CHAPTER THREE

The Black Subject in Mexico

Paul Gilroy indicates that the central "theoretical and political issues" surrounding the concept of identity are a sense of belonging, ethnicity, and nationality.[1] This seems to resonate with the thematic content of the literature available on the Afro population in Mexico. Drawing on the basic framework provided by Gilroy, this chapter will primarily explore the first two of the aforementioned aspects of Black identity in Mexico. The sense of belonging will be explored with specific regard to how the Black perspective of *indigenismo* is articulated, in revealing the dynamics of the relatively constant interaction maintained between Blacks and Indians in the Costa Chica region. Ethnicity will be explored in pinpointing how, on the one hand, Black Mexican culture is somewhat differentiated as a subset of Mexican national culture, while, on the other hand, it is widely accepted by scholars as virtually non-existent, in terms of how ethnicity is reflective of a collective identity; thus, any discussion about the cohesiveness of Black Mexicans as a classifiable group tends to challenge today's social reality. Nationality has already been addressed in chapter two, particularly when analysing the socio-political construct of *mestizaje*, although it will be briefly touched upon again in arguing how Blackness and Mexicanness are currently conceived to be profoundly incompatible with each other. The concepts of belonging and ethnicity are also tied into the analysis of the dynamics between identity and development, in advocating the mobilisation of a Black identity politics as one way

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[1] Gilroy, *Against Race*, 98.

that may proactively address the marginalised status and experiences of discrimination deeply marking the lives of Black Mexicans.

1. Being Black and Mexican: A bottom-up perspective

The ethnographical investigations of three principal anthropologists, Bobby Vaughn, Laura Lewis, and Julia Isabel Flores Dávila, will prove to be critical to the content of this chapter, in detailing the contours of Black identity as currently experienced in Mexico. Bobby Vaughn conducted research which he published in 2000 as his doctoral dissertation, entitled "Race and Nation: A Study of Blackness in Mexico", and also as his 2004 publication in collaboration with Ben Vinson III. He concentrated primarily in the Costa Chica region, above all in the town of Collantes in the state of Oaxaca, although he also visited several towns in the state of Veracruz, performing his field research from 1998 to 1999. Vaughn documents how he encountered various difficulties in being able to actually locate identifiably Black towns in Veracruz on which he could focus his studies, despite the popular belief that Veracruz is currently Mexico's 'Blackest' state. Beginning in 1997, Laura Lewis conducted her research in San Nicolás Tolentino in the state of Guerrero and has since published two particularly valuable articles, entitled "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans: The Dynamics of Race, Nation, and Identity in a Mexican *Moreno* Community" (2000) and "Of Ships and Saints: History, Memory, and Place in the Making of *Moreno* Mexican Identity" (2001). In 2006, Julia Isabel Flores Dávila carried out her investigation along with a team of researchers from the prestigious public institution located in the political heart of the country, the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). She has published two working papers

with the National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (CONAPRED), covering selected Black communities in the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, Veracruz, Tamaulipas, and Coahuila. Her publications are entitled "Afro-descendents in Mexico: Recognition and Anti-discrimination Proposals" (2006) and "Processes of Identity Construction, Living Conditions, and Discrimination in Afro-descendent Communities in the States of Coahuila and Tamaulipas" (2007).

The research by these selected academics not only details and analyses the identification processes of a wide range of Black Mexicans over the past decade, but it also differs to a substantial degree in both the arguments presented and the approaches employed. Additionally, it seems relevant to emphasis that each academic chosen has a distinct ethnic background, which further contributes to the richness of Afro-Mexican studies, especially in light of the analysis offered in chapter one regarding the close relationship between identity and generating knowledge.

1.1 Ethnicity

There have been various approaches to theorising the Afro identity in Mexico, ranging from theses that sustain the absorption of the African into the national *mestizo* fabric to others that emphasise the existence of a slave culture instead of a verifiable African culture. For instance, Aguirre Beltrán affirms in the final sentence of *La población negra* that "[t]he integration of the black population in the national society is the inevitable consequence of... the marginal situation that they [possessed] in the colonial society; undesirable situation that is resolved with the abolition of the caste

system".[2] Likewise, Benigno Jarquín Javier and Luz María Martínez Montiel affirm that the Afro-Mexican culture should be understood along the lines of a slave or maroon culture, rather than as an original, African culture that was preserved entirely within colonial society. This argument refers, above all, to the maroon communities which survived emancipation and maintained themselves isolated because of natural, geographical barriers.[3] Even more, some hypotheses stress the present lack of an *ethnic* Black consciousness among these communities, as Vaughn and Vinson claim. Still others, like Lewis, assert that the indigenous pillar remains overwhelmingly central to their identification process, as thus mandated by the hegemonic,[4] nation-building project of endorsing the "cosmic race". Despite the divergence of scholastic opinions, a so-called 'third root' consciousness is augmenting as a consensus is being reached regarding the differentiated nature of the culture in the Afro-Mexican communities.[5]

Indeed, the culture created by Mexicans of African ancestry can be catalogued as a subset of the national culture. The particular aspects that give rise to an *ethnic* Black identity, which is in part derived from and thus attributable to West African

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[2] "La integración de la población Negra en la sociedad nacional es la consecuencia ineludible de… la situación marginal que tiene en la sociedad colonial; situación indeseable que es resuelta con la abolición del sistema de castas;" Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra*, 292.

[3] See Benigno Jarquín Javier, "¿Continuidad o ruptura cultural mexicana en el México actual?" (paper presented at the IV Congrés d'Estudis Africans del Món Ibèric, Àfrica camina, Barcelona, Spain, January 12–15, 2004), http://www.africa-catalunya.org/congres/pdfs/jarquin.pdf (accessed October 11, 2007). In the same vein, Luz María Martínez Montiel talks about a *cimarrón* culture instead of an original culture; see "África: la tercera raíz de México," in *Arqueología, historia y antropología*: *In memoriam*, eds. José Luis Lorenzo Bautista, Jaime Litvak, and Lorena Mirambell, (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Historia y Antropología, 2000), 483–5.

[4] Vaughn describes such as a "hegemonic principle" in "Los negros, los indígenas y la diaspora," 82 [my translation].

[5] Gerardo Sánchez Díaz, prologue to *El rostro colectivo de la nación mexicana*, ed. María Guadalupe Chávez Carbajal (Morelia, Michoacán: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas de la Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, 1997), 9.

cultures,[6] include: the centrality of artistic expression, especially music and dance; speech and vocabulary; marriage and kinship forms; perceptions of illnesses and interrelatedness between body and spirit; among other aspects.[7] Beginning with Aguirre Beltrán's ethnography, *Cuijla*, of three Black towns on the Guerrero-side of the Costa Chica, many studies have been carried out detailing what the Afro-Mexican culture entails. This is an important dimension of understanding Blackness in Mexico, in defending the existence of a Black ethnicity originating in the lifestyles of the Black African slaves and passed on and amalgamated by their descendents. However, the discussion about Black Mexican culture will be limited here because the structure of this thesis is developed more by an interdisciplinary approach combining political studies and cultural studies than it is by cultural anthropology. Nonetheless, when discussing ethnicity, the topic of group identity, and thus the idea of showing solidarity to a collective based on a shared sense of selfhood, is undeniably central. As such, *this* aspect of exploring the ethnicity of Black Mexicans will be addressed further below, given the fact that this absence of solidarity and thus internal organisation has significant implications for the capacity of Black Mexican communities to effectively address their priority concerns regarding their marginalised status. All in all, understanding ethnicity as both culture and group solidarity means that the Afro-Mexican studies scholar is confronted with having to critically engage the great complexity of the challenges awaiting the Black Mexican to undertake, as will be more clearly shown throughout the remainder of this chapter.

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[6] To better understand the African tribal origins of the slaves transported to New Spain, see Aguirre Beltrán, "Tribal Origins of Slaves in Mexico: Historical Background," *The Journal of Negro History* 31, no. 3 (1946): 269–89; Palmer, *Slaves of the White God*, 20–3; Oriol Pi-Sunyer, "Historical Background to the Negro in Mexico," *The Journal of Negro History* 42, no. 4 (October 1957): 237–46.

[7] For a concise introduction to what makes a definitively 'Afro-Mexican' culture, see Flores Dávila, "Afrodescendientes en México," 39–57.

1.2 Sense of belonging: Black/Indian nexus of *moreno* identity

Being slaves and the descendents of slaves invariably positioned Black Africans and their progeny *against* the rest of colonial society, so that being treated as an outsider was not only accomplished by the Whites but also the Amerindians.[8] This sentiment is not only limited to the colonial past; it continues to persist in the mindsets and discourses of the Costa Chica, for instance.[9] Nevertheless, the process of *mestizaje* was slow and complex in nature. In judging the concept of the *raza cósmica* from the regional perspective of Veracruz, Patrick Carroll concludes that:

> In the broadest sense the Afro-Veracruzanos and *mestizos*, like their counterparts in Oaxaca, Puebla, Morelos, Parral and in the valley of Mexico, formed a central territory, with the whites to one side and the Indians to the other. The subgroups of Afro-Americans established social ties with the Indians, among themselves and with the *mestizos*; the *mestizos* created ties with the whites and the Afro-Americans. Together, the Black Americans and the *mestizos* attracted the Indians and the whites to this intermediary, social environment, dominated by the castes.[10]

Hence, a historical analysis provides the necessary material to understand Black Mexicans as forces of integration in the colonial era, in light of and propelled by the repression of being considered the most inferior of the human race.

Overall, race mixing proved fundamental to the survival and prosperity of the Black person within the context. Importantly so, cases of isolated Black societies also form part of the fabric of Black Mexican history, as is evidenced in the idea of wholly

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[8] Carroll, "Los mexicanos negros," 432.

[9] See Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans," 905–10.

[10] "En el sentido más amplio los afroveracruzanos y mestizos, como sus homólogos en Oaxaca, Puebla, Morelos, Parral y en el valle de México, formaron un territorio central, con los blancos de un lado y los indios del otro. Los subgrupos de afroamericanos establecieron enlaces sociales con indios, entre sí y con mestizos; los mestizos crearon enlaces con blancos y afroamericanos. Juntos, los americanos negros y los mestizos atrajeron a los indios y a los blancos a este ambiente social intermedio, dominado por las castas;" Carroll, "Los mexicanos negros," 433.

Black towns in the Costa Chica. Ben Vinson, in his 2000 ethnohistory of racial mixing in Igualapa, which is today roughly equivalent to the northern area of the Costa Chica, ascertains that miscegenation between Africans and the Indigenous peoples is a fairly recent phenomenon in those communities, and so contradicting the nationalist rhetoric that claims the contrary.[11] Likewise, according to Vaughn's ethnographical research that contrasts with Lewis', racial mixing in the Costa Chica reveals that "*mulatos*" and "*afromestizos*" formed the core of this region's *mestizaje*, as opposed to consistent mixing with the local Indian populations.[12] Vaughn also claims that in Collantes typically referred to as a town of "pure black folk" ("*pura gente negra*"), he always encountered the dominance of the Afro-Mexican family name without any traceable reference to an Indigenous ancestry.[13] Thus, Vaughn's research stands in stark contrast to Lewis' research on the town of San Nicolás Tolentino, Guerrero which shows that Black – Indian intermarriage frequently occurs, so much so to the extent that the *physical* proximity of the Indian person has lent to the paradoxical formation of *moreno* identity.[14] Nevertheless, this tension about the actuality of race mixing in the Costa Chica is stressed not to intractably weigh down the discussion at hand, but instead to show how it lends to the understanding of an

[11] Ben Vinson III, "The Racial Profile of a Rural Mexican Province in the 'Costa Chica': Igualapa in 1791," *The Americas* 62, no. 2 (2000): 269–82.

[12] Vaughn, "Los negros, los indígenas y la diaspora," 82–5.

[13] Vaughn, "Los negros, los indígenas y la diaspora," 83. Vaughn catalogues the following surnames as particular to the Afro-Mexican population, some of which curiously do not correspond to any other region of the country, nor do they originate from the prominent slave owners of the region (some of the strictly Afro ones are italicised, for instance): Acevedo, *Ayona*, *Bacho*, Bernal, Calleja, Cisneros, Colón, *Corcuera*, Dominguez, González, Hernández, Herrera, Liborio, Mariano, *Mariche*, *Morga*, Noyola, Petatán, Peñalosa, Saguilán, Salinas, Serrano, Silva, Toscano, and Vargas. In stressing the particularity of the Afro-Mexican handle of names, also see Vaughn, "Race and Nation," 188–9, which is the "Appendix 2: Regional Christian Names and Corresponding Nicknames".

[14] Indeed, both scholars recognise that the conclusions they reach from their research differs significantly from one another. For instance, see Vaughn, "Los negros, los indígenas y la diaspora," 82; Lewis, "Afroméxico," review of *Afroméxico. El pulso de la población negra en México: una historia recordada, olvidada y vuelta a recordar*, by Ben Vinson III and Bobby Vaughn, *Americas* 63, no. 3 (January 2007): 447–8.

ethnic, Black Mexican identity. In both Vaughn and Lewis' analyses, a tense and peculiar interaction between Blacks and Indians is described. Hence, it can be argued that the broader panorama of how Black/Indian relations are negatively enacted warrants greater attention than the focus, for the purposes of this thesis, on reaching a conclusive opinion on the particular details of race mixing in Black communities of the Costa Chica region.

Another manifestation of the relevance of Indianness to the discussion at hand refers to how the Black Mexican negotiates her/his sense of belonging to the nation, where nation is understood as the political community crafted out of the dispersal of various stateless ethnicities within the geographical confines of the State.[15] Returning to how Lewis analyses the interplay between Mexicanness, Blackness, and Indianness, she documents how Blacks in the town of San Nicolás create their connection to the Mexican nation through an intricate and highly "ambivalent" understanding of their position.[16] The idea of the *moreno* gives evidence of this. Although typically used as a euphemism for *negro* when politeness is the guiding rule for conversations, or to indicate a lighter-skinned Black person, *moreno* also refers to a person of mixed Indian and Black blood (*sangre mezclada*) in the Costa Chica, which leads locals in San Nicolás, for instance, to self-identify as "Black Indians" or "Indian Blacks".[17]

In their oral tradition, greatly significant for revealing how their relationship to Mexican territory (i.e., the physical location of their town and by extension to the nation) is negotiated, tales of ships arriving with Blacks from a faraway, *foreign* place

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[15] See Wallerstein, "The Construction of Peoplehood," 81–3.
[16] Lewis, Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans," 906–10.
[17] Lewis, "Of Ships and Saints," 74.

are regaled.[18] Specific reference to the general history of slavery or the area-specific history which narrates how slaves were first brought over to the region to work on cattle ranches,[19] to Africa as their place of origin, and to *palenque* settlements[20] is all but lost, so that the heart of their tale of belonging for all practical reasons begins right on the Pacific coast of Mexico.[21] The Third Root project, which, as already mentioned, is the government-sponsored cultural agenda set in place to disseminate information and educate Mexicans about the underappreciated African heritage,[22] celebrates San Nicolás as an especially important location. This is because of the conservation efforts aimed towards preserving the traditional, Afro-Mexican music forms, known as *sones de artesa*, in addition to the town housing one of the last remaining round houses, attributed to the traces of West African heritage, which in fact sits abandoned on the outskirts of the village.[23] As Lewis further argues, the issues of "uprootedness and contestation" are central to the "cultural processes through which races and places are made".[24] Hence, the idea of being both *foreign* and *original* to San Nicolás means that Black Mexicans create for themselves the necessary tools for constructing their sense of belonging, as an integral aspect of their identity formation, in specific regard to the tense coexistence of "uprootedness and contestation".

Indeed, this complex identity formation further convinces that Black Mexicans have great contributions to make to a wider-reaching understanding of Blackness,

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[18] Lewis, "Of Ships and Saints," 67–70.

[19] Vaughn, "Race and Nation," 49–52.

[20] For a brief discussion about *cimarronaje* in the Costa Chica, see Vaughn, "Race and Nation," 51–2.

[21] Lewis, "Of Ships and Saints," 68–9.

[22] See Laura A. Lewis, "African Mexicans," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Mexico*, ed. Michael Werner, 1–5 (Chicago and London: Fitzroy Dearbon Publishers, 2001).

[23] Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans," 898.

[24] Lewis, "Of Ships and Saints," 63.

given the similarities expressed here with how Du Bois theorised Black American identity in terms of a "double consciousness".[25] As such, it is incumbent to re-emphasise that the idea of the African Diaspora does not dictate racial purity or a single, authentic Black identity. In recapitulation, the Diaspora which is evoked in this thesis is sustained in particular by Black feminist writers who employ a dialogic identity formation allowing the concept to move beyond the boundaries of nationalist discourse to embrace heterogeneity at the expense of "forced homogeneity".[26] *This* is the African Diaspora that has much to offer to Black Mexicans as they renegotiate their sense of belonging so as to continually grow in separation from the tension-provoking, racism-inducing comprehension of race relations rooted in the colonial past. By problematising how Black Mexicans understand their place within the Mexican space they occupy – and have always occupied, in a sense, as the stories of the slave ship wreckage narrate – it is suggested that an application of a Diasporic formulation of Black identity to the Mexican context, mediated through the propagation of identity politics, may enhance the intricate relationship sustained between the Black and Indian peoples in the Costa Chica region. Despite whether San Nicolás' residents self-identify as Black Indian or Indian Black, there nevertheless exists an evident tension between the two social positions, which manifests itself in unproductive regurgitations and reformulations of the colonial *par excellence* racial distinctiveness, producing a notion of identity that is self-defeating to a great extent.

In justifying this assertion of the 'self-defeating' notion, Satya Mohanty stresses that the realist formulation of identity not only reveals a more accurate depiction of the socio-political construct but also produces distinctive advantages.

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[25] Gilroy is the scholar renown for engaging the theoretical material Du Bois provided in his *Souls of Black Folks*. See *Black Atlantic*; as well as Wright, *Becoming Black*, especially chapter two.
[26] Wright, *Becoming Black*, 140.

One important advantage of this theoretical account compels the establishment of judging criteria to be developed that allows for identities to be qualified as either "legitimate" or "spurious",[27] moving beyond the postmodernist critique that views identity as so arbitrary that judgement would be futile because all formulations are necessarily "constraining and pernicious". With this foundation, it can be argued that the way in which racial and ethnic identity is currently utilised in the communities identifiable as Afro-Mexican serves more to prejudice Blacks and a healthy personal development, which by extension influences upon their community development. By advocating that Black Mexicans more actively engage in the plethora of intellectual materials available within the African Diaspora, it is demonstrated that "the distinctively postcolonial challenge lies in leaving part of the past behind, in working through it to imagine agency and selfhood in positive terms, inventing new dimensions of cultural possibility".[28]

Likewise, Vaughn argues that the increasing migration of Afro-Mexicans to the United States, in addition to the dramatic turn-about of national and international interest in the experiences of being Black in Mexico, has a positive effect of introducing Afro-Mexicans to the greater Diaspora. In extension of how Vaughn introduces this possibility (and reality, for example, as embodied in the work of *México Negro*),[29] this reorientation is a significant endeavour to be undertaken, despite being tremendously complex in nature. While it is criticised, as Odile

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[27] Mohanty, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity," 56–7. He states: "[T]he second advantage a realist theory of identity offers is this: it helps explain how we can distinguish legitimate identities from spurious ones. In fact it gives us the way to appreciate different degrees of legitimacy and spuriousness. It does so by urging us to take the epistemic status of personal experience very seriously" (56).

[28] Mohanty, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity," 54.

[29] See Vaughn, "Los negros, los indígenas y la diaspora," 85–9.

Hoffmann does,[30] that Afro-Mexican studies tend to only partially or superficially engage in understanding how the inevitability of racial interbreeding has greatly isolated the salience of talking about Blackness in Mexico as central to the self-identification of persons of African ancestry, the way the Diaspora is conceived of in this thesis serves to address the present shortcomings.

This project of "imagining agency and selfhood in positive terms" is all the more urgent when one's sense of belonging to one's nation, especially given the rather benign form that racism has taken in Mexico in comparative terms,[31] is so precariously negotiated. Slavery and colonialism stripped Blacks of belonging, creating an empty nest that then needed to be filled by Blacks negotiating it themselves, which has led to an exceptionally complex interaction between Indianness and Blackness. The Mexican context provides a very enriching opportunity for analysis precisely because racial interbreeding, as a primary impediment to the colonial caste system based on the slave economy, has given place to an identity construct involving two colonially subordinated groups. So then, the irony of Black Mexican Otherness today is that it is only comprehensible when seen as the conflation of the Indian Other and the historical Black Other.

Hence, what Blacks and Indians disagree on and to an extent fight about (i.e., arable land rights) centres on the capacity of Blacks to retrieve and assert their sense of belonging to the *mestizo* nation that was built on their brokenness and ire-producing submission to the will and way of the White man. Regaling stories of the ship that was wrecked and thus "emancipated its human cargo" reveals the pride *morenos* and

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[30] See Hoffmann, "Negros y mestizos," 115–20.

[31] For an excellent comparative study on race and racism in Mexico, Brazil, the United States, and South Africa, see Pierre L. van den Berghe, *Problemas raciales*, trans. Juan José Utrilla (1967; first Spanish edition, Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1971).

negros feel in claiming the coastal region as their own, for the newly freed slaves were then met by Blacks who were already there.[32] Despite being uprooted, *costeños* nevertheless express the resistance-mindedness of the Black person by depicting the region as a "magnet of freedom",[33] a place where Blacks from different origins, whether arriving on a ship, already there before the ship arrived, or escaped slaves fleeing from the horrors of the U.S. plantations, come together to live in harmony, ruled by their own law. This is one of the ways in which belonging is depicted by Afro-Mexicans themselves. Indeed, "[l]ocal knowledge is shaped by the fact that older morenos, like other Mexicans, have not been taught the history of slavery in Mexico, and illiteracy is widespread. But it is also shaped by the way people understand Mexico as 'free' and thus as a place incompatible with enslavement."[34]

2. Conflation of public and subjective identities: Politicized ethnic identity

Blackness in the case of the overdeveloped world, as referred to by Gilroy, has assumed new contours, the consequence of the increased interaction between technology and culture that has led to the commercialisation of what was once labelled the counterculture.[35] Success, as defined in terms of upper mobility, has begun to dilute the divisions that existed a generation or two ago in the economic and social structures so that now the issue of class and underdevelopment is climbing the scale of importance. Paradoxically, these changes within Black society in the

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[32] Lewis, "Of Ships and Saints," 68.

[33] Lewis, "Of Ships and Saints," 68.

[34] Lewis, "Of Ships and Saints," 68. Flores Dávila's study illustrates how a community leader stresses a different opinion to the extent of whether or not Black Mexicans know their own history, although I would sustain that Lewis' description of San Nicolás is most likely the norm; see Flores Dávila, "Afrodescendientes en México," 81.

[35] Gilroy, *Against Race*, 242.

overdeveloped world have also magnified the internal instability that now sets the rich Blacks against the poor Blacks in a re-enactment of the time-old class-based struggle.

For the developing world, however, this phenomenon of the commercialisation of Black culture and the subsequent dissolution of the counterculture, with its political ramifications, is not currently relevant in the same matter. Perhaps it will never progress in that direction. Nonetheless, the point remains that while Blackness in the overdeveloped world is concerned with issues of critiquing modernity and the transnational growth of Black cultural representations, the issues that are embodied in the concept of the counterculture are still very relevant to the developing world. In the case of Mexico, these consciousness-raising exercises are still very fresh and have yet to fully embrace the complexity of Blackness as already experienced. As such, I argue it is possible to draw from the Diasporic armoire of experience in utilising identity in the fight for development.

How Blackness is currently understood, both as a process of internalisation and external ascription, within the national context are a question of debate among the interested anthropologists, both national and international. Lewis, for one, sustains that the "Africa thesis", termed as such by John McDowell[36] in the way that it is purported by the Third Root project, does not directly correspond to most Black Mexicans themselves, in any representational way of direct relevance. Above all, this is because it fails to promote development in terms of generating material resources at the most basic level, when questions of discrimination prevail as manifest in the abysmal lack of labour opportunities available in Black towns, as Flores Dávila's research reveals. Since the onset of the 1990s, the project has had partial success in

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[36] McDowell, *Poetry and Violence*, 103, cited by Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans," 900.

promoting the advancement of a Black consciousness among the more urban population, such as in the case of the municipal seat of Guerrero, Cuajinicuilapa, where an Afro-Mexican museum was inaugurated in 1995 in celebration of the government's dedication.[37] Unfortunately, this has yet to be *relevantly* communicated to the rural communities in a way that appropriately engages them from the standpoint of how *they* currently embrace *their* Blackness.

The promotion of 'Africa' as an original source of Mexican national identity, in addition to the Indian and Spanish, is somewhat of a contradiction. On the one hand, approaching Africa as a single unit of analysis has historically served more to camouflage the widespread heterogeneity of the continent's inhabitants than to illustrate a true depiction, being born more out of a racialised parochialism that viewed the non-White world as politically identical terrain for conquest.   The historical ambiguity with which Africa has been approached by both Whites *and* Blacks alike (especially in the United States, as Tunde Adeleke argues) is indicative of this very mindset. By hastily masking Africa together under a singular framework, politicians and scholars failed to truly explore the divergences and convergences of African societies from an inside perspective. On the other hand, this contradiction is especially owed to the extreme lack of connectivity expressed by Black Mexicans themselves, neither in terms of a historical or contemporary relation. Nor does it help that Black Mexicans seem to regurgitate the global connotation of the visualisation of the African as synonymous with being poor and backwards;[38] why would Black

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[37] Hoffmann, "Negros y afromestizos," 123.

[38] Regarding this idea of Africa, Oyekan Owomoyela writes: "One must grant that the dismal performance of independent Africa provides enough reason for disappointment with the new African states, their institutions, and their bureaucrats; yet the current vogue of postmodernism and its challenges to supposedly settled verities, its space-clearing possibilities that permit alternative was of seeing and of being, should have served to discourage any attribution of essential insufficiency to

Mexicans, who have little to no consciousness of their *historical* legacy choose to align themselves with and celebrate their African heritage without this project being properly communicated? Indeed, rural Black Mexicans resent this aspect of the Third Root project when it gives further evidence to their foreignness to the nation.

As such, one could interpret Our Third Root as something of political leverage exercised by the political elites, both in dealing with the claims of those who politicise the ethnic identity of Black Mexicans and above all with 'keeping with the times' given the current academic and social trend to recognise Latin America's third root.[39] In other words, the way for the State to placate the politicisation of Blackness in Mexico is to grant 'Africa' 'third root' status. But, what is the *practical* relevance for the communities of Afro-descendents in the Costa Chica of idealising Africanness and how does this prejudice the project of exploring the *essential* nature of Blackness in Mexico? Here pertains the analysis of Black identity as either hindrance or freedom.

It is argued that the ultimate failure of the third root consciousness has been its utilitarian projection of Black identity in Mexico, in that it seems to incorrectly assume another hegemonic attempt at imposing Africanness on the identification process of the Black Mexicans without strategically meeting the rural population and carefully listening to how they articulate their Blackness. Paradoxically, the rural communities sceptically see the cohort of consciousness-raising efforts, which are more overtly related to a Diasporic approach to Blackness, as an external imposition

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Africanity, and *to mitigate the pathologization of Africa*;" Oyekan Owomoyela, "From Folklore to Literature: The Route from Roots in the African World," in *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities*, eds. Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 280 [my emphasis].

[39] Interestingly enough, Flores Dávila notes that one third of Latin America is, in fact, Afro-Latino. For an overview of race and Blackness in Latin America, see Flores Dávila, "Afrodescendientes en México," 8–14.

by the dominant culture.[40] The imposition of an outsider conception of an 'authentic' Blackness embodied in the 'third root' consciousness has arguably done more to isolate the average Black Mexican than encourage their participation in the counterdiscourses of the African Diaspora.

Lewis stresses in her writings that the intent of the Third Root project in glorifying Mexico's African past has verged on making Blacks even *more* similar to Indians because of what she terms the "folklorization process [of Afro-Mexican culture], which obfuscates the real needs of contemporary populations".[41] As such, she draws a clear separation between what is being promoted and what is *real* for the local population of San Nicolás.[42] By hampering onto an idealised past, Our Third Root is failing to make itself relevant to Black Mexicans today. This is a serious criticism that needs to be appropriately considered by those in the national Office of Popular Culture as they continue to draw greater attention to the West African cultural vestiges in Mexico. Indeed, the focus of the Third Root project on "pastness", as Immanuel Wallerstein terms it,[43] leads to the conclusion that it is more concerned with the re-conceptualisation of national identity, proudly proclaiming Mexico to be a multicultural and multiethnic nation, than with ameliorating the present situation of marginalisation of the focus population. Otherwise, it will continue to serve as

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[40] Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans," 916.

[41] Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans," 913. Lewis also references the following text regarding "what has been termed *folklorization* with reference to relations between Indians and the state in Latin America"; "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans," 912, citing Greg Urban and Joel Sherzer, eds., *Nation-States and Indians in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 10–1.

[42] Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans," 910–3.

[43] Wallerstein, "The Construction of Peoplehood," 78.

another means by which White subjects in Mexico have produced yet another Black Other.[44]

Despite the salience of Lewis' arguments, a controversial aspect of her writings is in how she groups together under one label all of the recent efforts at politicising the Black Mexican so that they all are thought to have the same effect of lending to the "folklorization process" of the African in the Black Mexican. In this sense, a distinction can be made between the aims of *México Negro*, the grassroots organisation born in the Costa Chica. For instance, one of the founding members of *México Negro* is Father Glyn Jemmott, a Trinidadian Catholic priest who has been working and living in El Ciruelo, Oaxaca since 1984.[45] Vaughn quotes Jemmott as saying: "More social action could be undertaken by blacks themselves if they have a cultural identity in common to give them strength".[46] In the same vein, the potential resource of the African Diaspora in aiding this development of solidarity, specifically by means of identity, is embodied in the objectives of *México Negro*.

However, the success experienced during the Meetings of Black Communities (*Encuentros de los pueblos negros*), spearheaded by *México Negro*, is a point of contention. The description Lewis offers of the impact of these Meetings differs notably from Vaughn's observations. Lewis writes from the perspective of local

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[44] For an understanding of how multiple Black Others have been produced as a result of the various theorisations of White subjectivity, see Wright, *Becoming Black*, especially chapter one.

[45] Lewis does mention in a footnote, although without mentioning the name of "this priest," that Father Jemmott "has been instrumental in educating local people about their history and the slave trade and in encouraging the artesanal production of boats, which come from the village in which he resides;" see footnote 13 in Lewis, "Of Ships and Saints," 78. It is a bit perplexing why Lewis fails to *name* Father Jemmott, as she makes mention to a certain Catholic priest several times, given that he appears to be a staple figure as an activist in the Costa Chica. Odile Hoffman, another scholar contributing to Afro-Mexican scholarship, also joins Lewis in this ambiguous approach to Father Jemmott as she analyses the recent trends in the ethnicisation of the *negro* in Mexico; see Hoffmann, "Negros y afromestizos," 120–4.

[46] "La acción más social podría emprenderse por los negros si tienen una identidad cultural común para darles fuerza;" Vaughn, "Los negros, los indígenas y la diaspora," 90 [my translation].

Blacks (or Black Indians or Indian Blacks) in San Nicolás, detailing how the First Meeting seemed to validate an appropriation of Blackness by White Mexicans more than actually fulfilling the aims of catering to the needs of Black Mexicans as articulated by Black Mexicans themselves. She notes that this was exemplified when one White participant, an anthropology student, said, "I'm not properly speaking black… but I share this identity," while another White history professor further contributed by saying, "All Mexicans have black, Indian, and white roots… It's important to recognize this".[47] She concludes by stating:

> Recent attempts by scholars and cultural promoters to reevaluate Mexican 'blacks' as 'Afromexicans' or 'Afromestizos' and to include them in a multicultural nation with three 'roots' have had the effect of replicating the separation of blackness and Mexicanness because they both impute an 'African' identity that local morenos do not claim and disregard their genealogical, historical, and sociocultural ties to Indians.[48]

Vaughn, on the other hand, draws attention to what he believes is the greatest achievement of the Meetings of Black Communities thus far (as he wrote in 2004), being the "vindication of Blackness".[49] Although Vaughn does not indicate this as the case of the perceptions shared by the Black populations he works with (above all in Collantes), he instead concentrates his analysis of Black politics ("*la política negra*") on the significant achievement of encapsulating the first attempt to bring together Black communities for these purposes. Naturally, it is an extremely difficult project to put into motion, given the contemporary political and economic situation notwithstanding the historical discontinuity which has given rise to an ambiguous sense of the Black Mexican's belonging to the nation. However, the criticisms raised

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[47] Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans," 913.
[48] Lewis, "Of Ships and Saints," 70. For a greater development of this argument, see Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans."
[49] Vaughn, "Los negros, los indígenas y la diaspora," 91.

by Lewis in not distinguishing Our Third Root from *México Negro*[50] suffices to demonstrate for those grassroots activists that a fundamental lack of communication is prejudicing the intent and outcome of the so-called 'movement'.

3. Identity and development dynamic

In International Relations, the idea of employing national identity to encourage economic development is well-documented.[51] Indeed, questions of identity are being allocated a more central position of analysis within the field of studies, despite the delayed response in following the general trend present in other social sciences. As internationalists are growing more and more aware of how identity is not only a determinant but a constituent of wider social practices, monumental events, and institutions, the relation between identity and development can be more readily engaged. Within the field of psychology, for instance, the utility of personal identity in stimulating healthy, positive personal growth is quite widely accepted.[52] Along the same lines, I propose that a similar argument can be made so that collective identity may be posited to stimulate and sustain community development.

In defining 'development', it refers to a process by which certain relevant factors in a community measure steady and significant increase so as to affect positive change in the capacity to generate wealth in order to adequately meet and sustain the

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[50] For a detailed difference, see chapter five of Vaughn, "Race and Nation," 146–78.

[51] See, for example, Ross Bond, David McCrone, and Alice Brown, "National Identity and Economic Development: Reiteration, Recapture, Reinterpretation, and Repudiation," *Nations and Nationalism* 9, no. 3 (2003): 371–91.

[52] See, for example, the following article that posits using ethnic and racial identity to encourage adolescent Blacks to abstain from drug use; Judith S. Brook and Kerstin Pahl, "The Protective Role of Ethnic and Racial Identity and Aspects of an Africentric Orientation against Drug Use among African American Young Adults," *The Journal of Genetic Psychology* 166, no. 3 (2005): 329–45.

rising demands of the population. The relevant factors to be discussed below include, among others, employment opportunities, education, housing, health services, and community infrastructure. Succinctly put, it is argued that social development (i.e., the consolidation of a public Black identity) may positively impact the economic development (i.e., sustainable generation of wealth) of the Black Mexican communities.

3.1 Discrimination, marginalisation, and the imperative of development

For the immediate analysis of this thesis, it is important to affirm that the extreme, segregationist experience of violently targeting the Black individual is *not* the case of Mexico. The explosive, degrading racism of the United States never existed in this country, pitting Mexico's humanitarian refuge against the vileness of the racialised hatred home to those lands so boasting of liberty of decision and freedom from iron shackles. In spite of this, the state of economic and political marginalisation still very actively reflects the lived situations of the Afro communities.

Regarding how discrimination correlates to the Black communities of Mexico, Flores Dávila reveals in her working papers that the experience of poverty is not thought to be a direct consequence of being Black in Mexico. Instead, the main problems articulated by Afro-Mexicans, including "poverty, lack of opportunity, and lack of organisation",[53] are affirmed to be characteristic of what plagues the whole country. As such, the economic conditions of the Black communities are not necessarily distinctive; they merely reflect the unequal economic growth and wealth

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[53] Flores Dávila, "Afrodescendientes en México," 71.

distribution. Of course, the Black communities are entirely situated in the poorest regions of Mexico. However, according to the perceptions of the target population, racism is not to blame for the underdevelopment of their communities. Indeed, they vehemently deny that racism is alive and well in Mexico.[54]

Discrimination, defined as a negative form of treating a selective group of persons solely on the base of physical or cultural traits, is widely believed to derive from the lack of labour opportunities that, in turn, fosters an environment of poverty. So, when a Black child goes to school shoeless and without the proper school supplies, it generates the impression that being Black is inconsequentially linked to being poor.[55] This becomes the staple stereotype of what it means to be Black and Mexican. The lack of labour opportunities within Black communities is blamed, above all, on the minimal attention received from the government in developing infrastructures. Even when the government complies, the development projects frequently bypass the immediate concerns of the residents, so that instead of concentrating on the building of a drainage system and securing easy access to clean water, for example, a boulevard is constructed.[56]

As such, other primary factors contributing to their poverty that were stressed in the surveys conducted in Flores Dávila's investigations are government inefficiency and the fact that "they are taken advantage of by everyone else";[57] the second of them is quite telling indeed. Although Flores Dávila does not expand on exactly how this manipulation is played out and perceived, it can be surmised that this

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[54] Flores Dávila, "Afrodescendientes en México," 87.

[55] Flores Dávila, "Afrodescendientes en México," 74–5, 78, 85.

[56] Flores Dávila, "Afrodescendientes en México," 86.

[57] Julia Isabel Flores Dávila, ed., "Procesos de construcción de identidad, condiciones de vida y discriminación en comunidades afrodescendientes en los estados de Coahuila y Tamaulipas," Dirección General Adjunta de Estudios, Legislación y Políticas Públicas of the Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación, working paper, no. E-20-2007 (Mexico City, December 2007), 36.

in some way references the way the rural Afro-Mexican population feels about the cultural promotion of the Third Root project. "Because morenos are the objects of both derision *and* cultural promotion, 'making fun' comes to include 'making money' because whites often sell the pictures they do manage to take of morenos. In this respect, the exploitation of blacks by whites has the unintended effect of making blacks like Indians after all."[58] It also evidences what Michelle Wright describes as W. E. B. Du Bois' extension of Hegel's dialectic in his seminal work, *Souls of Black Folks*, in that "Du Bois's paradox of the Negro American in *Souls* moves beyond Hegel's idealist structure of the dialectic to incorporate the materialist concerns: racism, political disenfranchisement, and *economic exploitation*".[59] In other words, Wright notes how Du Bois moved the discussion from the realm of theory in redeeming the Black subject to also include the material manifestations of the self/Other dichotomy that pitted the rational, enlightened White subject against the ahistorical, irrational Black Other.

Ironically, it appears as though Black Mexicans do not typically associate this overall lack of opportunity and the position of being taken advantage of with their skin colour, although there are numerous persons who opine the opposite, according to Flores Dávila's studies.[60] Hence, Black Mexican discourse revolves around discrimination and not racism when voicing concerns about their marginalised position, translating into State neglect and political disengagement. Again, this makes sense when contextualised to understand that Black Mexican understanding of racism is deeply embedded in their comprehension of Mexico as a 'free' nation and a *mestizo*

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[58] Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans," 910 [original emphasis].

[59] Wright, *Becoming Black*, 72 [my emphasis].

[60] Flores Dávila, "Afrodescendientes en México," 84–8. See also Flores Dávila, "Procesos de construcción de identidad," 83–4.

nation which, despite their position of marginalisation, has more to do with material factors (i.e., government inefficiency) than ideational ones (i.e., racist ideology).

Lack of organisation among them is another aspect cited as significant to the Black Mexican state of poverty.[61] Vaughn also encountered this as he engaged in countless conversations, both formal and informal, with locals in the Costa Chica. Even more, mention is made of how Blacks expressed admiration and envy towards the neighbouring Indigenous peoples because of how they have apparently achieved what Blacks have not: solidarity for the common cause of development.[62] The contrast between Indians and Blacks is thus further accentuated.

Referencing the "lazy" and "violent" nature of Black Mexicans,[63] the discourses surrounding the work ethic and propensity for solidarity that contrast the two peoples overwhelmingly reflect nationalist stereotypes which are, more than anything, cemented in generalisations of the purported biologically determined social capacity of the Black person and the Indian person.[64] Although Lewis references this tendency, she fails, in my opinion, to pinpoint that the "national sentiments that have repudiated blackness while idealizing Indianness"[65] stem directly from the tradition of raciology, which characterised the colonial agenda and morally legitimated slavery and the subjugation of the African person for "their own good". Raciology, the pseudo-scientific approach to justifying racial differences as fundamentally biological

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[61] Flores Dávila, "Afrodescendientes en México," 88.

[62] Vaughn, "Los negros, los indígenas y la diaspora," 80–1; Flores Dávila, "Afrodescendientes en México," 87.

[63] Flores Dávila, "Afrodescendientes en México," 82–4. See also Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans," 905–6. Veronique Flanet's 1977 publication is widely referenced as an integral text to Afro-Mexican studies, particularly for understanding race relations in the Costa Chica, and may be consulted for further reading; see *Viviré si Dios quiere: un estudio de la violencia en la mixteca de la costa* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1977).

[64] See, for instance, Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra*.

[65] Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans," 905.

which gave way to beliefs that Blacks were inherently stronger, more beautiful, and more sexually excitable, was espoused in chapter one. The propensity to resort to these racialised stereotypes, which are rooted in nineteenth century anti-Black racism (as espoused by Hegel and Gobineau), in order to make sense of the interaction between Blacks, Indians, and Whites urgently warrants a revision of what the contours of Blackness are in Mexico. This urgent revision also embodies a proscription to deal with the racism perpetuated by Blacks towards Indians, as well as the internal discrimination that pits Blacks against Blacks, claimed to exist even within the confines of a single community.[66]

3.2 Black consciousness-raising and development

The thoughts of Cornel West are quite useful in arguing how identity can, and possibly should, be mobilised for the purpose of achieving development. His writings are located within the philosophy of African-American critical thought, which focuses on the project of social justice as reached by means of Black liberation.[67] Indebted to Martin Luther King, Jr. for his inclusive vision of advocating for social justice, the oppression of people of colour also embraces the marginalised situation of indigent Whites, homosexual persons, Latinos, among a variety of other marginalised groups.[68] West theorises that the way towards achieving the "harmonious development of the personality"[69] in the face of the "oppressive existential situation"[70] of the marginalised

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[66] Flores Dávila, "Afrodescendientes en México," 85.

[67] Clarence Sholé Johnson, "Cornel West, African American Critical Thought, and the Quest for Social Justice," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2001): 550.

[68] See footnote 3 in Johnson, "Cornel West," 570.

[69] Cornel West, *Prophecy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 17, cited by Johnson, "Cornel West," 549.

Black individual is by means of merging the pillar strength of the intellectual tradition embodied in the activism of the prophetic, African-American church with American pragmatism.[71] Although West's formula is not the focus of this present emphasis on his thought, it does serve to demonstrate how he understands the interrelatedness between social freedom, political agency, and existential freedom. As Clarence Sholé Johnson summarises in a critique about his theory, West argues that "it is in and through human agency that existential freedom is exercised. And for West, the exercise of existential freedom in political praxis is 'social freedom'. It is for this reason that West aptly says, 'Existential freedom empowers people to fight for social freedom, to realize its political dimension'".[72] As West has formulated, the vindication of Black identity in Mexico is understood to serve as a liberating task working towards existential freedom, which in turn propels the Black individual to exercise their political agency.

Returning to the landscape of the Costa Chica, the inauguration of the Meetings of Black Communities, the first of which was held in 1997, contemplated precisely the complaint of the desperate lack of organisation among Black communities. By means of bringing together as many Black Mexicans as possible, representative of communities from the Costa Chica, to discuss issues relevant to being Black (i.e., culture, commonality, mutual development, etc.), the task of feeding

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[70] Johnson, "Cornel West," 548.

[71] An interesting branching-off of this study perhaps could consider applying a similar logic espoused in West's provocative book, *Prophecy Deliverance!*, to the instance of the church's importance in Afro-Mexican culture. Flores Dávila's studies, for example, document (as is typical of Mexico) that religious structures dominate the infrastructure of Black communities, even as other recreational centres are practically non-existent. In this sense, the role of the church could be positively mobilised in contributing to the social movement embodied in *México Negro*. At present, I am unaware of a similar enterprise already underway. See Flores Dávila, "Procesos de construcción de identidad," 13.

[72] Johnson, "Cornel West," 549, also citing West, *Prophecy Deliverance*, 18.

the sparks of a Black consciousness was hoped to have rooted.[73] Renato Rosaldo explains in the following way how consciousness-raising is vital in formulating an identity politics:

> The process of identity politics... has… to do with participation in new social movements. For the individual it involves entry into already established social processes, in which each person participates in her or his manner. The psychological processes in question concern the manner in which an individual participates. They are not pure narcissism… The proximate origins of the new social movements and their processes of change often have to do with consciousness-raising.[74]

México Negro, the Costa Chica based organisation which spearheaded the Meetings, embraced as one of their central objectives the idea of encouraging the growth of Black identity as a means to more adequately meeting the needs of the *costeños*.[75] Even still, the organisers confessed to having preferred to emphasis the less problematic aspects of strengthening community, like regional artistic forms, at the expense of encountering serious obstacles in overtly declaring the intent involved with the consolidation of *Black* identity.[76] Drawing from the Diasporic traditions of resistance, which situate music and literature as central components of Black political expression,[77] it may become more evident in Mexico, just as anthropologist and musician Lilly Alcántara Henze believes that Afro-Mexican dance and music is in itself a political act.[78]

Black Mexicans as a collective have yet to fully engage in this Diasporic challenge by means of effectuating a coherent and inclusive identity politics which

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[73] Vaughn, "Los negros, los indígenas y la diaspora," 90–1.

[74] Renato Rosaldo, "Identity Politics: An Ethnography by a Participant," in *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, 119.

[75] *Costeños* is one of the nomenclatures used by Blacks who reside on the coastal proportions of the Costa Chica to refer to themselves.

[76] Vaughn, "Los negros, los indígenas y la diaspora," 92–3.

[77] See especially Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.

[78] Vaughn, "Los negros, los indígenas y la diaspora," 93.

articulates their demands for social justice. Thus, it is proposed that the identity politics should be mobilised on two dimensions, oriented towards both the Mexican federation and the African Diaspora. The logic of this bilateral strategy argues that bombarding the local government with pleas for recognition and assistance is restricting. The decades of national neglect has very plainly confirmed this, as evidence of the recent migrations since the 1980s to the United States, in particular to North Carolina, Southern California, and Utah, in search of higher economic yield for their labour.[79] Diasporic resources are available to these Black communities, though it is argued solely in terms of gleaning *intellectual* stimulation so that the failure-and-success experiences of others may be applied and/or avoided. As such, the multilateral identity politics suggested emphasises the benefits that can be reaped from international collaboration.

Importantly so, cooperation with the Indigenous identity politics could serve a tremendous opportunity, following the example of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s and Cornel West's multiethnic project of liberation. However, it would most certainly have to be engaged with caution, considering the traditional eclipse of Blackness occasioned at the hand of national favouritism for the *indigenismo*, the 'Indigenous cause'. Despite this urgency, as recognised by *México Negro*, to consolidate an ethnic Black identity that is specifically focused on implementing solutions to the immediacy of the development of the Black communities, a long term objective of the Black identity politics should be to form a solidified front with the Indigenous identity politics. As such, Black identity politics is less prone to be criticised for its exclusive, and quite possibly Afrocentric, orientation.

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[79] Vaughn, "Los negros, los indígenas y la diaspora," 95; Flores Dávila, "Afrodescendientes en México," 76. Also see Laura A. Lewis, "Home is Where the Heart Is: North Carolina, Afro-Latino Migration and Cinder Block Houses on Mexico's Costa Chica," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 105, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 801–29.

In summary, development strategies aimed at the Black communities of Mexico are necessary because of their marginalised status in addition to the understanding that although Blacks in Mexico are hybridised, they nevertheless represent a distinguishable group. Despite the message of *mestizaje*, genuine differences exist and national homogeneity is not just a myth but a *pernicious* one at that, dangerous to the end of removing the necessary tools from the Black population to negotiate their own identity outside of a self-defeating framework, which has been alluded to above.

The benefits of effectuating a healthily formulated Black identity politics, as one means to strategically change the economically and politically marginalised position of Black Mexicans, are plentiful. By creating awareness of the existence of the other Black communities, exchanges can be encouraged in furthering development strategies as motivated at the grassroots level, resisting unilateral imposition of government strategies which fail to contextualise development and what it means for the communities themselves. The plethora of Diasporic resources available, in first and foremost renegotiating their sense of belonging to the Mexican nation by means of drawing from a framework of Black subjectivity, needs to be better and more forcefully communicated to Black Mexicans. The emphasis should be made on the reciprocal potential of this international exchange; while the Diaspora has much to offer, Black Mexico itself has great contributions to make that will provide wider and more accurate understandings of the generic concept of what it means to be Black.

Another benefit to be derived from the rejuvenation of the Black subject in postcolonial terms, is working towards eliminating the antagonistic perceptions and stereotypes of the Indians. Once a more truthful comprehension of Black belongingness to Mexico is embraced, the tension that characterises the "genealogical,

historical, and sociocultural ties to Indians"[80] should begin to dissolve. Being denied a historical claim to Mexico because of one's slave status and then by the exclusionary formulation of national identity warrants corrective measures to be proactively undertaken by Black Mexicans themselves.

Finally, in dealing with what Black Mexicans describe as intra-communal discrimination,[81] the use of a positively constructed identity may prove quite effective in eliminating social ills like gang violence, drug abuse, and neighbour mistrust.[82] Of course, this is in addition to the argument that Black identity politics be mobilised to increase the Black communities' own capacity to generate and sustain economic growth. As such, the position of explaining the proliferation of social ills both in terms of economic causes as well as socio-political causes is assumed.

It is also an imperative to consider the challenges inherent in advocating the mobilisation of identity for development purposes. To avoid Blackness being reduced to utilitarian purposes, in solely achieving political gains at perpetuating Black victimisation as the sole justification of the marginalised status of the Black Mexican, it is important for the consciousness-raising activities of organisations like *México Negro* deeply penetrate the comprehension of the rural population. Limitations on personnel and logistical resources obviously complicate this aspect; after all, activists have their own lifestyles to uphold, not to mention that the so-called 'movement' is still in its beginning stages. Nevertheless, it is tantamount that the purposes and aims of the Meetings of Black Communities are clearly communicated so that the local population does not assume it to be yet another ploy to further deride and exploit their *difference*.

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[80] Lewis, "Of Ships and Saints," 70.
[81] Flores Dávila, "Afrodescendientes en México," 85.
[82] Lewis, "Home Is Where the Heart Is," 821–2.

A pedagogical strategy should also play an integral role in the continued formulation of the Black identity politics. Perhaps forming connections with other Afro-Latin social movements will prove less daunting for engaging Afro-Mexico in the Diasporic tradition of resistance and transformative politics. After all, the underlining premise of this thesis is that knowledge is power. It can be mobilised to both the detriment and betterment of a people. What Black identity politics could achieve in Mexico is the regeneration of the Black subject in joining the ranks of the global project of Black liberation and advancement.