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“¿Tengo Cara de Ladron?”

“Do I have the face of a Thief?": An Investigative Study of Stereotypes and Racism in Ecuador

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Introduction

Approximately a year and a half ago, while living in Cuenca, Ecuador, I had a conversation with the maid of the house I was staying in. It is a conversation that I have never forgotten. We were sitting together, eating lunch and watching the news, when she said, “Los negros me dan miedo,” which loosely translates into English as: “black people scare me.” I was taken aback by her comment, but my curiosity led me to ask her why she felt that way. She then told me that most of them (that is, black folks) were “ladrones” (thieves). After proceeding to explain to me how she would avoid sitting next to them on the bus or greeting them in the stores, she then said, “Pero no soy racista” (“But I’m not a racist”). I felt she believed that because she did not want to cause any afro-descendants physical harm, her actions and feelings were not racist. I explained to her that racism is when we think or act in a negative manner towards someone because of their race and that saying that afros are thieves is a racial stereotype.

Racism and stereotypes are still very apparent in Ecuadorian society, yet time and time again, much like the maid I had spoken with, I have found people who claim racism does not exist in Ecuador. Fascinated by how such an obvious (for an outsider) part of Ecuadorian society could be systematically denied by so many people who were part of that society, I decided to explore the issue of racism further and sought to find out, through the use of in-depth qualitative interviews and ethnographic research, how students at La Universidad Estatal de Cuenca narratively construct racial identity and racism.

Literature Review

Racism is a term that can include segregation, exclusion, and hate that is influenced by the idea that one is superior/inferior by cause of some biological characteristic or trait (Traverso-Yopez, 2005). Racial prejudice (that is judging someone based on their race and/or ethnicity) is

an important factor of racism (Fletcher, 2003); however, it is not the only one. Discrimination, which can include any action from avoidance and verbal insults to physical assaults, is also a part of racism (de la Torre, 1999). Racism is a collective experience; when one person of a certain race is affected, all those who self-identify themselves of that race are affected as well (de la Torre, 1999). Race, itself, is a category that exists because of culturally dependent social construction; however, the general public has varying conceptions of race. For instance, while some see race as physically and biologically based, it has been argued that the origins of race lie, on the contrary, in history (Weismantel and Eisenman, 1998). According to Carlos de la Torre, Ecuadorians still question ethnic domination and live in a society oppressed by racism; however, the role of racism in Ecuador needs further investigation (1997 and 1999).

Within the discussions of race and ethnicity in Ecuador, the concepts of “Mestizaje” and “Blanqueamiento” (“whitening”), or ways in which people could supposedly become “less indigenous” or “less black,” are recurring themes (Beck, Mijeski and Stark, 2011). Mestizaje is the belief that “todos somos mestizos” (“we all are mestizos”); mestizo is the mix between European and indigenous, which makes it so that the preferred mestizo is of lighter color and more western and that indigenous people are unable to have their own true identity within the nation (de la Torre, 1999). Racist attitudes in the Andes towards indigenous people all stem from the belief that many indigenous people cannot or will not become “white,” that is educated with morals that conform to Western standards (Weismantel & Eisenman, 1998). Even indigenous people believe that one can be born indigenous and die mestizo, if one changes their way of living, their habits of speaking Quichua, and constructs an outward appearance that is in essence “white” by conforming to western fashion ideals (de la Torre, 1999; Weismantel & Eisenman, 1998). Because this type of self-identity change is possible, it makes it hard to differentiate

clearly between mestizo and indigenous (de la Torre, 1999). The social construction of racial identity of indigenous is such that they are seen as lesser on the mestizo-scale. Consequentially when a mestizo, who comes from an indigenous background, distances themselves from the indigenous people, they are acting out of self-hatred (de la Torre, 1997 and 1999). A mestizo, in refusing to accept other indigenous people, is consequently rejecting a significant part of his own heritage. Mestizaje ideology, while seen as a “unifying doctrine of ecuatorianidad,” actually is behind a lot of the hegemonic racism in Ecuador, with one being superior/inferior because of their ethnicity and/or skin tone (Whitten, 2003).

There has existed in Ecuador a form of topographical segregation; that is to say that certain ethnic groups tend to reside in different geographical regions of the country. Afro-Ecuadorians have historically resided in the coastal areas where as indigenous people have resided in “el campo” or the countryside. Some members of these ethnic minorities have broken topographical segregation by moving to urban areas such as Quito and Guayaquil. In moving into areas where they are seen as “not belonging,” according to the dominant ethnicity, they become “the other” and racial tension is created (Muteba, 1998).

“El otro” or “the other” is a popular subject in Ecuadorian research. The indigenous and afro-Ecuadorian people, usually those with darker skin, are seen as the others (Traverso-Yepez, 2005). Racism in Ecuador is a hegemonic ideology, or dominant societal belief, that “the other” is not only seen as different, with special social significance given to physical characteristics, but also as lesser (Weismantel & Eisenman, 1998). Racism is present in many different ways in Ecuadorian society, including structural linguistics; for example, in words such as “cholo,” and “longo” (both words used in reference to indigenous people), as well as “negrear” (basically the verb for being, becoming, or acting black) (Fletcher, 2003). In a world of “mestizaje,” “the

blending of a national social body” (Whitten, 2003), racism against the indigenous is seen as a form of “self-odio” or “self-hate” (de la Torre, 1997), but it is still very much present in society. Even with the continued blending of different ethnic groups, whitening of the race, “blanqueamiento,” has been seen in Ecuador as a goal for many (Beck, Mijeski, & Stark, 2011; Muteba, 1998), highlighting the socially perceived positive aspects of one group (whites) over others (indigenous; afro-Ecuadorian).

In Ecuadorian society, specifically, the condition of being black or indigenous has been used as a form of insult (Traverso-Yepez, 2005). For instance, the word “negrear,” associated with the word “negro” which translates to black, means to be of lesser status (De la Torre, 2009). People from the coast, the area of the country with the highest percentage of afro-descendants, are referred to as “monos,” which translates to monkey; they are associated with an animal which could be tied with them being viewed as lesser (Whitten, 2003). Likewise when using the words “indio,” “cholo,” or “longo” in place of “indigena,” one is referring to something negative, associating the recipient with poverty, uncleanliness, and lack of intelligence (Colloredo, 1998; Fletcher, 2003). Some whites and mestizos disrespect indigenous people by paternalistically addressing them, adults included, with “hijito/hijita,” “little son/little daughter” (De la Torre, 2007 and 2009). Words such as “suco,” used to describe blondes/white people, are usually given a positive connotation (Fletcher, 2003). The evidence available in the verbalizations associated with race point to the everyday existence of racism within Ecuador.

In Ecuador, racism has been practiced specifically against the indigenous (Beck, Mijeski, & Stark, 2011; Colloredo-Mansfield, 1998; de la Torre, 1997; de la Torre 1999; Hidalgo Flor, 2004), as well as against afro-Ecuadorians (Anton Sanchez, 2007; Beck, Mijeski, & Stark, 2011; Traverso-Yepez, 2005; Muteba Rahier, 1998; Muteba Rahier, 2008). The “indigenas,” the

indigenous people of Ecuador, are descendants of the racial groups in existence before Europeans discovered the “new world.” This racism is the result of a form of xenophobia, which is hegemonic in Ecuadorian society, towards those who are different and described as “el otro,” or the other in English (Traverso-Yepez, 2005). Afro-Ecuadorians and indigenas have created advocacy groups in the past decades (Antón Sánchez 2007, Beck & Mijeski, 2000; de la Torre 2006). Through the work of these advocacy groups and the indigenous protests that took place in the 1990s and early 2000s, Ecuador has adopted political policies, like the Constitution of 1998 that protects the rights of these groups (Hidalgo, 2004; Muteba, 2008). While these changes have occurred, racism is still very much present in Ecuadorian society.

Even though the majority of Ecuadorians are classified as mestizo, a mix of white and indigenous, there has been a long history of racism against indigenous peoples (Collaredo, 1998). In the past, they were confined to the lower class with little to no representation in the economy and government; and while advocacy groups were created in the 1960s (Beck & Mijeski, 2000), most indigenous people did not gain the ability to vote until the 1970s as previously illiterate people were not allowed to do so (most indigenous people were illiterate in Spanish) (de la Torre, 2006). Over the past decades, however, they have promoted political changes, participated in strikes, and created more influential advocacy programs (Beck & Mijeski, 2000; Collaredo, 1998; De la Torre 2006; Hidalgo Flor, 2004). One such program, the Confederacion Nacional de Indigenas en Ecuador (CONAIE), which began in 1986, has been very prominent in organizing various strikes and uprisings in the struggle for their rights (Beck & Mijeski, 2000; de la Torre 2006).

There have been also been many uprisings and strikes since then, the most prominent of which occurred in 1986, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1999, and 2001 regarding such issues as water usage

and treatment on buses (Collaredo, 1998; de la Torre, 1999; de la Torre 2006; Whitten, 2003).

The government created el Consejo de Desarrollo de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas del Ecuador (CODENPE), el Proyecto de Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas y Negros del Ecuador), and la Dirección Nacional de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (DINEIB), which gave representation to indigenous and also created a bilingual education base for those who spoke Spanish and languages such as Quichua (Hidalgo, 2004). Changes such as these, while beneficial, still have not entirely erased the racism in Ecuadorian society.

The indigenous people of Ecuador have long been associated with disease, irrationality, and un-hygienic living conditions (Collaredo, 1998; Weismantel and Eisenman, 1998). They are also stereotyped as stupid, lazy, and immature (Swanson, 2007). Those who have come from the country side to live in the urban city areas are usually referred to as part of the “indigenous problem” (Traverso-Yepez, 2005). It is common to see many of these indigenous people begging or participating in menial labor in the streets. Begging, though a way of life for many of these urban indigenous women and children, reinforces class-based stereotypes of indigenous as well as racism (Swanson, 2007). The creation of an indigenous middle and upper class, in contrast, has shaken previous assumptions but sometimes is met with resentment of lighter skinned people who feel displaced by those they feel should be below them (de la Torre, 1999).

The embarrassment, shame, and self-hate associated with being of indigenous or black ancestry stems from the obsession to “improve the race” through blanqueamiento, that is to make it whiter, even though many Ecuadorians are not exactly sure of how white they actually are (de la Torre, 1999). When a baby is born of lighter skin, people are happy because the race has “been bettered” or the “blood has been cleaned” (de la Torre, 1999; Fletcher, 2003). Because of this ideology, the geographical areas inhabited by mostly non-whites are seen as “savage” regions;

thus, the migration of these people to other urban centers poses a threat to the hegemony and socio-economic power of the white-mestizo community (Muteba, 1998).

The emphasis on whiteness and the avoidance of darker skin, as in many countries, is a result of slavery and the need for an explanation of continued class division, making afro-descendants the ultimate “other” (Anton Sanchez, 2007; Traverso-Yepez, 2005; Weismantel & Eisenman, 1998). The history of Afro-descendant arrival to Ecuador is a direct result of the slave trade in the sixteenth century. A Spanish ship headed to Callo, Peru, was ravaged by a storm after having docked to obtain supplies in Las Esmeraldas. The twenty-three slaves aboard the ship escaped and were presumed to have killed their capturers (Muteba, 2008). Historical events related to the slave trade are why there are significantly more Afro-Ecuadorians in the coastal region than anywhere else in the country. Afro-Ecuadorians, having been slaves and seen as property to be bought, sold, and used, are divided from the rest of society under socially constructed notions of superiority and inferiority.

Afro-Ecuadorians, as victims of racism, discrimination, and social marginalization, began fighting for their social and representative rights in the 1970s, when they organized El Centro de Estudios Afroecuatorianos (the Center of Afro-Ecuadorian Studies), which provided analyses of the racial circumstance (Anton Sanchez, 2007). Afro-Ecuadorians created support and advocacy groups in the past decades, including la Confederacion Nacional Afroecuatoriana (CNA), and held meetings such as el Primer Congreso Unitario del Pueblo Negro in Quito (Anton Sanchez, 2007). Another organization was created in 1988, La Asociacion de Negros del Ecuador (ASONE)/the Association of Ecuadorian Blacks, to combat racism and its hegemonic nature in society (de la Torre 1999; Whitten, 2003). Some groups have even organized strikes; for example, in September 1995, various Afro-Ecuadorian organizations got together to protest

the response of police, after a group of mostly Afro-Ecuadorians were wounded and killed. The policeman had attributed the violent nature of the event to their rave, which they associated with words such as “poverty,” “ignorance,” and “delinquency” (Muteba 1998). Throughout the course of the 1990s, acceptance of Afro-Ecuadorians began to grow, and the Afro-Ecuadorian presence has become stronger in larger cities such as Quito, the capital (Muteba 1998). Though change has occurred, it does not negate the fact that racism is still a social issue.

Afro-Ecuadorians have been seen as the absolute “other”; while indigenous people occupy a lower place in the mestizo scale, afro-Ecuadorians have been perceived as not belonging at all (Beck, Mijeski & Stark, 2011). They are described as a lazy, uneducated people, predetermined to be like this because of their genetics (Traverso-Yepez 2005). The persistence of racism can be seen through reactions to Afro-Ecuadorian success. For instance, when Mónica Chalá won Miss Ecuador in 1995-96, many Ecuadorians surveyed (over 70 percent) disagreed with her having won the title and could not imagine her being representative of Ecuadorian beauty as it was in direct contrast to the white-mestizo preference. Even people who showed no animosity towards her placed heavy importance on her skin color, sometimes even referring to her as the “black Venus” (Muteba, 1998; Muteba, 2008). The Ecuadorian soccer team’s victory in 2006 for the FIFA Soccer world cup, composed of mainly Afro-Ecuadorians, and the public’s focus on their race further demonstrates a focus on racial differences. Many people would also comment on the natural athletic abilities of Afro-descendants (Muteba, 2008). Persistent stereotypes, existent even in modern Ecuadorian society, are that they are inclined to music and sports, laziness, violence, and delinquency (Beck, Mijeski and Stark, 2011).

A large portion of racism in Ecuador is associated with xenophobia, an intense fear of those who are different. This is especially the case of the general attitude of Afro-Ecuadorians

who have historically been seen as savages (Whitten, 2003). This of course is only reinforced by Ecuadorian media which has long presented Afro-Ecuadorian men as violent and dangerous (Muteba 2008). They tend to only mention race when the perpetrator is black and the victim is not (Beck, Mijeski & Stark, 2011; Muteba, 1998). In some parts of Ecuador, there is a very small Afro-Ecuadorian population, which leaves many people without personal experiences to base their views on, and instead rely on societal prejudices and their size and strength to provoke fear (Muteba, 1998). Upon introduction to an Afro-Ecuadorian community one of Muteba's interview subjects, overcame her fear, however still saw them in a diminutive manner (1998).

The dynamics of race and racism have been changing in Ecuador due to a variety of factors. Both Afro-Ecuadorians and indigenous people have been migrating into urban areas and breaking the racial geographic boundaries, making their presence more visible (Muteba, 1998; Swanson, 2007). They have also increased their political influence throughout the years, especially with the most recent Constitutions. For example, the multicultural Constitution of 1998 was created to meet indigenous demands, by the national Constitution Assembly (Hidalgo, 2004; Muteba, 2008). The current president, Rafael Correa, was elected after promising constitutional reforms that would make sure equality was present for all (Muteba, 2008). The concepts of *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento* have been increasingly challenged by the new idea of multi-culturalism, the inclusion of people of different unique cultures living together in a world of acceptance (Muteba 2008; Whitten, 2003). In this millennium, it has seemed that the power of *mestizaje* has decreased, though Afro-Ecuadorians and indigenous people continue to be "the others" (Whitten, 2003).

Though previous research has shown the importance of race and the existence of racism, in 2004, 48.5 percent of Ecuadorians surveyed by the government did not know what racism

even meant (Beck, Mijeski, & Stark, 2011). Considering the extensive history and overwhelming presence of racism in Ecuador, before racism can be eliminated or addressed through social programs, it must first be identified, defined, and its presence in society must become something that is made real to Ecuadorians. Previous research has shown the presence of racism in Ecuadorian society, while simultaneously showing a lack of awareness in the larger community. The changing dynamic of this issue requires further investigation into the present nature of people's awareness and views of race and racism. In this paper I explore how a group of college students in Ecuador understand, perceive, and use the concept of race in their everyday lives. My main research questions are: 1) Do Ecuadorians acknowledge racism exists in their society; 2) How do Ecuadorians perceive racial differences in their society; and 3) Do Ecuadorians believe that social relationships among whites, indigenous, and afro-Ecuadorians are improving?

Methods

Setting

Although many students at La Universidad Estatal de Cuenca believe that their society is currently changing for the better in terms of social inclusion, racial identity still plays a very important role in Ecuador. The exact nature of this importance differs according to geographical region. In Cuenca, where the majority of the study was conducted, a web of interrelated factors such as last names, ancestry, ethnicity, and social economic status continue to foster stereotypes, xenophobia, and discrimination towards those seen as different, or rather "the other".

Chosen Methods

The primary method for this study is intensive interviewing (Sprague & Zimmerman, 1989). Intensive interviewing involves a series of open ended questions concerning a specific topic, enabling the respondent to control the personal significance of that topic. Theoretical

importance of the self-construction to meaning is rooted in symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1967). Symbolic interactionism is the study of human interactions and how people interpret and respond to a particular situation, the other people involved in that situation and the environment in which the situation is taking place. Through this perspective, self and meaning are continually negotiated between an individual and her social audience through the exchange and interpretation of spoken and unspoken symbols (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000).

I have lived temporarily in the Ecuadorian culture and have drawn from my own experiences as well as those of other people I encountered outside of the sample. One aspect of ethnographic research is the full participation of the researcher into the culture or group that is being studied. That is, in ethnographic research, the researcher becomes a “participant observer” by immersing themselves in the studied social setting and experiencing it and the people in it first-hand (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 1995). I accomplished this by returning to Ecuador for three weeks, two of which were spent living in a friend’s house in downtown Cuenca and one was spent traveling in Montañita and Guayaquil. While there I discussed my project with most people I came across, from taxi drivers to people I met in dance clubs. During the majority of my time there, I stayed with and or hung around Afro-Ecuadorians, who in turn would talk to me about their own personal experiences. I also observed how people reacted to my Afro-Ecuadorian friends as well as to indigenous people I saw in the city.

Recruitment & Sample

The specific population that was involved in the interviewing process consists of students from La Universidad Estatal de Cuenca, a public university in Cuenca Ecuador (see Appendix C). Having lived in Ecuador previously, I had already created many contacts. Many of the interviewees were students that I knew personally, while a few of them were friends of friends. I

was able to set up most interviews via Facebook and telephone, these being the most common forms of communication within the population.

While grounded theory methodology, which refers to the method of creating a theory after analyzing data, promotes theoretical saturation for sample size, the point at which no new information is presenting itself in the interviews and that there is enough evidence to draw conclusions and create theories (Glaser, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), purposive sampling of a few cases is usually seen as appropriate for qualitative research (Onwuegbuzie, 2003). I conducted a total of 20 interviews, 5 of which were chosen to be analyzed in this paper, so as to be able to conduct a more thorough analysis of the interviews, as well as lower the inequality of ethnicities represented. Participants were randomly assigned numbers 1-20 so as to not release their names. Participants 3, 9, 15, 18 and 20 were chosen. These students were chosen so as to have the mestizo, afro-Ecuadorian, and indigenous perspective represented in this paper as well as both genders. Most interviewees were mestizo, which is comparative to the actual population demographic. I was able to interview students from Cuenca as well as students from other regions. One student was self-characterized indigenous, while two students were afro-Ecuadorian. I also controlled for gender.

Initial Interview

After choosing students who attend la Universidad Estatal de Cuenca in Ecuador as my population, I obtained IRB approval for the entire project prior to interviewing the first participant. I then constructed a rough interview guide with various questions (see Appendix A). I selected one student from this population to be the subject of my first semi-structured qualitative interview. This student is a 20-year-old male mestizo student at the university. I chose this particular student because he is bilingual and was one of my classmates while I was

studying in Ecuador. He also has easy access to Skype, which was essential considering I was in the United States at the time of the interview while the participant was studying and living in Ecuador.

At the beginning of our internet conversation, I had the participant read the consent form and then electronically recorded him verbally giving his consent. At the conclusion of the interview I also asked the student's thoughts on the interview itself, and if he had any suggestions or other thoughts. This allowed me to get a feel for what might be relevant about racism in Ecuador other than what I had put on the interview guide. This case study was used to determine the relevancy of my interview questions in modern Ecuadorian society and the need for further research on racial identity and the experiences of racism in the lives of university students in Cuenca. It was also used as a way to evaluate English-to-Spanish translational issues, the effectiveness of specific probing questions and the depth of information I could reasonably expect to receive about race and racism from a college-aged student in Ecuador while conducting these interviews. I then used the results from this initial interview to revise the interview guide (see Appendix B).

Interview Procedure

Interview questions were based on the student's thoughts, opinions, and personal experiences with stereotypes and racism. Information gathered from the initial interview as well as a review of the literature aided in the construction of the interview guide. In future interviews, more attention was to be put on seeing whether or not the participant understood racism. Confused reactions to some questions led to their removal, while the addition of a certain topic prompted by the participant led to the creation of new questions.

Data Analysis

Each interview was transcribed and coded. Coding was done using the free limited version of Hyper Research. I created a total of 29 codes were generated from these initial 5 interviews (see Appendix D). In the findings I focused on the following codes: Apellidos, Afro-Ecuadorians, Indigenous, and all codes having to do with perceived change. Within these main codes, there existed some crucial patterns, in which other codes tended to be mentioned. For instance, discussions of fear correlated with discussions of Afro-Ecuadorians. Apellidos related to social class and indigenous people were often associated with their traditional clothing. Within both Afro-Ecuadorian and Indigenous, special attention was put on the Prejudice/Stereotype section within those main codes.

Findings

The social makeup of a community has the ability and the likelihood to change with time. It is affected by advances in technology, globalization, and education. While previous literature on race and stereotypes in Ecuador is well researched and general agreement exists that there is a cultural blending that privileges whites over other groups, more recent research is needed in order to study the changes made in recent years as well as understand further the potential uniqueness of the city of Cuenca. Furthermore, the manner in which the interviews for this study were conducted of students from la Universidad Estatal de Cuenca is different from other sources. While the ethnography includes conversations with people from other regions of Ecuador, there was significant information gained on the city of Cuenca, the third largest city in Ecuador, located in the Sierran region. Many people view Cuenca, through personal observations as well as interviews, as a conservative city. This makes this study unique. Each interview was started by asking the question “qué significa raza para ti”, which means “what does race mean to

you.” From the five participants studied, the term race as well as the use of such classifications does not usually have positive results, that is to say that such classifications can result in discrimination and social separation. One participant even referred to race as “a bit of a social problem.” By grouping people into different races, division is created. Majority of participants preferred the word ethnicity and went so far as to say that the word “race” should not exist, especially in reference to humans, according to Participant 15 who thinks of this term in relationship to dogs: “Raza? No sé. Soy sincera, tal vez soy tonta, pero cuando escucho raza pienso es de perros... no sé pero para mí, raza no en los seres humanos. No lo tomo muy en cuenta” or “Race? I don’t know. To be honest, perhaps I’m stupid but when I hear race I think of dogs...I don’t know, for me, race in humans. I don’t take it into account.” Participants argued that we are one human race, filled with different ethnicities and biological differences. They stated that these classified differences should not make any sort of social difference, yet all agreed that these differences were given importance in Ecuadorian society as well as specifically in Cuenca. Significant discussions on the importance of last names, Afro-Ecuadorians, indigenous people, and perceived change have been analyzed.

Apellidos

In Cuenca much importance is given to a person’s “apellido” or last name. Though Participant 3 did not notice any significance and Participant 20 did not mention it, this was a popular topic among the majority of the 20 interviews I gave that was not included in the interview guide. Many of the participants brought up the issue without prompting, which shows the importance of last names in Ecuadorian culture. That is, the importance of last names was not a topic initially generated by the researcher but rather from the narratives of the participants themselves. Three participants (18, 9, and 15) all agreed on the role of these last names.

Specifically, last names that were more colonial, that is tied to Spanish origins, were considered good last names. People with these last names tend to be whiter in color, according to Participant 15, and usually receive preferential treatment in society. Participant 9 believes last names were more prevalent in his grandparent's generation and that they still have significance but that things are changing. It is definitely clear from this research that the importance of last names is based in family history as well as ethnicity, with people being able to know someone's ethnicity by their last name.

Indigenous People

When the chosen participants talked of indigenous people, none of them expressed negative feelings towards them but did say they felt that there were negative stereotypes about specific groups in Ecuadorian society. Some felt they were looked down upon by many Ecuadorians and sometimes mistreated. Participant 18 believes there are different degrees of indigenous:

“The thing is that the majority of people are not indigenous they are mestizo. There are different degrees of having indigenous ethnicity. So, that causes a real problem [be]cause everyone is able to discriminate against everyone else based on their different degrees, varying degrees of relation to indigenous people.”

This goes back to the concept of mestizaje, and the different degrees of indigenous discussed in previous literature. All other participants agreed that Ecuadorian society, in some ways, views indigenous people as lesser. This is apparent in the uses of various words that are synonymous to “indigena.” A few of the participants discussed the uses of words such as “cholo,” “longo,” and “indio,” which are all words used for indigenous people. Participants 3, 15, and 20 agreed that these terms were used as insults both to people who are not indigenous as well as those who are

not, which insinuated that an indigenous person was somehow lesser: “entonces si decimos a alguien que un insult eres un indio es porque el indio es menos pues por eso...porque el indio es menos” or “then if we say to someone that an insult ‘you are indio’ is because the indio es less...because the indio is less (Participant 15). One of the participants used in this study, 3, was an indigenous student from Saraguro. When asked what “cholo” meant he defined the term by saying it was someone of a lower social status: “una persona un poco más bajo de status social.” This is one of many presumptions made of indigenous people.

According to the students, some people still assume that indigenous people do not bathe. Participant 20 discussed how she has people stand up and change seats in the bus if an indigenous woman sits down next to them because they think she does not bathe. A couple of the participants mentioned that it is also a stereotype that they are less educated. Participant 3, though he stated that in his experience the education in the country side or “el campo” is not at the same level as that in the city, spoke of the stereotype that they are all uneducated and said that people have asked him whether or not he had finished elementary school and were surprised when he said he was almost done with college. Stereotypes such as these have led to them being treated differently, for instance in banks they do not receive the same customer service as someone who is of lighter skin, according to Participant 9.

None of the students interviewed had any personal stereotypes against indigenous people. Furthermore many of them seemed proud of where they came from; this is especially true of some of the mestizo students who acknowledged their indigenous roots. It is interesting to note that three different male participants claimed themselves to be indigenous even though they also admitted that they were mestizo. Participant 15 liked the indigenous because no matter what people may say about them in the street, they conserve their traditions, some even continuing to

wear their hair in braids and the traditional clothing, in this way some of them resist globalism and the blending of cultures. Participant 9 believes that those who are whiter can get along with indigenous people but they will not commonly hang out or get along very well: “digamos gente blanca y con gente indigena se puede llevar pero no se pueden llevar muy bien digamos.” It is apparent that there is still a social barrier that exists between indigenous people and the majority of society; they are still not completely accepted.

Afro-Ecuadorians

The interviews were conducted in Cuenca where there is a very small population of Afro-Ecuadorians; though, I also had some conversations with a few Afro-Ecuadorians from Guayaquil, a city close to the coast, as a part of my participant observation. All 5 of the participants agreed that Afro-Ecuadorians were associated with delinquent and violent behavior. There still exists, in Ecuador, a very apparent form of xenophobia towards people of a darker skin color. Most of the research of Afro-Ecuadorians is based in fear. Participant 20 even admitted to unconsciously crossing the street when coming across black people and as a habit hiding any valuables she has on her so as to prevent being robbed. She insisted that this reaction is never premeditated but rather an instinctual result of how she was raised and the fact that three out of the four times she has been robbed in her life has been by Afro-Ecuadorians. Both Afro-Ecuadorian participants were able to give first-hand accounts of being treated differently because of their skin color and/or ethnicity. Participant 9 told stories of people crossing the streets and clutching their purses tighter in fear that he might rob them. Participant 15 feels the difference specifically when she goes to the super market, where employees seem to pay extra attention to her. When asked why she thought they did this she responded with “porque como aqui hay una [creyencia] que todos los negros son ladrones o futbolistas; entonces yo no puedo ser futbolista

entonces tengo que ser ladron.” She refers to the stereotype that all black people must either be soccer players or thieves. She then goes on to joke that since she cannot be a soccer player she must be a thief.

While inside the University, the Afro-Ecuadorian students studied did not feel any difference among peers in response to the difference in skin color; however, they felt the difference outside of the university as well as from people of older generations. When Participant 15 was in high school, her chemistry teacher told her to her face that all black people were stupid: “un maestro me dijo que todos los negros eran tontos.” Jokes are also commonly made, not only in reference to delinquency but also to their presumed intelligence level, for example: “un blanco vestido en blanco es doctor; un negro vestido de blanco es un heladadero” (Participant 9). This translates to: “a white person dressed in white is a doctor; a black person dressed in white sells ice cream.” In Ecuadorian society there is a clear social distinction that people make against Afro-Ecuadorians. Participant 20 tried to compare the small amount of Afros in the city with a mouse amidst a bunch of cats. When asked why she used this comparison she said she did not know, that maybe rats with tails and rats without would be a better example but that she wanted to show the difference. Participant 3, while he has had many friends who are Afro-Ecuadorians, he notes that they are not accepted in Ecuadorian society as another person of a different ethnicity might be: “los morenos no son tan aceptados como...como cualquier otra person.” Racism and fear towards Afro-Ecuadorians is still very common.

Perceived Change

While racism and stereotypes still exist in Ecuador, most participants agreed that things have been changing, especially in the past 20 years according to Participants 9 and 20. Within the political realm, students have noticed changes in response to the 2008 Constitution that

acknowledges different ethnic groups, the law of inclusion, and political campaigns.

Globalization and the internet were also discussed. Some argued that with access to what is going on in other countries around the world, young people are developing a different mentality, one that is more open and inclusive of other ethnicities:

“...estamos en una nueva era donde estamos aceptando, conociendo, abriendo un poquito más nuestras mentes para hablar un poquito mas de tú a tú y ya no pensar que alguien es mejor que otro solo por su color. Pienso que eso se debe a estamosComo raza estamos mejorando; estamos yendo por adelante” (Participant 9).

In this quote the participant explains how he believed we are in a new era where we are beginning to open our minds a bit more and be more accepting. He mentions that we can begin speaking to each other “tú a tú,” which basically means that we can start addressing each other in an informal matter as we are the same, since no one is better than another because of their skin color. He believes that as the human race, we are moving forward. Some students believed that change, or rather a transformation according to Participant 20 is still needed, and that Ecuadorian society is currently within this process. Participant 15 thought that the process is “as slow as a turtle” but that one day they will end up at their goal: “yo creo lo malo en el Ecuador es que nos vamos en el paso de Tortuga pero llegamos algún día a la meta....” or “I believe the bad thing about Ecuador is that we are moving [as slow as] a turtle but we will one day arrive at our goal.”

Conclusions/Discussion

This research can be furthered in the future by analysis of the remaining interviews I gathered while in Ecuador. Finding students willing to talk about an issue so rarely discussed was difficult in itself. Finding students of indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian ethnicities proved near impossible, as there are said to be few within the University to begin with (The University

does not advertise demographic statistics). It would be beneficial for future studies to focus on these populations if possible as it would provide greater insight into any possible differences in thoughts or opinions. While conclusions can only be drawn in regards to the actual population studied, the results of this study could be used in forming hypotheses and theories on the social construction of identity in other parts of Ecuador as well as in Latin America. These interviews could also be used in the future in analysis of other topics, such as class and gender.

This research is completely original, as no one has studied the student of La Universidad Estatal de Cuenca in this manner. These 20 in-depth interviews with college student in Cuenca can provide insight into how this specific group perceives race in Ecuador. Their perspective can then be compared with the perceptions of other groups. This would be another way to further research in this area.

It must also be noted that college students are a very unique group of individuals as they are receiving a higher education. On the other hand, some of the students interviewed claimed that they do not usually talk about the concept of racism. Further knowledge and interaction with different races could arguable promote change in perspective. Such was the case with participant 20 who concluded her interview with “He podido aprender de esto es que sin darnos cuenta somos racistas así pero a veces es más inconsciente que consiente” or in English: “I have been able to learn from this that without realizing we are racists, but sometimes as much unconsciously as consciously.” In this quote the student acknowledges the insight she gained from having gone through just the interview process.

The ethnographic study of course is based on my own observations while in the country. Qualitative interviews, in contrast to quantitative methods, are participant based, and allow a greater and deeper understanding of the views of the population studied. The process of getting

closer to the subject/issue studied in such an involved manner gives greater insight to the study.

Both means of research allow for new information to be contributed to the current literature.

Appendix A
Interview Guide

Basic interview of interviewee:

Age:

City of birth:

Ethnicity:

semester in school:

Major:

What does race mean to you?

Do you think people of different races are treated different in this country (probe for example)...this city (probe for example)...this university (probe for example)?

Do you think it is present in Ecuador? Cuenca? The university?

Have you been a victim of racism? (probe)

Have you been stereotyped? (probe).

Have you witnessed someone being mistreated because of their race? Type of clothing? Socioeconomic status?

What do you think when you see a person who is:

White

Mestizo

Black

Indigena

Please describe the physical characteristics of your ideal woman/man.

Thoughts on interracial dating/marriage? Would you? Why/Why not?

Are you friends with anyone who is foreign, white, mestizo, black, indigenous?

Do you think that your education has influenced your awareness and opinions of race and racism? How?

Have there been any significant changes in Ecuadorian politics and views of racism in your lifetime?

Appendix B

Interview Guide (revised)

Basic interview of interviewee:

Age:

City of birth:

Ethnicity:

semester in school:

Major:

What does race mean to you?

Do you think people of different races are treated different in this country (probe for example)...this city (probe for example)...this university (probe for example)?

Do you know what racism is? What is it? (Researcher be prepared to provide definition)

Discuss violence, verbal slurs, racist jokes, etc.

Do you think racism is present in Ecuador? Cuenca? The university?

Have you been a victim of racism? (probe)

Have you been stereotyped/prejudiced? (probe).

Have you witnessed someone being mistreated because of their race? Type of clothing? Socioeconomic status? Their last name? (Probes to any positive answers)

Do you assume anything upon seeing a person who is: white, mestizo, black, indigenous..?

Thoughts on interracial dating/marriage? Would you? Why/Why not?

Are you friends with anyone who is foreign, white, mestizo, black, indigenous?

Do you think that your education, especially in La Universidad de Cuenca, has influenced your awareness and opinions of race and racism? How?

Have there been any significant changes in Ecuadorian politics and views of racism in your lifetime?

Participant	Gender	Age	Place of birth	Ethnic Group	# semesters in University
1	Male	25	Cuenca	Mestizo *	6
2	Female	21	Cuenca	Mestizo	6
3	Male	26	Saraguro	Indigenous	8
4	Female	21	Cuenca	Mestizo	6
5	Male	25	Puyo	Mestizo	8
6	Male	23	cuenca	Mestizo*	6
7	Male	26	Piñas	Mestizo	5
8	Female	20	Cuenca	Mestizo	6 (4 in current major)
9	Male	23	Oriente	Afro-Ecuadorian	5
10	Male	23	Cuenca	Mestizo	5
11	Female	21	Cuenca	Mestizo	4
12	Male	29	Azogues	Mestizo	4
13	Male	22	Cuenca	Mestizo	2
14	Female	35	Cuenca	Mestizo	2
15	Female	29	Esmeraldas	Afro-Ecuadorian	8
16	Male	25	Saraguro	Indigenous/Mestizo	6
17	Female	25	Cuenca	Mesizo	8
18	Male	20	Cuenca	Mestizo	4
19	Female	43	Cuenca	Mestizo	4
20	Female	20	Cuenca	Mestizo	3

Appendix C. *a couple participants, though they admitted they stated they were technically mestizo, they perceive themselves as indigenous.

Appendix D

Abuse
Afro-Ecuadorians
Apellidos
Biological Aspects of Race
Cuenca
Education
Family Influence
Fear
Generational difference
Historical influence
Indigenous
Interracial dating/marriage
Meaning of Race
Media/forms of communication
Mestizo
Outsiders
Political Influence
Prejudice/Stereotype
Race as a social problema
Racism
Racist jokes
Regional differences
Self-esteem
Significance of clothing
Social change
Social class
University
White
Words

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