

## Book Marrones Write

This book is the product of the work that the Identidad Marrón (IM) collective has been carrying out since 2019 through workshops, cultural institutions, journalistic articles and conversations. In these interventions, we reflect on three main axes: a) the erasure of *marrón* (brown) cultural products due to racial and class-based exclusions, b) the practices of representation of *marrón* bodies, which are often mediated by white perspectives, c) self-representation as an anti-racist alternative and to produce new forms of *marrón* and dissident beauty.

The work gains specific intensity in 2020, during which discussions about institutional racism in Argentina re-emerged. On the one hand, this is the result of hemispheric processes of anticolonial dispute that originated in the Global North. On the other hand, 2020 is a time of condensation of anti-colonial disputes that made the recognition of racism in Argentina more and more unavoidable. The debate around racism is based on the strength of the historical struggles of the Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities and in turn, goes beyond the policies of identity recognition. Identidad Marrón is an anti-racist movement; it is a communal space for questions and explorations about *marrón* lives in their multiplicity.

This book is also the outcome of the cooperation established between IM and the research project Cultures of Anti-Racism in Latin America (CARLA), coordinated by the University of Manchester in collaboration with the National University of San Martín (UNSAM) and the University of Buenos Aires (UBA). The research included here documents the trajectories that challenge white supremacy as a social structure (as an idea and a practice) in Argentina and the rest of Latin America. The book is a collective production, compiled and edited by Florencia Alvarado, América Canela and Alejandro Mamani, with editorial support from Pablo Cossio and Ana Vivaldi.

The book proposes to make an intervention in the discussion about racism, which goes beyond multicultural policies. It proposes to reflect on racism as a structuring dimension in close relationship with other lines of difference and power. The book is simultaneously memories of activism and militancy associated with territories and vectors that connect.

This book is also an object which combines texts with illustrations, collages, and memes. It includes photos from the collective's archive, which is under construction, and images aimed for anti-racist critique and construction. The images here are part of a deliberate curatorial work by América Canela and Flora Alvarado. This book object was designed by Neko based on *marrón* perspectives, aesthetics, and politics. It is a tool that includes proposals for activities and an invitation to take over (*malonear*) cultural institutions and beyond.

### Part 1

#### MANIFESTO MARRÓN

Where are we, the *marrones*? Who writes about anti-racism? Where do we look for answers? How much is their guilt worth? Where does your family's gold come from? Who gets to read it? Who generates empathy? How many are we? What is a mirror? What colour is the Buenos Aires conurbation? And the prisons? And the shantytowns? Where are we? Where do you see your colour? Who are your mirrors? Where are we in the art books? Where are we? In what kind of images? Are these new images or photographs from the past century that show us naked, in fields? Where are we? Are we in the cities, in the metropolises? Where did we grow up? How much did you have to distance from your parents to be here today? When did you learn, *marrón*, to deny your origins, deny your features, avoid mirrors, and erase your ancestry? Is art a white profession? How much revenge is in your blood, *marrón*? Is our strength ours? Or it is the debt of pain that we inherit? For how long have you not seen your parents so you can come here? How many hours did they work? How long did they have to cry? Where are we, *marrón*? What turns into fuel? What pain, what hate, what rejection? How much revenge is in your blood, *marrón*? How much revenge is in your parents'? And in your grandparents'? Is questioning racism cannibalism? Is seeking justice cannibalism? How many of us come from people who spent years of their lives doing the same activity, day after day, without proper salary or social security contributions? And their children? Does racism question your identity and your children's children? Does racism ask? Do we have the answers? How much justice is in your blood, *marrón*?

***Marrón / Indigenous: Are there differences between being *marrón* and being Indigenous? How are the *marrón* and Indigenous connected?***

The ideology of Argentina as a white nation[1] was developed by the elites of the so-called 1880s Generation (the same ones responsible for the genocidal military campaigns known as the Conquest of the Desert) and favoured the concealment of Indigenous identities. This ideology promoted the disaffiliation of Indigenous (as well as Afro-descendant or *mestizo*) people and their communities. In exchange for doing this, they were promised incorporation into the nation. Thus, the entire population was encouraged to embrace European culture and lifestyles. This incorporation was never effective, and the population's homogenization around European values was not complete either. However, part of the efficiency of the white ideology was that people who identified as Indigenous, black, or mixed-race and who had lived in the city for generations, or as merchants or rural workers, stopped doing so. In other words, their specificity and their trajectories became imprecise, but their racialisation remained clear and visible. This racialisation is one of the mechanisms used for their subordination as a class: they were identified as *criollos*[2], *cabecitas negras*[3], people from the Buenos Aires conurbation, migrants (although they are not), shantytown dwellers. An example of the complexity of the racial order in Argentina can be found in how white shantytown dwellers, by the mere fact of living in a precarious neighbourhood, are racialised as "non-white". Their class condition, clothing, and popular habits are used to racialise them; they are repudiated insofar as they do not represent the aesthetic logic of bourgeois cities accustomed to a European-Anglo-Saxon

aesthetic. The children in the shantytowns do not perceive themselves as white since they have been socially assigned roles and values based on their class structure as "negros villeros". The mere fact of inhabiting a marginalised territory places them in the bottom echelon of the productive, social, and racial hierarchies. Likewise, the people of the rural north live under systems of whiteness that are different from those of the urbanised centres. In their villages, those who do not necessarily respond to the Indigenous phenotype are classified as white, and they perceive themselves as such. However, when they migrate to large cities like Buenos Aires, their bodies automatically become racialised since their phenotype, faces and skin colour are not white enough for the European standards that hegemonise the criterion for privilege in the city. The tonalities of the voice and social behaviours are also factors that racialise those who do not respond to the white parameters of the city.

On the other hand, plenty has been said about the confusing representation of these racialised features and bodies, as well as how the external eye defines those who are racialised. Somehow, *marrón*-Indigenous people end up being defined as otherness. An othering process unfolds, placing them as if they were from abroad and alienating everyone who has the *marrón*-Indigenous identity in their features. The presence of ancient communities and cultures that have inhabited Argentina before the arrival of the Spaniards is unacknowledged. They are not seen as from the land; they are included within the Argentine culture. On the contrary, the myth that phenotypically white immigrants from overseas built the Argentine nation is continually reinforced. This is not the truth.

This is not (all) the truth:

The city's space is one where groups and people with established Indigenous ancestry find it very difficult to recognise themselves as such. The process of recognition of who is an

Indigenous person begins at a political level. Since the 1980s and, especially in the 1990s, it has become something defined by legislation and public policy. This process restricts what and who is considered Amerindian and the requirements a community needs to fulfil to be recognised as Indigenous.

### **Thinking about the South from the South. What are the similarities and differences between racism in the United States and Argentina?**

Colourism becomes effective when, for example, social mobility and class are associated with European skin tones and phenotypes. Sociological studies show that people with a lighter complexion tend to have better careers and job opportunities in the Brazilian labour market. The specificity of colourism in Latin America and the Caribbean is a point that Stuart Hall (1985) discusses when he reflects on his experience growing up in Jamaica, aware that his skin was darker than the rest of his family. Colour was important in Jamaican society. Part of his family was middle-class, light-skinned and had European background; the fact that he was darker was the subject of gossip and lamentation for this side of his family. This distinction between colour and class disappeared when he arrived in England and was confronted with European racism, which saw him as an unequivocally black subject.

It is necessary to consider these historical trajectories. In Latin America, the state has cast light on racism through projects, plans or public policies, but these are generally aimed only at Afro-descendants. The need to visibilise the impact of the transatlantic trafficking of Afro people is present on the political agenda of governments, and it is essential to address this historical event when we talk about structural racism. Understanding racism as a universal issue is one of the most used and convenient premises for progressive sectors, academia, and even local politicians. From these places, racism towards the black community in the US and the most explicit forms in Argentina are denounced. Still, they deny internal-local racism within institutions and the structures that subordinate those who are racialised. Along these lines, the slogan #BlackLivesMatter has been a rallying cry in Argentina, but it has not been used to denounce trigger-happy murders carried out by the police in the different territories of the country as if they had no direct relationship with police brutality in the US. It seems easier to talk about trigger-happy police officers than racist crimes in working-class neighbourhoods. The skin colour of the boys and girls murdered in poor communities is never mentioned. Therefore, international anti-racism is often discussed in Argentina, but racism at the local level is neither questioned nor addressed. The main difference between Argentine and US racism is, then, their way of operating. Undoubtedly, the structural racism of our country generates an invisible layer in a white Argentina that does not assume itself racist.

### **Who are the Blacks (*negros*) in Argentina?**

In one way or another, racism in Argentina is associated with racism in the Global North. Our argument in this book -and Identidad Marrón's actions- is that we need to think about racism from Latin American and Argentine perspectives to contribute with a deep reflection about this issue from the Global South. Racism is entrenched, affirmed, and strengthened as a destructive power, a power of hatred, which singles out "whiteness" not just as skin colour but as a social status that gives access to economic, cultural, and educational opportunities. In the United States, it operates against Black people and against Hispanics (even if they are white). In Argentina, the same thing happens with specific structural traces that are neither problematised nor made visible. As we already pointed out, white-skinned people born in the slums are immediately categorised as "negros de mierda" (fucking *negros*). Racism ceases to be something only attached to phenotype and becomes a form of violence directed against a particular class: the masses. It configures a social and racial hierarchisation process by which one's position in society is racialised. The ways of living of the people who live in working-class neighbourhoods are also racialised. In everyday life, specific ways of speaking, dressing, and even eating and specific cultural consumption and production patterns are defined as good and respectable or as ordinary and "negro". This was precisely the point that was addressed in "Una mesa propia" (A proper table), an intervention at Buenos Aires Museum of Decorative Art by Identidad Marrón (see image).

There has not been an in-depth debate about structural, institutional, and interpersonal racism in Argentina. Only individual actions of discrimination based on skin colour are denounced in the media and individually. However, as shown in the work "Una mesa propia", racism operates in all spheres of society. It is transformed and reproduced in its most subtle forms. One of the spheres where racism is recreated while denied is that of institutional spaces, including the public administration. Public policy sphere becomes a central space since it defines access to social rights. For example, how can the right to abortion of *marronas* from working-class sectors be guaranteed if racism in the health service is not recognised? Another debate is still pending about value and racial stratification: how much is being white or non-white worth? This can be measured in concrete terms. For example, how much money do whites and non-whites with the same qualifications earn? There is factual information about this that, if there were political will, would allow a numerical measurement of the effects of racism in the labour market. This, of course, would show that talent and effort are not the only factors that define people's professional success.

**How do the shades of brown (*marrón*) operate within the modalities of colourism?**

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Argentine white elites built the “melting pot” myth. Although the image might resonate with miscegenation and could include Indigenous and the Afro elements, in Argentina the Generation of the 1880s used the idea to emphasise the disappearance of non-white people. The “melting pot” in Argentina was said to be composed of people of European origin who would make the non-European element disappear. It was argued that the cultures of the different European regions merged to form a modern, civilised and entirely Western type of culture. This narrative of Europeanisation was used to justify the omission of the non-European. From that moment on, an alleged “Argentine race” built from this European melting pot was presented as the only genesis of the Argentine people. Those who had Indigenous features were supposed to hide, in one way or another, and whiten themselves to participate in the nation's political life. In this way, the Argentine case operated similarly to the ideology and structures of *mestizaje* in other Latin American countries. For the construction of this myth of white Argentina, the success of the military campaigns that occupied the autonomous Indigenous lands of Patagonia and Chaco was reaffirmed. Afro-descendant people were considered “extinct” or gradually disappearing, as the Nation-State found consolidation. The idea of the Melting Pot in theory, is inclusive. However, in practice, it was categorically repressive against Indigenous and Afro phenotypes. Under this idea, the children of white migrants from Europe were categorised as legitimate citizens. In contrast, the children of migrants with Indigenous or *marrón* features were labelled as foreigners, even if they were Argentines. This foreignisation of *marrón*-Indigenous and Afro people again reveals the processes of otherness that were applied, and are used, towards those who are not white enough to participate in the melting pot. Unfortunately, this myth was cemented in the structures of the state by the white-creole elites.

### **Gender and Racism: Why do LGTBIQ2+ diversity have to be anti-racist and address the struggle of the *marrones*?**

The precarity of women’s jobs racialised as *marrón* means that poverty has been feminised. Human rights progress has allowed for the inclusion of socially relegated groups, such as trans people and women, and sexually diverse people. The improvement is impressive if we consider that, for example, until 2012, it was illegal for people to wear clothes of the opposite. This was abolished when the identity law was passed, which was one of the most advanced worldwide. The transvestite-trans identity in Argentina has positioned itself as a gender identity, against all odds and after years of struggle. Being a transvestite is an identity that breaks with the binarism imposed by the state and is undoubtedly one of the most essential achievements in the sphere of gender politics of recent times. However, most posters, advertisements, and videos representing the LGTBIQ2+ community show white people. Very few – if any - are *marrón* or Indigenous. The most interesting thing about this is that two of Argentina’s most essential trans activists were of *marrón*-Indigenous descent and from northern Argentina: Lohana Berkins and Diana Sacayan. To this, we can add Daniela Ruiz, a member of Identidad *Marrón* who supports transvestites of Indigenous descent who arrive in the city from the interior and suffer violence for being transvestites and racialised.

### **Do the Police suspect more of *marrón* bodies?**

The foreignization of brown-Indigenous people has repercussions on police violence in working-class neighbourhoods. Trigger-happy cases are nothing more than racist crimes. The police mainly kill and repress marrones and poor people. Do we know of any case of a rich person suffering from trigger-happy police officers? Thinking that racist murders at the hands of state agencies happen elsewhere prevents us from seeing the murders of *marrón* and racialised people as racism. The national newspapers present their deaths as trigger-happy cases. Is it just a coincidence? No, it is not: police violence is not associated with local racism, and that denial has no political colour. Racism is something that we can see in a distant reality (like in the United States), but not in Argentina. March 21 marks the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to commemorate the killing of 69 people by the police in a peaceful demonstration against the apartheid pass laws in South Africa (Sharpeville). This day invites us to reflect on police violence in the world and, in particular towards the racialised sectors of Latin America. Reviewing this is the first step towards asking ourselves about police and institutional violence in Argentina and the fact that the country's prison population is predominately *marrín*. At the same time, those who administer justice in court are white.

In the context of the health emergency produced by the Covid-19 epidemic, extreme poverty, violence, and structural inequality between those bodies that matter and bodies that do not become more prominent. Trigger-happy crimes increased (or, more appropriately, murders of *marrón* people committed by the police with the backing of the state). We can see racism in the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Still, we cannot see the same racist violence against *marrón* bodies like Luis Espinoza (who was kidnapped and murdered by the police in Tucumán) or Ceferino Nadal (who was asphyxiated in downtown Tucumán). Media complicity and oblivion are manifested in the cases of Facundo Astudillo (arrested and disappeared by the Buenos Aires police), Brandon Romero (murdered by the Mar del Plata police), Lucas Gonzales (murdered by the City of Buenos Aires police), Rafael Nahuel and Elías Garay (who were killed in defence of their Mapuche Indigenous territories) and dozens more who were not only killed by the police but also subjected to social oblivion and judicial impunity. Racism in Argentina, in this sense, is a reality that needs to be analysed. Racism invades social relations so that Indigenous, Afro, *marrón*, migrant, and peasant communities are discarded or annihilated. The

fight against racism is a fight against violence directed towards non-hegemonic, precarious, marginalised and undesirable bodies.

As we mentioned earlier, only racism against Afro-descendants is identified in Latin America. The racialised masses suffer a form of racism that is structural yet invisible. The logic of racial discrimination are characterized as xenophobia, such as the rejection of other cultures. However, racism is the fundamental variable to understand why trigger-happy crimes only affect *marrón* bodies.

### **Is there a racial division of labour? The racialisation and feminization of precarious work**

The professional opportunities of marron people are often socially conditioned. In general, the masses are the ones in precarious employment. For example, they are the ones who work the land, the ones who sacrifice their body to bring food to the table. They are the breadwinners, peasants, harvesters, sowers, greengrocers. They are the ones who produce food. However, they rarely have access to social security. Another fundamental aspect is the racialised feminisation of precarious work: the women work in the harvest, in domestic work. The racialised nature of their working conditions remains invisible, condemning them to precariousness. Identidad Marrón is part of a generation that aims to make visible the historical inequality suffered by their ancestors to claim absolute and effective equality in the access to rights. In this sense, we ask ourselves: where are the social security contributions? Where are the unpaid contributions that racialised people should have received? Domestic work is a feminised job. According to the state, in Argentina, 76.8% of domestic cleaners are employed in precarious conditions. It is common in our society to understand that the employer is doing the employee a favour if social security contributions are paid. However, the employee is entitled to this by law. Emotional ties occasionally emerge between cleaners and their employers. Employers often accuse domestic workers who request that their social security contributions are paid of being “ungrateful”. They claim that they are trying to take advantage of them despite being considered “part of the family”. Even politics is no stranger to this. Politicians don’t care about the injustices suffered by racialised migrant women unless they can use them politically.



## **Part 2**

***Think structural racism from your own experience***

### ***A marrón poem***

*By Melissa Ibaló, visual artist and occasional writer from a migrant and working-class family. She studies Visual Arts at the National University of the Arts and is a high-school philosophy teacher at the Teacher Training Institute No. 42, "Leopoldo Marechal".*

### ***From many places and from none***

*They call my dad bolita[4]*

*And to think that he denies being from Santiago del Estero*

*When they asked him his Nationality, he answered: Santiago del Estero*

*I don't think he's ashamed of his origin*

*He is tired of chewing dung*

*He doesn't like to be told that they are drunk and lazy, especially him, who doesn't sleep the siesta*

*He always gets up at the same time*

*And he stands out for 15 years of perfect attendance at work*

*He says that he would have liked to study*

*But with hunger and heat you can't think*

*He longs for his little adobe house and the cot where he grew up*

*The only thing he doesn't miss is harvesting cotton*

*He migrated 34 years ago*

*And he still misses his land*

*I know he laughs when they call him bolita*

*He prefers to be a foreigner*

*He doesn't want to be called lazy*

*That's why he lies and says he is Paraguayan*

*He repeats what he learned from his mother-in-law*

*He likes to insult people*

*Who always remain intrigued*

*Since they don't know where that face is from*

*They can't insult him, for me he gives away himself a little*

*Because he keeps dragging the "r" sound and, although he doesn't like the guaracha, when he hears it, he smiles.*

*He also says that he divorced my mum*

*Because he married his job*

*Not because he wants it that way*

*It is a contract with the state; he doesn't like to work but it is the way to survive the system*

*So what can I tell you about revolution and emancipation*

*He knows what hunger and misery is, I have the privilege that he gave me*

*To have a roof to sleep, clothes to wear, food to eat and the chance to study*

*He gave me a geographical reference*

*That gives me an identity Although my features remind him of Santiago He knows better than any lefty That no matter where we come from On this land, we are all brothers.*

### **Part 3**

*Proposal for an activity / Secondary Education These activities are designed for secondary school students aged between 12 and 18.*

#### **Activity 1 Antiracist Memes Workshop**

This Antiracist Memes workshop will help you learn about the meme culture and how content and images can be mixed to create an understandable and empathic message. We propose to analyse the background of memes. We will ask ourselves what they mean, how they represent reality, how we interpret them and how or what social roles they reflect in everyday life.

#### **Requirements:**

A projector, TV or computer

An Internet connection

Templates to print in QR 1

You can use [memegenerator.es/](http://memegenerator.es/) or QR 2 to have examples of memes

You can use QR 3 of racist memes as an example

Some markers or pencils to write the sentences of each meme

**First steps:** We are going to analyse a selection of well-known memes in social networks. It is recommended to check those available in the QR3 or others that are considered appropriate for the development of the activity. Various examples of viral memes can be found at [memegenerator.es/](http://memegenerator.es/) (QR2). In the first place, we will think about the images that make up the selected memes, based on questions that inquiry the meaning and the concept that said meme contains. We will begin the workshop by observing or sharing the ideas that the memes naturalise.

**Activity:** The memes found in QR3 represent situations of racism towards *marrón* people with Indigenous features. We suggest that you start by asking or making observations about some issues that the images represent. Some memes deal with beauty standards and what constitute socially accepted bodies and skin colours; others deal with racialised poverty or ridicule the masses.

To trigger the discussion, you can use the following questions:

- What makes us laugh about these memes?
- Why do we find the daily practices of working-class communities funny?
- Whom do we laugh at the most: the upper classes or the lower classes?
- low?
- Which faces and bodies are beautiful, and which are not? Why?

Next, with the templates found in this QR1, or others, you will design a meme based on the questions previously discussed. You will be able to assemble the memes with the printed images and complete them with sentences. The idea is that this creation inverts common memes that make fun of the masses. The aim is for it to develop an anti-racist perspective.

### **Conclusion:**

Comment on the meme with the phrase that each one used, and then share the reflection. You can put together a collage with all the memes and leave them in the classroom to show the product of today's work.

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[1] Article 25 of the National Constitution ratifies the myth of white Argentina coming from ships: “The Federal Government will encourage European immigration, and it will not restrict, limit or burden with any taxes the entrance into Argentine territory of foreigners who come with the goal of working the land, improving the industries and teach the sciences and the arts.”

[2] A word commonly used in contemporary Argentina to refer to people with a rural background or ancestry. It can at times imply that the person is mixed-race.

[3] A term that was often used by the middle and upper classes to refer pejoratively to the working class, especially during the 1940s and 1960s. Though it was seen as a condemnation of socially unacceptable behaviour and Peronist allegiance, it implied non-whiteness and rural background.

[4] A derogatory term to refer to Bolivian immigrants.