Gender, Place and Culture

ISSN: 0966-369X (Print) 1360-0524 (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cgpc20

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To cite this article: KATE SWANSON (2007) 'Bad Mothers' and 'Delinquent Children': Unravelling anti-begging rhetoric in the Ecuadorian Andes, Gender, Place and Culture, 14:6, 703-720, DOI: 10.1080/09663690701659150

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09663690701659150

Gender, Place and Culture
Vol. 14, No. 6, pp. 703–720, December 2007

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group Ltd

'Bad Mothers' and 'Delinquent Children': Unravelling anti-begging rhetoric in the Ecuadorian Andes

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Abstract *In this paper I examine the rhetorics that circulate surrounding the lives of young indigenous women and children who beg on the streets of Quito, Ecuador. I focus particularly on rhetorics being produced and reproduced by urban planners, social workers, religious leaders and the media. Drawing on in-depth interviews, I reveal how these groups regularly imagine indigenous women and children in terms of child exploitation/child delinquency, false manipulation of public sympathies, ignorance, laziness and filth. Indigenous women and children are further understood as being fundamentally 'out of place' in the city. I unravel these rhetorics in order to draw attention to how begging is differentiated according to gender, race and age and to reveal how these rhetorics become inserted into exclusionary policies and practices. Moreover, and as a counterpoint to such rhetorics, I provide an alternative understanding of women's and children's involvement in begging by drawing upon the perspectives of indigenous women and children themselves. I argue that far from being passive victims, indigenous women and children work with and around oppressive conditions and mobilise them to their own advantage.*

Key Words: Beggars; indigenous; children; informal sector; Ecuador

Introduction

A young indigenous girl approaches a tourist on the streets of Quito. Clad in jogging pants under an *anaku* skirt, a faded Walt Disney t-shirt, and a blue *chalina* wrapped around her shoulders, she murmurs, '*Regálame*' or 'Gift me', while extending her hand. On another busy street, a member of the Ecuadorian upper-middle class encounters a young, indigenous woman at his driver-side window while idling at a stoplight in his SUV. '*Compre chicles*'—'Buy gum'—the young woman says, with a few packets of gum lodged between her fingers. When she catches the driver's eye, she gives a supplicating gesture and points to the toddler strapped to her back, '*Para el wawito*'—'For the baby'.

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ISSN 0966-369X print/ISSN 1360-0524 online/07/060703-18 © 2007 Taylor & Francis
DOI: 10.1080/09663690701659150

Figure 1. A 28-year-old woman sells gum in Quito with her 9-year-old son.

Begging encounters are increasingly common on the streets of Quito. The vast majority of the capital's indigenous beggars hail from a small, agricultural village in the Central Andean province of Tungurahua.[1] Since the mid-1990s, indigenous women and children from this village have been migrating to beg and, increasingly, sell gum as key means to overcome diminishing agricultural returns and to meet rising cash demands. No longer able to sustain themselves from the land alone, these women and children have joined the ranks of men in temporary rural-to-urban migration. With few marketable skills and limited employment

options within Ecuador's social and racial hierarchies, they have turned to begging.

Yet, on the streets, these women and children are harassed and, in some cases, forcibly detained while municipalities attempt to control public spaces and sanitise the streets of the '*indio sucio*' or 'dirty Indian'. In 1999, a coalition of social organisations combined forces with the National Police Force for Children and Youth (DINAPEN) to detain more than 50 indigenous children found begging on the streets of Quito. Some were held for more than a week. A widely publicised municipal campaign states that buying from street vendors endangers personal safety. The accompanying image shows a gum vendor's hand, while the text suggests that street vendors are 'delinquents'.[2] In 2004, Quito hosted the international Miss Universe pageant, an event that broadcast sanitised images of the city to millions of viewers around the world. In the months prior to the pageant, itinerant vendors and beggars complained of increasing police harassment and arrests on the streets (El Comercio, 2004a; 2004b). Some Quiteños, in fact, argue that the widely publicised municipal campaign for a '*Quito Limpio*'—a 'Clean Quito'—barely conceals a corresponding campaign to force out the city's beggars and street vendors (Swanson, 2007).

A discussion surrounding particular instances of exclusion is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, I am concerned here with the ways in which indigenous beggars are portrayed in the city. In this paper, I draw upon empirical data from Ecuador to unravel how rhetoric pertaining to indigenous beggars informs policy and practice. I focus particularly on the rhetoric being produced and reproduced by urban planners, social workers, religious leaders, and the media. Within these groups indigenous women and children are regularly described in terms of child exploitation/child delinquency, false manipulation of public sympathies, ignorance, laziness, and filth. They are further described as being 'out of place' in urban areas. I argue that these types of rhetoric draw attention away from problems associated with market economies that fail to redistribute wealth to the poor and, rather, focus on the alleged vices of beggars themselves.

As a counterpoint to these rhetorics, and following upon Katz's (2004) efforts to delineate between resilience, reworking and resistance, I explore the ways in which indigenous women and children work with and around oppressive conditions and mobilise them to their own advantage. Katz suggests that the term 'resistance' is often used too broadly to encompass a wide array of social practices that could be construed as oppositional. Instead, she distinguishes between: *resilience*—autonomous initiatives that allow people to shore up their resources and get by each day; *reworking*—practices that attempt to recalibrate or *rework* oppressive and unequal circumstances; and *resistance*—practices intended to subvert or disrupt conditions of exploitation or oppression (Katz, 2004, p. 242).

I find these distinctions useful when discussing the lives of indigenous beggars, particularly in terms of child 'renting', a practice whereby the presence of children has become integral to women's begging tactics. I discuss these instances of reworking and resilience in order to suggest that indigenous women and children are not passive victims in the face of oppressive socio-economic conditions. Rather, they actively engage with and rework the forces that affect their everyday lives.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. I begin by describing my methods and the case study for this paper. I situate this within the context of the current situation for Ecuador's indigenous peoples. I then offer a précis of the academic literature on begging, which dwells on how this practice has become

negatively framed within moralistic rhetorics and criminalised through legal codes. I further remark upon the legal status of begging in Quito and tease out some of the associated assumptions regarding its purported 'disguised' character. Next, I use my field research in Quito to unravel some of the rhetorics surrounding indigenous women's and children's lives that circulate within this place. I question these rhetorics in order to draw out an alternative understanding of begging, as articulated by the women and children directly involved in this activity. I raise questions pertaining to indigenous economies of caring and argue that begging is an entrepreneurial activity that allows indigenous women and children to get by in the face of economic and racial marginalisation.

Case Study and Methods

This paper draws heavily upon empirical research conducted over a period of 18 months in 2002 and 2003. The case study focuses upon indigenous beggars from the Kisapincha community of Calhuasí, located approximately four to six hours from Quito (Figure 2). While I conducted the majority of my field research in Quito, I also spent much time both living in and regularly visiting Calhuasí (see Swanson, forthcoming). In total, I conducted 125 interviews in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the situation for Ecuador's indigenous beggars. Thirty-seven of these interviews were with young women and children who beg in the city. The oldest of these was 24 years old and the youngest was seven. The average age was 13. Twenty of these informants were female and 17 were male.

The remaining 88 of my interviews were conducted with community members, indigenous leaders, teachers, politicians, academics, agronomists, social workers, religious leaders, urban planners, police officers and government members, all of whom were connected to issues surrounding indigenous beggars.[3] Of these individuals, 35 were indigenous (namely community members, indigenous leaders, teachers, and a few politicians and government members), while the remaining 53 were white-mestizo.[4] These interviews were complemented with participant observation and hundreds of field notes from informal conversations with women and children both on the streets and in their village. While living in Calhuasí, I also conducted a survey with 42 children (in Grades 5–6) concerning their work at home and in the city. This survey provided important information on children's involvement in street work.

For the purposes of this paper, I draw upon 41 of these interviews, specifically those that were conducted with social workers, religious leaders and urban planners, all of whom but two were white-mestizos. I use this empirical data to trace how rhetorics concerning indigenous beggars are reproduced and demonstrate how these then justify exclusionary policies and practices, such as the DINAPEN incident mentioned above. Of course, I do not want to suggest that all social workers, religious leaders, and urban planners imagine indigenous women and children as bad mothers who exploit their innocent children; however, I did find a remarkable number that did. In this paper, I critically assess these perspectives and try to provide an alternative understanding of indigenous women's and children's involvement in begging drawing from the perspectives of women and children themselves.

The situation of indigenous peoples in Ecuador varies by region. The northern region of Otavalo, for instance, houses some of the wealthiest indigenous communities in Latin America. The Otavaleños are renowned for their

Figure 2. Map of Ecuador and location of Calhuasí.

international trade in textiles and tourist commodities (Meisch, 2002). Members of this community have also been key leaders in Ecuador's strong indigenous political movement (see Radcliffe *et al.*, 2002). But despite much political mobilisation and growing economic prosperity in some regions, there has been little substantive change in many of Ecuador's rural indigenous communities, including Calhuasí.

Calhuasí is situated at 3,400 metres in the Andes. It had long been a remote and inaccessible community until the construction of its first road in 1992. Up until that point, the only way in or out of the community was via a long and difficult footpath through the mountains. The construction of this road fundamentally changed the community. It enabled better access to medical services and vaccines, thus significantly decreasing infant mortality. For instance, one 60-year-old father recounted how seven of his 11 children had died during childhood, an occurrence that was not at all uncommon in the recent past. Now, some mothers complained

to me, too many of their children were living. Due to lack of birth control and lower infant mortality rates, the population has been increasing rapidly. This has led to rising land pressure and increasing land fragmentation. Since there is a tradition of land inheritance in the community, every year the land becomes fragmented into smaller parcels. This means that there is little productive land left for many of the community's young people.

It is very difficult to earn a living as a small agriculturalist in the Andes. In 1998–1999, Ecuador underwent a major economic crisis which resulted in rampant inflation. In 2000, the government dollarised the economy in an attempt to bring the economic situation under control (see Whitten, 2003). But as a result of converting to US dollars Ecuador is now one of the most expensive countries in Latin America. For rural agriculturalists, this means that the costs of agricultural inputs have risen dramatically. It has also resulted in a flooding of the market with lower-priced produce from Colombia and Peru. Consequently, during my fieldwork, Calhuaseños were earning between fifty cents and one dollar for 100 pounds or 46 kilograms of potatoes. For this reason, many community members have decided that it is more economical to abandon agriculture altogether.

Combined with these changes, there has also been a rising need for cash income. The new road facilitated access to new consumer goods (particularly bulky ones such as housing materials and furniture), which could now be transported by truck. Up until 1992, the only way to transport goods in or out of the village was on the backs of donkeys, mules and people. Diets have begun to change to include foods that cannot be produced in the community; traditional foods such as barley and root crops are being replaced with white rice, flour, and pasta. Children's educational costs are also gaining tremendous importance in Calhuasí. In fact, the vast majority of children's street earnings are used to pay for school supplies, such as uniforms, notebooks, and school lunches.

All of these local changes are situated within the context of a prolonged colonial history of racism, social exclusion, and economic marginalisation for Ecuador's indigenous peoples. They are positioned on the bottom rungs of a social hierarchy that posits white-mestizos at the very top (de la Torre, 2002a; Stutzman, 1981; Weismantel & Eisenman, 1998; Whitten, 1981). Consequently, racism is a constant presence in the majority of indigenous peoples' lives.[5] Within these social and racial hierarchies, their employment options are limited to highly gendered and racialised roles, such as manual labour and domestic service (de la Torre, 2002a). In popular imaginations, indigenous bodies are commonly marked by contamination, filth and disease (Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1998; Orlove, 1998). They are often stereotyped as 'lazy', 'stupid', backward' and 'dull' (Van Vleet, 2003). They are infantilised as simple-minded, immature beings (Guerrero, 1997; Radcliffe, 1990). This racist rhetoric is further compounded through racial–spatial divides that shape Andean landscapes; within Andean imaginative geographies, cities are associated with whiteness, whereas rural areas are associated with Indian-ness (Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996). Given this social, economic and racial landscape, begging itself can be understood as an act of resilience. Begging has become a way for community members to get ahead within the confines of a capitalist market economy and racist social structure. Yet, as outlined in the following section, the lives of beggars, both in Ecuador and beyond, are regulated by negative moralistic rhetorics and discriminatory criminal codes.

The Offensive Beggar

Despite the prevalence of beggars throughout the world, there has been very little Anglo-American research on beggars beyond North America and Northern Europe. Exceptions include Chaudhuri's (1987) research on women who beg near temples in India, Schak's (1988) research on a community of beggars in Taiwan, and Martínez Novo's (2003) research on indigenous women street vendors and beggars in Mexico. Within North America and Britain, much of the contemporary research on begging explores the issue through the lens of homelessness (Duncan, 1978; Fitzpatrick & Kennedy, 2001; Lankenau, 1999a, 1999b; Snow & Anderson, 1993; Wardhaugh, 1996). Other literature analyses: public attitudes and the moral discourse surrounding begging (Adler, 1999; Dean & Gale, 1999; Erskine & McIntosh, 1999; Jordan, 1999); begging in the Victorian city (Jaffe, 1990; Murdoch, 2003; Rose, 1988); begging governance (Hermer, 2007; Hopkins Burke, 1999); and begging youth (Coles & Craig, 1999; Helleiner, 2003). The following discussion draws largely upon this existing body of literature from the North. In doing so, I do not presume that conditions in the Andes are the same as in North America or in Northern Europe. Rather, it is my intention to demonstrate how this moralistic rhetoric, with origins in the Global North, is being used to regulate beggars in Ecuador, despite a vastly different political, economic and social landscape.

Within almost all major religious traditions, alms giving is understood as an indication of goodness. Yet while giving is equated with goodness, receiving is understood as a moral failing (Erskine & McIntosh, 1999). As stated by Mauss (1966, p. 72), 'To give is to show one's superiority . . . To accept without returning or repaying more, is to face subordination, to become a client and subservient.' In the vast majority of societies, gift exchanges are understood as reciprocal transactions. The timescale and shape of this reciprocity may differ but, ultimately, gifting becomes a perpetual cycle of exchange where honour and status are at stake. Thus, in the words of Douglas (1990), there is no such thing as a 'free gift'.

For the beggar, who takes but gives nothing in return, accepting charity with no thought of reciprocity or repayment inevitably implies a loss of honour. Perceived within the context of gift economies, the beggar is understood as lowly and inferior. In other words, charity is wounding for those who accept it (Mauss, 1966). For the giver, however, charity implies an increase in status and honour. By donating cash and material goods in public spaces, givers gain public esteem by proving both their moral goodness and material solvency. Street begging transactions are always publicly performed transactions. Although they are personal transactions between two individuals (and may involve bodily contact), they always take place in public spaces. Yet, regardless of what may be gained or lost through these transactions, begging encounters are often highly disquieting moments that elicit a wide range of emotional and physical responses.

Begging is most often addressed under criminal law. In Ecuador, begging in and of itself is not illegal. Rather, the law stresses the potential criminality and deceitful nature of beggars. Listed under the rubric of 'Public Safety', articles 383 to 385 dictate that beggars who carry false documents, who feign sickness, who carry weapons or pick-locks are liable to between three months and one year in prison. A 'disguised' beggar or a beggar who escapes from the authorities is liable to between two months and one year in prison (Código Penal, 2003).

What exactly is a disguised beggar? The penal code provides no definition but over the last few centuries critics have written much about begging 'impostors'

(Murdoch, 2003; Rose, 1988). Beggars are often constructed as highly suspicious characters. They are described as frauds who fabricate wounds and forge illnesses. They are depicted as clever professionals who rely on ruse and disguise. In the Victorian city, beggars were perceived as wealthy con artists who preyed upon the generous hearts of hard-working souls. At the end of the day, it was said that they would shed their costumes to celebrate like kings (Rose, 1988). Yet, at its core, this emphasis on the deceitful nature of beggars effectively works to question the credibility of their poverty. By suggesting that beggars are selling a false image of poverty, attention is drawn away from the inadequacies of market economies to instead emphasise the inadequacies and corruptibility of the poor.

This is precisely what is happening with indigenous beggars in Ecuador. Not only are they accused of manipulating public sympathies, but they are also accused of child exploitation, ignorance, and laziness. Child beggars are described alternatively in terms of innocence, corruptibility or potential criminality. Both women and children are understood as being fundamentally out of place in the city. And, as I stress below, very little emphasis is placed on the factors that drive indigenous women and children onto the streets to begin with.

Disguised Beggars, Gendered Beggars and Child Beggars

While the vast majority of Calhuaseños began their street careers as beggars, in recent years they have been increasingly selling gum. This is largely due to pressure from a local NGO that has tried to persuade them that selling allows them to retain their dignity. The argument is that if they fit into normative definitions of work, they will earn more respect on the streets. Yet, regardless of whether indigenous women beg or sell, many continue to perceive them as disguised beggars. One social worker explained: 'If they try to provoke pity and people buy their product because of this pity, then they're begging' (30 June 2003). The complaint is that they do not market their products *per se* but, rather, market their poverty. In the words of a municipal director:

> It's that down deep, there's an intention to exploit the emotional side of the population. And so of course you feel more compassion when you see a little child only so big carrying her little sibling on her back and on top of this selling gum. (13 December 2002)

Or, as put by another social worker, 'They're exchanging misery for money' (9 December 2002).

This raises the issue of how other informal street sector activities are often categorically lumped in with begging. By expressing their very real need, indigenous gum vendors are perceived to manipulate givers' moral sympathies (and thus are understood as disguised beggars). Because the decision to purchase gum may be a moral decision rather than a commercial one, vending and begging are perceived as one in the same. Yet in order to convey need, at some level need must be performed. Accusations that they are disguised beggars who are 'exchanging misery for money' relate to concerns pertaining to the presumed deceitful nature of beggars; a fear that these women and children could be selling false identities.

Ironically, rather than selling 'false' identities indigenous beggars are both selling and fulfilling their gendered and racialised roles as dependent women and children and submissive Indians (Guerrero, 1997; Oakley, 1994). Supplicating for

assistance on street corners conforms to popular imaginaries concerning indigenous women's and children's subservience and docility. In no way naïve, I found that Calhuasí's women and children are very aware of the need to perform these identities in response to gendered and racialised readings of their bodies (see Mahtani, 2002; Swanson, 2005). In this light, it could be argued that women's and children's involvement with begging is actually congruent with the vagaries of capitalism; when indigenous women and children beg, they are in some ways capitalising upon racialised and gendered expectations.[6] In a very modern and entrepreneurial twist on resilience they are actually selling their racialised and gendered identities in exchange for US dollars.

As a nation where *machismo* is well-entrenched, able-bodied male beggars are rare in Ecuador. This contrasts to the situation in North America and Northern Europe where the majority of beggars are men.[7] Young boys may beg but only as long as they appear young enough to do so. I have observed that as boys reach this threshold—somewhere between 12 and 14 years of age—they may carry babies in order to help legitimise their acceptance on the streets. Elderly and disabled beggars, however, are generally tolerated on the streets regardless of their gender. Due to very limited and inadequate social security benefits (which are less than US $8/month),[8] many elderly and disabled individuals have no other means of earning income. During an interview with an urban planner, she expressed her willingness to help the elderly: 'The elderly need to be protected. Many are kicked out of their homes and have nowhere to sleep. They have nothing to eat. So if I see an old person [begging], I do give them money' (8 September 2003).

Yet her view was very different for able-bodied indigenous beggars. She continued: 'But if I see a strong woman, I don't give her anything. Because she has to, she can work. She can go look for work and bring her baby with her. She can find work doing laundry or housecleaning or doing something' (8 September 2003). In her opinion, the 'strong woman' is undeserving of her charity due to the fact that she is able-bodied. She further believes that able-bodied beggars are simply lazy and 'do not want to work' (2 September 2003). Another municipal employee recounted her experiences: 'I've said to them, "Come with me. You can wash clothes in my home." And they've said no. So, [begging] suits them or it's more like it's easier for them to beg or sell gum' (25 July 2003). Within these words, the emphasis is placed upon capitalist productivity. Those who 'do not want to work' offend this sensibility. Rather than being individuals worthy of compassion, they become individuals worthy of derision.

I found that able-bodied indigenous beggars are regularly described as 'lazy'. According to a social worker who works with Quito's street and working children:

> They like the easy life, they like everything for free because, you know, they'd rather be begging than working. Because you know they could get a job. Even young Indians—they'd rather extend their hands than work in a restaurant peeling potatoes or gardening or washing clothes. Rather, they prefer to sit and beg. (29 July 2003)

These quotes reflect not only a view of Indians as 'lazy' but also contemporary beliefs about the types of occupations indigenous men and women should occupy. Indigenous women should occupy the highly gendered roles of washing clothes, cleaning homes, or peeling potatoes. Indigenous men should occupy equally gendered manual labour roles, an example of which is gardening. In Andean

imaginaries, the indigenous body is assigned to the most humble of occupations (de la Torre, 2002a).

Within Ecuador's social and racial hierarchies, indigenous peoples are very limited in their employment options. On the streets, girls are frequently offered positions as domestic workers—an occupation deemed appropriate for their perceived low status. Yet this occupation has been shown to expose girls to high levels of physical, psychological and sexual abuse. A recent study commissioned by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Ecuador uncovered that many young domestic servants—the majority of whom are indigenous—work under conditions comparable to slavery. Enclosed in live-in situations (referred to as 'closed door' jobs because girls are rarely permitted to leave the premises), young maids receive low pay, endure limited freedom, are isolated from their families, and regularly suffer physical and sexual assault (Castelnuovo y Asociados, 2002). In an interview with the authors of this study, they recounted how this violence against young indigenous girls is as much racial as it is sexual; so much so that if a pregnancy results, employers consider this a benefit to the girl since her child will be whiter than she—thus *mejorando la raza* or improving the race (12 December 2002).[9]

For young girls from Calhuasí, begging and gum vending are preferred employment options. While working on the streets, Silvia, a 16-year-old Calhuaseña, recounted how she was offered a job as a live-in maid at a salary of US$30 a month. Yet on the streets she earns US$20 a week, money that she uses to pay for the costs of her education. Silvia is currently enrolled in a part-time high school, which is very significant considering that there is not yet a single high school graduate from her community. Taking this job would have greatly interfered with her ability to attend school. Moreover, Silvia's home is in Calhuasí; she has no interest in moving to Quito permanently and confining herself within a stranger's home. In fact, numerous women and young girls told me that they are offended when they are offered employment, especially if they are selling gum at the time. In their minds, they already have jobs as independent entrepreneurs—jobs that pay much better, and are possibly much safer, than those being offered. Yet their refusals of these employment offers only reinforce beliefs that they are 'lazy Indians' who 'do not want to work'.

Rhetorics surrounding sickness and hygiene also surfaced regularly, particularly during interviews with urban planners and religious leaders. One individual described begging as a '*contagion*' spreading through the Kisapincha communities (Nun, 7 May 2003, emphasis added). Another urged the need to 'eradicate begging so that there is no further *contamination* from this begging *sickness*' (Priest, 2 September 2003, emphasis added). The association of beggars with sickness and disease also resonates with popular imaginaries surrounding indigenous peoples. Just as beggars are described as dirty, smelly and diseased, so are Ecuador's Indians. This 'hygienic racism' posits 'a clean, healthy, "normal" white population and a dirty, weaker, native population' (Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1998, p. 188). Calhuasí's women and children are thus doubly stigmatised as 'dirty beggars' and as 'dirty Indians'. Some are repulsed by these women and children. Referring to an indigenous woman selling gum, an urban planner described her visceral response: 'When it's a dishevelled person, all dirty, I just have no desire to buy from her. Knowing that [the gum] in her hands, her dirty hands, all sweaty, in the sun [shiver of revulsion], no way! I mean, I just don't want to buy it' (8 September 2003).

While begging, women and children rely on begging cups—perhaps recognising a general reluctance to place change directly into their hands.

As previously mentioned, racialised imaginative geographies continue to circulate widely in Ecuador where white-mestizos live in the cities and Indians live in the country (Radcliffe & Westwood, 1996). Out of place in the urban sphere, indigenous women and children are expected to remain in the countryside. Their presence on the city streets disrupts Ecuadorian norms and conventions. Contemporary newspaper articles depict pictures of migrant indigenous women selling bundles of carrots and onions who are 'out of control' and who are 'invading the streets' (El Comercio, 2002, p. D4). This imagery inverts the colonial complicity in driving indigenous peoples out of urban centres and into the countryside. It presents their re-'invasion' as deviant behaviour that threatens to upset the imagined order and stability of the city.

In the Andes, as elsewhere, class, race, and ethnicity inform understandings of gender and public space. Unlike men, white-mestizo women rarely loiter in public spaces. As I discovered, women are subjected to sometimes threatening sexual harassment when alone in public. Married women who venture out without their husbands face much criticism and suspicion. Yet, contrary to the majority of white-mestizo women, indigenous women routinely work in public spaces. Rural indigenous women spend much of their days working in fields, in public markets, or on the streets bargaining and selling goods. Nevertheless, within white-mestizo sexual ideologies, indigenous women remain out of place on the streets (see Invernizzi, 2003; Weismantel, 2001).

Indigenous children are no more welcome on the streets than their mothers. Children on the streets face competing representations through an emerging child rights discourse and through a more entrenched juvenile delinquency discourse. For the latter, the assumption is that, regardless of a child's situation, time spent on the streets will turn them into criminals. For instance, I attended a meeting between social workers, municipal planners and religious leaders to discuss issues surrounding indigenous beggars. The position of these particular municipal planners was clear: street work fosters delinquency. According to an urban planner, children who beg or sell are: 'delinquents and drug addicts. You see children of three or four years old who are already sniffing glue. This is the future they have on the streets' (8 September 2003). Or, as stated by a priest: 'He may begin by selling candies but will end by selling cocaine' (2 September 2003). In order to avoid this perceived inevitability, children must be kept off the streets through policies and practices designed to 'save' children.

Many view indigenous child beggars as products of bad parenting. Yet these accusations fail to acknowledge the difficult life circumstances that push indigenous women and children into the streets. For instance, Rita is a 43-year-old woman with seven children, one of whom was a seven-month-old baby at the time of this research. Rita came to Quito for the first time in 1999 because her husband lost his job as a market porter. Along with her children, she begs and sells in order to earn money to support her family. Like most Calhuaseños, she works as part of a tight-knit kinship group. On the streets, her children are under constant surveillance by one or more of her family members. Rita wants the best for her children and is doing what she can. For instance, one of her boys attends a special school for street working children in Quito because the quality of this education is much better than what he receives at home. Yet, for the most part, women who beg

with their children are perceived as women who exploit their innocent children and thus are unfit.

If women are constructed as unfit mothers, then 'saving' these children becomes a legitimate goal. Their exclusion in public space is thus framed as being in the best interests of their children. This further draws from a paternalistic understanding of Indians as innocent children who must be both represented and protected (Martínez Novo, 2003). It is often hedged in a belief that they have 'bad mothers'. The National Director of a social organisation for working children believes, for example, that these families

> ... don't realise the dangers. I mean a family from the popular sectors doesn't realise that there are moral dangers. I believe they don't see them. If you point them out to them, that someone can grab their daughter, fondle her, abuse her, various things, many people don't see this type of risk. We as Westerners, as a structured people, perhaps we see these things more clearly. But they live in a world where this is normal. (9 December 2002)

Within this imagery of dangerous geographies, which relies on visions of villainous men lurking behind every corner waiting to 'grab', 'fondle', and 'abuse' children, there is a reluctance to admit that, statistically speaking, children face greater risks within the sanctified spaces of private homes (see Valentine, 1996).[11] This is not to suggest that there are no risks on the streets; however, as discussed, the risks that these children face on the streets (particularly in the case of girls) might well be substantially lower than the risks that they would face as domestic workers, confined in the private spaces of white-mestizos' homes.

Another view that often overlaps with that described above is a belief that these women intend to exploit their children. A social worker for the Municipality of Quito said, 'we believe that there is a clear intention on the behalf of the family or of the adult ... to use children to make money' (13 December 2002). In fact, Calhuasí's indigenous women are often accused of 'renting' children as props for begging—an accusation which, as will be discussed below, fails to grapple with the complexities of indigenous economies of caring.

Child 'Renting'

As previously noted, enhancing empathy is crucial to beggars' success. According to a social worker, 'When people see a child in the streets, they immediately offer them money' (30 June 2003). For this reason, in the face of dire socio-economic conditions, babies and toddlers have indeed become important parts of indigenous women's begging tactics. However, the discovery that children enhance empathy is by no means unique to Calhuaseños. In China (Schak, 1988), India (Chaudhuri, 1987), Mexico (Martínez Novo, 2003), Ireland (Gmelch, 1979) and in England (Hermer, 2005), women have been accused of renting or using children for the purposes of begging. Much like charitable aid organisations rely upon the image of the wide-eyed, suffering child to solicit donations, it would seem that beggars throughout the world have long done the same.

When young or unmarried Calhuaseñas go to the city and do not yet have children of their own, they sometimes bring children belonging to their extended family members. In exchange, these women must return with 50% of the child's earnings and provide the child with a new set of clothing. From a Western capitalist

perspective, this does seem like 'renting'. As a result, during interviews social workers, urban planners, and religious leaders frequently criticised Calhuaseñas for 'renting' children as props for begging. However, when I asked indigenous women for their interpretation of this issue, their perspective was quite different.

Rather than a purely capitalistic exchange, indigenous women perceive this practice as *prestando* or *mandando niños*—'lending' or 'sending' children—a practice integrally connected to notions of redistribution, reciprocity, kinship and skill-building. By sending young children to the city with their relatives, indigenous women believe they are allowing children to get to know the city, which is considered a benefit for the child. There are key elements of socialisation and training. Children who go to the city at a young age learn how to earn an income and become more productive contributors to the family. Sending children is also tied to an economy of organised caring. It temporarily relieves parents of some of their childcare responsibilities and allows them to focus on other activities. Furthermore, the added income earned by loaning children to their sisters, aunts or cousins brings in much needed financial assistance.

Child circulation is a long-standing practice among indigenous families (Leinaweaver, 2005). According to a Professor of Quichua and Andean philosophy, this practice has much to do with the redistribution of wealth. When he was growing up, his father, a weaver, was 'loaned' several children in a sort of apprenticeship (25 July 2003). When parents are unable to care for their children or if one of their family members needs assistance in the home, they may temporarily or permanently loan a child to an extended family member who thus assumes responsibility for the child's food, clothing, and shelter. In the city, 'loaned' children are like apprentices. While under their care, relatives provide knowledge, food and shelter. Upon their return to the village, a purchased outfit may symbolically represent that their clothing needs were equally met. Likewise, the shared earnings may be a reciprocal gesture to redistribute their recently acquired 'wealth'.

These types of child circulations and informal adoption practices are common in indigenous communities and serve to bind families together both socially and materially (Uzendoski, 2005; Weismantel, 1995). They are premised upon the understanding that biology is not the only criterion for parenthood. Rather, in these indigenous communities, people become parents by feeding and caring for children over extended periods of time. It is the action and process of raising a child that creates parenthood. By building these social and material ties through child circulation and informal adoptions, indigenous peoples are better able to draw upon these kinship bonds to cope with their social and economic marginalisation.

When white-mestizo social workers, planners and religious leaders criticise indigenous women for 'renting' children, they are assuming the primacy of biological kinship and imposing a Western-based nuclear family structure. They are further perceiving the exchange of money and clothing purely from a Western capitalist perspective. However, I would suggest, this practice has more to do with the redistribution of wealth, reciprocity, and kinship—all of which remain important values in Ecuadorian indigenous societies (see Uzendoski, 2005). This practice also contributes to children's socialisation and provides them with skills needed to survive on the economic margins. Given limited options within Ecuador's social and racial hierarchies, Calhuasí's indigenous women have learned how to maximise their families' earnings by incorporating children's labour on the streets. Rather than an act of resistance, this is a practice that reworks

oppressive conditions in a way that takes advantage of social norms and Christian charity. It is an act of resilience that allows indigenous women to get by given few other options. Yet when social workers, planners and religious leaders point to women's 'deviant' parental practices and argue that they are falsely manipulating the sympathy of the public by 'renting' children, it becomes much easier to justify exclusionary policies and practices.

Conclusion

In Ecuador, begging is an activity that is allowing indigenous women and children to shore up their resources and move forward within the confines of a capitalist market economy and a racist social structure. In this paper, I have unravelled key rhetorics pertaining to indigenous beggars and revealed how they are shaped according to race, gender and age. Despite women's and children's life circumstances, urban planners, social workers, religious leaders, and the media portray them as 'lazy Indians' who 'prefer to sit and beg'. Children are often perceived to be on the streets due to bad mothering and manufactured necessity rather than actual poverty. Deviating from dominant understandings of 'proper' childhood, their very presence on the streets leads many to decry that they will inevitably become delinquents, criminals and drug addicts. Yet, within this rhetoric, attention is drawn away from problems associated with market economies that fail to redistribute wealth to the poor and rather focuses on the vices and alleged laziness of beggars themselves. Constructing beggars in this way thus justifies efforts to remove them from the streets.

By unravelling these rhetorics, the ways in which they become inserted into policy and practice become much more obvious. For instance, the DINAPEN incident mentioned at the beginning of this paper—the detention of more than 50 indigenous children—was premised upon a perceived need to protect innocent children from their 'bad mothers'. Yet taking young children away from their mothers traumatises the children rather than protects them. During this incident, little consideration was given to the conditions of poverty and unemployment that were driving women and children onto the streets to begin with. Newspaper articles that describe indigenous street vendors as 'out of control' and 'invading the streets' assume that these women are fundamentally out of place in the city. During the Miss Universe pageant, indigenous beggars were swept off the streets in an attempt to cleanse and sanitise the city of 'dirty Indians' and all others who tarnished the image of a clean Quito. In the aforementioned 'Don't buy in the streets!' campaign street vendors are equated with delinquents. The underlying assumption is that time spent in the streets turns individuals into criminals who prey upon unsuspecting customers.

Elsewhere I have argued that there has been a diffusion of neoliberal urban policies from the Global North to Ecuador in an attempt to project sanitised cityscapes (Swanson, 2007). Here, I would like to suggest that there has also been a diffusion of negative moralistic rhetorics surrounding beggars' lives, the origins of which stretch back to at least nineteenth century Britain. These negative moralistic rhetorics are now being used to inform neoliberal exclusionary policies and practices in order to sanitise Quito's streets of 'contaminated', indigenous bodies. Yet what is worrying is that there is no empirical evidence in Ecuador to substantiate these discriminatory claims. Rather, these rhetorics merely serve to justify exclusionary policies and practices while drawing attention away from the

pressing social issues that push indigenous women and children onto the streets to begin with.

In this paper, I have also critically assessed perspectives concerning child 'renting' in order to provide an alternative understanding of this practice. Indigenous women are often criticised for abiding by models of parenting and childhood that deviate from the Western norm. In this paper, I have pointed to how these criticisms fail to grasp the complexities of indigenous economies of caring. Child circulation is a long-standing practice in Andean society. It is tied to notions of reciprocity, redistribution of wealth, kinship and skill-building. However, when social workers, planners and religious leaders criticise Calhauseños for 'renting' children, they assume the primacy of biological kinship and point to mothers' deviant parental practices. In contrast, I suggest that Calhuaseños' approach to child circulation is a modern and resilient take on an age-old tradition.

Far from being passive victims, indigenous women and children actively engage with and rework the forces that affect their everyday lives. Given highly oppressive economic conditions created by a prolonged colonial history of racism and social exclusion, begging itself can be understood as an act of resilience. It is an entrepreneurial way for indigenous women and children to capitalise upon gendered and racialised readings of their bodies. Given few other options within Ecuador's social and racial hierarchies, begging is a way for them to pursue their educational aspirations and improve their material conditions. Yet the fact that begging is deemed a better option than available alternatives speaks to the continued oppression of indigenous peoples—an oppression that is both racialised and gendered.[11]

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the indigenous women and children who participated in this research. I would also like to thank Deborah Cowen, Leah Gibbs, Joe Hermer, Sharlene Mollett, Chris Philo, Sue Ruddick and three anonymous reviewers for very helpful comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this paper. Special thanks go to Linda Peake and to Deborah Dixon, in particular, for fantastic editorial assistance.

Notes

1. The community has a population of approximately 1,250 individuals divided among 255 families.
2. The sign states, 'When you buy in the streets, you put your safety in danger. When you pay delinquents, they see your money, your items of value, your car. For this reason, don't buy in the streets!'
3. I conducted all interviews in Spanish and all translations are mine. All names in this paper are pseudonyms. Funding for this research was provided by the International Development Research Council (IDRC) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).
4. White-mestizos are individuals who generally self-identify as white but are described within the nationalist ideology of *mestizaje* as mestizo. Mestizaje is understood as a process of racial and cultural mixing which involves the blending of Spanish, African and indigenous ancestry; yet this is not an equal mixture. Those with more Spanish ancestry are deemed more worthy than those without. Marisol de la Cadena (2000) describes mestizaje as a process wherein individuals are perceived to gradually evolve from 'primitive' Indianness into more 'civilised' states of being—states that eventually become incompatible with indigenous ways. In this view, the process of mestizaje is not so much about 'mixing' as it is about a progressive 'whitening' of the population—often referred to as the process of *blanqueamiento* (see also Bonnett, 2000).

5. Afro-Ecuadorians are also widely discriminated against in Ecuador but an analysis of this issue is beyond the scope of this paper. See de la Torre (2002b), Rahier (1998), Walmsley (2004) and Whitten (1974) for further analysis.
6. Many thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this insight.
7. This is with the exception of beggars from ethnic minority groups such as Gypsies/Travellers or Romas (see Gmelch, 1979; Helleiner, 2003).
8. For instance, individuals 65 years of age and above who worked outside of the formal sector (such as in agriculture or in street sales) are entitled to US $7.50/month through the Bono Solidario. Disabled individuals are also entitled to this amount. Considering that the average urban family currently needs approximately $450/month to meet basic food and shelter needs (INEC, 2006), this supplement is very low.
9. See also Weismantel (2001, pp. 154–159) for similar conclusions.
10. I recognise that Valentine's argument is based upon evidence in the Global North. However, due to high levels of domestic violence in Ecuador (see Pitkin & Bedoya, 1997), I believe this insight carries over.
11. Thanks to the same anonymous reviewer for the wording of this sentence.

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATION

'Malas madres' y 'niños delincuentes': desenmarañando la retórica anti-pedir limosnas en los Andes de Ecuador

RESUMEN En este papel examino las retóricas que circulan alrededor de las vidas de las mujeres y los niños indígenas jóvenes que piden en las calles de Quito, Ecuador. Enfoco particularmente en las retóricas que son producidos y reproducidos por los planificadores urbanos, los trabajadores sociales, los líderes religiosos y los medios de comunicación. Haciendo uso de entrevistas profundizadas, revelo cómo estos grupos imaginan regularmente las mujeres y los niños indígenas en términos de la explotación infantil/la delincuencia infantil, la manipulación falsa de compasiones públicas, la ignorancia, la pereza, y la mugre. A las mujeres y a los niños indígenas se les entiende fundamentalmente como 'fuera de lugar' en la ciudad. Desenmaraño esta retórica para llamar la atención a cómo la acción de pedir limosnas se distingue según género, raza y edad, y también para revelar cómo estas retóricas se insertan en políticas y prácticas exclusionarias. Además, y como contrapunto a tales retóricas, proporciono una comprensión alternativa de las mujeres y de los niños que mendigan desde las perspectivas de las mujeres y de los niños indígenas. Discuto que lejos de ser víctimas pasivas, las mujeres y los niños indígenas trabajan con y alrededor de condiciones opresivas y las movilizan para su propia ventaja.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Mendigos; indígenas; niños; sector informal; Ecuador