Chapter 8: *"El Movimiento Afroboliviano"*
Cultural Revitalization, Citizenship and Development

What is often simply referred to as *"el Movimiento Afro(boliviano)"* is in fact a heterogeneous conglomerate of organizations representing a wide range of activities and engaging with different political discourses. In this chapter, I will trace the emergence of the *Movimiento Afro* from efforts by a group of high school students to rescue the Afrobolivian dance *saya* in the Yungas town of Coroico up to the formation of various organizations that continue to shape Afrobolivian politics today. *El Movimiento Afro* emerged in a context that was marked by the logics of a Bolivian state that increasingly embraced multicultural politics and topics like cultural diversity and differentiated citizenship. At the same time, Afrobolivian activists also embraced discourses and ideas associated with the wider African Diaspora in the Americas, combining elements of indigenism (Niezen 2003) and multiculturalism with ideas of "diasporic ancestrality" (Walsh and León 2006) and the global struggle against racism. I will show how the struggle for the survival and passing on of certain Afrobolivian cultural practices took on more political dimensions and ultimately crystallized into what has been called *"el Movimiento Afro"* in Bolivia.

In order to get a first glimpse at the evolution of the *Movimiento's* discursive and ideological foundations, it is instructive to analyze the logos of three Afrobolivian organizations that were founded in different periods of history (see fig. 19). The logo on the left belongs to MOCUSABOL, the *Movimiento Cultural Saya Afroboliviana*. MOCUSABOL is regarded as the first Afrobolivian organization in the country and was officially and legally established in 1998, although its roots date back to the late 1980s.[1] Its name vividly exemplifies the thrust of mobilizations in the late 1990s, highlighting culture and especially *saya*. It also uses the denomination *Afroboliviano*, hinting at the efforts to establish this term as an alternative to *negro/a*.

1 It is often difficult to establish an exact date of foundation for many of the organizations. Very often, the process of legally establishing an organization *(obtener personería jurídica)* takes several years. If not otherwise noted, with "foundation" I refer to the moment when the members of an organization consider that it was established, not the date of official registration.

The logo furthermore features the silhouette of Bolivia's national borders combined with two black faces. When I asked the founding members how this logo came into existence, they told me that the graphic was designed in a time when the members of the organization referred to it as "*Movimiento Negro*" and that it was supposed to represent the fact that "there are blacks in Bolivia" (*"También hay negros en Bolivia"*). Later, the organization was officially established as *Movimiento Cultural Saya Afroboliviana* and became nationally known as "*Movimiento Afro*," though the initial logo was kept. MOCUSABOL's logo and name thus exemplify a first shift and its underlying contradictions: the terminological shift from *negros* to *Afrobolivianos*. They also hint at the importance of *saya*, as well as the central importance of positioning *Afrobolivianos* as part of the Bolivian nation.

Figure 19: Logos of Afrobolivian organizations (courtesy of MOCUSABOL, Mauchi, Afrocruz).

The second logo belongs to *Mauchi*, an Afrobolivian organization founded in the city of Cochabamba around 2010. *Mauchi's* name refers to an Afrobolivian funeral rite considered to be the 'most African' of all Afrobolivian traditions and its logo uses what members describe as "African iconography" *("iconografía Africana")*. Furthermore, it makes direct reference to the concept of *Afrodescendientes*. *Mauchi* represents another set of developments shaping Afrobolivian organization. There

is no reference to *saya*, but to another 'cultural element' associated with Afrobolivians. It thus represents a move away from the focus on *saya* to include further aspects of Afrobolivian culture. It also replaces the denomination *Afroboliviano* with *Afrodescendiente*, hinting at the growing importance of transnational discourses on *Afrodescendencia*. Furthermore, it visually expresses a link to Africa and what Afrobolivians regard as representative of 'African culture.' It is important to note that *Mauchi* was founded in Cochabamba, whereas the first Afrobolivian organizations were based in La Paz. Throughout the years however, more and more Afrobolivians migrated beyond La Paz (the city closest to the Yungas geographically) and organizations were established in Cochabamba, Santa Cruz and Sucre.

The third logo belongs to an organization founded in Santa Cruz in 2015. It carries a reference to Santa Cruz in its name *"AfroCruz"* and its logo, in addition to the Bolivian flag, also displays the white and green flag of Santa Cruz. It references relations to *"lo Afro"* through a depiction of Afro hairstyle and the red star that the designer of the logo explained to me as being a reference to "African internationalism" *("internacionalismo Afro")*. It furthermore includes references to *saya*, depicting a drum *(caja)* and *cuancha*, the basic instruments of *saya*. Also very interesting is that it includes the image of a whip. In earlier performances of *saya*, the leader of the men would carry a whip, underscoring his authority over the dance troupe, an element of *saya* rarely found in performances nowadays.

Conspicuously, none of the organizations I have introduced so far was founded in the Yungas, the region of Bolivia most strongly associated with Afrobolivians. In fact, the largest part of my discussion of the *Movimiento Afro* is centered in urban contexts. This is due to the fact that beyond the foundational moment in Coroico and the surrounding *comunidades,* Afrobolivian organizations are mostly an urban phenomenon. With the notable exception of Tocaña (see chapter 7), even today there is no explicitly Afrobolivian organization in the Yungas. However, the organizational logics of urban Afrobolivians have been gaining ground in the Yungas, even though strong peasant unions *(sindicatos)* remain the principal institutions of political belonging and mobilization. What is more, and as I will show in this chapter, the emergence of the *Movimiento Afro* is inextricably linked to migration and thus concerns urban and rural Afrobolivians alike. In Cala Cala, the debates described in this chapter have also played only a limited role. *Cala Caleños* did frequently recall and mention two concrete events that I will address in this chapter: the gathering of Afrobolivians at the Governmental Palace in La Paz at the invitation of Vice President Victor Hugo Cárdenas in 1994 and the recording of *saya* by the *Tambor Mayor* project in 1998. They also mentioned that they sporadically participated in workshops and that they were familiar with Jorge Medina because of his radio show. All those things remain isolated phenomena from their perspective, however. *Cala Caleños* have not been thouroughly mobilized according to the logics of the *Movimiento Afro* and their participation remains momentary and relatively volatile. This is also

why, in Cala Cala, a localized notion of what it means to be *Afro* largely prevails (see chapter 3) and the activities of the nationally active organizations are often perceived as only marginally important in the local context. As my discussion of a particular project in chapter 10 suggests, however, Cala Cala is increasingly drawn into the discursive spaces that the *Movimiento Afro* has created and confronted with images of Afrobolivianity established by decades of mobilization and debate.

Rediscovering *saya*: Coroico, 1982

When asking an Afrobolivian person to explain how the "*Movimiento Afroboliviano*" was founded and what it was all about, one is normally first told the story of the rediscovery of *saya*. Minor variations notwithstanding, there is a fairly standardized narrative of the rediscovery of *saya*. The following paragraph is a condensed account of the many almost identical narratives that I have heard from countless Afrobolivians:

"On 20 October 1982, for the first time in many years, the village of Coroico in Nor Yungas Province witnessed a public performance of *saya*, a uniquely Afrobolivian dance. The performance was part of the *fiesta patronal* in honor of *La Virgen de la Candelaria*. It was staged by high school students, young people of around seventeen years of age. As the *saya* dancers entered the village plaza, spectators admired the skills of the drummers, singers and dancers and marveled at the 'exotic' and uncommon appeal of the Afrobolivian rhythms and songs. They cheered the young musicians, encouraging them to keep playing. The whole village was thrilled by the sight of this 'black tradition' *(tradición negra)* in the space of public festive performance, since there had not been a similar performance in many years, leading to the assumption that *saya* – and with it the 'culture' of black people in Bolivia – had disappeared and was beyond recovery. The dance had not been performed by Afrobolivians for decades and only persisted in the memories of people in the Yungas. Many older members of the Afrobolivian community reluctantly watched the performance from afar, afraid of mockery and distasteful comments by the non-black audience. Indeed, it was because of mockery and discrimination that they had stopped performing *saya* and valuing their culture in the first place. Only after a while and after witnessing the positive reactions the youngsters' performance sparked among the spectators did they feel confident enough to approach the performance and express their joyfulness. At some point in the *fiesta*, some of the Afrobolivian villagers even joined in the singing, drumming and dancing, and the *saya* performance in Coroico on 20 October marks the moment *saya* was rediscovered and the beginning of its revitalization."

This narrative contains a lot of condensed information and also a number of key components that play an important role in shaping the narratives on culture,

history and political mobilization that circulate among Afrobolivians. First of all, it foregrounds the claim that *saya* had almost been lost in the years prior to the performance and that the 'loss' of *saya* corresponds to Afrobolivian culture more generally. This process is attributed to widespread discrimination against Afrobolivians and their culture, which led an entire generation to seek integration by assimilating to the cultural mainstream in the Yungas and Bolivia more generally. Second, it emphasizes the pivotal role the younger generation played in the rediscovery of *saya*; against the will of the older generations, or at least despite their reservations against dancing *saya*, the students managed to stage a performance. Last, by framing the rediscovery of *saya* as the moment of inception of the "*Movimiento Afro*" more generally, this narrative posits the centrality of 'culture' for the Movement and Afrobolivian identity and establishes *saya's* paramount importance for everything that follows. Whether the 20 October performance was indeed the first public *saya* performance in years is not entirely unquestioned. It is also unclear – and this is an issue hotly debated among Afrobolivians – whether *saya* was indeed at the brink of disappearance or just not very frequently performed in public anymore. There are some sparse pieces of information that suggest that there had been other occasions, but none had the profound consequences the Coroico performance was able to generate (see below). This is why the 20 October performance has entered the Afrobolivian collective memory as the moment when the revitalization of their 'culture' began.

After the success of the 1982 *saya* performance, the group repeated the performance for the same occasion in 1983. This time – as participant Julia Pinedo recalled in an interview – the performance had an even greater impact:

> "[In 1983] there was the 'boom' in town [in Coroico]. It was the sensation in town, *la saya*. And the very people from the *comunidades*, for example Tocaña […] who didn't want to know about dancing *saya* before. They danced indigenous dances in their *fiesta patronal*, they were dancing to other types of music of the indigenous people, but not their own. They heard the *saya* and they said: 'Wow, who is playing *saya*? It can't be the kids from school.' And then they threw themselves in. […] And the next day, even more. All of them had come to see, they took the drums away from us […] and they ended up playing."[2]

2 *"[1983] ya ha sido pues el Boom. En el pueblo. Ha sido la sensación en el pueblo, la saya. Ya la misma gente de las comunidades, por ejemplo Tocaña […] que ya no querían saber de bailar saya, ellos bailaban en su fiesta patronal […] bailes indígenas, estaban bailando otros tipos de música de los indígenas menos lo de ellos. […] Ellos escucharon la saya y decían:'¿Pucha quiénes son los que están golpeando saya? No creo que sean los chicos de colegio.' Y se lanzan. […] Al día siguiente ni hablar. Todos se habían venido a ver, nos han quitado los tambores […] ellos terminaban tocando […]."*

People in the villages had been aware that a performance was planned even before the official *entrada* on 20 October and on the day of the *fiesta*, many had come to witness the performance and even join the group of dancers. As Julia put it, in 1983 they witnessed a "boom" caused by *saya*, led by the high school class that she was part of, but already spreading to the rest of the Afrobolivian population in the *comunidad* of Tocaña; a population that had been abandoning customs considered Afrobolivian, as her statement about the residents of Tocaña dancing 'indigenous dances' suggests.

After that, many members of the high school class involved in the first performance migrated to the city of La Paz, as many young Afrobolivians do, in order to study at the university. In La Paz, they met only sporadically, keeping in touch mostly through their persistent link with their community of origin and less through formal gatherings in the urban environment. As many of the people stated, in spite of the success and the positive feedback of the *saya* performances, there were initially no efforts to dance *saya* in La Paz and it was only due to an outside interest that some of the 1982 dancers reunited around *saya* once more. Some years after their first performance, the dancers were approached with the idea of forming an Afrobolivian folklore ballet by a foreign dance instructor. Reluctant at first, they nevertheless decided to seize the opportunity and agreed to practice for *saya* performances. Initially, the plan was to stage an international tour that would take them to Spain – a plan that in the end did not materialize. As Fortunata Medina, an important figure in the early days of revitalization, recalls, they started with a very small group and were recruiting members one by one:

> "But what did we do? We went to Avenida Pérez Velasco [one of the most crowded streets traversing the center of La Paz] and looked for black people [*gente negra*] who wanted to join the group. Because it was only me, Julia and my brothers, nobody else. So we went, and given the shyness of our people, they didn't want to. The majority didn't want to know about dancing *saya*. Every Sunday, we would stand there, at 4pm, and every black [*negro*] that passed by, we would talk to them about *saya*. And that's how we built it [the group]."[3]

Finding new members for the nascent organization proved difficult due to the reluctance of many Afrobolivians to join a *saya* troupe. Besides finding more people to participate in the city of La Paz, the group also had to get in touch with people from the rural villages – mainly Tocaña – in order to be taught how to build the

3 *"¿Pero cuál era nuestro trabajo? Salir a la Pérez Velasco y buscar a gente negra que quiera incluirse al grupo. Porque era Julia y mis hermanos, nadie más. Salíamos y con la timidez que tenía nuestra gente, no quería. La mayoría no querían saber de bailar saya. Todos los domingos estábamos parados a las 4 de la tarde en la Pérez Velasco, todo negro que pasaba le hablábamos de la Saya y así fuimos formando."*

instruments *(cajas)*, learn more lyrics, and master the drumming and dance moves. They raised money from the ranks of the few members to bring skilled individuals from Tocaña to La Paz and kept the rehearsals going for almost a year, waiting for the chance to perform in public. As they realized that the international tour they were promised was most likely not going to happen anytime soon, they decided to take matters in their own hands. Together with Vicente Gemio, a well-known *saya* composer from Tocaña and one of the specialists teaching the students in La Paz, they set out to perform yet again at the fiesta in Coroico on 20 October 1988. This date is today also represented as the date that the *Movimiento Cultural Saya Afroboliviana (MOCUSABOL)* was founded. The performance group in 1988 was composed of about fifteen residents of La Paz (the folkloric ballet) and some individuals from Tocaña who joined the *saya* on that occasion.

A decisive encounter happened the following year. In 1989, the La Paz residents and the performers from Tocaña again danced together on 20 October and caught the attention of Fernando Cajías de la Vega, a renowned colonial historian and at that time newly appointed Prefect of the *Departamento La Paz*. Cajías was known to be a promoter of 'Bolivian cultural traditions' and offered the *saya* not only material support, but also gave them the opportunity to participate in a *Prefectura*-sponsored tour of the country. *Saya* was to be included as a *'tradición paceña'* and presented alongside other dances and musical genres in different Bolivian cities including La Paz, Cochabamba, Sucre and Potosí. Fortunata very vividly described this time as a decisive shift:

> "And that is how it grows, the cultural movement, the *saya Afroboliviana* keeps growing, many people are losing fear, losing shyness, losing embarrassment. Because many were embarrassed. If they dance they are going to hit them, if they dance, what will they say? So this fear was going away."[4]

For her, the most important step was to get people to forget their doubts and reservations about dancing *saya* – the doubts that made the older generations frown upon the first performance in 1982 and also became an obstacle to recruiting members for the first dance group. The official support, a first wave of media coverage and national and international interest sparked a process that eventually led to the formation of a more formally organized group. In the early years, there was a loosely connected group of *saya* performers composed of La Paz residents (among them the members of the original *ballet folklórico*) and individuals from Tocaña that would get together on special occasions but then dissolve quickly into their component parts. Most members describe the early stages of the group's development

4 *"Y así es como crece, el movimiento cultural, la saya Afroboliviana va creciendo, mucha gente va perdiendo el miedo, va perdiendo la timidez, va perdiendo la vergüenza, porque muchos tenían vergüenza de que si bailan nos pegan, si bailan, ¿qué nos dirán? Entonces ese miedo se ha ido perdiendo […]."*

less as a type of formal organization than as a way of getting together with people that inhabited the same situation as fairly recent migrants from the Yungas to La Paz and could provide support and a certain degree of assistance in times of economic hardship. Besides this function as a vehicle for group cohesion and an informal network for Afrobolivian migrants, *saya* soon became a vehicle for two related goals.

Visibilizing the community (*"Visibilizar la comunidad"*)

According to the founding members, there were two main goals in the early days of the organization besides efforts to unite Afrobolivians and 'make them identify with their culture' by promoting positive images of blackness (cf. Templeman 1998). First, what they refer to as "visibilization," i.e. the creation of a consciousness among Bolivians that there are Afrobolivians in the country and second to (re-)claim ownership of the term *saya* and the music and dance associated with it (see next sub-chapter).

Most people explain the 'invisibility' of Afrobolivians with reference to situations where it is clearly their visibly different physical appearance that sparks the curiosity of their counterparts. As individuals, Afrobolivians are highly 'visible'; many of them are repeatedly confronted with situations where other Bolivians question their country of origin, expressing the opinion that "in Bolivia there are no black people" and that they must be from Brazil, the Caribbean Islands or from Colombia. The 'invisibility' that they refer to is that of a recognizable Afrobolivian collective that they could be considered as part of. When they state that they are "(made) invisible *(invisibilizado)*" what they mean is that most Bolivians have no knowledge concerning the historical or contemporary presence of Afrobolivians in the country and thus do not consider them part of the country. Occasionally – most commonly in the context of the late 1980s/early 1990s *saya* performances – they also collectively experienced the ignorance of many Bolivians when it came to Afrobolivians. As Julia remembered, during one of their performances, people approached the dancers in order to verify that their faces where not painted and that they were in fact "real black people":

> "Because when we arrived for example in Sucre, many did not believe that we were Bolivians. They said we were from Brazil, that we were from Peru, but not Bolivians. [People said things] like 'But where? In what book are you? You cannot be found in any book. Where are you? How come you are so abandoned? I don't believe that you are Bolivians!' They didn't want to believe us. A child, for example, in Sucre […] said: 'Mami, Mami' he says, 'Mami, they are not painted after all, they are for real!' Imagine this! And we started laughing, right? We found it a little funny,

but afterwards I started thinking how [widespread] the ignorance is, our own people didn't know that we existed here in Bolivia."[5]

As a reaction to situations like these, the members of the first *saya* ensembles felt the urge to make the presence of Afrobolivians known across the different regions of the country. The strategy to achieve this would be *saya*. Through performances in different cities and locales (festivals, bars, nightclubs) and media coverage, Afrobolivians spread their messages throughout the country. In the early 1990s, the group also recorded its first CD of *saya*s and established a more stable media presence, especially in La Paz. In 1994, Afrobolivians performed *saya* at the Governmental Palace in La Paz at the invitation of Vice President Victor Hugo Cárdenas, an event that was publicized nationally and put Afrobolivian *saya* on the map throughout the country. One particular *saya* was performed that day and its lyrics made specific reference to the special occasion:

"Mister vice president
We appear before you
The blacks *[los negros]* of Bolivia
Asking for recognition"[6]

The group, made up of people from different communities in the Yungas, as well as Afrobolivian migrants living in the city of La Paz, performed several *sayas*. According to Roberto from the community of Cala Cala, this was one of the first times he had personally met many of his fellow Afrobolivians from other communities. He recounted that moment very vividly, emphasizing the importance for the creation of a feeling of belonging to an Afrobolivian community extending across the whole country and not limited to his small rural community in the Yungas and the immediate neighboring communities. For him, performing *saya* that day meant experiencing "unity" and a shared sense of identity. *Saya* played a pivotal role in all this. As he put it: *"Todo era uno."* The word *"todo,"* as he explained to me, hides a variety of differences between the participants he encountered that day. Among those are stylistic differences concerning the drum patterns, the clothing and the lyrics associated with the dance, but also the participants' different regional backgrounds and the different realities of rural and urban Afrobolivians. However, none of this

5 *"Porque cuando llegamos por ejemplo a Sucre muchos no lo creían que éramos Bolivianos. Decían éramos del Brasil, que éramos del Perú pero menos Bolivianos. O sea '¿Pero dónde? ¿En qué libro están? No se los ve en ningún libro! ¿Dónde están? ¿Cómo es que los tienen tan abandonados? No creo que sean Bolivianos.' No nos querían creer. Una, un niño por ejemplo en Sucre, […] dice 'Mami, mami' le dice […] 'Mami, no han sido pintados, habían sido de verdad.' Imagínate, ¿no? […] Y nos hemos puesto a reír, ¿no? Un poco nos causó gracia pero después yo me puesto a pensar cómo es la ignorancia, nuestra misma gente no sabían que nosotros existimos acá en Bolivia."*

6 *"Señor Vicepresidente/ Nos hacemos presentes/ Los negros de Bolivia/ Pidiendo el reconocimiento."*

was important in that specific moment, he said. Roberto was not the only interlocutor stressing the importance of that day in 1994, even though other memories of that moment highlight different dimensions of the invitation to the *Palacio de Gobierno*. Unlike Roberto, who emphasized the personal importance of the event for his interpretation of belonging to a broader community, Julia Pinedo and Mónica Rey, two longstanding members of MOCUSABOL and the latter now a member of the MAS administration, cited the events as a milestone in political terms, more specifically in terms of political visibility and official recognition. The symbolic value of having been received by the second most important man in the state – and the 'visibility' gained through this – was of great significance. What is more, the lyrics of the *saya* performed that day foreshadowed the importance that discourses on 'recognition' would have for later activism.

In a certain sense, the 1994 performance of *saya* for the vice president was a turning point for Afrobolivian activism. The invitation to perform for a national audience in a symbolic space such as the Governmental Palace is interpreted as an important step in terms of the above-mentioned goal of gaining greater visibility. From that follows the related goal of not only being visible, but being recognized as a culturally distinctive collective. The official invitation by a high representative of the government foreshadowed the political opportunities that would arise as a consequence of a rapidly changing political climate in Bolivia. Similar to the continent's other countries, Bolivia embarked on a path to multicultural reforms, shaping state politics regarding 'cultural minorities' and social movements' efforts until today. This shift also fundamentally influenced the political positions of Afrobolivian activists in the years to come and in this sense, the period around the events of 1994 can be seen as both a time of the first important achievements of Afrobolivian activism as well as the starting point for Afrobolivian identity politics under regimes of neoliberal multiculturalism.

Yet it is important to stress the singularity of this event in two different respects. First, the reception by a representative of the state as important as the vice president was a unique occasion not to repeat itself for many years to come; second, the 'Afrobolivian community' appearing before the second most prominent man of the state was not a community in the sense of a group of people with strong and ongoing ties. The staging of the *saya* performance that day was an exceptional effort coordinated by urban activists, uniting representatives from communities from all over the Yungas, something rarely – if ever – naturally occurring in a comparable fashion. Both the state's attentiveness and the make-up of the 'Afrobolivian community' presenting itself in the eyes of the state and society were singularities. The focus on rather spectacular events such as those described above in the foundational narrative and activist discourse overshadows constant tensions between different Afrobolivian communities concerning questions of legitimate representation and the overall effectiveness of the urban organizations' actions.

With and through *saya*, Afrobolivians presented themselves before the eyes of the nation, or as Sara Busdiecker (2007:165) has put it, they "perform[ed] blackness into the nation." *Saya* was not only the main vehicle for making the community visible, it was at the same time the most effective tool for spreading more elaborate movement messages that went well beyond the basic "we are here too" motive. The topics included propagating a more positive image of blackness to black and non-black people alike, encouraging the positive identification of black people with the identity *"Afroboliviano,"* de-racializing notions of blackness and emphasizing black cultural expression in Bolivia, and presenting certain traits of Afrobolivian lifestyles to the audience (see also: Rey 1998; Templeman 1998).

Intimately linked to both the efforts to re-create *saya* as a cultural practice and the mission to make Afrobolivian culture visible to a broader audience was the re-claiming of cultural ownership of Afrobolivians in relation to *saya*. Before turning to the implications of multicultural state politics for Afrobolivian identity politics and collective organizing, I want to briefly sketch this dimension of the early struggles, since it plays a vital role in how the whole political discourse of that time was shaped.

Reclaiming *saya*: authenticity, ownership, appropriation

The struggle to 'reclaim' *saya* as an Afrobolivian tradition has been dealt with extensively: several papers address this issue and stress the paramount importance of questions of ownership and representation (of self and other) in the wider context of Bolivian musical tradition and festive culture (Céspedes 1993; Pérez Inofuentes 2010; Revilla Orías 2013b; Rocha Torrez 2007; Rossbach de Olmos 2007; see also chapter 6 in Busdiecker 2007).

At the heart of the debate on authenticity and ownership of *saya* lies the appropriation of the term *saya* by mainstream Bolivian folklore, mainly by the well-known and internationally recognized group *Los Kjarkas*. Starting in the late 1980s, the Cochabamba-based group – already established as one of the most important representatives of Bolivian folk music – released a number of songs denominated as '*sayas*.' The '*sayas*' of *Los Kjarkas* and other groups are related to a dance genre called *Caporales*. The *caporal* is a figure in Afrobolivian *saya* representing the slave overseer and is commonly impersonated by an experienced member of the group guiding the other dancers with a whip and bells around his feet that mark the pace of the performance. Based on this figure from the *saya*, as well as inspired by the dances *"Tundiqui"* and *"Los Negritos,"* urban folklorists in La Paz created a dance called *Caporales* that soon became popular with the urban middle and upper classes and has become an integral part of the 'traditional Bolivian dances' roster ever since. Not only did the creators and performers of *Caporales* appropriate parts

of the *saya*, and a certain terminology, they also – through their lyrics – created the impression that this musical genre was 'traditional' black music from Bolivia, the 'rhythm of the *morenos*' from the Yungas of La Paz. Being of indigenous and *mestizo* background, *Los Kjarkas* claimed to represent Bolivia's Afrobolivian musical tradition. The lyrics of the song *"El ritmo negro,"* for example, read:

> The black rhythm of the heart, the black rhythm
> *Saya*, Bolivian *Saya*, *Saya* of the Yungas
> *Moreno* Flavor
> How the hips are moving to the black rhythm. You can feel fire in the blood, the fire of the *morenos*
> From the Yungas of Bolivia, comes the *saya*, Afrobolivian Music
> *Moreno* Flavor
> Let's dance *saya*, the black rhythm, may the party of the *morenos* never end
> Let's dance Bolivian *saya*.[7]

Most Afrobolivians argued that the music of *Los Kjarkas* did not represent Afrobolivian musical tradition and they strongly opposed the fact that the group spoke of *saya* when performing these songs. Afrobolivians felt that not only were they marginalized in official historiography, ignored in school textbooks and official representations of the nation's population, and were thus largely 'invisible' to the rest of the population; now their 'culture' was being taken away by others, their music manipulated by non-Afrobolivians and presented as authentic. It is indeed ironic that the debate around ownership, authenticity and the appropriation of Afrobolivian culture by outsiders circles around a dance that is based on the figure of the slave overseer. As an intermediary between slaves and masters, often himself a black man and former slave, the *caporal* is often seen as the most despicable representative of the oppressive system. And now this figure was at the core of yet another scheme stripping Afrobolivians of their 'rights' to culture and their opportunities for self-representation. Afrobolivians opposed these tendencies with a *saya* of their own (composed in 1995, see Templeman 1998), stating:

> After 500 years
> You will not exchange
> The beautiful rhythm of *saya*
> With the rhythm of the *Caporal*

7 *"El ritmo negro del corazón, el ritmo negro./ Saya boliviana Saya, Saya de los Yungas./ Sabor moreno./ Como mueven las caderas, al ritmo negro. Se siente fuego en la sangre, fuego en los morenos./ De los Yungas de Bolivia, viene la Saya, música Afroboliviana, Afroboliviana./ Sabor moreno./ Vamos a bailar la Saya, el ritmo negro, que no se acabe la fiesta de los morenos./ Vamos a bailar la Saya Boliviana!"*

The Kjarkas are confusing
Saya and *Caporal*
What you are hearing now
is original *saya*[8]

Through their music and its lyrics, Afrobolivians made claims to authorship and ownership of *saya*, denying the indigenous/*mestizo* folklore industry access to their 'culture.' At the same time, Afrobolivians also demanded that their views and opinions be taken into consideration when it came to the representation of slavery and Afrobolivianity in Bolivian folklore and popular culture more generally. Images of Afrobolivianity and representations of slaves circulate in the dance *Tundiqui/Negritos*, as well as in the well-known *Morenada* and the already mentioned *Caporales*. What all these dances have in common is the fact that they express the views of 'others' (indigenous, *mestizo*) on Afrobolivians and their history. With the revitalization of *saya* and the public performance of the dance, Afrobolivians aspired to present themselves and their view on blackness, as opposed to being (mis)represented by others or obviated completely (cf. Rossbach de Olmos 2007).

Recently, Afrobolivian organizations have focused their critique primarily on the dance *Tundiqui* (occasionally also referred to as "*Los Negritos*"). This dance is performed by non-Afrobolivians in blackface – painting their faces with black shoe polish – and depicts enchained slaves being whipped by their masters (Sigl and Mendoza Salazar 2012:190). Afrobolivians consider the stereotyped depiction of slaves in the dance highly racist and have filed an official complaint with the *Comité Nacional contra el Racismo y toda forma de Discriminación*, an institution established by Law 045 (*"Ley 045 Contra el Racismo y Toda forma de Discriminación*"). Although in 2014 the *Comité* issued a resolution condemning the racist content of the dance, various fraternities still publicly perform *Tundiqui* in La Paz, El Alto and also in the famous Oruro Carnival. The *Tundiqui* case not only serves as a vivid example of the continuing presence of racialized stereotypes that circulate in Bolivian folklore with regard to Afrobolivians, but also clearly demonstrates the limited capacity of the anti-discrimination law. Year after year, Afrobolivian organizations decry the racist depictions of what they consider their ancestors, referring to the anti-discrimination law in general and to the resolution on *Tundiqui* in particular. Yet the public performances of the dance continue and as far as I am aware, there have been no further attempts to settle the matter legally.

8 *"Después de 500 años/ No me vayas a cambiar/ El bello ritmo de Saya/ Con ritmo de Caporal./ Los Kjarkas están confundiendo/ La Saya y el caporal./ Lo que ahora están escuchando/ Es Saya original."*

Migration, discrimination and the struggle to consolidate the *movimiento*

As many of the early members repeatedly stated, keeping the group afloat and preventing it from dissolving was a constant struggle. Not only did they lack the economic resources to finance the group's basic needs, they also lacked a stable meeting place and access to communication that would have been necessary to coordinate the members that were dispersed all over the city of La Paz. What is more, many male members of the group did not immediately manage to find stable jobs in the city. This was mostly due to their lack of formal education, paired with a racist urban work environment and the severe economic crisis that Bolivia had to endure throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. This meant that they repeatedly had to return to their communities in the Yungas, especially during harvest seasons, to provide for their families' survival and they were often absent from La Paz for long periods of time. The women, on the other hand, fared better in the urban work environment. Many found jobs as domestic workers, secretaries or shop clerks, thus becoming the economic pillar of their urban households and more strongly integrated into the urban environment. This economic situation in part explains the prevalence of female leadership in the early years of the group's existence, but also its ever volatile status, teetering on the rim of dissolution. Nevertheless, the group made great efforts to become more formally organized:

> "We started to work on our statutes, legal credentials […] and we went on to do more work, right? Working in a more orderly fashion, so that people know, understand. And through *saya* we have achieved many things, we have achieved visibility for the Afrobolivian people. Because we were very lost, very hidden, without history, without news [coverage], so we started to define what we had to do, right? In terms of respect and everything. They started in the [government] offices, to open doors, to recognize us as Bolivians."[9]

The members set out to define more specific goals, developed formal statutes and started interacting with NGOs and certain state institutions, referred to as "offices" in the statement above. As I mentioned earlier, starting in the late 1980s and intensifying in the 1990s, Bolivia went through a process of economic restructuring and multicultural reforms (including decentralization), a conjuncture for which Charles Hale has coined the term "neoliberal multiculturalism" (Hale 2005). For

9 *"Empezamos ya a trabajar en nuestro estatuto, personería jurídica […] y fuimos haciendo ya trabajos, ¿no? Un trabajo más ordenado donde la gente sepa, entienda y mediante la Saya hemos conseguido muchas cosas, hemos conseguido, la visibilidad del pueblo Afroboliviano en Bolivia. Porque estábamos muy perdidos, muy escondidos, sin historia, sin noticias, entonces empezamos a marcar lo que tiene que ser, ¿no? Lo que debe ser el respeto y todo. Ya empezaron en las oficinas, abrieron las puertas, a reconocernos como Bolivianos."*

Afrobolivians this meant that they were presented with a number of opportunities to interact with state institutions and transnational NGOs that set out to foster the participation of ethnic and cultural minorities in the newly proclaimed multiethnic society (Bolivian Constitution of 1994). This political climate helped to stabilize the *Movimiento* and opened up new horizons for its organizational development. Very importantly, in 1998 the Cochabamba-based *Centro Pedagógico Simón I. Patiño* organized and funded the work of a team of researchers, as well as a series of meetings and events with the Afrobolivian population. As a result, the center published *"El Tambor Mayor,"* a book with an audio CD including the documentation of Afrobolivian musical traditions and a summary of available information on the history of the communities and the recuperation of *saya*. The book also included first hand testimonies of Afrobolivian villagers on culture and history and up to this day serves as an important reference in academic publications and activist discourse alike. But *"El Tambor Mayor"* was important beyond its quality as a documentary source and academic reference. The efforts to compile the information that the book is based on led a team of researchers (including movement member Mónica Rey) to various communities and many people I spoke to affirmed that it was in the context of those efforts that they became more deeply involved with the organized movement and the revitalization of Afrobolivian culture more generally. Additionally, various Afrobolivian communities from the Yungas participated in a meeting and music festival sponsored by *Fundación Patiño* and the Catholic Church in Coripata *(Festival Luz Mila Patino* and the *I. Encuentro de comunidades negras)*, strengthening the ties between dispersed parts of the population and spreading the idea of cultural revival beyond La Paz and Coroico/Tocaña.

Also in 1998, the urban-based movement managed to become a legally established organization by obtaining *Personería Jurídica* under the name of "*Movimiento Cultural Saya Afroboliviana*" *(MOCUSABOL)*. It is interesting to note that the group had started out as "*Movimiento Cultural Grupo Afro-Boliviano*" in the late 1980s, but changed its name to "*Movimiento Negro*" in 1995 (Templeman 1998:435). However, in 1998, the name that was officially registered – and is still in use today – was MOCUSABOL, abstaining from the term *negro* and emphasizing *"lo cultural"* and the ever-present *saya*. The following years would become decisive in shaping the orientation of the movement and formalizing the political mobilization of Afrobolivians beyond the realm of *saya*. Before I turn to shifts in political orientations, however, there are some aspects concerning the foundational narrative that deserve further attention.

Contextualizing and decentering the foundational narrative

The basic narrative reproduced above has been advanced especially by members of the Coroico/Tocaña faction within the Afrobolivian community and has been propagated through a variety of means. Most prominently, Mónica Rey and Fortunata Medina, members of the high school class that performed *saya* in 1982, have become important spokespersons and representatives for Afrobolivians in general and for the propagation of this particular narrative more specifically. Both from Tocaña, their views contrast significantly with those from other *comunidades* in the rest of the Yungas, but nevertheless have become the main reference for everyone interested in the Afrobolivian community (scholars, activists, politicians and national/international media). Rey wrote her undergraduate thesis (1998) about the meanings and uses of *saya* in the Afrobolivian community and has been interviewed extensively by the media on questions of the history of the movement. As one of the first written sources on the emerging Afrobolivian mobilization, it has also been widely cited in a variety of later sources. She was also part of the *Centro Pedagógico Simon I. Patiño* team that produced the first recordings of *saya*s and published *"El Tambor Mayor"* in 1998. The *saya*s recorded there are almost exclusively from the community of Tocaña, the small village near Coroico that has become the emblematic community of Afrobolivians in Bolivia. Furthermore, Mónica Rey counted on the support of Fernando Cajías, who organized and sponsored most of the early *saya* performances. She served as President of MOCUSABOL and was one of the founders of CONAFRO, the first Afrobolivian organization with explicitly national aspirations. In 2015, she was elected *Diputada Supranacional* for the ruling *Movimiento al Socialismo* and remains one of the most visible and prominent representatives of the Afrobolivian community. Fortunata Medina, for her part, besides actively contributing to the foundation of MOCUSABOL, also spoke internationally about her experiences with the movement and appeared, for example, in a 1998 conference on blackness in America and the Caribbean that lead to the publication of the seminal edited volume by Whitten and Torres (1998). She moved away from La Paz and is as of 2017 one of the leading figures of the Afrobolivian community in Santa Cruz and also closely related to CONAFRO. Both Medina and Rey are without any doubt key figures in the Afrobolivian community and widely respected for their years-long dedication to the cause of the Afrobolivian people. To me, their dedication and ongoing efforts are beyond question. Yet their prominent positions and privileged access to disseminate their version of the story lead to a simplification of the various nuances that can be found and whose importance is put forth by other scholars and activists that do not enjoy such extensive and long-lasting coverage.

In most of the testimonies I collected from activists in La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz, the basic pillars of the foundational narrative remain relatively stable

across the different testimonies. Yet there are certain variations that deserve further attention in order to contextualize what has become 'common sense' among many Afrobolivians when it comes to imagining their political history and the 'revival' or 'salvation' of their culture more generally. First of all, there are various voices that stress the importance of not overlooking specific earlier performances of *saya* in 'public spaces' and more generally the many clues – both in written sources and oral histories – of the continuous importance of *saya* within the different Afrobolivian communities. Martín Ballivián (2014) not only cites evidence of a public *saya* performance in La Paz in the 1950s but also forcefully argues for a reconsideration of the narrative of loss and oblivion so common among Afrobolivians. He states that *saya* has played a major role in festive contexts, as a carrier of Afrobolivian oral history and in community organizing since at least the early 20th century and denies tales of its imminent disappearance in the 1960s and 1970s that have become crucial for the construction of the activist discourse. He goes on to mention the testimony of a well-known composer of Afrobolivian *sayas*, stating that he had composed a new *saya* specifically for a festival held in Coroico in 1977, five years before the alleged salvation of *saya* from oblivion. The same information is mentioned in Robert Templeman's (1998) account of *saya*'s 'revival' in the 1980s.

Ballivián's (2014) description partly resonates with some testimonies I collected in Cala Cala where people have active memory of *saya* performances and do stress the continuous importance of *saya* while at the same time acknowledging the effect the activities of the urban organizations had on their practice and understanding of *saya* in the 1980s. Roberto told me that as far as he remembered from his childhood in the 1970s and early 1980s and from what he learned from his relatives, the people of Cala Cala performed *saya* on special occasions such as the annual *fiesta* in Cala Cala or neighboring Dorado Chico, or at weddings among the Afrobolivian population. Cala Cala always had its own drums *(cajas)* that were kept and taken care of by the community. He went on to describe how in the mid-1990s a group of Afrobolivians from Coroico/La Paz, alongside historians and musicologists and funded by *Fundación Patiño* arrived in the village to record *saya*s from Cala Cala. Indeed, this led to an increasing interest in *saya* in Cala Cala, but it seems exaggerated to suggest that *saya* was on the brink of disappearance within the community. I have been told similar stories in other villages, especially the Sud Yungas village of Chicaloma, another well-known Afrobolivian community (on Chicaloma see: Kent 2001; Léons 1972; Sturtevant 2013).

Besides critically examining the assertions of *saya's* imminent disappearance, it is also important to note that the above-mentioned narrative apparently understates the active participation of people who are not from Tocaña but who also played a major role in the foundation of MOCUSABOL. Again, it is especially Chicaloma – a village in Sud Yungas and the self-proclaimed "cradle of traditional *saya*" *("cuna de la saya tradicional")* – that seems to have played a much bigger role than

the Coroico-centered narrative admits. Chicaloma also plays an important role in the ongoing discussions about the specificities of *saya* performances and certain aesthetic features related to the dance.

The pitfalls of folklorization and the shift "from performance to politics"

The focus on *saya* in early mobilizations also had its pitfalls. Afrobolivians were quickly reduced to *saya* and their skillful dancing, and the movement's early focus on *saya* ended up overshadowing other aspects of the Afrobolivian experience. As a consequence of focusing on *saya* and participating mainly in events that relied on this cultural expression, Afrobolivian identity and culture became folklorized and were often reduced to *saya* alone. This led to a tendency that Lioba Rossbach de Olmos (2011) has called *"patrimomialización."* With that term she refers to tendencies to recognize Afrobolivian cultural expressions alongside other folklorized traditions as 'cultural patrimony' without granting Afrobolivians further territorial, political or economic rights. She juxtaposes the Bolivian case with the situations in Colombia (where an ethnicization of blackness prevails) and Cuba (where she speaks of racialization). Formally, this juxtaposition is not tenable as of 2009 when the Bolivian Constitution granted Afrobolivians the same rights (including the right to territory) as indigenous peoples, wherever appropriate *("en todo lo que corresponda")*. Furthermore, and with my remarks on race in Bolivia in mind, it is problematic to analyze the Bolivian case without reference to racialization. In many regards, however, Rossbach de Olmos' description is still quite accurate even today. Reviewing the national laws and decrees (as well as departmental and municipal decrees) concerning Afrobolivians that have been passed in the last decade, it becomes obvious that most of these bills have to do with *saya* and the recognition of Afrobolivian 'patrimony' more generally. Most prominently, Laws 138 and 200 recognize *saya* as "Historical-Cultural and Immaterial Patrimony of the state" and declare 23 September the "*Día Nacional del Pueblo y la Cultura Afroboliviana*".[10] Even though many Afrobolivian organizations struggled for the passing of these laws and most people I spoke to regard them as important milestones for the Afrobolivian population, most of my interlocutors were keenly aware of the limitations this kind of recognition entails. Harsh critiques of folklorization abound among Afrobolivians and the tendency to see them (and their culture) as merely national patrimony, were voiced in numerous instances. A fairly explicit hint at the overall problem can be found in a statement by an Afrobolivian activist cited in a newspaper article on a CONAFRO congress in 2012. Giving his opinion on matters of justice and discrimination, Edgar Vázquez, a CONAFRO member and Afrobolivian

10 www.gacetaoficialdebolivia.gob.bo [24/09/2018].

activist, called attention to the fact that Afrobolivian women are stereotyped in a variety of ways: they are racialized, sexualized and treated as objects, but also reduced to their potential ability in *saya* dancing:

> "I manifest that Afrobolivian women are seen as objects for being physically well endowed. Furthermore, I comment that many associate them with Afrobolivian dance because they are from the Yungas. 'She must know how to dance *saya*,' they say."[11]

Besides providing a gendered perspective on discrimination, he clearly also sees the firm association of Afrobolivians with *saya* as a problem. The article continues:

> "They do not see the Afrobolivian woman because of her capacity and her knowledge, but from a folkloric point of view. That is also a discriminatory act. It is fine, we have our culture, we respect it very much, but what we want is for people not only to see us as a culture, but as persons."[12]

Besides decrying the objectification of black women – a discriminatory practice most Afrobolivians I spoke to explain in terms of a deeply rooted racism in Bolivian society – Vázquez points out the folklorization of Afrobolivians and the fact that they are not seen as individuals or valued for their capacities and knowledge *("capacidades y conocimientos")*.

To counteract the tendencies of folklorization, Afrobolivian organizations searched for opportunities to widen the scope of their activities and discourses. In the late 1990s, according to many of my interlocutors, the activities of MOCUSABOL started to become 'political.' The first generation of leaders – the *saya* generation – had been gradually stepping away from the organization. For example, Fortunata Medina moved to Santa Cruz where she would become a key figure in the mobilization of the ever-growing Afrobolivian population in Bolivia's lowland boomtown and Julia Pinedo left the organization to focus on her professional career. Despite these developments, MOCUSABOL remained the center of Afrobolivian cultural and political activism and by far the biggest and most important group. Its leadership was taken on by Jorge Medina, who pressured the group to become more 'politically' active and transcend the focus on dancing *saya*. Many of the people I interviewed associate two things with Medina: *"talleres"* and *"política."*

As Julia remembers:

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11 *"Manifestó que las mujeres afro son vistas como objetos por ser bien dotadas corporalmente. Asimismo, comentó que muchos las asocian con la danza afroboliviana por proceder de los Yungas. 'Debe saber bailar saya,' dicen." (El Cambio 2012)*

12 *"No ven a la mujer afro por su capacidad y sus conocimientos, sino desde el punto de vista folklórico. Este hecho también es un acto discriminatorio. Está bien, tenemos nuestra cultura, la respetamos muchísimo, pero lo que queremos es que no sólo nos vean como cultura, sino como personas." (El Cambio 2012)*

> "So he [Jorge Medina] takes it up and rebuilds it. But he starts working very little in culture. He starts working more in the identification of the *pueblo afro* but it was not easy to convince the people that we needed to go further, that we couldn't just keep on dancing. So Jorge decides to give workshops, mixing always culture with our history. He starts rescuing and he starts giving workshops to tell us a little bit about our history because we also didn't know what our history was. He tells them and just then, gender equality and all that is en vogue. So he starts working with that and he starts entering institutions and he doesn't do it so much focused on culture, but he does it politically. He entered through culture and afterwards identity, history and all that and he ends up doing what he is now, he is a member of parliament thanks to what the *saya* began to work on, right?"[13]

The workshops he organized were mainly concerned with two related topics: history and identity/identification. Medina's line of argument and subsequent strategy parted from the experience he and other leaders had had in the early years of mobilization: many Afrobolivians did not identify as such and this lack of identification made mobilizing an Afrobolivian constituency very difficult. Secondly, Medina and others adopted a critical stance towards the achievements of the cultural movement based on performing *saya*. They argued that performing *saya* had made Afrobolivians visible as part of the country and had proven to be an effective means of conveying the messages concerning ownership of *saya* to the public. At the same time, however, the focus on dancing and performance had contributed to the stereotyping of Afrobolivians as mere dancers and entertainers, reducing their organization to the status of a dance troupe.

> "Oh no! The little blacks, the dancers, the ones of the *saya*. We were the *saya* dancers. That's how people knew us, as the *saya* dancers. They saw a black person and said: 'Ah, the *saya* dancers, the musicians, the dancers!' So we didn't want that. So in MOCUSABOL I told them: 'People, we have to start thinking politically.' But there was no interest. People were too involved in the cultural part."[14]

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13 "*Entonces el lo retoma eso y lo vuelve a armar. Pero él empieza trabajar muy poco tiempo en lo que es lo cultural. Él empieza más a trabajar en lo que era identificación del pueblo afro pero no era fácil convencerlos a mi gente que deberíamos ir más allá, que no podáamos quedar solamente bailando. Entonces Jorge decide dar talleres, mezclando siempre lo cultural con lo que era nuestra historia. Empieza rescatar y empieza a dar talleres para contarnos un poco que es nuestra historia porque tampoco sabíamos lo que era nuestra historia. Les cuenta y también justo se pone de moda la equidad de género, todo esto. Él empieza trabajar con todo esto y empieza meterse a instituciones y ya no lo hace esto tan cultural, sino ya lo hace algo político. Él ha entrado por lo cultural y después ya identidad, historia y todo eso y termina haciendo lo que es el ahora, que es diputado gracias a lo que la Saya empieza a trabajar, ¿no?*"

14 "*Ah no! Los negritos, los bailarines, los de Saya, éramos los bailadores de Saya. Así nos conocía la gente, como los bailadores de Saya. Veían a un negro y decían: Ah, los bailadores de Saya, los músicos, los bailadores. Entonces no queríamos eso. Entonces en el MOCUSABOL les digo: Chicos, tenemos que*

In Medina's view, it was a result of that situation that MOCUSABOL had not been able to achieve any significant improvements for the Afrobolivian population. He thus proposed a twofold strategy. Internally, he sought to strengthen the organization by organizing workshops concerned with Afrobolivian identity and history, raising the consciousness of topics such as discrimination, social rights and equality of opportunities among the Afrobolivian population. In addition to that, he approached state institutions in order to obtain funding and lobby for Afrobolivian interests so that they would be on the agendas of ministries and development agencies. His emphasis on 'politics' as opposed to 'culture' eventually led to the creation of *CADIC (Centro Afroboliviano para el Dessarrollo Integral y Comunitario)* in 2006, considered to be the political branch of MOCUSABOL by most Afrobolivians. Through CADIC, Medina sought to institutionalize the divide between culture *(saya)* and politics, reserving the former arena for MOCUSABOL, while working on the latter through CADIC. The organization's objectives no longer make any direct reference to *saya* and instead emphasize other goals such as promoting the formation of new leaders, development projects, and strategic alliances with other organizations, and pushing for public policies such as affirmative action programs.[15] CADIC also puts great emphasis on "strengthening the ethno-cultural identity of Afrobolivians and promoting the integration and development of our communities" *("fortalecer la identidad étnico-cultural de los Afrobolivianos/as promoviendo la integración y el desarrollo de nuestras comunidades")*. This can be read as a first step in the direction of ethnicization, which I will discuss more thoroughly in chapter 9.

From *negros* to *Afrobolivianos/Afrodescendientes*

Very importantly, Medina introduced a major shift in broadening MOCUSABOL's scope in its search for new members, as well as its political discourse. Previously, the group was primarily composed of *negros* – Afrobolivian individuals matching expectations regarding a normative phenotypical blackness – and recruited its members almost exclusively from the ranks of Nor Yungas migrants, mainly from the *comunidades* around Coroico (cf. Templeman 1998:431). Medina sought to include migrants from other regions of the Yungas, as well as the growing population of urban-born Afrobolivians, many of whom were not classified as *negros*, but as one or another intermediate category hinting at racial mixing *(zambo, mulato, mestizo)*. For Medina, as long as they identified with their Afrobolivian heritage, which he sought to strengthen through workshops, and had some Afrobolivian ancestors, their claim to Afrobolivian identity was equally valid. He sought to reach this

empezar a pensar políticamente. Pero no había ese interés, la gente estaba metida en la parte cultural."(Jorge Medina quoted in Komadina and Regalsky [2016]).

15 See: www.cadic.org.bo [16/09/2016].

part of the population through the aforementioned workshops, motivating people to learn about Afrobolivian history and embrace their heritage and identity as Afrobolivians. However, not all of the first generation members shared that opinion and according to Bolivian anthropologist Kantuta Cavour (personal communication), who conducted fieldwork among the members of MOCUSABOL in the 1990s, Medina's decision to include individuals with only some degree of Afrobolivian ancestry sparked fierce resistance from certain factions of the group. Those opposing Medina's strategy argued that the movement had been and should continue to be an organization formed of *negros*, defending the interests of *negros*. The tensions engendered by the uneasy relationship between skin color, genealogical ancestry and self-positioning practices in the articulation of Afrobolivianity have not been resolved to this day, as I have shown in chapter 6. On an organizational level, however, Medina's line of argument eventually prevailed. Under his leadership, MOCUSABOL grew steadily and was firmly established as the most visible Afrobolivian organization in Bolivia. Medina also benefitted personally from the success of his mobilization efforts and was long considered the most important Afrobolivian political leader. In 2010, he became the first Afrobolivian member of the *Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional*.

Beyond broadening the possible membership base of MOCUSABOL, the shift from *negros* to *Afrodescendientes* also meant embracing the transnational politics of blackness gaining momentum in Latin America in the 1990s (Minority Rights Group 1995). Medina's engagement of the term *"Afrodescendiente"* and some of his political projects certainly were inspired by transnationally circulating ideas and discourses. He participated, for example, as a delegate representing Afrobolivians in a series of regional preparatory events for the "World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance" held in Durban, South Africa in 2001. One of his first projects as *Asambleísta* (Member of Parliament) was lobbying for an anti-discrimination law. The *Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional* passed Law 045 *("Ley 045 Contra el Racismo y Toda forma de Discriminación")* in 2010. Jorge Medina was heavily involved in its elaboration and many of the articles reflect the language of the Durban Declaration of 2001.[16]

16 The law is occasionally invoked by Afrobolivians when describing everyday racism, but to date, I have not come across a single case where an Afrobolivian individual has filed a legal suit based on the anti-discrimination law. In the debates surrounding the passing of Law 045 in 2010, the topic of racism as a specific form of discrimination was quickly deflected. The debate and media coverage focused instead on the possible curtailing of the freedom of speech, since the law also contemplates sanctions for individuals and media outlets that propagate discriminatory attitudes and opinions. Four years after the passing of Law 045, CONAFRO filed a complaint denouncing the racist attitudes reflected in the dance *Tundiqui* and causing the *Comité Nacional contra el Racismo y toda forma de Discriminación* to issue a resolution condemning the public display of racist stereotypes in *Tundiqui* performances.

From folklore to cultural citizenship

The terminological and conceptual shift described in the preceding section has another important dimension. This is clearly expressed in a MOCUSABOL publication that explains that:

> "The Afrobolivian Movement uses the term Afro instead of *negro*, since *negro is a color, it's not a culture, history, philosophy. In contrast, Afroboliviano is that and much more*, it is the sign of the cradle of humanity and its diaspora in the world […]" (Emphasis added by the author.)[17]

Some authors interpret statements like this as a clear sign of Afrobolivian organizations approaching politics from an exclusively transnational vantage point. They take the adoption of the language and discourses of transnational organizations on *Afrodescendant* people as indicating a trend of envisioning Afrobolivian politics mostly beyond the national context (Komadina and Regalsky 2016). The very terminology *Afrodescendiente* is taken as an indicator of this, as is the framing of grievances in the language of racial discrimination, references to slavery and the historical injustice it engendered. Debates associated with the term *"Afrodescendiente"* on a transnational level have certainly enhanced the discursive repertoire of the *Movimiento Afro* and many organizations have established ties to organizations spanning the whole continent, participate in events associated with the UN Decade for People of African Descent and clearly express the political importance of belonging to a wider African Diaspora.

I argue, however, that this interpretation fails to acknowledge some important developments with regard to the *Movimiento Afro* and its political discourse. On the one hand, even before Afrobolivians began adopting the term *Afrodescendiente,* they had already replaced the racialized and derogatory terms *negro/a, negrito/a* and *moreno/a* with *Afroboliviano*. The prefix *"Afro"* denotes – as is the case with the widely known Afro-American or African-American – cultural ancestry and ties to the African continent, as I have shown in the quotation from MOCUSABOL's publication above. The second part of the denomination is equally important though: *"-boliviano"* makes clear reference to the claim to national belonging and "recognition as part of the nation" that much of Afrobolivian activism very prominently makes (Busdiecker 2007). "We are Bolivians, too" *("Nosotros también somos Bolivianos")*, is consequently one of the most important slogans of the movement today.

However, the resolution has not rendered any palpable results and *Tundiqui* performances still occur frequently (for a recent discussion, see Busdiecker 2019b).

17 *"El Movimiento Afroboliviano utiliza el término Afro en vez de 'negro', ya que negro es un color, no es una cultura, historia, filosofía. Mientras que Afroboliviano es eso y mucho más, es el indicativo de la cuna de la humanidad y su diáspora en el mundo […]."*

This focus on national belonging and the claiming of rights in the name of national citizenship is in part a consequence of the early struggles that emphasized Afrobolivian cultural expression as being part of national cultural diversity. Beyond this cultural dimension, however, it is also the consequence of the widespread tendency in Latin America that indigenous and other marginalized groups must accommodate their claims and voice them within a discourse and language of citizenship (Canessa 2005; Postero 2006; Yashar 2005).

In the context of constitutional reform in Bolivia in 1994, the topic of differentiated citizenship (Kymlicka and Norman 2000) or cultural citizenship (Rosaldo 1994) for indigenous groups was becoming a major buzzword in Bolivian politics and social movement activism (Van Cott 2000). Within this context, Afrobolivian organizations aimed to reposition Afrobolivians in Bolivia's "structures of alterity" (Wade 2010:36) in order to benefit from the multicultural regimes of recognition set in motion by Bolivia's 1994 Constitution. Racialized others *(negros/as)* were repositioned in political contexts as cultural others *(Afrobolivianos/Afrobolivianas)* with a claim to cultural citizenship. Throughout this process of political repositioning, references to *Afrodescendencia*, and by extension to African culture and history, were the basis of claims to a unique and recognizable Afrobolivian culture beyond *saya*. This cultural difference was then employed politically as the foundation for claims to differentiated citizenship equivalent to that of indigenous groups. Very importantly, ties to *Afrodescendientes* and Africa – real and imagined – were used to present claims to the Bolivian state in the language of differentiated citizenship, not as a means to position Afrobolivians as a transnational or diasporic collective in need of a different set of practices of recognition.

The political repositioning of Afrobolivians as "cultural others" has contributed to a variety of developments and processes. Culturalizing blackness politically has enabled Afrobolivians to participate in government- or NGO-sponsored programs addressing issues of cultural diversity and differentiated citizenship in a way that a racialized discourse on blackness would not have offered. The above-mentioned invitation by Vice President Cardenas, the nationwide media presence by way of participating in cultural activities and the funding available through programs latching onto Bolivia's 1994 multicultural constitution would not have been possible otherwise. This shift also laid the groundwork for Afrobolivian mobilization in the context of Bolivia's *proceso de cambio* beginning in 2005, which I will address in chapter 9.

CADIC and the discourse of development

Another of Jorge Medina's political merits was his astute embracement of the discourses of development circulating in Bolivia from the 1980s onward. Besides recognizing the vital importance of the vast mixed-race youth in urban centers for

Afrobolivian mobilization and the opportunities claims to cultural citizenship offered, he engaged with the international development industry in novel ways. Bolivia has been, until very recently, at the top (or close to the top) of any list concerning development funds received or the percentage of foreign aid in relation to GDP. Development, organizations and funds related to it have correspondingly been very important in the country (Carmona 2010). Beyond the organizational and economic dimensions, development discourse has also shaped the country's "complicated modern trajectory" (Goodale 2009:146) in more general terms. Therefore, it is important to discuss the ways development discourse has been used to political ends by Afrobolivian activists, giving relations between the rural and urban realms of Afrobolivian reality a particular twist. What Medina understood was that in order to attract funding for his projects, he had to frame them in the language of development and he designed CADIC accordingly. Given the large scale roll back of the state in Bolivia starting in the mid-1980s and occurring most fiercely in the 1990s, NGOs were on the rise and transnational and development discourse with them. CADIC was founded as "the political branch" of MOCUSABOL and purported to transcend the realms of folklore that MOCUSABOL firmly occupied through *saya* performances. The Afrobolivian leaders involved in CADIC's foundation were sharply aware of the above-mentioned pitfall of folklorization and strategically repositioned the discourses of Afrobolivian activism once more. In its name, CADIC features the buzzword "development," highlighting its "integral" and "communitarian" focus. In a recent statement, CADIC was described as

> "An institution that has the objective of promoting the empowerment of the *pueblo Afroboliviano*, strengthening its ethno-cultural identity through its educational, political and socio-cultural formation, seeking relations with the government, civil society, and international organizations generating actions that contribute to the development of its communities."[18]

Besides the lack of reference to *saya* and cultural performance – which was unheard of for an Afrobolivian organization by the time of CADIC's foundation in 2006 and still stands out as rather unusual – the quote above displays an instructive array of references to key elements of CADIC's work. There is talk of empowerment, ethnocultural identity, education, civil society, international organizations – and how all these factors should ultimately contribute to development in Afrobolivian communities. The 'politics' CADIC has in mind, then, is in the first instance 'development.'

18 *"Una institución que tiene el objetivo de promover el empoderamiento del pueblo afroboliviano, fortaleciendo su identidad étnico-cultural a través de su formación educativa, política y sociocultural, buscando el relacionamiento con el gobierno, sociedad civil y organizaciones internacionales generando acciones que contribuyan al desarrollo en sus comunidades."* (http://www.jorgemedina.org/2014/04/cadic-cumple-8-anos-de-vida-en-servicio.html [19/07/2017]).

By development, I mean what Gillian Hart (2001:650) has called "'big D' Development," which she defines as "a post-second world war project of intervention in the 'third world' that emerged in the context of decolonization and the cold war" as opposed to "'little d' development or the development of capitalism as a geographically uneven, profoundly contradictory set of historical processes." One important aspect is the notion of this kind of development as an 'intervention' – the 'first world' intervening in the 'third world' for the sake of development. Mapped onto Bolivia and the Afrobolivian case specifically, this means that CADIC (and with it urban Afrobolivians) intervenes in rural *comunidades* for the sake of development. Obviously, the global dimension of the 'first world' intervening in a 'third world' country such as Bolivia is an important notion in the Afrobolivian case, too. Yet I would argue that for understanding the dynamics of Afrobolivian mobilization and identity politics, the relationship established between the allegedly urban/modern CADIC and 'backward rural communities in need of development' – and the symbolic as well as material and power differences this opposition entails – is of even greater importance. It casts the rural Yungas communities as recipients of development in need of assistance from urban, modern Afrobolivians. Ironically, the more successful CADIC became at channeling development funds, the more dependent the communities became. This relationship of dependence and the discursive construction of urban organizations working on behalf of 'disenfranchised rural communities' has become a pattern that is difficult to overcome both in discourse and in practice (see chapter 9 on CONAFRO). It bars rural Afrobolivian community leaders from participating in decision making and political action in urban settings directly and is one of the main problems CONAFRO faces today in its attempts to position itself as the legitimate leadership of all Afrobolivians, urban and rural.

Talleres (workshops) as spaces of articulation

Jorge Medina's move to engage development discourse had further consequences beyond establishing a specific pattern of relationships between rural and urban Afrobolivians. It also meant that workshops *(talleres)* became the main method of approaching Afrobolivian identity politics. This tendency is not limited to CADIC as an institution. In chapter 5 I described a workshop in Coripata where *Cala Caleños* were prompted "to think about identity" *("tenemos que pensar en la identidad")* and in the previous chapter I showed how cataloging Afrobolivian culture is also achieved at least in part by gathering people in workshops.

Following Eduardo Restrepo (Restrepo 2004:705), who has analyzed the ethnicization of blackness in Colombia, I propose to analyze *talleres* as "techniques that entail the concentration of people in a determined time and space with a specific aim." Beyond the "circulation of a certain kind of speech, of a particular management of the body and of the establishment-reproduction of specific power rela-

tionships," these techniques are important in the sense that they aim to "establish relations and assumptions into the matrix of interaction among the attendees at multiple levels" (Restrepo 2004:705). Mark Goodale (Goodale 2009) has also vividly described in his ethnography of human rights discourse in Bolivia that the importance of *talleres* can hardly be overstated. Writing about the program brochure of a workshop he attended during fieldwork, he notes that "the entire range of technocratic knowledge practices are brought together within the four corners of this humble little brochure at the service of, as it turns out, what has become a kind of meta-technocratic knowledge—human rights" (Goodale 2009:132–133). What is more, this is not a new phenomenon only recently introduced and relevant in Bolivia: it is something that has been shaping Bolivian people's sense of themselves, and their view on law, politics and development in decisive ways. As Antonio Rodríguez-Carmona aptly put it:

> "Twenty years is nothing, or it can be a lot. Twenty years of seeing 4x4 vehicles drive by, seeing international cooperation personnel dressed in polar jackets. Twenty years hearing the talk of solutions to poverty, projects, expected results, *twenty years of participating in training workshops [talleres]* […]" (Rodríguez-Carmona 2009:1, my translation, emphasis added)[19]

What applies to processes of transforming Afrocolombian political subjectivities as described by Restrepo and to human rights in the case of Goodale's study, I argue, also applies to plurinational ID-ology and the propagation of Afrobolivianity as a framework for identification. Each workshop must be seen as one concrete event giving meaning to the category *"Afroboliviano"* as the basis for collective gathering and political action in contexts where this category is often not salient in organizational terms. In rural contexts, identification as *Afroboliviano* competes with *comunario* identity and *sindicato* politics, as I have shown in chapters 3 and 4. In urban settings, Afrobolivians are often dispersed geographically and concrete spaces of communication among Afrobolivians are mostly found in *talleres* or in meetings of Afrobolivian organizations. *Talleres* thus serve to constitute a sense of collective belonging on ethnoracial grounds. In *talleres* people are explicitly addressed as Afrobolivians. They are encouraged to frame their claims as 'Afrobolivian claims' and conceptualize needs and deservingness in collective ethnoracial terms. To cite but one example, in a *taller* organized by CADIC that I attended in Santa Cruz, Medina addressed the audience as follows: "What does the Afrobolivian community of Santa Cruz want?" The people in the audience responded with a long list of desires: a project to create incentives for the formation of Afrobolivian micro-

19 "*Veinte años no es nada o puede ser mucho. Veinte años viendo pasar vagonetas 4x4, cooperantes extranjeros vestidos con chamarras polares. Veinte años oyendo hablar de soluciones a la pobreza, proyectos, resultados esperados, veinte años asistiendo a talleres de capacitación […].*"

businesses *(micro-empresas)*, a census of Afrobolivian people in Santa Cruz, a direct Afrobolivian representative on the municipal board of the city, an emergency fund for Afrobolivian people that can provide financial aid in cases of sickness or accident, support for an Afrobolivian cultural festival, a school that teaches Afrobolivian *"artes y expresiones culturales"* (artistic and cultural expressions) and health insurance for Afrobolivians *("seguro Afroboliviano")*. As this list shows, matters of economic necessity, political representation, culture and health care were framed as Afrobolivian needs and desires that should be addressed within a framework relying on collective ethnoracial identifications. Even overarching topics such as better access to health care and insurance – doubtless a matter of great interest for many Bolivians – were approached from a perspective foregrounding collective identification as Afrobolivians.

A last point that I only want to briefly introduce here as it will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapter is the increasing salience of "rights talk" (Merry 2003) fostered by workshops. Whereas earlier approaches – for example the work of MOCUSABOL and the important efforts of the *Centro Pedagógico Simón I. Patiño* – circled around the revitalization of customs and 'tradition,' as well as the salvaging of 'culture,' the more transnationally inspired approach employed by CADIC advocated for introducing the idiom of rights through concepts such as human rights, women's rights, indigenous rights, minority rights or explicitly *Afrodescendant* rights. Jorge Medina often explicitly adopted a rhetoric inspired by the 2001 Durban Declaration, making the term *Afrodescendiente* an important reference, as well as introducing a more explicit anti-discrimination framework into Afrobolivian politics hitherto framed more commonly in terms of multiculturalism. The legacy of the logics and modes of engagement CADIC first introduced is thus manifold. It shaped Afrobolivian politics to a large extent and with durable consequences by making development a major issue, by firmly establishing the workshop as a context of engagement and interaction, and by broadening the scope of Afrobolivian political discourse to include different facets of "rights talk." The partial shift to a more decidedly diasporic political rhetoric – expressed in the proliferation of the term *Afrodescendiente* – also occurred during CADIC's most active period.

Conclusion

What started in 1982 as the initiative of a few high school students in a small Yungas village had, by the turn of the 21st century, become an increasingly organized network of Afrobolivian organizations. The 'rediscovery' of *saya* and the ensuing propagation of a cultural understanding of what it meant to be Afrobolivian beyond the color of one's skin paved the way for Afrobolivian organizations and individuals to articulate their grievances in national and international contexts. Afrobolivian

organizations have ever since been active in the realms of folklore and cultural production, in national politics, international development contexts and transnational fora. Their discourses and strategies mirror all these contexts, as well as the very immediate and local specificities of the Afrobolivian case.

Following the 'rediscovery' of Afrobolivian culture, certain key individuals started organizing primarily black *(negro)* youth in urban centers and embarked on a process of cultural revitalization that they carried into the rural communities from whence they had migrated a few years earlier. Public performances and the spaces offered by the folklore industry were key factors in this regard. Furthermore, the overall political climate and the support of a set of key actors (anthropologists, national NGOs and individual power brokers) favored these efforts and made it possible to consolidate the emergent movement under the banner of MOCUSABOL. The organizational panorama subsequently diversified, and with it the political propositions and discursive framings. The most salient development in this regard is the shift in terminology from *negro* to *Afroboliviano* and all the meanings this shift carries – namely the culturalization of Afrobolivianity and an emphasis on national belonging and citizenship. Additionally, the generally national focus of Afrobolivian politics notwithstanding, diasporic affiliations and ideas circulating within transnational networks of *Afrodescendientes* also had a part to play in Afrobolivian mobilization. Through activists' participation in transnational events – and their subsequent efforts at disseminating the contents of these meetings – Afrobolivians started reflecting on their origins, their relation to the wider African Diaspora and the meanings these links would have for their place in Bolivian society.

In terms of the goals achieved in this formative period of the Afrobolivian movement, visibility stands out as the most important. Through their activities, Afrobolivians "perform[ed] blackness into the nation" (Busdiecker 2007), challenging the widespread silence on Afrobolivianity in public discourse. The relative silence and invisibility of Afrobolivian collectivity and culture was replaced, however, only by partial visibility and recognition as part of the nation's cultural patrimony, leaving little room for representations of more mundane and day-to-day Afrobolivian lifestyles and contributing little to the betterment of living conditions in Afrobolivian communities. This is what I have called the pitfall of folklorization and the perceived limitations of early mobilizations inspired Afrobolivian activists to search for a number of alternative strategies to overcome this situation. Two stand out as most important: first are the discourses associated with development and second is the proliferation of "rights talk." While the former has marked contexts and genres of political engagement and interaction to a large extent, the latter became increasingly salient in the Afrobolivian campaign surrounding the Constituent Assembly convened by the newly elected government of the *Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS)* and its leader, Evo Morales, in 2006. It is to the processes around this event – usually referred to as ground-breaking and epochal – and its aftermath that I now turn.