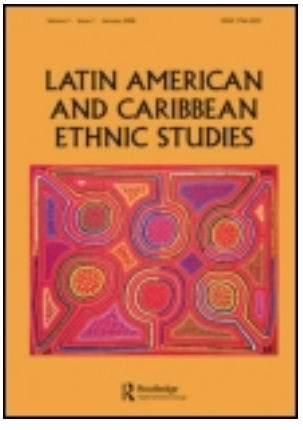

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'Had They Been Polite and Civilized, None of This Would Have Happened': Discourses of Race and Racism in Multicultural Lima

Tanya Golash-Boza

In 2006, the Peruvian government passed a law that made racial discrimination a crime punishable by incarceration. This law, part of a multicultural reform in Peru, can be seen as an effective recognition of the reality of racism in Peruvian society. Such recognition, however, contrasts with official depictions of Peru as a country without racism, and of Peruvians as people who deny the existence of racism in their society. Based on semi-structured interviews conducted in Lima, this note explores everyday discourses on this issue. The findings show that Limeños recognize racism as a societal problem, but they adhere to a restrictive definition of racism and use rhetorical strategies that allow them to portray themselves as not racist. Their expressions of distaste for people of color demonstrate that racism persists in interpersonal discourses because of deeply embedded ideas about the inferiority of blacks and Indians.

Keywords: Racism; Peru; sociology; race; multicultural reforms

> I don't have anything against people of color... We are all the same...
> People of color here in Peru can be characterized as delinquents, as gang members... The majority of people of color here are... bad people... criminals; they are in jail.
>
> (Fernanda,[1] 40-year-old woman, Lima)

Fernanda, a dark-skinned *mestiza*[2] artisan who has lived in Lima, Peru her entire life, told me that racism is prevalent in Lima and that she deplored racism, calling it a 'spiritual sickness.' Despite her dislike of racism and her insistence that she is not racist, she unequivocally told me that most people of color[3] are criminals. In this research note, I explore how Fernanda and other Limeños[4] are able to maintain such contradictory positions – denouncing racism while expressing racist viewpoints.

Understanding how people talk about racism in Peru is of particular importance at this juncture, as the Peruvian government is in the process of implementing reforms aimed at increasing multicultural tolerance and combating widespread racism. These 21st-century reforms are in some ways a continuation of changes made

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during the 1990s, yet are distinct in so far as these new reforms involve a more explicit discussion of racism. It is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain the position that racism is foreign to Peru, that it is hidden, or that it does not form part of public discourse – stances long held by Peruvianists.

The Peruvian government passed an anti-discrimination law (Ley 28867) in 2006. This law makes racial discrimination a criminal act, punishable by incarceration. The passage of this law reveals that legislators recognize the widespread nature of racism in Peru and renders it evident that race talk has made its way into national political debates. In 2000, Peru accepted a five-million-dollar loan from the World Bank to implement multicultural reforms in Peru. The acceptance of this loan implies the recognition of the special needs of indigenous and Afro-Peruvian populations, and thus a denial of the idea that race does not matter in Peru.

The Peruvian media also has made public several cases of discrimination, breaking their relative silence on the issue. The most prominent recent example of this is that several nightclubs in Cuzco and Lima faced fines in 2006 after denying entry to people on the basis of their physical appearance. The television networks covered these events extensively, bringing discriminatory practices to the fore in public debates. In another example, on 27 November 2006, two indigenous Peruvian congresswomen, Maria Sumire and Hilaria Supa, arrived at the airport just before 7:30 pm for an 8:55 pm flight. They were told that the flight had been overbooked, and that they would not be able to board. The Congresswomen, indignant they were not going to be able to travel that evening, showed the airline worker their diplomatic passports and demanded they be able to board the flight. The worker responded that they might be congresswomen, but that they cannot even speak Spanish properly and thus needed to take their complaints elsewhere. This event and the subsequent charges of discrimination were widely publicized in the Peruvian televised and print media.

This public discussion of discrimination raises the question of how this debate is affecting how Limeños are talking about racism today. In this research note, I explain that Limeños talk about and deplore racism as a societal problem, yet adhere to a restrictive definition of racism that allows them to see themselves as not racist. I argue that Limeños decry racism while expressing racist viewpoints using four strategies: claiming they are not racist because they have a multiracial family; claiming they are not racist because they have a multiracial circle of friends; insisting that propagating negative cultural stereotypes about blacks and Indians is not racist, but a description of reality; and defining racism as individual acts of bigotry in which they do not engage.

What does Racism Look Like in Peru?[5]

Scholarly writings about racism in Peru in the 1990s share three themes. First, most authors posit that racism is hidden or disguised (*solapado*). Second, they argue that Peruvians see racism as foreign to their country, as Peru does not have a history of legal segregation. Third, they contend that, in Peru, there is an official discourse about the absence of racism in the country. These three themes combine to create a

complex set of explanations for the perceived lack of discourses on racism in Peru. If racism is foreign, then there would be none in Peru, and the racism that does exist would be hidden (Callirgos, 1993; Oboler, 1996, 2005;[6] León, 1998; Portocarrero, 1993). Suzanne Oboler claims that racism in Lima is:

> understood in terms of interpersonal prejudices that warrant individual solutions by those whom it affects, freeing the larger national community from the burden and hence the task of addressing the problem of racism in the society. Consequently, the racial question is virtually absent from political debates.
>
> (Oboler, 2005, p. 89)

According to this view, politicians do not address the problem of racism in society because racism is a problem of interpersonal prejudice, and not something to which the state should or could respond. Further, absence of discussions of racism in public debates means that racism remains hidden in Peruvian society (León, 1998; Portocarrero, 1993; Oboler, 2005).

Peruvian scholars also often argue that racial discrimination is seen by many Peruvians as something foreign to Peru, frequently by comparing Peru with the USA and with South Africa, where racism has been part of public policy (Callirgos, 1993). Suzanne Oboler (1996, 2005) and Gonzalo Portocarrero (1993) found in their research in the 1990s that many Peruvians see racism as foreign. In addition, these scholars contend that racism is not discussed by public officials. However, today, discussions of racism are common themes in the public arena. How have these changes in public and official discourses on race and racism affected how Peruvians talk about race today?

A Few Words on Collecting the Data

To understand how Peruvians are talking about racism today, I conducted 30 interviews in Lima, between May and July 2007. My sample included people from varying social strata, of different genders, and of a range of phenotypes.[7] I drew from a wide variety of contacts in Lima to create my snowball sample. I used one contact at the Catholic University, one in the working-class neighborhood of Comas, and another in the bohemian neighborhood of Barranco. These in turn led to contacts in the upscale neighborhood of Monterrico and in two working-class outlying suburbs. My 30 interviewees varied quite a bit in terms of social standing, from students at the Catholic University to upper-middle-class professionals to working-class people to single mothers to government workers and artists. My interviewees were evenly divided between men and women. The average age was 34; the oldest was 67, and the youngest 19. Table 1 presents demographic details on my interviewees. Note that the university students all studied at the Catholic University, and were of varying class backgrounds.

The interviews, which lasted from 30 to 90 minutes, were conducted in Spanish and focused specifically on how Limeños talk about racism.[8] My research assistant transcribed all of the interviews and I translated the excerpts presented in the text. In the interviews, I asked respondents general questions about whether or not racial

Table 1 Interviewees.

Name	Gender	Age (years)	Class
Luis	Male	67	Government worker
Mario	Male	52	Government worker
Angela	Female	34	Professional
Jorge	Male	35	Professional
José Manuel	Male	42	Professional
Rumi	Male	26	Professional
Andrés	Male	21	University student
Cindi	Female	20	University student
Franco	Male	29	University student
Juan Carlos	Male	24	University student
Laura	Female	20	University student
Lucia	Female	22	University student
Paulo	Male	20	University student
Rafael	Male	21	University student
Victoria	Female	20	University student
Violeta	Female	22	University student
Cynthia	Female	34	University student
Fabiana	Female	54	Upper middle
Mary	Female	39	Upper middle
Pablo	Male	45	Upper middle
Sarita	Female	30	Upper middle
Alfredo	Male	42	Working class
Fernanda	Female	49	Working class
José	Male	27	Working class
Katya	Female	40	Working class
Luna	Female	40	Working class
Marcelo	Male	47	Working class
Maribel	Female	41	Working class
Pedro	Male	26	Working class
Soledad	Female	19	Working class

discrimination is a problem in Peru and how they would define racism. Later in the interview, I focused on personal prejudices by asking questions such as how they would feel if their son or daughter was romantically involved with a black or indigenous person. These questions provide insight into how Peruvians are talking about racial and ethnic differences and discrimination today. This analysis provides a context in which we can examine how contemporary discourses of difference affect racial discourses in Peru.

Cultural Racism in Lima, Peru

Many of my interviewees believed that holding culturally racist beliefs about blacks and Indians is not racist. In this section, I discuss the roots of cultural racism in Peru and the extent to which it continues to be widespread today.

The Acceptability of Cultural Racism

In Peru, cultural frames were the primary means by which racial inequality was justified throughout the 20th century. Nelson Manrique (1999) argues that racism

in Peru naturalizes the inequalities produced by the Conquest that persist to this day. A recent report by anti-racist organizations in Lima outlines several dimensions in which black and indigenous people continue to be disadvantaged, including education, health, and access to basic amenities (CNDDHH *et al.* 2009). The elite have consistently explained the subordinate status of Indians by pointing to their supposed refusal to assimilate (de la Cadena, 2000). And the economic subordination of black Peruvians has been explained as an outcome of their unfamiliarity with capitalist enterprise (Cuche, 1975). These cultural arguments continue to be used in the contemporary era, despite the legal and moral impermissibility of racism.

In Limeño discourse, the presumed cultural superiority of *costeños* (coastal people) and of *criollo* culture often goes unchallenged, and many Limeños do not sugarcoat their opinions with regard to the cultural inferiority of blacks or Indians. When a Limeño says that 'Indians are dirty', she often does not see this as a racist statement, but as a statement of fact. For many Limeños, until Indians get civilized and become *mestizos*, they are dirty: they urinate in public, they throw their dishwater into the street, and they do not wash their *polleras* (skirts). For many *mestizos* in Lima, the cultural inferiority of Indians is so evident that pointing it out is hardly racist. Although a white person does not have to prove that he or she is not dirty, a person who appears to be indigenous often has to assure potential employers or friends that he or she is not in fact an Indian, but a civilized *mestizo*. This parallels the historical discourse of assimilation, which asserts that education and modernization can 'whiten' Indians but that whites do not require the same processes to be considered white (de la Cadena, 2000).

Prevalence of Cultural Racism

In the Peruvian racial hierarchy, whiteness is privileged, and indigeneity and blackness are devalued. As indigeneity and blackness are defined culturally, indigenous and black culture also are held in low esteem. The extent to which cultural racism is embedded in Limeño discourse is evident in the writings of Peruvian anthropologist, Alejandro Ortiz. In a newspaper segment on racism in Peru, Ortiz argued that racism is an Anglicism and has no applicability in Peru. He posited that racism does not exist in Peru because, unlike in the USA, skin color is not the primary characteristic by which people are judged. As an example, he pointed out that a person can '*nacer indio pero algunos méritos económicos o culturales pueden realizar el milagro de ''blanquear'' a las personas*' ('be born Indian, but certain economic or cultural merits can produce the miracle of 'whitening' the person') (Ortiz, 1999). What Ortiz failed to mention is that Indians require certain 'merits' to become white, whereas people who are born white remain that way, regardless of their worthiness. His comments, which appeared in the prestigious Limeño newspaper, *El Comercio*, on 29 August 1999, are indicative of the extent to which cultural racism is embedded in Limeño discourses.

Ortiz's comments point to the widespread sentiment that Indians are culturally deficient. For Ortiz, this idea is not racist; he simply is drawing our attention to the cultural merits that Indians lack. Moreover, for him, Peru is not racist since Indians

have the option of cultural improvement. If they choose not to take advantage of the option of cultural improvement, then they have only themselves to blame for their low position on the social hierarchy. These sentiments were strongly reflected in my interviews with Limeños, particularly with regard to Indians.

Denigration of Indians and Cholos[9]

Many of my interviewees spoke of Indians as having '*un bajo nivel cultural*' ('a low cultural level'). For example, when I asked José Manuel, a light-skinned professional, how he would feel if his daughter decided to marry an indigenous man, he responded:

> Look, blacks . . . want to live well, want to live clean, want to have a house that is decent. It's like you can civilize them quickly . . . They want to be civilized, something like that; I am thinking of slavery . . . But the Indians, the *cholos*, it's like they always keep on living dirty, living badly.

José Manuel went on to say that if you teach a *cholo* to be clean, he will have trouble with his family, because they are unclean. They will say:

> Look, eating with your hands is good, you can enjoy your food . . . eating with your dirty hands and eating again and leaving them dirty and cleaning your face and running your fingers through your hair and cleaning them with your clothes . . . Well, if my daughter falls in love with a person like that, I would tell her, 'daughter, you have a lot of work'.

Mary, a fair-skinned woman from an upper-class family, echoed this idea that indigenous people need to be civilized. She said that if an indigenous family moved in next to her, she would be fine with it, because she would '*enseñarles algunas cosas, de repente le veo algo malo, aconsejarles*' ('teach them some things, perhaps I would see something wrong, and I would give them advice'). These are indicative of the widespread idea that *criollo* culture is superior to indigenous culture.

When I asked Luna, a brown-skinned artisan who considers herself *mestiza*, how she would feel if an indigenous family moved in next door to her, she said she would not like it because indigenous people are dirty: 'They are dirty, yes, they are not very urban . . . They are of a low level, they spit on the floor'. She also apparently has passed these ideas on to her daughter; Soledad, who is 19 years old and the color of cinnamon, said that her mother would not like it if she married an indigenous man, because 'they don't have much culture'.

An additional component of the racial discourse that emphasizes cultural inadequacy is the assertion of the inherent inferiority of the way indigenous people talk. Angela, a fair-skinned young dentist, told me that when a white-skinned person from the Andes is in Lima, people will say, '*mira al blanco, pero que no hable*' ('Look at that white man, but don't let him talk') or '*habló y la mató*' ('he spoke and that was the end of it'), meaning it is commonly accepted that having a mountain accent is indicative of cultural inferiority. Pablo, an upper-middle-class artisan, when referring to the indigenous congresswomen, called them '*mal habladas*' (literally 'badly spoken'), due to their accent in Spanish. Echoing this, Mario,

a *mestizo* student at the Catholic University, said that perhaps the congresswomen 'do not speak Spanish as well as the coastal people do'. Rumi, a *mestizo* recent college graduate said that the way one of his professors talks is '*chistoso*' (funny) because he has a Cuzqueño accent. (Cuzco is in the Andes mountains, an indigenous region.)

In everyday encounters in Lima, it is common to hear people make fun of *serranos*' (indigenous people from the highlands) accents. In November 2006, I was in a cab with some friends who are involved in an Afro-Peruvian social movement, and they were imitating the way *serranos* talk and making fun at how they say '*intonces*' instead of '*entonces*'. The fact that these people, who are avid anti-racists, were willing to make these sorts of jokes is indicative of the widespread acceptance of ridiculing linguistic differences. In Peru, linguistic differences are racialized in so far as speaking Spanish with a *criollo* accent is associated with the (white/*mestizo*) coast, whereas speaking an indigenous language or Spanish with an indigenous accent is associated with the (indigenous) mountain or the (native) Amazonian region.

When a black or an indigenous person is able to improve their situation, they are often seen as arrogant. For example, Fabiana, a fair-skinned upper-class woman, told me that 'when they [blacks or Indians] have status, when they ascend [socially], they think they are all that'. Another interviewee, Fernanda, a brown-skinned *mestiza* artisan, said that 'people of color sometimes, it's like they want to get ahead of themselves'. When I asked Pablo about the situation with the two congresswomen who had been denied entry into the airplane, he told me what he imagined must have happened. He explained that the two congresswomen probably arrived at the airport, speaking with their *serrano* accents, claiming to be congresswomen, and insulted the ticket agent, who was probably white. Because of the arrogance of the congresswomen, and the fact that they surely insulted the white ticket agent, the ticket agent returned the insult. According to Pablo, 'had they been polite and civilized, none of this would have happened'.

I also asked Pablo if he thought that employers preferred whites in general for employment, and he responded that employers prefer *cholos* for hard work and whites for public relations. Pablo explained:

> If we are talking about office work, this *cholo* is not going to be able to do anything, because this *cholo*, what he is going to need are his hands, his aggression, and his strength to hit something. The other, no, he only needs his intelligence.

In Peru, the reality is that Indians are more likely to be in positions that involve physical labor whereas whites are more likely to be in service-sector and professional positions. Pablo's differentiation of whites from Indians in this way can serve as a justification for this manifestation of racial inequality, continuing a trend that has roots in the Conquest (Manrique, 1999).

Negro = Delincuente

My interviewees also were quite open about expressing cultural stereotypes with regard to blacks. Historically, blacks and whites have lived in close proximity to one another, and blacks are not seen as culturally distinct from white *criollos* in the same

way as Indians (Romero, 1994; Golash-Boza, 2008). There are, nevertheless, certain stereotypes associated with blacks, including implications that they are criminally inclined and lazy. These stereotypes came to light in my interviews.

When I asked Cynthia, a *mestiza* student, if she thought that blacks face discrimination on a regular basis she said that they might, but that they can easily defend themselves, since '*las personas negras tienen relaciones con delincuencia*' ('blacks have friends that are criminals'). Fernanda also told me, with regard to blacks:

> People of color here in Peru can be characterized as delinquents, as gang members, because, generally, it is a marginalized race . . . The majority of people of color here are . . . bad people; they live in poor neighborhoods and are criminals as well; they are in jail.

These stereotypes also can be seen in common jokes. For example, a popular joke claims that if a white person is out running, he or she is jogging, but a black person who is out running is probably a thief.

My interviewees frequently described blacks as unintelligent and unlikely to be professionals. Fernanda, a brown-skinned *mestiza* artisan, said that a large percentage of blacks are soccer players, singers, musicians, and writers, and the rest are mostly criminals. Luna, also a brown-skinned *mestiza* artisan, told me that blacks are generally not very intelligent, are usually poor, and are not professionals. Maribel, a dark-skinned housewife in a working-class household, said that, although color is not important in terms of selecting someone for a job, intelligence is, and not very many blacks study at the university. This is because they prefer to do other things, like play sports, sing, and cook.

Through a plethora of widely accepted stereotypes, the assumed cultural and intellectual inferiority of blacks and Indians is used to justify their low position in the social hierarchy. In this sense, not much has changed over the course of Peruvian history. The way in which Limeños unabashedly express cultural racism is indicative of the extent to which the presumed inferiority of blacks and Indians is taken as simply factual for many Limeños. This also differentiates Lima from the USA, where people are less likely to be so forthcoming with their expressions of cultural racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). My interviewees unapologetically described Indians and blacks as culturally deficient as if their ideas were facts instead of opinions. For them, the assertion of these 'facts' is not racist; it is just how things are.

Rhetorical Devices Used to Justify Racism[10]

In addition to defining cultural racism as not racism, my interviewees defined themselves as not racist through the use of a variety of rhetorical strategies such as 'Some of my best friends are black' and 'My grandmother is black'. I discuss these strategies in this section.

Some of My Best Friends are Black (or Indian)

One of my interviewees, Pablo, frequently denigrated blacks and Indians, yet insisted that he was not a racist. One way he claimed his status as a non-racist was by pointing

out that he has black and Indian friends. An artisan from an upper-middle-class family, Pablo would be seen as white in Peru based on his family background and his physical appearance. Pablo often expressed overtly racist views in my presence. For example, the people in the town where he lives in the outskirts of Lima were organizing a party for their patron saint. I asked Pablo and his wife if they planned to attend this event. Pablo mentioned that he has some qualms with the people in town, related to a disagreement he had with them over a canal. When Pablo described the dispute, he referred to the townspeople as '*indios de mierda* and *cholos de mierda*'.[11] He said that one day 20 *indios* showed up at his house to complain about him having blocked off the water canal. In Pablo's description of this event, his disgust for the townspeople was evident. On another occasion when I was at Pablo's house, a young indigenous woman came to ask for something. When Pablo spoke with her, he treated her as one might treat a dog. He yelled at her, and talked to her as if she was unable to understand basic sentences and questions. When I asked Pablo why he talked to her that way, he explained to me that *cholos* have no culture, that *cholos* are worthless, and that they are so brutish that this is the only way one could relate to them. He explained that what happens is that *cholos* are fine so long as they stay in the mountains, but when they come to Lima, they continue with their country ways, and that this is unacceptable in Lima. This is reminiscent of early 20th-century ideas that the rightful place of Peruvian Indians is in the Andes, and that moving to the city only corrupts them (de la Cadena, 2000; Varallanos, 1962).

Pablo does not restrict his racist opinions to Indians. One afternoon, he was showing pictures of his daughter and granddaughter to a friend. His daughter lives in the States and has married an African-American. He told his friends that he was practicing to be able to communicate with his son-in-law and began to make primate noises.

Despite his disparaging statements about blacks and Indians, Pablo does not see himself as a racist. Pablo compared himself with family members who do not associate with blacks or Indians, calling them 'a little racist'. His mother and her sisters would have nothing at all to do with anyone who was not white. In contrast, Pablo told me that he does not care in the least bit what color someone's skin is, be it brown, white, black, green, pink. For him, this means he holds higher moral ground than his family members, and thus is not racist.

Pablo is currently married to a European woman, but the mother of his oldest daughter is, as he put it, '*cholita, peruana*'. In his eyes, he is not a racist like other members of his family because he is willing to have relationships with people who are not white and not wealthy. In addition to his former partner, Pablo has many artisan friends who are of indigenous or African descent. Thus, Pablo can see himself as not being racist because of his multi-ethnic circle of friends, in comparison with his mother, who only would consort with white Peruvians (and mostly with Peruvians of German or English extraction). Since Pablo defines racism as 'not dealing with blacks and Indians', he can claim not to be a racist.

Fernanda is another person who displays similar contradictions, and is from a very different background from Pablo. Fernanda is from a working-class background; her parents migrated from the Andes, but she was born in Lima. Her facial features

and skin color strongly reflect her parents' highland origins. Fernanda's opinions about blacks were very negative; she saw them as mostly delinquents. Nevertheless, Fernanda has some close friends who are blacks and does not see herself as racist.

As mentioned earlier, Fernanda expressed many negative stereotypes of blacks. At the same time, when I asked her about being romantically involved with a black person, she responded:

> I don't have anything against people of color . . . For us, there is no racism . . . We are all the same.

She also said later, '*yo tengo mis amigas de color, . . . no hay problema*' ('I have my black friends, . . . there is no problem'). Fernanda insisted that she is not a racist, and offered proof of this by pointing out that she has black friends, asserting that 'we are all the same'. In Fernanda's case, she holds stereotypes about blacks, but recognizes that there can be exceptions. Some blacks, like her friends, are not criminals or lazy.

Both Fernanda and Pablo used the fact that they have non-white friends as evidence that they are not racist. Notably, both Fernanda and Pablo do in fact have friends that consider themselves to be black and Indian. On one occasion when I was at Pablo's house, he had a few musician friends over for a jam session, and many of them were not white. Another friend of his who self-identifies as Indian came to visit from the USA – indicating a long-term relationship. As for Fernanda, I have seen her on many occasions with her friend Perla – a woman who identifies as black. Both Pablo and Fernando thus have multiracial circles of friends, despite their negative views of blacks and Indians. In a similar fashion, most of my interviews had non-white ancestors, and many invoked them as a strategy to define themselves as not racist.

Mi abuela es negra (My Grandmother is Black)

Nearly all of my interviewees (29 out of 30) claimed to have some ancestry that was not European. The exception was Franco, a white law student from an upper-class family. His four grandparents had come to Peru from Italy. Because of the recent migration of his family to Peru, he could be sure that he did not have any non-Europeans among his ancestors. Other Peruvians, even if they considered themselves to be white, thought they might have indigenous or African ancestors. Fabiana, for example, did not initially name a specific relative, but invoked the popular Peruvian saying – *quien no tiene de inga, tiene de mandinga* ('he who does not have Indian [ancestry], has African'), when I asked her if she had African ancestry. Later, she told me that her grandmother had been a *chola* (Indian). Although nearly all of my interviewees claimed a black or Indian grandmother, only some of them used this relative in a rhetorical strategy to claim not to be racist.

José Manuel, a fair-skinned young man from the middle class, for example, first told me that he was half-black and half-white, and that he had indigenous ancestry as well. Then, he told me that most Peruvians are mixed as well, but are not willing to admit it. Since he sees himself as one of the few members of his family

that is willing to talk about the non-white side of his family, he can consider himself not to be racist in that respect. This, of course, only works in so far as one's definition of racism is limited to biological racism. According to José Manuel, his willingness to admit that his grandmother was black shows that he does not believe that biology is destiny, and that he is not racist. He, after all, does not mind associating with blacks and Indians who, like him, are 'cleaned up' and 'civilized'. For José Manuel, then, having a black grandmother, being willing to discuss her, and being disposed to give *cholos* and blacks a chance to prove they are civilized means that he is not racist.

When I asked Jorge, a brown-skinned, middle-class, young dentist, how his father would feel if he married a black woman, he said to me, '*mi abuela es negra, problema de racismo no tengo*' ('my grandmother is black, I don't have any racial problems'). However, when I asked him how he would feel if his daughter married a black person, he said: 'I would have a bit of a hard time with it but I wouldn't prevent them from getting married'. Jorge clearly would prefer that his daughter marry a white man, yet does not see himself as racist. His rationale is that he simply wants the best for his children. Notably, he invokes his black grandmother as proof that he could not be a racist. This rhetorical strategy is generally not found in the USA, primarily because black or indigenous ancestry renders a person in the USA non-white, whereas in Peru this is not the case.

Defining Racism as Individual Acts of Bigotry

The final way that my interviewees were able to define themselves as not racist was by defining racism as individual acts of bigotry. When I asked my Limeño interviewees to give an example of racism, the majority pointed to the cases of nightclubs not allowing blacks or Indians to enter. They recounted that this had happened to them or to a friend, that they had heard about this happening, or that they had seen reports on television or in newspapers. As none of my interviewees were nightclub bouncers, they could deflect the racism onto those gatekeepers.

The next most prominent definition of racism was name-calling. Many of my interviewees defined racism as calling people '*cholo de mierda*'. Others defined it as using labels such as *cholo* or *negro.* Cindi, for example, told me that: 'It seems super ridiculous to me that people go around saying, ''look at that *mestizo*, look at that *negro*, look at that *cholo*'''. When I asked Fernanda, a brown-skinned, working-class woman, about racism, she said that blacks discriminate against Indians and *vice versa*. '*Empiezan a cholear, que cholos de ''M[ierda]''* . . . *negro cocodrilo* . . . *negro mono*' ('They start to call people *cholo*, *cholo* piece of shit, crocodile black . . . black monkey'). And, Rumi pointed out that when a *cholo* or a *negro* does something that someone does not like, they will say '*cholo tenía que ser*' or '*negro tenía que ser*' ('It had to be a cholo [or a black]'). Many Limeños define racism is the act of calling someone a *cholo* or a *negro*, especially if it is done in a denigrating fashion. Thus, those who watch their mouths and avoid using derogatory language can consider themselves to not be racist.

Discussion and Conclusion

My snowball sample of 30 Limeños provides insight into how racism works in contemporary Lima. One way this is evident is in the fact that, in my diverse sample, there were certain themes that arose in nearly every interview. All but one of my 30 interviewees decisively declared that racism is prevalent in Lima, and then proceeded to explain how they, personally, were not racist. Their explanations for why they are not racist also were markedly similar. All but one pointed to non-white members of their family. And, the vast majority mentioned non-white friends of theirs. Only one interviewee expressed personal disapproval of her son marrying a black woman; the remainder approved, albeit with some reservations. And, every single one of my interviewees expounded views of blacks and/or Indians that could be labeled cultural racism.

In my interviews, derogatory references to blacks and Indians were commonplace. All of my interviewees, both male and female, middle and working class, dark and light-skinned, had something negative to say about blacks and/or Indians. In so far as these denigrating statements referred to cultural inferiority, my interviewees did not see them as racist. In addition, my interviewees deplored racism and used rhetorical strategies such as my friends and/or grandmother is black or Indian to demonstrate that they are not racist.

Despite expressing racist ideas, my interviewees avoided the stigma of being labeled as racist in four ways: claiming a multiracial family; claiming a multiracial circle of friends; insisting that holding culturally racist beliefs about blacks and Indians is not racist, but just a description of the reality; and defining racism as individual acts of bigotry.

Unlike in the 1990s, racism is commonly discussed in public and legislative arenas in Peru. These discussions have reinforced the legal and moral impermissibility of racism. This public disparagement of racism influenced my interviewees in so far as they both recognized that racism is a problem in Peru and deplored racial prejudice and discrimination. Racism in Peru is no longer hidden. This recognition of racism as a Peruvian problem distinguishes 21st-century discourses on racism from those of the 20th century. However, the recognition and disparagement of racism did not lead my interviewees to develop tolerance towards people perceived to be black or Indian.

This description of how racism works in Lima is not an exercise in hunting out racists, but, instead, an exploration of how racist ideology works in Lima to sustain structural and cultural racism. The explanations provided in this research note help us to understand how a society like Peru can publicly denounce racism, implement laws to make racism illegal, yet do remarkably little to change the extent to which people of color are in a position of disadvantage and subject to derision.

In contemporary Lima, the media focus on racism has not worked to reduce racism primarily because the media has defined racism as unsavory acts committed by individual bigots. Media outlets have portrayed nightclub bouncers, guards at private beaches, and airline attendants as the primary perpetrators of racism. Whereas it is deplorable when a person is denied entry to a locale because of the color

of his skin, the vast majority of black and Indian Peruvians cannot afford entry into these exclusive spots and thus never experience this sort of discrimination. They do, however, confront a host of issues related to structural inequality and ingrained cultural racism. The media attention on these individualized occurrences in elite locales takes the focus off of the more ingrained dimensions of racial discourse. Structural and cultural racism are, of course, much more difficult to uproot than simply fining nightclubs or firing bouncers. However, if Peru hopes to be the multicultural, tolerant nation that it portrays itself to be, steps in that direction are necessary.

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Notes

[1] This name, along with all of the other names of interviewees used in this paper, is a pseudonym.

[2] *Mestizo* is an identifier used to refer to a person who is either racially or culturally mixed. A person of indigenous descent, for example, who has acculturated to the dominant culture is a *mestizo*. A person who has both indigenous and Spanish ancestry is also a *mestizo*. In Fernanda's case, she is a person of primarily indigenous descent who has acculturated to dominant culture in Peru. She neither speaks an indigenous language nor wears indigenous clothes. Instead, she speaks Spanish and wears western clothes.

[3] My interviewees often used '*gente de color*' (people of color) as a euphemism for black people. I was taken aback by this term as I had not heard it before. Blacks in Peru were referred to as '*de color modesto*' in the 1950s (Ribeyro, 1994), so this may be a carry-over from that. Or, it may be a direct translation of the US-based 'people of color'. Probably, it is a combination of both.

[4] Limeños refers to people born and raised in Lima, the capital of Peru.

[5] There are no official statistics on the racial composition of Peru, as race has not been included in the Census since 1940. However, a reasonable estimate is that the population is 40 per cent *mestizo*; 40 per cent indigenous, and the remaining 20 per cent divided fairly evenly between blacks, Asians, whites, and others.

[6] Although published in 2005, this piece is based on fieldwork done in the early 1990s.

[7] This research is supplemented by research I have done on racial issues in Peru since 2000, including six months of interviewing Afro-Peruvians and ethnography in Lima in 2004.

[8] My role as an interviewer was one of an outsider. I have lived in Peru for several years and am fluent in Peruvian Spanish. However, I am a white woman from the USA, and this was evident to my interviewees. I was concerned that my outsider status would lead interviewees to be less open with me. To the contrary, in the interviews, I found that people were surprisingly candid with me both about their own views on race and the state of racial inequality in Peru. In some cases, the advantage of being an outsider is that people feel inclined to explain things more. As Mary Pattillo (1999) points out, as an insider, informants presume you already know certain things and do not bother to explain them. I also expected my interviewees to hold back on some of their ideas about racial inferiority to give off a good impression of themselves (Goffman, 1959). However, as will become evident in this article,

many of my interviewees expressed opinions that I found shocking. If they were engaging in impression management, it was not evident to me. As an anti-racist scholar, it was at times difficult for me to maintain good interview practices and not to express outrage at their views.

[9] As Anibal Quijano (1980) has argued, *cholos* are people of indigenous descent who no longer have close ties to highland indigenous communities. To put it simply, a *cholo* is an Indian who moves to the city.

[10] This idea of 'rhetorical devices' is drawn from Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's extensive work on how white Americans talk about racial differences and racism. Peruvians' invocations of these rhetorical devices are distinct, yet this is a useful theoretical tool for understanding Limeños' racial discourses.

[11] This translates roughly as 'Indian piece of shit'.

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