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The Peruvian minstrel: an analysis of the representations of blackness in the performance of *El Negro Mama* from 1995 to 2016

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The Peruvian minstrel: an analysis of the representations of blackness in the performance of
El Negro Mama from 1995 to 2016

by

Ana Lucía Mosquera Rosado

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master in Liberal Arts
with a concentration in Africana Studies
School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies
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discourse, media studies.

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DEDICATION

To my parents, Ana Maria and Carlos, who sacrifice their dreams so I could fulfill mine.

To my ancestors, a remarkable example of strength and resistance.

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ABSTRACT

Peruvian mass media has failed in addressing and representing the cultural and ethnic diversity of its country, as the presence and representation of ethnic minorities (indigenous and Afro-Peruvian) are almost exclusively reduced to the reproduction of stereotypes in comedy shows, in which they are often racialized and the target of offenses directly related with their ethnic identities. The analysis will focus on the figure of El Negro Mama, a very popular character in Peruvian television thought to be a portrait of the Afro-Peruvian population. Through the use of textual analysis, the paper will explore of this character in order to determine the performativity of blackness in national television and the use of racist discourses in the national media and their direct relation with the reproduction of stereotypes and racist language. The research, then, seeks to provide an analysis of the transformation of the discourses that this character produced to show the variations of the racist discourse affecting this ethnic group and the transformation of the portrayals and interactions of the character when publicly rejected by the Afro-Peruvian civil society

INTRODUCTION

Peru is, definitely, a very diverse country that gathers an extensive group of different racial, ethnic and linguistic groups that have historically contributed to the creation and transformation to the national identity. Unfortunately, although the Peruvian society has now adopted multiculturalism as a discourse, this diversity is not a synonym of representation or visibility for most of these groups, who continue to be left outside the construction of *peruanidad*.

One of the spaces in which these groups disappear is the media, and since the Peruvian media is highly influential in the positioning and perpetuation of ideas and beliefs, the issues of visibility are fundamental and influential for the processes of social construction. In addition to this, the media contributes to perpetuating a beauty standard that privileges whiteness, leaving limited spaces for other racial groups to appear in it.

The focus of this research is the presence in the media of the Afro-Peruvian population, which represents 3.7% of the Peruvian population according to official numbers published in 2018 by the Peruvian Census and Statistics Bureau. In order to conduct an analysis of the images of this population in the media, the research will focus on the figure of El Negro Mama, a character that presumes a long trajectory in the Peruvian media and has become beloved, popular and almost untouchable.

El Negro Mama is a television figure that emerged in the mid-1990s, and that gained fame by depicting a criminal black man who used his little intelligence to take

advantage of innocent people and take away their money or belongings. Created and interpreted by the Peruvian comedian Jorge Benavides, Negro Mama was able to overcome many obstacles, critiques and even legal processes to continue existing as one of the most prominent comic characters of all times. His survival was possible, in part, due to his ability to adapt and modify aspects of his personality that resulted in the elimination and transformation of some of his most particular traits. Though this has not always helped him, and his personality caused him a temporary disappearance from television, Negro Mama is always capable of making powerful comebacks and to retain the devoted love of his fans.

With this in mind, the research will address the visual and discursive aspects of these representations to address issues of race, ethnicity, racism, racial prejudice and stereotypes, in relation to the development of this character and within the context of the portrayal of ethnically and racially diverse groups in the country.

When analyzing the state of the media in relation to race in Peru, Tanya Golash-Boza, argues that Afro-Peruvians are misrepresented, folklorized and associated with positions of surveillance, since they are often portrayed on Peruvian television as subservient, unintelligent, and exotic. For instance, telenovelas –considered as one of the most popular genres of Peruvian television- reproduce the established hierarchies portraying blacks in positions of submission, since these representations reflect the normalization of race dynamics and the uplifting of whiteness.

In relation to other sources of popular media, the scenario is not different. Golash-Boza addresses the issue of the advertising industry, in which 70 percent of the participants are white even though they are a minority group in the Peru. Moreover, she relates these representations to the legitimization of negative stereotypes inside of the Afro-Peruvian

population, referring to some testimonies that equated blackness with ugliness and lack of intelligence (Golash-Boza, 2011:163).

In addition to this, there are some technical documents that describe the nature of these representations in the media. One of these documents is a technical report written by Wilfredo Ardito (2014), who explores the nature and the nuances of the representations of both indigenous and Afro-Peruvian populations. In this report, the author does a very detailed work that provides a current evaluation of the images of these populations.

For instance, when referring to the Afro-Peruvians, he manifests that their presence is limited in written and audiovisual media, and their appearance on television is restricted to certain types of roles, mostly in comedy programs in which they are represented by non-Afro-Peruvians who employ personification techniques like the use of blackface and physical prosthetics.

To Ardito (2014), the portrayal of Afro-Peruvians in television is defined by two specific characteristics. The first one is related to their invisibility, as he argues that this population is “invisible and [they] do not appear in fiction series or in television shows as hosts.” (Ardito, 2014: page number) However, they may be seen in a very low percentage in reality shows, even though they are extremely racialized and identified by their racial identity. The second one is related to their appearance in comedy programs, since he states that they are portrayed physically by the exaggeration of their physical features, and in terms of their personalities, they will be often portrayed as lazy, naive and with low intellectual capacity (exemplified by the common Peruvian expression: *I might be black but I have a brain*). Overall, Ardito recognizes that these representations affect Afro-Peruvians

negatively and they contribute to the reproduction of racism and racial prejudice towards them, as communication media has a big impact on the social dynamics.

Concepts and definitions

This section will feature the key concepts that this thesis will use, in order to define them in accordance to the objectives of the research.

Many scholars have addressed the issue of conceptualizing *race*, and they have all argued that race is not a static concept and has varied along time. Traditionally referred to phenotypical characteristics, the concept of race is also used to assign characteristics to a specific group of people based on their physical appearance. Though race as a concept does not longer have a scientific validation, scholars as Wade (2010) and Valdivia (2013) to it as a social construction, since it does not exist as a biological entity, but rather as a form of social categorization (Valdivia, 2013: 36).

For the matter of this research, it is necessary to address the debates generated around this concept in Peru and specify how it applies to the Afro-Peruvian population, so that it applies to the discussion of the depictions of race through the analysis of Negro Mama.

In an analysis of colonialism and power, Anibal Quijano mentions that the concept of *race* was based in the establishment of supposed biological differences that positions some people in a natural situation on inferiority in comparison to others as a way to grant legitimacy to the relations of domination originated by the *conquest*. (Quijano, 2000: 220). Similarly to this description, De La Cadena remarks that academics used the concept as a characteristic that could be applied to human groups that share similarities of appearance,

but who also share other aspects as manner and speech, for example, and that these factors persisted over time, becoming hereditary (De La Cadena, 2001: 5).

However, is important to mention the particularities that this concept has when referring to the Afro-descendant population, and most specifically, to the Afro-Peruvian populations. For this, it is necessary to state that authors as Valdivia (2013), for the Afro-descendant population in Peru, the concept of race does not only relate to the phenotype, but also to the ancestry and the cultureⁱⁱⁱ (...) the group or collective identity of this population is defined mainly by the skin color as a key element of identification and of external categorization (Valdivia, 2013: 28)

This is important to determine that, in the case of the Afro-Peruvian population, the concept of race incorporate an element product of the process of racialization, but that is a concept in which the civil society and political leaders have had a fundamental role. The concept, thus, is constructed with the criteria of external categorization, but incorporate culture, heritage, traditions and customs as an important part of it. This examination of the concept will be useful later in the analysis in which these additional elements will come into place as part of the humor developed by the character of Negro Mama.

A concept related to race is *prejudice*, defined as a belief either negative or positive, attributed to a person or a group of people, without having enough information that allows to establishing a connection between these conceptions and the reality, often reproduced in social interactions and transformed into a general belief that resonates and affects the social interactions. For the effects of this research, I will refer to the concept of *racial prejudice*,

defined as a specific type of prejudice that uses race thinking and racial ideologies to provide the content and justify these beliefs.

Another concept associated with race is *stereotype*. According to Downing and Husband (2005) ^{iv} state that the concept of stereotype draws attention to the “psychological dimensions of ethnic image formation and retention”, and the ways to which people translate these images to the daily interaction with multiple groups of people. In addition to this, I will refer to racial stereotypes, identified by Gandy^v as a notion that includes belief systems that are assumed to characterize most of the members of identifiable groups.

In relation to the analysis of the discourse, according to Patricia Hill Collins (2014), a *discourse* is a “set of ideas and practices that, when taken together, organize both the way a society defines certain truths about itself and the way it puts together social power” (Hill Collins, 2014, 350).

Also, it is important to define *racist discourse*. Teun Van Dijk (2007) states that the production of racist discourses requires the establishment of a dominant class -also known as an elite- that immerses in processes of Othering in order to create and maintain differences that separate them from the ones they seek to dominate and the discourse, thus, becomes a necessary tool to reproduce the racist ideologies that maintain a social hierarchical order. This process generates a division between *Us* and *Them*, and in this context, the racist discourse is based on the process of emphasizing and deemphasizing the positive and negative characteristics of these groups in order to perpetuate the hierarchical structures of domination and reinforce the preconceived ideas around these groups (Van Dijk, 2007: 28).

Finally, it is necessary to define *media representation*. According to Hall (1997), representation is the process by which members of a culture use language to produce

meaning (Hall, 1997: 62). With this in mind, *media representation* refers to the standard way in which the media will attribute characteristics, values, and roles to a group of people, and that will affect the general perceptions of these groups. As Downing and Husband mention, media representation is a system of narrative images and discourses issued by the mass media. (Downing and Husband, 2005: 5)⁶

Research question and unit of analysis

The main research question of this thesis is *ow does El Negro Mama represent Afro-Peruvian identity in the JB news comedy?* and *“How does the representation of El Negro Mama in the JB news comedy change over time?* In order to answer this question, the thesis will analyze the selected media artifact having as variables *media representation* and *racist discourse*.

Research Design

The research will use a qualitative method to examine specifically the images and portrayals of Afro-Peruvians in national television. For instance, the research will be conducted using textual analysis, applied to the audiovisual footage of the television appearances of an Afro-Peruvian character.

Textual analysis will be used to examine the constructions of the images of Afro-Peruvians in television and will make possible to describe these constructions and the influence that they had in the development of other characters that represent the Afro-Peruvian population.

In the same line, the research will examine the narrative construction of the character and the ways in which the text has been constructed in relation to the racial and ethnic characteristics of Afro-Peruvians. Although the image analysis is indispensable to conduct the research, the analysis will highlight the variation in the discourse to understand the ways in which the racist discourse is modified and acquire more implicit variants throughout the years.

Methodology

In order to answer the research question, the research will conduct a case study that will focus on El Negro Mama. This character was selected as the focus of the case study because of his relevance in the national media and his popularity among the Peruvian population. In addition to this, due to his long presence in the Peruvian television, it has functioned as a standard of representation used by other artists to create images of Afro-Peruvians.

The character is also very controversial, as it has been publicly rejected by the Afro-Peruvian civil society and the Human Rights movement. For instance, a particular sequence generated controversy in the media and was sanctioned by the Ethics Board of the Media Companies, an organism managed by the Ministry of Transport and Communications, in 2010.ⁱⁱⁱ The portrayal of the Afro-Peruvian man in this show is, then, the portrayal of an uneducated person, with a lack of manners and primitive behavior, but always servile to others.

With this in mind, the research will highlight the variations in the discourse and the visual construction of the character, and because of this, it will address his early stages, his

development in the 2000s and his changes after some public controversies generated in the 2010s. Thus, the research will examine three groups of audiovisual footage. The first one will contain two six-minute clips of comedy sketches of the mid-1990s; the second one will contain one twenty-minute clip that generated a legal battle between the creator of the character and the Afro-Peruvian civil society, and the third one will contain two 13-minute clips of the new phase of this character.

The research, thus, will analyze the commonalities along time that these pieces to relate them to the racist discourse that impacts negatively the Afro-Peruvians. By choosing pieces produced in different years, the research intends to show the variations of the racist discourse about affecting this ethnic group and the transformation of the portrayals and interactions of the character when publicly rejected by the Afro-Peruvian civil society. Furthermore, the research will provide an analysis of the transformation of the discourse to encounter commonalities in the ways this character constructs a certain image of the Afro-Peruvian population, and how the racist discourse is constantly present, even when the character is modified and adjusted through time.

This document will be divided into five chapters. The first chapter will present a synthesis of the literature that has been written about media representation in Latin America. The chapter will present eight sources -including books and articles-, and will examine their main argument, the analysis of the authors in relation to the subject of media and representation, and their contribution to the academic field. The literature review will focus mostly on the issue of representation of indigenous and Afro-descendant population in the media, and the relation between race and discourse in Latin America.

The second chapter will focus on the first stages of Negro Mama, by examining the character in the period between the mid 1990s and the early 2000s. The chapter will analyze the construction of the character in terms of physical appearance and personality traits; and his dynamics when interacting with non-Afro-Peruvian and Afro-Peruvian characters in the sequences examined.

The third chapter will center on the controversy that the character generated in the late 2000s and will also look at the ways in which he was depicted by his creator, Jorge Benavides, before and after this public confrontation. The chapter will also address the mediatic campaign that Benavides promoted that gave Negro Mama some additional personality traits.

The fourth chapter will investigate the new discourses that Negro Mama adopted after the sanctioned generated by the 2010 controversy. By looking at the last period of the character, the chapter will examine the counternarratives that sought to reverse the categorization of Negro Mama as racist, and the transformation of Mama into an anti-racist advocate.

Finally, the conclusions will summarize main findings, accomplishments and shortcomings of the research, and will propose additional research routes that will contribute to the study of media representations of the Afro-Peruvian population.

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The literature review will present a detailed revision of literature related to the status of the Latin American media and its relation to the representation of ethnic and racial minorities with a special focus on the Afro-descendant population, the existence of racist discourse and ethnic stereotypes in the region.

Although the main focus of the thesis is the Afro-descendant population since the majority of the documents explored are related to this theme, it will also provide a general analysis of the representation of race and the discourse in Latin America. The literature review, thus, will examine the different arguments, views and methodologies that explore this issue from multiple perspectives.

With this in mind, the sources will be the most general approaches that include an overview of the addressing of race in Latin America through discourses, and more specific analysis of media in its relation to race and ethnicity.

Racist discourse in Latin America

The addressing of race in Latin America is an issue studied from multiple perspectives. However, the use of discourse as a mean to reproduce racist ideologies in the region has been understudied by the academia. Because of it, the book *Racismo y discurso*

en America Latina is an important text that provides a very relevant overview of the forms that racism acquires throughout the region.

The book was edited by Teun Van Dijk, a Dutch scholar who has centered his career in the development of academic work related to the analysis of discourse and its connection to race, racism, discrimination and prejudice. This work, then, compiles the work of scholars in eight countries to address the particularities of race and racist discourse and the nuances that these discourses have, depending on the demographics and the different media through which they are spread.

The publication includes the conceptualizing of racist discourse and the basic characteristics that it needs to have to be considered as such. In an effort to simplify the analysis of discourse and the addressing of race in it, Van Dijk specifies that discourse is constructed around the concepts of *us* and *them*, with *us* being the hegemonic group in power to determine who is considered as Other (Van Dijk, 2007: 29)^{viii}.

In this context, Van Dijk identifies four conditions on which the racist discourse is constructed: it emphasizes the positive in *us* while deemphasizing the positive in *them*; and emphasizes the negative in *them* while deemphasizing the negative in *us*^{ix}. This simple matrix of analysis is useful to the evaluation of discourse and is present in the work presented in the book, since these conditions apply to the different analysis of race in discourse presented by the authors.

The book is focused on the development of discourses about ethnic and racial minorities in Latin America and evaluates different types of media to provide specific analysis on the ways in which discourse is constructed from multiple scenarios; and presents various forms of research: from political discourse analysis to official discourses in

written media and racism in social media, it is possible to see how racism affects society from different aspects and how discourse can contribute to its establishment and justification.

Most of the essays in the book analyze racism in media and do a revised examination of the different type of public manifestations of racism to show the multiple expressions of the racist discourses. Because of it, the essays present points of convergence that make visible the constant appearance of the elites as the main creators and promoters of the discourses that seek to maintain a hegemonic ideology and restrict the opportunities for the minorities to participate equally in the social contexts.

For instance, the book addresses the process of a national identitarian discourse in Argentina, and the construction of whiteness and blackness through the media in Brazil, just to mention some specific cases. These essays engage in a discussion of the importance of discourse to the construction of national, racial and ethnic identities, arguing primarily that the class hierarchies affect the ways in which discourses are built.

The Argentinian case focuses mostly in the failures of the multicultural discourse and the erasure of the indigenous, Afro-descendant and migrant populations from the natural identity, addressing the role of a double discourse that is constructed from the elites but reproduced differently among social and economic classes, creating a private elite discourse and a public mass discourse.

These types of discourses, identified as elitist racism and popular racism, are both rooted in the hegemonic ideologies that privileged whiteness and locate brown and black bodies –indigenous, mestizo and Afro-descendant populations– but are formed and manifested in different spaces and ways. For instance, while the elitist racism is generated

in the middle and upper classes and manifested in a more explicit way, though in private spaces; the popular racism is expressed in public spaces and generated mostly in the low classes.

These discourses, despite being different, are interdependent and settle the bases for the reproduction of racist discourses widely supported by the citizens and justified in the different social spheres. While looking at the nature of the racist discourses, the authors enhance the responsibility of the elites in the Othering of the non-white racial groups and the reinforcement of the dichotomy of *us* and *them*, described by Van Dijk as the core of the racist discourse. An example of this are the essays in which the authors analyze the discourses of the others created by the Guatemalan and Peruvian elites, characterized by the discrediting of those identified as *Others* in order to justify the social divisions (Van Dijk, 2007: 344)^{vi}.

One of the types of media the book evaluates is the written media, showing the ways in which the press covers the particular events that involve racial and ethnic minorities. According to the authors, the coverage on issues involving these groups often ignore their collective narratives, the importance of their own cultural forms, and instead focus on their marginality, their association with criminality and other negative traits.³

Similarly, the authors examine the construction of the visual narratives about these groups through the analysis of television, agreeing on the fact that these minorities are both underrepresented and misrepresented, and that contributes to their association with stereotypes and their location as Othered subjects^{vii}.

The other, then, is determined by the place and time of the analysis. For instance, throughout the book it is possible to see studies about indigenous and Afro-descendant

communities primarily, but in some countries, the racist discourse is directed towards migrant communities that have increased their number in the last decades.

The book is an important point to begin the discussion of racism manifested through the discourse and the spoken word. This compilation, thus, is an indispensable material for consultation due to the diversity of its contents and for showing within this diversity the commonalities of the manifestation of racism in the region.

The issues of race and representation in the Latin America cinema

The second group of sources provide a more specific analysis of the state of visual media and the issues of race and representations. The documents presented in the following section will address the problems and the challenges that the representation of race has in Latin America.

Robert Stam (1997) does a specific analysis of Brazilian cinema to examine the ways in which Afro-Brazilian are represented in relation to their white counterparts. Stam starts the book by making a comparison between the ways in which race and ethnicity were established in the United States and in Brazil, since he considers necessary to understand the issues of representation and racial ideologies in accordance with other racially plural societies in the region.^{xiii} By the use of textual and visual analysis, the author presents an analysis from a historical perspective, from which he presents social and cultural context to introduce the issues of representation, misrepresentation and underrepresentation of Afro-Brazilians in the national cinema.

The author argues that the representation of non-white ethnic groups is strictly related to the representation of whites, since this allows for the white elites to construct

their own images^{xv}. It is possible, then, to observe similarities between Stam and Van Dijk, since they both agree in the fact that the construction of the discourses focus on emphasizing the positive characteristics of the dominant group.

Stam states that, during the process of filmmaking and producing, the group in control decides and regulate the images of the Afro-Brazilian population to create a binary between one and the other and reproduce stereotyped images of the non-dominant group.

In order to develop his argument, Stam uses a comparative method to examine the role that Afro-Brazilians have had through the years and the quality of their participation in cinematographic productions, framing this analysis in the historical evolution on multiculturalism in the country and the development of racial ideologies that constructed images of the Afro-Brazilians. As Stam develops his analysis, he is able to show the variations in the participation of blacks or Afro-Brazilians in the cinema, demonstrating how this population was excluded from this industry in the first part of the twentieth century^{xvi}, to later be included and be restricted to certain types of roles that generated an exoticized and stereotyped images of them.

By examining the origins and development of Brazilian Cinema, Stam is able to show the variations on the ways in which Afro-Brazilians are represented and their inclusion to the cinematographic industry; and the new alternative productions that constructed counter narratives^{xvii} that showed the issues that affected the black population in the country.

In this sense, Stam evaluates the repercussion of these new narratives not only at the national level, but also in an international sphere in which these images redefine the portrayal of Latin Americans in the cinema and show a different face of Brazilians,

breaking with the overall whiteness of their media depictions^{xvii}. He does so by examining many of the productions that were not made under the traditional standards of representation, thus showing the multiple faces of the Afro-Brazilian culture. These new films focused on highlighting the Afro-Brazilian cultural traditions like music and dance, but also on showing the state of abandonment and marginalization of these populations in the country, by emphasizing the role that race place in the social inequalities.

This new era in the Brazilian cinema, thus, does not only include the Afro-Brazilians in a more representative way, but also includes them at the production level, involving them in the creative process and the development of plots to guarantee that their images are accurate and reflect their realities and identities.

By examining the different types of films and the images of Afro-Brazilians, Stam shows both the positive and negative images that identify them inside of the filmmaking industry. Although he recognizes that these media images are the result of the distorted social imaginaries of Afro-Brazilians in society, he concludes by critiquing the subtle and explicit reproduction of stereotypes and the location of Afro-Brazilians in positions of surveillance and subalternity, even when the intentions are to highlight their culture.

To the author, the representations of Afro-Brazilians are not only influenced, but also determined by the hegemonic white elites, who have chosen to reaffirm the Afro-Brazilian's Otherness by relating them to "primitivism, exoticism and folklorization, using the colonized Other as an erotic fiction in order to reenchant the world"(Stam, 1997: 338)^{xviii}. Moreover, while recognizing the importance of alternative media centered in the Afro-Brazilian population, he concludes by emphasizing on the need of a more diverse cinema

that avoid the stereotyping of the black populations and promote the creation of more positive images that represent them.

The contribution of Stam's work is important to the discipline of media studies in Latin America and is relevant because it addresses representation by focusing not only in the matter of visibility, but also in the inclusion of racial minorities in the cinematographic business.

Another author that focuses on examining the representations of ethnic minorities in the Latin America cinema is Salome Aguilera (2016), who addresses this issue by conducting a comparative study in the matter. Her article *Las cargas de la representación: Notas sobre la raza y la representación en el cine Latinoamericano*, gives a detailed analysis of race and representation by looking specifically at the visual production of Latin American historical films.

In order to do so, the author introduces the concepts of race and ethnicity, showing the modifications they had through time and how they influenced the field of critical race studies in the region, to later evaluate how the perceptions of race have transformed and adapted to the different countries and social contexts. To her, the demographic composition of Latin America is a determinant factor for the understanding of these concepts, since Latin America is a very diverse and multiracial region, with a strong indigenous and Afro-descendant component. Despite this, the hegemonic elites have established whiteness as the standard and aspiration and the racial structures have created in base of this, affecting the ways in which the different ethnic identities were developed and national identities were formed to "unify a heterogeneous and unequal population under a unique nationalist flag

that resignified the supposed source of shame as a positive symbol of distinctiveness”(Aguilera, 2016: 139)^{xix}

Taking this into account, Aguilera reviews the racial formation processes in Mexico, Cuba and Brazil, and relates this context with some of the films that address race and ethnicity from a historical perspective, with the intention to analyze the ways in which these racial ideologies –racial democracy in Brazil, official indigeneity in Mexico and Afro-Cuban revaluation^{xx}– influenced the way race was represented in films.

While the author uses racial formation theories to develop her analysis, she also addresses the issue cultural appropriation –mainly of indigenous and afro descendant populations- not only as a part of the national identity formation processes, but also as a way to disposes these populations of their cultures and the possibility to constitute as an ethnic group and claim a distinctive cultural identity.

Cultural appropriation also had consequences on the racial structures, since this process established differences based on race and not on culture, as the latter vanished with the spread of traditions and expressions that later became a part of the national identities, while at the same time ignoring the vulnerable situation in which this ethnic groups were^{xxi}.

To conduct her analysis, Aguilera took films of the three countries previously mentioned to reflect on the ways in which race is addressed and the ideas of progress and post-racialism that these productions try to sell to the audiences. Following this premise, the author argues that these films conceive racism as a past thing and ignore its current manifestations and its social impacts. For Aguilera, this is not an exclusive characteristic of historical films, since most of the Latin American media avoids addressing these issues and

perpetuate the construction of imaginary social scenarios that privilege whiteness and do not include racial and ethnic minorities.

The article also shows the way in which racialized subjects appear in contemporary cinematographic productions, and how these appear as a symbol of national identity in order to avoid the addressing of racial issues affecting their lives^{xiii}. The analysis proposed by Aguilera, thus, allow the reader to understand the consequences of the discourse of *mestizaje*, as it vanishes racial tensions and appeals to the construction of a homogeneous national consciousness instead.

To her, these representations are contradictory, since they use racial and ethnic minorities as symbols of national identities as a strategy to dismiss the addressing of racial discrimination and hide a difficult socioeconomic reality.

The importance on Aguilera's work relies on the novelty of the combination of methods and theories of critical race studies and media studies to examine Latin American cinema, and the development of this type of work is important as these two disciplines are expanding and addressing social and cultural issues from a multidisciplinary approach.

The study of media and the representation of the Afro-descendant population

Jun Ishibashi evaluates the representation of Afro-Venezuelans in the media industry in the article *Hacia una apertura del debate sobre el racismo en Venezuela: exclusión e inclusión estereotipada de personas 'negras' en los medios de comunicación*, in which he addresses the nature of racism in Venezuela and the ways in which this affects the Afro-descendant population in the country, to later examine their levels of participation in the popular media.

The author begins his analysis specifying that the Afro-Venezuelans are an oppressed group in the country and that they are excluded of almost all the spheres of the country, which has caused the "symbolic annulment" of these populations (Ishibashi, 2013: 34)^{xxiii}.

Considering this, the author focuses his research in three different types of media, by choosing advertising, soap operas and the modeling industry, since he considers that these are spaces in which the exclusion of Afro-Venezuelans is openly practiced^{xxiv}. In order to conduct his research, the author uses a mix method that includes a quantitative analysis of the appearances of Afro-Venezuelans in these types of media, in-depth interviews with agents who work in the media industry, and work tables with members of Afro-Venezuelan organization to know their opinions about this issue.

The author, thus, states that the participation of "blacks" in the media makes them an absolute minority, since they rarely appear in the massive media products in the country^{xxv}. However, when they do appear in the media, they are usually interpreting laborer, except when they are interpreting artists or athletes.

Their inclusion in the advertising pieces is not different, since they are absent in scenarios such as workplaces or households, but overrepresented in parties and festive scenarios, in which they are located since they are more relatable to entertainment^{xxvi}. Hence, they barely appear as protagonists of advertising campaigns, and they are placed as accessory pieces to evoke entertainment but rarely have leading roles since they are easily associated to low income socioeconomic classes due to their skin color.

Moreover, their images disassociate from the ideas of traditional beauty, since the black representation is located within the framework of the "ugly", a concept that the author

references to identify what he conceives as “racial marketing”; this is, the strategies to sell products based on the aspiration of beauty and success related to racial characteristics.

The author’s findings coincide with the ones obtained by Aguilera and Stam, despite that he focuses in a different type of media. Hence, the literature until now agrees on talking about a clear invisibility of the Afro-descendant population in the different types of media, manifested in different social and political contexts.

Laura Tatiana Martinez (2016) analyses the images of Afro-Colombian in written press, by reviewing the most important entertainment magazines to examine how Afro-Colombians are located and how their images are constructed.

In her article “Entre la imagen light y la imagen identitaria. Las revistas de entretenimiento en Colombia frente a la cuestión afro”, Martinez examines the influence of these images in the construction of Afro imaginaries, addressing issues of representation, race and ethnicity in the Colombian context.

To do so, she locates the development of stereotypes in the social context of the Afro-Colombian identity, appealing to the traditional portrayal of this population to understand how they have been defined and determined and how these perceptions affected the ways in which Afro-Colombians see themselves.

To the author, the stereotypes contribute to the recognition of a character and an approach to identity built from third parties (Martinez, 2016: 29)^{xvii}; and reaffirm the Otherness of Afro-Colombians and their place in society. However, the author recognizes the exceptionalism that surround the Afro-Colombian public figures and conducts her analysis parting from that point of view.

Despite the fact that she identifies that the group of people that appears in the media and have a relative visibility are a part of what she calls “the black elite”^{xxviii}, she argues that their images are still based on racial stereotypes that identify Afro-Colombians and affect the way in which they are located into the industry of entertainment.

Because of it, her research is focused on answering how are Afro-Colombians portrayed in entertainment magazines, and if these magazines support the construction of stereotypes. To do so, she examines three of the most important entertainment magazines in the country, to conduct a discourse and image analysis to examine the portrayal of Afro-Colombians in these materials.

The article, states that even when the texts try to expose the state of discrimination and marginalization that affects the Afro-Colombians, it reproduces the same stereotypes that relate *afrocolombianidad* to negative attributes^{xxx}. To prove this she uses, for instance, a text in which a journalist addressed the status of marginalized Afro-Colombian communities using language that appeals to racist elements (black and white dichotomy) and propose education to rescue the black Colombians from the incivility.

In addition to this, the author conducts a semiotic analysis of the images that the magazines use to complement their texts, in where she found that the images reinforce the myth of the hypersexuality of the Afro-Colombians as a common element in these images, since they employ direct suggestions to their sensuality and exoticism.

In another example, the author uses the cover of famous magazines in which Afro-Colombian women appear to show the direct relation to a more vibrant and outstanding images, achieved with the choice of colorful outfits and elements, which contrast with images of non Afro-Colombians that are portrayed in a more sober way. With this analysis,

the author addresses the images of Afro-Colombianidad built from a hyperrealist perspective, in which their characteristics are enhanced to create a homogenizing standard of seeing and perceiving *afrocolombianidad*.

These analyses contribute to the understanding of the reproduction of these images that fall into misrepresentation and discrimination, despite they are used to show recognition and appreciation to the Afro-Colombian population^{xxx}. Moreover, the author is able to prove how the stories of the Afro-Colombian celebrities do not eliminate the stereotypes that identify, but rather use visual and discursive elements that contribute to their establishment in the public opinion.

Consequently, the narratives that the author found in the sources that she reviewed diminish the achievements of these figures and sometimes relate their recognition to the need of the elites to create figures that bring the Afro-Colombian population closer to the popular media products.

Finally, the author addresses the issues of representation agreeing with Teun Van Dijk; and attributes this misrepresentation of Afro-Colombians with an elite dominant discourse and the lack of participation of Afro-Colombians in the national media as content producers^{xxxx}. The article is innovative since it examines the representation of Afro-Colombians in the written press and analyze the contradictions in the discourses of the media when referring to these populations.

The field of media and communication studies have centered many of its work in the production of scholarly pieces that described the nature and nuances of the popular media in Latin America. However, there is a lack of work specialized on the impacts of media in the representations of ethnic minorities in the continent.

In this context, *Mira cómo ves: racismo y estereotipos en los medios de comunicación* provides an interesting overview of the images of ethnic minorities, focusing most of its essays on the representation of Afro-Peruvians and Afro-descendant in the mass media. The book compiles a series of essays presented at the International Seminar “The media: a path to ethnic inclusion”, organized in 2006 by the Center for Ethnic Development in Lima, Peru; and are an important effort to debate and discuss the issues and the impacts of the representations that the media creates around the Afro-descendant population.

The book reunites a group of Peruvian and international scholars and activists who have been involved in a permanent discussion about media images and have been able to produce a relevant analysis of the ways in which these images were created and are still reproduced in the world. Using comparative studies and case studies of other countries, the compilation of texts also seeks to establish a common indicator of the way in which the representation of blackness is located within a more global scenario^{xxxii}.

The authors, thus, address this issue from multiple perspectives, evaluating different types of communications, by looking at mass media sources as television, written press or advertising; while also documenting experiences of community-based communication^{xxxiii} and the development of alternative media.

The text focuses on to the representations of Afro-Peruvian and ethnic minorities and the interdependence of these representations with the ideologies of race, miscegenation, and national identity that perpetuated the cycles of discrimination and exclusion for the Afro-descendant and African populations around the world.

Therefore, the text is able to discuss the nature of the stereotypes and their social effects, by addressing the most common stereotypes associated with Afro-descendant

populations in Latin America and in the world, and how the construction of these images have contributed to the marginalization of these population, who have been systematically excluded and erased from the national construction processes.

In this compilation, the authors address the nature of dominant discourses that perpetuated the negative representations of Afro-descendants, highlighting their creation as a consequence of Eurocentric ideologies, that were uplifted as the idea of beauty, success, and happiness to be permanently portrayed in the mass media.

Consequently, these discourses have influenced the ways in which Afro-descendants in the Americas form their identities –referred as “fragmented identities” and integrate into a big national sphere as insignificant and irrelevant subjects, disconnecting the Afro-descendant population from the nation-state formation, through “a systematic process of banalization and historic responsibility liberation.”^{xxxiv}

To examine the current representations of ethnic minorities in the media, it is necessary to question the most common images that the media presents and, in this sense, the text analysis the representativeness of these images, challenging the overrepresentation of whiteness and the invisibility and erasure of ethnic minorities in the media production process.

This analysis, however, is not only based on the examination of media images, since the authors are able to establish a relation between them and the way in which prejudice and stereotypes influence notions of citizenship, belonging and real democracies. The underrepresentation and misrepresentation of ethnic minorities in the media, then, are constitutive factors of unfinished democracies and imaginary citizenships for these populations.

In this context, the essays presented in the book allow the reader to observe the commonalities identified in relation to the portrayal of the Afro-Peruvian population, which is often associated with images of music, sports, criminality, and movement. For the authors, the Afro-Peruvian populations exist in the media mostly as a mean for and humor, in scenarios in which they are commodified and objectified for the entertainment of the masses and the reproduction of negative stereotypes.

Through this analysis, the book questions the nature of the media and their functions, not only as a mean of entertainment and information but also as a powerful tool of ideological and political domination, that influences the actions of society. Because of this, the media in Peru should be a subject of study as it provides diagnosis about ethnicity, multicultural interaction, aesthetics, consumer's preference and the racial issues of the population.^{xxxv}

Mira como ves is, thus, an innovative and significant scholarly piece, and one the few ones existing related to ethnic stereotypes in the Peruvian media. It does not only represent an important contribution to the academic work written about Afro-Peruvians, but it is also a relevant piece in the field of media critical studies that should contribute to the discussion about the real role of the media and its influence on the social imaginary.

Conclusion

The number of academic sources that focus on media and communication studies in Latin America is still very limited. Moreover, many of these sources focuses in the impacts of media in different contexts, mostly highlight the political approach of communications. Despite the sources examined present noticeable differences in the approach, methods and object of study, they do have commonalities in their arguments and some specific topics.

First, a common theme that emerges in the sources is the relevance of elite groups and their participation in the creation and reproduction of racist ideologies and the promotion of racialized social structures. Despite some of the texts talk about contemporary manifestations of racism, most of them understand racism as a dominant system established by the groups in power that uplifted whiteness even in context in which most of the population is both indigenous and Afro-descendant. Second, the sources refer to the use of *mestizaje* as a discursive tool that does not have a real significance in the visual narratives of the media. The pieces of Stam and Aguilera, for instance, are able to show how the Latin American cinema continues to fall into the stereotyping of ethnic minorities and the lack of recognition of their cultural expressions and identities. Finally, the sources highlight the permanent invisibility of the Afro-descendant population in the Latin American Media, cause by the perpetuation of racial ideologies that influenced the images of these populations.

The sources cited in this document are relevant for the study of communications and media, but also to the field of critical race studies in the region, since they address this discipline from another perspective and are able to give a very much needed analysis of the impacts of the media in the addressing of race and ethnicity in the region.

CHAPTER TWO: THE BEGINNINGS OF NEGRO MAMA: THE DANGEROUS BUT NAÏVE BLACK THIEF

Introduction

The production of comedy shows increased significantly during the decade of the 1990s in Peru, becoming very popular among the audiences and competing with international productions. Most of these shows had a very similar format: they presented different sequences, a musical performance, and a final act with all the comedy stars interacting with each other. The shows took up many topics that affected the Peruvian society, thus becoming a major element of the popular culture (Peirano: 1984: 32).

One of those shows was *JB Noticias*, a show created by Jorge Benavides that worked in the format of a news show but used parody to address the daily events. This show created and shaped the figure of *Negro Mama*, the object of this thesis' analysis, and allowed the character to develop and acquire very particular personality traits that would be evolved in the following decades as the character became more popular among the public. We can trace the first appearances of Negro Mama to the first half of the 1990s, when it was directly associated with criminal intentions, but with an insufficient intellectual capacity to conclude his criminal plans. This chapter will look at three episodes from this period, which shows explicitly the connection between the characters and the negative stereotypes of black men.

This chapter will examine particularly the development of the identity of Negro Mama from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, by looking at the construction of the character in its direct relation to racist stereotypes and the effects of this character in the construction of blackness in national television.

First appearances of Negro Mama on the TV Show “JB News”

The history of Negro Mama has always been controversial, to say the least. However, his appearances at the beginning of this time period did not create public debates or generate continuous questioning, despite being the period in which the character has an explicit association with racist troupes. In this period, racial stereotypes appear as a system of beliefs and attributes that characterize most of the members of the black population (Gandy, 1998:84), being the basis for the type of communication created to represent them.

During this decade, the image of this character relates directly to criminality: in some of the episodes from the decade of the 1990s, for example, it is possible to see how Negro Mama appears as an astute man who takes advantage of the neglected attitude of people to steal whatever he could find. In this period, the character has a certain sense of freedom to create direct associations to negative stereotypes associated with the Afro-Peruvian population and their intellectual abilities, as it is possible to identify the known and infamous saying “I might be black, but I have a brain.”

This period is particularly interesting since there are no limitations in the process of characterization, which allowed the creator to incorporate many elements to the base of the character. The most visible features of the Negro Mama are the use of blackface and the

utilization of physical prosthetics to resemble the black body and, thus, create a sense of authenticity.

The use of blackface became popular through minstrelsy, a type of representation of the black population that became popular in the nineteenth century and used American black folk culture to construct a characterization of blackness that was included in the entertainment industry (Lott, 1993: 30). The minstrel used black paint –usually made of coal– in his hands and face; and dressed in slave-type attires, highlighting thus the social production of racialized subjects.

Luis Peirano addresses the personification process of comedians and the importance of the physical aspect to give consistency to the performance being a necessary part of the construction of the characters. The process does not only give the characters more legitimacy, but also reinforce the characteristics associated with the racialized subjects, contributing to their popularity (Peirano, 1984: 51)^{xxxvi}. To Negro mama, the use of blackface is not an option, but a requisite, to be validated as a black subject, and because of it this is the only characteristic that he has not changed over the years.

The creation and consolidation of Negro Mama in the public sphere

The most visible characteristic of Negro Mama is the explicit use of blackface. In this performance, the mask functions as the most visible way to represent blackness, and this purpose is useful to produce and create blackness for the consumption of white viewers (Lott, 1993:177). Throughout the development of the character, it is possible to observe how the color plays a major role in the identification and personification of the character, as

his blackness functions as a racialized identity that becomes the basis for the development of comedy.

The skin tone of *Negro Mama* works as a fundamental characteristic to validate his blackness, and it is an element used to add authenticity and legitimize him when confronting other dark-skinned characters in the episodes. Through the analysis of the episodes below, it will be possible to see how this characteristic is brought to attention to reinforce the character's identity.

The process of the physical construction of the character is based on the simulation of the characteristics that the Peruvian media consider authentic of an Afro-Peruvian person, and most particularly, of an Afro-Peruvian man. In this context, the character is part of a process of simulation that seeks to obtain a production based on real events, combining and exaggerating different elements to give situations a context of authenticity^{xxxvii}. In other words, the simulation uses the exaggeration of an imaginary to make situations, events or people “believable” to the audiences (Baudrillard in Durham, 2012: 528).

In addition to this, it is possible to recognize that other of the fundamental elements of the character is his voice, articulation, and word choice, which ought to be similar to the ways of speaking that the Afro-Peruvian population has. Though this might be recognized as a particular cultural asset by some scholars like Sandro Sessarego (2015), this element is a motive for mockery in the case of *Negro Mama*.

When talking about the unique way of speaking of the Afro-Peruvians, Sessarego recognizes this aspect as an identifiable characteristic of the Afro-Peruvian population of the rural areas particularly (Sessarego, 2015: 5), as a consequence of the process of

enslavement, colonization and creolization of the people of African descent brought to the Americas. In this context, the use of this specific way of articulating the phrases and words is a direct use of a cultural asset of the Afro-Peruvian population as a source of humor, to provide a sense of authenticity.

There is something particular not only in the voice of the character but in his use of language and the articulation of words, and this might be associated with a stereotype that dates back to the colonial era, in which black men and women did not speak proper Spanish because this was not their native language. In relation to the use of a specific type of language to identify people of African descent, Jill Lane states that this strategy is used to resemble the way of talking and the use of structures associated with the black populations specifically in the rural areas (Lane, 2005: 47).

The case of Negro Mama is not different since he does not only the use of a different vocabulary but, he structures his dialogues using language as a marker of blackness that serves to separate the character from the other members of the cast. JB News was aired by Frecuencia Latina from 1994 to 2001 and was a one-hour comedy show that included independent sequences and featured some famous comedy figures that played themselves, made fictitious characters or impersonations of public figures. The program dealt with imitations and parodies with congressmen, international presidents, singers, countries, sports, police places and imitations of people in Peru. One of these characters was Negro Mama, and he played the main role in most of the sequences in which he participated.

The character also faces many humiliating situations: he receives *nicknames* based on his skin color: people commonly refer to him as crocodile, raisin with arms, or mention

that the night has come when the character comes into a scene. Mama tolerates all these situations, but it is possible to note in the character a feeling of resentment and a desire to revenge, and for this to be explicit, he uses the quote “algún día” (someday), a phrase that he repeats after he is attacked. In this context, the character constructs the idea of a discontent black person who must deal with multiple humiliations but is always seeking to revert the aggressions by taking advantage of the people around them.

This group of situations produced a type of humor known as “ethnic humor”, that functions as an effective way of communicating information about the different ethnic groups, although this information is not always valid or accurate (Amditis: 2013, 5). However, this type of humor can function not only as a means of oppression, but also as a means of uplifting the oppressed. In this context, the sequences of Negro Mama do not only focus in the reproduction of racial stereotypes, but also develop humor around the successful revenge actions that he is able to execute to revert the violent situations he is exposed to in the first place.

The following part of the analysis will address three specific episodes aired in the first time period of the character. These episodes present a similar representation of the character and portray Negro Mama as a criminal –either a burglar or a pickpocket-, and the storylines of these episodes developed around the process of committing the crimes. This period is important as it does not intend to create implicit or covert associations, but rather openly reproduces racist stereotypes.

Negro Mama: the “intelligent” thief

The first episode examined aired in 1995^{xxxxviii}, and the sequence begins with a live broadcast from a voting center that shows voters waiting in line for their turn, and Negro

Mama at the end of the line. Suddenly, he decides to pass over the people and bumps into them with the supposed intention to vote before them. However, as he manages to passthrough them, he hits them as a strategy to get close to them to steal their belongings. Surprisingly, no one in the row notices he is taking their things, though this is clear in the images, and he successfully gets to the voting table with wallets, pens, cell phones, a newspaper, and even an identity document. Once in there, follows the regular procedure to register and vote, greeting the members of the main table with a cordial attitude, and even offering the newspaper he just stole to one man in the main table.

The sketch then makes a time-lapse transition and gets back to the image of the members of the table getting distracted with the newspaper, not realizing that Negro Mama is taking a long time in the voting chamber. Once they start to wonder why he is taking longer than expected, one of them offers to go check on him and remind him that there are people waiting. Immediately, the man comes back saying that the ballot box has disappeared, and the rest of the people realize that the table, the voting materials, the registering papers, and the voters' belongings disappeared as well. At this moment, they wonder how all their stuff disappeared, to finally blame Negro Mama for it.

This episode, which I examine as a part of the beginnings of the construction of the character, present explicit elements that relate the character's race to negative characteristics. In this episode, the criminalization of the character in relation to his race is evident and the elements are not blurry or difficult to recognize.

The character, then, is the protagonist of the sequence but shows little ability to articulate coherent sentences or communicate properly, appearing instead as the tricky thief that talks just when is necessary to pursue his goal. Furthermore, his blackness is

accentuated with the use of black paint over his face, black gloves on his hands, and some particular gestures and body movements that makes him look more like an animal and less like a human being.

This is one of the first appearances of the character as a part of this show, but this short clip –it lasts almost six minutes- allows the viewer to get a racialized representation of blackness and a direct view of him as a dangerous person or as a threat to the safety of everybody else.

In this first episode, the character is shown as an uneducated man with clear criminal intentions, whose abilities are only directed to find an easy way to dispossess people from their belongings. In the first clip, the character barely speaks to other people, being isolated from the normal interaction than the rest of the participants have in the scene. His character is constructed to show little or any social abilities, and his intelligence and cleverness functions exclusively to steal from the people in line. Despite the character manages to establish direct body contact with everyone he steals from, he remains as an outsider, to the point to which nobody notices he is stealing from them and taking all the voting infrastructure with them. In the clip, his presence remains unnoticed although he is not hiding that he stole from the people in the line but instead, he is showing everything he succeeded to steal, holding it in his hands.

N'bare N'Gom (2010) refers to this issue as “peripheral otherness”^{xxxx}; a phenomenon influenced by the depictions of the African heritage in the Latin American media. According to him, the construction of discourses of otherness is related to the dominance of hegemonic groups, who name and define the non-dominant minorities and assign them a particular value and relevance in a national context.

The character is presented as a black man without an identity and a name, whose only detectable characteristic is his predisposition to delinquency and his willingness to carry everything he can, even if this means interrupting an important event like the voting date. This association between criminality and blackness is reinforced at the end of the scene, when the people “discover” they were robbed. In that movement, the realization of the crime activates a unique way of identifying the thief: there is no doubt, then, that Negro Mama did it, and is not until that moment that he is recognized.

Criminal and charming: the “Family reunion” episode

The second episode is a longer clip aired in 1996⁴, which includes his interaction with others in a space of socialization. However, the stereotype that associates him to criminality does not change and the socialization is used as a strategy to achieve the goal of taking other people’s belongings.

The scene starts with a party, where everybody is enjoying themselves. The main character is a black man (not in blackface) who is believed to be the host of the party and is about to give a speech to his guests. He gathers everybody and says he is actually giving a party to honor his brother who is coming from Europe. The brother is about to get to his house and he asks everyone to meet him and welcome him to the party, and he proposes a toast and explains that his brother is a busy person and because of it, he can only stay for a few hours in the party.

He then asks people to surprise as soon as he opens the door and ask the guests to hide and turn off the lights. While they are waiting, the frame moves to the door and shows a handle being maneuvered as someone tries to open the door. When the door finally opens,

the audience sees *Negro Mama* coming into the scene with a suspicious attitude and carrying a big bag and a crowbar.

He is received by the crowd who welcomes him with enthusiasm, despite his attempt to explain he is not the person they are looking for. The party host is visibly excited about meeting him and interrupts *Negro Mama* every time he tries to say something, asking him what he would like to drink instead. The emotion is such that the host tells the fake brother to ask him for anything, and this situation presents an opportunity for the “brother” to ask for his golden statues, showing a vast knowledge of all the valuable objects inside the host’s house and asking for them with no shame, explaining he would take them as souvenirs. After the host gives him all the things he asked for, he then asks the guests to give him jewelry, money and other objects of value, which raises their suspicion. However, the host is committed to doing everything he can to make his brother happy, and because of it, he promises to pay back for all the guest’s items.

As the character has all the information about his visit and all the things he wanted in the first place, he explains his visit has come to an end and leaves with a big bag full of things people handed them voluntarily. While everybody seems to be content about the host’s brother and decides to stay in the party commenting about his visit, somebody knocks on the door. When they opened, it is possible to see a black man asking for Juan Carlos, the host, claiming to be his real brother, to the surprise of everybody else. When Juan Carlos is told there is a second brother asking for him, he looks doubtful and believes this to be a joke, for which he tells the man to tell the truth and leave his house. Far from doing so, the man claims he is his real brother by asking Juan Carlos to pay attention to

their physical similarities –pointing specifically to the hair and their skin color- and tells him that his flight got delayed and was the reason he got late to the party.

After some minutes, Juan Carlos recognizes his real brother and finally welcomes him to the party, to later wonder who was the man that just left the party. He then realizes that he and the guests were robbed and panicked as he recounts on all of the things he took with him. After their discovery, they leave the scene as they try to reach him to reclaim all their stolen goods.

The scene appears to be over, but before the clip goes out of air *Negro Mama* emerges from the back of the empty house still carrying all the items the host and the guests gave him. As he shows a triumphant attitude, he says a phrase that became one of the emblems of the character: “I might be black, but I have a brain,” while he continues searching for things to take with him.

This episode is particularly interesting because it shows the character in a space of interaction and socialization, despite his abilities to communicate function only with the purpose of committing a crime, whether is using violence or not. In this episode, there are some interesting elements to analyze, but one of the most important things to look at is the way the black characters relate with each other. Again, the use of blackface helps to legitimize the character’s blackness, but the stereotyped construction of blackness only seems to apply to *Negro Mama*, since the two brothers are never explicitly named as blacks by the other people, and they are not in blackface nor they have any wigs or prosthetics. Despite this, Juan Carlos and his real brother are automatically signaled as black when the party guests assume that Negro Mama is his brother, and that presents an even bigger

contradiction to the fact that Juan Carlos tries to assert their kinship by putting emphasis on his physical characteristics to then be relatable to his brother.

Moreover, the other black characters in the sequence are not the targets of any type of mockery and their blackness is only emphasized in order to justify their relationship with each other. The sequence shows racialized notions of blackness only apply to *Negro Mama* and no stereotypes are attached to Juan Carlos, the rich brother. He is not read as a black person by his guests, and his interactions are not centered around his race.

This sequence shows then, a clear association between race and skin color, since Negro Mama's skin is much darker than Juan Carlos and his brother, and their blackness does not come to the dialogue until later in the episode.

Teaching how to be “black”: Negro Mama as the master of crime

The final episode^{xii} explores this dynamic in depth, and it contributes to building the characteristics that the character maintained to become a mastermind of crime and felonies, using his talent to take advantage of the naïve people around him. In addition to this, the chapter will contribute to the construction of *Negro Mama* as a legitimate representation of blackness that will continue throughout the show, diminishing the blackness of the other afro-descendant characters that will intervene later in the episode.

The scene begins with two men I will identify as Burglar 1 and Burglar 2 trying to break into a house. They both are carrying knives and they are examining the house they just entered, which they find perfect for the plan they were about to execute. The two burglars are black men, but only one of them is in blackface (burglar 2/*Negro Mama*), and according to the dialogues, he is the master and is teaching the other man the abilities he

acquired “through practice.” They then begin executing the robbery, which starts with the man in blackface hitting the door to make some noise, that ended up waking up the owner of the house.

As the male homeowner enters the scene, he is surprised by Burglar 1, who shows the owner the tip of a knife and asks him to give him all his money before he kills him. The house owner laughs at him, as he thinks he is only seeing a small knife and threatens to shoot the burglar with a deadly machine gun. However, as Burglar 1 pulls out the knife from his pants and it becomes clear that he had a giant saber, which totally frightens the man. The man begs for his life, and at that moment Burglar 2/*Negro Mama* emerges from behind a couch to give Burglar 1 the authorization to kill the man, who, in turn, turns around and tells him he knows him from somewhere else. Despite *Negro Mama*’s effort to hide his face, the doctor immediately recognizes him and tells that he is a doctor and had previously saved *Negro Mama*’s life by treating him of a very large wound he had in his back as a product of a cut.

Burglar 2 then seems to remember who this man is and hugs him, thanking him for what he did, while Burglar 1 smiles in the back as a signal of approval. Just when the man thought he got away with it, *Negro Mama* asks how much the doctor charged him for the surgery, to which the doctor answers that he charged five thousand dollars, and this gives *Negro Mama* the perfect excuse to start negotiating with the man until he agrees to pay them twenty-five thousand dollars to “save his life.” Once the negotiation is over, Burglar 1 turns to *Negro Mama* and repeats the same phrases from the beginning of the sequence in which he praises the wisdom and experience of *Negro Mama*, and then exits the scene with the man who would pay for his life.

The last frame shows Burglar 2/Negro Mama accentuating that he “saved” the man’s life, and then turns to the camera to pronounce the same phrase of the second episode analyzed: ‘I might be black, but I have my brain, huh.’

This episode presents different elements worthy of analysis. The first one is related to the dehumanization of the two black characters as the episode portray them as savages and extremely violent who are willing to kill in order to get an economic advantage. As it was analyzed by Robert Stam, the representation of the afro-descendants as Others are made possible by relating them to “primitivism, exoticism and folklorization” (Stam, 2005: 338), and in this chapter, this representation is constructed by the use of elements as the sable and the constant threat of killing the house owner in cold blood. The portrayal of the two black men at the beginning of the episode is the portrayal of two merciless, animalized creatures who cannot control their impulses and are able to assassinate without guilt. Although they were never intending to kill the doctor, this information is not clear to the viewer until the end of the episode, when they finally revealed they had a plan.

The other identifiable element in this episode is the legitimization the idea of blackness that *Negro Mama* presents, which translates in the dynamic between the two burglars: Burglar 1, an afro descendant man, is not identified as an expert in the “art” of crime, and takes Burglar 2, *Negro Mama*, as a teacher in order to learn how to be a proper burglar. This dynamic presents Negro Mama as an experienced criminal, with a natural talent to plan and commit crimes, and his racial identity is marked by the way in which he is called and referred to by Burglar 1. Despite both burglars in the scene would be identified as afro-descendants, only *Negro Mama* is identified as the authentic black person, and it is in his hands to educate and introduce the other burglar into blackness. *Negro*

Mama, who is not only a burglar but a dangerous identified criminal, *is* the representation of blackness on the show and thus becomes a standard under which the other black characters need to develop.

Finally, the episode shows a trait that would become an important aspect of his personality, that is, his ability to trick people in order to rob them. It is possible to find this characteristic in the popular trickster, a popular and mythic character present in many slave tales and stories, represented as “thievish, deceitful, parricidal, incestuous, and cannibalistic” (Makarius, 1997, 67). Similarly, to the trickster, Negro mama distinguishes himself as a character that uses his virtues to commit acts of public defiance and transgression. Furthermore, Negro Mama uses his disadvantages on his favor in the same way the trickster tails turn unfortunate situations into positive and get revenge for the abuses committed to them.

Jill Lane (2005) addresses the importance of the representation of blackness in the 19th century Cuba, by analyzing the figure of the “negrito” and its repercussion on the understandings of blackness as a part of a national discourse. Lane investigates the stereotypes related to blackness and endured in the figure of “negrito” and its desire to control all the representations of black people, and specifically black men, in the Cuban society^{xiii}.

In this same line, the development and the interactions of Negro Mama did not appeal to his understanding as an isolated and fictional character, but rather were used to position this type of representation as “the” representation of blackness in this comedy show, by the use of repetitive dialogues in which the other characters supported and

reaffirmed that Negro Mama was, undoubtedly, the character that had to entail blackness in its entirety.

Conclusion

In this first period, the portrayals and storylines involving the character do not differ much: they all coincide in depicting *Negro Mama* as a primitive criminal, without social skills that only enters in contact with people when he is about to commit a felony. In addition to this, his dialogues are designed to ridicule his choice of vocabulary, and to diminish him as a person, being constantly misunderstood and not taking into consideration. This, however, functions not only against him, but also in his favor, as it helps him to trick people into giving him what he wants.

In an effort to simplify the analysis of discourse and the addressing of race in it, Van Dijk (2007) specifies that discourse is constructed around the concepts of *us* and *them*, with *us* being the hegemonic group in power to determine who is considered as Other. In this context, Van Dijk identifies four conditions on which the racist discourse is constructed: it emphasizes the positive in *us* while deemphasizing the positive in *them*; and emphasizes the negative in *them* while deemphasizing the positive in *us* (Van Dijk, 2007; 29). This simple matrix of analysis is useful to the evaluation of discourse and is used by Van Dijk to frame his analysis in relation to racism and discourse in Latin America.

When applied to the character and the episodes analyzed, it is possible to notice that there the development of the character does not deemphasize the positive in *Negro Mama* participates, but instead does not present *any* positive characteristics when depicting the character. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, this time period is marked by the

absolute freedom that the creator had to create and assign as many negative aspects as possible, without causing controversy.

This is also the time period in which it is possible to observe little variations in relation to the occupation that *Negro Mama* had and the type of situations that he is exposed to, though this was later modified when the character gained popularity and became more visible to the eyes of the Afro-Peruvian civil society. The following chapter will address a time period in which *Negro mama* was forced not only to change his discourse, but also to construct a more solid and relatable character in order to confront the critiques and to be supported by the public opinion.

CHAPTER THREE: NEGRO MAMA IN THE SPOTLIGHT OF CONTROVERSY

Introduction

As the previous chapter addressed, during the first years of Negro Mama the image of this character was directly related to criminality: in some of the episodes from the decade of the 1990s, for example, it is possible to see how Negro Mama appears as an astute man who takes advantage of the neglected attitude of people to steal whatever he can find.

Despite his indisputable popularity in the Peruvian society, the character started facing hard criticism by some of the Afro-Peruvian leaders that soon began to publicly denounce the racist and stereotyped characteristics that Negro Mama personified. These denunciations, along with the media attention that they brought, influenced the modification and transformation on some of the situations and discourses of the character.

This chapter will focus in the development of the Negro Mama in the decades of 2000s and 2010s, which I consider to be the decade in which the controversy forced its author to build a more solid character, also romanticizing its personal history and appealing to the sentiments of its fans to justify its continuity on national television. Therefore, the chapter will analyze some of the variants that the character presented during this time period and the controversy that arose as a consequence of a 2010 episode that received a sanction by the ethical board of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications^{xliii}.

This period is also marked by the versatility of the character and the diversity of the discourses, used as a strategy to avoid being considered racist, that configured a more complex scenario in which the speeches and the personification of the character deviated from its origins. However, the characteristics and associations related to old stereotypes have not vanished as time passed but rather transformed into subtle elements inserted in dialogues, ways of speaking or scenes that made enough space to generate suspicion – all of which added to the physical impersonation, serving as a motive of constant mocks related to the racial features of the character.

In addition to this, the social interactions of Negro Mama are framed under certain parameters, as they develop a context of constant subordination. For instance, in most of the episodes reviewed during this period, it is possible to note how the character is exposed to mocks and humiliations, treated almost as a person with no ability to reason for himself, but, at the same time, able to take advantage of the rest of the cast in the show. The particular development of the black characters is explored by authors like Hughey, who argues that their visibility is not unconditional, and their acceptance is only possible when they exist under limits that are still determined by the normative conventions (Hughey, 2009; 544).

Similarly, Barbosa (2008) recognizes that the black population in Peru² is still associated with stereotypes, which does not contribute in solving the issues of representation, but rather reproduce the existent racial structures. (Barbosa, 2008:28)

In this context, it is no surprise that the character is constantly the target of humiliating situations and remains the source of humor, which is mainly based on jokes that appeal directly to the color of his skin, dehumanizing him through his identification as an animal or a dark object. Despite the blatant offenses, Negro Mama maintains a

subservient attitude when he interacts with the members of the cast, but it is possible to note in the character a feeling of resentment and a desire to revenge, and for this to be explicit, they used the quote “*algún día*” (some day), a phrase he repeats after he is verbally or physically attacked.

Negro Mama and the *other* black

The first video this chapter will analyze is a video aired in the early 2000s.^{xiv} The video maintains the negative imagery of the Afro-Peruvian population, but presents an interesting interaction between another Afro-Peruvian character and Negro Mama.

The sequence begins with Benedicto Jimenez, who was named as the head of the INPE (National Penitentiary Institute) and called himself the “sheriff” to reaffirm his authority. The sequence is set in a supposed press conference in which Jimenez contests the demands of the public opinion regarding his work, for what he decides to talk to the interns about the new rules the inmates should follow.

He then starts to recount the achievements of his first fifteen days, while some inmates in the back mock him and continue to consume drugs at his back while he names some ridiculous actions that should be a proof that he was actually working. After he finishes with his speech, he proceeds to talk to the inmates to listen to their concerns. He briefly interviews an inmate who is serving time for killing his parents and after that he calls Negro Mama to the scene. As soon as he approaches, Benedicto checks with the patrol officer to make sure he had a gun with him, just in case.

When hearing this, Negro Mama confronts him and calls him “cousin,” appealing to Jimenez’s skin color. To this, Jimenez replies they are almost family, but he is a “tone

number forty”. To that, Negro Mama answers that he is part of the darkest sector or the prison, which leads to doubts by Jimenez. Negro Mama then clarifies that the prison is called imprisoned because he killed a fly with a gun, and because Jimenez considers this to be a minor crime, he decides to release the inmate because Negro Mama deserves to be free and not punished in such an unfair way. Just when Negro Mama starts to leave the set, he is questioned by Jimenez about the details of this killing, to which he answers that he actually killed a fly that was on top of his mother in law, which results in the re-detention and imprisonment of Negro Mama.

After speaking with another inmate, Negro Mama asks to have the word and proceeds to speak with the journalists about the situation of the prison he inhabits, saying that it is actually very insecure because there are no escape ways, in case of a natural disaster. While playing with the concept of escaping, he is then punished by Jimenez, who decides to do a further revision and discovers that inmates were hiding a large number of guns and other arms. The sequence finishes with Benedicto being robbed by the inmates, after he decides to turn off the lights inside of the cell, which cause them all to escape, leaving Jimenez in his underwear.

The sequence maintains the association between blackness and criminality is maintained through the figure of Negro Mama, but as in the other videos, there is another body read as black, who is not represented using blackface, establishing a difference between the two characters. This is in tune with what Tanya Golash Boza (2011) identifies when she evaluates the representations of Afro-Peruvians on television, mentioning that they are often misrepresented and associated with positions of surveillance, being portrayed either as “subservient, unintelligent or exotic”^{xiv}.

This gives an interesting contrast for the representation of blackness, since the sequences portrays Benedicto Jimenez, who is an Afro-Peruvian in real life, as a light-skinned person whose blackness is put into question as soon as he starts interacting with Negro Mama. The moment in which he claims to be somehow related to, but not totally identified with blackness is used to separate both bodies and gives legitimacy to the representation of blackness that Negro Mama endures, making him the authorized voice to speak on behalf of the other black prisoners.

Negro Mama reinforces the association to criminality by mentioning that he is not the only black inmate in that prison but that, in fact, there is a larger group of black people serving their sentences in this prison. The character retakes the attitudes that are seen in the episodes of the first stage of the character, reinforcing the idea of blackness associated with the constant attempt to take advantage of situations. This behavior, however, contradicts some of the actions of the character in which it is evident that, despite having the intention to take advantage of the person in charge, in this case Benedicto Jimenez, to try and escape from jail, Negro Mama does not have the intellectual capacity to sustain the lie that he used at first and therefore ends up evidencing his criminal tendencies, which causes him to be locked again in the prison cell.

This episode shows how the relationship of blackness and criminality persists through these representations in which not only is the idea of Negro Mama is reinforced as a criminal, but also in which elements are used to legitimize his speech and his blackness. The comparison, for example, between Negro Mama and Benedicto is used not only to identify each character, but also to reinforce the idea of how the black character should look and act. The reaffirmation of blackness in Negro Mama is a strategy used to strengthen the

sense of authenticity of the character and to perpetuate the stereotype in order to be accepted and reproduced in future representations of the character.

The public scandal over “El camion Herpes”

A particular sequence generated a big controversy in the media and received a sanction by the Ethics Board of the Media Companies, an organism managed by the Ministry of Transport and Communications, in 2010. This sequence was based on a public criminal case that involved an Afro-Peruvian security agent who stole 2 million soles from the company he worked for, after he offered their coworkers soda containing sleeping pills^{svi}. This situation functioned as a base for the developing comic sequence using the figure of Negro Mama.

The sequence starts with two women talking about the facts. After calling him racialized names, they wonder what the man will do with all the money. “Becoming white, of course”, one of the women says, as it was the best thing that could happen to him. They argue that, by doing so, he will go “from vulture to swan.” This reference to whiteness associates it, almost immediately, with the right human condition, diminishing any skin color that is not white and relating whiteness to beauty. At the end, as they say, “the man will end up in jail, but at least he will be white.” This specific comparison with whiteness aligns with what is manifested by Barbosa, who states the perpetuation of "whitening" is a common a form of identification for the Afro-descendants in the Brazilian media that associates being white with an improvement in the social status (Barbosa, 2008: 29).

When the introduction is over, the recreation of the crime starts. In this scene, it is possible to see the co-workers portrayed, but none of them have any modification in their physical features. When the person in charge of the group of guards calls Negro Mama, he

responds in a rude way and the person reminds him he should be thankful for having a job, otherwise he would be stomping grapes in “la Vendimia,” a typical Afro-Peruvian festivity. To this, Negro Mama replies: “someday, someday...” The treatment of these cultural practices is similar to the one observed by Lott, as they are used as a source of humor in itself, diminishing the value of black people and portraying them as unimportant, othered and uncivilized (Lott, 1993: 29). With this affirmation, both comedians are assuming that the festivity – considered a long-time tradition amongst the Afro-Peruvian communities – is something that the character rather avoids in order to have a better life.

The team then prepares to escort a woman to transport 2 million soles to a security vault. When the woman sees the black man as a guard, she states that she does not trust him and, when he tries to approach the woman, she immediately holds on to her purse, playing out the old association of black men with crime. Before they transport the money, the character approaches the woman again, this time to ask her for a little refreshment (a common practice in Peru when someone is doing a service) and she looks at him and says “no, negro.” After this incident, the repetition comes and it is possible to hear him saying “someday, someday...”

After this, all the members of the crew and the woman get into the security truck and they start to transport the money, but in the middle of the road, Mama’s coworkers mention they are hungry and thirsty. Suddenly, the camera does a close up in his face as it is heard “someday, and that day has arrived!” In that moment, the character offers soda and cookies to the rest of the people inside the truck and they accept them, falling asleep almost immediately. However, as *Mama* is celebrating his success, he drinks the soda, eats the

cookies, and falls asleep himself. Apparently, he was not smart enough to conduct this plan to run away with all the money.

The following scene shows the character inside a police station. The police officer refers to him as “negro Luciano” and tells him he has a visit. Surprisingly, the woman from whom he tried to steal the money comes into the scene and asks him to confess where the rest of the money is. As she gets angrier and raises her voice, the officer asks her not to yell because “it seems like she is a Negro”, or: she behaves black in a direct relation to the stereotype of black people being loud and scandalous.

The officer, then, manifests he was put through some torture for him to confess: one of these punishments was eating cat, and he complained about it. When the woman asks why he complained, the officer answers that he complained because they served him a little piece. In Peru, there are some Afro-Peruvian populations that eat cats, and once the practice was publicly exposed, the stereotype that associates black people with eating cats quickly spread.

In the next frame, Negro Mama complains about his situation, manifesting that “in this country, who is white is white, and who is black is ruined.” As he tries to figure out how to escape from the prison, a package arrives for him. It has a note from his friends, who happen to be criminals and drug addicts, who send him refreshments with sleeping pills so he can offer those to the people inside the station and escape while they are sleeping. He quickly executes his plan, and when they all fall asleep, he escapes from the bars. However, to celebrate his victory, he drinks one of the sodas and falls asleep himself, repeating the end of the first part of the sequence.

This episode is fundamental in the analysis of the character, because it determines the discourse that the character acquired after the controversy and generated a mediatic campaign that provided the character with a more solid background, and a family history in order to gain the approval of the public.

There have been multiple arguments that the comedian that created this character used to defend himself. He has used the argument of Negro Mama being just a parody to defend his existence and he denies any type of offense to the Afro-Peruvian community.

However, as Baudrillard mentions, “Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real (...). Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference” (Baudrillard in Durham, 2012, 524). In this case, the character might be considered as a simulation, that is different from a representation to the extent to which it does not have an equivalent in reality, since the characteristics attributed to him are based on stereotypes and prejudice towards the Afro-Peruvian population.

Two different public opinion surveys conducted the same year in different months show that, while in one of them^{svii} more than 70% (Graphic 1) of the respondents recognize that the media promote discrimination, more than 50% (Graphic 2) on the other hand^{sviii} do not find these programs offensive.

Gramsci refers to cultural hegemony as “the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” (Gramsci in Lears, 1985: 568). In a context in which racial hierarchies

have influenced the dynamics of society, domination is exercised by the racial minorities that concentrate the political and economic power.

The consent given to this comedian to keep performing this character represents a perfect example of a contradictory consciousness, a state that according to Gramsci mixes “approbation and apathy, resistance and resignation” (Gramsci in Lears, 1985: 569). Thus, it is possible to find very few social interventions that question this character and ask for its removal.

Contradictory Consciousness

However, because of the multiplicity of elements that reproduce negative stereotypes of Afro-Peruvians, there were public expressions of disapproval of the character that led to a direct confrontation with its creator. These confrontations arose when the Afro-Peruvian civil society organizations demanded his complete elimination from the national television.

This situation provides interesting insight into understanding how cultural hegemony has influenced the Peruvian society and has transformed racism into something that is a part of society and it is still present and expressed routinely, but mostly in a non-explicit way, which makes it hard to identify and confront.

Is in this society that the controversy about the offensiveness of a character opens a bigger debate about what is considered racist and who is willing to publicly admit it. Because of this case, multiple public opinion polls were made to evaluate the impacts and appreciations of Negro Mama and the public campaign to disappear him. These polls showed contradictory results, since as the public believed that the national television

contributes to the promotion of discrimination, but they also did not consider Negro Mama offensive.

It is possible to observe in this specific event the visible existence of a contradictory consciousness (Gramsci in Lears, 1985: 570). While the public sees a problem, it does not support public campaigns to eradicate the character or even attack the organizers who promote it.

Cultural hegemony also needs of consensus to be maintained as a mechanism of social influence, and the permanence of Negro Mama in the national television was then justified by the comedian who personifies him by referring to the acceptance that he considers the character has. This acceptance extends also to the Afro-Peruvian community, since one of the strategies of the comedian to defend the existence of the character was to request the support of Afro-Peruvian artists who publicly advocated for the permanence of this character, highlighting his humorous aspect and criticizing the public rejection from Afro-Peruvian social movements and advocacy groups, thus delegitimizing their public actions.

The controversy that this specific episode brought gave the creator the necessary conditions to reconstruct the character, providing him with a more consistent background that inserted him into a different environment, with the intention to appeal to the popularity that the character had at that moment.

In order to do so, the creator used many of the spaces inside of Frecuencia Latina to promote the character and to defend himself from the accusations of the Afro-Peruvian organizations that were confronting him about the existence of the character. Thus, Jorge Benavides was able to give multiple interviews and participate as a guest in many of the

prime time shows of the TV network, which allowed them to consolidate his popularity and to preserve the character.

There is one particular interview^{xix} that serves as a reference for the analysis in this chapter. Despite not being considered a chapter as such, is an important moment for the character because it takes part in a media strategy to clean up the image of Negro Mama and guarantee his acceptance and support.

The sequence features a special sequence in which the denouncing against Negro Mama is addressed, with the clear intention to defend the character and its permanence in television. The segment combines interviews given by Jorge Benavides and the Afro-Peruvian leader Monica Carrillo, and statements made by Benavides dressed as Negro Mama. While the comedian defends his right to create and do what he wants with his art, Carrillo unravels the nature of the character and explains the issues that it raises and the reproduction of stereotypes about the Afro-Peruvian population.

Though the sequence intends to present both sides of the dispute, it shapes the discussion towards the innocent and positive image that the character is trying to portray, intending to depict him as an honest man trying to work. Moreover, the interactions of the character suggest that Negro Mama is no longer located in a space of fiction, but instead has become a real character in his own right. Moreover, in this sequence, both the journalist and the comedian imply that the character is, in fact, a representation an Afro-Peruvian man and not a parody, as they argue that Negro Mama is “the most beloved negrito of Peru.”

The sequence was featured as a live interview, in which it was possible to identify the repetition of old patterns and jokes that are directly related to the stereotypes that identified the character in his early stages. However, the interview focused more in the background of

the character, portraying him as a naïve and noble character with a family history worth of telling. During the first minutes of the interview, Negro Mama explains the origins of his name, as he refers that his nickname is related to his love for breastfeeding as a child, and he reveals to the show host that he has a large family.

Despite the clear intention to create a family history that sympathizes with the public, Negro Mama falls into stereotyping of his family members and himself, by using rhetorical strategies to indicate that his parents are employed in low-income jobs. For instance, he mentions that his father solves issues related with *la banca* –that translates as ‘the bench’ but in Spanish is also used to refer to the banking industry- to later reveal that his father is actually a carpenter. In that same line, he plays with the word *luna*, which translates to both moon and glass, to later explain that his mother cleans car windows in the streets.

The last part of this interview addresses more personal details of Negro Mama, which relate him to a humble household where he must share the room with 24 brothers, which implies that he was raised in poverty and lacked decent living conditions. The following piece of information he gives contributes to reaffirm his ignorance, playing with the fact that he was not able to attend university, while also emphasizing his lack of abilities with the English language. Despite mentioning that he did not have university education, Negro Mama uses the same strategy that he used when mentioning the employment of his parents, to refer to himself as a “PR representative of the written press,” only to later reveal that he is in fact a paperboy.

This last sequence shows the strategies that the character used to justify his existence and to defend himself from the accusations that brought him to the public controversy. Consequently, the public opinion did not only support the continuity of the character in

television, but also denied any accusations of racism and racial stereotyping that the Afro-Peruvian organizations presented publicly. This had a repercussion in the public opinion that validated and defended the character as one of the most beloved and preferred on television, which also led to the vindication of the Afro-Peruvian leaders as problematic and senseless.

This strategy also included the participation of some Afro-Peruvian celebrities who defended Benavides and the character by attacking the Afro-Peruvian organization that made the denouncement and claiming that the elimination of the character went against freedom of speech.

One of these celebrities was the comedian actor Carlos Vilchez, who was a part of *JB Noticias* during the decade of the 1990s and appears in two of the episodes that the previous chapter examined. When declaring to the media^a, the actor stated that it was unfair to try to impede the appearance of the character since it was just a form of artistic expression. What is interesting about this declaration is that he did not identify himself as black, but he mentioned that his family and his grandparents were black and that despite this fact the character did not offend him. Moreover, he stated that the Afro-Peruvian organizations were racist for making speaking against Negro Mama and that they should, instead, be proud of who they were.

Another person that spoke in favor of Negro Mama was the singer Pepe Vásquez, though he did mention that the character had some things to correct, but that the character did not intend to offend the Afro-Peruvian population.

The comedian Martin Farfán, who had a character based on an Afro-Peruvian woman, also gave his support to Negro Mama. He mentioned that the denouncements were

trying to censor the creative process of the Peruvian comedians, but he was open to the dialogue with the Afro-Peruvian organizations to discuss the development of his character.

The last person that defended Negro Mama is the singer Ester Dávila, better known as Bartola, who did not also speak against the cancellation of the show, but also assured that there were no racial differences in Peru and that Negro Mama only brought joy to everyone⁶¹. Her case is probably the most interesting, because the show *El especial del Humor* includes an impersonation of her, and that impersonation was included in the controversial sequence *El asalto al camion Herpes*. Despite this, she affirmed she did not find her impersonation offensive and understood that both her impersonation and the character of Negro Mama were fictitious and did not represent any risk.

Conclusion

As it was mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the 2000s and early 2010s saw an evident modification of the nature of the character, and allow its creator to diversify his discourse, with the intention to diminish the risk of public accusations of racism. This was confirmed by him in the last sequence analyzed in this chapter, in which he categorically denies the early nature of the character and his direct association with delinquency. Despite Benavides' efforts to defend the character, though, it is possible to notice that Negro Mama does not change his nature despite the diversity of roles and jobs that he plays, since these roles do nothing but reaffirm the criminal nature that is inherently attached to the character. This argument was validated in the process of public denouncement of the character and influenced in the posterior sanction that Frecuencia Latina -the network that airs the comedy shows that features Negro Mama- in 2011. This sanction was also responsible for

the temporary retirement of the character from television, and the second reformulation of the character for its powerful comeback just some months later. The next chapter will examine the modifications that Negro Mama suffered due to this sanction and the new faces of the character which evolved to more sophisticated and subtle forms of racism.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE GOOD NEGRO: THE MAKING OF AN “ANTI-RACIST” NEGRO MAMA

Introduction

The 2010 denouncement that the Afro-Peruvian organization LUNDU did against the comedian Jorge Benavides and the character of Negro Mama were fundamental in the final transformation of the character traits into the version that continues to perform in the present. The controversy that the character generated was the point of start for multiple debates about the nature of the character, which led to his disappearance from *El Especial del Humor*. However, what was considered a positive outcome was only a temporary break for the character, who made its comeback within a few months.

This return is useful to the research as it allows to observe the last process of modification that Negro Mama suffered, in which the creator intended to eliminate the majority of the attributes that the Afro-Peruvian leaders considered offensive, and to orient the humor towards a new group of traits intended to be unrelated to his racial features.

When talking about this new facet of Negro Mama, it is necessary to locate the discussion around the new types of racist appealing that the character does, despite its clear intention to be considered anti-racist and progressive; and, in order to do so, it is necessary to refer to what Eduardo Bonilla Silva (2014) refers to as “colorblind racism”.

According to Bonilla-Silva, one of the main rhetoric strategies that colorblindness uses is the insertion of coded language, which became more frequent in the discourse of the character in this last period. For instance, many of the jokes of the character are coded in a double-meaning words and in most of the occasions, Negro Mama provides clarification for them, accusing the receptors of having a dirty mind.

The use of coded language does not only contribute to the continuation of racist jokes, but is also a strategy to avoid any claims, putting the weight of the interpretation of the words in the viewers. This dynamic is, then, extremely useful for the purposes of the comedian, since they reaffirm that neither the character or the sequences reproduce any type of racist language and that the clarification of words, quotes and dialogues of the character are a proof of this.

To Bonilla Silva, this new type of racism is covert, avoids any explicit racial terms or any reference to a racial agenda; and contributes to the invisibility of mechanisms that reproduce racial inequalities. This ideology, then, could be seen as a result of a process of containment and rearticulation¹¹ (Omi and Winant, 2015), and in this context, it is possible to trace the basis of colorblind racism to the processes by which the dominant elites dismantled the claims of the persistence of racism in society.

In this context, colorblindness manifests through the discourse and, in that sense, the language of colorblindness is “slippery, apparently contradictory, and often subtle” (Bonilla-Silva, 2014: 88), which include the use rhetoric strategies, such as testimonies, storylines and coded language, as a way to cover subtle racist points of view and justifying them while sounding politically correct.

This new period is characterized by the intention to clear the racist image that the character had in the past, through the highlighting of some of the positive references to some common elements of the Afro-Peruvian culture and a direct and clear anti-racism speech. Instead of seeing the character as racist in itself, Jorge Benavides saw the discourse as an opportunity to revert the rejection that it had, particularly from the Afro-Peruvian leaders and activists.

This final chapter will look at the development of the contemporary Negro Mama, since its return in 2012 until the present day. The analysis will focus on encountering the ways in which the character's discourse aligns with an anti-racist agenda and the contradictions between the character in itself, and the progressive agenda that his appearances try to push in the show.

Humor about a racist attack? Negro Mama and the addressing of racism in sports

The analysis will address an episode aired in 2014. As mentioned before, after the 2010 formal complaint of the Afro-Peruvian organizations, the creator of the character intended to modify it by posing as an advocate against racism and discrimination, by constructing a discourse that condemn racism and promoted respect to the Afro-Peruvian population. Though these discourses are framed by the creator as an intention to redeem himself and begin to change the way in which this character was perceived, the episodes that identify this period present other types of racist tropes and stereotypes that contradict the intentions of the creator.

The episode is framed in relation to a very public case of a racist aggression that affected the Afro-Brazilian soccer player Paulo Edson Nascimento Costa, also known as Tinga. The case happened in 2014 and involved the fans of Real Garcilaso, a Peruvian

soccer team that began to do racist chants when Tinga was playing a game with Cruzeiro, his team.

The case went public due to the denounces of the player and the club, and raised a necessary debate about the racist aggressions to Afro-descendant soccer players, involving even the Peru and Brazil presidents –Ollanta Humala and Dilma Rousseff- who publicly condemned the events and made visible the need to improve the mechanisms of regulation and sanction of this form of violence in the stadiums.

Using this case as a reference, Jorge Benavides managed to create a sequence that was featured in the show *El Especial del Humor*ⁱⁱⁱ. The sequence was set in a press conference that included a personified black comedian playing the role of Tinga, and Negro Mama as the player's manager; and intended to protest racism and discrimination by explicitly stating that these conducts are not acceptable and should be sanctioned. However, as the scene goes, a different group of racist tropes appear, contradicting the speech that was originally created and maintained by the actors.

The first visible difference in the portrayal of Negro Mama is the fact that he is now playing a manager, something that was never seen before. Despite this, the other traits of the character remain, as he continues to be in blackface and has issues of articulation as he speaks. When Mama addresses the matter as he speaks to the press, he provides to give more information about the racist aggression, but there is an evident reference to words and phrases that play with the hypersexualization of black men. The first is a subtle joke about the last name of the player, which can be confused with a vulgar word used to refer to the male genitals; and the second one is a smart wordplay in which they use the word “*penon*”

to indicate that the other players have a deep sadness about what is happening, with the underlying intention to refer to the size of their genitals.

The scene turned more vulgar when the journalists ask the manager to explain his choice of words and he stands up and acts as if he was trying to pull down his pants to the surprise of all the journalists, to later explain he was trying to adjust his pants.

The sequence intends to denounce this racist aggression and highlight the support that the player had from other public figures, even featuring the participation of the president of the country, who takes the world and confirm his will to act against the acts of discrimination. After him, the act includes the appearance of impersonators of Dilma Rousseff, Nicolas Maduro and Enrique Capriles, who reaffirm their support to the player.

A visible trait in the dynamics between the player, the manager and the journalists are the desperate need of *Mama* to take over the conference and be in the spotlight during the event, not allowing Tinga to speak and answering every question for him. In the final minutes of the sequence, he explains that Tinga does not speak Spanish and he would be his translator just for the player to say some final words. To the surprise of the participants, the player reveals that he does not only speaks Spanish, but that he is not from Brazil, but instead from a very popular Afro-Peruvian neighborhood called La Victoria.

Finally, the denounced is minimized when the fake soccer player stated that he was actually there to impersonate a famous reggaeton singer, and the scene becomes a scenario in where he performs and entertains all the press there, thus ignoring the main reason of the conference and the claims of racism.

Lee D. Baker (2007) explores the construction of the racialized black subject as

savage, less human and unintelligent, in order to justify their subhuman situation and the oppression that affected them. These characteristics spread through the societies and became a part of the negative stereotypes that identify the Afro-descendants in the world, contributing to the establishment of racial hierarchies that privileged whiteness and forcing the nonwhite subject to adjust to the “white” patterns of behavior ^{iv}.

Despite the noticeable change of Negro Mama, his late reaction to the events happening in the conference confirms he is not capable of showing a rational behavior, which ultimately led to him speaking incoherently to the journalists. Moreover, his dialogues used multiple sexual jokes that reaffirmed the myth of the hypersexual black man, defined by scholars like Kendi (2017) as one of the tropes that the elites established during the eighteenth century with the help of the scientific community, with the intention to prove that the genitalia size had a relation with the improper behavior that the black population had. Hypersexuality becomes more relevant in this new period for Negro Mama, becoming one of the sources for the jokes that he tells, thus replacing some old racist stereotypes that were previously critiqued.

Negro Mama as an advocate of the Afro-Peruvian culture

Following the same line than the episode previously analyzed, the comedian decided to dedicate one of his weekly episodes to commemorate the Day of the Afro-Peruvian culture^{iv} (4th of June) in which he tried to include popular Afro-Peruvian figures and deliver a message of inclusion.

The episode is set in a supposed Quinta, a multifamily housing complex inhabited by low-income class families, in where a small stage was installed to have a show that intended to celebrate the fourth of June. In the stage, comedian Carlos Vilchez is the person

in charge to announce the motive of the celebration and invite the neighbors that would give an artistic presentation. The episode features interesting and questionable participations of Afro-Peruvian popular figures that are presented and asked to give speeches in favor of the celebration, in order to emphasize the contributions of the Afro-Peruvian population.

In the stage, Carlos Vilchez welcomes two musicians who constantly play Afro-Peruvian festejo when people entered and exited the scene. After interviewing some of the neighbors and joking with them, the first controversial figure is introduced into the sequence. The presenter then welcomes Martha Moyanosm, an Afro-Peruvian congresswoman into the stage and enters the scene dancing. She enters the scene and dances along with comedian Carlos Vilchez, who introduces her and states that the crowd is very content with having her there. In the next dialogue, she is asked to give a speech to the neighbors, to which she responds by mentioning the importance of joy as a fundamental tool that the afro-descendants that has historically help them to see life and the world in a different way. She then proceeds to mention that afro-descendants fight for equality in a different way as well and that the need for inclusion must be attached to a process of self-recognition and acceptance, in order to be able to convince people that inclusion is the correct way to go. The crowd cheers and clap as she makes her way out of the stage dancing and the presenter introduces to a couple of sisters who do an artistic performance.

After this, the presenter introduces Negro Mama –only introduced as Mama- indicating that he is very loved among the neighbors and always brings something innovative. Negro Mama enters the scene dancing and mimicking dance moves. He then states that he is solely in the stage to remind the neighbors that they need to pay a special

security fee, just to be interrupted by the presenter who informs him that they are not there to talk about those issues since they are celebrating the Day of the Afro-Peruvian culture. Ignoring this fact, he continues to say the details about the fee and initiates a verbal game in which he refers to a bicycle and a fellow neighbor, using terms that can be used to talk about the bicycle and to sexually refer to the neighbor.

After approximately a minute of sexually related jokes, the present dismisses him to introduce the next guest: *El Negro Humo* –another comedian in blackface that also has an afro wig- comes into the scene dancing Afro-Peruvian music. He mentions he has something important to say only to make fun of the speech congresswoman Moyano gave, by repeating some of the things she said but without trying to make any sense of the worlds and laughing after saying them. After this, he mentions he would honor the Afro-Peruvian culture by singing a *panalivio*, a well-known Afro-Peruvian music genre created by the enslaved to manifest their pain during the colonial period. Disregarding the importance of this genre, the verses of the *panalivio* that the comedian sings are sexist, violent and sexual oriented, and are featured by burlesque movements for the enjoyment of the crowd.

The final number of this spectacle is Negro Mama, which returns to the stage to pay a tribute to the Afro-Peruvian culture, by giving a speech in which he emphasizes the importance of the date and recognizes the figure of Nicomedes Santa Cruz, one of the most popular Afro-Peruvian intellectuals. While he does so, however, he maintains his peculiar voice, making some mistakes when pronouncing the words but continues to announce that he will pay homage to Santa Cruz by reciting one of his most famous poems. The following frame is a repetition of the poetry and some in between dances while the crowd cheers and claps constantly until he finishes.

Once he is out of the stage, the presenter announces the final number of the day, introducing the Afro-Peruvian singer Guajaja, who enters the stage and proceeds to recite a verse of a Nicomedes Santa Cruz's poem and salute the crowd for what he calls "The day of the black race". When doing his performance, the other members of the public jump into the stage and continue with the celebrations while dancing and singing.

Before the sequence ends, Negro Mama appears again to deliver his final speech, in which he states that he hopes that this date contributes to the reflection on the big contributions of the Afro-descendant to the culture, the arts, and the sports in Peru; and that it helps society to understand that people are created equal and there is only one race: the human race.

As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, the creator of the character intended to use his popularity to, paradoxically, become an advocate of the anti-racist struggle and, in this context, this episode represents an effort not only to deliver an anti-racist message but also to bring awareness about the positive characteristics of the Afro-Peruvian population.

Despite this, the episode fails into multiple contradictions that end up diminishing the positive messages that are given during the first half of the episode. The participation of a popular Afro-Peruvian leader such as the former congresswoman Moyano, for example, is a very well thought strategy that intended to legitimize the messages and the homage the show was intended to pay to the Afro-Peruvian culture. Unfortunately, the weaknesses of the message in itself –as it contributed to the perpetuation of a stereotyped image of the Afro-Peruvians- and the posterior mockery of the positive message they were supposedly trying to give.

Also, the use of culturally recognizable element such as the Afro-Peruvian music and dance performances are used once again not only to legitimize the homage they intended to pay, but also as a motive for mockery, as it is possible to see from the frames in which Negro mama and the other comedian in blackface exaggerate the dance moves to make their performances more funny for the viewers. As Lott (1996) mentions when referring to the performances of Minstrel shows, the use of traditional music was a strategy to authenticate the portrayal of the African Americans. In this same line, the use of Afro-Peruvian music functions as a necessary element for this tribute, since it is used as a contributor to the validation of the spectacle.

In addition to that, many parts of the speeches that people give during the sequence are repetitive and intend to advocate for inclusion and equality. However, they continue to fall into the stereotyping of the Afro-Peruvian population. It is surprising, for instance, that a recognized person as former congresswoman Martha Moyano uses the few minutes he has in this space, to address the supposedly inherent joy that characterizes the Afro-Peruvians, without focusing on a deeper set of demands, or intent to push a real discourse against racial discrimination. Instead of maintaining the same line that her public discourse has, Moyano, decides to use this space to use a discourse that did not address the systemic causes of racism and the relevance of the Day of the Afro-Peruvian culture.

Despite the fact that the decision of former congresswoman Moyano to participate in this, to say the least, questionable in itself, the most surprising aspect of her participation is the weakness of her discourse, especially considering the fact that she served for many years as the President of the Afro-Peruvian working group inside of the Congress, and pushed many legislative initiatives for the advancement of the Afro-Peruvian population

during her years in Congress. Considered also a vital part of the Afro-Peruvian movement, she adhered to an articulated discourse that suddenly disappeared while participating in the show.

Her participation in the sequence, then, only functions to bring validation to the homage and the posterior interactions and dialogues that continue to fall into racist traits and troupes. Her presence is there only to represent a superficial reconciliation between the Afro-Peruvian civil society and the character of Negro Mama.

There are multiple elements that come into contradictions with the intended purpose of the sequence. The use of blackface, prosthetics, and afro wigs remained unchanged, despite the multiple claims and observations done to the process of impersonation of the character; and in addition to this, are used not only by Negro Mama but also by other characters that intervene in the sequence as *Negro Humo*. The choice to continue using the characteristic way of speaking of Negro Mama is also made in this sequence, and this is one of the main motives of mockery and laughter, especially when reciting the poems of Nicomedes Santa Cruz.

The sequence is designed as a homage to the contributions of the Afro-Peruvians and it intends to bring awareness about the day of the Afro-Peruvian culture, but the order in which the speeches and discourses do nothing but overshadow the main objective of it.

The good Omama: Negro Mama as the president of the United States

The last episode this chapter will analyze was aired in 2016 and draws from the official visit to Peru of the former president Barack Obama to participate in an international conference^{vi}. In this sequence, the comedian plays with the last name of the former

president and introduces “Omama”, who has the exact same physical appearance, behavior and way of speaking than Negro Mama. Omama enters the scene and salutes the crowd speaking in English, but he is not able to properly articulate the words, so he decides to announce that he would rather speak in Spanish to facilitate the dialogue. Continuing with his speech, he claims he is very happy to be in Peru and he waits that at the end of the night he can take a girl to his room, to which the crowd reacts scandalized. Then he clarifies that this is because he has many books in his room that he hopes to share with a girl, because knowledge is power.

In the next part of the sequence, he manifests how happy he is in Lima, Peru, and that he hopes to enjoy the delicious Peruvian food and uses an atypical combination of both Spanish and English accent to mention some of the most famous Peruvian dishes and drinks. Furthermore, he mentions he will not be doing any dance performance, but that he would not go without giving them his *piece*, using this word to refer to a musical piece and make a sexual reference as well. Contradicting what he said just seconds ago, he states that he has a musical performance prepared for the public, and proceeds to take out his coat and dance Afro-Peruvian *festejo*, repeating the same body movements that characterized Negro Mama, mimicking the original dance moves of this music genre.

The next thing Omama proposes is to do a Q&A section, receiving some of the questions of the crows in relation to some of the issues that affect the Peruvian citizens the most. The first question addresses the issues of safety in Peru and the person asking requests Omama for an alternative to reduce the number of crimes committed in the country. While at first it seems like Omama is dedicated into answering the question in a serious manner, when he proceeds to tell his personal experience he falls again into the use

of words with sexual connotation that he later must clarify for them to make sense. For instance, he mentions that, when he was trying to avoid a robbery, he “took *it* out and since he had *it* long”, he was able to scare the robber and maintain himself safe.

What is more, another member of the crowd tells Omama that he has an addiction to women, to which he responds that this is more than obvious because he can tell that “whenever (the other person) sees a woman, he notices it gets *stiff*. This use of words with double connotation continue when he addresses the issues of gender violence, mentioning that he helped a woman victim of violence *washing it and getting it in* her; or mentions that he notices one of the women in the crowd and he thought about *riding* her.

The sequence finishes with him going back to speak in English to thank all the people in the crowd for coming to his presentation and calling his personal security to take him out of the scenario. What is curious, however, is than in another sequence of the show, Barack Obama –or *Omama*- is impersonated in a different way, also with the help of prosthetics, to look more like the actual former president. The difference between one character and the other is neither explained nor addressed in later scenes and it is understood that these both characters would then represent the same person.

This episode is useful as it shows how the inclusion of more diverse representations of blackness and the different roles that Negro Mama impersonates in the show does not guarantee that the character would stop appealing to old racist troupes that reproduced stereotypes about him.

In this episode, despite Negro Mama is, in fact, acting as one of the most powerful men in the world, his performance is limited to the old stereotypes that characterize Negro

Mama, thus reproducing not only his physical appearance, but also deciding to reproduce the discourses associated primarily with his natural hypersexual behavior and his inability to be articulate and clear in his declarations.

In addition to this, the character is asked to act and perform as a “regular” Afro-Peruvian person, being asked repeatedly to dance Afro-Peruvian music, for example. Though it might seem confusing and lack of common sense, the character acts accordingly, thus eliminating the cultural and geographical factors that differentiate an African American person from an Afro-Peruvian one. For the creators of the sequence, blackness is a plain and homogenic characteristic that allows them to construct the imitation of Barack Obama under the same parameters that they use to construct Negro Mama. In this episode, Barack Obama loses its relevance as the president of the United States and become an uneducated and hypersexualized man whose value resides in his capacity to entertain the crowd that came to see him.

This episode shows how the homogenizing characterization of any black man functions in the show, since the position, the occupation or the job that they have in the show is not relevant as they would always be portrayed in the same way.

The most confusing aspect of this chapter comes at the end, in which it is possible to see a different physical impersonation of Barack Obama on a different sequence. Sadly, there is not further information about why and how this impersonation is changed, but it is important to note that the new Obama maintains himself in blackface, though some of his facial features are modified.

Conclusion

This chapter contains the analysis of the performances of Negro Mama that are, maybe, the most diversified and nuanced in the history of the character. Though this is directly related to the public controversy that surrounded the character during the end of 2010, the character failed to dismantle his racist discourse.

The most visible change in the development of the character during this period is the adoption of a clear anti-racist discourse and the efforts that Benavides did to try to make visible some of the positive traits and contributions of the Afro-Peruvians. In order to do this, Benavides and his team design and broadcasted multiple episodes in which Negro Mama intended to become an advocate -almost an activist- against racial discrimination, promoting a message of unity and inclusion.

In order to do this, the character appealed to some popular and recognized Afro-Peruvian figures from the civil society and the popular culture, to legitimize his new image and to act as support figures that would validate the messages he was trying to deliver in his show.

The three episodes analyzed in this chapter show that, despite the many efforts done in order to clear the racist image associated to Negro Mama, the character only shifted and directed some of his racist troupes in order to be seen as a progressive and inclusive character while continuing perpetuating the physical and personality traits that qualify him as such.

CONCLUSION

As Matthew W. Hugey mentions, “media exercises no less influence in promulgating and protecting de facto racism through the patterned combination of white normativity and anti-Black stereotypes” (Hugey, 2009: 544). Taking this into consideration, the initial objective of this research was to theorize and deeply analyze the issues of representation of the Afro-Peruvian population in the media through the understanding of one of its most controversial figures: El Negro Mama. It was my intention to position this character at the center of a debate about the depictions of the Afro-Peruvians in the media, and to observe how this figure evolved and transformed itself through time, as the conceptions of racism transformed as well.

The decision to explore the nuances of this character came after my own reflections as an Afro-Peruvian woman and activist, and my previous career in the field of communications. First, the research on the field of media studies is necessary as it is an underexplored field in Peru; and is very much directed to specific events or phenomena looked from a global perspective, thus excluding the analyzes of the role that race, gender, class or sexuality have in them.

Second, it was important for me to contribute to systematize and theorize an issue that has already been denounced and publicized by the Afro-Peruvian society. In this sense,

I was aware of the fact this research was not intending to discover an unknown phenomenon, but to insert this long time known issue into the academic field in order to provide a more consistent foundation that would later serve for a deeper debate about the matter of the representation of Afro-Peruvians in the media.

I decided to focus only in the figure of Negro Mama since it is not only the most popular and controversial Afro-Peruvian image on television but because it has also served as a standard for posterior representations of blackness in the media. With this in mind, his existence is not only important but actually fundamental to the standardization of the ways in which almost every comedy show has depicted Afro-Peruvians in the last two decades: the use of blackface –that would certainly be criticized and even criminalized in other countries- is widely accepted and use in other comedy shows to personify real and fictitious black men and women. In addition to this, other behaviors have been copied and reproduced without alterations and have been validated by comedians in the national television. Because of it, it was important that this research looked at Negro Mama as a pioneering figure in the representations of blackness in the media. For instance, a large number of Afro-Peruvian soccer players, TV personalities and even politicians have been depicted following the example of Negro Mama, as it is possible to observe in the images.

The thesis accomplished the objective of analyzing the representation of the Afro-Peruvian population through the examination of El Negro Mama as the most representative black character in television for nearly thirty years. By the analysis of his process of characterization and his discourse, I was able to explore the transformation of the character and the different discursive strategies he used throughout his existence to make evident the reproduction of racist tropes.

When looking at the enormous number of episodes that include this character, I identified three different stages of the character that were later used to divide the analysis and thus show the different versions that the character presented through time. It was important to me to mark these specific stages of the character to address the multiple ways in which the racist stereotypes and discourses come into play.

The first chapter intended to prove the evident racist nature of the performance of Negro Mama during the mid-1990s and mid-2000s, by showing the construction of the character that was tightly associated with criminality and marginality. In this period, the use of racist discourse is used without any reserve and it is also the time in which Jorge Benavides establishes a standardized physical appearance of the character and some personality traits that are maintained until the current times. What is interesting about the construction of the character is the fact that, during the first years of his existence, Negro Mama is clearly marked as ‘the average black man’, and this establishment is maintained consistently throughout most of the episodes. After watching dozens of episodes aired between this period, it was clear to me that at first, Negro Mama was not provided with an individual identity, and instead, it was built as a representation of any black person.

In addition to this, another element associated with this period that I have not identified previously was the participation of other characters that I identified as black. When looking repeatedly many of the sequences, I was able to identify the dynamics in which these other black bodies were involved and the ways in which their blackness was diminished or ignored to focus on Negro Mama as the ideal representation of black men.

This was an important element to show the strong relation between blackness and phenotype that Jorge Benavides created, on one side, and the explicit use of criminality as a natural and inherited characteristic of the black men, on the other.

Moreover, this period is marked as the one that fixates the personality traits of the character, despite some later remarks of Jorge Benavides about the creation of the character. Taking in consideration that this period is the one that popularizes the character, it is necessary to address the relevance of the characteristics that were attributed to this character and that will prevail as it became popular and loved among the audiences.

In the first stage of the character, then, the appealing to racist troupes and stereotypes is not only evident, but also a fundamental element to build the foundations of the character and its later development in the sequences of the comedy shows.

The second period explored might be the one in which it is possible to observe a deep work of development of Negro Mama, due to the public controversy and complaints from the civil society that not only put him to public scrutiny but also helped to create a public debate over the issues of comedy and representation of ethnic minorities. In relation to this specific matter, it is necessary for me to mention that Negro Mama is not the only character created by Jorge Benavides that parodies a member of an ethnic minority: Benavides has also a character that personifies an indigenous woman called La Paisana Jacinta. Though this character was never intended to be the main objective of this thesis, it is relevant at this point as it contributes to having an extended view of what was happening at the time in terms of the debates around race and representation.

The denouncements and legal issues that involved Negro Mama and Jorge Benavides, then, helped to: a)the defense of Jorge Benavides as he used freedom of speech to defend his right to play Negro Mama, by framing him as a parody; b)reformulate Negro Mama to add a consistent storyline that included information of his family history, occupation and other interests; and c)test the popularity of the character among both the non Afro-Peruvians and the Afro-Peruvian audiences. It is worth mentioning that Jorge Benavides did an extremely strategic campaign, appealing to very popular figures of the national television, thus diminishing the claims of the Afro-Peruvian organizations that were given considerably less on-air time to expose their views around the nature of the character.

When the controversy started, back in 2010, I was barely involved in the Afro-Peruvian member and had just been welcomed in the organization that I am still a part of. However, there was little, if any, information about the claims and the nature of the technical documents that LUNDU-the organization leading the denounces- had presented in order to have the character removed from television. The secrecy about the details of the matter remains even today, with only the public resolution of the sanction as the main document of the entire process; and some media clips that show a biased side of the story.

However, for the nature of the research, it was important to explore the development of the character during and after the denouncements, and the transformation of the discourses of Negro Mama in an evident effort to clear his image and avoid being accused of being explicitly racist. In the process, thus, Negro Mama began to soften his discourse and to transform into a benevolent and innocent black man with a family, with hopes and ambitions but mostly, with a desire to continue doing honest work. This situation

-the public and legal lawsuit- had a major impact on how the character would develop in the following years, and the final time framed to show the real consequences of the transformations of Negro Mama.

The third time frame intended to look at the transformations of Negro Mama between the early 2010s and the mid-2010s. This is, without doubt, the period in which I observed the most variety in the character in its entire existence. Not only did Negro Mama performed as a black man with multiple occupations, but he also did performances impersonating a wide range of non-fictional characters, in which even the former President of the United States Barack Obama was included. However, this is also the period in which the racist troupes become more subtle and covert, for which it is harder to be publicly contested and denounced.

In this last stage of the character, the influence of its past controversies is more than evident and are taken into consideration to construct Negro Mama – or simply Mama – as a hard-working man that is no longer related to criminality, and that is also a strong advocate against racial discrimination and other forms of exclusion. It is surprising and astonishing to see the rehabilitation of a character that started as a criminal to become an activist, a well-reputed artist and even the President of the United States.

This is not only astonishing but also controversial since there is a very clear line in the jokes and discourses that appeal to the hypersexuality of the black men, specifically. As been hook states “in popular culture, representations of black masculinity equate it with brute phallocentrism, woman-hating, a pugilistic ‘rapist’ sexuality, and flagrant disregard for individual rights” (hooks, 1992: 140). Negro Mama, through the use of humor,

repeatedly appeals to his hypersexual nature, even more consistently when embracing an anti-racist discourse, in a clear contradiction with what he advocates for.

This period offered me many aspects to explore, but the focus of the fifth chapter was to address the ways in which humor functioned -or not- in the fight against racism and the positive recognition of the Afro-Peruvian populations. As it was mentioned before, this last stage of the character intended to clear his image and eliminate any questioning about the use of racist traits, and it did a good job in transforming its discourse that went from blatantly racist to covert and subtle racist, thus appealing to a completely different group of traits to eliminate the sources of past controversies.

An interesting fact of this stage is added by some of the perceptions of the audiences. Though my analysis was not centered on the responses of the audiences -since that would have created a separate thesis topic on its own- it was impossible not to look at the perceptions that the audiences had about the show. In this aspect, what surprised me the most was that a large portion of the social-media fans of the show mention that, due to the multiple modifications that the character suffered, it was not as funny as it was in the past.

Despite all of what was stated in this research, the character is still active these days and continues to be one of a loved and cherished character. In a country in which more than 80% of the population accepts that racism exists but only 55% admit that they are racist , Negro Mama, one of the few black faces in the national television, evolved to become a subtle but still dangerous character, just as racism transformed in the Peruvian society to become less identifiable but equally harmful.

This character has certainly more elements to explore, and this research only focused on nine out of thousands of episodes aired since the mid-1990s. There are some other variables, such as gender, class and sexuality that were not addressed in depth by this thesis, and future work should focus in the multiplicity of elements that this character brings to the discussion.

One of them is the addressing of gender, understood not only as the analysis of the participation of women, but instead as the construction of gendered subject as such, and the way in which their racial and gender identities interact.

In addition to this, I would like to further explore in future research is the responses of the public opinion leaders and the audiences to this type of content. In Chapter 2, I presented information about two surveys that included a question about the role of media in the reproduction of stereotypes. However, these surveys did not intend to gather information about the role of the media, but rather were general surveys to measure public opinion in a wide variety of topics.

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