Chapter 7: "We are Culture, not Color"
Musicians, Technocrats and the (Re-)Making of 'Afrobolivian Culture'

As I have shown in the preceding chapter, references to phenotypical appearance and genealogical ancestry have been enhanced by references to 'Afrobolivian culture' as a defining feature of Afrobolivian identity and groupness. Moreover, 'distinct culture' is an important conceptual basis for political mobilization and ensuing legal recognition in multicultural and plurinational times. Just as the shirt of the young man in the photograph below indicates (see fig. 16), the articulation of Afrobolivianity, as well as political mobilization and demands for recognition, heavily focus on discourses that foreground *"cultura"* as the defining aspect of being Afrobolivian.

Figure 16: Afrobolivian saya musician with a shirt stating: "Soy cultura, no color" – "I am culture, not color." (photograph by the author).

In this chapter, I will approach the subject of 'Afrobolivian culture' in two contexts. First, I will discuss the Afrobolivian dance *saya*, analyzing the changing contexts, meanings and discursive roles of the dance as a "cultural performance" (Cohen 1993; Guss 2000; Parkin, Caplan, and Fisher 1996), as a strategic asset of mobilization, and as an important symbol of Afrobolivianity more generally. Second, I will discuss processes of compiling, organizing and codifying 'Afrobolivian culture' during the implementation of state-sponsored programs that aim at establishing an objective definition of 'Afrobolivian culture.'

Saya as cultural performance

In September 2014 I attended the *III. Festival de la Saya Afroboliviana* taking place at the Plaza San Francisco, the main square in the city of La Paz. The event was organized by CADIC and Jorge Medina and was held on a stage with amplification and professional lighting similar to a pop concert. Its program consisted of performances by *saya* groups from different places in the Yungas and from the city of La Paz. Parallel to the festival, CONAFRO was hosting its biannual congress that also counted on the participation of various community leaders from the Yungas, as well as leaders of the various urban groups from Santa Cruz, Cochabamba and La Paz. I arrived at the festival shortly before its official opening and was accompanied by Francisco and other representatives from the *comunidad* of Yábalo-Ihaco (Sud Yungas), including his wife. As we waited for the show to start, we discussed the events of the CONAFRO congress we had just attended. More and more people flocked onto the plaza, among them other delegates of the congress, but also the general public passing by the central plaza. Francisco calmly observed the preparations and was pleased by the great interest of the public in the *saya* performances. Finally, Jorge Medina took the stage and gave his opening speech. He emphasized the great importance *saya* has for the Afrobolivian people and gave a short introduction to its history. Brought to Bolivia from Africa by slaves in colonial times, he summarized, *saya* had been practiced by Afrobolivians in the Yungas for generations and, as of now, represented the most important 'cultural tradition' of Afrodescendants in the country. He went on to inform the public that as a result of his interventions in parliament *(Asamblea Plurinacional)*, *saya* had been recognized by law as being part of the 'cultural patrimony of the nation,' as "belonging to the Afrobolivian people" and, furthermore, that it was the state's obligation to foster and promote its performance as part of the national cultural heritage.[1] He ended his introductory speech with a summary of his legislative efforts on behalf of the

1 *Ley 138: Declarase Patrimonio Histórico Cultural e Inmaterial del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia a la expresión artística cultural viva "Saya Afroboliviana" perteneciente al Pueblo Afroboliviano.*

Afrobolivian people and then introduced the hosts for the night's entertainment, two radio journalists who were to be in charge of announcing the different acts and enlivening the crowd. Besides the *saya* groups, they announced, the spectators were to be entertained by a performance of capoiera, another "traditionally African expression," and by different musical groups, including *Alaj Pacha*, a fairly well-known folklore band of *mestizo* origin. A significant crowd had assembled by that time and the performances began.

What followed was in some sense a contest between different *sayas*, displaying their mastery of the dance, spicing up their performances with various gimmicks – even though there were no judges or prizes and no explicit mention of a competition was made by any of the participants. One group exhibited a great variety of different dance steps and choreographed sequences, whereas in the performance of another group, a particularly talented singer took center stage, singing some of the *coplas* as solos. Yet another group prominently placed young children at the front of the performance, exhibiting the skills of the youngest members of their group. They were complimented with a lot of applause by many of the spectators and the atmosphere was in its majority cheerful and festive. The people in the audience seemed to enjoy themselves greatly and some people even approached the stage and danced along with the performers. It struck me as remarkable that among the most enthusiastic individuals in the audience there were very few Afrobolivians. Francisco also stood in the back rows of the crowd and observed the spectacle with little outward signs of emotion, looking – if anything – puzzled. Given the fact that in between the performances the hosts – as a means of complimenting the performers for their skillful presentations – repeatedly shouted that "here, we are seeing the 'joyfulness of a people'" *("la alegría de un pueblo")* and "the essence of Afrobolivian people and culture" *("la esencia de la cultura y del pueblo Afroboliviano")*, it was an odd situation to observe the self-identified members of this *pueblo* occupying the role of puzzled bystanders at the sight of 'their culture' being performed publicly to a zealous crowd. Since the loud music made it impossible to talk, I could do little to inquire into Francisco's impressions of the whole thing and we stood side by side watching the show. Only after some time, during a short break, did he turn and address his wife and me, saying: "They are stylizing it too much. It is going to be lost" *("Mucho lo están estilizando, se va a perder")*. His wife nodded in agreement and they both turned again to keep watching the unfolding event. After the *saya* performances, it was the turn of the capoeira group to take the stage. They performed a short series of 'games' in an improvised *roda* (see Downey 2005) and shortly afterwards took their leave.[2]

2 Initially, the organizers had also announced the participation of a musical group from Africa, allegedly from Kenya, via some local newspapers. Although this performance did not

The show was then interrupted for the preparations for performances by different musical groups and I asked Francisco what he had meant with his previous comment. He started by telling me that he was very happy to see young people dance *saya* and that he was very pleased at how the crowd had received the dancers and that so many people had come in the first place. Yet the way he saw *saya* being performed that day made him worry. The *saya* he knew, the *saya* from his community, was different, he told me. It was slower *("más pausada")*, he explained, less spectacular *("más sencilla")* and not as conventionalized as the performances he had seen. And it was not only the *saya* performances that had made him uneasy. The capoeira group and their performance did not make sense for him in this context. "That has nothing to do with Afrobolivians" *("No tiene nada que ver con el pueblo Afroboliviano")* he noted. Being a man of very few words, Francisco did not further elaborate on his statement and told me he had to leave in order to find the hostel that had been provided to him by CONAFRO for attending the conference. What I took from his comment and his brief explanations was a general inquietude towards the matter of *saya* performances such as those we just witnessed. It would seem exaggerated to speak of disapproval – recall his happiness about the fact that young people were performing *saya* – and I prefer to interpret his statements as a fundamental puzzlement in light of the changes he perceives are happening in regard to *saya*. He did not express dissatisfaction explicitly; it seemed rather like a slightly nostalgic disbelief in what he saw, paired with a silently expressed acknowledgement that these changes, however puzzling they appeared to him, also had a positive side and would continue to shape what is perceived as 'Afrobolivian culture' in Bolivia today.

This short episode exemplifies the central importance of *saya* for any discussions of 'Afrobolivian culture.' First and very importantly, *saya* is still by far the most visible part of Afrobolivian presence in the public sphere. Only through *saya* do Afrobolivians gain such wide visibility as afforded by a show in La Paz's most important plaza. While the more politically oriented CONAFRO congress we were coming from was held behind closed doors inside an auditorium with little to no outside participation or media interest, the *saya* festival was held at Plaza San Francisco, one of the most important public spaces in La Paz. Yet the context of the festival also alerts us to the fact that in its moments of greatest visibility and coverage, Afrobolivian culture appears mostly in a framework of folkloric performance. The festival's program gave a fairly palpable impression of the location of *saya* and Afrobolivian culture within the conceptual space of Bolivia as a nation, showcasing the Afrobolivian dance alongside popularized Andean music referencing Bolivia's indigenous musical tradition (cf. Bigenho 2002). The capoeira per-

materialize that day, it is not unusual for *saya* to be performed alongside 'African' music or dance.

formance, in turn, points to the fact that *saya* is nowadays also associated, in the broadest of senses, with cultural expressions of the African Diaspora. Albeit briefly and only in passing, Jorge Medina also commented on his legislative efforts with regard to *saya*, most notably the passing of Law 138, hinting at the fact that *saya* (and Afrobolivian culture more generally) is now the object of legal regulation. Finally, through Francisco's statements, we also get a glimpse of the contested nature of Afrobolivian culture. His comments invite us to think about the relationship between performers and spectators, between Afrobolivians from different regional backgrounds, as well as between different generations, paying special attention to competing political orientations, aesthetic preferences and perceptions of cultural change.

Cultural performances are – as David Guss (2000) has argued following Abner Cohen (Cohen 1993) – best understood as "important dramatizations that enable participants to understand, criticize, and even change the worlds in which they live" (Guss 2000:9). Cultural performances are dialogical and even polyphonic sites of discursive reflection, but also sites of "cultural production" (Guss 2000:12). Analyzing *saya* as cultural performance is thus a fruitful vantage point from which to analyze the changing meanings and roles of 'Afrobolivian culture' and the discourses surrounding it. Compared to other aspects of Afrobolivianity, the literature on *saya* is quite substantial. The (mostly unknown) history and origins of *saya*, its material characteristics, rhythmic and musical aspects, as well as the fundamental role it plays in Afrobolivian cultural revival and mobilization have been widely covered (see, among others, Ballivián 2014; Busdiecker 2007: chapter 5; Centro Pedagógico y Cultural "Simón I. Patiño" 1998a; Quispe 1994; Revilla Orías 2013b; Rey 1998; Rocha Torrez 2007; Rossbach de Olmos 2007; Sánchez Canedo 2010; Sánchez Canedo 2011; Templeman 1995; Templeman 1998). Those works have also documented and analyzed *saya* as a cultural performance through which people "are able to talk about local life and tradition, about change over time in the community, about local needs, individual relationships, and about being black" (Busdiecker 2007:205). In her ethnography of blackness in Bolivia, Sara Busdiecker writes:

> "Saya is not simply what is 'most important' to Afro-Bolivians nor is it merely what Afro-Bolivians are 'best known for'; rather, saya is powerfully implicated in not only notions of color and race, but also notions of ethnicity, culture, and peoplehood as they relate to blackness in Bolivia. In other words, the very construction of the present-day experience and meaning of blackness by Afro-Bolivians and non-Afro-Bolivians alike is inextricably tied to saya." (Busdiecker 2007:165–166)

Indeed, it is hardly possible to discuss any topic with Afrobolivians from any background without at least touching the subject of *saya* and, more often than not, *saya* or discussion of the dance takes center stage.

In what follows, I will highlight some aspects of *saya* that I consider especially important. On the one hand, through *saya*, Afrobolivians express and negotiate notions of history, authenticity and cultural change. In this sense, *saya* is a crucial discursive device in the process of articulating Afrobolivianity. *Saya* is also often identified by Afrobolivians themselves as their most important strategic asset for gaining visibility and recognition. Moreover, as the fundamental cultural emblem of Afrobolivianity, *saya* supplements "more local village or kin-based affiliations" (Clifford 2013:222) in processes of articulating Afrobolivianity – parallel to what Clifford has discussed with regard to indigenous identifications.

Debating history, authenticity and cultural change: *saya de antes* and *saya de ahora*

The origins and early history of *saya* are unknown. Afrobolivians nowadays refer to "the time of the *hacienda*" *("el tiempo de hacienda")* in order to account for its temporal origins and most regularly only mention *los Yungas* as the region where *saya* originated. By Afrobolivians themselves, *saya* is thus represented as genuinely Afrobolivian, rather than as an 'African tradition' as some journalistic accounts of the dance sometimes state. Afrobolivians also agree on the fact that traditionally *saya* used to be played and danced mainly at patron saint fiestas and wedding festivities in Afrobolivian communities and this practice is reported to have remained intact until the Agrarian Reform in 1953. After the Agrarian Reform, *saya's* importance steadily declined and this period is remembered by many of my Afrobolivian interlocutors as the time when *saya* "was lost" *("se perdió")*. The dance was then re-vitalized, recuperated and salvaged in the 1980s and 1990s by young migrants in urban settings. What is important to note is that as a part of revitalization, the dance has been increasingly shaped towards being a performance for an audience of outsiders, i.e. people that are not part of the group of people that actually performs. Whereas in the years before the Agrarian Reform, *saya* was performed on occasions that were important for social relations within the rural community, the revitalized *saya* was not grounded in rural community life, but in urban settings and the experiences of young migrants in Bolivian cities. Most importantly, it was directed at the outside world as much as it addressed Afrobolivians. As Julia Pinedo, one of the principal actors of early revitalization and one of the founders of MOCUSABOL told me, the process of "revitalizing" on the one hand entailed consulting elders from the Yungas on their memories of *saya*, but on the other hand also required a lot of creativity from the founders of the group. They adjusted the lyrics to their experiences in urban contexts, displacing topics such as love and community life with matters of Afrobolivian identity, migration and political mobilization. They also adjusted the performance of *saya* to the prevailing models of both Bolivian *entradas* (folklore street parades) and the requirements of the organizers of dance performances. For

example, Julia recalled how she and other women invented choreography for *saya* that was compatible with performing it on a stage in a theatre, as well as in an *entrada* in the streets. Subsequently, different *saya* ensembles had to adjust their performance to varying needs, including trips to international folklore festivals, as well as the recording of CDs, the shooting of videos, performances on TV, at night clubs and in restaurants.

In general, people distinguish between *la saya de antes* (the *saya* from before the Agrarian Reform) and *la saya de ahora*, the *saya* that is danced now and that arose from the revitalization in the 1980s. Although the differences cited by my interlocutors show slight variations, the biggest differences are said to be found in terms of the lyrics, the composition of the ensemble of dancers, their clothing and the context of the performance of *saya*. Whereas in *la saya de antes* topics such as love, romantic courtship, community life and hardships of the peasantry dominated, *la saya de ahora* is much more concerned with topics of Afrobolivian identity and political messages. In terms of instrumentation and ensemble, *la saya de antes* required three sizes of drums (*Tambor Mayor, Tambor Menor, Ganyingo*), the *Cuancha* and metal bells *(cascabeles)*, that the *Caporal* or *Capitán de Baile* – the leader of the dance – would wear around his legs in order to set the pace of the dancers. Besides the *Caporal*, there were other symbolic roles important to *saya* performances, such as the *alcalde* (lit. mayor). Thus, *la saya de antes* could also be read as a display of hierarchies within the community. Nowadays, performances include far fewer of the above-mentioned instruments, focusing on *Tambor Mayor, Tambor Menor* and *Cuancha*. The specific roles are also only rarely included, since the focus is much rather put on the lyrics communicating specific messages and on the choreography that has been adjusted to fit the dynamics of street parades *(entradas)* and stage performances respectively. Another key distinction is made in terms of the clothes used for dancing *saya*. Most of my interlocutors agree that before, *saya* was danced in very simple white cotton shirts (men) and *polleras* (women). The dancers are said to have worn *abarcas* (sandals made of tire rubber, very common in the Bolivian countryside) or even to have danced barefoot. While *abarcas* are still the most common footwear used in *saya* groups, the hitherto simple outfits have evolved into colorfully embroidered *trajes*. In general terms, and certain exceptions notwithstanding, *la saya de ahora* is at once simpler in its instrumentation and the distribution of roles, and more complex in its lyrics conveying political messages. The style of the performance (i.e. having choreography) is much more suitable for performing it on stage or in the context of an *entrada*. The clothes people wear show the influence of the colorful outfits common in many folkloric dances of Bolivia. Most importantly for my analysis, the contexts and the audiences that are addressed with *saya* are different. Whereas for the *saya de antes* the main frame of reference was the Afrobolivian rural community, *la saya de ahora* is directed mostly at an audience of outsiders.

Naturally, the distinctions made here are not as clear as they may seem at first. There is a certain amount of debate, both in terms of the content and style of *saya de antes* vs. *saya de ahora* and in terms of the clear before-after timeframe of the Agrarian Reform. For example, in many narratives people recall an event in 1977, a coffee festival organized in Coroico, as the first glimpse of a revitalized *saya* before the events of the early 1980s that sparked more profound and durable efforts at reorganizing the *saya* groups. Yet I have also spoken to various individuals that recall 1977 not as the beginning of revitalization, but as the last time *la saya de antes* was performed before disappearing into oblivion. What is more, this debate only encompasses the Nor Yungas region, and circles explicitly around the *saya* of Tocaña, leaving the Sud Yungas Province and Chicaloma, *"el pueblo de los negros,"* out of the picture.

Even though the most commonly cited distinction pits the pre-reform *saya* against the new *saya* of the 1980s, *saya's* transformation is not limited to the early years of revitalization, but is still ongoing. The performances I have witnessed during recent years have all emphasized different aspects, varied significantly in style, size and sophistication and have occasionally introduced completely new elements. A vivid example is provided by the so-called *"Mama África"* characters introduced by a Cochabamba-based *saya* group in 2017 (see fig. 17), which also mirror the growing importance of references to Africa by Afrobolivians.

Figure 17: "Mama África" characters as part of a saya performance during a Carnaval parade 2017, Cochabamba (photograph by the author).

On the other hand, there are also initiatives that point in the opposite direction of recreating the pre-reform *saya*. The supporters of such initiatives are general-

ly critical of introducing new elements to *saya* and rather aim at re-introducing elements that have now been abandoned. One such initiative, for example, purported to reintroduce the *Ganyingo*, a small drum that was an integral part of the instrumentation of the dance in earlier days, but is hardly used at present.

Saya's history and the transformations it underwent – as well as the way Afrobolivians position themselves towards those issues – thus reflect the socio-cultural transformations affecting Afrobolivians in recent decades. *Saya's* transformation reflects Afrobolivian migration and the experience of discrimination, as well as engagement with Bolivian folklore as an important context for gaining visibility and recognition. Moreover, through *saya*, Afrobolivians refer to the Yungas as ancestral territory, but increasingly also incorporate diasporic references as an important element of what they consider Afrobolivian culture.

Saya as a strategy of visibilization

Saya is not only important as a performative and discursive device through which Afrobolivians engage with their history, tradition and perceived cultural change. Many of my interlocutors, and particularly the ones engaged in some kind of organized political effort, also explicitly highlighted the role of *saya* as an emblem of Afrobolivian culture and as a strategic communicational device directed at an audience beyond Afrobolivians. This discourse has been made prominent by the contributions of Mónica Rey, a leading figure in the Afrobolivian movement. Rey studied *Comunicación Social* at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés (UMSA) in La Paz in the 1990s and wrote her thesis on *saya's* role as a communicational device. To this day, she remains one of the leading figures of the urban Afrobolivian movement and enjoys particular visibility and respect among Afrobolivian activists. Therefore, her stance on *saya* is widely known among Afrobolivians and shapes the way many people think and talk about *saya*.[3] Rey (1998) argues that *saya* serves two communicational purposes for the Afrobolivian movement. On the one hand, it is a means to unite the Afrobolivian community and make them embrace their identity (see also Templeman 1998). *Saya's* second communicational purpose is, according to Rey, to propagate the messages of the movement to the wider public. *Saya* very literally 'gives Afrobolivians a voice' and through *saya* the Afrobolivian movement was able to express its discontent with the situation of the Afrobolivian population, and raise awareness for issues such as racism, poverty, discrimination and 'invisibility.' At the same time, through *saya* the movement articulated its demands and overcame the limitations with regard to effective political participation that Afrobolivians encountered at the beginning of their mobilization.

3 In 2014, she has been elected *Asambleista Supranacional* for the ruling MAS party and also occupies a very prominent position in CONAFRO.

Ethnomusicologist Robert Templeman – who carried out fieldwork among *saya* groups in the 1980s and 1990s, subscribes to a similar view. He analyzes the roles *saya* has played in the mobilization of the Afrobolivian people and highlights how through *saya*, the movement's messages are communicated to the public. For Templeman, the communicational strategy is twofold: On the one hand, Afrobolivians, through *saya*, challenge their 'invisibility' by presenting emic perspectives on Afrobolivian livelihood and making them known to the public. On the other hand, the lyrics convey a positive image of blackness as something beautiful that Afrobolivians do not have to be ashamed of. Building on the interpretation of *saya* as a communicational device, the dance is also occasionally framed even more explicitly as a political strategy. Many Afrobolivian activists refer to *saya* as a tool of political strategy functionally equal to road blockades, marches and strikes, forms of collective action very common in Bolivia, especially in the context of indigenous mobilization and other popular sectors' efforts to reach their goals. For Afrobolivians, *saya* serves the same purpose and is employed strategically when deemed appropriate. In various conversations on the subject, Juan Carlos Ballivián – former CONAFRO secretary general – attributed the strategic advantage of *saya* to a variety of factors: besides the already mentioned aspect of communication, *saya's* playful character is in his view less inviting of direct repression by the state. In contrast to roadblocks, marches or strikes, a *saya* performance is much less likely to be disbanded violently by the police. Finally, since it is not always and immediately identifiable as 'politics,' it can be employed in spaces not accessible to political activism as such. What is more, and even though most Afrobolivians often comment very critically on the association of *saya* with Bolivian folklore and reject any attempt to reduce the expression to this category, many organizations and individuals very actively seek out spaces of folkloric performance in order to publicize *saya* and Afrobolivian culture more generally. Since 2011, *saya* has been recognized as part of the cultural and historic patrimony of the nation, alongside other dances that clearly pertain to the realm of folklore. As folklore, *saya* has become a marketable commodity and, as such, is an important economic factor for Afrobolivian organizations, as well as for individuals. Performing *saya* for money enables many individual members to earn some extra cash that would otherwise not be available to them and serves as a key funding mechanism for many Afrobolivian organizations. Beyond the economic aspect, as patrimony, *saya* also offers a way for Afrobolivians to relate to discourses of Bolivian cultural and national identity. In fact, being recognized as part of the folkloric panorama and lately as historical and cultural patrimony of the nation, is a key area of Afrobolivian visibility and a significant source of pride for many Afrobolivians (for a recent contextualization of Afrobolivian *saya* as part of Bolivian national folkore see Sigl and Mendoza Salazar 2012, chapter 6.1).

The centrality of *saya* in representations of Afrobolivian identity and culture can be explained by a combination of factors. Most importantly, *saya* was fairly

easily translatable into the logics of the nascent multicultural Bolivia. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, in the context of multicultural reforms, the folklore industry (especially music and dance) emerged as an important realm within which Bolivia's diversity was not perceived as threatening, but could be accommodated as 'harmless difference.' *Saya* was perceived as a non-confrontational expression of Afrobolivian otherness that fit the discourses of Bolivia as diverse in cultural and ethnic terms, while at the same time not threatening political unity or tackling widespread political, social and economic inequality too directly. Thus Afrobolivianity was accommodated in multicultural Bolivia through *saya*, whereas the pervasive racism and discrimination that Afrobolivians faced were effectively muted. Yet *saya* cannot be entirely reduced to folklore; its inchoate character as floating between folklore and politics has become its major strategic advantage and through *saya* Afrobolivians have been able to some extent to voice political demands and create a collective space of political articulation.

Saya as the emblem of 'lite' Afrobolivianity

The centrality of *saya* in the realms of folklore, politics and discourse, however, must not divert our attention from the fact that *saya* ceased to be an important part of everyday practice in the Yungas in the years after the abolition of the *hacienda* system. In Cala Cala, although there have been efforts at revitalization and people told me that *saya* is performed occasionally, the dance is not part of everyday life and is also secondary to articulating a sense of Afrobolivianity. In Cala Cala, as elsewhere in the Yungas, social institutions that are not specific to Afrobolivians – mainly the *sindicato campesino*, the peasant union – are central for mediating community relations and framing belonging.

In its current form, *saya* is a re-instatement developed out of the experiences of Afrobolivians in urban settings and their engagement with folklore, emerging multicultural and plurinational regimes of recognition and diasporic identity politics. The central symbolic importance of *saya* for the articulation of Afrobolivianity also stems from urban contexts. When expressed through *saya*, Afrobolivianity has thus become a modality of identification that "coalesces around key symbols […] but is not generally rooted in daily practice" (Canessa 2018:30). Andrew Canessa has observed a similar tendency with regard to indigeneity in Bolivia. On the one hand, there is the modality of indigeneity he observed in a small Andean village where "indigeneity is rooted in a community life with reciprocal labor practices and a set of rituals that bind the community and ancestors together" (Canessa 2018:31). On the other hand, he argues, there is the indigenous discourse developed by Evo Morales and his government in Bolivia. This discourse relies heavily on "symbols of national indigeneity" like the Indigenous New Year celebration and the coca leaf as a symbol of indigenous customs, identity and worldview that are "rooted in the national ra-

ther than the local community" (Canessa 2018:31). Following Thomas Grisaffi, who has studied indigenous identifications among coca growers in Cochabamba, Canessa argues that Evo Morales' government propagates a specific articulation of indigeneity, "a more flexible indigenous *lite* version of identity" that enables many people in Bolivia to "support an [indigenous] ethno-nationalist project without actually having to be all that indigenous themselves" (Grisaffi 2010:433) (i.e. without living in indigenous rural communities or speaking an indigenous language). In a similar vein, *saya* functions as the key symbol of a "lite" Afrobolivianity. This "lite" Afrobolivianity is rooted in the discourses of nationally dispersed urban Afrobolivian communities and not in daily economic and social life in local communities. Through *saya*, urban Afrobolivians thus have a way of engaging with Afrobolivianity, although they do not engage in any other particular social, economic and/or ritual practices that would distinguish them from the rest of society.

I think that this also explains why in urban settings people make so much of the affective capacity of *saya* and constantly emphasize its emotional value, whereas in the Yungas, discussions of *saya* are much less frequent and rather sober in tone. Many urban Afrobolivians emphasized that by performing *saya* they "embraced," "realized" or "learned about" their "true identity" as Afrobolivians. They also stress that it is through the bodily practice of performing *saya* (drumming, singing and dancing) that they most strongly "feel" their Afrobolivianity. Therefore it is crucial to acknowledge that *saya* – beyond its strategic value and its discursive role – is also very importantly a bodily practice of drumming, singing and dancing that has a heightened affective capacity. In various conversations I had with Afrobolivians throughout the years, at some point people would offer an account on how actively performing *saya* – for them – made their "identity as Afrobolivians" *("la identidad como Afroboliviano/a")* emotionally and affectively accessible.[4] Interestingly, the second most important context urban Afrobolivians mention with regard to engaging Afrobolivianity are workshops *(talleres)*. It is quite remarkable that, on the one hand, Afrobolivianity is engaged in highly formalized contexts and, on the other hand, through *saya*. In a way, *saya* can be regarded as the experiential counterpart to the formalized identity politics of workshops. I have thus come to think of both contexts – *saya* and *talleres* – as temporally and structurally marked dramatizations and culminations of Afrobolivianity. *Saya* is the experiential, emotional and bodily counterpart to workshops and political rallies in the sense that both contexts "activate" Afrobolivianity as a meaningful frame for people's self-identification (see Eidson et al. 2017).

4 I cannot systematically explore this aspect here, since my material from Cala Cala simply does not offer any fundamental insights with regard to the affective capacity and the bodily practice of *saya*. In Cala Cala, *saya* is not generally practiced and discussions of *saya* – limited as they are to begin with – focus on historical dimensions.

Saya is, however, not the only context in which notions of 'Afrobolivian culture' are negotiated and framed as meaningful. In what remains of this chapter, I will discuss processes of debating, cataloging and structuring 'Afrobolivian culture' in the context of government-sponsored programs. My discussion of Afrobolivian culture will thus move beyond *saya* by introducing additional elements that are considered important for Afrobolivian culture and by highlighting the fact that beyond the realm of cultural performance, contexts mediated by state institutions and certain legal regulations are emerging as key sites of often fairly strategic and guided efforts to catalog elements of Afrobolivian culture and make them a meaningful resource for articulating Afrobolivian identity in Bolivia.

Cataloging 'culture,' and sketching the contours of a *pueblo*

Similar to many other Afro-Latin American groups (see Minority Rights Group 1995), Afrobolivians have – for the most part with good reason – argued that they have been "invisible," "forgotten," "ignored" and "excluded" (cf. Busdiecker 2007:230) in their country. Beyond the realms of politics, rights and the economy, many Afrobolivians assert that this also holds true for the history and notions of national culture in Bolivia, where Afrobolivian contributions are generally obscured, neglected and minimized to the point of invisibility. Moreover, the few sources on Afrobolivian culture that are available have been produced by non-Afrobolivians and in ways that Afrobolivians do not agree with.[5] In recent years, however, there has been a significant increase in efforts at compiling elements and publishing findings on the subject of Afrobolivian culture and, some minor debate aside, a fairly stable list has been produced of musical expressions *(expresiones músico-danzisticas)*, cultural elements *(elementos culturales)*, historical and cultural contributions *(aportes y contribuciones históricas y culturales)*. More recently, and sparked by linguistic research (Lipski 2007; Lipski 2008; Pérez Inofuentes 2015; Sessarego 2011a; Sessarego 2014), Afrobolivian organizations have included references to Afrobolivian language *(la lengua Afro)* to their repertoire of elements. In local contexts, however, *la lengua Afro* hardly plays a role. People occasionally comment that they speak bad Spanish *("español mal hablado")*, but a proper Afrobolivian language does not play any part in their sense of being Afrobolivian.

Efforts at cataloging Afrobolivian culture must be seen as an integral part of the plurinational impetus of state institutions in their quest to implement the *"proceso de cambio"* – the envisioned political and cultural revolution in Bolivia. The

5 This mirrors the tension between self-presentation and representation (by someone else) that has been identified as a decisive feature of debates on Afrobolivian culture in the realm of folklore (Rossbach de Olmos 2007).

very practice of compiling allegedly stable 'elements' that constitute a generalizable 'Afrobolivian culture' mirrors important basic assumptions of plurinational discourse and the idea of discrete *pueblos*. It is based on the premise that each *pueblo* possesses a 'culture' that can be adequately described by listing specific elements. This 'culture' not only defines the *pueblo* in question, but also distinguishes it neatly from other *pueblos*. The essentialist and homogenizing outlook of the plurinational ID-ology machinery bluntly glosses over local variation in Afrobolivian lifestyles, as well as the contested nature of some expressions, let alone the fact that there are many more things Afrobolivians share with fellow Bolivians compared to the few 'elements' that are fashioned into the basis for their distinctions. Moreover, since the task of compiling and subsequently representing those elements in codified form has been attributed to specific institutions under the tutelage of the *Consejo Nacional Afroboliviano (CONAFRO)*, Afrobolivian culture is subject to political manipulation as well as to a certain bias in terms of which communities are taken into account in the process of compilation.

Before I address a set of concrete contexts in which the compilation of Afrobolivian culture takes place, it is useful to take a look at the 'elements' that have been established and are most widely accepted as constituting 'Afrobolivian culture':

- Dances: *saya*, *semba*, *matrimonio negro* (also occasionally referred to as *huayño negro*, *baile de tierra* or *cueca negra*)[6]
- "*El Rey Afroboliviano*": the symbolic Afrobolivian monarchy
- Funeral rites: *mauchi* and *la chiguanita*
- Material Culture: *saya* instruments, *saya* clothes
- Language: *lengua Afro*

The fact that the prevailing idea of 'Afrobolivian culture' can be transcribed as a mere list of elements is significant in itself. The document pertaining to the Afrobolivian school curriculum treated below, for example, amounts to almost 300 pages. However, the document consists of tables and lists almost in its entirety.[7] The parts of the documentation that are not presented in tables or lists are summaries of the

6 There seems to be a lot of variation and even confusion regarding the exact terminology and the distinctions between *matrimonio negro*, *baile de tierra*, *cueca negra* and *huayño negro* (cf. Busdiecker 2007:156). In Tocaña, *baile de tierra* is the most commonly used name for a dance mostly danced at Afrobolivian weddings *(matrimonios)* in the past (thus the relation to *matrimonio negro*). That same dance is occasionally referred to as *cueca negra*. In Cala Cala, people spoke of *huayño negro* being performed alongside saya at Afrobolivian weddings and were not familiar with the designation *baile de tierra*.

7 For example, over 200 pages of tables indicate which elements can be subsumed under which official category. Furthermore, these tables indicate at what age and through which didactic methodology the elements ought to be taught to students.

legal and epistemological foundations of the educational reform that can be found in a strikingly similar fashion in all of the *currículos regionalizados* that have been made available to the public.[8] The document contains hardly any contextualized information on the meanings and practices associated with the listed elements. An interesting case in point is the symbolic Afrobolivian monarchy known as *"el Rey Afroboliviano"* (formerly also referred to as "*Rey Negro*"). The curriculum mentions *"el Rey Afroboliviano"* at the outset in the preamble, stating that:

> "It would be difficult to think of the *Pueblo Afroboliviano* without making reference to the meaning of the lineage of Rey Bonifacio Pinedo and his current heir, Julio Pinedo I., *Rey del Pueblo Afroboliviano*, principal political authority and in whom all the pillars of this *pueblo* are based"[9]

Yet, similar to other elements, *"el Rey Afroboliviano"* is merely listed and the institution is not further explained. An exploration and contextualization of this tradition, however, renders interesting results and is in many ways instructive of how *elementos culturales* are shaped in discourse and practice (for a recent discussion see Busdiecker 2019a).

The *Rey Afroboliviano* in context

The current Afrobolivian King (*Rey Afroboliviano*) is the grandson of *Rey Bonifacio Pinedo*, who died in the 1960s. According to the first and very prominent version of the story, the institution of the *Rey Afroboliviano* dates back to an unspecified moment in the colonial period when a slave of unknown African origin (some refer to the Congo, others to Senegal), was brought to work on the *hacienda Mururata* in the Nor Yungas province. The slaves of the *hacienda* are said to have discovered that this slave was of royal birth and referred to him as *Príncipe Uchicho*. They petitioned the owner of the *hacienda* to exempt him from his responsibilities and offered to do more work themselves in exchange for *Uchicho* to be left alone. This version has been recorded by Pizzarroso Cuenca in his publication *"La cultura negra in Bolivia"* without mentioning precise sources, attributing the information merely to "*tradición oral*" (Pizarroso Cuenca 1977). Bonifacio Pinedo, the last king whose existence can be accounted for in oral tradition today and who died in the 1960s, as well as Julio Pinedo, the current king, are regarded as direct descendants of *Príncipe Uchicho*. It

8 As of July 2018, nine *currículos regionalizados* have been published by the *Ministerio de Educación* (http://www.minedu.gob.bo/curriculos-regionalizados.html [28/07/18]).

9 *"Sería difícil pensar en el Pueblo Afroboliviano sin hacer referencia en lo que significa todo el linaje del Rey Bonifacio Pinedo y su actual heredero Julio Pinedo I" Rey del Pueblo Afroboliviano, máxima autoridad Política y en quien se cimientan todos los pilares de este Pueblo."*

is, however, unclear how the line of Afrobolivian kings was carried on from colonial times into the 20th century (Revilla Orías 2014b).

There is, however, a competing narrative accounting for the *Rey Afrobolivano* tradition. It appears in the testimony of an elderly inhabitant of Tocaña (the *comunidad* directly neighboring Mururata) that was recorded in the 1990s and published as a part of the *Tambor Mayor* project (Centro Pedagógico y Cultural "Simón I. Patiño" 1998b). This testimony neither makes any reference to the tradition dating back to colonial times, nor mentions an African prince as the origin of the tradition. According to this testimony, Bonifacio Pinedo was a very astute and clever *peón* of the *hacienda Mururata*. He was the *capataz* of Mururata (a sort of foreman coordinating the workforce under the supervision of the *hacienda* administrator) and also occupied a special position in the religious hierarchy of the community, assisting the Catholic priest in the celebration of the Holy Mass. According to the testimony, he used those positions to accumulate a significant amount of material wealth, despite the fact that he had to serve the *hacienda* owner as a *peón* just like any other resident of Mururata. He eventually became so rich that he could not only afford to build a house with a corrugated iron roof for himself located on the margins of the *hacienda* property, but also to pay fellow *peones* to take over his labor responsibilities towards the owner of the *hacienda*. In order to underline his special position among the *peones*, the testimony asserts, he travelled to La Paz and had a crown, scepter and coat fashioned by an urban artisan. Then he declared himself king, "King of money, King of gold, King of all the blacks" (*"Yo soy Rey de plata, Rey de oro, Rey de todos los negros"* [Centro Pedagógico y Cultural "Simón I. Patiño" 1998b:114]). He enjoyed an elevated status among the *peones* of Mururata and was frequently sought out for counsel and to settle disputes among the inhabitants. When he died without leaving a male heir in the 1960s, no successor was crowned and the institution of the *"Rey Afroboliviano,"* alongside other Afrobolivian cultural particularities, transformed from a practice to an account of local oral history.[10]

Only in the 1990s, following the first wave of revitalization of Afrobolivian culture, did the tradition of the "black king" again receive attention. In 1992, a wealthy hotel owner from Coroico approached Bonifacio's only known relative, his grandson and current king Julio Pinedo, and convinced him to be crowned as *Rey Afroboliviano* as part of a cultural festival held in Coroico to promote tourism in the Yungas (Rossbach de Olmos 2011:34). Since then, the *Rey Afroboliviano* has mainly appeared in journalistic accounts depicting Julio Pinedo as "the only African king in South America" (The Guardian 2007), "The last king of the Americas" (El País 2016), or the monarch of the "hidden kingdom of the Afro-Bolivians" (BBC News 2009), to name

10 *Cala Caleños* repeatedly asserted that no account of the *Rey Afroboliviano* circulated in Cala Cala until well into the 21st century. As far as the available sources go, the *Rey Afroboliviano* was only ever known in Mururata, and the neighboring *comunidades* of Chijchipa and Tocaña.

just a few of the exoticized images these articles tend to conjure up. Almost a decade after the coronation ceremony of 1992, in the early 2000s the urban Afrobolivian movement discovered the *Rey Afroboliviano* as a tradition potentially translatable to political strategy. Activists began positioning Afrobolivians as an ethnic group (*"etnía"* and later *"pueblo"*) analogous to indigenous people in Bolivia. In this context, a "traditional" institution and figure of authority became an important discursive asset. This process of political appropriation reached its peak in 2007, when another crowning ceremony for Julio Pinedo was organized in the *Prefectura* (regional government) of La Paz. During this ceremony, the governor of La Paz recognized the symbolic authority of the *Rey Afroboliviano*, declaring him the highest representative of the *pueblo Afroboliviano*. The well-known Afrobolivian activist Jorge Medina, who coordinated this event, has repeatedly explained the message he intended to send: if indigenous Bolivians now had 'their president' Evo Morales, Afrobolivians had their king. In political practice, however, the role of the king is minimal. He is occasionally invited to public events representing Afrobolivians in a purely ornamental fashion and his role as a symbolic authority is not even salient in his native Mururata, where the tradition originated (Busdiecker 2007).[11]

The institution of the "*Rey Afroboliviano*" thus has multiple roles: it has been transformed from a purely local symbolic figure with contested origins, surviving only in isolated accounts of oral history, to a performance orchestrated by non-Afrobolivians for journalistic and touristic ends beginning in the 1990s. In the 2000s the Afrobolivian monarchy became a contested symbol for political strategy, manipulated by urban Afrobolivian activists. Most recently, *el Rey Afroboliviano* has been included as another *elemento cultural* in the growing list of markers constituting the culture of *el pueblo Afroboliviano*. In this last role however, *el Rey Afroboliviano* is reduced to a mere 'element' on a list and hardly any details on the history or the current role of the king appear in the document.

11 Most recently, events took an even more unexpected turn that even surprised many Afrobolivian activists. Apparently, several years ago, Julio Pinedo was approached by a Spanish citizen who runs an online blog concerned with genealogical research, especially of families related to Spanish nobility (http://www.docelinajes.org/blog [24/06/18]). One of the few individuals in Bolivia who told me that he had met him in person referred to him vaguely as "a man from Spain with a lot of money doing something with lineages." Most likely his interest in Rey Julio Pinedo was sparked by one of the many journalistic accounts that have appeared in newspapers around the globe. I have not been able to document the relationship that developed out of this encounter. One of the results, however, is the official webpage of the *"Casa Real Afroboliviana"* that documents not only the King's activities, but also contains information on the history of the Afrobolivian monarchy.

Arbitrariness, political manipulation and the Tocaña bias

As I have come to understand through conversations with people in Cala Cala, the above-cited list claiming to represent universal 'Afrobolivian culture' is highly arbitrary and it was often met with open rejection or at least confusion by many of my interlocutors. Their criticism was twofold: on the one hand they argued that important 'elements' from Cala Cala were missing in the compilation, mainly aspects of local history and specific aspects of Cala Cala's *saya*. On the other hand, they were displeased that certain 'elements' not found in Cala Cala were represented as being important to all Afrobolivians nationwide – not least the *Rey Afroboliviano* that I have just discussed. People in Cala Cala often explained the differences between what they considered 'their culture' and what many publications represent as Afrobolivian by identifying the latter as rooted in a lack of knowledge and commitment to thorough research on the part of the compilers. Yet I have also come across various cases of quite straightforward manipulation for political ends. What is more, most representations of Afrobolivian culture rely on the context of one particular community and are thus imprecise when applied to all Afrobolivians in the country. In what follows, I will first introduce two short examples of political manipulation. Then I will discuss the Tocaña bias, i.e. the tendency for a particular Afrobolivian community (Tocaña) to be established as an index for Afrobolivian culture.

A vivid example of the processes associated with the compilation and the intentional manipulation of what is listed and represented as 'Afrobolivian culture' is an anecdote surrounding the elaboration of a monograph on Afrobolivian history, culture and economy developed jointly between CONAFRO and the Cochabamba-based research institution FUNPROIEB-Andes *(Fundación para la Educación en Contextos de Multiligüismo y Pluriculturalidad)*.[12] As one of the members of the research team recalled, people in the Yungas were asked to name "typical Afrobolivian dishes" to be included in the book. Responding truthfully, most people said that *"arroz con huevo"* ("rice with eggs") was the most common dish eaten by Afrobolivians every day. Juan Carlos Ballivián, then secretary general of CONAFRO and head of the research team, pushed for this information to be left out of the publication, since he considered *"arroz con huevo"* to be too trivial a dish to represent 500 years of Afrobolivian presence in the country. He even went as far as to consider this a disgrace, showing Afrobolivians as living in poverty and misery. As far as we can judge from the publication, his intervention was successful: alongside typical regional *Yungueño* dishes that are not specific to Afrobolivians, the book eventually listed references to "Mondongo, Anticuchos, Chicharón [sic!] and Patasca" as being dishes that Afrobolivians "might have exported to other regions of the country"

12 Foundation for Education in Contexts of Multilingualism and Pluriculturality.

("comidas que el Pueblo Afroboliviano habría exportado a otras regiones del país"). The description continues:

> "Even though we do not have proof that the aforementioned dishes were an African contribution, among Afrobolivians it is known that those dishes originated in Afrodescendant communities […]. According to activists, a proof of this is that in Afrodescendant communities in neighboring countries, those are typical dishes of their people. Thus, every Bolivian local population has probably added its own particularities, but the African essence and heritage have not been lost." (Zambrana B. 2014:205, my translation)

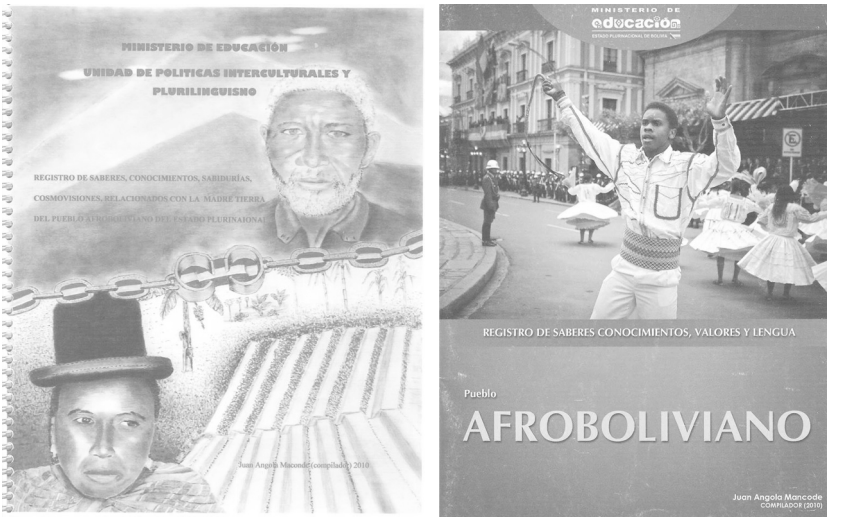
This short paragraph is instructive in a variety of ways: First of all, the information collected in Afrobolivian communities was overruled by a small group of specialists that had decided what kind of information was suitable for their project, even though they claim that "Afrobolivians" are the source of their information. Secondly, we learn from the quotation that "activists" have discovered parallels with Afrodescendant groups in neighboring countries, which serves as proof that those dishes are Afrobolivian. Simple analogies like this, establishing an unquestioned link between Africa, Afrodescendants in the Americas and Afrobolivians are often cited by Afrobolivian organizations and individuals in order to account for Afrobolivian cultural particularities. It is important to note that the logics shining through this example are neither limited to the topic of food, nor to this specific publication, but permeate most discussions, compilations, representations and negotiations of Afrobolivian culture. Sometimes they are framed as recuperations and revalorizations of purportedly 'lost cultural elements' and sometimes they are represented as the mere compilation thereof. Occasionally, as is the case for example with the growing trend of dressing in "African clothing," Afrobolivians explicitly address such practices as being part of *"etnogénesis"* (see for example Zambrana B. 2014:211).

Another very telling and visually accessible case is the cover design of a compendium of Afrobolivian culture sponsored by the *Minsterio de Educacíon*. The Afrobolivian researcher Juan Angola Maconde was assigned to coordinate the compilation and pen the publication. He also designed a cover image (see fig. 18), yet this image was replaced with the image of a *saya* dancer on the final publication.

Juxtaposing the two images, Juan Angola made the following comment in a Facebook group on Afrobolivians that he manages:

> "For the cover of the book I created a historical thread. Therefore I divided the drawing into two parts. The upper part reminds us of the African presence in the Villa Imperial de Carlos V. [Potosí] […]. The lower part of the illustration makes reference to the Yungas […]. In this region [the Africans] learned how to cultivate coca from the natives, the product that is the backbone of the Yungas economy until the present. Thus the region has become lived history of the African presence

Figure 18: Original cover design by Juan Angola Maconde (left) and the cover of the final publication (right) (images courtesy of Juan Angola Maconde/ Ministerio de Educación).



> in the Department of La Paz of what is today the Plurinational State of Bolivia. But the cover and back cover, I do not know for what motives, reasons and on what grounds, were changed to *saya*, making it look as if the contributions can be reduced to dance. Who provided the photographs for the cover? Where are the ethics?"[13]

He suspected CONAFRO and the *Minsterio de Educación* to be behind it, albeit that this was never confirmed and I have no knowledge of how the matter was settled. The case is telling in a variety of aspects. It shows the possibility of political manipulation by both Afrobolivian organizations and state institutions. It reminds us again of the centrality of *saya* and how it tends to overshadow other elements of 'Afrobolivian culture.' And, most importantly, it alerts us to the fact that what is

13 *"Para la tapa del libro creé un hilo histórico, para ello, hice el dibujo dividido en dos partes. La parte superior, hace memoria de la presencia africana en la Villa Imperial de Carlos V. […] La parte baja de la ilustración, hace referencia a los Yungas […]. En esta región [los Africanos] aprendieron a cultivar la coca de los nativos, producto que forma parte de la columna vertebral de economía yungueña hasta el presente. Convirtiéndose la región en historia viva de la presencia africana en el departamento de la Paz y de lo que hoy en día es Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia. Pero, la tapa y retapa, no sé por qué motivos, razones y fundamentos fue cambiado por la saya. Haciendo ver que, los aportes, se reducen al baile. ¿Quién proporcionó las fotos para la cubierta de la tapa? ¿Dónde queda la ética?"*

represented as 'Afrobolivian culture' very often tends to focus on simplified, folklorized images of harmless difference and does not take historical entanglements and lived reality into consideration. What is more, focusing on *saya* means granting Afrobolivian difference center stage, whereas similarities with other groups – expressed by Juan Angola by mentioning the importance of Afro-indigenous interaction in the coca economy – remain underrepresented.

The Tocaña bias

Beyond a rather narrow focus on *saya* and open political manipulation, another common tendency is to conceptualize 'Afrobolivian culture' with reference to one single community: the *comunidad* of Tocaña in Nor Yungas province (for a detailed ethnography of the community see Busdiecker [2007]). The force of that referencing has led to what I have come to think of as the *Tocaña bias* whenever Afrobolivians discuss matters of 'culture,' as well as when measuring degrees of authenticity. On the one hand, the Tocaña bias establishes a set of normative expectations with regard to what constitutes meaningful Afrobolivian 'cultural elements.' On the other hand, the expectations also refer to how certain 'cultural elements' are actually practiced: this encompasses *saya* performances, as well as the use of Afrobolivian Spanish, certain religious rites and other 'customs' like the making of *saya* drums and clothing. The bias has collective and organizational as well as individual dimensions and has recently been firmly and officially established by the state through its new law of education (see below).

Besides *saya*, which is known and has been practiced in all Afrobolivian communities that I am familiar with, the dances of *semba* and *baile de tierra* are also considered to be uniquely Afrobolivian dances, despite the fact that many communities – Cala Cala for instance – do not have any memory of these dances, let alone actively perform them in the present or the recent past. Additionally, the funeral rite *mauchi,* as well as the Afrobolivian monarchy *(el Rey Afroboliviano)*, count as important features of 'Afrobolivian culture' – even though not a single community other than Tocaña and the surrounding hamlets have any recollection of these elements (for details on the contested nature of the "*Rey Afroboliviano*" tradition see: Busdiecker 2007; Revilla Orías 2014b; Templeman 1998). A very common explanation for this situation, which is largely accepted in many other Afrobolivian communities, is that Tocaña has simply retained more 'African' elements than the other communities and is both the cradle and the "last bastion" of 'Afrobolivian culture' (cf. Busdiecker 2007).[14] Yet by taking a closer look, it becomes clear that Tocaña

14 Other explanations that cite much more recent and less 'African' roots for certain practices do exist, but have not gained such prominence within and beyond the Afrobolivian community.

has been made the reference for how 'Afrobolivian culture' and community ought to look through a long process rather than by virtue of 'objective' criteria.

The Tocaña bias as an assemblage of expectations – and lately as quasi-official reference for indexing 'Afrobolivian culture' – has its roots in a variety of sources. Firstly, Tocaña and its inhabitants and/or representatives have been very successful at almost monopolizing attention from scholars, the media, the Bolivian national government, tourism and international cooperation. This particular attention is in part rooted in Tocaña's seminal role in the early efforts at revitalization of Afrobolivian culture, making it a particularly visible community for quite some time. As will be detailed in chapter 8, individuals from the village and migrants somehow related to Tocaña or neighboring communities have been crucial actors in the establishment of the first urban *saya* groups and Afrobolivian organizations. As a consequence of this, the most prominent Afrobolivian political leaders are from Tocaña or are the offspring of migrants from the region, thus ensuring the prominent position of the community in most Afrobolivian organizations. Through its privileged position with regard to the attentions of activists, scholars and state agents, Tocaña's fairly particular demography, as well as the overall make-up of the *comunidad* and the equally particular panorama of cultural practices has been established as 'representative' of Afrobolivian communities and culture. The process by which Tocaña alone has been established as 'representative,' was also aided by the fact that Tocaña, more than most other Afrobolivian communities, fits the basic assumptions of what constitutes a "legible" (Scott 1998) community in multicultural, post-multicultural and plurinational Bolivia: cultural difference, ethnoracial homogeneity, and clear boundaries. Being the most homogenous Afrobolivian community to be found in the Yungas, with only a handful of Aymara inhabitants and hardly any interethnic marriages, Tocaña best fits the plurinational fantasy of discrete ethnoracial groups with clear cultural and geographic boundaries. The *comunidad's sindicato* is predominantly made up of Afrobolivian members, resulting in an almost complete overlap between ethnoracial affiliation and the social institution most consequential for daily life. In Tocaña, unlike in any other *comunidad* with Afrobolivian presence that I am aware of, residence patterns, *sindicato* organization, kinship and most of the political, economic and social networks do coincide with ethnoracial identity.

Its exceptionality notwithstanding, Tocaña has been established as being the most 'typical' and most 'authentic' Afrobolivian community and this has far-reaching consequences: Tocaña's 'culture' is taken to be the index of Afrobolivian culture in terms of the content (i.e. *elementos culturales*) and all other communities and people are assessed against the backdrop of Tocaña and its cultural expressions. Similar to the Colombian case, where the *comunidades negras* of the Pacific coast have "[provided] blackness with a stable, if narrow referent" (Wade 2009c:176), Tocaña has become that referent for Afrobolivian culture. Afrobolivian

communities and individuals must refer to this index in one way or another. For many community representatives aiming to position their community as Afrobolivian in any politically meaningful sense, this means aspiring to compile as many sanctioned cultural elements as possible. In many cases this has led to a tendency to objectify culture to a great extent, making difference and 'authenticity' (and with that deservingness) a matter of quantifiable *elementos culturales* and *Afroboliviano* a category that is measured against the backdrop of Tocaña. In a more subtle way, the Tocaña bias also functions as a blueprint when questions of interethnic relations and the position of Afrobolivians in regional and national society are negotiated. Tocaña's historical, demographic, social and political circumstances are generalized and presented as the pattern for the kind of social relationships Afrobolivians have with other *pueblos* in Bolivia. Negating specific local situations and differences in time and space, Tocaña's very particular situation is established as the conceptual starting point for thinking and talking about Afrobolivian communities and their relationships in general. The logics entailed in the Tocaña bias require Afrobolivians everywhere not only to resort to an almost stereotyped list of cultural markers authorized by certain forces as valid for cultural distinction, but also to conceive of their situation and their relationships in a way that might not reflect their everyday experiences. This is true for rural Afrobolivians from other communities that are historically or demographically different from Tocaña, as well as for urban Afrobolivians who are trying to make sense of what distinguishes them culturally from other members of Bolivian society. What is lost along the way are the much more subtle distinctions that nevertheless have much greater significance in day-to-day interactions and in the construction of an Afrobolivian consciousness in various different settings of the Afrobolivian reality, urban and rural.

The few competing narratives decentering the Tocaña bias in political rhetoric and discursive articulations of Afrobolivianity have for the most part lost traction or have been superseded by the dominant position of political leaders from Tocaña. In the past, the Sud Yungas village of Chicaloma was known throughout Bolivia as "the village of the blacks" *("el pueblo de los negros")* (Léons 1972; Sturtevant 2013). *Chicalomeños* also claim the title "cradle of the traditional *saya*" *("cuna de la saya tradicional")* for their village. In the 21st century, references to Chicaloma have become rather scarce, though. I attribute this declining discursive importance of alternative local referents for Afrobolivianity to wider trends towards the homogenization of Afrobolivianity. Through their political influence in CONAFRO, people from Tocaña can exert great influence with regard to defining who or what represents 'Afrobolivian culture' on a national scale. For example, Juan Angola Maconde, a well-known activist and researcher from the *comunidad* Dorado Chico, was forced to publicly clarify the range and scope of one of his publications. He had to publicly declare – and did this among other ways through his Facebook page – that his glossary of

Afrobolivian Spanish entitled "The *afroyungueño* vernacular" should more precisely be entitled "The *afroyungueño vernacular of the sector Nor Yungas Coripata*," the region from which he collected most of his data (Angola Maconde 2012).[15] Prior to his public retraction, he was approached by CONAFRO officials and reprimanded for showcasing a supposed language of all Afrobolivians, when in reality he only presented data from one particular locality. So while the Tocaña faction is far from hesitant to hold Tocaña's *elementos culturales* to be valid for all Afrobolivians, and has the political power and institutional backing to actively enforce this point of view, they very jealously defend this privileged position and police the boundaries of what is considered 'Afrobolivian culture.' This of course has to do with access to resources, political and otherwise. The discursive power of the Tocaña bias, paired with the leading role of the Tocaña-dominated CONAFRO in political terms, has not only led to the hegemony of Tocaña with regard to defining what Afrobolivian culture is, but has also benefitted the community in economic (through tourism projects), and political terms (the majority of Afrobolivian elected representatives and technicians are from Tocaña and its surroundings).[16] What is more, and I will turn to the implications of this in the next section, Tocaña's culture and the list of cultural elements compiled from Tocaña has even become 'official' Afrobolivian culture in codified form in the Afrobolivian school curriculum. This was made possible through CONAFRO's and CEPA's close ties to the *Minsterio de Educación* and the crucial role individuals from Tocaña and the surrounding hamlets played in the elaboration of the curriculum.[17]

Currículo regionalizado del pueblo Afroboliviano: cataloging the essence of a people

The compilation and interpretation of 'cultural elements' "pertaining to Afrobolivians" *("perteneciente al pueblo Afroboliviano")* is not merely an academic endeavor and is not limited to book publications or debates among activists. The plurinational machinery set in motion by the legal recognition of Afrobolivians has catapulted the question of what constitutes 'Afrobolivian culture' to center stage, most notably in the combined efforts of CONAFRO and the Ministry of Education in developing

15 Original title: "*El habla afroyungueña*" *vs.* "*El habla afroyungueña del sector Nor Yungas Coripata*".

16 Of course there are also people in Tocaña critical of CONAFRO (on these and other grounds) and people from other regions actively contributing to the proliferation of the Tocaña bias for a variety of reasons.

17 In fact, CONAFRO's secretary general *(Secretario General)*, its secretary of education *(Secretario de Educación)* – who at the same time presides over CEPA – and the key *técnico* at the *Ministerio de Educación* were all from Tocaña or neighboring villages at the time of the elaboration of the curriculum's contents.

the so-called regionalized curricula for Bolivian public schools. The idea behind the *"currículos regionalizados"* is detailed in Law 070 (*"Ley 070 de la Educación "Avelino Siñani - Elizardo Pérez"),* the backbone of the educational reform the MAS government introduced in 2010. Law 070 establishes that education in plurinational Bolivia – among other things – ought to be

> "decolonizing, liberating, revolutionary, anti-imperialist, de-patriarchal and transforming the economic and social structures; oriented towards the cultural reaffirmation of the *naciones and pueblos indígena originiario campesinos*, the *comunidades interculturales* and *afrobolivianas* in the construction of the Plurinational State and the *Vivir Bien*." (Law 070, Art. 3)[18]

In addition to the so-called *currículo base* (the basic curriculum applied in schools all over the country), it is the specific goal of the new educational system to implement so-called *currículos regionalizados* to establish certain educational content according to the socio-cultural and linguistic context of specific regions (*"contexto sociocultural y lingüístico"* [Ley 070, Art. 70]). In practice, this meant that the *Consejo Educativo del Pueblo Afroboliviano (CEPA*) had to compile information and, in collaboration with the *Ministerio de Educación*, develop an Afrobolivian *currículo regionalizado* that does justice to Afrobolivian particularities.

The first time I came into direct contact with the processes associated with the elaboration of the *currículo regionalizado* was in August 2012 in the Sud Yungas village of Irupana, where I participated in a workshop *(taller)* organized jointly by the *Consejo Nacional Afroboliviano (CONAFRO)*, the *Ministerio de Educación* and the *Consejo Educativo del Pueblo Afroboliviano (CEPA)*. The workshop was designed to be the platform for Afrobolivian communities to support the Ministry of Education technocrats *(técnicos)* with 'traditional' content for the new Afrobolivian curriculum. The workshop was held with the inhabitants of different communities of the Sud Yungas province, in which various *comunidades* with Afrobolivian populations are located. I had been informed by my contacts from La Paz that this workshop was complementary to a similar workshop that had been held in Tocaña with the participation of Afrobolivians from the Nor Yungas province. Highlighting the Tocaña bias once more, however, the organizers of the workshop brought people from Tocaña in a bus (sponsored by the *Ministerio de Educación*) in order to participate in the workshop in Sud Yungas as well. The goal of the workshop was to compile the Sud Yungas perspective from Irupana and the neighboring *comunidades*. Yet the organizers thought it important to bring in people with experience *(experiencia)* in

18 *"[…] descolonizadora, liberadora, revolucionaria, anti-imperialista, despatriarcalizadora y transformadora de las estructuras económicas y sociales; orientada a la reafirmación cultural de las naciones y pueblos indígena originario campesinos, las comunidades interculturales y afrobolivianas en la construcción del Estado Plurinacional y el Vivir Bien" (Law 070, Art. 3).*

order to orient *(orientar)* the participants from the surrounding *comunidades* in the process of compiling 'cultural elements.' The organizers framed the whole workshop in a way that clearly gave Tocaña a privileged position. The people from Sud Yungas were to merely complement the contents that had already been compiled in Tocaña, leaving no room for contradictory voices and serious debate.

At first, representatives from CONAFRO introduced the organization, its goals and recent milestones of mobilization, as well as the relation between CONAFRO, CEPA and the *Ministerio de Educación* (see chapter 9). After that, CEPA representatives and the *técnico* from the ministry explained the 'theory' behind the new Law of Education, emphasizing its de-colonial impetus, the respect for cultural diversity it purports to foster, as well as the goal of revalorizing indigenous and Afrobolivian knowledge *(saberes y conocimientos del pueblo Afroboliviano)*. Interestingly, the Ministry of Education had invited representatives of two indigenous groups – an Aymara and an Uru Chipaya – who had participated in the elaboration of their respective *currículos regionalizados*. They shared their experiences concerning the technicalities, as well as the contents the Aymara and Uru Chipaya had discussed in the context of the elaboration of their curricula. Even though it was never stated explicitly, the participation of these two indigenous representatives confronted the participants with a certain logic concerning the information the organizers were trying to compile. Tacitly, the Afrobolivian collectivity was equated with an indigenous *pueblo*, establishing a set of markers and certain expectations tied to the logic of being a *pueblo*. Thus, beyond the legal sphere and mere formalities, the workshop contained a moment in which the equation between indigenous and Afrobolivian *pueblo* status was instantiated in practice.

Experts, categories and 'culture'

For the actual process of compiling, the organizers separated the participants into different groups and assigned different tasks to them. There were groups for gathering relevant data on Afrobolivian history, medicine and 'traditional' healing practices, 'traditions' and values, dance and music, their relation to the environment (*"la Madre Tierra,"* lit.: "Mother Earth") and sustainable use of natural resources, as well 'traditional' modes of subsistence. Even though the format seemingly left it to the people to choose what they thought would be relevant content, categories and items, the introductory lecture on the 'theory' of the law established the categories that people should try to accommodate their 'experiences,' and 'knowledge' to. What is more, each group was accompanied by one or two of the 'experts' who guided their brainstorming and directed the process of compiling relevant elements. The influence of predetermining relevant categories of knowledge became obvious when the posters prepared by the participants were discussed in the plenary and contained almost exactly the same categories and technical language the experts

had used during their introduction. One case in point is the listing of the category of "bio-indicators" *("bio-indicadores")*. This category stems from the idea that 'indigenous groups' have a profound knowledge of "bio-indicators" that enhance their ability to interpret specific natural phenomena and that go beyond the content of regular educational curricula inspired more by a belief in 'Western' natural sciences. Such technical language is all but absent from the everyday vocabulary of Afrobolivians and was probably coined at some meeting of educational professionals debating the theory of indigenous curricula. This is not to say that Afrobolivians (or other groups for that matter) do not possess this kind of knowledge. The point I am stressing is that this knowledge is neither specific to Afrobolivians in the Yungas, nor subsumed commonly under the rubric of "bio-indicators." Rather, it is part of common Yungas knowledge that has now been designated as something inherently Afrobolivian and codified in a specific way. The workshops thus not only shaped the categories used by people and classified their knowledge, but instructed them to claim it as exclusively Afrobolivian knowledge.

The *Currículo Regionalizado del Pueblo Afroboliviano* as it appears on the homepage of the *Minsterio de Educación* and will eventually be implemented in schools all over Bolivia reflects these conceptual bases and the practices of compilation of the *talleres* in question. The workshop's basic approach and its different dimensions are reflected in large parts of the document. First and foremost, the *currículo regionalizado* conceptualizes Afrobolivian culture as a set of discrete elements that can be listed and categorized in order to be operationalized in programs of education. It furthermore abets the idea that this set of markers applies to all Afrobolivians, thus essentializing and homogenizing a heterogeneous collective. Finally, it posits certain elements, *saberes y conocimientos* as specifically Afrobolivian, downplaying the essentially transcultural and overarching character (in the sense that they are shared by *Yungeños* regardless of their ethnic or cultural affiliations) of many of the items listed as Afrobolivian.

Traditional knowledge, coevalness and plurinational anxiety

What is more, during the workshop, participants were urged to think about how things were done "back in the day" *("como se hacía antes")*. When prompted in this way, some of the older participants were able to recall certain plants and their uses as household medicines, old forms of measuring distances, surfaces and weights or quantities of coca leaf (none of which were specifically Afrobolivian as far as the participants were concerned). Remembering knowledge is of course not a bad thing *per se*, neither is teaching it to children in school. The crux, however, is that their way of life is essentialized and exoticized. That is, Afrobolivians of the past are exoticized as 'others' in the sense of not being coeval (Fabian 2002), not pertaining to 'modernity.' The experts – relying on the new law and its politics of represen-

tation – were not interested in how these people actually lived, and those aspects that did not fit their predetermined ideas of the life of an 'indigenous group' were often ignored. For example, everybody was thrilled about the fact that some people remembered a certain plant that was used to wash clothes in the past (probably *Sapindus saponaria*) and eagerly included this piece of information in their database, ignoring the explicit statements by various people that "of course, nowadays, we use *Ace* [a brand of industrially produced detergent available all over the country]." In a similar fashion and during the course of the entire workshop, 'non-traditional' knowledge, the use of 'modern technology,' the dispersal of many Afrobolivian communities due to ongoing massive migration to regional and national urban centers, the growing use of agrochemical products in the coca economy and the influence of mass media were downplayed or even openly ignored. As a result, the information that had been compiled during the course of the workshops presented a *pueblo Afroboliviano* living as it did fifty years ago. The preamble of the *currículo* even states that the document "recovers the values and historical and cultural principles of the *pueblo Afroboliviano* that have remained latently present as a living culture for more than half a century," making the assumptions underlying the *currículo* with regard to different temporal horizons and their significance for the present explicit. The set of cultural traits that should be considered for the purpose of education are located in the past ("half a century ago"), in the time of the *hacienda* and not in the present.[19]

The *currículo* is not the only example pointing in this direction. Very vivid and instructive in this regard is a short documentary movie produced by the *Ministerio de Culturas* in Cala Cala in 2012. This documentary is part of a series of short films aimed at recuperating the oral history and "traditional values" of the thirty-six recognized groups in their respective languages.[20] The Afrobolivian contribution consisted of the re-telling of a legend associated with the coca plant *(la coca era di sacudí)*.[21] The six-minute film presents three temporal horizons: the present, the time of the *hacienda* and an undefined mythical past . It begins with a woman from Cala Cala remembering – in the present – how her grandfather told her the tale of why it is so hard and physically exhausting to harvest coca leaves. Community members dressed as they would have in the times of the *hacienda* perform scenes that show how the story was told in those times. Additionally – introducing a third temporal horizon – the myth located in a moment even further back in time is performed by community members. The relationship between the three temporal

19 "*Se recogen los valores y principios históricos y culturales del Pueblo Afroboliviano que se mantuvo latente como cultura viva por más de medio siglo.*"

20 "*Rescate de la historia oral en 36 lenguas y valores humanos a través de cuentos tradicionales.*"

21 "*La Coca era de sacudí*" (available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVXFbeyX-bY [17/01/18]).

horizons is quite interesting. Besides the quasi-mythical times of the forefathers (which in the case of Afrobolivians can be estimated to lie in the 17th century) when the events that were later converted into the legend took place, there is the time of the *hacienda* (when these stories were told to children by their grandparents) and the present plurinational moment of recuperation. Thus knowledge considered 'traditional' and worthy of recuperation and conservation is localized in the times of the *hacienda* from whence it must be retrieved. These tendencies were not at all taken as something negative or even strange by the participants of the workshop or the documentary. The almost generalized feeling of many people that 'traditions' are eroding, lifestyles are rapidly changing and that this leaves them with little of their 'identity' led most of my interlocutors to enthusiastically embrace this kind of approach. Whereas people tend to express pride in 'authentic Afrobolivian culture' that has survived despite a century-long "*invisibilización*" in formal interviews, I gained other impressions from numerous informal conversations with Afrobolivians from all over the country. What many people conveyed to me in these conversations was a certain type of anxiety, as if they felt that the 'culture' they possess and are able to exhibit in everyday contexts somehow falls short of the expectations put forth by the New Plurinational Constitution, its related programs and the ubiquitous experts and agents of plurinationality that stress concepts of cultural difference based on ahistorical, unchanging pureness and homogeneity.

Making the group, freezing the differences

Besides the tendency to exoticize Afrobolivians as a group and localize them and their lifestyle in the past, 'unspoiled by modernity,' the workshops' design, content and logics had another effect. Unquestioned by most of the participants, the mere invitation of Afrobolivians to the workshops postulated the importance and social relevance of this category of identity. For the experts, it goes without saying that "being Afrobolivian" is the most important and socially consequential facet of identity and thus the only logical basis for compiling data on their way of life. Given my experiences in Cala Cala and other regions of the Yungas, and also with regard to migration and the circumstances under which Afrobolivians live in the country's urban centers, this unquestioned salience is less clear than it may at first seem. Yet the educational law, by way of the categories it proposes, establishes and privileges, and through the practices and performances that are part of these workshops, changes the way people think and talk about themselves, others and difference. By gathering people according to their identity as Afrobolivians, such workshops motivate them to think about their way of life "as Afrobolivians," highlighting what distinguishes them from others. The complex machinery comprising activists, NGO workers and government officials, equipped with laws, projects, programs and workshops summons the collective that they are purporting to

represent, include and educate. Workshops are sites where Afrobolivian groupness is called into being and their logics not only mark Afrobolivians as different, they also establish the permitted parameters of this difference by culturalizing Afrobolivianity. They localize Afrobolivians and 'their culture' in the Yungas by linking cultural difference to territoriality (most clearly expressed through the notion of regionalized *currículo*) and by indexing Afrobolivian culture as something rural, premodern and 'other.' They largely ignore the similarities Afrobolivians share with other groups in the Yungas, and fail to contextualize the region with its economic and political connections and migratory flows to different regions of the country. Though there is constant talk of interculturality and the coexistence of different *pueblos* within the region, the logics of the educational law stick to the rather rigid ideas of discrete cultural entities and ignore instances of transculturation and adaptation that mark the history of Afrobolivians and other groups in the Yungas that would, of course, complicate the elaboration of discrete curricula for supposedly discrete cultural groups located in discrete territories.

Conclusion

My aim in this chapter was to elaborate on my assertion that references to 'Afrobolivian culture' are increasingly important in articulating Afrobolivianity. Although racialized images of Afrobolivians are still widespread and Afrobolivians themselves continuously debate racial mixture, 'culture' plays an increasingly important role, especially in the realms of political mobilization, the elaboration of legal documents and in public performances of Afrobolivianity.

Analyzing notions of Afrobolivian culture inevitably means engaging with *saya*. Revitalizing *saya* has been the starting point of establishing notions of an Afrobolivian collective identity in cultural terms and *saya* is often portrayed as synonymous with Afrobolivian culture. By approaching *saya* as a reflexive, contingent and often ambiguous cultural performance, an "important dramatization […] that enable[s] participants to understand, criticize, and even change the worlds in which they live" (Guss 2000:9), I have fleshed out how the dance "may be used to articulate a number of different ideas" and thus "produce new meanings and relations" (Guss 2000:10–11). In the context of *saya* performances, a wide range of aspects important in the articulation of Afrobolivianity are negotiated. Folklorized images of Afrobolivian cultural difference, racialized notions of authenticity (recall the episode from chapter 6 and the question of whether 'white' people should be allowed to dance) and the strategic political positioning of Afrobolivianity all come together in *saya* performances. Moreover, in the context of *saya* performances, competing perspectives on the "roots" and "routes" (Greene 2007a) of Afrobolivian identity and culture

are expressed and negotiated by interchangeably or simultaneously referencing the Yungas and 'Africa' through instruments, lyrics and dress.

Saya also vividly exemplifies the transforming social contexts of Afrobolivianity. It reflects Afrobolivian migratory trajectories, the overlaps and contradictions between rural and urban Afrobolivians and the transformations the concept of Afrobolivianity has undergone during the process of being articulated as a matter of cultural difference in multicultural and plurinational times. As a part of this process, *saya* has transcended the local context of Afrobolivian communities and has become a national emblem of an Afrobolivianity that is no longer exclusively located in rural village contexts. The modifications of *saya* this entails are sometimes interpreted as leading to *saya's* meanings being diluted and its essence being lost – recall Francisco's fear that *saya* "will be lost" *("se va a perder")*. I argue, however that rather than being "lost" or stripped of its meaning, *saya* has been creatively adjusted to new contexts: urban Afrobolivian lifeworlds, folkloric spaces of performance, as well as multicultural and plurinational opportunities at representation. What is more, *saya* has a profound emotional value for many Afrobolivians and thus, beyond being the object of strategic political maneuvering, I have argued that *saya* must be seen as the affective counterpart to formalized contexts of identity politics.

Moving beyond *saya*, I have described efforts at cataloging Afrobolivian culture for various ends: academic publications, political lobbying and the elaboration of documents that purport to represent the 'culture' and lifestyles of recognized *pueblos*. The efforts at cataloging Afrobolivian culture and representing it in codified form are important in many regards. First of all, they are a sign of the growing importance of direct state intervention in matters of culture. They also reflect the particular perspective of the plurinational state vis-à-vis the question of how Bolivia's *proceso de cambio* is to be effectuated. As can be identified in the new Law of Education the 'cultural reaffirmation' of the *naciones y pueblos indígena originiario campesinos* is represented as the decisive step in 'transforming the economic and social structures' of the country. Privileging indigenous groups and *el pueblo Afroboliviano* as collective actors whose cultural reaffirmation, empowerment and representation lies at the core of the current political conjuncture makes it increasingly necessary to obtain clear-cut definitions of what a *pueblo* is and what 'culture' can and should be "reaffirmed." During this process, Afrobolivian culture is conceptualized as a list of discrete elements that clearly mark the boundary of *el pueblo Afroboliviano*. This approach not only overshadows variation between different parts of the Afrobolivian population, but also ignores the fact that many elements that are posited as specifically Afrobolivian are, in fact, fundamentally transcultural and of overarching importance in the Yungas. What is more, the efforts to compile and codify culture propagate a static view on culture, downplaying the processual nature of Afrobolivian cultural practice.

In this chapter, I have argued in favor of considering 'culture' an increasingly important aspect of Afrobolivianity. I have based my argument on the central role of *saya* for representing Afrobolivianity and have also highlighted how the plurinational state actively engages with Afrobolivians as a collective subject essentially defined by its cultural characteristics. This perspective is shared by many Afrobolivian individuals – the shirt stating *"soy cultura, no color"* (fig. 16) being just one visual and very clear articulation of a broader narrative. However, as we have seen in chapter 6 and also throughout my discussion of what it means to be *"Afro"* in Cala Cala, this perspective is neither uncontested, nor can it explain Afrobolivianity exhaustively. In fact – and many approaches to Afrobolivianity tend to overlook this important aspect – it is a rather new perspective. It emerged in the 1980s and gained widespread acceptance mainly through the activities of what is often referred to as *"el Movimiento Afro"* – the Afrobolivian movement. Thus the articulation of Afrobolivianity as a matter of 'cultural difference' cannot be understood without reference to this heterogeneous movement. In the next chapter, I will therefore trace the historical roots of this movement in order to show that specific perspectives and conceptualizations that are often taken for granted nowadays only emerged through a contested process of political struggle.