A postcolonial comparative study of secondary education and its ideological implications for West Indian communities in Puerto Limon, Costa Rica; Bluefields, Nicaragua; and Old Providence Island, Colombia

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A POSTCOLONIAL COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SECONDARY EDUCATION AND
ITSIDEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONSFORWESTINDIANCOMMUNITIES IN
PUERTO LIMÓN, COSTA RICA; BLUEFIELDS, NICARAGUA; AND OLD
PROVIDENCE ISLAND, COLOMBIA.

by

Raquel Sanmiguel

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A POSTCOLONIAL COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SECONDARY EDUCATION AND
ITS IDEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR WEST INDIAN COMMUNITIES IN
PUERTO LIMÓN, COSTA RICA; BLUEFIELDS, NICARAGUA; AND OLD
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Abstract

The present study sets out to identify the ideological implications that the current national systems of secondary education have for West Indians who ended up living in the “buffer zone” between Latin American and Anglophone Caribbean histories: Raizales in Old Providence Island, Colombia; Afrolimonenses in Limón, Costa Rica, and Creoles in Bluefields, Nicaragua. The axis of examination is the school curriculum both as practice and as a set of pre-determined content and goals that teachers have to follow. It is a critical analysis of the ideologies that inform education, supported by an inquiry into the historical and cultural factors that give shape to the schools, the knowledge and values that are promoted, and the regulatory practices that are enforced by teachers. As a cross-regional, post-colonial comparative study, it offers the opportunity to identify continuities in the history of “unbroken colonization” of the aforementioned West Indian groups, and to observe the ways the groups cross epistemological and cultural boundaries to learn from each other. In doing so, the study focuses on the way in which education contributes to the perpetual domination of the cultural ‘Other.’ The focus on the curriculum reveals one of the significant means by which the respective nation states manage to keep these groups in a state of liminality. In fact, the research indicates that the examined national school curricula are largely founded on Western epistemologies and knowledge inherited from the colonial past, and that they are not inclusive of the histories, knowledges, wisdom, and/or challenges of the West Indians. The general national goal of forming citizens overrides issues of ethnicity and identity, placing all nationals onto the same path to globalization without giving ethnic groups, such as the ones studied, a firm
understanding of their historical and cultural roots. If these West Indian groups were provided the opportunity, through formal education, to enhance their understanding of their respective historical and cultural roots, they would be better able to face social challenges such as the discrimination that several of them endure. Issues of power and knowledge form part of the dynamic hegemonic discourse on nation and belonging that serve to marginalize these West Indian groups and to represent them as the racialized ‘Other’. The study examines this phenomenon and the ways in which it is perpetuated by the school curricula in the three territories. It concludes by offering alternative approaches to the current content and pedagogical models.
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**Introduction**

Afro-descended and indigenous populations in most Hispanic nations in Latin America have been discriminated against as a result of inherited colonial notions of the limitations of race and class, sustained by ruling *criollo* elites through the reproduction of colonial discourses in the educational systems. At independence from Spanish rule, the nascent republics were built upon unifying concepts of nation through which the ruling *criollo*, of mostly white ancestry, contributed to the continuation of hierarchical and discriminatory societies which ignored the diversity of ethnicities lying at the roots of the newly independent nations. Discourses of national identity which carried legacies of colonial ideology were imposed on peripheral ethnic communities that did not necessarily share such imaginaries. Formal education, understood as that taking place through the schooling processes, has served as an instrument to spread and legitimize these dominant ideologies through the reproduction of relations of power inscribed in the schools’ pedagogical practices and curricula (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003; Kanu, 2006).

Amongst these disenfranchised ethnic groups are several little-known West Indian communities (English-based Creole speaking groups, descendants of African slaves, runaways, maroons, and/or free coloreds) which, given the dynamics of Caribbean colonization, ended up living on the cultural and ideological fringes of Hispanic nations in the circum-Caribbean. It is common to hear members of these communities, located in the Western Caribbean, express the idea that the migration and trade between the islands and the coast of Central America, which linked them from the time of European
colonization, created family ties and shared cultural traditions across the region that persist to this day. In fact, the three communities of my study, Raizales on Providence Island, Colombia; Afrolimonenses in Puerto Limón, Costa Rica; and Creoles in Bluefields, Nicaragua are West Indian communities descended from African slaves who speak variants of English-based Creole that are intelligible to one another; have mostly maintained their links to the Protestant churches; and have historically resisted incorporation into the dominant Hispanic societies and nations, each in their own particular way.

Mostly in contact with indigenous ethnic groups, foreign missionaries and commercial entrepreneurs, and/or Hispanic descendant criollo elites, these groups developed and maintained linguistic and cultural expressions that differentiated them from the “Hispanic” majority (Gordon, 1998; Harpelle, 1994, 2001; Parsons, 1956/1985; Ratter, 2001; Vollmer, 1997). Having been subject to what Brotherston has called “unbroken colonization” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2002, p. 206) by colonial Spanish and British rule, imperial United States incursions, and the current Hispanic nations that ‘host’ them, these communities have undergone processes of acculturation through dominant colonial discourses, hybridization through multi-ethnic contact, and resistance through their own socio political struggles, emigration, and diverse cultural manifestations. By enacting a neo-colonial relationship to these ethnic and racial minorities, the Hispanic-descended dominant groups place themselves in a position of power and control similar to that of European colonization and U.S. imperialism, dictating economic policies resulting from global pressures, and sustaining cultural and
ideological discourses through a variety of social institutions (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, 2000). Formal education is one such institution which has played an essential role in the processes of acculturation, spreading dominant discourses that have attempted to suppress manifestations of difference (Clemente, 1991; Tünnermann, 1983). The pedagogical practices in the schools are based on curricula which do not address the root causes of social discrimination and inequity, thus reinforcing the disadvantaged position in which these communities find themselves. The extant curricula do not contribute to structural change affecting the problems of a global, yet highly unequal society. Such a system of education is contributing to ongoing school desertion, low attainment of formal educational goals, forced migration, involvement in high risk drug trade ‘trips,’ participation in tourist prostitution, gang urban interethnic violence, and the general economic marginalization of the communities (McIlwaine, 1997; Sanabria, 2006; Solano, 2005; Caamaño-Morúa, 2007).

The dominant groups of these nations, the ruling elites, have been pressed into pluralizing their discourses and practices by the effects of local, national, and international movements in favor of the rights of communities disenfranchised by such issues as discriminatory practices based on gender, race, and ethnicity. The 1970s and 80s saw an awakening of indigenous and Afro-descended movements in Latin America, which led to some political reforms. Some states, like Colombia, recognized the presence of plural ethnic groups and languages in the political constitution of their nations; others, like Costa Rica, speak of respecting this plurality, yet the constitutions of these nations establish the Spanish language and the religious framework of Catholicism as their
guiding principles (Gill, 1980); still other nations, like Nicaragua, have granted autonomy to the ethnic groups living in the regions of the Caribbean coast, reflected in their right to maintain their own cultures and languages, and to participate actively in the constitution of their own governing institutions (Gordon, 1998). These legal frameworks have either contributed or responded to the rethinking and development of educational models that are more conscious of multi-ethnic societies, such as the Intercultural Bilingual Education Program (PEBI by its Spanish acronym) (López, 2000) for South American indigenous populations; and Ethnoeducation programs devised with Colombian Afro-descendant populations in mind (Mosquera, 1998). In other regions of the world, there have also been significant theoretical advances which have fostered multicultural (Banks, 2001) and intercultural educational approaches, which inform, complement or contest the previous ones.

In spite of these endeavors, the dominant groups have managed to maintain the power and privilege that their ideologies and cultures have given them in a world where more sustainable and equitable modes of life are needed. Even though a road towards the acknowledgement of diversity and the inclusion of minorities has been opened by allowing the design of more culturally-oriented models of education such as the ones mentioned above, they are not the foundations of State education in the three countries under study. Therefore, most West Indian school students attend public education institutions whose national curriculum is defined, supervised, and evaluated by a centralized Ministry of Education. The developments of models such as Ethnoeducation and PEBI are still rather limited. Within State education, the actual day-to-day schooling
practices taking place contribute to what Apple (2004) calls the reproduction of the “ideological hegemony of the most powerful classes in society” (p. 41).

This is a cross-regional comparative study whose main objective is to draw lessons from each locality by identifying continuities in their postcolonial/neocolonial situations, making their struggles visible to the field of Caribbean Studies, which seem to relegate them to oblivion for not constituting nationhood in the modern political sense of the word. It is an interdisciplinary, qualitative and exploratory study which offers insight into the dynamics of dominance and resistance that take place within and outside contemporary schooling practices and curricula of educational institutions serving the three West Indian communities mentioned above. Its axis of analysis is the school curriculum as it is lived and experienced and as a document that sets goals, guidelines and content. By focusing on the curriculum, the study reveals how the State manages to keep these ethnic groups in a state of liminality.

As an interdisciplinary research endeavor, the study is informed by a combination of theoretical frameworks that contribute to the identification and deconstruction of colonial ideologies which, embedded in schooling practices and curricula, sustain unequal relations of power and produce the disenfranchisement of the cultural and ethnic groups under study. These are: postcolonial theories of representation; curriculum studies which approach the relationship between knowledge and ideology; and theories of critical discourse analysis as they apply to education.
The postcolonial theories of representation constitute the leading conceptual framework through which the inquiry is approached: (a) the dynamics of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1984) sustained by colonial notions of race, class, and nation; (b) the “expressions of resistance” to domination found in the “cultural difference” in which Homi Bhabha (1994) locates the possibility of the agency of the postcolonial, subordinate subject to invert the established order of things and imagine new possibilities; and (c) the feelings of “ambiguity” and “ambivalence” towards the dominant cultures as the West Indian communities under study find, in the “Third Space” or the “articulation of culture’s hybridity” (Bhabha, 1994), the possibility to negotiate meanings and imagine a world different from the one imposed upon them by their new colonists.

The curriculum is approached to reveal “the relationship between ideologies and educational thought and practice” (Apple, 2004, p. 12). As such, it traces the epistemological foundations on which goals and content are determined, finding their roots in colonial inherited ideologies. Also, it explores how schools legitimize dominant knowledge and ideologies by inquiring the ways in which teachers “tacitly accept and promote” concepts, traditions, and values related to the hegemonic discourses in their everyday work (pp. 12-13). In line with Apple’s (2004) theories, this study conceives that the relations between power and knowledge, which underlie the school curriculum, are based on the understanding of schools as social institutions of cultural preservation and distribution (p. 2). As the curriculum sustains the hegemony of dominant ideologies, it becomes a tool of “social control” (p. 44). Similarly, the study questions the liberal tenets with which education is conceived, as it relies on “science, neutrality, and education as a
form of social amelioration” (p. 16), ignoring political and economic issues that might not sustain the latter. Based on these premises, the current study looks into the following three aspects of the institutions of education: (a) the school itself, as a historical and culturally situated institution; (b) the knowledge forms, as they are distributed and inscribed in overt and/or hidden curricula; and (c) the teachers and their everyday regulatory practices, as they reproduce and legitimize dominant ideologies (pp. 3 -13).

In setting out to inquire into the reproduction of dominant ideologies, the theories of critical discourse analysis (CDA), as they apply to education, provide the study with the rationale to design and approach the inquiry. Emphasis is given to the Discourses (with a big “D”), which account for the beliefs, representations and values that “language bits” express (Rogers, 2004). By carrying out a “critical” discourse analysis, the study approaches the way in which hegemonic Western ideologies inform current educational models and sustain their practices. This contributes to the reproduction of dominant Discourses.

Based on the socio-cultural and historical contexts described above, and the theoretical premises presented, the study was carried out around the following major research question: How can schooling practices in the three aforementioned postcolonial Caribbean territories be reformed for the achievement of a more inclusive, empowering and liberating mode of education?
To approach this question, state high schools were chosen as the central site of the field research, with one representative school per locality, that is, an institution with a proportionally high enrolment of West Indian children. These were visited for a six-week period during which school ethnographies were carried out through a combination of research techniques such as the revision of curricular documents, textbooks, notebooks, notice boards, and the like; class observations; visits to the school grounds and buildings; interviews; informal conversations; and attending school celebrations, pedagogic activities and meetings. The same ethnographic techniques were applied to each one of the schools, in view of the intended cross-regional comparison. The towns and surrounding regions where the schools were located were also visited in order to get a broader picture of the insertion of the West Indian community in the everyday life of the area; this included visits to cultural activities and gatherings, leisure and academic centers, academic meetings, and conversations with key members of the communities.

The present document develops the issues presented above as follows. Chapter 1 traces the cultural roots of the three West Indian communities so as to point at their common origins and points of encounter, which make the comparative study possible. Chapter 2 sets out to reconstruct the histories of education that each of the groups went through from the time they arrived and settled in the Caribbean territories of the three Latin American countries as the republics consolidated their projects of nation. The role of schools to impose the dominant ideologies of a nation-state is clearly illustrated. Chapter 3 approaches the issues of race that gave shape to the current republics, and how they were perceived by West Indians within and outside schools. By not approaching issues of
racism and/or discrimination in the classroom, the racialization of the Latin American countries is perpetuated by means of state education. Chapter 4 analyzes the curriculum as it is enacted in the examined schools; the field research is described, and the school ethnographies present the schools as historical and culturally situated institutions. The general deprived socio-economic context of the schools under study, and that of their culturally diverse students add to the discrimination that the system of state education perpetuates against minorities in the nations. Chapter 5 then examines the school curricula as documents that are linked to the three countries’ projects of nation, where Western thought and knowledge prevail. Chapter 6 presents the general conclusions of the study, its contributions to “knowledge,” and proposals.

The comparative study suggests that if the nation-states under study really mean to respond to their constitutional claims to cultural diversity (and/or to the recent educational goal of interculturality in Costa Rica), their school curricula and modes of education should be more inclusive of the histories, epistemologies and saberes of their ethnic groups in ways that allow for the decolonization of the mind; one that has been achieved through the universalization and totalization of Western modes of approaching, valuing and understanding the world.
Chapter 1

Cultural Roots of West Indians in Latin American Nations of the Circum-Caribbean

The eastern coastline and lowlands of Central America meet the Western Caribbean Sea and together constitute the Western Caribbean Region. This ethno-cultural zone hosts the three present-day West Indian descended communities of this study and the territories they inhabit: Raizales on the island of Old Providence, Colombia; Afrolimoneses in coastal Puerto Limón, Costa Rica; and Creoles in Bluefields, Nicaragua. In the processes of incorporating these communities into postcolonial Latin American nations, education has played an important role: that of spreading colonial inherited ideologies in order to maintain the desired social order and privileges of those in power: the criollo elites.

The present day republics of Colombia, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua were built upon the idea of homogeneous societies where the different ‘others’ would be subject to the imposition, in a colonial manner, of ideologies and cultural values inherited from their Hispanic and European ancestors. Under the colonial rule of Spain, Catholic missions were used to incorporate the “savage” indigenous to “civilization,” and after independence the nascent republics would turn to State education to enforce their founding ideologies over “wild,” “uncivilized,” and “foreign” looking peoples alike. The postcolonial centers of government of these nations were located away from their

1 See Figure 1 in the Appendix for a map of the region.
Caribbean regions, both in geographical and cultural terms. A historical look into the way in which these cultural groups were approached once the ruling powers came in these territories should illustrate what can be described as a neo-colonial way of relating to the different ‘others.’ Emphasis will be given to the events which gave shape to the cultural identities of the groups under study, distancing them from the project of nation of the *criollo* ruling elites, and the role that State education played in solving ideological differences. The use of the term “West Indians” as an umbrella term to refer to the aforementioned ethno-cultural groups already speaks for the difference. I will start by referring to it.

**West Indians**

Resulting from one of those ways in which “History” records events and passes them from generation to generation, the chain of islands that lies between the North and the South of the American continent once received, amongst other names, that of the “West Indies.” Christopher Columbus, it is claimed, would have died believing he had reached India by sailing out towards the West. Thus, the native inhabitants of the islands were identified with the generic name “Indians,” and the phrase “West Indians” came to identify, later in time, those who settled the islands as a result of the dynamics of European colonization, namely those of African descent. Both terms, carrying a clearly
Eurocentric perspective,² have remained as identifiers of these human groups up to the present, with “West Indians” being more broadly used in the former British colonies.

I have adopted the term “West Indians” to refer to the communities studied in my dissertation, to underline their differentiating historical and cultural origins with respect to the largely Hispanic nations of which they would become a part. Of particular attention are two of the Anglo inherited cultural aspects that these Afro descended groups and individuals made their own: Protestantism, and the English or English-based Creole language. Embraced by Protestant churches whose presence in the region supported processes of emancipation and spread their faith, these communities found, in Baptist, Adventist, and Moravian missions, spiritual support and the opportunity to receive education, mostly denied or nonexistent while enslaved. School education, religious services, and Sunday school (religious education) were conducted in the English language. Speaking English and professing the Protestant faith were two characteristics which, added to their mostly black skin, would clash with the unifying characteristics that the nascent Republics gathered around: Catholicism, Spanish, and a largely “white” or at most mestizo population.

Once the West Indians under study became part of the largely Hispanic Republics, their histories took different routes, but faced similar challenges. Each of their histories was shaped by the internal dynamics of each Republic, and by their insertion at national, regional, and local levels. An overview of their historical and cultural insertion, with

² Professor Colbert Nepaulsingh presents a reflection on the connotations and implications of the names that have been given to the “Caribbean” region, suggesting they speak of misunderstandings that should be corrected for the writing of a more appropriate and endogenous history of the region. See (Nepaulsingh, 1996)
special reference to issues of education, should allow us to see how these communities evolved at the ideological margins of the nation-building processes. In line with the civil rights movements of racial, ethnic and indigenous groups of the 20th century, some of these West Indians would end up “acquiring” an ethnicity that might secure them political and social rights. Even though there is not always consensus or total identification of its members with a particular ethnic identifier, for the purposes of this dissertation, and resulting from my inquiries, I have adopted the ethnic names mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

The comparative study I have set out to conduct is supported by two aspects: the common cultural roots that these three communities cling to and defend to this day as the foundation of their cultural identities; and the similar ways in which these communities have been subject to State-sanctioned measures, such as education, which promote the official national identities of the postcolonial aforementioned Latin American countries. Their cultural identities were formed as a result of the dynamics of European colonization of the Caribbean, and can be identified in the continuities that have remained into the beginnings of the 21st century. Of the three locations, the island of Old Providence can be identified as the one in the South Western Caribbean Region where the African and British ancestors of the present-day West Indian communities arrived the earliest and where some of the overlapping cross-regional movements and interactions resulted in an ethno-cultural zone: one which has been absent from official historical accounts and school curricula.
Raizales in Old Providence Island, Colombia

Origins of Raizales

The earliest cultural roots of present-day Raizales go back to the times when British colonists remained on Old Providence Island after being definitely expelled from it. English Puritans had settled the island in 1629 hoping to make it a godly colony as an escape from the persecution of Anglicans in England; a place where they could live out their religious ideals of austerity and devotion to work; create an agricultural society from which they could profit, and strengthen their commercial interests (Parsons, 1964; Kupperman, 1993; Ratter, 2001). To this effect, the English created the Company of Providence to finance this venture, called by its full name “The Governor and Company of Adventurers of the City of Westminster for the Plantation of the Islands of Providence or Catalina, Henrietta or Andrea and the Adjacent Islands Lying upon the Coast of America.” The first settlers of the island, farmers, craftsmen and servants, were brought directly from England and from their recently formed colonies in the Caribbean. Black slaves brought from Tortuga, Barbados, Jamaica, or directly from West Africa were introduced to the island later on in response to the lack of agricultural workers, since many of the colonists had been used to build the 14 forts that the island came to have (Cabrera, 1980). These would be the earliest ancestors of the Raizales.

However, the agricultural and Puritan colony only lasted twelve years, and its traces are still being revealed in archives, diaries, and letters of travelers and other written testimonies. The island yielded tobacco and cotton under the Puritans, but several circumstances contributed to the collapse of the colony: the illicit trade encouraged by the
presence of the Dutch vessels, which interfered with the commercialization of their products; the long distances between the island and other British colonies; and, other activities such as piracy and smuggling, which proved more productive. Located in the strategic route of Spanish fleets carrying treasure out of South America, Old Providence became one of the most important pirate havens of the region in the seventeenth century, with looting and smuggling as their chief economic activities.

“The episodes of the Puritan colony of the beginnings of the 17th century have faded considerably from the consciousness of the population, and more important are great pirates like Henry Morgan, who sailed out from here to destroy Panama in 1671, and whose name has been given to several attractions of today” (Sandner, 2003, p. 328). Morgan is currently a name that makes up part of a past of adventures, sold to tourists and visitors alike; but piracy, a strategy used by Europeans to encroach upon the Spanish empire in the Americas, is not even mentioned in the school curricula of Social Studies. Instead, in the streets it is advocated by some as the vocation of the people of the Caribbean, while others blame such ideas as one of the causes for the misfortune of some of their youngsters.

The presence of West Indians in the Western Caribbean region is related to the encroachment of the British in the Spanish Empire. Old Providence was the center from which they set the foundations for the creation of British Honduras (present-day Belize), the occupation of Jamaica (1655), and their interest in the Bay Islands of Honduras starting with the colony on the island of Roatán (1638 to 1642).
With the dissolution of the Puritan colony in 1641, some African slaves escaped their masters, some remained, and some are said to have gone and come back, in overlapping movements between and along the circum-Caribbean lands of Central America and other islands. Yet it was not until 1783, after a long period of Europeans shifting possession over the island that the Treaty of Versailles stated that the English colonists should leave Spanish colonial territories. In spite of that, some managed to gain the approval of Spanish governors to remain with their slaves. A captain of the English navy who traded in black slaves, Francisco Archbold, was granted permission and territory to settle with his slaves in Bottom House, the southernmost territory of Providence Island, today still acknowledged as the sector where slave descendants live. A British colonel, Robert Hodgson, obtained approval to remain in Bluefields, in the Mosquitia, pledging loyalty to the Spanish crown; and a few British and French settlers who had developed tobacco and cotton plantations with their slaves were also granted permission to stay. One of the conditions given to remain in the island territories was their conversion to Catholicism, yet no particular missions or official educational policies were enforced with this objective at this time. The most common family names of Raizales, such as Archbold and Hodgson, current to-day; their English language, considered their cultural heritage; their claims to British identity; and the origins of several of their foundational characters can be traced back to these times.

So, which community or ethnic group... do you belong to?
Islanders’ ethnic group… Afro-Colombian. They say that: Afro-Colombian, but I consider myself is as descendant of English. 

School teacher. Old Providence Island, Colombia. Recorded Interview
08/04/2009)

The memories of the Puritans were not passed down in the oral tradition of the West Indians as much as were other events, such as the above mentioned pirates as heroes and symbols explored today as touristic landmarks and attractions; the stories of many of their ancestors as great captains of the sea. Yet neither has been present in official historical accounts taught in schools.

I believe that our children should know more of their own roots, their own history. If they don’t know who they are, where they came from, how can they understand or appreciate themselves? They learn about classic history, medieval history, all kinds of histories, except their own… I know my history because I read about it, because my grandfather used to talk to us about it. …But our students don’t know anything of our history.

(In conversation with a school teacher in Old Providence Island, 08/19/09).

3 The interviews of this study were carried out in English and/or Spanish, and the interviewees were encouraged to reply in either language, which meant that samples from various points along the Creole-English continuum were usual. I have kept the original English language where suitable and I have translated the Spanish. Indications will be given where the original language was kept. Otherwise, the reader can assume that the original voice has been translated from Spanish.
Early Postcolonial Colombian Approaches

Located in the heart of the Western Caribbean Sea, 280 miles off the northern Caribbean Coast of Colombia, 112 miles off the coast of Nicaragua, and 250 miles southeast of Jamaica (Parsons, 1964), Old Providence Island became part of an archipelago of three inhabited islands and a series of cays, which were integrated in 1822 to the newly formed republic of Colombia: the Archipiélago de San Andrés, Providencia y Santa Catalina in Spanish, or Archipelago of Saint Andrews, Old Providence and Kathleena, in English; most commonly referred to as Archipiélago de San Andrés y Providencia. The island of Old Providence is lined by coral reefs and sand banks and the archipelago includes a series of cays north and south of these larger islands, the northernmost ones marking border lines of the Colombian marine territory in the Caribbean Sea. The geographic distance of the archipelago from the mainland of the country, which had to be travelled by sea, and the cultural differences between the West Indian descended communities and the criollos, delayed the approach of the latter to the former.

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4 Providence Island received the adjective Old in its name from the Company of Providence, to differentiate it from New Providence, found in the Bahamas. The whole island was initially called Santa Catalina, name with which it appears on maps that date back to 1510 (Parsons, 1964). The island of Providence is located 80 nautical miles north of San Andrés island.

5 The island of Santa Catalina or Kathleena is a rocky height of 0.62 mi2 (1 km2). It is believed that, at one point in time, it would have been united to Providence Island, and a canal would have been constructed between them (Cabrera, 1980). Nowadays it is separated, yet united by a pedestrian bridge. Santa Catalina was fortified and it is said that this is where Captain Morgan, the British pirate, would have hidden his treasures. Nothing has been found there; legend has it that the place is haunted by slaves who would have been killed and buried with the treasures in order to look over them.
During the nineteenth century, the West Indians and the British masters who had remained on the island had little contact with Colombians. Plantations of tobacco, cotton and agricultural produce were kept until the abolition of slavery, declared in Colombia in 1851. In line with a colonial order, Blacks had been used as slaves by the Company of Providence and their treatment gave rise to slave rebellions that were violently crushed, and to slaves running away to other islands, including San Andrés (Cabrera, 1980). Between 1818 and 1821, a French adventurer called Louis Aury occupied the island bringing back pirate attacks on vessels passing by, raiding and pillaging towns along the Central American Coast with seamen from different parts of the Caribbean. This brought along a great number of tradesmen and further West Indian colonists to the island, especially from Jamaica (Parsons, 1964). After abolition, the freed slaves inherited the lands of their masters and adopted their family names, constituting extended families. The islanders of Providence engaged in an extensive and successful tortoiseshell trade and the smuggling and commercialization of several products with Great Corn Island, Jamaica and the Central American coast. This added to the creation of the ethno-cultural zone suggested earlier, the basis of commonalities and continuities in their cultural processes. Actually, Parsons (1964) indicates that many families in Providence descend from Corn Islands, today a Nicaraguan possession, as a result of these relations.

The Caribbean coast of Central America provided freed Blacks and runaways with opportunities to hide away at times when slavery was still a usual practice around the Caribbean, and later it was a place which provided them with job opportunities. The
ethno-cultural zone witnessed the movements of these peoples up and down the coast and across the sea, creating familiar and cultural ties which remain despite the political borders of the postcolonial republics of Central and Latin America, as suggested by cultural geographer George Sandner (2003). The perspective of work in the Costa Rican Caribbean lowlands and in Panama (i.e. railway construction) attracted West Indian migration from the islands of Providence and San Andrés by the end of the nineteenth century. The long contact with the British, reinforced by the work of Protestant missionaries which embraced the freed black slaves, establish the pillars of the cultural identity of the communities under study: that is, not only of those on the island of Providence, but those along the Caribbean coast of Central America.

**Protestant Missions and Education**

The appearance of missionary work in the Caribbean during the times of the abolition of slavery finds its roots in the awakening of Protestantism of the early 19th century, with the Baptist, Seventh-day Adventist and the Moravian Churches playing a predominant role in the Western Caribbean region. The Baptists, who had the most significant presence on the Archipelago of San Andrés and Providence since the 1850s, made the education of slaves one of their goals. Religious and moral instruction was a constitutive part of their mission, as well as teaching literacy and basic disciplinary knowledge through which the English language was reinforced. They developed schools and organized Sunday Schools alongside the churches (Clemente, 1989). The early Seventh-day Adventists were U.S. missionaries who had been appointed for missionary work in
Central America and neighboring islands. In 1902 they arrived on the island of Providence. They preached, offered health services (care for the physical body), and opened schools (Turnage, 1975). The Protestant missions taught values such as honesty, responsibility, prayer, and moderation; importantly, they also contributed to enhancing sentiments of loyalty and admiration for the British. The Protestant Church-run private schools became a pillar of the West Indian descended community, and the churches and their leaders represented a spiritual authority to look up to.

The permanence of these schools on the island of Providence, by the side of Protestant churches, has been affected by the ups and downs of the local economy, in relation to a rather small population (4,147 inhabitants)\(^6\) and their low purchasing power. During my visit to the island in August 2009, a school teacher belonging to the Adventist parish explained that the schools had to be shut down because most people could not afford payment of the fees; and a couple of North American Adventists, a pastor and his wife returning to the island of Providence after several years of absence, also mentioned the financial difficulties they faced, which took them away from the island. Only the international support they sought from the Adventists would allow them to try and start again. The only religious school that has managed to keep its doors open is the Centro Educativo María Inmaculada (CEMI), a Catholic school run by Capuchin sisters, which used to be financed by the vicariate, and is currently being supported by the mayor’s office, with public resources. It is a school which is located next to the Catholic Church, and it has kept a good reputation for its discipline, organization and the moral values

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developed in students. As such, it becomes a symbol of the overwhelming presence of Catholicism, which Colombia would impose from the beginning of the 20th century.

Churches of different Protestant denominations have remained and new ones have arrived on the island, yet my interviewees express how the leadership of the old bastions of Protestantism has gone astray.

Since the laws and the government took over children education, they assumed the position that parents should take. The level of exactness [sic] in churches and schools has lowered since the government and other institutions took over. … Churches have lost their leadership. Youth don’t go to church anymore. Churches don’t exercise their spiritual, moral and intellectual leadership anymore. Intellectual also, because alongside them there were always schools… not only Sunday Schools.

(Academic Head of School. Old Providence Island, Colombia. Notes from interview 08/20/2009)

In spite of the above feelings, churches are still seen as a fundamental part of their culture. The school students interviewed recall their participation in Sunday schools, where they went when they were younger (Student Focus Group 01. Old Providence Island, Colombia. Recorded Interview 08/06/2009). A New Zealander by origin, living on the island of Providence for 15 years, who used to have a radio station, expresses how the pastors of the churches have lost moral leadership due to social problems and
corruption (notes from a conversation held 08/15/09), and thus some churches have closed. Most if not all private schools run by churches have shut down, but some Sunday Schools continue, and as one teacher put it:

…here in Providence …it is part of our culture to be a … dynamic part of a church and everyone goes to church. It is part of our life, part of our culture. Everyone does it [no matter the religious denomination].

(School teacher. Old Providence Island, Colombia. Recorded Interview 08/06/2009)

Nation-Building Actions

Catholic Missions and Education

As the Colombian State approached the islands, they encountered a Protestant, English-speaking, largely black community, which did not fit into their imaginary of a Catholic, Spanish-speaking, mestizo nation. For Colombia, the 19th century had been one of continuous internal warfare and debates between opposing political parties and ideologies, amongst which was the relationship between the Catholic Church and the State. Rather than facing the fragmentation of the society, liberal and conservative elites agreed to have the Catholic Church as the element that could bring together the two sociopolitical poles of the nation. The Constitution of 1886 determined that education would be organized in agreement with the Catholic Religion, and a Concordat with the Vatican was signed in 1888 for Catholic missions to Christianize and colonize the
peripheries of the nation (Helg, 2001). At the beginning, English Catholic missionaries were sent to the islands of Providence and San Andrés to carry out this task, but soon they would be replaced by Spanish Capuchins, who had the task of Colombianizing the Afro-Anglo-Protestant communities through the teaching of the Spanish language, and their conversion to the Catholic faith. The origin of the above mentioned CEMI goes back to these times. Public schools, whose very first institutions began in 1871, could not be open in a continuous manner due to “the lack of adequate funding and trained English-speaking teachers” (Robinson, 1996, p. 51). This was at the time when the Spanish language policy was not as strong as the Catholic one. Later on, public schools such as the one where my field research was concentrated, implemented this policy.

Junín School [founded in 1962] contributed to the learning of Spanish. Everything was taught in Spanish. Those who came to Junín after having attended schools that emphasized the learning of English, such as the Baptist or the Adventist Schools, spoke more English and learned Spanish gradually. Nowadays the youngsters like Spanish, they want to learn it. Unlike San Andrés [the sister island], one does not hear it [Spanish] in the streets so much, but it is spoken and it is learned through Colombian music and television.

(Notes from conversation with the founder of Junín School. 08/11/09)

By the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States had obtained strategic possessions in the Caribbean. The Western Caribbean became dominated by their presence in Nicaragua, Panama and Costa Rica, pushing the British away from the area.
The West Indian descendants in the islands of the Archipelago established commercial ties with the United States, tightening their cultural links to the English language, especially through Baptist, and Seventh-Day Adventist missions, which reinforced their presence on the islands and their contributions to education (Robinson, 1996). International, conflicting interests in the region between the United States and Colombia increased, following events such as the separation of Panama from Colombia (1903); the United States’ illegal exploitation of guano in a cay of the Colombian Archipelago; and the negotiations around the possession of San Andrés, Providence and the Corn Islands. By the time of the 1928 Treaty of Esguerra-Bárcenas, Colombia gave up any rights on the Corn Islands to Nicaragua, and their possession of the Archipelago of San Andrés and Providence was ratified, resulting in an aggressive set of policies put in place by the Colombian government to integrate the islands to the country during the twentieth century. Nicaragua has contested possession of the Archipelago of San Andrés and Providence up to recent times.7

**Modernization and State Education**

The Archipelago of San Andrés and Providence was declared a Free Port in 1953 with the purpose of integrating it to the national developments, and to further assimilate the West Indian descended people to the dominant idea of the nation, a process that had begun with the religion-education work of missionaries in the 1900s. Mainland

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7 As of December 2007, the International Court of Justice in The Hague had ratified the validity of the 1782 Treaty of Esguerra-Bárcenas, which settled the issue of possession over the islands of San Andrés and Providence.
Colombians flocked in large numbers to the Archipelago lured by promises of land and opportunities in a paradisiacal island, in exchange for their labor in the construction of roads, airport, hotels and residences. Most swarmed the island of San Andrés, aggressively disrupting the socio-cultural structures of the West Indians, with little respect for their social organizations, lands, traditions, language and beliefs. The newcomers brought along with them a different language, modes of life, traditions and beliefs.

During colonial times, the island of Old Providence was the center of colonization and settlement of the Archipelago, and the main link to the Western Caribbean territories; San Andrés had occupied a second place, having been deserted for longer periods of time. Under Colombian rule, San Andrés became the administrative center and the main target of development of the Free Port, and Providence came in second place. The modernization projects needed to attract commerce and tourism, and the resulting visitors which overwhelmed the islanders in San Andrés did not arrive with the same force in Old Providence Island. In fact, the latter managed to protect itself from the disorderly and aggressive modernization processes that San Andrés was enduring, by establishing, from early times, a closer supervision of the circulation and permanence of visitors to the island, and a tighter control on the expansion of building projects. Old Providence has kept a more rural type of organization, with several small villages scattered around the island, and a central one around its maritime port, government houses, hospital, library, and largest commercial businesses. Tourism is geared towards diving, sailing, and relaxing, targeting a selective segment of international travelers. San Andrés, instead, developed a crowded urban center at the north end of the island where commerce,
tourism and urban dwellings popped up one after the other, suffocating the wooden houses that once characterized the area. Most of the West Indian descended population has remained isolated from this urban center in three different settlements south and at the center of the island. San Andrés is geared towards mass “sun and beach” tourism, with a prevalence of transnational hotel corporations.

Shortly after the Archipelago was opened to free commerce and tourism, education was taken over by the State, and representatives of the local educational authorities were put in place on the island of San Andrés. A system of public education was developed in the 1970s, for which teachers were brought from mainland Colombia.

Cultural Diversity and the Idea of Nation

The political Constitution of 1886, which had laid the legal basis for the development of a mestizo nation, was replaced by the Constitution of 1991, which defined Colombia as a “unitary Republic, decentralized, pluriethnic, multicultural, democratic, participative and with autonomy of its territorial entities” (Castillo, 2007, p. 236). According to Castillo (2007) external and internal factors combined for the development of a new Magna Carta, amongst them the fall of the Berlin Wall and its implications for a “bipolar world”; the international agreements produced in defense of the native indigenous and other ethnic groups; and the internal crisis of the Colombian State which faced an increasing situation of violence whose actors multiplied as the institutions and those in power lost authority. The Constitutional National Assembly, which prepared the political Magna Carta,
counted on the participation of representatives of the traditional political parties and members of the different guerrilla groups that had been formed to oppose the government, and which had surrendered arms based on the condition that a new Constitution would be written. The indigenous natives had their own guerrilla group, and had become a strong social movement in its own right. They came also to represent the demands of the black communities who did not have any representation in the Assembly and had to develop strategic alliances to be heard. Castillo (2007) explains that the black communities had not made up a part, as a social group, of these armed conflicts; therefore they could not participate in the writing of the new constitution. The obliterating effect that the mestizo project of the nation had on the black communities was that, by then, the great majority of people had little knowledge of their cultural and social characteristics. The black communities had to find strategic allies amongst intellectuals in the Assembly who had been fighting for their communal rights to their territories. Eventually, the new political constitution would acknowledge, amongst the “ethnic minorities” of the country, the black communities and the Raizal populations of San Andrés, Providence and Santa Catalina.

The term Raizal (coming from the word “root” in Spanish) was adopted by the West Indian descended group in the Archipelago in an attempt to embody their right to the territories as a result of their historic settlement of the islands. The term results from a political need to differentiate themselves as a group in order to fight for the political, social, and cultural rights that the Constitution of 1991 guarantees. Such a definition has created tension amongst the different cultural groups that inhabit the island, in the struggle to define who is a Raizal and who is not; who has the right to remain and work
in the territory and who does not. Raizales have gained the right to occupy the main political positions of the Archipelago, and have created legal organisms to control the circulation and permanence of those who visit the islands, as well as a Consulting Assembly through which all matters related to the island, the islanders and their territories are to be taken for prior study. The Raizal group is far from homogenous in terms of their political ideologies; there are internal divisions among the group and, as in any other community, some of their political and spiritual leaders have faced difficulties either with other members of the group, with the community as a whole, or with the central government of Colombia. It is a dynamic process, with faults and achievements, which has gone through different phases: claims for separation from Colombia; formal demands before international courts against Colombia for what has been described as “cultural ethnocide”; petitions of protection made to foreign nations such as Great Britain; and the more recent quest for self-determination.

**Afrolimonenses in Puerto Limón, Costa Rica**

**Origins of Afrolimonenses**

The Caribbean lowlands of Costa Rica, where Puerto Limón is located and where West Indians migrated, evolved away from the Costa Rican colonial society of the Central Valley and the peasant society of free farmers that characterized it (S. P. Palmer & Molina, 2004). The early West Indians who arrived in the region from Nicaragua, Panama and Caribbean islands, such as San Andrés, were fishermen and sea captains who
turned into farmers exchanging products with the native indigenous of the region, with travelers from Nicaragua and Panama, and much later at the markets developed in Puerto Limón (P. Palmer, 2000). Some of the villages they organized which persist to present day are Penshurst, Cahuita, and Old Harbour. The interviewees of Paula Palmer’s (2000) oral tradition work indicate that the seeds of their crops, such as breadfruit, mango, avocado, oranges, cacao and coconut had been brought from San Andrés by West Indians (p. 14); the accounts regarding customs and traditions reveal strikingly strong cultural links with those in the islands of San Andrés and Providence, as well as with those in Bluefields, Nicaragua, to which I will refer later on.

Puerto Limón became the main port of the Atlantic region of Costa Rica at the end of the 19th century, around the time that the bulk of West Indians coming from Jamaica were brought to Costa Rica. The port is the capital city of one of the seven administrative territories in which the nation is currently organized: the Province of Limón. The province lies on what has been described as the Caribbean lowlands of Central America, a tropical rain forest extending from Panama in the south to Nicaragua and Honduras in the north, with strong and frequent rains throughout the year, high humidity, hot temperatures, and lush vegetation. More often than not, though, the name “Atlantic” is used to refer to the geographical location of Limón, as well as to the location of Bluefields, Nicaragua and its autonomous regions, as we will see later. The term “Caribbean” is used more often in studies or writings that are more aware of the historical and cultural connections of this strip of land with the islands of the Caribbean Sea, whose western-most border is the Central American Coast. In the words of Ronald Harpelle (2001), for example, this region can be understood as “a buffer zone between the
Caribbean and Hispanic Worlds” (p. xvi). Conquest of the Eastern coast of Costa Rica, the Caribbean lowlands, proved to be impossible for the Spanish given the region’s inclement tropical weather and rain forest vegetation, as well as the continuous resistance of those who came to be described as *indios bravos* (wild Indians) (Gabb, 1978 [1875], p. 9 in Ministerio de Cultura, Juventud y Deportes & Organización de los Estados Americanos (OEA), 1983, p. 36). The Spanish colonists created a few isolated settlements by the estuaries of rivers on the Caribbean side, but the region was never really controlled by the Spanish (Harpelle, 2001; P. Palmer, 2000). Back in the 17th century, absentee Spanish masters had a few imported African slaves to work and watch over their cacao plantations in Matina (S. P. Palmer & Molina, 2004). The colonial center of Costa Rica was established in the Central Valley or *Valle Intermontano Central*, where “a society was born, base of the future Costa Rican nation” (Monge, 1978, p. 121).

**Cultural Diversity and the Costa Rican State**

The Province of Limón is home to a cultural diversity that is clear to the naked eye, contrasting the long sustained imaginary of a more homogenous cultural idea of the nation which Costa Rica set out to be. As Carmen Murillo put it, “Puerto Limón, and with it the Atlantic region of Costa Rica, evolved from its cradle with the face of cultural diversity.” (1995, p. 60) The region of Talamanca in the south is today home to indigenous territories in the highlands, and to scattered villages along the lowland coastal areas where the earliest migrations of West Indians travelled and settled sparsely and gradually, largely unnoticed by the Spaniards. North of the province is Turtle Bogue,
today Tortuguero, the name given to a region where sea turtles have come to lay their eggs for thousands of years, and where Miskitu Indians, English Pirates, and West Indians came to hunt them for centuries before a village was settled under this name by a sea captain from the island of San Andrés (Lefever, 1992). Waves of Chinese, Italians, West Indians from Saint Lucia, “coolies,” ticos (mestizo Costa Ricans) and nicas (Nicaraguans) have passed through, mixed in, and stayed on, adding to the diversity of the province. Its climate and its dense vegetation display a sharp contrast with the more temperate areas of the Central Valley, and with the volcanic regions and valleys of the Pacific side of the country, dry to the northwest, more humid to the southwest. The western limits of the Province of Limón are marked by the once insurmountable peaks of the Talamanca highlands, the high peaked volcanoes of the mountain chain that runs along the heart of the nation, and lagoons and rivers which surround the plains of the Turtle Bogue region. These characteristics of the terrain contributed to the isolation of the region and its association with a diversity that differed from the claimed homogeneity of the Central Valley where the nation grounded its core identity: one that would eventually be imposed on the variety of peoples, using, amongst other tools, public education to reach them. Murillo (1995) argues that the State made efforts to establish a school for men in 1877 in Puerto Limón in response to this diversity, but it had to be closed in 1890 due to “the chronic absence of students” resulting from “the little interest that the foreign settlers had for education in Spanish” (1995, pp. 60,61).
The U.S. American Enclave and Afrolimoneses: Issues of Cultural Identity

The Caribbean lowlands of the nation were explored by independent *criollo* Costa Ricans as part of the efforts to define the territories of the republic and its economic potential. Isolated from the Central Valley and the Pacific due to the abrupt mountains and tropical forest and vegetation that separated them, the elites thought that it would be beneficial for the country to build a port on the Atlantic coast and a railway line that would facilitate the exportation of coffee, a major basis of their economy, to Europe. Construction of the railway line started from both ends of the country in 1871 and it was not finished until 1890 given financial constraints, difficulties in acquiring suitable labor at the Atlantic end of the line, and the challenges posed by the mountain passage and the tropical vegetation. The task of finishing the line on the Caribbean side was eventually given to Minor Cooper Keith, a U.S. citizen who secured a lease on the lands that surrounded the railway line for ninety-nine years, by means of which he developed extensive banana plantations to finance the construction of the railway. Minor Keith created a company that exported millions of bananas to the United States and later merged with other fruit companies, giving rise to the United Fruit Company, a powerful foreign corporation that would take control of the banana industry not only in Costa Rica but in several Central and Latin American territories (Harpelle, 2001).

The Caribbean lowlands of Costa Rica had turned into a foreign enclave that used foreign labor force. Harpelle (2001) suggests that the Costa Rican government had issued the *Ley*
The bulk of the West Indian migration to Costa Rica is thus associated to the construction of the railway and work in the banana plantations. Harpelle (2001) quotes a study that indicates that some 43,000 Jamaicans would have come to work in the banana plantations between 1891 and 1911 (p. 17), but he points at the fact that statistics regarding West Indian migration are not always reliable since they do not include unofficial migrants, such as women who were not actually contracted by the companies. Also, the numbers of West Indians who would have ventured to Central America as sparse individuals from other points in the region or from Caribbean islands would not be accounted for in these statistics. Carmen Murillo (1995) indicates that in fact, the immigration of West Indians to Costa Rica resulted from those who were “brought about by the company that built the railway,” and from the spontaneous and continuous arrival of others, or “ant
immigration” (pp. 87-88). The municipality of Limón indicated in the 1927 census a population of 32,278 of whom 57 percent were of African descent (Harpelle, 2001, p. 19), an official number that already caused concern amongst the Costa Ricans of the Central Valley. Limón had turned into a “bustling enclave” where people from different parts of the world passed by, there were jobs, and good infrastructure. Costa Ricans were attracted by the possibility to get land and jobs in Limón, but some felt that it “was not like the rest of the country. Limón was exotic, populated by people of African descent, and dominated by foreign capital” (p. 21). This image, nourished by ideas about race of the end of the 19th century, would make a lasting impression on the Costa Ricans of the Central and Pacific lands.

Duncan and Meléndez (2005) state that the dream of the early Jamaican West Indians was to “make fortune in legendary lands, and return to their country” (p. 116). The roots of their cultural identity had been shaped by their relationship to the British who had brought them to the Caribbean islands; this explains the fact that they would make all efforts possible to keep their English language and to replicate the British educational system while in Costa Rica. The United Fruit Company (UFCO), a U.S. American corporation, offered financial support to their schools and favored their employment because of their command of the English language and the skills they brought with them to work in a modern kind of organization. The West Indians who joined the banana plantations spoke English, were mostly literate, educated, religious, and had developed a class consciousness. They could take skilled positions in the company because they had
made part of the plantation societies of the British islands and thus had been acquainted with a capitalist system. Even though this gave advantages to the West Indians over Costa Ricans who moved to Limón in search of land and employment with the UFCO; it also developed into a high rate of dependency on the UFCO for their economic and social development (Harpelle, 2001). In the 1910s the UFCO confronted the uprising of the West Indians. Thousands of workers agreed to make part of a West India Regiment to fight in World War I as subjects of the British, during which time the demand for bananas had decreased and wages had not increased or had remained the same. Once the war was over, the workers that remained in the plantations went on a strike, took arms, and the company used police force to repress the protesters violently. The UFCO faced a shortage of labor and searched to form a pool of surplus laborers in order to put down the protests, but turned down an offer to hire more Hispanics, fearing the development of a united labor organization of workers from one single ethnic group.

The arrival of Marcus Garvey’s movement in Limón in 1921 (Palmer 2000, p. 198), the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), added to the West Indian search for cultural identity and historical roots. The movement advocated for a return to Africa, claiming that West Indians should never have been uprooted in the first place, and called for solidarity and organization amongst the West Indians. Fearing the impact of the UNIA on dissolving the UFCO’s labor force, the company found ways to use Garvey to further its objectives of work and production, by encouraging the workers to contribute with remittances to the UNIA. This increased their dependence on the UFCO since they
needed their jobs to be able to give something to the UNIA. Yet, several of the regional UNIA organizations that West Indians of Limón formed around the Province did become a threat to the UFCO and they were dismantled through the infiltration of informants who helped identify the leaders for their arrest. The company had controlled the uprising of the West Indians effectively, and their dependence on the Company continued. Little could they do to sustain themselves outside the UFCO. Some managed to settle in lands that the Costa Ricans had preserved outside the domains of the Company, but the products of their farming had to go through the latter, which used to be called *el pulpo* (the octopus) for it provided most of the available services, and controlled land, production and communications (Harpelle, 2001, p. 23). A higher presence of Hispanic Costa Ricans in Limón resulted in open criticism and control of the UFCO, regarding taxation but also the quotas of employment for Costa Ricans; the Company was accused of favoring West Indians, who were not even considered citizens of the country.

Little if anything is found of these episodes in the school curriculum of Costa Rican public schools today. The voices of some of the students and a teacher talk for themselves:

- *How much has the school curriculum... Social Studies in particular... taught you about the history of the black ethnic group in Costa Rica?*

- φ Honestly, not much…

- δ Well, what we have been told is that the way Blacks are treated is not right because we were the first…uhm…who arrived here, to this colony, right?,
before the… after the native indigenous, right?, who were the first, we were the ones who brought here the railway, exportation and all that.

(Student Focus Group 02. Puerto Limón, Costa Rica. Recorded Interview 10/07/2009)

If we are going to speak about Blacks, it doesn’t just mean to mention the building of the railway: that is the least. In doing that, everything they did before the building of the railway, is lost, it is dead history. …[But that is how the school curriculum has it.] …the arrival of the black person to the country… is really seen only in that moment, especially with the Liberal Period and then the building of the railway is mentioned, and the arrival of the blacks and of different culture, but the emphasis is on the blacks, how they help build [the railway] and why they stayed in the area of Limón.


**Nation-Building Actions: Citizenship and Public Education**

As a result of a disease that attacked the banana plantations in the 1930s, the United Fruit Company moved to the Pacific coast, taking away part of the infrastructure of the region such as telegraph lines, bridges and rail tracks with them (Harpelle, 1993, p. 109), and the Costa Rican authorities took control of the region. The Company was allowed to develop plantations on the Pacific coast but they could not employ any West Indians. The spread
of the “Africanization” of Costa Rica was claimed to be a result of the presence of the UFCO in the region (Harpelle, 2001).

Concerned about this, the government issued a set of rules that discriminated against West Indians and peoples of African descent who, according to the census of 1927, formed the majority of the population in Limón. Measures included: restricting immigration to members of these (and other) ethnic group(s) to the country; not allowing them to work with the UFCO on the Pacific Coast; renting them cleared lands at increasing rates; and enforcing racial segregation between Hispanics and West Indians in public places in Limón (Harpelle, 1994, pp. 97-98). As a measure of control, the West Indians were asked to register officially, acquiring identification cards that stated their status as foreigners, and later on as residents, tightening the conditions with which they had to comply to do so. Many were forced to emigrate in search of opportunities to make a living, and a few chose to stay, seeking refuge in their own religious or secular organizations. The West Indian population decreased by 62% of its members between 1927 and 1950, many of whom were young men of working age (Harpelle, 1993, pp. 111-112). The West Indian community that remained suffered internal divisions, failing to maintain a group identity that would strengthen them. Following a brief civil war led by social democrat José Figueres in 1948 in the context of political divisions, the West Indians acquired Costa Rican citizenship and the right to vote, a series of social reforms in defense of the workers was enforced, the army was abolished in 1949, and the democracy of the nation was safeguarded (S. P. Palmer & Molina, 2004).
In the late 1930s the Costa Rican government targeted the “Protestant Church-run English education system” (Harpelle, 2001, p. 124), private schools of the West Indian communities, which had received support from the United Fruit Company (UFCO), the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), and churches of different Protestant denominations (Castillo, 2000). Since these schools did not follow national education guidelines, and did not promote national attitudes, the governmental authorities made public education “official” and compulsory, leaving private institutions available only for optional attendance outside official hours of schooling. Discriminatory practices of enrollment were also suspected, leaving many West Indians without schools, especially those who could not afford private education. The Spanish language and Catholic religious instruction were enforced, as well as a curriculum that was “foreign” to West Indians in Limón (Harpelle, 2001, pp. 125-128). Paula Palmer (2000) contends that, after the Police, the second State institution to make a presence in the Province of Limón was the Ministry of Public Education, as it sent Spanish-speaking teachers to the most remote schools (p. 291), and it set up many schools, but it took them a long time to attract the Afro-Caribbean peoples (p. 196).

Under the rule of the Costa Rican government, the West Indian community is said to have undergone strong internal divisions. The community, now separated as individuals, found ways to deal with the challenges imposed by a nation that had been born away from the cultural “others” encountered in the Province of Limón in the 1930s. The departure of the UFCO from the region and from their lives marked a turning point in the destinies of this cultural community I have decided to identify this group as *Afrolimoneses* in order to recall their West Indian ancestry: a name that contrasts with
the more commonly used denominator in the everyday life of the region and the country nowadays: *negros* (blacks).

**Creoles in Bluefields, Nicaragua**

Edward Gordon argues in his 1998 volume *Disparate Diasporas: Identity and Politics in an African Nicaraguan Community*, by far one of the most detailed analyses of identity of Nicaraguan Creoles, that “Creoles’ history of power and resistance is largely erased from historical accounts” and from the “popular memories of Creole history” (p. 52). In response, Gordon sets out to reconstruct an “authentic” past for this community. A review of the official curricula of State schools in 2009 indicates that history is still told through the agency of those who have visibly attained political power on the Hispanic side of the nation. Gordon (1998) contends that Creoles’ politics and identity went through three phases: one of “collusion” with the encroachment of U.S. Anglo economic and cultural power; one of “resistance to Nicaraguan national rule” as the *Mosquitia* were intended to be “reincorporated”; and one of “apparent acquiescence” as dictator Somoza, representing the Nicaraguan State, joined forces with the U.S. government with the support of the educational role of the Moravian Church to combat communism (p. 82). This framework of analysis offers a good basis to provide a view of the events that shaped Creoles’ identity, and to give a glimpse of the role that formal education played in it.
Origins of Creoles

The origins of the West Indian descended Creoles in the Atlantic regions of Nicaragua are found in the encroachment of British colonizers into Spanish colonial territories of the circum-Caribbean of Central America and the Western Caribbean region in the 17th and 19th centuries. African slaves and runaways arrived on the coasts of Central America on board pirate ships; fleeing from the plantations of the Caribbean—especially from the Puritan colony on the island of Providence set up in 1629 (Gordon, 1998); and/or as survivors of a shipwreck carrying African slaves off the Nicaraguan coast in the 1640s (Frühling, González, & Buvollen, 2007; Guerrero & Soriano de Guerrero, 1982; Sandner, 2003). It is suggested that in the 17th century, English colonizers coming mainly from the Puritan colony of the Island of Providence developed small plantations of sugar, dye, and wood with African slaves, ancestors of the present day costeño society (n.a., 1986, p. 7,8). The cultural identity of the Creoles in Nicaragua was shaped in their relationship with British colonizers, and the indigenous groups in the region: as runaways, slaves, then children of masters who gave them their freedom, and enslavers themselves, their history is tied to that of the Miskitu, particularly to the “Kingdom of the Mosquitia,” a British protectorate which would last a little under 200 years (Gordon, 1998). Miskitu, Creoles and other cultural groups came under the influence of the British and developed a particular coastal culture.

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8 “Atlantic” is the geographic name used in Nicaragua to refer to its eastern coast, bordering the Atlantic Ocean, not the Caribbean Sea. As stated earlier, the term “Caribbean” is used more often in studies or writings that are more aware of the historical and cultural connections of this strip of land with the islands of the Caribbean Sea. This document will use the names “Atlantic” and “Caribbean” to refer to this region interchangeably, as the context permits it.
Roots of Creoles’ Cultural Identity

The British Mosquitia

The origin of the Miskitu,\(^9\) one of the largest ethnic groups that inhabit the Atlantic regions to-day, is contested. Some say that they descend from the native Bawihka or Tawira (Frühling et al., 2007); others sustain that they descend from the Caribes (Guerrero & Soriano de Guerrero, 1982); and yet others indicate that the word Miskitu was first used to refer to the region that the Sambo and Tawira inhabited, and that only later the name was used to refer to the actual group of indigenous (Offen, 2002). The Tawira, it is generally argued, willingly mixed with the early English pirates and Africans they met, giving rise to a highly diverse Miskitu ethnic group.\(^{10}\) Amongst them, explain Frühling et al. (2007), there are some whose physical appearance indicate a marked African ancestry, others an indigenous origin, and others a European background (footnote 4, p.15); in spite of this diversity, the ethnic group’s identity coalesced around its Miskitu language and the matrilineal organization of their indigenous society. The Creoles consolidated as an ethnic group in the context of the encounters with the indigenous, the British, and the society that formed under their protection. Gordon (1998)

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\(^9\) Miskitu is the spelling that members of the community accept as official, but it has been spelled differently in different written sources, amongst them Mosquitos, Moscos and Miskito (Frühling et. al 2007).

\(^{10}\) The origin of the name Miskitu is contested: some say it derives from a type of arm that the British gave the indigenous of the area called “musket,” and which indicates that the Miskitu would have supported them in their battles (Frühling et al. 2007). Others say that the name Mosquito or Mosco comes from Muisca, meaning “men,” a name given by Spanish sailors and explorers. A more popular idea is that the name responds to the many flies (mosquitos) that infested the area, as some accounts of the time indicate (Guerrero & Soriano, 1982).
depicts “Creole identity as emerging from the collision of cultures within the context of racial slavery and colonial power in the Mosquitia of the 18th to the early 20th centuries” (p. 32).

The Mosquito Coast was a coastal region that extended, geographically, from the Black River to the north, in present-day Honduras, to Monkey Point, south of Bluefields in present-day Nicaragua. The coast was attractive to the British for the possibility of destabilizing the commercial monopoly of the Spanish in the region, in which pirates played an important role. In fact, European pirates, most of English origin, and buccaneers roamed the seas and coasts of Central America since the 1550s, finding in the intricate bays and rivers of the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua ideal refuge for their attacks against the Spanish fleet and their possessions in the Americas. The name of “Bluefields” is said to derive from that of a Dutch pirate called Bleevelh or Blauvelt, who set up a refuge and buccaneer meeting point in the 1600s  

(Pérez-Valle, 1978). By the end of the 16th century Spain had been debilitated, and the British started to advance firmly on Spanish lands and territories in the 17th century. In the 1620s the Company of Providence was created to finance a Puritan Colony on the island of the same name, and possession over the island was won by the British, mainly through pirate attacks. The British set up trading posts and colonies off the coasts of Nicaragua and Honduras from the 1630s onwards. In 1655 they took the island of Jamaica. In 1687 they proclaimed control over the Mosquitia by creating the “Kingdom of the Mosquitia” (Sandner, 2003), a British protectorate. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the British expanded their

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11 Bluefields was a buccaneer meeting point for the organization of an attack on Curaçao ordered by the governor of Jamaica, which turned into an attack on Old Providence Island instead, under the leadership of Pirate Edward Mansfield (Pérez-Valle 1978).
political and economic power in the region. They had created major settlements, and had appointed, in 1747, a “superintendent” for the Mosquitia to defend their interests (Gordon, 1998).

The British had gained control not only over the peoples and resources of the Mosquitia, but had managed to aggravate the animosity of the native indigenous against the Spanish. The British had become an Anglo-related cultural referent for Creoles, who came to feel more civilized than the Spanish because of their relationship to the British (p. 45). The Spanish had been known to treat the native indigenous populations with cruelty, which resulted in the Miskitu being more than ready to fight them. The British, instead, managed to establish a “reciprocal” relationship with the latter, trading “provisions, turtle, and work force” for “tools, fishing equipment, and –especially- firearms” (Frühling et al., 2007, p. 17), which the indigenous used to support military incursions of the British into Spanish territories in Nicaragua, Honduras and Costa Rica\(^\text{12}\); and to impose their authority over other native groups, whom they enslaved. For the British, the Miskitu were deemed powerful (skillful navigators, tradesmen and a military force), while the Africans were their source of labor. As noted earlier, the British brought African slaves from Jamaica, and had them work alongside the enslaved native indigenous (Bell, 1899, cited by Gordon, 1998, p. 33). A stratified society around class and color was being shaped as a result of these dynamics (Gordon, 1998).

In 1783, the Treaty of Versailles between the Spanish and the British forced the latter to abandon the Mosquitia, and even though many did leave with their slaves, others stayed.

\(^{12}\) One of these attacks was carried out against the Fort of Matina, in Costa Rica in 1747, where the Spaniards had developed cocoa plantations; they were looted and destroyed (Pérez-Valle, 1978).
Amongst those who remained was Robert Hodgson, a British Colonel who pledged allegiance to the Spanish in exchange for permission to stay, along with his slaves. Hodgson and his extended family\(^{13}\) had acquired great commercial power and right to several territories from the *Miskitu*, but as he tried to divide the latter in favor of the Spanish, he was attacked by his own slaves and *Sambo Miskitu*, and forced out of Bluefields. The *Sambo* king took control over the region for the next 40 years, fighting and sending the Spanish away, and defending the African descended peoples (former slaves, maroons, free blacks and colored) from attempts at enslaving them. No European power remained in the region during these years. The maroons had to devise ways to justify their freedom in a world and time where slavery of blacks was the rule. One of those justifications was their role in trading. The Maroon communities that developed in former English settlements such as Bluefields and Pearl Lagoon (to the north) established trade with Jamaica, the United States, and Curaçao through the islands of San Andrés, Providence and Corn Islands. The population of blacks and colored increased, attracted by the prosperity of the region. By the 1830s, when the British returned to the region, the Creole (English Creole-speaking of African and mixed descent, born on the Coast)\(^{14}\) had acquired positions of power in the south Atlantic Region, with Bluefields as a bustling trading post and new capital of the *Mosquitia* (Gordon, 1998). During the forty years which they remained without any European power a “*Miskitu Coast Creole Culture*” solidified (p. 39). The reviewed literature does not mention any development of formal education systems particular to this culture, neither by the coastal peoples themselves nor

\(^{13}\) Hodgson is a common family name among the Creoles of today in the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua.

\(^{14}\) According to the analyses of Gordon (1998), the identity of “Creoles” in Nicaragua is one that has shifted with times and has clear political connotations. The one in these parentheses extracts and paraphrases from that given by Feurig in 1862, quoted literally by Gordon p. 40).
by foreign religious missions, let alone resulting from State education measures, which in
the end are the focus of this study.

The U.S. American Enclave

After independence from Spain in 1821, the Atlantic region of Nicaragua and its ethnic
groups, Creoles included, continued to live separated from life in the Pacific Coast where
the Hispanic descended criollo elites had fought one another for some 60 years before
coming together under the common project of a new nation. Landowners and merchants
envisioned the construction of a “Europeanized” nation-state, linked to a capitalist world
through international markets for their prolific agrarian and natural resources (Burns,
1991). Such was the vision that would drive the approach of the Hispanic elites towards
the Atlantic region, rich in natural resources; however, it was the British again, and later
the U.S. Americans who would appear in the region before them, strengthening the link
between Creoles’ cultural identity and Anglo-related cultures.

According to Burns (1991), two particular aspects made Nicaragua attractive to British
and U. S. Americans alike: its natural resources and the fluvial passage across which the
Central American Isthmus could be crossed (the San Juan River and Lake Nicaragua).
The British had returned to the Mosquitia, acquired concessions of land for the
exploitation of timber, and seized San Juan del Norte, a port city at the mouth of the San
Juan River, declaring it part of the Mosquitia and renaming it Greytown in honor of the
governor of Jamaica. Their actions raised concern not only amongst the Nicaraguan
elites, since their national project was threatened; but also, as Freeland (1988) reminds us, amongst the U.S. Americans too, since these had declared the Americas their area of influence through the Monroe Doctrine of 1823. As a result, the United States found its way into a contract with Nicaragua for one of its companies to transport passengers between New York and California along the fluvial passage in 1849; and in 1850 it signed a treaty with Britain according to which neither party would acquire territories in Nicaragua or claim rights to the construction of a canal. Frühling et al. (2007) argue that the United States was securing exclusive power over the region, and was starting a relationship of “neocolonialism” with Nicaragua (p. 23).

The British left the Caribbean Coast in 1860, but not without first assuring the rights of the Miskitu to their territory. The Mosquitia had been declared a British Protectorate in the 1840s, and in 1860 it was turned into a Reserve under the Treaty of Managua signed between Great Britain and Nicaragua. Frühling et al. (2007) contend that this treaty was seen as the “complete surrender of the powers of Great Britain to the territory” and a “formal promise of Nicaragua towards the autonomy of the Coast” (p. 23). The power of the Miskitu had shifted to the Creoles during the time of absence of the British, and Bluefields turned into the capital of the Reserve. The authority of the Miskitu and the Creoles would be overrun by the events that unfolded as Nicaragua decided to “reincorporate” the Mosquitia in 1894, and the last of its kings was sent in exile to Jamaica where he received life pension from the British (Frühling et al., 2007).
The Moravian Church

Life in the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua would be shaped now by the presence of the United States and by the arrival of the Moravian Church to the region. The economic interests of the United States on the Caribbean Coast turned the region into an economic enclave by the end of the 19th century. As such, U.S. American companies received large concessions for the exploitation of natural resources such as woods, rubber, precious metals, and bananas; exerted total power over the workforce and the land; paid little to no taxes; created alliances with the local elites to keep the privileges they had won; and used their Marines to overthrow non-cooperative governors and appoint their own (Vilas, 1987). With the overwhelming presence of the United States in the Reserve, the dream of the “reincorporation” of the Mosquitia to the Nicaraguan State had not been successful: instead, the divisions between the Pacific and the Atlantic Coasts had been furthered.

The Moravian Church, a Protestant church coming from Central Europe, arrived on the Coast in 1849 and evolved into a civil institution of power and respect amongst the different communities of the Coast. Away from political powers, the Moravian missionaries would influence the societies of costeños (coastal peoples) by promoting the Christian faith and moral principles related to family, dress, hygiene, habits, beliefs, and the value of work (Frühling et al., 2007), contributing to the transition of costeños into “modernity,” argues Gordon (1998). The Moravian Church offered Creoles, Miskitu and other ethnic groups on the Coast friendly religious and moral support, English-language education (setting up the first schools in the Reserve), and a sense of “national” identity
across the different ethnicities. A Miskitu leader who took me to see the tombs of some of the earliest Moravian missionaries stated that they had brought to the Miskitu something they valued a great deal: the love of God. Even though the early Moravian missionaries were mostly German, they reinforced in Creoles their sense of “British patriotism and colonial subjugation” by reminding them of the protection they had received from the British in the Mosquitia, and exalting figures like the Queen of England (pp. 55-56). The Moravians were to remain for many years, contributing to the interests of those in power, the U.S. Americans first, through whom anti-communist values were reinforced; and then supporting the promotion of the Spanish language and curriculum dictated by Nicaraguans. The Moravian taught “respect for authority, political disengagement, and subservience to established governments” (Gordon, 1998, p. 84).

Divergent National Discourses and Creoles

Nicaraguan “Reincorporation” under U.S. Interference

The Creoles of the Southern Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, where Bluefields is located, are depicted by Gordon (1998) as a politically active group, which attained positions of power among the Miskito and other ethnic communities, and demanded political representation and participation from Nicaraguans. As mentioned earlier, they felt more civilized since they identified with Anglo and U.S. cultures, spoke English, were more “urbanized” than the other ethnic groups, and pursued a more Europeanized culture (Gordon, 1998, p. 45). Together with the Miskito, they defended the nationalism of the
Mosquitia before the Hispanic Nicaraguans, until they attained autonomy, reflected in the creation of today’s Regional System of Autonomous Education (SEAR, by its Spanish acronym).

Divergent discourses and ideas of nationhood came along to the Atlantic region with the conflicts between political forces in the Pacific side of Nicaragua, and State education measures were put in place to participate in shaping the national identity. In the 1900s schools in the region were to teach Spanish and the Moravian schools were to be shut down. Creoles resisted these measures but the Moravians supported the Nicaraguans in power and gradually talked Creoles into learning Spanish so that the Church as an institution could remain in the region. Political instability reigned in the “Spanish” Nicaragua while the “Caribbean” Nicaragua (terms used by Frühling et al. 2007, p. 11) simply evolved under the influence of foreign powers. The economic, political, and military power of the United States threatened the consolidation of a national project as it subjugated the elites, interfered with the decisions of political leaders, and crushed any attempts at rebellion or protest. In the 1920s the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), led by Marcus Garvey, became prominent in the region and raised a consciousness of blackness amongst the Creoles; the “Negro National Holiday” of August 31st finds its origins in these times, and it is still celebrated today with a parade that commemorates this Back-to-Africa movement.

Amidst the discontent of workers displaced from their lands, unemployed or underpaid in the “Spanish” Nicaragua, a guerrilla war (1927-34) broke out on the Pacific side under
the leadership of César Augusto Sandino, who pursued “a nationalist war of liberation” targeting the United States companies and their political allies (Freeland, 1988, p. 27). Such a pursuit had no echo among the costeños of the Caribbean Coast. In their eyes, Sandino was just “a Spanish caudillo” (leader) who was provoking the collapse of the United States companies that provided them with jobs, and who had disrespected their strongest civil institution by murdering one of their Moravian missionaries accused of espionage in favor of the United States (Frühling et al. 2007, p. 32). Sandino was murdered in 1934 and a dictatorship developed under Anastasio Somoza, groomed into power by the United States to suppress communist guerrilla attempts. His rule lasted 43 years, under which there was little direct interest in the Caribbean Coast and the U.S. kept its economic enclave through the ups and downs both of the world economy and of local conditions. During this time, the costeños developed stronger cultural ties with the United States than with “Spanish” Nicaragua, but the depredation of natural resources and the enclave approach of the U.S. companies led to the impoverishment of the region and its peoples, some of whom were forced to return to a subsistence type of living (Freeland, 1988). The gap between the “Caribbean” and the “Spanish” sides of a divided Nicaragua widened.

The dictatorship was overturned in 1979 by a revolutionary movement that found its inspiration in the ideas of César Augusto Sandino: the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (the Sandinista Front of National Liberation), known as FSLN by its Spanish acronym, which is currently (2010) consolidated into a major political force in the
country. The Sandinista Revolution was seen by *costeños* as the event that would forge the unity of the Nicaraguan nation based on the respect of the historical ethnic diversity of its peoples (Butler, 1985). Yet, this was not always so. The Sandinistas faced resistance from the peoples of the Coast, who mistrusted the newcomers (in their eyes part of the long “Spanish” enemy) as much as the revolutionaries mistrusted them (given the *costeños*’ historical ties to the U.S.). Discourses, perceptions, and ideologies clashed. With little knowledge of the peoples of the coast, the Sandinistas incurred critical errors in their approach that would turn the local population against them.

Both the *Miskitu* and the Creoles stood up for their rights before the revolution, and each would engage in different ways to defend them. The *costeños* had long received the influence of anti-communist U.S. Americans and their supporter, the Protestant Moravian Church, which preached that “all radicals are communists, and all communists are anti-Christians” (Frühling et al. 2007, p. 34). Combined with the radical protests of the *Miskitu* against the exploitation of their lands by Sandinistas without an agreed compensation, this would transform the coast into fertile ground for U.S. Americans to create counterrevolutionary armies among the *Miskitu* to combat the communist threat of the FSLN in the Caribbean Coast. The *Miskitu* of the northern region would suffer the consequences of political division, exile, and the relocation of their villages and communities, amidst a general situation of war and violence between Sandinistas and counterrevolutionaries. According to Gordon (1998), the Creoles also suffered the consequences of a violent war as the youth were forced to get involved, some of them

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15 This was not a new tactic; the U.S. also used the *Miskitu* to prepare the troops that would attack Cuba in the failed Bay of Pigs invasion.
joining counterrevolutionaries in Costa Rica. Many Creoles, influenced by the U.S. Americans (who condemned the revolutionaries as “agents of the Cubans and Soviets” spreading armed revolts around the region), blamed the Sandinistas for a war that made no sense (p. 244). Gordon (1998) argues that Creoles resented the revolution because it affected their economic situation: the access to basic products of consumption was rationed, the commodities of U.S. American origin mostly disappeared, fishing industries and agricultural production were disrupted, and there was rampant hyperinflation. These, the confrontations with religious groups (Moravian and Catholic), and the establishment of obligatory military service which took young male Creoles into the army of the revolution heightened Creoles’ aversion toward the revolutionary movement, as they associated it more and more with a communist rule that countered their Anglo-inherited identity and values (pp.245-249). Gordon (1998) suggests that the Creoles felt that the approach of the “Spanish” Nicaragua since reincorporation had been one of “acculturation” in which they had had no power over their own destinies (p. 252).

**Autonomy of the Atlantic Regions of Nicaragua**

As the armed conflict escalated, the pressure of the international community increased, and the leaders of several indigenous groups took up struggles for their rights again, the Sandinista government began a process that would bring about the establishment of regional autonomous governments for the Caribbean region. Acknowledging errors in their approach to the Caribbean Coast, the Sandinistas started by granting, in 1981, general amnesty to all those Miskitu who had participated in the revolutionary acts
against the Sandinistas, invited disarmament, and engaged in political negotiations with
the groups in conflict (Frühling et al., 2007). In 1984, Daniel Ortega won the presidential
elections for the FSLN, a series of negotiations started, and regional commissions were
created to study the project of autonomy for the Coast. The new Political Constitution of
1987 acknowledged the “multiethnic nature” of the country, as well as the rights of ethnic
groups to preserve their cultural manifestations (language, religion, arts, and culture); to
determine their own ways of organization; and to enjoy communal rights to their lands, in
line with their traditions. The project of autonomy took shape under the *Estatuto de la
Autonomía de las Regiones de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua*, commonly known as the
Law No. 28 of 1987. The Autonomy Law indicates, amongst other things, that the
communities of the Atlantic Coast are organized in two administrative autonomous
regions known as North and South Atlantic Autonomous Regions (R.A.A.N and
R.A.A.S, according to their Spanish abbreviations); that these regions are an “integral
part” of the “unitary State” of Nicaragua; that they enjoy an “autonomous regime” that
allows their communities to pursue their “historical rights”; that their native languages
are “official” within the region, together with the official language of the country,
Spanish; and that their educational programs are to use the native languages of their
peoples and to teach about their historical heritage.

The proclamation of the Law was a fundamental achievement of both the endurance of
the indigenous and ethnic groups in the struggle to stand up for their “historic” rights, and
of the willingness of the Sandinistas to acknowledge the errors made as they approached
the peoples of the Atlantic Coast with an ethnocentrism that spoke of the need to “civilize” and “develop” the “backward” and “primitive” peoples that inhabited the region (Frühling et al., 2007). Politically, it meant a turning point for Nicaragua as it embraced the diversity of its peoples, embarking upon an experience of great significance to the country and the region. Yet its implementation would entail many a difficulty. Not all differences had been solved. Processes of compromise between the leaders of the different ethnic groups, and between the political parties and alliances across the two sides of Nicaragua, would delay the law’s execution. A certain unwillingness on the part of the ruling parties to approve the project of autonomy persisted throughout the years and under different national governments. Essentially, the political leaders of the nation feared the rise in regional power and ignored how to deal with the idea of communal land holdings. The revolutionary government (FSLN) lost power in 1990 to a governing coalition that opposed the socialist nature of the Sandinistas, and were more centralist and integrationist in nature than what the authors of the autonomy project had set out to be. The election of the first Regional Councils that would administer the autonomous regions only took place in May 1990, more than two years after the Law was proclaimed; the regulation of the latter, and the approval of the law on communal land holdings were not approved until 2003.

The North and South Atlantic regions of Nicaragua, which officially bear the name “Atlantic,” make up more than half the territory of the nation. The regions share the geographical and climatic characteristics of the whole eastern lowlands of the Central
American Isthmus, running from Panama in the south to Honduras in the north. It is a strip of land covered by dense rainforests, multiple rivers and creeks, mangroves, and swamps of palm trees, which maintain a high degree of humidity and hot temperatures well inside the region (Sandner, 2003). Transportation within and across the regions is mostly carried out by boats, along rivers and canals. No major roads cross the southern region in its entirety. Travel to Bluefields from Managua, the capital of Nicaragua located on the Pacific side is even now (2009) accomplished either by air on board small aircrafts, or by bus to the town of Rama where rapid boats make their way to Bluefields down the Escondido River. Commerce and travel within the region rely mostly on travel by water. The opening of a road to connect Bluefields to the Pacific coast by land has been an ongoing construction plan that has never been completed: it has been marked across the terrain and people say it can be travelled, but only by certain vehicles and in the dry season.

Nicaragua is said to be a land of waters and volcanoes, and it has been subject to the devastating forces of nature. The Pacific region of Nicaragua is largely flat and hot, but it is dotted by volcanoes that have made their surrounding lands very fertile. A group of mountainous highlands rises in the north central part of the country, meeting the Caribbean lowlands by the northwest. Sitting on the border of two tectonic plates, and on a depression that gives way to two large inland freshwater lakes (Lake Nicaragua and Lake Managua) the Western side of Nicaragua is prone to earthquakes and volcano eruptions. The Caribbean side of the region, on the other hand, has been exposed to the
force of destructive hurricanes coming from the Atlantic Ocean across the Caribbean Sea. Thus, the capital city of Nicaragua, Managua, was practically destroyed by an earthquake in 1972; and the coastal city of Bluefields was highly devastated by hurricane Joan in 1988, to mention two of the most recent natural disasters that the country has endured.

The coastal city of Bluefields is located on the southern part of the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, more frequently referred to by Nicaraguans as the Atlantic region. The city sits on a bay of the same name, referred to ordinarily as Bluefields Lagoon, with an outlet to the sea; the port is located across the lagoon in a peninsula called El Bluff. Bluefields is the administrative capital of the South Atlantic Autonomous Region of Nicaragua (R.A.A.S. by its Spanish acronym).

**Education and National Discourses**

Education in Nicaragua, as Arnove (1994) indicates, reflects the political struggles of the nation. Before the Sandinista regime, for example, U.S. American textbooks were used in schools as a result of the economic and political links between the two nations. During the Sandinista revolution, an aggressive literacy campaign was developed with revolutionary ideas forming the basis of textbooks; after the revolution, textbooks coming from South America were implemented, without much adaptation, in order to promote

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16 The link that the inhabitants of the region had with the “Caribbean” as an ethno-cultural zone of contact and exchange during colonial times is little acknowledged by the dominant national culture.  
17 The administrative capital of the North Atlantic Autonomous Region of Nicaragua (R.A.A.N. by its acronym in Spanish) is Bilwi, known in Spanish as Puerto Cabezas, located on the coast, near the northern border with Honduras.
the traditional Catholic values of the middle class. The Statute of Autonomy given to the communities of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua in 1987 allowed them to pursue the development of a “regional, autonomous educational model” promoting “national unity based on respect for equality and diversity” (URACCAN, 1998). The Intercultural Bilingual Education Program, developed by South American indigenous populations from the 1970s onward has been the guiding light for their own projects.

Conclusions

The Raízales of Old Providence Island, Colombia, the Afrolimonenses of Limón, Costa Rica, and the Creoles of Bluefields, Nicaragua, are three West Indian descended ethnic groups who relate to one another on the basis of their common historical and cultural roots, and their current insertion in the Latin American countries that host them. Their earliest ancestors were Africans who were forced into slavery as a result of the expansionism of Europe and the colonization of the Caribbean; and British colonizers, who exploited their labor as slaves in the development of agricultural plantations in the islands of the Caribbean, and from whom the West Indians derived their English and built their English-based Creole languages, and their Protestant faith.

The territories where they came to live constituted an ethno-cultural zone that was for a long time under the control and influence of cultures different from the Hispanic descended criollo. British first, U.S. Americans later, and foreign Protestant religious missions that stayed all along shaped and strengthened their links to Anglo-related
cultural expressions. This created feelings of animosity against the Hispanic descended *criollo* whose later approaches were similar to those of a new colonizer trying to impose language (Spanish) and faith (Catholicism), and forcing their assimilation into an idea of nation that neither respected nor incorporated their cultural values.

The histories of these three West Indian ethnic groups diverted as the ethno-cultural zone was divided into differentiated political communities. But the nation-building strategies used by the *criollo* elites of the three nations reflect continuities as to the treatment to which these ethnic minorities would be exposed. Education would play an important role into spreading national sentiments towards the nascent republics and forcing the acquisition of the Spanish language. Colombia made use of Capuchin missions to spread the Catholic faith and to “colombianize” the West Indians through education and religious formation; while later measures of modernization brought the imposition of State education. Costa Rica implemented measures to stop the “Africanization” of their country, such as regulating the immigration of the West Indians, their mobility within the country, and their possibilities to have a job or to acquire land. Also, public education was enforced to counter the foreign curriculum, language and values of the English Schools of the *Afrolimonenses*. Nicaragua’s attempts at “reincorporating” the Atlantic regions and their ethnic and indigenous groups into its project of nation resulted in granting them autonomy to, inter alia, define their own educational project. The different phases of reincorporation responded to the political project of nation that was in power, and education would reflect those phases.
Chapter 2

West Indians, Education, and the Idea of Nation

The Central and South American territories became independent from Hispanic colonial rule in the first part of the 19th century, yet ideologically, the new nations would be built upon inherited colonial notions and institutions. Since Raizales, Afrolimonenses, and Creoles evolved away from the Hispanic idea of nation developed in their corresponding independent republics—Colombia, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua, it seems relevant to look first at the way formal education evolved in these communities. This should set out the context to present a preliminary discussion of the effects of State education, and later, to present an analysis of the ideological implications of current school curricula on these communities.

The first “imagined political community” that the criollo\(^{18}\) envisaged, evoking Benedict Anderson’s (1991) definition of nation, was of unitary nature, revolving around the common language, religion, and customs inherited from the Spanish. The main institutions through which the ruling criollo would spread the organizing principles of society inherited from their former colonists, and the ideas of Enlightenment coming from Europe, were the church and the school: the school, through the expansion of a State system of education; the Catholic Church as an institution which would remain a

\(^{18}\) *Criollo(s)* is the Spanish equivalent of the word “creole.” I have chosen to use the Spanish word in this context in order to differentiate it from the “creole” that identifies those of Anglo-descent. *Criollo refers* to the Hispanic descended colonists, born in Spanish colonies of the Americas.
fundamental moral referent of the nations, and would participate in formal education too. The West Indians of our study would not make part of the unitary idea of nation with which the nascent Latin American republics identified: one in which all citizens gathered around one single faith, flag, and language. Nor would they participate from the beginning of the State system of education, which was given the duty to spread these pillars of nationhood. With time, the unitary idea of nation would start moving towards a more plural one, with some nations acknowledging the existence of indigenous and ethnic groups within their borders, and with the State education system starting to reflect such changes. At this moment in time (2012), though, many are the challenges that have to be overcome to do so: amongst them, the profound implications of colonial ideologies, which continue to shape the actions of the groups being analyzed in this study.

**European Ideological Frameworks**

The ideas of the Enlightenment, together with those of the Scholastics, would lie at the base of a fledgling system of education that the Spanish had started to develop in their colonial territories in the early years of the 19th century. Education under Scholasticism emphasized the learning of basic literacy skills, the Christian dogma, developing good habits, and praying. Christianity had grounded its educational and religious missions during colonialism on the premise of “submission to divine power, family and consciousness” (Salazar, 2003, p. 4). The age of Enlightenment, developed in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries, had placed the human being and his/her capacity to reason at the center of the universe, condemning that which might be associated with
superstition and ignorance, and indicating, in the words of Immanuel Kant, that “man acquires the status and capacities of a rational and adult being” (as cited in Gandhi, 1998, p. 30) through the enlightenment of scientific knowledge. The tenets of the Enlightenment, which set in motion the French Revolution, would also bring along ideas of nationalism, democracy, secularism, and the rights of “man,” serving as a support to the movements of independence in the Americas. Invaded by France, Spain wrote the Constitution of Cadiz of 1812, which separated the powers of Church and State, created schools in the different towns of its colonies in the Americas, and promoted their secularization and modernization: this would become the basis for the development of the new States in Latin America. Yet, the Catholic Church maintained its political, ideological and educational power in the new nations, as it appeared in the early political constitutions of the three nations, while the Protestant Church became the educational and spiritual authority of West Indians living away from the centers of government.

During some three hundred years of colonization, the Church had been for the American colonies of Spain and Britain the one institution through which the dominant ideologies of the European colonizers would be spread by means of educational and missionary work. Having been under attack by “anti-clerical” and “anti-religious” movements in Europe, Christianity found, in the colonization of the Americas, an opportunity for

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19 Colombia, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua established, in their first constitutions, that the Catholic religion was the one of the State. The Constitution of the United Provinces of Central America of 1824, which included Costa Rica and Nicaragua, did so and excluded any other religion from public exercise. The latest Constitution of Costa Rica, issued in 1949 with reforms of 2001, have kept the Catholic religion as that of the State, but it indicates that other forms of worship are permitted as long as they do not “oppose the universal moral or the good habits/manners.” Nicaragua moved away from the exclusivity to the Catholic religion since its own national constitution of 1886, and its latest one of 1987 indicates simply that it has “no official religion.” Colombia guaranteed freedom of worship with the Constitution of 1991.
expansion, transformation, and revival. The effects of Catholic and Protestant missions
and churches to date cannot be ignored. Such is their influence that some authors even
argue that the effects of their theology and philosophy, contained in Scholasticism, are
still at the base of much of the contemporary education system of present-day nations
such as Colombia: a system that clings to a “bipolar logic of scholastics” —soul/body,
true/false, good/evil—which does not allow for a more global and integrating
comprehension of the world (Ramírez,, 2004, p. 15). The ideological implications of the
Protestant Church for the education and spiritual development of the West Indian
communities, especially after the abolition of slavery, are in effect to this date.

**State Education: An Ideological State Apparatus**

State education, as an organized system of instruction pursuing a particular vision of
those in power in a nation-State, takes shape in Latin America with the emergence of
independent republics in the form of public schools and a prescribed set of contents
and/or curriculum. Before the State, education was, for some, a matter of private tuition
at home; for the children of colonizers and elite *criollos*, education was pursued in
schools of the metropolis of the colonial power; for others, it was tied to learning a craft,
an art or a trade as an apprentice to a learned adult; and for the great subjugated majority
it was closely linked to the Christian missions, which enforced their doctrine and their
ideologies. “In the pre-capitalist historical period,” says Louis Althusser (1972), the
Church had been the “…one dominant Ideological State Apparatus… which concentrated
not only religious functions, but also educational ones, and a large proportion of the
functions of communications and ‘culture.’” (p. 151). In times of the expansion of capitalist modes of production, says the author, the rising “bourgeoisie” of Europe needed to find ways to reproduce “capitalist relations of production,” and the school became the new dominant State Apparatus that would carry out the job. Since the European colonization and exploitation of resources in the Caribbean islands and in the Americas used slave labor, the school as an institution did not really appear before the emancipation of slavery, and the church mostly carried out a task of conversion and indoctrination. The school emerged as a dominant Ideological State Apparatus in the nascent republics of Latin America with the expansion of State education, which set out to develop a unitary idea of nation and to serve the vision and purposes of those in power. The State system of education eventually reached the West Indians who had their own system of education tied to other ideas of nation, within a system of capitalist production, evoking the principles of Weber’s ethic of work and Protestantism.

**Education for Raizales in Old Providence Island, Colombia**

The first black slaves who inhabited the island of Old Providence in the late 1630s, early African ancestors of the present-day *Raizales*, were brought from different island colonies of the Caribbean or from West Africa through the island of Jamaica. They were meant to provide labor as an alternative to the English servants who, having complained to the Company of Providence of maltreatment, became difficult to acquire (Kupperman, 1993). The enslaved Africans became a profitable source of labor for the island and made

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20 Italics and emphasis in the original.
up a large part of the population of the island. The archival study of Kupperman (1993) confirms the existence of a substantial number of slaves, which Parsons (1964) doubts: she mentions a Puritan councilor who challenged the Company for enslaving the Africans; a slave rebellion in 1638, the first in any English colony; and runaways who, recovered from the mountains would be registered as “Negroes taken in the woods.” Yet, during the short-lived Puritan Colony (1630-1641), Kupperman indicates that there is no reference to religious education for the slaves, and no church was built at the time.

**Early Colombian Public Schools vs. Protestant Missions’ Schools**

The earliest written records regarding the development of systems of education in Old Providence point to the second half of the 19th century, when Colombia first attempted to set up public schools on the island, and missionaries of two Protestant churches arrived there in the context of the abolition of slavery and the revival of Protestantism in the early 19th century: the Baptist Church in the mid-1850s, and the Adventist Church in the 1900s. Cordell (1996) refers to the existence of two public schools in 1873, which lacked funding as well as trained English-speaking teachers, and had for directors West Indian descended islanders of renowned name to date. It was claimed, at the time, that those who were teaching did not have knowledge of the Spanish language, nor did they

21Isabel Clemente (1991) offers by far the most comprehensive archival research about education, educational policy and the politico-cultural conflicts in the Archipelago between 1886 and 1980, with reference to the Catholic and Protestant missions. Other sources are those written by the missions themselves or by descendants of the Baptist and Adventist congregations: Loren Turnage (1975) for the former; and Duffis, Daniel A. (2000) the latter. Up to the present, there is no official report of the Capuchin Catholic Mission about their doings in the Archipelago, highly questioned by scholars from different venues.
have any teaching training, which explains why some were sent to Cartagena to be prepared. The language difference, the difficulties of the long sea voyage, and the lack of any means of communication were obstacles to the first attempts of Colombia to develop public education on the islands (Helg, 2001).

The Baptists, who arrived from the island of Jamaica, based the construction of their congregations on their education project, and directed it especially toward the former slaves (Clemente, 1989). The schools developed alongside the churches, and the first Sunday School, devoted to religious education and demanding the highest moral standards from its members, was established in Providence in 1894. Classes at the schools included areas such as “Bible, geography, grammar, hygiene, history, civics, reading, urban life, English grammar, Spanish grammar, arithmetic, dictation, and spelling,” and learning was achieved by “rote memory” (Turnage, 1975, pp. 86–87). The Seventh-day Adventist missionaries, who arrived on the island from Central America in 1902 and constructed their first church building in 1911, developed their mission through religious services, health assistance and education. Their first school, set up in 1917 in Rocky Point—an area of the island known to be mostly inhabited by Adventists to date—is described by Duffis (2000) as “one of the most influential schools of the island in terms of the quality of citizens it produced” (p. 80) … “men and women of good, and remarkable missionaries in the Seventh-day Adventist Church” (p. 83). Its curriculum was similar to that of the Baptists, and the students’ achievements in learning were the

22 The Sunday School Movement was already popular throughout the Caribbean at that time (Turnage, 1975).
outstanding reason why the school was highly appreciated. A students’ end-of-year presentation would include the performance of “speeches, poetry, spelling, arithmetic and geography bees, and … music [such as] … solos, duets, quartets and … ‘sing alongs’” (p. 82). This school was open until only a few years ago; a member of the congregation indicated to me, during my field research, that given the current economic crisis of the island, a private school would be unsustainable (personal informal conversation). The Seventh-day Adventists are also found in San Andrés, Puerto Limón, and other locations in Central America, where their communities are still strong amongst the West Indian descended communities.

Clemente (1989) indicates that the Baptists laid, through education, the religious, ethical and social values that would shape the identity of the West Indians; such bases have had long-lasting effects, visible in the present-day Raizales.23 The author presents a valuable analysis of such principles. On the one hand, Baptist education made of Standard English “the language of prestige, the one that identified cultured people, making it a clear element of social differentiation” (p. 186).24 On the other hand, religious education set out to make of the church the “leading institution of all social life” with the “pastor-teacher” as “arbiter” of all issues, thus “leader of the community” (p. 188). Values such as order, discipline, cleanliness, honesty, and care for the elders and the sick were

23 Undoubtedly, the legacy of the Seventh-day Adventists was as determining, yet the emphasis of Clemente has been made on that of the Baptists, probably due to the fact that this congregation was the largest in the Archipelago. The treatment of the two islands as a homogenous whole is something that several non-specialized studies have done, putting the island of Old Providence in the same bag as its bigger sister, San Andrés.

24 Original is in Spanish. Translation is mine.
emphasized. Fights, dangerous gossiping, illicit sexual relations, gambling, dancing, and drinking were condemned, just as were superstitious practices, and beliefs about duppies25 (ghosts or spirits of the dead). Education promoted values that reflected the Baptist traditions of “brotherhood” and which were shared by other Protestant congregations of the Caribbean, such as the Moravian Church: communitarian values, a sense of cooperation, and a democratic and egalitarian understanding of education.

**School and Church: Colombian Ideological State Apparatuses**

Education and religion were seen as the best way to integrate the diversity of peoples of the Colombian territory into a unifying idea of a nation, amongst them the English-speaking peoples of the Archipelago. Aline Helg (2001) indicates that two divergent ideologies governed the debates and the political trends at the outset of the nation-building process: a conservative one, with a strong Catholic Church linked to a centralist State that would maintain the organization and privileges of the colonial society; and one of ‘liberties’ and secular, with a capitalist, liberal and federal State which would give rise to a new society. In the 1870s the Liberals in power made education one of the functions of the State, yet the Church was allowed to provide religious instruction in the schools, and to supervise the moral content of the classes. The author explains that even the Liberals, supposedly neutral with respect to matters of religion, felt that “Catholicism should be the common denominator of Colombians, since the Church was the only national institution that could give coherence to this disjointed society” (pp. 27-28). As a

25 Creole word referring to a belief that spreads around Afro Caribbean communities.
result, the political Constitution of 1886, which established political centralism, had as its preamble: “In the name of God, supreme source of all authority…” having acknowledged that “…the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman religion is the one of the Nation, and as such the public powers will protect it and make it be respected, as an essential element of social order…” decrees that “Article 41. Public education will be organized and directed in agreement to the Catholic Religion…” This excluded the State from participating in education. A Concordat was signed between the Vatican and the Colombian State in 1887, and in 1888 Colombia signed the first agreement with Catholic missions for the “colonization and Christianization of its entire periphery”—that is, 72% of the entire territory (Helg, 2001, p.186).

**English and Spanish Catholic Missions’ Schools**

From the early 1900s, Catholic missions were given the task to convert the Anglophone, Protestant West Indians of San Andrés and Providence to Catholicism, and to have them learn Spanish, the official language of the Republic of Colombia. At first, members of the Mill Hill English Catholic Mission, also referred to as the Josephites, were entrusted with the task of Catholicizing the population; islanders recall them as having had a respectful approach to their people, since they used English as the language of instruction. In 1927, a Spanish Catholic Mission of Capuchins replaced the Josephites. The Catholic mission of Capuchins in Providence Island confronted that of the Baptists who had been on the island since the 1850s. The relationship between Catholic Josephites and Baptists had been friendly and their differences were not so divisive (Turnage, 1975, p. 54). The
arrival of the Capuchins, instead, brought difficulties. Clemente (1989) indicates that the Capuchins carried out their religious and educational tasks through a forced process of acculturation which matched a “colonial situation.” The evangelization practice of the Capuchin Mission was based on an understanding that to be “civilized” was to “dress in a Western manner, learn Spanish, and profess Catholicism,” being white meant being civilized; and Protestantism was a synonym of “heresy” or a “system of errors” (pp. 201-202). Since the Capuchin Mission counted on the support of the Colombian government, jobs were created for the construction of facilities, but if you wanted a job you had to convert, and many who did were called “job Catholics.” In schools, the Spanish language was forced, the English language was banned, and the Baptist faith was disapproved of (Turnage, 1975). The Baptists preferred to attend their own private schools, which reaffirmed their faith and they were taught in the English language. Attendance at the public schools, which was free, was the only option of the poorest families. Those who could, chose to pay for private education. It was a way to express their resistance to the way the “colombianization” process was being enforced.

**Colombian State Education**

The role of the Missions in imposing their doctrines on the diversity of peoples in the periphery of the Colombian nation raised strong criticism in the 1930s, but the State did not have the financial means or the technical capacity to take over, and education was not a political priority. Education fell mostly in the hands of the private sector, and great educational gaps opened across the nation between the urban and rural zones; by contrast,
though, the level of literacy in the Archipelago was already the highest of the country in 1918 (Helg, 2001, p. 36). Only in the 1970s did the State develop a centralized system of education for the nation, and placed it under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, the entity that would issue national educational policies and administer its finances. In San Andrés and Providence, the local administration of education was passed from the Capuchin Mission to the government of the territory but the Capuchin continued directing and teaching in their own schools under a contract between the religious order and the State. The public sector expanded into multiple little primary schools in both islands, and a couple of schools offering secondary education. In the 2000s the public education sector was restructured into comprehensive educational establishments on the basis of concepts of efficiency. Colegio Junín, founded in 1962, became the biggest public school of the island of Providence, offering grades K-11. Side by side, runs the Centro Educativo María Inmaculada (CEMI), which offers grades K-9, and used to function under a contract with the State and the coordination of the Capuchin Order – nowadays it is wholly financed by the State. The Baptist and/or Adventist private schools that once existed are currently closed, as are several of its churches on the island. Raizales always preferred private to public education, given the closer ties of the former to Church and family. The choice for public education was not one to be trusted, yet with the demographic expansion of both islands, and the economic crises felt after the decline of the drug dealing boom of the 1980s, private education became a privilege of the few who could afford it—namely those in the sister island of San Andrés.
While State education expanded and consolidated, Raizal leaders strengthened their struggles for self-determination, including the determination of their own education. After the State took responsibility for mass primary and secondary education, a number of administrative decrees and regulations were issued throughout the years to increase enrolment and levels of literacy across the nation, and to decentralize the administration of education in its financial aspect. The Ley 115 or General Law of Education of 1994 marked a turning point as it embodied the trends of a neo-liberal model of education, prescribed for Latin American countries by their international financial agencies. The law made public schools into “semi-autonomous” institutions, which must define their own educational project, create their own school government, and “modernize” their management to make them more “efficient” and to run with the logic of the market place (López & Flores, 2006). Radical processes restructuring the educational system took place on the islands, clashing against an endogenous project of trilingual education that had been promoted by the Christian University Corporation, which was the Raizal higher education institution on the island of San Andrés. In the context of the 1991 Political Constitution of Colombia, which acknowledged the multicultural and pluriethnic characteristics of its population, and the right of its indigenous and ethnic groups to define their own education, the Raizal academic, cultural, political, and spiritual leaders advanced continuous struggles for their “self-determination.” The response of the State education system to the promotion and acknowledgement of the Afro-Colombian population, as part of the ethnic diversity claimed by the Political Constitution of 1991, was to create the Cátedra de estudios afrocolombianos (Afro-Colombian Studies Educational Program) a curricular program to be implemented across the different
subjects of study in elementary and secondary schools. How much this Cátedra has contributed to filling the void that the school curricula had regarding its 4,311,757 Afro descended citizens (10.62% of the national population, 30,565\textsuperscript{26} of which are Raizales) is something I will address as part of the curricula analysis of the Archipelago. An in-service course for teachers in schools in Bogotá, the capital of Colombia, regarding this Cátedra showed that there is a need for a revised, complementary type of affirmative action to counter the “entrenched stereotypes” that surface as student-teachers develop pedagogic activities on Afro-related topics for the classroom (Arocha, Guevara, Londoño, Moreno, & Rincón, 2007).

One of the cornerstones of the Raizal struggles has been to base education on their values and visions of the world, and on their native language, an issue around which the members of the community debate, assent and/or dissent, come together or split apart. The peak of the debate about education has been the issue of which language to use for teaching, the English-based Creole language or Standard English, a debate that is common to several English speaking Caribbean islands and Afro-Caribbean communities along the coast of Central America. Several attempts have been advanced by the Raizal academic and community leaders towards the development of their own educational system, disputed by renowned Raizal civil servants of the Secretary of Education, who have been in charge of the promotion of a bilingual education model using Standard English and Spanish for several years now. In the late 1990s a “Creole-based Trilingual Education Project” was created by the Christian University Corporation of San Andrés

\textsuperscript{26} Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE), Census 2005.
under the guidance of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, aimed at implementing a transitional teaching and language acquisition model going from English-based Creole, through Standard English, to the Spanish language, in a gradual manner. The project was piloted in three public schools housed by Baptist Churches in the island of San Andrés, and in one school in the island of Providence. The leaders of the project have argued that given the restructuring of the educational system, several of the teachers who had been trained and who had participated actively in the project were transferred, and the project could not be concluded. The latest educational program of the Archipelago, issued by the Secretary of Education (that is, the local educational authorities of the State), speaks of an “Intercultural Bilingual Education Plan for the Department 2001-2010,” suggesting the development of an English-Spanish bilingual program, which respected the Creole language but did not use it as a pedagogical instrument. In the year 2004, an agreement was signed between the National Ministry of Education and the Raizal Pedagogic Commission for the development of a “Trilingual Intercultural Ethnoeducation Model for the Raizal People.” The so-called development plan of the current local government, which ended in December 2011, spoke of a Project of Bilingualism and Ethnoeducation for the Department, whose goals are far from being reached.

The island of Providence, in the municipality of its ‘sister’ island San Andrés, has somehow evolved away from these debates, but it has nonetheless been targeted by the national educational policies. My field research allowed me to perceive a certain type of rivalry between the islands, rooted in the allocation and transference of public resources;
and a rather surprising feeling of closeness to Colombia.\textsuperscript{27} Even though it is usual to hear that both islands differ as a result of particular historical events, some studies tend to refer to the two islands or to the Archipelago as a whole without differentiating them enough. Several of the issues raised by Raizal political movements on the island of San Andrés, which have sought separation, autonomy and lately self-determination, do not seem to be followed with the same intensity or credibility on the island of Providence, and some seem to be perceived as exogenous to them. Due to the claims of Nicaragua before the International Court of Justice over the maritime and territorial possession of the Archipelago since 2001, the island of Providence has felt a closer presence of the Colombian government than it had probably experienced before. The immediate response of the government to the damage caused by Hurricane Beta in 2005 is but one recent situation that islanders recall with gratitude. Raizales on the island of Providence are rather suspicious of the approach of the stranger, and are somehow skeptical. The implementation of a standard-based curriculum in the school system of the island of Providence has brought along a team of experts from the Secretary of Education in San Andrés to assist the many changes entailed by this and the modernization processes of the educational sector.

\textsuperscript{27} What I had assumed as a usual claim of Old Providence islanders to British ancestry and identity, and the history of “colombianization” of the Archipelago misled me into thinking that their feelings for the Colombian nation would still be as divisive as those in the sister island of San Andrés.
Education for Afrolimonenses in Puerto Limón, Costa Rica

The West Indians, who were brought from Jamaica to the Province of Limón towards the end of the 19th century to work on the construction of the railway (1871 to 1890), had been exposed to the public education system that the British colonizers developed in their Caribbean colonies from the 1830s in the context of the abolition of slavery. Following emancipation, the British colonizers extended the religious education that the former slaves used to receive from missionaries to a system of schooling that, ultimately, as King and Morrissey (1988) suggest, would contribute to “preserve the plantation system” through the perpetuation of the “class structure” (p. 24). Inspired by the English educational models of the 19th century, elementary school was “a diluted version of the working-class education” (p. 21), which set out to discourage any sign of “idleness” in the former slaves, by providing basic English literacy and agricultural skills, as well as religious and moral training. Secondary education was also based on the highly academic curriculum28 of the “grammar schools” of those times; discipline was enforced through corporal punishment; the English textbooks in use taught of realities beyond those lived on the islands, developing sentiments of loyalty and patriotism towards the “power and beneficence of the ‘Mother Country,’” and providing them with “stereotypes” and “myths” about the different ‘others.’ King and Morrissey (1988) indicate how “they learned, for example, that Africa was a ‘dark’ continent on which no light had shone until the coming of the Europeans” (p. 22).

28 “...the curriculum of a leading Jamaican secondary school in 1893 included Scripture, Prayer Book and Catechism, English Grammar, English History, Geography, Latin, Greek, French, German, Arithmetic, Algebra, Euclid, Trigonometry, Geometrical and Analytical Conic Sections, Mechanics, Chemistry, Political Economy, Physiography and Physiology” (King and Morrissey, 1988, p. 21).
Education was deemed a fundamental aspect of the formation of the Costa Rican nation, yet this process started long before the West Indians were acknowledged as Costa Rican citizens; West Indians had found in their own education a pillar of the Anglo-related identity they cherished, and the key to any possibility of improvement of their conditions of life. Salazar (2003) indicates that the Spanish colonists had decreed the creation of schools and universities in the territories of the Monarchy since 1812, but already in the 1800s attempts had been advanced to make education obligatory for all children. The early ‘Political Statutes’ of the Costa Rican nation of 1823 mentioned the commitment of the Government to the development of “public instruction,” and the subsequent Political Constitutions of the 19th century elaborated on it. The initial emphasis on religious education and on the “submission to the divine power, the family and the conscience” (p. 4) that the colonial Catholic Church had given to education would be expanded by the ideas that the French schools which were rooted in 19th century thought developed around “humanism, enlightenment, positivism and liberalism”; ideas which Costa Ricans looked up to (p. 7). The Education Reforms of 1886 or Ley General de Educación Común (General Law of Common Education) would embrace and reflect these philosophical ideas as it declared that “school is the place where the citizen is formed, and where one learns to love the Patria (fatherland) and its Institutions” (p. 28). One of the first Costa

29 The Constitution of Cadiz of 1812 decreed that “elementary schools would be set up in all the towns of the Monarchy so as to teach children how to read, write and count, and the catechism of the Catholic Religion, which will comprise a small exposition of the civil obligations” (Salazar, 2003, p. 7); and Article 367 decreed “the creation of as many universities and other instructional institutes as deemed necessary for the teaching of all sciences, literature, and fine arts...” (Salazar, 2003, p. 11).

30 These resulted from the principles of the Scholastics, which implied that education meant “learning how to read, write, the Christian doctrine by saying the Rosary; and the practice of good habits...” (Salazar, 2003, p.4).
Rican public schools to open in Puerto Limón in 1877, the *Escuela de Varones* (School for Boys) had to be closed in 1890 because the foreign workers of the region had little interest in education in Spanish (Murillo, 1995). Amongst these were the West Indians who held education as a value, and thus found a way to create and sustain their own English schools in the manner they had lived in Jamaica, away from the Costa Rican idea of nation that emanated from the Central Valley. The very first generation of West Indians dreamed of going back to Jamaica; the second generation defined themselves as Jamaicans, as their ancestors did and as Costa Ricans considered them too: their English schools would help them keep these ties alive (Duncan & Meléndez, 2005).

**Protestant Missions’ English Schools**

The West Indians of Costa Rica organized their “English schools” with the support of several institutions: the Protestant missions that had a presence in the region from the 1800s onwards; the UFCO (United Fruit Company), and the UNIA (United Negro Improvement Association). Protestant missionaries such as Baptists, Anglicans, Wesleyan Methodists and Seventh-Day Adventists arrived in Limón in the late 1800s and set up churches in the small villages scattered around the Province, alongside the railway line or by the coast (Holland, 2002). According to several interviewees of the oral history research carried out by Castillo (1998) the schools were sustained thanks to the joint support of the churches (which offered space in their halls for the classes), the UFCO (which provided financial and material support), and the UNIA (which supplied teachers and actually established schools). Gradually, most Protestant churches established their
own schools, and spread the idea of the “Sunday School” as a way to reinforce religious and moral education, and to reach working children who could not attend regular classes. The schools of the West Indians were known as “English Schools” because teaching was carried out in the English language, the curricula and textbooks came from the educational system of the British colonies, and most teachers were brought from Jamaica (Castillo, 1998). The main objectives of the schools were “to teach reading, writing, arithmetic, moral and Christian principles” (p. 73). Morals were taught based on proverbs and psalms from the Bible (to which one whole day a week was devoted in school), and on short stories, fables and poems written by established British and American authors of the time. In her analyses, Castillo (1998) points at the similarities between the curriculum and instruction of the English schools in Puerto Limón and those in the British colonies of the Caribbean, where schools “prepared students to become valuable industrial workers and helped preserve the established social institutions” (p. 103), reason enough for the UFCO to offer support to these institutions. Education hoped to develop good habits, high morals, and the value of hard work in the West Indian students. One of her interviewees indicated that “church, family and school” were the “tripod” on which the Black family built their values and behavioral norms of respect, obedience, and honesty. In 1927, there were 33 private “English Schools” in Puerto Limón, with 1,500 students enrolled (Castillo, 2000, p. 63), but most of them closed soon after the removal of the

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31 Still recalled by some Afrilimonenses with whom I conversed during my field work in Puerto Limón (Sept.-Oct. 2009), are the popularly called “Red Cover” and “Black Cover” books, that were used in the English schools. Deyanira Castillo identified them as “The Royal Readers” and “The Royal Star Readers,” which would have been “printed in England by Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., shipped to Jamaica and other British colonies” as the books indicated. The books that the author facilitated to me contained no date of publication: she had rescued them from an interviewee and they were already in a certain state of decay.
UFCO from the region, and as a result of the educational and migration policies of the Costa Rican State, which was to make a more direct presence in the area after the 1930s.

**Early Costa Rican Educational Policies vs. English Schools**

The Costa Rican government had little presence in the Province of Limón from the moment it handed over the construction of the railway to U.S. individuals, who in turn developed banana plantations on the lands that were ceded to them for their exclusive administration and exploitation (S. P. Palmer, 1990). Eager to establish a path to modernity and progress, and lacking suitable workers, the government agreed to the hiring of foreigners, including blacks; that is, the West Indians who had been brought from Jamaica. However, when the UFCO was granted permission to set up banana plantations on the Pacific Coast, as Lefever indicates, they were not allowed to hire “colored labor” (as cited by Sharman, 2001, p. 49). The nascent society had grown concerned about the “Africanization” of their country, which they blamed on the UFCO. The West Indians had brought to the region not only their labor, but also their traditions, their beliefs, and the Protestant churches that embraced them as a community and helped them set up their English Schools. The UFCO, employer and authority of the region, valued the West Indians for their skills and education, and therefore supported their schools financially; by leaving the region, the company put the survival of the schools at

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32 Already in 1862, Costa Rica had issued the Ley de Bases y Colonización (Law of Settlement and Colonization) to restrict the immigration of the “Negro and Chinese” races, fearing the arrival of colored peoples from the south of the United States, as Abraham Lincoln had envisaged (Harpelle 2001, p. 7).
stake. But most significant was the educational policies of the Costa Rican government in this respect.

The “English Schools” were private institutions, which did not adhere to the national program and were thus beyond the control of the government: English was the language of instruction, curriculum and textbooks were foreign, and the teachers were English-speaking. The Secretary of Education pointed out that all private schools were an “acute problem for the education system” since they “tend to denationalize their areas” and do not allow the nation to “teach national ideas and the sentiments of Costa Rica” (Castillo, 2000, p. 72). Even though the “English Schools” yielded the highest literacy rates of the country in the early decades of the 20th century (Harpelle, 2001), the government issued measures to have major control over private education, declaring public education the only one “official” in the country, and Spanish fluency a requirement for attendance. West Indians resisted the measure, arguing that the English language was a fundamental link of their children to their past, but they ended up having to adjust the schedule of their own private schools so that their children could attend them after they had gone to class in the “official” schools. Castillo (1998) argues that the “English Schools” struggled to stay open as they faced financial constraints due to the migration of many West Indians who were without jobs and things started to change even more when U.S. ministers arrived in the area to administer the churches and the schools. In fact, those that remained open became a good “reinforcement” of what the “official” schools did, making the new generations of West Indians very well prepared students, something teachers praised. A few “English schools” remained open up until the 1990s with a similar philosophy; but
the very few that are open to date (2012) have turned into private “bilingual schools” officially recognized by the government since they follow the national guidelines and curriculum. These schools target particular sectors of the currently diverse society of Puerto Limón, which seek the added value of learning English as a foreign language. St. Mark’s School, a bilingual institution which used to be an “English School,” is said to have made a continuous effort to instill pride in the Afro-Caribbean tradition by recreating customs, literature, folklore, and allowing the use of Creole outside the classrooms (Castillo, 1998; Duncan & Meléndez, 2005).

The “English Schools” of the West Indians evolved away from the educational policies of the Costa Rican nation. The Educational Reform of 1886 created the subject Instrucción Moral y Cívica (Moral and Civic Instruction), as a mechanism “to form suitable citizens for the Patria” (Palacios Robles, 2006, p. 4)—an exogenous Patria that had not been that of the West Indians. According to Palacios (2006), the objective of the course was to have students become active and knowledgeable citizens of the country by means of a thorough study of the nation’s political and social institutions; the rights and duties of a citizen; the role of the family; and principles of hygiene and moral conduct, amongst others. This is a subject that is still part of the national curriculum nowadays, albeit with modifications. The Educational Reform also made education secular, handing it to the State. In doing so, education went along notions of “patria,” nationality, republic, progress and civilization, symbolic elements of identity and national integration” (Quesada, 1989 cited by Palacios, 2006, p. 8). The education of the West Indians, instead,

33 Italics are mine.
was closely guided by the Protestant churches, which acted as guardians of their lingering subjection to the British. Palacios (2006) further explains that the Educational Reform had developed a comprehensive education plan consisting of obligatory attendance for all children of the nation, based on a common basic curriculum with differentiating activities, a number of obligatory subjects, and a scope based on differences of gender and location (urban/rural)—a curriculum that would first and foremost set out to form a Costa Rican “man” who related lovingly and dutifully to his patria, family, society and God. It is worth noting that cultural differences did not matter. Neither indigenous, nor West Indians, nor any other immigrants present in Costa Rica were given any particular mention. A sense of homogenization of the society was being spread by the State institution of education. With the Costa Rican government present in the Province of Limón from the 1930s onwards, the West Indians found themselves within the borders of a nation that would find ways to force their incorporation or, failing that, simply trigger their emigration.

**Nationalization through Costa Rican Citizenship and Schools**

Along with the policies regarding education came others that would transform the insertion of the West Indians to the Costa Rican nation. In 1948, the West Indians were granted citizenship during the first government of José Figueres, giving them an opportunity to participate actively in politics, and furthering their integration into the nation. Opting or not for citizenship had meant a long and rather individual quest for identity. Harpelle (2001) contends that, before Figueres, Costa Rican-born West Indians
had been given the right to naturalize themselves as citizens as long as they could prove their status in society, yet foreign-born West Indians had not always wanted this for their children, given their lingering sentiments towards the British and the distance they felt towards what was happening in Costa Rica. As citizens and politically active subjects, one of their first achievements was to outlaw the clause of the 1934 contract with the UFCO, which proscribed the hiring of West Indians in the banana industry of the Pacific coast (p.176). Citizenship and compulsory education in the “official” schools of the nation (where Spanish was the language of instruction, Catholic religious teaching was included, and a different curriculum was developed) would instill in the West Indians educated from the 1950s onwards a different sense towards their insertion in the Costa Rican nation. Many new public schools were built in the Province of Limón to carry out the task of nationalization of West Indians (forty-seven schools were built in the Province between 1954 and 1958), bringing about the closure of their “English Schools.” In time, the first professionals would graduate from universities and find work in the wider society, as some individuals moved to the cities in the Central Valley and some married Hispanics. Yet, concludes Harpelle (2001), this did not mean that actual social equality had been achieved.

**Costa Rican State Education**

The educational system of Costa Rica, highly centralized by the State, is still, nowadays, a pillar of the Costa Rican nation and society, and the *Ley General de Educación Común*
(General Law of Common Education) or Education Reforms of 1886 is still current (2010).

The neo-liberal politics of the 1980s also affected education in Latin America; it triggered reforms to the educational models, the teaching practices, and the fundamental education laws of most countries in the region. In the case of Costa Rica, these changes are contained in a plan that was written in 1994 called Política educativa hacia el siglo XXI (Educational Policy towards the 21st Century), a document I will mention as I embark upon the study of the current national curriculum in relation to my questions of research. The document establishes strategies and norms to have schools participate more actively in their own management, including the goal of implementing “Intercultural Education.” The latter was received with great enthusiasm by some of the local educational authorities of the Province of Limón, but it was then mostly an idea under construction.

Education for Creoles in Bluefields, Nicaragua

The West Indian descended “Creoles” of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua first arrived in the region during the 17th and 18th centuries, as a result of the incursions of British colonists in the Western Caribbean region and the Central American Coast. Some of them arrived as runaway slaves from plantations of the surrounding British island colonies; others were survivors of a shipwrecked slave ship; and still others had been brought by the British to work as slaves in their agricultural plantations. Even though several trading
posts were established by the British along the coast to establish commerce with the native indigenous, and to exploit the natural resources, no major colonies seem to have evolved where some form of formal education would have been developed.

**Moravian Church Education and Anglicization**

The earliest references found in the literature with respect to any formal system of education for the Creoles of the Atlantic (Caribbean) Coast of Nicaragua correspond to the arrival of the Moravian Church in the region in 1849—an evangelical Protestant mission which was welcomed by the Miskito king, in response to an official letter of introduction of the British Prime Minister (Frühling et al., 2007). There is general agreement, in the literature reviewed, that the Moravian Church became a highly respected civil institution, which offered education, religious and moral support, and even basic health services to the different ethnic groups of the Mosquitia. Moravian missionaries set up the first schools in the Reserve, taught the Christian faith to native indigenous and Creoles and, as Gordon (1998) contends, paved the road to “modernity” by instilling values of work and family, habits of dress, hygiene, and moral principles. Moravian education ‘Anglicized’ the Creole; classes were in the English language, with reference to arts, sciences and English literature, and celebrations and commemorations that reinforced “patriotism” and the “subordination” of the Creole to the British, which strengthened their Anglo identity. According to Frühling et. al. (2007), the Moravians had the success that previous religious missionaries had not had in the region due to the warmth with which they inculcated Christian values into the ethnic groups, and to their
involvement in improving practical aspects of the daily life of the communities; but also, because they arrived at a time when foreign enterprises of the United States were coming to the region, bringing along a capitalist economy that would introduce the ethnic and indigenous communities to entirely new modes of production and commercialization. The Moravian missionaries were an important support for all the ethnic groups in this transition; they became spiritual leaders of the communities, and the Church gave a sense of identity and belonging across the region.

**Early Nicaraguan Educational Policies vs. U.S. Educational Influence**

The “Reincorporation”\(^\text{34}\) of the Atlantic Coast by the Nicaraguan State in 1894 raised general resistance amongst the communities of the Reserve, and the Moravians had to accommodate to the new situation in order to guarantee the permanence of the Church in the region. The region now known as the Departamento de Zelaya was “reincorporated” into the nation through military force, the enforcement of taxes and fees, and a liberal exploitation of lands and resources of the Coast. This created turmoil and armed resistance from the ethnic and indigenous communities, which the United States placated. Concerned about the need to “nationalize” the foreign-sounding peoples, the Zelaya government ordered that schools teach in Spanish, forcing the Moravian schools to close down. Gordon (1998) argues that this affected especially the Creole population, since the education of the Moravian schools had placed them in a more “civilized” position than

\(^{34}\) Given the historical events that shaped the region, the concept is commonly questioned throughout the literature and also by speakers in academic encounters, thus the use of quotation marks when referring to it.
other cultures of the region. The Moravian Church chose to “encourage the Creoles to nationalize” and the schools started teaching Spanish but the missionaries had a difficult time convincing parents to pay the small fee for the books needed, and to get the children to study the language (p. 70). The Creoles refused to accept Nicaraguan citizenship for a long time, and preferred to keep their children studying at home than send them to school. As time passed, the presence of the United States companies in the region spread commodities, values, and beliefs, which the Moravian missionaries, by then mostly U.S., supported.

The presence of the Nicaraguan State was not consolidated along the Caribbean Coast with the forced “Reincorporation” of 1894, nor were the attempts at nationalizing its peoples through education or any other means fully successful. Instead, the United States intervened in Nicaraguan governmental affairs, overthrowing and appointing presidents, strengthening its economic enclave in the Caribbean region, and occupying the country militarily between 1912 and 1932 in order to oppose the possibility of negotiations with any other foreign power, and to placate attempts at rebellion. César Augusto Sandino, who led an armed uprising against the Nicaraguan government and the interference of the United States was murdered, and Antonio Somoza rose as a dictator, setting up the Somoza dynasty for the next 43 years (between 1936 and 1979). Under the reign of the Somoza family, the Nicaraguan State was mostly absent in the Caribbean region. Education was still in the hands of the Moravian Church (Frühling et al. 2007), and U.S. textbooks were used across the national education system (Arnove, 1994, p. 14). Most public services were neglected by the Nicaraguan State, and investment in infrastructure
was scant. Incorporation to the Nicaraguan nation was not achieved; instead the costeños\textsuperscript{35} developed closer ties to the ‘Anglo’ culture, this time embodied by the U.S., who had provided them with jobs and commodities even if for a short term and under the conditions of exploitation of a foreign enclave that they could not foresee.

**From a Sandinista to a Conservative National Education System**

The first time that the Nicaraguan State attempted to develop a national education system in the Caribbean Region was under the Sandinistas, who overthrew Somoza in 1979 and sought to achieve social change and liberation among those disenfranchised by previous capitalist modes of government. Tünnermann (1983) states that, to the Sandinistas, the peoples of the Caribbean Coast were perceived as living in “neglect and in a barbaric state” and thus in need of being introduced into more “advanced” modes of living (p. 68). Arnove (1994) argues that a literacy campaign launched in Spanish for all the country, later adapted to the languages of the ethnic and native indigenous, served as a medium to spread the ideas, symbols, and heroes of the revolution by means of primers that were especially developed and used for this purpose. ‘Schools’ were improvised in all corners of the nation, and volunteer young *brigadistas* (squads) joined the Sandinista men and women in the literacy campaign. Education was deemed an important way to spread the ideas of the new society: one where the individual would develop a more “altruistic and cooperative behavior” and would be “more willing to make sacrifices on behalf of the

\textsuperscript{35}Costeños, coastal people, is the Spanish word used to refer to all the peoples from the Atlantic/Caribbean coast of Nicaragua.
nation.” To achieve this, education was to implement more “collective, participatory, inquiry-oriented, and work-related approaches” (p. 21). Opposition towards an indoctrinating education inspired by the ideology of the FSLN, Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista Front of National Liberation), was voiced by those who pursued “traditional Christian-based values” and not a “godless Marxist-Leninist ideology” that taught of class conflict (p. 33). The Sandinistas sustained that “Education by its very nature is a political act” and theirs pursued the “creation of a more prosperous and egalitarian society” (p. 34). The nationwide literacy campaign was followed by a national discussion to design the new education system, and a series of developments were achieved: a national textbook industry; curricula reform at all levels of the educational system; the introduction of new teaching methods and areas of study in the arts and sciences; significant increase in the levels of literacy across the nation; and the creation of technical and agricultural centers in abandoned areas of the country. In Bluefields, where I carried out my research, a fishing and navigation institute was founded. Following the U.S.-supported counterrevolutionary confrontations in which the ethnic groups of the Caribbean region were involved, and which the international community condemned, the Sandinistas finally laid out the path to a new concept of national integration through the development of an autonomous regime for the peoples of the region. Already during their rule, a law regarding education in the native languages for the Atlantic Coast was issued (decree 571 of 1980); and the new political constitution of 1987 acknowledged the multiethnic nature of the Nicaraguan population as a result of the consolidation of the Estatuto de Autonomía (Statute of Autonomy) issued in the same
year. The constitution states that the peoples of the Coast are given the right to their own
religion and to intercultural education in their languages.

In 1990, the Sandinistas lost the presidential elections to a coalition of parties which,
amongst other things, opposed the political indoctrination of “an education system
divorced from the ‘Hispanic, Christian, and indigenous’ cultural heritage of the
Nicaraguan nation.” Education was radically reformed to “return to and rescue the true
meaning of education: the full and integral formation of individuals … guiding the
student to the truth … to the supreme well-being” (Arnove, 1994, pp. 67-68). From the
times of the emergence of the Nicaraguan nation, the ideas of the European
Enlightenment had been embraced by its elites, as they sought the “modernization” of
their country and its economic prosperity in line with the European countries of the time.
Within this framework, public education had been envisioned as the way to “civilize the
masses,” substituting “European values for folk culture,” and creating “a new society
dedicated to work” (Burns, 1991, pp. 142–143). The political constitution of 1894 had
defined education as secular, yet, Catholic-inspired values were so deeply rooted in the
population that they kept coming back. In words of a leading intellectual of the Ministry
of Education in the closure of a National Congress of Education in 1991, “the person who
is incapable of understanding the immense value of the change produced by the
conversion of America to Christianity is incapable of knowing what true history consists
of, nor knowing the essence of our identity” (Arnove, 1994, p. 64). Returning to a system
of education that did not promote “sectarian politics,” encouraged Christian values, and
responded to the neo-liberal economic policies of the new government meant changes
that ranged from a reform to the curriculum to the implementation of textbooks that were in line with the traditional Catholic values of a middle class, the liberalization and support of private institutions, and reduced intervention of the State. The curriculum reform strengthened the teaching of math and science, included civic formation, and removed sectarian political information as well as subjects such as political economy. Many of the new textbooks were imported from Colombia, and the Sandinista ones were removed; in some places they were “symbolically burned” and many were shredded and turned into pulp (p. 82). Private proposals of education were supported by the nation, investment was prioritized in the primary levels as suggested by the World Bank, and the public school system was submitted to the neo-liberal indicators of an efficient and productive organism: the efficiency of schools would be measured by national examinations, and pay and budget assigned in accordance to results and enrollment.

**The Regional System of Autonomous Education for the Caribbean Region (SEAR)**

Despite the effects that the neo-liberal policies of the 1990s had on the education system of Nicaragua, the Autonomy regime of the Caribbean Region had been under way since 1987 and an autonomous system of education, one of their fundamental demands, was being developed. The peoples of the Coast had continuously resisted the enforcement of education policies that attempted to integrate them into a nation that they perceived so distant from their own cultural links and historical heritage. Having lived in permanent contact with a diversity of ethnic and indigenous communities, brought together
temporarily under the umbrella of a foreign or local power or a religious order, yet keeping differentiated traditions, languages and modes of social organization, they knew of the value and challenges of diversity. The literacy campaign of the Sandinistas, which the ethnic groups demanded be carried out in their native languages, was the first and most important achievement towards their continuous demand for having an education system of their own. This one set the bases for the development of an Intercultural Bilingual Education Program (PEBI, by its Spanish acronym), which started in 1984, around which a Regional System of Autonomous Education (SEAR, by its Spanish acronym) would be developed. Two public, regional universities were opened in 1993, URACCAN (*Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de Nicaragua*), and BICU (Bluefields, Indian & Caribbean University), becoming important centers for the promotion of the cultural reaffirmation of the region; the preparation and professionalization of human resources around the project of Autonomy; the support given to the local and regional governments through research and academic programs; and their presence in rural areas and distant communities (Frühling et. al, 2007). The SEAR was designed in response to the formulation of a National Plan of Education that invited the creation of a system of education of “excellence,” which formed “productive, competent and ethic citizens” … who could live in a context of “peace and social justice.” Approved by the Autonomous Regional Councils, the SEAR became part of the national educational policies (Consejos Regionales Autónomos RAAN y RAAS. & Comisiones de Educación RAAN y RAAS, 2003, p. 19), and it was incorporated to the National Law of Education of 2006 as one of five sub-systems of education in the nation attending the Caribbean Regions. The SEAR was pedagogically conceived on the basis
that “different knowledges, systems of knowing, and gifts coexist within the multiethnic communities of the region” (p. 18), and its fundamental principles are: “autonomy, interculturality, pertinence, quality, solidarity, and gender equality” (p. 31). Some of its major achievements have been the definition, at primary level, of curricular guidelines, scope and sequence charts per subject area, and the profile of the intercultural bilingual primary teacher (p. 24); a gradual production of their own textbooks in the native languages, and a curricular reform for the preparation of teachers in intercultural bilingual education (Frühling et.al, 2007). URACCAN has played an important role in training and professionalizing teachers in intercultural bilingual education, with inservice programs and at undergraduate and more recently graduate levels.

The experience of Autonomy of the Caribbean regions of Nicaragua and its developments in education is certainly one that produces admiration, given the history of challenges that have been faced, and those that are still to be overcome. When in the 1990s the new leaders of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MED, by its Spanish acronym) set out to eradicate manifestations of Sandinism and so-called political propaganda in the curriculum and the textbooks, several of their actions countered the principle of autonomy of the region with respect to their education. In 1990, the MED dismissed the team of experts in charge of the intercultural bilingual program (PEBI) and transferred its coordination to Managua. Ruiz (1998) argues that while the PEBI had a Sandinista-type basis, the MED was on the side of a neo-liberal traditional Catholic government. The MED censored the textbooks that had been prepared by native indigenous because their legends and beliefs promoted “black magic” (the power of the dead over the living), or
because they opposed Catholic beliefs (i.e. adherence to polytheism). Instead, the MED prepared reading material on civics and moral instruction through which the beliefs, traditions, and even at times the languages of the indigenous were dismissed, in a most “offensive” manner (p. 13); and they made quick adaptations of the textbooks brought from other countries, translating them into the Miskitu language, but keeping illustrations that clashed drastically with the immediate surroundings and realities of the region: their purpose, to infuse the ideologies and values of a middle class, pursued in accordance with the idea of nation of the heads of the MED (Frühling et al., 2007; Ruiz, 1998). The team of the Creole bilingual program was authorized to write their own books, but they were equally censored by the MED. More than half the content of the reader “Black Majesty,” which was meant to inspire pride for the African heritage, was removed. Amongst them, “a drawing of a raised, clenched fist—symbolic of resistance to oppression,” deemed by the Ministry of Education as “unnecessarily antagonistic” (Arnove, 1994, p. 107). Arnove (1994) obtained this information from Angélica Brown, director of the Intercultural Bilingual Program of the Southern Autonomous Region until 1993, and member of the team of Creoles who founded, in 1996, the Horatio Hodgson High School where I carried out the field research for my dissertation. What is striking is that the logo (seal and shield) of the school, which hangs on one of the school buildings, is the drawing of a raised, clenched black fist, holding a torch across an open book. When it caught my attention, I made a photograph of it and zealously asked for a reproduction of it on paper, since it was used as the official seal of the school and also as the identifying school badge on the students’ uniforms and on the school flag. I managed to get the reproduction of the seal I was looking for, only to realize now that I look at the pictures again, that,
everywhere I looked (except for the old metal sign on top of the building) the hand had been turned into a light skinned hand. Similarly, one could claim that the history of dreams, challenges and changes that this school has endured since its conception, is one that reflects the ups and downs and evolution of the Autonomy process of education along the Caribbean Coast, and more particularly that of the Creole ethnic group and their struggles. But this is the topic of the core analysis of my dissertation, yet to come. Other difficulties in adopting and developing an intercultural bilingual education program are financial in nature, and related to the challenges of achieving interculturality amidst issues of power within an extant ethno-linguistic hierarchy.

**Conclusions**

In view of what has been presented above, one could argue that within the political territories of the nascent republics, differentiated “nations” (understood as peoples with their own languages, cultures, and traditions) seemed to be evolving away from one another. On one side was the “imagined political community” (Anderson, 1991) that was being conceived by the ‘Hispanic’ criollos who were now in power in each of the countries under study; and on the other the indigenous and ethnic communities, among which were the West Indian descended communities. These had been embraced by English-speaking, Protestant missions, forming characteristics that would not be considered part of the Hispanic imagined political community.
Benedict Anderson (1991) argues that the Creoles set their first imaginations on the ‘common’ language, religion and culture that they inherited from the Hispanic, and acknowledges that it is in the “colonial ideologies” (p. 163) where the roots of the imagined nations lie. The historical accounts presented above indicate that the formal education that West Indians received from both Anglo and Hispanic related cultures was founded on colonially inherited ideologies. On the one hand, the Protestant and Catholic missions would reinforce submission to a divine power, reproducing a hierarchical structure of society; and ethical and moral values inspired by Christianity which promoted a bipolar understanding of the world divided into good and evil; Western and non-Western habits, manner and dress; and the division between superstitious/magic and the rational. The schools of the English-speaking religious missions, which were closely linked to the British, helped reinforce patriotism towards the British and/or to the U.S. when the latter became an overwhelming presence in Limón and Bluefields. On the other hand, the State schools of each country spread sentiments of nationhood and love for the patria, for the institutions and the family as pillars of society. In addition, the emphasis of both mission and State schools was on academic classes which were based on Western knowledge, and on the development of civic values related to citizenship. Even though Protestantism and Catholicism were strong contenders in Europe and during European colonization, and that there are fundamental differences in their clergies, congregations and rites, the fact that both profess “belief in Jesus as the Christ” (Webster’s New World Dictionary of American English, 1991) indicates that both Churches hold various values and ethical standards in common, certainly when contrasted with the extant religious practices of their respective colonial subjects. And, since both came from Europe, along
with colonialism, they make up part of those inherited colonial ideologies I have been discussing. It is interesting to note that, according to the above-mentioned dictionary, the colloquial understanding of Christian is, as a noun “a decent, respectable person”; and, as an adjective, “humane, decent, etc.”

Anderson (1991) also suggests that language was never an issue in the formation of nation in the Americas since, unlike the “selfconscious Machiavellism” of the Russification of the “heterogeneous population of the Czar,” the Hispanization of the Americas… was “out of an unselfconscious everyday pragmatism” … not really ‘Hispanization’ … rather “simple conversion”\(^36\) of heathens and savages” (p. 86). The arguments presented in this chapter, however, indicate that language was an issue in the nation-building process of the Latin American countries under study, especially in the realm of the school, one of the “Ideological State Apparatuses” used to develop feelings of nationhood through the imposition of a language. Education, in the form of an institution inherited from the Spanish colonists, was shaped around the Spanish language, and as the nation-states came face to face with the West Indians, Spanish was imposed as the teaching medium in schools, and declared (or reaffirmed as) the “official” language of the three states. In line with the arguments of Anderson (1991), Spanish, a “print language,” became the “language-of-State” and the “language-of-power” vis-à-vis native indigenous languages and the West Indian’s English and English Creole languages. The former was associated with the presence of unwanted foreign powers, and the latter was

\(^36\) Italics in the original.
the target of disqualifying terms and misnomers since it was perceived as a ‘deviation’ from the Standard English.

The school set out to spread not only language, but ideals and ideologies as suggested above: Catholic-inspired moral principles and values; colonial conceptions of a hierarchical society where race was the organizing principal placing the “white” race at the top and the black race—slaves—at the bottom; and dichotomous ideas of ‘civilization’ against ‘barbaric’ and ‘savage’ modes of life. In fact, public education was seen, at different moments in the evolution of the nation-states under study, as the best way to ‘civilize,’ ‘modernize,’ and nationalize, through language and faith, those outside the core idea of ‘Hispanic’ nations.

The idea of nation as unitary, revolving around some common language, religion, culture and “race” would prove to be a failure as time evolved and the republics faced continuous resistance from those Others, outsiders within the ‘official nations,’ against whom State educational policies pursuing homogenizing systems of education would be implemented. Several are the moments in which the three nation-states would embrace public education with the purpose of instilling sentiments of ‘nationhood’ in its diverse peoples, even if actual investment in education was not always a priority. In the case of Nicaragua, we can identify three illustrative moments. At the emergence of the nation, the ruling elites, “patriarchs” (landowners and merchants), found in a “Europeanized” public education the best way to “civilize” the “folk” and thus change their “customs and ideas” into a life “dedicated to work”; their vision, to achieve “economic prosperity” through the
exploitation of their rich resources for international trade (Burns, 1991). Under the Sandinista regime, public education was reformed to spread the socialist ideologies of the revolution, pursuing social change and the emancipation of the disenfranchised; which at some point meant taking ‘Indians’\(^{37}\) out of their ‘barbarian state’ and the situation of neglect in which they were living. Under the political coalition that took over from the Sandinistas, public education was used to revert to Christian-inspired values as the basis of society. In Costa Rica, the development of public education was defined, from early on, as the ideal way to form citizens who love their patria and its institutions. As such, public education was made official and compulsory in order to oppose the English Schools that the Afrolimonenses had been attending. And, as the army was abolished in 1949, the teachers were claimed to be the new soldiers of the nation, giving public education the mission of ‘defending’ and spreading the idea of nation. In Colombia, education was as much a private initiative as a State commitment and endeavor, but for a long time not a real priority. Education was initially placed in the hands of the Catholic Church, with the clear objective of ‘hispanizing’ and ‘colombianizing’ the peripheries of its political territory, and public education was not very well developed (Helg, 2001). The expansion of the public education system in the 1970s was conceived as a way to spread “homogenizing, selective and excluding” ideas of nation, identity and race, as some studies of relevant social science textbooks have shown (Soler, 2006).

Leaving aside particularities deriving from the historical evolution of each of the countries under study, and their more recent educational developments, it seems possible

\(^{37}\) Common name to refer to the native indigenous populations of the Americas.
to claim that schools have fulfilled the role with which State educational institutions have entrusted them: the implementation of national educational policies that facilitate the spread of assimilationist ideologies of nation. Yet, schools, understood as “cultural artifacts,” are also sites for individual and/or collective resistance. Arnove (1994) narrates how the heroes and symbols of Sandinista revolutionary ideas mixed with images of Disney characters and U.S. commodities on the classroom walls and in notebooks of schools along the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua, suggesting the limits of indoctrination within the bounds of a heavily politicized education. Schools do not work alone. As one of the “Ideological Apparatuses of the State,” schools are informed by the way in which the “memory of independence” is told by “history,” indicating that which should be remembered and that which is to be forgotten (Anderson, 1991). These are factors that will come up as I advance the analysis of the curricula that guide schools in the present historical context of the West Indian descended populations under study.
Chapter 3

Race, Education and West Indians

The ideological legacies of European colonial rule in the Americas have informed the nation-building processes of present-day Central and South American territories since they became independent nations two hundred years ago. Three hundred years of colonial domination gave rise to racialized societies around which the superiority of the “white” race justified the enslavement, exploitation, and conversion into Christianity of the “non-whites.” In the wake of nationhood, the ruling criollo elites held on to the caste system of their former Spanish colonial society and to their colonial institutions in order to keep their privileges.

Cornell and Hartmann (2007) argue that the idea of “race” as a biological category that separated human beings based on their physical characteristics resulted from European colonialism across the world. A “racial designation,” argue the authors, implies the “inferiority” of the “Other” in skills and moral value, and establishes relations of power between human groups. Even though the Latin American societies inherited such understandings, and their criollo elites were more mixed than they were ready to acknowledge, their conceptions, and their nation-building actions were also influenced by the scientific developments on race, which Europeans, and later on the U.S. would apply to relate to the “Others” and to configure their own countries. Such colonial inherited notions of “race” evolved, and the original ideas of nation have also changed, but Latin
American societies are far from having overcome the ideological implications of the racial ideologies of colonial times, which education has helped sustain.

In an attempt to understand the place and meaning of race in the contemporary educational systems of the countries and communities under study, I have found that Omi and Winant’s idea of “racial projects” offers a good perspective of analysis. Understood as “an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” (1994, p. 56), a racial project “connect[s] what race means in a particular discursive practice and the way in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized based upon that meaning.”

The foundational idea of nation in most territories in Central and Latin America was that of the mestizaje of its peoples, a mixture of races through which racial differences would be blurred into a new race to be proud of. Racial differences, based on phenotypical characteristics (namely, skin color, facial features and hair texture), would not be a cause of conflict. A “racial democracy,” as has been argued in the case of Brazil, gave all races political rights of participation. This idea, that racial differences were not a cause of conflict, prevailed based on the argument that there have been no comparable practices in the region like the ones that took place in the United States or in South Africa, where there were generalized practices of segregation (Wade, 1997). Little known, however, are the cases of West Indians in Costa Rica and Nicaragua who were subject to a

38 Italics in the original.
discriminative access to public places. Harpelle (1993) indicates that the Costa Rican government applied such measures against *Afrolimonenses* in Puerto Limón, Costa Rica, in the first part of the 20\(^{th}\) century. And Gordon (1998) indicates that Creoles in Nicaragua were subject to segregation in public places, including churches, by *mestizos* and U.S. entrepreneurs who brought to the region their ideas of the superiority of the white race. With slight differences between the three countries under study, the general effect of ignoring racial differences has been the marginalization of black communities, and in a different way, of the indigenous populations, with *mestizos*, in many instances called “whites” (as they have perceived themselves), perpetuating the caste system of colonial times. The *mestizo* racial project would have been a foundational project that is still in the minds of many today in spite of the rather recent declarations for embracing the multi/pluriculturality of the nations.

Within this perspective, the idea of race can be perceived as an “organizing principle” of colonial societies, one that still shapes most social dynamics in Latin American nations today (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007, p. 27) and therefore one that must be addressed in studies of education as a root cause to understanding the persistent inequality, marginalization and disenfranchisement of a great numbers of their peoples. Within education, the notion of race is linked to ideology and its expressions are found in the selection and distribution of knowledge; the discursive formations that surface in textbooks; the ‘tacit’ understandings of the world of teachers and students; and the open and ‘hidden’ school curricula, following Michael Apple’s (2004) theoretical constructions on the relationship between ideology and power. To reach this point of
analysis though, it is necessary to have a preliminary understanding of the way in which the Latin American nations under study apprehended and deployed their own notions of race, how they dealt with them in building their nation-states, and the role that education played in this. Several theoretical constructions around race come up as one approaches the issues of race of the nations under study: race as a social Darwinist idea; the Latin American construction of *mestizaje*; the theory of eugenics and its applications in Latin America; the relationship between race and place, and considerations of race and class.

**The Issue of Race in Costa Rica**

The race issue in Costa Rica is closely tied to the idea of a nation born out of a set of ‘exceptional’ conditions as claimed by historiographers, writers and authorities, who wrote that Costa Ricans descended from a homogeneous race of mostly white European ancestry (S. P. Palmer, 1990). This was based on the description of early Costa Rica as an “egalitarian, middle-class society” of hard-working, free-spirited peasants who had lived in isolation from the colonial center of the Captaincy of Guatemala, in “a land of peace, hard work and progress,” and who had not engaged in violent conflicts due to class or racial issues, as most Latin American countries had (S. P. Palmer & Molina, 2004). Monge Alfaro (1978), renowned Costa Rican historiographer and author of history school textbooks in the mid twentieth century, places the yeoman of the Central Valley as the axis around whom “the Costa Rican nation will be structured,” since he represents the spirit of work and “rural democracy” of a nation where the land did not divide the people and the generalized poverty of the nascent republic did not create social classes or hatred
between *criollos* and the indigenous people (p. 160). This image simply ignored the presence of the different ‘Others’ around the Central Valley, and did away with the history of the conversion and exploitation of the indigenous people and their use as slaves by Spanish colonizers. The harmonious mixing of races, where the European white prevailed, accounted for the claim of “white” ancestry of the Costa Ricans, an exception to the rule of its neighboring Central and South American territories. The settlement and population of the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, by West Indians, Chinese, and indigenous ‘Others,’ to name the largest ethnic groups, was not part of the imaginary of nation.

For a long time, it was argued that the Afro-descended element of the population of Costa Rica was almost nonexistent, yet studies of the 1970s onwards would prove otherwise (Bourgois, 1994; Cáceres, 2008; Castillo, 1998; Duncan & Meléndez, 2005; Gudmundson, 1984; Gudmundson & Wolfe, 2010; Murillo, 1995; Olien, 1980). Africans, West Indians, and African-descended individuals and groups arrived in Costa Rica as slaves, maroons, and laborers; along the Caribbean coast, their presence is associated mostly with railroad construction, the banana plantations of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and earlier on with the cacao plantations of the 17th and 18th centuries. A considerable number of free blacks, *mulatos*,\(^{39}\) and *pardos*\(^{40}\) already made up part of the population of the Central Valley and the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica in the 17th century. For purposes of having control over the growing mixed Afro-descended population, and

\(^{39}\) Resulting from the mixture of blacks and whites.

\(^{40}\) Resulting from the mixture of Amerindian, blacks and whites.
getting taxes from their involvement in trade and agriculture, they were concentrated around a town called La Puebla de los Pardos, where they could be officially registered (Cáceres, 2008). The town was built around a church constructed in honor of La Negrita, a dark colored image representing the Virgin Mary, found by a mulatto girl, which would become La Virgen de los Angeles, Costa Rica’s patroness (Olien, 1980). The free Afro-descended peoples of the Atlantic side of the country were involved in trade, arts and crafts, domestic work, the servicing of plantations in Matina, and militias which fought indigenous uprisings and attacks of British and French (Cáceres, 2008).

But, despite the multiple evidences of African and Afro-descended presence in Central America during the colonial period, there is absolute silence with respect to their existence in the official history. Both in the classical texts and in school textbooks of every single country (Cáceres, 2008, p. 14).

Gudmundson (1984) claims that Costa Rica, unlike Argentina, did not need to resort to white immigration in order to contain the “degeneration” of the races, as most Latin American countries did between the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Yet their policies of restricting the immigration of colored people to the country in the 1860s, and not allowing the employment of West Indians in the banana plantations of the Pacific coast in the 1930s for fear of the ‘Africanization’ of their country, are measures that speak of their intention to maintain their imaginary homogeneous ‘white’ race. Costa Ricans had inherited, like their counterparts in Latin America, a belief in the inferiority of the black race, spread by the scientific beliefs of the 19th century about the inequality of races, in the spirit of Social Darwinist theorists (Omi & Winant, 1994); and, they feared the
condemnation that Europeans and the U.S. made of the liberal mixing of races, responsible for the degeneration which rendered them inferior to the ‘pure’ European races (Stepan, 1991).

These concepts of race have been subject to change as a result of the re-encounter of ‘blacks’ and ‘whites’ in Costa Rica, contributing to an understanding of race as a social construct. Once the Afrolimonenses were granted citizenship, shortly after the revolution of 1948, notable individuals and civil organizations started engaging in political and social actions geared towards “tearing down the barriers that separate today [1972] the ethnic groups” of Costa Rica (Duncan & Meléndez, 2005). Duncan and Meléndez indicate that there have been substantial advances in the past 30 years, in terms of a framework of legislation, declarations, and projects, yet there are also contradictions, silences, and fears related to ‘essentialist’ understandings of race, which tend to maintain relationships and structures of domination.

For Costa Ricans, the inferiority of the black race was derived not only from a biological perception of its characteristics, such as the color of the skin, but it was associated with the tropical climate of the Province of Limón, where only non-white races were believed to be able to make a living, and to cultural practices that did not conform to that of the Central Valley. Following Peter Wade’s (1993) association of race and place in several Latin American countries, Sharman (2001) indicates how the carretera (highway) that linked Limón to the Central Valley in the mid-1980s would mean, for the Costa Rican “white” society, the “threat” of a black invasion; and for the Afrolimonenses, the
“downfall of Puerto Limón.” For the Costa Rican dominant society, argues the author, Limón and its blackness are associated with danger (p. 46); a dark skin is a sign of poverty (p. 55); and Afro-Costa Ricans are assigned “child-like features” (p. 53). These result from what the author considers a half-way kind of incorporation of Afro-Costa Ricans into the dominant society, which finds them “in a perpetual state of liminality” (p. 54). For the *Afrolimonenses* the overwhelming presence of “whites” in Limón meant disorder, crime, and lack of city planning. The voices of my interviewees are dotted with such racialized representations at both ends of the race spectrum. Yet, most voices argue that there is no racism in the country…only it is concealed, it is “hidden.”

There is in Costa Rica a “hidden racism.” They smile at you but when they have a problem with you they insult you as “black son of a bitch.”…Is the black color of my skin a sin?

(In conversation with a school teacher in Puerto Limón, 09/09/09).

Some stereotypes against the blacks come up from time to time, not very frequently. There is this sentence the students use…, like in a situation where I ask a student to do something. "Please, you, go and erase the chalkboard." "Why *fulanita* don't do it? Am I a black man"? “¡Qué!? ¿Acaso soy negro?” …To which I say “We are not talking about that, I say to do it.”

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41 The words have been transcribed literally from the recording, including the code-switching and the intonation, which is conveyed by the punctuation marks used.
West Indians’ Political Actions against Marginalization and Racial Discourses in Education

Certain issues of education brought up by *Afrolimonenses* are also food for thought regarding underlying issues of race. In the late 1980s the Ministry of Public Education (MEP by its Spanish acronym) and the Organization of American States (OAS) supported the initiative of a renowned *Afrolimonense* poetess to develop a program of education for the Province of Limón. A series of workshops was organized with members of the community across the Province, and a set of seven booklets was issued containing cultural manifestations of *Afrolimonenses* such as language, dances, music, food, and carnival, Anansy stories, and the history of the Province of Limón. Duncan (2005) indicates that this was one of the first political achievements of the community, but it was short-lived due to “an unfortunate misunderstanding” of the Ministry of Education, who argued that “a problem of racism, alien to our country, was being imported” as posters of abolitionists such as Harriet Tubman were being used in one of the schools (p. 16). The booklets contain valuable compilations of cultural expressions of *Afrolimonenses*, which were obtained through research with members of the population, and have become reference material that students still consult today at the public library of Limón. The worn state of the books speaks of the frequent consultation, and the fact that they were never reprinted. Their incorporation in the curriculum, one of the objectives of the
project, was not achieved officially. Instead, the curriculum saw the addition of a children’s novel that the *Afrolimonense* community found highly controversial.

Beginning in 1994, a children’s novel written in 1947 by Joaquín Gutiérrez Mangel, a well-known Costa Rican writer, entitled *Cocorí*, was included in the list of readings that the Ministry of Education assigned every school year. The *Asociación Proyecto Caribe* condemned the action publicly in 2002 arguing that the book “is racist and harms the integrity of the black man” (cited by (Chen, 2008) from “Semana Nacional,” 2003). The denunciation triggered a polemic that was covered by the media, and later it was addressed by language and literature scholars during a seminar which was to honor the author of the book. Largely speaking, the academics set out to defend the high quality of the work of literature and the innovative way, for the time it was written, in which the black child, the main character, is portrayed. The child is intelligent, curious, and brave; someone who undertakes a voyage seeking answers to profound questions about life (Caamaño, 2004). Some argue that the plot is an inversion of the Europe-America encounter, and that it is one of equal and loving exchange (Chen, 2004). Other critics rescue the value of the piece to raise consciousness by situating it historically, even though they acknowledge in their analyses the weight and implications of a discourse where the word *negro/negrito*\(^{42}\) is used as a noun to refer to or to name its characters; and that the word is associated with that which is not beautiful while white is, suggesting an Eurocentric perspective

\(^{42}\) “*Negrito*” is the diminutive form of *negro* (black).
(Caamaño, 2004). For Afrolimonenses, their claim is one that relates to their feelings and ought to be respected as such. A member of the community denounces the right that blacks have to demand respect for their word and their claims. The text, it is claimed, acts as a mirror of the image blacks have been associated with and that they hate the most: that of inferiority and dependence. “Hopefully, the rights of the black community to say what they feel are respected. I dream of a day people stop telling us how we must feel and act…” (cited by Chen, 2008). What seems to be a report for an organization called Sistema de Integración Centroamericana indicates that the Ministry of Education did acknowledge in 1994, in an official document, the “discriminatory” nature of the text, but it did not give arguments to support it (Mora, n.d.). Instead, adds the report, the Constitutional Assembly passed a resolution in 1996 indicating that there were no elements to support the banning of the text, arguing in its favor some of the positive evaluations presented above by scholars. Thus, the text is still part of the compulsory list of readings for the year 2011. An Afrolimonense English teacher of the school where I did my research was the one who informed me about this issue as she recalled with pride the fact that they had been able to voice their discontent and have the book removed.

The Use of Racial Categories

Another issue to be addressed is the fact that in present-day Costa Rica it is customary to use what I perceive as colonial categories of race to refer to the population, suggesting an essentialist understanding of the concept where the phenotype is given priority. Terms such as Indio, Negro, Mulato, Chino, Blanco, and to a lesser degree Mestizo, are used on
an everyday basis to refer to one another. The words themselves, it is claimed, do not imply a racist or discriminative practice; instead, the tone of voice with which the label is used, or the context, would be.

… things have changed and people would nowadays not dare, ever, discriminate against you openly because there are laws that don’t permit it. Instead, there is hidden racism. “If you and I are [sic] friends and we have a problem or conflict you might call me “negra h.p.” [black ‘son’ of a bitch]… which in this context is clear racism. Because, why call on the color of my skin to insult me…? To which, at one time one might answer “paña yellow belly” [laughter].43

(In conversation with a former school teacher in Puerto Limón, Costa Rica. 09/29/09)

The “ethnic” categories used in the last general national census of Costa Rica, carried out in the year 2000, were: indigenous, black or Afro-Costa Rican; and Chinese.44 The school where I focused my field research applied the first two categories to keep its statistics but used a broader category, “Asian,” to refer to Chinese, Korean and Japanese amongst others; as well as a category called “Other” which included Jewish, Arab and other nationalities.45 It was striking to see the numbers. Out of a total of 1,878 students, only 177 would be classified as having an ethnic category. Of these, 112 were recorded as

43 The interviewee switched codes during the conversation. Those in quotation marks are literal transcriptions.
Afro-Costa Rican or Blacks, which seemed to me to be too low against what I could perceive. When asked, some of my interviewees indicated that students were classified as black (*negro*) based solely on the color of their skin, while a *mulato* would already be considered as *mestizo*, or *blanco* (white): this would explain the low number. The head of school indicated hesitantly that *mulatos* would be part of the black category, not giving much importance to the difference. And a couple others stated that criteria of race, gender and class were taken into account to form balanced groups. Following my field notes of class observation, where I took note of the students’ “race” based on my own perceptions (an exercise which probably yielded some errors), the percentage of Afro-descended students in the lessons observed (which in my wider understanding included “mulattoes”) would be 48% in average; quite higher than the 9.42% of total student population assigned as Afro-Costa Rican or Blacks. A teacher indicated that as the academic year advanced, school desertion increased and the ethnic composition of the groups changed; this explained that one of his 7th grader groups happened to be made mostly of Afro-descended students while others I visited had other ethnic compositions.

A racial designation of the Other, suggest (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007) implies his/her inferiority; an ethnic description of a cultural group, instead, reflects more of a self-conscious process of identification and value in relation to others, even if assigned from outsiders to the groups. The term *Afrolimonense* seems to be more of an academic construction than one that people would use to refer to one another. The word *Limonense*, instead, is more widely used but nowadays it is restricted to refer to the geographical origin of a person, a group or a particular cultural expression –i.e. *Calypso Limonense*. A
true Limonense, suggest Duncan and Meléndez (2005) as they refer to the whites who were raised in Limón before 1948, was someone who adapted to the “culture of Limón,” leaving aside “cliché prejudices and becoming brothers with the black man” (p. 146). Thus, it has a tint of nostalgia for what used to be.

Of the three nations under study, Costa Rica is the one which has come to acknowledge the diversity of its peoples later than the others, yet there have been no major changes in the political constitution of the republic in reference to a multi/pluricultural composition of society. Scholars of the Social Sciences have been contributing their research findings to promote discussion and change at this level, hoping to have an effect on education. One of their achievements has been to push through, in 1994, Law 7426, proclaiming the former Día del Descubrimiento y de la Raza (Day of the Discovery and the Race) celebrated October 12, as Día de las Culturas (Day of the Cultures). The Day of the Discovery and the Race, enacted by Law 4169 on July 20 1968, is questioned in (Hernández, Ibarra, & Quesada, 1993) for the way in which it praised the “discovery” and the great “blessings” that the Spanish brought along with them –civilization, the true religion, their customs and language… ignoring the contributions of the “natives” or of ethnicities different from the “Caucasian” or European. In order to promote the enactment of the law towards acknowledging the participation of the different cultures that have contributed to making the Costa Rican nation, Bozzoli, Ibarra & Quesada (1998) published a small book offering basic, user-friendly information about the most visible contributions of the cultures that arrived in Costa Rica and advice as to how the celebration of the cultures could be done by schools. Scholarly work about the presence
of Blacks in Costa Rica, and activism of Afrolimonenses for their rights, has also contributed to dispelling the ideas of a homogenous, Hispanic-descended “race” as the basis for the construction of the nation. Simultaneously, the Afro-Central American Youth have come together under an umbrella organization called ONECA, to voice the needs of the Afro-descended to become rightful citizens in their respective countries; the Asociación Proyecto Caribe from Costa Rica, which presented claims against Cocori, is part of this organization, with the active participation of West Indian descended individuals.

Class, Race, and Place: Students’ Perceptions

Class is a category of analysis that has been widely used in Latin America to explain discrimination and marginalization, and to argue against practices of racism. Class differences stemming from the spread of capitalist modes of exploitation and production were highlighted by different scholars in the 1970s to explain racial or ethnic discrimination in Latin American societies. Peter Wade (1997) contends that class alone cannot “account for particularities,” and neither can race, ethnicity or gender: it is the interaction of these what can explain particular circumstances (p. 78, 79). Economic mobility of Blacks up the social scale does not necessarily dispel racial inequality, as evidenced by detailed studies of Brazil’s case, which show that “blacks and mulattoes got less return for a given level of education than whites did” (Hasenbalg, 1985, p. 95 in Wade, 1997, p. 71). Yet there is, amongst the West Indian descended people in my study, a common tacit understanding that education is the gateway towards upward social
mobility and opportunity, and most of them argue that there is no racism in their schools and localities, even if many acknowledge having experienced discrimination by skin color, or by a racialized understanding of the place they inhabit within each their republics.

- φ1 My mother tells me… “First take care of your studies, then….Without studies, you are nothing.” That is the only thing they have inculcated in me.
- φ3 …My mother has always told me to study, that studying is what is most important in life, the truth is that it is the only thing we have to be better. Since I was small I had this idea of not having children. Study and study more, and have my house and my profession and fight for my things.
- φ2 …My mother has also inculcated [the value of] studying in me; first things first, she says that the only thing she can offer me is my studies. That is the most important thing.

[...]

- φ2 …[Those from the Valle Central (Central Valley)] discriminate against us a lot… God forbids! We are always the bad ones, the…
- φ1 The thieves.
- φ2 That’s right. “Hey! Be careful because that one is a Limonense” or something like that.
- φ1 The drug dealers…
- φ2 …But if we are talking about criminality and all that, there is more [of that] in the Valle Central... ...
In other words, there is criminality everywhere.

But they always place Limón aside, always. … …there is always a certain sense of discrimination against the color… the black color. They always say that the blacks are the bad ones… I have many friends from San José [the capital city of Costa Rica, located in the Central Valley], and I am one who has Internet, and I know that if I connect to Internet, and I say “I’m from Limón,” everyone will ask, “Are you black?” And I say, “No.” Then he says “Alright, otherwise I would delete you.” That’s the way they are. They don’t like them [blacks].

They even ask for proof: photographs, Webcam… And I say, “Look if you start with such stupidities, it is me who is going to delete you.

(Student Focus group 01. Puerto Limón, Costa Rica. Recorded interview. 10/05/09)

An inquiry into expressions of discrimination against West Indians on the basis of “race” differs depending on where the inquiry is made. As the words of students above suggest, Costa Ricans still associate blacks with the Province of Limón, independent from the presence of other ethnicities that may have inhabited the region. Instead, Limonenses live a diversity of cultures and ethnicities where, according to most of them, there is no open racism against any particular group or individual, but people discriminate against one another for a variety of reasons.
- φ3 In my opinion, that [racism] has changed a lot. Now almost everyone gets along well with everyone else, and I see many [mixed] couples, blacks and whites, whites and Chinese, all kinds. … Just as there is also some racism …

- φ2 Well, there will always be [racism].

- φ3 To me, it is not as exaggerated as it was before, things have advanced, there is not so much racism. At school, I don’t see it.

- φ1 There is as much racism as xenophobia.

- φ2 …Nicaraguans are highly discriminated, to be a Nicaraguan is like an offense…

- φ3 Here in Costa Rica.

- φ1 …I have to laugh about that… I don’t give it importance. And racism always happens not only with the negritos46, also with the Chinese, the whites, the blacks, everywhere.

(Student Focus Group 01. Puerto Limón, Costa Rica. Recorded interview, 10/05/09)

- φ Some parents say “Oh no! I won’t send my son to this school because they are all problematic because almost all of them are black, most of them are blacks, and blacks are problematic.”

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46 The word *negrito* in Spanish is a diminutive, denoting either condescendence or “infantilization” of the “Other,” in this case the blacks, just as Sherman suggested in her study. The interviewee was a mestizo-looking student of Nicaraguan origin.
…I have no problem [with that], I know I am not like that. I am black but I know that I am quiet. If they speak of blacks it is of the problematic blacks, they are not speaking about the blacks who don’t do anything [wrong]. If it is about a black person, maybe it is one from Pacuare, because there…

[laughter]

…there you can find the problematic ones. Because most of the people who live in Pacuare come to study in this school.

Yes, that is right.

Then, they refer mostly to Pacuare and other such neighborhoods. But when they say something like “It was that black one who did it!” and things like that… Then, hey! I don’t like to hear “it was that black one,” rather say the name!! But I don’t feel bad because… Well, I do, because it is our race the one doing such [bad] things, sometimes.

(Student Focus group 02. Puerto Limón, Costa Rica. Recorded interview. 10/07/09)

Laura Putnam (2010) argues that before the 1920s there was no “polarized notion of black vice as the antithesis of white virtue in Central American public debate” (p. 288). The Caribbean lowlands of the Isthmus witnessed migratory movements of Chinese, Arabs, Turks, Syrians, Armenians, Gypsies, and “coolies”\(^{47}\) as well as West Indians coming from several of the Antilles; the immigration of the latter was allowed in Limón, from India.

\(^{47}\) From India.
Costa Rica, since it was believed that they were fit to work in the high temperatures and humidity of the lowlands, and keeping them was a small price to pay for becoming modern. The author contends that outside the “white zones” of the U.S. companies where Jim Crow segregation measures were imposed, the State authority of ports, towns and countryside usually had “a black face” and spoke “English creole” (p. 285). Legislation against blacks came with the adoption of eugenic criteria to restrict immigration, following the steps of the United States in this aspect.48 The black race was to be banned and, if at all possible, “erased” from the Caribbean lowlands, to defend the racial homogeneity of the Latin countries (p. 294), which in the context of a Pan-American congress on eugenics in 1927 had been misleadingly presented as a “superior race” along with the Saxon (p. 293).

In line with Putnam (2010)’s thesis, the sovereignty that the Costa Rican State exerted over the Province of Limón was informed by the eugenic idea of avoiding the degeneration of their homogenous, exceptionally “white” race. These eugenic beliefs combined with colonial notions of race to form the foundation upon which the new nation set out to construct itself, and the education sector was given the task of homogenizing the region around a Hispanic, largely white and Catholic project of nation, against which the diversity of the Caribbean was a threat.

48 Inspired by social Darwinist theories, the science of eugenics of the early 20th century sought the improvement of the human beings through a “deliberate selection of the fit over the unfit” (Stepan, 1991, p. 24). In the 1920s the United States issued immigration policies that allowed them to screen immigrants in search of the hereditary characteristics that might guarantee the desirable moral, mental, and physical conditions of human beings, fit to populate their country, and so intended to do the sixteen (16) Latin American countries which attended “the first Pan-American conference on Eugenics and Homiculture, held in Havana in December 1927,” amongst them Costa Rica and Colombia (Puntnam, 2010, p. 292).
The Issue of Race in Colombia

The initial idea of nation, with which the *criollo* set out to form the republic of Colombia, responded to a racial project of *mestizaje*, where ‘races’ lived harmoniously and a “racial democracy” would develop. Lasso (2007) shows how, in the debates of the Courts of Cadiz between 1810 and 1812, when a new constitution was written for the monarchy with the participation of representatives from the Spanish territories overseas (then part of a single nation), *criollos* defended the idea of “racial equality” for their Afro-descended populations against that of their inferiority sustained by the Hispanic. At stake was the issue of awarding or not citizenship to the blacks; although citizenship was not granted by the Constitution of Cadiz, it was by the initial constitutions of the *Gran Colombia*. Scholars of the subject in Colombia sustain, however, that the ideas of racial harmony were a mere rhetoric used by the *criollo* elites to obtain the support of the blacks during the wars of independence (Lasso, 2007; Mosquera, Pardo, & Hoffmann, 2002), and the abolition of slavery was not declared in Colombia until 1851. The persistence of racial discrimination caused the blacks to migrate away from the areas of control of the dominant *criollo* society into its peripheries (Mosquera et al., 2002) accounting for the present-day configuration of the bulk of black communities living in peripheral areas of the country, and in marginal belts of urban centers. The colonial understanding of the inferiority and superiority of races would be maintained as an “organizing principle” of society in Colombia. The West Indians inhabiting the island of Providence, Afro-Anglo descended, would be confronted with the idea of a *mestizo* nation, whose claimed “equality of races” had not been achieved.
Influenced by the “scientific” ideas of “eugenics” developed in the late 19th century, the criollo elites attributed the state of social and economic decay in the country to the degeneration of the races. McGraw (2007) suggests that the discourses resulting from the issue of race reaffirmed the elites in a position of authority to express their thoughts and ideas about how to improve the conditions of the “inferior” races; particularly how to avoid the contamination of the black race and the “cultural deviation” resulting from “racial instability.” The debates over the causes of degeneration ranged from blaming deficient racial ancestries, to diseases and vices claimed to be common in certain races, to the misery of the living conditions among the Afro-descended; the solutions, for the most part, revolved around the development of hygiene programs and moral education, as well as promoting the immigration of purer races. Expressions of degeneration included “the increase of madness and criminality, the frequency of civil wars, resorting to suicide, alcoholism and syphilis” (Helg, 2001, p. 112). The Caribbean region of the country, indicates McGraw (2007), was considered to be at the core of the decline of the races, given its climatic conditions, and the potential contamination of the country by the black race, which was not seen to be fit for modern industry. Together with education, the author points at the implementation of “paternalistic” measures by the elites towards improving the conditions of life for the working classes such as giving out clothing to children, paving roads and installing sewage systems, so as to “improve the image of the country before the eyes of the world” (p. 64) Their attitude, and their little belief in the “civilization” of the blacks and the lack of morality of the coastal people, reinforced the
extant hierarchies of race and class (p. 73), which continue to characterize the Colombian nation.

**Representations of Race and Nation in School Textbooks**

Recent studies of school textbooks and manuals used in education in Colombia, at different times during the 20th century, reflect representations of nation and race that derive from the contexts presented above.

Herrera, Pinilla & Suaza (2007) indicate that one particular manual of moral and civic instruction, published in 1907, suggests the building of a nation around “men of an equal race, who share a religion, with a common language,” excluding all those who did not conform to the Catholic and Hispanic traditions; for the manual, the indigenous are considered as “savages… counter to what we are expected to become as human beings and Colombians,” and the blacks are not even mentioned (p. 722). The author of the manual proposes the development of “a Christian citizenship” based on the belief of “a natural hierarchy, which begins with God,” where a previously established sacred order is not to be questioned. In this social order, there is a notion of “Us” encompassing “all that is normal; being Catholic, being white, the men, the pure, the obedient, the patient. The vicious, the others, therefore, are the suicidal ones, the dirty ones, the ignorant ones, the sinners, the alcoholics, the abnormal ones.” (p. 721)
Soler (2006) approaches issues of discourse and racism in social science school textbooks used in Colombia after 1991. She indicates that a previous study of texts used between 1900 and 1950, advanced by Herrera et al. in 2003, concludes that the ideas of nation, identity and race used throughout the books of this period reflect a biological and geographical determinism where one race, white Andean, is superior to the others—the rest of them. Soler (2006) then embarks upon a critical discourse analysis of textbooks of social studies, used after 1991, when Colombia passed its latest political constitution acknowledging the diversity of its peoples. Having reviewed a total of sixteen (16) social studies textbooks for the different levels of primary and high school, edited by two of the major publishing houses of the nation between 2002 and 2004, the study showed that racist ideas persist against indigenous and Afro-descended peoples in the form of omissions, distortions and the association of the minority groups with problem areas. Such is the context in which my own research is located, but my focus of analysis is the school curricula. After 1991, the expressions of discrimination towards these communities are veiled by what I deem is a politically correct discourse of the elites, who have the power to create discourses from “the State, the school, the church or the media,” as Soler (2006) puts it (p. 256).

The Use of Ethnic Identifiers

Afro-descended groups in Colombia nowadays escape colonial designations based on race such as the use of the words blacks or mulattos to describe them. Mosquera, Pardo and Hoffmann (2002) suggest that as the Afro-descended people become visible subjects
of history they escape “univocal” descriptors. They are no longer called just black peoples, slaves, or mulattos; their interactions with others indicate that their identities are social constructions, be they cultural or political.

The use of terms such as Afro-colombians, Afro-descended, Black communities, Palenqueros\(^{49}\) and Raizales reflect a more ethnic than a racial description of their identities (Cornell and Hartmann, 2006). On an everyday basis, Colombians tend to use the word moreno, “brown,” to refer to blacks, avoiding the plain use of the word negro, black, which in the mind of the one who utters the word might raise conflict. Just as the word moreno acknowledges the black element in the identity of a person, it also veils it by emphasizing the mixed color in it. On the other hand, its use seems to me to imply a condescending attitude of a speaker towards blacks, which might explain why the members of the etnia negra in Costa Rica actually do not like to be called morenos.

Raizal is a term that resulted from a self-conscious quest of ethnic identity of the Afro-Anglo descended people who have inhabited the Archipelago since the third decade of the 17\(^{th}\) century. The ethnic identifier derives from the word “root” and it was selected to refer to those who find their cultural origins in their early contact with British colonizers, who had brought their African ancestors to work in agricultural plantations of the Caribbean as slaves. Having an Anglicized name, speaking English and/or an English Creole somewhere along a linguistic continuum, and being anywhere between a dark

\(^{49}\) Ethnic identifier of the descendants of a maroon community known as Palenque, located in the Caribbean/Atlantic region of Colombia.
black skin and a lighter skin, would make a *Raizal*. This, and several other attempts to define who is and who is not a *Raizal*, has been contested by many who find their roots in the settlement dynamics of the Archipelago, which brought along a diversity of peoples who mixed with the West Indian descended individuals, amongst them Chinese, and Colombians from the mainland. This ethnic label is not claimed as authentic by many in the island of Providence, who prefer to call themselves Islanders, and who still place their identity more on the side of their British inheritance. Most of the interviewees identified themselves and the inhabitants of Old Providence as Islanders. The word *Raizal* did not come up spontaneously in response to a question about their ethnicity.

- *Where are you from?*
- From Providence, here.
- *Were you born here?*
- Born here, native speaker islander… ha, ha, ha.
- *So, which community or ethnic group…*
- Ethnic group…
- …*do you belong to?*
- Islanders’ ethnic group. … Afro-Colombian. They say that: Afro-Colombian, but I consider myself is as descendant of English.
- *Islander.*
- Islander… ha, ha.
- *Any other cultural community from the island that you belong to?*
No. Well… majority of time Islander is a mixture of everything; a mixture of Spanish, and Nicaraguan, and all these… England, African, and Spanisher [sic]… and anyway, everything.

- So, for you Islander is...
- A mixture of everything, ha, ha, ha.

(School teacher. Old Providence Island, Colombia. Recorded Interview 08/04/2009)

There seemed to be little identification amongst my interviewees with the term Raizal, perceived more as an exogenous term used by outsiders to refer to them. Racial identifiers, such as black, were not used. Instead, the word Islander was referred to by most of them, and there was a general feeling of having several cultural identities.

- Are you from the island of Providence? Born here?
- Yes.
- Which community or ethnic group would you say that you belong to?
- Sorry?
- Which community or ethnic group would you say that you belong to?
- Well to the… to the…, community or ethnic group?! Mmm…
- Or you don’t feel…
- Yes, yes, yes. It’s just that I belong to this… mmm… this… mm… How do you say? Black? Afri… Afro…
- Afro-Colombian? Afro-Caribbean?
- Afro-Caribbean is who I am, ha, ha, ha…
- *OK. Islander?*
- Yes! And very proud to be one.
- *Would you agree to say Raizal?*
- Of course! Ha, ha, ha.
- *But also Colombian.*
- Of course! Ha, ha, ha.

(School teacher. Old Providence Island, Colombia. Recorded Interview 08/06/2009)

- *Which community or ethnic group would you say that you belong to?*
- Me, I belong to the native community of Providence. I feel I am a native. Native of Providence. […]
- “Raizal”? *Or don’t you identify yourself with the word “Raizal”?*
- I do, yes. I am Raizal, born from a Providencian woman. I feel Raizal. … I am Raizal, Providencian. I identify with Providence.

(Acting School Director. Old Providence Island, Colombia. Recorded Interview. 28/07/09)

For purposes of my study, I have kept the ethnic label *Raizales* to refer to the West Indian descended individuals inhabiting the island of Providence nowadays, given the fact that
the term has earned them political recognition as it appears in the Colombian Constitution to refer to Providencians and Saint Andreans alike. Nonetheless, I believe it is important to take into account these self-perceptions as they refer to processes of cultural identity. In any case, the avowal of the term Raizal by Providencians might suggest an acceptance of the political struggle led by organized groups who have been fighting for their self-determination.

**Class, Race, and Place: Students’ Perceptions**

Several theories surface to explain the geographical determinism with which “races” are represented in countries like Colombia. One has to do with the idea that the black race, the focus of my discussion, was fit to endure the extreme climatological conditions of tropical areas, such as the lowlands of the Atlantic/Caribbean coast north of Colombia – and, for that matter, those of the Pacific coast of the country, where the bulk of black communities live under conditions of poverty. Such a conception derives from the times of European colonialism, when black Africans were enslaved and brought over to work on agricultural plantations and the extraction of minerals, and it is sustained by a biologist understanding of race (Cornell & Hartmann, 2007) to justify the exploitation of the other. Another one argues that given the continuous discrimination of criollos against blacks, these would have emigrated to the peripheral zones of the country and to the urban belts of the cities where they are mostly concentrated even today (Mosquera et al. 2002). And yet another refers to an understanding of the nation-state as a cultural space, inspired on Norman Whitten’s theoretical elaborations (cited by Wade, 1997) within the
wider framework of post-modernism. In this context, the question refers to whether blacks are seen as part of the ‘imagined community’ of the nation or not, whether they are nationals or not, and to the measures of race mixture, mestizaje, and cultural whitening that individuals go through to be part of the idea of nation.

The Afro-Anglo West Indian descended Providencians came to live in what could be described as one of the farthest peripheral regions of the Colombian nation, a “buffer zone” between Latin American and Caribbean settlement dynamics: a zone of encounter of British and Hispanic inherited socio-cultural characteristics, like that of the Central American circum-Caribbean lowlands. Located in a geopolitical strategic point of the Far Western Caribbean Sea, the region became of interest to the Colombian nation for its marine resources, the expanding tourism industry, and more recently, the possible exploration of oil from its sea beds. Its ethnic group, Raizales, who claim the right to inherit the territory and to their self-determination and government, against the neo-colonial approach of the Colombian State, have been subject to discrimination on the basis of at least three aspects: their English language, their Protestantism, and the mostly black color of their skin.

In line with what was argued for Limón, Costa Rica, I believe that the results of an inquiry about discrimination on the basis of “race” would differ if done on the island or in mainland Colombia. Within the island itself, with a total population of 4,147, of which
3,645 identify as Raizales and 105 as Afro-Colombian50, there is a generalized feeling that there is no discrimination on the basis of race. Most of my interviewees indicated that there is rivalry between students and groups of youngsters coming from the different sectors of the island with one sector in particular being the most mentioned: Bottom House or Casa Baja. The island of Old Providence is divided in separate small towns or villages scattered along and around its coastal areas. Bottom House is known to have been the sector of the island at the southwestern end given to slaves upon emancipation, while Town, at the north end, was the sector where there were more “whites.” In terms of skin color, there is a wider range of “color” amongst the Raizales of Old Providence, with many of them having a much lighter skin than others, several having green eyes, and others having dark black skin. Yet, the causes of discrimination, most of my interviewees argue, do not have to do necessarily with the color of the skin, although this point alone would be a subject for further research, since perceptions and understandings vary significantly. Of interest to my own research is to identify the tacit and open ideologies that inhabit schools and give shape to the way that Raizal students from Old Providence approach and understand the world they live in.

- …right here within the island there is racism. …Because those from Town dislike those from Bottom House, and those from Bottom House dislike those from Town; or those from Bottom House and those from The Mountain… Or Kathleena and Old Town, or Old Town and… there are always conflicts between the youngsters… Agression too….

- And, do those conflicts have to do with the color of the skin?

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50 DANE, National Census 2005.
- Yes, yes.
- *Or is it socio-economic?*

- It is not socio-economic because people here are used to sharing. But it is the color of the skin. That comes from… that has its roots.

(School Teacher. Old Providence Island. Recorded Interview 08/06/09)

The perceptions of students regarding discrimination by way of race or ethnicity differ depending on their own social construction and inter-subjectivity. Some claim that there is no such a thing as ‘racism,’ neither on the island nor in school; that what matters to an islander is that outsiders relate to them respectfully. *Raizales* call those who have a Hispanic ancestry *pañas*, and depending on the context and tone of voice the term can be offensive or not. Old Providence Island is small enough for anyone coming from outside to be easily noticeable; and for everyone to know most of everyone else’s ancestry and family composition.

- φ…to those of us who are from elsewhere, the islanders, those from here, seem to like to insult us, humiliate us, and that is not fair because we are all the same. Just because one person is from one place and the other one is from somewhere else, that has nothing to do. We are all equal. …

- δ1 Well, this is my opinion. I mean, when someone from the continent comes with a good attitude, they are friends… But there are people who, so to say, are very stuck up, then people start feeling very angry at them…. 
The thing is that, there are many *pañas* on the island who… have their jobs, their business, progress, everything. But there are others who…people just do not like.

(Student Focus Group 03. Old Providence Island. Recorded Interview 08/10/09)

In the same way…

- Φ I was born here and I was raised here, but here they say that because one
  has color, or because… my hair is more straight than others’, they [other girls]
  will find ways to provoke me. […]

- Φ1 I am not an islander, I came here since I was very little… and I like it
  here; and well, yes, there are people among the islanders who I don’t know
  why but they think that because I come from elsewhere I am going to take
  things away from them, and they dislike that. […]

- *And do you think that happens because you are not from here?*

- Φ1 Well, yes. I do believe so, because they say things like “you are a *pañia*,
  and this and that.” […]

- *Could we say that there is some discrimination or racism?*

- Φ1 Maybe racism … because for example, my skin color is lighter than the
  others,’ so there are many *morenitos* who dislike me because of my color and
  because I am not from here.
- φ No, not that…
- δ1 Well, because… you know, “You are not like me” and things like that.
- φ Sometimes things happen in the classroom too. For example, last year…
  there was this boy from Bottom House who used to say… He was all the time naughty, all the time, then he said that… because he was black they always sent him out of the classroom; but he did not realize that it was not because of his color, which was more moreno, or anything like that, but because he was being naughty.

(Student Focus Group 03. Old Providence Island. Recorded Interview 08/10/09)

The island of Providence, like its sister island San Andrés, has been affected by the transnational networks of drug trafficking, involving youngsters whose lives are shaped by these dynamics, bringing to an otherwise pacific island signs of violence and intimidation by gangs, which have also been present in school.

…there are some sectors where the aggression of both parents and children is more noticeable. Then, since these sectors mix here in the school, because we have children from all sectors, there is confrontation between them due to their different ideologies. For example, those from Bottom House… Some time ago, they used to be the best of our students: they did not speak, they did not say anything, they did not talk back to you… but now, they are the most aggressive ones of school. …When something happens, the students themselves say: they must be from Bottom House. What has happened then? Well, they have formed
some kind of a gang, and they want to show us all that they are the ones in a position of power… and we cannot say anything to them.

(Member of the School Staff. Old Providence Island. Recorded Interview 07/28/09)

The situations and reflections presented above, together with other voices and data gathered during field work, seem to suggest that Raizal students and members of school in Old Providence Island might be more concerned with finding a place in the cultural space of the nation-state as rightful citizens, than in pursuing an outright struggle for approaching the world from a conscious knowledge of their cultural and ethnic roots, and a critical understanding of their place in the nation and the globalized world. Further analysis into the various aspects of school curricula should take me to sustain or refute such a hypothesis.

**The Issue of Race in Nicaragua**

The patriarchs of Nicaragua, landowner and merchant criollo elites who wished to maintain the privileges of a hierarchical colonial society, set out to build the nation based on the idea that the “folk” ought to be “civilized” and taken onto the path of modernization (Burns, 1991). The racialized “Others” were the object of civilization if they were to become part of the nation. According to Juliet Hooker (2008) “…race concerns shaped the narratives that built the nation resulting in the exclusion of
citizenship for blacks and indigenous, and particularly for costeños – inhabitants of what used to be known as the Mosquitia Coast, today known as the Atlantic Coast” (p. 163). The author argues that such foundational racialized narratives are legacies, which have informed even seemingly contradictory ideas of nation throughout the times in Nicaragua, and can be seen in the discourses and actions of, amongst others, school textbooks inspired by history books.

According to Hooker (2005), the notion of mestizaje, used as the official discourse for the Nicaraguan nation, is articulated only in the early twentieth century, to face U.S. intervention. Before that, both conservatives and liberals had envisioned a nation in terms of the differences between “civilized” and “savages.” According to a renowned Nicaraguan conservative leader, the mestizaje was “a more humane strategy of colonization,” through which assimilation of the “inferior” for servitude could be reached progressively. In his view, the mestizaje process that took place during colonial times had been a harmonious and gendered one where the Spanish conqueror male gave its seed and the Amerindian women were its passive receptors; the black element was not acknowledged to be part of the race mixture (Hooker, 2005, p. 22). The liberal ideas of the nineteenth century brought from Europe ideas of democracy and equality, which conservatives found inadequate for the context of Nicaragua for they upset the hierarchical, peaceful society of colonial times.

Hooker (2005) argues that the idea of mestizaje has prevailed throughout the history of Nicaragua, even to contemporary times when the nation speaks of a multicultural society.
Even Sandinistas first sought the assimilation of the indigenous groups of the Caribbean Coast to become *mestizo* peasants, just as had been previously attempted with those of the Pacific coast. The indigenous ancestry of Nicaraguans was stressed by Sandinistas, who conceived of their revolution as a class struggle against oppression and imperialism, while the black part was not acknowledged since it was associated with the imperialists. Hooker (2005) contends that the recognition of multiculturalism of the 1990s is “nominal,” since there is still resistance to acknowledging rights based on the distinct identities of blacks and indigenous; and, “for some non-*costeño* legislators the recognition of racial diversity threatened national unity” (p. 35).

An assumption of the inferiority of the black race underlay the discourses of the *criollo* elites in the nation-building process. Hooker (2008) argues that their vision of nation was built upon the “opposition between the ‘civilized’ Republic of Nicaragua and the ‘savage’ kingdom of the Mosquitia.” The *criollo* elites disliked the idea of being confused with the “savage hordes” of the Mosquitia, who might dare feel that because they had the protection of the British, they could themselves become a nation. The French, adds the author, refused to negotiate with “those little Miskito governments” for risk of “degrading themselves,” since they were “no more than a kingdom of indigenous governed by blacks” (p. 167). The Creoles were considered to be “foreigners” and inferior, therefore unable to administer the Reserve (p. 170).
Representations of Race and Nation in History and School Textbooks

Fernández (2009) presents an analysis of the very first text used in schools to teach the national history of Nicaragua: *Notas geográficas y económicas sobre la República de Nicaragua*, written by French engineer Paul Lévy in 1871. It so happened that the book had been published to promote Nicaragua for the construction of an inter-oceanic canal, yet it was adopted by the Nicaraguan elites to be used in schools.

A racist at heart, Lévy points at demographic aspects of the country where he describes the Caribbean Coast as the “non-civilized” part of the country, inhabited by “savages who are fully aware of their condition and intentionally so” (Lévy, 1976, p. 210, cited by Fernández, 2009, p. 316). In line with the theories of the degeneration of the race, the author of the history text indicates that the population of Nicaragua is basically *mestizo*, which is a problem because “*mestizos* are beings which are always physically and morally inferior to the pure races that produced them” (Lévy, 1976, p. 193, cited by Fernández, 2009, p. 315). The elites of Nicaragua would place such descriptions on the subordinate, suggests Frances Kinloch Tijerino, a Nicaraguan historian, ascribing the “role of spreading European civilization” to themselves (p. 311). Fernández (2009) concludes that the text gives a vision of “a state as an excluding entity, at the service of a small elite that looks towards other countries and omits, obliterates or does without the vast majority of its population, something that is currently done” (p. 321). A revision and adaptation of the 1871 text in 1976 did not refute the above depictions of its peoples, adds Fernández (2009). Instead, one of its most renowned intellectuals wrote in its 1976 introduction that Lévy could not but be exempted from the “racist” speculations of the
text, given the fact that these theories were current at the time; the text “makes history,” says the intellectual, because it managed to give a rather accurate picture of the nation at the time.

Hooker (2005) notes how the mestizo nationalist discourse is sustained by the work of poets, writers and intellectuals of the Vanguardismo of the 1930s, who set out to spread their ideas through speeches, and references to national history and identity. She mentions, particularly, El Nicaragüense, a collection of essays from 1968 written by Pablo Antonio Cuadra, a conservative intellectual, which contains the basic nationalist discourse of this movement: the harmonious mestizaje between indigenous and Hispanics, and the absence of costeños in it, particularly blacks. Such a publication became so fundamental in defining Nicaraguan-ness, that it is repeatedly quoted in a fifth grade civics school book of 2004 to approach issues of identity of Nicaraguans (footnote 15, p. 20). Similarly, argues the author, the Sandinismo of the 1960s emphasized the indigenous ancestry in the mestizaje of Nicaraguans, and their assimilation to mestizo peasants, while ignoring the participation of blacks. And, the mestizo multiculturalism of the 1990s denies distinct black and indigenous identities based on the fact that “the nation as a whole is mixed” (p. 39).

Arnove (1995) points at studies and criticisms raised by the adoption and production of school textbooks between 1979 and 1990, a period in which Nicaragua was ruled by two successive opposing political systems: a socialist and a capitalist one. Even though these studies do not refer to particular issues of race, they reveal issues of nation in the fact that
education is used to spread the ideologies and values of those in power. Of interest to my study is the response of the Ministry of Education to certain criticisms advanced to history and language textbooks produced in Nicaragua. The first one refers to a fourth grade history text written by one of the most distinguished Nicaraguan historians, which lacked a critical position with regard to the U.S. occupation and portrayed a “sarcastic” (p. 36) view of Sandinismo; the Ministry ordered that these sections were not to be covered by teachers. The second one has to do with the translation of a Spanish language reader into Miskitu language, done by Miskitu teachers from Honduras, whose language does not share the same characteristics. The translation of this reader and other textbooks did not take into account the linguistic and cultural context of the peoples of the Atlantic coast (p. 34), and the people of the coast expressed resistance towards their adoption just as they have resisted assimilation to the idea of Nicaraguan mestizaje.

When, in 1995, the Bilingual Intercultural Education Program of the Ministry of Education developed and published a series of English language readers and social science textbooks for the Atlantic coast, they used the standard version of the language and not the Miskito Creole language that is mostly spoken by Creoles and Miskito alike; the series was not issued again, and the highly used books lie on the shelves of schools for English teachers to use from time to time. In the meanwhile, introductory reading material in the Miskito Creole language was being developed by the . Similarly, a reader which was produced by people of the Atlantic Coast to enhance pride in the African heritage of their peoples, Black Majesty, was highly censored by the Ministry of Education (Arnove, 1994).
The Use of Ethnic Identifiers

The Atlantic region of Nicaragua evolved away from the center of the republic and its homogenizing ideas of nation based on the inherited legacies of their Hispanic colonizers. The so-called costeños had for colonial heritage their ties to the British and to the Moravians, yet they developed strong ethno-cultural identities which served as a basis to struggle for their autonomy before the Hispanic criollo, with whom they did not identify. In my opinion, their ethno-cultural awareness results from their successive political statuses before Nicaragua, and subsequent confrontations: approximately 200 years as a British protectorate and Kingdom of the Mosquitia; 34 years as a Miskito Reserve under the control of Zambo Miskitos, where black Creoles gained political and economic power; 40 years of a U.S. economic enclave in the region; 7 years of a bloody U.S. supported counter-revolutionary war against Sandinism; and over 20 years of an autonomous regime to-date. As a result of their continuous struggles in the present-day autonomous regions of the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, people are highly conscious of their ethnic roots; and their local institutions and organizations are actively invested in this.

Six ethnic groups inhabit the current autonomous regions of the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua: Creole, Rama, Sumu-Mayangna, Garifuna (Black Carib), Miskitu, and Spanish-speaking Mestizos. The Estatuto de la autonomía de las regiones de la costa Atlántica de Nicaragua (Statute of Autonomy of the Regions of the Atlantic Coast of
Nicaragua), issued in 1987, mandates in article 12 that the members of the communities of the Atlantic Coast have the right to define and decide over their own ethnic identity. When asked about their ethnic belonging, my interviewees at the school community responded in concordance to this article, referring to their ethnic identifiers.

- δ 2 Well, I am 19, and for me, well basing on the autonomy law, da how they say, you know, you could pick your ethnic group as we wanna be, you know, so de now I pick myself like a Creole people too [sic].

(Student Focus Group 03. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview, 11/11/09)

- By my physical characteristics I would be a mestiza.
- Do you feel mestiza?
- Sure! The language, my customs, my food, the music I hear, all is related to that ethnic group.
- And, is there any other community or ethnic group you’d say you belong to?
- The Garifuna, ha, ha, ha…I find their history fascinating…I always say, jokingly, that I am the only white Garifuna….

Class, Race, and Place: Students’ Perceptions

The division of Nicaragua into Pacific and Atlantic regions seems stronger than in neither of the two countries referred to in this study. The Atlantic side, today organized into two politically autonomous regions, the North and the South Atlantic Autonomous Regions of Nicaragua (R.A.A.N. and R.A.A.S. by their Spanish abbreviations), differs from the Pacific one in its geographical characteristics, its historical links to cultures different from the Hispanic mestizo, and its own ethnic composition. The way that the center of power in Pacific Nicaragua has approached the Atlantic coast speaks of a racialized perception of society that still informs the actions of decision makers, institutions and the State itself, something that it is suggested by the analyses of authors and writings which question the multi-ethnic nature of the nation, defined at constitutional level (Cunningham, 2008; Hooker, 2008).

Dr. Myrna Cunningham\(^{51}\) (2008) suggests that there is racism and discrimination of the State towards the Atlantic coast and towards indigenous communities found in the North Central Pacific area, and that this derives from its colonial past which produced the division of the country. The indigenous and the Afro-descended ethnic groups of the Caribbean embody that “otherness” which divides the nation into we and them (p. 9), justifying practices of discrimination, acculturation and the exploitation of the resources

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\(^{51}\) Dr. Myrna Cunningham was born in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (R.A.A.N by its Spanish acronym) of Nicaragua. Her writings and analyses have the value of offering an endogenous view based on her own life experience and work in Nicaragua as a medical doctor; director of research at the Ministry of Health; member of the Regional Council of the R.A.A.N.; coordinator of the Continental Campaign 500 Years of Indigenous, Black, and Popular Resistance; and current consultant on ethnic topics, amongst other positions.
of the Atlantic regions. In particular, she mentions as expressions of racism and discrimination a biased treatment of people based on their skin color; the existence of an ethno-linguistic hierarchy based on “color of the skin, blood purity, dress, language, and accents, amongst others” (p. 11); racial stereotypes reproduced over the media, making it hard for students who go to the Pacific to study, since they are associated with violence, drug trafficking and depravity (p. 15); discrimination against mother tongues, since the language of opportunities is that of the dominant culture, that is Spanish; unequal distribution of resources and political opportunities; and, the lowest index of human development in the Atlantic coast, amongst several others. However, the author indicates that the problem is that neither the State nor the institutions want to acknowledge that there is an underlying and persistent problem of racism and that as long as this is not admitted, no measures will be taken to deal with it and to achieve changes in what is deeply ingrained in society.

Within the autonomous regions of Nicaragua, the expressions of racism are not open, but according to Cunningham (2008), some institutions or organizations do reproduce colonial ideologies. The school where I focused my research was actually founded in order to welcome Creole students who were discriminated against or could not continue their studies in monolingual (that is, Spanish speaking) public schools of the nation, on the basis of their language skills; eventually, the school opened its doors to children from other ethnic groups who were also discriminated against because of their low performance in Spanish. I found a general feeling of friendliness, openness to, and celebration of the diversity of cultures and languages, and no sense of racism or
discrimination for such reasons within the school. The mixture of languages was common, as students exerted their right to express themselves in their own languages, just as the following excerpt of a focus group shows; the ethnicity of the interviewees is given in brackets.

*How are the relationships between you people in class? How do you relate to one another? Pensando que son de distintos grupos étnicos... [Since you belong to different ethnic groups...]*

- φ 2 [Garifuna] Well a se [I say] good beca’ as a [I] tell you before there is a intercultural skill so is like no discrimination between each others, and they are... they are the same! [sic]

- δ 2 [Miskitu] Para mí es normal tratarnos bien porque somos iguales, somos personas iguales en todo, así que para mí no debe haber discriminación entre nosotros... [To me, the usual is that we treat each other well because we are equals, we are the same in everything, so to me, there should not be discrimination amongst ourselves...]

- φ 1 [Garifuna] I only could answer towards our section [class]. In our section there is no discrimination, at least I no see none.

(Student Focus Group 01. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview 11/06/09)

The perceptions of students regarding discrimination or racism amongst themselves or between teachers and students mostly derive from their own social constructions and
inter-subjectivity, as was argued earlier for other cases. Some refer to particular situations where they feel that there is either preference of a certain teacher towards a *paña* girl; that a teacher picks on a student; or that students mock one another. Some say they feel offended by what classmates sometimes tell them, and some believe that they are discriminated against and offended because they are an ethnic minority in a given classroom.

- *How is this relationship between yourselves based on the different ethnicities?*

  ¿Cómo es esa relación entre ustedes siendo que ustedes son de distintas etnias?

- δ [Miskitu-Creole] Pues yo me entiendo bien con todos… [Well, I get along well with everyone]

- φ [Creole] Aha! I no got for discriminate nobody, caus’ fa me everybody is de siem [the same], and I think everybody is de siem. I don’t treat nobody different like that. [sic]

- *And they don’t treat you different either?*

- φ [Miskitu_1] Hay, hay…[There are, there are…].

- δ [Miskitu-Creole] Sólo que a veces me caen mal, ciertas personas. [It’s just that there are some people I just don’t like.]

- φ [Miskitu_1] Hay, hay por ejemplo en la sección Creoles que nos relacionamos con nosotros los Miskitos y con los pañas, pero hay también otra parte que nos discriminan a nosotros los Miskito … [y] a los Mestizos porque somos las razas que están más poquito en la sección. … A veces nos ofenden.
There are for example, in our class, Creoles we, the Miskitu, relate to, and
panas; but there are also some who discriminate us, the Miskitu and the
Mestizos because we are the fewer of the races in the class. … Sometimes
they offend us.]

- φ [Creole] Mmhh [agreeing].

(Student Focus Group 02. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview 11/10/09)

Issues of power cut across the attempt to build an intercultural society based on the
encounter of diverse ethnicities. Students perceive it and so do teachers.

The Creoles like to discriminate, they say that the mestizos discriminate them
when they go to the Pacific, but here they discriminate the other ethnic groups.
They do! … It’s what they say to each other as well as the mocking tone they use
“No, that one is Miskitu; …that one is Rama, that one is Garifuna, that one is
Mestizo…” …Everyone defends their own interests; they don’t see the interests of
the group… Who cares what happens to you; I want this and this is what I am
going to do, and if I have the majority to support me, you are going to lose and I
won’t care how you feel… and that is what happens in the classroom too.


The cultural division of Nicaragua into Pacific and Atlantic and the relations of power
between them remind us of Peter Wade’s (1997) association of race to place. Despite the
ethnic awareness and the political autonomy that the ethnic and indigenous peoples of the autonomous regions have achieved, the expressions of racism referred to by Cunningham (2008) ratify Hooker’s (2008) argument over the difficulty to overcome the legacies of racism on which the nation was built and continues today.

For example, the association of the Atlantic Coast to blackness (negritud) is still used nowadays to argue that costeños have no right to self-government because they cannot rule over mestizos or they are incapable of governing themselves effectively.” (p. 179)

Conclusions

The overview presented above suggests that State education in the three nations under study has contributed to sustain the racialization of Latin American societies that resulted from colonialism. Examples of this can be found in several moments: in the critical discourse studies of school textbooks carried out in Colombia; in the refusal of the Costa Rican centralized education authorities to incorporate an endogenous curricular proposal for Limón, and to withdraw from the official school curriculum a novel that West Indians found racist; in the adoption of a Nicaraguan history textbook produced in 1871, which offered a racist depiction of its Caribbean coast, and its 1976 edition which ratified its discourses after revision and adaption; and, in the exclusion of contents from readers and textbooks produced in the autonomous regions due to the “antagonistic” and inappropriate values they promoted, according to the centralized authorities of education.
of Nicaragua. The omission of topics related to Afro-descended populations by school textbooks, argued by Cáceres (2008) and Soler (2006), further supports the above thesis.

Issues of racism and/or discrimination based on race cut across the schooling practices of the three localities under study in the hidden curricula that sustain them. Understood as the “norms and values that are implicitly, but effectively, taught in schools and that are not usually talked about in teachers’ statements of end or goals” (Apple, 2004, p. 78, 79) the hidden curricula reproduced structures of discrimination by not addressing critically and with students the roots of racist attitudes and/or discriminating policies. Students indicated, through their voices, that little was done to solve conflicts between students within the schools; these were just part of their daily life. Teachers described situations of conflict within schools and ventured possible reasons, placing the blame on the ills of the surrounding society which they declined to take responsibility for changing.

In general, the perceptions which students, teachers and members of the school communities had on issues of racism derived from their own social constructions of race and inter-subjectivity. In Limón, Costa Rica, some teachers and members of the community spoke of “hidden racism”; and West Indian students expressed awareness about and some degree of acquiescence towards the negative perceptions that the surrounding society had of black people, while mestizo students voiced the challenges they had to overcome the discriminating attitudes of Costa Ricans to Limonenses just for coming from this area of the country. In Old Providence, Colombia, some suggested that racism was sustained by the lingering effects of the social configuration of the island,
divided during colonial times into sectors where slaves were kept and those where masters mainly lived; others blamed the general state of society, and West Indian students seemed to express the wish to find their place as rightful citizens of the cultural space of the Colombian nation, overcoming discourses of racism. In Bluefields, Nicaragua, students lived, on a daily basis, the challenges of living in an intercultural society where issues of power cut across the ethno-cultural composition of their Caribbean regions. As a collectivity, they were aware of the struggles of the region for equal recognition as ethnic minorities within the larger Nicaraguan society, and as individuals each of them constructed their own social idea of race.
Chapter 4

School Ethnographies

Education, as a formal schooling system, is generally perceived as an instrument used by the ruling classes to reproduce dominant ideologies (Apple, 2004). Such has been the case for the West Indian communities under study, who would be forcibly assimilated to the Hispanic and Catholic idea of nation through education. Yet, as has been illustrated by the many studies of the colonization of the Caribbean, domination did not go without expressions of resistance; the colonization process had effects on both the colonized and the colonizer; and finally, the imposition of language and culture was not or has not been one of total assimilation, but one of creolization and/or hybridization amidst expressions of resistance. The present study was designed with these ideas in mind, and so was the purpose of the school ethnographies advanced on site: to read into the dynamics of dominance and resistance to colonial and neo-colonial governing ideologies, within and outside current schooling practices and curricula of educational institutes serving the three West Indian communities under consideration.

In order to advance a critical reading of the ideologies that inform education, the school ethnographies presented here focus on three aspects, following Apple (2004)’s framework of analysis: (a) the school itself, as a historical and culturally situated
institutions;\(^{52}\) (b) the knowledge forms, as they are distributed and inscribed in overt and/or hidden curricula; and (c) the teachers and their everyday regulatory practices, as they reproduce and legitimize dominant ideologies (pp. 3-13). The axis of analysis of this study is the curriculum, understood as that which goes beyond what is set through a list of pre-determined contents, goals, and/or standards to be reached (Walker, 2009). The school curriculum is the combination of the officially prescribed knowledge, the pedagogical practices that bring it to the classroom, the norms that regulate school life, and the hidden curriculum that accounts for the tacitly accepted discourses about how things are done and understood. In the context of this study, the school curricula are defined by the Ministry of Education of each country and its application is obligatory.\(^{53}\) Even though teachers, subject area coordinators, principals, and students have little leeway to modify a curriculum that is defined and prescribed elsewhere, the actual curriculum of a school is reflected in the every-day actions and decisions of those who implement it (Walker, 2009). The inquiry advanced on site explored the dynamics of dominance and resistance taking place around the prescribed contents and objectives of the school curricula, by looking into how teachers, students, directors and/or staff engaged with them. Particular attention, approached through observation, interviews, document review, and conversations, was paid to the current status of West Indians vis-à-vis their insertion in the postcolonial Hispanic nations.

\(^{52}\) See Table 1 for a synthesis of the main characteristics of the three schools under study, in the Appendix.

\(^{53}\) In the Autonomous Regions of Nicaragua, the sub-system of education created by law to attend to education in the regions, SEAR, has been constructing the curricula and teaching materials in native languages for primary school, and has been implementing them gradually and only in selected primary schools across the regions. In Bluefields, capital of the southern region, there were no schools where these changes were being implemented at the time of my field research.
Before presenting the ethnographies and their analyses, I will first describe the methodological aspects of the field work.

**Field Research Description**

The current research is a qualitative, exploratory insight into the dynamics of dominance and resistance to colonial and neo-colonial governing ideologies, within and outside current schooling practices and curricula of State schools serving the three West Indian communities under study. It is a cross-regional comparative study whose main objective is to draw lessons from each locality by identifying continuities in their postcolonial/neocolonial situations, making their struggles visible to Caribbean Studies. The less than readily visible struggles of these groups seem to have relegated these West Indian communities to oblivion for not constituting nationhood in the modern political sense of the word. As scholars into comparative education suggest, this study takes educational analysis to spaces outside school; it addresses “great problems of the world” and it crosses boundaries into learning from the “other,” by developing new categories of analysis (Beauchamp, 2003).

**Methodology**

State high schools were the central site of the field research, with one representative school per locality, that is, an institution with a proportionally high enrolment of West Indian children. The same ethnographic techniques were applied to each one of the schools, in view of the intended cross-regional comparison. Each locality was visited for
a six-week period, during which I lived with or next to a family of the West Indian communities. The school ethnographies included a revision of documents such as curricula, textbooks, notebooks, notice boards, and the like; class observations; visit to the school grounds and buildings; interviews; informal conversations; and attending school celebrations, pedagogic activities and meetings. The towns and surrounding regions where the schools were located were visited in order to get a broader picture of the insertion of the West Indian community in the everyday life of the area; this included visits to cultural activities and gatherings, leisure and academic centers, academic meetings, and conversations with key members of the communities.

Population Selection and Setting

The research is directed at three West Indian communities living at the margins of three different Hispanic nations, and the selected State schools where these ethnic groups are significantly represented. The three West Indian communities under study–Raizales in the island of Old Providence, Colombia; Afrolimonenses in Puerto Limón, Costa Rica; and Creoles in Bluefields, Nicaragua–were selected for a cross-regional comparative study on the basis of their common ancestry, their historical links, and their current insertion in the cultural and ideological fringes of Hispanic nations in the circum-Caribbean where they have been subject to marginalization. The State schools were chosen based on referrals made by local contacts within the educational setting who recommended institutions where the West Indian enrolment would be representative. The schools were contacted and authorization from the local authorities was sought to carry
out the research. Within the schools, the selection of actual classes and interviewees was done on-site and depended heavily on the school activities, schedules, time availability and the willingness of the members of the community to take part in the research. The following criteria narrowed down the selection: a) Classes and students in their last two years of high school, also called secondary education; b) Students between 15 and 18+ years of age attending these schools, with a special focus on West Indians, but open to members of other ethnicities willing to participate; c) Teachers of these students, from different subject areas; d) Members of the staff who related to academic, disciplinary and normative issues; e) The latest State educational policies on curriculum development: laws of education, guidelines; curricula; and f) The Social Studies program, which was selected for its relevance to concepts of nation and race, pillars of this study. The study involved a total of 327 participants: 90 active ones (54 formal interviews, 36 conversations); and 237 students observed in a total of 10 classes (see section on limitations for the reason behind this rather low number of classes).54

Data Gathering Methods – Instruments of Research

The school ethnography made use of the following techniques and instruments of research: a) Class observation based on a set of criteria prepared in advance and applied to all classes; the criteria included basic identifying information (date, time, class, teacher, topic, number of students by gender); class activities (plain description); discourse (language in use); and remarks of the observer; b) Semi-structured, face-to-face

54 See Figures 2 and 3 in the Appendix for graphs showing details of the research sample.
interviews with teachers and members of the staff; and focus group interviews with 15 to 18+ year old school students. These interviews were recorded if the interviewees gave their consent or had it from parents in the case of minors. When the interviews were not recorded, notes were taken and transcribed to reconstruct them as faithfully as possible (see appendix for a description of interviews and their protocols); c) Field research journal writing where activities of the day were registered, as well as reflections on the research experience, to keep it on track or to make sense of obstacles, doubts, and events; d) Locating and revising documents related to school curriculum, educational laws, textbooks, and bibliography; e) Taking photographs of school settings, symbols and, when given consent, of groups of students in a particular pedagogic activity.

**Ethical Considerations**

The field research was previously approved by the University at Albany, Institutional Review Board (IRB). Given its nature, it had to comply with the following requirements:

1) Before going to the field, the research project had to be endorsed in its ethical aspect by an expert of the local context or by a member of the ethnic community; 2) On site, all participants had to give written consent to being interviewed, to being part of a class that the researcher would observe, and to being in a photograph that might be taken. Minors (children under 18 years of age) had to have their parents’ consent and had to give their own consent; adults (students 18 and over, teachers and staff) had to give their own consent; 3) The consent forms had to be authorized by the IRB before going to the field. They had to be written in Spanish and in English, given the bilingual nature of the
potential research participants; and they differed according to the age group and the member of the school to whom they would be addressed; 4) Access to the schools had to be authorized first by their corresponding authorities; that meant approaching first the local educational authorities, and then, the school principals themselves. These authorizations and the signed consent forms were to be kept by the researcher at all times, who should be able to produce them by request of the IRB.

**Limitations of the Field Research Design**

The field research was developed in the three localities just as it had been designed and substantial data were collected to reach the goals set. It is worth mentioning two aspects which presented a challenge but which were readily overcome: getting children’s consent for class observation, and approaching teachers and their classrooms.

The IRB required the researcher to obtain written consent of every single student in a class that was to be observed, in addition to that of the teacher. This proved to be cumbersome and a bit of an obstacle to the researcher’s ability to sit in a class; therefore with the approval of the IRB, sought from the field, the requirement was modified. Getting consent from *all* the students in a classroom seemed an unrealistic goal to reach—in fact, consensus is rarely the target needed to make a group decision. In the context of primary and high school, teachers warned me, one cannot really count on children to take school communications home, let alone return them. It happens that, for example, in some families, parents and children do not meet often; children mislay documents they
are given; or they simply forget to do it because it is not of interest to them. Students themselves, who were ready to be observed in class, suggested the requirement be modified for the activity to take place and they presented alternatives. The IRB agreed, based on the situation, that classes could be observed with the written consent of the teacher only.

The research was designed with the idea that class observation would be one of the core activities through which the agency of teachers and students face to the prescribed knowledge and activities of the curricula could be perceived the best—as if ideologies came only through the teaching of a particular field of study. Class time in these sites is only one part of a network of pedagogically oriented activities through which formal education reaches its mission and goals of forming citizens. Patriotic celebrations of national holidays and participation in local festivities also make part of school curricula, just as do the elections of student representatives, a director’s morning reflection, and the times classes are suspended or used to prepare for and take exams, to address problems, or for teachers to attend to meetings, supervision or workshops. Teachers are quite busy with these many activities and their own responsibilities of teaching, preparing classes, making reports, and attending to students when these approach them. The above, added to the limit opportunities for the researcher to observe teachers in class, but this was compensated by other significant data which helped bring a picture together. For the purposes of my study, the combination of research techniques and sites helped overcome the difficulties presented when some classes could not be observed, particular teachers were not readily available, or students were too timid to participate.
Data Analysis

Although any education-related study is likely to be subject to multiple and broad analyses, it is important to recall the specific contribution that the research sets out to make: to offer a critique of how the ideologies of the dominant society inform the school curricula of the communities under examination, revealing the dynamics of power and knowledge, and the expressions of resistance to hegemonic discourses. Michael Apple (2004) indicates that “one of the most neglected areas of educational scholarship [is] … the critical study of the relationship between ideologies and educational thought and practice.” (p. 12). Althusser (1972) had already identified the school as one of the main Ideological State Apparatuses, a notion which differs from the assumptions of liberal educational theory, according to which education is a neutral action (Apple, 2004). Teachers who hold this perspective conceive of their task as impartial because they are not made aware of the ideological principles behind a particular school curriculum or pedagogical action. Thus, some teachers become reproducers of an educational discourse whose content and values they identify with, as they, perhaps inadvertently, participate in the ideological agenda of the State apparatus which has the power to define, impose and demand particular results. In spite of this, there are, within the schools and the educational apparatuses as a whole, those individuals who contest the discourses and “rebel” a little, as one teacher in Costa Rica put it. And there are also those who, as a collectivity, have opposed a whole system, such as the case of the Autonomous Regions in Nicaragua, and are creating their own systems and ideologies.
Premises, Categories and Themes of Analysis

In order to set up a framework for analysis of the field research data, I have identified four premises inspired by the theoretical constructions used to delve into issues of race, class and nation; the concepts of curriculum presented above; and categories and themes coming from the data themselves. These are:

PREMISE No. 1 – White Ethnocentrism

The school–ideological apparatus of the State (Althusser, 1972), a formal institution of education, spreads dominant discourses that attempt to suppress manifestations of difference, resulting in processes of acculturation (Clemente, 1991; Tünnermann, 1983). The dominant discourses relate to:

- The superiority of the “white” (read mestizo) race, which informs contents of the curriculum, provides universal premises and beliefs that underlie the schooling experience, and accounts for most of the tacit understandings of what is to be valued and promoted (Soler, 2006).

- The contents of study which emphasize dominant narratives related to a centralized and homogenous idea of nation. Ideas of modernization, progress, secularism, and citizenship oppose other world views and values, which diverse ethnic groups might bring along.

- The imposition of a language of power and prestige over languages that have no power in market-driven societies.
➢ The use of binary types of colonial categories to explain and describe the world, such as the contrast between “civilized” and “savage” or blackness and whiteness, which replicate hierarchies and perpetuate unequal relations of power.

➢ Representations of the other in open and hidden curriculum—stereotypes, associations with negative perceptions and problems, such as linking race to place (Wade, 1997).

➢ The claim of neutrality in education and science as forms of “social amelioration” ignoring socio-political and economic issues that might not sustain them (Apple, 2004).

**PREMISE No. 2 –Non-Empowering Content and Pedagogy (Non-critical Reproduction)**

The extant school curricula and pedagogical practices (classes, activities, tests) do not address root causes of social discrimination and inequity, reinforcing the disadvantaged position of these communities, and reproducing the problems of a highly unequal society–i.e. contributing to school desertion, and involvement of youth in illegal activities (drug dealing, prostitution and participation in sex tourism, interethnic gang violence…). This can be seen through a curriculum that:

➢ Omits topics that could address social discrimination and inequity.

➢ Omits the human agency behind the events.

➢ Does not promote critical thinking due to traditional pedagogies and the pressure of national exams and/or standardized testing.
➢ Does not contextualize the curriculum. Local context is the responsibility of teachers, who have to respond primarily to the requirement of national tests.
➢ Does not motivate the students enough, pushing them away from studies.
➢ Does not find support enough in the extant human resources (teachers), physical resources (technological support, equipment, classroom furnishing, libraries), and financial resources.
➢ Seems to state that worthwhile knowledge is that which is measurable only through criterion-referenced standardized tests (Sleeter, 2005).

**PREMISE No. 3 – Universal Ideologies (Foundations of Curricula)**

The extant curricula is rooted in “universal truths” and in the neutrality of science with which “conservative social and educational decisions” (Apple, 2004, p. 71) are concealed, making of curricula an instrument of “social control.” The universality of rationality, rooted in the tenets of the Enlightenment, has managed “to repress all symptoms of cultural alterity” (Gandhi, 1998).

Subjugated knowledges are labeled as “inadequate” … “insufficiently elaborated” … or lacking “scientificity” (Foucault, 1980). This can be observed in:

➢ The emphasis that curricula give to scientific knowledge and reason over other modes of knowing or explaining the world.
➢ The idea of an inherent humanism that justifies the search for and guidance toward reaching human perfection.
➢ A binary understanding of the world that Ramírez (2004) identifies as the “bipolar logic of scholasticism,” where categories such as good-bad; true-false; soul-body,
define “epistemological, ethical and aesthetical criteria, avoiding access to more
global and integrating comprehensions…” (p. 15).

➢ Tacitly accepted understandings and ways of reproducing ideologies, inscribed in
the values promoted, structures and forms of organization, and behaviors (Apple,

**PREMISE No. 4 – West Indian Resistance**

Members of the West Indian communities negotiate (accommodate, compromise, resist
or recreate) openly and/or tacitly the discourses of the dominant groups, within and/or
outside the schools. In contexts where the school curriculum is defined and controlled by
the centralized Ministry of Education, and the leeway to modify it is small, the
expressions of resistance to hegemonic discourses and mandates take different forms and
result from:

➢ Feelings of ambiguity and ambivalence (Bhabha, 1994) towards a hegemonic
discourse, as the members of the ethnic groups make sense of their surroundings
and their life projects.

➢ The power of agency to contest the mandates of the curricula, and with it those of
a centralized system of education, as individuals or a collectivity question the
authority of the hegemonic culture, from the articulation of their “cultural
difference” (Bhabha, 1994).

➢ The capacity to imagine a different world through the re-elaboration of
curriculum and pedagogical actions as “a cultural practice” (Kanu, 2006). This is
done from the Third Space which members of the ethnic groups experience as
their cultures hybridize and the polarities are overcome, giving rise to alternative expressions of living (Bhabha, 1994; Kanu, 2006).

Two databases were built to attempt a systematization of the findings as they related to these categories: one of them brought together voices from interviews and conversations, and notes from observations and relevant documents kept in the research journals; the other one attempted a comparative analysis of the curricular guidelines and goals of education as contained in documents produced by the educational authorities of each country. The present chapter focuses mainly on the first database; that is, on the curriculum as it is enacted. The next chapter is devoted to the knowledge prescribed by the curriculum and its relation to the contexts studied.

**Junín School, Old Providence Island, Colombia**

Since Junín School was and still is the only State school on the island of Providence offering all levels of school education, it was chosen as the one where the research would be centered; in fact, only in this institution could I have access to students completing their last two years of high school, as the research had been designed. In 2009, the year the field research was carried out, the school system of the island was made up of three State institutions: 1) Junín, which had all levels of school education: pre-school, primary and secondary; a student who graduates from this institution can pursue higher education. 2) The Centro Educativo María Inmaculada, CEMI, run by Capuchin sisters, covered pre-school, primary and basic education up to level 9 –the minimum level of compulsory
education by law in Colombia; since 2007 it depends on resources from the local authority, not on the vicarage as it used to for a long time. And 3) Bomboná, which offered pre-school and primary education. The private schools, which used to be administered by churches such as the Adventist school, had closed their doors given the economic downturn of the island in the last few years, making their stay unsustainable, as some Adventists I talked to claimed.

**Location**

*Junin* School is located in a section of the island called Old Town, one of several little “villages” scattered on the flat lands around the perimeter of an otherwise rocky Old Providence island, which is 6.56 mi² (17km²) with peaks rising 1,181 feet (360 meters) above sea level (Ratter, 2001, p. 80). The school receives students coming from all over: from Kathleena, another rocky little island of 0.62 mi² (1 km²) linked to Old Providence by a pedestrian bridge; from the other schools; and from the different sections of the main island, bringing along, as one interviewee stated, the rivalries they have between sections. In fact, when asked about the presence of conflicts within school, one of the most common answers was that the clashes between students derived from issues they had outside the institution as the sections confronted one another for, amongst others, cultural reasons.

…right here on Providence, every locality has a different culture…. For example, the people from Old Town, the sector where we [the school] are located, have a very different culture from the people of San Felipe… [Even though they] are
neighboring localities, …they have different customs, and they speak differently too. For example, if I am right in here, and out there someone from Casa Baja or from San Felipe is speaking, I can tell the difference without seeing them. …Then, sometimes, for example, eh… to say something… the children from Casa Baja are against the children from Pueblo Viejo, there are confrontations between ethnic groups of the same community.

(Member of the School Staff. Old Providence Island. Recorded Interview 07/28/09)

**School History**

*Junin* School was founded on August 7th 1962 by a petition of the island community presented to the General Inspector of Education in the Archipelago, who was then a high-ranking member of the Catholic hierarchy. It was under the direction of Catholic fathers for approximately 30 years (1969 to 1998); for 27 of those years, it was under members of the Capuchin order. Only in 1998 was the school secularized (Institución Educativa Junin, 2008, p. 101). It is surprising how long it took for this school to become secular, since in the island of San Andrés, capital of the insular Department, State education had taken over the administration of schools from the Catholic missions since 1976. It is comprehensible then that many of the current teachers and directive teachers, 61% of which have between 10 and 30 years of service in the institution (p. 41), expressed in the interviews or conversations that education was very much in chaos under the direction of
the State, and that they recalled with nostalgia the years when members of the religious orders were in charge.

Since the laws and the government took over education… the level of exactness [sic] in churches and schools have [sic] lowered. …Churches don’t exercise their spiritual, moral and intellectual leadership anymore. Intellectual also because alongside them there were always schools, not only Sunday schools.

(Academic Head of School. Old Providence Island, Colombia. Notes from interview 08/20/2009)

Official documents at the local educational authority’s office, CALSEP, classify Junín as rural State education, offering both academic and technical programs of high school. At different moments of its history, the school has implemented Marine and Touristic technical emphases within the academic program, and in 2008 it envisaged the development of entrepreneurial skills around a touristic and bilingual educational project (Institución Educativa Junín, 2008). Alongside the day shift, a night shift was organized in 1981 to offer a high school program with emphasis on commercial skills, but it closed once there were too many graduates having the same preparation.

Even though the school does stick to the curricular guidelines given by the National Ministry of Education, teachers and staff feel that the education offered does not give youngsters any skills to find a job or a way to make a living, especially in a context

55 Member of the School Staff. Old Providence Island. Recorded Interview 07/28/09.
56 CALSEP (n.d.) Files on Institución Educativa Junín (n.p.).
where few have the means to travel elsewhere to pursue higher education. Most of my interviewees, amongst teachers and staff, expressed the need to develop emphases or modes of education that offer a wider range of alternatives than what an academic high school program does: to prepare students to move on to professional higher education, of which there is no presence on Old Providence. The only institution of higher education is a public one called the National Learning Service (SENA, by its Spanish acronym), which provides businesses of all kinds with the workforce they require, and it has traditionally been an organic part of the Work Ministry. Several of my interviewees, amongst teachers and staff, acknowledged that they do have some autonomy to contextualize the curriculum, but at the same time they feel restricted for reasons I will delve into as I move on to the analysis of the prescribed curriculum and the supervision of a centralized authority. When asked whether school responds to the needs and/or expectations of the community, they ventured ideas that might make it more responsive to the expectations and needs of the locality, such as having emphases like the ones they once had (marine, touristic)\(^{57}\); offering more than academic classes (arts, sports, spiritual formation and values)\(^{58}\), and/or addressing problems and challenges that youngsters were facing.\(^{59}\) One of them spoke at length of a project she would have presented years before to orient school education towards the development of technical skills.\(^{60}\)

\(^{57}\) 02_ProvStaff_Direct_072809 Recorded Interview.
\(^{58}\) 03_ProvStaff_Psic_073109 Recorded Interview; 04_ProvEngTeach_080409 Recorded Interview; 05_ProvSpanTeach_080609 Recorded Interview.
\(^{59}\) 03_ProvStaff_Psic_073109 Recorded Interview.
\(^{60}\) 01_ProvStaff_Disc_072809 Recorded Interview.
**Enrolment and Ethnic Composition**

*Junín* is the biggest school on the island; in 2009, it had a total enrolment of 498 students, out of the approximately 900\(^6\) student total population of both Old Providence and Kathleena islands. The *Proyecto Educativo Institucional (PEI)* of the school (Institución Educativa Junín, 2008), statutory document through which each and every school in Colombia must define and state their specificities in terms of vision, mission, philosophy, goals, and study plans, describes the students of *Junín* School as being 95% *Raizales* and having particular physical and ethnic characteristics.

Skin color has different tones, depending on ancestral mixtures, some have a black skin, others tend more towards white, others are brown (p. 11).

Tall, well-built, 95% *Raizal*, bilingual, shy when having to interact in a group, they are also highly sportive with many artistic and related skills (p. 18).

The total population of Old Providence Island, according to the latest national census, is 4,147 inhabitants, of which 3,645 describe themselves as *Raizales*,\(^6\) 106 as Afro-Colombians, and 386 do not identify with any of the ethnicities given.\(^6\) According to these data, *Raizales* make up approximately 88% of the population, a majority that is also

\(^6\) Numbers vary among the several documents reviewed. The ones given here are the totals given by official documents kept at the office of the local educational authorities called *Centro Administrativo Local de Servicios de Educación Providencia* (CALSEP).

\(^6\) The total population of *Raizales* in Colombia, according to the latest census (2005) would be 30,565 persons. Within the total population of Colombians in 41,468,384, *Raizales* represent 0.073%.

\(^6\) Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (DANE), Census 2005. The ethnic composition of the population was determined through a question of self-perception, with four possible categories: Indigenous, Afro-Colombians (including Blacks and Palenqueros), Raizales, and Rom (gypsies). Note that Raizales are differentiated from the group of Afro-Colombians.
reflected in the student population of school. My interviewees indicate that there are, in Junín, students from Nicaragua, Panama, Grand Cayman, and from continental Colombia, particularly from coastal cities of the Atlantic Coast; but since most students are Raizales, they make sure outsiders know how things are done in their territory, resenting any signs of superiority from those coming from elsewhere.

…Because we are… most students are Raizales, when they notice that [people from other cultures trying to impose their ways] they say to themselves…you are coming to our island, you have to adapt to what is ours, not us to you, then automatically, they [outsiders] have to change. Yes, almost without talking…

(Member of the School Staff. Old Providence Island. Recorded Interview 07/28/09)

Despite the fact that the majority of students in Junín were Raizales the everyday schooling practices and the environment did not suggest much of a difference from that of a traditional school as would be found anywhere else. Only the few rundown images found on some walls, and the natural surroundings of the buildings suggested the tropical environment and the closeness to the sea, but none refer to the historical or cultural context of its student population. The state of devastation and neglect of its infrastructure could be argued to explain the absence of such signs, since the primary section of the school did make use of some local symbols and of their English language in some signs. In any case, these aspects aside, the academic setting and schooling practices did not reflect much ethnic awareness.
Socio-Economic Context

The island of Providence is highly rural, and its average socio-economic level is not high. The island has no greater urban development than an area in the northern part of the island called “Town” where the naval port, the town hall, public offices, banking, communications, a small hospital, a few businesses, residential houses and other main public service offices are found. Junín is actually classified as a rural school, implying a different ratio of teachers to students but no difference in the curriculum. The National Administrative Department of Statistics of Colombia (DANE by its Spanish acronym) provides a measure of the population having Unsatisfied Basic Needs, through which the socio-economic level can be observed. The percentage of people, whose basic needs were not met in Providence, in 2005, was of 19.54%. In the year 2008, data given by SISBEN, a system that identifies potential beneficiaries of social programs, indicate that more than half the population of the Archipelago falls under levels 1 and 2, the lowest indicators of poverty. And yet another socio-economic index used is that of the classification of residential zones in six strata, following the quality of public services, road access, and general services, with level 1 being the poorest. According to this index,

64 The Unsatisfied Basic Need methodology, promoted by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) –CEPAL by its Spanish acronym, has been used in the region since the 1980s to identify the hardships that people endure with reference to housing and education (PNUD, 2010, p. 41). In Colombia, this index determines that a person or a family is poor if any of the following characteristics are met: inadequate housing; critically overcrowded homes; inadequate supply of services; homes with high economic dependence; and homes with children of school age who do not attend school. DANE, 2005

65 Percentages of people whose basic needs are not satisfied are 42.45% in San Andrés Island, the capital of the Department; and 27.7% at the national level. www.dane.gov.co

66 Sistema de Identificación de Potenciales Beneficiarios de Programas Sociales.
the school reports that 76.35% of its student population is at level 2, 13.68% is at level 3, and 8.9% at level 1 (PEI, 2008, p.37).

At national level, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reported, in 2009, that Colombia occupied position 77 amongst 182 countries, indicating a high level of human development with an HDI of 0.807\(^{67}\); and a Gini index of 58.5, suggesting high inequality of income distribution (Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el desarrollo-PNUD, 2009).\(^{68}\) In fact, the same report states that 27.9% of the Colombian population lived on U.S. $2 a day, and 16% with U.S. $1.25. In 2010, a report of the UNDP focusing on issues of inequality suggested, in an ethnically differentiated analysis, that 24.1% of the Colombian afro/indigenous descended population would be living with less than U.S. $1 a day, against 15.2% of European descent.\(^{69}\) These data help illustrate the socio-economic situation and inequalities that the Afro-descended Colombians endure, even though there is no differentiated analysis related to the different communities and individuals that could be said to have African ancestry, amongst them the Raizales under study.

The public schools in the Archipelago receive support from other State institutions in order to guarantee the permanence of students in conditions of equity and quality, a national policy that CALSEP, the local education authority office, has been

\(^{67}\) This measure results from the combination of indicators of life expectancy, educational attainment and income into a composite human development index or HDI. [http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/hdi/](http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/hdi/)

\(^{68}\) See Figures 4 and 5 in the Appendix for two comparative graphs showing the HDI and the Gini Index of the three countries under study.

\(^{69}\) See Figure 5 in the Appendix for a comparative graph showing a differentiated analysis of poverty by ethnicity.
implementing. In *Junín*, students receive daily breakfast and lunch from the Colombian Family Welfare Institute (ICBF by its Spanish acronym), at a very low price – lunch was approximately 10 cents of a dollar during my stay. Also, the mayor’s office sponsors a school bus to take students to and from school. These programs were being implemented during my visit. On the other hand, in 2009, students paid school fees according to their parents’ socio-economic status.

Generally speaking, public education in Colombia attends to the population which has no economic means to pay for private schooling. In this context teachers are advised to refrain from demanding the acquisition of textbooks from students; and, in line with the modernization of school management, where principles of efficiency and efficacy govern (López & Flores, 2006), the allocation of financial resources depends on the number of students enrolled, having schools make alliances with other institutions and social actors to find complementary financial, material and also academic support to attend to the needs and projects of institutions. The actual public resources that reach schools are limited for school directors and teachers to push their tasks beyond the benchmarks that the Ministry of Education demands from them, and Providence is rather small to have institutions other than the State to be able to provide support. This makes a school like *Junín* highly dependent on what the State and the local government provides. Within the logic of the market dynamics of a neo-liberal model of education, the solution is to modernize the way schools are managed (López & Flores, 2006), placing the blame for

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70 Extracted from files on Institución Educativa Junín kept by CALSEP (Local Educational Authority).
the failures of the institution on the directive teachers, and on the inefficiency of local educational authorities.

My study intends to read into the expressions of resistance or accommodation to what the State provides, prescribes and determines for schools such as Junín, which attend to an ethnic group that has lived under the rule of the Colombian State; one that came to upset their private network of schools growing alongside churches, having the participation and support of the community, and giving them a set cultural values and beliefs to live up to. It is important to recall at this point that according to its history Junín School had been run mostly by religious fathers until 1998 when the State appointed lay professionals to direct it. Therefore, the transition into a different model of education and school administration is only now taking place.

Colombia have been eh… choosing, selecting… eh, whatever… just like … experimenting with education from different countries… Just sit yourself down and organize your curriculum, organize your strategy, organize what you want to do and what strategies need in your country. You can’t be choosing one from this, and choosing… and well try to study the best, and choose from each one to organize and coordinate and to fix your community. … …government using school as business. If you don’t have this amount of student, you can’t get this amount of money and… schools shouldn’t… schools shouldn’t be business. School is school. It shouldn’t be business. [sic]
Expressions of Resistance

Junín depends on the State for its finances but also for its curriculum. The State provides financial support to cover the costs of student’s enrolment, teachers’ salaries, in-service training, infrastructure, equipment, and maintenance. And, the State dictates the curriculum. Yet, neither aspect seems to function well.

By the time of my visit, the infrastructure of the high school, grades 6 to 11 was highly devastated. Most classrooms had their windows, doors and rooftops broken or non-existent; rusty, out-of-service ceiling fans served, at times, as birds’ nests; scratched, worn out acrylic boards lay on top of old cement green or black boards; gloomy, dirty walls were full of scribbles or decorative colorful old drawings; and school chairs were scratched with countless scribbles. No classroom or hall had a single bulletin board, and several classrooms and sections of the buildings were being used as store houses. The roofs, doors and windows of the students’ restrooms had been completely smashed, making the place unusable. Comparably, the one library, two small computer rooms, teachers’ and staff” rooms and offices were in a good state, and one could see a couple of unfinished and unused structures lying around. Surrounded by large green fields, and having palm trees, and lush green and flowering trees here and there, the one-story light blue classroom buildings, which looked pleasant from afar, were a stark contrast to the surroundings given their state of neglect and destruction. It all seemed to indicate a
generalized level of dissatisfaction on the side of students towards their schooling experience, and disavowal towards the preparation and authority of several of their teachers; some voices support this perception.

- **Why would children want to destroy their own school?**
- Dissatisfaction.
- **About what?**
- I don’t know… It might be with the methodology used by school, because if I feel well in a place, I don’t destroy it; but if I don’t, I try to get that out of my chest by damaging something. [...] Seeing it from the internal part of students… I destroy something because I am resented, I am angry and I do not know how to tell that person that I feel like that, instead… I manifest it through my aggressive actions towards the external world… [...] [I wish] there were more organization, compliance and sense of belonging. [I wish] teachers, staff and students felt that this belongs to them and they took care of it, because they have it greatly damaged.

(Member of the School Staff. Old Providence Island. Recorded Interview 07/31/09)

Several aspects of daily school life, as observed during my six week visit, also served as expressions of passive resistance towards the schooling experience being offered. No one, neither teacher nor student, rushed to go to class after a bell signaled a class change, but almost everyone rushed to leave class and school at the end of the day. Unless a
particular effort was made by the school director himself to supervise the morning arrival to school, and scolding words were addressed to the school community, late arrivals were the norm but no one did much about it. Students lingered around and walked in their classrooms behind their teachers or much later even, with little more than a teacher’s word or gaze of disapproval. Some actions against particular teachers or against classes were upfront challenging attitudes, like breaking a teacher’s chair in class; throwing rocks on the roofs of classes while they were in session, and recurrently breaking disciplinary school norms around personal presentation such as uniform, hair style, and body ornaments; or, engaging in ‘illegal’ activities such as gambling and selling things on the school premises.

The actions and positions of single individuals or groups amongst some students illustrate a more constructive kind of resistance to the general schooling experience. It could be said that, they are somehow aware of being in-between cultures, in a ‘Third Space’ as Bhabha (1994) expresses it, and that they locate in the expression of the “cultural difference” their possibility of agency. Some of the students interviewed expressed the need to overcome polarized positions of Raizales against pañás, on the basis of essentialisms of race or culture, indicating that it all had to do with the way an outsider treats the island and islanders as he/she comes—the issue of “cultural supremacy” which, as Bhabha (1994) states “is itself produced only in the moment of cultural differentiation” (p. 51).

δ … It’s not because of your color. Here, there is no racism, no socialism [sic] nothing like that. […] …the paña [those of Hispanic descent] who come here
collect what they sow. We treat them the way they deserve. If you approach us with some signs of superiority you are going to have it hard. [...] You get what you look for. [If] you are a nice person…

(Student Focus Group 01. Old Providence Island. Recorded Interview 08/05/09)

Amongst the students interviewed, there was a general feeling that the schooling experience did not devote spaces for them to develop or to display their artistic talents; and, that campaigns or projects they supported or they led did not receive sufficient support. In the name of order and discipline, some students argued, most civic and cultural acts had been stopped in school, discouraging students from expressing themselves. In particular, some mentioned how students sang national and school hymns out of rhythm or tone, making fun of the moment, disrespecting the Colombian symbols. Dancing, some of them stated, was what most students enjoyed, setting up presentations, some along with the tradition, and others out of their own creation, yet this was often discouraged because of fear of disorder. Writing, saying poems, acting, singing, and making music were also mentioned as talents students had, which were not given a place within school; nor were sport festivals where classes competed against one another the rule.

Music, painting and sports are three fields where Raizales from both islands have traditionally found a way to display their abilities, to speak of their traditions, but also to create counter-discourses to oppose the hegemonic culture. The latter is spoken from the
ambivalence of the ‘Third Space’ where they develop awareness of their “cultural difference” in the presence of the dominant culture they also belong to, as is the case of well-known musical groups such as “Creole” on San Andrés Island. During my field work, a particular student of Junin School shared a couple of recordings of his own music, which he kept in a cell phone; it was rap music sung in Creole and Spanish where, as he explained, he spoke to his peers about the challenges and traps of society. Later on I perceived that he was acknowledged by his classmates as he performed before a group of young foreign travelers visiting the school, but I did not have access to the words of his songs in writing to have a closer idea of their contents.

Displaying great ability and creativity at dancing, the three groups of seniors graduating that year put on dancing shows that they presented before the island community at the celebration of the national day of Colombian independence, July 20th. One of the groups was to travel to San Andrés Island to join yet another national day celebration on August 7th in the name of the island of Providence, but the project failed. According to the students, who spoke in detail of their efforts to prepare the dancing show during long hours of work, none of the entities which promised to transport them worked out at the last minute. But what hurt the student who coordinated the effort the most was the response of some members of the community and of the school too, who having ridiculed their show, had also made fun of their luck and their pretensions. In words of the student,

- φ … Nothing good ever works out on this island. We wanted to take [to San Andrés] something excellent… people cursed us. […] No one helps the other and they do not help themselves either, they do you harm. […] There is a
problem on this island. …if I come out, someone else will pull me down the
hole where he/she is. That means… if I am down, you also have to be down…

(Student Focus Group 04. Old Providence Island. Recorded Interview 08/10/09)

The power of agency of students, who wished to represent the island with a creative show, was limited in this case not only by the lack of support or the unwillingness of members of the community to collaborate, but also by the very essence of an ethnic group which, according to Peter Wilson (1995)’s ethnology of Old Providence island, behaved like crabs inside a basket. The anthropologist had compared the extremely egalitarian island society of Old Providence to a basket full of crabs which would pull each other down whenever anyone climbed to get out of it. Feelings of ambivalence towards the traditional discourses of their own ethnic group, and towards the gaze of outsiders, including those from their sister island who “look down on us as provincials”71 would have served them as starting points to articulate the “cultural difference” from which they would contest signs of dominance that would not let them act.

Pedagogical Practices

Several were the sources from which I could gather that the teaching and learning practices that predominated in the high school classrooms of Junín responded to the

71 Student Focus Group 04. Old Providence Island. Recorded Interview 08/10/09.
traditional class methodology where a teacher introduces and explains a topic and the student takes notes and learns from it.  

Most of the students interviewed expressed that classes should be more dynamic than the usual format according to which a teacher arrives in class, sits down, explains something, has students copy from the board or take a dictation, and, if there is time left, encourages some kind of sharing or discussion around a topic being studied. They argued that such a method soon became boring and not motivating. Some of them contended that having a textbook would make classes more dynamic since they wouldn’t have to spend so much time writing in class, and they could rather learn while reading directly from the text. Others mentioned examples of class activities taken outside the actual classroom such as projects with the community where they participated, visits outside school, as well as the celebration of civic days and cultural acts, as learning spaces they valued the most. They also appreciated classes where teachers approached topics giving a wider view than the local one, and encouraged discussion. In the same way, most of them called for the inclusion of more practice than theory, pointing at the technological limitations that make the learning process too basic. In general, students expressed rejection of classes led by teachers who were not open to dialogue and related to students authoritatively. All in all, though, students did express affection and appreciation for most their teachers, since they could find in many of them persons whom they could confide.

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72 Student Focus Group and teachers’ interviews; class and school observation; written diagnoses of subject areas and school found in PEIs and files of CALSEP.
Looking out from the balcony of the administrative block during quiet moments when classes were taking place, I could see and hear the voices of teachers and students in some classes, as well as the dynamics inside and outside of them. This, together with the few classes observed and teachers’ interviews, contributed to the data on which the current analysis is based. The setup of high school classrooms responded to the traditional way in which children usually sit at their chair-desks in rows facing the front part of a classroom where the teacher and the only board are, while the teacher sits at or stands by a desk where he/she keeps his/her material. Classes usually took time to start while teachers arrived, students walked in and the roll was called. Teachers made use of a diversity of school textbooks and other reference books to design their classes. In fact, their class syllabi mention them as reference, and I had the opportunity to browse them while they were in the teachers’ room. Most, I noticed, were produced by the biggest Colombian and/or transnational publishing houses specializing in school textbooks. In class, teachers had students copy or take dictation of key definitions or concepts. While sitting at the balcony, I could hear teachers dictating or writing on the board for students to copy, and I also saw signs of this activity on the boards once day classes were over. Frequently, I found students catching up with class content they had missed by copying from a classmate’s notebook; and also, I witnessed how school parents did so when their younger children fell behind because of absence. Teachers explained that a measure of control and supervision by the Ministry of Education was to review students’ notebooks to make sure the content of a particular day coincided with what the written lesson plan said. In turn, then, teachers demanded from students that their notebooks be updated and in agreement to what was being done in class. By reviewing some students’ notebooks I
could notice that they had in fact been revised in detail by their teachers, and they
contained the latter’s signature. The notebooks were structured according to the teachers’
indications. They contained the definitions of concepts copied out from the board or
taken in dictation, or copied out from encyclopedias or other sources as a result of
students’ ‘investigations’ outside school, which I could also witness when visiting the
town’s library. The contents of a notebook were therefore expressed in terms different
from those of a child, who might otherwise display his/her creativity if the notebook were
not just one more element of control. Notebooks, as I concluded in my journal, were their
textbooks.

When they [supervisors from the Ministry of Education] come, they come to go
over our papers—the notebooks of our students, our daily planner following their
indications, our syllabus… and they give us a qualification. […] They don’t come
to see what we do.

(In conversation with teacher. Old Providence Island, 08/06/09)

They [the Ministry of Education] demand “quality” from us [teachers] and they
believe that is achieved by giving us loads of guidelines and forms to fill in; and
by demanding classes be developed according to the planning which, the teacher
should be able to … adjust to the conditions that affect the processes. We are
judged even if we change the order in which we introduce a topic.

(In conversation with a teacher. Old Providence Island. 08/13/09)
Michael Apple (2004) suggests that just as schools might well be perceived as “the great engines of democracy” they can also be seen as institutions that “help some groups and serve as a barrier to others” in line with the “economic and cultural functions” they fulfill and the “ideological rules they help preserve and enhance.” The author contends that not only the forms of discipline but the forms of knowledge are used as means of “social and economic control.” Amidst the first are the rules and routines to keep order, and the “hidden curriculum” which “reinforces norms of work, obedience, and punctuality” amongst others (p. 61). In the day-to-day routines of Junín School, as I observed, actual class time was little and what pervaded was a class methodology where students were mostly passive recipients. The actual development of a class was affected by the time it took students and teachers to get ready for a lesson; the time taken to recall norms of discipline such as arriving on time, wearing uniforms according to the rules, being respectful, or solving students’ fights which upset everyone else’s tasks; the time demanded from teachers to attend to supervision visits, or in-service training; and, the days schools were called off for a variety of reasons.\(^73\) This, added to the traditional teaching methodology described, contributes to the reproduction of differentiating modes of education where, as suggested by Apple (2004) institutions forming people for decision-making, professional or administrative positions organize their school and

\(^73\) My field trip to Old Providence, with Junín School as the center of the study, lasted forty-one (41) days, of which thirty (30) were school days—the others were weekends. Of the latter, six (6) were devoted to preparing, presenting and then recovering from military type of parades to celebrate two national (Colombian) days—where there was a great display of patriotism, and enthusiasm on the side of students. During four (4) days (three class days) the school had the visit of five members of the local educational authority with seat in San Andrés, the Secretaría de Educación Departamental; teachers and staff were tense because they had to “produce” whichever report they were asked for within a certain time limit, as I was explained; many classes did not take place. And, during three (3) days, teachers had in-service training, which took them away from their classes at different moments. All in all, out of 30 school days, only 18 were actual “complete” school days.
curricula around “flexibility, choice, [and] inquiry”; and those attending to “semi-skilled or unskilled workers” emphasize “punctuality, neatness [and] habit formation” (p. 62).

Caught between two cultures, the dominant one imposing a mode of education defined elsewhere; and their own, a traditional one, whose basic pillars—church, school and family—are not what they used to be anymore, most teachers seem to resist the changes enforced, and students perceive it as lack of commitment on the part of their teachers and the community to fulfill promises made to improve school. Teachers comply with the minimum demands of their employer, the Ministry of Education, but they do not identify with the system, which does not respect their culture.

We are closely supervised by a tight application of the laws surrounding education. They expect us to follow a plan of study exactly, with little place of accommodation. There is disregard for the local context, for example, they don’t respect our custom to mourn our dead. Once, when a former school director fell ill, retired, and died some weeks after, the people from Secretaría de Educación in San Andrés ordered school should move on as usual, and we could not attend the wake. There was indignation and sadness. People could do nothing.

(In conversation with a teacher. Old Providence Island. 08/05/09)

Some have been working as teachers for twenty-seven years or more and they are not willing to change the way they have been teaching. The new regulations of education are too different from how they have always done things. […] What is conceived for other contexts of Colombia does not necessarily work for us. We
are a different culture, we are two islands which cannot be conceived in the same way as other places. Other things are more important to us.

(In conversation with a teacher. Old Providence Island. 08/19/09)

Limón School, Puerto Limón, Costa Rica

*Limón* School is one of forty (40) institutions of primary and high school education found in Puerto Limón, according to the 2008 data given by the regional educational authorities representing the national Ministry of Public Education (MEP by its Spanish acronym). Also known as the Day-Shift School of Limón, *Colegio Diurno de Limón*, it is a secondary school which offers grades seven (7) to eleven (11). Within the Costa Rican national system of education, grades 7 to 9 correspond to the third cycle and grades 10 and 11 to the fourth and last, also known as *Educación Diversificada* (diversified education). I was referred to this institution by an *Afrolimonense* scholar advancing studies on the Creole language of the West Indian community in Limón, who described it as being the most traditional and representative public school having the highest number of West Indian descended students, and the two last grades of high school I was to focus on.

The State school system of Costa Rica extends widely in the province of Limón, and it has different modalities within the system: technical institutions, rural schools with only

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74 Extracted from the 2008 data base of the regional office of the Ministry of Public Education in Puerto Limón, facilitated by the Administrative Director of the August 17, 2009.
one teacher, academic schools preparing students to move on to professional education in universities, and schools within the indigenous reserve of the highlands of Talamanca.\textsuperscript{75} The school curriculum for all types of school institutions is centralized: it is defined by the national Ministry of Public Education (MEP). The regional office of the MEP has, apart from an administrative section, an academic team of consultants for each area of study and a particular professional who acted as Consultant of Indigenous Matters. There was no one in particular representing the black communities, or for my case, the \textit{West Indian} descendants. Nonetheless, the topic of my field research was received with enthusiasm by the current regional consultant of social studies, an \textit{Afrolimonense} herself, former mayor of the city of Limón, and former director of the office, who let me into details of the latest project of intercultural education being led by the MEP, but still under construction.

\textbf{Location}

\textit{Limón} School is located on top of a hill from which one could have a panoramic view of the naval port around which the city of \textit{Limón} developed, but the three-story school building, completely covered by railings, grilles or lattice, is oriented inwards towards a central patio. The school’s neighbors represent differing and contrasting socio-economic sectors of the city, but it is mostly part of a middle-class section of town. It is located on a busy road, whose noisy traffic is heard inside the classrooms.

\textsuperscript{75} In 2008, there were 356 primary and high school institutions in the Province of Limón, attending to a total of 64,427 students. In Puerto Limón there were thirty (30) primary and ten (10) high school institutions, of which five (5) were private and thirty-five (35) public, attending to a total of 12,659 students (MEP database).
During my visit, I noticed how students commutted to school on their own, therefore it was common to see them walking up and down a road that led downtown, waiting for an urban bus, or being dropped or picked up by cars and/or taxis. The school gate was supervised by a guard, who checked all bags coming in and out, and who asked strangers to register by signing a book and informing where they were heading. The movement of students arriving and leaving the institution throughout the day was constant, and so was their presence around the school yard. Teachers and students negotiated class times to advance on the prescribed syllabus and to meet the learning goals required; for example, they used the class time of teachers who might be absent to advance their own. Thus, students were free to come and go as their own schedule and arrangements were settled. This might have been happening because the end of the school year was approaching, especially for 11th graders, who would be graduating that year. In fact, several activities geared towards graduation, preparing and giving national exams, and getting ready to access higher education, reduced the time they met for actual classes taking place during my visit.

School History

Limón School was founded on 23 December 1945, by a governmental decree which created a School of Secondary Education for the city of Limón, but it started functioning as such in 1946. Its creation was requested to the government by a group of Limonenses (natives of Limón) who were concerned because there was no center of secondary
education in the city. There were only a couple of primary schools and there had been one so-called Escuela Complementaria de Comercio (Complementary School of Trade), which being private attended only to those who could afford it, and had closed its doors in 1942. Also, it was believed that an institute of secondary education was needed given the gradual development of the Atlantic region of Costa Rica, the loss of human values, and the need to offer youngsters the possibility to increase their knowledge, and to pursue higher education studies (Ministerio de Educación Pública de Costa Rica, 1985, p. 9).

The current school building started to be constructed in 1957, but it was in 1959 when the school community moved in, after having occupied several other locations throughout the city (MEP).

A night shift school functions in the same school building but under an independent administration. Both schools are called Limón but one is day time and the other one is night time. Classrooms are shared but offices, library and other services are different. This is worth mentioning because, according to my interviewees, some of the violent events reported in the news around the times of my stay (having weapons, stabbing and/or killing a student) originated in the night shift, and the high degree of vandalism of students in the night shift did not allow students and teachers of the day shift to have certain elements of comfort and decoration in their classrooms. Yet, it was also acknowledged that the students of the day shift could also get out of control and become as destructive against the institution.76 Having two institutions using the same building

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76 CR_Staff_Director. Recorded interview 092309.
affected other aspects of the schooling experience of the day shift Limón School, which I shall mention as it becomes relevant.

Little more was there to be learned about the history of the day-time Limón School. The actual book from which the brief history mentioned was taken was all that was available. There were a few photographs of graduate student promotions, of groups of teachers and staff, and of former directors hanging on the walls of the hall of the administrative area that were testimony of the past of the school, as well as a window case in the teachers’ room where a miscellanea of dusty and disorganized trophies, medals, pictures, and gadgets of all kinds, might complement the written account found about its past. None of what could be seen suggested that the participation of Afrolimonenses might have been fundamental to the construction or development of this public secondary school.

**Enrolment and Ethnic Composition**

*Limón* School was, by far, the largest of the three schools where I did my fieldwork.\(^77\) According to the enrolment registry of the school, by March 2009 (March being when the school year starts in Costa Rica), there were a total of 1,878 students and 75 teachers. Organized in fifty-six (56) class groups, it handled morning and afternoon shifts to be able to accommodate them all, giving way to a complex schedule of attendance of both students and teachers. Lessons were 35 minutes long, determined by law, and a loud

\(^77\) Onwards in this document, *Limón* School refers, exclusively, to the day-time school, where my field research took place. If otherwise, it will be clarified.
school bell was used to signal class period changes, recess, lunch, entrance and exit times.

The official ethnic composition of the school is measured by the Ministry of Education following the categories of the national census.\textsuperscript{78} To my surprise, the actual number registered in Limón School as “black or Afro Costa Rican” was only 112,\textsuperscript{79} which made up 6\% of the total number of students enrolled. As explained in an earlier chapter, my perception differed from the actual number given, since in the classes observed the proportion of blacks or Afro Costa Rican would be of 43\%.\textsuperscript{80} The difference might lay in the wider comprehension I handled\textsuperscript{81} and the actual criteria used by school to classify someone as such: the black color of their skin. Once a student’s physical appearance denoted mixture, that is, a mulatto, he or she would not be classified as Afro Costa Rican. However, Limón School had, within the wider community, the reputation of having a high presence of blacks, as suggested by several people I talked to, and sustained by the scholar who had referred the school to me. Also, as a student put it,

- φ There are parents who say “Oh no! I won’t have my child study in that school because in that school everyone is problematic because almost everyone is black, most of them are black and blacks are problematic.”

\textsuperscript{78} Ethnic categories in the Costa Rican Census 2000 were: indigenous, black or Afro Costa Rican, and Asian; plus one called “Other.” At Limón School 3 students were classified as indigenous; 2 as Asian; and 60 as “Other,” where 29 were specified as foreigners.

\textsuperscript{79} Colegio de Limón. Estadísticas de Matrículas y Personal, año 2009.

\textsuperscript{80} Out of 65 students attending three classes observed, a phenotypic observation would say that 28 were Afro-descended, with varying skin tone and hair type. That makes up for 43\% of the student population of a sample which was random: two 10\textsuperscript{th} and one 8\textsuperscript{th} grader classes.

\textsuperscript{81} I was looking for the presence of West Indian descended students, from a self-perception of ethnic belonging, which would encompass those of mixed phenotypic characteristics.
The restrictive policies of immigration and work issued by the State against blacks in the 1860s and the 1930s correspondingly, diminished the presence of Afrolimonenses in Puerto Limón. While in 1927, 57% of the population would have been of African descent in the municipality of Limón, the numbers of the 2000 Census suggest that approximately 45% would be. This last percentage coincides with my own perception based on the identification of Afro elements in people, which does not necessarily mean that this amount of persons had a feeling of belonging to the West Indian original ethnic settlers.

An ethnographic observation of the wider city showed that there was a West Indian descended community but it was scattered around the place. Here and there, a few little, wooden, colorful, typical houses, nowadays enclosed behind railings, stood among the overwhelming majority of cement blocks, stores and houses. Older folks speaking their English and/or their Limón English Creole, Mekatelyuw, could be seen inhabiting them. The tone and rhythm of their English Creole reminded me of the one in the Archipelago of San Andrés and Providence. Two neighborhoods were associated with the presence of

40,000 West Indians coming from Jamaica would have been brought to build the railway and work in the banana plantations between 1891 and 1911. In 1927, the municipality of Limón indicated that 18,398 people were of African descent (57% of its total population) (Harpelle, 2001). The latest national census of Costa Rica, in the year 2000, speaks of 27,073 Afro Costa Rican or black amongst a total population of 60,298 ( Retrieved 08/18/10).

Name given by Anita Herzfeld (2002) to the English-based Creole spoken in Limón.
West Indians: Jamaica Town, also called Roosevelt neighborhood, located nearby the abandoned railway station, north of the city; and Cristobal Colón, also known as Cieneguita corresponding to the Spanish word pun coming from Cien negritos, meaning one hundred little blacks, located south of the city. But none is exclusively inhabited by members of the West Indian Afrolimonenses nowadays; these are everywhere and nowhere in particular, living in different types of houses and neighborhoods, mixed with people of other ethnicities and not mixed too.

However scattered around the city, or seemingly lost as a cultural unity amidst a majority mestizo and culturally diverse population, Puerto Limón, and Limón School too, find in the West Indians who arrived in the region, historical and cultural roots they vindicate through symbols, celebrations and other cultural expressions. Many of the walls facing the central patio of the school hold murals that represent episodes of the history of Limón with the West Indians as central actors: the construction of the railway and the banana plantations at the back; the Liberty Hall building located downtown Limón–originally the headquarters of the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) founded in 1922, declared part of the national historic and cultural heritage twenty years ago\(^84\) (Limón Roots, 2009); typical wooden houses by the sea around a group of black men and women preparing food and making music; and, a stereotyped fruit vendor, amongst a few other academic ones depicting sporting, encouraging reading, or honoring the institution’s

\(^{84}\) The Liberty Hall was registered, since its foundation, to the black community of Limón, the Afrolimonenses. It is a landmark, around which their celebrations and parades take place. It is described as the center for the “promotion and preservation of the Afro Antillean culture and identity” and the “core for the international contact of the Afro Caribbean population of Limón with their counterparts regionally and globally” (Limón Roots, 2009, p. 4).
mission. Painting murals of the same kind are found at the public library, named after Mayor Thomas Benjamin Lynch, an *Afrolimonense* of Jamaican origin whose actions on education gave origin to the library (Simpson, n.d.). The paintings recall some landmarks like the railway and the Liberty Hall, but also members of the Black ethnic group associated with sports, professions, and politics, as well as an image of Mayor Lynch.

The literature reviewed mentions the achievements of individual *Afrolimonenses* and/or organizations *vis-à-vis* the Costa Rican society which, according to different authors, has not always acknowledged the participation and contributions of the Black communities to the nation. Following Duncan & Meléndez’s (2005) inventory, some of the achievements have been of individuals participating in politics or as renowned professionals, writers, and sports; others have been pushed by civil and cultural organizations. Amongst them is what the authors mention as the incorporation of the ethnic category in the census, pursued by the *Asociación Proyecto Caribe* –the same one that struggled against the inclusion of the novel *Cocorí* in the curriculum, as explained in an earlier chapter; associations of Afro Costa Rican women and of the young, which work along with international organizations around common objectives. Also, the annual festivities of the diaspora, Flowers of the Diaspora, and of the Day of the Black and Afro Costa Rican Culture, the latter of which is celebrated with great display every August 31st in Limón (p. 162, 163). Organized by Limón’s Negro Cultural and Civic Committee, the Black Cultural Festival of Limón “…seeks to bring the culture of Limón into the collective Costa Rican consciousness” (Limón Roots, 2009, p. 20), and it ends with a gala parade around town with the participation of schools, and of local and international black
organizations. A close look at the parade I witnessed in 2009 gave hints of their founding associations, their beliefs, their achievements, and their institutions. Of particular notice was the presence of several Protestant churches and religious schools, which quoted proverbs or excerpts of the Bible appealing to the values of Christianity as the bases to form their children, and to reduce signs of violence and drugs amongst the young.

The incorporation of Blacks in the Costa Rican society has been gradual, and the scattered presence of *Afrolimonenses* in Puerto Limón witnesses the effects of the restrictions that the nation imposed on this group to eventually accept them as citizens only in the 1949 under the presidency of *José Figueres*. And even then, the incorporation of the *West Indian* descended community was not total, since in the consciousness of many, the Black would still be the “Other” coming from somewhere else, someone against whom there were discriminating stereotypes difficult to overcome, as Duncan and Meléndez (2005) illustrate clearly. The language, education, and history of the *Afrolimonenses* have not yet found a place in the idea of nation and, amongst members of the community, there are divisions due to the way in which individuals decide to relate to the whites in the Central Valley.

**Socio-Economic Context**

Following the Unsatisfied Basic Need methodology mentioned earlier, the Province of Limón is qualified as one of the three regions of Costa Rica’s seven provinces suffering
The analysis indicates that the areas of the country located on the coasts and at the borders suffer the most deprivation, while the most urban sectors of those at the center are the least disadvantaged (Méndez Fonseca & Trejos Solórzano, 2000, p. 15). At national level, a total of 39.9% of the population is said to have one or another type(s) of hardship (p. 24); in Puerto Limón alone, the capital of the province where Limón School is located, 35% of the population does. Such figures recall the archetypical organization of most Latin American countries and societies, where socio-economic differences persist between urban/rural, center/periphery, and afro-indigenous/white-mestizo, depending on their geographical and societal position. At a socio/cultural level, it evokes the association of place to race that Peter Wade (1997) mentions.

Comparatively speaking though, the above and other indicators suggest that amongst the three countries under study, Costa Rica has the highest socio-economic level, and the lowest rate of inequality. According to the UNDP data of 2009, the country occupied position 54 amongst 182 countries. This ranking places Costa Rica with nations and territories having High Human Development, with an HDI of 0.854; and it had a Gini index of 47.2, which still indicates inequality of income distribution but it is the least strong between the areas studied. In terms of the threshold of poverty based on income, the national results indicate that 11% of the total population of Costa Rica would be

85 The National Institute of Statistics and Censuses of Costa Rica (INEC by its Spanish acronym) establishes the level of hardship based on access to decent housing, healthy living, knowledge (school attendance and achievement), and other goods and services.
86 www.inec.go.cr/Web/Home/GeneradorPagina.aspx
87 See Figures 4 and 5 in the Appendix for two comparative graphs showing the HDI and the Gini Index of the three countries under study.
under this level, with 8.6% earning U.S. $2 a day, and 2.4% making U.S. $1.25 a day (PNUD, 2009, p. 190). Of these, a differentiated analysis between European and afro/indigenous descended population carried out by the UNDP in 2010 yielded that only 5% of the first would make less than U.S. $1 a day, while a lower 4.9% of the latter would.88 Though a relevant analysis for my purposes, this analysis based on data from the year 2000 (UNDP, 2010, p. 37) might not be very accurate, given the phenotypic criteria that seems to have been used to determine ethnic belonging in the nation, as I expressed it elsewhere in this document. On the other hand, it might just reflect the lesser degree of inequality that the Gini coefficient of Costa Rica suggests.

Basic education in Costa Rica is mandatory and public schools are financed by the State,89 but frequently they have to turn to other institutions for complementary support. Like other institutes in the nation, Limón School receives support from a private foundation which has provided the institution with technical equipment, yet this one is not readily available for classes due to inadequate spaces or to burglary. Most interviewees expressed that the teaching-learning processes lacked practice; and so could I witness during my visit. Only those students who chose to do “Education for the Home” (Educación para el hogar), and Industrial Arts had access to a workshop where they created things; only one of two listed computer labs was open, and it had only ten computers with irregular access to Internet. There were no science or language labs.

88 See Figure 5 in the Appendix for a comparative graph showing a differentiated analysis of poverty by ethnicity.
Several public education policies and actions taken to support them are signs of the socio-economic level of the student population. Law 181 of education indicates that “poor” students should be provided with all the material needed to study, through the National Fund of Education.\(^9\) Related to this, teacher interviewees explained that the students were not required to buy textbooks, given their high costs; instead, several of them used photocopies of excerpts from national and/or international publishing houses; the teachers prepared the excerpts, and students paid to obtain them. Also, students had optional access to a daily nutritional lunch served in a school restaurant for the equivalent to approximately U.S. $0.17 or what they could give. These two forms of support to students are common with what was witnessed in Junín, Old Providence Island.

**Expressions of Resistance**

*Limón* School seemed to me to be just one more public school of Costa Rica, financed and controlled by the State and its centralized curriculum and educational policies, where there was a general acquiescence to the state of things. The feeling—amongst the teachers as well as the students interviewed—that everyone in school was the same in terms of culture or ethnicity; that the role of teachers was constrained by the mandates of the curriculum and by the universal declarations to protect the youngster; and that education was nowadays mostly restricted to preparing students to the national tests of high school, made me wonder about the agency of the members of the school community (and in particular of the *Afrolimonenses*) to promote changes or to question or resist

\(^9\) Article 68, Code of Education No. 181 —*Código de Educación No. 181*.  

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Incidents of violence within the school (physical aggression between students and the destruction of desk chairs, which were the only elements present in otherwise empty, large classrooms) were evident signs of dissatisfaction about the schooling experience received and a reflection of the vulnerable and changing society in which the students live. Even though several teachers and students interviewed sustained that there was no real violence in school, they referred to cases of aggression between students resulting from personal problems that they preferred to settle by fighting. Other teachers who gave psychological assistance to students spoke of conflicts they had to deal with on a daily basis, where there might be weapons involved, and situations with parents who would have menacing attitudes towards teachers. The problems mentioned did not have ethnic or racial reasons; anyone could be involved. The destruction of furniture was blamed, partly, on the students from the night shift.

A focus group of selected students in their final year of high school (whose members identified with the Black ethnic group) felt that the school environment was no longer a welcoming place to be, but one where the ills of society were evident.

- δ1 …I see that schools are being used nowadays to sell drugs, to prostitute oneself, to many such things. It is not seen any more as a doorway to be successful, but as a doorway to do… acts that go against the law.

- Then, that does not make you feel so good [at school] …
That’s right. One feels a little insecure because here sometimes… you can have problems if you turn and look at someone who thinks you did not look at them right…

I believe that people behave like that because they lack dignity, I mean they use that to hide. They hide under that costume… inside they might be feeling… nostalgia, fear, but they use that to defend themselves, … to manifest their hatred, their pain, their anger, their family problems…

(Student Focus group 02. Puerto Limón, Costa Rica. Recorded interview. 10/07/09)

The one particular student in this group who was trying to find reasons for the aggressive and discriminating behavior of his classmates was a West Indian descended student who helped me form this special focus group to collaborate with my study. He stood out to me because of his dark black skin, his neat appearance, his politeness, his mastery of the English language (West Indian like), and his English accent when speaking Spanish. I would later learn that he had also been elected student representative, and had participated actively in the Day of the Black and Afro Costa Rican Culture parade I had witnessed the day after my arrival, where he appeared in pictures I had taken randomly. Undoubtedly, his opinions and reflections had all to do with his firm sense of belonging to the “Black” ethnic group, which (in his case and in Limón more generally) meant the West Indian descended Afrolimoneses I was studying. Clearly, for him and his classmates in this focus group, the schooling experience was affected by what was
happening in their society, and students themselves damaged the school building and its elements.

- δ1 There are many stereotypes, that is, many groups [amongst the students of the school]. The groups of those who are considered to be less capable, those who are discriminated against for coming from another country, those who receive… special attention. …And then, there are the others, the VIP as they are called, the most popular in school, the ones who do not need to be part of elections,… who do not need to get along well with any teacher, because they are more than the teachers.

- *And what makes them so?*

- δ1 What they do. For example, they start by writing on the walls, creating dance groups, mmh… creating gangs…

- δ2 They become popular because their parents have money.

- δ1 Many times because the father is into… into things that don’t… outside the law, right? Drug dealers, robbers, *sicarios*⁹¹...

- δ2 Then they [other students] start to see them as… Wow! His father is a drug dealer, he has a lot of money, he has power over this province. Then they [other students] start fearing them and admiring them too.

- ϕ Reason why they [other students] join them.

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⁹¹ Hired killers.
When asked about discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, particularly blackness, the students said they were aware that Blacks were considered by most to be rude, aggressive and problem makers, and that their ethnic group was easily pointed at for whatever happened. Also, they referred to a generalized attitude in Costa Rican society where the Blacks are subject to suspicion, just for being black. They also acknowledged differences between themselves on the basis of the area of town they lived in, suggesting issues of class.

And how do you feel with respect to this [being discriminated]?

- φ Sincerely, I feel nothing because I, I am not [a problem maker].
- δ2 One is used to live like that.
- δ1 One always feels this… how do you say?… anger for the way one is treated, but one gets used to that.
- I say, that goes with the person, because if the person gives so much importance to any little thing … We are in a century and a world where… none of that [discrimination, racism, xenophobia] is important anymore.

(Student Focus Group 01. Puerto Limón, Costa Rica. Recorded interview, 10/05/09)

The students interviewed saw in education the path to follow their dreams and to reach their goals, independent of where they come from, who they are and where they live. Even though they felt that their schooling experience could be improved, they firmly believed that education was what would take them where they wanted to go, if they worked for it. The discourse of those students from the Black ethnic group seemed to suggest that their power of agency to approach their lives lay in the values and world vision they received from their communities.

Amongst the teachers interviewed, a sense of general acquiescence to the educational system and its curriculum was the norm, as well as a position of defense towards the equal treatment that all students received. Teachers argued that the institution made all efforts to have an equal share of students by ethnicity as well as non-hearing and special education students in the classrooms.92 Highly aware of their tasks and responsibilities before the nation and the Ministry of Education, many of the teachers acknowledged that

92 Limón School was described by its director as a bi-cultural school, meaning they had hearing and non-hearing students, as well as students of special education making part of the regular classes.
they followed the school curricula as it had been designed and that they had not really stopped to wonder about potential academic benefits of having cultural diversity in the classroom, or the possibilities of being more inclusive of the history of the Province and of their cultural groups when other opportunities came up. Instead, in general, there were reflections about the need to include quality time to reflect upon topics such as violence, drugs, alcoholism, and abuse, which students faced in their everyday lives.

Sometimes, quite a few Creole-speaking *Afrolimonense* teachers found themselves sitting around the teachers’ large working table at the same time, and the event was noticeable, especially in my eyes, given my interest in this cultural group. I had spontaneous conversations with some of them and formal interviews with others, some from disciplines other than Social Studies, hoping to get a wider picture of their insertion in the educational community. Most mentioned the persistence of racism based mostly on the color of the skin, even in situations in which students might consider that a black teacher would show preference for their black students, or a white teacher might not relate equally to a black kid. Others expressed that in spite of the diversity of Limón, there were attitudes that spoke of hidden racism, as referred to in an earlier chapter. Tied to the mandates of the curriculum, they found it difficult to adapt it or to question it, but when they could they did. It was clear to me that the higher their awareness of their ethnic roots, and their consciousness of their own history, which each of them narrated as they learned it from their ancestors, the more they engaged with the curriculum and questioned it.
…I have always said that sometimes one has to be a little bit rebellious against the program itself [the syllabus]; what the program wants is such people, people who believe what they want them to believe; if the curriculum says such and such, that is how we must all be; that is not real.


**Pedagogical Practices**

One of my teacher interviewees summarized what he acknowledged as anachronistic pedagogical practices, by paraphrasing what someone had expressed at a symposium he had attended recently: “…we are teachers with teaching methods of the 19th century, being teachers of the 20th century, teaching children of the 21st century; that is, we are outdated”."93 However generalized, such a description seems fair following my own impressions gathered from class observations and the responses of most my interviewees in this respect–with notable exceptions, of course.

Most of the teachers interviewed argued lack of technological know-how on their part, and bureaucratic and curricular type of constraints to embrace innovative type of teaching practices. One teacher argued that setting up the technological appliances in the classrooms, where they could not be kept permanently, discouraged the use of

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93 CR_Prof_01_Est Sociales 091109 Recorded Interview.
Another teacher pointed out that organizing field trips, which would complement an otherwise too theoretical subject for the students, carried so many additional considerations that it could only be done once in a while, which resulted at times in dropping the initiative altogether. The lack of infrastructure such as science and language laboratories also contributed to what the school director characterized as teaching and learning practices which lacked a practical aspect. The curriculum was also named as a constraining factor, since teachers felt compelled to stick to its demands, of which a major one was to cover the material given so that students could sit and pass the national exam which certified them as high school graduates. On the other side, students perceived that just as some teachers were committed to their task, showing interest in them, several of them simply assigned some job to their students in class and left them alone while they engaged in something else or just lingered around. In general, classes, they claimed, should be made more didactic, practical, and above all, the schooling experience should include more motivating types of activities to attract the students to attend the lessons and to remain in the school.

The classes observed reflected most of the concerns referred to above. In the first place, the actual classrooms were “empty” blue-walled large rooms where there were no bulletin boards or visual images of any kind: only the few chair desks that had, by then,
survived the destructive hand of students, a small teacher’s desk and a chalk board. It was common to see students carrying desk-chairs from class to class, or walking up and down to fetch an empty one they could use; thus, several of them arrived in class late and named this as the reason. At times students shared chairs and, being a guest, I chose to remain standing at the back of the class or to sit in a chair that would be of no use to a student. There were no fans in the rooms; instead, they had high ceilings and high rows of bricks with holes to allow ventilation—but this also brought the interfering noise of traffic passing by. The spacious high rooms echoed and multiplied the sounds of screams and the screeching noise of metal framed desk-chairs being moved about. Class organization responded, more often than not, to the traditional way in which students sat in lines and rows facing the teacher. Some of the teaching methods observed also reflected traditional ways of going about a class. Some teachers prepared guides from selected excerpts of school textbooks which students worked on during class individually, as a basis for the following session where answers would be discussed. Others gave lectures to guarantee that the prescribed contents were covered, as a teacher acknowledged. Others centered the class around the teachers’ presentations of a topic or concept, and asked students to give examples of their own or to discuss a particular point. Class time in grade 11 was very much geared, in the month of September, towards preparing students for the national high school exam, and giving tests and results, according to the national calendar. Teachers of different levels were usually engaged in grading, planning tests and/or writing students’ reports that were required by the Ministry. These aspects discouraged teachers from inviting me to observe a class that would not be, in their eyes, worth seeing because there was no pedagogic activity as such.
It was striking to witness the proportionately low number of students who attended some of the classes I observed—an average of 22 students, when according to official numbers class size would be 33 in average. Attendance was higher when there were tests to be taken.

The effects of a centralized school curriculum, defined at the Ministry of Education, were clearly identified by a particular teacher who described herself as a little rebellious against the system. She perceived the curriculum as being so “vertical” that it turned teachers into conformist educators, and students into extremely passive learners, with neither of them questioning or complementing what the curriculum prescribed. Referring to the pedagogical practices, she stated:

If I did it the way the Ministry tells me to do it, these kids would be sleeping in my classes. They would be asleep, bored, they would not wish to attend the lessons of Social Studies. That is why I have always thought that, and I base myself on what one is taught at university, one has to make the change. Then, if you have the chance, do it, even if camouflaged, but try to make the change, otherwise the student is going to fall asleep. Because nowadays, we are competing against technology, and they prefer to work at a computer than to sit and listen to us talk and talk and talk.

(School teacher. Puerto Limón, Costa Rica. Recorded Interview 09/21/09)

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Horatio Hodgson High School, Bluefields, Nicaragua

I was referred to the Horatio Hodgson High School (HHHS) since it was the only State institution of secondary education in Bluefields which had mostly Creole students. Also, as I would learn later, it was particularly tied to the process of autonomy that the Atlantic regions of Nicaragua had been living for little over twenty years then. Most other State high schools in Bluefields were still monolingual and were not part of the Intercultural Bilingual Education Program (PEBI by its Spanish acronym) that the Regional Autonomous System of Education (SEAR by its Spanish acronym) promoted. Of notice, but not the subject of my research, was the existence of private schools such as little primary ones running alongside Protestant churches; amongst them stood the Moravian school which offered all grades up to high school and was greatly appreciated. Creoles who could afford it sent their children to there. Amongst other things, it was stated that students could attain a good command of the English language in this school, even though it was not bilingual.

Location

The HHHS is located in the heart of Beholden, one of the three most traditional Creole neighborhoods of the city of Bluefields,\(^{100}\) described by Gordon (1998) as the

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\(^{100}\) Other mostly Creole neighborhoods are Pointeen, Old Bank, and Cotton Tree (Robb Taylor, 2005)
neighborhood where the poorer and darker Negroes lived.\textsuperscript{101} Beholden was home to the Liberty Hall,\textsuperscript{102} one of the headquarters of the United Negro Improvement Association founded in Bluefields by Marcus Garvey in the 1920s (p. 76), and it is also referred to by many as a place where protests were organized and held (Robb Taylor, 2005).

Back in 2009, when I did my field research, the Horatio was located next to an area in Beholden known as “the ghetto” for being a place where illegal drugs could be obtained. The actual school building occupied a relatively small corner at the back of a larger terrain where two other educational institutes and a church were found: a primary bilingual school, \textit{Colegio Dinamarca} [Denmark School], so-called to recall the support of the Danish to rebuild the school after Hurricane Joan in 1988 (Robb Taylor, 2005), nowadays a State school which pays for the teachers’ salaries; a Special Education institution, called Aaron Hodgson; and a Protestant church called Marantha Vineyard Church. Access to the HHHS was either through the larger \textit{Colegio Dinamarca} located right by the road, or through an alleyway which, like several others, ran between residential houses of the neighborhood. The institutions found on this terrain, including the church, were tied to a common history and struggle to which I will refer later.

The city of Bluefields is the capital of the South Atlantic Autonomous Region of Nicaragua (RAAS by its Spanish acronym), a port city which sprang from a Dutch

\textsuperscript{101} By “Negroes,” Gordon meant both the darker Creole descending from colonial times, and a later wave of Black immigrants coming from the West Indian islands of the Caribbean and from the south of the United States to work at the economic enclave.

\textsuperscript{102} This building was brought down by Hurricane Joan in 1988, which literally devastated the city. The Moravian church, a most prominent historical landmark, was actually rebuilt after the Hurricane hit, along with its school.
buccaneer’s refuge and center of operations where the name came from–Blauvelt or Bleevelh (Pérez-Valle, 1978; Robb Taylor, 2005). Six ethnic and indigenous groups inhabit the two autonomous regions of Nicaragua: Creole, Rama, Sumu-Mayangna, Garifuna, Miskitu, and Spanish-speaking Mestizos identified in the national census of 2005 as Mestizos from the Caribbean Coast. The presence of Mestizos increased in the autonomous regions of Nicaragua as the U.S. American enclave came to an end, and the agricultural and cattle ranching activities of Nicaraguans expanded towards the Atlantic. 16,607 Creoles inhabit the RAAS and make up 34.8% of the inhabitants of Bluefields, Nicaragua, according to data presented by McLean (2008). The HHHS had a higher number of Creoles than of any of the other ethnic groups, in agreement to its very essence and mission, but members of the other five communities were also present.

School History

The Horatio Hodgson High School was created in 1996 by a group of Creole teachers and leaders, who identified the need to offer bilingual high school education to the Creole/English speaking students who had been studying in schools implementing the Intercultural Bilingual Education Program (PEBI by its Spanish acronym) in the region since 1984 (Ordóñez Pondler, 2002). In fact, Creole students coming out of the latter schools would have to move on to the monolingual secondary institutions where their language and culture would not be taken into account.

103 The two autonomous regions have a total of 737,900 inhabitants of which 27,197 are Creoles; 125,869 Miskitu; 19,370 Mayangna; 3,440 Garifuna; 1,290 Rama; and 560,727 Mestizos (McLean Herrera, 2008, p. 13).
104 57% are Mestizos, 6% Miskitu, 2,7% Rama, and 0,5% Garifuna (McLean Herrera, 2008, p. 13).
This school made like an option, especially for Creole and black people; … So, after the school come up is like to give that attention to this Creole speaking children; and others, like maybe Ramas, the different community people that come to this school. Why? … Is because … other school don’t put too much interest, for example, if it is a black people speaking, huh? And them have maybe some difficult in Spanish, that teacher don’t care. Them don’t care about you. Them give them class, if you understand you understand, and if not … them don’t care. But then when the school made that was the option, to help, to help our black people, and to help the next… other ethnic group that have difficult in Spanish.105

(School staff. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview 11/06/2009)

Several events made the creation of this school possible. The process of autonomy in the region had been advancing since 1987. In 1990, as a coalition of political parties (UNO) displaced the Sandinistas from power, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports cut the budget for the support of the PEBI, and dismissed many of the local professionals who had been working on the program (Rizo, 1996; Students of 11th Grade, 2002). The regional government of the RAAS created a consulting team of these professionals and supported the creation of the HHHS as a regional, autonomous institution. The University of the Autonomous Region of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (URACCAN), founded in 1995, was also a good support to this project, since the institution of higher education

105 Literal transcription.
set out to support and to promote the PEBI, a fundamental pillar for strengthening the process of autonomy of the region (Students of 11th Grade, 2002). By 2003, the PEBI had developed Miskitu, Sumu/Mayangna and Creole English versions in the autonomous regions of Nicaragua; the headquarters of the Creole PEBI is Bluefields, where only primary schools are actually implementing the program (Consejos Regionales Autónomos RAAN y RAAS. & Comisiones de Educación RAAN y RAAS, 2003).

The HHHS was the first high school to be framed within the Intercultural Bilingual Education Program in the South Autonomous Atlantic Region of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua. It started off in 1996 with 7th grade advancing one grade per year, graduating their first students from high school in the year 2000. In the spirit of its founding principles and objectives, the institution has been giving priority to minorities–students disempowered due to their language limitations, their low self-esteem, and/or their socioeconomic and cultural disadvantage. At the outset, the school was mostly directed at disempowered Creoles who, coming from the bilingual program of education in primary schools, would be discriminated from monolingual Spanish high schools for their lack of proficiency in the Spanish language. During the first years, the teachers of the HHHS were mostly Creole, and were highly identified with the mission and objectives of the school. Classes were taught both in English and Spanish; Creole was used by teachers when necessary to assist students with understanding and making a transition to the other two languages. As time passed and teachers started to find other positions and to leave the HHHS, it became necessary to involve teachers who did not always understand its
mission and objectives fully, had not been trained in intercultural bilingual education, and did not embrace the dream of autonomy as one that would empower the local population.

Inspired by the process of autonomy, the school was named after Horatio Hodgson, the first black Senator of Nicaragua representing the Caribbean Coast. Hodgson was famous for addressing autonomy in a speech known as the Hodgson Memorial before the Congress in Managua in 1935, where he denounced the exploitation of the resources of the Atlantic region by the Nicaraguan government (Gordon, 1998, p. 81). His daughter, Enid Hodgson, indicates that his years of public service as Senator of the republic, and mayor of Bluefields, were devoted to defending the rights of the coastal people to their territories. Recalling his life, she feels grateful because “the Horatio Hodgson High School has chosen to represent his mission of public service” (Robb Taylor, 2005, p. 438).

Enrolment and Ethnic Composition

HHHS Vision

The school is “envision [sic] as an intercultural bilingual school joining effort with parent’s [sic] association, students and teachers to serve and educate the ethnic communities of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua.”

(Students of 11th Grade, 2002, p. 10)
Tied to its particular history, the HHHS was the smallest and probably the poorest of all State high schools in the city of Bluefields. In the heart of a rather poor neighborhood, infamous for being a center of drug dealing and consumption, it had amongst its students members of the six ethnic groups of the region, but the highest proportion of them were still Creole.

According to a survey I took in November 2009, the school had a total of 232 students from grades 1 to 5 of high school. Following the law that entitles them to determine their own ethnicity, this is what I found: one (1) of them was Sumy/Mayangna; three (3) described themselves as Rama; twelve (12) said that they were Garifuna; twenty-nine stated that they were Miskitu; forty-eight (48) indicated that they were Mestizo; and one-hundred and thirty-nine (139) identified as Creole. That made 60% of the student population Creole. The official number of students enrolled at the beginning of the academic year in 2009 was 259 students. The average percentage of student retention the year before had been 84%, according to the official records of the school; following my calculations, in 2009 the retention in November would be 90%. Even though by September 2009, only 43% of all students were actually passing their school year, the rate of retention seemed rather high. My interviewees actually underlined the fact that one of the main concerns of the HHHS was to offer their students a place to be safe, away from their harsh realities at home and in the streets, and away from the discrimination they suffered in other schools for not mastering the Spanish language. Some of their voices express these aspects clearly:

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106 1 to 5 are equivalent to 7th to 11th grades in other scales.
…the students who are here, most of them, come from different communities [ethnic groups] or municipalities, because the Creole come mostly from the Creole neighborhoods of Bluefields, but the Miskitu, the Garifuna, come from other municipalities; [and also] the Mayagnas, the Ramas, when we have any. Then, … the parents always look for the Horatio when they come from the communities … because they understand that the Horatio is a school where children do not handle the Spanish language… and that here, the children can come and if they do not understand Spanish, they are attended to in their mother tongue. …we are sorry to have to tell them, sometimes, that we have no room for them because as you can see, the Centre is small… we wish we could have them all, but we do not have that possibility… so we have to say “Sorry bot we no have no more space” [sic].

(School staff. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview 11/11/2009)

…when we can keep the students in class, when we know that at least they do not have severe health or economic problems, even not having something to eat… then we are well [because] they can be at ease, they can receive their classes in peace. … Because it is true [that] many come here to have a good time. They do not pass the year because they never did anything… but at least we manage to have the students in the school, right?

(School Teacher. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview 11/09/09)
… many time many situation come up and them will… Les say for example ah… as I was saying before, the stupidness that the children them does… … Maybe other school guain say, I don want to support you, the stupidness, what, send them in the street, expel and finish. We no. We try to talk to the student, we try to give them counseling, and… realize them wrong what them are doing and… get back in the classroom and so. In that sense, I think we are helping a lot, the student them.

(School staff. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview 11/06/2009)

Socio-Economic Context

The socio-cultural and historical division of Nicaragua into Atlantic and Pacific invites a differentiated analysis when approaching the socio-economic context of the school and its location. General analyses of the nation reported by the UNDP in 2009 classify Nicaragua as having a Medium level of Human Development with respect to a total of 182 countries, occupying position 124, with a 0.699 HDI, and a Gini coefficient of 52.3. Even though these figures suggest that the nation as a whole has great challenges to face in order to improve Nicaraguans’ life expectancy, educational attainment and income, when the analyses are differentiated, the situation seems more severe.

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107 See Figures 4 and 5 in the Appendix for two comparative graphs showing the HDI and the Gini Index of the three countries under study.

108 These indicators, when combined, make up the HDI (Human Development Index).
According to a UNDP report on Human Development in the Autonomous Regions of the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua (PNUD, 2005), both regions qualify as low, like Bluefields, with a HDI of 0.494. National studies such as the latest census of 2005 do not always break down data to the local level or by ethnicities; usually the autonomous regions are included as a whole and other studies such as one found on Unsatisfied Basic Needs does not aggregate the results to give an index of poverty (INIDE, 2011). 2007 World Development Indicators published by the World Bank state that “Nicaragua is the second poorest country in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a per capita income of US$1,022, ahead only of Haiti. … half the population lives beneath the poverty line, with almost one out of every five Nicaraguans in conditions of extreme poverty.” (International Monetary Fund, 2010, p. 8) From an ethnic perspective, 35% of afro/indigenous descended Nicaraguans would be living with less than U.S. $1 a day, while 15% of European descent would be living in the same conditions (PNUD, 2010).

These data illustrate in a quantitative manner what I could perceive qualitatively through my visit to the area and to the Horatio Hodgson High School. The institution had very limited resources and infrastructure, and it counted on a meager budget. The school administration and the teachers’ place of work shared the same space divided by furniture or cases, and a bookcase that contained all the library items the school had. Classrooms were small and even though they had large railed windows, they had problems of ventilation in hot days and of water leaks and muddy grounds around them in the long

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109 The HDI of the RAAS as a whole is 0.454, and that of the RAAN is 0.466 (PNUD, 2005, p. 22). The index combines indicators of health, access to potable water, education retention and enrolment, and income.
110 See Figure 5 in the Appendix for a comparative graph showing a differentiated analysis of poverty by ethnicity.
rainy months of the year. The school had a total of five classrooms—one per level, and no other pedagogic spaces such as science, language or computer labs. It did not have athletic fields either—basketball was played in Beholden’s public court, and the surrounding grounds were sometimes used to play football, no matter the rain or puddles. Each classroom had an acrylic board, chair desks for the students, and some posters on the concrete, non-painted walls. Students took turns at cleaning and rearranging their classrooms by the end of their school day; also, by the end of the school year, each of them sandpapered their chair desks as part of the closing activities of the year.

Unlike the schools visited in Old Providence and Limón, there were no visible actions of support for students such as cafeterias or transportation. Some of my teacher interviewees expressed awareness and concern for their students’ socio-economic difficulties, which added to the challenges they faced in the streets and within their families.

Well, despite all the problems that we endure as Nicaraguans, given the actual economic situation, or the actual situation of the region… we feel well when we all have, first of all, health, and the willingness to come to school; to participate in class even if only rarely; to try and do homework; and when we see in our students enthusiasm, happiness, if not because of class, because they can share with their classmates… [We are well] when we can have our students in class, when we know that at least they do not have severe problems of health or economic [difficulties] which go even to not having what to eat… [Because] we have critical cases of people who come to school without eating, or who do not go home because they know that there is no one there, then they linger around…
Just as in the other two public schools, locations and countries, students in the HHHS were not required to buy textbooks given the costs, and if teachers wished to hand out some type of document, they had to pay for it themselves—the school had no equipment to make a photocopy or to print a document. Budget cuts to the PEBI pushed the school into asking the Ministry of Education for financial support. This affected the objectives of the HHHS since teachers started to be appointed by the Ministry without taking into account the school’s nature.

**Expressions of Resistance**

The mere creation and existence of an institution like the Horatio Hodgson High School can be perceived as an expression of resistance to the approach of Nicaragua’s founding elites, and of most subsequent political leaders who saw in public education the way to take indigenous and blacks out of their barbarian state into a civilized one to make up part of a modern and productive nation (Burns, 1991). The HHHS’ objectives and mission framed a collective action of resistance to such discourses, as it set out to give “Creole youth a strong cultural, environmental and language program,” building their “self-esteem so that they may become intellectual, technical and leaders of their homes, communities, and country, pushing forward the autonomy process” (Students of 11th Grade, 2002, pp. 9–10). At its outset, the school was clearly linked to the process of autonomy of the region, it was supported by the regional government, and it had the
contribution of scholars in URACCAN who promoted and worked for the development of a bilingual, intercultural education program for the region. As a secondary school, it was meant to welcome those students who had done their primary studies in intercultural bilingual institutions such as its neighboring Denmark school.

The school I visited in 2009 had somehow drifted from its original goals due to budget cuts to the PEBI, which had sustained and inspired it. Some of the subjects that had been created to contextualize the school and to complement the national curriculum were still being taught; others weren’t. The desired bilingualism of English/Spanish had given way to some sort of multilingualism where the students were allowed to use their own native languages to express themselves, but Spanish had become the dominant language of teaching, as the national curriculum prescribed. The school welcomed not only Creoles, but members of different ethnic and indigenous groups, many of whom approached the HHHS in search of a place where they would be treated with respect and where they could complete their high school studies in spite of their difficulties with the Spanish language.

Although the HHHS had become a State school, following the national curriculum and having teachers who, being appointed directly by the Ministry of Education, did not necessarily understand the original project, its founding mission and objectives still echoed in the schooling experience of students. Students expressed ethnic awareness, a sense of belonging in the region, and a critical position towards the institution. The students interviewed recalled and applied to their answers and comments concepts and
rights they had learned or were learning about in school. For example, some of them quoted their right to define their ethnicity and to use their own native languages.

- δ 2 Well, I am 19, and for me, well basing on the autonomy law, da how they say, you know, you could pick your ethnic group as we wanna be, you know, so de now I pick myself like a Creole people too.

(Focus Group 03. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview. 11/11/09)

- φ 1 [Garifuna] We talk about different tongues, different languages.

- Language? A lot?

- φ 2 [Garifuna] Yeah, language and rights. …Because well our principal right is to speak in our native language, so that is why mostly about language and rights.

(Focus Group 01. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview. 11/06/09)

Others referred to the importance for all school students to understand the meaning and implications of the autonomous process, what they had learned themselves, and what it implied to be “intercultural.”

- φ [Misk_1] …the teacher explains a lot about the ethnic groups that the Coast has and it is nice to hear about the origin of the languages, the cultures…

(Focus Group 02. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview. 11/10/09)
- δ 2 [Creole]… When we go investigating all of that [autonomy law], some of that show … the rights that… we have at the autonomous regions, a lot of things what we could make, you know, reflect and …. At least now I know [that] we, everybody have a right for free expression, free thinking, a lot of things … And discrimination, that’s something [that] is not part of what should [be] happening because everybody is one, no matter the color, the race… so you have to respect everyone by what [they are].

(Focus Group 03. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview. 11/11/09)

- φ 2 [Garifuna] …there is a intercultural skill so is like no discrimination between each others…

(Focus Group 01. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview. 11/06/09)

- φ [Creole] … I no got for discriminate nobody, caus’ fa me everybody is de siem [the same]… I don’t treat nobody different like that.

(Focus Group 02. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview. 11/10/09)

Several of the students were critical towards manifestations of preference in class for some students or others on the basis of their ethnicity, rejecting, for example, that a mestizo teacher might prefer a student of his/her own ethnicity. Aware of the challenges of being intercultural, some students complained about being discriminated against by their Creole classmates (the ethnic group which made up the majority in school), something that was illustrated through several of their stories, and was pointed out by a
teacher in a class situation I witnessed. What some perceived as a lack of discipline in class, others saw as lack of respect between one another, either because of issues related to ethnicity or to power relations between the different groups, or between the teacher and his/her students. The attitude of the teachers observed and interviewed towards the disruption of students, their different languages and behaviors during class and in problem situations outside class, was one of “non-confrontation,” showing openness to the challenges presented by a diverse classroom and the disadvantaged social context that most of their students came from.

The needs of this institution…are probably not the same as those of another one, [one with] better conditions, maybe?, and less problems of interculturality; or maybe not as many ethnic groups present in one single institution; here we have members of probably the six ethnic groups.

(School Teacher. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview 11/09/09)

The students and teachers interviewed were well aware of the shortages of the HHHS, and most of them adopted a critical position when evaluating it. Nevertheless, one could see that, as a collectivity, seeds of consciousness and power of agency had been sown thanks to a schooling experience which, albeit less than perfect, struggled to promote respect for the students’ cultural diversity, languages, and the study of their cultural histories and of their present insertion in the region and in the Nicaraguan nation. Immersed in a context that acknowledged cultural diversity, which the HHHS made one of its pillars, it could be said that the students enunciated their present and looked into their future from within the framework of the hybridity of cultures that met in the school
grounds. Such a space encourages in an individual the possibility to understand his/her insertion in the world from the difference of his/her cultural experience, as Bhabha suggests when he says that “The enunciation of cultural difference problematizes the binary division of past and present, tradition and modernity, at the level of cultural representation and its authoritative address” (1994, p. 51). As such, the schooling experience of the HHHS could be understood as one of resistance to a dominant, homogenizing ideology, regarding the vision and objectives with which it set out to be.

**Pedagogical Practices**

The disadvantaged socio-economic context of the HHHS and its members limited the type of teaching-learning experiences to which students could be exposed on site. Teachers and students did not have access to complementary pedagogic, technological and/or experimental material which might support or enrich their tasks. Classes were mostly developed in a traditional manner around a board used by the teacher to write exercises, definitions, or examples that guided the lessons, with a group of students sitting in lines and rows of chair-desks, usually cluttered in the reduced space of a classroom that fit 30+ students, participating as their teachers prompted them. Without textbooks, students used their notebooks take dictation or copy selected concepts or definitions given by teacher, and to do homework. This is what I witnessed in the classes observed, and of most other classes taking place in school, which I could observe as I passed by since the classrooms had railings but no glasses in their window frames.
The students interviewed expressed general appreciation for their teachers, yet they mentioned that their class methodologies could be improved. Some of them found that the classes turned “a little boring” at times and others felt that teachers could do a better job to make the teaching-learning experience more active, entertaining, and effective too.

φ1 [Garifuna] All the class them, I feel like they should be more active in a way… like maybe. Make it more happier. Sometimes is like they go, they explain, they explain, they write, they write, and is like… you get boring of a one thing over and over so. They should change the way of giving the class.

(Focus Group 01. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview. 11/06/09)

δ1 …to me, that class [Autonomy class] [should] be given from first year, it could be, you know, in a way that… the smaller one them could got an idea about them things, because, believe me, from first year we come, and I study from first year coming to fifth, but believe me I start getting idea from that class when I ended the four year because really the class was there but they only making artículo, artículo, artículo, [articles of the law of autonomy] but we… we, you know, …never somebody come and tell you the right kind of way how that should be given.

(Focus Group 03. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview. 11/11/09)

Some students acknowledged that the conditions of the school and the classrooms were not appropriate for learning: classrooms were crowded, hot in the sun and wet in the rain.
Because of the heat, a student mentioned, sometimes they managed to take some activities outside, which she enjoyed, but it was certainly not the usual.

δ 2 …. I would say [that] in a section sometime well is too much of them and maybe …. [and] you no gat the ambient exactly for… dedicate direct to the class; maybe this one de striking you, they talking about what happened last night but they talk too hard and the teacher, you know…

(Focus Group 03. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview. 11/11/09)

The teachers interviewed were aware of the limitations that their own work had, due in part to the insufficient resources with which they had to work, which contrasted with the mandates of the central curriculum, but also because of lack of preparation they received to handle the challenges that most students of the HHHS had to face. Such a situation demanded teachers to be creative and committed to make meaningful classes possible, something that not all managed to do, but that some did and this was actually acknowledged by some students.

We work with many restrictions… [We lack] teaching material, mainly, but also pedagogical [formation] and lack of preparation … to respond to the needs that students have so they can overcome their problems. …. But also, …. the educational system is discouraging at times,… they demand so many things when one doesn’t have the means or resources to do them… also, the salaries we

111 In Standard English: “I would say that sometimes there are too many students in a section (classroom, or class group)… [and] you don’t have the best environment to concentrate on the class; someone might hit you, others might be talking about what happened the night before, but they talk too loud and the teacher, you know….“
receive from the system of education are really low. Nonetheless, we are willing to continue working, to continue doing what we like, and of course hoping things will get better.

(School Teacher. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview 11/09/09)

…the student of these classrooms has it difficult to keep concentrated. …They [students] come here with I don’t know how many problems from their houses and they reflect it in the classroom. They are usually distracted, some are sleepy, others complain because they are hungry. Then one has to fight against all those factors and try to have the kid handle it, have him concentrate, have him try to answer, have them pay attention to what you are saying. And, what do I do to achieve that? I usually ask them “Did you hear the radio? Did you hear such news? Did you see such and such event on TV? Do you know what is going on?”

(School Teacher. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview 11/11/09)

Students valued pedagogical activities where they could go outside the school, either to participate in sports competitions against other institutions, or to visit places and talk to people to inquire about issues of interest to the community. During my stay, I learned of interviews they had carried out with the people of Bluefields about the project of opening a road that would connect the city with the Pacific. Students mentioned that experience in class, recalling some of the interviewees’ answers, as they evaluated a current event broadcast by the radio which their teacher brought up. Also, it was most illuminating to
attend to the presentation of the final research projects that the graduating class had to
develop as final requirement to attain their *Bachiller* (high school) degree. Most topics
related to socio-cultural and environmental problems which youngsters, families, and the
surrounding communities and society faced. The learning process that students must have
undergone to prepare these papers was surely worthwhile. Often, students mentioned in
the focus groups that they were asked to “investigate” and search for information outside,
as part of homework, which implied a bit of work on their side. Even though some
complained about it and wished they instead had one book that could condense the
contents of a class, others understood that such type of work made them independent
learners.

Thanks to international cooperation programs of which the HHHS was a part, a couple of
students from the final grade of high school had had the chance to visit Norway and
Pennsylvania, in the United States, as part of an educational exchange visit. This
experience had given two particular students who participated in the focus groups the
possibility to improve their command of the English language, and to engage critically
with their own lives and with the challenges of making a living in Nicaragua.
Nonetheless, their analyses were fair in that they valued what they had learned at home,
the effort of some of their teachers at the HHHS, and also the English language that some
of them had learned while studying for some time in their past in the Moravian school.
Conclusions

This chapter presents an ethnographic analysis of the secondary schools visited, approaching them as historically and culturally situated institutions whose pedagogical practices and structural conditions reflect the dynamics of dominance and resistance. Financed by the State and determined by centralized national curricula, the three institutions were located at the peripheries of each their countries, where, historically, the diversity of cultures prevailed; but ideologically, the discourses of the dominant mestizo or “white” majorities informed and directed the contents, organization, and the means of evaluation of the system of public education.

Particular attention was given in this chapter to reading the curriculum as it was enacted; that is, to the classes, the school day, and the “hidden curriculum” which sustained the everyday actions and reactions of teachers and students. The pedagogical practices and everyday regulatory dynamics observed echoed the theoretical premise according to which schools serve to reproduce social differences within a nation, depending on the population they target, the socio-economic context they have, and the political decisions that facilitate or promote a particular educational project. The generalized lack of teaching aids—textbooks, laboratories, and computer and information technological equipment—restricted the teaching-learning processes to what a teacher could bring to class, where much time was taken to dictate, copy or, at best, take notes from a lecture.  

The schools organized their days and activities around the goals prescribed by the

112 See Table 2 for a comparative qualitative assessment of the resources and teaching methods of the three schools under study, in the Appendix.
national curricula, which in some schools, like Limón, meant giving priority to the preparation of students in their final year for the national tests; and in others, like Junín, it implied investing quite a bit of time in responding to the planning requirements and supervisions of the educational authorities. All of them invested time in enforcing disciplinary norms such as wearing the school uniform in the ‘proper’ way, arriving on time (a reminder of school directors mainly), and attending to students’ conflicts and disruptions which affected a school day. The general conditions of deprivation or insecurity in the areas where the schools were located brought to the classroom great social problems that the teachers and schools as institutions had to confront: violence, drug dealing and consumption, family destruction, and hunger. Also, the conflicts between members of different ethnic groups and/or neighborhoods, where issues of race and class could be observed, were transferred to the school grounds, and in some cases, such as the HHHS, it placed at risk the schooling possibilities of ethnic minorities whose languages and cultures did not meet the expectations and standards of the national curriculum.

In such contexts, where the systems of public education did not respond to the needs and expectations of students and teachers, and were not inclusive of the cultural diversity that characterized the regions and localities under study, there were several expressions of resistance. These ranged from destructing their elements of work, and slowing the pace of work (much in the way that slaves would do under the oppressive system of the plantations in the Caribbean), being critical and implementing methodological changes to the classes, and acting as a collectivity to resist the imposition of the hegemonic
discourses of one single culture, as was the case of the Horatio Hodgson High School in Bluefields, Nicaragua.
In the realm of the ideologies that inform secondary education, which is the concern of this study, I have focused on the school curriculum as a way to identify “whose knowledge” and “whose truths” are being made legitimate (Apple, 2004) by the ideological State apparatus that is the school (Althusser, 1972); and how the present-day West Indian communities make sense of these in their own lives. In other words, my study approaches the curriculum as “cultural practice,” which in Kanu’s words “place[s] culture (i.e., the beliefs, values and meanings on which different groups draw to make sense of the world) at the center of curriculum analysis… and…emphasize[s] practice as an important context for this endeavor” (Kanu, 2006, p. 4). Such perspectives are in line with the idea that the ideologies (i.e. knowledge, values) of the groups in power prevail over other cultural imaginations, suggesting a relationship between power and knowledge.

Reflecting upon the hierarchy of knowledge that has ‘disqualified’ that which does not adjust to the principles of Western scientific thought, Foucault (1980) refers to the emergence of “subjugated knowledges” vis-à-vis those whose theoretical methodologies and discourses intend to have universal value. Such knowledges identify ‘fragilities’ at the bases of the constructions of knowledge which have accounted for the ways in which
everyday life is organized and understood (p. 80). These disqualified knowledges, “local popular knowledge” and “crude, exact historical knowledge” have had to counter “the effects of a power which the West since Medieval times has attributed to science and has reserved for those engaged in scientific discourse” (p. 85).

Subjugated knowledges are [on the one hand]…those blocs of historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematising theory and which criticism—which obviously draws upon scholarship – has been able to reveal. …On the other hand…[they should be understood as] a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naive [sic] knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity (Foucault, 1980, p. 82).

Such issues are relevant to my analyses since one of the most important parameters that the national school curricula of the three countries make use of to validate learning and to approach local knowledges is that of scientific research. As Foucault himself argues, “It is not that these global theories have not provided or continue to provide in a fairly consistent fashion useful tools for local research,” but “the attempt to think in terms of a totality has in fact proved a hindrance to research” (pp. 80-81).

With respect to the location and effects of power, Foucault warns that one should not just locate it in an individual, a collectivity or an establishment, but rather look into the
“micro-mechanisms” of power, which make it possible for certain discourses, and not others, to be embodied by the individuals themselves, where power is expressed:

…power is not to be taken to be a phenomenon of one individual’s consolidated and homogeneous domination over others, or that of one group or class over others. …Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody’s hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation (Foucault, 1980, p. 98).

This reflection helps us understand the diversity of ways in which my interviewees perceived, and either reproduced or questioned ‘taken-for-granted’ truths, discourses and mandates of the official school curricula and practices of education. And also, it speaks for the different expressions of resistance to the dominant discourses of education of non-West Indians living in contact with them.

Foucault suggests that much of the exercise of power is sustained by the production of ideologies and “apparatuses of knowledge” (p. 102), which in turn sustain “truths” that societies enforce and reproduce to reach their goals and to obtain political and economic benefits.
…truth isn’t outside power, or lacking in power. …Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its régime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true (p. 131).

Schools, as state ideological apparatuses, conceive of their educating mission as liberating because it is built upon universal truths inspired on the neutrality of science, and on the understanding that there is a common rational human nature that prevails over the many different expressions of human diversity. National school curricula comprise expressions of dominance as they exclude histories and knowledges that are not legitimated by the ‘régime of truth’ to which Foucault refers, because either they have no political or economic value in the present-day modern societies, or they do not accommodate to a Western way of thinking.

The overarching perspective with which this study sets out to inquire into the ideologies that inform the school curriculum is that of postcolonialism, which questions the universality of rationality rooted in the tenets of the Enlightenment; a rationality that has managed “to repress all symptoms of cultural alterity,” as Leela Gandhi (1998, p. 40) puts it. The inquiry is supported on the principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA) of education, whose theoretical base relates to “the Frankfurt school of critical theory,” as it studies power relations:
Critical research and theory is a rejection of naturalism (that social practices, labels, and programs represent reality), rationality (the assumption that truth is a result of science and logic), neutrality (the assumption that truth does not reflect any particular interests), and individualism. Critical research…argues for a dialectic between individual agency and structural determinism.” (Rogers, 2004, p. 3)

The critical analysis presented below will focus on the big “D” of discourse which, according to Paul Gee “refers to the ways of representing, believing, valuing, and participating with the language bits,” the latter of which make up the little “d” of discourse (Rogers, 2004, p. 5). Within the documents studied, such Discourses can be perceived in the choice of words and phrases which describe a given subject or process; in the way alterity is referred to; and in the choice of content of a syllabus and the order of appearance of that content. Underlying these are the ideologies which constitute “the interface that links social structures with cognitive representations of social group members” (Dijk, 1996, p. 7). In particular, the postcolonial reading of the curricula inquires into notions of race, class, and nation that shape ideologies and raise expressions of resistance to domination within education.

The previous chapter advanced an analysis of the school curriculum as it was enacted; that is, as students and teachers engaged with it on a daily basis, and the schools’ and the regions’ socio-economic and cultural contexts shaped the schooling experience in each locality. In this chapter, the focus of analysis is the knowledge as it is prescribed by the
school curriculum and the ideological implications it has on the West Indian communities under study. Sources of study were the national education laws of each country; the diverse curricular guidelines issued by every Ministry of Education such as general norms, educational policies, standards, content, and bibliographic handouts or material; the actual syllabi or programs of study\textsuperscript{113} of Social Studies; and particular bylaws developed in each country and/or region.

Unlike previous chapters, this one approaches the analyses in a cross-regional, comparative manner instead of presenting each case separately. This is due to the fact that the data collected suggest significant similarities: on the one hand, the national school curricula of the three countries have common ideological bases which find their roots in their shared Spanish colonial past; on the other, there is growing concern about the challenges posed by globalization processes, and the simultaneous struggles for the rights of cultural and ethnic diversity. These common processes underlie the political scenarios of the three countries, whose differences can be appreciated as the discourses that make up the laws of education, policies, curricular guidelines, and content of a class are analyzed critically. A data base was built to read into the data obtained from these sources against the premises used to approach the curriculum as it was enacted. These will guide the analyses.

\textsuperscript{113} Since the three countries use different terms to refer to the actual documents that define or recommend teaching guidelines for the subjects they teach, the present document will use the terms “program of study,” “study plan,” and “syllabus” alternatively to refer to them. As a matter of fact, there is no common way in which these documents are laid out in each country and/or region.
Nature of the School Curricula

The official written curricula of the three State schools under study are defined by each of their corresponding Ministries of Education or by a national centralized educational board; their application is compulsory. The curricula derive their principles and goals from their corresponding national laws of education, which in turn respond to the principles of their political constitutions, and to international agreements the countries have pledged to such as the Universal Declarations of Human Rights (1948), the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (1969), the Elimination of Discrimination against the Woman (1981), the Rights of Children (1990), Cultural Diversity (2001), and the World Declaration on Education for All (1990). The school curricula can be understood as some sort of a chart which shows the route to follow in order to achieve a certain type of individual or community within a particular idea of nation. Schools, as Apple (2004) states, “…are linked through their everyday practices to other powerful institutions in ways that are often hidden and complex” (p. 60). The curriculum is one way through which such linkages can be understood.

…historically, curriculum theory and development have been strongly connected to and influenced by economic needs and changes, and, … by a rather interesting notion of what the ideal “community” should be (Apple, 2004, p. 65).

The national school curricula of Colombia, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua refer to the existence of national identities, and promote allegiance to national values and history, even where cultural diversity is acknowledged. The school curriculum is defined as:
Colombia

…a set of criteria, study plans, syllabi, methodologies and processes, which contribute to … the construction of the national, regional and local cultural identity (Law 115 of 1994. General Law of Education. Articles 76 and 77).

Costa Rica

…an intentional proposal, which is framed in the corresponding legislation of the country (Costa Rican National Curricular Guidelines, 2009, p. 30), [and holds as one of its goals] to form Patria-loving citizens (Law 2160 from 1957, updated 2001).

Nicaragua

…a pedagogical-technical instrument which has public policy value through which the goals and objectives of Education can be reached (Law 582, 2006. General Law of Education, Chapter III, Article 6, Literal g); [where education is] oriented towards the strengthening of the national identity (Principles of Education).

Apple (2004) argues that the earliest theorists of curriculum development were influenced by the ideas of “social control” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and they believed that schools should contribute to having some control over society, wherein some people could keep their privileges over others who were not entitled to them. Diversity in the population was seen as a threat to creating a sense of
community and “like-mindedness,” and so were alternative models of education which attended to it. Initially, the school curriculum served as an instrument to adjust education according to differences in intelligence, and to reproduce the extant social hierarchies of society. Later, as educational attainment was equated to economic interests and to the competitiveness of a nation, the national curriculum was geared towards the standardization of processes.

The current school curricula of the three nations of my study are organized differently, but in general, they are designed to attain pre-determined levels of quality, and to form citizens who are respectful of human rights, democracy and cultural diversity. The curricular guidelines of each nation contain in themselves tensions as they try to attend, simultaneously, to global, national, and regional socio-economic and cultural needs and trends. The nature of the curricula gives an idea of the goals of education that each nation pursues.

The national curriculum of Colombia is built upon sets of “basic competence standards” per area of study, which establish “a criterion of quality, that everyone must reach” (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, 2006, p. 13). The level of attainment of the desired levels of quality is measured through external and internal evaluations (p. 9); the schools are encouraged to determine the way in which such standards are reached, by taking into account the particularities of the regional and the local contexts (p. 13). Considerations about cultural diversity are included throughout the standards and the contents suggested alongside them.
In Costa Rica, the Fundamental Law of Education of 1957, lastly updated 2001, does not speak of curriculum as such. It speaks of "study plans" and "teaching programs." The educational policies for the 21st century, published in 1994, mention that "the educational centers must be the basic unit of contextualization of a basic, national curriculum…" as it reflects about the coherence of the system of education where "study plans and programs of study; textbooks and other didactic resources; the process of evaluation; the mediation of the teacher...his/her formation..." must be coordinated. New curricular guidelines were issued by the Ministry of Public Education in 2009, the year in which I did my field research, indicating deep transformations to the way in which the current study plans and national curriculum were to be organized. Such guidelines promote a more active involvement of schools in defining their own Institutional Educational Project (PEI by its Spanish acronym), in ways similar to what the Colombian regulations had been doing since the 1990s. Among its guidelines, there is an invitation to advance into the implementation of an intercultural education for multicultural regions such as Limón. My analysis will concentrate on the actual “study plans” or syllabi which were being followed by school at the time of my visit; that is, the ones that were defined by the Ministry of Public Education. Such syllabi are described as “curricular documents that incorporate the fundamental contents of the subjects, the pedagogic suggestions, the values and the attitudes that will allow the students to obtain a solid academic and ethic formation. They are the vertebral column of the educational task in Costa Rica” (Ministerio de Educación Pública de Costa Rica, 2003, ciclo 3, p. 14).
In Nicaragua, the national curriculum is understood as the sum of actions that make the development of educational policies possible. The General Law of Education of Nicaragua, Law 582 of 2006, indicates that the study plans and programs contribute to developing quality education (Article 6); and that these are developed, reviewed and approved at national level (Articles 30 and 60)—through consultation of teachers in the regions. The syllabi are said to be “flexible and pertinent” (Article 70), but the law determines the minimum contents that must be covered in each level—primary and secondary. The actual document that states what is to be done in each area of study is made up of a “matrix of contents” and a list of criteria of evaluation. The Social Studies area is made up of two subjects, History and Geography, and their syllabi consist of a list of topics per year of study and a set of descriptive actions that the teacher can do to evaluate the students. In separate documents, the Ministry of Education offers so-called scientific and methodological documents that serve teachers as sources of reference to carry out their tasks. These contain “ready-made” syntheses of the topics made up by summaries, chronological data of events, maps, definitions of key concepts, and recommendations about didactic strategies to develop the contents given in class. Just as in the case of Costa Rica, a new set of curricular guidelines for Basic and Secondary Education were issued by the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education in the year 2009. These resulted from the “Great National Consultation of the Curriculum” developed between March 2007 and March 2008 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Nicaragua, 2009). These guidelines suggest a transformation of the system of education, which include the development of competences, the use of national and international evaluations, and measures to adjust to the trends and requirements of globalization as well as the
particularities of the regions and of its ethnic and indigenous communities, within the goals of the nation. Although during the analysis that follows I will call upon the latest curricular guidelines, I will concentrate primarily on the so-called “matrices” of contents and evaluation that were in use at the time of my field work.

**Universal Ideologies**

…the child of independent India, is really the son of a reluctantly departing colonizer (Gandhi, 1998, p. 8).

So deep were the ideological legacies of colonization in the elites of three Latin American republics under study that I believe the quote above also applies to this context. A critical reading of the epistemological foundations of the school curricula of these nations suggests that the colonizer did not depart with independence. The philosophical bases of the national school curricula find their bases in Westernized modes of knowing, organizing, valuing, and comprehending the world.

The principles of Western rationality, science and humanism are identified as the epistemological foundations of the task of education in the three nations. These are expressed as goals, objectives, and/or principles in the national laws of education of each country; and referred to in the Social Studies syllabi.
Some of the goals that the General Law of Education of Colombia establishes in this respect are:

The acquisition and generation of the most advanced scientific, technical, humanistic, historical, social, geographical and aesthetic knowledge, by means of the appropriation of intellectual habits which are suitable to the development of knowledge (Article 5).

The development of capacities for logical reasoning…

Advancing in the scientific knowledge of physical, chemical and biological phenomena by understanding the laws, how problems are posed, and experimental observation;

The scientific study of national and world history…

The scientific study of the universe; of the Earth, its physical structure, its division and its political organization; of the economic development of the countries and of the diverse cultural manifestations of the peoples (Ley General de Educación 115 de la República de Colombia, 1994, Article 22).

Likewise, in the Fundamental Law of Education in Costa Rica, the following goals and actions suggest such links to Western epistemologies.

To preserve and to widen the cultural heritage, by imparting knowledge about the history of man, the masterpieces of literature, and the fundamental philosophical concepts (Goal of Education, Article 2).

To achieve the stated goals, the Costa Rican school will work on:
The improvement of the mental, moral and physical health of man [sic] and of the collectivity;
The intellectual development of man and his ethical, esthetical and religious values;
The pronouncement of a dignifying family life, according to Christian traditions and to the civic values that characterize a democracy (Article 3) (Ley Fundamental de Educación 2160 de la República de Costa Rica, 1957).

The presence of Western ideologies in the General Law of Education of Nicaragua can be appreciated in the following excerpts:

Education is [considered to be] a unique, democratic, creative and participative process, which associates theory to practice, manual to intellectual work, and it promotes scientific research; … (Preliminary Consideration No. 4).

To develop a moral, critical, scientific and humanistic consciousness in Nicaraguans; to develop their personality with dignity and to prepare them to undertake the tasks required by the development of the multiethnic Nation (Article 5. Objectives of Education).

As a Pedagogical Process, education …promotes a scientific and moral formation, using the scientific research as a method of learning that allows the appropriation of knowledge… (Article 6) (Ley General de Educación 582 de la República de Nicaragua, 2006).
The Social Studies programs of the last two years of secondary school make use of the word “scientific” and its morphological variations “scientist” and “scientificity” in order to convey rigor to the pedagogic processes, the evaluation, and the validity of the knowledge that they promote. This results from the emphases that the laws of education give to Western rationality, which finds its utmost expression in the methods and principles of “scientific” research. The basic standards of Social Sciences, in the Colombian national curriculum, encourages students to “develop a scientific way of thinking and …the capacity to think analytically and critically” (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, 2006, p. 105). Even though the introductory part of the document that presents the standards of Social Sciences questions the universal validity of the results of scientific research, it suggests that the knowledges of other cultures are scientific, as if to indicate tacitly that this is what makes them valid. While it recommends that students “…acknowledge the contributions to knowledge that differ from the scientific,” it qualifies the knowledges of ethnic groups as “scientific.”

I acknowledge the contribution that some artistic traditions and scientific knowledges of different Colombian ethnic groups, past and present, make to our identity (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, 2006, p. 128).

The Social Studies program of secondary school in Costa Rica uses the word “scientific” as one aspect that goes alongside others such as the social, political, economic, cultural, environmental, and technological ones. Also, it is used to indicate the quality of a pedagogic process. In the last two years of secondary school, the “technological and scientific revolution” is included as a topic of study, and it encourages a critical analysis
of the socio-economic and environmental effects of this revolution. The students of secondary education should, amongst others, be able to

   Explain the political, scientific and economic characteristics of Western Europe during the 15\textsuperscript{th} and the 16\textsuperscript{th} centuries.

Use scientific rigor to express [their] knowledge about close and distant geographic surroundings, meteorological phenomena and their influence on the bio systems and life style of the populations.

Value the importance of studying the human societies with scientific rigor.

Be interested in carrying out a scientific study of the geographic surroundings (Ministerio de Educación Pública de Costa Rica, 2003).

Similarly, the criteria of evaluation of the History part of Social Studies in Nicaragua, recommend, amongst others, that teachers:

   Observe and assess the students’ mastery, objectivity, scientificity, critical sense and truthfulness as they acknowledge and interpret the main characteristics and the vitality of the cultural legacy of the indigenous societies of Nicaragua and America.

   Observe and assess the students’ confidence, clarity, coherence, fluency, objectivity and scientificity to express their opinions about the different aspects of the reality of Nicaragua, America and the world (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Nicaragua, 2008).
Postcolonial theorists oppose the notion that rationality is the one universal and legitimate way to produce knowledge and to be human, suggesting that “there is a discrepancy between the finitude of the thinking rational subject and the infinite variety of the world” (Gandhi, 1998, p. 40). The emphasis that these centralized official school curricula give to being “scientific” (learning, thinking, approaching a situation and/or expressing oneself scientifically), maintains a power relation of domination over alternative ways of thinking, which do not always necessarily ground themselves in Western rationality.

“…rationality or modern intellect has the power to define and thus determine what does not fit into anomalous, deviant. …[and] it has also endeavored violently to repress all symptoms of cultural alterity” (Gandhi, 1998, p. 40).

**White Ethnocentrism**

In the context of postcolonial and neo-colonial relationships between center and periphery, which have characterized the relationships between mestizos or self-perceived “whites” in power, and the West Indians of this study, Western modes of knowing and comprehending the world persist to-day over other cultural ways. In general the national school curricula of Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Colombia emphasize the need to pursue national identities on the basis of singular national narratives and the understanding that the existing cultural diversity of each their countries shapes such national identities. In other words, there is an assimilationist trend of diversity for the sake of a unifying project
of nation, where issues of discrimination by way of race and gender are timidly addressed. The former, in particular, is openly restricted but it is silently experienced.

**National Identity**

The national school curricula of these nations are geared towards developing sentiments of nationhood in their students, in which the dominant narrative of citizenship is promoted over one of ethnicity. The process of incorporation of *Limonenses* in Costa Rica, and *Creoles* in Nicaragua included granting them the citizenship of each of their corresponding republics, something they both resisted but eventually accepted. Schools became the state *apparatus* through which the idea of nation would be spread. The current national curricula of these republics, and of Colombia too, maintain this goal through an emphasis on the development of citizenship competences, attitudes, and/or values. Some of the stated national goals of education encompass such emphases:


Formation based on respect for the legitimate authority and the law, the national culture, the Colombian history, and the *patria* symbols (Law 115 1994. General Law of Education. Colombia).

To form all persons [to] respect the Law, the National Culture, the Nicaraguan History and the *Patria* Symbols, as a fundamental tool to transform and develop

Nicaragua).

The 2009 national curricular guidelines developed in Costa Rica and Nicaragua\textsuperscript{114} promote an education that respects and takes diversity into account as a basis to consolidate a democracy where there is no discrimination due to geographic, socio-economic, gender, cultural, religious, linguistic, and/or ethnic differences. The cultural diversity of the nations is acknowledged, yet the overarching idea of \textit{nationhood} is maintained as that which binds them to a common way of being. The rhetoric that runs across the recommendations responds to a pluralized discourse, but the knowledges and truths that sustain the curriculum are preserved and re-asserted.

Costa Rica

It is important to remember that the programs of study give teachers and technical teachers, amongst others, the general objectives, the contents, the procedures, and the values and attitudes they must develop, as well as the learning that is to be

evaluated, in agreement with the philosophical sources that sustain the current Educational Policy. That is: rationalism …. constructivism … and humanism…” (Ministerio de Educación Pública de Costa Rica, 2009, p. 15).

Nicaragua

"The graduate from Basic and Higher Education will have the following features: …. [he/she] has attitudes and actions that bear witness to the identity and the pride to be Nicaraguan, as he/she knows and values interculturality, the customs, traditions, folklore, cosmogonies, archeological remains and other national arts, including those of his/her own community and region" (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Nicaragua, 2009, p. 45).

**Social Studies Programs**

Within the curricular documents studied, I focused on the Social Studies area given the role this one plays in shaping concepts of nation, race, and class, the axes of my study. The choice of content of the Social Studies syllabi of the three countries, and the way they are organized and expressed allow a critical analysis of the knowledges that are included, the truths that are promoted, and the ideological Discourses that underlie them. By adopting a “critical” standpoint to analyzing the Discourses that run across the syllabi of the Social Studies, it was possible to identify the fact that a “white” ethnocentrism prevailed as a result of the emphasis on Western epistemology and culture.
There is an implicit and at times explicit assertion of a “universal history,” built around the predominant role of Western thought, which has explained the world and its current geopolitical organization. The common reference to events such as the Greek and Roman civilizations and their cultural, political and philosophical legacies; the Renaissance; the Enlightenment; the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man, legitimate the weight that the laws of education give to scientific, rational and humanistic principles on which education is based. Even though the three national curricula speak of forming critical citizens, these ‘historical’ events are included in the syllabus not to question them necessarily, but to value them for their effects in the “development of human kind,” as expressed in the curricular guidelines of Colombia. Even if there is an invitation to value the legacies of other cultural groups, their contributions are not always as clearly identified or named as the ones which seem to have acquired “universal” validity. So long as these knowledges are not validated by the scientifcicity of Western thought, it seems they will not occupy a place in official syllabi.

“We must question these ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognized from the outset” (Foucault, 1972, p. 22).

The ‘History’ part of the syllabi, in each of these nations, is built around events which have contributed to create the politically independent republics that those in power wished to pursue; or, as Anderson (1991) named them the “imagined political communit[ies]” whose inhabitants share a feeling of comradeship despite extant inequalities or exploitation (p.7). Thus, the events which get the most weight in the
curricula are those which have been chosen as the most relevant towards shaping the nation, while those that are of importance to the identity and heritage of cultural groups different from the dominant ones, such as the West Indians of this study, are omitted or just mentioned as one more event in the context of the nation-building process: the choice of historical events that a national curriculum makes is thus a product of the relationship between power and knowledge. Notwithstanding this common trend, it is worth mentioning certain differences in the way the curricula of the three countries approach and word content that relate to the West Indian descended groups under study.

In the Social Sciences syllabus of the national curriculum of Colombia, the performance standards emphasize the development of critical thinking skills to approach a given topic, inviting students to apply the principles of scientific inquiry, yet being critical towards the doings of science (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, 2006). Expressed in the manner of performance indicators (I analyze…, I compare…, I identify…, I assume a critical position before…), the focus is on encouraging critical contextualized reflections of aspects that shape particular social dynamics, in such a way that it leads to “citizen action” (p. 101). Acknowledging the value of diversity, the syllabus encourages reflections about the characteristics, cultural legacies, struggles, and scientific knowledge of “ethnic groups,” “communities” and/or “cultural groups,” as they relate to particular political, economic and/or social situations. Although it does not restrict the ‘historical’ content to be studied, what it does mention are episodes of world and/or national history which seem to have acquired ‘universal validity’ and it gives suggestions of kinds of events or topics that can be studied, in parentheses, or by using adverbial phrases as
“such as,” “like” and so on. Beyond particular historical events that revolve around Europe and the Western world, the references made to events from this side of the world are not as explicit; let alone those related to particular communities such as the Afro descended populations, or specific ethnic groups. The national curriculum of Social Studies in Colombia does not engage with any particular region or cultural group, but it does mention explicitly what is considered to have been relevant to the nation-building process of Colombia during the 20th century, such as its internal violent confrontations regarding political power and their long term effects and transformations. All pedagogic situations are geared towards forming critical citizens, aware of the diversity of the nation’s peoples but with a clear sense of belonging to a country called Colombia.

Schools in Colombia are responsible for writing their own syllabi based on the national basic standards and the curricular guidelines. This means that schools are expected to contextualize the standards, and to determine the pedagogical methods they deem best for their student population (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, 2006). Such is the proposal; something else is what is done.

In Nicaragua, the choice of content for the History subject of the Social Studies program issued by the Ministry of Education in 2008, and being applied in 2009 during my fieldwork, is explicitly related to the political project of the then-socialist government of President Daniel Ortega. Although it might not be comparable to the times of the Sandinista Revolution literacy campaign and its reading textbooks, or to the radical change of textbooks of the coalition of parties that followed the revolution (Arnove,
1994), the History syllabus of the last two years of secondary school reminds the reader of such political interests. The Nicaraguan official History study plan is made of a chronological periodization of events, marked by the process of consolidating the republic. As with the Colombian case, apart from including events which have acquired ‘universal’ validity through Western thought, there is explicit reference to episodes that are related to socialist political projects such as so-called “Revolutionary and Liberating Movements” which refer to the Cuban, Mexican and the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela; the cases of Argentina, Guatemala, Peru, Panama and Chile; the rise and development of the socialist system up to the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of State socialism; and, the relationship of the United States and Latin America with reference to dictatorships and militarism. Regarding internal events in Nicaragua related to the building of the republic, there is a section called “The meaning of the North American interventions,” which lists international treaties [under intervention]; and, “the nationalist ideolog[ies] of Zeledón and Sandino” who, respectively, supported and opposed U.S. interventions. There is also a unit about the Atlantic Coast in the 20th century, which underlines the “importance of the reincorporation of the Mosquitia” and the “attitude of the ethnic groups” regarding this action. The choice of words to list subtopics reflects the ideological and political tensions that the project of a united republic of Nicaragua has faced: “Marginalization of the Atlantic Coast”; “Regionalism and centralism”; “The 1987 Autonomy Law of the Atlantic Coast.” However relevant these topics are for the Creoles of Nicaragua, who have been central actors in the process of autonomy, the History program includes them because of its importance to the consolidation of the republic.
According to the General Education Law of Nicaragua, "The Ministry of Education is responsible for designing, through consultation to the educational community, the basic, national curricula, and it must organize, with the autonomous regional authorities, the adaptation to their own particularities. ... At the local level... each Educational Institute builds the proposal of Curricular Adaptation." (Law 582 of 2006, article 20) Yet, as a teacher expressed it:

I have always said that the people who do this [define school curriculum]... even if they invite us [teachers], inform us, consult us, ask us... whenever we get the material in our hands, we see that it is centered on the Pacific coast, as if people who do it are really just sitting in an office, putting things together; and when the material reaches us here, it is totally different: it does not apply, and I repeat, it does not go with the reality we live here, it is different; the environment is different, the structures are different, even the languages of the students are different....

(School Teacher. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview 11/11/09)

In the case of the Horatio Hodgson High School, I was not referred to any type of regional or institutional curricular adjustments to the official program of study; instead, the “Autonomy” class, a subject that had been created with the school when this one was founded, did the job of contextualizing the autonomous regions to the students.
The case of Costa Rica stands out among the three countries since its Magna Carta, issued in 1949, has not been modified into embracing, officially, the cultural diversity of its inhabitants; and its Fundamental Law of Education, which dates back to 1957 and contains amendments from 2001, is still very much geared towards promoting an idea of nation and identity which correspond to a centralized history. This is reflected in the way some goals of education and some policies are worded, but also in the choice of contents, and in the way that the representations of the world are encouraged through the Social Studies syllabus.

In line with what Soler (2006) indicated from critical discourse analyses of school textbooks mentioned in a previous chapter, it was found that there was a tendency to associate the cultural groups which constitute the cultural other with socio-economic problems in the syllabi, contributing to new forms of discrimination. A good example can be found in the 7th grade syllabus of Social Sciences in Costa Rica, as the problems of the coastlines are referenced:

Socio-economic problems of the coasts: drug addiction, prostitution, shortage of jobs, youth pregnancy, close seasons, red tides, garbage, water pollution, little infrastructure to offer sailing services and to attend to tourism, others (Social Sciences syllabus, 7th grade, Costa Rica).

Given this situation, the school syllabus recommends that, in terms of values and attitudes, students develop “Tolerance towards the different ethnic groups that inhabit the country”; “Concern for recovering and forming ethical and moral values”; and
“Appreciation for the ethical sense of dignifying and honest work.” By juxtaposing such values and attitudes right against the detailed list of problems of the coasts, and expressing them with words such as “tolerance,” “concern,” and “appreciation,” a relation of power is established at two levels: on the one hand, the populations of the coasts (rural, culturally different, non-white–indigenous, Afro-descended) are represented as unethical, dishonest, and living in conditions of lower quality, as they are tacitly compared from an ethnocentric “white” position where, apparently, such problems would not be present. Such language bits create Discourses which end up by associating problems with particular “races” and places, contributing to the perpetuation of socio-economic and cultural hierarchies and structures, in which communities such as the Afro-descended Limonenses have been discriminated against. The program of Social Studies directed at the last two levels of secondary school, where I focused my attention in the field, maintains the use of such language bits. Teachers are invited to develop in the students “tolerance,” (6 times) “appreciation,” (twice) and to a lesser degree “respect” (once) towards the ethnic and/or cultural diversity of the nation. The word “tolerance,” defined by Merrian Webster’s Online Dictionary, as “sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one's own,” does not necessarily reflect an action of engagement to understanding or approaching the vision of that one who is different from me. Nor does it encourage a two-way process of learning where all cultural groups learn from one another.

In grades 10 and 11, the study plan reaffirms the organization of the world into developed and underdeveloped peoples, as it suggests that students should have an attitude of
“Concern about eliminating the limitations that lead to the mental and economic underdevelopment of peoples.” “Having a critical attitude towards the problems that developing peoples endure.” And, “Responding to the inequity of development opportunities for Third World peoples”\(^{115}\) (Social Sciences syllabus, 10\(^{th}\) & 11\(^{th}\) grade, Costa Rica). Even though the terms I have emphasized with italics are being used within statements that invite the students to be critical, to be concerned and to react against inequity, this does not mean that the model of development is open to analysis or criticism. Thus, the weight of the discourse falls on the use of terms which equate development to economic criteria, and organize the world into first, second and third, a paradigm which has been questioned by more comprehensive criteria of human development. Such conception of the world implies that some still have a long way to go before they are considered to be “developed,” and to overcome their “mental” limitations. Such binary categories (developed-underdeveloped) recall the use of colonial categories, which divided the world into black and white, savage and civilized. Besides, the term ‘mental underdevelopment’ recalls the idea that an enlightened humanism for the subaltern would be possible in the future, when “man acquires the status and capacities of a rational and adult being” (Kant, quoted by Gandhi, 1998, p. 30).

**Non-Empowering Content**

…the verticality [of the curriculum] is exaggerated, right? It is: you teach and you only teach, that’s it. And even, nothing of what the youngster can transmit to you

\(^{115}\) Emphases in italics are mine.
is of use, only what you are doing, right? Then, that’s a problem. …You can find that…in the general law of education, [of] Costa Rica, and also in the programs of study themselves. The thing is that the program tells you what it is you have to do and if you divert from it, it’s as though you were being disrespectful of the Ministry of Education and all entities in the book, right?…the curriculum…puts everyone in exactly the same bag, without taking into account the needs of each reality.


The voice quoted above is a good example of how those teachers, who were critical of the educational system in the regions studied, felt before a centralized curriculum, which supervises, mandates, and evaluates, offering little company, and giving little leeway or, I would add, effective support to manage the contextualization of the curriculum to the regions.

There are two perspectives from which the official Social Studies syllabi could be approached to determine whether the contents prescribed are empowering or not for the West Indians. One is related to the actual inclusion and/or omission of material that refers to their past and attends to their present; the omission is, according to Soler (2006), another form of discrimination. The other perspective is that of teachers and students, members of the cultural groups themselves, as they take a moment to think of their schooling experience and the curriculum.
A critical analysis of the content that the three programs of Social Studies recommend indicate, in general, that given the common national goals of forming citizens, the past and present of these Afro-descended ethnic groups do not receive particular attention. Thus, the cultural roots of the West Indians of this study do not go any farther than their arrival as slaves with European expansionism, and their present is associated either with the socio-economic problems of the places they inhabit (the coasts or the periphery), or to the ethnic diversity of the countries, which is to be appreciated for what they contribute to a national identity. In general, the last two years of secondary school curricula address great problems of the 20th century in each country, and in the world; in particular, attention is given to the geo-political organization of the world that results from ideological and economic blocs, without much mention to cultural issues. Of particular notice is the way the three school curricula put the Afro-descended populations of these countries in the bag of ethnic diversity, without addressing the issues that contribute to their cultural and structural marginalization from the dominant narratives of the nations.

Most of the students, teachers, and directive teachers interviewed in the three localities agreed that the national school curricula were overly theoretical, meaning that the emphasis was on the development of intellectual skills needed to respond to national tests, or to the requirements of their corresponding centralized Ministries of Education. To some of my interviewees, who were aware of the few opportunities students of the region had to move on to higher education, such a learning process was not relevant. To others, the fact that the school curricula did not include classes on the artistic, sportive,
linguistic, cultural and/or spiritual areas made the schooling experience incomplete since it did not attend to the diversity of skills and interests of students in general. And to others, who expressed consciousness about the cultural disenfranchisement of West Indians and ethnic minorities with respect to the dominant narratives of the country, the school curricula did not give them the opportunity to learn about their roots and cultural identities. Nonetheless, the opportunity to receive education was valued by everyone alike, since it was seen as the possibility to improve their conditions of life and to move up the social ladder. Hence the explicit demand that the kind of education students receive be of the same quality as the one others received elsewhere within their regions and their countries: to be competitive and not to be discriminated against.

The national school curricula of the three countries—written matrices of content, standards, and/or general pedagogic and evaluating guidelines, particularly those for the Social Studies area, are not built upon the diversity of cultures that make up their nations. The past and/or present of the West Indians are only mentioned where they might have had a role in the construction of the nation only as it matters to the official narrative of history that is built from the center; otherwise, they are not mentioned at all. As Raizales, Afrolimonenses, and Creoles became “citizens” of their corresponding republics, and their schools (Baptist, Adventist, Moravian, or just the “English Schools” of Afrolimonenses) were either closed, or transformed to adjust to the national requirements of education, a process of ideological and cultural assimilation started and their language, beliefs, and values had to stay, “officially,” out the door. Public schools have done their job of spreading a national ideology and for generations now, the West Indians who have
passed through their classrooms have entered a process of cultural hybridization as they came in contact with the dominant narratives of national identity, and with other cultural communities. To the West Indian students interviewed, there is no particular clash of ideologies or values between family and school. To them, both family and school promote common values such as respect and honesty, even if these are not strictly enforced by all teachers or followed by all students. To particular members of the older generations of West Indians, however, the schooling offered by public institutions has meant losing their values, language, and culture. This belief has led individuals and/or collectivities within the communities to struggle for the preservation of their cultures, as a way to resist total acculturation to those who discriminated against them on the bases of their skin color, language and beliefs, and to fight against the disenfranchisement to which they have been subject.

**Contextualizing the National Curricula**

The national curricula of the three countries indicate that teachers must contextualize the programs of study and pedagogies in order to attend to the local needs of their students.\(^{116}\)

\(^{116}\) In Colombia, every school is expected to work on the ‘how’ of the standards given, which according to the curricular guidelines means that the definition of their institutional educational projects must take into account regional characteristics (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, 2006). In Nicaragua, the programs of study are claimed to be flexible, so that every educational institute must make the necessary “Curricular Adjustments” so as to respond to the characteristics of students and their surrounding environment (Ley General de Educación 582 de la República de Nicaragua, 2006, Article 20). In practical terms, this means that 70% of what is prescribed at national level is compulsory and 30% of it can be used to make the necessary adjustments (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Nicaragua, 2009). In Costa Rica, the contextualization of the curriculum is only addressed through the curricular guidelines of 2009. According to these, the institutional projects of each school should devise intercultural
In the particular case of West Indians, this is not readily done because of several factors. On the one hand, *vis-à-vis* the weight that national, standardized or end-of-school tests have for the Ministries, for the schools as institutions whose quality is thus measured, and for the students who depend on their achievements to move on to higher education, the contextualization of contents has little value. On the other, there are few resources and academic materials that teachers, directors and even local educational authorities count on to achieve contextualization. Usually, teachers depend on what they have learned of their own communities by oral tradition, and they do not always have the knowledge they might need.

Countries like Colombia and Nicaragua have regulated the types of education that should be implemented for ethnic and indigenous minorities, yet these have not been thoroughly put in place by the local educational authorities in the regions inhabited by the West Indians under study. In Colombia, it is referred to as “Ethnoeducation or education for ethnic groups,” meaning “the one offered to groups or communities who make up part of the nationality and who have their own and autochthonous culture, language, traditions and jurisdictions” (Ley General de Educación 115 de la República de Colombia, 1994, Article 55). In Nicaragua, it is conceived as “Intercultural Bilingual Education” (Ley General de Educación 582 de la República de Nicaragua, 2006, Chapter 2, Article 4), which is the basis of the system of regional education. The autonomous regions of activities that promote respect for the cultural diversity of the nation (Ministerio de Educación Pública de Costa Rica, 2009).
Nicaragua have advanced greatly in designing and implementing intercultural bilingual education, but it is not yet generalized to all schools, as I will explain below.

**West Indian Resistance**

**Within Schools**

Searching for expressions of resistance to the ideological imposition that came along with the national school curricula, I found that, amongst the teachers of Social Studies, only selected ones engaged with the prescribed contents or with the methodologies suggested in order to raise consciousness and critical skills in their students.

If I want my students to have more information and not just what the program is telling me, then it is me who has to see what I can do in the classroom for that information that I do know or that the students themselves can find out, is used the way it should be used. …I have always said that sometimes one has to be a little bit rebellious against the program itself [the syllabus]; what the program wants is such people, people who believe what they want them to believe; if the curriculum says such and such, that is how we must all be; that is not real. …


I can’t just come here, to this school, to one of these classrooms and say: “well, let’s see, we are going to go to the… Internet room and download some
information so that you see it,” I can’t. That is what the curricular changes that Nicaragua adopted from last year for all the matrices [of study] ask me to do.

“Refer to the CD of I don’t know what…” Where am I going to [be able to] read it? I can’t apply those matrices to any student in this classroom. Some might have computers in their houses, but the school doesn’t; the infrastructure does not allow me to prepare a ‘data show’ and [to have the] equipment to project it. Then, I have to take that, which is there [in the matrices], and apply it to the reality that students live; because it is the only way I can guarantee that I can grasp the knowledge they bring and apply it to what the matrix is suggesting.

(School Teacher. Bluefields, Nicaragua. Recorded Interview 11/11/09)

Others were not as critical, either because they were just starting their teaching careers, or, as suggested by a particular teacher, they had studied at universities that did not foster critical thinking; others were just not particularly engaged with issues of culture in the region.

[The curriculum] makes my work easy since it is a ready-made dish; I only have to program the different activities with the purpose of covering the topics I must impart in a class. I really don’t have any difficulties with it. I believe that eventually, depending on the regions, one should include some type of specificity of the communities that live there. For example, if we are speaking of the area of Limón, the Social Studies area could eventually say something about the history of Blacks in Costa Rica. …something is said about the indigenous in Costa Rica,
but in a very general way. I believe that one could go a little deeper there, but I understand also that because of limitations of time one cannot cover it all… one has to work with the exams in mind.


In some cases, teachers were so tied up with responding to the requirements of their local educational authorities such as planning, filling in formats, writing evaluations, or grading and participating in supervision meetings or training workshops that they did not stop to think of issues such as the pertinence of the curricula or the diversity of cultures they had in front of them. Comments of that kind were made by several of my interviewees, who during the interviews said that they had not stopped to think of one or another of the aspects about which I was inquiring.

**Outside the Schools: Collective Expressions of Resistance**

The previous chapters mentioned the main political actions of resistance that the three West Indian communities under study have undertaken with respect to education. These can be regarded as collective expressions of resistance taking place outside schools, which are closely related to the education that the nations have imposed on them. In Colombia, organized members of the *Raizal* community who struggle for their self-determination managed to have the National Ministry of Education sign an agreement
with them for the development of a “Trilingual Intercultural Ethnoeducation Model for the Raizal People” in 2004. Its implementation has not taken place. In Costa Rica, two particular actions were taken to affect the national school curriculum for the Afrolimonenses’ benefit: the development of an education program for the Province of Limón in the 1980s, based on the recovery of their cultural expressions and historical roots; and the legal action against the inclusion of the reader Cocori on the basis of issues of racism in 2002. Although neither one was completely successful, they signified major acts of resistance to ideological domination through the school curriculum. In Nicaragua, the autonomous regions obtained the constitutional right to define their own education through the development of a regional and autonomous system of education, SEAR, which bases itself on the Intercultural Bilingual Program that the region had been developing since the 1980s. Such a struggle has been a regional collective act of resistance, with the Horatio Hodgson High School (HHHS) as one of its earliest creations, and currently with major advances towards the transformation of their educational system at primary levels. Amongst their achievements are the production of curricular guidelines, teaching material in native languages, and training programs for teachers in primary school. With the universities involved in supporting these processes, higher education is also being transformed.

Expressions of resistance to the hegemonic discourses and ideologies of the nations are found outside schools in a great variety of ways. West Indians gather around cultural organizations, religious communities and/or political movements which have managed to sustain traditions, values and beliefs that hold them together amidst the diversity of
cultures with which they are in contact on a daily basis. Each of these (celebrations, committees, organizations, churches) could be subject to analyses of the Discourses they produce and help maintain since their own “régimes of truth” are contained in their cultural practices as they encompass their beliefs, their values, their knowledges and their own epistemologies as it is conveyed through their own language. Although such an endeavor does not fall within the scope of this study, a general appraisal of the ideologies that sustain their cultural practices indicates, on the one hand, that Christian values and beliefs sustain much of their cultural identity; and on the other, that there is an increasing awareness of their African ancestry as it is consciously utilized in the dances and music of the younger generations, who would most probably acknowledge this root in their lives more readily than members of earlier generations, who focused more on their British roots. The English/Creole linguistic continuum in which West Indians move is one that does remind them of this cultural link to their past, but it is also a factor of identity that West Indians also use to express their “cultural difference.”

**Conclusions**

The epistemological foundations of the national school curricula (which are of obligatory compliance in the public schools that the West Indians of this study attend) find their roots in Western modes of knowing, organizing, valuing and comprehending the world. This is reflected in the adoption of Western rationality as the way in which the world is legitimately apprehended; in the knowledge that is selected for study; in the truths that are stated overtly or suggested tacitly throughout the school curriculum; and in the
subscription to a Western humanism which is in turn “informed by the universalization of rationality” (Gandhi, 1998, p. 27).

Western rationality finds its utmost expression in the appeal that the different laws, goals, standards and/or programs of Social Science studies make, to the use of scientific modes of knowing, scientific ways of expressing knowledge and/or validating the ancestral knowledges of ethnic minorities. These emphases are also suggested by the overt goal of developing the students’ rational thinking skills to approach and solve problems. The choice of contents also reflects the way in which the knowledge that prevails in the curricula finds its roots in the spread of Western modernity.

The expansion of Western capitalism implied the expansion of Western epistemology in all its ramifications, from the instrumental reason that went along with capitalism and the industrial revolution, to the theories of the state, to the criticism of both capitalism and the state (Mignolo, 2002, p. 59).

In fact, the national school curricula under study emphasize the formation of citizens who have the knowledge and skills to develop democratic systems; an emphasis that finds its roots in the origins of Western civilization, which travelled with the expansion of Europe and have remained as the bases of the Latin American states under study. Public schools in the three countries are given the task of reinforcing a national identity and a national culture in which citizenship overrides issues of ethnicity and cultural identities.
Such ideological foundations also inform the way in which the national curricula attempt to diversify their discourses by mentioning the ethnic diversity of each of their countries. This is perceived, particularly, when the official Social Studies syllabi invite students to value the contributions that the ethnic groups have given to build a national identity; when the adjective “scientific” is used to refer to the ancestral knowledges, as a way to validate them; and, when a relation of power is established as the ethnic groups are associated with the problems of a region, and/or when they are pictured as needing understanding and/or appreciation.

The development and implementation of alternative models of education that should respond to the particularities of the West Indians, such as “Ethnoeducation” in Colombia and “Intercultural Bilingual Education” in Nicaragua, are both under construction. The former has seen almost no advances for Raizales in Old Providence Island. The latter is the pillar of the Regional System of Autonomous Education, which attends to the six ethnic and/or indigenous groups that make up the two autonomous regions of Nicaragua; this includes Creoles. By 2004, a curricular proposal had been developed for the Intercultural Bilingual Education of Primary School, which has implied the creation of teaching material in the native languages and teacher training programs (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deportes & Consejos y Gobiernos Regionales y Autónomos RRAN y RAAS, 2004). By 2009, the Creole program was being piloted in rural primary schools where the communities were more open to the incorporation of the Creole language in education, as it was explained to me. Since the application of this curricular proposal was at the primary level, and in areas of the region different from Bluefields, my study did not
incorporate these sites and developments into the analyses. However, since I have expressed that these advancements (including the creation of the HHHS) constitute acts of collective resistance to the imposition of hegemonic discourses, I believe it relevant to address at least a few of the ideological foundations of the curricular transformations developed by the SEAR, in view of the contributions that the program can make to the development of endogenous modes of education for West Indians.

Since the curricular proposal is articulated along the national guidelines of education, it is built upon common grounds and goals such as forming citizens, promoting the development of ethical and moral values, developing democratic principles, and making “human constructivism” and “active pedagogy” their pedagogic foundations. Just as it emphasizes a cultural understanding of the above concepts, it also acknowledges the benefits of referring to “universal values” as well as to their cultural values (p. 9), and of incorporating “universal scientific and technical knowledges” to their autochthonous knowledges (p. 12). However, the document does state that they face several challenges in achieving the curricular transformation. Particularly, the development of research to nourish the curriculum in aspects such as the knowledge of their own history, the mathematical concepts provided by the cultures, “social practices such as building, weaving, calculating cycles in agriculture and fishing” (p. 38), and the writing systems of the native languages; but also, and most importantly, to develop their own pedagogy.

The biggest challenge, however, is to transform the cultural and life experiences about the way that wisdoms [saberes], knowledges [conocimientos], technologies, values, attitudes, and behaviors are transmitted, into fundamental elements to
The contextualization that teachers manage to carry out of the official curricula cannot bring about fundamental transformations of the pedagogical and/or epistemological foundations of West Indians’ schooling experiences—not when these are geared mainly to the acquisition of academic skills. At most, they might decide to illustrate a topic by giving examples that are more meaningful to the students, or promote a debate around a particular issue of the context, as several of my teacher interviewees expressed. Or, as has been the trend, they might make reference to cultural expressions such as dances and food, folklorizing the concept of culture, and making of them commodities for a market-driven society.

The West Indians of my study seem to have been Westernized in their own epistemologies as a consequence of over 500 years of “unbroken colonization” (Brotherston in Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin 2002, p. 206) first by the Spanish, then by the British, and the U.S., and lastly by the dominant mestizo majority of the countries they inhabit. British, Spanish, and criollo school education programs (secular and religious) have reproduced and continue to reproduce the founding values and philosophies of Western civilization which “emerged in the Renaissance and [were] consolidated during the Enlightenment and by German philosophy in the early nineteenth century” (Mignolo, 2002, p. 81). Yet their assimilation into the dominant Discourses of each of their countries has not been complete, since issues of race and culture have placed
them, historically, into what Bhabha (1994) called a “liminal” position *vis-à-vis* the hegemonic idea of nation that prevails. This constitutes the locus of their resistance.
Chapter 6

Conclusions: Findings, Contributions, and Proposals

The present study sets out to identify the ideological implications that the current national systems of secondary education have on West Indians who ended up living in the “buffer zone” between Latin American and Caribbean histories: Raizales in Old Providence Island, Colombia; Afrolimonenses in Limón, Costa Rica, and Creoles in Bluefields, Nicaragua. The axis of analysis was the school curriculum as it came to life in the schools visited in 2009, and as a set of pre-determined content and goals that teachers had to follow. This required that the study look into the historical and cultural factors that gave shape to the schools, the knowledge and values that were promoted, and the regulatory practices that were enforced by teachers, as Apple (2004) suggests when carrying out a critical analysis of the ideologies that inform school practices.

A combination of fieldwork and document review allowed the study to approach issues of nation, race and class from a postcolonial perspective; that is, one that resists the “mystifying amnesia of the colonial aftermath” by “revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past” (Gandhi, 1998, p. 4). In the case of the West Indian communities under study, their colonial past is not found only with European colonialism, but it is also found in the approach of the Hispanic criollo who ruled the postcolonial countries where they [the West Indians] would now live; an approach that could be understood as neocolonial, given the economic interests of the ruling elites to exploit the resources where these communities settled. Theirs has been, as Brotherston
suggests (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002, p. 206), an “unbroken colonization.” The fact that the West Indians of the three republics have maintained language(s), cultures and beliefs after so many years of continuous colonialism, resisting total assimilation by the hegemonic Hispanic descended culture, triggered my interest to inquire into the articulation of resistance to the ideological imposition that state schools pursued. This cross-regional, comparative study offered the opportunity to identify continuities in the history of these West Indian groups and to observe the ways they crossed boundaries to learn from the other, addressing great problems of the world, as Beauchamp (2003) suggests. In this case, that great problem is the way that education contributes to the perpetual domination of the cultural ‘Other.’

**Findings**

The following statements intend to give response to the questions that led the present study, based on the analyses advanced throughout this document, but also on further elaboration or discussion of issues that may yield elements to address the core question of the research: *How can schooling practices in the three aforementioned postcolonial Caribbean territories be reformed for the achievement of a more inclusive, empowering and liberating mode of education?*

1) The current national school curricula of the three countries where the West Indians of this study live are largely founded on Western epistemologies and knowledge, from which the cultural ‘Other’ is approached. These colonial-inherited ideologies have
been perpetuated by the educational systems in which West Indians must participate, where they learn that there is only one valid and universal way to apprehend and value the world: through the philosophical principles of Western civilization, whose beginnings are placed with the Greeks, and through the study of events that have marked the development of Western knowledge. The national laws of education, Social Science study plans or syllabi, goals and/or standards promote, to one extent or another, scientific, rational and humanistic modes of learning about, approaching, and valuing the world. When ethnic and/or cultural diversity is incorporated into the curricula, it is done through the lens of Western rationality and humanism, so that the “other” knowledge is validated by the principles of Western thought. This does not leave room to the development of epistemologies that may account for the diversity of ways in which ethnic groups and cultures explain and understand the world, within the extant curricula.

2) Two of the main goals (explicit or not) of the Social Studies syllabi, matrices of contents and/or standards of the national curricula of the three countries are: to promote feelings of nationhood, and to develop citizenship competencies. This implies that in the selection (or recommendation) of historical events, what gets the most priority is what has shaped the project of nation of each of the republics. In line with this, the ethnic diversity of each of these countries is acknowledged by the current curricula as a basis to develop a corresponding national identity and culture, and to foster sentiments of appreciation, understanding and/or tolerance of cultural diversity. The West Indians are not mentioned explicitly by the study programs, just as no other ethnic minority or Afro-descended communities would be. They are all placed in the same bag of ethnic diversity,
and their histories and knowledges can only be explored if the local schools and teachers do so. Instead, there is a trend to associate them (West Indians and ethnic minorities) with the problems of the coasts (explicitly in Costa Rica), or with challenges (such as “reincorporating” them into the Nicaraguan project of nation). Otherwise, the goal of forming citizens overrides issues of ethnicity and identity, placing all nationals onto the same path to globalization without a firm understanding of their historical and cultural roots, which could help face challenges such as the discrimination that several of them endure. The effect of this sustains the thesis I expressed earlier in this document when speaking of Raizales; that West Indian high school students in the three localities are more concerned with finding a place in the cultural space of the nation-state as rightful citizens, than in pursuing an outright struggle for approaching the world with a conscious knowledge of their cultural and ethnic roots, and a critical understanding of their place in the nation and the globalized world. The issues at stake are whether the systems of education really offer a formation that is strong enough for them to compete with the rest of the world, and whether the modernity that started with colonization and has taken us to the globalization of knowledge and markets can sustain a mode of life that is more inclusive and less destructive.

3) The extant national curricula are not inclusive of the histories, knowledges, wisdoms, and/or challenges of West Indians in their Social Sciences’ syllabi, nor do the curricula give room to exploring these in a meaningful manner. Soler (2006) suggested that the exclusion of minorities from school textbooks is a form of discrimination through which, I would add, expressions of racism are easily avoided. The national curricula of
the three countries make teachers and schools responsible for contextualizing the syllabi to the regions and culture, but the effort has little value in front of the pressure of national exams that determine the students’ graduation and their possibilities of moving on to higher education. In addition, the resources that teachers and schools count on to do so are insufficient, and the trend to associate contextualization to the inclusion of tangible cultural expressions (food, dress, dance), or to facilitating particular cultural celebrations is not enough to seek an empowering and liberating mode of education where West Indians are reflected.

4) Since the education that the State schools of the three countries under study is financed, organized, and its curriculum is determined and evaluated by the State authorities, the expressions of resistance that West Indians might articulate to oppose ideological domination within schools are not generalized, and those outside schools respond to organized efforts. In fact, teacher and student members of the West Indian groups of this study perceive the schooling experience that State schools offer them differently: some seem to submit to the state of things; some express their discontent by damaging the infrastructure of the institution; a few of them contest what the curricula prescribe; and some join collective efforts (such as associations, organizations or regional movements) to defend their rights or to articulate the expression of their “cultural difference.”

5) There is little awareness amongst the West Indians of my study to the fact that the educational experience of both British and Hispanic contributed equally to the Western
colonization of their minds and bodies. Nonetheless, their expressions of resistance refer to the Hispanic experience and account for the survival of their culture vis-à-vis each of their republics. The extant national school curricula sustain, through omissions to their culture, the state of “liminality” where the hegemonic idea of nation has placed them. The effects of the colonization while under the British and/or Anglo-related missions instead constitute an important part of their cultural roots and identities.

6) Having been colonized by Western thought and depending largely on the hegemonic Hispanic rule, the “cultural imaginations” that teacher and student members of these groups express to modify their schooling experience, relate mostly to improving the quality of State education as a whole. A common appeal to modify the highly theoretical type of teaching and learning methods might suggest the need to imagine alternative cultural pedagogies and epistemologies, but this is not voiced as such except in the curricular proposal for the Intercultural Bilingual Education of Primary in the autonomous regions of Nicaragua (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deportes & Consejos y Gobiernos Regionales y Autónomos RRAN y RAAS, 2004). Mignolo (2002) identifies two “macronarratives” that underlay the expansion of Europe and capitalism into the Atlantic: Western civilization and modernity. Gordon (1998), Duncan & Meléndez (2005), and Clemente (1989) suggest in their accounts that the West Indians under study, had been inculcated with skills, knowledge and values that were attuned to the projects of modernity in these regions. Aware of that, the West Indians asserted that they were more “civilized” than their indigenous and/or Hispanic mestizo counterparts, which just illustrates the effects that Western colonial ideologies had on them.
Contributions to Knowledge(s)

The inquiry that the current study has advanced into expressions of dominance and resistance to colonial-inherited ideologies within and outside State schools that attend to West Indians in three Latin American nations in their Caribbean regions contributes to the advancement of knowledge in the following three aspects.

First, it offers a critique to the way in which the dominant ideologies of the nations under study intersect with dynamics of power and knowledge to give shape to their official school curricula. Most critical studies of the ideologies that inform education in Latin America and the Caribbean focus on school textbooks while this one has made the broader school curricula its axis of analysis, both as documents that are designed by centralized authorities and as practice.

Second, it brings to the foreground historical, cultural, and ideological continuities between three West Indian groups in a comparative study that had not been suggested before. Each group had been studied separately, but the three had not been brought together in a study about their education. Significant continuities were identified, which invite further studies. In the area of education and ideology it is relevant to note the reference that members of the three groups made to the “Royal Readers,” books that they used in their education which have only been mentioned by the study of Castillo (1998) for Limón, Costa Rica. Other studies might refer to identifying and studying the ideological implications of schools such as the “English Schools” of Limón presented by the aforementioned author, particularly those that were tied to Protestant missions and are
currently linked to Protestant Churches and attend to West Indians. Beyond punctual 
studies such as these, and in line with the de-colonization of knowledge to which 
Mignolo (2002) refers, it would be relevant to make further inquiries into their saberes, 
their epistemologies, and a critical discourse analysis of counter-discourses contained in 
artistic expressions such as songs, dances, and social movements. Of the latter, it seems 
interesting to mention the “Black Farmers Back to the Land” movement in Nicaragua, 
with which leaders and members wished to have the possibility not only to be 
economically active and independent, but to recover some of their traditions and saberes 
as they organized and revisited the effects of their colonization.

Third, as the study interrogates the ideological foundations of national school curricula 
from the perspectives of postcolonial theories, it invites curriculum designers and policy 
makers to revise the implications of their Discourses on ethnic minorities. Also, it offers 
ways to rethink the design of models of ethnic and/or intercultural education, particularly 
with respect to the epistemologies that ground them and the processes of decolonization 
of knowledge.

**Proposals**

This section addresses the core question of this study based on the conclusions and 
findings presented above and on those elaborated throughout the document: *How can 
schooling practices in the three postcolonial Caribbean territories of this study be*
reformed for the achievement of a more inclusive, empowering and liberating mode of education?

This study has shown that the three Latin American countries have imposed, on the West Indians who came to inhabit the postcolonial Caribbean territories of these nations, modes of education that respond to projects of nation which have not been inclusive of their [West Indians’] histories, knowledges and expressions of their cultures, amongst them their language(s). It has also indicated that the schooling experience revealed pedagogic practices that were marked by a lack of resources, practice, and innovative methodologies. In these conditions, the schooling experience cannot be conceived of as empowering or liberating.

One way to achieve this could be by finding strategies to include historical and cultural data related to these groups in the curricula, and to recommend that the infrastructure be improved, teachers be given the opportunity to learn about these groups so that they can mention their histories in classes, and language be included in the process. All of this and many other similar measures are significant since they would at least contribute to making the curricula more inclusive of ethnic and cultural diversity, and the conditions of study would be more equitable to all. But what this study is pointing at goes beyond that.

The study mentioned that the homogenizing discourses of the nations, which still sustain the examined school curricula, had been pressed into pluralizing their discourses as a result of local, national, and international movements in favor of the rights of
communities disenfranchised by such issues as discriminatory practices based on gender, race, and ethnicity. The Intercultural Bilingual Education Program led by indigenous communities in South America, and the right of indigenous and ethnic groups to an education of their own known as Ethnoeducation in Colombia, resulted from the above mentioned movements. Of these, Nicaragua decreed that education in the autonomous regions would be intercultural and bilingual; Colombia created the Cátedra de estudios afrocolombianos (Afro-Colombian Studies Educational Program) to promote a transversal insertion of topics related to these populations; and Costa Rica has recently begun to think of education as intercultural as well. These overarching educational projects are designed upon the idea that there are saberes, pedagogies and cognitive structures that respond to the ancestral cultures and that could question Western modes of education (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, 2001). Yet, what this study reports is that the examined national school curricula do not reflect a shift towards the pluralization of the modes of knowing or epistemologies. What it does is recommend contextualization, a project which is done at the other end—that is, in the school classroom—by using local examples to illustrate a concept from the curricula, identifying relevant topics, including celebrations, and/or addressing one or another issue of common interest to Afro-descended populations. Such types of contextualization do not really contribute to the decolonization of knowledge and epistemologies, where the possibilities of overcoming colonial ideologies lie.

The extant legislation (national and international) and the academic rationale that sustain these overarching educational alternatives to attend to ethnic minorities and Afro-
descended populations in Latin America would indicate that the conditions are there to develop more empowering and liberating modes of education. Yet, issues of power and knowledge along with the persistence of race as an organizing factor of these societies limit the possibilities of their development. It was observed by this study that the southern autonomous region of Nicaragua is the one that, amongst the three territories under study, has advanced the furthest in designing a system of education with the ethnic diversity of its peoples in mind. One of the factors that has facilitated their process has been the alliance between regional government, civil society and university (academic work) to develop a mode of intercultural education made with the participation of all, rather than being designed from a center of power, whichever that may be.

Mignolo (2002) suggests that “The limit of Western philosophy is the border where the colonial difference emerges, making visible the variety of local histories that Western thought, from the right and the left, hid and suppressed” (p. 66). The West Indians of my study, especially those who resist (individually and/or collectively) the hegemonic discourses and ideologies that filter through education, have the challenge of coming together, and in the spirit of “the Akan concept of sankofa” ... “reach back and gather the best of what [their] past has to teach [them], so that [they] can achieve [their] full potential as [they] move forward” (Kanu, 2006, p. 203). In doing so, they might find the “colonial difference” mentioned above, from which their own worldviews and epistemologies can be reconstructed, and a mode of education that is more empowering and liberating can be developed.
References


Ley General de Educación 115 de la República de Colombia. (1994).

Ley General de Educación 582 de la República de Nicaragua. (2006).


Bibliography


Appendix

Figure 1. Map of the Region

http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/americas/central_america_ref02.jpg
Figure 2. Research Participants by Locality

![Bar graph showing research participants by locality.
- Old Providence: Interviewed (Recorded) - total of 20, In Conversation - total of 10, In Class Observation - total of 37.
- Puerto Limon: Interviewed (Recorded) - total of 22, In Conversation - total of 12, In Class Observation - total of 39.
- Bluefields: Interviewed (Recorded) - total of 2, In Conversation - total of 1, In Class Observation - total of 237.]

Figure 3. Total Research Sample

![Bar graph showing total research sample.
- Involved Participants: 90
- Passive Participants: 237
- Total Participants: 327]
Figure 4. Human Development Index – UNDP (2009)

Figure 5. Gini Index-UNDP (2009)
Figure 6. Poverty. Differentiated Analysis by Ethnicity – UNDP (2009)

- Eurodescended
- Indigenous and Afro-descended

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Eurodescended</th>
<th>Indigenous and Afro-descended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>15.20%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>24.10%</td>
<td>4.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1. School Ethnographies (2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Junín School</th>
<th>Limón School</th>
<th>Horatio Hodgson High School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Old Town” One of several sectors</td>
<td>“Cerro Mocho” Middle Class section of town</td>
<td>“Beholden” Traditional Creole neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>• 1962 by petition of community • Capuchin order • Secular in 1998</td>
<td>• 1945 by petition of community seeking secondary education</td>
<td>• 1996 regional autonomous inst. • IBE for Creoles • State financed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment &amp; Ethnic Composition</td>
<td>✓ 498 students ✓ 95% Raizales ✓ Foreigners: Nic. Pan. Cayman I.</td>
<td>✓ 1,878 students ✓ 6% Black(skin color) ✓ Indian, Mestizo,Foreigners</td>
<td>✓ 232 students ✓ 60% Creole ✓ Six ethnicities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>• Academic (some technical emphases) • Rural, State School</td>
<td>• Academic • Bicultural (Special Needs &amp; Mainstream)</td>
<td>• Academic • Linguistic &amp; cultural minorities • National Curric.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Junín School</td>
<td>Limón School</td>
<td>Horatio HHS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Computer Access</strong></td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internet Access</strong></td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IT Classes</strong></td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Library Resources</strong></td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Basic to Poor</td>
<td>Poor to None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Science Lab</strong></td>
<td>Empty</td>
<td>Empty</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Lab</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Classrooms</strong></td>
<td>Run down, noisy</td>
<td>Run down, noisy</td>
<td>Hot, small, noisy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Class Size</strong></td>
<td>35 – 40 students</td>
<td>35 to 40 students</td>
<td>35 to 40 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of CIT in Class</strong></td>
<td>Rare</td>
<td>Rare to none</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of Textbooks</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sport Fields</strong></td>
<td>Cement - Nature</td>
<td>Central patio</td>
<td>Outside -barrio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviews

1) Students’ Focus Groups

Groups of four or five students will be formed to be interviewed simultaneously. The rationale behind this is that students at the ages of 15 to 18 usually hang out in groups that respond to their interests, their common backgrounds, their gender, and/or maybe, their ethnicity. At their age, besides, they feel more at ease being in groups than in a “formal” face-to-face interview, and the data gathered can be very rich.

For the purposes of research, they are focus group since they will be formed based on shared characteristics such as the ones mentioned above. Special attention will be given to the ethnic composition of the groups, so as to have as large a representation of youngsters who identify themselves with the West Indian community as possible. Yet, the presence of other ethnicities will also be encouraged. Their profile will result from my observations and informal conversations with the students and their teachers.

Possible languages of the session will be Spanish, English, and Creole English: students will be advised as to their freedom to choose the language they feel more comfortable with, since this is already data that will inform my analyses. I will be using either Spanish or English to address the group, as it suits them best, and will ask students for their support with particular words, phrases or expressions used in Creole, to keep the conversation flowing.
Parental and School consent will be sought for the participation of students in these focus groups.

**Interview Protocol**

*Introduction*

*Greeting and expression of thanks for agreeing to participate*

Hello everyone! Thanks for agreeing to participate in this group interview. I hope you are all feeling comfortable and excited about your participation. I am!

*Brief recalling of the research in which the interview is framed*

As you all know, I have been visiting your school and observing your classes these last weeks as part of a study I am doing about education for members of the West Indian ethnic group in state schools, like this one. Today, I have the great opportunity of listening to your experiences and opinions about how you perceive your school in relation to your everyday classes and school activities, and to your lives and the meaning school has for you.

*Brief description of the interview process*

To do that, I have prepared some questions that I would like to ask you, so that we can cover several topics, and we can exchange ideas. Since it is a small group, everyone will have a chance to participate. I ask you to please be respectful of each other’s opinions; you are not expected to have the same opinion or answer as those of the others in the group. The more the variety, the more interesting our conversation will be. Please, raise your hands when you want to participate and I will be calling on you. Let us try to listen to one another’s answers so that we can comment or discuss the questions. I will be
controlling the time we spend in each question, so as to be able to cover all topics in the time we have.

_Brief recalling of issues of confidentiality and the audio-recording of the interview_

I want you to know that what you say here is confidential. The information I will gather from you will not be disclosed to any of your teachers, parents or classmates. I will only use it for my studies, and the terms of confidentiality stated in the consent protocol that you signed will be kept. None of your personal information will be disclosed. I have received the documents where you have agreed to participate in this interview voluntarily, which means that no one has forced you to be here; and, you have also agreed to my using a digital tape recorder to register the interview. Is that right with everyone? …..

Any questions? …..

Then, let us begin!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>LINK TO RESEARCH QUESTION OR CONCEPT (FOR MY ANALYSIS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Let us talk about the school environment: does school make you feel “at home”? What does? What doesn’t?</td>
<td>SCHOOL DISCOURSES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Is there anything that makes you feel uncomfortable when you are in school? What does? Why?</td>
<td>SCHOOL DISCOURSES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What activities, organized by school but different from the classes, do you like to do here? Why?</td>
<td>MAKING SENSE OF CURRICULUM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Which subject(s) do you like the most? Why?</td>
<td>THE RELATIONSHIP OF CURRICULUM TO THEIR LIVES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Which do you like the least? Why?</td>
<td>AS ABOVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How do teachers relate to students in class or while organizing an activity?</td>
<td>RELATIONS OF POWER AND KNOWLEDGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. How do you students relate to one another? (Probe) Are there any noticeable differences amongst students in your classroom?</td>
<td>CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONS HYBRIDITY RACE, CLASS, CULTURE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What would you like to do later in life?</td>
<td>MAKING SENSE OF SCHOOL IN THEIR LIVES.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How do you think that school might be helping you towards that?</td>
<td>MAKING SENSE OF SCHOOL IN THEIR LIVES.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. If you could change something about your school, what would you change? Why?</td>
<td>IMAGINING NEW WAYS OF CONCEIVING THEIR SCHOOLING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Do teachers/staff allow you to express your own opinions, play your own music, do your dances, speak your language, put up a show, and things of the kind? Do you have any experiences to tell about something related to this?</td>
<td>RESISTANCE CULTURAL DIFFERENCE AGENCY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Think of the teachings you get from school, the norms, the beliefs, the values, the arguments given to explain something... Are any of these different from what you hear “at home” (where you live)? How do they differ?</td>
<td>DEALING OR IDENTIFYING DIFFERENCES OR SIMILARITIES BETWEEN DISCOURSES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Closing statements
I want to thank you all again for your participation. It has been very pleasant to share with you and your contributions will be very important for the purposes of my study,
which one day should help others in trying to make school education a more equitable and liberating experience for all. I hope I can find a way to share with you the findings of my study, once it is finished. Thanks again!

2) Teachers

Teachers will be interviewed individually, with the help of a semi-structured questionnaire. They will be chosen from those teaching the students within the range of 15 to 18. Preference will be given to those teaching social sciences, language(s), headroom teachers, and any particular class or pedagogic activity where issues of concern to my research are likely to come up.

I will share with teachers the purpose of my research, as I visit school for the first times, so as to receive their consent to participate and to allow me to observe their classes and activities. By not posing any threat or major disturbance with my presence, I hope to gain acceptance and confidence from them, so as to develop an environment of trust and cordiality between researcher and school members.

Questions will derive from what has been observed in classes and in other school activities I might have shared. Therefore, the following constitute general guidelines.

**Interview Protocol**

*Introduction*
Greeting and expression of thanks for agreeing to participate
Brief recalling of the research in which the interview is framed
Brief recalling of issues of confidentiality and consent petition for recording the interview
**Ice-breaking, setting the interview process**

**Gathering basic data for a profile of the interviewee...**

1. What do you teach?
2. How long have you been a teacher in this school?
3. What languages do you speak and which do you feel more comfortable with?
4. Where are you from? Where were you born?
5. Which community or ethnic group do you belong to?
6. Is there any other cultural community you belong to?

**Questionnaire**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Link to research question or concept (for my analysis)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. For you, what is the role of a school teacher?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What in the school’s curriculum, structure and organization facilitate your role as a teacher?</td>
<td>MAKING SENSE OF SCHOOL IN THE TEACHERS’ LIVES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What makes it difficult?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How do your students feel about the class you teach? What makes them / some of them feel one way or another? How can you tell?</td>
<td>THE RELATIONSHIP OF CURRICULUM TO STUDENTS’ LIVES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. If you could modify something particular about the subject you teach, what would you modify? (Probe) Do you actually implement any of these modifications? Why?</td>
<td>MAKING SENSE OF CURRICULUM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How close is the philosophy of school to that of the community or ethnic group you belong to?</td>
<td>DEALING OR IDENTIFYING DIFFERENCES OR SIMILARITIES BETWEEN Discourses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do you think that your students bring cultural diversity to the classroom? How do you feel about it?</td>
<td>RACE, CLASS, CULTURE, CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Do you perceive clashes between the members of the different ethnic groups that attend your class?</td>
<td>CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Do you think your students are happy with their schooling experience? When are they the happiest? How do you perceive they are content or not?</td>
<td>MAKING SENSE OF SCHOOL IN THE STUDENTS’ LIVES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. If you could change something about the schooling experience offered to these children and youngsters, what would you change?</td>
<td>IMAGINING NEW WAYS OF CONCEIVING THEIR SCHOOLING</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Closing statements to thank the participation of the interviewee and express my intention of finding ways to share my findings with him/her and the school community once the study is finished

3) Administrative Staff

Among the members of school which make part of the administration, I will concentrate mostly on persons such as: school director/headteacher; academic chair or similar; and, discipline head or similar, if there are any.

I will conduct individual face to face interviews with each of them, given their different positions and particular tasks.

Interview Protocol

Introduction
Greeting and expression of thanks for agreeing to participate
Brief recalling of the research in which the interview is framed
Brief recalling of issues of confidentiality and consent petition for recording the interview

Ice-breaking, setting the interview process
Gathering basic data for a profile of the interviewee...
1. What do you do in school? What is your job? What are your main tasks?
2. How long have you worked in this school and in this position?
3. What languages do you speak and which do you feel more comfortable with?
4. Where are you from? Where were you born?
5. Which community or ethnic group do you belong to?
6. Is there any other cultural community you belong to?

Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION</th>
<th>LINK TO RESEARCH QUESTION OR CONCEPT (FOR MY ANALYSIS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How would you describe the relationships between teachers, students and administrative staff?</td>
<td>MAKING SENSE OF SCHOOL IN THE TEACHERS’ LIVES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Who determines the school curriculum? Do members of the school community participate in its definition? | **THE RELATIONSHIP OF CURRICULUM TO STUDENTS’ LIVES**

3. Who makes/defines the rules of conduct and/or the everyday norms and regulations? | **MAKING SENSE OF CURRICULUM**

4. How close is the philosophy of school to that of the community you belong to? | **DEALING OR IDENTIFYING DIFFERENCES OR SIMILARITIES BETWEEN DISCOURSES**

5. Do you think that your students bring cultural diversity to the school? How do you feel about it? | **RACE, CLASS, CULTURE, CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS**

6. What role does school play for the communities that surround it? | **CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS**

7. Do you perceive clashes between the different ethnic groups that make up the school community? | **CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS**

8. What would you say are some of the most troubling expressions of disorder/disruption within school? What causes them? | **CROSS-CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS**

9. Do you think that school responds to the expectations of the communities it serves? | **MAKING SENSE OF SCHOOL IN THE STUDENTS’ LIVES.**

10. If you could change something about the schooling experience offered to these children and youngsters, what would you change? | **IMAGINING NEW WAYS OF CONCEIVING THEIR SCHOOLING**

Closing statements to thank the participation of the interviewee and express my intention of finding ways to share my findings with him/her and the school community once the study is finished.