Chapter 2: The Afrobolivian Presence in Bolivia, Then and Now

In order to contextualize the ethnographic material presented in the following chapters, it is necessary to introduce some general aspects of Afrobolivian history. Moreover, it is crucial to sketch specific social, political and economic transformations in Bolivia and how they relate to the situation of Afrobolivians. This chapter serves a dual purpose. On the one hand it introduces the ethnographic and historical context of my study: the Yungas region and its role in the political and social history of Bolivia, as well as the Yungas' place in the "cultural geography" (Wade 2010:16) of the country. On the other hand, it summarizes the existing literature on Afrobolivians and delineates the state of the art. I begin with a critical examination of the discourse on 'invisibility' that is frequently deployed by Afrobolivian individuals and organizations, but also in some scholarly publications on the subject. I then sketch the regional context of the Yungas, and specifically how the topics of ethnicity and indigenous identity are approached with regard to the region. I continue with a brief examination of historically oriented work on Afrobolivians and then introduce early ethnographic accounts dealing with Afrobolivians and the Yungas. The next sections focus on political transformations in Bolivia since the 1980s, namely the country's shift towards multicultural politics and the recent turn to plurinationality within the so-called "*proceso de cambio*" ("process of change") led by Evo Morales and the party *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS, Movement towards Socialism).

"Are there black people in Bolivia?" Invisibility and beyond

As in other Latin American countries (de Friedemann 1984; see also: Minority Rights Group 1995), Afrobolivian activists and scholars have often decried the 'invisibility' of their people, their history, their culture and their contributions to the nation (Zambrana B. 2014). As I mentioned in the introduction, Afrobolivians have never been at the center of debates on Bolivian national culture, heritage or identity. They have consequently also received far less attention than indigenous people from

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politicians, intellectuals, in public culture or within debates in society at large. After the abolition of slavery in 1851 – and until the plurinational population census in 2012 – no official national statistics revealing the numbers of Afrobolivians were produced.

The 2012 National Population Census, for the first time in Bolivia's history, included the category *"Afroboliviano"* as an option for self-identification. This was seen as a milestone in Afrobolivian mobilization and interpreted as the long overdue recognition that Afrobolivians constitute a distinguishable collective within Bolivian society. Many Afrobolivian organizations engaged in a campaign aiming at motivating Afrobolivians all over the country to self-identify as such. When the results were released, however, most activists were highly disappointed to learn that only about 16,000 individuals across Bolivia had identified as "belonging to the *pueblo Afroboliviano*" *("perteneciente al pueblo Afroboliviano")*. Activists' own estimates regularly cited figures of around 30,000 Afrobolivians in the country (occasionally up to 50,000).[1] In 2012, according to the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE)* 16,329 people over the age of 15 years declared that they belong to the *"pueblo Afroboliviano."*[2] This amounts to about 0.15% of Bolivia's total population of 10 million. Afrobolivians are dispersed geographically throughout the whole country, although they are 'traditionally' associated with the Yungas region near Bolivia's highland metropolis La Paz.

Various publications assert that roughly thirty years ago it was fairly common for the Bolivian general public to be unaware of the existence of Afrobolivians at all (Angola Maconde 2001; Busdiecker 2007). Afrobolivian activists often cite the phrase "I didn't know there were black people in Bolivia" *("No sabía que había negros en Bolivia")* to exemplify the reaction they faced when identifying as Afrobolivians. Similarly, Afrobolivians assert that they are regularly identified as foreigners and are sometimes at great pains to assert their Bolivian nationality. By now at least, the generalized and extensive ignorance seems to have given way to a limited and stereotyped awareness that there are, in fact, "black people in Bolivia." It is rather uncommon to encounter people with no knowledge on black people

1 The inclusion of *"Afroboliviano"* in the National Population Census was a major topic when I first came to be engaged with Afrobolivian politics from 2010-2012. When I returned to Bolivia in 2014, the topic was hardly discussed among Afrobolivians anymore and the census data was seldom employed as a strategic means by Afrobolivian organizations. Many of my interlocutors told me that they worry that the numbers give the impression that Afrobolivians are only a very small group. In their view this might hamper political enfranchisement, rather than enhancing it as they hoped before Afrobolivians were officially counted. Some commentators even argue that the constant talk of being invisible and "ignored" *("ignorados")* has become the most powerful rhetorical tool for Afrobolivians in making political claims vis-à-vis the state (Spedding 2009:447).

2 Https://www.ine.gob.bo/ [16/07/2018].

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in Bolivia whatsoever as *la saya Afroboliviana* has become such a fundamental part of the country's folkloric repertoire, represented in various forms in all kinds of media and present in the large *entradas* (parades) all over the country. What is more, in the 1990s, some Afrobolivian players were part of Bolivia's national soccer team that received a lot of attention for participating in the 1994 FIFA World Cup in the USA. When I talked to people in Bolivia about my project and mentioned Afrobolivians, the most frequent comments had to do with *saya* or *los Yungas* – and whether I had travelled there yet in order to go see them. 'Invisibility' has thus given way to a stereotyped depiction of Afrobolivians as *saya* dancers and inhabitants of a very specific region of the country (Busdiecker 2009a; Templeman 1998). Recently, the term *el pueblo Afroboliviano* ("the Afrobolivian people") has been legally acknowledged as a collective subject bearing "where appropriate" *("en todo lo que corresponda")*, the same collective rights as indigenous groups (*"naciones y pueblos indígena originario campesinos,"* Article 31 of the New Constitution). Therefore, references to Afrobolivians have become rather frequent in government reports, in municipal action plans, in state-sponsored and/or NGO-led initiatives, as well as in legal documents that are in some way related to the constitutional provisions for indigenous people and other groups with special rights. Moreover – and I often had the impression that this was even more important than the special rights and the differentiated citizenship in Article 31 – Afrobolivians are mentioned in Article 3 of the Bolivian Constitution. It states:

> "The Bolivian nation is formed by all Bolivians, the native indigenous nations and peoples, and the inter-cultural and Afro-Bolivian communities that, together, constitute the Bolivian people."[3]

Being mentioned in such a foundational article of the Plurinational Constitution as an integral but distinct part of the Bolivian nation has afforded Afrobolivians a great deal of visibility and consequently serves as the basis for exceptional levels of pride among most Afrobolivian individuals. As a consequence of legal recognition and the ensuing political enfranchisement, Afrobolivian individuals have also been elected as representatives to national congress, regional parliaments and municipal councils, and some serve as public functionaries in ministries, vice-ministries and other government institutions. All this has led to a significant rise in visibility and public presence. 'Invisibility' thus doesn't fully capture the situation of Afrobolivians. It remains important as a motif of Afrobolivian political discourse, but has

3 In the Spanish original, Article 3 reads: "*La nación boliviana está conformada por la totalidad de las bolivianas y los bolivianos, las naciones y pueblos indígena originario campesinos, y las comunidades interculturales y afrobolivianas que en conjunto constituyen el pueblo boliviano.*" Unless otherwise noted, the translated passages from the Constitutions are from the English translation provided by www.constituteproject.org.

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given way to an – admittedly often stereotyped – partial visibility of Afrobolivians. Beyond the situation in politics and throughout Bolivian society at large, a partial and emerging visibility can also be identified in writings on Bolivian history and debates on the colonial origins of contemporary Bolivian society. Before I turn to publications dealing with the historical presence of Afrobolivians, it is important to sketch some particularities of the regional context of the Yungas in Bolivia and how this relates to Afrobolivians.

The regional context: the Yungas in Bolivia's cultural geography

In Bolivia, the term Yungas refers mostly to the steep semitropical valleys on the eastern slopes of the Andes, administratively divided into the provinces of Nor Yungas (North Yungas, capital Coroico), Sud Yungas (South Yungas, capital Chulumani) and Caranavi (capital Caranavi), which was separated from Nor Yungas province by decree in 1992. The region ranges in altitude between approximately 1,500 and 2,500 meters above sea level and is characterized by warm temperatures and a humid climate.[4] The Yungas are one of the centers of Bolivia's coca production and are also known for producing a variety of fruits and coffee (Klein 2003:5). They are situated geographically between Bolivia's *altiplano* (Andean high plateau) and the *amazonía* (Bolivian Amazon). For the context of this study, it is crucial to understand the Yungas' place in Bolivia's imagined "cultural geography." With that I refer to notions of "how cultural difference is spread over geographical space" (Wade 2010:16). In a crudely simplified account, Bolivia is often divided into the *altiplano* (associated with Aymara and Uru culture), the central valleys around Cochabamba and Sucre (associated with Quechua culture) and the Amazonian lowlands (associated with various indigenous groups of varying size, the largest being the Guaraní in the region around Santa Cruz). This highly schematic perspective is reflected in Bolivian school textbooks and government-sponsored tourism leaflets. It also informs a variety of political reforms, not least the distribution of special electoral districts for indigenous people *("circunscripciones especiales")* and the regionalized school curricula *("currículos regionalizados")* that are developed by the Ministry of Education (for details see chapters 7 and 9).

Within this classificatory scheme, the Yungas have until very recently not been associated with any particular ethnic group, indigenous language or culture. Although sometimes referred to as an "Aymara culture stronghold" (Klein 2003:52) due

4 More generally – beyond the provinces this study is concerned with – the term Yungas or Yunkas (derived from Aymara and Quechua *yunka* – hot) can also refer to an ecoregion including the regions of Huánuco y La Convención in Peru, as well as Inquisivi, Larecaja and Vandiola in Bolivia (Klein 2003; Spedding 1994).

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to the influx of Aymara settlers beginning in the 16th century, the Yungas are not conceived of as the place where Aymara 'originally' belong or where 'Aymara culture' is to be found. This tension is reflected for example in the title of a publication from the 1970s headed "*Yungas: los 'otros' aymaras*: *Diagnóstico económico-socio-cultural de Sud Yungas*" (Equipo CIPCA 1976).[5] By addressing Aymara in the Yungas as "the other Aymara" *("los 'otros' aymaras")* the study discursively separates them from the Aymara population in the highlands, positing that the Aymara in the Yungas may speak the Aymara language, but do not exhibit 'Aymara cultural features' like in the highlands. In a similar fashion, in a more recent edited volume on "regional identities" *("identidades regionales")* (Arnold 2009) the Yungas are described as a region where "indigenous identity has not developed a lot, due to the multiethnic characteristics of the population since the distant past" (Arnold 2009:598 my translation).[6]

The multiethnic make-up of the Yungas is explained by the fact that since colonial times the region has been marked by a constant influx of migrants that intensified as the coca producing *haciendas* (large agricultural estates) kept expanding (Klein 2003:51–52). Chronic labor shortages on the countless coca *haciendas* of the region sparked the migration of mostly Aymara-speaking people from the highlands. The incessant demand for labor in the coca economy also explains why African slaves were brought to the region. According to some secondary sources (Bridikhina 1997:4–5), black slaves began to be brought to the Yungas in the 17th century, but official records referring to black slaves in the Yungas are only known from the 18th century onward (Léons 1972:287–288). The Afrobolivian and Aymara settlers displaced the various nomadic indigenous groups (Lecos and Mosetenes) that had populated the Yungas before, generically referred to as c*hunchus* by people in the Yungas (Spedding 2009:432).

As I will detail in chapter 4, there is a strong discourse on *Yungueño* identity, yet this identity is conceived of mostly without reference to ethnicity or indigenous culture. Instead, coca production and the ensuing identification as *cocaleros* (coca growers) is seen as fundamental for constructing regional identity (Spedding 2009; Spedding and Colque 2003). The representation of the Yungas as a multi-ethnic society where indigenous ethnic identities only play a very limited role for collective identification has only recently been challenged. Interestingly, it was not the Aymara majority 'discovering their indigenous culture' or foregrounding their ethnic identity. The only ethnic group *(etnía*; or *pueblo* in the terminology of the Constitution) that is considered to be distinguishable in the Yungas is in fact *el pueblo Afroboliviano*. Although not 'indigenous' according to the prevailing common-sense

5 "Yungas: The 'other' Aymara: Economic-socio-cultural diagnostic of Sud Yungas."

6 *"[...] no se ha desarrollado mucho la identidad indígena, debido a las características multiétnicas de estas poblaciones desde tiempos remotos."*

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definition of indigeneity in Bolivia that is related to pre-Columbian origins, Afrobolivian mobilization and official recognition by the state have led to the positioning of Afrobolivians as the most representative population of the Yungas in terms of identity and 'culture.'[7] This is, however, a very recent phenomenon and it is important to keep in mind that ethnic identity is generally regarded as secondary in the Yungas.

Afrobolivians in colonial and early republican society

Historical studies have since the 1960s unearthed a good deal of information on the presence of Afrobolivians in the country, focusing on a variety of aspects. Initially, historians set out to reconstruct black slavery in Bolivia (Crespo R. 1977; Portugal Ortiz 1977; Wolff 1964). These studies showed that due to its geographical location and the abundance of indigenous labor, slaves and slave labor did not play a fundamental role in the economy and society of the regions that would later become Bolivia. Bringing slaves to Potosí, Charcas (the contemporary Sucre) or La Paz through the ports of Callao and later Buenos Aires involved an arduous journey of several weeks through rough terrain and difficult climates, which made slaves a very expensive commodity in colonial Charcas. Colonial officials thus preferred to employ indigenous labor and black slaves were employed mostly in the households of rich urban families, as well as in the *Casa de la Moneda* – the colonial mint – in Potosí where they worked in the foundry.[8] Further studies have focused on slaves in urban contexts, mainly as domestic workers (Bridikhina 1995a; Bridikhina 1995b), and on slave labor in a wine-producing region in Chuquisaca (Aillón Soria 2005). More recently, and through a focus on social history, the relations of black slaves with other groups and the circumstances of their daily life in colonial society have been approached by a series of fascinating studies painting a vivid picture of colonial society that complicates one-dimensional accounts of colonial slavery. The authors point out instances of "negotiations of identities of the Afrodescendant population within the judicial system" *("negociación identitaria de la población afrodescendiente ante la justicia")* (Revilla Orías 2013a), as well as of the "adaptation, agency and fugitive action" of slaves (Gutiérrez Brockington 2000; see also Gutiérrez Brockington 2006). What is more, they shed light on a variety of Afro-indigenous encounters on

7 Accounting for this shift and its implications is a topic that runs throughout this book. Local concepts of Afrobolivian autochthony and the processes accounting for this shift will be analyzed in detail in chapters 3, 6, 8 and 9.

8 It is a common misconception in Bolivia that black slaves worked in the mines in Potosí. In fact, they were not employed as miners, but, allegedly because colonial officials valued their knowledge in the manipulation of metal, worked in small numbers in the colonial mint (Spedding 2009).

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the level of individuals and families (Revilla Orías 2011; Revilla Orías 2015), destabilizing notions of the Spanish colonial *casta* system being characterized by rigid group boundaries (cf. Albiez-Wieck 2017; O'Toole 2012).[9]

Paola Revilla Orías (Revilla Orías 2014a) has furthermore studied the situation of slaves after Bolivia's formal declaration of Independence in 1825, pointing out that, the liberal ideals of the Independence Movement notwithstanding, slavery legally persisted in Bolivia until 1851. For the 19th and early 20th centuries, however, the historical records become increasingly scarce (Revilla Orías and Cajías de la Vega 2017:42). This also has to do with the fact that after the legal abolition of slavery, there was hardly any official language referring to Afrobolivians that would make it possible to consistently reconstruct the circumstances of their lives from historical documents (Revilla Orías 2014a:238). One of the few articles addressing the situation of former slaves in Bolivia during the second half of the 19th century analyzes the situation in the *haciendas* of the Yungas. According to Eugenia Bridikhina's findings, black slaves were employed only by the wealthiest *hacienda* owners *(hacendados)* of the Yungas, supplementing indigenous labor on the estates. After the abolition of slavery in 1851, and given the fact that alternative labor arrangements had long existed for the indigenous workers on the *hacienda*, the *libertos* (freed slaves) were quickly incorporated as *peones* on the *haciendas*. As *peones*, they received a small plot of land in usufruct in exchange for their labor on the *haciendas*' land (Bridikhina 1997). Bridikhina reports that, at least for some time after the abolition of slavery and on *haciendas* with a significant number of black *peones*, there was a specific position of authority reserved for black people called *capitán*. Their functions, similar to the indigenous *jilacatas*, were to serve as the representative of the *hacienda* owner in front of the *peones* and to coordinate the workforce at the will of the owner or the administrator *(mayordomo)*. According to a census of the Yungas dated 1883, black people (referred to as *morenos*, lit.: brown) made up an average of about 7-8 percent of the population in the province of Nor Yungas. Looking at smaller administrative units *(cantones)*, the highest concentration of *morenos* could be found in *cantón Mururata*, where they made up roughly 45 percent of the population. In absolute numbers, however, even in Mururata, only 324 *morenos* (out of a total of 734 inhabitants) were counted.[10] However, the fairly small numbers of former slaves notwithstanding, the Yungas were to become the only region in Bolivia with a discernible Afrobolivian presence until today. In all other places with a proven historical presence of Afrobolivians, they 'disappeared.' This process

9 For reasons of space, I cannot not detail any of this interesting work here. For a recent and timely overview see the work of Bolivian historians Paola Revilla Orías and Fernando Cajías (Revilla Orías and Cajías de la Vega 2017).

10 Bridikhina (1997) cites the following figures: *cantón Pacallo*, 56 *morenos* (total population 536), *cantón Mururata*, 324 *morenos* (total population 734), *cantón Coroico*, 130 *morenos* (total population 5,335), vice *cantón Coripata*, 315 *morenos* (total population 3,806).

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is mostly explained with reference to migration and miscegenation (Aillón Soria 2005; Gutiérrez Brockington 2006). There are also no further accounts of Afrobolivian social organization or cultural practices – in the Yungas or elsewhere – until the second half of the 20th century when references to *la cultura negra* resurfaced in accounts limited to the Yungas (Pizarroso Cuenca 1977).

Before I focus on the situation of Afrobolivians in the Yungas in the 20th century, there is another body of historically oriented literature that has to be addressed. Important contributions in terms of reconstructing Afrobolivian history also came from within the Afrobolivian community, closely linked to the efforts to revitalize certain Afrobolivian cultural practices and mobilize politically (for details see chapter 8). Most important in this regard is the work of Juan Angola Maconde, an Afrobolivian economist (by training) and historian/ethnographer/linguist/activist (by vocation). His ethnographically and historically oriented contributions are explicitly positioned in order to overcome the 'invisibility' of Afrobolivians in Bolivian historiography and are often concerned with contributions *(aportes)* that Afrobolivians have made to Bolivian society and that have been neglected and obscured in 'official historiography' (Angola Maconde 2001; Angola Maconde 2010). In this context, Angola Maconde is mainly interested in highlighting the contributions Afrobolivians made to the Bolivian economy (as slaves and workers), but also their service as soldiers in various armed conflicts – for example in the rebellion of Tupac Katari in 1781, the wars for independence from Spain in the early 19th century and the Chaco War *(Guerra del Chaco)* in the 1930s (Angola Maconde 2001; Angola Maconde 2010).

Haciendas, the National Revolution and land reform in the Yungas

Unfortunately, the literature is mostly silent on the situation of Afrobolivians in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Therefore, it is hard to account for the 150 years between 1800 and 1950 in detail and we can only deduce how Afrobolivians lived from what we know from later sources. As Bridhikina's (1997) isolated account suggests, former slaves were swiftly integrated into the general workforce of the Yungas *haciendas* and lived there somewhat isolated form the rest of Bolivian society until the 1950s. With the exceptions of some accounts on Afrobolivian soldiers fighting in the Chaco War between Bolivia and Paraguay from 1932-1935 (Angola Maconde 2007), there are no hints at a significant presence of Afrobolivians beyond the Yungas.

In 1952, Bolivia witnessed one of the most profound social revolutions on the American continent, the *Revolución Nacional* (National Revolution) (Klein 2003:209). Backed mostly by peasant militias from the valleys around Cochabamba and miners from the *altiplano*, the *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR)* seized power from a political and economic elite dominated by the mining oligarchy and large

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landowners. The mines were nationalized, universal suffrage was declared and the Revolution was followed by a large scale land reform in 1953 that dissolved the large land holdings of the *hacendado* elite in all regions of Bolivia, including the Yungas. Adopting the principle of *"la tierra es para quién la trabaja"* – "the land to those who work it" (de Mesa, Gisbert, and Mesa Gisbert 2008:513), the MNR's land reform freed the *peones* from their obligation to work on the estates of the landowners and distributed the parcels that had been occupied in usufruct to the peasants (Malloy and Thorn 1971). Afrobolivian and indigenous *peones* thus became small landowners and the former *haciendas* became *comunidades*, organized in peasant unions *(sindicatos)* under the tutelage of the MNR. The consequences of the revolution and land reform in the Yungas were enormous. The former *peones*, now small landowners, were freed from many of the obligations tying them to the rural estates – both physically and economically. The MNR also pushed for rural education, building schools and sending teachers to all *comunidades* – something the *hacendados* had always actively discouraged. Taken together, the land reform, rural education and political enfranchisement (through universal suffrage and *sindicato* organization) changed the face of the Yungas significantly (McEwen 1975a). The land reform furthermore laid the foundation for another development that came to be of paramount importance starting in the 1970s and 1980s: migration. As the plots of land distributed to each household were often not enough to support the households of all the children, many younger *Yungueños*, Afrobolivians and Aymara alike, migrated to the cities and to newly established areas of colonization in the lowlands, mainly Caranavi and Alto Beni (Léons and Léons 1971).

The post-Revolutionary developments and their impact on rural society in Bolivia received a good deal of scholarly attention and are thus a fairly well-studied subject (Kelley and Klein 1981; Malloy and Thorn 1971; Muratorio 1969; Pearse 1972; for the Yungas: Equipo CIPCA 1976; Equipo CIPCA 1977; Heath 1972; Léons 1966; Léons 1967; Léons 1972; Léons and Léons 1971). The focus of these studies is the impact of revolution and land reform on *peasants* and little attention has been paid to ethnic, cultural or racial differentiations beyond the dichotomy of white/*mestizo* landowner vs. indigenous/black peasant. With this focus on the class aspects of identity and social stratification, these studies mirror the Bolivian intellectual and political mainstream of the time that sought to incorporate indigenous people *(indios)* as citizens by way of their de-indianization, converting them into *campesinos* (peasants) (Stefanoni 2010). In fact, the use of the term *indio/a* was banned from official usage and the educational reform put great emphasis on inculcating the Spanish language and 'modern,' 'national' values to the people in the countryside (Luykx 1999).

The few studies that did make reference to Afrobolivians (referred to by that stage as *morenos/as, negros/as* or *negroes*, respectively), all emphasized that their class identity as peasants by far trumped their sense of ethnoracial belonging (Equipo

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CIPCA 1976; Equipo CIPCA 1977; Léons 1966; Léons 1972). Studying the Sud Yungas town of Chicaloma, anthropologist William Léons (Léons 1972) describes the overarching tendency that the most relevant distinction within the community is that between peasants (*negros* [black people] and *indios* [indigenous]) and *mistis* (the Hispanic section consisting of *mestizos* and *blancos* [whites] who mostly worked in trade and as shopkeepers). To differences between *indios* and *negros* he only attributes a secondary role. Consequently, blackness and indigeneity are not analyzed in relation to each other, but much rather in terms of their relationship to *misti* identity and lifestyle. This view is also put forth by Alison Spedding in her more recent analyses of Sud Yungas communities (Spedding 1994). Cultural differences and social stratification, mainly expressed by the unequal distribution of political power and economic wealth, are approached by focusing on the distinction between *misti* and peasants, hardly discussing the relationship between *negro* and *indio* (see also: Equipo CIPCA 1976; Equipo CIPCA 1977). Although Léons (Léons 1972) mentions slight differences between *negros* and *indios* when it comes to land tenure and general income, he repeatedly stresses that the bigger and more significant cleavage is that separating those groups from the 'Hispanic section' that monopolized political influence, economic power and social prestige to a large extent.[11] Léons also stresses that acculturation is equally perceived as an important means to gain upward mobility by *indios* as well as *negros*. He reports that *negros* expressed little or no interest in cultural traits considered specifically Afrobolivian and even explicitly referred to *saya* as a "stupidity from the past" ("*una estupidez del pasado*" [Léons 1974:171]). Moreover, *negros* pursued accelerated acculturation through interracial marriage in order to "make the race disappear" ("*hacer perder la raza*" [Léons 1974:174]). He affirms that in light of the absolutely small numbers of *negros* in Chicaloma, interracial marriage, "would appear to be an effective [strategy]" and he speculates that in two or three generations, through marriage with non-black people, the offspring of "very dark grandparents" would be indistinguishable from the bulk of rural Bolivians (Léons 1972:176). In light of the reduced interest in Afrobolivian culture, the growing economic and political integration after the land reform and the declining importance of endogamy among *negros*, Léons concludes that *negros* in Chicaloma have been transformed from a "culturally, racially, and socially distinct" group into to a group that is now mainly defined by racialized difference (Léons 1972:284). Yet this racialized difference is highly visible and, interracial marriages notwithstanding, not as easily manipulable as dress, language or occupation, which he considers to

11 In the context of my fieldwork in Cala Cala and Nogalani between 2014 and 2017, references to *mistis* and/or *mestizos* did not play an important role in local accounts of social stratification and difference. In the local context, distinctions were made mainly between Afrobolivians (*"Afros"*) and Aymara and the terms *mestizo* or *misti* were not used to describe the society of the Yungas (for details see chapter 3).

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be the main referents for the identification of *indios*. Thus he considers it unlikely that distinctions between *indios* and *negros* would completely disappear and give way to a social organization exclusively marked by vertical stratification (i.e. the difference between *mistis* and peasants).

From approximately the same time as Léons' account comes one of the few widely known publications on 'Afrobolivian culture' before the 1990s. Arturo Pizarroso Cuenca's *"La Cultura Negra in Bolivia"* (Pizarroso Cuenca 1977) neatly reflects the attitude of Bolivian intellectuals and politicians with regard to indigenous culture and processes of acculturation. Reflecting the spirit of the time that saw the disappearance of the 'traditional customs' of indigenous rural Bolivians as an inevitable – and necessary – step in the efforts to modernize the country, Pizarroso Cuenca describes Afrobolivian 'traditions' on the verge, as he sees it, of their obliteration. Yet acculturation and increasing interracial marriage did not produce results that were as straightforward as the author predicted. Despite acculturative pressures, interracial marriages and massive migration, Afrobolivian cultural and phenotypical differences did not disappear. The same is true for collective identification as Afrobolivians, which was not completely absorbed by peasant *(campesino)* affiliation. To the contrary, the 1980s saw an unprecedented upsurge in expressions of Afrobolivian 'culture' in a fundamentally changing political and intellectual climate.

Cultural revitalization and emerging ethnic politics in the multicultural age

The revolutionary MNR government was ousted from power in a military coup in 1964 and the peasant *sindicatos* were coopted by the government by way of the (in)famous *pacto militar-campesino* (military-peasant pact) that secured the power of the military in the countryside through a rigid system of vertical patronage and political clientelism (Klein 2003:223–225; de Mesa, Gisbert, and Mesa Gisbert 2008:534). Political opposition and unrest – including, among various protests and movements, the globally famous campaign of Ernesto "Ché" Guevara in Bolivia – were met with violence and repression (de Mesa, Gisbert, and Mesa Gisbert 2008:535–540). In the Yungas, as elsewhere in Bolivia, the emerging emancipatory politics were stifled by military rule and *mestizo* political brokers with ties to the ruling military were primarily in control of the fate of the population (for an excellent overview of Bolivian politics after 1952 see: Dunkerley 1984). The political climate changed only in the 1980s when, after almost twenty years of military rule, countless coups and an ever-growing involvement in the global drug industry, Bolivia formally returned to democracy. Plagued by foreign debts, hyperinflation, government corruption and a devastated economy, the governments in the 1980s and early 1990s took radical measures, applying a series of controversial politi-

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cal and economic reforms. Under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and initially advised by Jeffery Sachs, markets were liberalized, government spending was cut and the state-owned mining enterprises were privatized – with enormous consequences for large parts of the population (Gill 2000).

Accompanying the neoliberal restructuring of the economy, Bolivia adopted an important series of political reforms as well. In 1994, the Constitution was radically changed, declaring Bolivia to be "multiethnic" and "pluricultural," recognizing indigenous rights. The constitutional reform was accompanied by the *Ley de Participación Popular* (LPP), Bolivia's take on decentralization (Postero 2006) and educational reform, introducing bilingual education for indigenous groups and promoting respect for indigenous languages and values in the education system (Van Cott 2000). These reforms were meant to respond to the growing demands of indigenous groups claiming autonomy, land rights, respect for their cultures and languages, and an end to discrimination and disenfranchisement (Van Cott 2005).[12] They were also influenced by international developments such as the promulgation of ILO Convention 169, which Bolivia was one of the first countries to ratify in 1991.

Afrobolivians entered the scene of multicultural Bolivia through performance. Sparked by the efforts of a group of students and with the decisive support of certain key cultural and political brokers, the Afrobolivian dance and song genre *saya* became the vehicle for cultural revitalization and political mobilization (Busdiecker 2009b; Rossbach de Olmos 2007). I will detail this process and its implications in subsequent chapters. For the moment, suffice it to say that the 'rediscovery' of Afrobolivian culture and the popularity *saya* achieved in the 1990s and the early 2000s not only fundamentally altered they way Afrobolivians perceived of their 'culture,' identity, ethnoracial belonging and the general features of their "groupness" (Brubaker 2002), but also sparked an unprecedented rise in scholarly and media interest in Afrobolivians. Building on the pioneering work of ethnomusicologist Robert Templeman (Templeman 1995; Templeman 1998), who documented the circumstances of its revitalization, various studies have focused on different aspects of *saya*: its musical characteristics (Quispe 1994); its relation to Bolivian folklore and heritage (Bigenho 2002; Céspedes 1993; Rossbach de Olmos 2007; Sigl and Mendoza Salazar 2012); its role in Afrobolivian history (Sánchez Canedo 2010; Sánchez Canedo 2011); its role as a tool for communication (Rey 1998); and its importance for

12 For reasons of space, I cannot discuss the vast literature on indigenous mobilizations in Bolivia (for an overview see: Canessa 2005; for the period before the National Revolution in 1952: Gotkowitz 2008; for the postrevolutionary period: Dunkerley 1984; for the 1990s: Postero 2006; Ströbele-Gregor, Hoffman, and Holmes 1994; for comparative perspectives on Latin America: Jackson and Warren 2005; Postero and Zamosc 2004; Van Cott 2005; Yashar 2005).

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political mobilization (Busdiecker 2009b; Komadina and Regalsky 2016; Lisocka-Jaegermann 2010; Rossbach de Olmos 2011), and as an expression of oral history (Ballivián 2014; Revilla Orías 2013b). *Saya* has also been the main subject of a series of audio-visual documentaries (Centro Pedagógico y Cultural "Simón I. Patiño" 1998a) and countless journalistic accounts – too many to cite even a fraction of them here.

The most ethnographically grounded full-length monograph on Afrobolivians from this period is the work of Sara Busdiecker (Busdiecker 2007), who has conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Tocaña, an Afrobolivian village in the Nor Yungas province. Tocaña is often represented – by Afrobolivian activists, as well as the media – as the most 'authentic,' 'traditional' and 'representative' Afrobolivian community. Nevertheless, Busdiecker asserts that even though Tocaña is often represented as the 'typical' Afrobolivian community, it is in fact in many regards rather atypical: it is the only *comunidad* in the Yungas where Afrobolivians are a demographic majority, which has consequences for the way blackness is perceived, represented and talked about on the one hand and for relations with non-Afrobolivians on the other (Busdiecker 2007:163). From the perspective of Tocaña, she argues that although Tocaña's residents display a great deal of socio-cultural similarities with non-Afrobolivians, there are important instances of them "being Bolivian differently" (Busdiecker 2007:88) by virtue of their blackness. She points out the seminal importance of *saya* for "performing blackness into the nation" (Busdiecker 2007:165) and has found expressive culture to be the aspect most commonly foregrounded by *Tocañeros* with regard to their blackness. *Saya*, as well as some other musical genres, is at the core of what people consider *"lo nuestro"* ("ours") and most important in determining what is distinctive about Afrobolivians (Busdiecker 2007:145). Moreover, certain marriage customs, locally known as *matrimonio negro*, and the funerary rite *mauchi* are cited as elements distinctive of Afrobolivians and although most of these cultural practices had already fallen out of use at the time of Busdiecker's research, they live on "in memory and oral history" and are part of *Tocañeros'* "narratives of blackness" (Busdiecker 2007:204). Her approach is characterized by embracing blackness as a relevant and consequential category of social differentiation in the Yungas quite uncritically. Moreover, she analytically separates the discourses of emerging ethnic politics and related state discourses on multicultural diversity from the local context by treating them in a separate chapter under the rubric of "representations of blacks and blackness arising from non-blacks" (Busdiecker 2007:230). This perspective is problematic since Tocaña has been an important hotspot of cultural revitalization and emerging Afrobolivian politics since the late 1980s and the rural community with the closest ties to the urban movement (see for example: Centro Pedagógico y Cultural "Simón I. Patiño" 1998a; Komadina and Regalsky 2016; Rey 1998; Templeman 1998). In my view, she gives nationally circulating discourses too little credit for the shifting local meanings of blackness

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in Tocaña. At the same time, she understates the importance of Tocaña's particularities as key references for the urban movement and the notions of Afrobolivian 'culture' it propagated (see my remarks on the Tocaña bias in chapter 7).

From multiculturalism to plurinationality

In an unprecedented election in 2005, Evo Morales and the *Movimiento al Socialismo* party (MAS) rose to power and set out to fundamentally change the country through what they refer to as *"el proceso de cambio"* (the process of change). Morales' election was preceded by years of civil unrest, violent repression and political turmoil (Kohl and Farthing 2006). Immediately after taking office in early 2006, the Morales government convened elections for a Constituent Assembly that started developing a new constitution in Sucre in mid-2006.[13] Through this constitutional reform, Bolivia was re-founded as the Plurinational State of Bolivia in 2009. As the sociologist and current Bolivian vice president, Álvaro García Linera (García Linera 2009:7), has argued, "it is not the same to define the state as plurinational as to define the society as pluricultural" *("No es lo mismo definir al Estado como plurinacional que a la sociedad como pluricultural").* A plurinational state – according to García Linera – moves beyond the mere recognition of the diversity of society by making a "diversity of institutionalities and practices of the indigenous peasant world" *("una diversidad de institucionalidades y prácticas del mundo indígena campesino")* (García Linera 2009:13f) an important part of the "machine of political power" *("máquina de poder político")* (García Linera 2009:7). Whereas the "monocultural, monolingual, monoinstitutional" state – even in times when society was already officially acknowledged to be multicultural – only served the interests of non-indigenous national elites and transnational capital, the Plurinational State is represented as the institutional counterpart to a multicultural and pluri-ethnic society (García Linera 2008:13).

For Afrobolivians, the stakes in Bolivia's re-foundation process were high, as it represented a very immediate and palpable opportunity to push for legal recognition in a climate favorable to such claims (see chapter 9 for details). In the years leading up to 2005, Afrobolivians had achieved a certain degree of visibility, mainly by way of performance in folklore, but were still largely denied recognition in political and legal contexts. For example, Afrobolivian efforts to include *"Afroboliviano/a"* as a category for self-identification in Bolivia's 2001 population census were denied on the grounds that they did not constitute a legally recognized collective subject. Similarly – and despite the personal commitment of Vice President Victor Hugo

13 For reasons of space, it is not possible to detail here the political and economic crisis leading up to Morales' election in 2005. For an overview see Kohl and Farthing (2006) and Shultz and Draper (2009).

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Cárdenas, who officially received Afrobolivians and listened to their demands in La Paz in 1994 – Afrobolivian activists felt excluded from spaces of political participation and decried ongoing discrimination and poor living conditions in most Afrobolivian communities.

Taking into consideration that Afrobolivian organizations had already begun adopting discourses centering on topics such as legal recognition as an ethnic group, it becomes clear why the political and social conjuncture of those years became so important. An Afrobolivian activist from Cochabamba once very neatly summarized two fundamental aspects and achievements of Afrobolivian mobilization during those times by saying:

> "With the Constituent Assembly, the results of this, after being there days, weeks, months in Sucre, fighting, it's that we have achieved that in the Constitution the terminology and the rights and all those things are included, right? I think that this was already a big step. And the second transcendental step for me particularly – because I know this fight from very close – was that Jorge [Medina] was able to be part of this new political conjuncture. Because that allows us visibility, in the eyes of the state, in the eyes of society, that is what we lack, you could say, the Afrobolivian community."[14]

As can be discerned from the quote above, the importance lies in the recognition of Afrobolivians and their rights within the Plurinational Constitution ("we achieved that the terminology and the rights are included"), as well as in the inclusion of concrete Afrobolivian actors in spaces of decision making within the Plurinational State ("that Jorge [Medina] was able to be part of this new political conjuncture"). From this perspective, the plurinational promise of recognition and empowerment seems to have been achieved for Afrobolivians – at least in the particular moment this statement was made in 2012.

However, this rather positive assessment of the plurinational conjuncture made by an individual activist, as well as Garcia Linera's remarks on plurinationality cited above, require some qualifications. As for Afrobolivian activists, not all share the optimistic view on recent political developments. As my analysis of activism in chapters 8 and 9 shows, there is considerable debate among Afrobolivian activists and within organizations concerning the general scope, as well as the specifics of Afrobolivian participation and empowerment in plurinational Bolivia. Secondly,

14 *"Ya con la asamblea constituyente los resultados de esto después de estar días, semanas, meses ahí en Sucre peleando, es que logramos que se incluya la, en la Constitución la terminología y los derechos y todas estas cosas, ¿no? Creo que eso ya era un paso grande, y el segundo paso transcendental para mí particularmente porque conozco muy de cerca toda esta pelea, es que Jorge [Medina] ha podido ser parte de esta nueva coyuntura política. Porque esto nos permite la visibilización, frente al Estado, frente a la sociedad, es lo que nos falta digamos, la comunidad afro."*

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and with regard to the straightforward official rhetoric on plurinationality represented by Garcia Linera's statements, recent analyses of Bolivia's political conjuncture suggest that the situation is rather more complex and that the turn to plurinationality has produced contradictory results. Although Bolivia's plurinational model has been widely celebrated – much in the same vein as in the abovementioned statements – as being a fundamental step towards introducing indigenous values and logics in matters of governance, jurisprudence and economic policy (Acosta 2015; Escobar 2010; Schilling-Vacaflor, Brand, and Radhuber 2012) there are also various voices (Albro 2010a; Canessa 2012a; Postero 2017) pointing out the limitations and inherent contradictions of the MAS-led *proceso de cambio.*

Bret Gustafson (2009) offers a concise genealogical sketch of the concept of plurinationality (plurinationalism in his words) and traces it back to Ecuadorian indigenous movements from whence it "percolated upward from the grassroots" and "filtered downward through transnational movement debate" (Gustafson 2009:999) all over the Andes. He differentiates plurinationality from neoliberal multiculturalism, which, in his view, "sought to manage difference and call on the market to solve redistributive problems while depoliticizing deep historical inequalities". Plurinationality, on the other hand, "speaks of robust redistributive social rights rooted in a strong state alongside equally robust indigenous rights" (Gustafson 2009: 991). In Bolivia, plurinationality was first invoked in the 1980s by the largely Quechua and Aymara peasant unions and also influenced indigenous movements in the Bolivian lowlands. In the wake of demands for constitutional reform at the turn of the millennium, discourses of plurinationality soon became a fundamental part of the *Pacto de Unidad's* political agenda.[15] Eventually, plurinationality was also taken up by the MAS party as a part of their agenda and discursive repertoire. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the MAS party's discursive shift towards plurinationality was fairly recent (Gustafson 2009: 1003). That also might explain, among other factors, why the Plurinational Constitution that was eventually passed

15 The *Pacto de Unidad* (Pact of Unity) is an alliance of indigenous, peasant, and workers' organizations officially formed in 2004. It represents the core of *CONALCAM (Coordinadora Nacional por el Cambio)* a pro-government alliance of social movements. The composition of the *Pacto de Unidad* has varied over time, but since 2006 it has generally consisted of the following organizations: *Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Markas del Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ)*, a federation of highland communities; the *Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas de Bolivia (CIDOB)*, a federation of lowland groups; the *Confederación Sindical de Colonizadores de Bolivia (CSCB)*, which has recently been renamed as *Confederación Sindical de Comunidades Interculturales Originarios de Bolivia - CSCIOB*, mostly highland peoples living in colonization zones in the lowlands; the *Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (CSUTCB)*, the peasant workers' federation, and the *Confederación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia – Bartolina Sisa (CNMCIOB-BS)*, the national federation of women peasant workers (for details see Postero 2017: chapter 2).

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in 2009 under the leadership of MAS, fell short of the many more radical demands originally made by indigenous activists and other social movements in the years leading up to the *Asamblea Constituyente*. Nancy Postero (2017: 57-60) contends that the New Bolivian Constitution reflects the proposal made by the *Pacto de Unidad* only in terms of recognizing the plurality and diversity of Bolivian society. With regard to the possibility of indigenous autonomy, juridical pluralism and shared decision-making, however, she concludes that the Constitution approved in 2009 is much less progressive. Moreover, reconciling and balancing indigenous rights with state sovereignty and economic 'development' has not been an easy task in political practice. For example, the government's focus on 'development' and its extractivist economic policies have been objects of severe criticism for not respecting the rights of the indigenous communities the Constitution purports to protect. This contradiction became apparent and received great international attention in the context of the so-called TIPNIS controversy in 2011, sparked by the government's plan to build a highway through indigenous territory and the fierce resistance against those plans by indigenous movements (for details see Postero 2017). What is more, and although Gustafson (2009: 1001) urges us to view plurinationality as a "dynamic process of transforming relationships" rather than as a "congealed model" (Gustafson 2009: 994) of ethnic autonomy or federalism, much of the state's intervention in plurinationality's name has had the taste of rather "crude territorial, […] political [and legal] fixing" (Gustafson 2009: 1001) of certain categories of identification. This tendency is exacerbated by the general conceptual perspective on indigeneity and ethnic difference that characterizes the New Bolivian Constitution. It has been criticized as too narrow and essentialist, privileging an imagined rural, pre-modern, collective indigenous subject and thus covering only a fraction of Bolivia's multiple and changing indigeneities (Albro 2006; 2007; 2010a; Canessa 2007; 2012a; 2018; Postero 2017).

Afrobolivians have received only very limited attention within these debates as scholars generally approach the multifaceted transformations observable in the country with a focus on indigenous people, both urban and rural (Albro 2010b; Lazar 2008; Postero 2017; Schavelzon 2012), or the growing importance of 'new middle classes' in the country (Pellegrini Calderón 2016; Shakow 2014). Afrobolivian communities and politics in plurinational Bolivia, as well as the transformations in the aftermath of recognition, have not been thoroughly studied to this date.[16] A few exceptions aside (Sturtevant 2013; 2017), recent contributions (beyond the works dedicated to Afrobolivian colonial history cited above) either summarize material

16 Significant recent contributions to the study of Afrobolivianity can be found the field of linguistics, where interest in Afrobolivian Spanish and its status as an Afro-Creole variant of Spanish has sparked considerable interest and debate (Lipski 2007; Lipski 2008; Lipski 2012; Pérez Inofuentes 2015; Sessarego 2011a; Sessarego 2011b; Sessarego 2014).

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already presented earlier (Angola Maconde 2010) or are fundamentally descriptive and documentary in nature (Ballivián 2015; Zambrana B. 2014). They are furthermore, in my view, often uneasily positioned at the boundary between research and activism, often blurring ethnographic descriptions with evocative speculations on 'African roots' and Afrobolivian cultural particularities (Angola Maconde 2000; in this regard see especially: Ballivián 2014).

My discussion of plurinational Afrobolivianity takes up the topics of the debates sketched above and places special emphasis on the processes of "legalizing" (French 2009) Afrobolivian identity in the context of plurinational reforms. An important focus of my study are the effects that static, essentialist and collectivist conceptualizations of indigeneity (and hence also Afrobolivianity) engender in political practice and in everyday contexts. Throughout this study, I analyze how those conceptualizations are engaged politically and deployed strategically, but also how they are re-negotiated and resisted. In political and legal terms, the processes I am concerned with are most clearly expressed in the widespread use and propagation of the concept of *el pueblo Afroboliviano*. Speaking of a single *pueblo* insinuates boundedness, internal homogeneity and a very clear sense of collectivity (see chapter 9 for details). This approach to Afrobolivianity, which is characteristic of Bolivia's plurinational moment, represents a decidedly new take on the question of Afrobolivian collectivity and identity. The discursive invocation and legal recognition of a single collective subject that becomes the basis for political and social enfranchisement – *el pueblo Afroboliviano* – poses new challenges for Afrobolivian political activism, but also for individuals engaging with their Afrobolivianity. Finally, it urges us to inquire into the question of what it means to be a *pueblo* (in the sense of the Constitution) and what consequences the rise of this concept and the related perspective on society has for our understanding of Afrobolivianity. This is especially important in contrast to the focus of earlier studies that I have summarized in this chapter and their take on Afrobolivianity. As I have shown, studies in the 1960s and 1970s found the economic and political changes engendered by the National Revolution and land reform in the 1950s to be the main framework of political action and social transformation. During those times, Afrobolivians faced great acculturative pressures and their engagement with society was marked by efforts at blending in racially, as well as culturally. The 1980s saw an increasing flow of Afrobolivian migrants arriving in urban contexts, as well as Bolivia's return to democracy, an upswell of indigenous mobilization and Bolivia's turn to multiculturalism and neoliberal structural reforms. Afrobolivian music and dance, emerging patterns of political mobilization and the sometimes conflicting relationships between urban and rural Afrobolivians became major topics during those times. Most recently, plurinational constitutional reform and the legal recognition of a collective Afrobolivian subject have added decisive new features to the debate. As the following chapters and my ethnography of Cala Cala show, all of the abovementioned

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topics continue to be of great importance for the articulation of Afrobolivianity – a set of processes that draws on a wide variety of sources and differs across contexts.

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