

# **‘*Longos*’ and ‘*cholos*’: Ethnic/‘racial’ discrimination among *mestizos* in Ecuador**

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### *Abstract*

This paper presents some of the processes of ethnic/'racial' discrimination taking place in Ecuador but which have thus far remained hidden from research and policy making by representations of Ecuador as a homogenously mixed or '*mestizo*' state. To uncover these processes, this paper explores how those generally identified as Ecuadorian upper-class '*white-mestizos*' in Ecuador's two main cities, Guayaquil and Quito, represent their ethnic identity and that of others in relation to the state's hegemonic discourse of *mestizaje* or 'mixture'. By looking at the terminology used to refer to certain *mestizos*, i.e. '*longo*' and '*cholo*', this paper argues that the upper-classes' use of *mestizaje* hides discriminatory practices that inhibit the creation of socio-economic networks among *mestizos* and, therefore, render the returns from education for certain individuals limited, also checking their opportunities in the labour market and impeding their social mobility. The state's promises of social inclusion and advancement through *mestizaje* are, therefore, rendered empty.

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## 'Longos' and 'cholos': ethnic/'racial' discrimination among *mestizos* in Ecuador

By Karem Roitman

### 1. Introduction

The Ecuadorian Republic has been historically constructed and represented as a *mestizo* or 'mixed' state (Clark 1998, Martinez-Echazabal 1998), a construction that has tacitly rejected Ecuador's indigenous (Muratorio 2000) and Afroecuadorian heritage (Rahier 1999), advocating acculturation as a means for integration (Stutzman 1981). The results of the 2001 national census appear to confirm the success of this '*mestizo* paradigm', showing that more than three-quarters of the Ecuadorian population identifies itself as '*mestizo*' or 'mixed' ethnicity/race.<sup>1</sup>

*When asked, 'What do you consider yourself?' and given six categories from which to choose, the Ecuadorian population self-identified as follows:*

**Table 1: Ecuadorian population: ethnic identity identification**

| Categories     | Population | Percentage | Cumulative % |
|----------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Indigenous     | 830,418    | 6.38       | 6.38         |
| Black          | 271,372    | 2.23       | 8.61         |
| <i>Mestizo</i> | 9,411,890  | 77.42      | 86.49        |
| Mulatto        | 332,637    | 2.74       | 89.22        |
| White          | 1,271,051  | 10.46      | 99.68        |
| Other          | 39,240     | 0.32       | 99.55        |
| Total          | 12,156,608 | 100.00     | 100.00       |

Processed with Redatam+SP Cepal/Celade 2002-2006. Source: INEC <sup>2</sup>

This representation of Ecuador's ethnic structure assumes homogeneity among *mestizos* and permits ethnic grievances to be linked only to apparent 'ethnic minorities' – the 6.38% of indigenous peoples, 2.23% of 'blacks' and 2.74% of 'mulattoes' the census finds – making ethnic grievances of rather limited, and therefore peripheral rather than central, national concern. If policies to address ethnic disparities are based on this representation they will most likely be targeted only to the minority populations just listed (as has indeed been the case<sup>3</sup>), while assuming a lack of ethnicity or 'race'-based inequalities among *mestizos*. Such an assumption, however, might ignore significant processes of ethnic and racial exclusion and discrimination, addressing only the most overt symptoms of unequal access to resources and opportunities while leaving unquestioned undergirding dynamics and ideologies. In order to fully comprehend and effectively address

<sup>1</sup> I use 'ethnicity/race' to refer to the conflation of 'ethnicity' (culture) and 'race' (biology).

<sup>2</sup> The INEC, National Institute of Statistics and Census of Ecuador, allows researchers access to the 2001 Census database for simple tabulations at <http://www.inec.gov.ec/REDATAM/RpWebEngine.exe/PortalAction> (Accessed in August 2006).

<sup>3</sup> A new law making racial discrimination illegal in Quito demonstrates this view. The Council set up to investigate allegations of racism is to be constituted by a local councilman and the city's Social Development Secretary (whose ethnicity is not mentioned or questioned), and an Afroecuadorian and an indigenous delegate (who represent the 'ethnic other', possible victims of discrimination) (El racismo se prohibio 2007).

ethnic disparities in Ecuador, we need to investigate how 1) individuals who ascribe to different ethnic identities and 2) to different socio-economic strata within each ethnic grouping understand and relate to hegemonic ethnic discourses. In other words, we need to examine how individuals understand the hegemonic definition of 'black', 'indigenous', *mestizo*, et cetera, and how their understanding affects their ethnic identity and their interactions with other ethnic groups. While some such research has been undertaken, an academic vacuum has emerged around middle-upper and upper-class *mestizos* (Cuví 2003). Scholarship on Ecuador tends to identify this sector as 'white-*mestizos*' (Whitten 2003), hinting at this group's distance from acculturated indigenous peoples, and at a 'racial' or colour basis for this distance. Nothing, however, has been written about this group in terms of its ethnic identity or its ethnic narratives. The sparse amount of research in this area may be due to the difficulty of accessing the socio-economically dominant sectors of a society (Marcus 1983, Burbano 2005), to the exoticisation of the research subject (Smith 1999), and/or to the possibility that *mestizos* have been largely, and tacitly, conceptualised as individuals of the lower socio-economic classes (Roitman 2004). This dearth of research may also reflect a bias in scholarly work on 'elites' to concentrate on economic and political networks, rather than on the more amorphous space of narratives and identities (Marcus 1983).

This paper seeks to contribute to our understanding of ethnic relations in Ecuador by exploring how those generally defined as Ecuador's upper-class 'white-*mestizos*', or Ecuador's upper-class white-'mixed' individuals understand and represent *mestizaje*. Summarising the findings of a larger investigation (Roitman 2008b), this paper will be divided into four further parts. Section 2 will provide a brief overview of the research population and site. Section 3 will look at how the research population represent *mestizaje* in their city, highlighting some of the implications of such representations. Section 4 will analyse these upper classes' representations of heterogeneity among *mestizos*, uncovering processes of ethnic and racial discrimination among *mestizos*. Finally, the last part of the paper will review the consequences of discrimination among *mestizos*.

## 2. Research site and population

### 2.1 Research site

As Ecuador is a country marked by deep regionalism, it can be expected that the ethnic narratives used by the inhabitants of its various regions will differ. Little research on regional ethnic narratives actually exists, however, and no previous research has sought to understand how *mestizaje* is conceptualised in each region. For this reason, this paper analyses the two main poles of Ecuador's regional divide: Guayaquil and Quito. Moreover, as these two cities are the economic and political/administrative centres of the Ecuadorian Republic, it is feasible that ethnic narratives used in them will have an impact throughout the nation.

Ward and Jones (1999) remind us that the political context during which research is undertaken must be carefully weighted in to interpret gathered data correctly. Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez was in power while this research was conducted. During the first period of fieldwork, the summer of 2003, Gutiérrez had just been elected president with the backing of large parts of the indigenous movement. During the second period of fieldwork, the winter-spring of 2005, the Gutiérrez regime was struggling to remain in power, with large marches in favour of and against the government paralysing Guayaquil and Quito for several days. Class and ethnic narratives permeated the public debates that accompanied these marches. It is important to keep these events in mind as one reads and interprets these research

findings, as these findings reflect a very specific period in Ecuadorian history, a period marked by particularly tense inter-ethnic relations.

### 2.2 Research population

The research population are the upper classes of Guayaquil and Quito. Other researchers have noted that there is no agreed-upon sample frame for research on 'elites' (Clarke and Sison 2003:217). Part of the research, therefore, was to learn who constitutes these classes, how they are defined and bounded. More specifically, the research sought to understand the role ethnicity plays in delimiting these classes. The research population, consequently, was constituted organically through the fieldwork as interviewees and informants guided me to others they considered part of the 'elite' in a 'snowballing' technique. Thus, the very act of setting up interviews provided information about what is considered the Ecuadorian 'upper classes'.

For the purpose of this research, 30 university-aged, middle-upper-class youths in Quito and eight university-aged, upper-class youths in Guayaquil, as well as 40 (25 men, 15 women) working-age individuals of upper socio-economic standing in Quito and 37 working-age individuals of the upper socio-economic class in Guayaquil (18 men, 19 women) were interviewed, using semi-structured and in-depth interview techniques. Interviewees included four previous presidents of Ecuador, several government ministers and previous ambassadors, presidents of the Central Bank, as well as many key figures from prestigious social and civil service organisations (Junta de Beneficencia de Guayaquil, Kiwanis Club, Club de la Union, Club de Rotarios, Yatch Club, Club El Condado), and members of traditional 'elite' families – all of whom are correctly considered members of Ecuador's 'elite'.

## 3. Regional representations of *mestizaje*

### 3.1 Guayaquil

Interviewees in Guayaquil presented *mestizaje* in their city as different from that of the highlands given their *Montubio* (see below), rather than indigenous, roots. Interviewees, however, did not present *mestizaje* as a salient self-identity, but rather as a distant national reality linked to acculturation. Indigenous peoples were represented as immigrants to the city who could acculturate to become Guayaquilenians and, therefore, *mestizos*; Afro-Ecuadorians, represented as recent arrivals to the city, where not linked to regional processes of *mestizaje*.

The linking of *mestizaje* to *Montubios* by interviewees in Guayaquil is of significance. *Montubios* are a coastal identity made popular by regional literary elites in the 1930s and, more recently, an identity that has sought state recognition and funding as an 'ethnic minority' (Roitman 2008a). Although a 'mixed' people, descendants of coastal and highland indigenous peoples as well as Afroecuadorians, with a culture that has developed to address the challenges of the coastal region, *Montubios* were represented by interviewees as a *sui generis* identity, autochthonous to the coast and with no links to indigenous peoples. Informants unanimously argued that there were substantial differences between *Montubios* and indigenous peoples, the latter represented as exclusive to the highlands. In fact, to explain who *Montubios* were, several interviewees began by noting the differences between *Montubios* and highland inhabitants. Joseph, for example, noted that when the Spanish came to what is now Ecuador:

The highland territory was populated entirely by indigenous people from the time of the Incas, while indigenous people did not inhabit the littoral

region. The people of the littoral [had]... racial characteristics, customs, and a physical aspect, that are rather Malay.... If you look at the native of the Ecuadorian coasts, he is Malay, with rather copper-coloured skin, with pronounced cheek bones, with eyes a bit slanted...the typical man of the littoral is incommensurable to the typical man of the highlands. The *Montubio* is different to the indigenous peasant of the highlands. Our *Montubio* is a man of another category, with an agile mind, with certain degree of intellectual capacity... (Joseph<sup>4</sup>, Guayaquil: 2005).

In common with other interviewees, Joseph declared that *Montubios* are distinct from and better than highland indigenous people (according to Joseph, 'racially' different). By linking themselves to *Montubios* rather than to highland indigenous peoples, interviewees implicitly underlined their distance from the highlands and set the stage for the conceptualisation of a unique, regional *mestizaje*. Several interviewees thus spoke about the 'unique mixture' that took place in the coast after the conquest (Joseph, Esteven Guayaquil: 2005). This was well captured by one of the city's literary elites:

... it is imperative, then, to remind ourselves that we have a *mestizo* ancestry of different combination: it is not the highland indigenous who brings us the symbol of ancestral strength and links us to the earth, but rather that human version far closer to our way of being, belonging to the people of hot blood and conceptual disorder. *We are, certainly[,] montubios*. (Ansaldo Briones 2004).

Links between *Montubios* and highland indigenous peoples were either unknown or denied by coastal respondents. The *mestizaje* of the coast was not, therefore, a *mestizaje* endowed with the characteristics attributed to indigenous peoples through Ecuador's history. Coastal *mestizaje* could escape essentialisms of indigenous peoples and attribute to itself the independence, courage, and assertiveness endowed upon the *Montubio* (Roitman 2008a).

While representing coastal *mestizaje* as unique, interviewees did not embrace '*mestizaje*' as a salient self-identity. Guayaquilenian historian Jenny Estrada agreed with this, stressing, "The word [*mestizo*] is not used [here, in Guayaquil]...and whoever tells you the contrary lies!" (Estrada 2005). Other interviewees noted that while they might have felt forced to answer a certain way in the context of the census (given the closed-question format of the census and a sense of civic pressure for all to identify as *mestizos*), there was no pride or consciousness of *mestizaje* in Guayaquil (Ricardo, Guayaquil: 2005).<sup>5</sup> *Mestizaje* was often presented as an attribute of certain individuals who have been able to advance socio-economically, but not as a characteristic of the upper classes. As Sebastian explained,

I think that those who have been able to achieve the proper education have integrated, but we are speaking of very few people, very few. Therefore, in Guayaquil...those who rule remain the 'elites' rather than the *mestizos*. [The *mestizos*] might...distinguish themselves so that one says '*Caramba!* What an interesting man, he is a newspaper editor or editor of a news channel...' et cetera. Nevertheless, in the end, well, just look at

<sup>4</sup> All names used in this paper are fictitious to protect interviewees' anonymity. I will cite anonymous interviews in the following format: pseudonym, city:year).

<sup>5</sup> Regarding the pressure to self-identify as *mestizo* refer to Stutzman 1981.

the leading TV programmes and see if you find a *mestizo* in any of the shows (Sebastian, Guayaquil: 2005).

Interviewees in Guayaquil only used the terminology of *mestizaje* if asked to define '*mestizaje*' or to contrast Quito and Guayaquil in regards to *mestizaje*. The historical promotion of the *mestizo* nation-state ideal by highland rather than coastal cultural elites (Espinosa Apolo 2000:10) might explain why the concept of *mestizaje* was of regular use among highland interviewees (as will be shown below) while it was forced and uncomfortable among lowland interviewees. Yet, although uncomfortable with the use of '*mestizo*' as a term of self-identification, Guayaquilenian interviewees emphasised that the process of *mestizaje* was far more advanced in Guayaquil than in Quito, representing Guayaquil as an inclusive, integrated city (Afredo, Veronica, Joseph, Nicolas, Andrea, Guayaquil: 2005). Quito was pointed to as having a greater number of 'pure races' partly, as will be noted below, because interviewees saw ethnic identity markers as more visible in the highlands than in the coast.

Some interviewees in fact presented *mestizaje* as the acculturation of 'pure races' into the hegemonic culture of the city. Thus, when they spoke about processes of *mestizaje* in Guayaquil they referred to the large indigenous population that, according to interviewees, had 'immigrated' and acculturated to the hegemonic local culture, rather than to a process of amalgamation that could include the upper social strata. Sebastian, for instance, noted,

I think the percentage [of *mestizos*] is very high here in Guayaquil.... This has something to do with the unclear definition of the indigenous people of the coast...there are many people from rural areas *who were originally indigenous* but have immigrated to the city and their customs have changed; *losing their identity* somewhat they have integrated into the city (Sebastian, Guayaquil: 2005, my emphasis).

An understanding of indigenous and *mestizo* identities as fluid and porous, where whether a person is considered indigenous or *mestizo* is largely the result of external identity markers such as clothing, was pervasive among coastal interviewees. Indigenous peoples were represented as immigrants to the city, implying that no indigenous people are native to the coast. The remarks of a female member of Guayaquil's 'elite' succinctly captured what Guayaquilenian interviewees often mentioned in regard to indigenous peoples:

...it is curious how [indigenous immigrants] just *become* Guayaquilenians. The indigenous who live in the highlands maintain their values, their culture, their poncho, and their hair. The indigenous people who come to Guayaquil are integrated within a year: in one year the poncho is put away for when they visit Quito, in two years they have cut their hair; then they put on sandals and a t-shirt, and that is it! They only have their outfits for indigenous festivities. Guayaquil has its culture as a city – it is informal, it is independent, it is completely metallic [money leads the way] and people can be quickly *incorporated* (Evelyn, Guayaquil: 2005, my emphasis).

Three points stand out from Evelyn's remarks. Firstly, her representation of highland indigenous peoples is highly essentialised, it assumes a similar physical culture for all indigenous inhabitants, expecting all to wear a poncho and have long hair, thus inextricably linking indigenous identity to a specific physical culture. This representation was common among Guayaquilenian interviewees, whether



interviewees lauded or decried the 'indigenous' physical culture. Secondly, Evelyn constructs Guayaquilenians and indigenous peoples as mutually exclusive categories, as implied by the idea that once indigenous people become Guayaquilenians they are no longer indigenous. Such a construction suggests that there are no indigenous people native to the city, inherently linking all indigenous movements exclusively to the highland and Amazon regions. Indigenous peoples in Guayaquil are, in short, seen as recent immigrants who must choose whether to remain indigenous or become Guayaquilenians. Lastly, Evelyn emphasises a single culture for Guayaquil, noting that it is possible for indigenous peoples to become Guayaquilenians by adopting this dominant culture. Integration through participation in diverse subcultures, or while maintaining ethnic identity markers seen as indigenous, is not presented as a possibility. Similarly Pedro noted,

When the indigenous of the highlands come, they come with the poncho, *alpargatas*<sup>6</sup>, hat, all that is distinctive of their identity. They get here [to Guayaquil]...they get rid of the poncho and of the hat...then they begin to use white shoes, which is the second phase. In the third phase they cut their hair, and as soon as they do this, *they have stopped being indigenous, they are part of the Guayaquilenian mass*, they are integrated...in the highlands it is impressive how the indigenous man continues to use his outfit – his hat and all the attributes of his culture. Is this not what forces, obliges us, in terms of our vision, to segregate them a bit? (Pedro, Guayaquil: 2005, my emphasis).

Like other interviewees Pedro presents acculturation as synonymous with integration into the dominant culture of the city – a process involving entirely material changes. He further conceptualises ethnicity as largely defined by external identity markers, a view that is also hinted at in Evelyn's declarations – once clothes and hairstyles are changed indigenous people are no longer 'indigenous people'. Importantly, this view of integration denies a 'racial' understanding of identity, as no 'essential biological' indigenous nature is attached to people once they adopt the dress code and manners of Guayaquil. As we can note from his statement above, Pedro contrasted what he perceived as an ease to 'integrate' into Guayaquil with the situation of the highlands, where unaltered identity markers, according to him, foster and justify discrimination. The discrimination that occurs in the highlands is then implicitly blamed on the resistance or inability of non-Western groups to integrate into the dominant culture. However, if indigenous 'immigrants' to the city integrate by altering their culture and, subsequently their ethnic identity, then the 'embrasive' nature of Guayaquil city seems to prevent, de facto, the existence of groups other than *mestizos*. It is then not surprising that several interviewees held that there were no indigenous people in the coast partly, at least, because "in the coast they can have no conscience [of themselves as indigenous]...they can have no ethnic consciousness" (Carlos Antonio, Guayaquil: 2005). In brief, if integration into Guayaquil takes place through a process of acculturation that results in '*mestizaje*', then *mestizaje* and integrated indigenous people in Guayaquil are mutually exclusive, leading an interviewee to explain:

The *mestizo* is necessary for society but the indigenous might see *mestizaje* as a bad word because for them it means acculturation – *they would have to disappear!* They are the enemies of the *mestizo* because it eliminates them, it annuls them as an autonomous social group (Carlos Antonio, Guayaquil: 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Shoes worn by certain indigenous groups of the highlands.

Given Guayaquilenian interviewees' representation of indigenous people as non-native to the Coast and integrated through acculturation, it is not surprising that non-acculturated indigenous peoples and their political concerns were represented as distant and foreign:

The indigenous problem here is seen as very distant, like the Amazon, the Galapagos; it is something from an external world, outside Guayaquil, like the president of the United States (Evelyn, Guayaquil: 2005).

The scale of ethnic mobilisations has, in fact, been much lower in the littoral than in the highlands. Several of my interviewees attributed this to the integrative and non-discriminatory nature of Guayaquil which, they claimed, has made ethnic consciousness and mobilisation unnecessary. In other words, Guayaquilenian indigenous peoples and Afroecuatorians were purportedly pleased with their situation and, therefore, they did not need to cry out for public attention. This view was supported by reference to the Gutiérrez government's (2003-2005) failed attempts to mobilise the coastal indigenous and Afroecuatorian population.

The leaders of the indigenous movements have stopped coming here. The indigenous here see these leaders coming to mobilise them but...they are so well integrated here, they just don't want to mobilise.... *This is something I have always said, the indigenous that comes here...wishes to be part of society* (Francisco, Guayaquil: 2005).

### 3.2 Quito

In contrast to what has been reviewed for Guayaquil, interviewees from Quito emphasized *mestizaje* as a central identity in their region, as well as a salient variable of self-identification. *Mestizaje* was represented as a broad label fitting all Ecuadorians, as a label for acculturated indigenous peoples, and it was used as a political argument against the political mobilisation of non-*mestizo* ethnic groups.

The great majority of working-age informants in Quito self-identified as *mestizos*, four self-identified as white, and two refused to acknowledge the existence of 'races', identifying themselves simply as 'human'<sup>7</sup>. Two other interviewees refused to answer the question. Among university students in Quito, 28 out of 30 interviewees self-identified as *mestizos*. Miguel identified as "white, in terms of 'race'" but as *mestizo* culturally, while Ximena first identified as white, perhaps jokingly, and then corrected herself saying she was *mestiza*. These responses point to the pervasiveness of a narrative of *mestizaje* in this city. Interviewees' responses appeared well rehearsed: 'we are all *mestizo*' most answered quickly. Furthermore, it was evident during interviews in Quito that those who self-identified as white saw their response as contentious, with several interviewees noting the societal pressure to identify as *mestizos*. For instance Pilar noted:

People who believe themselves to be part of the upper classes do not think of themselves as *mestizos* (except perhaps very few). *But I think they now know they cannot say that* [they are not *mestizos*]. *I think that mestizaje took place with... the Spanish conquest of the Indians....Therefore it is true that we have indigenous roots and, therefore, we are all mestizos!* (Quito: 2005).

<sup>7</sup> I do not include in this tally informants of foreign ancestry who identified as Arab, German, Jewish, et cetera.

Another interviewee further explained,

Now *everyone is a mestizo* because... through the media people are learning that the autochthonous values of indigenous people are good, or [at least] not as bad as they were supposed to be....Moreover it is now trendy to say 'yes, I am [partly] Indian'. It is a process of self-expiation for the past (Tomaso, Quito: 2005).

Tomaso's statement captured what was a constant feature of interviewees in Quito: when asked to speak about their ethnic identity or ethnic relations in Ecuador, most began by highlighting that in the last decade they had learned that 'we are all *mestizos*'. An educational process leading to the adoption of '*mestizaje*' as one's identity was evident.

I think the reality is that we are all *mestizo* and education has made the [social 'elites'] aware of this.... I think that people with *enough education* to know the history and trajectory [of this country] know that they are *mestizos* (Gloria, Quito: 2005).

Importantly the *mestizaje* learned about by interviewees in Quito was a 'racial' fact, a 'biological mixture', rather than *mestizaje* as a cultural mix, or as a new identity (i.e. hybridity, see Roitman 2004). This representation of *mestizaje* emphasises the existence of 'original' 'races', permitting the essentialisation of such 'pure races'.

*Mestizaje* was also largely used by interviewees in Quito to label those who were not considered 'properly' indigenous, or acculturated indigenous peoples (Roitman 2004). If a main representation of *mestizaje* is that of acculturation, however, the adoption of *mestizaje* as a learned identity by Ecuador's upper classes is problematic: as holders of the hegemonic culture they have not undergone a process of acculturation, making the content of their '*mestizaje*' appear vacuous. The interpretation of *mestizaje* as acculturation highlighted the importance of physical culture as a symbolic boundary for ethnic identities in Ecuador and avoided the idea of 'races'.<sup>8</sup> According to this interpretation any indigenous individual can become *mestizo* by adopting the appropriate physical markers. In a similar manner to interviewees in Guayaquil, interviewees in Quito expressed their belief that a lack of physical identity markers detracted from ethnic/'racial' differentiation and discrimination in Guayaquil, while permitting discrimination and exclusion in Quito. They reasoned that once physical markers were obliterated there would be no reason to differentiate and discriminate against certain groups. Soledad, for example, declared,

There are less [reasons] for racism in Guayaquil because people there all sort of dress the same. Therefore, the differences among them are less noticeable (Quito: 2005).

While non-hegemonic identity markers were seen as creating divisions, *mestizaje* was represented as a tool for political unity in the midst of corrosive diversity. The statements of Ignacio Perez Arteta, president of the Agricultural Chamber of the First Zone, on behalf of landowners during the indigenous uprising of 1990, exemplify this political use of *mestizaje*:

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<sup>8</sup> In the past, physical identity markers such as dress have been used as a determinant of ethnic identity in censuses.

[Indigenous peoples'] desire to own land in the way they imagine things to have been 500 years ago, leaves aside all that happened in history from that point forward...forgetting processes *such as mestizaje* that, whether or not the Ecuador of 1990 likes it, are now a reality (Perez Arteta 1992: 39, my emphasis).

Perez Arteta's statement found an echo among many interviewees who noted that "we cannot forget that we are now a *mestizo* state" and "history cannot be undone" (Quito, 2005). Thus, in response to claims for power and resources from indigenous political movements, *mestizaje* was represented as an inescapable reality. Some informants spoke about fearing the indigenous political movement, representing indigenous political leaders as threatening and fearsome. Speaking about this fear one of my informants confidentially stated,

Well, between you and me...[pause], I don't know if I would like to have an indigenous government. I am not sure that the racism that they [indigenous peoples] have experienced through the centuries might not reverse itself in a much more violent form and in a much smaller period of time once they are in power. This is a complicated topic because I don't think my opinion is racist. I don't think so. But racism might be there... (Jose Miguel, Quito: 2005).

### 3.3 A note on Afroecuatorians

It is important to highlight that neither interviewees in Guayaquil nor Quito spoke about Afroecuatorians in relation to the idea of *mestizaje*. This corroborates Rahier's (1999) important emphasis on the extent to which Afroecuatorians are invisible in Ecuadorian socio-political space. The use of *mestizaje* as the national identity narrative, and the construction of this *mestizaje* to exclude Afroecuatorians, implies a complete dismissal of Afroecuatorians from the nation-state. The consequences of this are evident in the fact that no national statistics on the size or location of Ecuador's Afro population were available until the World Bank-funded development projects for minority populations in Ecuador began in 1998 (Guerrero, 2005).

## 4. Differentiating between and discriminating among *mestizos*

Having briefly reviewed the different representations of *mestizaje* among the upper classes of Guayaquil and Quito I will now turn to look more closely at how interviewees represented heterogeneity among *mestizos*.

### 4.1 'Longos' in Quito

University-aged interviewees in Quito defined *mestizaje* as consisting of varying degrees of biological/cultural mixture. All of them acknowledged that vast heterogeneity exists within the *mestizo* group. Andres, for example, stated that there are "economic and also physical differences...as some [*mestizos*] look more like Indians". What criteria do interviewees use to differentiate *mestizos*, and where do they fall within the *mestizo* narrative they use?

Given that historically education has been presented as a tool for indigenous people to 'become' *mestizos* and for *mestizos* to advance socio-economically (Partridge and Uquillas 1996), an initial hypothesis can be that education could serve as a criterion for differentiation among *mestizos*. Indeed, all interviewees presented education as a tool for social mobility. Miguel, for instance, stated, "Education plays a very important role within *mestizaje*, because it is what allows people to break 'racial' and ethnic barriers" (Miguel, Quito: 2003). The majority of

university-aged interviewees also emphasised the links between education and economic resources. Thus, different educational institutions, dependant on their cost and prestige, were linked to different ethnic identities and classes. Thus,

...if you attend 'El Americano,'<sup>9</sup> it is expected that you will be white and from money...in 'Mejía' [a state school] you will find only '*longos mensajeros*' ['*longo*' couriers] even if they have money. In 'Montufar' [another state school] you see the children of janitors (Julian, Quito: 2003).

Furthermore, interviewees were quick to add that education does not present the ultimate answer for those who wish to break free of ethnic chains. Susana declared that,

There are people who are prepared<sup>10</sup> but they are not that pleasant [*agradables*]<sup>11</sup> and because of that they are not given work. When you go to a place if you have the right *image* they help you more quickly (Susana, Quito: 2003).

Could economic variables be the root cause for differentiations among *mestizos*? If this is the case, support would be gained for the idea of 'whitening' (Wade 2004). According to this idea, in racially hierarchical societies such as Ecuador, where individuals often wish to be white, an increase in one's economic status is paralleled by an upward movement on the ethnic ladder. A person is 'whitened' by the money s/he possesses. Thus, according to this idea, wealthy *mestizos* should be perceived differently from impoverished ones. Interviewee responses, however, throw doubt on this theory. Some did consider economic status a key division among *mestizos*, or at least initially claimed that it was so. Thus, they stated, "In societies like ours money gives a certain social class" (Esteban, Quito: 2003) and, "there are no real physical differences [between *mestizos*] because, although there are some phenotypical differences, the determinant is money" (Patricio, Quito: 2003). Interestingly, this last statement implies that even if money is held to be a significant factor, physical differences are still noticed. This was a pattern often replicated among respondents who wished to prove that phenotypes did not influence peoples' experiences. They would overtly note the physical aspect of an individual to highlight that "even though he looks like an Indian, he has been accepted by *mestizos*" (Galo, Quito: 2005). These statements implicitly drew attention to interviewees' awareness of others' phenotypes and of a certain hierarchy among phenotypes. Thus respondents who initially disregarded the importance of physical characteristics would modify their answer in later conversations accepting that "Yes, phenotypes are important, they brand you" (Patricio, Quito: 2003). A wealthy and famous Ecuadorian lawyer was cited as an example of the importance of phenotypes. A man of 'indigenous features' he was deemed a "janitor dressed as a lawyer" and as "[forever the] son of a labourer" (Patricio, Esteban, Quito: 2003). In fact, the majority of interviewees stated that biological differences, rather than money, created the difference between *mestizos*. One respondent, for instance, declared:

<sup>9</sup> An expensive American private school founded by Galo Plaza Lasso in 1940.

<sup>10</sup> Who have an education, i.e. who have the skills to undertake a job successfully.

<sup>11</sup> 'Pleasant' refers to their physical aspect. In other words 'they are not pleasing to the eye'.

If I go to play football with some *guangudo*<sup>12</sup>, even though we are both wearing the same clothes [a uniform, so there are no apparent differences in clothing which could denote socio-economic differences], one can still see the difference. Deep down physical characteristics are fundamental, regardless of socio-economic status (Julian, Quito: 2003).

Attesting to the ambivalence in this area, however, the same respondent later contradicted himself and said "...if one sees a *mestizo*, a '*cholito*' with good education, who ends up with money, people will see him as less of a *cholito*" (Ibid.).

A complex interplay, thus, seems to exist between phenotypes and socio-economic levels. A respondent stated that "It usually goes together: poverty with more indigenous phenotypes, with less access to education. They [those with indigenous phenotypes] have fewer opportunities than the less *mestizos*" (Ximena Quito: 2003). Another respondent was able to give examples of the role phenotypes played in access to resources

...in my university<sup>13</sup> it is about the looks. You can be 'rolling in money' but you cannot get into the 'A group'.... Kids with no money but with the right looks will get together, and this also happens in bars, such as the Cerebro: gringos with their awful outfits are allowed in, but a person that is well dressed and with money but darker will not be allowed in (Susana, Quito: 2003).

The veracity of this interviewee's statement was attested to by the owner of one of the most popular bars in Quito in 2005. His partner noted, "Yes, Rodrigo, does that. He stands at the door and checks who comes in. If you look '*longo*' we just say 'members only', or 'it's already full' (Maritza, Quito: 2005).<sup>14</sup>

In short, the homogenising promises of *mestizaje* seem unable to embrace those defined as '*longos*' or '*longuitos*'. But, who are these individuals? They were unambiguously distinguished from indigenous peoples by my interviewees. Carolina for example noted,

You never call an indigenous person a '*longo*', you never say 'Indio '*longo*', because you call '*longo*' someone like the construction worker, who is darker, who has more of the features of the Indian than the white...it is a derisive term similar to moron<sup>15</sup>... '*longo*' you call any of those '*cholos*' who make you upset, then you yell out '*longo de miércoles!*'<sup>16</sup> (Carolina, Quito: 2005).

The '*longo*' was, therefore, always identified as a *mestizo*. Often the 'more indigenous' or 'more *mestizo*' characteristics of this *mestizo* were emphasized. '*Longos*' were further linked to socio-economic and occupational rankings – as can

<sup>12</sup> '*Guango*' was used by my interviewees as a pejorative term for the long hair worn by certain indigenous men. '*Guangudo*' was a derisive way to refer to indigenous men.

<sup>13</sup> She was referring to the International University of Ecuador, an expensive private university established in 1992 and fully recognised in 1997. The high costs of this university severely limit access for specific sectors of the Ecuadorian population.

<sup>14</sup> A restaurant in Lima, Peru, was recently closed and fined for undertaking similar practices (BBC, July 8, 2007 < <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/6281346.stm>>). The Ecuadorian state is still far from addressing these more subtle ways of exclusion as Peru has done.

<sup>15</sup> In Spanish '*pendejo*'.

<sup>16</sup> '*longo*' of Wednesday – a euphemism for a ruder insult.

be noted above in Carolina's comment about a construction worker being a '*longo*' and Pablo's rude attempt at humour in remarking that "...a '*longo*' is a mixture between the bus driver and the street peddler" (Pablo, Quito: 2005).

Among university interviewees, the image of indigenous peoples, although romanticised, essentialised and not always appreciated, was far more respected than that of '*longos*'. It might be argued that this takes place because ethnic boundaries have been crossed by '*longos*', whereas indigenous peoples, especially those who promote the radical culturalist agenda of *neoindigenismo*, contribute to the safeguarding of symbolic boundaries between themselves and *mestizos*. Thus, students stated: "The indigenous [person] who maintains his culture is more respected than those who are westernised" (Lorena, Quito: 2003). Indigenous people who chose to acculturate were described as "*igualados*"<sup>17</sup> (Karina, Quito: 2003), while indigenous people were characterised as "well defined" (Isabel, Quito: 2003).

Even geographically [indigenous people] are well defined...there is much more discrimination against '*longos*' than against indigenous peoples. We all agree that the Indians are our roots and because of that we have a respect for them even if no one wants to be an Indian...(María Soledad, Quito: 2003).

'*Longo*', therefore, functions as an appellative for individuals acculturated into the *mestizo* identity with an indigenous rather than European heritage. Thus, while embracing *mestizaje*, my interviewees drew a distinction between themselves and '*longos*'. As Andres declared, "...there are economic differences and there are also physical differences [among *mestizos*], some look more like Indians...these are the ones that are called '*longos*' because of the way they speak and because of their appearance...and also because of their habits" (Andres, Quito: 2003, my emphasis). In Andres' statement the habits and physical appearance of individuals are almost unconsciously conflated and presented as barriers to their incorporation into interviewees' socio-economic networks. Some interviewees, however, sought to distance themselves from a physical characterisation of '*longos*', they sought to link this term solely to habits and behaviours:

To me this appellative of '*longo*' is a cultural issue. It is not a matter of skin...[to be a] '*longo*' for me is rather a mentality, in which a rejection of everything is evident:...I have to be aggressive, violent, uncultured, not trust anything from society. We all have a bit of '*longo*' from some point of view (Tomaso, Quito: 2005).

In Tomaso's statement the 'resentment' or 'self-rejection' characterising '*longos*' is highlighted. Several interviewees followed suit and, like Ana and Tomaso, argued that *longos* are not accepted because they are aggressive. Their aggressiveness, it was stated, resulted from their rejection of their heritage and their unhappiness with a situation in which they were neither indigenous nor Spanish (Ana, Quito: 2005). *Longos*, therefore, were in so many words defined as *mestizos* unreconciled to their status, suffering from some sort of psychological complex.

Despite this psycho-social explanation of '*longo*', the fact that biology plays a significant role in defining who is a *longo* was attested to by my interviewees' ease

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<sup>17</sup> An aggressive and demeaning term meaning 'those who have attempted to make themselves equal'.

in describing what a '*longo* looks like': [they have] "dark hair and look *runita*<sup>18</sup>", said Roberto (Quito: 2003), and according to several respondents they are 'small', 'dark [skinned]', with 'very straight, shiny hair, like bristles' and slanted eyes.<sup>19</sup> It was also stated that they are 'unattractive' and have less 'refined' features (Paulina, Quito: 2003). In this regard, one of my interviewees spoke about her experiences with students in one of Ecuador's most 'elite' and expensive universities,

One of the things that shocks us every year when we start school in September is that a high percentage of students undergo plastic surgery over the summer holiday. They come to school with bandages on their noses, because they want to look better to come here. [This is] because discrimination is still visual here in Ecuador...to say this is very hard for me, but it is the truth...you look at people and think, you, yes, you, no.... It is true. For that segment, whom some would call *longos*, little is actually done. They are the ones who come here every year with nose surgeries and *they try to integrate*, they try to get into some niche in society and never get anywhere (Gloria, Quito: 2005).

Several socio-behavioural characteristics were also listed as typifying the '*longo*'. Among these were that '*longos*' "have an inferiority complex" (Karina, Quito: 2003), and are "poor and slow" (Susana, Quito: 2003). The nature of the '*longo*' was essentialised with these characteristics, as one of my interviewees noted: "...even if you educate a '*longo*' he is still a '*longo*'" (Pablo, Quito: 2005). Sadly, these are the same characteristics that have been ascribed to indigenous people throughout the history of Ecuador – see Guerrero (1997), Clark (1998) and Muratorio (2000). The discourse of *mestizaje*, therefore, appears to have done little more than provide a cover for the paternalistic racism that has continually been imposed against the descendants of indigenous peoples.

#### 4.2 Heterogeneity among mestizos in Guayaquil

A similar dynamic of differentiation among *mestizos* was evinced by interviewees in Guayaquil. This dynamic was exemplified by the use of the term '*cholo*'. When asked 'who are *cholos*?' a few informants in Guayaquil ventured descriptions of the 'fishermen of the coast', a 'rather submissive character', or spoke of the '*cholo*' as "...the mixture of a natural inhabitant, proper of this region, with a *mestizo*..." (Joseph, Verónica, Antonia, Cristina, Guayaquil: 2005). The idea that the '*cholo*' is of mixed heritage was usually present, but a clear definition of who 'he'<sup>20</sup> was, was evidently lacking.<sup>21</sup>

The most common use of '*cholo*' among my interviewees, however, was not as a noun referring to an ethnic community, but rather as an adjective, qualifying individuals or actions. All respondents were clear about the negative connotations of the term. The negative meaning of '*cholo*' was attested to by local media articles

<sup>18</sup> 'Runa' is the Quichua word for 'human', however, it, and its diminutive 'runita' are sometimes used derisively to refer to indigenous peoples.

<sup>19</sup> An interviewee also mentioned the shape of their noses – 'narizes como escuadras' (noses like square rulers) – which helps to explain Gloria's comments below.

<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to note that interviewees always used the masculine form of ethnic identities, pointing to the need to carefully consider gender in our search to understand ethnicity (Radcliffe 1999).

<sup>21</sup> There is a movement to politicise a '*cholo*' identity in the coast of Ecuador, as a means of providing this population with access to economic, political, and social resources on the basis of their 'ethnic capital' (*Cholos defienden su identidad* 2000), (Los Cholos de la Peninsula 2003).



noting individuals' efforts to dodge the '*cholo*' label by wearing foreign and expensive brands (Buenaño 2004, Racismo rima con Nazismo 2001, Fougeres 2001, Límites al diálogo 2001, Larrea Vasconez 2001). The emphasis on economic gains as a means to avoid the '*cholo*' label ignores the role of ethnic/'racial' structures. Like the '*longo*', the '*cholo*' is an individual who turns to seek a Western rather than an Indigenous tradition. They are individuals who seek social advancement through the path of cultural *mestizaje* and, by moving beyond the distant anonymous 'other' of the indigenous, threaten to breach separations, whether economic, social, or ethnic. Several interviewees explicitly expressed their dislike of '*cholos*' because they have crossed these unspoken boundaries. As a female respondent explained:

*Cholo...cholo is the one who wants to be in a position that does not belong to him....* Because they have always been subjected, they have always been peons in the haciendas or they have worked as domestic servants, they have always been marginalised. Now, then, when these people try in one way or another to progress they are called *CHOLOS!* (Susana, Guayaquil: 2005).

'*Cholo*' was also used as a verb by my informants: one '*cholea*', i.e. calls another a '*chola*' and therefore 'makes' the other a '*cholo*', 'treats the other like a '*cholo*', in order to re-establish threatened boundaries (Pedro, Guayaquil: 2005). Thus, a person who refuses to conform to the norms of speech, dress, and manner associated with his or her ethnic identity and economic strata, one who adopts western models of dressing, for example, will be deemed a '*cholo*'. In this my findings closely parallel those of Torres and Patiño on youths of Guayaquil's upper socio-economic strata, who use '*cholo*' as a tool of verbal violence against the invasion of 'elite' areas by others (Torres Cardenas and Patino Rodriguez 2002).

An interesting difference in opinion could be discerned between how male and female informants explained the negative weight of '*cholo*'. This difference might be due to the dissimilar realms of experience from which interviewees draw their conclusions, highlighting the need to consider the interplay between ethnicity and other variables such as 'gender' when drawing research findings. Several male informants argued that '*cholo*' was used to denote economic differences between individuals. As Ernesto noted, "...it is a matter of distinguishing someone not by their social class or ethnicity, but by the size of their saving account" (Ernesto, Guayaquil: 2005). Several women, however, declared that a person might become quite wealthy and still be termed a '*cholo*'. Susana quietly confided,

There are, of course, isolated cases of 'such' people becoming successful, to be honest. And when that happens...you hear people say very quietly, almost under their breath, 'He is a worthless *cholito* and yet look at where he is' – and they mean [what he has achieved] in terms of education and wealth, how much he has achieved even though he is just a *cholito* (Susana, Guayaquil: 2005).<sup>22</sup>

My respondents rarely described the boundaries that separated a '*cholo*' from a 'non-*cholo*' in terms of 'race' or 'phenotype', rather they explained these in terms of immeasurable qualitative differences in aesthetics and manners.<sup>23</sup> Thus, explicitly

<sup>22</sup> When the diminutive of the word '*cholo*' – *cholito*, *cholita* – is used, the term becomes less confrontational and more paternalistic and condescending.

<sup>23</sup> This might have been influence by my physical characteristics, reminding us of the need to consider interviewee/interviewer interactions in all qualitative research.

racial categories were almost entirely avoided and replaced by 'coded terms' (Gilroy 1992:53). Attempting to describe the vague qualitative differences that set the '*cholo*' apart, a female interviewee noted:

...you perceive that [the '*cholo*'] is of a different 'type', or at least you think so, and you also hold him beneath you because he is not at your level. I am not referring only to education but also to behaviour, to the way one carries oneself.... The way of speaking, of dressing; the clothes of a '*cholo*'...we call these '*chola*' because they are not aesthetically pleasing, because with what little money they have they are vulgar... (Cristina, Guayaquil: 2005).

*Cholos*, then, were critiqued and disliked for their attempts to gain social mobility in terms of wealth, education, and fashion, and criticised for their inability to do this 'well'. In contrast to them, several interviewees praised the 'beauty of pure races'. In other words, while the '*cholo*' was critiqued for attempting to embody values that the 'elites' saw as reserved for their kind, people who were satisfied with identities distant from the social space of my interviewees were lauded. Folkloric identities were applauded as long as they remained distant and non-threatening to my informants, with several of my respondents waxing poetic on descriptions of essentialised and romanticised peoples. As Susana declared:

...I am not the sort of person who would ever say 'this *cholo*'.... On the contrary I love being able to appreciate the purity of the 'race', this is something that I have always liked. For example in Adoum's<sup>24</sup> *Entre Marx y una Mujer Desnuda* [Between Marx and a Naked Woman], there are many studies on the indigenous of the highlands...Adoum describes the Indian, he describes even geometrically how the Indian stands up like a triangle, because he is all poncho, until the bottom.... And I love it when he speaks about the Indian, about our Indian, the highland indigenous who is considered very, very, submissive, and is often painted this way... (Susana, Guayaquil: 2005).

#### 4.3 Liminal identities: parallels between Guayaquil and Quito

Interviewees' ambiguous position toward *mestizaje* makes visible a rich area of contestation, where duels over what should and should not be mixed are conducted. How those embodying mixture should be treated is one of the subjects disputed in this area, leading to the emergence of new ethnic terminology that seeks to delimit a space that is by nature controversial. It is in this area that the terms *longo*, in the highlands, and *cholo*, in the littoral, serve attempts to delimit the boundaries of *mestizaje*. *Longo* and *cholo* are liminal identities: they lie at the nexus of the struggle for *mestizo* identity as socially constructed categories to describe elements that challenge ethnic boundaries. '*Longo*' and '*cholo*' are terms used to defend against those who seek social gain by ascribing to the promises of *mestizaje*, while not directly attacking the idea of *mestizaje*. *Cholo* and *longo* are negative labels with strong 'racial' undertones, labels used to chastise individuals or actions that could destabilize Ecuador's ethnic hierarchy.

Like all ethnic appellations, '*cholo*' and '*longo*' cannot be 'objectively' defined because they are created daily in colloquial exchanges. However, they are even more problematic than other ethnic labels because their narrative is more unstructured and less historically grounded, being, therefore, far more flexible. First, these terms are not attributed to a group with a common history or

<sup>24</sup> Adoum, Jorge Enrique. *Entre Marx y una mujer desnuda*. 1976.

geographic location; the '*cholo*' or '*longo*' labels were applied by interviewees to all but indigenous peoples or Afroecuatorians – thus these labels are applied to the vast majority of Ecuadorians who fall within the nebulous realm of *mestizaje*. They are, consequently, extremely fluid labels. Moreover, '*cholos*' and '*longos*' have not become institutionalised as ethnic groups and are, consequently, more threatening to the status quo. For instance, while the 'Montubio' has been defined as a rural, agricultural identity, the '*cholo*' and the '*longo*' may yet seek to be identified with the *mestizo* urban space, seeking political, economic, and symbolic power currently in the hands of the upper classes. Furthermore, while Montubios, indigenous peoples, Afroecuatorians, and other groups represent themselves as separate non-*mestizo* populations within the *mestizo* state in order to advance their 'ethnic capital' as a political tool, '*longos*' and '*cholos*' are considered *mestizos* and must therefore share the *mestizo* ethnic capital. As long as the upper classes are implicitly understood as *mestizo*, '*longos*' and '*cholos*' would have to share their capital. Sharing capital, however, dilutes it and might, consequently, alter the ethnic hierarchy.

The '*cholo*' and '*longo*' narratives are particularly devious because they are mostly hidden. A great number of interviewees in Guayaquil denied ever having used the term '*cholo*'; they declared that this term was increasingly fading out of use given its negative and lacerating connotations. These declarations, however, were contradicted by my observations during informal social gatherings, by declarations from my informants' [university aged] children (Hugo, Alexandra, Felipe, Guayaquil: 2005), and by my analysis of the local media. The '*cholo*' narrative', then, is not an open social narrative, but rather an unacknowledged reality, unaddressed in the public realm. Similarly, while the use of '*longo*' is well acknowledged among the inhabitants of Quito, it is not officially recognised and, therefore, not officially addressed. An interviewee in Quito interpreted this as a sign of non-discrimination, stating, 'Here if the press catches you saying '*longo*' they kill you!' (Matias, Quito: 2005). The hidden nature of the '*longo*' and '*cholo*' narratives may explain the lack of research on this terminology.<sup>25</sup> Investigating these terms and the narratives that support them requires a sophisticated analysis of processes that are often private.

##### **5. Consequences of discrimination: limited socio-economic networks**

It is important to note that '*longos*' and '*cholos*' are unable to call upon essentialised ethnic identities such as 'indigenous peoples', Afroecuatorians, Montubios, et cetera, in order to access socio-economic capital. They are also unable to decry the racism they experience, given that racism has thus far been understood as only suffered by non-*mestizos*. These two realities make this population particularly vulnerable, presenting a poignant example of the intersection of ethnicity/'race' and class. '*Cholos*' and '*longos*' are trapped both by unspoken 'racial' prejudices and by their socio-economic status. Ethnicity, 'race', and class affect each other in various ways and jointly produce a variety of dynamics detrimental to this population.

We can analyse how the '*cholo*' and '*longo*' narratives affect the well-being of certain *mestizos* by applying the concepts of network analysis. Using networks – with all their fluidity, multiple layers, and complexities – as a way to conceptualise the workings of the social world has become increasingly influential (Burt 2000).

<sup>25</sup> Presently there are only three works seeking to examine the sociological use of these terms: Torres and Patino (2002), Kelly (2003), and Jijon y Chihuisa (1999). Of these, Kelly's short article concentrates on the etymology of these terms while Chihuisa uses the terms as a basis for a general critique of Ecuadorian social structures.

Network analysis is “...an attempt to reintroduce the concept of man as an interacting human being capable of manipulating others as well as being manipulated by them” (Boissevain and Mitchell 1973: vii). Individuals, in other words, function within specific cultural, social, ethnic/‘racial’, and economic relations to others. These relations constitute networks through which positive and normative information can flow. These networks are heterogeneous, non-bounded, and fluid, interlacing and being altered through individuals’ actions. Individuals, then, as ‘socially embedded actors’, embedded within social, economic, and normative networks, have the ‘...capacity to appropriate, reproduce, and potentially to innovate upon received cultural categories and conditions of action in accordance with their personal or collective ideals, interests, and commitments’ (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994:1442). Networks can either aid or hamper the outcome of actors’ agency. Kingman (2000) recognises the limitations that networks can place on individual action in Ecuador when he states:

*‘Que me respeten por ser alguien’* [‘Respect me because I am somebody’] means in Ecuador: because I am not a nobody. In Ecuador, the citizen as a subject with universal human rights is missing. Only the *specific* person has value, with his/her friends and prestige, weighted with attributes: s/he has the right of being treated decently (Kingman Garces 2000:303).

Individual action in Ecuador, as in other Latin American countries with strong traditions of patronage, is far more effective if channelled through networks than if it attempts to bypass them. The location of an individual within societies’ diverse networks, therefore, can be seen as a resource from which s/he can draw. Thus, being ‘well located’ or ‘better connected’ has been presented as a form of ‘social capital’ (Burt 2000:3). One of the clearest ways in which ‘connections’ represent a resource for an individual is in terms of access to information, where information is defined in its broadest economic sense. Even if only slight market imperfections exist, it will take time for information to be relayed across a population. Given that “information...will circulate within groups before it circulates between groups” a person’s specific relations will determine how soon or tardily s/he has access to a piece of information (Burt 2000:6). Julian offered a clear example of this process stating,

...if your uncle tells you ‘Look, I need a lawyer for my company,’ you tell your friends, therefore, they have an advantage over those who are not your friends (Julian 2003).

While those who are part of a cohesive network might have quick and effective access to pertinent information, those outside the network are inherently excluded from this information. It is important, however, to clarify that all individuals are interlaced in different networks. Thus, it is not their connectedness that is being questioned, but the location of this connectedness and, consequently, the efficiency and ability of an individual’s networks to provide relevant information. A person’s network, for example, may suffer from a high level of constraint, meaning that all of his/her contacts are interconnected but not linked to any external source (Burt 2000:33). Therefore, while the information available will swiftly circulate among the network’s members, lack of access to information from other socio-economic groups will actually limit their possibilities for socio-economic mobility. Cleaver’s research in Tanzania exemplifies this process. Her research shows that the poorest segment of the population in Tanzania, while internally linked, have no access to information on high-paying jobs due to their lack of access to external sources of information (Cleaver 2002). As Cheong et al have noted, this indicates

the need for a more nuanced understanding of social capital for development, not simply as access to other individuals, but as effective and useful access (Cheong et al, 2006).

Exclusion from a network inherently signifies unequal access to the resources of that network (Silver 1994). This is not, however, an equity or justice problem unless all possible access routes to the network are limited or negated and the network monopolises certain resources. Thus, if "...group boundaries impede individual freedom to participate in social exchanges, exclusion [in the form of] discrimination" takes place (Silver 1994). As Silver further states, "[e]xclusion may be based on virtually any social difference, but the extent to which differences produce exclusion depends on such issues as the permeability of boundaries" (Silver 1994:np). Ethnic/'racial' narratives can aid exclusionary processes by justifying the use of certain identity markers as group boundaries. As ethnic/'racial' boundaries cannot be overcome, their use as boundary markers can result in systemic injustices. Ethnic/'racial' boundaries, moreover, may interact with other types of boundaries, so that exclusionary processes,

...arise from the interplay of class, status, and political power [to] serve the interests of the included. [This] social "closure" is achieved when institutions and cultural distinctions not only create boundaries that keep others out against their will, but are also used to perpetuate inequality. Those within delimited social entities enjoy a monopoly over scarce resources (Silver 1994:np).

How do ethnic/'racial' narratives work in practice to prevent the creation of socio-economic networks across 'ethnic' groups? We can start by noting that while individuals might choose who they will speak to and relate with, they can only choose from among those with whom their networks put them in contact. Several of the university students I interviewed provided examples of how these restrictions work. As Julian concretely declared:

For example, on the first day of school it is more probable that one will become friends with someone who takes the same bus from the south, rather than with someone who arrives in a great car (Julian 2003).

More abstractly, Esteban stated:

...one relates more with people with whom you *feel* more *equal*" (Esteban 2003, my emphasis).

These two responses reveal several of the forces that underline the creation of social networks. First, as Esteban states, networks cannot exist without an agent's consent. A semi-conscious process takes place where agents choose with whom they will associate based on normative values. These normative values, based on an individual's habitus, are affected and justified by the narratives that legitimise social structures. Thus, we can expect that the different ethnic narratives that permeate Ecuadorian society will inform these values.

Gender, geographic, and economic variables also play a part in the creation of social networks. Julian speaks about Quito's specific reality, stating that one can more easily establish a relationship with someone from the same geographic region (such as the south) and with people of similar economic level (as the south is one of the poorest regions of the city, and buses are the most economical means of transportation, it can be expected that someone who comes from the south in a

bus will be from quite a different socio-economic status than a person who arrives from the north, a wealthier part of the city, in a 'great car'). Furthermore, when Julian declares that it is more probable that one will befriend someone from the same area and economic status as oneself, an analyst must relate this statement with others that reveal the economic and geographical layout of ethnicities/'races' in a city; in other words the racialised nature of social space (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996). It is then feasible to extrapolate that a multiple process of exclusion takes place in Ecuador, with certain individuals being geographically marginalised, economically disadvantaged, and ethnically discriminated. These several facets of exclusion and other variables such as gender combine and reinforce each other. Creating networks across boundaries where ethnic/'racial', geographical, educational, and economic differences coincide is unsurprisingly challenging. As an interviewee noted,

I think in the US and Europe friendships between two social strata must be difficult but here they are even more difficult because besides the economic part there are also ideas about racial differences, which, well, in reality don't exist. Still I think we are all a bit racist (Cristina, Guayaquil: 2005).

'*Longos*' and '*cholos*' were linked by interviewees to specific social, spatial and economic sectors, such as the south of Quito "...where all the *longos* are" (Andres 2003, Pedro 2003).

Indeed, it is not difficult to demonstrate the existence of processes of discrimination and 'social closure' in Quito and Guayaquil. Andres, for instance, stated:

Those with *money* always join together and those who are excluded from all groups get together somewhere else.... I mean those that they call *longos*, of course. They [*longos*] get together because they would never be (accepted) by people of white looks, if they do get together [with people of 'white looks'] it is only because of work or homework (Andres 2003).

This response presents economic and 'racial' variables as intertwined, and this mixture as the reason why certain people are excluded from specific networks. Individuals who are conceived of as '*longos*' are not allowed to join certain groups because of their physical characteristics. Another respondent recalled how at the school she attended, she and "the whitest girls in the school" formed a group of "the 'good' girls" (Lorena 2003). Again, 'racial' variables played a part in who had access to this network. In this case, moreover, discrimination was taking place among a group of girls most of whom would be classified as 'mestizas' according to the latest national census. Within the same school, therefore, among individuals with similar investments in education, ethnic/'racial' narratives introduced differential access to social resources.

If the cases cited above were exceptions within Ecuador's reality, they would not be so troubling: they could be understood as aberrations within the social structure. However, the preponderance of such acts (in 35 semi-structured interviews with university students in Quito, for instance, I was able to gather 41 separate examples of racist behaviour that led to social exclusion) hints at the structural nature of social exclusion in Quito and Guayaquil. Exclusionary mechanisms become structural when they "...are repeatedly confirmed through social relations and practices" (Silver 1994: np). The separation between 'indigenous-*mestizos*' and 'white-*mestizos*' was made particularly evident by students' answers to a short

survey they were asked to complete. In this survey 17 (out of 24) of the students stated that they use the terms 'Indian' or '*longo*' in order to insult others; 18 stated that a person with 'white' phenotype-characteristics is more attractive than one with '*longo*' characteristics; and 15 stated that it was easier to relate to people who looked more like themselves than to those who looked more indigenous (Quito, 2003). University-age students were especially candid about the role of ethnicity/'race' in limiting individuals access to social networks. Even in the ambiguous ethnic realm of *mestizos*, the role of ethnicity/'race' was noted as significant,

We admit that there are different degrees of *mestizaje*, and that one tries to befriend only those that look like one [who resemble oneself]...even though it is hard and difficult to admit this (Irene 2003).

Research by GRADE (Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo, Perú) has demonstrated that social exclusion results in a lower rate of return to investments (Saavedra et al. 2002). The rate of return to an individual's investment in education, for instance, might be reduced due to exclusionary practices. We expect an individual's investment in education – the economic cost of instruction, materials, transportation, and time that could have been spent elsewhere – to be based on expected returns in educational credentials, future earning potential, but also in the socio-economic networks that are created through the educational process. By preventing the creation of these networks, ethnic/'racial' narratives directly diminish the returns to educational investment for certain individuals, undermining efficient and optimal choices.

Returns to education in terms of employment in the labour market might also be affected by ethnic/'racial' narratives. A clear example of this was provided by Andres,

I have friends [who]... knew as much as me, but in the street they would call them 'ignorant' simply because of how they look. If they saw Nina Pacari in the street and did not know she was a Minister, they would think she is ignorant (Andres 2003).

Other students interviewed presented more examples of how investments in education by non-whites did not result in the expected returns. Susana, for example, declared that in her university, students who were more '*longos*' "coincidentally always received lower grades" (Susana 2003). These examples provide counter evidence to the theory of social mobility being based on an individual's skills and preparation. It is feasible to extrapolate that if an investment in education does not result in commensurate returns, the incentive to undertake such an investment is reduced.

Discrimination on the basis of physical phenotypes in Ecuador is facilitated by the requirement that all job applications include a picture of the applicant (Burlong 2003). Given this fact, discrimination within the labour market can take place in at least two ways. First, applicants can be discriminated against on the bases of 'soft skills': "skills, abilities and traits that pertain to personality, attitude and behaviour rather than formal or technical knowledge" (Shih 2002:104). Shih found that employers in the United States "...said they looked for job seekers with 'natural aptitude'... and [used] intangibles... such as their 'intuition' or 'gut feeling' to decide whether they could train and 'get along' with a job seeker" (Ibid.). In a society where discrimination has become structural, such as Ecuador, the process of deciding who holds these 'soft skills' permits exclusion based on 'racial' and ethnic

variables to be perpetuated. Several interviewees stated that 'racial' characteristics in Ecuador were seen as linked to the behavioural attributes that make up 'soft skills'. Individual competitiveness, for example, was attributed to white-*mestizos* given that "...indigenous-*mestizos* seek collective goods, while white-*mestizos* seek individual advancement" (Miguel 2003). Similarly, it was stated that "...some [*mestizos*] think less of themselves, as in the case of Indians, and they will not better themselves even if the opportunity is given to them" (Roberto 2003, also Victoria and Pilar, Quito: 2005). This lack of motivation was seen as "...part of their culture" (Monica 2003). The attribution of such characteristics as passivity and lack of motivation to 'indigenous-*mestizos*' permits these individuals to be disqualified from employment due to a supposed lack of 'soft skills'. In the coast an interviewee attributed the advancement of a well-known business man to his refusal to work with '*cholos*':

He used to say "*cholos* in charge [of the company] with me? Never!"  
And he was not a *cholo*?

No! No, no. He was poor, which is different. He was not *cholo* at all. Neither *cholo* nor Indian. He was white. Very white. (Milton, Quito:2005).

We have noted that *mestizos* are differentiated partly along 'racial' lines; in turn, different soft skills are attributed to different 'types' of *mestizos*. This division is at odds with the homogenising discourse of *mestizaje*. Respondents, however, couched the differentiation of *mestizos* in the rhetoric of 'image', which might not appear overtly 'racial' (Rattansi 1992). Statements regarding companies' and peoples' right to associate only with those who portray the "right image" were constantly cited to explain discriminatory behaviour. Andres, for example, stated that "If an educated '*longo*' was in a high position within a firm, he would be ignored at a managers' meeting because of his looks...in firms for the high positions they are always looking for people with a 'good presence' [image], they will never take a *longuito*" (Andres, Quito: 2003). Similarly, Monica declared, "In the client-service sector you try to choose people that will give the image of your company. Perhaps in a closed room where they have no contact with people there, perhaps, knowledge is more important [than looks]" (Monica, Quito: 2003).

'Statistical discrimination' also permits exclusionary processes to be perpetuated in the labour market. 'Statistical discrimination' is "...defined as the process wherein employers use easily discernible markers such as 'race' (as a group marker that employers believe is correlated with behavioural traits) in lieu of more expensive hiring practices" (Shih 2002:17). The examples given above clearly demonstrate how 'racial' characteristics are seen to predict behavioural traits. A specific instance of discrimination in the workplace was shared by Andres (Quito: 2003):

In my work...my boss would choose not to hire people simply by looking at them and deciding they were *longuitos*. My [colleagues] said [those *longuitos*] would make the group look bad...

Andres further stated that all the applicants had comparable educational credentials but that this governmental office, "...searches for white personnel to have a good *image*."

When asked whether they would hire a '*longo* with a graduate degree' (i.e. with very high educational credentials within the Ecuadorian context) he responded:



They would not take him. There was one girl who only worked with us for a month, she was a bit *longa* and no one got along with her, she was always by herself.

*Was it because of her manners?*

No, she had the same manners, the same socio-economic level; it was all because of appearances (Andres, Quito: 2003).

Speaking of a similar situation, Ana stated:

In the bank where I work, a *longuito*, a man without 'good presence' applied and because of that he did not get in. It is the same with indigenous [people], they don't want them to get in power even though they now have education (Ana, Quito: 2003).

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has presented an overview of the narratives of *mestizaje* used by individuals usually referred to as the 'upper-class white-*mestizos*' of Ecuador's two main cities, Guayaquil and Quito. Several points can be made about the significance of these representations. First, in noting the different ways *mestizaje* is conceptualised and represented in Guayaquil and Quito, the lack of a common national vision for this identity can be highlighted. *Mestizaje*'s ability to invoke a sense of egalitarian national unity is, consequently, questionable. Secondly, it can be noted that interviewees' construction of *mestizaje* as a process of acculturation is exclusionary on several levels. This construction perpetuates a vision of the urban core as *mestizo* and non-indigenous, a vision that rejects the indigenous from central spheres of political and economic power. In the case of Guayaquil, it appears to reject indigenous people (and their concerns) from the coastal region altogether. In fact, Guayaquilenian interviewees' emphasis on the Montubian roots of their *mestizaje* separates coastal inhabitants from the parts of Ecuador that derive their *mestizaje* from indigenous peoples, and, in turn, exonerates the coast from taking responsibility for the poverty and discrimination suffered by indigenous peoples. A construction of *mestizaje* as acculturation, moreover, ignores Afroecuadorians, excluding them entirely from the main narrative of national belonging.

Interviewees' construction of *mestizaje* is also conservative, supporting an ideological and social status quo. The emphasis of Guayaquil and Quito's, but primordially Quito's, interviewees on *mestizaje* as a 'racial' mixture supports the idea that 'pure' races exist. These pure races can be essentialised and romanticised or demonised as needed for political purposes<sup>26</sup>, and 'essential racial' characteristics can be called upon to justify inequalities in opportunities and outcomes. Interviewees' emphasis on *mestizaje* as acculturation of 'the other', furthermore, leaves unquestioned the substance of the '*mestizo*' identity of the upper classes and fails to question these classes' role and place in the creation of ethnic hierarchies in Ecuador.

In short, regional representations of *mestizaje* have significant implications, implications that must be uncovered and addressed if inclusive sustainable social stability is desired in Ecuador. The promotion of a 'national *mestizo* narrative' falls short of its promises of integration and egalitarianism at the local level and, unless these local dynamics are researched and understood, ethnic policies in Ecuador are likely to remain vague and ineffective.

<sup>26</sup> See Roitman (2008b) on the events of April 2006.

Sections 3 and 4 of this paper looked at differentiations among *mestizos*. Interviewees in Guayaquil and Quito differentiate among *mestizos* on the basis of cultural, social, and economic capital. More importantly, however, they also differentiate among *mestizos* in terms of phenotype. The terms '*cholo*' and '*longo*' are used in the struggle to define and justify these differentiations and their impact on certain *mestizos*' access to socio-economic networks. In this paper it was noted that individuals deemed '*longos*' or '*cholos*' face restricted returns to education and bounded job opportunities. Thus, significant processes of 'racial' exclusion and discrimination appear to be taking place among and between *mestizos*. Research on these processes, however, has not been previously undertaken because the mechanisms through which they occur are hidden by the broad label of *mestizaje*. Racial/ethnic discrimination and exclusion among *mestizos*, therefore, is unacknowledged, un-researched, and unaddressed. *Mestizos* who are discriminated against are disempowered to struggle against the discrimination they suffer insofar as their plight is not acknowledged or legitimated by the state's anti-racism policies, policies that concentrate solely on indigenous peoples and Afroecuadorians.<sup>27</sup> More research is needed empirically to measure the extent to which certain *mestizos* are detrimentally affected by ethnic/'racial' narratives in Ecuador, but such research can only effectively proceed from a nuanced, qualitative understanding of local narratives, as presented in this paper.

To conclude, this paper has explored how Ecuador's upper class 'white-*mestizos*' understand and represent *mestizaje*, delving beneath the hegemonic representation of Ecuador as a solid *mestizo* state. Through the analysis of these representations, some of the complexities of Ecuador's ethnic structures are revealed. Fully understanding and addressing dynamics that sustain inequalities in Ecuador requires us to go beyond official representations, to uncover structures of power hidden beneath hegemonic narratives.

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<sup>27</sup> By 'anti-racism policies' I refer to legislations and discourses opposing different types of discrimination. I do not mean to imply that Ecuador has a cohesive national anti-racism programme.

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