https://doi.org/10.7592/EJHR.2025.13.4.1091

The European Journal of Humour Research 13 (4) 57–68
www.europeanjournalofhumour.org

Racist humour in Mexico's media: denouncers' inadvertent bolstering of bigotry

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Abstract

In 2020, an unprecedented public discussion sought to denounce racist humour in Mexican mainstream and social media, especially targeting Indigenous people. Against the organisers' expectations, the result appeared to bolster the bigoted comedian who they attempted to condemn. This case is an example of recent efforts by progressive intellectuals and comedians around the world who aim to criticise discriminatory comedy only to reinforce polarised views on the topic. The pattern consists on progressives becoming moralizing figures, denouncing what they consider inappropriate in public discourses and humour, and chauvinists who experiment, push the line, and claim their right to freedom of expression. The resulting tension generates polarisation, as each side asserts rightfulness without opening the possibility of dialogue. On one side, progressive intellectuals and activists provide solid arguments regarding the link between racist humour and discrimination of and harm to individuals and collectives. On the other side, bigoted comedians use the known strategy of "just a joke," and profess their right to freedom of expression. The discussion analysed here, thus, encapsulates a specific iteration of polarised views that may offer a few elements to overcome polarisation.

Keywords: Indigenous, social media, discrimination, Mexico, comedy.

1. Mediatised racism in Mexico

"The fault is not of the Indian, but of that who befriends him," goes a popular joke in Mexico, stressing the notion that being Indigenous is an impairment. Quips like this, which make fun of Indigenous people for the mere fact of being Indigenous, abound in a country that is still strongly marked by colonial-era hierarchies and power dynamics. While the main targets are Indigenous people, numerous puns also address darker skin as a disadvantage. In mainstream and social media, as well as in live comedy performances, such racist humour appears to take place without any type of consequence. In fact, it is often the type of jesting that provokes roaring laughter. Nevertheless, after decades of this type of humour being a part of all forms of entertainment, "the social conversation about race, ethnicity and class in Mexico has deepened and intensified" (Dorcé, 2022, p. 1). Racist humour is now considered by scholars, activists and some public figures as legitimising existing structural and systemic racism in the country.

It is, nevertheless, a practice that is difficult to change. This paper analyses a key event where denouncers of racist humour sought to convince comedians and the public of its harm. The event was an independent public panel in 2020, organised by an anti-racism non-governmental organisation. I argue that contrary to the organisers' aims, the panel only served to reinforce the righteousness of bigoted comedians, especially of the only comedian who took part in the discussion.

This paper, thus, addresses a key challenge of our times: the rise of discriminatory humour and the difficulties denouncers face while trying to discredit it. Around the world, intolerant movements usually linked to neonationalist agendas, are reshaping media outlets and discourses in the image of progressive ones (Sienkiewicz & Marx, 2022). They are doing this by incorporating concepts like freedom of expression or "just a joke" (Horisk, 2024). As Pérez has pointed out, racist humour is itself "a racial project, or a process by which this particular form of racial discourse can serve as a mechanism that contributes to the formation of social othering and ordering" (Pérez, 2022, p. 43). Hierarchical structures that rely on perceptions and self-perceptions of a collective's members uses both structural, physical and symbolic violence to maintain the established status quo (Burawoy, 2019; Farmer, 2004; Moreno Figueroa, 2010). In this context, representations in mainstream and social media have become crucial means to convey the social order (Lopez, 2020). In Mexico, current forms of racism and its advancement have a genealogy that draws on colonial-era pre-scientific ideas of caste and race (Schwartz, 1995).

The mentioned panel was a unique chapter in a long history of racist humour in Mexico. It was the first time an event called out bigoted public comedy and sought to denounce it in public. My argument is that its format, timing, and presentation resulted in the opposite of what its organisers wanted. Instead of curtailing the influence and practice of chauvinist comedy, it actually strengthened the arguments for it. This happened at a time when polarisation had been becoming a prevalent configuration of the political landscape in Mexico (Prior, 2013). Crucially, the Mexican political polarisation is strongly shaped by colonial-era categories: race and class (Moreno, 2024). In 2012, the comedian denounced at the panel, Chumel Torres, became a public figure because of his use of humour against the increasingly popular politician Andrés Manuel López Obrador (better known for his initials as AMLO) and his followers. Once AMLO won the presidential election in 2018, Torres became a prominent voice of the opposition. He did so by mocking the politician and his followers with racial and classist connotations. For years now, Torres has been accused of racism and classism, accusations he frequently denies but uses as proof of the fear AMLOists have of him.

The panel was organised by a Mexican anti-racism non-governmental organisation called RacismoMX (2020). The panel took place at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic and was streamed online on the NGO's YouTube channel, where it remains available.The director of the NGO, José Antonio Aguilar, acted as moderator of the discussion. He started the event by stating: "[this is] not a debate [because we all agree that] racism is a structural problem. Racism kills; racism is not a joke" (RacismoMx, 2020, minute 1). In doing so, he referred to the numerous cases in which institutional and structural racism has cost lives mainly of Indigenous people (El Kotni, 2018). The title of the panel, "Racism is not a joke," reflected the organisation's agenda. Some guests were stars in Mexico's entertainment industry, while others were academics or writers. Most of them, however, are also deeply involved with anti-racist activism. The only guest who is not is Chumel Torres, who agreed that racism is wrong, but also claimed to be "a fan of politically incorrect humour [because] it's the most horizontal way of making jokes about everyone" (RacismoMx, 2020, minute 36). He went on to defend his style as following on a Mexican tradition of jesting on sociocultural differences, which was a point of contention.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first will discuss racism and racist humour in Mexico, especially in relation to Indigenous populations. It examines the tradition Torres referred to as a problematic use of jokes. This section includes a theoretical explanation of the need to study racist humour instead of other approaches like ethnic humour. It also addresses the history of racist humour in Mexican media. The second section scrutinises the panel as an example of discussions in the Mexican public sphere, or rather in public sphericules (Gitlin, 1998), that have advanced polarising positions in Mexican society. On one side, denouncers share analyses that prove how prejudices and discrimination in the media perpetuate actual disadvantages and even harm to minorities. On the other side, Torres and others accused of racist humour defend their jokes as creative takes on Mexican identity. I conclude that in framing the panel as an agreed condemnation of the type of humour Torres and others practice, its organisers and most participants ended up reinforcing the views and sense of self-righteousness of those who practice racist humour.

The investigation that informs this paper is an experimental ethnographic study of decolonial humour from an Indigenous perspective. As a social anthropologist, my approach is to engage with a wide range of data-gathering methods as well as analytic tools. This paper's examination builds on content analyses of the panel's video and of various texts and websites around the time when it took place.

2. Roaring laughter and racism in Mexico

For decades, racism in Mexico was mostly discussed in academic circles and usually limited to historical forms of discrimination (Dorcé, 2022). Over the last few years, however, the word and its implications have been applied more frequently in public discussions to describe and criticise inequality and the blatant maltreatment of large swaths of the Mexican population, especially Indigenous peoples (Navarrete, 2016). The increasing use of the concept of racism, due to the flow of ideas and concepts across borders (Castellanos Guerrero et al., 2009; Zamora, 2022), has been particularly useful since the fall of the single party regime in 2000. This is because up until then the overtly controlled media maintained the illusion that racism was something that happened elsewhere but not in Mexico (Vaughan, 2018). Such an idea emerged from the skilful conceptualization of "*mestizaje*" as a guiding concept of national identity (Sue, 2013). *Mestizaje* is similar to the notion of miscegenation, which is intended to mean the admixture of people from different ethnicities or supposed races (Lemire, 2002; Wade, 2004). The regime that arose out of the Mexican Revolution successfully used it as part of its strategy of social control to reduce uprisings and violence in the country (Stavans, 2011). Now widely considered a "myth," mestizaje served the purpose of maintaining the view that all Mexicans were equal, even though injustices and inequalities prevailed (Gutierrez Chong, 2020). Among the outcomes of a semi-authoritarian control of concepts – often called "soft dictatorship" (Gillingham & Smith, 2014) – is the fact that nowadays most Mexicans today often argue that we cannot be racist because we are all mixed (Moreno Figueroa & Saldívar Tanaka, 2016).

Nevertheless, jokes have for decades abounded on the differences that exist between people of different skin colour and phenotypes (Marini, 2018). Such puns not only stress the distinction between colours or traits, but link them directly to perceived capacities, wellbeing, or the worthiness of individuals or groups of people (Tipa, 2020). This is not what is known as ethnic humour (Lowe, 1986), because such a style is usually directly related to an ethnic group or specific ethnic categories as sociocultural identities (Apte, 1987, p. 180) or of people with "a common cultural tradition" (Davies, 1990, p. 1), and because such approaches to humour

usually avoid examinations of actual consequences. It is rather a case of racist humour because the assumption is that people hierarchically categorised in determinate "races" – regardless of the fact that these do not exist (Wade, 1997; Brannon, 2023). Racist jokes, thus, legitimise harmful attitudes that perpetuate inequalities (Weaver, 2016). In Mexico, such inequalities have their roots in the Spanish colonial era, as authorities then used a classification system that would clearly benefit white Spanish over all others (Trujillo, 2024). Its direct legacy today has been termed pigmentocracy (Telles, 2014).

Naming comedy relying on racialised hierarchical distinctions as racist humour, therefore, allows for a critical examination of the perpetuation of "stereotypes, ideologies and world views" (Pérez, 2023, p. 777). Under the guise of "it's just humour," as Pérez has shown (2022), jokes that clearly reify hierarchies or prejudices seek to spread negative ideas about others. While in places where the science of racism is more a part of everyday life, such as in the United States of America, racist jokes help recruit people to far-right collectives (Sienkiewicz & Marx, 2022). Pérez has widely reflected on the role of racist humour, and in his view, "racism is more than hatred. It is also a practice deeply rooted in a pleasurable solidarity grounded in an amused contempt for racialised others" (Pérez, 2022, p. 18). In Mexico, however, racism and the humour around it have remained in the background of social awareness, albeit in the foreground of hierarchies and benefits (Sue & Golash-Boza, 2013). I would therefore be hesitant to define Mexican racist humour as equivalent to what Pérez describes as fuelled by hatred or amused contempt. In different ethnographic research projects I have carried out in Mexico, the country where I was born and lived half of my life, I have noticed how racialised interactions tend to follow patterns of patron-client relations. This means that those who benefit are considered patrons while the rest are subsumed under their authority. Some even refer to the political system as reliant on an institutionalised racism that pervades even new offices supposedly addressing intercultural and human rights issues (Orozco-López, 2018).

Part of my anthropological research has taken me to many stand-up comedy shows in Mexico City and Guadalajara. In the vast majority of open mic sessions, for example, there have been at least a couple of sets by comedians who use racism as a central topic of their puns, or make offhand remarks that imply racist assumptions. On a few occasions, I have witnessed comedians go beyond self-deprecation into internalised racism (Speight, 2007; Cort et al., 2009; Pyke, 2010; Nguyen, 2016), explaining their misfortunes as deservedly derived from their skin colour or phenotype. Much to my surprise, all of these performances and remarks were met with roaring laughter. This type of humour is therefore different from American uses of "just a joke" (Anderson, 2023). They seem to go into a sense of "denial, disavowal, and elusiveness" of racial hierarchies of the sort that Wekker has identified as "white innocence" that naturalises inequalities and hierarchies in the Netherlands (Wekker, 2016).

For Raúl Pérez, racist humour in the United States is based on amused racial contempt, that is, the conflation of "racial ridicule and amused contempt against those who are racialised, mocked and alienated as targets" (Pérez, 2022, p. 23). A crucial difference in the respective social make-ups of the United States and Mexico is that brown-skinned populations are still minorities in the former (albeit not for much longer), while not in the latter. This means that racist jokes in Mexico work even among dark-skinned Mexicans, perhaps because there are always darker-skinned or more Indigenous-looking Mexicans to make fun of. This poses a challenge when it comes to naming racist humour in Mexico. One common feature of such humour, for example, is that it often conflates racism and classism, by referring to Indigenous-looking individuals as naturally underprivileged. In Mexico, therefore, racist humour has an element of aspiration, as people aspire to become whiter, in order to leave their darkness

behind. This is evident for advertising professionals, who argue that Mexicans do not respond well to ads with brown people, because whites represent better what they aspire to. This is what Navarrete calls "chromatic racism" (Navarrete, 2023, p. 69). Mexico's pigmentocracy is therefore bottom-up, not top-down (Vargas Cervantes, 2023). This means that whiteness is not something that only whites seek to perpetuate, but rather an ideal that many non-whites work towards.

The genealogy of racist humour in Mexican media incorporates strong imaginaries about Mexican identity and its order. This reproduces the patron-client relations that I referred to above. For most of the twentieth century, Mexican media used humour to portray minorities (especially Indigenous and Afro-Mexicans) as backward yet endearing, unsophisticated yet demure (Tipa, 2023). This representation perpetuated the consideration that whites, European or otherwise, had all the qualities that darker-skinned poor Mexicans did not. It was a perception that some anthropologists only accentuated, like Oscar Lewis' *Children of Sanchez* (1961). Several characters embodying the hallmarks of darker skin, poverty, and lack of education became icons in the Mexican mediascape which are well-known to this day. For the sake of brevity, I will focus on three: Cantinflas, La India Maria, and the "*mil usos*" (thousand tasks).

The first, Cantinflas, is a character to this day recognizable throughout Latin America (Pilcher, 2000; Stavans, 2012), and is considered by many a Mexican version of Charles Chaplin (Borge, 2013). Mario Moreno, an actor, mime and comedian, first created Cantinflas for performances in itinerant marquees, a type of entertainment in the interwar period – the time when the nascent single party regime was taking shape – which still allowed strong political critiques. The character consisted of a series of traits that were common among Mexico's poorest urban dwellers. He is immediately recognizable due to his ragged clothes and a rope instead of a belt holding his trousers, a scant moustache that denotes the phenotypical lack of facial hair among native Mexicans, and a speech style that produces a barrage of words and semi-structured phrases that often contradict each other and do not offer clarity of ideas or argument (Pilcher, 2000). This last feature became his key attribute and has even become a verb: *cantinflear* means to speak a lot without saying anything. It provoked roaring laughter in audiences at a time when sound transformed cinema (Poblete, 2015). Unsurprisingly, the verb *cantinflear* became a popular way of describing Mexican politicians' declarations to the media.

The India María is a renowned character that featured in sixteen films and appeared in several television programmes between the 1970s and 2010s (Rohrer, 2009). The actress who portrayed and created her is María Elena Velasco (Rohrer, 2017). A common narrative in her films was an encounter with modernity, usually embodied by other characters who represented either law, business, government, or another area, whose professionality, dress, practices and language highlighted the contrast with her. She always appeared in traditional dress with her braided hair, a use of Spanish with strong Indigenous accent and exaggerated facial expressions highlighting her innocence. The India Maria would end up facing hostile situations set in an unfamiliar terrain for her, usually related to a modern aspect of the country, which she resolved with wit, surprising athletic ability and good nature. Although some of these situations boiled down to racism, classism and corruption, their portrayal and resolution were far from everyday situations taking place all over the country.

The third case I include is the character known as "mil usos" (thousand trades) embodied by the actor Héctor Suárez in two films from the early 1980s. The "mil usos" is a young Indigenous man who decides to leave his community and try to seek fortune in Mexico City. Upon his arrival, he tells someone that he knows many trades, which earns him the name of "mil usos." As he gets on with various attempts at working, however, he is frequently duped

by others, often losing his income, freedom, or wellbeing. He always maintainins a good disposition, however, even when faced with hardships, and never gives up. The success of both films perhaps gave Héctor Suárez the idea for his hit show *¿Qué nos pasa?* (*What is up with us?*), in which he embodies several characters to explore various problems in Mexican society. But as with Cantinflas and the India María, the issues that could be interpreted as denunciations of abuses and discrimination also ended up reifying a status quo where Indigenous individuals bear the brunt of the country's rapid modernization.

What these examples reveal is an array of forms of racist representations that were discriminatory and yet laudatory. They, and many others, showed a contrasting and conflictual attitude towards racialisation. These characters are known to all generations of Mexicans, who became acquainted with them through the endless re-runs back when the options on television were scarce, and through the internet, where many of these films and programmes are still available. If they are known as classics, their symbolic influence remains, as was discussed in the panel.

3. A controversial comedian in an anti-racist panel

The panel discussed above was problematic from its inception. It was originally planned to serve as an inaugural discussion for the new office examining cases of racism and bigotry in mainstream and social media of the para-governmental National Council for the Prevention of Discrimination (Conapred). The choice of comedian Chumel Torres as one of the guests led to a series of complaints in mainstream and social media, as he is widely accused of including racist and classist comments in his programmes. In fact, Conapred cancelled the panel after AMLO's wife complained about a recent case in which Torres had made fun of their child. Torres had not only made fun of the minor's overweight, but also of his brown skin and artificially blond hair. A couple of months after the cancelation of the panel, the NGO RacismoMX announced it would host it with some of the same participants. It also changed the title from a question, "Racism and/or classism in Mexico?", to a statement: "Racism is not a joke: the role of social media, comedy and entertainment." Chumel Torres remained as one of the guests. In fact, he was the only comedian included.

Two other participants announced for the original panel remained: Tenoch Huerta (an actor who openly denounced the discrimination he has faced throughout his career); and Maya Zapata (a renowned actress who has also become a vocal anti-racism activist). Three others joined RacismoMX's iteration: Jumko Ogata (a writer and anti-racism activist of Afro-Japanese and Mexican-American descent); Federico Navarrete (an anthropologist and historian, specializing on racism); and Mariana Ríos (a political analyst). José Antonio Aguilar, the director of RacismoMX, was the panel's moderator. In his introduction, Aguilar clarified that the panel was not a debate: "racism is a reality that is not up for debate," and added that there would be no winners or losers. "Racism kills. Racism is not a joke," he insisted, underscoring the reason behind the panel's title. Aguilar went on to explain the panel's structure, which would consist of questions posed by him to two participants who would take three minutes each to answer. Afterwards, other participants could comment or intervene. What was not mentioned is that all the participants, apart from Torres, are renowned anti-racism activists who have collaborated in several events and campaigns. It was also unclear which audience the panel was attempting to reach.

The panel proceeded with a series of statements condemning racism in Mexico and explaining how stories and representations in mainstream and social media reinforce it. Zapata, who has openly said she has been denied leading roles simply because she is not

white, insisted that the country's mass media reproduce false representations of the Mexican population by not including darker-skinned people in shows. Navarrete, whose recent book *Mexico racista: una denuncia* (*Racist Mexico: an accusation*) explains the trickling down of everyday racism, described xenophobia in Mexico as a historical system of domination and power established in the colonial period and reinforced after independence. Torres agreed that racism is harmful, but defended his politically incorrect comedy. In response, Ogata argued that those who claim to use political incorrectness as something positive "pretend to present themselves as transgressors, when it is the least revolutionary act in comedy… it is about continuing forms of offensive banter that have existed for centuries." Navarrete explained that political correctness emerged precisely out of a need to oppose racism, in order to seek that those who have been traditionally marginalised are no longer insulted or humiliated. Torres insisted that he was only doing what he had grown up watching on Mexican television shows and films.

After the panel, in his radio show and YouTube programmes, Torres complained that during the panel he had felt attacked. Not only was the panel rebranded to address jokes and he was the only comedian invited, he said, but all other participants seemed to have already reached an agreement which condemned him. He then used these arguments to portray himself as a victim of cancel culture or the woke agenda (Ng, 2022; Castro Cornejo, 2023), which because of his visibility and popularity, resonates with large swaths of Mexico's population. As has occurred in other countries, Torres used the same terms that are employed by progressives. After Conapred axed the original version of the panel, he tweeted: "Where does one complain about being discriminated against by the anti-discrimination Council?" In the aftermath of the panel, he repeated time and again that everyone was out to get him: "I am the flag for whitexicans [a term used to criticise white Mexicans' privileges], and that's why a lot of people hate me," he said in a stand-up comedy show that toured around the country (the last of which is available on his YouTube Channel[1]). That show was, in fact, titled using a wordplay on whiteness: *El blanco de tus burlas,* which can mean "the butt of your jokes," but also "the white of your jokes."

Chumel Torres, therefore, used the panel to his advantage by promoting the idea that panellists' arguments against racism limited his freedom of expression. Such reasoning would not have the same effect if uttered by other comedians, but Torres has gained enough visibility and popularity over the last few years that provide him with mediatic legitimacy. One might say, however, that his renown is characterised by playing such victim role. In 2016, he starred in his own show in HBO Latin America, *Chumel*, which was touted as the Mexican version of *The Daily Show.* In 2020, HBO cancelled the programme because of a series of racist tweets by Torres. His influence has nevertheless grown. In 2024, he was invited by Pope Francis to a meeting with comedians from around the world. In 2025, he was included in a list of the 300 most influential Mexican leaders. Not surprisingly, his role in the polarising process of Mexican politics is significant. The fact that political polarisation in Mexico follows patterns of hierarchy and prejudice dating back from the colonial period make the patterns of belonging and practice difficult to change.

Paradoxically, Mexicans support a social order characterised by inequality and harm even when it affects them. *It is not normal* (*No es normal*) as Viridiana Ríos pointed out in her detailed analysis of Mexican society (2021). Using statistical analyses, she argues how everyday choices mark a distance between public good and private interest, where the former is sacrificed for the benefit of a small minority. One way in which such symbolic configuration remains alive is through mainstream and social media, where tastes, opinions

[1] URL: https://youtu.be/rTVzQGtBnk4?feature=shared

and outlooks are shared and made visible. With its affective and social reverberations, "humour can tell us much about how existing social relations are reaffirmed and normative social boundaries maintained" (Lockyer & Pickering, 2008, p. 809). As was shown above, much of the humour that is considered classical in Mexico reifies a racist status quo. When Torres cites his comedic inspiration in such archetypes, he is blatantly following a genealogy of colonial racist relations.

In this context, the arguments by Tenoch Huerta, the actor who after the panel published a book called *Orgullo Prieto* (*Dark-skinned pride*) (Huerta, 2022), fall on deaf ears. So does the work of Jumko Ogata Aguilar, which includes the books *¡Quiero ser antirracista! Un manual práctico* (*I want to be anti-racist! A practical handbook*) (Ogata Aguilar, 2025), and *Mi pelo chino* (*My curly hair*), a children's book published in Spanish and Mixteco (Ogata Aguilar, 2023). The fact that Huerta and Zapata have collaborated with the association Poder Prieto (Dark-Skinned Power), ironically, is used by Torres to disqualify them from having an "objective opinion." The "just a joke" formula is therefore as effective in Mexico as it is in other countries (Weaver, 2016).

4. Feeding the flames of polarisation

Naming racist humour as a tool that legitimises abuses and discrimination is clearly necessary in a context like that of Mexico. But doing it to confront figures who are clearly popular will only maintain, if not harden, polarised opinions. The original discussion sought the modest objective of simply talking about racism in social media. The iteration convened by RacismoMX, on the other hand, sought to advance its anti-racist agenda by confronting a comedian who is renowned for his racist rants. Did the activists expect the comedian to accept their views?

Our political present is one in which all the information that can prove a point evaporates in a rapidly evolving media environment. All around the world, new information and communication technologies are allowing for flows of opinions and information that bear no resemblance to how news used to circulate. Mainstream media are no longer just a few national broadcasters. International players streaming a wide variety of content have offered platforms for people who might not have had them before. This is even clearer with social media, where self-productions can quickly grow in influence and resonance. Chumel Torres remains best known for his YouTube programme, *El Pulso de la República* (*The Republic's Pulse*). For most of the twentieth century, Mexico was led by a single party regime renowned for its control of the media. Despite the increasing electoral competition between political parties, some practices of media control among power groups remain. As is well documented, racism remains a key form of social control. Racist humour, therefore, serves to legitimise it. In this context, it is not enough for activists and academics to say that "racism is not a joke," especially when thousands of racist jokes are told every day.

Over the last decade, racist jokes have gained prominence in the Mexican political arena because of the rise of AMLO, as most of the critiques aimed at him and his followers allude to race and class (Castro Cornejo, 2023). Even before being elected, he was often accused by his opponents of not being up to the task of high office, not knowing English, and of causing embarrassment due to his lack of cosmopolitanism (Estrada & Rawnsley, 2021). As happens in Mexico, furthermore, such critiques are usually followed if not overtaken by jokes, sketches and parodies in legacy and social media. Those jokes accusing him and his followers of being uneducated, unrefined and far from a cosmopolitan ethos are then followed by waves of criticism from AMLO's followers against the others for being conservatives, "fifi" (meaning

posh), and of prioritising aspirational consumption over social services for those in need. Ongoing debates in the public sphere are thus frequently more about perpetuating such mutual prejudices than about ideologies, policies or actual projects.

Such tensions, however, are useful political tools. On the one hand, followers and supporters of AMLO insist that his and his party's agenda seek to end centuries of privilege marked by racist and classist hierarchies. On the other hand, opponents claim that accusations of racism show intolerant and authoritarian tendencies among those claiming to be progressives. At a time when trust in science, quality journalism and legitimate authorities is waning, how can dialogues achieve any type of arrangement? How can the public good be defined when most of the public is not interested in defining what is good for the collective? Will these overlapping interests maintain the current polarisation as a lifeline for the coming future? Or is there an opportunity for other voices to achieve some of the changes that are sought after by anti-racists? What this essay seeks to show is that forms matter. By playing into the discourse of bigoted actors who claim to be victims of cancel culture, progressives yield important symbolic discourses. New formulas need to be sought in order to reduce the apparent inevitable polarisation.

Acknowledgements

This research is funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are, however, mine only, and they do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them. This work is supported by ERC grant 101040059 (NoJoke).

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