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Interest convergence in the Land of the Cosmic Race: Mexican anti-racism and the motivation question

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ABSTRACT
Recent contributions to the academic literature describe Mexican racism as structural: an unintended blameless outcome of the combined actions of many individuals and institutions. This conceptualization appears to hamstring individual motivation for collective action: who is responsible for redressing the injustice and why? In this paper, I appeal to interest convergence – a key tenet of Critical Race Theory – to argue that Mexican anti-racism could gain from strategically identifying and communicating "shared predicaments" with the beneficiaries of racial injustice. Employing Grounded Normative Theory as a methodological approach and examining empirical research through [Jackson, Taharee. 2011. "Which Interests Are Served by the Principle of Interest Convergence? Whiteness, Collective Trauma, and the Case for Anti-racism." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 14 (4): 435–459] "disaggregation" of interest, I find hints of moral, psychological – even emotional and material – interest convergence between beneficiaries and victims of racial injustice in Mexico. I conclude that the contextual and erratic nature of Mexican racism could be strategically harnessed to produce social reform and advance racial equality.

Introduction

There is a globalized preference for white skin (Dixon and Telles 2017) and Mexico is no exception. Research unveils racialized bias in interpersonal relationships (Iturriaga 2016; Moreno 2008; 2010) and the job market (Arceo-Gomez and Campos-Vazquez 2014); it reveals pervasive racial disparities in variables such as education level, income and social mobility (Campos-Vazquez and Medina-Cortina 2019; Rejón 2023a; Trejo and Altamirano 2016); and it demonstrates this discrimination translates over into the political

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sphere: darker-skinned candidates are disadvantaged in elections (Aguilar 2011; Campos-Vazquez and Rivas-Herrera 2021) and underrepresented in legislative leadership roles (Rejón 2023b).

Unlike other countries, however, these racial disparities are not a consequence of a segregationist racial project. While a caste system was established by the conquistadors, the Mexican racial project after independence was founded on the *myth of mestizaje* – a project of assimilation seeking to render all "the same" (Corona 2020). At the expense of "the indigenous" and "the black", a *Cosmic Race* was to emerge (Sue 2013).

This nation-building ideology continues to shape the racial landscape in Mexico. It effectively removed the notions of "race" but the racist practices behind them persisted (Moreno 2008). The resulting phenomenon has been described as a synergy between racism and mestizaje in which people celebrate their racial mixture while desiring phenotypic whiteness (Sue 2020, 127). Most people do not identify themselves in racial classifications because they ignore the categories exist or oppose being associated with them (Del Popolo et al. 2009; Vaughn 2013).

Consequently, academics highlight the structural nature of Mexican racism (Moreno 2010; Rejón 2023a): it is an unintended outcome of many individuals and institutions in pursuit of their goals and interests, without any of these agents blamefully causing the injustice. This provides conceptual precision, but complicates the motivation question: who is responsible for redressing the injustice, and why?

Traditionally, political theorists have assigned responsibility for injustice through duties of justice and duties of humanity. The former require the wrongdoers to redress the harm they caused; the latter, lacking a direct and blameful causal connection, rely on the generosity of those able to assist. Duties of justice are usually thought to be stronger than those of humanity. For decades, these approaches were everything available to push for progress in the debate for racial justice. Every step forward was thought to be the result of moral breakthrough (Delgado 2006, 31) until Derrick Bell (1980) introduced his thesis of interest convergence; according to which "any advances toward racial equity for people of color occurs only when it converges with the interests of White people" (Lewis and Shah 2021, 191). The explanatory power of this principle soon made it a tenet of Critical Race Theory (Alemán and Alemán 2010, 5).

While Bell's premise was that racial justice must be won through protest (Gillborn 2010, 6), some argue that his interest convergence thesis offers key insights into human nature that can (and should) be harnessed to build the multiracial coalitions necessary to resolve racial inequality (Cashin 2005, 254–255). Scholars have used interest convergence not only as an explicatory tool but as a tactic for generating support and producing socio-political change (Alemán and Alemán 2010, 5–7; Driver 2011, 155).

In this paper, I provide a novel answer to the motivation question in Mexican anti-racism suggesting interest convergence as a political strategy. After reviewing empirical research that indicate Mexican racism grants benefits contextually and erratically, I argue the anti-racist movement in Mexico has much to gain from strategically identifying and communicating "shared predicaments" with the beneficiaries of racial injustice.

In Section 1, I present the theoretical traditions that frame this analysis. First, Young's models of responsibility in relation to her account of structural injustice. Then, I introduce Critical Race Theory and explain how interest convergence has been used as a political strategy. Particularly, I describe Jackson's (2011) "disaggregation" of interest (i.e. material, emotional, psychological, and moral). In Section 2, to provide socio-historical context, I review the characteristics of Mexican racism, including the myth of mestizaje. In Section 3, I explicate the methodology of the article. In Section 4, I bring all these elements together to review theoretical and empirical evidence that suggest that the moral, psychological, and even some emotional and material interests of the beneficiaries of racial structural injustice in Mexico converge with those of its victims. I conclude that the contextual and erratic nature of Mexican racism could (and perhaps should) be strategically harnessed to create interest convergence and, ultimately, advance racial equality.

Theoretical framework

Structural injustice

Young (2006) distinguishes two models of responsibility: liability and social connection. Liability looks for blame, fault, or guilt; it allocates responsibility to an (individual/collective) agent if their actions are voluntarily and causally connected to wrongdoing. In moral philosophy, this corresponds to duties of justice – built on the notion that the most straightforward and uncontested way to acquire moral obligations is to voluntarily cause harm to another person (Miller 2001, 464). Intuitively, intent is the most obvious basis for responsibility, and culpability its strongest justification.

For Young, however, the liability model overlooks how external factors can condition (or even determine) people's actions and that, at least sometimes, people act within unjust background conditions (Young 2011, 4–15). She explains this idea through the example of sweatshops, where manual workers (usually in the developing world) are employed at very low wages for long hours and under poor conditions. Sometimes there are clear and *liable* perpetrators (i.e. factory owners violating local labor laws) but other times owners lack resources to make factories more humane workplaces, or they cannot afford paying better wages. Hence, in those cases, laborers are not victims of a *blameful* agent, but of an extensive

system of "structural social processes" which no particular agent can control.

Structures (i.e. infrastructure, institutional rules, interactive routines) are relatively stable historical givens which "limit the options" individuals have (Young 2006, 114). The opportunities and choices agents have depend on socio-historical conditions and on the position they occupy in the structure; this "structured" social action and interaction frequently has collective results no one intended. Thus, no one is directly "guilty". The injustice is "structural": many actions, norms, policies, and agents contribute to producing harm, which cannot be attributable to only one of them. Everyone "caused" the outcome – they participated in the structure –, but no one directed the process or intended its results.

The liability model cannot allocate responsibility for this kind of injustice. Thus, Young introduces the social connection model – grounded on social roles or positions, not on blame. Agents are not responsible because they are at fault but because they contribute, sometimes involuntarily or unavoidably, to processes that produce unjust outcomes (Young 2006, 119). This model can deal with structural injustice: people are complicit in any collective action because they participated in it, even if they did not intend the outcome. Without intent, agents are not responsible in the traditional sense, but in a forward-looking sense where they must remedy the injustices caused (Young 2011, 105).

However, without intention/guilt, what is the basis for that forward-looking responsibility? For Young, it is "social connection" – "belonging together in a system of interdependent processes of cooperation and competition through which we seek benefits and aim to realize projects" (Young 2006, 119). Whether "social connection" successfully grounds responsibility or not is an open question (McKeown 2018), but duties of humanity – another traditional response to the motivation question – do not necessitate a culpable agent and can, technically, assign responsibility for structural injustice.

Based on the premise that there is a direct correlation between the existence of suffering and a moral duty to end it or minimize it (Campbell 1974), duties of humanity rely on "charity". Miller (2001, 460) describes it as a principle of capacity: "remedial responsibilities ought to be assigned according to the capacity of each agent to discharge them". In Singer's (1972, 235) rendition: "if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything morally significant, we ought to do it".

Normatively, duties of humanity might be a good fit for structural injustice, but they are poor political motivators. Research shows that people are less responsive to arguments of humanity than they are to arguments of justice (Lawford-Smith 2012). In situations of structural injustice, where blame-shifting is easy (Young 2006, 124), duties of humanity have few chances to succeed.

Critical Race Theory and interest convergence

Critical Race Theory argues that racism is endemic, institutional, and systemic (Lewis and Shah 2021, 191; Taylor 2000). It locates racism in social structures, not in individuals; challenges liberal ideology (i.e. neutrality, objectivity, and meritocracy) as this has only served to further entrench the normative supremacy of Whiteness; values the fulfilling and empowering dimensions of experiential knowledge; acknowledges that race is just one of the many oppressive social forces; is socially transformative, intended for practical application to aid those at the bottom of the racial hierarchy; and it is interdisciplinary, to situate race and racism in a proper socio-historical context for analysis (Alemán and Alemán 2010, 3; Delgado and Stefancic 2001).

Critical Race Theory emerged after decades of struggle for racial equity framed in terms of duties of justice and humanity. "Advancements" toward equal rights were interpreted as moral breakthroughs or social "realizations" (Delgado 2006, 31), but these legal and political "victories" rarely translated into tangible realities. For these reasons, Derrick Bell (1976) challenged the traditional answers to the motivation question and the assumptions of moral breakthrough when it came to progress toward racial equality. Bell offered a historical overview of anti-racist "victories" in America to argue that white self-interest was the best explanation for any relief from racial oppression that African Americans had experienced. Analyzing *Brown vs Board of education,* Bell (1980) explained that the Court's decision failed to deliver equal education opportunity to African Americans because it actually intended to serve the interests of White Americans. He argued "the interests of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (Bell 1980, 523).

This idea soon became a tenet of Critical Race Theory – interest convergence or material determinism (Lewis and Shah 2021, 191) –, which holds that where there are power dynamics and divergent interests between parties with unequal bargaining power, the subordinate party's interests will not advance unless that interest coincides with the interests of the majority party (Crowder 2015, 693; Driver 2011, 151). Bell's argument was that racial equality requires racism-granted privileges to be surrendered and, therefore, cannot not be achieved without displeasing the privileged (Bell 1980, 523). Bell's thesis is highly-regarded as a contribution to correcting the narrative of "unambiguous triumph" regarding racial considerations in constitutional law (Cashin 2005, 254–255; Delgado 2006, 31; Driver 2011, 157).

Furthermore, scholars have used Bell's material-determinist theory not only as an explicatory tool for other civil rights "gains", but as a tactic for swaying support for racial remedies. Academics have looked for "opportunities for convergence" and argued that social change can be produced by

deliberately aligning the social justice interests of communities of color with those of Whites (Alemán and Alemán 2010, 5–7; Zion and Blanchett 2011) in domains as diverse as education, animal rights, and the war on terror (Driver 2011, 155). Crowder (2015) explores the utility of interest convergence as a transactional mechanism (i.e. creating value for all parties) to alleviate regional poverty; arguing the issue is not a "zero-sum game" but an opportunity for mutual exchange and collaborative work (Crowder 2015, 703–704). Cashin (2005) concedes that any social group in power would oppose policies that they perceive to be contrary to their self-interest, even in the face of moral counterweights. She thinks anti-racism should harness this key insight into human nature to build multiracial coalitions to close existing gaps of racial inequality, arguing that communities of color, working class, and progressive whites have (at least perceived) interests in common to allow this to occur (Cashin 2005, 254–255).

Jackson (2011) follows this same reasoning to develop a more comprehensive framework for interest convergence. She thinks that while laws, cultural norms and institutional practices serve the material and emotional interests of whites, these simultaneously undermine their psychological and moral interests. To explain the point, Jackson (2011, 440–442) disaggregates "interest" into four types:

- Material Interest (Having): gains in or the maintenance of the superior socioeconomic status of the privileged.
- Emotional Interest (Feeling): the sense of well-being that the privileged can feel as a result of being white. The enjoyment of the illusion that if they made it, others can and will (if they work hard enough).
- Psychological Interest (Thinking): the cognitive dissonance and collective trauma that the privileged face once they realize their accomplishments have more to do with arbitrary factors – race – than with merit.
- Moral Interest (Doing): the moral and ethical bankruptcy of humanity that the privileged often encounter as a consequence of acting out of "false charity", rather than acknowledging the legacy of racism and actively working against it in solidarity.

Jackson explains this reasoning through the experience of Xernona Clayton, as she came to buy a dress for Coretta Scott King to wear to his husband's funeral. Clayton did not want to bother the widower for a credit card and asked the owner if she could take the garments for Coretta to choose, and then comeback with the money to pay. He agreed. At Clayton's return, the owner condoned the debt: "I'm a white American; I have to take some of this guilt and pain, and this is a way to assuage my grief". (Jackson 2011, 436–437). This exemplifies the ominous guilt that whites feel when they reflect on the pernicious effects of racism, the psychological and moral

bankruptcy of white dominance and the devastation of "realizing racism" (Jackson 2011, 436–437).

Jackson thinks that disaggregating "interest" this way allows one to see the guilt, collective trauma, and "pathology" that many whites face because of racism and to note what could be counterintuitive at first: that whites are adversely affected by racism. This "painful shaking of their conscience could easily be avoided by a full understanding of racism at the outset" (Jackson 2011, 436). She argues all oppression undermines the basic humanity of both oppressed and oppressors, albeit in markedly different ways. The oppressors benefit in real and tangible ways but they are also disenfranchised as both participants in and beneficiaries of a racially oppressive power structure, to they have their own stakes in ending racial inequality (Jackson 2011, 435–436). Jackson's argument is that "much like a people whose mental and cultural integrity has been violated by unjust circumstances, so too can whites experience a form of psychological trauma if they become aware of their role in a racial hierarchy, and their existence as a people for whom achievements have less to do with individual merit and more with a legacy of unearned privilege […] the collective trauma of whites can be devastating upon realization that they are the undeserved beneficiaries of a great deal of human suffering" (Jackson 2011, 449). She thinks this "trauma" far outweighs the limited benefits of racism.

While some oppose employing interest convergence "strategically" in this way (Aguirre 2010; Alemán and Alemán 2010), many agree that the totality of white interests is not always served by racism (Omi and Winant 2014) and the psychological interests of the privileged are far better served when they come to a critical consciousness of the state of racial inequality (hooks 2003). Bell himself conceded that "further progress […] is possible to the extent that the divergence of racial interests can be avoided or minimized. Over time, all will reap the benefits from a concerted effort toward achieving racial equality" (Bell 1980, 528–232).

Context: mestizaje and the structural nature of Mexican racism

The caste system that the Spanish conquistadors established during the colonial era was institutionally abolished when Mexico gained its independence (Levitin 2011; Russell 2010, 50). Mexican progressive elites aimed to build a united and color-blind society (Knight 1990) and embraced the myth of mestizaje – according to which miscegenation between the Spanish and the Indigenous had produced one single race (the *mestizo*), which embodied the best of both peoples (Martınez et al. 2014; Sue 2013). This racial "uniformity" would come at the expense of the "indigenous" and the "black", as public policies aimed to produce a Spanish-speaking and looking "homogenous' society (Barragan 2020).

While racist logics of discrimination and exclusion persist (Moreno 2008; 2010), the myth of mestizaje did change the social landscape: it effectively removed the notions of "race" (Iturralde 2018; Loveman 2014, chap. 4) and most Mexicans deny the existence of racism (Moreno and Saldívar 2016). Furthermore, Moreno (2010, 398) argues that the benefits of Mexican racism are contextual, not a ubiquitous reality; depending on where and with whom you are, a space of whiteness as privilege may or may not be occupied. While there are "white" Mexicans whose physical features are attached to privilege, this does not happen in a fixed pre-determined manner. Many other social categories (i.e. class, gender) influence whether a "white body" occupies a space of privilege (Moreno 2010, 397). In other words, "whiteness' is a social norm – relational and contextual, normalized but ambiguous. Light-skinned Mexicans can be privileged at times and, because of relational readings, be on "the other side" at other times (Moreno 2010, 397).

Therefore, academics insist on describing Mexican racism as structural injustice (Moreno and Saldívar 2016), which – as flagged in Section 1 – entails that it is an unintended outcome of many agents in pursuit of their interests, without any of them blamefully causing the injustice. A recent paper commends the work of activist organizations in Mexico and their initiatives to rebut the myth of mestizaje and condemn racial discrimination, while pointing out that the mainstream narrative of the anti-racist movement in Mexico currently ignores the structural nature racism, relying too heavily on the liability model for responsibility (Rejón 2023a). The paper argues this is a (normative and political) mistake and recommends focusing on the structural nature of the injustice and a "conciliatory narrative" that is not obsessed with identifying individual perpetrators, but considers background conditions to effectively understand, communicate and reform the unjust structure (Rejón 2023a, 20).

It is important, normatively and politically, to understand the structural nature of Mexican racism. Trying to employ the liability model to a case with no direct perpetrators is not only inadequate, but it could be counterproductive. Young (2006, 124) admits that when injustice is structural, agents could easily find valid excuses to mitigate their liability, because there are other responsible actors and structural constraints limiting their options. However, if there is no one to directly blame for racial injustice in Mexico, who is supposed to do something about it, and why? Why would the beneficiaries or indirect perpetrators engage in reforming the unjust structure that benefits them?

In what follows, I join those utilizing interest convergence as a political strategy to provide a novel answer to these questions. In Section 4, I examine empirical research through Jackson's (2011) "disaggregation" of interest framework, to suggest that the beneficiaries of Mexican racism have (not only moral and psychological) emotional and material overlapping

interests with its victims. If the benefits that Mexican racism grants are indeed contextual and erratically distributed, the anti-racist movement in Mexico has much to gain from strategically identifying and communicating "shared predicaments" with the beneficiaries of racial injustice. Before, in Section 3, I briefly describe the methodological approach and the data I used to respond the questions.

Methodology and data

In social research, normative and empirical approaches are not normally employed together. Usually, theorists examine normative arguments (Valentini and List 2016) while empirical researchers – quantitatively or qualitatively – investigate social phenomena to generate objective knowledge (Bryman et al. 2021). Recently, however, some scholars have aimed to bridge this gap through Grounded Normative Theory (GNT), which I employ here. Based on the idea that normative and empirical research can complement each other, GNT incorporates "original empirical data or analysis in a recursive process of theory development striving for accountability to persons in empirical contexts" (Ackerly et al. 2021, 3).

Ackerly argues that power inequalities impact the way people experience political life and, therefore, political theory would benefit from the input of those who are struggling (Ackerly 2018, 141). Therefore, GNT is "a normative analysis engaged with the concrete realities of people's lives" (Ackerly et al. 2018, 4); it entails the development of theoretical claims by going back and forth between conceptual analysis and engagement with data and/or research subjects directly (Ackerly et al. 2018, 7–8). In other words, GNT appreciates that the marginalized and their insights offer essential data for understanding injustice, so it turns to them seeking their contribution. This comes from the respectful recognition that people in the field – the oppressed themselves and the workers on the frontline – have important insights to offer. GNT draws on the ideas, claims, and lived experiences of those in political contestation to empirically inform normative theory and its methodologies generally entail empirical research or analysis of data to inform the development of normative arguments (Ackerly 2018, 137; Cabrera 2020, 94).

The methods within GNT vary: researchers sometimes develop their own data from interviews, ethnography, autobiography, reports, art, and other self-expression of individuals belonging to groups engaged in contestation (Ackerly et al. 2021, 6–7). However, other potential sources for GNT include newspapers, political pamphlets, organizational documents, internet resources, reports, speeches, committee hearings, and even legislation (Ackerly et al. 2018, 15–16). The distinct feature of GNT is not collecting data but the core methodological attention to the power of epistemology

to make invisible voices unfavored by dominant power dynamics. Similarly, GNT can use either deductive or inductive methods, but it is characterized by a recursive analysis: it moves back and forth between theory and data (Ackerly et al. 2018, 17).

In this paper, three main sources of data build the argument. An autoethnographic approach provides insights into the analysis of the experience of racial discrimination in Mexico. This method gives me access not only to my own experiences but helps me understand the experience of others in similar circumstances (Clandinin and Connelly 2004, 19). This research method challenges the "objective" divide between "the researcher" and "the researched" (Anderson 2006) but, admittedly, it is prone to dent academic rigor; therefore, I examine and compare these experiences with the work and findings of other scholars investigating the complexities of racial prejudice in Mexico. Lastly, I engage with the work of anti-racist organizations, mainly in the form of conferences, seminars, and workshops. These events were recorded and are published by the organizations (ColectivoCO-PERA n.d.; KajaNegra 2020; RacismoMX 2020).

Discussion: anti-racist interest convergence in Mexico?

In Section 1, I reviewed Young's account of structural injustice and highlighted how the liability model fails to adequately allocate responsibility for structural injustice and how the social connection model virtually relies on the good will of the privileged to promote social change. In Section 2, I surveyed the historical and current context of Mexican racism, underscoring how scholars emphasize its structural and erratic nature. This conceptualization of Mexican racism makes it difficult to assign responsibility for the injustice and, in turn, complicates the motivation question. If Mexican racism is an unintended blameless outcome of the combined actions of many, who should do something about it and why? In this section, I suggest that examining empirical data through Jackson's (2011) "disaggregation" of interest framework, reveals overlapping interests between the beneficiaries of Mexican racism and its victims. This could be harnessed to produce social reform.

Duties of justice are irrelevant for Mexican racism. For clarity: arguing that no agent is blameful for structural injustice in Mexico is not to say that no one is at fault for any kind of racial discrimination. Some are voluntarily and directly discriminating people based on their appearance or ethnic origin without any structural processes "forcing" them to do so. These wrongs have direct perpetrators, which are guilty and should be liable. However, the focus here are the structural issues channeling and influencing (if not causing) perfectly innocent actions to produce a combined unfair outcome. In these cases, there are no guilty agents and the liability model is inadequate. Moreover, even if one were to ignore the normative

shortcomings of applying this model of responsibility to this case (i.e. assuming that people *are* guilty), the problem would remain because, practically, duties of justice are poor motivators (Lazarus 1991 referenced in Lawford-Smith 2012, 678). In other words, duties of justice fail – normatively and politically – to provide a satisfactory answer to the motivation question.

Duties of humanity technically "work" in the case of Mexican racism: it is irrelevant that there are no direct perpetrators or that the injustice is an unintended outcome. According to this model, if there are agents capable of redressing the injustice, they should help, because they can. However, this model is weak – even from a purely normative perspective – when one considers the intersectional positionality of all agents in the structure. For instance, even where the privileged benefit from the unfair structure, it is not necessarily the case that they have the relevant capacity (i.e. white Mexicans with a disability might be, overall, "worse off" than victims of racism). Therefore, if the capacity principle is the only thing grounding responsibility and motivation, the model fails. What is worse, non-beneficiaries and victims of racial discrimination themselves could have equal or superior overall capacity. It is just counterintuitive to argue that a victim of racial injustice that managed to overcome those obstacles has the duty to redress racial injustice.

To escape this stalemate, I appeal to Critical Race Theory and interest convergence. Given that the privileged (i.e. parties in position of power with unequal bargaining power) will not concede any advancement to the subordinate party's interests unless that interest coincides with the interests of the majority party, the question is whether there is any overlap between the interests of the beneficiaries and the victims of Mexican racism?

Recall Jackson's (2011) disaggregation of interest. She argues that racist laws, cultural norms, and institutional practices serve the material and emotional interests of whites at the time they undermine their psychological and moral interests (Jackson 2011, 435). By "undermined" psychological and moral interests, she means the "collective trauma" the privileged experience with the realization that their accomplishments have more to do with their skin color than with merit, and with the ethical bankruptcy they encounter for not acknowledging the legacy of racism and actively working against it in solidarity. Although in different ways, racial oppression undermines the basic humanity of both oppressed and oppressors: the privileged benefit in real and tangible ways but they are also disenfranchised as both participants in and beneficiaries of a racially oppressive power structure (Jackson 2011, 435–436).

This argument resembles Hegel's (1979, chap. 4) lordship and bondage dialectic. The philosopher asserts that, while masters appear to be better off in that relationship of domination, they are in fact dependent upon the slave for determining their place in the universe, because true self-

consciousness – what makes us human – can only be achieve through mutual recognition (Dege 2014, 1152; Solomon 1988, 68). The master-slave relationship is the exact opposite to what the master thinks because they depend upon the slave for affirmation of their position of master, which fuels the slave's sense of dignity as they recognize that there is no fundamental difference between master and slave (Feilmeier 1992).

Those persuaded by these arguments will not have issue accepting that these same psychological and moral interests of the privileged are, arguably, undermined in Mexico as much as they are in Jackson's context – the United States. Nevertheless, I empathize with the reader that finds the argument unconvincing and who doubts that the "collective trauma" the privileged experience "outweighs the benefits they gain", as she claims (Jackson 2011, 449). However, I do not think one needs to accept the argument to that extent for one to admit its partial validity. In other words, a set of interests does not have to be "weightier" than other for the two to converge. I am happy to concede that the negative consequences – psychological, moral, or otherwise – of structural injustice that white Mexicans (might) experience are in no way comparable to the way in which racialized Mexicans are wronged because, for the argument to hold, these "harms" need not to be more serious but, simply, occur. Furthermore, I think that empirical research in Mexico suggests that it is not only in the psychological and moral dimensions where the interests of the beneficiaries and the victims of racism converge.

The first time I pondered the idea that Mexican racism could undermine the emotional and material interest of its beneficiaries, arose from my personal experience as a light-skinned Mexican teenager growing up playing soccer "pick-up games" in public parks. Often, I was mocked and subjected to "tougher" treatment (i.e. unnecessarily strong tackles). I could tell, even back then, this treatment was testing the fragility and delicateness associated to the class stereotype correspondent to my skin tone. This more "violent" treatment was not an accident, but directly related to the racial schema we were socialized with.

A similar phenomenon occurs with foreigners in Mexico. It is well-known that international tourists are overcharged by service providers and vendors because of the assumption that they have more money – a reality for most American/European tourists. Interestingly, people assess whether someone is "wealthy" mainly through the appearance of the customer: skin color is the main indicator used to read class. Something comparable happens, albeit to a lesser degree, to light-skinned Mexicans visiting (street) markets.

Of course, this anecdotal evidence hardly proves the more substantive argument I am positing here. However, as I engaged with the work of anti-racist organizations (mostly forums for people to share their lived experiences

of Mexican racism that are available online) more examples of the social "costs" of being light-skinned in certain Mexican contexts arose. In one of these events, the panelists stated that "inverse racism does not exist". I agree with the statement, but a puzzled member of the audience shared the case of a "white, blonde" girl in their school who was sexualized, stalked, and sexually abused (e.g. kissed against her will, catcalled, and spanked on the buttocks). They mentioned that her skin color was the only explanation they could think of for her to be targeted. Her white skin, which brought her privilege in many contexts, rendered this girl a victim of the sexual desire of entitled and abusive male classmates.

One could argue, perhaps, that this girl was not a victim of her white skin but of the myth of the "easy white girl" (i.e. the idea sold by the media which suggests that white/blonde girls are "airheads' and "promiscuous" that easily agree to sexual intercourse). This argument is weak, though. First, even if her sexualization is better explained by this myth, this does not change the fact that it was her white skin what "triggered" the actions. Also, it is impossible to know whether the perpetrators were exposed to this myth or not. The best placed agent to answer that question would be the member of the audience recollecting the story, but they attributed the abusive behavior to skin color.

Another woman explained she regularly visited a marginalized area of Mexico City as part of her activist job for a feminist organization. She argued that her light-skin made her a "target" of certain crimes, as people would assume she had money. She claimed not to display significant class indicators (e.g. expensive clothes, jewelry) and that skin color was the only attribute people could use to assume wealth. In this case, I readily concede that her feelings might be better explained by paranoia than by real danger. Arguably, she was the one profiling those around her, and her fear was completely delusional. However, imagined or not, her case indicates that light-skinned Mexicans experience anxiety in some contexts, given the color of their skin. This feeling exists, even if it is completely unjustified. Substantiated or not, it constitutes a negative consequence of racial stereotypes.

Again, sceptics could attempt to dismiss these experiences arguing they are simply anecdotical, if not imagined altogether. However, empirical research documents similar findings. For instance, Tipa (2020) investigated colorism in Mexican advertising. The study confirms skin color discrimination and a strong tendency to exclude people with "indigenous" traits and dark skin tones from advertising. Perhaps more surprising, it is the fact that a similar trend exists toward people with stereotypical "European" or "Caucasian" traits. Tipa argues that the most requested profile in advertising is "Latin-American", one of dominant corporeal whiteness that does not look "too European". The phenotypic parameters mentioned in the casting process make this obvious: "no whites, no brown, nor clear/blue eyes, no blondes, no afros, no redheads" (Tipa 2020, 118). The phenotypical

aspirations of *Mestizaje* appear to be costly for those who do not look like the "ideal mestizo", at both ends of the spectrum.

A recent study investigating descriptive representation in the Mexican Chamber of Deputies found a similar pattern (Rejón 2023b). "Mestizos" (people with light-brown skin) are overrepresented in the legislative body while dark-skinned Mexicans are underrepresented; notably, the same is true for Mexicans at the lightest end of the spectrum (Rejón 2023b, 10). Again, *Mestizaje's* aspiration for "the middle point" between two racial groups is costly for those at the extremes of the color palette, who do not fit the ideal looks (Rejón 2023b, 11).

Multiple qualitative studies find other "costs" for whiteness in Mexico. For instance, Navarrete (2016) examines several racist prejudices in Mexican jargon and argues that the phrase "güero de rancho" (transl. "White but from a farm") is used to describe light-skinned Mexicans from rural or low socioeconomic level who do not belong to the elites (Navarrete 2016, 54). According to the author, the phrase is representative of Mexican racism used in "reverse direction" (Navarrete 2016, 54). There is an expectation for light-skinned Mexicans to belong to a certain social class (Cerón-Anaya 2020) but, as flagged in Section 2, not all white bodies occupy a space of privilege (Moreno 2010, 397). Still, not meeting the criteria is perceived as a failure worth of contempt.

Christina Sue (2020) documented other ways in which racial stereotypes affect light-skinned Mexicans. Interviewing people who married individuals darker than themselves, she found that respondents acknowledged there are – internal and external – barriers to overcome, such as incessantly having to endure the critical looks of outsiders and relatives alike, or the persistent preference for a lighter partner that lingers in the back of their minds (Sue 2020, 119). Other scholars have expanded on this, arguing that, in Mexican racism, the lines between victims and victimizers are not only blurry but unfixed (Navarrete 2016, 73). Racism sells itself as an obstacle anyone could overcome (Iturriaga 2015, 109) and whiteness as the target people should strive for (Navarrete 2017, 175). People are in a slippery slope between "white" and "black/indigenous", supposed to overcome their non-white selves (Basave 2002). Up to a certain level, mobility is possible: people can whiten themselves with the right combination of education, professional success, and wealth. This is what Mexican popular culture calls "mejorar la raza" (transl. "improve the race"). You can marry a whiter person to "upgrade" your offspring, but you can also go to a certain school or dress a certain way (Navarrete 2016, 72). However, these goals are never fully achieved (Navarrete 2016, 153). This helpless aspiration is exhausting and requires continuous self-denial. People learn to loathe themselves and try to "get better" (Moreno 2010, 396). Navarrete (2016, 72) calls this the "Mestizo's self-doubt".

To close this section, I think is pertinent to bring up one emblematic case which appears in most anti-racist research outputs in Mexico. In 2012, Leslie Ornelas, a light-skinned girl with blonde hair, was asking for alms in the streets of Guadalajara until the police separated her from her brown-skinned family. They did so not because they were concerned about her well-being (in that she was asking for alms), but because they assumed the girl had been kidnapped and forced to ask for alms – even after the mother explained that the girl's father was a tourist who had visited Mexico from the United States, and she showed them the girl's birth certificate (Escamilla 2012). A DNA test confirmed the mother's testimony and it still took almost a year for the girl to reunite with her family (Montalvo 2013). Activists and academics have, rightfully, used this case to demonstrate that racism in Mexico is not only real, but that it significantly harms racialized people (Navarrete 2016). This is a clear wrong against the mother, undoubtedly; but think of Leslie herself: a light-skinned Mexican girl who was deprived of her family for almost a year. In this specific case, Leslie was wronged just as her brown-skinned mother, if not more.

These examples and empirical findings go beyond anecdotical proof and constitute hints (if not evidence) that suggest that racial injustice in Mexico harms both white and non-white Mexicans, even if it does so in different contexts, and at different intensities. The harms differ from one group to another, but they exist for both. More interestingly, these harms undermine not only the moral or psychological interests of the beneficiaries of the injustice, but they also affect their emotional and material interests. This knowledge is important because it creates an opportunity to "harness" interest convergence and build coalitions to fight racial inequality. The observation that Cashin (2005, 254–255) made about the American case, might be true for Mexico too: communities of color and of working class and/or progressive whites have (at least perceived) interests that overlap.

I think these "shared predicaments" could be the basis for a novel answer to the motivation question. As flagged in Section 2, this argument is hardly new and has been made by Critical Race Theorists before. bell hooks (1984, 68) argued that shared predicament bounds people together and generate political solidarity. If it is true that Mexican racism targets everyone, even if contextually and to a lesser degree, that is politically relevant. Young herself states that pointing fingers and blaming others leads more to resentment and refusal to take responsibility than to a useful basis of action (Young 2006, 124). Where appeals to "justice" and "humanity" fail to generate political action, interest convergence might succeed. Pointing out the ways in which some white Mexicans "suffer" the consequences of racism might be a better political strategy than simply blaming them or appealing to their selfless good will. Shared predicament is a better political mobilizer than guilt.

I understand how counterintuitive it is to argue that racism can harm white Mexicans, even if only in specific contexts and to a lesser degree. However, this is not the first time someone argues that a system of oppression can harm members of a group that is overall benefited. For instance, the gender system primarily harms women; and this led many to think of men as the "enemy" (Atkinson 1974; Frye 1983). However, others noted the ways in which men are oppressed by the same gender system (King 2020) and thought that patriarchy (not men) was the real enemy (hooks 2000, 67). This was not to say that men are the primary victims of the gender system, but to simply acknowledge that men can be victimized by it and, therefore, they could be allies and "comrades in struggle" (hooks 1984, chap. 5). Furthermore, for some, because men are the primary agents maintaining sexism, these oppressions can only be successfully eradicated if men are compelled to assume responsibility for transforming their (and society's) consciousness (hooks 1984, 81).

Kimmel's (2013) argument about *Angry White Men* is another example. His research investigated conservative white men supporting Donald Trump and opposing anti-racist initiatives. He found that these men are justifiably angry, as they experience what he calls "aggrieved entitlement" (Kimmel 2013, 18). He argues that pointing fingers at middle-class white-men and calling them privileged and oppressors while they were feeling victimized, turned their economic anguish, psychological distress, and political confusion into blind rage (Kimmel 2013, 110–111). Kimmel does not contend that these men are right – in fact, he explains they are not –, but invites us to recognize the authenticity of these men's pain and anguish in order to reform the social structure that wrongs them (Kimmel 2013, 133).

Conclusion

There is a pervasive preference for light-skin color in Mexico. Research demonstrates that these preferences impact all areas of people's lives, not trivially but tangibly. Furthermore, racism in Mexico is not only harmful, but a complex structural arrangement that cannot be reduced to mere discrimination at an individual or personal level; it is the unintended consequence of many individuals and institutions in pursuit of their particular goals and interests, within given institutional rules and accepted norms. These actions are guided by relatively stable social processes that limit the options agents have. Therefore, there are no direct "guilt" links between the wrongdoers and the wronged. This conceptualization of the problem provides theoretical precision but complicates the answers for the motivation question: who is responsible for doing something about it and why?

Traditionally, political theorists have argued the wrongdoers have *duties of justice* to redress the harm they caused and that, when there are not direct

and blameful causal connections, agents have *duties of humanity* to gener-ously assist the victims of injustice. Before Critical Race Theory introduced the interest convergence thesis, these traditional approaches were the only tools available to push for (and explain) progress toward racial justice, and every anti-racist victory was thought to necessitate (and be the result of) moral breakthrough. However, the realization that any advances toward racial equity occurs only when it converges with the interests of the privi-leged generated a different way for social reform, one that does not rely on the selfless good will of the beneficiaries of injustice. The principle of inter-est convergence became a strategic tool for engendering support and produ-cing social and political change.

Employing Jackson's (2011) framework of "disaggregation" of interest (i.e. material, emotional, psychological, and moral) I have reviewed empirical research that suggest that the benefits that Mexican racism grants are contex-tual – and distributed erratically throughout different social settings. These peculiar circumstances entail that the moral, psychological – and even some emotional and material interests – of the beneficiaries of racial struc-tural injustice in Mexico converge with those of its victims. These "harms" might be real or imagined and, in all cases, they are not comparable to the wrongs racialized people in Mexico are victims of, but they could serve as "shared predicaments" to generate political solidarity. Interest convergence could (and perhaps should) be strategically harnessed to create the coalitions necessary to advance racial equality.

Disclosure statement

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