affect political behavior. He argues that social capital is necessary for democracy to flourish.

The study conducted by Putnam and his colleagues begins with an examination of regional governments created in Rome, Italy in 1970. The research includes two decades of data comparing policy performance, socioeconomic modernity, social capital and the civic community. Important to the measures of civic community and social capital are (1) civic engagement, (2) political equality, (3) solidarity, trust, and tolerance, and (4) the social structures of cooperation (Putnam 1993: 87-91). They find dramatic differences between the regions in North and South concluding that the northern region of Italy has more social capital which is why democracy has flourished there. This performance is measured by the institutional capacity.

Putnam and Leonardi also show that there is a strong correlation between civic capacity and institutional performance. They do this by showing the causal link from the growth of civic capacity in the nineteenth century Italy to the civic politics and the institutional performance in the same region at the time that he conducted his study.

The broader importance of *Making Democracy Work* is the theory of social capital that Putnam develops through showing the failures of the Italian south due to the lack of strong social capital. This theory holds that if societies invest in social capital and develop strong networks of

cooperative citizens they will have a fuller experience of democracy. This theory is generalizable in that it explains the “lukewarm” experience that the United States has, as Putnam shows in “Bowling Alone.” (Putnam 2000) It also suggests a solution to the lack of development in the Third World. Putnam’s research was important because he not only looked at how democracy works but he evaluated how one form of democracy in the same country has different levels of functionality depending on how active are the participants involved.

The major critics of Putnam disagree with his emphasis on the importance of social capital. Margaret Levi, for example, takes issue with positing that because can be a source of social capital it cannot be a valid measurement of civic engagement. She also argues that policy performance may be a source of trust, not a result as Putnam opines (Levi 1996). Her claim is that the networks and associations created by the government which are designated as ‘social capital’ should actually be referred to as ‘antisocial capital’ “because in practice they serve to foster division, hatred, clientelism, corruption or conflict, whether based on religion, race, ethnicity, gender or whatever.” (Levi 1996: 50) While her observations are not unfounded it is also important to acknowledge that not all networks and associations are created by the government. Furthermore, the associations that are created by the government can demand a certain level of accountability from those in power. Therefore, as long as they build strong horizontal relationships, which are the most important factor, they can still create change and act as powerful agents of a more full democracy.

Another critique of Putnam and Leonardi’s work is that in southern Italy, “the absence of civic capacity is the by-product of dysfunctional politics, state-building and social structure rather than of low levels of social capital . . . policy makers who attack the lack of social capital by encouraging association would be attacking the symptoms and not the causes of the problem.” (Tarrow 1996: 390) This opinion does not acknowledge the importance of associations to increase

transparency and demand government accountability. The ill-suggested policy would actually be to infer that these ‘dysfunctional politics’ can self-correct the corruption and failures without the impetus of an actively participating discontent public.

Such harsh critiques on the validity of social capital as the defining component of good democracy miss the important ways in which strong social capital is imperative for a fruitful and functional democracy. *Making Democracy Work* is important for showing that “networks of civic engagement, like . . . neighborhood associations, choral societies, cooperatives, and sports clubs . . . represent intense horizontal interaction” and “the denser such networks in a community, the more likely that its citizens will be able to cooperate for mutual benefit.” (Putnam and Leonardi 1993: 174) The horizontal networks bring together agents of similar status and power and so are not powerful enough to formalize change. However, they can sustain a level of social trust and cooperation that is not feasible in vertical relationships. Thus, they are better equipped to solve issues that require collective action. It is then that they can engage the asymmetric relationship of hierarchy and dependence to stake a claim for change. Here is where an effective strategy of communication is needed which has been provided previously by Habermas’s theory of Communicative Action.

Putnam’s contributions to the importance of civil society have been immensely important for continued research on the topic by other scholars. According to Michael Walzer civil society is crucial for citizenship. In *Theorizing Citizenship* he locates civil society within the four social formations which all humans inhabit. Walzer defines civil society as “the space of uncoerced human association and also the set of relational networks that fill up that space.” These relational networks are formed by “family, faith, interests, and ideology.” (Walzer 1995: 153) The state also forms one of the four social formations that Walzer outlines with civil society, the nation, and the

economy being the other three. We do not live comfortably within either of them because there is a constant search to find which one is the best for human development. Walzer argues that in fact it is all of them combined. According to him, civil society itself cannot exist without state protection. He accurately points out that, “We have been thinking too much about social formations different from and in competition with, civil society. And so we have neglected the networks through which civility is produced and reproduced.” (Walzer 1995: 154) A truly democratic state will protect the rights of civil society even in the face of opposition. I would also reiterate the notion here that civil society does not have to be radically opposed to the state to perform successfully but that in those instances where it must do so that it is done courageously.

Walzer’s essay adds to the current discussion of civil society by placing civil society within the discussion of citizenship and democracy. He also addresses some fundamental questions how to achieve the goals of the “good life.” He asks, what is the preferred setting, the most supportive environment, for the good life and what sorts of institution should we work for? He outlines and presents the shortcomings of the four traditional answers to these questions including the Communitarian approach, the Marxist approach, the capitalist approach, and the Nationalist approach. His answer to the shortcomings, the fifth position, is civil society due to the strong and authentic solidarities that it forms.

*The good life can only be lived in civil society, the realm of fragmentation and struggle but also of concrete and authentic solidarities, and become sociable or communal men and women. The picture here is of people freely associating and communicating with one another, forming and reforming groups of all sorts, not for the sake of any particular formation—family, tribe, nation, religion, commune, brotherhood or sisterhood, interest group or ideological movement—but for the sake of sociability itself. For we are by nature social, before we are political or economic, beings. (Walzer 1995: 162)*

Walzer presents civil society as the ideal setting because no single setting is preferred. Civil society can encompass a variety of market agents: family businesses, publicly owned or municipal companies, worker communes, consumer cooperatives, and nonprofit organizations of many different sorts. The variability in civil society is important and needed because the experience of democracy is expanded and enhanced by groups that are in but not of the state. The state, however, is still needed. The caution to the importance of the state is that civil society remains aware. Walzer points out that when citizens “are free to celebrate their histories, remember their dead, and shape (in part) the education of their children, they are more likely to be harmless than when they are unfree.” (Walzer 1995: 167) Thus successful civil society requires actively participating and engaged citizens.

Walzer’s prescription contributes considerably to the argument for civil society. He would suggest decentralizing the state. This will not only allow but prompt citizens to become more engaged and take responsibility for their activities. He also suggests diversifying market agents with a socialized economy in both the communal and private spheres. Ultimately, as the “free market” of ideas faith, and identity, civil society has a distinctive ability to create citizens who care (Walzer 1995). This provides an opportunity for fully engaged citizens to contribute to a more fruitful and substantiated democracy.

### ***Revisiting the Theories of Racial Hegemony, Communicative Action, and Civil Society.***

After conducting a historical survey of the political, economic, and social processes in Eastern Europe, political scientists Robert Bideleux and Ian Jeffries have noted that “Social capital and civil society have made important (albeit subordinate and secondary) contributions to

democratization, liberalization and socio-economic change.” They have done so “by substantially complementing and healthily constraining the paramount roles of power-relations, power-structures, ruling elites and political struggles.” (Bideleux and Jeffries 1998: 593 – 594) This is a process that is not unique to Eastern Europe. With the figure presented below (Figure 1) I hope to place the experience of Afro-Argentine civil society within the discussion of the above reviewed theories.

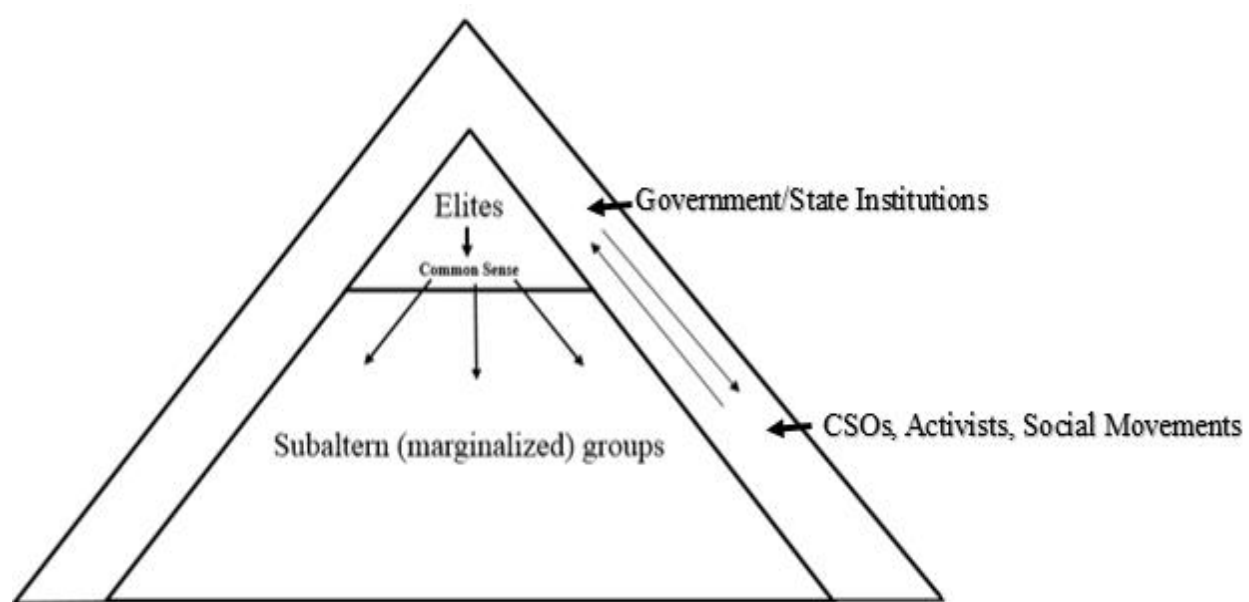


Figure 1: Conceptualization of the Role of Civil Society in Racialized Nations

This figure represents the hierarchical structure in which most societies live. At the top are hegemonic players. This refers to the wealthy elite but also to state powers. The two often interact in that the state can often act as the arm of the elite formalizing policies that maintain the hierarchy. Racial hegemony, the realm of common sense, is dictated by the elites. This discourse flows one way, from the top down. It affects the subaltern groups by keeping them at the bottom. Subaltern groups include Afrodescendants, the working class poor, and any marginalized group.



The outer area of the figure represents the realm of formalized relations. It is still part of the hierarchical structure where the hegemonic players are at the top and marginalized groups are at the bottom but it is also an important area where communicative action can occur. This is represented by the arrows that flow in both directions. While the hegemony of the state is irrefutable it does not exact an omnipotent will. In *Theorizing Citizenship* Walzer noted that, “only a democratic state can create a democratic civil society; only a democratic civil society can sustain a democratic state.” (Walzer 1995: 170) The relationship between civil society and the nation-state in regards to the advancement of blacks can be far more symbiotic than is often assumed when considering racial hegemony as the only process at work. On the one hand, it is necessary for states to create a discourse and space that support pluricultural and pluriethnic societies. At the same time, however, without on the ground activism of civil society those changes are merely words on a piece of paper. Furthermore it takes a conscious and strategic effort on the part of civil society to advantageously incorporate inclusive discourse to achieve tangible outcomes.

The other area where symbiotic relations can occur is the horizontal connections formed by civil society and the constituency that it represents. These relationships are crucial for maintaining a democratic civil society and holding CSOs accountable to representing the community and not becoming a tool of the government. Civil society organizations cannot function truthfully and fruitfully without maintaining the horizontal connections to subaltern groups. Ehrenberg suggests that this is what is necessary for a revitalized civil society (1999). This is an area where Afro-Argentine CSOs have been particularly effective which I will discuss further in the following chapter.

## ***Conclusion***

Civil society is not only a contested term but is also highly contested as a process through which to achieve a fuller experience of citizenship and democracy. With the above discussion I do not attempt assert that civil society is unflawed or the only answer to better democracy. I do show, however, that civil society and social capital are crucial components of a flourishing democracy. It is even more necessary in those societies where inequality is rife. The preceding chapter showed that Afro-Argentines have endured a long history of inequality and invisibility. The following chapter will show that now, with lower numbers than have been present in the past, for the first time Afro-Argentines are not only increasing their visibility but also inserting themselves in the larger notion of Argentine nationality. They have done so through the efforts of Afro-Argentine CSOs which are a recent phenomenon in Argentina. The following chapter will show that this has been possible because the CSOs have effectively communicative with the government in a manner that has achieved for them more rights and more space in the Argentine nation.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Examples of the Organizing Strategies of Three Afro-Argentine Civil Society Organizations**

#### ***Introduction***

Roland Barthes once wrote, “Myth is depoliticized speech. . . . it has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification. Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact.” (Barthes 1972:173) This is the current predicament with which many black activists in Argentina are confronted. The myth that “there are no blacks in Argentina” is a residual of *blanqueamiento*, a process that valued whiteness so much that it became a common sensical notion of *argentinidad* while blackness became a stigmatized and aversive component of identity. The effect is still so prevalent that black activists in Argentina purport that the number of Afrodescendants reported by the Census is far greater than four percent. This number is skewed because many people of African descent either do not know of their heritage or will not admit to it (Fortes and Ceballos 2002).

The major problem this creates for Afro-Argentine civil society is it hampers their attempts to mobilize. Mobilization is an ongoing initiative in Afro-Argentine civil society organizations because a thriving constituency is a crucial component of forming strong associations and maintaining viability. Despite this major challenge and the gloomy past of Afro-Argentine

presence in the public sphere I propose that there are brighter implications for the future of the community due to the effective organizing strategies of Afro-Argentine Civil Society.

Afro-Argentine CSOs have made great strides in the last ten years and are the agents of a better future for the black community in Argentina. However, it has not been civil society alone that has provided the conditions for this future. The previous discussion of Michael Walzer illuminated the interconnectedness of the state. He posited that the state needs civil society and civil society needs the state (Walzer 1995). Argentina's 1983 transition to a democratic government with a strong emphasis on human rights led to the proliferation of a number of NGOs and CSOs whose mission centered on group and identity rights. Many have taken an anti-racist approach which has led to a push for the protection of human rights and multicultural policies (Sutton 2008). By taking on a strong stand for the protection of human rights in its policies and discourse the state contributed in creating the conditions necessary for an optimistic future for Afro-Argentines. Although Argentina provides a strong case, it is not entirely unique and so provides a valuable example for students and scholars of Latin American democratization.

In *New Social Movements in the African Diaspora* Leith Mullings notes that in making claims many organizations now rely heavily on international standards of justice as part of their organizing strategy. These standards of justice most often include human rights documents and protocols (Mullings 2009). Non-existence has been more or less uncontested in Argentina. However, human rights discourse provides a discursive space for Afrodescendant civil society to be conversant with state figures which creates the public space necessary to contest the myth of invisibility. Having challenged the notion of invisibility Afro-Argentines can now make claims for multicultural and group rights that more specifically address their grievances. This chapter looks

at three organizations who have had relative success with their initiatives; *Agrupación XANGÓ*, *Misibamba Afroargentino*, and *Casa de la Cultura Indo Afro Americana*.

While time and resources would not allow for an examination of more civil society organizations it was important to examine more than one case. On the one hand it begins to show a pattern of success that many of the Afro-Argentine civil society have had. Equally important is the fact that many of the civil society organizations agree on some matters but disagree on others. This difference is particularly true in terms of identity and who should be the true representative for Afro-Argentines. A necessary larger project would look at the successes and failures of many organizations. For the purposes of this thesis I focus on the three organizations that I made contact with during a short stay in Argentina in the summer of 2012. These organizations have different purposes in terms of organizing behind cultural and/or political strategies. Showing the successes of all three will also show that the driving force behind the gains for Afro-Argentine civil society has been the discursive strategy and an adept navigation of spatial politics. I will begin with a brief introduction of Argentina's black movement and introduce the three Afro-Argentine CSOs examined in this work. I trace how these organizations have used discourse for the advancement of the Afrodescendant community and review pertinent state responses.

### ***Black Mobilization in Argentina***

Although Afro-Argentine civil society is relatively new in Argentina the development of a black identity is evident in the black press and the mutual aid societies and the nations that began as early as the late 1800s (Andrews 1980). Black political activity was also present in the 1930s although it was not as strong as it is today. The main person behind this activism was Martin Escobar, who was driven into exile in Switzerland during the military dictatorship of 1976-1983.

It has been in the last twenty years, however, that we have witnessed the strongest surge in the Argentine black movement. The creation of the National Institute against Discrimination in the late 1990s led to the proliferation of many black organizations including the *Nigerian Organization*, the *African Diaspora Working Group*, the *Afro-Indigenous Coalition*, and many others. Furthermore, the transnational effects of black mobilization percolates the Argentine nation via the international embassies (Anderson 2010).

There are currently a number of black organizations in Argentina which fall under the classification of mutual aid societies, brotherhoods, NGOs, and civil society organizations. During my time in Argentina the CSOs were not only the most visible but also presented the most visible outcomes of success. The following three organizations provide a sample of Afro-Argentine CSOs and are the three with which I had closest contact.

### ***Agrupación XANGÔ***

*Agrupación XANGÔ* is an organization of activists fighting against racism, discrimination, sexism, xenophobia, and homophobia towards Afrodescendants in Argentina. They have chosen the name of the Yoruba orisha Xangô, or “Shango” in the Caribbean, because he is the epitome of justice and righteousness. The name also shows the transnational networking which is an important part of *Agrupación*’s mission. Xangô is the Portuguese spelling of the name of the god in the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé. The organization is relatively young. The organizational process began with the Pre-conference of the Americas on the Fight Against Racism, held in Santiago, Chile in 2000. It was not, however, until the Third World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa in 2001 that black Afro-Argentine activists developed a definitive plan to form the CSO. At this landmark conference

black activists from worldwide movements came together to fight for Afrodescendant rights in terms of cultural and political identity (Agrupación 2012).

Since the administration of Nestor Kirchner (2003-2007), the national government has developed and implemented a set of tools, proposals, policies and strategies to achieve a more egalitarian Argentina framed in a transformation process that primarily impacts the daily life of every citizen in the cultural and national arena. However, *Agrupación* sees that there is a need for specific policies that specifically impact the community as a way to create a space that allows equal treatment and opportunities (Alvarez 2013). The organization classifies itself as a political NGO. Their self-stated foremost organizational strategy is creating transnational networks with international Afrodescendant organizations and using human rights discourse to promote social justice, inclusion, and equity. They also seek to contribute to building a more just and egalitarian Argentina which is free from racism and discrimination.

The major projects and initiatives of *Agrupación* focus on campaigning and lobbying to the government and staging marches and protests. The marches and protests not only serve to get attention for the government but also to bring the plight of Afro-Argentines to the attention of the larger Argentine community. An example of a current campaign is the project of getting the government to establish November 8<sup>th</sup> as “Afro-Argentine Day.” The day is important because it corresponds to the anniversary of the death of Maria Remedios del Valle. She was an Afro-Argentine revolutionary and nurse who fought with a few other women alongside General Manuel Belgrano (1770-1820) in the battle of Ayohúma (1913) during the Independence wars. She was such an auxiliary that Belgrano referred to her as the “Mother of the Nation” and granted her the rank of Captain for her bravery and courage in the field (Agrupación 2012).

Another current initiative of *Agrupación* is to increase awareness of the important role of Afro-Argentines in the Independence Wars. To this effort, they staged a march this year on the national holiday of May 25, which commemorates the official start of the revolution for independence in 1810. Hundreds of people attended the march, including many white Argentines who painted their faces black and donned signs that read, “La historia que te enseñaron es un disfraz. Argentina también es Afro.” (The history they have taught you is a fraud. Argentina is also black.)<sup>1</sup> The place and timing of this march on a main street in the city of Buenos Aires and during a national holiday had the effect of garnering much public attention. Protesters also carried signs that called for the local congressman to consciously support the exposure of the role of Afro-Argentines in Argentina’s independence (Agrupación 2012).

### ***Asociación Misibamba: Comunidad Afroargentina de Buenos Aires***

The second organization that I will introduce is *Asociación Misibamba*. The organization was founded in May of 2008. The name *Misibamba* is the name of an Afro-Argentine candombe written in 1946. It was sung by an Afro-Argentine by the name of Alexander or “the grandfather.” María Elena Lamadrid, president and a founding member of *Misibamba*, named the organization in memory of the sentiments of pride in her Afro-Argentine roots that the song made her feel. *Misibamba* is organized quite differently than *Agrupación XANGÔ*. They are more of a cultural association than political activists. They promote the development of Afro-Argentine culture within communities of African descended Argentines.

This does not mean that *Misibamba* is not involved politically and does not want concrete policy changes that help Afro-Argentines but that their stated main goals are different. *Misibamba*’s

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<sup>1</sup> Translation provided by author.



goal is to establish itself as a thread of continuity between the black ancestors and the generations of Afro-Argentines to come. Furthermore, the organization wants to cultivate the cultural roots of Afro-Argentines dating back slavery. To do this they have formed strong ties with educators to study and proliferate the history of Afro-Argentines. Aside from unearthing information about Afro-Argentine history *Misibamba* seeks to facilitate an environment of visibility for Afro-Argentines and the culture of Afro-Argentines from the colonial trunk. They hope that this visibility extends not only throughout all of Argentina but also to international community (Misibamba 2011).

*Misibamba* is also distinguished among other Afro-Argentine civil society due to the exclusionary aspect of their organization. They are established as “afroargentinos del tronco colonial.” Being descended from the colonial trunk refers to Afro-Argentines who are direct descendants of slaves. This very specific type of mobilization can be very limiting. Not only are there very few Afro-Argentines who fall under this category but there are some who may not even know due to the arduous task of tracing ones family history. Furthermore, it presents a limitation to the notion of Afro-Argentine in that it describes Afro-Argentine culture as that culture of those descended from the slaves. This does not allow a space for other aspects of Afro-Argentine culture, say for example the vibrant Cape Verdean community, or any other type of “black” culture for that matter. This organization raises important questions about organizing culturally and ethnically that merit further research. For the purposes of this thesis, however, I will focus on how they have been effective at gaining space in the public sphere with the use of discourses similar to the state.

The projects of *Misibamba* are centered on the insemination of knowledge of Afro-Argentines descended from Argentina’s slaves in the form of workshops and exhibits. One

example the workshop taught by Pablo Cirio on the genealogy of Afro-Argentines which they hosted in conjunction with Minority Rights Group International. Many of their initiatives are also Cultural in nature and aimed at promoting pride in the Afro-Argentine community. Such events include festivals and dances celebrating their heritage.

### ***Casa de la Cultura Indo-Afro-Americana***

Another organization who has made significant achievements in this way is the Casa de Culura Indo-Afro-Americana. They work very closely with *Misibamba* and are also a cultural organization. They are, however, more inclusive in that not only do they consider all African descended peoples but indigenous as well. *Casa de la Cultura* has also been around for more than a decade and has managed to find the human and economic capital necessary continue in its mission.

The mission of *Casa de la Cultura* is to tend to the rescue, defense, development, dissemination, and promotion of cultural roots of Argentina's indigenous and Afrodescendant groups. This goal is achieved through the promotion of awareness, recovering of the historical memory, and fighting against racism, xenophobia and all forms of discrimination. *Casa de la Cultura*, like *Agrupación XANGÔ*, also works at the national and international level with related organizations. The organization specializes in non-formal education, intercultural fellowship, and the performing arts (INADI 2013). These projects are often intertwined. For example, in June of this year, *Casa de la Cultura* hosted a workshop of African dances and the rhythm of the Toubal, a drum played by Afro-Argentines. In addition to teaching the dance moves and drum beats members of the organization also inform participants of the history of Afro-Argentines. The nature of fellowship in the workshop, as it is open to the entire Santa Fe community, is meant to not only

stimulate awareness but also to promote a culture of acceptance of Argentina's diversity, a notion which is evident in *Casa de la Cultura's* logo (See Appendix E) (Molina 2013).

### ***Discursive Strategies of Afro-Argentine Civil Society***

Although the aforementioned civil society organizations are all organized differently, they have all played a role in procuring some of the advancements that Afro-Argentines have experienced in the last ten years. Likewise, they have all used similar strategy. The most common is the use of state discourse to communicate the issues of Afro-Argentines. The rhetoric chosen is not merely a repetition of state discourse but a manipulation of this discourse. Although it is true that sometimes CSOs mimic the rhetoric of the state in an attempt to gain favor I argue that Afro-Argentine CSOs do something that is quite different. In a way they challenge the promises of the state by saying, "yes we are a nation that reveres human rights. Here are some areas where we need to and have the opportunity to strengthen that claim." The primary discourse that is implemented by Afro-Argentine CSOs is the state discourse of human rights and multiculturalism.

In the previous chapter I gave a brief review of how in Argentina a social movement based on the advancement of human rights entered into the political sphere and left remnants of human rights throughout state discourse and civil society initiatives (Jelin 1994). Almost twenty years have passed since Jelin's assertion and the state is still an active player in the use of human rights rhetoric. The primary reason for the continued emphasis on human rights discourse is the result of government responses to the tensions still present as a result of past impunities. These tensions are kept alive by the efforts of non-governmental and civil society organizations. While in office, Nestor Kirchner, an advocate of human rights, often used such terms as *la verdadera memoria* (true memory) when responding to questions about truth trials and other topics related to reconciliation and retribution (La Nación 2006). In addition to linguistic discourse the state has

used the same rhetoric in extralinguistic ways with the naming of public spaces such as *Parque de la Memoria* (memory park), a public park dedicated not to telling the history of the past but creating a memory of the past. Another example is the creation of the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights. Human Rights laws were written into the 1994 constitution (Constitución 2013). An important distinction is that aside from Argentina's emergence as one of the principle nations open to the discussion of human rights is that along with this comes a discussion of civil and social rights as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Convention for Civil and Political Rights, and the International Convention for Economic, Social, and Cultural rights. Afro-Argentine civil society organizations have capitalized on the rhetoric of "true memory," "justice," and "human rights" in a discursive process with the state that has had positive outcomes.

The first example to illustrate this discursive process is the organization *Agrupación XANGÓ*. On their website they state, "we wish to recover our identity, our history and our values, memory and justice based on those who shed their blood and their lives to freely build this nation that represents us and includes us all." (Translated by author) The description of the purposes of the group on the website provides an example of the use of terms such as memory and social justice (Agrupación 2012). I was also in Argentina for the inauguration of *Agrupación's* presentation of the International Day against Sexism and Machismo towards Afrodescendant Women on July 19, 2012. The event included an exhibit featuring artwork by Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Uruguayan, Afro-Panamanian, and Afro-Argentine women. The exhibit was preceded by lectures by various Afrodescendant activists from the Southern Cone states. In the welcome speech by Carlos Alvarez, the president of *Agrupación XANGÓ*, he mentioned that Afro-Argentines were on a mission to rediscover "*la verdadera memoria afroargentina*" (the true memory of Afro-Argentines). I could

not help but notice the similitude in the language he used when he spoke about procuring rights for Afro-Argentines to the rhetoric used in prominent human rights discourse in Argentina. It was a strategic choice to use the word memory as opposed to history. It is the primary way in which the state has referred to the past since the last military dictatorship and is also the rhetoric present in newspapers documenting the trials of the officials of the dictatorship.

Another example of the employment of state discourse is the current efforts of activists to use the rhetoric of multiculturalism and inclusion in claims of citizenship. The most formalized tool that they use is the 1994 Constitution. In section 20 Argentina claims to be such an inclusive nations that all participants in Argentine society both foreigners and citizens are entitled to “full civil rights: they may exercise their industry, trade and profession; own real property, buy and sell it; navigate the rivers and coasts; practice freely their religion; make wills and marry under the laws.” Although article 17 of section 75 only guarantees the ethnic and cultural pre-existence of indigenous peoples of Argentina article 19 of this same section promises that the state will “enact laws protecting cultural identity and plurality...and the artistic heritage and places devoted to cultural and audiovisual activities.” (Constitución Argentina 2013) These articles have been a tool that Afro-Argentine civil society has used to gain access to state owned spaces. For example, the art show for the International Day against Sexism and Machismo towards Afrodescendant Women that I mentioned before was held at the Argentine Chancellery.

The Argentine state also seeks to portray itself as a multicultural and multiethnic state. The state website for the Ministry of Education states, “Argentina is regarded as a multicultural and multiethnic country where more than 40 countries’ different cultures, traditions and cults harmoniously coexist. Such a diversity has been enshrined in the National Constitution.” (Estudiar en Argentina 2013) *Asociación Misibamba* employs this same rhetoric in the description of the

organization. “The *Misibamba* Association sees itself as a constituent part of Argentine society. We understand that our country is built on the basis of a multicultural and multiethnic society in which all social actors, both individually and collectively, through various NGOs, should be active participants in the production of the history of our country.”<sup>2</sup> (Asociación 2013)

An important discursive tool Afro-Argentine CSOs have used outside of the connection with the state has been the transnational discourse between Afro-Argentine civil society and other Afrodescendant organizations. *Agrupación XANGÓ*, *Casa de la Cultura Indo-Afro-Americana*, and *Misibamba Afroargentino* all take part in this dialogue. *Agrupación* achieves this effort by working with various Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Uruguayan organizations. They have also expanded in the last two years to work with a couple of organizations in Africa (*Agrupación* 2012). *Casa de la Cultura* members were part of an international human rights initiative against racism where they presented at the conference in Chile. They network with other Afrodescendant civil society organizations throughout Latin America as well.

Afro-Argentine CSOs have used similar discourse as the state not to act as a tool of repetition but open a door to the further exploration and understanding of the presence of African culture and peoples in Argentinian history. The rhetoric of national organizations and formalized discourse has been adapted into the mission statements of many of the Afro-Argentine CSOs. This provides an example of the effective organizing strategies of the various Afro-Argentine civil society organizations. Even when formal measures are not explicitly instituted for Afro-Argentines they have found ways to use the rhetoric to their advantage.

Furthermore, communication in the form of free, moral, and deliberative discourses between the state and civil society has been an important factor for the advancement of Afro-

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<sup>2</sup> Translation provided by author.

Argentines. Afro-Argentine CSOs have not only used this discourse on their webpages but in their campaigning as well. Their slogans for human rights and a true multicultural society pervade social media and fill the poster boards of protest. The following section illustrates some of the positive ways that the state has reacted to the initiatives of Afro-Argentine Civil Society organizations.

### ***Government Response to Afro-Argentine Civil Society Initiatives***

In 1996, while visiting the United States, then Argentine president Carlos Menem was questioned about the black population in Argentina. His response was, “blacks do not exist in Argentina, that is a problem that Brazil has.” (Gabino 2007:1) Then in 2002 María Lamadrid, an Afro-Argentine woman and now an activist, was detained in the Ezeiza International airport in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The immigration officials did not believe that her passport was real because she is black and her passport displays Argentinian nationality (Ackerman 2005). Although these two events are localized, they provide a concrete example of the invisibility of Afro-Argentines in Argentina which is still a contemporary issue. Although both events occurred ten years ago or more, they are not isolated events in the lives of Afro-Argentines (Agrupación 2012). It is, therefore, not an easy task to measure if the efforts of Afro-Argentine civil society have produced real changes, which is to say that their efforts have had relative success.

If the efforts of Afro-Argentine civil society have been effective, as I argue in this thesis, we should expect to see real and measurable differences in the lives of Afro-Argentines as well as evidence of increased visibility of their existence. Furthermore, these measured differences must be shown to be a direct result of the initiatives of Afro-Argentine CSOs in order to show that they are not the result of something else. Also, positive changes must be evident not only at the micro

level, which includes the Afro-Argentine community, but on a larger scale as well, that is in state and media discourse. Furthermore, the increase in visibility must be accepted and encouraged by the state in order for me to state that through the efforts of civil society Afro-Argentines are attaining group differentiated rights in the form of validating claims to cultural citizenship. The following examples show the increase presence of Afro-Argentines in the dominant discourses of Argentine culture and society.

The state has made formal advances toward the elimination of racism and discrimination in state discourse. These changes began as early as with the administration of Carlos Menem and were furthered by the la Rúa administration. The important contribution of the Menem administration was the 1994 Constitution which adapted human rights rhetoric and included amendments prohibiting the discrimination of any groups (Romero 2002). This was little realized in application to Afro-Argentines but again provided a discursive legal tool for organizing and asserting rights.

Another formal advance was the creation of the National Institute to Combat Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism, also known as INADI. This organization operates under the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, as an institution of the state charged with monitoring human rights abuses in the country. INADI also keeps a registry of all Civil Society Organizations that directly or indirectly contribute to the fight against discrimination in Argentina. The institute also investigates organizational forms, subject areas and specific modes of intervention of each organizations. Furthermore, CSOs have the option of joining the national registry of the institute. Through joining this registry, INADI may promote coordination and participation of these organizations in the joint management of anti-discrimination policies that meet the specific demands of those subject to discrimination (INADI 2013).



The Afro-Argentine cause has also been picked up by the media in recent years. In 2002 Jorge Fortes and Diego H. Ceballos produced a documentary called *Afroargentinos*. This documentary combines present day interviews with historical material to illustrate the continuing presence of Afro-Argentines throughout the country's history (Fortes and Ceballos 2002). The film shows a process of "revisibilization" on a national and international level as it has become a product of popular media due to the many film awards the documentary won. Another example of this increased visibility is the increasing appearance of Afro-Argentines in the popular newspaper *La Nación*. A search of news articles through the online archives of *La Nación* from 1990 to the present provides evidence of this process.<sup>3</sup> This is evidence of an increase in visibility because Afrodescendants do not appear nearly as often as the main subject of an article before 2005 after which they do so frequently. These articles display the cultural fests and educational efforts of the CSOs. Some articles reflect on the issues that blacks in Argentina face.

Aside from increased media presence, Afro-Argentine have made great strides in terms of gaining recognition from the state. Arguably the most significant change is the addition of an Afrodescendant category on the 2010 census (See Appendix F). This monumental event was the result of the efforts of such organizations as *Asociación Misibamba*, *Africa Vive*, and *Casa de la Cultura Indo-Afro-Americana*. The last time Afrodescendants had appeared as a category on the census was in 1895 (Censos 2012). Although the new census will not give a real representation of the number of Afro-Argentines, due to the erasure through many years of whitening, it has many positive implications. First, it is the first time that the government has formally recognized Afro-Argentines as a group that is culturally relevant to Argentina in more than 100 years. Second, the

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<sup>3</sup> I use the date range of 1990-2013 because the archival information on the newspaper's website goes back as far as 1990 only. Furthermore, I did not have access to the microfilm archives of earlier dates at the time that this research was conducted ([www.lanacion.com.ar](http://www.lanacion.com.ar))

census will also provide a specific statistical medium to measure the living conditions of those Afro-Argentines who did answer yes to the question inquiring if they were of African descent. This will give organizations specific issues that need to be resolved and provide specific details for the creation of group differentiated policies. There was also a silver lining that resulted from the many discrepancies produced by the most recent census. Because of the discrepancies in the forms, one being the non-inclusion of information about Afro-Argentines and what it meant to be Afrodescendant, there is a possibility that many people who could have checked “Afrodescendant” did not. Disappointment with the inconsistency in the forms led Afro-Argentine activists to develop rights monitoring and data compilation bodies which were independent of the government (Minority Rights Group, 2011).

Another example of the state recognition of Afro-Argentines as part of the national heritage is evident in the beautiful story of the *Paseo de las tres Culturas*. I learned of this success when I met Lucía Dominga Molina while interning with the Institute for the Study of Afro-Argentines and Afrodescendants at the National University of La Plata. *Paseo de las tres Culturas* (The Plaza of the Three Cultures) is a public square in Santa Fe, which serves as the entrance to the Museum of Ethnography and History. Until 2009 this plaza was known as the *Paseo de las dos Culturas* and represented the indigenous and European roots of Argentina. Due to the efforts of Lucía Molina, author, activist, and president of *Casa de la Cultura Indo-Afro-Americana*, the name of the plaza was changed to include the African heritage as part of the roots of the Argentine nation. This name change was then commemorated with a national plaque in 2011. This accomplishment is a great achievement to the important space center city plazas encompass in Argentine culture. They are important meeting and resting spots and each plaza has a statue or plaque recognizing an important part of the Argentine identity (See Appendix G).

The next two examples provide evidence of increased discourse between the major players in Argentine society and the Afro-Argentine activist community. Before I mentioned being present for *Agrupación XANGÓ's* sponsoring of the opening reception for an art exhibit commemorating the International Day Against Sexism and Machismo towards Afrodescendant Women on July 19, 2012 at the Argentina Chancellery building. The event was sponsored by the CACCSC, the Commission of Afrodescendants of the Advisory Council of Civil Society. This exhibit and its location were important for many reasons. First, it was held at the Palacio San Martín, the chancellery building which serves as the ceremonial headquarters to the Ministry of Foreign Relations. This location shows that not only is the Argentinian state recognizing the efforts of the Afrodescendant community but it is also providing state owned spaces for the promotion of the culture as well as encouraging the transnational discourse necessary for the success of Afro-Argentine organizations. A second important accomplishment of this exhibit is that it is part of a series of exhibits titled Culture, Art, and Integration: Afrodescendants in Mercosur. Such a sponsorship by a transnational economic and trade bloc shows that there is an underlying motive related to development strategies that is very important not only for the goals of civil society but for the social uplift of this marginalized group.

Another example relates to the creation itself of the Institute where I did my internship. The Institute for the Study of Afro-Argentines and Afrodescendants at the National University of La Plata was established in 2011 and is overseen by Professor Augusto Pérez Guarnieri and Dr. Norberto Pablo Cirio. Both scholars have already produced a significant amount of literature relating to music, culture, history, and contemporary issues of Afrodescendants (Cirio 1997, 2000; Pérez 2010, 2011). The Institute carries out the study of Afro-Argentines both historically and contemporary through various disciplines including but not limited to anthropology, history,

ethnomusicology, and various other social sciences. As this commission was given to one of the largest and most important public institutions of higher learning in Argentina, it serves as yet another concrete example of a move toward recognition of the Afro-Argentine community. It also provides the opportunity for the production of more scholarly knowledge about contemporary Afro-Argentines, as the majority of the current literature is limited to historical perspectives of the group.

There is further evidence that the government is taking a role in the proliferation of knowledge about the black roots of the Tango. In 2008 the Programa Identidad Entrerriana an extension of the local government in Entre Ríos financed the founding of the Tangó de San Miguel. The group works in collaboration with the *Casa de la Cultura Indo-Afro-Americana* to teach Afro-Argentine forms of dance and music. The program has also received the sponsorship of the Santa Fe Ministry of Innovation and Culture as an educational provider (Suárez 2009). This event provides an example of the government funding of Afrodescendant identity building.

One final example shows that not only are Afro-Argentines achieving space and cultural recognition but have begun to procure changes that have more optimistic social implications for the community. The Refugee Assistance Organization was created in response to reports of violent attacks against African refugees. Although not its own ministry the RAO is an extension of the Ministry of the Public. It is different from other refugee organizations because it has been created for African refugees specifically while other organizations tend to lump refugees together (Anderson 2010). Although this example does not specifically address Afro-Argentines, it is important to include here because it suggests that the government is not only recognizing that racism exists but that it also has a negative impact of the black community. This dispels the myth

that coincides with the myth that “there are no blacks in Argentina,” which is that for that reason “there is no racism in Argentina.”

In the working paper “So What Difference Does It Make: Mapping the Outcomes of Citizen Engagement,” John Gaventa and Gregory Barrett (2010) map 830 possible outcomes of citizen engagement. Gaventa and Barnett narrow down four areas where citizen engagement can have an influence on state-society relations. The table below illustrates the possible negative and positive outcomes of civil society activism. The evidence presented shows that Afro-Argentines have been successful at achieving the latter two positive outcomes and have already begun to achieve some of the positive outcomes listed in the first two cells on the positive side. It remains to be seen if they will have more success in these areas as the organizations are relatively new.

Table 1: Outcomes of Citizen Engagement (Source: Gaventa and Barrett, 2010: 25 Table. 5.1)

Positive	Negative
<b>Construction of citizenship</b>	
Increased civic and political knowledge Greater sense of empowerment and agency <sup>11</sup>	Increased knowledge dependencies Disempowerment and reduced sense of agency
<b>Practices of citizen participation</b>	
Increased capacities for collective action New forms of participation Deepening of networks and solidarities	New capacities used for 'negative' purposes Tokenistic or 'captured' forms of participation Lack of accountability and representation in networks
<b>Responsive and accountable states</b>	
Greater access to state services and resources Greater realisation of rights Enhanced state responsiveness and accountability	Denial of state services and resources Social, economic and political reprisals Violent or coercive state response
<b>Inclusive and cohesive societies</b>	
Inclusion of new actors and issues in public spaces Greater social cohesion across groups	Reinforcement of social hierarchies and exclusion Increased horizontal conflict and violence

## *Conclusion*

This chapter highlights some of the areas where Afro-Argentine CSOs have been effective. It does not suggest civil society is a cure all for racism but that it is a viable option for creating democratic conditions for all citizens. I do not wish to paint the picture that the government has done away with the issues blacks face in Argentina. In fact, in many ways tourist sites propagated by the state still perpetuate the notion of a white nation (Sutton 2008). Hopefully, the examples I have provided serve as an invigoration for new activist efforts as opposed to being a celebratory declaration of civil society's achievements. It is important to portray the instances of hope especially for the Afro-Argentine community because it has been dormant for too long.

It has been in the last ten to twenty years that Afro-Argentine activists have put a tremendous amount of effort and energy into the plight of the Afro-Argentine community. Because this movement is so young, many civil society organizations are still completing the primary steps of forming a strong black movement. They are working with hegemonic powers to create racial consciousness and to unearth long buried histories about Afro-Argentines. An important step will be to continue to build their constituency and fortify the relations between civil society organizations. They have already proven that they have the discursive techniques needed to effectively communicate with state actors. At this point it is extremely crucial to build the horizontal relationships. These relationships are what keeps civil society strong, thriving, and democratic. Some of the most recent research shows that solidarity between groups is indeed an area that Afro-Argentine CSOs could strengthen (Anderson 2012). There is still a long way to come and a great deal to be done, but the efforts of civil society thus far have not been in vain.

## CHAPTER V Conclusion

### *Afro-Argentines: The Journey from Enslaved to Invisible to Enlightened*

In this thesis, I have sought to make various contributions to the plight of Afro-Argentines. I attempt to add to the general knowledge about Afro-Argentines by offering a concise history of the community. Furthermore, I provided background information on the various ways in which Afro-Argentines have contributed to the history of Argentina as a nation and to some of the most prominent forms of Argentine culture. For example, in addition to comprising almost fifty percent of the independence army Afro-Argentines played a major role in the development of national music and dishes. I also examine the social, scientific, and political processes which have led to the current situation of invisibility and exclusion for Afro-Argentines. *Blanqueamiento*, or the whitening campaign socially portrayed all things black as primitive while formally enacting policies of immigration and census taking that “erased” the black population. Academics contributed to this process through the presently refuted sciences of craniometry and eugenics which attempted to scientifically prove that blacks were inferior. Aside from examining the social processes by which an ethnic group has remained invisible in the larger society I also attempt to continue the counter-narrative to the national myth that “there are no blacks in Argentina.” I do this by providing a contemporary view in to the Afro-Argentines who live in the country today and civil society’s attempts to address the unjust issues that they face.

Second, I attempt to contribute to various academic discussions and theories regarding how citizens can have a fuller experience of democracy. One of the most common and most contested suggestions of this analysis is the idea of civil society. I review various authors in support of and against civil society. Drawing attention to the importance of strong voluntary associations built on trust and mutual interests is far more productive to democratic development than focusing on the many intricacies that show the ways in which civil society can improve. The primary error in the critiques of civil society is that they are not critiques of civil society at all but of the many intervening factors that can harm the autonomy of such associations: coopting, clientelism, and corruption. Stripped down to its most basic definition, civil society contributes to democracy by creating strong associations of members who are not only informed about their government but also who care. Ultimately this leads to the greater participation of citizens, more transparency and accountability for government and for profound experience of citizenship and democracy.

Ultimately I have demonstrated how the argument for civil society plays out using the case of Afro-Argentines as an example. This example shows how the experience of citizenship for Afro-Argentines has slightly improved since the development of Afro-Argentine civil society in the last twenty years. Furthermore, I argue that these CSOs have been more effective than other racially conscious factions of the group through using an effective discursive strategy. Afro-Argentine CSOs have piggybacked off the popular discourse of human rights and multiculturalism and used the rhetoric when campaigning for the use of public and government-owned spaces.

### ***Policy Implications***

Although the previous discussion has an optimistic tone it does not negate the continued experience of exclusion of Afro-Argentines. The current situation suggests that there are some important policy implications for governments who purport to have inclusive societies. It also



suggests the need for further strategy development for civil society if they are to remain strong, revitalized, autonomous and democratic. A crucial policy implication for the state would be to move beyond the discursive support of Afro-Argentines and formalize specific recognition as the Constitution does for indigenous groups in Article 75, section 17 (Constitución 2013). This would not only continue to provide Afro-Argentines with a tool for activism but also would introduce other sectors of society to the importance of Afro-Argentines primarily because of the importance that the Constitution has for Argentines (Levinson 2012a). A second suggestion would be to include the study of Afro-Argentines as a part of formal secondary education. This will help the history of Afro-Argentines move beyond the realm of a mystical story-like experience and essentialize it for all Argentines.

The suggestion to Afro-Argentine CSOs would be to strengthen the horizontal relationships between the various organizations. Judith Anderson (2012) points out that the recent migrations of blacks to Argentina has led to heightened black identities but that the experience has not led to a unified effect. The largest wedge is perhaps not between the various immigrants from Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean but between those pre-existing Afro-Argentines and the new wave. Thus the question should not be who gets to say “what does it mean to be Afro-Argentine” but “how we all can overcome the situation in which a racialized society has placed us.” The answer to this is to form strong networks and coalitions. These horizontal relationships, as previously stated are crucial for maintaining a democratic civil society and holding CSOs accountable to representing the community and not becoming a tool of the government.

### ***Possible Future Research***

Although countless hours of research went into the production of this thesis, as is true of most scholars, my works does not feel complete. Fortunately, there is always an opportunity for future research to be conducted by the researcher or to be carried out by future researchers. My examination of Afro-Argentines left many questions unanswered and led to the development of many new ones that would provide valuable future research. One area that I did not get to examine deeply enough is the failures of Afro-Argentine CSOs. This is a project that will require greater resources and personal connections people are more likely to recount their successful ventures to others as opposed to their failures. Furthermore, organizations are often not as keen to provide researchers this the ways in which the organization is not meeting its commitments. Such a study would likely require intense ethnographical research. However, such an investigation is necessary to make further suggestions on how to improve the efficacy of civil society.

Another research topic that came up often in my research is the role women have played in the experience of blacks in Argentina. Throughout the research stage of my thesis women were often mentioned but never in great detail. For example, many Afro-Argentine men died in the Wars of Independence leaving behind sisters, mothers, daughters, and wives. While George Reid Andrews (1980) provides research showing that many married white immigrants, this information leads to other important questions. What role did these women play constructing a black identity in Argentina? If they were the mothers of a mixed nation, did they seek to preserve multicultural identities of their children or promote whiteness? Andrews (1980) also comments that black women comprised the majority of domestic workers and artisan workers in the early 1800s. How did these roles shape the Afro-Argentine experience and Argentine culture in general?

There are contemporary questions pertaining to women that I would like to examine in future research as well. In Argentina, many prostitutes are black women from the Dominican Republic. Their experiences would undoubtedly shed light on the many ways in which blackness is experienced in the country. However, I did not witness any initiatives of the CSOs I researched that dealt with this issue. Among the various CSOs and mutual aid societies I researched I also noticed the prominence of women as the leaders of civil society. This is not only true in Afro-Argentine CSOs but across CSOs throughout Argentina. What implications does such information have for the organization and efficacy in Argentina? This is the work I hope to continue for my dissertation. To accomplish this I will need to commit to research which is limited to the study of Afro-Argentine women and black women in Argentina. I will also need to be more read in feminist theory as it is the theoretical framework in which I will situate my study.

Lastly, I think a worthwhile study would examine the limits to organizing culturally, as many Afro-Argentine CSOs do. Undeniably, an important first step in Argentina is to establish pride in the African heritage. However, knowing the history is not enough. In *Orpheus and Power*, Hanchard (1994) cautions that cultural organizations need to go a little further if they are to serve their communities in a way that is socially beneficial. That is, Afro-Argentine CSOs need to not only improve awareness and racial consciousness but social situations as well. As of right now, it will be important to use the space that Afro-Argentine CSOs have gain to make a claim for formalized changes that improve the social indicators of Afro-Argentines. I do not believe that this is a task that is impossible for cultural organizations to do so it would be interesting to examine how this can be achieved.

## APPENDIX



A. Percentage of Afrodescendants in Latin American Countries. Inter-American Development Bank (Source: <http://www.iadb.org/en/topics/gender-indigenous-peoples-and-african-descendants/percentage-of-afro-descendants-in-latin-america,6446.html>) Accessed 5-20-2013.

Sortijas finas  
Tasas de loza con nombres.  
PEINETAS DE CAREI CALADAS *muy baratas*  
Tijeras finas  
Corta-plumas  
Lapiz de patente  
Cigarreras pintadas  
Cajas de rapé  
Cucharas y tenedores de composicion  
Lámparas con globos  
Libritos para escritorio  
Una escopeta  
Un par pistolas.

PAPEL PINTADO, se venderá mas barato que no se ha vendido todavía ; las guardas y los frisos se venderán por separado haciendo una rebaja considerable. Almacen calle de la Plata No. 133. No se vende despues de la oracion. 21-6p

**Ojo.**



En la calle de la Florida No. 210, se desea comprar ó conchavar una criada muger, que tenga buenas recomendaciones, para llevarla al interior á la ciudad del Tucuman. Tambien se vende un sofá de última moda y otros muebles en la misma casa. Las personas que gusteu tratar, pueden ocurrir á cualquiera hora. 21-3s

**Desean conchavar,**

EN el almacen que está en las cuatro esquinas de San Nicolás, un hombre que pueda acreditar su buena com- portacion. Ocurran á la misma esquina. 21-3p

**Se vende,**

Un mueble de...

...dad No. 2, es Victoria bajo á precios muy...

...tre ellos los h que se puede á precios muy Hay quitasole cio alto. Tan de la mejor ca do con la per paraguas de m lo que se conv to se encuent de paraguas. de capote, neg las pidan.

**Aviso**

...de las clases de frutales, como de ...A su estensa coleccion anterior, obra o con gastos enormes, se encuentran re- las del extranjero y enteramente nuevas as calidades no ménos esquisitas que ... Entre ellas se citan las siguientes:—  
**UCIDAS DE LOS ESTADOS UNI- A AMERICA DEL NORTE.**  
Pileans.  
den Drop.  
Washington.  
mperial Gage.  
**I DE FRANCIA.**  
Claude.  
irabelle.  
Hatif  
rdrigon.  
**OS E. U. DE AMERICA.**  
mond.  
Black Oxheart.  
**FRANCIA**  
reaut.  
ency.  
**MASCOS.**  
calidades diferentes (segun listo) introducidas de América y Fran  
**MASCOS Y PELONES.**  
les nuevas.  
**ANZANAS.**  
alidades nuevas.  
**GRALES.**  
siete calidades (segun lista) nueva- ocidas de América y Francia.  
**MORAS, HIGOS, CÁSTANOS,**  
**Y PARRAS.**  
de uno hasta ocho años, incluyen- ses diferentes de uva, entre ellas

B. Slavery After Emancipation: 1865 Classified ad to sell a housemaid. The ad reads: *On Florida Street no. 210, looking to buy or hire a servant woman, who has good recommendations, to take into the city of Tucuman. Also selling a sofa of the latest fashion and other furniture in the same house. Those who would like to inquire can at any hour* (Translation provided by author). Uncovered during internship with the Cátedra Libre de Estudios Afroargentinos y Afrodescendientes at the University of La Plata (Source: Avisos. *Diario de la Tarde*. May, 1865.)



C. Blackface caricature: The jazz band of the Compañía Argentina de Broadcasting (Source: Karush, Matthew B. 2012. "Blackness in Argentina: Jazz, Tango and Race Before Perón." *Past & Present* 216.1: 215-245, 233.



D. Lois Blue (Lucy Bolognini Míguez) in "Blackface." (Source: Karush, Matthew B. 2012. "Blackness in Argentina: Jazz, Tango and Race Before Perón." *Past & Present* 216.1: 215-245, 235.)



E. Logo of *Casa de la Cultura Indo-Afro-Americana*. The three intertwined hands represent the European, indigenous, and African cultures that together, in the opinion of *Casa de la Cultura*, represent the Argentine identity (Source: <https://www.facebook.com/luciadominga.molina>)







G. Plaque in the city center Plaza in Santa Fe, Argentina commemorating the original communities of Argentina. Before 2009 the plaque only acknowledged the indigenous and European communities (Source: <http://estudiosafroargentinos.blogspot.com/2011/05/17-de-abril-dia-del-afroargentino-del.html>)

es and things    Prisca

**Lucía Dominga Molina** + New Message ⚙ Actions 🔍

 **Prisca DN** 📧 4:15pm

Hola, soy Prisca, la estudiante de la universidad de la Florida en los EEUU. Me enteré de la organización Casa de la Cultura Indo-Afro-Americana cuando hice una pasantía con la Cátedra Libre de Estudios Afroargentinos y de Afrodescendientes en el verano de 2012. Estoy escribiendo mi tesis en el tema de los afroargentinos y busco información de cuantos miembros tiene la organización. Esta información no puedo encontrar en las páginas de la red. Les agradezco mucho si me pueden compartir esta información. Muchísimas gracias. Prisca Suárez.

 **Prisca DN** 📧 6:18pm

Y disculpa la molesta pero también le pido permiso usar la foto que aparece en tu muralla de las tres manos entrelazados cual es el logo de Casa de la Cultura Indo Afro Americana. Quiero mostrar que tu organización no discrimina sino promove la diversidad de Argentina y el trabajo de mejorar las experiencias de los indígenas y las afrodescendientes argentinos. Mil gracias.

Thursday

 **Lucía Dominga Molina** 8:08pm

Vale.  
Gracias.

Write a reply... 

 Add Files  Add Photos Press Enter to send  Reply

Permission to use figure in Appendix E. Logo of *Casa de la Cultura Indo-Afro-Americana*.



Prisca Suárez &lt;priscagayles@mail.usf.edu&gt;

---

**So What Difference Does it Make? Table 5.1**

4 messages

---

**Prisca Suárez** <priscagayles@mail.usf.edu>  
To: j.gaventa@ids.ac.uk

Tue, Jul 9, 2013 at 3:52 PM

Esteemed Dr. Gaventa,

My name is Prisca Suárez. I am currently finishing up my masters thesis titled "Maximizing Citizenship with Minimal Representation: An Analysis of Afro-Argentine Civil Society Organizations." I would like to request permission to use a reproduction of Table 5.1 on page 25 in my thesis. It provides good examples of the ways in which the civil society organizations in my case study have had positive outcomes. Thank you kindly for your response.

Best regards,  
Prisca Suárez

--

Prisca Suárez  
University of South Florida  
ISLAC Graduate Student/ Instructor of Spanish  
ISLAC/ Department of World Languages  
4202 East Fowler Ave., CGS 101  
Tampa, FL 33620  
[priscagayles@mail.usf.edu](mailto:priscagayles@mail.usf.edu)

---

**Prisca Suárez** <priscagayles@mail.usf.edu>  
To: jgaventa@stfx.ca

Tue, Jul 9, 2013 at 3:57 PM

[Quoted text hidden]

---

**John Gaventa** <jgaventa@stfx.ca>  
To: Prisca Suárez <priscagayles@mail.usf.edu>

Tue, Jul 9, 2013 at 5:17 PM

Yes, that is fine. Thanks for checking.

---

**From:** Prisca Suárez <priscagayles@mail.usf.edu>  
**Date:** Tuesday, July 9, 2013 4:57 PM  
**To:** John Gaventa <jgaventa@stfx.ca>  
**Subject:** Fwd: So What Difference Does it Make? Table 5.1

[Quoted text hidden]

---

**Prisca Suárez** <priscagayles@mail.usf.edu>  
To: John Gaventa <jgaventa@stfx.ca>

Tue, Jul 9, 2013 at 5:23 PM

Thank you kindly Dr. Gaventa.

Permission to use Table 1: Outcomes of Citizen Engagement (Source: Gaventa and Barrett, 2010: 25 Table. 5.1).

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Jul 10, 2013

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Permission to use Appendix C: Blackface caricature and Appendix D: Lois Blue.

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