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# Narrative, Activism, and Aesthetics: Composing Electroacoustic Music for Mexicans

**Abstract:** This article presents the composition process of three electroacoustic pieces belonging to the project *Contra el racismo en Mexico* (Against Racism in Mexico). The project aims to raise awareness about racism. Concerned with engagement, national identity, and the invisibility of racism in Mexico, I included fragments of interviews with Mexicans to share their views and call for a change. In the article, aspects such as compositional methodology, selection of sound materials, cultural aspects addressed in each piece, and engagement with society are discussed. Aesthetics and form are also examined, as they played a significant role when composing electroacoustic music for broad audiences. I argue that these pieces may have documentary qualities that depict racism in Mexico.

## Racism and Activism in Mexico

This article presents the different aspects and challenges of composing three electroacoustic pieces for a broad Mexican audience. These are part of the artistic project *Contra el racismo en Mexico* [Against Racism in Mexico], consisting of a series of electroacoustic works aiming to raise awareness about racism in Mexico (described more broadly at <https://rosaliasorialuz.com/snca-fonca-mexico>). This project raises the three questions:

1. How to best raise awareness about racism and call for a change through music?
2. Who is willing to participate and listen?
3. What is the potential impact of the pieces?

The project's objectives, reflected in the pieces to be discussed in this article, were: to engage with society, raise awareness and call for a change through music, and make the works accessible to broad audiences. I interviewed Mexicans as a part of the creation process with two purposes: having fragments as an essential part of the music and including members of society through their experiences. No ethnographic or statistical study was intended.

The framework of the compositions is rooted in the social problems stemming from racism among Mexicans. These introductory remarks present three topics to better understand the context: a brief review of racism in Mexico, a brief review of

activist music in Mexico, and the general context and motivation for the project *Against Racism in Mexico*. This is followed by a presentation, for each of the three pieces, of the specific challenges and solutions in each piece. This includes methodology, material selection, and spatialization. These are followed by a brief discussion of the reception of the works and some concluding thoughts.

## Racism in Mexico

To introduce racism in Mexico, it is necessary to define the words *mestizo* and *mestizaje*. In the colonial caste system, *mestizo* was a category representing the offspring of a Spaniard and an indigenous person (Camacho 2020). The term generally refers to "a person born to a father and mother of a different race, especially white and Indian" (cf. the dictionary entry published by the Real Academia Español, <https://dle.rae.es/mestizo>). *Mestizaje* refers to the process of interracial or cultural mixing (Martínez-Echazábal 1998).

In Mexico, discrimination due to ethnicity and skin color is present in daily life. As Virginia Mercado (2021) points out: "Mexicans with indigenous or black ancestry face discrimination in jobs, education, and the justice system, even though racial distinctions officially do not exist." Survey data from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography and Statistics (INEGI 2016) sheds light on how discrimination due to skin color can affect access to education, employability, and mobility. Furthermore, these statistics document the limited opportunities for people of darker skin,

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especially for people of indigenous origin (Martinez 2018).

In recent decades, the phenomenon of racism in Latin America has been the focus of attention in projects such as PERLA (<https://perla.princeton.edu>) and Barómetro de las Américas (<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/about-americanbarometer.php>). Based on survey data from the 2010 Mexican Américas barometer, Trejo and Altamirano (2016) report that in Mexico, “dark-brown mestizos are 2.5 times more likely to perceive discrimination than whites, and indigenous people are 3 times more likely.” They also suggest “a structural persistence of a color hierarchy in Mexican society.” Their analysis shows that “as in colonial times, there is a significant decline in wealth as individuals move from the top of the social scale (i.e., white) to the bottom (i.e., dark-brown mestizo and indigenous).” As discussed by Edward Telles (2014), Mexico, as well as most Latin American countries, is a country of unnoticed “pigmentocracy.”

Mónica Figueroa (2013) points out that [in Mexico, the idea of “improving the race” is a prominent topic in daily conversations] and has, [a strong connection with the multiple meanings of the concept of *mestizaje*]. It offers flexible inclusion but allows racism to exist by favoring “whitening processes,” using the national identity discourse to mask discrimination. Federico Navarrete (2016) writes that “as Mexicans, we think of ourselves as mestizos, and recognize in our physical features a combination of ‘European’ and ‘indigenous,’ with a clear preference for the former.”

### Activist Music in Mexico

Activist music has existed for centuries. “As long as people have been getting fed up with the status quo, they’ve been singing about it” (Henwood 2017). Protest music has played an important role in numerous famous movements around the world, such as the antiwar movement, women’s suffrage, LGBTQ+ movements, and the labor movement (Neel 2020). According to Rastas and Seye (2019), “black music refers to various musical styles created by people who have faced and fought against

racism at different times and locations.” A more comprehensive background of activist music from the world is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, attention is drawn to activist music in Mexico and Latin America.

Activism in Mexican music has a precedent, most notoriously, in contexts outside academia. Mexican musicians and composers have been concerned with portraying and condemning social problems for several decades. Icaza and Basuritas Records (2020) write about how, in the 1960s, constant repression towards teachers, workers, and students was depicted in the works of singers like Oscar Chávez, Amparo Ochoa, or the group Antorcha. Martín and Nieves Molina (2020) mention the *rupestres*, a movement of young musicians in the 1980s known for their criticism of the authorities and society, with Rodrigo González as a leading figure. Salvador García (2019) elaborates on how the music videos of the popular band Molotov (1995) are regarded as a “direct attack on government-supported ideology.”

In the field of electroacoustic music, Vasquez and Fraire (2020) mention several composers with activist pieces. Liliana Rodríguez and her “Installation” on domestic violence; Ivan Abreu with “m(rpm), Mexican National Anthem,” about the disappearance of national identity; and “Paisaje Sonoro Anti-Peña” [Landscape against Peña] by multiple composers intended “as a protest against the contemporary Mexican social situation as a whole.”

In recent years, conveying antiracist and activist messages through popular music has become common in Latin America. The following are some examples of composed works addressing this topic. The musical *La Bandada* (written, composed, and directed by Roxana Ávila, Carlos Castro, and Francisco Díaz, and produced by the University of Costa Rica in 2019), has been described as “an examination of xenophobia and racism in society” (cf. Córdoba Rojas 2019). The play, a musical montage with puppets, was “primarily intended for children, but the actors controlling the puppets decided that its message should really reach all audiences.”

The song “Somos” [We Are] is part of the campaign *Música contra la discriminación* [Music

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against Discrimination] promoted by the National Institute for Human Rights in Chile (INDH 2014). It aims to deliver a message that helps to eradicate racism and xenophobia among young people.

Similarly, in Colombia, the song “Juntos más grandes” [Bigger Together] was promoted by the Organización Internacional para las Migraciones [International Organization for Migration]. The song can be heard online ([https://youtu.be/xqV\\_2xebZ0A](https://youtu.be/xqV_2xebZ0A)), its message is to condemn discrimination and violence against refugees and immigrants.

Activist music combating racism in Mexico has a precedent in the campaign Rap Contra el Racismo [Rap against Racism], promoted by the Spanish organization Movimiento contra la intolerancia [Movement against Intolerance] ([rapcontraelracismo.es](http://rapcontraelracismo.es)). It consists of a song and a video clip with the collaboration of distinguished artists from the Spanish rap scene. The campaign seeks to make an impact on a student audience, helping them to recognize and condemn racism and xenophobia as authentic problems needing to be combated. A Mexican version with the title “Rap Contra el Racismo en México” [Rap against Racism in Mexico] was also created in response to this campaign. The rap song “Poder Prieto” (Delgado 2022) is inspired by the antiracist movement of the same name, which denounces the lack of visibility of brown and black skin in Mexico. The song intends to convey an antiracist message by providing timely information.

### Context for the Three Pieces Discussed

Javier Alvarez (1996) comments on how, in the 1960s, influential Mexican composers such as Manuel de Elias and Mario Lavista traveled abroad to broaden their horizons in the electroacoustic field. Federico Schumacher (2015) comments that it is typical of Latin Americans to be more aware of musical tendencies in the United States and Western Europe than of those in the immediately neighboring countries, and that every composer, every artist with ambition, feels obligated to complete a round of studies in first-world countries. In my case, a realization of social nature came after studying music in Europe and observing the culture.

European cultures have a strong sense of belonging and discriminatory practices toward outsiders. Delanty, Jones, and Wodak (2011, p. 1) emphasize that “there is widespread agreement that racism in Europe is on the increase and that one of its characteristic features is hostility to migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers, who are positioned in exclusionary discourse as the new ‘others.’” Ball, Steffens, and Niedlich (2022, p. 1) assert that “the prevalent understanding of European racism is connected to migration from the former colonies to the European metropolises and the post-Second-World-War immigration of ‘guest workers.’” Masoud Kamali (2011, p. 301) points out how European modernity needed what he called “inferior others,” to “legitimize its colonial wars, occupations, slavery, and genocide,” thus resulting in “racism and discrimination towards ‘the others’ during the long history of the establishment and expansion of European civilization,” and “a sense of narcissism among European nation-states and colonial powers.”

Regarding Latin America, Jason McGraw (2018) affirms that “over the last 30 years, scholars and activists have documented the region’s pervasive anti-Black and anti-Indian sentiments and its lack of social mobility for people of African or indigenous descent.” Wade, Scorer, and Aguiló (2019, p. 2) write that “many scholars share our emphasis on the colonial origins of racism, particularly recent colonial theorists, who see racism and colonial relations (including the ones that persist after the end of formal colonialism) as underpinning concepts.”

The need to be aware of and combat racism and xenophobia in Mexico and Latin America arises from the widespread denial of this problem. About this fact, Dzidzienyo and Oboler (2005) write: “Over the past few years, different governments of Latin America have made statements to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination claiming, among other things, that ‘racial prejudice’ does not exist, ‘in our country problems of discrimination do not exist,’ ‘this phenomenon does not appear in our country,’ or ‘in society, at the present time racial prejudices are practically negligible.’”

Reflecting on these facts, it is very evident that Mexicans discriminate against their own, especially

those of darker skin or indigenous origins, but they might not be aware. As pointed out earlier, racism and its colonial roots seem to be unacknowledged in Mexico. Several questions arise from this fact: Why is this happening? Can a piece of music help to raise awareness about racism? How can music call for a change? These questions motivated the creation of the artistic project *Against Racism in Mexico*, which aimed to raise awareness. In a culture where racism is invisible and systematically denied, the first step to eradicating it is to recognize it.

The project was proposed to the Mexican National Fund for Arts and Culture SNCA-FONCA in the 2017 call for proposals. It was accepted and developed from 2018 to 2020 and consisted of seven electroacoustic works aiming to raise awareness about racism. A vital element in the proposal was the inclusion of interviews with Mexicans to share their experiences and views about this problem. The recorded materials would serve as a sound source for composition and as testimonies to provide the pieces with authenticity. This approach differed from previous works in other genres addressing the same issue. Spoken testimonies can potentially be more relatable for those who have experienced racism and can be a powerful means to raise awareness. Three pieces of the project contain fragments from these interviews and are discussed in the following sections.

## Tabú

*Tabú* [Taboo] is an eight-channel fixed-media work composed in 2018. The piece's purpose was to openly discuss racist practices in Mexico and call for a change. To engage with society and share their opinions and experiences, several short interviews took place in informal settings at the beginning of 2018. A fragment of a subtitled stereo version of this piece can be found at [https://doi.org/10.1162/COMJ\\_a\\_00634](https://doi.org/10.1162/COMJ_a_00634).

## Interviews

The invitation to participate in a short interview about racism in Mexico was posted via social media.

The interviewees were from different states in Mexico, with diverse backgrounds and ages from 12 to 65 years. Most of the interviews took place in cafes, although a small number were held via video calls. Participants preferred not to come to my home studio. The interviews were recorded using a TASCAM portable recorder. They lasted about ten minutes on average and were preceded by a brief conversation in which they were introduced to the concept of the piece and the project. The interviewees were also asked to sign a release to include fragments of their interviews on the piece.

The interview structure was planned so people could share their experiences, reflect on the possible causes of racism in Mexico and discuss how to eradicate the problem. The questions were:

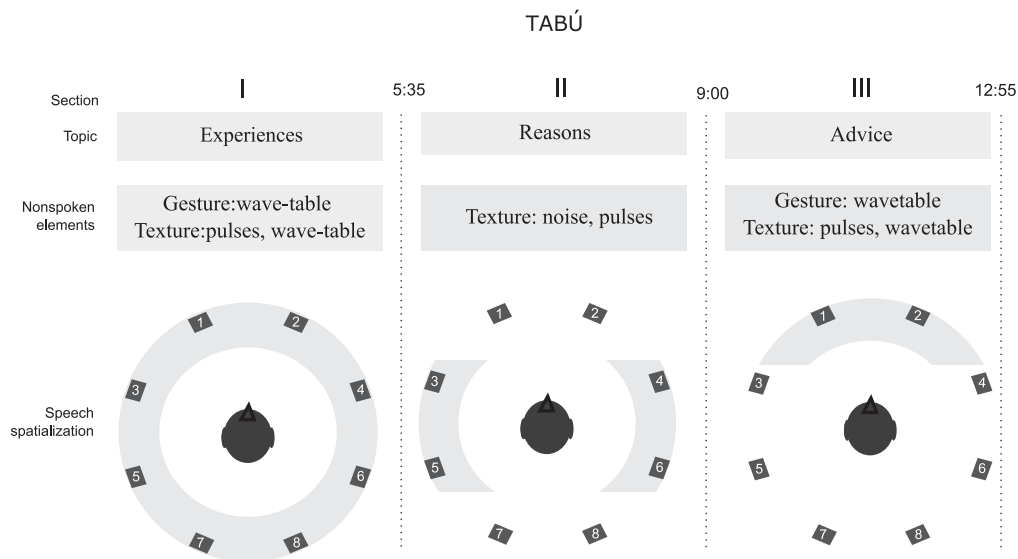
1. Do you think racism exists in Mexico?
2. Could you share a personal or witnessed experience?
3. Why do you think this happens?
4. What would be your advice to eradicate this problem?

Given the generalized denial of racism in Mexico, Question 1 was a way to ascertain that racism exists in Mexico and start the conversation. Question 2 was for the participants to share a personal experience of racism. It also worked as a way to talk openly about racist behaviors in Mexican culture. Question 3 aimed to set a context for the causes of racism in Mexico from the population's perspective and to be used in a reflection section within the piece. Question 4 was intended to collect advice to eradicate racism from Mexicans to Mexicans. This was with an activist intent to call for change.

## Composition Methodology and Challenges

The first step was to create an initial selection of "basic units," small audio fragments to capture specific experiences, reflections, or advice. Fragments that mentioned similar issues were grouped into subcollections such as discrimination at work, discrimination against the indigenous, and complaints about beauty stereotypes.

Figure 1. Nonspoken sound materials and speech spatialization used in “Tabú.” (© 2018 Rosalía Soria Luz, all rights reserved.)



The next step was to select specific “audio units” from the subcollections to create a powerful narrative. I decided to include testimonies told in the first and third person. The decision was based on the questions: What was said? Who said it (e.g., a student, worker, or a professional)? How did they say it (first versus third person)? How can the listener relate to the person speaking? I considered the testimonies told in the first person to be more potent as the listener could relate to those who have experienced similar situations. Witnessed experiences could convey disapproval, and participants with intellectual backgrounds provided critical historical facts upon which I could reflect. The speech’s pace, audio quality, and the voice’s spectral range were also considered. Environmental noise was present in all recordings, and improving speech intelligibility was an arduous task. At the same time, such noise provided the piece with a certain authenticity.

The final process of selecting audio units was parallel to creating nonspoken musical elements. As the testimonies would be the “something-to-hold-on-to factor” (Landy 1994), other musical elements were used to support the narrative. As the testimonies needed to be intelligible, the other elements were required to support and complement

the voices without distracting the listener when speech is present. At the same time, they needed to provide context and to add or decrease energy for dramatic purposes. For these nonspoken elements, fragments of the interviews were transformed via wavetable processes to create gestures and contrasting textures. Pulse-like synthetic sounds were designed to provide an impression of rhythmic sound. Shaped noise was used as a kind of “glue” to tie and mask the various background noises from the recorded interviews.

The piece’s structure was divided into three sections: personal or witnessed experiences, possible reasons, and advice. The piece’s structure, the materials used, and the spatialization approaches are shown in Figure 1. This structure aimed to fulfill the intended goals of raising awareness, promoting reflection and calling for change through advice. Each section had a careful selection of nonspoken elements to support the respective topic discussed. The experiences section was made with synthetic pulses to provide energy, wavetable-based gestures for transitions, and wavetable-based textures of dissonant character to create a dramatic atmosphere. The reflection section was made of subtle pulses and noise to create an atmosphere for reflection. The third section was made of

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pulses with harmonic intervals to create a positive atmosphere.

Spatialization was an essential aspect of the composition process. The eight-channel format aimed to create diverse atmospheres to immerse the audience with testimonies coming from different directions. In the first section, testimonies of racism come from all directions. For the reflection section, the speech is moved to channels 3, 4, 5, and 6. For the final section, the speech comes from a central frontal image.

After the first performance, the multichannel format was switched to two eight-channel “stems,” one containing the speech elements and the other with all remaining music elements (Popp 2013). This format was chosen so the levels can be adjusted live to guarantee the speech’s intelligibility. A stereo reduction was created as the piece was intended to be presented in spaces where multichannel concert setups might not be available, as well as for online presentation.

## Nuestras Voces

“Nuestras voces” [Our Voices] is an eight-channel piece composed in 2019. A fragment of a subtitled stereo version can be found at [https://doi.org/10.1162/COMJ\\_a\\_00634](https://doi.org/10.1162/COMJ_a_00634). The piece’s goals were to share testimonies of racism, to present explanations for the preference for European roots, and to promote pride in Mexican indigenous roots with an activist intent. With this focus in mind, a series of additional interviews took place in 2019, with the invitation to participate similar to the one for *Tabú*. The interviews were planned to last between five and ten minutes. The questions were designed so that the participants could share their experiences and thoughts as follows:

1. Do you think racism exists in Mexico?
2. Could you share a personal or witnessed experience?
3. Why do you think we prefer the European aspects of our culture?
4. As a Mexican, is there anything you are proud of from our indigenous origins?

Questions 1 and 2 were chosen for reasons similar to *Tabú*. Question 3 aimed to explain the preference for European phenotypes over the indigenous, which is a strong component of racism in Mexico. These explanations would constitute a reflection section in the piece. Question 4 had an activist intention. It was for the participants to share aspects of the indigenous cultures to be proud of as Mexicans. This would be included in the closing section of the piece to promote pride in those cultures. The participants answered the first two questions relatively quickly. Surprisingly, only a few of the participants were able to provide concrete answers to the last two.

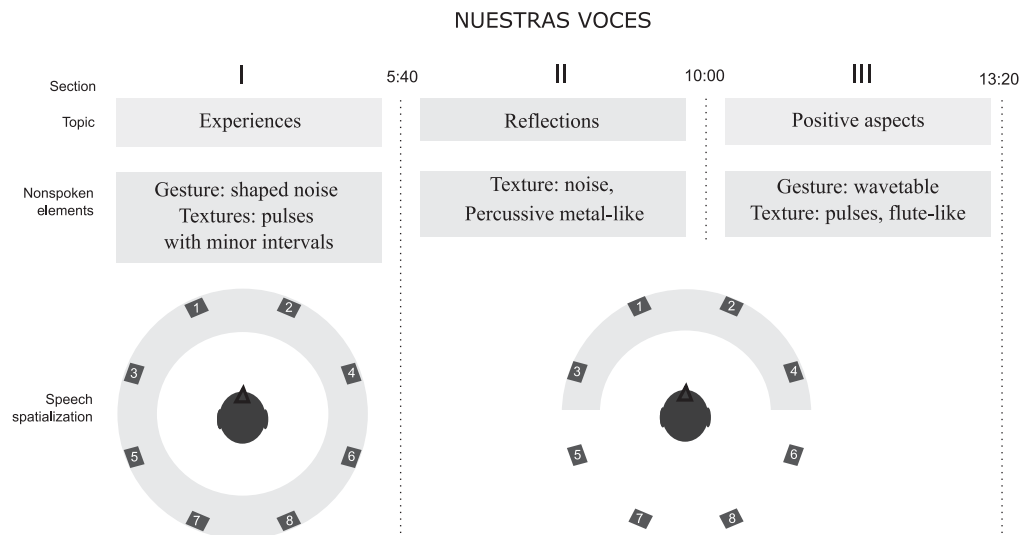
## Methodology and Challenges

The material selection process was similar to the one for “*Tabú*.” The “basic units” for short testimonies of racism were chosen more freely and were not grouped by topic. Similarly, it was decided that all audio fragments from the interview were to be presented with no substantial transformations to guarantee intelligibility. Despite not having as many answers to Questions 3 and 4, the participants provided insightful thoughts and some advice. Therefore a small selection was made to be included in the piece. The pace of speech, the audio quality, the voices’ spectral range, and the background noise were considered. These aspects were essential for the piece’s pace and the general mix, as they are to be layered with other nonspoken elements.

The piece’s structure was set into three sections: testimonies, reflections on Mexican history, and the advice about and the positive aspects of indigenous and Mexican culture. Figure 2 shows this structure, the nonspoken materials used for each section, and spatialization. The second section is of particular relevance, as participants talk about the effects of the Spanish colonization on Mexican culture and the value of Mexican pre-Hispanic cultures.

Creating the nonspoken elements to support the narrative was challenging, as speech and nonspoken elements needed to be balanced to produce a powerful narrative. For the first section, synthetic sounds containing mostly intervals of perfect fifths and minor thirds, with varying rhythmic patterns,

Figure 2. Nonspoken sound materials and speech spatialization used in “Nuestras voces.”  
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were created to produce a dramatic atmosphere. The sounds for the historical context section were mainly made of rhythmic, metal-like textures and gestures based on shaped noise. These sounds are intended to provide an atmosphere to reflect upon. As the second section blends with the final one, sounds resembling falling water were introduced and combined with synthetic pulses and flute-like sounds to create a positive atmosphere.

The eight-channel spatialization was essential in the composition process. The speech’s spatialization in the first section was designed to surround the listener with voices from all directions for dramatic purposes. The second and third sections were designed with the speech in stereo configurations (channels 1, 2, 3, and 4), as shown in Figure 2. This is intended to keep the listener’s attention focused on one area, in contrast to the first section. The nonspoken sounds are mixed over all eight channels.

The final eight-channel mix was made of two eight-channel stems, one containing only speech and the other containing all other materials. A stereo reduction was created as the piece was intended to be presented in spaces where multichannel concert setups might not be available, as well as for online presentation.

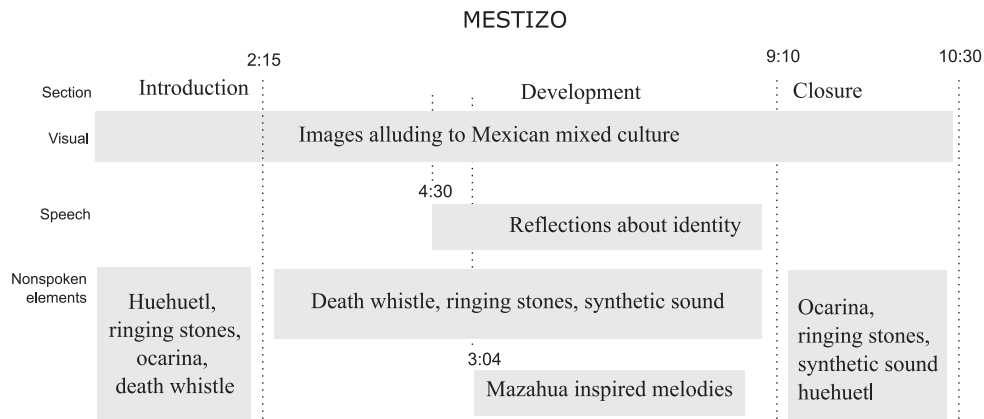
## Mestizo

This audiovisual piece was composed in 2020. It aimed to depict the identity conflict and racism caused by the concept of mestizo. It is based on the idea of fragmentation as an analogy to the fragmented identities resulting from colonization, the eternal conflict between European and indigenous roots, and the preference for the former. A fragment of this piece can be found at [https://doi.org/10.1162/COMJ\\_a\\_00634](https://doi.org/10.1162/COMJ_a_00634).

## Composition and Challenges

The visual part is made of images representing the Mexican mixed inheritance and folklore. Some images allude to Mexican indigenous cultures, whereas others depict Spanish buildings and traditions. The mix of both cultures is represented, for instance, by buildings with Spanish architecture decorated with indigenous crafts, atria in churches decorated with colorful skulls from the Mexican holiday Day of the Dead, folkloric dance costumes, hats, piñatas, and mariachi, to name just a few. These images are sometimes presented with a mosaic effect as a metaphor for fragmentation, as they represent

Figure 3. Structure and materials used in “Mestizo.” (© 2020 Rosalía Soria Luz, all rights reserved.)



Mexican cultural heritage, which is fragmented due to identity conflict.

The piece contains a small selection of fragments from the interviews from 2018 and 2019. Finding these fragments required a new selection process. Even though there was an existing collection of labeled basic units, they did not contain labels specifying identity conflicts. The interviews were revised again, looking for comments on historical facts and their implications. Those interviews stood out, because not many people talked about these topics. In the small collection found for the piece, the participants emphasize the tendencies to reject the Mexican culture’s indigenous side and embrace the Spanish side. They comment on how, in regions closer to the border with the United States, people identify with that culture and how identity and a sense of belonging are difficult to find.

The sounds in the piece include samples of Mexican pre-Hispanic instruments, such as ocarinas, the death whistle, singing stones, and huehuetl. The inclusion of pre-Hispanic instruments aimed to create sonorities related to ancient Mexican civilizations in order to promote pride in them. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, no studio recordings were possible at the time, so the use of commercial samples was a practical solution (Rodriguez 2004). The piece also includes synthetic, harmonic sounds, flute-like sounds, and shaped noise. Most textures are derived from transformations of the instrument samples layered with synthetic sound materials.

The piece is made of three main sections: an introduction set to present images representing Mexican mixed culture. The second is a development section with reflections on identity, followed by a closure section. Figure 3 shows this structure. The sounds for the introduction are gestural and include huehuetl, singing stones, ocarina, and death whistle. Short words or phrases are also presented as gestures. These words are small fragments of the testimonies and work and will connect to longer fragments in the second section. The second section presents the interview’s fragments in full. When these fragments appear in the piece, the visual element is kept as a black background to give the listener time to focus on what is being said. This section includes singing stones and ocarina melodies accompanied by rhythmic percussion. These were inspired by indigenous dances from the Mazahua indigenous groups from central Mexico (NotimexTV 2015). These melodies accompany images depicting indigenous aspects of Mexican culture. The closing section presents ocarina, singing stones, and huehuetl sounds.

### Presentations and Reception

In Mexico, “Tabú” (2018) and “Nuestras voces” (2019) were presented in theatres or venues in cultural institutions (patios in Casas de Cultura) and over stereo public address systems. Most of the concerts were organized by me and took place in



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several central and southern Mexico states. The pieces were introduced as part of a program of acousmatic music.

The eight-channel version of “Tabú” has been presented only in Europe, primarily due to constraints with multichannel setups in venues in Mexico. For these presentations, a subtitled version was used. “Mestizo” (2020) was presented via YouTube online concerts due to Covid-19 restrictions in 2020 and 2021.

I briefly account for the comments and feedback received at different presentations. A systematic statistical analysis of the piece’s reception was not carried out, as the project’s goals were artistic (per FONCA regulations for art projects). On average, very few people disagreed with the opinions expressed in the pieces, suggested that the testimonies had been fabricated, or insisted that there was no racism and people just needed to learn their places. The vast majority had a positive reaction. There were comments such as that the pieces had been eye-opening and how now they were aware of the racist nature of certain practices widely accepted in Mexican culture. Young people showed particular enthusiasm. Some comments were that listeners identified with the pieces and would like the situation to change.

## Conclusion

This article presented compositional aspects and challenges that arose while composing three fixed media pieces addressing racism among Mexicans. The goal of engaging with society was fulfilled by conducting short interviews with Mexicans to collect relatable stories, testimonies, and advice. The goal of raising awareness about racism in Mexico was fulfilled through the narrative aspects of the pieces. Including testimonies made them potentially relatable and more accessible to broad audiences. The goal of calling for a change was fulfilled through the advice section in “Tabú”; the section on positive elements of Mexican culture in “Nuestras voces,” and invitations to reflect in fragments from “Mestizo.”

The three pieces tackled different cultural aspects to raise awareness: “Tabú” was planned and composed so people could openly talk about racism and for the audience to realize how racism materializes in Mexico. Presenting testimonies and comments about everyday racism may be a powerful way to create awareness. In particular, the piece emphasizes that rejecting and marginalizing the indigenous is one of Mexico’s most significant expressions of racism. The closing section containing advice can be a powerful way to call for change and promote action.

“Nuestras voces” presents personal testimonies of racism. These short fragments of people expressing anger or frustration may dramatically affect the audience. People might feel their struggles are voiced if they identify with the situations presented. The piece tackles a historical aspect of Spanish colonization. For centuries, the history of colonization in Mexico has been misrepresented, with claims that “the conquest of Mexico was the extraordinary against-all-odds achievement of a great hero” and “that it was European technological superiority” that allowed the victory (Mursell 2017). In recent years, historians have challenged this version. They argue that the kingdom of Tlaxcala was a powerful ally of the Spaniards and that this kingdom, the biggest enemy of the Aztecs, effectively conquered the vast region of ancient Mexico. This theory is supported by information in the Tlaxcallan codex (Gillespie 2011). Historians also argue that “the Aztecs were not barbarian or less civilized than Spaniards or Europeans; they just had different cultural practices” (cf. Mursell 2017).

In the piece, some participants discuss these historical facts and how Mexican history has been misrepresented. Such conversations were prompted by Question 3, “Why do you think we prefer the European aspects of our culture?” Listening to such aspects of Mexican history might help the audience realize that indigenous cultures were not and are not inferior or uncivilized, and that it is essential to value them.

One aim of the piece was to enhance the greatness of the indigenous cultures through a section promoting pride. For instance, there are fragments in which people say they are proud of their indigenous

language, of the indigenous ceremonial centers, or that they see beauty in indigenous faces. This may combat racism by promoting pride and a positive image of the indigenous. The fact that, during the interviews, Question 4 received fewer answers might reflect racism; in a culture in which the indigenous are regarded as inferior, such a question might be challenging to answer.

"Mestizo" addresses the identity conflict and the implicit racism arising from the meanings of "mestizaje" and "mestizo." These words appear to be inclusive and accepting of different cultures. In fact, they generate conflict. In the piece, one hears people saying that mestizos do not know where they belong. On the one hand, they are proud of their ancient indigenous heritage but reject the modern indigenous. On the other hand, they are proud, too, of their European heritage, but they might feel they are betraying their race. There are also fragments where people criticize the rejection of the indigenous (phenotypes and culture). The piece may help the listener reflect on these conflicts and accept their indigenous and European origins as equally valuable.

I consider that the electroacoustic genre lent itself well to raising awareness through these pieces. The testimonies were integrated into electroacoustic aesthetics to create powerful, relatable narratives. Similarly to documentary films, which "have the ability to make us see timely issues in need of attention, literally" (Nichols 1991, p. ix), these pieces might be seen as documentaries, reflecting the realities of racism in Mexico. This fact marks a difference from works composed in other genres, such as rap, where singers address racism through their lyrics, rhythm, and melody. Spatialization may enhance the message by enveloping the listener with testimonies and comments about racism to create a dramatic effect representing racism's ubiquity. Future work may involve a study on the effect of these pieces on the audience.

Regarding technical aspects, the challenge posed by environmental noise in the recorded interviews was turned into a strength, as the pieces acquired authenticity.

Having these pieces included in contemporary music concerts remains a challenge. Some curators

have shown no interest in adding them to a regular concert. As George E. Lewis (2018) points out: "It is the music curators and institutions who have been composing and improvising colonialism. What we would like these people to do is to help audiences discover what decolonization sounds like." Despite being composed for a Mexican audience, I hope these pieces can also be relevant to other Latin American countries.

## Acknowledgments

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