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Introduction

During the summer of 2019, I was leading an antiracist workshop in Cali, Colombia, for the international non-governmental organization Community Peacemaker Teams, an NGO that accompanies communities at risk of forced displacement in different parts of the globe. At the time, I was researching racialisation processes experienced by Colombian internally displaced persons in Colombia, Colombian refugees in Canada, and Venezuelan migrants in Colombia. Since I was comparing racialisation processes in Colombia (Latin America), and Canada (North America), this research provided transnational insights into white supremacy as a racial ideology, which were quite useful for the antiracist workshop that I was leading. However, I was having difficulties explaining white supremacy to the internationally diverse group of attendants, who were coming from Australia, Canada, Colombia, Egypt, England, Honduras, Iran, Israel, Ivory Coast, Palestine, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, and the United States. Especially to those that were coming from nations and world regions that experienced colonial models and ideologies of racism that I was not familiar with. This paper presents an opportunity to explore the connections between *mestizaje* as Colombia's racial ideology, with extension to Latin America, and racial ideology in India. I hope that by exploring the impacts of colonialism and white supremacy in both spaces and expanding the transnational analysis of racial ideology; I will be in a better capacity to reflect on how racism impacts the lives of people and communities at risk of forced displacement in different parts of the globe, and how can we contribute to dismantle racism in those spaces.

This paper argues that racism is a European invention instituted through the project of colonialism. Decolonial authors[1] locate the origin of racism in the 15th century, as a result of Europe's exploration of the Atlantic and Indian oceans, the moment of encounter between Europeans and Indigenous peoples in the Americas, the enslavement of Africans, the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from the South of Europe, and the emergence of the capitalist world system and modernity. These authors favour a more comprehensive interpretation of racism, including religious, cultural, and biological approaches. According to this understanding, racism is a global racial ideology that is foundational to the modern world. However, its relevance is not confined to the past because it has had a remarkable influence through the eras of conquest-colonisation, independence, and in the present. This body of knowledge differs from Anglo-centric views that locate the origin of racism

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during the enlightenment and the emergence of modern sciences, nation-states, and the French and Industrial Revolutions[2] . Anglo-centric views also tend to limit the understanding of racism to biological and biopolitical approaches[3] and it is characterised by brushing aside knowledge produced in the global South and limiting its bibliography primarily to literature generated in English. With a great dose of irony, it could be argued that Anglo-centric work about racism reproduces epistemic racism by reinforcing the knowledge production complex, which tends to ignore research advanced in the global South and other languages than English.[4]

Racism and its ideologies are causally connected with the history of colonialisms. This paper joins Morgensen's (2012) call to conduct studies that account for the specificities of particular contexts, rather than applying general theories of racism and colonialism, "[a]ll such theories must be revisited to ask if they erroneously generalise specific colonial situations, and to provincialise all such situations by positioning them comparatively".[5] This essay is divided into three sections that address issues of coloniality and racism in two nations and world regions, Colombia in Latin America and India in South Asia. The first section addresses critical theoretical concepts such as racial ideology, racialisation, and racial formation. It argues that white supremacy is the dominant racial ideology globally and explains how functional European colonisation of much of the world to establish this ideology was. The second section explores *mestizaje* as the dominant racial ideology in Colombia and much of Latin America. *Mestizaje* is a subcategory of white supremacy that responded to a particular context where Africans, Europeans, and Indigenous peoples were in constant contact. However, the racial transgressions of *mestizaje* do not undermine racism; instead, they reinforce white supremacy by pursuing whiteness. This section also argues that the colonial enterprises in most of Latin America created middle-ground societies, defined briefly as societies where European colonial powers could not isolate completely Indigenous peoples and *mestizaje* became the dominant racial ideology.[6] The third section elaborates on the *casta* system, a theme that is helpful to understand *mestizaje* as a racial ideology, but that also serves as a bridge between racial ideology in Colombia (Latin America) and India. The caste system is useful to explore the consequences of European colonization in both nations and how white supremacy operates as a global racial ideology.

The Globalisation of Racism

Drawing from Omi and Winant (1994), this essay understands the ideology of racism as the hegemonic "way in which society is organized and ruled" to "redistribute resources along particular racial lines"[7] (56), benefiting members of one or more privileged racial groups in detriment of members of one or more oppressed racial groups, which have been deemed racially inferior. An ideology of racism is reproduced in "both social structures and everyday experiences"[8] (Omi and Winant, 1994, 56), this reproduction is what guarantees its permanence. In other words, everyday racism, including racial microaggressions and actions that might not seem racist at first sight, and structural racism are both necessary to sustain racism. It requires cooperation as much as power to sustain the ideology of racism. It is challenging for a member of the society under the dominance of an ideology of racism to escape from it. This difficulty applies to those that benefit as well as those that are oppressed by it because the ideology of racism is part of the way they understand the world and "make sense of the things they do and see -ritually, repetitively- on a daily basis".[9]

This study understands racialisation as "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed".[10] Although processes of racialisation include all bodies because all humans have been classified in racial categories, it is undeniable that some racial categories are more visible than others. Racial formation is key in the creation of racial categories. It

is based on the constant interaction between racial ideology structure and everyday experiences.[11] A key element is who has power and agency to determine their and others' racial classification, while whiteness is left untouched and invisible at the centre[12], other groups are racialised constantly with the strategic use of physical characteristics, culture, language, traditions, religion, ancestry, marriage, relationships, manner of dress, diet, place of origin and residence, gender, class, among others.[13] Racialisation processes are about constructing ideas to discriminate against individuals and groups of people based on race and building and reproducing white superiority. Everyday discourse, law and policy, and the ordering and organising of space are crucial components of racialisation processes. This dynamic causes the exclusion of racialised individuals and communities. According to Brahinsky et al. (2014), racial projects "classify and assign social and political meaning to difference"[14], which is used to allocate goods, services, and resources. Thus, "[r]acial projects historically have focused on endowing or restricting access to property, social privileges, and access to social and geographic spaces.[15]

White supremacy is an ideology that maintains the racial superiority of a particular group of people. Even more damaging, according to authors such as Fanon (1986) and Wynter (2003), white supremacy is an ideology that dictates who deserves to be recognized as human and who is not. Fanon (1986) argues that the world is divided between Blacks/racialized people and Whites, "there are two camps: the white and the black"[16]. For Fanon (1986), racialized people and White people have a dialectical relation, "White men consider themselves superior to black men […] Black men want to prove white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect."[17] There is a hierarchy of humanity divided by a line of superiority/inferiority, the specifics of how this hierarchy operates are dictated by the particular history of colonialism of each place. In this understanding, racism/white supremacy, or the line that divides human superiority and inferiority, is not just determined by skin colour; it can be determined by culture, religion, ethnicity, and language, among others. This understanding of racism creates two spaces, a zone of being occupied by those whose humanity is accepted and a zone of non-being inhabited by people whose humanity is not fully recognised.[18] According to Fanon (1986), racialised people are located in the zone of non-being because their humanity has been denied.[19]

The Latin American group Modernity/Coloniality presents a comprehensive understanding of racism that builds over the analysis of Fanon (1986, 2004) and other decolonial authors. Quijano (1999) argues that racism, as we know it today, started more than 500 years ago with the colonisation of the Americas and that it was essential to the consolidation of European identity and modernity.[20]Grosfoguel (2012) locates the origin of racism in Spain when the Catholic monarchy put forward the idea of "*pureza de sangre*" (purity of blood) to exclude Jews and Muslims.[21] In a self-preservation effort, more than 300,000 Jews converted to Catholicism to "purify their blood," avoid the Inquisition and remain in the expanding kingdom (Smedley, 1999).[22] Spain's unification presented traits of the modern nation-state: one people, one identity, one state, one language, and one religion. The imposition of this nation-state runs parallel to the encounter of Columbus with the Americas and the so-called Age of Discovery. Therefore, the unification of Spain, Europe's exploration of the world, and the conquest of the Americas would inform each other concerning racism and the construction of the Other. The encounter with Indigenous peoples generated the idea of "*pueblos sin religión*" (people without religion), which should be read as people without soul, "more animals than humans".[23] This process of dehumanisation represents an instance where the quality of humans of many different groups, homogenised under the geographically mistaken category of "Indian," was questioned. Spain was at the time the leading European nation, and these arguments would influence the racial ideology of white supremacy.

The debate that followed in Spain after the encounter with the Americas inaugurated two modern trends of racism. On the one hand, biological racism, with Ginés de Sepulveda arguing that "Indians" did not have soul, private property, and trade. On the other hand, cultural racism, with De Las Casas arguing that "Indians" were barbarians, they did not know God, but their salvation could come with "being civilized".[24] These discourses persisted and were adapted after the Age of Enlightenment, the historic moment where Anglo-centric understandings of racism locate the origin of racism.[25] The meaning of "not having a soul" moved from religious to biological grounds and became "not having human genes," while "being barbarians" evolved to "in need of civilization."[26] Simultaneously, Africans entered this debate via slavery. After Indigenous peoples were deemed "innocent" because they did not have the opportunity to learn about the "one and true God" and therefore needed Christianity, Africans were deemed soulless because they rejected the "real God" and were condemned to slavery. At this point, race as a combination of physical and non-physical characteristics that went beyond skin colour came into the debate creating a division between humans and non-humans, where all the subcategories of the Other—relevant in the Iberian peninsula at the time—, whether Jewish, Muslim, Indian or Black, informed and reinforced distinct, although articulated, forms of racism that deprived them of their humanity.[27]

White supremacy is the ideology of racism, the origin from where racism and all its context-specific ideologies depart. If we ask what it is to be human according to the dominant ideology of racism? The answer is to be Western, imitate its cultures, speak its languages, participate in its economy, follow its political models, and learn its knowledge and sciences. Eurocentrism is the answer imposed by European colonialism. White supremacy has its roots in the colonial era that saw Europe colonizing most of the world and imposing its claim to racial superiority and its culture, languages, economy, politics, knowledge, and science. Quijano (1999) connects colonization, modernity, racism, power, and knowledge.[28] This author argues that the global division of power installed during the European colonisation of the world persists today with few changes. Europe's colonial enterprises created binaries such as possessors/ dispossessed, White/racialised, and coloniser/colonised. According to Quijano (1999), colonisation also implied a dual process of stealing and denying, taking the knowledge that was useful for Europeans and suppressing the knowledge that was not practical for them, which annihilated entire cultures. This process sought to impose European modernity globally.[29] Quijano (1999) coins the concept of the coloniality of power to denote Eurocentric rationality. Like the development of the private property, this rationality builds a relationship between Europe and the rest of the world where the first is a subject/owner and the second is an object/property.[30] According to Walcott (2011), one cannot make sense of the present "without taking into account the context of Western global expansion over the last five hundred years, a period in which Europe reordered the globe under its own terms or ways of knowing as the only legitimate way of being […] and the invention of the modern nation-state in its current liberal democratic form."[31] The colonial project that established white supremacy as the dominant racial ideology on the global scale was not only imposed through force; it was also made desirable. According to (Quijano 1999), "European culture was made seductive: it gave access to power. After all, beyond repression, the main instrument of all power is its seduction. Cultural Europeanisation was transformed into an aspiration."[32]

White supremacy is a racial ideology that establishes humans' superiority over those that identify as European descendants/White. This ideology reinforces the supremacy of White bodies through small and big instances of white privilege on the micro geographies of daily life. Quijano (1999) explains that Western domination operates simultaneously on a global scale.

If we observe the main lines of exploitation and social domination on a global scale, the main lines of world power today, and the distribution of resources and work among the world population, it is very clear that the large majority of the exploited, the dominated, the discriminated against, are precisely the members of the 'races', 'ethnies', or 'nations' into which the colonised populations, were categorised in the formative process of that world power.[33]

And at a local scale, even to the point that racialised bodies have internalised this domination, "the relationship between the European –also called 'Western' –culture, and the others, continues to be a colonial domination […] a colonisation of the imagination of the dominated".[34]

Mestizaje: **Racial fluidity and Racism**

Mestizaje is the dominant racial ideology in Colombia and most of Latin America.[35] White supremacy was imposed via colonisations, a concept that must be plural when addressing spaces that respond to different colonial projects.[36] In Colombia and Latin America, European colonisation produced middle-ground societies (Veracini, 2011) and developed *mestizaje* as a racial ideology. This ideology is characterised by a fluid understanding of race, but it still reproduces white supremacy.[37] Veracini (2011) explains that "settler colonial orders often replace previous colonial regimes, denouncing already established and mutually constructed 'middle ground' traditions (when indigenous people possess enough power to force non-indigenous interlopers to accommodate some of their social and cultural practices)."[38] In Latin America, European settlers did not manage to impose a "settler-colonial order" completely, as they never subsumed "mixed settler/indigenous life […] into the 'settler' or the 'indigenous' category".[39] It rather evolved from a "middle ground tradition" that strengthened the *Mestiza* category, which was constructed over the heritage of Indigenous, Afrodescendants, and Europeans, even though it privileged the European ancestry, while racialising and discriminating Indigenous and Afro-descendants. This is the historical background of *mestizaje* as a racial ideology.

According to Smith (1996), *mestizaje* has at least three different but related meanings.[40] First, *mestizaje* corresponds to social and biological processes that create a group of people of mixed heritage; second, *mestizaje* is understood as the identification of an individual or community with the *mestiza* identity at the communal or national scale. This meaning is immediately connected with the third one, *mestizaje* is a political discourse that identifies the political, cultural, and racial character of *Mestizas*. In this essay, *mestizaje* is given an additional meaning, it is understood as the dominant racial ideology in Colombia and most of Latin America.

The origin and history of *mestizaje* started with the violent moment of encounter and the construction of racial hierarchies in Latin America. *Mestizaje* became Colombia's racial ideology due to the emergence of the *Mestiza* people as the predominant demographic group in the nation.[41] *Mestizas*' primary advantage over the Indigenous population was its spatial mobility. Consequently, many Indigenous people started to embrace a *mestiza* identity, or more precisely, identify with it. This identification must be understood as a strategic action to escape the constraints imposed on Indigenous groups as socio-political units. In some cases, this identification can be understood as a form of denial of Indigenous identity, but it cannot be reduced to that.[42] A crucial aspect of this dynamic is that middle-ground societies are as interested in Indigenous labour as they are in Indigenous land, contrary to settler-colonial societies, whose primary goal is to appropriate Indigenous land.[43] While Indigenous labour was tied to the land, in many cases as slave labour, *Mestizas* could leave Indigenous territories and perform wage labour in the cities.[44] This spatial

mobility responded mainly to processes of urbanisation, industrialisation, and education. The agency of Indigenous people who reclaimed a m*estiza* identity can be framed as a process of *mestizaje* from below, understood as "a mestizaje that is not defined by the state but claimed and remade by Indigenous people."[45]

Rapapport (2014) explains that it is more accurate to speak of identifications than identity concerning racial categories in the colonial era because the same individual could claim different racial identities throughout their life.[46] The ambivalence of the *mestiza* category implied that they did not compose an ethnocultural, collective, and sociological group with privileges and responsibilities such as Indigenous nations, but simply a category of identification that was pretty loose and named many people that could not be denominated otherwise. In this sense, it was an inclusive category that people classified into different races could identify with (Rapapport, 2014).[47] This identification of ordinary people with the category of *mestizaje* was socially accepted and became a central aspect of the ideology of *mestizaje*, which in turn was fundamental to developing nationalist discourses and modernizing narratives in Latin America.

Castro-Gómez (2005) argues in his research about race, science, and the Enlightenment in Nueva Granada --the name of the territory that comprises Colombia before independence from Spain-- that the imaginary of whiteness was an essential aspect of coloniality and modernity in Latin America. Although he clarifies that whiteness was more than skin colour, it was also related to religion, clothing, heritage, behaviour, and knowledge production.[48] Racial classification was a determining factor in an individual's social position. Being able to perform whiteness, which included practising Catholicism, probing Spanish heritage, dressing, and behaving as Spanish, was a guarantee for receiving white privileges, such as access to public office, the Church hierarchy, intellectual work, and the right to wear particular clothing, while racialised people could only perform manual labour.[49] There were tensions within the category of whiteness. Latin American nations' independence struggles were led by the White *Criolla* elite, who, despite being the direct descendants of Europeans, did not have access to some positions of power reserved exclusively for Spaniards due to their place of birth.

Catelli (2012) uses the concept of *Criolla* agencies to address the initiatives that the *Criolla* elite adopted to establish itself as the dominant group in society. Catelli (2012) argues that the *casta* system in place during the colony was used to establish the racial superiority of *Criollas* over racialized bodies.[50] Simultaneously, *Criollas* used the discourse of *mestizaje* to connect themselves to ancestral indigeneity and rescue some cultural elements of Afrodescendants and other subaltern groups that would become part of the emerging national cultures and identities. These strategic actions positioned *Criollas* as the "rightful" leaders of Latin American nations.[51] *Mestizaje* as a nationalist discourse was dominated and mobilised by White *Criolla* elites from the moment of independence (Wade, 1993; Smith, 1996). Similar to the role of Whites in settler-colonial societies, where they seek to become the natives of the land.[52] *Mestizaje* is revealed as a contradictory racial ideology that denied Indigenous presence to deliver the land to White *Criollos*, while at the same time it appropriated Indigenous and Black *Cimarrones* (maroons) anticolonial struggles to claim that the nation was the product of *Criollos'* heroic resistance against foreign invaders.[53]

There is an interesting discussion about *mestizaje* and its relation to racial identity's static or fluid character. The history and essence of *mestizaje* indicate that it has been a racial ideology that allows race fluidity. This characteristic is reflected in the present. Different factors such as gender, class, clothing, place of birth, and education, among others, can allow an individual to trespass racial borders and perform a different race than it has been assigned.[54] highlights some interesting gender dynamics concerning the performativity of race during the colonial era. She argues that *Mestiza*

women were more likely to be accepted as White Spanish and members of the colonial elite, while *Mestizo* men were relegated to inferior racial and class positions. This gender difference was connected to another racial/gender dynamic. Indigenous males were feminised; they were "like females" who could not defend themselves from conquest and colonisation. Females were apt for *mestizaje*, reproducing a pattern that started with La Malinche and her "*hijas de la chingada*",[55] which in turn accentuated the loss of manhood of Indigenous males. In most cases, Indigenous women were forced to participate in these acts of emasculation. However, in some instances, they adapted to the racial ideology of *mestizaje* by rejecting Indigenous partners and selecting light-skin partners that were a pathway to whitening.[56]

In the present, the place of birth and residence, class and economic status, education, accent, relationships, and clothing, among other particularities, affect the way people are classified racially. In previous research about internalized racism among *Mestizas*[57], I observed that individuals could be classified into different racial categories depending on the characteristics mentioned above. For example, an Afrocolombian man born in Chocó, a region located on the Colombian Pacific coast and rainforest, a space marked as racialized by the discourse of tropicality—defined briefly as a discourse that marks remote lowlands in Colombia as racialized territories[58], was racialised differently from one born in Medellín, Colombia's second major city. The Afrocolombian born in Chocó was subjected to more intense forms of racial discrimination, while the second could "pass" as a non-racialised body in different contexts and circumstances thanks to his place of birth, education, class, friendships, and marital relationship. Something as simple as clothing allowed a person to trespass a racial border at least temporarily. In the same research, an Indigenous woman shared situations where she could pass for a *Mestiza* when she was not dressed in traditional indigenous clothes. On other occasions, the same Indigenous woman was the target of racial insults when dressing in traditional indigenous clothing. *Mestiza's* clothing made her "normal," part of the ideal bodyscape and racial imaginaries of inclusion in the Colombian nation.[59]

The instances where the Indigenous woman and the Black man from Medellín were able to "pass" for non-racialised bodies are exceptions, but they occur.[60] In these cases, markers such as education, profession, class, place of birth, living in an urban setting, accent, friends, romantic partners, and clothing are all characteristics that can locate racialised subjects in a blurred space within the racial spectrum. The markers pointed above are constitutive of racial formation in the microgeographies of daily life, they are "racially coded characteristics" that position "race as common sense".[61] Despite these exceptions, most interviewees in that research agreed that class could be changed over time if they managed to improve their economic status, but they could never change their race. This affirmation is not a contradiction with the experiences of racial ambiguity that they shared. It is complementary, it means that racialised people can receive racial privilege when they can perform whiteness, but it does not mean that they would never be subjected to racism over their lives, or that they have complete agency about how they are perceived and classified in the racial spectrum. They might have moved the line that separates the zone of being from the zone of non-being temporarily, but they have not erased it permanently.

Mestizaje's fluid character has been criticised for its whitening dimension.[62] Whitening practices in the Colombian context echo Thobani's (2007) analysis of immigrants' assimilation into Canadian multiculturalism.[63] In the Colombian case, it is the racialised subject within the nation that has to conform to the ideal body of the nation by performing whiteness. There is a complex contradiction within this idea. Although *Mestizas* constitute the majority of the Colombian population, they are forced to pursue and in some cases perform whiteness while being excluded at the national and international scale from this category of racial privilege. Another instance where

mestizaje exhibited openly its connection with white supremacy, was during the rise of eugenics, defined briefly as "the science of improving human stock"[64], in Latin America in the early twentieth century. At the time, the White *Criolla* elite promoted the migration of White Europeans to Latin American nations with the objective of whitening Latin American societies. Colombia did not manage to attract as many European migrants as other Latin American nations, such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Venezuela, among others, and in consequence was not very successful with its eugenics project.[65] *Mestiza's* exclusion from racial privilege is due to the ascendance of white supremacy as a racial ideology. Thobani (2007) explains that "the colonial encounter was structured as a racial one: the violence necessary to bring into being the colonial order fashioned and propagated a racial order. It organised privileges, rights, and entitlements of juridical subjects through a race status."[66] The caveat is that while this race status has been more fluid in Latin America's *mestizaje*, it has "actuated as essential and immutable"[67] in North America's white supremacy.

The critique of whitening takes place in two realms. First, it becomes an abstract dimension in which ethnic groups are losing their cultural practices and adopting Western culture. This anxiety can be explained by taking into account Western's long history of colonisation and domination in the Americas[68] and the extension of these dynamics in the present. Second, in a practical domain, it is concerned with whitening practices in the microgeographies of daily life, such as hair straightening, clothing, and body aesthetics. This preoccupation is immediately related to the discussion about race as static or fluid and anxieties about (re)defining what is acceptable and what is considered a betrayal of the racial category in which an individual has been classified. Racial borders are blurred in Colombia, which, fortunately, makes their regulation a problematic matter. This essay has insisted on the fluid character of *mestizaje* as a racial ideology. Afrocolombians, Indigenous, and *Mestizas* transgress racial borders continuously, reclaiming agency while contesting oppressive racial boundaries in the microgeographies of daily life. On the other hand, many of these transgressions do not challenge *mestizaje's* white supremacy. Instead, they reinforce it by aspiring to whiteness. In other words, racialised people in Colombia try to perform whiteness to access racial privilege, not to dismantle racial hierarchies (Gutiérrez, 2015).[69]

Some academics have idealised *mestizaje* as a racial ideology.[70] This idealisation is evident in the concept of the cosmic race.[71] As a nationalist discourse in Latin America, *Mestizaje* has been used to identify the national subjects politically, culturally, geographically, and racially against external forces. First against European empires and later the United States[72], but this discourse hides internal racial and class differences, while the ruling elites have stayed Europeanised/whitened .[73] Vasconcelos (1925) developed the theory of the cosmic race in the context of the Mexican revolution. This concept combated racism with racism because it pitted an idealized "*Mestiza* race" that brought together the best of the White, Indigenous and African races against the "Anglo-Aryan race" predominant in the global North. Understanding *mestizaje* as the emergence of a superior race that brings together the best characteristics of different racial groups is highly problematic. It has led to the imposition of *Mestizas* as the ideal bodies of Latin American nations after the independence from European Empires[74], excluding Afrodescendants and Indigenous peoples from these national projects.[75] Although *mestizaje* vindicates a racial subaltern group at the global scale, its similarities with Arianism are highly problematic.[76] Smith (2010) presents an additional critique of the concept of *mestizaje* offered by Anzaldúa (1987) because it "situates Indians and Europeans in a dichotomy that can be healed through *mestizaje*. Anzaldúa positions Indian culture as having 'no tolerance for deviance,' a problem that can be healed by the 'tolerance for ambiguity' that those of mixed race 'necessarily possess'".[77] While the fluid character of *mestizaje* might be more tolerant of ambiguity,
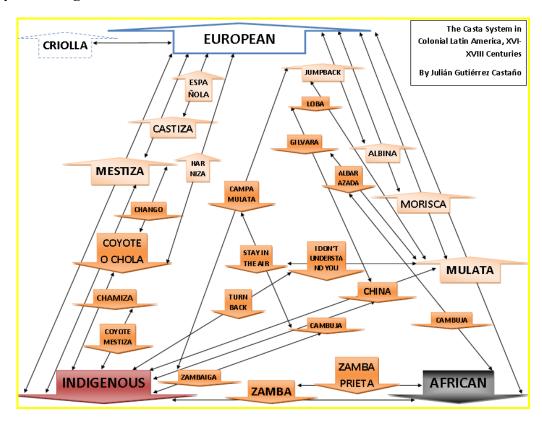
this fluidity has not healed the dichotomy between Indigenous peoples and Europeans, it has taken sides in this dichotomy as a variant of white supremacy.

The analysis of *Mestizaje* as a racial ideology must include the emergence and construction of *mestizas* as a racial and cultural category that many Colombians and Latin Americans identify with, as well as the moments of encounter with all its violence, the colonial project, and the development of racism in the past and present of Latin America. One problem with limiting *mestizaje* to the moment of encounter in the contact zone is that it reduces the discussion and normalizes the position of *Mestizas* within this complex dynamic; it subsumes other racial identities within one single category. Walcott (2015) offers the concept of creolisation in the Caribbean context as an interesting alternative to *mestizaje*. Walcott (2015) addresses the moment of encounter in the contact zone without romanticising it, instead focusing on "the violent process of becoming through/in modernity," concluding that "the importance of creolisation, conceptually, is that it locates our lives, histories, and experiences between brutality and something different—something more possible."[78] More than reducing *mestizaje* to the central role of *Mestizas* in the process that followed the moment of encounter in the contact zone, an analysis of *mestizaje* must address the violence that was central to it, the relations of domination and exploitation that framed it, and even current racial relations that are a consequence of these historical dynamics. This elaboration contributes to discussions about *mestizaje* from the ground and decolonial *mestizaje* because it goes beyond the two axes that sustained it as a racial ideology: the state and white supremacy.[79] This reflection is crucial for comprehending *mestizaje* as a racial ideology and the possibilities of racial justice in Colombia.

The *Casta* System and Other Points of Convergence

Colombia and India's racial ideologies have different points of convergence. Some of them are obvious, such as the historical and geographical confusion between the Americas with India, and the consequent mischaracterisation of Indigenous peoples in the Americas as Indians. Other points of convergence are the relevance of the discourses of orientalism[80], understood as a discourse that builds the identity of Europe and its people as a "civilized" continent in a dialectical relation with the "Orient", a category that does not respond to geographical knowledge, but to the need to fix the other in a single arbitrary category; and tropicality, understood as a discourse that similarly constructs the identity of Europe, and by extension Europeans and its descendants that inhabit "the temperate world", as "moderate and hard-working", in opposition to the peoples that inhabit the "tropical lands"[81]. The anxieties that miscegenation provoked in British and Iberian colonizers, although they reacted differently to the emergence of a Euro-Asian or Anglo-Indian population in South Asia and a *Mestiza* population in Latin America. A comparison between the categories of *Criolla* in Colombia and Euro-Asians and domiciled Europeans in India[82], and their role in the colonial era, independence struggles, and post-independence. The emasculation of colonised subjects to reaffirm the authority and capacities of the colonisers.[83] However, due to time and space limitations, this essay cannot address all those points of encounter between Latin America and India's racial ideologies and will concentrate on the caste system.

Casta System Diagram

The *Casta* System in Colonial Latin America, XVI-XVIII Centuries

By Julián Gutiérrez Castaño

The *Casta* System in Latin America was a racial hierarchical classification created by Iberians to privilege whiteness while oppressing blackness and indigeneity. The *Casta* System presented small differences in the names of racial categories or *castas* from one viceroyalty to another, which were the territorial administrative divisions that the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns used to organize their Latin American colonies.[84] The *Casta* System is the first known attempt to classify subjects in races or *castas* based on skin colour and genealogy in Latin America, and it was imposed by the colonial governments in the region for more than two centuries. The creation and imposition of the racial categories of the *Casta* System created a deep awareness of individuals and groups' position in a society based on their skin colour and ethnic heritage. This system was so pervasive that its consequences are still present nowadays in Colombia and Latin America. The *Casta* System diagram presented above describes and represents an oppressive hierarchical system of racialisation that stood both as a consequence of racism because it reflected European racism and a cause since it reproduced racism in Latin America. The fact that these racial categories were created and imposed as *castas*, that their names sometimes changed from region to region, and that each category carried privilege and oppression, demonstrates that race is socially, spatially and politically constructed.[85]

These are some important clarifications to understanding the *casta* system diagram. First, three foundational racial categories correspond to Indigenous, African, and European. Second, the double arrows that connect each one of these three racial categories represent the mixing between racial categories and the creation of new racial categories or *castas* (e.g. Europeans and Indigenous

produced the *Mestiza casta*, and Indigenous and African originated the *Zamba casta*). Every double arrow connects two existing *castas* and creates new ones in the process, the new *castas* are located over the double arrow and towards the middle of it. These categories were quite consistent across Latin America, but there were small regional variations that influenced the way people use racial categories nowadays. E.g. According to Hale (1996), in Guatemala, the south of Mexico and some countries of Central America, *Ladina* is used interchangeably with *Mestiza*.[86] Third, each racial category or *casta* is located inside a wide arrow that is pointing down or up. A racial category pointing up signifies a positive connotation in the *casta* system, which implied upward mobility in the social order because it was closer to whiteness. A racial category pointing down represents a negative connotation; it entails downward mobility because it was closer to brownness and/or blackness. Fourth, '*Criolla*' is a category that stood by itself; it included the American-born children of European parents. Most of the 'national heroes' of Latin American independent movements were part of this group[87], which presents an interesting intersection between race and class during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, although it could be argued that the Latin American elites are still representatives of this group. Fifth, this paper does not endorse or glorify the *casta* system in any way, it only attempts to describe an oppressive hierarchical system of racialisation that stood both as a consequence of racism, because it reflected Europeans' early incursion on racial classification before it was legitimised by 'science' in the nineteenth century[88], and a cause, since it reproduced racism in Colombia and Latin America.

The hierarchical racial structure of the *casta* system represented European anxieties about miscegenation and the need to construct and regulate changing racial borders by pathologising them.[89] The racial categories created by the *casta* system were not static across space; their meaning changed between the metropole and the colonies. For example, in Spain, religion was the main factor for acquiring pureza de sangre (blood purity) certificates that recognised whiteness, while in the Americas, the race was more relevant.[90] The process of *mestizaje*, understood as social and biological processes that create a group of people of mixed heritage (Smith, 1996), was manipulated by the colonial White elite using the *casta* system to create racial categories that were fundamental to the social and political structure that guaranteed and reproduced white power and supremacy.[91] Economically, politically, and socially, the *casta* system responded to the need to classify, order, exploit, and control people to tax and maintain power relations and social hierarchies reproduced through access to particular spaces, education, and professions. Culturally, it represented racial anxieties and obsessions with whiteness and whitening.[92]

It is not a coincidence that Latin America and India experienced during the colonial era a social hierarchical structure called the caste/*casta* system. Although the system of stratified *varnas* predate the colonial era as long as 1500 BCE[93], the term "caste" was introduced to India by the Portuguese in the sixteenth century.[94] Caste was originally used in the Iberian Peninsula to designate race, tribe, clan, strain, kind, stock, family, and religion. The notion of "purity of blood" that we encountered previously originated in the Latin "*castus*", meaning "chaste" or "pure". Early European explorers, and later, colonisers, used European categories to understand India's *varna* system.[95] This explains how the term caste was introduced in India, but it does not clarify if there were other connections between India's and Latin America's caste systems, which is quite possible taking into account that Latin America's *casta* system was imposed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the British furthered strategically the caste system in India starting in the nineteenth century.

The British empire developed non-settler colonialism in India and South Asia, which differs drastically from the settler-colonialism found in North America and other British colonies, and from the middle-ground societies that the Portuguese and Spanish Crowns produced in Latin America.

According to Mizutani (2021), non-settler colonialism is characterised by an interest in extracting resources from the colony, not in settling the territory, for this reason "men and women from working class families [were] encouraged to emigrate to Australia or other settler colonies, but not to India"[96] during the colonial era. Similarly to middle-ground societies[97], non-settler colonialism needs the labour of colonial subjects. This labour need produced a deep contradiction in colonial India because the proclaimed 'civilising' and 'modernising' missions of the British empire had to be carried out by Indians. According to Mizutani (2008), this contradiction produced tension in the colonial order. The British sought to maintain their power, which was strongly based on the racial ideology of white supremacy, but using Indians for basic tasks that sustained the colonial enterprise, particularly administrative roles, implied "the very creation of modern, civilised, and (in this specific sense) 'White' persons".[98] The British faced the dilemma of how "to maintain their status as a 'ruling caste'"[99]. In consequence, the approximation of Indians to whiteness was always incomplete. The British had to "adjust the membership criteria for the ruling community so that the colonised might become infinitely close to their colonizing counterparts, but at the final moment be always dismissed for their being 'almost the same, but not quite'"[100].

The system of stratified *varnas* has been known since the Hymn in the Rigveda, one of the oldest surviving Indian texts.[101] Originally, this system put more emphasis "on the functions of the classes than on hereditary membership, in contradistinction to caste, which emphasises heredity over function [...] the four-class system was more a social model than a reality."[102] Originally, castes have some fluidity and there was mobility among them.[103] According to Dharampal-Frick and Götzen (2011), the caste system is a system of detailed stratified social hierarchy unique to India, and the concept of caste has similar importance in academic, political, and social debates as the concepts of class in England and race in the United States.[104]

Dharampal-Frick and Götzen (2011) argue that the concept of caste has been racialised by the influence of the concept of race.[105] In the original stratified *varna* system, phenotypical differences such as skin pigmentation were not understood as racial-hierarchical differences in India before colonisation, *varna* was simply "any one of the four traditional social classes of India."[106] *Varna* is also translated as "colour" in Sanskrit, which opened space to speculations about class distinctions based on skin colour (Britannica. 2022).[107] According to Beteille (2001), the historical confusion between caste and race have different sources.[108] First, Europeans used to equate class with race until the nineteenth century. Second, the confusion between race and ethnicity, which includes language in many cases, conflates some castes that respond to ethnic classifications, with race. But castes cannot be equated with race, they sit at the intersection of stratum, occupation, and class. [109]

Beteille (2001) questions the strategy of recognising caste discrimination as a manifestation of racism.[110] This author argues that this is a wrong use of the concept of race, although he also recognizes that racial classifications connect to white supremacy because they enshrined the superiority of white bodies, and the caste system was used by the British with similar purposes.[111] Mukharji (2021) argues that nowadays it is difficult to address issues of racism in India because "[w]here the history of race ends and where the history of caste begins has been difficult to determine."[112] Dharampal-Frick and Götzen (2011) argue that the entangled history of the race-caste discourse is complex, it has a role in the promotion and resistance in systems of domination and socio-political discrimination. The racialisation of caste persists even after caste discrimination was outlawed by the Indian constitution of 1950.[113] The continuity of this racialisation process is the reason why activists have campaigned to declare untouchability a racist practice.[114] Mukharji (2021) argues that, similarly to Latin American nationalist elites[115], Indian elites have historically

appropriated and furthered scientific racism and the caste system as a way to claim their racial superiority and legitimise their privileges.[116]

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the West developed a form of racism that relied heavily on 'science'. The British were at the forefront of these developments and India was their playground.[117] They merged scientific racism and the caste system to reinforce colonial rule, furthering connections between caste and race. The British applied different techniques that contributed to scientific racism in India, most notably the use of statistics and anthropometry, elaborating censuses and measuring bodily features of different caste members and establishing patterns of superiority/inferiority. These techniques were applied to the census advanced by H.H. Risley in 1901, although these ideas were the product of his ethnographic work since the 1870s.[118] Dharampal-Frick and Götzen (2011), explain that "[t]he census project aimed not merely to fix Indian social hierarchy, defined according to racial categories but even more significantly, to determine the racial origins of the disparate Indian populations".[119] The British merged Hindú notions of caste with their ideas of class and race.[120] Similarly to the *casta* system in Latin America, the caste system in India is one source of internalised racism.[121] The census advanced by the British in India was riddled with errors presented as science, "the data contained in the British colonial censuses about caste were far from reliable indices of social reality."[122] The interpretation of the data was marked by prejudices against Indians. The impact of the census was not limited to administrative matters, it was also a process that "contributed to quite drastic changes in how Indians came to understand themselves not merely in the colonial past but well into the postcolonial era as well." [123]

British scientific racism relied on anthropometry, ethnology, sociology, and statistics, among other sciences, to create narratives "that gave sustenance to the newly understood rigidity of native customs and traditions."[124] Many colonial administrators were enthusiastic ethnographers that helped to produce the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. Mukharji (2021) explains that "[m]ost of the groups criminalised by this act were extremely low on the caste hierarchy, often very poor, and frequently groups that had traditionally engaged in mobile forms of labour and eschewed sedentary lifestyles."[125] Members of these groups were marked as "criminals by birth". The impact of this policy was not small in terms of people affected and duration. By the time of India's independence, 3.5 million or one per cent of its total population were classified as members of criminal tribes. The social stigmatisation of these groups persists even today.[126]

Racial ideology and pseudoscience go hand in hand. The absurdity of racism displays all sorts of contradictions to justify the pretended racial superiority of white bodies.[127] The British honoured this practice by using selectively Indian scriptures, framing them in ways that were convenient to them. According to Dharampal-Frick and Götzen (2011), the British took Brahmanical texts about stratified *varnas* and used them as social categories to impose a social hierarchy that was amenable to their interests of domination.[128] This dynamic required the complicity and collaboration of some of the colonised. Dharampal-Frick and Götzen (2011) argue that Brahmin scholars collaborated in this initiative to further their power. Regarding religion, the British used Indian scriptures to reaffirm biblical scripture and Western Christian mythology.[129] This pseudohistorical interpretation reproduced the superiority of whiteness and the racial interpretation of the caste system. According to this narration, the Aryans migrated from Central Asia to South Asia, where "they came into close contact with an unequivocally black race, the Dravidians [...] the antagonism between diametrically opposed races, the Aryan and Dravidian, which distinguishes the racial history of India from elsewhere and accounted for the rise of its peculiar institution of caste."[130] The British were invested in ideas about the Aryan race because these ideas legitimised their claims of white superiority. On one hand, the British were taking selectively information that reinforce the myth of

the Aryan race, on the other hand, they used the same sources to prove Indian's religious inferiority and backwardness when compared to the superiority of Christianity/whiteness, qualifying caste as "the most cursed invention of the Devil that ever existed."[131]

Caste System and Labour Division

Racism (understood as white supremacy) and capitalism share the same origin; they both emerged in the colonial era. Colonialism was the period of capitalism's original accumulation.[132] Capitalism has helped to build the foundations of white supremacy over the different peoples that Europe was encountering during the exploration of the world.[133] Salazar (2002) presents the idea that one of the cradles of capitalism was the mining city of Potosí in today's Bolivia.[134] The development of this extractive capitalist economy followed the production of the silver mines, it started in the mid-sixteenth century, reached its peak in the seventeenth century, and collapsed by the end of the eighteenth century, just about the time that Eurocentric views of modernity located the origin of capitalism in the North of Europe. The emergent capitalist economy of Potosí combined different forms of labour: Indigenous slave labour under the Mita system—which rotates Indigenous tribute labour from surrounding communities under Indigenous authority—, African slave labour and wage labour under the Minga system—originally a system to coordinate collective work for the well-being of the whole community or society (Salazar, 2002). This organisation of labour introduced one of the critical elements of capitalism, the freedom of labour. This element was so influential in Potosí that non-Indigenous bodies participated in the wage-labour market of the Minga system along with Indigenous workers. Even Indigenous bodies that worked under the Mita system—free voluntary labour—contracted their labour in the Minga system during their resting days of the week.[135] Smedley (1999) presents an interesting analysis of the connection between white supremacy and capitalism in the Southern United States.[136] Smedley (1999) argues that the White colonial elite divided the masses of poor along racial lines to prevent the development of class conscience among the working class of all races.[137]

> Class divisions diminished in the minds of poor whites and they saw themselves as having something in common with the propertied class, symbolised by their light skins and common origins in Europe. With laws progressively continuing to reduce the rights of blacks and Indians, it was not long before the various European groups coalesced into a white "racial" category whose high-status identity gave them access to wealth, power, opportunity, and privilege.[138]

Sen (2021) reflects on the connection between the caste system and the imposition of capitalism in India. This author asks if caste was not "an 'invention' of capitalism?"[139] According to Sen (2021), "there is ample scope for exploring the ways in which the capitalist mode of production was both inflected by casteist assumptions, even as it came to buttress and magnify an order that hinged on the extraction of value from those it deemed subservient."[140] Sen (2021) develops this argument in the context of comparative studies that have explored Dalit and African-American populations in India and the United States, taking into account oppression, exclusion, and racial and socio economic conditions.[141] It is particularly interesting in this discussion, questions about how the upper classes have used racial classifications, including caste hierarchy, and ideas about superiority/inferiority to "retrench their dominance"[142], but also reflections on the agency of the people most affected by the oppression of racism and the caste system "of the tremendous power of modern Dalit activism itself in shaping how caste has come to be contemporaneously understood [...]

in shifting the terms on which caste has been comprehended from a matter of social structure and hierarchy to questions of social and political justice."[143]

Conclusion

This essay offers a discussion on some key concepts within race studies: race ideology, racial formation, racialisation, white supremacy, and *mestizaje*. Racism or race ideology is defined as a system that organises a society on racial terms and divides resources among the racial groups it creates, giving privileges to one group while oppressing and excluding the others. It influences how people think and understands the world, using a combination of force and cooperation to ensure its legitimation and reproduction. Racialisation is a central process in race ideology; it is the active process that creates racial categories based on an absurd and incoherent combination of physical and immaterial characteristics. Racialisation is closely connected to racial formation. Everyday experiences and the macro-level structure come together to reinforce racial formation (Omi and Winant, 1994).[144] Racial categorisation defines what humans are going to be regarded as superior and, in consequence, receive racial privilege, and what humans are going to be classified as inferior, being subjected to discrimination, oppression, and exclusion.

 Europe's exploration and colonisation of much of the world gave rise to white supremacy, the dominant global racial ideology. White supremacy and colonisation created binaries such as White/racialised, coloniser/colonised, possessors/ dispossessed, establishing the racial superiority of European descendants and creating a line that divided humans from those whose humanity is questioned. Racism, since its origins, went beyond a biological understanding that was not limited to skin colour; it included culture, religion, ethnicity, language, and knowledges, among other characteristics that determined racial superiority/inferiority. Colombia and Latin America are middle-ground societies where *mestizaje* is the dominant racial ideology in many nations. One distinctive aspect of *mestizaje* in Colombia is its racial fluidity. Identification with the *mestiza* category offered the mobility denied to Indigenous and Africans, which compelled many individuals to embrace this category during the colonial era. White bodies enjoyed white privilege, they had access to the best positions in society, which in turn reinforced white supremacy. On the other hand, racialised people could only perform manual labour. Latin American revolutions to achieve independence from Spain did not transform these racial dynamics; they embraced the racial ideology of *mestizaje* to legitimise White *Criollos*' privileged position and exclude Afrodescendants and Indigenous peoples. Fluidity remains an intrinsic characteristic of *mestizaje*, but because of the influence of white supremacy, the act of trespassing racial borders does not seek to challenge racism; it aims to access white privilege.

 The final section of this paper explores the connection between Colombia and India's racial ideologies. It mentions briefly some dynamics that are points of convergence between these two nations, such as characterising Indigenous peoples in the Americas as Indians, the relevance of discourses of orientalism and tropicality, the anxieties about miscegenation and the emergence of *Mestizas* and Euro-Asian populations, the emasculation of colonial subjects; but it concentrates on the caste system. This paper follows postcolonial theory and joins the Subaltern Studies Collective (2021) in arguing that the British used strategically race science, statistics, and anthropometry in the application of the census and the shaping of the caste system to govern India. The consequences of these actions are multiple: national elites took advantage of the racial ideologies imposed by European powers to legitimise their privileges, the low categorisation of some groups became a source of internalised racism, and the impact of these categorisations in the division of labour implied that racialised bodies could be over-exploited.

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Notes

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