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Black Motherhood Politics in Costa Rica: Diasporic Genealogies and Links to the State

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Abstract

Black women who seek and win elected office are changing the political landscape in the Americas. In Latin America, this shift became widely recognized when Epsy Campbell Barr became the first Black woman vice president in Costa Rica in 2018. Her election builds on the work of three generations of women whose engagement in formal politics is rooted in their intertwined identities as Black, women, and of West Indian descent. By recovering a racialized, gendered, and ethnicized lineage of community activism, relationships, and networking—which I call "Little's links" to honor the legacy of the writer and activist Eulalia Bernard Little—I argue that in Costa Rica, Caribbean identity and Black motherhood politics have influenced Black women's engagement in national politics. This account of these other (and mothers') political routes to state power for Afro-Caribbean women in Costa Rica complements current explanations of Black women's participation in national politics elsewhere.

Keywords: Black women; Black motherhood; Afro-Costa Ricans; Caribbean; intersectionality

Resumen

La llegada de mujeres negras a la arena electoral está cambiando el panorama político de las Américas. En Latinoamérica, este logro fue ampliamente reconocido con la elección de Epsy Campbell Barr como la primera vicepresidente, mujer y negra de Costa Rica. Sin embargo, su elección en el 2018 no ocurrió en el vacío. Campbell representa la continuación de tres generaciones de mujeres, cuya participación política deriva de su mismo posicionamiento como descendientes afrocaribeñas. Mediante la recuperación de un linaje marcado por la raza, el género y la etnia, un linaje de activismo comunitario, relaciones y redes —al cual denomino "Little's links" en honor al legado de la escritora y activista Eulalia Bernard Little— argumento que la identidad afrocaribeña y las políticas de maternidad negra han influenciado la participación de las mujeres negras en el estado. El ejemplo de estas "otras" rutas políticas ofrece valiosas aproximaciones para comprender la presencia de mujeres negras en la política nacional, en otros contextos de la región.

Palabras clave: mujeres negras; maternidad negra; afro-costarricenses; Caribe; interseccionalidad

"There must be a [Black] generation born without the need to fight for their right to be as any other person. That has been my motivation for occupying spaces, even the space of a

political party, which I never dreamed I would do."[1] Those were the words of Laura Hall Moore, explaining to me her journey to national politics. She spoke of her long career as a Black activist occupying leadership positions at the Organización Negra Centroamericana (ONECA) and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). During the 2014–2018 electoral period, she ran for vice president of Costa Rica for the party Frente Amplio but did not win. However, another Black woman did win. Epsy Campbell Barr won that election for the Partido Acción Ciudadana as the first Black woman vice president of Costa Rica. Campbell had previously served as a congresswoman for two terms, becoming the fourth Afro-Caribbean congresswoman in the history of the country and the fifteenth of West Indian descendent since the 1950s. She also ran for the presidential nomination as one of three Afro-descendants historically aspiring to that position, and the only woman. For the second time in recent history, she was one of the two Black women running for vice president of Costa Rica in 2018.[2] Campbell is widely known as a Black feminist and leader of the Afro-Latin American and Caribbean women's movement (Safa 2006; Paschel and Sawyer 2008; Agudelo 2010). Most centrally, the presence of Hall, Campbell, and other Black women in electoral politics and high-ranking state positions has challenged the *longue durée* of Whiteness in Costa Rican national imaginaries (Gayles and Muñoz-Muñoz 2022).

In Costa Rica, Law 8765, passed in 2009, requires that all parties include a man and a woman on their list of two vice presidential candidates. Black women leveraged this law by "expanding the ticket's group linkages as part of the strategy to appeal to and work with more groups in society, enhancing inclusiveness to women and possibly to other groups" (Pignataro and Taylor-Robinson 2021, 7). As has been the case with other Black women politicians in the region, Hall and Campbell share a history in the Black and Black feminist movements. Their careers align with the increased visibility of African-descent and Indigenous movements during the nineties, the adoption of multicultural policies including quota legislation by nation-states, and the subsequent co-optation of Black and Indigenous leadership through national and "ethnic" institutions (Rahier 2012; Anderson 2012; Hale and Millamán 2006; Htun 2014). Whereas the combination of ethnic and gender quotas is identified as propelling Black women's participation in governments across Latin America (Htun 2014, 2016; Piscopo 2016), there are no ethnic quotas implemented in Costa Rica today. Moreover, constitutional multiculturalism appeared significantly later in Costa Rica than in the rest of the region (Muñoz-Muñoz 2017).

The weight of Costa Rican democratic tradition has shifted to favor the social ascent, professionalization, and political participation of women (Saint-Germain 1993; Schwindt-Bayer 2006). Perhaps as a result of gender quotas, which Costa Rica adopted in 1990 through Law 7142 (Promotion of Women's Social Equality), Costa Rica "has consistently ranked in the top ten countries in the world for the participation of women in parliament

[1] Laura Hall Moore, interview, February 17, 2017, Siquirres City, Limón. Between August 2016 and April 2018 I conducted ethnographic research on Black women Costa Rican politicians as part of my doctoral dissertation, "Bilingüismo politico: Afrocaribeñas en el Estado blanco y multicultural costarricense (1978–2017)" (Muñoz-Muñoz 2018). All material from interviews follows the University of Texas at Austin's IRB Number: 2016-04-0060. I am deeply grateful for each of the Afro-Costa Rican women leaders who shared their stories during this process.

[2] A note on terminology: *race* is a colonial-modern construct, but I use the term to denote a particular experience of being Black as the racialized other. I also at times use ethnicity and *ethnicized* to highlight the simultaneous experience of cultural "otherness" of Black women in Costa Rica as a result of their West Indian ancestry, which has shaped their ways of being and doing politics. The use of the terms *Caribbeanness* and Afro-Caribbean, which emphasizes ethnicity, reflects the process of self-identification of the Black community in Costa Rica. Despite the conceptual distinction between ethnicity and race, however, they are often entangled in practice and are shaped by gender as well, as Black feminist work on intersectionality makes clear. Moreover, the scholarship on quotas often uses the terms *ethnic* and *race* interchangeably (e.g., ethnic quotas). I use *ethnicity* to denote the Black Caribbean cultural identity of Afro-Costa Ricans. Additionally, I use and capitalize the terms Mestizo and White as constructs embedded with power relationships.

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for several years" (Schwindt-Bayer 2012, 4). The combination of "a solid legal framework and strong enforcement mechanisms"—specifically, Law 7142 and its measures to ensure parity of women in eligible positions—have "led to substantial increases in women in power throughout the nation" (Rodríguez 2015, 182). But Costa Rican racial formation processes and national imaginaries today remain rooted in homogenous Whiteness (Palmer 1995, Putnam 1999, Telles and Flores 2013). What makes it possible, then, for Costa Rican Black women to occupy high-ranking positions within an imagined White nation state?

Political scientists working on women's participation in politics have noted the importance of male family lineages and elites in paving women's paths to senior leadership positions within the state (Skard 2015; Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2009). Other works question the weight of these legacies in countries where gender quotas are strong (Schwindt-Bayer, Vallejo, and Cantú 2022). In the Latin American context, the "nurturant and affectional tasks" of the *supermadre* model (Chaney 1979, 20) and other feminine archetypes have been frequently cited as explanations of why and how women become politicians (Chaney 1979; Schirmer 1993; Werbner 1999); but these patterns vary, and today female legislators seem to be motivated not only by "women's domain issues" (Schwindt-Bayer 2006). Whereas discussions on gender and politics keeps expanding, what has so far been less studied is what happens when race and gender traverse these political genealogies and ways of understanding politics. This is an important question, considering that gender roles, the public-private division, the experience and struggle of mothering, and community care have been different for Black women across the diaspora (Hill Collins 2000; Roberts 1999; McKittrick 2006; Caldwell 2007; Safa 2006).

In contrast to such approaches, and in conversation with intersectional and diasporic theories of Black women's activism and the history of Afro-Costa Rican politics, I offer a contextual, historical (and *her*storicized) genealogy of the unusual routes to national politics of Epsy Campbell and other Black Costa Rican women before her in an imagined White nation. Drawing on a variety of interdisciplinary methodological approaches including history, ethnography, and textual analysis, I build a theory of Black Costa Rican women's national political activism derived from archives, interviews, and even poetry. This essay examines Black women's motivations and the conditions that enable them to participate in national politics and institutions, considering their intertwined identities as Black, women, and daughters of Caribbean ancestors. Through a close reading of the written and embodied archives of their political trajectories, and after performing deep interviews with twenty Black women who have participated in Costa Rican national politics, it is my contention that Black women's paths to the state in Costa Rica have followed an ethnic, circum-Caribbean tradition and lineage of women's political activism (Leeds 2013; Morris 2010). Black women's engagement in national politics builds on a diasporic experience of being and doing racialized and gendered politics, which influences their style of leadership, their relationship with other Black women and Black families, and ultimately, their sense of care for their communities. From that stance, Black women's political trajectories may be illuminated by a look at the patterns of diasporic Black motherhood, "othermothering," and women-centered networks identified by Hill Collins (2000) and defined in the following section.

Black women's political participation has been historically influenced by race, gender, and class.[3] In the Costa Rican and other diasporic contexts, this intersectional approach

[3] Intersectionality considers race, gender, and class as interlocked systems of oppression (Crenshaw 1990). As suggested by the work of McIlwaine (1997), class oppression reflects some nuances in the Costa Rican Afro Caribbean experience and may overlap with ethnicity. A particularly important factor is the centrality of education as a tradition of the Costa Rican Black community. The majority of Black women included in this study may then be considered part of the middle class, where cultural background and some of the social mobility policies adopted in the country during the twentieth century converged to favor their social ascent.

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also includes ethnicity, specifically, Black women's experiences as Caribbean daughters and Black political mothers. The experience of these other political routes to the state for Afro-Caribbean women in Costa Rica may offer valuable insights and complement current explanations of why and how Black women participate in national politics elsewhere.

Intersectional Black motherhood and the Costa Rican experience

To unpack the genealogies and motivations behind Black women's paths to national politics, I find theorizations of Black motherhood to be very valuable. Patricia Hill Collins (2000), for example, explores the patterns of Black motherhood in the Caribbean and among other Black diasporic societies in her analysis of Black women's feminist thought in the United States. For Hill Collins, "the institution of Black motherhood consists of a series of constantly renegotiated relationships that African-American women experience with one another, with Black children, with the larger African-American community, and with self," which ultimately serve as a "catalyst for social activism" (Hill Collins 2000, 176). Although worth some critical scrutiny due to a patriarchal bias and the primacy the author gives to the reproductive power of the female body, her distillation of the Black motherhood institution by means of concepts of "othermothering" and "women-centered network politics" helps us to illuminate Black women's diverse political strategies. Confronting racial oppression, Hill Collins argues, Black biological and nonbiological mothers develop cooperative communitarian arrangements for children and community caring, which include othermothering, or sharing extended family views and family care, and women-centered networks, or organizing with each other to protect both Black families and communities. Hill Collins recovers the centrality of the concept of motherhood for African descendants but also explains its influence on Black women's "more generalized ethic of caring and personal accountability" (Hill Collins 2000, 189). This care is defined as a "socially responsible ethic that is imbued with the idea of political activism to the larger Black community" (Story 2014, 6).

These three concepts—Black motherhood, othermothering, and women-centered networks—suggest a common political space and framework for Black women across the diaspora. In response to systemic anti-Black violence, Black women take actions that "they otherwise might not have considered" (Hill Collins 2000, 194). Furthermore, Black women share a "different understanding of political activism and empowerment than fighting on one's own behalf" (Hill Collins 2000, 194). In fact, Black motherhood experiences and practices reverberate throughout the Latin American diaspora, shaping community and local politics, such as in the Brazil context (Perry 2013; Alves and Silva 2017).[4] As Dest (2020) suggests for the Colombian case and the example of Francia Márquez, there has been a shift of Black community leaders devoting increasing energy to electoral politics that deserves attention beyond a simple co-optation critique.[5]

As I will analyze later, Black motherhood, othermothering and Black women's women-centered networks suggest the existence of other, non-male-centered types of political

[4] Perry's work on Black women's centrality in anti-Black systemic racism struggles at the community level in Salvador de Bahia suggests a dynamic view of Black mothering politics. Brazilian Black women are also organizing locally to defend and improve services within their communities, evoking the example of other Black women before them, such as Marielle Franco. See Pereira (2020).

[5] Marquez became the first Black woman vice president of Colombia in 2022. According to Dest, she was motivated to engage in electoral politics by the state's failure toward Black communities. He states, "By engaging in electoral politics, Márquez put into practice a saying that Carlos Rosero, one of the co-founders of PCN, often repeats while preparing for workshops throughout northern Cauca: '*Hay que montarlo para desbaratarlo*' (you have to build it up to break it down)" (Dest 2020, 18). Marquez' trajectory from defending the territory and lives of the Pacific Black communities to running for national politics may also be explained through the lenses of Black political motherhood.

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genealogies. Black women's "decisions to become social activists" (Hill Collins 2000, 189) due to their othermothering politics (extended Black family views) suggest relevant political background and social capital for Black women in politics (Darcy and Hadley 1988; Farris and Holman 2014). From that stance, Black women's paths to the state, whether as mothers or as othermothers, need to be historically, culturally, and ethnographically contextualized as politics of the diaspora (Gordon and Anderson 1999), which can serve to invigorate the field of Afro-Latin American politics (Laó-Montes 2009).[6]

Black women's presence in Costa Rican state politics warrants consideration precisely because of the country's racial formation processes. Unlike the founding narratives of *mestizaje* in the majority of Central and Latin American countries, which celebrates Hispanic and Indian—and exceptionally Black—racial mixture (Euraque, Gould, and Hale 2005; Gould 1998; Hooker 2010), Costa Rica embraces the imaginary of the White nation (Putnam 1999; Molina 2002).[7] As seen in data from the last census, these mythologies influence the dynamics of self-identification to this day. Afro-Costa Rican women participate in national politics while the country persists as the only one in the isthmus and one of only four in Latin America to identify itself as White (Telles and Flores 2013). Despite this national identity, Black women's presence in both electoral and cabinet appointments in state politics has been remarkable.[8] The numbers are significant compared to other countries in the region with larger Black populations or where multicultural policies have been implemented for decades (Carvalho 2014; Hooker 2009).[9] Figure 1 demonstrates the continuity and increasing presence of Black women in national politics, from the election of the first Black congresswomen in the unicameral Costa Rican Legislature in 1982 to the election of the first Black women vice president of Costa Rica in 2018.

The majority of the high-ranking legislative, executive, and public administration positions occupied by the list of Black women in Figure 1 coincides with the era of ethnic and gender identity politics in the last decades of the twentieth and first decade of the twenty-first century. Gender quotas have been crucial for achieving a position, particularly in a unicameral legislature formed by fifty-seven deputies. It is worth mentioning that in Costa Rica there are no affirmative action policies or quotas promoting the participation of

[6] Laó-Montes's critique (2009, 210) of the presence of a Black elite supporting right-wing and conservative agendas in Colombia serves as a wake-up call not to disregard Black politicians' contradictions in the region. Along the same lines, Boyce Davies (2007, 68) asks us "to subject the rise of black women to leadership positions to the kind of internal critique that is fair and necessary." Assessing the political performance of Black women politicians goes beyond the scope of this article. Also, the empirical evidence derived from the interviews shows a general congruence between the trajectories of Afro-Caribbean women in state politics and social justice agendas. From that stance, it is plausible to consider the contribution of Black women national politicians to the field of Afro-Latin American politics and Black politics more broadly.

[7] During the nineteenth century, the Costa Rican liberal and oligarchic elite spread a foundational narrative of homogeneous Whiteness through curriculum materials and cultural products such as paintings, literature, and music. Costa Rican foundational narrative entangled race (White), culture (Hispanic), and space (Central Valley) (Molina 2002).

[8] Although an analysis of Black men's political trajectories in Costa Rica is beyond the scope of this paper, it is worth mentioning that only one Black man has been appointed to a cabinet position. Fourteen Black congressmen have been elected, but only as representatives of the Caribbean province of Limón, whereas four of seven elected Black congresswomen have led the bill as national congresswoman (not just representing Limón). Two Black women and only one Black man have run and won local electoral contests.

[9] Htun (2012, 5) writes of the precariousness of Black women representation in countries like Brazil and Colombia, stating, "Afro-descendant women are even more underrepresented than Afro-descendants as a whole, and women as a whole. For example, they occupy only 1% of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies in Brazil and none in the Chamber of Representatives of Colombia, despite the fact that they constitute 25% and 6% of the total population of their countries respectively." In the Central American region, Nicaragua represents the vanguard of multicultural reforms, but only two Black women have been elected in Congress—a striking number considering that Nicaragua has also led the region in the election of women to parliament since the late 1980s (Saint-Germain 1993).

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ethnic minorities, like those that exist in Ecuador or Colombia (Htun 2014; Piscopo and Wylie 2020). And yet, these Black women's English last names suggest the centrality of race and ethnicity, and the continuation of the Afro-Caribbean community's trajectory in Costa Rican politics, a community made up of West Indian descendants, mainly Jamaicans immigrants from the end of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth centuries (Rosario Fernández 2015). From the election of the first West Indian descendant as congressman in 1953 until 2018, this Afro-Caribbean community has consistently secured at least one seat, which represents up to 2 percent of the total legislators within this period. One third of these Black legislators have been women (Piscopo and Wylie 2020). Moreover, the number of Black legislators grew from one to three between the electoral periods 2002–2006 and 2014–2018.[10]

Analyzing data from twenty interviews, I found that all the Black women who have participated in national politics and/or occupied a high position in the state referred to their Caribbean background as Jamaican descendants as a cultural identity marker. Sixteen of them did so in the first five minutes of conversation. For the eleven Black women directly involved in national or local electoral politics, three mentioned being motivated by the example and identity politics of their Black fathers, and eight by their Black mothers. In recounting their political trajectories, all twenty interviewees, public figures by appointment or election, mentioned the influence of other Black women's activism motivating their political careers. Reading their personal accounts in conjunction with the visual and written archives of their political interventions, one could situate their paths to the state within an Afro-Caribbean tradition of gendered, racialized, and ethnicized activism.

This brings us to the concept of "Little's links," which I coined in honor of the legacy of writer and activist Eulalia Bernard Little. Little's links identify the tradition of community activism of Black mothering, the practice of extended families (othermothering), and the supportive networks of Black women within the Afro-Caribbean community as agents of empowerment driving Black women's participation in national politics and national institutions. Contrary to the widespread assumption that the political participation of Afro-Costa Rican women follows a purely male genealogy, the historical register and the personal memories of Black women politicians demonstrate the power of a tradition of women's political activism wrought by the first generation of West Indian descendants during the 1940s, tempered by their daughters in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and galvanized during the era of identity and multicultural politics in the 1990s and the first decades of the twenty-first century.

Of Eulalia Bernard Little's two last names, I've chosen the matrilineal one, Little, to honor Black women's diasporic genealogies and paths to the state. I use the possessive "Little's" to stress the Caribbean female political lineage of Bernard Little and the Black women politicians who followed her. Although her name does not appear in the list of Black women above, most of the women who have held a government position in Costa Rica identify Eulalia Bernard Little as their inspiration in national politics. I also follow Chamberlain's (2006) ideas on how identity narratives in the Black Caribbean incorporate maternal lineages and female ancestry, and how "those prescriptions continue to be conveyed throughout the Caribbean and its diaspora" (Chamberlain 2006, 60).[11] The concept

[10] Almost 8 percent of Costa Ricans self-identify as Black or Afro-descendant (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos 2014). Securing 2 percent makes them the strongest political ethnic minority in a legislature dominated by a 96 percent Mestizo-White majority. Jewish legislators barely make up 1 percent of the Congress historically, and Chinese descendants are close to 0.40 percent. To this day, there has not been Indigenous representation in the Costa Rican legislature; this speaks both to the challenges of representation and the constant political effort of the Black community.

[11] According to Chamberlain (2006, 9), "The sense of self conveyed in African-Caribbean life stories is one in which descent and rebirth consistently blur the boundaries of selfhood ('I am a grandmother child,' 'I am from my

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"Little's links" aims to reinforce other maternal and Black women's lineages that rescue "herstories" and names in terms of legacies of activism and networking for political participation. These relationships illuminate Black women's paths to state politics. Following Cooper, the links also "situate Black women within a long lineage of prior women who have done similar kinds of work" (Cooper 2017, 26). The small play on "Little" suggests that these connections are not salient at first glance. They could even be dismissed due to their size and their limited effectiveness amid the restraining power structures of national politics for both Black people and women. But Little's links help us to grapple with the ways in which diasporic Black motherhood, othermothering, and women-centered network politics have functioned as Black political and social capital for the Afro-Caribbean community in Costa Rica, as explored in the following sections.

A political genealogy of Little's links

West Indian workers and their families migrated to the Central American Caribbean at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, fulfilling labor demands in railway infrastructure and banana plantations (Meléndez and Duncan 2012; Chomsky 1995; Bourgois 1989). What was conceived of as temporary became permanent, particularly due to the escalation of anti-Black racist restrictions on migration and circulation in the circum-Caribbean during the interwar period (Putnam 2013). Black immigrants and their descendants struggled to remain in the imagined White nation. According to Senior Angulo (2011, 195), there was "a growing organizational awareness on the part of groups based abroad, as well as Afro-Costa Ricans in Limón and San José; urging their peers to legalize their legal-civil situation on national soil." First- and second-generation community leaders negotiated citizenship and belonging during the 1930s and especially during the 1940s. This collective, motivated by a Black and Caribbean tradition of political activism, included both public and anonymous figures; the so-called Black Whiz was one of the most salient. Formed by "outstanding Black men," this group claimed citizenship for West Indian descendants and a better life in a poor and abandoned Limón. By 1950, they also demanded inclusion in national politics. According to Sawyers-Royal (2012, 230–231), "in 1951, with the 1953 elections approaching, a group of Blacks who called themselves 'Black Whiz,' which means 'outstanding Blacks,' wrote a letter to the three major political parties . . . saying they felt it was essential that Blacks who were now Costa Ricans should have the right to participate in the country's politics."

The Black Whiz included Alex Curling and Stanley Britton. Both figures are relevant for understanding Afro-Costa Ricans' trajectory in national politics. They also suggest not only a paternal but a Black Caribbean political lineage for Black women in the state. Curling became the first congressman of West Indian descent. He was also the father of the first Black congresswoman in the early 1980s, Thelma Curling Rodríguez, and grandfather of the first Afro-Caribbean woman to occupy a senior-level position in the judiciary, Lena White Curling. Britton, similarly, was the grandfather of the second Black woman to lead a ministry in the executive, and a candidate for vice president for the 2006–2010 period, Esmeralda Britton González.[12] The political maneuvering of the Black Whiz established a tradition of participation in the national political arena for the Afro-Caribbean community (Rosario Fernández 2015). These male figures and others who followed also influenced the careers of their daughters and their descendants. These types of relationships confirm

mother'). The concept of self, and its narration, and the concept of biography may have different meanings and purposes in which some identification with the group and ancestry takes precedence over the metaphysics of the self."

[12] It is worth mentioning that the political lineage that followed the Black Whiz was exclusively female. No male descendants of the Curling or Britton family have participated in national politics.

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the weight of father figures in the performance of women politicians in Latin America (Skard 2015; Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2009) and also coincide with analyses of the political trajectory of Black women in the insular Caribbean (Hosein and Parpart 2016).[13] In the Costa Rican case, Epsy Campbell mentions that "the issue of Black identity was always an issue worked on in my house and reaffirmed by, mainly, my dad."[14] Laura Hall mentions how in her work in civil and social organizations, "wherever my dad was, to the spaces in which he was, he took me . . . . So, I think that there is also some part of this work that comes from there, the DNA."[15] Elayne Whyte, former vice-minister of foreign affairs and former permanent representative of Costa Rica to the UN office in Geneva, recalls the figure of her Black father and his lessons, such as the daily reading of the newspaper next to him, "when we closely followed news from the 'World' section . . . including the struggles against apartheid in South Africa."[16]

Education also played a role in motivating these Black women's political interests and careers, as the two vice presidential candidates of 2018 both emphasized. In a similar fashion to other Black women public figures, Elayne Whyte notes: "there is an issue that seems to me to be very relevant in the reality of Afro-descendant women . . . . 'You have to study and become a professional.' That was almost like a mandate that I received, especially from my father."[17] These memories help to explain Afro-Costa Rican women's interests in social and Black issues as well as their professional choices. Testimonies also confirm how father figures have influenced the respectability politics of Black daughters who follow expected social behavior and morality throughout the diaspora (Johnson 2013), and particularly in the Caribbean (Wilson 1969).[18]

But next to this Black (male) legacy, Black women in national politics also credit their female diasporic genealogies as having paved their routes to the state. Contesting an imagined solely masculine or "fathered" political lineage, the stories of Black women Costa Rican politicians follow a tradition of political activism of other Afro-Caribbean women before them. They embody a diasporic practice of Black political motherhood, othermothering, and women-centered networking, which functions as a "catalyst for social activism" (Hill Collins 2000, 176) and propels them to participate in national politics.

Since the arrival of the first West Indian migrants, as well as the aforementioned mobilizations of the 1940s, female figures in Costa Rica engaged with Black politics. Despite the silences of history, women embraced everyday politics of respectability and were crucial actors within Black organizations, such as the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). They took an increasingly prominent role in public discussions about the destinies of their communities. Afro-Caribbean women actively negotiated a Black presence, and then permanence, on Costa Rican soil.[19] This was particularly the case when the job market

[13] Eugenia Charles is an example of the importance of the Black father figure for a Caribbean Black woman politician (Barriteau and Cobley 2006).

[14] Epsy Campbell Barr, interview, September 19, 2016, San José City, San José.

[15] Laura Hall Moore, interview.

[16] Elayne Whyte Gómez, interview, February 7, 2017, Skype.

[17] Elayne Whyte Gómez, interview.

[18] White's important work on respectability politics demonstrates its doubled-edged nature as a discourse of resistance that at the same time reinforces stereotypes for Black women (White 2010, 36). The centrality of education and professionalization for a middle-class group of Black women politicians may speak to the legacy of Caribbean politics of respectability for the Afro-Costa Rican community. However, the history of this Black community speaks to the transformation of Black women's (and men's) politics of respectability. Black women's strategies and choices to negotiate political spaces also suggest their dynamic and heterogeneous experiences of these type of politics.

[19] Black women's agency in elevating their communities (Leeds 2013) and defending their personal fame traverses the everyday life of the plantations (Putnam 2002). At the turn of the twenties, in the midst of a community disarticulated by the economic crisis caused by the fall of the banana market and the consequent migrations, Black women appealed to the same moral responsibility for silencing racist accusations (Foote 2004). Leeds

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declined with the "banana fall" following the 1929 depression, and women were responsible for raising extended families whose male figures migrated first to Panama and then to the United States. As the decades progressed, and in defense of the rights of their communities, some served as representatives in national institutions. Many of these contributions remain anonymous (Leeds 2013; Senior Angulo 2011). Other names, although almost imperceptible, are kept in oral memories but also in the written archive, as shown in Figure 2.

Afro-Caribbean women negotiated with the state from different community bodies, such as the (Educational) Board for the Province of Limón. By request of the National General Inspector of Private Schools, the archive from 1943 of *La Voz del Atlántico* (regional press) shows a list of the Caribbean (English) male names of the elected board members: the president Mr. Jos A. Thomas and the secretary Mr. Cyril Corniffe. Among them, "Mrs. C. C. Bernard," Carolina Bernard, serves as the vice president and the only woman. Carolina (Little) Bernard, as part of the first generation of Jamaican immigrants, was nurtured by the circulation of ideas and the Black mobilizations of the circum-Caribbean during the interwar period (Putnam 2013). She embraced the nationalization crusade along with West Indian contemporaries, men and women (Harpelle 2002). Carolina Bernard was an English teacher and, like others, influenced the cultural formation and the sense of Black and circum-Caribbean identity of the descendants of Jamaican immigrants (Rosario Fernández 2015). As a "colored" women of the diaspora, Bernard embodied "a sense of care for Black communities in a world where non-Black people did not find value in the lives and livelihoods of these communities" (Cooper 2017, 2). Indeed, the daughter of Carolina Bernard, Eulalia Bernard Little, celebrates her mother's legacy and Black motherhood politics in her poetry. In the poem "My mother and the *tajamar*," Eulalia writes that from the "mother's tongue," she learnt "the solemn truth/about my ancestors/ (Abandoned in this land)." And also "to be a soldier/with the word drawn/in my hand" (Bernard 1991).[20]

Afro-Costa Rican women (and also men) in the state identify Eulalia Bernard Little (Figure 3) as the leading promoter of Black political representation for nearly four decades. A second-generation West Indian descendant and political and cultural activist, the daughter of Carolina (Little) Bernard demanded a space for her community in national political and institutional spheres. Eulalia Bernard Little and her mother represent the first "Little" link of Black women to the political arena. In the 1970s, working from the Ministry of Education, Bernard Little implemented an educational program specifically addressed to the Black youth of Limón. She was the only woman in the organizational board of the First Black Seminar in Costa Rica, a site that sought to promote the Black agenda in government plans (Meléndez and Duncan 2012).

By 1986, Eulalia was the country's second Black female congressional candidate, the first for a nontraditional and communist party, Pueblo Unido (People United).[21] In her introductory pamphlet, and as a testimony to her political views and cultural tradition, she appealed in English to the Afro-Caribbean voters, "my People," to "Hold the Stars." In the text, she speaks about her trajectory as a Black activist: "I have lived by, and for,

(2013) recovers the figure of Philomena, a woman who published regularly in the *Limón Search Light*, as an example of the complex relationship between discourses of respectability and Garveyism. "Better your situation for a better Limón," she instructed young women (Leeds 2013, 17).

[20] For an analysis of Black motherhood politics in Bernard's poetry, see Muñoz-Muñoz (2021).

[21] Eulalia was leading the ballot for congress in the province of Limón. However, the Pueblo Unido party only gained one position (San José) for Congress. Eulalia's choice of party was an exception to the centrist politics of the Afro-Costa Rican community. Another exception was the creation of a Black left party Partido Auténtico Limonense (PAL) in the seventies. PAL was the first to establish in its statutes that "there will be equality for women within the organization and eligible positions," thus anticipating the quota regulations in the province and the nation (Rosario Fernández 2015, 317).

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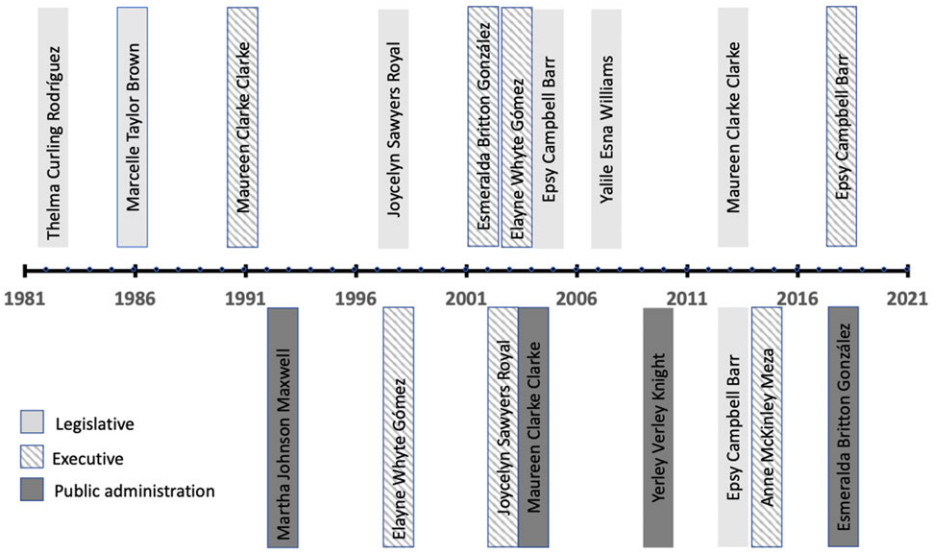
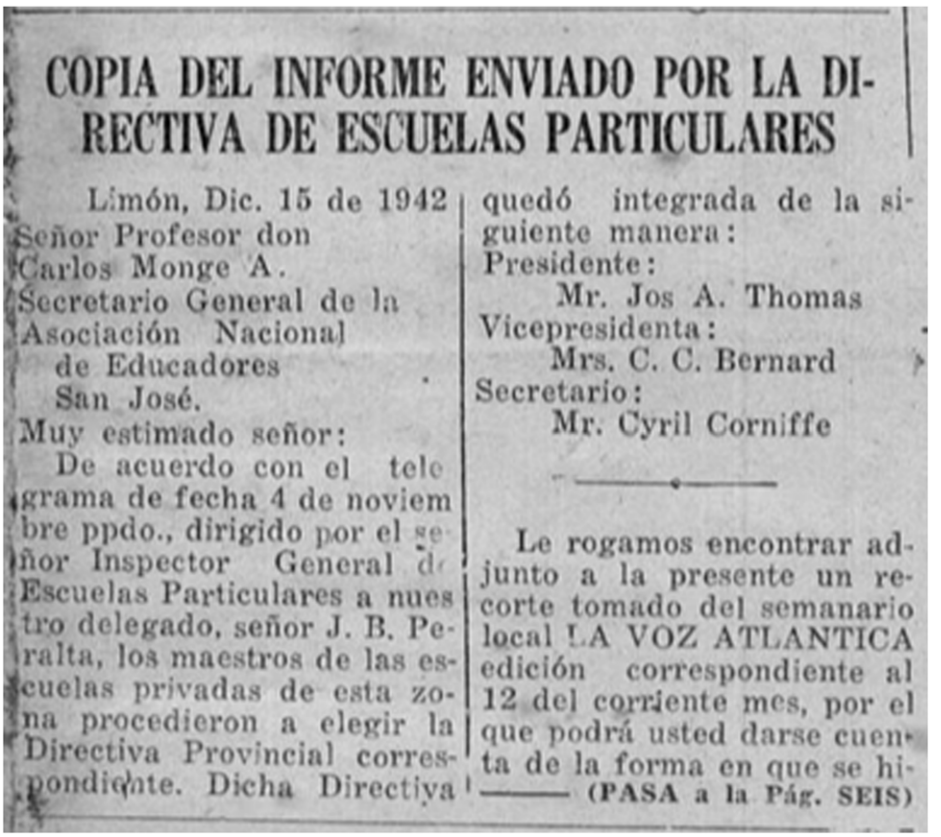


Figure 1. Afro-Costa Rican women in electoral and cabinet positions, 1982–2018.



COPIA DEL INFORME ENVIADO POR LA DIRECTIVA DE ESCUELAS PARTICULARES

Limón, Dic. 15 de 1942
Señor Profesor don
Carlos Monge A.
Secretario General de la
Asociación Nacional
de Educadores
San José.
Muy estimado señor:
De acuerdo con el tele grama de fecha 4 de noviembre ppdo., dirigido por el señor Inspector General de Escuelas Particulares a nuestro delegado, señor J. B. Peralta, los maestros de las escuelas privadas de esta zona procedieron a elegir la Directiva Provincial correspondiente. Dicha Directiva quedó integrada de la siguiente manera:
Presidente:
Mr. Jos A. Thomas
Vicepresidenta:
Mrs. C. C. Bernard
Secretario:
Mr. Cyril Corniffe

Le rogamos encontrar adjunto a la presente un recorte tomado del semanario local LA VOZ ATLANTICA edición correspondiente al 12 del corriente mes, por el que podrá usted darse cuenta de la forma en que se hi-
(PASA a la Pág. SEIS)

Figure 2. Mrs. C. C. Bernard listed as vice president in the Educational Board of Limón in 1943. *La Voz del Atlántico*, January 16, 1943.

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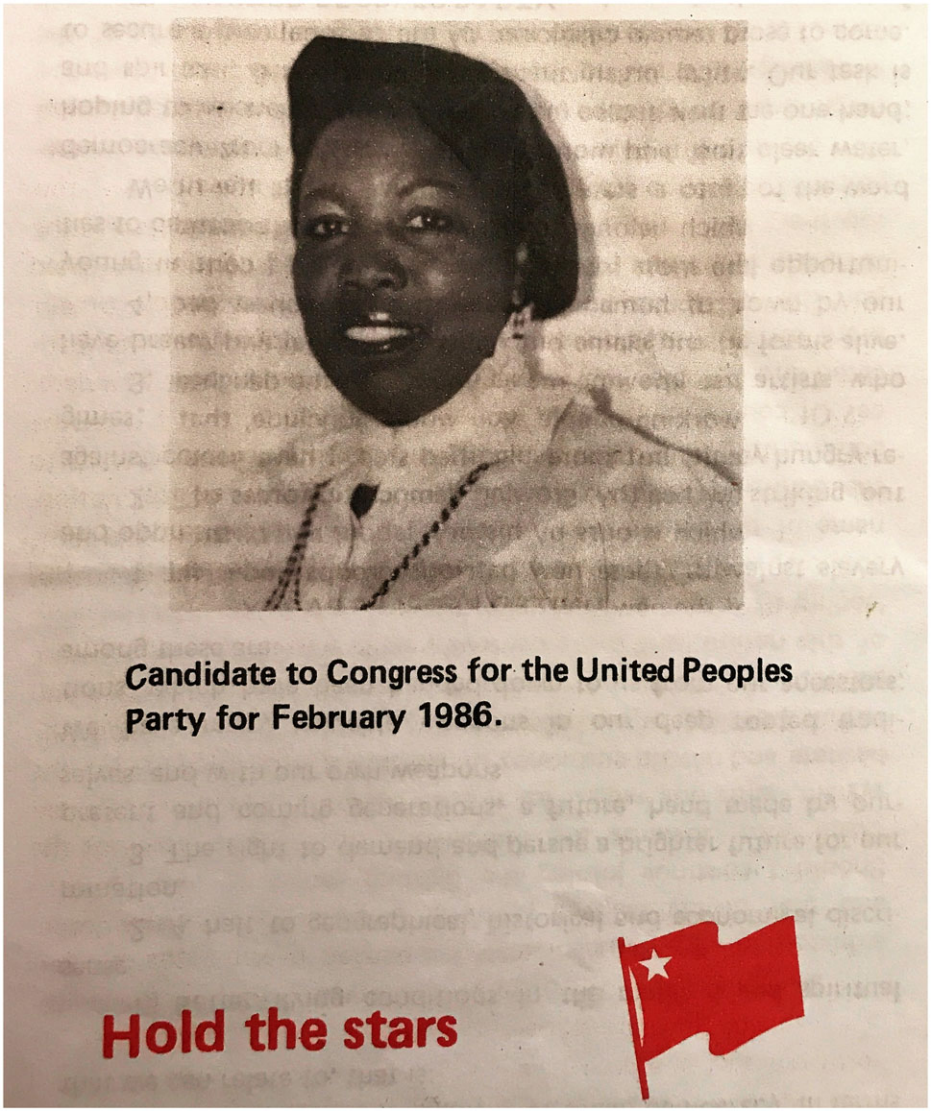

Figure 3. Eulalia Bernard Little as a candidate for Congress in 1986. Diana Senior Angulo, personal collection.

the fundamental principles of our people. I have always been with you, defending our causes in all the battlefields, at the local, national and international levels." She also presents herself following a (maternal) genealogy of Black women, being part of "the extraordinary struggle of *our* women in the quest for identity and the preservation of our best traditions" in a nation "which is ours by history, work and birth."

Bernard Little was a teacher, poet, and national and transnational political activist, and through each of these activities she fought for Black people's rights. In the national political arena, she committed to ensuring a quota of black participation and visibility. In one interview from the 1990s, the literary critic Shirley Jackson recorded Bernard Little telling of her political crusade. She said: "I ran for vice president of the Partido Liberación Nacional—something that had never before happened in Limón. I made the Whites understand that we Blacks are not invisible or hidden, that we want a piece of the pie that we

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paid for four hundred years ago" (Jackson 2003, 24). In an instant of almost haughty lucidity that defied the ravages of Alzheimer's disease, I heard similar words from Eulalia one afternoon in December 2016: "and I grappled and grappled" so there would always be "some of us there [in the government] . . . . This country and San José [the capital] cannot be conceived without an Afro community, which has won its space in its own right."[22]

Black women across diverse political parties recognize Eulalia Bernard Little as a forerunner of Afro-Costa Rican leadership and of Black women's leadership in particular. An examination of various political trajectories of Afro-Caribbean women confirms Bernard Little's influence. Rosario Fernández (2015, 359) points out that in 1992, the Costa Rican delegation at the first meeting of the Red de Mujeres Afrolatinoamericanas y Afrocaribeñas in Santo Domingo was "headed by Eulalia Bernard and Epsy Campbell." Eulalia's name traverses the archives and memoirs of Joycelyn Sawyers Royal's term as congresswoman from 1998 to 2002.[23] As a proponent of the multicultural reform of the constitution, Sawyers states that Eulalia "opened the way, she opened the way and for that must be respected."[24] When Elayne Whyte was appointed as the first Black woman vice minister of foreign affairs in 1998, she recalls being invited by the Afro-Caribbean community to a homage for being the first Black woman on occupying a major diplomatic position in the Costa Rican government.[25] Eulalia Bernard was the author of this initiative, and her influence on linking Black women's efforts resurfaced when Whyte coordinated the preparatory process for the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa. Bernard Little, Sawyers Royal, and Campbell Barr, as well as other Afro-Costa Rican women's last names, appear in the Durban Conference' file of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The list of Black women participating in the Durban preparatory meetings also includes Laura Hall Moore (in her early twenties at that time) Lena White Curling (daughter of Thelma Curling, the first Black congresswoman and granddaughter of Alex Curling, the first Black congressman from the Black Whiz), and Carol Britton González (granddaughter of Stanley Britton and sister of Esmeralda Britton González, second Black woman to lead a ministry in the executive, and a candidate for vice president for the 2006–2010 period).[26]

Reading the archives and listening to the ways Eulalia's and other Black women's names arise in Black women's accounts about their political trajectories helps us to trace a genealogy of Black women's (Little's) links and the emergence of diasporic Black women politics. According to Cooper (2017, 26), the citing of names "situate[s] Black women within a long lineage of prior women who have done similar kinds of work, and naming those names grants intellectual, political and/or cultural legitimacy to the Black women speaking their names." Recounting Black women's political genealogies, Epsy Campbell points to the impact of an organization called NETFA, "a group of Black women headed by Carmen Hutchinson."[27] The group served as a model for creating the Asociación para el Desarrollo Integral de las Mujeres Afrocostarricenses in 1995, today the Centro de Mujeres Afrocostarricenses. NETFA, "an Ethiopian name which means 'free woman,'" performed

[22] Eulalia Bernard Little, interview, December 23, 2016, Curridabat City, San José.

[23] Bernard Little joined Sawyers in the meetings of the "National Development Plan for the Afro-Costa Rican Community: Alex Curling Delisser." Her influence is evident in the fact that the topics of the debate included "the support as a group for Afro-descendants candidacies in different political scenarios" (Rosario Fernández 2015, 362).

[24] Joycelyn Sawyers Royal, interview, September 27, 2016, Limón City, Limón.

[25] In the poem "The Latest News," Eulalia celebrates Whyte's achievement. She states in her Caribbean English creole: "One study for foreign/then give she affairs for foreign" (Bernard 2006).

[26] See Archivo Nacional de Costa Rica, Expediente 158, Transferencia 71-2006, Fondo Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Costa Rica: "Proceso preparatorio para la Cumbre Mundial contra el Racismo, la Discriminación Racial, la Xenofobia y formas conexas de intolerancia" (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Costa Rica 2006).

[27] Epsy Campbell Barr, interview.

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Black women's motherhood politics through othermothering and women-centered networks. In Hutchinson's words, "we were Black feminists without knowing it," and by 1991, NETFA reunited sixteen Black women "who seek to know us better, take care of each other and respond to the needs to our Black communities."[28]

Whereas Epsy Campbell mentions Carmen Hutchinson and the women-centered network NETFA as her inspiration, Laura Wilson Robinson recounts Anne McKinley, the cofounder (with Epsy Campbell) of the Centro de Mujeres Afrocostarricenses, and the work of Joycelyn Sawyers as a congresswoman promoting a training program for Black women leaders, as crucial references for her political trajectory. A community activist, previous municipal councilor in Talamanca (Limón), president of the Forum Association of Afrodescendant Women of the South Caribbean, and promoter of the Political School of Afro and Indigenous Women, Laura Wilson recalls:

> So, they put me on the women's ballot at the local level. At that time, I was in that process of Black women leaders who were training us to be parliamentarians for a day. I was sitting in that chair [Joycelyn Sawyers's]. There I met Anne McKinley, Epsy Campbell, because all of them were part of that process. Then, that came, as it all came together and I learned how to do deliberations and we carried out the whole process to become congresswomen.[29]

Black women's names are mentioned, defining other Black women's trajectories and weaving a net of relationships and networking. These Little's links may be illustrated by an image from 2001, when the same Centro de Mujeres Afrocostarricenses organized a ceremony, Mujeres de Ébano del 2001 (Women of Ebony 2001) (Figure 4). Congresswoman Joycelyn Sawyers appears in the photo in conversation with Vice Chancellor Elayne Whyte. Close to them, Eulalia Bernard seems ready to intervene. The three of them are celebrated as examples of "Black women who have led transcendental struggles in our Costa Rican history, ... women who have been chosen by our [female] ancestors to teach us to stand up and fight for a society free from all kinds of discrimination," as the invitation to the event states.

Little's links in action

The embodiment of diasporic Little's links as Black motherhood politics shapes Black women politicians' trajectories. For Black women in Costa Rican politics, following Bernard Little's model, the maternal heritage of their activism is central. Whereas the initial examples highlight Black fathers' influence on Black women's political careers, there is another and crucial link to national politics. When they speak of their own experiences, Afro-Caribbean women in politics expose the limits of dominant understandings of their own paths to power that privilege the role of men in their lives. In their accounts, these women emphasize instead the importance of their mothers and their own experiences of being Black mothers, and their relationships with other Black mothers, children, and extended families through community activism as the motivation for their political engagement.

Martha Johnson Maxwell, the first female governor of the province of Limón, reenacts Bernard Little's legacy when recounting the influence of her mother, Lucilla, on her own Black political consciousness and later activism. A first-generation Jamaican immigrant to the Central American Caribbean, her mother, also an English teacher, "had that fortitude

[28] Carmen Hutchinson Miller, December 22, 2016, Alajuela City, Alajuela.
[29] Laura Wilson Robinson, September 3, 2016, Talamanca City, Limón.

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Figure 4. Women of Ebony Ceremony, 2001. *From left to right*: Joycelyn Sawyers Royal (Congresswoman, 1998–2002); Elayne Whyte Gómez (Vice Chancellor, 1998–2006), and Eulalia Bernard Little. Centro de Mujeres Afrocostarricenses Archive.

and strength and she instilled it in us: You do not lower your head for anything in the world, you are Black and proud. And I engraved these words on me."[30] Johnson is also linked to Maureen Clarke as her political advisor.[31] When Clarke, previously a congresswoman, vice-mayor, and government minister, tells her story, she says that the names of her mother, Emilia (Amelia) Clarke, and her "othermother," her aunt Harriet Russell, are crucial.[32] By virtue of her relationship with diasporic activism, which includes creating the Afro-Costa Rican Research and Study Center, Johnson's political career lives up to the image of the outsider politician. Clarke's trajectory seems to align with the image of the insider, having a more traditional political and party career. However, both routes converge in the legacy and practice of diasporic political motherhood. "Decisions to become social activists" (Hill Collins 2000, 189) derive from and transform a legacy and a will to make an impact for future Black generations (Story 2014). In Maureen Clarke's words:

> In our gatherings, for example, we mentioned our [Black women] pioneers, the previous ones, which preceded us in the struggle and who we see little. We inherit their spirit of struggle. They fought in their areas and perhaps not all in politics, or not at

[30] Martha Johnson Maxwell, interview, January 12, 2017, San José City, San José.

[31] Maureen Clarke's political career has included serving as minister for the status of women, minister of justice and grace, and minister of the interior and police. She was also vice-mayor of San José (the capital) and congresswoman. Martha Johnson has accompanied her in several of these institutions and served as her advisor for the 2014–2018 period in Congress.

[32] Maureen Clarke Clarke, interview, January 12, 2017, San José City, San José. In her interview, Clarke emphasized how her mother was named "Emilia" by the Costa Rican registry because her real English name, Amelia, was not understood by the Hispanic national authorities.

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> the highest level of national politics, because they did not have the possibilities and opportunities. What has mattered, at least for me, is to leave an example for other Black women to come. Because I had the privilege of getting to these positions, I can't abandon the fight for my ethnic group . . . . Furthermore, I must forge greater opportunities for my grandchildren and I hope they live in a society where what I am still fighting for, becomes history . . . . I want my grandchildren to be seen as any other person and have the same opportunities as any other person.[33]

Assessing Black women's paths to the state through the lenses of the institution of Black motherhood and the experience of Little's links complements previous explanations of women in national politics. We may find supporting evidence for the idea of women getting into politics due to family or male tradition (Skard 2015; Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2009; Schwindt-Bayer, Vallejo, and Cantú 2022). However, this tradition is Black and Caribbean. We may find supporting evidence for the role of social movements in paving women's paths to politics. But the activism or public visibility that channels an invitation from a political party, and its masculinist leadership, are rooted in a Black motherhood institution "that politicizes Black women" (Hill Collins 2000, 194). As the first Costa Rican Black woman vice president, Epsy Campbell, explains, "my foray into politics happens through activism." When she was invited for the 2002 elections to enroll and became a candidate for congress of the party that made her vice president in 2018, she emphasized her identity as a Black woman activist, performing Black motherhood politics:

> When they invited me, at first, I said: "But what am I going to do in politics?" I did an internal DAFO, a list of advantages and disadvantages. I called about 50,000 people (many of them women and Black women) and asked them: does it make sense to enter into politics? And finally, I agreed. But I agreed on one condition. I wrote a letter to the party saying that I could accept a nomination as long as I could continue to carry the flags that I had historically carried as an activist. If that was a space *where I could raise the banners of human rights, of Black people, of women, of Black young generations, yes; if not, no.* The truth is that I had not requested my arrival to the party either.[34]

Along the same lines, the experiences of the majority of Campbell's predecessors (included in Figure 1) illustrate a Black Caribbean legacy of women's activism that increased their public visibility and led to them being invited to run by a political party or a male political leader. For example, the congresswomen Thelma Curling Rodríguez, Marcelle Taylor Brown, and Joycelyn Sawyers Royal were each invited to join the race by their parties' respective leaders, former presidents Luis Alberto Monge (1982–1986), Rafael Ángel Calderón Fournier (1990–1994), and José María Figueres Olsen (1994–1998). But having the support of a caudillo/male leader or a party invitation, although crucial, was preceded by decades of their political activism and that of other Black women. They were recruited for their public visibility, but that visibility was rooted in the institutions of Black political motherhood.

Joycelyn Sawyers explains her successful congressional campaign by linking her political duties and her mothering and othermothering experience as educator, saying: "Every time we went there [visiting the Congress], there was nothing about my Black children and my Black girl [her only daughter]. I never thought that one day I would be able to arrive . . . . It was just seeing, wishing and teaching here." Her motivation for proposing the multicultural reform of the Constitution was also framed within the Black motherhood institution. She described that drive as "my 'always' concern for my Black children whom I

[33] Maureen Clarke Clarke, interview.
[34] Epsy Campbell Barr, interview.

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did not see in the Constitution."[35] Moreover, the long process to achieve multicultural constitutionalism serves as an example of how Black women from different parties embodied Little's links through their Black mothering, othermothering, and women-centered network politics.

On August 24, 2015, President Luis Guillermo Solís Rivera signed the reform of the Article 1 of the Political Constitution of Costa Rica to acknowledge the multiethnic and pluricultural character of the nation. In the ceremony, Joycelyn Sawyers, the proponent of this reform during her term as a congresswoman (1998–2002), said with great emotion: "Hundreds of voices from my ancestors overwhelm me and flutter through my head and I am sure they are also fluttering around this beautiful setting." She mentioned Alex Curling, the first Black congressmen, but she also evoked her Black mother, Eleonora Sawyers, as a protagonist and reason for her fight. Ms. Joyce, as she is known in her community, gave thanks to the president for being true to his word: "the one ... that he committed when he went to Limón." Almost twenty years after presenting the project in Congress and during the 2013 electoral process, a group of Afro-Costa Rican women spearheaded the organization and signing of the "Campaign Commitment" in Limón, an agreement which included the multicultural reform. Yelgi Verley Knight, the Black woman mayor of Siquirres (in Limón), and the Afro-Costa Rican Women's Center (Centro de Mujeres Afrocostarricenses) pushed the agenda, with the support of other Black organizations, most of them led or constituted by Black women, such as the Ladies Unity Club (Muñoz-Muñoz 2017).

During her speech, Ms. Joyce praised the work of Congress, but she highlighted the names of Maureen Clarke Clarke and Epsy Campbell Barr, the two Black congresswoman who "reintroduced" the project and "pushed" the debates since the beginning of their terms. Reading the debates around a project that took two generations of Black women to become a law, it is clear that their political interventions are motivated by their daughters, grandchildren, and the Afro-Costa Rican youth. Indeed, during these debates on multiculturalism, Epsy Campbell stated that as a Black woman, daughter, mother, and grandmother as well as a third-generation West Indian immigrant, she saw this as "not a minor discussion." Black generations "will not need to fight for something as basic as being recognized by the Constitution," she claimed.[36] It is a statement that resembles Laura Hall's aspirations, quoted previously: "There must be a [Black] generation born without the need to fight for their right to be as any other person."

Campbell's personal investment to achieving the reform of the constitution as a congresswoman included reading one of her sister's poems, Shirley Campbell Barr's "Rotundamente negra." This political gesture of making visible her Black female body and being in the plenary room was repeated and amplified almost three years later. During Inauguration Day, Shirley Campbell Barr herself, a Black woman activist and poet like Eulalia Bernard Little, recited the same verses, celebrating her sister Epsy as the first Black woman vice president of Costa Rica. Both Campbell sisters were invoking a diasporic genealogy of Little's links from which Black women claim their right to be political agents in an imagined White nation. Figure 5 captures the moment of Shirley Campbell Barr's recitation on May 8, 2014.

Eulalia Bernard Little passed away on July 11, 2021. I joined a panel to remember her intellectual and political legacy three days later. Shirley Campbell Barr was there. She emphasized how Eulalia's ways of "occupying spaces" influenced the Black consciousness and political empowerment of her generation and others. Shirley described her siblings as sons and daughters of Eulalia. She emphasized one name: "and my sister [Epsy] who today occupies such an important political position ... we were all empowered by Eulalia." This

[35] Joycelyn Sawyers Royal, interview.

[36] See Asamblea Legislativa de la República de Costa Rica, 2015, "Expediente 17150: Reforma Constitucional del Artículo 1 para establecer el carácter multiétnico y pluricultural de Costa Rica (Ley 9325)," 346–347.

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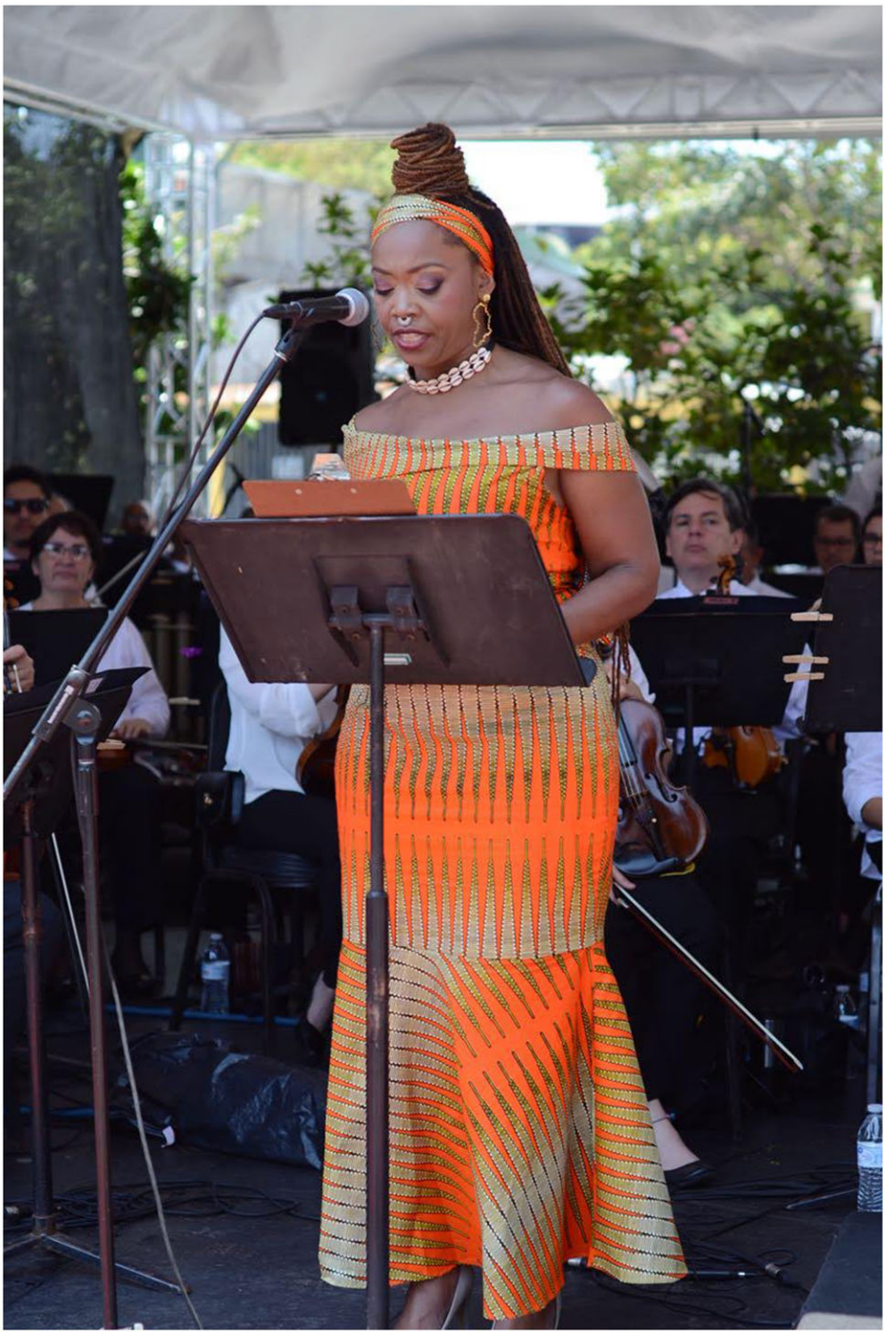

Figure 5. *Rotundamente negra* in the 2018 *Traspaso de poderes* ceremony. Shirley Campbell Barr reciting her poem on May 8, 2014. Shirley Campbell Barr's personal archive.

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suggested a recognition of causation between Eulalia Bernard Little's legacy and the first Costa Rican Black vice president. Her statement explicitly invoked Little's links.

Final remarks

Little's links offer an intersectional explanation that weaves together a tradition of Caribbean Black mothers' and othermothers' community activism, relationships, and networking as supports for Black women's participation in national politics. Beyond the recognition of exceptional, charismatic figures, and next to the successful trend in implementing gender quotas, the Costa Rican experience demonstrates that Black women's political participation is catalyzed by a diasporic political motherhood practice that predates the identity politics era. As evidence of a Black women's genealogy of politicians flowing from Eulalia Bernard Little (and her mother), the concept of Little's links focuses on the ways that Black women have been politically motivated to work for the betterment of their Black communities, and how those shared aspirations have influenced and linked their political trajectories.

The political trajectory of the first Black woman vice president in Costa Rica builds on three generations of women whose engagement in formal politics is rooted in their race, gender and ethnic intertwined positionalities as Black women of West Indian descent. The trajectory of Epsy Campbell cannot be understood without that of Joycelyn Sawyers or Eulalia Bernard, and their mothers and other Black Caribbean women's black motherhood, othermothering, and women-centered networks politics before them. Black women continue a tradition of political participation in their Black communities, a political practice that links them together and propels their routes to the state. The centrality of female figures and their Black Caribbean understanding of political activism complicate premature assumptions of the influence of elites, family, and male figures as the only explanation for their political success.

An understanding of Black women's motherhood politics in Costa Rica based on historical and ethnographic evidence can help inform debates about Black women's political engagement and other ways to promote it, in combination with gender and/or ethnic quotas (Htun 2016). From that stance, Little's links may offer a complementary explanation about women's paths to state power in Latin America. Black motherhood politics are enacted differently across the diaspora, a variability that warrants further attention. Having this Central American example of Black motherhood politics offers a point of departure for better understanding the conditions that support Black women to become Black political subjects (Paschel 2016), and engage in national politics elsewhere. The case can even trigger an intersectional analysis of the "contagious effect of female success" in electoral politics (Speck 2018). Ultimately, Black, feminist, and Afro-Caribbean politics in the state invigorate the field of Afro-Latin American politics (Laó-Montes 2009).

Marianela Muñoz-Muñoz holds a PhD in Latin American studies, with doctoral portfolios in African and African diaspora studies and Native American and Indigenous studies, from the University of Texas at Austin. Her dissertation, "Bilingüismo político: Afrocaribeñas en el Estado blanco y multicultural costarricense (1978–2017)," earned the Lozano Long Institute in Latin American Studies' Best Dissertation Award in 2018. She is professor at the School of Philology, Linguistics, and Literature at the University of Costa Rica and a Fulbright-Laspau scholar. Her current book project focuses on Black women's politics and political thought inside the state. Other research interests include race and ethnicity in Latin America; Indigenous and Black epistemologies and literature; and decolonial, feminist, and Black cultural studies in the Caribbean and Central America.

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