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**Framing Afrodescendants in a Country “*Donde No Hay Negros*”:
A Critical Analysis of the 2010 Argentine Census Survey of African
Descent**

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by

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In 2010, for the first time since 1895, the Argentine census asked those living within its national territory if they were of African descent. While the inclusion of this question followed broader regional shifts to integrate questions on race and ethnicity into national censuses, this historic disjuncture is most astounding in Argentina. No country in Latin America has more successfully constructed itself as a nation *donde no hay negros*, where there are no blacks, than Argentina. Through a frame analysis of digital texts produced in Argentina between 2010 and 2012 regarding the new census question, this Master’s thesis uncovers how government, media and Afro organizational actors understood the meaning of Afrodescendant and the purposes of the census question. As such, this research seeks to expand research on the African diaspora in the Americas by analyzing how racial politics of identification work in a nation-state of hegemonic whiteness.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2010, for the first time since 1895, the Argentine census asked those living within its national territory if they were of African descent. While the inclusion of this question followed broader regional shifts to integrate questions on race and ethnicity into national censuses, this historic disjuncture is most astounding in Argentina. No country in Latin America has more successfully constructed itself as a nation *donde no hay negros*, where there are no blacks, than Argentina. The inclusion of a question on African descent in the 2010 census – when “to be Argentine is to be white” (Farred 2004:58) – provides a unique and untapped opportunity to understand how racial politics of identification work outside of the often studied centers of the Afro-Americas.

While Argentina was indeed once part of Afro-Latin America – in 1800, 37% of its population was estimated to be of African descent – it is no longer demographically or discursively part of it (Andrews 2004). Yet in spite of its title as the most successfully whitened nation in the subregion, with all the physical and symbolic extermination that that entailed, Argentina is home to multiple Afro¹ communities. These include, but are not limited to: the descendants of the Atlantic slave trade; twentieth-century Cape Verdean immigrants and their descendants; Afro-Latin Americans, particularly Afro-Uruguayans; and Sub-Saharan African migrants seen increasingly over the last decade. Given this heterogeneity, the 2010 census question was purposefully inclusive of all persons of African descent, regardless of nationality, phenotype or the nature of their African ancestry.

Nonetheless, the question became reframed – by prominent Afro organization leaders, government institutes and local media sources – as an epic move for the Afro-

¹ Though at odds with how *Afro* is understood in the English language, I have opted to generally maintain the Spanish *Afro* because using any English equivalent (e.g., black, Afrodescendant) would confuse this analysis as it primarily seeks to document how actors framed and came to define who is and is not an Afrodescendant. I use Afro, as it is understood in Spanish, as an inclusive term for all the communities of African descent in Argentina. While Afro has not been employed in English-language texts in this way, it allows this analysis greater clarity in distinguishing between an analysis of the census term Afrodescendant, for which I use that term, and the populations of African descent, for which I use Afro. As we shall see, the contested boundaries mean Afrodescendant does not signify the same constituencies as those of Afro.

Argentine community, primarily those descended from the Atlantic slave trade and with the somatic features commonly understood to mark African ancestry. The perplexing question emerges: *How did this census question, which did not quantify that population (i.e., “nonwhite” Afro-Argentines descended from enslaved Africans), come to serve as a momentous achievement for that constituency? What does this shift show about how involved agents make sense, define and understand Afrodescendant as an identification? And, finally, what consequences does this have for the Afro communities in Argentina that fall outside those redefined, circumscribed boundaries?*

By engaging the framings of Afrodescendant identification in Argentina, this work marks an important step to ameliorate the failure of Latin Americanist scholars to interrogate racial politics of identification in a country whose nationality inexorably conjures up whiteness (Farred 2004). Scholars have consistently taken the Argentine official discourse of whiteness at face value and thus failed to seriously engage the roles and meanings of Afrodescendant, blackness and the African Diaspora in such a context. Even though scholars have documented that racial formations and racial politics of identification vary incredibly across geographic contexts (Gordon and Anderson 1999; Gordon 2007; Goldberg 2009), Argentina has been almost unequivocally excluded from these academic dialogues as scholars emphasize cities, regions and countries traditionally imagined as having an Afro constituency. The meanings of African diasporic political projects in spaces hegemonically imagined as white like Argentina remains unresolved. The 2010 Afrodescendant census question provides the empirical scene to ask how distinct modes of identification – Afrodescendant, Afro-Argentina, black – “constructed, ascribed, affirmed and denied” (Gordon and Anderson 1999:294) in Argentina, which is understood domestically and internationally as Latin America’s paramount country of European whiteness.

CENSUSES: MAKING RACIALLY BOUNDED CONSTITUENCIES

All modern states are racial states (Goldberg 2002) as the formation of modern nation-states hinged on the state’s production and continued management of racial

categories. As states produce, manage and give meaning to these racial categories they racially configure themselves as nation-states, construct national racial boundaries (Goldberg 2002), and bear the ideologies that render racial exclusions real in social structures – often with devastating material consequences.

Census categories provide one important example of the technologies and apparatuses that states have employed to “fashion, modify and reify the terms of racial expression, as well as racist exclusions and subjugations” (Goldberg 2002:4).

Various scholars have documented the multiple and important consequences of the implementation of racial and ethnic categories in national censuses. Censuses as sociopolitical practices do not reflect an objective social reality but instead play a key role in the construction of that reality (Kertzer and Arel 2002). Because racial and ethnic groups do not objectively exist, censuses serve as powerful tools, through their official enumerations of such “groups,” that can create, confirm and reproduce their existence. As Nobles (2000) shows, census racial categorization is a key political process through which nation-states define the meanings and boundaries of citizenship.

Throughout history, this enumeration has been a double-edged sword. During the 1800s, national statistics on race served to maintain race as a central organizing principle of highly exclusionary colonial societies (Andrews 2004:203). However, over the last few decades, official enumeration has also served minority groups seeking state recognition throughout the Americas (Nobles 2000; Oboler 1995). In the act of naming, censuses can legitimize socially imagined racial and ethnic groups (López 2005:91) and open spaces for targeted claims on the state. Without such data, governments cannot begin the task of identifying the profound inequalities that affect, for example, Afro populations in Argentina and Latin America beyond (Andrews 2004:206). Moreover, censuses are particularly useful objects of analysis because they demonstrate a major terrain for the disputes surrounding racial and ethnic categories (López 2005:74).

THE STATE OF DIASPORA STUDIES: NOTING NEW FRONTIERS

Diaspora studies has had its important ebbs and flows, moments of expansion and contraction, often following larger theoretical trends in the academy. As such the conceptual boundaries of diaspora remain contested among authors. Originally used for the Jewish Diaspora, then extended to other collective experiences of “traumatic dispersal” (Cohen 2008:4), followed by an explosive expansion (Dufoix 2008; Brubaker 2005) that some believe emptied the concept of much of its analytical clarity, there has arguably been a reconsolidation of Diaspora studies since the turn of the century (Cohen 2008). While some scholars seem comfortable with its deployment as a flexible concept (Koser 2003; Dufoix 2008), Cohen (2008) argues that an expansive typology of diasporas makes sense of the complexity of transnational identities. Cohen’s (2008) typological model suggests the ideal types of victim, labor, imperial, trade, and deterritorialized diasporas. If the reader favors the diaspora typology proposed by Cohen (2008), then this case study provides unique empirical ground to see the remaking of the boundaries of Afrodescendant identification to include the “first African diaspora” (Cohen 2008) while excluding the others.

In contrast, theorists such as James Clifford (1994), Stuart Hall (1990) and Paul Gilroy (1993) have suggested another mode – what Dufoix (2008:25) names the “oxymoronic” – that emphasizes the hybridity and malleability of diasporas by engaging their frontiers rather than their centers. Dufoix (2008) argues that much research has engaged in a fruitless effort to find “real” diasporas and distinguish them from other related phenomena that he fears only produce static approaches. As Waldinger writes in the foreword to Dufoix (2008) “there are no diasporas, only different ways of constructing, managing, and imagining the relationships between homelands and their dispersed peoples” (xvi). Brubaker (2005:12,13) argues that diasporas should not be understood as bounded, existing entities but rather “diasporic stances, projects, claims, idioms, practices” whereby scholars employ diaspora as a category of analysis only after it has emerged as a category of practice. In following Brubaker (2005), this work does not directly engage diaspora as a category of analysis because it was not a central mode

of meaning-making in the framings of the Afrodescendant census question. Nonetheless, the literature on the African diaspora, particularly in the Americas, has produced much of the scholarship on racial politics and identification in the region to date.

Scholarship on the African/Black Diaspora

Not unlike diaspora studies more broadly, African diaspora literature has produced multiple models and tendencies of analysis. Fitting within the larger postmodern turn in academia, scholars rightfully began questioning the cultural and racial essentialism of the then prevailing perspectives on the African diaspora (Gordon and Anderson 1999:286; Gilroy 1993). This marked a turn away from Afrocentrism towards hybridity (Hall 1993) – a routes (rather than roots) approach.

Yet, as Gordon and Anderson (1993:287) have noted, this hybrid cultural model when pushed too far denies stable ground from which to engage in politics against racial oppression. This has often marked it as a body of literature separate from those who emphasize mobilization and political resistance, according to Hanchard (1999a). Though Gordon and Anderson (1993:287) present Gilroy's (1993) *Black Atlantic* as a middle ground between essentialism and unstable hybridity. Edwards (2003:13) similarly seeks a middle ground whereby diaspora

implies neither that it offers the comfort of abstraction, an easy recourse to origins, nor that it provides a foolproof anti-essentialism: instead, it forces us to articulate discourses of cultural and political linkage only through and across difference in full view of the risks of that endeavor.

Gordon and Anderson (1999:289) suggest another middle ground that does not ignore roots or routes; while “diasporic identity is created and re-created through routes, it is also imagined in roots. Africa serves as the key symbol for the particularity of Black identities.”

While studies have largely assumed the African diaspora to only be the result of the traumatic dispersion wrecked by slavery (for an exceptions, see Gordon 2007; Cohen 2003), Koser (2003) names postcolonial and more recent African migrations as examples of “new African diasporas.” Koser (2003:7) argues that the evidence suggests that these

are wholly separate from the African diaspora born of the Atlantic slave trade. Moreover, Koser (2003:8) challenges the diaspora types proposed by Cohen, suggesting that Cohen overdetermines the importance of the reason for dispersal because often “there is a convergence in the circumstances of diasporas which have been formed for broadly different reasons.” As we shall see, these multiple modalities through which to define and understand African diasporas – roots or routes, reasons for dispersal or present circumstances – also emerge in actors’ efforts to frame the Afrodescendant census question. Yet the “new African diasporas” framework Koser proposes has completely ignored the recent South-South migrations as his edited collection looks exclusively at the Global North.

African Diaspora in the Americas

While sharing similar traits to the emphasis on a diaspora project and stance (Brubaker 2005; Dubois 2008), scholars of the black diaspora in the Americas have noticeably foregrounded political mobilization and modes of resistance. A body of research has analyzed the racial politics and political mobilization of Afro peoples in Latin America, particularly looking at Brazil (Hanchard 1994; 1999b) and Nicaragua (Hooker 2009; Gordon 1998), and the importance of transnational links between Cuba and the United States on Afro political strategies (Guridy 2010). The “Austin School Manifesto” (Gordon 2007) epitomizes this perspective, calling for scholarship centered upon “Black positioning in relation to power and social hierarchy” (93) in order to clarify racial oppressions as part of a “political project...dedicated to expressing our full humanity and seeking for liberation” (94).

While, as previously noted, this work does not engage with diaspora as a category of analysis because it did not emerge as a fundamental category of practice in the census framings (Brubaker 2005), engaging in a diasporic framework allows, as Gordon (2007:94) notes, the researcher to place “seemingly disparate processes of racial formation in dialogue, enabling us to recognize and articulate how race operates locally and globally.” As such, this piece answers Gordon’s (2007:95) call to address “the

political significance and effectiveness of mobilization around issues of identity” and Gordon and Anderson’s (1999:282) call for “a shift in focus toward analysis of the processes through which individuals identify with one another.” Gordon and Anderson (1999:284) later affirm that literature must concentrate

not so much on essential features common to various peoples of African descent as on the various processes through which communities and individuals identify with one another, highlighting the central importance of race – racial constructions, racial oppressions, racial identification – and culture in the making and remaking of diaspora.

Nonetheless, work on Afro communities in Latin America, understood as diasporas or not, has largely failed to incorporate the multiple migrations of African and Afrodescendant peoples to and within Latin America (for some exceptions, see, on Brazil: Kaly 2000, 2001; Kimary 2008; Vida 2000; and Afro-Latin American migrants in Buenos Aires: Domínguez 2004; Frigerio 2000, 2008; Bidaseca 2010b) in its analyses. The literature commonly frames a singular trajectory of the African diaspora of Latin America as born of the Atlantic slave trade. Andrews (2004), for example, makes no reference to any African migration to Latin America not born of slavery. Thus the paradigm shift that Ferguson (2011) calls for within African American studies would similarly serve research on Afro-Latin America. Ferguson asserts,

Put simply, contemporary black migrations are more than demographically significant. They are epistemological formations that compel critical ruptures within African American studies, demanding significant and unprecedented paradigm shifts. (116)

This failure to address other Afro migrations may be because historians produce much the literature that frames our understanding of the Afro-Latin American experience (for example, Andrews 1980, 2004; Gates 2011; McKnight and Garofalo 2009). Unfortunately, this dominant historical perspective is particularly manifest in countries like Argentina, which are no longer part of Afro-Latin America. In a comprehensive

bibliography of the Afro-River Plate,² Pacheco (in Goldman 2008:11) apologizes for the predominance of historical works; in spite of Pacheco's desire to cite publications from across disciplines, Afro-River Plate studies has been almost exclusively the domain of historians. On Afros in Argentina in the twentieth century, Frigerio (2000:4) confirms, scholarship is remarkably scarce.

Though historians do not monopolize scholarly production on Afro-Latin America (for examples, see Dzidzienyo and Oboler 2005; Wade 2010), historical narratives, accounts and summaries detailing the contingent role of slavery in the birth of Latin American nation-states reinforce a singular trajectory of Afro-Latin American heritage. Both activists, as seen below, and academics (Dzidzienyo and Oboler 2005) have mobilized the historical presence and longevity of Afro populations as a major reason for the need of public and academic recognition of the population respectively. This, tied with popular and academic understandings of Argentina as a country whose whitening policy succeeded, has meant the circumscription of the production of scholarship on twentieth- and twenty-first century Afro communities in and migrations to Argentina.

The majority of Afro-Latin America today is indeed descendant from the forced migrations of the Atlantic slave trade, making this history indisputably necessary to be recounted. To ignore the violence, political projects and economic exploitation that bore the vast majority of the Afro-Latin American communities is tantamount to genocidal erasure. Nonetheless, this hegemonic framing of the Afro-Latin American community does not allow for a multiplicity of trajectories and marginalizes the plights of more recent Afro communities in Latin America – from the recent influx of Haitian asylum seekers to Brazil and the established Angolan refugee community in Rio de Janeiro, to Afro-Uruguayans in Buenos Aires and the Cape Verdean communities in metropolitan Buenos Aires formed throughout the twentieth century. Regardless of the relative size of

² River Plate, or *Río de la Plata*, is an estuary that forms the border between Argentina and Uruguay. Afro-River Plate studies refers to the cities and communities along the River Plate and not the entire countries of Argentina and Uruguay.

these communities, particularly in Argentina, it is inadequate to describe the Afrodescendant experience solely through an analysis of the experiences of the descendants of enslaved Africans. In spite of the predominant narrative, other trajectories of Afro populations in Latin America, and in Argentina specifically, exist.

Scholarship on more recent African migrations to Argentina (Zubrycki and Agnelli 2009; Maffia 2010; Traoré 2009) has provided important socioeconomic and demographic mappings of these new communities yet these scholars have not directly engaged with these individuals as political subjects in Argentina. For these varied reasons, scholarship has yet to directly address the meaning work and framing processes through which certain Afro constituencies were officially included yet symbolically excluded. Analyzing these processes will provide much needed insights into how racial formations and racial politics of identification work in Latin America's self-proclaimed white country.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: IDENTIFICATION AND FRAMES

Work on identity politics and the state's enumeration of ethnic and racial minority groups requires a particular language so as to not reify, but instead "account for the process of reification" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:5), of these groups. It is a grave sociological error to uncritically accept categories of practice as categories of analysis, particularly when studying identification (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). In following Brubaker and Cooper's (2000) critique of the overextended and ambiguous concept of identity - a "blunt, flat, undifferentiated vocabulary" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:2) - this work employs identification as its category of analysis. Identification sidesteps the muddy reification and essentialism of "identity" by instead guiding the analysis to identify the social agents who do the identifying (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:14). In the words of Hall (1991:15),

What we've learned about the structure of the way in which we identify suggests that identification is not one thing, one moment. We have now to reconceptualize identity as a *process of identification*, and that is a different matter. It is something that happens over time, that is never absolutely stable, that is subject to the play of history and the play of difference.

Identification calls attention to the complex and ambivalent processes of identifying oneself and being identified under discussion here, and how modes of identification shift with historical contexts (Hall 1991:16). However, guidance from Hall (1991:11) reminds us, echoing Marx, to go beyond an analysis of the actors central to identification and recognize that “there are always *conditions* to identity which the subject cannot construct.” As such, this analysis will outline in chapters two and three the conditions and histories within which actors attempted to imbue this new mode of identification *Afrodescendiente* with social meaning.

In order to analyze the ways various actors understand the census question on African descent, this work employs the conceptual framework of frame analysis (Snow et al 1986; Snow and Benford 1988; Benford and Snow 2000) of social movement literature. Pulling from sociological frame analysis (Goffman 1974), Snow et al (1986) applies the concept of frames, which render “events or occurrences meaningful” and “function to organize experience and guide action,” in order to understand the roles different framing processes play in movement participation and mobilization. An engagement with these processes throughout the data analysis illuminates the types and purposes of the frames actors engage with in their work to define Afrodescendant while also mobilizing support for and participation in the census question.

With this overview of the state of the literature, and the gaps much in need of remedy, I now turn in Chapter Two to provide a historical overview of the histories of Afro populations in Argentina to contextualize the question, and the faults in its framing, as well as emphatically demonstrate that Argentina indeed has an Afro population, which is constituted by multiple trajectories and migrations, and represents the heterogeneity of Argentina’s Afro constituency. Chapter Three addresses the methods used and analyzes the frames employed in the discussions surrounding the census question. In the conclusion, Chapter Four, I discuss the results of the census question, restate the arguments of this work, and suggest lines of future research.

Chapter 2: Histories Of Peoples Of African Descent In Argentina

An analysis of the boundary making of the identification Afrodescendant included in the census necessitates an introduction to the histories of Afro populations in Argentina. I present a brief historical summary of some of the disparate trajectories of Afro populations³ in Argentina, because, in the words of Brubaker and Cooper (2000:3), “the dangers of flattening those histories into a static and singular ‘identity’ are serious.”

AFROS IN EIGHTEENTH- AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY ARGENTINA⁴

The colonial and revolutionary periods (late 1700s to early 1800s) mark the apex of Argentina’s inclusion in Afro-Latin America due to the sheer size of the Afro population at that time relative to the whole population (Pacheco in Goldman 2008:16). According to Andrews (2004), in 1800, 37% of Argentina was of African descent. Even during that period, the Afro populations were not ethnically homogeneous; large slave populations were brought by primarily Spanish and British slave-trading companies from what are today Mozambique, West Africa, the Congo and Angola (Andrews 2004:20; Libereiro 2001:16; Yao in Goldman 2008:273).

At the end of the eighteenth century, slaves in Buenos Aires were concentrated in food processing (e.g., bakeries, meat salting and drying factories), manufacturing industries, domestic service and street vending (Andrews 2004:15; Yao in Goldman 2008:273). They also worked in small artisan workshops where they usually worked as apprentices and journeymen, though some became master artisans (Andrews 2004:15).

³ I have worked here to introduce the Afro communities addressed, even if marginalized, in the census question. I do not pretend to provide an exhaustive survey of the Afro communities in Argentina, but introduce the communities that participated in and emerged in the framing process. I greatly lament that this work, for example, makes no reference to the Dominican community in Buenos Aires, which has its own unique characteristics (see Bidaseca 2010b). I recognize that this only further serves to marginalize those already excluded Afro populations.

⁴ This may not be the beginning of the Afro trajectory in Argentina. Pacheco writes, “It is interesting to observe that there is not a single reference to the possible existence of a black rio-platense presence before Spanish colonization. This is contrary to various studies about the African in Mexico that, based in spurious generalizations of some pre-Colombian artifacts, conclude that Africans arrived to the Americas hundreds of years before Christopher Columbus” (Goldman 2008:17).

African enslaved persons also had an important rural presence, particularly in wheat production (Yao in Goldman 2008:273). As throughout Latin America, enslaved African populations were concentrated in the subregions of Argentina that most required slave labor for their economic structure. Buenos Aires as a coastal city showed important urban slavery (Andrews 2004:15). Yet the Afro populations were not exclusively slaves by this time. While the vast majority of slave importation to Buenos Aires occurred after 1790 (Andrews 2004:20), by 1800 free blacks and mulattoes outnumbered the slave population in Argentina (Andrews 2004:44).

In spite of this numerical prevalence at the turn of the eighteenth century, the 1887 census registered only 2% of the population as black. Much literature has dealt with this “disappearance” of the African and Afrodescendant populations. However, the scholarly arguments for why vary. Some authors have highlighted the low marriage and fertility rates (see, for example, Caballero 1990). Others have argued that military service in numerous campaigns in the early and late 1800s demonstrated an important loss of life for black and mulatto populations in Argentina (see, for example, Liboreiro 2001). In one campaign across the Andes that began in 1817, of the roughly 2,500 Argentine libertos⁵ who crossed into Chile with San Martín, less than 150 returned six years later (Andrews 2004:62). Andrews (2004:62) shares another chilling example of the havoc the wars wrecked on the Afro population:

Argentine libertos [also] suffered terrible losses during the early 1820s in Indian wars in southern Buenos Aires province. During the winter of 1824, slave troops fought in subfreezing temperatures without shoes or adequate rations. They returned to the capital crippled by frostbite and gangrene, many of them having lost toes, fingers, or parts of limbs. Well into the 1840s and 1850s, crippled black veterans begging in the streets were a common sight in Buenos Aires.

These two arguments together – low marriage and fertility rates coupled with disproportionate deaths of Afro soldiers – have also led to explanations built on the role of miscegenation because there were black women but no black men. And finally, the other major argument that continues to proliferate, in public as well as academic circles,

⁵ Commonly translated to “freed slaves,” this term should instead refer to freed formerly enslaved persons.

is that many died in the 1871 yellow fever epidemic in Buenos Aires. These arguments are so pervasive in public discourse that they emerged prominently in the conversations surrounding the census question. As Afro activist Carlos Álvarez states in a news channel interview, “there is a collective unconsciousness that in Argentina there are no Afrodescendants, right? That they all died in the struggles for independence, right? Or with the Yellow Fever [Epidemic]” (Tv Pública 2010a).

However, the sheer magnitude of the disappearance of blacks from Argentina cannot be explained by the “objective” realities marked by death or fertility rates, but instead a symbolic disappearance more than a physical one. Andrews (1980) outlines a number of symbolic disappearing acts. He argues that, beyond the likelihood of under-enumeration in census taking, more importantly, ambiguous racial terminology was used. For example, lighter-skinned Afrodescendants were likely classified as *trigueño* (“wheat colored”) which did not necessarily imply African ancestry, and thus was likely subsumed as white when the demographic statistics were compiled (Andrews 1980:80, 84, 87). Even in the late eighteenth century, this symbolic disappearance was already appearing as attempts at upward mobility meant that “disparities among the same individual’s racial identification in different documents were commonplace” (Andrews 2004:49). Moreover, scholars have shown that contemporary publications produced by the Afro community did not show any concern that its community was disappearing (Andrews 1980; Frigerio 2000). Thus this “disappearance,” according to Andrews (1980), largely resulted not from high mortality rates and low birth rates but instead the reclassification of the Afro population as white.

As Segato (2007) underscores, this process involved the deletion of “ethnically marked persons” as a constituency through various formal and informal mechanisms up to and including extermination. Whether through physical extermination in the varied military campaigns of the period and the 1873 Yellow Fever Epidemic, or low birth rates and miscegenation, or through the symbolic disappearance in official documents as state erasure and individual upward mobility, the consequence was the invisibilization of the Afro communities of Argentina. It is this historical multipronged physical and symbolic

attack, and its contemporary manifestations, that prove central in Afro activists' struggles to mobilize individuals to self-identify as Afrodescendant in the 2010 census. While variations of similar physical and symbolic attacks seen in Argentina emerged in other countries of Latin America, Argentina was unequivocally the most successful in the region in transforming itself through demographic and nation-making processes from a country of Afro-Latin America into an exclusively white, European nation.

Throughout the nineteenth century, elite desires to maintain a racial hierarchy and the privileges of whiteness seen in the colonial period continued, in spite of Afro community efforts for socioeconomic equality and the rights of citizenship.⁶ The process of Argentine nation-making purposefully excluded ethnically and racially marked populations from its imagined community (Anderson 1991). The Generation of 1837, an influential group of racist intellectuals, where predominantly responsible for the invention of the still existing myth of the white, European Argentina, of a nation without blacks, indigenous or gauchos, which intellectual and president (1868-1874) Domingo Faustino Sarmiento named barbarous populations. While Castro (2001) adds that positive representations of Afro-Argentines are also present in the literature of this time, he finds that the Buenos Aires elite "not only destroyed the Afro-Argentine population in a physical sense but also stripped from the Rioplatine blacks their real and valuable positive cultural contributions to *La argentinidad*" (98).

TWENTIETH AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: *CABECITAS NEGRAS* AND NEW MIGRATIONS

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the export boom Argentina experienced and the political consolidation it allowed meant that the oligarchical regime "no longer had to make concessions to ex-slaves and free blacks demanding freedom, land, and the rights of citizenship" (Andrews 2004:118). This period also saw a radical whitening policy that sought to whiten the nation demographically and culturally through immigration (Andrews 2004:119). As European immigrants arrived in mass they

⁶ For more information about the political mobilizations of Afro populations in Argentina, see Yao (in Goldman 2008) and throughout Latin America, see Andrews (2004).

displaced Afro populations from their traditional positions in the labor market. As Andrews (2004:142-43) writes:

Thus, in Buenos Aires, which by 1914 had 780,000 immigrants and fewer than 10,000 Afro-Argentines, the latter were virtually eliminated from the skilled trades, factory employment, and even street vending, in which they had been quite visible through the 1870s. By 1900, workers of color were confined almost entirely to domestic service, occasional day labor, and low-level service positions in government offices.

However, Andrews (2004:126) also observes that this period of economic displacement and exclusion from white civic and social organizations coincided with the burgeoning of Afro sociocultural institutions, particularly in Buenos Aires.

The Great Depression marked the end of the economic success of the oligarchies of the early twentieth century and, in the 1940s, the emergence of populism. As Andrews (2004) discusses, populist leader Juan Domingo Perón's political constituency were racialized subjects:

This identification between blackness and labor-based populist movements occurred throughout Afro-Latin America. Even in Argentina, one of the few countries to have succeeded in its turn-of-the-century whitening project, the followers of Juan and Evita Perón were referred to...as *cabecitas negras*... In overtly racial terms recalling the association between nineteenth-century dictator Juan Manuel de Rosas and the black population, anti-Peronists denounced Peronist rallies and demonstrations as a 'new federal candombe'." (159)

Cabecitas negras emerged as a social category during this period in reference to the Argentine migrants moving from the rural areas of the country into its cities. Even though the "little blackheads" were named as such for their dark hair and complexion, public and academic discourse have instead understood the term as imbued primarily with class and geographical stigmas, largely ignoring its racializing component. In regards to these internal migrants, Frigerio (2002) writes, "at the same time that the quantity of 'real' *negros* was reduced in the city, the visibility of other 'negros' began to grow that, I suggest, are semantically and even genetically related with their precursors" (10). Moreover, regardless of the degree of African descent among the migrants, the very

power of *cabecitas negras* as a stigmatizing term greatly results from its racial invocations (Frigerio 2002:11).

The first half of the twentieth century also saw an influx of Cape Verdean immigrants. While Cape Verdeans began to arrive in Argentina at the end of the nineteenth century, the 1920s and 1930s saw an increase of Cape Verdeans immigrating to Buenos Aires and its province, particularly to Dock Sud, la Boca and Ensenada (Maffia 2008). Cape Verdean male immigrants worked principally at the ports in the maritime industry, while Cape Verdean women often worked in domestic service. For much of its history, the Cape Verdean communities in Buenos Aires did not relate with the Afro-Argentine population descendant from the slave trade. Informal and formal social organizations among the Cape Verdean immigrants reinforced familial and national ties rather than a larger African diasporic community (Maffia 2008). This separatist tendency continued throughout much of the twentieth century, only shifting during the last two decades. As Frigerio (2000a:21) writes, “they do not stress their African heritage, nor do they –except for a few of its members– interact with other black groups or with entrepreneurs of black culture.” Much of this has to do with Cape Verde’s own history of denying its relation to the African content, understanding themselves instead as Portuguese (Maffia 2008).

In general, while there is little data to confirm the continued existence of Afro communities throughout the twentieth century, scholars (Frigerio 2000; Andrews 1980) have documented this fact through the community’s sustained community life and cultural production: newspapers until the 1910s, black mutual aid societies until the 1950s, recreational societies in the 1920s and the Shimmy Club dancehall until the early 1970s. Nonetheless, Frigerio (2000a) states that while in the 1960s and 1970s media reports had covered an Afro-Argentine community in Buenos Aires, in the 1980s and 1990s the few articles produced instead highlighted the disappearance of the Afro-Argentine community and shifted instead to covering the discrimination felt by Afro-Uruguayans and Afro-Brazilians in Buenos Aires.

The last two decades of the twentieth century saw an important migration of Brazilians and Uruguayans – not only those of African descent – to Buenos Aires. For Uruguayans, the reasons for this migration were multiple: the larger labor market, cultural similitude and geographical proximity made Buenos Aires an easy migratory destination for many (Frigerio 2000:11). Among these immigrants were Afro activists who “brought different histories of organization and struggles connected to their particular experiences as ‘negros’ in their countries of origin” (López 2005:43). With this immigration, in the end of the twentieth century Afro-Argentines lost almost entirely “their ability to present their own version of their culture and were replaced as spokesmen of their own history and tradition by Afro-Uruguayans and by practitioners of Afro-Brazilian religions” (Frigerio 2000:1).

Sub-Saharan African migration to Argentina emerged as a new migratory trend at the end of the twentieth century and became numerically significant at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the largest constituency being from Senegal. The majority of these migrants participate in *venta ambulante*⁷ (Bidaseca 2010a) selling bijouterie in highly trafficked areas in Buenos Aires making them a hyper-visible population because of their physical appearance as well as their particular insertion into the informal labor market. These Sub-Saharan African migrants are predominantly males (Bidaseca 2010a; Maffia 2010). Whether these migrants plan to move on to destinations farther North (Kliedermacher 2010) or return to Africa (Bidaseca 2010a), “staying tomorrow” is always under negotiation.

THE PERSISTENCE OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Having documented the historical trajectories of some Afro communities in Argentina, and particularly in Buenos Aires, I now briefly discuss the continued prevalence of racist discrimination. In spite of the public discourse that racism does not exist in Argentina, Afro populations have registered important levels of racism and

⁷ Commonly translated to street peddling in the United States, though the associated stigmas differ between national contexts.

discrimination. A 2010 survey, conducted by the University of Buenos Aires and the organization *Africa y Its Diaspora*, interviewed 257 Afrodescendants of African, Latin American and Argentine origin living in the city of Buenos Aires. While Afro-Latin Americans (here including Argentines) and Africans were discriminated in multiple societal spheres, the discrimination was particularly more common for Africans in the labor market and with police violence; 43% of Africans said they had experienced police violence within the last year (versus 23% of Afro-Latin Americans) and 49% said they had experienced work discrimination in the previous year (compared with 29% of Afro-Latin Americans) (Bidaseca 2010a). A Malian man said in his interview, “there is racism, the people know nothing of the Afro, what we suffer, the negation of the state at all levels” (Bidaseca 2010a). While the UBA survey (Bidaseca 2010a) demonstrated the racist discrimination experienced by Afro constituencies today, the challenges among the communities vary with qualitatively different experiences with police brutality, labor market discrimination, legal precarity, the Spanish language, educational barriers, and discrimination in housing (López 2005; Bidaseca 2010a). As Koser (2003:11) suggests, this data gives “the impression that African migrants can be [at least] triply disadvantaged – they are migrants, they are black and they are from Africa.” However, Koser (2003:12) has shown that this discrimination, made visible by a intersectional perspective, has had contrasting – sometimes spurring and other times discouraging – effects on Afro or African identification.

In conclusion, blackness in Argentina has a tumultuous and multi-layered history. The hegemonic ideological construction of an ethnically homogenous, white Argentina originated during the nineteenth century and it remains, seemingly inextricable from the national imaginary. While important shifts in the public sphere, marked by new state policies and institutes, embrace ethnic diversity, these moves have not undermined the dominant narrative of whiteness and racial homogeneity in Argentina (Aidi 2002). The myth of Argentine racial homogeneity has historically disallowed the emergence of race or ethnicity as relevant or resonating languages for political mobilization. More recent shifts seen throughout the region have reformulated the relationship between the state and

its ethnic and racial minorities, as demonstrated by the most recent censuses throughout Latin America. Work to resolve this tension, between, on the one hand, the national imaginings of a white Argentina and, on the other, new official discourses and policies of an ethnically and racially inclusive nation-state, was central to the possible functioning and efficacy of the census question on African descent.

Years before the census question, Andrews (2004:5) wrote, of countries like Argentina, which are no longer considered part of Afro-Latin America, the following:

This is not to say that people of African ancestry disappeared from those countries or ceased to exist. Their absolute numbers, in fact, may even be greater today than they were in 1800 (though the lack of racial census data in those countries makes it impossible to prove this point).

While we now have the census data, public discussions surrounding the inclusion of a question on African descent demonstrated the contradicting frames of not only who in Argentina should identify themselves as Afrodescendant, but the very need to demonstrate the reason for such an identification. Veron (2004:59) speaks to the uphill battle of rewriting the racial boundaries of Argentine nationhood: “[i]f blackness has no public Argentine voice, even when the body itself is black, then the nation’s whiteness cannot be drawn into question.” Veron (2004:57) again shares: Argentine subjects do not need to be “hailed or addressed into ‘whiteness’, rather, he has not needed to be interpellated: that is the ultimate triumph of the Argentine nation’s racial/racist discourse.” Yet, since Farred’s piece was published, a counter-narrative emerged – made visible through the census – that questioned a lack of racial difference within Argentina. Yet, before analyzing the frames through which actors developed and gave meaning to that counter-narrative, I shall contextualize the emergence of the census question.

THE MAKING OF A CENSUS QUESTION

This section contextualizes the political opportunity structures (Benford and Snow 2000) in which the census question emerged and that both restrained and enabled the deployment of particular frames by involved actors. In the 1990s, a new ethnic and racial identity politics emerged throughout Latin America (Wade 2010). Even in Argentina, the

modalities of political mobilization shifted to include ethnic and racial identifications (López 2005:26). Within this new arena, both state and grassroots actors framed this shift within discourses that reconceptualized citizenship as inclusive of the right to identity and a valorization of ethnic and racial identification (López 2005:54; Frigerio 2003). It was within these larger shifts regarding social movements and citizenship that census questions on African descent emerged in Argentina and throughout the region.

Between 2000 and 2010, the majority of Latin American countries integrated questions on race and ethnicity – some for the first time in over a century – that emerged from local, regional and international pushes for state recognition of racial and ethnic minorities. In Argentina, the census sought to quantify the Afrodescendant population and qualify their socioeconomic situation for the first time since 1895. Yet, as we shall see, while the census question itself attempted to reframe a racial group as an ethnic group (Fenton 2010:22) by removing any reference to blackness or physical appearance, somatic references continued to emerge in discussions regarding the question.

Afrodescendant as the Census Category

Arriving at “Afrodescendant” as the category of identification for the 2010 Argentine census was in no way predetermined. Rather than the reinvigoration of an established term of ethnic identification in Argentina, employing *Afrodescendiente* meant embracing an entirely new categorization of the Afro communities in Argentina.

Afrodescendant as an identification made it to Argentina through the participation of Argentina and its Afro leaders in the 2001 Durban Conference, the UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance. According to López (2005:19), a UN advisory statute from the conference transformed the playing field by officially designating Afrodescendant as a category of identification. Among Afro activists throughout Latin America, many embraced Afrodescendant as a term, which could: unify the Afro movements throughout the subcontinent by a regional embrace of the term; mark a political move away from the colonially imposed *negro*; and, as an identification legitimized by the UN, offer political validity and real legal

channels for redress (López 2005:60). Cape Verdean-Argentine Afro activist Miriam Gomes explains why she embraced the new category of identification:

When we adopted it we understood that it was a political question, it was time to adopt that term because...it seems to us, that it is much more inclusive than the term *negro*, that on the other hand is a term imposed from outside during a precise historical period, that of the conquest and colonization of America. But at the same time it is a term that we used for a long time to identify ourselves and reclaim our origins, so then, there are people that still call themselves *negro*, and I myself continue to call myself *negra*, but I understand that because of strategic and political reasons the more adequate term...is that of Afrodescendant, because it has juridical status, because it is included in the Declaration of the United Nations, you realize, it is sanctioned by the United Nations, so for us it is important to attach ourselves (*acogernos*) to that term. (López 2005:102)

The Durban Conference legitimized Afrodescendant as an identification while also providing the impetus for data collection on the Afro populations of the participating countries. The final declaration of the conference, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action (DDPA), which Argentina signed, stated that quantitative and qualitative data should provide the basis of states' targeted policies and programs to ameliorate the socioeconomic inequalities born of the racism and discrimination experienced by Afro populations (United Nations 2001). National censuses were such a way to collect this data.

In 2003 and 2004, the World Bank held meetings with the Argentine Census Bureau (INDEC), and African and Afrodescendant organizations in Argentina to coordinate the formulation of the census question (López 2005:85). Throughout the development meetings with the World Bank and INDEC many proposals emerged regarding whom the question should include as actors negotiated the national and phenotypic boundaries of being Afrodescendant in Argentina. In these first meetings with the World Bank, Afro coalitions suggested asking if anyone in the household was Afrodescendant, and separately, if they were African (López 2005). At other moments in the negotiations with INDEC, Afro activists pushed to count all Afro communities but differentiate between Afro-Argentines descendant from the slave trade, new Afro-Argentines (i.e., the children of immigrants) and new Afro immigrants (López 2005:102).

With the development of the 2005 census pilot survey, conducted in Santa Fe and Buenos Aires, tensions continued about whether to include only Argentine nationals or all Afros in Argentina.

Along with debates on the importance of constituting boundaries of nationality, tensions also emerged regarding the phenotypic boundaries of Afrodescendant identification. In general, the Afro activists did not want to leave out those who did not look Afro since they wanted to base their quantification in heritage rather than somatic stereotypes (López 2005:98). Yet INDEC expressed doubts about whether a different, qualitative method for surveying the community would prove more utile because the pilot survey and later census would not actually find the relationship between this ethnic identification and socioeconomic conditions because it would include “white” people (López 2005:97). The position of INDEC at that point demonstrated the integration of the Durban frames into state institutions; it marks both a recognition of Afro minorities in Argentina as well as the tacit recognition of the existence of sufficient discrimination as to have material consequences for those populations. At the same time, however, it homogenized the Afro community and reproduced tropes of black poverty. As López (2005:47) writes, these transnational processes constituted a new discourse through which “race” emerged and became inextricably linked with socioeconomic position.

Understanding the International Influence

The role of multinational agencies in the making of the census question is undeniable. Multinational agencies had demanded of Latin American states an official counting of Afrodescendants in order to “objectively” evaluate the socioeconomic situation of that population and plan the financing of targeted projects (López 2005:66). The increasing role of international organizations in the intersecting spaces of ethnic identification and political mobilization in the region⁸ shaped both the pleas of minority

⁸ At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Afros were included in the agendas of various transnational organizations and agencies, including: UNESCO, Organization of American States (OAS), International Labour Organization, Inter-American Development Bank, World Bank, Economic

groups and official state positions on ethnic diversity and citizenship. In Argentina, the inclusion of Afro themes on the agendas of multinational agencies served as a crucial impetus for both the emergence and fortification of Afro organizations (López 2005:65). This does not in any way mean that Afro agents adopted the frameworks promoted by global actors without major reflection, but that they did reframe their modes of identification and mobilization given the opportunities opened up by these transnational processes (López 2005:46).

The constitution of a global arena for local ethnic and racial mobilization has multiple consequences. Beyond providing Afro leaders with new, and in some ways very effective, tools of collective action, the impacts locally can also be problematic as these movements become greatly affected by norms, discourses and frameworks produced by international agencies and forums (López 2005:8; Oliveira 2000). It is true that some Afro activists, rather than embracing these new transnationally produced spaces, named it as paralleling colonialist cooptation (López 2005), a partial recognition of the significant paradox of the global neoliberal transformation:

globalization and transnationalism seem to have opened new possibilities for claims for social movements, but, on the other hand, these processes [in neoliberalism] not only intensified economic inequality but also redefined in a significant way the political-cultural terrain in which social movements should undertake currently their struggles. (40)

In conclusion, the inclusion of a question on African descent in the 2010 Argentine census was one important culmination of shifts on various scales in the modalities for mobilization and identification. In this section, I have sought to briefly suggest that the emergence of Afrodescendant as a census category was in no way preordained but instead particular to and contingent on a confluence of specific local, national and international actors, their practices and discourses. This process marked the beginning of the need for meaning work of the “strategic fitting” (Benford and Snow 2000:627) of Afrodescendant, a transnational product, to the particularities of Argentine

realities. Afrodescendant as an identification produced both a new modality for encompassing a plurality of demands while also introducing new challenges and reconstituting the spaces for interaction between Afro organizations and the Argentine state. As we shall see, this is an unstable and even ambivalent process capable of both affirming the rights of certain constituencies and yet also unequally flattening the multiple Afro communities living in Argentina.

Chapter 3: Data Analysis

NOTES ON DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This work analyzes the coverage of the census question on African descent in the October 27, 2010 Argentine census. It illuminates the frames employed by multiple actor groups regarding the inclusion of the question, particularly for whom and with what purpose. This frame analysis results from data collection of digital sources – including blog posts, news articles, videos and powerpoints – produced between 2010 and 2012 by Afro organizations and activists in Argentina, Argentine media outlets, and government institutes. As such, this data collection can be understood as a multi-sited approach (Hine 2011); rather than privileging one news outlet or digital media format, this collection sought to collect digitally-available media from a variety of sources and formats. In part, I include data through the end of 2012 to cover the period of INDEC’s public release of question results in June 2012. Yet the vast majority is from 2010. All sources found that met those temporal requisites, and that mentioned the census question on African descent, were included in the analysis. This data collection resulted in 44 documents, 32 print sources and 12 videos, totaling roughly 32,500 words including video transcriptions.

While sociologists have had varied responses to the digital info-glut, some such as Uprichard (2012) have made compelling calls for sociologists to not only engage with digital data but recognize their particular strengths in handling these new sources of information for analysis. By maintaining the sociological imagination, sociologists are well positioned to sidestep some important pitfalls of digital research – particularly the easy slip into ahistorical analyses (Uprichard 2012) – as I have attempted here. Though social worlds and the media mutually constitute each other, “human beings live in a world of media, not a media world,” (Grossberg et al. 1998:6) highlighting the continued priority for sociological analysis of digital spheres which both shape social worlds, and, more importantly here, provide a stage through which to analyze social milieu. As Grossberg et al. (1998:xvii) writes, media production also produces social identities,

“contributing to people’s sense of who they are and who other people are” – in other words, the processes of identification central to the research questions posed here.

This analysis thus is a tentative, but necessary first step into digital sources on the part of ethnographer-in-training. As such, I analyzed the print sources and video transcriptions through the open and focused coding methods (Emerson et al 1995) with which I am familiar, while seeking to interpret the frames encoded in these texts (Grossberg et al. 1998:155) in an eclectic methods style involving both content and narrative analysis techniques depending on the nature of the text (Grossberg et al. 1998). When relevant, I also considered the images included in the sources, though this analysis has unfortunately not been produced in any systematic way emphasizing the visual, but rather as but additions to the textual analysis (Pauwels 2005). Because comments on documents, while possible, were almost nonexistent, they played no role in analysis; nor do I dialogue with any form of audience interpretation or reception (Hine 2011; Grossberg et al. 1998).

Moreover, these analyses undoubtedly draw from my experience living, working, studying and researching *in situ* before and after the 2010 census, most relevantly from August 2009 to July 2011. During that period, I also informally interviewed academics in the field, including Alejandro Frigerio and Giselle Kliermacher, and shared conversations with my friend and 2010 census taker, Emmanuel Barrenechea. In following Hine (2011), it is my hope that those *in situ* conversations help address the potential problems of “loss of depth and contextualizing information” in digital data analysis as I allowed “the field site to spill out beyond the internet.”

The principal reliance of this work on digitally available sources provides important benefits. While I lived in Buenos Aires during the census period, web access to these materials has made the completion of this research possible from afar. As Grossberg et al. (1998:3) writes, “we can travel great distances and across centuries, all in the comfort of our own living rooms.” It also, more importantly, allows the researcher access to a plethora of data, produced by various sources and actor groups, which would have been difficult to gather by on-the-ground qualitative data collection; as Hine

(2011:570) writes, “internet encourages us to move away from a model of ethnography focused on intensive engagement within a single site, towards a more fluid, mobile and connective form of fieldwork.” Finally, digital documents can produce more faithful later analyses of a particular moment in time than would interviewing as actors’ narratives intrinsically shift and reformulate over time. In spite of claims to the contrary (Grossberg et al. 1998:47), I did not find that “linear conventions of both time and space [were] constantly violated and played with” within these sources, and can with great assurance understand these digital texts as representative of a particular historical moment.

Nonetheless, it also has significant drawbacks. First, by being a removed collector of digital data, it becomes difficult to interrogate, delineate and address the document producers’ intentions and positionality. As Grossberg et al. (1998:59) write, “[n]othing is could be more important in understanding the processes of making media than understand *who makes the media* and *how* they are ‘made’.” In news articles, for example, I do not have access to the entirety of the comments collected for the piece but instead only the snippets that made the final published draft. As such, in most cases, the words of Afro leaders analyzed here have been provided, cut and deemed worthy of presentation by media outlet actors. As Benford and Snow (2000:626) write, “social movement activists rarely exercise much control over the ‘stories’ media organizations choose to cover...or how the media represent the activists’ claims.” I understand these texts therefore as the products of multiple actors from different actor groups. Beyond this, behind journalists and newscasters there are entire media organizations – editors, researchers, directors, etc. – that in many varied ways play a role in what emerges in those digital products (Grossberg et al. 1998:60). No document analyzed here was the product of a single actor. And those documents produced by media organizational entities are governed by routines and rules (Grossberg et al. 1998:71) and their own professional news media cultures (McBarnet 1979; Jacobs 1996) which play an unseen role in what emerges in these texts, and is outside of the realm of analysis here. And, unlike in ethnography and interviews,

digital sources do not allow the researcher to confirm they have understood and interpreted correctly the words of the author(s) (Grossberg et al. 1998:122).

While it was my original intention to analyze how framings of the census question differed by actor group, acknowledging this multi-actor production of texts discredits such an attempt. Moreover, in my data analysis I discovered remarkable consistency across actor groups regarding for whom and for what this census question served, further challenging any attempt to make theoretical claims regarding the frames employed by one actor group versus another. There is also overlap between these actor groups, as in the case of Carlos Álvarez, who serves not only as an Afro organization leader but also as an INDEC representative. And, finally, while these actors demonstrate a variety of subjectivities and personal trajectories I do not want to argue that the relatively few actors cited in these documents in any way epitomize any particular Afro community or actor group in Argentina.⁹ Indeed, these comments may only represent but front stage (Goffman 1959) views for these actors; but, regardless, these public performances serve to help illuminate what these actors believe will legitimize the term Afrodescendant and the census question, and all that it was meant to accomplish – pertinent questions here. Moreover, the data collected demonstrate incongruences as the frames and narrative elements employed by actors shift and are not always reconcilable; these tensions play a role in the analysis as well.

Second, in data collection and analysis an issue with reposting digital sources also emerged. I found that Afro organization blogs often “copied and pasted” other internet documents without any reflection on the content. Because they did not provide any new information or narratives, for data collection I traced these documents back to the original source and only included that instance in data analysis.

Third, and perhaps most importantly and unfortunately, given the nature of the questions here, only one voice of an African national regarding the census emerged in

⁹ Frigerio (2000a:2) highlights how Afro-Argentines have presented different and contested representations of Buenos Aires’ black traditions. While this thesis generally emphasizes the surprising continuities across actor groups, regardless of nationality, I do not want to deny the reality of intra-Afro contests and disputes. These contests also emerged in coding, though they fell outside the final analyses.

data collection. Any discussion of the drawbacks of digital data collection would be incomplete without a consideration of the inherent inequality in the knowledge produced in these spaces. While electronic media have allowed for shifts in knowledge production, they have also worked to reconcentrate and centralize control and power over information (Grossberg et al. 1998:46). Dominant search engines decide what texts are most readily accessible (Hine 2011). Many of the organizations by or for African migrants in Argentina do not have websites, or never addressed the census through that platform, except for the blog of Nengumbi Celestin.

In conclusion, I recognize that this data analysis bears but a messy introductory attempt to grasp onto the “opportunities afforded to researchers where our primary tools are no longer confined to the survey or the tape recorder” (Back and Puwar 2012:6). It is my hope and belief that, in spite of these weaknesses, the methods of data collection and analysis employed here are sufficiently robust to outline the frames employed by involved actors regarding who should and for what purpose individuals should identify as Afrodescendant.

FRAMING THE CENSUS QUESTION

This, the principal section of this thesis, analyzes the ways central actors understand Afrodescendant as a category of identification for the Argentine 2010 Census as well as the “why” and the “what for” of the census question on African descent. As such, it interrogates the meaning work behind collective action frames (Benford and Snow 2000) by highlighting empirically how relevant actors attempt to legitimize the construction of new terms for racial and ethnic identification through particular framings. As Benford and Snow (2000) write, movement actors, along with media and state agents, engage in a “politics of signification” (Hall 1982) whereby these “signifying agents actively [engage] in the production and maintenance of meaning” (Benford and Snow 2000:613).

This section is broken into four subsections to address the following questions: 1) How do actor groups frame this census question as necessary? 2) How do these actor

groups understand the purpose of this question on African descent, or, in other words, what do they think it will accomplish? 3) How do they understand what *afrodescendiente* means? This question about the meaning of Afrodescendant takes into consideration how the narrative frames of “for whom” and “for what” affect this definition. And, finally, 4) where do these frames leave the Cape Verdean-Argentine, African and Afro-Latin American populations? What role are they allowed/do they play in these frames?

I. The Why of the Census Question

Throughout these documents, actors explain this census question as necessary through a variety of narrative elements that coalesce around what I label frames of longevity, contribution and continued group suffering. Connecting and aligning these different “events and experiences so that they hang together in a relatively unified and compelling fashion,” marks a process of frame articulation (Benford and Snow 2000:623) whereby certain events and issues are accented in order to legitimize the installation of the census question.

Longevity

Actors mobilize a variety of narrative elements that highlight the longevity of the Afro population in Argentina in order to affirm the longstanding need of the quantification of the Afro community in Argentina. I label these the *longevity* frames; all the sources highlight, through a variety of narrative elements, the longevity of the Afro population in Argentina.

First, at least 39% of the sources mobilize history as a narrative feature in three main ways. First, that different measures of inequality have persisted throughout Argentine history, as the Afrodescendant population has been “historically stigmatized” (Camino 2010) and “invisibilized” (Celestin 2010e; INDEC N/D; Tv Pública 2010a), had “historical problems” (Celestin 2011a; Télam 2011) and, that there is “a history” of mistreating minorities (Télam 2010b). Second, that there is a historical Afro presence that is a part of Argentine national history: they “erased our history” (Camino 2010), a “part of history” (Halfon-Laksman 2010), in “Argentine history, that there is another

history not told” (Ortuño 2010), and a “history they forgot” (Uno 2010). In the words of Javier Ortuño, of the organization Africa and Its Diaspora, “if we want a plural identity and a country for everyone, it is very important to recognize where we come from, who we were in the past” (Ortuño 2010). Third, to mark this moment as a much needed rupture from past state politics: a “historic incident” (Celestin 2010a), a “historic achievement” (Celestin 2010d; INDEC 2010b; CN23 2010; Tv Pública 2010a), “historic census” (Celestin 2010f), and “historic recognition” (Celestin 2010g).

Second, actors also emphasize longevity by referencing long periods of time. These often reference, with a marked temporal variety, the last time (if ever) the Afro population was included in a census: the “first time in over a century” (Camino 2010), “for the first time” (Ilama 2010b; Télam 2010a; Télam 2010b), after “115 years” (Ortuño 2010; Álvarez 2010; CN23 2010; Ilama 2010b; Tv Pública 2010a), “200 years” (Ortuño 2010), “it’s been 150 years” (CN23 2010; Télam 2010b), or “more than 130 years” (Tv Pública 2010b; Télam 2010a). Long tracts of time also serve one of the same functions as references to history by marking the persistence of marginalization for Afro populations in Argentina: “to revert hundreds of years of exclusion and invisibilization” (Celestin 2010f), “the invisibles of always” (Halfon-Laksman 2010), “120 years of historic invisibility” (Celestin 2010g), “throughout more than 100 years of sociocultural invisibilization” (INDEC n/d), and “denied for centuries and centuries” (Télam 2010a).

Third, actors often reference particular years to highlight the long overdue need to address the Afro population through census taking. Here you also see great variety in when actors understand the last moment of statistical visibilization of the Afro population. These include: “the last time we Afrodescendants were included in a population census was in 1895” (Celestin 2010a), “The last statistical data revealed about the Afro population in Argentina refers to the Buenos Aires City Census of 1887” (Celestin 2010e; also see INDEC n/d, Ilama 2010a), “[t]his is the first time that they include in the Census the question about the Afrodescendant population” (INDEC 2010a), “[t]he censuses of 1869, 1887 and 1895” (Lag 2010), and “around 1869, 1870 the population coming from Africa stopped being counted in the census” (Tudanca 2012).

Other references, such as those to the census of 1778 (Camino 2010; Ortuño 2010; Sukama 2012), mobilize these dates to mark proof of the demographic reality that Argentina was, early in its history, a territory constituted to a great degree by Afro populations.

Finally, another common element is to reference slavery and the enslaved Africans in Argentina during that period. At least 25% of the sources made a reference to slavery. In particular, references to slavery mark it as the primary reason for why Afro populations are in Argentina, as seen in the following examples: “12 million persons were kidnapped in Africa and transported to America for their utilization in the regime of slavery during European colonization...the Kingdom of the Río de la Plata, was not an exception” (Camino 2010) because Buenos Aires was a “slave port” (Ortuño 2010); “[t]his is the result of a process of diaspora produced by slavery and its transformation into servitude” (Sukama 2012); “the African presence in the country...[during] colonial [times] was an enslaved African presence” (Página/12 2010a); and “they brought them as slaves” (Lag 2010). In narrating his ancestry, Pita also highlights the forced nature of that migration; “[m]y great, great grandfather is Argentine, and in some moment they didn’t come but where brought from Africa, product of the slave trade” (CN23 2010). Less commonly, references to slavery discussed instead their role in the colonial economy (INDEC 2010b; Tv Pública 2010a).

Historical references serve multiple purposes. One, they mark the census question as a micro-revolution by defining it as a paradigm shift (Tudanca 2012) from the rest of Argentine history. Actors understand the census as a paradigm shift in part because it rewrites national ideology by affirming that the Afro population is more than a relic of Argentina’s past. As Federico Pita shares:

All the official history, which is what they teach in the schools, makes the Afro a rarity of another time. For that the blacks appear only for May 25th and July 9th and to represent them there is always one that paints his or her face with charcoal. And what does all that tell us? That blacks are a fossil. Something of the past, and that they are so different from us that here the closest we can get is a painted white person. (Miller 2010)

Two, and more importantly here, such references legitimize the census question by calling out the longstanding and long overdue need for redress for the Afro populations in Argentina. In short, “from the beginnings of the nation we are here” (Tv Pública 2010a) and have been “invisibilized throughout time” (Uno 2010). Through the public discursive space opened up by the census question, Afro activists, paraphrasing the words of Stuart Hall, learned to tell themselves the story of their own past and to interrogate their own history (1991:19), as we see further below. Emphasizing longevity was but one frame employed. Another important frame employed to demonstrate the legitimacy of such a question was references to Afro contributions to Argentina, above all its culture.

Contribution

Documents on the census question emphasize that the Afro constituency of the country has played an important and essential role in the construction of Argentina, in particular its culture. Hall (1991) illuminates the importance of such a process:

There is no way, it seems to me, in which people of the world can act, can speak, can create, can come in from the margins and talk, can begin to reflect on their own experience unless they come from some *place*, they come from some history, they inherit certain cultural traditions. (18)

Speaking to the particular experience of the Afro constituency in Argentina emerged primarily in meaning work to situate the Afro as an inseparable part of the Argentine nation. Of the sources, at least 29% made reference to the Afro contribution to the Argentine nation. In some, this narrative element marked the census inclusion as part of a push to “reclaim the social, cultural and economic contribution of this community” (Ilama 2010a) and to “demonstrate [its] concrete and specific contributions” (Álvarez 2010). As Nengumbi Celestin, African activist in Argentina, writes:

Finding ourselves in the year of the bicentennial and understood that the Africans of distinct generations have contributed much in the country’s construction and growth, one arrives at the conclusion that it is time to recognize said contributions and to give the Afro community in Argentina the place that it deserves in this society. (Sukama 2010a)

“The contribution of this community, to Argentine culture and history” (Tv Pública 2010b) also served as a tool to legitimize the worth of including the Afro community in the census. The largest emphasis was on the Afro cultural production that had been incorporated into Argentine cultural patrimony. Many documents highlighted the Afro influence on Argentine musical expression (“candombe and tango...to cite the African cultural heritages most known in Argentine music” (Camino 2010), “tango” (Sukama 2010a), “the milonga, the tango” (Ortuño 2010), “influence of the tango, chacarela, malambo” (CN23 2010)). As academic Dr. Dina Picotti shares: “Its musical influence exists not only in the tango, malambo or candombe, but also in that our folklore has the basic rhythm of 2 by 3, which characterizes black music. Moreover, candombe, zamba, tango are words of bantú origin” (Lag 2010). Other cultural heritages were referenced including food (“*el guiso de mondongo* (mondongo stew) and *el asado de achuras* (barbequed innards)” (Camino 2010) and in language (“as with the word *quilombo*” (CN23 2010)). There were also references to economic contributions to the country, particularly in the times of slavery. Celestin writes, “with respect to [their] contributions in the construction of Argentina, the Africans as enslaved [peoples], where assigned to the labors of agriculture, ranching, domestic work and in smaller measure artisanal work” (Sukama 2012). On its website regarding the Afrodescendant question, INDEC (INDEC 2010b) similarly highlights the domestic and artisanal work that enslaved and free Afro peoples did during the colonial period. Finally, some actors also framed this contribution in terms of the roots and origins of Argentina (“the black roots” (Camino 2010), “the lack of awareness of this country’s society about its African origins” (Camino 2010), “recognizing its roots” (Halfon-Laksman 2010), “the inclusion of a question about the African roots” (Ruchansky 2010)).

Discussing the contributions of Afro peoples to the construction of the Argentine nation served to legitimate the inclusion of Afrodescendants in the Argentine census by marking the multiple ways Afro populations have been fundamental to the making of Argentine identity and culture, in particular. This differs from past analyses that instead noted the importance of constructing and presenting a cultural or ethnic group identity as

distinct from the nation-state and national culture in Latin America (Hooker 2005) as a key strategy of political mobilization around racial and ethnic identification. Returning to the frame analysis, references to tango, for example, the beloved national dance, is a frame extension (Snow et al 1986: 472), whereby actors “extend the boundaries of [their] primary framework so as to encompass interests...that are incidental to its primary objectives but of considerable salience to potential adherents.” Though it may also mark a moment of frame amplification, whereby actors work for frame resonance by tapping existing cultural values and narratives (Benford and Snow 2000:624). The contribution frame, as we see below, reinforces understandings of the census as marking the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion of a nation-state.

Continued Group Suffering

Finally, the frame of continued group suffering highlights and legitimizes the need to address the suffering – past and present – of Afro communities through a measurement of not only the population, but their socioeconomic conditions as among the “most vulnerable” populations in Argentina, in the words of INDEC Director Ana María Edwin (Celestin 2011a) and others (“the most vulnerable” (Télam 2011), “situation of vulnerability” (Télam 2010a)). Throughout these references to the persistence of social suffering, actors engage in work of frame transformation (Snow et al 1986) whereby particular social patterns and practices are expressed through “injustice frames” that name the sufferers of the acts, amplify the suffering (Benford and Snow 2000), and thus mark those social realities as “inexcusable, immoral, or unjust” (Snow et al 1986:475).

First, as seen above, references to past suffering, particularly to slavery, are common. Notably though, these references to slavery often emerge within narratives that seek to mark the continuity of injustice into present times. One article quoted an INADI report that the “slavery system established racist and stigmatizing matrices that survive in diverse forms until the present day” (Camino 2010). Celestin agrees:

[s]lavery itself and the mistreatments received by the members of the Afro community during and after the abolition of slavery demonstrate the systematic violation of their fundamental rights (political, civil, economic, social and

cultural) that reveals the notable social injustice that characterized and characterizes this community in Argentina. (Sukama 2012)

References to past suffering cover not only slavery but also the misery of “the most successful systematic plan of extermination and whitening in America” (Camino 2010).

Yet this frame more frequently references the current challenges facing Afrodescendants in Argentina. The challenges are numerous. Camino (2010) continues to cite the INADI report in outlining the multiple ways discrimination manifests itself in Argentina:

...the worst jobs, precarious housing and less schooling, but the document also picks up other types of discrimination in the spheres of work (harassment and humiliation), education (incomplete curriculums), information (concealment or exoticism in treatment), police treatment (persecution and violence) and health (longer waits and lack of awareness of illnesses). (Camino 2010)

Celestin also pulls from reports on present-day suffering. He cites the study conducted by the University of Buenos Aires discussed above. The final report found that, Celestin writes, “57% have experienced situations of ethnic-racial discrimination, 40% work discrimination and 34% police violence” (Celestin 2010g). Other sources all listed together a variety of inequalities (“In the case of the Afro community, it is characterized by not having equal access to various of their fundamental rights, principally education, decent and stable employment, dignified living, political rights locating [the community] in the situation of permanent marginality and poverty” (Sukama 2012); “above all to take us out of the exclusion, poverty and the high levels of discrimination” (Télam 2010b)).

These realities of discrimination were highlighted throughout these documents, while some actors emphasized particular categories. Predominant were references to poverty and socioeconomic inequality, such as: “[t]he current social stratification locates them in poverty” (Sukama 2012); “[i]t’s enough to see the faces of the poorest of the poor to see the phenotypic coincidences. Not all of the ‘dark’ poor are Afrodescendants, but many yes” (Frigerio 2010); the “Afro which, in general, is immersed in poverty” (Ruchansky 2010); and “poverty is not something that exclusively attacks Afros, but it would seem that it does it with more fury” (Uno 2010). Or, as Frigerio attests,

To begin to approximate ourselves quantitatively to this chromatic variety and to recognize the role that it fulfills in the reproduction of social inequality – through the correlation between African descent and poverty indicators – is an important first step in the fight against discrimination. (Frigerio 2010)

In a critical engagement with these exaltations of Afros as belonging to the lowest sectors of society, while for many a fair representation, López (2005:128) writes that this framing inserts the population “in the parameters of financing agencies that establish a direct relationship between race and poverty, reducing the range of possibilities of identification.” In such a reading, Afros are not allowed to be anything but poor.

But references specific to education (“the youth hardly gain admission to university” (Camino 2010)), housing (“living in the worst conditions in the whole world” (Lag 2010), increasing gentrification in historically Afro neighborhoods (Miller 2010)), and criminal justice (“our jails are full of Afrodescendants” (Miller 2010)) also appear. While in some moments particular forms of discrimination were highlighted (such as labor, “you are not going to see Afrodescendant legislators, you are not going to see Afrodescendant businessmen, you are not going to see Afrodescendant senators” (CN23 2010) or the likelihood of discrimination against the Afro census takers (CN23 2010)), these documents show a strong emphasis on speaking to discrimination more broadly, along with references to racism and prejudice.

Racism and discrimination are common points of reference. Actors understand this question as combating, measuring or at least providing a discursive space for discussion regarding racism and discrimination (see Celestin 2010c, 2010f, 2011a; Sukama 2012; Ilama 2010b; Ruchansky 2010; Álvarez 2010; CN23 2010). And, this discussion of racism even transcends to a discussion of institutional racism (Argentina is “a very racist country institutionally” (Ortuño 2010); “institutional racism that today some public functionaries promote in Argentina” (Celestin 2010c); but particularly by INADI: “prejudice of an ethnic-racial character by part of the representative authorities of the Argentine state, in the case of INADI...towards the Afro entities” (Celestin 2010b) and “[i]n this setting, we cannot but characterize the unequal treatment that INADI offers

us as Afrodescendant and African organizations as a practice of institutional racism” (Sukama 2010c; see also Celestin 2010f)). Moreover, the prevalence of racial discrimination both among these frames and the origins of the census question contrasts with Hooker’s (2005) findings that cultural recognition in identity politics has obfuscated questions of racial discrimination in Latin America.

An Inaccurate Invisibilization

One of most prevalent frames in these documents was marking that the Afro community in Argentina had not disappeared but instead been invisibilized. At least 49% of the sources reference this invisibilization (“they didn’t disappear, they [were] camouflaged” (Camino 2010) as a matter of “state policy” (Miller 2010); see also Celestin 2010g, 2010e, 2010f, 2011b; Sukama 2012; Halfon-Laksman 2010; Lag 2010; Ilama 2010b; Ruchansky 2010; Cn23 2010; Télam 2011; INDEC n/d; Tudanca 2012; Uno 2010; Ortuño 2010; Álvarez 2010). Or, as Pita states, the Afro community “doesn’t exist, it’s just there” (Ruchansky 2010). The census then is understood as an important step towards visibilization (“with the objective to visibilize the Afro community” and “to finish the denial of [their] rights and visibilize them” (Celestin 2011a); see also Frigerio 2010; INDEC n/d; Ilama 2010b; Télam 2010b; CN23 2010).

Often, to assert the inaccuracy of this historical invisibilization, actors referenced the numbers produced by the 2005 pilot survey to legitimize the census question. Afro organization leaders in particular reference the pilot report’s estimation (Stubbs and Reyes 2006:11) that between 4 and 6 percent of the country’s population is Afrodescendant, roughly 2 million people (Camino 2010; Lag 2010; Página/12 2010a; Uno 2010; Pita 2010; CN23 2010; Tv Pública 2010b). Though Afro leaders at times inflated these numbers, as when Álvarez states, “13 percent of the population is made up of Afro-Argentines” (Ilama 2010a) or Gomes, sharing her high hopes, says, “[w]ith this census question we are hoping to arrive at being up to 20 to 25% percent...we believe and we have confidence in that we are many” (Tv Pública 2010b). This framing work serves as an example of belief amplification (Snow et al 1986:470) regarding the efficacy

of collective action, in which actors at times “cite and embellish the apparent successes of past movements.”

In conclusion, this frame articulation (Benford and Snow 2000), the linking of past and present sufferings, also served part of the diagnostic framing (Snow and Benford 1988) whereby actors worked to construct and imbue meaning to the inequalities experienced by Afros throughout history as a social problem. These frame processes sought to demonstrate the necessity and legitimacy of including a question on African descent in the census. But for what does the question itself serve? We address this question in the next section.

II. What the Census Question Will Accomplish

Public Policies and Policies of Reparation

Along with the frame transformation that reframed the inequalities experienced by Afro communities as a social problem in need of redress, actors engaged in prognostic framing (Benford and Snow 2000:616) to clarify that the census question would provide avenues for resolution of the newly named social problem. As such, actors often stated that the quantification of the Afrodescendant population would provide data to articulate clear, affirmative public policies to address the Afro populations’ needs – already outlined as a legitimatizing reason for the census question. The census question, it was argued, would provide guidance for how and where to focalize policies for Afrodescendants in Argentina.

In fitting with the frame of slavery and moreover the past and continued suffering of the Afro populations in Argentina, sources at times utilize the language of reparations. However, only 4 sources (9%) for this research mobilized this term, though Ruchansky (2010) includes various references. These examples include: “to initiate policies of reparation for our community” (Celestin 2010a), “the injuries that were committed in our country throughout time and that should be repaired” (Ilama 2010b), “a historic reparation” (Ruchansky 2010; Tv Pública 2010b), “to include Argentina in the reparation

policies that they give in the continent” (Ruchansky 2010), and “the need of restorative¹⁰ policies” (Ruchansky 2010). This lack of a large reference to a discourse of reparations differs from the findings of López (2005) who showed it to be much more ubiquitous among her Afro leader interviewees. López (2005:101) writes that the Afro movements in the region pulled directly from the notion of reparations. The importance of the reparation discourse, she argues, manifests itself in the insistence of participating in the Durban Conference, and in achieving that slavery was declared a crime against humanity, and as part of the larger push for affirmative action laws, reparations, and formal state apologies for the descendants of the enslaved Africans in Argentina.

Nonetheless, while the language of reparations emerged, the hope that this census question would serve to establish public policies for the Afrodescendant community was ubiquitous, mentioned in at least 47% of sources (Camino 2010; Frigerio 2010; Celestin 2010e, 2010f, 2010g; Sukama 2012, INDEC 2010A; Ilama 2010A, 2010B; Télam 2010a, 2010b, 2011; Tudanca 2012; Uno 2010; Pita 2010; Álvarez 2010; Tv Pública 2010a, 2010b; AfroPrideTv 2011). As Carlos Álvarez states, “the second step will be to demand to the state focalized public policies” (Camino 2010) and, as the newspaper Uno (2010) writes, “to plan the financing of development projects for those communities.” Frigerio agrees; the census, he affirms, will help to “visibilize and locate these individuals as subjects deserving of particular policies of affirmative action as a basic question of social justice” (Camino 2010).

National Citizenship Narratives

Secondly, beyond the census question’s use for concrete social policies to ameliorate past and present sufferings, involved actors foregrounded its potential to expand the boundaries of the Argentine nation. The very act of asking the question of African descent was understood by various parties as a diagnosis and subsequent reformulation of the racially and ethnically exclusionary boundaries of Argentine

¹⁰ Here, while in English translated to restorative, in the original Spanish it is the same word as reparation – *reparadoras*.

citizenship and the Argentine nation – to provide, in the words of Argentine historian Oscar Chamosa, “a new discourse of nationality” (Alvado 2012). The census question’s inclusion is framed as signifying “larger citizen equality, a recognition of the Afrodescendants as citizens” (Lag 2010) and challenging “the founding myth of what is the essence of Argentina (*argentinidad*)” (Tv Pública 2010a) which, “before had to be homogeneous” (Alvado 2012), by its “comprehension of Argentina as a multiethnic and pluricultural nation” (Celestin 2011a; see also Télam 2010b). Along with the mobilization of an inclusive national citizenship, actors highlight the Afro as “the third identity root” (Lag 2010) of the Argentine national identity (see also Sukama 2012; Ortuño 2010). As academic Dina Picotti states, “[t]o ignore the Afrodescendants in the country is to not recognize our identity, it is to deny ourselves” (Lag 2010), while Oscar Laborde, Argentine politician and coordinator of the Civil Society Advisory Council, affirms, “effectively the Afros have much to do with our own identity” (Télam 2010b). The need for this reworking of a more inclusive understanding of the Argentine nation and its citizenry was highlighted at times through references to the passport fiasco of Afro-Argentine activist Pocha Lamadrid. As Camino (2010) details:

Police agents and migrations officials stopped Pocha Lamadrid in 2002 from boarding a flight and she remained detained in the Ezeiza [Buenos Aires international] Airport during eight hours because of a nonexistent problem with her passport reinforced with the argument that “in Argentina there are no blacks.”

In conclusion, involved actors explained that the question of African descent would provide documentation to legitimize demands for and thus help establish public policies targeting the Afrodescendant populations in Argentina, as well as open up the boundaries of citizenship.

III. Making And Defining Afrodescendant

So how do we understand who is an Afrodescendant? What are the narrative frames and definitions that emerge? This section addresses these questions by outlining the making of the Afrodescendant as an identification.

Making Afrodescendants

As an identification, Afrodescendant has to be brought to bear. It is in no way a natural category in Argentina, not even among Afro activists. The documents speak to the recent appearance of this term, born of the Durban process (“Because it is a term that was born not long ago that begins in Santiago, Chile and ends in an international convention in Durban” (Pita 2010)); while also demonstrating the explicit need to create Afrodescendant as a term of identification among the masses. While some essentialist understandings of Afrodescendant appeared (“when [individuals] do not recognize their own selves, they deny themselves their own resources” (Lag 2010)), the majority of remarks instead highlighted the need for awareness and identification-making campaigns. As Alejandro Frigerio remarks, “the great part of those given the census [survey] are not going to know what ‘Afrodescendant’ wants to say or what it means to be it” (Frigerio 2010). While describing participation in awareness campaigns throughout Argentina, Pita highlights that “it has been no more than 20 years that the term ‘Afrodescendant’ is [in] use” and “we tried to install it” (Lipcovick 2012).

Regarding the *making* rather than the defining of Afrodescendant, that is why the awareness campaigns, which in most cases did not have the intended impact (lack of funds and organizational politics played important roles), were incredibly important. At least 29% of the sources referenced them. Within references to the awareness campaigns, essentialist frameworks emerged (“Many persons don’t want to recognize that which they are. For that, they are very important the comprehension campaigns...to make the population aware” (Lag 2010)) but so did those that understood the term as a reframing (“the imperative and urgent need to unite around an awareness and understanding campaign of the meaning of the word ‘Afrodescendants’” (Sukama 2010a). Given the new and external nature of the concept, frame bridging (Snow et al 1986:468), between the census question and “unmobilized sentiment pools or public opinion preference clusters” was crucial to whether or not individuals felt compelled to identify themselves as Afrodescendant.

Defining Afrodescendant

6 ¿Ud. o alguna persona de este hogar es afrodescendiente o tiene antepasados de origen afrodescendiente o africano (padre, madre, abuelos/as, bisabuelos/as)?

☐ Sí Indique el N° de persona:

☐ No

☐ Ignorado

Figure 1: Census Survey Question on African Descent, Argentina 2010 Census.
Source: INDEC 2010a.

But how do these sources define Afrodescendant? In them emerge both official and unofficial definitions. INDEC provides the official definition: “the concept of Afrodescendant is related with being descendant of the Africans brought as the enslaved to Argentina, to being African or descendant of an African, having black ancestors, to being or considering oneself black or Afro-Argentine, or to being African in the diaspora, among others” (INDEC 2010a). Figure 1 provides an image of the official census question: Are you are any person of this home Afrodescendant or do you have ancestry of African descent or African origin (father, mother, grandparents, great-grandparents)? (INDEC 2010a). Even though the official definition on the website includes black, the census question itself does not. As Alejandro Frigerio (2010) writes, the question avoids the word *negro* “because of its negative and racialized connotations” and “it continues and makes official the use of the more politically correct ‘Afrodescendants,’ popularized by the ‘black’ activists – sorry for using the word.” Frigerio (2010) continues to elaborate that the term

tries, moreover, to include in the possible positive responses: the Afro-Argentines belonging to the traditional families that descend from the enslaved Africans during the colony; to the more recent Afro-American immigrants; to the current African immigrants and the former (primarily Cape Verdean) and to the Argentine children and grandchildren of both groups... And, finally, to include – in a very important way – all persons that know that they have some ‘black’ ancestor...*whatever their phenotype*. (emphasis in original)

The official definition, however, differs substantially from the ways Afro organization leaders, journalists and news anchors, and even the same government organizations frame, define and explain who is Afrodescendant. Federico Pita, in multiple venues, rewrites the meaning of Afrodescendant. He is the most forceful and consistent in his circumscribing of Afrodescendant as identifying the descendants of enslaved Africans brought to Africa. In one such account, Pita remarks that Afrodescendant “has to do with the children of Africans born outside of the continent because their ancestors were uprooted from their lands to be enslaved, which is very different from the immigrant that decides to leave and takes his family and his culture” (Télam 2011). In this and other moments, Pita forcefully rewrites the census meaning of Afrodescendant to align more closely to his own constituency – the descendants of the enslaved African peoples brought to Argentina during the slave trade.

Nonetheless, there was still dissention surrounding the census. In one video documentary short clip, one Afro-Argentine activist states, I was “deceived from the beginnings of the census because I do not agree with the questions they did, I do not agree with how the census was carried out, and really for me I consider that it is one more way to disappear us” (AfroPrideTv 2011).

Gendered Nature

Within this reframing of Afrodescendant as ancestral rather than phenotypic, gendered frames of the family and familial knowledge emerged. Two common narrative frames both involve referencing the grandmother. In one mode, Afro organization leaders tell others to use this question as an opportunity to ask their family about their heritage – to ask their grandmother, who seems to hold all the family secrets. To discover yourself as Afrodescendant requires that you “ask your family, we want to stimulate that they investigate with their grandmothers who is the Afro in the family” (Tv Pública 2010b). Or, the second frame, highlights that the grandmother or another woman, through her own blackness, is the ancestral link to an African origin – and who is always hidden in a

proverbial closet (“hiding the black grandmother in the closet” (Camino 2010); “we all have a *negra* in the closet” (Ruchansky 2010)).

Returning References

Negro and the Role of Phenotype

Throughout the documents, tensions surrounding the role of phenotype continue to emerge in the defining of Afrodescendant. To a certain degree, actors embrace the identification Afrodescendant as one purposefully beyond phenotypic inclusion to one of heritage. Afrodescendant as an identification beyond skin pigmentation emerges most prominently in an exchange between a news anchor and Federico Pita. After voicing his skepticism regarding the population estimates the Afro leaders had shared, the newscaster asks, “among these 2 million Afrodescendants, there are white people?” and Pita responds, “Exactly, exactly, of course” (CN23 2010). Afrodescendant is understood as a more “politically correct term” (Lipcovick 2012) meant to replace black as an identification. As journalist Karin Miller writes, “Since [the Durban conference], the political correction marks that the children of the children of the Africans brought to the River Plate should be called ‘Afrodescendants’ and that the old ‘black’ should be a shunned word” (Miller 2010).

Nonetheless, the importance of the phenotype continues unabated within the discussion as when Pita communicates that in Argentina “you see on the street there are many people that have Afrodescendant traits” (Uno 2010) whereby a term he himself understands as an overarching term of heritage and origins, becomes redefined as something you can see through physically distinguishable traits. Pita (2010) emphasizes the somatic by highlighting what he understands as a challenge to the efficacy of Afrodescendant collective action: even those who should consider themselves Afrodescendant because of their physical features, do not identify as such. Pita says,

There are tons of people that don’t know or you find [on] them features, curls, lips, nose, whatever, or the skin color and then you ask them, “Are you Afrodescendant?” And faced with the question they’re stunned. They don’t know

what you asked them and then you add, “are you black?” And they laugh, [and say] “no.” (2010)

In this mobilization the term Afrodescendant is something that can be read through the phenotype. Even though Pita (2010) then affirms that Afrodescendant as a term is an overarching synthesis that goes beyond a question of just pigmentation and that speaks of origins, the importance of physical markers is displaced not erased.

In the discourses that emerge in these documents, as may have already become apparent, Afrodescendant has not entirely replaced the use of the word *negro*, or black, even among the Afro activists themselves that participated in the Durban Conference. What has come to be defined within the activist community in relation to transnational shifts as a pejorative term continues to be mobilized in conversations surrounding the census question. Actors demonstrate a tendency to switch between black and Afrodescendant as if they were synonyms.¹¹ But, maybe especially in the case of Argentina, they are not.

Most commonly, *negro* emerges in these documents through references to the myth central to the foundation of Argentine national identity that “there are no blacks.” In order to name and challenge “the hegemonic social imaginary that considers that ‘in Argentina there are no blacks’” (Celestin 2010e), Afro leaders continued to mobilize *negro*. In similar forms, different Afro leaders and journalists named the myth that “in Argentina there are no blacks” (INDEC n/d).

However, it is not only in naming in order to combat this myth that actors use the term *negro*. Afro-Argentine activist Pocha Lamadrid states, “There are many whites that are blacks but it’s not in their interest to admit it (*no les conviene reconocerse*)” (Camino 2010). In this instance, the use of *negro* seems quite odd, as Afrodescendant would appear much more appropriate. But statements that use *negro* or blackness are ubiquitous

¹¹ We also see this synonym use between Afrodescendant and black among academic scholarship. Even anthropologist Alejandro Frigerio has difficulty making this identification overhaul: “[t]he more politically correct ‘Afrodescendants’, popularized by the ‘black’ activists – excuse me for using the term” (Frigerio 2010).

throughout the documents with at least 40 references in 18 documents (41%) made by Afro activists like Pita, Álvarez, Gomes, and Lamadrid as well as media representatives.

This tension over contrasting modes of identification, I argue, emerges not only from the newness and foreignness of the term but the very ambiguity inherent in constructing ethnic and racial identifications – as inherently social and not objective modes of categorization. These ambiguities appear through the words of Federico Pita in these sources. In his presentation at the Book Festival, Pita says, “Afrodescendant is a very new term. I, for the last 31 years, I have felt myself [to be part of] a black family. I heard of the term very recently” (Pita 2010). In comparison, disallowing his previous modes of identification, he states in a television interview, “I don’t respond to the idea of black...but what I am is Afrodescendant” (CN23 2010). While, in another interview, Carlos Álvarez asserts himself and Federico as black: “in this case black persons like I, like Federico” (Tv Pública 2010a). These identification shifts, marked by the tensions between self-making and interpellation, highlight the instability and ludicrousness of ethnic and racial identifications.

The tension regarding the mobilization of multiple identifications results in part from the particular nature of racialization in Argentine society. As Frigerio (2010) writes,

...exceeding this probably not so big circle of blacks (Argentines of different generations, immigrants of different origins) there is another [circle] *much* larger of individuals that by virtue of that African descent they are considered nonwhite (or not-sufficiently-white: “*negros cabeza*” (black heads), “*negros villeros*” (slum-dwelling blacks), “*negros de m...*” (shit blacks or niggers) and are also subjects of discriminatory practices. (emphasis in original)

While all of these terms may appear hyper-racialized pejorative terms, within Argentina they are understood more ambiguously as intersecting race, class and geography. The phenotypic understanding of *cabecitas negras* and other terms above clearly marks nonwhiteness but not necessarily, in public discursive use, African descent. This process in itself marks the success of the intense whitening process in Argentina where not even *negros* are black or of African descent. *Negro* as a social category in Argentina has been deracialized while it continues to denigrate blackness, as seen in its frequent use of the

phrases Frigerio lists. It was this field of meaning that Afrodescendant as an identification would hope to sidestep. To understand the naming and identification of the Afro population in Argentina requires a further development of the meaning of *negro* in Argentina. Over the last hundred years, *negro* has been come to be understood not as another racial group, but instead a cultural or social group, as López (2005:29), writes:

This transposition that produces an emphasis on social categories more than racial ones is, according to Frigerio, primarily an attempt to deny, on one hand, the existence of racial prejudice and, on the other, the continued presence of racialized ‘Others’ in the city.

Visual material also highlighted the importance of the phenotype in understanding who is Afrodescendant. Of the images produced in these documents, white faces without “Afrodescendant traits” were nonexistent. But, not only that, more notably they placed African descent as within particular physical features marking the continued importance of the phenotype. The *Página/12* article “Censistas en busca de una reparación histórica” (Census-takers in search of historic reparation) includes a cover photograph that foregrounds the back of Carlos Álvarez’s head, highlighting his long dreadlocks. This photograph circumscribed African descent as visually of the body through the emphasis on Carlos’ hair. Moreover, the only awareness campaign that came to fruition, the *Soy Afroargentino/a* INADI campaign, produced a short video clip that further rewrites the question as deemed for those with particular phenotypes. The 55-second clip begins with close-up shots of body parts presented in rapid secession: four hands, to five mouths, to five individuals eyes, to eight pairs of eyes, to a shot of seven facial profiles in a line. These shots guide the viewer to look for Afro identification in the face and hands. As Gilroy (2001:12) attests, “for many racialized populations, ‘race’ and the hard-won, oppositional identities it supports are not lightly or prematurely given up.”

The only article dedicated exclusively to the Afro-Argentines of Cape Verdean descent highlights the tensions surrounding Afrodescendant identification:

It was the first time that she thought about herself as the descendant of Africans, but her father, Matas (84) is convinced that he is Portuguese. Although his face is outlined with black roots, it also preserves European characteristics because of

that mixture that developed in Cape Verde..."I cannot convince him that he is African. We have already discussed until fighting because [of] that topic. Last night again we talked about it, so that he would say it in the census. But it was pointless." (Página/12 2010a)

This excerpt demonstrates the continued emphasis on the phenotype, as the journalist writes that Matas' face was outlined with black traits, even though in the official definition physical attributes play no role in who should be considered Afrodescendant. Moreover, it also exemplifies the difficulties involved actors faced in trying to mobilize Afro constituencies to self-identify as Afrodescendant on the census.

In conclusion, in spite of moves to clarify Afrodescendant as marked by origin rather than phenotype, the constructed somatic markers of African descent continued to be mobilized in discussions surrounding the census question – sometimes by even the same actors that also denied phenotypic traits as determinants. While, as Frigerio (2010) points out, the question was understood by almost all the actors almost all the time as not about white Afrodescendants. Karin Miller succinctly demonstrates this by ending her article with "Less pale. More real" (2010). Here again, we see a rewriting of the census question – which, because of its ancestral emphasis, does indeed include *white* Afrodescendants – as about blackness, or certainly at least about non-whiteness, through continued somatic references and the mobilization of *negro* as identification – regardless of what the census question actually asked. Thus despite the attempts to shift away from racial politics of identification, towards an ancestral mode that emphasizes ethnic and cultural traits to legitimate the inclusion of the question, Gordon's (2007:95) claim that "race is crucial to the construction of identities in the Black/African Diaspora" resounds.

Afro-Argentine

Actors continually re-ascribed the national boundaries of the census question's constituency by supplanting Afrodescendant with Afro-Argentine. The official awareness campaign produced by INADI epitomizes this shift. INADI (the National Institute against Discrimination, Xenophobia and Racism) was founded in 2005 and, as

part of Argentina's Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, is responsible for elaborating national policies and concrete measures to combat discrimination and racism (INADI 2013). Here it is of interest to compare the final awareness campaign with an earlier campaign plan produced by activists in partnership with a local university:

To make a poster with a photo of a white person and on one side a caption that says that that person has grandparents that were brought from Africa as slaves to this territory, and below more photos with blacks of different phenotypes (some lighter and others darker). The trifold diagram [would] have some paragraphs speaking of the history of blacks in Argentina (of slavery, etc.). (López 2005:98)

The continuities and ruptures between this earlier campaign plan and that produced by INADI are notable. Paradoxically, the early campaign sought to rupture the link between African descent and phenotype by privileging the presentation of phenotypes. Notably, while this assertion of the white Afrodescendant was lost in both the actual awareness campaign and the majority of discussions as documented above, the emphasis on a particular national narrative persisted. The INADI campaign was even titled "I am Afro-Argentine (*Soy Afroargentino/a*)."

The audio of the campaign's video short, which accompanies the images discussed above, includes a succession of different voices making single affirmations of identification ("I am proud to be Afro-Argentine") or of ancestry ("My great-grandfather came from Africa") while African descent is somatically located through the video's images. Yet these claims of ancestry ("my mom came from Africa," "my grandfather came from Africa") include only the descendants of Africans and do not include a single "I came from Africa," thus excluding the narratives of those born in Africa who the census will also count. The last spoken audio affirms: "We want to know how many Afro-Argentines we are. This October 27th, the next national census will let us know."

At least 44% of the documents use the term Afro-Argentine in a variety of ways. Some references mistakenly (see López 2005) assert the census question as an Afro-Argentine accomplishment ("a conquest for the whole Afro-Argentine community" (Celestin 2010f)), while others highlight national contributions, as seen above ("The Afro-Argentines contributed a lot in the construction of Argentina" (Sukama 2012)). Yet,

other deployments are more egregious. Journalist Florencia Halfon-Laksman (2010) writes in *Tiempo Argentino* that Afro-Argentines were in Jujuy, an Argentine province, even though she then writes dismissively (discussed in the following section) that Balthazart Ackhast, the president of the organization African and Its Diaspora, and African national from the Ivory Coast, was also in attendance (Halfon-Laksman 2010). Journalists and news anchors often misinformed their audiences what the question was (“about if persons have Afro-American...ancestors” (Ilama 2010b), “[f]or the first time the population was asked...if it they were Afro-Argentine” (Página/12 2010b), “The questionnaire includes three specific questions destined for Afro-Argentine citizens” (Tv Pública 2010b)). The most common employment, though, of Afro-Argentine is as an identification mobilized primarily by Afro organization leaders (“Afro-Argentines exist in the whole Nation-State” (Tv Pública 2010a), “I had to tell the girl that was [the census-taker] that I was Afro-Argentine” (AfroPrideTv 2011), “The Argentine Afrodescendants that for the first time were included in a public policy” (Télam 2010b), “the topic of the Afro-Argentines” (Tv Pública De Córdoba 2010)).

One of the causes of this national circumscription arises from the frustration among Afro-Argentines of an interpellation process that has often made them foreigners themselves and denied their Argentine national identification. Federico Pita demonstrates this frustration with being portrayed as or assumed to be foreign in numerous article and television interviews (Ruchansky 2010; Uno 2010; CN23 2010; Tv Pública 2010a). Ruchansky (2010) quotes Pita: “I tell them that I’m from here and they make a weird face at me. We are always foreigners.” Again in Uno (2010), Pita says, “What country are you from, is a question that permanently they ask when they meet you, and when I tell them that I am Argentine they laugh because many believe that I’m lying to them.” Pita also shares, in Ruchansky (2010), his frustration that “in the newspaper articles they change the preposition ‘of’ for ‘in’ in the name of the association” he represents, African Diaspora of Argentina. These shared irritations detail the continued difficulty of Afro-Argentines to assert themselves as a community that even *exists* in Argentina, let alone one deserving of redress for its multiple modes of marginalization

and exclusion. Yet the airing of these frustrations simultaneously denigrates the Afro populations in Argentina that are immigrants; being foreign is something Pita does not want to be.

IV. Marginalized Afro Communities

Through many of the frames and narrative elements outlined here, government institutes, Afro organization leaders, and media representatives emphasize the historic national roots of the Afrodescendant communities in Argentina in ways that misrepresent who the census question actually included in its definition of Afrodescendant and curtail a more inclusionary discourse. The frames employed, those of longevity and contribution to national culture, in particular, truncated the inclusion of more recent African (im)migrations to Argentina.¹² Of the sources analyzed, only two referenced all of the Afro constituencies discussed here (Camino 2010; Frigerio 2010).

Cape Verdean-Argentine Community

Through a dual process, the Cape Verdean community of Argentina is largely excluded from expositions of whom the census question includes. First, references to the Cape Verdean population are extremely unusual; only three sources mention the community. Second, the moments when Cape Verdean-Argentines are quoted most commonly speak to the Afrodescendant population in Argentina more broadly, often embracing the frames of longevity that do resonate with their communities' own historical trajectories. For example, Marcelino Santos, president of the organization *Amigos de la Isla de Cabo Verde*, comments: "After 500 years of negative propaganda towards the Afro people, I believe that this is beginning to change (*revertirse*)... The

¹²The Afro Latin-American populations are in fact the most ignored constituency in these videos and articles. PÁGINA/12 2010A is one of the only to even reference this constituency. However, the newscasters who interview Carlos Álvarez highlight his Uruguayan nationality. This constituency is so excluded from these documents that the data collection was sufficiently small to strain any analytic claims made here.

state formally apologized (*se le pidió perdón*) to the indigenous communities and also to Paraguay for the war of the Triple Alliance. No one has spoken yet of the quantity of Afro blood spilt in those battles” (Ruchansky 2010).

The words of Miriam Gomes, first-generation Cape Verdean-Argentine and member of *Sociedad de Socorros Mútuos Caboverdeana*, demonstrates the singular position allowed Afro representatives in the public sphere as she employs frames of longevity and continued group suffering that do not correspond to her community’s experience; for example, she invokes the need for a “moral reparation with a request of forgiveness for four centuries of oppression” (Camino 2010). Moreover, as Gomes says, “we are between five and ten percent of the population,” (Tv Pública 2010b) the “we” Gomes invokes is, clearly through the numbers she raises, not one restricted to her community. As López (2005:101) demonstrates through her 2004 interview with Miriam Gomes, this follows her earlier uncertainty about the boundaries of Afro-Argentine and Afrodescendant identifications, yet her desire to be included in both.

Gomes: What are we, are we Africans, are we Afrodescendants? What am I, am I Afro-Argentine? ...the term Afrodescendant should include all of us, including situations that were not contemplated, or even though we did not descend directly from those enslaved Africans, or that we are products of immigration.

I in no way mean to moralize or critique Gomes’ stances in these documents; solidarity across constituencies can be crucial in collective action. Moreover, who knows what other comments were not published. Yet whether Gomes’ own decision or the result of media agents’ editing, these excerpts speak to the limited arena available for Afro constituencies. Unfortunately Gomes’ insertion of herself as part of the Afrodescendant community was largely accompanied by an erasure or a marginalization of the particularities of the Cape Verdean collectivity in Argentina.

One short article – “Una espera caboverdeana” in *Clarín* (Debesa 2010) – explicitly and exclusively covers the inclusion of the Cape Verdean-Argentine community in the census survey of African descent. While Debesa affirms, “it consists of one of the largest communities of Afrodescendants based in the country,” the article

also illustrates the confusion surrounding the workings of the census question. Carolina Kalipolitis, president of the Cape Verdean organization of Ensenada, states “we will finally have data about our population” while the author Debesa writes, the “2010 census will give them a definitive approximation of [their] number.” Yet, in comparison to the frames of Gomes and Santos, Kalipolitis and Debesa make no references to a larger Afrodescendant community. Debesa, rather than citing the frequent “2 million” estimation, instead includes the population estimate for the Cape Verdean-Argentine population of Ensenada: “they are some 10,000.” I note this difference in identification in order to highlight a key misunderstanding: the census survey provided absolutely no way to differentiate the Cape Verdean-Argentine community from the rest of the Afrodescendant population.

Recent African Constituencies

Recent African migrants to Argentina are similarly displaced from the discussion surrounding the census question – it is not understood as for them or for their benefit. Even though the census question counts them, the possibility of public policies for African migrants, for example, never arises in these documents. Moreover, as with the Cape Verdean-Argentine community, the prevalence of frames of longevity and national cultural contribution exclude more recent African populations. And, although narratives generally displaced white Afrodescendants from the census question’s constituency – through ubiquitous nonwhite somatic expressions of African descent and the prevalence of *negro* as mode of group identification – these re-ascriptions did not include all agents.

As with the Cape Verdean representatives, the words of Celestin demonstrate a slight tendency to mobilize frames that do not speak to his trajectory, or to not understand the African constituency in Argentina as part of its Afrodescendant community. Celestin’s shifting stance of where Africans fit regarding Afrodescendant identification demonstrates this unsure terrain. At times Celestin asserts on his blog the inclusion of Africans within Afrodescendant identification (“the Afrodescendants (including the Africans)” (Sukama 2010a), “the last time that we Afrodescendants were included”

(Celestin 2010a), “to initiate policies of reparation for our community” (Celestin 2010a), “how many of us Afrodescendants live in Argentina” (Celestin 2010g)). In other moments, Africans stand alongside but not “within” the Afrodescendant community (“the Afrodescendants and African residents in the country” (Sukama 2010a), “the organizations of Afrodescendants and Africans” (Celestin 2010g)). And, in one instance, Celestin even employs the nationally restrictive frame of Afro-Argentine that excludes him and the African community for which he organizes, by saying the census “question [was] about the Afro-Argentine population origin” (Tudanca 2012). Unfortunately, Celestin’s blog posts are one of the only documents that even discuss the African constituency let alone allow an African voice in the coverage of the census question.

Other sources, if they reference the African populations, never include the words of an African representative; journalists spoke *about* but *not to* the African communities in Argentina (see, for example, Camino 2010; Página/12 2010a). When articles do mention African community leaders, the results are often quite strange. In the article “Con el censo dejaremos de ser los invisibles de siempre,” journalist Florencia Halfon-Laksman writes:

“It is a recognition of these populations at the world level,” Carlos Álvarez, the general secretary of the association African and Its Diaspora, said to *Tiempo Argentino*, while Balthazart Ackhast, Afrodescendant of the Ivory Coast, took photos of himself with some of the indigenous community members that participated in the act.

In one of the only mentionings in any of the documents of an African leader – one that even includes him as an Afrodescendant – does not include any of his words, but instead mentions, in a 627-word article, that Ackhast took pictures of himself like a tourist, rather than someone who belonged at the act. Nor does the article mention that Ackhast is president of that same organization Africa and Its Diaspora. “Datos antes del censo” (Página/12 2010) discusses the data produced before the census on the Afrodescendant populations in Argentina. It mentions a 2007 study conducted by Dina Picotti, Miriam Gómes and Boubacar Traore. While the article names Gómes as the “president of the Cape Verdean Union of Dock Sud,” the article only shares that Traore is, “doing his

Master's at the same university" as Dina Picotti. Here, Senegalese researcher Traore's own voice and nationality are negated as the short piece instead quotes Picotti on the recent African flows.

In the one article that does include an African representative, he is not named as such. Ruchansky (2010) quotes Celestin: "'There didn't have to be blacks. That's what many Argentine dignitaries thought, they wanted Argentina to be an extension of Europe,' signaled another Afro leader, Celestín Sukama (sic)." The only African voice that does appear presents the historical frame and is not named as an African national. While on its own Celestin's inclusion as an Afro rather than African could measure a form of inclusion, within the context of the other analyses here, I argue that the most important aspect to highlight is that what is included as words of Celestin is only a further references to the narrative element of Argentine history, long before his arrival in the country. While journalists denied the inclusion of African points of view regarding the census, Afro-Latin American organization leaders often deny it as well.

Key Afro organization leaders coopted the African constituency and devalued the emergence of an African voice regarding the "for whom and for what" of the census question. Pita, while discussing the definition of Afrodescendant, says, people associate "it more with the idea of the refugee, but we political organizations also *take [the refugee]* as an Afrodescendant as a purely political position" (Pita 2010). In stating that the Afro organizations are choosing to "take" and include African refugees as Afrodescendants – framed as a unilateral decision – this marks a disallowal of any agency on the part of the African populations themselves. In a television interview, when the newscaster asks about the recent African migrants coming to Argentina, Carlos Álvarez replies:

They arrived in conditions of refugees, [or as] asylum seekers, but a little of that which they have permitted also is to visibilize the rest of the population. People see them and ask, "you guys, where are you from?" And then people start to ask what's happening with ours, what is happening with the Afro-Argentines. (CN23 2010)

As with Pita's statement where he marks his role in choosing whether or not they are to be included, Álvarez similarly disenfranchises the African community by framing them as instruments that serve to visibilize not their own population, but the Afro-Argentine community. López (2005:101) explains the tension among the Afro-Argentine community about whether or not to include the African population in the census because while Afro-Argentines want reparations from the enslavement of their ancestors, suggesting the exclusion of Africans from the Afrodescendant constituency, the Afro-Argentines also "need greater visibility, [a] fact that helps and favors them [is] the presence of the immigrants as well as their inclusion in the quantification." Yet this inclusion in quantification yet exclusion in the claims made on the state erases the different challenges confronting a very heterogeneous African migrant community.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Through a frame analysis of how principal actors understood the 2010 Argentine census Afrodescendant question, this thesis has sought to document the need to reframe and broaden our understanding of what it means to be of African descent, and who belongs to the African diaspora in Latin America. It has affirmed, as found in one important deviation (Camino 2010) from these documents, that

the plurality of origins demonstrates that “the African diaspora is absolutely represented in Argentina,” for which Álvarez urges [the] “rescuing [of] the diversity of [the Afro] community because not all the Afros are equal like the imperialist or colonialist vision transmits.”

Within Argentina, an Afro ideal type exists, not wholly unlike the African-American ideal type Ferguson (2011:20) critiques, whereby the African American subject is narrated through a universalized “historical trajectory of enslavement, emancipation, and civil rights struggle, against which the African migrant can only be seen as deviant.” While the narrative frames may have shifted according to the Argentine context to include many of the elements discussed above – slavery, cannon fodder, Yellow Fever Epidemic, tango – they similarly produce an exclusionary ideal type where other Afro constituencies simply do not fit. Recent migrations from Africa and Afro-Latin America to Argentina can “be understood as disturbing the plotline” (Ferguson 2011:115) that has defined Afro-Argentine racial formations. This single “plotline” does a disservice that misrepresents the demographic realities in Argentina and circumscribes opportunities for communities born of more recent Afro migrations to make claims on the state for targeted public policies.

Regardless of the inclusivity of the census question itself, which sought to definitionally include a multiplicity of Afro communities, how the question was understood did not override the dominant understandings of who is of African descent. As we have seen, phenotypic understandings of African descent and nation-driven narratives continued to proliferate in conversations surrounding the census question, by all actors involved. Regardless of the role of transnational actors and organizations

(López 2005; 2006), or the reality that the census does not only count Argentine citizens, the local actors involved – government, Afro organization leaders, and media – understood the census as a national product, as creating a relationship between a nation-state and its citizenry. Because of this national frame, Afro populations not born in Argentina were generally excluded or, if included, instrumentalized.

In June 2012, INDEC published basic information on the Afrodescendant population. According to the 2010 census data, there are approximately 149,500 Afrodescendants in Argentina (0.37% of the total population). Of this amount, the data show, according to place of birth: 92% are Argentine, 6.8% are Afro-Latin Americans (primarily Uruguayan), 0.70% are African, 0.11% are Asian, and 0.40% are European. Thus 8% of the Afro population in Argentina is estimated to be foreign-born, according to the census data.

Yet what these numbers tell us is unclear. The only real conclusion to be drawn is that the vast majority of Argentines do not identify themselves as Afrodescendant. The meaning work of involved agents to produce culturally resonating frames (Benford and Snow 2000) was, unsurprisingly, largely unsuccessful in counteracting the persisting myth of Argentine whiteness and the coupled social stigmas of an othering blackness. In the words of Frigerio (2010):

It is clear that very probably the number that is obtained will be ridiculous, for various motives that don't have to do with the magnitude of the "real" presence of this population. Considering that, many individuals are not conscious of their African descent.

The data contrast sharply with the 2005 pilot survey, which suggested that roughly 5% of those living in Argentina are Afrodescendant. Moreover, the estimation of the African Afrodescendant population seems unrealistic given that, the census registered 2,107 Africans living in Argentina (what would instead be 2% of the Afrodescendants counted in the census) and, according to the census question, regardless of their phenotype, all Africans are Afrodescendant. What Hanchard (1994) finds in the case of the Movimento Negro in Brazil worked, in its own way, in Argentina as well; racial hegemony, articulated in its own nationally-formulated ways, severely hampered Afrodescendant

identification as persons in Argentina largely refused to imagine themselves as in some way of African descent. As such, the political mobilization around Afrodescendant identification failed to dislodge the social stigmas associated with blackness and the national myth that Argentina does not have a problem with racial oppression.

The goals of principal Afro community leaders – one, to legitimize the community as citizens by demonstrating the high quantity of Afrodescendants in Argentina, which pushed for broad inclusivity; and two, to produce focalized public policy to counteract the poverty and discrimination of the Afrodescendants in Argentina, which demanded a more stringent and workable definition of Afrodescendant – contradicted each other. The 2010 Argentine census illuminated the messy work of boundary-making in ethnic and racial identification as Afro leaders, able to mobilize particular frames and resources, wrestled with who is Afrodescendant and the nature of the various Afro constituencies' relationship to the Argentine state. By addressing these topics, this piece has sought to demonstrate that Afro communities do indeed exist in Argentina. As such, scholars of the African diaspora must cease to take the Argentine national myth of whiteness at face value. This research has hoped to serve as an important first step in ameliorating the urgent theoretical and political need to address the experiences of African diasporic communities, not only in spaces traditionally imagined as black, but also in centers of hegemonic whiteness.

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