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## Fighting racism in monocultural university systems and institutions in Latin America. Advances, tensions, challenges, and the work of regional networks

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Alternautas is a peer reviewed academic journal that publishes content related to Latin American Critical Development Thinking. It intends to serve as a platform for testing, circulating, and debating new ideas and reflections on these topics, expanding beyond the geographical, cultural and linguistic boundaries of Latin America - Abya Yala. We hope to contribute to connecting ideas, and to provide a space for intellectual exchange and discussion for a nascent academic community of scholars, devoted to counter-balancing mainstream understandings of development.

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# Fighting racism in monocultural university systems and institutions in Latin America: Advances, tensions, challenges, and the work of regional networks<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract.** Racism, as both the founding ideology and regime of power constitutive of the Modern World, is a crucial cause of pervasive inequalities in all Latin American societies. As it happens to other social fields, racism intrinsically marks hegemonic monocultural Higher Education policies, systems, and institutions. Eradicating racism in university systems and institutions demands transforming the whole field to make it completely intercultural, an ambitious and long-run mission that currently involves the practices of numerous and highly diverse social agents. Meanwhile, some of these agents and also others with less transformative agendas have been implementing concrete measures to contain or fight racism in monocultural university systems and institutions. This article discusses diverse initiatives that seek to contain or fight racism in monocultural Higher Education in some Latin American countries. Some of these initiatives have implemented “affirmative action” and other programs to ensure access and fruitful trajectories for Afro-descendant and indigenous people students in monocultural universities. Others have set up programs that articulate the goal of strengthening the educational experiences of these two groups of students with activities that seek interculturalizing monocultural universities. The article shows that although most of these modalities of action have achieved valuable advances, they also confront similar tensions and challenges. These issues are focal points in the work of some regional networks that integrate agents

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<sup>2</sup> I am thankful for the valuable suggestions made by the two anonymous reviewers of a former version of this article. I am also thankful to the Editorial Committee of *Alternautas* for allowing me to bypass the journal’s article length limit to respond to those suggestions, and to incorporate considerable additional data.

from these initiatives with others participating in other forms of fighting racism in higher education, such as those developed in/from intercultural and Afrodescendant's and indigenous peoples' universities.

**Keywords:** Racism, Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendants, University, Higher Education, Latin America

**Resumen:** El racismo, como ideología fundante y régimen de poder constitutivo del Mundo Moderno, es una causa crucial de las desigualdades generalizadas en todas las sociedades latinoamericanas. Al igual que ocurre con otros campos sociales, el racismo marca intrínsecamente las políticas, sistemas e instituciones monoculturales de Educación Superior hegemónicas. Erradicar el racismo en los sistemas e instituciones universitarias exige transformar todo el campo para hacerlo completamente intercultural, una misión ambiciosa y de largo aliento que actualmente involucra las prácticas de numerosos y muy diversos agentes sociales. Mientras tanto, algunos de estos agentes y también otros con agendas menos transformadoras han ido implementando medidas concretas para contener o combatir el racismo en los sistemas e instituciones universitarias monoculturales. Este artículo examina diversas iniciativas que buscan contener o combatir el racismo en la Educación Superior monocultural en algunos países de América Latina. Algunas de estas iniciativas han implementado "acciones afirmativas" y otros programas para asegurar el acceso y provechosas trayectorias de los estudiantes afrodescendientes e indígenas en las universidades monoculturales. Otras han puesto en marcha programas que articulan el objetivo de fortalecer las experiencias educativas de estos dos grupos de estudiantes con actividades que buscan interculturalizar las universidades monoculturales. El artículo muestra que si bien la mayoría de estas modalidades de acción han logrado valiosos avances, también confrontan tensiones y desafíos similares. Estos problemas constituyen puntos centrales en el trabajo de algunas redes regionales que integran a actores de estas iniciativas con otros que participan en otras formas de lucha contra el racismo en la educación superior, como las que se desarrollan en/desde las universidades interculturales y afrodescendientes e indígenas.

**Palabras clave:** Racismo, Pueblos indígenas, Afrodescendientes, Universidad, Educación superior, América Latina

**Resumo:** O racismo, como ideologia fundadora e regime de poder constitutivo do Mundo Moderno, é uma causa crucial das desigualdades generalizadas em todas as sociedades latino-americanas. Tal como em outros campos sociais, o racismo marca intrinsecamente as políticas, sistemas e instituições monoculturais do Ensino

Superior hegemónicas. A erradicação do racismo nos sistemas e instituições universitárias requer a transformação de todo o campo para o tornar plenamente intercultural, uma missão ambiciosa e a longo prazo que actualmente envolve as práticas de numerosos e muito diversos agentes sociais. Entretanto, alguns destes actores e também outros com agendas menos transformadoras têm vindo a implementar medidas concretas para conter ou combater o racismo em sistemas e instituições universitárias monoculturais. Este artigo discute várias iniciativas que procuram conter ou combater o racismo no Ensino Superior monocultural em alguns países da América Latina. Algumas destas iniciativas implementaram "acções afirmativas" e outros programas para assegurar o acesso e trajectórias de sucesso para estudantes afro-descendentes e indígenas em universidades monoculturais. Outros implementaram programas que articulam o objectivo de reforçar as experiências educativas destes dois grupos de estudantes com actividades que visam a interculturalização das universidades monoculturais. O artigo mostra que embora a maioria destas modalidades de acção tenham feito progressos valiosos, também enfrentam tensões e desafios semelhantes. Estas questões são centrais para o trabalho de algumas redes regionais que integram actores destas iniciativas com outros envolvidos noutras formas de luta contra o racismo no ensino superior, tais como as desenvolvidas em/de universidades interculturais e afrodescendentes e indígenas.

**Palavras-chave:** Racismo, Povos indígenas, Afro-descendentes, Universidade, Ensino superior, América Latina

## Introduction

Racism, as both the founding ideology and regime of power constitutive of the Modern World, is a crucial cause of pervasive inequalities in all "Latin American"<sup>3</sup> societies. In Latin America, racism primarily affects persons and communities of

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<sup>3</sup> For ease of communication, I use the term "Latin America" to name the American continent countries whose official languages include Spanish or Portuguese, even though it is questionable. On the one hand, it is problematic because the name "America" was given to this continental mass as part of the European colonization process, ignoring the fact that the Cuna (or Guna) Indians called it *Abya Yala*. For this reason, many indigenous leaders and organizations are increasingly using the term *Abya Yala* instead of America. On the other hand, the adjective "Latin" hides the presence of Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples. According to the most recent census data, jointly taken, these two population groups constitute about 30% of the total population of this region of the world. The expression "Latin America" was not part of the lexicon of the independence movements of the early nineteenth century, which usually used the term "Hispanic America." Both of them hide the presence of Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples. The idea of "Latinity" and its application as an adjective was proposed in 1836 by the French intellectual Michel Chevalier.

African descent and indigenous peoples. In this regard, histories and current situations vary from country to country and often also between diverse regional contexts within each and concerning the cases of specific communities and peoples. These differences contribute to understanding the existence of diverse strategies to confront racism developed in specific contexts, as this article briefly illustrates with particular regard to Higher Education.

Nevertheless, beyond those differences, some commonalities are meaningful. Since the founding of "Latin American" nation states, hegemonic social groups have legitimized their dominance over Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples through racist public cultural and educational policies. In addition, over time, they have increasingly used their press and other mass media communication companies to strengthen this endeavor. They have been so successful that currently, racism is so "naturalized" in these societies that most of the population often limits the usage of the concept of "racism" to explicit facts of "racial discrimination," particularly concerning cases of police brutality in other world regions (Mato, 2021a). This reductionism is indicative of the generalized ignorance built on the role of racism in the historical origin of social inequalities and how it permeates specific institutions and is reproduced through them. In contrast to this reductionism, the idea of "structural racism" is usually employed to highlight its critical function in the reproduction of pervasive inequalities in all Latin American societies (Almeida, 2019; CEPAL & FILAC, 2020; CEPAL & UNFPA, 2020; United Nations, 2005).

Even though the concept of "structural racism" is insightful to stress the role of racism in the construction and reproduction of contemporary societies, some usages of this idea may be misguided for the design and implementation of effective interventions to fight racism in specific contexts. In Higher Education, the idea of "structural racism" is often understood as if racism were a problem coming from outside, as part of an unattainable "structure" that pervasively permeates every social field. I have had numerous opportunities to observe how representation of the idea of "structural racism" operates as I engaged in or observed casual dialogues and conference debates with colleagues and university and public policy decision-makers

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"Latin America" as a compound name first appeared in a book by the Colombian intellectual José María Torres Caicedo in 1865 (Ardao, 1980).

in several Latin American countries since the 1990s. <sup>4</sup>It works as an "epistemological obstacle" (Bachelard, 1972 [1934]), an assumed truth that blocks further inquiry and, what is very problematic in this case, often also blocks any practical action. In other cases, these representations of structural racism limit the actions to critical elaborations offered in classroom work and scholarly publications, divorced from any practical attempt to transform Higher Education. In contrast, developing practical responses to contain or fight racism in Higher Education makes it necessary to disaggregate the "structural racism" category and refine the analysis in the specific contexts of possible action. It is

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<sup>4</sup> Following the suggestion of this article's reviewers, it seems appropriate to explain the basis for the analyses presented here and the type of interests that guide its formulation. The analysis and interpretations offered do not only rely on published sources, but also on my personal involvement in the field. Apart from bibliographical and documentary research, it is based on personal learning achieved through participant observation, interviews, and other exchanges with numerous university teachers, students, and authorities; Afro-descendant and indigenous intellectuals, leaders, and other activists; and governmental officials. I derived those learning opportunities during lectures, seminars, workshops, advisory missions, and other activities I have participated in at over a hundred universities and other institutions and related social organizations in fourteen Latin American countries since the 1990s. However, two specific responsibilities largely contributed to enhance my knowledge about the matters discussed in this article. A fruitful source for learning has been my position as director of three region-wide research and policy advice projects about Higher Education, Afrodescendants and Indigenous Peoples in Latin America commissioned by the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO-IIESALC). The development of these projects involved the participation of about eighty colleagues from twelve countries, and took me into field research and advising activities throughout the region between 2007 and 2018. Other particularly enriching sources of learning derived from my role as the director of the Programa Educación Superior y Pueblos Indígenas y Afrodescendientes en América Latina (Programa ESIAL), at the Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero, since 2011. From this program we promoted the creation of the Red Interuniversitaria Educación Superior y Pueblos Indígenas y Afrodescendientes en América Latina (Red ESIAL), which currently has the participation of sixty universities from eleven countries, and has sponsored six region-wide working meetings that included presentations about over one hundred experiences in this field. Co-working with all these meetings' participant colleagues and students has been a most valuable learning experience. The Programa ESIAL, we have also launched the Iniciativa para la Eradicación del Racismo en la Educación Superior en América Latina, which up to now has involved the participation of over twenty university teams from seven countries. Additionally, I should also stress that I have been an active member of the regional networks discussed in the final section of this text, which conditions my view of this field. I do not pretend that these antecedents grant any "truth" status to the discussion offered in this article, only to specify the types of empirical referents on which it is based and my relationship to the field.

necessary to discard generalizations and scrutinize how racism operates and is reproduced in each specific context of action, such as public policy making; system and institutional policies, norms, and practices; curriculum design; and teaching, research, and outreach practices.

Hegemonic monocultural <sup>5</sup> Higher Education systems and institutions play a significant role in the naturalization and reproduction of racism. On the one hand, they do not provide equitable and quality educational opportunities to Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples' individuals and communities. On the other hand, the education they provide to a small proportion of members of those peoples and the rest of the population is monocultural. They have historically excluded those peoples' worldviews, languages, and knowledge systems to *monoculturally* train the teachers of the entire educational system, journalists and other public opinion makers, and other professionals that play crucial roles in all economic, political, and social fields. For these reasons, to make our societies more just and equitable, it is crucial to scrutinize how racism is reproduced and naturalized in monocultural university systems and institutions and implement specific initiatives to transform them.

In the last three decades, the struggles and initiatives of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples in several Latin American countries have led to the creation of their own universities and other types of institutions of higher education. Besides, their struggles have also led some governments to create intercultural universities. In addition, they have sparked the emergence of various types of transformative actions within monocultural universities. This wide diversity of initiatives constitutes a very heterogeneous field of experiences, both in terms of the objectives pursued and the working modalities and institutional formats.

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<sup>5</sup> I indistinctly use the adjectives "monocultural" and "conventional" to name the predominant kinds of universities whose mission, institutional design, or curriculum does not explicitly consider the rights, needs, or demands of Afro-descendant or indigenous peoples. In contrast, following the predominant usage by Afrodescendant and indigenous peoples' organizations, I employ the adjectives "intercultural," "own," "indigenous," or "Afro-descendant," depending on specific cases, to identify those other universities that do it or have been created by them. Several publications discuss the main reasons and criteria for distinguishing between these different types of universities and provide numerous examples (Mato 2016, 2019; Mato, coord., 2008, 2009, 2018).

This article reviews the advances, tensions, and challenges of numerous initiatives to contain or fight racism in hegemonic monocultural university systems and institutions in several Latin American countries. It additionally discusses the emergence of some regional networks that integrate agents from this kind of initiative with others participating in other forms of fighting racism in higher education, such as those developed in/from intercultural and Afrodescendant's and indigenous peoples' universities. The text is organized into five sections. The first offers some introductory remarks about racism and anti-racism in hegemonic university systems and institutions. *The second section explains the implementation of "Affirmative Action"*<sup>6</sup> and similar programs in monocultural *university* policies, systems, and institutions. The third section reviews the creation of other kinds of initiatives, such as specific research centers, careers, and even an intercultural university within a monocultural one. The fourth section briefly discusses the bearings of some regional networks that have become spaces of collaborative work and the promotion of transformative agendas. The fifth section offers some final remarks and proposals. The main objective of the article is to present a broad panorama of the diversity of initiatives to contain or fight racism in hegemonic monocultural university systems and institutions in Latin America and the work of related regional networks. Nevertheless, since this region comprises numerous countries, the second and third sections only present examples from a few of them, complemented with references to publications focusing on many others to ease potential readers' search for further information.

### **Racism and anti-racism in hegemonic university systems and institutions in Latin America.**

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<sup>6</sup> For ease of communication, I use the expression "affirmative action" because it has become part of the standardized vocabulary in the field. However, it seems necessary to highlight that it has a specific history and conceptual background. It was coined in the United States, in the 1960s, in the context of the Civil Rights movement. It became a federal policy through an executive order issued in 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson to compensate Afro-Americans for some of the consequences of the discrimination they were suffering. It was later on extended to women, Native Americans, Hispanics, and other social groups. Since then, it has been incorporated into the vocabularies of numerous social agents worldwide. In Latin America, diverse initiatives seeking similar goals are not necessarily named "affirmative action" or fully respond to its liberal "individual" conceptual background.

As in other world regions, in Latin America, the struggles toward eradicating racism have been mainly embodied by communities and organizations of the directly affected peoples. They initially took place in local and national contexts and were later strengthened thanks to convergences with some social movements with greater capacity for global advocacy. Especially after the Second World War, human rights movements have played a significant role in this regard. The adoption by the United Nations of Human Rights instruments has played a positive role in providing legal legitimacy to the struggles of Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples. I refer particularly to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention of the International Labour Organisation (1989), the Durban Declaration, and Program of Action (2001), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007).

These international instruments have been influential in ensuring certain advancements in the national constitutions and specific laws in most Latin American countries. However, the situation of Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples in most of these countries shows significant gaps between constitutional rights, laws, public policies, and institutional practices. Economic policies and the businesses of agricultural and cattle ranching, oil, mining, urbanization, and tourism facilities development corporations, among others, affect these peoples' traditional territories and ways of living. These policies and corporate business often force them to migrate to the peripheries of large cities, where they have to live in deplorable housing and sanitary conditions. In these ongoing processes, states do not ensure their constitutional rights effectively. In sum, despite international instruments and national constitutional guarantees, states do not appropriately ensure Afro-descendants' and indigenous peoples' human rights. Of particular interest to this article, states do not effectively secure their educational rights at any academic level in rural or urban areas (CEPAL & FILAC, 2020; CEPAL & UNFPA, 2020; Mato, coord., 2012, 2018; United Nations, 2005).

Ten country studies made in 2010-2011 for a regional research project conducted by the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO-IESALC) showed significant gaps between constitutional rights, laws, policies, and institutional practices that affect the access of Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples to Higher Education. They also illustrated these peoples' disadvantaged chances of access and graduation and the

lack of relevance of most careers design regarding their communities' needs, claims, and life projects (Mato, coord., 2012). A more comprehensive research project conducted in 2017- 2018 showed the continuity of the significant incidence of these same problems in twenty Latin American countries (Mato, coord., 2018).

Those mentioned above and other studies show that some naturalized forms of racism significantly affect Afro-descendants' and indigenous peoples' opportunities to gain entry and graduate in Higher Education. Economic disadvantages and the localization of most monocultural universities are significant problems for both groups in Latin American countries. Linguistic differences are also a salient factor. Other relevant issues derive from their primary and secondary education. Most have studied at schools operating in inappropriate buildings, with insufficient maintenance, and lacking appropriate learning resources. Their teachers often have not been adequately trained to work with students from these peoples. Moreover, many do not speak their languages. Additionally, the exclusion in the university curriculum of these peoples' worldviews, languages, epistemologies, and knowledge systems in hegemonic monocultural universities constitutes a form of racism that is rarely visible to most members of university communities. These exclusions are reinforced by the shortage, or the absence of teachers from their peoples.<sup>7</sup> All these exclusions affect the quality of the education of all students who become monoculturally professionalized,<sup>8</sup> whether or not they are indigenous or Afro-descendant. Nevertheless, in the case of indigenous and Afro-descendant students, they also operate as factors of estrangement and denial of their existence that affect their educational trajectories. Furthermore, racist

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<sup>7</sup> The lack of statistics regarding indigenous people and Afro-descendant faculty at Latin American universities is even more generalized than those regarding students. Their scarcity and need for their statistical visibility are regular claims of students and teachers of these peoples, also stated in numerous publications already referred to in this article, among others in the national studies contained in the two already mentioned regional studies conducted by UNESCO-IESALC (Mato, coord., 2012, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> That conventional hegemonic universities monoculturally professionalize their students is the unavoidable consequence of the monocultural education they provide. I understand that this formula could be dismissed as a simple tautology by whom do not want to see the problem at stake. However, I am also hopeful it may be inspiring to reflect on the quality of hegemonic university model.

prejudices often articulated through actual discriminatory expressions or actions are additional factors that often jeopardize the experiences of indigenous and Afro-descendant students and scholars in Higher Education. The incidence of all the formerly mentioned and other disadvantages has been extensively discussed in numerous publications about almost every Latin American country (Cfr.: Bedolla Mendoza, 2020; Calambas Pillimúé & Tunubalá Yalanda, 2020; Castillo Guzmán, 2020; Cervantes Anangonó & Tuaza Castro, 2021; da Silva Ferreira et al, 2020; da Silva, J., 2021, da Silva, M.N., 2021; Diniz, 2020; Gomes do Nascimento, 2021; Gómez Gallegos, 2018; Ivanoff et al 2020; Luciano & Amaral, 2021; Luiz Paiva, 2020; Mancinelli 2019; Mato 2020a, 2020b; Mato 2020a, 2020b; Mato, coord., 2018; Ocoró Loango & da Silva, 2018; Ocoró Loango & Mazabel, 2021; Olaza, 2021; Ossola 2013; Quintero, 2020; Rea Ángeles, 2018; Rebolledo Cortes, 2020; Ribeiro de Vargas & Bonin, 2020; Soto Sánchez y Berrio Palomo, 2020; Valdez et al, 2020; Varela Huerta & Pech Polanco, 2021; Velasco, 2018).

As the following two sections of this text illustrate, indigenous peoples' and Afro-descendants' organizations, some universities, governments, and international agents have promoted diverse initiatives in response to those mentioned problems. Some of them are programs to ensure the access of Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples to monocultural universities. Specific programs also include activities to strengthen their academic performance and familiarize them with university rules and ambiance. Some of them also include courses and talks aimed at teachers, students, and authorities of the respective university about the history, knowledge, languages, and rights of these two population groups to promote intercultural competencies and prevent racial discrimination. Other initiatives have included the creation of specific research centers, careers, faculties, and even an intercultural university within a monocultural one. As the following pages illustrate, there have been concrete advances in this wide diversity of fields of action, as tensions and challenges in their development.

Due to length limits, this article does not discuss the other two kinds of initiatives that make part of this broad field of anti-racist university experiences, whose existence must at least be mentioned here. On the one hand, some governments have created what they usually name "intercultural universities" to serve mainly indigenous peoples' communities. On the other hand, some indigenous organizations and leaders of indigenous peoples and Afro-descendant communities have established their "own" universities, most of which are also named

"intercultural." The concept and practical implications of "intercultural university" vary from one case to another, as has been discussed in publications about specific cases in numerous Latin American countries (Cfr.: Casillas & Santini., 2009; Ceto, 2019; Dietz & Mateos Cortés, 2019a; Hernández Loeza, 2018; Hooker, 2018; Mazabel Cuásquer, 2018; Mandepora Chunday, 2016; Mato, 2016, 2019; Mato, coord., 2008, 2009, 2018; Palechor, 2017; Sarango, 2009; Schmelkes, 2008; Similox, 2019).

### **“Affirmative Action” and similar programs in *monocultural university* policies, systems, and institutions**

As discussed in the former section of this article, several factors significantly affect the access to higher education of Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples in most Latin American countries and the experiences of those who gain entry. Some universities, state agencies, and international foundations have adopted policies and programs to deal with these interwoven challenges. Some of them are scholarship and special admission programs. Other initiatives are devoted to strengthening the academic writing skills and facilitating the familiarization of Afro-descendant and indigenous people students with university rules and customs. Still, others develop special activities to educate the institutional communities (students, teachers, and authorities) to promote intercultural perspectives and prevent racial discrimination. As explained above, following a terminology coined in the United States, some of the formerly mentioned are often named "affirmative action programs." As the following pages illustrate, most of these policies and programs face difficulties and tensions associated with their scale of action, instability of their budgetary resources, and other forms of active or passive resistance they encounter in conventional monocultural university systems and institutions. In contrast to this pessimistic general panorama, since 2003, Brazil has been regarded as a positive case in these matters. Nevertheless, the advances achieved in this country are currently at risk because of its current president's racist positioning and practices.

#### ***Brazil***

In Brazil, the struggles of Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples to confront the inequities discussed in former pages have been influential in establishing diverse affirmative action programs by certain universities and specific states of the Brazilian federation to be reviewed in the following paragraphs. Building upon these

experiences, the governments of Lula da Silva (2003 – 2011) and Dilma Rousseff (2011 – 2016) have launched a series of federal affirmative action programs that, through the assurance of slots and economic aid, made possible a considerable increase in the entry and retention of indigenous peoples and Afro-descendant students in “conventional” HEIs. The first of these initiatives was the University for All Program (Programa Universidade para Todos - PROUNI), created in 2004. Nevertheless, the Federal Law no. 12.711 / 2012, enacted in 2012, better known as the Quota Law (Lei de Cotas), is usually considered the most important. To strengthen the efficacy of this law, in 2013, the Permanence Allowance Program (Programa Bolsa de Permanência) was instituted. This whole of initiatives additionally stimulated the adoption of articulated actions throughout the country to ensure the admission and successful trajectories of Afro-descendants and indigenous people in higher education. The Quota Law determined that, within a maximum period of four years, federal HEIs should reserve 50% of vacancies for students from public schools, with specific quotas for students from low-income social groups and Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples (Cfr.: Felipe & Silva, 2022; Gomes, 2022; Gomes do Nascimento 2018, 2021; Gonçalves da Rosa, 2017; Lazaro & Castro, 2017; Luciano & Amaral, 2021; Salomão et al., 2022).

There are no comparable nation-wide federal public policies in other Latin American countries. However, a severe challenge threatens the future of the Quota Law. It must undergo evaluation by the National Congress this current year of 2022 in an explicitly unfavorable political context. Several precedents are worrisome in this regard. Since the beginning of his period, President Jair Bolsonaro has repeatedly made clear his racist ideology, and one of his first measures, in 2019, just upon assuming the presidency, was to close the Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion. In this context, some sectors of a growing social movement are proposing an extension to have a more reasonable timeframe to evaluate its effects on generations of students and graduates; and others are also advocating additional measures to ensure the successful fulfillment of its objectives (Gomes, 2022; Salomao et al., 2022).

As mentioned above, the PROUNI, Quota Law, and other federal policies were preceded by several policies and affirmative action programs implemented by some states. Among other pioneering initiatives, these states established particular admission modalities through quotas or vacancy reserves, differentiated selective processes, and preparatory admission courses for Afro-descendant (Rio de Janeiro)

and indigenous (Paraná, Mato Grosso do Sul, and Amazonas) students. As an example, let us consider the policy adopted by the state of Parana as of 2001, with the approval of State Law 13.134 / 2001. This law guaranteed the indigenous inhabitants of the Paraná territory the right to additional vacancies. Also, it established a specific admission policy in the seven state universities by creating an admission course known as "Vestibular dos Povos Indígenas." The "Comissão Universidade para os Índios" was established to apply this policy, made up of indigenous teachers and students from each of the universities involved, together with the General Superintendence of Science, Technology and Higher Education of Paraná (Amaral et al., 2016; Luciano & Amaral, 2021).

This policy and the subsequent implementation of those mentioned above federal affirmative action policies allowed for very significant growth in the enrolment of indigenous students in universities. In the universities of Paraná, as in others in Brazil, the growing presence of indigenous and Afro-descendant students allowed a better appreciation of the multiple ways in which structural, systemic, and institutional racism<sup>9</sup> damage the experience and performance of these students (Amaral et al., orgs., 2016; Cassaro Nascimento et al., 2020; da Silva Ferreira et al., 2020; da Silva, J., 2021, da Silva, M.N., 2021; Diniz, 2020; Gomes do Nascimento, 2021; Luciano & Amaral, 2021; Luiz Paiva, 2020; Ribeiro de Vargas & Bonin, 2020). To respond to the problems affecting indigenous students, in 2014, the State University of Londrina established the Intercultural Cycle of Academic Initiation for Indigenous Students. This program succeeded in reducing the dropout rate of indigenous students from 52% to 14% through academic and ethnic-community empowerment activities (Amaral, 2020; Amaral et al., orgs., 2016).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> As it has formerly been stated in this article, to fight racism it is helpful to differentiate between the different albeit interrelated social "levels" it operates. I use the expressions "structural," "systemic," and "institutional" racism to emphasize the existence of norms and practices that operate mainly at the most general social level, within the university system, and at any specific university level (Mato, 2020a).

<sup>10</sup> Limitations of extension preclude discussion of the policies of other Brazilian states, the numerous experiences of affirmative action programs in Brazilian universities, and the tough challenges and tensions, which have been extensively discussed in multiple publications. (Cfr.: Aguilera Urquiza & Nascimento, 2013; da Silva, M.N., 2021; dos Santos de Jesus, 2017; Gomes do Nascimento, 2018; Luciano & Amaral, 2021; De Souza Lima & Macedo, 2018).

### *Beyond Brazil*

Discussing some affirmative action and similar initiatives at the university level in other countries is fruitful. However, comparisons between Brazil and other countries in the region are not advisable because other countries do not count on such a significant set of nationwide federal public policies. Beyond that critical difference, comparisons between countries on this matter are not advisable also because of other factors. For example, in contrast to Brazil, in Argentina, the Law of Higher Education (Ley 24.521) ensures university admission to all aspirants who have completed secondary education.

In 1994, the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México - UNAM) instituted a program currently called the Cultural Diversity and Interculturality Program (CDIP) whose work integrates diverse lines of action. It provides about a thousand scholarships to indigenous and Afro-descendant students each year, whose university trajectories and subjective experiences it seeks to improve through academic and other activities. Additionally, it develops research and offers an optional seminar to educate about cultural diversity and intercultural challenges that a thousand students -not necessarily scholarship recipients - take from the most diverse faculties each year (del Val Blanco, 2016). A very few universities in the region count on a comparable program. Nevertheless, its scale is remarkably undersized in a university with over 360,000 students; in a country where 21% of its population acknowledges being part of an indigenous people, and more than 1% does it of being Afro-descendant (Valera Huerta & Pech, 2021). This disproportional scale makes it unlikely for the program to achieve a significant incidence in fighting racism at the university (Bedolla Mendoza, 2020; Paramo & Medina, 2020).

According to most recent available census data, in 2010, in Argentina, the indigenous peoples' population represented 2.4% of the country total population. In contrast with Brazil, whose indigenous peoples' population represents 0.5% of the total population, Argentina does not count on any federal program to grant scholarships to students from this population group. As will be further discussed in this article, almost half of its 57 public universities count on centers, programs, and specific chairs committed to working with indigenous peoples' communities and organizations. However, only a few have managed to secure permanent resources to

grant scholarships to indigenous students, and only at a modest scale, and none of them for a program oriented to Afro-descendant students (Guaymás, 2018; Mato, 2020b).

As an example, in Argentina, the National University of the Northeast (Universidad Nacional del Nordeste - UNNE) established the Indigenous Peoples Program (IPP) in 2011. This program grants scholarships to indigenous students whose university trajectories and subjective experience it seeks to improve through academic and other activities. The IPP counts on a Consultative Council of indigenous intellectuals that advises the program work, and provides support and guidance to indigenous students. In addition, its members teach seminars about indigenous peoples' histories, worldviews, rights, and other related issues open to the whole university (Artieda et al., 2017; Rosso, comp. 2016). Nevertheless, due to budgetary limitations, from its establishment in 2011 to 2019, this program granted 360 scholarships to a university with over fifty thousand students. This difference in scale is remarkable considering that this university serves a region where, according to most recent census data, 2.3% of the total population is indigenous peoples. Like the CDIP at UNAM case, it is highly difficult that the IPP could achieve a desirable incidence in fighting racial discrimination at the university (Rosso, 2018). It seems also complicated that the program could have a significant incidence in reversing the exclusion of the indigenous peoples' histories, languages, and knowledge systems in the curriculum; which affects the quality of education and the trajectories of indigenous students as in any other *monocultural* university (Zamora Aray & Fernández, 2020).

Despite the commitment of involved teams, the absence of a federal affirmative action policy and budgetary limitations at each university have had similar consequences in other universities in Argentina. For example, since its inception in 2013, the Intercultural Program for Indigenous Peoples' Students at the National University of Rosario (Universidad Nacional de Rosario) could only grant about two hundred scholarships to a university with over ninety thousand students (Calapeña & Honeri, 2017; Gotta, & Ramirez Benites, 2019).<sup>11</sup> Similarly, at the Litoral National University (Universidad Nacional del Litoral), a sixty thousand student university where, since 2013, only fifty

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<sup>11</sup> The number of granted scholarships is an estimation obtained through a personal consultation with program officers.

scholarships could be granted to indigenous students (Bournissent, 2017).<sup>12</sup> Another example is the case of the National University of Cuyo (Universidad Nacional de Cuyo). Its pioneering scholarship program for indigenous people and rural students has granted only about two hundred scholarships since its inception in 2003 to a university of almost fifty thousand students (Sánchez & López, 2022). Unfortunately, other efforts have been interrupted, like that of the Let's All Walk for Education Program at the National University of Misiones (Universidad Nacional de Misiones), selected in 2014 by the Ministry of Education through a national competition to receive a three-year grant from one of its policy lines. Nevertheless, it could only operate during 2015 when the new federal government canceled that policy line and did not honor the already signed commitment (González et al., 2017). Establishing and developing these programs has often gotten to crucial tensions derived from the resistance of diverse sectors of each university's community and local social agents. Similar resistances have prevented establishing or maintaining scholarship programs in several other universities (Guaymás, 2018; Guaymás & Cachambí Patzi, 2021; Hanne, 2012, 2018; Mancinelli, 2019; Mato, 2020b, 2021b; Ossola, 2013; Paladino, 2009; Rodríguez, 2022).

Length limits do not allow reviewing examples from other countries in this article. However, based on former studies, it may be stated that the implementation of affirmative action programs in the region has mainly been subject to resistance and tensions and has relied on limited and unstable budgets, as illustrated in publications about experiences in Chile, Colombia, Peru, and most Central American countries (Cfr.: Mazabel Cuásquer, 2018; Montero de la Rosa, 2018; Mora Curriao 2016, 2018; Ocoró Loango & da Silva, M.N., 2018; Olivera Rodríguez, 2018; Zúñiga, 2017, 2018).

### ***The Ford Foundation programs in Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Guatemala, and Peru***

In such an unfavorable regional context, two initiatives of the Ford Foundation have been influential, although their achievements have not been enduring in every country. In 2001 this international foundation launched two international

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<sup>12</sup> The number of granted scholarships is an estimation obtained through a personal consultation with program officers.

initiatives *for promoting inclusiveness in Higher Education* outside the United States, the International Fellowships Program (IFP), sustained until 2013, and the Pathways to Higher Education Program (Pathways program), sustained until 2011. They both supported specific programs in selected countries throughout the world, including some in Latin America.

The IFP provided scholarships for graduate study to some specific social groups in five Latin American countries. Through partnerships with local institutions, the IFP granted 187 scholarships to students from Chile, 127 from Guatemala, and 176 from Peru. Most of them pertained to indigenous peoples and in minor proportion to other under-represented groups in Higher Education. In Brazil, the program granted 306 scholarships to Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples students. In Mexico, it was exclusively oriented to indigenous people students and granted 225 stipends.<sup>13</sup>

Except in the case of Mexico, when, as formerly planned,<sup>14</sup> the Ford Foundation support ceased, the respective country programs stopped granting scholarships. However, the IFP made possible the postgraduate formation of numerous indigenous and Afro-descendant professionals. Interestingly, for this article's focus, some have gotten positions in universities, other kinds of higher education institutions (HEIs) or research centers, and have actively participated in some of the initiatives discussed in the following pages, including the networks discussed in the fourth section.<sup>15</sup> In Mexico, at the end of the Ford Foundation support, the Center for Research and Higher Studies in Social Anthropology (CIESAS), which was the IFP partner in charge of the program execution, managed to gain the interest of the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT) to ensure the continuity of the experience. Since 2012, based on the IFP experience, a new program named

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<sup>13</sup> Figures obtained from documents available at the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program records, 2000-2013 at Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Archival Collections Portal, Columbia University. [https://findingaids.library.columbia.edu/ead/nnc-rb/ldpd\\_9489034/dsc](https://findingaids.library.columbia.edu/ead/nnc-rb/ldpd_9489034/dsc) - Recovered 05-16-2022.

<sup>14</sup> The limited duration of these two programs was publicly communicated since their respective launching.

<sup>15</sup> This statement is based on my own experience as the director of the already mentioned three regional projects commissioned by UNESCO-IESALC, which counted on the participation of numerous of these indigenous and Afro-descendant professionals. I have additionally met several others in my roles as the coordinator of the already mentioned Red ESIAL and editing several books and journal thematic issues.

Graduate Scholarship Program for Indigenous Peoples (PROBEPI) has continued operating as a CIESAS – CONACYT partnership (Navarrete, 2017).

On the other hand, through partnerships with some domestic universities and related institutions, the Ford Foundation Pathways program was mainly oriented to strengthen the academic trajectories, graduation rates, and subjective experiences of indigenous undergraduate students in Chile, Mexico, and Peru and indigenous and Afro-descendant students in Brazil. Additionally, it contributed to developing stakeholders' networks and the production of thesis, articles, and conference papers about the experience of indigenous and Afro-descendant students in higher education. These results, in turn, provided further visibility to the inequities at quest and some of the involved forms of resistance and conflicts. Each of these experiences faced particular resistances and tensions that length limits impede addressing in this article but are addressed in numerous publications (Cfr.: Aguilera Urquiza & Nascimento, orgs., 2013; Badillo Guzmán, 2011; Canque, et al., 2012; De Souza Lima & Paladino, orgs., 2012; De Souza Lima & Macedo Barroso, orgs., 2018; Didou & Remedi, 2008; Ferreira 2008; García de Fanelli, et al., 2007; González Plitt & González Gómez, 2012; Navarrete, 2017; Programa Hatun Ñan, 2011; Reynaga Farfán, 2012; Villasante Llerena, 2012).

In Chile, through partnerships with the Universidad de La Frontera and Universidad de Tarapaca, the Pathways program funded the development of locally tailored programs to improve the educational trajectories and subjective experiences of a total of about 800 indigenous students (Canque et al., 2012; García de Fanelli et al., 2007; González Plitt & González Gómez, 2012). In Peru, the partnerships with Universidad Nacional de San Antonio Abad del Cusco and Universidad Nacional San Cristóbal de Huamanga made it possible to establish locally shaped programs that reached a total of about 1,500 indigenous students (Programa Hatun Ñan, 2011; Reynaga Farfán, 2012; Villasante Llerena, 2012).

In Mexico, in 2001, a partnership with the National Association of Universities and Higher Education Institutions (Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior - ANUIES), made it possible the implementation of the Indigenous Higher Education Students Support Program (Programa de Apoyo a Estudiantes Indígenas en Instituciones de Educación Superior - PAIEIIES). Until the first semester of 2010, the PAIEIIES supported the trajectories

of about ten thousand students in sixteen HEIs with the participation of about seven hundred mentors and advisors organized in specific institutional units (Badillo Guzmán, 2011; Navarrete, 2017). Prior to the end of the Ford Foundation funding, the PAIEIIS coordination managed to secure funding from the World Bank and the Secretary of Public Education (Secretaría de Educación Pública). Nevertheless, in 2012, once external funding ended, the lack of specific budget resources inhibited the capacity of numerous HEIs to continue funding the activities of the respective support teams of mentors and advisors. Meanwhile, others were capable of doing it, but on a lesser scale. In addition, the lack of federal institutional support and coordination also affected the capacity of incidence of the remaining or recreated single HEI units (Badillo Guzmán, 2011; Castillo Salazar, 2012; González Cornejo & Velasco Cruz, 2012; Navarrete, 2017).

In Brazil, the Pathways program funded the development of two initiatives. On the one hand, funded the activities of the Politics of Color in Brazilian Education (Programa Políticas da Cor na Educação Brasileira - PPCor). Developed by the Public Policies Laboratory, a research and action initiative at the State University of Rio de Janeiro (Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro), the PPCor spanned its action throughout numerous universities. The PPCor sought to promote the democratization of access to higher education by fostering the adoption of affirmative action policies for African descendants in universities. From 2001 to 2004, it supported the implementation of 27 affirmative action projects in several universities. Later, it focused on scientific research, book publishing, training courses, academic events, a vast documental collection, and campaigns to promote ethno-racial equality. Its activities were fruitfully ingrained with the advances in public policies and the struggles of Afro-descendant students and teachers in the universities of that time (Ferreira, 2008).

On the other hand, it funded the development of the Trails of Knowledge Project (*Projeto Trilhas de Conhecimentos - PTC*). Led by the Research Laboratory on Ethnicity, Culture and Development at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro), from 2004 to 2010, this project also involved the participation of the federal universities of Pará, Mato Grosso do Sul, and Bahia, the State University of Mato Grosso do Sul, and the Dom Bosco Catholic University. The PTC fostered affirmative action initiatives to promote the training of indigenous professionals who could defend their rights, carry out health and ethno-development projects in their

lands, monitor and influence public policies, and intervene in universities to favor indigenous access and graduation. The PTC team collaborated with government agencies to develop and implement these policies. This project got positively articulated with the advances in public policies and the struggles of the indigenous peoples' organizations, particularly those of their university students and teachers of that time (Aguilera Urquiza & Nascimento, orgs., 2013; De Souza Lima & Paladino, orgs., 2012; De Souza Lima & Macedo Barroso, orgs., 2018).

### **Other kinds of anti-racist initiatives in monocultural university systems and institutions**

As discussed in a former section of this article, several factors significantly affect the educational trajectories and personal experiences of Afro-descendant and indigenous people university students and professors in most Latin American universities. Their struggles, often related to their respective social organizations beyond university, have given place to ensuring the establishment of special teacher training degree programs, diverse kinds of research centers, and other academic units whose work often articulates academic and activist work practices.

#### ***Teaching, research, and university extension centers and special chairs***

In Brazil, since the late 1970s, the Afro-descendant movement struggles have made it possible to establish a paradigmatic kind of Afro-Brazilian studies center often designated as *Nucleos de Estudos Afro-Brasileiros* (NEABs). However, some of them have adopted similar other names. These centers are constituted by Afro-Brazilian researchers who are both qualified scholars and committed activists in the anti-racist movement and integrated into the Brazilian Association of Black Researchers (Associação Brasileira de Pesquisadores/as Negros/as - ABPN), established in 2000. These centers combine research, teaching, and the production of educational materials, with interventions in educational policies and the struggle against racism even beyond universities. They usually work in collaboration with Afro-descendant and other local organizations. Some of these centers also include the participation of indigenous peoples' scholars, in which case they typically adopt the name of Afro-Brazilian and Indigenous Studies Centers or similar others. Currently, there are about one hundred and forty centers of this kind in a little lower number of

universities and federal and state educational institutions, some of which host more than one of these centers. They integrate the Consortium of Afro-Brazilian Studies Centers (Consórcio Nacional de Neabs - CONNEABs).

This interwoven movement of agents has played critical roles in the design and application of affirmative action initiatives in the universities and since the adoption of the Quota Law in its application. It also plays a salient role in the mentioned proposals to extend the in-force time of this law or the adoption of additional measures to strengthen its effects. These scholars and centers also take responsibility for making visible the diverse ways racism affects the universities and in defense of students, scholars, and university employees affected by racial discrimination and other forms of racism often "naturalized." They also insistently claim that the participation of Afro-descendant students and scholars in universities is still unfairly insufficient in a country where half of the population is Afro-descendant. They clearly state that the achieved advances are not enough to remove racism from universities and society, a genuinely defeating message in the country's current political context (Cardoso et al., 2022; Da Silva, J., 2021; Da Silva, M.N., 2021; Da Silva Ferreira, et al, 2020; Diniz, 2020; Felipe & Silva, 2022; Gomes, 2022; Marques & Lima da Silva Correia, 2022; Ocoró Loango & da Silva, 2018; Salomao, et al., 2022)

Although in a smaller number, centers or other kinds of institutional units fighting racism in *conventional* universities also exist in some other countries. All of them nurture collaborative work with Afro-descendant or indigenous peoples' communities or organizations and, in most cases, are led or count on the active participation of scholars or other professionals from those peoples.

In Colombia, in 1998, Decree 1122 established the obligation of creating an Afro-Colombian Studies Chair in all preschool, primary and secondary education establishments. This federal decree was a result of the struggles of the Afro-Colombian movement that in 1993 had already secured a law recognizing certain rights to the "Black communities ("Comunidades Negras"), and, jointly with the indigenous peoples' movement, the recognition of the pluriethnic and multicultural character of the country in the constitutional reform of 1991. The continuity of those struggles feeds the ongoing movement to create Afro-Colombian chairs in universities. The first of them has been the Afro-Colombian Chair Rogerio Velásquez Murillo,

established in 2014 at the Universidad del Cauca, a public university. This chair offers elective courses that are part of the university's regular curriculum, carries out research, cultivates collaborative relations with social organizations, and promotes reflections and actions to fight racism within and beyond the university (Caicedo Ortíz, 2018). Afro-Colombian chairs that promote debates and actions have been created at other public universities, though their courses do not make part of the regular curriculum, like those at the Universidad de Antioquia and Universidad de la Guajira. The establishment of Afro-Colombian chairs is also advancing in some private universities, such as the Luis Amigó, del Cesar, and San Buenaventura. However, they are still facing certain bureaucratic limitations (Caicedo Ortiz & Castillo Guzmán, 2021).

In Argentina, chairs of this kind exist in twelve universities. All of them work on indigenous peoples' issues in collaboration with their organizations and communities. Nevertheless, one of them, the chair at Universidad Nacional de la Patagonia San Juan Bosco, which already had several years of working with Afro-descendants and migrants, included the explicit reference to these collectives in its name in 2020. On the other hand, the Black Communities' Rights from an Afro Perspective Chair (Cátedra "Derechos de las comunidades negras en Argentina desde una perspectiva afro") was established in 2021 at the Universidad de Buenos Aires, offering an elective course and extra-curricular activities. All these chairs play significant roles in fighting racism; nevertheless, most of them are usually underfunded, and their courses are often extra-curricular (Guaymás, 2018; Guaymás & Cachambi, 2021; Mato 2020b, 2021b).

Similar chairs that carry out research, offer courses, promote anti-racist activities, and work in collaboration with social organizations, have also been created in other countries. For example, the Afro-Andean Studies Chair at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, in Ecuador, develops research, teaches graduate courses, promote public debates, and further regional networking.<sup>16</sup>

### *Teacher training programs*

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<sup>16</sup> Further information about the Afro-Andean Studies Chair available at: <https://www.uasb.edu.ec/catedras/comunidad-andina-de-brasil-investigacion-copy/>  
Recovered 06-20-2022.

In several countries, the creation of teacher training programs devoted to offer professional enabling certification to practitioners already teaching without an official certification in Afro-descendant or indigenous peoples' communities has responded to the struggles and demands of their organizations. They are mainly oriented to candidates from these peoples, but some are also open to other candidates interested in teaching these groups of students. These programs often constitute a significant concentrated presence of students of these peoples in the conventional monocultural universities that offer them, which often spark both positive and negative reactions in the institution, and, therefore, tensions. Programs of this kind are offered in several universities in Brazil, Mexico, and Colombia, as illustrated in the following paragraphs; as well as in several other Latin American countries (Limachi Pérez, 2008; Mora Curriao, 2018; Mosonyi, 2018; Olivera Rodríguez, 2018; Tuaza Castro, 2018; Zúñiga, 2017, 2018).

In Colombia, the creation of university degree programs in Ethno-education began in 1995 to train teachers for indigenous communities. There are currently seven such programs, two of which also train teachers for Afro-descendant communities. These programs were created in response to the struggles and demands of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples who first achieved the 1991 Constitution's recognition of the pluriethnic and multicultural character of the country and later some advances in educational policies. These programs have already trained about one thousand teachers. Their value has been highlighted by education specialists and representatives of these peoples. Nevertheless, their work has been affected by quality evaluations that respond to international criteria that do not consider their particularities or those of the communities their graduates serve. These evaluations affect the allocation of funds to existing programs and hinder the creation of new similar programs (Caicedo Ortiz & Castillo Guzmán, 2021; Castillo Guzmán & Ocoró Loango, 2021; Ocoró Loango & Mazabel, 2021)

In Brazil, as part of the public policies established by the Lula da Silva government, in 2005, the Ministry of Education created the Program of Support for Higher Education and Indigenous Bachelor's Degrees (Prolind) under the coordination of the Secretariat of Continuing Education, Literacy, Diversity and Inclusion (SECADI). Through annual calls for applications open to public HEIs, between 2005 and 2018, this program promoted and financed the creation of university degree programs for indigenous teacher training in twenty HEIs, which graduated more than seven thousand teachers from indigenous communities (Gomes do Nascimento, 2018). The training

was aimed at in-service teachers in indigenous communities who did not have a university degree. The main problem of this program was its institutional and financial fragility, which was dependent on yearly calls. The visible presence of indigenous students gained support among some university sectors but also encountered resistance among others. Approximately half of the HEIS that created these courses based on the calls for proposals ended up institutionalizing and funding them, but others did not (Gomes do Nascimento, 2017, 2018). Significantly, as it has been already mentioned in this article, one of the first measures taken by Jair Bolsonaro, in 2019, upon assuming the presidency of Brazil, was to close the SECADI. Since then, there have been no new calls for proposals.

In Mexico, the National Pedagogical University (Universidad Pedagógica Nacional - UPN) created the Degree in Indigenous Education (DEI) in 1982, offered at its Mexico City campus. The DEI was created to respond to the training demands of teachers in rural schools attended by indigenous children. Some of these teachers were secondary school graduates and others from Normal schools.<sup>17</sup> More recently, the UPN created the Degrees in Preschool Education and Primary Education for the Indigenous Context in branches scattered throughout the national territory. More than 45 thousand indigenous teachers have graduated from these programs. Nevertheless, similar to the Brazilian case mentioned above, these programs have aroused mixed reactions within the university. Some sectors strongly support them, and others oppose them. Some even consider that they are not properly part of the university but only a service it provides to the national education system (Czarny, 2010; Salinas, 2021). Moreover, a recent study shows that indigenous students at the Mexico City campus have experienced racism at the university (Velasco Cruz, 2018).

### ***An intercultural university within a monocultural university***

In Mexico, there is a particular case of an intercultural university within a conventional university. The Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural (UVI) is the only “intercultural” university created from within a “conventional” university, the Universidad Veracruzana (UV), a well-known public autonomous university of about

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<sup>17</sup> In Mexico, the “normal school has been the main institution responsible for the training of teachers” for basic preschool, primary, secondary school levels. Since 1922, numerous teachers serving in rural indigenous people communities have been trained in rural Normal Schools (Navarrete-Cazales, 2015).

sixty thousand students. Established in 2005, the UVI has already graduated six hundred students and currently has over three hundred students in four campuses in rural areas and one on the UV main campus in Xalapa, the state capital city. Its pedagogical perspective strongly emphasizes articulating research, teaching, and collaborative work with the communities.

In México, as in some other countries intercultural universities have been created either by the states or by diverse kinds of social organizations (Cfr.: Casillas & Santini., 2009; Ceto, 2019; Dietz & Mateos Cortés, 2019a; Hernández Loeza, 2018; Mato, 2016, 2019; Mato, coord., 2008, 2009, 2018; Schmelkes, 2008). In México those created by the state depend on the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP), which jointly with the respective states of the federation provides its budget, elects their authorities, and establishes the general rules of their operation (Cfr.: Casillas & Santini., 2009; Dietz & Mateos Cortés, 2019a; Hernández Loeza, 2018; Schmelkes, 2008). The case of the UVI is undoubtedly unique. However, the case of the UV is not less singular; it is the only monocultural university with an intercultural university as part of its structure.

Having an intercultural university within a conventional public university has some consequences of particular interest to this article. The existence of the UVI has increasingly challenged the naturalized monocultural life of the UV. It has promoted the incorporation of some specific intercultural criteria in its regulations concerning students' admission, teachers' career, or the adoption of anti-discriminatory norms, among other issues. It has opened opportunities for UV students to take courses at UVI and for UVI students to take courses at UV, contributing to interculturalizing classroom routines. These processes have carried out debates within UV about student admission, curriculum, thesis format, and community outreach policies, among other institutional significant matters. Changes in this regard have not always been smoothly adopted. Some innovation proposals have encountered resistance and tensions, transformations take time. However, the novelty of this experience has opened practical paths to contain or fight racism in the otherwise monocultural UV (Dietz & Mateos Cortés, 2019a, 2019b, 2020, 2021; Meseger, 2017).

## **Networks**

The previous sections of this article show that the struggles to achieve concrete advances in the fight against racism in higher education involve the participation of

individuals and organizations of these peoples, as well as university teams from numerous institutions. As in other social fields, some common interests have stimulated the development of collaborative networks within the respective countries and on a regional scale. The most visible results of their existence and capacity for collaborative work can be seen in the regional circulation of students and teachers, as well as in the undertaking of shared projects and the production of edited books and special thematic issues of journals. The analysis of the bibliographical references in this article may provide some clues about the role played by some universities and other institutions. The establishment of shared transformative proposals that these networks have managed to make in declarations issued by regional meetings of Higher Education is indicative of the programmatic convergences among these networks and their capacity to influence their horizon of meaning, a prerequisite to fighting for concrete transformations.

Three regional conferences on Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (CRES) have been held since 1996. UNESCO has convened each as a preparatory instance for the subsequent world conference on higher education. Beyond this primary objective, these conferences have served mainly to exchange ideas, reach a consensus on public policy orientations, and establish cooperation agreements among the participating institutions. The first CRES was held in 1996 in Havana and did not address issues related to racism or the relationship between higher education and Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples.

These issues became increasingly relevant in the following two editions of this series of regional summits, thanks to the work of some regional networks and UNESCO-IESALC. The second Regional Conference on Higher Education was held in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, in June 2008 (CRES 2008). This Summit was co-organized by UNESCO-IESALC and the Ministry of Education of that country. It was attended by more than 3,500 representatives of Higher Education systems and institutions in the region, including ministers and other government authorities, university rectors and other university authorities, university networks, specialists in the field, students and their federations, and teachers and other workers and their

unions. This regional Summit issued a final declaration that included two explicit recommendations regarding the focal issues of this article.<sup>18</sup>

The third Regional Conference on Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Cordoba, Argentina, in 2018 (CRES 2018), was co-organized by UNESCO-IESALC, the Ministry of Education of this country, and the Consejo Interuniversitario Nacional, a body composed by the rectors of all the public universities of the country. This summit gathered the participation of five thousand representatives of Higher Education from all over the region, including the same kinds of qualified participants as the former conference, who endorsed the Final Declaration that included eight recommendations on the matter. Those recommendations included, among others, the need for Higher Education public policies and institutions:

1. Contribute to dismantling all the mechanisms that generate racism and all forms of intolerance and discrimination;
2. Not only promote the inclusion of indigenous and Afro-descendant students but transform Higher Education to ensure its social and cultural relevance;
3. Ensure the incorporation into Higher Education of the world views, values, linguistic systems, epistemologies, forms of learning, and institutional designs of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples;
4. Promote the learning of these peoples' languages and their effective use in teaching, research, and extension practices;
5. Ensure the training of bilingual intercultural teachers; and
6. Guarantee the state recognition of indigenous peoples' and Afro-descendants' own HEIs.

The adoption of these recommendations by these two regional summits of hegemonic Higher Education is not incidental. It is a result of the endeavors of those already mentioned collaborative networks, Afrodescendant and indigenous people intellectuals and organizations, and some national, regional,

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<sup>18</sup> These recommendations identified as C3 and D4 in the Final Declaration emphasized the need to interculturalize the HEIs and strengthen their work's pluricultural and multilingual nature. These two recommendations were taken up and expanded in the Final Declaration of the CRES 2018, as explained in the following lines.

and international agencies, who since 1997 have held working meetings, seminars, and conferences.<sup>19</sup>

Held in May 1997, the "Seminar on Indigenous Universities and Related Programs" was the first of these meetings. This seminar was attended by representatives of twenty-three universities and was organized by the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast (URACCAN), the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (SIFC) of Canada and the University of La Paz, at the latter's headquarters in Costa Rica (Barreno, 2003: 26). In October 1999 URACCAN organized the "Indigenous 2000" meeting, this time in Nicaragua, which included the participants in the first meeting and expanded with five more (Barreno 2003: 26). In April 2002, UNESCO-IESALC organized the "Regional Meeting on Higher Education for Indigenous Peoples in Latin America", held in Guatemala with the support of the UNESCO Office in that country and the Government of Guatemala, with the participation of 31 directors and specialists from Indigenous Higher Education institutions from 11 countries in the region and one from the aforementioned SIFC, from Canada, as well as 6 representatives of governmental and non-governmental Higher Education organizations (UNESCO-IESALC, 2003).

Between 2003 and 2007, seven meetings of this kind were held in seven Latin American countries. Each of them involved the participation of new significant institutions, social organizations, and universities. Among other important agents in the field, these meetings included the participation of the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca (CRIC), the Organización Nacional Indígena de Colombia (ONIC), the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), the Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, the Coordinación General de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (CGEIB) of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) of México, the Dirección Nacional de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe of Ecuador, Colciencias (an administrative department of the Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación, of Colombia), the Asociación Colombiana de Universidades

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<sup>19</sup> Much of the information presented in this section comes from my direct experience in this field. I have included information on some of these networks, meetings, and testimonies in previous publications (Cfr.: Mato 2018a, 2018b). About some of the meetings and statements are some publications referred to in the text and some Internet sites, included as hyperlinks in the text. Information on other meetings and statements was available on Internet sites that do not currently exist.

(ASCUN), the Fondo para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas de América Latina y el Caribe, UNESCO-IESALC, the Oficina de Cooperación Técnica Alemana (GTZ), the Ford Foundation, and over twenty universities (CGEIB, 2004; Pancho Aquite et. al., 2004; UNESCO-IESALC, 2003; Universidad Central del Ecuador 2005).

In July 2007, UNESCO-IESALC established the Cultural Diversity and Interculturality in Higher Education Project. This project brought together professionals from many of the institutions mentioned above and others linked to some networks dedicated to the subject to participate in a research and policy advising project of regional scope to be presented at the CRES 2008 (Mato, coord., 2008). A significant part of the recommendations elaborated by this team of nearly fifty collaborators from 11 countries, with significant participation of professionals of African descent and indigenous peoples, were incorporated into the Final Declaration of the CRES 2008. Subsequently, this project organized two regional meetings in which more than seventy members of initiatives in the field in twelve countries participated. The first was the "Regional Workshop on Cultural Diversity and Interculturality in Higher Education in Latin America," held in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in August 2009. The second was the Regional Workshop "Higher Education Policies and indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples in Latin America," held at the University of Panama in May 2012. This workshop issued a declaration called "Latin American Initiative for Cultural Diversity and Interculturality with Equity in Higher Education," which was adopted by the Interparliamentary Conference on "Education in the Knowledge Society" of the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino), held in June of the same year. The Parlatino adoption of these recommendations expanded the political projection of these networks' views and proposals.

Since 2012, budgetary limitations have imposed restrictions on developing the UNESCO-IESALC Cultural Diversity and Interculturality in Higher Education Project. However, this did not stop the building of collaborative relationships and construction of networks. Instead, it gave rise to the creation of the Red Inter-universitaria Educación Superior y Pueblos Indígenas y Afrodescendientes de América Latina (Red ESIAL), which establishing was promoted in 2014 by the Programa Educación Superior y Pueblos Indígenas y Afrodescendientes de América Latina (Programa ESIAL) at Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero (UNTREF), Argentina. Between 2014 y 2019, the Red ESIAL held six region-wide working meetings that included presentations by well over one hundred experiences in this field in eleven countries.

Many of these meetings' experiences or individual members were already interlinked through their participation in other significant networks in the field. Among them, it is necessary to highlight the cases of the Red de Egresados y Egresadas de la Universidad Indígena Intercultural (REUII), the Red de Universidades Indígenas Interculturales y Comunitarias de Abya Yala (RUIICAY), the Associação Brasileira de Pesquisadores/as Negros/as (ABPN), the Red Interuniversitaria de Educación e Interculturalidad (RIEDI), the Asociación Nacional de Universidades Interculturales (ANUI), the Red de Formadores en Educación Intercultural para América Latina (Red FEIAL), the Rede de Saberes (Aguilera Urquiza y Casaro Nascimento 2016), and the Red Interdisciplinaria de Investigadores de los Pueblos Indios de México (Navarrete, 2013, p. 977). The eight policy recommendations on the subject included in the Final Declaration of the CRES 2018 were based on a research and policy advice project elaborated by a team of thirteen professionals, most of them members of Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples, who make part of this converging networks (Mato, coord. 2018).

### **Final remarks**

As the former pages illustrate, in response to the struggles and demands of Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples, some universities, a few federal and state governments, and international foundations have implemented concrete initiatives to contain or fight racism in monocultural university systems and institutions.

Some of these initiatives are programs to ensure the access of Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples' students to monocultural universities. Some also include activities to strengthen their academic performance and facilitate their familiarization with the university rules and ambiance. Some also include courses aimed at teachers, students, and authorities of the respective university about the history, knowledge, languages, and rights of these two population groups to promote intercultural competencies and prevent racial discrimination. Other initiatives have included the creation of specific research centers, careers, faculties, and even an intercultural university within a monocultural one, as means to interculturalize monocultural university systems and institutions. Most of these initiatives have had to face resistance and tensions. Many also have to "survive" severe economic limitations and fragilities.

Nevertheless, they have managed to advance thanks to the commitment of their teams and related Afro-descendant and indigenous peoples' organizations, including some constituted by teachers and students of these peoples. These teams and organizations are holders of valuable knowledge and capacities. They also have fruitful collaborative work experiences among themselves and with their peers working in/from intercultural and Afrodescendant's and indigenous peoples' universities. This fact became visible in the development of many of these initiatives and the last two editions of the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Conference of Higher Education (Conferencia Regional de Educación Superior) held in 2008 and 2018, respectively (Mato, 2018b). In these summits, they jointly proposed to governments and HEIs an agenda to fight and eradicate racism in Higher Education. They pointed out that it is necessary to interculturalize Higher Education by incorporating these peoples' worldviews, languages, knowledge systems, and learning modalities. They also emphasized that it is necessary to secure sufficient and stable budgetary resources to that end and to ensure the access and fruitful trajectories of these people's students and teachers in Higher Education. In addition, the CRES 2018 final declaration also emphasized these peoples' right to establish their own HEIs, and the duty of states to provide them with adequate funding and academic recognition.

Both of these conferences adopted these recommendations in their final declaration. Nevertheless, governments seem to ignore these peoples' educational and civil rights with few exceptions. They neglect that these rights are consecrated in international instruments that are part of the national constitutions of almost all Latin American countries.

However, those networks of university teams and Afrodescendant's and indigenous peoples' organizations continue working to eradicate racism in Higher Education, ensure these peoples' human rights, and improve the quality of HEIs to make them pertinent to the pluricultural and multilingual societies they serve. This article seeks to contribute to these ends.

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