
Latin American Anti-Racism

in a “Post-Racial” Era (LAPORA)





In Latin America, there has been a notable increase in antiracist actions since about 2000. Governments have enacted public policies aimed at the elimination of racial discrimination, while social movements and organizations have adopted strategies to challenge the daily and structural racism they face. By talking openly about racism, these actions seek to transcend the simple recognition of cultural diversity, a product of the “multiculturalist turn” of the 1990s in which many governments officially defined their countries as multicultural. This document summarizes the purposes of the LAPORA research project, outlines the obstacles facing anti-racist actions in the region, proposes a broad framework to understand what anti-racism is, and ends with a summary of different modalities of anti-racist actions and the advantages and disadvantages that characterize each one.



LAPORA: our approach

The LAPORA research team conducted research on antiracist practices and discourses in four Latin American countries:



Brazil



Colombia



Ecuador



Mexico

In addition to conducting a documentary analysis of the anti-racist and anti-discriminatory legal frameworks, the team chose about:

25

cases to be investigated intensively.

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additional cases to be studied in less depth.

The cases include state institutions, non-governmental organizations, grassroots social movements and legal processes. During nine months, qualitative interviews were carried out in each country with actors and social leaders, along with participant-observation in events and public meetings, focus group discussions with activists and audiovisual recordings.

Challenges and difficulties facing anti-racism in the region

In Latin America there is a dominant ideology that emphasizes mestizaje (mixture between people of European, African and native American ancestry). The ideology affirms that the diversity of the nation is submerged in a long history and on-going process of biological and cultural mixing, which has produced nations in which “we are all mestizos” (people of mixed ancestry), resulting in tolerance and colour-blindness. More recently, the ideology of mestizaje has been complemented by an ideology of multicultu-

ralism, which more openly recognizes cultural and ethnic diversity, but within a framework of coexistence, mixture and “harmonious and tolerant” dialogue among the various ethnic groups. Both ideologies coexist with clear racial hierarchies and diverse forms of racism. This coexistence means that, while the existence of racism may be recognized to some extent, it remains difficult to fully see, accept and fight it.

Our study found that anti-racist actions in the region face the following barriers:

- ✱ Racism is denied, minimized or seen as anachronistic or “extraordinary.”
- ✱ Discourses circulate about “racism in reverse.” Victims of racism are identified as racist for “over-emphasizing” racism and imposing a diversionary, Anglo-centric agenda that divides class and gender struggles.
- ✱ The moral and psychological credibility of those who denounce racism is questioned, and they are accused of being complexed, resentful and hyper-sensitive.
- ✱ The denial of racism produces feelings of insecurity and self-doubt for the victims and witnesses of racism and for those who denounce it.
- ✱ The terms “racism/racial/race” are avoided because of their negative historical baggage and are replaced by ethnic categories and a discourse of cultural diversity, without referring to racist oppression, exclusion and discrimination.
- ✱ When admitted, racism is generally seen as involving individual acts associated with insults, rejection and humiliation. It is harder to denounce the structural dimension of racism (that is, its capacity to reproduce racial inequalities in the economic system, in the design and implementation of public policies, in institutional practices, and in cultural representations).
- ✱ It is assumed that Indigenous peoples suffer less racism than Afro-descendant populations and that racial discrimination affects mostly the latter. This hinders the possibility of creating alliances around the racist exclusion that they suffer in common.

① The anti-racist turn in Latin America

Despite these obstacles, the LAPORA team documented the gradual formation of a turn towards anti-racism in the region, which challenges - but does not displace - the powerful ideologies of mestizaje and multiculturalism. The most obvious anti-racist actions we found include:

- ✦ Censuses and statistical surveys demonstrating that Afro-descendants and Indigenous people (and in some studies dark-skinned people in general) suffer disproportionately from social exclusion.
- ✦ Affirmative actions for Afro-descendant and Indigenous populations in the fields of education and employment.
- ✦ Laws that criminalize racial discrimination, and that may also be used to denounce racism.
- ✦ Media campaigns in state-funded and private-sector media, and in social media, denouncing racism and trying to break with racist stereotypes.
- ✦ Aesthetic interventions aimed at the improving the visibility and empowerment of Afro-descendants and Indigenous peoples.

① Alternative anti-racist grammars

Our research found that, in order to understand the panorama of anti-racism in Latin America, it is important to recognize other ways of mobilizing anti-racism that do not depend on the verbal naming of racism, but that mobilize other languages to achieve anti-racist outcomes.

①① Defending territory

For example, Indigenous peoples tend to recognize experiences of economic, cultural and linguistic discrimination but do not usually talk explicitly about racism. However, their territorial struggles can erode the structural racism that underlies the processes of accumulation of land and resources that displace their communities.

- ✱ This is the case of the recovery of Indigenous territories pursued by the Association of Cabildos del Norte del Cauca in Colombia, by the National Indigenous Congress in Mexico, and by the struggles against mining in Indigenous and Afro-descendant territories in Ecuador. These actions seek to transform relations of colonial origin between the land and Afro-descendant and Indigenous populations.
- ✱ In Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil, to fight against the dispossession of the Indigenous Guarani-Kaiowá people by agro-industrial development, the communities mobilize a grammar of “body as a territory”, according to which the body is intimately connected to the territory, and defending one is defending the other too.

00 Defending life

Some Afro-descendant organizations articulate antiracist ideologies in grammars that talk about the defence of life and survival in urban and rural spaces.

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- ✱ For example, the mothers of the victims killed by the police in Rio de Janeiro-Brazil mobilize through the Network of Communities and Movements Against Violence and use a grammar of maternal suffering to fight against the violence and the anti-black genocide that affect their children and communities.
- ✱ In Ecuador, Afro-descendant communities in Esmeraldas, such as the Wimbí community, denounce environmental racism, demonstrating how the expansion of the African palm agroindustry and extractive mining and forest projects have contaminated their territories, undermining the life of this population and leading to its “slow death”.

00 Defending the body

A grammar that talks about wounded and empowered bodies also enables the denunciation of racism.

- ✱ Representations, videos, and testimonies of the capture and harassment of the Kichwa Indigenous people in Saraguro during political protests in Ecuador in 2015, and attacks against Afro-descendant

people by the Colombian government forces during the 2017 Buenaventura Civic Strike, enabled social organizations to demonstrate and denounce connections between racism, violence and structural exclusion.

* Various Afro-descendant organizations have also mobilized grammars of empowerment, emphasizing beauty, visibility and physical enjoyment. Collectives such as Amafrocol (Colombia), Manifiesto Crespo (Brazil), Fundación Azúcar (Ecuador) and Huella Negra (Mexico) promote the aesthetic value and positive feelings of their black bodies in the spaces of daily life, work, the media, institutions and the family. In this process, they subvert collectively and visually many of the racist stereotypes associated with the bodies, self-images and the occupations of Afro-descendant women and men. Using the language of the empowered body, organizations denounce the logic of whitening (which promotes the aesthetic and moral value of whiteness), and the combined operation of racism and sexism.

In sum, it is important to bear in mind that, when we speak of anti-racism, we refer a set of struggles that do not necessarily name racism explicitly.

0 Modes of anti-racism

The research team found that anti-racism operates in different modes, each of which has its advantages and disadvantages. There is no single answer: anti-racism must be practiced on many fronts simultaneously.

MODE
OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES

ADVANTAGES

DISADVANTAGES

Entrepreneurial anti-racism

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the professionalization and economic empowerment of Afro-descendants and Indigenous peoples. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breaks the stereotypes that associate Afro-descendants and Indigenous people with poverty Can create an Afro- | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assumes that racism can be overcome just with the upward mobility of the Afro-descendant or Indigenous population. |
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MODE OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES

- Create ethnic-racial market niches and Afro-descendant and Indigenous-owned companies.



ADVANTAGES

- descendant and Indigenous middle class that can access positions political power with an anti-racist agenda.
- Can strengthen self-recognition as Black and Indigenous and promote self-esteem.

DISADVANTAGES

- Can reproduce ideologies that associate social mobility with the denial of Black or Indigenous identity.
- May not question underlying structures of class and power and could easily reproduce sexist dynamics.

Juridical anti-racism

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- Criminalize and punish racial discrimination.



- Highlights the existence of racism and makes it clear that it is not admissible.
- Individual cases can provoke public debate.
- Has more symbolic than practical effect; not many convictions are achieved.
- Is individualistic and does not combat racism as a system of inequality.

Media anti-racism

- Denounce the creation and circulation of racist stereotypes in public and private-sector media, and social media.
- Produce new media representations of Afro-descendant
- Destabilizes racist stereotypes.
- Can generate public debate.
- Can strengthen self-recognition as Black and Indigenous and promote self-esteem.
- Produces subjective changes that lead to
- Can generate a lot of noise, with little underlying change.
- Can open (especially via social media) new spaces for the expression of racism.
- Can get entwined with sexist gender stereotypes.

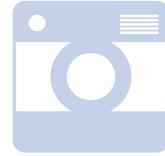
MODE OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES

and Indigenous populations.

ADVANTAGES

- the empowerment, pride in and enjoyment of the body
- Can strengthen the construction of anti-racist networks.

DISADVANTAGES



Identity anti-racism

- Promote practices, experiences and exchanges that strengthen self-recognition as Black and Indigenous and promote self-esteem, through participating in groups and networks that seek to create awareness of and educate about the history, culture and current condition of Afro-descendants and Indigenous peoples.
- Helps to overcome the effects of racism by recognizing and healing psychological and emotional wounds.
- Destabilizes racist stereotypes.
- Challenges the dominant versions of national cultures and histories.
- Produces subjective changes that lead to the empowerment, pride in and enjoyment of the body.
- Strengthens the construction of anti-racist networks.
- Can act at the individual level to produce individuals “aware” of their Black or Indigenous identity, but who remain in poor economic conditions.
- The emphasis on Black or Indigenous identity can generate negative reactions from other sectors of society.
- Can “trap” individuals in pre-defined versions of Black or Indigenous identity.



MODE OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES

ADVANTAGES

DISADVANTAGES

Structural anti-racism

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|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to transform and destabilize the articulation between racial hierarchies and processes of accumulation, dispossession and violence. • Promote affirmative actions to redistribute resources (territory, education) and power. • Promote restitution and reparation for victims of racism and their inclusion in citizenship projects. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addresses the fundamental dimensions of racial inequality, that is, the distribution of resources, opportunities, security and power. • Can strengthen the economic and political (and legal) autonomy of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. • Can stimulate processes collective reparation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because they are radical measures, it is difficult to create and implement the necessary policies. • Can lead to claims that affirmative action policies “unfairly” favour minorities. • Can cause very violent reactions. • Changing the distribution of power and resources does not necessarily eliminate negative racist images nor address racialised sexism. |
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Conclusions

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In Latin America, the ideology of mestizaje (even when it is nuanced with an official multiculturalism) creates specific problems for anti-racism, linked to the minimization of racism and the questioning of the credibility of those who draw attention to it.

Despite this, a gradual shift towards anti-racism in the region is evident.

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It is necessary to understand the anti-racist nuances of various struggles that do not name racism as such. The exclusions suffered by Indigenous people must also be included in racism.

There are different modes of anti-racist actions. The most radical and the most difficult addresses structural racial inequalities (one example being affirmative actions). Other modes, which tend to be more individualistic, are very valuable, but it is difficult for them to correct structural inequalities.

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The document is a product of the LAPORA project, financed by the Economic and Social Research Council and based in the University of Cambridge and the University of Manchester, between January 2017 and December 2018. See <https://www.lapora.sociology.cam.ac.uk/es> . The views expressed here are those of LAPORA researchers alone.

