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**Low-income mestiza and Black women's organizations and NGOs in Quito, Ecuador: A micro-level analysis of the impact of neoliberal policy.**

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**Low-income mestiza and Black women's organizations and NGOs in  
Quito, Ecuador: A micro-level analysis of the impact of neoliberal  
policy.**

**by**

**Rachel Catherine Stifter, B.A., M.A.**

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## **Dedication**

To all the women who encouraged me to fulfill my dreams while they fought to fulfill theirs.

And, to my best friend, best supporter and husband, Pablo.

## **Acknowledgements**

Hundreds of hours of other people's time went into the creation of this dissertation. I thank you all. I am especially grateful to the Ecuadorian women who made time for me in their very busy days. Also, I thank the Ecuadorian women's organizations and women's NGOs that allowed me to observe and participate in good, bad and boring moments, knowing that I came to cast a critical eye on their activities. Without my husband (and dissertation coach), I don't think I would have ever finished. Finally, I thank my U.S. and Ecuadorian family who, despite my rambling, imprecise explanations of what I was doing and their concerns for my safety, encouraged me to keep studying, traveling and writing.

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## **Preface**

The material collected for and the analyses presented in this dissertation are affected by my position in the field as well as my relationships with individuals and the organizations in which they participated. My position and my relationships were influenced by the fact I am a blonde-haired, blue-eyed American often perceived as supporting United States policies and economic decisions. Who I talked with and what I was told reflected what I looked like, my United States citizenship and both my own and others' interpretations of what these meant. Therefore, it is from this vantage point that this dissertation develops, but visions people had of me and my own sense of position in Ecuador developed over time. Here, I describe the deeper relationships I had with mestiza women's organizations, as compared to Black women's organizations, how I came to volunteer at CAM, the NGO I present as a case study, and how difficulties within CAM affected my research. Finally, I introduce the two women who were my closest associates in this effort and explain the contribution they made to it.

### **Personal/political placement of myself in my research**

Regardless of my personal beliefs that a globalized, free-market economy and the United States would not solve the world's problems, my stereotypical American looks made it difficult to separate myself from these stereotypes of American ideology in Ecuador. I found myself both stigmatized and admired for, in my opinion, all the wrong

reasons. Despite the challenges and frustrations of living there, Quito became home. I married and have family (in-laws) there. Some organized popular sector mestiza women even teasingly suggested that I should become a member of their groups. All the same, they knew I would leave someday, that I would take their ideas with me and that it would be a long time before they saw those ideas again, summarized, translated and reattributed for the sake of confidentiality.

I stake my place as a “researcher” on the words and ideas people shared with me, trusting that I would use them well. This dissertation is a systematic presentation and application of those words and ideas to make an argument. My goal has not been to twist meanings or misinterpret, but that is bound to have happened at some points due to my position, attitude and personal prejudices.

### **My relationships with popular sector mestiza and Black women’s organizations**

In the chapter called “In the Beginning,” I introduce the popular sector (low-income) women’s organizations, both mestiza and Black, with which I worked closely. The appendix also serves as a reference to the current activities and interests of these organizations as well as those of the secondary organizations, NGOs and NGO-like institutions with which I worked. In contrast to their situation a few years before, most organized popular sector mestiza and Black women said their organizations were in a decline or stagnant when I met them in 2000 and 2001. A couple of groups had income-producing projects that, while keeping the group alive, had become the sole reason for the organization’s existence. Regardless of their difficulties, almost every popular sector mestiza and Black women’s organization I visited made me feel welcome and openly shared their experiences.

I spent the majority of my time with popular sector mestiza women’s organizations. This was, in part, because the NGOs and many of the researchers who

provided me interview contacts worked only with popular sector mestiza organizations. Then, popular sector mestiza women kept introducing me to other popular sector mestiza women and their organizations. The fact that NGOs and popular sector mestiza women related primarily to each other also reflected the discrimination against and socio-economic marginalization of Blacks in Quito (an issue I will discuss at length in the second chapter).

In the end, it took several months to make contact with a popular sector Black woman who could introduce me to other popular sector Black women and their organizations. She became an influential figure in my research, but, despite her good will, I found it very difficult to contact Black organizations and then arrange successful meetings. Many popular sector Black women worked outside of the home full-time and their grassroots organizations often met irregularly and only late at night, presenting logistical and safety issues that were hard for me to overcome. Furthermore, I later discovered that the woman helping me meet organizations was not well accepted by some Black Movement leaders, limiting my work with them and groups in which they participated. As a result, Black women and their organizations represent roughly one-fifth of the popular sector women and organizations I worked with in this investigation. I did not get to know popular sector Black women's organizations or the Black Movement as well as I would have liked. My analyses of Black women's organizations are not as ethnographically-based as they are for popular sector mestiza women's organizations; something I hope to change in the future.

Unlike with their Black counterparts, who I often only met once or twice, my relationships with popular sector mestiza women and their organizations, in many cases, extended throughout my research period. Even so, many organized popular sector mestiza women felt uncomfortable around me apparently, at least in part, because of

socio-economic differences. The women I came to know best, although open and friendly, still signaled their recognition of our differences in status with formal forms of address and treatment.

### **Volunteer work with CAM**

My involvement with CAM, the women's NGO I present as a case study, was the conclusion of a long series of events. I started volunteering at another women's NGO where everyone was sufficiently overworked that they could not spend time with me. It took days to achieve simple research goals and volunteer tasks as I waited to get the director's approval (a requirement for all projects and ideas). In the end, I gave up and moved on to CAM. At CAM, I designed and conducted evaluations for a failing organization-based project and for the newest version of CAM's micro-enterprise training project to gain perspectives on why the organization-based project had failed and what participants thought about the micro-enterprise training. Through these tasks, I gained information that contributed significantly to my analysis. Yet, despite spending time with them at the office, during interviews, at meals and (on one occasion) at home, full-time CAM workers rarely shared personal opinions with me about the institution. Perhaps they were quiet on these matters because CAM was facing both financial and personnel difficulties, and they did not want to make themselves or the institution look bad to an outsider.

### **Stellar individuals**

There are many women whose stories I would love to tell in great detail, to add more texture and feeling to the events and processes that I discuss in this dissertation. Most of these women, however, shared their stories, opinions and experiences in confidence. With these constraints in mind, I still want to introduce two women who inspired and advanced my investigation with their contributions. One was a Black

woman who had participated in numerous organizations over a period of about 20 years. She had knowledge of groups' histories and interconnections that helped me understand the processes and ideological stances of popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations. She had an outgoing nature that helped her make friends and contacts and from which I benefited greatly. At the same time, her refusal to stay quiet on issues that upset her made her unpopular with some leaders of the middle-class women's movement and the Black Movement. Most striking to me, though, was the fact she lived and breathed to participate. We spent about three quarters of our time together going to meetings, networking with members of different organizations and motivating people to organize or join one organization or another.

The other woman was mestiza. She provided a first-hand perspective on the development of popular sector mestiza women's organizations in Quito. She also opened her workplace, her home and her family to me, giving me the opportunity to see what participation meant at work, in the community and at home. Through her and her adult children, many of whom talked with me as much as I did with their mother, I began to understand the impact of a mother-community activist on her household. I also heard first-hand how her children learned to respect their mother's desire to participate and began to enact their own version of activism.

**Low-income mestiza and Black women’s organizations and NGOs in Quito, Ecuador: A micro-level analysis of the impact of neoliberal policy.**

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This dissertation explores the micro-level impact of relationships between macroeconomic neoliberal policy, globalization, NGOs and organized popular sector mestiza and Black women in Quito, Ecuador by “reading up the ladder of privilege” (Mohanty 2003, 511). Prior to 1998, women's NGOs and popular sector mestiza organizations were closely related, while organized popular sector Black women became part of Ecuador's growing Black Movement. Severe economic and political crises from 1998 to 2000 led Ecuador to dollarize its economy and forcefully change presidents. These crises greatly increased popular sector mestiza and Black women's economic needs and limited their ability to participate in organizations. NGOs, also affected by the crises, faced declining international funding and switched from work with popular sector mestiza women's organizations to the development of micro-enterprise courses for popular sector men and women. The change in NGO programming caused organized popular sector mestiza women to feel abandoned by NGOs and frustrated in their search

for resources that would improve their organizations.□Meanwhile, Black women felt NGOs continued to overlook their organizations and their Movement.□

Women's frustrations and reactions were closely linked to the macro-level issues of neoliberalism and globalization.□The NGOs and NGO-like institutions I studied in Quito increasingly promoted neoliberal ideology through their programming amid efforts to attract increasingly scarce funding from global donor agencies.□Furthermore, in doing so, NGOs provided individualized, short-term programming and became less likely to support the efforts of popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations to create collective approaches to the new education and income needs of their members.

This project draws on 24 months of participant observation and interviewing with women's organizations and NGOs in Quito, Ecuador. I worked with a number of women in impoverished neighborhoods, as well as with the organizations in which they were involved.□I also interviewed and spent time with representatives of NGOs who had a history of involvement with women's organizations.□Context for the study was also developed through a survey of historical studies concerning organizational development in Quito.□Analysis drew on these three types of sources for the analysis of ongoing relationships between NGOs and women's organizations.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction to Argument and Analytical Framework**

In this dissertation, I explore the micro-level impact of relationships between globalization, macroeconomic neoliberal policy, NGOs and popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations<sup>1</sup> in Quito, Ecuador by "reading up the ladder of privilege" (Mohanty 2003, 511). I show that neoliberal policy and NGO programming decisions, in combination with constructions of race in Ecuador, hurt popular sector mestiza and Black women by removing financial resources from popular sector organizations and reducing these organizations' access to information, especially after Ecuador's most recent economic crisis. These were factors that severely limited popular sector mestiza and Black women's efforts to confront economic crisis and to provide for socio-political needs through collective approaches. In a drastic change from their past expressions of empowerment, organized popular sector mestiza and Black women said they now felt abandoned and hopeless in the face of Ecuador's worsened economic situation due to the impact of these factors upon their organizations.

Earlier fieldwork in Quito indicated the importance popular sector mestiza women attached to the grassroots, all-female organizations they had created within their neighborhoods and the education these organizations provided. The grassroots organizations popular sector mestiza women had formed helped them learn anything from crafts to gender-based political analysis, provided collective solutions to economic issues and often received support from local women's NGOs (non-profit service

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<sup>1</sup> Note that I have given pseudonyms to all individuals, organizations, NGOs and other institutions that participated in my investigation.

institutions, formed and run by middle-class, university-educated women).<sup>2</sup> These findings led me to return to Quito in 2000 in order to find out what popular sector women learned about politics and political participation in their community-based, grassroots organizations. I also wanted to learn about both mestiza and Black women's experiences to obtain a better perspective of Quito's popular sector women's organizations.

Conversations with members of popular sector mestiza women's organizations in 2000 indicated they were still pleased with the community improvements achieved, education obtained and economic solutions provided through past participation. In addition, they stressed that the success of their organizations and richness of their organizational experiences had much to do with the informational, technical and financial support received from women's NGOs. Popular sector Black women, meanwhile, said they had essentially no contact with NGOs (women's or otherwise) but learned a lot about Black Ecuadorian history and identity within their organizations - low-income, mixed-sex, grassroots groups linked to a Black Movement that was trying to overcome the invisibility of Blacks in Ecuadorian society as well as official constructions of Ecuadorian national identity (de la Torre 2002, Westwood and Radcliffe 1996).

As made very apparent by their interviews, popular sector mestiza and Black women's living conditions and organizations declined sharply in 1999 when Ecuador fell into economic and political crises. The crises, which led to the toppling of a president as well as the formal dollarization of Ecuador's economy, did not level out until 2001. These events completely disrupted popular sector mestiza and Black women's lives and their organizations. They also caused economic distress for NGO employees since they did not spare the middle-class or social institutions.

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<sup>2</sup> I provide more detailed distinctions between popular sector women's organizations and NGOs in the next chapter.

While popular sector mestiza and Black women had faced economic crises in the past, they believed that, unlike before, their organizations had limited means to help them confront the results of this newest crisis. According to popular sector mestiza and Black women, two elements constrained their organizations' ability to help their members. One, renewed economic crisis limited the time and energy members could devote to their organizations. And, two, the attitude of NGOs toward their organizations. Organized popular sector mestiza women felt women's and other NGOs had distanced themselves while organized popular sector Black women felt NGOs in general overlooked their groups.

Employees of CAM, the women's NGO I present as a case study (see the appendix for a brief description of this institution), claimed that their institution had undergone a "change in era" linked to its increased maturity, Ecuador's recent crises and decreased foreign financial support. Now, CAM focused on the "economic rights" of popular sector individuals and the promotion of gender inclusive policy within local and national governments. In terms of CAM's programming for popular sectors, this meant projects with popular sector women's organizations were terminated and replaced with micro-enterprise training for popular sector men and women that promised fast, market-oriented, individual solutions.

By combining data I collected about other NGOs in Quito and southern Ecuador with analyses made in similar studies, I realized that CAM was representative of a larger trend. Thanks, in large part, to shifts in international donor/development agency interests, more and more NGOs had gone from supporting long-term social change among popular sector organizations to promoting short-term, individualistic solutions and (intentionally or otherwise) neoliberal macroeconomic policy (Schild 2000, Alvarez et al 2003, Feldman 2003, Gideon 1998). This shift in behavior made CAM and other NGOs

much less likely to support the efforts of popular sector mestiza women's organizations to create innovative programming that fulfilled the new education and income needs of their members. Due to the withdrawal of NGO support from popular sector mestiza women's organizations and NGOs' continued neglect of popular sector Black women's organizations, organized popular sector mestiza and Black women found themselves cut off from financial and informational resources that could help them to learn, grow and provide. Limited access to and availability of resources also triggered competition between popular sector organizations. Due to these factors, organized popular sector mestiza and Black women felt that, although they still had the desire to provide collective solutions to Ecuador's recent economic crisis and fight for women's socio-political needs, they did not have the personal means to do so nor did they have the skills to attract new sources of support. They were frustrated because, where before their organizations had helped with economic issues and enabled women as agents of social change in their households and community, their organizations' present inability to act provided no hope to women who desperately sought solutions to their worsened economic situations.

### **Analytical Framework**

My analytical goal in this dissertation is to emphasize the particular yet globally influenced experiences of popular sector mestiza and Black women as a means to “read up the ladder of privilege” and “to access and make the workings of power visible” (Mohanty 2003, 511). I found popular sector mestiza and Black women's changing experiences of organization participation in Quito demonstrated the micro-level influence and workings of neoliberalism and neoliberal policies, the ideology and strategies often imposed through the macro-level decisions of transnational institutions and governmental representatives sitting at the top of the “ladder of privilege” referred to by Mohanty (2003). Analyzing the influence and workings of neoliberalism and neoliberal policies

through popular sector mestiza and Black women's micro-level experiences produces a concrete critique. For example, instead of referring to the effects of neoliberalism on an abstract group of "impoverished women," I can say (after providing supporting analysis) that the influence of neoliberalism and neoliberal policy provoked the reduction of resources for popular sector mestiza women's organizations in Quito and, thereby, undermined the attempts of Veronica and other members of the popular sector mestiza women's organization AMPM (refer to the appendix for details on this organization) to empower themselves and confront their needs.

Due to growing influence of neoliberalism across the globe (indicated by many authors, Mohanty 2003, Comaroff and Comaroff 2001 among them), I also feel that the particular, micro-level critique presented by organized popular sector mestiza and Black women in Quito can illuminate other analyses of the influence and/or workings of neoliberalism and neoliberal policies. For instance, my emphasis on popular sector mestiza and Black women's perspectives adds to analyses of NGOs and neoliberalism like Schild 1998, Petras and Veltmeyer 2001 and Alvarez et al 2003 (introduced in the chapter "Theoretical Framework"). While these authors present valuable discussions that consider the experiences of popular sector or grassroots individuals and/or groups, their arguments are more theoretical or abstract and infrequently incorporate popular sector voices. So, I view this dissertation as an opportunity to show, through a re-presentation of popular sector mestiza and Black women's views and opinions, that neoliberalism, through its influence on NGO programming harmed (at least some) popular sector mestiza and Black women by undermining their primary sources of support and education - grassroots, community-based organizations - and by not providing alternative sources that took these women's needs, limitations and interests into consideration.

Bringing the experiences and opinions of organized popular sector mestiza and Black women's into comparison also illustrates the influence of constructions of race on popular sector women's organizational experiences and development, particularly NGOs' decisions to include popular sector mestiza women's organizations in their programming and exclude popular sector Black women's organizations. For instance, during the 80s and 90s, popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations both requested NGOs and other support institutions assist them with programming that spoke to their similar economic needs. Many popular sector mestiza women's organizations flourished thanks, in great part, to the tutelage and programming lavished upon them by NGOs and NGO-like institutions. Meanwhile, NGOs continually overlooked popular sector Black women's organizations which struggled to consolidate and to find support for their economically focused projects.

Comparing organized popular sector mestiza women's economic needs with those of their Black counterparts, I was left to assume that NGOs and NGO-like institutions excluded organized Black women from their programming due to racial constructions in Ecuador that labeled Blacks as criminal, uncivilized and not quite Ecuadorian. Besides discussions about anti-Black racism with organized popular sector Black women and observations of discrimination against Blacks, my hypothesis is informed by authors like de la Torre (2002) and Iglesias (2002), both introduced in the chapter "Theoretical Framework." De la Torre (2002) stresses that the state needs to categorize a population as distinct for that same population to successfully organize itself and to obtain assistance as a distinct group. Black Ecuadorians were not legally categorized as a distinct population until Ecuador's 1998 Constitution and still are relatively invisible in popular as well as official constructions of Ecuadorian national identity (de la Torre 2002). Iglesias (2002), on the other hand, highlights the fact that decisions to invest or disinvest

in particular racial spaces play a significant role in the ability of people organizing around racial identities to form solidarities and to produce effective collective action (316, 318). As you will see, my study shows that the decisions, intentional or otherwise, of NGOs and other support institutions to disinvest in popular sector Black women's organizations inhibited the growth and consolidation of the spaces (organizations) popular sector Black women wanted to form.

**The organization of this document.** While women's particular experiences form the bases of my analysis, I develop my argument through a roughly chronological presentation (covering approximately 1980-2003) that illustrates, with the influence of racial constructions as a continuous subtext, the growth of popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations; the evolution of their participation experiences; their changing relations with NGOs; and, finally, the growing impact of globalization and transnational neoliberal policy on their lives, their city, and their country.

In order to situate the reader, I introduce the study context and theoretical framework in the chapters "Introduction to Study Context" and "Theoretical Framework." I explain that Quito, as well as the individuals, groups and institutions found in this dissertation, reflect and are impacted by interconnected notions of class, color and race as well as Ecuador's histories of urbanization, urban and social movements, neoliberal macroeconomic policy and corruption. This study, on the other hand, is shaped by arguments that stress the importance of popular sector women's collective actions because of their possible connections to so-called new social movements; to the potential for improved, new or alternative spaces for women in politics; and, in connection with NGOs, to the "strengthening" of civil society and democracy. It is also influenced by analysts who present globalization and neoliberalization as connected forces that promote (and maintain) the transnational nature

of capitalism and that assist capitalist ideology in its fight for hegemonic control. The continued implementation of neoliberal policy and reform across Latin America, in turn, has reinforced the transnational and hegemonic characteristics of capitalism and has sparked the formation of (new) social movements and/or the collectivization of popular sector individuals, especially women, by provoking worsened living conditions.

In the chapter “In the Beginning,” I introduce the principal “characters” of this dissertation – popular sector mestiza and Black women’s organizations and women’s NGOs – through a discussion of their origins during the 1980s. I show that women’s NGOs fostered many popular sector mestiza women’s all-female organizations while university-educated Blacks and the Catholic Church promoted the mixed-sex, Black-identity/culture-based groups in which popular sector Black women participated. Within this chapter, you will also see that the provision of learning opportunities facilitated the formation of popular sector mestiza and Black women’s organizations and, often, was the basis of their relations to women’s NGOs and/or other external support institutions.

I use the chapter, “The Golden Years,” to emphasize that popular sector mestiza women’s organizational learning experiences provided many benefits, and, that participants often credited women’s NGOs as the providers of these benefits. Popular sector Black women’s organizations, as I will indicate, had limited relations with NGOs in general (women’s or otherwise). All the same, these organizations provided benefits similar to those experienced by mestiza participants as well as benefits linked to Black identity and Black Ecuadorian culture.

I then provide a general description of Ecuador’s recent economic and political crises (1998-2000) in the chapter “Start of a Decline.” Due to the social and economic disruption they caused, I feel these crises helped bring an end to the “golden years,” an important growth/development period, for popular sector mestiza and Black women’s

organizations. These crises also intensified the economic needs of popular sector mestiza and Black women and NGO employees and had a lasting impact on their lives as well as their organizations.

Finally, in the chapter “A Change in Era,” I illustrate the frustrations and limitations experienced by popular sector mestiza and Black women’s organizations from 2000 to 2003. These frustrations were linked to the political and economic crises from 1998 to 2000. They were also due to, as you will see, organized popular sector mestiza and Black women’s different experiences and treatment due to constructions of race; the decreased involvement of women’s NGOs in popular sector mestiza women’s organizations; the increased neoliberalization of women’s NGO programming; and, an overall reduction in resources that caused popular sector organizations to decline and that triggered competition between them.

## Chapter 2: Introduction to Study Context

The following dissertation is based upon twenty-four months of fieldwork in Quito, Ecuador between 2000 and 2003. During that period in Quito I visited, interviewed and shared with approximately one hundred<sup>3</sup> popular sector mestiza and Black women and the seventeen popular sector, community-based,<sup>4</sup> grassroots organizations in which they participated. I visited and carried out formal interviews with several members of three secondary organizations representing mestiza or Black women. I also volunteered for two different women's NGOs and visited one NGO-like institution<sup>5</sup> repeatedly and interviewed five women employed by these institutions. In addition, I held formal interviews with two former women's NGO workers and with seven popular sector mestiza women who did not have any organization affiliation, community or otherwise. During interviews and informal conversations with the above individuals, I discussed their past and present experiences in popular sector community-based organizations, secondary organizations, women's NGOs and/or NGO-like institutions, their perspectives on the future and how they tied into and were affected by Ecuador's most recent economic crisis.

By women's NGOs, I mean nongovernmental institutions wherein "professional" (i.e. university educated, middle-class) women act as creators, managers and providers of

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<sup>3</sup> Out of this approximate number, I had at least one, formal, recorded interview with sixty individual women. I also performed four formal recorded group interviews (with at least four women present) along with several unrecorded, freeform group interviews during organizational visits. Out of these, three women and two organizations participated and assisted repeatedly throughout my fieldwork.

<sup>4</sup> Here community-based does not imply that the organizations always worked in relation to or for the surrounding community. Rather, I mean that the particular organizations I was involved with (excepting one) gathered women living in (or who had lived in) the same neighborhood, not from all over the city of Quito.

<sup>5</sup> See the appendix called "Chart of Organizations" for organization, NGO and NGO-like institutions names and details, including clarification of their mission/goals.

various services related to women/gender, from training to policy writing, for low-income and middle-class populations as well as governmental institutions (local, regional, national) throughout the city of Quito. I base my argument and conclusions upon interviews, observation and participation within women's NGOs in Quito, focusing on one women's NGO called CAM, but also the commentaries of popular sector Black women and the work of authors who interacted with a variety of NGOs (women's and otherwise). So, you will see NGO (unqualified) used in this dissertation as a general reference to non-governmental institutions wherein "professional" (i.e. university educated, middle-class) individuals act as creators, managers and providers of various services for a variety of populations or target groups.

In addition to women's NGOs, I interacted with and heard about several intellectual, service institutions and charity foundations or NGO-like institutions in Quito. They performed similar functions, employed similar people and might be called NGOs using a broader application of the term, but none of these institutions called themselves NGOs. They distinguished themselves from NGOs because they felt, principally, their mission, function and activities were distinct (more religious, more political, more grassroots and so on) from the institutions they identified as NGOs. For these reasons, when I refer to these institutions, I use the term "NGO-like institution" instead of NGO.

Popular sector organization indicates community-based, grassroots organizations formed by low-income women (and men, in the case of Blacks) with the intention of providing assistance and services (be it friendship, healthcare, training, infrastructure improvements) to members and the community. These organizations were, for the most part, located in Quito's peripheral low-income (popular sector) neighborhoods. Some popular sector organizations also provided limited sources of income to members through income-producing projects or micro-enterprises. The mestiza and Black women who

made up popular sector organizations usually came from low-income households and had primary school educations. Some mestiza and Black women organization participants also had partial or complete high school education. Mestiza women in popular sector organizations often did not work outside the home full-time, but this had begun to change during my last two years in the field (2002 and 2003). Most women participating in Black organizations, on the other hand, had full-time jobs throughout their organizational experience.

The individuals I met as well as the organizations and institutions in which I interviewed, observed and participated, interacted with and discriminated against each other based upon interconnected notions of class, color and race. They also were influenced by Ecuador's histories of urbanization, urban and social movements, neoliberal macroeconomic policy, globalization and corruption. This chapter is an attempt to clarify these interconnections and influences as well as the terminology and perceptions they produced so the reader may better understand the context in which my investigation occurred and critique the discussion that follows.

### **Class, color and race**

My argument incorporates complex identifiers - popular sector, mestiza and Black - for the women who became the principal foci of my dissertation. In Quito, each of these three identifiers usually carried embedded notions of socioeconomic class, color, and race, terms that are highly intertwined. While these terms also indicate ethnicity<sup>6</sup> or carry ethnic aspects (Wade 1997), the majority of the people I met in Quito used notions of ethnicity or ethnic only when discussing indigenous groups.<sup>7</sup> The exceptions were

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<sup>6</sup> By ethnicity, I mean identities that refer to "origin in a cultural geography in which the culture of a place is absorbed by the person..." and to a "location in a cultural geography... [where] the phenotypical traits used in racial discourse are distributed across that geography..." (Wade 1997, 21).

<sup>7</sup> Wade 1997 finds this same tendency among researchers.

leaders of the Black Movement who used the terms ethnicity and ethnic along with race in their formal, identity discourses. I am not certain why notions of ethnicity or the term ethnic were used so infrequently in Quito. Perhaps, it was because they implied non-whiteness in a society focused on the white-ideal, as I discuss next. Another possibility is that notions of ethnicity or ethnic did not fit with the unified national and regional identities (not discussed within this dissertation) taught in schools and promoted by national and regional politicians and leaders (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996).

Let me stress that while my analysis and perception of class, color and race in Ecuador are informed and influenced by many authors, among them Wade (1997), Halpern and Twine (2000) and de la Torre (2002) whose ideas I introduce in the chapter “Theoretical Framework,” this section is not a theoretical discussion of class, color and race in Ecuador. Rather, it is my best attempt to present how Quiteños perceived themselves and others in terms of class, color and race based on my observations, conversations and everyday experiences in the city. To clarify where these perceptions come from, I also provide supporting material from or refer to Ecuador-based, ethnographic studies of class, color and race.<sup>8</sup>

**Class.** In Quito, class, as a socioeconomic category, plays an essential role in defining individual and group interrelations. Although individuals of different socioeconomic classes interact along hierarchical lines in the workplace and at home (live-in maids are common in the middle- and upper-classes), they rarely mix as friends, neighbors, business associates or intimate partners. An apt description of how class

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<sup>8</sup> Several authors have dedicated their careers to studying these elements in Ecuador. Two who have published in English are Norman Whitten, Jr., who wrote numerous studies (several of his students expanded his work), and Carlos de la Torre Espinosa, who recently shifted to studying racism in connection with Blacks and middle-class indigenous in Ecuador. (He was already well-known in Ecuador for his political analyses.) Cervone and Rivera (1999) is another interesting collection of Spanish language essays on the topic.

worked and what it meant in Quito came from women who quoted a song when discussing class during interviews; “*cuanto tienes cuanto vales*” they said – what you have is what you’re worth.

The most important socioeconomic class term for my study is popular sector, a literal translation of the Spanish term *sectores populares*. In its Spanish or English form, popular sector is commonly used in Ecuador and in Latin American research, like de la Torre 1996 and 2002, Alvarez 1998 or Müller 1994 (studies that influenced my work), to refer to a majority population, poverty-level income<sup>9</sup> (or nearly so) as well as socioeconomic and geographic marginalization. Ecuador’s highly disparate economic distribution<sup>10</sup> and the fact that the majority of Quito’s most impoverished residents live along the outskirts of the city, in areas with limited or non-existent basic services, reinforces the marginalization implied when I, Quiteños and the researchers referred to above use the term popular sector.<sup>11</sup>

Some people who defined themselves as white, upper-middle-class combined character, class, color and/or race into one term when they used popular sector (or the abbreviated “popular”) to describe ignorant, lower status people with dark skin hair and eyes. Of course, there were exceptions, like the NGO workers I met who, along with the low-income women I interviewed, downplayed the race and color implications of popular

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<sup>9</sup> Poverty in Ecuador is usually measured against an individual’s or household’s ability to purchase a “basic basket of goods” (the foods required for a “basic but healthy diet” for a household of four). I cannot find any poverty statistics for the country from reliable sources after 1999, however. To provide some idea of what poverty-level might have been recently, Ecuador’s minimum wage was \$137.91/mo., the minimum monthly household income for a four person family was \$253.17 and the value of the basic basket of goods in the highland region, where Quito is located, was \$373.06/mo. in April of 2003 (*El Comercio* 2003). Of course, many of the women and men I met did not earn or have the ability to demand minimum wage because they did not have formal work contracts or had their own formal or informal businesses.

<sup>10</sup> In 1998, the poorest 10% of the population received less than 1/10<sup>th</sup> of 1% of Ecuador’s total income (World Bank 2000a).

<sup>11</sup> Vallejo and Laspina 1995 present “poverty maps” for Quito that support my observations of impoverished communities along the outskirts of the city. The population of Quito (city proper) is 1,615,809 while the Metropolitan District of Quito claims 1,920,480 inhabitants (Dirección General de Planificación 2000).

sector. When they defined someone else or themselves as popular sector, they stressed its reference to socioeconomic class and often used it to signify a group of people they felt were caught in poverty because of the illogical, greedy and corrupt behavior of the national government and national elite.

Nearly all the popular sector mestiza and Black women with whom I worked defined themselves as popular sector but knew they were not among the poorest of the poor. This was especially so with popular sector mestiza women. Many owned their homes (albeit in Quito's very low-income barrios), and some did not have to work outside the home because their spouses' sole income supported the household (this was increasingly rare, however). Also, despite their near poverty-level incomes and their worsening economic situations, most popular sector mestiza women could afford to send their children to school without their children working to support their educations. Many popular sector Black women I met, on the other hand, rented, worked outside the home full-time and, in a few cases, needed their children to work to support their educations.

**Color.** By listening to off-hand commentary and descriptions as well as observing interactions on the street and with friends and acquaintances, I quickly came to understand that color<sup>12</sup> was very important to Quiteños. Everyone, it seemed, constantly compared their color to others in order to determine how they should treat people and how others might react to them. I learned that no matter how an individual might identify or how he or she dressed, the darker his or her color, the poorer he or she was perceived to be and the more likely she or he was discriminated against. This probably explains why, on several occasions, I noticed that a newborn's skin color or indirect references to it (eye color, hair color, etc.) were among the first descriptors parents gave. I also heard

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<sup>12</sup> For the remainder of this discussion, I use "color" as shorthand for the identification of individuals along phenotype, with skin color as the primary determinant. Hair color/type and eye color are characteristics normally (but not always) linked to skin color.

dark skinned babies receive comments like “poor little thing, s/he’s come out *morenita/o*” while lighter skinned babies were called *alaja* (cute) and *colorada/o* (red-skinned, a term also used for white foreigners).

The connections between darker skin, poverty and other negative connotations probably came from Ecuador’s history of colonialism and urbanization. De la Torre (2002) and Fernández-Rasines (2001), for example, consider the white supremacy that exists in Ecuador a legacy of the Spanish colonial caste system that hierarchically organized society – placing those from darker “races” and of mixed racial background on the bottom. Due to this colonial legacy and then official constructions of Ecuadorian identity, indigenous and Black people as well as their phenotypes came to signify impoverished, ignorant, backwards (not modern) individuals from rural areas who were second-class citizens (Schubert 1981, Larrea and Trujillo 2001, Fernández-Rasines 2001). These ideas of color and poverty were almost inseparable from racial categorization and stereotypes that qualified an individual’s character.

**Race.** From observation and experience, I found racial categories were almost inseparable from ideas of color and class. Despite this, I rarely heard the term “race” except in reference to Black people. So, if I wanted to hear people’s ideas on race, I had to bring it up explicitly. Most Quiteños explained that Ecuador had four races, white, indigenous, mestizo/a and Black. I learned that each of these racial terms could also imply color, class, beauty, intelligence and hygiene, much like they can in the U.S. For the most part, white was considered the superior and ideal color/race, unless the individual using the term was a Black or indigenous activist. The racial term white focused on phenotype - pale skin; blonde, red, light brown, or brown (not black) hair; and light-brown, green or blue eyes. White also referred to individuals with middle- or upper-class economic status who were perceived to be of greater value to and power in

Ecuadorian society. Upper-class economic status and power would not confer ‘whiteness’ upon an individual who did not match the white phenotype, however. For example, the few individuals with upper-class economic status and power I encountered or heard about who did not match the white phenotype were permitted into upper-class white circles because of their wealth, but were not called white. When these individuals were within earshot of a conversation about them, their color was rarely mentioned. If these individuals were not present, however, they were often described with phrases like “so ugly but nice,” “looks like an Indian but smart,” or “noble as if s/he were white.”

Indigenous also implied phenotype, race and socioeconomic class, but it was the only term I heard Quiteños embed with ideas of culture and ethnicity. At Ecuador’s national museums, tour agencies and in its school history texts, I saw indigenous peoples presented as historical figures, as representatives of ethnic groups unique to Ecuador and as symbols of Ecuador’s cultural diversity. Yet, hearing derogatory descriptions of indigenous individuals and their style of dress on many occasions while riding the bus, attending meetings in popular sector barrios or spending time with middle-class host families demonstrated indigenous people were discriminated against daily because of their associations with poverty, ignorance, backwardness (lack of modernity) and poor hygiene. Larrea and Trujillo’s (2001) journalistic article discussing discrimination against indigenous people and de la Torre’s (2000) analysis of discrimination against indigenous students are particularly interesting discussions in this area.

An incident early in my fieldwork, where my foreign status helped negate the offense I caused, and observations had taught me that using the term *mestiza/o*<sup>13</sup> was a

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<sup>13</sup> Stutzman 1981 discusses the uses and problems with the concept of *mestizaje*, the matter of being *mestiza/o* and the process that led to *mestiza/o* people, in Ecuador. He argues that the concept of Ecuador as a *mestiza* nation is used by military and governmental leaders to exclude those groups who are not mixed from the nation. In my opinion, the article does not deal with the negative social implications behind imposition/assumption of *mestiza/o* identity that I observed in Quito. Also, strong rejection of the

delicate matter in Quito. In hopes that people I knew better would be less offended by my questions, I was careful to ask only close friends what they knew about the term mestiza/o. Expecting awkward pauses, I was surprised when they easily responded that mestiza/o referred to people who were a “mix” between white and indigenous races. In Quito’s public schools, they explained, children learned about the term mestiza/o through discussions of the “mixing of races” that happened during Spanish colonization and that was happening at present. Mestiza/o people, they said, were identified by a range of olive skin tones, dark hair and dark eyes. De la Torre (2002), Radcliffe and Westwood (1996) as well as Whitten (1981) clarify that up until the 1990s official constructions of Ecuadorian national identity idealized the mestizo/a race and considered it representative of an Ecuadorian population heading toward homogenization through the democratic mixture of white and indigenous “races.” The same authors also point out that this official construction of national identity is constantly contradicted by the belief in white supremacy mentioned earlier.

I also asked these friends why, from what I had observed, almost no one identified as mestiza/o. They said that many people, including themselves, often rejected the label mestiza/o or did not identify with it because it implied the very negative characteristics of non-whiteness and blood relations to indigenous people. Also, they told me that it was good I had not asked popular sector women about what mestiza meant or if they identified themselves as mestiza because I would have offended the women and/or made them feel like I was defining them as lower status than me.

Blacks, identified by basically the same phenotypes as in the U.S., were considered the most marginal, the “poorest” racial group in Quito. Along with “poor,”

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term mestiza among people I met indicated that there were at least some (if not many) individuals who did not share the belief that being Ecuadorian means you are of mixed racial heritage.

the color/racial term Black indicated rural origin/residency (from observations of Black Movement events, also Fernández-Rasines 2001, de la Torre 2002)<sup>14</sup> and carried many negative associations, like lazy and criminal. Also, according to de la Torre (2002) and Radcliffe and Westwood (1996), Blacks were excluded from official constructions of Ecuadorian identity and, in terms of national policy, law and censuses, were invisible to the Ecuadorian state. Unfortunately, the few times Blacks were mentioned by pioneering Ecuadorian social scientists, they were described as “obstacles to the building of national culture and to the attainment of national progress” (de la Torre 2002, 19). The Black women I interviewed experienced the reproduction of the above beliefs on a daily basis and said that being labeled as Black meant you would face strong discrimination and have many opportunities denied you. In fact, Black was such a negative color/race term that people outside of the Black Movement would use *morena/o* (a term that signifies dark hair and dark olive skin) instead of Black when trying to describe someone in a polite manner.<sup>15</sup> If it needed to be clarified that the person referred to as *morena/o* was Black (and not a dark mestiza/o), I noticed people would say the individual was part of the *raza* (race) *morena* to avoid saying “S/he’s Black.”

**Self-identification and imposed identities.** Although many women I interviewed identified themselves as part of a socioeconomic class without provocation, only two popular sector women, besides Black women in Black organizations, identified themselves in color/racial terms.<sup>16</sup> As I came to realize, color and race terms were rarely

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<sup>14</sup> Both of these authors provide analyses of Black populations in Quito. De la Torre’s 2002 text is particularly good for its discussion of racism against and within Black populations.

<sup>15</sup> Based on my observations and conversations, I disagree with Whitten and Quiroga (1995) who insist that *moreno* only refers to Black in Ecuador and that *moreno* is the only polite term available for non-Black speakers to refer to Black Ecuadorians (298). I do acknowledge that for individuals outside of the Black Movement, I would avoid using any racial or color terms to refer to them in order to avoid causing offense.

<sup>16</sup> At the beginning of my research, I never asked women about their color or racial identities because I took them for granted. Later, as I mentioned above, some friends/acquaintances confirmed that my

used to identify oneself, a friend, or someone considered an “equal.” Instead, they were almost always imposed upon individuals for critique and debasement.

The loaded meanings of color and race terms became very clear when I lived with middle-class families who considered themselves whiter than the majority. Often, individuals in these families were quick to use color and race to classify others. To them, the color/race label white implied high status, beautiful, well-educated and well-behaved people. Mestiza/o, moreno, Black or any other term that meant “darker than them,” meanwhile, signified people who were everything opposed to white (i.e. inferior, poor, ugly, uneducated, crude) and to be avoided.

Although popular sector mestiza women rarely discussed personal experiences of discrimination, I noticed how the popular sector and mestiza signifiers their bodies carried affected their behavior. For instance, almost everyone fretted about getting a tan and obsessed about their clothing. To me, it seemed they worried about their skin getting darker and their clothes getting worn because they did not want people to assume they were “poorer” than they were and/or discriminate against them more strongly. Also, they rarely used explicit color terms as descriptors for themselves or individuals unless, as I mentioned, it was for critique or debasement. Instead, they described people by hair type, eye color (both of which could imply a person’s color), haircut, height and weight (which avoided color references). For example, only two women identified themselves in color or racial terms during interviews and not one woman directly mentioned my color (although many referred to it indirectly by discussing my blonde hair).

If I consider what people told me and what I observed, then, when I discuss mestiza women’s organizations, I am deliberately imposing a mestiza color/racial identity

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oversight was probably fortunate. Directly asking women to identify themselves along race or class lines would have definitely caused extreme discomfort and might have offended many.

on these women who identified themselves by place of residence and/or origin and described themselves through physical characteristics that, at most, only indirectly implied color or race. I impose this mestiza identity, in part, because I am reluctant to struggle for another term that could identify this group of women for my readers and for Ecuadorians. More importantly, I use mestiza to stress that these women had to deal with the repercussions of imposed mestiza and other non-white identities on a daily basis. Regardless of how the popular sector women I interviewed wished to identify themselves, the majority of Quiteños would impose non-white identities or identifiers upon this group of women (mestiza being the most “polite”) to describe their darker skin and poverty. And, as the above discussion tries to demonstrate, an imposed non-white identity implied discrimination and difficulties for individuals living in a society focused on the “white ideal.”

I use the color/racial label Black to describe some of the popular sector women with whom I worked for two reasons. First of all, as with mestiza color/racial identities, Black color/racial identities were often imposed upon individuals, regardless of how that individual wished to be identified, and often resulted in discrimination against that individual. Second, *unlike* the organized popular sector mestiza women I interviewed, the organized popular sector Black women I met and interviewed self-identified as Black. A few Black women explained that self-identifying as Black meant “telling things like they are,” confronting the negative connotations linked to Black identities and fighting against the invisibilization of Black people in Ecuador. Therefore, *unlike* with mestiza women, I know that when I use the term Black, I am also using a term that is accepted by the women I am attempting to identify.

In this dissertation, you will see the terms Black, Black Ecuadorian, Afro-Ecuadorian and Pueblo Negro. They all refer to same group of people. Within the Black

Movement, however, there is some contention over which of these terms should be prioritized. Some members of Black Movement organizations in Quito felt the Black Movement should emphasize Black or Black Ecuadorian identity over Afro-Ecuadorian identity. The president of Quito's division of the Black Movement in 2001 explained his opinion as follows: "We need to work on getting Black people to take on being Black AND getting non-Black Ecuadorians to consider us part of Ecuador before we focus on our identities as African." He feared that, if the Movement focused on Afro-identity at this stage, it would 1) prevent non-Black Ecuadorians from considering Blacks a legitimate part of the country's population; and 2) prevent Black Ecuadorians from assuming their Blackness and dealing with, changing and challenging the negative connotations of Black identity by providing another euphuism for Black. His stance also reflected that of the Blacks with whom I worked most closely, but, as they all clarified, there was no majority opinion on the matter within Ecuador's Black Movement.

### **Urbanization and social movements in Quito**

Because they imposed identities, discrimination and needs upon individuals, perceptions of class, color and race in Quito influenced and shaped the participation of popular sector mestiza and Black women in their community-based organizations. Two major factors fostered the existence of these community-based organizations, however. Ecuador's urbanization process helped create an urban popular sector and led to the development of urban movements in Quito. The urban movements, in turn, collectivized the urban popular sectors around their needs (influenced by class, color and race) and strengthened pre-existing community-based organizations; both actions made way for the present day community-based organizations in which popular sector mestiza and Black women participated.

A large number of my respondents came to Quito during its population and territorial expansion in the 60s and 70s. This expansion was linked, in great part, to two elements. One, Ecuador's economy shifted from an agricultural focus to urban commerce, banking and investment (Carrión 1987) which motivated the country's workforce to reallocate from rural to urban areas.<sup>17</sup> Two, land reform introduced by military dictatorships during the 60s and 70s made land ownership a possibility for an increasing number of people, but also made rural poverty and unemployment more apparent in the highlands and the coast (Chiriboga et al 1988).<sup>18</sup>

The factors behind Quito's population and territorial expansion also fed an urban movement. This urban movement incorporated growing numbers of rural migrants and popular sector tenants and demanded the city provide affordable housing and land (Unda 1996). Almost all of the neighborhoods in which I worked came into existence due to this urban movement and/or the precedents it set.

Ecuador's urbanizing population and economy in the 60s and 70s also fed Quito's working-class which populated unions and worker's movements (Unda 1996). The unions, popular sectors (which, as mentioned above, had previously collectivized for land/home ownership) and Ecuador's budding middle-class women's movement

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<sup>17</sup> Ecuador's population was 35% urban and 65% rural in 1962; 41% urban and 59% rural in 1974; and 49% urban, 51% rural by 1982 (INEC 2002). In 2001, 61% of Ecuador's population lived in urban areas (ibid.).

<sup>18</sup> Rural poverty and unemployment became more visible with land reform as large-scale land owners (*hacendados*) of the past had to release some portion of their properties back to local residents (indigenous for the most part) as well as the *huasipungueros* (tenants who paid for the use of a small plot by laboring for the *hacendado*) who had worked for them. Usually local residents and *huasipungueros* were one in the same. While the local residents and former *huasipungueros* had ownership of small plots of land after reform, these plots were usually too small and too unproductive for them to subsist or produce income to purchase market goods. Therefore, many of these individuals left rural areas and moved to the cities to find cash producing labor. Ecuador's shift from an agricultural to an industrial/export oriented economy, already happening at the time of land reform, further provoked the rural to urban movement of laborers. For more information on Ecuadorian land reform and its impacts on rural populations, please see Quintero and Silva 1991 and Pallares 2002. Pre-reform, Jorge Icaza wrote a classic novel on the issue, Huasipungo 1943.

mobilized on a massive scale in the late 70s (Unda 1996). These mobilizations led to the stepping down of Ecuador's military dictatorship, after a decade of rule, in 1979 (ibid.). In 1982 and 1983, these same groups protested governmental austerity measures invoked to meet IMF requirements for debt rescheduling (Hey and Klak 1999, Unda 1996). With the exception of significant protests in 1997 and 1999, however, urban mobilizations declined from the mid-80s to the present due to the following: economic crisis; reforms in urban land policy; creation of laws decreasing the possibilities of union formation and allowing for the intervention of government in land cooperatives; and the use of armed police to disband marches (Unda and Barrera 2000).

From what I observed, present day social movements like those formed or in process of creation by Ecuador's indigenous groups and Blacks, respectively, pass almost unnoticed in Quito. My interpretation is that, since indigenous and Black people are frequent targets of discrimination and stereotyped as "rural," their issues are overlooked in urban areas like Quito. For example, Ecuador's Indigenous Movement is very active and has highly visible leaders in national government. Yet, the Indigenous Movement as a whole only captures the media spotlight in Quito when multiple indigenous organizations gather to form massive protest marches in the city.<sup>19</sup>

In the opinions of the Black grassroots participants and leaders I met, Ecuador's Black Movement is much smaller and younger than the Indigenous Movement and these factors prevent Black issues and the Black Movement from being more visible in Quito at the moment. It is only since 1998 that Black Ecuadorians were officially recognized by the Ecuadorian government as a unique group within the Ecuadorian population and as eligible to participate in the state's "ethnic development projects," which are funded by

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<sup>19</sup> While I was in the field, the indigenous groups took up camp near the National Congress for a week to protest the national government's proposed neoliberal reforms - increases in gasoline prices, reductions in subsidies - especially for cooking gas- and privatizations of utilities.

different transnational donor agencies (de la Torre 2002). Also, according to some Black leaders in Quito (also noted by de la Torre 2002), the national Black Movement tends to promote Black identity as a rural identity, an issue exemplified by the Black Movement's attempts to obtain autonomous, rural territories in Ecuador's province of Esmeraldas.<sup>20</sup> This emphasis on rural identity, in addition to the general public's perception of Blacks as rural inhabitants, makes it very difficult for organized Black women and men in Quito to visibilize their issues as an urban Black population in Quito and in the national Black Movement (de la Torre 2002, my observations of Black Movement seminar discussions).

### **Neoliberal macroeconomic policy and globalization**

Ecuador has been dependent on a few primary exports for the majority of its existence. Up until the 1970s, the power of local weather pattern fluctuations and international markets over the production and trade of cocoa, coffee, bananas and shrimp either sustained or destroyed Ecuador's economy. With the discovery of oil in the Amazon region in the 1970s, Ecuador's economy found a new source of income, and its government (military at the time) promptly assumed millions of dollars in foreign loans to expand infrastructure, social services and government in general (Carrière 2001, among others). Since that time, oil has been Ecuador's primary export and its primary economic vulnerability.

During the 80s and early 90s, Ecuador began to shift its macroeconomic policy from protectionism<sup>21</sup> toward neoliberalism (Hey and Klak 1999; Carrière 2001 for example). The city of Quito, meanwhile, began neoliberalization in the 70s with decentralization, privatization as well as restructuring of land, economic and planning

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<sup>20</sup> For more information on autonomous Black territories see Halpern and Twine 2000 and de la Torre 2002.

<sup>21</sup> I understand protectionism in Ecuador as an economic program that tried to protect, support and promote the development of local industry through state subsidies, public investment and import restrictions.

policy to attract foreign investment (Carrión 1987). Reforms in national, macro-economic policies (also called structural adjustment policies), such as reducing tariff protection for local industries, facilitating privatization of state industries and increasing interest rates, re-oriented Ecuador's production toward the external market and opened its commerce to international competition (Palán 1993, Carrière 2001, Hey and Klak 1999). These structural adjustment policies also lowered the state's social spending in order to pay off external debt and to remain competitive in the external market (ibid). Reduced social spending affected the popular sectors by increasing the price of and decreasing the availability of public services, like healthcare and education (Palán 1993, Naranjo 1992).

Ecuador's economy did not stabilize after its adoption of neoliberal policies. Carrière (2001), Hey and Klak (1999), and Beckerman and Cortés-Douglas (2002) explain that Ecuador's neoliberal reforms were doomed to limited success because natural disasters, global economic events as well as national political and social conflicts prevented their uniform implementation. They discuss how, in the 80s, an international drop in oil prices and an earthquake prevented Ecuador from meeting its income projections and debt payments, causing severe economic crises and making further economic reform impossible (ibid.). They also describe how social protest and mid-term political infighting often repealed and/or prevented the implementation of neoliberal policy and reforms proposed and/or instated by presidential administrations at the beginning of their terms.

Carrière (2001), Hey and Klak (1999) recognize that neoliberal policy has produced declines in the standard of living in Ecuador, especially for popular sector populations. All the same, they give two reasons why they feel Ecuador has no other alternative than neoliberalization. First, no political group or social collective, in their opinions, has had the strength and unity to develop, present and implement a credible

alternative to Ecuador's neoliberal program (Carrière 2001, Hey and Klak 1999). Second, Ecuador is in a neoliberal Catch-22 of sorts. By reducing its public spending via neoliberal policy, Ecuador's national government causes a decline in living conditions, especially for low-income populations. Yet, if the national government increases public spending and, thereby, breaks loan agreements made with transnational agencies like the IMF and World Bank, these institutions would promptly stop loan payments and future loan negotiations. Without IMF and World Bank loans or monies from other agencies and foreign investors who base their decisions on IMF and World Bank actions, Ecuador would not be able to pay its foreign debt nor could it support the majority of its national budget (Hey and Klak 1999). This latter scenario would also cause living conditions to decline. This is almost exactly what happened in Ecuador in 1998-1999, provoking national economic and political crises that undid Ecuador's recovery from its economic crisis in the 80s (León and Vos 2000; I will briefly describe these most recent crises in the chapter "Start of a Decline").

### **Corruption in government**

Attitudes about corruption in government shaped popular sector mestiza and Black women's perceptions of Ecuador's economic and political situations. The women I interviewed often saw corruption as the catch-all source of any problem in Ecuador and rarely looked beyond corruption when seeking explanation for Ecuador's woes.<sup>22</sup> They described corruption as insipid and rampant; interwoven into the social fabric of the country. In turn, they saw government and politics as intrinsically linked to and as a haven for corruption and corrupt people. Recent events have done little to change this perception. The country has gone through seven presidents since 1997; two of whom

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<sup>22</sup> Only one popular sector woman connected neoliberal policy and neoliberalism to Ecuador's worsening economic situation in her conversations with me. Perhaps other popular sector women shared her beliefs, but were never inspired discuss them with me.

were ousted and are in exile, one who went to jail. Several former ministers are in similarly compromised situations and the frequency of criminal charges seems to multiply as you move down the governmental hierarchy. All the same, a cumbersome judicial system susceptible to bribery and strict anti-defamation laws made it easy for most representatives to escape charges and to win reelection. Experiences like these created a cynicism and lack of faith in government among the Ecuadorians I met. Their attitudes rubbed off on me, making it hard for me to believe that Ecuador's governmental representatives would prioritize the nation's condition over their personal gains when they made economic and/or political decisions.

### **Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I presented and defined the principle terms I utilize throughout this dissertation and contextualized these terms and their usage within the observations and perspectives I obtained while living in Quito. Particularly important to my analysis are the constructions of race and treatment of racialized individuals discussed here. As I will clarify, these constructions and the discrimination they created served to limit organized popular sector mestiza and, especially, Black women's access to the financial and informational resources they needed to develop collective approaches to Ecuador's worsened economic situation and their changing socio-political needs.

I also situated the individuals and organizations I studied within Ecuador's historical experiences of urbanization, urban and social movements, neoliberal macroeconomic policy, globalization and corruption. These experiences promoted and sometimes supported the collective actions of popular sector individuals to make demands upon national and local governments. They also indicated the bases of popular sector mestiza and Black women's lack of faith in government and its representatives. Due to this lack of faith, most popular sector mestiza and Black women I met said they

could not rely on any government representative or institution (at any level) to create or promote positive change for them or their country. In the past, as I will describe in the chapter “In the Beginning,” popular sector mestiza and Black women found community-based organizations could provide some assistance with their economic and socio-political needs. Yet, when I was in the field from 2000 to 2003, they commented that their efforts to confront their economic and socio-political needs through organizations were frustrated by Ecuador’s (and their) worsened economic situation and the distancing or absence of NGOs from their efforts. Where before they believed they could help themselves (at least a little), they now felt their hands were tied.

### **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework**

While the relationships between organized popular sector mestiza and Black women and NGOs in Quito, Ecuador differed, neoliberalism and globalization had a significant impact upon their existence as well as their interactions with each other. As I hope to demonstrate, the analyses covered in this chapter as well the ethnographic evidence and argument presented in this dissertation demonstrates three points. First, NGOs and NGO-like institutions in Ecuador worked under the influence of racial constructions that led to the exclusion of the Black Movement, Black organizations and popular sector Black women from their programming. Second, the NGOs and NGO-like institutions discussed within my investigation, especially the women's NGO I present as a case study, promoted neoliberalism (or neoliberal ideology) through their programming in Quito, Ecuador. And, third, this promotion of neoliberalism or neoliberal ideology could frustrate popular sector mestiza and Black women's efforts to confront economic crises through their Quito-based organizations.<sup>23</sup> Although I only present a selection here, many theorists and studies have led me to believe popular sector women, NGOs and relations between them were sources of new or transformed ideas about women's roles in Latin America as well as social and political change. These theorists and studies stress the importance of popular sector women's collective actions by linking them to new social movements; to the potential for improved, new or alternative spaces for women in politics; and, in connection with NGOs, to new concepts of civil society and democracy.

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<sup>23</sup> I cannot demonstrate, in all cases, that the NGOs and NGO-like institutions involved in my study intentionally promoted neoliberal ideology through their programming and/or intentionally frustrated the efforts of popular sector mestiza and Black women to confront economic crises through their organizations.

According to another group of analysts, neoliberalism, globalization and the decline in living conditions they caused are significant factors behind popular sector women's collectivization and the continued growth of (new) social movements after Latin America's "transition to democracy." These same factors set the foundations for and promoted the growth of NGOs as service institutions and/or development program subcontractors that "helped" popular sector women confront poverty. The studies presented below argue that many NGOs are now disseminators of neoliberal ideology among popular sector organizations and populations due to their connections with increasingly neoliberal local/national governments, development agencies and programs.

### **Popular sector women and...**

**New social movements.** New social movements in Latin America and across the globe were labeled new because they looked very different compared to the institutional character of Marxist-influenced collectivization and analysis in Europe (Wade 1997, among others). People's actions within new social movements were seen to illustrate that class-based analysis was outmoded and could not encompass the diversity of social conflicts in post-industrial/postmodern society. Melucci (1988) believed that the key factor distinguishing so-called new social movements from traditional movements was that new social movements acted as signs instead of as characters. To clarify, a traditional movement (albeit a stereotypical one) might oppose "oppressed workers" against "oppressive capitalists," both clearly defined and dichotomous groups. Meanwhile, new social movements distinguished themselves as new by trying to identify, challenge and change the elements of oppression found within individuals, communities and institutions. Their fight was no longer one group of people against another; it was to change the way people thought about and recreated oppression. New social movement participants cannot protest against elements that produce oppression like they can protest

against a particular institution or individual. So, they present symbolic challenges to oppression. For example, as a way to get people to think about how “black” has come to label everything negative, members of the Black Movement in Quito made an effort to never use the word “black” when it carried a negative connotation (like in the phrase “a black day”) and critiqued other individuals when they did so. By doing this, Melucci would say Black Ecuadorians (or other new social movement participants) changed power from a character (“the oppressor”) into a set of signs (or the elements of oppression, like the negative connotations of “black” that have been used to oppress Black Ecuadorians). Changes in perspective like these, according to Melucci, made power (or forms of it, such as oppression) and the way it worked more visible; and, with visibility, came the ability to recognize power and to negotiate for change. Due to the new perspectives they represented and the cultural innovations they fostered outside of traditional political systems, Melucci also believed that new social movements expanded civil society.

Discussions, like Melucci’s, about new social movements helped researchers realize that power is also located and recreated outside of politics and government and encouraged them to seek out and analyze the workings of power and challenges to power in new areas. This new perspective inspired new analyses of Latin American women’s participation, both within and beyond the traditional private sphere. These analyses, in turn, fostered new discussions about the meaning, potential and contributions of Latin American women’s participation to democracy, politics and social change. They also combined with and added to renewed interest in the concept of civil society. Foweraker (1995), for example, theorized that some Latin American women’s participation in social movements was shaped by their political contexts and political opportunity structure, particularly their experiences of authoritarian regimes. He also felt that new social

movements, instead of posing direct political challenges, moved mainly *within* civil society. Through their work within civil society, Foweraker said new social movements posed indirect challenges to the state by combining identity and strategy practices and by trying to widen spaces and extend boundaries of social and political citizenship.<sup>24</sup>

**Popular sector Black women and new social movements.** Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar parallel Melucci and Foweraker when they stress that

...social movements not only have sometimes succeeded in translating their agendas into public policies and in expanding the boundaries or institutional politics but also, significantly, have struggled to resignify the very meanings of received notions of citizenship, political representation and participation, and, as a consequence, democracy itself (1998, 2).

Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar differ from Melucci and Foweraker, however, by emphasizing the deployment/enactment of “cultural politics” that happens when identity-based social movements try to change the meanings of concepts like citizenship, political representation and participation (1998, 7). Particularly, their description of the “entanglement of the cultural and the political” within social movements helped me understand the Ecuadorian Black Movement’s combination of culture and politics in its activities and objectives (Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998, 5). To clarify, the Ecuadorian Black Movement transformed Black Ecuadorian culture/identity into a political category upon which it could base further demands by gaining the recognition of Blacks as a unique yet Ecuadorian group in Ecuador’s National Constitution. This created a legal and political category based on culture/identity – Black Ecuadorian - where before there was none. With Black Ecuadorian established as a legal and political category, the Black Movement had bases upon which it could demand the rights entitled

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<sup>24</sup> A notion linked to Gramsci’s idea of indirectly challenging the state through culture and education not direct political confrontation (Kumar 1996).

Ecuadorian cultural groups, such as the inclusion of Black Ecuadorian history in school curriculums and the creation of schools for and by Black Ecuadorians.

In Wade's opinion, Black and indigenous groups in Latin America exemplify new social movements because of their focus upon identity as an end in itself and the interaction of race, ethnicity and class within these groups (1997 96, 99). He also claims that the visibility of the resistance made evident by Black and indigenous movements lends political significance to their behavior (Wade 1997, 108). Despite their potential and ability to make a difference, Halpern and Twine (2000) and Wade (1997) indicate that Black movements are less visible and more marginalized than indigenous movements because, in general, Black identities in Latin America are not institutionalized in their countries' imaginaries and legal systems to the same extent as indigenous identities. For example, up until their recent recognition as a unique group in the 1998 Ecuadorian constitution, Blacks in Ecuador, "unlike indigenous people, were not institutionalized as 'others' who had need of specific state policies" (de la Torre 2002, 89).

Critical race theorists like Iglesias (2002) point out the "... role of law in organizing and disorganizing the intra- and intergroup solidarities that are so central to effective collective action in any institutional context" (316). This parallels Halpern and Twine (2000) and Wade's (1997) emphasis on the lack of institutionalized identity as an obstacle to Black movements' visibility. It also supports de la Torre's belief that it is "fundamental that the state categorizes a population with policies that differentiate distinct groups for the successful formation of organizations and movements" (2002, 90). According to Wade, Halpern and Twine, Black identities' lack of institutionalization in Latin American countries also limits the ability of Black movements to gain international and/or NGO support (Wade 1997, 96; Halpern and Twine 2000, 20, 29-30).

Also helpful on the matter of institutionalization is Iglesias' argument that the institutionalized or legal right of different economic actors like banks, government officials and transnational financial agencies to make investment and disinvestment decisions gives these actors the power to create racial spaces (2002, 318). In terms of transnational donor agencies' decisions to fund "ethnic development programs" and the decisions of the Ecuadorian state to include Black Ecuadorians in the coverage of these programs (de la Torre 2002), Iglesias' discussion pinpoints the importance of investment decisions behind the ability of a particular group to form "positive" racial spaces, like Black Ecuadorians' ability to consolidate a Black Movement in Ecuador. Iglesias' work is also relevant to the situations of popular sector or grassroots Black organizations who felt programming investment and disinvestment decisions made by Black Movement leaders, who as "state recognized" leaders had the legal or institutionalized right to make such decisions, had a negative impact on their organizations and their ability to collectively confront economic needs (discussed in the chapter "Change in Era").

**New social movements in Ecuador as of 2000-2003.** Ecuador's Black Movement and Black popular sector or grassroots groups, as well as popular sector mestiza women's groups, might be considered new social movements or part of them. This is because of their symbolic challenges to dominant codes (like Blacks challenging derogatory usage of the word black to fight against racism, popular sector mestiza women using community activism to change ideas about women's role in society); their emphasis on making issues of relevance to them visible, recognizable and negotiable (once again, racism and subordination); as well as their focus, especially in the case of Blacks, upon identity as an end in itself (Melucci 1988, Wade 1997). I believe that, at present, popular sector Black women's organizations are part of a new social movement while organized popular sector mestiza women in Quito are not. Although most organized popular sector

Black women I met felt their organizations were in decline, claimed ignorance of other Black organizations' activities and were frustrated with Black Movement leaders' avoidance of economic issues, most still felt part of a Black Movement and that their activities could advance the Black Movement's agenda. And, despite the difficulties it faced, the Black Movement still presented itself as an autonomous identity-based movement that was working with many different Black organizations as well as local and national government representatives to challenge racism at personal, neighborhood, city and national levels.

Unlike organized popular sector Black women, few popular sector mestiza women's organization participants said they felt part of something beyond their own organizations or that their actions contributed to a larger movement. From the 80s through the 90s, mestiza participants explained, women's NGOs had encouraged and helped them to march with, attend meetings and combine activities with other popular sector mestiza women's organizations in Quito. During this period, participants said that they felt part of a larger, multi-class women's movement and took part in activities that reflected some of the elements Melucci (1988) and Wade (1997) used to describe new social movements (presenting symbolic challenges and emphasis on making issues of relevance to them visible, recognizable and negotiable). Around 2000, it seemed women's NGOs relinquished their motivating and coordinating roles among popular sector mestiza women's organizations. At this time, participants of popular sector mestiza women's organizations began to feel abandoned by women's NGOs, out of touch with what they now perceived as a middle-class women's movement and, most important, unable to coordinate marches and meetings with other popular sector organizations. Because the activities that characterize a new social movement (like making symbolic challenges, making issues visible and negotiating them) no longer

occurred among popular sector mestiza women's organizations in Quito and because many organized popular sector mestiza women no longer felt part of a larger movement, I find it inappropriate to discuss popular sector mestiza women's organizations in Quito as elements of a new social movement after 2000.<sup>25</sup> Research by a women's NGO also found that leaders of popular sector women's organizations in Quito did not believe a popular sector women's movement existed (Ernst, Acosta Maldonado and Tamayo 2000, 81).

### **Popular sector women – reasons behind and contributions of their participation in collective action**

My concern with popular sector women's organizations and the present limitations upon their activities is shaped by feminist theory and interpretations based on women's participation in politics and collective protests in Latin America. Many analysts within this group focused on Latin American women's use of their traditional roles, especially those of mother and household manager, as rationale for collectivizing, mobilizing and participating in a variety of politics. Some feminists have critiqued this analytical focus for reifying beliefs that women only have value as wives and mothers (see Dietz 1998 below). Although this critique rightfully points out that "mother politics" is not automatically "good politics," it underestimates the ability of popular sector women to use traditional roles for transformative purposes. The popular sector mestiza and Black women I interviewed indicated that by working through their traditional roles (instead of rejecting them) they not only created change for their community, they also demonstrated women's value and negotiated the transformation of traditional roles

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<sup>25</sup> There is an ongoing effort to form and consolidate an autonomous (i.e. not NGO controlled) popular sector women's social movement in southern Ecuador. This effort had a branch office, where I did interviews, and several affiliated organizations in Quito, of which I visited three. While a colleague informed me that the movement still existed in southern Ecuador, by the time I left the field, the branch office and all but one of the affiliated organizations in Quito had disappeared.

(supported by Lind 1992 and Rodríguez 1994). As you will see, present limitations upon popular sector women's organizations in Quito have made participants feel their ability to create change in their communities and women's traditional roles is greatly reduced.

Chaney (1979), in her classic text, theorized that Mexican women in politics defined their public activities as an extension of their jobs as mothers and, thereby, used women's roles as mothers to explain their non-traditional (for women) efforts outside of the private sphere. Although Chaney was criticized for inadequate analysis of women's oppression through traditional roles, Martin (1990) and Escandón (1994) expanded her approach. Both Martin (1990) and Escandón (1994) believed that popular sector women changed the way people in their communities and feminists thought about politics. Martin (1990) claimed that, by grouping together as mothers, women created a new definition of what was legitimate politics. The women Martin studied complained about the corruption of male political officials in public, emphasized that only women were important in times of crisis, undermined the legitimacy of male politicians and created a space where people would listen to their (women's) advice on 'doing' politics. Escandón (1994), meanwhile, focused on how popular sector women's mobilization in times of economic crisis showed Mexican feminists that political parties were not the only place to fight for and discuss women's issues and needs.

Molyneux's 1985 article presented another element to the discussion on the how and why of women's public and/or collective activities. As part of her analysis of women's participation in the Nicaraguan Revolution, Molyneux theorized that women's attempts to resolve practical interests (needs related to traditional women's roles, like potable water, paved streets, electrical service, etc.) would arise 'inductively' from the women and the conditions in which they lived. Meanwhile, she felt, strategic interests (attempts to counter women's traditional roles, like changes in divorce and property laws)

tended to be generated and promoted by women from external sources, like feminists and/or activists from NGOs, the middle-class and/or the U.S. Although Molyneux's 1985 analysis was criticized later for the dichotomy it created between so-called "practical" interests and "strategic" interests, some of women's NGO workers I met used "practical" and "strategic" to categorize the issues they worked on with popular sector mestiza women's organizations. For example, these women's NGO workers considered helping popular sector women get phone lines an effort related to "practical" interests while they hoped getting popular sector women to march for improved domestic violence laws would promote "strategic" interests.

Authors like Miller (1991), Müller (1994), Arizpe (1990, 1998) and Stephen (1997) all presented different yet similar ideas about what popular sector women's collective actions would contribute to politics, society and feminism. Miller's (1991) text suggested that collective actions of Latin American women not only affected feminists in the region, but caused Western feminists to rethink their positions. She also believed that "women's politics" (an expanded notion of politics influenced by or part of women's collective actions) would act as a catalyst for general change in society and, thereby, alter the political sphere as a whole.

Müller (1994) and Arizpe (1990, 1998), in contrast, separated women's collective activities from formal politics. They saw women's politics as a new way of doing politics that came to be because traditional institutions were incapable and would always be incapable of serving women's needs. Authors like Stephen (1997), meanwhile, felt the contributions women's participation made to society depended on their particular context and positioning. For example, in the Mexican case she presents, Stephen believes women used and even reproduced conventional roles and political behavior. Yet, women's collective actions and income-producing projects came to incorporate a

questioning and negotiation of women's roles and political voice (Stephen 1997, 193-194). Stephen also provided a contrary case, rural women workers in Brazil who were influenced by a strong feminist movement and leftist political parties. The women in this case separated themselves from male-run labor unions and consciously tried to create a different political structure and culture (Stephen 1997, 232-233).

With their Ecuadorian studies, Lind (1992) and Rodríguez (1994) contributed a focus on class and community identities and a critique of Molyneux (1985) to this discussion. Both authors felt that, in the process of organizing for community needs, women combined their contexts of gender, poverty and community to create empowering barrio women identities that provided negotiating power when they dealt with traditional political actors. Lind brought out the popular sector class aspect of these identities while Rodríguez emphasized the community aspect and coined the term 'barrio women.' Both authors also critiqued Molyneux's (1985) practical-strategic interest dichotomy by illustrating that barrio women intuited and combined so-called strategic interests (those that try to counter traditional roles) through and with their efforts to collectively confront so-called practical interests (those linked to traditional roles).

All of the authors in this section provide reasons for my interest in and concern with popular sector women's organizations and the collective activities these organizations promote. Lind (1992) and Rodríguez's (1994) discussions of gender, poverty and community identity as motivating elements behind popular sector women's collective actions as well as questioning and negotiation of traditional roles, however, most closely fit my own findings. This is not surprising since my investigation included organizations also studied by Lind and Rodríguez (albeit several years later).

**Questioning of potential.** Of course, there are authors whose analyses balance the excitement pervading the above arguments. Considering my discussion of an

apparent decline in popular sector women's organizational activity in this dissertation, these authors help frame questions and propose ideas about what brought about this decline. For example, the essays in Jaquette's text (1994) emphasized that women were key to collectivizing and voicing protest under crisis as well as to strengthening civil society and fostering democratization under authoritarian regimes. While confident that women's movements would persist, Jaquette was realistic about the difficulties they would face and had concerns that, despite positive assessments, many women in the movements studied would return to their normal routines once crises were over or resolution in sight (Jaquette 1994, 2, 7).

Fitzsimmons (2000) also took up the issue of apparent decline in Latin American women's organizational activity in her study of Chilean women's groups. She framed her argument within organizational theory and came to the conclusion that younger organizations, like women's groups in Chile, were less flexible and had a harder time adjusting to environmental change. Due to their newness and inflexibility, she believed the decline in Chile's feminist and women's groups was due to their poor ability to adapt to the environmental change signified by Chile's switch from dictatorship to democracy.

According to Foweraker (1998), Latin American women could create new political identities and were challenging the public/private divide with their political and/or collective activities. All the same, he asked, were/are women really making a difference? Have/had they "really" expanded women's rights or produced "real" political or social change? Foweraker (1998) concluded that the impact of women's participation was limited because it was occurring through their traditional roles and did not extend women's agendas in formal politics. Due to these elements, he felt women still did not have adequate political representation and often were not leaders of groups/movements

that might provide them entry into civil society or formal politics (where he believed “real” change had a better chance of occurring).

Dietz (1998) shared Foweraker’s (1998) pessimism about women using traditional roles to explain their participation and tried to dissuade authors from using motherhood/mother roles as bases of analysis. She argued that focusing on women’s use of their experience in the private sphere, especially as mothers, to counter or change worldviews or institutions only “reinforces the abstract split between the public and the private realms” (Dietz 1998, 51). Also, she believed that “no theoretical connection is provided for linking maternal thinking and the social practice of mothering with ‘ethical polity’... one informed by democratic thinking and the political practices of citizenship”(ibid).

My work responds to the above questions in various ways. As already mentioned, the experiences women shared with me suggested that theorists like Dietz (1998) underestimate the ability of popular sector women to create change in traditional roles by working through those same roles. Also, Ecuador’s economic crisis was far from over for popular sector mestiza and Black women. So, I doubt that they were demobilizing because they saw resolutions in sight, a possibility forwarded by Jaquette (1994). Instead, it seemed like popular sector mestiza and Black organizations were demobilizing because the crisis had produced or was producing dramatic changes in their life contexts. This leads me to favor Fitzsimmons (2000) theory that the youth of women’s organizations make them less flexible and less adaptable to environmental change. Although Fitzsimmons considers the environmental change that came with Chile’s switch to democracy, her ideas could apply to popular sector women’s organizations in Quito. Maybe these organizations were having difficulties adapting to the environmental changes represented by Ecuador’s economic crisis as well as the shifts in funding and

resources available to popular sector organizations and NGOs (detailed in the chapter “A Change in Era”).

Fitzsimmons’ discussion of women’s organizations as young also creates ties between my work and Foweraker’s (1998) conclusion that women’s participation has not created “real change.” Maybe, popular sector mestiza and Black women’s organizations in Quito did not have time to create long-lasting changes in traditional roles and/or spread transformed ideas about women into formal politics (where Foweraker believes real change happens) before a change in environment undermined organizational activities. Although what Foweraker (1998) means by “real change” is not clear and I do not agree with his implication that social change can only happen through formal politics, I acknowledge that, at the moment, middle-class women involved in Ecuador’s Women’s Movement believe women have little chance of getting their demands heard unless they speak through formal politics. Two NGO critics, who were Women’s Movement participants and former NGO workers, stressed this belief during interviews. They said the greatest failure of women’s NGOs in Quito was neglecting to teach popular sector women how to translate their demands into the language of policy and politics.

### **Role of NGOs in Latin America in connection with popular sector women**

Up to this point, I have indicated the authors who influenced my decision to focus on popular sector mestiza and Black women’s organizations, my belief that these organizations were means for their members to confront economic as well as socio-political needs and my analysis of these organizations’ weak points. This section discusses the studies that framed my consideration of NGOs in Quito as well as their problematic (beneficial yet adversarial) ties to popular sector women’s organizations through education provision, notions of civil society and funding relationships.

As detailed in the next chapter, the UN's Decade for Women (1975-1985) and transnational development agency interests in supporting Latin America's transition to democracy placed an emphasis upon "poor" women and women's collective actions as agents of development and strengthened democracy (Vega 1992, Schild 2000, Alvarez et al 2003). This emphasis drew attention to and created funding for "poor" Latin American women, their organizations and the NGOs or institutions that supported them. Not surprisingly, the increase in attention and funding promoted existing relations and fostered new ties between NGOs and popular sector women's organizations in Latin America. NGOs and popular sector mestiza women's organizations in Quito were no exception to this trend (Müller 1994, Vega 1992).

**NGO provision of/assistance with learning experiences and popular education in popular sector women's organizations.** Paulo Freire's (1985) critique of formal education systems and promotion of popular education for marginalized individuals and communities had significant influence on NGO programming in Quito, Ecuador and the rest of Latin America. His critique indicates that the dominant classes in Latin America hold the reigns of power in the form of knowledge and its distribution, i.e. the formal/traditional education system and its pedagogy. Education, according to Freire, must be seen as a practice of liberty and a liberating practice that frees knowledge as well as the people providing and seeking it. The crux of Freire's discussion on education as a liberating practice is the creation of a pedagogy developed in conjunction with and contextualized within the opinions and needs of the group seeking education/knowledge.

Also of significant influence to the education provided in popular sector women's organizations, because of their likely influence on Freire and popular educators, were Gramsci's ideas (and interpretations of them) about adult education in labor unions. Gramsci's discussion about adult education, although political in nature and focused on

labor unions or factory councils, forwards ideas paralleled in Freire's works about popular education (Mayo 1999). In Gramsci's opinion, labor unions had to incorporate adult education so that the laborers had the means to improve their knowledge and their vision of the world. With improved knowledge and vision, the workers could then see the hegemonic powers influencing them, could think critically and respond critically (as well as intelligently) to those powers with counterhegemonic actions that could develop into a larger counterhegemonic movement (Mayo 1999).

Giroux (1983), Foley (1990) and Luykx (1999) expanded upon Freire's and Gramsci's ideas about the dominant classes' control over formal education and resistance through education. Giroux and Foley's US-based studies emphasized the role of formal education systems in creating/shaping students as future citizens and as individuals that know their "place" in society (as determined by their race/ethnicity/color, geographic origins and socioeconomic standing). Luykx's (1999) argument was similar to that of Giroux and Foley, but her Bolivian study was more like mine in that it dealt with adults and the socioeconomic issues of an Andean country. Luykx (1999) prioritized Bolivia's historical, class, ethnic and race issues throughout her examination of school practices and school-student discourse in a Bolivian teacher training school. With her study, she demonstrates the role of schools in processes of national and individual identity formation by illustrating how/when clashes between the mestizo, criollo and indigenous identities of teachers/students and contemporary Bolivian national discourse are used to shape teacher/student identities.

The discriminatory and identity creating power of formal education systems, seen above, helps to explain why women's NGOs, feminist women's groups and community organizations for women in Quito and much of Latin America utilized Freirian-type education programs. Many programs emphasized a democratic approach and the

liberating potential of an education created in collaboration with/situated within women's needs and contributions. The feminist popular education promoted by Vargas (1993) for all-female groups, and borrowed upon by one women's NGO in my study, is precisely of this sort. This education should, according to Vargas, utilize the daily circumstances of women's lives as the bases for learning, for creating political consciousness and for integrating instructors' and trainees' knowledges, and its main goal is to teach women how to evaluate and overcome oppression mechanisms in their homes and society.

Along with Vargas, there are several other theorists who promote the value of adult women learning in Latin American popular sector organizations. Lind (1992) and Rodríguez (1994) are particularly important to my study at this point because they clarify the positive benefits of women's participation in organization-based popular education programs in Quito, Ecuador and corroborate my findings in this area. They demonstrate that learning opportunities in popular sector organizations promote changes in personal and group identities, create more active/formalized participation of women in their communities, and encourage women to undertake activities that challenge the traditional roles set before women by their society.

**Relations between NGOs and popular sector women's organizations linked to alternative ways of thinking about civil society and relations to state.** Ritchey-Vance (1993) and Fisher's (1998) optimism about both the notion of civil society and the potential of NGO-popular sector organization relations to strengthen civil society represent another reason why I focus upon NGO-popular sector women relations. Their work reflects the analyses and mindset that helped transform civil society, NGOs, popular sector women's organizations and their interrelations into targets of development programs in the 90s. According to Ritchey-Vance (1993), NGOs strengthened civil society by pluralizing it through the creation of spaces for traditionally marginalized

groups, like women and indigenous peoples, to participate in society; informal education programs and community organizations became 'spaces' often supported by NGOs. NGOs also increased the number of organizations available for mediation between individuals and the state and, thus, promoted civil society and the sustainability of democratic procedure within particular nations. Fisher (1998), meanwhile, saw NGOs as crucial to strengthening civil society in so-called developing countries because they (NGOs) increased the number of organizations between citizen and state, promoted political rights and civil liberties, deliberately promoted democracy in their actions and programs (bottom-up democratization) and broadened ownership of capital through micro-enterprise development.

**Questions about civil society.** Through their connections to new social movements and social change, some of the authors mentioned already (and some that I have yet to present) tie women's collective actions and/or NGOs to civil society and to the possibility of expanding and strengthening it. Pateman (1988a and 1988b) and Waylen (1994), however, stress that notions of civil society cannot be taken for granted and question civil society in terms of subordinate relations, like women to men and popular sector women to state governments. Yúdice (1996) also raises questions about civil society through his doubts about the applicability of the concept to Latin America.

Pateman (1988a and 1988b) believes modern concepts of 'civil society' and their relationship with the state never intended to include women; a striking critique when you consider that contemporary theorists (including those mentioned above and later in this chapter) usually visualize civil society as open to everyone. To prove her point, Pateman emphasizes the *patriarchal* and *fraternal* nature of the social contract that formed the basis of modern civil society and the state according to theorists like Hobbes and Locke. Men, not women, had power and political right in this social contract. She shows that

Hobbes, Locke and theorists like them believed that women were the property of men and, as such, had no part in the social contract or civil society. Keeping women apart from civil society, according to Pateman, meant that there was no chance that women could access the rights that might give them control over their reproductive abilities, control men had to maintain if they were to successfully defend their social positions.

According to Waylen (1994), ways of conceptualizing grassroots participation, most notably that of women, and the effects it has on state and society are impeded by definitions of civil society. These definitions, she believes are, for the most part, too narrow and simplistic, too focused on the traditional public sphere and institutions, to include or even see the gender relations actually involved in civil society activities or the social movement/grassroots actions so influential in Latin America. Finally, Yúdice (1996) questions the existence of civil society in Latin America. He believes civil society was never there or, if so, it is very fickle and ineffectual against state and economic apparatuses. All the same, he believes grassroots social movements open up new forms of participation and may change institutional boundaries. However, he warns social movements should *not* replace civil society or whatever stood for civil society in Latin America (Yúdice argues intellectuals played a mediating role between government and citizens). If social movements assumed the place traditionally assigned to civil society (like presenting demands to the state and providing assistance to non-governmental members of the state), Yúdice believes that would be a way for the state to displace its responsibilities onto the subordinate groups that typically make up social movements.

From the above discussion of civil society, I draw two points. One, the fact women's experiences and their collective actions in Latin America helped provoke Pateman, Waylen and Yúdice's questions provides further support for my assumption that Quito's popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations and women's

experiences within them can provide new perspectives that enable and foster critical thought on women's lives and the contexts that surround them. Two, because these authors show civil society is a problematic notion, any use of the term requires explanation and clarification. So, I present a definition of civil society because of its continued use by theorists presented in this chapter. Out of the many definitions available, I prefer John Keane's (1998) because his emphasis on civil society as an 'ideal-typical category' captures civil society's doubtful reality yet ubiquitous presence in the theory and research that influence my work. Keane describes civil society as "...an ideal-typical category...that both describes and envisages a complex and dynamic ensemble of legally protected, non-governmental institutions that tend to be non-violent, self-organizing, self-reflexive and permanently in tension with each other and with the state institutions that frame, constrict and enable their activities" (Keane 1998). Note that I find Keane's use of the words 'institution' and 'legally protected' limiting since they can imply established or long-term tradition as well as access to or response from local and national governments, none of which consistently apply to popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations in Quito.

**NGOs as problematic intermediaries between popular sector/new social movements, the state and global funding agencies.** While theorists and development agencies (World Bank 2000b) alike were excited about the potential of popular sector women and NGOs to bring down authoritarian regimes and strengthen democracy and civil society afterward, some raised the voice of caution. Pateman (1988a, 1988b), Waylen (1994) and Yúdice (1996) questioned notions of civil society as well as their oversimplification and overambitious use. Burgwal (1995) and Vélez-Ibañez (1983), meanwhile, warned of the clientelistic relationships that could form between popular sector groups (often social movement motivators) and NGOs or state institutions, wherein

popular sector groups might be aided but only in return for favors like giving favorable reviews to a program or institution, finding program participants, bringing groups to certain protests and recruiting voters for a particular political candidate. Van Thijn and Bernard (1998), meanwhile, asked funding and development agencies to carefully choose which NGOs they financed since NGOs could not be held responsible like state institutions. Alvarez (1998), Schild (1998) and Mindry (2001) continue the analysis of State-NGO-Social movement/popular sector relations, pinpointing the power of funding in these relations.

Alvarez (1998) discusses how the NGOization and professionalization of feminism and feminist movements in Latin America has created a growing power divide between the women involved in feminist movements. Although Alvarez (1998) is excited that grassroots or popular sector groups are still fighting, helping to decenter the women's movement and are changing and multiplying the locations of women's activities, she notices that women with professional titles and/or in NGOs, not the popular sectors, get the attention and assistance of aid and development agencies. She identifies several problems with funding that prioritizes or favors NGOs due to their "professionalism" and the professional titles of their employees; here, I indicate two. One problem is that NGOs have no accountability – they are not held by the constitution of their country to give certain services or provide certain results. Another is that, since NGOs and professional women have control over the money flowing into women's/feminist movements in Latin America, they determine which parts of the women's/feminist movements in their area receive funding. In some cases, notes Alvarez (1998), this financial control has allowed NGOs to neglect awareness-raising among and/or silence the mobilization of popular sector women.

Also considering NGOization and professionalization, Schild (1998) believes relationships between NGOs, the state and international level agencies produce limited positive benefits to women, especially those working within/from the grassroots. In her opinion, the overlaps between NGO and state programming for women set up a competition for funding that the popular sectors and the organizations closest to the grassroots are not professionalized enough to win (Schild 1998). The groups who do get more funding, like state institutions and professionalized NGOs, get more attention as do their ideas and politics. They become the producers of knowledge and categories that form part of the state's moral ideology since the state seeks ideas that will obtain funding in the future. Unfortunately, according to Schild (1998), state agencies and political parties transform these ideas into programs that approach women's issues and women on an individual basis; an approach which serves to undermine women's previous successes as collective actors.

Mindry (2001) introduces the notion of "virtue" in funding relationships through her analysis of interactions between donor agencies, local NGOs and Black women's grassroots organizations in South Africa. She discusses how local NGOs have to prove that they are "virtuous" enough to receive foreign donor agency funds by showing that they have "real" connections with grassroots groups and have successfully produced grassroots change. Grassroots groups in her research area were aware that NGO workers knew how to write grants and represent themselves to donor agencies and, therefore, were eager to form relations with NGOs. Yet, she found, grassroots groups also had to prove their "virtue," by demonstrating that they were truly needy and willing to cooperate in efforts to help, improve and/or empower themselves, in order to get the NGOs' attention (Mindry 2001).

The contradictory (beneficial yet problematic or limiting) nature of NGO-popular sector women relationships shown above is reflected in the NGO-popular sector women relationships presented in this dissertation. You will see that organized popular sector mestiza women felt women's NGOs were benefactors, providing education, political and social contacts or assistance as well as financial aid. Popular sector Black women looked to NGOs in general as potential benefactors who might provide education, financial assistance or funding contacts. Yet, recent changes in NGO behavior affected both popular sector mestiza and Black women's perceptions of NGOs in Quito as well as their organizations' ability to confront economic and socio-political needs. Some women, for example, came to perceive NGOs as the adversaries described by Alvarez (1998), Schild (1998) and Mindry (2001). I believe the growing influence of neoliberalism and its impact on NGO programming, in particular, are significant factors behind changes in NGO behavior. A framework of definitions for and arguments on globalization and neoliberalism, presented next, show the theoretical bases of this idea. Then, I will discuss the authors that shaped my belief in the influence of neoliberalism on NGO behavior.

### **Globalization and Neoliberalism**

When I introduced the context of my study, I briefly described the impact of globalization and neoliberalism on Ecuador's economy. Throughout this dissertation, I discuss the micro-level impact of neoliberalism and globalization on popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations, their participants and NGOs. The authors who informed my argument, meanwhile, present macro- and mid-level analyses of the interrelations between globalization, neoliberalism, popular sector women and/or NGOs. As you will see below, they present globalization and neoliberalization as intertwined elements that have promoted (and maintained) the transnational nature of capitalism and have helped capitalist ideology gain authority within the world's economies. In turn, the

ongoing implementation of neoliberal policy and reform across Latin America has reinforced the transnational and domineering characteristics of capitalism and has provoked living conditions that sparked the formation of (new) social movements and/or the collectivization of popular sector individuals, especially women.

**Basic definitions - Globalization.** Petras and Veltmeyer (2001) label globalization as a description and prescription. As a description, they state that globalization "...identifies a complex of changes produced by the dynamics of capitalist development as well as the diffusion of values and cultural practices associated with this development..." (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001, 11). Meanwhile, their definition of globalization as a prescription is a quote taken from a 1992 UNDP document: "...Globalization involves the liberalization of national and global markets in the belief that free flows of trade, capital and information will produce the best outcome for growth and human welfare" (ibid.). As is obvious, their explanation of globalization as description intertwines globalization with capitalist development, and, as clarified below, their definition of globalization as prescription is almost identical to the focus or intent of the economic reforms that have come to define neoliberalism.

In an article that ponders how to study concepts of "the state" in a globalized world, Trouillot (2001) warns readers to not "overlook the fact that words like 'global' and 'globalization' in their most current use were first broadcast most aggressively by marketing agents and marketing schools," and stresses that, if used without clarification, these words become slogans or clichés that hide the fact capital has always been transnational (2001, 128). I take Trouillot's warning into account, but continue to utilize the term globalization for two reasons. One, it is precisely the transnational nature of capital and the increasing theoretical concern about the range and depth of capitalism's influence that I wish to stress with the term globalization. Two, the discussions of

neoliberalism and globalization that I find relevant to my argument, as you will see below, almost always intertwine notions of globalization with neoliberalism (or capitalist ideology and capitalist development) or vice versa. In fact, the terms are nearly inseparable in some cases (as indicated by Petras and Veltmeyer 2001 above). By presenting neoliberalism and globalization in this way, the authors emphasize the increasingly (if not completely) global reach of neoliberalism as well as the transnational level of macroeconomic decisions that promote it.

**Basic Definitions - Neoliberalism.** Regardless of their opinions on neoliberalism, the analysts I read almost all said Williamson (1990) helped shape the concept of neoliberalism with his use of the term “Washington Consensus” “to refer to the lowest common denominator of policy advice being addressed by the Washington-based institutions to Latin American countries as of 1989” (Williamson 1990 in Williamson 2000, 251-252). In a 2000 article, Williamson restates the ten policy reforms he felt would have been agreed upon by the “Washington Consensus” as “good for Latin American countries” in 1989 (2000, 252). Today, many of these reforms have come to define neoliberal policy and to represent the neoliberal ideology these policies promote.

...fiscal discipline; a redirection of public expenditure priorities toward fields offering both high economic returns and the potential to improve income distribution, such as primary health care, primary education, and infrastructure; tax reform (to lower marginal rates and broaden the tax base); interest rate liberalization; a competitive exchange rate; trade liberalization; liberalization of inflows of foreign direct investment; privatization; deregulation (to abolish barriers to entry and exit); secure property rights... (Williamson 2000, 252-253)

**Commentary on globalization and neoliberalism.** Several authors link globalization to a new form of imperialism, wherein capitalist ideology is the dominant force spreading across the world. This spread of capitalist ideology or capitalist imperialism linked to globalization is then often paired with neoliberalism and/or the

“Washington Consensus,” described above. San Juan’s (2000) analysis of postcolonial states and globalization demonstrates this analytical interconnection of globalization and neoliberalism, as twin powers within a dominating force.

...globalization is a recently retooled program of universal commodification, imperialism for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It functions as the paradigm of a supernatural process of homogenizing the world under the political and ideological hegemony of monopoly capitalist states through multilateral agencies (World Bank, IMF, WTO, United Nations) and transnational banks and firms. (2000, 198-199)

Mohanty (2003), in her article “Under Western Eyes Revisited,” interprets globalization and neoliberalism as linked forces that seek hegemony. She describes globalization as a new force of recolonization of people in the Two-Thirds World aided by corporate capitalism’s “redefinition of citizens as consumers” and use of global markets to “replace the commitments to economic, sexual and racial equality” (Mohanty 2003, 514, 515).<sup>26</sup> Two-Thirds World refers to the social majority that has limited economic means and restricted access to services that might be considered normal in industrial countries (Mohanty 2003, 506). The Two-Thirds World can include the popular sector women presented in my dissertation as well as impoverished individuals living in or around San Antonio or New York.

Like San Juan and Mohanty, Comaroff and Comaroff analyze the hegemonic nature of globalization and neoliberalism. They believe that “nation-states... have been rendered irrelevant by world market forces” (2001, 28). In their opinion, the global economy, assisted by transnational pressures to assume neoliberal reforms, has created mobile markets that “disperse the production and circulation of value” and provoke the nation-state’s loss of control over its economy and wealth (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001, 29). The undermining power of a global economy on a nation-state made apparent in the Comaroffs’ analyses is exemplified in Ecuador. As the chapters “Introduction to Study

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<sup>26</sup> Mohanty refers to Eisenstein 1998 when she discusses corporate capitalism and global markets.

Context” and “Start of a Decline” indicate, Ecuador’s economy has been at the mercy of a global economy for years. Also, Ecuador’s government has done little to or been unable to maintain its voice in the neoliberal reforms assumed in exchange for loans from transnational institutions like the IMF.

The mechanisms behind the spread and promotion of neoliberalism on a global scale, illustrated by Stiglitz (2002), further explain neoliberalism’s potential to undermine a nation-state. Stiglitz indicates that the transnational institutions promoting neoliberalism take the hypocritical stance: you drop your economic, trade and financial barriers, we’ll keep ours (2002, 6). This, of course, gives control to the countries mandating policy and makes countries on the receiving end vulnerable. He then adds that governments encouraged to assume neoliberal reform are not given enough information to make informed choices based on “an understanding of the consequences and risks of each decision” (Stiglitz 2002, 88).

Stiglitz also clarifies factors behind the desperation felt by individuals living in countries undergoing continuous neoliberal reform. He stresses that, when it comes to the creation and assumption of neoliberal reform or neoliberal policies, a very limited number of individuals make macroeconomic policy decisions for a particular country;<sup>27</sup> none or few of whom are actually elected by the people of the country for which they are making decisions (Stiglitz 2002, 19, 225). In other words, residents of these countries, like the popular sector mestiza and Black women and NGO employees I interviewed, have no voice in their countries’ decision to adopt or reject neoliberal reforms included in agreements with institutions like the IMF or WTO. Popular sector mestiza women

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<sup>27</sup> Finance ministers and central bank governors make decisions in negotiations with the IMF while trade ministers make deals with the WTO (Stiglitz 2002, 225). In Ecuador, all of these individuals are appointed by the president and, from what I saw while in the field, the individuals filling these positions change at least twice during a four year administration.

involved in my research demonstrated this lack of voice when they commented that protest was the only means Ecuadorians had to speak against the consequences of neoliberalism in their country.<sup>28</sup> Their protests had little effect, however, other than delaying the implementation of a particular reform (Hey and Klak 1999, Carrière 2001, personal observations), and were declining in frequency and force (Unda and Barrera 2000).

Ironically, considering the limited number of people involved in macro-economic policy decisions (Stiglitz 2002) and democracy's supposed inclusiveness, Latin American countries shifted to economic neoliberalism at the same time they underwent transitions to political democracy in the 80s and 90s (Alvarez et al 2003, 547; Hey and Klak 1999, essayists in Demmers, Fernández Jilberto and Hogenboom 2001, among others). Schild clarified this dual transition to neoliberalism and democracy as the time when "the market became the engine of development" instead of the state (2000, 282). As I mentioned earlier, the city of Quito showed signs of neoliberalization, like privatization and tax reform, in the 70s (Carrión 1987) while Ecuador formally assumed neoliberal reform in the 1980s (Hey and Klak 1999, Carrière 2001).

Based upon my experiences in Ecuador and the experiences Ecuadorians shared with me, I believe neoliberalism ignores the needs of low-income individuals, weakens states' control over their own economies and, far too often, is the means for corrupt politicians/government representatives to fill their pockets at the expense of their countries' economic well-being. Yet, to risk sounding like Margaret Thatcher, perhaps at the moment, there is no alternative for Ecuador when it comes to neoliberalization. As discussed in the previous chapter, some analysts feel Ecuador is in a Catch-22 due to

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<sup>28</sup> Very few Ecuadorians I met discussed neoliberalism/neoliberal reform directly, rather they complained about declines in public services and increases in prices that often resulted from Ecuador's progressive neoliberal reforms.

intense international (mostly US-IMF-World Bank) pressure to assume neoliberal policies and because no group in Ecuador has presented viable alternatives to neoliberalism (Hey and Klak 1999, Carrière 2001, Beckerman and Cortés-Douglas 2002).

**Links between neoliberalism, globalization, (new) social movements and popular sector women.** Neoliberalism and globalization, according to some authors, provoked the conditions that then facilitated the formation of new social movements and/or the creation of popular sector women as social actors. Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar indicate that neoliberal policies minimalize concepts of state and democracy and change relations between state and civil society by underscoring that citizens should find ways to help themselves (1998, 1). They also believe “neoliberalism and globalization do transform significantly the conditions under which collective action may take place” (Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998, 23). An example of this is apparent in Schild’s article, within Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar’s text. She indicates that neoliberal emphasis on decentralization and market has economized citizenship - economically productive citizens are considered active citizens. International aid agencies, in turn, can promote these neoliberal notions by funding only those states, institutions and/or groups that share or demonstrate neoliberal trends in their agendas (Schild 1998).

Further examples of how neoliberalization and globalization affect and/or provoke collective action come from Marxist geographers like Katznelson (1993). Katznelson (1993) examines how capitalism structures spaces and what goes on inside of them and, like other theorists in this area (Holston and Appadurai 1999, for example), focuses on cities and how they provide unique contexts for social organizing. Particular to Katznelson’s (1993) work, and helpful to my argument, is his insistence that new social movements protest the conditions of life caused by capitalism. By doing so, they do not protest capitalism itself, yet they do not surpass capitalist relations altogether

(Katznelson 1993). To clarify, the popular sector women I met did not collectivize to protest capitalism per se. Rather, they joined organizations and marches to protest the worsened life conditions provoked (for the most part) by neoliberal reform and the capitalist ideology it promoted.

Other authors clarify how neoliberalism and globalization undermine the activities of new social movements and/or alternative social actors like the organized popular sector women presented in this dissertation. Molyneux (2002) and Lind (2002) theorize that national governments and international aid agencies utilize the free labor of popular sector women and their organizations to run programs that make up for the effects of unsuccessful neoliberal policies. Indicating elements that also limit women's ability to act collectively, Mohanty stresses that "the proliferation of structural adjustment policies around the world has reprivatized women's labor by shifting the responsibility for social welfare from the state to the household and to women located there" (2003, 525-526).

The impacts of neoliberal policy and naturalization of capitalist values, according to Alvarez et al (2003) have undermined the efforts of Latin American women and women's movements in which they participate.

Cuts in public funding and reliance on the vagaries of the market have accentuated a culture of individualism, competition, and conflict over scarce resources, making it difficult to pursue collective solutions to social problems and to effectively enforce rights gained as the result of struggles in the previous decade. Development projects have become focused on teaching women how to manage poverty individually rather than on collectively mobilizing them to reduce it at a societal level. Even projects with common goals compete with each other for funds from international sources, and local agendas are often compromised to adapt to external priorities. In the neoliberal world of "projects" for social change, long-term visions of change often have been substituted for practical short-term "results." (2003, 570)

**Neoliberalism's ties to NGOs.** Alvarez et al (2003) indicates that arguments about NGOs and their ties neoliberalism can be dichotomous and reflect a divide in Latin American and Caribbean feminisms that began twenty years ago. Initially, claims Alvarez et al, almost all Latin American and Caribbean feminists followed an “identity-solidarity logic,” meaning their work was geared away from government institutions and centered on the feminist movement and its “development of feminist identities, communities, politics and ideas” (2003, 548). With the arrival of democracy and neoliberalism to the region, some feminists began to follow “policy-advocacy logic,” which refers to the fact they joined political parties, entered government and founded NGOs in attempts to “promote feminist-influenced gender policy through formal government and non-governmental institutions” (Alvarez et al 2003, 547-549). From that time onward, the policy-advocacy group crashed heads with the identity-solidarity group; the latter claiming the former compromised feminist solidarity and was slipping into “collusion with global neoliberal patriarchy” (Alvarez et al. 2003, 547).

According to Schild (1998, 2000) and Petras and Veltmeyer (2001), NGOs are most often agents who promote neoliberalism and undermine efforts to fight against neoliberalism and/or its consequences. In her 2000 case study, Schild clarifies her 1998 analyses in a discussion of NGO programming for impoverished communities done on contract for the Chilean government. Under this program, NGOs enter a pre-selected community and encourage residents to design self-help projects for a funding contest. The contest leaves out community leaders and organizations and its competitive nature divides the community. This programming, according to Schild, undermines popular sector organization-based activity/protest approaches to issue resolution and indoctrinates popular sector communities in the individualist, market-based ideology promoted by the neoliberal model of development (Schild 2000, 291, 293, 297).

In their very critical text, Petras and Veltmeyer (2001) label NGOs the “agents of imperialism.” Petras and Veltmeyer claim that not only do NGOs divide communities by causing them to compete with each other over resources, they make sure the popular sectors focus on more limited/immediate issues so they do not see, complain about or mobilize against the larger issues surrounding them. By doing this, NGOs divert the attentions of the “masses” so the neoliberal state and macroeconomic institutions can do with the country as they please (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001). The authors indicate that NGOs are successful at diversion because the majority of NGO leaders were reaped from leftist movements. So, they know the language of solidarity and essentialist identity (now emptied terms according to the authors) that will unify people and convince them that what they are doing will change or counter state policies while, in actuality, they are supporting state and international mechanisms of neoliberalism (Petras and Veltmeyer 2001). I do not believe the NGO and NGO-like institutions I visited in Quito, particularly the women’s NGO I present as a case study, intentionally *began* as Petras and Veltmeyer’s (2001) “agents of imperialism.” Rather, my argument is that (willingly or not) some NGOs and NGO-like institutions *became* representatives of neoliberalism several years later, much to the detriment of popular sector mestiza women’s organizations, their collective actions and the potential for social change they represented.

**Chapter summary: Ties between popular sector mestiza and Black women’s organizations in Quito and theory**

As mentioned in the introduction to my argument and analytical framework, I view this dissertation as an opportunity to illuminate more theoretical or abstract analyses of the influence and/or workings of neoliberalism and neoliberal policies with a concrete critique based upon my interpretation of the experiences and perspectives of organized

popular sector mestiza and Black women in Quito. So, my work substantiates the ideas of the above theorists in many ways and then attempts to provide more detail and/or begin to extend from this theoretical framework based upon my micro-level analyses. For instance, my findings parallel those of Alvarez (1998), Schild (1998) and Mindry (2001) which show NGOs had much greater access to international donor agencies than popular sector or grassroots women's organizations and, thereby, had near-complete control over programming decisions and resources. As a result of this control, I show that, in Quito, popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations were dependent upon NGOs and Black Movement leaders (who also had greater access to donor agencies) for programming and resources. I also found NGOs and Black Movement leaders adjusted the content of popular sector or grassroots programming and popular education to fit their ideas, needs and limitations rather than those of organized popular sector mestiza and Black women. This counters the collaborative nature of the Freire (1985) and Vargas (1993) influenced popular education pedagogies NGOs and Black leaders supposedly promoted. In addition, my analysis of organized popular sector mestiza and Black women's critiques of NGOs and Black leaders indicates that NGO and Black leader control over popular education could reproduce or mirror the dominant classes' controlled distribution of education or access to information to maintain their position and the status quo, an issue made evident in Freire's (1985) critique of formal education systems.

Supporting Alvarez et al's (2003) findings, I noticed that women's NGOs in Quito changed their programming to capture increasingly scarce foreign funding and to take advantage of the increased availability of funding for programming with neoliberal inclinations. This observation leads to my argument that the neoliberal ideology increasingly promoted by NGO programming not only weakened popular sector

collective activities by endorsing individualism, competition and a market focus, as Schild (2000) and Petras and Veltmeyer (2001) discuss, but turned women's NGO interests away from popular sector mestiza women's organizations. Due to the control women's NGOs had over programming and resources (pointed out by my own work as well as Schild 1998, Alvarez 1998 and Mindry 2001), this shift in NGO interests meant popular sector mestiza women's organizations were excluded from the information and resources they relied on to perform collective activities that would confront their socioeconomic needs.

Popular sector Black women's organizations who had little contact with NGOs in the past and who now sought NGO support for income-producing projects that Black leaders continued to overlook found NGOs still overlooked them reflected the absence of past NGO-Black organization relations referred to by Halpern and Twine 2000 and Wade 1997. Their experiences also indicated the ability of investment and disinvestment decisions, and of who has the institutionalized right to make these decisions, to limit or promote a group's ability to form racial spaces that meet their needs (Iglesias 2002). For organized popular sector mestiza and Black women, the results of this exclusion (or disinvestment as Iglesias might say) by NGOs and Black leaders were feelings of frustration and hopelessness in the face of Ecuador's worsened economic situation. The current feelings of organized popular sector mestiza and Black women implied that they were no longer (and made me wonder if they would return to being) the activists and sources of socio-political change they and authors like Martin (1990), Lind (1992), Rodríguez (1994) and Stephen (1997) had portrayed them to be in the past.

In the following chapter ("In the Beginning"), I show that women's NGOs, NGO-like institutions and their relations with popular sector mestiza women in Quito arose out of development policy and trends as well as middle-class women's growing

disenchantment with socialist/Marxist political parties, to name the most important factors. The growth of women's NGOs in Quito, although linked to development agencies (and the "imperialism" that can imply), seemed to benefit popular sector mestiza women's collective efforts. Popular sector mestiza women's accounts of their organizations' beginnings stress the importance of women's NGOs and parallel Ritchey-Vance (1993) and Fisher's (1998) arguments that NGOs were agents who supported and promoted popular sector women's efforts to produce change in their economic and socio-political situations. Meanwhile, shifts in NGO approaches to sapling popular sector mestiza women's organizations, which I begin to demonstrate in the next chapter, indicate NGOs' increasing promotion of neoliberalism, as theorized by Schild (2000) and Petras and Veltmeyer (2001).

Unlike their mestiza counterparts, popular sector Black women's organizations in Quito were overlooked by women's NGOs during and after their creation, paralleling findings by Wade (1997), Halpern and Twine (2000) and de la Torre (2002). At the same time, university-educated Black leaders and Catholic Comboni missionaries fostered relationships with popular sector Black women and men in order to form grassroots Black organizations and to consolidate an identity-based Black Movement, similar to the new social movements described by Melucci (1988) and Foweraker (1995). Although their formation was assisted and encouraged by different groups, many popular sector mestiza and Black women's indicated that they entered organizations because of the learning opportunities they provided. I will show that these learning opportunities drew from or paralleled Freire's (1985) and Vargas' (1993) popular education pedagogies, which endorsed collaboratively produced education as a source of empowerment, and also reinforced relations between popular sector mestiza and Black women's

organizations and their supporters (NGOs, NGO-like institutions, Black leaders and Comboni missionaries).

## **Chapter 4: In the Beginning**

Women's NGOs in Quito have changed roles in their work with popular sector mestiza women, a change that, regardless of intent, has reduced popular sector mestiza women's access to the information and skills they need to confront Ecuador's worsening economic situation. In this change, women's NGOs have fallen in line with neoliberal trends rather than providing an alternative to them. Through a discussion of their origins during the 1980s, this chapter introduces the past history and status of women's NGOs as well as popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations as a context within which to examine their current roles and limitations. I show that women's NGOs fostered many popular sector mestiza women's all-female, grassroots organizations while university-educated Blacks and the Catholic Church promoted the mixed-sex, grassroots groups in which popular sector Black women participated. Within this chapter, you will also see that the provision of learning opportunities facilitated the formation of popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations and, often, was the basis of their relations to women's NGOs and/or other external support institutions. Learning opportunities became so important to sustaining organizations that their decline later in history (discussed in the chapter "A Change in Era") caused many members to leave and severely weakened organizations.

### **HOW WOMEN'S NGOS AND NGO-LIKE INSTITUTIONS CAME TO BE IN QUITO**

Local women's NGOs and NGO-like institutions in Quito came into existence and proliferated in combination with an economic crisis due to the crash in oil prices in the early 80s (Müller 1994, Vega 1992, Rodríguez and Leon 1992), the UN's declaration of a Decade for Women in 1975 (Müller 1994, Vega 1992, Schild 2000) and Latin

America's transition from authoritarian regimes to "democracy" and neoliberal policy (Alvarez et al 2003, Schild 2000). Ecuadorian middle-class women, who had lost jobs and collectivized because of economic crisis in the 80s, found support and employment alternatives in the women's NGOs and NGO-like institutions that received funding from the UN and international feminist groups who, with the backing of the UN's declaration of a Decade for Women in 1975, called attention to women as subjects/sites of development and endorsed research on women as well as organizations and collectives directed by women (Müller 1994, Vega 1992, Schild 2000). Reflecting development theories in the U.S. and Europe at the time, the UN portrayed low-income women and their traditional reproductive roles as the principal means through which institutions and "third world" countries could improve living conditions. According to this development logic, if poor women could perform their traditional reproductive roles better, their lives and the quality of life in their home countries would improve as well (Müller 1994, Schild 2000).

In 1979, Ecuador joined Latin America's transition from authoritarian regimes to democracy and market-focused or neoliberal policy (Alvarez et al 2003, Schild 2000) when its military government stepped down in response to social protest and its elected presidents adopted neoliberal reforms in order to pay off the debt incurred by the military government (Carrière 2001). Influenced by the significant impact women's protests for the "disappeared" had on Argentina's dictatorship (Miller 1991), transnational aid institutions portrayed women as agents for the development and strengthening of democracy and, therefore, encouraged transitions to democracy in Ecuador and all of Latin America by financing women's organizations in the region (while international finance promoted the neoliberal transition at the level of national government) (Alvarez et al 2003, Schild 2000). While not certain (though very likely) women's NGOs and

NGO-like institutions working with women in “newly democratized” Ecuador benefited from the funds created by this focus on women as agents of democracy, they did benefit from the political voice and increased ability to change policy brought by democratization (Vega 1992).

The UN and other transnational institutions’ emphases on low-income women and on women’s collective actions as “sites” to improve the “third world” and strengthen democracy dovetailed nicely with the socialist ideologies expressed by women’s NGO workers in Quito, many of whom wanted to help “proletariat” women participate in Ecuador’s new democracy (interview with ex-NGO worker, Alvarez et al 2003 for Latin America and NGOs in general). Based upon interviews with women’s NGO workers, organized popular sector mestiza women and Mindry’s (2001) discussion of NGO-grassroots relations in South Africa, I believe the above emphases placed women’s NGOs in highly dependent relationships with popular sector women because, in order to access available funding, women’s NGOs and NGO-like institutions had to demonstrate they were helping popular sector women and popular sector women’s organizations. Later, to prove their efforts were successful and merited further funding, women’s NGOs and NGO-like institutions had to expand their “client” base; meaning they had to make contact with more popular sector women and encourage them to form organizations. Meanwhile, organized popular sector women, thanks to NGO recruiting and assistance within their groups, found they needed women’s NGOs in order to access the multiple resources that could promote their organizational goals.

In the 1990s, an emerging emphasis on civil society and sustainable democracy provided further support and financial assistance to NGOs (women’s and otherwise) and NGO-like institutions in Quito. At the time, civil society was perceived as the principal space or category through which citizens could act and improve/transform their country

(Putnam 1996, Diamond 1996, Cohen and Arato 1992 all pronounced this belief to varying degrees), and it had become a prime site for development (Diamond 1996, Arizpe 1998, Fisher 1998). NGOs supposedly strengthened civil society by creating spaces for traditionally marginalized groups, like women and indigenous peoples, to participate in society; by promoting political rights and civil liberties; by encouraging democracy in their actions and programs (bottom-up democratization) and by broadening ownership of capital through micro-enterprise development (Ritchey-Vance 1993, Fisher 1998). With this connection made between NGOs, stronger civil society and sustainable democracy, NGOs themselves became sites of development meriting significant funding (Ritchey-Vance 1993, Fisher 1998, World Bank 2000b). Of course, this emphasis tended to overlook the problematized the roles of NGOs in the “third world,” like NGOs’ lack of accountability to their service recipients and sometimes undemocratic decision-making process for fund distribution, indicated by Van Thijn and Bernard (1998), Schild (1998), Alvarez (1998), and others.

**CAM.** I first heard about CAM through studies like Müller’s (1994) overview of Ecuadorian women’s organizations. Then, through a series of coincidences, I volunteered at a branch of CAM and became familiar with the institution when I did fieldwork for my master’s thesis. It was CAM’s extensive work with popular sector mestiza women’s organizations, including many groups who contributed to this dissertation, that led me to volunteer there and give it a central role in this investigation. My time with CAM also indicated its reliance upon international donor agency funds which, I came to realize, gave donor agencies significant control over the direction of CAM programming. The issue of donor agency control over NGO programming through funding, as reflected in the case of CAM, then became a central part of my argument.

The story of CAM (Centro para el Avance de la Mujer – Center for Women’s Advancement) closely parallels the general story of Latin American NGOs told above. According to Müller (1994), CAM was founded in 1983, shortly after Ecuador’s democratization and in the midst of the UN’s Decade for Women. Up until around 2000, it received generous funding from UNICEF, WHO, Terra Nuova and DINAMU (a women’s commission created by the Ecuadorian government in the 80s, now called CONAMU) and did not often suffer from financial distress. Instead, its problems were instability and reduced program effectiveness caused by its great size and changes in the numerous organizations with which it collaborated. At the same time, CAM’s size and many collaborators, allowed it to offer a wide range of activities to its focus groups - middle-class and low-income women in Quito. It provided various forms of legal and medical assistance (seminars, clinics, legal consultations and more) and ran a shelter for abused women. It also worked on consciousness-raising among women of all economic classes and on creating and/or assisting neighborhood women’s groups with informational seminars, basic skills training, fundraising and recreational activities (above information paraphrased from Müller 1994, 89-92, supported by my observations 1998, 2000-2002).

I collected first-hand accounts about the beginnings of CAM from two women. One was a mestiza woman highly involved with CAM from its beginning who had recently left the institution when I spoke with her in 2003. The other source was a popular sector woman who was one of CAM’s first volunteers and “clients.” The former CAM worker<sup>29</sup> explained that CAM was founded by a group of women who left the Worker’s Union Central (*Central de Sindicales*) because they were dissatisfied with how

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<sup>29</sup> The following foundation story comes from interview notes, not a recording. Note that all interview accounts presented in this dissertation, be they paraphrased or direct quotes, are my translation.

the Worker's Union Central dealt with women and women's issues. Upon leaving, these women decided to create a house for working women in vulnerable economic situations. They obtained the assistance of a Swedish NGO, SIDA (now defunct), that financed the purchase of the building, later called the Women's Haven, where CAM would put its offices. In the beginning, CAM focused on legal aid and nutrition for women in vulnerable economic/social positions. Later, there came a daycare and a decision to work with domestic violence. All of these services were free and were meant to facilitate low-income women's participation in society in terms of income-producing labor and formal politics. In other words, there was a political end to all of CAM's actions. Shortly after CAM began to function, the Worker's Union Central tried to take over the Women's Haven because they thought that the women at CAM wanted to divide the Worker's Movement. It took the intervention of the UN and the Swedish NGO to protect CAM's Women's Haven project.

The popular sector woman's account about the beginnings of CAM added details where the ex-CAM worker left off. She explained that the Swedish NGO supported CAM programming by providing money and sending Swedish student volunteers. A German aid institution and *Tierra de Hombres* (Land of Men) provided funding and personnel for the daycares and medical centers with which CAM was involved. While *Bröt fur die Welt* (Bread for the World), another German institution, provided financing for some investigations, publications and organizational projects.

Swedish and German student volunteers paid a stipend to stay on the second floor of the Women's Haven which also helped pay CAM salaries. In CAM's original plans, the second floor was to provide cheap housing for people from other provinces and rural areas who came to Quito for marches or other activities. In the opinion of the popular sector woman, CAM housed only student volunteers there, however, because it proved

more profitable.<sup>30</sup> She also felt CAM followed its original objectives ( *línea de trabajo*), more or less, until the 90s because there were many Swedish and German volunteers working with them and observing operations at all times. Once these volunteers became scarce in number, she felt CAM took a different path which, among other things, included charging for all services without much concern, in her opinion, for a solicitant's need or ability to pay. I will detail CAM's new path in the chapter "Change in Era."

**CPMM.** CPMM (Coordinadora Política del Movimiento de Mujeres - Women's Movement Political Coordinator) was an NGO-like institution. I say NGO-like because many of CPMM's collaborators said CPMM had become more like an NGO than the political/policy focused group it was supposed to be due to its current focus on externally funded programs and projects. I was first drawn to this institution because I heard it was one of the prime loci of Ecuadorian women's movement activities. For example, many of Ecuador's female politicians and intellectuals were affiliated with CPMM. I also learned it had a "political training school" for women funded by the UNDP and that CPMM's chapter in Quito proposed to coordinate the efforts of organized mestiza and Black, middle-class and popular sector women in the city. Later, I also realized CPMM's focus on funded projects and programs meant that, like CAM, international donor agencies had influence upon the direction of CPMM's programming. It was these areas of influence, but particularly the issue of donor agency influence on programming, that made CPMM key to my overall argument.

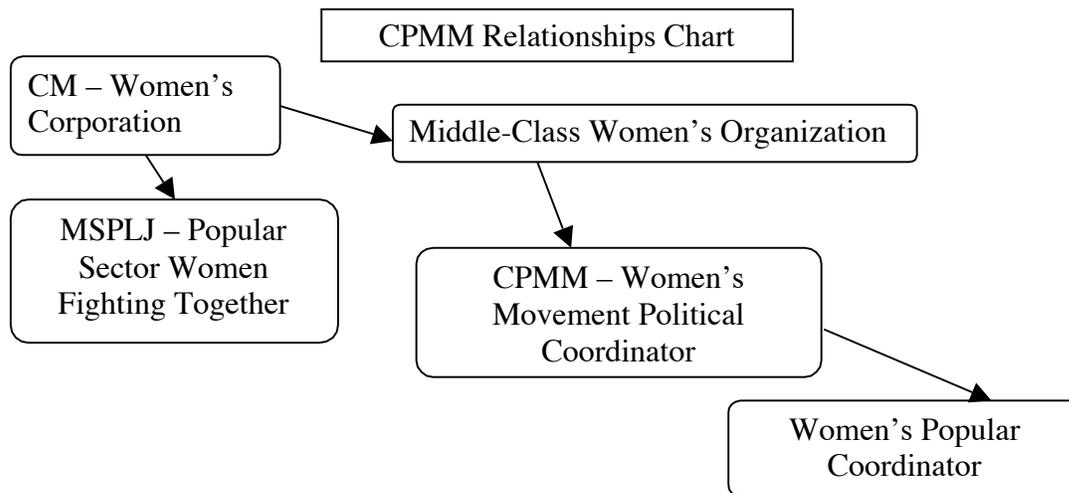
A middle-class women's organization created CPMM in 1995 as a response to their belief that the women's movement needed to be consolidated on the national level in order to better coordinate activities. CPMM was to be an institution under which women's organizations, including popular sector and indigenous/ethnic women's groups,

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<sup>30</sup> By the time I was in the field, 2000-2003, the second floor was office space.

could come together, coordinate activities and strengthen themselves. Unfortunately, from what I heard and saw during my time there, CPMM was not serving its original purposes of consolidating the women's movement. As one CPMM employee commented, middle-class women's organizations, instead of being unified under one umbrella institution like CPMM, were divided among several different coordinators, movements or forums (each with a different plan for the women's movement and its consolidation). Also, CPMM programming and activities continued to overlook popular sector mestiza and Black women and their organizations. This marginalization (intentional or not) of popular sector mestiza and Black women and their issues within CPMM caused popular sector mestiza women to form the Women's Popular Coordinator and CM (Women's Corporation) to help other popular sector mestiza women form MSPLJ, a movement made up of popular sector women's organizations.

In the chart below, I clarify the groups CPMM came from and the groups it helped to create unintentionally. The arrows indicate the outgrowth or breaking off of one group from another. Meanwhile, horizontal alignment of the groups indicates, roughly, the time of a particular group's formation in relation to others. For example, CM was born during the military dictatorship of the 70s with two "patron saints" of the Ecuadorian Women's Movement as its founders. The middle-class women's organization that created CPMM was formed by a group of women who broke off from CM (Women's Corporation) around 1984. Meanwhile, MSPLJ was created by CM before CPMM was formed.



In this section, I showed that NGOs in Latin America were urged into existence and/or greater visibility by transnational agencies seeking to improve so-called developing countries through initiatives focused on “poor” or popular sector women and democracy. The women’s NGOs and NGO-like institutions I encountered in Quito were no exception to this general pattern and, later, came to represent the control international donor agencies (and their money) had over the direction of NGOs’ and NGO-like institutions’ programming. Below, I introduce popular sector mestiza women’s “origin” stories for their organizations as well as their perspectives on the role women’s NGOs or NGO-like institutions played in their newly created groups.

### **ORIGIN STORIES FOR POPULAR SECTOR MESTIZA WOMEN’S ORGANIZATIONS**

Origin stories for popular sector mestiza women’s organizations indicate that, although popular sector mestiza women had to do a lot on their own to get organizations started, women’s NGOs and/or middle-class women working for NGO-like institutions had moderate to intense involvement in beginnings of many popular sector mestiza women’s organizations. As you will see in the origin stories presented below, women’s

NGOs often provided contacts with Ecuador's middle-class women's movement institutions. They also helped with the legalization process since popular sector mestiza women's organizations had to be legalized<sup>31</sup> by the national government in order to receive support from women's NGOs, other NGOs, NGO-like institutions and local government offices. Shortly after their initiation, relationships between popular sector mestiza women, women's NGOs and/or NGO-like institutions provided popular sector mestiza women means to confront economic as well as socio-political issues and encouraged them to think as a collective instead of individuals. As I stress later, many popular sector mestiza women's organizations came to rely on the resources women's NGOs provided them. Due to this reliance on women's NGOs for resources as well as NGO control over access to those resources (women's NGOs were the ones who gave courses, designed grant proposals and provided invitations to seminars), popular sector mestiza women's organizations became very vulnerable to economic crisis and socio-political issues when women's NGOs withdrew their assistance around 2000.

Keep in mind that women's NGOs organizing popular sector mestiza women in Quito during the 1980s were working under the influence of socialist ideologies (still fairly strong in Ecuador at the time), the varied success of squatter and barrio struggles in Quito from the 1930s to the early 1980s<sup>32</sup> (Unda 1996, Carrión 1987) as well as the news of urban movements happening all over the world. For example, Manuel Castells' (1983) high hopes for urban-based struggles and their ability to express urban forms of social

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<sup>31</sup> Legalization involved the organization of a group along guidelines set by the national government (including leadership, statutes or constitutions and so on) as well as official recognition and registration of the group.

<sup>32</sup> Although Ecuador came out of military rule in 1979, the paranoia about communist revolution that had made way for military dictatorship continued in presidential administrations of the 1980s. This paranoia, often expressed in explicit and subversive oppression, stifled social struggles significantly.

meaning might have affected women's NGO workers in Quito when they assisted the first popular sector mestiza women's organizations.

### **The first (supposedly) popular sector mestiza women's organizations in Quito**

Popular sector mestiza women's organizations had a variety of reasons for getting started: a need to work together in order to respond to economic and infrastructure needs, a middle-class woman's encouragement, etc. The involvement of women's NGOs also affected how these groups formed. Through a comparison of origin stories, I learned that, in their earliest attempts to organize popular sector mestiza women, women's NGOs and NGO-like institutions used a variety of crafts courses to provide a context for women to meet, to learn, to form and to consolidate a group and/or for groups to draw in new members. Popular sector mestiza women's stories about their early experiences in organizations showed that these courses worked like a bait, switch and hook recruiting method (which I will detail later in this chapter) that helped them, as potential or new organization participants, think beyond fast solutions to their immediate economic needs and become interested in long-term solutions, participation and social change. All the stories I heard indicated that these courses were brought to the organization by women's NGOs, NGO-like institutions and/or middle-class women who knew of or worked for these institutions. In other words, these courses and women's NGO involvement with them were important to the sapling group's initial growth and success. By the time women's NGOs ended their attempts to organize popular sector women, around 2000, they no longer used crafts courses. Instead they promoted self-esteem/self-help groups as a way to gather women and then create legal organizations. (Santa Rosa, discussed below, is an example of this approach.)

The founding members of Martha Bucaram,<sup>33</sup> GMV and AMPM claimed their organizations were the first of their kind in Quito. Their groups all began slightly after the consolidation of women's NGOs in Quito in the mid-80s, but they were organized to different degrees before an NGO came to assist them. Women in Martha Bucaram received, for example, a lot of assistance from a U.S. Catholic nun working in their barrio and undertook the formation of a daycare before they got in touch with a women's NGO. GMV members implied or directly stated that a women's NGO was what really helped them become community activists, causing me to believe that GMV was more dependent on a women's NGO for its formation and consolidation than Martha Bucaram. Meanwhile, women in AMPM did not mention an NGO of any kind when discussing the beginnings of their organization although a middle-class woman was highly involved in their group's formation. In all three cases, an NGO (women's or otherwise) did not interact with the groups on a regular basis until they required assistance with legalization. Note that legalization (a long, complex, bureaucratic process) was essential to popular sector mestiza women's organizations because it brought official state recognition and was required to access any national, regional and local government or NGO services popular sector mestiza women's organization might need or find interesting. Legalization also gave the state means to control and monitor organizations as well as the interests they represented (de la Torre 2002, 81-82).

With the origin stories of these three popular sector mestiza women's organizations I hope to demonstrate three issues. First, when it came to the first popular sector mestiza women's groups, women's NGOs acted, primarily, as consolidators. Second, women's NGOs began relating with to these groups through the provision of services, like courses and legalization, that popular sector mestiza women could not

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<sup>33</sup> Note: All organization names have been changed. The names given are pseudonyms I chose.

obtain or perform on their own. Finally, as the remaining origin stories show, these three ‘pioneer’ groups set the example for future women’s NGO work with forming and/or consolidating popular sector mestiza women’s organizations.

**Martha Bucaram.** Several outside agencies and individuals helped Martha Bucaram become a women’s organization – first, the kindergarten teacher of one of the founder’s children, then a Catholic nun, then a woman’s NGO in Quito (especially a lawyer from the NGO who helped the group legalize and obtain a meeting and work location), then the provincial government and finally, the parents of the children who helped the organization fight to gain possession of its daycare building. I spoke to two long-term members to obtain this origin story. Both agreed that Martha Bucaram came together as a group of women due to a first aid course offered at a neighborhood school. However, one woman, Barbara, emphasized domestic violence as a main reason for the group coming together. She said that her daughter’s kindergarten teacher had noticed that she had been abused and encouraged her and other women to get together, learn about and discuss issues of domestic violence during the first aid course and other courses the women received. Meanwhile, the other woman, Erica, didn’t mention domestic violence. Rather she said that getting to know Barbara as well as talking and sharing problems among women during the first aid course inspired the women to form a group.

Both Barbara and Erica agreed that women in the group wanted to try to address their economic needs so they sought out an activity or project that would produce a little income or provide jobs. At this point, they obtained the assistance of a Catholic nun to start craft and sewing projects. The nun and four founders later created an informal daycare. Shortly after that, the group got in touch with a women’s NGO via one of the founders who, through past organizational experience, had come to know the NGO and

what it could do for a popular sector women's organization. The women's NGO assisted the organization with legalization, with its efforts to formalize the daycare and with its fight for the daycare building. Erica claimed that the women's NGO decided Martha Bucaram would be the first popular sector women's group it helped because Martha Bucaram was the most vocal and motivated group the NGO had met. So, according to Erica, her organization was a pioneer group in this particular NGO's work with popular sector women. Because of its success in Martha Bucaram, she explained, the women's NGO then went on to found more popular sector women's organizations in nearby neighborhoods.

**GMV – Women for the Neighborhood.** GMV members told slightly differing foundation stories. According to one of its members, GMV was a social group that then became a group of women who worked on barrio infrastructure issues. She pointed out that a women's NGO played a key role in her organization's transition from a social group to a legalized organization of community activists.

María (2001 315-321)<sup>34</sup> I came here to this neighborhood and some women, they're friends now, some women, they had just decided to form a ladies group, from the neighborhood. So these ladies asked for the NGO's support. I guess that there must have been someone who knew the NGO. So, they told me how ... the ladies of the neighborhood had united and I liked it, I said, I'm going to see if I can sign up too, to see if I can join them... (332-336) ...the women from the NGO came, I met all the founders, I met many people, all through the NGO, who

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<sup>34</sup> ...vine yo acá al barrio, unas compañeras, amigas que son ahora, justo se valieron para formar un grupo de damas, del barrio, entonces esas damas pidieron apoyo a la ONG, o yo que se que ya había alguna persona que conocía la ONG, entonces ... me conversaron que se han reunido las damas del vecindario, y me gustaba, y yo dije no, yo también me voy a ver si es me inscribo a ver si es que, si es que me ajunto donde ellas... (332-336) ...venía el, las señoras de la ONG, conocía a (names suppressed) me conocí a muchas personas, por medio de la ONG que nos venían a dar de ahí nos empezaron a darnos unos talleres... (342-349) Entonces ahí formamos el Grupo de Mujeres para el Vecindario, entonces en iniciales es GMV, así es, de ahí ya se hizo jurídico eso, por medio de abogado y todo eso, la ONG misma nos dio haciendo todo esas cosas, después teníamos muchas sesiones para irnos, para ayudar a la ciudadela, ya con valor que era jurídico, o sea nos reuníamos para ver un grupo de personas que hagan su trabajo por decir, un grupo de personas se iba al Agua Potable, otra a la luz eléctrica, otras a un Colegio para formar la ciudadela para apoyo de la ciudadela, formamos el mercado que es ahora, muchas obras que hizo el GMV.

came to give us workshops... (342-349) So, there we formed the Women for the Neighborhood Group, GMV, then it was legalized through a lawyer and all that. The NGO itself did all of those things for us. Later, we had many sessions to go help the neighborhood, now with the value of being legalized. For example, we would meet to make sure a group of people did their job, for example, a group of people went to the Potable Water office, the other to electricity, others to a high school to gain more support in the neighborhood, we created the market that you see today, GMV did a lot of work.

Another member said that the women got together because inadequate neighborhood infrastructure, like the absence of paved roads, potable water and telephones, provoked common needs and frustrations among community women. Meanwhile, yet another woman said that it was a man in the neighborhood who encouraged women to get together in order to protest for a school in the barrio. Two of these women commented that the women's NGO came in to help with organization consolidation (they started in with courses and economic projects that drew in more women) and started to work on social issues while members kept working on infrastructure concerns like the ones mentioned above. In addition, they claimed the women's NGO helped with education about how local government worked so that women could get improved responses to their barrio's infrastructure issues.

**AMPM.** The founders of AMPM said they started the group with a desire to work on women's issues. Meanwhile, all of the non-founding members I met said that AMPM's provision of opportunities to learn and crafts courses were the initial reasons why they joined, but that their objectives later changed to match the founders'. All the women in AMPM who considered themselves founders shared the same origin story. They said that they got tapped on the shoulder by a middle-class woman who was their children's English teacher at a distance learning institute run by the Catholic Church. The teacher and the NGO-like institution with which she worked facilitated topical discussions, helped the group get courses, helped them with legalization and left the

organization with good foundations. For the initial meetings, the teacher and founding members met in school rooms or the neighborhood park while they looked for a formal place to meet. They also had crafts courses offered by the teacher's NGO-like institution and the provincial government when/wherever they found a space to have them.

Not much after it formed, AMPM also started working on a health center project. Eventually, they obtained a house on loan (*en comodato*) from the city of Quito as a permanent place for the organization to meet and to house the health center. The house was derelict, however. So, it was not until after they worked hard to obtain remodeling materials and equipment from the provincial government and labored to make the building livable that they could move into their new organizational home. Only after AMPM moved into this building does an NGO appear in women's stories, and then, it is as an institution that gave human relations talks, led discussions on women's rights and offered courses on topics related to the organization's needs.

Susi (2000 507-509)<sup>35</sup> What the NGO has helped us with has been professionals, not with money. They've sent us a woman to give courses, about accounting for example. When we've needed help like that they've sent it. They've helped one of us go to a course on how to make a project. That's been the support the NGO has given us.

### **Heavy NGO involvement**

The following three cases demonstrate instances where women's NGOs used heavily involvement to form popular sector mestiza women's organizations from nothing (to varying degrees of success). These cases also show, chronologically, three different phases in NGO approaches to forming and assisting popular sector mestiza women's

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<sup>35</sup> De la ONG lo que nos han colaborado es con profesionales, no con dinero, así nos han mandado alguna compañera para darnos cursos, por decirle algo de contabilidad, ya, entonces hemos necesitado eso, nos han mandado eso, para hacer un proyecto nos han facilitado una compañera, ese ha sido el apoyo de la ONG.

organizations.<sup>36</sup> All cases present the challenges from within popular sector organizations and their communities that made forming a women's organization difficult. More important, all cases indicate the following two points: the influence women's NGOs exerted over popular sector mestiza women's organization formation through the information and resources they (NGOs) provided to organizations; and, NGOs' shift from providing or developing collective approaches to popular sector mestiza women's economic issues toward more neoliberal (market-focused), individualized approaches.

**Barrio Nuevos Horizontes Daycare.** Although a women's NGO was heavily involved with Barrio Nuevos Horizontes for several years, the community had better luck working with women and women's issues through mixed-sex barrio committees than through an autonomous or women's NGO-assisted women's organization. I met women of the barrio through Elena, the head of the daycare branch of the barrio committee and also a leader for popular sector mestiza women's activities in Quito. Elena said that a women's NGO had coordinated a health center in the barrio and tried to start a women's group in Nuevos Horizontes using craft courses as a recruiting method. Yet, Elena explained, despite the NGOs' efforts, infrastructure needs and their impact on women, these elements just weren't enough to get women to unite. Women were just too conflictive, she felt, and couldn't get along well enough to form an organization. So, the idea was abandoned by the women's NGO and the women of the barrio.

Meanwhile, the barrio committee, started by Elena and her husband before the women's NGO came to the area, had already begun work on infrastructure issues for the barrio and turned out to be an effective force. Elena felt that, in the end, there really wasn't a need for a women's group because the barrio committee always had a

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<sup>36</sup> The Barrio Nuevos Horizontes story refers to, approximately, 1987, the Santa Rosa story to around 1998 and Delicias del Hogar to around 2000.

representative number or a majority of women. Therefore, barrio women had a voice and a vote and could get their issues attended to through the barrio committee.

Roberta, the daycare manager, explained that the barrio daycare started when an NGO, who came to the community through the women's NGO that ran the barrio health center, "sold" the barrio a daycare project that would be run by community women.

Roberta (2000 483-498)<sup>37</sup> ...since the neighborhood got the health center, this NGO came along shortly, it was in charge of working with children and through it we came to know one of its workers. She came to sell her project here in the neighborhood. It seemed an ambitious, nice and necessary project to us because, more than anything, there was so much need. We noticed parents left children home alone without anyone to look after them. So, they decided to do a census, and for this census I was already working with them. We covered the whole population. Everyone said that it would be convenient to have a daycare. So, we started there...

Eventually, the daycare became autonomous of the NGO and was overseen by the barrio daycare committee, whose membership consisted only of women.

In reference to the present, daycares, it seemed, were the only projects started by NGOs that were successful to some extent once the NGOs left. This might have been because there was a government system in place to support "popular" daycares with training, money for wages and children's meals. Right before I left the field, however, the Ecuadorian government was thinking about handing their daycare programs over to NGO management. The federation of "popular" daycares was not happy about this as their general opinion was that NGOs spent project money on themselves, not on the projects. Compared to the origin stories and "golden years" experiences presented here

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<sup>37</sup> ...ya el barrio como barrio consiguió el centro de salud, y de pronto vino una ONG, que se encargaba de trabajar con la niñez y por medio de ella le conocimos a una trabajadora, ella vino a vender su proyecto acá en este barrio, entonces nos pareció un proyecto ambicioso, un proyecto bonito, y un proyecto necesario mas que todo, porque era de tanta necesidad, porque veíamos que a veces los papás se salían y los niños se quedaban por ahí sin mayores cuidados, entonces se decidió hacer un censo, y yo para ese censo ya estuve trabajando con ellos, entonces en ese censo, hicimos a toda la población, todos manifestaron que hubiese sido conveniente tener una guardería, entonces empezamos por ahí...

and in the following chapter, this wariness of NGOs indicated a significant change in popular sector mestiza women's attitudes toward NGOs. I will further detail popular sector mestiza women's changing attitudes about NGOs in the chapter "A Change in Era."

**Santa Rosa.** Starting as a self-help group fostered by a women's NGO, Santa Rosa had barely begun when the women's NGO proposed that the group start a community budget diner (*comedor popular*). Participants explained they were willing to try the project because of their intense economic needs. So, members sold food at community events to pay for cooking/nutrition courses and the women's NGO assisted with the legalization of the organization, both requirements if the group was to manage the *comedor*. Ruth and Amalia provided details on how the organization and the *comedor* came to be.

Ruth (26 April 2002 491-499)<sup>38</sup> One of our friends brought... one of the women from the NGO here. She said that she had the opportunity to go to an organization in Solanda. So, she said (to the NGO workers), she said I'm from this neighborhood and we'd like it if you'd go there too, if you'd give us some talks. So, the lady from the NGO came here and for the meeting this woman gathered I think 6 or 7 women. At the next meeting, there were about 10, 11. Then, we kept on meeting, one day at my house, another day in another woman's house, another day at the police station, like that. We talked about our problems, sometimes we had a snack, and from that came the idea of making an organization, of uniting and working, that's how it was.

Amalia (18 April 2002 20-26)<sup>39</sup> ... the idea behind this, at first, was to only have a self-help group. So, as time passed we wanted to try our luck, to see if some

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<sup>38</sup> (491-499) Eso le digo, una de las compañeras... nos trajo las señoras de la ONG aquí. Ella dijo que tuvo la, la oportunidad de asistir a una, así a una organización por Solanda, entonces ella le dijo [a las trabajadoras de la ONG] le dijo soy de este barrio, nos interesaría que vayan allá también nos den estas charlas, entonces vino acá la señora de la ONG y, y la señora para eso ya nos reunió creo que éramos como seis o siete, de allí a la siguiente ya nos reuníamos como 10, 11, entonces así seguíamos ya reuniéndonos, un día en mi casa, otro día en la casa de alguna de las compañeras, otro día en el retén, pero así, conversábamos nuestros problemas, de pronto nos tomábamos un cafecito, de allí surgió esto de hacer la organización, de unirnos y trabajar, eso fue.

<sup>39</sup> ...la idea de esto era primero sólo hacer un grupo de auto ayuda nomás, entonces ya conforme iba pasando el tiempo, quisimos probar suerte si se puede decir ver si es que se crea alguna empresa, para

business could be formed to help ourselves as women since you can see that we are low-income people. So we wanted to see if we could start something, not something that dripped with money but something that would serve to at least bring something home. So, there, with the help of an NGO worker, they (the NGO workers) went along training us to no longer be a self-help group but an organization, that this be a legal organization, nothing else. (200-203) Well, in the time I was there an NGO worker came with the idea of the community budget diner (*comedor popular*) because she'd gone to Lima (Peru) and had seen some results that, I imagine, to the NGO women seemed good and they thought that maybe here it would work too. I mean, they only talked about the diner nothing else. At that point, I left for almost a year or more I was out of the group, that's when I found out that they'd started the new daycare and the diner...

Unfortunately, the *comedor* began to fail shortly after it started.<sup>40</sup> Women's NGO workers blamed strong divisions within the community and lack of community support. Participants noted these issues and also emphasized the devastating effects of gossip and internal power struggles on the *comedor* project and its workers.

While the *comedor* was in decline, participants and the women's NGO started an impromptu daycare. The daycare never had the planning, organization, viability study or economic support it needed from the beginning. It was only a spur of the moment response; a way to use uneaten food from the failing *comedor popular*. These factors as well as growing community conflicts with organization members caused the daycare to lose clientele and led to its decline.

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podernos ayudar como mujeres que ve que somos personas de escasos recursos económicos, entonces queríamos ver si formábamos algo que, que no chorree pero que nos sirva por lo menos para llevar algo a la casa, y de ahí con la ayuda de una trabajadora de una ONG es lo que, nos fueron capacitando para hacernos ya no como grupo de auto ayuda sino la organización, que sea jurídico nada mas, (200-203) Bueno hasta lo que yo estuve vino una trabajadora de la ONG con la idea de que, esto del comedor popular porque se fue a Lima, y había visto unas experiencias que, es, me imagino que a las de la ONG les pareció bueno pues, y pensaron que tal vez aquí también iba a dar resultado, o sea solo se hablaba del comedor nomás, de allí yo también como me salí casi un año y mas estuve afuera, entonces allí si me enteré vuelta que ya habían armado la nueva guardería y, y el comedor...

<sup>40</sup> Studies like Rakowski (2000) indicate that some *comedores populares* in Peru and Chile have been successful in empowering women and helping them/their communities confront economic needs worsened by neoliberal reform. This was not the case in Santa Rosa, however.

In the end, the *comedor* only benefited the women's NGO, who received financing for managing the project, while the popular sector women working in the *comedor* and daycare received minimal to no benefits. A couple of members, who were not working in the daycare, took a micro-enterprise course the women's NGO offered and decided to start an urban gardens (*huertos urbanos*) project. The rest of the members were too frustrated to continue with the new project and dropped out of the organization, leaving the two members and their garden project as the organization's lone representatives.

**Delicias del Hogar - Clientelism success.** I call Delicias del Hogar a "clientelism" success because it was formed almost completely under NGO initiative (the women's NGO sought out clients for its program) and was still functioning when I left the field in 2003. Members of Delicias del Hogar all had previous experience in popular sector mestiza women's organizations. They got involved in Delicias del Hogar after CAM invited them, via their popular sector mestiza women's organizations, to participate in a yearlong course that discussed nutrition and how to start a micro-enterprise. By the time they entered the course, some women still participated in their primary groups, or in other cases, their primary organizations no longer existed.

Members of Delicias del Hogar explained that they had had no intention of forming the group and its micro-enterprise until after the nutrition course was over. CAM workers, on the other hand, explained that CAM had decided that after the course ended, it would sponsor<sup>41</sup> a micro-enterprise (a test run of sorts) and the first graduates of the course would be offered positions in the micro-enterprise. Delicias del Hogar's potential to provide income was a big draw for course participants. A few women greatly

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<sup>41</sup> CAM sponsorship meant that CAM provided all the extras a new business might need – help with bookkeeping, management, PR and contracts.

reduced their organization participation so that they could work as a member of Delicias del Hogar. Or, as one member explained, the job opportunity provided the perfect alternative to her failing women's organization which had also been assisted by CAM.

Paula (2000 200-210)<sup>42</sup> I stayed home, and in the afternoon there wasn't much to do. A friend who lived in front of my house, she was a little crazy, she said, Ms. Paula let's go, you have time in the afternoon, let's do this, this other thing and we went. Before this, I was in a hair-styling course, I also took a course on first aid. So, we knew that there were going to be courses in the neighborhood and we signed up for everything. So, we were forming an organization in our neighborhood and we went to CAM to ask for help, that they send us some instructors for knitting. I think that was the time CAM was helping us to form an organization in our neighborhood. So, CAM invited us to this course on nutrition. So I, since our organization was dissolving because there wasn't, the people like to have income and since their wasn't they withdrew, the people weren't coming anymore, so I decided it'd be better to start this course on nutrition, and here I am, still fighting.

Despite the fact it was made up of women with previous organizational experience, Delicias del Hogar shared few elements in common with the popular sector mestiza women's organizations I have already discussed. It represented one of CAM's last collaborations with organized popular sector mestiza women (and, by 2002, CAM's newest approach to assisting popular sector individuals in general). The change in NGO approaches to popular sector women represented by Delicias del Hogar demonstrated a shift from group work on confronting women's multiple issues to neoliberal programs that focused on women's individualized, market-based responses to economic issues. For

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<sup>42</sup> O sea yo pasaba en la casa no, así en la tarde, casi en la tarde no hay mucho que hacer, y una amiguita del frente ella era medio alocadita, me decía doña Paula vamos usted tiene tiempo la tarde vamos a hacer esto, esto otro, íbamos, antes de eso seguía yo un curso de belleza, seguí un curso de primeros auxilios, entonces ella ya sabíamos que iba a haber cursos en el barrio y nos metíamos, nos metíamos a todo, entonces estuvimos formando nosotros una organización de nuestro barrio, y nos fuimos al CAM a pedir ayuda, que nos manden unas instructoras para tejidos creo que fue esa época, entonces nos estaban ayudando el CAM a formar la organización en nuestro barrio, entonces por el CAM, mediante el CAM nos invitó a este curso de nutrición, entonces yo como ya en nuestra organización ya se iba disolviéndose porque no había, les gustaba a la gente que haya ingresos económicos y como no había entonces iban retirándose la gente ya no iban asistiendo entonces yo decidí mejor entrar a este curso de nutrición, y aquí estoy todavía luchando.

instance, participants in *Delicias del Hogar* were removed from the context of their popular sector women's organizations. They were to work apart from their original groups, as individual employees of a micro-enterprise. Then, they were trained in how to get the micro-enterprise started and in how to improve their leadership skills so that their new business would have a better chance of success. Gender issues and self-esteem, principle foci of NGO work with popular sector mestiza women in the past, were taken into account, but the time dedicated to these issues was increasingly reduced over the years.<sup>43</sup>

### **The abandoned child**

**EDU (Domestic Workers United).** I consider EDU an unusual popular sector women's organization for three reasons. One, its mission to fight for the rights of domestic workers was more like that of a union than of your typical women's group. Keep in mind that domestic workers (*empleadas domésticas*) were and are not allowed to form unions because a domestic worker's union was and is illegal in Ecuador.<sup>44</sup> Two, its membership was a mix of both mestiza and Black women. Its leader/founder was a popular sector Black woman who, after being part of popular sector and middle-class women's organizations and formal political parties, became involved with Black groups in Quito. And three, it was an organization that had survived passive NGO disapproval/abuse in the early stages of its development.

The experiences of EDU and its founder suggested that NGOs only dedicated themselves to organizations that promoted their interests. EDU's story also indicates the

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<sup>43</sup> When the micro-enterprise program first started in 2000, the course took one year. By the time I observed the program, in 2002, the course took two months, two or three days of which were dedicated to the topics of gender and self-esteem.

<sup>44</sup> EDU's founder mentioned that domestic workers unions were illegal. My father-in-law, an Ecuadorian labor lawyer, then explained why their unionization was illegal and why their legal, formal association could never become a union. Domestic workers cannot unionize in Ecuador since, according to Ecuadorian law, union members must all work for the same employer.

potential influence NGOs had in determining which organizations could form, consolidate and advance. For example, without NGO assistance, it was almost impossible for EDU (and probably other organizations without NGO support) to legalize and, thus, become eligible to apply for and receive financial and informational resources that EDU required. In terms of my overall argument, EDU's experiences foreshadowed the difficulties popular sector mestiza women's organizations would face without NGO assistance in the future.

EDU was encouraged into existence by a women's NGO when a domestic worker was burned by her employers. Yet, EDU promptly lost the NGO's support as soon as its founder gathered a few domestic workers together. EDU's founder felt the women's NGO made her run circles when she tried to get her organization legalized and took advantage of the fact she could barely read and write at the time. She noticed that the women's NGO, which had legalized many of Quito's popular sector women's organizations, passively refused to offer the same assistance to EDU (losing papers, sending them to the wrong place, "forgetting," etc.). All the while, this women's NGO kept EDU close to it, passing "spare change" to the group and saying that, once legal, the group would receive their full support. EDU became a legal organization after 16 years when a lawyer from a different institution helped organize the required papers and deliver them to the correct offices.

Pati (2000 364-385)<sup>45</sup> Well, I was participating in this NGO, and I was recently starting to learn how to read and write when one of the workers said to me, Pati,

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<sup>45</sup> Bueno, yo estaba participando con una ONG y bueno pues yo recién estaba comenzando a aprender a leer y escribir, cuando me dice una trabajadora de allí, me dice Pati sabes qué ha pasado le han quemado a una chica, le han quemado los patrones porque no ha planchado bien el terno, le pusieron la plancha en la cara, entonces yo dije bueno y qué es ella, me dice una empleada doméstica y es menor de edad, ella tenía quince años, era una niña para planchar un terno, entonces le dije mire compañera, qué puedo hacer, conversar con unas compañeras y unimos como ustedes están unidas en la Unión Femenina de Mujeres, porque había una organización de mujeres que se llamaba Unión femenina, de ahí yo aprendí a coser por ejemplo en máquina, de ahí me dice, quieres hacer eso, le digo sí, entonces comencé a conversar con mi

guess what's happened? They've burned a girl, her bosses burned her because she didn't iron a suit properly, they put the iron on her face. I said, well, what is she? She said, a maid and she's underage. She was 15 years old, she was too little to iron a suit. So, I said, look, what can I do, talk to some women and unite like you are united in the Women's Union? Because there was a women's organization called the Women's Union – that's where I learned to use a sewing machine. She said, do you want to do this? I said yes. So I started by talking with my little sister, with my nieces, with my friends, we started out with five, then we started to call on the people. We did theater in the parks because that's where the maids meet, we started to do radio theater where we'd imitate the family that burned this girl and it gave good results. We gathered something like 80 women, registered with the organization and everything, but there wasn't anyone to give us follow-up. At the time, I didn't know how to make a request so that they'd help us, I didn't know. I mean, it was important that we were organized but we didn't know how to do things. ...But, since the formation center didn't give us any follow-up they didn't help us with this. They gave us knitting courses, sewing courses, but this didn't go with our goals. Instead of gathering people, the people got bored and the NGOs didn't give us support. (390-407) The NGO I had helped out with didn't receive us very well, considering that they inspired us to organize. So, it's like it wasn't in their interests (*no les convenía mucho*), they didn't even send their own maids, nobody wanted to send their maids to the organization. I'd put forth the idea, wouldn't it be great to work with the maids of the women who

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hermana menor, con mis sobrinas, con amigas, bueno comenzamos a reunirnos cinco, y comenzamos a llamar la gente, hacíamos teatro en los parques porque ahí se reúnen las compañeras, comenzamos hacer radio teatro para pasar en las radio todo imitando a la familia que le quemó a esta chica, y nos dio buen resultado, reunimos como ochenta mujeres en ese momento, y ya afiliadas a la organización y todo, pero no hubo quien nos dé el seguimiento bueno yo no sabía todavía cómo se hace una solicitud para que nos apoyaran no sabía, o sea era importante estar organizadas pero no sabíamos cómo hacer cosas... pero como no les dieron seguimiento del centro de formación no nos ayudó en ese, nos ayudaba a darnos cursos de tejido, nos daba cursos de corte, o sea que eso no iba con nosotros en ves de agrupar la gente como que la gente se cansaba y no nos daba las ONGs apoyo. (390-407) La ONG no nos dio muy buena acogida diciendo que ellos nos idearon a que nos organicemos, entonces como que no les convenía mucho, ni siquiera nos daban las empleadas de las mismas compañeras ahí, nadie quería mandar a su empleada doméstica a la organización, entonces yo les planteaba, bueno de que estamos hablando sí sería cheverísimo trabajar con las empleadas domésticas de las mismas compañeras que trabajan en una ONG, porque ya es mas fácil, porque decía yo si ellas ya tienen una mente formada de organización de derechos y todo eso, entonces yo les decía por qué no les mandan, pero no, no les convenía, no creían conveniente que las compañeras sepan sus derechos, entonces creo que eso fue lo que, no nos daban el apoyo fundamental a nosotros como organización, y cuando me acuerdo nosotros planteamos que nos ayuden a conseguir la personería jurídica, como no sabíamos, entonces nos daban tantas vueltas, tantas cosas, a la final una mujer que ahora trabaja en la comisión del niño la juventud y la familia, ella nos dijo bueno yo soy abogada y podemos hacer, recojan papeles, entonces yo me encargué de recoger los papeles, y pero nunca le entregamos para que nos haga los estatutos, bueno ahí no entendíamos muy bien de lo que eran estatutos, o sea todo fue novatada, nunca nos dijo estos son los estatutos y todo, o sea nunca le dieron un seguimiento sino, era para un poco despistarnos de la exigencia, porque nos decían que si nosotros éramos jurídicas nos podían ayudar, si no, no, entonces duró como 16 años para conseguir la personería jurídica,...

work in the NGO, because it's easier, I said, if they are already thinking about organization, about rights and all that. So, I said to them, why don't you send them (your maids)? But, it wasn't in their interests, they didn't find it convenient to have their maids learn their rights. So, I think that they didn't give us fundamental support as an organization. I remember when we asked them to help us become legal, since we didn't know how, they set us in circles, so many things. Finally, one woman who now works on the Child, Youth and Family Commission, she said I'm a lawyer and we can do this, get the papers together. So, I put myself in charge of getting the papers together, but we never turned them in so she could make the statutes. We didn't understand very well what statutes were, we were novices. She never said these are statutes, they never gave any follow-up. Rather, it was to get us distracted from demanding things, because they said that if we were legal they could help us, if not, no. So, it took something like 16 years to legalize the organization...

The contrasting origin stories for popular sector mestiza women's organizations discussed in this section indicated that having contact with an NGO (especially a women's NGO) or NGO-like institution and/or being seen favorably by an NGO were significant factors behind a informal group's transformation into to a legal, popular sector mestiza women's organization that could receive external support and carry out projects for its members and community. Women's NGOs were so important to popular sector mestiza women's organizations because, as demonstrated above, they (women's NGOs) had access to information and money popular sector mestiza women did not. In most cases, women's NGOs were generous with providing information and/or resources when popular sector mestiza organizations needed them. Only the case of EDU, which was denied NGO assistance, foreshadowed the severe difficulties popular sector mestiza organizations would face without NGO support after 2000. (I discuss these difficulties at length in "A Change in Era.")

This section also showed the beginnings of the neoliberal shift in women's NGO programming for popular sector mestiza women (which I emphasize in the last chapter). The origin stories from pioneer organizations demonstrated that women's NGOs

emphasized collectivization and group approaches to confronting and resolving individual, organizational and community economic and socio-political issues. Organizations like Santa Rosa and Delicias del Hogar (created about ten years after GMV and AMPM), meanwhile, indicated NGOs' progression away from collective approaches toward more limited, market-based and, eventually, individualized approaches that dealt primarily with popular sector women's economic issues.

### **CREATION OF BLACK ORGANIZATIONS IN QUITO**

Black women were also part of the popular sector population and, sometimes, lived in neighborhoods literally across the street from popular sector mestiza women's organizations. Yet, they had minimal to no involvement in these groups. I only heard of two Black women in popular sector mestiza women's organizations. One had tried to join GMV, and she was not well accepted. I interviewed another who participated in Martha Bucaram, but I do not know if she identified herself with Black Ecuadorians or with the Black Movement.<sup>46</sup> Women's NGOs, as far as I heard or saw, never encouraged Black women to join mestiza women's groups or helped them form their own women's groups despite the fact that no women's NGO programming specified popular sector *mestiza* women. Why women's NGOs never formed a relationship with popular sector Black women in Quito remains open to speculation.

The origin stories provided by Black women leaders and grassroots participants indicated that Black groups were encouraged into existence by university-educated Black leaders and/or a group of Catholic missionaries, the Combonis, not NGOs or NGO-like institutions. These characters, though different, paralleled those involved with popular sector mestiza women's organizations. The organizing activities of university-educated

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<sup>46</sup> During my interview with her, she alluded to being overworked and mistreated by an employer because of her color, but I never heard her use the term Black, or its euphuism *morena*, to identify herself.

Blacks<sup>47</sup> paralleled those of middle-class women who helped popular sector mestiza women organize. Meanwhile, the efforts of the Comboni missionaries paralleled the organizing work of women's NGOs among popular sector mestiza women in Quito. Unlike popular sector mestiza organizations, de la Torre (2002), a mestizo analyst, would add that the Ecuadorian state played an important role in the formation of the Black Movement and its organizations in Ecuador through the promotion of projects for the Black Ecuadorian population that captured international funds earmarked for "ethnic development."

Unfortunately, I had fewer opportunities to interview and visit Black women and their organizations. Due to this, I have relatively little, first-hand information about the formation of the Black Movement and Black organizations in Quito. As a result and unlike with popular sector mestiza women, I used both interviews and published origin stories to find out about the beginnings of the Black Movement in Ecuador and in Quito. These stories were rarely in perfect agreement with each other. Therefore, the Black Movement origin stories I present here do not indicate consensus, rather, they indicate that their sources were individuals who participated frequently in my research and/or were well-known leaders within Quito's branch of the Black Movement. For individual Black groups, I have chosen two origin stories that represent the roles of the Combonis and university-educated Black leaders in the formation of Black groups and Black-centered educational programming for Black groups. Finally, I use some of de la Torre's (2002) study to present an alternative analysis of the Black Movement's beginnings in Ecuador.

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<sup>47</sup> Outside of the Black Movement, many university-educated Blacks were often considered popular sector because of their economic situations and their color/race. Within the Movement, however, their level of education gave them a higher standing and set them apart from grassroots participants.

I present these origin stories to indicate the principal differences between popular sector Black and mestiza women's organizations: the groups that encouraged popular sector organization formation and consolidation (university-educated Blacks and Comboni missionaries for popular sector Black groups, women's NGOs and middle-class women for popular sector mestiza groups) and the foci of organization activities (identity and religion for Blacks, economy and gender for popular sector mestiza women). The similarities between popular sector Black and mestiza women's organizations are just as important. Both had economic needs that they sought to address through their organizations and both relied upon their support groups (university-educated Blacks, Combonis, NGOs) for information and financial resources. As I show later, these similarities made popular sector Black and mestiza women's organizations vulnerable to Ecuador's upcoming economic crisis and to changes in their support groups' interests and programming.

### **Beginning of the Black Movement in Ecuador**

According to one Black leader, Elsa, the Black Movement in Ecuador had its beginnings when people began to investigate the history of *Pueblo Negro* (Afro-Ecuadorian population) through archival research and the collection of oral histories about ten years ago. These researchers then brought that history back to the *Pueblo* of the present, and used it, along with the unique cultural identity it represented, to get Black people to think of themselves as part of a Black community not as individuals. Before this time, there was not a single text that discussed Blacks in Ecuador's history beyond brief references to slavery and how some slaves arrived free when they were shipwrecked off the country's northern coast. The efforts that started with these researchers eventually brought the Black community "to a point where it could begin to unite, to find common issues and to work together, where before Blacks could not even stand to be in the same

room” (Elsa, Black Movement Leader). In the minds of some Black leaders, although not all, this desire to work together and the organizational process had come to the point where, by 2001, you could talk about an Ecuadorian Black Movement instead of individual Black groups or regional federations of Black groups.

### **An origin story for the Black Movement in Quito**

The origin story I present below comes from Renán Tadeo (1999). Tadeo was a key figure in the group that claims it started the Black Movement in Quito. According to Tadeo (the account below is my translation and summary of part of his 1999 article), students in Quito from four provinces created a cultural center in 1979 as a space for investigation, *concientización* (awareness-raising) and identification as a Pueblo Negro. The student founders traveled to Black communities throughout the country to collect information about the history and culture of the Pueblo Negro. Meanwhile, the growing strength of socialist systems at a global level encouraged Blacks (and also other groups in Ecuador) to organize along class lines and to fight for their rights. Due to the formation of the center and socialist influences, a group of young Black students and workers began to meet informally to talk about Black reality in Quito and the issues they faced at a national level. (Tadeo 1999, 67-69)

Despite the fact it had become a formal, state-legalized institution, by the early 1980s the cultural center was weakening due to the departure of students who, once they graduated, left Quito and began parallel organizations in their provinces of origin. At this point, the center received assistance from a Comboni missionary. This same priest was also a principal initiator and promoter of the idea that Blacks in Quito should join to fight for their basic needs. (Tadeo 1999, 68, 70)<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> De la Torre presents slightly different data, saying that the Comboni missionary created the Centro Cultural Afroecuatoriano in 1983 and that Combonian missionaries promoted the formation and organization of Afroecuatorian groups throughout Ecuador. In 1981, he says, the first Black group was

In 1983, around the time the center was weakening, Tadeo indicates that the first Black Women of the Americas conference took place in Ecuador in 1983. Between 1985 and 1990, several Black associations appeared due to the awareness-raising and organizational work of the center (mentioned above) and other recently formed Black centers and groups in Quito. These groups helped open spaces for Blacks to reflect, to speak out, to propose and to obtain recognition by civil society. At this time, there was a shift in thought about the direction of activities held by Black groups. Someone (Tadeo is not clear who or what group) decided that recovery of identity was the greatest strength of the Pueblo Negro. Therefore, the way for Blacks to overcome problems (*superación*) and to obtain liberty was through the recuperation of their culture, history and identity. Quito became a testing ground for Blacks to recognize and assume their identity as such. (Tadeo 1999, 71)

1990 to 1998, in Tadeo's account, marked a period of consolidation for the Pueblo Negro organizational process. Organizational efforts become stronger due to the assistance of the Comboni Missionaries. Over the years, more Black groups formed, and every six months there was a "Meeting of Black Families" at the Comboni seminary. Out of these meetings arose FOGNEP (Federation of Black Groups and Organizations of Pichincha - Federación de Organizaciones y Grupos Negros de Pichincha). (Tadeo 1999, 72, 75)

Tadeo ends his article with the following paragraph:

In conclusion, the dynamic of the organizational and consolidation process has changed. Blacks have gone from protest to proposal; a proposal that seeks the well-being not only of Blacks but of all the excluded groups in the country.

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formed in Guayaquil, in 1982 a group in Esmeraldas, in 1983 in Quito and in 1992 in Sucumbios. These groups of Black Catholic students and intellectuals then formed the Movimiento Afroecuatoriano Conciencia (Afro-Ecuadorian Movement "Awareness") in 1983 (de la Torre 2002, 116-117). De la Torre's 2002 account also provides extensive details on the Combonis and their involvement with Blacks in Ecuador.

Blacks have opened themselves to society, they do not seek to step on those who have stepped on them. Quite the opposite, they look for unity in diversity, they find in their history and culture the strength for change. They have passed from accusation to self-esteem, because among Blacks in the Federation, laments, lies and paternalism are prohibited. (1999, 75)

Before I move on to “origin” stories for individual Black groups, a few comments on Tadeo’s account. Note that he said university students started the first Black cultural center. University students and university graduates were and are a very small minority among the Black community. So, although they rarely had a higher economic status than other Blacks, Black university students and graduates were not representative of the Black population in Quito, and they tended to be given or took on a privileged status within the Black population because of their education. Black women participating at the grassroots often complained about university-educated Black Movement leaders during our meetings. They said that these individuals acted as if they were higher and better than the rest of Blacks just because they had more education or, maybe, a slightly better economic standing. Finally, they commented, some Black Movement leaders rarely evaluated if their statements about the Black Movement reflected reality or if their programs met the needs of popular sector or grassroots Black participants (de la Torre 2002 notes this as well). The last line of Tadeo’s account, for example, would likely have caused Black women participating at the grassroots to break out in laughter because they felt they had been lied to and belittled by some leaders of the Black Movement.

### **Origin stories for individual groups**

Both of the stories below demonstrate the absence of NGO and, in turn, international donor agencies or external funds in the formation of individual, popular sector Black organizations. Africa’s Daughters, the only all-female popular sector Black

organization that I met,<sup>49</sup> reflects the strong role of Comboni missionaries in consolidating popular sector Black organizations and, later, the reliance of these organizations on the Combonis for support. Africa's Daughters' origin story also indicates the importance of religion to its formation and consolidation. Black identity, culture and economic issues were of interest to and the cause of problems for Africa's Daughters and, its members implied, for many other Black groups. Africa's Daughters story foreshadowed that these same issues would push Africa's Daughters and other groups to seek NGOs for information and resources in the future.

JPCN, meanwhile, demonstrates the role of university-educated Black leaders in the formation of popular sector Black organizations. It is exceptional due to its minimal contact with the Comboni missionaries and because it took a combined (and relatively successful) approach to identity and economic issues from its beginning. Later, JPCN was one of the few organizations I found that remained relatively stable in spite of Ecuador's economic crisis.

**Africa's Daughters.** Africa's Daughters' origin story illustrates the involvement of Comboni missionaries in the formation of a Black women's group, the fact the Combonis became an essential source of support for this group and, later, the difficulties the Black Movement and the Comboni Missionaries had addressing the economic issues of importance to the popular sector Black women in Africa's Daughters. One of the founders of Africa's Daughters, Kathi, explained that it started as a group of friends (women from the same town who had moved to Quito) with no name or formal agenda who got together to socialize, not to confront any particular issues or to form part of any movement. Then, Combonian nuns contacted them and some women started attending

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<sup>49</sup> The other popular sector Black organizations I met were, technically speaking, mixed-sex, but the majority of their membership was women.

Bible studies. Soon, Bible study with the nuns became the focus of the group. This formalized group meetings and caused some women to drop out because they didn't like anyone pressing a schedule on them. Eventually, the remaining women named the group Africa's Daughters and entered the Black Movement in Quito thanks to contacts between the nuns and the Comboni missionaries who aided the Movement.

Kathi and Victoria, a newer member, pointed out that, instead of strengthening the group, entering the Movement nearly extinguished Africa's Daughters. In their opinion, this happened because the Movement and its grassroots programming didn't have clear objectives and focused on culture and religion. Without clear objectives, it was hard for members to see the benefits of being in the Movement or a formal Black organization so they stopped participating. Also, the focus on culture and religion did not contend with the primary concerns of sector Black women, economic issues, giving Black women further reason to drop out of Africa's Daughters.

Despite popular sector Black women's insistence that programming address their economic issues, Kathi and Victoria said that Black Movement leaders paid little attention to economic issues in the programming they (Black leaders) designed. So, Africa's Daughters and other newly formed popular sector Black organizations looked to the Comboni missionaries for help addressing their economic needs. The Comboni missionaries responded by providing micro-loans to start income-producing projects, much like NGOs responses to popular sector mestiza women's requests for help with economic issues. Unfortunately, Kathi and Victoria explained, the projects failed, left participants in debt and caused many members to leave their Black popular sector organizations, severely weakening Africa's Daughters and other newly formed Black grassroots groups.

In spite the issues they had with Black Movement programming and their frustrations with organization projects, Kathi and Victoria insisted on the need for popular sector Black men and women to participate in organizations. They felt that organization participation was the only way for the Black people in Quito to become visible as a minority cultural group and to get ahead (*salir adelante*). Presently, as I will address in the chapter “A Change in Era,” popular sector Black organizations like Africa’s Daughters were trying to address their economic needs and maneuver around Black Movement leader control over information and resource distribution by seeking out NGOs directly.

**JPCN (Juntos para la Promoción de la Cultura Negra – Promoting Black Culture Together).** The creation of JPCN demonstrates the importance of a charismatic, university-educated Black Movement leader, Elsa, in the formation of a popular sector, mixed-sex Black organization. JPCN is exceptional among Quito’s Black organizations in that it received no direct assistance from the Combonis and tried to address members’ economic needs in combination with its Black culture and identity-focused activities. Elsa said she formed JPCN for cultural purposes, in part, but that among the organization’s objectives was to help with personal issues and problems that arose from being Black in Ecuador. Therefore, JPCN focused on music, dance as well as cultural recuperation and diffusion but also provided workshops on self-esteem, communication and personal formation for the women, men and youth who formed the group. Later, JPCN took on small income-producing projects so members could make some money, besides what they earned from music and dance performances, while they learned about and shared Afro-Ecuadorian culture. Also important to JPCN, until 2002, was to cooperate with but remain autonomous from the Black Movement in Quito. This autonomy was Elsa’s way of maintaining JPCN’s objectives and facilitating members’

independent and critical thinking. Despite JPCN's autonomy from the Movement, Elsa was a strong, charismatic leader in the local and national Black Movement.

Members of JPCN emphasized that Elsa was the key figure in forming and maintaining the group. She was the one who had chided them into joining, and she received most of the praise when activities went well. Members also mentioned that they liked participating because the group provided a place for people to meet and make some money.

### **Comboni involvement**

According to women's individual accounts, one or two Comboni priests literally went door to door, getting Black families to come to meetings. Those same priests kept people up-to-date on Black activities in Quito. The programming provided by the Combonis focused on Black history and cultural recovery as well as self-value and awareness-raising about what it meant to be Black and to be part of a Black community.

Recently, one of the priests highly involved in organizing Blacks, and very popular in the Black community, had left Ecuador. Shortly after he left, many Blacks lost interest in Black organizations. Some interviewees explained that being part of the Black Movement was not the same without this priest because he had been the one to communicate what happened within the Movement in Quito and, as far as they could tell, no one else cared to tell Black grassroots organizations what the Black Movement was doing.

Although they were a great help to the Black community in Quito, Elsa mentioned some issues with the Combonis that, in her opinion, kept organized Blacks submissive to the missionaries.

Elsa (2001 200-215)<sup>50</sup> ...I've been in the organizational process 20 years already. I formed part of other organizations until I had an experience that struck me, it made me change in terms of continuing with them, and in this case I'm speaking about the Church, because they had a limit and they also had a purpose. Yes to awareness raising, yes to self-valuing of the Black as such, yes to recognition but no to independence, no to being able to do things without them because there is also patronizing (*paternalismo*). ...It's not that I have anything against them, they are doing a wonderful job, but they have their limitations... religiously speaking, they teach us to bow our heads, to bow our heads and wait for our reward in heaven. So, this (belief) is still prevalent among our people...

Apparently, Elsa was not the only Black leader to have issues with the Combonis. In 2002, the Black Movement in Quito was peaceably breaking off its relations with the missionaries. When I asked participants and leaders about this decision, they provided enigmatic responses that indicated the Movement in Quito wanted to grow and, in order to do so, it had to distance itself from the Combonis. It never became clear to me exactly why the Black Movement separated itself from the Combonis. All I do know is that it seemed the Combonis respected the wishes of the Black Movement and did not include themselves in organizational or Movement activities unless asked to do so.

### **De la Torre analysis**

An interesting point, brought up by de la Torre (in reference to Whitten 1974) is “that Afro-descendants did not see their Blackness as a fundamental part of their identity, nor did they consider themselves as a group apart, until the 80s and 90s” (2002, 105). In consideration of this statement, de la Torre then brings up a point that could be controversial if one promotes the idea that the Black Movement in Ecuador began with

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<sup>50</sup> ...ya tengo 20 años en el proceso organizativo, estuve formando parte de otras organizaciones, hasta que tuve una experiencia que me, como sonó, que me hizo cambiar en cuanto a continuar allí con ellos, y estoy hablando en este caso con la iglesia, porque ellos tenían un limite, y también tenían un propósito. Sí la concientización, sí la autovaloración del negro como tal, sí el reconocimiento pero no la independencia. No, el poder hacer las cosas sin ellos porque hay el paternalismo también. ...yo no tengo nada en contra, están haciendo un trabajo magnifico, pero que tiene sus limitaciones así ... religiosamente se nos enseña a agacharse, a agacharnos y esperar en la mas allá la recompensación. Entonces eso todavía prima en nuestra gente...

Blacks' autonomous organization. He believes that the Ecuadorian state had a special role in promoting Black organizations.

During Alarcón's government (February 1997- August 1998), a National Plan for Human Rights was promoted that included specific proposals about the collective rights of Pueblos Negros, including the strengthening and consolidation of the Afroecuadorian movement. According to the press, Jamil Mahuad's government hosted the first National Conference of Blacks in March of 1999 in which the National Afroecuadorian Confederation (CAN) is formed. The state not only helps Blacks consolidate a unified movement that combines coast and sierra, it also negotiates with Black leaders to create state organisms that channel resources to them. (De la Torre 2002, 86)

De la Torre also contemplates the possibility that

...the fiscal crisis of the Ecuadorian state over the past years plus the availability of international funds for ethnic issues in the context of this crisis maybe in some way was an incentive for different ethnic groups to organize as such in order to have access to funds for ethnic development (*etnodesarrollo*), for the recovery and development of non-traditional medicine or for sustainable agriculture. (2002, 108)

This analysis implies that an emphasis on being Black and on Black as an Ecuadorian ethnic group came about, in part, because there was money to be had for being "ethnic." Depending on your interpretation, this analysis could take away from Blacks as agents in forming their own movement by implying the Ecuadorian state sought them out as potential funding recipients. On the other hand, you could interpret it as saying Black activists were very effective at making themselves and their issues visible, so much so that, when funding became available, they could press the national government to create programming for them.

### **Key points**

Overall, these origin stories from Black leaders, Black grassroots participants and a mestizo researcher indicate that Comboni missionaries, university students and the Ecuadorian state, *not* popular sector individuals or women's NGOs (as in the case of

popular sector mestiza women's organizations), were key in the formation of a Black Movement in Quito. The Catholic Church, according to some Black Movement participants, influenced the direction of Movement activities and growth through the Combonis' focus on religion and Catholic patronage rather than independent Black thought and independent Black program design. The absence of discussion about NGOs in origin stories for Black groups is conspicuous in comparison to their prevalence in mestiza accounts.<sup>51</sup> Finally, de la Torre's (2002) analysis points out a particular participation of the Ecuadorian state in the creation of the Black Movement that was not mentioned by any Black individuals I interviewed.

The above origin stories point out the Black Movement's and grassroots popular sector Black organizations' emphasis on culture, identity and religious issues, quite different from the economic and gender foci of popular sector mestiza women's organizations. Meanwhile, de la Torre's (2002) analysis indicates the Ecuadorian state's promotion of the Black Movement as a way to capture international funds available for ethnic development, also quite unlike the beginnings of popular sector mestiza women's organizations. Particularly important elements or, better said, voids in these origin stories are the absence of NGOs and the limited attention given to popular sector Black women's economic issues by Black Movement leaders. The absence of NGOs in these origin stories implies that the Black Movement and grassroots Black organizations did not benefit from nor were they influenced by NGO provided information, finances or increasingly neoliberal NGO programming. For this reason, I looked to popular sector Black women's organization activities as a potential alternative to and/or critique of the

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<sup>51</sup> My observations and participant comments regarding NGO relations with Black organizations are paralleled in Halpern and Twine (2000: 20, 29) who stated that Afroecuadorians were ignored and made invisible by NGOs, while indigenous groups were assigned resources. I will expand upon Halpern and Twine's comments in the chapter "Change in Era."

individualized, market-focused NGO-produced programming that, I argue, undermined popular sector mestiza women's organizations. As I show in the chapter "A Change in Era," however, the limited attention given to popular sector Black women's economic issues by Black leaders (and the Comboni's failed attempts to address them) in the face of Ecuador's worsened economic situation weakened popular sector Black women's organizations, provoked feelings of disenchantment with Black Movement leadership and caused them to seek NGOs for assistance.

As you will see in the next section, both the Black Movement leaders and the NGOs assisting popular sector Black and mestiza women's organizations drew on several different sources of information in order to form the education they provided to their participants. The education provided to popular sector mestiza women's groups drew upon local intellectuals and women's movement and/or popular sector activists from all Latin America while Black Movement leaders based their educational programs on local research as well as Black Movements all over the world. Through its content, NGO, Black Movement leader and/or Comboni missionary-provided popular education shaped the focus and activities popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations. While providing unique benefits and strengthening ties between popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations and their support groups, research participants' accounts showed that the scope of popular education programming (decided by NGOs, Black leaders and Comboni missionaries) limited what their organizations could do when their supporters distanced themselves (or, in the case of the Combonis, were distanced) from mestiza and Black popular sector women around 2000. In many cases, members of popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations felt their groups could no longer provide the learning opportunities or proactive measures that had helped them collectively confront economic and socio-political issues in the past.

## **LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN POPULAR SECTOR MESTIZA AND BLACK WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS**

As apparent in many of the origin stories above, the need to learn was shared by the majority of popular sector mestiza and Black women participating in organizations. Also, most popular sector mestiza and Black women explained they hadn't had extensive access to formal education and were held back from formal education not only because of economy but because of their sex. In the case of popular sector Black women, they felt racism further limited their access to formal education. Missionaries, women's NGOs and NGO-like institutions, during the 80s, found that their niche was to fulfill the education needs of popular sector mestiza and Black women and to use learning opportunities as a way to recruit individuals into organizations. The provision of learning opportunities also developed and maintained NGO/Church – Popular sector mestiza/Black relations and became a maintenance mechanism for both popular sector mestiza and Black women's groups.

The chapter "The Golden Years" further supports the idea that providing learning opportunities served as an organizational maintenance mechanism. This section and "The Golden Years" lead into my later argument that the decline in the number of learning opportunities caused women to feel less benefit was to be had from participation. As a result, veteran participants were not as active, and it was harder to draw in new members.

Note that popular education was the principal method behind women's NGO, Black Movement and Comboni teaching. Also, popular sector mestiza women's organizations used a single-sex approach to education/learning while Black organizations and the Combonis used a mixed-sex approach. These factors influenced course content and affected the impact/changes women experienced. They are also important to my

discussion in “The Golden Years” of the issues organized popular sector mestiza women had with men.

### **NGO and theoretical perspectives on education for popular sector organizations**

NGO workers used “popular education” to refer to the pedagogical approach that structured their classes for popular sector (mestiza) women.

Iris, NGO worker, (2002 335-343)<sup>52</sup> ...I believe that for popular organizations, one of the most useful things for us has been the use of popular education as a learning tool. Because, it really allows people to move outward from their experience, to reflect on their experience and go on to a transformative action. That and also it allows for a learning level and knowledge that is simpler, easier, more practical, more useful and that uses even life-based methods.

In practice, popular education in popular sector women’s organizations involved a three stage cycle, hinted at in Iris’ comment above (“move outward from their experience, to reflect on their experience and go on to a transformative action”). Although this cycle can be applied to many other topics, I base the following explanation upon a meeting I attended, wherein an NGO used popular education methodology to help a popular sector mestiza women’s organization improve problem-solving skills. The first step of this three stage cycle was like brainstorming. NGO workers encouraged women, in various ways (usually ice breakers or games), to share experiences or problems (stating their experiences and current knowledge). In the process of sharing, women realized what knowledge they had, where they needed more or what they could learn from someone else in the organization. Then, they moved toward step two, where an individual (a more experienced member but, more often, an outside facilitator from an

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<sup>52</sup> Bueno, yo creo que por ejemplo para las organizaciones populares es muy útil, yo creo que una de las cosas que mas útil nos ha resultado es realmente el utilizar la, la educación popular como un instrumento de, de aprendizaje, porque realmente permite que la gente primero parta de su experiencia que reflexione su experiencia y vaya a una, acción transformadora no, entonces y además de eso que permite el nivel de aprendizaje y de conocimiento más sencillos más fáciles, más útiles y, y que utilice incluso, un, métodos vivenciales no,

NGO or similar group) encouraged women to come up with solutions/improvements to a particular issue, emphasizing the information and questions provided by women in step one as bases for solutions. Once again, all women were encouraged to contribute and their suggestions validated in one form or another. In step three, NGO workers asked women to come up with concrete applications of the solutions, like making committees, planning actions, designing and carrying out a project, in which all members were encouraged to participate. These concrete actions and applications were meant to “prove” that women, with their own knowledge and some outside information they now knew how to obtain, could transform (improve, change) their situations and/or themselves. These applications, their successes and failures were then taken back to step one and recycled into a new cycle regarding a different issue (if they had met success) or the same issue (if their actions did not produce the expected or needed result).

The pedagogy of the women’s NGOs I contacted had close ties to Paulo Freire’s popular education. In *Pedagogía del Oprimido* (1985), Freire critiques formal education systems and stresses the importance of education for marginalized individuals and communities in non-industrialized societies. The dominant classes in Latin America, argues Freire, use the formal/traditional education system and its pedagogy to control knowledge and its distribution and, thereby, maintain their hold on the reigns of power. As a way to loosen the dominant classes’ hold on power, Freire makes a case for pedagogy developed in conjunction with and contextualized within the opinions and needs of the group concerned. For this to happen, he emphasizes that there must be a transformation of the student-teacher relationship from one of teacher domination to one where the teacher is open to the multiple needs and contributions of the student. (As you will see below, this is precisely what popular sector mestiza women felt happened during learning opportunities in their organizations.) Education, to Freire, must be seen as the

practice of liberty or a liberating practice. Due to its empowering nature, applications of Freire's pedagogy were common in education programs for traditionally oppressed groups, like those of the women's NGOs, Black Movement and Combonis in Quito.

As I hoped to prove in my above description, NGO popular education for popular sector mestiza women in Quito reflected Freire's ideals in that it emphasized a democratic approach and the liberating or empowering potential of an education created in collaboration with and situated within women's needs and contributions. NGO popular education in Quito was also influenced by feminist thinkers who combined feminism with Freire's ideas. One ex-NGO worker involved with women's NGOs in Quito from their initiation said that Virginia Vargas, a Peruvian feminist, inspired the women-only approach in women's NGO popular education programs. Vargas' feminist education for popular sector women (she published her ideas in English in a 1993 article) utilized women's daily experiences as the bases for learning, for creating political consciousness and for integrating instructors' and trainees' knowledges. The main goal was to teach women how to evaluate and overcome oppression mechanisms in their homes and society. As you will see from popular sector mestiza women's comments in the next chapter ("The Golden Years"), many women took this goal to heart though few felt they attained it.

### **Why learning opportunities in organizations were good recruiting mechanisms**

**Issues popular sector women had with formal education.** Frustrated education goals were a common issue among popular sector mestiza and Black women. They valued formal education because they were certain it would bring them knowledge and papers (formal degrees, titles, etc.) that would provide the possibility of better jobs and better living conditions. Popular sector mestiza women repeatedly told me that their family's economic situation, the low value given to education for girls and the need to

work at a young age to support younger siblings cut their formal education short. If they did not stop going to school for these reasons, the responsibilities and social expectations of women connected to marriage, pregnancy and childcare put an end to their formal education altogether. Popular sector mestiza women explained that their husbands refused to send them to school, kept putting it off with excuses or didn't provide the financial and moral support necessary. Below is a quote from a woman who is only one example out of many.

Dolores (2001 136-141)<sup>53</sup> No, I couldn't keep studying because, like I said, it happened that at the same time I got married a very hard situation came upon us. I used to live with my brother, then I went to live with my other sister and there's where I got married and, well, my sisters said since I've married, now, I should look to my husband, that it's him who should support me, because we didn't live, I mean, we married on the sly, without my parents knowing, so I couldn't keep studying and get to be what I wanted to be. (146-149) Yes, I think that it was sometimes due to my husband too, because my sisters always told him, make her study, make her study, even if it's university at a distance, but my husband never wanted to, he'd say no, because if she goes than I should too, for that, or, on my husband's part too, he was a little selfish too.

For Black women in mixed-sex Black organizations, their relationship to education and education frustrations was a little different. People like Elsa, a Black activist devoted to the issue of education, would say that society was excellent at suppressing inclinations toward learning within the Black population (de la Torre 2002 supports this). As her quote below indicates, school teachers and other Blacks used Blackness and poverty as reasons why Blacks didn't need education. Blacks were told

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<sup>53</sup> No, ya no pude, ya no pude seguir estudiando porque, porque como le digo ahí nos vino así mismo a lo que me casé vino una situación muy dura como yo vivía con mi hermano, luego me pasé a vivir con mi otra hermana, entonces ahí me casé y ya pues mis hermanas me dijeron si me he casado que ahora le vea a mi esposo que es para que él me mantenga, porque no vivíamos iguales, sino nos casamos o sea calladito de mis padres me casé, entonces no pude seguir estudiando y llegar a ser lo que yo, o sea quise ser. (146-149) Sí, yo creo que verá también era de parte a veces de mi esposo, porque mis hermanas siempre le decían póngale, póngale que estudie aunque sea en la Universidad a distancia, pero, mi esposo nunca quiso, o sea el decía no, decía no porque si ella entra yo también, por eso o sea dije que, era de parte de mi esposo un poco egoísta también, si.

not to bother with education because they could get faster responses to their problems and needs through cash, brought by their cheapened labor.

Elsa (2001 158-167)<sup>54</sup> They always used to make us believe that we, not only as Blacks but as poor people, that the poor person because he or she is poor doesn't have access to education, he or she doesn't have a reason to and, besides, for what? That's what they say. I remember when I was 17, I said that I was going to study sewing and fashion, and I said I was going to keep going to high school in order to go to a university. They said to me "But, if you with what you know is enough. Why do you want to go study in a stupid university if you can easily make money faster working here with us in a house?" And, they always say that a Black secretary can't find work, a secretary, a Black male or female professional has a lot of difficulties finding work. That idea was generalized, it was reproduced by our own people. So, you see, it's part of the loss of hope.

According to Elsa, this social programming was not 100% effective. There still was a tremendous desire to learn among the Black population and many Black leaders saw access to and completion of formal education as key to improving life conditions for the Black community and strengthening the Black Movement. At the same time, formal education had to be approached carefully. They warned that it was a double-sided sword that could do the Black population as much harm as good.

Elsa (2001 740-744)<sup>55</sup> ...my people, we have thought that one of the strongest, most powerful instruments the system has had to "de-culturate" (*desculturizar*) whatever group is education. If we take control of this instrument for our people, we'll manage to trick (or lull, *arrullar*) the state into placing better people in its nation, that's what it's about.

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<sup>54</sup> Siempre nos habían hecho creer, no solamente a nosotros así como negros sino como pobres, el pobre por ser pobre no tiene acceso a la educación, no tiene por qué hacerlo porque además ¿para qué? Les dicen. Yo recuerdo cuando yo tenía 17 años y dije que iba a ir a, a voy a seguir corte y confección, y dije que iba a continuar el colegio para ir a una universidad, me dijeron "Pero no, si tu con lo que sabes basta, ¿para qué quieres ir a esto, diablo, a estudiar a una universidad? si tranquilamente puedes hacer la platita más rápido trabajando aquí con nosotros en una casa." Y, lo que siempre ese dice que una secretaria negra no puede encontrar trabajo, una secretaria, una profesional negra o uno negro está con muchísimas dificultades. Esa idea se generalizó, esa idea se reproduce en nuestra misma gente. Entonces, mira usted, es una parte de la pérdida de esperanza.

<sup>55</sup> (740-744)...mi pueblo nosotros, nuestro, nosotros hemos pensado que una de los instrumentos mas fuertes y poderosos que ha tenido el sistema para desculturizar a cualquier pueblo es la educación. Si nosotros nos apoderamos de esta parte para nuestro pueblo, llegamos a arrullar al estado a poner mejores hombres en su nación, pues, de eso se trata.

Black Movement leaders like Elsa felt they had to create education programs that met Blacks' unique needs to get Black people to try organizations and to get Blacks excited about learning again. The obstacles to Black learning and Black organization, in their minds, needed to be tackled on multiple fronts. Although Black organizations, the Black Movement in Quito and the Combonis emphasized a mixed-sex approach and their programming focused on Black ethnic/racial identity, the education they provided was similar to the popular education promoted by women's NGOs in that, according to Elsa, it worked with people's experiences, self-value and self-esteem so that they wanted to learn more. Elsa clarified that the principal goal of popular education in the Black Movement and JPCN was to help Blacks assume their Blackness, develop a sense of community, realize that as Blacks they share similar joys and pains and that they are part of a collective, not individuals fighting on their own. Black leaders said they obtained ideas for this education from their own experiences and histories but also from Black Movements all over the world, like the United States, Colombia and Haiti. In a 1996 NACLA article referred to by Halpern and Twine (2000), Nina Pacari, an indigenous leader and current foreign minister of Ecuador clarified the use of Haitian notions of 'blackness' in Ecuador's Black movement:

Black Ecuadorians have drawn from the Haitian concept of 'blackness' (*négritude* in French, *negritud* in Spanish). This concept, which challenges nationalist discourses of *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento* (whitening), stresses the 'positive features of blackness among people classed as, or self-identifying as black' (Halpern and Twine 2000, 26, italics in original).

**That something special about education for popular sector organizations.**

Through popular sector mestiza and Black women's comments and stories, I came to understand that the way women learned in organizations was essential to making them repeat visitors, be it to courses or to meetings, and later active participants/members. Here, I try to explain what was so special about education and learning experiences in

organizations that kept bringing popular sector women back for more. Note that the term popular education was usually imposed by me and NGO workers as organization participants rarely used the term themselves. Also, my analysis of the importance of education for popular sector organizations is weighed more heavily toward the experiences of popular sector mestiza women because I obtained more data from them and because, in comparison to their mestiza counterparts, popular sector Black women's commentary showed that their organizations and the Black Movement provided few learning opportunities (which was a source of much complaint).

Sometimes women joined an organization with an intention to fight or work for particular issues, not only to learn utilitarian things. However, these women were the exception and usually only present among the group that considered themselves "founders" or "almost founders." The majority, on the other hand, got into organizations through what I call, for descriptive purposes, the "bait, switch and hook" method. For example, an organization, in the case of popular sector mestiza women, would open an NGO-supported crafts course to women in the neighborhood or, in the case of popular sector Black women, extend invitations to a Comboni-led course on Black history (the bait). Members would sign up for the course, as it was something they found useful or interesting, and encourage non-members to join as well, pointing out how practical or interesting the course would be and that they (the non-members) would also learn something about the organization hosting the course. Meanwhile, women's NGO workers, Comboni missionaries, someone they hired, or a group they had contacted for the organization would come in and give the course. The courses were taught in a very interactive way, quite unlike what most popular sector mestiza and Black women had experienced in school, and usually had undertones of solidarity and group work.

As the course progressed, women spoke with each other, non-members noticed how members got along, asked questions and, sometimes, became more interested in the organization itself. Later, non-members were invited to organizational meetings or special talks. At meetings and talks, women's issues (in the case of popular sector mestiza women) and working together for the community (both popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations) became explicit points of discussion, where they had only been a subtext in the courses (the switch). Of course, these meetings and talks emphasized interactive approaches influenced by popular education pedagogy much more than the introductory courses – they took women's experiences, moved outward from them, reflected upon them and went onto transformative actions and/or empowerment. Many women declared they truly enjoyed the meeting experience because it gave them a chance to get out of the house; it fostered new friendships (most women were new to Quito and/or felt lonely at home); and, it encouraged them to feel they could do something worthwhile for themselves, their household, their community, and other women (the hook). Women's NGOs and Combonis then took advantage of this "hook" as a means to build relationships between themselves and organizations and expand those relationships outward. The quote below expresses the proverbial "bait, switch and hook" method from the perspective of a popular sector mestiza women's organization participant.

Susi (2000 182-187)<sup>56</sup> They invited me to a course on how to make toys and cards, and I attended that course. And there they were, my (future) friends were also taking the toy-making course that the Provincial Council came to give, that's where I met them. There, they invited me, they said, you know, we are forming this organization, there were only 10 members at the time, and so there I started to

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<sup>56</sup> ...me invitaron a un curso de juguetería, y tarjetería, y yo asistí a ese curso, y ahí habían estado ellas, mis compañeras también recibiendo curso de juguetería que vino a dar el Consejo Provincial, ahí les conocía yo, ahí me invitaron dijo sabe que estamos formando esta organización, habían diez compañeras nomás en ese entonces, y entonces ahí comencé a asistir, asistir y me gustó, me gustó la forma de que nos informaban de que se trataba y todo eso de organización y así me integré.

attend meetings and I liked it. I liked how they told us what it was about and everything about being organized and that's how I joined.

Once they experienced education in popular sector organizations, most of the women I talked to were very pleased by its content, method and purpose and often used these categories to respond to my questions about the differences between school education and organization education. Their responses helped me understand “that something special” about organization education that made it a potentially efficient recruiting (and, later, maintenance) mechanism for women's NGOs, Comboni missionaries, Black and mestiza activists promoting organizations as well as for popular sector organizations themselves.

Most frequently, women said the **content** of organization-based education was what made it so different from formal or school education. Women emphasized that what they learned in organizations was based on life experience, on the real world, on practical things, not theory like school education. They also mentioned that organization courses covered human relations, sex, popular sector leaders and other topics that they never received at school and/or were considered taboo when they were young.

The **method** behind learning was important to organization women too. They did not discuss the steps behind popular education like NGO workers did. Instead, they were very impressed that course instructors allowed them to ask as many questions as needed and that they could learn from sharing with the instructor and course mates. This was very different from the one-way, rote memorization, learn-if-you-can method many women experienced in primary and secondary school. In addition, women commented that they were free to learn what they wanted to, no one obliged them to go to seminars or learn about a topic that did not interest them.

Susi (2000 354-362)<sup>57</sup> Things in high school are like this. The professor goes to class, lectures and, at least in secondary school, if you didn't understand well, you had to go find books and sources to explain it and all that, right. On the other hand, in my organization, since I've entered, they make you understand well. If you don't know, you keep asking, like Antonia told us, you can ask 70 times 7. She'd say that I am going to make you understand until you get tired.... If we didn't understand in one talk, we've asked for another until we understand the topic well. And, more than anything, it's participating with the other members, with their ways, their jokes... (368-370) How else is it different? It's that all of us are free to learn, no one obliges us, nobody makes us go to the courses we don't want to attend. Rather we all go to the courses that we want to learn.

**Purpose** was a third category women used when they explained differences between education in their organizations and formal education. I imply two slightly different things when I use the word purpose. First, I mean purpose as intention. Women explained that you go to an organization or to a course the organization provides with different intentions than when you went to school. You went to an organization to work together, to volunteer, to work for the community. It was not an obligation like school. Second, I apply purpose as use. Some participants commented that formal education is for people who are "the right age," but that education in organizations is for people with an adult mindset. You have certain applications in mind when you participate in organization-based education. In other words, it was easier to focus on a course or talk when you knew where/how it applied to your life, unlike school where you weren't sure if/when you would ever use what you had to learn again.

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<sup>57</sup> Las cosas en el colegio es, como le digo se va, va una profesora le dicta la clase, a menos en la secundaria no se si entendió bien, y si no entendió tiene que buscar consultas y todo eso no es cierto. En cambio en el AMPM, como le digo desde que yo he ingresado, le digo, le hacen entender bien, si una no se sabe, se vuelve a preguntar como decía, nos decía Silvia, pueden preguntar setenta veces, siete, nos decía la Silvia que yo les voy hacer entender, hasta cuando ustedes ya se cansen... y si no hemos entendido todas en esas charlas, hemos vuelto a pedir otra charla, hasta entender bien las cosas, entonces y más que todo es participativo con todas las compañeras ya se acaba, con sus cosas, sus chistes... (368-370) Qué más le podría diferenciar, de ahí también todas, todas somos libres, de aprender, o sea no nos obligan, nadie nos obliga ir a los cursos que no queremos, sino todas vamos a los cursos que nosotras queremos aprender, las que queremos aprender...

**An exception.** Although it came across as a very democratic and enlightening approach, popular education provided by women's NGOs to Quito's popular sector mestiza women's organizations might have had some unusual requirements considering the education frustrations of the focus population. These requirements, if certain, would have prevented many popular sector mestiza women from joining organizations. While interviewing a woman at her friend's house I found out, by chance, that women had to have a sixth grade education in order to join their organization or to participate in NGO education programming. Unfortunately, I could not corroborate these comments further and NGO workers never mentioned this requirement to me.

Ximena (2000 419-422)<sup>58</sup> For example, if we didn't know how to read or write, what would we do in an organization? You see, even in an organization they give you a paper to fill out that says minimum sixth grade education. So, in reality, you have to have bases or a foundation, despite the fact that they say that in organizations sex and creed do not matter.

Isabel (in Ximena's interview 2000 426-430)<sup>59</sup> Well, it's one thing, that you know how to read and write. But, you suppose that, well, if you know how to read and write you made it to sixth grade. Rather, for certain courses that they've given us, there's been a requirement that you know how to read and write or sometimes that you've completed at least nine years of school (*ciclo básico*), at least for some courses that we've had to take. So, even to be able to participate and understand (*desenvolvernos*), it's necessary to have a little more knowledge.

## Chapter summary

With this chapter, I emphasized that international funding shaped and promoted the development of women's NGOs and NGO-like institutions working with popular

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<sup>58</sup> Por decirle algo si no sabríamos leer ni escribir qué hacemos en una organización, incluso verá en una organización le dan para que llene, no dice, mínimo sexto grado de escuela, entonces de ley hay que tener bases, no, a pesar de que dicen en las organizaciones no importa el sexo, no importa el credo, no importa.

<sup>59</sup> O sea es una, que sepa leer y escribir. Pero entonces se supone que bueno pues si sabe leer llegó hasta sexto grado. Más bien para ciertos cursos que se nos han dado hay una exigencia de que se sepa leer y escribir o a veces que se tenga conocimientos por lo menos el ciclo básico al menos para algunos cursos que nos ha tocado seguir, entonces hasta para poder desenvolvernos es necesario tener un poco más de conocimiento.

sector mestiza women in Quito and demonstrated that women's NGOs and NGO-like institutions were often agents behind the creation and/or consolidation of popular sector mestiza women's organizations in the 80s and 90s. These elements created an interdependent relationship between these groups (though, definitely not equally interdependent). Women's NGOs needed international funding to maintain themselves (i.e. employee and director salaries) and their activities. In order to receive international funding, women's NGOs had to prove their relationships with popular sector mestiza women's organizations, the "poor" women who were targets of international funding during this period (80s and 90s). Popular sector mestiza women's organizations, in turn, discovered (sometimes with NGO encouragement) that they needed women's NGOs to become legalized and to access the resources that could help them confront their economic needs.

I also highlighted the differences and similarities in the objectives and methodologies of the organizations in which popular sector mestiza and Black women participated. Popular sector mestiza women's organizations focused upon economic and gender issues and their activities were influenced by neoliberal shifts in women's NGO programming (their primary source of resources) instead of changes in popular sector mestiza women's interests or needs (issues I will detail extensively in the chapter "A Change in Era"). Popular sector Black women's organizations, meanwhile, focused upon Black culture, identity and religion and, much to the frustration of popular sector Black participants, often overlooked economic issues. Their principal supporters and education providers were university-educated Black leaders and Comboni missionaries, meaning popular sector Black women's organizations had limited contact with NGOs (of any kind) and increasingly neoliberal NGO programming.

Both popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations relied heavily upon their supporters for resources (information, education, technical assistance, loans, etc.). And, despite some differences in organizational objectives, I stressed that learning opportunities drew popular sector mestiza and Black women to organizations. Education providers' (women's NGOs, university-educated Black leaders and Comboni missionaries) goals and intentions, however, shaped and sometimes limited learning opportunities for popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations.

I will return to the issues of information, resource and education provision to popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations throughout this dissertation, especially in the chapter "A Change in Era." As you will see, the tremendous influence, involvement and control of women's NGOs, NGO-like institutions, university-educated Black leaders and missionaries in popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations, while initially beneficial, also made popular sector women's organizations vulnerable. For example, a decline in women's NGO, Black Movement or Comboni provided learning opportunities, which started around 2000, caused members to lose interest in and leave popular sector mestiza and Black organizations. More importantly, when the aforementioned external agents withdrew or were distanced from popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations, these organizations found they had limited ability to find outside support and produce programming that would help their members confront Ecuador's ongoing neoliberalization and most recent economic crisis.

## **Chapter 5: The Golden Years**

The “golden years” of popular sector mestiza and Black women’s organizations in Quito lasted roughly from the mid-80s to the late 90s. As I indicate in this chapter, popular sector mestiza women’s learning experiences in their all-female organizations provided many benefits, such as income-producing and interpersonal skills that helped participants feel empowered and able to confront economic and community needs as well as gender role based conflicts at home. As a result, researchers in the 80s and 90s were enthusiastic about the potential of these organizations (in Ecuador and in parallel cases across Latin America) as sources of social change. I also found that, during the “golden years” popular sector mestiza participants tightened their relations with women’s NGOs, often credited women’s NGOs as the providers of the aforementioned benefits and believed women’s NGOs helped them (popular sector mestiza women) be part of Ecuador’s Women’s Movement. The language some popular sector mestiza women used to recognize NGO contributions illustrated the sometimes hierarchical and clientelistic relations women’s NGOs had with popular sector mestiza women’s organizations, foreshadowing the problems NGO withdrawal would cause popular sector mestiza women’s organizations in the future.

During the Golden Years, popular sector Black women’s organizations still had limited contact with NGOs, continued to emphasize Black identity and culture and provided participants benefits like empowerment and increased feelings of self-value through awareness and appreciation of Black Ecuadorian community and history. A few popular sector Black women also felt the mixed-sex nature of their organizations helped them negotiate gender-role issues at home, offering a counter-example to some NGO

worker's and Vargas' (1993) beliefs that popular sector mestiza women's organizations could best address gender-role issues if they were all-female. Finally, Black Movement programming still avoided economic issues from the mid-80s to the late 90s despite the fact popular sector Black women participants faced economic needs as strong as when their organizations began.

Both popular sector mestiza and Black women faced similar obstacles of class, color or race and traditional gender role responsibilities that limited their organizational participation and learning. Popular sector Black women, however, stated the internalization and recreation of racism as the main elements that limited their participation as well as the consolidation of their organizations and the Black Movement overall. Popular sector mestiza women, on the other hand, felt their organization participation was most inhibited by men and *machismo*. It is not so surprising then, that organizational participation and learning, though restrained by these obstacles, also focused on presenting challenges to these obstacles and the "traditional order" they represented. So, in spite of opposition at home or in the community, women remained active participants. Popular sector mestiza and Black women's fondness of their organizations, as reflected in this chapter, also explains why organizational decline, so visible during my fieldwork from 2001 to 2003, was a real cause for concern among participants.

### **Other researchers on the benefits of organization participation in Quito**

Lind (1992) and Rodríguez (1994) introduced me to the possible benefits popular sector women's organizations in Quito could bring their participants. Unfortunately, their work is based solely upon popular sector mestiza women's organizations.<sup>60</sup> Also,

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<sup>60</sup> They do not clarify or address this in their studies. Rather, I am familiar with the organizations they investigated.

beyond the Black women participants I met, I have yet to find comprehensive analyses or accounts of Black women's experiences in Quito's popular sector organizations (be they part of the Black Movement or otherwise). My limited work with participants in popular sector Black women's organizations also fails to qualify as 'comprehensive.' Although they only worked with popular sector mestiza women's organizations, Lind (1992) and Rodríguez's (1994) investigations helped me detect similarities in the benefits popular sector mestiza and Black women experienced through organization participation, like learning to speak, improved ability to negotiate gender roles and increased confidence due to knowledge gained.

Lind (1992) and Rodríguez (1994) felt that, in the process of organizing for community needs and learning together, popular sector mestiza women in Quito combined their contexts of gender, poverty and community to create empowering barrio women identities that provided them negotiating power for dealing with traditional political actors. Both authors observed popular sector mestiza women successfully changing their neighborhoods and their society on the micro-level, from the inside out, with multiple responses and multiple identities as women, mothers, workers and community activists. Through their negotiations for community improvements and participation in many educational programs, Lind and Rodríguez also believed popular sector mestiza women incorporated external ideologies with their own and brought them to bear internally. For instance, women participants in democratically-run organization programs learned to let their voices be heard and that they were capable of changing gender relations at home due to the new knowledge and confidence they gained.

As mentioned in my theoretical overview, both Lind and Rodríguez's Quito-based research fit well within the 1990s feminist, political and social theory literature that discussed what popular sector women's increasingly visible (or increasingly observed)

public participation signified. Many theorists in this area felt that popular sector women's participation would create new ways of being political/doing politics, change the political sphere and/or strengthen civil society. Rodríguez's (1994) article also tried to link organized popular sector mestiza women in Quito with theories about new social movements by emphasizing the multilayered gender-space-class 'barrio identities' they formed through participation. (Lind did not clarify 'barrio identities' yet made a similar argument.) This notion of 'barrio identities' fit well with Foweraker's (1995) idea of new social movements as combining identity and strategy practices and attempting to widen spaces and extend boundaries.

Popular sector mestiza women's organization experiences and learning during the "golden years," presented next, lend support to Lind (1992) and Rodríguez (1994) and, to some extent, Foweraker (1995). Paralleling Lind and Rodríguez's findings, popular sector mestiza women participating in my research discussed how, while meeting to deal with gender role based needs (like getting potable water for easier washing and cooking), they shared problems and became aware of gender role based issues that needed to be negotiated in order to continue organization activities that would benefit their households. Popular sector mestiza women also said they learned that they were more effective at creating change when they acted as a collective of women working on behalf of their community. This was a combination of identity and strategy practices that fit Foweraker's (1995) description of a 'new' social movement. While popular sector mestiza women's organizations performed activities that paralleled each other, participant accounts show organizations had limited interaction with each other and rarely combined efforts to confront common issues without intense women's NGO involvement. I feel the lack of networking and individualized efforts of popular sector mestiza women's organizations prevented them from forming what might have been called a popular sector

mestiza women's new social movement. As you will see later in my dissertation, it looked like the popular sector mestiza women's organizations Lind (1992) and Rodríguez (1994) believed were sources of social change might not survive the results of Ecuador's economic crisis (1999-2000) or the withdrawal of NGO support (around 2000).

### **Popular sector mestiza and Black women on the benefits of organization participation**

Influenced by Lind (1992) and Rodríguez's (1994) studies, I constantly asked popular sector mestiza and Black women to discuss the benefits and skills they obtained from participating in an organization. Many answered with enthusiasm, yet they discussed benefit and skill acquisition as past events. This as well as the timing of studies expressing the benefits of participation (like Lind and Rodríguez) led me to believe that popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations had experienced a golden era that was now over. Hence, the reason why I call this chapter "The Golden Years" and link women's discussions of benefits to the mid-80s and mid-90s instead of the present. Due to the significant differences between popular sector mestiza and Black organizations mentioned above, I discuss their benefits separately.

### **POPULAR SECTOR MESTIZA WOMEN**

A few women were rather nonchalant about their participation experiences during the "golden years." They said, yes, they enjoyed participating and, yes, they had learned some helpful skills, but it wasn't that big of a deal. The majority of women, however, believed participation had a significant impact on their lives. They explained that NGO-provided courses taught them their rights, when they should demand them, how they should try to enact them in the household. What women learned through participation, explained one woman, helped them go from feeling like household creatures to being people with a voice and vote in society who wanted other women to share the experience.

During the “golden years” women felt they learned to model and promote, as mothers and wives, what women’s lives could become in a time of social change. Comments like Sofia’s (below) came as a result of her organization experiences and support Montero’s (1990) Peruvian study or Lind (1992) and Rodríguez’s (1994) Ecuadorian studies – all of which emphasize popular sector women’s potential to create change and space for women in society through organization participation.

Sofia (2001 213-225)<sup>61</sup> Yes, I think that women’s organizations have helped us as women because it is there where we change, it is there that we see that we can be different, do other activities, no just be stuck between four walls. So, from there comes the change. For example, you (as a participant) go along giving this example to daughters, to women, to sons. So that they see that they have to work hard now that they are studying so that in the future they can work, nothing is impossible for women either. Yes, organizations help you a lot. I mean, I’d like it if more women would come to organizations because they’re still, women are still submissive (*sometidas*) to their spouses who don’t let them attend. They think that you come to organizations to gossip, that you waste your time and it’s not that way. We should have our own space. And, even though sometimes they see the things that you do in an organization, they see how a woman who’s participating progresses in her home, in the neighborhood, but even then, they don’t want to accept, they refuse to accept it. So, little by little, we have to keep trying that they understand us as women; that we also have to have our space.

**“Practical” things.** Mestiza women, especially those who had participated several years, talked about receiving lots of courses. Most started by discussing the practical courses that got them into the organization in the first place; things like crafts,

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<sup>61</sup> Sí, sí yo creo, sí sí las organizaciones de mujeres nos han ayudado porque es allí donde nosotras cambiamos, es allí donde vemos que nosotras podemos hacer diferentes, otras actividades que no es solo estar metida entre cuatro paredes, no. Entonces, desde allí viene también el cambio, ah ha. Entonces uno por ejemplo se va dando ese ejemplo a las hijas, a las mujeres, a los hijos, no, entonces que ellas tienen que esforzarse ahora que están estudiando para que en el futuro ellas trabajen, nada es imposible para las mujeres tampoco, no. Sí las organizaciones sí te ayudan mucho. O sea a mi me gustaría más que las mujeres acuden más a las organizaciones porque todavía ellas, las mujeres estamos como sometidas, no, a los esposos que allí después que no les dejan asistir, ellos piensan que uno se viene a las organizaciones a chismosear, que uno se pasa el tiempo de gana, y no es así. Debemos tener nuestro espacio. Y aunque a veces ellos por ejemplo ya ven las cosas en que, lo que se hace una organización, ven lo que, como progresa esa mujer en el hogar, en el barrio y ni así ellos no quieren aceptar son rehacios a aceptar eso. Entonces pero poco a poco tenemos que seguir tratando de que ellos nos comprendan como mujeres, no, que nosotras también tenemos que tener nuestro espacio.

ceramics, first aid, medical remedies and nutrition that helped them and their households to some extent. Some said they sold the crafts they made. Others explained they saved money because organization courses were much cheaper than private ones and because courses like first aid and gynecology helped them recognize if an ailment was serious or not. Many women also mentioned nutrition courses where they learned to balance their diets, eat less fat and use both traditional grains and non-traditional soy to add protein to their diets.

Women's NGO courses and programs also taught mestiza women a lot about women's rights, women's legal issues and laws that worked for and against women, like child support and divorce. Domestic violence was top on the list, however, because formal and informal problem sharing sessions (some attended by NGO workers) showed it affected many organization participants. As a response, women's NGOs provided counseling and legal resources for abused women, made sure women knew how to press charges against an abuser and involved participants in marches against domestic violence to raise general public awareness on the issue. The women's NGO response reflected Freire's (1985) emphasis that education for marginal groups be developed in conjunction with the group's needs and Vargas' (1993) endorsement of collaboratively created, feminist education as a means to help women overcome oppression. According to CAM and CPMM workers, domestic violence became a focal point of CAM programming and Ecuador's Women's Movement at about the same time CAM began working with popular sector mestiza women's organizations in the early to mid-80s.<sup>62</sup>

**Sharing, sharing problems, making friends, being united.** By joining a group and sharing with each other, women created a space and a time for themselves. The

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<sup>62</sup> Domestic violence remained among CAM's focus issues from 200-2003. Refer to the appendix for an outline of CPMM and CAM's current focus issues.

organization gave them a reason to get out of the house, de-stress, share with friends and forget about their worries for a little while. Participants pointed out that they learned to put their problems in perspective, to not let problems drown them and to find support in the organization.

Julia (2000 662-667)<sup>63</sup> An important benefit, I think, is making ourselves change our mood, because sometimes we reach a state of desperation, where we don't have anyone to share our pains, because there's more pain than joy, so seeing ourselves alone, without anyone to share with, we find ourselves obliged to share with a true (female) friend, with a real helper, talking with them about good and bad. Sharing our pains, we get ahead and we feel good, we have the desire to live a better tomorrow.

**Learning to talk.** Group discussions and courses opened women's eyes to what was going on in their world and encouraged them to talk about it. I remember Piedad saying that before she joined an organization, her conversations with her husband were very limited to things like "What do you want for dinner? How was the food? When can we go to the market?" After being in the organization, however, she said she learned to talk about a variety of topics which changed her conversations and relationships at home.

Piedad (1998 183-190)<sup>64</sup> Here, you even learn about what our country is like, what things are like in the world. So, that way, you can converse with them (spouses), because before we didn't talk about anything because we didn't know anything, we were like animals. Now, it's different, now I know how to converse, what's this that happened, what's that... so of course I now converse with my

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<sup>63</sup> Como beneficio importante creo que es hacernos cambiar el estado de ánimo, porque a veces estamos en un estado de desesperación, en no tener con quien compartir nuestras penas, porque la mayoría son penas que alegrías, entonces vernos ahí solitas sin tener con quien desahogarnos entonces nos vemos obligadas a estar compartiendo con una verdadera amiga, con una verdadera ayuda, mal o bien, hablando con ellas, compartiendo nuestras penas salimos adelante, y nos sentimos bien, moralmente estamos con deseos de vivir de un mañana mejor.

<sup>64</sup> ...inclusive aquí hasta se aprende, se aprende cómo es este país, cómo esté en el mundo las cosas. Entonces así conversa con ellos, si no, no nos conversábamos nada porque nos sabíamos nada, sólo lo que sabíamos era de cocinar y éramos como, pues, como animales. En cambio, ahora ya no, ya sé conversar, qué es lo que pasa, qué es lo que...entonces con ellos yo desde luego yo ya converso con mi marido, dije qué te parece, así, asado, cocinado...ya los temas de conversación ya no son sólo unos solo de la casa, de que tú lo que has hecho...ya tenemos muchos tópicos de conversación, sea de, ahora de las elecciones, como analizamos ya los de lo eso porque yo me he auto-educado pues aquí. Antes no sabía nada inclusive para ir a dar el voto y me decía quien es de dar tú plano.

husband, what do you think about this – yes, no, maybe so? Our topics of conversation are no longer only about the household, about what you did today... now we have a lot to talk about, now with the elections, how we analyze the candidates because I've learned about it here (at the organization). Before, I didn't even know how to vote, my husband used to tell me who to vote for.

Piedad's situation reflected what other popular sector mestiza women learned through the practice of organization participation. They explained that by being encouraged to speak and to learn in an organization, they got over their shyness and began to express themselves in public. They discussed how learning to talk not only meant learning new words; it meant learning to speak out and to say their minds.

Jesusa (2001 54-59)<sup>65</sup> ...the good thing about the movement is that it's given us the opportunity to experience a growth in our self-esteem, to lose our fears. It cost years of work, everything, to lose the fear of speaking, without the need for us to have the correct or perfect words or vocabulary. We speak, we might go all over the place trying to explain one thing. Well, we've learned to synthesize things and this has been the change for us, to go on preparing ourselves bit by bit.

**Self-esteem.** While popular sector mestiza women discussed increased self-esteem as a result of participation, it was also the focus of many seminars and part of one NGO's last effort to (re)consolidate mestiza women's organizations in popular sector barrios.<sup>66</sup> During the "golden years," some women felt self-esteem seminars and groups were interesting but not helpful to focus on at times they really wanted to learn income-producing skills. Others, like Isabel, saw self-esteem and self-esteem groups as essential for women.

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<sup>65</sup> ...lo bueno es del movimiento es que nos ha dado la oportunidad de tener una, de tener una, un crecimiento de autoestima como le digo personal, perder esos miedos, ha costado años de trabajo, todo, perder el miedo a hablar, sin que, sin, sin necesidad de nosotros tener las palabras correctas, perfectas, el vocabulario como se dice, nosotros hablamos nos damos un vuelton, para decir una cosa, bueno hemos aprendido a sintetizar las cosas y eso ha sido el cambio para nosotros irnos preparando poco a poco...

<sup>66</sup> Women Helping Themselves was one of these groups, refer to the appendix for more information.

Isabel (2000 1359-1377)<sup>67</sup> This self-esteem group that we have now is very important because it is... our space where we women have the liberty to say what we feel, who we are, to share experiences with other women... all the problems at home and outside too, because within the community there've been many problems with members, they've called us lazy and they haven't valued us at the beginning, but now, really, the space that we've maintained is that of self-esteem which I think is the most important for women, to make them recognize that we have value, that we women are able, what we women signify, because before, the woman was whatever thing, not now. ...but it is difficult to raise a woman's awareness, but once women have become aware, it is beautiful, to see a woman, now I'm brave, now I'm not going to let myself get abused, I'm not going to allow them to abuse my children. I mean it is really going along and acquiring your personality, you go along valuing women for what they are.

**Value as women.** When asked what they learned through organization participation, the number one response from popular sector mestiza women probably was “to value myself as a woman” or “the value of women.” In fact, the frequent repetition of this phrase made me wonder if it had been the catch phrase of a women's NGO education program or institution with which all of them had been in contact. Before they entered the organization, the majority of women said felt they were on the margins of society, limited to the household and ignorant because they had no money and no time to study. Valuing yourself as a woman, they implied, came from the combination of learning, speaking, sharing and working together to meet goals. Through these experiences, they discovered that what they knew was valuable and that they were perfectly capable of learning more despite their age, economic or social status. They found they were able

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<sup>67</sup> ... es muy importante esto del grupo de autoestima que ahora tenemos no, porque es ... nuestro espacio donde las mujeres tenemos la libertad de decir lo que sentimos, lo que somos, de compartir las experiencias con otras mujeres ... todos los problemas dentro del hogar y afuera también, porque dentro de la comunidad también habido muchos problemas hacia la organización que nos han tildado de que somos desocupadas, y no nos han valorado al principio, pero ahora realmente el espacio que nosotros mantenemos es el de autoestima que pienso que es el más importante para las mujeres, a hacer reconocer que lo que nosotros valemos, lo que las mujeres somos capaces, lo que las mujeres significamos, porque antes éramos cualquier cosa la mujer, ahora no ... pero eso es difícil de concientizar a la mujer, pero una vez que la mujer ha tomado conciencia de eso, es muy lindo cuando ver a una mujer, ahora yo soy valiente, ahora no me voy a dejar pegar, no voy a dejar que traten mal a mis hijos, o sea es realmente va adquiriendo esa, su personalidad, su, se va valorando ya la mujer,

and useful. They knew they made a difference, not only in their households but in their barrio and society, by creating health centers or daycares and bringing infrastructure changes to the community. They realized that what they had to say was important and deserved to be said; it didn't matter if it came out unorganized the first try. All of these experiences, some fostered by women's NGO employees and workshops, motivated women to further learning/further change. As many women said, organization participation taught them how to *desenvolverse*. Literally this means unfold or develop, but it implies how to behave, how to get ahead, how to fulfill your potential.

Belén (2000 270-297)<sup>68</sup> I think that we've acquired a level of consciousness where we are also participants in general problems... and that we try not to simply become stagnant, stuck in household chores, rather we try to go farther, keep fighting. For example, there are many women that, simply, we've gotten stuck... due to economic resources our education could not advance, but that doesn't mean we have to stay that way because now, the organizational process we've gotten into has given us the opportunity to try to meet other goals... I mean, after you've raised your awareness, it allows us to not want to be simply women in the home, rather to go out, to want to get into bigger things... it is a process of change that, it would be great if all women had the opportunity we've had to connect a little farther beyond ourselves, to not only care about ourselves... to where we believe that we women can also be part of this change...

Sharing, learning to talk, self-esteem, recognition of women's value, these benefits all reflected Freire's (1985) belief in the liberating and empowering nature of education created in collaboration with the needs and contributions of the group seeking knowledge. The above benefits also imply that organized popular sector mestiza women

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<sup>68</sup> ... nosotros ya creo que hemos adquirido un grado de conciencia donde también somos partícipes de las problemáticas generales, ... y que intentamos no simplemente estancarnos en los quehaceres domésticos, sino ir mas allá, ir superando, por ejemplo hay muchas compañeras mujeres que simplemente nos hemos quedado ... por el recurso económico se ha estancado, pero eso no ha significado que tengamos que seguir quedándonos, porque ahora el proceso organizativo en el que nos hemos metido ha permitido, nos ha dado la oportunidad de poder ir consiguiendo otras metas, ... o sea después que uno se adquiere conciencia, nos ha permitido a no querernos ser simplemente las mujeres dentro de una casa, si no salir y querernos meter en las cosas mas grandes, ... es un proceso de cambio, al que, que bueno fuese si todas las mujeres hubiésemos tenido la oportunidad como la que hemos tenido nosotros de podernos vincular un poquito mas allá, de no solo preocuparnos por nosotras mismo, ... donde creemos que nosotras las mujeres también tenemos que ser las partícipes de ese cambio, ...

were learning to identify oppression, a requirement in Gramsci's and Vargas' (1993) adult education pedagogies. In addition, these benefits all seemed to prepare popular sector mestiza women to be the sources of social change authors like Martin (1990), Stephen (1997), Lind (1992) and Rodríguez (1994) hoped they would be. Yet, as I discuss briefly under "Politics" (next) and at length in the chapter "A Change in Era," popular sector mestiza women's future organizational activities were inhibited by limitations in the benefits and skills obtained through participation and their reliance on NGO resources to compensate for those limitations.

**Politics.** When I went to Quito in 2001, it was under the influence of theorists who saw popular sector women as potentially transformative political actors and with the intention to learn how popular sector women learned about politics in popular organizations. So, I expected to see participants learning about political participation (both politics "at home" as well as party politics) in addition to learning about how to demand their rights and fulfill their needs more effectively. I found women like Piedad, who said that you learned about politics and performed political analyses from hearing other women's opinions and participating in conversations about politics/political figures. Or Erica, who said that after participating in an organization, you no longer voted without thinking, you analyzed your choices a little. In general, it seemed that participation helped women learn about national and local government operations and helped them make concrete connections between what was happening in their barrio, the social issues and politics they talked about in the organization and politics at the city or national level. This "connection process" between contexts was part of what excited social, political and feminist theorists like Miller (1991), Martin (1990), Jelin (1990) and Arizpe (1990, 1998) who touted popular sector women as agents of political change. Yet, I discovered that direct talk about politics in an organization or organizational course was rare.

Isabel, a frequent contributor to my investigation, explained that there was limited discussion of formal or party politics in popular sector mestiza women's organizations because it had been a taboo topic until about ten years ago. She said that when her group had first started, a woman had tried to discuss party politics during a meeting. The NGO workers present at the meeting directly told the woman that party politics was not allowed. What organization participants could discuss, Isabel added, was "politics at home." Bianca provided a good definition of "politics at home" and what it meant to "do" them.

Bianca (2001 526-523)<sup>69</sup> [Rachel: What kind of politics to women do here in Ecuador?] Here in Ecuador there are all kinds of, how to put it, social politics. That's the principal form because you're also inside society, you're inside an environment that's more open, more ample and also inside general society. I think that all of us women enter (politics) using this method. They aren't well prepared or studied, they're simply part of society and they're people. (544-547) For example, another kind of politics you do is the kind that happens when you are trying to get into society, to learn new things, also when you discuss things with other people, opening social contacts and all of those things, that's also politics of a sort.

Despite the fact they were strong advocates of "doing politics at home" and that the taboo on formal politics in organizations had been lifted, organized popular sector mestiza women's direct participation in formal politics in Quito was often limited to obligatory voting in national and local government elections. Most women expressed that formal politics didn't interest them because it was just too corrupt. Instead of wanting to change formal politics or feeling that they could change it, they wanted to stay

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<sup>69</sup> [R: ¿qué clase o clases de política ejercen las mujeres aquí en Ecuador?] O sea, aquí en Ecuador hay de todas, cómo se puede decir, la política social, esa es la principal porque uno también está dentro de la sociedad, está dentro de un ambiente más abierto, más amplio y también dentro de la sociedad general que creo que somos todas las mujeres que entramos a ese método. Ya no son de preparación, no son de estudios sino simplemente son de sociedad y son de persona. (544-547) ...por ejemplo la política que se ejerce es uno también tratando de meterse en la, dentro de la sociedad, aprendiendo cosas nuevas, también manifestando a otras personas, abriendo vínculos sociales y todas esas cosas. Eso es una también una manera de política.

as far away from it as possible and/or felt they were not qualified in terms of education to do anything about it. Attitudes like these helped explain why political participation and discussion was limited to informal levels in popular sector mestiza women's organizations. At the same time, they raised questions like: what happened to CAM's original goals of facilitating economically vulnerable women's active participation in formal politics? And, how could popular sector women become or be transformative political actors if they did not consider themselves able to act in political realms? CAM blamed funding restrictions for the absence of education on formal politics within organizations. Authors like Martin (1990), Miller (1991) and Arizpe (1990, 1998) believed the political activities of popular sector women, like the 'social politics' Bianca mentioned, would transform formal politics from the outside and through their influence on middle-class feminists. So, perhaps, these authors would not be concerned about the lack of formal political education in Quito's popular sector mestiza women's organizations. Meanwhile, female political activists in Quito and theorists like Foweraker (1998) worried women would never reach the "critical mass" (in political parties) necessary to make large-scale political change. My observations as well as conversations with popular sector mestiza women and ex-NGO workers caused me to believe that 'social politics' did create small scale change for the women performing them. All the same, according to two ex-NGO workers, the absence of more comprehensive education about formal politics prevented organized popular sector mestiza women from knowing where or how to fit their demands into local and national political agendas. In the opinion of these ex-NGO workers, this limitation prevented the development of formal, government responses (i.e. policy) to popular sector mestiza women's needs and, in the long run, made it very difficult for organized popular sector

mestiza women to present their economic and socio-political issues to government institutions or foreign support agencies without NGO support.

### **Popular sector mestiza women on NGOs - Kudos**

Many mestiza women credited women's NGOs for the skills and information they obtained through organization participation; most important being the courses women's NGOs provided.

Tina (2001 270-274)<sup>70</sup> CAM itself helped us a lot. For example, when we've needed or when we've said that we want a workshop, for parents or whatever, CAM has helped us, trying to find, to bring us the workshops, more CAM than anyone because they've given us workshops or, when we haven't had something, they've helped us out.

As shown in "In the Beginning" and in this chapter, NGO-provided courses or workshops were what really drew women into an organization and solidified the group. They made women realize that, despite their age or economic status, they could learn and people were willing to teach them. From these courses came the dialogues about learning to value oneself as a woman, about not putting up with violence at home, about teaching husband and kids to help with housework, about learning to speak and about making a difference in your community.

Through these courses, some popular sector mestiza women developed close ties to women's NGOs. They said that, from the mid-80s to late 90s, they felt welcome at women's NGO offices, felt part of what NGO workers were doing and felt they had contacts at higher levels. Thanks to her contacts with a women's NGO, one popular sector mestiza organization participant found work in an institution linked to the middle-

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<sup>70</sup> El CAM mismo nos ha ayudado bastante por ejemplo cuando nosotros hemos necesitado, o cuando nosotros hemos dicho queremos un taller, de padres, de todo, eso nos han, nos han apoyado las del CAM han tratado de buscar, traernos eso, los talleres, mas el CAM, porque el CAM nos ha apoyado con talleres, o cuando no nos hemos tenido cualquier cosa nos ha apoyado.

class women's movement. Many other popular sector mestiza women had jobs in a catering micro-enterprise fostered by a women's NGO.

In general, women's NGOs were seen as an essential connection, or provider of benefits, that guaranteed the success of popular sector mestiza women's organizations during their "golden years." Some organizations got almost everything from NGOs (women's and otherwise): courses, legalization assistance, space for meetings and/or projects, free training for income-producing projects, jobs and job contracts for their micro-enterprises. One woman alluded to a mother and child relationship when she described how a women's NGO had helped her organization.

Isabel (2000 1395-1399)<sup>71</sup> It was CAM who practically took us by the hand to where we are, and that was something important, that an institution came to the organization to train us, to help us with what we didn't know, and since then we have coordinated in conjunction with CAM, with very important people in different periods of the organization.

The imagery created by the above quote represents the trust in and need for women's NGOs expressed by many participants. At the same time, it illustrates the unequal relationship between a women's NGO and popular sector mestiza women, emphasizing the women's NGO as the provider of education and important "connections" while overlooking popular sector mestiza women's autonomous actions and self-provision. The women's NGO was somewhat like a "godmother" from a higher socioeconomic class who helped popular sector mestiza women make their way in society. To some extent, this reflects Ecuadorian political culture. An Ecuadorian political analyst stresses the existence of paternalism between popular sectors and politicians; the popular sectors look for a higher class, political 'godfather' who will

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<sup>71</sup> ...fue CAM quien prácticamente nos ha llevado de la mano hacia donde estamos, y eso es una cosa importante que una institución se vino a la organización a capacitarnos ayudarnos en todo lo que nosotras desconocíamos, y desde ahí pues nosotras estamos conjuntamente coordinando con el CAM, con personas todas muy importantes en las diferentes etapas de la organización.

stand up for them in local and national government (de la Torre 1996). Alvarez (1998), Burgwal (1995) and Vélez-Ibañez (1983) also point out the clientelistic relations and power divides created by the fact that NGOs had greater access to and control over knowledge and resources compared to popular sector organizations. As I will discuss in the chapter “A Change in Era,” organized popular sector mestiza women lost their NGO “godmothers” in the midst of Ecuador’s recent economic crisis, much to the detriment of their organizations.

### **POPULAR SECTOR BLACK WOMEN**

As I detailed in the previous chapter, popular sector Black women had minimal to no contact with NGOs through their organizations. Meanwhile, through their efforts to create and consolidate a Black Movement, university-educated Black leaders and Combonian missionaries became the primary developers of popular education for and supporters of popular sector Black organizations. So, with rare exceptions, almost all the organizational education and skills popular sector Black women acquired came from the Combonis and leaders of the Black Movement.

Despite limited contact with NGOs and their courses, popular sector Black women described some organizational benefits similar to those mentioned by their mestiza counterparts. For instance, they frequently commented that they learned to get along (*convivir*) with different kinds of people, to express themselves, to get ahead, to value themselves as women, to be united, and to fend for themselves through organization participation. These benefits express, in other words, the empowerment that Freire (1985) and Vargas (1993) hoped popular sector individuals would experience thanks to popular education opportunities. They also liked the opportunity to get out of the house that an organization meeting provided. And, as with their mestiza counterparts, getting over their shyness or timidity and increased self-esteem were considered benefits

of participation. But, among some Black women, the topic of self-esteem had become cliché because it had been the focal point of far too many seminars when they desperately wanted to learn how to improve their economic situations and how to help others. This desperation showed that, unlike many popular sector mestiza women's organizations, most popular sector Black women's organizations (JPCN being the exception, refer to the appendix for more information) could not help members confront their economic needs during the "golden years." Popular sector Black women's frustration with the education provided their organizations implied that Black Movement leaders did not consider popular sector participants' needs and/or did not collaborate with popular sector participants (as Freire's 1985 popular education pedagogy requires) when they developed programming for popular sector organizations. Unresolved, this frustration caused a few popular sector Black women's organizations to (unsuccessfully) seek assistance outside of the Black Movement while I was in the field.

Recall that Black organization learning opportunities took place in mixed-sex groups, unlike popular sector mestiza women's all-female organizations. Some Black women felt this approach gave them an advantage when they negotiated household labor issues because it helped Black women and men learn to cooperate with and advance each other's participation. Experiences like these pose a counter example to Vargas' (1993) encouragement of all female groups as the means to confront gender-based oppression by suggesting that women can also deal with gender role issues when they are in organizations with men. (I will expand on this issue at the end of this chapter.)

The Black Movement promoted its identity focus within the popular sector Black organizations it fostered. As a result, organized Black women (and men) learned a lot about Black identity through courses on Black culture and Black history in Ecuador and discussions about the problems faced by Blacks in other parts of the country. Many

participants said they had no idea about Afro-Ecuadorian history until they joined an organization. Some popular sector Black women participants mentioned that they learned how to appreciate their roots and their Blackness instead of being embarrassed of them.

Lucia (2002 220-225)<sup>72</sup> For me, yes, I learned a lot in organizations. Before anything, I remember Black music and dancing in Guayaquil (where she grew up). My mom used to go to get-togethers with her friends, there they'd dance only bomba, marimba (music connected to Blacks) and I'd say, I don't like that music. So, yes, you become aware of how you're ignorant or how you ignore certain things and you don't want to accept them, even when you know better, but it is my reality, my people, I have roots there and that's beautiful.

Other popular sector Black women participant said they learned that Blacks had a legitimate place in Ecuador and that they had rights as Ecuadorian citizens. Among those rights was the right to learn. According to Elsa and Angela (both Black leaders), this was a right the Black Movement was trying to make the Ecuadorian government recognize and fulfill by encouraging grassroots participants to confront discrimination at school and in school admission policies and by lobbying for schools with curriculum based on Black Ecuadorian worldview.

The formation of Black organizations helped Blacks get to know one another. One woman stressed that Black groups gave people within the Black community a point of contact where they could rejoin, break down individualism and develop friendships – challenges to the isolation and negative relationships that had developed between many Blacks. By helping people get to know one another, Black organizations also increased visibility of Black issues in Ecuador because, through participation, Blacks could identify

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<sup>72</sup> Digo por mi parte sí, digo dentro de la, del movimiento negro antes, esto primero que nada yo, me acuerdo en Guayaquil música negra yo ya bailando, es más con mi mami, mi mami sabía irse a reunir con sus amigos, ahí bailan pura bomba, marimba, esa música no me gusta, entonces sí, uno llega a tomar conciencia como uno es ignorante cuando o no, o sea ignora las cosas y uno como que no las quiere aceptar, o sea cuando conoces las cosas entonces no pues es mi realidad, es mi gente, yo tengo raíces de ahí, y no pues que bonito.

with people who had similar needs, frustrations and goals, could join their voices in complaint and could unify their actions to improve the situations of Blacks in Ecuador. Simply put, a group of people complaining about similar issues could accomplish more and get more attention than individual efforts.

Victoria (2002 125-129)<sup>73</sup> And so, to maintain this visibility, it's only possible through an organization and every time, in spite of the problems that there are, you keep going ahead with a few people, and every time you go along seeing new forms of fighting, new forms of organizing, new spaces to get what you want and that's what makes the few of us grow attached to this way of life... (279-282) ...those spaces that the Black Movement has gone along consolidating have reinforced identity, have helped us to accept ourselves, value ourselves and, obviously, made the *mestiza* indigenous culture accepts us. It's also helped us to go on creating a national project because that's what's missing in our country, a national project with diversity.

The identity based benefits exemplified by Victoria's quote reiterate the Black Movement's use of 'cultural politics' (Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998) to make Black identity part of a new, ethnically diverse notion of Ecuadorian national identity. Victoria's quote also shows how the Black Movement parallels the so-called new social movements described by Melucci (1988) through its (the Black Movement's) attempts to increase the visibility of power issues present in discrimination against and between Blacks; by Wade (1997) when it makes Black identity an end in itself; and, by Foweraker (1995) when it combines Black identity and strategy practices to expand boundaries and widen spaces for Black Ecuadorian identities and needs in Ecuador. While these identity based approaches and benefits contrast with the economic and gender based approaches

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<sup>73</sup> ...y entonces para mantener esa visibilidad es solamente a través de la organización, y, y cada vez a pesar de, con todos los tropiezos pues que hay, se va saliendo adelante no, con poca gente y, y cada vez se va viendo nuevas formas de, de lucha, nuevas formas de agrupación, nuevos espacios para conseguir, y eso, y eso hace que los pocos que estemos nos afiancemos a, he, a esta forma de vivir... (279-282) estos espacios que, que se ha ido consolidando el movimiento negro hacen que, reforzar la identidad, y el aceptarnos, el valorarnos y obviamente he, que también la, la cultura mestiza indígena, también he, nos acepte e ir creando pues un proyecto nacional porque eso es lo que carece en nuestro país un proyecto nacional, con la diversidad.

and benefits of popular sector mestiza women's organizations, Victoria's and other organized popular sector Black women's comments in this section demonstrate the same attachment to and appreciation of organization participation indicated by organized popular sector mestiza women. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, this appreciation of organization participation and its benefits explains why the decline in popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations, apparent from 2001 to 2003, was cause for concern among participants.

#### **DURING THE "GOLDEN YEARS": OBSTACLES TO LEARNING AND CHALLENGES POSED BY LEARNING**

Although popular sector Black and mestiza women said they learned a lot through their organization activities, there were several issues that limited their participation and the benefits they could obtain from it. Most significant to Black participants and organizers was the racism and discrimination imposed by daily life and formal education, how they were internalized and reproduced among Blacks, and how they divided the Black population. These issues provided significant obstacles by fostering contempt for Blacks among Blacks and by undermining attempts to create a sense of Black community. At the same time, attempts to overcome those obstacles through the organization of Blacks and education within Black organizations presented challenges to the traditional social order which expected Blacks to remain invisible, uneducated individuals who did not know their rights.

Unlike Black women, organized popular sector mestiza women consistently indicated, during interviews and conversations at meetings, that men and *machismo* (loosely defined here as male chauvinism and chronic male selfishness) were among the principle elements, besides economic issues, that conditioned their participation and learning in organizations and limited their advances as individuals. All the same,

participants found popular sector mestiza women's organizations provided solutions to their problems with men and *machismo* and presented hope that women's relations with men would experience positive change in the future.

### **Obstacles to Black women's participation and learning in organizations**

**Internalization and reproduction of racism and discrimination.** Many Black women explained how, within Black organizations, the internalization and reproduction of racism and discrimination created dynamics that frustrated group activities and intentions to get more Blacks to join the Black Movement. Martha and Graciela discussed racism and self-discrimination within the Black community as well as how they impaired the Black Movement by enacting what they felt were common behaviors.

Martha and Graciela (2001 240-246)<sup>74</sup> M: ...for example, I'm at work and over there another person says, "Be a dear, ask about a job for me." Oh no, I say, I'm not going to help you. Even for things like that there's selfishness and racism. People say "That Black is going to make me look bad, that Black is going to make me an accomplice, I won't get into that," and that's how we Blacks are.  
G: Among ourselves, between Blacks we're racists. So, the thing is, we have to give way for our race, we have to be more united.  
(763-768) M: Ah, on the bus, just on the bus, you'll see. For example, I get on

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<sup>74</sup> S: ...por ejemplo yo estoy, yo estoy en un trabajo que por allí va otra persona y me dice, "no sea maldita, déme viendo un trabajo" Ay no, le digo yo, no le ayudo, sólo en eso nomás hay el egoísmo y el racismo. Dice hay, 'ese negro me ha de hacer quedar mal, ese negro me va a hacer colaboradora y no me meto allá' y así somos los negros. G: Entre nosotros mismos, somos racistas entre nosotros negros mismos. Entonces cosa que no pues, tenemos que dar paso a nuestra raza, entre nosotros ser más unidos. (763-768)  
S: Ahha, en el bus, en el bus nomás, en esto verá. Por ejemplo, yo me subo está un negro sentado y ese asiento es desocupado, yo me paso al de atrás, no me siento allí. G: Yo soy así. ...Con mi raza porque hay unos que son más negros, diga usted no es cierto, yo soy un poquito lavada, entonces como voy a sentar al lado de ese negro y que estén mal vestido, usted, yo que sé, yo no me siento, sinceramente yo le digo sinceramente. (780-787) G: ...Entonces yo sinceramente digo, ningún negro trabajaría para ayudarle... a otro negro, no. S: ...Por ejemplo, doña Graciela es rica, me dice 'Ay, Martha, ¿quiere trabajar conmigo?' yo le digo no. ...No nos guste que otro negro nos trate, no. [G: Que nos venga a dar órdenes.] No, no somos así los negros, así somos. (845-850) S: ...verá, el indígena es bastante unido ¿por qué? Porque son muy humildes ellos, ellos son súper humildes, ellos hacen lo que el jefe de la comunidad dice, si le dicen metate a ese hueco, allí vas a ahogar, allí se meten. Nosotros no. [G: Nosotros somos más rebeldes.] En cambio nosotros no, si nos digan, por ejemplo, tiene que irse de aquí a la Villaflores, nomás, váyase a pie – ah no señora, déme para el bus. Los indios se van a pie, nosotros no, déme para el bus, yo tengo mi plata y me voy. [G: Sí, esa es la verdad]...

the bus and there's a Black seated and next to him is an empty seat, I go to the seat behind, I don't sit next to him.

G: I'm that way. ...With my race there's some who are blacker, right, I'm a little lighter, so how am I going to sit next to that Black, who's poorly dressed, I won't sit there, sincerely, I tell you sincerely.

(780-787) G: So, sincerely, no Black would work to help another Black, no.

M: ...For example, Miss Graciela is rich, she says "Hey, Martha, do you want to work with me?" I say no. ...We don't like having another Black treat us that way.

G: That they come to order us around.

M: No, we Blacks are like that, that's how we are.

(845-850) M: You see that the indigenous are really united, why? Because they are very humble, they are very humble, they do what the head of the community tells them to do. If they say, get in that hole, there you are going to drown, there they go. Not us.

G: We're more rebellious.

M: On the other hand, not us. If they say, for example, "you have to go from here to a place ten blocks to the north, just walk." No way lady, give me money for the bus. The Indians, they walk, not us. Give me money for the bus and, once I've got my money, I'll go.

G: Yes, that's the truth.

Blacks avoiding other Blacks, especially to "get ahead" and stay ahead, as highlighted above, came up during a group interview with popular sector Black women and provoked extensive discussion. They expressed that some of their most frustrating experiences within the Black community were with university-educated Blacks who, it seemed, the "higher" they went the more they avoided Blacks (participants in de la Torre's 2002 study of Black organizations in Quito also noted this issue). This attitude, the women exclaimed, would always keep the Black Movement and Black people from getting ahead.

Roldos 94 Group (2000 525-551)<sup>75</sup> 1: And another thing are *those* Blacks, the one who studies, the one who is a little bit more, he or she steps on other Blacks.

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<sup>75</sup> M: Y pasa otra cosa también que *estos* negros, el que estudia, el que ya es un poquito más, le pisa al otro negro, entonces yo digo, *este negro* no va a trabajar por los negros, o sea yo he visto negros que son supuestamente políticos, hay un ejemplo, cuando yo estaba yo en la Universidad estudiando comunicación social fuimos hacerle una entrevista a Jaime Hurtado. Estábamos seis, cinco mestizas y yo negra, y cada

So, I say, *that Black* is not going to work for Blacks. I have seen Blacks who are supposedly politicians. For example, when I was in university studying communication we went to do an interview with Jaime Hurtado (a Black politician murdered in 1999). We were six, five mestiza women and me, a Black, and every time I asked him something that deceased Black answered my classmates. He never even looked me in the face. I was so angry that I wanted to tell him “Why don’t you look at me?” He spoke with my friends, I asked him, he answered them, but them not me. So, I didn’t vote for Hurtado, no way, no kidding. ...2: You see, Blacks who study and have a profession, the majority that I know, they isolate themselves completely from the Black world. They isolate themselves, you don’t see them, you don’t get to know them, they isolate themselves completely. It’s like they say, if they see me with a Black, there’s no chance for me. They isolate themselves completely. [A: They whiten themselves]... (606-610) 1: ... (another man, for example) he managed to have his profession, they gave him opportunities because he’s a *very* smart Black. I mean, if this Black would get into the Movement, he could do miracles because he’s very involved, he goes from country to country, but now he doesn’t deal with Blacks. He doesn’t even say hello to his brothers and sisters, not even them, to the point that his sister called and said, “I used to give him money for bus fares, now he doesn’t even call.” So, how, when are we going to get ahead?

The results of this kind of attitude, according to one Black leader, made it difficult to have Black leaders with higher education working in cooperation with Blacks who did not have access to education. She believed they did not know what it was like to be a poor Black in Ecuador and that they thought having money would solve all their problems.

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vez que lo le preguntaba, el negro finado les contestaba a mis compañeras, a mi ni siquiera me alzaba a ver la cara, yo tenía tanto coraje que, me daba gana de decirle ¿por qué no me miras?, él habló con mis amigas, yo preguntaba él les contestaba pero a ellas no a mi, entonces yo por Hurtado no voté, o sea no ni en chiste. ...J: Verá los negros que estudian y tienen una profesión, la mayoría que yo conozca, se aísla totalmente del mundo de negros, se aíslan no se les ve, no se les conoce, se aíslan totalmente, o sea como que dicen si me ven con un negro no hay chance, se aíslan totalmente. [O: Se blanquean, se blanquean]... (606-610) M: ...alcanzó a tener su profesión le dieron oportunidades porque es un negro *muy* inteligente, o sea que si ese negro si se metiera pudiera ser maravillas porque es muy enredado, anda de país en país, pero ahora con negros él no trata, ni siquiera saluda con los hermanos, ni con los hermanos, cosa que la hermana lloraba dice yo le daba para los pasajes, ahora ni siquiera me llama por teléfono, ya, entonces ¿cómo, *cuando* vamos a salir adelante?

Angela (2002 467-477)<sup>76</sup> If these people come, who supposedly haven't lived with much poverty, who didn't have difficulties, because sometimes people think that by having money she or he has stopped being Black, that by having money he or she has stopped having difficulties. I mean, if, when these people aren't in decision-making positions we are going to advance, but if these people are in decision-making positions we aren't going to advance very much because they tarnish things themselves, make sure things don't advance, I mean knowledge. They're always saying that it has to be well-prepared people in such a place. They are marginalizing us, Blacks themselves are marginalizing Blacks. So, that is one of the difficulties we're facing...

### **Black challenges to obstacles**

**Overcoming separation and creating visibility.** A few Black women commented that Black organizations were the principal means to overcome the separation or individualization within the Black community that had been encouraged among Blacks and also assumed by them as a survival technique. Angela, a popular sector Black leader, explained that Black women and their problems had not been taken into account in their neighborhoods; that they were ignored, in part, because they had to assimilate in order to survive. Now, she explained, Blacks still were not considered part of the neighborhood, but she saw the strengthening of Black organizations as a way to gain visibility and be acknowledged in the future.

Angela (2002 33-37)<sup>77</sup> ...Black women's organization activities still aren't very visible because, really, neighborhoods haven't taken us into account. We were

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<sup>76</sup> ...si viene, esta gente que supuestamente ya no vivió mucho pobreza, ya no, ya no tuvo dificultades, porque a veces la gente piensa que tener plata ha dejado de ser negro, que tener plata ha dejado de, de tener sus, sus dificultades, no, o sea si cuando esta gente no está en puestos de decisión nosotros vamos a avanzar, pero si esta gente está en puestos de decisión no vamos avanzar mucho porque ellas mismas ponen las taras no cierto, para el no avance, o sea, el conocimiento siempre están diciendo tiene que ser gente bien preparada para que esté en tal parte, o, nos están marginando, los negros mismo marginan a los negros, entonces, un poco es eso la dificultad,...

<sup>77</sup> ...no es muy visible todavía la organización de mujeres negras, porque realmente, una que los barrios no nos han tomado como en cuenta no, he, como que nosotros sea, éramos unos más pero sin tomar en cuenta nuestra problemática, de arrendamiento, de educación, de nuestra cultura, o sea nosotros en, muchas veces tenemos que enculturizarnos no cierto, coger las otras culturas, para poder sobrevivir dentro de, de el barrio, de la población que estemos. (40-44) ...más bien nuestras organizaciones estamos haciendo autónomamente, no como, no como barriales, o sea, en el barrio no nos toman en cuenta, no, no somos

just a few more people. They didn't acknowledge our problems with renting, education, our culture. I mean, many times, we have to acculturate, right, take on other cultures in order to survive within the neighborhood, within whatever population we might be in. (40-44) ...Actually, we've been forming our organizations autonomously, not as part of neighborhoods. In the neighborhood, they don't consider us. We're not part of neighborhood committees, we aren't part of anything that has to do with the neighborhood's organization. So, for that reason, our priority is to strengthen the organization of the Black people so that we become more and more visible, because up until now we've been invisible...

**Rights.** Black women also commented that participating in Black organizations gave them the opportunity to learn their rights as citizens of Ecuador, both as women and as Blacks. This posed a significant challenge to the traditional order of things since, as one Black leader stated, the rest of society wanted Blacks to “stay in their place” and not demand their rights. She explained that the Ecuadorian government might pretend all is equal, but that Blacks were often required to do more than mestizo people. For example, she clarified, if you were a young Black applying for school, you could be an excellent student but you would have to fill many requirements extraneous to the ones for mestiza students before your application would be accepted. Then, if more than one Black had applied, the school would only pick one Black to enter regardless of the others' qualifications. In the end, she said everyone has rights and obligations according to the constitution, but the Ecuadorian state and Ecuadorian society were only interested in demanding obligations from Blacks and not fulfilling their rights.

Elsa (2001 635-641)<sup>78</sup> ...the moment I am a citizen, I have the right to all that the Constitution says I have a right to as a citizen. The moment I am recognized as

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parte de la directiva barrial, no somos parte de nada, de la organización del barrio y entonces por eso es que nuestra prioridad es un poco fortalecer la organización del pueblo negro para que vaya he, siendo visible no, porque hasta estos momentos si ha sido invisible...

<sup>78</sup> ...en el momento en el que yo soy ciudadano, yo tengo derecho a todo lo que la constitución dice que tiene derecho el ciudadano. Y el momento en que yo soy reconocido empiezo a ejercer esos derechos, y eso es lo que no quieren, que ejerza el negro ese derecho. Ya basta con lo que considere parte del Ecuador, entonces allí tienes que quedarte callado como negro porque qué tanto estas pidiendo, sí, y allí automáticamente empiezan a negar el derecho como ciudadano, no. No lo hacen tan directa, abiertamente sino de una forma camuflada, sutil. (650-655) Y allí algo muy importante, los negros no conocemos a qué

such I begin to exercise those rights, and that's what they don't want, that the Black exercises those rights. It's enough that he or she considers himself part of Ecuador, so there you have to stay quiet as a Black because you are asking too much. Yes, there they automatically begin to deny rights as a citizen. They don't do it so directly, openly, rather in a subtle, camouflaged way. (650-655) And there, something very important, Blacks don't know what we have a right to. Blacks, we aren't so well informed nor so well read about what the Constitution says or what all the national and international conventions that our country has signed and ratified say. They don't know and that's another job we are going to take on within the organizations. We all should know to what we have a right and we should also know where to go when our rights are denied.

Black women's comments in this section showed that racism as well as its internalization and reproduction by Blacks caused contempt for Blacks and promoted individualism among Blacks. According to Black organization participants, these factors were the principle external and internal elements that undermined attempts to build Black community within the Black Movement. These elements also weakened or limited Black Movement leaderships because they fostered disdain and distrust between Black leaders and popular sector participants. All the same, the growing appreciation of Black identity, history and community shown by organized popular sector Black women demonstrated that the Black Movement was, to some extent, beginning to change racist attitudes among its participants.

Considering the frequency with which popular sector mestiza women stated gender roles and disagreements about gender roles limited *all* women's organization participation (which I discuss next), I was surprised that organized Black women rarely mentioned gender roles as obstacles to their participation. In fact, a few Black women I met participated in the same organization as their partners. As I mentioned already,

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tenemos derecho. Los negros no nos estamos enterando tanto ni leemos tanto lo que dice la constitución y lo que dice todas las convenciones, nacionales e internacionales, que nuestro país ha asumido, ha ratificado, no conocen y esto es otro trabajo que vamos a realizar dentro de las organizaciones. Todos debemos saber a qué tenemos derecho y también debemos saber a donde acudir cuando nuestros derechos no son, nos son negados.

Black organizations used a mixed-sex approach in their meetings, discussions and courses. A Black woman activist with extensive participation in both single and mixed-sex groups felt that mixed-sex groups dealt with the gendered division of labor better than women-only groups. At the same time, she said that all-female groups, like those in which popular sector mestiza women participated, gave women the opportunity to speak more freely than they might with men. Below, are the differences and, in her opinion, the benefits of the two approaches.

Angela (2000 579-609)<sup>79</sup> ... For example, before our partners came home on Friday and set to drinking, the woman had to take on all of their responsibilities and now, for example, men and the women that have partners say that yes, it does them a lot of good to be in an organization because the men, they're taking on a double role, helping the woman with the children, with the house in various activities, they're sharing activities. So, it seems to me that this happens in a mixed organization because it always happens that when we're divided, it's always the gender division right, the women are over there and the men over here... [R: And now, what are the benefits of being in a women's organization?] ... the benefits of participating in a women's organization, I think that is it much more important because we as women we express our feelings, our difficulties, because when we are with men it's like we don't want to say what happens to us. But, when we are in a group of only women...you can say more than you would normally because you can free yourself, because you can express what you think and what you feel. So, I think that these are very important concepts for women's organizations.

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<sup>79</sup> ... por ejemplo antes los compañeros llegaba viernes se agarraban a tomar, la mujer tenía que asumir todas sus responsabilidades, y ahora los compañeros y las compañeras que están con compañero, por ejemplo dicen que sí, que les hace bien estar en la organización porque están asumiendo los compañeros un doble rol ayudándole a la compañera con los niños, con la casa, en algunas actividades, están compartiendo actividades, entonces eso me parece estar en una organización mixta, porque siempre cuando estamos divididos, siempre es la división de género, no cierto, ah las mujeres están allá y nosotros acá... [R: Y ahora de, beneficios de participación en una organización de mujeres?] ... los beneficios de participación en la organización de mujeres, creo que es mucho más importante porque nosotros como mujeres expresamos nuestros sentimientos, nuestras dificultades, porque cuando estamos con hombres como que no queremos decir lo que pasamos, pero cuando estamos en grupo solo de mujeres, ... puedes expresar más de lo debido porque puedes soltarte, porque puedes expresar lo que piensas y lo que sientes. Entonces creo que son bases muy importantes dentro de la organización de mujeres...

### **Obstacles to popular sector mestiza women's participation and learning in organizations: Men and machismo**

Although I observed discrimination against popular sector mestiza women because of their color, they never mentioned this issue as an obstacle to the formation of their organizations or to their participation in organizations. Instead, the majority of organized popular sector mestiza women commented that men (especially male partners) and *machismo* (of men and women) inhibited women's activities in general and, especially, prevented women from entering organizations and/or greatly limited their participation if they joined. As a response to popular sector mestiza women's issues with men and *machismo*, women's NGOs in Quito like CAM promoted Vargas' (1993) feminist popular education as well as her emphasis on formation and/or consolidation of all-female groups. As Angela expressed above and one ex-NGO worker clarified, women's NGO organizers hoped the all-female approach would encourage popular sector women to discuss their problems and give them the freedom to find ways to confront these problems.

While this all-female approach and feminist popular education certainly had its benefits (as discussed earlier in this chapter), women also mentioned that it set limitations on the possibility of incorporating popular sector mestizo men into popular sector mestiza women's organizational activities (from time to time). This made it hard, said organized popular sector mestiza women, to show their male partners what they did in organizations. As a result, a minority of popular sector mestiza women said that their male partners felt their participation was "good" because they (male partners) knew participation gave their female partner a chance to get out of the house, to learn things, and to obtain benefits for the household. These women, however, acknowledged the difficulties faced by other women when it came to participation. They and their co-

members knew that men in the community looked upon organization women as loose (*callejeras*), as lazy gossips (*amigueras*), as rebellious, rabble raisers or as feminist guerrillas.

Susi (2000 490-498)<sup>80</sup> ... We also helped organize another barrio, but there because of the parochial council itself, there everything fell apart because they thought we were guerrilla women, how is it, that we were turning the women into guerrillas, they'd said they were going to throw us to the dogs and all of that, you see, because we gave them courses, making them recognize their rights, women's rights, all of that. I mean, the *machismo* of men that has always existed, that's it, so they talked about it to their husbands and they thought that we were guerrillas. So, to not get into any trouble with this parochial council we pulled out, just for making women react, for having them learn the rights each woman has.

Non-participating community women and participants' household members, unfortunately, also tended to have a negative opinion of popular sector mestiza women in organizations.

Isabel (2000 709-718)<sup>81</sup> ...even women said that we were a bunch of lazy bums, that we mustn't have anything to do at home and for that reason we were dedicated to going to our meetings. They didn't appreciate us. So, it was even worse with the spouses, uff, the fight with the spouses has been really hard, even with the older children there's been problems because they didn't appreciate, the didn't truly understand the role that we were undertaking and the other benefits, that they too were going to participate in the benefits that we obtained. So, there

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<sup>80</sup> ... en otro barrio también les formamos, pero ahí por la, así mismo por la junta parroquial y ahí todo se desbarató porque creían que nosotros éramos unas mujeres guerrilleras, como es que les estábamos haciendo guerrilleras a las señoras, y habían dicho que nos iban a botar los perros y todo eso veré, o sea porque, o sea lo que les dábamos cursos, es haciéndoles reconocer los derechos no, los derechos de las mujeres todo eso, o sea que el machismo que siempre ha existido de los hombres, eso es lo único, entonces eso conversaban eso, a los maridos y todo eso y pensaron que nosotros éramos unas guerrilleras, entonces ya por no tener problemas con esa junta parroquial nos retiramos nosotros, por hacerle reaccionar a las mujeres, por hacerles conocer los derechos de cada mujer.

<sup>81</sup> ...las mismas mujeres nos decían que somos unas vagas, que por qué no tenemos quehacer en las casas nos dedicamos andar así en nuestras reuniones, no nos valoraban, entonces peor los esposos, pues uf, esa ha sido una lucha muy dura con los esposos, incluso hasta con los hijos mayores, habido problemas porque no valoraban, no se daban cuenta realmente del rol que estábamos desempeñando y en los beneficios que ellos también iban a ser partícipes de los beneficios que nosotros consigamos, entonces había mucho problema desde el hogar y con las mujeres de afuera igual, nos tildaban de vagas, de desocupadas, que no estamos preocupando de los demás, pero realmente no era eso, pero no valoraban y eso ha sido muy difícil hacerles que tomen un poquito de conciencia de lo que significa ser mujer organizada y ha sido un lucha terrible con las mismas mujeres.

was a lot of trouble coming from home and from women outside of the organization as well, they labeled us as lazy, as careless, that we weren't worried about the rest, but really, it wasn't that, but they didn't understand and that has been really difficult, making them just a little bit aware of what it means to be an organized woman and it has been a terrible fight, even with other women.

Frequently, mestiza participants explained that they had problems with their spouses because they (their spouses) were worried about what women learned in organizations (that they would try to become better than their husbands or become feminists), worried that women would find lovers (using meetings as a cover for this activity), worried that women were going to ignore the household and children, etc. For example, issues with men came to a head in GMV when women's organizational work on infrastructure issues and participation in NGO-facilitated activities during the "golden years" required women to spend time outside of the home and "on the streets."<sup>82</sup> According to NGO workers involved with GMV, the intense involvement expected of participants was, looking back, overwhelming, did not take women's household responsibilities into account and might have provoked or worsened some of the problems women had at home.

### **Challenges to men and machismo**

Popular sector mestiza women's organizations and the women's NGOs working with them taught women, by sharing experiences and suggestions, how to respond to men's negative reactions, especially how to report abuse when they felt the need to. They also learned how to negotiate their participation with their husbands, by showing the benefits the organization provided to the home and to the woman herself. At the time I spoke with them, most women gave the impression that they had "successfully" negotiated their participation. In this case, successful meant that they could regularly

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<sup>82</sup> This example refers to events 16 years past, please refer to the appendix to see GMV's current activities.

participate without worrying about abuse when they came home. Yet, even when negotiation was at a stable point, I noticed that women were frequently anxious at meetings. When entering the meeting, they always said they hoped the gathering would end soon. Many tried to leave early, commenting that they hadn't finished/started cooking dinner or that their children would get angry if they didn't go home soon. It seemed some of this anxiety was due to the "problems" they might face if they didn't do what was expected of them.

Anita (2000 331-335)<sup>83</sup> HE likes that I go to groups like these, but as long as I don't forget about the house, in the afternoon, when he's there, yes, he says "don't come home well into the night, I want you home early" and, like always, in order to go out you have to leave everything clean and ready, so that way there's no problem. On the other hand, when I arrive late or at night, uff (R: What does he say?) "No, well, in that case, if you can't come early it'd be better for you to quit," he says, then yes, but beyond that, he likes me to participate...

Despite their participation and the changes it had made in some women's households, women's anxiety during meetings and quotes like the above indicate that most participants still had to fulfill all of their traditional women's roles at home or they would run into trouble. Women from two different popular sector women's movements pointed out that a woman might participate in an organization, but if she still reproduced or recreated *machismo* at home, nothing would change.

Mercedes (2000 326-330)<sup>84</sup> ... because the profound change that we, as organized women, are waiting for, won't happen if we ourselves don't change this

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<sup>83</sup> ÉL le gusta que asista así a estos grupos pero sin descuidar la casa, a la tarde que ya esté ahí, si, el no, que no me haga de noche, que esté en la casa temprano y como siempre para uno salir tiene que dejar todo arreglado entonces por ese lado no hay problema, sino que cuando llego muy tarde ahí si, o de noche ucha, [R: ¿Qué dice?] No pues en ese caso si no vas a poder venir temprano mejor retírate, dice, ahí sí pero de lo contrario no, a él le gusta que participe...

<sup>84</sup> ... porque el cambio profundo que nosotras estamos esperando como mujeres de organizaciones no se va a dar si nosotros mismas no empezamos a cambiar esa forma machista, porque quienes formamos a nuestro hijos realmente somos las mujeres, entonces si nosotras hemos creado una sociedad machista ha sido por nuestras formas, y a esos patronos que nos han impuesto desde muy pequeñas... (359-362) ...entonces no podemos decir que sólo las mujeres, o sólo los varones, debemos complementarnos, debemos tratar de ser

*machista* way of being, because who really forms our children? We women do. So, if we have created a *machista* society it has been because of our ways, and those patterns that they've imposed on us from very little... (359-362) ... so, we can't say that only women or only men, we have to complement each other, we should try to be the beings that we are, with our peculiarities but we have to be complementary in order to get better results, even with our own children.

As I mentioned earlier, many popular sector mestiza women used organization participation to fulfill their education needs. So, their negotiation with their partners was not only for the chance to be in a group, to make friends and to share problems, it was a negotiation to keep learning. For some women, this need to learn and to participate was worth a tremendous fight, even if it meant separation or divorce and being the sole adult responsible for the household.

What I wonder about, but to which I don't have many answers, is: if the organizations in which popular sector Black women participated avoided or abated some gender issue conflicts by incorporating men and women into activities why couldn't or didn't their mestiza counterparts do the same? Mestiza organization participants said their attempts to include men through occasional activities failed, and, as far as I could tell, CAM, the women's NGO I present as a case study, did not work with men on any issues at all. CAM's decision was puzzling considering the multiple problems popular sector participants had with men. Lisa, a former NGO worker, believed that the only reason a women's organization she started in Lago Agrio (a principal town in Ecuador's Amazon region) worked and was still working when we talked, was because she and organization members worked with men to help them understand that women's participation was important.

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los seres que somos, con nuestras particularidades pero tenemos que ser complementarios para obtener mejores resultados, inclusive con nuestros mismos hijos.

Lisa (2001 472-481)<sup>85</sup> ...when I went to Lago Agrio, I saw that the women with whom we were working started to have problems at home,... for going out, for going to a meeting, for going to a workshop, they started to have problems with their husbands. The husbands began to make them choose, you either stay in the organization or you stay home, things like that. So, when we came to see things like that...we started to work with the spouses too, with the children. That's how we did it in the women's leadership schools, we also used to work with husbands, with partners, and what was so successful about the work in Sucumbios (the province where Lago Agrio is located), was having obtained the men's support. Now, the leaders' partners are really cool, they turned into our pals, because, in addition, they came to value the change in their women, the changes in their household, the changes in themselves, it was a really beautiful experience.

From popular sector mestiza women's stories of how learning in organizations changed their lives and posed challenges to issues that restricted women's activities, it seemed that their actions were changing society bit by bit. Yet, how far and how fast would these changes go if popular sector mestizo men were left to the side in the fight against *machismo*? Would popular sector mestiza women participant's efforts at home create lasting change or, at least, affect the children in their households?

### **Chapter summary**

In this chapter, popular sector mestiza and Black women's accounts showed the knowledge, empowerment and agency they obtained through organization participation that was supported by NGOs, Black Movement leaders and Comboni missionaries. These experiences appeared to set the foundations for organized popular sector mestiza and Black women to become like the agents of social and political change portrayed in

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<sup>85</sup> ...cuando yo fui a Lago Agrio, veía que las mujeres con las que trabajábamos empezaban a tener problemas en sus casas... por salir, por ir a la reunión, por ir al taller, empezaron a tener problemas con los maridos, el marido les empezó hacer escoger o te quedas en la organización o te quedas en la casa, así cosas, entonces cuando nosotros nos tocó ver eso... empezamos a trabajar también con los maridos, con los hijos, entonces así mismo hacíamos en las escuelas de mujeres lideresas, y también trabajábamos con los maridos, con los compañeros no, y el éxito del trabajo de Sucumbíos es haber logrado el apoyo de los varones, no, entonces ahora los compañeros de las dirigentas son super chéveres, se hicieron nuestros panas, porque además fueron valorando mucho el cambio de sus mujeres, los cambios en su casa, los cambios de ellos mismo, entonces fue una cosa bien linda...

Lind (1992), Rodríguez (1994), Miller (1991) and Stephen (1997). Popular sector mestiza women demonstrated the potential to become agents of change through the economic skills they gained and the transformations they fostered in their household gender relations and in their community infrastructure (basic services). Popular sector Black women, as part of a Black Movement that paralleled the new social movements described by Melucci (1988), Foweraker (1995) and Wade (1997), indicated their potential as agents of social change through their use of newly acquired, identity-based strategies to visibilize and to confront discrimination against and within the Black community.

At the same time, there were issues that limited or presented obstacles to organized popular sector mestiza and Black women's potential as agents of social and political change. I mentioned that the absence of education about formal politics for organized popular sector mestiza women's might have limited their ability to create political change. While I concluded that Martin (1990), Miller (1991) and Arizpe (1990, 1998) might not feel popular sector mestiza women's minimal knowledge of formal politics would limit women's potential as agents of change, Foweraker (1998) and women political activists in Quito were very concerned that this informational gap would prevent popular sector women's demands from being incorporated into political agendas and/or policy. Popular sector mestiza women, however, were more concerned about the obstacles men and *machismo* posed to their participation and learning. Their accounts were more confident than I was (with my advantage of hindsight) about the ability of organizational experience and education to confront gender issues like *machismo*.

Organized popular sector Black women, in contrast, felt their potential to learn and to create change was limited by the Black Movement's avoidance of economic issues as well as the internalization and reproduction of racism by Blacks. While these issues

were frustrating, popular sector Black women explained that they were optimistic they would learn how to better confront these issues during the “golden years” of their organizations. Unfortunately, popular sector Black women felt they had not made much headway on economic issues or the internalization and reproduction of racism by the time I met them (2000-2003).

As I will clarify in the next chapters, events after the “golden years” left organized popular sector mestiza and Black women wondering if their struggle for change at home and in their communities could advance. They all discussed how Ecuador’s economic and political crises during 1999 and 2000 affected their ability to participate. Some women also stressed that the recent distancing of NGOs, Black Movement leaders and/or Comboni missionaries limited their organizations’ access to new knowledge, an element that this chapter showed was fundamental in organized popular sector mestiza and Black women’s efforts to change the traditional order of things at home and in their society.

## Chapter 6: Start of a Decline

As I discussed in the previous chapter, popular sector mestiza women were pleased, for the most part, with their accomplishments as part of an organization and with the personal and educational benefits organizations provided. Black women found similar benefits in their organizations and, also, learned a lot about their identities as Black Ecuadorians. Yet, as their interviews made very apparent, the economic and political crises that hit Ecuador between 1999 and 2000 completely disrupted their lives within and outside of organizations. These crises did not spare social institutions or the middle-class and intensified the economic needs of NGO employees as well. Here, I present a general description of critical political and economic events between 1999 and 2000 as well as some related statistics to show their lasting impact on popular sector mestiza and Black women, their organizations and, also, NGOs. I feel these events helped bring an end to the “golden years” of popular sector mestiza and Black women’s organizations; hence, the title of this chapter, Start of a Decline.

### Changes from 1998 to 2000

**Setting the stage, 1998.** El Niño,<sup>86</sup> a sharp drop in oil prices (Ecuador’s primary source of revenue) and economic crises in East Asia, Brazil and Russia were all blamed as events in 1998 that set the stage for Ecuador’s economic and political crises in 1999 and 2000 (World Bank 2000a, among many other sources analyzing the period). Nationally-produced television and newsprint analyses also specified corruption in the banking system as a factor behind the crises. By the end of 1998, annual inflation was at

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<sup>86</sup> El Niño is the name for the weather changes that occur, more or less every four years, when there is a shift in the oceanic currents, from cold to warm, that run along Ecuador’s coast. The warm currents bring torrential rains and flooding to the coastal region of Ecuador, destroying crops and infrastructure.

45%, unemployment at 11.5% and gross rates of underemployment were at 45.8% compared to 9.2% and 40.4% rates respectively for 1997, and 6.5%, 45.5% for 1988 (León and Vos 2000). Meanwhile, poverty rates, based on the number of people who could not purchase a basic basket of food goods, were 46% for 1998 (World Bank 2000a).

**1999.** In 1999, economic crisis hit the country hard and left the population staggering. The sucre, Ecuador's currency at the time, devalued 206% in 1999 (Guzman 2000). The GDP contracted 4.1% from the first quarter of 1998 to the first quarter of 1999 (World Bank 2000a), and annual inflation went from 56.5% in July to 60.7% by the end of 1999 (Vos 2000). To make things worse, the Ecuadorian government had to skip a Brady Bond interest payment, setting off alarms among foreign investors and stalling IMF loan negotiations (Beckerman 2002).

In an attempt to prevent people from withdrawing all of their highly devalued money from banking institutions and adding a bank crisis to the situation, banks closed for nearly a week in March of 1999 and, later, most deposits were frozen for a year (Beckerman 2002). Several large banks went broke after they reopened.<sup>87</sup> The Ecuadorian version of the FDIC (called the AGD) did not have the funds to repay customers of the foreclosed banks because the national government had spent all AGD funds and nearly emptied the national treasury bailing out several bankrupt financial institutions.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, the clients of the foreclosed banks effectively lost their money (although the AGD promised partial returns at some indefinite, future date) while clients of the remaining banks had limited access to their deposits even after the yearlong freeze.

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<sup>87</sup> 10 out of 40 banks went broke from August 1998 to June 1999 (*The Economist* 1999).

<sup>88</sup> The governmental rescue package for one bank alone cost \$700 million (North 1999).

I wasn't in Quito at the time, but friends' anecdotes about the crisis painted a bleak picture. They explained that jobs were nearly impossible to find and that those available paid a pittance. Companies went bankrupt from morning to night because of the money they lost through devaluation and bank crises. As a result, one friend was hired and fired in the same day because the company closed before he had a chance to work.

According to estimates by the Superintendent of Companies and the Chamber of Small Industry, 200,000 and 100,000 people, respectively, lost their jobs in these areas the first six months of 1999 (Guzman 2000). Urban unemployment was 15.6% and underemployment 51% in May 1999 (World Bank 2000a). Poverty rates, based on consumption, measured the extreme poor at 20% and poor at 55% of the total population in 1999 (Parandekar, Vos and Winkler 2002).

**2000.** On January 10, 2000 (six days before I arrived in Quito), then-president Mahuad froze the value of the sucre at 25,000 to a dollar and presented the idea of changing Ecuador's currency to the US Dollar (Guzman 2000). The switch over to the dollar, or dollarization, was as Mahuad admitted later, a political decision more than an economic one. National economists and concerned Ecuadorians complained that Ecuador would lose sovereignty and fiscal control by making its economy reliant upon the decisions of the United States.

Shortly after I arrived in the field, Mahuad was thrown out of (or fled) the presidency on January 21, 2000 when a combined group of mid-level military officials and indigenous leaders overtook the National Congress. Concerns about undemocratic procedure, about "Indians" leading the country and about how the world would react, especially the US and IMF, were aired in households and on national television. Within a matter of hours, however, the vice president was proclaimed president with the full

support of top military officials. Meanwhile, “rebellious” military officers and indigenous were removed from the Congressional building and dollarization remained economic policy. According to the Ecuadorian media, the transfer of power to the vice president maintained “democratic procedure,” had US approval and returned a sense of stability to the country.

The economic impact of Mahuad’s dollarization plan and departure was reflected in 78% yearly inflation (January 1999 to January 2000) and 14.3% monthly inflation for January 2000 (INEC, DIPLA-DIMAE 2003). Wages were simply converted from sucres to dollars with no increase for inflation.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, the real minimum wage fell 25% compared to 1999 (Vos 2000). Of course, even with terrible pay, very few jobs were available. Petroleum jobs, some of the best paid in Ecuador, offered around \$160 per month to work in the jungle seven days a week, sixteen hours a day for shifts of unknown length. Overall, people who considered themselves middle-class were tense about the economic situation and the popular sectors were desperate.

As a result of the above factors, many Ecuadorians decided to leave the country to seek employment opportunities. Between 1999 and 2000, a net total of 267,000 Ecuadorians emigrated; reportedly 7,000 per month in 2000 went to Spain alone (National Direction of Migration data from 2000 in Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002). Ecuador’s total population is approximately 12 million, so roughly 2.2% of the population left the country from 1999 to 2000. Ecuadorians abroad, it seemed, worked hard to help those they left behind; remittances in 2000 were 8.6% of the GDP, up from 4.3% in 1998 (Beckerman and Cortés-Douglas 2002).

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<sup>89</sup> According to friends and family in Ecuador, previous to dollarization, labor laws demanded wage adjustments twice yearly to confront inflation. Wage increases were always minimal, however, and never par with inflation.

The new presidential administration and national government focused on continuing neoliberal reforms so the IMF would not cut off loan payments and the country could keep paying off its growing foreign debt (Carrière 2001). In March of 2000, the Ecuadorian National Congress passed a packet of progressive neoliberal reforms that proposed to privatize public electricity, telecommunications, and hydrocarbon companies; facilitate private sector entry into the aforementioned sectors; and, make labor legislation more flexible in order to encourage the entrance of foreign companies into Ecuador (Beckerman and Cortés-Douglas 2002, 100). In attempts to meet the demands of IMF loan agreements, the new administration also raised taxes and reduced gasoline subsidies which led to increased bus fares, transportation costs and food prices (The Economist 2001, Beckerman and Cortés-Douglas 2002, local media reports).

By September of 2000, the month the U.S. dollar officially became the currency that ran Ecuador's economy, annual inflation reached 108% (INEC, DIPLA-DIMAE 2003). Living with these rates of inflation meant daily price increases, especially for food. For the poorest 15% of the population, basic expenses were 3.13 times their household income (Guzman 2000). In economic terms, popular sector mestiza and Black women were falling backwards and desperately needed new sources of income. Several members of one popular sector mestiza women's organization became foster mothers for an international adoption agency in order to support their households in crisis. The agency gave them abandoned infants and toddlers to care for until it found adoptive parents abroad. The stipends they received as foster mothers, women commented, helped with household expenses and made a significant difference in their quality of life. The emotional price could be high, however. Many women said that they did not become foster mothers because they would not be able to stand separating from the children upon adoption.

Considering their growing knowledge of dollarization and search for ways to deal with Ecuador's newest economic crisis, I asked popular sector mestiza and Black women how the crisis had impacted their individual households. The first thing most women mentioned was that their diet had changed for the worse. Food was just too expensive thanks to price increases caused by inflation linked to dollarization. All of them drastically reduced the amount of meat, milk and cheese their families consumed. Many women's families ate fewer meals (usually only one meal a day) and ate only very small portions of eggs, fruits, beans and vegetables. Because rice and potatoes were still relatively affordable (thanks to overproduction), they increased carbohydrate consumption significantly to make up for reductions elsewhere. Some participants utilized knowledge gained in past organization courses on nutrition to try to balance the household diet on a significantly reduced budget. Others recalled past courses on how to make wheat gluten, soy milk and tofu (*queso de soya*) and used these products to supplement or replace meat proteins and milk in their diets. Not all the women in groups learned how to or had the time to make these supplemental products, however. Overall, participants' comments regarding diet were similar to a 1999 survey of women participating in the Bono Solidario program<sup>90</sup> where 91% of respondents said their households had stopped consuming some type of basic food (Ernst, Acosta Maldonado and Tamayo 2000, 28).

One thing participants stressed that they were trying not to change was the household education budget. They did everything possible to keep their children in

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<sup>90</sup> The Bono Solidario was a supplemental income program initiated at the end of 1998 with the intention of helping "the poor" deal with reduced/eliminated subsidies on cooking gas and electricity (Parandekar, Vos and Winkler 2002). By the time I came to Ecuador, it had turned into a pseudo-welfare program for low-income women (mothers with underage children and elderly) that paid recipients \$15/mo. According to Parandekar, Vos and Winkler 2002 (152), adjustments in value meant that program paid \$11.50/mo. to low-income mothers in early 2002.

school. They tried to cut costs by buying fewer school supplies and school uniforms, but schools demanded maintenance and wage supplements from parents on top of increased tuition and fees. So, despite their efforts, some women had to take their children out of school because their labor was necessary to acquire basic household necessities. Their comments made me recall interviews where women said they had left school to work and support themselves as well as younger siblings due to a change in the family's economic situation.

Black women participating in Pueblo Negro organizations faced economic issues similar to popular sector mestiza women, but they tended to be more severe. In general, Black women (and men) faced higher rates of poverty and unemployment than mestiza women due to racial discrimination that limited education and job possibilities.<sup>91</sup> So, organized Black women explained, many Blacks dedicated their time to finding employment that would help them to get by (getting by meant having food and housing on a daily basis) and rarely had time to “waste” (or so non-participants thought) in an organization. The worsened economic situation made people even more focused on economic needs and made it very difficult for Black organizations to draw in new members and maintain the few participants they had. Organized Black women added that their grassroots groups were further weakened by the Black Movement's continued avoidance of economic issues in its programming.

### **How organization-oriented education responded to the crisis**

Since dollarization had become inevitable, organized popular sector mestiza women decided to learn more about it and attended NGO-sponsored courses on the topic.

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<sup>91</sup> There are no official un/underemployment statistics in Ecuador stratified by race or ethnicity. As many Black women pointed out to me, however, mestiza society expected Black women and men to be good maids and doormen/security guards, respectively, and nothing else. These jobs offered long hours, low pay, instability and no time to study, even in night schools. Attempts to work in other sectors were usually met by outright or subtle forms of discrimination.

The women who assisted these courses said that the language used was too technical, however, and that they needed a “normal” person to explain dollarization to them in “plain” words. After attending a course on dollarization, I clearly understood their complaints. NGOs had selected economists and officials from competing political parties to discuss dollarization. Instead of clarifying the situation, the presenters used the courses to promote their party platform and left participants with unresolved questions and conflicting ideas about dollarization.

I was aware of only one other form of education for popular sector organizations that responded to Ecuador’s economic crisis: micro-enterprise training. The women’s NGO I focus upon within this dissertation (CAM) promoted these courses as a way to confront economic crisis. Yet, most of the popular sector mestiza women I met were not interested in these courses for, basically, two reasons. One, they considered the cost of micro-enterprise training very expensive. And, two, starting a micro-enterprise (the goal of training) required making a high risk investment in the midst of an economic crisis - precisely when popular sector mestiza women had the least ability to do so.

Very few popular sector Black women I met had even heard of the micro-enterprise training courses offered by CAM (or any other NGO). I concluded that this was yet another instance where NGOs in Quito overlooked or did not reach out to popular sector Black women for some reason I could not confirm (but which I assumed had to do with racism). A few Black women leaders I encountered were aware of micro-enterprise training courses, but they were disinterested in them for nearly the same reasons as popular sector mestiza women. One popular sector Black leader, Angela, said that micro-enterprises were not worth the trouble and disruption they caused (Black groups had been weakened by failed Comboni micro-credit projects in the past). She also pointed out that they were an NGO-style, quick fix that did not fit with the Black

Movement's interest in taking a measured, identity-based approach to issues faced by the Black population. While Angela's comments implied that the Black Movement was disinclined toward the neoliberal programming micro-enterprise training represented (I discuss this link at length in the next chapter), they also provided no alternative or response to the economic needs of popular sector Black participants. Perhaps Black Movement leaders had not yet found a way to incorporate economic issues into their identity-based programming. Or, it could be that this avoidance of economic issues reflected the tendency of some university-educated Black leaders to discriminate against or be disinterested in the needs of grassroots participants, as discussed in the previous chapter (and also noted by de la Torre 2002).

### **After the crises peaked**

**2001.** By January 2001, it seemed that Ecuador's situation had stabilized. Dollarization, although still protested, was a finished process. The people I met and the women I interviewed seemed a little less shocked. Some said dollarization had kept the country from falling into a black hole and foreign analysts felt Ecuador was on the road to recovery, albeit an uncertain one (The Economist 2001). Some analysts suggested remittances from abroad propped up Ecuador's economic recovery and pointed to statistics from the Central Bank of Ecuador showing that migrants sent \$1.4 billion home in 2001; making remittances Ecuador's second largest source of income after oil exports (Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002, The Economist 2002).<sup>92</sup> Also, annual inflation for January 2001, at 78.7%, was less than it had been when dollarization took hold in September 2000, but it had hardly changed from January 2000 (INEC, DIPLA-DIMAE 2003). Women explained that what they bought at the market with 5,000 sucres in 1999 they

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<sup>92</sup> Remittances were 2.2% of the GDP in 1997, 4.3% in 1998 and, as mentioned, 8.6% in 2000 (Beckerman and Cortés-Douglas 2002)

bought with a dollar (supposedly equivalent to 25,000 sucres) in 2001. To make things worse, their income had not increased to compensate for this change. By the end of 2001, real wages were 12% below 1997 levels (Parandekar, Vos and Winkler 2002, 129). People's purchasing power was greatly reduced, and the majority of the popular sector mestiza and Black women I encountered felt dollarization had dragged them even further into crisis.

Ecuador's government, rather than help the nation's population face crisis was intent on satisfying its standby agreement with the IMF, especially after the IMF had withheld payments mid-2000 because of delays in structural reform (Beckerman and Cortés-Douglas 2002). So, the national government tried to uphold its agreement with the IMF by raising gasoline prices another 20-30% and cooking gas prices by 100% in January 2001 (ibid.). It also authorized 12-15% public sector wage increases (ibid.), a sector that no longer includes many Ecuadorians due to two decades of privatizations (Beckerman and Cortés-Douglas 2002, Hey and Klak 1999). Massive protests, however, resulted in cooking gas prices increasing only by 60% and gasoline price increases were postponed for another year (Beckerman and Cortés-Douglas 2002).

While Ecuadorians were struggling to deal with the country's recent economic crisis, international organizations and donor agencies cut back their spending due to slowdowns in the global economy and changes in funding politics that led to a declining interest in Ecuador and the rest of Latin America. For example, with the opening of Eastern Europe, many European donor agencies shifted their attention closer to home and reduced or eliminated funding for NGOs in Latin America (Schild 1998). Also, as one women's NGO worker clarified, foreign donors interpreted Ecuador's reduced country risk rating and the national government's proclamation that Ecuador was entering

economic recovery as signs that the country had less need for increasingly scarce donor agency resources.

The decision of some donor agencies to reduce or abate their Ecuadorian programs affected NGOs as well as the middle-class women's movement and popular sector mestiza women's organizations tightly related to them. In particular, two women's NGOs and one NGO-like institutions I encountered during my research claimed they lost significant funding sources for these reasons and had to seek new programming tracks that would bring monetary resources. As I will detail in the next chapter, these changes in women's NGO programming meant popular sector mestiza women's organizations lost the external support women's NGOs had provided them. In turn, women participating in these organizations lost some of their crisis support because organizations had less to offer. With the reduction of organization assistance and worsened economic situation, popular sector mestiza women, already looking for income providing sources outside of the home, were forced to look even harder.

**2002-2003.** Sadly, when I left the field, it did not look like Ecuador's economic situation would improve anytime soon. According to the World Bank, Ecuador is a severely indebted, lower middle income country (World Bank 2003a).<sup>93</sup> The GNI (gross national income) per capita was \$1,450 in 2002 and lowered to \$1,080 in 2003 (World Bank 2003b). In 2002, unemployment was 9.2%, with 5.5% open unemployment and 3.7% hidden unemployment (INEC 2003). Meanwhile, for 2003, total unemployment was 11.7%, open unemployment 8.5% and hidden unemployment 3.2% (ibid.)

A new president, Lucio Gutierrez, took office in 2003. He was one of the military colonels involved in overthrowing Mahuad in 2000. He ran for presidency in coalition with the MPD (socialist-inclined) and Pachacutik (indigenous) parties, pledging "no" to

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<sup>93</sup> According to The Economist (2002), Ecuador's debt service consumes half of the government budget.

corruption and “no” to foreign interests. Not surprising to cynical Ecuadorians, his administration promptly forgot its pledges and Ecuadorian “negotiators” signed an IMF loan agreement in record time. This means that the so-called “negotiators” agreed to all the requirements set by the IMF - raising taxes, increasing the price of gasoline, cutting back social spending, and facilitating the privatization of public sector industries (like electricity, petroleum and telecommunications). All of these requirements, as made apparent by the involvement of the IMF (as well as the World Bank and IDB) in their endorsement, followed the lines of international, macroeconomic neoliberal policy. They also provoked inflation, put the country more in debt and placed the popular sectors in a tighter economic situation. In fact, annual inflation rose slightly in January 2003, to 10%, the month the new president took office and his new economic policy went into effect (INEC-DIPLA-DIMAE 2003). By May 2003, however, annual inflation was down to 8.25% (ibid.).

For popular sector women, national economic policy adjustments in 2003 were felt in various ways. Food prices, for example, fluctuated according to how much transport companies thought they needed to raise their prices in relation to inflation and increased gasoline prices. In April 2003, the basic basket of goods cost \$366.59 per month for the nation and \$373.06 for the highland region where Quito is located (El Comercio 2003). If you compare these costs to the minimum monthly income for a worker at \$137.91 or minimum monthly household income for a four person family at \$253.17 (ibid.), you see that the foods required for a “basic but healthy diet” were well beyond the reach of minimum wage households.

Ecuador’s neoliberal policy adjustments also meant that spending on the national education and health care system, already minimal, did not increase to match inflation. This resulted in multiple strikes, ranging from a week to a month in length, by state

hospital personnel and public school teachers. Translated in the lives of popular sector women I interviewed, the strikes meant they had no access to emergency healthcare (no one had money for non-emergency healthcare) and that they could not meet their work, income or other goals because they had to stay home and/or find emergency childcare for children not in school.

And, that is a brief overview of Ecuador's economic situation up to 2003. Popular sector women said they were frustrated with their inability to confront economic crisis and were anxious about the impact of this crisis upon their children's future. The middle-class individuals I met expressed similar emotions. Meanwhile, people of retirement age were terrified to leave their jobs for fear that it would sink them into absolute poverty and/or dependence on children economically unable to support them. Very few people felt that any group in Ecuador would make a difference in their country or could present an alternative to the government's policies. They felt powerless and worried endlessly about what the future would bring.

### **Chapter summary**

As you saw here and will see in the following chapter, Ecuador's crises and neoliberal responses to them had a significant impact on the country's economic system, popular sector mestiza and Black women as well as their organizations. Dollarization and dollar-based inflation, especially, presented new challenges that popular sector mestiza and Black women wanted to learn how to confront. Unfortunately, popular sector organizations and NGOs did not provide information on dollarization nor means to confront Ecuador's worsened economic crisis that met the expectations of organized popular sector mestiza women. Based on popular sector Black women's complaints that their economic needs and concerns were not adequately addressed, I assumed that most Black organizations were also unable to meet their members' expectations of them just

after Ecuador's economic crisis. The economic situation and organizations' minimal response to it limited popular sector mestiza and Black women's participation by, respectively, increasing the time women had to search for income (in order to make up for reduced income, decreased subsidies and more expensive public services) and reducing women's interest in participation. As a result of more and more members with less time to participate and with less interest in devoting their increasingly limited time to organizations that did not meet their expectations, popular sector mestiza and Black women's organization weakened.

The situation of popular sector mestiza and Black women, unfortunately, was not unlike that of many impoverished women around the globe. Mohanty points out that "the proliferation of structural adjustment policies around the world has reprivatized women's labor by shifting the responsibility for social welfare from the state to the household and to the women located there" (2003, 525-526). Like Mohanty, Alvarez et al indicates that "neoliberal policies... have accelerated women's poverty and increased the burden of their 'double or triple day' through the simultaneous devolution of public services to the household and the increase in women's need to perform paid work outside of the home" (2003, 570).

Although the popular sector mestiza and Black women I met were accustomed to economic difficulties, they implied or expressly stated that this most recent economic crisis (and the economic policy adjustments that came with it) had hit them harder than others. Why? As I will discuss in the next chapter, in great part it was because they felt that, unlike in the past, their organizations had limited means to help them confront the results of this newest crisis. Organized popular sector mestiza women commented that women's NGOs had withdrawn from their organizations, an action that limited (and possibly cut off) popular sector mestiza women's organizations' access to the information

and financial resources that had helped them achieve results and provide benefits in the past. I will argue that this NGO withdrawal was the result of the increasingly neoliberal (meaning market-focused, short-term, individualized, competitive) nature of NGO programming in Quito and much of Latin America (Schild 2000, Alvarez et al 2003).

Popular sector Black women commented that, after Ecuador's most recent crisis, their frustrations with the Black Movement grew. Black Movement programming (and the leaders who created it) still avoided popular sector participants' economic needs despite Ecuador's worsened economic situation. And, now that the Black Movement had distanced itself from the Comboni missionaries, popular sector participants felt that they had even fewer places to look for informational or financial support.

These experiences of withdrawal and rejection, which I cover in the next chapter, made organized popular sector mestiza and Black women feel stranded and without the experience or knowledge to obtain the external support they needed to confront economic and socio-political needs. Some organized popular sector mestiza women also began to feel women's NGOs had abandoned them and/or were much more critical of NGO activities and interests in general. In a marked contrast from the "beginnings" and "golden years," NGOs took on an adversarial role in organized popular sector mestiza women's accounts and, ironically, became ideal supporters in the minds of organized popular sector Black women who sought NGO aid but were overlooked or ignored (as always has been the case, according to organized popular sector Black women's past experiences with NGOs as well as Halpern and Twine 2000 and Wade 1997).

## **Chapter 7: A Change in Era**

The economic situation in Ecuador almost never was “good,” especially for the people who made up the popular sectors. Thus, from the initiation of popular sector women’s organizations, the fight to satisfy immediate economic needs and the fight for women’s rights often seemed to be at odds with each other. Sometimes these fights could work together as shown in the chapter “The Golden Years” (for other Quito-based evidence of this, see Müller 1994, Lind 1992, Rodríguez 1994). Unfortunately, due to the severity of Ecuador’s most recent economic and political crises and the significantly decreased involvement of women’s NGOs in popular sector mestiza women’s organizations that followed, the possibility of continuing a fight that dealt with both women’s economic and socio-political needs seemed very unlikely to popular sector mestiza women’s organization participants. As I indicated above, while Ecuador’s neoliberal responses to its crises, especially the reduction in social services and subsidies, brought the country much needed loans, they worked against popular sector mestiza and Black women by not taking their limitations into consideration. Without the resources or information NGOs had provided or could provide, as you will see in this chapter, popular sector mestiza and Black women’s organizations felt they were unable to provide the education, economic strategies and jobs that members wanted or expected from them.

When commenting on NGO absence, some participants implied NGOs had abandoned them while others, much more critical, felt NGOs had used popular sector women’s organizations to obtain benefits. CAM, a women’s NGO presented here as a case study, meanwhile, claimed that their mission and objectives had experienced a change in era; that they now intended to provide micro-enterprise training to popular

sector individuals and work on policy. The NGO critics I interviewed and encountered in parallel studies showed that NGOs like CAM reflected a larger, neoliberal trend in NGO programming, a trend that promoted neoliberal ideologies among popular sectors and limited popular sector organizations' ability to find group approaches to their economic needs.

#### **CHANGES IN DEMANDS ON ORGANIZATIONS DUE TO WOMEN'S CHANGING ECONOMIC SITUATIONS**

As of 2000, participants in popular sector mestiza organizations commented that they were more preoccupied with economic problems than in the past and that their organizations offered less of the education-based programming they valued. Although they all said they enjoyed participating, some were disinclined to continue participating and others greatly reduced their activity. They felt there were fewer benefits to be obtained from participation because their organization activities were unable to help them confront Ecuador's economic crises with jobs, economic strategies and new learning opportunities that would present alternative ways to deal with crisis. Veteran participants said they remained in organizations, despite decreasing activities, because the organization had become an integral part of their lives. Yet I noticed, even for veterans, activity levels were minimal. One veteran pointed out that she and other members still had the desire to participate, but the economy inhibited their activities.

Taña Group (2001 668-676)<sup>94</sup> It's that the economic situation has a lot of influence too, because if we see that, I am speaking as the organization for

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<sup>94</sup> ...que la situación económica también influye bastante, porque si vemos que nosotros por ejemplo como organización hablo, no, veo que en mi hogar se está suscitando cosas que verdaderamente porque por la cuestión económica está complicado en mi hogar, no pues no me voy a salir, voy a dejarlos en la casa tirados no, o sea sí influye también la situación económica, la situación del país... O sea nuestra ilusión queremos nosotros también en las marchas no faltar en ninguna marchar, queremos ir a salir a protestar, pero a veces la situación económica, es bastante crítica no nos permite, incluso ahora ya 20 centavos sí reemplaza haciendo alguna gestión para allá, para acá, y se acabó el dólar, se acabó el dólar, sólo en el pasaje, entonces sí nos cohibimos un poquito de, por la situación económica

example, I see that in my home things are happening because the economic situation in my household is complicated. So, I'm not going to go out, leave them alone at home, no. So, yes, the economic situation has its influence, as well as the country's situation... I mean our dream is to be in the marches too, to not miss a single march, we want to go out to protest, but sometimes the economic situation, it's really quite critical, and it doesn't allow us. Even now, twenty cents (bus fare) makes a difference, you go to do something here, over there and you've used up a dollar, only in bus fares. So, yes, we are a little inhibited a little by the economic situation.

**Financing and starting income-producing projects.** Women in popular sector mestiza organizations frequently complained that their organizations no longer had the financing or technical support they needed for courses or to start projects, especially income-producing projects. Without courses and without income-producing projects, organizations lost members and found it impossible to attract new ones. As Isabel said, with everyone so focused on economic crisis, it was difficult to interest women in non-economic organization benefits without first providing for their economic needs.

Isabel (2000 1456-1464)<sup>95</sup> I think that, at the beginning, it is always difficult to call the women, to get them to organize. Well, within our community I think that's not so much the case, but in marginal neighborhoods, for instance, it is really difficult because now everyone is more concerned about the economic situation, they (the women) are looking for some way to sustain their household, their kids. So, maybe, it's a really secondary thing, the matter of organizing, because really they don't know what it means to be organized. So, I think that until one manages to raise the consciousness of women, what it means to be organized is something really difficult, once a woman is really aware of what this means, then, yes, things are going to move along (*enrumbarse*) in a better way and it is going to be easier for the rest of women to join an organization.

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<sup>95</sup> (1456-1464) Yo pienso que siempre al principio es muy difícil, es muy difícil llamar a las mujeres a organizarse, bueno ya dentro de nuestra comunidad creo que ya no mucho, pero en los barrios marginales digamos, es muy difícil porque todas las personas están ahorita preocupadas más de la situación económica, que ellas buscan de alguna manera buscar el sustento para su hogar, para sus hijos que quizá es una cosa muy secundaria el hecho de organizarse, porque realmente no conocen lo que significa ser organizada, entonces yo pienso que hasta lograr concientizar a la mujer, lo que significa ser organizada es algo muy difícil, una vez que la mujer realmente esté consciente de ese significado, entonces sí, las cosas ya van a enrumbarse de mejor manera, y va a ser más fácil para el resto de mujeres integrar una organización.

In the past, women said they joined organizations to learn something and/or to make changes in the community. Through learning and participation in introductory courses or initial community-focused organization activities, most got “hooked” on the idea of being in an organization. The possibility of making a little money through a project or with a skill they learned also kept women’s interest. By 2000, no participant was ignorant of the fact that her organization now had to deal with women’s economic needs first. Participants stressed that even they wouldn’t recommend new women join an organization unless it provided some income. Also, they added, husbands limited women’s activities unless they saw concrete (economic) benefits from participation.

Christi (2000 441-447)<sup>96</sup> Well, darn, the truth is that it is really hard to bring a person (to an organization meeting), you see, I think that now the economic situation has a lot of influence. If I invite someone to an organization that’s only, how could I put it, for social purposes, I mean (Isabel: That it doesn’t produce income.) That’s it exactly, where there’s no income, there’s not going to be much participation because now, you know more or less how we are. Time isn’t there to waste it, like they say, and so, I would say that it’d be better for you to look for an organization where there’s the chance of getting something out of it. Because, truly, even husbands get bothersome when there isn’t something to be had.

As Pati pointed out, for women with very limited household budgets, the decision to participate in an organization was like choosing between spending money on bus fare to go to meetings or on food for the family.

Pati (2000 661-670)<sup>97</sup> ...because now, with the economic problem, people can’t get around easily... they can’t come because they have to take two buses. That’s

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<sup>96</sup> Chuta, la verdad es que es bien difícil llevar a una persona, veré es que yo creo que ahora influye bastante la situación económica, si es que le invito a una organización que sólo sea por como le digo, como le diré en el aspecto social, o sea que [Isabel: Que no genera ingresos.] No haya ingresos, eso exacto, no va a haber mayor participación porque ahorita se, ya más o menos sabe como estamos no, entonces el tiempo no está como para desperdiciarlo como quien dice, no y entonces yo le diría que mejor se busque una organización donde haya la posibilidad de conseguir algo, sinceramente porque hasta los esposos se molestan cuando no hay algo de por medio, digo, no

<sup>97</sup> ...porque ahora con el problema económico, la gente no puede movilizarse fácilmente ... que no pueden venir porque ya les toca coger dos carros, son doce mil sucres solo para venir a una reunión, entonces piensan bueno con doce mil sucres yo me compro una libra de arroz...

12,000 sucres (about 50 cents) only to come to a meeting. So, we tend to think, with 12,000 sucres I can buy a pound of rice...

Paralleling Pati's comments, a local coordinator of a popular sector women's movement stressed that the economic situation undermined their organizing activities because participants had to work more hours and/or several jobs, leaving no time for meetings. Also, the movement lost a significant number of members to out-migration. Women had moved to Spain and other countries in search of jobs and income they could not find in Ecuador.<sup>98</sup>

Murdock's (2003) Colombian study found popular sector and working-class organization participants torn between the same concerns – participation or economic survival? Due to Colombia's neoliberal economic reforms, the organized women she interviewed experienced increasingly tough financial situations (much like the women I interviewed in Quito). And, while these Colombian participants believed learning about women's rights and gender issues was necessary, they wanted their organizations and the NGOs that supported them to provide projects that would help them confront their worsening economic needs (Murdock 2003, 521).

**Responsibility/Time devoted to organization.** Several mestiza participants (some Black participants also) felt women were now too concerned with their own problems and jobs to devote time to any other cause unless it provided material returns. One mestiza woman clearly explained the results of this attitude.

Charo (2001 423-427)<sup>99</sup> Because, in reality, there aren't so many women who feel a compromise with the organization. Instead, they look at it as a means, as an

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<sup>98</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, between 1999 and 2000, a net total of 267,000 Ecuadorians emigrated; reportedly 7,000 per month in 2000 went to Spain alone (National Direction of Migration data from 2000 in Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002). The most recent migration statistics I could access indicated a net migration of 138,330 in 2001 (INEC 2001).

<sup>99</sup> Porque ya en realidad no hay tantas mujeres con compromiso hacia la organización, más bien ahora se le ve como un medio, como un fin para lograr cosas, beneficios más bien personales, no, crecimientos personales porque en el grupo hay mujeres que se capacitaron para estar dentro de la comunidad y fuera de

end, to get things, for personal benefits, personal growth because, in the group, there are women who were trained to be in the community and outside of it, but lamentably, this training has ended up only being for that person and it hasn't had the trickle-down effect (*efecto multiplicador*) it should have had.

Elections exemplified participants' limited time and desire to participate in organization activities. A few women from different groups commented that it was really hard to get people to take leadership positions. Betty described what happened one election-day in her organization.

Betty (2000 462-467)<sup>100</sup> ...Every year you have to elect the directive board. Last year, I remember that elections were really hot, I mean, in the sense that no one wanted to compromise herself – because they always need a little time on top of problems at home and with the children. You have to give yourself a good amount of time to dedicate yourself to the organization, for one thing or another, and as a leader of this organization you have to be at the head, right. So, for this reason, people refuse to compromise themselves, to form part of the directive board.

**Veterans' perspectives.** Veterans' commentaries shed light on the current situation of popular sector mestiza women's organizations. In most cases, they did not claim the past was problem-free, but they felt their present organization experiences just did not compare.<sup>101</sup> Isabel explained that long-time participants were tired. They went to the organization to socialize and had little interest in organization task committees or taking part in protests like they had in the past. In terms of protests, she said, no one paid attention to them anymore because they brought no results. Bianca, another veteran

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ella, pero lamentablemente esa capacitación se ha quedado solo para la persona y no ha tenido el efecto multiplicador que debería haber tenido.

<sup>100</sup> ...como cada año hay que reelegir a la directiva, y el año pasado recuerdo que ese día fue muy caluroso digamos en cuanto a que nadie quería comprometerse, porque siempre se necesita un poquito de tiempo pues a más de los problemas de la casa, de los hijos. Dedicarse, sí un buen tiempo para poder dedicarse a la organización ya sea por una cosa o por otra, y como dirigentes de esa organización hay que estar al frente no, entonces por eso es que la gente rehuye a comprometerse, formar parte de la directiva...

<sup>101</sup> Keep in mind that, sometimes, younger participants felt women's organizations needed to change their ways, and the "veteran" participants could prevent that change from happening.

participant, commented that, with the bad economic situation, women weren't going to put their jobs at risk to go to a protest that would provide limited results, if any.

### **Problems money caused**

**Distrust within groups.** Every mestiza organization I met wanted to have an income-producing project. Yet, as demonstrated by the experiences of several organizations with income-producing projects, women became very concerned about who had control and who might be stealing once money came into the picture. One group was destroyed by distrust; members could never trust the other members when they were in charge of money, causing the group's project to fail and the majority of its members to quit. In another group, still active, two individuals "lost" over \$2000 of organization funds and two other members were under suspicion because the project's payroll check had been stolen before they could get to the bank.

**Broken relations between organizations.** Money also influenced relations between organizations. Where once women felt a sort of "sisterhood" between popular sector women's organizations, there was now suspicion. As Jesusa's quote below indicates, women were so wary about having their ideas and the potential funding they represented stolen that they dared not invite outside groups to visit or to share ideas.

Jesusa (2001 565-566)<sup>102</sup> ...Blessed economic situation, that's what's made everyone pull water for their own mill, nothing else (572-576) I, for instance, look at other women's organizations from afar, nothing else, because we think, what? What will they come to do? The women from popular sectors who want to participate in what, what is there about that group? So, we don't dare, not one or the other, to say what we are doing, come and see if you like. That's the issue.

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<sup>102</sup> ... bendita situación económica, es lo que a cada quién le ha hecho jalar agua para su remolino, nada más. (572-576)... yo a las otras organizaciones les vemos de lejitos, porque pensamos qué, que vendrán hacer, que ideas tendrán, a nosotros, nos ven, no sé que pensarán estas mujeres pues, que, que querrán, las mujeres de los sectores populares que quieren participar en qué, que habrá, entonces no nos atrevemos ni las unas ni las otras a decir esto estamos haciendo y vengan y vean si les gusta, esa es la cuestión.

In a group interview with an older organization, women commented that the reduction in financing for organizations made them individualistic and competitive. The few courses available to groups were now very expensive. Due to this, no one shared experiences or information and no one did anything for free.

AMPM (Group 2001 707-716)<sup>103</sup> T: For example... we wanted them to give us a talk about youth violence among kids already in puberty, another organization had touched on the topic and it was very important to us, but when we approached the group they said “Well, because you are from AMPM, because we are women, that means \$10 at the cheapest,” (S: And it was between friends (*compañeras*) ... We said no, not for a talk, it can't be fair that among women we are competing with each other. Instead of saying, friends, let's do an exchange of ideas, courses, no, everything must be paid for, everything. (740-746) V: That's why I think that back then we used to have help from other countries, not from here, no, so, we had those projects, those work programs, but unfortunately those programs are over. That's why you have to pay for practically everything now and lamentably you can't, because instead of getting better the economic situation has gotten much worse. So, I think that's the reason why, right, because there's no other way. Before, there were institutions where you used to receive aid. (S: Now, there isn't.)

### **Needing a guide**

Some women discussed the need for a guide or a coordinator to improve their group. When I looked at the qualities they wanted in a coordinator and compared them to what participants said women's NGOs provided in the past, I saw that this guide or coordinator was someone meant to fill the space left open by NGO workers' absence.

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<sup>103</sup> T: por ejemplo... nosotros queríamos que nos den sobre la violencia de la juventud, no, que están ya en la pubertad, para nosotros ese punto que topó otra organización fue muy importante, pero cuando nosotros nos acercamos donde ese grupo nos dijo que, ya porque somos de la organización “AMPM”, porque somos mujeres, dice que significa, así por lo más barato 10 dólares, [S: Y era entre compañeras] ... Nosotros decíamos no pues para una charla, no puede ser justo que las mismas, entre mismas compañeras nos estemos compitiendo, no, en vez de decir compañeras hagámonos un intercambio de ideas, de cursos, no, todo quieren pagado, todo. (740-746) V: Por eso yo pienso de que, en ese entonces teníamos ayudas de otros países, no de aquí, no, entonces teníamos esos proyectos, esos programas de trabajo, no, pero desgraciadamente se han acabado esos programas, por eso es que ahora prácticamente es que todo hay que pagar, y lamentablemente no se puede pues, porque en vez de mejorar la situación económica, más bien se ha deteriorado bastantísimo, entonces yo pienso de que ese es el motivo, no, porque no hay otra forma, antes, como digo había instituciones de que recibían apoyo, [S: Ahora no]

For example, one popular sector mestiza woman said her organization needed a guide, analyst or assessor, someone who knew how to run organizations and how to create projects. Erica was more explicit, saying that popular sector organizations needed support from “people above.”

Erica (2001 546-548)<sup>104</sup> ...so, we need a little more help from above. I mean the help of people who are more in contact with government, with political things, that’s what we need the most... (2002 42-46) In many things, for example now there’s these micro-enterprises, but for that you’d need the support of people who are better prepared than we are so that they can give us a hand in the preparation and to be able to get ahead because, what happens if you have brilliant ideas and there’s no economic support? Everything stops there, that easy. It’s like the moment you don’t have the economic side of things taken care of, everything falls apart.

In 1998, Veronica touched upon the abandonment she felt when the middle-class woman who helped found her organization left. She, like Erica, expressed an explicit need for someone “from above” to help her organization. The time of her comment also indicates that women’s NGOs had already begun to pull away from some popular sector mestiza women’s organizations in 1998 – something that did not become more apparent until 2000.

Veronica (1998 246-252)<sup>105</sup> Speaking of the woman who helped us organize, she abandoned us already you might say. In the case of the other women too, it’s like they’re over there and we’re over here. But, the fact is that some of my co-

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<sup>104</sup> ...entonces necesitamos un poco más la ayuda de, de arriba no, o sea la ayuda de las personas que están más en contacto con, con el gobierno, con las cosas políticas, eso es lo que un poquito nos hace más falta... (2002 42-46) En, en muchas cosas, por ejemplo el, ahora hay este, las micro empresas pequeñas, hay pero ahí sí se necesitaría el apoyo de las personas que sean más preparadas que nosotras para que puedan darnos la mano, en, en la preparación y poder salir adelante porque, qué pasa que si uno tiene ideas brillantes y no hay el apoyo económico, y ahí quedó todo, así de fácil, es, es como en todo al momento que no hay lo económico, todo se desbarata.

<sup>105</sup> en el caso de la señora quien nos ayudó a organizar, ya nos abandonó como quien dice ¿no? En el caso de las otras compañeras, también como que nos, ya ellas por allá nosotras por acá, pero da el caso de que como algunas de mis compañeras aquí dicen no ya ¿por qué?, no, no es cierto, sí necesitamos de ayuda, necesitamos mucha porque si tuviéramos una persona bien preparada y de empuje, esto fuera más arriba. Las compañeras, si les pongan todo de sí, todo de su parte pero no es así, nosotras falta bastante orientación, bastante ayuda en el sentido económico y en el sentido de, como le digo, de como un poco de preparación.

members say, no, they don't need to be here, why? But, that's not certain, we do need help, we need a lot because if we had a person who was well prepared and motivational, this organization would go higher. Some other members say if they'd give their all, do their part, but that's not how it is. We need a lot of guidance, a lot of help in the economic sense and in terms of a little preparation.

### **Popular sector Black women – seeking assistance**

Popular sector Black women's economic situation and needs were similar to those of their mestiza counterparts. Ecuador's economic situation made it difficult to maintain and draw in members. Organizations sought guidance and ways to confront their members' economic needs. And, communication between grassroots or popular sector Black organizations had declined because of reduced Comboni involvement (the missionaries had acted like coordinators).

Some popular sector Black groups also tried to start income-producing projects, but like mestiza women's groups, they believed they lacked the capital and specialized skills to turn their ideas into projects. Some projects had been supported by the Comboni missionaries, but every one of these projects had failed because, in the participants' opinion, they had not been trained properly. The Black women I met felt these project failures pushed many people out of Black organizations and made remaining members very reluctant to participate in another group project.

Kathi (2002 235-242)<sup>106</sup> It seems like people are afraid of working in a group, it's like they're terrified. You see there already has been, for example, one group had their restaurant and it went broke and in the south too there was another restaurant... that went broke too. ... So, now it's like people panicked and, even us, with the loans that the (Comboni) priest made recently, only some people have

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<sup>106</sup> ...entonces parece que, sino que la gente como que no, tiene miedo de, de estar así trabajando en grupo, como que tiene terror, no ve que ya su, ha habido por ejemplo, un grupo ya tuvo el, el restaurante y quebraron, y, en el sur también habido otro restaurante... también quebró... Entonces ahora como que la gente está con pánico, y, incluso con nuestros, con los préstamos que hizo el padre recién, es, solo algunas gentes han quedado con los, con los proyectos, pero otros no hemos, o sea ya no tenemos ni el capital, ni, ni nada, [V: Ni la materia prima,] Ni nada, entonces, eso también da miedo otra vez volver a, a endeudarse, a todo eso venía.

stuck with the projects, but others we haven't, I mean, we don't even have the capital, nothing, nothing (Victoria: Not even raw material,) Nothing, so that also causes fear of going back in debt, it's come down to all that.

Despite their misfortunes with Comboni loans and the Black Movement's separation from the missionaries, many Black women felt their groups had nowhere else to look but the Combonis for financial assistance. They had no personal capital and little guidance from the university-educated leaders of the Black Movement. Also, like popular sector mestiza women, they believed they had few of the skills required to create a project proposal that would attract funding. As you will see in the section on Black critiques of NGOs, some Black women felt their groups were not yet "the kind" NGOs would support. De la Torre (2002) encountered similar beliefs and, like his analysis of popular sector mestizo populations, found that popular sector Blacks sought paternalistic relations or "higher class" political and social "godparents" who would lend them a helping hand.

### **Feeling Small**

Women's increased demand that organizations provide economy strategies, limited time for participation and overall exhaustion reflected the combined impact of Ecuador's economic crisis and Ecuador's neoliberal policies on their lives and their organizations. The crisis reduced popular sector women's purchasing power while neoliberal policies reduced social services and subsidies provided by the national government. Both the crisis and neoliberal policy, therefore, made it much more expensive for popular sector women to provide for themselves and their households and "shift[ed] the responsibility for social welfare from the state to the household and to women located there" (Mohanty 2003, 525-526). Meanwhile, the few women's NGO projects still available to popular sector mestiza women appeared to follow the neoliberal model and "focused on teaching women how to manage poverty individually rather than

on collectively mobilizing them to reduce it at a societal level” (Alvarez et al 2003, 570). In Quito, all of these factors undermined popular sector mestiza women’s abilities to participate in groups and their groups’ willingness to act together. It was as Schild (2000), Mohanty (2003) and Alvarez et al (2003) indicated; the neoliberalization of popular sector women’s life contexts through changes in national policy and NGO programming, individualized women’s efforts to confront economic crisis, created competition between popular sector individuals and groups over scarce resources and, thereby, broke down the group-based solutions that had evolved in the 80s.

One mestiza woman provided a precise description of the impact the economic situation had on both Black and mestiza women as organization participants – the economic situation made them “feel small.”

Dolores (2001 659-663)<sup>107</sup> ... because I can give more of myself if I try, because, sometimes like they say, age doesn’t matter if I want to keep educating myself, because I saw a program where in another city there was a woman, already quite old, and she kept learning and learning. So, I saw that and said, why not? I can but, the thing is, like I told you, sometimes the economic part is what I think makes us feel small.

When I heard this, it stood in contrast to organizational participants’ comments about the golden years. In the past, they said they felt they could make a difference, especially as part of a group, and that they were valuable to society. Theorists had hoped changes in awareness like these would make popular sector women become agents of long-term social change (Martin 1990, Arizpe 1990 and 1998, Lind 1992, Rodríguez 1994). But now, like Dolores said, they felt small and powerless due to economic crisis. Dolores’ comment and the frustrations many other popular sector mestiza and Black

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<sup>107</sup> porque yo puedo dar mas de mi si yo me propongo, porque a veces como dicen no importa la edad si yo me quiero seguir educando, porque yo vi un programa por ejemplo, en, en otra ciudad que había una señora ya bien mayor y se seguía educando y educando entonces yo vi y dije y por qué no, puedo sino es que a veces como digo compañerita en lo económico es lo que a veces creo que nos hacemos pequeñas...

women discussed above made it seem like they had given up on their dreams of learning, sharing and changing lives for the better. They believed they and their organizations were not prepared to handle an economic crisis of this extent, let alone deal with their socio-political needs at the same time. Participants who were not “hooked” on organizations simply left to seek individual solutions to their economic needs. Those who remained said that women’s economic needs were too great and that they didn’t have the money to run income-producing projects that might attract new members. In the case of popular sector mestiza women’s organizations, attempts to draw funding or proposal writing skills out of women’s NGOs and other old allies, were met with empty promises, courses half-done or silence. These comments made me realize that not only Ecuador’s worsened economic situation but a withdrawal of women’s NGOs was linked to the growing frustrations of organized popular sector mestiza women and the apparent decline of their organizations.

Popular sector Black women’s organizations not only faced economic difficulties that made them feel small and undermined their organizations, but exclusion at two levels – by some university-educated Black Movement leaders (and the programming they designed) as well as NGOs. NGO ignorance or dismissal of Black organizations was nothing new, as I already mentioned (and as noted by Halpern and Twine 2000 and Wade 1997). Angela, a popular sector Black leader, and de la Torre (2002), meanwhile, postulated that some Black leaders overlooked popular sector participants’ needs and/or ideas in order to maintain the status and recognition brought by keeping themselves (Black leaders), their ideas and their issues in the spotlight.

## **POPULAR SECTOR MESTIZA WOMEN'S COMMENTARIES ABOUT CHANGES IN NGO BEHAVIOR**

In the past, I rarely heard popular sector mestiza women critique NGOs. As my fieldwork progressed, though, I noticed popular sector mestiza women talking more and more about NGOs (women's or otherwise) in the context of difficulties faced by their organizations after Ecuador's crises (1998-2000). Placed alongside discussions about what they received from women's NGOs before, these narratives indicate NGO withdrawal from (and possibly rejection of) popular sector mestiza women's organizations and a developing critique of NGO behavior among organized popular sector mestiza women. Black women's commentaries added to the critique of NGO behavior. Popular sector Black women had limited interaction with NGOs, but their few experiences suggested NGOs did not treat Black organizations with the same consideration given popular sector mestiza women's organizations in the past. Black women leaders, who had much more involvement with NGOs than their grassroots counterparts, disapproved of NGO programming approaches and also shared accounts of exclusion and abuse by NGOs and the middle-class women's movement (in which many women's NGOs participated).

### **NGO visits and education programming greatly reduced**

If you spoke to popular sector women who had participated in their organizations less than three years, you didn't hear them discuss courses or NGO visits. This supported veteran participant commentaries that women's and other NGOs had not offered courses or visited their organizations for a long time. To most participants with lengthy experience, the difference in NGO behavior was confusing, considering that women's NGO personnel used to offer different courses every weekend and/or visit organizations frequently, especially if they had just started a project.

Erica (2002 202-207)<sup>108</sup> ...For example, the NGO doesn't participate with us so much anymore. Before it was, every month, every week there were courses, they were obligatory classes that we had to be there, but, you know, we liked it because the NGO would make food, they'd provide lunch, we'd do socio-dramas and everything. And the NGO was active there too, motivating the women, "Let's go! That's great." Now, there's none of that anymore, maybe it's because they don't have resources either.

NGOs almost never sent invitations to courses, like they had in the past, one mestiza woman said. When they did, she explained, the courses were at times organization participants could not attend. I found her organization was not the only group that had problems with NGO course offerings. The difficulties and frustrations of two women from a well-established organization indicated that their old women's NGO ally did not facilitate learning by giving courses within organizations anymore and, also, did not assume the same teaching methods as it had in the past. These women had attended a project proposal writing course. One woman explained that she had had to pull some strings and do a lot of begging at home in order to participate because the course took place at the NGO's offices during the week. The other said the NGO instructors weren't clear in their directions and kept changing their minds about what they expected of organizations and their representatives. While before it was easy to learn from a women's NGO, these women made it sound like the women's NGO made the course difficult to attend and unnecessarily complex. One woman implied that maybe they were reluctant to share their knowledge on project writing.

Bianca 2000 (321-336)<sup>109</sup> The NGO called us to a course to teach us how to make projects, in order to use that to ask if there was funding available. They even

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<sup>108</sup> (2002 202-207) ...por ejemplo la ONG ya no participa tanto con nosotros, mire antes era, cada mes, cada semana eran cursos, que eran cursos obligatorios que nosotros estábamos ahí, pero sabe estábamos a gusto, porque la ONG hacía un, hacía comida, he, daba la almuerzo, he, hacíamos sociodramas y todo, y, y la ONG estaba activo ahí también, o sea incentivando a las mujeres vamos arriba, o sea eso, eso es grande, ahora ya no hay eso, será que ellas tampoco tienen recursos,

<sup>109</sup> La ONG nos llamó a un curso para enseñarnos hacer proyectos, para eso pedir, así alguna parte, nos hicieron hacer inclusive un proyecto a nosotros unas cartas de presentación, pero después nos dijeron que

made us do a project where we wrote letters of presentation, but later they said that it was going to be like a contest, but up until now I don't know anything, if we've won or lost or what it is that's happened... They'd told us they'd let us know March 19<sup>th</sup>, I think it's going to be June 19<sup>th</sup> and they haven't told us anything. [Another member listening in on the interview: The project got returned because the name of our project was missing, was the name there?] Yes, it is there (sounding exasperated). ...We practically did it (the project) alone because there they almost didn't say anything. They told us one way, later they explained it another way. ...But, the deal is that we, five members, we went, a whole month and I don't know, I haven't heard. Right now, I find out that the project has been returned. So, they changed the name for us, we had changed it and now they've said that the project doesn't have a name.

### **Socioeconomic class divides more apparent**

From Bianca's comment and ones similar to hers, I sensed a growing frustration with women's NGOs that made me reexamine my interviews. Upon reexamination, I found indications that class divisions between women's NGO workers and popular sector mestiza women, while always a background issue, had been brought to the fore recently. These issues also spoke to concerns that women's NGOs could take advantage of popular sector women because of their "subordinate" socioeconomic status (Schild 1998, 2000, Alvarez 1998, Petras and Veltmeyer 2001, for example).

**No longer treated as equals.** When they first formed and during "golden years," women's NGOs worked hard to create a sense of solidarity (if not equality) between themselves, the middle-class women's movement and organized popular sector mestiza women. They facilitated popular sector mestiza women's contacts with Quito's middle-class women's movement and encouraged their participation in large and frequent

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eso iba haber como especie de concurso, pero hasta el momento yo no sé nada si es que hemos ganado, hemos perdido o que es lo que ha sucedido,... nos dijeron el 19 de Marzo les avisamos, ya creo que va a ser 19 de Junio y no nos han dicho nada. [Z: Regresó porque es que nos falta el nombre de la nuestra, y ¿sí está el nombre ahí?] Sí está pues ...hicimos prácticamente solitas porque ahí es que casi no nos dijeron, nos dijeron de una manera y después nos explican de otra.... Pero el asunto es que asistimos nosotros cinco compañeras fuimos, todo un mes, y ni sé yo, no he sabido, ahorita me entero que el proyecto ha regresado. Entonces ellos nos cambiaban de nombre, nosotros cambiábamos y ha dicho que no tiene nombre el proyecto.

marches with middle-class women's movement organizations and institutions. Several popular sector mestiza women mentioned that women's NGOs sent them to large meetings/seminars all over Ecuador. Activities like these, some participants said, helped popular sector mestiza women feel like they were part of a fight that went beyond their households and communities. They also made popular sector participants feel that middle-class women were willing to work with popular sector women and treat them as equals. Being *treated as equals* was very important to popular sector mestiza women since, most of the time, their daily interactions with individuals of higher education and/or "higher" class standing meant putting up with patronizing and demeaning attitudes.

Veronica was the only woman I met who, when referring to the "golden years" of her organization, critiqued the middle-class women (labeled "professionals" in her narrative because of their class standing and university education) involved in her organization's projects. She felt they took advantage of popular sector organization women's lack of education and made them do all the work. Veronica's interview made me realize that, although class issues had become more apparent recently, they had always affected relations between popular sector women and NGO personnel.

Veronica (1998 226-231)<sup>110</sup> So, here we have members of all sorts. I think that there are more members that don't have a good education, I mean in terms of learning. So, sometimes we've had to make a lot of mistakes, I mean on projects that we've asked the professionals for. What happens is that the professionals have made us work, but they've gotten the salary and we've worked for nothing. It's like, that's not right, that's not right...

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<sup>110</sup> Entonces, aquí tenemos compañeras de todo tipo, creo que hay más compañeras que no tienen una buena educación, o sea me refiero a una aprendizaje ¿ya? Entonces que a veces nos ha tenido que trompezar muuuucho, esto digo para un proyecto que hemos pedido a los profesionales. Lo que pasa es que los profesionales, nos han hecho trabajar a nosotras pero ellos han llevado el sueldo y nosotras hemos trabajado por nada, como que eso, como que no, no está bien, no está bien....

Unlike in the past, comments like Veronica's were no longer the exception. Popular sector mestiza women's organization participants' comments now indicated that class divides had been reemphasized through changes in NGO behavior toward popular sector mestiza women's organizations. Veteran participants, especially, claimed that they no longer felt welcome or informed as to what happened in women's NGOs or other parts of the middle-class women's movement. One woman said, before, she had felt at home in the offices of one women's NGO, but that was no longer the case.

Erica 2002 (207-209)<sup>111</sup> ...but that family is no longer there, that sense of community, you went and you used to feel like you were at home, truly, you felt you were part of their efforts and their institution. But, the NGO has lost that already, I don't know if the new director doesn't have the charisma, the motivation, but that's over.

Comments like Erica's are paralleled by popular sector and working-class women in Murdock's 2003 Colombian study. They felt a local NGO (and its workers) had distanced itself from their community organizations and made class differences more apparent. Some NGO workers believed this distancing came from foreign donors' recent emphasis on NGO "professionalization," efficiency and impact (Murdock 2003, 520, 523).

Another woman said that better educated women in Quito's women's movement utilized popular sector women; they were just called upon when they needed workers or numbers for some project or event. Some popular sector women, she claimed, had dropped out of her organization because they were tired of being used by middle-class women. She also said that women like her were not treated equally if they went to middle-class women's movement institutions, regardless of the fact that they were supposedly together in the fight for women. She had tried it, and it just did not work.

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<sup>111</sup> ...pero ya no, ya no hay esa, esa familia, esa comunidad que uno iba se sentía como en casa, que, realmente se sentía parte de sus esfuerzos y de su institución, entonces eso ya ha perdido la ONG, no sé si la directora nueva no es, no tiene el carisma, la motivación, eso se acabó ahí.

She didn't feel she had the education to understand everything discussed and didn't feel included because no one tried to explain things to her and she was treated differently.

**NGO contacts forgot about popular sector mestiza women once in government positions.** Erica, a veteran participant, explained that almost every woman in local and national government (at the time of my fieldwork) had worked for NGOs or had been involved with the middle-class women's movement at some point. Also, she and other veteran popular sector participants personally knew most of these women. They were the same women who had given popular sector mestiza women's organizations a helping hand as middle-class organizers and NGO workers. The labors and successes of popular sector mestiza women's organizations, in turn, strengthened these middle-class women's resumes. Once they got into government, though, they forgot about popular sector mestiza women. Erica said these women had let go of popular sector women's organizations and declined to offer a helping hand again. She gave the impression of a "mother" who had abandoned her children and refused to recognize them. Or, to refer to de la Torre's (1996) analysis of Ecuadorian political culture, it seemed popular sector mestiza women's efforts to cultivate political "godmothers" among NGO workers had failed. Now, popular sector mestiza women were left without the political and social contacts that they had hoped would facilitate their organizational activities and goals.

Erica 2002 (228- 239)<sup>112</sup> ...So, the NGO is practically part of our life, like we are for it, because they, without us, don't function and nor do we without them. They

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112 ...entonces la ONG es, prácticamente es parte de nuestra vida, como nosotros de ellas, porque ellas igual sin nosotros, no funcionan, y nosotras sin ellas, ellas son la parte intelectual, por algo se han preparado y entonces son, son mujeres más intelectuales y además con, con otro nivel social que es más fácil no, porque están relacionadas con el alcalde, con el gobierno, porque son mujeres que han subido bien alto... Yen eso nosotras orgullosas porque nos codeábamos con ellas, andábamos con ellas y para uno es un orgullo no, que te suban tan alto, pero ...qué pasa que suben alto y se olvidaron nomás de nosotros y, y eso es lo malo, y uno espera que el momento que suban alto pues, estemos más, cogidos de la mano, porque nos tenemos en, como quien dice un brazo fuerte, pero sucede que ahí nos sueltan ...

are the intellectual part, they've prepared themselves for something and so they are more intellectual women and, besides that, women with a different social level that makes it easier because they're closely connected to the mayor, to the government, because they are women who've risen quite high... we are proud about that because we were rubbed elbows with them, we walked with them and that's something to be proud about, that they rose so high. But... what happens is that they rise high and they just forget about us and that's bad. You hope that the moment that they rise high that we're taken by the hand because we don't have, like they say, a strong arm, but what happens is that there (once they've risen), they let us go.

### **NGO management of funds**

I also noticed popular sector women becoming increasingly and more openly suspicious about how NGOs spent their money. When I spoke to one community leader in 2002, she said popular sector groups were coming to realize that NGOs spent about 80% of project money on themselves and only 20% on the project itself. She explained that the federation of popular sector daycares in which she participated was protesting the national government's plans to switch the management of popular sector daycare assistance to an NGO. With an NGO in charge, she and the other representatives felt daycares would surely receive much less money than they did already. They, as daycares, trusted the national government much more than a potential NGO manager. This comment marked a real contrast from a few years ago when popular sector mestiza women portrayed NGOs as their allies in the fight against corrupt national and local governments.

### **A particularly critical individual**

Pati was particularly critical of NGOs and their interactions with grassroots organizations. Her critiques were based on twenty plus years experience as a popular sector contributor to Quito's middle-class women's movement and as a leader of a popular sector organization. To sum up her critiques, she saw NGOs as institutions that,

for the most part, got rich off of the poor, designed projects according to what was trendy in the world of donor agencies, wasted money, didn't produce real change and didn't practice what they preach.

Pati (2002 162-172)<sup>113</sup> ... So, I don't agree with that policy, that you support grassroots organizations (*organizaciones de base*) through NGOs because the NGOs are who prioritize things. And, well, later, they give you a workshop of two, three hours and after they make you sign and with that they justify (where the funding was spent). And, we don't know what they did, in what they wasted the rest of the money. ...Before, we used to talk about gender equity, that too, but darn, the people, the NGOs they did their things and well, they achieved some things but at an intellectual level. They didn't achieve things at the grassroots level and for us that's fundamental, for me... that would be the fundamental basis... Those are the organizations that have a need because the upper class, the middle class, middle-lower class, they, it's like they already have their politically, economically visible people.... (203-204) ...but it's also they who are getting rich off of our work (*a costillas de nosotros*)...

During a wrap-up interview in 2003, Pati gave examples of NGOs and foundations that tried to take advantage of her organization. One NGO helped Pati write projects for her organization. Then, Pati discovered that once a project was approved, the NGO would not advise her that the project had received funding and would take the project money in her name. Another foundation had promised to help her write projects and lend her an office if she paid them a small monthly stipend. Later, they told her that once a project received funding, she would have to pay them 10% of the money awarded for their assistance and another 10% for maintenance despite the fact she was already paying them a stipend. In addition to dealing with NGOs and foundations like this, she

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<sup>113</sup> ... entonces yo no estoy de acuerdo con esa política, de, de que se apoye a las organizaciones de base a través de las ONGs, porque las ONGs son las que priorizan cosas y, y bueno después te dan un taller de dos, tres horas y después te hacen firmar, y, y con eso justifican y no sabemos en qué se hizo, en qué se desperdició lo demás de los fondos, ...antes hablábamos de la equidad de género, también en la equidad de género chuta la gente, las ONGs, eh, hicieron sus cosas y que, bueno se logró algunas cosas pero a nivel intelectual, o sea no se logró las cosas a nivel de, de base, y para nosotros lo fundamental, o para mi... sería la base fundamental... esas son las organizaciones que necesitamos, porque clase media alta, o clase media, media baja, ellos ya como que tienen su, su, su gente visibilizado políticamente, económicamente... (203-204) ...pero son ellos también los que se están enriqueciendo a costillas de nosotros...

described the vicious cycle in which organizations like hers got stuck. Anyone offering assistance or information insisted that her organization physically show it had “x” number of members before they would help. This was very difficult, however, since most members worked during the week and many were inactive because the organization’s lack of funding severely limited the frequency of organization meetings and activities.

As a popular sector participant in the middle-class women’s movement, Pati attended many seminars where NGOs used trendy terminology. She found that, as a non-NGO person, it was very difficult to get someone to explain what the new terminology meant. In her opinion, NGOs guarded special terminology and their knowledge to keep their jobs.

Pati (2002 174-180)<sup>114</sup> We’ve seen that the NGOs are our adversaries, better said, because they have a little more preparation, more language to make projects, more knowledge to be able to decipher things. On the other hand, grassroots organizations we don’t have many arguments and we have to be asking people who know so that they can do things for us and that costs us a thousand, fifteen hundred dollars when we don’t have any way to pay. So, that’s when we do things whichever way we can (*a la maldita sea*) and sometimes our projects aren’t accepted... (188-205) ... because now everything talks about public policy, economic policy, development policy, DESK is a little trendy too. So, everyone is talking about DESK and we don’t know what DESK is. For example, it would

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<sup>114</sup> Nosotros sí hemos visto que, que las ONGs son un poco nuestra, nuestros adversarios más bien dicho porque ellos tienen un poco más preparación, más lenguaje para poder, he, hacer los proyectos, más conocimientos para poder descifrar cosas, en cambio la, la, las organizaciones de, de base no tenemos muchos argumentos, y tenemos que estar pidiendo a la gente que sepa, para que nos dé haciendo, y eso nos cuesta mil, mil quinientos dólares cuando no tenemos para pagar, entonces ahí es cuando hacemos nosotros a la maldita sea, he, y, y, y a veces no, no son acogidos nuestros proyectos... (188-205) ... porque ahora todo se está hablando de políticas públicas, he, políticas económicas, políticas de desarrollo, eso del, DESK está un poco como en moda, entonces todo el mundo está hablando del DESK, y, y no sabemos qué es el DESK, no, o sea por ejemplo eso de decir las ONGs miren compañeras, vengan tantas compañeras les vamos a explicar que es el DESK, para poder defendernos en algunas actividades... recién en este curso de la Andina supe lo que era el DESK, ... pero son cosas que chuta no sabes una palabra, por una palabra que no sepas o sea puedes estar entorpeciendo todo, entonces la tarea de las ONGs, es de que realmente si quieren que este, este país cambie... no hagamos un cambio, un cambio superficial, sino más bien un cambio de conciencia, un cambio de trabajo porque no es que unos somos los que trabajamos .... un poco hay que practicar, hay que, hay que practicar lo que se predica, o sea, en cosas así concretas...

be one thing if the NGOs said, look ladies, come, x number of women, we are going to explain what DESK is to be able to defend ourselves in some activities. ...recently, in this course at the University, I found out what DESK meant. ...Anyway, there are things that, darn, you don't know a word and for one word that you don't know you can be slowing everything up. So, the job of NGOs, that is if they really want this country to change... let's not make a superficial change, but a change in consciousness, a change in jobs because it shouldn't be a few of us who are working... you have to practice what you preach in concrete things...

According to Pati, NGO behavior limited popular sector mestiza organizations' ability to react to and exist in the face of Ecuador's renewed economic crisis. Her comments also clarify how the decline in NGO programming for popular sector mestiza organizations and the "forgetfulness" of former NGO workers in government positions, mentioned by Erica above, could effectively (and Pati would say purposely) block popular sector organizations' access to necessary information and contacts. To explain, as I showed in the first section of this chapter, the majority of the popular sector mestiza women's organizations I met said their current knowledge and resources were ineffective against Ecuador's (and their) worsened economic situation. Some organizations said they had ideas that would help their members confront economic crisis, but claimed they needed external support to enact these ideas as well as the writing skills, arguments and vocabulary to attract that external support. Other organizations said that they needed inspiration. In both cases, they looked to women's NGOs for help, since they had been an important source of information that had helped them grow and learn in the past. They also knew that NGOs, because of their institutional networks and the socioeconomic class and education of their workers, had access to information and learning opportunities (like the seminar mentioned by Pati above) that helped them develop new ways to confront Ecuador's economic crises and their ever-changing institutional needs. Yet, as women's comments about changes in NGO behavior indicated, women's NGOs were now disinclined to educate popular sector women's

organizations about the process and practice of applying for proposals. The rare times women's NGOs offered proposal writing courses the courses were incomplete, confusing and at times when popular sector women could not attend (as happened to Bianca and her co-member).

With the exception of two, all of the organized popular sector mestiza women's organizations I encountered commented that they were without NGO allies, with limited ability to develop new programming that met their new needs and with few skills to attract the external support that would help them to develop and/or enact new programming.<sup>115</sup> Members said their organizations could only proceed with activities members could develop and pay for themselves. For instance, AMPM cooking classes were only for members who could pay full-price for materials and instructor (before members paid discounted prices) while Martha Bucaram collected a monthly quota in order to provide members with a chicken dinner on special occasions (refer to the appendix for details on these organizations). Many participants knew that, due to their restricted finances and time (linked to economic crisis) as well as reduced NGO support; organization activity options had become limited or stagnant, could not assist members effectively and lost member interest. Also, as a group interview with AMPM pinpointed, popular sector mestiza women's organizations could no longer reach out to other popular sector mestiza women's groups for assistance or to exchange ideas and resources due to

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<sup>115</sup> The exceptions were Manuela Saenz and Women from Dorado. Manuela Saenz had expressed these frustrations but, right before I left the field, an NGO focused on strengthening the organizations within Manuela Saenz' community began to assist Manuela Saenz as well. Women from Dorado was very socialist and radical compared to other popular sector mestiza organizations. I did not get to know them very well and was not certain if they worked with NGOs. The few times I met with them, however, I got the impression that they were very wary of and rarely (if ever) worked with NGOs. The appendix "Chart of Organizations" provides details on all the organizations I met, both mestiza and Black. There you can see the remaining popular sector mestiza women's organizations who felt they did not have NGO allies anymore and were with limited skills to attract additional or new support.

the competition and hoarding mentality provoked by the scarcity of financial and informational resources.

Instead of working against the control dominant groups held over education and knowledge (Freire 1985), NGOs in Quito were reproducing this control through their changed relations with popular sector mestiza women's organizations. First, organized popular sector women wanted NGOs to keep sharing their knowledge. Yet, as indicated already, NGOs no longer visited or shared ideas, formally or informally, with popular sector mestiza women's organizations and continued to overlook popular sector Black women's organizations. Second, organized popular sector women wanted NGOs to work with them as organizations (not individuals), to find flexible, low-cost, group-oriented means to confront their worsened economic needs. By the time I left the field, however, CAM (presented here as a case study) only offered micro-enterprise training for popular sector individuals. This training did not take popular sector women's needs into consideration since, as organized popular sector mestiza women complained, the courses took place when household responsibilities prevented them from attending. Also, many organized popular sector mestiza women said the training did not interest them because it was expensive and, in the end, involved a high risk investment in a micro-enterprise. Finally, although group representatives could attend, the micro-enterprise training focused on individualized solutions to economic needs. As NGO workers implied, and I will detail below, they offered the courses because they attracted income for the NGO not necessarily because they would meet the needs of popular sector mestiza women's organizations.

Shortly before I left the field, I met with two popular sector organization participants who had frequently contributed to my investigation. With them, I discussed Pati's comments and how I connected them to the current situation of popular sector

mestiza women's organizations. One woman, a popular sector mestiza leader involved with a federation of popular daycares and several popular sector mestiza organizations, also recognized that popular sector organizations were at a disadvantage compared to NGOs. She explained that, although they may not trust local/national governments or NGO program managers, popular sector daycares and organizations had few funding alternatives beyond these institutions. When it came to a choice between NGOs or popular sector groups, she said donor agencies were more likely to finance NGOs because popular sector or grassroots groups simply did not have the name recognition of a large NGO. Donor agencies took name recognition as assurance their funds would be spent and managed well. Our conversation supported Schild's (1998) argument that professionalized NGOs had control over popular sector programming because their employees' university degrees and streamlined proposal writing lent NGOs more credibility in the eyes of donor agencies.

The other woman, a participant in popular sector mestiza women's organizations since the 1980s, started her response with the following: "We're a front for corrupt people" (*Somos una pantalla para los corruptos*). This did not surprise me since many of the Ecuadorians I met felt corruption was ubiquitous and believed government officials used money stolen from popular sector assistance programs to finance opulent lifestyles. What did surprise me was what followed. She made it clear that the possibility women's NGOs used popular sector women and their situations as a way to enrich themselves, licitly and illicitly, was nothing new to her. After more than fifteen years in popular sector organizations, she was convinced that NGOs (of all kinds), like corrupt government officials, used popular sector individuals and groups as a means to get money for their own pockets. In her mind, that wasn't the biggest problem. What mattered was that, at the current time, NGOs did nothing with popular sector groups yet still tried to make

money off of them. Before, whether the NGOs were skimming money or not, she said, at least the NGOs were working with the popular sectors, educating them, helping them start projects and trying to improve their success. Now, her comments and the experiences of other organized popular sector mestiza women implied that popular sector mestiza women's organizations were left high and dry, desperately seeking other sources of technical advice and funding contacts to make up for what NGOs had provided, but to no avail.

**POPULAR SECTOR BLACK WOMEN AND BLACK WOMEN LEADERS' COMMENTARIES ABOUT NGOS AND THE MIDDLE-CLASS WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN QUITO**

Due to racial discrimination and its effects, the Black women I interviewed said Blacks had always been excluded from educational, employment and governmental resources as well as national politics. So, like their mestiza counterparts, Black organization participants had to overcome educational, social and economic obstacles on a daily basis. Unlike popular sector mestiza organizations, I only met one popular sector Black women's organization that had received technical assistance from NGOs of any kind in the past (and that was only once or twice). Popular sector Black women made it clear that their grassroots organizations had to rely on Comboni missionaries and Black Movement leaders for support. Due to this extremely limited interaction with NGOs, organized popular sector Black women's critiques (with a few exceptions) tended to focus on the coordinating or mid-level, secondary organizations of the Black Movement and Movement leadership. For example, women in a popular sector Black organization and Angela (a popular sector Black leader) knew the Women's Coordinator of the Black Movement (refer to the appendix for details on this group's activities and my relationship with it) received money from an external source to support Women's Coordinator

programming and were irate that none of this money (nor information on how to obtain it) had ever reached their grassroots groups.

Black women participating in the Black Movement through coordinating organizations and leadership positions<sup>116</sup> provided commentary that further illustrated the problematic relations between NGOs, the middle-class women's movement and popular sector groups already indicated in this chapter. They expressed how, as Black women in a joint fight for Blacks and women, they felt selectively excluded from the Women's Movement in Quito which was made up primarily of middle-class, mestiza women (although it claimed to represent all women). In addition, they had experience with NGOs which made them much more wary and critical of NGOs than grassroots, popular sector Black women participants. They saw NGOs as institutions to be utilized in order to obtain important funding and information, but to be used very wisely since they could become adversaries at any moment. Their commentaries also illustrated that they found the content and aims of NGO education contradictory to creating a united, strong movement of any kind. Finally, their accounts of Black Movement advances in local and national governments, but not in NGOs, reflected a lack of NGO interest in the Black Movement despite intense NGO involvement with indigenous movements in Ecuador (also discussed in Halpern and Twine 2000).

### **Grassroots perspectives on NGOs**

Most grassroots participants I met felt that Black Movement programming did not meet their economic needs and that they were discriminated against by leaders of the

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<sup>116</sup> I differentiate these individuals from grassroots participants because they had extensive, direct involvement with many parts of the Black Movement, especially its secondary organizations. They were not necessarily middle-class or of a higher socioeconomic standing than grassroots participants (unlike most of their mestiza counterparts in NGOs and women's movement institutions) for two reasons: 1) the very limited access they had, as Black women, to opportunities that would provide middle-class income, and 2) very few Blacks in Ecuador, no matter their income, were perceived as middle-class because of their race/color.

Black Movement (primarily university-educated Blacks) in Quito. Also, their relations with the Combonis, their principal external supporters, were increasingly limited because Black Movement leaders had decided to separate the Black Movement and its grassroots organizations from the missionaries. Paralleling comments made by their mestiza counterparts, some popular sector Black women participants mentioned that their groups needed coordinators, people who knew what was going on in the movement; a role previously filled by the Combonis. In response to these critiques and needs, some grassroots groups sought the assistance of NGOs. In one case, the little NGO-supported education a Black grassroots group obtained did not deal with economic issues adequately because the course, on proposal and project writing, was abandoned for no apparent reason.

Roldos 94 (2000 413-418)<sup>117</sup> So, we're still like this (left in a lurch), we wanted to do a daycare project [Another woman: But we didn't get it because we didn't find a house (to put it in)] No, it's that a girl came who was going to do the project for us and all of that... And, later, the girl never came again, I mean she didn't help us, she only came the first day. We were all excited, yes, let's do this, but she disappeared. So, since she disappeared and we didn't even know where to start, the project stopped there (*ahí quedó*)...

Black grassroots participants from another group implied that NGOs only work with organization that are sufficiently "virtuous," and that the Black Movement and its organizations were very far from that ideal. Their comments showed that they, apparently, had assumed an ideal notion of NGO "client."

Victoria (2002 131-132)<sup>118</sup> What happens is that we really need more direct assistance in order to obtain (what we need)... because what we women need,

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<sup>117</sup> Todavía estamos así, nosotros queríamos hacer un proyecto de la guardería, [Another woman: Pero no se nos dio por lo que no encontramos la casa.] No, es que vino una chica que nos iba a dar haciendo el proyecto y tanta cosa ...después la chica no vino nunca más, o sea no nos ayudó, solo vino el primer día, nosotras emocionadas sí hagamos esto, pero desapareció, entonces como ella desapareció y nosotras como no sabemos ni por donde empezar, ahí quedó...

<sup>118</sup> ...lo que pasa es que necesitamos realmente un apoyo más directo no, para, para poder conseguir, ...porque lo que las mujeres necesitamos lamentablemente es, es buscar formas de, de vivir

lamentably, is to find ways to live well economically. (211-216) The problem is that NGOs, obviously, look for... consolidated groups, for the reason that in the end, they are the ones responsible. So, it's like this, the Black groups, some are still very weak, they haven't managed to look for assistance because the NGOs, it's not like they go looking, you have to look for them. And, so it's like you do this process simply when the organization is consolidated enough to look for help, but what happens is that our groups, not all of them obviously, but they're a little weak in the organizational process, which makes it so assistance obviously doesn't, (Kathi: Doesn't arrive)... (248-262) ...the (Black) Movement that is rising is barely 10, 12, 15 years old, that's very little. So, we have very little experience in order to develop projects of this sort. So, based on that, there's little we could say, that no one supports us, because our process is still too new, right. (256-260) ... more or less, Black organizations have a lot to do in order to consolidate the support of NGOs. ...there are little steps that have been given recently, that go along making space in the State, at the local level. So, that causes us to still not be visible to NGOs, they don't see (us as) an alternative to support, but obviously there is.

Here, you see the beliefs that Black groups are supposed to be consolidated and to have experience developing projects before they can “attract” NGO assistance; and, that the Black Movement is still too immature, after fifteen years of existence, to obtain support. I do not know what processes or experiences brought Victoria to these conclusions, but comparing her ideas on NGO expectations to the development of women's NGO-popular sector mestiza women's organization relations, it seems that popular sector Black groups were held to a very different, much more challenging set of

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económicamente bien... (211-216) Ese, yo creo que ese es el problema que las ONGs obviamente buscan.. a grupos consolidados, a tal punto que ellos son los que responden a la final no, entonces como que, los grupos negros algunos hem, todavía muy débiles, eh, no han logrado he, buscar ayuda porque las ONGs no es que ellas buscan, uno tiene que buscarlas a ellas, y entonces como se hace ese proceso simplemente cuando la organización está consolidada para buscar apoyo, pero lo que pasa es que nuestros grupos, no todos obviamente pero, están un poco débiles en su, en su proceso organizativo, lo que hace eh, que, el apoyo obviamente no, no [K: No llegue] ... (248-251) ...el movimiento que está surgiendo lleva apenas diez, doce, quince años es poquísimo no, entonces tenemos muy poca experiencia para desarrollar proyectos de esa índole no, y entonces en base a eso poco podríamos decir que, que no hay quien nos apoye no, porque nuestro proceso es corto todavía no, (256-260) ...más o menos las organizaciones negras todavía tienen muchísimo que hacer como para, para consolidar este apoyo a las ONGs, ...son pasitos que, que se ha venido dando he, eh, de recién que se va consiguiendo espacios a nivel de, de estado o a nivel local y entonces eso hace que, que las ONGs también todavía no, no seamos visibles para ellos no, no vean una, una alternativa de apoyo, pero obviamente sí hay...

standards than popular sector mestiza women's organizations. While women's NGOs had been more than happy to help popular sector mestiza women's organizations start from nothing, Black groups, it appears, had to be highly united and know how to do everything before an NGO would acknowledge them.

### **Black women leaders' perspectives on NGOs**

**Used by Women's Movement.** Black women, both leaders and grassroots participants, and popular sector mestiza women's leaders all commented that Black women had a limited presence within the Ecuadorian Women's Movement in Quito. Black women leaders, like Angela, indicated that this was mostly due to negative past experiences where, she felt, the middle-class women's movement had only called upon Black women when it needed numbers or to demonstrate "diversity" for the photos and activities reports sent to supporting donor agencies. Meanwhile, if there was an election, a course or something of import occurring within a Women's Movement institution, Angela said Black women were either not invited or invited so late that they had no time to change their work schedules and participate. Due to these experiences of being utilized and then excluded, Angela explained, Black women leaders preferred to work with each other, not Ecuadorian Women's Movement institutions, when it came to gender issues within their organizations.

**Ideas stolen.** Some Black women leaders were also very wary of having their ideas stolen by individuals within NGOs or foundations that held project funding contests. During an informal chat, one leader told me a story that still made her shed tears of frustration. She had submitted a proposal to a foundation that worked like a "funding clearinghouse" for income-producing projects. Curious to know what had happened, she visited the foundation. They said that her proposal had been lost and that she should try again later. She was irritated, but decided to let the issue pass. Then,

during another meeting at the same foundation, she found out some individuals from the foundation had taken her proposal, submitted it in their names and “won” funding. At that point, she spoke directly to the financing coordinator and tried to claim her intellectual property. He claimed to believe her, but did nothing, saying that recognition of the proposal as hers would involve a long legal process. What made the situation worse, in her mind, was that the individuals who stole the proposal had altered it so that it benefited, principally, themselves instead of the 30 or more people it would have assisted in her organization.

**NGO-style fast results don’t last.** Angela, another Black leader, commented that, besides their other negative points, NGOs tried to change things too quickly. During NGOs fast attempts at social change, she explained, people did not have the time to personally assume that change. Instead, they got swept into the fight while NGOs controlled everything. When the NGOs left, along with their money and their courses, people dropped out because the fight had not been internalized and quickly lost importance. Angela added that the Black Movement’s response to this issue was to take the slow approach to education and change in order to build a solid foundation.

Angela (2002 158-160)<sup>119</sup> ...rather, we’re doing it from our own perspective because we need to be strong, prepared for what’s coming and, as citizens, see our rights but from our own perspective... (486-495) You know that the processes that give results are the slow ones because if you start to fight and the solution comes about from one day to the next, that’s not worth anything because you don’t have the strength necessary to start to conceptualize, to take it on as yours,

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<sup>119</sup> ...más bien nosotros lo estamos haciendo desde nuestra propia visión, porque necesitamos un poco estar fuertes, estar preparadas para lo que nos viene, y, como ciudadanos a ver nuestros derechos, pero por nuestra propia visión...(486-495) Sabes que los procesos que, que dan resultado son los procesos lentos, porque si tu comienzas a luchar no cierto, y, se dio la solución de la noche a la mañana eso no vale nada, porque uno no tiene esfuerzos necesarios para comenzar a, para comenzar a conceptualizar, a tomarle como tuyo a, a empoderarte de tu problema, a empoderarte del, del yo, entonces esos no vale la pena... por eso no importa a nosotros dar un paso cada año pero un paso firme donde que podamos tomar decisiones políticamente, económicamente, organizativamente, o sea, todo que venga en, en conjunto que no venga suelto, porque si todo eso de las cosas, sin objetivos principales, sin objetivos generales, sin una visión, misión y visión, o sea creo que no llegas a nada, no, eso,

to empower yourself with your problem, to empower yourself with who you are. So, those (fast processes) aren't worth anything... For that reason, it doesn't matter if we take one step each year as long as it is a firm step where we can take political, economic and organizational decisions. I mean, that everything comes together, not loose, because if everything comes without principal objectives, without general objectives, without a vision and mission, I believe you won't come to anything...

### **The Black Movement and government**

Recently, the Black Movement began to receive more attention and support from the city of Quito and the national government. Quite literally, the Black Movement was “entangling the cultural and the political” (Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998, 5). For example, Quito's mayor passed a regulation that required the inclusion of Black Ecuadorian history and culture in the municipal school curriculum.<sup>120</sup> Also, the municipal administration had a division for Black Socio-economic development and lent administration buildings for Black Movement meetings in Quito. These results pleased Black leaders and brought hopes that future proposals would also meet success. Yet, as Elsa (a Black leader) mentioned, these hopes were conditioned by concerns that Blacks were being given attention only because the mayor wanted their votes in the next election.

In terms of national government, the Black Movement had obtained a National Pueblo Negro Day and recognition within the National Constitution of Blacks as a distinct group within the Ecuadorian population. The Movement was also fighting for Black ethnoeducation programs based on Black cosmovision or worldview and developed for and by Black Ecuadorians. It hoped to use education and politics as bases to deploy the alternative concepts developed within the Black Movement on a large scale.

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<sup>120</sup> Ecuador has several kinds of schools, both public and private. Among public schools, there are two main kinds – federal and municipal. Federal schools share the same curriculum across the nation and are monitored by the national government. The curriculum for municipal schools, on the other hand, varies by city, is different from that for federal schools and is monitored by city administrations.

In addition, they constantly created and sought the passage of national policy that dealt with or incorporated issues faced by the Black Ecuadorian population. One of the Movement's largest efforts, when I was in the field, was to obtain an autonomous territory (*comarca*) in the northern coastal province of Esmeraldas from the national government. Although always concerned about co-option, the members of the Black Movement involved in these activities were invigorated by their progress. They felt that their ability to start negotiations and bring, even a few, to satisfactory ends signaled that the Black Movement was gaining visibility and strength at the national level. De la Torre would add that the multi-cultural politics promoted by the ILO and World Bank indirectly aided Black Movement negotiations by providing financial encouragement for the Ecuadorian national government to be more receptive of Black Ecuadorian demands (2002, 142-143).

### **Where were the NGOs?**

The advances of the Black Movement at local and national governmental levels highlighted the absence of relations with NGOs. As indicated already, some Black women felt their groups were not appealing "investment alternatives" for NGOs and that this lack of appeal explained limited popular sector Black organization interactions with NGOs. Black Movement leaders' wariness of NGO intentions, fear of cooption and low opinion of some NGO programming also explained restricted NGO-Black Movement relations to some extent. All the same, as a part of a movement that emphasized ethnic identity, that was of growing visibility and interest to local and national governments and, according to de la Torre (2002),<sup>121</sup> of interest to financiers of national government social programming, I expected NGOs to demonstrate an interest in Black organizations. NGOs were certainly involved with indigenous groups, movements and federations – all

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<sup>121</sup> See discussion of his analysis in the section called "Creation of Black Organizations in Quito"

emphasizing their ethnic identities - in Ecuador. Yet, they had almost no involvement with Black Ecuadorians, the Black Movement or individual Black organizations. One NGO I visited claimed that Black groups were difficult to work with because of their insistence on autonomy and wariness of outsiders. Another NGO said, without further explanation, that they had had a program in a primarily Black neighborhood, but had terminated it after “problems” prevented the program from advancing as expected.

These reactions raised further questions about the interests of NGOs in Quito, NGOs who supposedly expressed solidarity with marginalized groups. The extremely limited NGO relations with Black organizations noted here are paralleled in and questioned by Halpern and Twine (2000). In an article discussing Black-indigenous alliances in the province of Esmeraldas, Halpern and Twine state that Afroecuadorians (as well as most Black groups from Latin America) are ignored and made invisible by NGOs while indigenous groups are assigned resources (2000 20, 29). Like me, Halpern and Twine remain puzzled as to why NGOs consistently overlooked Black Ecuadorians. They conclude their article saying that “by bringing international attention to the situation of Blacks across the Americas, NGOs can play a significant role in supporting the human rights initiatives of groups of African descent” and offer a suggestion for change: “...what is needed is to reconceptualize and expand national definitions of ‘indigenous’ to include people of African descent...if NGOs are to serve all of the indigenous populations most in need of their assistance” (Halpern and Twine 2000, 29-30). Although these comments correctly emphasize the ability of NGOs to draw attention and financial support to movements, they overlook the negative issues, indicated here and in other investigations (like Mindry 2001, Schild 1998, Alvarez 1998, Alvarez et al 2003), that any group must deal with when they initiate and maintain relations with NGOs.

Popular sector mestiza and Black women's perspectives on recent NGO behavior indicated that their organizations had extremely limited or no contact with external support institutions and that this limited or absent contact greatly restricted their organization activities. Organized popular sector mestiza women were confused as to why women's NGOs, their past allies, no longer offered assistance. Some even felt NGOs had abandoned their groups or were purposefully limiting popular sector mestiza women's access to information and resources. The few popular sector Black women's organizations that had contact with NGOs perceived NGOs as inconsistent (Roldos 94 – see details in the appendix) or exceptionally demanding of potential “clients” (Africa's Daughters - see details in the appendix). Meanwhile, Black women leaders felt NGOs were adversaries who had little to offer the Black Movement or its grassroots organizations.

The rationale for behind NGO avoidance or rejection of their organizations was not clear to most of the popular sector mestiza and Black women who participated in my research. A few, like Pati, theorized that NGOs were just following their financial interests, regardless of the impact it had on popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations. It turns out that money was indeed a factor behind NGO avoidance of popular sector mestiza women's organizations and a possible factor behind NGO neglect of popular sector Black women's organizations. As I discuss in the next section, women's NGOs like CAM (presented as a case study) needed new sources of funding to withstand the impact of Ecuador's economic crisis and to make up for international resources withdrawn from Ecuador. As a result of these factors, CAM, mirroring a larger trend in Latin American NGOs (Schild 2000, Alvarez 1999, Alvarez et al 2003), shifted its programming away from popular sector women's organizations toward market-focused, competitive, individualized programs that fit increasingly neoliberal donor

agency interests. I will also argue that CAM (and NGOs like it) changed its programming without much consideration for the popular sector mestiza women's organizations that depended on NGO resources or the other popular sector organizations, like those of Black women, that hoped NGOs would provide much needed support.

### **NGO PERSPECTIVES**

In consideration of the above critiques, the question arises, what did NGOs have to say about their actions? Several recorded interviews with present and former employees of NGOs or NGO-like institutions as well as unrecorded interviews and observations during volunteer work showed that, obviously, not all NGOs, NGO-like institutions or NGO workers changed in the same way, and they had varied reasons for and critiques of these changes. There were, for instance, a few individuals who questioned what was going on and tried to do things differently. In this section, as in this dissertation, I focus on CAM and the changes it experienced, but present similar and counter examples/commentaries from other institutions and their employees.

### **CAM**

It seemed that CAM was quite aware popular sector mestiza women's organizations faced difficulties and that their members wanted help to keep their organizations going. It contributed to a book, published in 2000, that restated some of the issues women said affected their organizations (many of which match issues discussed above):

In respect to the popular sector women's movement, the leaders of popular sector organizations think that it doesn't exist, that before, they mobilized, they protested, despite repressive conditions, because there was a women's NGO that motivated them and was at the head. They think that there is a lack of leadership and many feel that there is exhaustion because it is always the same people who participate. Other members claim that a movement does exist and demand that the women's NGO retakes the call to action. They believe that support of the

popular sector movement would be enormous because women are capable of carrying out what they propose to do. They think that the women's movement is also in decay and that it provides restricted spaces where it is difficult for popular sector organizations to fit in.<sup>122</sup> (Ernst, Acosta Maldonado and Tamayo 2000, 81)

CAM ended its work with popular sector mestiza women's organizations shortly after the Ernst, Acosta Maldonado and Tamayo text was published. From CAM, I obtained some perspectives on this change in behaviors but no critiques. No employee said that they or CAM felt an obligation to keep working with popular sector mestiza women's organizations despite the fact that those groups and their members had been, up until 2000, a principal part of CAM's mission. A ride home with two CAM workers ended up being quite thought provoking on this matter. As they drove, the workers discussed how things used to be between their institution and popular sector (mestiza) women's organizations;<sup>123</sup> a conversation sparked by seeing familiar faces at the talk they had just given. They recalled events fondly, in a "those were the days" tone. They marveled at the intensity of their efforts with the first popular sector women's organizations. Now, they realized, they might have asked popular sector women to devote too much time to organizations in their (CAM's) enthusiasm to create social change and had not given enough consideration to women's responsibilities at home. All the same, they had had so much energy and so much fun. But, as one of the workers clarified, that had been a different era and CAM had moved in another direction. Their

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<sup>122</sup> "Respecto al movimiento popular de mujeres, las líderes de las organizaciones populares piensan que no existe, que antes, se movilizaban y protestaban, pese a las condiciones de represión, porque había una ONG de mujeres, que las motivaba y estaba adelante. Piensan que hay falta de liderazgo y muchas sienten que hay un desgaste, porque son siempre las mismas las que participan. Otras compañeras señalan que existe un movimiento y, demandan a la ONG de mujeres, el retomar las convocatorias. Consideran que un aporte del movimiento popular, sería enorme, porque las mujeres son capaces de llevar adelante lo que se proponen. Piensan que el movimiento de mujeres está también en decadencia y que son espacios restringidos donde es difícil que las organizaciones populares tengan cabida." (Ernst, Acosta Maldonado and Tamayo 2000, 81)

<sup>123</sup> They did not refer to these women as mestiza, I insert the term to clarify the group of women with which they interacted.

comments caused me to wonder why CAM had changed and to be startled by the way they, as NGO workers, had impacted popular sector women's lives and then left them.

An unrecorded, yet formal, interview with a woman who had recently left CAM revealed donor agencies' insistence on "impact indicators" to monitor fund usage and program achievements and changes in funding interests as factors that, in her opinion, had limited and changed CAM's work. NGOs like CAM, she explained, had to present the required impact indicators in order to receive continued funding. Yet, she said, as an institution that worked on social issues, it was incredibly hard to provide "impact indicators" that demonstrated exactly how money used in a certain part of the project affected the whole project and/or a focal element of it.

In terms of changes in funding interests, she exclaimed that almost all of the changes in NGO programming were due to changes in donor agency interests. She gave the example of USAID. Before, USAID had helped finance the creation of women's "police stations" where women could go to press charges and receive legal advice/assistance for domestic violence or other crimes. A short time ago, however, USAID became interested in urban agriculture programs and no longer funded women's police stations. With virtually no money available for women's police stations from USAID or any other source (as other development and funding agencies followed the trend set by USAID), she said it was hard for the project to continue regardless of its value and its incorporation into city planning.

The head of the CAM department where I volunteered, Iris, also explained that some donor agencies had left Ecuador because they felt its dollarization and renewed economic stability, as announced by the Ecuadorian national government, meant the country no longer needed donor agency funds as much as other countries. The ex-CAM employee and Iris' comments are supported by Schild (1998) and Alvarez (1999). Schild

(1998) explains that the opening of Eastern Europe produced a new development target that redirected donor funds and development programming away from Latin America. Alvarez (1999), meanwhile, indicates that NGOs, faced with decreased foreign funding and increased availability of governmental monies, due to neoliberal decentralization/privatization efforts, have been pushed to work as government subcontractors for “in vogue” neoliberal self-help programs that view low-income women’s integration into the market as a crucial poverty alleviation strategy (1999, 182, 191). If NGOs critique these programs, says Alvarez (1999), they simply will not get chosen to implement the programs and will lose a funding opportunity.

Iris offered another explanation for CAM’s change in behavior. She said that CAM had matured in its fight and that we (social movements, NGOs, the world) were undergoing a change of era so things would be confusing until they got sorted out.

Iris 2002 (109-116)<sup>124</sup> ...I think that CAM has also matured in terms of its fight. Before, the fight was in the streets. I don’t think that was bad, rather that, for example now CAM and even the political coordinator is trying to make a more political fight, but one that has a larger impact. I mean, that we get into the negotiation of public policy to obtain gender equity in all spaces. Through this, the law against violence against women and the commissaries have been obtained. Also, we’ve made big advances, for example, in employment policy that has to do with gender equity. (385-389) ...we would say that we are in an era of change, a change of era. We are in a change of era where we still are a little confused about the things that we are doing, the concepts we are handling, but I think that little by little this new way of thinking will go along consolidating itself.

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<sup>124</sup> ...creo que el CAM ha, también ha madurado en cuanto a su lucha, antes la lucha era en las calles y todo eso no, yo creo que, no es que eso estaba mal, sino de que por ejemplo ahora el CAM, incluso la misma coordinadora política está tratando es de más bien de hacer una lucha más política, pero que tenga mayor impacto es decir que ya nos metamos al, a la negociación de políticas públicas para conseguir la equidad de género, en todos los espacios no, y es por eso que se ha conseguido la ley en contra de la violencia de la mujer, se ha conseguido las comisarias, se está consiguiendo grandes avances también... por ejemplo en lo que es, son las políticas de empleo no, con equidad de género. (385-389)...nosotros diríamos que estamos en una época de cambio de, un cambio de época no, estamos en una cambio de época donde que, todavía estamos como un poco confusos de las cosas, que estamos haciendo, de los conceptos que estamos manejando, pero yo pienso que poco a poco se va a ir como consolidando ese nuevo pensamiento no.

Iris felt CAM was looking for and performing activities it felt were more effective, had more coverage and had the possibility to make bigger changes. She stated that CAM felt its work with popular sector mestiza women's organizations was a waste of energy because it only covered a small part of the population and didn't produce consistent results. Equally important, CAM now had greatly reduced resources with which to work since fewer donor agencies were interested in funding Ecuadorian programs or NGOs.

Iris' department, once the heart of CAM, reflected changes in focus and economic stress within the institution. From the time she started in CAM (1988) to my time there (2002), she indicated that her department had cut personnel by 75% and shifted objectives at least three times. It went from facilitating the formation of women's organizations, to strengthening them and starting income-producing projects within them, to, most recently, a focus on micro-enterprise courses aimed at popular sector men and women. Unlike their previous work with popular sector mestiza organizations, the micro-enterprise training program had very short term goals and very short-term involvement with participants (four months at the most). Also, note that individuals, not groups, paid CAM to receive the micro-enterprise courses (although group representatives could attend). These courses, according to Iris, were a reply to people's need for fast responses to Ecuador's ongoing economic crises and were also supposed to foment citizenship, gender issue awareness, self-esteem and leadership. In reality, citizenship was hardly touched upon because CAM had no money to hire a teacher for the subject. Meanwhile gender, self-esteem and leadership, previously the essence of CAM's work with popular sector mestiza women, were covered in three days. The rest of the course was devoted to technical and legal issues involved in starting a small business. Therefore, Iris' department, the area of CAM that used to work with popular

sector mestiza women's organizations, had shifted almost completely to a market-based approach, as demonstrated by its current focus on micro-enterprise training and on providing competitive services that would attract public and private investors.

Iris 2002 (372-379)<sup>125</sup> Well, I believe that the change, for CAM, has been the fact of reducing personnel. I also believe that one of the things we have to do is make an effort to strengthen the technical abilities of the people (working for CAM) in order to offer better quality products, to be more competitive in the market. I believe that's a necessity we're seeing more and more everyday. Before, we used to work only out of love for our country and now we see that really we have to get ourselves into the market even though we don't like it. Also, we have to be very competitive, very responsible and also very demanding at the technical level.

According to Alvarez (1999) market-oriented training programs with a gender perspective, similar to CAM's micro-enterprise program, are part of a major growth industry in Chile (1999, 195). Schild (2000) also noticed market-related programming shifts for impoverished urban populations in Chile similar to those mentioned by Alvarez (1999) and to those I observed in Quito. In Schild's study, NGOs bid to carry out a local development program, called *Entre Todos* (Between Us All), aimed at impoverished men and women. The winning NGOs sent workers to communities pre-selected by the program. Once NGO workers gained the confidence of community leaders, they encouraged residents to design self-development projects for a funding contest. The contest excluded established community leaders and organizations, often bypassing them altogether, and their competitive nature ended up dividing the community. Only one project could win and, unbeknownst to the community, the winner was selected for its potential fundability, not its viability or potential for positive impact on the community.

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<sup>125</sup> Bueno, el cambio creo que para el CAM ha sido el hecho de, un poco reducir el personal, de, de yo creo que también una de las cosas que tenemos que hacer es hacer esfuerzos para, fortalecer la capacidad técnica de la gente, para ofrecer productos de mejor calidad, ser más competitivos en el mercado que creo que es una necesidad así como que la estamos viendo cada vez mas, no, antes trabajábamos solamente por amor a la patria y ahora vemos que, que realmente tenemos que meternos en esto que es el mercado aunque no nos guste, eje, y que además tenemos que, ser muy competitivas tenemos que ser muy responsables y, y también como muy exigentes a, a nivel técnico.

This kind of state-NGO development programming, according to Schild's analysis, changed the traditional, organization-based activity/protest approaches popular sectors had used to deal with their issues and indoctrinated them in the individualist, market-based ideology promoted by the neoliberal model of development (2000, 291, 293, 297).

CAM's micro-enterprise training directly produced effects similar to those pointed out by Schild (2000), especially individualism and a market focus. First, it extracted trainees from their communities and their organizations because the course only took place at one location in Quito. This often forced the individual to work as an individual, not with his/her community, or, more rarely, as an organization representative. Second, the trainees had to think in terms of market competitiveness to try to ensure the future success of their small businesses. Third, the trainees were encouraged to think they would be better citizens and would improve their communities if they joined and supported "the market" through a small business that would provide jobs for themselves and, perhaps, other individuals.

Unlike the program in Schild's (2000) study, CAM's micro-enterprise program did not yet include a funding contest while I was in the field; that was something CAM hoped to do in the near future. So, instead of competing for funding, program participants paid for the course (some received "scholarships" from institutions that they worked for or that worked in their neighborhoods) with hopes that they would find a way to finance their micro-enterprises independently. Yet, even if CAM obtained funds to "reward" certain course participants (CAM hoped to obtain micro-loans from the city of Quito), one program employee said the micro-loans would not be sufficient to give "winning" micro-enterprises a fair chance at success. She explained that, at most, the loans would be \$500 while she and her co-workers had calculated that the micro-

enterprises participants proposed would require at least \$2000 to get off the ground and have a chance at success.

The program employee's commentary surprised me since it meant that program coordinators were aware that *even if* participants got to the point of starting micro-enterprises (from what I observed, many did not), the micro-enterprises had limited chances of meeting participants' expectations or needs. Maybe I should not have been surprised. As Iris mentioned and as studies like Mayoux (1995) indicate, CAM and other NGOs were frustrated with their previous efforts at local intervention and were willing to try any new approach, especially if it brought donor support. Also, it could be that the program employee was being realistic. She was probably aware that, while new for CAM, micro-enterprise training was not a new or successful approach for NGOs in general. Mayoux's (1995) study clarifies that the majority of micro-enterprise projects have failed time and again because they do not deal directly with women's time, power and resource access issues. Also, the time span of references Mayoux utilizes in her study implies that the majority of income-producing and micro-enterprise programs have failed or done poorly (in terms of donor agency and participant expectations) over the past 20 years, if not longer.

To be fair, I understood, to some extent, the position of CAM workers. They might not have liked everything about their jobs or about CAM programming, but it was a job when there were few to be had. The most recent economic and political crises in Ecuador left very few individuals untouched, and middle-class women with university educations and feminist mindsets had very few public or private sector job options. Therefore, just like when women's NGOs began in Quito, women's NGOs like CAM, as one young worker explained, provided young women a chance to apply their skills in a

workspace that provided continuous education opportunities and a flexible work schedule, albeit with very low pay.

In consideration of their tight economic situations, I recognized that NGO workers and their institutions might shift their programming in order to provide for themselves. Yet, I was surprised how CAM and NGOs like them jumped from idea to idea rather than working off programs and networks already in place (perhaps they had already exhausted them). Also, the new programs, supposedly aimed at the popular sectors, seemed to not take popular sector mestiza women's needs and time restraints into consideration nor did they consider popular sector mestiza women's desire to work as groups rather than individuals. All of this gave me the impression that women's NGOs decided to follow the funding tracks available to them with little concern for the popular sector mestiza women who had been involved in their abandoned programs/projects.

### **CPMM**

While CPMM's efforts focused on political issues and mostly middle-class women, recent changes in the institution demonstrated, as in the case of CAM, the control donor agencies had over CPMM programming. I spoke with the content coordinator and the director of a CPMM program whose focal point was a school that trained (mostly) middle-class mestiza women to be better politicians/actors in formal politics. The content coordinator, Lucrecia, had a lot to say about CPMM and its transformation from an institution of the women's movement into something like an NGO. She explained that instead of focusing on policy and strategy, CPMM had become a technical advisor and project manager. She was frustrated with that fact that a project ended when funding ran out, that there was no follow-up with project participants and that, in order to get more funding, CPMM had had to change its ideals several times.

Lucrecia 2002 (573-583)<sup>126</sup> Yes, that is a problem. We've tried to not get into all of this, functioning like NGOs, because really we aren't an NGO, but we have certain similarities to NGOs and sometimes that job ends when the funding ends, that is the problem. Also, with funding they direct us where we have to go and not where we want to go. That's what they condition when you have funding, because we don't receive any resources from the State, and well, if we did have, it they would also limit us in terms of our position regarding the State. So, it is a really difficult situation to set out on, trying to be autonomous but having to respond to certain directives. But, up until now I believe we haven't done such a bad job. Though, without a doubt, the Coordinator becomes more and more like an institution than a movement.

The director of the political training program was not as critical of CPMM's recent activities. She pointed out that their projects could be improved, however, by providing sustained training, not just short-term, thematic workshops (which had become the norm). Her particular project, she added, needed to have greater coverage or get more people through training if it was to have lasting results and attract further funding.

I sat in on a two-day session of CPMM's political training school, part of its political training program. There I discovered that the entire program was up for funding renewal. School participants were frustrated with CPMM for starting something that it might not have had the funding to complete. They didn't want this to be another project to which they devoted a lot of time, but out of which they got nothing besides nice experiences. Later, I heard that the program had indeed lost its funding from the UNDP, its only sponsor, because its coverage was too limited and it did not incorporate popular sector women. Without funding, the program ended. Individuals working on the

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<sup>126</sup> Sí, ese es un problema, sí nosotros hemos tratado de no entrar en toda este, esta, como funcionan las ONGs, porque realmente no somos una ONG, pero tenemos ciertas similitudes con las ONGs, y a veces ese trabajo termina cuando termina el financiamiento, ese es el problema, y además con el financiamiento nos direccionan por donde tenemos que ir y no por donde nosotros queremos ir. Eso es lo que te condicionan cuando tu tienes financiamiento, porque no tenemos ningún recurso del Estado, y bueno y si tuviéramos también nos limitarían en cuanto a nuestra posición frente al Estado, entonces es, es una situación bastante difícil encaminar así, tratar de ser autónomas, pero tener que responder a ciertas directrices, pero bueno hasta ahora no lo, yo creo que no lo hemos hecho tan mal, sin embargo cada vez la Coordinadora se ha convertido más en una institución, más que un movimiento, en una institución.

program in various functions (some from popular sector mestiza women's organizations) lost their jobs, and school participants were left with nothing to show for their time and effort. It became yet another case of an NGO project left half-finished. This time, even middle-class women participants were left feeling abandoned.

### **“INSIDERS” ON THE “OUTSIDE”**

Matilda was among the group of middle-class women who founded CPMM and was a long-term collaborator with the middle-class women's movement, NGOs, and local branches of international agencies in Quito. When I met her for a casual interview, she worked for a UN program. She was very critical of the situation in which CPMM and women's NGOs found themselves and felt CPMM and NGOs had swapped roles. CPMM was fighting over projects and money while women's NGOs were trying to “do politics” and create policy. In her opinion, women's NGOs should be the technical branch that supported and carried out the politics created by the Women's Movement and its institutions, like CPMM.

Beyond this role reversal, she believed women's NGOs and institutions like CPMM misused funds. She didn't mean they skimmed project money for personal use. Rather, she meant they didn't find effective means to change politics/policy or help public administrators put the “gender inclusive policy” women's movement institutions insisted on into practice. She explained that women's NGOs offered “gender awareness” seminars that no one attended when, instead, they should offer workshops on how to create and apply “gender inclusive policy” without budget increases.

The biggest misuse of funds for her, however, had been NGO programming for popular sector women's organizations. With all the money women's NGOs had received for projects with popular sector women over the years, said Matilda, women's NGOs should have been teaching popular sector women how to change their demands into

*política* (policy / politics) that they (popular sector women or NGOs who claimed to represent them) could present before local and national governments. That effort, in her opinion, would have created the large impact sought by NGOs and institutions like CPMM. Yet, she felt, no women's NGO or women's movement institution had bothered to do this or planned to do so.

Lisa, a former NGO employee working for a self-supported popular sector women's movement in southern Ecuador, felt NGOs of any kind were complementary to the purposes of movements like the one with which she worked. At the same time, she emphasized that NGO programs independent of strong popular sector direction prioritized the economic model, promoted neoliberalism and expected ideas to only come from a few sources. She added that NGOs tended to co-opt popular sector women's voices, claiming they were popular sector "representatives" yet never consulting with them.

Heavy NGO involvement in a group, according to Lisa, created dependency on outside funding (no one was willing to sacrifice their own money for some purpose or fight) and prevented popular sector women from participating in political proposals (in the broad sense) because the NGO had them focused on economic projects. The economic focus did not allow the women to participate in/develop their own political projects and to assume their own voices/needs. Also, she pointed out, she had seen NGO clientelism divide communities (paralleling findings in Schild 2000) – those who received funding got along with each other while those who did not felt bitter.

From what she had observed in Quito, Lisa believed NGOs had created popular sector mestiza women's organizations with participants who never learned to make sacrifices for what they really wanted because they were overly accustomed to getting financial support for every activity. Now that they had no external support, Lisa wagered

that popular sector mestiza women's groups in Quito were unwilling to use their own resources to continue their activities. The quote below, for example, clearly parallels Lisa's observations and gives the impression that outside financing was an essential part of one organization's activities; that, without external funding, the organization could do nothing. Ecuador's worsened economic situation probably increased these beliefs, since women truly had fewer personal resources to contribute to the organization, and made it more difficult to change them (further limiting organizations).

Veronica Group (2001 684-693)<sup>127</sup> Of course, before we also had assistance (*ayudas*) for instance. And, so this assistance allowed us to mobilize. But now, this economic assistance that we used to get from other countries has been cut off. So, this is also the reason why, like my friend (*compañera*) said, it is hard to take money out of your own pocket, and with the little bit of assistance that we had, it used to pay bus fares. They helped us raise our awareness in a certain way, we also got small snacks (*refrigerio*), talks on human relations, on how we have to confront the situation and everything really. It was good help, but now, lamentably, there isn't any of that anymore. So that's the reason why you sort of end up like this in the group, meeting, getting your mind off of everyday life (*distraerse*) and nothing else. And it's sad in a way because the truth is there are so many other things we'd like to do, but we can't.

In consideration of the above, it seems possible that women's NGOs further limited popular sector mestiza women's organizations (unintentionally), by making them over-dependent on NGO assistance. CAM workers acknowledged this possibility, albeit belatedly and (of course) rarely in relation to their institutions' activities.

The NGO perspectives provided in this section demonstrate, in the case of CAM, the shift in NGO programming from collective, collaborative work with popular sector

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<sup>127</sup> Claro, es que anteriormente también teníamos por decirle ayudas, y entonces esas ayudas por ejemplo nos permitía poder movilizarnos, en cambio ahora ya están cerradas estas ayudas económicas que se tenía de otros países, entonces ese es el motivo también en que como decía la compañera, nosotros de nuestro bolsillo bien difícil poder sacar, y con las ayuditas que teníamos se nos pagaba los pasajes, se nos concientizaba en cierta forma, también recibíamos su pequeño refrigerio, las charlas de relaciones humanas como tenemos también que enfrentar la situación y todo pues, era una ayuda buena, pero lamentablemente ahorita ya no hay eso, entonces ese es el motivo también que uno tiene que ya, como irse quedando solamente así en el grupo, reunirse, distraerse y nada mas, y con cierta pena porque la verdad que ya, cuantas cosas mas quisiéramos hacer, pero no se puede

mestiza organizations to individualized, market-focused, competitive micro-enterprise training programs that paralleled neoliberal trends in donor agency interests. This shift, as I mentioned, mirrored the movement of other Latin American NGOs toward more neoliberal programming (Alvarez 1999, Schild 2000, Alvarez et al 2003). CAM's case, along with CPMM, also demonstrated that program development and duration was based upon donor agency interests and the money those interests represented rather than the needs or limitations of the groups NGOs or NGO-like institutions supposedly served.

The negative impacts of NGOs' tendency to "follow the money" and increasingly neoliberal programming were illustrated by NGO critics, Matilda and Lisa. Matilda stressed that the efforts of NGOs and NGO-like institutions were misdirected because they did not teach people how to help themselves. For example, she said women's NGO programming had not taught popular sector mestiza women how to turn their demands into politics or policy or, in other words, how to speak the language NGOs and NGO-like institutions used to draw attention to and confront issues, like domestic violence and gender discrimination, at the level of local and national government. In turn, Lisa argued that, when allowed free reign, neoliberal NGO programming was harmful because it fostered an economic focus within popular sector organizations and prevented popular sector organizations' political development and involvement. She also felt that NGO-funded projects divided communities through competition over access to NGO resources and made participating organizations so dependent on external support that they could not act without it.

### **Chapter summary**

At the beginning of this chapter, I illustrated how the decline in popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations was not due, solely, to Ecuador's worsened economic situation. Rather, popular sector mestiza women's organization participants

felt that, in addition to their reduced ability to participate (due to economic crisis), their organizations were weakened by the withdrawal of NGO support. The distancing of women's NGOs, as popular sector mestiza women's accounts showed, severely restricted access to information and finances that popular sector mestiza women's organizations needed to develop collective approaches to economic crisis. Popular sector Black women also had difficulty obtaining the information and finances their organizations needed to confront economic issues thanks to NGOs' marginalization of and Black Movement leaders' exclusion of popular sector Black women's organizations, shown above and in de la Torre (2002), Halpern and Twine (2000) and Wade (1997). The combination of economic crisis and withdrawal of external support produced two striking results. One, many organized popular sector mestiza women were now wary of NGOs, some even saw NGOs as adversaries. Two, organized popular sector mestiza and Black women no longer felt empowered or able to confront their economic needs, much less their socio-political issues. This second result, in the case of Quito, Ecuador at least, counters the hopes or conclusions of authors like Lind (1992), Rodríguez (1994), Miller (1991) and Stephen (1997) or new social movement theorists like Melucci (1988) and Foweraker (1995) who saw the collective actions of popular sector women and other traditionally oppressed groups (like Blacks) as sources of social and political change.

CAM's and CPMM's programming changes represent two cases of women's NGOs and NGO-like institutions who shifted their programming often in order to match donor agency interests and, thereby, receive donor agency monies. In the case of CAM, programming became more neoliberal, as shown by its focus on micro-enterprise training that tried to produce rapid, market-based, individual responses to economic issues. I used studies by Alvarez (1999), Schild (2000) and Alvarez et al (2003) to demonstrate that CAM's increasingly neoliberal programming represented a larger trend among Latin

American NGOs and undermined popular sector organizations by emphasizing individualized solutions over collective approaches. Meanwhile, organized popular sector mestiza women's disinclination toward CAM's new micro-enterprise training made it apparent that this programming did not take organized popular sector mestiza women's needs or desire to work collectively into account. Finally, the fact that CAM employees were aware that micro-enterprises had little chance of meeting participants' expectations supported the idea that CAM cared more about the income micro-enterprise programming produced than about program participants' needs or concerns.

Former NGO-workers, turned critics, provided supporting materials to the argument that NGO programming could limit and/or undermine the collective efforts of popular sector women to confront their needs. Matilda believed that women's NGOs did not provide popular sector women the information or political education needed to transform their demands into politics and policy – the only language, Matilda implied, to which government representatives would pay attention. Lisa theorized that popular sector women's organizations had been crippled by NGO projects that endorsed neoliberalism, promoted a one-sided focus on economic issues, limited (or prevented) political activity and divided communities through competition over NGO resources.

About a year before I left the field, I heard that financiers like the UNDP, who had supported CPMM's political school project, now sought to work directly with popular sector organizations. It seemed not all donor agencies promoted a focus on popular sector individuals and that more popular sector women's organizations would find the external assistance they wanted. Yet, most popular sector women's organizations I knew did not find support, at least while I was in the field. Lisa and Pati, who both worked for organizations run by and for popular sector women, explained that their organizations' access to international funding was limited because they no longer

wished to work through (or underneath) NGOs. These groups also did not fit into the programming tracks offered by the UNDP or other financiers who supposedly wanted to work directly with popular sector organizations. As made apparent by commentaries and organizations presented in this chapter as well as Lisa and Pati's experiences above, it appears that NGOs, NGO-like institutions and donors were moving in contrary directions. These uncoordinated (and, perhaps, inconsiderate) NGO and donor agency programs left supposed and potential "targets," popular sector mestiza and Black women, alone and unfunded when they most desperately sought assistance.

## Chapter 8: Conclusions

I ended the previous chapter with an image wherein organized popular sector mestiza women are isolated in the midst of a flurry of activity designed, supposedly, to “help poor people” like them, and organized popular sector Black women are watching from the margins, their economic needs disregarded by assistance agencies, NGOs as well as Black Movement leaders. The lack of agency in this image is frustrating and unsettling when compared to popular sector mestiza and Black women’s commentaries about the empowerment they experienced as well as the community and household changes they enacted in the past. They felt that they did not have and could not obtain the financial or informational resources they needed to collectively confront the results of Ecuador’s most recent economic crisis. They believed NGOs and, in the case of popular sector Black women, university-educated Black Movement leaders had access to these resources but were not willing to share them. Adding insult to injury, the few programs offered to popular sector mestiza and Black women did not consider their needs and limitations.

How did popular sector mestiza and Black women’s organizations get to this point of desperation? After Ecuador’s recent economic crisis, popular sector mestiza and Black women’s organizations revealed similar educational and economic needs as well as similar experiences of organizational decline linked to Ecuador’s increasingly neoliberal macro-economic policy. At the same time, they indicated NGOs’ failure to assist them with their educational and economic needs. Neoliberal transformations in NGO programming influenced NGOs’ exclusion of popular sector mestiza women’s organizations while social constructions of racial and ethnic identities were probably

behind NGOs' exclusion of popular sector Black women's organizations. Organized popular sector Black women also added that they had sought out NGO assistance because Black Movement leaders disregarded requests for economic programming. So, although their bases for exclusion differed, I believe it was organized popular sector mestiza and Black women's exclusion from information and resources that lead to their feelings of hopelessness and anxiety despite their past accomplishments.

As I discussed in the chapter "In the Beginning," the relationship between transnational agencies, NGOs and Quito's popular sector mestiza women began in the early 1980s. At this time, transnational agencies favored NGOs and organization-based education for popular sector women in Latin America because they believed they would further their goals at the time: strengthen and consolidate democracy through improved civil society and alleviate global poverty by improving the situation of "poor" women (Müller 1994, Vega 1992, Schild 2000). During this period, economic reform (soon to be called neoliberalization) was also believed to support democracy (Rakowski 2000) and "help" Latin America overall (Williamson 1990 and 2000). Both the transnational emphasis on economic reform and helping "poor" women promoted and shaped the formation of women's NGOs and popular sector mestiza women's organizations in two ways. One, economic reform caused Ecuador to cut its social spending and reduce the public sector which limited the job market for many university-educated, middle-class women and fostered popular sector women's collectivization to meet their needs. And, two, the emphasis on helping "poor" women provided funds to work with popular sector women and their organizations, presenting some university-educated middle-class women with a new source of employment, and gave financial support to popular sector women's organizations.

With the support of women's NGOs funded by transnational agencies, popular sector mestiza women's organizations consolidated and fostered popular sector women's increased agency through the provision of learning opportunities. In many cases, women's NGOs used popular education pedagogy, paralleling Freire (1985) and Vargas' (1993) approaches, to provide learning opportunities. It was also the provision of learning opportunities that formed and maintained tight relations between women's NGOs and popular sector mestiza women's organizations in Quito until about 2000.

With the help of Wade's (1997) and de la Torre's (2002) analyses, I found it very likely that constructions of race and ethnicity influenced transnational agencies and NGOs who helped "poor" women and "marginalized groups" in their decisions (intentional or otherwise) to overlook popular sector Black women in Quito. Expanding upon Wade's (1997) explanation that Black identities are not institutionalized in Latin America to the same extent as indigenous identities, I think it likely that Black women (and Blacks in general) went unnoticed by identity/culture focused aid programs because they were not part of a legal and political group that could demand assistance based on identity, culture and/or ethnicity. Prior to the ratification of Ecuador's 1998 Constitution, the Ecuadorian state did not officially recognize Black Ecuadorians as a special (i.e. ethnic) group that had need of specific state policies (de la Torre 2002, 89). De la Torre stresses that groups require that qualification as "special" if they are to successfully organize and form movements (2002, 90). In other words, unlike indigenous Ecuadorians, Black Ecuadorians did not have an official qualification as "special" or ethnic that they could use to negotiate for particular programs and other forms of assistance from abroad until 1998.

In addition, constructions of race in Quito, which not only incorporated color but also socio-economic class, beauty, personal character, geographic origin and value to

society (observations, similar findings in de la Torre 2002, Fernández-Rasines 2001), might have predisposed NGOs and similar support institutions to exclude popular sector Black women from programming for “poor” women. In Quito, being identified as Black often meant you were considered not only extremely poor but also ugly, thieving, ignorant and of no worth to society. So, although I could not corroborate this, I believe that some women’s NGOs in Quito discriminated against Black women and did not recruit them into programming for “poor” women because constructions of race depicted Black women and their organizations as individuals and groups not worthy of assistance.

Despite discrimination, a supposed lack of institutionalization and limited access to external support, popular sector and university-educated middle-class Black women and men created a Black identity-based movement with the assistance of Comboni Catholic missionaries and, according to de la Torre (2002), an Ecuadorian state willing to provide funding to Blacks based on their identity/culture before that identity/culture was an official legal and political category. Popular sector Black women’s organizations were very different from those of popular sector mestiza women in their identity focus and assistance sources, but similar in that they attracted members and consolidated themselves around learning opportunities. In fact, like women’s NGO-popular sector mestiza women relations, it was the provision of learning opportunities that formed and maintained ties between popular sector Black women’s organizations, Comboni missionaries and university-educated Black leaders.

In the chapter “The Golden Years,” popular sector mestiza women indicated that organization participation and the learning opportunities it provided helped them improve their household relationships and their communities. Their experiences were paralleled among organized popular sector women across Latin America and raised hopes that popular sector women would become/were sources of social change (Martin 1990, Lind

1992, Rodríguez 1994, Stephen 1997). Popular sector mestiza participants also listed the economic solutions provided by organizations<sup>128</sup> as factors behind their joining organizations and the improvements they experienced. In many cases, organized popular sector mestiza women gave women's NGOs credit as sole providers of the social and economic benefits they obtained through participation, indicating that women's NGO-popular sector mestiza women's relations were probably hierarchical and clientelistic at times.

Looking back, I saw a few events during this golden era of popular sector mestiza women's organizations that foreshadowed the problems these organizations would face future. For example, popular sector mestiza women benefited greatly from the funding women's NGOs obtained for their projects during the golden years, but women's NGOs rarely shared the skills, contacts and procedures that brought those projects into fruition. And, just as Matilda, the former NGO worker pointed out in the previous chapter, women's NGOs never shared the language of policy (*política*) that was essential for talking about women's demands in both political and financial circles. As a result, women's NGOs were almost entirely in control of the funding process leaving few organized popular sector mestiza women educated about and aware of how their ideas and needs contributed to that process. Once women's NGOs withdrew, many popular sector mestiza women's organizations realized they had little idea of who to contact or how to get funding. Limited awareness of policy-oriented language also left organized popular sector mestiza women without the terminology that would draw the attention of both potential financiers and political allies.

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<sup>128</sup> Not surprisingly, transnational agencies had something to do with this ability to provide economic solutions. Mayoux (1995) indicates that, since the 1970s, donor agencies, development programs and NGOs have promoted income-producing projects and micro-enterprises for "poor" women as poverty alleviation strategies.

Comboni missionaries and Black Movement leaders continued to emphasize Black identity and culture through the programming they provided popular sector Black women's organizations from the mid-80s to the late 90s. According to participants, this identity/culture focused programming provided benefits like empowerment and increased feelings of self-value through awareness and appreciation of Black Ecuadorian community and history. Some participants also believed that the mix-sex approach in Black Movement programming helped them negotiate gender-role issues at home, offering a counter-example to some NGO worker's and Vargas' (1993) beliefs that popular sector women could best address gender-role issues if they were in all-female groups.

Although popular sector Black women participants said they faced economic needs as strong as when their organizations began, they explained (with frustration) that Black Movement programming for grassroots participants did not address economic issues during the mid-80s to the late 90s. The Comboni missionaries tried to assist popular sector Black participants with economic issues by providing micro-loans for income-producing projects. Unfortunately, the Combonis' efforts to help met failure because, according to some organized popular sector Black women, participating organizations were not given enough training. As members of Africa's Daughters explained later (see the appendix for details on this group), this failure provoked an exodus, severely weakening participating organizations as well as the Black Movement, and shook people's already weak faith in the abilities of an organization or Black Movement to help provide for their needs.

Organized popular sector Black women pointed out that, during the golden era of their organizations, Black Movement leaders failed to transmit clear Movement objectives to grassroots participants, did not discuss the funding process with grassroots

participants and never assumed or shared coordinating activities with Comboni missionaries. With the benefit of hindsight, these women saw these factors as the principle reasons why they had problems attracting new members, writing proposals to finance projects and contacting other popular sector Black groups when Black Movement leaders and Comboni missionaries were unwilling or unavailable to assist. They also believed these same factors impeded the Black Movement's efforts to consolidate itself at present.

Ecuador's recent economic crisis and intensified neoliberalization did not improve the situation of popular sector mestiza women in Quito and neoliberalism, through its impact on popular sector women's life contexts and on their organizations in Quito, had indeed "transform[ed] significantly the conditions under which collective action may take place" (Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998, 23). As popular sector mestiza women's commentaries in "A Change in Era" showed, Ecuador's economic crisis and its intensified neoliberal reform afterward reduced women's ability to participate in organizations by forcing them to devote more time and labor to household-focused reproductive and productive activities. In attempts to respond to participants' worsened economic situations and to maintain membership, popular sector mestiza women's organizations looked to women's NGOs for additional economic solutions and assistance programming.

Despite increased demand, NGO programming for popular sector mestiza women's organizations decreased drastically. Popular sector mestiza women expressed that their past NGO allies had abandoned them and showed no interest in supporting their collective efforts to provide for their worsened economic needs. Also, they claimed the lack of NGO-provided resources provoked competition between popular sector mestiza women's organizations and undermined their already weak inter-organizational networks.

Neoliberalism had indirectly destabilized popular sector mestiza women's collective activities through its influence over a series of factors that caused women's NGOs to shift their support away from popular sector mestiza women's organizations. Changes in the global economy and funding interests, due to the opening of Eastern Europe (Schild 1998) and Ecuador's self-proclaimed economic recovery, supported warily by some foreign analysts (The Economist 2001), lead several donor and development agencies to end their programs in Ecuador. This significantly reduced the finance available to NGOs in Quito, like CAM. The agencies and transnational poverty alleviation programs that remained in Ecuador had become increasingly neoliberal in their focus, reflective of a larger trend (Schild 2000, Alvarez et al 2003). This neoliberal programming demanded greater efficiency and bigger impacts on behalf of NGOs (Murdock 2003, Interview with Iris) and promoted individualized, market-oriented solutions for popular sector individuals (Schild 2000, Alvarez 1999). These factors resulted in local NGOs, like CAM, ending their programming for popular sector mestiza women's organizations and shifting their efforts to policy development and promotion as well as micro-enterprise training for popular sector individuals (men and women). Popular sector mestiza women's organizations no longer fit within the interests of transnational agencies and local NGOs, shaped strongly by neoliberal policy and ideology. So, popular sector mestiza women's organizations were cut from programming without previous consultation and, apparently, regardless of the damage this action might have caused.

Popular sector Black women and their organizations were no better off than their mestiza counterparts after Ecuador's recent economic crisis. Organized popular sector Black women looked to Black Movement leaders for emergency assistance or possible economic solutions, but found that leaders ignored or overlooked grassroots participants'

economic needs. Some organized popular sector Black women believed that Black Movement leaders ignored grassroots needs and interests because they (Black leaders) felt their university-educations made them and their ideas more important and valuable to the Black Movement than those of grassroots participants. De la Torre would add that Black Movement leaders maintained a focus on culture and identity (and avoided economic issues) in order to preserve the Black Movement's reason for existence – i.e. to promote the uniqueness of and fight for the special needs of the Black Ecuadorian population – and to protect their prestigious positions as leaders of a nationally recognized movement (2002, 92-93).

Black leaders' failure to provide economic solutions and the distancing of the Black Movement from the Combonis (who had provided economic support in the past, albeit unsuccessfully) caused a few popular sector Black women's organizations to seek out NGOs for possible support. As before, they had no luck. The popular sector Black women participants who tried to present proposals to NGOs felt that their projects did not capture the attention of NGOs or other sources of financial support because their organizations were part of a Black Movement that was too new and in the process of consolidation and, therefore, did not have clear ideas or objectives nor the recognition brought by a history of successful projects. Remember that I found this explanation for NGOs' rejection of popular sector Black women's organization proposals confusing when compared to NGOs' support of popular sector mestiza organizations that had only existed a few months. I later came to believe that this case paralleled NGOs' exclusion of Black organization proposals and participants in Ecuador and Latin America in general (Halpern and Twine 2000, Wade 1997). Although for different reasons, popular sector mestiza women's organizations came to share this experience of NGO exclusion with their Black counterparts shortly after Ecuador's 1999 economic crisis.

In the cases of both popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations, the inability to provide collective solutions for the increased economic needs of members caused many members to leave and made organizations unappealing to potential newcomers. Both organized popular sector mestiza and Black women blamed the lack of external financial and informational support for their organizations' failure to provide economic assistance and/or solutions. NGOs now offered individualized, short-term, market-based solutions and were not interested in providing financial or informational support for organized popular sector mestiza women's proposals to confront economic issues through collective approaches. Meanwhile, organized popular sector Black women discovered many Black Movement leaders would not support their economic projects and that the Combonis could not offer much assistance since the Movement had distanced itself from the missionaries. All of these issues provoked organizational decline, making many organized popular sector mestiza and Black women feel they had lost a principal source of support in their lives and powerless to confront their worsened economic situations, let alone their other socio-political needs. They no longer seemed to be the elements of change they and many researchers, like Martin (1990), Lind (1992), Rodríguez (1994) and Stephen (1997), had believed them to be.

Within the chapter "A Change in Era," I included the opinions of a few individuals on why this organizational decline might be happening and why organized popular sector mestiza and Black women felt so helpless. Pati and Angela implied that it was not in the interests of NGOs and university-educated Black leaders that popular sector mestiza and Black women have their support to learn and develop group solutions to confronting economic crises. According to Pati and Angela, whose viewpoint paralleled that of de la Torre (2002), NGOs and university-educated Black leaders wanted to maintain control over the information that would help them keep their jobs and

ensure that they were the only ones informed enough to receive financial support. Pati and Angela's ideas also reflected Petras and Veltmeyer (2001), who believe that NGOs and similar institutions limit the agency of popular sector collective action by making them focus on limited and immediate issues so they do not see or mobilize against the larger issues surrounding them, like neoliberalism. This ensures that NGOs keep their jobs because they are the only ones informed about the "big picture" and also maintain favor with government and international agencies by keeping the popular sectors quiet.

Other respondents, like Lisa the former NGO worker, believed that popular sector mestiza women's organizations were in decline because, in Quito, these organizations and their participants were overly dependent on NGO support and were not invested enough in their fight for change to carry on independently, using their own resources. NGOs fostered over-dependence (unintentionally or otherwise) during the beginning stages and so-called golden years of popular sector mestiza women's organizations by facilitating and/or funding nearly every activity and rarely teaching the skills and language organizations would need to coordinate and finance projects on their own.

Fitzsimmons' (2000) belief that Chile's women's organizations are in decline because they could not adjust to their newly democratic environment helps clarify Lisa and Angela's ideas. As Fitzsimmons (2000) points out, using organizational theory, the youngest organizations are the most inflexible and the most likely to die when their environment changes. Popular sector mestiza women's organizations in Quito were born and raised under the unique circumstances of a highly funded, non-profit Ecuador that was created almost solely to serve the purposes of popular sector women's organizations. Now, non-profit Quito has almost no funding. So, in order to support themselves, NGOs have turned to in-vogue, well-funded market-oriented programs that they offer on a "take it or leave it" basis, leaving popular sector women's organizations alone in their attempts

to adapt to this new environment. Perhaps, due to the peculiarity of their birth and adolescence, popular sector mestiza women's organizations were creatures maladapted to present circumstances of resource scarcity.

Finally, other popular sector mestiza women gave the impression that organizations were in decline because women were tired of protesting and of being used. Their commentary mirrored Molyneux (2002) and Lind's (2002) critique that governments and international aid agencies, through both direct programming and projects contracted out to NGOs, use women's free labor and their collective actions as shock absorbers for bad neoliberal policy. It might be that, in Quito, NGO programs had taken advantage of popular sector women's labor too long, and popular sector women were not going to jump into action without being certain that their needs and limitations were taken into consideration. Simply put, women cannot be expected to volunteer forever.

My conclusion as to why popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations were, apparently, in decline and why their participants, previously self-proclaimed activists, now felt so hopeless is informed by the above opinions (of course) and is framed by Freire's (1985) belief that those in power maintain the status quo by controlling the distribution of knowledge. Freire proposed popular education to counter dominant groups' control over knowledge, but as my own work shows, women's NGOs had authoritative control over most popular education programs and other sources of information for popular sector mestiza women in Quito. As indicated by Schild (1998), Alvarez (1998) and Mindry (2001), NGOs have control over programming for two reasons. One, NGO "professionalism" – including the professional titles of their employees - captures transnational donor agency funding that grassroots organizations, who rarely have university-educated members, are not qualified enough to win. And,

two, the ‘winners’ of funds, NGOs, decide how and where funds are spent. Transnational donor agencies, in turn, have control over popular sector programming through their financial influence on NGOs.

Recent NGO program changes, represented here by the case of CAM and also discussed by Schild (2000) and Alvarez (1999), show NGOs have adjusted the content and knowledge provided in popular education programs to fit their financial interests rather than the economic or socio-political needs of the popular sectors. These adjustments completely contradict the collaborative and collective nature of the popular education proposed by Freire as well as the collective nature of the educational and economic solutions popular sector mestiza and Black organizations wanted to develop. The actions of women’s NGOs, like CAM, also showed a total denial of popular sector mestiza women’s voice in decisions about the popular education offered to them. To make things worse for popular sector mestiza women, the interests of transnational donor agencies and, thereby, those of the NGOs dependent upon them for funding, have come to increasingly reflect and/or support neoliberal ideology and macroeconomic policy (Schild 2000, Petras and Veltmeyer 2001), significant contributors to the worsened economic situations of popular sector mestiza (and Black) women in Quito (Palán 1993, Naranjo 1992).

As my interviews showed, organized popular sector mestiza women captured the language of solidarity, collective action and women’s rights brought to them through NGO programming. By 2001, however, many still felt they could not use what they had learned to create collective action independent of NGOs. It would seem that NGOs had shrewdly controlled the knowledge they distributed so that its recipients (popular sector mestiza women) would not present a challenge later on. Perhaps this hypothesis is too pessimistic or paranoid. All the same, with no voice in NGO programming or popular

education, especially now that women's NGOs like CAM focus on individuals rather than organizations, it appears popular sector mestiza women's organizations in Quito have little chance of getting programs that consider their needs and limitations. Also, without access to alternative sources of information, it seems unlikely that popular sector mestiza women's organizations will break or sidestep NGOs' control over knowledge and other resources. Put in terms of Gramsci's ideas on adult education (analyzed in Mayo 1999), if the only source of information or knowledge available to popular sector mestiza women promotes the neoliberal ideology that is trying to gain hegemony, it will be very hard for popular sector mestiza women to critically respond to that ideology.

While popular sector Black women's organizations had little to do with NGOs, they, like their mestiza counterparts, faced problems of access to information and financial resources. Due to the social prestige and mobility provided by the Ecuadorian state's recognition of them as leaders (de la Torre 2002, 92-93) and by their university educations, Black Movement leaders had access to resources (especially those that came to Ecuador through ethnic development programs) that organized popular sector Black women did not. Black Movement leaders also realized that the way to maintain their prestigious positions and control over resources was to keep their ideas and the uniqueness of Black Ecuadorian identity and culture in the limelight (interview with Angela, de la Torre 2002). In addition, organized popular sector Black women's persistent inability to get the Black Movement to help with economic needs showed that Black leaders, much like NGOs, adjusted the content of popular sector programming to their needs rather than those of popular sector Black participants. In the case of both organized popular sector mestiza and Black women, it seems they no longer fit within NGOs' and Black leaders' interests, provoking, in large part, their exclusion and

disempowerment at a time when they had great need of assistance and of means to continue their collective efforts to confront crisis.

It is the painful irony of organized popular sector mestiza and Black women's situations that I cannot get over. The very institutions and people who had gotten popular sector mestiza and Black women 'hooked' on organization participation were the same institutions and people that were making popular sector mestiza and Black women's organization participation nearly impossible by cutting them off, intentionally or otherwise, from knowledge and resources. Even more ironic, these institutions and people still claimed they 'helped' popular sector mestiza and Black women despite the fact that their actions and their control over the distribution of knowledge reiterated popular sector mestiza and Black women's socioeconomic subordination. Instead of continuing to offer programming that spoke to popular sector mestiza and Black women's needs and limitations, these institutions and people decided to embark on projects that fulfilled their financial needs and, in the case of NGOs, reflected the increasingly neoliberal ideologies of external financiers. Thus, I feel I must end this dissertation on a pessimistic note, portraying the past supporters of popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations as people and institutions that presently seek to make helping a more profitable enterprise in terms of economic and social upward mobility.

Paralleling points made by Mohanty (2003), Alvarez et al (2003), Petras and Veltmeyer (2001) and the Ecuadorian Palán (1993), the depressed situation of popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations in Quito seriously questions the feasibility of neoliberal policy and neoliberal ideology as sources of "solutions to poverty" on the micro-level. Rather than creating new sources of employment and capital, macro-economic neoliberal policy in Ecuador, it appears, continuously undercuts any advance popular sector mestiza and Black women make when trying to meet their

individual and household economic needs. Neoliberal ideology as promoted by transnational funding agencies, meanwhile, holds increasing influence over the programming and projects of NGOs. In the case of CAM, I believe neoliberal ideology, as passed down through donor agency funding stipulations, helped provoke programming transformations that undermined the collective approaches organized popular sector mestiza women found useful in the past and replaced them with individualized approaches that appealed to few and provided no real solutions to poverty.

If I were more idealistic, perhaps I would hope that the Ecuadorian government and NGOs like CAM take note of the negative impact their neoliberal policy and programming decisions have upon popular sector mestiza and Black women and offer more support for collective approaches to resolving economic needs. Of course, authors like Schild (1998, 2000) have already pointed out that, when governments and NGOs start to support approaches used by popular sector groups, these approaches tend to be co-opted and transformed into something that meets the needs of government and NGOs, not those of the popular sectors. The apparent state of decline of popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations in Quito, due to governmental and NGO decisions, raises the distinct possibility that the Ecuadorian government and Quito's NGOs do not always put the welfare of the popular sectors before their own.

Of course, organized popular sector mestiza and Black women's feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness not only speak to the inability of neoliberal policy and ideology to present so-called "solutions to poverty," they also problematize some of the social movement and popular education theories that foresee women like them as potential agents of social change. While helpful for theorizing how popular sector mestiza and Black women in Quito empowered themselves and opened arenas of action through identity and collective actions in household and community, Foweraker (1995),

Rodríguez (1994), Lind (1992) and Freire (1985) are not so useful for explaining why, despite their past successes and learning experiences, these women now feel very limited in their ability to create positive change. Wade (1997), de la Torre (2002) and the critical race theorist Iglesias (2002), for instance, all point out that social and legal constructions as well as funding can inhibit and promote collective action around racialized (or ethnic) identities. Yet, their work also has its limitations when trying to understand why organized popular sector Black women feel their grassroots groups are in decline while Black Movement leaders and upper level committees of the Black Movement are, apparently, gaining strength and recognition locally, nationally and internationally.

By demonstrating hierarchical power relations between upper levels of movements and the grassroots or between NGOs and the groups they assist, De la Torre (2002), Mindry (2001), Alvarez (1998) and others like them, try to de-romanticize social movements and show that just because individuals, groups and institutions may claim to have shared objectives does not mean they will selflessly provide for, or even acknowledge, one another's interests. And, I used the work of these authors in combination with my data to show that organized popular sector mestiza and Black women's subordinate socio-economic status plainly left them at a disadvantage in their negotiations for access to the knowledge and resources that NGOs and Black Movement leaders used to support their activities.

Despite the rationale I offered throughout my analysis, I still find myself wondering why popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations in Quito felt so hopeless in the face of Ecuador's most recent economic crisis and without the assistance of NGOs, Comboni missionaries or Black Movement leaders. Why did they seem to have so very little agency when confronting hierarchy and the influences of neoliberalism when these were two elements that provoked their organization in the 80s and 90s? My

observations and data often led me to portray popular sector mestiza and Black women and NGOs, like CAM, as characters who, by the time I met them, accepted (albeit grudgingly) whatever powerful leaders or neoliberally-influenced agents dictated. This portrayal is obviously not accurate for all cases, as clearly indicated by Lisa's story about the popular sector women's movement in Southern Ecuador (discussed in the previous chapter) that refuses to be dependent upon middle-class supporters, NGOs or to accept neoliberal policy and ideology. Experiences from Ecuador's Indigenous Movement, also very anti-neoliberal, might provide an alternative portrayal as well.

In the future, I want to continue my research with popular sector mestiza and Black women's organizations and see how they confront their current situations of economic crisis and organizational decline. More immediately, however, I hope to collaborate with other investigators who work with Black and Indigenous Movements (both within and outside of Ecuador) in order to encounter and debate alternative theoretical models and experiences that illuminate relations between grassroots participants and leaders in social movements as well as interactions between popular sector organizations and the institutions that support them. This collaboration, I expect, will also help me find better ways to consider the influence of and reactions to neoliberal ideology among organizations and institutions like those discussed in this dissertation.

## Appendix – List of organizations

*All information refers to the period 2001-2002<sup>129</sup>*

### Low-Income Women's Grassroots Organizations

1. Martha Bucaram

*Characteristics:* Mestiza women, popular sector, community-based, newer families with young children, most not homeowners

*Age (approx.):* 18 years

*Focus issues:* Daycare project; economic issues – especially funding additional sources of income; women's issues (minimal)

*NGO involvement in foundation:* Yes

*Additional comments:* Group rarely discussed being a women's organization during meetings, spent 99% of meeting time on daycare and related issues; around 30 members would show to meetings; intense NGO involvement at beginning, dropped off to almost nothing around 2000

2. AMPM – Asociación de Mujeres Pro-Mejoras, Women's Improvement Association

*Characteristics:* Mestiza women, popular sector, community-based; most homeowners with children 12 and up, few renters with children under 12

*Age (approx.):* 18 years

*Focus issues:* Management of organization's community health center; economic issues; construct organizational meeting/activities building

*NGO involvement in foundation:* Yes

*Additional comments:* Only group where I observed interactions over several years – met them in 1998, again in 2000 and worked with them until 2002; 15-30 members would show to meetings; minimal NGO involvement when formed, then sharp increase and gradual drop off to almost nothing around 2000

3. GMV – Grupo de Mujeres para el Vecindario, Women for the Neighborhood

*Characteristics:* Mestiza women, popular sector, community-based, most homeowners with adult children

*Age (approx.):* 18 years

*Focus issues:* Socializing, economic issues, women's issues, finding income-producing project

*NGO involvement in foundation:* Yes

*Additional comments:* Between 4-6 members would show to meetings; personality conflicts reducing motivation and membership; no ongoing group projects; intense

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<sup>129</sup> I have changed the names of all organizations listed, excepting 16 and 17 which are groups I visited but that are only referred to via other authors in my dissertation.

NGO involvement beginning to mid-point of organization's existence with gradual decline to nothing by 2000

4. EDU – Empleadas Domésticas Unidas, Domestic Workers United  
*Characteristics:* Mestiza and Black women, popular sector, most renters with children of all ages, organization recruited women from all over Quito  
*Age (approx.):* 18 years  
*Focus issues:* Domestic worker's rights, promotion of organization, find external funding, economic issues, women's issues, health issues related to work conditions, member skill training  
*NGO involvement in foundation:* Yes and no. NGO suggested formation but offered no concrete informational or financial support after that point.  
*Additional comments:* Key for analysis of NGO clientelistic practices, funding-based motivation of NGO decisions as well as façade funding foundations; supposedly 80 members on list – five active; majority of members are Black; legalized in 2000; according to founder, work schedule of domestic workers and their very scarce economic resources principal reasons for low activity levels
  
5. Nueva Aurora – New Aurora  
*Characteristics:* Mestiza women, popular sector, community-based  
*Age (approx.):* 10 years  
*Focus issues:* Economic issues, find income-producing project; ceramics course; women's issues (minimal)  
*NGO involvement in foundation:* Yes, minimal and short term  
*Additional comments:* AMPM women claimed they helped to start this group but had to pull out after community resistance; visited twice – individual who introduced me to the group not well-liked by president so I was not given permission to work with the group
  
6. Mujeres del Dorado – Women of El Dorado  
*Characteristics:* Mestiza women, popular sector, community-based, squatters  
*Age (approx.):* 10 years  
*Focus issues:* Housing and property legalization issues; economic issues; women's issues  
*NGO involvement in foundation:* Not as far as I am aware  
*Additional comments:* Members from newer squatter settlement; socialistic ideology; visited twice and performed one group interview
  
7. Hijas de África – Africa's Daughters  
*Characteristics:* Black women, popular sector, community-based, majority of active members over 50  
*Age (approx.):* 10 years

*Focus issues:* Economic issues; find income-producing project; find external support; strengthen organization; Black culture education; women's issues; issues for Black population; religious (Catholic) study

*NGO involvement in foundation:* No

*Additional comments:* Had been assisted by and remained highly involved with Comboni Catholic Missionaries; only about five active members; trying to breathe life back into the group; key for NGO clientelism/interests analysis; key for grassroots-Black Movement leadership relations discussion

8. Manuela Saenz

*Characteristics:* Mestiza women, popular sector, community-based, most new homeowners in recently created barrio some renters, most had children over 12

*Age (approx.):* 8 years

*Focus issues:* Economic issues; strengthening organization; sheet-making micro-enterprise; micro-banking cooperative

*NGO involvement in foundation:* Yes, but minimal and short term until 2002

*Additional comments:* No formal interviews, but three visits to organization meetings and several phone conversations with the president; representative of the middle-period of women's NGO organizing activities; group experienced a re-birth in 2002, a new NGO (tied to city government and transnational donor agency) came to work with and strengthen all organizations within barrio

9. Santa Rosa

*Characteristics:* Mestiza women, popular sector, community-based

*Age (approx.):* 4 years

*Focus issues:* Economic issues; daycare; women's issues; starting urban garden income-producing project (two members)

*NGO involvement in foundation:* Yes, intense for duration of daycare and beginning of urban garden project

*Additional comments:* Key for analysis of NGO clientelistic behavior – group started with budget diner project that failed and was converted into daycare; daycare in process of closing when I visited; only two out of four remaining members continued in urban garden project; middle or end period of women's NGO organizing efforts

10. Delicias del Hogar

*Characteristics:* Mestiza women, popular sector, from same general sector of Quito but not all from same barrio

*Age (approx.):* 3 years

*Focus issues:* Running catering micro-enterprise; job training; women's issues

*NGO involvement in foundation:* Yes

*Additional comments:* Made up of women from other popular sector mestiza women's organizations (some of which no longer existed); initiated by an NGO and

under its “wing” until 2002; autonomous after 2002, but with NGO support easy to obtain

11. Grupo de Mujeres Ayudándose – Women Helping Themselves

*Characteristics:* Mestiza women, popular sector, community-based, homeowners with children of all ages

*Age (approx.):* 2 years

*Focus issues:* Women’s issues, self-esteem training; helping women help themselves; strengthening organization; problem-solving skills; education about social services; finding permanent place for meetings

*NGO involvement in foundation:* Yes

*Additional comments:* Probably short-lived, as newly formed right when NGOs basically stopped all popular sector work; only one visit with three members present

**Low-Income Mixed-Sex Grassroots Organizations**

12. Barrio Nuevos Horizontes Daycare

*Characteristics (daycare):* Mestizo women, popular sector, community-based

*Age (approx.):* 5 years (daycare), 15 years (barrio committee that manages daycare)

*Focus issues:* Children’s education; community social issues; economic issues; employee training; women’s issues (indirectly)

*NGO involvement in foundation:* Yes, NGO “sold” daycare project to community, daycare independent of NGO when I visited; no NGO involvement in formation of barrio committee

*Additional comments:* One group interview; a few individual interviews with daycare workers and daycare director; women’s issues came up when women started to work outside of home in daycare and leave neighborhood for training sessions

13. JPCN – Juntos para la Promoción de la Cultura Negra, Promoting Black Culture Together

*Characteristics:* Black men, women and youth, popular sector, community-based

*Age (approx.):* 15 years

*Focus issues:* Integral education on issues of Black population in Quito – Black culture recuperation, Black culture diffusion, youth dance/music group, gender relations; also undertook occasional income-producing projects

*NGO involvement in foundation:* No

*Additional comments:* One visit during a meeting, other visits only with individual interviewees; several individual interviews with women members; focus on coastal Black culture because president and majority of members from coastal region; excellent for critique of formal education system; only Black group I encountered that tried to consistently address members’ economic needs

14. Roldos 94

*Characteristics:* Black women and men, popular sector, community-based

*Age (approx.):* 8 years

*Focus issues:* Black culture education; economic issues; gender relations; issues for Black population

*NGO involvement in foundation:* No

*Additional comments:* Two visits, one group interview; key for analysis of relations between grassroots Black Movement groups and Black Movement leadership

### **Secondary Organizations**

15. MSPLJ – Mujeres de Sectores Populares Luchando Juntas, Popular Sector Women Fighting Together (also visited three groups in Quito that were members of MSPLJ)

*Characteristics:* Mestiza women, popular sector, member organizations located all over Quito, most participants renters with children of all ages

*Age (approx.):* 15 years

*Focus issues:* Women's issues, economic issues, coordination of grassroots member organizations, finding income-producing projects for individual grassroots groups

*NGO involvement in foundation:* The majority of grassroots member organizations were funded by an NGO that later promoted the formation of a movement (MSPLJ) and its provincial and national coordinator (where I visited and performed interviews) which the NGO supported until 2001.

*Additional comments:* Migration and economic crisis had devastating impact on membership numbers; movement at national level supposed to incorporate mestiza, Black and indigenous women, groups I visited in Quito were only mestiza; movement in Pichincha disappeared in 2002; groups I visited were community-based – the provincial coordinator focused its efforts on Quito, but it was also part of the national movement; ages of grassroots groups and the length of their membership in the movement varied

16. FOGNEP – Federación de Organizaciones y Grupos Negros de Pichincha, Federation of Black Organizations and Groups in Pichincha

*Characteristics:* Black men, women, youth; middle-class and popular sector; provincially-based by name, city-based by activity

*Age (approx.):* 10 years

*Focus issues:* Education on and diffusion of Black culture; rights of Black Ecuadorian population; development of national and local government policy related to issues faced by Black population; find external funding for cultural and educational projects

*NGO involvement in foundation:* No

*Additional comments:* Programming not very inclusive of grassroots opinions and needs; some NGO support or interest in individual committee activities; legalized in 2001

17. Coordinadora de Mujeres Negras – Black Women's Coordinator

*Characteristics:* Black women, most middle-class/university educated a couple popular sector

*Age (approx.):* 5 years

*Focus issues:* Find external funding for seminars; Black women's self-esteem; women's issues in general; Black culture education and diffusion

*NGO involvement in foundation:* No

*Additional comments:* NGO support for some of their seminars; part of CPMM; not all-inclusive of grassroots groups – had their “favorites”; while some were quite open, I found most members uncomfortable with me performing interviews within the Coordinator out of concern that information would not be returned to Coordinator; I encountered many Black women outside of the Coordinator who did not have very high opinion of most Coordinator activities and members, obviously influencing my opinion of it

18. CAM – Centro para el Avance de la Mujer, Center for Women's Advancement

*Characteristics:* Mestiza women, middle-class university educated, city-based

*Age (approx.):* 20 years

*Focus issues:* Women favorable policy; creation of projects for popular sector men and women; find external funding; economic issues of popular sector; women's issues especially domestic violence and legal aid

*NGO involvement in foundation:* International aid

*Additional comments:* NGO by self-definition; primary assistant of popular sector mestiza women's groups in Quito; most recent focus is economic issues for popular sector in general no longer worked with just women or with women's organizations; volunteered with CAM itself and one of its branches

19. CPMM – Coordinadora Política del Movimiento de Mujeres, Women's Movement Political Coordinator

*Characteristics:* Mestiza women (supposedly Black women too), middle-class (supposedly popular sector too), national, regional, provincial and city divisions

*Age (approx.):* 9 years

*Focus issues:* Women's politics/policy; women in formal politics; creation of projects; find external funding

*NGO involvement in foundation:* International aid agency support

*Additional comments:* I only worked with representatives from national and city divisions; officially a coordinating institution of the women's movement in Ecuador, yet many participants said CPMM involvement with the creation of/bidding for projects made it more like an NGO than anything else; projects and groups incorporated within CPMM focused primarily on middle-class women

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## **Vita**

Rachel Catherine Stifter was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on August 26, 1974, the daughter of Patricia Lee and Ronald Paul Stifter. She graduated from Ozaukee High School, Fredonia, Wisconsin in 1992 and entered Beloit College in Beloit, Wisconsin to study Anthropology and Spanish. She was awarded the degree of Bachelor of Arts in May of 1996. In 1997, she obtained a National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowship and entered the Graduate School at The University of Texas in Austin to study anthropology. She performed her thesis fieldwork in Quito, Ecuador and received the degree of Master of Arts in May of 1999. She won a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Fellowship in 2001 for dissertation fieldwork in Quito, Ecuador. October of 2002, she married Pablo Castillo. They returned to Austin, Texas in 2003.

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