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Articulating Race on Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast

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by

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Abstract

Articulating Race on Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast

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Mestizos have lived on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast since at least 1894 and been the majority group since at least 1981. However, Nicaragua's Caribbean coast is frequently imagined as a predominantly black and indigenous space. As renewed interest in mega-development projects, such as the trans-oceanic canal, bring attention to Nicaragua's Caribbean coast, questions about the autonomy of Afro-descendant and indigenous communities are raised once again. Moreover, as mestizos continue to migrate from the Pacific and central regions of the country towards the Caribbean coast territories, violence has escalated as they attempt to claim lands that have been constitutionally recognized as collectively owned by Afro-descendant and indigenous communities of the Caribbean coast territories. Recently, mestizos on the Caribbean coast have begun to express a racial identity, as "mestizos costeños." This thesis explores the emergence of this racial articulation by drawing on Stuart Hall's theory of articulation to analyze the discourses produced about mestizo costeño history and identity in Bluefields, Nicaragua. Using in-depth interviews and participant observation, this thesis examines the discursive elements that mestizos costeños link together to produce these discourses. The thesis argues that to understand how mestizos costeños fit into regional and national

politics, we must explore the political work that the discursive linkages do in the articulations they produce. To that end, this thesis examines these articulations and situates them in the context of local, regional, and national politics to gain a broader understanding of the implications of the discourse of mestizo costeño identity for racial politics in Bluefields and the Caribbean coast. The thesis concludes by examining what the case of mestizos costeños in Bluefields has to offer towards understanding the contributions of identity politics to liberalism by considering the ideas of Charles Mills and Creole community leaders from Bluefields.

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Chapter 1: Mestizos Costeños and Historical Geographies of Race in Nicaragua

Mestizo Disruptions in Bluefields, Nicaragua

In January 2010, mestizo campesinos marched through the streets of Bluefields, Nicaragua, a port city located on the country's southern Caribbean coast. These protestors claimed that land belonging to over 600 mestizo campesinos was part of the territory that had recently been titled to Bluefields and the Rama and Kriole territories under Law 445, which granted indigenous and Afro-Caribbean ethnic groups on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast the right to title their lands. According to Courtney Morris' ethnographic observations, these mestizo campesinos came from a community near Kukra River, located just south of Bluefields. (Morris 2016) When asked about the protest and their interpretation of the racialized politics of land tenure, one mestizo marcher responded that "We are being discriminated as Mestizos. They discriminate against us as Mestizos." (Morris 2016)

Morris subsequently found out that this protest march was "organized" by a mestizo representative of the regional council that paid protestors to march and provided the transportation from the Kukra River area to Bluefields. (Morris 2012, 238) Fabricated origins of the protest notwithstanding, Morris notes that the complaints and aggrieved tenor of the march felt real. Six years later, during my own opportunity to hear mestizos in Bluefields, I came across similar narratives of discrimination, and specifically discrimination against mestizos costeños. But who are mestizos costeños? And if the

protest was to some extent manufactured by a politician and not from community of mobilization, what were the complaints and grievances really about?

I begin my thesis by noting some of the ways in which mestizos have disrupted daily life in Bluefields. In an immediate sense, the opening anecdote illustrates a spatial disruption: by filling a street that was otherwise relatively quiet, mestizos disrupted the organization of space in daily life in this section of town. During my own conversations with *costeños* of various racial backgrounds, I also learned about how mestizos were squatting on lands and taking control of farms and other collectively held plots of land. In this sense, then, the marches also reflected a broader pattern in which mestizos have disrupted the existing land tenure system by taking often violent and extralegal control of the land.

Much of the literature on Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast has focused on the experience of Afro-descendant and indigenous *costeños*. This focus has allowed scholars to examine how indigenous and Afro-descendant racial identities have been formed there (and to what ends), how indigenous communities have negotiated foreign intervention, how multicultural models of ethnic rights have failed to secure the rights it sets out to protect, and how Afro-Nicaraguans navigate multiple forms of state violence. (See Goett 2017; Gordon 1998; Hale 1994; Hooker 2005b; Hooker 2009; Hooker 2010; Morris 2016.) While these works have acknowledged mestizo presence on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast, very little scholarly attention has focused on their role or impact on the coast, which is striking given that mestizos have comprised the majority group on the coast since 1981. A relatively larger body of work exists that examines the experiences of

Nicaraguan mestizos outside of the Caribbean coast territories. However, as Morris insightfully points out, this larger body of work is characterized by a pattern of treating the Caribbean coast region as “peripheral to the nation’s political history when, in fact, it has served as a key site of state driven projects for national development.” (Morris 2013, 150. For important and useful exceptions see Gould 1998; Hooker 2005a.) Further, this body of work generally treats mestizos as racially unmarked bodies, foreclosing an interrogation of how race structures their social and political projects. To this point, Morris crucially reminds us that “one need not focus on the Coast to study the role of race in national political formations.” Likewise, one need not focus on racially oppressed populations to study how race and power are bound up in political projects. This lack of scholarly attention to how mestizos (re)produce, protect and mobilize racial power in a country that so distinctly presents itself as a mestizo nation calls into question the extent to which we can claim to have a full understanding of national and political projects in Nicaragua.

This thesis responds to this silence by examining how mestizos construct narratives of racial identity in Caribbean coast city of Bluefields, Nicaragua. By building on the work of previous Nicaraguanists that have mapped out the racial dynamics of the Caribbean coast, I show how mestizos in Bluefields have produced a third kind of disruption. If the largest racial groups on Nicaragua’s Caribbean coast were Afro-Caribbean and indigenous until 1981, then the shift to a mestizo majority signals a demographic disruption, which presumably brings with it a set of related political consequences. This shifting demographic dynamic is what generates the questions I

explore in this thesis: Who are mestizos costeños? How do they engage with other groups? What do they make of regional autonomy and the attendant racial politics of the region? To understand the context in which these questions have emerged, the rest of this chapter sketches out a historical geography of race in Nicaragua to examine how race, space and power have been mutually imbricated throughout Nicaraguan history. This analytical method allows me to emphasize the ways in which mestizo racial power has been related to politics of land and territory while strategically engaging a politics of silence in the production of historical narratives of Nicaragua.

Historical Geographies of Race in Nicaragua

As Courtney Morris points out, much of the scholarship on Nicaragua has focused on mestizos while not examining their relationship to racial projects. Since this thesis sets out to ask how mestizos costeños in Bluefields construct this racial articulation, it is important to understand the context in which these articulations take place. In “Race and the Space of Citizenship,” Juliet Hooker demonstrates how race and space were co-constitutive processes that delineated the boundaries of citizenship. (Hooker 2010) In sketching a brief historical geography of race in Nicaragua, I extend this analysis by paying attention to three examples in which mestizo racial power was spatialized while simultaneously producing the conditions that led to mestizo migration from Nicaragua’s Pacific and central regions to the autonomous Caribbean coast territories.

The first moment I present is the military annexation of the Caribbean coast region into the Nicaraguan national territory in 1894. Through forced military incorporation, the early mestizo nation-state established its commitment to using violence as a means of enforcing racial hierarchies in the service of nation-building projects. The

second instance I discuss is the coffee and cotton boom of the mid-20th century. During the mid-twentieth century, Nicaragua engaged the world economic market through an increasingly monopolistic strategy of agricultural exports, largely (though not exclusively) cotton and coffee. The process by which this economic enterprise took shape resulted in the displacement of mestizo campesinos from the Pacific and central regions, after which they were encouraged to consider the agricultural frontier as a possibility for economic renewal. This second example illustrates an instance of what Rob Nixon theorizes as “slow violence.” (Nixon 2011) Though the economic practices of this period did not resemble the immediate and spectacular violence of the annexation, they are crucial towards understanding how the Caribbean coast and its Afro-descendant and indigenous communities are imagined as disposable and exploitable resources of the Nicaraguan nation-state while mestizo bodies remain central concerns of the state. Through this example, I show how mestizo political elites begin to develop the political and economic conditions from which mestizo migration and displacement emerged. The third and final example I present explores the development of what Hooker terms “mestizo multiculturalism” in the 1990s. Following the Sandinista Revolution and subsequent Contra War, the Nicaraguan government negotiated with the Caribbean coast territories to produce a system of regional autonomy. Here, I discuss how this model of multiculturalism was presented as a model of ethnic rights while not fundamentally reorganizing the racialized distribution of power in Nicaragua and, instead, preserving the existing racial hierarchy.

During the establishment of the Nicaraguan nation-state, the Caribbean coast territories were a spatial representation of the racial anxieties that political elites felt in Nicaragua’s first years. Unlike the rest of the Nicaraguan national territory, the Caribbean coast region (then known as the Mosquito Kingdom) had never been under Spanish

colonial rule. Instead, the Mosquito Kingdom functioned as a British protectorate, following a colonial trajectory distinct from the Pacific and central regions of the country that had previously been controlled by Spain. While the Pacific and central regions of Nicaragua had more (but not exclusively) mestizo populations, the Caribbean coast was still largely populated by racially-mixed Afro-descendant and Amerindian groups under different colonial powers.

In “Race and the Space of Citizenship,” Hooker demonstrates how the racial and colonial positions of *costeños* were central preoccupations of political elites in the late 19th century. (Hooker 2010) Mestizo political elites in the emerging nation discovered that affiliating with the Afro-descendant and indigenous populations of the Mosquito Kingdom challenged the extent to which European governments were willing to grant Nicaragua some semblance of privilege vis-a-vis whiteness. In one particularly illuminating example, Hooker reminds us that when Nicaragua sought support from France in efforts to challenge the British over the Mosquito Kingdom, France’s response was that “European nations cannot, without demeaning themselves negotiate with those little Mosquitian governments.” (253) Thus, not only did the French contribute to a racialization of Afro-descendant and indigenous populations as “savage” and inferior, but their reaction made it evident that other nations were responding to the way in which Nicaragua decided to articulate itself, in this case by responding to how the nascent Nicaraguan nation engaged with the non-white populations of the Caribbean coast. By appealing to the prevailing ideologies and logics of anti-black and anti-indigenous racism to gain favor in the international sphere, mestizo Nicaraguan political elites aligned themselves with a racial hierarchy that persists to this day. Additionally, this early oppositional dynamic between mestizo political elites in the Pacific and Afro-descendant

and indigenous communities on the Caribbean coast, was one that has also survived in various ways.

The nature of the opposition is comprised of a potential for Afro-descendant and indigenous political autonomy that would preclude mestizo elites' historic commitment to military intervention and economic extractivist policies in service of official mestizo nationalism. However, the early discourse of a "civilized," mestizo nation-state and a "savage" Afro-descendant and indigenous Caribbean coast region has also survived, remarkably intact in spite of few modifications. Through the military annexation, mestizo political elites in Nicaragua sought to delegitimize Afro-descendant and indigenous political autonomy in the Caribbean coast territories. One of the ways in which Nicaraguan political elites justified excluding *costeños* from citizenship is by drawing from this racist ideology that Afro-descendants and indigenous people were inferior. Indeed, Nicaraguan political elites imagined the Mosquito Kingdom as "savage" and taken over by "Jamaican Negroes," despite the fact that Creole and Miskitu communities had been established long before the development of a Nicaraguan nation. (Hooker 2010; Gordon 1998)

The annexation of the Caribbean coast is an essential starting point in understanding how race and space have been mutually constitutive elements in Nicaraguan history. What I wish to emphasize here is that while much of the discourse sets out to establish an imagined inherent inferiority of black and indigenous populations on the coast, it simultaneously seeks to establish the legitimacy of mestizo political dominance in the emerging Nicaraguan nation-state. As a strategy of nation-building, this discourse inscribed citizenship within the mestizo *criollo* populace while excluding black and indigenous communities from the Nicaraguan national imaginary. This discourse also contributes towards two additional political tasks: 1) it foreclosed the possibility of racial

solidarity and 2) established the racialized politics of land control as a central preoccupation in Nicaraguan nation-building projects. By choosing to go forward with the military annexation of the Caribbean coast, political elites chose to appeal to anti-black and anti-indigenous ideas of racialized inferiority and an inability for self-governance. In doing so, mestizo elites rejected any early potential of challenging the racialized logics of violence that European colonial projects developed throughout Latin America and, more specifically, in the emergent Nicaraguan society. Further, in refusing to acknowledge the political agency of black and indigenous communities in the Mosquito Kingdom, mestizo elites took power and control over the territory of the Mosquito Kingdom in line with what geographer Sharlene Mollett reminds us is a colonial legacy of land-grabbing. (Mollett 2016) This annexation is one of the first times, if not the first, that mestizos in Nicaragua produce racialized power through a violent politics of land control. The political elites of the time point to specifically racialized narratives to justify the annexation and the political exclusion of black and indigenous *costeños*. In this way, then, mestizo disruption of black and indigenous governance and land tenure on the coast dates as far back to at least 1894. As an initial moment for this historical geography of race, we see how mestizo political elites used race as a discursive tool to justify the violent, forced annexation of the coast territories and the subsequent political exclusion of *costeños* from the Nicaraguan nation. Indeed, as Hooker observes, this moment is especially instructive in that it reveals the extent to which preoccupations about race have shaped the mestizos' politics in Nicaragua. (Hooker 2010)

In the decades that followed, political elites would go on to develop various forms of official mestizo nationalisms that consistently reinscribed mestizos as the citizens of the Nicaraguan nation-state while employing various strategies to erase or otherwise marginalize black and indigenous communities in Nicaragua. (Hooker 2005a)

However, in the mid-twentieth century mestizo campesinos' livelihoods would be disrupted as capitalism in Nicaragua was remodeled to align itself with worldwide shifts in economic and social structures after World War II. The way in which capitalism was re-articulated in Nicaragua during the 1950s and 1960s is important in understanding how mestizo racial power was shaped because of the differential impacts it had on different groups of mestizo Nicaraguans. As such, in this next example I choose to analyze and discuss this moment to bring into sharp relief how economic disenfranchisement took form for many mestizos throughout the country, creating the conditions for them to move eastward into black and indigenous communities in the so-called agricultural frontier and the Caribbean coast territories. I suggest that Rob Nixon's notion of "slow violence" is a useful way of understanding how this reformulation of capitalistic practices in Nicaragua is also centrally about reformulating how mestizo political elites operationalized race during this period.

In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon offers a new way to conceptualize violence. Nixon argues that immediate, spectacular, visible forms of violence predominate our understandings of violence while other slower, less visible, yet insidious and pervasive forms of violence remain unnoticed and understudied. (Nixon 2011) Nixon explores how writers have made slow violence visible across various genres and to multiple audiences. Although Nixon's discussion is rooted in the example of the biological consequences of environmental toxic agents, the concept of slow violence helps us see the linkages between agricultural reforms and racialized state practices of surveillance and policing of black communities throughout Nicaragua's Caribbean coast. Indeed, in *Black Autonomy*, Jennifer Goett shows how the elision of slow violence generates a paradox in which scholars and journalists consistently point to Nicaragua as regionally exceptional.

When it comes to violence, Nicaragua is often held up to be an exception in Central America in contrast to the higher homicide rates of the so-called Northern Triangle comprised of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. When it comes to poverty, Nicaragua is often ranked second only to Haiti in the Western Hemisphere. However, Goett shows how these claims gloss over very important variations *within* Nicaragua that homogenize perceptions of violence and poverty, obscuring the ways in which they are organized along racial and regional lines. Goett's book centers on one site in which these variations are painfully visible by documenting and theorizing the activism of black Creole communities in the Monkey Point community in Nicaragua's Southern Caribbean coast. To understand the development of policing and state violence in Monkey Point, Goett shows how it is essential to also examine the rhetoric of drug enforcement and national security policies produced by the mestizo Nicaraguan nation-state. Goett's work clearly traces how the state's rhetoric and strategies of public safety, economic prosperity and international cooperation in the infamous war on drugs always come at the expense of black and indigenous *costeños* or are otherwise not inclusive of how these goals would translate in their context. In the following example, my goal is to show how the existing literature on mestizo campesinos in Nicaragua provide the empirical observations of the deepening economic and political cleavages between mestizo campesinos and mestizo elites. I suggest that these economic and agricultural policies were forms of slow violence that complicate our understanding of racially organized patterns of poverty and violence in Nicaragua.

Various scholars have studied the ways in which processes of globalization played out in Nicaragua and more broadly throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. My discussion of this historical moment in Nicaragua builds on these works by focusing on how race and space were re-articulated during this time. In *Transnational Conflicts*,

sociologist William Robinson provides an in-depth analysis of how trends in globalization changed how capital, labor, and politics were organized in Central America during the second half of the 20th century. He proposes thinking about capitalist expansion in Central America as occurring in four waves: 1) mercantile capitalism from the 1520s-mid-1800s, 2) classical/competitive capitalism from the 1870s-1930s, 3) corporate/monopoly capitalism from the 1940s-1970s, and 4) global capitalism from the 1980s-present. (Robinson 2003, 155) Robinson's argument is primarily concerned with the third wave of capitalist expansion in Central America, which he names as corporate/monopoly capitalism and occurring from the 1940s to the 1970s. Robinson characterizes this wave as primarily characterized with the production of beef, sugar, and cotton as exports and dominated by a coffee oligarchy, capitalist planters, and a "financial, industrial and commercial" elite. Throughout this time period, one key feature of mestizo campesinos' livelihoods was their dependence on land-owning elites as employers and seasonal sources of income.

In *To Lead As Equals*, historian Jeffrey Gould traces the development of political consciousness among rural campesinos between 1929 and 1979 in Chinandega, a department in Nicaragua's northwest Pacific region. In this account, Gould traces the development of political consciousness of rural campesinos as they engage with and make sense of how political and land-owning elites consistently limited the economic opportunities available to them as campesinos. While Gould's focus is on highlighting the development of a collective group identity and community-oriented politics, this study is useful to the present discussion in at least two ways. First, it shows how race remains largely unacknowledged for mestizos. Second, it carefully delineates the economic and political forces that led to the displacement of campesinos not only in the

Northwest Pacific department of Chinandega but throughout the rest of the rural Pacific and central regions of Nicaragua.

Gould's discussion focuses on self-identified campesinos. Early on, Gould admits his hesitation to use "rural proletarian" or "peasants" as analytical categories through which to understand the people he wrote about in Chinandega because although the terms were more popular in the historical and anthropological literature, they failed to adequately capture the dynamic he observed. Instead, he notes that the people he wrote about used the term "campesino" far more commonly. It's notable that throughout the book, the most substantial discussion of race comes when describing the sexual violence that elite and working-class men inflicted on indigenous women, producing a generation of mestizo children that were not recognized by campesino communities in Chinandega but were welcomed by Indians in Sutiavas. Otherwise, the campesinos that Gould writes about present themselves as racially unmarked, instead focusing on their financial disenfranchisement. Likewise, Gould follows suit and instead directs his analysis towards a discussion of how political consciousness was developed along class lines, producing a cleavage between the mestizo Nicaragua elites and rural campesinos in Chinandega.

This silence on racial identity reproduces the "unmarked" racial position of mestizos which naturalizes their centrality in Nicaraguan politics and misses the opportunity to complicate the way that race is multivalent and, among other ways, shaped by class position. However, Gould's account of campesinos in Chinandega does trace how mestizo campesinos were displaced through an economic system of agricultural exportation that increasingly left campesinos without land, credit or state services upon which to lean for support. (Gould 1990; Robinson 2003) While the mechanisms through which individual mestizo campesinos and their families arrived at displacement may vary, the structural picture that Robinson paints helps illustrate the broader context in

which Gould's ethnographic narratives occur. In examining how monopoly capitalism between the 1940s and 1970s played out in Nicaragua, these analyses reveal that the Nicaraguan state consistently identified itself as a mestizo nation while simultaneously disavowing its growing population of increasingly landless and cash-poor mestizo campesinos. Thus, these middle decades of the 20th century are a period in which the order of race and space in Nicaragua is complicated for mestizos because mestizo campesinos can no longer live or work the way they had for decades. Instead, they were forced to sell whatever land they had and search elsewhere for a way to establish their livelihoods, oftentimes turning to the Caribbean coast in search of these possibilities.

At the same time, the state officials and political and economic elites that committed Nicaragua to a practice of monopoly capitalism that led to the abovementioned displacement were also mestizos. Insofar as we can understand how race and space are imbricated in Nicaragua, it is important to note here that mestizo campesinos were economically disenfranchised while remaining legitimate subjects of concern within the Nicaraguan political imaginary, unlike black and indigenous *costeños* who were either erased, silenced or imagined as existing in the past (or stuck in the past). (Hooker 2005a) The fact that mestizo campesinos remain politically visible, if economically disenfranchised, members of the Nicaraguan polity points to how race works to preserve their position in the Nicaraguan political imaginary while maintaining black and indigenous exclusion. Further, this process also reveals the way in which mestizo political and economic elites reproduce racialized state power through the politics of land tenure. In aligning itself with a model of monopoly capitalism, the mestizo political elite disrupted the livelihoods of mestizo campesinos by colluding with an increasingly transnational economic elite that concentrate land-ownership among themselves. In the broader sketch of race and space in Nicaragua, the experiences of

mestizo campesinos during this period allow us to see that mestizos were not a homogeneous group, but rather held various levels of economic capital that determined their ability to negotiate their position in the national landscape. More importantly, we learn more about how race can be operationalized differently by paying attention to the ways in which mestizos in Nicaragua were not a homogeneous group, in this case by noting the differences that emerged along class lines during this period.

If we understand capitalism and race as webs of inter-related practices that are frequently remade across time and space, then our understanding of this period would be incomplete if we didn't also take into consideration how race was also being reformulated and re-operationalized. A comprehensive analysis of race in mid-twentieth century Nicaragua is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, one observation from this discussion is that mestizo Nicaraguan elites used race to continue excluding black and indigenous *costeños* while also obfuscating the class-based violence by appealing to campesinos' sense of national belonging. As shown with the earlier discussion and in more detailed accounts by Hooker, this sense of national belonging was profoundly structured by race while also holding the stratifications produced along class and, though not discussed here, gender. (Hooker 2005a; Hooker 2010)

It is telling that Robinson's account of politics and economics in Nicaragua does not delve into the way in which the Nicaraguan state consolidated land ownership and economic wealth in the Pacific among mestizo elites while encouraging cash-poor campesinos to migrate eastward into the Caribbean coast territories. In fact, one of the most striking aspects of Robinson's discussion is that he doesn't explain how the process of regional autonomy highlights the significant economic variation between the Caribbean coast and the Pacific and central regions of Nicaragua. Without examining how wealth, violence and the titular "transnational conflict" are organized along racial

and regional lines in Nicaragua, it's impossible to account for the different realities that take place on the coast and instead allows mestizo elites to continue reproducing narratives about a harmonious mestizo nation that silence and/or erase the lived experiences of black and indigenous costeños. Additionally, without discussing how nation-building projects have depended on the racial-spatial subordination of black and indigenous communities, it is easy to ignore how this system of monopoly capitalism was structured for the benefit of the mestizo nation-state and elites, just like the annexation of the Caribbean coast was also part of this genealogy of anti-black and anti-indigenous nation-state development. To complete this brief historical geography of race, I turn towards this process of regional autonomy that came about from the multicultural model of group rights in Nicaragua.

Much has been made of the multicultural reforms in Latin American governments during the 1980s and 1990s. In concluding this section of the chapter, I turn towards the multicultural model of regional autonomy that was produced in 1987. After years of conflict following the Sandinista War and the Contra-war produced by Reagan's administration, Nicaragua's Caribbean coast was in the middle of important debates regarding its future political structure. For years, communities debated group-based rights for black and indigenous communities of the coast. However, the final model that emerged was one that granted autonomy not to the specific communities, but to the region as a whole. Law 28 called for regional autonomy of the Atlantic Coast (later renamed as the Caribbean coast) of Nicaragua, producing a northern and southern territory within the autonomous region. This law granted political autonomy to the region and the six groups that resided in the region: the Mayangna, Miskitu and Rama indigenous communities, the Creole and Garífuna Afro-descendant communities and mestizos. This model allowed each group to have representation in regional government

councils. Since this happened in 1987 and mestizos gained majority group status on the coast in 1981, mestizos remained the racial group with most political representation and power on the coast. (Hooker 2009: 140) Thus, while the autonomy regime allowed for cultural recognition, it did not address the need and desire of black and indigenous communities for self-governance. This form of regional autonomy neglects to address the racial injustice against black and indigenous *costeños* upon which Nicaraguan nation-building projects have been built. Instead, as Hooker shows, this form of autonomy reinscribes racial diversity on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast within older forms of mestizo nationalism, a form of multicultural rights that Hooker terms "mestizo multiculturalism." (Hooker 2005) By limiting the extent to which regional autonomy can begin to formulate a more just society for black and indigenous *costeños*, mestizo multiculturalism is part of this historical geography of race insofar as it continues to preserve mestizo political power despite the reality that many mestizos on the Caribbean coast are indeed cash-poor migrants from the Pacific and central regions of the country.

However, regional autonomy was not entirely ineffective in providing legal protections for black and indigenous *costeños*. By extending collective rights to all the racial groups of the coast, the autonomy regime has allowed the legal and rhetorical foundations on which to make arguments regarding black and indigenous collective land rights. Cases like *Awas Tingni* and more recent legal developments like Law 445 have proved to be important victories for these communities. In a context in which they have not otherwise achieved legal protections to establish self-governance and racial autonomy, these victories have been a way to achieve some measure of protection for the claims to land on which these communities have lived long before Nicaraguan independence and the migration of today's Caribbean coast mestizo majority.

This being said, Gordon, Hooker, Morris, and Goett have all written about how black *costeños*' rights and safety continue to be consistently violated. (Gordon 1998; Hooker 2005b; Morris 2012; Goett 2017) Indeed, it is the longstanding and increasingly violent violation of their rights and of the autonomy law itself that has produced the practices of resistance that Goett centers and documents in *Black Autonomy* and that Morris' research also explores. Currently, the violence surrounding land claims throughout the Caribbean coast continues to escalate, resulting in the homicides of black and indigenous *costeños* as mestizo farmers take extralegal control of more and more land that has been historically worked and collectively owned by black and indigenous *costeños*. In this way, mestizos in the Caribbean coast continue to reproduce the deadly displacement of black and indigenous *costeños*. This process of displacement constitutes reflects the way in which mestizo multiculturalism fails to provide protections or redress for historical injustices to black and indigenous communities of Nicaragua's Caribbean coast. It also shows the way in which an autonomy regime touted as "multicultural" still allows one group to continue violating the collective rights of other groups. I conclude this historical geography of race by discussing mestizo multiculturalism not only because of the chronology but also to show how even the achievement of supposed legal protections of collective rights are not enough to end the pattern of racialized displacement and violence in Nicaragua.

Organization of the Thesis

In this chapter, I've sketched out a brief historical geography of race to trace how race and space have been co-constitutive processes that structure the lives of mestizo Nicaraguans. In doing so, I've traced some of the conditions that produced mestizo migration from the Pacific and central regions of Nicaragua towards the Caribbean coast

territories that ultimately led to mestizos becoming the majority group since 1981. The articulation of a mestizo costeño identity is puzzling because it appears to emerge after decades of choosing not to identify along racial lanes. Most theories of social mobilization and the development of collective identity explain that movements emerge after structural opportunities align in such a configuration as to encourage or make possible the development of grassroots organization and mobilization. However, this type of extensive structural change seems to be missing in the last few years as an explanation for this emergent racial articulation. Thus, given the claims that mestizos made about discrimination, both in Morris' observations and my own, several questions came up time and time again: Who are mestizos costeños? How do they think of themselves, other costeños and the coast? How do they fit into broader aspects of politics in Bluefields and Nicaragua, more broadly? In this remainder of the thesis, I use interview data and my observations and conversations in Bluefields to begin to answer these questions.

In chapter two, I discuss the theoretical framework in which I base my analysis. I begin by discussing the relevant scholarship on race and ethnicity in Latin America and establish why I focus on race instead of ethnicity, a distinction that is particularly significant in the context of Nicaragua's Caribbean coast given their use of vocabulary of "ethnicity" and apparent silence around "race." I then examine the scholarship that has focused on mestizos and mestizo racial identity in Latin America while paying attention to the relationship between the questions scholars have asked and the methodology they employ. Here, I also discuss how ethnography has been crucial in answering the kinds of questions I pose in this thesis. I conclude by discussing how the methodological tools of

ethnography and my own positionality in the field allowed me generate the data to answer the questions this thesis explores.

In chapter three I present the main discursive elements of mestizo costeños' articulation of their racial identity. I trace out two sets of elements and contextualize them within broader traditions of social and political thought they draw from and engage with in their narratives. In doing so, I show how these narratives are not simply about capturing a set of cultural practices, a strategy of assimilation or a social psychological phenomenon of identity. Instead, I show how these narratives reflect mestizos costeños' engagement with politics across scale, notably to make claims to land rights' in the context of regional autonomy.

In chapter four, I conclude with a discussion of the utility of identity politics in crafting future political projects. Mestizos costeños articulate an account of history and identity that is mutually imbricated to their ideas about politics on the coast. In this chapter, I briefly discuss how identity politics are being challenged not only on the coast but in the United States as well, including in bizarre ways by those who supposedly reject this framework. In this chapter, I turn to Charles Mills' critique of racial liberalism to show how black Creole women leaders have used identity politics to craft an approach that takes into account the complex history of violence and recognizing the limits of working with the systems currently in place. Thus, in this chapter I examine what we stand to learn about identity politics by taking into consideration how black Creoles and mestizos costeños in Bluefields are articulating their identities as they engage broader political projects on the coast and throughout Nicaragua.

Chapter 2: Articulating Race on Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast

In this chapter I review the current literature on race, racial identity, and racism. I begin by examining how scholarship on race in Latin America has shifted to unsettle previous assumptions that sociologists from the United States made about Latin American ideas about race. While much of the research continues to grapple with identity, I suggest that a useful approach would be Stuart Hall's theory of articulation. Given the difficulty of finding official texts normally analyzed in discourse analysis, I turn to ethnography to directly observe how mestizos in Bluefields, Nicaragua construct the discourse of mestizos costeños. To continue the review of the literature, I show how three scholars use ethnography to generate insights that are not only analytically useful, but also representative of the kind of project that allows us to answer the questions through the framework of articulation. I conclude the chapter by briefly detailing how I conducted the interviews in Bluefields that I analyze in the remaining chapters.

Towards an Articulation of Racial Projects

One of the central goals of this chapter is to highlight how recent scholarship has turned away from taking race and racial identity for granted and instead interrogating how they are constructed and used. Mara Loveman's comment in the December 1999 issue of the *American Sociological Review*, "Is Race Essential?", highlights this turn as she responds to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's 1997 article, "Rethinking Racism," in which he calls for a structural theorization of race and racism. Loveman's critique of Bonilla-Silva's structural approach is predicated upon her preference for a "comparative sociology of group-making." (Loveman 1999) Loveman's essay is a useful starting point for discussing the sociological literature on race and racism because it raises several

questions about the way that sociologists have conceptualized and operationalized race. Loveman structures her critique in three parts.

She begins by noting that Bonilla-Silva treats race as both a category and a group. Loveman concedes that such a conflation may be adequate in some contexts but decidedly erroneous in others, particularly when racial identity –individual as well as collective- does not align with the experiences of a broader group. (891) Since the publication of Bonilla-Silva and Loveman’s exchange, a rich and vast literature has emerged to support this point. Much of this literature has also grappled with Loveman’s second concern, which examines how race becomes “reified” in scholarly analyses despite observations that some social actors choose to reject race altogether as a social-analytical lens for their experience. Loveman provides the example of black activists in Brazil that had to do the work of raising racial consciousness before being able to mobilize around racial injustice, thus showing how race was not a central aspect of identity but rather one that was made as such. The utility of this intervention is in pausing to ask if scholars are asking the right questions.

By being more attentive to the ways in which context matters for understanding how groups have used race as a social construction, scholars have produced a research agenda that reformulates the way race figures in their projects. For example, in “Beloved Enemies,” political theorist Juliet Hooker traces the way the Nicaraguan nation-state used race to identify who was included and excluded in the national political community throughout three distinct national discourses in the 20th century. In “Beloved Enemies,” Hooker sets out to understand the ends to which race was being used and how it was

operationalized to meet those ends. Likewise, in Tianna Paschel's recent ethnography, *Becoming Black Political Subjects*, Paschel examines how activists in Colombia and Brazil make their claims to their respective nation-states without presuming that race and/or ethnicity are given, static or central sociological objects of analysis. I discuss both of these works in subsequent sections but present them now as examples of scholarship that do not "reify race," but instead focus on highlighting to what extent and in what ways race matters. This scholarship goes beyond Loveman's call for a Weberian analysis of group closure by further illuminating other ways in which social and political actors have mobilized race beyond the social psychological arena of individual racial identities. Instead, Hooker and Paschel ask how race matters in organizing power and examine how different groups have used ideas about race to do specific forms of political work across time and space.

Loveman's final critique of Bonilla-Silva's proposal for a structural theory of racism challenges the need to make an analytical distinction between race and ethnicity. Although Loveman focuses on Bonilla-Silva's theory, her observation of Bonilla-Silva reproducing notions of race and ethnicity that are specific to the US in non-US contexts is a trend seen throughout much of the sociological literature on race and ethnicity in Latin America, regardless of whether the literature centrally engages in theorizing race and ethnicity in the region. (Telles and Paschel 2014) I read Loveman's critique as suggesting that the scholarship was not only reifying race by taking for granted its significance but also assuming that race was static across time and space.

I suggest that one of the ways in which sociologists reproduce the trends that Loveman notes is by relying on a small set of theoretical and analytical frameworks. Indeed, as recently as 2015 Mustafa Emirbayer and Matt Desmond claimed that there has never been a comprehensive theory of race. (Emirbayer and Desmond 2015: 1) Although Emirbayer and Desmond's claims are questionable, their argument reflects how sociology as a discipline continues to struggle with defining race and racism. At the same time, even Emirbayer and Desmond note the extensive presence and influence of a small group of texts in the literature, particularly Michael Omi and Howard Winant's popular text, *Racial Formation in the United States*. In the 2015 third edition, Omi and Winant revise some aspects of their theoretical framework and incorporate more contemporary empirical examples to clarify their arguments. Despite Loveman's earlier critiques and continued efforts to move beyond racial formation framework, as exemplified by Emirbayer and Desmond's *Racial Order*, Omi and Winant's text continues to shape how sociologists think and write about race and racism. Given its prevalence in the field, its worth noting some of the more relevant contributions it makes to framing the discussion that sociologists have about race and racism.

Insofar as *Racial Formations in the United States* continues to frame how sociologists conceptualize and think about race and racism, Omi and Winant's text makes the following useful contributions: a concise analysis of how sociology has discussed race and a "theory of racial formation." First, they present a discussion of three theoretical paradigms that emerged in US sociology during the 20th century to challenge the ideas of scientific racism and eugenics. This review identifies ethnicity, nation, and

class as the three analytical categories that scholars offered as a way to challenge prevailing narratives of white supremacy. Omi and Winant conclude, however, that these theoretical trends failed to grapple with the way racialized violence has been a fundamental political process for centuries. This edition does a better job of referencing the contributions of scholars of color, especially black authors and notably Jamaican philosopher Charles Mills' *The Racial Contract*. Throughout the text, Omi and Winant also frequently remind readers that race should be understood as being co-constituted by gender, class and sexuality, citing Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Davis, and more women of color that have more incisively theorized how race has been constructed and operationalized in the United States. Given these and many other references to other works in the field of critical race theory, it is odd that they don't engage with the ideas and theories of these scholars more substantively in their theory of racial formation.

This theory of racial formation is the second major contribution that I glean from this text in framing the discussion that sociologists have about race and racism. Omi and Winant identify their theory of racial formation as the linkages between the production of racial meaning and the way those meanings are "translated into social structures and become racially signified." (Omi and Winant 2015: 109) They state that one major goal of this theory is to be able to identify how racial projects are operationalized and, therefore, if a given project is racist or not. Although their discussion focuses on empirical examples from the United States, some scholars that study race in Latin America have used these theoretical contributions as analytical jump offs from which to

begin making sense of how race is constructed and to what ends in various contexts beyond the United States. As Loveman argued, however, this is neither enough nor entirely appropriate. Sociologist Edward Telles and his collaborators on the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America (PERLA) provide a useful intervention in their 2014 work *Pigmentocracies: Ethnicity, Race, and Color in Latin America*.

In *Pigmentocracies*, Telles and the PERLA team analyze the results of an original survey that examines public opinion, educational attainment, occupational status and various forms of identity in Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. One of the most controversial and innovative aspects of this study was its use of an eleven-tone skin color palette that interviewers used to “measure” the skin color of survey respondents. As part of the analysis and discussion, Telles and the corresponding PERLA team for each country direct their analysis towards understanding the relationship between skin color and respondents’ notions of race, ethnicity, and identity. *Pigmentocracies* demonstrates how race and ethnicity are sociological objects that are produced and infused with context-specific meaning by respondents and their political projects.

One example from the text comes in the chapter on Colombia. In this chapter, Telles and PERLA analyze ethnoracial and social inequality in Colombia by presenting and discussing the data they collected on years of schooling, high status non-manual occupations and mean monthly income. For all three of these categories (and a fourth one on respondent’s parents’ mean years of schooling) a pattern emerged in which respondents that self-identified as mestizo and mulatto (the two mixed-race categories of the five options) had higher mean years of schooling, a higher proportion in high status

non-manual occupations and higher mean monthly salaries than their white, indigenous or black counterparts (the three monoracial categories). However, each of these charts also included the data when sorted by skin color. Lighter-skinned respondents had more years of schooling, a higher proportion in high status non-manual occupations and higher mean monthly salaries than their medium- and darker-skinned counterparts. (Telles 2014: 109-112) Most respondents identified as mestizo or mulatto while still expressing sharp patterns of inequality within those categories, revealing that skin color was a more accurate predictor of inequality than racial categories.

Placing this evidence in conversation with the data on public opinion regarding attitudes towards affirmative action and ethnoracial movements in Colombia, the researchers conclude that one of the reasons why there is such high self-identification in the mixed-race categories is the specific national discourse of mixed-race heritage in Colombia. While *Pigmentocracies* does not trace the specific trajectories of race in the many nation-building projects across Latin America, it serves as a useful text insofar as it provides a thorough profile of how race, ethnicity, skin color and identity are used in the four countries that the book analyzes. This distinction in the way race works across Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Peru reflects a shift from the assumption that race is constant across context and begins to more robustly address Loveman's call towards decentering US-notions of race beyond their utility.¹ Further, Telles and the PERLA team

¹ While I agree with their analysis that narrow conceptualizations of race from US sociologists is not entirely useful in fully understanding how race works in Latin America, I don't think that ideas about race in Latin America are entirely separate from ideas of race in the US. In *Theorizing Race in the Americas* Hooker explores how these two sets of ideas about race are related by charting a hemispheric intellectual genealogy of racial thinking.

conclude that there is nothing about racial or ethnic identity that inherently caused the inequality they discuss. Instead, they examine how these identities capture and reflect how survey respondents use the ideas of race and ethnicity in their constructing their identities as part of contemporary sociopolitical projects. As such, one important question that emerges from this text is: to what ends is a particular racial project being produced? Further, if identities don't easily align to tell us about the political project of a particular person or group, to what extent is identity still a useful way of understanding racial projects?

Stuart Hall's theory of articulation provides a useful heuristic for answering these questions. Hall explains that an articulation is a "connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time." (Hall 1997: 141, emphasis in the original) Using a visual example, he invokes "an 'articulated' lorry (truck): a lorry where the front (cab) and back (trailer) can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another. The two parts are connected, but through a specific linkage, that can be broken." (141) In the examples from *Pigmentocracies*, it's clear that there is nothing necessary or determined about the way racial identity works within and across national contexts. Historically, mestizos in Nicaragua have not used race or ethnicity to identify themselves, identifying themselves primarily as national subjects (nicaragüenses) rather than the racialized term 'mestizo.' There seems to be nothing necessary or determined about identifying as mestizos, costeños, or mestizos costeños for mestizos in Bluefields, marking the emergence of mestizo costeño "identity" all the more intriguing after more

than 150 years of being mestizos that are, technically, costeños insofar as they've been on the coast.

Hall's idea of articulation pushes us to examine these points of articulation, the unnecessary linkages of various elements, to understand what is meaningful about the discourse in the context in which it is produced. This approach centers the agency of social actors while also requiring our analysis to provide sufficient and appropriate context with which to understand a specific articulated discourse. Indeed, Hall goes on to say that "the 'unity' which matters is a linkage between that articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected." (141) Thus, I identify two kinds of linkages in Hall's theory of articulation: discursive and social linkages. The discursive linkages are those linkages that an individual or group creates to connect, or articulate, two or more elements in a discourse but are not "necessary, determined, absolute and essential." The social linkages are made analytically to understand the context in which the articulated discourse gains social and political significance.

Hall's theory of articulation pushes us to make sense of the way in which the discourse of mestizos costeños is socially produced in a specific spatial, temporal, and political context. This theory suggests that a specific set of "social forces" converged to create a set of conditions under which this particular racial articulation ("mestizo costeños") could be possible, though not necessary. By examining the discursive linkages that produce mestizo costeño discourse (MCD), we can see how the practice of linking various elements serves a social and political purpose. As such, this approach allows us to

go beyond simply cataloguing the elements of a racial or ethnic identity, and instead focus on how the specific assemblage of these elements are used to connect individuals to broader groups and projects.

To make visible the discursive linkages, I use semi-structured in-depth interviews to analyze how self-identified mestizos costeños articulate MCD themselves. In discussing the major elements that are articulated by mestizos costeños as part of MCD, I also discuss how they engage with major ideas in Latin American political thought. My goal here is to show how MCD connects to broader political and social forces that shape the experiences of mestizos in Bluefields and becomes meaningful only through the specific temporal, spatial and political contexts in which it is produced. To this end, the remainder of this chapter explores how scholars have used ethnographic methods to produce data that allows us to see how race is articulated in Latin America. I begin with Tianna Paschel's *Becoming Black Political Subjects* and then discuss two ethnographies that examine mestizo racial projects. These last two ethnographies are among the most substantive engagements with the politics of mestizo racial identity, although there is admittedly very little scholarship that examines how mestizos articulate mestizo racial projects.

Ethnography and Racial Articulation in Latin America

I now turn my attention to three ethnographies: *Becoming Black Political Subjects* by Tianna Paschel, *Indigenous Mestizos* by Marisol de la Cadena, and *Más Que Un Indio* by Charles Hale. For each text, I examine how the evidence each author provides works to directly substantiate their observations or theoretical insights. I undertake this exercise

with two goals. The first goal is to show how these authors use ethnography to study race in various parts of Latin America. Second, I am also interested in showing how these authors make visible the non-necessary linkages in the racial articulations they examine. My hope here is to provide examples of how ethnography has been useful in producing data that can make visible how race is articulated in context-specific and non-necessary ways.

In *Becoming Black Political Subjects: Movements and Ethno-Racial Rights in Colombia and Brazil*, sociologist Tianna Paschel sets out to trace how black Colombians and Brazilians developed a black consciousness despite being in contexts where widespread, collective black identity was hardly the case. Paschel turns to Hall's theory of articulation to explain how black activists challenge black co-nationals to reconceptualize their politics by explicitly engaging race, reminding us that the way discourses of racial identity are assembled must be examined instead of taken for granted as always already present.

Traditionally, ethnography as a method is discussed only in terms of the data-producing processes of participant observation and interviews. (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2014; Katz 2001, 2002) However, if Hall's theory is to be useful, then ethnographic texts must also contextualize the observations, interviews, oral histories, etc. that they present and analyze. Hall explains that the social linkages are the linkages made between the discursive articulations and the specific social contexts in which they are forged. *Becoming Black Political Subjects* highlights why this is not only an important aspect of understanding the political context of racial articulations, but

essential if the goal is to understand what kind of political work a racial articulation can do. Paschel fulfills this mandate by providing an extensive analysis of the historical contexts in which blackness has been situated throughout Latin American nation-building projects.

She begins this in Chapter Two, “Making Mestizajes,” by showing how Colombian and Brazilian nation-building projects in the 19th century conceptualized blackness in distinct but related ways. Further, the distinct ability of each state to enforce its nationalistic myths about race also explain the different racial configurations Colombia and Brazil. Paschel then brings in ethnographic vignettes to illustrate how these historical trajectories of mestizaje have produced the context in which distinct ideas about blackness manifest today in Colombia and Brazil. Paschel uses quotes from these interviews to highlight her earlier point that the success of these social movements was never guaranteed and that an “oppositional racial consciousness” was anything but widespread in either context, preventing the mobilization that social movements require. For example, on page 73 Paschel presents a quote by Brazilian activist Amauri Mendes in which he recounts an early experience of standing on a street corner with a megaphone to “verbally attack people,” a strategy to directly puncture the silence around race and bring a discussion of racism into the public sphere.

Here and throughout the text, Paschel explains that a black consciousness was intentionally created to allow black Brazilians not only to organize as such, but also to express their critique of Brazilian racism specifically as black Brazilian political subjects. In this way, Paschel uses her observations and interviews to show how the discourse of

black Brazilian identity was located in the context of critiquing racism through demands that black activists made to the state. Consequently, Paschel's theorization of social movements and the "global ethno-racial field" through Bourdieu's concept of political fields directly responds to Stuart Hall's call to contextualize discursive linkages to social linkages in his theory of articulation. By tracing the context in which black activists in Colombia and Brazil constructed their politics through archival research, Paschel's ethnographic findings provide the discursive elements that activists chose to connect as they made themselves black political subjects.

The text continues to map out the social and political context in which discourses of black political subjectivity were produced through Paschel's analysis of records from the International Third World Conference against Racism in Durban, the Santiago Regional Conference of the Americas and the national assemblies of both Colombia and Brazil. These archives show how discourses of multiculturalism were developed through global and international processes in what Paschel terms the "global ethno-racial field," which constructed blackness in ways that the Colombian and Brazilian states would later use in their own domestic politics. In arguing for understanding the shift from the multicultural alignment to the racial equality alignment, Paschel brings in interviews with activists and legislators from those time periods to substantiate the relationship that she identifies existing between global organizations and domestic political actors, giving analytical strength to her argument by centering the voices of the actors whose political labor she analyzes for the bulk of this section. Moreover, by explaining which discourses and material needs activists were responding to, Paschel's observations and interviews

demonstrate how the assemblage of elements to produce an understanding of blackness in Brazil and Colombia was neither random nor immaterial, but rather highly strategic responses aimed directly at achieving specific goals.

In one of the final chapters, “Unmaking Black Political Subjects,” Paschel shows how the policies of the early 2000s required black communities to contort themselves into narrow definitions of blackness if they wanted to benefit from the new policies developed in Colombia and Brazil. Throughout this chapter Paschel expands the warrant for her ethnography by showing the extent to which these new laws shaped everyday life for black Colombians and Brazilians. Her observations reveal the continuing pervasive state presence in black communities in Colombia in the form of state-sanctioned mining projects as well as the impulse of various black Colombians to create their own false organizations with the goals of both bolstering support for black communities on a statistical level while also gaining material benefits from the state to support themselves. Paschel strengthens her analysis of her observational data by interviewing the activists she writes about and allowing them to walk the reader through their logic, explaining for example why they began creating so many “paper organizations.” Along with the preceding chapter, this section marks the cornerstone of her ethnographic methodology in this project as she successfully captures the voice, logic and experiences of the political actors whose world she engages in her theorization of black social movements in Colombia and Brazil. Paschel uses ethnographic methodology to take seriously the political thought and strategies of black Colombian and Brazilian activists, simultaneously tracing how this contemporary articulation of blackness is historically and

materially situated. In reading Stuart Hall's theory of articulation into her analysis, I understand her text as showing how black activists forged discursive linkages in order to articulate black identity in a context in which blackness was defined narrowly and specifically by the nation-state.

In *Indigenous Mestizos: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919-1991*, Marisol de la Cadena explores a process that she calls de-Indianization. De la Cadena argues that "Indian" is a term used by Cuzqueños to specifically refer to the embodied "historical stigma of colonized inferiority." (de la Cadena 2003, 6) Thus, "Indianness is perceived as a social condition that reflects an individual's failure to achieve educational improvement." (6) In short, de-Indianization is a process by which a group of working-class indigenous Cuzqueños signify retention of indigenous culture while simultaneously distancing themselves from the stigma of "colonized inferiority" generally attributed to Indianness. This process of de-Indianization provides another example of a racial articulation. De la Cadena begins her text by tracing the intellectual genealogy of racial thought in Peru, providing the context in which ideas of Indianness and mestizaje emerged. One important dynamic that she explores is what she terms as a set of "interregional dialogical racial struggles." Throughout the text, de la Cadena shows how this interregional dialogue about race between Lima and Cuzco is one that generates the social forces in which working-class indigenous Cuzqueños would articulate a mestizo identity when entering urban centers like Lima. In *Indigenous Mestizos*, the notion that there is a regionally-organized racial conflict helps make visible why and how indigenous Cuzqueños would choose to articulate mestizaje.

Throughout the text, de la Cadena explores various aspects of de-Indianization through the mining of various archives and a careful ethnographic approach. Her in-depth descriptions and carefully chosen interviews reveal how indigenous mestizos articulate their mestizo identity. One example comes in Chapter 4, “Insolent Mestizas and Respeto: The Redefinition of Mestizaje.” When interviewing Lucrecia, de la Cadena shares the following excerpt from her interview:

I am a mestiza fighter, I have always worked along with my husband so that my children would never want for anything. I have stood up to anyone who disrespected me... They call us ‘those *cholas*,’ they insult us; they think we are thieves and whores...I am only a worker and I have helped my husband all my life...Because of that all my sons have been educated and now all of them, every one is a professional.

In this excerpt, de la Cadena shows us how Lucrecia links the disrespect attributed to *cholas* with her desire and need to provide for her children. Instead, she subverts the category of *chola* and the disrespect it is given and articulates herself as a “mestiza fighter,” a “worker” who has worked alongside her husband to turn each of her ten sons into a professional. De la Cadena shows us how mestizas like Lucrecia use the politics of morality to challenge anti-indigenous racism by re-articulating themselves as mestizas. De la Cadena’s observations and interviews provide an important set of voices that are frequently omitted or obscured in the archives assembled for scholarship: indigenous thinkers, especially youth. By placing their ideas in a sustained conversation with those of the political and economic elite, Marisol de la Cadena shows the multiple ways in which mestizaje is articulated in Cuzco, Peru. Further, by tracing the intellectual genealogy of racial thought in which these articulations are embedded, she allows us to

see how working-class indigenous Cuzqueños articulate a mestizo identity as a strategy to retain indigenous practices while also living dignified lives. (327) Thus, ethnographic methods allow contemporary researchers to “take seriously the critical intellectual production of those historically denied the category of ‘thinkers.’” (Walsh 2007) Moreover, by not romanticizing resistance or glossing over important contradictions, de la Cadena is able to use ethnography to more fully account for the social forces that shape the choices that working-class indigenous Cuzqueños make.

To this end, de la Cadena is clear throughout her analysis that such an articulation is not a neat contestation of racism. Indeed, one of the central contributions of de la Cadena’s analysis is that the category of mestizo and the process of mestizaje have always had ambivalent political potentials. As Hooker notes, Vasconcelos’ initial formulation of mestizaje was at once anti-imperialist while decidedly reinforcing multiple racist tropes. (Hooker 2017) Throughout the text, de la Cadena presents mestizaje as a “terrain of political contestation and dialogic reformulation in which elite and grassroots intellectuals dispute meanings of identity labels and rights to equal citizenship.” (de la Cadena 2000: 318) The depth of her archival work certainly reveals the contested and frequently reformulated nature of mestizaje in Peru between 1919 and 1991, betraying any idea of neat racial formations. Instead, de la Cadena’s theorization of de-Indianization “also reveals complicity between dominant and subaltern groups in identifying “Indians” as the most contemptible members of society.” (328) By rejecting binary logics and instead focusing on the complexity and nuance with which Cuzqueños navigate the racial landscape of everyday life, de la Cadena offers an analysis that more

fully captures the lived experience the people that inform her study. Her insights into the politically multivalent nature of mestizaje are extended in Charles Hale's *Más Que Un Indio: Racial Ambivalence and Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Guatemala*.

In *Más Que Un Indio*, Charles Hale explores what he calls Guatemalan ladinos' "racial ambivalence." Hale sets out to understand the development of Maya politics over the last few decades by "reversing the ethnographic gaze" from the Maya onto ladinos. By examining ladino political thought and taking seriously their interpretation of local and national-level politics, Hale makes various contributions to the literature on Guatemala. First and foremost, this is one of the few, if not the only, ethnographic account of ladinos that interrogates their interpretation of the Maya movement. Second, Hale points out that most of the literature references or discusses ladinos in Guatemala as caricatured oppressors or erases them altogether. Instead, Hale's ethnographic approach allows the reader to gain a closer look at the contradictions embedded within discourses of reverse racism and the lived experiences of ladinos in the town of Chimaltenango. Like de la Cadena's approach, Hale's ethnography is not concerned with facile categorizations or typographies of racial formations. Hale's analysis makes visible how ladinos articulate the discourses of reverse racism precisely by focusing on the contradictions and tensions that he finds.

In trying to understand the historical and political trajectory of the Maya movement by examining the role and politics of ladinos, Hale creates a more complex racial geography of Guatemalan politics. This approach of focusing on the dominant racial group to obtain a fuller account of racial politics has served as a useful model for

this Master's thesis. Just as Hale sought to better understand Maya politics by taking seriously and allowing ladinos' politics to exist in multivalent complexity, I have tried to better understand the political context of Afro-descendant communities in Nicaragua's Caribbean coast by examining the role of mestizos costeños. To this end, one of Hale's most important contributions is carefully tracing out what "racial ambivalence" means.

Hale theorizes racial ambivalence as a set of phrases and ideas that "express dissatisfaction, criticism, and fear in response to the changing social conditions" that ladinos face. (Hale 2006: 118-119) Hale offers that "inherent in the perception of reverse racism is a critique of the classic racism that used to prevail" in Guatemala. (126) However, it is also accompanied by a subsequent logic of "self-exoneration." Hale uses his interviews to allow ladinos to flesh out the contours of racial ambivalence in their own voice. In the passage where Hale explains this simultaneous denunciation of classic racism and the concurrent self-exoneration, he shares how a ladino explained it: At times this critique [against classical racism] encompasses a healthy dose of self-criticism, and other times an insistence that, as Don Rolando put it, "What happened, happened. Why should we take the blame for what took place five hundred years ago?" (126) By embedding the voices of ladinos throughout the prose and into his analysis, Hale takes seriously the political implications of the discourse that ladinos developed regarding racial politics in Guatemala. Moreover, like Paschel and de la Cadena, Hale's approach is one that allows us to produce data that is useful to answering the questions I set out to answer within the framework of racial articulation.

Hale's account of ladinos' interpretation of the Maya movement shows that ladino identity has at one point embraced classic racism while rejecting it in another point. At the same time, while ladinos reject classic racism, Hale shows how their discourse is linked to reconfiguring how racism operates in Guatemala. What these three texts reveal about ethnography is that it is particularly useful in making visible the two kinds of linkages that Stuart Hall identifies in his theory of articulation, especially when the group making these linkages has been understudied or has not produced easily accessible texts wherein we could find this discourse. In the case of mestizos costeños, they have been ignored thus far either geographically, when most scholars intentionally choose to ignore the Caribbean coast, or racially, when most scholars discussing the Caribbean coast focus only Afro-descendant or indigenous communities. As such, I draw from the analytical and methodological insights of these texts in designing my research methodology.

Methodology and Positionality in Bluefields

The data produced for this thesis is based on interviews conducted with self-identified mestizos costeños in Bluefields, Nicaragua during the summer of 2016. I began my research with a conversation with Nora Newball and Dolene Miller, previous leaders of the Creole communal government. Both are Afro-descendant women who have long been a part of the Creole community's struggles for justice in Bluefields as well as in the national arena. Following Walsh's call to extend the category of thinker to those who have been denied it, I used their account of history and politics as an analytical entry point to begin understanding how Creole women in Bluefields would construct the "interregional dialogical racial struggles" in Nicaragua.

Newball and Miller's account is an important way to begin thinking about how self-identified mestizos costeños talked about race, identity, history, autonomy, and land rights in Nicaragua's Caribbean coast by providing an account of history and politics that has been silenced by scholars, political elites and popular media alike. Indeed, while some scholars have begun to write about Afro-descendant communities in Nicaragua's Caribbean coast, it is not new to write about the African diaspora. However, the pattern in much of the scholarship takes for granted that theory is produced in the global North while the global South provides the empirical studies on which to build the careers and industry of academics. In trying to intentionally depart from this, I turn to Michel-Rolph Trouillot's work on silence in historiography as a way of beginning to outline my methodology.

In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Trouillot offers a theory of history by examining how power shapes its production. More specifically, Trouillot suggests that there are four moments in which silence enters the process of historical production: "the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance)." (emphasis in the original) (Trouillot 1995, 26) By taking Newball and Miller's historical narrative as a "moment of fact creation" that is assembled through their process of "fact retrieval," my goal is to continue addressing the academic silence around mestizo racial projects in Nicaragua's Caribbean coast and their attendant consequences for Afro-descendants in Bluefields.

Another reason why this initial conversation with Newball and Miller was important is because it helped me pay attention to the dynamics and questions that I might not otherwise know to ask. Aside from not being from the Caribbean coast, I am the light-skinned son of two mestizo Nicaraguans who raised me in the United States, where I also gained my education. Beyond the standard hand-wringing statement to acknowledge the privileges I am given due to how I am positioned in multiply-constituted matrices of power, I am interested in pointing out that my positionality reflects the kind of questions that I would ask as well as the ones I would not know to ask. For example, although my family is Nicaraguan, they are mestizos from the Pacific coast and had virtually no interaction with anyone on the Caribbean coast. As Rhacel Parreñas reminds us, my positionality then is important to note not because it is a unique configuration of identities or privileges, but because those identities and privileges mean that I experience the world differently than others. Moreover, the significance to this project is that I should be mindful as I craft my methodology to be attentive to how I experience the world differently than the people I write about so that I may provide a more honest account and better analysis of the question at hand. To that end, it struck me that it was curious that mestizos in Nicaragua's Caribbean coast did not use race as a way to identify themselves despite living on the Coast for over a century and being the majority group for over three decades. However, taking into consideration Parreñas' call to put our reflexivity to work, I also ask what kind of political work the emergence of mestizo costeño identity discourse can do. To answer this question, I examine how mestizos costeños construct this discourse and then present Newball and Miller's

interpretation as a counterhistory. In doing so, I interrogate how these two accounts diverge as a way to examine what is useful for mestizos about articulating themselves as mestizos costeños.

The interviews with mestizos in Bluefields were semi-structured and varied in length. During the interviews, I asked participants to tell me about how they identified, what that meant to them, and how this might be related to the regional politics of autonomy. What I found was a fairly consistent discourse about mestizo racial identity that drew heavily on well-established narratives of mestizaje. In the following chapter, I present how mestizos in Bluefields produce the discourse of mestizo costeño identity by focusing on the linkages they make between discursive elements.

Chapter 3: “Sitting on a Time Bomb”

The morning was particularly humid when I walked into the white and blue building on the corner. Up the dark wooden stairs and through one of the three doors on the landing, Orlando Obando was waiting at his desk. During our interview, Orlando shared that he has had multiple positions working for the Caribbean coast governments for all of his professional life. Most recently, he is a member of the Southern Caribbean coast regional electoral council.

It was not very difficult to get the conversation going. After the usual introductions and setting up the audio recording device, I asked him about how he identified and what he could tell me about that. Orlando spoke for about an hour from this prompt alone. Like the others I interviewed, he spoke about identifying as a mestizo costeño and how important the regional dimension of that identity was to understanding what he was talking about. He talked about regional differences between mestizos, how mestizos migrated to the Caribbean coast over time from various places, and how the six different ethnic groups on the coast get along harmoniously. Until they didn't. About an hour into the interview, Orlando said:

Defining the notion of property has brought us to a point in which we are sitting on a time bomb because people are exacerbating animosities and creating ethnicism. They've even been using racism and it is an inverted racism. It isn't mestizos against other ethnicities; it's other ethnicities that believe themselves to be superior.

(Definir el tema de la propiedad, nos ha llevado a un punto en cual estamos sentados en una bomba de tiempo porque ha habido gente que estan exacerbando ánimos y han estado creando el etnicismo. Han estado utilizando el racismo y es un racismo invertido. No es el mestizo contra otra etnia, es algunas etnias que se creen superiores.)²

² Interviews were conducted in Spanish. In the text, I've provided my own translations followed by the original Spanish in parenthesis. In the rare case when someone spoke in both English and Spanish, I've done my best to preserve their original choice.

The jarring and ominous tone of his assessment of racial politics on the coast confirmed how intricately woven racial politics were to ongoing struggles over land rights. However, if the six groups of the Caribbean coast territories were at one point coexisting harmoniously, as he said, where did this time bomb come from? To answer this question and those posed earlier in Chapter 1, I analyze how mestizos in Bluefields, Nicaragua articulate a discourse about mestizos costeños in the interviews I conducted.

Borrowing from Hall, I use the verb “articulate” to signify both the expression of an idea and the construction of a discourse through intentional and unnecessary linkages. In the discussion that follows I identify two major sets of discursive elements that mestizos drew upon when discussing mestizos costeños: mestizaje and land rights. In discussing these two sets of discursive elements separately I don’t mean to say that they are discrete or neatly bounded. Instead, my intention is to show two general themes that allow us to make sense of the narratives that emerged in the interviews. These two sets of ideas and discursive elements are a useful way to begin interrogating the discourse that I heard on the Caribbean coast and were reiterated in the interviews that I recount here. Mestizos frequently discussed the process of mestizaje as it related to producing mixed-race bodies in Nicaragua and, more specifically, on the Caribbean coast. This set of discursive elements was frequently linked to claims to land rights on the Caribbean coast. In my discussion, I focus on identifying the discursive elements and the linkages that mestizos made among them to explore what kind of political work these linkages can do. In doing so, my goal is to make visible the social linkages that make these articulations meaningful, revealing the conditions that Hall’s theory says must be present to allow these articulations to be made.

Mestizaje and Identity on the Caribbean Coast

When mestizos in Bluefields began to tell me about their identity as mestizos costeños, they consistently mentioned the same discursive building blocks. They began by identifying mestizos as mixed-race subjects that resided somewhere outside the Caribbean coast territories and within the boundaries of Nicaragua. They cited Managua and Chontales as their families' original residence, and one young student at the Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (BICU) said he came from Nueva Segovia. The narrative that emerged was of a hard-working, landless mestizo campesino who had to move his family eastward so that they could find land to cultivate and earn a living. This narrative of national expansion eastwards towards the Caribbean coast seemed to echo the same inevitable tone that is often found in texts that describes US expansion westward to the Pacific, also thought of in official discourses as inevitable and necessary. Orlando presents a concise summary of this part of the mestizo migration narrative:

They came searching for better options. They weren't big landowners. They began to invade the communal lands. The invaders were us, the mestizos. And yet, we learned to coexist and adopted the forms, customs and traditions of the people here. We mixed. You'll find mestizos married with Creoles, mestizos married with Garífuna, mestizos married with Rama. I have a friend that says he doesn't know what he is because he says "I'm mestizo because of my mother, black because of my father, so I'm mestigro!"

(Venian buscando como mejorar sus opciones, que no eran grandes terratenientes. Empezaron a invadir las tierras comunales. Los invasores fuimos nosotros los mestizos. Sin embargo, aprendimos a coexistir, coexistir y adoptamos las formas, costumbres y tradiciones de la gente de eca, nos mezclamos. Te encuentras mestizos casados con Creoles, mestizos casados con Garífuna, mestizos casados con Rama. Tengo un amigo que dice que el no sabe que es, porque dice "Soy mestizo por mi madre, negro por mi padre, entonces soy mestigro!")

Orlando's explanation of mestizo migration to the Caribbean coast and the subsequent imagined social harmony establishes the foundation of mestizo costeño

discourse. In this excerpt, he begins to establish what anthropologist Charles Hale found among ladinos in Guatemala: a critical historical gaze that is coupled to a self-exonerating present positionality. (Hale 2006) The critical historical gaze comes when he names mestizos as “invasores,” which I’ve translated as invaders. During my time in Bluefields and in brief excursions into neighboring communities of Pearl Lagoon, the Wawashang school and reserve, Afro-descendant and indigenous costeños often referred to mestizos interchangeably as “Spaniards” and “colonos,” literally colonists. By labeling mestizos as a group that invaded the Caribbean coast, Orlando reveals an awareness that Afro-descendants and indigenous communities had collective rights to the land, as established by Law 28 in the national constitution. And yet, he immediately pivots the narrative into the realm of social harmony.

In the quote above, Orlando establishes that after the initial injustice of invasion, mestizos learned to “coexist” and live in harmony with the other groups of the Caribbean coast. Here, Orlando turns to intergroup marriages as the ultimate symbol of progress. Beyond learning about each other’s culture, Orlando says that they “mixed” in a reference to intergroup marriages in which mestizos married Creoles, Garífuna, and Rama Indians. This trope of racial harmony echoes the work begun by Gilberto Freyre, widely credited with establishing the concept and discourse of racial democracy in Brazil. Indeed, the narratives about mestizaje that emerged in these interviews departed from the better-known trope of indigenous-white/Indo-Hispanic racial mixing and instead reflect a conceptualization of racial mixing that allows mestizos costeños to be connected to both indigenous and Afro-descendant groups on the coast. Sociologist Tianna Paschel notes that Freyre acknowledged and “valued” African insofar as it allowed him to essentialize Africans and recast them as “co-colonizers” of Brazil, distorting the way power was organized along racial lines. (Paschel 2016: 35) By establishing that mestizos costeños

are extensively mixed with other groups despite a history of past invasion, the discourse moves into the present realm in which cultural mixture has allowed racial harmony to take place, leaving past injustices beyond the realm of contemporary politics and flattening the uneven power relations between mestizos and Creoles in Bluefields. To make sense of how we go from this racial harmony to the “time bomb” that Orlando describes, it is useful to take into consideration another account of mestizo migration.

In Miguel Gonzalez’s account of mestizo migration to the Caribbean coast, Miguel connected how the different waves of migration are related to contemporary struggles over land rights. Miguel’s account emphasized how the politics of migration resulted in what *costeños* call *la frontera agrícola*, the agricultural frontier. During our conversation, he described mestizo migration to the Caribbean coast as consisting of two major waves. He locates the first wave of migration in the first two decades of the 20th century. He said this wave included mestizo “elites, lawyers, business-owners in Granada, Chontales, Managua, Matagalpa. Their children became *costeños* as they are born here but I don’t know that there was a sense of racial belonging for them, although there is definitely that sense among the indigenous and Afro-descendants on the coast.” He then goes on to identify the second major wave of mestizo migration as occurring in the 1950s and 1960s during the “*proyectos de modernización*,” or “modernization projects,” that the Nicaraguan state took on. Among these projects, he mentioned the concessions of land that the state made to allow the development of what sociologist William Robinson called “monopoly capitalism.” (Robinson 2003) Miguel explains that these projects were largely organized around plantation style agricultural economies that revolved around the production and exportation of coffee and beef. As mestizos *campesinos* lost the ability to maintain access to land, Miguel explains that the state began incentivizing mestizo migration east by a mixture of explicit policies that

facilitated this migration as well as turning a blind eye towards the occupation of indigenous and Afro-descendant collectively owned lands.

This second wave of migration is particularly important in understanding how Miguel linked mestizos migration to contemporary struggles of land. Miguel explains that during this wave of migration, mestizos begin to settle in the “old agricultural frontier,” “la antigua frontera agrícola.” During my time in Bluefields, the agricultural frontier was frequently brought up in conversations that referenced mestizo migration and/or mestizos’ occupation of land throughout the Caribbean coast territories. As I heard *costeños* describe the frontier and sometimes even saw how the frontier moved eastward over the years on maps, it also struck me that the frontier was as much a physical demarcation as it was a space of contestation.

When Miguel talked about the frontier, I asked him to tell me more about it and what it meant for mestizos who were migrating. To that, he responded that it was

un modelo de pensamiento, como guía un tipo de acción, un tipo de imaginario que tiene un gran componente material, que es muy tangible. Significa para Nicaragua, poder relieve the pressure that peasants experienced during the plantation economy (particularly coffee, banana) to push that population to the east. Clearly a policy decision by the Somozas in the 50s to alleviate that pressure felt in Central Nicaragua. The east became that imaginary for the infinite expansion of agricultural economy and the subsistence economy. But it doesn’t make any sense, there’s no *frontera agrícola* anymore. ... The expansion of agricultural activities moves further eastward but [this idea of the *frontera agrícola*] stays in the narrative because it conveys a way of thinking.

Miguel’s historical narrative of the second wave of mestizo migration aligns more closely with the kind of mestizos that Orlando described as hard-working and landless *campesinos* that went in search of opportunities. However, the linkage in Miguel’s narrative is not between mestizo migration and racial harmony, but between mestizo migration and the nationally-endorsed occupation of the Caribbean coast territories.

Miguel thinks of the agricultural frontier as an “imaginary,” a “way of thinking,” that has a major material aspect to it. Here, Miguel’s articulation of mestizo migration reveals an analysis that also connects the role of the state in producing the conditions that encouraged mestizo migration and encouraged the development of the imaginary that Miguel identifies as the agricultural frontier.

Reading these two accounts of mestizo migration to Nicaragua’s Caribbean coast allows us to see some useful resonances and divergences. Both Miguel and Orlando narrate mestizo migration as a process shaped by economic need. As is the case for many migrants around the world, the decision to leave a home community often includes the desire and/or need for a better economic future when they do not think they have access to one in their current situation. In the case of campesinos moving into and across the agricultural frontier, Miguel and Orlando suggest that these mestizos were economically displaced as a result of the state’s economic strategy and desire to engage in the global market through the monopoly capitalism that concentrated land and wealth among an economic elite in the majority mestizo Pacific and Central regions of Nicaragua. The narratives of migration diverge when we begin to pay attention to how Miguel and Orlando narrate the outcomes of these migrations. Where Orlando articulated a future of racial harmony and cultural mixture, Miguel framed mestizo occupations of lands as extra-legal occupations. This divergence points to the different emphases that Orlando and Miguel placed on mestizo costeño identity and the kind of political work that these linkages do. Orlando’s narrative erases the racialized and gendered violence that Creoles face throughout the Caribbean coast and in Bluefields in general. (Goett 2017; Morris 2016) The linkage in Miguel’s narrative still refers to mixed-race mestizos that migrate to the Caribbean coast in search of economic opportunities, but it does not make use of the self-exoneration that Hale finds among many ladinos and that Orlando uses earlier in

the interview. Thus, Miguel's narrative provides one way of thinking about mestizo costeños that does not rely on reconciling past violences that have not actually been addressed.

Returning to my original prompt for both Orlando and Miguel, I asked them about how they identified and if they could tell me more about what that meant. As anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena has noted before, Latin American mestizaje is not a fixed political statement but rather “a terrain of political contestation and dialogic reformulation in which elite and grassroots intellectuals dispute meanings of identity labels and rights to equal citizenship.” (de la Cadena 2000, 318) The following formulations of mestizaje that I found in the interviews reflect this political contestation occurring on the Caribbean coast. In his discussion of mestizo costeño identity, Miguel emphasizes that the sense of belonging for the earlier wave of migrants and their families was not necessarily racialized, so much as it was spatialized. At the beginning of the interview when he elaborated on how he thought about mestizo costeño identity, Miguel began by explicitly stating the significance of space in understanding mestizo costeño identity:

Aunque hablo español en la casa, hay un sentido de que somos distintos a otros mestizos del Pacífico del país. It started as a joke that mestizos from Managua are a particular way and from Chontales are another way. Aquí estudiamos, aquí tenemos nuestros amigos, aquí tenemos la residencia, aquí tenemos a nuestra familia. Nos hace parte de una identidad mestiza, pero costeña.

(Although I speak Spanish at home, there is a sense that we are different from other mestizos of the Pacific. It started as a joke that mestizos from Managua are a particular way and from Chontales are another way. We study here, we have our friends here, we have residence here, we have our families here. It forms part of our mestizo identity, but costeña.)

Miguel is clear that the sense of social belonging is necessarily rooted in space due to the proximity to family and friends. Additionally, it is unclear whether he thinks that the

“sense” that mestizos living in the Caribbean coast are fundamentally different than mestizos living elsewhere, whether those differences are socially constructed or not. In other words, there is a “sense” of difference, but what is clearer is that mestizos living in the Caribbean coast have their social networks in the Coast and live in a different context than other mestizos do throughout Nicaragua. Orlando takes this one step further by linking this sense of spatial identity to his argument that mestizos costeños are discriminated against by mestizos in the Pacific.

Orlando’s narrative about anti-mestizo discrimination is built up by the following elements. When I first asked him about mestizos costeños, he first distinguished between the “national mestizo” and mestizos costeños. He explained the “national mestizo” is the archetypical mestizo subject in the Pacific whereas mestizos costeños live on the coast in a different reality than those in the Pacific. He says that mestizos costeños have

“coexisted peacefully, suffering hard times and worse times, that is, we suffer the same that Creole mestizos, black Creoles, Rama Creoles- here everything is a mix. Here there is no one who can say I am 100% of a particular ethnicity.”

“Hemos coexistidos pacíficamente sufriendo las duras y las ma’duras, o sea lo mismo que sufre el Creole mestizo, el Creole negro, el Creole rama, aquí todo es una mezcla. Aquí no hay nadie que diga “yo soy 100% de tal etnia.”

Here, he establishes two discursive elements. First, he flattens the differences between the suffering that different groups experience on the Caribbean coast when he says that “we suffer the same as Creole mestizos, black Creoles, Rama Creoles.” Such a claim flies in the face of extensive historical documentation that violence on the Caribbean coast is organized along racial lines, as Courtney Morris and Jennifer Goett have recently documented. (Morris 2016; Goett 2017) Then, he says that everyone is so mixed, that it is impossible to claim racial, cultural or ethnic purity. During the interview, this comment

was striking because it was an abstraction that he applied to all other groups on the coast while he was mostly discussing mestizo costeño identity.

As I listened to the interview again, it became clear that this was an important discursive strategy in building up his argument about anti-mestizo discrimination. In the minutes that follow this point about racial purity, Orlando goes back and forth on his points about racial and cultural mixture. On the one hand, he maintains that there is such extensive intergroup marriages that being 100% of any group is impossible. On the other hand, he went on to say that on the coast some groups are easily recognizable. To make his point, he draws upon prevailing stereotypical narratives of Creoles by saying that if “you talk about the Maypole (it’s the dance of the Creoles), if you talk about rondón, they are the things that identify a person.” (“Si vos hablás de palo de mayo (es el baile de los criol), si hablás de rondon, son las cosas que identifican a una persona.”) Orlando reifies Creole group identity through these distinct features that other groups supposedly lack, or at least are denied in his account in this particular interview.

In his description of Creoles, we find an important aspect of his argument of anti-mestizo discrimination. He says that “although [Creoles] are not autochthonous, just like us who came later, they already have some permanence on this territory.” (“Aunque no son autoctonos, a lo igual que nosotros que vinieron después, ellos ya tienen tiempo de permanencia en este territorio.”) Again, when Orlando says that neither Creoles nor mestizos costeños are autochthonous to the Caribbean coast, he is suggesting that their relationship to the territory is the same by flattening the differences between Creoles and mestizos costeños’ relationship to the land, the state, and the territory. This claim also misses historical works that have traced Creoles’ relationship to the territory for years. (Gordon 1998; Hooker 2010) Further, by his own admission that mestizos came in search of better economic opportunities whereas Creoles were there long before, the comparison

does not do the work he sets it up to do. Instead, the political work of this comparison is to erase the distinct historical trajectories that have been imbued with differential racialized power relations to position mestizos costeños and Creoles on the Caribbean coast as somehow having equal claim to the territory.

The way Orlando links mestizo costeños, Creoles, and their relationship to the Caribbean coast reveals how closely linked race and land rights are within discourses of mestizo costeño identity in Bluefields. One of the important things to note here is that Orlando had not yet begun to focus his discussion on land rights. At the time, he was still describing mestizo costeño identity and the relationship between mestizos costeños and other groups on the coast. The narrative of anti-mestizo discrimination, or what Courtney Morris calls “mestizo victimhood,” works to position mestizos as experiencing a specific form of discrimination that other groups do not. Orlando’s discursive strategy is to flatten differences and power differentials between mestizos costeños and Creoles on the coast, a strategy that also works to establish an imagined relationship of equality on the Caribbean coast that becomes unsettled when Afro-descendant and indigenous communities protect their collectively owned land from mestizo occupation. This is more explicitly seen in the next set of discursive elements that are more specifically organized around ideas of land rights and autonomy.

Mestizos Costeños and the Racial Politics of Regional Autonomy

In the previous section I explored how Orlando and Miguel used ideas about mestizaje to articulate mestizo costeño identity. One of the reoccurring strategies I notice in Orlando’s narratives is forging a linkage between mestizo migration to the Caribbean coast and subsequent sanitized intergroup relationships. In this section, I explore how

mestizos costeños' ideas about autonomy help us understand contemporary racial politics of land rights in Bluefields.

Orlando begins to talk about autonomy by discussing the relationship between mestizos costeños and the coast. One of the quotes that most stands out at the beginning of this portion of his discussion is when he says mestizos costeños don't have their own identity. About half an hour into his account of mestizo costeño identity and history, Orlando said that "costeño identity is what unites all the ethnicities. The one who truly makes use of all is the mestizo costeño because he doesn't have his own identity." ("La identidad costeña es lo que une todas las etnias. El verdadero que hace uso de todo es el mestizo costeño porque no tiene identidad propia.") This statement continues to build on his earlier statements of racial and cultural mixture. Earlier in the interview when Orlando says that mestizos have so thoroughly integrated into the Caribbean coast that they have married with individuals of all racial groups, Orlando was beginning to build an argument of racial mixture that is reminiscent of Mexican thinker José Vasconcelos' "cosmic race." I think of Vasconcelos' idea here because of the kind of work racial mixture does in Orlando's narrative. In *The Cosmic Race*, Vasconcelos writes that European empires "committed the sin of destroying those races, while we assimilated them, and this gives us new rights and hopes for a mission without precedent in History." (Vasconcelos 1997, 17) Here, Vasconcelos writes about race mixture as a way of justifying new rights to which mixed-race people are entitled. Orlando's narrative uses the idea of racial mixture to suggest that mestizos costeños do not have their own identity in the way that other racial groups (ie: Creole, Garífuna, Rama, Sumu and Mayagna) have their own identities on the coast. Indeed, he goes as far as to suggest the mestizos costeños are the only ones who can unite these groups because they embody this mixture. He then links this notion of group unity to specific rights through the concept of

autonomy. One of the clearer quotes in which he makes this linkage is when he shares that:

We say that on the Caribbean coast we can do anything if we use the basic principle of autonomy: unity in diversity. But we have to be united on the issues of development and there is a serious problem there.

(Decimos que la costa Caribe podemos hacer cualquier cosa si usamos un principio basico de la autonomia. La unidad en la diversidad. Pero tenemos que estar unidos en los temas de desarrollo y ahí está un problema serio.)

The topic of development projects has been a central issue for the Caribbean coast territories. Law 28 of the Nicaraguan constitution delineates the constitutional basis of regional autonomy and specifically discusses development as a central issue that the communities of the Caribbean coast must be able to lead for themselves. Thus, when Orlando says that “we have to be united on the issues of development,” he is not entirely wrong. As he frequently points out, many development projects have failed to benefit the communities of the Caribbean coast. In the past, he has resigned from positions with organizations and international projects when he has felt that they are not leading to sustainable progress for the coast, focusing instead on more generative projects. (Leon 2009) However, development projects in Nicaragua have not always impacted all racial groups in the same way, often centering the needs of mestizos and rendering invisible the needs of Afro-descendant communities.

When Orlando says that anything is possible on the coast through the “basic principle of autonomy,” he invokes unity as a discursive strategy to erase the divergent ways in which differentially racialized groups experience development projects. He expands on this linkage when he says that

[The coast has] 90% of the resources, 50% of the territory, cultural diversity, but these policies don't incentivize development, only extraction. Mestizos don't escape that. Just because the rest of the country benefits from this doesn't mean we do. ([La costa tiene] 90% de los recursos naturales, 50% del territorio, diversidad cultural, pero estas política no incentivize el desarrollo, solo

la extracción. Y los mestizos no se escapan de eso. Solo porque en el resto del país se beneficia no quiere decir que nosotros también.)

Here, he adds an important part of his narrative: that mestizos costeños do not benefit from certain projects the same way mestizos beyond the Caribbean coast do. He brings it all together in the following:

When we go to the Pacific, they discriminate against us when they see we wear chains and have long hair. Then you return to your land and a black person, even if you're related, will discriminate against you because of your ethnic condition, and saying you don't have rights. Or you find a miskitu and says "You mestizos have nothing to do here." Costeño identity has been lost and now it's a conflict of interests along the lines of "I'm owner of this land and you have no rights here. I'm owner of the resources and you have no rights." And we've eaten shit together. When it's convenient for them, the autonomy process is a solution. When it's convenient for them, they use the territorial governments or communal governments to make decisions but not to empower them. And when it's not convenient, they don't recognize them. The big loser is the mestizo costeño. If you talk with one or another ethnic group, they see us as invaders, as if we don't have rights, the weed in society. The mestizo costeño is a worker, is out at sea, producing on land. There's no difference. There are robbers in every ethnic group, good people and bad people. The more people there are, the more good people and the more bad people.

(Cuando vamos al Pacífico, nos discriminan cuando ven que tengo cadena o pelo largo. Y cuando venís a tu tierra, te encuentras a un negro que te relacionaste y hasta sos familia, discriminandote por tu condición étnica y diciendo que vos no tenés derechos. O te encontrás con un Miskitu que viene y dice "Ustedes los mestizos no tienen nada que hacer aquí." Identidad costeña se ha perdido, es conflicto de intereses: yo soy dueño de la tierra y vos aquí no tenes ningun derecho. Soy dueño de recursos y vos no tenes derechos. Y hemos comido mierda junto. Cuando les conviene el proceso de autonomia es una solucion. Cuando les conviene usan los gobiernos territoriales, a los gobiernos comunales para que tomen decision pero no les dan capacidades. Y cuando no, lo desconecen. El gran perdedor es el mestizo costeño. El mestizo costeño si vos hablas con uno u otra etnia nos ven como invasores, nos ven como que no tenemos derecho, la mala hierba dentro de la sociedad. El mestizo costeño es trabajador, anda en el mar, produce en la tierra. No hay ninguna diferencia. Hay ladrones en todas las etnias, hay gente buena y hay gente mala. Entre mas gente, mas gente mejor or peor.)

This last quote captures what I found to be at the crux of his arguments regarding mestizo costeño history and identity. This quote reveals how Orlando makes the linkages

between mestizo migration and making claims to land rights through the autonomy process. Here he continues to expand the narrative of mestizo victimhood by arguing that mestizos costeños are discriminated against by multiple groups: not only mestizos in the Pacific, but also black and Miskitus (if not indigenous groups more broadly) on the Caribbean coast. Then, he explains that he feels that mestizos costeños are seen as “invaders” that don’t have rights on the coast, although he himself opened the interview by stating that mestizos costeños invaded the Caribbean coast, using the same word. A more important point to notice here is his quick turn from the all-encompassing notion of “rights” to the specific issue of land and resources.

Throughout the interview, when Orlando discussed rights on the Caribbean coast, he almost always meant rights to own land. I interpret this as one of the social linkages that connects the discourse of mestizo costeños to the broader political forces and conditions on the coast. Afro-Caribbean and indigenous communities of the coast have struggled to protect their rights to the Caribbean coast territories, which they have lived on since before Nicaragua was even a nation. The forced military annexation of 1894 incorporated the territory into the bounds of the nation while treating its Afro-descendant and indigenous residents as second-class citizens, a history that has been well excavated and traced by scholars but also local Creole leaders. (Gordon 1998; Hooker 2010; Hooker 2012; Morris 2016; Goett 2017) Thus, this history of anti-black and anti-indigenous violence sanctioned and often led by the Nicaraguan state has not been kept secret or inaccessible. Instead, discourses like that of mestizo victimhood, reject this series of facts in favor of a fictionalized account in which past injustices were abruptly ended through intergroup marriage or cultural mixture. In this way, intergroup marriages, cultural mixture, and the inability to claim “pure” racial ancestry are all discursive elements that

work to obscure or erase the history of dispossession experienced by Afro-descendant and indigenous communities.

Similarly, the idea of “inverted racism” captures this political orientation and work. If the claim of inverted racism (or the more commonly called reverse racism) is that Afro-descendants and/or indigenous communities have the collective power to oppress mestizos, then one important implication of this argument is that Afro-descendants and/or indigenous communities have somehow obtained that collective power. Based on Orlando’s account, it would seem that his answer to this lies in Law 445’s ability to grant communal land titles to Afro-Caribbean and indigenous communities of the Caribbean coast.

This narrative of mestizos costeños is not the only one that emerged in the interviews, although it is certainly reflective of the prevailing ideas and logics I overheard in Bluefields during my time there. In taxi cabs, restaurants, stores, I tried to pay attention to how mestizos in Bluefields articulated themselves and their histories. Orlando’s narrative contains most of the elements and linkages that I heard time and time again. However, as Stuart Hall reminds us, the linkages are not necessary, absolute, pre-determined or for all time. Instead, they are forged under specific conditions and for specific reasons. Some of the ideas in my other interviews help establish another possibility for thinking about mestizos costeños and their relationship to the Caribbean coast and its communities.

“What do we do now?”: Alternative Linkages for Mestizo Costeño Discourse

One significant difference between Orlando and Miguel’s articulations of mestizo costeño history and identity was their approach to land rights on the Caribbean coast. Orlando’s invocation of inverted racism presumed that other groups were encroaching

upon mestizos costeños' rights to land. In contrast, Miguel's account offers a different set of articulations and, therefore, another way to articulate mestizo costeño history and identity. Miguel said,

The current Nicaraguan state is content not solving or addressing the basis of the conflict that is confronting poor peasants against indigenous communities, particularly this concerns who owns the land. How do the rules govern access to land and the activities held on that land? It seems to me that it's been a long process that hasn't stopped of continuous occupation of the coast by peasants and colonistas and some of them, more recent waves, without any titles or legal basis for this occupation. So its an uncontrolled occupation, promoted by the state, sometimes by omission and other times by policy. Clear to me that the state is not really concerned with stopping that process. I would say that implicit support for the occupation of the land on the coast has not changed the perception that the coast still has value in the eyes of the Nicaraguan.

While Miguel recognizes that mestizos costeños are cash-poor, he also attributes responsibility to the state. Miguel describes recent mestizos costeños presence on the coast as a "continuous occupation of the coast by peasants and colonistas." In describing these recent mestizo costeño migrants as "peasants and colonistas," Miguel recognizes that they are both cash-poor while also violating the collective land rights of indigenous communities on the coast. Rather than presume that indigenous communities are violating or negating the rights of mestizos costeños whenever they protect their lands, Miguel articulates mestizo migration to an illegal occupation that is encouraged by the state. This linkage suggests a different set of political implications.

Miguel's narrative recognizes that the state has a continued interest in unsettling the collective claims to land that Afro-descendant and indigenous communities have. This narrative highlights how the Nicaraguan state has a variety of ways in which it is complicit with mestizos costeños' occupation of indigenous lands. In essence, Miguel is linking mestizo migration to broader land grabbing projects in Nicaragua. Geographer Sharlene Mollett offers a similar argument, claiming that colonial legacies of land

usurpation and land grabbing manifest in contemporary politics by shaping development projects throughout Central America's Caribbean coast albeit in varying forms. (Mollett 2016) This linkage, then, does not work to justify mestizo costeños' illegal occupations of Afro-descendant and indigenous territories. Instead, it reveals how mestizos costeños are simultaneously economically disadvantaged while racially privileged enough to escape the legal consequences of violating the collectively held Afro-descendant and indigenous land. At the same time that mestizos costeños are being allowed to violate land laws, black youth on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast are subject to surveillance and extrajudicial state violence, a violence that is both racialized and gendered. (Goett 2011; Goett 2017; Morris 2016) This discrepancy shows how the racial hierarchy in Nicaragua is preserved.

By way of conclusion, I return to some of the central questions about mestizos costeños. Much of the literature on race also delves into examining racial identity. This scholarship takes for granted that racial identity also reveals something about the political orientation or ideas that an individual (or collective) might have. However, this chapter shows that it is not always the case. Both Orlando and Miguel are clear that they identify as mestizos costeños. Both would say that mestizos costeños are mixed-race subjects that reside on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast. And yet, their ideas about mestizo costeños and their politics on the coast are significantly different. In other words, their identity does not fully capture their politics. In order to answer the question about how mestizos costeños think about autonomy, the Caribbean coast and its other racial groups, it was necessary to think beyond how they might identify themselves racially and interrogate what their discourses about themselves and their history tell us about contemporary racial politics in Bluefields.

This exercise in reading these two articulations of mestizo costeño history and identity was useful in making visible Stuart Hall's point that the linkages in an articulation are unnecessary. However, I also want to recall Charles Hale's approach in *Más Que Un Indio*. Hale was interested in providing an account of Guatemalan ladinos that did more than caricature them as villains in the drama of contemporary racial politics. At the end of Orlando's interview, he began to ask what would come of this interview. "How do my people benefit? ...What do we do now?" ("¿Cómo se beneficia mi gente? ...¿Qué hacemos ahora?") Many months after this interview, the idea of answering this question and defusing the time bomb that he used to describe contemporary racialized land politics in Bluefields feels far beyond the scope of this project. Instead, the next chapter explores what the implications of these discourses are for racial politics in Bluefields in the Caribbean coast.

Chapter 4: Mestizos Costeños, Black Autonomy and the Potentials of Identity Politics in Liberal Projects

For weeks after November 8, 2016, media outlets in the United States published op-eds and articles that examined the results of the 2016 presidential election. Most articles referenced identity politics during the candidates' campaigns. Mark Lilla's op-ed in *The New York Times*, "The End of Identity Liberalism," was a particularly forceful indictment of identity politics, reflecting how many commentators felt after the outcome of the election. (Lilla 2016) The general line of critique claimed that the result of the election was a product of an obsessive focus on interests that are too narrowly-tailored to specific "identity groups," such as the frequently discussed bathroom bills that emerged preventing trans people from using the bathrooms that correspond to their gender. Other articles focused on Hillary Clinton's campaign for disingenuously pandering to multiple identity groups: too specific to reach large numbers, too disingenuous to garner true support, and too narrowly focused on people of color to reach the white majority.

Both critiques and users of identity politics seemed to rely on the basic premise that identities matter in politics. Even those that critiqued it often did so by saying that Clinton's loss was due to her disavowal of white, rural, low-income voters. Thus, while many political commentators and academics blamed the framework of identity politics for the outcome of the US Presidential election, they simultaneously reinforced it by using it to identify a group of people that was left unsatisfied with one political party and appeased by the populism of another. These analyses are all eager to examine and classify the electoral population with the goal of understanding the dynamics of which

group voted in which way. In doing so, these arguments take for granted that an identity category is also an identity group, a critique that sociologist Mara Loveman (1999) leverages when questioning why race is “essential.” Loveman’s critique is particularly apt as discourses of identity politics often center race in their conceptions of identity. My research in Bluefields and subsequent analysis suggest that there are more relevant questions waiting to be asked.

The academic literature has explored the complex dynamics within a given identity group. Taking Latinos in the United States for example, social scientists have explored the widely divergent political and social experiences within the group called Latinos in the United States have, explaining why Dominicans in New York might have different political ideologies and practices than Cubans in Miami or Venezuelans in San Francisco.(Affigne, Hu-DeHart, and Orr 2014; Beltrán 2010; García Bedolla 2014) Indeed, this literature is so well-established that even articles in popular newspapers and magazines have examined the extent to which widely different trajectories from Latin America to the United States have shaped the politics of different national groups once they make it to the US. Both in the academy and in the mainstream media, we have been asking the same questions about identity politics for several decades. Instead, I suggest that a more relevant question would build on the work done by previous scholars and ask why and how identity matters. Put another way, what political work does identity perform in a given context?

I conclude this thesis by exploring how the case of mestizos costeños in Bluefields helps us answer this question. I begin by interrogating the claims put forth

about “identity liberalism” and show how my project responds to that. I argue that the point is not merely to claim an identity, but rather to understand the political work that identities and their attendant discourses can do for the bodies that claim them. Then, I turn to the ideas posed by Dolene Miller and Nora Newball in our conversation and show how they reflect one possible iteration of what Charles Mills terms as “black radical liberalism.”

Identity, Liberalism and Politics: Learning from Bluefields

The case of mestizos costeños in Bluefields provides a useful case study to think through the ideas put forth in many emerging critiques of identity as a part of contemporary politics. Lilla’s opinion piece in *The New York Times* claims that recent generations of voters, journalists, educators, and politicians in the United States have relied on identity as a lazy and inadequate way to form their politics while having “shockingly little to say about such perennial questions as class, war, the economy and the common good.” Thus, this first component of the critique of identity politics is that it is a deficient form of politics because it does not engage with the “perennial,” important questions that have historically preoccupied political thought.

The second part of the critique reifies identity politics and reveals how essential it is. Lilla’s opinion piece is one of the clearer pieces to do this. In his op-ed he critiques the whitelash thesis in which he posits that the liberal interpretation of the election says that white voters transformed their economic disadvantage into racial rage, a “whitelash.” He does not offer an explanation for how millions of non-white voters that were also economically disadvantaged did not also connect in the same way to the politics of

“whitelash,” but instead reifies the object of his critique by limiting his analysis to one group. The explanation that he does offer is that these white, rural, economically disadvantaged voters were “not actually reacting against the reality of our diverse America,” but instead “reacting against the omnipresent rhetoric of identity.”

Lilla’s suggestion is to bring about the end of identity liberalism by drawing “from the past successes of pre-identity liberalism,” in other words, to make liberalism great again. He goes on to say that “such a liberalism would concentrate on widening its base by appealing to Americans as Americans and emphasizing the issues that affect a vast majority of them. It would speak to the nation as a nation of citizens who are in this together and must help one another.” This analytical move away from identity makes it impossible to begin grappling with the historical injustices that some groups have experienced in the United States. In the previous chapter, some of the discursive linkages that Orlando made achieve the same end.

This study of mestizos costeños in Bluefields reveals the political implications of identity in political discourses. In Bluefields, the linkage between mestizo migration and a harmonious racial present allows commentators to represent activists that focus on rupturing that discourse as if they are disrupting actual harmony. What black Creole activists like Nora Newball and Dolene Miller are doing is reiterating the historical and present conditions of black Creole communities, allowing us to see why an approach that does not begin with acknowledging these experiences will be an inadequate way forward. What my research on mestizos costeños shows is that, indeed, talking about identity is not enough. This is why activists that pursue identity politics do not simply present and

discuss their identities as if that was the only aspect of their politics. Instead, black women activists have used discourses of identity to map out their politics and articulate them to broader social, historical, and political questions. In this thesis, I chose Stuart Hall's theory of articulation because it allowed me the analytical tools to make visible how identity is mobilized in political discourse in addressing the "perennial questions" that Lilla is concerned are left unattended if the starting point of a discussion is not rooted in comforting white citizens. In the case of mestizos costeños in Bluefields, I was able to find at least two ways in which mestizo costeño identity was linked to different political analyses despite being rooted in similar ideas about mestizo racial identity in Nicaragua's Caribbean coast.

In one articulation, mestizo costeño identity was a way to make claims to land rights. By establishing mestizos costeños as profoundly racially mixed as anyone else on the Caribbean coast could be, Orlando makes the argument that mestizos costeños should have rights to the land protected on the coast. This was the most commonly heard discourse among mestizos costeños, in which identity served to flatten differences in power and to obscure the injustices and violences done to Afro-descendants and indigenous communities on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast. In a less commonly heard articulation, mestizo identity served to show how the Nicaraguan state had produced policies that had not only violated the rights of Afro-descendants and indigenous communities, but was now also including mestizo campesinos in the wake of its contemporary ambitions to stay connected to global capitalist projects. This second critique has the potential to reframe the effects of these global capitalist projects and

show how despite being racially privileged and maintaining the complicity of the state, mestizos costeños experienced the economic pressure that these projects place onto the masses in the global South, economic pressures that Afro-descendant and indigenous communities have felt, navigated, and protested for decades. Given that these articulations exist simultaneously with different orientations, they show Hall's point that articulations need not exist in a specific form even when they are made under the same conditions. I suggest that they also show the potential for political projects that philosopher Charles Mills calls "black radical liberalism," forms that also address the perennial questions mentioned above while beginning with the experiences of black Creole communities.

Black Autonomy & Black Radical Liberalism

In *Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism*, Mills offers a critique of the way liberalism has been practiced thus far. (Mills 2017) He suggests that what has been practiced has been a form of liberalism that has privileged whites and whiteness while exploiting people of color and justifying the multiple forms of violence enacted against them through global white supremacy. Mills critiques theorists of justice, especially John Rawls, who present ideal theory as a tool sufficiently able to deal with the historical injustices that Mills lists and which hundreds of scholars have traced in excruciating detail. In response to these ideal theories of justice, Mills concludes that if the point is to work towards any meaningful idea of justice, then black radical liberalism may be a more productive way forward.

Mills theorizes black radical liberalism as a political philosophy that is “responsive to the realities of black diasporic experiences in modernity” as a way of reorganizing and transforming liberal politics. (203) As such, Mills offers that a black radical liberalism must recognize white supremacy as a constitutive element of liberalism in the United States as a way to begin transforming that system into one that can benefit black Americans as well. Extending this idea to Nicaragua’s Caribbean coast, I interpret the project of black autonomy as one potential form of black radical liberalism.

During my initial conversation with Nora Newball and Dolene Miller, one of the central themes that emerged was their awareness of the extensive role the Nicaraguan state has in shaping the lives of *costeños*. While there are certainly active ways in which the state can shape their experiences, such as fulfilling its duty to title the collectively held Afro-descendant and indigenous lands, there are also the less visible ways, such as when it refuses to arrest mestizos *costeños* that illegally occupy these lands. During my conversation with Newball and Miller at the beginning of the project, one of the aspects that most struck me, then, was their desire to engage with a state that has historically disavowed Afro-descendants on the Caribbean coast. “We’re not asking for more than what the law give us nor for more than what our rights give us, nor more than history recognizes,” Miller explained. Miller and Newball recounted a history that traced how the Nicaraguan state had historically used land grabs to transform communally held lands into national lands that could then be privatized and sold for profit. In recognition of that historical relationship, Newball and Miller contend that “the only way [forward] is for Nicaragua to recognize our rights and let us live in peace.” Newball and Miller both

discussed the rights that the National Assembly guaranteed to their collectively held land. Their analysis recognizes the way the mestizo nation-state has violated the very laws they have passed and, in recognition of that, they are demanding that the government follow its own laws. I read this approach to politics as an example of the kind of black radical liberalism that Mills suggests while keeping in mind that it might depart in some ways.

One key point in thinking about black autonomy on the Caribbean coast as a form of black radical liberalism is figuring out how white supremacy figures into theorizing this strand of Afro-Latin American political thought. In his epilogue, Mills says that a black radical liberalism would begin by recognizing how white supremacy has been constitutive of (racial) liberalism in the United States. In thinking through a black radical liberalism in Nicaragua, I would say that it's important to also take into consideration how projects complicit with white supremacy have also shaped the trajectory of racialized violence. As racial subjects, mestizos in Nicaragua and mestizos costeños more specifically are clear that they identify as racially mixed subjects. One important component of the articulations I traced in chapter 3 was that mestizos costeños are fundamentally mixed-race mestizos. Orlando's narrative goes to significant lengths to establish that mestizos costeños are anything but a single race. In another interview, Doña Luisa recounted an extensive family history in which she included mestizo, Afro-descendant and indigenous background. As such, mestizos costeños and mestizos elsewhere in Nicaragua are not necessarily located in a social position of whiteness. Recognizing that their social position is not necessarily one of whiteness allows us to explore how non-white racial subjects can still produce and align themselves with anti-

black and anti-indigenous politics and practices. As such, whiteness and whiteness studies may not be the most useful way to understand racial domination in a context in which whiteness is not a part of the intellectual and political genealogy of race in which these politics develop. This isn't to say that white supremacy is not present, but rather to suggest that it isn't the only or most useful way in which to understand anti-black and anti-indigenous politics. In the case of Bluefields and throughout Nicaragua, thinking about anti-black and anti-indigenous politics beyond only whites allows us to see how other actors can be complicit with these racial projects, allowing what Mills calls "racial liberalism" to continue enacting violence and exploitation into Afro-diasporic communities well into the 21st century. As such, by expanding the ways in which we might make sense of anti-black and anti-indigenous political projects, we can also begin to formulate an articulation that can begin to more directly address them and work towards a more just future by being more aware of the multiple ways in which violence has worked.

This kind of political project, however, would require the collaboration of mestizos costeños. For decades, mestizos costeños have been the majority group in Bluefields and throughout the Caribbean coast. (Hooker 2009; Hooker 2010; Morris 2012) As such, their interpretation and contribution to local and regional politics has enormous implications for the future of black autonomy and any attempt at racial justice on the coast. A central impetus for this project was trying to explore what kind of ideas about race, justice, land, and autonomy mestizos costeños have in Bluefields. Along the way, one important question that simmered under the surface was if this was a new group

of people that have recently emerged in some way or if this was a new way in which an existing group was expressing itself. Taking into consideration the discourse that I found in my interviews and my interactions during six weeks in the summer of 2016, I suggest that the latter idea seems to best capture what I observed. The men and women that shared their time and ideas with me were very clear that their families have been on the coast longer than the terminology of “mestizo costeño.” Any remaining doubt I have about this would come from an argument regarding the role of phenomenological approach to understanding the emergence of a group. My impression from my interactions and in reviewing interview audio, is that mestizos costeños today would not fundamentally delink themselves from mestizos living on the coast in previous years and, in fact, trace their history and identity to mestizos who lived on the coast in previous years or decades but did not necessarily identify as “mestizos costeños.” One important complication to this is the continuing migration of mestizos into the coast since their identity and politics are likely different from mestizos that have lived on the coast all or most of their lives, while still having the opportunity to significantly impact the development of politics and projects for autonomy. This constitutes a potential agenda for future research.

The intellectual contributions of black Creole women leaders like Nora Newball and Dolene Miller provide important interventions in thinking about the currently existing project of regional autonomy. The discourses produced by mestizos costeños allow us to begin to understand how this ever-growing group understands its relationship both to Creoles in Bluefields and to the Nicaraguan state. These various accounts of

history and politics directly engage the “perennial questions” of class, economics, justice, and education. That much is evident to anyone willing to take their ideas seriously. What I hope this thesis makes clear is that while there is plenty of violence that has been done in the past, there is nothing “necessary, determined, absolute or essential for all time” that should prevent us from ending that violence. Keeping this in mind, I return to the question Orlando posed to me at the end of our interview: “What do we do now?”

Mills’ ideas about a black radical liberalism have been helpful in tying together the promise of racial articulations and the reality that multiple groups are experiencing in Nicaragua’s Caribbean coast today. Visions for justice on the coast would have to grapple with the historical record of anti-black and anti-indigenous violence, while also considering how the Nicaraguan state has had a hand in producing the displacement of mestizos throughout the Pacific and central regions of the country. Likewise, it would also need to take into account that violence has come from more than one source and that the kind of power that different groups have had has been profoundly unequal, requiring all groups to articulate a politics that can grapple with this history while recognizing their multiple positions, privileges, and relationship to power. If the goal is to move towards any form of justice, then identity politics is an indispensable tool in making visible how multiple positions can articulate such political projects.

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