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**“Si No Vista La Paisana Jacinta No Tuviste Infancia:” Humor and Nostalgia in the
Acceptance of Peru’s Anti-Indian Media Portrayals**

In March of 2014 La Paisana Jacinta, the Peruvian comedy show that follows the life of an indigenous migrant women played by Jorge Benavides, returned to air at its prime-time slot on Frecuencia Latina. Banned in 2002 and again in 2005 for allegations of racism against the portrayal of Jacinta, the program’s main character, the network released a third season of La Paisana Jacinta this year. Despite the program’s tumultuous history and its denigrating depiction of indigenous migrants as dirty and stupid, La Paisana Jacinta was welcomed back to television with a 21 point rating, making it the third most popular show in Peru. Condemnation from the United Nations citing "a racist vision against indigenous peoples" led to the program’s censure again in August 2014. This article investigates not the censure of the program, which came from national and international sources, but the more curious phenomenon of its defense. La Paisana Jacinta was tolerated and well-received by an audience that has openly supported this program for 15 years. I analyzed YouTube comments posted below episodes of Frecuencia Latina’s 2014 publications of La Paisana Jacinta. As a measure of attitudes held by the fans of this program, I argue that the language fans used in their comments reflects the popular discourse surrounding race, racism and race relations that account for the show’s wide reception. I will analyze how the two principal forces revealed in the YouTube comments, nostalgia and parody, help to normalize a racist image of indigenous people in what is believed to be a colorblind society. This discourse is evidence of a wider discourse and ideology in contemporary Peruvian society that has historically oppressed indigenous people, especially since the 20th Century promotion of mestizaje by elites. This article demonstrates how contemporary Peruvian discourse reinforces the nationalist myth of mestizaje using the fans of La Paisana Jacinta as a case study.

A woman hobbles along the beach through the sand, burdened by a cooler in one hand. Clad in a purple *pollera*¹, a bright turquoises cardigan and long black braids, the woman's face comes into view revealing a man dressed in drag. A multicolored *manta*² is slung over her back and tied in a knot across her chest. Her skin has been darkened, her teeth have been blacked out, and a grotesque prosthetic nose adorns her face. When she speaks, shouting for beach-goers to buy her *sanguches de pollo*, her Spanish sounds whispery because of her Quechua accent. As she goes about her business, it is clear that her appearance, style of dress, occupation and accent define her every interaction with others. The people she encounters try to keep space between themselves and this woman, but when they are not successful they do not hide their disgust at her odor. These people also do little to hide the fact that they believe this woman is less smart than they are, questioning nearly everything she says or explaining simple things to her as they would to a child.

This woman is Jacinta, the main character of the popular and controversial Peruvian television show, *La Paisana Jacinta*. The show aired in the prime time slot on Frecuencia Latina³ in 1999, a comedic narrative that follows a clumsy, messy indigenous migrant who has recently moved to Lima. In March 2014 Frecuencia Latina released a new season of *La Paisana Jacinta* after cutting the previous season short nearly ten years prior because of allegations of racism from CHIRAPAQ⁴ and the Round-Table Conference against Racism of the National Coordinator of Human Rights.⁵ The show was cancelled again after a formal condemnation by

¹ Traditional hoop skirt worn by indigenous women of the Andes in Latin America

² Fabric that is typically

³ Frecuencia Latina is one of the top television stations in Peru, founded in 1983.

⁴ CHIRAPAQ: The Center for Indigenous Cultures of Peru

⁵ CHIRAPAQ, REOJIP, and CONACIP, "Racial Discrimination in the Peruvian Media: Case Study of the Comedy Show 'La Paisana Jacinta.'" (report presented at the 85th period of sessions

CHIRAPAQ before the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in August. Throughout its patchy 15-year broadcast history, *La Paisana Jacinta (LPJ)* was criticized by indigenous groups but was well received by the public of Peru. This year, audiences received the familiar program warmly for its nostalgic value and symbolism of national identity while discursively burying its highly discriminative portrayal of an indigenous migrant woman from the Andes. The rhetoric used by *LPJ*'s sizeable fan-base is a tangible cross-section of popular discourse in Peruvian society that works and has worked to maintain a social hierarchy that is fundamentally race-based but discursively discriminative on a cultural basis. The reception of *LPJ* by the 2014 Peruvian public is emblematic of the ideological devices that have replaced and continue to divulge popular notions of indigenous identities through the promotion of a unified national identity while suppressing indigenous peoples' rights through widely-accepted cultural discrimination.

In this article I explore the negative stereotypes assigned to indigenous people in contemporary Peru. Considering the program *La Paisana Jacinta*, I analyze the resilience of this stereotype in 2014 through popular discourse used to defend the show by its supporters on Youtube. First, using personal observations made from watching the show as well as a case study of the show presented by CHIRAPAQ to the United Nations, I evaluate the racist portrayal of indigenous people in *LPJ*. Next, I synthesize the voice of the general public of Peru: the public has come out in support of the program for its familiarity and its humor, and has consistently accepted, defended this form cultural discrimination in the media, all of which continues to oppress indigenous peoples. Based on my analysis of the discourse used by a more specific cross-section of *LPJ*'s fan base – YouTube users – I argue that the show's depictions of

of The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Geneva, Switzerland, August 11-29, 2014), 5.

indigenous women work to naturalize a racist discourse through two primary mechanisms, nostalgia and parody.

The Negative Portrayal of Indigenous People in *La Paisana Jacinta*

Strong ties between race and culture in Peruvian society explain why many of Jacinta's most ardent fans will claim that *LPJ* is not a racist program. Their arguments fall into line with dominant understandings of race in Peru, where people tend to practice a form of "racism without race"⁶ meaning that discrimination is based on cultural differences rather than racial ones. Though cultural differences often distinguish groups along the same lines of racial differences, cultural differences are understood as being less intrinsic than race differences. "In racism, unlike other forms of social hierarchy, differences are naturalized, that is to say, they are seen and postulated as essential and unsurpassable."⁷ The denigrated identity assigned to Jacinta in *LPJ* is derived from commonly held stereotypes of indigenous people in Peru, not merely an interpretation of Andean migrant culture.

Jacinta's every encounter with other people in the show is colored by the fact that she is "the other" and the baggage that comes with such an identity weighs down her interactions. Jacinta is a migrant woman so – at least within the context of this show – that means she is constantly in need of work. Though she has few skills, is extremely clumsy and is a *paisana*,⁸ Jacinta is a *pendeja*⁹ and manages to find odd jobs or trick her way out of bad situations in every

⁶ Virginia Zavala and Roberto Zariquiey. "I Segregate You Because Your Lack of Education Offends Me: An Approach to Racist Discourse in Contemporary Peru." In *Racism and Discourse in Latin America*, 251-90. English ed. (Lexington: Lexington Publishers, 2013), 285.

⁷ Gonzalo Portocarrero, "Introduccion," en *Racismo y mestizaje y otros ensayos*, 13-29, (Lima: Fondo Editorial del Congreso del Peru, 2007), 13. [originally in Spanish, translated by me]

⁸ *paisano/a*: a person from the countryside; a peasant

⁹ In Mexico and other Latin American countries *pendejo/a* means "asshole" or "idiot" and is used as an insult. In Peru, it has taken on a nuanced meaning that comes out of the "vivacity" and

episode. In order to understand the show's frivolous plot lines, however, it must first be understood by the viewer that Jacinta is inherently an underdog working to come out on top in every situation. That is to say, Jacinta's identity as an indigenous, migrant woman from the Andes living in the Peruvian capital of Lima – not to mention her dirty appearance, Quechua accent, and backwards philosophies on life – constitute the show's plot, which would otherwise be nothing more than a woman living her life.

The fact that Jacinta's identity discriminates against indigenous, migrants from the Andes is corroborated by the report presented by CHIRAPAQ to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. "*La Paisana Jacinta* is built around features that, according to different studies aimed at highlighting the social imagery that predominates in Peru, have been identified with indigenous peoples: among other characteristics displayed, she is ignorant, dirty, clumsy, unreliable, governed by primary instincts, and has little control over her emotions."¹⁰ In less kind words, CHIRAPAQ found the character Jacinta to be based on offensive stereotypes of indigenous women that are widely held by Peruvians. Although popular understandings of race in Peru indicate that "race" has ostensibly been removed from "racism" in the country and discrimination generally stereotypes people based on cultural differences,¹¹ it is clear that the stereotypes presented in *LPJ*, while certainly pertaining to notions of Andean culture, are exclusively assigned to people of indigenous race.

Peru's Favorite *Pendeja*: Jacinta's Wide Acceptance by the Public

"craftiness" of the *criollo*, migrants who moved to Lima in the '80s and '90s and who, in the face of adverse situations, made a living through their charisma, cleverness and trickery. *Pendejo/a* is often used to refer to someone who is "clever" and "resilient," someone who is "lively" and able to make the best of a bad situation. It is in many ways the embodiment of the migrant spirit in Lima

¹⁰ CHIRAPAQ, REOJIP, and CONACIP, "Racial Discrimination in the Peruvian Media," 7.

¹¹ Zavala and Zariquiey, "I Segregate You Because Your Lack of Education Offends Me," 285.

Although the CHIRAPAQ case study is useful as a formal condemnation of *LPJ* and confirms that the show uses discriminatory stereotypes to present a racist image of indigenous people, it makes one claim that my research and experience contradicts. The Shadow Report claims that after *LPJ*'s brief broadcast in 2005, the show returned in 2014 "to the surprise and rejection of the majority of society..."¹² My research indicates just the opposite. In reality, it is *La Paisana Jacinta*'s predominantly tolerant and even receptive audience that makes the show such an important lens through which to study race relations and discourse in contemporary Peru.

I was living in Lima, the capital city of Peru and setting of *La Paisana Jacinta*, when the program returned to airwaves on March 10, 2014. Images of the brightly dressed character were plastered around the city and her infamous cries of "Na Na Na Na!" blared from televisions everywhere. The ancient T.V. perched atop the refrigerator in my host family's small kitchen was no exception. It was there I encountered *La Paisana Jacinta* for the first time as she elicited uncontrollable giggles from my host family's *empleada* Eslanda, a live-in domestic worker of my same age. By this time I had seen Jacinta in my travels around Lima. I had also heard about Jacinta, her return striking the nerves of my new Peruvian friends at Pontificia Universidad Católica del Peru. Still, when I looked up from my arroz con pollo to see what it was that Esli was laughing so hard at, I remember being struck by how overtly offensive the show was. I wholly anticipated that the criticism of the show I had heard at La Católica was more of a reflection of my new friends' astute observations about racism in their society rather than such an obvious statement of fact. Instead, I saw an overtly offensive depiction of the same migrant women who sold me *chifles* on the corner and knick-knacks in the Centro de Lima on national,

¹² CHIRAPAQ, REOJIP, and CONACIP, "Racial Discrimination in the Peruvian Media," 5.

Peruvian television. In this section, I will describe the immense show of support offered by the Peruvian public for *La Paisana Jacinta*, even in the face of its ostensibly racist content and two formal recommendations for the show's dismissal in 2005 and again in the summer of 2014.

Indicators of *La Paisana Jacinta*'s popularity among much of the Peruvian public range from the media's reception of the show to comments made by fans in online discussion forums. On a fundamental level, the show was a cash cow for its popular television channel host, Frecuencia Latina. Throughout the show's at times bumpy, 15-year broadcast history, advertisers never pulled their funding of the channel, especially when the show held its primetime weekday-evenings slot. Nor was there a massive rejection of the show's return to airwaves in 2014 as CHIRAPAQ claims in its report, rather the opposite. March headlines in Peru's top newspapers boasted rave reviews for Jacinta. The show received a 21-point ranking, naming it the third most popular television show in Peru. Until the United Nations made its official ruling, the media painted Jacinta's third season to be well received by the masses.

Once the new wave of racist allegations began to surface, as indigenous Congresswoman Hilaria Supa became the face of the show's opposition in the Peruvian Government, the media quickly revoked support for *LPJ*. In June Colgate was the first brand to withdraw advertising for *LPJ* after receiving a letter at its United States headquarters about the show's racial discrimination. In August, the United Nations CERD met in Geneva and CHIRAPAQ presented the Shadow Report formally rebuking the show and the Peruvian Government's negligence with regard to regulating racial discrimination in the media. By September, *La Paisana Jacinta* was completely off of television, but Frecuencia Latina was quick to satiate dissatisfied fans, posting every episode of the new season to their official Youtube channel. It is clear that Frecuencia Latina removed the show from television more as a response to political pressures than as a

result of demands made by the “majority of society.” Considering that one would be hard-pressed to find public support of the show after such polarizing allegations had been brought against it (though some do exist and I will address those later), I turned to Youtube comments to understand the ways in which some fans of *La Paisana Jacinta* express support for the character and defend the program as non-racist.

In collecting qualitative data for this section of my article, my role was that of the invisible observer in the public forum that is the Internet. My data is drawn from comments posted about 13 episodes of *La Paisana Jacinta* published by the official Frecuencia Latina Youtube channel and a channel called “Tendencias Peru” between March and May of 2014. I also draw on comments from one episode from November of 2013 posted by a Youtube channel called “LaPaisanaJacintaTV.” The average views per episode in my data set is 316,465 with the average number of “likes” per episode outnumbering “dislikes” at a ratio of nearly 6:1. The episodes I studied received an average of 106 comments, with the majority falling into the category of positive affirmations about the show and a smaller amount falling into the category of debate about the show’s racist nature. In sum, the users who commented in my data set represent a section of the general public that almost unanimously supports *La Paisana Jacinta* and, as I will demonstrate, were willing to publicly affirm their support for the show and even defend it when other users posted accusatory comments.

It is important to study the comments made by these YouTube users because they are representative of a significant portion of society that the CHIRAPAQ report did not realistically account for. The discourse used by these users is especially relevant, as Peru looks for ground-up solutions to its racial discrimination problem beyond the very top-down solution of banning *LPJ* from national television. Popular discourse in Peru has oppressed indigenous peoples in a way

that denies their identity through notions of citizenship, equality, and mestizaje.¹³ These notions systematically eliminate racial identifications within the general population and give way to “cultural” discrimination, which is more acceptable but achieves the same goal.¹⁴ The discourse used by *LPJ* fans on YouTube demonstrates the process by which Jacinta’s denigrated representation of indigenous women is naturalized for viewers through mechanisms of nostalgia and humorous parody.

“Si no viste La Paisana Jacinta, no tuviste infancia” [If you didn’t see La Paisana Jacinta, you didn’t have a childhood:] Assigning Nostalgia to Racism

One line of argument seen in the comments falls into the category of users expressing support for the show for its nostalgic value and their familiarity with its character. Indeed, as the show first aired back in 1999, with three non-consecutive seasons in the past 15 years and various periods of time when reruns ran on television between new seasons, many people have been raised watching the show. Users that support the show for its nostalgia and familiarity discursively naturalize racial discrimination against indigenous people because they have assigned sentimental value to the program and also grown up with its offensive stereotypes.

Viewers who strongly associate *LPJ* with their upbringing characterize the first element of this kind of support. The majority of their comments consist of exclamations like, “*my childhood!*” indicating a certain element of nostalgia towards the show and the character Jacinta. The following users exemplify the kind of fans who grew up with the show:

villero85 7 months ago que chvr!! que recuerdos!! creci viendo la paisana jacinta, ojala que hagan muchos capitulos_

¹³ *Mestizaje*, the biological and cultural encounter and mixing of different ethnic/racial groups. This is a term used in most of Latin America to describe the racial fusion that created today’s distinct population demographics.

¹⁴ Zavala and Zariquiey, “I Segregate You Because Your Lack of Education Offends Me,” 268.

How great! What memories! I grew up watching la paisana jacinta, hopefully they will make many episodes¹⁵

SevenProducciones 7 months ago Mi infanciaaaa csm!. Me cague de la risa !!_

My childhooddddd son-of-a-bitch! I'm shitting laughter!

bebachi vargas bocanegra 7 months ago gracias por revivir nuestra infancia !

thanks for reviving our childhood!

Comments like these demonstrate that a certain section of Peruvian society has assigned sentimental value to the show through associations with their childhood. This sentimentality renders *LPJ's* racist depictions of indigenous women naturalized within this group of fans as the show now represents far more than the humorous storylines it presents.

The second element of this kind of support is illustrated by comments regarding *LPJ's* familiarity within the Peruvian household. *LPJ's* long broadcast history, though tumultuous at times, has produced a generation of fans who first watched the show in their youth and now continue to watch it, over a decade later. *LPJ's* resilient presence in the public domain also naturalizes the show's discrimination, which has inevitably informed the assumptions held by many Peruvian millennials about indigenous, migrant women. One woman commended the show for its ability to bring her two sons together despite their age difference of almost ten years:

rita herrera 7 months ago Que lindo! mi hijo que ahora tiene 22 años y trabaja Economista de G&M ahora viene corriendo a ver a Jacnta y se sigue riendo a carcajadas y ahora tambien mi hijo de 13 lo acompaña, Gracias cholita, mantienes la familia unida!_ *How cute! My son who is now 22 years old and works as an economist for G&M now comes running to see Jacinta and he's still laughing out loud and now my son who is 13 also joins him. Thanks cholita, you keep the family together!*

This fan makes no reference to the show's content other than its comedic element and focuses on its symbolic value and the resilience of its appeal to all ages. This sector of *LPJ's* fan base celebrates the show for its symbolic meaning. Now 15 years old, the show is to many Peruvians what shows like *Friends* and movies like *Toy Story* are to millennials from the United States.

¹⁵ All translations were made by this article's author unless otherwise specified

The value of shows from one's childhood becomes detached from actual program-content and more attached to the nostalgia they elicit in long-time fans.

The media in Latin America, especially in the past century, has always struggled with the task of representing the region's diverse places and peoples. On television, white people play roles in romantic or melodramatic productions while indigenous people are primarily cast in comedic roles¹⁶ or they are cast as "marginal, delinquent or subversive."¹⁷ That the image of indigenous people presented by *LPJ* has become a familiar one within the households of many Peruvians reinforces notions that this identity is an undesirable one that migrants must work to shed upon their arrival to the country's capital. However, the nostalgia that viewers have for *LPJ*'s racist characterization of indigenous women comes from more than Jacinta's long presence on Peruvian television.

Van Dijk attributes the late emergence of an academic, anti-racist discourse to several reasons including myths of "racial democracy" in countries like Venezuela and Brazil, the deeply-rooted association between social inequality and class, and a focus on "ethnic" characteristics of nonwhites instead of the real-life manifestations of racism perpetrated by whites. However, viewers' acceptance and nostalgia for *LPJ* is representative of a more general reason that the fight against racism was slow to emerge in Latin America. "The inequalities in daily interactions with indigenous and black people in traditional societies in which all groups had their own place and [their] role appeared to be 'natural,' and the idea of racist domination

¹⁶ Celia Aldana- Duran, "The Media in Peru: The Challenge of Creating a Constructive Democracy," in *The Media in Latin America*, 179-190, ed. Jairo Lugo-Ocando. (Glasgow: Open University Press, 2008), 186.

¹⁷ Wilfredo Ardito Vega, "Hacia los afroperuanos en los medios de comunicacion," en *Mira como ves: Racismo y estereotipos etnicos en los medios de comunicacion*, 103-106, ed. Lillia Mayorga Balcazar, (Lima: Centro de Desarrollo Etnico, 2010), 103

was often – and is still frequently seen today – as a preposterous accusation.”¹⁸ For centuries, race-based stereotypes that discriminate against nonwhites have been almost subliminal within the fabric of society resulting from colonial legacies of social hierarchies based on “natural” racial differences. When viewers assign nostalgic-value to the character Jacinta, *LPJ* becomes more than just a symbol of their childhood. *La Paisana Jacinta* also elicits nostalgia for the time before the emergence of anti-racist academia problematized the “natural” hierarchy of inferiority based on racist stereotypes that cast blacks and indigenous as the most inferior race.

Indeed, even within the show’s decade and a half long lifespan, the policing of racism in the Peruvian media has increased substantially with the growth of the indigenous population’s representation in civil society. Major demographic changes since the 1950s have been marked by Peru’s transformation from a largely rural country to one that is highly urbanized. This shift facilitated the mixing of rural, indigenous peoples with white urbanites and the country became more *mestiza*, racially mixed.¹⁹ Increased interactions between city-dwellers and the populations they previously understood solely through racist stereotypes has forced whites to confront the realities of indigenous livelihoods in Peru’s highly unequal society. “During the last decades, the media have incorporated languages, music and topics that are more diverse, including a better representation of the diversity of the country, and especially in Lima.”²⁰ Today, increased exposure of indigenous culture in urban society as well as in the media challenge the offensive stereotypes that were once widely unchallenged. More than sentimentality for childhood, *LPJ* represents for many Peruvians nostalgia for the “natural” order of society that characterized

¹⁸ Teun A. Van Dijk, “Racism and Discourse in Latin America: An Introduction,” in *Racism and Discourse in Latin America*, 1-13, (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009), 3.

¹⁹ Aldana- Duran, “The Media in Peru,” 185.

²⁰ Aldana-Duran, “The Media in Peru,” 186

indigenous people as the most inferior group based on widely held assumptions about their appearance, intelligence and culture.

“Esto es sólo una parodia nada más” [This is just a parody, nothing more]: Disguising Racism With Cultural Parody and Humor

The acceptance of racist portrayals of indigenous people in the Peruvian media is facilitated by cultural parody and humor. When racism is carried out in the context of comedy, it is more-easily written off as fictional entertainment that, therefore, does not offend. In the YouTube comments made by fans of *La Paisana Jacinta*, users often defend the show with claims that it is just fiction. These comments deny the fact - which actor Jorge Benavides admits to - that the character Jacinta is based on an actual *paisana* whom Benavides used to know and who inspired him to create this character. In denying this truth, claims that the show is fictional also deny the real-world existence of the stereotypes presented by Benavides’ portrayal of this indigenous, migrant woman. When users employ this line of defense, they do so as if the label of “fiction” can absolve the subject of its ability to offend. Here is an example of such a comment:

Gouu D 7 months ago es un programa para entretener ala gente no discriminator todo es ficcion _
this is a program to entertain the people not discriminator everything is fiction

Users that argue *LPJ* is “just fiction” imply that because the show is a form of fictional entertainment, it should not be viewed so critically. While this argument hardly constitutes dismissal of the show’s racist elements, it at least demonstrates that these users believe it is important to deny that the show is meant to discriminate against any real-world identity. These users acknowledge that racial discrimination is not acceptable so they make the claim that *LPJ* is fiction to separate it from this association.

A similar line of argument, however, fully acknowledges the origins of the show, admitting that it is indeed a parody of Andean women. Like the users who defend the show's acceptability because it is a work of fiction, these users find the show acceptable because it is just a *parody*²¹ of the Andean women.

renzo leon gallardo 4 months ago Oye Mestiza Andina acá nadie está discriminando a la mujer andina; si no, esto es sólo una parodia nada más
Hey Mestiza Andina [a user who made an earlier comment about the show's discrimination] here no one is discriminating against the andean woman; rather, this is only a parody, nothing more

The claim, made in defense of *LPJ*, that the show is just a parody of Andean women underscores the acceptability of cultural discrimination in Peruvian and much of Latin American society. Here, it is important to mention that users who employ this form of defense do not say that the show is a parody of “indias” or “mujeres indígenas,” rather they say “mujeres andinas” which has cultural, not racial, connotations. This is a general trend in the racial discourse in Peru and Latin America as a whole, where racial segregation was never legalized and has therefore been historically less explicit than in the United States, where racism was legal and violent. In Peru, hierarchies of power have therefore been maintained through cultural discrimination as opposed to racial discrimination.²²

The use of “parody” as a defense in the face of the controversial presentation of indigenous women in *LPJ* also speaks to the power that humor has to soften racism.²³ Subjects

²¹ For the purpose of this article, “parody” is understood to mean what “parodia” means in Spanish; an imitation of someone or something made as a joke. This is in slight contrast to the English word’s meaning, which specifies that the imitation is of an individual’s artistic style or specific body of work

²² Marisol de la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919-1991*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) 22; Van Dijk, “Racism and Discourse in Latin America,” 3.

²³ Christina A. Sue and Tanya Golash-Boza, “‘It Was Only a Joke:’ How Racial Humour Fuels Colour-Blind Ideologies in Mexico and Peru,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36 [2013]: 1593

that may otherwise be considered impolite and issues that have become naturalized within society, like racial differences and racism, are more easily addressed through the use of humor mechanisms like parody.²⁴ Sue and Golash-Boza find that when many Peruvians speak about racism and racial differences they will firstly declare they are not racist and then go on to make offensive comments in playful tones with the implication that they are joking. It has also been found that victims of racist humor will feel pressure to “go along” with the situation because of the way racism has become naturalized within Peruvian society.²⁵ Viewers react to *LPJ* in a way that conforms to Peruvian social norms, which dictate that objection to comedy and jokes is not accepted. “These responses then signal or imply an acceptance of the humour, conveying a message that it is unproblematic, which then legitimizes and encourages the continued use of such humour.”²⁶ The user above explains that the denigrating image of Jacinta turning heads everywhere that she stumbles is “nothing more” than a parody, implying that it is something slight and easily brushed-off or ignored. The light-hearted and lovable nature of Jorge Benavides’ comedic portrayal of Jacinta in *LPJ* naturalizes racism in Peruvian society, a process that is manifest in the YouTube comments fans make about the show.

Self-identification and Indigenous Peruvians Distancing Themselves from the “the parody” in La Paisana Jacinta

In Peru, one’s culture is understood as something that can be changed while one’s race is understood as essential. This distinction has historically and systematically stymied indigenous groups from organizing around a shared identity. There was even a trend in the second half of the twentieth century, inspired by political corporatist notions of citizenship, for indigenous people

²⁴ Donna Goldstein, *Laughter out of Place: Race, Class, Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), 10.

²⁵ Sue and Golash-Boza, “It Was Only a Joke,” 1589

²⁶ *Ibid*, 1595.

to identify as peasants instead of indians.²⁷ Now, while it is still a far cry from fiction, racial identity in Peru is understood as something that is transient as well; depending on the context a person finds herself in. Within her family, someone may be “blanca” because her skin is lighter than her parents and siblings, but at school she is “chola” because she the most indigenous of all her friends.²⁸

This helps to understand how it could be that indigenous people would come out in support of *LPJ*. Situational identity formation leads individuals to define themselves in relation to others and therefore many indigenous people who have assimilated, disassociate with the character Jacinta. In some cases, this has even led indigenous people to come out in support of the show; various YouTube users were sure to mention what part of Peru they are from and these users were usually from migrant communities outside of Lima or rural parts of the country where migrants generally come from. In doing so, these supporters distance themselves from Jacinta’s undesirable backwardness claiming that she is a fictional character and not a representation of them, therefore they are not offended.

Here is a comment in which the user expresses his love for the show and also mentions that he is from Villa el Salvador, one of the *pueblos jóvenes*²⁹ on the outskirts of Lima that is home to a large majority of migrants who fled to the city from the Andes during the 1980’s and 1990’s.

david osorio 7 months ago ES LO MAXIMO LA PAISANA JACINTA :) SIGUE ASI CON LOS NUEVOS CAPITULOS ESTAN CHEVERES AQUI EN VILLA EL SALVADOR NO NOS PERDEMOS TUS CAPITULOS ;)_

²⁷ Deborah J. Yashar, “Contesting Citizenship: Indigenous Movements and Democracy in Latin America,” *Comparative Politics* 21 [1998]: 26-27

²⁸ Portocarrero, “Introduccion,” 16-17.

²⁹ *Pueblos jóvenes*: “young towns” – the communities that formed on the outskirts of major Peruvian cities during rapid urbanization in the second half of the twentieth century, commonly referred to as “shantytowns” in English.

LA PAISANA JACINTA IS THE BEST! KEEP IT UP WITH THE NEW EPISODES THEY ARE AWESOME HERE IN VILLA EL SALVADOR WE DON'T MISS YOUR EPISODES ;)

This comment exemplifies many fans' desire to show that *LPJ* is even loved by people in poorer areas. Then there are the affirmations of support for *LPJ* made by two famous, indigenous entertainers in Peru, who claim that the show is fictional and does not offend them. Actress Magaly Solier took a public stand in support of *LPJ* saying, as YouTube users did, that the show is fictional and therefore she does not take offense to it as an indigenous woman:

“Hay que tener claro que una cosa es la ficción y otra la realidad, y ‘La paisana Jacinta’, es ficción, una actuación, porque la mujer del Ande no es así. Soy una mujer andina, y no soy así. Es ficción, el arte es así”

“You have to be clear that fiction is one thing and reality is another and ‘La Paisana Jacinta’ is fiction, an act, because the woman of the Andes is not this way. I am an Andean woman, and I am not this way. It is fiction, art is this way.”

Solier is from Ayacucho, the rural province in Southern Peru from which many of Lima's migrant population fled during the country's violent conflict. “I am an Andean woman, and I am not this way” is the way in which Solier attempts to debunk the claim that *LPJ* is based on nonfictional stereotypes and is discriminative against indigenous women. However, instead of indicating the harmlessness of *LPJ*'s portrayal of these women, Solier's comment falls into line with those of YouTube users and the general ideology in Peru that identities are transient and contextual; Solier is *less* indigenous, *more* mestiza than Jacinta and therefore separates herself from the character. It is in this way that she is able to come out in support of the program; rather than criticize it for denigrating her race she discursively disguises the show's offensive elements as fictional.

Racism and a discriminatory racialist discourse hold institutionalized positions in Peruvian society. In reading the YouTube comments of *LPJ* fans two major mechanisms by which racist discourse is naturalized by the show, nostalgia and comedic parody. Viewers have

nostalgia for the character and her representation of simplistic, historically accepted and denigrating images of Andean women and indigenous, Peruvian identity. This nostalgia overpowers the discriminatory nature of *LPJ* because Jacinta's offensive value has been replaced with sentimental value and familiarity for certain segments of society. For the generation of Peruvians that became accustomed to Jacinta on *Frecuencia Latina*, the millennials and generation y, an offensive image of indigenous, migrant women that has been historically naturalized for centuries has been reinforced de nuevo. The portrayal of Jacinta the peasant is couched in humor and light-heartedness that makes the show's offensiveness acceptable and often dismissible. The show's comedic nature naturalizes the racism that viewers feel nostalgia for after all these years of watching *LPJ* and so many centuries that have reinforced the racist stereotypes Benavides' Jacinta is based on.

Conclusion: "En Peru, el que no tiene de inga tiene de mandinga,"³⁰ Racism as National Patrimony

Nostalgia and comedic parody are two mechanisms that facilitate the process of naturalizing racism and derogatory stereotypes of nonwhites in Peru. The result of this process of naturalization is society's co-option of *LPJ*, specifically the character Jacinta, as a symbol of nationalism. Fans express notions of national identity and multiculturalism against claims of discrimination in YouTube discussion about *LPJ*. The show's offensive, racist content, naturalized by the above mechanisms, becomes instead a celebration of Peruvian diversity. When considering the perception that viewers have of *LPJ*, it is important to keep in mind the weight that the show carries as a representation of nation for the general Peruvian population. That is to

³⁰ "In Peru, he who has no Incan ancestors has black ones," Popular saying in Peru that reflects the country's *mestizo* national identity (Van Dijk, "Racist Discourse in Contemporary Peru," 266).

say, the depictions presented by this show influence the attitudes and perceptions that Peruvians have of their own country and countrymen; especially their perceptions of indigenous migrants in the country's capital and their ability to survive. Generally, representation of indigenous people on Peruvian national television has been marginal, and when representative programming does make it on air, it lacks positive, political influence. In fact, there is a history of the image of indigenous people being exploited in the media by political figures who went on to oppress rural populations.³¹ In my concluding remarks about how *LPJ* naturalizes racism in Peru I assert that the image of Jacinta has come to represent national pride and Peruvian identity for many of her fans.

YouTube users argue that *LPJ* is essentially Peruvian and therefore valuable as a symbol of national identity. Peruvians take pride in the image of the peasant and the humor incorporated in that image³² as esoteric elements of the show. These elements that are considered representative of Peru and Peruvian culture, are celebrated in the international forum of YouTube. Many users make the claim that *LPJ* is an example of Peruvian humor and to accuse this humor of being discriminatory or racist is to challenge what it means to be Peruvian.

Jair Valdez 1 month ago para los que no saben esto es el humor peruano y si no les gusta que pena y like y me subscribo_
For those who don't know this is Peruvian humor and if you don't like it what a pain and like and subscribe to me

julio antonio rojas basagoitia 1 month ago es una sátira una exageración no lo hacen de mala fe pero porque no nos podemos apoyar debemos defender el humor peruano...el Perú es multicultural porque ocultarlo_
[La Paisana Jacinta] is a satire, an exaggeration they do not do it in bad faith but because we are not able to support we should defend the Peruvian humor...Peru is multicultural why hide it

³¹ Aldana-Duran, "The Media in Peru," 186.

³² Sue and Golash-Boza, "It Was Only a Joke," 1589.

These comments and other of their nature make the claim that Peruvian humor is unique and cannot be understood by outside parties like the United Nations. Since racism is so well-integrated into Peruvians' understandings of the humor in their country, defending a show against claims of racism is merely a matter of making clear that the show is meant to be humorous with its benign framing.³³

Another way YouTube comments demonstrate the tendency of some Peruvians to assign national pride to the image of Jacinta is in users' comparisons of *LPJ* and other popular television shows they call "less Peruvian." Namely, the shows that fans most frequently compare *LPJ* to are *Esto es Guerra* and *Combate*. Both of these programs are extremely popular, reality game shows in which young, attractive athletes in minimal clothing compete against one another to complete ridiculous tests of physical strength and agility. Fans of *LPJ* often comment that if discrimination in the media is the UN's concern, they ought to go after shows like these for the unrealistic images they present regarding body image and sexuality.

Andrewz Diago 7 months ago CREO QUE LA PAISANA JACINTA ES ALGO QUE ES MUY GRACIOSOS ME GUSTA ESTE PROGRAMA ES SUPER ES ALGO DEL PERUIGUAL DEBE DE SER LA DE GRAN SINTONIA Y NO DE LOS PITUCOS Y EXTRANJEROS DE COMBATE Y ESTO ES GUERRA..PONEN A PITUQUITOS SEXUALES HACEN COSAS HORRIBLES QUE NO DEJAN ENSEÑANAZA A LOS MAS NIÑOS Y NUNCA TE ARIAN UN ACTO D ECARIDAD A GENTE POBRE SI NO TEIEN CAMARA..A ESOS SAQUENLOS DEL AIRE.
I THINK THAT LA PAISANA JACINTA IS SOMETHING THAT IS VERY FUNNIES I LIKE THIS PROGRAM IT IS SUPER IT IS SOMETHING FROM PERU...LIKewise [THE PROGRAM] SHOULD BE OF THE GENERAL AUDIENCE AND NOT OF THE RICH PEOPLE AND THE FOREIGNERS ON COMBATE AND ESTO ES GUERRA...THEY HAVE LITTLE, SEXUAL RICH PEOPLE DO HORRIBLE THINGS THAT DO NOT LEAVE LESSONS FOR THE CHILDREN AND NEVER [SHOW] YOU AN ACT OF CHARITY TO THE POOR PEOPLE IF THEY DON'T HAVE A CAMERA...THESE SHOWS SHOULD BE TAKEN OF AIR

³³ Ibid, 1595.

This comment, and others like it, claim that *LPJ* is better than shows like *Esto es Guerra* and *Combate* because it is about poor people; real people. This line of argument brings in an element of national identity and representation in the media that has been historically utilized to mask racism. Notions of *mestizaje* are used discursively to conceal differences between races and unify multicultural populations. Zavala argues that the national identity of “mestizo” is understood as being unmarked, and is adopted by the general population: “...to be *mestizo* means to not be anything, as *mestizaje* is vague, and we Peruvians find it very difficult to define ourselves racially, unless we are white.”³⁴ In other words, unless you can definitively say that you are white, in Peru everyone is mestizo. With this in mind, we can understand why YouTube users would make the claim that *LPJ* is more Peruvian than shows like *Esto es Guerra* and *Combate*, which notoriously feature majority white participants, presumably of affluent origins.

Finally, Jacinta is co-opted as symbolic of national patrimony for her ability to be a “pendeja,” a term that masks the inequality she faces in the show just as it masks inequality for indigenous peasant in Peruvian society. Jacinta is the quintessential pendeja as she finds herself in difficult situations in every episode but always manages to escape or turn the tables on her adversaries to come out on top. Many YouTube users make comments that commend Jacinta for her cleverness and trickery, defending the show as an illustration of the fact that anyone in Peru can make it if they are a pendejo/a. The following comments demonstrate this argument:

Rubén Vilca 4 months ago Perú, el país donde todos "se la quieren pasar de pendejo".
Peru, the country where everyone "who wants to can pass as a pendejo"
Kimberly Cordova 8 months ago Jajajaja te pasas jacinta eres una pendeja
Hahahaha you've out-done yourself jacinta you're a pendeja

This line of argument, that anyone can succeed if they are clever – even a peasant like Jacinta – masks the reality of the great inequalities that face many people in Peru, especially indigenous

³⁴ Zavala and Zariquiey, “I Segregate You Because Your Lack of Education Offends Me,” 266.

women. The best comparison I can make to the idea of the “pendejo” in Peru is the idea that is popular in the United States that anyone “can achieve the American Dream.” Both ideologies propose that everyone has the same opportunity to succeed and one need only to be a “pendejo” or “pull themselves up by their bootstraps” to do so. The fact that Jacinta always comes out on top at the end of each episode re-affirms and disseminates this problematic ideology to the masses, obscuring institutional inequalities that work to oppress indigenous people in Peru.

Historical legacies of power in Peru reflect social hierarchies first established along the lines of race in the Colonial Period. Though power relations have not changed within this structure, with Peruvians of indigenous and African descent snugly at the bottom and white Peruvians reigning at the top, the language used to maintain this structure shifted slightly since the time of the Spanish. Since the turn of the twentieth century, understandings of race, racism and race relations in Peru have been directly tied to understandings of culture, assimilation and mestizaje. Cultural distinctions replaced racial distinctions, ideologically, as grounds for discrimination. By never formally recognizing race-based inferiorities, twentieth century Peruvian elites could promote the idea of racial mixing without fears of creating worse races. This ideology gave way to notions of cultural, rather than racial, discrimination and the need for assimilation. One’s (cultural) inferiority is a condition that can be changed through racial mixing and assimilation rather than a scientific characteristic, like racial inferiority. Based on data drawn from public comments made by Peruvians in defense of *LPJ*, I argue that the process that naturalized discriminatory, racist images of indigenous people is facilitated by the show’s nostalgic and comedic value. That racism has been naturalized for *LPJ* fans is manifest in their claims that the image of Jacinta on national television is one that should be celebrated as indicative of a multicultural and inclusive Peru.

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