Chapter 1: Encountering Afrobolivianity

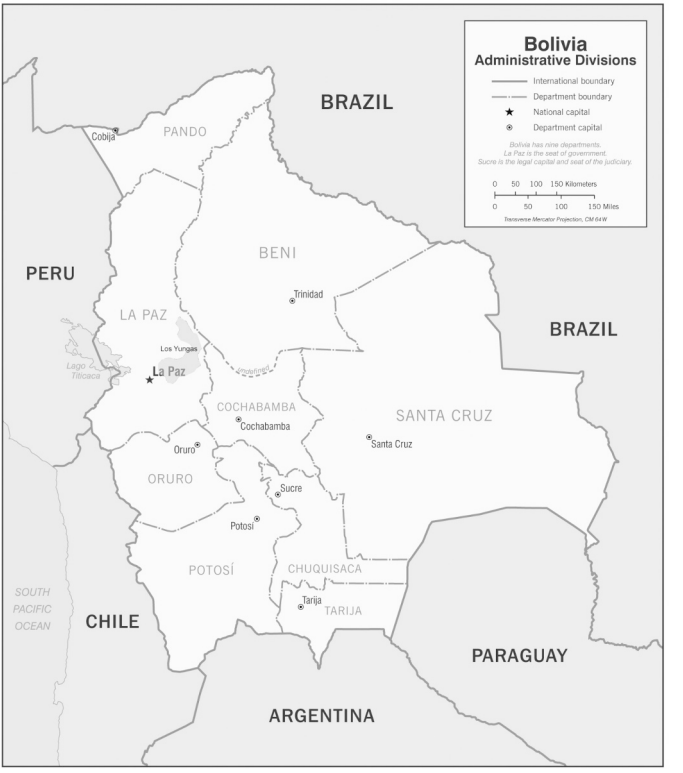
Some remarks on the particularities of Afrobolivian demography and social geography

In order to contextualize my ethnographic approach to Afrobolivianity and to understand how different aspects of the following descriptions of Afrobolivian cultural practices, political activism and social relations relate to each other, it is important to sketch the circumstances in which Afrobolivians live in the country. According to the National Population Census of 2012, there are about 16,000 people who self-identify as *Afrobolivianos*. Unfortunately, to this date, the *Instituto Nacional de Estadistica (INE)* has not published any data referring to the distribution of the roughly 16,000 Afrobolivians within the country, which makes it difficult to establish a clear-cut panorama of the demographic distribution of those identifying as Afrobolivians. What is more, Afrobolivian organizations have questioned the numbers presented by INE, arguing that their own estimates concerning the number of Afrobolivians are nearly twice as high (about 30,000).

It is very common to distinguish between Afrobolivians living in rural and urban contexts, although the divide is not as clear-cut as one might suspect. Speaking of rural versus urban Afrobolivians is mostly a way of differentiating between Afrobolivians living in the Yungas (a region on the eastern slopes of the Andes characterized by steep semitropical valleys, see chapter 2 for details) and Afrobolivians living in the larger cities of Bolivia, mainly La Paz, Santa Cruz, Cochabamba and, to a lesser extent, in Bolivia's constitutional capital Sucre (see figure 2).

However, the rural-urban divide overshadows important internal differences with regard to the Afrobolivian population of the Yungas, as well as with regard to the different urban experiences of Afrobolivians. In the Yungas, there are basically four types of settlement, located along a continuum from rural to urban in the regional context, although all four are considered rural (*campo*) from the perspective of La Paz or Santa Cruz. These types are: *comunidades* (lit. communities, in this sense of the word this refers to social, territorial, political and economic units organized in *sindicatos* (unions) and retraceable to former *haciendas*), *pueblos* (towns), *pueblos nuevos* (new towns, emerging after the abolition of *haciendas* in the 1950s)

Figure 2: Map of Bolivia (elaborated based on the CIA Map Bolivia Administrative)



and the *zonas de colonización* (agricultural colonization areas in the lowlands). The 'traditional' *pueblos* of the Yungas – Coroico (2,319 inhabitants) and Coripata (1,238) in the Nor Yungas province, as well as Irupana (1,949) and Chulumani (2,028) in the Sud Yungas province – predate Bolivian national independence and were founded in colonial times.[1] Those towns are nucleated settlements grouped around a central square *(plaza)* dominated by the church and the administrative buildings and are still the administrative centers of the homonymous administrative units called *municipios* (municipalities). They are also economically important as sites of trade and transportation, commerce and services. Especially before the National Revolution in 1952 and from the perspective of the peasants living in *comunidades* – for the most part dispersed settlements without much infrastructure – the towns were

1 Population figures according to the latest census of 2012 (see: www.ine.gob.bo [25/09/2018]).

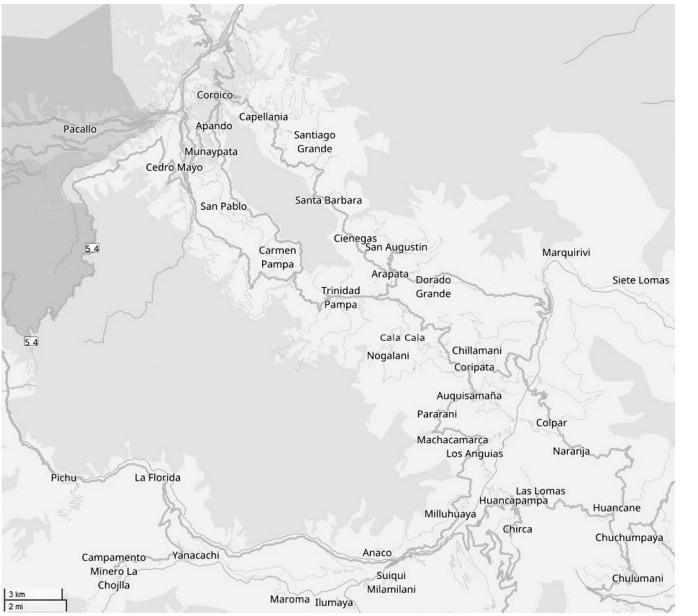
often already a space perceived as decidedly urban where most people do not make a living from working the land, but rather engage in trade or live off government salaries. To some extent, the traditional towns' importance has decreased through the foundation of the so-called *pueblos nuevos*, new peasant towns, emerging in the 1950s and 1960s in the aftermath of the land reform (Léons and Léons 1971). Especially in terms of trade and transportation, the new towns have gained a strong foothold in the Yungas and in some respects have even eclipsed traditional towns. The colonization zones around Caranavi (13,569 inhabitants) and Palos Blancos (5,478 inhabitants) have experienced rapid growth in population, receiving immigrants from the *altiplano*, as well as from the Yungas beginning in the 1960s (Loza and Méndez 1981). Thus what appears to be simply *los Yungas* or even more generically *el campo* (the countryside) when viewed from La Paz is in fact a highly heterogeneous space (see fig. 3).

In terms of Afrobolivian demography, there is also some variation: in Yungas *comunidades* and towns (old and new), Afrobolivians are usually a rather small minority, ranging from 5 to 15 percent of the population according to my estimates. In the colonization areas, albeit that there are no reliable numbers, the percentage of Afrobolivians seems to be even lower, and in all of Bolivia there is only one *comunidad* (Tocaña) and no town where Afrobolivians are the numerical majority. Therefore, the references to *"las comunidades Afrobolivianas en los Yungas"* ("the Afrobolivian *comunidades* in the Yungas") by Afrobolivian activists and also the Constitution are misleading. As will become clear in my discussion of Cala Cala, speaking of *"comunidad"* in the Yungas is (with the exception of Tocaña) not a reference to a strictly Afrobolivian collective (see chapters 3 and 4). Therefore, and this is especially important for my discussion of Afrobolivian political mobilization in chapters 8 and 9, there are also no exclusively Afrobolivian organizations in the Yungas that function as local actors in ethnic politics.

'Urban Afrobolivians' living in La Paz, Santa Cruz or Cochabamba are by no means a homogeneous group either. They can be distinguished, most importantly, by their migration history: there are recent migrants born and raised in the Yungas, as well as people whose parents or even grandparents migrated in the 1970s and people that settled in La Paz in the 1980s and recently moved to Santa Cruz. Moreover, it also makes a difference if people live in La Paz or in Santa Cruz. While La Paz is only a three to four hour bus ride away from most Yungas *comunidades* and *pueblos*, travelling to Santa Cruz means at least an additional twenty hours by bus and significant costs. Therefore, in La Paz there are many more individuals living intermittently in Yungas *pueblos* and *comunidades* and the urban La Paz, whereas migration to Santa Cruz usually involves a more thorough spatial separation from the Yungas.

Although there is, as we have seen, a lot of variation within the groups generally represented as rural and urban, there are also important categorical differen-

Figure 3: Map of towns and villages in the Yungas (© OpenStreet Map contributors; Terms: www.openstreetmap.org/copyright)



ces that explain the common juxtaposition of urban and rural Afrobolivians. Most strikingly, and very important in terms of how everyday life is experienced, Yungas residents are mainly peasants – producing coca, coffee, citrus fruit and rice. Some individuals in towns and *comunidades* have diversified their economic activities to include providing services like transportation, establishing little shops or engaging in mining enterprises. Yet their lives and social relations are shaped significantly by their peasant livelihood.[2] Urban residents, on the other hand, engage in a great number of different activities and are integrated into varying social networks of Afrobolivians and non-Afrobolivians alike. Some pursue high school and/or university education, some work in unskilled jobs, whereas others have achieved significant upward mobility and occupy qualified positions both in government offices and in private enterprises. The cities are also the center for a growing number of

2 Although the coca economy is marked by fairly particular dynamics (Léons and Sanabria 1997; Pellegrini Calderón 2016; Spedding 1994; Spedding 2004; Spedding and Llanos 1999) and hardly comparable to coffee and citrus fruit cultivation, from the perspective of most of my interlocutors, all this is eclipsed by the dichotomy of peasant vs. non-peasant.

professional activists/scholars with an Afrobolivian background. For most Afrobolivians the vast differences in lifestyle this divide entails eclipse all instances of internal differentiation and have become an important discursive device shaping their account of what being Afrobolivian means to them. Thus the juxtaposition of rural versus urban settings does occasionally shape certain arguments that I am making throughout this book. Yet I do not wish to imply that those settings are separate, unconnected spaces. In fact, it is the various connections among, between and beyond rural and urban communities and the networks that are spun by various actors that add an interesting level of complexity to negotiations of Afrobolivian collective identification and culture.

In order to illustrate the interconnectedness of contexts and the constant flow of people, concepts and discourses, it is revealing under which circumstances I first got to know Cala Cala, the place where I conducted the largest part of my fieldwork. Cala Cala is a former *estancia* (small agricultural estate) in the municipality of Coripata that was initially populated by Afrobolivian *peones* and was integrated into the larger *hacienda Nogalani* between the late 19th and early 20th century. Nogalani – one of the biggest coca producing estates in the Yungas – was inhabited by Aymara speaking *peones*. Since 1952, Cala Cala and Nogalani have formed a single *comunidad*. Although this entails many entanglements and a shared sense of community in many regards, *Cala Caleños* additionally express a very strong identification as an Afrobolivian collective, locally termed *"los Afros de Cala Cala."*

Arriving in Cala Cala

When I visited Cala Cala for the first time in 2014, I had already been engaged with different Afrobolivian organizations in La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz through several months of fieldwork as a graduate student in 2010 and 2012. I had also occasionally visited the Yungas before and was familiar with different settings of Afrobolivian reality. In 2014, before I came to Cala Cala and eventually decided that it would be a very productive field site for my study, I had spent some time in the provincial town of Coripata at the invitation of Martín Ballivián, an Afrobolivian activist and scholar whom I had met in Cochabamba in 2012. By the time of my visit, he was working in the public relations department at the municipal government of Coripata. He was always very eager to help with contacts and logistics for my research and established the contact in Cala Cala (where his mother was born) when I was in search of a rural field site for my dissertation project. On a Sunday afternoon we hired one of his friends to take us the approximately five kilometers to Cala Cala in his Toyota Minivan.

When we arrived in Cala Cala, Martín made the driver stop at certain houses and screamed out of the window that the 'meeting' he had told them about was

going to start and that everybody was to gather at the small village church. After inviting the residents in this way, we headed for the church and waited. Little by little people flocked in from different sides of the community and shortly after, Martín started conducting the meeting with about six Afrobolivian men present. He introduced me very briefly and announced that I would be given a chance at a later point in the meeting to explain my request. He then went on to inform the community members of his plans to include them in a cooperative housing project he had started with some residents of Coripata and which he intended to extend to the rural community of Cala Cala. He urged them to come up with a possible location for the houses and start working on obtaining a legal title for some stretches of land or request permission from the local union *(sindicato)* to use land that was considered 'collective property.' He cautioned those present not to speak too openly about the plans, since he feared that if "the others" *("los otros")* heard about them, they could obstruct his plans for the Afrobolivian people *("los Afros")*.

The Cala Cala residents started debating how, where and under what circumstances they could obtain a stretch of land in order to apply for the funding to build their houses. There was, some argued, the piece of uncultivated land called *el Matuasi*, right next to the densely overgrown ruins of the former *hacienda* house, which "as everyone knows" *("como todos saben")* was land that belonged to "them" *("es de nosotros")*. Yet it had already been decided to build an Afrobolivian community cultural center *(Casa Cultural Afro Cala Cala)* with funding from the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB) there. The area of wasteland where the actual ruins of the former *hacienda* mansion were located would be an option, somebody argued. This idea, however, was met with general rejection. First of all, the ruins as physical remains of historical *hacienda* times were to be exploited as a tourist attraction in the *Casa Cultural* scheme; second, and even more importantly, "the ones from above" *("los de arriba")* would never give up such a large area of uncultivated land in the middle of the community. Martín proposed seeking out the offspring of the former *hacienda* owner, who was said to still own a legal title to at least some of the land surrounding the community. People nodded approvingly, yet nobody seemed to know how to go about approaching the family of the former landlords *(hacendados)* living in La Paz to ask them to sell or give up their land.

At this moment, Martín embarked on a passionate speech on how Afrobolivians have always been treated as "second class human beings" *("gente de segunda categoría")*, how the state and "the international community" *("la comunidad internacional")* "owes Afrobolivians" *("nos deben a los Afrobolivianos")* and how all this should be enough to demand both land and funding for building houses in rural Afrobolivian communities. He went on to lecture on "historical reparations" *("reparaciones históricas")* and how they should be implemented by the Bolivian government to remedy past injustices like "slavery" *("esclavitud")* and "exploitation" *("explotación")*. The com-

munity members mumbled approvingly and promised to see what could be done in order to obtain land for the housing project. They then shortly informed Martín about the progress of the IDB-financed *Casa Cultural* project and urged him to use his contacts at the municipal government *(alcaldía)* to speed up the issuing of an environmental certificate for the construction.

After all these issues had been discussed, it was my turn to explain my request to stay in the community and determine if it would be suitable as a field site for my study. I explained my request in the most general of terms, trying to avoid confronting the people with too much of my conceptual baggage at this stage. Martín, however, did not seem to share my reservations and 'clarified' that I was studying Afrobolivian communities and Afrobolivian 'culture' and was interested in visiting Cala Cala and getting to know its "traditions" *("tradiciones")*. If "traditions" was what I was interested in, said Víctor, one of the men there, then I should definitely visit and stay for the festivities on *Todos Santos*, and possibly there would also be a chance to witness a *saya* performance by the community members. He offered to let me stay at his house and we agreed to be in touch in order to settle the details for my visit, which turned out to be the beginning of my longer term engagement with the community. In order to get a first sense of the community, we took a short tour of the surroundings, passed by the ruins of the *hacienda* mansion, the *Matuasi* and some coca fields. Our driver urged us to leave shortly after, since he had other plans for the day, and the meeting was dismissed and everybody went their separate ways.

As we were about to leave, we came across Juan Angola Maconde, a renowned Afrobolivian historian and activist. Besides his scholarly writing and editing, and leading an NGO in La Paz, he is also a very active community leader in his home village Dorado Chico, a small Afrobolivian hamlet on the hillside opposite Cala Cala. He told us – slightly out of breath – that he had walked all the way from Dorado Chico to collect signatures pressing for direct representation of Afrobolivians in the municipal board (see chapter 5). He explained that only if Afrobolivians joined forces now and collectively pushed for it could they hope for their "constitutional rights" *("derechos constitucionales")* to be put into practice. Martín told him to look for the community members at their houses and we took our leave.

As I wrote down this episode in my fieldwork diary later that night, I did not understand even a fraction of the implications that many of the comments, categorizations, histories and concepts would reveal to me later, after months of intensive fieldwork in and around Cala Cala. It was clear to me, though, that within a few hours, I had witnessed and even become part of a variety of processes that – in some way or another – bring Cala Cala's residents into contact with different ideas, discourses and practices, as well as with economic, political, and legal resources that circulate locally, nationally and transnationally. From a single short episode, it was later possible to discern a variety of individual actors (community residents,

regional administrative functionaries, urban activists, and anthropologists), organizations (*sindicato* [union], *alcaldía*, urban NGOs, transnational funding institutions [IDB], the Bolivian state) and their different projects (political mobilization, push for legal recognition, community development, and dissertation research). Along with actors and their projects appear certain discursive and conceptual formations (local concepts of community, difference and social groups, [international] development, community tourism, legal recognition, cultural difference, indigenous rights, slavery and reparation, discrimination and marginalization) as well as corresponding practices (holding meetings, writing applications, obtaining certificates, collecting signatures, mobilizing political favors, participant observation, and conducting interviews).

Researching Afrobolivianity in Cala Cala

My fieldwork in Cala Cala began with the episode described above and took place during two prolonged stays – one consisting of eight months between September 2014 and April 2015 and a second shorter stay of four months between February and May 2017. During this time, I participated in the daily activities of different households in Cala Cala, exploring life in the community through participant observation and innumerable informal conversations in a variety of contexts. I continuously visited the homes of all of Cala Cala's households, worked with them in the coca fields, shared public transportation to and from the *comunidad*, and met people in public gatherings like *sindicato* meetings, visits of technical or political commissions and the meetings accompanying the tourism project described in detail in chapter 10. The main research participants were members of two extended Cala Cala families with whom I lived and worked during my longer stays in the *comunidad*. They, in turn, introduced me to many other individuals and households in Cala Cala and numerous people from Nogalani, who occasionally also took me with them to their coca fields and with whom I participated in many public gatherings. Although I spent most of my days in the coca fields accompanied by groups of *comunarios* (varying in size and composition), I also met and engaged with people in other settings like the small store in the *comunidad*, the soccer field or the school courtyard.

To complement my findings from participant observation, I conducted a census of all the households in Cala Cala, gathering information on the number, age and gender of the residents, as well as on their relatives living elsewhere that maintain ties to Cala Cala. To corroborate the information on kinship I gathered through the census, I interviewed people in Cala Cala on the subject of their genealogy and drew up kinship diagrams in dialogue with them. The information gathered through those interviews was combined with insights concerning the history and demography

of the *comunidad* that I gathered by analyzing administrative documents pertaining to the *hacienda Nogalani* (discontinuously covering the years between 1920 and 1965 approximately). Those documents were provided to me by Afrobolivian activist and scholar Martín Ballivián who obtained them from a Coripata-based lawyer in 2014, published some facsimiles in his publication *"Somos Afrobolivianas Afrobolivianos"* (Ballivián 2015) and in 2017 entrusted the documents to me for further analysis. As will become clear in chapter 3, kinship – and how it relates to local history – is an important dimension of community and belonging, as well as a decisive category of collective identification in Cala Cala.[3]

Spending time in Cala Cala and participating in the daily chores of its inhabitants meant engaging a series of topics beyond Afrobolivian 'culture', collective identifications or identity politics. During my stays in the *comunidad*, I learned a great deal about regional history and economy, peasant livelihood and the cultivation and marketing of coca leaves. Furthermore, I dealt with topics such as migration and translocal sociality, as well as with the functioning of local *sindicato* politics. This enabled me to approach Afrobolivianity and engage with my Afrobolivian interlocutors by way of their interconnections with other contexts and frames, as well as through cultural and social practices beyond those considered 'Afrobolivian.' It naturally also meant engaging the non-Afrobolivian parts of the population and their experiences, views and opinions (see below).

Roles and perspectives in the field

Having been introduced to Cala Cala by a locally well-known Afrobolivian activist (at that time also a municipal officer in Coripata) with kinship ties to the community, and – as we have seen in the episode above – being presented as someone who is interested in "Afrobolivian culture" and "local traditions" marked my initial role in the field to a great extent. I would have definitely been perceived and treated differently had I approached the community in another way. This became clear to me when I met Rolando, a non-Afrobolivian resident of Nogalani, who handled the e-mail correspondence of *ADEPCOCA (Asociación Departamental de Productores de Coca*, the regional coca growers' association). He told me that he had brought foreigners to the community that were interested in studying coca cultivation and who had approached him through ADEPCOCA. My presence in the community, on the other hand, was from the beginning framed in a way that gave the category *Afroboliviano*

3 It must be noted, however, that kinship is not the principal focus of this study, neither empirically nor theoretically. Therefore, I do not engage with the whole range of methodological, conceptual and theoretical literature on the subject, but limit myself to a few key points relevant for my study of community and collective identifications in Cala Cala (see chapter 3).

paramount importance.[4] Yet even in the very first encounter with *"los Afros de Cala Cala,"* local concepts of community, culture and tradition beyond *Afroboliviano* had already come to the fore when Víctor mentioned *Todos Santos* as an important local tradition. As I later learned (see chapter 4), this tradition is in no way framed as Afrobolivian.

Although my association with the Afrobolivian households in the community remained important in accounting for my presence until the end of my fieldwork, there were important developments that helped unsettle and change my initial role. The most important aspect was the fact that I worked with people in the coca fields day in, day out over the course of several months. The coca fields are not only the most important site of everyday social interaction, but also the context in which notions of community beyond ethnoracial categorizations are most salient. Through participating in the often arduous tasks of weeding the fields and harvesting the leaves, I got to know a great number of people not directly associated with *"los Afros de Cala Cala."* I thus not only learned a lot about the community beyond *"lo Afro,"* but was also less strongly associated exclusively with *"los Afros,"* especially since the conversations I had during the day circled almost exclusively around coca cultivation. Since everybody in Nogalani has a lot to say about coca (production, consumption, marketing and political implications) this opened up opportunities to engage in conversation with a wide range of people. My presence in the coca fields earned me several invitations to visit people's houses, join them for the monthly *sindicato* meeting, share transportation to and from Coripata and La Paz, and become more and more dissociated from the focus on Afrobolivians. Of course, there were also factors reinforcing my association with *"los Afros,"* most notably the fact that I lived with two particular Afrobolivian families for most of my time in Cala Cala.

It is important, however, to highlight the fact that there was not one single role that I occupied in Cala Cala, but rather roles (in the plural) that were subject to change over time and also between situations, depending on the specific topics, the range of interlocutors and the formality/informality of the context. While I researched the make-up and the history of the community, I spoke to Afrobolivians and Aymara alike. Other than the few specific Afrobolivian projects (some meetings in the context of the tourism project, for instance), the contexts of participant observation were often not specific to Afrobolivians and largely devoid of any ethnoracial separation. Although my ethnography clearly and willfully parts from an Afrobolivian perspective, the voices of self-identified Aymara or *mestizo* people

4 In Cala Cala and other Afrobolivian communities this is not uncommon. In fact, even though the discourse around the alleged 'invisibility' of Afrobolivians is still widespread, the Afrobolivian parts of the Yungas population have recently received far more anthropological and media attention than the Aymara populations of the region.

from Nogalani and elsewhere play a significant role in my study. They shape many of my arguments, since they are a fundamental part of public interactions, official meetings and the great majority of documents that I write about and reflect upon. Most notably, their input and perspective is crucial for my discussion of the shared sense of belonging and identification as *comunarios* or *cocaleros Yungueños* that applies to Afrobolivians and Aymara alike (see chapters 3-5 for details).

Researching Afrobolivianity beyond Cala Cala

Beyond Cala Cala, I researched Afrobolivianity in a variety of contexts in order to enrich the local perspective and in order to contextualize my findings. During various fieldwork stays in Bolivia (beginning in 2010 and 2012 as a graduate student, as well as during very frequent travels from Cala Cala in 2014/15 and in 2017), I conducted and recorded over thirty interviews with Afrobolivian individuals in the cities of La Paz, Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. I also spoke to Afrobolivians in various towns and *comunidades* all over the Yungas including Coroico, Coripata, Tocaña, Dorado Chico and Chillamani (Nor Yungas) and Irupana, Chulumani, Chicaloma and Palos Blancos (Sud Yungas), as well as in Caranavi. Many of those individuals were leading activists who hold (or held at the time of the interview) a leadership position in an Afrobolivian organization or government institution. Others were regular members of Afrobolivian organizations or people I met through personal contacts. Additionally, I visited and participated in dozens of workshops over the course of seven years (from 2010 to 2017) and I was part of innumerable gatherings of Afrobolivian organizations, covering a range from National Afrobolivian Congresses with dozens of participants to small informal gatherings with only a handful of attendees. Very importantly, during some of the workshops, I benefitted from the fact that people were already gathered in a formal space and setting to conduct focus group discussions and group interviews. Those techniques were especially relevant in unearthing the structures of activist discourse and the organizational logics of many of the Afrobolivian organizations I worked with.

Applying a multi-sited approach (Marcus 1995) and venturing through various different spaces of contemporary Afrobolivian experience was inspired by two interrelated factors: First of all, the general awareness of different regional and economic contexts among *Cala Caleños* themselves is very high. Every family in Cala Cala has kin all over Bolivia and people repeatedly told me about their relatives and friends in the cities. Many also directly suggested that I visit their relatives next time I travelled to La Paz, Cochabamba or Santa Cruz and mentioned me in conversations over the phone (*"Estamos en el cocal con Mauricio,"* "We are in the coca

field with Mauricio").[5] This complements my earlier impressions while researching the activities of urban groups and organizations, when I was incessantly told that I had to journey to the Yungas in order to fully understand 'Afrobolivian culture' since "in the Yungas, there is another logic" *("ahí, la lógica es otra")*. For both rural and urban Afrobolivians, the other context is ever present and many of their experiences only make sense when bearing these relations in mind. Moreover, life in Cala Cala is in many ways characterized by constant travelling between the Yungas and La Paz. People mostly travel to sell coca on the market in La Paz, but take advantage of their trips to visit friends and family or engage in small-scale trade in fish, meat or other products (*chuño*, potatoes) not readily available in the Yungas. Through their travels, but also through the growing proliferation of mobile phones and internet access in Cala Cala, they engage in social practices transcending the geographical boundaries of Cala Cala, be it through doing business, sharing their leisure time with friends and family in La Paz or exchanging information and ideas in workshops and meetings with urban organizations. To account for those interactions and the practices linking Cala Cala with urban spaces of Afrobolivianity, I sometimes joined them on their travels, met their relatives all over the country and occasionally participated in the activities of urban organizations with them. Thus my commitment to mobility and a multi-sited ethnography of Afrobolivianity is grounded in my interlocutors' everyday experiences of mobility and translocal sociality.

However, my multi-sited approach was not only inspired by *Cala Caleños* everyday experiences of translocal sociality, but also by the crucial realization that the processes of articulating Afrobolivianity have transcended any given locality since their very beginning. Therefore, it is impossible to grasp the processes of articulation, translation and performance of Afrobolivianity from a localized perspective alone. Afrobolivianity cannot be 'rooted' in any single place, but emerges from journeys, encounters and mutual engagements of various actors in different contexts. This is true for the beginnings of the organized urban movement (see chapter 8) and the processes through which the concept of Afrobolivianity was shaped by discourses of plurinationality (see chapter 9). It is, however, also true for *Cala Caleños'* immediate engagement with Afrobolivianity.

Consider the case of Roberto, one of my main interlocutors in Cala Cala. He repeatedly told me how he started engaging with his Afrobolivianity as a young man of about twenty years, when activists and members of the newly founded *Movimiento Cultural Saya Afroboliviana (MOCUSABOL)* visited his community in the 1990s. He recalled them visiting Cala Cala in order to research and record Afrobolivian cultural practices and – very importantly – in order to foster community organizing

5 In Cala Cala, the Yungas and in most of the rest of Bolivia, I go by the Spanish version of my first name, "*Mauricio*".

based on a shared ethno-cultural identity as *Afrobolivianos*. His story resonates with that of many people in rural and urban contexts that emphasize the novelty of such developments in those years. One Afrobolivian interlocutor once stated very clearly: "Before, we knew nothing of the *saya*, we didn't know what Afrobolivian was".[6] Roberto added some very interesting detail pertaining to the second part of this quote. He repeatedly told me about his recollections of the first national meetings of Afrobolivian communities that took place in La Paz and El Alto prior to an audience with the Vice-President of the Republic in the early 1990s. As he recalled, it was the first time that he personally met people from *comunidades* further removed from Cala Cala geographically, experiencing belonging to a collectivity beyond his local *comunidad campesina*. He also found it very interesting that one of the main topics of those meetings was the question "What would we call ourselves?"[7] The term *"Afroboliviano"* already circulated among the participants of those meetings, but competed with other terminological options for naming and framing the emergent collectivity. Over the course of several years, "*Afroboliviano*" would displace the terms *"negro"* and *"moreno"* to become a fundamental pillar of discourses on identity, recognition and rights. Initially, however, the attendees of the gatherings in question agreed to stick to the commonly used term *"negro,"* chanting in the Palace of the Republic: *"Señor Vice-Presidente, se hacen presentes los negros de Bolivia, pidiendo el reconocimiento"*. I found it very intriguing how Roberto described the atmosphere of that event. For him personally, it was the first encounter with ideas and practices that he had not considered part of his everyday logics. He described the deliberations as extremely cautious and controversial, and attributed this to the fact that the different parties of the encounter did not have the conceptual tools to fully grasp what was happening. Therefore, it was necessary to establish a common ground for discussion and further action, beginning with the question of what this collectivity gathering for the first time that day could possibly be called. I do not want to overstate this point, since there are instances where Roberto did not express that sort of puzzlement, but instead emphasized the continuity of at least some sense of collectivity, belonging and awareness of Afrobolivianity prior to the revitalization efforts. I will argue throughout this book, however, that understanding the trajectory of the concept of Afrobolivianity means, in good part, tracing processes of imagining, articulating and performing a sense of community and identity that had hitherto not been imagined in that way. Within those processes, local communities are repeatedly invoked as the sources of Afrobolivianity, as the concrete places where its 'roots' can be found and located. Yet Afrobolivianity – even in its most localized forms – transcends local Afrobolivian communities, both geographically and conceptually. Therefore, my approach is guided by the conviction that

6 *"Antes no sabíamos de la saya, no sabíamos lo que era Afroboliviano."*

7 *"¿Cómo nos íbamos a llamar?"*

my ethnography of Cala Cala as a local community needs to be linked with a multi-sited ethnography of Afrobolivianity as a conceptual and political vantage point on questions of culture, collectivity and rights.

Panorama of Afrobolivian organizations

In many instances, Afrobolivian organizations and their political logics play a decisive role in shaping notions of Afrobolivianity, but also in providing and shaping the spaces of encounter, performance and debate. Therefore – and before closing this chapter on the various 'fieldsites' of my study – it is crucial to introduce at least a basic panorama of Afrobolivian organizations at this point (for a full discussion of organizational developments and the accompanying discursive dynamics see chapters 8 and 9).

The first Afrobolivian organizations, which emerged in the 1980s and were formally established during the 1990s, were first and foremost *saya* dance ensembles. They had a decidedly local scope and presence, limiting their activities to La Paz *(Movimiento Cultural Saya Afroboliviana MOCUSABOL, Organización Integral Saya Afroboliviana ORISABOL)*, Santa Cruz *(Comunidad Afroboliviana Santa Cruz CABOLS, Unión Afro Santa Cruz)* and Cochabamba *(Organización de Afrodescendientes Mauchi, Comunidad Afroboliviana Cochabamba)*, respectively. By far the most important and well-known organization until roughly fifteen years ago was MOCUSABOL. It was also the first organization to be formally established and influenced many of the other regional *saya* ensembles. Furthermore, MOCUSABOL was the first organization to start to transcend the mere performance of *saya* and begin lobbying for Afrobolivian interests in political contexts. In 2006, Jorge Medina, long-time president of MOCUSABOL, founded the *Centro Afroboliviano para el Desarrollo Integral y Comunitario CADIC* (Afrobolivian Center for Integral and Community Development), designed to be the "political and technical arm of MOCUSABOL" *("el brazo político y técnico de MOCUSABOL")*. CADIC is often characterized as an Afrobolivian NGO and it mainly organizes workshops with a wide range of topics funded by international development cooperation. Jorge Medina was also one of the leading figures of Afrobolivian mobilization during the Constituent Assembly 2006-2009 and was to become the first Afrobolivian member of the *Asamblea Plurinacional* in 2009.

In 2011, two years after constitutional recognition, a group of Afrobolivian activists – initially in hope of obtaining Medina's support, later in open competition with him – founded the *Consejo Nacional Afroboliviano CONAFRO* (National Afrobolivian Council), an organization that purports to transcend the localized efforts of former organizations and become a national representation of Afrobolivians (see chapter 9). CONAFRO's main interlocutor is not international cooperation, but the Bolivian state, mainly through its ministries and other institutions. There is one fundamental difference regarding CONAFRO: whereas MOCUSABOL never offici-

ally claimed to 'represent' a collective Afrobolivian subject and CADIC is run like an NGO, CONAFRO very clearly positions itself as the legitimate representation of all Afrobolivians. MOCUSABOL has members (some active, some passive, some with leadership positions), CADIC has a director and employees, whereas CONAFRO has an elected board of representatives and a constituency: *el pueblo Afroboliviano.*

Official recognition has furthermore led to the formation of state institutions pertaining specifically to Afrobolivians. Most importantly, those are the *Consejo Educativo del Pueblo Afroboliviano CEPA* (Educational Council of the *Pueblo Afroboliviano*) founded in 2011 alongside CONAFRO and the *Instituto de Lengua y Cultura Afro ILC-AFRO* (Institute of Afrobolivian Language and Culture) founded in 2013. They both depend politically and financially on the *Ministerio de Educación* (Ministry of Education). CEPA's main purpose is to foster and coordinate Afrobolivian engagement with the state in terms of educational reform. ILC-AFRO's purpose is broader, including the general tasks of researching, recovering and developing, diffusing and promoting, as well as teaching and normalizing Afrobolivian language and culture.[8] Both institutions are controlled by CONAFRO – either directly through formal integration in CONAFRO structures in the case of CEPA or by way of determining who will be appointed as an employee *(técnico)* in the case of ILC-AFRO. During the time of my fieldwork, the main task of both institutions – working closely together under the tutelage of the CONAFRO board of directors – was the coordination of the compilation and processing of the information that would be included on Afrobolivians in the new Bolivian public school curricula (see chapter 7). Besides this major project – spanning multiple years between compilation starting in 2012, ratification by the Ministry of Education in 2015 and the first attempts at implementation in 2018 – ILC-AFRO has coordinated some concise written compilations of Afrobolivian culture and history: a small leaflet on Afrobolivian funerary traditions and information on *haciendas* with Afrobolivian populations before the Agrarian Reform.[9] Before ILC-AFRO was formally established in 2013, the Ministry of Education published *"El Registro de Saberes, Conocimientos, Valores y Lengua"* of the *"Pueblo Afroboliviano,"* a sixty-six page booklet compiled by Juan Angola Maconde in 2010. Most recently, CONAFRO, CEPA and ILC-AFRO have joined forces with the Cochabamba-based NGO FUNPROEIB Andes to publish a full-length monograph entitled *"El Pueblo Afroboliviano. Historia, Cultura, Economía"* (Zambrana B. 2014). These publications are generally not known in detail by the wider public, circulating mainly among urban activists and within government institutions.

8 *"Es una institución que tiene como objetivo central: 1. La Investigación. 2. Recuperación y Desarrollo. 3. Difusión y Promoción. 4. Enseñanza y Normalización de la Lengua y la cultura del Pueblo Afroboliviano"* (https://www.facebook.com/ilcafroboliviano/ [19/06/18]).

9 See https://www.facebook.com/ilcafroboliviano/ [17/07/2018].

Ethnographic fieldwork in times of ID-ology

One fundamental question has accompanied me during the entirety of my engagement with Afrobolivianity, especially in the local context of Cala Cala: What part do I play, through my presence as a researcher, in the proliferation of the category of identification *"Afroboliviano"*? Coming back to the episode of my arrival to Cala Cala again, it is clear that there are – even with no foreign anthropologist present – more than a few actors that do the work of ID-ology. I was also, as I found out some weeks later, neither the first foreigner to spend time in Cala Cala, nor the first anthropologist to visit the community.[10] Moreover, the *Instituto de Lengua y Cultura Afroboliviana (ILC-AFRO)* – a government institution entrusted with the mission of documenting Afrobolivian culture (see chapter 7), had approached *Cala Caleños* in order to conduct research on the *hacienda* period in the village. While my presence as a researcher and my presumed interest in aspects of 'Afrobolivian identity' in Cala Cala had certainly not gone unnoticed, the experience of how my roles in the field changed, and with them the way I was approached and engaged in conversation by people in Cala Cala, gave me reason to believe that my presence was not an overly important factor. As is often the case – at least in my experience during fieldwork – the presence of the researcher becomes normalized to a certain extent quite quickly and people do not invest too much energy in acting a certain way or trying to pretend certain things are happening (or not) just for the sake of my presence. Of course, sometimes people verbally articulated very clear-cut distinctions explicitly addressing my (widely assumed) interest in *"lo Afro,"* but they did not seem to observe their own alleged rules for dealing with certain relationships afterwards. What is more, people often raised topics beyond ethnoracial identities and discussed competing alternative visions of the world and social relations in Cala Cala. While engaging the discourses of Afrobolivian identity politics and the possibility of highlighting *"lo Afro"* is always an option – regardless of the presence of an anthropologist – there are many occasions where *Cala Caleños* discuss questions of community, identity and belonging, referring to a wide range of interpretations and strategies for dealing with them. In fact, during the first weeks of my fieldwork in Cala Cala categorizations like *"Afroboliviano"* or "Aymara" played only a limited role and were hardly mentioned in everyday conversations. Without being prompted – and I avoided explicitly addressing matters of social categorization – people hardly resorted to ethnoracial categories when explaining

10 Cala Cala has received visitors from different parts of the world, mainly through the Catholic Church in Coripata which regularly sent foreign volunteers to work in the community. Moreover, an anthropology student from the United States spent some time in the community in the context of a Study Abroad Program in Bolivia (see: https://studyabroad.sit.edu/ [04/07/19]).

their notions of community, local history, 'culture' or 'tradition'. In contexts where specific categorizations were employed eventually – one of the clearest examples is the tourism project I will deal with at length in chapter 10 – but also in numerous other cases – *sindicato* meetings, informal conversations in the coca field and narratives of migration – I did not have the feeling that my presence altered people's ways of going about those deliberations. I was furthermore cautious not to get involved too tightly with one or another faction, opinion or strategy. Even on the occasions when I did become involved – actively or passively – as a referent for negotiating identity claims, categories and options, I regard my presence not simply as a distortion of the 'social reality' I am trying to understand, but as part of it. As an interlocutor I confronted people with my views, debated certain issues with them, answered their questions, gave them hints, assistance and critical feedback, depending on the situation. During these conversations people sometimes took me for an expert on subjects that I am not, giving my opinion more weight than it deserved. At other times, they easily dismissed my interpretations. In short, they very quickly treated me – for all I know and have been able to observe – as a slightly strange, sometimes appealing conversation partner that did not seem to exert such great influence on them as to constantly pretend to be something or somebody that one is not, concur with my opinions or interpretations, or care too much about my presence for that matter. Therefore I had the impression that I was able to carry out a productive kind of fieldwork that involved the establishment of meaningful relationships with a wide range of people.

In the next chapter I will discuss the existing literature on Afrobolivians and offer some important historical and political contextualization of the topics that I deal with in this book. I will also further situate my discussion of Afrobolivianity within ongoing scholarly debates on Bolivia. To that end, I first discuss the important trope of 'invisibility' with regard to Afrobolivianity and address the Yungas' place in Bolivia's cultural geography. Moreover, I will briefly situate Afrobolivianity in Bolivian colonial and republican history and sketch the implications of a set of profound social and political shifts in Bolivia and their relation to Afrobolivianity. With that I refer to the National Revolution and land reform in the 1950s, as well as Bolivia's turn towards multiculturalism and, most recently, plurinationality.