



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Identifying Indigenous people: Visual appearance, filiation, and the experience of race in an “Indigenous” soccer championship and in everyday life in Otavalo, Ecuador

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## Abstract

While Indigenous/*mestizo* distinction in Latin Americanist anthropology has been mainly thought of as a cultural and/or socioeconomic demarcation, I argue that a conceptualization in terms of race offers some valuable insights. Starting from a soccer championship in the Otavalo region of Ecuador, I show how *otavaleño* Indigenous people's historical and current experiences of racialization have shaped the criteria that they consider relevant to identification practices, and I illustrate how they build on these to act to some advantage. Building on the assemblage of what I call phenotypization—an extended notion of phenotype—and genealogy, *otavaleños* create spaces of identification control, striving to maintain the Indigenous/*mestizo* divide and a sense of belonging upon which they rely for economic activities. Favoring the notion of race, this study lays the groundwork for a Latin Americanist anthropology that considers Indigenous people as part of the same subaltern category as Afro-descendants.

## KEYWORDS

Andes, difference, identification, Indigeneity, race, soccer

## Resumen

Mientras que la distinción indígena/*mestizo* en la antropología latinoamericanista ha sido pensada particularmente como cultural y/o socioeconómica, sostengo que una conceptualización en términos de raza ofrece aportes valiosos. A partir de un campeonato de fútbol en la región de Otavalo, muestro cómo las experiencias históricas y actuales de racialización de personas indígenas otavaleñas han moldeado los criterios que estas consideran pertinentes en las prácticas de identificación y cómo se basan en estos criterios a la hora de actuar para obtener ventajas. Apoyándose en el ensamblaje de lo que llamo “fenotipización”—una extensión del fenotipo—y de la genealogía, los otavaleños y otavaleñas crean espacios de control de la identificación, esforzándose por mantener la división indígena/*mestizo*, así como un sentimiento de pertenencia del cual dependen sus actividades económicas. Favoreciendo la noción de raza, este estudio constituye un intento de cimentar bases para una antropología latinoamericanista que considere a las personas indígenas como parte de la misma categoría subalterna que a las afrodescendientes.

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## PALABRAS CLAVE

identificación, indigeneidad, raza, diferencia, fútbol, Andes

## INTRODUCTION

In the rural area of the Otavalo region in the Ecuadorian Andes, where I conducted most of my ethnographical research, people often use the label “*runa*” in Kichwa, the native language, and “*indígena*” in Spanish (a language they also usually speak) to identify themselves as Indigenous in daily life.<sup>1</sup> They generally recognize themselves as an identifiable group based on certain distinctive features, such as specific clothing, long hair for men, and speaking Kichwa. At the same time, they employ the term *runa/indígena* to differentiate themselves from those whom they designate as *mishu/a* (Kichwa)/*mestizo/a* (Spanish): that is, the Spanish-speaking people who do not regard themselves as Indigenous and who constitute the majority of the population in Ecuador and in the towns of the Otavalo region, around 100 km north of the capital Quito. *Mishu/a/mestizo/a* refers to the population usually labelled as “white-*mestizo*” in social science literature on Latin America.

In the anthropology of the Andes and Latin America, the Indigenous/white-*mestizo* differentiation has tended to be understood as a cultural and/or socioeconomic demarcation. Indeed, considering that since the beginning of the Spanish colonization of the Americas, ongoing reproductive practices between people of different backgrounds, mixture ideologies, and syncretic practices have diversified phenotypes and complexified the social world, many scholars working on Latin America have evaluated physical and genetic differences as irrelevant in the white-*mestizo*/Indigenous demarcation (e.g., de la Cadena, 2000; Femenías, 2005; Weismantel & Eisenman, 1998; Whitten, 2007). Consequently, other markers have been considered, such as spoken language, dress, religious practices, lifestyle, residence (particularly rural or urban), wealth/poverty, and education, among others (e.g., Babb, 2022; Canessa, 2012; Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1999; de la Cadena, 2000; Femenías, 2005; Gose, 1994).

However, although since the 1990s Latin American states have widely adopted multiculturalist national narratives, Indigenous and Black people still suffer more poverty and discrimination, based particularly on their appearance. This has pushed some scholars to reconsider and emphasize the racial dimension of the identification categories (e.g., Canessa, 2012; Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1999; Hale, 2006; Rahier, 2014; Ravindran, 2020; Saldívar, 2014; Telles, 2014; Wade, 2015; Wade et al., 2019; Weismantel, 2001). Studies tackling the question of race in relation to Indigenous people in Latin America highlight the structural mechanisms of racialization that emerge from the dominance of white-*mestizos* and which is embedded in colonial history (for the Andes, see Babb, 2022; Canessa, 2012; Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1998, 1999; Martínez Novo, 2018; Ravindran, 2020; Weismantel, 2001).

In this article, I show how the historical context of racialization and *otavaleños*’ experiences of marginalization as “Indigenous” have been embodied by them and have shaped their processes of (self-)identification. This is particularly noteworthy concerning the criteria relating to the body and genealogy that *otavaleños* consider relevant in differentiating Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. However, I also show how *otavaleños* build on these criteria to act and “group” themselves under the label of *runa* to create benefits for themselves.<sup>2</sup> This process notably generates a sense of belonging, which is crucial for their economic activities related to trade and tourism. Consequently, I address racial embodiment as a process of subjectivation, namely how the experience of racialization shapes Indigenous people’s subjectivity, including their agency (see, for the Andes, works integrating interactional encounters and/or intimacy, such as Canessa, 2012; Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1999; Ravindran, 2020; Weismantel, 2001). My argument draws from scholars studying Blackness, in Latin America and elsewhere, who have contributed more to this issue (e.g., Allen, 2007; Benn Torres & Torres Colón, 2015; Fassin, 2011; Hordge-Freeman, 2015; McClaurin, 2001; Rahier, 2014; Torres Colón, 2018; Wade, 2015). While this scholarship looks at “race” (as a process of racialization and embodiment) as a means to analyze inequalities and power asymmetries within a global context, it argues that racialized subjects may, for example, exploit economic niches (e.g., Allen, 2007), undertake political actions to improve the subaltern conditions of Black women (McClaurin, 2001), or improve their health through strong social cohesion (Benn Torres & Torres Colón, 2015). I argue that this scholarship constitutes a useful source to look again at Indigeneity in the Andes.

My argument is based on the case of a soccer championship called *Mundialito indígena* (Indigenous Little World Cup) organized in an Otavalo town. Its purpose is to encourage soccer competitiveness among Indigenous men, and the players are categorized as Indigenous or non-Indigenous. I particularly consider a meeting, which occurred before the 2012 championship, during which the team representatives evaluated the Indigeneity of some players registered as Indigenous but who, having short hair, could be regarded as *mestizos*. I take this case as a telling ethnographic situation that reflects ordinary dynamics of (self- and other-) identification.

I first address the organization and purpose of the *Mundialito*, as they reflect the dynamics of inequality and marginalization faced by *otavaleños*. After describing the abovementioned meeting, I focus on the policing of the Indigenous/*mestizo* divide, which allows *otavaleños* to create spaces of identification decision and control. The next section examines what I call phenotypization: an extension of the concept of phenotype, namely a *process* tying a visible element intimately onto the body and within a collective experience of group identification. It allows me to consider the main elements—hairstyle and “traditional” clothes—

that contribute to constituting the body, making it visually identifiable. Subsequently, I address the issue of filiation, which was the criterion discussed for the short-haired players by the meeting evaluators. Thus, for *otavaleños*, the Indigenous/*mestizo* divide relies on material and ideal elements related to their racial experience. As I finally show, these elements must nonetheless be “assembled” in certain ways and with other elements (such as language and social integration) to gain meaning (Latour, 2005; M'charek et al., 2014; Wade, 2015), at the same time pushing purely cultural or socioeconomic dimensions into the background.

In this article, I use “race”—a type of categorization different from ethnicity or class—as a heuristic angle to examine my ethnographic material. Not only does this choice emerge from the experiences of my interlocutors, but it also allows me to say different things than if I relied on the notion of ethnicity. While “race” is a malleable categorization, it rests on ideas on bodily appearance (phenotype) and heredity (genealogy) (Wade, 2002, 2015). While Latin Americanist anthropologists have tended to loosen the relationship between these two aspects and race, I argue for the relevance of this relationship at the ethnographic and theoretical levels.

Furthermore, considering the categories in use in the Andes as “racial” allows me to situate Indigenous people in the broader continental and global history and geography of racism and of power asymmetries based on racialized hierarchy (e.g., Pierre, 2012; Saldívar, 2014; Thomas & Clarke, 2013; Wade, 2015). Thus, the focus in this article is on the Indigenous/white-*mestizo* divide, and not on the dynamics of differentiation between different Indigenous groups. The “racial difference” is, I argue, relevant in the former.

## THE MUNDIALITO INDÍGENA, INDIGENOUS PLAYERS, AND THE EXPERIENCE OF RACE

Soccer has become the most popular sport amongst *otavaleño* men (Kowii, 2006), reflecting its nationwide and worldwide popularity.<sup>3</sup> Its practice in Indigenous communities of Otavalo dates back to the 1940s (Males, 1985; Voirol, 2018). Currently, men's and women's tournaments take place in different Indigenous communities across the region throughout the year, with the Mundialito indígena, a men's competition, being the most important. This championship happens during the Carnival period (in February or March according to the year) in Peguche, an Indigenous community close to the town of Otavalo (approximately 45,000 inhabitants).<sup>4</sup>

The Mundialito is part of an 11-day festival called Pawkar Raymi (the “Blooming Festivity” in Kichwa), made up of different cultural performances (particularly “traditional” music and dance) and sporting events (Ordóñez, 2017; Voirol, 2018; Wibbelsman, 2009). As part of my research on Indigenous festivities, in 2011 and 2012 I assisted the Pawkar Raymi organizing committee with logistical activities including visits to potential sponsors and dealing with the invited artists, allowing me to attend all the organizers' meetings.

The festival is led by an annually elected person, who forms a committee to help with the organization. The first version of this festival, in 1995, was modest in terms of organized activities, participation, and financial investments, but it has since grown over the years. From the beginning, the core of the festival has been the soccer championship (see Figure 1). The budget since the 2010s has been around USD 100,000 per year. In addition to public funding and private sponsors, the festival organizers receive some financial and logistical help from migrant relatives and friends. Since the 1940s, a large number of *otavaleños* have travelled around South America, and to North America, Europe, and Japan, to sell handicrafts whose production and trade constitute their main economic activity (Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1999; Ordóñez, 2017). Some of these migrants sponsor a team they name after the place they migrate to, such as Barcelona, the Netherlands, or Milan. For these reasons, the tournament is commonly known as Mundialito indígena. Moreover, since 1998, the winning team wins a replica of the FIFA World Cup trophy.

As an “Indigenous” tournament, the Mundialito indígena asks that the participating teams be composed of Indigenous players. However, the teams are allowed to field three non-Indigenous players, who are meant to strengthen the squads.<sup>5</sup> This implies a rule that defines who is Indigenous (those who do not meet the criteria for this category fall into the “non-Indigenous” one). The 2012 written regulations—which were inspired by the previous ones—stipulate in Article 2 (titled “About Identities”) the three characteristics that identify Indigenous players: they must have Indigenous parents, wear their hair in a long braid, and speak Kichwa. These are features—particularly the hairstyle—that *otavaleños* are likely to mention if one asks them what defines an Indigenous man. The organizers, therefore, based Article 2 on *otavaleños*' common sense.

According to my interlocutors who were involved in the festival organization, the aim of the championship is to encourage Indigenous young people to play competitive soccer. Many *otavaleños* told me that “white-*mestizo*” and “Black” players are essentially better than Indigenous players. They often referred to the “evidence” of the Ecuadorian professional soccer championship, in which there are no *runa* players. On the Mundialito pitch, they—including some Indigenous players with whom I spoke—perceive Indigenous sportsmen's way of playing not really as a matter of style but as a lack of skills, tactics, and physicality compared to white-*mestizos* and Afro-descendants. However, the teams only select individuals who are strong players from these latter groups to strengthen the squad. This contributes to maintaining the perception that these groups are essentially better at soccer (see Carrington, 2010 concerning the “Black athlete” as an ideal-type). Therefore, the combination of a majority of *otavaleño* players and three non-Indigenous competitors on each team is thought of by the organizers as a way to improve soccer among Indigenous youth (see Figure 2).





FIGURE 1 Mundialito indígena match. Pawkar Raymi 2011, Peguche, Otavalo. Source: Jérémie Voirol. [This figure appears in color in the online issue]



FIGURE 2 Team participating in the Mundialito indígena with Indigenous, Afro-descendent, and *mestizo* players. Pawkar Raymi 2016, Peguche, Otavalo. Source: Francis Mobio. [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

However, several interlocutors blame the lower level of Indigenous player ability on the lack of opportunities for them to participate in sports competitions due to the marginalization of Indigenous people within the national space. In a conversation with Wilo, the head of the tournament committee in 2011 and 2012 and who is in his late 50s, he told me:<sup>6</sup>

Our young people haven't had any opportunities to practice soccer, which we like so much. Unfortunately, where we live, we've little opportunity, because those who run the local leagues, the semi-professional and professional

teams, are *mestizos*. And in one way or another, they've always marginalized us, the *indios*. Our aspiration has been to begin here, to root [the soccer practice] here, so that soon we could see our young men, our *indios*, playing in the professional leagues. It's our aim ... but we've made very little progress. Practically, we need a lot of resources. ... [To see a young Indigenous man trying to improve] makes us proud, happy, even if he's not a relative, but being a brother of blood, an *indio*, it makes us proud.

The marginalization evoked by Wilo is not related to poverty. For several decades, *otavaleños* have invested in the niche of ethnic marketing, producing and selling (mainly woven) handicraft items for tourists in Otavalo and in the places they migrate to across the world. This has enabled them to raise their general living standard, although this has created large socioeconomic disparities among individuals (Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1999). Nowadays, for example, most of the buildings in the Otavalo town center are owned by *otavaleños* (including hotels, stores, restaurants, and bars), while in the 1970s, white-*mestizos* overwhelmingly dominated this space (Huarcaya, 2014). The Pawkar Raymi festival constitutes a showcase of this economic success for other Indigenous groups and the wider national society. Internally, the festival follows the dynamics of local fiestas, allowing those who can afford the costs of organization to gain prestige.

While racism often emerges from the articulation of “structures of power difference and economic domination” (Wade et al., 2019, 11), *otavaleños*, despite their relative economic success, still face discrimination and marginalization because of their Indigenous status, as is reflected in Wilo's words. Soccer is only one of the domains in which *otavaleños*, as Indigenous people, encounter obstacles. Wilo's words give a sense of an experience of being different, or of being made different, which fosters a feeling of belonging to a subaltern group. His choice to use *indio* (“Indian,” a pejorative term with racist connotations) instead of *Indigenous* (commonly used for self-identification) and to refer to “blood” evokes an experience of racialization within the national space, particularly in interactions with white-*mestizos*.

Consequently, the tournament brings into play diverse identification categories (“Indigenous,” “Black,” and “*mestizo*”) that originated in the colonial and Republican period and which still make sense nowadays and still resonate with power asymmetries and experiences of discrimination (for other cases in Ecuador, see Novo Martínez, 2018; Rahier, 2014). Even in an officially multiculturalist national society, which recognizes equality among groups whose difference is conceptualized as “cultural,” the power structure of the previous national ideology of *mestizaje* persists (Hale, 2006; Rahier, 2014; Saldívar, 2014; Wade, 2015). This ideology, adopted by many Latin American states from the beginning of the 20th century, had the effect of marginalizing people identified as Black and Indigenous—considered as backward—in elevating the *mestizo*, the racially mixed individual, as the representative of the nation and the guarantor of its unity, and in urging Afro-descendent and Indigenous people to become *mestizo* by embracing the ideology of progress and standards of whiteness (Canessa, 2012; Gotkowitz, 2011; Hale, 2006; Huarcaya, 2014; Rahier, 2014; Wade, 2015; Whitten, 2007).

Additionally, the relations between these “cultural” groups are still marked by “processes of racialization,” as Emiko Saldívar (2014) argues, building on the Mexican case. Indeed, “real (and perceived) physical and cultural attributes, such as skin color, phenotype, and language, regulate social relations between people,” and “social differences are tangible and fixed in people's bodies and practices,” reifying Indigenous ethnicities and making them essentially different from national identity (associated with white-*mestizos*) (Saldívar, 2014, 92; see also Thomas & Clarke, 2013 for a broader argument on the relevance of racialization processes in contexts promoting the multiculturalism ideology).

The “low” level of soccer ability of Indigenous players may constitute an internalization and an embodiment of the hierarchy characterizing the *mestizaje* ideology. Nevertheless, Lizardo, an *otavaleño* intellectual who organized the Pawkar Raymi in the 1990s, goes further:

Sport is a way, for Indigenous people, of answering existing social segregation. ‘Watch me, I can play like you *mestizos*.’ Even if we aren't able to perform with the same technical quality, ... [sport] is what identifies us as part of general society. [For us,] sport has always been a challenge, and it'll continue to be.

Therefore, sport constitutes a challenge to the dominant white-*mestizos*, as Indigenous people can show what they are capable of: it is a motivation to improve, to surpass oneself as a member of a subaltern group (see Carrington, 2010 on Black athletes). Wilo is proud when a young Indigenous player progresses in his ability. *Otavaleños* such as Lizardo, Wilo, and the soccer players acknowledge their racialized condition (which goes beyond the domain of soccer) but try to do something, taking this reality into account. Indeed, as Didier Fassin (2011) argues, processes of racialization rest on the dialectic of ascription/recognition. Firstly, a racial ascription is imposed, which constitutes an authoritative act: an act of subjection. Secondly, the recognition by the racialized person “works as a form of subjectivation,” which may lead to forms of emancipation (2011, 425). Therefore, their “racial experience” informs people's subjectivity. As Gabriel Torres Colón (2018, 132) puts it, “It is true that racialized peoples cannot be made responsible for their marginal condition because of racism, but people still experience race in ways that profoundly affect how they make a meaningful existence for themselves in this world” (emphasis in original). The experience of racialization includes the possibility of “pride, a sense of community, a sense of belonging, and a political sense of purpose” (Torres Colón, 2018, 136; see also Allen, 2007; McClaurin, 2001).



With this in mind, how do *otavaleños* try concretely to move forward, despite their disadvantaged situation of experiencing racialization? The very conceptualization of the Mundialito constitutes one way to do so, as *otavaleños* impose their own rules, intended to favor the improvement of Indigenous players, using the abilities of non-Indigenous sportsmen (who are keen to participate as they are paid by their team). In the next section, I describe a meeting organized by the Mundialito committee in which team representatives negotiate the Indigeneity of players who look like *mestizos* but claim to be Indigenous. Despite this identification ambiguity, as I show below, in the Mundialito, Indigenous organizers strive to maintain the Indigenous/*mestizo* boundary not only for the benefit of Indigenous players but to valorize Indigeneity and to grant themselves power as decision-makers.

## THE MEETING: NEGOTIATING INDIGENEITY ON THE SPOT

Despite fitting the commonsense understandings of *otavaleños*, the Mundialito's Article 2 is not rigorously applied, as the organizers tolerate two short-haired Indigenous players on each team and ask that at least their parents speak Kichwa.<sup>7</sup> This tolerance raises issues about the identification of Indigeneity, as these players are regarded as looking like *mestizos*. In previous years, several cases arose of teams accusing their rivals of using *mestizo* players pretending to be short-haired Indigenous men. This kind of "misuse of identity," if confirmed (through a visit to the parents), leads to the expulsion of the incriminated player from the tournament, according to Article 37 of the regulations. To avoid these accusations, the organizing committee decided to bring together the team representatives and the players registered as short-haired Indigenous for a meeting 2 days before the beginning of the 2012 championship. The aim of this meeting was to categorize these players as Indigenous, or not. Consequently, no accusation would be possible during the tournament against those players recognized as Indigenous.

On the day of the meeting at the festival office, three of the 12 teams registered are missing. Wilo, the head of the tournament committee, explains that he will call each team one by one, asking for the two short-haired Indigenous players to come to the front of the room. At the same time, he will give the players' names and hand a copy of their identity card to the audience. This procedure should help to evaluate the Indigeneity of these players. The team representatives and the members of the championship committee are all self-identified and ascribed as Indigenous, except one team representative who is white-*mestizo*. The main language used is Spanish, as usually happens in public meetings, even when the audience is mainly Kichwa-speaking.

The short-haired players from the first team are called. One is Ricardo Guña, from the neighboring province of Pichincha. There are some comments. Wilo asks: "Any objection?" One team representative affirms: "Because of [his surname] Guña, I think he's Indigenous!" Another continues: "Yes, Guña, there are some here [in the Otavalo area] also, I believe." Therefore, Wilo adds: "Then, it's OK? You accept him as Indigenous? After this, you won't be able to complain!" No one in the room protests. Another player, from a different team, is Diego Sevillano. One team representative in the room says something in Kichwa about him to his neighbor. Diego hears and answers him in the same language, leading to laughter in the office. Then Wilo says: "It's OK, he's Indigenous!"

Later, the player Kevin Cáceres, from the province of Carchi, a region considered to have few Indigenous people, is evaluated. Seeing his identity card, one team representative affirms: "He's my son's wife's cousin, and she's from Ilumán [a nearby Native community]!" Nelson, a committee member, adds: "He's the cousin of Tonio Cáceres, from Ilumán!" Another in the room: "I know his uncle, he's a real *runa*!" There are some other comments, and this player is also accepted as Indigenous. At the end of the session, one player stands. His surname is Ramírez. Some team representatives shout: "Of course, the Ramírezes are from here, it's an Indigenous name!"<sup>8</sup>

Finally, all presented players are assessed as Indigenous. Wilo affirms that only the players registered as short-haired Indigenous from the three missing teams could face "identity misuse" accusations. In this respect, one team representative says that those teams did not come because they have something to hide. Another affirms that one of the missing teams always registers *mestizo* players, pretending that they are Indigenous. Wilo seems to agree.

The white-*mestizo* representative asks, concerning the obligation to have one under-18 Indigenous player on the pitch: "Must the teenager have long hair? Because the fashion trend now is to have short hair! Long hair shouldn't be a requirement!" An Indigenous representative disagrees: "No! If the teenager doesn't have long hair, then there'll be three Black players, two short-haired players, and one short-haired teenager, and then no more *runa*!" Wilo takes the floor: "The regulation says that the under-18 player must be Indigenous, and Article 2 states that an Indigenous person is identified by his long braided hair!" The white-*mestizo* contests: "But I've a player, he's 15 and his parents are Indigenous. He's short hair, but speaks Kichwa." Wilo says: "But he can be one of the two short-haired Indigenous people!" The white-*mestizo* insists: "But he's a real *runa*! What are you doing?" Wilo explains to him: "Our intention [with the obligation to have one under-18 Indigenous player] is to defend our culture and identity, while Peguche has always been characterized by this concern so that young people don't lose their roots! Then we've to keep the rule of having long braided hair!"

The issue provokes a debate, and Wilo organizes an absolute majority vote. The majority of the team representatives agree that the Indigenous teenager may have short hair.

## THE AMBIGUITY AND MAINTENANCE OF THE INDIGENOUS/MESTIZO DIVIDE

The controversy related to the short-haired Indigenous players shows the permeability of the white-*mestizo* and Indigenous categories and their possible malleability: a common anthropological finding, in part due to the irrelevance of a phenotypical distinction (Babb, 2022; Canessa, 2012; de la Cadena, 2000; Terry, 2020; Wade, 2015). The player evaluation meeting reflects what Tathagatan Ravindran (2020, 979) calls “undecidability,” namely the indetermination and unpredictability of racial categorization in the Andes, where “inherited phenotypical traits” “play an important role, though in complex interaction with other factors like culture and acquired non-phenotypical traits.”

Given the competitive issue, the social actors involved in this meeting play with the undecidability to be more inclusive than in other ordinary situations, striving to find arguments to ascribe the Indigenous label to the assessed players. Each team wants its own players registered as short-haired Indigenous competitors to be identified as such by the others, to have the right to field them (as each team has already registered three non-Indigenous players). Thus, it is better to be accommodating with the other team representatives. This is particularly well illustrated by the debate about the teenager's hair and the fact that the only short-haired players who are ascribed as potentially *mestizo* are those who are absent from the meeting. Even if some comments suggest that some evaluators do not consider a short-haired person to be a “real” Indigenous person, all the team representatives evaluated all the present players as Indigenous, and the majority accepted the possibility of fielding a short-haired teenager.<sup>9</sup>

This situation is particularly interesting in the context of racialization and identification processes in the Andes and in Latin America more widely. The scholarship concerning these regions has mainly focused on people trying to perform *mestizo-ness*, while aiming for upward mobility (e.g., Canessa, 2012; de la Cadena, 2000; Ravindran, 2020; Telles, 2014), rather than cases of allegedly *mestizo* people seeking to be identified as Indigenous.<sup>10</sup> As a result of the history of racialization from the colonial to the *mestizaje* eras, whitening—including all its connotations, such as cleanliness (Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1998), urbanity and Christianity (Whitten, 2007), and personal progress/mobility (Canessa, 2012)—is more desirable than darkening (e.g., Canessa, 2012; Rahier, 2014; Roberts, 2012). In contrast, the assessed players are keen, during the meeting at least, to be identified as Indigenous. The evaluators—all Indigenous except one—are trying to support the (situational) claim of players whom they would probably not identify as Indigenous in other contexts; some evaluators seem not to associate short-haired people with Indigeneity, for example. In fact, Indigenous men from other regions, who do not necessarily recognize long hair as a relevant distinctive trait of Indigeneity (as in Pichincha and Carchi provinces, where two of the short-haired players came from), may most often be identified as *mestizo* by *otavaleños*. Therefore, if the Indigenous/*mestizo* differentiation is at stake in the evaluation session, it intersects with the demarcation with other Indigenous groups, as a non-*otavaleño*, Indigenous short-haired player may be recognized as non-Indigenous or “not Indigenous enough.”

Therefore, the situation described shows a certain agency by *otavaleños* in deciding who is who. It also shows that maintaining the Indigenous/*mestizo* divide matters, in spite of the ambiguity of identification and the possible malleability, as the tournament is meant to encourage the participation of marginalized Indigenous people, as Wilo and Lizardo argued. However, the divide also matters on many occasions in everyday life in Otavalo, as many *otavaleños* do not aspire to be *mestizo*. They have developed a sense of belonging to and pride in their Indigeneity, as most of their economic activities rest on their identification as Indigenous, and as Indigenous social movements, which were very influential during the last quarter of the 20th century, have promoted Indigeneity as “culture,” fighting inequalities and racism (e.g., Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1998; Rahier, 2014; Ravindran, 2020).

Having been racialized in the first place, *otavaleños* show their agency by deciding, in everyday life as in the Mundialito, to maintain and police the Indigenous/*mestizo* divide, ultimately valorizing Indigeneity. Then, what counts as difference for them? How do they deploy criteria upon which the divide can be maintained? This production of difference depends on the very conception of Indigeneity, which comprises some aspects that are specific to Otavalo (compared to other Indigenous groups' understanding of Indigeneity).

## PRODUCING A SENSE OF PHENOTYPE THROUGH CLOTHING AND HAIRSTYLE

Most of the scholarship on race and racialization centers the physical body. Fassin (2011, 420) argues that “body is the site of the racial experience” in a complex way and that racialization mainly (but not exclusively) rests on “bodily attributes.” Torres Colón (2018, 133) writes about race as “embodied difference” in “instances of hierarchy and characterization via physicality.” Most of this scholarship focuses on cases where phenotype is quite clearly identifiable, relying particularly on skin color, certain facial traits, and hair texture (Wade, 2015, 6).

In the Mundialito, as in other everyday situations, Afro-descendants do not usually raise issue of identification. Light-skinned people with light hair—including a minority of Ecuadorians (who are also classified as *mishu/mestizo* by *otavaleños*)—would probably not be confused with Indigenous people. Although, as I said, many studies argue for the irrelevance of phenotype in the Indigenous/*mestizo* divide, Ravindran (2020), while recognizing the ambiguity of identification in the Bolivian Andes through his concept of “undecidability,” emphasizes the role of “inherited phenotypical traits” (980) associated with Indigeneity in impeding

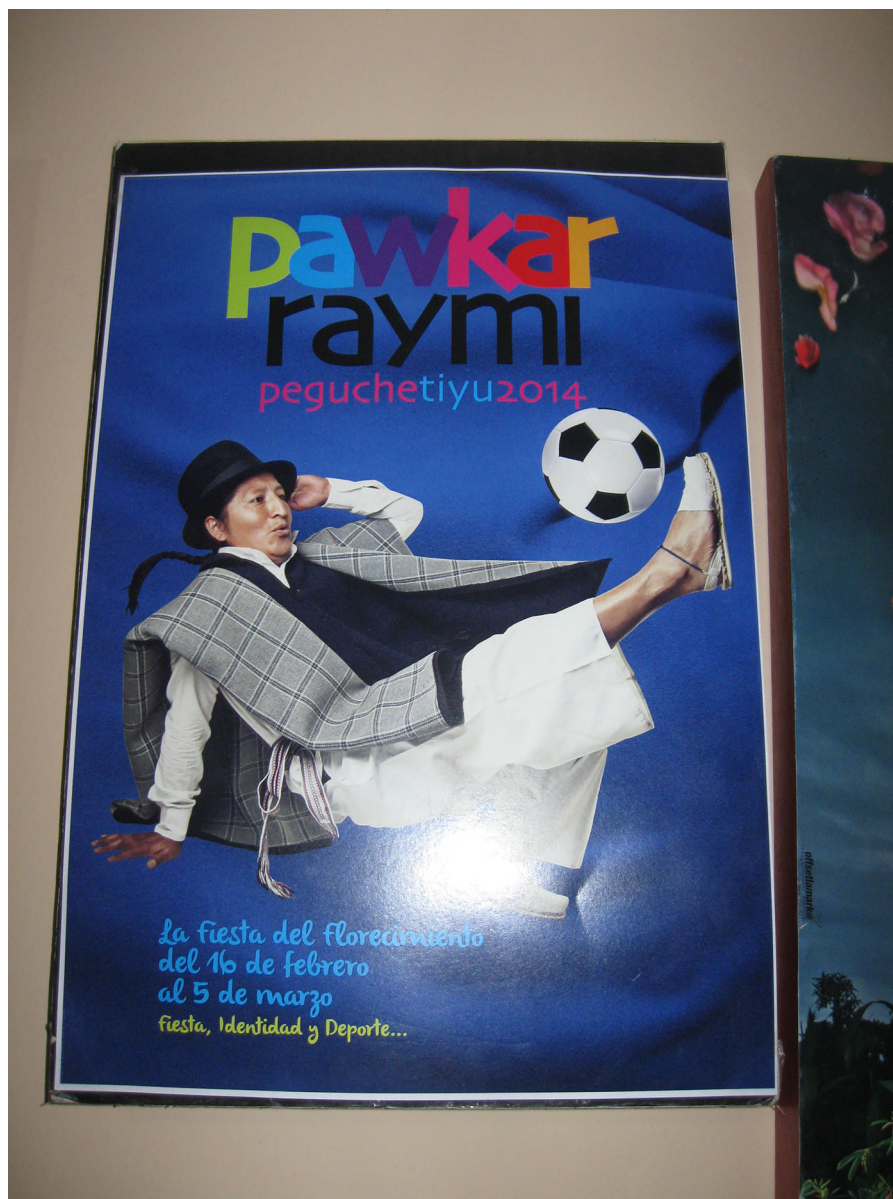


FIGURE 3 Pawkar Raymi 2014 poster with an *otavaleño* man wearing the traditional clothes. Peguche, Otavalo. Source: Jérémie Voirol. [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

upward mobility. In a similar vein, Edward Telles (2014), based on quantitative research in several Latin American countries, shows that skin color, irrespective of an assigned or self-identified ethnic-racial category, has a decisive impact on inequalities (the darker the skin is, the lower the socioeconomic position). In this section, my aim is to extend the notion of phenotype to understand *otavaleños*' identification processes and their (re)production of the Indigenous/*mestizo* divide.

The meeting described above emerged because the short-haired players who claim to be Indigenous lacked one of the three required criteria in Article 2: the long braided hair. The emphasis on this body visual trait reflects its ordinary importance in interactions and conversation when a man's (self-)identification is at stake. In everyday life, alongside long braided hair for men, the clothing qualified as "*tradicional*" (traditional) constitutes a strong characteristic that allows *runa* and *mishu* people to easily identify a person as Indigenous in the region (see Figure 3).<sup>11</sup> Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld (1999, 13) notes that the appearance of *otavaleños* is an aspect that usually draws the attention of outsiders (for research on Indigenous people from the Cuzco region, see Terry, 2020). Hairstyle and clothes also constitute emblematic markers of *otavaleños* at the national level, which also distinguishes them from other Indigenous groups. In fact, contemporary *otavaleño* men do not wear often traditional clothes. However, they usually keep their long braided hair, which makes all the difference in (self-)identification in relation to white-*mestizo* men, at least in the Otavalo area. Conversely, *otavaleño* women are more likely to wear the traditional outfit on a daily basis, clearly



marking them as Indigenous. However, the fact that their long hair is less distinctive than it is for men allows them more fluidity if they are not wearing traditional clothes.

Clothing is usually considered “cultural” or “socioeconomic” in the anthropological literature of the Andes and beyond (namely as a *marker* of ethnicity or class). An Indigenous person can be identified as *mestizo* by changing his/her clothes (e.g., Babb, 2022; Canessa, 2012; Terry, 2020; Wade, 2015). However, scholarship on the topic also widely recognizes that dress in Latin America has constituted, since Spanish colonization, a tool of distinction and racist discrimination against Indigenous people (e.g., Canessa, 2012; Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1999; de la Cadena, 2000; Femenías, 2005; Saldívar, 2014; Terry, 2020; Wade, 2015). The same kind of discrimination may occur with braided hair for men and women (Novo Martínez, 2018). I can report several instances of this sort from my ethnographic material. For example, Segundo, my Kichwa teacher, is from the Otavalo region but grew up in Quito. He told me that he was constantly abused at school, even hit, because of his braided hair, which was associated with Indigeneity. Therefore, *otavaleños* have experienced racialization through their dressed bodies and hairstyles because their clothes and hair identify them as Indigenous.

Consequently, alongside the cultural dimension of *otavaleños*’ clothing and hairstyles, I argue that these two elements are an integral part of what I call a process of phenotypization. I argue that the abovementioned idea that phenotype is not relevant in distinguishing Indigenous from white-*mestizo* individuals rests on a restricted idea of what counts as phenotype (usually skin color, certain facial traits, hair texture). I am interested here in what counts as visual and bodily difference for *otavaleños* and what makes them discriminated against or recognized as Indigenous in Ecuadorian society (a dynamic that may be slightly different in the case of other Indigenous groups, particularly for those whose men do not wear their hair long). Relying on hairstyle and traditional dress that powerfully shape visual appearance, *otavaleños* endeavor to produce clearly discernible bodies, giving them a sense of innateness, a process that I call phenotypization; they make hairstyle and traditional dress part of their phenotype. More precisely, they reproduce a difference embodied initially through the type of racialization experiences I evoked above. However, the aesthetics of the traditional dress is valorized by *otavaleños*, and they often emphasize the beauty and strength of their long hair—particularly that of men—as a way of naturalizing their difference and specificity. Therefore, the embodiment of difference through hair—which is part of the physical body—and clothes (particularly for men and women respectively) generates a sense of phenotype, which shapes *otavaleños*’ experiences of being racialized and is a part of their belonging and pride in being Indigenous. This phenotypization is also an essential tool in the trade of “ethnic” handicraft products.

My attention to processes of phenotypization echoes the call to consider phenotype in an extended way (Wade also discusses the idea of “extended phenotype,” personal communication, 2020; see also M’charek et al., 2014). As Peter Wade (2015, 21) argues, different extra-bodily elements, according to the context, may participate in racialization processes, including “beards, hairstyles, body adornments and alterations (tattoos, piercings), and even clothes,” which echoes Colloredo-Mansfeld’s (1999, 84) assertion that in Ecuador, “[race] relates to bodies in an expansive sense.” While clothes and hairstyle are usually not considered phenotypic elements (e.g., Babb, 2022; Femenías, 2005; Weismantel, 2001)—instead categorized as acquired bodily attributes (Weismantel & Eisenman, 1998, 136)—I argue that they are part of the assemblage of elements that participate in shaping and naturalizing the physicality and visibility of the body. They work in a similar way as do skin color (Ravindran, 2020; Telles, 2014), specific types of work, leisure, and diet (Canessa, 2012; Weismantel & Eisenman, 1998), and practices of assisted reproduction (Roberts, 2012), for example. My notion of phenotypization shows the importance of visual appearance and how social actors make it relevant as something in the order of the innate. This approach echoes Telles (2014) and Ravindran’s (2020) plea to refocus on phenotype, yet in an extended way. What matters in processes of identification and racialization at the national level in Latin America may often be what people look like, as Saldívar (2014) argues for Mexico, which goes beyond a restricted meaning of phenotype.

Related to the issue of race, Wade (2002, 2015) states that alongside classificatory criteria linked to ideas concerning bodies, ideas of heredity are also relevant. The evaluation meeting explicitly points to this aspect in the context of Otavalo.

## HEREDITY AND THE ASSEMBLAGE OF RACE

The controversy raised in the evaluation meeting concerns how, in the Otavalo region, people are grouped around the category of *runa* through processes of phenotypization. Without long hair and traditional dress, the visual difference between Indigenous and *mestizo* men is made irrelevant. *Otavaleño* women and Indigenous men from other regions may blur this division just by not wearing the traditional outfit. However, the *runa/mishu* divide may continue to matter; consequently, it must be produced based on other criteria.

What is certain is that *otavaleños* may consider Indigeneity, in everyday life, as beyond the phenotypical features of braided hair and traditional clothes, and beyond the Kichwa language, despite their role in characterizing Indigenous people. Regarding the Mundialito, the organizers recognized that some young Indigenous men cut their hair, even if this practice is widely criticized by Indigenous adults and can create tensions within a family and a community. Far from justifying this practice (as he once explained to me, Wilo refused to allow his sons to cut their hair or his children to speak Spanish at home), Wilo told me: “In every sector, there are Indigenous young people, sons of Indigenous people, who, for reasons of fashion or—what do I really know about this?—cut their hair and, somehow, we didn’t want to marginalize them.” Additionally, the organizers do not check the

players' Kichwa skills, as they are aware that many young Indigenous people living in towns do not often have the opportunity to practice their parents' language and, thus, do not speak it fluently. However, the player who displayed fluency in Kichwa during the evaluation meeting was directly identified as Indigenous, showing the potential importance of this characteristic.

Wilo refers in the quote above to young men as "sons of Indigenous people," which emphasizes the importance of heredity. Indeed, the filiation criterion in the regulations—players must have Indigenous parents, insinuating that the parents' parents (and grandparents, and so on) are also Indigenous—should solve the problem of differentiation. However, it is more difficult for the organizers to establish the distinction based on genealogy, as they do not know the short-haired players personally.

Therefore, in the meeting, the evaluators sought to find ways to rely on filiation, trying, for example, to establish kinship with known Indigenous people in the Otavalo region: "He's my son's wife's cousin, she's from Ilumán!" This kind of kinship relation is reinforced by place, as Ilumán is well known as an Indigenous community, which seems to imply intense kinship relations among *runas*. The attention paid to family names is another attempt to establish connections of filiation; the team representatives try to trace players' surnames back to the surnames of known Indigenous people from the region, such as Guña and Ramírez (see Canessa, 2012 for Bolivia; Hale, 2006 for Guatemala).

This attention to filiation contributes to generating a sense of ancestry and of a group that rests on endogamic reproduction. As we saw earlier, Wilo even conceptualizes this aspect through the idea of "Indian" "blood." The fact that the category *mishu* is usually not conceived of locally as "mixed" (at least not with an Indigenous element, see Weismantel, 2001) strengthens the idea of *runas* being a genealogically relevant group that is separated from other groups. Therefore, the genealogical concern, combined with the sense of phenotype highlighted in the previous section, evokes the reappropriation of a racial understanding of social difference by otavaleños. Following Wade (2015), heredity, as transmitted through sexual reproduction, is considered in many contexts to form the internal essence of racialized individuals, while physical appearance constitutes the visible part. Heredity is usually thought of as engendering the phenotype, which suggests the former (Wade, 2002, 2015; Whitten, 2007, 359).

While the concrete part played by the invisible side is rarely made explicit in particular cases by the scholarship on race, in the instances where phenotypization fails to differentiate individuals, filiation emerges as a fundamental aspect for my interlocutors. However, filiation may not be determinant. My teacher Segundo's parents are from an *otavaleño* community, but he grew up and lives in Quito. As his integration into *otavaleño* networks is poor, many people in the Otavalo area are not able to trace his genealogy with Indigenous kin, and perceive him as a *mishu*, despite his fluency in Kichwa, because he currently has short hair and never wears the traditional dress.

Therefore, in the case of Otavalo, neither the criteria on which phenotypization relies nor those referring to genealogy—the two key criteria in racialization processes (Wade, 2015)—guarantee the demarcation Indigenous/*mestizo*. This echoes Ravindran's (2020, 977) affirmation that "Andean racial formations are characterized by a constant alternation between multiple classificatory logics," leading to ambiguity and undecidability. In addition to using different classificatory logics to (dis)identify people, Indigeneity and *mestizo-ness* work as "assemblages": each category must be assembled from elements of different kinds (M'charek et al., 2014; Wade, 2015), including bodily attributes, heredity, language, social networks/integration, among others. These elements are "mediators" that rely on each other to produce meaning according to their arrangement (Latour, 2005). Given the weight—although fluctuating—of elements coming from phenotypization and of the attention on filiation in the multiple ways of assembling indigeneity (and *mestizo-ness*) by *otavaleños*, these categories convey racial connotations, which are not unrelated to the historical relationship between white-*mestizos* and Indigenous people.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The criteria involved in the identification assemblage and their potential to generate certain kinds of meanings are entangled in local and continental histories of Indigenous experiences of racialization and discrimination from white-*mestizo* society. *Otavaleños* have been racialized and discriminated against as Indigenous as a genetic group, with some supposed phenotypical characteristics (a certain skin complexion and facial traits, for example) and, among other elements, through their costume and hairstyle. These experiences have affected how they make their lives meaningful (Torres Colón, 2018). Therefore, racial ascription came first, producing racialized bodies (Fassin, 2011). By deploying some of the same criteria to think of social difference and to identify people as others use to discriminate against them, *otavaleños* reproduce a racialized embodied difference. Yet this is a non-identical reproduction, as they select certain traits that have been depreciated and instead value them. Clothing and hairstyle, as I have argued, play a very important part in *otavaleños*' conceptualization, evaluation, and naturalization of social difference—what I call "phenotypization," a concept that invites us to extend the notion of phenotype and not to take for granted what it constitutes. Indeed, these aspects shape *otavaleños*' bodies and give them a dimension of innateness.

Therefore, *otavaleños*' identification practices rely on classificatory criteria related to the body and heredity (Wade, 2015). The Mundialito indígena reflects the preoccupation with these criteria, both in the regulations and in the meeting described. Importantly, in this tournament and other instances of everyday life, *otavaleños* create spaces where they are able to decide who is who and who to include (or not) in the *runa* category (which may negatively affect men from other Indigenous groups).

Furthermore, while recognizing their racial condition, *otavaleños* have reappropriated some elements in seeking to create a more positive meaning of Indigeneity and a sense of belonging that generates forms of solidarity and empowerment. Building on their economic success and cultural commitment, they have created, for example, an elaborated aesthetic of dress and hairstyle, which allows them to be recognizable in a positive way, among themselves and by (national and foreign) tourists, but also to distinguish themselves from other Indigenous groups, making *otavaleño* Indigeneity the model of all Indigeneity. This sense of belonging tends to make any aspiration of becoming *mestizo* irrelevant, as it is also critical for developing the economic activities related to the handicraft trade and tourism on which many *otavaleños* rely.

Nevertheless, *otavaleños* are not alone among Indigenous groups in suffering discrimination and facing obstacles as a result of being identified as Indigenous. Their position in the soccer domain constitutes just one aspect of this. In an era of neoliberal multiculturalism, in which the recognition of different, equal “cultures” may just be superficial, the use of a racial idiom in Latin Americanist anthropology constitutes an important move. It allows scholars to pay attention to and emphasize both the everyday discrimination that people experience and the structural, global, and historical dimensions of these experiences. These dimensions, which are closely interwoven with European colonialism and imperialism (e.g., Canessa, 2012; Carrington, 2010; Pierre, 2012; Thomas & Clarke, 2013; Wade, 2015), are something that “analysis guided by ethnicity theory would be likely to overlook” (Hale, 2006, 211). Therefore, in the Latin American context, using a racial idiom encourages us to consider Indigenous people as part of the same subaltern group as Afro-descendants, since the latter face similar racist discrimination and structural lack of power and resources. This theoretical stance may notably help to widen antiracist thinking and struggles.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> They may also use the labels *otavalo* and *otavaleño/a* to self-identify; however, these are used much less often than *runa/indígena*.
- <sup>2</sup> I use “to group,” following Bruno Latour (2005), to emphasize the active process of identification and the fact that groups exist only if/when this process is activated.
- <sup>3</sup> For studies focusing on soccer in Latin America, see Pablo Alabarces (2003); Rory Miller and Liz Crolley (2007).
- <sup>4</sup> Based in Peguche (4000–5000 inhabitants), I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the Otavalo region for my PhD research on Indigenous festivities, over a 20-month period spanning 2009–2016.
- <sup>5</sup> Since 2018, the teams have been allowed to field up to seven non-Indigenous players. This change is the result of ongoing debates around discrimination, empowerment, and competition attractiveness.
- <sup>6</sup> All of my interlocutors’ names here are pseudonyms.
- <sup>7</sup> Michelle Wibbelsman’s (2009, 62) study suggests that the tolerance for two short-haired Indigenous players applied at least from the beginning of the 21st century.
- <sup>8</sup> Ramírez is indeed quite a common surname in the Otavalo rural area, although it is also widespread in Spanish-speaking countries and originally came from Spain. There are several surnames of Spanish origin that are very common in the Indigenous milieu of Otavalo. The other surnames sound local and non-Hispanic.
- <sup>9</sup> This inclusiveness happens internationally in sports; for example, national identity may become more inclusive to field better players who would not necessarily be considered “national” in ordinary situations.
- <sup>10</sup> Andrew Canessa (2012) discusses the case of some white-*mestizo*, urban middle-class, leftist intellectuals in Bolivia who situationally self-identify as Indigenous.
- <sup>11</sup> The traditional costume for men consists of a Borsalino hat, a navy blue or black poncho, white trousers and *alpargata* (sandals); for women, it consists of a colored scarf-like item (*fachalina*), a white blouse with a floral design, a long navy blue or black skirt (*anaku*), and *alpargata*.

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