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Hybridity, Mestizaje, and Montubios in Ecuador

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The ‘Montubio’ ethnic identity has recently gained notoriety in Ecuador. This paper analyses how this identity emerges from and falls within Ecuador’s construction of ‘mestizaje’ or mixture as a tool for national integration. Given the exclusionary and limited nature of mestizaje in Ecuador, it is argued that as far as Montubios are uncritically constructed in relation to such mestizaje, they cannot serve as a progressive hybrid identity able to overcome essentialisms and existent ethnic structures. This paper starts by briefly reviewing how mestizaje has been constructed in Ecuador and then examines how the Montubio identity emerges from this mestizaje. It then explores different ways in which mestizaje may be conceptualized, and examines how these different models disguise or address power dynamics within heterogeneous populations. It concludes by briefly noting how ‘translocational positionality’ might provide a way to conceptualize the most progressive promises of mestizaje that Montubios might access.

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Introduction

In the Spring of 2001, after a protracted hunger strike by several group members, the Montubio people were officially acknowledged as an Ecuadorian ethnic identity and the ‘Council for the Development of the Montubio People of the Ecuadorian Coast and Subtropical Zones of the Littoral Region’ (CODEPMOC) was granted official recognition and government funding.² The very few writings that exist on the Montubio identity have alternatively represented it as the core of Guayaquil’s mestizaje (Estrada 2000), (Ansaldo Briones 2004) as a type of Ecuadorian mestizaje (Paredes Ramírez 2005:40-42), or as a ‘sui generis’ identity that, implicitly, emerges from Ecuadorian mestizaje (de la Cuadra and Robles 1996), (Robles 1996). These representations are based on an understanding of mestizaje as a ‘third space’: a creative, productive area that emerges from the collision of two initial forces: conquerors and conquered. From this area, it is posed, new *hybrid* identities can arise, hybrids that escape essentialisms because they inhabit a liminal space in relation to the binaries from which they emerge (Beltran 2004). These hybrids’ liminality is characterised by a constant struggle to negotiate and translate their identity vis-à-vis their ‘roots’, resulting in a nuanced questioning of initial essentialisms. If, following this view, Ecuadorian mestizaje is understood as a creative space from which novel, transgressive identities can be constructed, Montubios may (and indeed have been) represented as one such progressive identity: an identity that arises from Ecuador’s mestizaje yet bypasses the ‘white’/‘indigenous’ binary upon which this mestizaje is built.

In this paper I wish to contend that a representation of Montubios as progressive hybrids in relation to mestizaje in Ecuador ignores the power dynamics at the heart of the construction of mestizaje and is, more importantly, detrimental to the political empowerment of Montubios. While a casting of mestizaje as a creative space has been criticized by some scholars, it is daily gaining political support in Ecuador, a support that ignores the socio-political context from which ‘mixed’ identities emerge and forgets the extent to which mestizaje in Ecuador has historically been built as a homogenizing and exclusionary narrative. As the Montubio identity is currently being solidified in the national imaginary through media and scholarly representations, it is important to make explicit the dynamics between this ‘new’ identity and Ecuador’s hegemonic narrative of mestizaje in order to avoid ‘Montubios’ falling within, and reinforcing, national ethnic structures of oppression.

To build my argument I will start by briefly reviewing how mestizaje has been constructed in Ecuador and then turn to look at how the Montubio identity emerges from this mestizaje. Less has been written on mestizaje in Ecuador than on most other Latin American countries. Previous literature surveying ethnic identity change in Ecuador has largely concentrated on how Indigenous people ‘acculturate’ (often called the ‘whitening process’), changing from Indigenous to mestizos (Espinosa Apolo 2000), (Ibarra 1998), (Ibarra Davila 2002), (Smith Belote and Belote 1984). Change within the mestizo group, however, has largely been ignored or represented as a change in socio-economic status, not as an ethnic identity change. This is partly due to the simplistic conception of ‘mestizo’ groups as homogeneous, and partly due to the academic construction of mestizos in Ecuador as ‘acculturated indians’. Ethnic terminology specific to Ecuadorian processes of ethnic change within mestizaje, such

² CODEPMOC’s official website is available at <http://www.codepmoc.gov.ec/codepmoc.php> (Accessed: January 12, 2007).

as ‘montubios’ and ‘longos’, has, therefore, escaped study. Yet, in so far as the mestizo group is understood as homogenous, tensions and inequalities within it can be hidden and left unaddressed by policy makers. In the third part of this paper, therefore, I will turn to look at how mestizaje has been conceptualized and how different models present or disguise power dynamics within mestizaje. I will conclude by noting how ‘translocational positionality’ gives us an option if we seek to conceptualize the most progressive promises of mestizaje.

Mestizaje as acculturation in Ecuador – a historical overview

The clearest marker of ‘racial’ identity in the Americas was established in the 17th Century through the ‘Indian Tribute’, which was only abolished in Ecuador in 1857 (Ibarra 1998:18). In Ecuador, due to their lesser number, Afro-descendants, who ranked at the bottom of the emerging racial pyramid, did not attract as much legislative emphasis as Indigenous people. Descendants of a Spanish and Indigenous ‘mixture’ came to be termed ‘mestizos’ although, in a more encompassing sense of course, a process of mestizaje or mixture was taking place even among those who were not the biological result of Spanish and Indigenous unions, as the *cultural* bodies of both conquerors and conquered were mutually altered through daily interaction. These two meanings of mestizaje were conflated, in what De la Cadena has noted as a conceptual hybridity, allowing for the existence of certain “Indigenous mestizos” (De la Cadena 2005).

To understand the dimensions of the social gap that existed between Spaniards and mestizos, we might highlight that for lower class Spaniards in the 18th Century (termed the *plebe*) being called a mestizo was considered an insult (Ibarra 1998:11). As racial structures became consolidated in the Americas, mestizos were not fully accepted by Spanish society, even among the lowest social strata, and they were not entitled to the state-benefits reserved for Indians. Mestizos’ unclear ethnic belonging and their lack of contribution to the Colonial state, as they did not pay the ‘Indian Tribute’, made them an easy target for criticism. Thus, “the political position of mestizos was liminal in that they had none of the specific political rights held by either Indians or Spaniards...they [lacked] a juridical existence” (Smith 1997:1). Yet, since opting to ‘become’ a mestizo implied greater social possibilities and less economic burdens than being an Indian, several people chose this route to avoid paying the Indigenous Tribute.

Soon a terminology was created to refer to Indigenous peoples who adopted non-Indigenous identity markers in order to claim a mestizo identity. This laid the foundation for a growing perception of *mestizaje as the acculturation of Indigenous peoples into the dominant culture*. Indigenous peoples who appropriated Spanish dress and custom were termed ‘peinadillos’ (referring to a change in hair style) in the sixteenth century (Espinosa Apolo 2000:18). In the eighteenth century the term ‘forastero’ (transient) was used to refer to Indigenous people who became landless (and therefore transient) when they refused to pay the Indian Tribute (Espinosa Apolo 2000:45). Finally, these people came to be called ‘cholos’ in the nineteenth and twentieth century (Espinosa Apolo 2000:18). Significantly, while this term initially referred to Indigenous peoples who had migrated to cities from rural areas, modern civic and history books used throughout Ecuador now teach that ‘cholos’ are one of the *types of mestizaje* of the Ecuadorian highland (Ibarra 1998:16), (Ayala Mora 2004). Thus, an important conflation of meanings takes place, permitting mestizaje to be understood primarily as an acculturation process.

The Liberal Revolution of 1895 greatly increased the overt importance of ‘mestizaje’ as the foundation of Ecuador’s national identity (Ayala Mora 2004). This Revolution opposed the rule of the entrenched conservative Criollo ‘elite’, which in part meant supporting the leadership of new mestizo regimes. Eloy Alfaro, leader of the Liberal Revolution, “...expressed the chola or mestiza identity that overcame the Criollo identity” (Ibid.). Thus, mestizaje was legitimated and increasingly accepted *as the narrative of national identity* due to “...two fundamental historical events: the conversion of the mestizo into a *historical* actor after his active participation [in the Liberal Revolution], and the constitution of this group as the numerical majority [of Ecuador]” (Espinosa Apolo 2000:130).

As mestizaje was built in contrast to representations of Indigenous peoples, changes in these representations led to commensurate alterations in mestizaje. During the early 20th Century, the construction of the ‘Indian imagery’³ in Ecuador was led by the *Indigenistas* (Guerrero 1997), (Clark 1999). Although some of the intentions of the *Indigenistas* might have been laudable, “...due to their emphasis in quantifying differences, *Indigenistas*, ultimately, contributed to a racialized vision of the Indians: that is, a vision of Indians as a separate racial group, with innate and hereditary characteristics” (Clark 1999:79). *Indigenista* models implied subtle connections between ‘race’, ethnicity, and social behaviour. On the one hand, biology was used to explain the innate separation of Indigenous people from other groups of people (such as *mestizos*, blacks, or whites), claiming that biological differences underlay the social and behavioural traits of Indigenous peoples. On the other hand, alterations in a person’s behaviour were presented as a tool for ethnic and even ‘racial’ changes, since:

...by definition Indians were seen as ignorant because it was assumed that *Indians who were educated would automatically become mestizos. Perceived racial differences in Ecuador were clearly defined in terms of social behaviour, rather than genetically determined characteristics.* Thus dominant ideology assumed that an Indian who learned Spanish, left behind his poncho, and moved to the city would immediately begin to partake of national culture as a *mestizo* (Clark 1998:203, my emphasis).

Mestizaje, then, was conceived as a process of alteration for Indigenous peoples, which implied an understanding of ‘race’ as malleable. It was, in fact, an understanding of ‘race’ *as* ethnicity. The *Indigenista* movement sought to incorporate Indigenous people into the national mainstream by promoting policies of social change. Language, dress, and other social customs could ‘make a mestizo from an Indian’. This view has led some scholars, with whom I disagree (Roitman 2008), to claim that the “...mestizo ‘race’ in Latin America is largely defined through culture rather than phenotype or colour. A publicly defined mestizo can be virtually any biological mixture...but must have acquiesced to the dominant ‘national’ culture” (Smith 1997:506).

Through the configuration of Indigenous identity as changeable and different from mestizaje, and with mestizaje set up as the core identity of the nation, two processes take place. On the one hand, mestizaje is presented as a broad and abstract category into which all the country’s inhabitants can fall, as everyone is a mestizo, whether biologically or culturally. The dominant representation of mestizaje, therefore, includes a *universal promise of inclusion*. On the other hand, mestizaje became concretely understood as the acculturation of Indigenous people, the ‘Other’,

³ In Spanish, ‘imaginario Indígena’.

into the urban dominant culture. Afro-Ecuadorians and others who could not trace their heritage to 'Indian' roots were tacitly excluded from the national ideology, as were Indigenous peoples unwilling to 'be whitened'. The mestizaje that has served to build an Ecuadorian national identity has, by definition, excluded Afro-Ecuadorians: the mixture constantly evoked as the core of 'Ecuadorianness' is that of Europeans and Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants are not mentioned. Unlike Indigenous peoples, Afroecuatorians were not promised, however deceitfully, integration through acculturation. The Afroecuatorian ethnicity/'race' identity was simply considered foreign to Ecuadorianness. As Rahier declares:

In this [mestizo] imagination of Ecuadorianness, there is logically no place for blacks; they remain invisible. Afro-Ecuadorians constitute the ultimate Other, some sort of a historical aberration, a noise in the ideological systems of nationality, a pollution in the genetic pool, the only true alien, the "non-citizen" par excellence; they are not part of mestizaje (Rahier 1998:422).

Afroecuatorians have not simply been a marginal group in Ecuadorian society, they have been almost invisible. This is demonstrated by the fact that until the development in 1998 of PRODEPINE, the 'Indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian Peoples Development Project' partly funded by the World Bank, there were no estimates of the size of the Afroecuatorian population (Guerrero C. 2005:15).

Two trends of thought emerged in response to Indigenistas in Ecuador. 'Democratic liberalism', epitomized by Benjamín Carrión, advocated the advancement of the mestizo nation, conceptualising mestizaje as what was *not* Indian. Mestizaje, according to 'democratic liberalism', could be understood as a 'third space', a new creation, based on the mixture of genetic and cultural ingredients, but a mixture which favoured Spanish components. In this version of mestizaje, "...the Indigenous...is not incorporated but diluted, only his/her past remains" (Polo Bonilla 2002:51). Conversely thinkers such as Camilo Ponce Enriquez and Jacinto Jijón y Caamaño, advocated for a 'Hispanized' nation, which should garner its strength, its "cultural essence, [from] the Hispanic culture which [was] clearly superior" (Polo Bonilla 2002:41). This view held mestizaje as degenerative, and did not seek to construct a 'third space' but to encourage a return to Spanish roots. While more overtly racist and intolerant, support for a 'Hispanized nation' coincided with 'democratic liberalism' in favouring an understanding of Ecuadorian identity as non-Indian.

During the 1960s, the Tzantzicos (labelled after the journal they published), criticized the 'Othering' of Indigenous peoples through the discourse of mestizaje. The 'Tzantzicos' did not oppose the idea of mestizaje but rather "...its abstract and illusory character" calling for a 'deeper' cultural and biological mestizaje which would dissolve the category of the 'other' (Polo Bonilla 2002:82). Along these lines Fernando Tinajero stated that "[Ecuador's] culture has not...become an organic whole because the necessary mestizaje has not been produced... because...purity of blood is held as a value which cannot be substituted" (Polo Bonilla 2002:82). A critique of the notion of acculturation was not what underlined the Tzantzicos' statements: even though they supported a greater incorporation of Indigenous values into the process of mestizaje, they still saw the result as something that was not Indigenous. Nevertheless, this group presented an interesting criticism to those who advocated for 'racial purity', a Hispanized mestizaje, and to the 'elites' who silently remained aloof from the 'mestizaje' of the masses.

In the late 20th Century, the national narrative of mestizaje was increasingly institutionalized and, correspondingly, became evermore ideologically dominant. The

strength of 'mestizaje', understood as a process of acculturation and integration, was demonstrated by dictator Guillermo Rodríguez Lara (1970-1978) who "...at the same time [as] he appealed to the 'common Indigenous ancestor of all Ecuadorians', stated: 'There is no longer a problem in relation to the Indigenous...we all become white when we accept the goals of the national culture'" (Silva 1995:17). Thus, the ruling perspective held that "...contemporary cultural and social dynamics [were] principally a matter of acculturation and assimilation of subordinate peripheral heterogeneity to the dominant homogenous centre" (Stutzman 1981:49). The state was strongly involved in promoting the appropriation of the mestizo identity by Ecuadorian citizens as a means to reduce the ethnic diversity that threatened to disrupt development policies by questioning hierarchical relations.

'Neoindigenism', which demanded the maintenance of Indigenous cultural traits within Ecuadorian national culture, developed partly as a reaction to the strong acculturation message spread by the dominant mestizo narrative, and it was embraced by many of the Indigenous organizations that became increasingly politically mobilized after the 1960s land reform. In response, while mestizaje remained at the core of Ecuador's national identity, a space was created for certain Indigenous cultural traits. As a result of the activism of Indigenous leaders, such as Dolores Cacuango, schools that permitted the use of Quichua, were established, although Spanish remained the national language (Rodas Morales 1998). Thus, bilingual education was promoted among, and only among, Indigenous peoples (and often to make their learning of Spanish more efficient!). The implicit logic of these actions was that Indigenous peoples should be able to maintain their language within the private sphere, but the nation was still mestizo, that is non-Indian, and, therefore, in order to partake of mainstream society command of Spanish was necessary. The state, then, "...in order to ensure and control [Indigenous peoples'] contribution to society....proposed the protection, conservation, and investigation of 'vernacular cultures' so that the acculturation of their members would not imply the abandoning of their cultural identities" (Rivera Velez 2000:386). The influence of this perspective is evident in the policies of several of the Ecuadorian Presidents who followed Rodríguez Lara – namely, Jaime Roldos (1979-1981), Oswaldo Hurtado (1981-1984), Rodrigo Borja (1988-1992), and Sixto Durán-Ballén (1992-1996) – (Silva 1995).

After the presidency of Durán Ballén (1992-1996) Ecuador entered an especially unstable political era where coups ended the presidencies of Abdalá Bucaram, Jamil Mahuad, and Lucio Gutiérrez. Sectors of the population mobilized under ethnic banners have been important actors in these developments, most evidently Ecuador's Indigenous population. Identities historically marginalized by the construction of Ecuadorian mestizaje emerged as empowered political actors at the end of the 20th Century. Their empowerment was helped by the growing international aid sector, with NGOs seeking to fund and promote 'ethnic minorities'. The actions of ethnic identity-based groups, in turn, re-enforced the role of 'ethnicity' as a political tool, prompting other ethnic groups in Ecuador to consolidate and claim national and international aid as 'ethnic minorities'. This required the consolidation of solid ethnic boundaries, de facto essentializing these identities, in order to separate them from the larger 'mixed' population. In this respect mestizaje *has* served as a 'third space': the conflicting relations and struggles engendered by the colonial encounters in Latin America have prompted the growth of new identities that struggle to negotiate their placement within power inequalities structured around the hegemonic narratives of 'mestizaje as acculturation' and 'mestizaje as universal

inclusion'. To what extent such identities are progressive hybrids, however, remains to be explored.

A new hybrid identity? Ecuadorian Montubios

Montubios⁴ are one of the identities that have become salient after the recent 'ethnic earthquakes'⁵ in Ecuador. President G. Noboa was prompted to create CODEPMOC by signing Executive Decree 1394 on March 30, 2001, after protest actions by several group representatives (El Codepmoc a paso firme 2001), (Movimiento montubio pidio partida para los proyectos productivos 2003), (Montubios dan plazo a Noboa 2000). This decree recognizes Montubios as an ethnic group and provides government funding for CODEPMOC.

CODEPMOC is defined as a:

...decentralized technical organism, lead by the very Montubio people, through their Representatives who make up the National Council, greatest authority within the organism, [to] define and establish policies for the rural, integral and sustainable development of the Montubio populations, with an exact knowledge of their reality and within their own vision of development (CODEPMOC).

CODEPMOC seeks to "plan, program, and execute projects of global and integral development, conceived by the [Montubio] communities..." (Ibid.). Its proposal implies the existence of an established ethnic community with solid ethnic boundaries, whose demands for development can be based on their ethnic identity, and sets itself up as the official leader of this ethnic community. CODEPMOC's official website provides some insight into how this community's ethnic boundaries are being conceptualized. The website opens with a picture labelled 'The Montubio People': in it a crowd of individuals is shown, where almost every person wears a light-coloured Panama hat and brandishes a machete. I reproduce the picture here:



'The Montubio People'

⁴ Most references to the Montubio are male, opening up questions about the gender construction of this identity.

⁵ *Ethnic earthquake in Ecuador* is the title of an edited volume analysing the implications of the Indigenous uprising of 1990. Quito: Abya-Yala, Cedime, 1993.

All other pictures in the website follow this model, showing individuals in light coloured Panamanian hats talking, walking, and undertaking ranching and agricultural activities. Through its website, CODEPMOC presents the identity of the 'Montubio People' as well established and idiosyncratic, with well-defined, non-porous boundaries based on labour roles, habitat, and customs. This is supported by a number of folkloric representations of Montubios in the media, which highlight the costumes, rodeos and, to a lesser extent, the music and dance of this population as distinctive and unique (Torres 2000), (Arte montubio en Guayaquil 2002), (2003), (Medina 2003). The website constantly uses the plural possessive 'our' to present a unified voice for Montubios' wants and needs.

CODEPMOC's actions seek to solidify the 'Montubio' identity by delineating its ethnic capital: the use of Panamanian hats and machetes, a Coastal location, a rural lifestyle, ranching and agricultural activities, rodeos, et cetera. The stronger the boundaries surrounding the Montubio identity, the better this ethnicity can serve as a justification for the acquisition of economic and political resources. Montubios can then be presented as a united whole with a shared history of oppression, and a common need for state acknowledgement and aid, rather than as a loose coalition of individuals seeking socio-economic advancement. This is one reason why CODEPMOC has sought dominance over all movements invoking the Montubio identity. Actually, CODEPMOC is a particularly fascinating instance of the growing importance of ethnicity in Ecuador, as it is in fact the redressing of a labour movement, the Peasant Solidarity Movement (*Movimiento Campesino Solidaridad - MCS*), under an ethnic label, (Noboa mas cerca de bases indias 2001). We have here an instance of an 'ethnic' identity being chosen over a 'class' identity in the strategic game for power.

Importantly, in using ethnicity as a political tool CODEPMOC has at times joined with the Indigenous movement, strategically positioning itself as a fellow representative of an impoverished ethnic minority. In April of 2000, for example, Montubio leaders threatened the government of Gustavo Noboa with joining the protests of the CONAIE (the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) if Noboa did not approve and fund the CODEPMOC (Unidad dentro de la diversidad 2000). Positioning Montubios as analogous to Indigenous peoples accomplishes several things. Firstly, it reinforces the idea of Montubios as an 'ethnicity' comparable to Indigenous peoples. Interestingly, this is partly accomplished by emphasizing *class* similarities between Indigenous peoples and Montubios as rural peasants. Secondly, it forces the state to aid Montubios financially, and to grant them similar political leverage to that granted to Indigenous peoples. Montubios also become eligible for development programs aimed at 'ethnic minority groups' (Bonnet 2006). This supports Breton's thesis that the transition of labour identities into ethnic identities is not a "natural evolution of the [ethnic movements'] leadership, but goes hand in hand with neoliberal privatisation of the state development projects and the massive presence of NGOs" (in De la Torre 2006:253). Simultaneously, however, this positioning of Montubios firmly separates them from Indigenous peoples, despite their similar labour roles; they are presented as analogous but distinct. Finally, it also separates Montubios from mestizos, given that their request for economic and political resources is based on their status as an 'ethnic minority' outside the mestizo majority.

Like all identities, the Montubio ethnic identity is an exclusionary paradigm. As a politically active group 'Montubios' seek to increase the material wellbeing of

their members, those who use the group's identity markers and embrace its particular life-style. This entails a struggle to increase the value of what can be deemed 'Montubian ethnic capital' against other 'ethnic capitals' within Ecuador's ethnic/'racial' hierarchy. An increase in value means greater capacity to exchange 'ethnic capital' for other capitals (economic, social, cultural, etc.). To obtain such an increase, however, it is necessary for the community to solidify its boundaries. It must necessarily exclude 'ethnic others' including Indigenous peoples and Afroecuadorians, while excluding itself from the larger mestizo masses.

Ethnographic research is still needed to understand how the Montubio identity is experienced and understood by those who claim it. The fact that little research has been undertaken in this area is an instance to the lack of research *about* mestizos and within mestizaje, as noted at the beginning of this paper. This paucity of research may also point to the unquestioned and uncontroversial status of this identity up to recently. While Montubios were mainly represented as a class identity – as an agricultural labour force – and were not part of ethnic mobilizations in Ecuador, there was no need for research on their ethnic identity to be undertaken. Recent events, however, such as the consolidation of CODEPMOC, have prompted a trickle of research from the Guayas' Historical Archive, leading to the publication of three new works on Montubios by Willington Paredes Ramírez: *Los montubios y nosotros* (2005), *Los montubios, una etnia sociocultural invisibilizada* (2006), and *Eloy Alfaro y los montubios* (2007). *Los Montubios y Nosotros (The Montubios and Us)* presents a summary of the research agenda and findings of the Archive's efforts. Several interesting points can be highlighted. Firstly, the insurmountable distance between Montubios and 'Us', the unexplored 'us' who undertake the research, is striking. At all times the Montubio is represented as an outsider, even if a laudable outsider, while the identity of 'Us', the 'other Guayaquilenians', is never questioned or explained. This evinces an 'exoticized' understanding of ethnicity as a characteristic of the 'other', never of the dominant classes. I note that the Montubio is *represented* as an outsider because, despite the extensive fieldwork that apparently substantiates the findings of *The Montubios and Us*, Paredes Ramírez's work allows little space for the experiences of Montubios. When 'Montubio' voices are introduced, it is next to their pictures, where we once again see images of individuals (all males) wearing white Panamenian hats. These voices are introduced to answer the question '[What are you] Montubios or peasants?'

Both things are the same...! I am a Montubio because I make my life from agriculture in the hills and I am a peasant because I live in the fields. Francisco Troya

I do not leave my land: I am a montubio to the core. I don't like the town, I have to...wear shoes there...Montubio or peasant? It is all the same. Montubio is the peasant who works the earth. Ecuador Sellan Carpio

Montubio and peasant are similar things. Peasant is the one who works in the fields, the one who sows rice, and the montubio is the one who does things like ride horses, raise cattle and other things we do which make us montubio[s]. Gabriel Villamar
(Paredes Ramírez 2005:40-42).

Despite these individuals' statements that their Montubio identity *is* their peasant identity, Paredes Ramírez seeks to define the specifics of Montubios as an *ethnic*

identity. Their role as peasants is in effect presented as their 'essence': "The montubios can easily be identified by their lifestyle. What is more, in the rural social and cultural lifestyle of [these] men and women is expressed economically, socially and culturally not just their doings but also their being and their life itself" (Paredes Ramírez 2005:27). In fact, Paredes Ramírez argues that it has been Montubios' struggle for land, especially between 1900 and 1970 that "forced them to a relative distance from their socio-cultural reference as a montubian social ethnicity 'forcing' them to behave and 'be' peasants" they were also influenced "...by leftist ideology, politics and organizations which in their labour structures, as well as in their dogmatic insistence on peasantisation (for their political and union interests) repressed and silenced the socio-cultural aspects of the montubios" (Paredes Ramírez 2005:50-51). To Paredes Ramirez, then, Montubios are not a sector in the labour market that has chosen to emphasize and ethnic identity but, rather, an ethnic group that was forced to emphasize their class identity as peasants. Again, more ethnographic research is necessary to understand Montubio's self-identification and to what extent their identity is being 'ethnicized', whether by themselves or by others such as Paredes Ramirez, for political/economic gain. Research is also necessary to understand the implications of these representations for different socio-economic and ethnic sectors of Ecuador's population, and for Ecuador's ethnic/'racial' structures.

Paredes Ramírez both presents the 'racial' ancestry of Montubios and admits diversity among them "...they are diverse: of light skin, copper [skin], with evidence of their mulatto, black, and chola ancestry" (Paredes Ramírez 2005:29). Montubios are presented as the "'other' mestizos of the coast" (Paredes Ramírez 2005:28), while the identity of the first mestizos is left unexplored, submerged under the occasional use of the 'white-mestizo' label. Like CODPEMOC, Paredes Ramírez positions Montubios as analogous to Indigenous peoples and, consequently, as deserving of similar aid and state support:

They ask that *just like the indigenous* they [Montubios] be attended to with development programs to attenuate and alleviate their poverty. The montubios also ask for their right to [such aid]. They want those who facilitate and grant those programs to see them as another poor, forgotten, segregated, and silenced [group]. From the depths of the rural area they cry out 'We Montubios also exist!'" (Paredes Ramírez 2005:57).

Clearly, the Montubio population may make political and economic gains by emphasising its ethnic identity. While we cannot be certain from existent research whether this community a) exists as a self-identified community (outside of those who make-up CODPEMOC) and b) identifies itself as an ethnic group, the question remains: why are others such as the Guayas' Historical Archive choosing to emphasize their ethnic identity? Secondly, if Montubios are understood as a 'type of mestizaje' or as an ethnic group that emerges from mestizaje, would such representation allow them to act as progressive identity, overcoming the power dynamics inherent in Ecuadorian mestizaje? To answer this latter question, let me turn to look a bit more closely at how Montubios have been historically constructed.

Most of the previous writings on Montubios come from Ecuadorians literature, which has drawn on the 'montubio' as a stock coastal character. Demetrio Aguilera Malta, Enrique Gil Gilberto, Joaquin Gallegos Lara, and Alfredo Parez Diezcanceco, who formed the literary 'Guayaquil Group', and Jose de la Cuadra were among the first to write about identities developing in the coastal areas of Ecuador in the first part of the 20th Century. These writers were, therefore, instrumental in forming the national understanding of the 'montubio' identity.

Three previous works have attempted to describe the reality of ‘montubios’ from a sociological, rather than literary, perspective: Jenny Estrada’s *El Montubio – un forjador de identidad* (1996), Teodoro Crespo’s *El Montuvio: Centro de la Colonización* (1959, 2nd Edition), and Jose de la Cuadra’s *El Montuvio Ecuatoriano*, published first in 1937, and re-issued in 1996. Jose de la Cuadra’s book is by far considered the classic treatise on ‘Montuvios’ and referred to by all later writers as an authority on the nature and identity of Montubios.

In his book, de la Cuadra distinguished four different periods in the treatment of ‘montuvios’ within Ecuadorian literature. During the first period, which spanned from the inception of Ecuador to the end of the 19th Century, the “...montuvio is only a name...[that is] when he is at least given a name...[often] he is simply called ‘peasant’” (de la Cuadra and Robles 1996:39). De la Cuadra unwittingly notes the lack of a fully formed, or at least a fully recognized, Montubio identity during this initial period, during which the emphasis is on economic roles, and therefore on class, something de la Cuadra decries as hiding or ignoring ‘montuvios’ identity. In the second period (1910-1920) the uniqueness of the montuvio is highlighted, but his/her idiosyncrasies are used for derisive purposes. This second period coincides with Ecuador’s Liberal Revolution, in which montuvios played an important part as revolutionary fighters. Derogatory representations could therefore be a reaction by conservative forces that felt threatened by the ‘ferocious Montuvio’. The role of the Montubio in the revolutionary struggle may also have served to consolidate the Montubio identity as a useful political recourse for the new elites. De la Cuadra places himself and the writers of the Guayaquil Group in a third period, during which a realist representation of the montuvio is attempted, under the slogan ‘reality, but all reality’ (de la Cuadra and Robles 1996:42). De la Cuadra and the Guayaquil Group sought to present the reality of the Montuvio as they saw it, hiding no antipathies and disguising no brutal habits. Their most well known attempt to capture the reality of the Montubio is found in the Guayaquil Group’s edited volume *Los que se van* (1930). Finally, de la Cuadra predicts and criticizes a fourth and future era in which literature will seek to use the montuvio for political purposes (de la Cuadra and Robles 1996).

Despite de la Cuadra’s stated desire to communicate the entire reality of the montuvio people with no political goals in mind, his writings exemplify the essentializing of an ethnic identity (Sinardet 2005). His work attributes both physical and psycho-emotional characteristics to montuvios, and romanticizes these people as a life-saving force for the construction of the Ecuadorian nation-state. Similarly, in his *El Montuvio: Centro de la Colonización*, Teodoro Crespo presents a romanticized idea of the montuvio as “The wild man who lives in our tropical jungles, whom for me is the hope and most valuable treasure that this country has” (Crespo 1959:9). Unlike de la Cuadra, Crespo’s intention is clearly political: he seeks to place the montuvio at the centre of development in the rural coastal areas. Neither de la Cuadra nor Crespo question the reality of the ‘montuvio’ identity or explore its construction. Both treat the Montuvio as a solid entity upon which future policies could be built. More recently the writings of Jenny Estrada have also presented the montuvio as a solid entity, characterised by specific music, dance, food, and ranching traditions (Estrada 2000), (Estrada 1996). Significantly, Estrada notes that the Montubio is the core of coastal mestizaje.

Three characteristics seem to substantiate the separation of ‘montuvios’ from other ‘mestizos’. Firstly, contrary the Ecuadorian mestizo as reviewed at the start of this paper, Afroecuadorian ‘blood’ and Afroecuadorian cultural traits, broadly

defined, are mentioned as part of the ‘montuvio’s’ ‘racial’/ethnic mixture. De la Cuadra, for example, summarizes the ‘composition’ of montuvios as “60 percent Indigenous, 30 percent Black, and 10 percent white” (de la Cuadra and Robles 1996:27). Following this formula, the prologue to the first edition of de la Cuadra’s book on montuvios, introduces them as,

...rural proletariat that lives next to the great rivers, [and] is the result of the fusion of the Indians with the black on which[,] through the passing of the centuries[,] have been deposited *drops* of white blood... it is the product, moreover, of the inheritance left by African imports (IMAN 1937:10, my emphasis).

Estrada’s recent book on Montubios (1996) supports these ideas by presenting a photograph of the different ‘races’ that have combined to create the ‘montubio’ people: the ‘white European’, the ‘Black’, and the ‘Cayapa Indians’ of the Ecuadorian coast (Estrada 1996:25). The linking of Montubios to a specifically coastal Indigenous ancestry, rather than to Indigenous peoples more broadly should be highlighted, as it sustains their separation from the larger Indigenous movement and marks them as uniquely coastal.

The 1937 prologue to de la Cuadra’s work also hints at the second distinguishing characteristic of montuvios: they are linked to rural space. The importance of spatial location is reflected in the etymology of the label ‘Montuvio’: there is some debate as to whether it should be spelled ‘montuvio’, in reference to the hills (montes) and rivers (fluvius) within which the ‘montuvio’s’ life flows, or ‘montubio’, in reference to the life (bios) that emerges from the hills (montes) that sustain the ‘montubio’ (Robles 1996:iv, xxiv).⁶ The linking of ‘montuvios’⁷ to the landscape of the Ecuadorian coast is so significant in the conceptualization of this identity that Toledo Crespo speaks of those who have left this area as ‘ex-montuvios’ (Crespo 1959:12). The modern definition of ‘montubios’ as given by the Dictionary of the Spanish Real Academy continues to highlight a spatial understanding of this identity, defining montubios as a “peasant of the Coast (Ecuador and Colombia)” (RAE).

Finally, we can note that a process of acculturation is seldom linked to the ‘montubio identity’. Montubios are understood as a ‘sui generis’ group, rather than as a group in transition to the dominant core (IMAN 1937:10). This marks a most significant distance between montubios and mestizos, the latter being tacitly understood in Ecuador as acculturated Indigenous peoples. The ‘roots’ of Montubios are not questioned even if they are occasionally mentioned. Their ‘mixture’ is presented as stable and settled. The new hybrid identity of Montubios is represented as solid.

The idea of Montubios as a ‘sui generis’ group, along with an emphasis on Montubios’ links to specific occupational niches, has allowed the increasing mobilization of this ethnic group for political purposes. It thus appears that, contrary to de la Cuadra’s prediction, it has not been the literary ranks, but rather those who consider themselves part of the Montubio people, who have turned to this identity for political purposes. This is most clearly manifested in the creation of CODEPMOC.

Can Montubios be understood as a ‘hybrid’ identity in the progressive sense identified at the outset of this piece? Such a view would support their representation

⁶ Teodoro Crespo, Jose de la Cuadra, and the ‘Guayaquil Group’ use ‘montuvio’. Estrada and Ecuadorian newspapers between 2000 and 2005, on the other hand, use ‘montubio’.

⁷ I do not take a stance in this debate but opt to change my spelling according to the source I am citing in a specific context.

as a ‘sui genesis’ group and the use of this identity to differentiate the Ecuadorian Highlands and Lowlands by distinct processes and kinds of mestizaje. Such understanding of Montubios, however, can only be sustained if we de-contextualize the Montubian identity. The newly politicized Montubian identity emerged during the ‘ethnic earthquakes’ that marked the last 20 years of Ecuadorian politics. The increasing use of the Montubio identity as an ethnic identity eligible for minority aid and representation is at least in part a response to the increasingly politicized role of ethnicity in Ecuador. This was illustrated by CODEPMOC opting for ethnicity over class as the organization’s core. This identity, therefore, does not surpass local political power plays and institutionalized power structures but actually responds to them – Montubios turned to ethnicity as ethnicity became a stronger political currency in Ecuador. The Montubio movement, moreover, is being constructed in relation to the Indigenous movement; the Montubio identity, therefore, does not surpass the ‘Indigenous’ component of Ecuadorian mestizaje but seeks to place itself as its co-equal. The exclusionary and essentializing nature of Ecuadorian mestizaje works in favour of the Montubio movement as it seeks to strengthen and commodify Montubian ethnic capital. The placing of Indigenous people as external to the hegemonic core of mestizaje creates a space for Montubian identity as an analogous ethnic group. Montubian identity, of course, has to be essentialized in order to separate it from mestizaje as mixture more broadly. The hegemony of mestizaje in Ecuador, therefore, requires the essentialization of Montubios if they are to be successful in claiming political and economic resources as non-mestizos. In turn, this demands that the Montubio community solidify its boundary markers, refusing any further mixture. Therefore, the Montubio mixture is forced to be not only stable but also static.

As far as Montubios are constructed in relation to Ecuadorian mestizaje without first questioning and problematizing this mestizaje, Montubian identity is likely to support and even exacerbate the power discrepancies supported by mestizaje in Ecuador. In other words Montubios’ actions led by the current conceptualization of Montubio identity will serve to strengthen the idea of an Ecuadorian mestizo state where mestizaje is constructed as unachievable acculturation, where Indigenous peoples are exoticized and excluded, where Afroecuadorians are ignored, and where other groups may only benefit by claiming to be as exotic as Indigenous peoples. Thus far the Montubio identity, as represented by Montubio leaders in the CODEPMOC and by intellectuals in the Ecuadorian coast, has not served as a ‘hybrid’ identity able to escape essentialisms, but has rather reinforced ethnic boundaries in its search for ethnic capital. This strategy forces Montubio people into strict moulds and obliges them to struggle *within* the oppressive ethnic structures that characterise Ecuadorian society rather than acting against these structures. The question that then emerges is, can we conceptualized ‘hybrid’ identities in such a way that Montubio’s identity may serve as a means of empowerment without serving an essentialist programme? In an attempt to begin addressing this question, let us turn to look at some of the ways in which mestizaje can be conceptualized.

Mestizaje as a third space?

In a ‘traditional’ sense, mestizaje has been represented as denoting the mixture of two initial substances resulting in the creation of a third.⁸ Thus, the ‘mixture’ of Spanish

⁸ Some scholars have advocated the complete dismissing of terms like ‘mestizaje’ and, ‘mixture’ because they emphasize the mixture of two substances, promoting instead ‘creolization’ as a means to “escape the political cage and unscientific trap of racial, phenotypical and biological categorizations...”

and Europeans, according to traditional discourses, resulted in the mestizo ‘race’ and/or ethnicity. This view, predominant in the Ecuadorian educational system, is made explicit in a current and widely used civic textbook where mestizos are described as “...[having] physical traits that reveal their ethnic mixture and in their daily life [their assimilation of] Hispanic and Indigenous cultural elements” (Ayala Mora 2004:np). We know that this apparently straightforward definition can lead to problematic consequences: if mestizaje is understood as the “...mixture of pure elements such as primary colours, that is to say homogenous bodies free from all ‘contamination’” and valued for their purity, then, unless these two elements are seen as fully complementary, their mixture might be perceived as polluted and undesirable (Gruzinski and Dusinger 2002:19). In Ecuador’s case, this perspective would translate into a rejection of mestizos and an embracing of the pure and ‘authentic’ groups of Spanish and Indigenous peoples. Such translation would, of course, be affected by whether the initial ‘ingredients’ are equally valued, which is not the case in Ecuador or other racist societies. Any initial power disparities will affect how the resulting mixture is perceived and gender dynamics will, of course, play into these power differentials. In turn, the symbols and characters adopted by the mixed population are not haphazard, as the stronger side of the mixture may be able to dictate the rules of the mixture. This might result in the dilution or disguising of the weaker group’s heritage.

This ‘traditional’ model of mestizaje has been critiqued for obscuring the power plays just reviewed. The ‘traditional model’ makes it feasible to pretend that two initial substances meet and mix equally, resulting in a rich and peaceful combination. Mestizaje then “...becomes a metaphor for order, where the contribution of ‘both sides’ is symmetrical, while the result is a synthesis of these” (Polo Bonilla 2002:58). Struggles between the sides to impose their idiosyncrasies, and the possibly unbalanced outcome, are hidden. This ‘traditional’ model has also been critiqued for its implicit assumption of original ‘pure’ identities, identities that exist prior to any mixture and are not relationally constructed and negotiated.

It has also been argued that mestizaje is a democratising force as, in its broadest construction, it can embrace all parts of the population equally. If a nation’s identity is built on the idea of ‘racial’ mestizaje, for example, the “...democratic inclusive aspect to this ideology...holds out the promise of improvement [and integration] through race mixture for individuals and for the nation: everyone can be a candidate for mixture and hence moral and social uplifting” (Wade 2001:849). This argument, however, ignores that ‘pure’ identities must necessarily be excluded from such mestizaje. While the more broadly mestizaje is defined, so that it includes cultural mixture with or without ‘racial’ or genetic mixture, the more apparently encompassing it can be as an identity narrative, power disparities among mestizos will remain unless all initial ‘ingredients’ are equally valued. In the case of Ecuador the exclusion of Afro heritage from the construction of mestizaje means that those who are linked to such ancestry might not be equally valued within the national mixture. Montubios, as we noted, have been linked to an Afro ancestry. Moreover, the adoption of certain cultural products created by ‘others’ into the hegemonic culture need not entail the acceptance of these ‘others’. Thus, the fact that Montubio heritage is praised in some of the recent representations of Montubios by Ecuador’s cultural

(Cohen 2007: np). In this work I use mestizaje because it is the main ethnic term used in Ecuador, but struggle to undermine the notion of human ‘races’ and of original, ‘pure’ groups.

elite, does not mean that Montubios are granted a voice within national political and economic spheres. They might simply be accepted as folkloric oddities.

As we have noted in this article, and contrary to the ‘traditional’ view just reviewed, mestizaje may also be understood as a space that allows the formation of new forms that transcend their components and may even eventually influence them. Homi Bhabha terms this the ‘third space’: a space created by the colliding of two initial substances, which permits the creation of new ‘hybrid’ forms (Bhabha 1994), (Mitchell 1995). In the Ecuadorian case, this abstract concept translates into the belief that the Spanish colonization resulted not only in the mixture of genes and cultures, but also in the creation of new ethnicities. These new ethnic groups may have adopted certain Indigenous and Spanish elements but, importantly, they surpassed both of these, reaching a new creative level. These new groups, therefore, can be “...a liberating force which disrupts colonial and neo-colonial categories of race and ethnicity” (Malon in Clark 1998:205). Even before Bhabha concocted the phrase ‘third space’, the representation of mestizaje as a productive, progressive space has had a plethora of manifestations throughout Latin America: from Vasconcelo’s ‘Cosmic Race’, Argueda’s ‘Bronze Race’, Anzaldúa’s *mestiza* (1987), to Corky Gonzales’ ‘I am Joaquin’ who asserts “I am Aztec prince and Christian Christ” (1967).

As I have noted in the case of Montubios, this ‘alternative’ perception of mestizaje can be criticized for not contextualizing the resulting hybrid forms. Even though these are new groups or beings, they are created within a specific power structure to which they must respond and adapt (Anthias 2001:637), (Kingman Garces 2000:307). In a similar way to what we have discussed for Montubios, Spivak has noted that hybridity can be exploited and advanced by the few who benefit from it (the ‘brown workers of the World Bank, IMF’, et cetera) while exploitation remains hidden within it (in Hutnyk 2005). Thus, the exclusion and isolation that are part of societal encounters and mixture are often underplayed by overzealous promotions of ‘hybridity’ as a progressive force. Furthermore, the idea that hybrid forms have privileged knowledge due, according to Homi Bhabha, to the “...potential transgressivity of inhabiting a liminal space” can be questioned given the necessary contextual limits placed on the ‘hybrid’ (Bhabha 1994), (Anthias 2001: 623). At issue here is whether socio-economic constraints will affect Montubios’ worldview and actions. Are non-Montubios, on the other hand, to be understood as static and limited? Then again, can we speak of any social body that is not the result of some ‘mixture’?

Hybridity can also serve to ‘flatten difference’ serving “...commercial festivals of difference in an equalizing of cultures that would confirm Adorno’s worst fears of a market that sells ‘fictitiously individual nuances’” (Hutnyk 2005:95). Both the traditional view of mestizaje and the concept of ‘hybridity’ when used in relation to mestizaje, have been accused of serving homogenizing forces rather than promoting or permitting diversity within nation-states. In the case of Ecuador “[t]he Ecuadorian elites [have] attempted to create a *national mestizo identity* which excluded the ethnicity of the Indian and the black ‘other’” (De la Torre 2002:24, my emphasis). Mestizaje as a third space, on the other hand, may promote a growing folklorization of local identities as they strive to gain national and international recognition and aid. Against the idea of mestizaje as a homogenizing force Wade (2005) has argued for mestizaje to be understood as a ‘mosaic’ that requires the maintenance of the identities from which it evolves (e.g. in Ecuador’s case the idea of an ‘Indigenous’ identity and a ‘European’ or ‘Spanish’ identity), rather than as a

homogenizing force. He does not highlight, however, the power dynamics within the mosaic. Ecuador's mestizo narrative has indeed allowed and, in fact, required the maintenance of 'ethnic others', but only safely outside the political core and socio-economic apex of the state. If Montubios are added to the Ecuadorian mosaic, they are also likely to remain in the periphery.

In short, the Montubio identity that has emerged from Ecuador's mestizaje fails to deliver the promises of a 'hybrid' identity. Rather than surpassing the ethnic dichotomy upon which Ecuadorian mestizaje has been constructed the Montubio identity has been built in relation to it, supporting the separation of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The essentialization of Montubios for political purposes, moreover, further solidifies Ecuador's ethnic structures, reinforcing ethnicity as a political tool. 'Montubios' may be new players (or players who are gaining prominence) in the ethnic politics of Ecuador, but they are not players that question or challenge these politics.

The inability of Montubios to overcome Ecuadorian ethnic politics might be the very heritage of the mestizaje from which they spring, a mestizaje inhering with power disparities. The most radical promises of mestizaje, such as those embodied by Gloria Anzaldúa's *mestiza* in Anzaldúa's *Borderlines/La Frontera* (1987) – where the *mestiza* serves as a bridge, since she lives and is part of two worlds, experiencing and labouring beneath divided and coeval loyalties – cannot arise from a mestizaje that has historically constructed identities as mutually exclusive and granted socio-economic advancement only through acculturation into the dominant culture. In Ecuador, one cannot be *mestiza and* Indigenous or Montubio *and* black because Ecuadorian 'mestizaje' has been built on the separation of identities and their denial through acculturation. Thus, in regard to mestizaje in Ecuador, we might agree with Alonso in noting that certain words cannot escape the taste of their history, try as we might to reconstitute them (Alonso 2004:459). Ecuadorian mestizaje prompts ethnic polarization or acculturation as a means for social advancement: it does not serve as a creative third space from which progressive identities can emerge. Multiple and fluid identities cannot be integrated into this mestizaje. But this is what the most progressive representations of mestizaje as a third space promise; this is why Anzaldúa, Vasconcelos, and Corky Romano present mestizaje as crucially subversive and radical. If mestizaje as it has been constructed in Ecuador is unable to function as a third space from which liminal, subversive new hybrid identities can emerge, can we propose a different path?

In her criticism of hybridity as a means to understand diasporas, Floya Anthias presents a model that discards all essentialisms while seeking to conceptualize multilayered, complex identities with multiple roots and embedded in various hierarchies (2001). Although Anthias does not make use of her model to understand what has been termed 'mixed' ethnicities, *translocational positionality* presents useful insights into how we might conceptualize identity construction through narratives of placement within different sets of relations. This view,

...combines a reference to social position (as a set of effectivities; as outcome) and social positioning (as a set of practices, actions and meanings; as process). As such, it is an intermediate concept between objectivism and subjectivism, inhabiting a space between social constructionism and approaches that stress agency (Anthias 2001:501-02).

In other words, we turn away from an emphasis on the components of an identity to look at the narrative processes through which individuals are located and relocated by themselves and others in different social contexts. In the case of Montubios, we turn

away from seeking to define the specific characteristics that ‘make’ a Montubio (such as a Panamenian hat) to look at the different narratives that create him/her as a coastal inhabitant, as a peasant, as an Ecuadorian, as a ‘Montubio’, at a specific time and for a specific audience. Some of these positions might be contradictory and/or dialogical – hence translocationality. This perspective, therefore, “acknowledges that identification is an enactment that does not entail fixity or permanence, as well as [acknowledging] the role of the local and the contextual in the processes involved” (Anthias 2001:633). This model has space for the construction and understanding of the ideal progressive ‘mestiza consciousness’ that Anzaldúa describes as “[to] be a crossroads” (Anzaldúa 1987: 194, my emphasis). “The focus on location (and translocation) recognizes the importance of context, the situated nature of claims and attributions and their production in complex and shifting locales” (Anthias 2001:502).

A representation of ‘identity’ as constructed through various, contextually embedded narratives of positionality permits a conceptualization of individuals as “enmeshed in a web of contending loyalties and commitments” which “opens up the possibility of coalition and unexpected affinities, *increasing* the capacity for successful political action and contact” (Beltrán 2004:606). The democratic citizen constructed by this model is empathetic because s/he shares different positions, different perspectives at different times and in different contexts. Perhaps, then, the progressive promise of mestizaje is not that of ‘new hybrid’ identities that can overcome the historically constructed ethnic hierarchies from which they emerge, but rather that of individuals who carry within them the conflicting demands of diverse histories and can therefore be, ideally, emphatic participants in the democratic process. This is not to say that an individual is both ‘Indigenous’ and ‘Black’, for instance, because that assumes the existence of essential ‘Indigenous’ and ‘Black’ identities, but rather that an individual can be positioned and position her/himself in different spaces within existing social relations at any one time and, therefore, that different individuals share common experiences, however fleeting, within the societal hierarchies among which we manoeuvre, the hierarchies we fight or recreate.

Conclusion

Among the many ways mestizaje has been interpreted, mestizaje as a ‘third space’ that permits ‘hybrid’ identities with privileged insights because of their liminal location has at times been represented as the most progressive political model. Such interpretation of mestizaje, however, ignores the enmeshed nature of the ‘new hybrid’ identities that might emerge from it and, therefore, this interpretation fails to provide a progressive model. By looking at the case of Montubios in Ecuador, I have argued that ‘hybrids’ cannot escape the historical nuances of the mestizaje from which they emerge and, therefore, that mestizaje cannot be presented as a progressive ‘third space’ in Ecuador. The Montubio identity, I have noted, does not exist beyond the tensions caused by the dualisms (Indigenous/white and Indigenous/mestizo) of Ecuadorian mestizaje. As illustrated by the strategic relations between CODEPMOC and the Indigenous movement in Ecuador, the gains made by Ecuadorian Montubios are circumscribed by these historical divides. The actions of Montubios, moreover, affect the development of ethnic relations in Ecuador and, in so far as ethnicity is used as a means for socio-economic advancement, their effect might not be positive in the long run.

The Montubio identity, while rich in its cultural production and advantageous for a limited number of Ecuadorians at present, illustrates the limitations of new ‘mestizo hybrids’ as progressive forces in Ecuador. In response to these limitations I

have proposed that we appropriate Anthias's model of *translocational positionality* to explore the progressive possibilities of mestizaje as a narrative that permits individuals to be positioned in various, even contradictory, set of identity relations and, therefore, to constitute a body of empathic citizens, enriched and troubled by diverse loyalties and responsibilities. Such a model would arrest attention from the boundaries demarking ethnic identities, opposing the essentialization of these identities, while engaging with the different positions in which the complex heritage of post-colonial relations place individuals and with the knowledge and empathy such positions might generate.

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