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**21<sup>st</sup> Century Cholos**  
Representations of Peruvian youth in the discourse of *El Panfleto*

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MSc in Media, Communication and Development

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# **21<sup>st</sup> Century Cholos**

## Representations of Peruvian youth in the discourse of *El Panfleto*

**Esteban Roberto Bertarelli Valcárcel**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research explores the question of identity amongst the young *cholo* (mix-raced) groups in Lima, Peru, through the analysis of the discourse of satirical webzine *El Panfleto*. Taking into account notions of discourse, power, ethnicity, representation, voice and resistance through satire, it examines whether the social group addressed in several *El Panfleto* articles – the *periurbanos marginales* or doorpeople – constitute a counter hegemonic Peruvian identity.

In order to do so, a discourse analysis grounded in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's Discourse Theory has been undertaken. While this theory has been criticised for its lack of an established framework and for its disregard for non-discursive elements of society, when used in conjunction with elements of Critical Discourse Analysis – as proposed by Rear and Jones (2013) – it proves a useful tool to examine power, hegemony and identity from a subaltern point of view. Following proposed guidelines for discourse analysis found in literature (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002; Hill, 2012; Schneider, 2013), ten articles were studied with care, identifying Discourse Theory elements – nodal points, floating signifiers, chains of equivalence and articulation – and the findings were related to the research question.

The study concludes that there is a clear sense of identity developed in the discourse of *El Panfleto* that goes against previously held notions of what a *cholo* is supposed to be and act like. Through irony and satire, *El Panfleto's* staff both reveals and resists the powerful mechanism of racism and discrimination entrenched in Peruvian society. At the same time, a sense of group identity is being built around what *El Panfleto* calls the *door people*, one that is closely connected to the traditions and values of its forebears – in particular music – while at the same time connected to the World at large through the Internet. The article ends by proposing new avenues of research that would further understand how these social agents are organising in Society.

## INTRODUCTION

*But our cry is not only grief, it is also anger.*

(Gutiérrez, 1991: 282)

Growing up in Peru entails being keenly aware of race, class and its consequences. A multicultural and pluriethnic nation, there is nonetheless a very clear bias to emphasise the White and Westernised parts of Peruvian identity at the expense of the Andean (Bustamante, 1986; Portocarrero, 1992). Peruvian ethnic groups, as shown by Pancorbo, Espinosa and Cueto (2011), are prey to long lasting stereotypes: the poor uneducated *Indio*<sup>1</sup>, the successful, beautiful White, the criminal Black, the hard working reserved Asian, the undetermined *Mestizo*<sup>2</sup>. This situation is complicated by the fact that: (1) racism is never overt, but *solapado*<sup>3</sup>; (2) racism is thought of as foreign, due to Peru lacking a tradition of legal segregation; and (3) ‘there is an official discourse about the absence of racism in the country’ (Golash-Boza, 2010: 318). Golash-Boza goes on to show, through interviews with Peruvian citizens, how deeply rooted racist discourses and practices are in society, and how has the media focus on racism not worked to reduce racism by portraying it as unsavoury acts committed by individual bigots (ibid: 328).

In this sense, webzine *El Panfleto* proves a particularly interesting case to study the emergence of counter discourses, in particular those regarding race and class in Peru. Established by a group of social science students of the National University of San Marcos — the oldest public university of Peru, and amongst the most respected education institutions of the country — it takes pride in having a roster of writers that come from middle and working class backgrounds, and from different departments of Peru<sup>4</sup>. With over two hundred thousand Facebook likes and twenty-eight thousand Twitter followers, and having caught the attention of Peru’s biggest news outlets (Gallegos, 2014; El Comercio, 2015), *El Panfleto* is on the forefront of Peruvian political and social humour. The sociocultural background of the writers in the publication, and the satirical aim that it has, transform their articles in fertile ground to study racial discourses and counter discourses, and the ways in which identity is negotiated in a multiethnic discriminatory society.

While the case is particular to the Peruvian situation, the lessons acquired through its study could be applied to other national realities. Every society, as Gramsci very well explained, has

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<sup>1</sup> A residue of the Spanish conquest, in Peru native Peruvians are called *Indios* (Indians).

<sup>2</sup> Mixed-raced.

<sup>3</sup> Hidden or disguised.

<sup>4</sup> Lima, Chachapoyas, Huancayo, Huamanga, Arequipa, Moquegua and Piura (Sifuentes, 2014)

groups of people that suffer ‘under hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation’ (Louai, 2012: 5), the subaltern class. Subalternity does not only involve class, but also ‘caste, age, gender and office’ (Guha, 1982) or any marker of differentiation that could be used to oppress. Thus, subaltern classes exist in every nation of the world, in every time in history. In that sense, we are very likely to find more similarities in the experiences of Andean Peruvians, Desi Britons or Black South Africans, that we are to find differences.

The study of *El Panfleto* is also relevant from the standpoint of one of the major discussions in postcolonial studies: can the subaltern speak? (Spivak, 1988). Spivak’s famous question ‘was interpreted as a declaration of the impossibility of voicing the oppressed groups’ resistance because of their representations by other dominant forces’ (Louai, 2012: 7), and of the necessity of having intellectual representatives speaking for the voiceless and politically marginalised groups (Louai, 2012, p.7). However, ‘the Internet and similar media allow subaltern voices to bypass the corporate, hegemonic media and either engage in anti-geopolitics or in postcolonial discourse that dissolves the hegemonic framing of an issue’ (Dittmer, 2010: 146). The analysis of such an outlet for subaltern voices is of interest for Media and Communication studies, regardless of the country in which it is situated.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Discourse and Power**

In Peruvian society, discursive power runs deep. As Stuart Hall defined it, discourse is a group of statements which provide ways of talking, of representing, a particular topic at a particular historical moment (Hall, 1997). Essentially, discourse transmits and produces power, while at the same time reinforcing and rendering it fragile, possible to thwart (Foucault, 1998). Discursive power stems from ideology, which, as Engels proposed, ‘is the deduction from reality not from reality itself, but from imagination’ (in Roucek, 1944: 483). While in traditional Marxism this take on ideological – and discursive – power was predominantly related to economic structures, over time it evolved to encompass other categories with hierarchical power structures, such as gender, ethnicity or nationality (Brooker, 1999).

Discourse produces power by transforming ideas, independent of their relevance, or even truthfulness, into widespread held truths, which are considered ‘common sense’ (Gramsci, 1971) to the point where they become naturalised, and are believed to be not a possibility, but a fact. Barthes (1972) related this process of naturalisation to those of myth making, which are

...very broad and diffuse concepts which condense everything associated with the represented people, places and things into a single entity (...) [with] ideological meanings, serving to legitimate the status quo and the interests of those whose power is invested in it (Van Leeuwen: 97)

This interiorisation of the ideological meanings dear to the ruling classes by the whole of society is what Antonio Gramsci, when writing about the concept of hegemony, described as one of the two ways in which a social group manifests its supremacy: ‘domination’ –that is, direct power – and ‘intellectual and moral leadership’ (Gramsci, 1971: 193) which, as stated above, leads the ruled to consider these ideas as ‘common sense’ (p. 430). These two ways, however, are not antagonistic among themselves, for, as Hall notes, ‘there is no pure case of coercion/consent – only different combinations of the two dimensions’ (1986: 17). In this, Gramsci’s view of power is similar to that of Machiavelli and Nye, in that ‘a major power should not just rely on dominance, force, and hard power’ (Yilmaz, 2010: 195). For Machiavelli, it is respect for those in power what commands obedience (Wright, 2004); for Nye, it is the ability to persuade others that they share common interests, an ability he deems ‘soft power’, in opposition to blunt force, or ‘hard power’ (Nye, 2002). Both concepts reflect,

as does Gramsci's take on hegemony, the fact that the ruled are not always forced to comply with the ruling classes, but more often than not do so willingly. The immateriality that is intrinsic to this takes on power is what brought Bourdieu to name it 'symbolic power', that 'invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it' (Bourdieu, 1991: 164), which he calls

...an almost magical power (...) that is defined in and through a given between those who exercise power and those who submit to it, i.e. in the very structure of the field in which belief is produced and reproduced. (Bourdieu, 1991: 170)

While Gramsci's oeuvre is firmly rooted in Marxism, it goes beyond the purely economic aspects to include those dimensions that were neglected by classical Marxism: the political and ideological (Hall, 1986, p.8) According to Stuart Hall, this willingness to look beyond the economism of classical Marxism, without disregarding 'the powerful role which the economic foundations of a social order (...) play in shaping the whole edifice of social life' (1986: 10), is what allows him to identify the various forces that determine a social situation. This is what led Althusser and Balibar (1971) to distinguish between 'modes of production' — 'the basic forms of economic relations which characterise a society' (Hall, 1986: 12) — and 'social formations': 'the idea that societies are necessarily complexly structured totalities, with different levels of articulation (the economic, the political, the ideological instances)' (Hall, 1986, p.12). As Gramsci sees it, social phenomena should not be studied in absolute terms, but as 'relations of force' in a given historical moment. Hall recognises three characteristics which emerge from this position: (1) that hegemony is not a permanent state, but a particular and temporary moment in the life of a society; (2) that it reflects not a unidirectional struggle for power, but a multi-front war of positions; (3) that the ruling class is not a homogenous bloc, but will have within it dominant, subaltern and dominated individuals who share the common goal of maintaining the status-quo. (1986: 15).

### **Representation**

Stuart Hall finds Gramsci's work particularly useful to understand and study racism for a number of reasons; especially relevant to the Peruvian case are the following: (1) the fact that racism is historically specific, and not immutable in time; (2) a non-reductive approach to questions concerning the inter-relationship between class and race; (3) the cultural factors in social development, which he defines as 'the grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs (...) which constitute a national resource for change as well as a potential barrier to the development of a new collective will'; and (4) the ideological field, in which Hall recognises the existence of contradictory ideologies among the subordinate

classes, which subject ‘the victims of racism to the mystifications of the very racist ideologies which imprison and define them’, while emphasising the value of ideological struggles to transform ‘common sense’ (Hall, 1986, 23-27).

Representation is a powerful vehicle through which ideologies are disseminated in a society. As Hall notes, it links concepts and language, allowing us to refer to people places and things both in real and imaginary worlds (1997: 17). M.H. Abrams, in *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), his study of Romanticism, used the metaphor of a mirror to explain a mimetic approach to representation — in the sense that the mind reflects the external world —, and of a lamp to illustrate the turn that he perceived towards an anti-mimetic approach — which suggests that is the mind which imprints in the perceived object its own thoughts and beliefs. As Dani Cavallaro says, ‘a representation only represents by virtue of being interpreted and ultimately represents anything it is capable of suggesting’ (2001: 39). The process through which audiences interpret what has been represented was theorised by Stuart Hall in 1973, when he elaborated the encoding/decoding model of communication. This model suggests that audiences have three possible stances to take with regards of what the creators of the text wanted to convey: they could accept it as it is, negotiate a middle ground, or take an oppositional position.

Naturalisation is a perfect example of how hegemony and representation are linked. ‘A representational strategy designed to fix ‘difference’, and thus secure it forever’, naturalisation ‘is an attempt to halt the inevitable ‘slide’ of meaning, to secure discursive or ideological ‘closure’” (Hall, 1997: 245). If a negative representation of an ethnic or social group becomes naturalised, it is harder for the subjects to break free of its bondage. In Peruvian society, the discourse that white skin is better is so naturalised that *El Comercio*, the most powerful newspaper in the country, consents to the following statement: ‘a person can be born Indian, but certain economic or cultural merits can produce the *miracle* [emphasis added] of ‘whitening’ the person’ (Ortiz, 1999 in Golash-Boza, 2010: 321).

### **Peruvian Identity**

Peru has a long story of deeply engrained racism, which Nelson Manrique (1999) traces back to the Spanish colonial regime, which was interiorised and naturalised by the whole of society. Over time, the official segregating regime of the ‘Indian’ and ‘Spanish Republics’ that existed during colonial times (Gareis, 1993) gave way to a much less overt discrimination, in which class and cultural markers are used instead of racial ones, a kind of racism without race (De la Cadena, 2004). An analysis of the racist discourse of Peruvian elites (Zavala and Zariquiey, 2007) shows how, despite claims that racism is non-existent in the country, there

is a clear distinction between Us and the Others, who are seen as less cultured, less intelligent, less worthy. It is worth quoting them at length:

Nowadays, Peruvian racism involves complex discrimination that goes beyond skin colour, for this category has been articulated with those of class, culture and education. It is possible to conclude that, in Peruvian society, a modern conceptualisation of race exists, one in which phenotype has been subordinated to intellectual capacities and moral standards, whether they are seen as intrinsic to the person or as features that can be achieved through formal education. Racism, then, has been rewritten from other social categories, and therefore it can be said that whiteness is a social construction that can be linked to ‘decency’ or with the ‘learned’ (Zavala and Zariquiey, 2007: 47)

While there are important Afro and Asian Peruvian communities that suffer specific forms of discrimination (see Luciano, 2012; Van der Hoef, 2015), it is fair to affirm that these are both subsumed in the act of ‘*cholear*’, a system through which Peruvians determine their positions in the social scale (Nugent, 1992). Even if the term ‘*Cholo*’<sup>5</sup> can be used as a sign of endearment or as a semantic indicator of Peruvianness, the act of *choleo* is a discursive and discriminatory act performed not only by the White population, but also by people of indigenous descent (Torres Vitolas, 2011), for “*mestizaje*’ unveils the psychosociological contradictions about the dynamics of power and rule in contemporary Peruvian society, namely the simultaneous practice and disavowal of discrimination by all groups’ (Moore, 2002: 495)

Though there is the perceived notion that all Peruvians are *Mestizos* (Portocarrero, 1993: 216), what this actually means ‘remains ambiguous and fraught with difficulties’ (Moore, 2002: 496). This is, nonetheless, an important part of Peruvian identity. The identity of an individual – the subjective concept of oneself (Vignoles et al., 2006) – emerges in part from a ‘collective group consciousness that imparts a sense of belonging derived from membership in a community’ (Premdas, 2011: 813). In his Social Identity Theory (SIT), Henry Tajfel defines social identity as the part of a person’s self-regard that is derived from the knowledge of its belonging to a social group or category (Tajfel, 1984 in Rottenbacher and Espinosa, 2010). Membership within one of these groups helps define oneself and shapes self-esteem (Tajfel, 1982). Social identity can be formed through two distinct paths (Postmes et al.,

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<sup>5</sup> The RAE dictionary defines *cholo* as a mix of European and Amerindian blood, or as an Amerindian who adopts Western habits. Quijano (1980) describes him as someone from indigenous descent who no longer holds ties to highland communities.

2005): a top down process in which members form their identity on the basis of shared characteristic that differentiate their group from others, and a bottom up process in which shared identity is based on the sum of individual expressions by group members (p. 1145-6). The first approach implies the perceived homogenisation of the members in the group, who favour the group common traits over their own individual identities (Turner, 1985); in the second one, 'within-group differences may be integrated into the shared cognitive representation of the group' (Swaab, Postmes et al., 2007, in Jans, Postmes et al., 2012: 1146). While it was believed that heterogeneity impairs social cohesion (Putnam, 2000), Jans et al. suggest that 'strong social identities can emerge and thrive even in heterogeneous groups' (2012: 1149).

National identity formation in societies in which multiple cultural traditions coexist oscillate between this two extremes. Kincheloe and Steinberg (1997), for instance, identify five types of multiculturalism, ranging from monoculturalism — in which the dominant culture is assumed as a norm and all other expressions should be subsumed into it — to critical multiculturalism — that take into account issues of race, gender and ethnicity, and problematises the hegemony of the dominant culture. In recent years, Peru has seen a renewed interest in safeguarding cultural manifestations, manifested, for instance, in the existence of an Interculturality Vice Ministry<sup>6</sup>, or in the inclusion of Andean and Amazonian cultural manifestations in touristic campaigns; these, however, remain subordinated to Coastal, predominantly White, traditions (Cuevas Calderón, 2004; Matta Aguirre, 2012). As a consequence, non-white Peruvians often believe in a 'whitening utopia' — the desire to become socially White (Portocarrero, 2013) — which can be attained by economic success. While the 'progress myth' (Degregori, 1986) was already recognisable in the 1980s, the adoption of neoliberal policies during the Fujimori presidency further entrenched it in Peruvian middle class (Cánepa, 2016).

In studying how racism becomes normalised in a society, a great point of comparison is that put forward by the Critical Race Theory (CRT). The movement had its origin in the disappointment experienced by people of colour toward the traditional avenues of legal reform, and the perceived discrimination of non-white voices (Harris, 2015: 266). This theory, however, has a very clear legalist focus, which deviates from the sociological aims of the research. Despite this, an early insight of CRT proved interesting when thinking about race relations in general: why are people of colour much more likely than Whites to see a society as racist and to be pessimistic about eliminating racism? (Harris, 2015: 267). When

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<sup>6</sup> Part of the Culture Ministry, created in 2010.

answering that question, some scholars (e.g. Johnson, 1991) argued for the necessity to have a ‘voice of colour’ when discussing public policy. A similar claim to that made in the theories of voice and the public spheres which will be discussed in the next section.

### **Recognition, voice and listening**

A large part of the Peruvian fixation with whiteness has to do with the diminished importance given to indigenous and afro traditions, for ‘nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a (...) reduced mode of being’ (Taylor, 1994: 75). A mode of being so reduced as to render someone invisible (Ellison, 1952), non-existent in a social sense (Honneth and Margalit, 2001: 111). Thus, in order to properly exist — once again, in a social sense — it is not only necessary for an individual or a group to be acknowledged, but to be recognised, which Honneth defines as ‘the expressive act through which (...) cognition is conferred with the positive meaning of an affirmation’ (2001, p.115). Recognition matters not only in the symbolic level, but also has direct economic consequences in terms of the distribution of material resources and justice (Fraser, 1996; Butler, 1997; Fraser and Honneth, 2003).

Couldry equates the ‘crisis of recognition’ (Couldry, Livingstone and Markham, 2007) with a ‘crisis of voice’ (Couldry, 2008), which can be defined as the inability to give an account of oneself, and to have this account matter (Couldry, 2010). The process of speaking has its counterpart in the act of listening, particularly across difference (Dreher, 2009), for the burden of proof of recognition should not be put in the voice of those oppressed, but shared with ‘the conventions, institutions and privileges which shape who and what can be heard’ (ibid: 447). This cycle of inclusive speaking and listening can be associated with Fraser’s subaltern public sphere, where ‘members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and need’ (1990: 67).

### **Satire and irony**

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, satire and irony play a fundamental role in the formation of counter discourses. Traditionally, satire was thought of as an aristocratic art (Griffin, 1994) that sided with authority (Hutcheon, 1995) and served as a safety valve that purged the need for direct action (Feinberg, 1967). However, as Amber Day points out, modern political satire is engaged, often combining deconstructive abilities with the visceral quality of political protest (2011: 13). Through satire, the shortcomings of official policy become evident, initialising a change of perception and often triggering the formation of a unified opposition (Bloom and Bloom, 1979; Day, 2011). Satire also aids in the process of ‘reiterative resignification’

(Burbank, 1998), which consists in the gradual change of the ideas and associations related to particular people, concepts or ideologies (Day, 2011: 21). With its high degree of commitment and its involvement with the problems of the world (Hodgart, 1969), modern political satire becomes a tool of the dispossessed to have their voices heard in the arena where hegemony rises and is secured: popular culture (Hall, 1998).

### **Conceptual framework and research objectives**

The previous pages presented the importance that discourse has on transmitting hegemonic notions which have consequences in every order of society. I have argued that identity is based on the recognition that each person has on belonging to a specific social group. By taking a social constructionist stance, it can be argued that this sense of belonging is influenced by the hegemonic discourses existing in society in two different and supplementary ways: by influencing individual self-recognition in specific social groups, and by determining whether each social group is perceived as valuable within the whole of society. Is in this second sense that Peruvian society has privileged ‘whiteness’ in detriment of other ethnic and cultural groups, as shown by the works of Degregori, Portocarrero, Golash-Boza and others.

More specifically, this research assumes Laclau and Mouffe’s take on identity (1985). For the Essex School thinkers, ‘individual and collective identity are both organised according to the same principles in the same discursive processes’ (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002: 41). Inspired by Althusser’s concept of interpellation (1971) — which maintains that ‘individuals are interpellated or placed in certain positions by particular ways of talking.’ (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002: 41) — Laclau and Mouffe’s identity theory can be summarised as follows: the subject is fundamentally split, but acquires identity by being represented discursively. Thus, identity is formed by identifying with a subject position in a discursive structure, and it is always relationally organised. Since the subject’s identity is fragmented and overdetermined, it becomes contingent, and can be challenged (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002).

Group formation, meanwhile, is to be understood as a reduction of possibilities, where alternative identities are distracted in favour of others (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002). This reduction can be understood by following a ‘logic of equivalence’— where, for instance, every non-white is considered ‘black’ — or ‘logic of difference’ — which takes into account other relevant categories, such as gender. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Jorgensen and Philips, 2002.). As groups are ‘not socially predetermined, they do not exist until they are constituted in discourse’ (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002: 45), which occurs through representation and representational practices.

Hegemony, as Hunt (1990) shows us, can be contested through the the 'reworking' or 'refashioning' of the elements which are constitutive of the prevailing hegemony' (p. 313). The emergence of counter discourses, in particular those originating in subaltern public spheres, provides capital in formulating 'oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and need' (Fraser, 1990: 67). The process of displacing existing hegemonic blocs, however, is gradual and slow, and requires cumulative strategic action on the part of specific social actors (Hunt, 1990). Laclau and Mouffe identify this struggle for meaning as 'social antagonism', where 'different identities mutually exclude each other' (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002: 45). Antagonisms are resolved through 'hegemonic interventions', which allows the fixation of elements into moments in discourses that collide antagonistically (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002). Deconstruction (Derrida, 1976) reveals how a hegemonic intervention could have been combined in different ways, making reality contingent (Laclau, 1993). 'Thus, deconstruction reveals the undecidability, while the hegemonic intervention naturalises a particular articulation' (Torfing, 1999: 103 in Jørgensen and Philips, 2002: 45)

As Burbank and Day argue, satirising existing social and political practices help in the gradual change of ideas and associations related to particular people, concepts and ideologies (Day, 2011: 21).

The following research question will guide the analysis:

*To what extent does the discourse of webzine El Panfleto reflect the emergence of a counter hegemonic Peruvian identity?*

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This research analyses the discourse of *El Panfleto* by performing a discourse analysis grounded in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's Discourse Theory (1985). While this particular approach has been criticised for its lack of a structured framework (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002) and for the excessive importance that it gives to discourse over structural conditions in society (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999), when applied to the study of discourses it becomes a powerful tool to discuss identity, hegemony and resistance, in particular from a subaltern's point of view<sup>7</sup>.

Attempts have been made to develop a working framework to Laclau and Mouffe's theory (see Walton and Boon, 2014). This research is particularly indebted with Rear and Jones proposal (2013), which combines the main tenets of Discourse Theory (DT) with the concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Kristeva, 1986; Fairclough, 1992; Candlin and Maley, 1997; Candlin, 2006; Bhatia, 2010) — central to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) — and with the studies of Media, Arts and Literature compiled by Carpentier and Spivoy (2008).

The starting point for DT is the proposition that discourse is 'a structure in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed' (Laclau, 1988: 254). Establishing relationships among the elements that form discourse — in what Laclau and Mouffe call 'the articulatory practice' (1985: 105) — alters the identity of said elements. This position, which Carpentier and Spivoy (2008: 5) termed 'discourse-as-ideology' is what differentiates DT from other approaches to discourse, which maintain a clearer conception of 'discourse-as-language' (Carpentier and Spivoy, 2008: 5; Jørgensen and Philips, 2002. p. 62).

Discourse attempts to fix meaning by excluding all possible alternatives existing in 'the field of discursivity' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 111). For DT, however, discourse can never be totally fixed, and is subject to struggles at all levels of society (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002). This struggle is resolved in what Laclau and Mouffe, after Gramsci (1971), called hegemony, which in DT is 'the expansion of a discourse, or set of discourses, into a dominant horizon of social orientation and action by means of articulating unfixed elements into partially fixed moments in a context crisscrossed by antagonistic forces' (Torfing, 1999: 101). In doing so, the meaning naturalised becomes 'common-sense'.

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<sup>7</sup> Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), arguably the most common method for discourse analysis, is more concerned with 'top down relations of dominance than bottom-up relations of resistance, compliance and acceptance.' (Van Dijk, 1993: 250).

Discursive hegemony is achieved ‘by means of a relatively stable fixation of the meanings of polysemic and contested signifiers around a nodal point.’ (Rear and Jones, 2013: 380). A nodal point (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 112) is a privileged sign around which other signs are ordered, in relation to which they acquire meaning (Jørgensen and Philips, 2002: 28). Nodal points are ‘empty signifiers, a pure signifier without the signified’ (Žižek, 1989: 97), but ones that acquire meaning through the process of articulation (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 133), which fix meaning of a chain of signifiers or moments (p. 112). Rear and Jones exemplify this as follows: ‘if we accept that there is a ‘discourse of neoliberalism’, the term ‘neoliberalism’ itself would be a nodal point, effectively identifying the discourse, while terms such as ‘freedom’ and ‘choice’ would be moments within that discourse’ (2013: 380). Meaning is invested in signifiers through ‘chains of equivalence’ (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), ‘where signs are sorted and linked together in chains in opposition to other chains which thus define how the subject is, and how it is not.’ (Jørgensen and Philips: 43).

When a nodal point or a moment are contested, to the point where they can assume different meanings in different contexts or discourses (Carpentier and Spivoy, 2008: 8), they are termed ‘floating signifiers’. For Laclau (2005: 133), floating signifiers reveal the possibility of displacing discursive frontiers, or blurring them. While it could be interpreted that the potential meanings for floating signifiers appear naturally in different discourses, it can safely be inferred that hegemonic disputes could occur as an act of resistance to the prevailing fixations of meaning; it is in this act that antagonism is revealed.

Jørgensen and Philips argue that ‘Laclau and Mouffe’s theoretical point that discourses are never completely stable and uncontested can be turned into methodological guidelines concerning the location of the lines of conflict’ (2002: 26). Intertextuality – ‘the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts (...) which [they] may assimilate, contradict [or] ironically echo’ (Fairclough, 1992: 84) – reveals discursive struggle ‘through analysis of how the meanings of (...) signifiers are represented, negotiated and effectively contested within the texts’ (Rear and Jones, 2013: 279).

### **Limitations**

By centring the analysis on the media texts themselves, we are bypassing both the writer’s original intentions and the audience actual understanding – or decoding (Hall, 2003) – of the message. In this, we are assuming a Foucauldian view of language, which understands language speaking through us (Andersen, 2003: 6). In order to compliment this study, two further investigations would be advisable: in-depth interviews with the editorial team in charge of the publication and audience analysis. The last one in particular would help shed

light over the power and effectiveness of the discourse which is being studied in this investigation.

A second limitation regards the identity of the researcher operating the analysis. While his ethnic and economic background is mix-raced and upper-middle class, his education and social circle plants him squarely in the privileged class. In that sense, he becomes an outsider looking in, able to empathise with the bitterness and indignation felt by the inequality, but having never felt it himself.

### **Deployment**

The frequency with which *El Panfleto* posts new articles — at least one per day since December 2013, and with several months in which the average has been three or four daily — has generated a vast amount of data that could be potentially analysed. Thus, it was necessary to establish filtering criteria.

Given the nature of the research question, the first filter applied identity code words. A search was made for all the articles that contained the words ‘cholo’, ‘periurbano marginal’<sup>8</sup> and ‘door people’<sup>9</sup>. The two hundred and thirty five (235) resulting articles were then reviewed and organised by relevance to the research. Of these articles, ten (10) were selected, owing to the following criteria: they touched on issues of identity and identity formation; they were written in different moments of the history of the Webzine; they represented different formats and tones of writing. Two of them — in particular the one presented as an appendix — could be read as manifestoes for the Webzine’s generation.

The list of the articles that were analysed in this dissertation can be found in Table 1 below.

The articles were then subject to a close linguistic reading, inspired — but not limited to — those frameworks encountered in specialised literature (Jørgensen and Phillips, 2002) and Web-based fora (Hill, 2012; Schneider, 2013). While this frameworks were predominantly influenced by linguistic based analysis, in particular CDA, a close reading which incorporated notions of DT — nodal points, floating signifiers, the discursive field, chains of equivalence and articulation — applied to cultural and art texts (Carpentier and Spivak, 2008) proved fruitful to understand the construction of identity in *El Panfleto*.

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<sup>8</sup> A mock on statistical socio-economic classifications that brings together the concepts of social marginalisation and of the peri-urban (see Barsky, 2005)

<sup>9</sup> A re appropriation of a stigmatising label (Galinsky et. al, 2003) that appeared in an offensive tweet (*Twitter: Estudiante...*, 2014). It makes reference to the colour of the skin of non-white Peruvians. *El Panfleto* has coined the term ‘yacht people’ to make reference to white Peruvians.

Article name	Date published	Link
Chacalon Jr. plays spontaneous show in San Martin Plaza and Lima is bombarded to prevent it	27/11/2014	<a href="http://bit.ly/2bi6RU5">http://bit.ly/2bi6RU5</a>
20 classic huaynos you stomped to with your old folks in the Central Highway	20/04/2015	<a href="http://bit.ly/2aOxRdx">http://bit.ly/2aOxRdx</a>
I listen to Toño Centella but I post jazz songs to my girl	06/01/2015	<a href="http://bit.ly/2b6M1FU">http://bit.ly/2b6M1FU</a>
Ayacuchan visits Pontifical Catholic University of Peru and ends up as part of a retablo performance	18/05/2015	<a href="http://bit.ly/2byXNuT">http://bit.ly/2byXNuT</a>
To celebrate Peasant's Day, PLUS TV emits a feature on exotic cholos presented by Rafo Leon	24/06/2015	<a href="http://bit.ly/2byXuAh">http://bit.ly/2byXuAh</a>
Aspiring provincial man goes to Lima and immediately loses his accent	04/09/2015	<a href="http://bit.ly/2buTrDV">http://bit.ly/2buTrDV</a>
Inverse racism: Miraflores denounces that no White Peruvian is ever shown in "Domingos de Fiesta"	23/10/2015	<a href="http://bit.ly/2b9mCud">http://bit.ly/2b9mCud</a>
Skandalo and Joven Sensación, or when brown Peruvian youth finally had their own music	28/12/2015	<a href="http://bit.ly/2bidJA9">http://bit.ly/2bidJA9</a>
The cholo chronicles: An ethnostory of young emergent cholos in Peru	09/03/2016	<a href="http://bit.ly/2aWHrt6">http://bit.ly/2aWHrt6</a>
The cholo chronicles: From internet booths to online cholo performance.	08/08/2016	<a href="http://bit.ly/2bthBN4">http://bit.ly/2bthBN4</a>

Table 1. Analysed articles.

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

### **A wild *cholo* appears**

Stereotyping, as Hall (1997) shows us, is a powerful tool of domination. Just as black males in the USA were constantly reduced to insatiable sexual beings while at the same time being infantilised by being denied the attributes of adulthood, to the point where they were referred to as ‘boys’, native and mix-raced Peruvians have suffered their own repertoire of stereotypes that seek to define them and their relations with society. Callirgos (1993) lists some of them: backward, uneducated, primitive when living in the countryside; ambitious, resentful, and parvenu when moving to the city.

*El Panfleto* is acutely aware of these stereotypes, which are constantly used as the building blocks of their articles. A perfect example can be found in the opening paragraphs of the September 2015 article, *Aspiring provincial man...*:

Heinous! A humble and hardworking provincial settler that wished to improve his social condition — for in the provinces you can’t find electricity, running water, education, the Internet, employment... is like, there’s no civilisation — had no better idea than to venture going to Lima to experience the ‘Doorpeople dream’.

However, deep Peru’s humble and bucolic anthropomorphic being, as soon as he arrived in Lima, completely changed his natural provincial essence. He stopped being humble and started picking up fights with anyone who tried to take him for a fool... (Müller, 2015d)

In the piece, Müller<sup>10</sup> leans on some of the classical traits attributed to the Peruvian *cholo*: humble and hardworking, but uncivilised, when living in the countryside; proud and resentful, when in the city. Several instances of equalising a *cholo* with negative features are found all through the data set: they are sad and disillusioned (Müller, 2015b); poor and suffering (Müller, 2015c); savage, exotic and unable to think due to lack of oxygen in the Andes<sup>11</sup> (*El Panfleto*, 2015); they live in sandy pits or cornfields (Chanchó Arnulfo, 2015b);

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<sup>10</sup> The editorial staff of *El Panfleto* write under pseudonyms. In this essay we have mainly used pieces published by ‘François Müller Miró Llosa Althaus de la Jaus’ — a caricature of the white upper-class social scientist — and ‘Chanchó Arnulfo’ — ‘Arnulfo the Pig’, the editor in chief, embodiment of various social clichés ascribed to cholos.

<sup>11</sup> This echoes a claim made in CADE — a yearly meeting of the business class in Peru — made by then Prime Minister, and current President, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (Degregori, 2006; Perú 21, 2016), which serves as a prime example of both the way *El Panfleto* uses intertextuality as a humour tool, and of how deeply entrenched are these stereotypes.

are violent and semi-literate (Müller, 2016a), ‘wild *cholos*, obscene brownies, doorpeople, a herd of unrepresentable peri-urban marginal subjects’ (Müller, 2016b).

Together, the list of epithets presented above form the chain of equivalence attached to the nodal point that is the *cholo* identity. By hammering on them, by playing on the stereotypes historically used to subjugate the subaltern classes of Peru, but which are nowadays often just implied and not uttered out loud, *El Panfleto* displays just how much they are still present in Society; by doing so in a jocular tone, they resist them by showing just how ridiculous they are. As a consequence, the *cholo* identity — a discursive nodal point, as mentioned above — opens up to the field of discursivity, and becomes a floating signifier to which attach a new meaning, a new sense of Self.

### **The exotic and brown world of the Peruvian peasants**

In Peruvian society, the *cholo* is, and has always been, the Other. For *El Panfleto*, it is the more specific category of ‘*emergente*’<sup>12</sup> the one that nowadays contains ‘the crux of otherness’, ‘the acme of prejudice’ (Müller, 2016a). To be an *emergente*, one has to be everything that a privileged Peruvian is — supposedly — not: ‘wretched, exotic, violent, quasi illiterate, half-civilised, in a word: a settler’<sup>13</sup> (Müller, 2016a). As with every case of otherness, however, attention should be paid to what is being opposed, to that Other of the Other which Lacan deemed an impossibility (Bush, 2005), but who must exist in opposition.

*El Panfleto* has very clearly identified one major oppositional figure in the persona of François Müller Miró Llosa Althaus de la Jaus, Expert in Cholos, founder of the Peruvian Institute for Cholo Studies (IECHPE, for its acronym in Spanish<sup>14</sup>). In him, they characterise white affluent Peruvians as ‘laughable, predictable and with the colonial residues of racism and exclusion’ that are endemic to the country (Müller, 2016b). Inspiration for this parody was found in the now extinct blog *Choledad Privada*, in which the character of *Chuto* was used to characterise ‘the brown denizen as an irreverent and cartoonish creator of Peruvian identity’ (Müller, 2016b). Müller becomes, then, a clear effort to sneer in the face of oppression by ridiculing a figure of power; in this, we can single out another instance in which the chain of equivalence attached to a nodal point is contested and rearticulated to mean something different.

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<sup>12</sup> The indigenous Peruvian that migrates to the city and finds —and is often defined by — economic success. See, among others: Degregori (1986), Balbi and Pais (1997).

<sup>13</sup> The word settler (*poblador*) was identified by *El Panfleto* as a code term that the Peruvian press uses for non-privileged classes; its antonym would be ‘neighbour’. The article was not analysed in this dissertation, but you can access it in Chancho Arnulfo (2014).

By focusing on the figure of the white intellectual, *El Panfleto* emphasises how powerfully entrenched in society are the discourses of racism and exclusion, for even in well-meaning allies you can find traces of it. In this sense, we find a repertoire of characters that perpetuate exclusion: a girlfriend, student of Philosophy in the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PUCP), who ‘doesn’t share [his] brown tastes’ (Müller, 2015b); a travel show about ‘the exotic and brown world of the Peruvian peasants’ (*El Panfleto*, 2015); or a Social Science Faculty that sees the appearance of a ‘poor Ayachuchan settler’ as an opportunity to have him perform in the show *Mourning, bleeding and lachrymose Ayacuchan, Vol. 2: encounters between the body and the car bomb* (Müller, 2015c).

In other instances, what is highlighted is not how much discrimination is still strong in society, but how little regard and respect is bestowed upon the subaltern. This is comically exemplified by the lack of seriousness with which François Müller undertakes his academic obligations. Asked about the reason why Peruvians lose their countryside accents the minute they set foot in the capital, Müller responds that it is because they see in Lima a place where you can fulfil your dreams, away from provinces where you cannot find universities or work, and where the main economic activity is to be a serf in a hacienda; with his expertise in *cholos* as the only argument given to sustain the claim (Müller, 2015d). In order to make an ethnography of the Peruvian door people, he enlists students from his Masters module (*21<sup>st</sup> century cholos<sup>15</sup>: Contemporary anthropologic theory about door people*), who then go and do four hours of field work and write a book about the four interviews they managed to conduct (Müller, 2016d). The attitude is expressively put as follows:

The same people that are now honouring you, that want to get to know your exotic culture, are the ones that taught you to despise yourself for your cultural origins when you were a teenager, Steven and Yahaida<sup>16</sup>. “*Cholo* music, indian music, *chuncho*<sup>17</sup> music, unwelcomed music<sup>18</sup>”. They taught you to despise the Andean, the Amazonian,

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<sup>14</sup> The IECHPE is a pun on the IEP (Instituto de Estudios Peruanos – Peruvian Studies Institute), which traditionally employs people perceived as middle class champagne socialists

<sup>15</sup> During the early stages of this research, the author – a white privileged Peruvian – mentioned this as a potential title to a member of the staff. The intention was to fathom whether it was perceived as offensive. While no direct answer was received, the title was then used as an example of white clueless academics studying only the surface of social processes they cannot really understand. Serves him right for asking.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Steven’ and ‘Yahaida’ are *El Panfleto*'s go-to names to refer to Peruvian *cholo* youth. They allude to the custom among working-classes in Spanish speaking countries to name their children with misspelled anglo names. In Spain, for instance, ‘Yahaida’ would be ‘la Jenni’.

<sup>17</sup> A *chuncho* is a person from the Amazon that is not Westernised.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Unwelcomed music’ – ‘*música nada que ver*’ in the original – is a reference to a Facebook post in which a white cultural promoter cancelled an event because it was being attended by ‘*gente nada que ver*’, literally ‘nothing to do people’. This is another instance in which *El Panfleto* uses intertextuality to call back on everyday racism in Peru.

the *Mestizo* in favour of the millenary European culture. Now, them, they honour you, now they want to know you when they realise they are fifth-rate Europeans. Phonies, all of them. Their globalisation and inclusion is so colonial it is laughable. They are a forgery of our voice. (Müller, 2016b)

The constant exaggeration of plausible situations serves a clear function: to show how deeply internalised social prejudices are, how much they are assumed as ‘common sense’. Müller just assumes that the provinces are backwater places with no civilisation, and that every single one of them migrated to the capital with ‘just a raffia bag filled with underwear and stuffed *rocotos*<sup>19</sup>’ (Müller, 2016a).

But *El Panfleto* goes one step further than just exaggerating social situations: they reveal the symbolic violence that lurks below social interactions in Peru. Bourdieu and Wacquant define symbolic violence as ‘violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 169). The paradigmatic example of this would be gender violence, which finds male order ‘so deeply grounded as to need no justification’ (ibid: 171). When violence ‘is wielded precisely inasmuch as one does not perceive it as such’ we witness an act of misrecognition (p. 168). *El Panfleto*, thus, seeks to have us recognise that what is being accepted as normal, as common-sense, is instead an act of violence.

A great example can be found in the oldest article chosen for analysis, *Chacalón Jr. plays spontaneous show ...* (Müller, 2014). The article is based – in another case of intertextuality – on a real situation: leftist Puerto Rican pop star Calle 13’s impromptu show in Plaza San Martín, Central Lima (*El Comercio*, 2014). Despite not having any sort of permit to do so, Calle 13 managed to sing for 45 minutes, impervious to any kind of interruption by the police. *El Panfleto* imagines what would have happened if, instead of a white foreign pop star, the impromptu concert had been organised by local singer Chacalón Jr.<sup>20</sup>:

Incredible! The current Home Minister and the Audit in Chief for the Lima Municipality prevented terrible tragic events from happening today’s morning. It was informed that a group of seasoned settlers planned to spontaneously take Plaza San Martín. The reason was that popular singer Chacalón Jr. had tweeted summoning his thousands of followers to that square. “I wanted to play an outdoors show, I had the

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<sup>19</sup> A type of hot peppers.

<sup>20</sup> José María Palacios, *Chacalón Jr.*, is the son of one of the biggest voices in Peruvian music, the late Lorenzo Palacios Quispe, *Chacalón*. Palacios Quispe, who died in 1994, sang to the second generation of migrants in Lima in what is probably the biggest hit of eighties Chicha: *Soy Provinciano*. See Leyva Arroyo (2005) for an overview of his life and work.

necessity to share my music with all those chacaloneros-at-heart. I invited them to spontaneously take this place. I wanted to show that I'm rebellious and popular", declared the person in question.

While Chacalón Jr. was declaring to our journalists, a fleet of F-16, commanded by Urrestegui and Susel Paredes<sup>21</sup>, was seen in the sky. "WE'LL NEVER ALLOW FOR THIS FELLOWS TO TAKE PLAZA SAN MARTIN SPONTANEOUSLY! THEY ARE A MOB THAT MUST BE DISSUADED IMMEDIATELY! WHO DO THEY THINK THEY ARE! THEY ARE NO ARTISTS!" said both from a condor. (Müller, 2014)

The scale of the reaction seeks to unveil the scorn that is felt by Peruvian popular artists when venturing outside of the areas of the city where they are tolerated, contrasted with the easy acceptance of the white pop star. The language used to speak of Chacalón Jr. followers — 'a group of seasoned settlers planned to spontaneously take' — is reminiscent of the one that media would use to refer to the great land invasions of previous decades (see Matos Mar, 1984), and equates *Chicha* music followers to illegal settlers. By spoofing Peruvian Media language with all its idiosyncrasies — 'terrible tragic events' — the whole unrealistic situations becomes somewhat credible, which helps put their point across: Peruvian Society is violent against its own.

### **Songs that summarise this beautiful dump**

All throughout *El Panfleto*, music takes a central role. Of the ten articles analysed for this dissertation, nine had music as a central argument point, with five of them<sup>22</sup> being arguably about music. This is not casual, for 'popular music is an integral component of processes through which cultural identities are formed, both at personal and collective levels' (Connell and Gibson, 2003).

Traditionally, when in Peru you speak about Peruvian music what comes to mind is both the Coastal and Andean folklore that reigned over the airwaves during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. While both traditions were in constant dialogue with each other and attracted arguably similar crowds, it was the Coastal variety which received official recognition, with the *Criollo* Music<sup>23</sup> Day being established in 1944. Andean Music was, despite the interest in classical music

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<sup>21</sup> The Home Minister and Audit in Chief at the time, respectively.

<sup>22</sup> *Chacalon Jr. plays...; 20 classic huaynos...; I listen to Toño Centella...; Inverse racism... Skándalo and Joven Sensación...*

<sup>23</sup> The Coastal variety.

circles, always seen as less respectful, music for maids and workers (Lloréns Amico, 1983). “*Cholo* music, indian music, *chuncho* music, unwelcomed music” (Müller, 2016b).

Recent years, however, have seen an ever-growing acceptance of Tropical Coastal<sup>24</sup>, Andean and Amazonian sounds among the Peruvian elite and middle-classes. Hardworking orchestras like *Grupo 5* or *Hermanos Yaipén* started to sound in high-class parties and saw movies produced about their stories, while the Amazonian Psychedelic sound of *Los Mirlos* and *Juaneco y su Combo* reached the mainstream by being covered by Limeño band *Bareto*. Nowadays, Electronic Cumbia outfits like *Dengue Dengue Dengue* and *Animal Chuki* are a common fixture of European and Asian festivals, where they play sets rife with Amazonian and Andean melodies. For Fiorella Montero-Díaz (2016) this interest allows ‘white upper classes to self-recreate their identities through rapprochement with ‘the other’ (belonging) and to distinguish themselves from the role of exclusive discriminatory upper classes’ (ibid: 206), thus feeling included and expiating the sins of their forbearers.

What *El Panfleto* sees, instead, is cultural appropriation and embourgeoisement. It says so as much in the mouth of Müller Miró Llosa: “now, them, they honour you, now they want to know you (...) [but] their inclusion is so colonial it is laughable” (Müller, 2016d). In the *Tío Vlady*<sup>25</sup> column analysed for this dissertation, a peri-urban marginal young man tells the story of how his new girlfriend erased all his “Yaga & Macky, Toño Centella, Clavito y su Chela, Gisela Lavado and Chacalito songs<sup>26</sup>”, and has him proving his cultural capital by posting ‘jazz, boss nova, blues, symphonic power metal, classical music and independent rock’ (Müller, 2015b). *Tío Vlady*’s advice is worth quoting at length:

Dear Brayan, stop being someone you are not. Downplay what people might say and listen to what you really dig, brownie boy. If the hipster chick doesn’t want to get down with *perreo* for the foxy ladies, let her go. You are losing your mates and they are starting to think of you as an imbecile. STOP ACTING LIKE THAT! Try taking her to the *Súper Complejo*. This Saturday *Clavito y su Chela* plays back to back with *El Lobo y la Sociedad Privada*. Tell her that love is the only thing that matters in a relationship, and if that doesn’t work, you can always go and have some chicken soup. (Müller, 2015b)

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<sup>24</sup> To distinguish it from the *Criollo* Coastal variety. Tropical Coastal music has influences of Colombian Cumbia and other rhythms.

<sup>25</sup> An agony uncle parody in which Vladimiro Montesinos, the strong man of the Fujimori regime, gives advice to young and confused cholos.

<sup>26</sup> All the artist mentioned are perceived to be unrefined by Peruvian elites. Not that they need their acceptance: *Clavito y su Chela*’s *¿Por qué serás así?* (2013) has close to 18 million views on YouTube.

In the April 2015 article *20 huaynos you stomped to...* (Müller, 2015a) a playlist of traditional Peruvian huaynos<sup>27</sup> is accompanied by commentary of what would a hypothetical *cholo* family be doing when each song played in a party. The article is a treasure chest of clichés of what a working class party is: ‘when the only thing left to eat are beer or *cañazo* boxes, this song emerges so you start saying goodbye’. But amid the japes there are constant reminders that this is just an exaggeration of a common shared experience for most of *El Panfleto*’s readership.

Nephew, niece, this door people staff wants to remind you that, before you partied to David Guetta, you did so to orchestras formed by violins, guitars, *tinyas*, saxophones and harps<sup>28</sup>. Don’t play dumb, *chuls*<sup>29</sup>, we know you well because we are like you. (Müller, 2015a)

Popular music thus becomes another nodal point to be transformed into a floating signifier, another chain of equivalence to contest and modify. But what *El Panfleto* seeks is not to have Popular Peruvian music accepted by the elites, for after all why would they need to ‘bring attention to cumbia groups with decades of national and international touring and thousands of records sold’ (Müller, 2016b). Instead, what interests them is the way in which popular youth music reflects the codes of the *barriadas*<sup>30</sup> as a generational story. It is because of this that they see in *Skándalo* and *La Joven Sensación* more than the Peruvian answer to N’Sync and the Backstreet Boys: they see it as the early aural memories that spoke to their generation, the first inklings of a group and class consciousness. (Chanco Arnulfo, 2015b)

### **We celebrate ourselves**

*El Panfleto* has a clear sense of class and race identity that is different to what existed in previous generations. In the series of posts ‘*The cholo chronicles*’ — two of which were reviewed for this dissertation — they seek to explore “the emerging youths that belong to the savage clans of San Juan de Lurigancho, Comas or the dreaded bus stop of Chacas<sup>31</sup>” (Müller, 2016a).

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<sup>27</sup> A popular dance from the Andes.

<sup>28</sup> The classic configuration of an Andean band.

<sup>29</sup> A variation of *cholo*.

<sup>30</sup> A variation of *barrio* (neighbourhood), it would be equivalent to ‘the hood’.

<sup>31</sup> San Juan de Lurigancho and Comas are working class districts of East and North Lima; the bus stop of Chacas belongs to the northern beach resort of Ancón, where social elites and the working class reluctantly share the same social space.

The first of the chronicles analysed is the one subtitled '*An ethnostory of young emergent cholos in Peru*' (Müller, 2016a). In it, Müller decides to 'share his findings with all the Stevens and Yahaidas who won't be able to pay the S/. 150<sup>32</sup>' that his book would cost. He starts by contesting the category of *emergente*, which he deems 'the first step in constructing a miserable and resent-filled being'. To be an *emergente* is, for Müller, to be the 'acme of otherness', to be condemned to always be in the process of emerging, but to never actually reach 'a position in an egalitarian world'. The *emergentes* are always living amidst their parents' migration history, are always trying to aspire to something they are not.

To this chain of equivalences that construct every *cholo* as a 'provincial/migrant/emerging destitute that migrated to the capital with just a raffia bag filled with underwear and stuffed *rocotos*' (Müller, 2016a), Müller opposes a different one that has Peruvian youth being part of 'a global communities that has its demands written and shared online, on TV and in the radio'; a group of people with a 'high degree of mobilisation', who are never stuck in their 'sad slums'; who dance to k-pop and *tecktonik* as well as *huaylarsh* or *perreo*<sup>33</sup>; who are, in a word, connected. Müller wishes to demonstrate how the idea of a 'peri-urban marginal emerging youth' is a 'nebulous concept', one yet open to solidification. By pigeonholing a great segment of the population as people always aspiring but never reaching, an act of oppression is being performed. *El Panfleto* sets out to explicitly change this perception, in an act of re-articulation of meaning.

The second chronicle is even clearer in its aim to identify a group identity. *From internet booths to online cholo performance* (Müller, 2016b) is a *bildungspost*<sup>34</sup> that follows the relationship between the peri-urban marginal youths and the Internet. It is divided in three parts, or settings. On the first one, the neighbourhood Internet booths become the places where kids became exposed to global cultural goods, and had interactions with people from all over the World in chat rooms and online gaming. As a consequence, 'the first herd of brown guys with contemporary discourses of modernity and globalisation' was born.

The second and third settings narrate the process which gave birth to *El Panfleto*, from the early attempts of representation of a *cholo* character as a central tenet of Peruvian identity that was performed in the blog *Choledad Privada*, to the realisation that if the Internet was to become a democratic space it was going to be through 'the voice coming out from long-

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<sup>32</sup> Around £ 35.

<sup>33</sup> K-pop is Korean pop music; *tecktonik* is a French style of dance music; *huaylarsh* is a traditional Andean crop dance; *perreo* — literally 'doggy style' — is a dance associated to reggaeton.

<sup>34</sup> A wordplay on *bildungsroman* — a coming-of-age novel.

lived pioneering booths of North Lima, the Mantaro Valley, Ayacucho, Piura and Arequipa' (Müller, 2016b). The exercise of the voice found in the Internet booths implied a 'necessary and urgent change in the relations of yacht people (the privileged class) and door people', a change that would break centuries of subalternity and second-class citizenship in favour of becoming the current idea of the country.

Despite the certainty and righteousness shown in the article, a note of melancholy is perceived. Breaking character, Müller says that

We celebrate ourselves, and that is why we are condemned to also disappear. Our networks are running thin, and if we don't jump with the necessary momentum, our right foot won't hold. Where to go? What new things to do? Which new Apu<sup>35</sup> shall we adore? Which new Internet guru need we brown-nose? Those are our doubts. (Müller, 2016b)

The networks Müller speaks of are the ones that would allow young door people to 'to write every day, to produce new audio-visual material, to contact sponsors' (Müller, 2016b), but that are currently dominated but what he names the 'inter-borough intelligentsia' of Miraflores and Barranco<sup>36</sup>. The lack of networks reflect the extent to which economic and symbolic power is still held by white Peruvian elites. However, insofar as the subaltern classes in Peru persist in gaining an economic and social foothold, while at the same time developing a strong sense of identity and self-esteem, a time will come in which the idea of an 'Expert in *cholos*' becomes preposterous.

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<sup>35</sup> An Incan divinity.

<sup>36</sup> Two affluent districts of Lima.

## CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages we have seen how *El Panfleto*, through humorous tales of squalor and discrimination — counterintuitive as that may be — reveals the rise of a new, markedly distinct Peruvian *cholo* identity. An identity that is inevitably influenced by their forebears' own social processes and identities, but that is also decidedly their own. An identity that is both traditional and modern, local and globally connected, that dances with the same glee to *huaylarsh* and EDM, to *tobadas* and punk rock. In *El Panfleto*'s view, migrants and *provincianos*, long condemned to be perceived as 'poor little birds' in need of help (Müller, 2016a), are ever gaining agency and voice, are ever more aware of who they are or, more importantly, who they want to be.

The medium in which *El Panfleto* operates, the Internet, plays a big role in the configuration of the new *cholo* identity and in the development and transmission of a distinct generational voice. After all, it was the access gained through the Internet booths of the 1990s what allowed 'youths and children from the outskirts of the capital and its provinces' to interact perfectly with the rest of the World, thus developing their own discourses of globalisation, becoming global subjects (Müller, 2016b). It also became a platform through which a generation was able to 'openly express [themselves] about national politics, culture, ethnomusicology and day to day life' (Müller, 2016b).

To read these articles through the lens of Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory is to see how much of a conscious counter hegemonic struggle they represent. 'Common-sense' ossified categories, like *emergente*, *cholo* or even 'good music' are constantly contested; entire chains of equivalence are deemed inappropriate, opening floating signifiers to the field of discursivity and the possibility of a new articulation into something that more closely resembles social justice and equality.

This research also opens new epistemological avenues to explore in the future. A first one would study the impact that *El Panfleto* has had in its audience, both in terms of an increase of self-identification as *cholos* and in the pride of being so, and in terms of the advancement of a progressive political agenda<sup>37</sup>. Another one would study the feasibility of a political articulation of the discursive platform put forward by *El Panfleto*, or the extent to which it overlaps with current political movements in Peru. A third one would contrast a compare the

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<sup>37</sup> Though not discussed in this dissertation, *El Panfleto* has a very clear progressive/liberal agenda that advances social rights and which may have been influential in preventing Keiko Fujimori's victory in the 2016 elections.

political humour brandished by *El Panfleto* with similar undertakings in other latitudes, with an emphasis on how cultural realities shape humour. Finally, a fourth one would see the extent to which mainstream media has picked up the issues put forward by *El Panfleto*, both in political and representational terms.

In 1985, a young rock band from the Unidad Vecinal N°3<sup>38</sup> published one of the first albums of the *Rock Subterráneo* movement. In the fifth track, *Oirán tu voz, oirán nuestra voz* (Leusemia, 1985), a young Daniel F. sings:

‘Let’s Peruvianise the nation’ - they say,  
and they’ve never heard you sing!  
but the relay is about to come  
and they will finally hear your voice.<sup>39</sup>

Thirty years may have passed, but the relay seems to have finally come.

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<sup>38</sup> A social housing project built in the 1950s.

<sup>39</sup> *¿Peruanicemos la patria* – dicen? / ¡si nunca te oyeron cantar! / empero la hora del relevo se acerca / y al fin oirán tu voz.

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