

Racist Subjectivations and Strategies of Resistance in a *Ngigua* Community in Mexico¹

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this article is to show some examples of the impact of racist domination practices in San Marcos Tlacoyalco, a *ngigua* community in the State of Puebla, and to see the challenges they faced since the establishment of the Intercultural University of the State of Puebla (UIEP), in 2019. Informal interviews were conducted with UIEP students and a focus group was organized with professionals graduated from different universities in Mexico who work at the UIEP. The research showed the impact that the practices of domination have had on the constitution of racist subjectivities. The subject becomes a key cog in the way of perceiving differences, which affects the way of seeing oneself and others. As a result, racism has impacted this community both in public policies and in attitudes of contempt and self-loathing directly related to ethnicity.

KEYWORDS: Racism; Indigenous people; Resistance to oppression; Health policy; Mexico.

Subjetivaciones racistas y estrategias de resistencia en una comunidad *ngigua* de México

PALABRAS CLAVE: El propósito de este artículo es mostrar algunos ejemplos del impacto de prácticas de dominación racistas en San Marcos Tlacoyalco, una comunidad *ngigua* del estado de Puebla, y ver los retos que enfrentaron desde el establecimiento de la Universidad Intercultural del Estado de Puebla (UIEP), en 2019. Se realizaron entrevistas informales a estudiantes de la UIEP y se organizó un grupo focal con profesionistas egresados de distintas universidades de México que trabajan en la UIEP. La investigación mostró el impacto que han tenido las prácticas de dominación en la constitución de subjetividades racistas. El sujeto se convierte en un engranaje en el modo de percibir las diferencias, que afecta la manera de verse a sí mismo y de ver a los otros. Como resultado, el racismo ha impactado en esta comunidad tanto en políticas públicas como en actitudes de desprecio y autodesprecio relacionadas directamente con el origen étnico.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Racismo; población indígena; resistencia a la opresión; política de la salud; México.

TRANSLATION: Sol Tiverovsky Scheines / Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla

HOW TO QUOTE

Tiverovsky, S.; López, G. y Manzano, M. (2024). Racist Subjectivations and Strategies of Resistance in a *Ngigua* Community in Mexico. *Culturales*, 12, e850. <https://doi.org/10.22234/recu.20241201.e850>

RECEIVED June 4, 2024 / APPROVED October 28, 2024 / PUBLISHED November 26, 2024



¹ This investigation was conducted with the support of the CONAHCYT postdoctoral fellowship fund.

Introduction

In this work we want to show some examples that will allow us to understand the way in which racism is present in Mexico. In addition, we are focusing specifically on the *Ngigua* community from San Marcos Tlacoyalco, to see how it has impacted on the formation of subjectivities rooted in racism. For that purpose, we will conduct a diagnosis of the situation by defining the concept of racism and, with the help of some examples, analyzing the historical and current characteristics that have been acquired. On one hand, it will attempt to demonstrate the impact that racism has had in Mexico on public politics and on the management of diseases that affect determined social groups; on the other hand, with the same aim mentioned above, but on the self-perception of each individual that is assumed to have certain characteristics influenced by racist knowledge.

For this project we conducted informal interviews to the students of the Intercultural University of the State of Puebla (*UIEP*), which is located in San Marcos Tlacoyalco; in the interviews we address the topic of racism and how it manifested in their daily lives. In addition, we organized a focus group consisting of teachers between the ages of 30 and 65, who are currently working in the indigenous education system, intercultural universities, official general high schools, and research centers in the south and central regions of the state of Puebla. Each of them graduated from different public universities in Mexico, including the Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla, *Instituto Politécnico Nacional*, *Instituto Tecnológico de Tecamachalco*, *Instituto Tecnológico de la Sierra Negra en Ajalpan* and *Instituto Tecnológico de Tehuacán*.

The members of the group had in common that they were born in the *Ngigua* community of San Marcos Tlacoyalco, specifically in the city of Tlacotepec de Benito Juárez. All of them speak the *Ngigua* language and work in the community where they were born. Also, in their childhood, every one of them experienced power relations and racism, as well as discrimination, especially in the transition process between middle school and high school. For many of those involved, this was the first time in their lives that they were able to mention this topic. Some of the focus group members expressed feeling safe and confident to talk about these issues. This can be difficult to do because, in some cases, they

continue to coexist with the people who harassed and scorned them for their skin color when they were students.

The interviews were conducted in three sessions. Six professionals participated in the focus group, which was developed through four questions: 1) Have you seen some type of discrimination in the school environment that you consider left a permanent mark on you? 2) What strategies did you use to deal with racism and discrimination? 3) How was your admission process, your stay, and your graduation from the university institution where you graduated? 4) How was your return to the community to practice your profession?

The results of the interviews and informal conversations that we conducted for this work are analyzed as part of "speaking" (Foucault, 2001) of a historical formation. That will enable us to approach the way in which a specific topic is managed in a determinate time and community. In this case, we want to know how racism in Mexico, especially in San Marcos Tlacoyalco, is expressed in daily life. The results of the interviews fall within what Foucault and also Deleuze, in the courses he taught on the former's thought, referred to as the "anonymous murmur" in the sense that "... all the subjects positions are aligned as variables of a 'speaking'" (Deleuze, 2013, p. 117).

Racism: a multidimensional phenomenon

We agree with Fanon (2009) when he affirms that: "A given society is racist or it is not" (p. 94). Racism is not an attribute of a determinate social class or an incapable or uneducated group, but rather goes through social groups as a whole. It's about a mode of perception that is diffused through diverse discursive registers, and shapes the way we see ourselves and others. Racism not only refers to the manner in which we perceive physical-physiognomic differences, it is about a social discrimination technology and a mechanism for the domination and social control of populations (Foucault, 2006). It's a historical phenomenon that originated in the 19th century in Europe, and has a high mutation capability. Geulen (2010) defines it as: "[...] a 'doctrine' of human races, of their mutual relationships [...]" (p. 11) and mostly of the differences in the value assigned beforehand to each of them and their supposed innate characteristics.

New sciences, such as physiognomy and anthropology, that relied on the aesthetic ideal of the Greek sculpture and attributed a series of moral principles to the physical characteristics started to develop a century earlier. According to Mosse (2023), racism achieved such an impact because of the visual register that anyone, even without having to read long, tedious summaries, could understand. It is about “ideas and ideals which could be readily apprehended [...] Men and women could see the beautiful and the ugly stereotype, just as they could see the national flag” (Mosse, 2023, p. 15). The beautiful and the ugly, according to the aesthetic paradigm, were directly related to the moral values of the individuals.

A racist individual is being constituted. For Foucault, the individual is historical. Their subjectivity is determined by a power-knowledge diagram specific to the historical formation to which they belong. That is to say, the knowledge about the human race and its innate characteristics was guaranteed by scientific studies that for decades had been doubted but in the 19th century had a real status.

Within the development of racism, it is possible to recognize the three main concepts that Foucault studied: the formation of knowledge, systems of power that organized its practice, and the way in which an individual recognized itself as a subject, based in a racist power-knowledge. (Foucault, 2009, p. 8). In order for racism to function not only as a differentiation technology, But mostly as domination of others, where it is necessary that each and every one of the individuals embrace racist thinking as reality, and not only apply it to themselves and their decisions but also replicate and transmit it to others.

Regarding Mexico, we need to keep in mind that, just like the rest of Latin America, the Conquest as well as the colonization left a big impression on the way to see indigenous communities. After, with the Independence and subsequently, the constitution of the national states, the negative view towards indigenous people not merely worsened but also consolidated with the development of a racial ideology. (Gómez, 2006) In accordance with Urías (2007): “There is a line of continuity between the postulates on race that appeared throughout the 19th century and those that articulated the post-revolutionary ideology” (p. 15).

The ruling elites considered indigenous people as obstacles to national progress, and the problem became that of their integration and assimilation (Gall, 1998, p. 152). This assimilationist project mandated that in order to be part of the nation, the indigenous population had to leave behind their culture, their language, and their lifestyle so they could fit in the ruling productive model. As mentioned in the following journalistic note, in which a balance of the general situation of indigenous people and their “poor condition” is indistinguishable from that of the savages.

The author of the note explains that the problem lies in the fact that it is people with low needs; therefore, they have low motivation for work. “They don’t think about the future; it doesn’t exist for them. By filling their miserable needs today, they’re more than satisfied.” And adds that given the circumstances, it seems necessary to teach them “the Christian education and the practice of virtues...”. The article concludes with a significant phrase: “Let’s do it justice; let’s offer saving hands to them; let’s take advantage of their arms; let’s nurture their intelligence; and we will deserve the well of humanity” (*El Tiempo*, 5/10/1892, p. 2). The author shows, by using this method, that education will achieve the aim of lifting indigenous people from the wretchedness in which they are. What we can understand within this phrase is that there is a deep interest in integrating this population. Changing the mindset of indigenous people would provide the nation with a workforce large enough to focus on progress.

This premise will not only be found in political speech or in newspapers from the 19th and 20th centuries, but also in some novels. In *El resplendor*, from Mauricio Magdaleno, one of the priests of San Andrés de la Cal, an *Otomí* community in the state of Hidalgo, upholds this discourse: “A community without needs, Mr. Gonzalo –used to say the priest Chávez– is not a community. It will be a mob of wretches, and everything you wish and command, but not a community. Mexico’s misfortune is its three or four millions of indigenous people” (Magdaleno, 1937/2001, p. 87). They were a misfortune because, according to the official discourse, they didn’t integrate into the civilizational flow, and didn’t contribute to the national economy.

Some Mexican intellectuals influenced by Spencerian evolutionism considered that Mexico was in a physical and moral deterioration phase and that only racial improvement

could save the country from backwardness and decadence. On this matter, erasing indigenous presence from society was the aim. But indigenous people were not only a problem because of their reluctance to incorporate into the national state; it was also claimed that they had bad habits and genetic defects that made them dangerous individuals.

Guerrero (1901) forcefully affirmed that Mexico's indigenous heredity had a direct effect on the high level of violence in the country. "personality in a big part of society has declined, and the Aztecs' ferocious tendencies have reappeared. After ten generations, the beating of the spirit of the worshipers of *Huitzilopoztli* has returned in some of our compatriots' chests (p. 235).

The image of the troublemaking indigenous person has been described too by Mauricio Magdaleno in the novel quoted above. In this dry and arid region, where nothing grows, people starve and act out of desperation, two adjacent indigenous communities get into bloody fights to get scant food, leaving many dead people as a result of those brawls. Not even priests want to stay there, and the town storekeeper blames indigenous people for that: "--Even God is leaving us! [...] You have thrown him out because of your crimes... bunch of degenerate indians!" (p. 23). And the town's judge, joining the reprimand against the population, vigorously and forcefully pointed out that the biggest problem is that in Mexico "religion's lacking and there are too many indians" (Magdaleno, 1937/2001, p. 75).

Racism has established the basis of a perception mode that begins with a gaze, and it focuses on forms and physiognomic characteristics but goes further than that because it manages to establish a bond between what it seems at first sight and what is consubstantial to it but is hidden. That is to say that not only a beauty paradigm is at stake, but with it a series of moral, intellectual, and self-control ability traits are united. Hence, it is about a multidimensional phenomenon (Mosse, 2023, p. 16).

Evidently, and as we can see in these examples, it was considered that indigenous people lacked all of their virtues. They were considered unattractive because of their facial features that were far from the model of the Greek statuary; also, they were considered unintelligent, and everyone presupposed that they were incapable of controlling their passions, which led them to commit atrocious crimes. That explains the request of one of

the priests of San Andrés de la Cal, from the novel mentioned above, who said to the residents, "remember that you have a duty you must fulfill; prove to the world that Indians are just as capable as the children of any other race. Much has been said in Mexico about the inferiority of the indigenous people; are you going to confirm this criminal reasoning?" (Magdaleno, 1937/2001, p. 33).

Indigenous people, stereotyped and stigmatized, are obligated to demonstrate that they are not what people have claimed they are. Then, a domination dynamic is established in which a group of people will set themselves up as judges and decide to what extent they honor their race or whether, on the other hand, they have managed to overcome the genetic defects that affected them so they have become normalized and can now join the Mexican nation.

At this point, it is understandable that because of the negative characteristics that indigenous implies, such as the individuals who have been subjectified based on this racial perception mode, they try to distance themselves from it as much as possible. Being labeled as indigenous and, in that sense, having a dark skin tone indicating a proximity to them will be seen as an insult. Studies carried out in schools in Mexico pointed out that nicknames such as "*indio*," "*negro*," "*prieto*," or "*chango*" continue to be used among kids in order to mock the dark skin color of some of their classmates (Tiverovsky et al., 2023). The presence of certain nicknames established with an evident denigrating purpose shows us a continuity in the racial perception modes.

The literature reflects the reaction towards certain nicknames that directly allude to body pigmentation: "Me, *prietito*? (an offensive Mexican word used to refer to someone with darker skin), you have heard such a thing!" (Gorostiza, 1957/1972, p. 116). Don Ricardo affirmed, in response to the provocation of Hector, the "*güero*" (a colloquial word in Mexican Spanish used to refer to someone with fair skin), of his children. And Anselma, a 19-year-old main character from the novel *Veleidosa* (Peón y Contreras, 1891), reacts to her aunt's affirmation, who mentions that she isn't really white but swarthy: "--I, tan? -- You are not white! [...] But that's all, thank God you aren't ashamed of that-- It looks like it, but; yes, I am ashamed." (p. 6).

As we can see in these examples, racism as a visual ideology and being endorsed by a classificational and hierarchical eagerness has impacted the way in which we perceive one another. This is, probably, the most visible face of the phenomenon. As individuals, it affects us directly, in our psyche and in our body. And it also constitutes a fundamental element in the racist subjectivation. Nevertheless, we must not forget that racism is a technology of biopower, which is a fundamental pillar supporting politics that focus on the lives of individuals and populations. Racism has allowed taking action destined to make some people live and, at the same time, let others die.

In order to comprehend the manner in which it is implemented as a technology of biopower, we will present some data related to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Mexico.

Surviving during the pandemic. “Letting die” expressions

Toward the end of 2019 we began to listen with concern to the news from Wuhan, China. A contagious disease named COVID-19 is advancing aggressively, resulting in deaths. In Mexico, the first registered case happened in February 2020 (Mexican Secretariat of Health, 2020). Although a disease doesn't distinguish between sex or social class, some groups considered “vulnerable” were most severely impacted by this virus. In Mexico, indigenous communities live in a situation of vulnerability that COVID-19 only worsened. It was about the scarcity of doctors, the remoteness of hospitals or the low-budget making it impossible to get an oxygen tank. But also, it was about the lack of water and necessities to prevent contagions.

If we take into account the vulnerability rates of regions like valle de Tehuacán, we should talk about a syndemic that complicates the possibility of building community bonds and that endangers the lives of historically invisible populations (López, 2021). This situation involves state racism that, according to the conceptualization of Foucault, should be understood as a pillar that substantiates the political rationality of the state. It is embedded, and it is a determining factor in decision making that will benefit some people and be difficult for others.

Biopower is a political practice mode from the state that intends to manage life and make it grow healthy. So, in order to do that, it must take life itself into its hands. If, prior to the 17th century, the power of sovereignty, a type of power that was fundamentally the power to kill and which this philosopher defines as the power to “to make die and to let live,” prevailed in Europe. In the 18th and 19th centuries, we see the emergence of a mode of exerting power that is characterized, in contrast, by “To make live and to let die.” It is a positive power, Foucault (2006; 2011) will tell us, because it manages life, orders it, and multiplies it. And at the same time, it produces knowledge, which enables it to exert itself in a more effective and organized way.

The opposite side of this positive power is that it “let die” to make live. Those population groups that represent a hindrance to progress, or are considered “strange” or “unassimilable” to the monoracial paradigm of the nation-state, and that, by this logic, put society as a whole at risk, are left to die. “It is as managers of life and survival, of bodies and the race, that so many regimes have been able to wage so many wars, causing so many men to be killed” (Foucault, 2011, p. 127).

One of the consequences of this power over life is the emergence of a society of normalization, in other words, a society that classifies, hierarchizes, normalizes, and, therefore, distinguishes individuals and populations. But that does not mean that the killing has stopped. On the contrary, the atomic bomb is compelling evidence that not only are killings taking place, but they are occurring on a scale previously inconceivable. And this is where we encounter racism.

Foucault explains that the power to kill in the modern state was made possible by racism. Biological racism, which is already in the mechanisms of the state, is what makes it possible to distinguish those who should live from those who must be left to die because their very existence puts the whole of society at risk. “Racism caters to be the death function of the biopower economy, according to the principle that the death of others means the biological strengthening of oneself as a member of a race or a population” (Foucault, 2006, p. 233). This enables the whole population to be involved in the fight against those elements that are perceived as harmful or dangerous. So we have, on the one hand, racism that is understood as hatred of the other. And on the other hand, racism as a

technology of power, which allows the modern state to function. As long as it is governed by the principles of biopower, racism will be inevitable because it is part of the logic of this biopower.

Racism became the mechanism by which it was possible to exercise the right to die. But although war or direct attack on any social group has been the most evident form of letting people die, we must emphasize that this is expressed in less notorious actions than a war. As an element of social differentiation, racism was central to the development of policies oriented to the protection of life, as well as letting people die. Letting die is when certain political decisions are aimed at distinguishing the population, providing services to one community, and leaving another without the possibility of meeting basic needs.

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 was an event that highlighted inequalities and social vulnerability and showed the social, economic, and political contradictions of the countries affected (Menéndez, 2021; Morán, 2019, p. 26). Crisis situations such as the one we experienced in 2020 with the spread of the coronavirus, show the limitations of health systems in the face of a situation that exceeds them and for which they are unprepared. The statistics also showed that all this had a particular impact on the sectors with the least purchasing power, which, due to their living conditions, were unable to follow the health guidelines set by international organizations such as the WHO and by national governments. The isolation suggested by the authorities had to be ignored in the face of the reality of having to go out to work in order to survive. The need for potable water to wash your hands and sanitize homes was not possible in all houses because potable water is not distributed equitably.

In addition to all this, there is the structural crisis of the health system in Mexico, with an insufficient infrastructure that became evident when the pandemic caused an increase in the number of sick people and hospitals could not cope to provide for everyone. The lack of stretchers, technical equipment, and medicine was a constant during the first year of the disease. Access to health care, the possibility for people to have access to a hospital with everything they need to be treated, is, in our country, a factor of social inequality (Lomelí, 2020). This explains why deaths are also unevenly distributed.

According to official statistics, in Mexico City 44,235 people died. 19% of these, or 8,652 deaths, occurred in Iztapalapa (Mexican Government, 2023) the most populated delegation of the capital, with serious problems of inequality and social vulnerability (Morán, 2019). In 2021, at the peak of the pandemic, the World Health Organization warned of health inequalities in urban areas that were affecting the poorest people, which meant enormous difficulties in dealing with a health crisis (WHO, 2021).

In Mexico as a whole, by December 2022, the number of deaths due to COVID-19 was estimated at 331,030 (Mexican Secretariat of Health, 2022). By August 2, 2023, the number had increased to 334,336 people (Mexican Government). This statistic positions our country in fifth place worldwide in deaths due to this disease (WHO, 2023). It must be considered that the statistics give an estimate of the number of deaths, but some researchers estimate that it may have been twice or even triple what the government has reported (Palacio-Mejía et al., 2021). This is due to the fact that mortality factors such as lack of medicines or overcrowding in hospitals and, therefore, the impossibility of being treated there, or even the cases of chronic patients whose symptoms worsen due to COVID-19 not being taken into account, and the cause of death of those patients was registered as chronic disease (WHO, 2022).

Considering the vulnerability of indigenous populations in our country, studies were conducted to determine the impact of the epidemic on these social groups. According to a study conducted only a few months after the beginning of the pandemic, the mortality rate in indigenous populations was 18.8%, whereas in the rest of the population it was 11.8% (Cortez-Gómez, 2020). In 2022, the Mexican Secretariat of Health, in its "Comprehensive Report on COVID-19 in Mexico," released a series of statistics on disease and death in the population recognized as indigenous, explaining that:

Indigenous people are historically among the most vulnerable populations, and the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized pre-existing inequalities. These communities experience a high level of socioeconomic marginalization and are disproportionately at risk in public health emergencies due to a variety of situations, including lack of access to effective surveillance and early warning systems and adequate health and social services (Mexican Secretariat of Health, 2022, p. 58).

In other words, even the Mexican Secretariat of Health should have recognized the vulnerability of indigenous communities to COVID-19. The example of the pandemic shows one of the faces of racism as a distinguishing element of society and a fundamental part of the rationality of modern states. This allows us to understand why, although there are complex healthcare systems that care for and protect life, so many people have died.

In 2018, the *Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social* (CONEVAL, 2018) carried out a study to measure poverty in indigenous communities², calculating that 69.5% of Mexico's population was living in poverty, which is equivalent to 8.4 million indigenous people, and around 3.4 million in extreme poverty. One of these communities is San Marcos Tlacoyalco, a town of 10,509 dwellers (INEGI, 2020) located in the municipality of Tlacotepec de Benito Juárez, in the state of Puebla. This region has been an important energy transition node, involving wind (Esperanza), photovoltaic (Cuenca Libres Oriental), hydroelectric (Sierra Negra), and open-pit mining (Ixtacamaxtitlan) projects to produce economic value for the Netherlands, Spain, France, and Germany.

During the pandemic, *UIEP* students faced various difficulties, including access to potable water, money scarcity, shortage of medical professionals, and the struggle to acquire medicines and access to the internet to take online classes. Water scarcity, a delicate topic in Mexico nowadays, has been a problem for decades in the *Ngigua* community of San Marcos Tlacoyalco.

The two jagüeyes they had are dry, and of the four wells, only two have water. In informal interviews, local residents have told us that this is due, on the one hand, to three years of continuous drought in the region and, on the other hand, to the proliferation of clandestine wells due to the water needs of the swine and poultry farms in the Tehuacán valley. In addition, there are the so-called "Chinese lands," which develop intensive crops

² The CONEVAL website states that nine indicators were used to measure poverty: current per capita income, average educational nurturing at home, access to health services, access to social security, housing quality and spaces, access to basic services in housing, access to food, level of social cohesion and level of accessibility to paved roads.

to export to South Korea through the Huixcolotla supply center and, for that purpose, require large amounts of water.

Lack of money for basic necessities was also a problem. UIEP students said that they received a scholarship worth 12,000 MXN from the Federal Government's Welfare Secretariat, which they provided every four months. However, 3,000 MXN per month was not enough to cover daily expenses, which caused some young people to emigrate in search of employment in other regions of the country during the pandemic period (Tiverovsky and Manzano, 2022).

The shortage of medical professionals and hospitals to care for the population has been a sensitive issue, especially during the pandemic. It should be considered that the region had a delay of at least six months compared to the beginning of the vaccination campaign in the city of Puebla. Nor was there an intense campaign in the local media that provided information in the native language warning about the characteristics of the vaccine, as well as its contraindications. People were fearful of the consequences that the vaccine could bring, especially among the older population. This had an impact on the decision to vaccinate in the early stage of the pandemic.

During the interviews we conducted in March 2024 at *UIEP*, a student told us that a few months ago they were given a questionnaire in which people were asked if they wanted more health centers, and they said no. "Even if we get more health centers, what good is it going to do for us? If the ones that already exist in San Marcos do not have the medicines we need and the doctor is only there a few days a week." The disease does not wait for the specialist to arrive.

Finally, we should mention that online education, very well thought out to continue with school activities while avoiding contagions, presented serious difficulties for *UIEP* students. That is because many of them did not have access to the internet, and the data recharge for their telephones was extremely expensive if we consider that it had to be used several hours a day in order to attend virtual classes. As Galán, professor at the *UIEP*, explains:

[...] for the ethnically differentiated population, this educational model represents a historical problem of challenges and contrasts: absence of public educational policies

for indigenous peoples, limited access to computer equipment or mobile devices, poor internet connection in homes, little or no experience with virtual modalities by intercultural student communities, extreme poverty, marginalization, and scarce technology in the intercultural higher education institutions themselves, among many other situations (p. 50).

So far, we have seen some of the characteristics that state racism acquires in everyday life, that is, the way in which national states have made use of this technology of differentiation to distinguish the population. But these public policies that directly or indirectly benefit some while leaving others to die are based on racist thinking that circulates in society and has an impact on people's perception. The results of the interviews will allow us to understand some of the characteristics that racism acquires in everyday life.

Racist Subjectivations: attitudes of contempt and self-contempt

Racism is neither timeless nor immanent to every human being. It is, as we have explained and exemplified, a historical phenomenon that has a fundamental political function, as it is the element that makes it possible to distinguish the population and to direct public policies according to a judgment based on racial differentiation.

Racism as a visual ideology (Mosse, 2023) allows identifying at a glance from physical and physiognomic characteristics, the beauty or ugliness of a person, as well as a series of intellectual and moral characteristics of the individuals. Let's see an example of this, taken from a story by Luis G. Urbina (1864-1934), who was a writer, journalist, and teacher in Mexico. In this story, the main character, a bored clerk, looks out of the window at the landscape and narrates what he observes. In the description of what he sees, he highlights the contrast that he finds between the beauty of nature and the *ugliness* of the indigenous women who pass through there:

My painting has very little movement. It is a landscape without figures. They tend to appear suddenly, among a clump of carnations or behind a crest of daisies, the vulgar and sallow countenance of the indigenous girls who live in that small paradise, planted to make us jealous, in front of our bureaucratic hell. But the poor little things —heads from illustrations

of trips to Africa— are so ugly that, instead of increasing, they take away the intrigue from the composition. And, at the same time that it is presented, it seems that some irreverent and malicious person smudged those crude figures with sepia, intending to fade the delicacy of the background (Urbina, 1945, p. 113).

The character, while describing the landscape as if it were a painting, sympathizes with the ugliness of the indigenous women he observes from his window. Being indigenous is, first of all, being physically unattractive. Let us remember that we are rooted in an aesthetic paradigm that is based on the Greek-European beauty ideal (Winckelman, 1959). Racism involves power relations that are determined by a diagram. This diagram is historical; or, in other words, each historical formation has a power diagram (Deleuze, 2014). Thus, racism is implemented from the nation-states to constitute a racist subjectivity.

The population assumes as true certain statements such as the existence of superior and inferior races, beautiful or ugly, decent or indecent, which leads these individuals subjected by the racist ideology to affirm, for example, the need to “improve the race,” seeking whitening through the choice of lighter-skinned sexual partners. All this is part of this indoctrination that has been going on for two centuries. In order for racism to work as a technology of domination, it is necessary that individuals accept this knowledge as true and act upon it. For Foucault (2011), power is not exercised from the top down but circulates throughout the social body. Power makes the individuals participate as if they were gears in the mechanism of domination. In order for racism to function efficiently as a determinant element in social differentiation, it is essential that this knowledge be accepted as true.

In many cases, it is in the core of the family where sentences with racist overtones are heard for the first time. Ana, a 35-year-old mother and head of a family, also a law student with an intercultural focus, told us that when she was a child, her aunts, whom she defines as “light brown-skinned” used to call her the “*sorulla* of the family,” making allusion to the song “*Capullo y orullo*” from the group *Sonora Dinamita*; a song that since the 80’s has been played at every Mexican party and turned the *sorullo* into the result of “incorrect

miscegenation." If we compare it with the lineage paintings in the 18th century in Mexico, the *sorullo* would be like a "jump back" because the son, far from whitening, which would be the ideal of the mixture, is born darker and is therefore the object of ridicule.

Ana said that she felt that her mother regretted that her daughter had a darker skin color than she did. Darker meant uglier, so the color had to be disguised so as not to look so dark: "All my childhood I had to wear neutral colors like beige, white, or black. I couldn't wear brightly colored clothes." On one occasion she came home wearing a green blouse, and after a brief look of disapproval, her mother told her, "take off that blouse. That color *te aprieta*," a curious way of telling her that it made her look darker. It is not about looking with darker skin but, on the contrary, it is about dissimulating the dark color of her skin.

A racist subjectivity that assumes the aesthetic models coming from Europe is being constituted. Gómez (1999) states that "Racism, far from disappearing in our environment, is reinforced and even pierces the vision of those who ultimately are also its victims" (p. 47). In discursive practice, racist thinking has repercussions on the way we perceive others and ourselves. And at the same time, they allow that the same individual can affect and be affected by this mode of perception, feeling white with some and brown with others.

Fanon (2009) speaking of the alienation of the black West Indian, explained that racism causes the existence of a neurotic society, and that this impacts negatively in the way we interact with others and ourselves: "...the Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation" (p. 76). Racism has reached deeply in our way of perception that it is very difficult to transcend it and it is part of our constitution as individuals.

A *UIEP* student told us that when she was young a beauty contest was organized and she wanted to participate. There happened to be a girl there that she describes as: "Very pretty, with rosy cheeks, slender". When she arrived, she noticed that this contestant's mother was looking down on her. The mother seemed to point out with her gaze that she had no business being there because, with her brown skin color and indigenous features, it was impossible for her to win such a contest. She wanted to participate and so she did. When the student had to speak, she gave her speech in the

Ngigua language, and when she got off the stage, she heard a lady comment with contempt: "she had to stutter...". The comment alludes to a generalized derogatory way of perceiving this native language. She told us the anecdote very proudly, pointing out that, in spite of that, she was able to win third place.

Clara, a 37-year-old student of the Intercultural University in San Marcos Tlacoyalco, told us that her 12-year-old daughter sadly asked her why she was brown-skinned. She explained that there was nothing wrong with that. The sadness and frustration that dark skin color causes in children has been seen in public schools in Mexico. If the brown color is perceived as a misfortune, it is fundamental because it is identified with the indigenous. In this sense, and as a survival strategy, they stopped teaching the native language to their children for fear that they would be discriminated against. As Fanon says, "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (Fanon, 2009, p. 49).

Rosalía, a student at UIEP, a 32-year-old mother and head of a family, told us that she married a man from another town. Although they are of the same ethnic origin, the native language is no longer spoken there. When they had a daughter, she decided to speak to her in *Ngigua*. At home she had several siblings. Their parents spoke to them in *Ngigua* and they all learned it. It was very important to her that her daughter also learned it. When her mother-in-law heard her, she warned her not to teach her daughter *Ngigua* because she would stutter (personal communication, 2024, March 26). To speak *Ngigua* is to show that you are indigenous and, therefore, to risk being discriminated against, as one teacher explains about his experience of having to leave his community to go to the municipality to study high school:

At the end of the school day, we were looked for by students from neighboring communities, not even from Tlacotepec centro, who paradoxically really did live in the hills, to tell us, well, they were waiting for us to tell us that we were bothersome indigenous people who had come down from the hills, rough-pawed feet indigenous people who didn't know why we were there in Tlacotepec, and that it would be better for us to return to the village (Personal communication, 2024, March 28).

When a *Ngigua* speaker must leave their locality, they face discrimination and contempt for the fact that they are indigenous. In that sense, and in order to be accepted, they must stop speaking the language. In another passage this teacher adds:

When I was a high school student, during my era there wasn't a high school in the community. So I had to go to Tlacotepec to study high school. I was one of the first, along with two neighbors, to make the trip to the municipality in order to continue studying.

I always knew that in order to improve my literacy I had to stop speaking my language because old people told us that in Tlacotepec we were going to experience a lot of discrimination and that the only way to stop being discriminated against and getting hurt by their words was to stop speaking my mother tongue (Personal communication, 2024, March 28).

For racist thinking, to be indigenous is to be a person without reasoning, without intellectual capacity: "Even the teachers told us, 'You don't know anything.' You are a stupid *chocho* [Indian]." (Personal communication, 2024, March 29). When prejudice and contempt come not only from classmates but also from teachers, the victims of racism question themselves from the arguments that denigrate them, as expressed by this professor:

I felt ashamed of what I was when I entered high school, and in Tlacotepec I stopped dancing the traditional dance of San Marcos, the *Santiagones* one [...] I stopped dancing; I also stopped participating in community activities because I felt that the only way to get ahead was to give it my all in school and learn what they told us in the classrooms (Personal communication, 2024, March 27).

Discrimination, contempt, and indifference are ways in which racism is expressed. But individuals do not remain immobile in the face of this situation. Human beings rebel and look for ways to dignify themselves, and this is what we observed in the experience reported by the teachers and students we interviewed. In this context, this population develops ways of resistance.

Foucault (2011) affirms that “where there is power, there is resistance.” (p. 89). Power relations bring forth various sources of resistance, which are not in a position of exteriority to such power but which cause the whole diagram of strength to alter and transform. Resistance is the most dynamic element; it arises within these relations of domination between conflicting forces that disagree and affect each other. In the Tlacotepec school environment and in the face of the contempt to which students from neighboring towns were subjected, they sought ways to resist:

In high school I realized that the way we were organized according to our origin helped us to resist the forms of discrimination that were established against us. Especially during recess, those of us from San Marcos would sit in one part, those from San José Buenavista in another, those from Santa María la Alta in another part, and those from Pazoltepec in another part, and so each community among friends would get together and become strong. If it was time to form a team, if it was time to make a presentation or a project, we would always get together because of our origin and our affinity as neighbors and as friends since middle school (Personal communication, 2024, March 29).

In the same sense, another professor expressed himself when he explained:

Later I discovered that the only way to survive was to become strong with my neighbors and with acquaintances I had from communities other than Tlacotepec. That is how I understood that by speaking the language we could also establish resistance and tell each other things that those in Tlaco did not understand (Personal communication, 2024, March 28).

Resistance must be understood as a struggle for life, for the search for spaces that allow us to breathe, live, and feel good about ourselves. Resistances exceed a power diagram. In this diagram we observe three aspects: “the power to affect, the power to be affected, and the power to resist” (Deleuze, 2014, p. 207). The resistance points, scattered throughout the diagram, allow the diagram to transform. In the specific case we are analyzing, it allows the *Ngigua* community to empower itself by rescuing its own knowledge. In that sense, we believe that the creation of the Intercultural University of the State of Puebla in San Marcos Tlacoyalco, in 2019, served the community in its resistance struggle.

The university opened spaces for discussion and dialogue on *Ngigua* culture. The language is taught, and local culture is valued. However, it has been a challenge to position itself as a quality university and attract young people to study there. A student from the university commented that they distributed flyers in a neighboring town to publicize the *UIEP*, and a lady said to her, "Oh, yes, the one over there, in the town where they talk kind of weird? I don't think they have much of a future."

A professor explained the problems *UIEP* has had in obtaining prestige:

This has been one of the problems when the intercultural university was created here in the community. Because many people thought that the university was only for indigenous people. Well, it was never going to be the same as, for example, the *BUAP* or a private university in Tehuacán, because these universities, well, it is as if they were saying, "We can't believe that a good university is coming for our people, because they have always sent us the worst or the remains of what someone no longer wants." And that has been very difficult to accredit, the quality of the university. And although it has been sought that the teachers have a doctorate and a very advanced profile in their studies, people, when you hear in the square or in Tlacotepec itself, even some people from our community, that there is a university here, which very few communities have, still refer to ours as a minor university, a second or third rate university, the "university of the Indians," and it is strange, isn't it? Because we discriminate among ourselves, we are very *malinchistas* (a Mexican term used to refer to someone who betrays their own culture by favoring foreign cultures); it is as if nothing good could happen among us (Personal communication, 2024, March 29).

The example is interesting because it shows that racism circulates and that the racist discourses that proliferated in the 19th century continue to circulate with other nuances, which demonstrates the transforming capacity of the phenomenon. It also shows how a racist subjectivity that guides our actions, our behaviors, and our way of perceiving ourselves has been constituted.

Conclusions

With this research, we set out to analyze the ways in which racism is expressed, both at the macro level, in national policies that are not applied equally in the different regions of the

country, and in a micro level, in comments or actions of racial denigration and contempt. And how from this racist knowledge-power arise subjectivities rooted in this way of perceiving differences that gives a complex to individuals, leading them to despise themselves for their skin color. It is demonstrated that this is not only a way of perceiving differences but also a practice of domination.

As could be observed through the examples presented, racism in Mexico is oriented towards contempt for the indigenous and for anyone who reminds us of an indigenous origin, whether by their physical appearance, their physiognomy, their way of speaking, or their customs. This does not mean that other population groups, such as people of African descent, Chinese people, or Jews, have been exempt from racial discrimination. In the construction of every nation, a group is declared upon which to vent racist fears and paranoia. Thus, for example, racism in Nazi Germany, although not exclusively, was directed towards the Jew. Every country has its own object of racial vent, and in Mexico it has been towards the indigenous people. With the paradox that at the same time substantiates a national identity based on the idea of miscegenation through which it is intended to whiten the population, both culturally and biologically. This has led to attitudes of discrimination that are expanded throughout society.

This work demonstrates that racism has impacted the *Ngigua* community of San Marcos Tlacoyalco in various ways, both in public policies and in attitudes of contempt and self-contempt related to ethnicity. We see that resistance acts as a fight for life, as a fight to create spaces that allow individuals to dignify themselves. Following Foucault, we can affirm that the victims of racism have the strength to affect themselves, to transform themselves, and to open spaces for possible struggles.

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