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Race, gender and nation: indigenous and black movements in Latin America

In her recent book, Mayan Visions, June Nash demonstrates how the indigenous Maya of Chiapas are attempting to assert cultural autonomy through armed uprising (as in the Zapatista takeover of San Cristóbal in January 1994) and through careful negotiation with the Mexican state, which still continues to deny their claims. As she (2001: xviii) observes in the Preface: "Mayans retain a sense of their communal identity and the values that sustain an alternative vision to that offered by capitalist development"

Mayans are challenging not only the threat to their livelihood posed by the incursion of global capitalism, but also their paternalistic relationship to the Mexican state. Mexico, like other Latin American and Caribbean countries, predicated the integration of their indigenous and Afrodescendent populations upon a policy of *mestizaje*. *Mestizaje* celebrated racial and cultural mixture as a way of forging a unified and homogeneous national image at the same time that it reasserted the supremacy of the European race and civilization by favoring *blanqueamiento* or whitening. As Nash (2001: 13) notes, in Mexico *mestizaje* was embodied in the paradigm of *indigenismo*, which dominated Mexican state policy from the time of the 1910 revolution, and "cultivated a respect for indigenous roots at the same time that it negated self -determination for the Indian population, ...by equating progress with acculturation to European ways"

Mayan communities are not the only indigenous groups in Latin America to contest *mestizaje* as the protests over the Colombus Quincentenary and nationwide uprisings by indigenous people in Ecuador and other countries attest (cf. Delgado-P. 2002). Now, Afrodescendent populations in Latin America are joining the indigenous in asking states to recognize their cultural autonomy and to acknowledge their rights to equal participation in the political, social and cultural life of the nation. Though slower to organize than the indigenous, the Afrodescendent movement gained a huge impetus from the preparation for the III U.N. World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerances held in Durban, South Africa in September 2001. This conference brought Afrodescendent populations from around the globe together for the first time. A major achievement of the Durban process was the recognition by Latin American and Caribbean governments, in the preparatory regional conference in Santiago, Chile in December 2000, that slavery constituted a crime against humanity and was a direct cause of the widespread poverty and marginalization of Afrodescendent peoples in the Americas (Turner 2002).

This paper is an attempt to compare contemporary indigenous and black movements in Latin America in terms of the ways they are contesting the concept of *mestizaje* as a framework for nation-building in the region. Through *mestizaje* or race mixture, Latin American nations celebrated their hybridity and diversity at the same time that they proclaimed the superiority of white European culture over subaltern indigenous and Afrodescendent groups. Through the concept of *blanqueamiento*

or whitening embedded in the process of *mestizaje*, acceptance of Eurocentric white norms became a criterion for inclusion in the dominant white-*mestizo* society and a way of developing a homogenous national culture. Indigenous and Afrodescendent groups are now challenging the superiority of whiteness within the ideology of *mestizaje*, and arguing that their own cultures should be valued on an equal footing with the European white norms of the dominant sector.

The adoption of the term Afrodescendent was coined by Brazilian black leaders as a way of countering invidious distinctions between mulattoes and blacks, and will be used in this paper to cover both populations in Latin America. The term Afrodescendent focuses on the African component among the great majority of racially mixed blacks, and thus dismisses the whitening bias inherent in *mestizaje*, However, the term Afrodescendent also brings Latin American racial constructs closer to the U.S., since it signifies a change of emphasis from phenotype to descent, and adopts a bipolar dichotomy between Afrodescendent and white, which many Latin American activists strongly reject. Despite the need for greater black solidarity, most Latin American activists prefer their fluid system of racial/ethnic classification to the racial oppositions existing in the U.S.

Women are playing an increasing role in both the indigenous and Afrodescendent movement, and this paper will compare their struggles to negotiate a place within the larger social movement, traditionally led by men. I will argue that women have faced even greater obstacles to participation among the indigenous than among Afrodescendent groups, where women have traditionally been more autonomous. Gender consciousness is stronger among Afrodescendent women than among the indigenous, where it is subordinated to ethnic consciousness.

Far more has been written about the indigenous than the Afrodescendent movement, partly because the latter is only beginning to emerge. However, Afrodescendent women's organizations are now found in virtually every country in Latin America, as the Network of Afrocaribbean and Afrolatina Women, now based in Costa Rica, will attest. This brief paper will highlight Brazil, which has the largest Afrodescendent population in Latin America (and second only to Nigeria in the world) and where the movement is most advanced; Central America, where people of African descent are in a clear minority in *mestizo* societies; and Colombia, where a large black population is directly threatened by armed conflict. Statistical data by race and gender is still lacking in all areas, even in Brazil, which is the best documented. This lack of data also demonstrates the state's unwillingness to deal with the problems of Afrodescendent people that remain largely invisible. Nevertheless, Afrodescendent women are beginning to challenge the old *mestizaje* or *indigenista* paradigm, particularly in its emphasis on *blanqueamiento* or whitening, as will become apparent in the following analysis.

Comparing Indigenous and Afrodescendent Movements in Latin America

While *mestizaje* applied to both indigenous and Afrodescendent groups in Latin America" Wade (1997) notes that Indians were treated differently in the colonial period by outlawing indigenous slavery and establishing *resguardos* or reserves placed under the special protection of the Spanish Crown. This gave the indigenous

a political and territorial base, which contributed to the development of an "institutionalized identity" which Afrodescendents lacked. Africans, on the contrary, were imported as slave labor and lacked any land of their own (with the exception of runaway slave communities) until after emancipation. *Mestizaje* was furthered by interracial unions, most often between white men and indigenous and African and Afrodescendent women, due to the shortage of white women in the early colonial period. Marriages were allowed with indigenous women, but in the late colonial period restricted with Afrodescendent women, particularly after the Pragmática issued by the Crown in 1778 (Wade 1997:30). Clearly, such unions continued, but more often as consensual unions lacking legal recognition and inheritance rights.

"Scientific racism", a theory in the late 19th century designed to bolster the superiority of white civilization, condemned *mestizo*s or mulattoes as degenerate, because they lacked racial purity or *limpieza de sangre* (cleanliness of blood) as the Spanish termed it. But in the 20th century, after Latin American countries consolidated their independence and searched for their own identity, this negative concept of *mestizaje* began to change. Racial and ethnic diversity was valued as distinguishing Latin American societies from Europe, and in the 1920s the Indian became a prime symbol of national identity, especially in Mexico and Peru, with the largest indigenous populations. The mulatto, although positively revalued, never achieved comparable status in terms of state policy in Latin America, even in Brazil and Cuba, with large Afrodescendent populations. Social scientists reinforced this distinction, treating the indigenous as a culture worthy of study in its own right (particularly by anthropologists) whereas Afrodescendents were studied primarily by sociologists and historians interested in race relations (Wade 1997. Chapter 3). This distinction is reminiscent of the difference in the United States between the treatment of Native Americans as 'nations" (a concept which grew out of the treaties signed by the U.S. with these sovereign entities to end the Indian wars) and of blacks as a minority.

After the rejection of scientific racism and the studies of Boas and others challenged the theory of innate racial differences, the term "race" came to be abandoned in social sciences and government policy. The indigenous in Latin America were termed an ethnic group, which de la Cadena (2000: 329-30) links to the increasing importance of cultural criteria such as language and dress in racial and ethnic designations. However, as she points out, this shift from physical to cultural and later class criteria did little to weaken social hierarchies, still used as a basis for discrimination and social exclusion in Latin America today.

In Brazil, the term race was replaced by ethnicity in scientific texts and government documents for 50 years, starting in the post World War II period, while color categories such as *preto* (black) or *pardo* (brown or mulatto) remained (Guimaraes 2001). Guimaraes (2001: 39) argues that in Latin America the refutation of the biological foundations of race or non-racialism is equated with anti-racism, and the possibility of racial discrimination. This has been used in many Latin American countries to justify the elimination of racial categories from the census, arguing that if not officially recognized, race cannot serve as the basis for discrimination. However, such a stance ignores the importance of the social construction of race, which

goes far beyond official, legal categories and still differentiates and discriminates against the Afrodescendent (and indigenous) population.

Despite its maintenance of social hierarchies, the ideology of *mestizaje* did contribute to a more fluid concept of race in Latin America and the Caribbean than in the United States. In Latin America, it was possible for persons to pass out of the indigenous or Afrodescendent communities by adopting the cultural and class characteristics of the larger white, *mestizo* society. Education and income whitened, leading to a large intermediate sector of *mestizo*s or mulattoes. In several Latin American countries, states consciously tried to whiten the population by encouraging European immigration, but only in Argentina were Afrodescendents virtually erased as a racial group (Andrews 1980). This immigration policy again demonstrated the whitening bias embedded in *mestizaje*, despite its emphasis on biological and cultural mixture.

The relatively elevated status of the indigenous in Latin America may have made it easier for them to organize against the white bias in *mestizaje* than it was for Afrodescendents. Certainly, the indigenous population has received much more support from international organizations like the United Nations and the Organization of American States than has the Afrodescendent community. The most important legislation in favor of the indigenous is the I. L.O. declaration approved in 1969 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, which established the Commission for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The rights of Afrodescendents and indigenous were recognized in the 1988 Constitution of Brazil and the 1991 Constitution of Colombia. But a regional declaration if still lacking, even though the population of Afrodescendents are almost five times larger than that of the indigenous, and constitute 30% of the total population of Latin America and the Caribbean (Bello and Rangel 2002: 7).

As Nash shows, the Maya and other indigenous possessed land, often in closed corporate communities, which was cultivated collectively. Land helped them preserve their culture and resist the dehumanizing effects of an ever-encroaching market economy. Few Afrodescendent groups could lay claim to such territorial rights except in the *palenques* and *quilombos* established by runaway slaves, whose legal right to land was (and is) seldom officially recognized.

The Afro-Colombian communities of the Pacific coast, developed after the collapse of the mining economy in the 18th century, have succeeded in gaining some state recognition of their territorial rights, but far less than the much smaller indigenous communities in the same area (Arocha 1998). The indigenous Colombians have been given greater state and international support, and now control 22% of the Pacific territory while constituting 2% of the population (Wade 1997: 106) Like the indigenous, Afro-Colombian communities of the Pacific have emphasized the importance of maintaining territorial control over their communities and its natural resources as a precondition for the survival and strength of their culture (Grueso, Rosero and Escobar, 1998). Like the Maya, their demands reject integration (based on *mestizaje*) and traditional developmental formulations in favor of the construction of their own collective identity based on territorial autonomy. Yet autonomous movements among both Afro-Columbians and indigenous peoples in the Pacific re-

gion have been seriously weakened by traditional developmentalism, clientelistic politics, and particularly armed conflict (Ibid.). Both groups now face massacre and large-scale displacement from their riverine communities as a result of harassment by the Colombian army, paramilitaries and the drug trade.

The Garifuna in Central American are also an Afrodescendent group with land claims dating back to their arrival in Honduras in 1797 (Gonzalez 1988). They were forcibly relocated by the British at that time from St. Vincent in the Caribbean, where African runaway slaves had married Carib women and resisted British occupation of the island. Because of their dual indigenous and Afrodescendent identity, they can ally with either group. However, their ties with Afrodescendents are strained because of their hostility toward the Afro-Creole, with whom they share much of the Atlantic coast of Central America. Afro-Creole laborers were brought from the West Indies by the British to Central America in the 19th century to build a railroad and work on banana plantations. Favored by the British, the Afro-Creoles gained a higher status than the Garifuna, whom they treated with disrespect. This split has seriously weakened Afrodescendent solidarity in Central America.

Both Afro-Creoles and Garifuna worked on the railroad, on banana plantations (operated largely by United Fruit) and on the docks. Garifuna men spoke English at this time and were excellent seamen, while women did most of the subsistence cultivation supplemented by fishing along the Atlantic coast of Honduras, Belize, Guatemala and Nicaragua. The Afro-Creole and Garifuna's heavy involvement in wage labor weakened their claims to land, and in most Central American countries they are now increasingly urban. Their ethnic standing was further diminished by mass male migration to the U.S. following the collapse of the banana economy and severe hurricanes, which further destroyed the Central American urban and rural economy. Today much of the remaining Garifuna and Afro-Creole population is dependent on remittances sent from the U.S. and other areas. On the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, where *mestizo*s predominate and the total population is less than 10% of the entire country, the Afro-Creole population represents 17.5% of the population, and the Garifuna - only 1.5% (Oakley 1996).

A Garifuna organization in Honduras called ODECO has succeeded in prodding the Honduran government into recognizing the Garifuna indigenous right to land, and by 2001, 39 collective titles to land had been granted, totaling 32,000 hectares, some of which is still in dispute. However, much Garifuna land in Honduras, which still has the largest Garifuna population, is now under threat from tourism development and *mestizo* colonization along the Atlantic Coast. Their assimilation into *mestizo* society has been eased by their adoption of Catholicism and increasing Spanish language acquisition. Even in Belize, where a cultural renaissance emphasizing language instruction started in 1960 and has spread to other Central American Garifuna settlements, in 1990 only one community continued to speak the vernacular language (Cayetano and Cayetano 1997).

The lack of a territorial base and the constant inferior status ascribed to the Afrodescendent population in Latin America, even in comparison to the indigenous, has made it more difficult for them to challenge *mestizaje* as the indigenous have done. Afrodescendents, even more than the indigenous, have consciously had to

build pride and dignity in their own culture, though in certain heavily populated black areas like Salvador Bahia, a strong African identity has been maintained (Walker 2002). Following slavery, Afrodescendents were also more subject to the erosive effects of involvement in a market economy, yet denied access to public schools and other services that would help them compete. Today, even in Colombia, they are a predominantly urban population, as Afro-Colombians flee to cities like Cali and Medellín after forced expulsion from the Pacific (Wade 1993). The Afro-Brazilian population is the least territorial based of the Afrodescendent communities studied here, since with migration to Sao Paulo and other areas of the southeast, they are now spread throughout the country. However they remain marginalized and in 1999, Afro-Brazilians represented 64% of the poor population, and 69% of the indigent (very poor) (Henriques 2001).

In most Latin American countries, Afrodescendents are not included as a census category, rendering them largely invisible. Under pressure, Colombia and Costa Rica have included blacks as a census category for the first time, but there was an acknowledged severe undercount of the Afrodescendent population. Part of the problem in Colombia lies in the way racial categories were constructed and enumerated (Urrea et al. 200l). But the problem also lies with the Afrodescendent population themselves, who are reluctant to identify as black because of the negative stereotypes long associated with blackness (cf. Twine 1998). Even in Brazil, there has been a noticeable move since 1940 away from the black to the mulatto or pardo category in the national census (Lovell and Wood 1998), which can be explained as a process of cultural whitening. Degler (1971) posited what he termed a "mulatto escape hatch", which he reasoned helped Afrodescendents escape the oppression of blackness, and distinguished Brazilian racial stratification from the U.S. However, Lovell and Wood (1998) have shown that mulattoes and blacks face similar limitations on critical issues such as life expectancy, school enrollment, and occupational distribution, which would seem to invalidate Degler's notion.

The proliferation of Afro-Brazilian organizations, which now number 2000 (Morrison 2002), has not yet achieved mass support among the Afrodescendent population, which is increasingly socially differentiated (Hasenbalg, and Silva 1999: 164-165). This class differentiation causes divisions, but it is the black professional middle class, which has provided the principal leadership behind Afrodescendent NGOs and affirmative action and other policy measures. Because of the co-optive strategy of *mestizaje*, which convinced mulattos they were more like whites than like their black brothers, there is also a reluctance to create confrontational racial blocs such as exist in the U.S. The irony, as Hasenbalg and Silva (1999: 160) point out, is that since 1950, as a result of civil rights and affirmative action policies, "indexes of inequality began to decline in the U.S., while in Brazil, they remained stable and in some areas worsened". As a result, by 1980, the U.S. had become a more racially equal society than Brazil.

Brazil was long upheld as a racial democracy, a thesis, which argued that racial inequality was due basically to poverty and class differences, and would disappear with development. However, the continuing racial gaps in socioeconomic status following the period of rapid economic growth from 1960 to 1980, and the growth

of a black middle class, which still suffers from racial discrimination have weakened a belief in racial democracy. Still Afro-Brazilians may be choosing to achieve their rights through a class-based group such as a political party or a labor union rather than through a race-based movement (Guimaraes 2001), as the success of the Workers Party with strong black support in the 2002 election suggests. Race has never served as the basis for residential segregation in Brazil, but there are marked class differences (Telles 1999). The relative lack of racial discrimination in the working class combined with the poverty of a near majority of white Brazilians strengthens the possibilities for inter-racial class solidarity among the Brazilian poor.

Class-consciousness is also evident among the "indigenous *mestizo*s" of Cuzco, Peru, studied by de la Cadena (2000). As these market women acquired more education, income, and urban dress and refinement, they consciously shed their indigenous identity in favor of a *mestizo* identity, In Peru, a strong indigenous movement never developed, which de la Cadena suggests is partly due to the Peruvian state's weak endorsement of *mestizaje*, in comparison to Mexico and other *mestizo* countries. She (2000: 324) argues that government promotion of *mestizaje* ideology through indigenismo rebounded and contributed to a more negative image of *mestizo*s in these countries than in Peru.

Greater autonomy is important to both the indigenous and Afrodescendent movements, but I would argue the meaning is quite different. For the Maya and other indigenous people, autonomy means recognition of their territorial rights and respect for their cultural differences. Nash (n.d.) also distinguishes indigenous autonomy from its meaning in western society: "It does not, as Zapatistas say, mean to be free of all constraints, but to accept the collective will as one's own. Nor does it mean unlimited privileges, but rather to earn the rights of belonging through responsible participation" The importance placed on collective will also constrains indigenous women's autonomy, as we shall see shortly.

Afrodescendents do not place nearly as much emphasis on the collective. They are a more urbanized, wage-earning community. They are less concerned with autonomy than with social revindication, which requires greater access to the resources of the larger society and strong involvement with institutions like labor unions, political parties, and religion. Culture has also played an important role in the formation of black identity, especially in Brazil, where the *blocos afros*, musical groups rooted in Salvador, were formed to reinforce a politics of identity with Afro Brazilians, emphasizing self-esteem, antiracism, and equality in difference. Rather than autonomy, the term "community" became important, not in a territorial sense, but including "all those who share an identity by their exclusion and marginality." (da Cunha 1998: 236). Using culture as a strategy for mobilization has its problems, however, because in Brazil, Colombia and Cuba, this Afrodescendent music has been largely appropriated by the national culture as its own (Wade 2002: 27).

Among neither Afrodescendents nor indigenous, as Nash and others have pointed out, does autonomy mean secession or balkanization, but "prioritizing the fulfillment of basic community needs" (Delgado-P. 2002: 37). Thus, it would seem that the fragmentation that Latin American nations feared would result from racial and ethnic diversity is unwarranted. In fact, as I have argued, most Afrodescendent

groups are not rejecting *mestizaje* per se, rather the bias toward *blanqueamiento* promoted in its earlier Eurocentric versions. They wish to redefine *mestizaje* to revalorize their own culture and identity, which would require access to the resources and services, which whites now enjoy.

Gender subordination in Afrodescendent and Indigenous communities

Women have played an increasingly important role in both the Afrodescendent and indigenous movements. They want a larger voice in these movements, which we're generally controlled by men. They also want to address specific women's concerns such as domestic abuse or reproductive health. They were stimulated by the growth of the feminist movement in Latin America, but felt the whited *mestiza* movement neglected their concerns.

The primary goal of the larger feminist movement was to abolish patriarchy, which led them to see men as the enemy. Patriarchy in *mestizo* society was reinforced by a gender ideology based on the model of the male breadwinner, which relegated women to the role of dependent housewives. This gender ideology was also inscribed in the moral and sexual codes of *mestizaje* and privileged men as wage earners and heads of the household. In the colonial period, Afrodescendent and indigenous women who did not abide by this code were seen as immoral and uncivilized. Yet these women could not depend on a male breadwinner because of the limited resources available to both communities. Women were forced to take on additional responsibility for the household, and were accustomed to a considerable degree of economic autonomy. They did not see men as the enemy since the larger *mestizo* society posed a much larger threat.

The indigenous maintained a system of gender complementarity, which as Cervone (2002: 190) observes, is quite different from gender equality in liberal western feminism. While gender equality argues that men and women are the same, and therefore should be given equal opportunities, gender complementarity argues for equality in diversity. "Women are not just like men, they are different; but it is precisely their difference that legitimizes their capabilities and establishes their rights to the same opportunities as men." (Ibid.). Indigenous women are largely confined to the domestic realm, which ideally is as valued as the public sphere where men operates. However, as Carol Smith (1996: 159) observes, the closed boundaries of the indigenous community also restricted women's sexuality and economic autonomy. As the repositories of cultural tradition, women were expected to marry within their village or ethnic group and not to seek work beyond its boundaries. Women who did so were rejected as ethnically disloyal. With increasing involvement in a market economy and state policies encroaching upon indigenous autonomy, the value of indigenous domestic domains has also declined. Men's economic importance increased as they migrate to work in cities or abroad, or take government positions in politics or development projects. Still most indigenous women would not define men as the enemy, because the ethnic struggle for autonomy is supreme, and cannot be challenged by gender divisions. Hence indigenous women subordinate gender consciousness to ethnic consciousness, even while they are forming their own organizations to promote women's needs.

Nash's (2003) analysis of the indigenous women's struggle in Chiapas illustrates the contradictions indigenous women are facing. In her view, Zapatista women are trying to abolish all forms of hierarchy, including male domination in the home. Men were privileged throughout the seven decades that the PRI enjoyed monopoly of power until 2000.

Men were given priority in schools, in development and training programs, and in the granting of *ejido* land. Women did receive assistance in marketing artisan products starting in the 1970s, and benefited from medical programs to reduce maternal death in childbirth (still six times higher in Chiapas than nationally) and infant mortality (which still stands at 150 per thousand). But women received less attention and thus "were not tied to paternalistic structures of the PRI government to the extent that men were" (Nash 2003: 8).

The resistance of Zapatista women grew during the economic crisis of the 1980s. Women's artisan production became important, first as an added source of household income, and with the onset of the crisis, as a way to sustain small plot cultivation. However, attempts by women to challenge male authority led to an increase in domestic abuse. Indigenous women have become a major target of paramilitary youth recruited from their own Zapatista villages by the PRI to deliberately destroy the reproductive base of the Zapatista community. Literacy and knowledge of Spanish is still much lower among Zapatista women than men, and restricts women to the home.

Nevertheless, women constituted 30% of the combat ranks of the EZLN (the Zapatista army), and a women's Bill of Rights was issued along with the New Revolutionary Law proclaimed in January 1994. Inspired by this declaration, Nash (2003: 11) observes how

> *indigenous women are linking the demands for cultural autonomy to self-determination and the rights of women. This translates into demands for the right to communal and private lands after divorce, to choose their own husband, to have the number of children they wish, and to be respected and not be subject to the abuse of husbands and familiars. Women's subordination to male figures, their fathers or husbands, was condoned as 'tradition' in most indigenous communities. Laws granting women suffrage in 1950 and those that allocated specific land claims to women, were ignored in local custom.*

Still women have paid a heavy price for their championing of women's rights. When the woman who was president of the first pottery cooperative in the community of Amatenango del Valle dared to run for political office in 1980, her opponent had her gunned down.

While the Zapatista women's struggle may be the best known, indigenous women's struggles have now spread to Central America and the Andes. Because of the political sensitivity of women's issues, women are forced to produce distinct forms of leadership combining ethnic and gender consciousness. As Cervone (2002) shows in her comparison of two indigenous women leaders in Ecuador, both women agree on the need to work with men because women's claims still lack legitimacy.

The control of indigenous women's sexuality can be seen in the contrasting depictions of La Malinche, the indigenous woman taken by Cortés during the Spa-

nish Conquest. For many years, she was seen as a traitor to Indian racial purity, which indigenous women were expected to maintain. However, feminists and Chicanas have reinvented her as the progenitor of the *mestiza* caste, and a victim of Cortés predatory sexuality (Mallon 1996). In Cuzco as well, according to de la Cadena (2002) rural indigenous women took as their symbol an Indian goddess symbolizing racial purity. This goddess was repudiated by the urban market women, who saw *mestiza*s not as traitors but as the road to progress. Indians despise *mestiza*s as immoral and degenerate, but these indigenous *mestizas* replaced the code of decencia or decency, with the code of *respeto* or respect, which repudiated sexual propriety in favor of a work ethic that released women from dependency and the protection of men. Respect is earned through income and skills, so that *mestiza*s are defined as successful indigenous women. The image of the marketplace was also transformed from a site of filth and disease into a symbol of popular class struggle. De la Cadena (2002: 172) argues that this process decolonized *mestizaje*, because these indigenous *mestiza*s are not disappearing into a homogenous *mestizo* culture, but defining a new form of *mestiza* distinguished from Indians not ethnically but socially.

These analyses of gender and ethnic consciousness help me to understand the lack of gender consciousness we found among Afrodescendent women's organizations along the Atlantic coast of Central America, where ethnic rivalry is intense. The indigenous Miskito in Nicaragua, with some support from other ethnic groups, had succeeded in having the *sandinistas* legally grant them some cultural and political autonomy in 1987. However, with the fall of the *sandinistas* and the institution of a neoliberal government, little has been done to implement this Autonomy Law. Male emigration contributes to the growth of female heads of household, who now constitute about one-third the Atlantic coast population. The Afro-Creole population in Nicaragua has a higher level of education than other ethnic groups on the coast, but they have lost control of the economy as *mestizo*s have grown more dominant demographically and politically.

The Afro-Creole population is making more progress in Costa Rica, where public schools are of higher quality and the political system has opened up to allow for some political representation. The former President of the Network of Afrocaribbean and Afrolatin American Women was elected as a deputy through a new political party in 2002. A 1990 study of the Afro-Creole population of Limon by Mcllwaine (1997) suggests that women are faring even better than men, and are more competitive than *mestiza* women. Afro-Creole woman have higher educational levels than *mestiza*s, and earn more. Afro-Creole women are also more likely to be employed in professional jobs such as nursing and teaching. Incomes within Afro-Creole households are also higher, due to higher labor force participation by Afro-Creole women, and to remittances, especially from abroad (mainly the U.S), which constituted 70% of non-earned income (Mcllwaine 1997: 7). As McIlwaine (1997) points out, paid employment has long been at the core of Afro-Creole women's identity, whereas *mestiza* women are more closely identified with the domestic domain, and face more male restrictions on working. However, Afro-Creole women remain virtually excluded from key decision-making positions occupied by *mestizo* men, even in health and education, where women predominate. Afro-Creole men as well

have been largely confined to manual jobs in the port and the railway, which is now closing down while cargo services have been automated. Since both Afro-Caribbean men and women work primarily in public sector jobs, they have been severely impacted by government budget cuts and now face heavy unemployment. This has contributed to large-scale migration, estimated in the early 1990s at 30%, primarily of men (McIlwaine 1997: 12).

The Afro-Creole women of Nicaragua and Costa Rica have long enjoyed a higher educational and occupational status than their indigenous neighbors, a heritage of their British West Indian upbringing. They have a high labor force participation rate that is associated with a high percentage of female heads of household. The Garifuna are plagued by low levels of education and employment, and high fertility, but Garifuna women are also very self-reliant. It is clear that neither the Garifuna nor the Afro-Creoles ever shared in the myth of the male breadwinner, which persuaded many white and *mestiza* women to rely on their husbands as economic providers (Safa 1995). The racial and class barriers faced by most Afrodescendent men reduce their capacity to be adequate breadwinners, and this is aggravated by decades of large- scale male emigration, particularly on the Atlantic coast. Emigration has also instilled in both Afro-Creole and Garifuna women the need for sexual as well as economic autonomy, which has helped maintain a stronger gender consciousness than among the indigenous women reviewed earlier.

Racial consciousness is also prevalent among Afro-Brazilian women. Most of the current Afrodescendent women's NGOs grew out of the black solidarity movement, and realize the importance of reaffirming racial pride and dignity. But Afro-Brazilians have several advantages over Afrodescendents in Central America: they are more numerous, they speak the national language (Portuguese), most are literate and some are becoming highly educated, and forming part of a growing professional Afro-Brazilian middle class. Afro-Brazilian women's NGOs are now heavily involved in policy, and form one-third of the National Council of Women's Rights in Brazil. Under the Lula government, three black women have been named to ministerial posts, and six black women were elected deputies in 2002.

But the great majority of Afro-Brazilians remain socially excluded. "White" Brazil is 2,5 times wealthier than black Brazil, who is concentrated in the low-income categories, and this has not altered with economic growth (Henriques 2001). Although there have been improvements in the education and occupational profile of both the white and black populations since 1960, and the middle class has grown considerably, the gap between the races has remained virtually constant. This undermines the thesis of racial democracy and suggests that economic growth alone will not reduce racial inequalities.

There has actually been more improvement in Brazil in reducing inequality by gender rather than by race. International indices developed to compare countries on overall goals such as human development and the status of women demonstrate significant gains by white women, outdistancing Afro-Brazilian women (AMB 2001: 12); for example, in 1999 the Gender-adjusted Development Index ranked white Brazilian women at 48, while Afrodescendent women were ranked at 91 (Sant' Anna 2001: 62). Overall gender gaps in years of schooling and illiteracy have been

done away with, but the educational differential between blacks and whites has remained virtually unchanged since the 1920s (Henriques 2001) Among women, illiteracy is 22% for Afro-Brazilians versus 10% for white women (Sant' Anna 2001: 19). Afro-Brazilian women have made greater educational gains than black men recently, and are entering at the university level at a proportionately faster rate than white women, though the racial gap between women remains (Sutherland 2002).

The educational gains women generally have made are not necessarily translated into better jobs. Afro-Brazilian women are overepresented in the informal sector, particularly in domestic service, in which half of all employed black women worked in 1991 (Lovell 2000a: 284). Since the 1960s, Afro-Brazilian women have made the greatest absolute gains in white-collar work, and while they still lag far behind white women, they are better represented than black men in professional and technical occupations (Lovell 2000b). They also continue to have a higher labor force participation rate than white women, which is associated with the high percentage of female-headed households reaching 26% of families in 1998 (Teles Costa 2002). These households are often the poorest of the poor (earning less than one minimum salary), and 60% of these are Afro-Brazilians (AMB 2001: 18).

Despite their educational and occupational gains, Afro-Brazilian women continue to lag behind black men in wages, while both earn less than white women and especially white men. In 1991 in Sao Paulo, the average monthly wage of Afro-Brazilians and women was roughly 60% the respective wage of whites and men (Lovell 2000b: 286). The racial wage gap actually increases with education for both Afro-Brazilian women and men, suggesting that better schooling and jobs cannot by themselves eliminate the racial and gender wage gaps (Lovell: 2000b: 286; Arias et al 2002). The gender wage gap has been shrinking at about 1% a year between 1987-98, while the race-based wage gap has not budged (Soares 2001). White women have more access to better jobs than Afro-Brazilian women, who suffer the highest absolute monetary cost of discrimination (Lovell 1999: 410-411). These continuing educational and occupational gaps between the Afro-Brazilian and white population point to the need for affirmative action policies, which have been expanded under the Lula government.

Much of the work of the best known Afro-Brazilian women's NGOs such as Criola, Geledes and Fala Preta is devoted to exposing the racist bias in the health care system, particularly in the area of reproductive health among women. Even though life expectancy increased for both groups between 1950 and 1980, the gap remained approximately the same (Lovell and Wood 1998: 95), with Afro-Brazilians living about seven years less than whites. Infant mortality is twice as high among mothers of color than among white women, among whom the rate has shrunk twice as much than among Afro-Brazilians between 1977 and 1993 (da Cunha 2001). Again we see how gender inequality has received greater attention in Brazil than racial inequality, favoring white women.

The Brazilian case points up the need for continuing pressure from below to address racial and gender inequalities in Latin America. The pressure, which the strong women's movement in Brazil put on state policy starting in the 1980s combined with the efforts of women to obtain better educational and occupational status,

has helped reduce gender inequalities, but white women have benefited more than Afro-Brazilian women, particularly at the professional level. This helps explain why Afro-Brazilian women organized on their own and need to continue building a unified Afro-Brazilian movement with men to address both racial and gender inequalities.

Conclusion

While structural factors such as collective control of land and a strong cultural heritage favor ethnic consciousness among the indigenous as compared with racial consciousness among Afrodescendents, the opposite appears to be true for gender consciousness. The tight control over women which ethnic solidarity imposed on the indigenous community was weakened among the urbanized, more individualized Afrodescendents.

This helps explain why gender consciousness is stronger among Afrodescendent women, especially in Brazil. Afrodescendent women have long played an active and independent role in the social reproduction of their communities, with high labor force participation rates and high percentages of female-headed households. Though many of these households are poor, women also learned early that they should not depend on men and needed to personally assure the survival of their families, which gave them considerable economic as well as sexual autonomy. Gender consciousness is lower among the Afro-Creole and Garifuna communities of Central America, plagued by high levels of emigration and a dependence on remittances, which saps the leadership potential these Afrodescendent women could provide. As among the indigenous, the need for ethnic solidarity also undermines the growth of gender consciousness.

Indigenous women also had to take a critical role in social reproduction and to not depend solely on men for survival. However, the growth of gender consciousness is weakened by the strict controls imposed on them by traditional ethnic solidarity, which limited their mobility and autonomy within indigenous communities. Now ethnic solidarity is being eroded by growing involvement in a market economy, which is drawing men into wage labor in the cities (and the U.S.) and creating class divisions in indigenous communities, as Nash has shown in Chiapas. The state also privileged indigenous men over women, making it more difficult for indigenous women to assume key decision- making positions in their communities. Strong indigenous women leaders do emerge, such as among the women *comandantes* of the Zapatistas or Rigoberta Menchú of Guatemala, but they must combat tremendous odds.

Both indigenous and Afrodescendent groups question the traditional ideology of *mestizaje* in terms of its white bias and Eurocentric norms. Both have succeeded in promoting a more positive image of their communities, both within their own communities and among the elite, and are gaining legitimacy as full citizens worthy of specific public policy to redress past wrongs. They have pushed for recognition of greater cultural diversity through territorial rights, bilingual education, curriculum reform and affirmative action programs in education and employment. But Afrodescendents' inability to foster mass support for racial solidarity as a means of

addressing inequality suggests the possibility of a class- based interracial movement, as exemplified by the recent electoral success of the Workers Party in Brazil. The role that women play in these Afrodescendent and indigenous movements certainly warrants further study, to see how the growth of ethnic and racial consciousness can be combined with concern for gender rights to promote greater social justice in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

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