


# Antiracism in MEXICO



The project “Latin American Anti-racism in a ‘Post-racial’ Age” (2017-18) conducted research on antiracist practices and discourses in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico.

In these countries, anti-racism confronts the ideology of “mestizaje”; that is, the idea that historical mixture between people of Indigenous, African and European ancestry produced mestizo nations in which racism is a minor problem that is steadily becoming less important.

More recently multiculturalism has given greater recognition to ethnic minorities, without always confronting the problems of racism and racial inequality.

## *What is racism?*

It is an ideology and a practice that justifies and produces relationships of oppression and inequality between groups, based on the perception of physical differences (differences skin colour, shape of the hair, body and face) and cultural (languages, traditions, clothing, justice systems, among others). Racism organizes the population in a racial hierarchy, that is, a social order that distributes inequality and in which some people are more valued than others. Inequities can be in terms of access to privileges, benefits, value, power and security.

## *What is anti-racism?*

Anti-racism refers to practices and discourses that confront, erode, reject, transform and/or eradicate the relations of inequality and oppression caused by racism. These actions are almost always linked to other struggles (for cultural recognition, human rights, gender equality, land rights, greater social equality, etc.). In Mexico, we found that most anti-racist actions use a different vocabulary; that is, they do not call themselves “anti-racists” even though they fight the causes and consequences of racism.

## *Racism in Mexico*

There is a tendency to see racism as one among many types of discrimination (based on gender, class, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, age, etc.), which hides the specificity of racist practices and experiences.

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There is also a tendency to assume that class and ethnic discrimination are often seen as the major causes of social inequality, rather than racism; or that it is a problem of personal offense and not a social and structural issue.

This is also due to the racial ideology of mestizaje which makes people believe, for example,



that Indigenous peoples have no space in the mestizo nation.

Their “cultural” differences are also thought of as a cause of social disadvantage, ignoring or denying the historical appropriation of their resources and territories.

This ideology even erased Afro-descendant people from the nation’s mestizo image, making it even more difficult to identify how this population is affected by racism.



Mestizaje condemns Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples as “different”



while it praises as “normal” the rest of the mestizo population.

However, this – mestizo, “normal” and Mexican - population is also ranked in terms of facial features and skin colour.

### ← The everyday nature of racism

Racism can also be considered as a form of stigmatization that denigrates, humiliates, and undermines the dignity of people because of their perceived physical and/or cultural traits, manifests in daily aggressions, insults and jokes.

#### This type of racism is experienced in: >>

Public places (public transport, streets, hairdressing salons, shops, nightclubs).

Working spaces (social interactions between workers, supervisors and customers).

Educational contexts (humiliation, bullying, and belittling among students, inadequate attention from teachers).

Legal and health institutions (people being ignored, underestimated or insulted; receiving poor service).

Media (denigrating stereotypes in TV and radio programmes, magazines and advertising).

### The structural nature of racism →

Structural racism refers to the historical inequalities that make it difficult for people to access opportunities and/or resources (health, work, justice, land, food, capital, etc.).

## Indigenous peoples

represent:

20%

of the total population.

More than:

40%

lives in extreme poverty.

compared to:

10%

of the non-indigenous population.

Afro-Mexicans represent 1.4% of the population. It was only in **2015** that the category of Afro-Mexican and Black were first incorporated into a national governmental survey.

A person with a lighter skin colour *averages nearly 3 years more schooling* than a person with darker skin colour.

Lighter-skinned people are five times more likely than dark-skinned people to obtain a position as public officials or as managers.

### Infant mortality

indigenous

47%



national average

26.5%



**35%** of the national territory is licensed to the mining sector. **80%** of the mining industry is on indigenous territories.

## ← What did we learn?

Our research gave us evidence that there are different anti-racist strategies in Mexico. Some actions are explicitly anti-racist or anti-discriminatory, while others do not mention racism directly.

### Actions

#### ⊙ Statistics

There are statistical data that count the population according to how they self-identify in racial or ethnic terms and also in relation to their skin colour. This helps measure racial inequality and develop antiracist interventions, such as government policy. Social organizations and movements also use these data to demand attention, recognition, rights and services.

#### ⊙ Social Mobility

Indigenous and Black people who have been to university and have professional occupations are more easily able to negotiate their demands with institutional or business sectors.

## ⤵ Juridical

In Mexico there is no law that specifically punishes racism, but people can work with the justice system to counter the effects of racism. For example, some organizations provide translators and assistance to indigenous people who seek legal support; others have managed to secure a public apology from the government to indigenous people who have been unfairly treated.

## ⤵ Territorial

Indigenous organizations are giving unprecedented visibility to the appropriation of their lands and the violence they suffer for defending their territories.

## ⤵ Media or artistic

Advertising campaigns and artistic projects can be effective tools for challenging racialized stereotypes about people who have dark skin and African racial markers, such as curly hair.

## Challenges for creating anti-racist agendas in Mexico

The power of the ideology of mestizaje produces the following effects:

- ❶ Racism is personalised. It is difficult to see it like a social and public problem.
- ❷ Racism is normalised. It is difficult to recognise when someone is facing racism, and if a problem is noticed, the trend is to confuse it with one of class.
- ❸ Racism is minimized. The moral and psychological position of those who denounce racism is undermined, by accusing them of having an inferiority complex and being over-sensitive, or of exaggerating the problem.
- ❹ It is assumed that Indigenous peoples suffer ethnic discrimination (due to their perceived cultural difference) and not racism (due to their perceived body differences).
- ❺ The historical and structural racism suffered by the Afro-descendants is not recognised.

## What is missing?

- ❶ Ensure that anti-racist actions are effectively articulated to anti-sexist, anti-classist and/or other social struggles.
- ❷ Publicize the role played by skin colour in causing social inequalities.
- ❸ Challenge the continuing reluctance to use “race/racism/anti-racism” as analytical terms to explain oppression.
- ❹ Develop an anti-racist agenda addressing mestizo people, which encourages them to question how they may benefit from racism, while possibly also being its victims, and that skin colour also plays a role in their opportunities for a “good life”.

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