

RACISM IN ARGENTINA AND THE BLACKNESS PROBLEM

THE CHANGE OF PERCEPTION TOWARDS AFRO-DESCENDANTS IN
BUENOS AIRES AND THE NEW DIMENSIONS OF BLACKNESS IN ARGENTINA
(1880-1930).

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines racism in Argentina between 1880 and 1930. The governing elite's efforts to whiten the Argentine population at the end of the nineteenth century led to the erasure and discrimination of anyone who did not have Caucasian features: Afro-descendants, mulattos, mestizos, and creoles. However, in the 1930s, whitening policies proved to have limited success. On the one hand, Afro-descendants were praised by the middle and lower classes of Buenos Aires; on the other hand, the Great Depression's effects made it clear that the Argentine population was made up of an ethnic mixture that had much darker skin tones than the whitening elite preferred. This work will show how the impact of the 1930s global crisis, as well as the enthusiasm for Afro-descendants, reinforced the racism that still existed, and will demonstrate that blackness became more than a racial but also a class connotation.

Keywords: Blackness in Argentina, Afroporteños, Racism, Buenos Aires, Afroporteño Press, Racial Identity, Popular Blackness, Commercial Press, Sports Pages, Interwar Period.

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INTRODUCTION

Less than a year ago, when the Prime Minister of Spain Pedro Sánchez visited Argentina, his host, President Alberto Fernández —paraphrasing the Mexican poet Octavio Paz— stated at a press conference: “Mexicans came from the Indigenous, Brazilians came from the jungle, but we Argentines came from the ships, and those ships came from Europe, and that is how we built our society.” In 2018, former Argentine President Mauricio Macri reportedly invoked the same fallacy during the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland: “the association between MERCOSUR (*Mercado Común del Sur*) and the European Union is natural because in South America we are all descendants of Europeans.”¹ Two things to point out: Octavio Paz never uttered that phrase and by now it is well known that both statements are as false as they are racist. The social, cultural, ethnic, and demographic composition of Brazil, Mexico, and Argentina is much more complex than what was outlined by the Argentine presidents.

Representatives of indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants criticized the unfortunate expressions of the Argentine presidents and, at the same time, they claimed their protagonism in Argentine History. Nevertheless, both presidents reproduced an idea that is quite widespread in popular thought and can be traced back to the nineteenth century. It did not come from the people, but from the state elite led by Julio Argentino Roca,

¹ Ernesto Ise “La innecesaria repetición del concepto “los argentinos venimos de los barcos”, *Diario Perfil*, June, 09, 2021, <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/politica/polemica-alberto-fernandez-frase-argentinos-venimos-de-los-barcos-mexicanos-indios.phtml>

Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, Juan Bautista Alberdi, and Bartolomé Mitre, founders of Modern Argentina.² Inspired by Social Darwinism, and by the desire to take Argentina on the road to progress, they tried to enforce a process of whitening Argentina's multi-ethnic population. This whitening process would leave no traces of the Indigenous and slave-owning past. Those inhabitants —indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants— were to disappear through miscegenation with immigrants arriving from Europe, an important instrument that would turn Argentine's diverse population into a white European one.³

Indeed, European immigration was heavily promoted. From the second half of the nineteenth century until the First World War, Argentina was the country that received the most immigrants —in relative terms— among all the countries of the American continent.⁴ White people, especially in the city of Buenos Aires and its surroundings, became the majority of the Afro-descendant population Argentina's ethnic composition was becoming whiter, but the ruling elite considered it insufficient to constitute a "white country." They felt the need to create a story about the transformation Argentina was undergoing. Official information was needed to show how the population was becoming whiter. Within this context, First National Census was conducted under the presidency of Domingo Faustino

² Modern Argentina is understood as the period between 1880 and the enactment of the Sáenz Peña Electoral Law in 1912. During those years, Argentina underwent a process of modernization and consolidation of the State according to the National project of the ruling elite. The National State was organized around a capitalist agro-export economy, it promoted European immigration, transforming society at the same time that an incipient industrial sector was created and the services offered by the State diversified and became more complex. The political system was led by an interprovincial elite, the "generation of the 80s". See: Fernando Rocchi, "El péndulo de la riqueza: La economía Argentina en el período 1880-1916" in, Mirta Zaida Lobato (Dir.) *Nueva Historia Argentina .Vol. 5 El progreso, la modernización y sus límites*, (Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2000) 15-71

³ Fernando Devoto, *Historia de la inmigración en la Argentina*, Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 2009, 227-230, 257-261

⁴ One-third of the population was foreign by 1914, more than a century after the May Revolution. However, the large European immigration surge was halted by the First World War. Vanina Edit Modolo, "Análisis histórico-demográfico de la inmigración en la Argentina del Centenario al Bicentenario", in *Papeles de población, Pap. Poblac.*, vol.22, no.89 Toluca, (jul./sep. 2016): 211.

Sarmiento in 1869. The data recorded showed a country with 1,877,490 inhabitants and 41,000 Argentines abroad. At that time, the country's 211,993 foreign residents made up 12% of the total population. The vast majority of them settled in the province of Buenos Aires, but to get an idea of the significance of the number of Europeans in Buenos Aires, it is enough to note that the province of Buenos Aires had twice as many foreigners as the province of Santa Fe, which had the second-highest foreign population. Thus, Buenos Aires had 305 foreigners for every 1,000 inhabitants, reaching the figure of 151,241 foreigners.⁵ Although this first census did not contain a race or colour identification category, the municipal census of 1887 did and of the 429,558 inhabitants of the city of Buenos Aires, 421,553 perceived themselves as "Whites" and 8,005 people fell in the "Other Colours" category that represented only 1.8% of the population.⁶ Historian Hernán Otero's contribution is fundamental on this point. The author emphasizes that the omission of the demographics according to race cannot be understood only for reasons of presumed quantitative scarcity. According to the 1887 Municipal Census, the Afro-descendant population was higher than that of certain groups of European immigrants; however, the presence of the latter was highlighted and fully acknowledged.

According to Otero, the decision to eliminate racial categories from the censuses may have demonstrated a progressive conception of how to understand populations, but it was also a byproduct of a time when civilization was associated with white and European

⁵ See: First Census of the Argentine Republic, September 15th to September 17th, 1869: <http://www.estadistica.ec.gba.gov.ar/dpe/Estadistica/censos/C1869-TU.pdf>

⁶ Censo general de la ciudad de Buenos Aires, 1887, 2 vols. (Buenos Aires, 1889), 2: 56-57 De Marco, Graciela; Rey Balmaceda, Raúl y Sassone, Susana, "Extranjeros en la Argentina. Pasado, presente y futuro", en *Geodemos*, monográfico núm. 2. Buenos Aires, 1994.

culture and was based on a strong racist ideology.⁷ Through what Alejandro Solomianski called "discursive genocide," the idea of a "White Argentina" started to be imposed."⁸

The notion of a white Argentina as the engine of this growth increased along with the urban, economic, and institutional development of Buenos Aires. It was Buenos Aires where most immigrants settled and it was from Buenos Aires that the idea and discourse of "White Argentina" were projected to the rest of the country. At the beginning of the twentieth century, intellectuals and writers of immigrant parents such as Juan José Soiza Reilly wrote in one of the most popular magazines of his time, *Caras y Caretas*, that: "The (black) race is losing in the mixture its primitive colour. It is turning gray. It dissolves. It lightens. An African tree is producing white flowers."⁹ Decades later, Raúl Scalabrini Ortíz reinforced this idea, stating that the average Argentine is found in one of the busiest corners of cosmopolitan Buenos Aires: Corrientes Av. and Esmeralda Street.¹⁰ He was referring to white men, like those who descended from the ships, as the country's acting president stated in 2021.¹¹

The reality behind this rhetoric of erasure is that both Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendants were undermined by military and territorial extension campaigns. The first group was defeated and decimated by military campaigns to conquer their territories known as the Desert Campaigns (1823-1885), and the second was recruited in large numbers and

⁷ Hernán Otero, "Estadística censal y construcción de la nación. El caso argentino, 1869- 1914", in *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana "Dr. Emilio Ravignani"*, Third Series, Numbers 16/17, Second Semester 1997 and First Semester 1998. pp. 136-139.

⁸ Alejandro Solomianski, *Identidades secretas: la negritud argentina*. Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo Editora. 2003, 23-27

⁹ Juan José Soiza Reilly, "Gente de color," *Caras y Caretas*, N° 373, November 25, 1905, 6.

¹⁰ Raúl Scalabrini Ortíz, *El hombre que está solo y espera*, Buenos Aires, Librerías Anaconda 1933, 25.

¹¹ Ernesto Ise "La innecesaria repetición del concepto "los argentinos venimos de los barcos", *Diario Perfil*, June, 09, 2021. <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/politica/polemica-alberto-fernandez-frase-argentinos-venimos-de-los-barcos-mexicanos-indios.phtml>

sent to fight in the Paraguayan War (1869). Those who survived were victims of systematic discrimination and restricted their ability to compete in the labor market with newly arrived immigrants. It becomes clear that the idea of “the Argentina of the immigrants” has a component of truth but also of erasure towards those who inhabited that same soil before and were not white. Likewise, the idea of Argentina as the Europe of South America has been so deeply rooted in how many Argentinians perceive themselves that even today, in large sectors of the population, people repeat the sentiments of Presidents Macri and Fernández.

Further back in time, in 2005, recent traces of this racist process can be found in the press coverage of a clash for the *Copa Libertadores de América*, the most important football tournament in South America. Quilmes, an Argentine team, returned home defeated by San Pablo Futebol Club from Brazil. However, the highlight was that an Argentinian football player was jailed for referring to the opposing midfielder as a "macaco" (monkey) on numerous occasions.¹² Reflecting the conceptions that the ruling elites of the nineteenth century installed on Afro-descendants, the Argentine soccer player acted according to what society had taught him. In his eyes, those with black skin were akin to monkeys, synonymous with backwardness, apt for dancing and monkey business; lazy, and prone to waste their days in drinking and licentious living.¹³

Contrary to what these facts suggest, latent twenty-first-century racism, which has its roots in the nineteenth century, does not exhibit a clear pattern of continuity. In the 1930s, when the idea of white Argentina had already been established middle and lower

¹² Héctor Tobar, “A Racial Wrangle in Brazil Rouses Crowds Far Beyond football Field”, *Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 2005, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-apr-16-fg-race16-story.html>

¹³ George Reid Andrews, *Los Afroargentinos de Buenos Aires*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones La flor, 1989, 248-249

sectors of the cosmopolitan city of Buenos Aires went through a period of rediscovery of African culture that led to an appreciation of Afro-descendants from Brazil, Europe, and the United States. The arrival in Buenos Aires of Afro-descendant artists, musicians, and athletes caused great expectation among the public, as never before.¹⁴ Those who, decades before, were discriminated against and branded with the worst adjectives, during the 1930s were acclaimed by the white audiences of Buenos Aires. During those 10 years, Buenos Aires echoed, once again, a European trend, the *Tumulte noir*, which admired the artistic expressions of Afro-descendants. In this climate, Afro-American jazz and French variety show visited Argentina to delight the audiences of Buenos Aires. Likewise, Afro-Brazilian football players arrived in the country to join different football teams —the most popular sport of the moment, which was beginning its professional stage.¹⁵ At the same time, in the context of the Great Depression, another phenomenon related to blackness arose. Thousands of Argentines who lived in the provinces started to migrate to Buenos Aires in search of more and better work. That population was not Caucasian but had a dark complexion as a result of earlier ethnic mixing.¹⁶ This was another type of blackness with no apparent link to any African ancestry but connected.¹⁷ It was a popular negritude, the product of an earlier ethnic mix. The ethnic blending had not only resulted in "white flowers," as Juan José Soiza Reilly expressed it, but also darker ones. These Argentine migrants brought to the predominantly white city of Buenos Aires a demographic

¹⁴ Matthew Karush, "Blackness in Buenos Aires: The Transnational Career of Oscar Alemán", in *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentine*, ed., by Paulina Alberto and Eduardo Elena, Cambridge University Press, 2016, 73-98

¹⁵ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, (Harvard University Press, 2003, 171-173.

¹⁶ Ezequiel Adamovsky, *El Gaucho Indómito. De Martín Fierro a Perón. El emblema imposible de una nación desgarrada*. (Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI editores, 2019, 93-113.

¹⁷ Lea Geler, "Race in Buenos Aires. Blackness, Whiteness, African Descent and Mestizaje in the White Capital City" in *Runa /37.1* (2016), 75.

landscape that the state elite of the nineteenth century tried to hide or turn whiter, and at the same time exposed the lie of the white country that they wanted to install.

In the pages that follow, I'll try to explain how racism against people of African descent evolved in Argentina in the late nineteenth century. Because of this racism, at the start of the twentieth century, Argentina was characterized as a "white country" devoid of any African influences by politicians, intellectuals, artists, and writers. When Afro-descendants transitioned from being mocked to being praised in the 1930s, racism was still in effect. This admiration for African descent is what I have come to call "positive racism" since the status of those people in the 1930s did not change at all in the eyes of the white majority. As a matter of fact, from the nineteenth century onwards, Afros were seen as apt subjects for parties, for physical and artistic skills, and the exhibition of their bodies. I also intend to address the question of *popular blackness* from its origins and the popularization of the word *negro* (black man) —often used in a pejoratively— to refer to people of dark complexion but without any known African ancestry. The appearance of this type of blackness confirms the erasure of Afro-Argentines and the success of the whitening process and in addition, complicates the racial question in Argentina.

The sources for this research will be based on different newspapers, representative of each period and movement. To analyze the power of the whitening discourse, I will rely on the press produced by the Afro-descendant community in Buenos Aires. In addition to demonstrating the existence of a strong and active community of Afro-descendants in Buenos Aires, an examination of their press reveals how the wealthier segments of the Buenos Aires Afro-descendant community influenced their readers to value the dominant culture at the expense of their traditions. I will try to demonstrate how the Afro-descendant

bourgeoisie in the press was partially responsible for the culturally ingrained stereotypes about them. The newspapers urged Afro-descendants of Buenos Aires (*Afroporteños*) to moderate their actions, change their preferences, and renounce their ethnic past to become part of the group of progress, the group of whites.¹⁸ In this journey, I saw the need to contrast the Afroporteño press of the late nineteenth century with the main newspapers of the time. Beyond the short duration of the *Afroporteños* newspapers, their editions reveal characteristics that would only be appreciated decades later, when talking about the boom of the commercial and modern press. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Afroporteño press was eminently popular, financed by its owners' resources and by the income they would raise from their sales and sponsorship. This press, as we will see below, had a local scope. It was focused on the neighbors in its neighborhood, with whom they shared customs and skin color. In contrast, the press that dominated the Buenos Aires journalism scene was written by politicians solely to promote their ideology and demonize those who held opposing views.

In this work, the modern press will also serve to show the attraction for Afro-descendants, as well as popular blackness. I will focus on the sports section of *Crítica*, the newspaper with the widest reach among the popular sectors and the first newspaper that had a sports section separated from the rest of the news. Always concerned with increasing its sales numbers, *Crítica* was attentive to the preferences of the majority. By the 1930s, the middle and working classes found sporting events to be the best way to spend their leisure time on weekends. Likewise, the people who moved to Buenos Aires from the interior of the country after the Great Depression would attend the games. These groups

¹⁸ Lea Geler, *Andares negros, caminos blancos: afroporteños, Estado y Nación. Argentina a fines del Siglo XIX*, Rosario, Prohistoria Ediciones; TEIAA, 2010, 383

were the primary consumers of *Crítica*. To empathize with his readers, then, the most important journalist of the sports section, Pablo Rojas Paz, nicknamed himself *El negro de la Tribuna* (The Black Man of the Crowd). He had no African ancestry, but a sallow complexion and had been born in the province of Tucumán.

HISTORIOGRAPHY, METHODOLOGY, AND THEORY

Argentina emerged as a country after a long colonial past. As a result, racism can be linked to European settlement in America and interactions with Indigenous Peoples. For this research, the racism that interests us is related to the African communities and their descendants in the Argentine territory, more precisely in Buenos Aires and its surroundings. Although the legacy of Afro-descendants is a topic that in recent decades has aroused the interest of sociologists, historians, and anthropologists, one cannot fail to mention the now classic and pioneering book by George Reid Andrews, *Los afroargentinos de Buenos Aires*. The author covers a wide period—from the Colony to the supposed disappearance of Afro-descendants—and was the first to discuss the famous social construction of the scarce legacy of Afro-descendants in Argentina and their much-mentioned disappearance, even though Argentina had been a slave-holding country. In his work, he goes through all the hypotheses that were used throughout history to justify this disappearance. After a long journey in which he gives an account of the participation that Afro-descendants had throughout Argentine history, he concludes that, If Afro-

descendants started to disappear, it was, above all, a statistical manipulation by those who analyzed the demographic composition of the country and the desire to be as close as possible to the most advanced European nations.¹⁹

In the same line of thought, it is worth mentioning the recent work of Magdalena Candiotti, which covers the period from the Freedom of Wombs (1813) was declared until 1853-1860 when slavery was definitively abolished. Her work shows the activity of people of African descent in a context that *a priori* seemed favorable to them, but had the opposite effect since they were made responsible for achieving their freedom.²⁰ At this point, the aforementioned work by Hernán Otero is highly pertinent. Although it does not address the Afro-descendant issue, his study of the National Census concludes that as of the second half of the nineteenth century, Afro-descendants ceased to be counted. The First National Census did not distinguish its citizens by race. Otero suggests that this may be a sign of the progressivism of the time, although he is more inclined to think that behind the non-counting of Afro-descendants was the hand of the ruling elite, strongly committed to building a nation free of black people. That was one of the indicators of progress according to the scientific standards of the time.²¹ In this same line of thought, Alejandro Solomianski's book *Identidades secretas: la negritud Argentina*, is important for this study because it recovers literary and popular culture sources that show how strongly African culture influenced Argentina. However, the author contrasts these same sources with those

¹⁹ George Reid Andrews, *Los afroargentinos de Buenos Aires*, 125-128.

²⁰ Magdalena Candiotti, *Una historia de la emancipación negra: Esclavitud y abolición en la Argentina*, Buenos Aires, Siglo XXI Editores, 2020.

²¹ Hernán Otero, "Estadística censal y construcción de la nación. El caso argentino, 1869- 1914". 135-137.

texts of the hegemonic culture that proclaimed the extinction of Afro-descendants. Solomianski calls this hiding of the Afro-descendant influence a “discursive genocide”.²²

Lea Geler's *Andares Negros. Caminos Blancos* focuses on one aspect of Afro-descendant culture and its journalistic production. Through the analysis of *Afroporteño* community newspapers, Geler continues to delve into and complicate the reasons for the scarcity of Afro-descendants in Buenos Aires. In some ways, her work supplements George Reid Andrews's pioneering work on the subject. The novel contribution of Geler's work is her analysis of records left by the Afro-descendant community itself, newspapers mostly, at a time when European immigration policies were in place and the pressures of the hegemonic culture, influenced by scientific thinking of the day, played a role in the systematic marginalization of Afro-descendants. However, Geler's contribution reveals that the same practices, theories, and discourses aimed at marginalizing the descendants of African culture permeated the better-off members of his community and, through the newspapers disseminated a message of cultural hybridization based on the late-nineteenth-century state elite's canons of progress. As a result, some members of the Afro-descendant community succumbed to the temptation to blend in with lighter-skinned immigrants, eventually abandoning their traditions and contributing to the erasure of Afro-descendant culture in Buenos Aires.²³

All the works mentioned above refer to the period in which Afro-descendants were victims of the hegemonic culture and “persecuted” as a synonym of backwardness. With regards to the moment in which Afro-descendants were acclaimed, there is no significant

²² Alejandro Solomianski, *Identidades secretas: la negritud argentina.*, Beatriz Viterbo Editora, Rosario, 2003

²³ Lea Geler, *Andares negros, caminos blancos. Afroporteños, Estado y Nación.*

bibliography. Nevertheless, Matthew Karush's works on the interwar era demonstrate the existence of a fascination with blackness, particularly the one related to Afro-American jazz musicians within the context of a mass cultural marketplace where Argentinian consumers had access to the most recent imports from the United States, from music to film productions. In his works, he tells how part of the citizens of Buenos Aires acclaimed and received with affection Afro-descendant artists since they represented an exoticism that was foreign to the city.²⁴ I have compiled a relevant number of journalistic sources—in the particular compound of sports sections—that I have found to be a key to reinforcing what Karush stated in his work. This fascination with blackness is seen not only in the reports of artistic shows but also in the sports news in a city that, in the twentieth century, consumed large quantities of newspapers as well.

The cultural transformation that Argentina was undergoing and the prominence that the press was acquiring was not an isolated phenomenon in these latitudes, but part of a larger scale phenomenon. From the second half of the nineteenth century, the print media began to shift from what is known as *Party Press*—where newspapers were organs of a political party—into a new more independent business role. The literature that gives rise to the academic discussion on the impact of cultural production in Argentina is found in *La política mirada desde arriba. Las ideas del diario La Nación, 1909-1983* by Ricardo Sidicaro. The author presents one of the first relevant studies of the press in Argentina in which, from the analysis of the editorials of the newspaper *La Nación*, he shows the social

²⁴ Matthew Karush, “Black in Buenos Aires: The transnational career of Oscar Alemán”, in *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*, ed., by Paulina Alberto and Eduardo Elena, (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 73-102; And *Músicos en Tránsito. La globalización de la música popular argentina: del Gato Barbieri a Piazzola, Mercedes Sosa y Santaolalla*, Siglo XXI editores, (Buenos Aires, 2019); “Blackness in Argentina: Jazz, Tango and Race Before Perón” in, *Past and Present*, no. 216 , Oxford, Aug. 2012, 215-245

and political transformations, as well as the cultural changes and the crisis of the traditional political parties.²⁵ He proves that the press was one of the spaces where the feelings of national politics had repercussions. In the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, newspapers ceased to be a *puesto de combate* (combat post) and became a *tribuna de doctrina* (Tribune of doctrine).²⁶

As a result of the political, social, and technological changes that crystallized after 1880, the press was able to transform itself into business ventures rather than political instruments at the disposal of political leaders. While idealizations about the pedagogical and reformist effects of the press were fading away, the heterogeneous demographic composition of the city of Buenos Aires —as a result of continuous immigration— made possible the emergence of a new cultural market. In addition to political interests, it included political publications, no longer factional but ideological, such as socialist or anarchist publications, which entrusted the press with an educational capacity and a function of dissemination as well as entertainment. This new type of press is called commercial and massive press.²⁷ Literature on the popular press was inaugurated with the already classic *Regueros de tinta* by Sylvia Saítta.²⁸ This work, about the first two decades of existence of the evening paper *Crítica*, sees it as the tabloid *par excellence*. Directed by Natalio Botana, who knew how to interpret and express the interests of the popular sectors

²⁵ Ricardo Sidicaro, *La política mirada desde arriba. Las ideas del diario La Nación, 1909-1983*, Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 1993

²⁶ See: Claudia Román, “La modernización de la prensa periódica, entre *La Patria Argentina* (1879) y *Caras y Caretas* (1898)”. En *Historia crítica de la literatura Argentina*, (dir. Noé Jitrik). Volumen III, Buenos Aires, EMECÉ, pp 15-37.

²⁷ Roy Hora, “Autonomistas, Radicales y Mitristas: el orden oligárquico en la provincia de Buenos Aires (1880-1912)” In: *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana* “Dr. Emilio Ravignani”, III, nro. 23 (Sept., 2001), 39-77

²⁸ Sylvia Saítta, *Regueros de tinta, El diario Crítica en la década de 1920*, Siglo XXI Editores, Buenos Aires, 1998.

on newsprint, *Crítica* provided information on theater, cinema, politics, sports, and crime stories. It gathered data from international cables while attempting to confirm the goal that had been set for it: the protection of the interests of the populace. A few years after it was founded, it displaced its main competitor, *La Razón*, in terms of sales.

Since Saítta's work, several works on the popular press have emerged, many of which have shown that other newspapers, with origins before 1913, had begun to try out different forms of publishing to captivate a massive audience. At the same time, these studies also confirm that the arrival of the popular press was far from burying the political press, which simply had to adapt itself to the new techniques for persuasion demanded by readers, betraying its ideals as little as possible.²⁹ Saítta's work was the first to highlight the popular press as an element of mass culture to be analyzed. It also became a guide to analyze not only the press of these characteristics but also to analyze the interests of its consumers and the way how journalists addressed them. Newspapers began to offer more varied and expansive content at the same time that they altered their journalistic paradigm. To meet the needs of the public, it was necessary to incorporate new technologies as well as to hire new professionals and journalists.

This work aims to break into the literature on Buenos Aires' afro-descendent culture while also paving the way for future works on racism and its related terms, including popular blackness. The discrimination based on skin color and social class that many authors associated with the rise of Peronism in this work demonstrate that its genealogy can be traced back at least a decade. This same line of thought seeks to demonstrate how

²⁹ Juan Buonome, *Periodismo militante en la era de la información. La Vanguardia, el socialismo y los orígenes de la cultura de masas en la Argentina (1894-1930)*, Phd, Diss., Universidad de San Andrés, January 2016 and Miranda, Lida, *La rotativa de Dios. Prensa católica y sociedad en Buenos Aires: El Pueblo: 1900-1960*, Biblos, Buenos Aires, 2012-

racism that Afro-descendants experienced towards the end of the nineteenth century is replicated in the first decades of the twentieth century, hidden behind an unprecedented value placed on African culture. On the other hand, this work focuses on a little-studied topic: the cultural production of Buenos Aires' Afro-descendants community, as represented by its news media. Although speeches and newspaper editing have been studied, they have never been studied in the context of the period in which these publications took place. This project sought to demonstrate the characteristics of African-American journalism to conclude that the characteristics displayed were vastly different from those of its peers in the nineteenth century. The characteristics that the African press displayed toward the end of the nineteenth century will be seen in the major commercial newspapers in the early twentieth century.

THESIS STRUCTURE

The structure of this work consists of three chapters. In the first chapter, I intend to present the demographic and ethnic composition of the city of Buenos Aires and its surroundings. To do so, I will rely on literary, pictorial, and official sources. Although each of them has a distinct purpose, when taken as a whole, they provide a picture of the racial and social tensions that existed in a nation that aspired to be racially white like its European

counterparts. I will also go back to the Colonial period to analyze the links and origins of miscegenation and how the binary Argentina of white and non-white came to be. Blackness in Argentina was conflictual, polysemic, and undesirable to its founding fathers from the beginning. Hence, the desire to whiten the nation.

In the second chapter, I'll examine how Afroporteños responded to pressure from the ruling class and a society that gave special treatment to and made clear its preference for the white men who were constantly immigrating from Europe. Through their cultural productions, in particular their newspapers, I will try to expose and demonstrate the mixed opinions that the *Afroporteño* community had regarding the racist prejudice held by the elite. I also examine how Afroporteños in higher social positions perceived miscegenation positively, aiding in the whitening of the country. In this chapter, I will also analyze the characteristics of the *Afroporteña* press, oriented to a more narrow audience but with the characteristics of a modern and commercial press that would only make its explosion in the first decades of the twentieth century.

In the last chapter of this work, also from the press, but this time from the modern and massive newspaper *Crítica*, I will expose the change of perception towards Afro-descendants as the twentieth century progressed. Afro-descendants in the predominantly white and European metropolis of Buenos Aires came to be seen more favorably by the Buenos Aires audience. In the same way, a new kind of blackness—a popular blackness—was starting to emerge. A blackness that was not associated with race but rather with class, which explained the miscegenation that earlier generations had either ignored or kept hidden.

CHAPTER 1

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A WHITE AND WILD NATION

The expression "White Argentina" is deeply rooted in Argentine history. As I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, the idea that a country like Argentina was populated only with immigrants from Europe, is a thought that is not only strong in popular culture, it is also exported and reproduced by the country's highest leaders in this day and age.

To demystify this idea, it is necessary to trace the origin of this social construction—racist from the very beginning—, and the hierarchical patterns that were established according to the skin colour of individuals. Racism, as in all of America, does not originate in the nineteenth century. Its roots go much deeper. They date back to the Colonial period, and although the independence processes broke the political ties that united the Old and the New World, social hierarchies based on skin colour continued to be reproduced.

The whitening procedure I'm researching went through various stages, but each one was characterized by the disadvantage that having dark skin means in any western society. In the following pages, I will try to show how the contempt that Europeans felt towards people of African descent was transferred to other sectors of society. While the white and European minorities were a cohesive and supportive group, the subaltern sectors reproduced racist and hierarchical patterns based on skin colour as well. Thus, in colonial times, many people of African descent contemplated the possibility of whitening their skin

so that their freedom would be at least a little more feasible. During the times of independent Argentina, Afro-Argentines would also be marginalized both by the Europeanizing elite and by the gauchos, the criollo man. They had lighter skin than Afro-descendants, but in the eyes of the leaders, they were still Non-White, and thus despised by the state elite. The Gauchos were also associated with backwardness and a threat to state order.

To demonstrate the premises outlined above and the emphasis placed on turning a *mestizo* society into a Caucasian one, I will rely on official sources such as censuses, pictorial sources, and also literary sources such as *criollista* literature. On the one hand, the selection of these sources allows us to see the government's effort to conceal the presence of the country's Afro-descendants and to show citizens, as well as the rest of the world, one of the conditions that Argentina exhibited in terms of progress: a country without black people. On the other hand, picture works, as the most important literary production of the second half of the nineteenth century, accompanied the same ideology, which was represented by indigenous peoples, gauchos, and afrodescendientes as dangerous beings who fought against progress. However, *criollista* literature, which was based on recurring themes from the province of Buenos Aires and thus had less clout by the end of the nineteenth century, demonstrated how afrodescendientes coexisted peacefully in the Buenos Aires community, interacting with gauchos and Indigenous peoples as part of the social milieu that gave life to Buenos Aires at the time. This artistic expression had a wide reach in the subaltern sectors. The stories that made up this literature were of rural themes and had the *gaucho* as the main character. A wild, aggressive, marginal, and racist character. But due to the level of acceptance, it had among the European immigrants who

arrived to bring whiteness to a *mestizo* society, by the second decade of the twentieth century the Gaucho was elevated to the status of a national emblem.

THE ETHNIC LANDSCAPE OF BUENOS AIRES AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

Despite the abundant sources that give account of the multiplicity of races that remains in Argentina, the idea of a White Country prevailed over any empirical evidence. In the following lines, we will go back to the middle of the nineteenth century to present the ideological framework that guided the elite that governed the country when this idea originated. If we argue that Argentina was not—and is not—a white country, we must also consider the other non-Caucasian communities that inhabited that part of the world. Therefore, I will explore the traces of the Afro-descendant community, mostly settled in the city of Buenos Aires. Also, I will develop the values associated with the whiteness of the skin as well as those associated with blackness. Paradoxically, in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the whitening discourse began to develop, the Afro-descendant community was a collective group, with its differences, but with a high level of citizen participation.

In this analysis, the fact that Buenos Aires was one of the most important cities of the continent cannot be ignored. The greatest number of Caucasians were concentrated in that metropolis, as well as the greatest number of Afro-descendants. To paraphrase George Reid Andrews, it is impossible to talk about blackness without talking about Buenos

Aires.³⁰ To be more specific, the Municipal Census carried out in 1887 is a reliable example of this. Statistics at the end of the nineteenth century stated that 30% of the population was of Afro-descendant origin. However, 20 years earlier, when the First National Census was carried out, no inhabitants were identified by race or colour.³¹ A possible answer to the decision not to count the inhabitants of Argentina according to race or colour can be found in the scientific theories of the time to which the leaders adhered. To account for a high percentage of inhabitants of colour was contrary to the progress they wanted to achieve and show.

From its economic, military, and cultural primacy, Buenos Aires promoted different campaigns to conquer the lands beyond the Salado River Basin, a territory that was occupied by Indigenous peoples, the other group identified as non-white. The success of those campaigns drove Julio Argentino Roca to become President of the Nation in 1880, inaugurating a period known as “The Oligarchic Republic” (1880-1916). Before that, he had achieved fame after conquering the Argentinean desert. That area extends to the South and West of the Salado River Basin but far from being a dry and sandy expanse, it is one of the most fertile plains in the world. Among the leading intellectuals of the time, there was interest in repopulating the territory. The Indigenous Peoples that occupied a large part of it were nomads and did not constitute a “productive population”. In light of the economic interests of the rulers, these populations, in addition to being dangerous because of their constant attacks, represented an obstacle to economic progress due to the habitual theft of livestock. Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, one of the main promoters of the campaigns to

³⁰ George Reid Andrews. *Los Afroargentinos de Buenos Aires*, 17-19

³¹ Hernán Otero, “Estadística censal y construcción de la nación. El caso argentino, 1869-1914, in *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y americana*, 135-141

the *desert*, in his main literary work called *Facundo. Civilization and barbarism* describe the national territory as:

The desert wilderness surrounds it and insinuates into its bowels; solitude, barren land with no human habitation, in general, are the unquestionable borders between one province and another (...) To the south and the north, savages lurk, waiting for moonlit nights to descend, like a pack of hyenas, on the herds that graze the countryside, and on defenseless settlements.³²

The quotation demonstrates that, before the start of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Argentina was a vast country with significant regional differences. The largest proportion of those who inhabited Argentine soil was mainly Indigenous Peoples who were in a state of constant warfare against the National State. The central and southern areas of the country were the main territories in dispute due to the fertility of their extensive plains and the potential of their resources for exploitation and commercialization. For the elite, the Indigenous Peoples not only represented backwardness because of their lifestyle and their constant attacks against the established power in Buenos Aires, but also they were representatives of non-white peoples even though they were not of African descent.

The attempts to extend the frontier have their origins in the years that immediately followed the Revolution of May (1810).³³ Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, successive crusades called “Desert Campaigns” were carried out to extend Argentina's southern frontier and thus incorporate the fertile territory mentioned above. The city of

³² Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo. Civilization and Barbarism*. The First Complete English Translation / Domingo Faustino Sarmiento; translated from the Spanish by Kathleen Ross; with an introduction by Roberto González Echevarría, University of California Press, 2003, 45

³³ During the Napoleonic Wars, the May Revolution occurred as Ferdinand VII, the King of Spain, was being held captive by Napoleon Bonaparte. In the absence of their King, the Buenos Aires authorities refused to recognize Spain and started the process of establishing a first administration focused on the colony itself.

Buenos Aires—which would eventually become the most important city, among other factors because of its accessibility to the port—was founded in 1536.³⁴ From the Colonia's end until later in Argentina's history as an independent nation, the province of Buenos Aires' advances toward the south became more frequent. In this context of expansion, settlements were born around different forts, such as Mercedes, Chascomús, and many others. The last expedition took place in 1879, and as I mentioned, it was led by Julio A. Roca. Its success gave him a strong political capital which allowed him to be elected president the following year. Before this, Adolfo Alsina developed a defensive plan that prevented the advance of Indigenous groups to plunder the frontier towns. At the same time, the southernmost territories of the country, known as the Governorship of Patagonia, were also occupied.³⁵

As news of the militias' advances reached Buenos Aires, stories emerged about the men employed to defend the forts and frontier towns. In addition to men-at-arms, the federal government turned to the men at the bottom of the social pyramid, who could be creoles, mulattos, Afro-descendants, or *mestizos*. The recruitment of these men, who were going to face the danger of the Indigenous Peoples and very poor conditions, was marked by skin colour and social status. Their experiences in the forts would be the subject of an extensive literary production, *criollista literature*. It gave an account of what life was like

³⁴ Santiago Linares and Guillermo Velázquez, "La conformación histórica del sistema urbano", in *Historia de la provincia de Buenos Aires. Población, Ambiente y Territorio*. Volumen 1, Edhasa, (Buenos Aires, Edhasa), 365-398

³⁵ Various campaigns have taken held since the governorship of Martín Rodríguez in 1820. Each with varying degrees of success, but all with a favorable balance in the end. Following Martín Rodríguez's campaigns, Juan Manuel de Rosas' followed. His voyages resulted in the establishment of forts at what would become the cities of Tandil and Junín in 1823 and 1827, respectively, as well as the cities of Bahía Blanca in 1828, Azul in 1832, and Bragado in 1846, to mention a few. For the development of border movements and the establishment of various towns Santiago Linares and Guillermo Velázquez, "La conformación histórica del sistema urbano", 370-374

for men in those places, in rural areas, from *Gaucha*'s perspective. Class tensions and the hostility between the *Gaucha* and the State were a constant in this type of literary work.³⁶

Of course, all these readings were not devoid of ideological and racist perceptions of the different groups that inhabited the desert, the frontier, or the city. They were frequently removed against their will from their homes and families with the false hope that doing so would improve their social standing. Many literary works tell the tale of a Creole who leaves the frontier outposts and decides to blend in with the locals, where he eventually finds better relationships and understanding than he did with the rulers of the "White Argentina". The iconic work that best reflects one of the many expressions of this way of life is *The Gaucho Martín Fierro*. Instituted as Argentina's National Poem in 1913, José Hernández's work—a white man and representative of an enlightened elite—, written in 1872, is a first-person narrative of the vicissitudes that Martín Fierro, a *Gaucha* from the Pampas, goes through from the moment he is recruited to defend the frontier.³⁷

Beyond the life of this fictional character, *The Gaucho Martín Fierro* and the *criollista literature* show the demographic composition of the Argentine territory and the interaction between different ethnic and social groups towards the end of the nineteenth century. In the same way, there is evidence of a classist discourse that separated the men of power from those who were subordinate to them. The *Gaucha Martín Fierro* expresses:

Let the ball of fate go rolling on,
It'll come to a stop someday;
The Gaucho's life is a grim struggle,

³⁶ Ezequiel Adamovsky, *El Gaucho Indómito*, 18-20

³⁷ José Hernández, *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* (1872) Other iconic works that show the relationship between gauchos and Indians are: *La cautiva* (1837) y *El Matadero* (1871), by Esteban Echerrevía, *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926), by Ricardo Güiraldes. A study on the impact that such literature had on the popular field of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries can be found in: Adolfo Prieto, *El discurso criollista en la formación de la Argentina moderna*, Siglo XXI Editores, (Buenos Aires, 2006).

Till Death takes his legs from under him;
Or we get a 'criollo' Government,
That rules in the gaucho way.³⁸

Along these lines, we can appreciate the demand for social justice from the subordinate sectors. According to *Martin Fierro*, justice would only come when someone from the plebeian sectors of society would reach power. In the narrative of *The Gaucho Martín Fierro*, the contempt that the leaders felt for the Creole man, for the *Gaucha*, was evident. The same can be seen in a letter that Sarmiento writes to Mitre in which he suggests “Do not try to economize on *gaucho* blood. This is a fertilizer that must be made useful to the country. Blood is the only thing that these savages have of human beings.”³⁹ According to the elite, the gaucho was a man without value. If the Gauchos and Indigenous peoples ever engaged in combat, they would have much in common. In the eyes of the powers that be, both groups were non-white. The first was because they were Creoles, meaning men born in America as a result of the crossbreeding of Indigenous Peoples, Africans, and Spaniards, and the latter because of the brownish, coppery, or sallow pigmentation typical of their ethnicity.⁴⁰ Both groups were despised by the government and cataloged as inferior beings who had to be disposed of. Under this paradigm, Modern Argentina was built not only in institutional terms but also in racial and class terms. It was only a few years after the Centennial Celebration that the figure of the *Gaucha*, through the work of José Hernández,

³⁸ José Hernández, *The Gaucho Martín Fierro*, Printed at the Shakespeare Head Press St. Aldates and Published by Basil Blackwell, (Oxford, 1935), 89

³⁹ Correspondence from Domingo Sarmiento to Bartolomé Mitre, September 20, 1861. In: <https://www.educ.ar/recursos/128668/carta-de-sarmiento-a-mitre-sobre-gauchos>

⁴⁰ Ezequiel Adamovsky, *El Gaucho Indómito*, 93-95.

was elevated as an emblem of the nation. Before that, *Gaicho* has always been associated, like the Indigenous Peoples, with cattle rustling and vagrancy.⁴¹

The people who belonged to the elites were educated, often held civil service positions, and would usually engage in intellectual or artistic work. Merchants and professionals with a good economic situation were also in this social group. Plebeians, on the other hand, were workers, servants, artisans, and slaves. This grotesque and simplified social segmentation finds a parallel if we consider the pigmentation of their skin.



1- Della Valle, Miguel Angel (1852-1903), *La Vuelta del Malón* - 1892

⁴¹ According to Adamovsky, the gaucho was not given more positive adjectives for his bravery and courage in the struggle until after the wars of independence, but pejorative evaluations were never removed. See: Adamovsky Ezequiel, *El gaucho indómito*, 17-18



2. Pueyrredón, Prilidiano (1823-1870), *Un alto en la pulpería* - 1860

A representation of this same ideology can be seen in the painting *La Vuelta del Malón*, from 1892. The work was completed while European immigration was being heavily promoted and immigrants from Europe were arriving in large numbers. According to the curator of the *Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes* (Argentina), the work was painted to be exhibited at the Chicago International Exhibition of 1894 and was celebrated as “the first genuinely national work of art”.⁴² From the preceding lines and the appreciation of the painting, many things can be deduced. The purpose of the work is already a clear indication of how the whitening discourse was being executed, not only within the national borders but also abroad. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Argentina was presented as a

⁴² See: Ángel Della Valle, *La Vuelta del Malón* (1892) Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, <https://www.bellasartes.gob.ar/coleccion/obra/6297/>

racially and culturally binary country. Progress, the Catholic religion, and therefore civilization was represented by a white woman with Caucasian features who has been captive by a horde of Indigenous Peoples returning from an attack to a church or a fairly urbanized place. Having mentioned the complexion of the *gauchos*, Argentine citizens, the contrast in skin tones between the indigenous people and the victim is striking. This iconic painting contributed to the perception of Argentina, towards the end of the nineteenth century, as a civilized country, populated by Europeans but with some “problems” that it would overcome to achieve white hegemony. One of those problems was the eradication of non-white savages.

The second artwork presented in these pages is also by an artist of the second half of the nineteenth century, Prilidiano Pueyrredón. According to the canons of the time, this painting would never have been selected for an international exhibition because it reflected an image of which the rulers were not proud. It is about the creole lifestyle. A Creole scene that, like Creole literature, reflects the popular universe with the *Gaucha* as the protagonist. That character does not belong to the elite, neither urbanization nor progress, but it is much more like the social and ethnic composition of the Argentine territory in the second half of the nineteenth century. The illustration depicts some merchants or transporters. People from the poorer classes. *Gauchos* and Argentines, whose skin colour reveals their mixed race, are strikingly similar to the Indigenous Peoples in *La Vuelta del Malón*.⁴³ It is worth

⁴³ According to the curator of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, the scene could have taken place in the Northern Zone of Buenos Aires. Between San Isidro and Las Conchas. Area that was frequented by the painter. See: <https://www.bellasartes.gob.ar/coleccion/obra/3183/#:~:text=Un%20alto%20en%20la%20pulper%C3%ADa%20presenta%20los%20tipos%20costumbristas%20en,poco%20habitual%20en%20su%20uso.>

mentioning that this painting is currently exhibited at the National Museum of *Bellas Artes*, while *Un Alto En la Pulpería* is not.

In this sense, once again, creole literature and *Gaicho* poetry provide a broader perspective on the social composition of Argentina, Buenos Aires, and the area of the Pampas. As Ezequiel Adamovsky shows, such literature was widely circulated among the more plebeian groups of Buenos Aires, demonstrating that Afro-Argentines, *mestizos* or Indigenous Peoples, were not an alien component of the society of the time and were separated from the racist discourses that predominated among the elites.⁴⁴ Martín Fierro states:

The white man paints the devil black,
And the black man paints him white;
But a man by his colour ain't influenced,
It doesn't hold for, or yet against;
The Almighty made only one kind of man,
Though their faces are dark or bright.⁴⁵

Here, the *gaicho* acknowledges that all men are born as equals in God's eyes. The same type of communion between men can be found in many literary works produced in the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁶ However, in that period, the interpretation of the ethnic and geographic composition of Argentina was the one depicted in the first painting. This same dichotomy was represented in Sarmiento's

⁴⁴ Ezequiel Adamovsky, *El Gaicho Indómito*, 107 and Adolfo Prieto, *El discurso Criollista en la formación de la Argentina moderna*, Editorial Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 1988.

⁴⁵ José Hernández, *The Gaicho Martín Fierro*, 273

⁴⁶ Some representative works of the genre are: *Fausto*, *Impresiones del gaicho Anastasio el Pollo en la representación de la Ópera* (1866) by Estanislao del Campo, *Juan Cuello* (1880), *Hormiga Negra* (1881) and *Santos Vega* (1936) by Eduardo Gutiérrez, *Don segundo Sombra* (1926), by Ricardo Güiraldes,

influential text, *Facundo*, as well as in the mentality of those who ran the country. We cannot fail to mention that *El Gaucho Martín Fierro* is composed of two parts that were written 7 years apart. *The Gaucho Martín Fierro* (1872) and *The Return of Martín Fierro* (1879). The extract above corresponds to the second part in which the author presents a more reflective gaucho who seeks to redeem himself from all his past vices and mistakes. However, in the first part of the poem, José Hernández presents an irascible character with strong racist feelings, both towards Indigenous Peoples—which continue in the second part—as well as towards Afro-descendants. Tensions between race and class were a constant among all the social and ethnic groups that populated Argentine soil.

God made the white, and Saint Peter the brown, at least so I've heard men tell;
But the devil himself made the black as coals for the fire of hell.⁴⁷

As Hernán Otero suggests, censuses are also political tools.⁴⁸ Thus, colonial censuses showed that around 1778 Afro-descendants and mulattos constituted 30% of the population, 7,256 out of a total of 24,363 inhabitants.⁴⁹ The 1810 census showed that the population of Afro-descendants and *mulattos* remained constant and by 1838 the population of the people of colour had grown to 13,967 inhabitants, representing a quarter of the population of Buenos Aires. But, as George Reid Andrews indicates, the Afro-descendant population began to register a reduction among its members, representing only 2% of the population of the city of Buenos Aires. By 1883, Sarmiento himself did not

⁴⁷ José Hernández, *El Gaucho Martín Fierro*. 52.

⁴⁸ Hernán Otero, “Estadística censal y construcción de la nación. El caso argentino, 1869-1914”, 125

⁴⁹ Luis E. Wainer, “La Ciudad de Buenos Aires en los Censos de 1778 y 1810”, in *Población de Buenos Aires*, vol. 7, núm. 11, (Abril, 2010), 75-85

hesitate to affirm and celebrate that the Afro-descendant population had almost completely disappeared.⁵⁰

However, although the censuses show this reduction, the abundant cultural and intellectual production reveals that the Afro-descendant, *mestizo*, and *mulatto* communities had a strong presence in the daily life of Buenos Aires. It is also relevant to acknowledge that, within the Colonial system, the people of colour had an importance that it did not have after the Wars of Independence. Once that moment was over, as we will see later on, the Argentine economy stopped needing slave labor, so the premise was to get rid of all Afro-descendants or Indigenous vestiges. For this reason, for the First National Census carried out in 1869, under the presidency of Sarmiento, the population was not counted according to race or colour.⁵¹

Without information about the methodology used to carry out the different censuses, and considering that demography as a statistical science was not developed in Argentina until the twentieth century, the thinking of the political leaders of Argentina in the last quarter of the nineteenth century is well known.⁵² Influenced by the prevailing ideology of Social Darwinism, Argentine leaders saw the excess of people of colour as an obstacle to the progress so desired and pursued by the Nation.⁵³ At the beginning of the twentieth century, Lucas Ayarragaray, a physician who was involved in the political spheres, argued that Argentina's difficulties in inserting itself into the Western system were

⁵⁰ George Reid Andrews, *Los Afroargentinos de Buenos Aires*, 80.

⁵¹ *Idem*

⁵² See, Dora Estela Celton, Adrián Carbonetti, “La formación de la demografía en la Argentina, 1869-1947”, en *Estudios Digital*, (19), *Centro de Estudios Avanzados*, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, 2006, 27-42.

⁵³ About the racial ideas at the end of nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth, see: Eduardo A. Zimmerman, “Racial Ideas and Social Reform: Argentina, 1890-1916” in *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 72, No. 1 Feb., 1992, pp. 23-46 and Benjamin Bryce, “Undesirable Britons: South Asian Migration and the Making of a White Argentina”, *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Duke University Press, 2019. 247-273.

due to the population it had inherited. Therefore, it was imperative to improve the racial composition of the country with European immigrants.⁵⁴ This same perception was held by Juan Bautista Alberdi with his famous phrase “To govern is to populate” and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s ideas who promoted European immigration to populate the country and set it on the path to the desired progress. By the end of the nineteenth century, the process of Argentina's whitening had already begun, not only through migratory policies but also strongly supported by national statistics and cultural production. This process was not exempt from stereotypes based on the scientific theories of the time. While immigrants with dark skin were thought to come from underdeveloped areas, the goal of the promoted European immigration was to bring Argentina closer to the European powers, at least in terms of population.

Argentina's immigration policy achieved many of the goals of the policymakers. It is the country that, in relative terms, received the most immigrants between 1870-1914.⁵⁵ Likewise, the working capacity of its newcomers, plus the international situation between the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth, led Argentina to become one of the world’s largest food producers, supplying food to a large part of Europe and thus, earning fame as the “granary of the world”.⁵⁶ Moreover, in a few years, Argentina

⁵⁴ Lucas Ayarragaray, *La anarquía argentina y el caudillismo* Buenos Aires: F. Lajouane, 1904, "La mestización de las razas en América y sus consecuencias degenerativas," *Revista de Filosofía*, 1916, 221-41.

⁵⁵ Argentina's census data is frequently compared to that of the United States in general, as both countries received the greatest number of immigrants. By 1914, one-third of Argentina's population was foreign-born, according to census data: 2,357,952 of Argentina's 7,903,662 residents were born in Europe. Despite receiving more transatlantic immigrants at the same time, their impact on the native population was less significant. Given that nearly 15% of the population was born abroad by 1910, To see the 1914 Argentine Census: <http://www.estadistica.ec.gba.gov.ar/dpe/Estadistica/censos/C1914-T1.pdf> . For information about USA, see: <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1922/dec/vol-02-population.html>

⁵⁶ The history of Argentine immigration must be understood from a variety of perspectives depending on the intent behind the immigration laws and how they ultimately played out. Since the first years of independence, there have been discussions about how to populate Argentina. In their desire to break with Spain and in the face of the progress that the United States was experiencing, the state elite looked favorably upon the immigration flood of northern Europeans in exchange for so many Spaniards and Italians who brought,

became one of the most prosperous countries of its time with a clear distinction between the City and Province of Buenos Aires and the rest of the country, not only in economic terms but also in racial and cultural terms. One of the particularities of the Argentine case is that its main port, through which all immigrants arrived, coincides with its most important city and with the most fertile region of the country.⁵⁷ For those reasons, a large percentage of the newcomers chose the city of Buenos Aires and its surroundings to settle down. Bartolomé Mitre affirmed in 1857 that

Three races concurred (...) to the physical and moral genesis of the sociability of the *Rio de la Plata*: the European or Caucasian as an active part, the Indigenous or American as an auxiliary, and the Ethiopian as complementary. Their fusion resulted in this original kind, in which the European blood has prevailed due to its superiority, constantly regenerating itself by immigration; and by whose side has grown and improved another mixed race of black and white, which has assimilated the physical and moral qualities of the superior race. (Own Translation).⁵⁸

It is important to note that Mitre stated this 20 years before the immigration boom took place.⁵⁹ Mitre, like so many others afterward, acknowledged the ethnic eclecticism that prevailed in Argentina but did not hesitate to state that all ethnic groups had been subsumed to the white Caucasian composition that predominates in Buenos Aires, full of European immigrants. The preference of the elite for white skins was as evident as the

among other things, a classist and revolutionary ideology that had not existed before their arrival: See: Tulio Halperin, “¿Para qué la inmigración?” Ideología y política inmigratoria y aceleración del proceso modernizador: el caso argentino (1810-1814), in in *El espejo de la historia. Problemas argentinos y perspectivas latinoamericanas*, Sudamericana, Buenos Aires , 1987, 189–238.

⁵⁷ On the development of the province of Buenos Aires see: Roy Hora, “Buenos Aires ante el Bicentenario. El fracaso de la provincia problema”, In, *La Vanguardia Digital*, September 2020, <http://lavanguardiadigital.com.ar/index.php/2020/09/15/buenos-aires-ante-el-bicentenario/>

⁵⁸ Bartolomé Mitre, *Manuel Belgrano y la Historia de la independencia argentina*, Anaconda, 1950 (1857), cited in: Enrique Garguin, “Los Argentinos descendemos de los barcos. Articulación racial de la identidad de clase media, en Argentina (1920-1960)”, in *Moralidades, economías e identidades de clase media. Estudios Históricos y etnográficos*, Sergio Visakovsky y Enrique Garguín, (Comp.) Antropofagia, Buenos Aires, 2009, 61-94

⁵⁹ Between 1871 and 1915, Argentina received almost 5,000,000 European immigrants.

contempt for people of colour and for all those who inhabited the Argentine desert or its borders. The aforementioned shortage of people to work in the vast plains incorporated into the national territory with the *Desert Campaigns*, gave rise to perhaps the most distinctive policy of Argentina in the second half of the nineteenth century: Immigration.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the city of Buenos Aires was already three times bigger than the next biggest city. This disproportion was also reflected in the economic and demographic spheres in which Buenos Aires led the indexes of the entire American continent. In 1914, 25% of Argentina's population was concentrated in the city of Buenos Aires and its surroundings, where half of the inhabitants were of European origin, Spanish or Italian.⁶⁰

AFRO-DESCENDANTS IN BUENOS AIRES: THE *AFROPORTEÑOS*

Newspapers, popular demonstrations, interventions in popular culture, and a feeling of belonging to the Nation that sheltered them after a tradition of slavery. These are indicators of the significant activity of the *Afroporteño* community in nineteenth-century Buenos Aires. However, towards the middle of the century, the whitening discourse began to gain more and more strength while European immigration, was increasingly reducing in

⁶⁰ Enrique, Garguín, *Los Argentinos descendemos de los barcos*, 71.

importance the influence of *Afroporteños* in the social life of Buenos Aires.⁶¹ Most Europeans ended up settling down in the same location as Afro-descendants, the south area of the city of Buenos Aires and its surroundings. There is general agreement among historians that Buenos Aires' Afro-descendants lived in the areas now known as San Telmo and Monserrat from colonial times until the late nineteenth century. The slaves were assigned to those families because they were among the most prestigious at the time and lived there. However, by the second half of the nineteenth century, as a result of the social transformation that Buenos Aires underwent and the Yellow Fever epidemic (1871), the city's wealthiest families had relocated to the north, leaving the south to become a working-class area populated by immigrants from Europe and people of African descent.

In the following lines I intend to give an account of the presence of Afro-Argentines in *Rio de la Plata* and their evolution as a social group; those who, beyond their relatively early emancipation —*de jure* but not *de facto*— maintained a position of subordination to the social groups pre-established as hegemonic. As I alluded to in the previous using a Government policy, immigration, mainly European, was fostered.

The myth of a Caucasian Argentina was inevitably based on a colonial past, one devoid of Afro-descendants and where miscegenation produced Caucasian offspring. Like all the countries that are part of the New Continent, the territory that currently makes up Argentina was dominated by a slave-owning past that sustained the colonial economy. Although the Indigenous peoples were part of this system, their scarce presence and the rebelliousness of others necessitated the importation of slaves from Africa in the 16th and 17th centuries to work in the agricultural plantations, in, mining, or as servants for the most

⁶¹ On the confirmation of the Afroporteño community see: Lea Geler, *Andares negros, caminos blancos*, 55-87.

distinguished families. Thus, the presence of Afro-descendants and the struggle for their emancipation is directly linked to the history of the colonial regime. Once it was over, Afro-descendants began to dream of their freedom of action and decision. As historian Candiotti argues, the emancipation of Afro-descendants was a battle won rather than a right acquired.⁶²

In 1808, the power vacuum created by the fall of the Spanish Crown at the hand of Napoleon Bonaparte triggered the independence movement in the South American colonies. As far as the Viceroyalty of Rio de la Plata was concerned, the city of Buenos Aires led the anti-colonialist movement in the rest of the continent. At that time, the social composition of the Viceroyalty of the *Provincias Unidas del Sur* (Southern United Provinces) was not very different from any other Spanish American colony. The social hierarchy was determined according to skin colour, socioeconomic position, place of birth, or occupation, to mention a few of the classification categories. This meant that a small elite held power over a complex mass of subaltern groups. As many historians have argued, Spanish American colonial societies reproduced a pattern very similar to a caste system. The elite was a very small group. Their economic power was based on commercial activities and therefore, they were the same ones who held political power (Towards the end of the Colonial period, large landowners began to acquire a greater degree of influence in political decisions). This group was quite cohesive. They had a high degree of solidarity among themselves and an effective organization in the defense of their economic and political interests. These same characteristics were not reproduced in the subaltern sectors.

⁶² Magdalena Candiotti, *Una Historia de la emancipación negra. 135-140*

These groups formed a more fragmented mass with individuals who competed for recognition or for the favors that members of the elite could do for them.⁶³

The elite, in terms of race, was made up of people with European ancestry. They highly valued the colour of their skin because it gave them rights and an unquestionable superiority over non-whites. Among the subaltern groups, the skin coloration was darker. The segmentation on this chromatic scale, which served as the foundation for the social hierarchy, became more intricate. Andrews synthesizes that Indians were sometimes above Afro-descendants and, in other cases, below them. Free black people occupied an intermediate place between slaves and whites, while *mestizos* and *mulattos* struggled to attain some of the privileges of white people. Newly arrived Afro-descendants were also relegated to the Afro-Argentines, even though both were slaves. Mastery of the language was an asset that slaveholders valued when giving orders. Likewise, a peninsular white was above a white man born in the colony.⁶⁴ After the *Declaration of Independence* (1816) whites born on Argentinian soil became more prominent, but non-whites, continued with the same fate, occupying the bottom rung of the social scale.⁶⁵

Blacks, mostly slaves, represented an important part of the labor force. Something that characterized the aristocracy, whether at the time of Colonialism or at the time of National Independence, was the possession of slaves for a myriad of domestic activities such as cooking, washing, ironing, or sewing.⁶⁶ But while owning slaves was a sign of status, slaves also represented an expense that their owners were often unwilling or unable to bear. To compensate for the expense slaves incurred, lords allowed their slaves to go out

⁶³ George Reid Andrews, *Los Afroargentinos de Buenos Aires*, 23-25.

⁶⁴ *Idem*

⁶⁵ Magdalena Candiotti, *Una historia de la emancipación negra*. 25-42

⁶⁶ Magdalena Candiotti, *Una historia de la emancipación negra*, 112-124.

into the city to offer their services and make themselves more profitable. This caused one of the first tense situations with European immigrants.

When Buenos Aires became the capital of the Viceroyalty, its population grew and so did the economy. This motivated many peninsular artisans to cross the Atlantic Ocean to try their luck in the Colony. When they arrived, they found a saturated labor market. The entire supply of handicrafts and shoe repairs was in the hands of Afro-descendants. Given this context, immigrants were particularly interested in restricting the access of non-white men to the crafts, or at least they were concerned that they would not continue with a career of perfectionism.⁶⁷ Due to the pressure from Europeans, Afro-Argentines, *mulattos*, and *mestizos*, were confined to the lowest-paid jobs and hierarchies.⁶⁸

From very early on, even under a slave regime, the *Afroporteño* community was visible in the streets of the historic center of the city of Buenos Aires. Slaves' ability to perform various tasks or offer their services on the streets of Buenos Aires depended, of course, on their lords' masters carrying out the tasks they had previously agreed to. It was common for slave owners to hire them out to work on the properties of other city neighbors based on the skills the slaves possessed. It is crucial to note at this point that the neighborhoods of San Telmo and Montserrat served as the physical location for these activities. Because the wealthiest families chose to settle close to the city's administrative area in the South Area of Buenos Aires, this is where most Afroporteños could be found.⁶⁹ Within this context in which slaves could carry out tasks outside their homes, a collective thinking of the laborer began to develop around the non-white community. This thinking,

⁶⁷ See: Lyman, Johnson, *The Artisans of Buenos Aires During the Viceroyalty, 1776-1810*, University of Connecticut, 1974, 56-58.

⁶⁸ George Reid Andrews, *Los Afroargentinos de Buenos Aires*, 39-41.

⁶⁹ Lea Geler, *Andares Negros, caminos blancos*, 68-70.

as we will see in the final chapter, would be very important for the construction of a class dimension around blackness in the twentieth century.⁷⁰

The freedom of slaves was available, by legal means. Spanish legislation offered different mechanisms to achieve it, such as 13th-century legislation enacted by Alfonso the Wise. For example: if an owner made a slave tutor his children, the slave had the right to freedom. If a slave, with the consent of his owner, married a free person, that slave could attain freedom. Or, if the slave, per his owner's will, was his heir that slave attained freedom. However, these regulations were little known in this part of the Spanish kingdom and therefore were not frequently applied.⁷¹ Once again the most common means by which a slave could attain his freedom was through the purchase of freedom or the provision of services. A study of manumissions between 1776 and 1810 reveals that almost 60% of the slaves who attained their freedom did so through the purchase of their freedom and the remaining 10% through considerations and future promises to their former masters.⁷² As a result, the laboriousness of Afro-descendants was related to both their work as slaves and the things they had to do to gain their freedom.⁷³

During this long and complex process, racial and racist issues played a decisive role, as the freedom of an Afro-descendant was much more difficult to obtain than that of a *mulatto*, *mestizo*, or *pardo*. By 1810, the slaves who most easily attained freedom were

⁷⁰Although what this paper attempts to demonstrate precedes the origins of Peronism, on class and race in Argentina see: Ezequiel Adamovsky, "Race and Class through the visual culture of Peronism" in Alberto, Paulina and Elena Eduardo, *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*, Cambridge University Press, 2016, 155-183

and Elena, Eduardo, "Argentina in black and White: Race, Peronism, and the color of politics, 1940 to the present" in Alberto, Paulina and Elena Eduardo, *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*, Cambridge University Press, 2016,

⁷¹ Magdalena Candiotti, *Una Historia de la emancipación negra*, 52-57

⁷² Magdalena, Candiotti, *Una Historia de la emancipación negra*, 103-133.

⁷³ Idem

Pardos, 48%. Only 20% were of Afro-descendant origin. Therefore, an Afro-descendant of mixed origin had a slightly smoother road to freedom than those of pure African descent. For this same reason, *mulattos* had a better chance of attaining their freedom. Afro-descendants were always the most disadvantaged.⁷⁴ To achieve freedom more quickly, people of African descent tend to lighten their skin over time. Although different shades of dark skin tones could be found within the slaves, the darker the skin and the closer to the African past, the more difficult it was to achieve freedom. Despite the abolition of slavery, this social hierarchy will still exist. The second chapter of this thesis will show how people were included or excluded from various social environments based on the color of their skin.

The early nineteenth-century ideas of the Enlightenment were crucial for the abolition of slavery to be taken seriously. The notion of raising the standard of living for all citizens to advance society and make the desired advancement in a more egalitarian society was in the air. But once the time came for these ideas to materialize, conservative thought prevailed over the Enlightenment and, after the 1810 movement, the liberation of slaves was considered unfeasible. Nevertheless, the aforementioned revolutionary movement was decisive for Afro-descendants to be able to think about their freedom. Heroic service to the homeland was another path by which slaves could attain their freedom. The participation of slaves in the Wars of Independence allowed them to be freed as soon as they were conscripted. According to records, two thousand Africans and Afro-Argentines were freed in this manner between 1813 and 1818, though their children were still considered slaves because the mother initially transferred the legal status. But once

⁷⁴ George Reid Andrews, *Los Afroargentinos de Buenos Aires*, 55-56

they reached the age of majority—20 for men and 16 for women—those born into a slave womb were able to become free thanks to the Law of Freedom of Wombs, which was enacted in 1813. Their legal status had been that of freedmen up until that point.⁷⁵

The improvement of the legal status of slaves allowed people of African descent to lead their households. But although the legal framework, after the 1810 Revolution, permitted those who were slaves yesterday to be free today, it did not provide any means for them to achieve a substantial economic improvement, which would allow them to leave the bottom of the social pyramid. These actions were the first steps toward the official Abolition of Slavery which was officially decreed in 1853, in the First National Constitution. At that time, the Province of Buenos Aires was not part of the Argentine National Confederation and it was not until 1861 that Buenos Aires joined the Union and ended up accepting the Constitution drafted in 1853. In conclusion, only in 1861 did Argentina formally become a country without slaves.⁷⁶

Within this new context, the challenge for Afro-descendants was to insert themselves into a community that, in theory, opened the doors to social and cultural integration. However, just because public schools were opened to receive black students and the Constitution declared that all men and women were equal before the Law, it did

⁷⁵ Beginning in 1813, various legislations promoted by revolutionaries began to undermine the slave regime. The human trade was outlawed the same year. Every foreigner who entered the country was a free man, even if he was accompanied by his master. However, under the Right of Patronage, it was legal to buy and sell freedmen. See: Magdalena Candiotti, *Una historia de la emancipación negra*, 64-68.

⁷⁶ The separation of Buenos Aires from the Argentine Confederation was an event that took place on February 3, 1852, when the governor of Buenos Aires, Juan Manuel de Rosas, was defeated in Caseros by Justo José de Urquiza, governor of Entre Ríos and clear representative of the interests of the Litoral. From that moment on, a new stage in Argentine history began, a preparatory period for the organization of the national State, which was marked by the separation of Buenos Aires from the rest of the country. See: Sábato, Hilda, "Buenos Aires de 1820 a 1880: procesos, actores, conflictos" in Ternavasio, Marcela, *Historia de la provincia de Buenos Aires: de la organización federal a la federalización de Buenos Aires: 1821-1880*. - 1a ed. - Buenos Aires : Edhasa; Gonnet: UNIPE: Editorial Universitaria, 2013, 15-47.

not mean that there was integration.⁷⁷ It is known that black students were discriminated against by their teachers and classmates and that the usual employment of both men and women were street sellers, fruit sellers, greengrocers, porters (*changadores*), and washerwomen.⁷⁸ The black community was kept visible by these individuals who walked the streets hawking for their services. But they were not the only working people of African descent. There was also an Afro-descendant petty bourgeoisie. These men were the ones who wrote in newspapers of great scope within the community. There were also middle and high-ranking military men, as well as merchants or musicians who worked in churches or as private teachers.⁷⁹

This class distinction within the Afro-descendant community shows unity as well as ruptures. These positions began to become evident in the last decades of the nineteenth century when the labor market for Afro-descendants began to shrink due to the significant European immigration to Argentina. Many of the Europeans were in very poor conditions and, as was the case in Colonial times, they came to compete for jobs in the lowest sector of Argentine society. A popular song played in the carnivals of Buenos Aires said:

There are no more black men bottle sellers
nor Changador,
nor blacks who sell fruit,
much fewer fishermen;
because these Neapolitans
are even confectioners,
and they already want to take away
the whitener's trade.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Lea, Geler, *Andares Negros, caminos blancos*, 280-289.

⁷⁸ Lea, Geler, *Andares Negros, caminos blancos*, 128.

⁷⁹ Paulina Alberto, "El Negro Raúl: Lives and Afterlives of an Afro-Argentine Celebrity, 1886 to the Present", in *Hispanic American Historical Review* 96:4, Duke University Press, 2016, 92

⁸⁰ José Luis Lanuza, *Morenada*, Buenos Aires, Emecé, 1967, 220

(Own Translation)

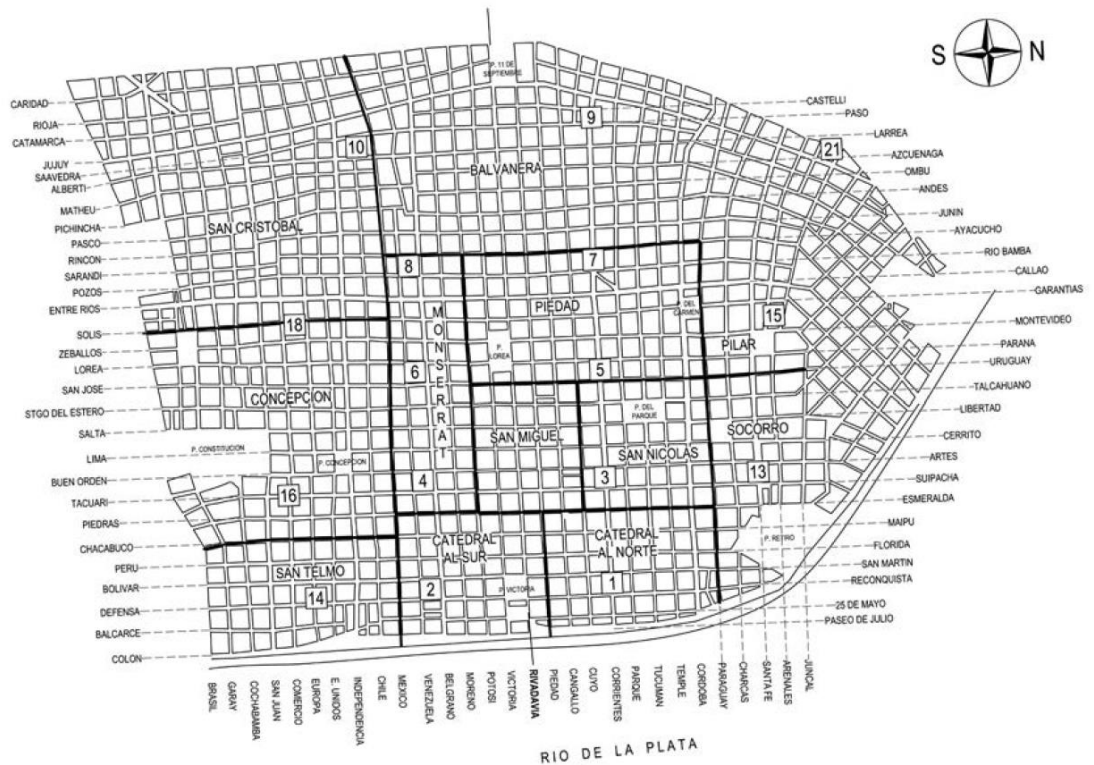
The strong advance of the immigrants condemned Afro-Argentines to return to service in the houses of the Buenos Aires elite or to turn to theatrical performances as musicians or dancers or enter the lower level of Government jobs. These alternatives allowed Afro-descendants to obtain at least a decent income. About the last one, Afro-Argentines had a small advantage over immigrants simply because they knew the language. This detail allowed them to obey their superiors without any misunderstandings. None of these jobs offered the possibility of progress, but at least they offered the stability that they did not find in other aspects of their lives, such as housing. In the same way, a new social construction, with roots in colonial times, was built around the blackness of Afro-descendants. Not only a construction around what their appearance implied but also an idea about what work activities and social roles Afro-descendants should carry out.⁸¹

Afroporteños used to socialize openly with them and with the rest of Buenos Aires society during particularly carnival and other religious festivals. African dances and rhythms adorned the Buenos Aires scene. The dances were a part of the Buenos Aires Afro-descendant community's syncretism of religion and cultural identity. In the streets of Buenos Aires, dozens of African groups danced while wearing outrageous costumes. The street where this activity took place is another method that aids in locating them on the map of Buenos Aires is the way they express themselves through Carnivals. The sound that afroporteños used to make when they were celebrating gave the Montserrat neighborhood its nickname, "el Barrio del Tambor" (The Neighborhood of the Drum).⁸² Afroporteños

⁸¹ Lea Geler, "Negros, pobres y argentinos. Identificaciones de raza, de clase y de nacionalidad en la comunidad Afroporteña, 1870-1880", en *Nuevo Mundo. Mundos Nuevos*, N° 4 september, 2005, 14-19.

⁸² Lea Geler, *Andares negros, caminos blancos*, 71

chose to live in the neighborhoods surrounding the parishes of Nuestra Señora de Montserrat and Immaculate Conception. Jose Miguel Rosal argued that even though those neighborhoods were not the most affordable for a very poor community to live in, they had formed some sort of attachment to them simply because they had been there since slavery times.⁸³



Buenos Aires for 1880. Parish Division.
Map elaborated by Lea Geler in *Andares negros, caminos blancos*.

The festivities were linked to the Catholic calendar. Epiphany, the feast of St. John, Easter, Christmas, and of course, Carnival.⁸⁴ During the first half of the nineteenth century,

⁸³ Miguel Ángel Rosal, “Negros y pardos en Buenos Aires, 1811-1860”, en *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, Vol. LI, 1, pp. 165-184., 1994, 173

⁸⁴ Lea, Geler, “¿Quién no ha sido negro en su vida?” Performances de negritud en el carnaval porteño de fin de siglo (XIX-XX)”, in *El Estado en América Latina. Recursos e imaginarios, siglos XIX-XXI*, Taller de Estudios Andinos y Amazónicos, Pilar García Jordán ed., Barcelona, 2011, 183-211.

the dances became increasingly popular to the extent that different groups of neighbors who were not of African descent began to emulate black people and their movements as well as their appearance. In addition to dressing and dancing like them, they also painted their faces black mimicking and mocking Afroporteños. These popular expressions from 1850 onwards began to be dominated by whites instead of Afro-descendants and then, around 1930, they died out.⁸⁵

The elite of Buenos Aires who recognized that the lustful and lewd movements were an assault on the morals that were sought to be professed in the Río de La Plata questioned these dances. These allegations eventually had an impact because the Afroporteño bourgeoisie was concerned to stop producing such exhibitions. Many *Afroporteño* newspapers repeated this idea. One of the most famous journalists in the community, Tiburcio Puntos Gallardo, argued that an annual dance was not bad, but celebrating parties every two weeks was immoral.⁸⁶ According to this journalist and other newspapers, these exhibitions belonged to an identity of the past that had to be left behind.⁸⁷ According to an 1882 article, young Afroporteños would contribute more if they learned to play musical instruments rather than the dated and pitiful drums.⁸⁸ And around 1905 an article celebrated the fact that the meetings of the Afroporteño bourgeoisie no longer included the typical dances of their culture, but rather modern costumes in the manner of Louis XV.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ By 1900 there were still between ten and fifteen comparsas of African descent. Lea Geler, “¿Quién no ha sido negro en su vida?”, 200

⁸⁶ “La mirada retrospectiva”, *La Juventud*, August 10, 1878, 2.

⁸⁷ “El lujo es incompetente y ruinoso a la clase de color”, *El Proletario*, May 9, 1858, p. 1.; *La Juventud*, February 26, 1876, p. 1. y June 25, 1876, 1.

⁸⁸ Cited in Luis Soler Cañas, “Pardos y Morenos en el año 80...” *Revista del Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas Juan Manuel de Rosas*, núm. 23, Buenos Aires, 1963, 289.

⁸⁹ Geroge Reid Andrews, *Los Afroargentinos de Buenos Aires*, 195

In this process of cultural hybridization, where whites appropriated the *Afroporteño* appearance and movements —only for certain festivities—, the *Afroporteño* community began to incorporate dances from European cultures such as waltzes and polkas. But that was not all. In the edges of the city of Buenos Aires —where most of the *Afroporteños* had to settle after the waves of immigrants disrupted their jobs and housing— a cultural exchange gave rise to *Tango*. In spaces called “Academies” where the lower classes, regardless of skin colour, congregated to socialize, the *tango* or *milonga* emerged.⁹⁰ A description of this dance from 1883 stated the following: “the *milonga* is only danced by the *compadritos* of the city, who have created it as a mockery of the dances given by the blacks in their places.”⁹¹ Once again the social question was mixed with race. The origin of the *milonga* exposes how even among people of equal social class, the white man felt morally superior to the black. It was not a process of fascination with *Afroporteños*, but mockery.

The *milonga*, which later developed into what is now well-known as *tango*, was born out of white people's mockery of black people. The lower socioeconomic Afro-descendant community had lost its sway over society. Not only of the city but also of the *porteño* culture. They were also losing relative presence. The contingents of Europeans that arrived transformed the *Afroporteño* community into a smaller and smaller minority. At the same time, the idea that Afro-descendants constituted, in addition to a lustful community, a lazy community with a little vocation for forced labor was forged. Those who once did nothing but work according to the wishes of their owners, almost a century after their liberation, represented the antithesis of work. Black people were good for

⁹⁰ Idem, 196-197

⁹¹ "El Carnaval antiguo", *Caras y Caretas*, February 15, 1902, 29

dancing, drinking, or singing, but not for working—the *Afroporteño* press asked itself and its entire community of readers in a self-critical tone. It was published in *La Juventud* at the turn of the nineteenth century.

It causes sorrow, inspires boredom; and above all, it's shaming the mere fact of considering and seeing that all the foreign colonies that reside here in South America are joining forces, creating Charity Institutions, Schools, Social Centers, etc, while we are the only ones who remain isolated, plunged in chaos, playing to perfection the role of pariahs in our own house.⁹²

On the other hand, when a well-known member of the community published his autobiography, one could read how he lamented the preference of Afro-Argentines for the comfort of domestic service instead of becoming skilled workers. The blacks were: "more imbued in the arrangement of the powder room than in the love of hard work, more predisposed to the pleasure than to the vicissitudes, more to the easy work than to furrow the earth with the plow."⁹³

The *Afroporteño* newspaper *La Broma* was analyzing the decline of their community in the face of recent immigration, and comparisons were inevitable. An editorial in the newspaper *La Broma* contrasted the way *Afroporteños* managed their money with Europeans. While the first always chose to squander it, those who came from Europe were more concerned with saving, either to progress in the country or to return home. According to historian George Reid Andrews, the causes that the *Afroporteña* community found to account for its backwardness in the Buenos Aires community are as follows: a propensity for wasting time, money, and effort on pointless entertainments; a dislike of manual labor; a detrimental lack of educational opportunities; and various

⁹² "¿Caen o se levantan?", *La Juventud*, October 30, 1878, 1

⁹³ Jorge Miguel Ford, *Beneméritos de mi estirpe*, La Plata, 1899, p. 124.

internal divisions that make it difficult to come together and cooperate for their common good.⁹⁴

Within the process of whitening that began in the second half of the nineteenth century, the *Afroporteño* community, mainly the bourgeoisie, began to subscribe to the idea that they embodied a lazy, profligate, and uncommitted-to-work personality type. Such interpretations encouraged divisions within the community itself while confirming what Lea Geler argues in her work on the black community of Buenos Aires. The sociologist explains that, as whitening policies and discourses deepened, a large part of the *Afroporteño* community understood that the best possible destiny for Afro-culture in Buenos Aires was to integrate into the hegemonic culture.⁹⁵ The most affluent members of the Afro-community prioritized assimilation into "white" culture over anything that suggested African origins through marriage and cultural appropriation. While the *Afroporteño* elite became integrated into the "white culture", those who did not, the poorest, retained the stigmas of being lazy, partying, and dancing. These characteristics, as we will see later, would be imputed to the athletes, from whom no forced labor was expected, but rather a certain aestheticism and grace in their movements. However, at the same time, African blackness was being deconstructed, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a new meaning of blackness was arising. It was a popular blackness. The connotation of that new social category would be marked by social class more than by race.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ George Reid Andrews, *Los Afroargentinos de Buenos Aires*, 221

⁹⁵ Lea Geler, *Andares negros, caminos blancos*, 242-243.

⁹⁶ Lea Geler, "Categorías raciales en Buenos Aires. Negritud, blanquitud, afrodescendencia y mestizaje en la blanca ciudad capital", 75

I SEE DARK PEOPLE

As we've seen, afro-descendants were not the only minority group despised by the elites, nor were they the only non-white community on Argentine soil. Despite their lack of African ancestry, the countryman and the Gaucho were all non-white, which is why the elite felt the need to completely erase all evidence of their physical characteristics. However, among the paradoxes of history, *el Gaucho* became the national symbol *par excellence*. The epic poem *El Gaucho Martín Fierro*, which narrated the misfortunes of a marginal character not aligned with the project of the country and who repeatedly claimed to be more in affinity with the Indigenous Peoples on the other side of the border, became the National Poem in the second decade of the twentieth century.

For this to happen, the image of the *gaucho* first had to be washed and whitened, both metaphorically and literally.⁹⁷ At the beginning of the twentieth century, the *gaucho* ceased to be uncivilized and *became white*, like many of the immigrants who read his story, and by with the wishes of those who chose him as a national symbol.⁹⁸ I'm not interested in telling this part of the story; instead, I want to look into the persona of the non-white man of popular origin whom the establishment tried to eradicate. To begin with, I will make a few brief comments on the genealogy of the term *Gaucho*. Throughout the eighteenth century, *Gaucho* was used to referring to vagabonds and thieves, but after the

⁹⁷ Ezequiel Adamovsky, *El Gaucho Indómito*, 81-85

⁹⁸ The colour of the nation was declared at the same time that José Hernández's work was designated as a national poem. It was decreed for the Centennial that the Gaucho was extinct, that he only existed in the spirit of the nation, and that all inhabitants of the nation were white and European descendants. See: Ezequiel Adamovsky, *El Gaucho indómito*, 59-64.

Wars of Independence, it acquired different meanings. Martín Miguel de Güemes, who led the independence troops in the north of the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, called his soldiers, who fought bravely against the Spanish royalists, *Gauchos*. Thus, at least in Northern Argentina, *Gaucha* came to have a connotation of prestige. It was a sign of bravery.⁹⁹

Regardless of whether the connotation was positive or negative, the figure of the *gaucho* was associated with the plebeian and rural as opposed to the urban and distinguished. Under the name of different characters, the *Gaucha* came to life through popular literature, whether in the form of poetry or novels. Bartolomé Hidalgo was the pioneer of this new literary genre. His style was later emulated by renowned Argentinian writers, such as José Hernández, Estanislao Del Campo, and Eduardo Gutiérrez. One of the main characteristics of this genre was that the gauchos spoke in the first person and gave an account of the sufferings of the countryman, the injustices that the poor had to endure at the behest of the rich, and the situations, they frequently had to overcome, such as fighting a duel with a basic knife.

The Creoles are thrown aside”; they are willing to work “for a small wage” to accumulate capital; some “take up the industry” and get rich quickly; others benefit from access to land, “which the government offers” to them but not “us Creoles”, who “are always forgotten / without any protection.”¹⁰⁰ (My translation)

These texts were not devoid of political content. Hidalgo's works were not conceived as literature but rather as protest texts. He addressed his peers to raise awareness

⁹⁹ Raúl Fradkin, “Centauros de la pampa. Le gaucho entre l’histoire et le mythe”, en *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, Année 58°, N° 1, January-February 2003, 109-133.

¹⁰⁰ Félix Hidalgo, *Milongas provincianas; verdades de Pedro Grullo; Décimas variadas*. Buenos Aires: La Popular, 1896

of the abuses and the deferrals suffered by the lower classes. On that point, they are not very dissimilar to the claims that Afro-descendants expressed in their songs or in their newspapers. *Criollos*, like Afro-descendants, from the second half of the nineteenth century, were politically and socially marginalized by European immigration, something that, as I have stated before, was strongly encouraged by the government. The song played repeatedly at carnivals referred to on page 41 is another example of the difficulties the Afroporteño community was having as a result of the arrival of Europeans. Jobs previously held by Afroporteños are now held by newcomers from Europe.

And there are no more negros botellers,
no changador, no negro who sells fruit,
and much less pescador;
because napolitanos have become pasteleros,
and they want to take away our job as blanqueador.¹⁰¹

Hidalgo's sentiments and the Afroporteños' song at Carnival were in agreement with Eduardo Gutiérrez's criticism of Juan Moreira:

On the ranch, as in the post, they prefer foreign labor to their own, because the landowner who has laborers from the country is exposed to be left without them when the national guard is mobilized, or when they are herded like rams to an electoral campaign. (My translation).¹⁰²

At this point, it is clear that towards the end of the nineteenth century, discrimination, although it had a racial component, was not a decisive factor. Black people, *mulattos*, creoles, and *mestizos*, such as the *Gauchos* that could be found in La Pampa, suffered a fate similar to Afroporteños at the end of the nineteenth century. Unlike the Afro-descendants, in the figure of the *gaucho* and the creole community, there was no self-

¹⁰¹ José Luis Lanuza, *Morenada*, Buenos Aires, 1967, p.220, cited by George Reid Andrews, *Los Afroargentinos*, p. 214

¹⁰² Eduardo Gutiérrez, *Juan Moreira*, EUDEBA, Buenos Aires, 1888, 6

criticism about how to insert themselves into urban and modern life. On the contrary, the *gaucho* and everything related to rural life were critical of everything that implied modernity in the terms that Buenos Aires's elite understood it—that is, the importation of European culture. The gaucho was hardly a meek figure. He was one of the more rebellious people to be found all over the province of Buenos Aires.¹⁰³

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the figure of the *gaucho* was charged with key political symbolism. In the context of the Argentine Civil Wars that took place after Independence, the *gaucho* was strongly linked to the group called *Federales* (Federals). Its most prominent leader was Juan Manuel de Rosas, a well-liked caudillo (leader) who won the support of society's most disadvantaged groups. On the opposite side were the *Unitarios* (Unitarians), the group that ultimately prevailed in the Battle of Caseros in 1852. Although both factions sought progress for Argentine territory, the *Unitarios* promoted foreign ideas, which, as we have seen, favored immigration and looked down on the native man of these lands. This way, *Unitarios* tinged the *Gaicho* with a wild and plebeian aura, of someone attached to the rural environment and therefore to backwardness.

As in the case of the Afro-descendant community, the press played a transcendental role because it was the platform on which these ideas reached the mass audience. Due to the high rate of literacy in the city of Buenos Aires, the number of printed publications was the highest in all of South America. Just as the *Afroporteño* community was able to publish a dozen newspapers, the same happened with the different political factions that published

¹⁰³ Ezequiel Adamvosky, “Criollismo, experiencia popular y política: el gaucho como emblema subversivo”, in *Anuario del Instituto de Historia Argentina*, vol. 18, n° 1 (june 2018), <https://doi.org/10.24215/2314-257Xe067>

their newspapers to disseminate their ideas.¹⁰⁴ Under the format of *folletín*, narratives that appeared in installments in the newspapers, dozens of works with rural themes reached great popularity among the lower classes. The success of this theme cannot be understood without taking into account the aforementioned work by José Hernández. The significance and recognition that *El gaucho Martín Fierro* achieved led to the publication of a large number of works on the same subject. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the newspaper that published *folletines* had a greater demand for readers.¹⁰⁵

Eduardo Gutierrez was the writer who most capitalized on these publications, which had a strong impact on the literate culture as well as on the popular culture, altering the behavior of the citizens.¹⁰⁶ As Ezequiel Adamovsky argued, among the lower sectors of society, an admiration for the protagonists of these works grew, which led many men to commit crimes or adopt violent attitudes. *Moreirismo* was a term that the press chose to define the violent and defiant attitudes that people incurred after reading or watching a play based on the novel *Juan Moreira* by Gutierrez. Like Martín Fierro, Juan Moreira was a *gaucho* who lived outside the law and showed his bravery and knife skills when dueling with a peer. In popular culture, the idea of “glorifying the *gaucho matrero*”, his violent version, was widespread.¹⁰⁷

As a result of the massive success of creole literature and the need to have a figure that would bring together the cosmopolitan population of Argentina and Buenos Aires in

¹⁰⁴ See: Tim, Duncan, “La prensa política: Sud – América” in *Revista de Instituciones, Ideas y Mercados* N° 46, (May 2007), 65-92; Paula Alonso, “En la primavera de la historia”. El discurso político del Roquismo de La década del ochenta a través de su prensa”. In *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Maericana: “Dr. Emilio Ravignani”*. Tercera serie, N° 15, 1st term 1997, 35-70

¹⁰⁵ Beatriz Sarlo, and Carlos Altamirano, “Esteban Echeverría: El poeta pensador”. In *Ensayos Argentinos. De Sarmiento a la Vanguardia*. Ariel, (Buenos Aires 1997), 17-83.

¹⁰⁶ *Juan Cuello* (1880) by Eduardo Gutierrez, *Santos Vega* (1885) by Rafael Obligado, *Una Amistad hasta la muerte* (1891), by Eduardo Gutierrez, *El Tigre de Quequén* (1880), *Los siete bravos* (1885) to name a few.

¹⁰⁷ Ezequiel Adamovsky, *El Gaucho indómito*, 56-67

particular, some members of the elite that were leading the country at the time of the Centennial understood that the *Gaicho*, despite themselves, was the most acceptable figure to instill a nationalist feeling in the great immigrant masses. The nationalization of the new masses was part of the project for a modern country that the authorities had been thinking about since the end of the nineteenth century. With this objective in mind, Leopoldo Lugones, one of the most renowned intellectuals of his time, concluded that the icon of the Pampas, embodied in the *Martín Fierro*, would be the ideal model to be the symbol of the nation.¹⁰⁸

Although *Martin Fierro* as a literary work had aroused the admiration of several Spanish-speaking critics, the canonization of *Martin Fierro* as a national emblem was highly condemned by other intellectuals of the time.¹⁰⁹ However, Leopoldo Lugones recognized that the gaucho had vanished and was no longer a danger to the advancement of the country. In these circumstances, Lugones managed to incorporate the gaucho into the formation of the national identity, Lugones asserted that the Argentines had inherited the gaucho's noble, chivalrous, devoted, and respectful social hierarchy. Although many other notable intellectuals had opposed the gaucho's canonization as a national symbol due to both its impure race and the ideals it represented, Lugones' idea ultimately won out.¹¹⁰

The gaucho eventually became a symbol of the country but not before being purified of

¹⁰⁸ Ricardo Rojas and Manuel Galvez were other intellectuals who contributed with different perspectives to find the cohesive factor of the population that inhabited the Argentine soil. See Beatriz Sarlo, Carlos Altamirano, "La Argentina del Centenario: campo intelectual, vida literaria y temas ideológicos", in *Ensayos Argentinos*, Ariel, Buenos Aires, 1997, 161-201.

¹⁰⁹ A group of Argentine intellectuals of the first half of the nineteenth century, influenced by European romanticism, is considered the "Generation of 1837". This group of intellectuals, among whom were Juan Bautista Alberdi, Esteban Echeverría, Juan María Gutierrez and Miguel Cané, among others, had tried to revive the figure of the gaucho as a national emblem and from it to build a national emblem. See Ezequiel Adamovsky, *El Gaucho Indómito*, 51-56

¹¹⁰ Leopoldo Lugones, *El Payador*, Otero & Co. Impresiones, Buenos Aires, 1916, 46.

everything that associated him with the nation's backwardness, such as his skin tone and rebellious attitudes toward the government.¹¹¹

By the beginning of the twentieth century, Argentina had been declared by its most important intellectuals as a country of white people that had successfully overcome its mestizo stage. Any trait that symbolized backwardness was a matter of the past. Migration policies had been highly successful and out of the melting pot had emerged a white man. According to these conditions, Argentina was prepared to start its second century as a free nation on the pillars that the discourse and white policies had built. However, as I have explained in the preceding pages and will demonstrate in the pages that follow, Afroporteños left enough traces of their presence in the nation's most significant city as well as their cultural output, including the newspapers that the neighborhood published.

The print culture that the Afroporteño community exhibited towards the end of the nineteenth century demonstrated that, in addition to having an extremely active public life, its newspapers showed traits of journalistic modernity that would only become massive with the boom of the commercial press shortly after the beginning of the twentieth century. On the other hand, the Afroporteño community, through its newspapers, was aware of the intellectual discussions that were taking place regarding the construction of the racial identity of the nation. These discussions generated tensions and contradictions that were expressed in the pages of Afroporteño newspapers as we will see in the following chapter.

¹¹¹ José Ingenieros, one of the strongest critics, argued that this non-white character symbolized barbarism and therefore an obstacle to progress. Many others shared this position, ascribing to the gaucho similar characteristics to those of Afro-descendants: clumsy and lacking in industriousness. See: Matías Emiliano Casas, *La Metamorfosis del gaucho. Círculos criollos, tradicionalistas y política en la provincia de Buenos Aires 1930-1960*, Prometeo Libros, Buenos Aires, 2017.

CHAPTER 2

THE AFROPORTEÑO BOURGEOISIE AS ADVOCATORS OF WHITENING AND THE PRESS AS ITS MAIN ORGAN OF MILITANCY.

The Afroporteña bourgeoisie, through its media contributed to the dissemination of the ideas of civilization, order, and progress that the whitening state elite propagated through their positivist discourses and migratory policies.¹¹² At the same time, it contributed to the characterization of its readers as vulgar, lazy, and libidinous, among other descriptors applied to Afroporteños during the long process of the nation's whitening. Although the Afroporteño press functioned as a cultural refuge in which the racial and cultural identities of the community were reinforced, the desires of the Afroporteño bourgeoisie to participate in the mainstream culture were much stronger than their desires to consolidate their identity as an ethnic group.¹¹³ Through different mechanisms operated by the newspapers of their community, they persuaded their readers to continue along the path that the middle and upper classes of Afroporteños had already begun to take, that of assimilation with the majority culture. This meant incorporating musical tastes that did not correspond to the African heritage that manifested itself in carnivals and other festivities in the streets of Buenos Aires throughout the second half of the 19th century. The Afroporteño press claimed that its readers should abandon different artistic expressions to

¹¹² Given the meaning that the word “disappeared” has in the recent history of Argentina, I would like to clarify that, as Lea Geler and other historians who have addressed the subject, by “disappeared” I am referring to the process of invisibilization that Afroporteños suffered due to the influence of the racist discourses that predominated in the 19th century.

¹¹³ Jean-Arsène Yao, “La prensa afroporteña y el pensamiento afroargentino a finales del siglo XIX”. *Historia y Comunicación Social*. Vol 20, N° 1, January-June, 2015, 137-157.144-149.

incorporate others, from dance styles or the playing of musical instruments to ways of expressing themselves, both verbally and gestural. The assimilation of hegemonic culture had even allowed some Afro-descendants, such as Rosendo Mendizabal and Domingo Sosa, to participate in national politics, something that would have been unthinkable if they had remained attached to the Afro culture of Buenos Aires.¹¹⁴ In this sense, the Afroporteño press served as an effective disciplinarian of its members and an accomplice, not of the interests of its readers, but of the ruling elite who understood that eradicating the color component of the nation's inhabitants would enable it to more closely resemble European models, where the Caucasian type predominated.

After addressing the presence and influence that Afro-descendants had on urban culture throughout the nineteenth century, both in quantity and in citizen participation, in this chapter I will concentrate on the means of communication used by Afroporteños and the various conflicts that existed among them. Many of these conflicts were dominated by a class bias that would eventually have an impact on the racial dimension and their own self-perception. At the same time, given the evident influence that the press had on the Afroporteño community towards the end of the nineteenth century, it seems appropriate to address Buenos Aires's journalistic scene. One of the largest and most diverse in Latin America.¹¹⁵ In this sense, while the small Afroporteño press was aimed at members of their community and dealt with issues of their own daily life, the most important newspapers in Buenos Aires were also aimed at a reduced public, but with the capacity to participate in

¹¹⁴ Rosendo Mendizabal was elected provincial deputy in 1853 and Domingo Sosa, deputy for the legislature of the Province of Buenos Aires. See: Ricardo Rodríguez Molas: "Negros libres rioplatenses", *Revista de Humanidades*, nº 1, 1961, 99-126.

¹¹⁵ James Cane, *The Fourth Enemy, Journalism and Power in the Making of Peronist Argentina, 1930–1955*, Penn State University Press, 2012.

national politics. Due to these circumstances, Afroporteño newspapers displayed traits that, in the early twentieth century, would become common and indicative of a modern press catered to a mass audience as a result of a process of social and political democratization. Although it had already begun to be evident in the nineteenth-century press, in the first decades of the twentieth century would be strongly expressed and popularized in newspapers such as *Crítica* or *La Razón*. Although it may seem pretentious to announce the Afroporteño press as a battering ram of journalistic modernization, the mention and analysis of its characteristics may contribute to thinking about how the press was thought of in terms of its readers beyond the social and political conjuncture.

In the first part of this chapter, I will discuss the journalistic environment in which the Afroporteño press operated in the first. Within this world, the Afroporteña press not only sought to reach the members of its community but also had pretensions to dialogue with the large national newspapers. This linking mechanism allowed them to legitimize themselves before the members of their community, but above all, to seek the legitimacy and recognition of the major national newspapers such as *La Nación* and *La Prensa*, for example. The reading of some of their articles will give us the guideline to understand what the objectives under which these newspapers were conceived were. In addition, I'll discuss how the newspapers position themselves in terms of race and class in relation to their community. On the other hand, the newspapers of the Afroporteño community presented points of contact and points of divergence with the great national newspapers. It is in those divergences that the Afroporteña press presents the greatest points of originality and modernity that will also be presented in the following lines.

In the second section of this chapter, knowing its characteristics, its readers, and its editors, I intend to address the stigmatization and conflicts of race and class that contributed to the process of whitening Afroporteños. I will try to show how the discourse of white Argentina first penetrated its editors and then its readers so that, finally, a large part of the Afroporteño community ended up subscribing to the standards of civilization, order, and progress that the hegemonic culture understood as such. These values were not explicitly spelled out but were linked to not being black. The fact of presenting traits and attitudes that denoted an African heritage was considered a sign of backwardness for the hegemonic culture and the Afroporteño bourgeoisie understood this message. Eager to be part of the majority culture, the media were also organs of indoctrination functional to the whitening discourse.

THE MODERN AFROPORTEÑO PRESS AND ITS UNIVERSE

The limitations of the Afro-porteño press and the traits of publications like *La Broma*, *El Tambor*, and *El Unionista* encourage us to examine them within a larger context of the journalism of the era. As other historians have investigated, the Argentine press at the end of the 19th century and during the first decades of the 20th century, had one of the most powerful publishing industries in South America.¹¹⁶ As referents of this

¹¹⁶ Consumption of newspapers in Buenos Aires tripled that of its nearest Latin American peer (Mexico City), Argentina also ranked third worldwide in per capita newspaper purchases in 1882 as well as in the mid-1930s. Editor and Publisher, International Year Book Number for 1946, 94–316; Prieto, *El discurso criollista*, 35

editorial/journalistic movement were newspapers *La Prensa* and *La Nación*, founded respectively in 1869 and 1870. The first was founded by José C. Paz and the second by Bartolomé Mitre, who was president of the Nation between 1862 and 1868. These newspapers, which managed to prolong their existence to the present day, emerged at a time when the press was far from presenting features of modernity such as those that were evident in the first decades of the 20th century with newspapers such as *Crítica* or *La Razón*. More evident in the case of *La Nación* than in *La Prensa*, the great national press, contemporary to Afro-descendant publications, was framed in what historiography called *factions* (*prensa facciosa*).¹¹⁷

Between the battle of Caseros (1852) and the turn of the century, the Argentine press underwent a process of liberalization that led to the consolidation of a strong journalistic production. The dictatorship of Juan Manuel de Rosas (1829 - 1852) implied journalistic censorship to anyone who expressed dissidence with the dictator's opinions. Once the dictatorship was over, the political dispute opened up for different forces and personalities with ambitions to fight for access to power. Faced with this new situation, the forces that prevailed over Rosas, inspired by political liberalism, managed to give the press a new legal framework that was embodied in the drafting of the first National Constitution whose main author was the aforementioned Juan Bautista Alberdi. Article 14 of the Magna Carta referred to freedom of the press. It stated that: “all inhabitants of the Confederation enjoy the following rights in conformity with the laws that regulate their exercise; that is:

¹¹⁷ See, Tim, Duncan “La prensa política: Sud-America, 1884-1892, in, *Revista de Instituciones, Ideas y Mercados* N° 46, Mayo 2007,65-92, Paula, Alonso, “‘En la primavera de la Historia’. El Discurso del roquismo de la década del ochenta a través de su prensa”, en *Boletín del Instituto de Historia Argentina y Americana*, “Dr. Emilio Ravignani”, Third serie, num 15, 1st. Semester, 1997, 35-70

. . . to publish ideas through the press without prior censorship”.¹¹⁸ The article guaranteed freedom of the press in its broadest sense regardless of political orientation, ethnicity, or citizenship. However, it is pertinent to clarify that the Province of Buenos Aires, the most powerful of all the provinces, did not subscribe to this constitution, until 1860. It had decided to organize itself as a political entity independent of the Argentine Confederation, but when it did so it sought to reinforce the already existing freedom of the press by adding Article 32 which argued that “the Federal Congress will not dictate laws that restrict the freedom of the press, nor establish federal jurisdiction over that freedom.”¹¹⁹

The renewed political life that Argentina was beginning to undergo after the fall of Rosas brought with it the flourishing of a type of journalism that would be closely linked to the political life of the nation and, during the sixties and seventies, would reach its greatest splendor. Several columns with strong political content crowded the newspapers of the time, leaving limited space for the reader to learn about the day's events. Jorge Navarro Viola's approach to the nineteenth-century press allows us to infer what type of reader these newspapers were aimed at, as well as who the editors were. Long political commentaries and book reviews were the raw material of these publications. In addition, "given the importance of the topics covered and the length with which the editors developed their thesis, they had to be scholars with a solid base of legal education and philosophical background, often deep thinkers, or true stylists, chiselers of the phrase".¹²⁰ In conclusion, it could only be the most enlightened personalities of the city who wrote those pages. In line with this, the readers could not be other than the most literate and

¹¹⁸ Cited in Jorge Mayer, *El derecho público de prensa*, Buenos Aires: Universidad, 1944, 137–38.

¹¹⁹ *Idem*

¹²⁰ Jogle. Navarro Viola, *Anuario de la prensa Argentina*, 1896, Buenos Aires, 1897.

enlightened neighbors in the country and therefore with the capacity to influence local politics, either with their vote or with their ideas. These newspapers left little room for their readers to learn about the daily life of the city, as this was not the purpose of this type of press. Neither was the commitment to the truth or certain objectivity at the time of issuing an opinion. Biased judgments and arbitrary commentary were essential aspect of its nature. Due to this type of characteristics, this type of publication received the name *Factional Press*.¹²¹ It is not a minor fact that in election years the number of this type of newspaper increased to be the spokespersons of the different candidates as well as strong critics and vilifiers of their adversaries.¹²²

By the 1880s, these static and well-defined characteristics were giving way to other types of content. As I mentioned before, the changes in the press cannot be fully understood without paying attention to other phenomena that Argentina and particularly the Province of Buenos Aires were going through. At the same time that migration policies began to be implemented and the results became visible, technical progress and economic well-being contributed to the fact that the great mass of workers who were mostly employed in the service sector had little time for reading. Factional Journalism ceased to hold hegemony and a new, more specialized press that covered scientific, moral, sports, photographic and social issues began to have a more prominent place in the life of Buenos Aires. A clear example of this transformation process was the newspaper *La Nación*. Founded by Bartolomé Mitré as an instrument of *mitrismo* (this was the name given to the set of political and economic ideas that Mitre represented), the former president of the nation

¹²¹ James Cane, *The Fourth Enemy, Journalism and Power in the Making of Peronist Argentina, 1930–1955*, Penn State University Press, 2012, 33-44.

¹²²Paula Alonso, "En la Primavera de la Historia", 38.

clarified in his first editorial that it was founded as a *combat post* from which he sought to place his ideas and refute the opposing ones, however, with the passing of time and the changes in the social situation, it was redefined as a "tribune of doctrine" (Tribuna de doctrina). Navarro Viola himself observed that newspapers are no longer written to please a man or a group of people, but to satisfy the demands of the public".¹²³

This transformation, which first became evident in the reading public and was the driving force behind editorial changes in the different media, stimulated the transition to a commercial press. The owners of the journalistic enterprises were no longer directly associated with political parties and a ruling elite but became entrepreneurs of a middle class whose journalistic enterprises were their source of employment besides being employers of numerous writers, publicists, editors, photographers, and journalists. Likewise, if those who wrote in the newspapers of the mid-nineteenth century were the most enlightened people in the city, now, the writing process would also go through a period of liberalization and would no longer be something exclusive to an enlightened elite. A growing number of people were able to access various journalistic endeavors to the extent that they felt challenged as the 19th century progressed, with writing, journalism, reading, and consumption, in general, becoming more liberalized. Newspapers such as *La Nación*, *La Prensa*, *La Razón*, and later *Crítica* are the great exponents of this transformation process, however, if we look back to the decades when the *factious press* still reigned, we find that in the Afro-porteño press, some characteristics that defined the commercial press were already in place.

¹²³ Jorge Navarro Viola, 23-24

The Afro-porteño community in Buenos Aires at the end of the 19th century was not only a community with a strong presence, but also had a dozen publications that shared characteristics with those later praised in the great evening newspapers of the first decades of the 20th century (*Crítica, La Nación or La Prensa* for naming a few). Between 1873 and 1882 there were at least seven publications made by Afro-descendants and aimed at Afro-descendants in Buenos Aires, namely: *La Broma* (1876-1882), *La Juventud* (1876-1879), *La Perla* (1878-1879), *La Luz* (1878), *La Igualdad* (1873-1874), *El Aspirante* (1882) and *El Unionista* (1877-1878). Currently, these publications were off the radar of researchers addressing press issues but they were an important source for those who set out to shed light on the Afro-porteño question. These publications did not have the mass reach that other newspapers had, mainly because that was not their purpose. However analyzing these newspapers, in addition to the issues specific to their community, can be revealing of some issues concerning journalism and the commercial and popular press itself.

Just by looking at the period of duration of the newspapers, a very evident feature stands out. In the decade from 1870 to 1880 many newspapers were published but each of them for a very short time. Although Afroporteño bourgeoisie intentions were that their editions would last forever, journalistic initiatives were very difficult to sustain over time.

The same was true of the *factional press*. Newspapers had very little durability and they were subject to whether or not the political party they supported won the elections. And point in common was that both, factional and Afro-Porteño press understood newspapers as an instrument for transformation. The Afro-Porteño press was different in that it wasn't a factional press but rather a commercial press because afro-porteño editors had to deal with investments and limited financial resources on a daily basis to keep their

newspapers alive. However, as Lea Geler points out, in a time of factious press, it was not well received to perceive any economic benefits from and entrepreneurship that was meant to improve citizens' lives.¹²⁴

The people behind the newspapers were not politicians but middle and upper class Afro-porteños, who needed to sell newspapers and seek, within a community with scarce economic resources, a way to finance themselves. In short, the lack of durability of the newspapers showed that the possibilities of obtaining resources to continue publishing news was a really difficult task and the competition for the market hegemony was really tough. It was a struggle for subsistence.¹²⁵ Just a few entrepreneurs, such as Horacio Mendizábal, Santiago Elejalde, Ida Edelvira Rodríguez, Gervasio Méndez, Froilán P. Bello, Juan A. Costa, Dionisio Malo, José M. García, Valerio J. Bello, G. M. Arrieta, Juan Balparda, Benjamín Ramos and Gabino Ezeiza were able to undertake the adventure of journalism and communicate their ideas and news to their community.

Although both types of press, the factional press of hegemonic culture and the commercial press of the Afro-descendants were a means of social and political positioning, they did not function in the same way and therefore their content was different. In the hegemonic culture, towards the end of the 19th century, social recognition was more linked to the circles of power, to the ruling elite or to the large agro-exporting businesses.¹²⁶ In this sense, the press was part of the power system. Social positioning through private or commercial enterprises would become massively visible only towards the turn of the

¹²⁴ Lea Geler, *Andares negros, caminos blancos*, 33.

¹²⁵ Lea Geler, *Andares negros, caminos blancos*, 139.

¹²⁶ Ver: Leandro Losada, “La sociedad bonaerense: tendencias demográficas, grupos sociales y formas de vida”, en Juan Manuel Palacio (Dir.): *Historia de la provincia de Buenos Aires : de la federalización de Buenos Aires al advenimiento del peronismo : 1880-1943* . Buenos Aires : Edhasa; Gonnet: UNIPE: Editorial Universitaria, 2013.

century with a wide improvement in the standard of living that would include broad sectors of society.¹²⁷ However, from the public sphere that the Afroporteño community represented, the wealthier members of the community managed to carry as much influence as possible among their peers. Just as in the hegemonic culture the press sought to influence the political and social aspects of its community, in the Afroporteño press, readers could also find different analyses of the situation of black people after the abolition of slavery, jokes, poems and stories in which the entire Afroporteño community could participate. A review of the editorials of the main newspapers, which were written by their owners, gives us the idea that their objective was not so much political, —in terms of political parties and representation—, but rather social and cultural. The newspaper *La Juventud*, which was first published in January 1876, argued that, before demanding political rights, was the task of consolidating itself as a community:

“Let us contribute once and for all to make our social union a fact, and the time will have come when our desired political freedom will have to be put into practice. (...). *La Juventud* is born, (...) with no other mission than that of the common good, and its columns are at the disposal of all people without distinction of sex, as long as they are in harmony with our program”.¹²⁸

The participation of the people in the pages of the press is undoubtedly a distinctive feature for the press of the time. This type of intervention would only reach the mainstream press after the centennial celebration when the commercial press began to become popular.¹²⁹ These newspapers shared with the rest of the media, issues, controversies and

¹²⁷ See, Leandro Gutierrez, y Luis Alberto Romero, *Sectores populares, cultura y política. Buenos Aires en la entreguerra*, Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 1995, Matthew Karush, *Cultura de clase: Radio y cine en la creación de una Argentina dividida (1920-1946)*, Buenos Aires: Ariel; 2013.

¹²⁸ “Nuestra misión”, *La Juventud*, 1 de enero de 1876, p. 1

¹²⁹ See, Sylvia Saitta, *Regueros de Tinta*, 48-50

interests, but they also highlighted the singularity of problems, especially the persistence of racial prejudices, that Afro-Argentines were going through.¹³⁰ As Jean-Arsène Yao synthesizes, "Afro-Argentine newspapers were much more organs of opinion, variety, entertainment and even particular communications among readers than of 'news' information."¹³¹ Months later, when *La Broma* made its appearance and in its editorial stated the purpose of its publication, it did not seem to differ much from that of *La Juventud*: "[we will specialize] in the news and chronicles of dances (...) We will not concern ourselves with politics. We will abide by the good as we will fight against the bad. The columns of our publication are henceforth at the disposal of our friends."¹³²

In both editorials, there was evidence of a refusal to address political issues as if it were something external to them. It would be more appropriate to argue that the editorials tried to avoid partisan issues that would divide their community. They called for the union of all Afroporteños and for joint and cohesive activity, as this was the only way to achieve the desired progress and a certain level of civilization. More evident in the case of *La Broma* than in *La Juventud*, the newspapers presented themselves as important social actors that sought to become the unifiers of all social activity involving the community, creating awareness of its strengths and weaknesses. To reinforce the former and modify the latter. Years later, this ideal continued to be reinforced in every editorial that appeared. Afroporteño newspapers were persistent in their efforts to achieve unity.¹³³ The repetition of this message suggested that the majority of Afroporteños were not aligned with the idea

¹³⁰ Jean-Arsène Yao, "La prensa afroporteña y el pensamiento afroargentino a finales del siglo XIX", 137.

¹³¹ Idem, 144.

¹³² *La Broma*, "Una palabra", september 20, 1877, p.1

¹³³ Lea Geler; "Guardianes del progreso. Los periódicos afroporteños entre 1873 y 1882", *Anuario de Estudios Americanos*, 65, 1, January-June, 199-226, Sevilla (Spain), 2008, 203-205.

of progress that was proclaimed in the pages of the press. The first and last editorial published by the newspaper *La Luz* exclaimed: "Courage, courage; do not let yourselves be overcome by apathy and our efforts and yours will crown the great work of civilization that we undertake with faith."¹³⁴ The idea of reaching a certain degree of civilization or of modifying some of the habits and customs of Afroporteños was very present in the pages of the newspapers. We will expand on this later.

This first and only appearance of the newspaper *La Luz* reinforces the fact that it was really difficult for Afro-porteño entrepreneurs to make their publishing companies profitable. These difficulties, typical of a small market and a community with scarce resources, manifested themselves in unpleasant ways. One could often read comments in which the editor of a newspaper was happy when a rival newspaper had not been able to go on sale or when an advertiser had abandoned it.¹³⁵ This shows that, although in general terms Afro-porteño press shared the same objective. Competition among them was often very cruel. In its pages one could read the most vulgar adjectives that among the different newspapers were given to each other, such as: "Raw meat" (*Carne Cruda*) or the "El Mono del Organito" (The Monkey of the Organito).¹³⁶ The resources available to the owners were scarce and fluctuating, and expenses were always a problem.

Publishers were constantly concerned about the number of newspaper subscribers. Each newspaper's primary source of funding came from subscription sales of its publications. *La Broma* was among the few that occasionally provided such information, despite the fact that there was little information available about the number of subscribers

¹³⁴ "Una Palabra al público", *La Luz*, September 30, 1878, p.1.

¹³⁵ Lea, Geler, *Andares negros, caminos blancos*, 35-40.

¹³⁶ George Reid Andrews, *Los Afroargentinos de Buenos Aires*, 212-213

that Afro-porteño newspapers may have had. On November, 1877, it announced that it had 486 subscribers. There were 500 subscribers by 1878.¹³⁷ After a few months, that figure had dropped to 200, and by 1881, it had boasted more than 300 devoted readers.¹³⁸ Another newspaper that published its subscribers was *La Perla*, which claimed to have 320 subscribers.¹³⁹ Newspapers were not profitable businesses, as we have previously stated, and it was a common complaint that they falsely claimed to have more readers than subscribers. In fact, one of the biggest problems these businesses had to deal with was getting more customers to pay more for the goods they offered. The poverty of their neighbors was one of the biggest barriers to publishers' ability to increase revenue. These individuals created strategies, though, to acquire reading material without spending a single peso. These strategies were called by Afro-porteño's newspapers "leer de ojito" (read spying—read by a glimpse of somebody's paper). Although these attitudes built stronger boundaries among the community created a great damage to the editors. In more than one newspaper it could be read that.

“do not currently lend anything to the *La Juventud* newspaper. thus obliging those who are interested in reading it to subscribe to it, or to buy the single issue, [. . .] to subscribe to it, or buy the single issue, [...] not allowing from now on, no person to read the newspaper by a glimpse”¹⁴⁰

La Broma, on the other hand, surrendered to the attitude of its readers and chose to estimate the number of readers who might read the newspaper: “subscription increases notably. If before it was read by one thousand five hundred or two thousand people, today we

¹³⁷ “Un paréntesis”, *La Broma*, , January 3, 1878, p. 2

¹³⁸ *La Broma*, October 10, 1878, p. 1; *La Broma*, March 6, 1881, p. 2, *La Broma*, November 15, 1878, p. 1.

¹³⁹ *La Perla*, May 3, 1879, p. 1

¹⁴⁰ “Hechos locales”, *La Juventud*, January 31 1878, p. 1.

guarantee that it has twice the number of readers, by the way, eight percent of them read it by a glimpse”¹⁴¹.

The amount that could be collected for the subscription did not even complete the value of a full salary.¹⁴² Newspaper editors had to perform additional duties in addition to reporting news when faced with this circumstance. The directors themselves were editors, salesmen and distributors. Some shopkeepers from their own community, such as cigarette shops or carnival items, who chose to publish in the pages of the newspapers were an important but not always constant help. The advertisements that Afro-Porteño business owners chose to publish served as another source of funding. Newspapers could not depend on these revenues being constant because they were affected by the economic climate at the time. In light of this, the editors developed a brilliant financial strategy. This was to charge the neighbors in case they wanted to publish some text of their production. This popular initiative led to some texts being published with spelling mistakes, since the condition of some who paid to see their texts in the pages of the newspapers was that they would not be edited at all. Between the dilemma of publishing a text with spelling mistakes or not receiving the neighbor's payment, the editors always opted for the more economically profitable solution. For this reason, in the pages of *La Broma* you could find the poems that Tomás Rivero published with an endless number of orographic errors. The author was opposed to the editors correcting his text.

“yo asisti adicho vaile / que me en vitaron ami / y era triste que un
desaire / tuve pronto que sufril // mi amor no me sujeta / la pacion
de un mosó honrrado / el continuo la flor de un poeta / sera, amante

¹⁴¹ “Varillazos”, *La Broma*, , April 15, 1880., p. 1

¹⁴² An analysis of the price at which newspapers were sold and the cost of producing them can be found in: Lea Geler, *Andares Negros, caminos blancos*, 33-36.

triste y desairado”¹⁴³

Also, among the many tasks that the editors assigned to themselves, there was also the task of claiming late payments. It was very common for subscribers to fall into arrears. Faced with this situation, it was the same newspaper editor who personally asked his client to pay the money owed. These procedures, carried out by the owner of the newspaper himself, allowed him to have a traceability of his economy and a direct contact with his readership, something essential for the type of popular publication that these newspapers represented.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Tomás Rivero, “Varillazos”, *La Broma*, November 22, 1887.p. 1.

¹⁴⁴ Lea Geler, *Andares negros, caminos blancos*, 35-40.

LA BROMA

ESTRELLA DE ROMA
497 - Suipacha - 497

ARTICULOS DE FANTASIA, ALTA SOVEDADI

Trajes de esmir para lana..... 400 \$ mpc.
de fantasia..... 500 a 600

ESPECIALIDAD EN TRAJES DE INVIERNO
Desde 300 hasta 1,200 pesos mpc

En 24 horas se confeccionan trajes a la medida.

À LAS FAMILIAS

Les prevenimos que hace ya mas de un mes que los negocios regalan a los consumidores.

BONOS

Doban no olvidarse de pedirlos.

Por cada 500 pesos nominales de Bono, se puede obtener un premio de 25 hasta 500 pesos.
Los premios se pagan todos los fines de mes.

OFICINA CENTRAL DE LOS BONOS RECONQUISTA 126
(Pasaje Argentino.)

LOS MEJORES CIGARRILLOS
QUE SE ELABORAN EN ESTA CAPITAL
SON LOS TURCOS ESPECIALES DE LA ABUNDANCIA
SOLO SE ESPENDEN EN LA FABRICA
214 - RIVADAVIA - 216

ROPA HECHA DE INVIERNO

Trajes de Saco, Casaca y faldas de primer orden, con 150 gustos y diferentes formas a 170, 200, 250 y 400 \$.

Sacos de Casaca a 80, 100, 120, 150, 180 y 200 \$.

Chalecos de casaca de 40, 60, 80, 100, 120, 150 y 180 \$.

Fantasia de casaca de 50, 60, 70, 80, 100 y 120 \$.

Risas y Sobretodos de 150, 200, 250, 300 y 400 \$.

Trajes para jóvenes de 10 a 15 años de 170, 180, 200 y 250 \$.

Trajes de niños de 6 a 9 años de 80, 90, 100 y 120 \$.

SASTRERIA DE CORTE ESPECIAL
RIVADAVIA 208

Trajes a medida perfectamente hechos, faldas imperiales a 400, 600, 800 y 700 \$ de Jupon 500, 600, 700, y 800 \$ de Levitas y levitas a 400, 600, 800, 1.000, 1.200. Chalecos de pelo matelase y franela a 100, 120, 150, 180 \$ de casaca a 60, 70, 80, y 90 \$ Orinas vista de hilo a 80 \$ una y 200 \$

la caja de 6 camisas de madapolan a 25 \$ una y 150 la media doctra, de color de pascu franela a 20 y 25 \$ una gran cantidad de camisas muy convenientes para los Sastreros de 20 hasta 100 \$ y se mide a tablero sistema de fabrica. En su casa la Sastreria que ofrece la muy conocida y acreditada Sastreria Corte Especial RIVADAVIA 28 vestas al por mayor y menor precio fijo.

MANUEL G. PEREZ

Dá lecciones de dibujo, en su casa y a domicilio. Horas de 2 a 4 p. m.
Precio Medio. Salta 60.
Peru.

ZAPATERIA DE LA ÉPOCA

A 100 \$ por botines para hombre, hechos en el país de cuero francés de recorte, con puntera y la costura garantida, y a 120 con abolladura para aguja y cuadrada.
CALLE DE CHACABUDO N. 301
Entre MELUCO y CHILE.

LA ECONOMIA PORTEÑA
ZAPATERIA UNIVERSAL

Hafael Urbino y Cia.

LINA N.º 133 BUENOS AIRES 224

Ofrecemos al público y a su vez a la familia, un gran surtido de calzado de todas clases para la costura, a precios como siempre en la confección y para ofrecer en vista, todo el material en una sola vez mas barato y mejor. Para que el público no ignore los precios de calzado, ofrecemos una muestra de ellos. Estas muestras de calzado material franela, con garantida, por el precio de 200.

El de terciopelo para debajo del pantalón..... 150

El de figura botín..... 100

El de caña de perro, café de becerro de..... 120

Figura botín..... 120

El de figura botín..... 120

Botines de cañón de recorte doble suela, cuero francés la masa base..... 100

El de sin doble suela..... 100

El de línea cuadrada..... 90

El de recorte..... 90

El de lana..... 80

Todas estas clases se garantizan que son de corte francés y trabajo especial.

Botines de recorte, con el cuero francés y la figura..... 70

El de lana..... 70

Botines de señora con el cuero de recorte alme..... 70

El de lana..... 60

El de punta alta línea forma 60, 65, y 70..... 60

El de recorte..... 45, 65, 65, y 70

El de línea..... 60, 65, y 60

El de la ligera..... 45, 65, y 60

Botines de niña de cañón y charol franela de la mejor forma especial 60, 70, 80, y 90

El de charol y granca..... 50, 60, y 70

El de charol y cuero de perro..... 45, 60, y 65

El de lana..... 60, 65, y 65

El cuero para niñas y niños..... 25, 30, y 35

Se garantiza que todo el calzado, es hecho en el país, sistema suela y que todo el material, como tambien la buena clase de sus materiales.

Para que el público pueda apreciar lo que ofrecemos, les ofrecemos un regalo para a visitar nuestra casa, que equivalente a un valor de lo que decíamos porque hallará un 20% mas barato que en cualquier otra parte.

En un grande y variado el surtido de calzado que poseemos, que sea es imposible hacer todo un detalle en el presente aviso. Invitamos al público a que visite nuestra casa.

NOTA—Se hace toda clase de calzado sobre medida a gusto del marchante con un aumento de 10 pesos, y se asegura gratis todo calzado que se desista o se desalve.

TIENDA Y MERCERIA DE FRANCISCO PUENTE
CALLE CORRIENTES 190

Surtido general en artículos del ramo

Especialidad en ropa blanca.

Trabaja con competencia, lo que importa decir, mas barato que en ninguna parte.

Invitamos a todos los suscritores y visitantes de este semanario a que se sirvan visitar nuestra casa.

190-CORRIENTES-190
Instituto de Comercio

This picture is an example of the kind of advertising that appeared in the Afro Porteño press. The majority of them are about clothing tailoring and dressmaking. *La Broma* September 16, 1881.

The closeness to the readers was not only useful to recover money but also to fill the pages of the newspaper and to reproduce the people's feelings as faithfully as possible. Although politics was not discussed, the news that the Afroporteño press dealt with was related to everything that was happening in the social activities of the community itself: dances, gatherings, inauguration of social clubs, neighborhood initiatives, etc. Under these circumstances, the decimated newspapers claimed to have a large number of reporters who could cover everything that happened at these events, from who the guests were to the

actions of each of them. For example, when a member of the community passed away, Nicasio Latorre took care of all the burial expenses. This attitude was highlighted in the pages of *La Broma* by publishing that: "Our friend Nicasio F. de Latorre deserves our most expensive manifestation of appreciation. Nicasio, as always active, gathered on Sunday (...) an amount (...) to meet the expenses of transporting the body of Mr. Giles".¹⁴⁵

In such cases, the actions of the neighbors were perfectly aligned with the civilizing mission to which the press was committed. Such initiatives were strongly encouraged by the newspapers and of course were very well received by those who were praised. In a passing article, one could see the expectation that a greater number of neighbors would commit themselves to community aid: "We expect philanthropy from our community. Everyone contribute what they can or what they want. The names and the amount contributed by each person will be published successively in this newspaper".¹⁴⁶ The incentive was to appear in the pages of *La Broma* or any newspaper. This confirms the authority that the newspapers had and the power of influence they had within their community. That same power of influence was also used to denounce those acts committed that did not meet the standards of civilization, order and progress.

¹⁴⁵ "Gran surtido de sueltitos" *La Broma*, August, 02, 1878, p. 1

¹⁴⁶ "Cumplamos con un deber", *La Broma*, June 4, 1880, p. 1

TENSIONS AND INTENTIONS IN THE AFROPORTEÑO PRESS.

The Afro-descendant community was mainly a subaltern group that could not escape the labor limitations to which they were exposed.¹⁴⁷ Although the constitution to which the Province of Buenos Aires subscribed in 1861 contemplated equality of conditions and equal treatment for all Argentines, regardless of skin color, in fact there were issues far distant from what the constitution contemplated. Within this context of segregation discussed in the first chapter, the Afroporteña press, in addition to operating as a source of information, functioned as a catalyst for the community's social and political demands and needs, especially when it was the State itself that incurred in discriminatory attitudes, as when it displaced a demonstration of Afro-descendants from the center of the city. Although the demonstration was not banned, the State, which was working to build and solidify its identity in the image and likeness of European cities, forced the Afro-descendants to gather far from the center of the city "out of sight" of the rest of the Argentines.¹⁴⁸ The pages of the Afroporteña press were the ideal medium for highlighting the discrimination suffered by the members of the community and for raising the steps to be taken in terms of strategy in order to achieve definitive integration. Tensions between people of different skin color were constant and Afroporteños were far from being a submissive community. It was through the press that their most reactionary side was shown.

¹⁴⁷ Oscar Chamosa: "Asociaciones africanas de Buenos Aires. 1823-1880. Introducción a la sociabilidad de una comunidad marginada." Bachelor Degree diss., Universidad Nacional de Luján, 1995.

¹⁴⁸ Lea Geler, *Andares negros, caminos blancos*, 52.

“We are assured that signatures are being collected among several neighbors of a site of México street to present a petition to the authority requesting the prohibition of the dances that take place there on Sundays, because the noise of the Drum makes them uncomfortable to the petitioners. We ignore if it is true what in this respect is told to us, although it is not the first time that this happens, and they have not obtained anything favorable the interested ones; and this time, what will they obtain?.....”¹⁴⁹

Beyond the fierce competition among the different newspapers, there was a common denominator in all of them: The service to the community and the commitment they had made to entertain and keep the entire community communicated. In Lea Geler's words, the Afroporteña press formed a "Subaltern public sphere" whose intellectuals sought to position their community in the best possible way through a constant search for internal cohesion.¹⁵⁰ Aware of its limitations, economic, social and political, the press demonstrated against all kinds of adversities by showing the reach and influence it had on all its readers.

“We know that our voice is weak and that it will be lost in space without being heard, but what can we do! We will leave a record of our protest and our efforts [...]. It will be preaching in the desert, but at least we will have thrown to the wind our complaints and the expression of our rejection.”¹⁵¹

In other editorials one could read comments vindicating the ethnicity that Afroporteños represented, the union that the group should maintain and the rights they should claim as a community with a much older history than that of the newly arrived immigrants. The Afroporteño community was historically, racially and class conscious, and in the press one could read editorials aimed at seeking unity among the entire

¹⁴⁹ “Gran sequía de sueltitos”, *La Broma*, January 27, 1881, p. 1

¹⁵⁰ Lea Geler “Guardianes del progreso. Los periódicos afroporteños entre 1873 y 1882, 200-201

¹⁵¹ “La ley”, *La Broma*, August 19, 1881, p.1

community and fighting for the places from which they felt they were being displaced and which directly affected their quality of life. In the pages of *El Unionista* the following could be read: "Men are all equal and are only distinguished, as we have said, by their greater intelligence or by their money, but in no case by their color".¹⁵² It was evident that there was a certain discomfort in the afroporteño intellectual environments as a result of the disadvantage in which the members of their community found themselves. Aware of this, they understood that discouragement and disunity would only deepen these differences, with only one single victim, the Afroporteño community. The calls from the press to remain united would tend to reinforce racial and class identities. In *La Juventud* it also could be read: "We are Argentines and belong to a class disinherited of all the rights and prerogatives granted by our Founding Charter, but that does not mean that we will stop loving, serving and cooperating to the flourishing and prosperity of what is called our homeland".¹⁵³ While in *La Broma*: "Among us the patriotic love, the national sentiment, has not dissipated and will never dissipate. The colored man has contributed with his blood since the war of our independence".¹⁵⁴

These demands for justice, social and political recognition reached high peaks of virulence due to the racism of which Afroporteños were victims. This racism was not expressed in the form of physical violence, but by denying their existence as a human group and by remembering the afro descendants only for their contribution to the wars of independence at the beginning of the 19th century.

Yes! Because the freedom enjoyed by those who mock us today is not due to themselves but to the heroic and self-sacrificing sacrifices of that indomitable race.

¹⁵² "Negros y Blancos", *El Unionista*, September 12, 1877, p. 2

¹⁵³ *La Juventud*, October 7, 1878, p. 1

¹⁵⁴ *La Broma*, September 23, 1879, p. 2

(...)¡What a sad award has been given to that race! ¡How far does human pride go!
¡Ungrateful! You, white people, aristocrats, who so much boast of being free and
independent, say To whom do you owe your freedoms and independence?? To
yourselves? ¡Of course Not!¹⁵⁵

At this point it is worth mentioning that there were other opinions that made themselves heard and presented their counterpoints on the past of Afro-descendants in the wars of independence. As usual, in the narrative of Argentine independence, Afro-Argentines played a prominent role to the point that many of them left their lives in battle. However, the narrative that sought to rescue the heroism of Afro-Argentines in the battle was the same one that claimed that Afro-Argentines had disappeared because of the number of dead. This account of them was precisely to justify (rhetorically) their disappearance. As Alejandro Solomiansky has expressed, it was a *discursive genocide*.¹⁵⁶ This account not only failed to recognize the truth that they had all perished as heroic soldiers as Falucho, but also failed to recognize the historical continuity of Afro-descendants in Argentine history, either as Afro-descendants or as mestizos. This argument could be found in the newspaper *La Juventud*, which invited the community to think about how to tell and highlight their own story:

“Eah! Generous Negro, your history is written on the battlefield. Valuable collection of loose leaves! Why are you shamed, why are you mired in mud? [...] [Society] does not know that oblivion is its terrible symbol that narrows it to conclude with it or erase from its pages the name of some of its heroes. Lorenzo Barcala, sublime martyr [...] We salute your memory with our eyes filled with tears, your bones will be in the desert, they have no burial or religious tribute. [...] And thirty-two years later, two thirds of a generation ignore that there was a man who, having a black skin, became general and governor of the province of his birth. He still sleeps on the bed of oblivion that the perjurer has spread to the colored society of Argentina, but the hairs of dawn begin to illuminate nature.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ *La Broma*, November 20, 1879, p.1

¹⁵⁶ Alejandro, Solomiansky *Identidades secretas: la negritud argentina*, 27-32.

¹⁵⁷ “Los cabellos de la aurora empiezan a iluminar la naturaleza”, *La Juventud*, , October, 30, 1878, p. 1

Complaints and grievances took on different versions and narratives. Some of them were oriented to the past and the use made of the history of black people on Argentine soil. Others were anxieties and concerns for the future about how Afroporteños should behave, because behind that noble proposal of reinvindicating their own history, was a second veiled intention: to persuade their readers and other Afroporteños to cut once and for all with the African heritage. Blacks were labeled as libidinous, lazy, and addicted to dancing and partying. So a good option was to keep them busy, but a better one was to get rid of them and make the whole society white with Caucasian features, either physically or in their personal characteristics. Comments of this type were also found in the pages of the Afroporteño press and were in constant tension with the idea of keeping the community united. The stereotypes that the hegemonic culture had created about black people generated the effect of anguish and concern to the point of generating divisions within the same community. Afro-descendants themselves began to discriminate against each other. They accused themselves of having vulgar, unconscionable, or uneducated behavior. Afro-descendants who presented these characteristics were directly closed to the doors of events.

“...People who are in charge of a social gathering do not have the right to invite people who, because of their bad habits, tarnish the meeting. These people are particularly detrimental to the young ladies, as they rub shoulders - because it cannot be said any less - with those unfortunate women who, with their swearing and ugly way of dancing, corrupt beings educated and prepared in another way, by means of the sacrifice made by their parents. Social gatherings are not public dances, therefore people who are not sufficiently well known beforehand should not be allowed to enter....”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ “Tertulias sociales, no bailes públicos”, *La Broma*, December 28, 1882, p. 1

Although the Afro-descendant community clamored for their recognition and for respect for their tradition, in the pages of their newspapers one could perceive the effect that the stare of the white elites had on them and the fear it caused them. The above quote refers to the way certain women in the community danced, as Lea Geler notes, "The African-rooted dance, its music and the instruments that used to be played represented the barbaric acts that had to be banished".¹⁵⁹ This idea, typical of the whitening elite, had permeated all the highest social circles of the Afroporteño community and, consequently, among those who organized the dances, gatherings and carnivals. If at one time the entire community participated harmoniously in social events, as the twentieth century approached, these same events became more selective and modest under the judicious gaze of the white public.¹⁶⁰

If during the first half of the 19th century carnivals represented situations that allowed the entire community to enjoy themselves regardless of skin color and social status, towards the second half of the 19th century, the most racist whites, showing their influence, began to mock and expose blacks, through songs and costumes. Blacks in the eyes of whites were: loyal, submissive, uneducated and funny. An aristocratic organization of Buenos Aires, called "Los Negros" founded in 1860 depicted afroporteños throughout different songs. The lyrics of one of the songs they used to play at carnivals exposed the black/worker-slave and white/owner dichotomy ("of the white boy I have been a slave / and I have been a black worker". The lyrics of the songs also made reference to the sexuality and the power of seduction that blacks had and that merged during carnival days.

¹⁵⁹ Lea, Geler, *Andares negros, caminos blancos*, p. 106.

¹⁶⁰ On the popular participation of the Afroporteño community, see: Lea Geler, *Andares negros, caminos blancos*, 136.

“A black girl and a black boy / started to play / He, being naughty / and she, being sly //
Oh, let me go, Pachinguito, // Oh, let me go, for pity's sake / That if mommy looks at us /
If mommy sees you...for pity's sake, / What if mommy looks at us, / What if mommy sees
you...”¹⁶¹

According to Oscar Chamosa, "the black-tinted whites were an attempt by the Buenos Aires elite to reinterpret popular culture by taking a part of it, decoding it in their molds, that is, stereotyping it and making it "folklore", to include it in a limited place within their project of national culture [...], a reworking of the reality of the subordinate classes through the eyes of the elite".¹⁶²

In the same way that some Afroporteño newspapers were instruments of national politics so that certain candidates such as Mitre or Avellaneda could win their elections, other newspapers were instruments to spread the message of the supremacy of Western values and customs over any other ethnicity. The social and cultural positioning of the Afroporteño bourgeoisie also generated a class division within the community itself. While members of the elite tried to shed their African customs by accepting social whitening, those of the lower sectors clung to them causing their marginalization of themselves. As the turn of the century approached, the messages of indoctrination in the Afroporteña press became more frequent. The whitening promoted by the press was masked behind the positivist premises of progress, order, and, civilization, which combined perfectly with the shame that dominated them. The Afro-descendant culture was gradually repressed and

¹⁶¹ In Puccia, Enrique, “Breve historia del carnaval porteño”. *Cuadernos de Buenos Aires XLVI. Buenos Aires: Municipalidad de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires*, 1974, 47.

¹⁶²Jorge Chamosa, “Asociaciones africanas de Buenos Aires, 1823-1880. Introducción a la sociabilidad de una comunidad marginada”, 66-70

carnivals were one of the few occasions in which they could display their ancestral identity, although they were also exposed to the malicious mockery of the rest of the people.

One of the most outstanding intellectuals of the Afroporteño community, Zenón Rolón commented in the newspaper *La Juventud* that:

“Our race, at present, has lost the virginity of the heart and the dignity of the individual spends its life lazy, dissolute, and depraved. The cry of freedom that resounded in their ear, was not understood by them, nor did they welcome it with the honest joy of those who aspire through it to work and education; and not understanding that in this way they were free from the dominion of others, they became slaves of their vile passions; and to the chains came vice, and to vice came ignorance, a greater debasement that they imposed it on themselves [...]. ...] [B]ecause if the white man despises us, it is our fault, that we do not even make worthy of ourselves.”¹⁶³

The prominent voice of one of the leading intellectuals of the Afroporteño community was a sign of how the mentality of their referents had begun to change. As can be seen in the quotation, they were responsible for the laziness and depravity that the hegemonic culture foisted upon them. It was no longer the grievances of whites against blacks, but the blacks themselves who accepted and recognized what the whites had foisted on them and made fun of at the carnivals. What to do about this situation? The social marginalization with which Afroporteños coexisted was constant and caused more and more damage to its members. The step forward that blacks decided to take (or at least the elites) was to accept that the way out of that marginalization was to accept those stigmas and reverse them. Under this premise, the newspapers became the “community's great teachers”, assuming full responsibility for the backwardness in which they found themselves:

¹⁶³ “El folleto de Zenón Rolón”, *La Juventud*, June 30, 1878, p. 2.

“Let us go back upon ourselves. Let us not stupidly blame causes that are not the real ones; the evil is in ourselves, in our political indifference, in our public manners, in that repugnance we have instinctively, and also because of our old habits of slavery, to satisfy the true conditions of freedom”.¹⁶⁴

The proximity that newspapers and intellectuals such as Zenon Rolon had to all members of the community gave them the possibility to observe and then write and denounce what needed to be corrected. The Afroporteño bourgeoisie did not want its citizens to act in a dishonorable manner, as it would only weaken them as a community in the face of a society that punished such attitudes with social exclusion. For that reason, through a system of rewards and punishments, the Afroporteña press had decided to expose those neighbors who did things wrong. While the prize for the virtuous neighbor was the praiseworthy mention, the neighbor who committed an impropriety received criticism in which he was mentioned by name and surname. At times the journalists resorted to a sarcastic tone and at other times to a harsher tone, as can be seen in the following quote:

“A repentant man - Our readers will remember the local event that we reported in this same section. For the same reason, we have received (...) a letter from that gentleman, who so bravely insulted (...). In it he states that he never committed such a thing, adding (...) these words which we have transcribed (...):- "I, gentleman, am the victim of an infamous slander; (...) [I am] not the denigrator of a young man that posterity must respect" (...) If we do not now throw the name of the person into the pillory; it is out of respect for his noble sentiments.”¹⁶⁵

The newspaper *La Juventud* had repeatedly denounced the aggressive behavior of one of its community members. The effect was such that the aggressive reader and neighbor apologized publicly in a letter. On another occasion, the inappropriate behavior of another

¹⁶⁴ “El viejo programa”, *La Juventud*, June 20, 1878, p. 1

¹⁶⁵ “Hechos locales”, *La Juventud*, April, 20, 1878, p. 1.

neighbor when he went to register with the Justice of the Peace was denounced by name and surname: “I dreamed that the Chinito Carlos/whose last name is Delzar/came to get himself registered/with a certain justice of the peace. But seeing him so pretty/the judge refused/to register him, and the chinito/took the door and flew away!”.¹⁶⁶ In a joking tone, the newspaper questioned that the neighbor Carlos Delzar had attended a public authority out of line. Because of the way the neighbor looked, the judge refused to register him. This situation, which was probably an act of discrimination, allows us to glimpse that the newspaper, despite being oriented to the Afroporteño community, empathized with the attitude of the judge. The newspaper's note does not provide more details than those mentioned about how Carlos Delzar was dressed, but in other articles and comments that we will see below I will try to expose the order, civilization, and progress that the Afroporteño press preached were aligned with the same meaning that the hegemonic culture gave to those words. Thus, the more enlightened and wealthy members of the afroporteña community understood that assimilation to Western customs and habits was the way to go, even in racial matters. Whitening had to be both, racial and cultural.¹⁶⁷

In this scenario, we must once again take into account the ideological context in which the Afroporteño community was immersed. At the end of the nineteenth century the idea of universal rights that individuals had was quite popular, however it was governed by the conception that a part of the total number of individuals was biologically inferior to the others.¹⁶⁸ Social inequalities, whether political, economic, or social, were understood

¹⁶⁶ “Varillazos”, *La Broma*, December 02, 1881, p.1

¹⁶⁷ Jean-Arsène Yao, “La prensa afroporteña y el pensamiento afroargentino a finales del siglo XIX”, 147.

¹⁶⁸ Mónica Quijada, “Imaginando la homogeneidad: la alquimia de la tierra”, in Mónica Quijada, Mónica, Carmen Bernand, Carmen y Arnd Scheneider (eds.), *Homogeneidad y nación con un estudio de caso: Argentina, siglos XIX y XX*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2000, 179-217.

as part of a deeper process of social hierarchization in which genetic issues began to play a role. The only alternative to equalizing this inequality - for the dominant culture - was individual self-improvement and belonging to a race understood as inferior was a natural impediment to achieving such improvement.¹⁶⁹ Thus, people who were marked racially understood that to overcome the inequalities they brought with them from their genetics, they had to subscribe to the hegemonic culture's interpretation of the ideals: reason, progress, and civilization. The leaders of the Afroporteño culture understood that economic progress and the assimilation of the hegemonic culture, which implied the whitening of their skin and habits, would be the way to reverse their situation of poverty and social marginalization.¹⁷⁰ The perfect combination was produced for the ideological domination process with a clear racial bias to finally triumph.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, factors intrinsic and extrinsic to the Afroporteño community combined to contribute to the dialectic disappearance of the Afroporteños and the consolidation of Argentina as a white country. As we have already seen in the first chapter, a large number of immigrants that Argentina received from 1860 to 1914 was a central factor in the relative loss of Afro-descendants. It also contributed to the nineteenth-century elite to install the myth of a "racially white country".¹⁷¹ On the other hand, another reason extrinsic to the Afroporteño community was the appropriation of European racial science by the intellectuals of the first

¹⁶⁹ Verena Sotclke, *Racismo y sexualidad en la Cuba colonial*. Madrid: Alianza, 1992, 113

¹⁷⁰ *Idem*

¹⁷¹ Tulio Halperin Donghi, "¿Para qué la inmigración? Ideología y política inmigratoria en la Argentina (1810-1914)" in, *El espejo de la historia. Problemas argentinos y perspectivas latinoamericanas*, Editorial Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 1987, 189-192

decades of the twentieth century, a product of the prestige that Darwinist theories achieved throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.¹⁷²

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to expose some of the causes intrinsic to the Afroporteño community that was functional to the whitening ideals of the ruling elite. In this context, the press media of the community were the means by which the Afro-descendant bourgeoisie transmitted a disciplining message to all its readers which, in turn, was shared by the political community but also by professionals and intellectuals.¹⁷³ This message was aimed at eradicating any behavior, habit, or ancestral ritual that linked Afro-Argentines with the "barbaric" aspects of their ancestral heritage in order to achieve the longed-for progress. As Lea Geler explains, the process of whitening that took place from the second half of the nineteenth century until the first decades of the 20th century was not free of tensions, contradictions and even senselessness. Argentina underwent a process of whitening that made it appear to have no mulatos and, of course, no Afro-descendants other than those who lived during colonial times and participated in the independence wars. A significant number of mulatos were born as a result of the mestizaje that the Afro-descendants underwent, primarily since the end of the 19th century. They were, however, also racially overlooked because the ruling class, which was eager to reveal the country's path to progress, did not consider them as such but rather as trigueños, pardos, o morenos. These are other racial categories or skin denominations that, particularly in this case, were used to hide the African heritage in the city of Buenos Aires.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Maristella Svampa, , *El Dilema Argentino: "Civilización o Barbarie"*, El Cielo Por Asalto, Buenos Aires, 1994, 147-165

¹⁷³ Eduardo A. Zimmermann, "Racial Ideas and Social Reform in Argentina", 28-32

¹⁷⁴ Lea, Geler "African Descent and Whiteness in Buenos Aires: Colors, Ways of Being, and Impossible Mestizajes in the White Capital City". Paulina Alberto y Eduardo Elena (eds.), *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina: Shades of the Nation*. Cambridge University Press, 213-240.

In this scenario, in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, the Afroporteño who did not or could not access the process of mestizaje through which he would be considered non-black anymore, was totally invisibilized by the hegemonic culture. This remnant of people with evident African features belonged to the most vulnerable population in socioeconomic terms. This condition facilitated their invisibilization at the same time the idea was built that Afro-Argentines perished in the battlefields of the independence wars without leaving any decency.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Afro-descendants were not considered as part of the national heritage, nor as a component of the sociability of Buenos Aires or Argentina. Afro-descendants were considered exotic beings, strange to Argentina, but according to the behavioral patterns to which Argentina had subscribed, Afro-descendants were perceived as barbarians and savages, and at best as beings with aptitudes for partying, dancing and physical skills. These characteristics will be well appreciated in the following chapter when we turn to the pages of the popular press at the beginning of the twentieth century. Mainly from the 1920s, when soccer was gaining popularity, the press of the time, a massive and commercial press, was forced to give coverage to the football confrontations between Argentines and Brazilians. This type of spectacles will allow us to see the continuities and ruptures that in the popular culture were evidenced in the positivist discourses of the end of the 19th century. At the same time, the important internal immigration that the province of Buenos Aires suffered as a result of the Great Depression, highlights the different uses of the word negro to denominate different types of people.

Football will be a source of employment for many internal migrants as well as Afro-Brazilians who arrived in the country to join different soccer teams.

CHAPTER 3

THE GOOD BLACK PEOPLE, AND THE WORKER ONES. THE OTHERS AND OURS.

The references to the work of Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz (1931) that were discussed in the first chapter confirm that in little more than half a century whitewashing discourse prevailed in Argentine society.¹⁷⁵ The projected image of Argentina was a simple reflection of its most important city. The myth of Europe in the Rio de La Plata was not only embraced by Scalabrini Ortiz, whose ideology could be placed within the nationalist and therefore anti-liberal ideology but was shared and reproduced by intellectuals ranging from socialists such as Enrique Dickman to conservative and Catholic thinkers such as Carlos Ibarguren, and also revisionist historians such as Ernesto Palacio.¹⁷⁶ All of them concluded that Argentina was a reflection of Buenos Aires where, by 1914, half of the population had been born in Europe. In fact, the nationalist reaction that took place for the centennial celebration (1910) shows that the problems faced by the ruling elite of the early twentieth century were not related to the already achieved racial superiority but to the problems that the large-scale immigration from Europe was generating.¹⁷⁷ From the street corner chosen by Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz, Corrientes Avenue at Esmeralda Street, it would be difficult to

¹⁷⁵ Raúl Scalabrini Ortiz, “El hombre de Corrientes y Esmeralda”, in *El hombre que está sólo y espera*, Librerías Anaconda, (Buenos Aires 1933), 24-27; Gonzalo Rubio García, “Los nacionalismos argentinos: un acercamiento al debate historiográfico en torno a sus figuras de la década de 1930”, in *Historiografías*, 13 January-June, 2017: pp. 74-94.

¹⁷⁶ Enrique Garguín, *Los Argentinos descendemos de los barcos*, 74-77.

¹⁷⁷ Aline Helg, “Race in Argentina and Cuba, 1880-1930: Theory, Politics, and Popular Reaction”. In *The Idea of Race in Latin América*, edited by: Richard Graham, University of Texas Press, (1990), 45-47. Carlos Altamirano, Beatriz Sarlo, “La Argentina del Centenario: campo intelectual, vida literaria y temas ideológicos”, in: *Ensayos Argentinos*, 161-201.

distinguish any Afro-descendant. This gave the *porteños* (Buenos Aires inhabitants) the possibility of effectively thinking of themselves as a city in which the process of mestizaje had resulted in a white population. From the ethnic and social construction that was made of Argentina, most notably from the second half of the nineteenth century, I will try to expose how blackness was configured in the early decades of the twentieth century. In Buenos Aires and its surroundings, the start of the twentieth century was once again marked by cultural trends from Europe.

Throughout the twentieth century, Afro-descendants in Buenos Aires became something exotic, something alien to the history of the country, *an other* without a history on Argentine soil. However, this constructed otherness was not free of tensions and contradictions. If during the first decades of the twentieth century Afro-descendants were ridiculed, mistreated, and discriminated against, compared to savages, uneducated, barbarians and monkeys, they were also admired, sought after and appreciated for their exoticism. However, in both discrimination and admiration, the stereotypes that had been installed in the last third of the nineteenth century remained. If during the 1920s African descendants were considered uncultured and savage, by the 1930s, African descendants were admired for their bodily expressions and their ability to entertain white audiences.

On the other hand, throughout the 1930s, blackness that had nothing to do with Afro-descent began to take shape. To define this type of blackness I will use a term already used by Lea Geler which is *Negritud Popular* (Popular Blackness). This expression includes Afro-descendants, but also transcends them. Throughout the 1930's a person could be called *negro* even if he or she did not present any evident trait of afro-descendance.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁸ Lea Geler, appreciates this same fact in today's society. Lea Geler, "Categorías raciales en Buenos Aires. Negritud, blanquitud, afrodescendencia y mestizaje en la blanca ciudad capital", 75

This blackness, which had no racial foundation, was assigned a class meaning. In order to understand this new construction around skin colour, it is essential to explore the behavior of the urban masses that settled in Buenos Aires and its growing European immigrant population, this time, with a significant difference. Although the effects of the Great Depression were not as significant in economic terms in relation to other countries in the region, economic downturn influence mass migration. The economic troubles that affected a large part of the globe decelerated migration to Argentina from the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. However, it triggered another phenomenon, that of internal migrations. The city of Buenos Aires and its surroundings stopped receiving European immigrants, mostly Spaniards and Italians, and began to receive immigrants from its own provinces. These individuals turned to the city of Buenos Aires in search of improving their economic situation or at least finding better job opportunities due to the challenges created by the Great Depression.¹⁷⁹ These Argentines possessed the features of the people of the interior, where the Europeans had not arrived in mass and miscegenation had resulted in Argentines with dark brown, copper, and black skins.

Once the citizens of cosmopolitan Buenos Aires had successfully rid themselves of the *Afroporteños* and could revel in the artistic and physical virtues that foreign Afro-descendants had to offer, a large contingent of dark-skinned Argentines flooded the city. This new group came to populate the lower sectors of cosmopolitan Buenos Aires. They

¹⁷⁹ During the 1930s, Buenos Aires received an average of 72,000 migrants from the interior each year. In the period from 1943 to 1947, that number would rise to 117,000. See. Gino Germani, *Estructura social de la Argentina*, Raigal, Buenos Aires, 1955 and David Rock, "Argentina 1930-1946", in Leslie Bethell (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin América*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, 1-72

joined the middle and working class sectors, resulting in a larger and more complicated entity to study, both in terms of race and class.

Again, the pages of the popular newspapers are a great window to appreciate this new blackness that emerged during the interwar period, particularly the sports pages of the evening newspaper *Crítica*. This newspaper, which was founded in 1913, was a clear exponent of the journalistic, urban, and political transformation that the city of Buenos Aires was going through. Like many others of the same period, *Crítica* did not depend on any political faction, but exclusively on its sales. Its director, Natalio Botana, was not a politician, but a businessman who sought the greatest profit from his company and thanks to it, he raised an exuberant fortune.¹⁸⁰

By the 1930s, *Crítica* had already established itself as one of the most modern and widely circulated newspapers in the city of Buenos Aires. By the 1920s, it defined itself as “*La voz del pueblo*” (The Voice of the Peoples), claiming to be the newspaper that best represented the interests of the middle and popular sectors of Buenos Aires.¹⁸¹ One of those interests were sports, to which *Crítica* devoted more pages than any other newspaper did.¹⁸²

Throughout the 1920s, horse racing was the most popular sport, but during the course of the decade, football gained ground and achieved the popularity the sport holds day. Coinciding with the arrival of the Great Depression and internal migrations, it reached the status of professional practice and the newspaper *Crítica* assigned a journalist to cover its biggest events. The nickname of this journalist who covered these events was *El Negro*

¹⁸⁰ Sylvia Saítta, *Regueros de Tinta*, 281-294.

¹⁸¹ Sylvia, Saítta, “La voz del pueblo”, *Regueros de Tinta*, 55-90

¹⁸² Sylvia, Saítta, “Fútbol y prensa en los años veinte: Natalio Botana, presidente de la Asociación Argentina de Football (febrero-agosto de 1926)” in: Revista Digital *Lecturas: educación física y deportes*, Buenos Aires - Year 8 - N° 50, July 2002 <http://www.efdeportes.com/efd50/botana.htm>

de la Tribuna (The Black Man of the Crowd). Pablo Rojas Paz was the real name behind the nick name, an Argentine writer who was not of African descent, but came from the Province of Tucumán, in the interior of the country.¹⁸³ Through the sports pages of *Crítica* and the notes of Pablo Rojas Paz, it will be possible to see how this popular blackness was built overtime, at the same time that football fans and the cosmopolitan Buenos Aires public surrendered to the exoticism of the Afro-descendants.

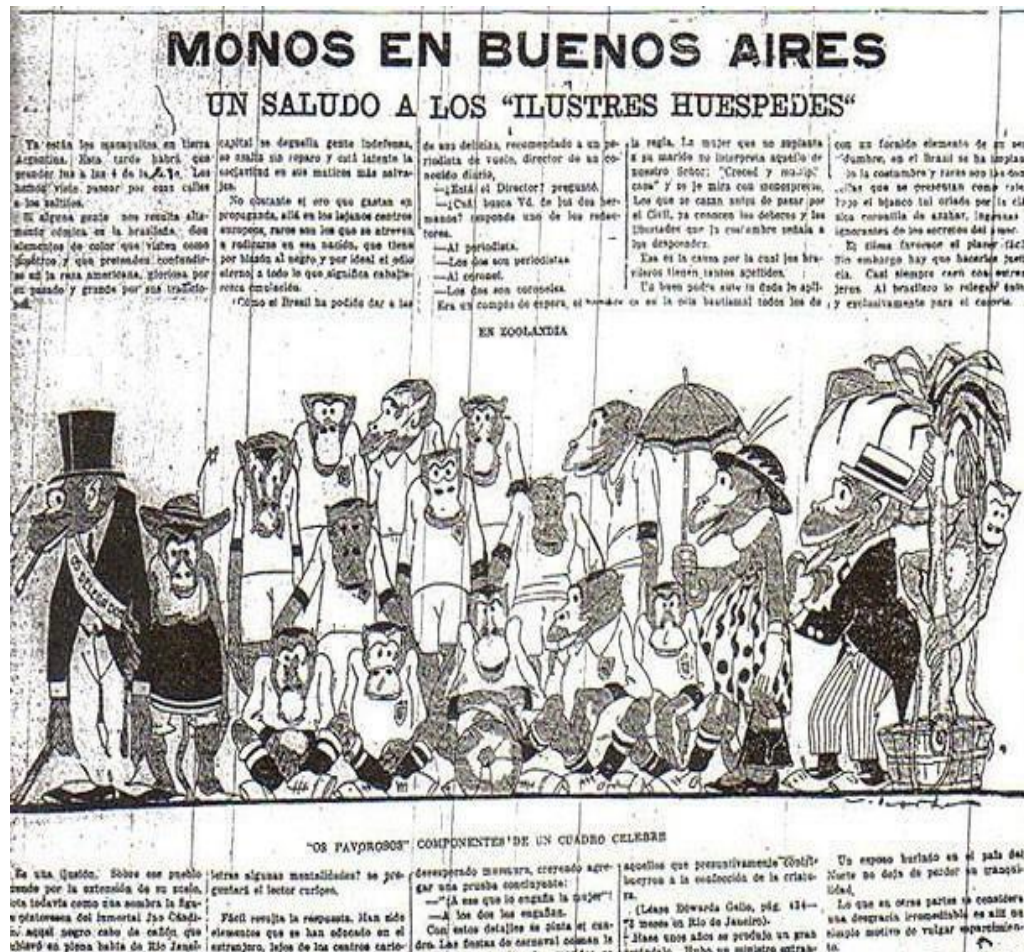
NEW SOCIETY, OLD PREJUDICE

As sport coverage gained popularity, newspapers such as *Crítica* did not miss the opportunity to take advantage of the magnetism that sports generated in society as a whole. The public's growing interest in sports led to an increase in the number of pages devoted to it, as well as in the depth of the analyses. In this sense, sports became a spectacle and a diversion that spread throughout the nation to the point of becoming a cultural hallmark, as well as the whiteness of its inhabitants.¹⁸⁴ Just as *Crítica* defined itself as “The Voice of the People” because it knew how to address the feelings of the Buenos Aires audience, it was also aware of the racial perception of its readers. Although at the beginning of the twentieth century the discourses and practices of the nineteenth century against Afro-

¹⁸³ Germán Ferrari, *Pablo Rojas Paz va a la cancha: las crónicas futbolísticas de El Negro de la Tribuna / Pablo Rojas Paz*; compilado por Germán Ferrari; prólogo de Germán Ferrari. - 1a ed. - Ciudad Autónoma de Buenos Aires: Biblioteca Nacional, 2020.

¹⁸⁴ Eduardo P. Archetti, *El potrero, la pista y el ring. Las patrias del deporte argentino*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Buenos Aires, 2001.

descendants were in retreat, on October 20 of 1920 *Crítica* published a caricature that reflected that the whitening discourse still was in force among the Buenos Aires population.¹⁸⁵ The bulk of Buenos Aires society perceived itself as white and had no problem making fun of Afro-descendants, in this case Brazilians.¹⁸⁶



Football's popularity not just in Argentina, but across the world, enabled international matches to be held between teams representing their respective countries.

¹⁸⁵ Paulina Alberto, L., "El Negro Raúl: Lives and Afterlives of an Afro-Argentine Celebrity, 1886 to the Present", *Hispanic American Historical Review* 96:4, Duke University Press, 2016, 671.

¹⁸⁶ An article by historian Benjamin Bryce states that during the first decades of the twentieth century, racial policies were still in force. These were not aimed at persecuting Afro-descendants, "who had already been combated", but at preventing the entry of any non-European immigrants into the country. See: Benjamin Bryce, "Undesirable Britons: South Asian Migration and the Making of a White Argentina", in *Hispanic American Historical Review* 99:2, (Duke University Press, 2019), 248-273.

Long before the World Cups emerged, countries competed for regional trophies, in competitions or simply played friendly matches. This was the case when the Brazilian national team visited Argentina on October 3rd 1920.¹⁸⁷ Local journalists caricatured the physical appearance of the players. The illustrated image was offensive enough, but the headline did not help: “Monkeys in Buenos Aires.”¹⁸⁸ If one looks at the clothes the characters are wearing, one can discern a kind of hierarchy among the members of the team. Two monkeys are dressed up as ladies with casual outfits, two male animals are wearing suits as the managers of the team, and the rest of the monkeys represent the football players with their uniforms. Of course, one cannot fail to mention the palm tree with a monkey and a bunch of bananas hanging from it to frame the situation and make it even more grotesque, to further illustrate the overall narrative. However, racist social constructions of the Brazilian people do not end in said picture. The text which comes along with it presents the Brazilian jungle as the area where all Brazilian football players come from. A glimpse of the article shows that the superiority of the Argentinian football team was not given by any sports reason but were based upon race. Specifically, the skin colour of the Afro-Brazilian football players and their presumed place of birth.

In this case, the jungle was presented as a symbol of backwardness. According to the journalist who wrote the article, the Brazilian jungle was not only a dangerous area but its closeness to the city made it that much more threatening. “Half an hour away from its charming capital, defenseless people are slaughtered, people are assaulted without hesitation and slavery is latent in its most savage shades.”¹⁸⁹ Based on that, Brazil was a

¹⁸⁷ Julio Frydenberg, *Historia Social del Fútbol. Del amateurismo a la profesionalización*, Siglo XXI Editores, (Buenos Aires, 2011), 39-43.

¹⁸⁸ “Monos en Buenos Aires”, *Crítica*, October 3, 1920, 6

¹⁸⁹ Idem

country that could easily be divided in two: the jungle and the city, and both represented two different concepts. Backwardness and enlightenment. In the author's eyes enlightenment was a result of the education and social background of those who inhabited the city. So Brazilian cities were home to those "who have been educated abroad, far from the carioca centers, where the activities are accompanied by the classic *machicha*." However, the Argentine journalist remembered "Some time ago we visited Brazil and came back surprised. Turn a society upside down, invert all the ethical factors and you will have a pale reflection of what it is."¹⁹⁰ These types of geographical conceptualizations were also present in Argentina throughout the nineteenth century (as I discussed in the first chapter), but they were also in force during much of the twentieth century.¹⁹¹

At the same time that Argentine newspapers were making fun of Afro-Brazilians, the Argentine national team discriminated against its own Afro-Argentine football players. According to Guido Guichenduc, a researcher who reports on the history of *Club El Porvenir*, Alejandro De los Santos —a outstanding striker who shined in the twenties and until the first five years of the following decade— was discriminated against when it was necessary to assemble the national team that participated in the first World Cup (1930).¹⁹² According to the researcher, this information was provided by his family. Although there

¹⁹⁰ Idem

¹⁹¹ As we saw in the first chapter, regardless of the biome, wilderness as non-urbanized spaces were cataloged as spaces to be conquered where everything that composed it had to be eradicated or transformed into progress. See. Cronon, William, "The trouble with Wilderness, or Getting Back to the wrong nature" *Environmental History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Jan., 1996), 7-28, Anahí Ballent, Adrián Gorelik, "País Urbano o país rural: La modernización territorial y sus crisis". In (Alejandro Cattaruzza Dir.) *Nueva Historia Argentina. Crisis Económica, avance del Estado e incertidumbre política*, Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2001, 143-201.

¹⁹² Alejandro de los Santos stood out in Club Sportivo Dock Sud, in Club Atlético Huracán and is the maximum idol of Club El Porvenir, besides being the first black football player to wear the shirt of the Argentine National Team between the 20's and 30's. Waldemar Iglesias, "Alejandro De Los Santos, el Primer crack negro que jugó para la Selección Argentina", *Clarín*, January 23, 2020: https://www.clarin.com/deportes/alejandro-santos--primer-crack-negro-jugo-seleccion-argentina_0_Hg1qRdVG.html

is no other source that confirms this fact, as per the standards of the time, it is highly plausible, beyond the fact that the player was part of the national team in the amateur era.



Alejandro de Los Santos as a member of the Argentine national team for the 1925 Americas Cup.
Source: El Gráfico Magazine: <https://www.elgrafico.com.ar/articulo/1088/34004/1925-argentina-conquista-su-segundo-sudamericano>

Racism towards Afro-Argentines, which still persisted in the early twentieth century, took on another expression as we approached the 1930s. During the 1920s Afro-Brazilians were ridiculed for the same reasons as *Afroporteños* in the late nineteenth century. In the 1930s, their skin colour, their way of dancing, their fast and graceful movements became highly valued by the Argentine audience and, consequently, reflected in the popular press. This could be seen both in football stadiums and theaters as we will see below.

THE NEW PERCEPTION AND POPULAR BLACKNESS

At that time, a new perception of blackness had emerged in Europe, with echoes of it appearing elsewhere in the world. This rediscovery of blackness that had its cradle in France after the First World War, with the *tumulte noir*, allowed Argentina, mainly in Buenos Aires, to experience part of this *negrophilia*.¹⁹³ Particularly during the interwar period, jazz musicians from the United States, as well as other artistic performances from Brazil and France, were well received in one of the most prominent South American metropolises, essentially cosmopolitan and culturally disposed to consume this type of cultural products.¹⁹⁴ Within this context, Argentina, with Buenos Aires as its main standard-bearer was always aware of what was happening on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, and was not exempt from any of the above-mentioned movements. The popular press, which did not miss the opportunity to reflect what most captivated the urban masses, accompanied this new interest in blackness with all its resources.

Unlike what happened throughout the end of the nineteenth century and until the 1920s in the pages of the press, particularly in *Crítica*, from the 1930s onwards, Afro-descendants became the target of all the praises of the main sports reporter, the aforementioned, *El Negro de la Tribuna* (The Black Man of the Crowd), mainly when they

¹⁹³ Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, Harvard University Press, 2003, 171-173.

¹⁹⁴ En una región donde los bailes de tango era uno de los principales divertimentos de los sectores medios y bajos, las orquestas que solían tocar en vivo se vieron en la necesidad de modificar sus repertorios e incluir dentro de ellos sesiones de Fox Trot, una especie de..... In the 1940s, the nationalism that emanated from the ruling class would significantly restrict access to foreign productions, so that both record labels and tango orchestras had to reformulate their repertoire, omitting all forms of expression that did not refer to Creole and urban rhythms. See: Matthew Karush, *Músicos en tránsito*, 36-40

came from Brazil. The presence of these characters, according to the chronicler, was a special addition to the spectacular nature of sporting events themselves. From the reading of his chronicles, and in harmony with the mood of the times, it is clear that there was an imperative need to attend wherever a black man showed up.

On March 11th, 1935, *El Negro de la Tribuna* headlined its usual chronicle as follows: “*Cada equipo debe tener su negrito bailarín*” (Every team must have his little black dancer).¹⁹⁵ In the article, he tried to draw an analogy between the graceful movements of Josephine Baker, the French artist who dazzled the world and had toured the stages of Buenos Aires arousing great attraction, with the dexterity that some football players showed on the football field. The journalist was referring to Waldemar and Petronilo De Brito, both Brazilians, but with a clear complexion that linked them to the dancer.

Just as the brilliant presence of Josephine Baker on the Buenos Aires stages showed the maturing process Buenos Aires society was going through, the figure of the de Brito brothers, also of great skill and exoticism, evidenced the international positioning that Argentina had managed to build from the moment football became a professional practice.¹⁹⁶ Thus, the first professional decade of Argentine football took place within an international context favorable to the consumption of entertainment shows. This episodes coincided with a growing appreciation of Afro-descendant culture and the capabilities that Afro-descendants could demonstrate in the most varied scenarios, from artistic and political to sporting.

¹⁹⁵ *El Negro de la Tribuna*, “Cada tim debe tener su negrito bailarín”, *Crítica*, November 3, 1935, p. 12.

¹⁹⁶ The French artist was in Argentina during the months of June and September 1929, during which she offered 172 shows. The pages of *Crítica* were a space where her shows were strongly promoted while she defied the censorship of nudity on the Buenos Aires stages that the executive power was trying to impose. See: *Crítica*, February 6, 1929, p. 6.

This negrophilia that was evident on both coasts of the Atlantic Ocean, as far as Argentina was concerned, transcended the theatrical stages and reached the grass of the most crowded stadiums of the port city to summon outstanding Brazilian football players of great value in sports, as well as economically.¹⁹⁷ The journalist also made accounts of the expenditures made by the main Argentine clubs to hire players that would further enhance the sport of the moment, among them the *El Negro Domingos* and *El Negro Waldemar* for whom \$48,000 and \$15,000 were paid, respectively.¹⁹⁸ These amounts were by no means trivial, although, according to the chronicler, still far from those paid by the mighty English football. Nevertheless, the vertiginous growth of the spectacle four years after its professionalization emboldened all *Crítica*'s staff to make comparisons and to dream of ever reaching the economic power of British football.

El Negro de la Tribuna, as its readers, was one more victim of the charms of those with whom he claimed to share colour: "Where did the blacks get that softness? Because Waldemar and Petronilo look as if they had learned Football in a dance troupe", Rojas Paz wondered and also added:

Waldemar is [*agua mansa*], the kind you have to watch out for. He is playing slowly, and as if he didn't want to, he suddenly shoots a cannon shot that makes the nets cry. He is the Josefina Baker of Dribbling and the shadow of the goalkeepers. He advances as if he were dancing the *machicha*; he writes his name on the ground with the tip of his foot, and suddenly sends an aerial correspondence to the goalkeeper, who looks like Rodin's Thinker.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷ Matthew Karush, *Músicos en tránsito*, 38-39

¹⁹⁸ *El Negro de la Tribuna*, "Será una pelea de cuatro. Los demás mirarán llover", *Crítica*, September 3, 1935, p. 16.

¹⁹⁹ *El Negro de Tribuna*, "Cada Tim debe tener su negrito bailarín", *Crítica*, November 3, 1935, p. 12.

From the pages of *Crítica*, Rojas Paz perceived that the fascination for blackness was something that reached a large part of the soccer fans. That is why the chronicler was in charge of adding drama to the presence of any black man stepping on the grass of a stadium. A portion of the Buenos Aires audience responded to the French dancer with the same fascination that the Afro-Brazilian soccer players generated at the biggest show in Argentina. “With this Domingos, every day there will be a party for Boca.”²⁰⁰ (Domingos means Sunday. The journalist was playing rhetorically with the name of the player and the holiday). This is how Rojas Paz transcribed an alleged comment made by a supporter after watching the Brazilian footballers play.

As is evident, mass sports such as football or boxing were not exempt from this fascination to blackness. The clubs of Buenos Aires, as great centers of attraction, in order of reinforcing their squads, on several occasions they acquired the services of Afro-descendant players generally coming from Brazil, like the de Brito brothers. An episode narrated by *El Negro de la Tribuna* illustrates in an unbeatable way the anxieties that the African blackness of the players generated in the audience. In 1935, Boca Juniors signed Domingos Da Guía, an Afro-Brazilian defender with the qualities of a real star. Unfortunately, an injury forced him to postpone his official debut, but the club's directors, knowing the expectations aroused by this signing, did not miss the opportunity to present him publicly by having him walk around the perimeter of the field minutes before the start of the match. The strategy of the club's management was aimed at calming the public's anxieties as well as increasing the already high expectations due to the public knowledge of the sum of money that the club had paid to have the services of the Brazilian.²⁰¹ *El Negro*

²⁰⁰ *Idem*

²⁰¹ *El Negro de la Tribuna*, “Cada Tim debe tener su negrito bailarín”, *Crítica*, November 3, 1935, p. 12

de la Tribuna He did not miss the chance to use these expectations to his advantage in his chronicles. In the days prior to the debut of *el Negro Domingos*, he wrote:

The mere announcement that the *Carioca* defender Domingos will make his debut in our fields in the match against Chacarita was enough to keep Boca fans and many other fans, attracted by the fabulous premium paid for his transfer, impatient to see him.²⁰²

Paradoxically, when Domingos played his first game it was not with the best of luck. The journalist began by saying: “A black player made his debut and a blond one played well.”²⁰³ Then, he continued describing how the fans' applause was distributed. Those at the beginning, after the expectations generated by both the press and the managers, were for the Brazilian. But once the match was over, the applause went to Valussi, his blond-haired partner at the back, who with an outstanding performance, overshadowed Domingos' debut. Everything that had been expected from the black player, the blond one had materialized; this, according to Rojas Paz, raised nothing but suspicions about the real conditions of the brand new acquisition.²⁰⁴ Baffled by the possibility of watching a black man playing football poorly, the fans wondered “Does he want to give Valussi a chance to show off?” “No –replied the reporter, I don't think a black man would be that unselfish. I know this from my own colored experience. In short, all that can be done is to wait. The *Negro Domingos* will have to play better in the next matches.”²⁰⁵ Black

²⁰² “Chacarita Jrs. Espera jugar un gran match”, *Crítica*, September 3, 1935, p. 10

²⁰³ El Negro de la Tribuna, “Resultó que era Rubio aquel negro tan mentao”, *Crítica*, March 18, 1935, p. 16

²⁰⁴ In the chromatic dichotomy proposed by the chronicler, one can perceive the existence of preconceptions or cultural constructions about the qualities that blondes and blacks or dark-skinned people had and how they were represented in different areas of mass culture such as tango lyrics and film productions, both locally and internationally. In the blond vs. dark-skinned opposition, a classist and hierarchical construction of society was raised on several occasions. See: Matthew Karush, Matthew, *Cultura de clases. Radio y cine en la creación de una Argentina dividida (1920-1946)*, Ariel, (Buenos Aires, 2013), 212-222.

²⁰⁵ El Negro de la Tribuna, “Resultó que era Rubio aquel negro tan mentao”, *Crítica*, March 03, 1935, p. 15

people, for Pablo Rojas Paz, were always a guarantee as well as for the spectators. That a black player had a bad performance was as striking as the black player himself on the field.

In a few lines of his sports chronicle, Rojas Paz highlighted, and at the same time took advantage of one of the most salient features of the cultural atmosphere in the cosmopolitan Buenos Aires of the 1930s: the fascination with blackness as it had never been experienced before and probably would never be experienced again.²⁰⁶ Although Argentina and Uruguay, in terms of football, were the American countries that stood out the most during the 1930s, Brazil, which did not perform well in either the World Cup of 1930 or continental tournaments, had the best individual talents.²⁰⁷ The search for Brazilian players by the most economically consolidated teams in Argentina was constant and, as we have tried to explain, their qualities were well recognized. *El Negro de la Tribuna*, dared to compare this sporting experience with the one that the director of the first lyric theater of the country had to carry out before the beginning of each season. Just as he traveled to Italy to recruit the best talents, Rojas Paz said: “If there were singers in Brazil, he would go to Brazil to look for them. But it turns out that they don't produce tenors there, only backs. And then, instead of the director of the *Colón* [Theatre], the managers of Boca Juniors go there.”²⁰⁸ Rojas Paz himself, in one of his chronicles, dared to compare the

²⁰⁶ Matthew Karush B, “Black in Buenos Aires: The transnational career of Oscar Alemán”, in, *Rethinking Race in Modern Argentina*, 73-98.

²⁰⁷ Argentina and Uruguay were the finalists in the first World Cup held in Uruguay, where the host team was the winner. The performance of both countries was similar in the Olympic Games, where they also disputed the final in 1928. In 1924, the Uruguayans were champions. As regards continental championships, during the 1920s and 1930s, both teams alternated the first two places on the podium.

²⁰⁸ “Será una pelea de cuatro. Los demás mirarán llover”, *El Negro de la Tribuna*, *Crítica*, March 09, 1935, p. 16. The incorporations referred to in this section correspond to the 1935 championship. As early as 1933, Afro-Brazilians were already being presented as fundamental elements for the hierarchy of the squads. In that year, San Lorenzo hired five players from Brazil, Ramón, Eugenio Vanni and Tuffy and Petronilho De Brito. Although not all of them had the continuity and the expected brilliance, Petronilho, due to his elegance and goal-scoring ability, was the one who transcended the most in that team. That year, San Lorenzo was crowned champion.

popularity of Bernabé Ferreyra, one of the most famous Argentine football players, with that of Enrico Caruso, the famous lyric tenor who visited Argentina during the first years of the great national lyric theater.²⁰⁹

Although it was impossible to verify the correlation of the chronicle with the development of the encounters, the blacks always had a special mention in his columns in *Crítica*. Whenever he could, he made them stand out. Pablo Rojas Paz baptized them as “*Negros*”, or so he chose to call them, although their nicknames were not the one that spoke about the colour of their skin. This is how he referred to “*El Negro Viola*”, known as “*El Mocho*” (the blunt) Viola for having lost a finger in a sawmill in La Plata City. The same happened with Oscar Emilio Castro “*El Negro Castro*” who was from Tucumán like him and had a similar complexion to his.²¹⁰ It was a similar situation when he referred to Manuel Seoane as “*El Negro de la cancha*” (The Black Man of the Pitch), to say later that he was unknown due to his thinness, and to ponder the skill with which he directed the plays. The other nickname by which Seoane was known was “*La chancha*” (The pig).²¹¹

From the sports pages of *Crítica* as a platform, these chronicles contributed to build a representation of blackness that transcended the limits of blood or the presence of African features that a person could have. In this representation, the limits of African blackness that identified the Afro-descendant football players as well as the French dancer, were blurred to include, under the same colour reference, anyone with sallow, brown, copper, or *mestizo* features. In such a way that it allowed that any man of dark complexion, without the need

²⁰⁹ “El Caruso del Football. La Gran sensación del año”, *El Negro de la Tribuna, Crítica*, June 3, 1932, p.13.

²¹⁰ “La red se movió tres veces”, *El Negro de la Tribuna, Jornada*, May 10, 1931, p. 15.

²¹¹ “En el Match Independiente-Boca, Yustrick fue un pez volador en el arco”, *El Negro de la Tribuna, Crítica*, March 28, 1932; See: Matías Rodríguez, “Manuel Seoane. Goles de novela”, *El Gráfico*, October 2015, <https://www.elgrafico.com.ar/articulo/1088/8632/manuel-seoane-goles-de-novela> , Consulted: July 2021.

to present features of African ancestry as the chronicler from Tucumán, could be worthy of that denomination. Likewise, Rojas Paz's portrayal of Afro-descendants for the readers of the evening paper had a highly positive evaluation in terms of physical skills and behavior. The Afro-descendants were strong, fast, committed, athletic, leaders of their teams and decisive in compromising situations in their matches. However, the traits that Rojas Paz Pas and all his readers pondered were exactly the same ones that half a century ago were questioned even by *Afroporteños* themselves.

To this group of Afro-descendant figures, presented as successful, *El Negro de la Tribuna* added his dark complexion and that of other sportsmen who, like him, did not have obvious Afro-descendant features, but rather Creole, sallow, dark or coppery, the result of miscegenation. That miscegenation, which had been discursively concealed, became more and more evident and undeniable within mass culture and internal migrations. But this blackness was not only related to a dark skin tone, it was also accompanied by a class connotation. The scope of the word “black” was becoming much wider, gaining relativity and losing definition. At times, the word black was associated with the effort of those who work hard, their physicality, and effort being the engine of their productive capacity. Perhaps recalling the past of slavery that Afro-descendants had. In a chronicle where the reporter transcribed the emotions of those who attended a game, Rojas Paz noted: “The usher in the bleachers, who had worked like a black man, said: I don't care how hard I had to work this afternoon to accommodate so many people. I am happy: we have won.”²¹² Thus, during the interwar period, black ceased to be a univocal term; it lost clarity and, as a result, gained broader meanings.

²¹² “No hay mal que dure cien años”, *El Negro de la Tribuna, Crítica*, August 28, 1933, p.17

I SEE BLACK PEOPLE

When talking about the task of narrating the most important sporting event of the week, Pablo Rojas Paz, loyal to *Crítica's* style, sought to empathize with the readers. Among the resources the writer had at his disposal, he resorted to calling himself *El Negro de la Tribuna* (The Black Man of the Crowd).²¹³ His chosen nickname, in addition to being a reference to the sallow colour of his skin, was an indication of who his readers were and where they were on game days. Given that the sports section of the newspaper *Crítica* included interviews to the audience, its pages are a reliable source to get an idea of the behavior of these men who gathered weekly to cheer on a football team.

During the interwar period, thanks to the high level of consumption that popular sectors enjoyed, added to the political, social, and labor protagonism, this group of people made intensive use of their free time. Theaters, cinemas, vacation centers, and recreational parks, to mention a few, were some of the few places that middle and lower classes of Buenos Aires used to visit. visited.²¹⁴ However, when fans demonstrated their behavior *en masse* it was not always appropriate. This could be seen when they went to football stadiums under the name of “fans”.²¹⁵ Social and mass behavior is a fundamental element in understanding this new dimension of popular blackness.

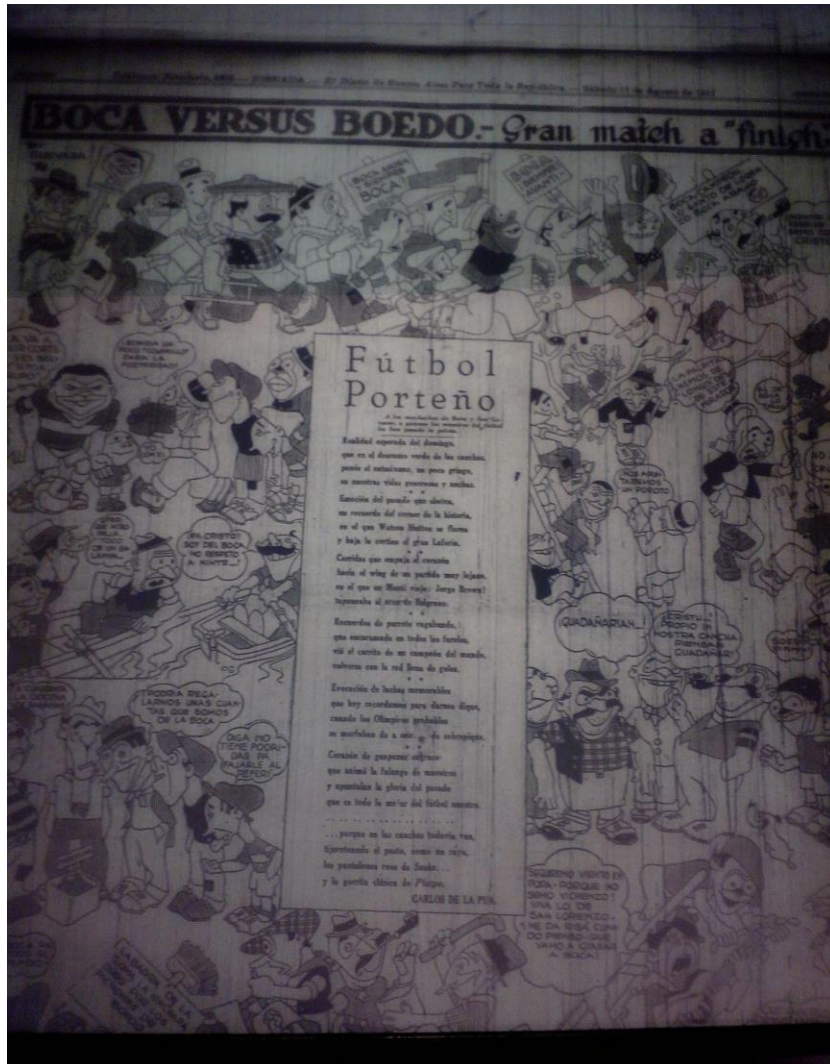
²¹³ A tour through the columns of Pablo Rojas Paz, reveals the sensitivity that the writer had at the time of giving nicknames, perhaps, the most outstanding nickname is the one given to him by the fans of the Boca Junior Club, "El Jugador número 12" for the supposed influence he exerted on the playing field.

²¹⁴ Leandro Losada, "La sociedad bonaerense: tendencias demográficas, grupos sociales y formas de vida", en *Historia de la Provincia de Buenos Aires: El Gran Buenos Aires* / Gabriel Kessler; dirigido por Juan Manuel Palacio, Buenos Aires, EDHASA, 2015. pp. 131- 139

²¹⁵ Frydenberg, Julio, *Historia social del fútbol*, 91-106. Montaldo, Graciela, *Museo del Consumo. Archivos de la cultura de masas en Argentina*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, Buenos Aires, 2016.

These crowds were reflected in the pages of the evening papers as part of a column or headline that showed their contribution at the time of crowding a stadium; as when tens of thousands of *porteños* were referred to on the cover of the evening paper under the title “50,000 people went to the Boca - River Plate Match”. Or when fans became a statistic of this booming show that year after year broke records of attendance and revenue.²¹⁶ Moreover, just as *Crítica Deportiva's* readership appeared in the general headlines of the evening editions, it also acquired a starring role when they were consulted on certain issues that concerned a large part of the consumers. *Crítica's* journalists and reporters were always close to the crowds with a pen and a notebook for taking notes and interviewing the spectators at any event related to the sports world. Big agglomerations of supporters gathered weekly around the sports stadiums and significantly altered the urban landscape. The neighbors of the areas adjacent to these establishments were involved, involuntarily, in the chaos proposed by the dynamics of game days. A representation of these mobilized men can be seen in a caricature illustrator Andrés Guevara made for the eve of one of the most popular football matches of the moment: Boca vs. San Lorenzo, on Saturday, August 15, 1931.

²¹⁶ “50.000 personas fueron al Match Boca - R. Plate” *Crítica*, September 16, 1934, p.1 “150000 Espectadores. 37 goals y \$55.335. Ese fue el resultado en cifras de la jornada inicial del campeonato profesional de nuestro deporte favorito”, *Crítica*, 14/03/1932, p. 11, O, “\$70.000 más, este año, que el anterior”, *Crítica*, March 28, 1932, p12.



Boca Versus Boedo , *Crítica* August 15, 1931
 Illustration by Andrés Guevara

Since it was the first big match of the professional era, *Crítica* presented it with great expectation and Guevara, while decorating a poem by Carlos de la Púa, did nothing more than capture the social universe that would attend the match. If we analyze who attended the match between Boca Juniors and San Lorenzo, we can easily distinguish at least one Afro-descendant. Additionally, we can infer that football was predominantly a male spectacle aimed for all ages: children, adults, young, and old men are represented in the image. The star journalist of the sports section, when he wanted to measure the scope of

the attraction of football, did not hesitate to include “the children, the grown-ups (...) Do you realize what three million people talking about football means?”²¹⁷ The same Rojas Paz was asking in his chronicle, was represented by Carlos de la Púa when he transcribed a coffee scene between two fans who were remembering their youth as football regular viewers: “they pointed to the goalposts with their clothes and any *murga* (gang) would give them a dance.”²¹⁸

Although Rojas Paz's chronicles like the rest of the articles in *Crítica* were oriented to a reader from the middle and lower sectors, the *cocoliche* spoken in the dialogues of Guevara's image provides an additional element to outline the composition of the football crowds.²¹⁹ Even though the image shows a game that was to be played in La Boca, both Italian and Spanish immigrants dominated the urban landscape and it was very common that they sought to assimilate with the popular creole component, emulating *porteño* expressions with their tunes: “En Cristo! I Soy de Boca. No respeto a niente”; “Cristu propio in nostra cancha piensan guadañar”; “sequiremo viento en popa porque no semo vichenzo. Viva San Lorenzo. Me da risa cuando pienso que vamo a golear a Boca”.²²⁰

All these people, drawn by Guevara, questioned by Rojas Paz or simulated by Carlos de la Púa, had an individual behavior that allowed the reader to project a golden future or to long for a past utilizing hints of nostalgia. However by acting together, people became a single mass identity that acted uniformly and received the denomination of *hinchadas* or *barras* (supporters). When these denominations were present, they were usually

²¹⁷ “La universalidad del fútbol Argentina”, El Negro de la Tribuna, *Crítica*, June 05, 1932, p.17

²¹⁸ “Rotos pero no vencidos”, Carlos de la Púa, *Crítica*, July 18, 1937, p. 14

²¹⁹ Cocoliche is an Italian–Spanish contact language or pidgin that was spoken by Italian immigrants in Argentina (especially in Greater Buenos Aires) and Uruguay between 1870 and 1970. See: Ezequiel Adamovsky, *El gaucho indómito*, op cit., pp. 79-85.

²²⁰ “Boca vs. San Lorenzo”, *Crítica*, August 15, 1931, p.11.

accompanied by violent actions that characterized these plebeian masses that congregated inside and outside the stadiums. Thus when in *Crítica*, no matter who the narrator or illustrator was the crowds of popular spectacles were depicted as a violent mob. Articles frequently mentioned violence, chaos, and conflictive situations that took place in the agenda of urbanity only on a weekly basis. Several of those scenes that imply potential violence are depicted in Guevara's image of the crowd. Those motivated by rage or a sense of injustice during a sporting event may act violently if they are united for the same cause. The reader, in turn, could find these insinuations materialized either as a spectator or as an actor in the post-match notes and chronicles. José Gabriel, another journalist, commented that “when Gimnasia started to lose by a few goals, from the stands people started to throw stones and fruits on Estudiantes' players.”²²¹

This popular fervor narrated in the sports pages was fueled by the way they presented the spectacles as “two contradictory temperaments of our metropolis, so full of singularities one and the other, that on Sunday they will try to define their pride and their passions, as in a war through a simple sporting joust.”²²² The newspaper added to the neighborhood rivalry built during the amateurism period, which did not change in professionalism which was already present in Argentinian football culture.

The match between San Lorenzo and Estudiantes had three halves; the third half was played in the street between the referee, the fans and the police. It must be said that the referee, during the whole match, was giving blows to the rules. For this reason, the fans agreed to give him a cordial farewell accompanied by a salvo of twenty-one orange shots.²²³

²²¹ “Naranjas y Piedras en La Plata”, José Gabriel, *Crítica* March 14, 1932, p 13

²²² “Football: Desahogo Pasional del Pueblo”, *Jornada*, August 04, 1931, p. 10

²²³ “Dios salve al referee, cantaron en la platea”, *El Negro de la Tribuna, Crítica*, August 24, 1936, p.11

Although the police had to intervene in this episode, by reading the sports section it can be inferred that they only played a dissuasive role in the riots that could occur. The security forces had a greater capacity for action when the disturbances were located in or near the stadiums. *El Negro de la Tribuna* went so far as to affirm that “there is no party without the police.”²²⁴

The scenes of violence could reach higher levels when the crowd was retreating or in the minutes prior to the start of the match as they approached the place where the match was to take place. On these occasions, the absence of security forces meant that the confrontations were resolved between the parties involved, with the crowds as the only witnesses. The narration of these urban-sporting episodes enriched the sports chronicles although also, depending on the seriousness of the episodes, they could be denounced with indignation; this was the case when a football player was attacked by his own fans for having applauded the rival team. In this report, José Gabriel summarized the types of violence that could be experienced inside a football stadium:

Assaulting supporters of other clubs on other people's fields or defending oneself from aggressions of others, yes, is something I have seen, and not precisely among supporters of Estudiantes de La Plata. But to hit a player to whom we owe so many selfless joys and a great part of the moral and material prosperity of the club (...) this, until now, has only happened in the club that was the honor of Argentine sport and it is a poor thing.²²⁵

The popular press and its skillful writers contributed to the conformation of the great imaginaries about football as a spectacle, as well as to graph the dynamism of the city during the weekends when there was a match: “from all corners of the city the fans came,

²²⁴ “En la cancha de River se desató un Huracán”, *El Negro de la Tribuna*, *Crítica*, June 06, 1932, p 17

²²⁵ “Caso único”, José Gabriel, *Crítica*, September 22, 1933, p. 12

taking advantage of the imaginable means of locomotion. Trucks full of fans began to speed through the city shortly after midday”.²²⁶ Likewise, this activity, in which passion was mixed with a sort of inter-urban tourism, was not free of risks in the Buenos Aires of the thirties. In the pages of the evening paper, the risk of traveling to certain stadiums was also exposed. The words in the 5th and 6th editions of *Crítica* became part of a social imaginary, which coincided with the danger that the police section stated about the Greater Buenos Aires area and those regions beyond the Riachuelo.²²⁷ “At last we can be calm. We have left the province,” sighed a River fan as soon as they crossed the Barracas Bridge after a match against Independiente.”²²⁸ And Rojas Paz himself stated that “every time La Boca moves to the forest of La Plata, there is a pitched battle.”²²⁹

The existing hierarchical organization in the clubs had its correlation in the administration of the spaces inside each stadium. These had seats assigned according to the hierarchies of the people who were linked to each institution. This hierarchy did not include members of the elite, but the most prominent place was reserved for managers who, because of their professions or commercial activities, occupied the middle sector of Buenos Aires society.²³⁰ Most of the stadium was assigned to the popular seats, where those who were members of the club were exempt from paying the entrance fee. The rest of the people, lower-ranking merchants, office workers, children, service providers, made extraordinary efforts to attend the games. According to Guevara's caricature, there was an important

²²⁶ “La fiesta del Football se realizó hoy”, *Crítica*, November 13, 1932., p. 14

²²⁷ See: Caimari, Lila, *Mientras la ciudad duerme. Pistoleros, policías y periodistas en Buenos Aires 1920-1945*, Siglo XXI Editores, Buenos Aires, 2012.

²²⁸ “Signo Triunfal eran en Avellaneda ayer 5 dedos de la mano”, *El Negro de la Tribuna*, *Crítica*, June 27, 1932.

²²⁹ “El Bosque es Nuestro, dijeron los platenses”, *El Negro de la Tribuna*, *Crítica*, August 17, 1936, p.16

²³⁰ Camilo Cichero, president of Boca Juniors, physician, José Bacigaluppi, Genovese immigrant, president of River, merchant, Eduardo Larrandarl, president of San Lorenzo, merchant, to mention a few.

number of people unable to pay for a ticket, so they ended up finding a place in a strategic location on the outskirts of the stadium. It could be a tree or a neighboring building to watch the game from there, like that “little boy hanging from a column” described by Rojas Paz.²³¹

I have pointed out that Rojas Paz, besides calling himself “black”, also did so with other personalities who had dark skin without being of African descent. In addition to the physical characteristics, blackness was also associated with the exhausting efforts that a person could make, like that usher (see page 99). However, it was not Rojas Paz who made explicit reference to the colour of the masses that attended sporting events. It was Roberto Arlt, the popular writer *par excellence* who commented what follows in the first football match he covered for the newspaper *El Mundo*:

The bleachers are black with spectators. Over these 40 thousand *porteños* a mysterious hand flips flyers that fall between the air and the sun with silver-leaf gleams.

Uruguayan and Argentine players crowd around a player stretched out on the ground. It was a kick in the back of the head. There's no turning back; sports are healthy.

Another rotten orange bursts in the skull of the same lonyi.²³²

Popular sports were the niche where the lower sectors of Buenos Aires society met on a weekly basis. Late European immigrants, recent internal migrants, dark and light skinned peoples from the north of Argentina or from the European south, American and transatlantic crossbreeding, *mulattos*. All of them, surrounding a football match, converged in a great mass that Arlt characterized with the colour black and of which Rojas Paz, rhetorically, chose to be part of it, defining himself as *el negro*. Mixing, thus, among the

²³¹ “Una ciudad entera jugó al football”, *El Negro de la Tribuna, Jornada*, October 19, 1931, p. 13,

²³² “Ayer vi ganar a los Argentinos”, Arlt, Roberto, *El Mundo*, November 18, 1929, p. 14

working class fans, who were waiting for “the half holiday” of the Saturday, not to rest but to “eat quietly and straighten up towards the field.”²³³ The reference to the black people that in Guevara's representation appears as unequivocal, in Arlt's chronicle becomes more ambiguous because the term is used repeatedly. For example, the writer comments that during the match he witnessed: “A black man appeared, hauling away a door leaf, raised a stand and began to shout, ‘20 cents a seat.’ Several parents went up to the makeshift balcony”, or when before his eyes he saw “a black man selling a dented umbrella to get out of the sun”²³⁴. This, which *a priori*, due to the association of colour with a particular individual, could suggest that Arlt was referring to Afro-descendants, loses accuracy when one reads the reference to blackness in the previous quote: “The bleachers are black with spectators”. The colour that dyes the stands no longer designates the other, the exotic, the fascinating, but it is a representation that incorporates dimensions linked to an agglomeration of people with a common past and present, socially, culturally, in their recent history and present time. The situation referred to by Arlt, has the same characters *el Negro de la Tribuna* described so many times:

The soul of the people is in football. The real people. The people who suffer and the people who work. Let's make an experiment , let's find out what do factory workers talk about during their breaks, the workers of La Boca and Barracas, besides the boyfriend; what does the policeman of the corner talk about with a neighbor: the bus guard who forgets to ring the bell, the newspaper man who has already sold all of *Crítica* 6th edition; the people who wait for the beginning of the section in the neighborhood cinemas; the hairdresser, on the days when there is no lottery, and the boy in the store. Football. Football, forever.²³⁵

²³³ “El partido de ayer”, *El negro de la Tribuna, Crítica*, October 25, 1931, p. 17

²³⁴ “Ayer vi ganar a los Argentinos”, Arlt, Roberto, *El Mundo*, November 11, 1929, p. 13

²³⁵ “La Universalidad del fútbol argentino”, *El Negro de la Tribuna, Crítica*, June 5, 1932, p. 16

The nickname chosen by Pablo Rojas Paz responds to an appellation that many of the readers of *Crítica* received and with which many others felt challenged. Any person of dark complexion or black lack, in a “court” situation were those blacks who dyed the stands.

By the thirties, Greater Buenos Aires was populated by workers and laborers resigned to a much more limited upward social mobility than the one people such as Ramón Santamarina, Pedro Luro or Pedro Vasena achieved, starting from a similar condition but having arrived in Argentina during the second half of the nineteenth century.²³⁶ For this reason, the middle sectors were building their own habits of behavior and consumption, austere and moderate, while at the same time they made their own spaces of belonging and built respectability based on effort and work.²³⁷

One of the main effects of the Great Depression in Argentina was the movement of people from the country's interior to the city of Buenos Aires. The vast city of Rio de La Plata served as a haven for everyone who was affected by the decline in economic activity in their home provinces. These families arrived to the big city in search to alleviate the effects of the crisis in their economy, so that “an increasing number of provincial people with dark skin moved to the large conurbations of the littoral.”²³⁸ Among them were many football players who triumphed and stood out, as those listed by Rojas Paz in several of his chronicles. The journalist also explains that not all those who attempted to find a successful path in sports were successful: “the light of the center did them wrong. They soon had their

²³⁶ Losada, Leandro, “La sociedad bonaerense: tendencias demográficas, grupos sociales y formas de vida”, en *Historia de la Provincia de Buenos Aires: El Gran Buenos Aires* / Gabriel Kessler; dirigido por Juan Manuel Palacio, Buenos Aires, EDHASA, 2015. pp. 131- 139

²³⁷ During the 1930s, Buenos Aires received an average of 72,000 migrants from the interior each year. In the period from 1943 to 1947, that number would rise to 117,000. See. Gino Germani, *Estructura social de la Argentina*, Raigal, Buenos Aires, 1955 y Rock, David, “Argentina 1930-1946”, en Leslie Bethell (ed.), *Argentina since Independence*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

²³⁸ Roy Hora, “Repercusiones de la Gran Depresión en la sociedad argentina” in Alan Knight and Paulo Drinot (Eds.) *La Gran Depresión en América Latina*, Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2015 , 42

berretines, the *milonga*, the *cabaret*, the pure *atorro*, the ladies."²³⁹ Thus, the characteristic cosmopolitanism of Buenos Aires began to recede and give way to an expression of nation that began to flourish, where once again Buenos Aires would be the place to assimilate—or not—a more genuine miscegenation.

²³⁹ “El Carusso del football: La gran sensación del año”, *El Negro de Tribuna, Crítica*, June 3, 1932, p. 13

CONCLUSIONS

In the previous pages I set out to explain how the perception that Argentines, more specifically the inhabitants of Buenos Aires, had of Afro-descendants between the late nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century was configured and transcended. By means of a shallow analysis of the sources, it could be affirmed that, as a result of the fascination with Afro-descendants that was awakened in Europe at the end of World War I, echoed by the City of Buenos Aires, there was a shift from discrimination to fascination with Afro-descendants. However, a more critical look at the sources reveals that the root of this fascination lay in the same characteristics for which people of African descent had been ridiculed and marginalized only a few years earlier. Behind the displayed fascination with Afro-descendants, hid the same sentiment of decades ago. Black people were human beings only apt to entertain at the cost of their physical prowess or to waste themselves at parties and dances at the cost of drinking and bodily excitement. This stereotype had its origin at the end of the nineteenth century with the ideas of Social Darwinism and a ruling elite that understood that social, institutional, and economic progress could not be far from the scientific precepts that argued that the desired evolution could not be achieved without a white population of Caucasian genes.

Both the whitening discourse that dominated Argentina and the policies aimed at materializing the desire of the ruling elite could not have been as successful as they were if it had not been for the most influential sectors of the *Afroporteño* community itself and its media. Pursuing a desire to progress, the *Afroporteño* bourgeoisie was persuaded by the

idea of accepting miscegenation and thus, whitening their skin and abandoning their ancestral habits and customs. The prize? For this sacrifice, *Afroporteños* were to be accepted into the hegemonic culture once they had whitened their skin and adjusted their attitudes. This mestizaje was to allow the fathers of the “Argentina of progress” to declare that it was a country composed of white people. Behind these policies lay a racist sentiment that sought to erase any trace of African heritage. On the other hand, the preference for European immigration would not only serve to populate the territory, but also to whiten the population.

Once the myth of a White Argentina was established, Buenos Aires residents were free to support people of African descent. Those who were stigmatized for their obscene and outmoded behaviors eventually gained praise for the very traits that were once seen as their flaws. At the same time that this “positive” discrimination was taking place, the effects of the Great Depression were responsible for giving back to the City of Buenos Aires a more realistic image of what miscegenation had produced and, although Afro-Argentines continued to be ignored, a new dimension of blackness emerged, one not linked to an African past but to a present of effort, work and miscegenation.

In the 1930s, with the great economic crisis taking center stage, a socioeconomic dimension was added to define a person as "black," whether or not he or she had African features. The latter, which can be interpreted as the triumph of the aforementioned whitening discourse, makes it difficult to understand what being a black person implied in Argentina at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. The question of class was added to the question of race to identify someone as black —although according to the sources gathered, the question of class was not yet a motive for

discrimination. *Negro* to refer to a person became a polysemic term. It no longer implied having physical traits that would indicate Afro-descent, but rather simply having a darker complexion than white Europeans and performing jobs that demanded great physical commitment, either due to the amount of effort or the number of hours worked.

To analyze the complexity of “blackness” in Argentina I have written three chapters with three common denominators that unite its layers. Without them, this transition from “bad black people to good and hard-working black people”, in my opinion, could not be understood. The first common denominator and structural axis of this research are Afro-descendants. At one point as victims and at another point as accomplices of the history that for a long time narrated their disappearance and built a story that argued that the process of miscegenation in Argentina had resulted in a white population.

The second common denominator of this work is migration to the city of Buenos Aires as the main receiving center of millions of migrants and the scenario where the largest number of Afro-descendants were concentrated. As I tried to explain in the first chapter, the number of immigrants who arrived on the shores of the *Rio de La Plata* was fundamental for the reduction, at least in relative terms, of the *Afroporteña* population. This event also contributed to setting the foundations of White Argentina. On the other hand, the cosmopolitanism that characterized the City of Buenos Aires as well as the cultural development it presented in the first decades of the twentieth century was a beacon for international artists and athletes, many of them of African descent. While the artists who arrived did so because of the impulse of a European fashion and the receptivity they found among the Argentine audiences, the sportsmen, mostly football players, did so because of

their talent. In one way or another, artists and athletes were acclaimed and admired for their exoticism and their ability to entertain at the expense of their physical prowess.

Another of the axes that structured this thesis was the role of the press. The high number of newspapers published in the city of Buenos Aires between the last third of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century corresponded to the economic and cultural development of the city, as well as to the high literacy rate of its population. These same characteristics were also present in the *Afroporteño* population, which by the end of the nineteenth century developed a great civic activity. Their participation in the carnivals and the number of journalistic ventures advanced by *Afroporteños* are vivid examples.

Although the *Afroporteña* press had already been addressed by other researchers, this paper presents a novel approach by including it within the journalistic universe of the city of Buenos Aires. Throughout these pages, the traits of modernity that these newspapers presented were highlighted. While the mainstream press was dominated by newspapers that responded to political interests and were maintained only by funds provided by the government or by groups of people linked to political factions, the newspapers of the Afroporteño community were supported by their sales and advertising. Regarding its content, the *Afroporteña* press intended to report on the daily life of their community and to entertain. This type of newspaper edition became popular at the turn of the century when the city of Buenos Aires saw high demographic density and active civic participation. Another editorial feature of the modern press found in Afro-porteño newspapers is the inclusion of their readers' voices. Three decades later, the popular newspaper *Crítica* would make use of this tactic to increase sales.

With the consolidation of the commercial press in this case through the analysis of newspaper *Crítica*, particularly its sports pages, I exposed the complex changes in the perception of Afro-descendants in the 1930s. The choice of this newspaper for this research has not been random, but rather *Crítica* had the greatest reach among the lower classes. Being the commercial newspaper *par excellence*, the content of its pages was directly aligned with the interests of the urban masses. The treatment given to Afro-descendants in the pages of *Crítica* shows how these peoples were perceived by the majority of the Buenos Aires community. While in the 1920s African descendants were ridiculed as monkeys and ignorant, during the 1930s, those same African descendants were acclaimed by the popular audience and thus, in the pages of the popular evening paper. The argument, presented throughout this thesis, is the permanence of racist stereotypes by means of which *Afroporteños* were urged to abandon their habits in order to integrate and be functional to the White Argentina narrative. The sexualized figure of the libidinous, dancing, party-loving Afro-descendant was still as present in the 1930s as it was in the late nineteenth century. The racism of the 1930s was veiled by the interest that white, cosmopolitan Buenos Aires audiences showed in the physical prowess of black people. Both in sports and on stage, blacks were used to entertain whites.

Likewise, it is possible to appreciate the importance that the myth of White Argentina had in Buenos Aires. While all the acclaimed people of African descent came from Europe, North America or Brazil, in the 1930s people without any African ancestry would be called *negro* simply because of the dark colour of their skin. Once again, the popularity of this nickname can be found throughout the pages of *Crítica*, so much so that the most important journalist of the sports section chose to sign his notes with the

pseudonym, *El Negro de la Tribuna* (The Black Man of the Crowd). Although this new way of naming dark-skinned people seemed to go against the myth of White Argentina, racially they were not considered black. However, this color designation, which was not racially related to Afro-descendants, did have a social and class relationship that was linked to a past and a tradition of forced labor and social subordination. The concept “*negrura popular*” (popular blackness), used to refer to internal migrants who arrived in Buenos Aires after the Great Depression, had a classist connotation. It described not a dark-skin tone, but the effort and sacrifice that these people made in their low-skilled labor activities.

This work does not intend to exhaust any of the topics addressed, but rather aims to deepen some of the lines of research that were proposed as the pages went by. The reviewed historiography demonstrates there is still a long path to explore on the history of *Afroporteños* and Afro-Argentines. Although existing works on the subject give an account of the conformation and dynamics of this community, there is still much research to be done on the links between Afro-descendants and the hegemonic “white” culture, especially throughout the twentieth century. This thesis addressed these issues when I analyzed *Afroporteño* press in contrast with other newspapers of the time. Moreover the myth of White Argentina is a topic that has been discussed for several decades in historiography, much work remains to be done to make non-scholarly audiences aware of Argentina's ethnic and racial history.

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