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Rethinking *Mestizaje*: Ideology and Lived Experience*

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Abstract. The ideology of *mestizaje* (mixture) in Latin America has frequently been seen as involving a process of national homogenisation and of hiding a reality of racist exclusion behind a mask of inclusiveness. This view is challenged here through the argument that *mestizaje* inherently implies a permanent dimension of national differentiation and that, while exclusion undoubtedly exists in practice, inclusion is more than simply a mask. Case studies drawn from Colombian popular music, Venezuelan popular religion and Brazilian popular Christianity are used to illustrate these arguments, wherein inclusion is understood as a process linked to embodied identities and kinship relations. In a coda, approaches to hybridity that highlight its potential for destabilising essentialisms are analysed.

Rethinking mestizaje *as embodied experience*

This article explores a key concept in the complex of ideas around race, nation and multiculturalism in Latin America, that of *mestizaje* – essentially the notion of racial and cultural mixture. I address *mestizaje* not just as a nation-building ideology – which has been the principal focus of scholarship on the issue, but also as a lived process that operates within the embodied person and within networks of family and kinship relationships. I consider how people live the process of racial-cultural mixture through musical change, as racially identified styles of popular music enter into their performing bodies, awakening or engendering potentialities in them; through religious practice, as racialised deities possess them and energise a dynamic and productive embodied diversity; and through family relationships, as people enter into sexual and procreative relations with others identified as racially-culturally different, to produce 'mixed' children.

This approach emphasises the ways in which *mestizaje* as a lived process, which encompasses, but is not limited to, ideology, involves the maintenance

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of enduring spaces for racial-cultural difference alongside spaces of sameness and homogeneity. Scholars have recognised that *mestizaje* does not have a single meaning within the Latin American context, and contains within it tensions between sameness and difference, and between inclusion and exclusion.[1] Yet a scholarly concern with *mestizaje* as ideology has tended to privilege two assumptions: first, that nationalist ideologies of *mestizaje* are essentially about the creation of a homogeneous mestizo (mixed) future, which are then opposed to subaltern constructions of the nation as racially-culturally diverse; and second, that *mestizaje* as a nationalist ideology appears to be an inclusive process, in that everyone is eligible to become a mestizo, but in reality it is exclusive because it marginalises blackness and indigenousness, while valuing whiteness.

Both assumptions are too simple. Firstly, nationalist ideologies of *mestizaje* contain and encompass dynamics not only of homogenisation but also of differentiation, maintaining permanent spaces, of a particular kind, for blackness and indigenousness, and creating a mosaic image of national identity. The standard formulation which counterposes elite and subaltern, and homogeneity and diversity is therefore unsatisfactory. If one looks at *mestizaje* as a lived process, the relationship between inclusion and exclusion is not best conceived of as one of superficial mask and underlying reality. Rather it can be understood as the interweaving of two processes, both of which have symbolic and structural reality. These, in turn, constitute a mosaic, at the level of the embodied person and the family as well as the nation.

The concept of *mestizaje* is not of interest only to Latin Americans and Latin Americanists; in the USA and Europe increasing attention has been paid to processes of racial and cultural mixture, usually referred to by a series of different terms such as hybridity, syncretism, *métissage*, *mélange* and creolisation, all or some of which may be related to other concepts, such as diaspora, which evoke the kinds of migrations and movements that lead to mixture.[2] For some theorists, mixture, hybridity and the formation of

[1] Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson and Karin A. Rosemblatt, 'Introduction: Racial Nations,' in Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson and Karin A. Rosemblatt (eds.), *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill, 2003); Charles R. Hale, '*Mestizaje*, Hybridity and the Cultural Politics of Difference in Post-Revolutionary Central America,' *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1996); J. Jorge Klor de Alva, 'The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of "Colonialism," "Postcolonialism" and "Mestizajes",' in Gyan Prakash (ed.), *After Colonialism, Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements* (Princeton, 1995).

[2] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco, 1987); Katya Gibel Azoulay, *Black, Jewish and Interracial: It's Not the Color of Your Skin, but the Race of Your Kin, and Other Myths of Identity* (Durham, NC, 1997); Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994); Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis, 1995); Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (London, 2000); Edouard Glissant, 'Creolisation in the Making of the Americas,' in

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diaspora have positive connotations of being able to break with essentialist ideas of identity and destabilise hierarchical relations of power which often depend on rigid categorisations.[3] However, in this article I argue that a Latin Americanist perspective on *mestizaje* can contest some of these more optimistic ideas about processes of hybridity.

Approaches to mestizaje *as ideology*

Mallon describes two discourses of *mestizaje* deployed in some recent scholarship.[4] On one side, '*mestizaje* emerges as an official discourse of nation formation, a new claim to authenticity that denies colonial forms of racial/ethnic oppression by creating an intermediate subject and interpellating him as "the citizen"'.[5] This discourse of social control – which is always gendered – marginalises and even erases indigenousness (and, one might add, blackness). Stutzman famously defined *mestizaje* as an 'all-inclusive ideology of exclusion', a system of ideas that appeared to include everyone as a potential mestizo, but actually excluded black and indigenous people.[6] A good deal of scholarly attention has been paid to *mestizaje* in this form, with more emphasis placed recently on its gendered dimensions.[7]

Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (eds.), *Race, Discourse and the Origin of the Americas: A New World View* (Washington, 1995); Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities,' in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London, 1996); Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe, *Scattered Belongings: Cultural Paradoxes of "Race," Nation and Gender* (London, 1999); Maria P. P. Root (ed.), *Racially Mixed People in America* (London, 1992); Maria P. P. Root (ed.), *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier* (Thousand Oaks, 1996); in Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (eds.), *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism* (London, 1997); Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London, 1995).

[3] Hale, '*Mestizaje*, Hybridity and the Cultural Politics of Difference in Post-Revolutionary Central America'; Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Tracing Hybridity in Theory,' in Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (eds.), *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism* (London, 1997).

[4] Mallon is commenting on articles in a special journal issue on *mestizaje. Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1996), edited by Charles R. Hale.

[5] Florencia E. Mallon, 'Constructing *Mestizaje* in Latin America: Authenticity, Marginality and Gender in the Claiming of Ethnic Identities,' *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1996), p. 171.

[6] Ronald Stutzman, 'El Mestizaje: An All-Inclusive Ideology of Exclusion,' in Norman E. Whitten (ed.), *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador* (Urbana, 1981).

[7] See for example Richard Graham (ed.), *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940* (Austin, 1990); Thomas Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (New York, 1974); Winthrop Wright, *Café Con Leche: Race, Class and National Image in Venezuela* (Austin, 1990). On the gendered dimensions of *mestizaje*, see Sueann Caulfield, 'Interracial Courtship in the Rio de Janeiro Courts, 1918–1940,' in Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson and Karin A. Rosemblatt (eds.), *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill, 2003); Mallon, 'Constructing *Mestizaje* in Latin America,' Verena Martinez-Alier, *Marriage, Colour and Class in Nineteenth-Century Cuba* (Cambridge, 1974); Carol

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On the other hand, 'we have *mestizaje* as a liberating force that breaks open colonial and neo-colonial categories of ethnicity and race. This is a resistant *mestizaje* … that rejects the need to belong as defined by those in power.'[8] Klor de Alva also notes the 'chameleonic nature of *mestizaje*' which either ideologically places mestizo America within the Western camp, denying indigenousness (and blackness); or in a contestatory ideological manoeuvre, locates mestizo America within indigenousness, pitting it against the West.[9] Examples of such indigenising ideologies of *mestizaje* include some Chicano/a constructions of identity in the USA – Anzaldúa's 'new mestiza', for example – and what de la Cadena describes as 'indigenous mestizas', women who identify as mestizas, but don't see themselves as non-indigenous.[10]

These analyses focus predominantly on ideologies, whether elite or grass-roots, rather than the lived experiences of those elite and/or grass-roots actors actually engaged in actual processes of mixture. As *mestizaje* was taken up as a key symbol for national identity, national elites generated a great deal of literature about national identity and mixture and this accounts for a certain bias in the scholarly material on *mestizaje*. Even anthropologists – and I include myself here – have tended towards the literate or discursive expressions of ideology when analysing *mestizaje*.[11] It therefore tends to be assumed that *mestizaje* is primarily a nation-building ideology, rather than a lived process. Contrast this with the USA and the UK, where *mestizaje* was not a nation-building trope, and the recent proliferation of literature about mixed-race people clearly includes a strong focus on the lived experience of mixed-ness.[12]

Another reason for the focus on discourse may be the influence of post-colonialist cultural studies theorising about hybridity – not to mention *créolité* and *métissage* – that originates primarily from post-colonial Asian and Anglo- and Francophone Caribbean contexts.[13] The recent emphasis on *mestizaje* as potentially subversive may indeed owe a good deal to theories about

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A. Smith, 'The Symbolics of Blood: Mestizaje in the Americas,' *Identities*, vol. 3, no. 4 (1997); Brackette Williams (ed.), *Women out of Place: The Gender of Agency and the Race of Nationality* (New York, 1996).

[8] Mallon, 'Constructing *Mestizaje* in Latin America,' p. 171.

[9] Klor de Alva, 'The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience,' pp. 251–3.

[10] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*; Marisol de la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, 1919–1991* (Durham, NC, 2000).

[11] See the special issue of the *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, vol. 2 no. 1 (1996), edited by Charles R. Hale. Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia* (Baltimore, 1993). But see also Smith, 'The Symbolics of Blood: Mestizaje in the Americas'.

[12] See, for example, Root (ed.), *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders as the New Frontier*, David Parker and Miri Song (eds.), *Rethinking Mixed Race* (London, 2001).

[13] See references cited in note 2.

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hybridity that cast it as a symbolic process that unsettles hierarchies, orthodoxies and purities, creating a 'third space' outside binary oppositions. It is worth noting that, while scholars may cast *mestizaje* as subversive hybridity, in the Latin American context this is generally tempered with a recognition that *mestizaje* may work as an ideology of oppression, marginalising black and indigenous populations. This indicates that theories derived from particular post-colonial contexts may not transfer so easily into others; indeed, there is considerable debate about whether Latin America is properly classed as a post-colonial formation.[14]

The analysis of *mestizaje* has focused on ideology, but I would argue that, at the level of ideology alone, things are more complex than the opposition between elite ideologies of homogenisation and subaltern ideologies of difference as is suggested by Mallon and Klor de Alva. Elite and literate expressions of mestizo identity harbour *within themselves* a tension between sameness and difference, rather than simply being homogenising expressions pitted against a subaltern consciousness of difference. The very idea of mixture depends fundamentally on the idea not only of whiteness, but also of blackness and indigenousness.[15] The idea of the mestizo nation needs the image of '*los negros*' and '*los indios*' (or, given the gendered nature of *mestizaje*, one might say, of '*las negras*' and '*las indias*'). The concept of *mestizaje* as an 'all-inclusive ideology of exclusion' does recognise this to some extent, precisely in the possibility of inclusion, but it fails to recognise the *dependence* of the ideology on its excluded others. Consequently, it establishes an opposition between inclusion as mere rhetoric and exclusion as the tough reality behind this mask. Yet Afro-Latin and indigenous peoples are better seen as actively *constitutive* of the very idea of the mestizo nation, indeed of the very possibility of its existence. I do not deny that ideologies of *mestizaje* may indeed involve important elements of simple or even cynical rhetoric about inclusion, but I think they go further than simple rhetoric and this provides a clue to their importance, rootedness and persuasiveness for people of many social classes in Latin American nations.

My research into the history of Colombian popular music in the twentieth century provides an example of these complexities of ideology.[16] I was interested in '*Costeño*' music from the Caribbean coastal region of Colombia, mainly *porro* and *cumbia*, music seen as rather marginal and rather black (or at the blacker end of the mix, as identifications of this kind are particularly relative and contextual in this regional context). I was tracing how this music became popular at a national level and came to be the music that identified

[14] Peter Hulme, 'Including America,' *Ariel*, vol. 26, no. 1 (1995), Klor de Alva, 'The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience'.

[15] Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia*, pp. 24, 64.

[16] This research was funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

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Colombia internationally. This musical shift both caused and fed on the 'tropicalisation' of the country, changing it from a nation that the highland elites represented as non-black, highly Europeanised and centred culturally on the Andean highland region, the location of the so-called Athens of South America, Bogotá.

This research revealed the immense literary, folklorist and intellectual production that, focused on the mid-twentieth century, was actively considering the question of national identity and, specifically, the place of Colombian blacks and, to a lesser extent, indigenous peoples within it.[17] Far from being 'invisible', as some have characterised the position of blacks in Colombia (and other regions of Latin America), during this period black people were very present in certain circles.[18]

This was very evident in the way the literate classes wrote about music. There was a constant emphasis on the tri-racial origins of music and dance, often attributing a racial identity to very specific musical or dance elements. Between the 1940s and 1990s, for example, descriptions of the folkloric *cumbia* dance commonly stated that the male dancer was a black man, while the female was an indigenous woman, and that both were wearing European-style clothing.[19] In relation to *cumbia* music, it was usually said that the drums were the African contribution, the *gaita* flute[20] (and, according to some, the maracas) were indigenous, while the harmonies and lyrics (if present) were Spanish.[21] Typical of discourses of *mestizaje*, which are always gendered and often sexualised, the mixture of *cumbia* is envisaged as a sexual dance encounter between male and female, although in this case – often referred to as *zambaje* – the dominant male partner is the African and not the white.[22] This probably relates to the conceptual predominance of blackness in the image

[17] Peter Wade, *Music, Race and Nation: Música Tropical in Colombia* (Chicago, 2000), pp. 30–52.

[18] Nina de Friedemann, 'Estudios de negros en la antropología colombiana,' in Jaime Arocha and Nina de Friedemann (eds.), *Un siglo de investigación social: antropología en Colombia* (Bogotá, 1984), Minority Rights Group (ed.), *No Longer Invisible: Afro-Latin Americans Today* (London, 1995).

[19] *Cumbia* is said to be a music and dance style characteristic of the Caribbean coastal region of Colombia and of colonial origins (although textual appearances of the word only date back to the late nineteenth century. Originally it was a plebeian rural and urban diversion and was popularised and commercialised during the middle and later decades of the twentieth century.

[20] The *gaita* is a type of vertical cane flute. On the particular concern of Latin American musicologists with racial origins, see Gerard Béhague, 'Reflections on the Ideological History of Latin American Ethnomusicology,' in Bruno Nettl and Philip Bohlman (eds.), *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music* (Chicago, 1991).

[21] Wade, *Music, Race and Nation: Música Tropical in Colombia*, pp. 58–61, Delia Zapata Olivella, 'La cumbia: síntesis musical de la nación colombiana; reseña histórica y coreográfica,' *Revista Colombiana de Folclor*, vol. 3, no. 7 (1962).

[22] *Zambo* is a term of colonial origin, used to refer to the mixture between black and indigenous people.

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of the Caribbean coastal region, despite the very significant contribution of indigenous people to the regional population and culture during and subsequent to the colonial period.

Each allusion to mixture necessarily makes reference to the original components of the mixture. Each discussion of *cumbia* recreates the image of an 'original' inter-racial encounter. For example, the sleeve notes of CDs by Colombian artist Totó la Momposina, who does renditions of *cumbia* and related styles for Colombian as well as international world music markets, suggest that her music has its origins in the distant past. The notes describe how African rhythms and Spanish romantic narratives have mixed and state, 'our music can be described as the result of a musical project which began perhaps more than five hundred years ago'.[23] In another CD, the notes say that *cumbia* has its origins in 'a courting dance … between Black men and Indian women when the two communities began to intermarry'.[24] Speaking of music as quintessentially mixed necessarily involves evoking racial origins and primordial encounters.

Something central to the ideology of *mestizaje* is revealed here: the literate classes are recreating the very things that are supposed to disappear in the progress of the *mestizaje* they are celebrating. Mestizo-ness is not simply opposed to blackness and indigenousness; rather blackness and indigenousness are actively reconstructed by mestizo-ness. This can be thought of in terms of the persistence of a symbolics of origins which exists alongside a symbolics of mixture. Instead of disappearing in a homogenous fusion, losing their identity, the original elements of the mixture retain their presence in the imagination of the cultural and racial panorama.

The recreation of blackness and indigenousness in the nationalist discourse of this period is, of course, neither accidental nor benign. It is necessary because elites and middle classes want to re-establish the possibility of making hierarchical distinctions of race (and thus also class and region), distinctions which threaten to vanish if the process of *mestizaje* were really to reach its ideological goal of homogenisation. These distinctions are the basis of exclusionary racism, but they also represent certain possibilities of inclusion. Here then, I do dispute an interpretation of *mestizaje* which identifies the rhetoric of national homogenisation as the mechanism of inclusion and the practical reality of differentiation and racism as the mechanism of exclusion. Instead I suggest, first, that the discourse of national homogenisation includes *within itself* complementary discourses of differentiation; and, second, that while the discourses and processes of

[23] Totó la Momposina, *Carmelina* (MTM, 7262-008026, 1996), produced for a Colombian market.

[24] Totó la Momposina y sus Tambores, *La candela viva* (MTM/Realworld 7260-008019, 1993); original notes in English, produced for an international market.

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differentiation can certainly act exclusively, they may also give rise to processes of qualified inclusion of a kind that does not rely on the disappearance of difference.

Mestizaje *as lived process*

If ideological discourse contains within it this tension between sameness and difference, then how does this work at the level of lived experience, of the body and the person? Such a perspective demonstrates even more strongly the importance of a symbolics of origin and related ideas about a mosaic of mestizo identity, in which different racialised elements and heritages are perceived to co-exist, rather than melding into an undifferentiated fusion, even as these elements also cohere into a single person. I am not arguing that lived experience is opposed to ideology: ideology is obviously part of lived experience. People's experiences of *mestizaje* are lived within a broader context wherein changing ideologies about the nation, its racialised components and their relative value are disseminated.

The illustrative cases which follow serve to outline further avenues for research, and are not the result of work that specifically aimed to explore these issues. My own work in Colombia, for example, did not in its conception aim to focus directly on these issues, which emerged post hoc. Rather this and other material is used here as a means of indicating a way forward for future work on the lived experience of *mestizaje*.

Music and the embodiment of mestizaje *in Colombia*

During my interviews in Colombia in the 1990s some of my interviewees talked about their own experiences with music and dance as embodied activities. I came across powerful notions of music as a kind of cultural property: certain styles of music and dance 'belonged' to particular regions and their inhabitants, despite these styles often being commercial productions that were in national and even international circulation. Territory, people and musical culture were thought of as a unified whole.[25] This sense of ownership can be interpreted as a result of the way music and dance were embodied, incorporated or made part of the body through living and performing them. Music became part of people, like the food they ingested – and, not surprisingly, cuisine is highly regionalised in Colombia, at least in symbolic terms. A person's body and self could thus potentially incorporate various different constitutive elements, perceived as having their characteristic regional-racial associations.

[25] Wade, *Music, Race and Nation: Música Tropical in Colombia*, pp. 209–12.

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To grasp the idea of incorporation, it is necessary to invoke the theoretical approaches to the body which see it as an unfinished entity, in a permanent process of elaboration or becoming through everyday performance, an entity that not merely reflects, but also constitutes the complex of social relations in which it is located. The body is physically constituted by cultural processes which become at once part of its biological fabric.[26] People think about bodies being shaped physically by biological and cultural processes. And, in Colombia, those processes are often racialised in the sense that they are frequently seen as related to origins and milieus with racial associations. From this perspective, one can think of at least two processes: first, the perceived addition of racialised elements into the body by means of their physical incorporation through performance and, second, the perceived realisation of latent elements which are already thought to be present in the body, but which are more or less passive.

An example of the first process is also an illustration of the intersection of food, body and music. A well-known popular music composer from the Caribbean coastal region, Antonio María Peñaloza, described how he arrived in Bogotá in 1940 to play in the house orchestra of the radio station Nueva Granada.[27] He recounted a heated debate with the director of the band over the correct way to play a *bambuco*. This was the emblematic style of the highland interior: it had been converted into the musical symbol of Colombian nationhood during the late nineteenth century and was still subject to disputes about the details of its time signature. According to Peñaloza, the director said, 'Hey, *negrito* [literally, little black man], you should know that, to play a *bambuco*, you have to eat *chunchullo*, *sobrebarriga* and [drink] *chicha*', that is, foods and drink all associated with the highland interior region of the country. His implication was that to have the embodied capacity to play the music correctly, a person had to have physically absorbed the characteristics of its region of origin. In this case, the discourse was quite exclusivist. Each region had its music and its food and its people. All of these had their racial associations: the highlands, with its food, music and people, were non-black, the coast black. People from the latter region could not play the music of the former. But the comment still held out the possibility of transformation: by eating the right food in the right milieu, one could (theoretically at least) acquire the correct bodily and mental dispositions required to play the music properly.

The process of embodiment could thus open up the possibility for a person to appropriate and incorporate new styles of music and dance by

[26] Judith P. Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London, 1993), Chris Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory* (London, 1993), Peter Wade, *Race, Nature and Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (London, 2002), pp. 112–22.

[27] Interview, Barranquilla, 1995.

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means of performing them and embodying them. In this respect it was notable how, in the *Costeño* music study, many of the interviewees in the highland cities of Bogotá and Medellín spoke in very physical and corporeal terms about the impact of *Costeño* music on their region and their lives. One middle-class woman said that, when *Costeño* music first arrived in Bogotá, people danced to it 'with timidity because the older people were against it, rejected it and considered it ordinary, vulgar. How could a girl move to the rhythm of a *cumbia* or a *porro*? What a scandal! But it gradually entered [into Bogotá society] because the rhythm is so *sabroso* [delicious, nice], so exciting that there are no hips that don't move to the rhythm of that music. It's impossible.' People in these cities commonly talked of how the music made them move their bodies, their hips, of the heat it produced in them and how the whole city seemed to heat up and relax. It was common to affirm that *Costeño* music, and the *Costeños* themselves, had warmed up, one could say tropicalised, the whole Andean region.[28] The music, as it were, speaks directly to something in the body and the body changes, incorporating a new kinaesthesis or sense of bodily movement, changing the social milieu in the process. Through rhythm and regional origin, the music is seen as linked to blackness, and it speaks to or motivates a sense of rhythm in the body, a sense of *sabrosura*, which is delicious but also risqué. The music awakens, or creates, reactions in the body – rhythm, *sabrosura*, a sexual frisson – that are themselves associated with blackness.

This already suggests the second process noted of the perceived realisation of latent elements that are already thought to be present in the body, but which are perhaps more or less passive. An example of this process comes from an ex-trumpet player in the city of Medellín (province of Antioquia), a light-skinned mestizo man who spoke of how *Costeño* music had attracted him from early on: 'The music is the best thing the *Costeños* have, the music and the sea. We Antioqueños have a different sort of music: *bambuco, pasillo* and the music of the interior [regions]. So what we have to dance to is their music […] because although our music is very nice, it's not dance music. So if you've got *un corazón de negro* [the heart of a black person] – at least that's how I feel it – you feel the music, you feel it so strongly you have to play it, you have to dance to it.'[29] The mestizo man with 'a black heart', in addition to being an interesting inversion of the stereotyped figure of the 'black man with a white soul' (or the Oreo cookie, or the coconut), is a trope that suggests a way of being mestizo in which a person has within himself different elements identified in relation to a symbolic national-musical panorama of racialised origins. It is not clear here how this man thought a person

[28] Wade, *Music, Race and Nation: Música Tropical in Colombia*, pp. 187–212.
[29] Interview carried out by Manuel Bernardo Rojas, Medellín, 1995.

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came to have a black heart, but the suggestion is that the mestizo person can inherit such elements as well as incorporate them into the body.

In a different research project, carried out in the Colombian city of Cali in 1998, I also found clear ideas about the formation of the racialised body through the physical inheritance of certain predispositions for music and dance skills.[30] When interviewing young dancers and musicians, who self-identified as black (*negro*), I found quite strong notions that a basic ability to dance well, or with a certain style, was 'innate' in black people. Even white people who had grown up in 'black regions', such as the Pacific coastal region, could not quite achieve the same effect in their dancing. One black dancer who ran a folkloric dance group said of white people: 'They have the same capacity, but they don't do it the same way we do it. They try to do it the best they can, but you can't see that impetus, that desire, that force that one has oneself who has lived all that stuff.' He added: 'There are some [white] people who get it [the rhythm] because of the milieu in which they live. But they don't do it the same.' In fact, there was ambiguity in this man's ideas: he said he thought it was 'in the blood', but he also stated that black people had 'that force' because they had 'lived all that stuff', so natural and cultural elements were blurred in the end. But the important point is that a symbolics of origin operated here to construe personal identity and history in ways that retained blackness as a racial-cultural element in the person. In this case, of a person not identifying as mestizo, it was done in a unilinear fashion so that blackness predominated; this man was a black cultural activist in a Colombia recently redefined as officially multicultural. In other cases, ideas about origins could be deployed to create mestizo identities that were mosaic in form, whether due to the genetic inheritance of certain elements, or their incorporation into the body from the milieu.

It seems then that the symbolism of origins has the power to shape the formation of embodied persons; its effects are material and tend to express themselves through a complex of ideas about music, dance, food and climate. People who saw themselves as mestizos, or at least recognised themselves as the product of mixture, did not necessarily see themselves as internally homogeneous and undifferentiated. Instead, a mestizo or mixed person could be a mosaic of elements, which were racialised with reference to the tri-racial origins of the nation. This suggests that the concept of mestizo includes spaces of difference as a constitutive feature, while also providing a trope for living sameness through a sense of shared mixed-ness. The latter is expressed in that most common of national tropes, *todos somos mestizos* (we are all mestizos), which one hears at all class levels and in many

[30] I am grateful to the University of Manchester for funding the fieldwork that included this study.

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areas of Latin America. *Mestizaje* provides the possibility for exclusiveness, by emphasising one racial origin – often whiteness, but also indigenousness or blackness – at the expense of others, yet it also provides the possibility of inclusion, and this may be at the level of the body itself. *Mestizaje* is physically lived through a tension between sameness and difference.

Religious possession and embodied mestizos in Venezuela: María Lionza

This sense of *mestizaje* as a lived process of embodiment and incorporation is reinforced by the work of Barbara Placido on the religious practices around the figure of María Lionza in Venezuela.[31] The 'cult' of María Lionza, which emerged from about the 1930s, consists of religious beliefs and practices directed at a wide range of spirits and sacred figures, among whom three central figures, The Three Powers, stand out: María Lionza herself (usually seen as a white woman), El Indio Guaicaipuro (portrayed as an indigenous man) and El Negro Felipe (portrayed as a black man).

At once it is evident that primordial, original racial identities, which are typically invoked in narratives about the formation of the mestizo Venezuelan nation, persist as crucial points of reference for many Venezuelans. These original elements do not fuse into a new and homogeneous whole, but instead maintain their identity and their power. It is interesting that the State has also tried to appropriate aspects of this religious complex: in 1952 a large statue of María Lionza was erected in Caracas, showing her in a way that invited identification as an indigenous woman, mounted on a tapir and holding a human pelvis above her head. Placido argues that this image was fashioned as a counterpoint to the figure of Simón Bolívar, the hero of the independence movement in Venezuela and elsewhere, who is usually depicted as a white man, and whose statue appears in town squares all over Venezuela. It is obvious that by converting María Lionza into an indigenous woman and juxtaposing her to Simón Bolívar, the State maintains conventional hierarchies of gender and race. Nevertheless, Placido demonstrates the ambivalence of both figures: 'each spirit while it is a representation of one individual, contains and suggests all other images and possible manifestations'.[32] María Lionza seems indigenous, but mounted on a tapir she evokes the image of Bolívar on his horse; at the same time, she suggests El Negro Felipe by holding the human pelvis in her hands, because,

[31] Barbara Placido, 'Spirits of the Nation: Identity and Legitimacy in the Cults of María Lionza and Simón Bolívar,' PhD, University of Cambridge, 1998; Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago, 1987); Michael Taussig, *The Magic of the State* (London, 1997).

[32] Placido, 'Spirits of the Nation: Identity and Legitimacy in the Cults of María Lionza and Simón Bolívar,' p. 31.

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according to Placido's informants, this recalls the human and animal sacrifices that the black devotees supposedly like to perform.[33] Meanwhile, Bolívar, apparently a white man, has long been the object of rumour and speculation about whether or not he had some black ancestry, or whether he has some hidden affinity with blackness by virtue of having had a black wet nurse.[34] Hence, both figures are ambivalent, with black, white and indigenous elements within them.

Placido's work offers a perspective on Venezuelan national identity which is rather different from the classic image of '*café con leche*', the title of Wright's book on the subject, which suggests the irrevocable fusion of elements that lose their original identity in the process of synthesis.[35] According to Placido, for the Venezuelans who participate in the María Lionza religious complex, '"Black", "Indian" and "White" are composite parts of the person; however, in the cult of María Lionza these different elements should not merge, people should keep them distinct.' It is necessary to 'contain these different aspects, but also to keep them distinct'. For these Venezuelans, 'to be authentically Venezuelan, humans have to be like *Las Tres Potencias*, an emblem of Venezuelan identity. Real Venezuelans are people who are not constituted of the merging of different racial and ethnic identities, not wholes made up of parts, because parts are not addable and do not generate wholes.'[36]

The devotees of María Lionza distinguish themselves from 'mestizos', even though they recognise themselves as containing different parts as a result of processes of mixture. Mestizos, in their view, are the product of a homogenising fusion, whitened and similar to Simón Bolívar. Real Venezuelans are 'complete': they are similar to *Las Tres Potencias*.[37] 'In the kingdom [of María Lionza] different people, blood and cultures might meet but remain separate. The cult emblem, the image of *Las Tres Potencias*, stands as a clear representation of how the three races from which all Venezuelans are supposed to have descended did not in fact mix to produce a country of mestizos, but remained distinct, separate ethnic groups that compose the nation.'[38] According to devotees, mestizos are the product of a homogenising mixture of the three original races and cultures and they are grey, without colour, vitality or power. Authentic Venezuelans, results of a mosaic-like composition, who had within them the three powers (or, one might say, potentialities) represented by the Africans, the Europeans and the indigenous peoples, had colour, vivacity and power and this was reflected in the altars that they created to venerate the spirits and which were full of

[33] *Ibid.*, p. 35. [34] *Ibid.*, p. 47.
[35] Wright, *Café Con Leche: Race, Class and National Image in Venezuela.*
[36] Placido, 'Spirits of the Nation: Identity and Legitimacy in the Cults of María Lionza and Simón Bolívar,' pp. 35–6. [37] *Ibid.*, pp. 36, 128. [38] *Ibid.*, p. 237.

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colour and variety.[39] The presence within a person of the separable racial elements permits fruitful and productive interaction with the spirits.[40]

All this leads us to a view of *mestizaje* which is rather different from the usual image of the nationalist processes striving to create a homogeneous identity that eventually erases blackness and indigenousness in order to end up with a whitened mestizo who represents the irretrievable fusion of three racial origins. It leads instead to the image of *mestizaje* as the construction of a mosaic, which can be embodied in a single person or within a complex of religious practices, as well as within the nation. This mosaic is rather different from the mosaic of what might be called official multiculturalism, in which each 'culture' is constrained within certain institutional boundaries, because the mosaic of *mestizaje* allows the permanent re-combination of elements in persons and practices. *Mestizaje* is not best understood as a simple rhetorical mask of inclusion that covers a reality of exclusion. The processes of inclusion at work in the construction of the kinds of embodied, musical and religious mosaics outlined here are more than simple rhetoric.

Difference and mestizaje *within the family: mixed women in Brazil and Colombia*

The examples in this section also reinterpret ideas about *mestizaje* (or *mesticagem*) and processes of inclusion and exclusion, but they are different from the preceding ones in that they illustrate the maintenance of difference in networks of kin relationships rather than emphasising the embodiment of racialised difference. The first comes from John Burdick's book on women, race, and popular Christianity in Brazil;[41] the second from my own fieldwork in Medellín.

Burdick describes the impact of the *pastoral negro* (the Black Pastoral) on working class women in Rio de Janeiro.[42] Through their attendance at workshops and classes run by activists in the Black Pastoral, many women adopted radical attitudes towards issues of race and class and took on varying degrees of 'black consciousness'. One aspect of this was an increasing

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 70.

[40] Something similar can be seen in other religious complexes such as Umbanda, in Brazil, which, like María Lionza, is a possession religion in which the devotee is possessed by different spirits which often have a clear racial identity, as in the case of the *preto velho* (old black man) who can enter the bodies of mediums, whether male or female, black or white. See Lindsay L. Hale, 'Preto Velho: Resistance, Redemption, and Engendered Representations of Slavery in a Brazilian Possession-Trance Religion,' *American Ethnologist*, vol. 24, no. 2 (1997).

[41] John Burdick, *Blessed Anastácia: Women, Race, and Popular Christianity in Brazil* (London, 1998).

[42] The *pastoral negro*, or Black Pastoral, is a movement formed by black priests within the Catholic church in Brazil in the 1980s, pressing for the official recognition of racial diversity. The Church finally created an official Black Pastoral in 1996: see *ibid.*, pp. 52–6.

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tendency to openly identify themselves as *negras*, a term often previously avoided in favour of terms such as *pardo* (brown). However, Burdick found that some women who recognised their mixed descent, although they might identify as *negras* in some contexts, also had misgivings about this. They valued their non-black ancestry because this signified personal and intimate links of kinship with relatives. For example, one woman identified herself as *mestiça* and explained the term in the following way: 'You know, a mix. Neither one nor the other. Mixed. My mother was very dark … She was *negra*, really, and my father was lighter. And you should see my brothers and sisters: they are all colours.' Burdick asked her why she didn't call herself *negra*, aligning herself with her mother, and she replied, 'Because I'm not. I am a mixture. My mother was *negra*. If I said I was a *negra*, what would that say about my father? [Burdick: Is that why you don't call yourself *negra*? Because of your father?] Yes, that, and because the *negra*'s life is very different from what mine has been.'[43] For this woman, and others like her, being mixed meant maintaining simultaneous identifications, rather than fusing everything into a homogeneous new whole in which origins lose their meaning.

What also emerges strongly from this example is that mixture for these women was not just about nationalist ideologies, but rather about personal relations of family and kinship. *Mestizaje* was an everyday reality for them, a reality of family genealogies, of personal histories, of relationships of sex and of paternal and filial love (and doubtless conflict). *Mestizaje* was not just an 'all-inclusive ideology of exclusion', a matter of elite discourses, but an everyday practice in which inclusion was not just rhetoric, but a lived reality. While the woman recognised that the life of a *negra* – in this case her mother – was different from her own, implying recognition of racial exclusion and hierarchy, it is clear that the family dynamics of mixture simultaneously imply processes of lived inclusion.

The second example comes from the city of Medellín, Colombia, where I carried out fieldwork in the 1980s. A black mother, from the department of the Chocó (a Pacific coastal province with a population generally seen as *negro* or *moreno*), had lived in the city for many years and had four daughters there before her black husband, also from the Chocó, died in a traffic accident. All her daughters either married or had children with local Medellín men, whites and mestizos. For the mother and her daughters and grandchildren, *mestizaje* was a lived reality that emerged from the urban context in which they lived. The young men that they encountered were mainly men who would not identify or be identified as blacks; they were rather 'mestizos' or even 'whites'. Migrants from the Chocó were a small minority in

[43] *Ibid.*, pp. 115–16.

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the city and comprised most of those who, in the urban context, would self-identify and be labelled as black. The relations the young women had with these young men were both long-standing and temporary, good and bad, but they created processes of inclusion, above all for the children of these unions. The reality of mixture was the kinship relationships that linked the new families.

This case is useful because it also illustrates the tension between inclusion and exclusion that is characteristic of *mestizaje*. The mother commented that other black families in the neighbourhood and elsewhere had labelled her and her daughters as 'racists' because, according to these families, the daughters had rejected black men as partners and their own position as black women. In this sense, the process of mixture, inclusive in that it created enduring spaces for racial diversity within the family, was being subjected to moral evaluations which had their roots in racial hierarchies that corresponded to the domination of whiteness over blackness in Colombia and to the nationalist dreams of whitening that would erase blackness. In this particular case, the moral evaluations corresponded to Afro-Colombians' challenge to this domination, which was an everyday experience for them in Medellín. From this point of view, which could be characterised as a position of resistance, marrying or having children by non-blacks amounted to a betrayal of black community values, an act of mixture that bowed to ideologies of whitening. By labelling this woman and her daughters as racists (discriminating against blackness), a process of exclusion was being imposed that differed from the inclusive definition of mixture adhered to by the mother and her children. This occurred without this family being unaware of the power and logic of the accusation. The exclusiveness of *mestizaje* could enter right into the very spaces of inclusion that were being created in the family's kinship networks.[44]

Conclusion

In this article I have proposed a view of *mestizaje* as multiple and with many meanings, among them the image of a mosaic, made up of different elements and processes, which can be manifest within the body and the family, as well as the nation. Seen in this way, *mestizaje* has spaces for many different possible elements, including black and indigenous ones, which are more than merely possible candidates for future mixture; it also implies processes of inclusion that go beyond mere rhetorical discourse.

[44] For a discussion of the meaning of mixed unions, see Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia*, pp. 310–12. It is interesting to consider the gendered aspects of mixture here. One wonders if the criticisms would have been as strong if, instead of daughters, this mother had had sons with white and mestizo partners.

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This is not an apology for *mestizaje*. I am not proposing here that *mestizaje* is 'in reality' a benevolent process because it has dimensions of inclusion that go beyond simple rhetoric. Rather I am arguing that *mestizaje* has both difference and sameness, homogeneity and heterogeneity, inclusion and exclusion as constitutive elements. These oppositions cannot be aligned with other dualisms, such as elite versus subaltern or ideology versus lived experience. Nation-building elites, middle class mestizos and working class black and mestizo people all live with these constitutive tensions within them in an experience which includes, rather than being opposed to, the production and consumption of ideologies. Dominant nationalist discourses of *mestizaje* also reproduce, albeit sometimes only implicitly, the vision of *mestizaje* as a mosaic of differences. Placido, it is worth noting, insists that the María Lionza cult, while it might contain some counter-hegemonic aspects, cannot be understood simply as a religion of resistance against the state, precisely because the cult is the result of an intersection of the practices and discourses of the devotees, academic commentators and the state. Indeed, it is this very dynamic that has allowed it to become an official emblem of the nation.[45]

The difference between ideas of mixture as seen from above and below in the racial hierarchy is not the difference between seeing it as a fusion and as a mosaic, but rather the role played by hierarchy and power in the ordering of the elements of the mosaic. Blackness and indigenousness can still be subjected to hierarchical orderings in which they are made to occupy inferior locations and are discriminated against and/or rendered exotic. If the idea of the mosaic implies that there are spaces for blackness and indigenousness, which do not locate them simply as candidates for future elimination through mixture and which may be personal and embodied spaces, then it is important to recognise that these spaces remain subject to the hierarchies of power and value inherent both in traditional ideologies of *blanqueamiento*, which favour whiteness and devalue blackness and indigenousness, and in more recent ideologies of multiculturalism, which tend to limit the nature of the space blackness and indigenousness can occupy.

In this sense, *mestizaje* is a space of struggle and contest. It is not a reason for automatic optimism or for Latin Americans to feel benevolent about their societies simply because *mestizaje* can have inclusive effects. It is a site of struggle to see what and who is going to be included and excluded, and in what way; to see to what extent existing value hierarchies can be disrupted. In Colombia, to take the country I know best, but also in other Latin American countries that have embraced some version of multiculturalism,

[45] Placido, 'Spirits of the Nation,' pp. 167, 230.

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this struggle continues.[46] New constitutions – such as that in Colombia in 1991 – and legal reforms – such as Colombia's 1993 Black Communities Law[47] – undoubtedly open new spaces for blackness and indigenousness, but such spaces are not, as I hope to have shown, unprecedented, as older ideologies of the mestizo nation also had some space for these elements. Rather they are transformations of existing spaces. There is less of a radical conceptual rupture than it might appear. The same struggle exists to make those new spaces mean something concrete, to create new forms of mosaic.

Coda: some reflections on mestizaje *and hybridity*

I think the foregoing argument has some interesting implications for current theories of hybridity. A Latin American perspective on *mestizaje* and an approach to it as a lived process as well as an ideology seems to highlight an inescapable interweaving of inclusion and exclusion in processes of mixture. *Mestizaje* always involves both processes and one cannot be separated from the other. This is particularly evident in Latin America and provides a critical view of some concepts of hybridity and hybridising diasporic movements that have emerged from other non-Latin American contexts – irrespective of whether or not one chooses to include Latin America within post-colonialist studies.[48] Theorists such as Hall, Bhabha and Gilroy have tended to see certain forms of hybridity as positive forces for creating non-essentialist and inclusive identities. Young notes that, in Hall's work – and I think something similar can be seen in Gilroy's work – one can detect two versions of hybridity.[49] The first, which as a shorthand I will call roots-hybridity, depends on a simple syncretism of two anterior wholes to make a third new whole. In this teleological mode, roots and belonging are paramount and exclusive essentialisms can easily be reproduced. The second, which I will label

[46] Willem Assies, Gemma van der Haar and André Hoekema (eds.), *The Challenge of Diversity: Indigenous Peoples and Reform of the State in Latin America* (Amsterdam, 2000); Donna Lee Van Cott, *The Friendly Liquidation of the Past: The Politics of Diversity in Latin America* (Pittsburgh, 2000); Rachel Sieder (ed.), *Multiculturalism in Latin America: Indigenous Rights, Diversity and Democracy* (Basingstoke, 2002).

[47] Peter Wade, 'The Colombian Pacific in Perspective,' *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2002).

[48] I tend to agree with Hulme and Thurner that post-colonialism is a category heterogeneous enough to encompass Latin America, but also think that one post-colonial context can bring critical insights to bear on theories derived from other contexts. Hulme, 'Including America,' Mark Thurner, 'After Spanish Rule: Writing Another After,' in Mark Thurner and Andrés Guerrero (eds.), *After Spanish Rule: Postcolonial Predicaments of the Americas* (Durham, NC, 2003).

[49] Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, pp. 24–5, Hall, 'New Ethnicities,' Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race*, pp. 123–33. For Bhabha, hybridity as a concept refers to the second of these two versions. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, pp. 4, 38.

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routes-hybridity, depends on unpredictable diasporic movements, creating unstable complex networks, not reducible to teleological progressions, but moving to and fro erratically in time and space. In this mode, routes and movement are paramount and exclusivism gives way to more inclusive identities based, for example, on perception of common interests and goals, rather than common origins. These two modes of hybridity exist in tension, but the latter is seen by these theorists in some sense as a progression from or challenge to the former, if not as its simple opposite.

Such claims for hybridity have been subject to various critiques, most commonly that the whole notion of hybridity does not adequately address, and may even be collusive with, the realities of a capitalist political economy.[50] Zizek notes that for 'the poor (im)migrant worker driven from his home by poverty or (ethnic, religious) violence, … the celebrated "hybridity" designates a very tangible traumatic experience of never being able to settle down properly and legalise his status.'[51]

My point is slightly different. If one looks at mixture through the lens of Latin American *mestizaje* it suggests that the routes form of hybridity cannot escape from the roots form. The two are mutually implicated and co-dependent. Indeed, one depends on the other for its effect. As I have tried to show with Latin American examples, people are constantly thinking in terms of roots and (racial) origins, and they may make inclusive spaces for these origins within their own bodies and families. It is impossible to conceive of processes of mixture without recourse to ideas about origins and roots, and routes-hybridity modes of mixture are implicated in this. Yet thinking in terms of roots and origins is not necessarily as essentialist and exclusivist as it might first seem. The idea of a mestizo person as a mosaic of racialised elements does not lend itself very easily to an essentialist definition of identity. Yet the elements themselves can retain an essentialist definition (as in the notion that having 'the heart of black man' caused an emotional affinity with tropical music). And, of course, the elements are easily subjected to evaluations that reinforce existing racial hierarchies and racial stereotypes.

[50] Jonathan Friedman, 'Global Crises, the Struggle for Cultural Identity and Intellectual Porkbarrelling: Cosmopolitans Versus Locals, Ethnics and Nationals in an Era of De-Hegemonisation,' in Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (eds.), *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism* (London, 1997); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), pp. 143–6; John Hutnyk, 'Adorno at Womad: South Asian Crossovers and the Limits of Hybridity-Talk,' in Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (eds.), *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism* (London, 1996).

[51] Slavoj Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London, 1999), p. 220.

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