

# **Drawing the Lines: Racial/Ethnic Landscapes and Sustainable Development in the Costa Chica**

by

Nicole-Marie Cotton, M.U.R.P.  
PhD Candidate, Department of Geography  
San Diego State University  
ncotton@rohan.sdsu.edu

&

Anthony R. Jerry, M.A.  
Associate Director, Center for Latin American Studies; PhD Candidate,  
Department of Anthropology, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign  
ajerry@mail.sdsu.edu

## **Abstract**

The geographic construction of difference has advanced economic interests of racial/ethnic groups in a “multi-cultural” Latin America. However, these racialized landscapes trap identities within geographic spaces and the discourses that accompany them. Eco-tourism and conservation efforts have embedded racial discourses that place Blacks and indigenous groups in particular stewardship roles, often times fixing racial/ethnic identities and re-enforcing colonial relationships. This paper explores how colonial ideas of race, culture, and environment compose the current conservation landscapes of Mexico’s Costa Chica region, and how the process of drawing racial and geographic boundaries might affect Afro-Mexican attempts at recognition and greater national investment.

African descendent invisibility in map-making and environmental discourse have roots in the historical colonial period. Cartography has been an important tool in maintaining colonial power and white privilege by reinforcing racial difference and rendering individuals invisible. Colonial processes and power are often not explicit in the map-making process, and readers simply take for granted the produced knowledge as an accurate representation of what (or who) occupies the space in any geographic location. Closer inspection of the map as an artifact can reveal interesting and crucial points about the dynamics of power that are responsible for the production of this cartographic knowledge, and the ways in which colonial logics continue to influence the process of connecting people and places. This paper will explore how colonial power has been legitimized through map making and what that means for African descendants in the Pacific Coast of Oaxaca in their push for greater social and political recognition, participation in sustainable development initiatives and collective rights.

One might suppose collective rights are awarded in conjunction with the proportion of ethnic minority groups relative to the majority population; yet Hooker (2005) demonstrated that collective rights are dependent on the country's perception of the group as having a distinct cultural identity. A possible explanation of why Blacks seem to be left out of NGO initiatives is that indigenous groups in Latin America have been given international attention and sympathy especially since the 1994 Zapatista movement. The Zapatista uprising in 1994 was a pivotal point in international consciousness and sympathy toward indigenous struggles. Sustainable development has been central to the issue of indigenous land rights, which links local indigenous movements with international environmental movements in Latin America (Halpern and Windance Twine, 2000).

An area where the disparity between Black groups and indigenous groups is of particular interest is in the disproportion of collective rights awarded in multicultural government reforms. Hooker (2005) claims Afro-Latinos are much less likely to gain formal recognition as only seven of the fifteen Latin American countries to implement multicultural reform give collective rights to Afro-Latinos and only three give Afro-Latinos the same rights as indigenous groups. Blacks find it more difficult to gain recognition because the multicultural reforms adopted by Latin American states are based on ethnic identity rather than race (Hooker, 2005) due to the aversion of Latin American states to accept the existence of racism (Anderson, 2003 as in Hooker). Both Anderson (2007) and Hooker (2005) suggest that African Descendant groups commonly fight to be considered an indigenous group in order to win collective rights.

Understanding how collective rights are awarded in Latin America is crucial to comprehending current landscapes of environmental conservation. Race intersects many areas of life in Latin America and, and the "environment" is one of them. Scholars have suggested development and self-empowerment agencies may have an affinity towards working with indigenous groups due to romantic post-colonial stereotypes of being environmental stewards (Sundberg 2004, Mollet 2006, Escarcega 2010).

This notion is in line with the environmental ethic of some environmental NGOs and many neoliberal global sustainable development initiatives that would like to encourage the protection of the world's natural areas while stimulating economic growth (Carruthers, 1996). Sovereignty, cultural protection, and environmental investment in the form of land rights are often accompanied with collective rights in multicultural reforms.

## **African Descendant Mis-representation in Map-making**

Dumoulin (2003) stresses that environmental NGOs played a key role in endorsing the idea of “indigenous knowledge” by associating indigenous populations with the maintenance and preservation of biodiversity hotspots. Scholar-activists were critical in connecting the idea of indigenous cultural preservation to environmental conservation by creating maps overlying indigenous inhabited areas and areas that have high concentrations of biodiversity as well as tables that correlated the number of diverse languages with biodiversity (Dumoulin, 2003). Thus, cartographical “scientific evidence” was provided to ethnicize environmental conservation as an indigenous cultural preservation issue.

Some of the reasons that African descendants are clearly left out of these map-making connections are: 1) in many countries, there are no census data on African descendants in Latin America because many countries do not have a category for African descendants (including Mexico). Therefore no similar maps can be made for their organizing. And 2) decision-makers in Latin American nations or environmental NGOs do not see African descendants as having a unique culture worth preserving. For many Latin-American nation-states the African presence does not fit in with the national identity embodied through Mestizaje (Wade, 2010 & Lewis, 2000) and for Environmental NGOs there is very little academic attention given to exposing connections between African descendant culture in relationship to environmental conservation. Dumoulin (2003) stresses the strength that maps give in international communication, “The cartographic data constitute undoubtedly the most pervasive argument, and the most readily communicable to international organizations and the public at large” (597). For this reason we are presenting a map showing African descendant communities in Oaxaca along with indigenous communities and the forest cover of the landscape to challenge the invisibility of the African presence in Mexico and spark the discussion about misrepresentation of African-Descendants in conservation initiatives.

Additionally, academics have neglected to reproduce maps of the Pacific African diaspora which has resulted in devastating effects for African descendants of the Pacific Coast on national and individual scales, from degradation of recognition of historical contributions to their nations to, internalized misrecognition seen in less self-awareness of inter-connectedness with other African descendants.

Afro-Oaxacan communities, like other African descendants of the Pacific Coast, are victims of what Feldman (2012) calls a “second diaspora”-geographic and conceptual exclusion of the African diaspora usually represented in maps of the Atlantic, “because of its geographical location along the Pacific Coast, the second journey made by enslaved Africans severed them from the shared structures and feelings and waterways of the Black Atlantic” (Feldman, 2012). The lack of cartographic representation of African descendants living on the Pacific Coast coupled with a lack of connection in proximity with other African descendants of the greater Atlantic diaspora has led to invisibility on multiple scales: international, national, local, and individual. This has major economic and social impacts on African descendants on the Pacific Coast, which we will talk about later in our discussion of the included geographic map.

## **The Geography of Racial Difference**

Afro-descendent invisibility in map-making and environmental discourse have roots in the colonial period. Racial Hierarchy is reflected on the environmental landscape. The environment goes through tides in where it becomes “racialized” and whitened. Landscapes are labeled and are visual markers of natural production while race is then tied to economic production. Racial hierarchy has to be groomed and managed just like the environment has to be groomed and managed. This hierarchy has been managed by the same people who run the multi-nationals and the state, the plantations and the missions- white Europeans to maintain white privilege. We therefore have to question the labeling we take for granted as “natural”- whether it is the label of tropical forest or the racial categories of Black, White or Indigenous.

Europeans claimed nature produced racial difference. Geography was paired with taxonomy to demonstrate a link between the naturalness of environmental order and as well as the “naturalness” of the superiority of colonial authority. Just as nature was ordered systematically through taxonomy, the idea of racial categories became assigned to the physical environment within which human beings dwelt. Physical features of non-whites became paired with animal like qualities to demonstrate a “natural” racial order. “ (A) System of nature was simultaneously a system of race... which underscores the global routes of natural history, comparative ethnology, and imperial science that converged to map race and nature at home and worlds away” (Moore, Pandian, & Kosek, 2003 p.12).

Scientists during the enlightenment used climate theories to explain why certain races were more suited for particular labor and classified the environment and groups accordingly. The climate of the New World produced an inferior race of people who were unable to properly utilize its resources and reach civilization because their environment conditioned them to be incapable of the desire (Moore at el 2003, Kosek 2004). This climate was seen as inferior to that of Europe and therefore produced a racially inferior group of peoples while Europeans were the only people qualified to steward natural resources- including people. Colonial vestiges of environmental determinism and essentialist ideas often disqualify African descendants in employment and development opportunities.

For instance Afro-Ecuadorians are associated morally with hot coastal climates of the areas where the majority live. Ecuadorian Blacks are described as “uncivilized peoples living outside modernity where the hot climates gave shape to innate laziness which they bring with them when they migrate” (Raheir, 1998, 422). This attitude is recorded in other areas of the costal diaspora (see Lewis 2000) and has serious implications for development in these communities.

During early European contact in the Americas, maps were made by early explorers and missionaries that were often less about accurately recording features and more about creating corroborating evidence of written accounts in hopes of gaining the European elites to fund their projects. Groups were “othered”, exoticized or rendered completely invisible to provide evidence of the return of investment in funding missions and expeditions. Colwell-Chanthaphonh & Hill (2004) describe how the maps by Padre Francisco Kino’s depicted the San Pedro Valley as empty spaces and abundant of rivers, which influenced political decisions as royalty deduced the topography would facilitate the domination of Apaches and an easy extension of European influence on the territory. Other maps were largely fantastical, for instance, Alta and Baja California, although a peninsula, was depicted as an island with a dangerous native dark-skinned female Amazonian army protecting treasures of gold for hundreds of years. This depiction inspired the Spanish legend of Queen Califa (from which California received its name) and her all-female army. This inaccuracy helped to exoticize the region, fitting nicely with a Spanish fantasy novel, and encouraged exploration and interest in the territory. The exclusion of groups from maps is another tool used to assert racial order and neo-colonial management. Brawn (2002) studied a conservation land-use dispute in the 1990’s in British Columbia, Canada where a map was produced showing government, logging and environmental contestations, however was no inclusion of native Nuu-Cha-nulth and their traditional uses in the area, even though the members constituted the majority population. Reasons for their exclusion are the competition of voices as stakeholders and competing interests in land use, and a threat other interests- including to white conservationist.

Geography has placed people, landforms and political boundaries in neat categories reinforcing ideas of difference. Colonists set these boundaries firmly in place to manage people and the environment. Otherwise, the purity of the white race was in danger of contamination- just like the pristine environment was at risk of contamination. Environmental conservationists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did not stray away from colonial ideas of superiority. Rather, they were strengthened by Social Darwinism and the scientific treatment of racial superiority. The highly celebrated father of the environmental conservation movement, John Muir had disdain for the natives of Yosemite considering them too ugly for the beautiful landscape and the Hispanic shepherders who used the land of the park he considered filthy, lazy and degenerate (Kosek, 2004). Creating conservation areas became a vehicle to maintain the purity of whiteness by insuring pristine natural spaces environment. The invisibility of groups such as African descendants and Asians, despite making considerable contributions in the Americas through forced and exploited labor working closely with flora, fauna, and natural resources can be explained by their perception as foreign bodies of contamination.

## Strategic Essentialism and Identity Making

With scant attention given to the presence of African descendants in general in Latin America (especially on the Pacific Coast) while greater value and representation are given to indigenous groups regarding conservation and political solidarity initiatives, there is prime opportunity for groups to use strategic essentialism in order to validate environmental claims. Strategic Essentialism is a method of using post-colonial ideas about racial and ethnic categories to legitimize claims and aid in organizing and advancing one's cause. Sundberg's research (2004) illuminates how gender and race play a part in interactions between indigenous groups and international environmental organizations and has become "identity-making". In her case study, indigenous women in the Maya Reserve were coached into performing stereotypical indigenous identities to appear more attractive to international aid organizations- reinforcing structures of dependency (Sundberg, 2004). Indeed, Anderson (2007), Helphern & Windance-Twine (2001), and Hooker (2005) note some African Descendant groups seek recognition as indigenous communities in order to become more successful in gaining collective rights.

Post-colonial discourses on race and the environment intersect directly with how both indigenous groups and African Descendant groups interact with one another- setting up groups for conflict once opportunities for investment in communities becomes tied to ethnic identities. Mollet's (2006) research uncovered how Miskito Indians and Black Garifuna groups in Honduras use racial stereotypes and ideas of environmental determinism and land use to discredit land claims of the opposite group in land conflicts when both claim collective land rights. This demonstrates that racialized environmental discourses are being appropriated by both communities in vying for environmental rights. In Escargcega's (2010) analysis of strategic essentialisms of indigeniety in the United Nations, she finds that models of indigenous groups of the Americas are favored in working definitions of indigenusness- conceptually excluding Asian and African groups. What is missing from Escargcega's analysis is the claims of African descendants in Latin America who claim indigeniety away from the African continent.

Since Afro-descendants have been left out of environmental decision-making and rendered invisible by national discourse and cartographers, we have provided a map showing the African descendant communities in Oaxaca along with the location of indigenous villages overlaid with forest cover (see figure 1). Forest cover was included because of the little attention given to Afro-descendants who live in communities that could benefit from environmental investment opportunities with NGOs. Some may critique this map citing a possible reinforcement of Afro-Mexicans being associated with essentialist stereotypes of living in hot, humid areas since African descendants are largely associated with coastal communities. Despite the apparent coastal clustering, some Afro-descendant communities are located far from the coast- in the highlands socially coded as "indigenous". An issue that Afro-Mexicans may face is their position on the coast itself, so it is noteworthy to map. Feldman (2012) argues Afro-Peruvians who also do not appear on their government census, lack investment because poverty programs do not typically consider the coast a critical poverty zone nor are Afro-Peruvians considered a vulnerable group.

Afro-Mexicans face similar geographical situations as Afro-Peruvians, both being mainly coastal, and even though being on the coast means that the “possibilities for access are more feasible than in an indigenous community high in the Andes...they have no dependable infrastructure that allows them to mobilize themselves” (Feldman, 2012, 43). Environmental NGOs who are aware of their existence may face spatial barriers to extend new links from their existing links in highland indigenous networks to coastal networks. Being labeled as a coastal community can be an impediment in and of its self for Afro-descendants due to environmental deterministic stereotypes, perceptions of access to coastal resources, and the physical barrier between them and organizations located in indigenous highlands. This map will hopefully be used to assist these communities in their grassroots mobilization and create coastal- highland networks and garner outside investment.

An example of the ways that groups can get trapped within geographical conceptions of space comes through the real potential, or lack thereof, for self-sustainability offered to the residents of the small communities within the Lagunas de Chacahua National Forest preserve in Oaxaca, Mexico. The preserve is located within the geographic region of the Costa Chica, and is an important resource for the many fishing communities that depend on the coastal resources for their livelihood. Not only do these communities depend on the resources that come directly from the Lagunas and surrounding ocean, but the salt that can be mined from this area is also an important resource. Fishermen and minero de Sal, Don Marcelo, of the community of La Pastoria in the Costa Chica makes it clear that while surrounded by an abundance of resources, the potentials to capitalize on these resources are less abundant, as local communities are limited by the ways in which they can interact with the environment.

Don Marcelo explained that he and some of his collective ecological group came up with the idea of starting a fish farm in the community of La Pastoria. This fish farm was conceived as a way to raise the economic potential of the region by capitalizing on the tourist industry’s needs for fresh, local, seafood. As it is, the communities of the Lagunas de Chacahua find a market for their products in town centers such as Puerto Escondido and Pinotepa Nacional. However, the competition is intense as fishing is the main economic strategy within the coastal towns, and there does not seem to be any serious organized unions of local fisherman. The transactions often times take place by utilizing middle men that bring the product of the coast to surrounding mountainous and indigenous communities as well as the commercial centers further into the interior, including Oaxaca City. This web of relationships not only transports seafood from one location to another, but a number of cultural and social elements get traded on this market as well.

Don Marcelo explained that when they brought the proposal to the Mexican Government of starting a large fish farm with the intention of economically supporting their local communities, they were told that the land was strictly for use as a national park, and that the development of the fish farm would be a violation of national park regulations.

Interestingly, this national park is currently promoted as a popular eco-tourist destination in which visitors can see a number of local birds, cayman, turtles, iguanas, and various other sea species. Even more interesting, the people that live within this national park can unconsciously become a part of the natural landscape, even though they are simultaneously excluded from fully capitalizing on the bounty of the region, which severely limits their ability to maintain any type of local autonomy. So, as the national park becomes a preserve for wildlife and the natural (traditional and authentic) lifestyles that it supports, it also becomes a trap of poverty in which the local residents become subsumed as a local resource within the eco-tourist industry. This trap also adds to the notion of stewardship that becomes connected with African descendants and indigenous through the discourses of environmental protection and sustainability. The eco-tourism industry creates the potential for local communities to capitalize, although on a very limited scale, on the tourists' desires to experience not only untouched and preserved "wildlife", but the many social and economic productions of the colonial moment that have been preserved within the space of the national forest.

One of the issues that come out of this example is the difference between communal lands, occupied by many indigenous communities through the ejido system, and the non-communal lands of the section of the Costa Chica occupied by many African descendants. Further down the Southern coast of Oaxaca lies a town known as La Barra. This small town is popular for its right point surf break. Of less popularity for local tourists is the fish farm maintained by the local community. This fish farm gives local residents the ability to purchase affordable fish from the local fish farm and is maintained by the local community. It is not clear if the community has incorporated their operation into a larger scale economic enterprise, but the ability to create such an operation shows the difference in potential offered to indigenous and African descendants through land use and maintenance.

While Don Marcelo's fish farm would not only support the local community through affordable access to a variety of popular fish species, it would also create the potential for local communities to begin thinking about supporting their own communities with the development of local infrastructure through the profits from the fish farm. When asked about the effect that the fish farm might have on the local fishing industry, Marcelo explained that the market for the fish farm would not be local families and individuals within the community. Rather, the fish farm would focus on the larger tourist industry within the tourist destinations of the Costa Chica and further up and down the coast. Interestingly, Marcelo (as a broader collective) and the national government are both focusing on the same type of markets, those created by the eco tourist industry, but due to the differing perspectives on eco-tourism and sustainability the fish farm project falls beyond the purview of the Mexican Government's intended use of the national forest space. In fact, the intentions of Marcelo's project could quite possibly be seen as contradictory to the foundational logics that allow for the governmental conception of the national forest project in the first place.



These logics are also employed by, and foundational to, the project of officializing difference that is currently taking place within the Costa Chica. These logics, and the processes, remain obscured by the map-making process and are then re-presented as natural elements within the final cartological project. Below we will elaborate on this process of making difference official to shed light on the ways in which space becomes racialized through both official and un-official apparatuses.

### **Awakened State Interest In the Oaxacan Coast:**

The United Nations' declaration of 2011 as the "International Year for People of African Descent" can be seen, in many ways, as the ideological backdrop for the recent political activities, both among local Oaxacan NGO's and the Oaxacan state, regarding social, cultural, and political recognition of Mexico's Black population. Political action regarding this struggle has been ongoing for at least 20 years, as Father Glynn Jemmot began his local organization, Mexico Negro, sometime ago in 1993. However, after the UN declaration, the state governments of both Oaxaca and Guerrero began to strategize at ways to seriously include African descendants within the racial, ethnic and cultural milieu through recognition of existence and rights within the respective state constitutions. This process of official recognition necessarily included the setting of a number of parameters and the invention of official definitions of Blackness. This process of defining and setting parameters brought a number of groups to the table and involved a negotiation between state government, local non-governmental organizations, and a number of politically active and not so active community members.

The methodology for the state organized part of this project was borrowed from pre-existing methodologies developed for the inclusion of indigenous communities within the state constitution. This borrowing of methodologies highlights the approach to cultural diversity/multiculturalism that the Mexican government has been employing over the last several years. Built into this methodology are a number of issues that created tensions between local activists and state organizations, as well as forced local community members to seriously think about their own identities and the ways in which they understand their own cultural and social development. The Comision Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indigenas (henceforth referred to as the CDI) was the federal arm that took on the development and implementation of the methodologies that would be used to locate, in a number of physical and metaphorical senses, the Black communities of the Costa Chica. In Oaxaca, the CDI was partnered with the Secretario de Asuntos Indigenas (henceforth referred to as the SAI) to help implement the methodologies that would be used for creating the official state and federally recognized ethnic group of African descendants.

With the help of the SAI, the CDI organized a number of Consultations (consultas) that we geared at literally defining and setting a number of parameters to actually locate and situate the Black communities of the Costa Chica. The first step engaged in by the CDI was the general objective to “Reconocer Mediante un proceso de consulta a las comunidades de los pueblos afrodescendientes de Mexico y sus principales características (Recognize through a process of consultation with the communities of African Descendent peoples of Mexico and their principle characteristics – translation mine) (CDI Brochure 2011)”. The first step in this process was to present the methodology of the consultas to a number of politically active representatives of the Black communities. This presentation was exactly that, a sort of “unveiling” of the plan to approach the Black communities. At the first meeting in Jamiltepec, Oaxaca, the plan was unveiled to the audience of about forty individuals representing a number of Black towns as well as employees of the CDI and SAI. The plan was drafted in Mexico city by CDI representatives in the capital city. As mentioned before, the methodology for this plan was taken directly from previous approaches to the recognition of indigenous communities, which overlooked the racial components that have historically been partly responsible for the development and defining of Blacks in Mexico.

One such element was the approach to naming, which was a major point of contention between the CDI representative leading this first consultation and the audience members. This tension was a direct outcome of the fact that the methodology for the location and situation, or general recognition, of the Pueblos Afrodescendientes was developed without consultation and collaboration with the activists and community members from these towns. In this way a methodology, as well as a general racial and ethnic conception, was simply imposed upon the Black communities through the already popular lens of multiculturalism popular with the federal Mexican government. The local community members and activists were under the impression that this first meeting would be a “brain storming activity”, while the CDI was under the impression that the “professionals” would present the plan which would then get ratified by the community. After several hours it was recognized that some of the material within the proposed consultas was not relevant or mis-conceived, but the general air was that the material was not going to change, as the “professionals” ultimately knew better. This is one example of the way that federal recognition can be a double edged sword, and can often times be conceived of in a way that suits federal agendas over the actual grassroots agendas of local communities. It should be made clear here that there may not be, or have been, some type of heinous plot against the recognition of Black communities on their own terms by the CDI. Rather, it is more likely that the presentation of the CDI agenda to the Black communities was simply based on a number of pre-existing logics of government, multiculturalism, race, ethnicity, etc. However, it must also be recognized that these logics are also based on colonial legacies that were themselves conceived of, somewhat heinously, with well thought out and intentional effects on Black and Indigenous communities. In these subtle ways, the racial logics and legacies of colonialism can continue to haunt current political mobilizations of difference.

The brochure circulated to the activist organizations of the Costa Chica in Oaxaca by the CDI to promote the “Consulta para la identificación de las comunidades afrodescendientes de Mexico” asks three important questions: ¿Quiénes somos (Who are we)?, ¿Dónde estamos (Where are we located)?, ¿Cómo nos identificamos (How do we identify)? And, the intention of the consulta is very clear, “Por el reconocimiento de nuestras comunidades y nuestros derechos”. Interestingly the inclusive pronoun of “we” is used within the language. This inclusive pronoun includes all community members, and ultimately a racial and ethnic symbolic community of African descendants (Nuestro Pueblo), within the CDI project and simultaneously puts the community on board with the CDI sponsored project and the approach to this project. Also, the project simultaneously recognizes a group of people without taking into account the processes that were responsible for “social forgetting” of this group. It is interesting that at this moment of invention, history is allowed to take a back seat while a people can be brought into the present and legally (officially) be recognized without the social recognition of the processes that have made this group invisible for so many years. So, then, once the three questions of “who are we, where are we, and how do we identify are answered”, the business of applying rights to this new multicultural group can be begin in earnest.

The brochure continues with a list of rhetorical sub-questions that were developed to help elaborate on the three main questions stated above and which would ultimately find their way in some form into the list of subjects addressed by the consultations themselves. Added to the list are: ¿A qué tipo de actividades productivas nos dedicamos? ¿Cuál es el origen e historia de nuestra comunidad? ¿Cómo nos organizamos al interior de nuestra comunidad? ¿Hasta dónde llega nuestra comunidad? ¿Cómo nos gusta que nos llamen o identifiquen? ¿Cuáles son nuestras autoridades propias?

The single question on the brochure that deals with any type of historical perspective is the one that asks about the “origin and history of our community”. Interestingly this is not speaking of the origin and history of the people within the community but the actual geographic community itself. This may take on a different context when applied to some of the indigenous communities who were “allowed” (somewhat tenuously throughout different political periods) to occupy and maintain traditional spaces, apart from the lands that were taken and developed as colonial centers. But, for Black communities the question of origin and history is inter-related with the origin and history of the Spanish and later Mestizo communities in the region. The question of a unique and separate community history and origin is something that can be perceived for indigenous communities, being that the indigenous groups are autochthonous to the region, but for Blacks the question of history and origin necessarily calls for the historicizing of the African descendent within broader colonial and later Mexican history. Without argument, the indigenous history and origin in Mexico is intimately tied to the colonial moment, but the conception of the history of indigenous and Black towns has to be intertwined with the racial and ethnic realities of the colonial and later national moments if we are to get a realistic picture of the history and origin of these communities.

Asking the question of history and origin of Black communities brings up a number of important questions that the CDI did not intend to address, and is not equipped to answer, especially with the parameters set forth by the Consultations. While indigenous and Black communities have different colonial histories within Mexico, both groups are, without a doubt, products of the colonial moment, and are therefore both colonized peoples. However, because of colonial understandings of biological and cultural difference and the historical difference in official connections and functions with relation to the Spanish crown during the colonial moment (Blacks being simultaneously part and product of the colonial moment), current approaches to space and place have to make linkages to racial and ethnic experiences of geography and the interconnections that the process of “officializing difference” overlooks.

In fact, the lands that were developed later by escaped enslaved individuals undoubtedly had once been claimed by some or another indigenous group. Take for example the small pueblo of Charco Redondo on the outskirts of the Lagunas de Chacahua National Forest. Charco Redondo is one of several towns incorporated into the larger state of Oaxaca through the county seat (Municipio) of San Pedro Tututepec, also known as Tutu. Tutu, is an important symbol within the local region as it is home to a local Indigenous community museum, Museo Yuku Saa, and continues to be a strategic source for the grounding of indigenous identities within the coastal region. Advocate/activist, Lucila Mariche Magadan, explained that during any heavy rain one could wander through the small town and find a number of indigenous artifacts as random as shards of pottery and as specific as fully preserved figurines. This was also corroborated by a number of residents in Charco. While the cultural origin of these “artifacts” (most probably Mixteco, Nuu Savi in the language as Mixteco is a Nuahtl word) has not been verified, their existence below the surface serves as a metaphor for the multiple connections between Blacks, Indigenous, and Spanish (and now mestizos) in the region. While the Spanish approach to colonization of indigenous lands utilized a strategy of partial domination and incorporation throughout the transfixing of Colonial capitals on pre-existing Indigenous political and ceremonial sites, the strategies of escaped enslaved individuals absolutely necessitated a similar strategy that involved “homesteading” on pre-existing indigenous communities, although the intention was undoubtedly less heinous, but perhaps also violent. In this way the heavy down pours of the rainy season in Charco can be seen to un-earth the foundations and colonial connections that the process enacted by the Federal Government, through the CDI, continues to overlook. Furthermore, these down pours ask us to re-think the ways that colonial logics of difference continue to inform our practices and conceptions of multicultural projects of equality and the ways that the projects inspired by ideas of multicultural equality continue to set the stage for conflicts based on difference.

## **Making Difference Official**

At least five governmental organizations/institutions, and at least thirteen local (Oaxacan) non-governmental organizations are sharing the political, social, and cultural, scene. After discussing the organizations, and their individual goals and intentions, with Eladio Reyes, current head of ECOSTA Yut Cuii and former mayor of San Pedro Tututepec, a sense of the tensions and the actual work that is involved in the project of making difference official becomes clear. This process has been a negotiation (perhaps not one of equality between the government and non-governmental organizations as mentioned above) between the government and the many local organizations created by local Black advocates and activists. ECOSTA is mainly an ecological organization founded by Eladio Reyes, who also holds a degree in agricultural engineering, which began to officially direct some of its energies and resources at African descendent issues and “Los Pueblos Negros” in 1997. During 2011, Eladio and the rest of ECOSTA were planning a gathering in order to bring communities throughout the Costa Chica together to discuss some of the issues that were important to Black communities, as well as some of the issues that were being focused upon by the CDI consultas. Eladio played an instrumental role as liaison and intermediary between the CDI and the Costa Chican communities, and was a huge factor in providing a platform on which local communities could then deliver their perspective and concerns to the ears and voice recorders of the CDI. It was said that Eladio’s experience and previous position as mayor made him a very respected member of the community and allowed him the unique ability to mediate conflicts and tensions between local NGO’s. While Eladio was born in the Costa Chica, in Santa Rosa de Lima, his racial and cultural Mestizo background may have aided him in the ability to act as mediator between both groups.

While Eladio Reyes and ECOSTA yutu Cuii began focusing on the ecological issues of “Los Pueblos Negros” in 1997, it was not until later that they began to help with the organization and promotion of a Blackness as a political and cultural identity within the Costa Chica. When asked why, seeing as there were already a number of local Black organizations, Eladio would find it necessary to add to this mix and direct some of ECOSTA’s already limited resources to the Black communities, Eladio explained that a number of organizations were less effective than they could be due to political tensions between the organizations and the effect that these tensions had on productive collaboration. In one sense, this affected the priorities of some organizations. And, in some cases the goal of rights, representation, and recognition were overshadowed by personal or professional aspirations and personal politics. This highlights how an investment in political difference can overshadow the overall goal of equality and change. The overall goal of any institution or organization that is created to fight racism should be that glorious day in which the institution is no longer necessary. In this way an organization is ultimately working towards its own destruction. In fact, the success of the organization should necessitate its own demise. But, when groups become official organelles of the struggle against racism, for example, or when specific problems lead to fully funded and permanent institutions within national governments people can often times make investments in the institutions which do not allow for the future dissolution of the institution itself.

In this way the perpetuation of the institution depends upon the perpetuation of the actual source, in this case racism, which was originally the cause of the inception of the institution in the first place. In this way an investment in difference as a vehicle for change can be a trap of our own design, and can bring about contestations, not over methodologies and practices, but about visibility and personal successes.

## **Conclusion**

The idea of difference, in fact the manifestation of this idea, is common place in our modern society. This idea of difference, and the naturalness that we often impart into the concept, has even become a foundational part of the way we organize in a number of contexts, i.e., culturally, geographically, socially, and politically. Our understanding of difference has real effects in the way in which individuals and communities are perceived. To deny the real effects of difference in favor of some utopic understanding of “one world, one race”, or an over embracing of the anthropological evidence that race has no real biological support is a mistake that allows us to overlook the real systemic effects brought about through the legacy of colonization and the ways that this legacy continues to effect the day to day life chances of the modern people’s that continue to inherit this legacy.

Maps have been considered a scientific tool in the reinforcement of difference through environmental determinism, though exoticization and through invisibility. It is our hope that this paper contributes much needed documentation surrounding the African presence in Mexico through the visual representation of the map, taking into consideration the historical movement in the Costa Chica today. This map should be critiqued in the way it too is reinforcing the labeling of racial difference between African descendants and Indigenous groups, taking into account that we have problematized the concept of racial difference, it’s supposed naturalness, and the CDI labeling of “Black communities” itself. There are few academics mapping the presence of African descendants in Latin America and this has real detrimental effects on these communities resulting in lack of awareness and missed opportunities for connection and cooperation with other communities and outside sustainable development investment. While mapping may be a useful and necessary process, the process itself must be understood as a culmination of the logics that frame our social world community and the question of what geographies and terrains remain obscured by the map should always be at the forefront of our discussions of people and places.

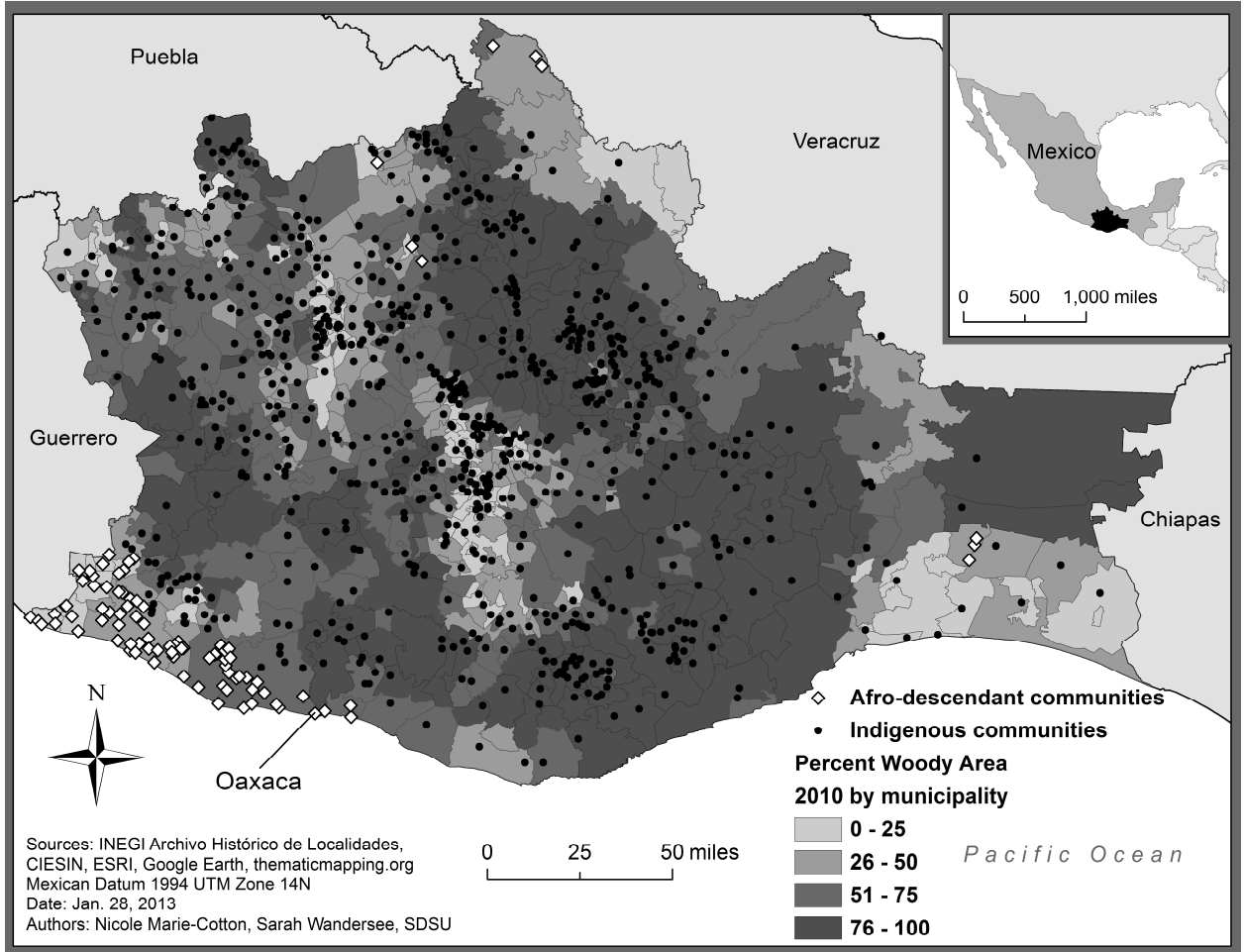


Figure 1. Map of the State of Oaxaca and Afro-Indigenous Communities

## Bibliography

- Anderson, M. (2003). 'Why Black Politics (Sometimes) Looks Like Indigenous Politics in Latin America: Insights from Garifuna Movements in Honduras,' Paper presented at the Rockefeller Seminar on Race Rights and Resources in the Americas at the University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX, 21 March 2003.
- Anderson, M. (2007). When Afro Becomes (like) Indigenous: Garifuna and Afro-Indigenous Politics in Honduras. *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, 12(2), 384–413.
- Braun, B. (2002). *The Intemperate Rainforest: Nature, Culture, and Power on Canada's West Coast*. U of Minnesota Press.
- Carruthers, D. V. (1996). Indigenous Ecology and the Politics of Linkage in Mexican Social Movements. *Third World Quarterly*, 17(5), 1007–1028.
- Colwell-Chanthaphonh, C., & Brett Hill, J. (2004). Mapping History: Cartography and the Construction of the San Pedro Valley. *History and Anthropology*, 15(2), 175–200.
- Dumoulin, D. (2003). Local knowledge in the hands of transnational NGO networks: a Mexican viewpoint\*. *International Social Science Journal*, 55(178), 593–606.
- Escárcega, S. (2010). Authenticating Strategic Essentialisms: The Politics of Indigenousness at the United Nations. *Cultural Dynamics*, 22(1), 3–28.
- Feldman, H. (2012). Strategies of the Black Pacific: Music and Diasporic Identity in Peru. In *Comparative Perspectives on Afro-Latin America* (p. 365). Gainesville: University Press of Florida.
- Halpern, A., & Twine, F. W. (2000). Antiracist activism in Ecuador: Black-Indian community alliances. *Race & class.*, 42, 19–32.
- Hooker, J. (2005). Indigenous inclusion/black exclusion: Race, ethnicity and multicultural citizenship in Latin America. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 37(02), 285–310.
- Kosek, J. (2004). Purity and Pollution. In *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements* (2nd ed., p. 444). London: Routledge.



- Lewis, L. A. (2000). Blacks, black Indians, Afromexicans: the dynamics of race, nation, and identity in a Mexican moreno community (Guerrero). *American ethnologist*, 27(4), 898-626.
- Mollett, S. (2006). Race and natural resource conflicts in Honduras: The Miskito and Garifuna struggle for Lasa Pulan. *Latin American research review*, 41(1), 76-101.
- Moore, D. S., Pandian, A., & Kosek, J. (2003). *Race, Nature, and the Politics of Difference*. Duke University Press Books.
- Rahier, J. M. (1998). Blackness, the Racial/Spatial Order, Migrations, and Miss Ecuador 1995-96. *American Anthropologist*, 100(2), 421-430.
- Sundberg, J. (2004). Identities in the making: conservation, gender and race in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, Guatemala. *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, 11(1), 43-66.