Afrodescendant studies in Latin America: racism and mestizaje

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Abstract: In this selective view of Afrodescendant Studies in Latin America, I start with issues of naming and racial classification, before exploring issues of racial discrimination and racism, and how these are addressed by governments and black social movements. This raises the question of whiteness and privilege. I then review the status of ideologies and practices of mestizaje, in the wake of 30 years of black political mobilization.

Keywords: Afro-Latin; racial discrimination; racism; blacks; Latin America; mestizaje

Introduction

The study of Afrodescendants in Latin America can be traced back to historiographical work on African enslavement, starting with Tannenbaum's *Slave and Citizen* (Tannenbaum 1948), which compared Latin American (usually Brazil) with the United States and often sought to link colonial regimes of enslavement to post-colonial regimes of race relations and answer the question of why in the southern United States rigid patterns of racial segregation emerged, while in Brazil they did not. The underlying implication that in Brazil racism was less of a problem than in the USA was soon

challenged, although it has still not completely disappeared (Da Costa 2016a). Recent historical research has tended to avoid broad comparisons, conscious of the way that comparative analysis can isolate “cases” and ignore interactions between them (Palmié 2008; Seigel 2005; Stoler 2001). Instead, the focus has been on transnational circulations of ideas, people and objects (Da Costa 2016b; Ferreira Furtado 2012; Matory 2005; Seigel 2009) and how these constitute cultural complexes that may appear to have developed in a purely local or national frame. Historians have also focused more on the diversity of Afrodescendant experience within Latin America, geographically and temporally. Rappaport (2014), for example, argues that the generic model of a “sociedad de castas”, often used to characterize colonial Latin America, did not exist in sixteenth-century New Granada. Detailed local studies, such as that of Maya Restrepo (2005), focused on seventeenth-century Cartagena and Antioquia, have unpacked the idea of a common Latin American model.

Social and cultural research on “Afro-Latin Americans” (see below on terminology) grew slowly from the 1950s. On the one hand, this built on the early work of key figures such as the Cuban Fernando Ortiz and the Brazilian Raimundo Nina Rodrigues - both lodged in social evolutionist frames - and the US scholar Melville Herskovits, who were all interested in Afro-Latin culture. On the other hand, it built on the sociological concerns of the early UNESCO studies of Brazilian racial relations, which explored themes of racial and class inequality. These currents of research have accelerated markedly from the 1990s, due to the rapid expansion of Afrodescendant social movements, the regional turn towards multiculturalism and the impact of the 2001 Durban

World Conference Against Racism. Organizations such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank have also taken an increasing interest in Afrodescendant populations (Sanchez and Bryan 2003).

The bias of the research - especially that published in English - towards Brazil remains (see, for example, Hernández 2013), but the geographical scope has widened considerably, indicating the variety of black experiences. There is no room here to cite all the relevant literature - for overviews see Andrews (2004, 2016), Andrews and De la Fuente (2018) and Wade (2010) - but, for example, the situation of a small minority, such as Garifuna communities in Guatemala and Honduras (Anderson and England 2004; England 1999; Hale 2005; Thorne 2004) or Creole, English-speaking black populations on the coast of Nicaragua (Goett 2017; Gordon 1998) and Costa Rica (Foote 2004; Sharman 2001), where differences in language and culture intertwine with race, contrast greatly with the situation in the Dominican Republic, where the vast majority of the population is of African descent, yet the key identification is as *dominicano*, and blackness tends not to form a vital aspect of identity. In fact, the term *indio* became current, especially during Trujillo's dictatorship, to describe this population, which national elites were at pains to clearly distinguish from neighbouring "black" Haiti (Baud 2002; Matibag 2003; Torres-Saillant 2000). Due to the bias of the literature towards Brazil and my own experience in Colombia, these two countries figure heavily in what follows.

Names and categories

The issue of the racialized terms and categories applied to and claimed by Afrodescendants in Latin America has been an important one, politically and sociologically. From a social science perspective, it was common to think that racism required clarity of categorization: to exclude or subordinate a set of people, one needed to be clear who they were as a collective group. The fact that in Latin America it was often possible to find multiple terms to describe "race" or colour, and that often there was a variety of opinion about which term should be used to describe a given individual, seemed to indicate that racism could not operate, or at least not in a systematic fashion. Politically, the corollary of this was taken to be that it was difficult to form a self-conscious and politically solidary collective of "black" people, because the boundaries of such a category were vague and did not distinguish clearly between *negro* ("black") and *moreno*, *pardo* or *mulato* ("brown") (Harris 1974; Toplin 1981). Since then, practices of naming and classifying have changed and seemingly clearer categories are in use in many areas of Latin America. Has racial ambiguity declined?

The term *negro*, used by many academics in the mid to late twentieth century, was avoided by many individuals to whom it was meant to apply, because of its pejorative connotations of low status and ugliness. The objectifying dangers of terms such as *los negros* could be partially avoided by referring to *personas negras* or *gente negra*, but euphemistic terms such as *moreno* were - and still are - common in everyday parlance (Streicker 1995; Sue 2013; Telles 2004). Academic usage avoided the problem by employing the prefix Afro - "Afro-Cuban" and "Afro-Brazilian" were in use from the early

twentieth century and “Afro-Colombian” was used early on by José Arboleda (1952), becoming increasingly common in the 1990s. Along these lines, the term Afrodescendant has become popular, especially after the 2001 Durban conference and in the internationalist circles of such bodies as the Inter-American Development Bank or the United Nations, where increasing attention is being paid to Afro-Latins (Sanchez and Bryan 2003; Santos Roland 2002; Zoninsein 2001). At the same time, the term *negro* has become a political rallying point in many countries, partly obeying the well-known logic by which a term associated with subordination is re-signified by people in the subordinate category as a term of political (and perhaps everyday) solidarity.

This trend toward a clearer categorical distinction between black and non-black (whether this is white, mestizo or indigenous) is linked to a number of developments. First, in Brazil, statistical studies from the late 1970s started to lump together the census categories of *pardo* (brown, mixed) and *preto* (black) in order to compare them to *branco* (white): the socio-economic differences between *pardos* and *pretos* was very small compared to the differences between both categories - labelled *negros* - and *brancos* (Silva 1985). This classification system has now become standard not just in Brazilian academic and activist circles, but also in state policy, which has formulated affirmative actions for *negros* (Guimarães 2017; Htun 2004).

Second, national censuses across the region began in the 1990s to count indigenous and Afrodescendant populations, as part of the turn to multiculturalism. By 2010, only Chile and the Dominican Republic had not counted Afrodescendants (Cruces, García Domench, and Pinto 2012;

Loveman 2014, 254). Self-identification is standard procedure in these censuses and, of course, many “Afrodescendants” in Latin America may also want to claim indigenous and/or European descent: their Afro ancestry may be only one aspect of their ideas about themselves (Burdick 1998). But in the way the options are presented in the questions and in the lack of options to simultaneously claim multiple identities or ancestries, there is a clear tendency to create a neat category of Afrodescendant, distinguished from both indigenous and a third category, often undefined and residual but certainly neither Afro nor indigenous. This resonates with the political pressure to positively identify with blackness, as expressed in the Brazilian civil society campaign first launched prior to the 1991 census: “Não deixe sua cor passar em branco” (do not let your colour be blanked/whitened).

Some might interpret this change as the imposition of US racial categories on a Latin American reality (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1999) - and it is true that series of discussions about ethnic inclusion in Latin American censuses under the rubric “Todos Contamos” was funded by the World Bank and supported by the Ford Foundation, among others - but the move clearly obeys a wider transnational tendency towards valorizing blackness and combatting racism, in which the nations and black movements of Latin American countries such as Brazil have been active participants (Hanchard 2003). However, while these changes show a trend to create inclusive categories of black people, Afro-Colombians, Afro-Latins and so on, as if these were clear categories, it is still evident from recent scholarship that

these categories do not command collective agreement and do shift according to context (Sansone 2003, ch. 1; Telles 2002).

For example, in Brazil, the implementation of racial quotas in public university admissions from the early 2000s caused controversy for various reasons, such as the idea that quotas would create greater racial friction, and that they would institutionalize racial difference when the longer-term objective was surely to realize a society in which race made no difference. One related concern was that it was very difficult, in the Brazilian context, to tell who was "really" black, and thus eligible for a black quota place. This was linked to a concern with "fraud", i.e. the fear that people who were not "really" black would apply for places reserved for black applicants. Although some universities experimented with in-house verification commissions, tasked with identifying legitimate black candidates (Maio and Santos 2005), self-declaration became the accepted solution. When in 2014 affirmative action extended to some areas of state employment, the concern with fraud and verification led to the formal institution of verification commissions in government agencies (Guimarães 2017). The rationale for this, enunciated by the state and black activists alike, was that affirmative action should work to benefit people who would be likely, in the Brazilian context, to suffer racial discrimination - that is, people who would be seen as "black" by others who controlled access to important resources (jobs, education, housing, security) and might exclude or victimize them. Others who might claim black ancestry, but who would not be identified as black by, say, a policeman or a recruitment manager, should not benefit. While these events may be creating increasingly

clear categorical distinctions, based mainly on appearance alone, rather than combined with identity and culture, it is clear that they are symptomatic of a context in which racial identity is still ambiguous.

Another example comes from Sue's ethnography of Veracruz, Mexico. She distinguishes between what she calls "colour discourse" and "race talk". People easily used a series of colour terms (*negro*, *moreno*, *moreno claro* [light brown], *güero* [light-haired/skinned], *blanco*) to describe the appearance of an individual in relative terms (i.e. someone was always *moreno* in relation to another who was less so, which meant the same person was more *claro or güero* in relation to another who was darker than her). People could also use some of the same terms, and others, such as mestizo and indígena, to talk about "race", but this provoked unease and uncertainty, because it implied connotations of hierarchy, group classifications and racism. Although Sue's distinction between discourses of race and colour is a little tenuous - even colour talk can imply hierarchical and racist distinctions (Moreno Figueroa 2008, 2012) - the point is that, in Mexico, the contextual and relational shifting of racialised categories and labels is still very evident. This is partly a function of the Mexican context, where blackness is a weaker presence than in Colombia or Brazil and black political mobilization is very muted.

In sum, I believe my view of a decade ago on practices of classification still holds true:

> clarity of naming appears to co-exist with continuing ambiguity in classifying practices and that the key to Latin American racial

> terminologies lies in grasping that people may make clear identifications of self and other *in particular contexts*, which may have far-reaching structural consequences in terms of labour markets or political mobilizations or police harassment, without there being a collective consensus, *independent of context*, on who is "black", "brown" and "white". Racial discrimination can co-exist very easily with classificatory ambiguity. Clarity of categorization at the collective social level is only necessary if rigorous systems of racial segregation or differential rights are being enforced, such as in the "Jim Crow" USA or apartheid South Africa. (Wade 2006, 109)

Racial discrimination and racism

A perennial theme in the study of Afrodescendants in Latin America is that of racial discrimination and racism. The separation of these two concepts here is meant to point towards the difference - admittedly hard to pin down - between specific acts and attitudes that discriminate on racial grounds and an overall structure of racialized disadvantage and privilege, perpetuated through multiple mechanisms, driven by diverse agents and motivations, not always clearly and individually linked to overtly racialized ideas and meanings. A key issue here, in my view, is that while racial discrimination is getting increasing attention in the public sphere in some Latin American countries - usually in relation to Afrodescendants, rather than indigenous peoples - racism as a set of structural processes receives rather less attention, probably because it

raises unwelcome questions about deep-seated inequalities, linked to class structures and elite/white privilege.

The 1950s UNESCO studies of Brazil, from one perspective, made affirmations about racial inequality and racial discrimination that were timid and equivocal; but from another perspective, insofar as some of them operated with a Marxist-inflected approach that firmly linked racial inequality to class structures, they set the basis for an understanding of structural racism (Maio 2001; Wade 2010, 52-9). These foundations led, from the 1970s onwards, to extensive documentation and measurement of racial inequality and the role of racial discrimination; but the analysis of structural racism was less developed. The mapping of racial inequality and discrimination often took two main forms, which might co-exist in a single case study.

First, quantitative data have been used to show racial inequality and statistically isolate the effect of "race" considered as a mathematical variable impacting on, say, income, alongside other variables, such as gender, age, occupation, education, etc. (Lovell 1994, 2006; Viáfara López 2008; Viáfara López and Urrea Giraldo 2006). These data - which have been most thoroughly analyzed for Brazil, with Colombia now catching up - have shown that race has an impact on life chances that is independent of and additional to class. A recent addition to this corpus of work uses skin colour, measured on a scale of 1 to 11 by an interviewer with a colour palette, as an independent variable (Telles and Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America 2014). While this raised some hackles because of its similarity to nineteenth-century anthropometrics deployed in the service of racist science,

it was actually an attempt to grasp a factor - skin colour - that has often been seen as key to racial inequality, but that is only partially captured by self-classification categories such as Afro-Colombian or *pardo*. The data collected for Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Peru showed, for example, that level of education correlated more closely to skin colour than to identity categories.

Second, qualitative data have been used to convey the experiences of black and dark-skinned people who confront racial discrimination and prejudice (Anderson 2002; Burdick 1998, 2013; Sheriff 2001; Streicker 1995; Twine 1998; Viveros Vigoya 2002; Wade 1993). These data have revealed trauma and pain, as well as deep-seated racist attitudes; they have also revealed that racial discrimination can operate within families and among mestizos (Hordge-Freeman 2015; Moreno Figueroa 2012). Such experiential data hint at the operation of structural racism insofar as they show how race and class are often lived together, but if the analysis stays at the level of experience, it has difficulty in grasping the structural processes at work. These processes need an historical analysis, which can reveal the cumulative effects of political-economic and biopolitical mechanisms, which, when articulated with the underlying racialized hierarchies of value that define some lives as more worthy than others, operate to reproduce racialized disadvantage and privilege (Cárdenas 2012; Mosquera Rosero-Labbé and Barcelos 2007; Restrepo 2013; Restrepo and Rojas 2010; Wade 1993).

All this quantitative and qualitative research has opened the way for racial discrimination, and to some extent racism, to become a concern for the state and indeed black social movements themselves, which did not always

make racism the centre of their attention. The easiest step for the state to take has been to outlaw racial discrimination - a step first taken by Brazil in 1951 with the Afonso Arinos Law. Such laws are often ineffective, because an individual complainant has to bring a case and the standard of proof required is often very high (Hernández 2013, ch. 5). But some victories have been scored, with important symbolic results (Meertens 2009). Governments have also set up agencies to monitor and prevent racial discrimination - e.g. Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación (CONAPRED) in Mexico; Secretaria Especial de Políticas de Promoção da Igualdade Racial (SEPPIR) in Brazil; Observatorio de Discriminación in Colombia's Ministry of the Interior. Tokenism is a problem here and, for example, CONAPRED's remit is to cover all forms of discrimination; this dilutes the focus on racial discrimination and makes it virtually impossible to tackle, or even think about, structural racism.

The biggest steps have been take in Brazil, where racial inequality and the impact of racial discrimination have been most clearly shown, and where the vast majority of the large black population lives in cities, facing major problems of access to markets, albeit alongside many non-blacks who also live in poverty (in some favelas, a quarter of the population are whites). In Brazil, the issue of racism, which has long been central for most black activists, was finally acknowledged by the state in 1995 and led to extensive affirmative action legislation in higher education, health and, recently, state employment. The Supreme Court emitted a ruling in 2012 that explicitly recognized the role of affirmative action in correcting past injustices, which had become embedded in the social system and generated structural racism.

However, the 2012 Law of Social Quotas made class criteria primary, with racial criteria taking a subordinate role. In line with this, two-thirds of Brazilians think that race-based affirmative action is fair (Hernández 2013, 157), but research indicates that most people's support for race-based action is actually rooted in more general ideas about social inequality (Schwartzman and da Silva 2012). This reveals a sense that race and class are inextricably and structurally intertwined, which is necessary to grasp the operation of structural racism, but it also risks reducing race to class, erasing its specificity, understating its importance and undermining the rationale for the race-based affirmative action that black activists strongly support. The articulation of race and class - always a thorny question in studies of racialized inequality in Latin America - continues to be a tricky problem.

In Colombia, things took a slightly different route. Although affirmative actions were established in 1993 (Law 70) and thereafter, they were aimed at Afro-Colombians as a culturally distinct "ethnic group", located in the under-developed Pacific coast region, where only a minority of Afro-Colombians actually lived (Restrepo 2013; Wade 1995). The black social movement, which in the 1970s and 80s had focused quite strongly on racism, now grew quickly, but frequently participated in this ethnicization, in which racial discrimination and racism were not highlighted. Although the Constitutional Court justified Law 70 in terms of historic disadvantage, it is only recently that the question of racism has begun to appear in state agendas, albeit in a limited way that focuses mostly on questions of discrimination, rather than structural racism (Wade 2009a). For example, the state has been mostly deaf

to the idea of reparations, viewed in light of the history of enslavement (Mosquera Rosero-Labbé and Barcelos 2007). The plight of Afro-Colombians displaced by violence from the Pacific region to the cities of the interior, for example, is seen by the state as needing attention, but as a short-term emergency caused by contingent problems of public disorder, rather than a problem linked to deep-seated mechanisms of racialized exclusion, tied to underlying processes of political-economic development and biopolitical governance (Cárdenas 2012; Escobar 2004). Black social movements are increasingly re-orienting themselves to include a focus on racism, but in quite varied ways. The organization Chao Racismo, for example, promotes black entrepreneurialism to create a black middle class and break the stereotyped connection between blackness and low status; in contrast, the organization Cimarrón has a more structural view of racism.

In Colombia, as in Brazil, the way racial inequality articulates with social inequality more generally remains a contested terrain for academic analysis and social policy. In Latin America, one could say that race is experienced in large part through the class system. To adapt Stuart Hall's formulation - that "race is the modality in which class is 'lived'" (Hall 1980, 340) - one could say that "class is the modality in which race is lived". This does *not* mean that race can be reduced to - i.e., explained (away) in terms of - class, or that race is insignificant compared to class. On the contrary, it attempts to locate the operation of structural racism in Latin America.

Interesting in this respect is the Cuban experience. Under Castro, an all-out attack on class inequalities certainly helped Afro-Cubans, who were

concentrated in the lower classes. But it seems this was not enough to eradicate the powerful racism that in Cuban society. In fact, racism resurged during the “special period” following the collapse of the USSR, which brought the increasing privatization of parts of the economy, especially through tourism (De la Fuente 2001; Pérez Sarduy 1998; Perry 2015; Sawyer 2006). Racism cannot be addressed only by reforming class structures, even in a radical way, even if such reform is necessary for addressing structural racism.

Whiteness

An emphasis on structural racism directs our analytic gaze towards privilege and whiteness, and reminds us that racism is not just about exclusion of subordinated people but also the inclusion of other people in a space of privilege. This inclusion/exclusion dynamic is a relational process that separates people at multiple levels: privilege is not just an elite business, but is immanent in the hierarchy

“Whiteness studies” have become fashionable in the social sciences and humanities, in an attempt to interrogate the “unmarked” position and subject, revealing them as in a process of historical construction and as dependent for their existence on the racialised subordinate, and uncovering the evasions and disavowals of power and hierarchy that are typical of those occupying an unmarked position (Kolchin 2002; Nayak 2007; Roediger 2006). Critiques of this trend point to the dangers of essentializing a link between white bodies and whiteness as a structural position of privilege; the focus should be on the latter, rather than the former. There is also a danger that

focusing on whiteness has the unintended consequence of yet again marginalizing non-whiteness (Nayak 2007).

Studies of racial formation in Latin America have been arguably slightly ahead of the game in terms of whiteness studies, insofar as a key theme has long been “whitening”, understood both as a racist version of nation-building ideologies of mestizaje, which sought to attract European immigrants to “improve” the national population (Leal and Langebaek 2010), and as an individual process of upward mobility by which people distance themselves from blackness (and indigeneity) by changing their behaviour and social milieu and perhaps finding a lighter-skinned spouse (Stolcke 1992) - a process which might, or might not, be motivated by a desire to escape blackness (Wade 1993, ch. 17). The theme of whitening directed some analytic attention to whiteness; it also invited an understanding of whiteness as relational - i.e. whiteness was something desired but perhaps only partially achieved; what mattered was to be whiter than you had been before, rather than just white.

However, studies of whitening did not necessarily develop these relational possibilities until more recently. Moreno Figueroa (2010), for example, argues that in Mexico, whiteness as a key motif is blurred by ideas about being mestizo, which connote sameness and equality. Co-existing with these notions of equality are ideas about the value of *relative* whiteness, which allow a mestizo person both to discriminate (against someone seen as darker than her) *and* feel discriminated against (as, for example, darker than a favoured sibling). In Mexico, whiteness is not simply unmarked, because mestizo people are aware they can be both inside and outside it, which makes

it relational and precarious. A recent book, edited by Alberto and Elena (2016), interrogates the whiteness long associated with Argentina, noting the tortuous process by which this image has been constructed over time. They acknowledge that Argentinian whiteness is not just a myth, but a complex and contradictory reality, exclusive, of course, but also inclusive (it has absorbed in uneven ways Jews, Afro-Argentines and indigenous peoples). The idea of Argentina as *relatively* white is shadowed and haunted by persistent traces of brownness, blackness and indigeneity, present in cuisine (*cocina criolla*), politics (*las cabecitas negras* was a term applied to the working-class supporters of Perón), family histories (white women recalling dark-skinned grandparents) and regional difference (e.g. the gauchos of *las pampas*). Such traces are, of course, well known in other Latin American nations.

Black social movements and mestizaje today

In my view, a key to understanding the location of Afrodescendants in Latin American racial formations is the simultaneous co-existence of processes that reproduce racial hierarchy and racial difference with processes that undo racial difference and thus *racial* hierarchy (without therefore undoing hierarchy more generally). Mestizaje as an ideology and a set of practices contains both possibilities as lived realities.

In one common approach, mestizaje is seen as a top-down ideology that masks racism and racial hierarchy under a “cloak” of apparent sameness (Hernández 2013, 4); it is an “ideological tool at the service of white and white-mestizo elites” (Rahier 2014, 79). In another, more nuanced approach,

mestizaje is seen as having two opposed faces: one from above, which tries to create homogeneity, and one from below, espoused by racialized subalterns, which celebrates diversity and contests the imposition of racialized homogeneity (Klor de Alva 1995; Mallon 1996). In this vein, scholars have shown how subaltern understandings of being mestizo can contest dominant versions, by asserting the possibility of being simultaneously mestizo and indigenous or black (De la Cadena 2000; French 2009). Both these broad approaches underestimate precisely the simultaneous imbrication of exclusion and inclusion, in which both tendencies are immanent in each other (Wade 2009b, 158-9). The very social processes and locations that act as modes of undoing racial difference and hierarchy - such as marriage and romantic relations across racial difference, or the mixed families that result from such relationships, or the existence of majority categories of "mestizo" people - are also places where racialized hierarchy can be forcefully reproduced, in a visceral way.

In this context, ethnic and racial social movements generally highlight (and contest) the multiple *exclusions* of Latin American racial formations, from invisibilization to marginalization and stigmatization of racial and ethnic minorities. In doing so, they generally emphasize cultural difference along racial and ethnic lines, demanding the right to space and respect for it. Although they seek inclusion in diverse ways, they are not predisposed to see it as an already existing element. However, they confront the problem that ideologies of mestizaje have been able to adapt very nimbly to demands to include difference, precisely because difference was always already

immanent in these ideologies. Official multiculturalism is not in fact the radical break from previous homogenizing ideologies that it appeared to be. The struggle then becomes one over exactly how racialized difference should be handled within the nation: state agencies attempt to reduce the scope of recognition, often making it tokenistic or not fully implementing the measures they agreed to on paper; social movements generally try to extend the scope, by pushing for greater state resources and opportunities for their constituents, and for differentialist policies. Even the integrationist stance adopted by organizations such as Colombia's Chao Racismo or Color de Colombia, which promote black economic and educational success, necessarily implies a differentialist approach insofar as such success, if it is to be anything more than tokenism, surely requires support targeted at poorer black people.

The challenge is then about the degree to which structural processes of racialized exclusion are addressed or, on the other hand, ignored. In this respect, it is evident that addressing structural processes involves much more than the explicit recognitions involved in identity politics and multiculturalism, however valuable these may be. This is why black (and indigenous) social movements tackle issues of land, ecology, water, health, education (not only in terms of curricula that seek to include, say, African history, but in terms of access to educational opportunities), security and violence, and gender inequality. The task is to show how *racialized* exclusions operate in these various domains, in which inequalities and exclusions are anyway deeply entrenched, but which also feed on racist stereotypes that value some lives as worth less attention and care than others. For example, the very high rates of

police violence suffered by black Brazilian men is seen by many ordinary black Brazilians themselves as the unexceptional product of a trigger-happy police force operating in a context in which poverty generates criminality; the racialized patterns of the violence do not attract their attention (Lamont et al. 2016, 167). But there is no doubt that racial stereotypes - held by non-black and black policemen alike - feed into these patterns.

The more the social movements address deep-seated structural exclusions, the greater the resistance from the state and privileged sectors of society that feel threatened. This becomes evident in the violence suffered by the black (and indigenous) movements and communities involved in these struggles - for example in Colombia, where the violence is often carried out by the private sector, arguably acting as proxies for the state (Escobar 2004; Oslender 2004; Wade 2016). The violence is often not racially motivated in a direct way, but it feeds on implicit racialized hierarchies of value and reproduces racialized exclusions.

Meanwhile, the possibility of recognizing the potential of mestizaje to undo racial difference continues to be pervasive, not just as a tactic of the privileged to obfuscate racialized hierarchy and violence, but as an everyday lived, but *partial*, reality. Mestizaje retains this powerful possibility because, like all successful ideologies, it communicates “a version of social reality which is real and recognizable enough” to resonate with people’s lives (Sue 2013, 182, citing Terry Eagleton).

For example, in Brazil it is well known that the aesthetics of female beauty are powerfully structured by racialized values that favour (relative)

whiteness: Afro hair is “bad”, leading many black women to straighten it; dark skin is “ugly” leading many black women to lighten it; cosmetic surgeons offer to improve a “Negroid nose”, etc. In this context, the Instituto de Beleza Natural has found great success offering treatments to “relax” rather than straighten Afro hair; racial appearance is never mentioned and the promise is that the “improved” appearance will help women get ahead in the work place. It is partly true that this “contributes to a racial ideology that silences any questions [of race]” and “exploits the racial anxieties of black women” (Hordge-Freeman 2015, 95). But it also feeds on women’s actual experiences of a majority mestizo society in which a great many women have brown (not white nor black) skin and curly (not straight nor Afro) hair. This does not mean the mixed-race woman is free from the effects of racialized hierarchy - on the contrary it is well known that her body is exactly a site for the operation of such effects - but it does mean that the possibility of *being* mixed, neither black nor white, is a reality, not just a myth. The realities of exclusion and inclusion are immanent in each other and simultaneously present and this gives racial formations based on mestizaje and an enduring particularity that poses challenges for anti-racism.

Conclusion

For reasons of space and my own interests, this overview has been selective. I have only touched on questions of gender, which have been important in studies of Afro-descendants (Wade 2009b); and I have not addressed questions of indigenous-black alliances and relations, which also merit

increasing attention (Wade 2010). I have focused on questions of racism as these seem to me a central and somewhat understudied aspect. I have emphasized the need to unpack structural racism and to go beyond the paradigms of discrimination, understood as a generic issue, or racial discrimination understood simply as mechanisms of direct exclusion and stigmatization (Lamont et al. 2016). We need to go deeper and bring to bear a broad political economy and biopolitical perspective, which allows us to see racial politics and categories as linked to changing class structures and regimes of governance. Neoliberalization is vital to understand the politics of multiculturalism in the region (Hale 2005) and the specific situation of black communities in the Pacific coastal region of Colombia, which is impacted by the violence that afflicts the region, which in turn is connected to state development priorities and power struggles over them. Debates about affirmative action in Brazil and Colombia have to be seen in the context of the economic squeeze being experienced by the middle classes in both countries.

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