

## **Alternative grammars of anti-racism in Latin America**

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### **Abstract**

*Naming racism has been usually seen as a necessary step for understanding racism and undertaking anti-racist action. However, the explicit naming of racism does not immediately tell us what kind of understanding of racism is at stake nor what kinds of action will follow. In the context of an incipient turn to antiracism in Latin America we conducted a project looking at antiracist activities in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico. It became apparent that different organisations varied markedly in their approaches to the concept and language of racism. Some explicitly use the language of racism, other organisations do not, even though they are engaged in struggles for land, rights, etc., which clearly have a racialised dimension. This difference revealed variations in the awareness of racism, which came in and out of focus in their practice. With examples from Colombia, Brazil, Mexico and Ecuador, we discuss the antiracist effects of what we call “alternative grammars of anti-racism” and the “racially-aware class consciousness” they imply. We end by questioning the assumption that the explicit naming of racism as such is necessary to advance antiracist work, and suggest that employment of more indirect ways of evoking racism, which imply an awareness of structural racism, have some advantages for antiracist practice.*

**Keywords:** racism, anti-racism, alternative grammars, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Ecuador

### **Introduction**

Against the background of a “turn towards anti-racism” in Latin America, which gained momentum from about 2010 and has been characterized by the expansion of anti-racist policies, laws and organizations, we undertook a project to explore the anti-racist discourse and strategies of a range of Indigenous and Black organisations, groups and networks - mostly grass-roots, but also governmental - in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico.<sup>1</sup> A key interest, at the

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<sup>1</sup> The project Latin American Anti-Racism in a ‘Post-Racial’ Age, LAPORA (<https://www.lapora.sociology.cam.ac.uk>) carried out comparative research exploring anti-racist action in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico. It ran from 2017 to 2019, with a team of 31 people, mostly academics and activists, including Indigenous, Black, mestizo and white people. We conducted nine months of ethnographic fieldwork, using a collaborative methodology for the analysis of the data. The project explored 24 cases in detail and a wider set of contextual cases looking at Indigenous and Black social grassroot movements, non-governmental organisations, legal cases and state institutions.

start of the research, was in the way different sets of people talk or do not talk about racism as a reality and an experience, and about anti-racism as an agenda and project for their organisation or campaign. This led us to interrogate how people's understandings of racism were linked (or not) to explicit talk about or naming of racism; we soon realised there were alternative articulations in which racism was not front and centre of the organisation's agenda and was moving in and out of focus in interesting ways. We recognised that there can be many struggles, such as those for ethnic, women's and human rights, for land, for justice, for life and for safety and well-being. In Latin America, many such struggles take place in a context in which inequalities and injustices align in significant ways with racialised differences, due to a profound and deep-rooted correlation between racial and class hierarchies. So the question arises of what difference it makes, in terms of anti-racist strategies, to think of racism as a key issue in any particular struggle and to explicitly and openly use the language of racism and antiracism to define and organise activities and struggles around equality, justice, fairness and rights.

In this article, we question the assumption that the explicit naming of racism *per se* is a sign of advancing antiracist work. We suggest that there may be distinct advantages for antiracist practice in the employment of strategic language, what we call "alternative grammars of anti-racism", which do not explicitly put racism at the centre of the agenda, but instead show an awareness of broader structural inequalities, in which the role of racial difference is indirectly acknowledged. We also suggest that the possibilities of using or not using alternative grammars are tied to specific racial formations rooted in particular contexts: in these Latin American cases, an overarching context is formed by the ideology of *mestizaje* (racial and cultural mixture).

Our use of "alternative grammars" is mindful of the many possible connotations of the term "grammar", which has been used in linguistics and literary theory - for example, Noam Chomsky's (1966) "generative grammar" or Jacques Derrida's (1974) "grammatology" - and in the social sciences, ranging from Gerd Baumann and Andre Gingrich's (2004) concept of "grammars of identity/alterity" all the way to decolonial theorists such as Walter Dignolo (2007) who talks of "grammars of decoloniality" or Vicente Rafael (1992, 2016) who analyses grammar as a colonial tool of domination and control.

We did not, however, opt for this term in a particular conversation with such texts. We arrived at the concept of alternative grammars of anti-racism in the face of a challenging empirical site that was not acting as we had supposed it would. While wanting to follow the term "racism" in the work of activists and grass-roots organisers, we were confronted with the very uneven use of the term in the midst of clearly racialised struggles. On the one hand, the term was barely used by some. On the other hand, we encountered explicit and expressive uses of the term racism, accompanied by uncritical and superficial understandings of the phenomenon. The overall picture was one of varying degrees of use and varied depths of understanding; we saw talk and use of the terminology of racism coming in and out of focus. So a focus on how a word was being used

revealed interesting contradictions. In line with Baumann and Gingrich's perspective, we agree that the term grammar "seems to echo so well with the most varied forms of our desire to see 'sense' or 'order' in people's capacities and failures to deal with their worlds (...) We use the word as a simple shorthand for certain simple classificatory structures or classificatory schemata" (2007: p.ix). Like them, we are interested in classificatory structures as a way to make sense of the content of anti-racist practice, but also the "doing" of such particular structure. If using the term "racism" is not a defining feature of anti-racist work, what are other cues that can allow us to map anti-racist work? Moreover, how then can we identify actions that might produce deep and radical transformation?

This connects to another question - that of how people conceived of racism as a process and, in particular, what kind of understanding of racism was behind explicit or implicit "racism talk". In some cases, we found that people would think about racism in individualistic terms, as a matter of the aberrant, perhaps anachronistic, attitudes and behaviours of a few misguided or ignorant people; it was seen as a question of people treating others badly and stigmatising them, and of excluding them from certain opportunities because of prejudicial attitudes. In other cases, racism was seen as a whole set of historically embedded processes and structures that functioned through multiple habits, practices and ideologies (whether in formal institutions or outside them) to create and maintain racialised inequalities in society. Challenging racism as a matter of individual prejudices is necessary and worthwhile, but a structural approach to racism holds out the promise of deeper and more radical social change.

In thinking about such structural approaches and what they might look like in practice, a key theme that emerged was in relation to the strong class-race nexus that is at the core of many struggles against inequality in Latin America. Given the particular regional context of *mestizaje*, its racial ambiguities and pervasive disavowal of racism, the racialised dimensions of hierarchical social relations are often seen as merely class differences, which can supposedly be surpassed through social mobility in a "meritocratic" society. We argue that some of the activists with whom we worked bring back a racialised reading of struggles for dignity, equality and justice in a stratified society by means of a "racially-aware class consciousness". In this article, we focus on this class-race nexus, but we are very aware of the gender and sexist implications of many of the issues that we explore; here, however, we just note them without going in depth. In a different publication, one of us has used three of the cases explored here to analyse in depth the gendered implications of anti-racist intersectional action (Moreno Figueroa and Viveros Vigoya, 2022).

In what follows, we briefly outline the turn to anti-racism, before discussing the theoretical context for the questions outlined above. We then give some examples of different ways in which racism figured in the discourse and activities of Black and Indigenous organisations and struggles.

## **The turn to anti-racism in Latin America**

Gaining impetus from about 2010, there has been a turn towards an agenda of anti-racism in Latin America. This is not to say that, prior to this time, anti-racism was not a feature of the social movement landscape in the region: there is a long history of challenges to racialised inequality and racism by Indigenous, Black and Brown people (Andrews, 2004; Gonzalez, 1985; Nascimento, 1980; Wade, 2010). Brazil was a forerunner on the Latin American scene insofar as racial prejudice, discrimination, hatred and inequality were explicitly named and were centre stage in black social movements from the 1930s, as they were in Cuba in the early twentieth century: these expressions came from urban Black populations, trying to compete in educational, employment and housing markets (Alberto, 2011; De la Fuente, 2001). Racism was also an explicit focus in other countries where Black protests mobilised, usually from the 1960s, in light of events in the United States and South Africa (Rahier, 2012; Wade, 1995). Among Indigenous peoples, while there were concerted struggles to defend land - including, in late nineteenth-century south-western Colombia, from the “ambition of the whites” (Sanders, 2004, p.85) - the language of racial discrimination was less obvious than a discourse of culture (De la Cadena, 2000; Rappaport, 2005).

From the late 1980s, official multiculturalism began to spread across Latin America, linked to regional trends of democratisation and the global rise of identity politics. In Latin America, this gave rise to constitutional changes, creating regimes of recognition and rights for “minorities” usually defined in terms of cultural difference.<sup>2</sup> A focus on culture, however, meant that the issue of racism and racialised inequalities tended to move to the back burner. A partial exception here is Brazil, where the urban Black population continued to highlight racism as a problem and where even some Indigenous leaders were fluent in the language of racism in the 1990s (Warren, 2001, pp.267-274). Multiculturalism opened up significant avenues for progress, which included at least the possibility of addressing the structural inequalities that afflicted the people whose cultures and rights were being recognised. Some of these people used the new regimes to press radical claims, as did the Zapatistas in southern Mexico in the 1990s, for whom racism figured explicitly as an issue, although ambivalently, as we will see (Mora, 2007, p.66). However, the limitations of multiculturalist regimes soon became apparent. As with official multiculturalism everywhere, it was wide open to tokenism and cooptative politics (Rahier, 2012). It proved to be a worryingly comfortable bedfellow for neoliberal agendas doing business as usual in pursuit of development in the region (Gros, 1997; Hale, 2002, 2019). And, as land-intensive and extractivist enterprises continued to flourish and encroach on newly-minted land rights, provoking vigorous reactions from Indigenous and Black organisations, there was a racist and violent backlash that targeted such organisations, which served

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<sup>2</sup> For an analysis of the multiculturalist turn and its causes, see Wade (2010) and Hale (2005, 2019).

to push the issue of racism to the fore (Hooker, 2020; Martínez Novo and Shlossberg, 2018).

An early spur to this turn was the 2001 Durban Conference on Racism. Anti-racist legislation developed in many countries, banning and sometimes criminalising racist acts. Some high-profile legal cases have set precedents by highlighting the presence of racism (Hernández, 2013). In Ecuador, for example, constitutional reform in 2008 and the Plan Plurinacional para Eliminar la Discriminación Racial y la Exclusión Étnica y Cultural (2009-2012) created a basis for laws against racism and for affirmative action policies for the employment of Indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and other ethnic minority people in state institutions. Institutions dedicated to dealing with issues of racial discrimination were established, such as Mexico's Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación (CONAPRED in 2003). In Colombia, the state promoted various campaigns: Campaña Nacional Contra el Racismo (2009), Hora Contra el Racismo and Ponga la Cara al Racismo (both 2015). In his 2018 inaugural speech Mexico's new president, Andres Manuel López Obrador, explicitly mentioned racism when outlining his new government's commitments. In the realm of census practice and government statistics, most countries in Latin America are now "counting race" in some form and Black people are featuring more frequently than ever before (Loveman, 2014). Finally, there has also been a burgeoning of academic studies (and comparative research projects) that are establishing how racism exists and developing theoretical approaches to it (Barbary and Urrea, 2004; Hooker, 2020; Martínez Novo and Shlossberg, 2018; Telles, Flores, and Urrea-Giraldo, 2015; Viáfara López and Urrea Giraldo, 2006).

### **Naming and defining racism**

In the context of this turn to anti-racism, how important it is to explicitly name racism and what are the implications of more and less structural understandings of racism? It is often assumed in anti-racist circles that, on the one hand, it is a necessary first step to call racism by its name, identify and label it publicly in all its manifestations and - almost self-evidently - to put it at the centre of the anti-racist agenda; and, on the other hand, that it is necessary to conceive of racism as structural, systemic processes, rather than individual ignorance and bad attitudes. The assumption is that these two elements, naming racism and understanding it as structural, should operate together to create effective anti-racism and, when they are pulled apart, it creates problems. For example, it is recognised that, all too often, we see the public naming of racism along with tokenistic interventions that do little to address structural issues (Bonnett, 2000; Lentin, 2016; Rahier, 2012). And it seems evident that tackling structural issues without explicitly acknowledging racism, hardly constitutes an anti-racist strategy. In Latin America, in particular, simply revealing and naming racism has been an arduous and necessary struggle (Wade, 2010), due to the region's long history of denying and minimising racism, rooted in part in dominant narratives of national identity that foreground mestizaje as the key

process leading to nationhood (De la Cadena, 2007; Gall, 2004; Leal and Langebaek, 2010; Moreno Figueroa, 2012; Moreno Figueroa and Saldívar, 2016; Wade, 2017).

However, our main contention in this article is that struggles that address structural dimensions of injustice and inequality without explicitly centring racism - but without eliding it entirely - can also be powerful anti-racist interventions. A secondary contention we advance is that naming racism without understanding it as structural can sometimes make a useful - even if limited - contribution and should not be automatically dismissed as not being radical enough or a mere distraction.

These two contentions are embedded in broader debates about how to best tackle inequality and injustice and to associated theoretical questions about the role of racism in constituting inequality and injustice in stratified societies. In broad terms, there is a continuum of positions (Lentin, 2004, pp.2-4). One pole is represented by views that see racism an *addition* to, an overlay onto, the basic class dynamics of capitalism. Because race has no biological reality and is “nothing but” a “social construction”, it is therefore not inherent to class, which is constitutive of the social order. This has implications for how to deal with racism, which may as a result be understood as an aberrant psychological state, a superficial deviation that needs correcting or an anachronism that will be superseded by means of, for example, the recognition of “cultural difference” or the promotion of greater public awareness of racism.

At the other end of the spectrum are positions that see racism as *constitutive of* the structures of capitalism and liberal governance, or more generally “modernity” (as feminists and especially Marxist feminists might argue is the case for gender difference). This is the line taken by diverse theorists: post-colonial theorists such as Paul Gilroy (1993), critical race theorists such as David Goldberg (Goldberg, 2008), coloniality theorists such as Walter Dignolo and Anibal Quijano (Dignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2007), Afro-pessimists such as Frank Wilderson (2010) and Hortense Spillers (2003) (who draw inspiration from Frantz Fanon), and thinkers in the traditions of black radicalism, such as Cedric J. Robinson (1983), Stokely Carmichael (Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967), Angela Davis (1983) and more recently Kehinde Andrews (2018). In this approach, the changes in the overtness of racism and racial discourse over the last 100 years or so - leading, in the period since World War II, to “cultural racism” (Taguieff, 1990), “raceless racism” (Goldberg, 2008) or “racism without racists” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) - are surface variations of an underlying reality of racial oppression. This line of argument suggests that racism is integral to modernity not principally because it helps to naturalise social stratification (although it does play this role), but rather because of the historical role played by colonialism - principally its European variant - which integrated racial difference into the fabric of capitalism and liberalism and made them possible as actually existing and on-going political-economic realities. That is, although *logically* both capitalism and liberalism could exist without racial difference, *in*

*historical fact*, both have been constituted with and by such difference, which has therefore become essential to them.

The implications of this position are that combatting racism and racial inequality means changing some of the basic structures of capitalism and the institutions of governance that facilitate it. Recognition of identity and culture is not enough, even though, if taken far enough, recognition can imply some structural change in the distribution of resources (Tomasi, 2012, ch. 5). How much has to be changed is an open question: Afro-pessimists and some black radicals like Andrews (2018) would say that ultimately *everything* has to change, which means the total dismantling of capitalism (and perhaps liberal democracy); others envisage more reformist changes that can be radical without requiring total system transformation (e.g. affirmative action, reparations, differentialist social policy, etc.).

But radicals such as Andrews recognise that requiring total change can be a recipe for passivity, as it sets the bar for worthwhile action impossibly high. In the meantime, we have to proceed in the present and everyday world and the question is: how do we evaluate which anti-racist strategies are worthwhile? In our project, we encountered Latin American organisations that worked in many different ways, underpinned by very varied understandings of what racism is, how it relates to projects of social transformation, and how necessary it is to name racism in order to challenge it. We argue for an inclusive approach that sees this variety as potentially positive and that pays attention to how a radically critical stance may lead us to evaluate many of these diverse ways of working in an overly negative or even dismissive fashion. At the same time, we argue that it is useful and productive to maintain a radically critical stance as a kind of *vision* or *horizon* that is alive to the limitations of reformist policies and culturalist actions, recognizes the challenges of structural change, and bears in mind Audré Lorde's words that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1984, pp.110-114). This balance between pragmatism and radicalism echoes Carolyn Pedwell's idea of approaching "progressive social change through an understanding of the *imbrication* of the revolutionary and the routine" (Pedwell, 2017, p.95).<sup>3</sup>

For example, the first example we present of the Colombian organisation, Chao Racismo, shows that explicit talk about racism by Latin American Black and Indigenous organisations does not necessarily translate to a radical view of its structural dimensions - i.e. they explicitly name racism without fully conceiving it as structural and systemic. Their strategies may be limited to culturalism, and/or conditional recognition politics, and/or combatting racism as individual acts or habits of discrimination and stigmatisation. But this does not mean such discourse and actions have no useful effects. On the other hand, in the other examples we discuss - the Rede Contra a Violencia in Rio de Janeiro, which

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<sup>3</sup> Developing a "politics of habit", Pedwell (2017, p.95) proposes that engagement with habit can "furnish a renewed pragmatist politics" that does not "dismiss the importance of radical imagination and praxis".

mobilises protest against police killings, the Congreso Nacional Indígena (CNI) in Mexico, which launched a struggle for political power, and the community of Wimbí, Ecuador, where Black people struggle for land and against environmental racism - we encountered struggles that did not always, or did not comfortably, name racism explicitly and would thus be judged to fall short by many standards of anti-racism. Yet we suggest that these struggles can have effects that are not only anti-racist, but also structurally so. These can also make a useful contribution.

### **Alternative grammars of anti-racism and racially-aware class consciousness**

We propose that such struggles and organisations use alternative grammars of anti-racism, i.e. logics of addressing issues of inequality and injustice using a language that forms statements that are not fully legible from an anti-racist standpoint. As our examples will show, these alternative grammars may foreground a language of anti-violence, political power or land rights, allowing a degree of fluidity and flexibility around the explicit naming of racism, alongside varying levels of awareness of the structural dimensions of inequality. These alternative grammars emerge in part from Latin America's history of *mestizaje* as a process and an ideology of nationhood, which have created many racial formations in which prototypical identities or social locations of "Black", "Indigenous" and "white" are supplemented by a large - often majority - "mestizo" middle ground, which, although racially ambiguous, is also powerfully structured by racialised hierarchies that value whiteness. This racial ambiguity - and the appearance of racial conviviality it creates - together afford many chances not to acknowledge racism and even racial difference (Moreno Figueroa and Saldívar, 2016; Segato, 2010; Sheriff, 2001). *Mestizaje* also has the potential to depoliticise practices of social transformation by eroding alliances between racialised groups, as the aspiration to move up through the racial hierarchy, and apparent possibility of actually doing so, disorients the possibility of solidarity. This has the effect of normalising the attacks on dignity and justice that the logics of inequality bring about.

However, while the denial of racism and the undermining of solidarity are clearly major problems, we contend that it is not always necessary to place racism at the very centre of one's struggle and that alternative grammars can play an important role. If we recognise that *mestizaje* is a silencing, distracting and delegitimising racial project, then it makes sense that alternative grammars emerge that can address racism alongside other social exclusions. In Latin America, these alternative grammars of anti-racism are often rooted in a racially-aware class consciousness, a sense of dignity, equality and justice in a stratified society, which is racially aware without racism being at the front and centre of consciousness. This racially-aware class consciousness is a particularly (although not exclusively) Latin American phenomenon, also noted for Brazil by some scholars (Burdick, 2008; Perry, 2013). This form of awareness is due in part to the influence of *mestizaje*, just noted, but its main cause is the region's



specific history of colonialism - originally of a white conquistador rather than white settler variety - which has created a fairly close coincidence of racial and class difference. In simple terms, the closer a person is to Blackness and Indigeneity, as racialised social locations, the further down the class hierarchy they are likely to be; and the closer they are to whiteness, the higher up they are likely to be (Telles and Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America, 2014). This is different from the US and Europe, where the correlation between class and race is not so close and many working class people are white.

One result of this race-class correlation, combined with the racial ambiguities created by *mestizaje*, is that the racialised dimensions of hierarchy are readable as simply class difference or at best as the anachronistic legacy of past racial disadvantage (e.g. slavery). These racialised features may even be read as actually *countering* racial hierarchy: for example, the limited possibility of social ascent for a few racialised subalterns has been read as a sign of racial conviviality and as evidence of the existence of a meritocracy. Historically, this has been a major trend in Latin America and has been part and parcel of the denial and minimisation of racism in the region. However, these readings do not entirely erase the racialised dimensions of the social order, which can still sometimes take starkly visible form. These racialised dimensions can therefore be addressed in an indirect or implicit fashion: by seeing them as an *integral* part of inequality and hierarchy, they can be implicated in any challenge to the inequality, injustice and hierarchy that exist in a racialised social order.

On the basis of the examples we explore below, we argue that there are a number of advantages to these alternative grammars. First, they work with a potentially productive intersection between race and class, which necessarily addresses structural issues of inequality. Second, this intersectional approach addresses racial inequality in a way that does not alienate groups who prefer to avoid an explicitly racial idiom - some Indigenous organisations, for example the CNI, see reference to racism as involving an outdated concept of race, which they want to distance themselves from; they may refer to ethnic discrimination and other forms of injustice, as distinct from racism as such. The race/class intersection creates a basis for building alliances and opens the way to including other intersections (e.g. with gender). Third, such grammars still allow room for the strategic use of explicit language about racism; that is, racism is by no means denied; it is consistently present, but not always in the foreground.

We also acknowledge that these alternative grammars carry some risks. The key danger is that, while groups using these grammars may have a radical approach to social change, this approach might not be framed by a radical perspective on *racism*, or at least not consistently. Thus these perspectives may underestimate the integral role racism plays in structuring inequality, especially in terms of naturalising hierarchy and dehumanising racialised subalterns. In that sense, they may align rather too comfortably with dominant denials and minimisations of racism.

Given this risk, we argue that it can be productive to be more aware of, and perhaps also more explicit about, the structural dimensions of *racial* inequality

and *racism* as a system for distributing disadvantage and privilege, as envisaged by a radical critique. There can be benefits to sharpening up the focus on the racialised dimensions of inequality, to demonstrate just how much racism is integral to the class system, and the role played by the affordances for naturalisation that racism offers.

In what follows, we offer four examples which show different ways in which racism features in the political agenda of a given organisation and how explicitly racism is named and not named. First, we give an example from Colombia of an explicit awareness of racism and explicit use of the language of racism. Then we give examples of alternative grammars of anti-racism from Brazil, Mexico and Ecuador. We end by questioning the assumption that the explicit naming of racism as such is necessary to advance anti-racist work, and suggest that employment of more indirect ways of evoking racism, which imply an awareness of structural racism, have some advantages for anti-racist practice.

### **Chao Racismo: explicit language of (anti-)racism**

The organization Chao Racismo was created in 2011 in Cali, Colombia, by Black lawyer Ray Charrupí, who filed a lawsuit against the gossip magazine *Hola* for publishing a cover photo that was widely deemed racist in its depiction of Black women in demeaning roles (as domestic servants catering to a family of rich white women). At the time of our research in 2017, Chao Racismo was made up of about a dozen women and men (mestizo and Black) who organise campaigns and actions to raise awareness of racism in Cali, Bogotá and Cartagena.<sup>4</sup>

Racism was very explicitly at the front and centre of their actions (Figure 1). Their definition of racism encompasses individual, but also structural dimensions of racial inequality. The key goal for Charrupí was to challenge the equation between *negro* and *pobre* (Black and poor): “If what you are going to do – be it act, process, project of political strategy – doesn’t lead you to say that *n* [*negro*] is different from *p* [*pobre*], then just don’t do it” (interview). He also challenged *blanqueamiento* (whitening, i.e. the process by which some Black, Indigenous and mestizo people, in an ideological context that gives supreme value to whiteness, are motivated to try to distance themselves from Blackness and Indigeneity). The idea of whitening is driven by the *negro* = *pobre* equation, which assumes that upward social mobility is also a move towards whiteness and discounts the possibility of being both Black and middle or upper class. In line with these goals, Chao Racismo had, amongst others, programmes that addressed employment issues. For example, the organisation created the Certificate of Inclusion which it awards to companies that meet certain standards specified by Chao Racismo in terms of employment policies that are inclusive of Afro-Colombians. It promoted meetings and congresses on Inclusive Marketing and Advertising, in order to sensitize PR people and

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<sup>4</sup> Data about Chao Racismo come from fieldwork conducted by Krisna Ruetter-Orihuela under the aegis of the LAPORA project.

businessmen to the issue of racism. Chao Racismo also addressed the violence that disproportionately affects young Black men in Colombia (Urrea Giraldo, 2012, p.156), by organising urban parties in Cali and talent shows in Buenaventura (a city on the Pacific coast) to provide non-violent venues for young Black people, backing these up with workshops about racism, sexism and violence. Furthermore, Chao Racismo integrated gender issues into their work, aiming to actively include women and men in their programmes, campaigning to promote the use of natural Afro hair in the Miss Colombia beauty contest, protesting against use of sexist lyrics and images in the events they organised in Buenaventura, and raising awareness about gender violence in the workshops they ran as part of this.



*Figure 1. The Facebook logo of Chao Racismo.*

These actions are addressing structural issues in some sense, and, it could be argued, they also work to humanise Black people, privileging a portrayal that is different from the common association of Blackness with poverty, and supporting a variety of interests, from employment to beauty pageants. However, the way these programmes were articulated was ultimately about middle-class enitism; the principal aim was to create a well-heeled Black middle class that was “*fashion, sexy y chic*” (fashionable, sexy and chic), in the words of Charrupí. For example, well-publicised activities included promoting a Chao Racismo T-shirt at Miss Colombia beauty pageants. In addition to not challenging the basic structures of capitalist hierarchy, Chao Racismo was celebrating them in their neoliberal version, by focusing on entrepreneurialism, valorising consumerism and making blackness into a fashionable product that middle-class white and mestizo people would want to buy. The main item on Chao Racismo’s agenda was an equation that stereotyped *all* Black people as poor, so the organisation challenged the equation by trying to make *some* Black people rich, and the focus on Black people (excluding non-Black poor people) could be justified because the equation itself was about *Black people*.

But this also meant that their programmes, apart from aiming to inspire individually based social mobility, did not question that fact that most Black people stayed poor, leaving intact the basic class hierarchy. If poverty in general had been addressed, then the issue would have arisen of how to justify a focus only on poor *Black* people. This could have been addressed by showing that, among the poor, Black people in Colombia are even poorer than others (as some statistics indicate, although the comparison is usually made between Black and non-Black people, without controlling for class).<sup>5</sup> But Chao Racismo’s focus was not on this kind of approach, which is about degrees of poverty, even though it is of great relevance to most Afro-Colombians.

In relation to gender, Chao Racismo’s emphasis was on promoting an image of wealthy and conventionally attractive Black women and, as we have seen, making Blackness seem “*fashion, sexy y chic*”. This strategy challenges overt expressions of sexism (in lyrics, music videos, domestic violence), leaving intact sexist and class-based divisions of labour and the intersection of race and gender in the structuring of the labour market - as seen, for example, in the disproportionate presence of Black women in domestic service (Wade, 2013).

In this case, we can see that some elements of a structural focus (on racial inequality, overt sexism and Black poverty) can proceed without requiring a radical rejection of class hierarchy, sexism and capitalism *in toto*. As noted above, some authors claim that to eradicate racism and racial inequality, it would be necessary to get rid of capitalism and/or the liberal social order, because racism is historically constitutive of these social orders. Chao Racismo, does not address the full spectrum of racial inequality: its entrepreneurial anti-racism embraces capitalism and, in shying away from radical change, leaves the

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<sup>5</sup> E.g. among Colombians below the poverty line, Afro-Colombians are over-represented among those below the absolute poverty line. See Urrea-Giraldo et al. (2007).

majority of poor black people untouched. A radical vision or horizon is useful to analyse the anti-racist work of this organisation because it alerts us to the shortcomings of entrepreneurial anti-racism and directs us towards proposing alternatives that address structural issues of poverty and inequality with a differentialist, Black-oriented slant.

However, all of this critique - motivated by a radical horizon - does not mean that activities like those of Chao Racismo are not useful in some ways or should be dismissed. It does attend to a certain population; it does have access and reach within established routes of dissemination of information; and it does valuable anti-racist work. Moreover, it raises the possibility that activities that may seem to others to be superficial, trivial or unimportant can also have useful anti-racist potential. An inclusive approach to anti-racist strategies does not mean being uncritical; it does mean valuing diverse contributions. In the case of Chao Racismo this includes their explicit naming of racism. However, the examples we now present used alternative grammars that made racism less explicit while also having a structural focus, to varying degrees.

### **Rede de Comunidades e Movimentos Contra a Violência: an alternative anti-racist grammar of violence and security**

The Network of Communities and Movements Against Violence is based in Rio de Janeiro, where it started in about 2003 as a reaction to four police massacres in the city's favelas.<sup>6</sup> At the time of our research in 2017, it had about 60 members, most of whom were favela-dwelling mothers who self-identified as *negras*; of these, about twenty regularly attended meetings and participated actively in street protests and demonstrations (Figure 2), attending court cases, registering official complaints and interacting with their main government interlocutor, the Defensoria Pública (public ombudsman or defender) of the state of Rio. The network also had several allies and supporters, who were mainly students, researchers and other activists.

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<sup>6</sup> Data about this network come from fieldwork conducted by Luciane Rocha under the aegis of the LAPORA project. See also Rocha (2012).



Figure 2. A street demonstration by the Rede de Comunidades e Movimentos Contra a Violência, Rio de Janeiro, May 2017 (photograph by Luciane Rocha).

In their public statements and demonstrations, the Rede (network) members denounced “genocide” and challenge mainstream “drug war” narratives, the criminalisation of protest and mass incarceration practices. They denounced racism in the justice system, drawing on data that shows 71 percent of homicides in Brazil are of Black people; that there has been a 40 percent rise in Black deaths (not just police killings) in the decade to 2014; that, controlling for age, sex, education and place of residence, Black people in Rio city are 24 percent more often victims of homicide than white people; and that in São Paulo state in 2011, Black people were 3 times more likely than white people to be killed by police, taking into account their demographic weight.<sup>7</sup>

In all this, exactly how central was “racism” in their discourse and agenda? There are some factors indicating that it occupied a relatively marginal location. While the women in the network tended to identify as *negras*, for example, this was rarely a matter of open discussion or explicit affirmation. The mothers’ protest against police violence frequently referred to the victims as being young

<sup>7</sup> Saenz (2015), Cerqueira and Coelho (2017). For São Paulo data, see Sinhoretto, Silvestre, and Schlittler (2014).

male favela-dwellers and the favelas themselves as spaces in the city. Another factor is that although many of murdered victims, identified as Black, this was not insistently made explicit by their mothers in the Rede, and was usually adduced alongside being a *favelado* and being poor, as an intersectional whole. Mother's calls were made for "justice" and against "extermination by the state", but "racism" was not explicitly named in the banners and posters that the network used in public protests. Overall, there was explicit recognition that police violence in favelas has an impact that crosses racial difference (and indeed includes some white victims). As a network slogan put it: "We are Mothers. We are Black Mothers, Indigenous Mothers, Working Mothers, Poor Mothers, Slum Mothers, Peripheral Mothers: We are Warrior Mothers!"<sup>8</sup>

Yet, at the same time, the underlying racialised character of the killings and the protesters was ever present. We see this in the photos of the victims – all young black men, albeit of varied skin tones – forming a central part of the visual aspect of these demonstrations and making the racialized character of the killing tacitly but abundantly clear, as did the bodies of the mothers themselves. In some demonstrations, home-made mannequins representing young black bodies were daubed with red paint and strewn about the pavements. This was a strategic use of bodies and images to highlight suffering and emotion (but also to question the spectacle and voyeurism around damaged bodies), and the bodies were clearly racialised. The racialised character of the Rede's struggle is also palpable in the mother's public speeches, where they occasionally reiterated the racial bias of the violence and talked of favelas as black territories.

In interviews, mothers quite often used a language of lethal racism. One said: "My children died at the hands of a racist police force because they were in racialized territory [the favela]"; another said: "Here in Brazil, you do not need to be guilty or involved [in crime] to be killed, just be Black, poor and live in the favela to be in the sights of the police" – although a second later she said only "poor and from the favela," reinforcing the absent-present quality of racialised identifications. The word "genocide" appeared occasionally on the banners displayed in public demonstrations and, while the word is defined by the UN in terms of threats to a particular "national, ethnic, racial or religious group", it arguably has strongly racialised connotations and some authors explicitly talk about "black genocide" (Nascimento, 1989; Rocha, 2012; Alves, 2014; Smith, 2017).

In addition, the data on violence in Brazil are nowadays often collected and analysed according to age, sex and colour (opposing "blacks" to "whites"), rather than class. The correlations between class, neighbourhood and violence are complex and it is not as easy to find clear and simple data on them. This shaping of the availability of data obeys the Brazilian state's orientation towards anti-racism and the dominant tendency to take census and survey data, which use four colour categories - white, brown, black and yellow (meant to capture people

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<sup>8</sup> "Nós somos Mães. Nós somos Mães Negras, Mães Indígenas, Mães Trabalhadoras, Mães Pobres, Mães de Favelas, Mães Periféricas: Nós somos Mães Guerreiras!"

of Asian ancestry) - and simplify these into Black-white comparisons. This tends to highlight racial factors, especially in activist and mainstream press reports, which do not always control closely for class (Amnesty International, 2015).

The case of the Rede is a rich illustration of an anti-racist motherhood and its dealing with state violence and young black male's death. In terms of our argument, the Rede illustrates how the naming of racism came into and out of focus, being explicit in some contexts (e.g. ethnographic interviews) and more implicit in others (e.g. public protests). There was clearly an awareness of the structural dimensions of the violence, but not necessarily a consistent centring of the role racism played in these structures nor a consistent strategic use of explicit reference to racism. Alongside a clear gendered position of the women as mothers, there was ambiguity about the intersection of race and class: the mothers appreciated that they did not coincide completely ("we" included "Indigenous mothers"), but they were clearly very aware that the categories of favela dweller and non-white overlapped a great deal. This race-class intersection and the racially-aware class consciousness that goes with it is also evident in the next two cases.

### **Congreso Nacional Indígena: an alternative anti-racist grammar of political power**

The Congreso Nacional Indígena (CNI) is a well-established and consolidated organisation in Mexico with national scope.<sup>9</sup> Its origins are closely linked to the 1994 uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) and it has convened five national congresses since 1996 bringing together representatives of all indigenous peoples around the country. As befits its origins, it is politically radical and it fights for Indigenous autonomy, with capitalism and the Mexican state clearly identified as adversaries in the struggle. In 2016, the CNI created the Concejo Indígena de Gobierno (CIG) to support an attempt to get an Indigenous candidate on to the slate for the presidential elections and in 2017 the CGI promoted the (unsuccessful) candidacy of María de Jesús Patricio (aka "Marichuy"), a female Nahuatl leader and healer. This was one of the most radical propositions of the CNI, counteracting a strong gendered and racialised stereotype of Indigenous men as ill-treating their women and of Indigenous people overall as incapable of leadership.

In terms of how the concept of racism figures in the CNI's discourse and agenda, there is, as in the case of the Rio mothers' network, a good deal of ambivalence. On the one hand, adhering to a basically Marxist perspective, CNI activists express a strong desire to speak on behalf of "*los de abajo*" (those from below) and they recognise the common oppression of many people. Their website lists the Indigenous peoples that make up CNI and then at the end adds "Afromestizo y Mestizo". One declaration says "We hear the pain of all the

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<sup>9</sup> Data about the CNI come from fieldwork conducted by Gisela Carlos Fregoso under the aegis of the LAPORA project.



colours that make up the Mexico of below” and “It is not only the racism of the political structure that did not let our proposal [of a presidential candidacy of Marichuy] appear on the ballot, because if those who oppose the capitalist destruction of the world were to have slanted, blue or red eyes, public policies and the supposed democracy would still be made to exclude them”.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, for the CNI, racism is but one ideological weapon used in pursuit of exploitation.<sup>11</sup>

In keeping with this, CNI public declarations only occasionally mention racism. For example, their website postings sometimes refer to “conditions of marginality, racism and discrimination” or talk about “the examples of racism from the Mexican government”.<sup>12</sup> But in four years of CNI website posts, “*racismo*” appeared only nine times, and “*discriminación*” fourteen. In addition, female solidarity (and female victimisation by violence) was sometimes seen to overcome both class and racial difference: in interview, Marichuy and some fellow activists talked about the possibility of urban, mestiza and white women identifying with and participating in the CNI women’s project.

On the other hand, there is a constant and powerful affirmation of Indigeneity, which is evident in the organisation’s name, in the visual materials and iconography used in its website, demonstrations and meetings, which overwhelmingly comprise Indigenous people, often dressed in traditional attire (Figure 3). This emphasis is also made explicit in CNI declarations about the struggles of resistance of “*los pueblos indígenas*” (Indigenous peoples) and their quest for autonomy based on Indigenous life-ways and practices - on “*el espacio de los indios que somos*” (the space of the Indians that we are). Overall, the discourse of the CNI is shaped by various approximately overlapping structural binaries: urban/rural, white/non-white, privileged/poor (and to some extent north/south within Mexico). Each binary connotes the other two: thus any talk of poverty (as in *los de abajo*) automatically evokes an image of Indigenous people (or dark-skinned mestizos), and vice versa. The precise boundaries and categorisations do not necessarily matter that much. Instead, the deep historical roots of the structural intersection between being Indigenous (or dark-skinned mestizo) and being poor was what drove the agenda. In this sense, while there was muted direct reference to racism, there was a powerful sense of a structural racialised subalternity.

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<sup>10</sup> “Escuchamos el dolor de todos los colores que somos el México de abajo” and “No es solo el racismo de la estructura política lo que no dejó que nuestra propuesta figure en la boleta electoral, pues si quienes se oponen a la destrucción capitalista del mundo compartieran entre si los ojos rasgados, azules o rojos, las políticas públicas y la supuesta democracia estarían hechas para excluirlos a ellos” <https://www.congresonacionalindigena.org/2018/05/02/falta-lo-falta/>.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.congresonacionalindigena.org/2017/04/12/escuchar-el-dolor-que-hay-en-mexico/>.

<sup>12</sup> “condiciones de marginalidad, racismo y discriminación”; “las muestras de racismo del Gobierno mexicano”.



Figure 3. Marichuy (second from left) at a meeting in Palenque, Chiapas state, October 2017 (photograph by Gisela Carlos Fregoso).

This scenario was given a tweak by the CIG and Marichuy’s electoral campaign, when her attempt to enter the national political arena as the candidate of *los de abajo*, but with a clearly racialised and gendered dimension, produced a highly racialised and sexist backlash that brutally revealed the racial and gendered aspects of the power hierarchy. Social media posts appeared, ridiculing Marichuy and likening her to a domestic worker: “she looks like the woman who cleans my house”; “why isn’t she making *pozole*? [a Mexican corn-based stew]; “I would vote for #MaryChuy. You can see she has experience in cleaning Mexico”.<sup>13</sup> These were widely reported in the press, usually with the appropriate hand-wringing. The racist and sexist social media reaction was limited but potent and it made all the clearer that Marichuy’s candidacy was in effect an anti-racist intervention.

In addition, its anti-racist appeal was intersectional and invoked a racially-aware class consciousness: the reference in social media posts to domestic service touches on a very potent articulation of race, class and gender in Latin America (Saldaña-Tejeda, 2014; Wade, 2013). A woman would not have to self-identify as Indigenous to feel the racism and sexism in these comments; any dark-skinned, lower-class mestiza could angrily identify with Marichuy on this issue.

<sup>13</sup> “Esa Marichuy se parece a la que limpia mi casa”; “¿Quién es Marichuy y por qué no está haciendo *pozole*?”; “Yo sí votaría por Marichuy. Se ve que tiene experiencia en limpiar a México” (Hernández Navarro, 2018; Marini, 2018).

In the case of the CNI, then, we see an awareness of structural racism mediated by an ambivalent approach to directly naming racism, which enters in and out of focus in a way perhaps even more ambiguous than the case of the Rio mothers' network. When racism is mentioned, however, it is done with precision and poignancy. There is a strong awareness of Indigenous peoples' negatively racialised and gendered condition, while the anti-capitalist stance of the CNI also invites their members - and others - to think about racialised and gendered inequality in structural ways and consider the whole racialised power structure of Mexico.

### **Wimbí and an alternative anti-racist grammar of environment and land**

Wimbí is a small community in the Esmeraldas province of the Pacific coastal region of Ecuador, ancestrally occupied by Black (and some Indigenous) people (Figure 4).<sup>14</sup> For centuries, but increasingly in the last few decades, the area has been subject to exploitation by outside interests, coming from the white/mestizo regions of the interior and from international companies, extracting natural resources (minerals, timber) and engaging in agro-industrial production (mainly of palm-oil and shrimp) (Antón Sánchez, 2015). Local community people are often involved in these enterprises as labour in different modalities (e.g. employees, day labourers); they may also be small entrepreneurs, linked to the incoming businesses as sub-contractors; and they may sell land and rights to resources or concede them in exchange for other benefits (e.g. road construction). As of 2012, about 25 percent of the land in northern Esmeraldas had been sold to outside capitalist interests. Transactions have sometimes been made willingly, but have often been coerced in some way, whether with threats or other less overt pressuring. In formal terms, such sales are often illegal, as these collective land titles do not permit sale; nevertheless, judicial cases sometimes decide in favor of private companies. Some of the land has also been invaded (Antón Sánchez, 2015, pp.99-102). Conflicts emerge over land and over environmental degradation (mainly the use and contamination of water and the destruction of the forest). Resistance by local communities is thus focused principally on land use and ownership and on environmental issues, but also on violence as leaders may be subject to threats and also murder, crimes that are frequently committed with impunity.

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<sup>14</sup> Data about Wimbí come from fieldwork conducted by María Moreno Parra under the aegis of the LAPORA project. See also Moreno Parra 2019.



*Figure 4. The community of Wimbí, Esmeraldas province, September 2017 (photograph by María Moreno Parra).*

At the time of our research in 2017, local activists in Wimbí were making use of legal instruments, including rights to titles for ancestral lands (*tierras de posesión ancestral*), accorded to them as Afro-Ecuadorian communities in the Law of Agrarian Development (1994) and in the 1998 Constitution. They also solicited the support of Ecuador’s Defensoría del Pueblo (ombudsman, public defender) and they mobilised their alliances with the Catholic Church’s Pastoral Social (Social Ministry) and environmentalist NGOs (e.g. Acción Ecológica).

In all this - as in the previous examples - racism was not often mentioned explicitly. The overriding frame for claims and protests was state multiculturalism and its rights regime, in which, as we have noted, is a context in which racism and racial inequality tends to get sidelined. Press reports on environmental issues and land conflicts - a specific conflict that arose in 2015 and is on-going has attracted some attention in the media - almost never mentioned racism and do not always even note that the local people are Black (and Indigenous). The website of the local community council (Junta Parroquial) notes that local people are descended from dark-skinned “Congos”, but does not refer to racism or discrimination and claims that slavery was never

present in this particular community.<sup>15</sup> Public statements by local leaders and allies (e.g. from the Church, NGOs and universities) may strike the same tone: the transcript of a meeting held in 2017 involving such stakeholders is full of denunciations of the situation, but does not refer to racism and mentions only once “the discrimination of the courts of justice against Black peoples,” in relation to obstacles to securing legal title to ancestral territories.<sup>16</sup> Even a document prepared for the United Nations’ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) by community organizations in Esmeraldas, Church spokespeople and local academics only refers three times to “racial discrimination” and “systematic discrimination” against Black and Indigenous communities in the region.<sup>17</sup>

Yet there was an underlying awareness among locals of structural issues linked to their racialised condition. Tellingly, this emerged in ethnographic interviews with local leaders, activists, teachers and Black church people, when the matter of racism was raised explicitly in the conversation by the researcher. Then people often responded by showing an acute awareness of racism, both direct and structural, as the following examples show:

We will not go back to being slaves. (local Black leader)

First they [the community] were owners [of the land] and now they are slaves [of the palm-oil companies] ... because they were slaves in the past, people want them to go back to being slaves. (Black teacher)

It seems they want to get rid of us, because it is only in the Afro communities and the indigenous communities that you can see so many abuses of our rights. (A mestizo official in the Church Pastoral Social, citing what a local black man had said to him)

The [palm-oil] company says “We have beaten high-powered people. Can’t we beat these *negritos* [demeaning diminutive form: ‘little black people’].” (President of the local community council)

I am fighting alongside them, alongside the community, so that we are not crushed because we as Black people have the same rights that all communities have. [...] Let the government see that these are ancestral territories that belong

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<sup>15</sup> <http://5dejunio.gob.ec/>. Accessed 12 May 2021.

<sup>16</sup> <https://verdadparalavida.org/audiencia-del-choco/>. Accessed 13 May 2021.

<sup>17</sup> The document is an “alternative report” to the normal country-level reports submitted to CERD. See [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/ECU/INT\\_CERD\\_NGO\\_ECU\\_28317\\_S.pdf](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/ECU/INT_CERD_NGO_ECU_28317_S.pdf). Accessed 13 May 2021.

to us because we are black. [...] This is how they want to crush us [*amoratarnos*] as Black people, “these *negritos* are going to be crushed with this because we have the [land] titles”. [...] They should not discriminate against us for being Black.” (member of the local community council)

As a Black person, you cannot get ahead: you know this already; it’s no surprise ... if you want the Black race to get ahead, they’ll kill you. (member of the local community council)

They screw us over because we are poor and because we are Black. (member of the local community council)

It has been said that the State does not care about the lives of the Black people in the area, not at all. [...] in the class of poor people where there are Black, white, mestizo, the most fucked up of all is the Black; there is a racial problem, I believe it is a racial struggle, not a class struggle. (local priest)

They keep looking at us here in [the region of] Esmeraldas, as an area, a province of Black people, and that also means that they did not act. [...] What is happening in San Lorenzo [regional capital city] and in Wimbí is a sign that the fight for racism has not ended. (priest in Pastoral Social Esmeraldas)<sup>18</sup>

These quotations reveal how Blackness (and thus also racism) is embedded in wider issues, linked to land, territory and the nation-state. Land can legally be claimed as the ancestral lands of an “Afro-Ecuadorian community” and, while this legal figure is framed in a multiculturalist rights regime, it still foregrounds a category for which racialised difference is implicitly present and can be made explicitly present, as we can see. This racialised difference is in turn embedded in a broader narrative about the development of the Ecuadorean nation, in which the northern Pacific region (and the Amazon region) are portrayed in the dominant discourse as inferior (underdeveloped, uncivilised), because of its

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<sup>18</sup> “Esto nos pasa porque somos negros”. “Al parecer nos quieren eliminar, porque solo en las poblaciones afro y las poblaciones indígenas es donde se ve tanto atropello a nuestros derechos”. “La empresa dice ‘hemos vencido a gente de gran calaña. ¿No vamos a vencer a estos negritos?’”. “Estoy luchando con ellos, con la comunidad para que no seamos aplastados porque nosotros como negros tenemos el mismo derecho que tienen todas las comunidades”; “Que el gobierno mire que esos son territorios ancestrales que nos pertenecen por ser negros”; “Así nos quieren amoratar como negros, ‘a estos negritos los amoratamos con esto porque tenemos la escritura’”; “Que no nos discriminen a nosotros por ser negros, debemos salir”. “Está dicho que al Estado no le importa la vida de los negros de la zona, para nada;” “en una clase de pobres que hay negros, blancos, mestizos el más jodido de todos es el negro, hay problema racial yo voy por la lucha racial, no la lucha de clases”. “A nosotros nos siguen mirando acá en Esmeraldas, como una zona, una provincia de negros, y que eso también hace que no se actué”; “lo que se está dando en San Lorenzo y en Wimbí es una muestra de que no se ha terminado la lucha por el racismo”.

Black (and Indigenous) population (Rahier, 2014; Whitten, 1986; Whitten, 1981). There is an underlying racialisation linked to the historical geography and moral topography of the country, which created and sustains a structural link between underdevelopment and Blackness (and Indigeneity), and constructs an image of the region as a place open to exploitation by any means necessary in order to make a profit.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the struggles for land and against environmental destruction are also implicitly anti-racist struggles, not just from our point of view as analysts, making an argument about the operation of structural racism, but from the point of view of many local people too. As with the Rede and the CNI, racism came into and out of focus, although in this case it was arguably less publicly in focus than in the Rede and the CNI and tended to become explicit mainly in interview contexts where the issue was put on the table. For Wimbí inhabitants, this reluctance to talk publicly about racism existed alongside great clarity about the unequal exploitation of land and environmental consequences, a clarity that was strongly inflected with a sense that the racialised position of the area's inhabitants is inherently involved in this inequality - i.e. Wimbí people revealed a racially-aware class consciousness. Notable for Wimbí, as for the CNI, is that when racism is adduced in this context it leads directly to a structural perspective, going beyond individual discriminations and stigmatisations. As with the CNI, it shows an awareness of - and invites others to consider - the whole racialised power structure of Ecuador.

## Conclusion

In all the three cases of anti-racist struggles using alternative grammars, presented above, racism as an idea is present in varying degrees, but in all cases it is imbricated with a wider concern with class (and gender), reflected in concerns about reduced access to safety/life, to political power, and to resources (land, water, forest).

In Latin America this has often been seen as a problem for anti-racism: race and class strongly overlap and mestizaje blurs lines of racial difference such that racism can be mistaken for - or purposely read as - classism, and racial inequality for class inequality. The anti-racist strategy has been to try to make lines of racial difference sharper, in order to highlight racism and racial inequality. This has been very useful politically in drawing attention to racism and to marginalised groups, but there are limits to this strategy. For example, this way of focusing on racism has often led to anti-discrimination legislation and initiatives. These are notable for the way they embrace a wide variety of differences, but they rarely address class difference, because doing so immediately raises structural issues that these laws cannot easily address. A 2010 Bolivian law against racism and discrimination and the 2008 constitution

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<sup>19</sup> For a parallel argument about Colombia, see Wade (1993).

of Ecuador both list numerous forms difference<sup>20</sup> and unusually they include class elements (socio-economic condition, level of education). Yet it remains to be seen what might happen if people tried to denounce the “discrimination” they suffered in the job market because of their low levels of education, or in the housing market because they didn’t have enough money to buy or rent the house they wanted. These are structural issues, which can’t be addressed by anti-discrimination legislation, which targets specific acts by individuals, even if legal action against such acts can have great symbolic power.

Our data suggest that a different approach is also possible, as a complementary strategy. The struggles of the Rede, the CNI and the Wimbí community all address class/race intersections that (like race/gender ones) invite a more complex approach, which wants to address the two dimensions together, but at a *structural* level. Through the use of alternative grammars of anti-racism, these organisations address basic structures of class and power inequality and, at the same time, show an awareness of how these structures are inflected by racism, while not affecting only a specific racialised category.

This complex approach to anti-racism is potentially productive for anti-racist work that seeks to address racial inequality, rather than just discrimination and stigmatisation as individual acts; it directs attention to basic structural issues but in a racially aware way. This can be a useful foothold or point of entry for anti-racist work especially in a predominantly mestizo society where many people have difficulty in empathising with the idea of racism - frequently understood in mainstream Latin American society solely in terms of hatred and violence, often individualised - but can more easily understand “unfairness” as a legitimate concern. An alternative grammar of anti-racism may be an effective tactic for maximising the legitimacy of claims and struggles in the eyes of others and avoiding the threat of delegitimation that a more unequivocally racialised demand may attract. This might appear to be catering to white-mestizo fragility, but, because the racialised dimensions of the struggle are never absent, alternative grammars actually manage to keep them in the frame in the form of a racially-aware sense of justice.

The racially-aware structural focus that is not narrowly attentive to specific racialised identities can also be an important way of building alliances, not only between Black and Indigenous peoples, but also potentially with dark-skinned mestizos - and in Argentina, with people pejoratively labelled *negro* who are not dark-skinned (Geler, 2016) - who are all implicated in a racialised category of *los de abajo*, but some of whom may not always want to acknowledge their racialised condition.

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<sup>20</sup> Bolivia’s Ley contra el racismo y toda forma de discriminación, Article 5, lists the following types of discrimination: “sex, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, cultural identity, family background, nationality, citizenship, language, religious creed, ideology, political or philosophical opinion, civil status, economic or social condition, illness, type of occupation, grade of instruction, physical, intellectual or sensory handicap or alternate capacity, pregnancy, regional origin, physical appearance, clothing, surname and others”. Ecuador’s 2008 constitution, Article 11, has a similar list.



However, there are of course risks here of underestimating the importance of the integral role racism and racialised inequality plays in structuring hierarchy and inequality as a whole. Wimbí locals and mothers in the Rede are unevenly aware of the historical intersections of race and class via colonialism, which have over the centuries produced the durable and often inflexible accretions and accumulations that constitute today's social structures. Even CNI people, who often deploy a discourse that is explicitly aware of these issues, often also put them in a Marxist frame that reduces racism to an ideological tool at the service of capitalism, rather than seeing it as historically constitutive of capitalism and liberal political orders. But the racist and sexist reaction to Marichuy's electoral campaign suggests that it might be necessary, at some point, to talk more explicitly about racism alongside sexism, as it is not only used as means of attacking Indigenous organising, but is also a key element in the mechanisms that reproduce inequality more widely in Mexico.

In this sense, while alternative grammars of anti-racism have distinct advantages in the landscape of anti-racist strategies, we argue it is worth exploiting the current "turn to anti-racism" in Latin America and working with a politically radical horizon in view to highlight, on the one hand, just how much racism has been and still is integral to the fabric of the class system (which is predicated on inequality and which political orders work to reproduce); and, on the other, the affordances racism offers for processes of naturalisation and dehumanisation.

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