

## preface

The roots underlying the project that gave rise to this book—in a way perhaps befitting the subject matter—go back a long way. As a postdoctoral researcher doing fieldwork in Colombia in the mid-1980s, Peter Wade first encountered Eduardo Restrepo, who was an undergraduate at the time. The meeting was the beginning of a long series of encounters over the next few decades. Not long after, while doing his doctorate in the United Kingdom, Carlos López Beltrán got to know Peter Wade in Cambridge, via a mutual Mexican friend, Alfonso Martín del Campo. After a long hiatus, their acquaintance was renewed at a conference on populations of African origin held in Veracruz in 2008, at a time when López Beltrán, along with his colleague Francisco Vergara Silva, had already been writing about the Mexican genome project. In the meantime, Ricardo Ventura Santos had sent Wade a copy of the article he co-authored and published in *Critique of Anthropology* (2004) on race and genomics in Brazil. So when Wade began to tinker with the idea of a project on genomics and race in Latin America, the infrastructure of the collaborations was already in place, transnational in scope and crossing the disciplinary boundaries of social anthropology, cultural studies, the history and philosophy of science, and biological anthropology.

Luckily, our timing was right and the project met with favorable reactions from the Economic and Social Research Council, United Kingdom, which agreed to fund the research for eighteen months (grant RES-062-23-1914). The funding included salaries for three postdoctoral researchers, to be based at the University of Manchester (María Fernanda Olarte Sierra, Michael Kent, and Vivette García Deister), and three part-time research assistants, to be hired in each of the three Latin American countries (Adriana Díaz del Castillo, Mariana Rios Sandoval, and Verlan Valle Gaspar Neto). We also had money to fund a number of project workshops and we were very glad to have the Mexican biologist Francisco Vergara Silva as a constant companion in these meetings.

After an initial three months of preparation in Manchester, fieldwork was carried out in Latin America for nine months, mainly by the postdocs and, as it turned out, the local research assistants. This work focused on the geneticists and their laboratories and involved participant observation in the labs,

interviews, and analysis of written materials. As described in the appendix, methods varied a little between countries: the focus in Mexico on the national medical genetics institute, INMEGEN, allowed García Deister a particularly in-depth relationship with a small number of scientists and technicians there. In Colombia, the diversity of genomics research meant the net was spread a little wider by Olarte Sierra working closely with Díaz del Castillo, while in Brazil, Kent found himself traveling the length of the country to encompass some of the great variety of genomics research there. In all cases, and as a result of the ethnographic methods employed, our researchers ended up concentrating on a small number of labs and scientists, with a focus on the way these human populational genomics projects operated in practice, the categories and methods they used to proceed, the reasons they took the shape they did, and how their results circulated, including domains beyond the science labs.

The regular workshops, held every three months during fieldwork and once after it ended, were fundamental to the working of the project. One of the reviewers of the manuscript of this book was interested in how the transnational exchanges inside the project's research team influenced the ideas that appear here. In fact, the transnational composition of the team was less significant than the comparative dimensions of the data that were emerging. It was not as if each team member brought a specific national approach to understanding the issues. One might have thought that a concept such as race could be a bone of contention for scholars coming out of British, Dutch, Brazilian, Colombian, and Mexican academies, but, in fact, as scholars of Latin America—most of whom had had transnational training experiences—we operated pretty much with a common understanding of the concept and its vagaries in the Latin American context. More generative was the experience of seeing how some aspects of genomics, especially in more public modes, were inflected by the national contexts in which it operated: for example, the emphasis on regional variety in Colombia, the nationalist rhetoric at work in Mexican biomedicine, or the emphasis by some Brazilian geneticists on the nonexistence of biological race and the illegitimacy of race (biological or social) as a basis for any kind of public policy, such as affirmative action. Yet we were also struck by the variety within each country and by the similarities between them—the use of genetic data to reinforce the gendered narratives of the origins of the nation in the sexual encounter between European men and Amerindian or African women was a common thread, for example.

The different disciplinary perspectives that team members brought to bear was also a vital part of the workshops. As it happened, the genealogy of genetics as a discipline was of interest to various people, whether historians, social

anthropologists, biologists, or biological anthropologists by training. This historical perspective was a constant reminder of the dangers of presentism in studying contemporary genomics and of how much of what we were looking at, despite the new technologies being employed, had deep roots in the past. On the other hand, one aspect that had little effect on the internal dynamics of our research team was differing stances with regard to matters of politics and policy, such as the value of affirmative action in higher education in Brazil. Although some observers found it odd—or even suspect—to see people with different political views collaborating together, we found this relatively easy to negotiate inside the team.

The workshops all included open sessions to which other academics, students, the press, and the general public were invited, as a way of disseminating our research. In Latin America, these sessions were well attended. Included in the invitation were some of the geneticists with whom we were working. Relations with these scientists were potentially a thorny issue. We were interested in whether and how categories such as race entered into their work. Most of the scientists rejected race as a valid biological category and might regard any implication that race was somehow still at work in their research as erroneous and even offensive. Researchers like us who tried to reveal underlying processes of racialization could seem patronizing and arrogant, as if the scientists needed these researchers to show them things they were not aware of themselves. In some instances, it has proven a difficult path to tread in the analysis and writing stages and on a couple of occasions some geneticists reacted negatively to our arguments (or what they understood our arguments to imply). While intent on understanding the science in its own terms and context, we also argue that some assumptions that are built into the normal practice of genomics can reinscribe—in altered form—concepts and categories that look like race, especially to the nongeneticist. During the fieldwork with the geneticists, the fact that we took their projects and their practices seriously and spent time delving into them made it easier to establish a productive dialogue with them, as various chapters in this book demonstrate (see, for example, chapter 5; see also the exchange in Bortolini 2012; Kent and Santos 2012a, 2012b). Even when the scientists' reactions were negative there was a process of dialogue, which caused us to revise several passages in the book.

The second phase of the project is only marginally represented in this book. It began in August 2011 with eighteen months of funding from the Leverhulme Trust (grant RPG-044) and focused on “public engagement with genomic research and race in Latin America,” building on the first phase, but with a greater emphasis on how scientific knowledge about population genomics

circulates through scientific and nonscientific public spheres and how diverse publics engage with this knowledge. Some changes in personnel took place for this second phase, which is reflected in the participation in chapter 2 of this volume of Ernesto Schwartz-Marín (postdoctoral researcher for Colombia) and Roosbelinda Cárdenas (local research assistant for Colombia).

Finally, it is necessary to mention the publication of a Spanish-language version of this book (the text of which is not exactly the same, as some very minor revisions were done to the English-language version after the translation work had been completed—for which thanks to Sonia Serna). It has been important to our team to publish the results of our work in Latin America, and Carlos López Beltrán, Eduardo Restrepo, and Ricardo Ventura Santos all worked hard to create a copublishing collaboration between the Fondo de Cultura Económica and UAM Cuajimalpa (Mexico), Editorial Universidad del Cauca (Colombia), and Editora Fiocruz (Brazil). Vivette García Deister has played a leading role in coordinating the translation and editing of the Spanish-language book.