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Afro-Latin Studies

Reflections on the field

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The state of Afro-Latin studies is reviewed, starting with questions about terminology and racial classification, then exploring issues of racism and the relation between race and class. The impact of black (and indigenous) social movements on the field of study is then examined and this raises the question of how ideologies and practices of mestizaje have changed in the wake of ethnic mobilization and challenges to nation-building narratives of mestizaje. Finally, some of the implications of the concepts of diaspora and globalization are examined in relation to approaches to black culture.

Keywords: Afro-Latin; racism; blacks; Latin America; mestizaje; black culture

Introduction

Studies of Afro-Latins – if that is the appropriate term (see below) – have been framed by three broad concerns. The first has been the comparative place of Latin American systems of slavery and race relations in the Americas. Starting with Tannenbaum's classic *Slave and Citizen* (Tannenbaum, 1948), scholars have explored differences and similarities across the continent, with a strong but not exclusive focus on comparisons between Brazil and the southern USA (Foner & Genovese, 1969; Hoetink, 1973). One question was whether Latin America had more benign slavery than the USA – it was generally conceded that it did not – but more interesting was the issue of why slaves were able to free themselves (or be set free) more readily in the former region, and why processes of mixture between Africans and Europeans (and indigenous people) were more intensive in Latin America and gave rise to societies in which mixture was accorded greater social recognition, reflected in complex racial classifications and terminologies. This was the question, in short, of why most Latin American societies were seen as and saw themselves as 'mestizo' and formed through *mestizaje* (mixture between different 'races'). The answer is, not surprisingly, complex, but concerns differences in demographic regimes, political-economic systems and cultural attitudes, all operating over the *longue durée* (Marx, 1998).

This historical body of work paralleled a second body of work, which was concerned with exploring issues of racism and racial discrimination, again with a strong comparative focus. After World War II, attention turned to Brazil as a

seeming – and self-avowed – example of a ‘racial democracy’, an image based precisely on the mestizo character of the society. Studies focused on the apparent ambiguity of racial classification and terminology, and on evidence of racial discrimination and racism. Comparisons were made explicitly or implicitly with the USA and an over-arching frame of reference was how racial categories fitted, or did not, with developing modernity, particularly capitalism. The image of Latin American ‘racial democracy’ was severely dented, but many studies still saw Brazil, especially, as very distinct from – even the opposite – of the USA and as a society in which class was the dominant axis of identity.

Drawing on this work, studies began to turn to the question of black resistance and political mobilization, focusing not only on the black social movements emerging in many countries, but on historical patterns of resistance. Key questions here concerned how ethnic movements emerged in mixed societies and what obstacles they faced, in terms of a perceived lack of clarity about who was black and of hegemonic ideas about the mixedness as the basis of national identity. Once again, comparisons were made with the USA and the character of the black movement there. The place of ‘blackness’ in the post-colonial Caribbean also served as a point of contrast.

The third frame of reference for Afro-Latin studies has been that of ‘black culture’ and its links, or lack of them, with Africa. Initial interest in tracing Africanisms, associated with Herskovits, developed into explorations of processes of syncretism and creolization. Black social movements were themselves concerned with culture and often with Africa – but also the USA and the Caribbean – as a point of reference. This eclectic Atlantic panorama fitted with emerging theoretical work on diaspora and globalization that has widened the frame within which Afro-Latin culture is understood.

In all this, it is worth noting that Afro-Latins and indigenous people tended to be separated out as distinct field of study, even though the mixedness of Latin American societies – even ones with substantial Afro-Latin populations – is clearly based as much on indigenusness as blackness and whiteness (and a great deal of work on *mestizaje* has looked at this process in the Andes and middle America). This seems to me a mistake. Afro-Latins have to be studied in a frame that includes whiteness and indigenusness (Vaughn, 2005; Wade, 1997b; Whitten, 1981).

In what follows, I give my own perspective on where Afro-Latin studies are currently at and where they might go in the future. My own experience in Colombia and the bias of the literature on Afro-Latins towards Brazil – despite recent diversification of this literature into other countries (for an overview, see Andrews, 2004) – means that these two countries figure heavily. I will start with some comments on racial classification and terminology and move onto discussions about racial discrimination. This leads into a section on black social movements, which prompts a consideration of the place of ideas about *mestizaje*, after a couple of decades of these movements being in existence. Finally, I look at questions of changing constructions of black culture.

What is in a name? Terminology and classification

Questions of racial terminology and classification play a key role in Afro-Latin studies. Early studies made much of the fact that there were many racial and color terms used by Brazilians (who were the subject of many of these studies on black people in Latin America) and that they used them in contextually shifting ways, which betrayed a lack of consensus about racial identity. Historical work also showed the use of shifting and multiple racial terminologies in, for example, Cuba (Martinez-Alier, 1989) as well as New Spain (Seed, 1982). Torres-Saillant (2000) argues that, in the Dominican Republic, compared to the USA, blackness has historically not been very salient in defining identity and racial that terminologies are multiple and shifting. This has underwritten ideas about Latin America being different from the USA and a society in which class was more important than race. Since then, practices of naming and classifying have changed and seemingly clearer, more inclusive categories are in use. Has racial ambiguity declined?

When I started my research career in the early 1980s, it was common to refer to 'black populations', or simply 'blacks'. In Latin America, the word *negros*, whether in Spanish or Portuguese, carried, and to some extent still carries, enough negative valence to make it uncomfortable to use in some circumstances. The leader of a Colombian organization called Cimarrón (subtitled The National Movement for the Human Rights of Black Communities in Colombia), Juan de Dios Mosquera, told me that *negro* should be used as an adjective rather than a noun, as the latter implied that blackness was the main or even sole important attribute of a person. Inspired by him, I began to use the term *gente negra* (black people) when writing in Spanish (Wade, 1997a). Despite protests from grammatical purists that this was a neologism – and possibly even an import from a US or UK context – it took on in some quarters of the Colombian academy (Barbary & Urrea, 2004; Camacho & Restrepo, 1999).

Meanwhile, it was also fairly common to refer to Afro-Cubans and Afro-Brazilians and, by the 1990s in Colombia, the term Afro-Colombian had begun to acquire currency, at least in academic circles and especially among those who wanted to highlight the role of historical African connections in shaping New World black cultures. 'Afro-Latins' and 'Afro-Latin Americans' were obvious extensions of this usage (Minority Rights Group, 1995); occasionally one finds 'Afro-Latinos' used to include black Latinos living in the USA (Dzidzienyo & Oboler, 2005). These usages do not necessarily focus on African connections, but rather link to the US style of hyphenated identities (if somewhat belatedly, as 'Afro-American' has long since been displaced by 'African American'). More recently still, the term Afro-descendant has become popular, especially 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 & Bryan, 2003; Santos Roland, 2002; Zoninsein, 2001), but also in many Latin American countries (Mosquera *et al.*, 2002; Safa, 2005, p. 312). Again, this obeys a US logic of putting everyone who has some African descent – although perhaps not just 'one drop' – in the same ethnic-racial category, but now with a transnational reach that includes all those considered to be part of a

global African diaspora. The term also responds to a growing interest, especially among black social movements, with an African cultural heritage.

The Colombian state, for one, has joined in with this expansive trend, moving from estimates of the Afro-Colombian population as 6 per cent, then 16 per cent and now 26 per cent of the national population (Wade, 2002b, p. 6). Nobles argues that, over the 20th century, the way Brazilian census data are collected and interpreted has helped shift Brazil away from an image of demographic whitening towards an image of majority non-whiteness (Nobles, 2000). Of course, many 'Afro-descendants' in Latin America may consider themselves to be as much or more Indo-descendants or Euro-descendants: the Afro part of the mix only identifies one aspect of what they may see as their inheritance. With the emphasis on self-identification, the term Afro-descendant acts as an invitation to join the diaspora as much as an objectifying classification.

These changes show a trend to talk in inclusive terms of black people, Afro-Brazilians, Afro-Latins and so on, as if these were clear categories. This trend has been fostered by the evident willingness of some people, who used to self-identify with more or less euphemistic terms such as *moreno* (Spanish and Portuguese: brown), to identify as *negro*, in a strategy of cultural vindication. The trend is also encouraged by the technique, commonly used in statistical studies of Brazil, of lumping together the census categories of *pardo* (brown, mixed) and *preto* (black) in order to compare them to *branco* (white). It is evident that these categories do not command collective agreement and do shift according to context, as recent scholarship continues to show (Sansone, 2003, ch. 1; Telles, 2002).

In this respect, one interesting avenue that I think needs greater attention is the way gender shapes the use of racial terminology. For example, while the meanings associated with *negra* and *negro* overlap strongly, there are differences in the way these terms are deployed, related to gender and sexuality. Telles (2004, p. 99) shows that in Brazil, survey interviewers are hesitant to classify as *preto* (black) women who classify themselves as such, especially if these women are well-educated. Telles suggests that interviewers want to avoid what they see as a demeaning classification and that this is stronger when classifying women rather than men and very strong indeed when classifying apparently high-status women.

On the other hand, historical and contemporary work shows that the image of the black, or dark-skinned, woman is strongly sexualized and that these women may be (sometimes willingly) targeted by lighter-skinned men for sexual relationships (Brennan, 2004; Caulfield, 2003; Martinez-Alier, 1989; Smith, 1997; Twine, 1998). The image of the black male is also sexualized, but in a more aggressive form, as a sexual predator (Viveros Vigoya, 2002). Thus, I speculate that the use of *negra* by light-skinned men may construct a more inclusive category of women seen as potential or desired sexual objects, while the use of *negro* by the same men may be more cautious, avoiding threats to their own sexual status. The gendered use of the terms by light-skinned women and by dark-skinned men and women, in contexts beyond the formal classification in surveys, would have to be explored empirically.

My view on practices of classification is that 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. Whether such clarity is strictly needed to enact positive discrimination – affirmative action programs, racial quotas – seems to me to be an open question (on which more, below).

Racial discrimination

The preceding section introduces the issue of how, and how much, racial discrimination operates in Latin America against Afro-Latins. Many studies indicate that it does. De la Fuente (2001) and Adams (2004) document this for Cuba, Anderson (2002) does for Honduras, as does Wright (1990) for Venezuela and various authors provide an overview (Andrews, 2004; Minority Rights Group, 1995; Sanchez & Bryan, 2003).

This question needs, however, to be seen in the context of the thorny question of the relationship between race and class, which still merits some clear thinking. An early approach, which characterized some of the work on Brazil of the 1940s and 1950s, was to oppose the Southern USA, where a 'caste' system operated in which racial identities defined status more strongly than class, to Brazil, which was basically a class society in which racial identities were superficial – and possibly disappearing – and the real divides were between rich and poor. This opposition created conceptual confusion: it is much more helpful to view both Brazil and the USA as class societies in which processes of racialization play different, though not opposed, roles – or, if one wants to avoid charges of theoretical class reductionism (Winant, 1992), as racialized societies in which class processes play different roles.

Whatever theoretical primacy one wants to assign to race and class – and in my view, this is now rather a sterile debate – it is still important to measure empirically the relative roles of race and class. It is not enough simply to point out how poverty-stricken much of the black (or indigenous) population is: significant though this is as a measure of overall racial equality in a society and perhaps as a stimulus to race-based affirmative action, such a measure does not tell us how much of such racial inequalities are the result of past discriminations and how much they are due to continuing racism. In practice, measuring the relative roles of race and class means either defining a third term, such as 'status', and measuring the relative impact of race and class on this (Harris, 1952); or measuring the impact racial identity has on a person's class position. The first method is difficult, because status (roughly, one's standing in the eyes of others who accept or reject you as an equal) is too subjective, contextual and hard to define; the second method takes the class system as the framework and looks at how racial identity shapes it. This has been the favored

technique in many Brazilian and Colombian studies, based on ‘controlling for class’, i.e. comparing white and non-white cohorts who have similar class and other characteristics (education, background, age, etc.) and seeing if they achieve differently in terms of social mobility (usually income, but also residential location). If they do achieve differently, and assuming all other influential variables have been controlled for, then the difference is probably due to racism.

A lot of work, mostly focused on Brazil, has been done to measure statistically to what extent racial discrimination operates against black people in Latin America. It is my impression that this work exceeds that statistically measuring racial discrimination against indigenous people – which seems to be taken more for granted (but see Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 1994). The overwhelming evidence from statistical analyses in Brazil is that racism does disadvantage black people in the labor market and educational system (Hasenbalg & Silva, 1999; Lovell, 1994; Lovell & Wood, 1998; Silva, 1985; Silva & Hasenbalg, 1999). Studies of particular firms can show more equivocal results (Araújo Castro & Guimarães, 1999). Studies in Colombia that have tried to achieve statistical rigor – whether more (Barbary *et al.*, 1999; Urrea Giraldo *et al.*, n.d.), or less (Wade 1993) – have shown that, while racial discrimination does operate in labor and housing markets, many Afro-Colombians broadly share a socio-economic level with many poor non-black Colombians. The main problem is that most Afro-Colombians are poor. For Cuba, while it is certain that, under socialism, an all-out attack on class inequalities favored Afro-Cubans, who were concentrated in the lower classes, this was never enough to eradicate the powerful racism that existed there. Indeed, racism seems to be gaining strength in the context of the special period and the increasing privatization of parts of the economy, especially through tourism (De la Fuente, 2000, 2001; Hagedorn, 2001; Pérez Sarduy, 1998).

These studies interestingly reveal how important gender is in shaping life chances in the class system: Lovell (1994) showed that in accounting for wage-earning differences between white men, black men and black women, more of the black–white difference was due to discrimination for black women than for black men. Even more of the difference was due to discrimination when comparing white women to white men (see also Safa, 2005, pp. 318–325).

If such statistical methods depend on analytically separating race and class, other studies have focused on how these things (and gender) intertwine in experience. This approach by no means rejects the data supplied by the statistical forcing apart of race, class and gender; it adds a different dimension. Rejecting all forms of class reductionism, Winant (1994) focuses on processes of ‘racial formation’, tracing how people pursue projects aimed at shaping racial ideologies, images and structures in ways that may themselves shape the class structure of society. This departs from the statistical approaches outlined above insofar as the latter take the basic class structure as given and then measure how much racial identity impinges on people’s life progress through it. Winant wants to see how different sets of people (e.g. politicians, black activists) try to shape racialized ideas and practices. Other more ethnographic studies – for example, by Burdick (1998), Sheriff (2001), Streicker (1995) and Twine (1998) – focus on how people experience race, class and gender together. For a black

working-class individual who experiences discrimination at the hands of non-black middle class people, it is not clear to him/her – or indeed to those doing the discrimination – what exactly is behind the discrimination: race or class (both mediated by gender); is it because s/he is poor or because s/he is black? Well, the point is that, in everyday life, the two things tend very frequently go together, even if statisticians can separate them out. Streicker (1995) shows how low class status, blackness and certain forms of gendered behavior (around sex and family life) connote each other in a working-class neighborhood in Cartagena, Colombia. Race is not a very public issue, local people deny racism occurs and racial identity is not a primary referent. Yet blackness is associated with being disreputable and poor and, in women, with being sexually loose, and, in men, of neglecting paternal responsibility. Reciprocally, things seen as disreputable and poor are also seen as black. The three statuses – blackness, poverty and gendered disreputability – imply each other in a circular process of mutual constitution.

These more ethnographic approaches also indicate the differences between the experiences of Afro-Latin men and women. For many black women, a key domain for experiencing race is domestic service in its various forms, often involving work in middle-class households. Racism in these contexts can be both intense – demeaning, humiliating – and softened by the quasi-familial relationships that may be formed. Servants may experience sexual harassment, but also opportunities to attend school and night classes. Afro-Latin men are also involved heavily in service occupations, but less often in these intimate domestic spaces. Their experience – which many black women also share – is likely to be of racial discrimination in more public domains.

Gender and race also intersect in marriage patterns: darker-skinned women may be able to marry whiter, wealthier men who perceive them as sexually attractive; attractiveness compensates for blackness. Darker-skinned men may only be able to marry lighter-skinned women if they (the men) are wealthy; wealth compensates for blackness – although not always as Fernandez (1996) shows for Cuban interracial marriages. Thus lighter-skinned men have a wider range of possible spouses to choose from, while darker-skinned men are more limited. Darker women have to be seen as attractive (and be able to convert that into a marital rather than just a sexual relation), while lighter-skinned women can use their whiteness as a resource in the marriage stakes (Burdick, 1998; Telles, 2004; Wade, 1993).

The important point of the qualitative approaches discussed above is that they address something specific about race in Latin America. This is that race is experienced in large part through the class system. To invert a famous phrase of Stuart Hall's – that 'race is the modality in which class is 'lived'' (Hall, 1980, p. 340) – one could say that 'class is the modality in which race is lived'. Ferreira da Silva (1998) makes the interesting argument that, in looking for processes of racial politicization in Brazil, we might need to pay attention to things that don't look like racial politics to someone accustomed to North American or perhaps European experiences – things that look, at first sight, more like class politics. This is *not* to say that race can be 'reduced to' – i.e. explained (away) in terms of – class, or that race is insignificant compared to class. It is to try and locate at least one aspect of the specificity of race in Latin America.

Black social movements

The recent politicization of blackness in Latin America into a '(new) social movement' has provided a great stimulus for Afro-Latin studies. I will only highlight a few themes: the expanded regional coverage of Afro-Latin studies; the role of US–Latin comparisons in a globalizing world; the relationship of blackness to indigeneity; and the question of national identity and multiculturalism.

Although there has been a steady current of social science work on Afro-Latins all over Latin America (e.g. Friedemann, 1984; Whitten, 1986), it has been Brazil that has dominated the academic scene. This has been changing over the last 10–15 years with more work emerging on areas such as Colombia (Arocha, 1998; Barbary & Urrea, 2004; Restrepo, 1996–1997; Wade, 1993, 2002a), Mexico (Lewis, 2000; Vaughn, 2005), Central America (Anderson, 2005; Gordon, 1998; Hale, 2005; Safa, 2005; Thorne, 2004), the Dominican Republic (Torres-Saillant, 2000) and Cuba (De la Fuente, 2001; Fernandez, 1996), to name only a few (see also Andrews, 2004; Dzidzienyo & Oboler, 2005; Minority Rights Group, 1995; Whitten & Torres, 1998) – and with an evident bias to English-language publications. Organizations such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank have also taken a broad regional perspective (Sanchez & Bryan, 2003).¹ This regional expansion has not changed many of the basic conceptual approaches to understanding Afro-Latins, but it has had important effects. First, the broadening view has indicated the variety of black experiences. The situation of a small minority, such as Garifuna communities in Guatemala and Honduras (Anderson & England, 2004; England, 1999; Gonzalez, 1988; Hale, 2005; Thorne, 2004) or Creole, English-speaking black populations on the coast of Nicaragua (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, term *indio* became current, especially during Trujillo's dictatorship, to describe this population, which national elites were at pains to clearly distinguish from neighboring 'black' Haiti (Baud, 2002; Torres-Saillant, 2000).

Second, the widening regional focus has highlighted the increasing diasporic interconnection of black populations, not in the sense of international migrations within Latin America, but rather in terms of Latin American migrations to the USA and, above all, connection to a globalizing, mass-mediated, black culture (Dzidzienyo & Oboler, 2005; Sansone, 2003). This has helped to widen the focus beyond the standard USA–Brazil comparisons which, although interesting, necessary and still active (Hanchard, 1999), are not the whole picture.

The literature on Afro-Latins and race in Latin America, partly because of its focus on Brazil, has often been located within a USA–Brazil comparative frame of reference. Is there a real contrast? If there is one, is the difference lessening? If things are changing, does Latin America nevertheless retain a *sui generis* character? These are important comparative questions. However, it is worth bearing in mind the politics of comparison as an intellectual endeavor (Stoler, 2001; Wade, 2004). After all, it was

in contradistinction to the USA that Brazilian intellectuals such as Gilberto Freyre attempted to define the Brazilian nation as a quintessentially mixed, tropical nation in which race was not a key issue. If they were using the comparative method to such evidently political ends does it not behoove us to question the comparative frame itself? Siegel's excellent PhD thesis on this question does just that, pointing out that oppositional comparisons hide the constant traffic of people and ideas that flowed back and forth between the USA and Brazil as black and white intellectuals on both sides used their interpretations of race relations in Brazil and the USA to make arguments about racial inequality and national identity (Siegel, 2001). What is needed here is not an image of two isolated nations, evolving distinct race–class systems that can be compared as case studies, but a hemispheric or even global frame of reference that sees all the Americas, and of course Gilroy's 'black Atlantic', as a network of traveling people and ideas (Dzidzienyo & Oboler, 2005; Gilroy, 1993; Matory, 1999; Yelvington, 2001).

The widening focus of Afro-Latin studies has also acted to bring the relationship between indigeneity and blackness more center stage. In countries where national ideologies of *mestizaje* or *mestiçagem* (race mixture) are strong (on which more, below), black and indigenous populations might be seen within a single analytic frame – often by historians (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2003) – because these ideologies cast them all as foot soldiers in a single process of nation building based on mixture. On the other hand, when it comes to exploring contemporary race or ethnic relations, studies have tended to focus on either blackness or indigeneity. I have argued that black and indigenous peoples fitted differently into 'structures of alterity' in Latin American nations, with indigenous people occupying the classic role of cultural other, while black people tended to be seen as subordinate citizens (Wade, 1997b). This was reflected in academic approaches which rarely brought them together (see however Whitten, 1981).

With the emergence of black and indigenous social movements, often based on vindicating black and indigenous identities as a challenge to ideologies of mestizo nationhood that were perceived to deny ethnic identity, there have been some shifts in this separation (Safa, 2005). In Colombia, I and others have noted how black social movements have fed off and interacted with indigenous ones that tended to be more experienced and better funded, ending up with a move towards the indigenization of blackness (Wade, 1995, 2002a). Hooker (2005) also argues that black social movements end up looking rather like indigenous ones, as they learn to pose their claims in forms that the state is accustomed to hearing, while Hale (2005) examines both indigenous and black struggles for land in Nicaragua and Honduras. In the context of multiculturalist reforms, north-east Brazilian communities that seemed to be generically mestizo and peasant have asserted their identities both as *remanescentes dos quilombos* (remnants of old runaway slave settlements) and as indigenous communities, both of which can apply for special land titles (French, 2002, 2004; Warren, 2001). Although one community cannot be officially black and indigenous at the same time – and in that sense the distinction between indigenous and black is maintained – this process certainly unsettles any simple distinction between the two identities, or between either of them and being mestizo.

Black and indigenous social movements have posed a major challenge to the national identities of many Latin American countries. Many states have enacted multicultural reforms which give greater constitutional and legal space to black and indigenous populations, although it would be naïve to assume that these reforms were a simple result of social movement pressures: as with multiculturalism everywhere, such reforms can also suit neo-liberal governance agendas (Hale, 2002, 2005). Overviews of the reform process have focused more on indigenous than Afro-Latin people (Assies *et al.*, 2000; Sieder, 2002; Van Cott, 2000), so I think there is room for more comparative studies of Afro-Latin populations and multicultural reforms, but there is also a need for detailed studies of how multicultural reforms are working out in practice in the context of Latin American national formations. The way gender and race/ethnicity intersect in social movements also needs more sustained analysis, given the US experience of gender discrimination within the black movement (hooks, 1981), and the important role of black and indigenous women in ethnic movements in Latin America (Safa, 2005).

Affirmative action policies and racial quotas in Brazil and Colombia are good cases for exploring multicultural reforms in action. Much debate in Brazil centers on whether affirmative action is appropriate for the country: racial democracy may now be regarded as a myth, but there is still a sense that Brazil has a racial system that sits ill at ease with racial quotas, associated with the racial politics of the USA.² (Interestingly, there has been little public debate about affirmative action in Colombia, where although there are no racial quotas in place, university bursaries are reserved for black and indigenous students, both black and indigenous communities can make special land claims and indigenous people have specially elected senators.) However, what seems to be missing is an ethnographic account of how racial quotas operate in everyday practice – although Maio and Santos (2005) give an account of how the University of Brasilia set up a commission to determine who was black and thus eligible to fill a quota place. In Colombia, in contrast, Afro-Colombian students applying for a university fee exemption have to have their identity as Afro-Colombian ratified by a black community or a black organization. At least in 1997, one black organization I knew took a very flexible line on who counted as black. In 2002, the University of Caldas passed a resolution allowing fee exemptions for black and indigenous students: these people would be ratified by the community, and the Ministry of the Interior would ratify the status of the community.³ At the time, the Ministry had a list of Afro-Colombian communities that seemed to include many communities that simply had some Afro-Colombian population present, which left a lot of room for maneuver. This list has since disappeared from the web. A recent government document on affirmative action for Afro-Colombian communities basically evades the whole issue of defining who will be the beneficiaries of these policies. The document seems to rely on common-sense about who and where the needy are and thus where to direct resources, and on future censuses that will include more effective enumeration of ethnic minorities and thus better identification of where they are (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2004). This is a rather different conception of affirmative action from images of racial quotas with strict rules about who is and is not black.

Mestizaje today

The issue of national identity, and the challenge posed by black and indigenous movements and by multicultural reforms, raises the question of the role still played by ideologies and practices of mestizaje in the wake of two or more decades of social movements and allied reforms. Has mestizaje now waned as an image of national identity? Has what might be called ‘mestizaje from below’ (Hale, 2002, 2005) emerged to confront official ideologies of mestizaje as a nation-building process orchestrated from above as a denial of ethnic diversity? Has multiculturalism, with its connotations of persistent and even institutionalized diversity, displaced mestizaje, with its connotations of progressive homogenization. Such questions clearly involve a view that encompasses Afro-Latin and indigenous peoples, as well as all other ethnic and racial categories.

Mestizaje has often been viewed as an official ideology of homogenization linked to whitening and even ethnocide (Gould, 1998; Stutzman, 1981). It has been studied by historians as part of elite ideologies that were concerned with building a better, whiter nation (Appelbaum *et al.*, 2003; Stepan, 1991). More recently, scholars have seen mestizaje as a more open ideological terrain, on which different people struggle to define its meanings (Hale, 1996). Both Mallon (1996) and Klor de Alva (1995) oppose ideas of mestizaje from above – official, colonialist – and from below – subaltern, contestatory. De la Cadena (2000) describes ‘indigenous mestizos’ in the Peruvian highlands, people who identify as mestizos, but do not deny being indigenous. Being mestizo, for them, means being successful and respectable rather than being non-indigenous; poor and uneducated indigenous people may, however, be the objects of their scorn and, indeed, racism. French (2004) also describes people in north-eastern Brazil who claim both mestizo and indigenous identity at the same time. Both cases contest official versions of mestizaje that imply that becoming mestizo means leaving an indigenous or black identity behind. Hale (2005, p. 25) identifies expressions of ‘mestizaje from below’ in Guatemala, in the form of young city dwellers who acknowledge indigenous descent but refuse both Ladino and Maya identities (some of them identify as *cholos*); and in the form of some Ladinos who also adopted an in-between positioning as ‘new mestizos’. As well as being a challenging form of mestizaje, these identity positions contest official multiculturalism with its identity pigeonholes.

I have argued that oppositions between mestizaje from above and below are not as clear as they seem (Wade, 2005). Official versions of mestizaje always made some space for indigenusness and blackness – highly constrained, of course. Using material from my work on music, race and nation in Colombia, I also argued that people’s experience of being mestizo, as a lived process, could include a sense of embodied diversity, as a kind of internal mosaic effect, in which ‘bits’ of blackness (and one could argue indigenusness, although I was looking at blackness) existed as sensibilities within a person. My argument is that mestizaje always involves a tension between inclusion and exclusion – this is at the heart of Latin American social relations of race – which can be played out in different ways, in arguments about who is to be included and excluded and on what grounds. There is a common language of

mestizaje, however: note how Hale's young city dwellers use the term *cholo*; or how De la Cadena's highland Peruvians use the terms *indígena* and *mestizo* – as well as more insulting terms such as *indio sucio*. These are all established terms in the lexicon of mestizaje. It is this common language that attests to the continuing role of mestizaje as a hegemonic ideology and experience. I am not sure that Hale's statement 'that "official mestizaje" has been superseded as hegemonic discourse' is correct (Hale, 2002, p. 524). This is partly because, as Hale (2002, p. 491) also recognizes, multiculturalism 'is the *mestizaje* discourse for new millennium'. He means in part that multiculturalism is a new tool for establishing governance, taking over where mestizaje left off, but I think it is also because Latin American multiculturalism actually has strong continuities with ideologies of mestizaje, when the role that diversity plays in mestizaje is recognized.

It is also important to be attentive to the role of what I call structural processes of mestizaje. This was something I explored in Colombia in the 1980s, before black social movements had achieved their current profile and before multiculturalist reforms (Wade, 1993). I was interested in how processes of social mobility for black people often entailed processes that could be described as structural whitening, independent of individual motivations and racial identifications. Black people who achieved some degree of success, often even in very limited and local ways, ended up being allied to non-black people and spaces. The most obvious process was migration from the mainly black Pacific coastal region to the mainly non-black highland cities, but the same effect happened at many levels, including within the Pacific coastal region and within the highland cities. As individuals, such black people might identify strongly as black or Afro-Colombian, but they were surrounded by non-blackness. This led to them being perceived by others as less black, might lead to a distancing from what they and others perceived as black cultural forms, and might also lead to marriage (or unions) with a non-black person – not from a desire to whiten oneself, but simply because that was what the social environment offered. Whether the resulting children were lighter than the black parent or not, they would grow up in a mainly non-black milieu and with the economic advantages that their black parent's upward mobility had won for them, which also placed them into a whiter environment. It is still an empirical question now as to the extent that such processes still operate, but where the black middle class is a minority – especially a tiny minority, as it is in Colombia – and blackness is spatially concentrated, whether in regions within the nation or in neighborhoods within the cities (McCallum, 2005), there is a good chance that they do.

Black culture, globalization and diaspora

The old debate between Meville Herskovits and E. Franklin Frazier about how and to what extent 'Africanisms' could be identified in New World cultures has been incorporated into (although not completely superseded by) work that focuses on processes of cultural change and mixture and on diasporic and transnational linkages (for an excellent review, see Yelvington, 2001). Debates about Africanisms and processes of creolization shaped by African cultural principles are still current and

important (Arocha, 1999; Price & Price, 1999), but they are complemented by an emphasis on the way that the *idea* of Africa and Africanism is constructed and deployed in different arenas of knowledge production – arenas such as academia, cultural activism and religious practice (Matory, 2005; Restrepo, 1996–1997; Wade, 2006, in press; Yelvington, 2006, in press). Rather than seeing Africa as something to be simply identified as present or absent in a cultural formation, more attention is being paid to the politics of culture, knowledge and perception that make it appear in certain forms, or disappear altogether.

Sansone (2003, pp. 59–93) traces how ‘Africa’ has been construed in varying ways by elites and popular classes in Salvador da Bahia over the last century, including a recent re-Africanization of Afro-Bahian culture and the emergence of a certain *negrophilia* that values an aestheticized form of blackness. In all this ‘looking African or sounding African is, in fact, what makes things African’ (p. 65). What Sansone emphasizes less is that audio-visual perception is a strongly mediated process, shaped by one’s own or others’ pre-conceptions about what ‘Africa’ looks like or sounds like in the first place. Sansone does pay attention to the transnational aspects of Afro-Bahian cultural formation and the role of the mass media and globalization – for example, reggae music or African migration to Brazil – in shaping local ideas of blackness. Matory (1999) also shows very well how these transnational dynamic operate – and how they are not just post-1970s phenomena. He describes how some black Brazilians went to West Africa in the late 19th century to be educated in English-speaking religious schools. Their absorption of Yoruba culture then shaped *candomblé* religious practices back in Bahia. But the Yoruba culture they were absorbing was itself part of a process of cultural formation and glorification that was being shaped by African intellectuals and, as it happened, by returnee migrants from Brazil, some of whom had been expelled from Brazil as rebels, and from the USA and Jamaica. In these circuits of people, ideas and politics, the question of what is African becomes highly malleable. As Matory (1999, p. 74) says, ‘the African diaspora has at times played a critical role in the making of its own alleged African “base line” as well’.

If analyses of race, class and politics have highlighted the close connection of blackness with poverty and low status, then the more global and historical analysis of cultural change and cultural construction teaches us that an interesting contradiction is submerged in Latin American (and indeed Western) societies. For blackness has also been construed as a valuable source of power. From colonial times, this power was perceived – by colonial rulers and others – in the realms of magic, witchcraft, healing and music and was both repressed and sought after (Taussig, 1987). More recently, with the emergence of trends of primitivism in Western culture, blackness has been paradoxically associated with modernity, at the same time as it was associated with backwardness (Barkan & Bush, 1995). Gilroy argues that, in slavery, black people experienced the constitutive conflicts of modernity before these became common-place for Europeans: blacks were the ‘first truly modern people’ (Gilroy, 1993, p. 220). The argument about primitivism is slightly different: blacks were perceived as modern by non-blacks (and perhaps perceived themselves that way too) because they were thought to embody certain qualities (sensuality, liberated

sexuality) that were seen as modern in the early and middle decades of the 20th century. This paradoxical co-existence of images of black culture as both traditional and primitive, and modern and progressive is part of the explanation for why, in countries such as Brazil, Cuba, Colombia and Argentina, musical styles associated with black people and the lower classes – samba, son, cumbia, tango – became mainstreamed into national musical icons. These musical styles successfully mediated between the traditional and the modern in ways that suited nationalist sentiments very well.

The difference between the view from political economy – in which Afro-Latins are poor and low status – and the view from cultural history – in which Afro-Latins are both primitive and modern – is more apparent than real. After all, being poor and low status is a thoroughly modern, as well as pre-modern, experience. The point is that in both cases, the *control* Afro-Latins have over their status is weak: the link between blackness and poverty and between blackness and primitivity–modernity is largely controlled by others, even if the image of blackness as fashionable and sexy can be deployed to good effect by black people themselves. If black style is defined as a globally ‘cool’ commodity, then this can lead to concrete benefits for some Afro-Latins who are able to get a slice of the pie, but the question is who is in control of the processes of definition and commodification. Here the political economy and cultural history come together: the more Afro-Latins do control these processes, the more they will be able to break the link between poverty and blackness – and vice versa.

Conclusion

Afro-Latin studies have deepened and widened greatly over the last couple of decades. Crucial to their progress will be the ability to bring to bear a broad political economy perspective, which, without being dogmatic, allows us to see racial politics and categories in the light of changing class structures and regimes of governance. Multiculturalism cannot be understood without linking these ideas and practices to neo-liberal economics and politics, as Hale (2005) has argued for Central America. The position of middle class blacks *vis-à-vis* the black social movement in Salvador, Brazil, or the debates about affirmative action, cannot be understood separately from the economic pressure on middle class status in Brazil in general. The situation of black communities in the Pacific coastal region of Colombia, and their relationship to the legislation that grants them land rights, is very obviously conditioned by the virtual war that afflicts the region, which in turn is connected to state development priorities and power struggles over them.

Equally important is a broad comparative perspective. There is a growing body of work on Afro-Latin populations outside Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador. The classic comparative dimension which counter-poses the USA to Latin America needs to be differentiated to encompass intra-national differences, such as those between Salvador and Rio (Sansone, 2003; Telles, 2004) or between Colombia’s Pacific and Caribbean coastal regions (Cunin, 2003), and international comparisons which bring in Afro-Peruvians, Afro-Bolivians, Afro-Uruguayans, Afro-Guatemalans and so on.

International comparisons need to be alive to the constant transnational connections that complicate an analysis based on national boundaries.

A comparative approach that embraces political economy also requires bringing indigenous and Afro-Latin populations – as well as mixed and white people – into a single analytic frame. Ethnic mobilizations that connect Afro-Latin and indigenous movements are already pushing analysts to think in such terms. More work is needed on *mestizos* and how they conceive of their identity, their mixedness and their relationship to blackness, indigenosity and whiteness. More work is needed on whiteness – not just as an ideology connected to whitening, but as a self-identity and lived reality in Latin American countries. While whiteness has been a growing subject of study in North America, especially, there is still a lot of room for development of this theme in Latin America.

Notes

- [1] See pages on Afro-Latins at the World Bank's website (<http://web.worldbank.org>).
- [2] See the debate in the journal, *Horizontes Antropológicos* vol. 11, no. 23, 2005; accessible via <http://www.scielo.br/>.
- [3] Acuerdo 07, 8 April 2003, Consejo Superior, Universidad de Caldas; available on the University's website at <http://www.ucaldas.edu.co/academia/normatividad.asp>.

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