

Navigating a Societal Paradox: Racism and Narratives of National Identity in Argentina's Social Network X

Carmen Pereyra

Abstract *Towards the end of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, when Argentina had already secured a place in the quarter-finals, The Washington Post published an article with the headline “Why doesn’t Argentina have more Black players?” For weeks, Argentine Twitter users went from direct attacks on the author of the article – mostly accusing her of being ignorant of Argentina’s racial reality, denying the prevailing “White Narrative” that the article sought to point out – to sarcastic mockery and finally to the accusation of academic colonialism. In this chapter I analyse the arguments put forward in response to the above-mentioned newspaper article and explain the main narratives depicted. The study interprets, reconstructs, and explains the overarching narratives present in the responses, unveiling, I argue, a societal paradox; ‘Argentine society’, as reflected in this discourse, perceives itself as post-migratory and post-race, while simultaneously perpetuating a racist and colonial imaginary through the enduring myth of the ‘crisol de razas’ (melting pot). This study contributes not only to a broader understanding of racism in Argentina, but more specifically to national cultural perspectives on dealing with racism, especially within the social network X. It also serves as a testament to the influence of social network dynamics on our processes of knowledge acquisition, discussion and opinion formation.*

Introduction

The article titled “Why doesn’t Argentina have more Black players in the World Cup?” authored by the African-American researcher Erika Denise Edwards was published on 8 December 2022 by the US newspaper, *The Washington Post* (Edwards, 2022). The newspaper’s Twitter/X account shared the online article on 9 December, prompting a great number of reactions from its followers. Most Argentinian Twitter/X users reacted mainly to the title of the article and even ignored the tagline (See Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: The title of the article received most of the attention while people ignored the tagline and the author's research background. Screenshot 4 June 2023

Why doesn't Argentina have more Black players in the World Cup?

Argentina is far more diverse than many people realize — but the myth that it is a White nation has persisted



Perspective by Erika Denise Edwards

Erika Denise Edwards is the author of the award-winning book *"Hiding in Plain Sight: Black Women, the Law and the Making of a White Argentine Republic"* and an associate professor at the University of Texas at El Paso.

December 8, 2022 at 6:00 a.m. EST

In the article, Edwards explores the lack of representation of Black players in Argentina's national football team, especially in contrast to other South American countries, such as Brazil. The author argues that this lack of representation is a result of a history of Black erasure at the heart of the country's self-definition, which has been perpetuated by several myths that try to explain the lack of Black Argentines (with only 149,493 people being identified as Black in Argentina's 2010 census).

The article outlines prevalent myths Argentines use to justify this absence: That Black men were used as "cannon fodder" in 19th century wars; that the high death toll of Black men caused Black women to form relationships with European men; and, finally, the belief that diseases, particularly yellow fever, disproportionately killed off the Black population. Edwards contends that Argentina historically had a significant Black population, including enslaved people, their descendants, and immigrants, with records indicating that one-third of Argentina's population was Black by the end of the 18th century. She argues that political leaders, such as former president Domingo Faustino Sarmiento and Juan Bautista Alberdi, worked to associate national identity with European heritage and promoted White European immigration, even amending the constitution to favour it.

Between 1860 and 1914, thousands of European immigrants transformed Argentina's landscape. Many Black and Indigenous (*Pueblos Originarios*) began to identify as White or adopted ambiguous ethnic categories to dissociate themselves from Blackness. Edwards assures us, finally, that despite this (narrative) erasure, Argentina's Black population remains and has been growing with African immigrants and their descendants, as well as other African descendants from Latin American countries seeking economic opportunities. The article concludes with a remark: "Argentina's soccer team may not include people of African descent, but it's not a 'White' team either."

The purpose of this paper is not to assess the quality or the arguments of the article in question, but rather to examine the reaction of Argentine Twitter to it. However, in order to demarcate the object of this study, it is necessary to highlight that

the article, despite being published in a mass media outlet, resembles an academic article due to its research depth. The following section will expand on the production and reception context of the article, as these provide key tools for understanding the nature of the discourses.

Study Aim and Method

This study focuses on the overarching narratives depicted in the responses on Twitter/X to *The Washington Post* article: “Why doesn’t Argentina have more Black players?” written by the researcher Erika Denise Edwards and published on 8 December 2022. For this study, I have opted for an interpretative qualitative method, namely data hermeneutics, which, similar to all interpretive methodologies, operates under the premise that these conversations are fundamentally symbolic interactions that necessitate an understanding of the subjective viewpoints of those involved. Furthermore, data hermeneutics primarily focuses on the synthetic objective of interpreting, reconstructing, and explaining the overarching narratives that underpin social media conversations (Gerbaudo, 2016: 99–100).

The timeframe for data collection ran from December 9 to December 22, 2022, capturing a crucial period of discourse surrounding the issue. The dataset comprises a total of 5,594 tweets, which includes 5,091 (of 7,180) responses directly linked to *The Washington Post*’s post on Twitter/X, 100 (of 657) responses to a tweet by the article’s author sharing the content, and 403 individual tweets and their associated responses. Using *top*, *random* and *zoom in* sampling and close reading of data (Gerbaudo, 2016), I was able to identify the most salient narratives employed to challenge the claims made in the article, and, primarily, in response to the title. Furthermore, I have focused on language and rhetorical strategies to reveal underlying ideologies informing these narratives.

Beyond the immediate focus on the article’s subject matter, this research presents an opportunity to engage in a broader conversation about the manifestations of racism in contemporary discourse within Argentina. Through this analysis, I endeavour to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding race-related discussions and shed light on the intricate dynamics shaping public discourse on race and racism in Argentina. However, it is important to note that the sample of views and arguments presented concerning racism in Argentina on Twitter/X is limited. Therefore, it should not be considered an exhaustive representation of the issue.

Furthermore, the algorithms that regulate the visibility of tweets and the dynamics of engagement also influence the reception of the content, as comments and discussions evolve in response to algorithmic cues:

“As these algorithms ‘nestle’ into people’s daily lives and mundane information practices, users shape and rearticulate the algorithms they encounter; algorithms impinge on how people seek information, how they perceive and think about the contours of knowledge, and how they understand themselves in and through public discourse” (Gillespie, 2014: 183).

This intertwined relationship between algorithmic influence and user interaction illuminates the intricate manner in which digital platforms mediate and amplify discussions on sensitive topics such as racism, thereby underscoring the necessity for a critical examination of these mediated conversations.

Context of Production and Reception

Dr. Erika Denise Edwards, the author of the article, is an associate professor at the University of Texas at El Paso. In her book *Hiding in Plain Sight: The Disappearance of the Black Population in Argentina* (2021) she argues that attempts by Black women to recategorize themselves and their descendants as White began as early as the late 18th century, challenging the notion that the Black population drastically declined at the end of the 19th century because of the whitening or modernization process. In Córdoba, Argentina, women of African descent were instrumental in shaping their own racial reclassifications and destinies (Edwards, 2021).

But to understand Argentinian Twitter’s reaction to this article, the global context in which it is set is crucial: The FIFA World Cup, as a global phenomenon, undoubtedly draws attention to different countries that are not usually in the spotlight. The national football teams then become a kind of “showcase”, where, it seems, some people think they can see a sample of the country. The question of the Whiteness, or otherwise, of Argentinian footballers and, by extension, Argentines themselves has been raised in the context of previous World Cups. In an academic article, Edwards cites a newspaper article entitled “Why Are There No Black Men on Argentina’s Roster?”¹ written in the context of the 2014 World Cup (Edwards, 2018).

Social media has been a privileged space for raising such questions, in addition to traditional journalistic outlets. Online debates that begin with the question of the Whiteness of Argentines usually include a large section on Argentina’s role in harbouring Nazi war criminals after the Second World War. In these debates, the visibility and reach of different arguments are often shaped by the interplay of editorial and algorithmic logics. As highlighted by Gillespie (2014):

1 See: https://www.huffpost.com/archive/ca/entry/why-are-there-no-black-men-on-argentina-as-roster_b_5571761 Accessed: 1 December 2023.

“The editorial logic depends on the subjective choices of experts, who are themselves made and authorized through institutional processes of training and certification, or validated by the public through the mechanisms of the market. The algorithmic logic, by contrast, depends on the proceduralized choices of a machine, designed by human operators to automate some proxy of human judgement or unearth patterns across collected social traces” (Gillespie, 2014: 192).

The postdigital context of social media influences both the distribution and production of discourses, including those in traditional journalism: Van Dijck and Poell (2013: 11) note that social media logic has gradually infiltrated mass media logic, altering and sometimes replacing it. Changing news consumption habits, such as reading on mobile devices, have significantly impacted the way articles are written and edited. In this competitive environment, mass media employs strategies such as keywords, clickbait headlines and search engine optimization. *The Washington Post*, active on Twitter since 2007 with over 20 million followers, operates within this framework. The discussed tweet generated unusually high traffic, possibly because subjects are more inclined to comment on news they disagree with (Chung et al., 2015), and the article in question proved to be highly provocative on Argentine Twitter/X.

Anonymity on social media significantly impacted the discussion that ensued, particularly given the sensitivity of the topic of racism. Interactions on Twitter, due to the “invisible rules” of algorithms, reproduce a rhetorical style that revolves around mockery, pedantry and irony. Humour, used to cloak prejudice, was instrumental in amplifying racial vilification practices on Twitter, Facebook and YouTube (See, e.g. Matamoros-Fernández, 2017: 9). For example, in response to *The Washington Post*’s article titled as a question, a user replied sarcastically: “because it’s a football team, not a Disney movie.” This comment received many “likes” and “retweets” leading to widespread replications: From 5000 tweets, 87 mentioned that the country was not a Netflix or Disney production, showing how users tailor their responses to align with popular and algorithm-favoured sentiments.

Additionally, past and recent U.S.-Argentine relations and prevalent “anti-Americanism” in Argentine society could influence how an American media tweet is interpreted, particularly on sensitive topics such as race and identity during the World Cup, when forms of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995) and also racism and xenophobia are rampant. While not all Argentines are fluent in English, Argentina had the highest score of any Latin American country in the 2022 English Proficiency Index.² In

2 The data is based on test results of 2.2 million adults who took the EF Standard English Test (EF SET) or one of EF’s English placement tests around the world. See: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1053066/english-proficiency-latin-america/>

addition, Twitter's translation tool makes content in different languages more accessible. With a substantial Twitter user base of 5.9 million in 2022,³ the Argentine Twitter community is known for its size and engagement.

Given the focus on responses to a journalistic article the data falls into the genre of "participatory news article" (Bruce, 2010) characterized by brevity, spontaneity and a tendency towards subjectivity, with statements often presented as endorsements or rejections of the journalistic content. Moreover, online commenting involves both active and passive users, creating unidirectional, often confrontational opinions with a crucial entertaining quality (Marmorstein & Sclafani, 2019: 1). While certain features of online racist discourse such as irony, sarcasm, and anonymity are universal, the understanding of racism is shaped by media platforms and linguistic choices within national ideological contexts (Pantti et al., 2019: 517). This study contributes to the understanding of racism in Argentina, particularly on the social network X.

Data and Data Analysis

The article received significant feedback within a short period, with users pointing out inaccuracies in the presented statistics. Specifically, they noted that the percentage of the Black population, according to census data and the country's demographic figures, was considerably lower. As a result, a correction was promptly added to the web version of the article. Furthermore, many users found the headline deceptive or opportunistic. The author responded, stating that the title was an editorial decision, and that many critics had not read the article. In fact, much of the backlash could have been avoided if the article, which de-constructs the myth of a White Argentina, rather than focusing on the ethnicity of players, had been fully read. The title of the article oversimplifies the issue by presenting racial and ethnic diversity as easily observable on a football team.

As expected in the "participatory news" genre (Bruce, 2010), responses fell into two categories: Endorsements and rejections of the content of the article or, in this case, of what Twitter users believed the article contained. The rejections came from both Argentina and U.S.-based audiences. While the U.S. audience criticized the article for its "race-bait" headline and perceived liberal, "woke" bias labelling it as "leftist propaganda" or "leftist obsession with race", Argentine users defended their national identity, feeling it was threatened by the portrayal of Argentina as racist.

Despite these differences, both audiences shared a "whataboutery" argument, claiming the necessity for a similar count on other national teams. Although pre-

3 See: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/242606/number-of-active-twitter-users-in-selected-countries/>

sented as a provocation or accusations of purported “reverse racism” (“Why are there no White players on the NBA roster?”), the question, when applied to different national teams, highlights the historical legacy of colonialism and the racialized division of the world that is constitutive of it. Nascimento (2019: 6) argues that the participation of African colony players in Portugal’s 1966 World Cup team was a strategic propaganda effort by the Portuguese government to promote their influence in Africa. Eusébio da Silva Ferreira, born in Mozambique and later a star for Benfica in Lisbon, led the tournament with nine goals. For African colonists, particularly agricultural labourers, the rise of Black football stars symbolized potential social mobility within the empire. This success was celebrated by both Lisbon elites and working-class São-Toméans, creating a racially inclusive national narrative. Despite some scepticism, this propaganda effort strengthened political ties to Portugal through the powerful emotions evoked by sport (Nascimento, 2019: 9). Thus, while the inclusion of Black players appeared to promote integration, it also perpetuated colonial subordination.

The focus here is on the rejection of the article by Argentinean users, which gave rise to reflections on the national racial issue. These positions may be divided in two: Denialism of racism, which perpetuates the ‘White country’ narrative, and critical analysis. In some cases, these positions overlap, particularly when arguing that *mestizaje* (miscegenation) is the solution to the conundrum. National narratives, not least in Argentina, that celebrate *mestizaje*, diversity, and define themselves – in more contemporary terms – as post-race often function as a subterfuge to maintain the ‘White country’ narrative. Finally, the article prompted a series of critical reflections on colonialism, with particular focus on the academic sphere. These reflections highlighted the limitations of the observations in unravelling the complexity of the racial issue in Argentina, which were constrained by a Eurocentric/North-American perspective.

The ‘White Country’ Narrative

After gaining independence from the Spanish Empire in 1816, Argentina’s state-building process involved establishing sovereignty through military and administrative control. This involved the systematic suppression and assimilation of the indigenous population under the liberal governments of the 19th century, in order to claim land for capitalist modernity and “European civilization”. These efforts were epitomised by the military campaign known as the ‘Conquest of the Desert’ and followed by plans to ethnically reshape the geography of the country (Taylor, 2020: 3).

The narrative of Argentina as a White country is founded on two key phrases. The first, by Juan Bautista Alberdi, politician and author of the foundations of the Na-

tional Constitution of 1853: “To govern is to populate”⁴. The second, “We Argentines descend from ships”⁵ reflects the collective belief in the success of European immigration. Alberdi’s phrase was based on the belief that Northern Europeans were superior to Southern Europeans, Jews (understood at the time as a separate racial category), Africans, and Asians and that Argentina’s Whiteness would align it with European modernity (Kaminsky, 2009: 2). To achieve this, Argentina needed to be populated with Europeans. As Grimson (2016: 16) notes, following Ghioldi (1946: 21), Alberdi’s statement “to govern is to populate” clearly referred to “populating with Europeans”.

The Immigration Promotion Law (*Ley de Fomento de la Inmigración*) of 1876, also known as *Ley Avellaneda*, aimed therefore to promote immigration from Europe. To this end, information and propaganda offices were established across Europe. These offices encouraged emigration and provided tickets funded by the Argentine government (Bertoni, 2001: 19). The results were remarkably successful: During the Age of Mass Migration (1850–1913), Argentina received about 6 million immigrants, making it the second most important destination of European migrants after the United States, and the highest per capita recipient in the world (Droller et al., 2023: 3). This gave rise to the popular phrase “We Argentines descend from the ships”, which overlooks the populations brought on slave ships, those who inhabited the territory prior to the arrival of the Spaniards and also later migration from neighbouring countries.

Population censuses were also part of the intellectual and political elite’s promotion of the idea of a White Argentina. Census reports of 1869 and 1895 consistently celebrated immigration and the growth of the “White race” in Argentina, aligning with racist theories prevalent in the mid-19th century. This ideological adherence manifested itself in the portrayal of [White] immigration as a means to ensure the superiority of the “new Argentina” and the expansion of the “White race” across the territory, erasing the presence of Black and Indigenous people from the narrative of a prosperous Argentina (Ocoró Loango, 2016: 64).

The demographic decline of the Black population in Buenos Aires was, therefore, artificially accelerated through the manipulation of official statistics, as highlighted by Reid Andrews (1980: 93). The 1895 National Census Steering Committee deliberately excluded Blacks, ‘mulattos’, and ‘civilized’ Indigenous people deeming them insignificant (Ocoró Loango, 2016: 64). Researchers argue that the censuses are incomplete and argue for cross-referencing to get a more accurate picture of the population in the 19th century (Goldberg, 1976; Reid Andrews, 1979, 1980; Geler, 2010; Ocoró Loango, 2016). This manipulation of the census was accompanied by a ‘White country’ narrative which, as we see in many of the responses to Edwards’ Twitter post, is still in place today.

4 “Gobernar es poblar”. All translations by the author, except where stated.

5 “Los argentinos descendemos de los barcos.”

The representation of Argentina in a perpetual ethnic present, characterized as a racial and cultural [White] unity without a past, underpinned, as we shall see, by the melting pot narrative, was embraced successfully by the intellectual and political elites and by the popular classes (Segato, 2007: 260) becoming unquestionable. According to Frigerio (2008: 119), this dominant narrative characterizes Argentine society as White, European, modern, rational and Catholic by making ethnic and racial contributions invisible, distancing Black people temporally (in the past) or geographically, ignoring processes of miscegenation and cultural hybridization, and downplaying Afro-Argentine contributions to local culture.

Fig. 2: Denialist responses following the “White country” narrative. Rejection to the article in the form of mockery and sarcasm.⁶



In a racist and denialist tone, a poster shared the argument that Black people had died in the wars of independence, which Edwards (2022) denounces as an argument used to erase their presence from the national identity: “The truth that nobody wants to say is that abolition is a joke, the brown people were sent to the wars and from the government of Rosas onwards they were exterminated, this race of mestizos and N”.⁷ Important to note is the derogatory use of the term ‘marrones’ (browns), which is used to define Indigenous and ‘Mestizo’ people, analyzed presently more thoroughly.

Many tweets denying accusations of racism actually used blatantly racist expressions (see Fig. 3). For instance one Twitter/X user hyperbolically stated: “Argentina, the least racist country in the world. By far”⁸, accompanied by a video of young peo-

6 <https://x.com/dalmirogache/status/1602783862530121728>; 13 December 2022 and <https://x.com/CarolJoyceasis/status/1601517660529123329>; 10 December 2022.

7 “La verdad que nadie quiere decir es que es un chiste lo de la abolición, a los marrones los mandaron a las guerras y desde el gobierno de Rosas en adelante fueron exterminados esa raza mestiza y de N” https://x.com/carla_venavidez/status/1602488973489733633; 13 December 2022.

8 “Argentina, el país menos racista del mundo. Por escándalo” <https://x.com/agustinromm/status/1603222319350001664>; 15 December 2022.

ple lifting a Black person in celebration. However, the interpretive framing of the video is quite different: The lyrics of the song they are singing contain explicit racist mockery directed at Black French football players (in addition to homophobic and transphobic language). Consequently, this particular celebration is distinct from the aforementioned statement and represents a specific instance of racially motivated misconduct. This impression is reinforced by the laughter of one of the fans to the camera, who seems to be making fun of the bullying.

Fig. 3: A group of young people lift a Black person in celebration, but the context reveals mocking intentions, underscored by a background song with racist, homophobic, and transphobic lyrics popular during the World Cup.⁹



9 The lyrics could be translated as: "Listen, spread the word. They play in France, but they are all from Angola. How nice it is! They are going to run. They are 'cometravas' [a slang term that refers to an individual who engages in sexual activity with a transgender woman] like f***ing Mbappé. Their mom is Nigerian. Their dad, Cameroonian. But in the document, nationality: French."

Denialism also assumes a normative guise, exemplified by statements such as: “How can this country be racist if the first paragraph of the Constitution is a love letter to immigrants?”¹⁰ This references the Preamble of the National Constitution which welcomes “all people in the world who wish to inhabit Argentine soil.” However, Article 25 of the same Constitution still contains the 19th century plan. It reads: “The Federal Government shall encourage European immigration.”¹¹ This argument only underpins the ‘White country’ narrative. As Garguin (2012: 359) argues the idea of Argentina as a White nation, solidified during the 20th century due to massive immigration, crystallized into an undisputable myth of origin and achieved the status of common sense, epitomized by the saying that Argentines descend from ships. In this sense, Frigerio (2006: 77) notes that a belief in Argentine racial exceptionalism, often disguised as a celebration of diversity due to significant immigration in the early 19th century fosters a prevailing sentiment that racism is not an issue.

As one Twitter/X user writes: “I took the trouble to read the Washington Post article about the lack of Blacks in Argentina, and I can't believe it's so disgustingly racist to refuse to accept that in this country miscegenation was the rule and we don't differentiate by race”.¹² Hundreds of users then denied what they perceived as an accusation of racism. Examples included: “Why are you so obsessed with our skin color? That's very racist of you”¹³ and also: “Skin colour is not our problem. They are trying to cultivate their racism in our country, but they won't succeed!”¹⁴. Joseph (2000: 362) asserts that the claim that race is irrelevant is itself productive in the Foucaultian sense: “It forms a part of racializing discourses in Argentina that reflect and maintain racialized social hierarchies within Argentina and in the international arena.” Resistance to acknowledging and addressing the rendering invisible of Afro-descendants¹⁵ in Argentina, but also racism, is a faithful reflection of what Quijano

10 “Qué va a ser racista este país si el primer párrafo de la Constitución es una carta de amor a los inmigrantes” <https://x.com/PLGoldstein/status/1602079442158895104>; 12 December 2022.

11 “El Gobierno federal fomentará la inmigración europea.”

12 <https://x.com/negrowernicke/status/1602626136697102336>; 13 December 2022.

13 https://x.com/snow_brc/status/1601822433270325248; 11 December 2022.

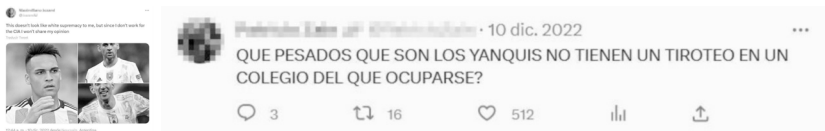
14 “El color de piel no es nuestro problema. Intentan cultivar su racismo en nuestro país, no podrán!!!” <https://x.com/roxialmiron/status/1602092141601226752> <https://x.com/roxialmiron/status/1602092141601226752> 12 December 2022.

15 The term “Afro-descendant” refers to individuals in Latin America and the Caribbean with African ancestry, who are descendants of Africans enslaved during the transatlantic slave trade. The Afro-Argentine community comprises individuals with diverse ancestral origins, including descendants of enslaved people, migrants from Cape Verde who arrived in the 20th century, and recent migrants from African countries such as Senegal, Mali, Cameroon, and Ghana. Due to miscegenation, some individuals of African descent in Argentina may not exhibit physical traits that are typically associated with their ancestral origins. Nevertheless, they are still considered to be of African descent, as the concept is not based on physical characteristics but encompasses ancestral heritage.

(1992, 2008) terms “coloniality of power”, which concerns the assimilation and naturalization by the colonized of the forms of domination.

Additionally, comparison, contrast and counter-accusation strategies reframe the discourse, supporting individual viewpoints and challenging arguments in the article. Many responses fall into the category of *ad hominem* fallacy, disqualifying the argument based on the author's national affiliation. The article provided an opportunity for hundreds of users on Twitter/X to express their anti-U.S.-American sentiments, which are prevalent in Argentine society, often manifesting in the unreflective use of the appellative “yanqui” for U.S. citizens. The backlash against the author's national identity was so intense, that an Afro-Argentine activist had to clarify: “You don't like her because she's a yanqui? Great, but what she says is accurate and aligns with the conclusions we afros (from Argentina) have reached here where we don't have the Washington Post as a megaphone”.¹⁶

Fig. 4: Expressions of anti-Americanism. The second text reads: “How annoying are the “yanquis”, don't they have a school shooting to deal with?”.¹⁷



Such responses, clearly defensive in tone, often took the form of “whataboutery”, with mentions, as seen in Fig. 3, of CIA actions in Latin America, the problem of school shootings but also U.S. war actions in Iraq or Afghanistan. Some also chose to recall the segregation policies that were still in force in the United States well into the 20th century. These comments can be interpreted as an exemplification of a pervasive inferiority complex, as evidenced by the use of the term ‘decent’ in the following comment: “The problem with you [plural, addressing purportedly U.S.-Americans], is that it seems to be necessary to have a Black population to be a “decent” country, is it maybe that your ass itches? Do you have a debt to pay off? You have no shame in your own history and you project it onto countries that had little to do with your colonial logic.”¹⁸

16 “No les gusta pq es yanki ? Joya pero lo q dice es todo así como lo dice y la conclusión es la misma a la q llegamos los afro de acá q no tenemos al Washington Post como megáfono” https://x.com/afroargentino_x/status/1601792397838467074

17 <https://x.com/PatricioZain/status/1601392219469975553> 10.12.2022 and <https://x.com/JozamiM/status/1601362121006010368> 10.12.2022.

18 “el problema con ustedes es que parece ser necesario tener población negra para ser un país “decente”, será que les pica el culo? que tienen cierta deuda que saldar? no tienen vergüenza

Critical Analysis Positions

From the Melting Pot to the Post-Migrant Narrative

One of the most repeated arguments was that of *mestizaje*, presented as understanding the difference in racial issues between Argentina and the United States. A tweeter wrote: "In Argentina slavery was abolished in 1813. You had slavery for 50 years more. Besides, here we mix and cross all races. We don't segregate like in the USA. We didn't have prohibitions against one race until late in the 20th century like over there. That's just it".¹⁹ Many echoed this argument and accompanied it with an illustration (see Fig. 5). The meme recalls colonial-era illustrations used in Latin America when the Spanish Empire promoted the Hispanicization of its colonies. The Spanish Empire's scientific taxonomy employed a visual pedagogy to destabilize racial categories. Family portraits depicted the father, from one racial group, the mother, from another, and one or two children, who belonged to a third, showing how various mixtures of European, African, and Native could give rise to a multiplicity of types (Kaminsky, 2009: 2).

Many tweeters pointed out the absolute dissimilarity of racial classification systems between the United States and Argentina, a distinction recognized by specialists in the field (Frigerio, 2006; Quijano, 2008; Reid Andrews, 1979; Segato, 1998, 2007).²⁰ Twitter/ X users highlighted the complexity of race in Argentina, especially in relation to the concept of "mixed race", as the country is made up of people with diverse ethnic backgrounds: "We don't have ghettos as US does. There were, though: italian, spaniards, germans, lebanese, ashkenasi and sefardis jews, etc. But they got all mixed up. We don't hv any pure WHEREVER communities, except asian, maybe. We don't hv any pure black people as we don't any pure white." In a subsequent tweet, in a more denialist guise, the person added: "And of course, all of them mixed up with the pre-columbian people (mestizos). We don't have a problem with races as US has. So extrapolation of other countries issues is an error in the analysis."²¹

de su propia historia y la proyectan a países que poco tuvieron que ver con su lógica colonial!" <https://x.com/tanquesegundo2/status/160188673309992965>; 11 December 2022.

19 <https://x.com/icardo8/status/1601603200057909248>; 10 December 2022.

20 See e.g.: "During the first half of the century, Buenos Aires, like other parts of Spanish America, used a three-tier racial classification system similar to Brazil's. This system distinguished between individuals of pure African ancestry, pure European ancestry, and mixed racial ancestry. This approach contrasted with the North American system, which grouped people of both pure and mixed African ancestry together as 'black,' distinct from 'whites' of pure European descent" (Reid Andrews, 1979: 37).

21 <https://twitter.com/lsgoodclint/status/1601732773307260935>; 11 December 2022.

Fig. 5: Meme that circulated profusely during the days of the post.

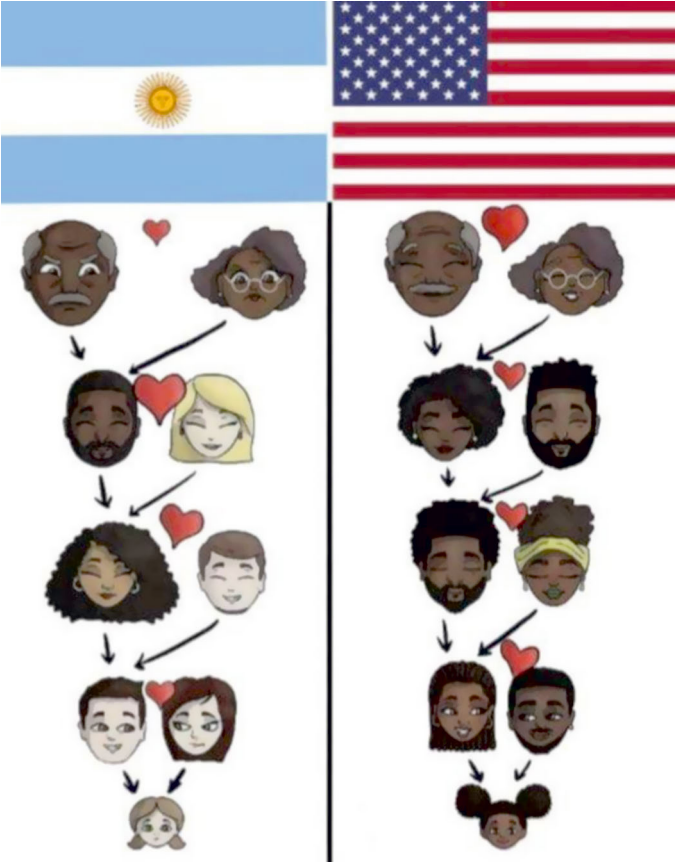
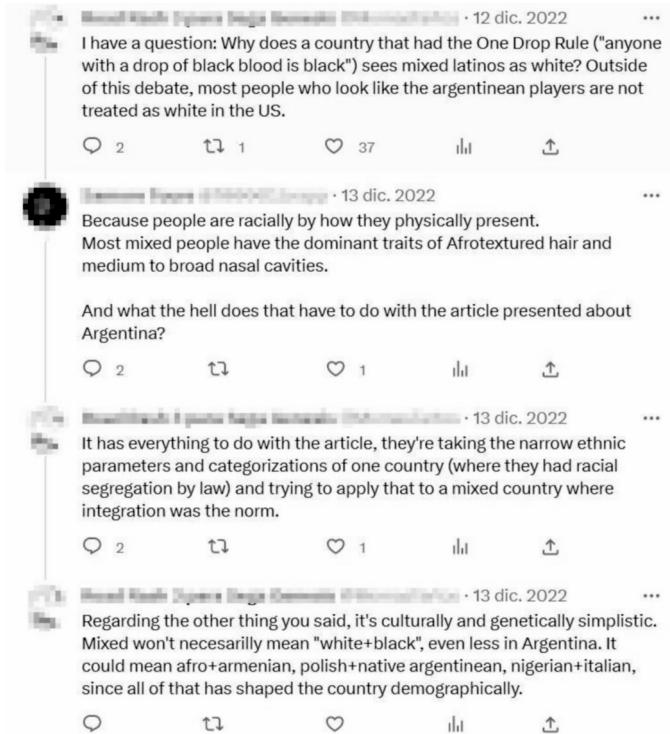


Fig. 6: The exchange between an Argentinian and an African-American in the comments to the article. It reads: "Mixed won't necessarily mean 'white + black', even less in Argentina".²²



These posts, less aggressive, pedagogical in tone and mostly written in English, sought to inform the U.S. audience about the structural difference between the two states. Discussions between tweeters from both countries highlighted contrasting approaches to racial issues. As Segato (2007: 189) explains, in the United States national unity is conceived as the result of the administration of the coexistence of different ethnic contingents, with a Black-White matrix of otherness shaping a segmented structure of difference. This national matrix imposes a segregated model of society and an essentialist conception of identities (Afro-American, Native-American, Italo-American, Asian-American, etc.). In contrast, Argentina's national society stems from an "ethnic terror" where access to citizenship requires to "erase the traces of origin" (Segato, 2007: 51).

22 The tweet has since been deleted. 13 December 2022.

Argentinian tweeters, aware of this difference, use terms such as “segregation” and “ghettos”. In one discussion (see Figure 5), an Argentinian user explains that “mixed does not necessarily mean black + white”, alluding precisely to this matrix of differentiation. The American user, on the other hand, offers a generalized view of race as a naturalized fact: “Because people are racially how they physically present.” The model in which ‘integration was the norm’, as the Argentinian user claims, as opposed to the U.S. model of segregation, is often explained by the image of the melting pot, which, as we will see below, was no less racist since it required the erasure of any ethnic marker (other than ‘White’).

The Melting-Pot Myth

In Argentina, a model of nationhood which, based on its pre-Columbian and/or colonial history, made hybridization the symbolic capital of the ‘national being’ has never prevailed, or has never become hegemonic (Briones, 2002: 68). Unlike in other Latin American states, the local intellectual elite, who laid the foundations for the nation-state, did not celebrate miscegenation, but Whiteness (Frigerio, 2008: 118). For the mid-19th century intellectual Sarmiento, *mestizaje* represented a regression in the evolutionary scheme. Paradoxically, Sarmiento’s opinion of the mulatto – the product of Black-White heterosexual sex – deviated from this perspective. He considered the mulatto “the link that binds civilized man to the uncouth one; a race inclined towards civilization, endowed with talent and with the finest aspirations of progress” (1972[1845]: 43). (Martínez-Echazábal, 1998: 25).

Despite this assessment by Sarmiento, Goldberg (1976: 83), in her study of the Black and ‘mulatto’ population of the city of Buenos Aires from 1810–1840, notes that the writings of the time, uninfluenced by the egalitarian ideas of 1810, reveal how much more despised the ‘mulatto’ was than the Black person as such: “The mulatto was ‘necessarily’ ‘indecent’; his very birth was a product of ‘indecent’, as his colour revealed him as the fruit of illegitimate unions.” Against this backdrop, the whitening of the local Afro-descendant population began. Reid Andrews (1979: 32) observed that many young Black people sought acceptance in White society by distancing themselves from their Black and African heritage. Furthermore, by 1910, almost a third of the population in Argentina was foreign-born, with almost 75% of immigrants being Italians and Spaniards (Modolo, 2016: 211). This influx drastically transformed the capital, turning it into a booming metropolis in which the Afro-Argentines became almost invisible (Reid Andrews, 1979: 38).

The arrival of immigrants in large numbers, although planned and financed, also caused unease and concern. “The strong foreign component implied an inevitable slide towards disintegration, also experienced in terms of loss of cultural identity and nationality” (Bertoni, 2001: 24). Moreover, expectations aimed at

stimulating immigration from Northern Europe were unmet as larger groups of Italians, Spaniards, Jews from Russia and Arabs from the Ottoman Empire arrived (Bertoni, 2001: 21). In the 1890s, two conflicting perspectives on the Argentine nation emerged, both inspired by European theories. Cosmopolitans advocated for a contractualist vision, valuing voluntary participation, extensive freedom for the foreign-born, and the positive impact of diversity (Bertoni, 2001: 310). Conversely, nationalists embraced an essentialist, exclusive and defensive viewpoint, emphasizing cultural singularity and legitimizing the nation through a national language, a national art and a single national “race” (Bertoni, 2001: 171).

This tension is better understood by acknowledging that in Latin America, “the Eurocentric perspective was adopted by the dominant groups as their own, leading them to impose the European model of nation-state formation for structures of power organized around colonial relations” (Quijano, 2008: 218). By 1910, in Argentina the culturalist conception excluded any national stance compatible with universalism, cosmopolitanism, cultural diversity, or multiethnicity, or that simply accepted cultural heterogeneity (Bertoni, 2001: 315). The racial homogenization imagined from a Eurocentric perspective as the main condition of modern nation-states, was carried out in the countries of the Southern Cone not by decolonizing social and political relations but by the elimination of indigenous populations and the exclusion of Blacks and mestizos (Quijano, 2008: 212). The oft-repeated metaphor of the “melting pot” as a cognitive operation that defines racism in Argentine discourse can only be understood against this background:

“The idea of Argentina’s ‘openness’ and the concept of ‘integration’ underlie the popular metaphor of the ‘melting pot of races’ (*crisol de razas*) in either of its two versions: as ‘Argentinization’ or as a fusion from which a new culture would emerge through the contributions of natives and immigrants. In the ‘melting pot’, the ‘races’ would blend into a single, unified, and homogeneous entity” (Caggiano, 2005: 191).

The melting pot, in practice, did not exclude people of other skin colours or ethnic backgrounds from national belonging; instead, it forced them to “dissimulate” any markers of their diverse origins to participate as citizens (Adamovsky, 2012: 343). Segato (2007: 260) speaks of the synthetic formation of an ethnic unity arguing that “the national matrix conditioned the participation of citizenship to the construction of a neutral, abstract person, stripped of any ethnic distinction, be it African, indigenous, Galician or Neapolitan” (2007: 275). In Argentina, as explained by Briones (2002: 73), the ideologies of *mestizaje* and *blanqueamiento* (Whitening) have been promoted as a *telos*, an irreversible path of osmosis, where cultural variance is disciplined, and hybridization occurs selectively. While “*mestizos*” are excluded from the

“unmarked us” of the nation, those “purified” by whitening may eventually do so, if they adopt hegemonic behaviours and values.

In response to the article, one commentator praised Argentina for its cosmopolitanism, stating: “Our Nation is a Cosmopolitan one, as USA, the difference is that here inmigrants [sic] mixed no matter their origins, so U can find someone like me w/Italian, Spanish, Irish, Swiss-German and Gipsy ancestors, or ppl w/wierd [sic] mixtures as Jews, Arabian, and German in the same family”.²³ Notably, this list omits Black and Indigenous people. Although the term “cosmopolitan” is not as widely used in Argentina as it is in Europe, it would be worthwhile to examine whether it is used similarly to “melting pot”, that is, to obscure marginalized populations and promote a national imaginary centred on Whiteness.

However, the omission of Black people can be interpreted differently: Their identity is perceived as no longer salient, like the national, cultural or religious ones mentioned in the comment. As argued by Geler (2007: 146) unlike immigrants and “uncivilised” Indigenous people, Afro-descendants could fulfil civil demands – demonstrating, voting and participating in the National Guard. Consequently, their integration into Argentine identity was ensured by their embodiment in a heroic distant history, particularly their participation in the wars of independence. This positive historical narrative allowed them to be seen as contributors to the nation’s development. Thus, the “anonymity/melting into the mass/disappearance” was fundamental for incorporating the Afro-Argentine population into the national community, making them “invisible” compared to other communities, not incorporated into the narrative of historical homogeneity, as happened with the indigenous populations (Geler, 2007: 147–148).

In Argentina, “the most relevant manifestations of racist discourse in the historical configuration of a matrix of otherness are aimed at ‘native peoples’ (‘Pueblos Originarios’), internal migrants, immigrants from neighbouring countries and Asian countries” (Belvedere et al., 2007: 45). Racist discourse targets indigeneity more than Blackness. Since the early 19th century, the indigenous population has been the primary target of resentment among the founders of the Argentine nation-state: For instance, in *Nuestra América: Ensayo de psicología social* (1918[1903]), the Argentine sociologist Carlos Octavio Bunge established a racial hierarchy in which Blacks were psychologically much better disposed for civilization and eugenically sounder than Indigenous people (Martínez-Echazábal, 1998: 26).

In the preface to the book on Bolivian immigration to Argentina, *Lo que no entra en el crisol* (‘What is excluded from the melting pot’), Grimson (2005: 14) notes that Bolivians are at the bottom of Argentina’s imaginary ethnic hierarchy among internal migrants, Paraguayans, Chileans, and Peruvians: “Bolivia, the most indigenous country in South America, is presented as a contrast to the national imagination.

23 <https://x.com/BiblisR/status/1601765141183627266>; 11 December 2022.

Bolivians are viewed as the inverted mirror of Argentines from the instituted imaginary. They represent what Argentines deny exists in their country.”

In this vein, it is written, e.g.: “Anyway, we have to explain to the Washington Post that all those who play in Argentina are more Black than the Blacks they have in the USA.”²⁴ This comment can then be understood in this light: In Argentine racial categorizations, and even with a pejorative charge attached to the word “*negro*”, indigeneity – the most visible ethnic trait in the team’s players – is more despised than Blackness. Argentina preponderantly emerges as non-indigenous and non-mestizo in the sense that “the compound that would have been distilled under the supervision of the moral elites in the local melting pot operates as the signifier of a silenced and untainted Whiteness” (Briones, 2002: 71).

Football, for instance, is one of the few areas of success for phenotypically indigenous Argentines, perhaps along with acting and, relatively recently, modelling. The so-called ‘liberal’ professions are mostly dominated by ethnically White or ‘Whitened’ individuals. As one person commented, also resorting to the term “melting pot”: “Soccer is the most inclusive sport in the country. Not just Maradona, many players come from ghettos [sic] & non-european backgrounds. The world does [sic] not divided into black & white. Argentina is a melting pot (1/2)”.²⁵ Some responses highlighted Argentina’s ethnic and racial diversity, suggesting a post-migrant and post-race society. As explained by Foroutan (2019: 49) the term post-migrant has emerged as a subversive reference to the fluidity of origin, culture and the transformation of collective identity. See, e.g. “we don’t know anymore what race we are”²⁶; or “Tell me what is my ethnicity. Argentinian are so mix that you have no idea what tag to put me. What is my race? I’m from every continent.”²⁷

But even in its most current variants, the melting pot narrative functions to downplay or deny racism. As Caggiano (2015: 189) notes while intellectuals, religious leaders and politicians express concern about discrimination and racism, the

24 “Igual hay que explicarle al Washington Post que todos los que juegan en Argentina son más negros que los negros que ellos tienen en USA”. <https://x.com/HerSpice/status/1602927969537859585> 15 December 2022.

25 The complete tweet read: “Would you really say that this is a “white” team?” (referring to a photo attached). “Soccer is the most inclusive sport in the country. Not just Maradona, many players come from ghettos & non-european backgrounds. The world does not divided into black & white. Argentina is a melting pot (1/2) <https://x.com/LomascoloSilvia/status/1602074791451795457>; 11 December 2022.

26 “We never had segregation. We mixed. In Arg no one asks about the race, never. We don’t know anymore what race we are. When you go through life all the time measuring the color of people’s skin to determine if it is black enough, guess who’s being racist?” <https://x.com/ScarletOHara111/status/1601736884857626624>; 11 December 2022.

27 The tweet was accompanied by a world map with the user’s supposed ethnic “map” <https://x.com/luppelazzo/status/1602035838216462342>; 11 December 2022.

hegemonic discourse reconstructs the myth of an Argentina open to immigration. This narrative contradicts the reality of state racism, which resurfaced towards the end of the 20th century, particularly in relation to close border migrants. These individuals were portrayed as a threat, and their exclusion was justified through racial and ethnic mechanisms (Pizarro, 2012: 224–225).

The widespread argument that in Argentina there is no racism but classism, is debunked by the daily experiences of Senegalese, Bolivians, Paraguayans or Chinese people, or indeed the media portrayal of the Mapuche (Escobar et al., 2010). In 2001, census data reported 1,883 individuals from the African continent residing in Argentina, with a nearly 50 percent increase by 2010, reaching 2,738. This demographic predominantly engages in precarious and informal labour, primarily street vending. Additionally, there is a growing immigration trend of Afro-descendants from Latin American nations, although specific data is lacking (Ocoró Loango, 2016: 60). A recent report by the National Directorate of Persons of the National Registry of Persons in Argentina, highlights widespread discrimination in various forms – racism, harassment, underestimation, marginalization, or supremacy – faced by the Senegalese population in the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires (Dirección Nacional de Población, 2023: 34).

Anti-Colonial Perspectives

Other Twitter users considered the article to be an example of “academic colonialism/ imperialism”. With a total of two thousand likes and seventy-five shares, it reads: “Why do race analyses always have to be so US-centric? Isn’t it possible for you to understand that there are societies different from yours?”²⁸ The focus relied on the different racial categories used in Argentina, and the different conformations of its societies, with varying degrees of integration of different cultural collectivities: “They are so immersed in their own ethnic-racial classifications that they cannot understand that there is racism in Argentina, but NOT ON THEIR TERMS; they are imperialistic even when they accuse us of racism.”²⁹ This is a clear example of the shift of focus (that is, away from denialism): Racism cannot be denied. However, it must be analyzed differently.

Interestingly, some of the comments aimed to contest the perceived imperialist or colonial view of the scholar, framed the views as issues of pride or shame, underscoring an emotional attachment to the issue. For instance, one commenter

28 <https://x.com/hiperfalcon/status/1601562368001335297>; 10 December 2022.

29 “están tan metidos en sus propias clasificaciones étnico-raciales que no pueden entender que en argentina hay racismo, pero NO EN SUS TERMINOS, son imperialistas hasta cuando nos acusan de racismo” <https://x.com/ugemitch/status/1602071455549775879>; 11 December 2022.

remarked, as an accusation: "Diversity as a consequence of colonialism and imperialism is not much to be proud about [...]." ³⁰ Another comment accused the scholar of racism, stating: "This is blunty [sic] racism: the author only can imagine 2 races, if the concept really exist [sic]. For her the tan- skinned latinamericans are shameful deniers of their black heritage and not a independent cultural poblation [sic] of mixed heritage." ³¹

Criticism of perceived cultural imperialism was often combined with simple attacks, some of which even referred to the author's national-ethnic identity: "It is quite ironic that you are actually behaving quite imperialistic and colonialistic. For me you are not an Afro American, you are just another American who thinks that the American view is absolute and infallible and who is trying to force his beliefs [sic] into other societies." ³² By dismissing the scholar's Afro-American identity and labelling her "just another American", the commentator suggests that the scholar's views do not truly reflect her ethnic background, but rather embody a broader American ethnocentrism. The argument further accuses the scholar of imposing her beliefs onto other societies, implying a disregard for cultural differences and a belief in the superiority of American perspectives.

Along these lines it was written: "Or perhaps stop pushing your neo-colonialist ideas of what you think diversity should be onto another culture." ³³ This critique implies that the scholar's understanding of diversity is rooted in a specific cultural and historical context that may not align with or respect the values and experiences of the culture being discussed. The comment underlines a broader critique in academia that Nina Glick Schiller has coined "methodological ethnicity": Here the ethnic group is unquestioningly assumed to represent a natural category of analysis and non-ethnic categories of belonging and distinction are ignored (Glick Schiller in Röh mild, 2017: 70). A thread posted by a social science's researcher received over ten thousand likes and explained that a Spanish person criticized Argentine players for their perceived Blackness and tattoos, while an American claimed the same players were all White, highlighting the subjectivity of the term. It emphasized that racism in Argentina, like in all countries, is not open to debate; rather, the focus should be on understanding the categories and historical, cultural, and economic processes that construct and sustain racism, which vary significantly among countries. ³⁴

30 <https://x.com/ElIndioRoman/status/1602024798225408001>; 11 December 2022.

31 https://x.com/CapitanAhab_/status/1602291794728947713; 12 December 2022.

32 <https://x.com/TommyBieringa/status/1603195504694657025>; 15 December 2022.

33 https://x.com/shep_leo/status/1602297326537740289; 12 December 2022.

34 https://twitter.com/Tia_MaGui/status/1602404742260559872; 12 December 2022.

Racial Classifications

“The particularity of racial discourses in Argentina makes it clear that neither race nor whiteness is a category with universally shared meanings” (Joseph, 2000: 335).

To comprehend racial classifications in Argentina, it is crucial to understand that racism is more focused on socio-economic and cultural aspects rather than ethnic considerations (Adamovsky, 2012; Briones, 2002). Given the article's title focus on the absence of “Black” players, a terminological clarification may have been appropriate. Discussions should begin with a clear definition of the term “Black”, acknowledging that Blackness is a category rooted in 17th century racist classifications and is therefore historical, cultural and heterogeneous. “Being Black” is not the same in the Congo in the 21st century as it was in the United States in the 19th century or in Haiti in the 17th century.

Morales (2012: 19) notes that: “[...] in Argentina, the term ‘negro’ has very heterogeneous meanings and different uses, although common elements can be identified in the variety of uses.” This prompts an examination of two instances of the word ‘negro’ (black) frequently seen in the comments on Edward’s article: (a) membership in a ‘popular’ or lower social class and b) political affiliation. The aforementioned comment, in which it is stated that: “All those who play in Argentina are Blacker than the Blacks they have in the USA” refers simultaneously to the social background of the players as some of them come from the suburbs, or from poor settlements or “villas”, as they are called in Argentina, and to their Indigeneity and *mestizaje*.

As the issue continued during Argentina’s victory over France, the celebratory scenes in the streets of Buenos Aires, with jubilant crowds from the suburbs accompanying the winning team’s bus parade, sparked ironic remarks on Twitter such as “I hope the Washington Post sees that we have Blacks”³⁵ and “The Washington Post today confirmed that Argentina is full of Blacks”³⁶, among various other tweets referring to the “Blackness” of the celebrants. Such expressions refer to the racial and racist category known as ‘*cabecitas negras*’ (little black heads), a term from the 1940s and 1950s in Buenos Aires used to describe dark-skinned individuals who became more noticeable in the city due to increased internal migration (Frigerio, 2006: 86).

The creation of this new racial category can be precisely dated: 17 October 1945, the day in which “suburban workers marched into Buenos Aires and gathered at

35 “Espero que los del Washington Post estén viendo que si tenemos negros.” <https://x.com/DiegoHioiki/status/1605256287536971777>; 20 December 2022.

36 “El Washington Post hoy confirmó que Argentina está llena de negros.” <https://x.com/Fernandita2914/status/1605355321152749572>; 21 December 2022.

Plaza de Mayo to demand the release of Colonel Perón" (Grimson, 2016: 1). The presence of these groups on the city streets was perceived "with the strangeness of the unknown" by the inhabitants of Buenos Aires, "that established society that prided itself on inhabiting a cosmopolitan, White, European society" (Grimson, 2016: 8). Following Lenton (2010), Taylor (2013: 602) argues that Perón's rule marked a foundational moment in indigenous people's transformation from "pariahs" to "citizens" (Lenton, 2010: 85). This inclusion required indigenous assimilation within a modern society based on their class position. Indigenous workers were therefore defined by their class subordination, rather than racial injustice. This framing effectively obscured racial issues by prioritizing class, thus overshadowing their subaltern struggle (Taylor, 2013: 602).

The discovery of these popular masses, which contradicted the narrative of the 'White country', reinforced the self-identity of the White porteño middle-class. Indeed, Garguin (2012: 358) posits that "a deep sense of Whiteness played an important role in the process of middle-class formation." This middle-class identity, dating from the same period, was constructed in contrast and opposition to these proletarian masses of "the interior" (provinces outside Buenos Aires), perceived as everything the other was not – White, civilized, European (Garguin, 2012: 371).

The dynamics of Buenos Aires, the capital city with the majority of the population and migration, affects the vision projected towards and onto the rest of the country. Consequently, the White porteño middle-class identity was projected metonymically onto the entire nation (Joseph, 2000: 337–338). Frigerio (2006: 81) examined the "blanquedad porteña", a widespread narrative that asserts that 'porteños' (citizens of the port capital city) are White. This notion is not critically examined as a social category but constructed at the micro level through the continuous rendering invisible of Black phenotypic features, labelling as "Black" only those with dark complexions and mottled hair, thus maintaining that "true Blacks" are few. The rendering invisible of Black people occurs not only in the dominant historical narrative but also in everyday social interactions (Frigerio, 2008: 121) through specific practices such as concealing Black ancestors in families; and by shifting the discourse on social differences from factors of race or colour to those of class (Frigerio, 2006: 82).

The association between racism and classism is deeply ingrained in Argentine society, rooted in the transformation from colonial caste societies into the class societies of the 20th century (Reid Andrews, 1979: 49). Adamovsky (2012: 354) notes that Black identity does not explicitly refer to African diasporic origin (except for small groups who claim to be Afro-Argentine) or to a specific Amerindian ethnicity, although it may have a vague sense of miscegenation, but serves as an ethnic marker within a class identity. Nevertheless, Frigerio (2008: 120) also identifies the rendering invisible of Blackness in the insistence that the category "*negro*" or "*cabecita negra*" is rather classist than racist. Indeed: "By obsessively naming 'los negros' as the non-

white part of the nation, this common sense inadvertently admits that whiteness in Argentina is an ever-incomplete spatial project that generates frustration and often rage" (Gordillo, 2016: 245).

In the rise of Peronism, the terms '*negro*' or '*cabecita negra*' acquired political connotations, specifically associated with Peronism and later Kirchnerism, parties whose electoral base is the working class, as we can see in the following example: "In Argentina, the Blacks are all Kirchnerists and they hold office because they belong to a political party."³⁷ But the figure of the *cabecita negra*, "the synthesis of an 'other' radically opposed to the respectable, White, and civilized man, would later include everyone who had been rejected from the spaces and welfare of modern urban civilization" (Garguin, 2007: 371). In this regard, it is also used, in the comments to the article, to refer to the social movements of workers and the unemployed who use street blockades or 'piquetes' as a tool for protest and struggle. The following statement reflects this: "The Washington Post asks why there are no Blacks in the Argentine national team... Hahahaha! Look at the street blockades and you'll see them all (blushing face with hand over mouth emoji)!"³⁸ In any case, as Cervio (2020: 29) points out, since the 19th century the category "Black" has persistently operated as a mechanism to subalternize and nominate radical otherness in Argentina, reflecting the intertwined racial and class tensions that have underpinned the colonial project throughout its history.

Discussion

The erasure of Black people in Argentine history, as argued in Edwards' article, may not be widely acknowledged by Argentine society, but it is accepted in Argentine historiography (Frigerio, 2008: 121). Efforts to address this historical omission have been made through various public policies. For instance, the Day of Afro-Argentines was established to pay tribute to the heroine of Independence, María Remedios del Valle. Additionally, during the bicentenary celebrations in 2010, the historical sequence deliberately sought to attack the narrative of the White, European nation (Adamovsky, 2012: 362) by highlighting the contributions of both African and Indigenous people to the founding of the country. The 2010 Census also included the category of 'Afro-descendant' from which the author derived her statistics.

37 En Argentina los negros son todos kirchneristas y ocupan cargos por pertenecer a un partido político. <https://twitter.com/ElCara333/status/1602451896941297664>; 12 December 2022.

38 El Washington Post pregunta por qué no hay negros en la Selección Argentina... Jajajaja! Que miren en los piquetes y los van a ver a todos! (emoji cubriéndose la boca)" https://twitter.com/gracielita_g/status/1602085133523324934

In Argentina, however, “the term ‘Afro-descendant’ is used strategically to include people who may not have a Black phenotype but have African ancestry” (Ocoró Loango, 2016: 68). Indeed, as highlighted by Segato (1998: 144): “The introduction of Afro-Brazilian religious lineages into a country like Argentina [...] shows the strength of an ‘African ancestry’ not based on commonality of blood, in North American terms, but on commonality in belief and on philosophical community.”

Without implying that Blackness was viewed positively, Geler (2010: 18) suggests that Black men and women were able to “disappear” because they had become fundamental for the future of the country. In a similar vein, Adamovsky (2012: 348–349) highlights the increasing recognition of Blackness which became particularly evident and massive in popular music: through tango and candombe in the 1940s, folk music in the 1960s and 1970s, and cumbia from the 1990s onwards. This would suggest invisibility by hypervisibility: Their contributions to the national culture are so important that they were rather “absorbed” than compartmentalized as something foreign.

The discourse regarding the Black population in Argentina is comparable to that of European Modernity in the way it relegates “the Others” (Africa, the Middle East, America, in one case and Afro-descendants in the other one) to the past, portraying them as having fought in the wars of Independence or having paired up with Europeans. Furthermore, as Cervio (2020: 33) puts it, Argentina is a country that has made “Blackness” (*negritud*) the semantic and social reservoir of otherness to the point of making it “invisible” (as foreign or abject). These considerations, as well as the affiliations between racism and classism in the local racist discourse, highlight the importance of understanding racial classifications in different national contexts, particularly with a focus on the effects of each society’s colonial histories.

A defining feature of the coloniality of power (Quijano, 1992: 439) is the aspiration for cultural Europeanisation. This pursuit aimed to participate in colonial power and later to achieve similar material benefits and power as the Europeans. Thus, a combination of violence, assimilation and wishful White-thinking rendered Indigenous and Black people in Argentina absent from the surface image, despite their presence, and present only as a kind of blackened underclass (Taylor, 2020: 4).

If the question is about genetics, biological anthropology has already answered it: The average ancestry for the Argentine sample overall in 2012 was 65% European, 31% Indigenous American (28–33%), and 4% African (3–4%) (Avena et al., 2012). If the question concerns racism, in Argentina its most prevalent expression is against Indigenous Peoples, a fact that has become evident over the past 15 years with the shift of the term “negro” as a racist epithet to the term “marrón” (brown), which also indicates a rejection toward “mixed-raced” people. And this is connected to the fact that although there is a celebration of the miscegenation as defining the national character, it is always an imaginary that favours Whiteness. As Briones (2002: 71)

pointed out: No one would refer to an individual with Euro-Argentine parents from different “collectivities” as a mestizo.

The assertion that the Argentina football players are “more Black than the Blacks they have over there in USA”, indicates how their bodily marks, seen as “racial” identity, are interpreted as belonging to an ‘Other’ marked by historical subordination (Segato, 2007: 23). This highlights a social paradox: Embracing the constitutive indigeneity of national society entails renouncing the racially hierarchical place in the world that the Argentine national state has conceived for itself. Anti-American commentary, beyond allegations of intellectual colonialism, underscore the identity dislocation experienced by Argentines and their negotiation of it in front of an ‘international’ audience: “For Argentina, whiteness is made fragile not just by the presence of indigenous and African subjects, but by its geopolitical subordination, especially to the USA, and its location in an ‘Indian’ continent” (Taylor, 2020: 13).

Nevertheless, regarding the narratives celebrating *mestizaje*, it is possible to interpret, following Gordillo (2016: 264) the presence of “an emerging yet inchoate formation”, which he terms *La Argentina Mestiza*, “characterised by a disposition that feels comfortable with multiplicity and does not desire to create a piece of Europe in South America”. The author interprets it as a “messy, disjointed, liberating mestizaje that confounds the very notion of an identity as a fixed, stable positioning”, in contrast to “the orderly diversity of neoliberal multiculturalism in which officially sanctioned identities are placed in bounded slots” (Gordillo, 2016: 264).

In this vein, the plea “because it’s a country, not a Disney movie”, repeated *ad nauseam*, though mostly in line with the online discourse of the so-called “alt-right”, “whose core belief is that ‘white identity’ is under attack from pro-multicultural and liberal elites” (Hermansson et al., 2020: 2), contains a perhaps understandable critique. The Disney film trope critiques a representation of diversity where ethnicity and culture overlap and where identities are compartmentalized and essentialized. Understanding the true ‘diversity’ of the Argentine national football team requires a nuanced view that goes beyond the ‘visible’ ethnicity of the players and considers how their ‘visible’ differences are interpreted in the national narrative.

Conclusion

Although some of the 5,594 tweets collected pointed in a direction not concentrated on here (targeting liberals and the so-called “woke culture”, simply aggressive comments or insults, and comparisons with other national football teams, to name a few), the use of top, random and zoom-in sampling alongside close reading of the data (Gerbaudo, 2016) revealed recurring themes that served to explain the self-perception of Argentine national identity and that were consistent with two main narratives of that identity: The ‘White nation’ and the ‘melting pot’ narrative.

Twitter/X responses to the article used tactics such as dismissal, rejection, avoidance, denial, sarcasm, mockery, and ridicule to resist addressing the rendering invisible of Black population and racism in Argentina, perpetuating the 'White country' narrative. These strategies reveal a reluctance to confront uncomfortable truths, reinforcing existing power structures that marginalize Black and Indigenous voices. Deflection, emotional appeal, reversal of accusation, and counter-argument shift focus away by presenting alternative perspectives and counter-narratives aligned with their beliefs. The use of ad hominem fallacies, dismissing arguments based on the author's nationality, was extended laterally to label the article as a form of intellectual colonialism. From the strong reactions it provoked, it is clear that the article tapped into some middle-class anxieties about how Argentine (racial) identity is presented to the world.

A significant number of users express frustration with perceived indoctrination from centres of power – the USA, in this case represented by *The Washington Post*—which they see as perpetuating an imperialist culture. This viewpoint reinforces a dynamic where Argentines define themselves as both colonized and colonizers, delineating who is considered Black, internally and who is truly White externally. Such a perspective risks using external marginalization to justify internal oppression. The discourse on Argentine racial identity remains complex, intertwined with both historical and contemporary dynamics of power, exclusion, and the ongoing quest for self-definition. The context of the World Cup, which heightens nationalism, exacerbates this issue. Argentine football with its anti-English/ 'resistance to colonial powers' identity (see Lietz & Pereyra in this volume) serves as a privileged space where Argentines negotiate their image and hierarchy in the global order.

It is clear that the myth of the White Argentine is still widely believed. However, another myth was mentioned in much greater numbers: the melting pot. The discourse on openness to migration, even in its "post-migrant" versions, serves as a shield to avoid addressing the problem of racism. *Mestizaje*, as in the founding origins of the homeland, continues to be perceived negatively. This perception can be seen in the derogatory use of the term "marrones" (browns), and as we saw in the understanding that the national team players, because of their mixed race and socio-economic background, would be "more Black than Black Americans".

Conceptualizations of a colour-blind, post-racial or even post-migrant society must be understood in the context of the construction of Argentine identity, which is based on the postulate of a synthetic ethnic unity oriented towards Whiteness. Argentine society may perceive itself as more post-race, post-migrant, and post-ethnic compared to the United States, where individuals select a distinct ethnic identity affiliation. However, this does not necessarily mean that it is less racist. On the contrary, these ideologies, which align with the founding myth of the "melting pot", are used to downplay the issue of racism and discrimination. At least discursively, many

commentators choose to include indigenous peoples as part of this national melting pot. The extent to which this inclusion manifests itself in everyday practice needs to be closely scrutinised.

Although clumsy, aggressive and often tactless, Argentines claim their right to epistemic sovereignty, asserting that they are capable of understanding and interpreting their racial history on their own. This must be understood in the context of a societal paradox and the persistent struggle with national identity, in which colonial legacies, geopolitical dynamics and the demand for 'a place in the world' intersect. Despite having 'whitened' itself, Argentina did not land a place in the 'first world'. In the context of this discussion, and in the global context opened by the massiveness and mediatization of the football World Cup, it does not get it precisely because it has tried to do so.

Finally, if the motivation is genuinely anti-racist, it is worth questioning if such headlines are more harmful than helpful. Ultimately, the message conveyed to the "global audience" is that Argentinians are "Whiter" than expected, thereby perpetuating the narrative (or "myth") of a White national identity. Thanks to the logic of social media, the search for engagement and the eagerness of public media, influencers, journalists and others to create content, it is to be expected that the issue will be put back on the agenda, perhaps becoming a seasonal phenomenon, every four years.

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