

## Round Table on Racial and Ethnic Inequalities in the Struggle for Social and Environmental Justice

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One line of research pursued at our University concerns racial and ethnic-related inequalities in Ecuador.

It is not new news that in the country's social scale, African-Ecuadorians and indigenous peoples are at a disadvantage with respect to other groups, such as whites and mestizos. Specifically, it is an exclusionary racial geography with two opposite poles: whites have the best performance levels, while on the other end are the indigenous peoples and individuals of African descent. This fact is deeply rooted in the experience of slavery and colonialism, effects of which have lasted long after the declaration of Independence from Spain in 1830.

In order to understand racial inequalities in Ecuador, we put advance a theoretical framework based on exclusion. Exclusion is the condition of a group of individuals who are denied societal participation and opportunities where they live. Exclusion is the limitation of citizens' rights, and consequently, involves restrictions to development.

There are many forms of exclusion: social, economic, political, and cultural. In the context of individuals of African descent, social exclusion is reflected in the lack of basic, academic, health, and entertainment services, and lack of access to technology, adequate employment, and consumption opportunities.

Economic exclusion is related to marginalization and subordination in the country's capitalist economic system. An illustrative example is the limited access to ownership, markets, productive lands, irrigation water, productive credits, and decent employment.

Political exclusion has to do with the capacity of institutions to facilitate the political participation of its minority groups in various national issues: for example, having few possibilities to be elected as mayors or congressmen.

Cultural exclusion involves discrimination factors, racial prejudice and implied and expressed racism that the majority society exerts against individuals of African descent. An example of this is the perceived stigma that they are dangerous and criminal; psycholinguistic racism; miscegenation ideology; and whitening.

Exclusion leads to socio-economic inequality. The latter refers to the scant distribution of resources among the excluded population. This is illustrated by the limited income a family receives for their wellbeing.

Nevertheless, note that the analysis of inequality exclusively from the perspective of income distribution is insufficient: it is important to bear in mind the distribution of opportunities and possibilities, too. Thus, factors that have an impact on opportunities and possibilities, such as participation, political influence and power, are closely related to economic differences, and are key elements in personal and social development.

### **Ethnic Inequality in Latin America**

We will now analyze inequalities among individuals of African descent according to statistical data.

It is well known that “Latin America and the Caribbean is the least equitable region in the world, with regard to wealth distribution.”

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2006), differences between the population’s poorest and richest quintile are extreme. By the year 2006, 36.5% of the population in the region (194 million people) were poor, while extreme poverty or indigence affected 13.4% of the population (71 million people).

It is estimated that over 30% of the Latin American and Caribbean population are individuals of African descent (about 180 million people), and that there are about 400 indigenous peoples groups, which represent some 40 to 50 million people.

In general, poverty and inequality have predominated in these communities. According to the World Bank's 2011 survey, while Latin America had demonstrated signs of sustainable economic growth in the late twentieth century and early years of the twenty first, it has also experienced a high degree of inequality and weak social indicators of wellbeing among individuals of African descent and indigenous peoples social groups. Inequality between these groups and others in Latin America has become an insurmountable challenge.

The best way to demonstrate this inequality is with the wage or income gaps of seven countries (Ecuador, Chile, Paraguay, Guatemala, Brazil, Peru, and Bolivia). According to the World Bank, although wage and income gaps are significant between ethnic and non-ethnic groups, they can be narrowed down, by taking into account education levels.

#### Table

In order to understand the persistent denial of opportunities and lack of stimulus for developing the capabilities of indigenous peoples and individuals of African descent living in the region, we may call upon the notion of structural racial discrimination of a kind that leads to what Charles Tilly (1998) calls "persistent inequality," and consequently, second-class citizenship. The matter before us is understand the impact or consequences of such "persistence," or to research exactly when and why this disadvantage has been aggravated.

#### **Ethnic Inequalities and Exclusion in Ecuador**

According to the 2010 census, there are 14,483,499 Ecuadorian men and women in the country. The ethnic makeup of this group is as follows: 71.9% are mestizos; 7.4% Montubians; 7.2% African Ecuadorian and 7% indigenous peoples.

Following the six-year administration of President Rafael Correa (2007-2013), who called his governance "Citizen Revolution" (*Revolución Ciudadana*), some positive outcomes and transformations can be seen. Not only changes regarding achievements related to governability, political system stability and the strengthening of the State, but

also, certain significant goals related to social policy have been achieved, which the Government calls the “Plan for Good Living” (el *Plan del Buen Vivir*).

According to official reports, during Correa’s administration, some issues such as inequality, unemployment and poverty have been significantly reduced. GDP distribution in the social sector has improved; more hospitals and highways have been built; school attendance rate has increased; and the free education has been guaranteed. Additionally, the Government has launched an ambitious plan to transform the power grid, investing sizeable resources in the hydroelectric sector so that, in the future, the country may be less dependent on energy from oil and gas.

Among all the achievements the Government claims credit for, it is worth analyzing the reported reduction of income inequality. However, at the same time, the Government is aware there are still challenges to overcome, especially in those fields where poverty crosses paths with problematic development variables, such as discrimination, exclusion and inequality among sectors such as the indigenous peoples and individuals of African descent.

The Government itself confirms that discrimination and poverty situation affecting peoples and nationalities continues, through social indicators “that show persistent inequality caused by the ethnic divide.” That is to say, “a clear gap between the levels of wellbeing achieved by the indigenous peoples, Montubians and African Ecuadorians and those of the white and mestizo populations. (SENPLADES: 2013:99)

Table

This illustration shows the existing disparity in social achievements in Ecuador, as self-identified by the population. It is official data taken from the “2013-2017 Plan for Good Living.” It is noted that income inequality is greater among indigenous peoples, Montubians, and individuals of African descent, while it decreases among white and mestizo social groups. Likewise, the Government is aware that, with regard to illiteracy and access to basic services such as drinking water and social security, the peoples and nationalities have fewer opportunities than mestizos and whites.

One of the factors that widen the country's "ethnic divide" and "persisting inequality," to the detriment of peoples and nationalities, is the right to education. According to the Government, this right is guaranteed in the country with negative differences toward peoples and nationalities:

#### Table

This table demonstrates educational disparity by self-identified group. With regard to illiteracy, peoples, and nationalities show an indicator above the national average of 6.8%. Among indigenous peoples, 20 of every 100 individuals is unable to read or write; among Montubians, 12.9% are illiterate, and 7.6% of individuals of African descent are illiterate.

In the country an individual self-identified as white has an average of 12 years of schooling, mestizos have 11 years, while indigenous peoples only get to 7.6 years, Montubians 8.3 years, and individuals of African descent, 9 years.

However, the greatest disparity exists in connection with higher education: while 21% of Ecuadorians have access to this education level, as regards white people, 32 of every 100 individuals have a college education; 26 of every 100 among mestizos, and only 11 of every 100 among individuals of African descent, 5.5 of every 100 among indigenous peoples and 7.7 of every 100 among Montubians. And what is worse, in Ecuador, 24 of every 100 white people get a university degree, 13 out of 100 mestizos, and only 7 of every 100 individuals of African descent, and only 2 out of 100 indigenous peoples people and 1.4 of every 100 Montubians.

If we adhere to the theory that poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon and the product of the denial of opportunities and capabilities, we can begin to understand the reasons for the inequality affecting peoples and nationalities.

And just as self-identified whites and mestizos have better academic conditions, they will just the same have better employment and higher incomes. The table shows the historical line of Ecuador's urban unemployment rate from 2003 - 2011. It is easy to see that the financially active African Ecuadorian population has the highest urban

unemployment rate every year, and further, urban unemployment is higher for youth and female African Ecuadorians.

Table

Why are urban unemployment rates so high for African Ecuadorians? African Ecuadorians primarily live in urban areas (74.4% according to the 2010 Census). The cities with the greatest numbers of African Ecuadorians are Guayaquil, Santo Domingo, Esmeraldas, San Lorenzo, Quito, and Ibarra. This phenomenon has an impact on these communities that are more dependent on the urban market, and at the same time, have greater difficulties to insert themselves into the community due to racist prejudices and negative stereotypes built around them.

The following table shows the income disparity among individuals of African descent, mestizos and the national and gender averages. Based on the December 2011 employment survey, while the income of mestizo males amount to a monthly average of \$474.60 USD, an African Ecuadorian male only receives \$379.4 USD, that is, \$100 USD less than mestizo males. However, if we introduce the gender variable, we find that women in all groups earn lower wages and salaries than men, and lower than the national average. So, an Ecuadorian woman earns \$100 USD per month less than that of a man, but a woman of African descent has an income \$126 USD less than the Ecuadorian male, and \$40 USD less than the African Ecuadorian male.

Table

### **The Geography of Poverty in Urban Territories and where Individuals of African Descent Live**

The Geography of Poverty in urban contexts: Inequality of Individuals of African Descent in Guayaquil.

These indicators are part of our research in Guayaquil. Twenty-four percent of African Ecuadorians in the country live in this city, and make up 10% of the city's population, according to the 2010 census. The map shows where African Ecuadorians live in Guayaquil. And if we look carefully, we can see that over 95% of individuals of African descent live in non-consolidated areas of the city, with high poverty levels, poor human

development and high social vulnerability. We are referring to areas such as Nigera, Los Guasmos, Isla Trinitaria, Fertiza, Cristo del Consuelo, and the shantytowns on the northeastern side of the city.

The question is why do African Ecuadorians settle in these poor areas? It is a phenomenon of racial residential segregation in a city where dominant groups have insisted on building the city in the middle of an exclusionary geography, an intentional policy of ghettos created since the end of 1888, when the last big fire took place and dominant white classes in Guayaquil, they decided to carry out an urban regeneration and sectorization of the city.

However, it is worth noting that the racial residential segregation in Guayaquil is not a model applied only by the racial dominant wealthy class in Guayaquil against individuals of African descent. If we carefully analyze the country's geography, we find that this model extends and applies to those traditional or ancestral African Ecuadorian regions. According to the 2010 census, rural and urban districts where more than 60% of the population is made up of African Ecuadorians, has poverty levels, according to NBI (unmet basic needs), ranging from 76% to 100%. There are 24 districts (parroquias) located in the provinces of Esmeraldas and El Carchi. This proves that the poverty in the country, in addition to the ethnic element, also has a territorial component, both urban and rural, since not even San Lorenzo with population of 25 thousand, 75% of which are individuals of African descent, is exempted from this rule, given its 65% NBI.

Map

Table

The last indicator is related to environmental and territorial inequality among African Ecuadorians. It refers to the environmental and social conditions in the ancestral collectively held territories of individuals of African descent in the province of Esmeraldas, specifically, in the San Lorenzo municipality.

Map 2 shows the collectively held territories belonging to individuals of African descent, which were granted by the Government as communes, during the 90s (97 thousand hectares). We are specifically looking at collectively held territories of

Palenque de la Federación de Comunidades Negras del Alto San Lorenzo. Map 3 shows environmental inequality as an indicator of the denial of rights.

In these collectively held territories, individuals of African descent would aspire to build their own development vision, based on the constitutional standards of “good living.” However, currently, the exercise of this constitutional right is not possible, given the many threats affecting ownership and the use of the land granted by the Government to African Ecuadorian communities and associations in Northern Esmeraldas. Currently, the pressure on communal territories still exists. These lands have been interrupted due to the progress of the agro-industrial capital (palm farming, shrimp farming, mining, tree felling) on their territories. As a result, the communal territory is divided and in the worst of cases, has been delivered through different means to individuals who do not belong to the communities. This intervention by capitalism produces deterritorialization, affecting community life in a variety of ways: migration to other cities, food dependency, and increased poverty.

Map 3 shows that in the FECONA territories, 32.5% of the forest has already been taken over by oil palms and forest exploitation. Thirty-three percent of the land is used for grazing. Twenty-two percent is for perennial cultivation, such as teak and eucalyptus. Only 11% is for agro-forestry cultivation, such as banana trees and tropical fruit. The worst is that there is no longer a natural forest, and this is serious, since it affects the food sovereignty of the communities who can no longer hunt. If African Ecuadorians ancestral territories are under these permanent threats posed by capitalism, we could understand that these communities are very far from feeling that the constitutional “good living” guarantee applies to them.

Illustration

### **Explanation as to the Cause for the Persistence of Poverty and Inequality among the Peoples and Nationalities of Ecuador.**

How can we understand the social and environmental inequality affecting peoples and nationalities in Ecuador? Especially that of the individuals of African descent?



Generally, when researching the causes of perverse poverty, persisting inequality and structural discrimination affecting peoples and nationalities, we find that they're basically determined by dynamics prevailing in Latin American society since colonial times up to today, and through which ethnic communities are exploited, they produce capital and surplus for others, instead of producing them for themselves, a situation that keeps them in a permanent decapitalization process.

From our anthropological focus, we are attempting to find a rational explanation for the inequality phenomenon in the shaping of the national identity and the nation-state model created in Ecuador in 1834, where the racial dominant position of the mestizo group and the exclusionary and negative position towards peoples and nationalities were designed. We consider that the origin of the inequality and poverty arises from the denial of racialized individuals and from exploitation of them by the capitalist system.

Whitten's work (1999) analyzes how the invention of racial categories was functional for building concepts such as nation and citizenship in America. Through the invention of these categories, racial concepts such as "black," "indigenous," "white," "mestizo," are created. Thus, ideas about race gave rise to cultural values of white supremacy and black and indigenous people insubordination. This polarization between white and black ended up mediated by the concept of mestizo (mixed).

When analyzing the mestizo concept as an exclusionary ideology, Whitten uses the case of Ecuador as example. By researching the social and ethnic structure of Ecuador, the author presents three constitutive socio-racial elements: white, indigenous and black. The three of them are in an asymmetric position with regard to power, hierarchy and prestige. What is white represents the dominant elite of the structure, while the other two groups support the weight of the white power. It is a three-party paradigm (see illustration) "which is present in all structures and social levels in Ecuador." (1993:25)

What Whitten is trying to explain is defined by Carlos de la Torre (2002) as the Racial Dictatorship, upon which the Ecuadorian society was structured. Under such dictatorship, the Ecuadorian society placed the black and the indigenous peoples as the last others, and as inferior, where the indigenous peoples were the good wild and the black, the uncivilized barbarian. These racialized images of African Ecuadorians are also sustained by writer José de la Cuadra, who in 1937 stated, "the majority of blacks are incorporated into the national economy, several hundred have returned to their

primitive savage condition, rebuilding tribal organizations, in a curious process of social regression.” (de la Cuadra: 1937:34-35, quoted by de la Torre (2002))