CHAPTER ONE

Identity Politics Matter

The notion of a burgeoning Black identity politics in Mexico is something of an enigma, not quite captured as truly relevant to any segment of the population. Still, a renewed focus towards the Afro communities recently is being publicised and analysed. Newspapers and magazines, both local and international, feature titles like "Afro-Mexicans, victims of poverty and exclusion" and "Recognition of rights of black towns demanded".[1] Flash phrases like 'lack of ethnic identity', 'racism', 'discrimination', 'invisibility', and 'marginalisation' seem to have become synonymous with the livelihood and overall experiences of Mexicans of African ancestry.

Drawing from the inception of Afro-Mexican studies as a largely historical arena concentrated on the colonial era, researchers are increasingly engaging in contemporary ethnographical investigations. They do so with the aim of appropriately situating the ideas of *difference* and *recovery* within a framework that accurately reads the what, how, and why of Black populations today from a local perspective, all the while questioning whether we can really talk about 'Blacks' within the Mexican context. In the introduction, I mentioned the concepts of difference and recovery as central to the undertaking of minority groups in their attempts to create

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[1] For example, see Julián Sánchez, "Afromexicanos, víctimas de pobreza y exclusión," *El Universal*, March 28, 2007; Misael Habana de los Santos, "Exigen reconocimiento a los derechos de los pueblos negros," *La Jornada Guerrero*, July 24, 2007; José Carreño, "'Falta de identidad en afromexicanos'," *El Universal*, May 13, 2005; Sonia Sierra, "Coyolillo: historias de racismo y discriminación," *El Universal*, January 10, 2004; Aran Shetterly, "Blacks in Mexico," *Inside Mexico*, April 2007, http://www.insidemex.com. Also see the edition of *Callaloo*, the Black studies journal, dedicated entirely to the subject; "Faces and Voices of Coyolillo," *Callaloo* 27, no. 1 (Winter 2004).

new identities for themselves, as opposed to merely continuing with those imposed by the dominant culture. Black Mexicans should, in fact, constitute a minority group,[2] despite the assumption that *mestizaje* (race mixing) has altogether usurped the necessity to classify the nation into racially divided sectors, thus obscuring any attempts to reopen national and regional discussions on Blackness in highlighting the extraordinarily complex task of race-based politics. This does not, however, mean to say that any plea for the legal and constitutional recognition of Black Mexicans as a minority group constitutes a return to the racialised social organisation of the past. Contrary to this notion, I argue that, against the historical backdrop of the debilitating effects produced by the colonial caste system, the propagation of *mestizaje* as the unifying ideology which would create an egalitarian society is, paradoxically, doing a disservice to the Black Mexican communities by denying them the necessary space to negotiate their differentiated status.

Given this fundamental issue, this chapter will attempt to provide the theoretical framework for how to mobilise a healthy Black identity politics in Mexico. Black identity politics, then, is simply the importance destined in politics to the identity of Black persons, mobilised in a bid for Black persons to raise local, regional, national, and international consciousness about their marginalised status in working

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[2] In stressing that Black Mexicans should constitute a minority group, I am asserting how the mobilisation of Black identity politics could effectively alter the marginalised status of Black communities within the economic organisation of the country. As will be elucidated in chapter three, this will serve to combat the negative effects generated by the recent capitalisation on the 'difference' of the Afro-Mexican, primarily in terms of their cultural and historical position (mainly within the colonial society), which generates the unintended consequence of further cementing the foreignness of the Black person in Mexico, as a figure understood not just in terms of alterity (and unavoidably the subject of national derision) but also as the object of economic exploitation by the dominant class. In all senses of the concept, Black Mexicans are politically, economically, socially, and numerically minority despite the complete absence of legal criteria in Mexico that would label them as such. In this sense, the assertion that Black Mexicans *should* constitute a minority group is a way to frame this issue, especially considering the debatable existence of a burgeoning political and social movement emerging around the 'Black' cause in the Costa Chica of Mexico's Pacific coast.

towards transforming the current developmental status of the communities they live in. As such, it will be argued that it is possible for Black identity politics to be utilised in Mexico as a resource by these pertinent communities in order to proactively deal with what *they* express to be their marginalised status, maintained as such because of discrimination mainly understood and articulated in terms of governmental neglect. For the purpose of showing how the social categories of identity, race, and ethnicity can be most fruitfully employed, I will draw mostly from the writings of two particular social theorists, Paul Gilroy and Linda Martín Alcoff, as well as from the African-American philosopher Michelle Wright when discussing the concept of the African Diaspora and Black subjectivity.

1. Identity as politically salient and resilient

In this age of multiculturalism and liberal equality, political correctness is the defining standard for public discussion, even to the extent of it seeping into academia. Political correctness would purport that employing terms like race and ethnicity and moreover resting discourses about identity on these elusive categories is dangerous for the growth of a unified society, given their potency for inciting further division in an already tenuously held together national entity. The quest for the homogenous society is made optimal and the project for advocating multicultural conviviality rendered null. The complexities derived from phenomena like immigration, immediately resurrected into 21st century concerns about terrorism, persuade more and more academics to argue *against* the benefits of cultural differences residing within the

same national borders. And so we retreat to the static days of fearing the Other as the embodiment of all evil and menace.[3]

If we must use terms that distinguish 'us' from the 'other', let them be as neutral and bland as possible, for fear of erupting and then eroding the carefully-knit social cohesion essential to the glorified concept of the Westphalian nation-state.[4] Indeed, that political entity is practically non-existent in contemporary times though its appeal still thrives, as unveiled in political discourse from time to time.[5] This is an example of how essentialists theorise identity, as telling of an overriding emphasis placed on only one aspect of an individual's social makeup, which in this case would be national identity.[6] A declaration like 'first Mexican, then Black' would exemplify how essentialism lays prior claim to the individual by pinpointing nationality as the basic and thus most important nature of the individual who is constitutionally labelled as Mexican. Another criticism set forth by conservatives would be that identity-based social movements further cement identity as a basis for difference which can only serve to jeopardise the arduously sought-after inclusiveness in addition to deflecting attention away from the "shared human attributes" that creates a transnational,

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[3] For an insightful and provocative analysis of the interrelatedness of terrorism, immigration, identity, and Otherness, which is severely plaguing Great Britain nowadays and its ability to harmoniously prosper as a multicultural nation, see Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). Also, for engaging studies of how the self/other dichotomy, a critical pillar in traditional International Relations scholarship, is exemplified in how wars are justified, see Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Reflections on War and Political Discourse: Realism, Just War, and Feminism in a Nuclear Age," *Political Theory* 13, no. 1 (February 1985): 39–57; J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1970).

[4] See Andrew Linklater, "Community and Citizenship in the Post-Westphalian Era," in *The Transformation of Political Community: Ethical Foundations for the Post-Westphalian Era*, Andrew Linklater, 179–212 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998).

[5] Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, 24–5.

[6] Paula M. L. Moya, "Introduction: Reclaiming Identity," in *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, eds. Paula M. L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-García (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2000), 3–7.

transcultural solidarity.[7]   The postmodernist argument against identity mostly originated as a theoretical response to essentialism and basically establishes that "social and cultural identities... are... fictitious because the selves they claim to designate cannot be pinned down, fixed, or definitively identified.   Moreover, identities are not simply fictitious; they are dangerously mystifying".[8]   In order to come up with an adequate conceptualisation of identity, it seems as though essentialism claims too much for identity while postmodernism claims too little.   A post-positivist, realist account, first formulated by Satya Mohanty in relation to identity, is thus provided as the more accurate accommodation of the complex aspects of identity.[9]

One of the most elegant and pertinent criticisms of identity has been elaborated by Judith Butler in both *The Psychic Life of Power* and *Gender Trouble*.[10] As Alcoff summarises, Butler argues that "social categories of identity make resistance possible but always fail to identify accurately, and thus by this very fact create the need for resistance.   Accepting identities is tantamount to accepting dominant scripts and performing the identities Power has invented."[11]   This seems to emphasise that the appeal to a position of victimisation can never truly reap the desired benefits of a more egalitarian society because the cries for justice become more and more pedantic as the dichotomy between the weak and the strong is forever perpetuated.   This sort of analysis employs a Freudian conception of identity as inevitably reflective of a fundamental lack of self in the individual who insists on

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[7] Moya, "Introduction: Reclaiming Identity," 4.

[8] Moya, "Introduction: Reclaiming Identity," 6.

[9] See Satya P. Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

[10] Alcoff references *The Psychic Life of Power* in criticising Butler's formulation of identity, while Moya uses *Gender Trouble*.

[11] Alcoff, "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" 321.

exploring the nature of identity.[12]   The identity politics then becomes an institutionalised aspect of the political repertoire, retiring its position as a force of resistance and transformation. Implementing public policy after public policy thus becomes the tool by which the State makes amends with the racist dealings of its past. In conflict resolution theory, for example, the replication of the world in binarisms (i.e., the oppressors versus the victims) does not serve to move the parties beyond the stark immediacy of their circumstances. Instead, by recognising the fault committed by all involved parties, and thus ceasing the juvenile enactment of finger-pointing, real progress can be made.[13] Likewise, the anti-identity argument depicts a sort of stalemate situation which can only be overcome once identity is eradicated.

Since this is a virtual social impossibility, what is proposed by the critics is the defence of identity along the lines of strategic essentialism.[14] The reasoning behind this position is an emphasis placed on the co-existence of two separate planes: one referring to the political realm where identity is strategically employed despite a staunch belief in its invented nature; and the other referring to the realm of "theoretical commitments" where identity is upheld as "both pernicious and metaphysically inaccurate".[15]   In other words, identity is accommodated out of a pragmatic imperative. A deafening critique of this position by Alcoff ultimately reveals its weakness, in that Alcoff cleverly argues that it "produces a politically

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[12] Alcoff, "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" 320, 322.

[13] The case of the protracted conflict in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, amalgamating the issues of poverty, environmental degradation, arms proliferation, corruption of public administrations, natural resources control, and political economy of petroleum, provides excellent analytic ground to explore the comparison I raise here regarding conflict resolution theory and the dichotomy between victims and oppressors. See, for example, Rosemary N. Okoh, "Conflict Management in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: A Participatory Approach," *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 5, no. 1 (2005): 91–114.

[14] Gayatri Spivak first proposed this accommodation of theory and practice. See *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 205; "In a Word. Interview," with Ellen Rooney, *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 1, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 129–54.

[15] Alcoff, "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" 322–3.

pernicious elitism and even *vanguardism* when it operates to divide the 'knowing' theorists who deploy identity strategically and the 'unknowing' activists who continue to believe in identity".[16] She goes on to claim that she is not convinced that strategic essentialism is the most constructive formulation of identity precisely because of the reasoning provided by Nietzsche against all strategic accounts as ultimately fallible, not to mention the incoherence this account cannot help but anticipate. Identity must be *believed* to be real in order for it to actually produce the desired effects in the public realm.

The line of logic outlined in the anti-identity position resounds most loudly in my mind as reflective of a melancholic adherence to reasoning similar to the defence of the world viewed in static binarisms. This paradigmatic outlook seems to be born out of the fear and insecurity of being challenged to prosper alongside difference.[17] In this sense, xenophobia and ethnocentrism are at once resurrected into the discussion about the political salience and resilience of identity. Of course, Butler's argument regarding the pernicious nature of identity is most readily evident when espousing White supremacist subjectivity, as exemplified in the Ku Klux Klan of the United States and the Boers of South Africa. Any claim to racial/ethnic superiority, as determinant of what Gilroy describes as raciology, would certainly reflect Butler's critique of identity as intimately connected with the institution of Power. However, as the realist theorists argue, this can only be the case in revealing the nature of *some*

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[16] Alcoff, "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" 323 [my emphasis]. John Kuo Wei Tchen also "fully endorse[s]" this part of Alcoff's argument in his study of the importance of multicultural education using "dialogic pedagogy" (200), asserting that this "elitism and even vanguardism" is "traditional top-down, patriarchal pedagogy" (200); see "On Forming Dialogic-Analytic Collaborations: Curating Spaces within/between Universities and Communities," in *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, 193–208, eds. Satya P. Mohanty, Linda Martín Alcoff, Michael R. Hames-García, and Paula M. L. Moya (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

[17] Alcoff also argues this point in "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" 334.

identities but should not be generalised to encompass *all* identities as having no relation to the generation of objective knowledge and truth in addition to being inherently harmful, social organising criteria.[18]

The rendering of identity as a social category we would be better-off without seems to assume the worst of human capacity to generate meaningful interactions with each other in spite of the abortive, violence-inducing racisms. On the one hand, this excessively pessimistic perspective belittles the bold and impressive traditions that have been constructed by the oppressed peoples as they make the best out of what has been their lot in life. Gilroy more eloquently phrases the argument I wish to detail now.

> Historians, sociologists, and theorists of politics have not always appreciated the significance of these sometimes-hidden, modern countercultures formed by long and brutal experiences of racialised subordination through slavery and colonialism and since. The minor, dissident traditions that have been constituted against the odds amid suffering and dispossession have been overlooked by the ignorant and the indifferent as well as the actively hostile. Some initiates, who should certainly know better, have even rejected and despised these formations as insufficiently respectable, noble, or pure. Nonetheless, vernacular cultures and the stubborn social movements that were built upon their strengths and tactics have contributed important moral and political resources to modern struggles in pursuit of freedom, democracy, and justice.[19]

I'd like to add philosophers to Gilroy's list of academics that have neglected to pay serious enough attention to the complex identity constructs of the oppressed, following the lead of Alcoff who notes that while philosophers have tended to theorise and critique the supposed essentialist (and thus homogeneous) nature of identity,

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[18] Alcoff, "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" 323–5.

[19] Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000), 13, citing Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (1952; second edition, London: Pluto Press, 1986), 161.

those within the social sciences have contributed more accurate theoretical depictions that allow for the heterogeneity of some identities all the while.[20]

I will now detail exactly what a realist theory of identity entails, the content of which I have been alluding to in arguing against the anti-identity formulation and the assertion that identity politics are divisive means of further segregating society. This, above all, diverts Butler's pessimistic analysis so that the assertion that identity is "constraining and pernicious" is applicable to only *some* forms of identity instead of *all*. Paula Moya describes the difference between the essentialist and idealist (including the postmodernist) accounts on the one hand and the realist on the other as most evident in the relationship depicted between the ascriptive (or public) and subjective identities.[21] Whereas essentialists assert that the ascriptive identity virtually eclipses the subjective identity so that the individual becomes imprisoned by the socially ascribed categories (i.e., gender, race, sexuality, etc.) and idealists assert there is little correlation between the two so that the individual can choose to "disrupt historically sedimented and socially constituted identity categories through individual acts of parody or refusal",[22] the realist affirms dynamism as the central characteristic so that one cannot be neatly separated from the other for analysis.

As such, the realist account of identity places great emphasis on the interaction between experience and the generation of knowledge as wholly contingent on the socially-embedded identity categories. Experience is explicative of the identities held by the individual and are comprehended by being filtered through a particular theoretical framework, so that the meaning of experience is not self-evident nor is it

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[20] Alcoff, "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" 324.

[21] Paula M. L. Moya, "What's Identity Got to Do with It? Mobilizing Identities in the Multicultural Classroom," in *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, 99.

[22] Moya, "What's Identity Got to Do with It?" 98–9.

entirely subjective and thus useless criteria in understanding how knowledge is generated. In this sense, experience can produce both mystifying and reliable knowledge, depending on whether or not it contributes to a more accurate depiction of the social world and the individual's position in it.[23] Identities are intimately related to social structures and social connections between persons. As realism primarily asserts the existence of an objective social reality, it can be known and transformed once identity is understood as a theory or location which *explains* this reality. Likewise, what is at stake in modifying identity is the transformation of the society, and likewise for the reverse task.[24] Because of the centrality of identity to society, the relevance of identity to politics is undeniably clear. As Alcoff specifies, however, the question to be engaged is how and when identity is relevant in politics.[25] In the discussion to follow, an analysis of Blackness will provide constructive ground for answering the how and when of identity politics.

2. Exploring racial and ethnic identities

The acidic taste of any defence of race as an acceptable identity category is quite strong within the arena of political correctness. Indeed, any identity formation which rests *primordially* on race is fragile at best, as Tunde Adeleke thoroughly argues in his analysis of Afrocentric consciousness.[26] Paul Gilroy echoes this same reasoning in exposing the "crisis of raciology" which is producing profound effects on how the

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[23] Satya P. Mohanty, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On *Beloved* and the Postcolonial Condition," in *Reclaiming Identity*, 32.

[24] Moya, "What's Identity Got to Do with It?" 99.

[25] Linda Martín Alcoff and Satya P. Mohanty, "Reconsidering Identity Politics: An Introduction," in *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, 7.

[26] Adeleke, "Historical Problems of Afrocentric Consciousness."

category of race is currently being digested and reproduced.[27]   After all, has not

humankind suffered enough from the hyper-racialised logic which has manifested

itself in 20th century travesties like South African apartheid and the Nazi-induced

annihilation of European Jews? A mere glance at any anarchist, White supremacist

literature should make any human-loving individual cringe with disgust at the overt

example of how xenophobic, Eurocentric racism has stagnated and perverted human

development.   In the same breath, I must mention that this is not only cultivated

within the confines of Whiteness, for in response to the repression of the non-White

subject,[28] counteractive ideologies likewise appealing to the same logic of absolutism

that undergirds White supremacist belief have arisen, as in the case of some forms of

Black nationalism.[29]

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[27] See chapter one of Gilroy, *Against Race*, 11–53. Raciology is to be understood as "the lore that brings the virtual realities of 'race' to dismal and destructive life" (11). This broadly refers to all harmful forms of racial-thinking, such as racial hierarchies based on deterministic theories of biology and genomics. In summary, "[t]he history of racism is a narrative in which the congruency of micro- and macrocosm has been disrupted at the point of their analogical intersection: the human body. The order of active differentiation that gets called 'race' may be modernity's most pernicious signature. It articulates reason and unreason. It knits together science and superstition. Its specious ontologies are anything but spontaneous and natural. They should be awarded no immunity from prosecution amid the reveries of reflexivity and the comfortable forms of inertia induced by capitulation to the lazy essentialisms that postmodern sages inform us we cannot escape" (53). I wish to emphasise that scholars (and pseudo-scientists) who defend any project of human genomics along the lines of racial divisions sustain an essentialist understanding of identity, so that "[t]hey imagine, for example, that if a person can be assigned to a racial… category on the basis of some invariable characteristic like skin color…, then everything else of significance, including how he or she self-identifies, his or her propensity for violence, personal characteristics, and even innate mental capacity follows from being a member of that particular group"; Moya, "What's Identity Got to Do with It?" 98.

[28] As Immanuel Wallerstein writes, "[w]hen W. E. B. DuBois said in 1900 that 'the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line', the colours to which he was referring came down in reality to White and non-White." It is in this way which I refer to the non-White subject. See Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Construction of Peoplehood: Racism, Nationalism, Ethnicity," in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, eds. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (London and New York: Verso, 1991), 80.

[29] See Gilroy, *Against Race*. Also see chapter four of Wright, *Becoming Black* for an analysis of how Black nationalism follows the same dialectical formulation that produced Black Others so as now to produce the "Other of the Other", as Black feminist theorist Michele Wallace argues, which is the Black female. Black nationalism not only at times assumed African superiority over the European (as present in Léopold Sédar Senghor's writings) but also failed to grant agency to the Black female as the conduit of human reproduction, and importantly so mothering babies of all races. As such, see the works of Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, Carolyn Rodgers, and Audre Lorde for theories of Black female

Although the typical postmodernist critique views identity as wholly and unavoidably derivative of a repressive and degrading context, I argue that it is possible to re-conceptualise Blackness by moving beyond the binary relationship established by the Enlightenment racial theorising agenda. In this sense, the identity construct is understood as based not only on the politically infused concepts of race, ethnicity, and history but also an intellectual, Diasporic tradition. The notion of the intellectual tradition (to be elaborated on later in this chapter), providing the cohesiveness for the idea of the African Diaspora, serves the purpose of relocating the cultivating ground for identity away from the constraining boundaries of the nation-state in a way that fosters the relevance of a Black identity in Mexico. The intellectual tradition of the African Diaspora serves as an enriching resource for posing significant questions that reveal the limitations of the unifying ideology of *mestizaje* for the national identity and how it has created an awkward, and in some ways self-defeating, identity construct for the Mexican of African descent.

Given that race and ethnicity are often conflated to denote identical concepts, it is important to have a clear idea of how they differ. Race, unlike ethnicity, is a classification which references purely biological traits of the human, including phenotype among other visual features like hair texture, eye colour, body shape, etc.

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subjectivity drawing from Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogics instead of the limiting Hegelian dialectic. Henry Giroux pinpoints another great contribution of Black feminist theorists when he writes: "By focusing on the ways in which white ethnicity exercises power, designates Otherness in terms that degrade and cheapen human life, and hides its own partiality in narratives of universality and common sense, black feminists have been able to redefine what it means for people of color to voice and speak in their own terms. To struggle within a politics of voice, within these practices, means that blacks have to reject a politics of the center in which the Other is reduced to an object whose experiences and traditions are either deemed alien by whites or whose identity has to bear exclusively the historical weight of Otherness and racialization"; Henry Giroux, "Postmodernism as Border Pedagogy: Redefining the Boundaries of Race and Ethnicity," in *A Postmodern Reader*, eds. Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 471. As will be most pointedly elaborated in chapter three, Mexico still suffers from the colonial orientation of the past towards 'alienating', 'historicising', and 'racialising' the Black person.

Ethnicity, on the other hand, denotes the creative capacity of a group of persons who have been thrust into the same space by a predominant historical event, employed accordingly to deal with, make sense of, and internalise this shared occurrence;[30] it is mostly comprehended alongside culture, and usually grounded specifically in language and territory. Whereas race is generally accepted as externally assigned to the individual, ethnicity is understood as that which is actively acquired by an individual. In this sense, I agree with Robert Gooding-Williams' definition of what it means to be Black when he explains that "one becomes a black person only if (1) one begins to identify (to classify) *oneself* as black and (2) one begins to make choices, to formulate plans, to express concerns, etc., in light of one's identification of oneself as black".[31] In furthering defining what Black identity is, Gilroy expands on what Gooding-Williams has established when he writes:

> Black identity is not simply a social and political category to be used or abandoned according to the extent to which the rhetoric that supports and legitimises it is persuasive or institutionally powerful. Whatever the radical constructionists may say, it is lived as a coherent (if not always stable) experiential sense of self. Though it is often felt to be natural and spontaneous, it remains the outcome of practical activity: language, gesture, bodily significations, desires.[32]

From these definitions, it is clearly demonstrated that self-identifying as a Black person is not merely reflective of the social concept of race but also ethnicity, as the Middle Passage represents a significant event around which the Black *race* (both in

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[30] Linda Martín Alcoff, "Against 'Post-Ethnic' Futures," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 18, no. 2 (2004): 102–3.

[31] Robert Gooding-Williams, "Race, Multiculturalism, and Justice," *Constellations* 5, no. 1 (January 1998): 23 [original emphasis], cited by Alcoff, "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" 339.

[32] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 102.

the Americas and in Africa) has created a sense of solidarity.[33] Likewise, the Black

identity fostered in the Diaspora is not as problematic as the critics would have one

believe, as argued by Gilroy in emphasising the coherence of Black selfhood.

As will be further argued in chapter three, the occasion of a Black Mexican

actually self-identifying as Black (*negro*) is quite rare, given the problematic way in

which Blackness is produced, internalised, and then reproduced within the Mexican

context. Hence, as I refer to Black Mexicans as Black instead of *moreno* or

afromestizo, it is more a projection of the urgency to critically reformulate Blackness

in the Mexican context than it is a description of the actual identity construct of

Mexicans of African ancestry. Because of the ambivalence of the Mexican case, and

in providing greater clarification of the concepts of race and ethnicity, the backdrop of

the African Diaspora will serve to provide an abundance of raw material for

comprehending the divergences and convergences of these two related yet separable

concepts.

2.1 Unresolved aspects of the post-ethnic/racial logic

The concept of humanity is diametrically situated against race[34] in a way that

reverses the progress achieved under the postcolonial critical theorisations against the

liberal rationale stating that "because 'race' *ought*… to be nothing, it *is* prematurely

pronounced to be of no consequence whatsoever".[35] To evoke race in politics, then,

means "getting things out of proportion, engaging in witch-hunts, practicing empty

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[33] For a treatment of how African-Americans and Black Africans differently embrace race and ethnicity, see Peter P. Ekeh, "Kinship and State in African and African American Histories," in *The African Diaspora*, 89–114.

[34] Gilroy refers to the interrelatedness of humanity and race in *Postcolonial Melancholia*, 18–9.

[35] Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, 144 [original emphasis].

moralism, or indulging in the immature outlooks of... 'political correctness'".[36] However, those critics who arraign race as suspect in political discussions do little to explain why the residues of the racist, colonial past still linger in the mindsets, attitudes, and subsequent actions of both the citizenry and civil servants when addressing peoples who have been systematically subjected to racialised understandings of what their humanity is comprised of. Indeed, it would be intriguing to determine whether visible traces remain in the constitution of political institutions in the case of Mexico, but that endeavour would exceed the purview of this thesis.

As such, I do not pretend to advocate for transcending race and/or ethnicity in a bid to sever what Judith Butler would argue as the pathological state acquired by oppressed peoples when they accept the illusory validity of racial/ethnic identities. That logic seems too futuristic and abstract considering the still-marginalised state of Black communities worldwide. In my judgement, this sort of rationale does not speak to the embeddedness of the problems related to ethnicity and race which are clearly quantifiable in the context of the developing world, where the reaches of globalisation as a homogenising phenomenon tend to defy the supposedly unproblematic correlation between liberal capitalism and human liberty. This is affirmed by Paula Moya as she states that "[r]ealists understand that as long as identities remain economically, politically, and socially significant, determining the justifiability of particular identity claims will remain a necessary part of progressive politics. Taking the easy way out is thus not something they are willing to do".[37]

Even Gilroy in his admonition of a completely de-racialised, planetary humanism reconciles his views as a "utopian hope" that does not currently have much

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[36] Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, 144.
[37] Moya, "Introduction: Reclaiming Identity," 22–3.

practical weight.[38] The gist of the post-racial/ethnic logic seems to belie the present embeddedness of such categories in our social realities. Regarding their "perniciousness", Alcoff summarises the position of those like Butler as follows:

> [T]he new critics of identity argue from the specific histories of oppression to conclude that ethnic identity claims almost always involve a bad faith or inconsistency about their contingent social construction, or that they represent a reductively strategic approach to political gain, or that they are simply naïve, poorly thought out responses to an oppression built upon reifying the very categories that minority activists want to protect.[39]

As tantalising as this argument sounds, however, it neatly – and fallaciously – assumes that ethnic identity is somewhat of a malady for which we someday will find a cure. By sidestepping the depth of the reality of these identities, these academics purport that people have the luxury to reject such identities as if the mere fact that they are socially constructed means the individual has some considerable objective distance to either decisively incorporate or not certain aspects.[40] Mexicans of African descent have been allotted particular circumstances that oblige them to negotiate and appropriately situate their Blackness; and by appropriately, I mean to draw attention to the way in which the typical, Latin American project of advocating the national mythology of *mestizaje* as indifferent to the African heritage and its contribution to the Mexican historical landscape.

Given the gaps present in the essentialist, postmodernist, and post-racial/ethnic accounts elaborated thus far, I have shown the validity of understanding identity as a "process of meaning making" which "is just to say that we have a location in social space, a hermeneutic horizon that is both grounded in a location and an opening or

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[38] Stanley Aronowitz, "Misidentity Politics," review of *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line*, by Paul Gilroy, *The Nation*, November 6, 2000, 31.
[39] Alcoff, "Against 'Post-Ethnic' Futures," 100.
[40] Alcoff, "Against 'Post-Ethnic' Futures," 101.

site from which we attempt to know the world".[41] From this definition, it becomes

quite easy to convincingly argue not only for the pertinence of identity politics as a

means for minority groups to collectively assert their importance but also against the

critique that identity is a "necessarily constraining and pernicious" construct that

should be theorised out of use. What Satya Mohanty terms as the realist-cognitivist

account of identity, then, grants substantial responsibility to identities, and particularly

minority identities as he argues for their "epistemic privilege", meaning that minority

identities are particularly valuable for pushing human knowledge further and further

towards objectivity. This is made possible because the theory-mediated experiences

of oppressed peoples give irrefutable evidence to

> what an oppressive social and cultural system obscures. Such 'obscuring' is often a
> highly mediated and almost invisible process, implicit in traditional forms of
> schooling as well as in less formal practices of education and socialization. The
> institutions of social reproduction and cultural transmission – schools, libraries,
> newspapers, and museums, for instance – are oriented to the dominant cultural and
> social perspectives. Much of their bias is often invisible because of the relatively
> benign form the transmission of cultural information takes: it seems utterly natural,
> part of the scheme of things. In such instances, cultural assimilation amounts to a
> repression of alternative sources of experience and value. That repression would
> explain why the feelings of minority groups about their 'racial' or cultural identities
> are so tenacious... or why [their] claims... are more than the simple 'politics of
> recognition'.[42]

This exposé of how repression silently takes its form is precisely why an invocation of

Black identity politics in Mexico will, perhaps unavoidably, confront serious criticism

within the national scholarship. It will be confronted because of the foreign sound of

what is currently at work in the Costa Chica, and also in the state of Veracruz, and

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[41] Alcoff, "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" 334 [my emphasis].
[42] Mohanty, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity," 63.

what is being proposed in this thesis for its further implementation. Even still, Mohanty makes a valuable contribution in highlighting how the marginalised societies have more to contribute to "the 'common-sense' of the 'mainstream,' or dominant, culture" than traditionally believed.[43] As such, the analysis offered in this thesis should only serve to further the comprehension of what constitutes a Mexican, both racially, ethnically, and nationally speaking. The following section espouses how the Black Mexican can utilise a theory of subject status as construed from a Diasporic approach, which at once confounds the inclusiveness of the Hegelian dialectical production of the subject as only possible within the confines of the nation-state.

3. Diasporic approach to theorising Blackness

Blackness has been the dialectical other of Whiteness for too long, seized by the oppressive dichotomy that rendered it non-existent in the absence of the White subject. Offset by the so-called 'discovery' of the New World and the subsequent Atlantic routing of the African slave trade, the resultant invisibility of the Black voice in the construction of history has profoundly stigmatised the advancement of the people. This historical invisibility was not unique to the experiences of African descendents alone though. Significant for the context of Mexico, the Amerindian peoples were also subjected to a similar process of marginalisation. The top-down approach to the formulation of national identity in the postcolonial period did indeed seek to 'recover' the Indian past of the 'nation', however questionable it originated or resulted. By "inducing self-abnegating consciousness in Blacks" through slavery,

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[43] Moya, "What's Identity Got to Do with It?" 103.

"[h]istory became a veritable tool of effacing Blacks and their contributions to the American and world historical stages".[44] Unequivocally so, the consequences are vastly felt wherever Blackness resides. This truth cannot be denied, and Mexico is no exception to this Diasporic tale.

The deconstruction of this prevailing dialectic between the White subject and the Black Other thus became an imperative for the Diasporic, postcolonial writers embarking on a process of redeeming Black subjectivity, beginning most cohesively in the twentieth century. Henceforth, Black intellectual thought has commissioned itself with producing counterdiscourses to the Western conceptions of dialectical relationships that have germinated a variety of Black Others. Despite the divergence regarding the specific content of each Black Other, all nonetheless converge on the inherent inferiority of the African; and "for blacks in diaspora, this was condemnation by association."[45] This agenda of racial theorisation[46] centred "not [on] objective observation but instead the need for self-definition. In order to posit itself as civilized, advanced, and superior, Western discourse must endlessly reify Africa and the Black as its binary opposite."[47] The Enlightenment rationale of this inferiority, purely cemented in terms of 'Black genes', thus provided the ontological bases for

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[44] Tunde Adeleke, "Will the Real Father of Afrocentricity Please Stand," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 25, no. 1 (2001): 22. Although the author refers to the United States of America when stating "American", this nullification of the African as ahistorical was an imperative of the mechanism of slavery wherever it was present in all of the Americas, regardless of the national background of the colonisers, and so the statement is legitimately applicable in the sense intended.

[45] Tunde Adeleke, "Black Americans, Africa and History: A Reassessment of the Pan-African and Identity Paradigms," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 22, no. 3 (1998): 186.

[46] Wright argues that Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Count Arthur de Gobineau in addition to Thomas Jefferson were of particular significance and most useful to the counterdiscourses of Black subjectivity expounded by the first generation of predominant Black thinkers of the twentieth century, including W. E. B. Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Frantz Fanon. The second wave of intellectuals moved beyond the heteropatriarchal, nationalist discourse inherent in the writings of the first generation to critique their obsoleteness in arguing that the Black female subject was ghostly absent in their formulations.

[47] Wright, *Becoming Black*, 27.

justifying not only the extraction of Africans for the economic machine of slavery and the colonisation of the continent, but also the undeniable oppression fixated on the Black individual in the West.[48] And so the Diasporic counterdiscourses became the battlefield in taking up the cross of self-definition in order to achieve Black subjectivity, which would interrelatedly modify what it meant to be Black in the public sphere.

As the Black communities in the early to mid-twentieth century, mainly in the United States, the Caribbean, Cuba and Brazil (as representative of Latin America), and West Africa, were engaging this significant task of reconstructing the Black subject as a historical being of great importance, not only as a means in the development of modern life but also as an end in itself, Mexico was altogether absent from this story. While chapter two will expound the contextual reasons for explaining this dormancy, located in Mexico's political landscape, I wish to spell out here exactly *why* an encounter with the African Diaspora is at all relevant for contemporary Mexico, before proceeding to detail how I will deploy the concept throughout the remainder of this thesis. As chapter three will reveal, Blackness is currently construed with two obvious defects: (a) as if it were inherently incompatible with the ideal of being Mexican, and (b) as if were still being subjected to the racist theorising of the colonial era. Given this uneasy foundation, Black Mexicans are prompted to 'make do' with what has been historically allotted to them. In the way of 'making do', they have followed suit as any oppressed people would and have sculptured for themselves a "process of meaning making"[49] which is peculiar to them alone. Herein lays the significance of the African Diaspora, to serve as a unique and compatible space for

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[48] Clarence Sholé Johnson, "(Re)Conceptualizing Blackness and Making Race Obsolescent," in *White on White/Black on Black*, ed. George Yancy (New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 175–6.
[49] Alcoff, "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" 324.

engaging Blackness in Mexico. The intellectual tradition of counterdiscourses that is quintessential to the Diaspora can serve as a conduit of valuable, authoritative experience to Black Mexicans on their quest to eradicating these defects, but also to first *recognise* them as the debilitating effects produced by still contributing to the perpetuation of colonial style Blackness. Having established the significance of a Diasporic approach, we may now proceed to outline how a Diasporic understanding of Blackness is articulated.

3.1 Intellectual tradition begetting transformative politics

According to Michelle Wright, reconstructing the Black individual from a Diasporic approach that transcends the seemingly insurmountable diversity of Black cultures across the globe can be achieved most persuasively through the intellectual tradition. For this reason,

> [a] truly diasporic approach to Black subjectivity must not be ethnically specific yet must provide some sort of specificity. It must translate across languages and cultures yet not effect so much transformation as to be unrecognizable to other Black communities. Cultural traditions, historical traditions, and political traditions will therefore serve only limited use. An *intellectual* tradition however, is an entirely different matter.[50]

In other words, a genuine and defendable concept of the African Diaspora emerges from the conflation of the Diasporic intellectual traditions. It is homogenised by a common methodology – and not by ethnicity – in a more durable and inclusive way than can be expected when merely drawing upon historical, cultural, and/or political similitudes as the primordial basis for defining Blackness (although these factors are

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[50] Wright, *Becoming Black*, 3 [original emphasis].

not minimised). This methodology, embraced by all Diasporic counterdiscourses independent of national affiliation, "understands Black subjectivity *as that which must be negotiated between the abstract and the real* or, in theoretical terms, between the ideal and the material".[51] In this way, Black subjectivity must not be understood in essentialist or absolutist terms, as if Blackness was somehow a fixed constant that remained exactly the same despite variations in social location in space and time.

Instead, I argue that Blackness is located in the interstices between the identity of the Diaspora and the more context-specific identity of the individual, the result of a continual process of negotiation as brought about by the experiences of extraction (from the motherland) and negation (in the West). Because this articulation of the Diaspora is not *directly* contingent on race and ethnicity, should my analysis of the legitimacy of these two identity classifications fall short, it would still prove possible to maintain my argument about the utility of the Diaspora for re-conceptualising Blackness in Mexico.

The provision of a sense of cohesion for the variety of Black communities, expressed as the African Diaspora, is multifaceted. Paul Gilroy, for example, argues that the Middle Passage and the consequent slave experience is the quintessential foundation for the idea of the Diaspora, or the Black Atlantic as he terms it, as a collective.[52] Although this formula seems to be flawlessly applicable, it does fail to allocate the necessary space to certain communities that have distinct historical origins, the result of *voluntary* migration, as in the case of the Afro-German population.[53] However, if the impact rendered on those left behind in Africa was also taken into consideration, then it would by extension account for these all-too-often

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[51] Wright, *Becoming Black*, 3 [original emphasis].
[52] Wright, *Becoming Black*, 134.
[53] See Wright, *Becoming Black*, 184–97.

forgotten Black communities. Nonetheless, my idea of the African Diaspora is that which equally embraces all persons of African ancestry by drawing recognition to the shared experiences of extraction and/or negation, permitting not only defensiveness against oppressive systems and institutions but also the idea of transformative politics. In other words, the idea of the Diaspora is not originated simply to defend the Black against White supremacy. It goes beyond resistance and counterdiscourse to reach towards establishing its own discourses, superseding the binaries set in place under the aegis of modernity; for it is under the umbrella of modernity where "[one of] racism's most virulent forms… colonialism",[54] is historically located.[55] This empowerment to create a living environment that embodies true democratic ideals is the essential beauty of the Diasporic discourse.

As Gilroy very convincingly argues, the way to confront the unsatisfactory assertions regarding what Alcoff terms the "constraining and pernicious" aspects of identity – as the anti-identity critics sustain – is by means of formulating a *counterhistory*. This is done with the objective to ultimately envision the future of cosmopolitan democracy as embodying multicultural conviviality, stemming from honest discussions about racism in the political realm.[56] This notion of the counterhistory is useful for my purposes of arguing for the vindication of Black identity in Mexico by means of rewriting history so as to birth a transformative politics which serves the dual purpose of dissecting and reconstructing how Blackness is portrayed while providing the material weight for the Black Mexican communities to advocate their own needs as they deem fit. While an impressive amount of archival

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[54] Aronowitz, "Misidentity Politics," 28.

[55] See also chapter five entitled "Colonial Empires" in Pierre L. van den Berghe, *The Ethnic Phenomenon* (1981; reprint, New York, Westport, Connecticut, and London: Praeger Publishers, 1987).

[56] Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, 17.

investigation has already been conducted to reconstruct the various stages of Mexico's development by tracing its dialogue with Blackness, from the colonial era to the post-Revolution era, I will limit the discussion in the following chapters regarding the issue of rewriting history to questions immediately concerning Black identity as currently understood.[57]

Like Gilroy, Satya Mohanty drives this point home, as he argues:

We cannot really claim ourselves morally or politically until we have reconstructed our collective identity, re-examined our dead and our dismembered. This is not simply a project of adding to one's ancestral line, for as we have seen, it often involves fundamental discoveries about what ancestry is, what continuity is, how cultural meanings do not just sustain themselves through history but are in fact materially embodied and fought for.[58]

As I interpret Gilroy's argument, as well as Mohanty's, to apply to the context of Mexico, it can be affirmed that this nation is currently undergoing a new, beginning chapter in Black identity politics. Of course, it is most certainly still in its most infantile stages. In no way is it implied throughout this thesis that Black identity politics is somehow of comparable material weight to the impact of the Indigenous identity politics on the national agenda, which underwent a significant shift in dynamics in 1994 with the Zapatista revolution in Chiapas. The very recent development of Black consciousness-raising pinpoints the mere beginnings of what could be called a new social movement which, if properly effectuated, may hopefully serve to transform the marginalised situation of Black communities.

3.2 Resisting refutations: Victimisation and racial purity

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[57] For one of the most comprehensive historiographies of Afro-Mexican studies, see Ben Vinson III, "La historia del estudio de los negros en México," in *Afroméxico*, 19–73.

[58] Mohanty, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity," 53–4.

One issue that the person of African descent will most likely encounter in the process of redeeming her/his subjectivity is the temptation to reduce his/her experience – whether historical or lived – to the accumulation of material compensation. Recklessly exploiting the victimisation that characterises Black history in a mere attempt at securing political gain is not fruitful either for the pursuit of social equality or for genuinely advancing the usefulness of Diasporic identity. This point of contention is very important in discussing the consolidation of Black identity in Mexico. Differentiated identity was historically only permitted in the case of the Indigenous peoples, and only as a means to incorporate the vast majority of the population given that ignoring them seemed overwhelmingly impractical for the 'creolised' elites. Even the Afro-Mexican studies pioneer Aguirre Beltrán argues that the racial integration of the Black person into the fabric of the Mexican nation signified the inconsequence of a differentiated Black identity.[59] As such, any political invocation of Black identity in contemporary Mexico will automatically have to confront assumptions that a victim-mentality motors the public appeal. Gilroy makes use of the writings of the African-American author James Baldwin in arguing for a prudent approach as required by the topic of victimisation and the Black experience.

> [Baldwin's] words locate the trap involved in hoping that what is *lazily* imagined to be shared identity might be straightforwardly transferred into the political arena. With his help we can apprehend the many dangers involved in vacuous 'me too-ism' or some other equally pointless and immoral competition over which peoples, nations, populations, or ethnic groups have suffered the most; over whose identities have been most severely damaged; and indeed over who might be thought of as the most de-racinated, nomadic, or cosmopolitan and therefore more essentially 'modern' or paradigmatically 'postmodern' peoples on our planet. However, with Baldwin's warning still in mind, there is much to be learned by foregrounding that experience of

[59] Odile Hoffmann, "Negros y afromestizos: viejas y nuevas lecturas de un mundo olvidado," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 68, no. 1 (January – March 2006): 112.

being victimized and using it to challenge the wilful innocence of some Europe-centered accounts of modernity's pleasures and problems.[60]

The significance extracted from this quotation centres around the uselessness of employing identity politics in certain ways. As Gilroy rightly points out, it is very tempting to become entrapped in irrelevant issues. The apparent innocence in doing so can become dangerous when it undermines and consequently illegitimates genuine concerns that *are* appropriately raised as a healthily propounded identity politics.

Another useful point to consider is Gilroy's critique of the type of identity that reflects the fascist political agenda as ultimately frustrated because it tries to fixate the boundaries of identity in the body even as the body inevitably defies such reification.[61] This could be compared to the struggle of the biracial individual (for example, a Black and White, as of most interest for my purposes) who seems to be continually caught in a web of in-betweenness, a space characterised above all by rejection when wholeness is epitomised as the ultimate definition of identity. This, more than likely, induces the individual to encounter a sort of double consciousness as theorised by W. E. B. Du Bois, reflective of a deeply complex and overwhelmingly contradictory balancing act as both the self and the other are confined to the same subject space. Likewise, the Black Mexican seems to find her/himself in a similar dilemma precisely because Mexican ideology never ventured outside of envisioning Blackness apart from pureness and absoluteness. Thus, in contemporary Mexico, when referring to Black identity, the possibility will most likely be refuted because race mixing is exemplified as the defining feature of the Mexican subject, so that racial purity is simultaneously nullified given this ideological prevalence of *mestizaje*.

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[60] Gilroy, *Against Race*, 113–4.
[61] Gilroy, *Against Race*, 104.

Any attempt to focus on the 'Blackness' of a Mexican will automatically kindle resistance as if the aim was based on a claim to racial purity, thereby creating a seemingly inextricable relation between talks of Black identity and essentialisms. Hence, the concept of *mestizaje* has served Mexico well in pronouncing the ideals of hybridity.

> Its recombinant form is indebted to its 'parent' cultures but remains assertively and insubordinately a bastard. It reproduces neither of the supposedly anterior purities that gave rise to it in anything like unmodified form. Here, at least, identity must be divorced from purity… Its protean constitution did not defer to the scripts of ethnic, national, racial, or cultural absolutism.[62]

However, the glorification of hybridity in the Mexican context falsely assumes that Black identity cannot be conceptualised apart from admonishing a sense of Afrocentric purity. This is not the case. It is possible, as this thesis attempts to establish, for the Black Mexican to self-identify as simultaneously belonging to a transnational, intercultural Diaspora, which draws a sense of connectivity between the abundance of communities of African descent *and* to the Mexican nation.

It is for the purposes of this thesis that the African Diaspora provides the broadest parameters for analysing the contours of Black identity in Mexico and its political significance. These parameters will serve as a point of departure for problematising the racist formulations of Black Otherness in the dialectics produced in relation to the White subject. Additionally, the Diaspora will also be a springboard to which the study will consistently return in situating the relevance of this thesis for the field of International Relations. In considering Black identity in Mexico, firstly it is vital to sustain that Blacks do not remotely constitute a homogenous group. It thus becomes necessary to specify the differences that exist within the Black community at

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[62] Gilroy, *Against Race*, 117.

large in order to appropriately situate their own understandings of Blackness. How Black identity is reclaimed in the urban centres is not equivalent to how it is expressed and lived in the rural areas.[63] In spite of this, I argue that this is emblematic of the Diaspora and so does not prove to be an impediment in analysing the contours of Black identity as a whole in Mexico, once the idea of the African Diaspora is adequately theorised, as has been outlined thus far.

Important to note is the cautious and inclusive approach taken. Dethroning Eurocentrism to instead hastily embrace the traditional culture of 'origin', in vindication attempts against the forced deculturation process experienced under slavery, is not on the agenda. The Afrocentric project of inverting the binary relationship to produce a White other in stark contrast to the Black subject is not propagated in this thesis. On the contrary, Black Mexican identity re-conceptualisation should not preoccupy itself with merely assuaging an anti-European/White sentiment at the expense of incongruity and uncritically re-embracing the whole of the 'pre-modern' culture without dissecting such to first judge which are the beneficial or degenerative aspects of those 'original' values and traditions.

A useful contrast regarding the notion of traditions and values is how J. E. Wiredu argues the importance of taking a critical stance in judging the value of African traditional thought, concluding that "[s]ifting through the elements of our traditional thought and culture will require a good measure of analytical circumspection".[64] This can also quite neatly apply to the Diaspora, given that a similar struggle between tradition and modernity exists in the negotiation process of

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[63] Laura A. Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans: The Dynamics of Race, Nation, and Identity in a Mexican *Moreno* Community (Guerrero)," *American Ethnologist* 27, no. 4 (2000): 917.
[64] J. E. Wiredu, "How Not to Compare African Traditional Thought with Western Thought," *Transition*, no. 75/76, The Anniversary Issue: Selections from Transition, 1961 – 1976 (1997): 327.

the identity formation for Blacks in the Americas, as it does likewise in contemporary Africa because of the colonisation experience. Even still, the fundamental difference regarding the purportedly binary relation between tradition and modernity (i.e., that tradition is anti-modern) is that the Afro-American in the Diaspora has been subjected to a profound severance from her/his origins, whereas the rupture has been much less profound for the African in the continent.[65] Besides this,

> [t]he idea of tradition gets understandably invoked to underscore the historical continuities, subcultural conversations, intertextual and intercultural cross-fertilisations which make the notion of a distinctive and *self-conscious* black culture appear plausible… However, the idea of tradition is often also the culmination, or centre-piece, of a rhetorical gesture that asserts the legitimacy of a black political culture locked in a *defensive* posture against the unjust powers of white supremacy… In these conditions, where obsessions with origin and myth can rule contemporary political concerns and the fine grain of history, the idea of tradition can constitute a refuge.[66]

Precisely that is the challenge of this thesis, to provide an in-between space in which Black Mexicans can exercise their subject status, without appealing to essentialisms. Certainly the Afro element of the Mexican person does not constitute the sole determinant in identity formation. Black Mexicans thoroughly view themselves as racially and culturally 'creolised' *and* nationalised.[67] The triumph of an overly zealous Afrocentric approach[68] would arguably misconstrue the lived reality of these communities. Likewise, any Diasporic identity is necessarily a negotiation born out

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[65] Gilroy argues against the dichotomous relationship typically defended between tradition and modernity; see especially chapter one of Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.

[66] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 188 [my emphasis].

[67] Vaughn, "Los negros, los indígenas y la diaspora," in *Afroméxico*, 82.

[68] For an analysis of the historical shifts within the Afrocentric paradigm, in order to understand the context within which it mobilised force in advocating its essentially anti-Eurocentric tenets, see Adeleke, "Will the Real Father of Afrocentricity Please Stand," 21–9.

of innovative efforts to make sense of the new environment into which one has been thrust.

In closing, the theoretical concepts described in this chapter should provide some of the more important and pressing tools that will aid Black Mexicans (and their Black and non-Black intellectual and/or activist interlocutors)[69] as they continue to negotiate their own Black subjectivity. The process of theorising subject status for the Black Mexican necessarily involves a reconstruction of collective identity, as Mohanty stresses, which should now be quite evident in defending a realist account of identity. The work of the *academic* thus becomes primordial to this process I call Black identity politics given that rewriting history necessarily involves the task of not only engaging in national literature but also, as is emphasised in this thesis, in Diasporic literature. And so another aspect of this process is the *dialogue* established between academia and the Black communities, where the communities provide most of the material content for the primarily idealist interpretation and proscription provided by academia.

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[69] For an excellent discussion about how the 'outsider' (i.e., non-Mexican or non-Black) can successfully contribute to this project of Black identity politics and what it entails, see Caroline S. Hau, "On Representing Others: Intellectuals, Pedagogy, and the Uses of Error," in *Reclaiming Identity*, 133–70.