

(Audio)visual Artivist Research

in Anti-Colonial and Anti-Racist Key



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Abstract

This article conceives of the University as a laboratory for the creation of anti-racist and anti-colonial practices through arts, communication, and education. It proposes the realization of (audio)visual¹ activist practices with an anti-colonial and anti-racist focus as the articulating axis of artistic creation experiences, art education, and educational research. It suggests the creation and exhibition of commented collages and short films of appropriation as instruments for individuals and groups to question colonialism and racism, both in the fields of audiovisual, visual, and sound culture, as well as in the field of their family, school, and cultural consumption formation; while promoting the re-existence of native and Afro-descendant identities, cultures, knowledge, and memories. It employs conceptual and methodological tools of critical pedagogy, visual anthropology, and film studies to describe how anti-”Indian” and anti-”Black” racism and the appreciation for cultural and physical whiteness can be reproduced and resisted. It recovers testimonies from situated processes of critical reflection on one’s personal and family history in relation to the reproduction of colonial and racist violence. It describes a methodological proposal to make (audio)visual artistic analysis and creation tools in the construction of knowledge and emotions for the social transformation of reality, and instruments to build a culture of peace, social justice, and historical memory.

Keywords: activism; anti-racism; decolonial; audiovisual literacy; artistic research; culture of peace

Pesquisa Artivista (Audio)visual em Chave Anticolonial e Antirracista

Resumo

Este artigo concebe a Universidade como laboratório para a criação de práticas antirracistas e anticoloniais por meio das artes, comunicação e educação. Propõe a realização de práticas artivistas (audio)visuais com foco anticolonial e antirracista como eixo articulador de experiências de criação artística, educação artística e pesquisa educacional. Sugere a criação e exibição comentada de colagens e curtas-metragens de apropriação como instrumentos para que indivíduos e grupos questionem o colonialismo e o racismo, tanto nos campos da cultura audiovisual, visual e sonora, como no campo de sua formação familiar, escolar e de consumo cultural; promovendo a reexistência de identidades, culturas, saberes e memórias originárias e afrodescendentes. Emprega ferramentas conceituais e metodológicas da pedagogia crítica, antropologia visual e estudos cinematográficos para descrever como o racismo anti-”índio”, anti-”negro” e a valorização da branquitude cultural e física podem ser reproduzidos e resistidos. Recupera depoimentos de processos situados de reflexão crítica sobre a própria história pessoal e familiar em relação à reprodução da violência colonial e racista. Descreve uma proposta metodológica para tornar a análise e a criação artística (audio)visual ferramentas na construção de conhecimentos e emoções para a transformação social da realidade, e instrumentos para construir cultura de paz, justiça social e memória histórica.

Palavras-chave: ativismo; antirracismo; decolonial; alfabetização audiovisual; pesquisa artística; cultura de paz

¹ The form *(audio)visual* is used considering that the making of found footage short films includes visual works (photographs, illustrations, comics), audiovisual (television programs, films, videos, documentary records), and sound (musical pieces, podcasts); and that the *audiovisual* form leaves out what is exclusively visual and sound.

Investigación (audio)visual artista en clave anticolonial y antirracista

Resumen

El artículo concibe la Universidad como laboratorio para la creación de prácticas antirracistas y anticoloniales desde las artes, la comunicación y la educación. Propone la realización de prácticas (audio)visuales artistas en clave anticolonial y antirracista como eje articulador de experiencias de creación artística, educación artística e investigación educativa. Sugiere la creación y exhibición comentada de *collage* y cortometrajes de apropiación como instrumento para que sujetos y grupos cuestionen la colonialidad y el racismo, tanto en los campos de la cultura audiovisual, visual y sonora, como en el campo de su formación familiar, escolar y de consumo cultural; paralelamente, fomenta la re-existencia de identidades, culturas, saberes y memorias originarias y afrodescendientes. Emplea herramientas conceptuales y metodológicas de la pedagogía crítica, la antropología visual y los estudios cinematográficos para describir cómo se reproducen y pueden resistirse el racismo anti“indio”, anti“negro” y el aprecio por la blancura cultural y física. Recupera testimonios de procesos situados de reflexión crítica sobre la propia historia personal y familiar en relación con la reproducción de violencias coloniales y racistas. Describe una propuesta metodológica para hacer del análisis y la creación artística (audio)visual, herramientas en la construcción de conocimientos y emociones para la transformación social de la realidad; instrumentos para construir cultura de paz, justicia social y memoria histórica.

Palabras clave: artivismo; antirracismo; decolonial; alfabetización audiovisual; investigación artística; cultura de paz

Introduction

In the spring of 2020, the murder of George Floyd sparked a global wave of anti-colonial and anti-racist actions, which often involved the intervention, destruction, and/or removal of statues; memorials in honor of key figures in the Euro-American colonial domination and exploitation of territories and populations in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. From Christopher Columbus and other conquerors to slavers and traders of enslaved Africans, Confederate generals, and genocidal monarchs, they were toppled as a political act of historical memory. As a professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts (Universidad Veracruzana, Mexico), a public center that produces and trains visual and audiovisual culture creators, I wondered: What should be the role of (audio)visual culture and the University as producer and trainer of (audio)visual culture creators in the face of racism and colonialism? How to produce anti-colonial and anti-racist (audio)visual culture? How to train listeners and viewers to analyze and create (audio)visual culture from an anti-colonial and anti-racist perspective?

I understood that the anti-colonial and anti-racist struggle is a fundamental part of a culture of peace (Hernández Arteaga et al., 2017), where social practices are

developed to build and reproduce relationships based on values, attitudes, behaviors, ways of life, and actions that recognize the life, dignity, and rights of individuals and groups in diversity while rejecting violence and adhering to the principles of freedom, justice, solidarity, tolerance, and empathy. Also, education in artistic practice is an effective means of social transformation articulated with processes of community and popular organization to manifest, fight, and resist violence; to transmit the emotions, thoughts, and realities of those who seek new forms of social construction in the face of conditions of inequality and injustice (Mejía Badillo, 2015).

I assumed the need to be a “revolutionary teacher for contemporary (decolonial) artistic education” (Jiménez, 2020), developing pedagogies of indigenous and Afro-descendant “re-existence” (Albán, 2013) from artistic practices; “artivism against oppression to transform education” (López, 2022). I inaugurated the Racism Project log and made my work as a full-time professor in a *Laboratory of anti-colonial and anti-racist (audio)visual ideas and practices*. I worked on my projects of film analysis and audiovisual found footage creation but also facilitated the development of creation and research projects in visual arts, photography, film studies, and art pedagogy. At the

same time, I wrote articles and book chapters, presented papers at conferences and seminars, and was a father to a child who is attending elementary school. I carried out exercises of anti-colonial and anti-racist (audio)visual analysis as a creative treatment of reality. I assembled three found footage short films where José Vasconcelos, founder of the postrevolutionary Education system in Mexico and author of the *La raza cósmica* (1925) racist essay, is the central figure: anti-“Indian” racism, anti-“Black” racism, and appreciation for whiteness. I assembled visual and audiovisual reflections to make visible and question the reproduction of racist discourses and imaginaries in (audio)visual culture and the inequalities they generate in access to the social recognition of individuals and groups of diverse identities and cultures.

During the summer of 2021, while anti-racism activism by collectives Racismo MX and Poder Prieto were occupying large spaces in national media coverage, I used the short films to prompt critical dialogues in a workshop aimed to build critical interculturality from artistic practice, the Interculturalidad Crítica y Artilugios desde el Arte Workshop of the Universidad Campesina Indígena en Red and the Centro de las Artes de Guanajuato (México). With the participation of men and women from different age groups, mainly teachers from various educational levels and different geographic contexts of Mexico, Colombia, and Argentina, I turned that space into a process of critical media literacy (Kellner & Share, 2007) where participants affirmed themselves as subjects by deconstructing injustices, expressing their voices, and collaborating to build spaces for peaceful coexistence. And upon conclusion, I began the cycle again, developed a second version of the short films, in addition to making a new one articulating the three and a new creative exploration, a two-dimensional collage—again with José Vasconcelos and his ideas as protagonists—; and generating a new space for critical dialogue in the second edition of the workshop in the summer of 2022.

Recognizing that racism is a foundational and structural part of the Mexican national education system (Velasco & Baronnet, 2016), as well as other national education systems in Abya Yala territories, this article

systematizes an experience of knowledge construction at the disciplinary intersection of arts, communication, and education, from three complementary research processes: a) one focused on the critical reflection of the creative process behind *A country that knows how to appreciate what it has* (series of found footage short films, 2022), *Whitening “Indians” in their image and likeness* (digital collage, 2023), and *Whiteners of “Indians”* (digital collage, 2023); b) another on the study of the series as a trigger for dialogue and reflection in anti-colonial and anti-racist (audio)visual literacy processes, and c) one more oriented towards generating information to improve both processes. It describes a methodological proposal to make of (audio)visual analysis and creation tools of anti-colonial and anti-racist construction of knowledge and emotions for social transformation of reality; instruments for building a culture of peace, social justice, and historical memory.

Laboratories of anti-colonial and anti-racist (audio)visual ideas and practices

The conception and design of the laboratories started with the understanding of coloniality (Quijano, 2000) as a power pattern, based on the idea that there is a racial and cultural hierarchy between diverse human subjects and groups, where European culture is considered superior to “indigenous” and “black” cultures. Moreover, racism, as a colonial domination device, is a system of thought and action for oppression and discrimination with deep historical and structural roots (Dei, 2013), which legitimizes, maintains, and/or exacerbates the inequality of opportunities among ethnic-racial groups, and can be expressed through stereotypes, prejudices, or discriminatory acts (Berman & Paradies, 2008). From this double platform, education legitimizes and reproduces a way of understanding and constructing the world where members of a certain collective dominate members of others, imposing their particular needs and ways of being, feeling, thinking, and doing (Dei & Kempf, 2006); in the case of Mexico and Latin America, the creole and mestizo elites who assumed power after the independence processes in the 19th century.

In contrast, whether it is called anti-colonial education (Dei & Kempf, 2006), decolonial education (Díaz, 2010; Jiménez, 2020), or pedagogy of re-existence (Albán, 2013), for example, education is also developed to legitimize and reproduce a way of understanding and constructing the world where subjects and collectives collaborate

2 Throughout the text, the categories *indígena/indio and negro*—and their corresponding English terms—are placed in quotation marks with the purpose of indicating that their meaning is a social construction that is usually loaded with colonial and racist prejudices.

from their diversities to build social justice and historical memory, recognizing the equal dignity of their diversities in difference. It advocates for breaking down norms that strengthen colonial imposition and domination and recognizing plural ways of being, feeling, thinking, and doing, particularly those of indigenous peoples and the African diaspora. It proposes formation processes oriented towards social transformation based on challenging Eurocentric-hegemonic knowledge and promoting the recovery and valorization of local, popular, and ancestral cultures and knowledge (Albán, 2013). In Adichie's terms (2018), it breaks with the single story of colonialism, making visible stories of resistance and offers tools for students to locate and value resistance in their past and in that of others (Dei & Kempf, 2006).

In the same vein, and as part of the theoretical-practical tools against colonial oppression, anti-racism is understood as a political-pedagogical effort aimed at eradicating the reproduction of racial hierarchies in all areas of life and in all structures of society, developing critical and reflective practices on institutional policies and practices that contribute to its reproduction (Berman & Paradies, 2008), as well as actions to "recognize and resist the subtle and explicit forms of racism, and work towards social justice, equality, and respect for diversity" (Dei, 2013, p. 17). From this anticolonial and anti-racist perspective, situated inquiry processes are developed, observing how domination is expressed in the immediate context of subjects, how each one understands their own oppression, as well as analyzing power imbalances and favoring the redistribution of access to social recognition; promoting community resistance through spaces of mutual listening to build empathy, building community in diversity, and collective actions that reflect the political needs and objectives of as many individuals as possible (Dei & Kempf, 2006).

On the other hand, the conception and design of the laboratories also stem from my experience teaching courses and accompanying the development of undergraduate and graduate research and artistic creation projects with students of Visual Arts, Film Studies, Photography, and Arts Pedagogy, as well as researching anti-colonial and anti-racist artistic education and (audio)visual literacy processes from the perspectives of critical interculturality and the decolonial turn. It has as a precedent my explorations on how to develop the critical and reflective capacity of subjects to question and dismantle colonial and racist practices in the discursive and narrative configuration of audiovisual works (Zárate-Moedano, 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2021a), formation and research processes to strengthen gazes and ways of listening in resistance to coloniality and racism. All of this is a consequence of assuming that, as a professor at a public University, if consensus fosters and maintains the social and cultural inequalities of my environment, I am obliged to explore other ways of thinking to act as a motor of change, seeking to make the public university an instrument for building social justice and historical memory (Jiménez, 2020).

In such a way, from this theoretical-practical framework, the research methodology employed in this study focuses on examining the subjects' experiences and their agency to analyze how coloniality and racism are reproduced and can be combated through the analysis and creation of (audio)visual culture. Hence, in a journal, I documented my actions based on the recognition that I cannot remain neutral in the face of oppression and violence (López, 2022) and that racism, like coloniality and other ideologies of domination, "not only appears in classrooms through those who enter them but also through the curriculum, positions of power, etc." I generated evidence of how I sought to resist coloniality and racism through my art, teaching, and research practices, adopting an artist approach. I understood artistic creation as a tool for problematization, reflection, awareness, and social transformation at an individual and collective level.

As a creator and audiovisual researcher, my actions involved constructing theoretical and practical knowledge on how coloniality and racism are reproduced and can be combated by exploring, experimenting, and testing ideas and practices through the construction and/or deconstruction of (audio)visual works. I developed inquiry processes based on analytical practices rooted in visual anthropology (Grau, 2005), film studies (Casetti & Di Chio, 2018), and critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2002). These processes aimed to

- deconstruct the visual and sound elements that compose the analyzed work to understand how colonial and racist (audio)visual ideas and emotions are articulated and constructed,
- critically and situated interpret them to question and dismantle their discursive and narrative practices,
- deconstruct the symbolic processes of social discrimination (Giménez, 2007) that occur through the articulation of their components, namely, discursive and narrative practices oriented towards reproducing advantages and disadvantages in accessing social justice and recognizing diverse subjects and groups, and
- make visible the messages and cultural values reproduced by their representation of stories, characters, situations, and the creators' perception of the world, their interests, values, preferences, and theoretical and ideological perspectives.

Through the construction of *A Country that Knows How to Appreciate what it Has* (a triptych of found footage short films, 2022b), *Whitening "Indians" in Their Image and Likeness* (digital collage, 2023b), and *Whiteners of "Indians"* (digital collage, 2023a), I explored and experimented with anticolonial and antiracist ideas and practices by appropriating and resignifying visual, audiovisual, and sonic fragments: photographs, illustrations, songs, films, television programs, and YouTube videos that convey the colonial and racist perspectives of the elites. Drawing on artistic techniques such as appropriation cinema (Martín, 2014) and collage (Yurkievich, 2005), I deconstructed visual and/or sonic elements from third-party works, dismantled their discourses and narrative practices, reinterpreted their original meanings, and constructed ideas and emotions in the opposite direction. The aim was to shed light on the messages and cultural values reproduced by their representation of stories, characters, and situations, as well as the interests, values, preferences, and theoretical and ideological perspectives from which they were created. This artistic research project was based on experiential experimentation and reflection, fostering a dialogue between practice and theory to generate new knowledge and critical perspectives on society and culture.

Furthermore, through the critical deconstruction of the trilogy of short films *A Country that Knows How to Appreciate what it Has* (2022b), in collaboration with participants from the Interculturalidad Crítica y Artilugios desde el Arte Workshop (2021 and 2022) of the Universidad Campesina Indígena en Red and the Centro de las Artes de Guanajuato (Mexico), I also explored and experimented with anticolonial and antiracist ideas and practices. As a facilitator of the critical deconstruction processes, I engaged in participant observation and documented ideas and reflections during the workshop sessions with 39 participants (in 2021, 20 women and 2 men, 11 holding a bachelor's degree, 7 holding a master's degree, 4 holding a doctorate, and in 2022, 13 women and 4 men, 12 holding a bachelor's degree, 4 holding a master's degree, 1 holding a doctorate), the majority of whom were teachers and, secondly, artistic creators and cultural managers.

As a community of practice (Wenger, 2001), we engaged in dialogue, analyzing (audio) visual content from an antiracist perspective, contrasting lifestyles, worldviews, practices, routines, rituals, symbols, conventions, stories, and narratives that shape our identities. Through dialogue, we deconstructed the visual and sonic elements of the trilogy, aiming to identify the



messages and cultural values reproduced by its representation of stories, characters, and situations, as well as the creators' perception of the world (interests, values, preferences, and theoretical and ideological perspectives). Moreover, we problematized reality not only by questioning the present and imagining alternative futures through (audio)visual analysis but also by creating and collaboratively exhibiting autobiographical narratives with an anticolonial and antiracist approach.

Finally, I systematized my experience (Jara, 2018) by analyzing the practice of activist (audio)visuals with an anticolonial and antiracist approach as a central element of artistic creation, art education, and educational research, and their relationship with the development of social competences, active citizenship, and full social participation, aligning with the Unesco roadmap (2006). I explored, organized, and analyzed the records in my journal (Anaya & Cózar, 2014), including facts, concerns, observations, ideas, direct quotes, and images, as well as audiovisual records and transcriptions of the workshop sessions. These formed the basis for a critical interpretation of the creative process behind *A Country that knows how to appreciate what it has* (a triptych of found footage short films, 2022b), *Whitening "Indians" in their image and likeness* (digital collage, 2023b), and *Whiteners of "Indians"* (digital collage, 2023a), as well as the process of sparking anticolonial and antiracist dialogues and reflections with these materials in the Interculturalidad Crítica y Artilugios desde el Arte Workshop (2021 and 2022). The aim was to contribute to the reflection on the role of individuals in peace education processes in the face of racism and coloniality and to identify which elements of political and civic education are involved in this process and which ones need to be incorporated and/or strengthened (Gómez-Barriga, 2019).

In summary, this is a qualitative study that examines the experiences of participants in the Interculturalidad Crítica y Artilugios desde el Arte Workshop and of its facilitator and creator of the audiovisual series and collages used as didactic tools and catalysts for anticolonial and antiracist creative actions. The research methodology employed included data collection strategies such as participant observation, documentation of the creative and facilitation processes in a journal, and videographic recording of the workshop sessions. The oral interventions of the participants and the (audio)visual works they created were analyzed to identify how they recovered/visualized

experiences related to the reproduction and combating of racist practices, as well as the conclusions they reached based on their workshop experience. As an integral part of the activist positioning of this study, the workshop participants consented to have the sessions recorded on video and their contributions during the sessions, as well as the (audio)visual works they produced, used as raw material for the anticolonial and antiracist reflections in this study, to facilitate the replication of transformation processes that originated in the workshop in other contexts.

Artistic research as anticolonial and antiracist (audio)visual analysis

In the summer of 2020, adopting conceptual and methodological tools from visual anthropology, film studies, and critical pedagogy, I used creative strategies such as collage and found footage cinema to research how anti-"Indian" and anti-"Black" racism and the appreciation for cultural and physical whiteness are reproduced in (audio)visual culture, and how they can be made visible and questioned by generating counter-narratives from an anticolonial and antiracist perspective. Recalling my cultural consumption as a student of the national educational and media system, I appropriated musical works that are often used as standards of "Mexicanness" such as the mariachi classics *El jarabe tapatío* (public domain) and *El son de la negra* (Public domain) or the *Marcha de Zacatecas* (Codina, 2000), always present in nationalist civic events in public schools; as well as audiovisual works of great popularity featuring Afro-descendant and indigenous subjects. I appropriated fragments of films, TV programs, viral videos, songs, state records of presidential and other politicians' speeches, postal stamps, illustrations, photographs, and paintings, articulating fragments into a discourse to make visible, evident, explicit, and question the gaze from which national identity and indigenous and Afro-descendant otherness are constructed, and what experiences, histories, and memories are made invisible, editing to research how they reproduce the appreciation for cultural and physical whiteness and anti-"Indian" and anti-"Black" racisms.

At first, I had a clear topic that I wanted to address, but not the exact way I wanted to do it. Therefore, in my logbook, spanning two years and nine months from July 2020 to March 2023, I documented 20 different creative action proposals, 16 labeled as "short film", 1 as "anti-racist video art", 2 as "audiovisual installation", and 1 as

“transmedia series”. Of those 20 records, 13 arose from creative explorations from the audiovisual editing table, experimenting by appropriating and re-signifying materials, and trying out ideas and practices by disassembling third-party works to rearticulate fragments into my discourse. The remaining 7 records are creative explorations in the form of written outlines for possible audiovisual works, experimenting with ideas and narrative practices from scriptwriting, such as short synopses or more extensive descriptions in three acts. From all those ideas, I developed three, addressing the reproduction of anti-“Indian” racism, anti-“Black” racism, and appreciation for cultural and physical whiteness. Thus, one year after starting my logbook records, in July 2021, I concluded the first stage of the research process with a series of three found footage short films.

To denounce the reproduction of anti-“Indian” racism, I articulated audiovisual records of José Vasconcelos speaking about his admiration for the conqueror Hernan Cortés, along with records of Esteban Moctezuma —head of the Secretaría de Educación Pública

(SEP) during the preventive confinement period due to the expansion of Covid-19— speaking with admiration of José Vasconcelos. These were interwoven with fragments of movies where non-indigenous actresses played indigenous characters, images of public spaces and post stamps dedicated to honoring the memory of José Vasconcelos, representations of Hernan Cortés and Mexican history, racist expressions on Twitter against María de Jesús Patricio — spokesperson for the National Indigenous Congress— and Yalitza Aparicio —an actress of Mixtec descent— and *El son de la negra*.

To address anti-“Black” racism, I articulated audiovisual records of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador speaking about Mexico’s independence and Esteban Moctezuma speaking about national identity, interwoven with fragments of Mexican TV shows and movies with Afro-descendant characters in dramatic and comedic tones, for example, from different versions of *Angelitos negros* (Rodríguez, 1948/1970), the children’s soap opera *Carrusel* (Corrales & Damián, 1989), and an animated short film of the comic book *Memín Pinguín* (Vargas-Dulché,



Illustration 1. Frame from *Anti-“Indian” Racism à la Vasconcelos* (2022). [Appropriation short film].

1943-2016). In addition, there was a viral video of an actress and model expressing disgust at seeing herself so “*prieta*” after accidentally applying a filter. Meanwhile, to address the appreciation for cultural and physical whiteness, I articulated fragments of TV shows and movies where European-looking actresses and actors played indigenous characters, such as Dolores del Río, Pedro Armendariz, Pedro Infante, Ignacio López Tarso, Germán Valdés, Silvia Pinal, Victoria Ruffo, and Adela Noriega. I also presented a clip from the movie *Raíces* (Alazraki, 1955) in which the characters discuss improving the indigenous race through genetic crossbreeding with a white European male, the sequence from *Angelitos negros* where a black girl paints her face white with powder in search of her mother’s approval, who rejects her for being black, and an image of skin lightening cream with the children’s song *La negrita Cucurumbé* (Gabilondo-Soler, 1954), which states that as a black girl “went to bathe in the sea to see if the white waves could whiten her face,” as well as the Mexican folk song *El jarabe tapatío*.



Illustration 2. Frame from *Anti-“Black” Racism a la Vasconcelos* (2022). [Appropriation short film].

In the first edition of the *Interculturalidad Crítica y Artulugios desde el Arte* Workshop (from July to October 2021), I presented the short films *Anti-“Indian” Racism* (5:20 minutes), *Anti-“Black” Racism* (5:50 minutes), and *Appreciation for Whiteness* (5:10 minutes), naming the trilogy *Decolonial Perspectives: Antiracist Audiovisual Analysis*. Dialogues with the community of participants led me to generate reflective records in my journal, as well as to develop creative actions through editing, a process that I described for the first time on February 28, 2022, as a “laboratory of ideas,” which ultimately articulated the components of the trilogy into a new short film: *A Country that Knows How to Appreciate What it Has* (6:48 minutes), a title that refers to how, excluding Afro-Mexican peoples from its discourse on national identity, Esteban Moctezuma says that Mexico is “a country that knows how to appreciate what it has”.

The final cut is not yet finished. It remains a laboratory of ideas, a space for exploration, inquiry, and experimentation [...] I identify and fragment sound and visual narratives that reproduce colonial and racist perspectives. I integrate, organize, and articulate these fragments and construct a reinterpretation, a counter-narrative discourse with an anti-colonial and antiracist vocation. (RZM, 02/28/2022)

Two years after starting the project development and documentation in the journal, in July 2022, I generated a second version of the trilogy, reducing the duration of each piece, going from just over five minutes to around three minutes each, and renaming them *Anti-“Indian” Racism à la Vasconcelos* (2:42 minutes), *Anti-“Black” Racism à la Vasconcelos* (3:06 minutes), and *Appreciation for Whiteness à la Vasconcelos* (3:37 minutes), and renaming the series *A Country that Knows How to Appreciate what it Has* (2022b). With this new editing exercise, I used the same materials 90 percent of the time, redistributing and complementing them with 10 percent that I considered contributed to reinforcing my discourse: an illustration representing Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, author of *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races* (1853), a theory that postulates Aryan racial superiority, as well as fragments from a diaper commercial featuring children representing fans of the Mexican national soccer team, a reality show, as well as videos from TikTok and YouTube content creators, including one where a male voice celebrates being a white Mexican of European descent.



Illustration 3. Frame from *Appreciation for Whiteness à la Vasconcelos* (2022). [Appropriation short film].

The three share a common beginning, a sequence in which the *Marcha de Zacatecas* is articulated with a speech by Delfina Gómez —the successor of Esteban Moctezuma as head of the SEP— celebrating the educational work of José Vasconcelos, the commemorative image of the centenary of the SEP, photographs, sculptures, and postage stamps honoring José Vasconcelos, images of murals, a video of an actress showing her disgust at seeing herself “*prieta*” with a filter, *El son de la negra*, sound of fireworks,

Esteban Moctezuma speaking about José Vasconcelos, José Vasconcelos speaking about Hernan Cortés; “a man who creates doctrine, who creates a system” and the title of the series *A Country that Knows how to Appreciate what it Has*. Also, the three share a common ending, a text on screen “In memory of the victims of Afro-descendant and indigenous ethnocide in Mexico and the rest of Abya Yala” and the voice of Esteban Moctezuma saying: “Mexico is a country that knows how to appreciate what it has.”

Through my artistic practice, I sought to answer: how can we make visible the reproduction of coloniality and racism in contemporary (audio)visual culture, while recognizing indigenous and Afro-descendant voices, perspectives, and experiences? What analytical tools can we use to identify racist expressions, deconstruct them, and question their legitimacy? What critical apparatus facilitates the analysis and creation of sound, visual, and audiovisual culture as a counter-narrative to coloniality and racism? What methods can be most appropriate for developing audiovisual literacy experiences that address these questions? And in the second edition of the *Interculturalidad Crítica y Artilugios desde el Arte Workshop* (from July 11 to August 6, 2022), I presented the trilogy again and registered new reflections on my practice as an artistic creator, facilitator, and researcher of audiovisual literacy processes.

I conduct anti-colonial and anti-racist audiovisual analysis when I study a set of audiovisual discourses and write a research article about them, also making found footage short films with these materials. Through editing, I identify and deconstruct the parts of visual, audiovisual, and sound discourses that reproduce racist perspectives on diversity and make visible how the elements of cinematic language are configured to reproduce colonial and racist perspectives. (RZM, 08/30/2022)

Likewise, the new feedback experience with the workshop participants brought about a new creative exploration, this time in the form of a two-dimensional collage, taking advantage of the fact that early in the process I appropriated a photographic archive portraying José Vasconcelos and the Secretaría de Educación Pública. The first creative explorations involved integrating the archive into the production of found footage short films. Subsequently, after a year and a half of (audio)visual work

and my participation in the first edition of the workshop, I created *Whitening “Indians” in Their Image and Likeness* (digital collage, 2023b). I appropriated a black and white photograph taken years after the Mexican Revolution: a classroom full of children. I replaced a set of their faces with those of José Vasconcelos, Cristóbal Colón, Hernan Cortés, Benito Juárez, and Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, and added a photograph of Adolf Hitler in the background of the classroom since José Vasconcelos was an open admirer of his.

In September 2022, I envisioned a video transition from the original photo to the collage. I edited the photos with sound scraps from *A country that knows how to appreciate what it has* (found footage series, 2022b), but did not develop the idea any further. Thus, in January 2023, I generated a new version of *Whitening “Indians” in Their Image and Likeness* (digital collage, 2023b) while working on the Racist Social Imaginaries and Antiracist Artistic Practices research seminar, collaborating with undergraduate and graduate

students, integrating new Mexican intellectuals who, like José Vasconcelos, associated national progress with the whitening of the population: Justo Sierra, Andrés Molina, Manuel Gamio, and Lázaro Cárdenas. Additionally, I created a new collage *Whiteners of “Indians”* (digital collage, 2023a), using photographs of Justo Sierra, Andrés Molina, Manuel Gamio, and José Vasconcelos, which resulted in revisiting how coloniality and racism had been present in my personal and familial history, resonating with a reflection recovered in the first entry in my journal:

The mestizaje ideology (Gómez-Izquierdo & Sánchez-Díaz, 2012) is the ideological weapon of ethnocide and has shaped the history of my family, producing the whitening of Mayan indigenous peoples. Family stories recognize our Mayan history as past events with anecdotal traces in the present. They offer a very limited memory, “they were Mayans and now they are not,” but do not recount how and



Illustration 3. *Whitening “Indians” in their image and likeness* (2023b). [Digital collage].

why the process of “ceasing to be” Mayans took place. What they do recount is the myth of national identity, the mixture of Spaniards and indigenous peoples, the story of my great-grandmother —the natural daughter of a Spanish landowner and a Mayan indigenous woman — and how my great-grandparents met as rural teachers, castellanizing Mayan indigenous peoples as representatives of the post-revolutionary mestizophile and nationalist State. (RZM, 26-07-2020).

Thus, I found a new route of development, a new exercise of historical memory and social justice, and a short film on that family story: *Victims of National Ethnocide*. Making it even more evident that artistic research can operate as a workshop for dismantling and constructing discourses and narratives, building knowledge collaboratively in an anticolonial and antiracist key, detonating practices of creation, training, and research to foster the re-existence of identities, cultures, knowledge, and memories, historically hidden by coloniality and racism.

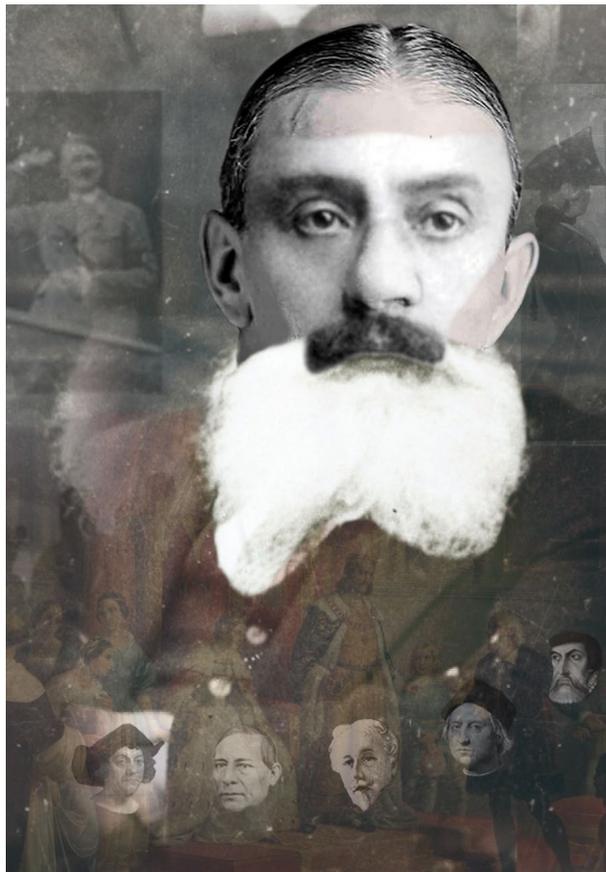


Illustration 5. *Whiteners of “Indians”* (2023a).
[Digital collage].

Researching anti-colonial and anti-racist (audio)visual literacy processes

During the summers of 2021 and 2022, I taught the module Pedagogies of Diversity in Mestizo Contexts within the Interculturalidad Crítica y Artilugios desde el Arte Workshop. Over the course of three weeks, I turned those spaces into laboratories of anticolonial and anti-racist (audio)visual ideas and practices, connected via videoconference with people from Mexico, but also from Colombia and Argentina. We reflected by commenting on texts, films, television programs, songs, how we were taught the history of our countries in school, or how we have reproduced or tried to resist a racist view of the world in our family life. We analyzed how *Anti-“Indian” Racism*, *Anti-“Black” Racism*, and the appreciation of cultural and physical whiteness are reproduced and resisted. At the same time, because of the processes of dialogue and introspection developed, autobiographical works of (audio)visual creation were generated. Through a collage (an articulated set of photographs and/or diverse visual elements) and a micro-story (written or oral text, one page or three minutes of audio or video), we sought to answer the following questions: how and to what extent have coloniality and racism permeated our personal and family history? And how can we break with their reproduction from our sphere of action in the world? Thus, in Bonfil’s (2010) terms, the set of works produced accounted for experiences of de-Indianization and de-Africanization lived within the families of the participants, that is, the ethnocidal historical processes through which they abandoned their original and/or Afro-Mexican identities.

As a starting point in all cases, we reviewed and commented on a set of freely accessible written and (audio)visual materials on the internet, including journalistic texts, political speeches, literary essays, lectures, research articles, short documentary films, and YouTube videos. In 2021, we analyzed the series *Decolonial Perspectives: Anti-racist Audiovisual Analysis*, which includes the short films *Anti-“Indian” Racism*, *Anti-“Black” Racism*, and *Appreciation for Whiteness*. In 2022, we analyzed the second version, *A Country that Knows How to Appreciate what it Has* (2022b), which includes *Anti-“Indian” Racism à la Vasconcelos*, *Anti-“Black” Racism à la Vasconcelos*, and *Appreciation for Whiteness à la Vasconcelos*. We consider coloniality and racism as an

identity policy of the Mexican State aimed at justifying strategies and actions to eradicate “indigeneity” and “blackness” and favor the reproduction of cultural and physical whiteness. We approached the study of the materials around five sources of meaning in (audio)visual discourses: staging, camera work, sound design, production design, and post-production.

Firstly, we shared a fragment of *La raza cósmica* (1925) where José Vasconcelos prescribes the path of whitening as the only possible one for indigenous peoples: “The Indian has no other door to the future than the door of modern culture, nor any other path than the already cleared path of Latin civilization” (2019, p. 13). In addition to watching and commenting on the *Anti-“Indian” Racism* short film in the 2021 edition and *Anti-“Indian” Racism à la Vasconcelos* in the 2022 edition, we analyzed the documentary short film *Existe cuando hablas* (Santiago-Francisco and Zárate-Moedano, 2015) where a Totonac linguist explains how the Mexican State has promoted actions to whiten indigenous populations, favoring the mobilization of reflections about what “going to school” means in family stories. This brought back memories of parents or grandparents internalizing —through symbolic and/or physical aggression— that being “indigenous” was bad; memories of children being attacked for speaking their first language instead of Spanish.

Furthermore, through the creation of counter-narratives, historical memory was made of everyday practices of anti-“Indian” racism within public school communities. As an (audio)visual artistic creation, testimonies of parents or grandparents or personal experiences were recovered. In the case of Guadalupe, *Una vida después de* (Vargas-Chablé, 2021), a text about her father, “he always tells us what he suffered for being a speaker of an indigenous language [...] that dialect you speak is useless, speak Spanish.” In the case of Angélica, *No soy de aquí y no soy de allá* (Díaz, 2021), a text about her grandmother, “she didn’t teach us the Nahuatl language anymore,” and her own story, remembering how she was ashamed that her classmates in a public school in Mexico City called her “Indita” because she was from an “indigenous” community.

The public school system is portrayed as a space that generates colonialism and racism, promoting the appreciation of cultural and physical whiteness while fostering hatred and disdain for young people who are “indigenous” or appear to be. This is based on a dialogue between

situated processes of introspection and historical family revision, diverse experiences of appreciation and rejection for being one way or another. It is described as a context where painful experiences of colonial and racist violence occur, where the dignity of individuals is devalued by demeaning their native identities and cultures, pushing them towards whitening themselves to avoid being targeted. These experiences occur in diverse contexts, as part of institutional practices, but also as everyday practices in casual interactions with classmates, as Mildrit recounts in her text *Mírate que indita eres hija*:

I had never felt singled out by society until I arrived in León and attended secondary school. One day in class, everyone was talking about doing something. I don’t remember what it was, and I just mentioned, “But that activity takes a long time.” I remember perfectly how all my classmates started making fun of me for saying the word “harto”... A tall, skinny, white girl said, “Oh, we forget that you’re from the countryside and that’s why you talk like that.” At that moment, I felt completely broken and never said the word again... They were my first raw experiences with whiteness... and I started whitening my vocabulary and forgetting that in my family “there was Indian skin,” as my grandfather says. (Vaquera, 2022)

To varying degrees, all the introspection processes involved reviewing and sharing painful situations, which was possible because the participants built a space of trust and solidarity. Moreover, sharing experiences in the community of practice (Wenger, 2001) was a mirror through which many of us could recognize ourselves, identify parallels between others’ family histories and our own, and feel accompanied:

[...] knowing that we have identical stories [...] that have separated us from language and culture [...] knowing that we are the result of those stories, but we can transform them to reclaim what was taken from us... Knowing that we have all experienced the same thing feels good. (Fabiola, T1: 31-07-2021).³

3 In the 2021 (T1) and 2022 (T2) workshops, all testimonies were expressed in Spanish, here are the author’s translations.

Secondly, we analyzed *Anti-“Black” Racism* in the 2021 Edition and *Anti-“Black” Racism à la Vasconcelos* in the 2022 edition, observing how anti-black racism is reproduced and can be made visible in (audio)visual culture. At the outset, I pointed out that almost two centuries, 198 years of constitutional invisibility as a State policy, passed before the Constitution recognized Afro-Mexican peoples as part of the national population in 2019. I recalled that in *La raza cósmica* (1925), José Vasconcelos expresses his condescending coloniality and racism towards individuals and groups of African descent:

The low types of the species will be absorbed by the superior type. In this way, for example, the black could be redeemed, and little by little, through voluntary extinction, the uglier strains will give way to the more beautiful ones [...] and the best specimens will ascend in a scale of ethnic improvement. (Vasconcelos, 2019, p. 27)

We discussed how the way in which History is told can either make certain information visible or invisible about facts, characters, perspectives, and/or positions. As an example, we mentioned the cases of Vicente Guerrero (2021 and 2022 editions) and Juan José Nieto Gil (2021 edition). In the first case, no one remembered being taught in their schooling that the second president of Mexico was of Afro-descendant heritage, while in the second case, Biviana —from Colombia— noted that she had not been taught in school that her country had had an Afro-descendant president (T1: 7-08-2021). This also led us to reflect on the whitewashing to which both characters are often subjected.

We identified that *Angelitos negros* in its two versions (Rodríguez, 1948/1970) —a film with blackface about a blonde woman rejecting her daughter for being Black— had been, to a greater or lesser extent, part of the family cultural consumption of many of the participants throughout their lives. We also noted that when Afro-descendant characters are incorporated into school activities, it is often done through racist stereotypes, such as reproducing the stereotype of the “good savage” dancer with children’s songs like *Negrito Sandia* (Gabilondo-Soler,

1954) or *La negrita cucurumbé* (Gabilondo-Soler, 1954) in the case of Mexico, or *El negro Cirilo* (Anwandter, 2015) in the case of Colombia. Additionally, Biviana shared reflections on the effects that consuming works that reproduce colonial and racist views can have, recalling that her grandmother —a fan of Mexican cinema in Colombia— replicated some of the practices of the characters in *Angelitos negros*, appreciating whiteness and despising blackness. “I was left thinking that racism in these audiovisual narratives is not harmless. What effects does it have on people’s self-esteem?” (T1: 8-08-2021).

On the other hand, since the creation of counter-narratives, historical memory has been made of the anti-“black” racism that has caused the erasure of Afro-descendant culture in the national culture. Voices emerged recognizing that there were Afro-descendant people in their family trees of whom they knew little or nothing and wished to delve deeper into to recover these hidden stories. For example, Adriana, with her *Microrrelato de una ausencia* (Ávila-Pardo, 2022), makes historical memory of a great-great-grandmother who was a mulatto and the difficulty of knowing more about her. Other voices denounced anti-“black” racist practices within the family, such as Alethia with her found footage short film *Yo no soy bonita o como el racismo anti-negro y el aprecio por la blancura han atravesado mi historia personal* (Martínez-Andrade, 2021), where she declares, “I came into the world with a sigh of relief from my maternal grandmother. She’s light-skinned!” and later reveals that one day her grandmother caught her looking at a photograph that she kept secret in a box, the image of a black man:

This man came to disgrace the family. Because of him, you are not pretty, you have a horrible wide mouth and a thick nose [...] I’m sure you got the habit of spying and taking things that are not yours from him. The only good thing about you is that you are light-skinned and have light eyes. I hope those eyes last.

Thirdly, we analyzed *Appreciation for Whiteness* in the 2021 edition and *Appreciation for Whiteness à la Vasconcelos* in 2022, observing how the cultural and

physical appreciation for whiteness is reproduced and made visible in (audio)visual culture. We recognize that “it still carries significant weight, not only in schools but also in media, programs, and all contexts where this discourse is strongly present” (Alma Karina, T2: 16-07-2022). We agree that the presence of European ancestors in our family trees is often highlighted, unlike if one’s ancestry is Indigenous or Afro-descendant, which is usually concealed or minimized. We note that the idea of “improving the race” often circulates in family conversations, and children easily appropriate the impulse to whiten themselves as a means of accessing social recognition denied to them for being dark-skinned. For example, a family photo that captures a dark-skinned child covering their face with powder, as in the movie *Angelitos Negros* (Mariana, T1:14-08-2021).

We also agree that the cultural and physical appreciation for whiteness is systematically reproduced in the educational sphere, overwhelmingly privileging knowledge of European or Euro-American origin over knowledge of other origins, such as in the study of History, Philosophy, and Art. “There is racism in how knowledge is filtered in educational spaces” (Alex, T1: 31-07-2021). Moreover, this mindset can lead to situations such as a teacher who had studied English and French, worked in a Nahua community, and was not interested in learning Nahuatl because he considered it useless (Irene, T1: 31-07-2021).

On the other hand, voices emerged recalling everyday experiences where racist practices are trivialized and permeate subjectivities. For example, the use of apps with filters to “beautify” subjects in photos by lightening their skin tone and “Europeanizing” their facial features. They also recall the historical whitewashing of the visual representation of the biblical character Jesus of Nazareth (Alex, T1: 14-08-2021). Voices such as Erasmo’s in his short film *Qué recuerdos míos...*, questioning how we learned and can unlearn the racist social imaginary in which we tend to move: “Where did we learn without knowing? Who taught us unconsciously? Who taught them, taught us, manipulated us, and manipulates us” (Ortiz-Palacios, 2022).

In summary, the editing exercises behind the short films that make up the series *A country that knows how to appreciate what it has* (2022b), along with other study

materials, have facilitated the visibility and problematization of how coloniality and racism are reproduced and combated in the fields of audiovisual, visual, and sonic culture, as well as in the learning processes developed through cultural consumption and family and school life.

The materials in this module provoke a lot of reflection and critical thinking. They include not only academic articles, but also videos that bring us back to our daily lives and invite us to reflect on what we see in the media, which constantly bombards us with information, images, and discourse. (Alma Karina, T2: 06-08-2022)

The community of practice (Wenger, 2001) served as a workshop to develop thinking and emotions about inequalities in the representation of diverse identities and cultures, as well as a space for autobiographical inquiry that is anti-colonial and antiracist, to explore-experiment-try out ideas and practices from the construction and/or deconstruction of audiovisual works. These generated exercises of historical memory about how coloniality and racism manifest in our everyday lives:

[...] an opportunity to create another story based on the awareness we are generating, and that there is no other way than through collectivity. I see this not as an idealistic thing, but as something that is happening right here with us. It is how our perspective, awareness, and sensitivity are being reformulated through these different stories, and how we gain the strength to act. (Marycarmen, T1: 14-08-2021)

Researching the critical media literacy processes not only generated relevant information about how coloniality and racism are reproduced and can be combated through that kind of workshop, but also provided substantial feedback for the process of researching through found footage filmmaking. It allowed me to observe and listen to how individuals and groups responded to the series of short films, how they related to them, how they interpreted them, to what places in their memory they returned, and how they were emotionally, intellectually, and politically

mobilized. Both processes operated as parallel explorations that mutually nourish each other, as mirrors of the same reality built up with different languages.

Conclusions

The creation and commented exhibition of the appropriation short film series *A Country that Knows How to Appreciate what it Has* (a series of found footage short films, 2022b) generated spaces for research in anticolonial and antiracist (audio)visual analysis, both as artistic research and educational research. The participants in the processes analyzed their historical and social context as analysts and creators of (audio)visual culture, recognizing that all areas of life are spaces for continuous learning, such as our family interactions, our consumption of (audio)visual culture, or the practices in which we participate within a school community; places where we learn and apprehend colonial and racist ways of being, feeling, thinking, and doing, learnings that inform the construction of our subjectivities. Therefore, both the production of collages and (audio)visual pieces and the audiovisual literacy processes are spaces of inquiry, seeking to make visible and question how coloniality and racism are reproduced and how they can be combated, whether the inquiry takes place as an (audio)visual montage or as a dialogue deconstructing the constitutive elements of narratives and discourses.

The text acknowledges that, from public training centers, as inhabitants of territories historically managed in a colonial and racist key, we can exist without questioning the established order, validating it, and contributing to reproducing colonial and racist inequalities, or we can actively question and resist, contributing to building social justice and historical memory in diversity from our daily practices. Consequently, it describes a proposal for a political-pedagogical action on how to position and act against coloniality and racism from the public university, understanding the daily work of the university as a laboratory of anticolonial and antiracist (audio)visual ideas and practices, a space for dialogue and collaboration from theory and practice to develop knowledge-building projects from artistic research, teaching in arts, communication, and education, and educational research in those fields.

The (audio)visual activist research in an anticolonial and antiracist key articulates conceptual and methodological tools from visual anthropology, film studies,

and critical pedagogy. It adopts creative strategies such as collage and found footage cinema to research how anti-“indian” racism, anti-“black” racism, and the appreciation of cultural and physical whiteness are reproduced in (audio)visual culture. It also explores how these issues can be made visible and questioned by generating counter-narratives in an anticolonial and antiracist way.

Whether through the creation of found footage works, by making evident how coloniality and racism are reproduced in the field of (audio)visual culture, or through the production of autobiographical texts, collages, and (audio)visual works as acts of historical memory, describing how State-led ethnocidal processes have affected the authors’ families and how they have experienced coloniality and racism throughout their lives, the processes of articulating visual, audiovisual, and sound elements in their discourses through montage are spaces where knowledge about the reproduction and combat of colonial and racist social imaginaries in the fields of cultural consumption, family history, and educational trajectory is generated. Besides, the logbook is fundamental for documenting, reflecting, and building knowledge about the creative process. It captures the motivations and objectives that guide the process, the explorations, experiments, and idea and practice tryouts in the construction and/or deconstruction of (audio)visual works, and the generated learnings.

On the other hand, the (audio)visual literacy processes, based on analyzing the series *A Country that Knows How to Appreciate what it Has* (2022b) and other anticolonial and antiracist (audio)visual and written materials, contributed to generating questions among participants about how anti-“Indian” racism, anti-“Black” racism, and the appreciation of cultural and physical whiteness are reproduced in their cultural consumption, family history, and educational trajectory. These processes also helped them develop acts of historical memory about how their families have been affected by State-led ethnocidal processes and how they have experienced coloniality and racism throughout their lives. Participants were men and women from different age groups, mostly teachers from different educational levels, from various geographical contexts in Mexico, Colombia, and Argentina, most of whom had no previous knowledge or experience in using artistic expression tools.

The participants, from their diversities, freely chose their means of expression, based on their interests,

preferences, experiences, and knowledge, contributing to the formation of a collection of texts, collage exercises, and short films with family archives. Through their artistic practices, they denounced the consequences of colonialism and racism in their life stories and created spaces for the re-existence of native and Afro-descendant identities, cultures, knowledge, and memories. At the same time, in the process, they constructed knowledge, emotions, and critical perspectives on their historical-social context, based on their creative process and experience shaping their works. Thus, fighting and resisting through activist practices, they rejected the symbolic and physical violence historically suffered by indigenous and Afro-descendant individuals and groups, built social justice as recognition of the equal dignity of individuals and groups in diversity, and made historical memory of those who have been victims of colonial and racist inequalities and injustices. Additionally, they affirmed themselves as subjects, telling the world and its history on their terms, deconstructing and denouncing injustices. In short, they contributed to building a culture of peace.

In conclusion, an anticolonial and antiracist (audio)visual analysis is carried out when studying a set of (audio)visual works and when constructing found footage short films. The language in which knowledge construction processes are objectified changes, but the emotional, intellectual, and methodological itinerary is the same and informed by the same theory. Studying these processes generates useful information to improve them, as well as creates fertile spaces for interdisciplinary knowledge construction. It also leaves us with many questions, such as whether, as Italian filmmaker Roberto Rossellini (2013) proposes, “a free spirit should not learn like a slave”, To what extent do the contents of subjects, the shelves of libraries, and the teaching practices of higher education institutions contribute to forming “free spirits” or building learning processes enslaved to Eurocentric, colonial, and racist perspectives? Haven’t our academies been spaces for reproducing coloniality and racism throughout time? In what ways and to what extent do anti-“Indian” racism, anti-“black” racism and the appreciation for cultural and physical whiteness shape our curricula and study programs? How many native and Afro-descendant creations, creators, and artists do we study compared to their European or Euro-American counterparts? What can we do to build social justice and anticolonial and antiracist historical memory from the daily life of our universities?

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