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**Global or Peripheral Middle Classes? A Decolonial Perspective on the Formation of ‘New Middle Classes’ in Ecuador**

*ABSTRACT* The article critically draws on the notion of a ‘global middle class’, presented by international development organisations as the alleged social core of a narrative which connects expectations of growth, redistribution and political stability. By refuting this narrative as regards its ideological operations, an alternative theoretical concept of the peripheral middle class in a broad sense is suggested in order to detect real material class antagonisms as well as still existing structures of coloniality in Ecuador. With an examination of qualitative interviews collected in the country in 2015, the initial thesis of a peripheral middle class acting as a barrage against more radical projects of social transformation is outlined in more detail.

*KEYWORDS* middle class, Ecuador, coloniality, transformation

## **1. Introduction**

Recent years have seen a continuous steady surge of a scientific discourse spearheaded by international development organisations on expanding ‘global middle classes’. These discourses are connected to a developmental narrative of sustained global growth, poverty reduction, and civic activism for democratic rights and a corruption-free government. “A strong middle class”, argues an OECD-paper on Latin American middle classes, “is not only good for economic growth per se, but can influence this economic development through its support for advisable political programmes and electoral platforms, in particular the sort of reasonably progressive social policies in education and labor rights that promote inclu-

sive growth” (OECD 2010: 17). With respect to Latin American ‘global middle classes’, Cárdenas, Kharas, and Henao conclude in their study: “[w]hen presented with a range of national priorities, the middle class overwhelmingly chooses economic growth over the alternatives. This is positive to the extent that is consistent with the growth agenda” (Cárdenas et al. 2011: 20). Noting a decline of the share of Latin American populations living below the level of absolute poverty of two dollars per day from 45 per cent in 1995 to 22 per cent in 2010, Ferreira et al. declare, in an extensive report crafted for the World Bank, that “the current situation in the region is (...) the result of a process of *social transformation* that began around 2003, in which upward social mobility took place at remarkable pace” [my emphasis](Ferreira et al. 2013: 3). Ecuador is named in this literature as a successful example of a country marked by such an upward social mobility, shifting significant numbers of people from poor to middle income groups without the risk of vulnerability or of falling back (Ferreira et al. 2013: 5; Pew Research Center 2015: 46).

This very term *social transformation* echoes the stakes of another debate, stemming not from the circles of development organisations, but from opposed political forces, organisations and intellectuals within the region of Latin America (and, of course, Latin Americanists from outside). Beyond the gushing rhetoric of counting the successful addition of new numbers to an apparently growing ‘global middle class’, for example in Ravallion’s account of 1.2 billion people joining the middle class between 1990 and 2005 (Ravallion 2009: 17), there rages a different deeply cleaved dispute. In this context, Ecuador has been one of the key subjects of conflicting arguments over the characterisation of the economic, social and political processes that have taken place on this continent during the past decade. Though apparently treating the same phenomenon, this debate is directed towards a quite different set of questions and, consequently, explanations. Ecuador was –and still is, compared to others – part of a so-called “progressive cycle” of left-leaning governments (Brand 2016a; 2016b), whose projects are said to be tied to a specific politico-economic structure, which Eduardo Gudynas labels “New Extractivism” (Gudynas 2011; 2012; 2013). This concept refers to a galvanisation of export-oriented economies based on natural resources and primary goods, which have dominated Latin America since colonial times, with the project of

social redistribution of wealth by an active, interventionist state. This new statehood is re-organised compared to its specific configuration during the preceding age of neoliberal adjustment. It takes control of a larger portion of extractive rents, and regulates and directs economic and social processes. However, as a central point of critique, New Extractivism is supposed to reproduce external dependencies with respect to the world market, as well as internal spatial and social hierarchies. A decisive popular electoral base for this project of progressive governments is seen in the support of upward-oriented social groups (Boris 2009; Boris 2012: 67ff). The successful political campaigns of Rafael Correa in Ecuador, who won three times in a row the office of presidency (2006, 2009 and 2013), and the parallel victories of his party, *Movimiento Alianza PAIS*, in parliamentary elections and elections for the constitutive assembly, adopting a new constitution in the year 2008, constitute an impressive case of this kind of political project. Here, in this debate, the argument concerns the question of the historical depth of the assumed transformation and its potential – or failure – to overcome long lasting social patterns of domination, inscribed in property relations and state apparatuses (Acosta 2013a: 13ff; Ospina Peralta 2013: 119ff).

In both accounts, the concept, or at least the vague notion, of middle classes plays a decisive role. In the economist surveys on rising ‘global middle classes’, they are portrayed as the backbone of a global capitalist success story that is connected with the assumption that growth-centred economic policies are able to resolve the problem of poverty. In the debate on the processes of transformation precipitated by progressive governments, they are discussed as the electoral base for a resurgent post-neoliberal redistributive state which fosters more or less universal social services, but at the same time increasingly steps into rising social conflicts with, mainly, indigenous social movements and left wing unions opposing the economic and ecological conditions and consequences of this new extractive state project (Polga-Hecimovich 2013: 137). In this text, affiliated with the second debate, I will start out from the assumption that the formation of ‘new middle classes’ and their connections to the progressive government of Rafael Correa (and Lenín Moreno, being his successor as candidate of *Alianza PAIS*, who scarcely managed to win the recent presidential elections of this year, since Correa himself could not run any more, for

constitutional reasons) constitutes an obstacle to more far-reaching transformative projects represented by social movement sectors. This does not mean denying the achievements of the so-called *Revolución Ciudadana* ('Citizen Revolution'), the political project of Correa, in the sectors of social security, health and education, which will be discussed later on. Nor does it mean denouncing the hopes and aspirations of those Ecuadorians who long for more equal and less exploitative social conditions after the destructive years of neoliberalism and its damaging effects of informal labour, rising poverty and inequality (Portes/Hoffman 2003). The traces of this period – as I will try to show – still run through the lives of many people in this country, leaving many wounds, burdens, and hardships. However, there remains the question of whether what has been achieved in specific economic, political and ideological struggles, constituting these new middle classes and a specific form of government operating on the basis of their demands and desires, is able to establish a sustainable break with the underlying causal mechanisms that produce such hardships and burdens. I suggest here that it does not, but rather forms a blockade to such a path. Several sub-questions are connected to this frame: Is there a useful concept of the middle class? If so, do middle classes exist in Ecuador? Finally, coming back to the initial assumption of a middle class barrier, what role do they play in processes of social and state transformation? In this regard, I will show, in a first section, that it is indispensable to break with a completely ideological notion of 'global middle classes', which essentially do not exist except in the paperwork of developmental organisations. In a second section, I will come back to the context of progressive governments and the debate circling around the question of their record. In a third section, I will try to theoretically develop an alternative concept of the middle class, which is more devoted to its real social materialities, drawing on Marxist, decolonial and postcolonial approaches in order to take into account complex matrixes of historical power relations. Finally, I will close with an empirically informed look at biographies of supposed members of the new middle classes, the bases of which are 16 biographical interviews collected in 2015 at one of the then newly founded state universities. These biographical data will create the context for some final reflections on the specific forms of state and government which operate in correspondence with this class constellation.

## 2. The spectre of 'global middle classes'

Speaking about the notion of a 'global middle class', one is tempted to paraphrase Marx and his famous introduction to the Communist Manifesto: A spectre is haunting the world of development research - the spectre of 'global middle classes'. This marks the inability of this kind of quantitative research to capture relevant information about social classes and their formational processes<sup>1</sup>. Following Althusser's considerations on the (pre-) conditions of a theoretical practice (Althusser 2011: 228ff), deconstructing these ideological accounts of 'middle classes' will serve as a resource to arrive, eventually, at a non-ideological concept of middle classes.

Generally, the economic literature concerned with doing research on middle classes measures the distribution of households or individuals linked to certain levels of income, and then clusters these to very differently defined statistical categories, which are tagged with the label middle classes. Once brought into the world of quantitative commensurability, these income categories are related to other indices in the data set, thus drawing conclusions, for example on 'middle class values, education, careers, occupational patterns and so on. A key element of these surveys is the tacit assumption that classes are some sort of statistical containers, in and out of which individuals – or households – move according to growth rates and government policies of redistribution. For this reason, a specific significance is always assigned to the exact range of middle class definitions, which is constituted by the lower and upper thresholds of income hierarchies. Those thresholds are the corner stones of selecting specific levels of income, which allegedly are able to represent the range of a globally comparable middle class'. This is seen as a concept which "truly identifies middle class' living standards" (Cárdenas et al. 2011: 4). Clearly, these attempts at measurement are an impossible and contradictory task. Basically, there are two different approaches to this problem. A first one uses relative measures like certain percentages of the respective national median income or certain percentiles of population as an upper and lower boundary. In a quite influential and often quoted study in this field of research, Easterly (2001) investigated the validity of a so-called middle class consensus, defined as a national situation where there are neither huge inequalities nor significant ethnic differences. In such harmo-

nious societies, according to his conclusions, there can be found significantly higher levels of income and growth, less political instability and a “more ‘modern’ sectoral structure” (ibid: 22). As thresholds he uses the 20<sup>th</sup> and 80<sup>th</sup> income percentile in each country. The OECD survey on middle classes in Latin America (2010) alternatively defines the range between 50 per cent and 150 per cent of the national median household income. These relative measures are easy to deal with in comparative studies. However, as Kapsos and Bourmpoula note (2013: 3), this could lead to the absurd result that, in so-called least developed countries, where vast majorities of people live below the absolute poverty line, extremely poor households or individuals are counted as being part of the ‘global middle class; this picture especially holds true in cases of several African and Asian countries (Pew Research Center 2015: 48f).

A second approach uses absolute boundaries of income in order to define what global middle classes are. Interestingly, both approaches, the absolute and the relative one, claim a better comparability for their own method (OECD 2011: 17; Kapsos/Bourmpoula 2013: 3; Ferreira et al. 2013: 31). The delicate question with this approach is evidently to find a reasonable range of boundaries to contain a global scope of middle classes, since the authors of these studies recognise the sharp contrast between income levels in ‘developing’ and ‘developed’ countries, too (Kapsos/Bourmpoula 2013: 2). As Cárdenas et al. concede, the boundaries depend on the purpose of the research. Kharas (2010: 10ff) and Cárdenas et al. (2011: 5), who very tellingly look for the potential of Asian consumers to step in for the weakening consumer demand in the USA, discard a boundary close to the absolute poverty line of two US Dollars per day, and instead set the limits between 10 and 100 US Dollars, thus excluding the very rich and the very poor. They construct this range by drawing on the national poverty lines of Italy and Portugal for the lower threshold and twice the median income of Luxembourg for the upper one. Ferreira et al. (2013: 35f) and Birdsall (2012: 4f) use a threshold between 10 and 50 US Dollars per day to identify a middle class secured from falling back under the poverty line. Thus, they exclude ‘vulnerable’ groups who face the danger of falling back under the level of absolute poverty. Kapsos and Bourmpoula (2013) and Ravallion (2009) both operationalise the problem of different income levels in ‘developing’ and ‘developed’ countries by constructing a ‘devel-

oping' and a 'developed' middle class. In the case of Ravallion, the 'developing middle class ranges from 2 US Dollars per day (the national poverty lines of many 'developing' countries) to 13 US Dollars per day (the US poverty line then), and in the case of Kapsos and Bourminpoula between 4 US Dollars and 13 US Dollars. It should be already clear by now, looking at these struggles at definition, that the major problem of establishing a middle class range of incomes here is the gap between the incomes of averagely rich and averagely poor countries. Still operating within a positivist quantitative research paradigm, Milanovic and Yitzhaki (2006) decompose national Gini coefficients for a breakdown of an overall 'World'-Gini by recipient. They come to the conclusion that inequality within the framework of the classical developmental division between the 'First', 'Second', and 'Third' World still explains roughly 70 per cent of world inequality, as 76 per cent of the world population lives in poor countries. Given these extremely high global inequalities between countries, "it is simply numerically impossible to have a middle class" (ibid: 106). Since a vast array of the world population (separated in deciles and ordered globally according to their income) still gathers around or slightly above the poverty line, while the range between the 81<sup>st</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> decile is overwhelmingly filled by populations of "mature economies" (Lakner/Milanovic 2015: 21), Lakner and Milanovic speak – a little ironically – of a "global median class" (ibid: 23).

However, this critique is just a first step in order to move out of an ideological scientific practice of imagining 'global middle classes'. To get to a realist picture of middle classes, it is necessary to pin down how the ideological core of these conceptions operates. Adamovsky (2013) convincingly rejects empiricist middle class concepts as abstract static constructions, which are unable to detect the historically concrete existence of classes. They are built on a "demonstrational effect" (ibid: 42ff), which consists in summing up gradual income and consumption levels to arbitrary quantitative patterns called classes, which then provide the basis for statistical correlations showing apparently distinguishable (middle) class specificities. If these patterns are dismantled, however, such distinguishable effects dissolve again into a continuum of gradual differences, lacking any specifics. Rather, the concept of middle classes constitutes an ideological space in order to (self)-identify morally superior members of society who move between the extremes in a decent, moderate way, thus representing



the supposed 'motor' of an imagined process of civilisation and modernity. This imagination is rooted in the 18th century debates of Enlightenment scholars, especially in the work of Diderot, who transfers 'natural' scientific organicist systems of classification to the social sphere, thus developing in the context of an argument about bad and good forms of luxury the idea of an "intermediate estate" as a civilising force (Adamovsky 2005: 307ff). This concept of a middle estate or class always acted ideologically as a flexible border line in order to mark "morally dangerous" classes and morally superior ones, thereby drawing the latter into alliances with dominating classes. Latin American history in particular shows that middle classes are not immune to supporting anti-democratic regimes (Franco/León 2010: 64). Looking at the later configurations of this ideological practice, it becomes clear that the concept of middle class in this context does not serve as a specific intervention in the debate about classes, but as an effort to obscure the concept of classes as antagonistic social groups altogether, replacing it with a category potentially fitting the ideal of a homogenous population. Modernisation theory in the late 1950s and early 1960s was concerned with the problem of how to curb social conflict in general, in order to establish stable societies following the route of Western-style development in the bipolar scenario of the Cold War. Lipset (1959) discerns several specific social requisites for stable democracies, particularly among them economic development. The integration into a homogenous national culture could – in his eyes – only be reached by the political creation of a "well-to-do lower class": "increased income, greater economic security, and higher education, permit those in this status to develop longer time perspectives and more complex and gradualist views of politics" (Lipset 1959: 83). This was expected to immunise these groups against the demagogues of class struggle. Shifting stratification to the form of "a diamond with a growing middle class", the latter "plays a mitigating role in moderating conflict since it is able to reward moderate and democratic parties and penalize extremist groups" (ibid.). With regard to Germany's post-World War context, Helmut Schelsky argued in a very similar way, rejecting the concept of class for that of a so-called "nivellierte Mittelstandsgesellschaft" (a levelled middle estate society) which is characterised by a relatively unified style of life, meaning mass consumption (Schelsky 1965: 332). Such accounts of middle classes are phantasmal, and represent an ideolog-

ical norm of supposedly advanced societies which – ignorant to questions of power or domination – pray the gospel of catching-up by adjusting to its standards. However, a different concept of middle classes is needed, one that refers to the structural mechanisms which forge classes as antagonistic forces of a material reality. Before we get there, some remarks on current debates on progressive governments in general, as well as specifically in Ecuador, will provide a necessary context.

### **3. The debate on progressive government policies in Ecuador**

As Klein and Wahl make clear with their notion of “double transformation” (Klein/Wahl 2015), which implies a mutual interlocking of moderate and radical tendencies of social and political projects of transformation in Ecuador, there is not just a single current involved in this controversially discussed process, but several ones. This does not hold only for the different progressive governments, which came to power in many Latin American countries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and which cannot be dichotomously separated in an oversimplified picture of “two lefts” (Petkoff 2005), one moderate and realistic and the other utopian. There are several different currents, depending on the radicalness of their emancipatory (or, in the eye of the beholder, non-emancipatory) visions and practices, thus constituting a complicated field of interaction between social movements, whose protests formed an essential element in the de-legitimation of neoliberal political projects, and leftist governments (Ramírez Gallegos 2006). Reflections on the positive and negative effects of these governments shape the core of a harsh contestation. On the one hand, a critical appraisal of the Ecuadorian left wing government joins the line of arguments developed by Gudynas (see above), clinging onto the contested concept of “buen vivir” (i.e. “good life”) as its measure of judgement (Walsh 2010; Acosta 2011; Gudynas/Acosta 2011; Houtard 2011: 62; Acosta 2013b; Bretón Solo de Zaldívar 2013). This concept was borrowed from indigenous communities and introduced as an organising principle in the new Ecuadorian constitution of 2008, determining the preamble, individual and collective “rights of the good life” (Article 10ff), the economic regime (Article 275ff) and even the rights of nature (Article 71ff). This current turns on the absence of struc-

tural breaches with the material foundations of an extractivist matrix of capitalist accumulation and the missed opportunities to radically change the historically established unequal property relations in the country, for example in the agrarian sector (Ponce/Acosta 2010; Ospina Peralta 2012; Acosta 2013b; Muñoz Jaramillo 2013; Dávalos 2013; Meschkat 2015).

On the other hand, there are warnings against an oversimplification of the real achievements in the sectors of social security, health and education initiated by the “Citizen Revolution” (Boris 2015), the central political project of the government of Rafael Correa. The record of changes in important sectors of government policies compared with the neoliberal period beforehand is, without any doubt, impressive. Public social expenditures moved from 4.8 per cent in 2006 to 8.6 per cent in 2015.<sup>2</sup> Given the positive growth rates of GDP at constant prices between 2006 and 2014 (except for the year of global economic crisis in 2009), which culminated at a height of 7.9 per cent in 2011, the rising public expenditures amount to a significant extension of social welfare. Most of this growth did not result from the oil sector, but from construction and aquaculture (Polga-Hecimovich 2013: 138) and was accompanied by rising levels of real wages (Ponce/Acosta 2010: 10) and a falling unemployment rate, dropping from 7.4 per cent in 2007 to 4.7 per cent in 2013.<sup>3</sup> Due to the present economic downturn, however, unemployment rates are creeping up again, to 5.4 per cent in 2015, and one should not disregard the still large informal sector of the economy, which does not show up in these figures.

Increasing state activities were possible because of two major changes: in the first place, the rise in the government share of petroleum rents from 13 to 87 per cent due to a new law regulating the extraction of hydrocarbons (Becker 2013: 87). This happened in the context of favourable terms of trade up to 2014<sup>4</sup>, especially as a result of rising international prices for crude oil (Polga-Hecimovich 2013: 137). Although oil rents still constitute a major source of government revenues (ibid: 139), a second factor contributed significantly to an enlarged public space of manoeuvring, namely, the imposition of more progressive elements in the system of direct taxes, a more efficient fiscal collection, and the imposition of new taxes, for example on banking profits in 2013 (Ponce/Acosta: 2010: 9; Minteguiaga 2012: 53; Becker 2013: 48). Not only was the extension of the social welfare system increased, as can be seen from rising numbers of people covered

(Minteguiaga/Ubasart-González 2014: 86), but also was its quality. This corresponds to the government discourse of representing exclusively the common good, following a universalistic vocation to provide social security against so-called “poderes facticos”, particular interests, which have to be brought down in order to release the beneficial effects of government policies (Minteguiaga 2012: 52). In public education, barriers of access have been lifted and school books have been distributed free of charge, as well as school uniforms and school meals. Additionally, the access to academic education was improved by abolishing student fees and introducing scholarships (ibid: 53). In the health sector, cost-free medical check-ups, free medication and mobile care were introduced, thus fostering the access of social groups who were excluded until then. These policies resulted in a significantly lowered infant mortality rate, decreasing from 23.1 per thousand life births in 2007 to 18.4 in 2015, and a rising net enrolment rate in secondary education from 56.1 per cent in 2007 to 85.4 per cent in 2015.<sup>5</sup> Also extended in scope (with a coverage of 95 per cent of households below the poverty line) and in benefits was the *Bono de Desarrollo Humano*, a conditional cash transfer programme which originally pooled together several pre-existing programmes established in the face of the deep economic and currency crisis in 1999, which led to the official dollarisation of the country and destroyed many small accounts. (Minteguiaga 2012: 50).

However, there are three points which hint at severe contradictions in this apparently positive record. First, there are specific groups, Afro-Ecuadorians and *Indigenas*, whose poverty rates or rates of indigence still lie significantly above the average population. The indigenous rate of indigence even increased after Correa took office (Ponce/Acosta 2010). The overall national poverty line dropped between 2007 and 2014 from 38.8 per cent to 31 per cent, but at a much slower pace than in the years before Correa.<sup>6</sup> As I will show in the following theoretical section, these specific vulnerabilities and differences are no coincidence. Secondly, a gender-specific “defamiliarization”, which entails an institutionalised compensation of unpaid female care-labour, did not take a prominent place in the course of the welfare reforms (Minteguiaga/Ubasart-González 2014: 89ff). Thirdly, the new ‘social pact’ as a whole has feet of clay, despite higher tax revenues and state rents. Its funding increasingly tends to rest on oil-for-cash loans from China, which gives credits to be paid in future extractive revenues.

The falling international prices for oil endanger this model with regard to growing deficits and external debt.<sup>7</sup> Also, the structure of exports has not changed significantly. In 2015 crude oil still accounted for 36 per cent of all exports, bananas for 16 per cent and seafood for 13 per cent<sup>8</sup>. Gudynas presently speaks of an exhaustion of the “compensatory state” (Gudynas 2016).

On the level of political representation, Correa and his electoral party, Alianza PAIS, assembled a significant part of the voters on a national scale as a result of social policies and social uplifting, thus securing victories not only in presidential but also parliamentary elections. This owed more to the impact of central government policies and campaigns than to an actual surmounting of regional divisions on political levels below the national one (Polga-Hecimovich 2014). Of course, this ostensible clearing of front lines in party politics is again part and parcel of conflictive perspectives. For one side there is a critique directed against the hierarchical structures and pressures of a highly centralised party (Meschkat 2015: 72ff), whose elites are entrenched in bureaucratic positions of government and operate on the basis of their self-perception as representatives of the general public interest, reclaimed after – in the words of Correa at the beginning of his presidential turn – “the long and dark night of neoliberalism”. Against such a notion of institutionalised public good, all forms of social movements’ dissent and opposition must appear as illegitimate particularisms, even if they relate to the cause of overcoming structural exclusions which date back to colonial times. Consequently, instead of opening social and political spaces for social movements, which would correspond to the guarantees of self-rule and autonomy granted to the indigenous collectives in the constitution (Ortiz-T 2010; 2014), Correa basically sought to split and replace strong national social movements such as CONAIE (*Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador*), i. e. the National Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, by co-opting smaller and less radical movements to the government’s agenda (Becker 2013: 50ff).

For the other side, this clearing of frontlines is turned into a political metaphor with respect to an ongoing struggle between left-wing revolutions and right-wing imperialist counter-revolutions, a continental confrontation which, according to long standing Marxist intellectual Atilio Borón (2017), culminated in the “battle of Stalingrad” in the recent presidential elections of this year in Ecuador, where Correa could

no longer compete, for constitutional reasons, and the alternative candidate of Alianza PAIS, Lenin Moreno, achieved a scarce victory only in the second round. If Correa's and the party's electoral base is actually built on "urban classes" distant from working class movements, as Becker maintains (Becker 2013: 51), what then really constitutes middle classes in Ecuador? Are they forming a barrier to more radical transformations associated with the still-defiant movement sector? The first question shall be answered in the next section, the second in the last one.

#### **4. A decolonial concept of middle class**

Having previously discarded ideological notions and constructions of 'global middle classes', what alternative theoretical perspective can be taken up to make visible a notion of middle classes in a more realist way? To start with, it is necessary to go back to Marx and try again, perhaps more carefully, to read into what he conceives of classes. Marx once wrote in a letter to a friend that "no credit is due to me for discovering the existence of classes in modern society or the struggle between them" (Marx 1852). Taking over the concept from bourgeois economists, it becomes central to his perspective of how societies are produced and reproduced. However, due to this process, some flaws and blank spots are also perpetuated. Recognizing these flaws helps us to understand why a reformulation – taking Marx beyond Marx (Balibar 1988: 206) – is necessary. Instead of giving up the concept of class and thus of a material notion of society, I suggest filling these blank spaces by drawing on postcolonial and decolonial theories, thus opening Marxist concepts of social classes to a critique from the global 'South'. This cannot be done by Marxist theories alone, since they too operate along a colonially drawn "abyssal" epistemic line of Eurocentrism (Santos 2007; 2014: 14), in which social realities of the 'South', i.e. from the peripheries, are either rendered invisible or are merely conceived of as an aberration of European historical standards. This holds for Marx's class analysis too, which mainly operates within the horizon of occidental experiences.

Famously, Marx and Engels wrote at the beginning of the Communist Manifesto: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of

class struggles” (Marx/Engels 1848). Reading this quotation carefully with a view to its inherent assumptions, it primarily / suggests that classes are real forces interacting and struggling with each other within specific real practices. They are not just academic definitions used in order to classify a population according to certain criteria. History is, contrary to Hegelian notions, a causal effect of these complex struggles. So the central question here is the real formation of (middle) classes (Dörre 2003: 23): how and by which processes and social mechanisms are these real social forces formed or formed anew? Implied in this short quotation there are several points that rely to the specifically Marxist concept of classes, which can be summed up to three aspects in the background of the literature (Dörre 2003: 20; Burzan 2007: 17f; Groß 2008: 19f; Vester 2008; Demirović 2009: 76f). First, there is the point that classes are structurally bound by different economic positions, which are conflictive. Secondly, these positions are generated within a set of historically concrete exploitative social relations that are tied to the fundamental ways in which human labour is deployed in order to produce material goods in a metabolic process with nature and within a set of certain practices which secure the reproduction of these relations of production. In capitalism, this form of exploitation is conditioned by the possession or dispossession of the means of production and the appropriation of surplus from those bereaved of all means to sustain themselves, who have nothing left than to offer their labour power. Thirdly, class formation is consequently to be understood as a relational process, as classes exist only vis-à-vis other classes in the form of antagonistic struggles.

Obviously, there are two elements working in this concept, a structural one connected to the capital-labour relation and the historically concrete aspect of practical struggles. The question now is, if there is an abstract logic of a capital-labour relation determining classes as real historical forces in capitalism in an economically objective, ‘pure’ sense, or must they be analysed as ensembles of an array of several practices and thus, allow for contingencies? Are they universally the same wherever the capitalist mode of production is present? If so, why then did Brazilian sociologist Florestan Fernandes demand, in the course of an often referred-to seminar on Latin American social classes in Mérida, that concepts of class formation have to be adapted to Latin American realities in order to

make sense (Fernandes 1973: 192)? I want to argue that it is necessary to refrain from “mechanical” (Vester 2008: 741) notions of class formation, where pre-given economic classes have to be enacted politically by mobilisation and the raising of consciousness about their ‘factual’ economic interests, thus creating a homogenous historical class subject identical with its economic determination. To conceive of classes as real historical forces, one has to start with the insight that classes do not really exist in hyper-historical spaces of economic purity, just to be animated thereafter with political life. This is a Zombie theory of class formation. Rather, as put forward by several authors (Poulantzas 1973: 49; Balibar 1988: 210; Quijano 2014: 290f; Pühretmayer 2017: 111), classes are formed and have an existence only in the class struggles; that is in concrete social conflicts, within a complex and heterogeneous set of differing practices. This does not rule out the relevance of structural aspects, but such aspects have to be understood differently, as historical limitations of the past with a view to present struggles. For Balibar, reflecting on the uses of the (economic) term of working class and the (political) term of the proletariat, Marx short-circuited these two parallel concepts and thus questioned the bourgeois imagination of a complete separation between the economic and the political, maintaining that class struggles always consisted of both aspects together. However, he was not fully able to solve the question of the interaction between them, lacking an idea of ideological practice being operative in class struggle as a constitutive element of class formation (Balibar 1994). Thus, a class formation is never fully closed in itself in the sense of pure’ relations; it is, rather, an open concept. For Poulantzas in particular, these ideological (and political) practices are constitutive mechanisms of class formation. While classes are, in his eyes, still inevitably shaped by their place in the process of producing surplus-value and the struggles linked to these positions, there are political and ideological relations operating in this process, which are relevant for class formation in connection to the relations of production and a specific social division of (intellectual and manual) labour (Poulantzas 1973: 31ff). Their effects, for example as forms of political organisation, struggle, and relations to the state, do not only provoke a differentiation within the working class, but are of specific importance in identifying segments of a middle class (or in his terms, of a “petty bourgeoisie”). One of these segments, next to a traditional



petty bourgeoisie of craftsmen and small property holders, is the “new petty bourgeoisie” (ibid: 37) consisting of non-productive workers (since they do not take part in the production of surplus value), working for example as civil servants in various state apparatuses, who are also constituted as a class by certain political and ideological characteristics: “Individualism, attraction to the status quo and fear of revolution, the myth of social advancement, belief in the neutral State above classes, a tendency to support strong States and Bonapartist regimes, revolts taking the form of jacqueries” (Poulantzas 1973: 37f). I presume that this is the segment of the ‘middle class’ which is subject to the empirical part of this investigation (see below). However, it is the segment of a specifically peripheral middle class, whose traits are connected to a set of social relations of domination, which Poulantzas did not systematically take into account himself.

Following the notion of class formation as a heterogeneous terrain of different practices, class can be understood as an effect of various different practices, not just economic ones. It is this notion which Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano terms “structural heterogeneity”. It allows for reading Latin American class formation not just as if it were European, with a dominating feature of wage labour, but instead as a very complex field of economic practices of various, co-existing modes of production which inter-relate with racist classifications (Quijano 1989: 44ff). Just like Stuart Hall (1989; 1994; 2004), who theorised this concurrence of different relations of domination on a structural level as an effect beyond the origins of each of these relations, thus excluding any guarantees that a class simply appears at an economically pre-given position, Quijano uses the concept of “articulation” to make these complex effects visible. He rejects any attempt to reduce this concept to a mere peculiar “provincialism” emerging in the periphery. Rather, he considers this notion of articulated mechanisms of class, racist domination and other practices as an accurate concept of universal or global totality, which is able to weigh class formations beyond an occidental reductionism in capitalist centres (ibid: 33). This heterogeneous totality consists therefore of several practices, which each work and operate in a different rhythm and with a relative autonomy to each other. Practices and totality are not related in form of an expression of the whole in each single part, but as a discontinuous ensemble, whose structure of dominance emerges as an effect from the

specific interplay of its elements (Quijano 2014: 296). Quijano finds a structurally and historically more precise term for this notion: “coloniality of power” (Quijano 2000). This term refers to a specific global pattern of articulated relations of domination, which was formed with the European conquest of America, constituting an ensemble of domination, in which European modernity and Latin American coloniality are historically produced as two different poles of a global totality of power relations. This perspective destroys the myth of modernity as an auto-generated, essentially European phenomenon (Dussel 2000). Coloniality, which is even after formal decolonisation the present global pattern of domination, consists basically of the specific articulation of racist classifications with a regime of forms of labour, which, consequently, are structured in a racialised manner. Whereas wage labour was predominantly assigned to ‘whites’<sup>10</sup>, other forms of labour were assigned to people who were classified as being ‘racially’ inferior: Africans working as slaves and indigenous people assigned to regimes of forced labour, which survived in Ecuador well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All pre-existing forms of labour were reshaped in a new manner in the process of colonization, since they were all subsumed to the control of capital and a world market controlled by European forces. Therefore, Quijano conceptualises class formations beyond the national scope of analysis, on the level of an international or global division of labour and international relations of exploitation and over-exploitation (Quijano 2014: 320ff) What is more, there is an epistemological level too, since this configuration of modernity/coloniality was connected to the rise of a specific modern rationality (Quijano 2007). As a consequence of the violent encounter between European colonisers and non-European colonised, this new rationality emerged, fit for Europeans to manoeuvre in the world of capitalist coloniality, resting on a rigid separation between mind and body as well as subject and object. This rationality delegitimises and devaluates all colonised forms of knowledge as ‘savage’ or ‘superstitious’. Although gender is a (quite subsidiary) issue in Quijano’s theory of articulated relations of domination, feminist theorists like María Lugones rejected Quijano’s notion of a biological substance of sexuality as the basis for social gender ascriptions, thus turning precisely the heterosexual normativity of biological sexualities into a fully-fledged analytical dimension of coloniality, as a norm socially imposed by colo-

nial rule and operating at the verge of a racist separation between a 'white' heterosexual humanity and a 'non-white' subhumanity, diverging from this norm (Lugones 2007).

Class formations, thus, cannot be understood simply 'economically'. Processes which might be interpreted as entailing the 'proletarianization' of indigenous people in the first half of the 20th century by Eurocentric perspectives are in fact complex and discontinuous. Members of indigenous communities are gradually, partially, sometimes just temporarily drawn into wage labour, but this tendency of semi-proletarianisation is articulated with the production of subsistence work (decreasing in its importance) and agrarian small-holding, merchandised craftwork and a parallel transformation of haciendas into capitalist agrarian enterprises (Montoya/Keck 1982). Moreover, these dynamics towards hybrid forms of wage labour are not only connected to internal migration and a switching of racialised categories from 'indio' to 'cholo', thus marking a decoupling from indigenous cultural practices (Ibarra 1992), but also to a switching of patriarchal regimes of masculine control over female labour power, whose submission in the household production (while often working in wage relations as well) secures the general conditions of family, and especially male, reproduction (Mallon 1986). The same notion of complexity holds for the terms 'mestizo' and 'mestiza'. As with the other classifications mentioned above ('indio', 'cholo'), this concept was part of a colonially erected racialised social pyramid and signified a social group between the strictly separated spheres of the 'white' colonial rulers (criollos) and the tributary indigenous population, secured for example by prohibitions of marriage and dressing rules (Wade 2008). After the founding of independent creole states and the fall of the tribute system, the terms 'mestizo' and 'mestizaje' operated – as a part of a matrix of structural coloniality (Walsh 2009) – at the centre of state ideologies aiming at the construction of homogenised national identities, under the surface of which racialised classifications lingered on, especially in the case of Afro-Ecuadorians and indigenous people, who were both excluded from citizenship, but also as tacit cultural-racist differentiations between 'white mestizos' and 'non-white mestizos' (Wade 2008; de la Cadena 2001; Roitman/Oviedo 2016). Indigenous struggles since the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been directed against this exclusive creole state project in a long-term "revolution in stages" (Coronel 2011).

Therefore, middle classes in Ecuador are not simply “global”, but, rather, due to the structure of modernity/coloniality, “peripheral”, because they are formed in the historical context of colonially articulated societies of the colonisers and the colonised, whose superimposed effects lead to a complex and heterogeneous configuration of class structures, colonial and racist domination, and cultural hierarchies, designated by Pablo González Casanova as “internal colonialism” (González Casanova 2006 [1969]). A realist analysis has to take into account these specific articulated relations of exploitation and domination, paying attention especially to the modifications in concrete (racist, labour-related, political, and other ideological) practices. Thus, it is necessary not only to look at general ideological and political traits of petty bourgeoisies mentioned by Poulantzas (see above), but also to changes in racialised classifications, sexual and gender-related subjectivities, peripheral forms of labour, international migration across the lines of the division of labour, relations to a peripheral state, and changes in epistemic perspectives and rationalities, e.g. appreciations of certain forms of colonised knowledge. Hence, an assessment of the role of these classes in the processes of transformation in Ecuador has to be focused on the question of whether, alongside the economic positions and struggles, these specifically peripheral classifications, ideologies, political practices etc. remain the same, just shift along an existing axis of domination, or are breached in the matrix of modernity/coloniality. This will be the task of the final section.

## **5. New middle classes in Ecuador and the new Development state**

This last section will deal with two questions. First, how are new formations of middle class in Ecuador shaped as a result of specific peripheral relations in a global pattern of capitalist modernity/coloniality? Do they pose a breach of capitalist coloniality or do they persevere its effects? Secondly, to what specific form of state and mode of government are they tied? The empirical data presented here were produced during a stay in Ecuador in March and April 2015 and consist of 16 Interviews (each between 45 and 130 minutes) with students at the Universidad Nacional de Educación (UNAE) near Azogues, one of four ‘emblematic’, i.e. flag-

ship, universities. It was opened in 2014 as part of a government initiative to reform academic education. Its mission, as described by the government, aims at the training of teachers for primary and secondary level education as an “instrument for equity and development”.<sup>11</sup> The university is based in the province of Cañar in the Southern Andes of Ecuador, which is marked by a high percentage of indigenous population, high rates of migration, low levels of education, and rates of illiteracy significantly above the national average (Vásquez Arreaga 2014: 54ff). Its spatial setting is itself a clear expression of the intense conflict over the issue of education that runs between the government and indigenous social movements, especially as regards intercultural and bilingual education, which are pushed by indigenous communities as part of a decolonial political agenda. While the government claims to universalise the constitutionally granted principles of bilingual education through its effort to improve the qualification of teachers (concentrating their training in the UNAE) and to set up a universal basic education in the so-called *escuelas de milenio* (Rodríguez Cruz 2015: 143), critics point out that this move towards educational and academic reform actually represents an attempt at recolonisation oriented towards the hegemonic standards of occidental knowledge and at marginalising indigenous languages, cultures and technologies according to a hidden agenda of “blanqueamiento” (i.e. whitening) and state sponsored cultural mestizaje (Oviedo 2013; Rodríguez Cruz 2015: 144). Such state practices run contrary to critical notions of interculturality, which seek an “epistemic insurgency” (Walsh 2008) against the devaluation of indigenous cultural practices. Studying at the UNAE is assisted with a basic income paid by the government. This site was chosen because I expected to find there a crossing of several methodologically and theoretically relevant aspects of middle class formation (ideology of ascendancy, significantly increasing government expenditure on education, limited personal economic means, people from different regions). The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way, mixing approaches of narrative and problem-centred interview strategies (Schütze 1976; 1983; Rosenthal 1995; 2005; Witzel 2000; Rosenthal/ Fischer-Rosenthal 2003).

Analytically, I drew on the concept of the inter-discourse (Link 2011; 2013), which seeks to combine a ‘horizontal’ Foucauldian analysis of power-knowledge with the ‘vertical’ analysis of effects of class structures, which

are to be understood in the theoretically developed broad sense. Basically, on the (Foucauldian) horizontal level, elaborated (special) discourses are differentiated from common (elementary) ones. On the (Marxist) vertical level, hegemonic aspects are differentiated from counterhegemonic aspects, although they cannot be simply derived from or ascribed to certain class positions, but are usually, especially in dominated classes, intersecting. Each concrete discourse position is an effect of these two operations. Due to the lack of space, I will concentrate here on the fundamental findings.

The first, most powerful hegemonic complex of discourse formations produced in the interviews is related to the notions of modernisation and development. This is a very broad elementary discourse, which deals with questions and utterances of advancement, proceeding, and improvement on the basis of an imagined lagging behind condition that has to be brought forward. It works on two different levels, which are connected to each other: the shape of the national society or country as a whole, and the shape of one's own or of third person's personalities. This two-fold elementary discourse is related to an elaborated, specialised discourse, which operates in the scientific field of pedagogic sciences. This discourse is equally directed to a clear gap between a deficient actual state of affairs, and an expected future condition to be improved and completely renovated by state or government initiatives. Here is a quotation from the interview with Gloria<sup>12</sup>. She reflects a period in her life when she had to give up studying architecture for financial reasons: "So at this point I said: no, I have to look for a different way. And that was the time this university (note: the UNAE) offered me. It offered me a grant; the university offered me these international professors, the best. Because in my family – what my family implanted in me is a vision that we have to adopt international things, because we are lagging many years behind. To me, it is 50 years behind, our country is very much behind, compared to the Great Powers"<sup>13</sup>. This quotation brings together all three dimensions of the hegemonic complex of discourses: there is the notion of a backward country, which has to be raised to international (meaning Western) standards. There is the parallel notion of a personal descent which has to be compensated and overcome in the form of an individual social ascendancy with the help of the state sponsored university, and there is the a notion of the specialised pedagogic discourse, contemplating on the poor condition of national education

levels and their distance to those of the Great Powers. In fact, fragments of these discourses appear in very many different places in the interviews, taking the form – in all three mentioned dimensions – of expressions such as: keep on studying or keep on moving, transcending; improve oneself, the country, or future pupils and so on. The power of these discourses was so strong that I was not able to detect counterhegemonic discourses, but just something what Link (2013: 416f) calls non-hegemonic aspects of hegemonic discourses, which means marginalised positions which do not actually challenge the hegemonic ones. One such aspect consists in the frequent narrations of family members who chose or had to leave the country after the financial crisis of 1999 because of unemployment. This crisis provoked dollarisation, the loss of small savings, and a severe crisis of party and state legitimacy, which contributed much to subsequent moral discourses (e.g. against corruption) of the new middle class in the country (Dávalos 2014). These are generally very sad and melancholically reported stories, which always allude to a certain personal loss, but without connecting to the problem of an international division of labour or mechanisms of crisis externalisation by the centres, of which they are essentially part. Instead, the moment of advancement and improvement is often understood and naturalised as a moral cause, as a question of ‘developing character’ and ‘constructing better individuals’ by educating them<sup>14</sup>.

A second important issue is the metamorphosis of racism and racist exclusions in Ecuador. There is, among interviewees, a widespread sense of living in a society where everybody is ‘Mestizo’ or ‘Mestiza’: “Here there are no whites, there are no – there are no blacks there are no – we are all Mestizos, all”<sup>15</sup>. As Quijano (2000) observes, this is the consequence of a political project of acculturation, which produces the myth of a Mestizo nation, whose alleged equality hides and renders invisible existing racist structures. Among interviewees, racism was neither identified as a grave problem in everyday practices nor associated with the political conflicts between the government and the indigenous social movements. It was – if at all – discussed on a completely individual level, as if it were just a matter of impoliteness or bad manners. A good example of this posture is an explanation given by Guillermo: “It’s just that here one cannot speak of racism. Or rather, there always are typical racist commentaries a little. (...) But here we have a mixture, yes, a mixture between coast and mountains.

It's a very interesting cultural mixture. So nobody is essentially from here. Therefore, there is no discrimination as such."<sup>16</sup> The naturalisation of this still present myth of a harmonious 'racial mixture' implies the absence of anti-racist discourses among middle class members. 'Race', as mentioned before, is a colonial construct without any ontological substance (Quijano 1999). Instead, there is a clear presence of cultural or spatial notions of racialised concepts such as 'mestizo' or 'indigena', for example. when the only "pure races"<sup>17</sup> are located in the Amazonas region and cultural differences are marked as "traditional", which are expected to be dissolved one day in the course of becoming 'mestizo'. Consequently, emancipatory critical reflections, put forward by indigenous discourses, on the relationality of such racialised concepts as part of a power structure of coloniality, are completely absent. Guillermo Bonfil laid the ground for such a relational reflection (1972: 110): "The category of the indio, actually, is a super-ethnic category which carries no specific content of the groups, to which it alludes, but a particular relation between them and other sectors of the global system, which the indios are part of. The category of the indio *denotes the condition of the colonized and refers compulsively to the colonial relation* [my translation and accentuation]". Due to the myth of a mestizo nation, this conflict along the structure of coloniality is not seen, but is made invisible by an ideological construct of mestizaje setting the boundaries of what can and cannot be said. This can be discerned in this context in the many expressions such as: "I don't know how to explain it"<sup>18</sup>. The new middle class as an important part of the electoral base of the Citizen Revolution exists completely separated from decolonial and anti-racist projects, thus erecting an insurmountable barrier to a politicised and movement-related concept of indigenous people or nations, and also to the possibility of a breach of structures of coloniality.

This takes us to the third and last point. The relation of the interviewees to the state executive is that of an individualised citizen to an allegedly neutral and de-politicised institution representing an ideological notion of "common good". There is a clear distinction between political activism and being part of what is called "cambio", i. e. change, meaning the series of state reforms described in section three. Again Gloria, talking about government expenditures and social and educational projects: "So in this sense...okay, there is the constancy that, for example, let's say, I



keep aloof of parties, social movements and all this, I have kept very much aloof. But as regards change, I have approached very closely to the government of Correa, I am very much in line in this sense because I have seen the change”<sup>19</sup>. This is of course a very outspoken case, but it shows the presence of a post-neoliberal government discourse of reclaiming the common good in the name of the fatherland by state interventions in an unfinished project of “change”, i.e. modernisation and renewal, where there is no place for factional opposition, as social movements’ activism is decried (Burbano de Lara 2015). Of course, the changes Gloria talks about are real with regard to progressive government policies, and one should be sensitive not to set this aside too quickly. But they are also very limited, critics note (Stefanoni 2012; Acosta 2013a), with respect to the position of dominant classes and a very unequal distribution of the means of production and wealth, which have been kept untouched. What is more, there is the return of a rearranged Development state, oriented towards the positivist-style dogma of improving and uplifting an imagined homogeneous nation, and its modernisation, by a technocratic elite (Clark 2010), which reproduces the structures of capitalist coloniality instead of opening up strategic breaches for social forces to destroy them. This is what Kaplan once called “Leviatán criollo” (Kaplan 1978), or a creole Leviathan.

The above quoted passage from Gloria’s interview shows that the connection of the analysed middle class segment to the central state does not rest upon political activism or the affiliation to a ‘proper’ political middle class project, but – due to individualist ideologies of personal improvement and social ascendancy – on a depoliticised ascription of representational loyalty to the central state and its president, who is perceived as a neutral institution above social conflicts. Unable to represent itself, this segment of the new middle class is represented by a centralised statehood and its power-concentrating presidency, a mode of governing which René Zavaleta, referring to Marx, calls Bonapartism (Zavaleta 2006). In this sense, the new middle class, or rather this specific segment, reproduces structures of coloniality instead of joining the forces who act in order to overcome them. The process of political power concentration in the central government, detrimental to the indigenous projects of a multi-polar plurinational state and communal autonomy, but backed by the middle class, can be witnessed by the installation of meta-steering governmental bodies,

reshuffles of government members, and the employment of new administrative personnel, as well as the forced replacements of the older members (Polga-Hecimovich 2013; Peña López 2015). The condensed structures of the state have not changed, decision-making power has only been transferred to planning and steering agencies like SENPLADES, the National Secretary of Planification and Development, or SENAP, the National Secretary of Public Administration, which are both directly subject to the presidency (Polga-Hecimovich 2013: 148). Thus, there is no radical decolonisation of the state in the process of the Citizen Revolution.

## 6. Conclusion

To conclude, by getting back to the initial thesis of a middle class functioning as a barrier to more radical projects of transformation, the central point is this: currently, there is neither common political ground nor an option for alliance between the political forces of indigenous state projects and the *Revolución Ciudadana*. By backing Rafael Correa and its Bonapartist regime, the new middle class segments hinder the realisation of a radical decolonisation of society and state, which is pushed by social movements. If the new President, Lenín Moreno, should ease the repression of social movements, there is a high probability that this will only be a tactical move in times of crisis, not a turning point. This is because there have been, in fact, two distinct and rival social and state projects in the process of change in Ecuador, with different class bases (in a broad sense as developed here theoretically), only aligned for a very short time under the fluttering flag of post-neoliberalism, from the inauguration of Correa in 2007 until the draft of the new constitution in 2008. One has been led by indigenous, anti-capitalist movements against the deep structures of capitalist coloniality, and the other by modernist intellectuals and technocrats taking over the state apparatuses and organising approval among new middle classes by policies of reform and redistribution. The latter project is has been electorally successful due to the specific configuration of its class base, a newly formed middle class, which still moves within the colonially drawn boundaries of an allegedly inclusive and homogeneous ‘mestizo’-nation, functioning as the ideological centre piece of a racist regime of clas-

sifications. Being ‘mestizo’ or ‘mestiza’ and being middle class necessarily still implies setting up a social distance from the classification of *indígenas*, which have been massively politicised in the past decades and – quite similar to the notion of the proletariat in Marx – have turned into a social and political force to overcome colonial and capitalist relations of domination. These newly formed middle class segments constitute – in their ideological inclination to national development, individual ascendancy, Bonapartist representation and colonially established structures of racism – a barrier for more radical projects in the process, merely re-forming the axes of capitalist coloniality, but not overcoming them.

- 1 To be fair, some of these studies recognise this weakness. The OECD in its Economic Outlook on Latin America Middle Class (2011) explicitly prefers to use the term “middle sector” instead of “middle classes”.
- 2 Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL): [http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil\\_Nacional\\_Economico.html?pais=ECU&idioma=english](http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil_Nacional_Economico.html?pais=ECU&idioma=english)
- 3 Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL): [http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil\\_Nacional\\_Economico.html?pais=ECU&idioma=english](http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil_Nacional_Economico.html?pais=ECU&idioma=english)
- 4 Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL): [http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil\\_Nacional\\_Economico.html?pais=ECU&idioma=english](http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil_Nacional_Economico.html?pais=ECU&idioma=english)
- 5 Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL): [http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil\\_Nacional\\_Economico.html?pais=ECU&idioma=english](http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil_Nacional_Economico.html?pais=ECU&idioma=english)
- 6 Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL): [http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil\\_Nacional\\_Economico.html?pais=ECU&idioma=english](http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil_Nacional_Economico.html?pais=ECU&idioma=english)
- 7 Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL): [http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil\\_Nacional\\_Economico.html?pais=ECU&idioma=english](http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil_Nacional_Economico.html?pais=ECU&idioma=english)
- 8 Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe (CEPAL): [http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil\\_Nacional\\_Economico.html?pais=ECU&idioma=english](http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/Perfil_Nacional_Economico.html?pais=ECU&idioma=english)
- 9 The terminology of a global ‘South’ or ‘North’ is of course very simplifying, since these are not homogenous social spheres, and considerations about the production of knowledge should not be completely reduced to a locus of enunciation. That is also why the terms are used with quotation marks here. However, it is necessary to develop concepts in order to clear up certain structural relations of domination, which, according to this author’s position, are also manifested and produced in a spatially and epistemologically asymmetric fashion. Both dimensions shall be grasped with these terms.
- 10 As Quijano makes clear, “colours of skin” are already themselves a racist construction projected onto the bodies which are subjugated to such racist classification, without any biologically reasonable substance (Quijano 1999). Thus the quotation marks.
- 11 República del Ecuador - Ministerio de Educación: Estrategia UNAE: <http://educacion.gob.ec/estrategia-unael/>, 2. 4. 2017.

- 12 Names and identity-relevant information have been changed in the interest of anonymity. The interviews were originally conducted in Spanish and have been translated to English by the author in order to bypass language barriers.
- 13 Interview with Gloria, April 20, 2015.
- 14 Interview with Silvia, April 20, 2015.
- 15 Interview with Carlos, April 21, 2015.
- 16 Interview with Guillermo, April 22, 2015.
- 17 Interview with Carlos, April 22, 2015.
- 18 Interview with Paula, April 22, 2015.
- 19 Interview with Gloria, April 20, 2015.

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ABSTRACT *Der Artikel wendet sich kritisch gegen die Vorstellung einer „globalen Mittelklasse“, die von internationalen Entwicklungsorganisationen als gesellschaftlicher Kern eines Narrativs präsentiert wird, das wirtschaftliche Wachstumsphantasien, Umverteilung und politische Stabilität miteinander verkoppelt. Diesem Narrativ wird zunächst widersprochen, indem sein ideologischer Gehalt herausgearbeitet wird. Anschließend wird eine alternative Theorie peripherer Mittelklassen vorgeschlagen, um die realen materiellen Klassenantagonismen und gegenwärtigen Strukturen der Kolonialität in Ecuador fassbar zu machen. Im Rahmen der Auswertung qualitativer Interviews, die 2015 in Ecuador durchgeführt wurden, kann die Ausgangsthese einer peripheren Mittelklasse, die als Barriere gegenüber radikaleren Projekten gesellschaftlicher Transformation wirkt, durch mehr Details verdichtet werden.*

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