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Intersectional Invisibilization: Black Female Movement Leaders in Mexico and their Private Sphere Resistance

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**INTERSECTIONAL INVISIBILIZATION:
BLACK FEMALE MOVEMENT LEADERS IN MEXICO AND THEIR PRIVATE
SPHERE RESISTANCE**

University of San Francisco

An honors thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the distinction of Honors
in the International Studies Department in the College of Arts and Science

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT, KEY TERMS, AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	2
INTRODUCTION	3
LITERATURE REVIEW	6
RACE.....	6
MULTICULTURALISM AND POST-RACE IDEOLOGY.....	10
GENDER IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS	14
RACE, GENDER, CLASS AND FEDERAL INVOLVEMENT.....	18
METHODOLOGY	
METHODS OF DATA AND ANALYSIS.....	22
LIMITATIONS.....	23
DATA ANALYSIS	
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS.....	24
FINDINGS:	
SYSTEMIC POVERTY.....	27
GENDERED INEQUITY.....	29
FEMALE LEADERSHIP AND REPRESENTATION.....	32
CONCLUSIONS	36
BIBLIOGRAPHY	38

ABSTRACT

International attention drew to Afro-Mexican individuals in 2015, when the Mexican inter-census survey first allowed Black Mexican people to self-identify as Afro-Mexican. The Black movement in Mexico revolving around recognition rather than liberation had been stirring in Coastal regions for decades prior, fueled by the work of incredible activists across the gender spectrum. However, the representation of such activists in public discourse is largely male. In analyzing this particular movement, the importance of intersectional theory becomes apparent, in unpacking both gendered and racialized forms of hierarchy and invisibility. By exploring the intersections between social movement and social suffering, as well as the immutable characteristics and structures contributing to dominant narratives in public discourse, one can use the case study of Black Recognition in Mexico to unpack structural violence on both the geo-political and the grass-roots level.

KEY TERMS

Invisibilization, Anti-Black Racism, Misogyny, Afro-Mexican, Black, Social Movement

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INTRODUCTION

Few communities are invisibilized in the same way as the Black population in Mexico: on political, geographic, economic, and social levels. This invisibilization is reflected in the fact that Mexico and Chile are currently the only two countries in Latin America that do not constitutionally recognize their Afro-descendent populations. Female leaders have been instrumental in the movement for Black recognition, yet are not publicly recognized for their contributions, as can be seen in racialized social movements throughout the Americas. Despite this, scholarship recognizes that for social movements involving immutable or cultural characteristics, such as race, the intersectional representation of the population is imperative in the movements' success.

While constitutional recognition will be achieved in the 2020 census, the earliest form of federal recognition of the Black Mexican population came in 2015. The 2015 Intercensal estimate allowed for Black Mexicans to self-identify for the first time, revealing that 1.38 million, or 1.2% of the entire population self-identify as Afro-descendent. According to Miguel Cervera, director general of sociodemographic statistics for Mexico's census bureau (INEGI), the purpose of this survey is to prepare for the 2020 national census, and to register demographic "changes" (qtd. in De Castro, 2015). The sample survey revealed well-established communities of Afro-descendent Mexicans, most of whom are concentrated in the states of Veracruz, Oaxaca, and Guerrero along the Costa Chica, in which Afro-descendent peoples self-identified as 3.28% of the population of Veracruz, 6.5% of population in Guerrero, and 4.95% of the population in Oaxaca (El Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, 2015). Activist Israel Reyes claims that

this survey does not reflect the entire Black Mexican population, based on the fluidity of Black identity and language. He says,

“Of course there are more than 1.4 million if they had taken into account the local ways of saying Black, such as “moreno” or “harocho”. We’d be sure there are more than 1.4 million Black population than the authorities mention. For the next census in 2020, we have to convince the authorities to use the local names that people use to call themselves, such as “harocho”, “moreno”, or “mascogo”. And finally the importance of this is that these numbers need to translate themselves into public policies, into affirmative action, into the full exercise of the rights and for these rights to be enshrined into the Mexican constitution” (qtd. in Duran, 2016).

The invisibilization of the Afro-Mexican population is largely due to the Mexican identity of racial mixture, or “mestizaje,” which emerged from the 1910 Mexican revolution and claimed the Mexican independent national identity as a blend of European and Indigenous ancestry. The terms “Mestizo” and “Mestizaje” refer to the project of racial mixture between European and Indigenous peoples that happened throughout Latin America as a result of Spanish and Portuguese colonization. This perception of mixture, however, does not recognize the Afro-descent population of Mexico as having membership, due to the post-racial ideology associated with “mestizaje.” Once slavery was abolished, many freed Black Mexicans joined the insurgent forces against the Spanish, and yet still did not receive distinction in the foundational constitution. Many freed slaves settled in the south, mainly the Costa Chica, which is why a majority of the Black Mexican population is concentrated there today (De Castro, 2015).

Post-race ideologies in Mexico are fortified by the political and economic relationships between Mexico and the United States. In the Spanish colonization of Mexico, roughly 200,000 African slaves were brought to boost the labor force. The Spaniards created a racialized caste system placing themselves at the top and African-descendants at the bottom (De Castro, 2015). Slavery was abolished in Mexico in 1829 by the Guerrero decree, increasing nationalist and

racial tensions with slaveholders among the Anglo-Americans. After the Texas Revolution ended in 1836, the Constitution of the Republic of Texas was amended to legalize slavery. Mexicans have carried this early abolition as a form of superiority to the otherwise domineering and oppressive United States, where anti-Black racism is seen as more public. However, this invisibilizes the struggle and marginalization of Black people in Mexico, which persists based on the foundational caste system, where the national dialogue is along the lines of “we can’t be racist because there are no Black people.”

On the international level, the United Nations named 2011 the year of the African Descendent, bringing attention to various diasporic communities - including Afro-Mexicans. Jerry (2013) identifies this year as a backdrop for the national conversation around Afro-Mexican identity, despite the presence of localized Black activism for over 20 years. Additional international attention was drawn to the Black Mexican experience in 2013, after Malcolm Shabazz, grandson of Malcolm X, was beaten to death in Mexico City (De Castro, 2015). This international pressure and focus encouraged Oaxaca and Guerrero both recognize their Afro-descendent populations as distinct ethnic categories in their state constitutions. Despite their constitutional and physical presence on the Costa Chica, Black Mexicans still have yet to obtain the same federal constitutional presence, prohibiting community members from accessing state services and programs aimed at alleviating conditions of poverty and violence. Cervera claims that “Afro-Mexicans have always been included in past surveys, but were never given the option to identify themselves as such” (qtd. in De Castro, 2015), however this statement works to further invisibilize the Afro-descendent population as blending into preexisting ethnic categories.

With the history of the Black Mexican fight for recognition in mind, I seek to answer the questions: what are the complexities in grass-roots mobilization around immutable characteristics such as race and gender? How does the social suffering hermeneutic and intersectional theories give us a better idea of the Afro-Mexican movement, and social movements in general, especially the transition between grassroots and political activism? To frame my analysis and findings the following literature review is broken into individual framings of race, gender, and class in the context of the Black and Mexican experiences, to display the unique power of women in spaces of social movements and community organizing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the following review, I will analyze and define the Black movement within the Mexican context and differentiate it from other African diasporic experiences in the Americas. In addition, in studying these shifts with a gendered perspective, I must recognize the invisibilization of Black and Latinx female movement leaders throughout the Americas, and the power of women in creating peace at a grass-roots level due to their normalization in the domestic sphere and exclusion from the public sphere. Finally, I will frame the intersectional webbing that constructs the Black female experience and identity within the context of Mexico, and the physical and spacial impoverishment of communities of color through an oppressive relationship with federal power.

RACE

In the analysis of racialized movements, I am using Paul Gilroy's (1993) theory of race in *The Black Atlantic* as a point of departure. He signifies that race is fluid, and both ethnically and socially constructed. In addition, Gilroy highlights that race is both transnational and

intercultural, and resistance to racism is a shared diasporic experience (Gilroy, 1993). This definition indicates that the social construction of a Black identity in Mexico, as well as the resistance to anti-Black racism, is both vastly different from and intrinsically linked to other Black experiences within the Americas. Mexico's economic and political positionality is unique, especially given the geographic relationship to the United States, and the unique history of both Spanish and United States colonialism and neocolonialism. While the shared history of Spanish colonialism links the experience to fellow former-colonized countries in the Americas, the Black experience is not identical.

Like similar movements sharing diasporic and colonial histories, Black identity in Mexico has manifested itself in the invisibilization of Black Mexican people as well as the hyper-visibility of their presence in public spheres as "other," aligning with W.E.B. Du Bois's theory of double consciousness being a universal narrative for those with a common African diasporic lineage (Du Bois, 1903). In Jerry's (2013) research, his own Blackness was treated as "other" throughout Oaxaca, while trying to locate Black communities with whom to interview about their experiences. Despite communicating that he is from California, he was continuously equated to darker-skinned people attempting to immigrate to the United States from Central America. He was told to continue further to find communities of Afro-descendent people, never coming across a group that self-identified as "Afro." His experience reflects internalized anti-Black racism among Black people in Mexico, as well as the hyper-visibility of Black individuals as "other."

Jerry's experience highlights a key element in the Afro-descendent experience in Mexico - that locales do not use "Afro" to identify themselves. Jerry furthers his analysis by unpacking

the terms “African descendent,” “Negro,” “Moreno,” and “Afro-Mexicano/a/x,” all of which carry various signifiers. Using “African descendent” connotes a historical shared experience, in a way that forces commonality on those who do not acknowledge or recognize Africa as part of their lineage and/or daily experience. “Negro,” meaning “Black,” and “Moreno,” meaning “Dark,” are the terms most commonly used among social movements and activists when referencing themselves and fellow community members. Jerry uses the term “Black” in his own work when “referencing individuals or communities that have shared a common experience of racialization due to their perceived racial similarities and are more and more adopting this term... to project a certain politicized identity” (p. 4). In my own research, I use the term “Afro-Mexican” in academic contexts in which the Black population is referenced using that term, and have chosen to use the term “Black” to identify this population in the social movement context, and “Afro-descendent” or “Afro-Latinx” when comparing groups of African-descendent populations throughout the Americas.

While I began my research using the term “Afro-Mexican,” Jerry (2013) points to this term as signifying inclusion in a larger state project, without holding the state accountable for their role in the racialization of the Black population. He says the term was, “imposed upon communities from above, due to the fact that (other) terms can implicate the state in social histories and processes of racialization” (p. 3). The conflict in terminology and identifying characteristics remains central in debates between scholars and localized activists. Black identity and culture is also fluid, beyond being perceived as Afro-descendants. Tulia Serrano Arellanes, a council member in the predominantly Black town of Santiago Llano Grande identifies that Black identity is beyond a shared African heritage, but is a cultural identity. She says,

“There’s more to being Afro-Mexican than just how you look. Identifying yourself as Black goes beyond the color of your skin, goes beyond a race issue. It’s really more to do, or as much to do with the culture, and also whether you had a Black grandmother or Black ancestor, then people feel that they are Black, but they may not look it” (qtd. In Duran, 2016).

Using the term “Afro-Mexican” raises the issue that many Black Mexican people do not identify as Afro-descendent, due to the erasure and invisibilization of African history and identity across generations. Despite this, as Arellanas identifies, many identify as Black due to cultural circumstances. The imposition of state labels without consulting localized activists and peoples allows the state to maintain and invisibilize racial hierarchies, and perpetuates a divide between scholars and activists both working in the field of Black liberation and culture in Mexico. A Black female teacher in Oaxaca confirms Arellanas, in referencing her students and their cultural identity. She says, “they themselves call themselves “Black”, the older generation uses the term “Moreno” which means “dark, or dark skinned”, but the word that they do not use at all is “Afro-Mexican”. That is an academic term that is being introduced from outside. It is not being used in local currency at all” (Duran, 2016).

The invisibilization of Afro-Latinxs and Afro-Mexicans as part of a larger state project is best reflected through the idea of “mestizaje.” It is a fundamental point of departure in analyzing modern racial relations, as it is touted to homogenize racial experience and invisibilize the Black and Indigenous struggles that persist within each respective community. Despite legacies of state domination for both Indigenous and Black populations, their social movements have formed differently as have the demands for collective rights. In “Indigenous Inclusion/Black Exclusion: Race, Ethnicity and Multicultural Citizenship in Latin America,” Hooker (2005) reflects on the disparities in experience between Afro-Latinx communities and Indigenous communities in

fighting for collective rights and state recognition. While both are marginalized by white populations, they carry different representation in the multicultural citizenship debate and representation in the “mestizaje” ideology. Hooker claims this is because Indigenous peoples are “better positioned than most Afro-Latinos to claim ethnic group identities separate from the national culture and have therefore been more successful in winning collective rights” (p. 285).

Afro-Mexican anthropologist Mara Alfaro confirms Hooker’s theory on Indigenous and Afro-descendent disparities in the Mexican context. She says,

“In Mexico we don’t want to admit that we are racist. But just like with indigenous people, we do treat Black people differently because of their color. And I’m afraid we treat them as someone who has less value. We completely deny the fact that Black people are our third root after the Spanish and Indigenous. But many of us do have African heritage too. I do, for example. But we think there are only the two roots” (qtd. In Duran, 2016).

The diasporic experience of Afro-Latinos and Afro-Mexicans is disjointed, where their African “roots” were invisibilized during the slave trade, ignored in classroom dialogue, and rejected from the political sphere. While cultural pride and unity is present in the Black Mexican community, a lack of education about Afro-descendent history and lack of an indigenous language or “mother tongue” inhibits legitimacy within existing state parameters. To counteract these parameters, women have been instrumental in uniting the populus to call for racial and cultural recognition, despite the post-racial ideology present in national discourse.

MULTICULTURALISM AND POST-RACE IDEOLOGY

Da Costa (2014) looks at post-racial ideology in Brazil, especially regarding the ideas of mestizaje and democracy as contributing to the invisibilization of communities of color, rather than to help them. By defining post-racism as an “ideology,” Da Costa works to address the hierarchies and oppression maintained by rejecting race and by imposing systems of equality

rather than equity, which would match the needs and reparations necessary for groups of people based on how they articulate it rather than a blanket response that treats everyone “equally” despite systemic models of inequality. The Americas, he says, display racial relations differently throughout, congruent to our understanding of each state as having a unique history and positionality, while a commonality remains “discourses and practices that include race/color-blindness, the denial or minimization of racism as an issue, persistent forms of anti-Blackness, and assertions that racial mixture and/or multiracialism can ameliorate the unequal effects of racial difference” (Da Costa, 2014, p.496). He claims the post-racial ideology is a “strategy of power,” reinforcing the Foucaultian idea of discipline and oppression through development policy, seeing as development policy reflects racial and societal relations. Da Costa defines “post-racial ideologies” as:

“those forms of thought, discourse, and action that evade, delegitimize, and seek to eliminate racial differences and their effects from the focus of academic scholarship, activist struggle, public debate, and state policy. Post-racial ideologies operate through racialized forms of power while simultaneously claiming the non-significance of race.” (p. 496)

It is important to recognize how this definition adopts post-racial ideology as a strategy for power, in maintaining racial hierarchies, and thus social, political, and economic hierarchies within a Foucaultian framework of discipline. While Da Costa focused his analysis on the Brazilian experience, this definition is present in the way Mexican individuals see themselves as part of “mestizaje” - which invisibilizes the experience of the Black population and perpetuates the oppression of the Indigenous population in the process.

In contrast to the post-racial ideology, a multiculturalist ideology and policy highlights heterogeneity through distinction, allowing for different populations to receive different forms of

aid based on better-calculated needs. Paschel (2016) identifies the heterogeneity of plurinational and multicultural movements in Brazil and Colombia as central to their respective Black liberation movements. Of these movements she says,

“(they) disrupted prevalent state discourses, which had denied the existence of racism and downplayed these countries’ cultural heterogeneity for decades. Nationalist narratives in these cases had been based on the notion of *mestizaje* - the idea that biological mixture and cultural hybridity between European, Indigenous, and African peoples - had given way to a racially egalitarian and homogenous society. The official state discourse was that these countries had overcome their sordid histories of slavery and colonization to create racial paradises of sorts... Black activists were often accused of importing racism from elsewhere” (p. 2).

As seen in the racialized discussion in 2005 regarding Memín Penguín and U.S./Mexican relations, Black activists in Mexico were accused of importing racism from the United States as part of a nationalist rhetoric (Figueroa and Tanaka, 2016). Mexican and U.S. scholars and public figures engaged Memín Penguín and Black identity in heated debate. Velazquez highlighted the ignorance of the implications of racism (qtd. in Figueroa and Tanaka, 2016), and that when the Black population is invisible, the racism they endure is also invisible. Lomnitz (2005) references that this debate is rooted in U.S. and Mexican relations, in which “mestizaje” conquers racism and contrasts the “Anglo-American penchant for genocide, apartheid, and Jim Crow.” Mexican public figure Enrique Krause claimed that Mexican treatment of African slaves was better than that of the United States, “in Mexico in contrast to what happens in the United States, we have treated Blacks in a kinder way (qtd. in Figueroa and Tanaka, 2016 p. 519). This comparison is rooted in anti-U.S. and Mexican nationalist rhetoric, to prove superiority in the racial arena after a legacy of economic and political marginalization. However, the reaction further oppresses and invisibilizes the Black population in Mexico. This aligns with the post-race ideology and sense

of color blindness implicated by Mexico, as a monocultural and monoethnic entity, where the impoverishment and exclusion of Black communities is somehow their fault.

In the Mexican context, exclusion emerges from how societies throughout Latin America were structured under Spanish colonial rule. Spaniards initially created 2 republics, one for themselves and one for Indigenous peoples. Black labor was considered part of the Spanish republic, as Afro-descendent slaves were considered Spanish property rather than an independent group of peoples (Jerry, 2013). This discredited the Black population from being recognized as independent, while invisibilizing and erasing their culture, reflecting the origins of modern value of Blackness in Mexico.

Given the proximity of Mexico to the United States, Black activists are accused of specifically importing racism from the U.S. by individuals who hold nationalist and post-race ideologies. The history of U.S./Mexican relations of domination, colonization, and neocolonialism through neoliberal development policy worked to establish a sense of pride in having a race-free discourse, since the racial discourse in the United States is incredibly public. Figueroa and Tanaka (2016) identify this as the internalization of “mestizaje” ideology to deny racial inequality, since “mestizaje” identifies the national as mixed-race and homogenous. This does not take into account the state’s history of racializing peoples and spaces.

In reference to racializing space and the process of invisibilizing disparities, Goldberg (2002) identifies multicultural celebration as superficial and color blind, without active reparations for racialized state formation. He does this by using a theoretical framework for analyzing “racelessness” or what Da Costa (2014) would call “post-racial ideology,” and how race and gender both contribute to the formation of the modern state. Racelessness is a process of

assimilation that does not take into account the historical contexts of racial oppression, and how culturalist conversations about the modern state absolve the state of racial exclusion. Rejecting the formation of the state, as Goldberg would advise against, is detrimental in understanding the modern state and the ways in which resistance movements have constructed in recent years.

GENDER IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Scholarship indicates that state powers trend towards not only invisibilizing the Black experience, but also the female. Similarities among female experiences across the Americas in racialized social movements can be seen from the United States to Brazil. The similarities encompass a private-sphere power unique to women, sometimes referred to as “kitchen table politics,” given patriarchal public-sphere exclusion. This exclusion allows for female-centric leadership on a grass-roots level in dealing with issues of structural violence such as racism, where male-centric leadership in peace studies often appears at the institutional level (Whitworth, 2004). This ability to mobilize and fuel movements with a bottom-up approach is especially important for women of color in feminist movements (Aquino, 2002) as well as racialized movements (Perry, 2013, Taylor, 2016, Taranto, 2017) due to their intersectional exclusion in the public sphere due to both their race and gender.

Despite the uniquely female power of organization on the grass-roots level, the dominant narrative of racialized social movements throughout the Americas is focused on the male experience. For example, the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States focuses on the dominant narrative of the unjust incarceration and murder of young Black men, and charismatic Black men are dominantly portrayed as the leaders of the movement. In actuality, the movement

was created by queer female activists Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi. In Garza's (2014) own words,

“Straight men, unintentionally or intentionally, have taken the work of queer Black women and erased our contributions. Perhaps if we were the charismatic Black men many are rallying around these days, it would have been a different story, but being Black queer women in this society (and apparently within these movements) tends to equal invisibility and non-relevancy” (p. 4).

Garza highlights the invisibilization of Black women within Black movements, and in her case, queer people as well. This point highlights the necessary intersectional lens of analysis and the recognition of heterogeneity within contextualizing social movements.

In the U.S., a primary example of Latina leadership invisibilization can be seen in the United Farmworkers Movement (UFW). Co-founder of the movement, Dolores Huerta, worked tirelessly to unite individuals and families to protect their health and labor rights while also promoting feminist, peace, and environmental causes. Despite her breadth of experience, she is often overshadowed by the charismatic figure César Chávez, even though she was the one to coin the infamous phrase related to the UFW, “Si Se Puede.” García (2008) states,

“While Chávez represented the public and spiritual face of the farm workers’ struggle symbolized by marches or what he called *peregrinaciones* or pilgrimages and physical fasts, Huerta represented the nuts and bolts of the movement. Huerta proved indispensable on the picket line and in keeping up the morale of the workers. She was especially critical in getting more women involved in the strike and through their influence keeping the struggle focused on Chávez’s key principle of nonviolence... Her courage, tenacity, and unwillingness to be intimidated by the all-male growers led to the final victory of the union and the signing of contracts with the agribusiness” (Garcia, 2008 p. xviii).

Garcia highlights Huerta’s power in mobilizing individuals and creating a sense of community and morale. This work was vital to the success of the UFW, yet her lack of recognition or public

attention is consistent with that of fellow female movement leaders, especially for Latinas, Chicanas, and other women of color.

In the Mexican context, conversations around marginalized female populations and feminist movements are excluded from public discourse due to the fact that they are mobilized by women and for women in public spaces they do not traditionally occupy. An example of this is with the female-led organizations responding to feminicide¹ in Ciudad Juarez, comprised of mothers, friends, and family members of the victims of femicide and survivors of domestic violence. Pineda-Madrid (2011) recognizes the Mexican authorities refusal and failure to investigate cases of femicide and domestic violence as a form of gender violence and discrimination. This is a public opposition to women's public expression of pain, given misogynist idea that women, especially the poor women of color who were targeted as victims of femicide, do not belong in the public sphere. Rosa Linda Fregoso noted, "although the murdered women were indeed targeted for their gender, perhaps even more significant are the racial and class hierarchies that constitute their identities as women" (qtd. In Pineda-Madrid, 2011 p. 109). Pineda-Madrid pushes the idea of public exclusion further with the concepts of "public man" and "public woman" in the context of feminicide protests, calls for justice, and female-led social movement. She says,

"The Mexican government's reaction to the women's public expression of their pain has been sharply negative. They have employed one of the oldest strategies in history to discredit the women involved. They have referred to each of these women as a "public woman," a term intended to cause damage. By sharp contrast, being a "public man" carries a highly positive connotation. A public man is generative of the economy, the culture, the democracy, and so forth, in short, an ideal man. A public woman in analogous to a prostitute. Being labeled or identified as a "public woman" (participating in the public marches and protests organized by *Ni Una Más*) is dangerous not only

¹ "Feminicide" and "femicide" both refer to the "murder of females because they are female" (Pineda-Madrid, 2011 p. 11). However, "feminicide," like "genocide," indicates systemic violence based on power structures while "femicide," like "homicide," references individual cases.

because it advances the supremely undemocratic position of excluding women from participation in public life in the polis but also because it serves to justify violence against and the killing of women who are out in public” (Pineda-Madrid, 2011 p. 116).

In this, Pineda-Madrid highlights that in order for women to exist in the public sphere, they cannot adopt a dissident or powerful role. This reflects the patriarchal structuring of society which pins women as mothers, or excludes them to the private-sphere role of familial foundation rather than public-sphere leaders. Licenciada Teresa Lagos puts this idea best in the following passage,

“Society places on women a responsibility that we do not ask for. Submission, abnegation and a rejection of desires is expected of us because a man decided that the family is the foundation of society and that the woman is the foundation of the family. What happens when you remove the foundation from the foundation?” (qtd. In Arce, 2018).

Lagos raises a key point, that women serve as the foundation of the family in patriarchal societies, and the family is the unit of analysis in public discourse. For publically active women, their visibility outside of the family context threatens that very patriarchal structure. In the case of women organizing to end femicide in Ciudad Juárez, they are mothers, friends, and family members of the victims, calling to end further structural violence to poor women of color working in factories along the U.S./Mexican border, also known as Maquilas or Maquiladores. They united in the private sphere to bring a united front to the public sphere.

Cycles of poverty and violence against women in border-city factories are directly related to neoliberal development policy imparted from the United States. Most factories employ poor, darker-skinned women, because they are viewed as more docile and less likely to question authority. The systemic violence towards these women and the negative reaction to their public sphere resistance allows for the perpetrators of violence to live with impunity, which allows the

cycle of violence to continue (Pineda-Madrid, 2011). This struggle exemplifies the connections between poverty, race, gender, and U.S./Mexican relations to unpack the complexities in grass-roots mobilization around immutable characteristics such as race and gender.

RACE, GENDER, CLASS AND FEDERAL INVOLVEMENT

While the Black experience in Mexico shares similarities with that of other countries in the Americas, the socio political and economic history of Mexico manifest themselves in unique ways. These programs work in a contradictory manner to both aid and displace Black and Indigenous populations, while also working to both eliminate and perpetuate the poverty, instability, vulnerability, and violence of the regions most inhabited by these populations.

Poverty heavily impacts the rural areas that host most communities of color in Mexico, introducing the intersectional framework of class as well as the idea of racialized space. Scholarship refers to the formation of rural communities of color as “regions of refuge,” “spatially constructed belongings,” and the racialization of space, in which peoples were excluded from nation building through physical exclusion from urban space, and the ways in which communities self-identify based on their geographic location (Aguierre Beltrán, 1967, Perry, 2013). The physical and economic exclusion from urban spaces contributes to existing conditions of impoverishment in communities of color, while systemic policing, violence, and neoliberal development policy allows those conditions to persist (Mora, 2017). In analyzing the Black experience in the Americas, Mexico is unique given its proximity to the United States, and the neoliberal and neocolonial development policies imposed by the United States, including the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which effectively bankrupt Mexico’s existing agricultural industry. The interplay between Mexican and U.S. politics heavily impact

marginalized communities, yet Mexican domestic policy pushes this further by allowing the criminalization of poverty and of Black and brown communities through dispossession and exclusion. In addition, when domestic policies seek to alleviate poverty, it is framed as the fault of community members rather than a fault of the state, creating the false logic of a “culture of poverty” (Mora, 2017 p. 74). In this, the state participates in a practice of invisibilization, in which it is absolved of responsibility in forming the racial structures that contribute to persistent impoverishment.

The Mexican federal program, *Prospera*, is an example of state action that labels poverty as a cultural flaw, taking the responsibility of poverty alleviation away from the state and putting it onto marginalized individuals. Mora (2017) refers to the social program as targeting “sectors of the population labeled problematic for development” (p. 75). The program identified the nuclear family as the root of violent behavior, and transferred funds to women heads of households in exchange for maintaining certain criteria for the health and education of those in their households. The government diagnostic of poverty was that these communities do not know how to adequately care for themselves and their families, rather than to take governmental responsibility for the marginalization and oppression of specialization and of racial relations. With this program, the government is attempting to “re-educate” the poor, while dehumanizing the population it seeks to help (Mora, 2017 p. 75). In this framing, it is the women in marginalized conditions who are responsible for the alleviation of poverty rather than the state, furthering their burden and marginalization. Without federally acknowledging the existence of a Black population, it is difficult to see the impacts of *Prospera* on Afro-descendent communities

in particular. This is why federal recognition through differentiation is important, to be able to measure the needs and to recognize the activism of racially marginalized communities.

Many Mexican scholars choose to identify the marginalization of communities of color as solely an issue of class, rather than incorporating the intersection of race that systemically keeps these communities economically marginalized. For example, the esteemed Mexican writer and political activist, Carlos Monsiváis Aceves, has richly critiqued the state's perpetuation of poverty in Mexico throughout his career. During the period of debates around *Memín Pinguín*, he interpreted the comic's structure to be gendered and class-based, completely ignoring the racial component to social relationships between the characters. He says, "the gaze is not racist. The central theme of the comic is not the 'burned' skin but social class. *Memín* is ridiculed but not excluded, and the jokes are the predictable ones: what then can be called 'racist' about it?" (qtd. In Figueroa and Tanaka, 2016 p. 526). While class is an important unit of analysis in popular culture icons and debates, scholars must recognize an intersectional approach to analyze *all* power structures contributing to character portrayals and subversive messaging.

Aside from *Prospera*, Mora (2017) frames other federal political and economic behavior within a racialized context. While she centers her analysis around a particular act of state-sponsored violence towards a group of Indigenous students, rather than members of the Black community, she highlights the contradictory purposes and applications of state programming with racialized groups. Mexican state entities use violent methods to repress the organized criminal activity occurring in economically and racially marginalized areas without acknowledgment of and reparation to the histories of state-sponsored economic and political

activity that impoverished the region in the first place - directly leading to the impoverishment and desperation of peoples that result in violent organized crime. Mora (2017) says,

“the very logic behind neoliberal social development policies - designed to combat extreme poverty in particular regions of (Mexico) - that generates a racialized effect through the devaluation of the lives of the targeted populations, specifically those categorized as incapable of breaking the intergenerational cycles of cultural and economic marginalization... These tendencies lead to new processes of securitization² of economic activities that, in turn, racialize bodies as part of the state’s ‘battle’ against organized crime” (p. 71).

In this passage, Mora identifies that the responsibility of the state to care for state members is transferred to groups of people that the state has already marginalized on the basis of race, gender, and class. This represents a form of disciplinary regime, which has manifested itself as federal policy under the guise of development and public safety, in order to maintain racial, gendered, and economic hierarchies. This is an example of Foucault’s (1975) theory on discipline, in which the state uses development policy to oppress the working class and maintain social hierarchies. Using Foucault to frame an intersection of class, race and gender in the Black movement as well as the Mexican socio economic and political context, this movement can be holistically analyzed.

The literature I’ve gathered here is an effort to provide a space for Black women in the context of Mexico and a uniquely positioned liberation movement. Using the historical, social, economic, and political contexts provided by existing literature, I have laid groundwork for a platform, from which the female leaders of the Afro-Mexican and Black liberation movement can share their goals, experiences, and truths. Through accurate representation of the disproportionate ways in which Black Mexican women are burdened by economic, gendered,

² “Securitization” in Mora’s context references turning “certain socio political spheres of society into a security issue” (Mora, 2017 p. 71) Original idea of “securitization” is credited to (Buzan, Waever, de Wilde, 1998).

and racialized hierarchies, and through including those experiences in public discourse, a holistic and heterogeneous movement can emerge - and uplift - all members of the Black population of Mexico, rather than just the male sector.

METHODOLOGY

METHODS OF DATA AND ANALYSIS

The literature review above reveals existing scholarship regarding feminism, Mexican identity and political economy, post-race ideology and multiculturalism in a Latin American context, and Afro-Latinx identity. The most important revelation here, is that rarely a discourse that connects these fields to identify the experience of Black Mexican women, especially female leaders in the Afro-Mexican movement.

I will use discourse analysis as my primary form of data. I will look into prominent social movement websites, homepages, sponsors, and publications to see what discourse they choose to share, and the similarities and differences across those lines of dialogue. I will especially focus on how census recognition has changed the tone and goals of each organization in order to identify patterns within the Afro-Mexican movement as a whole. When used in unison, discourse analysis, media analysis and personal interviews with both male and female movement leaders will help me to operationalize the ideas and intersectionalities of Black liberation movements in the Americas, Mexican multiculturalism, post-race ideology, and feminism.

Given the existing scholarship and gap in reference to the experience, needs, and leadership of Black Women in Mexico, my methodology is focused on unearthing those experiences and providing an academic platform through which to share them. In this, I asked

myself, what platforms do they already have? Universal platforms for sharing knowledge that these leaders have identified are blogs, social movement homepages/publications, and small publications highlighting local events and community gatherings. Because of the invisibilization of women in peacemaking and change-making process, given their private sphere power in community organizing, I turned to their blogs to find preliminary demands, and attempted to contact as many writers and leaders as possible.

I will use discourse analysis as a form of data to look at gendered relations within blogs, foreign media sources, and publications, as well as the representation of female leaders and issues impacting female members of the Black community in Mexico, such as access to comprehensive sexual education and addressing femicide and feminicide. In order to see where these issues are given a platform, I will look at who wrote those articles, and whether or not they are considered mainstream publications. In addition, I will personally interview as many movement leaders as possible, both male and female, to see what they believe are the next steps in Black female liberation, and what gaps in literature and public discourse they have identified. In addition, I will look at interviews with these leaders to see where their representation and their verbatim has already been published and publicized, and where it has not.

LIMITATIONS

My research is limited physically, culturally, and linguistically. My cultural and linguistic limitations are centered in the fact that I am a caucasian student from the United States who does not speak Spanish as my first language. I was raised in Washington State - one of the farthest states from the U.S./Mexican border, and am thus investigating the literature gap as an outsider. I

had the additional limitation of time constraints, as I had roughly 3.5 months to complete this project start to finish, and would love more time to push each theme further.

DATA ANALYSIS

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

To unpack the the Black Mexican movement and role of women in the transition between grassroots and political activism, I will use the Social Suffering Hermeneutic, Intersectional Theory, and the Politics of Difference. These various frameworks work in concert to unpack layers of structural violence identified in the literature review, regarding race, gender, and class in the Mexican context.

The Social Suffering Hermeneutic, outlined by Pineda-Madrid (2011), pushes the idea of a cultural hermeneutic further, to analyze situations of social suffering as a text. In her example, she uses femicide in Ciudad Juárez as a text, using the following guidelines to form her analysis:

1. Identifying the praxeological nature of suffering, or naming the suffering
2. Identifying the presence of interests in persisting conditions of the suffering
3. Connecting societal problems to personal narratives of suffering
4. Identifying the cultural representations and imaginaries that allow this suffering to persist

In the case of the Black female experience in Mexico, I will follow the same guideline of analysis using the information gathered in my literature review to frame my findings. While the

case of femicide in Ciudad Juárez is an explicit form of direct violence, the invisibilization of female movement leaders and dismissal of public displays of pain and activism are also suffering.

The praxeological nature, or name of the suffering I have identified is at the intersection of anti-Black racism and misogyny. The greater concepts of misogyny and anti-Black racism both work to undercut social movements and perpetuate the patriarchal and racial structures of Mexican culture.

Those with interests in maintaining the conditions of anti-Black racism and misogyny include European or white-passing Mexican residents, men, public officials, and those living in the United States. When people living in the U.S. interact with systemic social suffering in Mexico, it is easy to distance oneself and consider it a local issue. However, the relationship between the United States and Mexico on economic and political levels make U.S. residents complicit in the economic suffering that harms women and darker-skinned communities through product consumption, and governmental influence in national politics and neoliberal development policies. U.S. culture carries similar social imaginaries about women and race, in which women who fight for racial liberation alongside male counterparts are reserved to behind the scenes roles, or categorized as second-class citizens, where men are “fighting the fight” or dominant in public sphere discourse. Thus, female social movement leaders not only fight for their movement’s cause, but for space to participate in the public discourse of the movement.

The women at the forefront of the Black movement for recognition and liberation in Mexico represent how societal problems connect to individual narratives of suffering. In addition, the personal narrative comes from Black women who are disproportionately

discriminated against, sexually harassed and prohibited from access to healthcare facilities for themselves and their families. Their stories are imperative in understanding the ways in which structural violence manifests itself, and how women of color are responsible for picking up the pieces left behind for the wellbeing of themselves and of the children and adolescents of their succeeding generation.

INTERSECTIONAL THEORY AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE

The idea of the politics of difference, as outlined by Iris Marion Young (1990), establishes a theory in which the heterogeneity of social movements is the key to that movement's success. In this framework, she specifies that each movement must be treated individually, avoiding both positivist and reductionist methods of analysis, since all movements are born of unique cultural, social, political, and economic circumstances (Young, 1990). In her analysis of recent liberatory social movements, including racialized and gendered movements, she identifies a shift in rejecting assimilation-focused movements. She says,

“the ideal of liberation as liberation through the elimination of group difference has been challenged by movements of the oppressed. The very success of political movements against differential privilege and for political equality has generated movements of group specificity and cultural pride” (Young, 1990 p. 157).

In this selection, Young denounces assimilation as a means of achieving social equality and frames our discussion of race and gender in Mexico as an anti-assimilationist liberation project, focused on cultural pride. In using the politics of difference, scholars identify that each social movement emerges from a unique sociopolitical context. The internal composition of movements and populations must also take intersectional theory into account, in which the various immutable characteristics of the individuals that comprise movements and populations are

central analytical tools used to analyze that movement and population (Collins, 2016). Both intersectional theory and the politics of difference outline that a social movement's success rests in the heterogeneous membership and, I argue, heterogeneous representation in public discourse. The dominant societal narrative is largely that of the white male perspective. This is because history is told from the perspective of the conquerors, and both white people and men have conquered in their own respects throughout the world, over hundreds of years.

FINDINGS:

SYSTEMIC POVERTY

Through discourse and content analysis of podcasts, interviews, presentations, and news articles, one can extrapolate that Black Women in Mexico face disproportionate amounts of harassment and burdening from the state and patriarchal structures in place. Despite this, they are left out of statements regarding the Afro-Mexican movement, as well as federal multiculturalism and poverty alleviation programs. In Duran's series of interviews presented in a BBC podcast, she speaks with Black Mexicans throughout the Costa Chica regarding their cultural and political experience, especially in regards to how music is present. Tulia Serrano Arellanes, a member of the town council in the predominantly Black area, Santiago Rio Grande, told Duran that next to the council building there is a community dinner service to alleviate the hardships of low income and malnutrition. She says that the town's agricultural system in the was different in the past, where a farmer could have different crops all together so there was a balanced diet in a small plot of land. However, with the introduction of neoliberal development policies, the federal government pushes for specialization or cash crop production, limiting the amount of produce

they are able to cultivate. Tulia also points out that it is very difficult to apply modern technology but because of the size of the plot there is no piece of land big enough to justify the investment.

The marginality and poverty experienced in Black communities is exacerbated by the lack of constitutional recognition. In towns like the one Tulia works in, the Black population is very poor because they are not eligible to apply for funding. On the other hand, the indigenous populations of Mexico have access to additional resources apart from the federal resources that are given to all populations to solve their basic needs. This is through the “Commission for the Development of Indigenous Communities.” While the Black population is also consolidated in remote areas and are also in need of additional resources due to economic marginalization, and do not qualify for the Indigenous commission. Humberto Silva Silva, head of bureau for Afro-Mexican affairs in Oaxaca, which is part of the Office for Indigenous Affairs, told Duran (2016):

“When we go and ask (for something like the commission for indigenous affairs) they come up with excuses like, ‘well, no, we can’t find a list, or that we don’t have an indigenous mother tongue’. Language is the real criteria. They will give you that in writing. We are being discriminated against. We have no state or federal support...It’s about bureaucracy. They go by the book, saying it’s because we have no different mother tongue unlike our indigenous brothers.”

What Silva identifies is a discrepancy in recognition, while members of both Black and Indigenous communities face similar economic and accessibility barriers. However, since the Indigenous populations are federally recognized, they are eligible for additional services that Black Mexicans are not. This disproportionately impacts women in rural areas, as they are the foundation for family and family is the foundation for society - and are responsible for their own care and wellbeing in addition to that of their children. Thus, for health services, access to food, clean water, and educational facilities falls is the responsibility of women, in addition to access

for female reproductive and sexual health and education. Duran (2016) interviewed anthropologist Mara Alfaro, who said that “even on the coast in Black areas there is institutional racism. In daily life, for example in health centers, they are discriminated against as being poor and Black. There is no awareness or discourse addressing this here in Mexico.”

To contrast the narratives of grassroots activists in the Costa Chica, Cervera, a representative of INEGI spoke with a U.S. based news source, Fusion, and told them that he was “pleasantly surprised” by the intercensal survey results. He said “the Black population doesn’t appear to be trailing the rest of the population in terms of access to education or health services. In general terms, Mexico’s Black population seems to have better access to public services, education and work opportunities than the indigenous population. In any event, all Mexicans would be better served from stronger public policies and improved quality of life. And accurate census data is a first step towards diagnosing the problems facing different communities” (De Castro, 2015). While he is absolutely correct that accurate census data allows the federal government to determine the needs of distinct populations, community activists argue that this is not the case, due to the additional federal funding and recognition of Indigenous populations, as well as the limited terminology for Black Mexicans to self-identify in the census. As activist Israel Reyes claimed in his interview with Duran, the survey does not reflect the entire Black Mexican population, based on the fluidity of Black identity and language.

GENDERED INEQUITY

In addition to access to health and wellness services, interviews conducted by Duran and presentations by female leadership in the AfroMexican movement indicate that Black women are disproportionately harrassed compared to their male counterparts. While both populations are

harrassed on a racial basis - often treated as foreigners due to the lack of visibility of Afro-descendent populations outside of the Costa Chica - women are harassed for their gender in addition to their race. Clemente Jesús López, head of the government office in charge of Afro-Mexicans in Oaxaca, told Duran of various cases in which people were detained by federal police, and sometimes deported, when they were asked to present federal identification and were not believed to be Mexican even when they produced their IDs. An example he gave was of two Afro-Mexican women, one was deported to Honduras and the other to Haiti, because the police insisted there are no Black people, despite having Mexican federal ID. The women returned to Mexico, but had to deal with the consulates in Haiti and Honduras to negotiate their return. The Mexican police offered no apology or compensation (Duran, 2016). While this issue of Black citizenship is present in Jerry's (2013) ethnographic research as well, the deportation and lack of police accountability for these two women calls into question whether or not they were taken advantage of for their gender, or solely their race.

In her analysis of the interviews, Duran (2016) stated, "privately, I heard many shocking stories, especially from women, about the extreme forms of racism that they experience from their fellow Mexicans. One school teacher said she was regularly compared to a donkey." One of the women she interviewed, Mara Alfaro who is a Afro-Mexican anthropologist from Oaxaca, said that in her experience and research Black women are seen as "hot." Their stereotyping as more sexual than other women, which leads to harassment and early pregnancies, which limits their access to school (Duran, 2016). Without this message of disproportionate harassment in public discourse around Afro-Mexican identities and needs, the reality of harassment and its connection to the lack of access to reproductive healthcare and its impacts on education,

Afro-Mexican women will remain marginalized as the movement for recognition progresses, while allowing men to benefit from their labor in the movement.

On the level of federal discourse, programs such as *Prospera* place the responsibility of healthcare for families onto female heads of household without explicitly crediting or stating that involvement. This ties back into the point made by Licenciada Teresa Lagos, in which patriarchal structures determine that women are the foundation of family and family is the foundation of society (Arce, 2018). While *Prospera* is intended to fix a “culture of poverty” through providing impoverished female heads of households with monetary incentives (Mora, 2017), the official *Prospera* homepage and “What Do We Do?” page never mention women. The official Objective and Mission statements are as follows:

“Objective: to contribute to and strengthen the effective fulfillment of social rights that enhance the capacities of people in poverty, through actions that expand their access to food, health, and education, and improve their access to other dimensions of well-being”

“Mission: to improve the income and welfare of Mexican families in poverty, through the articulation of actions with other programs and strategies of social policy and economic policy under an approach of inter-institutional collaboration between the three levels of government, with organized society and private initiatives.” (“Programa De Inclusión Social PROSPERA ¿Qué Hacemos?”)³

In addition to the Objective and Mission statements, both the “Vision” and “History” statements are equally vague, with zero mention of the intrinsic role of women and the “culture of poverty” in the way the program functions. This invisibilizes the role and voice of poor women as the backbone of the project, especially Afro-Mexican women, who may benefit from the program but whose demographics are not considered in the analysis of success, due to the fact that they do not have constitutional recognition.

³ Translations done by author

Internalized racism plays a massive role in the self-confidence and development of Afro-Mexican children and adolescents, especially young girls, who are subjected to the hypersexualization of Black women identified by Alfaro in her interview with Duran (2016). An article depicting the experience of a photographer in an Afro-Mexican community describes her approaching three young girls “One of them, who was twelve years old, dabbed her face with a whitening powder to create a paler effect. She didn’t like being called “Afro-Mexican,” she said” (Blitzer, 2017). Due to the lack of visibility in public discourse and media, as well as the hypersexualization and violence towards Black women in the Mexican context, Women adopt a negative self-image at an early age due to their gender and skin color.

FEMALE LEADERSHIP AND REPRESENTATION

Female-led Afro-Mexican organizations and female movement leaders seek to address issues that pertain to both Black women and men, including negative self-esteem, access to developmental opportunities, cultural and communal space, and fundamental rights to education and health for children as well as adults, in order to uplift all members of the community rather than just men. Despite this, they are excluded from public discourse around the Black movement, or left towards the bottom of articles, where their ideas and contributions are framed as afterthoughts, or support to the male-centric pieces. An example of this is the representation of Sergio Peñaloza, the founder of Mexico Negro, one of the longest standing Black Mexican organizations. While he is a fantastic leader and spokesperson, Mexico Negro is not the only organization to call for federal recognition. Similarly to Garza’s (2014) experience with the Black Lives Matter movement in the U.S., charismatic Black men, unintentionally or intentionally, tend to dominate the public sphere, appropriating the work of Black women.

In my discourse analysis of popular media representation, male figures are described as being the “driving force” or as spearheading operations, whereas women as subsequent characters despite their active roles and participation. This is exemplified in the *Huffington Post* article, “Mexico Finally Recognized Its Black Citizens, But That's Just The Beginning.” Peñaloza takes center stage in this piece, being described as “A major force behind the government’s recognition.” His introduction is followed with discourse that highlights México Negro as the only key player in advocating for census recognition, with Peñaloza’s interview footage stating, “we have been working for twenty years without much government response, so the events of the past year have been huge progress for us,” without including the advocacy work of fellow Afro-Mexican organizations.

In addition, *Huffington Post* frames the fight for recognition as, “México Negro campaigned for recognition by INEGI, the census agency that did the initial count of Afro-Mexicans, and CONAPRED, the National Council for Preventing Discrimination.” (Varagur, 2016). This, again, discounts other advocacy organizations as well as the female leadership within México Negro, including the work of Elena Ruiz Salinas, who served as the representative for México Negro in the Afro-Mexican study program launching at the Universidad Autonoma de Benito Juárez de Oaxaca (UABJO). While Ruiz Salinas, also the founder of fellow Afro-Mexican feminist organization “Florecitas” is not mentioned in the HuffPost article, the university-level project launched by Rosa Maria Castro Salinas, (the chairwoman of the Association of Women of the Costa Chica of Oaxaca) is mentioned towards the bottom of the *Huffington Post* article as an afterthought to Peñaloza’s interview, in which he mentions the implementation of Afro-Mexican history in public school curriculum (Varagur,

2016). Varagur states that Castros “told HuffPost” about the program, indicating that they had spoken with her directly. If this is the case, and HuffPost spoke with both Castros and Peñaloza, their representation in the discourse is extremely disproportionate despite having both shared their experiences and projects with the same author.

This lack of female activist representation is not confined to the *Huffington Post* article, or to mainstream sources for that matter. *Remezcla*, a Brooklyn-based alternative media source intended to cover music, culture, and events for Latino Millennials, framed the inter-census survey in 2015 as being the responsibility of México Negro as well, using Sergio Peñaloza Perez as the only activist voice. They frame the activism around Black liberation with the following passage:

Recently, members of Mexico Negro – an Afro-Mexican advocacy organization – launched a national movement to officially recognize Mexico’s Afro-descendants on the national census. The proposed bill would create a census category for Afro-Mexicans, which would help ensure that Mexico’s African descendants receive important access to social and economic resources. “We are joining senators and deputies to be recognized in the Federal Constitution and the missing federal states, so that the Mexican state pays off its historical debt with Afro-Mexicans,” explained, Sergio Peñaloza Perez, the leader of Black-Mexico. The bill also plans to be launched later this month in Oaxaca, Mexico at the 16th annual meeting of Black peoples taking place on November 13-14th.” (Thompson-Hernández, 2015)

Fusion Media Group, a television-based news source, also reported on the inter-census recognition of Afro-Mexican people in 2015. The author wrote something similar to the article *Huffington Post*, in which Peñaloza receives ample talking space, and the only female representation is included at the bottom, sharing the space with another male activist and framed as a supporter to his thought without her own ideas and autonomous space, despite their equal participation and the fact that all three activists had spoken with the author. The article closes with the following passage:

“We don’t want to be seen as different, we just want to be differentiated,” activist Benigno Gallardo told Fusion. He said his main goal is for the term “Afro-Mexican” to be officially recognized in the Mexican Constitution. “This will help reinforce the recognition we’ve been fighting for,” said Paula Maximiana Laredo Herrera, head of the Oaxacan-based organization Network of Afro-Mexican Women (De Castro, 2015).

While women are consistently excluded from the public discourse around the Black movement for recognition in México, and their inclusion is secondary to male activists and their role is more supportive than trailblazing, Afro-Mexican women have taken an incredible leadership role in uplifting all members of the Black population, including women, girls, boys, and adolescents, rather than just uplifting the male sector. This is exemplified in the activism of Rosa Maria Castro, founder of Asociación de Mujeres de la Costa Chica AC. While not included in the title, Castro identifies as Afro-Mexicana, as do many members of the non profit. She has traveled throughout México, even coming to the University of San Francisco’s Global Women’s Rights Forum, to share the message of her organization and visibilize the Afro-Mexican population.

The transcript of one of her Prezi presentations from 2014 on the organization reveals the goals and power of her form of mobilization. In the transcript, Castro (2014)⁴ Identifies the problems of inequality, violence, lack of developmental opportunities, and lack of fundamental rights to education, health, housing, public space, and decision-making as specific to the women living in rural communities in the Costa Chica. Due to this commonality, she follows up with a call to action, in which women must build alliances with other women “in order to push forward common agendas that breach the gender gap and allow for full citizenship” (Castro, 2014). Through identifying concrete structural issues impacting the livelihood of Afro-Mexican women

⁴ The transcript is written entirely in Spanish, and is paraphrased by the author. All quotes are direct translations done by the author.

and families, and tying them directly into the struggles of fellow rural communities, Castro works to build a holistic movement from the ground-up, and give representation to marginalized voices.

An example of marginalized women uniting to create positive change, which was presented only once very briefly in the news articles I came across, is a group of 30 Afro-Mexican grassroots leaders and academics who came together at the Universidad Autónoma de Benito Juárez de Oaxaca (UABJO) to create Afro-Mexican curriculum at the collegiate level. Like Castro, they identified the commonalities among women in rural communities, and state “women who live in poverty, indigenous women, afrodescendientes, who live in rural areas and who are migrants, are more affected by restrictions to sexual and reproductive rights, and confront greater obstacles to access that information” (Académicas Y Lideresas Urgen Una Vida Igualitaria En Poblaciones Afromexicanas, 2018)⁵.

A particular meeting of these women in October of 2018 was reported by UABJO, in which they held a conference lasting several days to figure out which ways they could most effectively unite and mobilize their respective communities - both academic and through grassroots activism. They united to demand “urgent recognition of Afro-Mexican communities in the Magna Carta,” which is the same demand that Peñaloza receives sole credit for in public discourse. The goals that these academics and activists developed together is to “achieve federal recognition, justice, and development for Afro-Mexican women, girls, boys and adolescents, a specific sect of the population whose human rights need to be promoted and protected” (Académicas Y Lideresas Urgen Una Vida Igualitaria En Poblaciones Afromexicanas, 2018).

⁵ The transcript is written entirely in Spanish, and is paraphrased by the author. All quotes are direct translations done by the author.

This work uplifts all members of the community, including young boys and adolescents, rather than just adult Afro-Mexican men, seeing that women are culturally responsible for the wellbeing of not only themselves but of their succeeding generation. These women counter that narrative by fighting for a society in which all races and genders within the Mexican population can live with equal recognition and rights.

CONCLUSIONS

As social movements shift from grassroots organization to political action, the gendered components of private and public sphere leadership is ignored in public discourse. I contribute to the existing scholarship a sense of importance in using intersectional analytic frameworks to unpack the functionings of successful social movements, when issues of race, gender, and class have been previously unraveled separately. Female leadership in racialized social movements is vital to the success of the movement, and all leaders must be recognized for their contributions, in order to uplift all members of the movement rather than just the male sector.

With the case study of the Black Recognition movement in mind, Mexico is not alone in their federal level discrepancies creating systemic poverty and inability to access healthcare. In addition, Black women throughout the Americas experience disproportionate harassment based on the intersections of their race and gender, while also being held responsible for that of their families. Finally, my work emphasizes the point that female and private sphere leadership exists everywhere, as gendered systems of oppression exist everywhere. This case study gives an opportunity for intersectional theory to play a larger role in the analysis of any heterogeneous social movement, on micro and macro scales, where immutable characteristics are otherwise unraveled individually.

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