Tamara Hale

A non-essentialist theory of race: the case of an Afro-indigenous village in northern Peru

Article (Published version)
(Refereed)

TAMARA HALE

A non-essentialist theory of race: the case of an Afro-indigenous village in northern Peru

In the village of Yapatera, Peru, there exists a folk theory of race which posits that humans cannot be divided into mutually exclusive racial groups and that personhood is both physiologically and socially 'mixed'. By engaging with the psychological literature on racial essentialism (i.e. the tendency to view humans in terms of discrete categories, as if they were natural kinds), this article digs deeper into the local folk theory of race. Experimental tasks were designed to test the inductive potential of race and revealed that villagers are far more likely to use other social categories (class, religion, kinship and place of origins) than race to base their inferences. The article discusses the use of experimental tasks as a vehicle for a different sort of conversation between ethnographer and informants.

Key words race, cognition, Latin America, essentialism, *mestizaje*, kinship

Introduction

What do ordinary people mean when they invoke concepts of 'race' or speak of 'races' in everyday life? Given that race is now widely accepted to be a socially constructed concept, we can expect a great variability in the culturally and historically specific meanings and uses to which concepts such as 'race' are put. We also know of societies and historical periods where the concept of race has been absent. As a result, there are no simple interpretations of how concepts such as race are used locally. For example, in a given society, is race an individual or a collective property? Is it given or made? How is it linked to, or different from, concepts and practices in the domains of kinship, religion, class and work? Does it sit on the surface of the human body or deep inside it? Is it visible or invisible?

My field site, Yapatera, is a rural village on the northern Andean coast of Peru, built around the ruins of a former plantation. Contemporary villagers are descended from African and African-descended slaves and free people, as well as from indigenous labourers free from the colonial obligations of *mita* (tribute payments). These terms, however, including 'African' and 'indigenous', have little meaning in contemporary Yapatera. Villagers might instead refer to their descendants as *cholos*, *zambos* and *morenos*, all terms which denote individuals of mixed race, with varying mixtures of black, indigenous and white. My informants rarely spoke of *raza*, Spanish for race. When they did, the term usually came up in discussions of family history. The following, taken from one of many conversations with my friend Plácida, on the *vereda*, or paved front patio of her house, is a typical verbal context for *raza*:

> Just like on my father's side, on my mother's side there are also two kinds of families. My mother's father was from Yapatera and her mother from Piura

[the capital of the state in which Yapatera is located], but she came from the Chalaco race, from the Sierra of Morropón [a nearby mountain range], over there. My mother was born here. My cousins, her nieces and nephews, are big tall whites [*blancones*]. The *negrito* [a little black] part of me comes from the Riega [a surname], from my maternal grandfather. And my mother's first children were very white, but they died. My father was an overseer on the cotton plantation; he was an outsider, he immigrated to here and he married my mother. You see it's a hodgepodge [*mezcolanza*] of families, of races.

What may make Plácida's explanation difficult to follow is the at times overlapping, at times contrasting, associations given to *raza*: it describes skin colour but also a very localised geographic origin; it is linked to regional migratory processes, to occupation and to a kin group marked by a shared surname; it contains a sense of 'lineage' but also a recognition of race's non-linear flow. In a single family we find black and white cousins and siblings; in one person, the narrator, we find black and white 'parts'. Plácida's characterisation of the mixed quality of family and races, and the story of migration and intermarriage, is typical of views on these subjects in Yapatera. Plácida's explanation is linked to a very particular local folk theory of race, one which does not use race to create human groups and to predict their members' properties, precisely because of the 'hodgepodge' mixture that is thought to make persons, families and the village as a whole.

Outside of Yapatera, however, there are narratives which posit a much more pivotal role for race. These come in two contrasting forms: one is in the pervasive anti-black, anti-indigenous, anti-mixed race and broadly pro-white/pro-European racism; the other is in the form of an urban-based 'Afro-Peruvian' ethnic and racial consciousness movement. The local folk theory of race on the one hand and racism and the ethnic consciousness movement on the other operate with contrasting constructions of race. This led me to ask the following questions: how robust really are local ideas about race and the importance of mixture, given the existence of these alternative constructions of race? And to what extent is the local folk theory of race that is articulated in local narratives, such as those of Plácida's family history, not just a way of talking but also a way of thinking? These questions prompted me to examine local ideas about race and racial mixing in the light of cognitive and developmental psychological work on social and racial 'essentialism', in the hope of arriving at a deeper understanding of local theories and concepts of race. The aim of this article is twofold: to illuminate a puzzle which has long held the attention of scholars working on Latin America, namely the co-existence of national ideologies of mixture on the one hand and racism and structural inequalities along 'racial' and ethnic lines and to illustrate the benefits of employing experimental methods alongside ethnographic ones to understand local ideas about 'race'. To this end I present the ethnographic background and the design and results of an experimental task, and a related control task, which tested the extent to which race is used as an 'inferential category' compared with other socially salient categories.

A local theory of race: mixing and the absence of racial groups

Mestizaje (in Brazil *mestiçagem*) is the name given to discourses of nationhood grounded in the idea of racial mixture which emerged throughout the Americas during struggles for independence and gained currency in the 20th century (for an overview

see Wade 1997). Ideological narratives of mixture and national symbols of mixedness, including *mestizaje*, have received scholarly attention in a wide range of disciplines including political science, philosophy, theology, literature, fine arts, performing arts, popular culture, museum studies, Chicano studies and queer studies, among others. In recent years, increasing attention has been devoted to showing the varying manifestations and interpretations of *mestizaje* in different national contexts. *Mestizaje* and related concepts, such as 'racial democracy', which denote post-racial unity and class rather than race-based stratification, have long been seen as linked to exclusionary preferences for *blanqueamiento*, or whitening (for an early discussion, see Whitten 1965, 1974). A puzzle that has deeply concerned scholars in the region, including anthropologists, is the tension between the existence of racism and constructions of these nations as 'raceless' (for Peru: de la Cadena 2000; for Ecuador: Whitten 2003; for Colombia: Wade 1993; for Venezuela: Wright 1990; for Brazil: Burdick 1998; Goldstein 2003; Sheriff 2001; Telles 2004; Twine 1998, among others). Despite these fruitful debates surrounding the concept, however, *mestizaje* runs the risk of being treated as *only* ideological. While it is easy to characterise *mestizaje* as a fiction employed by those at the top of the social hierarchy to dominate those at the bottom and to justify existing social hierarchies – no doubt *mestizaje* has been used this way – the weight of such arguments has for some time eclipsed the question of how *mestizaje* matters as a 'lived experience' (Wade 2005): that is, as something shaped by ordinary people in their everyday lives.[1]

In Yapatera, ideas about racial mixing have an everyday significance which cannot be overlooked. Such ideas are shaped by Yapatera's history as a *hacienda*, or plantation, which functioned from the 16th century until the 1960s, producing, among other produce, rice, cotton, tobacco and briefly, but famously, sugar cane. Slavery, and *mita*, the form of tribute payments reserved for 'Indians'[2] in exchange for protections of communal lands, were abolished in Peru in the mid 19th century, partially as a result of the demand for labour. A rural landless class of peasants, without ethnic associations and privileges, was in the process of creation. While the majority of freed rural slaves migrated to the cities, free people of African descent who chose to remain on the rural plantations came to live, work and intermarry with indigenous labourers forming communities of mixed-race tenants, field hands and share-croppers. Nation-building projects constructed the Peruvian coast as a non- or post-racial centre of modernity, industry, education, culture and civilisation, while casting the rural highlands as the site of backward Indians. As villagers in Yapatera themselves are at pains to stress, the scarcity of labour on the *hacienda* created the conditions for social mixing and intermarriage between different types of plantation workers from different parts of the region – and, by implication, with differing 'ethnic' or 'racial' attributes. As part of agrarian reforms in the 1960s, plantations were expropriated and turned over to worker-owned cooperatives; in ideological terms these reforms sought to dismantle any remaining social distinctions between different types of plantation workers and reinforced the notion of belonging to one peasant (*campesino*) class. Villagers in

1 The Brazilian literature cited throughout has developed more on this issue than debates in the rest of Latin America.
2 Several historians and anthropologists now agree that colonial differences between Indians, non-Indians and slaves originated in religious definitions (de la Cadena 2005; Gose 2010; Martínez 2008; O'Toole 2012: 25–9) and were intended primarily as legal categories, denoting different rights and obligations, rather than being based on ideas about natural or phenotypical difference (e.g. Harris 1995; for Peru: O'Toole 2012: 164).

Yapatera see themselves, first and foremost, as small-scale peasant farmers with hard-won connections to their agricultural land (cooperatives were dissolved in the 1980s), rather than identifying along any ethnic or racial lines.[3]

It is within this historical, social and economic context that ideas about race and the role that it plays in social categorisation and social life have emerged. While a large number of villagers in Yapatera today have dark skin, curly hair and other features which can be read as related to 'blackness' in Peruvian racial typologies, villagers regard historical links to Africa as hearsay and say that 'real' blacks (*negros netos/verdaderos*) are to be found elsewhere in Peru. Today, they say, blackness has 'blended itself away', 'faded out' or 'sparsified'. Villagers distance themselves from such racial labels, stating that their history is one of racial mixing and intermarriage.

Ideas about mixing are grounded in a folk theory of race, which links ideas about physiology, procreation, kinship and human kinds and bodies. For people in Yapatera, *raza* 'race', or *razas*, 'races', are hidden substances which sit inside the human body, especially the blood which is the force responsible for animating bodies. Races, inside the blood, are inherited or 'dragged down' directly from one's immediate ancestors and progenitors: in the first line from one's two parents and in the second from one's maternal and paternal grandparents. One's two parents are thought to be made of inherently different bloods and, by extension, they are made of different races. In the moment of conception, referred to as the *cruce*, 'crossing', of the bloods of mother and father, the races come together in equal parts, however one may be stronger or weaker in ultimately determining the racial composition of the offspring. Races are responsible for influencing a host of visible characteristics on the individual's physical body including skin colour, hair texture, shape of the nose and mouth, body shape, stature and so on. However, there is no predictable pattern in which they do so, such that one can never know how a particular child of two particular parents will come out. Villagers frequently draw attention to the diversity of appearances within sibling groups, wider kin groups and, by extension, within the village as a whole. My host aunt, Luz, explained to me the variation in the children of her sisters and her brothers by saying that:

> We sisters, our children don't come out black. You look at the children of my oldest sister: they aren't black. They aren't black, black, they are light brown. The son of my second sister, he is white. The son of my third sister is also white. All of my sisters married men who were whiter. And me with the father of my child, he is white and my son he also isn't black. My brothers, by contrast, the first married a girl who was really white, white, of Cajamarcan descent and his child came out *moreno* [brown]. Another brother he has two daughters from two different mothers: one *negrita*, the other, also *negrita*. My third brother, his wife is very white too, but their daughter is *morena*. The fourth brother's children: *morenos*. In the case of my brothers, the men predominate.

The terms used to describe 'racial' characteristics, such as skin colour, hair texture and so on, reflect a variability, ambiguity and what has been described elsewhere as

3   Many neighbouring countries in the region have embraced multicultural reforms and Peru, like others, has seen a growing visibility of indigenous and afro-descendent ethnic social movements and ethnic politics, especially since the 1990s. However, these movements have had little impact in the far north of the country and Peruvian governments have been extremely slow to give state recognition and confer rights on the basis of ethnic and cultural 'identities'.

'fluidity' (for similarities in Brazil see Harris 1970; Jones 2009; Telles 2004; for Colombia see Wade 1993; for Venezuela see Wright 1990; for Puerto Rico see Gravlee 2005). There are no standard terms of reference for 'racial' characteristics; words are often invented on the spot and villagers make use of a combination of terms to describe skin colour, hair texture and stature, as well as employing diminutives and comparatives to differentiate individuals (such as describing someone as *negrito*, 'little black', or *moreno claro*, 'lighter brown'). Classification is relative to one's point of reference and lies in the eye of the beholder, hence two speakers may describe the same individual in very different terms. This also makes any descriptions or labels open to contestation and negotiation. Villagers maintain that 'true' or 'pure' whites are foreigners, and that true blacks are people from Southern Peru or Africans. Categories such as 'black' and 'white', therefore, referring to people outside the village, operate as what Gow has called 'external poles' (2007: 199), rendering, by comparison, all villagers more or less 'mixed'.

Race, a substance transmitted through descent, is by default both a product of, and driver of, mixture. What are the implications of such a view for social categorisation? While racial ascription is thought of as an individual physiological characteristic, insofar as it derives, in a literal sense, from one's kin relations as the combined effect of what is carried in one's mother's and father's blood, a person's race is necessarily multiple rather than singular. Because of this multiple quality and because everyone is in different ways 'mixed', race can hardly be used to categorise people into bounded and exclusive social groups such as 'blacks' and 'whites'. Indeed, villagers rarely generalise about 'blacks', 'whites' or '*cholos*' (a term from the Andean region often translated as mixed Spanish-indigenous) or speak as if such social categories existed, nor do they employ racial terms to imply deeper characteristics shared by those denoted by those racial terms. 'Race', therefore, cannot be used to predict any socially significant things such as customs, beliefs or behaviours. For example, in order to explain the local marriage practice of elopement, villagers did not invoke a shared ethnic or racial group membership, but would explain the practice using an economic argument, with reference to their shared class position as 'the poor': young men in Yapatera cannot afford to ask for a girl's hand in marriage because this would require a costly period of engagement, including displays of wealth and gifts for the bride and her family – instead they resort to 'stealing' women. Similarly, other social markers such as religion, place of origin and relatedness are used to talk about significant resemblances and differences that exist in Yapatera. For example, villagers talk about the difference between Peruvians and Chileans, between rich and poor, between Catholics and Evangelicals, between rural peasants and city dwellers.

According to this folk theory, race is an individual, physiological characteristic which can vary as much between kin as it does between strangers. Therefore, to sort people into groups according to a single physiological characteristic such as skin colour would be as pointless as classifying people according to their height. Local ideas about race in Yapatera, although framed by the idioms of blood and descent, differ quite markedly from those prevalent in Europe and North America. The model of race found in Yapatera challenges the assumption that individuals can be classed fairly unambiguously according to race and undermines the common, especially North American, practice of assigning the offspring of racially different parents to the category of the minority parent (Wade 1993). Ideas about race in Europe, North America and many post-colonial settings stress the notions of purity and pedigree and the policing of racial

boundaries. The theory in Yapatera, by contrast, places processes of mixing and the quality of mixedness at the centre of ideas about race. In this view, race is more graded than absolute, more continuous than discrete; it is therefore useless as a means to classify people into discrete and mutually exclusive groups.

The emphasis on mixture has a normative component beyond what it says about local beliefs about physiology and procreation. It is linked to the proper constitution of personhood, to the notion of the passage of time, to a sense of place through the physical and moral growth, establishment and consolidation of the village over time, to the historical relations with the plantation, to labour history, and to the historical agency of the ancestors. An emphasis on mixing derives from a bilateral understanding of kinship in which the biological, as well as the symbolic and material contributions of father and mother are to be recognised and given equal weight. In Yapatera, bilateral kinship ideology presents a template for thinking about persons who are both socially and physiologically 'mixed'. Family histories centre on the marriage (or other union) of an ancestral couple, and villagers, more often than not, draw attention to a racial difference between the husband and wife. Kinship, and mixing as part of the flow of kinship', is constitutive of a sense of history that echoes Gow's description of ideas about race for Piro people in Amazonian Peru:

> 'Race', in a sense, is a marker of personal identity which links a person to a particular known ancestor in the first or second ascending generation. 'Race' is part of the person's identity, and can be transmitted to his or her children. More than anything, identifying a person as of a particular 'race' places that person within the history of the construction of kinship. 'Race' is a mark that identifies a person as the child or grandchild of a particular person. But because everyone on the Bajo Urubamba is 'of mixed blood', identifications of 'race' locate everyone in the system of ancestral intermarriage which forms local history. (1991: 257)

To suggest to a villager in Yapatera that individuals can be classed in a straightforward manner into exclusive racial categories is to claim that mixing has not happened and thus to deny the very course of history, kinship and village-making.

Alternative constructions of race: ethnic activism and racism

Despite this widespread, fairly explicit cultural narrative about the centrality of mixing and the resulting irrelevance of race as a basis for categorising humans into groups, villagers are exposed to two other discourses about race, which differ quite markedly from their own. First, Yapatera is constructed as an 'Afro-Peruvian' or 'black' village by ethnic entrepreneurs and activists based in Peru's capital Lima, who seek recognition, rights and funding from the national government and international aid organisations. Following this lead, various cultural activists, writers, folklorists and journalists also depict Yapatera as a cradle of authentic black Peruvian culture. This construction contrasts with villagers' own disavowal of the terms 'black' and 'Afro-Peruvian' and glosses over their own emphasis on mixture. On a day-to-day basis, however, villagers are not confronted with this image of Yapatera as an 'Afro-Peruvian' or 'black village', since activists, based a 16-hour bus journey away in Lima, visit the village only a few times a year and never stay for more than a few days.

While this first construction casts 'blackness' as something to be celebrated, the second alternative understanding of race casts an entirely negative light on 'blackness' and on 'Indianness'; this is racism, which is pervasively present in Peru despite a national ideology of 'racelessness'. People of darker skin and those of indigenous descent in Peru are regularly discriminated against in the mainstream media and the popular imagination, which caricatures both 'blacks' and 'Indians' as backward and degenerate (albeit with differences between the two). Structural or institutional racism helps to account for pervasive social inequalities between people who might be construed as belonging to different ethnic groups in terms of access to health, employment, education and representation in politics (e.g. see Callirgos 1993; Portocarrero, 1993). Racism in Peru is also characterised by its hidden presence, masked behind other narratives about difference, such as about 'culture' and 'education' – so-called 'silent' racism, to use de la Cadena's term (2001).

Villagers in Yapatera are reluctant to talk about racist discrimination; many deny having experienced it and most say that stereotypes about blacks do not apply to them since they are mixed, not black. Nevertheless, this does not prevent others, especially strangers, from casting many villagers in negative terms as 'black' or 'brown', especially when they travel to other locations such as the nearby market town, the state capital and Lima.

Without looking all the way to European and North American models of race, therefore, villagers are confronted with an alternative construction which differs quite starkly from their own local theory of race as a mixed and composite substance. The existence of such alternative construction raises the question of whether villagers are at all influenced by it in their thinking.

Experimental methods and racial essentialism

Conversations about race are, by nature, difficult conversations to have. In Yapatera, villagers are aware of the negative stereotypes surrounding 'blacks', 'Indians' and other 'non-whites'. They are keen to position themselves at a distance from such labels. Indeed, it was because I wanted to observe whether and how notions of race, blackness, Indian-ness and so on were used that I waited about nine months into my fieldwork before I initiated and engaged people in explicit conversations about race. Conducting 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork allowed me to document the hierarchies of importance given to different types of categorisation and to different social markers. This is a distinct advantage of ethnography over other forms of qualitative and quantitative enquiry which must structure their questions to a much greater extent around pre-conceived categories. But the question remains whether what villagers *say* about race accurately and exhaustively reflects how they *reason* about it. For example, would villagers reason any differently about race if the people in question were not themselves, their families or their village, in other words, if the stakes were not so high?

To explore this question, I decided to use an experimental study adopted from the literature on psychological essentialism. As discussed in the other two research articles in this Special Issue, psychological essentialism refers to a cognitive bias which predisposes people to assume that

> certain categories (e.g. women, racial groups, dinosaurs etc.) have an underlying reality or true nature that one cannot observe directly. Furthermore, this

underlying reality (or 'essence') is thought to give objects their identity, and to be responsible for similarities that category members share. (Gelman 2004: 404)

One consequence of this assumption is that essentialised categories have 'inductive potential', namely, that one is prepared to generalise the knowledge one has acquired about the members of a category (e.g. that tigers are fierce) to novel instances (e.g. this new tiger specimen is fierce). As Gelman notes, inductive potential is 'one of the most important functions of categories. Categories serve not only to organize the knowledge we have already acquired but also to guide our expectations' (2004: 404). The more a category is essentialised, the greater inductive potential it has (see Gelman 2003: 26–59).

The ethnographic evidence I have presented about the way villagers in Yapatera use racial terms suggests that they do not use 'race' as a basis for induction – hence, that for them 'race' is not an essentialised category. Thus, knowing that someone is 'black', '*cholo*' or 'white' is no basis for predicting or explaining a person's customs, beliefs and behaviours. This is evident when villagers refuse to speak about 'blacks', *cholos* or 'whites' in general terms as if members of each category shared common traits, and when villagers resort to other social categories to explain a collective property, behaviour or belief, as in the example of elopement mentioned above. And yet, competing constructions of 'race' are also present: what activists and racists have in common is that they essentialise 'race', using its inductive potential to either extol the shared properties of the 'blacks' or to denigrate them.

In light of this, the question I wanted to investigate was whether, confronted with an experimental task – that is, with a task that, to use Astuti's expression, 'forces people to put their thinking cap on and leave their cultural narratives behind' (2001: 433) – villagers would resort to using the inductive potential of 'race' despite the fact that they do not seem to do so in their everyday conversations. A reason to expect that they might is that, apart from being exposed to the essentialisation of 'race' by other social actors they interact with, the villagers themselves might have a cognitive bias towards essentialism, which they might be predisposed to deploy when reasoning about social categories such as 'race' or 'ethnicity' (as suggested, among others, by Hirschfeld 1996; Gil-White 2001a).[4]

---

4   There has been a cross-disciplinary call for a more cognitive approach to the study of ethnicity, race and nationalism (Astuti forthcoming), particularly in cognitive and evolutionary anthropology (Boyer 2006; Gil-White 2001a, 2001b; Hirschfeld 1996; Richerson and Boyd 2005) and cultural anthropology (Levine 1999). As Brubaker *et al.* (2004) argue, the social and cognitive construction of ethnicity (and race and nation) are not contradictory but are necessarily mutually constitutive: as shared ways of understanding, interpreting and framing experience, constructions of ethnicity require cognitive processes and mechanisms found in individual minds. In Brazil, cognitive approaches have been used to investigate the claim that, despite local ideas about race positing continuous, rather than categorical racial variation, ordinary people operate with basic conceptual prototypical categories for classifying racial diversity into quite clear-cut basic categories of black, white and Indian. Experimental methods have been used both to counter (Baran 2007; Baran and Sousa 2001) and confirm (Gil-White 2001b) the notion that Brazilian concepts of race are binary. Jones (2009) directly investigates the issue of racial essentialism in Brazil, finding a local theory of racial essences, but also that such essences can be mixed in individuals and that race does not create clear-cut groups. Outside of North America and Brazil, however, few similar studies exist (for one exception see Astuti *et al.* 2004).

Study 1: design and results

Study 1 was designed to investigate the inductive potential of race as compared to other social categories. The task is modelled on a study by Diesendruck and HaLevi (2006) designed to investigate a different, but related, question in a different cultural context. Diesendruck and HaLevi's study was designed to show whether social category membership is a more powerful source of induction than personality trait for adults and children in Israel. Once adapted to the local circumstances, Diesendruck and HaLevi's task offered a template for establishing the inductive potential of race versus social categories in Yapatera. Study 1 asked participants to make an inference and gave them the choice of doing so on the basis of racial or other social characteristics. In a series of trials, participants were asked whether a fictitious character[5] followed the same customary practices as a person who was racially similar (and socially dissimilar), or a person who was socially similar (and racially dissimilar).

The task was conducted after 15 months of continuous fieldwork and I chose to test race against social categories which had emerged as especially culturally salient: class (rich vs poor), religion (Catholic vs Evangelical), origin (from the state of Piura vs from Lima) and kinship (cousins vs acquaintances). I also used salient local racial terms against which to test social categories. The cultural practices or customs were all fictitious, novel, previously unknown properties since I was not interested in testing participants' knowledge of real customs, but rather whether they would use race or a social category to make their inference. The made-up customs included culinary preferences, forms of dress and rituals or cultural practices.

Twenty-four individuals ranging from 9 to 78 years of age participated in the study.[6] Each participant took part in eight trials. While I read the script for each trial, I presented participants with props in the form of paper cards with the relevant traits written on them, to aid their memory. These were arranged on a table between the participant and myself. For the sake of illustration for the reader, I include diagrams here to give a better sense of how the task was conducted (Figure 1).

To give an example, the trial was formulated as follows:

> Here are two men. This one here (pointing to A) is black. He is rich. He likes to eat a food called poki. This man here (pointing to B) is white. He is poor. He likes to eat a food called batso. Here now is a third man (pointing to target). He is black like him (pointing to A) and poor like him (pointing to B). In your opinion this third man, does he like to eat poki like him (pointing to A) or batso like him (pointing to B)?

5   In these tasks the fictitious characters were all male. Given discussions in the regional literature which show that men and women are constructed racially in differing ways in Latin America, future tests using fictitious characters which are female could conceivably produce slightly different results. For Brazil, specifically Rio de Janeiro, Goldstein (1999) has argued that *mulata* and *mulato* (female and male mixed-race persons) are not equivalent in meaning; for Cuzco, Peru, de la Cadena (1995) shows how women are constructed as 'more Indian' than men.
6   Although I tested participants individually and privately, several children, when they caught a glimpse of what I was doing, begged to participate in the tasks. They were given randomised trials and tested in the same way as adults. Because all their results were consistent with those of the adults and their verbal explanations for their choices were similar to those given by adults, I include the results obtained from tasks conducted with children. I did not test any children younger than nine.
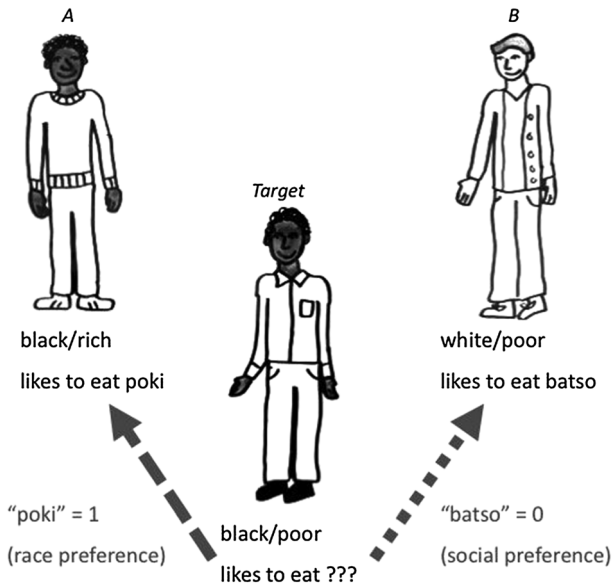
A

Target

B

black/rich

likes to eat poki

white/poor

likes to eat batso

"poki" = 1

(race preference)

black/poor

likes to eat ???

"batso" = 0

(social preference)

Figure 1 Sample formulation of Study 1

Participants' responses were scored as '1' if they judged that the target character had the same property as the racial trait match and '0' if they judged that the target character had the same property as the social category match. The order and combination of race and social traits was randomised across the participants. I conducted eight trials per participant, giving a total of 192 trials and 192 possible responses: either race or social category.

The results were as follows: participants used race as a basis for their inference 56 times (29%), while they used one of the other social categories 136 times (71%) (Figure 2). A binomial test confirmed that participants used one of the social categories as a basis for their inference more often than expected by chance.[7] In other words, class, religion, locality and kinship were deemed to be more informative about the characteristics of an individual than his race.[8]

By showing the weak inductive potential of race, the results of Study 1 are thus consistent with the folk theory of race: individuals are the result of mixing, which means that they cannot be categorised by their 'racial' attributes and that their properties (customs, food preferences etc.) cannot be predicted by the colour of their skin, the texture of their hair or the shape of their nose.

A possible objection to the task – by those who would expect race *always* to be essentialised and to have inductive potential – is that it forced participants to engage

7 These results are significant because the p-value = 0.00000067 (<0.01, for a 1% significance level).
8 The data set was too small to provide statistically significant results on the relative inductive strength of the different social categories compared to each other. Preliminary results indicate that class, origin, religion and kinship are not equally ranked against race across the sample and that class is inductively richest relative to race (compared to origin, religion and kinship). The sample size was also too small to provide results on the relative inductive strength of the different racial categories in relation to each other or the influence of the fictitious custom being asked about (i.e. food, ritual, dress, other practice) on the choices given.
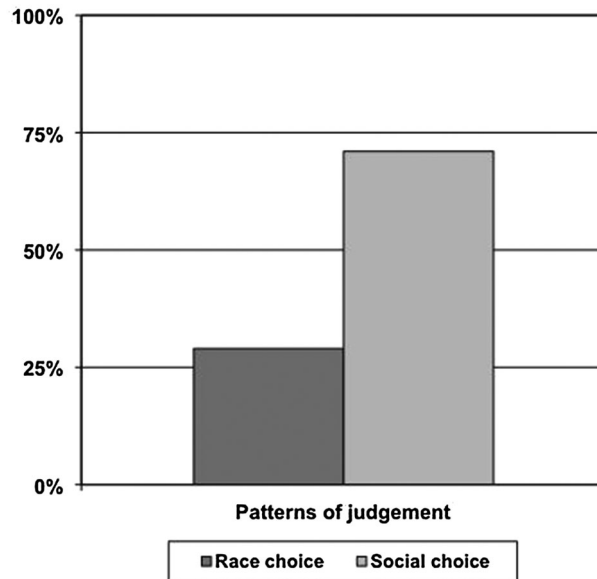
Figure 2 Results of Study 1: race versus social category

in such a foreign exercise that the results, albeit in line with the ethnographic data, might be the outcome of sheer misunderstanding or other task-related limitations. To counter this possible objection, I designed a control task, in which I invited participants to draw the same kind of inferences as in Study 1, but this time they had to choose to base their reasoning on either race or on a number of socially non-meaningful characteristics.

Study 2: design and results

The local folk theory of race suggests that a person's racial traits have as little relevance as other superficial characteristics, such as her height. For this reason, I wanted to test race's inductive potential as compared to a number of random individual properties. I therefore used a new task, which followed the design of Study 1 but which pitted race against a number of socially insignificant characteristics: having a scar on one side of the face versus the other, different shoe sizes, different birth dates, a wound on one leg versus the other. Would participants be as likely to use these random characteristics as the basis for their inference as they would use race?

As in Study 1, cards were used as visual props. A sample trial in Study 2 read as follows:

> Here are two men. This one here (pointing to A) is black. He has a scar on his left cheek. He likes to eat a food called poki. This man here (pointing to B) is white. He has a scar on his right cheek. He likes to eat a food called batso. Here now is a third man (pointing to target). He is black like him (pointing to A) and has a scar on his right cheek like him (pointing to B). In your opinion this third man, does he like to eat poki like him (pointing to A) or batso like him (pointing to B)?
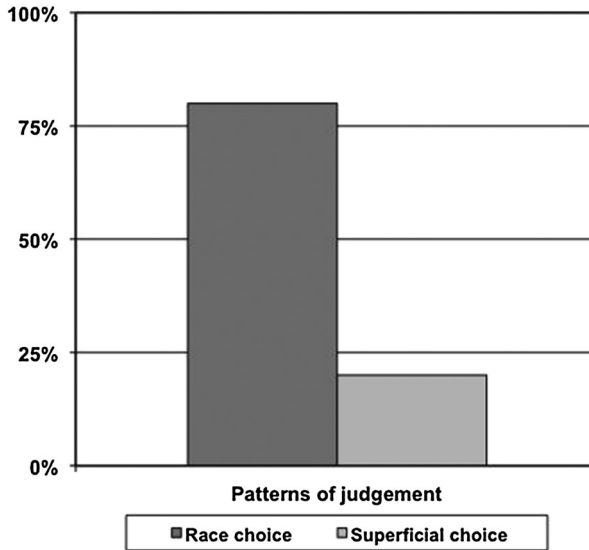
Figure 3 Results of Study 2: race versus superficial category

As in Study 1, I scored race responses as '1' and superficial responses as '0'. The order and combination of race and social traits was randomised across the participants. In this second task I had 16 participants, ranging between the ages of 9 and 82. Each participant completed eight trials, giving a total of 128 trials.

The results were as follows: participants used race 103 times (80%), while they used one of the random characteristics 15 times (20%). The binomial test confirmed the statistical significance of the result,[9] i.e. participants made inferences based on race more often than expected by chance.

The results of this second task are significant not so much for what they say on their own, but for how they relate to Study 1 (Figure 3). Specifically, when combined, the results suggest that race is inferentially richer than superficial characteristics, but less so than meaningful social categories. We would do well to see essentialism, specifically inductive potential, on a graded spectrum with low inductive potential at one end and high inductive potential on the other. In Yapatera, race sits well on the lower end of the spectrum, but not quite on the extreme low end as villagers would have it. Arguably, this finding echoes with aspects of the ethnographic data: after all, a folk theory that stresses mixing does not preclude the ontological primacy of separate pure, races.

However, the overall point remains that villagers in Yapatera have a non-essentialist construal of race. In this respect, the implications of the results of Study 2 for Study 1 are of special importance: they suggest that participants in Study 1 purposefully avoided using race as a basis for their reasoning, and chose instead social categories such as class, origin, religion and kinship; Study 2 proves that they did so not because of problems in the task design, but because they deem race to be inferentially weaker than those other social categories.

---

9   The results are significant because the p-value = 0.0000000000000229 (<0.01, for a 1% significance level).

Experiments as a different kind of conversation

The experimental data from the two studies largely supported the ethnographic findings, suggesting that villagers' folk theory of race is not just a way of talking, but that it informs their way of reasoning about novel scenarios. In addition to confirming the ethnographic data, conducting the tasks allowed me to have a different kind of conversation with my informants. The physical and social setting within which these tasks were conducted made this clear to them. Most of my ethnographic data-gathering happened in a number of very different settings: sitting on the *vereda* chatting, usually with multiple people and always within earshot of passers-by outside and kin inside the house; it also happened while riding on donkey carts, sorting mangos, treading through rice fields, shuffling behind coffins at funerals, before and after church, at public or social gatherings, watching TV, resting from work, cooking and while walking alongside each other. The experimental tasks required and created a different environment: participants were taken into a quiet room indoors (usually a living room) on their own, and sat at a table (usually a dining table that is rarely used) facing me across the table. Participants also signalled to me that they saw this as a different context for conversation. For example, when I first started explaining the task, many expressed concerns about 'getting the answers right', and expressed a desire not to disappoint me, something no one ever worried about when I interacted with them via traditional 'participant observation'. As part of the task set-up, I reassured participants that there were no right or wrong answers and that instead I was interested in their opinion about a given subject and that I was hoping to hear the many different views that might exist in the village. None of my participants refused or had difficulties answering the test questions, although most paused to carefully consider their answers; instead, they quickly seized on what was undoubtedly a very different activity for them, and many took obvious delight in what often became a sort of game or puzzle.

Most importantly, engaging people in these hypothetical scenarios offered me an opportunity to ask my informants to draw comparisons between race and social categories in a way that normal language and conversation did not allow – both because of the abstractness and the thorniness of such a comparison. I also learnt a great deal from the explanations that participants gave for their answers (after each trial and after recording the response, I asked participants for an explanation of their judgements, giving them an opportunity to respond more freely to the task).[10] Their answers made explicit things which could not otherwise be articulated. For example, in the cases where participants chose one of the social categories over race, they often verbally stressed the social or cultural similarity between two individuals who differed 'racially', often going out of their way to deny that race was meaningful. For example, one participant told me, 'A black and a white are of different races but it doesn't matter. In Lima there are blacks and whites. And there are some whites who like *ceviche* [a fish dish] and other whites who don't like *ceviche*'. While this explanation confirms the ethnographic data (i.e. that things like food preferences and other customs do not follow racial lines and that race cannot therefore be used to categorise people in a socially meaningful way), it could not have been articulated in a normal conversation because villagers rarely talk about 'blacks' and 'whites' in such an explicit way.

---

10 Unlike in an ordinary dialogue I merely recorded their responses, without responding to their explanations or asking follow-up questions.

Perhaps most intriguing are the explanations given for the minority of cases when, in Study 1, participants based their inferences on race: how could they justify their choice, given the powerful cultural narratives on mixing and the social irrelevance of race? In these few instances, participants were quite imaginative in drawing attention to, inventing or invoking circumstantial social, environmental or cultural factors that would explain why the two characters in the story shared the same characteristic. For example, participants stated that the racially similar characters shared a house, came from the same village, were friends or were work colleagues. In other cases, participants made up quite elaborate stories about the target character who was said to emulate the customs of the racially similar test character, in order to overcome a status disadvantage he shared with the other racially dissimilar but socially similar test character.

Conclusion

The results of the experimental studies confirm the ethnographic account of the folk theory of race that villagers in Yapatera articulate in their everyday lives and interactions. Despite their exposure to essentialist constructions of race, villagers used their non-essentialist folk theory to inform their reasoning in the tasks.

This is new empirical evidence on ordinary Latin Americans' ideas about race, which demonstrates the importance of mixture and its non-essentialist consequences. Latin Americanists have shown that narratives of mixture, such as in political ideologies of *mestizaje*, have discursive and rhetorical power for ideas about nation building, for ideas about exclusion and inclusion at the level of the imagined nation. However, the data presented here suggest that, at least in Yapatera, ordinary people's ideas about mixture, which emerge from their own experience of history, of the economy and kinship, inform the way they reason inferentially. In other words, mixture is not just a way of talking; it is also a way of thinking.

The extent to which these local ideas about mixture are related to broader, Pan Latin-American, nation-building narratives of *mestizaje*, is up for debate. In Peru and other parts of the Andes, *mestizaje* was not embraced as a dominant unifying theme of cultural nationalism nor did it become official state policy; instead, elites and intellectuals largely rejected racial mixture as a form of degeneration (Chambers 2003: 48; Larson 2004: 66). On the other hand, ideas about mixture at a national level inform the notion of 'Peruvianness' as more or less racially 'mixed' (as evidenced, for example, by the absence of a question about race on the national census). In Peru, ideas about *mestizaje* are articulated only when they are challenged, for example by ethnic activism. It is thus fair to conclude that villagers in Yapatera have, to a large extent, come up with their own ideas about mixture and the irrelevance of race, and that they have done so through their own engagement with, and participation in, historical and economic processes and kinship practices.

Indeed, villagers' non-essentialist construal of race might be explained with reference to their location at the bottom of Peruvian social hierarchy. As the descendants of both Africans and Indians, both of whom have, in different ways, been excluded from the projects of nationhood, modernity, civilisation and culture, there is much at stake in arguing, as they do, that race is irrelevant for social categorisation. A similar argument has been made by Mahalingam (2003), who compares conceptions of caste between Dalits and Brahmins in India, and finds that people at the bottom of the

social hierarchy might be more prone to thinking about caste in non-essentialist terms, while those at the top might be more prone to essentialise caste. Similarly, *mestizaje* may look very different from below than from above. For people in Yapatera, mixture works against a system of racial categorisation which would potentially cast them in a negative light. But it is likely that for people at the top of the social hierarchy, for example white Peruvian elites of European descent, mixture serves different purposes and holds different political meanings.

What is sure is that in Yapatera mixture, with its non-, even anti-essentialist potential, is fully embraced and deployed to talk and to reason about the social world.

Acknowledgements

Tamara Hale
Department of Anthropology
University of Colorado, Boulder
1350 Pleasant St, Boulder
CO 80309-0233, USA
tamara.hale@colorado.edu

References

Astuti, R. 2001. 'Are we all natural dualists? A cognitive developmental approach', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 7(3): 429–47.

Astuti, R. Forthcoming. *Cognition in the field*. London: AOTC Press.

Astuti, R., G. E. A. Solomon, S. Carey, T. Ingold and P. H. Miller 2004. *Constraints on conceptual development: A case study of the acquisition of folkbiological and folksociological knowledge in Madagascar*. Boston, MA: Blackwell.

Baran, M. D. 2007. '"Girl, you are not morena. We are negras!": Questioning the concept of 'race' in Southern Bahia, Brazil', *Ethos* 35(3): 383–409.

Baran, M. and P. Sousa 2001. 'Commentary: On the possibility of different sorts of racial categories', *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 1(3): 271–81.

Boyer, P. 2006. 'Prosocial aspects of afterlife beliefs: maybe another by-product', *Behavioural and Brain Sciences* 25(5): 466–6.

Brubaker, R., M. Loveman and P. Stamatov 2004. Ethnicity as cognition, in R. Brubaker (ed.), *Ethnicity without groups*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Burdick, J. 1998. *Blessed Anastacia: women, race and Christianity in Brazil*. New York: Routledge.

Callirgos, J. C. 1993. *El racismo: la cuestión del otro (y de uno)*. Lima: Centro de Estudios y Promoción del Desarollo.

Chambers, S. C. 2003. Little middle ground: the instability of a mestizo identity in the Andes, eighteenth and nineteenth century, in N. P. Appelbaum, A. S. Macpherson and K. A. Rosemblatt (eds.), *Race & nation in modern Latin America*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

de la Cadena, M. 1995. Women are more Indian: ethnicity and gender in a community near Cuzco, in B. Larson, O. Harris and E. Tandeter (eds.), *Ethnicity, markets, and migration in the Andes: at the crossroads of history and anthropology*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

de la Cadena, M. 2000. *Indigenous mestizos: the politics of race and culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919–1991*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

de la Cadena, M. 2001. *The racial politics of culture and silent racism in Peru*. Durban: UNRISD United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

de la Cadena, M. 2005. 'Are mestizos hybrids? The conceptual politics of Andean identities', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37: 259–84.

Diesendruck, G. and H. HaLevi 2006. 'The role of language, appearance, and culture in children's social category based induction', *Child Development* 77: 539–53.

Gelman, S. A. 2003. *The essential child: origins of essentialism in everyday thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gelman, S. A. 2004. 'Psychological essentialism in children', *TRENDS in Cognitive Sciences* 8(9): 404–9.

Gil-White, F. J. 2001a. 'Are ethnic groups biological "species" to the human brain? Essentialism in our cognition of some social categories', *Current Anthropology* 42(4): 515–53.

Gil-White, F. J. 2001b. 'Sorting is not categorization: a critique of the claim that Brazilians have fuzzy racial categories', *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 1(3): 219–49.

Goldstein, D. 1999. '"Interracial" sex and racial democracy in Brazil: twin concepts?', *American Anthropologist* 101(3): 563–78.

Goldstein, D. 2003. *Laughter out of place: race, class, violence, and sexuality in a Rio shantytown*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Gose, P. 2010. Petty disputes and purity of blood: race, honour and litigation in seventeenth-century Lima. Latin America Research Group, Toronto. Unpublished paper. Cited with permission.

Gow, P. 1991. *Of mixed blood: kinship and history in Peruvian Amazonia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Gow, P. 2007. 'Ex-Cocama': transforming identities in Peruvian Amazonia, in C. Fausto and M. Heckenberger (eds.), *Time and memory in indigenous Amazonia: anthropological perspectives*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida.

Gravlee, C. C. 2005. 'Ethnic classification in southeastern Puerto Rico: the cultural model of color', *Social Forces* 83(3): 949–70.

Harris, M. 1970. Referential ambiguity in the calculus of Brazilian racial identity, in N. E. Whitten and J.F. Szwed (eds.), *Afro-American anthropology: contemporary perspectives*. New York: Free Press.

Harris, O. 1995. Ethnic identity and market relations; Indians and Mestizos in the Andes, in B. Larson, O. Harris and E. Tandeter (eds.), *Ethnicity, markets, and migration in the Andes: at the crossroads of history and anthropology*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Hirschfeld, L. 1996. *Race in the making: cognition, culture, and the child's construction of human kinds*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Jones, D. 2009. 'Looks and living kinds: varieties of racial cognition in Bahia, Brazil', *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 9(3): 247–69.

Larson, B. 2004. *Trials of nation making: liberalism, race, and ethnicity in the Andes, 1810–1910*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Levine, H. B. 1999. 'Reconstructing ethnicity', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 5(2): 165–80.

Mahalingam, R. 2003. 'Essentialism, power and social mobility: folk theories of social class', *Journal of Social Issues* 59(4), 733–49.

Martínez, M. E. 2008. *Genealogical fictions: limpieza de sangre, religion, and gender in colonial Mexico*. Stanford, CA: Stanford General.

O'Toole, R. S. 2012. *Bound lives: Africans, Indians, and the making of race in colonial Peru*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Portocarrero, G. 1993. *Racismo y mestizaje*. Lima: SUR Casa de Estudios del Socialismo.

Richerson, P. J. and R. Boyd 2005. *The origin and evolution of cultures (evolution and cognition)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sheriff, R. E. 2001. *Dreaming equality: color, race, and racism in urban Brazil*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Telles, E. E. 2004. *Race in another America: the significance of skin color in Brazil*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Twine, F. W. 1998. *Racism in a racial democracy: the maintenance of white supremacy in Brazil.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Wade, P. 1993. *Blackness and race mixture: the dynamics of racial identity in Colombia.* Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Wade, P. 1997. *Race and ethnicity in Latin America*. Chicago, IL: Pluto Press.

Wade, P. 2005. 'Rethinking mestizaje: ideology and lived experience', *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37: 239–57.

Whitten, N. E. 1965. *Class, kinship and power in an Ecuadorian town: the negroes of San Lorenzo*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Whitten, N. E. 1974. *Black frontiersmen: a South American Case*. New York: Wiley.

Whitten, N. E. 2003. 'Symbolic inversion, the topology of El Mestizaje, and the spaces of Las Razas in Ecuador', *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 8(1): 52–85.

Wright, W. R. 1990. *Café con leche: race, class, and national image in Venezuela*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.