The Issue of Blackness and Mestizaje in Two Distinct Mexican Contexts: Veracruz and Costa Chica

Odile Hoffmann, Christian Rinaudo

The issue of Blackness and *Mestizaje* in two distinct Mexican contexts:

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Odile Hoffmann & Christian Rinaudo

Abstract: The construction of new nations in Latin America has triggered debate on the definition of national identity with a view to reconciling the reality of *mestizaje* with the attribution, inherited from Colonial times, of specific 'characteristics' to groups and individuals ('Spanish', 'Indian', 'Black', 'mulatto', etc). It was also confronted with racist connotations which, in the early 19th century, included the ideas of progress and modernity, hence the difficulty in legitimizing its own 'brand of *mestizaje*.' We will address these issues through empirical examination of two contexts in Mexico: the State and City of Veracruz, and Costa Chica on the Pacific coast of the States of Oaxaca and Guerrero. What these two case studies share is the issue of *mestizaje*, so strongly associated with that of Mexican national identity, from the standpoint of the African presence which, though considerable from the start of colonization, was not included in 'classic' views of national *mestizaje*. This analysis helps reveal various ways in which populations of African origin were incorporated into the Nation. Thus, we can see how the local configuration articulates with the overall discourse to privilege one facet or dimension of (cultural, or social, or political) Afro identification over another.

Keywords: racialization; ethnicization; indian identity; black identities; afro-latinos; hybridity; creolity

Odile Hoffmann is Geographer at the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD-France), at the URMIS Laboratory. Her research deals with social construction of ethnic and racial categories in the case of afrodescendant population in Colombia, Mexico and Belize.

Christian Rinaudo is Sociologist at the Université de Nice-Sophia Antipolis, Unité de recherche migrations et sociétés, URMIS. His research deals with ethnic and racial studies in France, Colombia and Mexico.

The explicit racialization of colonial societies appeared in the 18th century and developed especially in the 19th century, as shown by Alan Knight for Latin America (Knight 1990) and well developed by more recent authors for Mexico.[1] Before then and with Atlantic modernization in the 16th century, differences in colour, status, prestige and social position intermingled in multiple combinations within which the 'racial configuration' existed without eliminating the others (Velázquez 2011).

It was finally in the course of the 19th century that the idea of race was refined and reinforced. In Mexico, political figures from different parties and intellectuals, including 'scientists' (a group inspired by positivist theories), built a young nation, assumed to be *Mestiza*,[2] in search of its unity (after achieving independence in 1821) and identity after a century of civil strife. Combining opposites

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[*] We would like to thank the readers of this journal for their remarks, which enabled us to improve the previous version of this article.
[1] See the work edited by Yankelevich (2009)
[2] Because of the well-known difficulty in translating the terms *mestizo* and *mestizaje* in English, we preferred to leave them in Spanish.

and seeking a new path, they then shaped such notions as '*Mestizo* race', 'Bronze race' and 'New race', all expressing the will to recognize the specificity of a very mixed population while fitting it into the universalizing scientism that prevailed at the time. With the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), which further reinforced the need for cohesion, José Vasconcelos developed the concept of 'Cosmic race' (Vasconcelos 1925), echoing Manuel Gamio's *Indigenismo* (Gamio 1992 [1916]) to lay the groundwork for 'integrationist' cultural nationalism. Thus, even when glorifying *Mestizaje* and mixing, 'race' continued to guide the vocabulary, reasoning and discourse and, with 'race', the political and social rationales of hierarchical organization.

Instituted at the end of the 19th century, such paradigms waned a century later, giving way to other political concepts and a new societal model. The period of 1980-1990 was marked by the success of multiculturalism, the politics of recognition (Taylor 1992) and political handling of differences (Kymlicka 1996). These models were viewed as new options for fighting the marginalization and discrimination historically suffered by 'ethnic', 'racial', 'cultural' and 'national' minorities. From then on, several Latin American countries like Brazil, Nicaragua, Colombia, Perú, Bolivia, Ecuador and Venezuela launched a process of politico-institutional recognition of the claims of populations asserting their indigenous and African origins explicitly inspired by multiculturalism, and modified their constitutions and legislations accordingly (Gros 2000; Wade 1997, 2010). In Mexico, the *Indigenista* discourse around integration changed during this period evoking issues and action programmes defined in terms of respect for cultural diversity. Nonetheless, the constitutional change of 1992 recognizing the nation's 'multicultural composition' did not give rise to legislative reforms on this theme.

This political context largely contributed to 'ways of seeing' and understanding the issue of *mestizaje* as it arose in Mexico. Here as in many other Latin America countries, this question was discussed mainly 'from the Indian standpoint', starting from a process of 'dis-Indianization' (or assimilation in the 19th century and early 20th century), then (very) relative 're-Indianization' conducted on the basis of indigenous recognition accompanied by rejection of the ideology of *mestizaje* which prevailed throughout the 20th century. At the end of the 20th century, some observers and political players began interpreting this as what impelled the forced cultural homogenization central to the process of forging an official national chronicle which ignored the importance of other demographic phenomena (Viqueira 2010). In particular, populations of African origin were largely ignored until the end of the 20th century, when the Dirección General de Culturas Populares launched a national programme, 'Our Third Root' (*Nuestra Tercera Raíz*), and various scientific initiatives began revealing the importance and diversity of 'contributions' by people of African origin (Hoffmann 2005; Martínez Montiel 1994; Velázquez & Correa 2005). The invisibility of such populations can be explained in part by structural demographic processes: in Mexico, the largest number of slaves from Africa were brought in during the first part of the Colonial period, between 1580 and 1640 (Aguirre Beltrán 1972), unlike the Spanish Caribbean islands where the slave trade lasted much longer, into the

19th century (Benítez Rojo 1983). Consequently, there was no renewal of 'Black' populations and, in Mexico today, few individuals correspond to the generally recognized 'Black' stereotype associated with other identifications: 'African', Cuban 'Black', North American 'Black.' This low visibility of 'Black populations' on a national level also corresponds to the fact that few individuals identify with a category that has officially disappeared (from census data, official texts, public policy) since Independence (1821). Today in Mexico, only a tiny minority people define themselves collectively as 'Black'. Were we to try and count the number of individuals in this category, the figures might easily range from a few thousand to several million according to the selected criteria (phenotypic traits and skin colour, self-definition, genealogical descent, cultural practices, etc).

In this context, the matter of seeing how the link between the history of slavery and populations 'of African origin' is activated or not, proclaimed or not, used for political purposes or not helps revitalize research on the 'Black diaspora' or '*Black Atlantic.*' Taking into account how the issue of *mestizaje* is called into question or not, redefined or diversely interpreted, sometimes given a political bent, leads to examining the conditions in which boundaries based on presumably differentiated genealogies may produce 'groupness', meaning the crystallization of collective awareness of belonging to the same 'group.' In Brubaker's terms, the notion of 'groupness' — unlike 'groupism', which is a tendency to consider ethnic groups, nations and races as substantial entities — refers to an event, something which may or not occur in the social world, which may or not succeed in crystallizing despite players' efforts to impose its existence (Brubaker 2002).

To address these issues, we chose an empirical method enabling us to sidestep discursive approaches or ideologized debates. This entails describing two local contexts in Mexico which both share an approach to the issue of *mestizaje* based on — or including — an African presence: the coastal region and City of Veracruz on the Gulf of Mexico and Costa Chica on the Pacific coast between the States of Oaxaca and Guerrero. In both cases, we sought to understand how local configurations articulate with broader rationales to reveal or alter representations of *mestizaje* or, conversely, ignore them in favour of other models or representations.[3]

Veracruz, ethnic 'whitening' and folk culture

In the State of Veracruz, the absence so far of political organizations connected to transnational networks defending the rights of 'Black people' or 'Afro-descendants' produced a regional configuration in which contemporary political interests bear less on recognizing, labelling and counting social groups established on an ethnic basis than on accounting, or not, for cultural traits assumed to be of African origin (music, dance, festivities, diet) fitting in with those assumed to hark back to Spanish and indigenous origins as part of a regional culture recognized as linked to '*Jarocho*

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[3] In both regions of this study as in all Mexico, the historic miscegenation of populations from different origins (indians, peasants from other regions, slave descendants, mullatoes, foreigners, hacendados, etc) is a fact we are trying neither to debate nor to measure here.

identity'[4] and perceived as *Mestizo* (Sue 2007). In these conditions, it is mainly on the level of cultural policy formulated in terms of the 'Third Root' and its contributions to the regional heritage that the issue of an 'African presence' has been the subject of debate and specific positions taken by different local players.

In Veracruz, and throughout Mexico, the relatively early slowdown in the slave trade and the return to demographic growth of the indigenous population after a sharp fall resulted in rapid inclusion of populations of African origin into a largely rural 'folk civilization' Antonio Garcia de León called the Afro-Andalusian Caribbean.[5] The development of such cultural expressions as Fandango and *Son Jarocho* in this 'Afro-Andalusian' or '(Indo-)Afro-Andalusian' Caribbean (Pérez Montfort 2007, p. 183) organized around livestock and herding was not cut off from the city, however. Quite the contrary, they reinforced each other through continuous exchanges between ports and hinterland. From the start of the Colonial period, the city of Veracruz was home to a large number of people of African origin, slave and free, who enjoyed a rather broad margin of tolerance compared to other regions of Mexico, because of the presence of few Spaniards and their descendants who fled the city during the long hot season and outside periods when boats arrived to find refuge in the cities of the Altiplano (Alcántara López 2002).

Starting in the 19th century with struggles for independence throughout the region, new migratory waves from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Haiti, Jamaica, Santo Domingo, Colombia and Venezuela, unrelated to the Mexican system of slavery, as well as new forms of circulation and cultural exchange transited through the port of Veracruz (Ávila *et al.* 2011), contributing to complexifying the issue of the presence of populations of African origin in the city and nurturing what would be described in contemporary local historiography as an 'urban folk culture' largely characterized by the inclusion of Cuban (*Danzón*, *Son Montuno* or *Cubano*, *Bolero...*) and more broadly 'Afro-Caribbean' music.

Examining these elements helps identify two distinct processes in the transformation of representations of the local population, both linked to political interests in the issue of *mestizaje* — first, 'whitening' of the *Jarocho* stereotype in Mexico; then, development of cultural policy centred around the 'Third Root' of *mestizaje* — and their implementation in the State and City of Veracruz.

'Whitening' Jarochos

Throughout the 19th century, Veracruz was not spared the social phenomenon of the passage of travellers and chroniclers visiting Latin America from abroad; it was one of the main ports where they

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[4] As emphasized by Alfredo Delgado Calderón, the term *Jarocho* has become a symbol of regional identity, which was derogatory at first, associated in the dictionary of synonyms with 'boor', 'lout', 'insolent' and 'rude:' applied in the past to mulatto peasants and cowherds on the *Sotavento* Coast in the south-centre of the State of Veracruz. The word *Jarocho* later referred to all individuals with Negroid features and applies today to the inhabitants of the coast, who are proud to be called *Jarochos* (Delgado Calderón 2004, p. 78).

[5] "The Caribbean I call *Afro-Andalusian* produced the *Campesino*, *Jíbajo* and *Guajiro* genres, all of which appeared in the rural hinterland of these port complexes open to international and Colonial trade. This is shared by their expressions along with many other traits: they include musical and poetic genres fostered by cow-herding peasants and *Afromestizo* fishermen, a blend of three ethnic origins: Spanish (mainly Andalusian), Black and Indian. They were generally associated with stockbreeding and formed strongly mixed cultural niches as early as the 17th century: *Guajiros* in Cuba, *Jíbaros* in Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo, *Llaneros* in Colombia and Venezuela, *Creollos* in Panama, *Jarochos* in Veracruz" (García de León 1992, p. 28).

reached the continent or left for other destinations. There are many written descriptions of the region and its inhabitants, the most important of which are published in an anthology titled *Cien viajeros in Veracruz, Crónicas y relatos* (Poblett Miranda 1992). These travel accounts helped shaped an image of Veracruz which was viewed at the time above all as a dangerous inhospitable unhealthy city, a gloomy place that was hard to reach, where the local population was often depicted as idle, "sleeping all day under the rays of a scorching sun" (García Díaz 2002, pp. 215-238) or "belonging to all American races with complexions ranging from ochre to ebony" (De Valois 1861, p. 40).

In this context, *Jarochos* were most often shown to be the result of 'crossbreeding' with a strong African mark, as seen for example in this excerpt from Ernest Vigneaux, a young Frenchman with liberal republican ideas, who set out for the Americas in 1848 to describe backward, exotic regions where Modernist ideas should apply: 'The *Jarocho* is the peasant of the province of Veracruz; most often a product of the three known races and, under the fire of Cancer, from this unlikely mixture flows blood of molten lava in a body supported by muscles of steel. The *Jarocho* is a herdsman who also harvests whatever Mother Nature is willing to offer, without too much help, in the enclosure around his bamboo hut, since he is not much inclined to work, but such Creole idleness is paired in him with an energy for pleasure so typical of Negro blood. Such furious enjoyment is for him the last word of life: his leisure is absorbed by play, drink, music, dance and love" (Vigneaux 1863, pp. 541-542).

Similarly, the Italian painter Claudio Linati, known for having introduced the art of lithography to Mexico where he stayed in 1825 and 1826, clearly showed the connotation of poverty and rurality associated with *Jarochos* as well as their historical relationship with 'Blacks' (Linati 1955 [1828]).

Illustration 1: *Negro de Alvarado recostado en su hamaca haciendo trabajar a su mujer (1828).* Lithographs by the Italian artist Claudio Linati

Ricardo Pérez Montfort shows how, starting in the 1940s, there subsequently emerged an attempt to move away from this representation, which entailed in particular imposing another *Jarocho* cliché, originating this time in the post-revolutionary political apparatus: that of the '*Jarocho* dancing *La Bamba*' dressed in white (Pérez Montfort 2007), a cliché which excluded the historical relationship with 'Blacks' and 'negritude': "The dress and accessories worn by those representing these *Jarochos* had nothing more to do with the rural world or lower classes of the coast. From then on, the term '*Jarocho* costume' referred to the very elaborate costly immaculate-white clothing worn by the hispanophile elites of the Port, main towns and former haciendas of Veracruz. [...] Such a depiction of the *Jarocho* Fandango found its definitive place in the repertoire of regional stereotypes in 1940 when a group from Veracruz chose the lyrics and music of *La Bamba* as the leitmotiv for political campaigning between 1945 and 1946" (Pérez Montfort 2001, p. 156-157).

Illustration 2: Typical illustration reasserting the image of *Jarochos* in the mid-20th century (in R. Pérez Montfort, 2001)

This post-revolutionary period and its homogenizing centralist cultural nationalism came to an end between 1970 and 1980 (Jiménez 2006). It was followed by a process of cultural decentralization driven by the Federal Administration and the gradual creation in all Mexican States of Secretariats, Institutes and Councils of Culture. The *Instituto Veracruzano de la Cultura* (IVEC) was founded in its wake in February 1987. This was followed in subsequent years by the definition of major orientations and the implementation of what was to become a decentralized cultural policy applied to the State of Veracruz (García Díaz, Guadarrama Olivera 2012). In particular, this policy, which entailed highlighting the Afro-Caribbean dimension, privileged three main orientations: revaluing 'rural' *Son Jarocho* and its African influence; revaluing *Danzón* (Malcomson, 2010) and *Son Montuno* of Afro-Cuban origin as the urban culture of Veracruz; and local promotion of the national programme centred on the 'Third Root' of *mestizaje*.

In 1994, implementation of this policy led to launching the International Afro-Caribbean Festival, which has since contributed to producing another stereotypic image of Veracruz, as can be seen in the design of the Festival's different posters emphasizing phenotypic traits and body movements associated with stylized Africanity.

Illustration 3: Posters from the Festival Internacional Afrocaribeño (1997, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2008, 2009)

Over the years, the development of this cultural policy contributed to the emergence in both academic research and public action of different orientations which were beginning to surface in the local public arena. The first is linked to the launch by the Dirección General de Culturas Populares of the national programme known as 'Our Third Root.' Aiming to recognize the Latin American world's African cultural heritage, it originated in an academic and political focus on the history of slavery. In this perspective, it was a matter of promoting the 'Third Root of *mestizaje*', *i.e.* the historic contribution of slaves and their descendants to national Mexican culture. In Veracruz, this orientation was borne by Luz María Martínez Montiel, Cultural Heritage Director at the Institute of Culture when it was founded, and in charge of renovating the Veracruz City Museum (Martínez Montiel 1994).

A second orientation for local cultural policy vis-à-vis the issue of *mestizaje*, very influential in Veracruz, was associated with the historian Antonio García de León's insistence on the diversity of cultural heritages in the 'Afro-Andalusian Caribbean.' Defining *mestizaje* as central to the formation of the region's folk culture, it entailed recognizing the importance of the African heritage without boiling down to it. Thus, García de León's texts evoke this 'folk civilization' which generated *mestizaje* in Colonial times against the Spanish conquistadores and the city's White elite. He refers to a "folk culture stoked by various influences: African, Caribbean, European," which developed on the fringe of the elitist culture of the dominant class. He views Veracruz as the "tropical Babel of the Indies where all possible races and mixtures coexist" (García de León 1992, 1996).

Finally, a third orientation in this game of defining and implementing local cultural policy is borne by researchers close to militant Afro-Mexican movements (Cruz Carretero 2005). In this case, it is a matter of assuming the cultural and somatic specificity linked to the African presence in Mexico, not only as a heritage common to everyone, but as a characteristic that can be reasserted today in the context of a multi-ethnic vision of Mexico and considering 'Afro-Mexicans' as one of the ethnic components of national society.

These three orientations with respect to the issue of *mestizaje* and the African heritage in local cultural policy resulted in producing different accounts of the history of populations of African origin in Mexico. The first two can be analysed from the renovations and changes in the museographic design of the Veracruz City Museum. Inaugurated in 1970 to display the 'Four Times Heroic' city against foreign invasions, the Museum soon fell into disrepair. At the time the Veracruz Institute of Culture and the national 'Third Root' programme was founded, the Museum was taken over from the City by the Institute of Culture which opened a room dedicated to the history of slavery in the region alongside the existing collection. Following this episode, the City Museum was again managed by the Municipality, which lost interest and virtually abandoned it; the room dedicated to the history of slavery and Black populations was finally dismantled. At the end of the 1990s, the Municipality of Veracruz undertook to renovate the Museum again, calling on several historians who had promoted the second orientation borne by A. García de León. Relying on museographic instruments emphasizing the role of images (photographs, paintings, multimedia presentations), they sought to introduce historical information on the City produced in the past fifteen years. They highlighted the working class, folk culture and districts, urban expansion and its consequences, industrial development and changes in trade unions and the place of Veracruz in the Caribbean: all elements evoked still marginally during the first renovation which, with the notable exception of the room dedicated to slavery, was still very much within the historiographic trend of narrating 'major events' and 'great men.' Inaugurated again in December 2000, the Museum has since found a major place in *Jarocho* folk culture. This time, rather than the socio-racial boundary between famous figures in the history of Veracruz highlighting their Spanish origins on the one hand and the 'forgotten' figures of history including slaves and their descendants on the other, emphasis was put on the African, Amerindian and Spanish cultural universe characterizing the region, including both its rural (*Fandango*, *Son Jarocho*...) and urban (*Danzón*, *Son Montuno*, 'Afro-Caribbean' or 'Afro-Antillean' music...) facets. The third orientation evoked above is clearly expressed in the foreword to an exhibition organized in 2006 by the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum in Chicago which travelled to different parts of Mexico: "Being Afro-Mexican means descending from the African population which played an essential part in the history and culture of Mexico since the early 16th century. Despite the African participation in the formation of Mexico as a nation, few people are aware of the existence of Afro-Mexicans." This exhibition, titled *The African Presence in Mexico: From Yanga to the Present*, took a militant stance in tracing historical continuity between the enslavement of African populations, the

heroism of fugitive slaves and claiming an Afro-Mexican identity against the ideology of *mestizaje*. This third racializing orientation elicited little response in the region of Veracruz whose inhabitants generally showed little interest in interests specific to the actions conducted in the framework of this kind of cultural policy (Rinaudo 2012) and are more sensitive to accounts highlighting '*mestizaje*' specific to 'folk civilization.' Despite the efforts deployed by certain militants to impose the existence of identification as 'Afro-Mexican',[6] it did not succeed in crystallizing in the form of a collective conscience focusing on the African origin alone. It developed more successfully on the Pacific coast, however, as we will see in the second part of this paper.

Costa Chica, *mestizaje* through the prism of ethnicization

We refer here to populations residing in the small region known as Costa Chica, on the Pacific coast of the States of Guerrero and Oaxaca. According to its residents, cultural and ethnic diversity seems to be part of the landscape. These so-called 'Black', '*Moreno*' or '*Costeño*' inhabitants, more rarely dubbed *Afromestizo* or Afro-Mexicans, live in villages relatively isolated from the main coastal road. Indian villages are more often located in the hinterland, while the main road which crosses and structures this small region is strewn with small towns controlled by *Mestizos*. This apparent spatial split — since the real picture is obviously more complicated — functions as a geographic configuration which long acted as a clear-cut naturalizing element of the 'differences' imagined to be radical between the three 'ethnic groups' inhabiting the region. In regional collective representations, each group is associated with a specific space (Indian villages, Black *ranchos*, *Mestizo* market towns). As always, there is nothing neutral about such associations with a space which entails implicit values, functions and hierarchies leading historically, in this particular case, to the development of an image of Costa Chica as an 'Indian region.' It is in this region that one of the first regional INI (Instituto Nacional Indigenista) centres was set up in the 1940s; cultural and linguistic diversity is greater here than elsewhere and, until very recently, the political and administrative approach to multiculturalism concerned only groups qualified as 'Indian' and officially listed as such.

It is this context of poor legitimacy and visibility that certain well-structured Black groups sought to change in the late 20th century. The dynamics of mobilization remain weak, as attested by the persistent instability of the designations: Black, *Afromestizo*, Afro-Mexican or of African origin. None of these many terms actually refers to a very specific set of significations or even connotations. These people's social and political mobilization, however, long denied or ridiculed, can no longer be ignored. This is not the place to describe in detail the drivers and obstacles to this mobilization (see Hoffmann & Lara 2012) beyond the simple fact of its existence thanks to the resources deployed by

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[6] The position supported by Afro-Mexican militant movements has developed mainly in certain villages of the region, in particular in the region of Yanga, near Córdoba, where a Carnival called 'Black Identity Festival' founded in the 1980s with support from the Dirección General de Culturas Populares de Conaculta is organized every year by the municipality and various associations.

militants and their organizations. Despite their small numbers, they are beginning to appear as interlocutors capable of joining national and international Afro-militancy networks. The emerging debate is reinforced every day by the actions of local militants (*México Negro*, *Africa* associations), foundations and non-governmental organizations (Ford Foundation), government institutions (Conapred, CDI), academics and researchers (universities and research centres) in Mexico and abroad, international Afro activists, etc. The interactions of such 'experts' contribute to legitimizing a field and a set of 'Afro' spokespersons in Mexico.

On what ethnic and/or racial paradigm is this new social and political field built? What is the place of *mestizaje* as a concept? Two strong trends stand out, either in succession or interlaced.

Ethnicization: the normalization of identity linked with mestizaje

In the 1970s and 1980s, the struggle of Black activists — accepted as such by themselves and their interlocutors, independently of their phenotype as they perceive it — developed above all from the historical marginalization they suffered and the demand for better, fairer, more equitable and more dignified integration in the Nation. In this, their slogans and rationale for social claims are quite comparable to those of Indian mobilization which intensified over the entire continent at the same time (Gros 2000). Thus, *México Negro* meetings, organized yearly for some fifteen years by the association of the same name in one of the villages in Costa Chica, underscore strong social and economic demands in terms of health, education and housing, as well as access to land, political representation and culture. The debate on 'Black identity' places racism and discrimination at the heart of the 'explication' of regional inequalities, granting them a potential for mobilization. In the regional context evoked above, this debate 'logically' places Black identity in the open available ethnic range alongside and with the same status as the region's 'ethnic groups' (Amuzgos, Chatinos, Mixtecos, etc). Thus, in the past twenty years, we can see the rise of a political argument based on the dynamics of ethnicization which claims equivalence between 'Afro-Mexican' — although the terms are not yet stabilized — 'Indian' and 'Native' categories, with the corresponding ethnonyms commonly used in the region and country.

Ethnicization is explicitly devised as an instrument for visibilization and conscientization, as well as a political mechanism for the emancipation of the populations claiming it. It is opposed to the former racialization which held 'Black' individuals and groups in a particularism to make them feel inferior, stripped of all civic, political or even cultural value. Ethnicization claims to replace this and even surpass it in a way without ignoring it, however. The *Afromestizo* category, first used by Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (Aguirre Beltrán 1972, 1989), corresponds well with this aspiration. It would act in a way like 'being different to be like others,' claiming recognition as an ethnic group to become part of the areas of negotiation considered to be legitimate both regionally and nationally. This re-elaboration agrees with interpretations proposed by historians and ethnologists, greatly stimulated by official programmes like the 'Third Root' (see above, and Martínez Montiel 1994). Here, however, unlike

Veracruz, it acquires a collective dimension which is clearly political. Cultural particularities (music, dance) are highlighted and staged to build and consolidate the notion of 'group.'

In this phase as shown by the very term *Afromestizo*, ethnicization is very logically accompanied by an inclusive representation of *mestizaje*. In fact, this reflects a constant in the history of Conquest and Colony in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, for Blacks as for Indians: ethnogenesis based on mixing and subversion of the initial categories. Some cases are more emblematic or better known than others, like that of the *Métis* in Canada, legally recognized as a specific group with the same rights as 'Natives' on the basis of *mestizaje* or miscegenation. As Rivard explains, far from seeking 'pure identity, the group is built up by its margins and constantly renewed by opening to others (Rivard 2007).[7] In this case, *mestizaje* creates the conditions of ethnicization.

Other, less well known cases illustrate the possible articulations between phenomena of ethnogenesis and *mestizaje*, as in an article on pre-Colonial *mestizaje* between Indian groups in Bolivia (Combés & Villar 2008). It reveals processes that may oppose or nurture each other, with no predetermined harmony or conflict: "Born of *mestizaje*, the Chané and Isoseño not only deny it; they also denigrate it, diluting it in a deceptive rhetoric of purity and using it as an argument for interethnic discrimination (between themselves) (…) There is no absolute dissolution of collective identity - nor has it ever existed - in the magma of *mestizaje*, nor has there been an absolute negation of the very fact of mixture as implied in ideology; adrift between these two extremes, we discover on the contrary selective hierarchical discrimination which opens and closes alliance networks (military, economic, matrimonial) according to context and circumstances, which never stray from the need to consolidate ethnic identity proper" (Combés & Villar 2008, p. 6 & 9 of the electronic version). Here, *mestizaje* is a practice, an ideology and a scenography more or less activated and made coherent according to context. We can see that fluid, contrasting configurations of identity, extensively studied for trans-Atlantic Black diasporas (Gilroy 1992), are not the prerogative of these de-territorialized societies only, but account for phenomena widely shared by local so-called 'Indian' or 'Native' societies, whether pre-Colonial, Colonial or contemporary. *Mestizaje* is historically coercive and politically constructed. Similarly, 'Black' or 'Afro' identification in Mexico — and probably elsewhere — has never been univocal. Ethnicization relates to criteria of belonging that may be 'racial', sometimes local or regional, criteria combined according to a balance of power which may be violent and aggressive in contexts of alliance renegotiated according to short-term circumstances. At the end of the 20th century, such interests shape a 'Black' complex built no longer on *mestizaje* but on the 'ideological suppression of hybridity' (Combés & Villar 2008, p. 4 of the electronic version), via racialization.

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[7] What may seem obvious to theoreticians of Constructivism is an 'initial' policy which is not without posing a whole series of very concrete issues, starting with the impossibility of certifying a person's belonging to a group — thereby opening access to certain specific rights — according to criteria for belonging that happen to be changing and indeterminate.

Indeed, in the first years of the 21st century, several phenomena are challenging the viability of the process of civic integration through ethnicization and reintroducing openly racialized terminology. The issue of exhaustion of the ethnicizing/*mestizosé* paradigm far exceeds the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that it satisfies a historic convergence between global factors (lack of true democratic or economic opening despite ethnic recognition; the development of transnational Afro-descendants' networks) and national factors (Mexico's participation in International Conventions and the necessary respect of certain ethnic-racial recognition measures), or even local factors (the emergence or consolidation of associations advocating mobilization), all of which now place their bets on the racialized option to fight inequalities and acquire areas of expression and power.

This development implies a new discourse, in particular with standardization of the terms of the debate used in all arenas of international negotiation, and polarization which structures the world on a binary racialized 'Black-White' basis, leaving little room for 'mixed' or 'unusual' situations.

The argumentation observes the failure of inclusive options in Black identification as they could have been built up fifteen years ago around the shared experience of subjection, the memory of slavery or the fight against exclusion.[8] It moves away from political stances where 'race' was a complex concept inherited from historical conceptions combining colour, prestige, social position and kinship, in conditions which are always singular in determining the 'definition' of 'Blacks' in a given place and time, never out of context. Thus, the Black experience in Colombia differs from that of Mexico; that of plantations has little in common with urban Blacks' living conditions, not to mention the different modalities and rhythms of gradual emancipation from slavery, which varied greatly from one country or region to another. This complexity is now limited to the field of specialists and historians, for the benefit of simpler visions to transmit to a broader public and more efficient in negotiating arenas. The diversity of conceptions of identity and even 'race' is substituted for by a standard international vision focusing mainly on colour as an indicator of potentially inferior position.

The trend towards simplification is logically accompanied by polarization of identifiers between Black and White. Today, militants can often be heard to claim binary criteria, which overlook the entire range of terms used to describe the infinite nuances of skin colour, hair type and other supposed physical markers of the 'Afro difference.' To this end, some militant groups in Mexico already want to 'switch from Afro to Black',[9] like some of their Brazilian correspondents (Boyer 2010). Thus, they claim to avoid euphemization linked to the multiplication of designations to prefer only one: the colour black. Such concepts completely exclude all references to *mestizaje*.

It is legitimate to express a certain apprehension in the face of these racializing trends if we place them in a historical and regional context long known for violent antagonism between Indian and

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[8] In the 1990s, in particular around the Colombian experience of recognition of Black communities and the intense activity of developing and conceptual recomposition on the themes of race, social exclusion and the Nation.
[9] See Lara 2011

Black populations (Flanet 1977). It cannot be forgotten that, in Costa Chica, inhabitants and militants are faced with widespread appreciations often expressing exacerbated racism. We can take the case of two neighbouring villages, El Pitahayo and 'La Colonia', whose violent historic clashes we studied with their verbal expression (Hoffmann 2007). El Pitahayo is a little village founded and inhabited by the descendants of the neighbouring village of San Nicolás considered to be 'Blacks', while the inhabitants of the nearby village of 'La Colonia' are, as expressed in the name, *Mestizo* farmers and Colonists brought there in the context of land distribution in the mid-20th century. The Colonists' discourse is full of racist appreciations alluding to the 'primitive uncivilized' state of their 'Black' neighbours in the mid-20th century:

> "Here, the people were very primitive (…) They (the inhabitants of El Pitahayo today) were not hardworking; they were lazy; they sowed only one litre of maize; they formed gangs and spent their time killing people (…). They were very primitive people; they went about naked and lived amid pigs and dogs. They built their houses with bits of wood; the people slept in *tapextles* (wooden shelters on piles and covered with palm leaves) with the pigs sleeping underneath; they were poorly educated; they used *teconte* (a maize substitute in case of scarcity) to make *tortillas*. (…) They lined up one behind the other, like onion skins, to pick each other's lice and eat them. I kept hoping 'they would not invite me for a meal.' Now, they are sharper because they have begun migrating northward. Now, it seems the inhabitants of El Pitahayo are more refined." (Reina Pita, daughter of the founder of 'La Colonia', interview in 2005)[10]

In the accounts, peaceful coexistence and daily exchanges, whether social, economic or matrimonial for example, are systematically overlooked in favour of radical representation of 'difference.' The emphasis on alterity refers to a socio-racial order commonly accepted on a national level, which presents Blacks as intruders and foreigners. In this context, racist ethnic-racial identification is taken up locally to create a 'didactic image' that can be easily understood by interlocutors. Thus, there emerges a selection process for collective representation which excludes certain options (here, union between inhabitants of different villages and ethnic groups, day-to-day coexistence, alliances) while privileging others (racialization, racism, antagonisms). In their relations with the outside, it is more advantageous for both communities to emphasize an established 'difference': for inhabitants of La Colonia, this means maintaining their position of superiority in social hierarchies and privileged ties with the spheres of power associated with them as White or *Mestizo*; for El Pitahayo, it means preserving their identity as 'Black' descendants of the community of San Nicolás and, as such, the legitimate heirs of Black authenticity in the region, which enables them to channel certain cultural or economic assistance programme services. The Dirección General

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[10] "*Aquí la gente era muy salvaje (...) Ellos (los pitahayeños) no eran gente trabajadora, era floja, sólo sembraba un litro de maíz, una maquila de maíz, formaban gavillas y se dedicaban a matar (...) Estaba la gente muy salvaje, andaban desnudos revueltos (donde) vivían marranos, perros. Hacían su casita con palos, dormía la gente in un tapextle y los marranos abajo; estaban mal educados, usaban teconte para las tortillas. (...) Luego se ponían una detrás de la otra, como jugando cebolla se espulgaban y se comían los piojos, yo pensaba 'que ni me inviten un taco'. (...) Ya se han despejado porque empezaron a irse al norte. Ahora parece que los del Pitahayo se están refinando" (Reina Pita, hija de colono fundador),*" published in Hoffmann (2007).

de Culturas Populares's 'Third Root' programme began in San Nicolás in the late 1980s with the foundation of a Casa de la Cultura and the town has since become emblematic of the dynamics of 'Black' identity in the region, to the advantage of El Pitahayo indirectly. It should be recalled that exploitation of Black identity on a community level does not preclude the existence of far more diverse and complex behaviours in daily relationships between individuals and social groups identified as 'Black' or '*Mestizo*'. Thus, discourses targeting the outside and intended to express collective representations of identities give more than their due to ethnic normalization and racialized polarization which force people to define their identity from a univocal base and convert 'differences' into more or less naturalized and therefore indisputable 'truths'. Thus, quite logically, they have great difficulty in handling complex situations arising from interactions and mixing, a configuration which prevails nonetheless in Latin America, whether on local or national levels, public or private, touching on economic, political or obviously cultural areas. Just as the '*Mestizo* model' invisibilized Blacks — and marginalized Indians — just as the discourse on difference invisibilizes those who are in-between and claim to organize the Nation's understanding of polarized figures. In such circumstances, how can the collective emancipation 'of the Nation' shift towards more justice and equality if it is built on exclusion— even if only symbolic — of the majority?

Conclusion

In a recent text provocatively titled *The Return of the Native*, J.-L. Amselle asserts that it is possible to recognize opposing dynamics between a dominant society imposing ethnicization and dominated groups subject to and sometimes circumventing it: "In both Africa and Latin America, against the primitivism or ethnicization ascribed to folk categories by international organizations, NGOS and local cultural and political elites, there exists, if not a reaction on the part of such categories to this attribution, at least forms of cultural expression going against such projections imposed from the top. In this sense, ethnicization phenomena may be properly analysed only if they are placed in their original context encompassing both national and global considerations and only if they are seen as an instrument of power in the service of dominant society in a process intended to trigger the fragmentation of society" (Amselle 2010, p. 137). We would like to give our full support to this assertion, but this is no easy task since things are not always as clear cut: Black *versus* White, elite *versus* folk, political *versus* social. Our case studies show the contrary: what is true in Veracruz does not apply in Costa Chica. There may be radical differences within a single country at a given time. It is clearly the strength of local societies to be able to develop their own specificities, whether one agrees or not. Thus, as we could see from these two case studies in Mexico, a project impulsed from 'the top' (the official 'Third Root of *mestizaje*' programme) started in Costa Chica a process of awareness and emancipation among certain inhabitants claiming their African origin and representatives of a 'group'

which had been kept until then on the margin of the political mechanisms of national integration. This led these people first to valuing cultural specificities contributing to forging a collective awareness of belonging to a single 'group', then hardening this choice of identity to shift from the notion of *Afromestizaje* to that of *Negritud* (Blackness) and reject the national ideology of *mestizaje*, *i.e.* a shift from defining the group as '*Afromestizo*' to defining it as 'Black.' In Veracruz, the same 'Third Root of *mestizaje*' programme provided a chance to develop cultural policy emphasizing the town's place in the Caribbean region, while valuing forms of cultural expression broadly identified with *mestizaje*. In this case, it has rather contributed to the shift from a historical period characterized by accepted negation of the African heritage and attempts to 'whiten' *Jarocho* stereotypes to another identity, where the 'African roots' of *mestizaje* are now included in the representations of local society, without resulting however in 'groupness'. This does not mean that everyone accepts this representation as such, but that it is now taken as a legitimate norm for defining and accounting for local identity. Subsequently, the role of players in concrete situations entails positioning themselves with respect to this norm whether they accept it or not, whether they acquiesce or endure it, and with respect to this specific dimension of the representation of *mestizaje* — the so-called 'African roots.'

As we have seen, there is no reason here to seek to define *mestizaje* with a new metaphor (rhizome, hybridity, creolity, mosaic...) or look into the renewal of the issues involved.[11] We do not claim to re-legitimize an obsolete paradigm, but rather reintroduce the questions it raises and which remain uncertain when it comes to the mechanisms of construction and negotiation of hegemonies, ideological disputes and strategies anchored in daily life shaped by relations of domination. This enables us to eschew the spurious dilemma that claims to oppose the representation of an 'ethnocidal *mestizaje*'[12] — castrating *mestizaje* imposed from the top — denounced by Rita Segato, to that of a liberating *mestizaje* — *mestizaje* from the bottom — called for by Anibal Quijano (2000). The problem is the same in both cases: claiming moral qualification for *mestizaje*, condemned by the original rape and Conquest, or conversely praised for its potential for cultural creativity and subversion — and even resistance.

In the end, these two case studies clearly show that matters of racial identification and *mestizaje* are not mutually exclusive but, on the contrary, nurture each other in ways that may vary with the historical period, local context and social situations. The configurations of *mestizaje* can be grasped only in their articulation with other conditions of organization and representation of the world: regional situations, class and gender relations, rationales of identification and ethnic labelling.

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[11] See, for example, Paula López Caballero (2011) on the concept of a national regime of alterity or the analysis of relations between *mestizaje* and eugenics proposed by Marta Saade (2009)

[12] "Ethnocidal *mestizaje*, used to erase memory and delete the original genealogies, whose strategic value for elites is now gradually becoming reversed today by identifying in non-White - *mestizo* - features clues for the persistence and possibility of returning to a latent pulsating subliminal past whose eradication they once sought" (Segato 2010, p. 20); original in Spanish: "Mestizaje etnocida, utilizado para suprimir memorias y cancelar genealogías originarias, cuyo valor estratégico para las elites se ve, a partir de ahora, progresivamente invertido para hallar en el rostro mestizo, no-blanco, indicios de la persistencia y la posibilidad de una reatadura con un pasado latente, subliminar y pulsante, que se intentó cancelar" (Segato 2010:20).

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