

## **Race, Myth, and News: An Updated Model to Explain Representations of Racism in Colombian Racial Democracy**

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In Colombia, racial discrimination is supposedly a thing of the past. However, structural racism is still present in all dimensions of social life. While the myths of marginalization, differentiation, and assimilation explain the relationship between race, myths, and news in the United States, the coverage of racism in *SoHo*, a Colombian men's magazine, shows that these myths operate differently. Using a combination of critical discourse analysis, mythical analysis, the constant comparative method, and insights from previous studies, this article contributes to understanding racism and its mythical representations in magazine content outside the United States.

*Keywords: myth, crónica, critical discourse analysis, racism, racial democracies*

Journalism studies in the United States have provided a seminal definition of myth and a model that explains the relationship between this concept, racism, and news. Mythical archetypes are generic templates embedded within cultural values that facilitate the organization, telling, and understanding of events (Lule, 2001), and the myths of marginalization, differentiation, and assimilation explain journalism's representation of Blackness (Campbell, 1995). The problem is that the empirical evidence related to this model remains primarily focused on the United States (Figueroa, 2022; Gutsche, Cong, Pan, Sun, & DeLoach, 2022), leaving a gap regarding how the theory works in international settings, such as Colombia.

Additionally, the literature is limited by a methodological problem: Most critical discourse analyses (CDAs) and mythical analyses (MAs) focus on hard news (Graber, Figueroa, & Vasudevan, 2020; Gutsche & Salkin, 2017). Although some investigations have used CDA to study long-form journalism (Cortés-Martínez & Thomas, 2022), neither the extant literature nor Campbell's (1995) model outlines how to analyze myths in feature writing.

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Date submitted: 2022-07-28

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This article's contribution is twofold. First, the comparison between Campbell's (1995) ideas and the myth of racial democracies (de la Fuente & Andrews, 2018) makes it possible to describe the coverage of racism in an unexplored setting: Colombia. Second, the combination of CDA, MA, the constant comparative method (CCM), and insights from previous studies (Nartey, 2020, 2022) provides a suitable method to explain mythical archetypes associated with racism in magazine content.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Myths, Journalism, and Racism***

Media, including journalism, constitute a source of mythical narratives (Figuerola, 2022; Nartey, 2022). The analysis of myths highlights the ideological aspects of journalism, illustrating the intrinsic relationships between language and ideologies (Kelsey, 2015) and the links between news stories and cultural meanings (Gutsche & Salkin, 2017). If myths function as tools to make sense of given ways of reporting, a mythical approach should explain how journalists cover racism.

Mythical narratives promote a sociopolitical order that benefits the status quo by fostering certain interpretations and presenting elite's ideas, values, and expectations as natural, legitimate, and everlasting (Barthes, 1957; Lévi-Strauss, 1963). Newspapers, for instance, disseminate a distorted understanding of racism when they ignore the structural challenges faced by Black communities (Graber et al., 2020; Gutsche et al., 2022). In that line of thought, Campbell (1995) described how the press marginalizes, differentiates, and assimilates Black cultures.

#### *The Myth of Marginality*

The lack of Black presence in news is the first type of marginality, and the dismissal of Black voices in stories on Blackness is the second type (Campbell, 1995). Blackness is almost absent in news during the blatant phase: "People of color exist at the periphery of mainstream society and do not merit the attention granted to Whites" (Campbell, 1995, p. 57). The racial dynamics of this century have transformed the first type of marginality: The protests against the killings of Black citizens have spurred a considerable amount of news (Su, 2022), and reporters currently depict police brutality as a pattern (Zuckerman, Matias, Bhargava, Bermejo, & Ko, 2019).

During the subtle phase, journalists (co)construct a sense of marginality when reporters leave Black voices out to cover Blackness (Campbell, 1995). This type of marginality operates in a slightly different form: When covered, the press tends to trivialize and condemn Black voices (Graber et al., 2020; Gutsche et al., 2022).

#### *The Myth of Difference*

This myth stresses a sense of otherness based on stereotypes: "When the news sustains stereotypical notions about non-white Americans as less-than-human, as immature, as savages, as derelicts, it fits an understanding of minorities as different" (Campbell, 1995, p. 132). During the beginning

of the 20th century, news presented Black cultures as submissive, unreliable, lazy, angry, strong, and violent (Hutchison, 2012). By the 1990s, reporters substituted a blatantly racist coverage of Blackness for a subtle version, which presented Blacks as dangerous and unsatisfiable (Entman, 1990). Such a system of representation endures: Beyond the portrayal of Blacks as athletes (McClearen, 2017), journalists present Blacks as criminals (Waddell, 2017), violent (Kilgo & Mourão, 2019), and responsible for their poverty (El-Burki, Porpora, & Reynolds, 2016). Presenting cultures as The Other has been an elite strategy to impose unjust power dynamics by differentiating among races (Figueroa, 2022; Nartey, 2020, 2022).

### *The Myth of Assimilation*

This myth has three elements: "First, a general animosity among Whites toward African Americans; second, a resistance to Black political demands—for instance, affirmative action or hiring quotas; and third, a belief that racial discrimination is a thing of the past" (Campbell, 1995, p. 89). Journalism fosters racial antagonism when news blames Black people for their poverty (El-Burki et al., 2016), conveys a sense of resistance when it repeatedly depicts Black leaders as less effective than White ones because citizens do not vote for incompetent politicians (Cassese, Conroy, Mehta, & Nestor, 2022), and nurtures the idea of racism as a matter of previous generations through narratives of White saviors and redemption (Maurantonio, 2017). Despite the current growth of critical literature (Cassese et al., 2022; El-Burki et al., 2016; Maurantonio, 2017), the relationship between race, myths, and journalism in places other than the United States remains unexplored.

### *The Myth of Racial Democracies*

The basic premise of this myth is that Latin America celebrates racial mixing and that oppression based on race is worse in other parts of the world; however, scholars started questioning these ideas after the 1950s, seeing them as an elite's ideology for social control (Antón, 2005; de la Fuente & Andrews, 2018; Freyre, 1941). Despite criticism and distinct evidence of structural racial oppression, notions of racial democracies permeated several constitutions in Latin America, including Colombia (Wade, 1997). The common understanding of racism as a matter of the past among several South American countries shows a need to analyze the discursive mechanisms that prevent Black cultures from flourishing.

This article focuses on Colombia because this country exemplifies several features of the myth of racial democracies: Multiple cultures live in the same place, citizens share a narrative of integration, and society views international racism as worse than at home (de la Fuente & Andrews, 2018). In Colombia, the last census counted 2,982,224 people who identified with ethnicities of African descent such as Black, Raizal, Palenquero, or Afro-Colombian (DANE, 2019); the constitution and law define Colombia as an inclusive nation (Arocha, 2012); and the abolishment of slavery in Colombia almost 14 years earlier than in the United States nurtures the belief of racial progress.

### ***The Crónica Genre***

The writing of *Crónicas* is a long-standing tradition in Latin America: "The basic definition of the *crónica* genre would incorporate both the effective, repetitious retelling of news stories together with a

deliberate textual aestheticization impacting the recounting of the events of the newspaper or magazine page” (Reynolds, 2012, p. 5). This article focuses on *crónicas* because of its potential to resist the idea that only the elite is newsworthy (Caparrós, 2016).

Several reasons guided the selection of *SoHo*, a men’s magazine that targets upper-middle-class, educated, and, to some extent, elitist readership. *SoHo* is such a typical example of *crónica* that in 2008 it issued a compilation of its most representative pieces in a book (Samper, 2008). This magazine stands out for publishing narrative journalism and distancing itself from the news format, the most used genre in Colombia (Arroyave, 2020).

Previous meta-analyses show scarce research on racism in Colombian news content (Rocha, 2020). The available literature points out that Colombia’s news industry does not fit into the most cited descriptions of media systems (see Hallin & Mancini, 2004): Colombian news companies were originally family owned, with strong political ties, and gradually became part of large economic groups (Arroyave, 2020). *SoHo* is a clear example of that system. The outlet is owned by Semana Publishing House, a media conglomerate that belongs to the Gilinsky family, one of the richest in the country, which dominates the magazine market nationwide.

*SoHo*’s description and the overall argument on the relationships among myth, journalism, and the racial democracy of Colombia invite answers to the following research question: How did *SoHo*’s *crónicas* on Blackness discursively construct the myths of marginality, differentiation, and assimilation?

## Method

### *Six Discursive Modes of Marginalization*

The first section of this method was aimed at identifying whether and how the myth of marginalization operated in *SoHo*. An examination of a census sample, all *crónicas* published from June 1999 to July 2020 ( $N = 590$ ), allowed us to identify five discursive strategies that *SoHo* used to marginalize Blackness.

The first mode of marginalization emerged from the contrast between the total number of *crónicas* and the stories on Blackness. That comparison revealed the visibility of this population in *SoHo*. Since *SoHo*’s Web page does not have online versions of all its editions, we reconstructed the entire archive by including photographs of the physical copies available in public libraries. To identify the total number of stories, we added up the articles labeled as *crónicas* in the table of contents. A refined data set included the pieces with the keywords race, racism, discrimination, and concepts associated with Afro-Colombian identities such as Blacks, Raizales, Palenqueros, Mulatos, Afrocolombianos, and Afrodescendientes. After separating the pieces that had the keywords but were not relevant—stories that, for instance, contained the word black to describe the color of an object—we found 121 stories. The sample did not include *crónicas* on Blackness without the keywords, and this constituted a limitation.

The second mode of marginalization emerged from the comparison between *crónicas* with primary and secondary Black characters. The literature shows that the study of characters is key to understanding how myths work discursively (Barnett, 2005). The third mode of marginalization involved the number of stories on Blackness published on *SoHo's* cover. Covers are important since they are the first element readers see. The fourth mode unfolded from the analysis of the highlighted *crónicas* in the table of contents. Placement is crucial to analyze which stories are prioritized (Feldstein & Acosta-Alzuru, 2003). Although *SoHo* lists all its contents, only those that have a small illustration catch the readers' attention.

The fifth type of marginalization emerged from analyzing the themes that *SoHo* made discursively visible and invisible to its readership. Reporters convey shared understandings of reality not only through what is latent in their stories but also through what remains hidden (Kelsey, 2015).

### ***A Methodological Proposal to Analyze Differentiation***

This part of the process combined the tenets of CDA and MA by studying presuppositions and implications in the data (Nartey, 2020, 2022). The first step in this analysis was to look for generalizations (Kelsey, 2015): Statements that *SoHo* authors used to refer to entire Black cultures within the stories that contained the keywords. The rationale was to identify how the magazine characterized Black communities and, therefore, differentiated among cultures. The second step consisted of coding for connotations: Clues that contained inexplicit information. This article assumed the existence of implicit discriminatory statements in the data.

Although the data contained several instances of differentiation, this type of analysis presented methodological problems: The findings were only snapshots of each story, the lack of context of those excerpts limited the depth of the analysis, and the thorough description of each of the stories where those statements appeared exceeded the length of a research article. To solve this methodological limitation, and with the aim of including more nuance and complexity to the analysis, the third step required the analysis of the *crónicas* with Black people as primary characters to understand how they conveyed a sense of difference.

The fourth step of the analysis demanded a multi-method approach that combined the tenets of the CCM, MA, and CDA. MA suggests a close reading of the stories (Nartey, 2020). The process continued with the open coding of the CCM, where "conceptually similar events/actions/interactions are grouped together to form categories and subcategories" (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 12). This study analyzed 13 layers of discourse throughout the stories with Black people as primary characters: Titles, summaries, scenes, characters' descriptions, interviews (dialogues, direct quotes, paraphrases), cited documents, background information, author's point of view, fieldwork observations, structures, ideas presented in each paragraph, opening statements, and closing arguments. The result was the identification of a set of initial codes that indicated how *SoHo* represented differentiation. Next, selective coding—"in which the researcher uses the most frequently appearing initial codes to sort, synthesize, and conceptualize large amount of data" (Charmaz, 2012, p. 684)—was used to compare the emerging codes with one another. Those comparisons formed categories that improved the description of the results (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The analysis of those categories led to the identification of the *crónica* that best illustrated the tenets of the myth of differentiation.

With the goal of presenting empirical evidence in context, the fourth step of the method was to provide a *thick description* (Geertz, 1973) of the story that constituted an exemplar of differentiation. Since CDA implies that texts craft meaning (Fairclough, 2010; Kelsey, 2015), the complete *crónica* must be considered an artifact that participates in the social construction of reality.

### ***A Qualitative Approach to Analyze Assimilation***

During the coding of the myth of assimilation, this study initially followed the procedure applied to analyze differentiation. The distinctive step was to read the *crónicas* with the keywords asking how reporters represented racial interaction, Black leadership, and instances of racial oppression. Two problems emerged: One, the *crónicas* contained only a few instances of assimilation; and second, *SoHo* did not publish a story where all features of the myth were identifiable. The principles of the CCM supported this process (Charmaz, 2012): The open and selective coding allows the identification of the paragraphs in the data that strengthened the categories, and they constituted the evidence describing how assimilation operated in *SoHo*.

The literature suggests a further comparison between the findings and the insights from previous studies (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The discussion section describes this comparison. This article does not offer direct quotes from *crónicas* because the American Psychological Association (Lee, 2014) recommends presenting translations as paraphrases. The nuance of language is lost in many cases, and that constituted an additional limitation.

## **Findings**

### ***Five Discursive Layers of Marginalization***

The first layer of the analysis revealed that from 590 features published during *SoHo's* 20-year history, 20.5% (121) had the keywords of this investigation. The second layer showed that 3.9% (23) of the stories featured Black people as primary characters, and 16.4% (97) presented them in secondary roles. The third layer revealed that of the 232 editions, 4.3% (10) of the stories featuring Black cultures appeared on *SoHo's* covers. The fourth layer indicated that of those 232 issues, 3% (seven) of the stories on Blackness were advertised on *SoHo's* tables of contents.

The fifth layer showed that within the 23 stories featuring Black primary characters, *SoHo* associated Blackness with music (García, 2007b; Guerra, 2011), sex (de Frono, 2018; Hernández, 2012; Villamizar, 2010), poverty (Guardela, 2008; Molano, 2008, 2010; Reyes, 2013; Rubio, 2014), crime (Molano, 2008; Salamanca, 2016; Salcedo, 2013), and sports: Six on boxing (León, 2016; Salcedo, 2004a, 2004b, 2011, 2013, 2016), two on soccer (Caparrós, 2019; Salcedo, 2014), and one on bodybuilding (Atehortúa, 2015). Three stories covered other topics: A profile of a yellow-press photographer (Neira, 2007), a feature on a member of the army who removed landmines (Franco, 2016), and a *crónica* on the hunting of the Albino community in Africa (Zableh, 2011).

Two events in *SoHo* problematized the understanding of marginalization. First, the magazine published a 42-page-long profile featuring a Black person (Salcedo, 2004b): The first Colombian boxing

champion of the world. This story became a book and a Colombian literary journalism landmark. Second, the cover of the issue titled "Elogio De La Mujer Negra" ["Tribute to Black Women"] (2012) shows four dark-skinned naked women in the foreground joined by two light-skinned maids. The cover was a response to a *Hola* article published in December 2011, according to a *SoHo* director's tweet (Samper, 2012). *Hola* had presented a photograph of four light-skinned women, allegedly the most powerful women of Valle del Cauca, Colombia, in the foreground, joined by two dark-skinned maids in the background. These two stories suggest that *SoHo* did not completely neglect the coverage of Blackness.

### ***Extravagance as Marker of Difference***

The analysis of generalizations revealed some of the stereotypes that *SoHo* used to present people of African descent as different because of their extravagance. *SoHo* claimed that teenagers in a place where most people are Black begin their reproductive life early, and they reproduce themselves as fast as guinea pigs (Salcedo, 2008). Another *crónica* described a Colombian woman who supposedly represents the entire Black community: Almost 6 feet and 3 inches tall, with a body as thin as a 4 × 100-meter relay runner, big lips with well-applied red lipstick, and wearing a tight and short white dress that highlights everything, even her soul (McCausland, 2005).

Such generalizations share with the following connotations an alleged association between Blackness and extravagance. *SoHo* describes a person entering a cannabis shop as an enormous African American woman wearing a long multicolored dress (Wills, 2014). Another story represented a big Black man with several gold chains (Molano, 2005). A scene in an airport evoked another female of African descent as a James Bond movie character, with her silver fish ornaments hanging from her belt and tinkling bracelets (Gaviria, 2010). The middleweight champion wears lots of gold jewelry (Salcedo, 2011), and the welterweight champion has a gold-covered tooth with the initials of his name (Salcedo, 2004b).

These excerpts led to describe the *crónica* that best exemplified how *SoHo* differentiated Black cultures for their alleged extravagance: "Caraballo, the champion with no crown" (Salcedo, 2004a). The title suggests a sense of peculiarity: A winner with no trophy. The summary stressed the idea of difference through the author's point of view: Caraballo was the first Colombian who fought for a world title, he was the boxer that people liked the most, and he was someone who made a *difference* in and out of the ring (Salcedo, 2004a).

The opening statement described how the boxer was different. Caraballo was looking at a picture where he was sticking his tongue out, and then he said that being ignored was worse than losing (Salcedo, 2004a). The profile began with a scene where the journalist looks at a photo album and identifies two tendencies in the pictures where Caraballo was not fighting: He was either being silly, or he was wearing extravagant clothing (Salcedo, 2004a). According to the piece, Caraballo mixed the styles of rock-and-roll guitarists with folk singers: Satin pants, two-tone shoes, colored shirts, and Cuban hats (Salcedo, 2004a). The structure of the *crónica* enhanced the discourse of difference by describing Caraballo's dressing style and personality before covering his career.

The construction of scenes reinforced the idea that Caraballo was different. The boxer reflected on a picture taken during his retirement ceremony. Everybody stood up straight, wearing dark clothing, everybody but Caraballo: He was in yellow, wearing a shining tie and a hat (Salcedo, 2004a).

The profile suggested that what makes Caraballo different is that he likes attention. He said he did not mind if people said good or bad things, as long as they talked about him (Salcedo, 2004a). The background information on Caraballo's career revealed how much he enjoyed the spotlight (Salcedo, 2004a). Before a fight, the pugilist used to go to parks and supermarkets, yelling his name. As a result, everybody commented on him. On the day of the fight, he would wear his most extravagant clothes: Shorts with sequins and boxing shoes with bold color combinations—wine red and orange, for example. He usually wore an alligator skin hat with a frog at the top. Caraballo used to wear six robes, the last one made of tiger skin.

The profile also described Caraballo's unique boxing skills. People used to admire his physical condition and his style: The way in which he danced on tiptoe, almost as if he were levitating (Salcedo, 2004a). According to the story, Caraballo was good at deceiving his opponents: His chin, unprotected; his hands, down (Salcedo, 2004a). He was untouchable, a former boxer said. Then, the narrative recreated another scene (Salcedo, 2004a): Caraballo put his tiger skin robe on, stood in front of a mirror, and evoked his former moves, saying that he was hard to catch. The description of Caraballo's physical abilities, the words of the other pugilist, and the reconstructed scene stressed the idea of Caraballo's uniqueness.

The narrative further highlighted Caraballo's eccentricity. The profile mentioned two fights for the world title (Salcedo, 2004a). According to a rumor, Caraballo had lost the first time because he spent three days with sex workers. The boxer attributed that defeat to his weight; he was forced to wear plastic bags around his abs and run up and down a mountain two hours before the match.

The representation of the second fight did not contain stereotypes (Salcedo, 2004a). After presenting the date, the world title category, the place, the opponent, the number of assistants, and the press coverage, the author stated that the judges' decision was divided and that some people considered Caraballo's loss as one of the most disgusting thefts in sports history.

As the *crónica* further develops the sports frame, the narrative highlighted the eccentricity of the main character. Caraballo attributed his boxing style to the fact that he was almost born in the middle of a party (Salcedo, 2004a). His mother was dancing at the beach during her ninth month of pregnancy. Friends were able to take her to her house. The story also highlighted that when Caraballo danced on tiptoe in the ring, it was as if he had ignited the beating drums of his ancestors (Salcedo, 2004a).

The story represented inequality as a structural problem that affected the pugilist's life (Salcedo, 2004a). Caraballo lived with eight siblings and his parents in a three-room house. He fished at night and swam during the day to catch the coins that tourists threw into the sea. The boxer said that sometimes he went to sleep without dinner and that new clothing was a rare privilege. Caraballo's eccentric dressing style is a response to the poverty he faced, the pugilist's wife explained. When Caraballo was 10 years old, his family moved to one of the poorest neighborhoods in Cartagena. According to the *crónica*, this city, during

the mid-20th century, only offered two options to poor Black kids: Being a shoe shiner or a boxer. Caraballo cleaned shoes until he was 17.

The closing scene further developed the discourse of Caraballo as different. The end of the profile recreated an encounter between the boxer and his friends (Salcedo, 2004a). One of them implied that Caraballo was old because, at the moment, he was wearing subdued clothing. The boxer responded that many people now dress extravagantly; wearing bright colors was not fun anymore. Then, Caraballo told the story of him meeting Elvis Presley and said he was the only person in Cartagena who dressed like The King. Caraballo's reconstructed profile was the story that conveyed the strongest sense of difference among the rest of the *crónicas* analyzed.

### ***A Furtive Version of Assimilation***

#### *Antagonism Among Races*

Several stories contained instances of the animosity among races that the myth of assimilation describes (Campbell, 1995). A gonzo story of a journalist who worked as a boxer described Muhammad Ali as someone who overcame poverty and attacked racism with his pride and talent (Medina, 2002). The sentence emphasized that Ali was able to resist a system that worked against people of African descent although the story did not describe how racism operated at a deeper level.

The *crónica* on the woman with the biggest breasts in the world attributed her economic success as an entrepreneur to her body and to social changes in the United States: She was a successful queen of the eroticism business thanks to her enormous breasts and the deep demographic, political, and civil rights changes that had taken place in her country (Hernández, 2012). She stated that White men could eat their racial hate after the reelection of the first African American president. That sentence highlighted racial hatred in the United States.

The *crónica* on the Buena Vista Social Club Orchestra mentioned racial animosity in the Caribbean. The piece described the house where the musicians used to meet: It was a space for amusement for low-income Cuban workers, Black people who needed a break from the *gringos* who arrived at Fantasy Island during the 1940s (García, 2007b).

Three stories approached the topic of racial animosity in Latin America. The first one featured an indigenous boy who had to walk several hours to access education. According to this *crónica*, going to school might benefit the child as it would teach him the codes of the enlightened world; he would come closer to the White and Black nation (Salcedo, 2012). The piece further explains this statement: The boy will learn Western knowledge regarding history, algebra, and literature. Then, when he becomes a teacher, he will share his knowledge with future generations. The story implies a separation among Colombian cultures.

Two stories on boxing partially addressed racial animosity in Colombia. The findings on differentiation already described the *crónica* that featured Cartagena, Colombia, during the mid-20th century as a racist place because poor Black kids only had two employment options: Working as shoe shiners or

becoming boxers (Salcedo, 2004a). A description of the racial tensions at that time and place was also evident in the profile on the first Colombian welterweight champion of the world: To survive in the boxing circles of Cartagena, a racist place with royal aspirations, polarization was necessary; boxers had to either embody the rage of the oppressed or become the cocky Black whom all Whites wanted to see with his ribs broken (Salcedo, 2004b).

The profile of a former Brazilian soccer star highlighted the fact that he used white headbands: The one that garnered the most attention had "Stop Racism" written on it (Cavalheiro, 2012). The message of the player was presented only as a colorful feature of his personality: He had more than 10 headbands in his closet.

#### *Resistance to Political Demands*

Only one story slightly mentioned the community organizing efforts of Black cultures. The profile of the bodyguard of a female politician of African descent described a meeting that showed that communities were politically organized and active in Bogota, Colombia. According to this *crónica*, the senator was not expected to arrive at a meeting between the Afro-Colombian community and the mayor of the city (Pardo, 2008). The story, however, neither provided details of the meeting nor specified the activists' requests.

A story on a tutor of former paramilitary and guerrilla soldiers presented some issues that affect communities of African descent. The *crónica* features four characteristics of Chocó, Colombia, in a single paragraph (Salcedo, 2008): One, it is the poorest and most undeveloped state in the country; two, only 23% of its 470,000 residents have access to drinking water even though they live close to big and important rivers; three, unemployment is very high because the state is the only source of jobs; four, the infant mortality rate was 94 for every 1,000 in March 2007, when news of the death of 17 children from malnutrition shocked the nation. According to the article, some people *assume* that racial prejudice explains the government's negligence in an area where 90% of the population is Black, and that the systematic corruption of local politicians is another cause of poverty.

#### *An Overdue Conversation About Racism*

*SoHo* partially mentioned some achievements of people of African descent in history in *crónicas* that were not focused on racism per se. For instance, a story on the most populated place in Colombia featured people of African descent as founders of the island (Caparrós, 2006), and the *crónica* on the poorest side of Cartagena also identified enslaved individuals as the founders of several neighborhoods in that tourist city (Guardela, 2008). A travel journalism piece featured a so-called ghost town, a victim of violence, and recognized the important role of workers of African descent in resisting the labor conditions that the United Fruit Company imposed on them in banana plantations during the 1920s (Molano, 2010). These three stories concur on featuring the contributions of communities of African descent at different moments in history.

Two *crónicas* ambiguously mentioned the struggles that people of African descent in racial democracies face in the present. A reporter wrote about the journey of sugarcane workers, and only the second-to-last paragraph mentioned racism (García, 2007a). The following lines reconstruct this part of the story: Friday is

payday. The average income is about \$50 per week, \$20 at worst. The work week used to be from Mondays to Saturdays, but a new sugar mill policy established Sundays as working days. Those who do not come could face economic sanctions, suspension, and eventual dismissal. Cutting sugarcane all day, every day, is *something similar to slavery*. Maybe it is not an accident that most of the workers are Black: They are stronger than the rest, the managers say, and they are descendants of slaves who arrived five centuries ago at the same land to cultivate the sugarcane that Christopher Columbus brought on his second voyage in 1493.

The *crónica* explains that most of the indigenous people who had worked in the fields died. The story continues: Then, Black slaves from Senegal and Guinea were introduced to the lands of Chocó. They produced sugar and jaggery in worse conditions than their descendants, who are currently forced to work on Sundays. That paragraph finishes with a worker saying that he had cut sugarcane for 18 years, that he was fading, but that his dreams did not die in those fields (García, 2007a).

Another *crónica*, titled "Travel to the Soccer's Market" (Salcedo, 2006), asked why several soccer stars are from Tumaco. Heritage, dancing skills, hedonism, and playing on sand instead of grass are possible answers, according to the story. That article cites the census to state that most of the 170,000 people who lived in this town on the Colombian Pacific Coast by 2005 worked in fishing or agriculture. The following lines recreate the first of two consecutive paragraphs of the *crónica* that relate to racism. The journalist wrote (Salcedo, 2006) that the researcher Nel Enrique Valverde and the ecologist Lisenia Gallo had told him that Whites and Blacks used to be as incompatible as oil and water. They looked at each other with disdain, they avoided each other. They interacted only after 1918, when soccer arrived in the town, and they did not have another option than sharing soccer balls and fields. Since then, they created together an era of prosperity that the older people still remember. They built button, soda, and cigarette factories, they created a tuna company, they founded two newspapers, and they set up six businesses that provided wood to the entire South Pacific Colombian region.

The following is the reconstruction of the subsequent paragraph of the story (Salcedo, 2006): Eladio Mideros, a former player, highlights that the economic benefits of soccer are not quantifiable. Nobody has the exact measurement of the material contributions that the 1,236 professional soccer players have produced throughout Tumaco's history. That is why Mideros prefers to speak from a social perspective. Around 2,300 students graduate every year. Only 30% can afford college. The rest of them hang out in the streets, fish in the sea, or become parents early simply because they do not have other opportunities. Unless they succeed in soccer. Then, college and food are guaranteed for their families.

Among the 590 stories that *SoHo* published, only two directly talk about racism. The following is the summary of the *crónica* titled "Hunt for Albinos in Africa" (Zableh, 2011). To be an Albino in Tanzania is a curse: Men and women do not go out of their houses because of the risk of being attacked. How do these 2,000 people, who have to avoid the sun between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., and have a life expectancy of 49 years, live? "The Hidden Side of Muhammad Ali" (León, 2016) is the *crónica* that best illustrates the possibility of addressing racism in the Americas. The summary of that story is this: For some, Muhammad Ali was a defiant and arrogant character; for others, he was a symbol: The Black man who imposed himself on an oppressive system. The greatest of all time, who died three months ago, transformed boxing on a declaration of principles (León, 2016). Neither of these two stories talks about racism in Colombia.

## Discussion

### ***Marginalization of Blackness Despite the Belief That Racism is a Solved Problem***

The results showed evidence of the blatant type of racism (Campbell, 1995): *SoHo* made Black communities almost invisible from a discursive perspective. The outlet published a small number of *crónicas* with Black people or communities as central characters, presented a smaller number of those stories on the cover, highlighted very few of those *crónicas* in the table of contents, and excluded Blackness from stories related to settings such as politics and economy.

In contrast, this article did not find evidence of the tendency described by the literature to leave Black people's voices out in stories on Blackness (Campbell, 1995; Entman, 1990). The progress in terms of the amount of coverage that Blackness has received lately in the United States (Su, 2022; Zuckerman et al., 2019) was not evident in the Colombian case. *SoHo* did not make a discursive effort to cover Black cultures. Despite the 23 stories with people of African descent as primary characters, the long profile that was published as a book on a boxing champion, and *SoHo's* issue that makes a *tribute* to Black women, the data revealed that the opportunity for *crónicas* to present racism as a structural problem remains. Although marginalization operates differently in racial democracies, the social outcome remains the same: Reporters discursively marginalize Black cultures from journalistic content (Graber et al., 2020; Gutsche et al., 2022).

### ***Differentiation Based on Extravagance***

The data showed complexity regarding the reconstruction of the stereotypes that foster wariness and fear (Entman, 1990; Kilgo & Mourão, 2019). *SoHo* ambivalently fostered and resisted the presumed connection between Black cultures and poverty identified in the literature (El-Burki et al., 2016) while simultaneously enhancing the association of Blackness with extravagance.

If language constructs social meanings (Gutsche & Salkin, 2017; Kelsey, 2015), the monolithic portrayal of Blackness in stories on poverty results in stereotypical depictions. Five of the 23 stories with people of African descent as primary characters represent them as poor. Those findings enhance the tendency to represent Black cultures as impossible to satisfy (Entman, 1990); such coverage shows those cultures as if they were stuck in poverty, without recognizing their economic and social achievements. That is not to say that journalism should ignore social realities: If a particular community or social group faces poverty more than the others, reporters should point that out. The argument is that reporters could resist the stereotype of poverty by portraying Black cultures in a variety of social roles to illustrate the economic diversity among those populations.

However, through thick description (Geertz, 1973), this article found nuances in the construction of difference (Campbell, 1995). Caraballo's profile illustrated the possibility to resist the stereotype that associates Blackness with poverty. This *crónica* did not hide the economic challenges that the main character faced because of his race. Instead, the author questioned the socioeconomic context that led Black youth to choose between shining shoes or boxing. The story resists the stereotype by identifying the economic

structures that discriminate against Caraballo's ethnicity, presenting poverty as a social problem instead of a personal one.

*SoHo* also enhanced the myth of Black cultures as different by emphasizing their alleged extravagance. The examples of generalizations and connotations suggest that *SoHo* fostered an image of Blackness as a category that enclosed a group of people according to striking behaviors, such as their sex lives and outstanding fashion styles characterized by colors and jewelry, that make them different from the rest of the population. Caraballo's story strengthened that common perception. This *crónica* not only described in detail the character's clothes but also co-constructs Caraballo's extravagance through the portrayal of his personality and even his alleged *nature*.

Caraballo's birth scene also reinforces the stereotype of extravagance because, even though it had nothing to do with boxing, it stressed the particularity of Caraballo's style. Implying that Caraballo's physical abilities were natural, by establishing a link between his talent and his ancestors, wrongly associates dancing skills with Blackness, undermines the athlete's discipline, and enhances the sense of difference.

Although being different seems to be an essential element of Caraballo's self-identity construction, journalists should avoid portrayals that are detrimental to communities that have been historically misrepresented. Reporters must be aware of the role of language in social dynamics (Gutsche & Salkin, 2017; Kelsey, 2015). The greatest good for the most significant number should prevail over an individual's agency to tell a story in a manner that promotes the myth of difference.

The results call for reexamining the idea in journalism that man bites dog is news. Such an approach is detrimental to people of African descent because focusing on their excesses, highlighting their alleged bizarre aspects, not only differentiates among cultures but also reinforces a colonial tendency to fetishize and trivialize non-White ethnicities (Figuroa, 2022; Nartey, 2020, 2022).

### ***Variations on the Myth of Assimilation***

The myth of assimilation operates differently in *SoHo*. The magazine's discourse combines the elements of the myth proposed by Campbell (1995) with two principles of racial democracies: Racism as a foreign problem and as a matter of the past (de la Fuente & Andrews, 2018). Such an understanding of racism is also identifiable in the other two features of the original myth of assimilation: The data neither show evidence of current hostility among Latin American ethnicities nor represent current Black political demands.

#### *Animosity, a Foreign Problem*

The original myth proposes an animosity of Whites toward Blacks (Campbell, 1995). Only two stories approached racism in depth, and both occurred outside Latin America. This tendency remained among the *crónicas* that slightly mentioned racism: The gonzo story on boxing and the *crónica* on the woman with the biggest breasts in the world. The only two pieces on racial animosity in Latin America that address the topic vaguely—the feature on Buena Vista Social Club describing the relationship between Cubans and tourists from the United States and the profile on the Brazilian soccer player with headbands printed with

the word *racism*—do not describe Colombia racial context. *SoHo's crónicas* presented the confrontation among ethnicities as an issue outside Colombia. This discursive strategy is explained by a key feature of racial democracies: Latin American societies tend to present racism as a foreign issue (Freyre, 1941).

#### *Black Political Demands, an Absent Discourse*

Assimilation encompasses a resistance to Black political demands (Campbell, 1995). *SoHo's* discursive strategy to resist such claims was through omission; only two stories partially addressed that topic. The *crónica* on the bodyguard of a female politician implied that a Black community was organized: They attended a meeting with a mayor. However, the focus was neither on the community's political demands nor on the senator's agenda. The story on a tutor of former paramilitary and guerrilla soldiers gives some hints regarding Black claims. The problem was that the narrative framed that information as *problems*, not necessarily as demands, and *SoHo* attributed them to an assumption of *possible* racial prejudice. The myth of racial democracies explains the omission of Black political demands: Since discrimination allegedly does not exist (Antón, 2005), Black communities should have nothing to demand. The findings align with the idea that journalism prevents progress when reporters neglect structural inequalities and promote narratives of racial harmony (Cortés-Martínez & Thomas, 2022; Maurantonio, 2017).

#### *Racism as an Overcome Problem*

Racial democracies promote the idea that Latin American societies already overcame racial discrimination (de la Fuente & Andrews, 2018). *SoHo* presented Colombian racial antagonism either ambiguously or in past terms. The *crónica* on the indigenous boy who struggles accessing education is ambiguous because it does not present a confrontation among races: It only implied a physical and epistemological *distance* among Colombian ethnicities. The two stories on boxing that evoke Cartagena as a racist city used that label exclusively to refer to the 20th century.

*SoHo* was more successful at recognizing Black legacies and struggles of people of African descent in the past than in the present. The magazine identified the founders of two towns and highlighted the workers' resistance to the United Fruit Company's labor conditions. Only two stories indirectly allude to the current obstacles that Black communities encounter. The piece on cutting sugarcane mentions that most workers in the present seem to be of African descent but does not explain the current social, economic, and political conditions that force them to work on such plantations. The *crónica* on the soccer market recreated racial dynamics in previous times but did not directly address racial discrimination in the present. The story presents the low annual rate of graduates from high school but fails to clearly identify the race of this population. The omission made it difficult to classify that story as journalism that addresses racial oppression in the present.

The discourse of the magazine implied that the oppressive system based on race does not endure. The marginalization of Black communities from the content of the magazine, the suggestion that racism operates in societies different from Latin America, the acknowledgment of the accomplishments of people of African descent only in historical terms, and the lack of precision in addressing racial discrimination in the present enhance the idea that racism is a matter of the past.

This article's conclusions significantly contribute to the emerging critical literature on Latin American journalism studies. After almost two and a half years of not publishing content, *SoHo* renewed the publication on December 2022. Nevertheless, this new digital version remains operative within the traditional Colombian media system: A structure that historically has targeted privileged groups (Arroyave, 2020). The magazine reproduces a system of representation described in the literature, one that promotes a particular sociopolitical order that benefits the status quo (Barthes, 1957; Lévi-Strauss, 1963), excluding African descendants from positions of power and limiting their possibilities in an unjust democracy. For reality to change, the system of representation must change. Despite the variation in how Campbell's (1995) ideas operate in *SoHo*, the discourse described in this article is clearly detrimental to communities of African descent. As Campbell (1995) argued, the belief that racism is over is a dangerous myth.

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