

The reconfiguration of networks of alterity: anti-racist activisms and sociodigital mediations in Mexico

*La reconfiguración de las redes de
alteridad: activismos antirracistas y
mediaciones sociodigitales en México*

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Over the last ten years, sociodigital networks have become a strategic resource for anti-racist struggles worldwide. The instrumentalization of these technological devices entails multiple potentialities, tensions, and contradictions in the constitution of the political field and its democratic fabric. Drawing on a series of multi-sited ethnographic studies, this article analyses the ways in which diverse social actors deploy their anti-racist militant practices within the Mexican syndemic context.

KEYWORDS: Anti-racism, sociodigital networks, digital activism, networks of alterity, social movements.

En los últimos diez años, las redes sociodigitales se han convertido en un recurso estratégico para las luchas antirracistas a nivel global. La instrumentalización de estos dispositivos tecnológicos entraña múltiples potencialidades, tensiones y contradicciones en la constitución del campo político y su entramado democrático. Usando una serie de estudios etnográficos multisituados, en este artículo analizamos las formas en que diversos actores sociales despliegan sus prácticas militantes antirracistas en el contexto sindémico mexicano.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Antirracismo, redes sociodigitales, activismo digital, redes de alteridad, movimientos sociales.

Nos últimos dez anos, as redes sociodigitais se tornaram um recurso estratégico para as lutas antirracistas em nível global. A instrumentalização desses dispositivos tecnológicos envolve múltiplas potencialidades, tensões e contradições na constituição do campo político e de sua estrutura democrática. Com base em uma série de estudos etnográficos realizados em diversos locais, neste artigo analisamos as formas como diversos atores sociais desenvolvem suas práticas militantes antirracistas no contexto sindêmico mexicano.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Antirracismo, redes sociodigitais, ativismo digital, redes de alteridade, movimentos sociais.

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OBSERVING THE ENVIRONMENTS OF ANTI-RACIST ACTIVISM IN A SYNDEMIC CONTEXT

The COVID-19 pandemic has left a planetary trail of grief and bewilderment, having killed more than 15 million people and left chronic sequelae in more than 400 million (Al-Aly et al., 2024). Two aspects of this complex biosocial and geopolitical phenomenon are central to how we frame our analysis of anti-racist practices. The first is pragmatic: the response of many state public health systems entailed a lockdown that exponentially intensified reliance on information and communication technologies (ICT). This had a direct impact on the methodological redesign of our research: as a precaution, we scaled back in-person ethnography in favor of a far more intensive observation of anti-racist practices on sociodigital platforms. The second is epistemological. The same context threw into relief the synergistic and recursive character of the conjuncture, since the COVID-19 health crisis was amplified by the convergence of several pandemic contexts that together structured a cumulative comorbidity—in short, a syndemic context.

The *syndemic*, a concept developed by the medical anthropologist Merrill Singer, allows us to identify how interactions among multifactorial pathological conditions potentiate one another, producing ominous conjunctures of biosocial crisis (Singer et al., 2017). In Mexico, the diabetes and hypertension pandemic—driven by unequal access to healthy care practices and by impunity in the supply of junk and ultra-processed food—aggravated comorbidity among COVID-19 patients. Those already living in precarity, whether by reason of class, gender, territory, or ethnicity, proved more vulnerable to the health emergency: syndemic contexts are articulations that exacerbate the workings of oppressive structures that already damage health (Quinn, 2022).

Historically, the diverse anti-racist struggles have been configured in response to, and in combat against, these multifactorial crises. Our work has consisted in documenting and analyzing how, over the past eight years, diverse social actors in Mexico have oriented their anti-racist practices of audiovisual production through *hybrid media activism* (Treré, 2019)—that is, through the use of sociodigital platforms, their algorithms, and other participatory modalities of direct action deploy-

ing different communication technologies. These militant forms do not draw solely on contemporary social movements such as #MeToo or #BlackLivesMatter, fundamental feminist and anti-racist struggles constituted in the tactical use of ICT that propelled transnational connective action (Shahin et al., 2024).

The cases we study here also trace substantive genealogical associations with local socio-territorial struggles imbricated with anti-racism at the national level. The syndemic framework allows us to understand the specific COVID conjuncture as constituted by multiple components articulated in the register of crisis before, during, and after the “viral” sociopolitical emergency, whose epochal character has been characterized as the anti-racist turn in Mexico (Carlos Fregoso, 2024; Varela Huerta, 2025; Viveros Vigoya, 2020).

THE ANTI-RACIST TURN IN MEXICO: THE RECONFIGURATION OF NETWORKS OF ALTERITY

In other publications based on our research, we have reported on how the field of academic studies on racism in Mexico has played a fundamental role in the political and institutional field of the anti-racist struggle (Dorcé Ramos & Roque de Castro, 2025). We demonstrated, with empirical evidence, how the national sociopolitical arena has been reconfigured as a function of disputes surrounding racism. Social interactions mediated by sociodigital networks (SDN) have enabled the dispersion of transmedia contents that denounce, explain, and debate multiple forms of discrimination. In the wake of the tendential intensification of political controversies and discrepancies –traversed by racism across diverse sites of the informational sphere– we proposed to explore a reticular model that we have termed *networks of alterity* (Dorcé, 2022).

Drawing on the work of Nancy Fraser (1990), Claudia Briones (2005), Rita Laura Segato (2007) and Alejandro Grimson (2011), we argue that fields of interlocation –the intertextual domains generated by cooperative dynamics of signification associated with the schema of alterity formations– can be characterized through the heuristic of networked sociability (van Dijk, 2006). Read historically, a conjunctural

analysis of this sociability lets us describe how the conversion of these networks of the public sphere brings to light “sutures made visible in their contingency ... and how cultural movements open up from which new qualities of the hegemonic process may emerge” (Grimson, 2011, p. 178; our translation).

The notion of networks of alterity helps us grasp the organizational specificity of online practices of textual production, circulation, and consumption, given the dispositions that technological fabrics and infrastructures induce in actors. Their subjectivity takes shape in relation to the political becoming of class, gender, and ethnic-racial identifications intrinsic to specific nodes of media content, progressively digitized and redistributed online. It is an epistemic resource for understanding historically how links and nodes are established between distinct modes of technological appropriation, whose tensions and contradictions feed into the political field as it forms within the specificity of the post-neoliberal contingency. It is this condition that lends efficacy to algorithmic logics engineered to intensify and capitalize on the online activity of individuals, collectives, and associations pursuing widely differing interests (Rouvroy & Berns, 2016). Emergent technological forms for constructing citizenship and alterity thus incorporate and contend with the extractivist ethos of the attention economy, datafication, and platform capitalism –corporate orientations that maintain an opportunistic commitment to sociocultural diversity and to the plurality of political practices (Cieslik & Margócsy, 2022; García Canclini, 2020).

The cases presented here allow us to see how the sutures and fissures of national consensus acquire an intertextual discursivity, inscribed concretely in the relation between residual and dominant forms through which social movements reconfigure the political arena. What follows sketches some of the general components needed to contextualize anti-racist activisms, attending to the nodes of meaning that have shaped disputes over power as mediated by different technologies and textualities.

One historical singularity of the political organization of ethnicity in Mexico lies in the hegemonic force with which the dehumanizing practices of racism were denied, euphemized, and epistemologically contested throughout the twentieth century. This derives from the

prominence of *mestizaje* as the hard axis of a modernizing cultural politics articulated within an institutional order secured by state elites, the business sector, the church, and the media oligarchy. A hegemonic equilibrium of this kind required effective systems of government. The state and other institutions deployed negotiation, co-optation, and selective coercion to manage centralized information networks, producing the mediatic effect of social peace and intercultural harmony. Yet the historiography of social movements in Mexico attests to a vast plurality of political struggles led by peasants, laborers, and workers organized in multiple forms according to their class interests (Illades, 2018; López Caballero, 2011).

Scholarship has likewise documented the demands of social actors whose claims were voiced from complex positions of social status. Socioeconomic stratification and ethnicization operated together, as categories of ascription, upon Indigenous peoples, migrant communities, and, later, Afro-Mexican peoples. In both cases, the workings of exploitation and oppression were largely understood as unrelated to oppressive mechanisms historically constituted through the racialization of gendered social relations. The national formation of alterities in Mexico was defined, dominantly, by an organic refusal to acknowledge heteropatriarchal racialization as a substantive component of its ordering and of the political conflict it generated.

The waning of the 1960s fostered an intensification of exchange within international networks of solidarity, propelling metropolitan youth into the role of emergent political actors. Their demands crystallized a range of heterogeneous cosmopolitan claims woven from the growing exchange of politicizing cultural goods: journalism, literature, the sciences, and the plastic arts all glimpsed emancipations organized around justice, equality, freedom, and democracy. The characteristic authoritarianism of the hegemonic Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) responded by reinforcing its repressive apparatus, curtailing freedom of expression across telecommunication networks and the freedom of assembly of dissenting groups. The criminal category of “social dissolution” (Rodríguez Kuri, 2021) served as the prologue to a dirty war that normalized sabotage, torture, disappearance, and assassination as instruments of social control (Vicente Ovalle, 2021).

In a contiguous context, the women's liberation movement secured fundamental gains in the international legal sphere: the right to vote, expanding access to education, the gradual reform of labor conditions, and organizational parity (Rodríguez Everaert, 2022). The struggle for the rights of sexual and gender diversity likewise asserted its existence in close collaboration with feminism (Diez, 2011). In 1970s Mexico this meant increasing public visibility for the oppressive dynamics of gender that shape the very conceptualization of power, labor, the body, and the spaces of political action (Lamas, 2024). The feminist schism in Mexico, as elsewhere, proved profoundly consequential, for it radically altered the conditions of epistemic possibility for recognition. That disruption widened the field of legitimacy for unprecedented claims which, in the act of enunciation, invested new political subjects with existence. Feminism did not merely open spaces for women; it drew public attention to sites, situations, and processes of exploitation, subordination, exclusion, and abuse that hegemonic politics had engendered uncritically, including within progressive organizations (Heberle, 2016).

If official *indigenismo*, consolidated as state policy and initially promoted by non-Indigenous subjectivities, permitted recognition and a measure of redistribution for Indigenous peoples, feminism enabled practices of dis-covering (*desencubrimiento*) that, not without contradictions, exposed modes of oppression and erasure of women naturalized under the aegis of heteropatriarchal normality. This renewed the integrative character of the national political field. The dominant logics of visibility governing the “differences” that constitute political actors were recast through categories –sex and gender– that made it possible to characterize the transversal operation of power across socioeconomic and ethnic determinations not always thought together. Within that equation, Afro-Mexicanness (*afromexicanidad*) as a formal field of identification and social organization remained germinal. *La Tercera Raíz* (The Third Root), established as a disavowed genealogy of the nation in the work of Aguirre Beltrán, was systematically confined to the academy within the national mestizo order.

During the 1980s, neoliberal globalization inaugurated the consolidation of electoral democracies sponsored by Global North oligarchies with shareholders and partners in the Southern Hemisphere (Lins

Ribeiro, 2014; Massey, 2002; Yúdice, 2003). Inter- and supranational bodies sheltered models for managing interethnic relations strongly marked by a discourse of multiculturalism imagined as the production of “post-racial” market niches. The Italian success story of Benetton was emblematic of the emergent ethos: its marketing not only made room for people with “multiracial” ethnophenotypes but also acknowledged environmentalist struggles, dissident “subcultures”, and their militant aesthetics (Giroux, 1993). Free transit for commodities, cultural goods, and investment from North to South formalized the interdependence of economies as dissimilar as the US and the Mexican in trade agreements that practiced inclusion, but only among capital; non-reciprocal policies of economic liberalization that enriched minority elites while rendering vast majorities equally precarious.

The 1994 Zapatista uprising broadcast the combative clamor of a sui generis military organization with a popular and Indigenous base, whose anti-capitalist claims were crucially also anti-racist (Castellanos Guerrero, 2001). The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) secured its survival through the robust networks it wove with sympathizers in Europe and beyond (Rovira, 2009; Schulz, 2014). The very informational and transport infrastructures that had built the neoliberal thrust were turned to the constitution of a relative autonomy sustained by strategic connections of interdependence. The urgency with which neo-Zapatismo erupted onto the national and global stage placed historical relations of alterity at the center of national political discourse, especially in terms of the persistent marginality of Indigenous peoples. Ethnicity played a strategic role in that struggle for the recognition and global visibility of oppressively racialized populations in Mexico.

It is in this context that Afro-Mexican communities organized, mainly across the Costa Chica, in a movement that would regain force and effectiveness during the first two decades of the twenty-first century (Velázquez & Iturralde, 2016). Ethnicity served as a resource binding together diverse forms of racialized belonging –an orientation subsumed by the neoliberal state, which in its multicultural register produced the program *Nuestra Tercera Raíz* (Our Third Root) by the National Council for Culture and the Arts (Conaculta) (Lara Millán, 2017). Articulating this multiplicity of forms, scales, and temporalities

of political activism, traversed by different identitarian dimensions, facilitated the ordering of a grammar of the social relations of alterity and of anti-racist struggle (Dietz, 2017; Wade & Moreno Figueroa, 2021). With the spread of Internet use and the growth of sociodigital platform users, these activisms, their repertoires, and their epistemic framings have been significantly modulated as the networked organization of their interactions is updated through ICT.

NETWORKED ANTI-RACIST ACTIVISM FROM AUDIOVISUAL PRACTICES: METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Between 2020 and 2024, in our everyday use of sociodigital platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Spotify, we observed a marked increase in the visibility of accounts run by collective projects and by individuals sharing images, videos, live streams, podcasts, and texts on racism in Mexico.² Most of these accounts were promoted by artists, *artists*, and social activists who self-identify as Black, Afro-descendant, Indigenous, and *prieta* (dark-skinned) persons.³ Given the relative

² As we have argued previously, the rising visibility of personal and collective SDN accounts associated with anti-racist and identitarian themes is an extremely complex, multifactorial phenomenon. Even so, five domains can be identified within national historical contexts as bearing on Mexico's anti-racist sociopolitical conjuncture over the past decade: 1) the academy; 2) anti-racist civil society organizations and collectives; 3) the audiovisual industry; 4) the state; and 5) the algorithmic complex of the SDN. Within that framework, our earlier study identified a triad of events, mediated by the SDN, that intensified the interaction of these domains of social action across different locations: the social reception of: a) *La negrada*, b) *Roma* and c) Chumel Torres on HBO (Dorcé, 2022).

³ Given our personal anti-racist commitment and our intellectual orientation towards intersectional critique, we were able to observe diachronically the algorithmic operation that processed anti-racist activity within networks of "friends", accounts followed, and followers in our respective SDN feeds. This first-person experience was a fundamental condition of the research, providing

insularity of racism as a topic in Mexico, the content of these profiles was striking in itself. It acquired heightened social significance, however, once we observed that the projects had begun to interact intensively with one another through mentions, collaborations in public conversations, podcasts, festivals, and protests staged both online and in localities across the country. Photographs, illustrations, memes, infographics, reels, and videos became digital texts that constitutively animated the reticular circulation of encounters, colloquia, exhibitions, and marches undertaken from within anti-racist militancy.

We then asked ourselves how we could understand these dynamics of co-produced meaning, which afforded glimpses of complex creative and epistemic processes. This content and these interactions carried a powerful affective charge: life stories, desires, memories of migration, experiences of violence, and the search for other possible realities with shared horizons. To account for such a social fabric, we opted for multi-sited ethnography as a method for tracing and constructing the field. We “followed” the image, the hashtag, and the profiles –both in the sense of scrutinizing the SDN and in the methodological sense of following the people, the things, and the metaphor (Marcus, 1995).

The cases presented here exemplify concrete ways of acting against racialized inequality. These forms of hybrid media activism turn sociodigital platforms to the anti-racist struggle at a moment when multiple structural –that is, syndemic– crises converge. Our analysis proceeds from the tracking and observation of collective and personal accounts of anti-racist activists from 2020 to the present.⁴ We also conducted in-

the initial indications that made the subsequent systematization of our empirical work possible.

- ⁴ The mapping of the network of anti-racist collectives, groups, and actors is composed of primary nodes (*lo afro, lo prieto, lo indígena*, sex-gender dissidences) and subnodes (Movimiento Afromexicano, Prietologías, Afrochingonas, Red de Mujeres Afrodescendientes, Cardumen Lab, and others). Between them, traces (connections) indicate the relations established, whether through a shared project or an individual or collective collaboration.

interviews online and in person,⁵ extending the ethnography through attendance at forums, exhibitions, festivals, and marches in Mexico City. This section draws on interviews with the activists and artists Marbella Figueroa, Wess Montoya, and André Lo. The last of these, an Afro-Mexican communication scholar, filmmaker, and activist, is known on his platforms as @loafb and for his creative project Cardumen Lab, through which he produces and promotes collaborative trans-disciplinary anti-racist work.

Afro-Mexican artist Marbella Figueroa co-founded the podcast *Afrochingonas*, produced and sustained together with Scarlet Estrada and Valeria Angola, activists who share the same self-ascription. As she sees it, her work over the past five years has become an Afro-centered anti-racist research, communication, and creation project. Finally, the artist and activist known as Wess Montoya runs the visual project *Prietisimx*. We take up these three cases as ethnographic indices of a contemporary form of social activism that has strengthened, and continues to strengthen, the anti-racist movement in Mexico and beyond.

Cardumen Lab, Afrochingonas, and Prietisimx converge in an anti-racist activism that favors audiovisual formats for narrating personal and collective histories traversed by structural racism in its conjugations with class and gender. Through this digital materiality they make such histories visible, open up varied conversations, and generate questions and affective responses. At times, these practices prompt or become pedagogical tools; at others, they interweave to produce agendas and projects on a larger scale. Rendering racism visible through the image is not incidental: it responds to a historical production of visual representations built from a racist and colonial gaze, present in literature, cinema, music, the media, and new technologies such as artificial intelligence.

⁵ Through the interviews we sought to elaborate a dynamic cartography of family histories, educational and professional trajectories, and the interviewees' work on the platforms and collaborations with other creators and activists.

ANTI-RACISM THROUGH AUDIOVISUAL NARRATIVES

One of these actors' central concerns, as we have observed, is to narrate themselves and to tell stories through a repertoire of audiovisual resources to evidence racism as a present-day problem. Racism, they insist, is not confined to the moral conduct or individual discourse of "racist people"; it names a structure that shapes and traverses Mexican society as a whole and that produces social and economic inequality. Narrative experimentation has led these activists to a range of formats: illustrations, humorous reels, podcasts, infographics, and memes. Alongside his films *Las historias de mi gente* (still in post-production) and *Coronas Negras* (2023), André Lo has moved into content creation for TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.⁶ For him, activism cannot be separated from his professional trajectory as a filmmaker:

Activism has been added [to his process of artistic creation] and it was a natural element that arrived ... because, in the course of doing audiovisual creation, being a Black person, it led me to run up hard against a wall everywhere. I realize that I absolutely have to fight not only for that, but that I also have to fight for my rights. So they go hand in hand (personal communication, July 27, 2023).

During the preventive lockdown of 2020, the pandemic emergency put André Lo's film projects on hold. He redirected his energy into planning and producing content for social media, experimenting with TikTok, an application whose user numbers had by then risen by as much as 250 % over the first stretch of the lockdown. In that period, the platform reached 25 million accounts in Mexico, most belonging to young people between 13 and 18 years of age ("TikTok triplica", 2021).

One of Lo's first viral videos took a humorous approach, playing sarcastically on the common assumption that Black people do not exist in Mexico. After that post, his followers rose "from 500 or so to 10 000 followers in a week". In that video, André exclaims, "when they tell me

⁶ The Instagram account of André Lo (@loafb) has 85 700 followers; his TikTok has 115 700 followers and three million likes (May 2026).

... oh, you're so cool, you're not like Mexicans!" (Lo Sánchez, 2021a). The reference is telling, since it alludes to the everyday experience of many Black Mexicans whose national belonging is persistently questioned. In the video, André laughs mockingly, revealing the *charro* hat he is wearing—a stereotypical emblem of his Mexicanness—before turning to the camera and pronouncing: “dame dos de suadero, perro” [“give me two suadero tacos, dog”]. The line reasserts his Mexicanness through an idiom drawn from central Mexico. The video affirms and circulates a single claim: yes, we are Black and we are Mexican (Lo Sánchez, 2021a).

André's output includes TikTok series that gather reels around recurring themes and catchphrases: “Hi, I'm Afro-Mexican”, “When people say to me” (Lo Sánchez, 2021b), “It looks good when you're rich, but bad when you're poor” (Lo Sánchez, 2026), and “What do they call you?” (Lo Sánchez, 2024). He has also posted videos recounting and analyzing racist situations and practices in everyday life, deploying an anti-racist pedagogy that stands in contrast to the cryptic or inaccessible character of certain academic idioms. His followers pose complex questions about racism, identity politics, self-ascription, activism, and class and gender oppression. His most recent project, “Cuerpatidianos” (Cuerpa-tidianos, n. d.), available as video, digital text, podcast, and on Instagram and YouTube, develops stories told by people who share their testimonies, reflections, and feelings from an Afro-descendant or non-hegemonically racialized corporeality.

BETWEEN PLATFORMS AND ARTICULATED ACTIVISM

Afrochingas⁷ is formed by Marbella Figueroa, Valeria Angola, and Scarlet Estrada, young Black women based in Mexico City. The project grew out of a networked collective endeavor that had previously brought together Afro-descendant women from across Mexico and England, the United States, Brazil, and Colombia. The pandemic lockdown altered that dynamic and prompted the three to sustain

⁷ In quantitative terms, Afrochingas has 36 100 followers on Instagram, and 17 500 followers and 396 200 likes on TikTok (May 2026).

their meetings and reflections through a podcast whose first episode was titled “Guardaditas” (Figueroa et al., 2020), an account of their experiences during the 2020 lockdown.

Marbella notes that what distinguishes their productions is “always speaking from our own experience”, a commitment that has allowed listeners to recognize themselves in their opinions and accounts. The podcast, together with their visual and textual posts (Afrochingonas, 2021), has at times triggered processes of identification among Black and Afro-descendant people.⁸ At others, it models a contemporary space of dialogue that questions and problematizes positions and political practices, or exposes violence within activist spaces, feminist and anti-racist alike.

Afrochingonas engages its audience not only through podcasts, memes, and images, but also through digital gatherings and workshops. Their growth has coincided with the proliferation of national and international programs supporting projects that advance social equality. In 2022 the collective was invited by the Avina Foundation to the Pulsante Conductual event in Guatemala, a platform promoting initiatives to strengthen civic space and democracy in Latin America. The group has cultivated dynamic alliances with other independent Afro-descendant collectives and activists, and their sustained dialogue –on and offline– with social movements in various latitudes has helped generate expansive networks of anti-racist militancy.

An emblematic moment of offline-online convergence came in 2022, when Afrochingonas joined the first Anti-racist Front at the Pride March in Mexico City (Afrochingonas, 2022). It was in that public space that the prieto and the Black/Afro contingents chose to march together as a larger formation. We have highlighted this moment on our research network map as a bridge between the activism of Afroch-

⁸ In her interview, Marbella discusses her interaction with followers. One form this has taken is the private messages Afrochingonas has received about listeners’ processes of self-recognition as Afro-descendant or Black persons (February 2023). This dialogue, and its impact on followers, is also visible in the public comments posted on the collective account’s feed.

ingonas and the political aggregate of anti-racist sex-gender dissidences, an articulation that also includes groups such as Prietologías and the National Network of Afro-Mexican Youth. They have taken part in workshops organized by the Afro-feminist collective Afrocaracolas and have worked with the collective Vulgar Mx, leading the Narrative Power Coalition, a laboratory in Tepoztlán that convened six collectives with support from the Nebulosa Fund to devise narrative strategies against anti-gender violence.

Afrochingonas remained active in in-person events throughout 2023: they attended the meeting of Anti-racist Civil Society Organizations convened to follow up on the Declaration on the North American Partnership for Equity and Racial Justice; they broadcast live from the exhibition *Amor Rojo* at the Laboratorio Arte Alameda; and, with Mujeres Incendiarias, they held a collective listening session of the episode “Placer”. For their third anniversary they convened a picnic in the Bosque de Chapultepec, delivered an anti-racism workshop for the association Elige, and curated the exhibition *Narrarnos Juntas* at CCU Tlatelolco. In 2024, Valeria Angola took part in the legislative forum on discrimination and racial profiling at the Chamber of Deputies. Today the name and work of Afrochingonas are recognized as significant within the political struggle of Mexico’s anti-racist movement.

PRIETA CLAIMS ON SOCIODIGITAL PLATFORMS AND THE ANTI-RACIST STRUGGLE

One debate that has laid bare the effervescence and heterogeneity of the Mexican anti-racist movement on the SDN concerns the racism experienced by a population that does not identify with the ethnopolitical categories of the Mexican state –that is, which does not necessarily recognize themselves as Afro-descendant or Indigenous. Its members nonetheless maintain that anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism structurally traverses their everyday existence. This positions a set of social actors as non-white persons subject to racialization through the classing and ethnicization of their phenotype (Cerón-Anaya, 2019). The modality is composed of collectives, independent artists, and activists

who name themselves *prietos* and who contribute to anti-racist projects through digital activism and audiovisual creation.⁹

An emblematic case is the formation and implosion of the initiative Poder Prieto (@poderprieto_mx), which mobilized tens of thousands of followers internationally and achieved a mass media visibility unprecedented for the anti-racist cause. In the same vein, other collectives have organized events such as the Huateque (Prietisimx, 2022) and the Anti-racist Pachanga in public spaces, along with digital campaigns such as Octubre Prieto-Marrón (Prietologías, 2021), the product of an alliance between Prietologías and the Argentine collective Identidad Marrón (@identidadmarron). They have also formed the Anti-racist Front together with Afro-descendant and Afro-Mexican activists and sex-gender dissidences, marching on October 12, “Día de la Raza” (literally: “Day of the Race”), and at the LGBTQ+ Pride march in Mexico City (Varela Huerta, 2025). Spoken word has proved a productive expressive format for thematizing racism, classism, and coloniality in urban and digital spaces such as YouTube and Facebook. One example is PalabrAndando¹⁰ (2016), a project of cultural self-management and educational autonomy that uses artistic production as a tool for knowledge and un-learning (Garduño Guzmán, 2021).

Behind the anti-racist audiovisual content circulating on the platforms stand illustrators, photographers, musicians, poets, filmmakers, and visual artists. In the words of the Veracruz-born illustrator Wess Montoya¹¹—who produces anti-racist images and infographics centered on the affects and meanings of *lo prieto*—digital visibility makes the topic easier to voice and to circulate:

People recognize and express themselves not always through testimonies or words of their own. Sometimes they voice things and place topics “on the table” when they share a meme or an image on their profiles. “Maybe I’m not going to say it, but this image already says it for me” (personal communication, February 13, 2023).

⁹ See, for example, the account of Julia Guzmán (Guzmán, 2025).

¹⁰ We refer specifically to the work of Brenda Nava, Carimbo, and Titzé Malambé.

¹¹ The Instagram account of Wess Montoya has 23 400 followers (May 2026).

Wess, who designed the Poder Prieto logo, describes his illustrations as emerging from the epistemic reflection that accompanied his own identification as a *prieto* person:

I realized that when I wanted to imagine the main characters, someone white always came to mind, and they were never brown-skinned people. And it was so difficult, and it seemed so harsh to me, that when I wanted to represent someone like myself, I couldn't (personal communication, August 28, 2023).¹²

These reflections, given form in his Instagram visual project *Prietisimx* (2022), have unfolded alongside a wider discussion on sociodigital networks about *prietud* as a category capable of gathering distinct political claims. Both Wess and André Lo collaborated with and belonged to Poder Prieto, although their practices and activism preceded that network and outlasted its internal ruptures. Another key actor, to whom Wess attributes his structural understanding of racism, is the association RacismoMX, founded by José Antonio Aguilar, a former coordinating member of Poder Prieto. RacismoMX began convening public conversations and producing anti-racist digital content during the pandemic. It was in that conjuncture that the controversy over the racism of the influencer Chumel Torres went viral on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, costing him his HBO television program. RacismoMX then played an articulating role among multiple networks of national and international actors, which together produced one of the movement's most politically significant initiatives: the National Agenda against Racism, presented in September 2024.

The agenda comprises public policy proposals developed in dialogue with more than 60 anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, feminist, human rights, Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and migrant-focused organizations (RacismoMX, 2024). Its 20 proposals call on the state to address: 1) the visibility of racism as an existing phenomenon; 2) the inclusive representation of racialized groups in the spheres of power where public policy is designed and evaluated; 3) levelling measures to redress historical debts owed to oppressed populations; and 4) the formal incor-

¹² See illustration in Montoya (2022).

poration of an anti-racist perspective into the securing of human rights and justice.

The document represents an effort to articulate knowledges developed through multi-sited political processes of militancy, converging in an anti-racist perspective that seeks justice and social reparation as well as a dignified individual and collective life. Among the 60 collaborating organizations are the Red de Mujeres Afro de la Ciudad de México, the Instituto de las Mujeres en la Migración A.C., the Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas, Huella Negra, Espacio Migrante, Racializaciones COLMEX, Afro Tamiahua A.C., Basta Racismo Mx, Tembembe Centro de Estudios Afromexicanos, and the Red Nacional de Abogadas Indígenas, together with Prietisimx, Cardumen Lab, and Afrochingonas. Social demands and proposals such as the anti-racist agenda cannot be understood apart from the effervescence of work by activists and collectives who occupied the platforms as spaces for denunciation, for the expression of ideas and feelings, and as means of circulating discourses, narratives, and artistic creation, all from positions of limited economic resources and precarious employment.

CLOSING: THE RECONFIGURATION OF NETWORKS OF ALTERITY IN THE FACE OF THE SYNDemic

Our findings deepen the understanding of the “anti-racist turn” in Mexico as a phenomenon intrinsically bound to informational technological mediation within a context of biosocial crisis. The analysis shows that the COVID-19 syndemic context acted as one of the catalysts for the visibility of anti-racist struggles. As spaces of physical interaction closed off, the SDN served not merely as functional substitutes but became the central stage for the constitution and articulation of new political subjectivities. The new grammars of anti-racism unfold in social practices of linkage that sustain a continuity of meaning across the environments, technologies, and places of the public sphere. This “networked sociability” enabled actors historically excluded from the national narrative—grounded in the myth of *mestizaje* and the norms of heteropatriarchy—to take part in fracturing hegemonic consensus, restructuring the networks of alterity into a configuration that unsettles the national political field with a sharply critical intersectionality.

The efficacy of projects such as Cardumen Lab, Afrochingonas, and Prietisimx –articulated with RacismoMX and other political actors under the Obradorista government– lies in their capacity to convert personal experience and the affective appropriation of powerful digital texts into legitimate forms of political action. Humor and the first-person voice on TikTok or Instagram, testimony in podcasts, vindicatory illustration: each format responds directly to the historical production of a visual imaginary of Mexicanness firmly anchored in racist coloniality. This narrative experimentation performs a double function. Outwardly, it deploys an anti-racist pedagogy that makes the critique of structural racism accessible in relation to frameworks of distributive, labor, and gender justice, at a distance from cryptic academic languages. Inwardly, it fosters processes of identification and accompaniment for Black, Indigenous, and *prietas* persons, who find in this content the elements of a critical and participatory identification within a cosmopolitan Mexicanness.

Among the most significant issues raised here is the passage from digital mobilization to institutional and state advocacy. The participation of these collectives in drafting the National Agenda against Racism in 2024 demonstrates that when digital activism articulates with more thoroughly institutionalized bodies, the “attention economy” can be redirected towards public policy. The national political field is energized when such networks mobilize new meanings around the strategic significance of ethnicity, gender, and racialization in the constitution of that socioeconomically stratified arena.

It is no accident that one of the most disruptive recent reforms of the Mexican state –the 2024 judicial reform– favored the election of the first Indigenous person in Mexican history, Hugo Aguilar Ortiz, as president of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation. Equally telling is the controversy over identitarian impersonation in candidacies filled through affirmative quotas for deputy and senate seats in the 2024 federal elections, where Indigenous and Afro-Mexican self-ascriptions were challenged as inauthentic and opportunistic (Mares, 2024). Individuals, communities, and entire peoples are recomposing their antagonisms in the symbolic and juridical dispute over “native” ties to territories, natural resources, and customary norms (Adonon & Barbosa, 2021; Portal, 2013).

The pragmatic instrumentalization of “identitarian” categories is not new, nor is ideological or partisan imposture in the social history of struggles for power. A substantive dimension of political dispute lies precisely in the deliberation over the multiple uses of authenticity and congruence –values fundamental to producing the legitimacy of those who represent causes, groups, or interests. The anti-racist turn in Mexico and its derivatives in intercultural policy are inscribed within that epistemic, juridical, and political contest, which is constituted beyond national borders. The consolidation of right-wing movements worldwide has been accompanied by counter-reformist “anti-woke” offensives that share phobias, arguments, and positions with certain conservative sectors of the anti-identitarian left and of global liberalism.

The forms of anti-racist activism analyzed here take place in digital spaces territorialized by the symbolization and rituality that organize the action of those producing, consuming and sharing content for the SDN. They are territorialized, too, by the retrograde meanings mobilized by those who own the platforms: *tecnotenentes* [techno-landlords] who capitalize on the labor and interaction of everyone who participates in their infrastructures and algorithms, and who, as major beneficiaries of the dividends of the “culture war”, place the exercise of data colonialism (Mejias & Couldry, 2024) at the disposal of Global Trumpism (Blyth, 2016; Robinson, 2026).

Anti-racist activists operate from a position of relative autonomy, since the democratizing potential of their action coexists with the universalization of labor precarity, rising inequality, and an algorithmic control whose extractivist policies are often hostile to sociocultural diversity. The challenge for the anti-racist movement therefore lies in sustaining the force of its political disruption within technological infrastructures designed to capitalize on its online activity, and in contexts marked by particular syndemic configurations that will soon cease (socio-environmental, health, migratory, climatic, and neocolonial crises, among others). An info-cultural state policy genuinely committed to the public good would, for its part, have to underwrite and take part in a sovereignty not subordinated to the interests of openly supremacist computing oligopolies.

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