

Pardismo, Colorism and the “Brazilian Woman”: production of racial identity of light-skinned Black women

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Abstract: *In this article, based on studies, readings, and discussions at collective supervisory meetings among the authors, we discuss reflections that are preliminary to the realization of a study about the parda or light-skinned Black population, and the theme of “pardismo” in Brazilian society. We reflect on the processes of invisibilization of Blackness based on the ambiguity of phenotypic traits. Like all oppressions that operate in colonial Western society, the symbolic violence of deracialization, combined with gendered oppressions, can have significant psychosocial effects on people who occupy non-hegemonic gender positions. Focusing on Black women with light-skin, we consider how the denial of racial identity affects processes of subjectivation of these women in a society marked by coloniality. We also discuss how the concept of “colorism” can be adapted to Brazilian reality.*

Keywords: *Pardismo; Colorism; Racism; Whitening; Light-skinned Black women.*

Pardismo, Colorismo e a “Mulher Brasileira”: produção da identidade racial de mulheres negras de pele clara

Resumo: *Neste artigo, baseado em estudos, leituras e discussões ocorridas em reuniões de orientação coletiva entre as autoras, trazemos reflexões preliminares à realização de pesquisa sobre a população parda e o tema do “pardismo” na sociedade brasileira. Buscamos refletir a respeito dos processos de invisibilização da negritude com base na ambiguidade de traços fenotípicos. Como todas as opressões que operam na sociedade ocidental colonial, a violência simbólica da desracialização, combinada com as opressões de gênero, pode provocar efeitos psicossociais significativos em pessoas que ocupam posições de gênero não hegemônicas. Com foco em mulheres negras de pele clara, procuramos refletir sobre as formas como a negação da identidade racial incide sobre os processos de subjetivação dessas mulheres em uma sociedade marcada pela colonialidade. Refletimos ainda sobre a adequação do conceito de “colorismo” à realidade brasileira.*

Palavras-chave: *pardismo; colorismo; racismo; embranquecimento; negras de pele clara.*

Pardismo, Colorismo y la “Mujer Brasileña”: producción de la identidad racial de mujeres negras de piel clara

Resumen: *Este artículo, basado en estudios, lecturas y discusiones que tuvieron lugar en reuniones de orientación colectiva entre las autoras, trae reflexiones preliminares para la realización de investigación sobre la población negra de piel clara y el tema del “pardismo” en la sociedad brasileña. En tal sentido se procura reflexionar sobre los procesos de invisibilización de la negritud a partir de la ambigüedad de los rasgos fenotípicos. Como todas las opresiones que operan en la sociedad occidental colonial, la violencia simbólica de la desracialización, combinada con las opresiones de género, puede tener efectos psicossociales significativos en las personas que ocupan posiciones de género no hegemónicas. Centrándose en las mujeres negras de piel clara, el texto busca reflexionar sobre las formas en que la negación de la identidad racial afecta los procesos de subjetivação de estas mujeres en una sociedad marcada por la colonialidad. El artículo también reflexiona sobre la adecuación del concepto de “colorismo” a la realidad brasileña.*

Palabras clave: *pardismo; colorismo; racismo; blanqueamiento; mujeres negras de piel clara.*

Introduction

What is Black enough to be on the spectrum of Blackness? Should my hair be different? Who am I? Where am I located? “Mulatta”? “Morena” [brown]? Am I “the color of sin”? These questions accompany the daily lives of countless Black women with light skin. Women who, by affirming their Blackness are pierced by looks, comments and questions: “not that much”, “you are too light”, “your hair is not kinky enough”, “you are not Black enough”. They are women who live in a world of “almost”. In their faded Blackness these women inhabit bodies on a frontier (Mariana Amaral QUEIROZ, 2020), neither here nor there, bodies with (or without?) freedom of self-denomination, in a constant search for confirmation. They are never sufficient. After all, who defines the dimension of racialization? Who defines which Black people are more within the norms? How do the mechanisms that make invisible the Blackness of Black women read as “pardas/mestiças” [brown/mestiza] in Brazilian society operate?

For non-white women, often, what will socially define their racial group is their identification as a subject. This is related to their emotional or psychic processes. With cultural identifications or family relations, or even how this person is read by society (Gabriele de Oliveira da SILVA *et al.*, 2020).

In this article, based on studies, readings and discussions that took place in collective supervisory meetings among the authors, we present reflections preliminary to a study about the theme of “pardismo”² in Brazilian society, with a focus on Black women with light skin (Débora MONTIBELER, 2021). It therefore predates the realization of a study related to the theme by its second author, a student in the post-graduate program, who is a Black woman with light skin. The objective of these reflections, based on her own experiences and on readings and studies with the supervisors, was to support the realization of the proposed study. Therefore, beginning with issues lived by the researcher in her affections as a young woman, and related to the burden of stereotypes placed on women who are descendants of colonizers and of the enslaved Black people violently transported to Brazil, in this article we will consider ideas from various authors about the psycho-social effects of racism and miscegenation in the racial identity of Brazilian women today.

The themes of subjectivities, singularities, identities, and identifications, which are crucial for thinking of issues of race and gender – of differences in general – signal the appeal to knowledge from the field of psychology and related areas. Lélia González (1984; 2018) and Neusa Santos Souza (2021) were women thinkers who used psychoanalytical concepts in their studies about Black people in Brazilian society. In psychoanalysis, the theme of subjectivity refers to unique knowledge associated to a cleavage of the psychic apparatus (conscious/pre-conscious, unconscious) and to the place that the unconscious occupies in this field (Luiz Alfredo GARCIA-ROZA, 2000).

In 1983, the psychoanalyst Souza (2021), used these themes to introduce her study entitled, *Tornar-se negro ou As vicissitudes do negro brasileiro em ascensão social* [Becoming Black or the vicissitudes of the Brazilian black in social ascension: “A Black person who makes an effort to rise socially pays the price of the more or less dramatic massacre of their identity. Distanced from their original values (...) the Black population took the white as a model of identification” (SOUZA, 2021, p. 46).

In relation to the polysemic concepts of “identity” and identification” it is important to focus on a few issues: identification, an unconscious process, provides structure to identities, which are differentiated in personal identity and social identity. Personal identity, a subjective construction that marks the singularity of each person, is “the fiction of the Imaginary through which the subject represents themselves as a conscious ‘I’ seeking to give unity and coherence to this representation” (Mara C. de S. LAGO, 1999, p. 123). Meanwhile, social, cultural, and group identities, mark our sense of belonging. However, “the processes” of construction of personal and social identities, which are always relational, are similar and take place by identifications and contrasts: I/other, in the case of personal identities; and we/others, in the case of cultural identities or social groups.

In this article, we seek to understand the racial identity transit of Black women with light skin and how colonial mechanisms are configured that create a folkloric image about their

¹ In Brazil, there is a common ancient, yet still used, expression that associates people of color with sin, lust and sexuality. Even though this is a lesser used expression, it is still considered current to say that when a person is more tan or has a skin tone that is a bit darker than white that they are “the color of sin”.

² We define *pardismo* as the process by which the identification with the category *pardo* [brown-skinned] can produce identity and cultural alienation of Black people with lighter skin, fragmenting a unified group identity and making it difficult for Black people with lighter skin to claim their racial belonging. The concept differs from “national-pardismo”, which refers to a political ideology promoted in on-line communities such as Facebook and that defends a national state focused on pardos, as the “Brazilian race”. Portuguese is a gendered language and the words *pardo* and *parda* refer to the racial category of “brown people”, in the male and female respectively. In this article we are referring to pardos as “light-skinned Black people” or “black people with light skin”, because we are studying this specific portion of “brown-people”, those who identify themselves within the Black community.

bodies in the social imaginary. What we call "racial identity transit" concerns the racial elasticity socially conferred to people with ambiguous phenotype, that is, people who have phenotypical characteristics that are usually associated to both white and Black people, concomitantly, having them "move" through two or more racial identifications, whether in their own self-identification or in the hetero-classification made by third parties. In other words, they are classified in different manners by different people, and can be classified in more than one racial category in their process of identification in their lifetime and at times are read through their class belonging or geographic location instead of simply by their phenotypical characteristics. It was a reflection about this racial identity and belonging transit that initiated the questionings that mobilized this study. We begin with the understanding that racialization and attempts to erase Black identity result from socio-historic processes that are much broader and deeper in Brazilian society, for which colonization is its central mark. Thus, given that coloniality³ (Aníbal QUIJANO, 2005) is structured by processes of racialization and genderization, without which it is impossible to grasp modernity and its hierarchical mode of production (María LUGONES, 2008; QUIJANO, 2005; Walter MIGNOLO, 2003), in this text our objective is to understand the combined way that racism and sexism operate in the production of this movement of identity of Black women with light skin, who are the protagonists of the reflection in this article.

They are the people who carry the mark of the "Brazilian woman", the fetishism of the mix. This mixture does not go completely unnoticed because these women are also not recognized as white. Their skin "of the color of sin" is always highlighted, interweaving racialization to hypersexualization (GONZÁLEZ, 1979; 2018). In the essentializing nomenclatures and presuppositions attributed to them, it is evident that these women are seen as racialized, even if the racial inheritance signaled by their skin is not precisely identified. They are racialized and deracialized by the same system of power that structures society and places subjects in a hierarchy.

While these questions are individual, they are also collective, they steer our look to the phenomenon of "pardismo" in Brazilian society, and the influence of the violent denial of Blackness in processes of subjectivation of Black women with light skin. The "pardismo" or the tendency to use the term "pardo" [brown] to mark the population with lighter skin, neutralizing them in the racial debate, is a phenomenon that naturalizes a racial non-belonging and promotes a collective demobilization and depoliticization of race, given that it comes to be seen as an external denomination. As mentioned by the authors cited, this symbolic violence of deracialization strongly affects women and their living experiences marked by the overlapping of oppressions of race and gender.

In the conditions of production of racialized and gendered discourses in Brazil (CESTARI, 2017), the terms "morena" [brown] or "mulatta", for example, are classifications aimed at Black women with light skin. They function through the denial of identification of the place of the Black person, as well as the hypersexualization that can make them exotic through discourses that are also sustained in the imaginary of their bodies, a problem that has been discussed by González (1983), Pacheco (2013), Carneiro (2015) and other Black feminists (Cely PEREIRA; Rogério MODESTO, 2020, p. 279).

There is no clearer example of corporealization and objectification of women in Brazil than the image of the "Brazilian mulatta", as analyzed by Lélia González and returned to in this text, in a denomination actualized⁴ by analyses of Brazilian authors and Black movements.

To be able to establish the bases for this gendered racialization, it is necessary to reconsider and understand how the construction of the myth of racial democracy⁵ and miscegenation, based on the ideology of whitening, influence the racial subjectivation and self-identification of Black people read as parda. Firstly, this process implies understanding the project of nation that was inaugurated in the colonial period and that continues to be actualized and become more sophisticated today.

³ Coloniality is a concept used by Quijano (2005), who affirms that what we call modernity is a historic time inaugurated by colonialism and that the colonial logic continues to operate after the colonial experience. That is, the current experience is marked by a logic of colonial relations between forms of knowledge and ways of life, indicating a link between the past and present in which a standard of power emerges.

⁴ The term "Mulatta", which is considered highly pejorative because of its association with animals (mules) and the consequent dehumanization of the Black population, is used in this article only for purposes of a temporal reference, always in quotes, to mark a shift in the flow of reading. What we call "actualized denomination" concerns the current use of the nomenclature "Black with light skin" by social movements to refer to Black people with less pigmented skin, who are denominated as "parda" [brown] by the current racial classification and in the past were colloquially referred to as "mulatta".

⁵ The "myth of racial democracy" is a widely spread myth in Brazilian society, current since the 1930's that states Brazil is a society free from racial discrimination, a happy and harmonic country where all races live in peace. This idea of racial democracy and harmony has been continuously refuted by researchers and scholars in the racial studies as data shows there is a lot of inequality produced based on racial criteria, thus, it is deemed as a myth.

Miscegenation, ideology of whitening and the myth of racial democracy

The ideology of whitening is the background of those discourses that exalt the process of miscegenation as the most complete expression of our "racial democracy".
(GONZÁLEZ, 2018, p. 63)

The black myth constitutes itself by breaking one of the characteristic figures of the myth – identification – and imposing the mark of the unusual, the different.
(SOUZA, 2021, p. 55)

Miscegenation is one of the leading presumptions of national formation. As Kabengele Munanga affirms (2019), miscegenation cannot be conceived through its strictly phenotypical character, given that this is saturated by ideological-political content. For this article, we begin with the concept of miscegenation postulated by Munanga in his book *Rediscutindo a Mestiçagem no Brasil*, [Rediscussing Miscegenation in Brazil], which does not reduce the phenomenon to a crossing between phenotypically different populations, but addresses it through its social, psychological, economic, and sociopolitical effects. Therefore, we emphasize that race is, beyond skin color, an ideological-political positioning, given that a single person can be read racially in different ways, depending on where they are found geographically. Basically, therefore, miscegenation is the result of the crossing between individuals of different population groups (Fátima OLIVEIRA, 2004). However, not any reproductive process is denominated miscegenation. When two white people of different origins have relations and reproduce it is not considered miscegenation. The miscegenation is necessarily related with the presence of the racial mark of a subalternized group. The miscegenated (people who are mixed-race), pardo or mestizo is a racialized subject. Therefore, the ponderation about miscegenation is always based on the idea of the racial mark. In a recent interview, the author Alessandra Devulsky (2021b), whose research focuses on colorism, affirms:

The term miscegenation is a problematic term because we do not speak of miscegenation between two white people. If a white person from France marries a white person from Germany and has a child, no one will say that the child is mixed-race. Because to be white is the norm, the rule. To speak of miscegenation is to anticipate the fact that the Indigenous, Black or Asian element is the adverse element, it is the point outside the curve, the element that is dissonant from that which is the rule of beauty, the intellect and competence. The term carries the presumption that I have a norm and a dissidence, when we know that in racial terms there is no difference at all.

Beyond an attempt at physical whitening, the project of miscegenation involves a process of alienation (Frantz FANON, 2008) and fragmentation of the Black community. It is notorious that the racial question in Brazil is anchored in the discourse of racial democracy and on the idea that we are all miscegenated. It is a clear attempt to make invisible the racism that structures Brazilian society (Silvio ALMEIDA, 2019) and that makes the lives of racialized populations precarious. The historically specific traits of the Brazilian racial discourse, which denies the racial belonging of Black individuals, based on an evaluation of skin tone, were architected to produce divisions in the Black community, without failing to racialize Black people in general. Even if their aesthetic is closer to the norm (white), and therefore is more tolerated and even tokenized⁶ (Jeane de Jesus BISPO, 2020) in spaces that are mostly white, the racial mark does not go unnoticed. The racial mark of this group is noted to the degree that it even configures an intermediary racial category that is conventionally called pardo.

The official classification of race in Brazil, according to the census applied by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) is composed of five categories: white, black, brown [pardo], yellow and Indigenous. Pardo is a descriptive term for Black or Indigenous people with white ancestry (Grada KILOMBA, 2019). In the 1970s, an effort by the social sciences and Black movements joined Black and brown people under the broader category of "black population"⁷ (in Portuguese the correct term for this combination is "negro") for the purposes of analyses of population statistics and with the intent to generate a unified racial identity that would mobilize an integrated ant-racist organization. Today, the black population is constituted by the combination of Black and brown people (pardos). This combination emerged in the racial debate of the 1970s, based on a finding that the educational and socio-economic indicators of Black people with light skin (identified as pardos/pardas) were very similar to those of Black people in general (Sueli

⁶ According to an article published on the Portal Geledés por Bispo (2020), tokenization is a term that refers to the uses that whiteness makes of Black people to exempt whites from the accusation of being racist. It usually involves the integration of a Black person to spaces to allow affirming an absence of racism. The tokenization, therefore, refers to the practice that white people use to justify feeling racist or not.

⁷ In Portuguese, the word used to refer to the combination of black and brown people is "negro", which is not an offensive word in Brazil, and it has been used with pride by the black community. However, for translation purposes, we will use the term "black population" instead of "negro" as the latter may be taken as offensive in English-speaking countries.

CARNEIRO; Djamilá RIBEIRO; Bianca SANTANA, 2020), and that they therefore shared the same inheritance of social precarizations and vulnerabilities.

What represented a great victory for the Black movement at that time wound up having an unexpected contribution to the erasure of Indigenous populations. This occurred because, by appropriating the category *parda*, and using it only for people with Black ancestry, this initiative neglected the fact that many people of Indigenous descent also identify themselves in this way (as brown people). Therefore, this absorption of *pardos*, contributed in a certain way to an invisibilization of the Brazilian Indigenous population. It is important to note that, in Brazil "*parda*" refers to a residual and transitory racial category, a category of passage in the colonial whitening project, and that also includes Indigenous people (Geni Daniela Núñez LONGHINI, 2020) who had their racial identity denied by this whitening process. In this eugenic project of the Brazilian state of the nineteenth century, the *mestizo* or *parda* would be the halfway point on the road to the final objective of population whitening that permeated all racialized groups, including the Indigenous community. It is important to note that in this article, the discussion about the whitening ideology will take place through the perspective of Black people with light skin, who are socially read as *pardas* without considering the significance of this process for the Indigenous population. Nevertheless, in order not to repeat the mistake of erasure, we recognize that this theme must be carefully studied, and that it has been addressed by current Indigenous authors (LONGHINI, 2020; Kércia Priscilla Figueiredo PEIXOTO, 2017; Ailton KRENAK, 2021).

According to the Pnad-Contínua 2019, which is a National On-going Study of Residences by Sample, published by IBGE (2019), in the criteria for self-declaration of color or race, most of the Brazilian population resident in the country declares themselves to be *parda*, 98.2 million people, or 46.8% of the total.⁸ This represents a majority of the population, which is currently found in the gaps of racial identity (Joyce de Souza LOPES, 2017), people who do not see themselves represented by the dichotomic model (white-black) of race that comes from an imperialist inheritance, and who define themselves through undefinition. They are people who determine their race based on the tonality of their skin, given that "*parda*" [brown] is a tone between the broad categories of color, a middle term, and is not imbued with a definitive racial or even a cultural characteristic, after all, there is no *parda* culture.

Considering that *parda* is not a racial or ethnic designation but refers to the color or to what is affirmed to be a color, even if undefined, it is interesting to perceive how this is constituted as central when we propose to think about the constitution of the body-type of the national population (Viviane Inês WESCHENFELDER; Mozart Linhares da SILVA, 2018, p. 4).

To say that, in Brazil, there are only white, Black, Indigenous and yellow people in a defined manner is a reductionist affirmation that is quite influenced by a racial imperialism (Jones MANOEL, 2020), which ignores the fact that in Brazil there is a large group of people who compose this intermediary category. Some of them find their belonging in Blackness, another part very probably has Indigenous roots, and another part possibly is not able to define any point of racial belonging or identification, finding themselves in what some authors conventionally call "identity limbo" or "racial-identity limbo" (SILVA *et al.*, 2020; Lauro Felipe Eusébio GOMES, 2019). And it is for this reason that we reconsider the importance of seriously examining the question of *parda* [brownness] and try to understand the psycho-social effects of the process of subjectivation of this portion of the population.

To say "*parda*", moreover, may or may not admit an identification as Black. The condition "*parda*" in itself, does not refer to a political discourse or expressive identity, it is not associated in an obvious way to a specific cultural repertoire, and above all, it is not necessarily or imperatively linked to a keen perception of racial discriminations in Brazil (Verônica Toste DAFLON, 2017, p. 16-17).

In this sense, *parda* does not only indicate a category of mixture, but it is also an important element in the construction of Brazilian racial ideology (MUNANGA, 2019) and the bodies of *parda* women were widely used as undeniable physical proof of racial harmony, an element that reinforced the myth of a racial democracy or "Brazilian race". "Pardismo" is the embodiment of the colonial project that is still underway in a yearning for an approximation with the European ideal.

The notion of Brazilianness is marked by the hiding and invisibilization of the ethnic marks of Africanness and the Indigenous, in name of the creation of so-called Brazilian culture, characterized, among other aspects, by cordial racism, by institutionalized miscegenation, supported by whitening, and by the erasure and minimization of conflicts as its central ethos (Luena PEREIRA, 2020, p. 9).

⁸ In Brazil, the official color/race/ethnicity question in the census must be answered within five categories: *branca* (white), *parda* (brown or multiracial), *preta* (Black), *amarela* (yellow/Asian) or *indígena* (Indigenous). *Parda/parda* is a term used to describe "brown-skinned" people. This category is used by the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) to designate people with mixed racial ancestry that have mixed phenotypic traits. For the purposes of this article, we are considering people who are mixed, but who identify as Black with light skin (even though they may answer "brown" to the census), meaning part of their ethnicity is rooted in the Black community.

For some authors, “pardismo” is also related to the non(re)cognition of origins or to not being able to identify oneself racially and culturally (MUNANGA, 2019; Abdias NASCIMENTO, 2016). In this way, it is possible to draw a parallel between pardismo and the lack of ancestral references of Black populations in Brazil who, in the colonial process, were prevented from recuperating their origins. Therefore, genealogy is also part of the range of privileges (Maria Aparecida Silva BENTO, 2002; Lia Vainer SCHUCMAN, 2012)⁹ of those who are not racially marked, white people. Black people with light skin undergo a dual loss of references, because they lose the historic references of ancestral origins inherent to the condition of being Black in Brazil and through contact with the other who (de)racialize them lose the references to their racial identity.

In this sense, the racialization of the pardo is evident. In this article we will denominate as pardo those Black people with light skin, to contrast with what can be considered one of the greatest privileges of whiteness: not (needing) to think about their raciality. Only socially non-racialized individuals are free of the delicate task of thinking racially. White people are not convoked to constantly elaborate their racial experience or to self-declare their race. The reflection on skin tone, the hesitation to fill out a form or respond to the census, are intrinsically racialized living experience, something lived by non-white subjects. Upon filling out any form with the question “color/race”, a white subject is not invited to reflect on the implications of their response, if someone would doubt their self-declaration, or if their response corresponds to their possible social readings. White people have the privilege of not having to elaborate their racial experience. Black people with light-skin do not enjoy this advantage, they are under constant scrutiny, the question of how they declare themselves is always followed by a series of other questions. Lopes (2017, p. 156) asserts that “being mestiza/o, the racial symbols will always be ‘one and the other’, the ‘same and different’, ‘not one nor the other’, ‘being and not being’, ‘belonging and not belonging’”. This identity limbo in which they are socially placed can also originate two important characteristics of the condition of the pardo man or woman: doubt and silence, that is, silencing. These characteristics are articulated to produce a subject that is scared to take a position and politicize their Blackness. Doubt is promoted in relation to their place in the world, the racial place they occupy, forcing them to question if their living experiences and skin tone truly locate them within the spectrum of Blackness. Meanwhile, the silencing is related to structural racial questions, and can occur by two means: 1) either because the person who is pardo does not feel sufficiently Black to take a position in the anti-racist struggle (GOMES, 2019); 2) or by being constantly deauthorized to address the issue for this reason. These two elements constitute colonial strategies to disguise racism and coopt this group to instrumentalize the racial democracy myth.

The Brazilian Black population is permeated by the structural and structuring racism present in society (ALMEIDA, 2019), especially Black men and women who more visibly carry the traits of their Black ancestry (kinky hair, an accentuated Black skin tone). In a context of bemeaning of Blackness, Black people with light-skin in general establish an ambiguous and alienating relationship with their racialization. If on one hand society causes them to fear recognizing themselves as Black, it also constantly invites them to identify with what they will never be: white (KILOMBA, 2019). To the degree to which they understand themselves as part of a historic process of racial miscegenation, containing traits of white and Black phenotypes, they also receive “the passing” (Elaine K. GINSBERG, 1996),¹⁰ which turns their Blackness invisible in certain moments/contexts by society, conferring them a pretense liberty to “choose” to affirm a racial identity or not (Fernanda SOUZA, 2013). In fact, the relatively contextual and elastic character of the racial codes (DAFLON, 2017) for this group causes the individuals who are pardo to often be perceived as closer or farther from Blackness, depending on their geographic or social location. The passing conferred, in the case of Black people with light-skin, also acts as an element that produces psychological suffering and a diminishment of self-esteem, given that they understand that they gain access because of an invisibilization of factors that constitute their identity. Light-skinned Black people are more accepted because they “mitigate” the characteristics that make them who they are, characteristics that escape the norm and make them unique. This is the level of violence of the racist logic that operates in our society.

In this context we raise some questions to help consider racialized existences: isn’t the attempt to whiten and shift these individuals from one racial position to another, positions that are so opposed to each other – to be Black and to be white (Gabriela Machado Bacelar RODRIGUES, 2020) – also a product of racism? Aren’t “parda” people, and the very existence of this category,

⁹ For Schucman, privileges are symbolic and material benefits that white people receive and produce in the social structure, or that is, they are a mechanism of production of inequalities that assure the high place of whites in the social hierarchy.

¹⁰ According to her book *Passing and the Frictions of Identity* (1996), passing, or passability, is a term historically used in the United States to describe the ability of a person to be considered a member of an identity category or group that is different than their own, which can include racial identity, ethnicity, caste, social class, sexual orientation, gender, religion, age and or disability status.

part of racist attempts to erase the history and culture of the Black population? Aren't being pardo and the identity limbo lived as racial alienation an experience produced by a racist logic?

The parda, mestiza, or better, the Black person with light skin, carries racial marks, and it is only for this reason that she is perceived as miscegenated. Daflon (2017) contributes to this discussion by affirming that a pardo person is always a subject with an apparent racial mark, always racialized. Pardos are always those with some markedly racialized attribute, whether this attribute is skin color, hair, or other traits, and for this reason, we argue that their Blackness is perceived, although made invisible.

The definition [of pardo as] "dirty white, darkened" found in the Dicionário Houaiss – although it does not refer specifically to human beings – refers to an idea of pollution, of stain. If initially defined as an intermediary between the colors black and white, the reiteration of the designation "dark" in the dictionary entry appears to indicate that the pardo is not located at an equidistant position from the poles of color, but is placed in a relation of greater semantic proximity with the black color. In addition, "pardo" is, according to the definition, the "darkened white" and not the "whitened Black", it is that person of "dark" color, and not a subject of "light" color". This is because the "white" color is taken as the standard, the referent, the norm, and whiteness is placed at the center, at the same time that it is made invisible in the public discourse and in the daily language (DAFLON, 2017, p. 139).

Whitening is a tricky facet of racism, it is part of a process of colonization and eugenics that seeks to whiten the population, both their skin color and their subjectivity, alienating Black people from their own culture (Carlos Moore WEDDERBURN, 2007). In addition, this process produces a hierarchy within Blackness based on skin tone, which only serves the construction of whiteness as an ideal of humanity (KILOMBA, 2019; BENTO, 2002), the so-called pigmentocracy or colorism. In this sense, the colonization of African bodies also generates a distancing within the Black community, which feels the discrimination being modulated according to the tonality of their bodies (Alice WALKER, 1982). The fact is that miscegenation seeks to dilute the Black in the white, and as Teófilo Queiroz Júnior (1999, *apud* MUNANGA, 2019, p. 11) affirmed so well, "it serves well to project the *mulatto*, dissimulating the Black and arbitrarily expanding the white".

The invasion, colonization and consequent miscegenation of Brazil promoted different structural situations of racialization for Black people with light-skin (or those with ambiguous phenotypes) for Black people with darker skin and for Indigenous people, seen that the process of racialization is always relational (MANOEL, 2020). To this degree, the discourse of miscegenation is an important element in the racial ideological apparatus in the country (MUNANGA, 2019; NASCIMENTO, 2016), which has been committed to whitening (physical-ideological) the Brazilian population since the mid nineteenth century, a time when the state placed in course a eugenicist policy of incentives to European immigration with the ultimate objective of whitening the national population. In the project of the Europeanized nation, the brown body was translated into a symbol of the Brazilian people and of miscegenation. The body of the Brazilian woman was one of the elements of the exportation of this image. As Lélia González, (1979-2018) affirmed, "the term "mulatta" involves the most sophisticated form of reification: it is denominated as an "export product" that is, an object to be consumed by tourists and by the national bourgeoisie" (p. 75).

Is the "Brazilian woman" of the social imaginary brown?

The dimension of racialization is also constitutive of racialized women, and along with gender, it is impossible to separate these elements of subjectivity. The objective of this section is to explore the process through which the racialized woman has been configured into a paradigmatic element of the harmony of races, a body that is a symbol of successful miscegenation. Lélia González (1984, p. 228) maintained, "Like all myths, that of racial democracy hides something beyond that which it shows. At first approximation, we find that it exercises its symbolic violence in a special way on the Black woman".

To consider women as the central point of this study is based on the dual role that they have in racial mechanisms and those of colonial Brazil. Firstly, because the violence of colonization/miscegenation takes place through the violation of female bodies. Secondly, because the "export mulatta" or hypersexualized and exotic "Brazilian woman" is, herself, the epitome of a fallacious Brazilian harmony of races, an image widely used to instrumentalize the myth of racial democracy. These two factors elucidate the dual objectification of the racialized woman, who in a project of white cisheteropatriarchal¹¹ (Francisco VALDES, 1996) society, is perceived as an object-product of the success of colonization/whitening and simultaneously as a sexual object.

¹¹ According to Valdes (1996), the cisheteropatriarchy (from cis[gender], hetero[sexuality] and patriarchy) is a sociopolitical system that produces hierarchies that privilege male cisgender heterosexuality in detriment to other forms of gender identity and other sexual orientations. It is a term that emphasizes that the discriminations exercised over women and LGBT people have the same social principle.

In relation to the first point, miscegenation in Brazil was a process that began with the violence and subalternization of Black bodies, particularly of Black women, who suffered a dual violence, of physical punishment and sexual violations. It thus highlights that the colonial domination of Brazilian territory and the project of population whitening both began with the colonialization of the territory-body¹² (Catherine Moore TORRES, 2018) of women. These colonial elements, still latent in the social imaginary of a society marked by patriarchal and colonial aegis, until today place women in a more vulnerable and precarious position, moving along these axes of oppression. In her book *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of the Western Gender Discourses*, published in 1997, recently translated in Brazil, the Nigerian sociologist Oyèrónké Oyewùmí (2021, p. 186) affirms:

The colonial process was sex-differentiated insofar as the colonizers were male and used gender identity to determine policy. From the foregoing, it is clear that any discussion of hierarchy in the colonial situation, in addition to employing race as the basis of distinctions, should take into account its strong gender component.

In terms of the second point that we raised, since the early twentieth century, the discourse of racial harmony gained strength and the “export quality mulatta” or “Brazilian woman” has been the image promoted as the symbol of racial democracy. She was “celebrated” for a beauty supposedly coming from the mixture of races and as an heiress of the exacerbated sexuality attributed to Black women in the process of colonial racialization of the Americas. That is, there is an essentialist and thus racist production of identity and sexuality of the non-white woman in Brazilian society. This production constructs in the social imaginary “the Brazilian Woman” as a monolithic and a-historic subject (TORRES, 2018).

The *mulatta* woman became physical evidence of the “meeting of the races” and was raised as a symbol of a society that affirmed biological mixture as proof of harmony and an absence of racial conflicts (Corrêa, 1996). Nevertheless, the mulatta would continue to be hypersexualized as she had been since the colonial period (BROOKSHAW, 1983, *apud* DAFLON, 2014, p. 134).

Elevated to a symbol of national beauty, the racialized woman or the “mulatta” was revered as an object of desire and of colonial success. The exotification of the body of the Black woman with light-skin involves the racist logic of an objectified body, available for sex. This representation combines with her exhibition as a “trophy” of coloniality. She represents that it is possible to use technologies to produce a body that combines different racial groups in an aesthetic manner, that is, she is considered beautiful for her approximation to the ideal white phenotypes. It is important to note that heterosexism is a fundamental part of how gender combines with race in the operations of colonial power (LUGONES, 2007), given that the woman to whom we are referring to is reified in the colonial heterosexual normative. She is found historically confined to the local and to the folkloric, the “mulatta” crystallized in the social imaginary is at the service of cisheteronorms, her sexuality is only thought of through the lenses of racialized cisheteronormativity. In this sense, the heterosexual system of domination continues to reinforce free access to bodies of racialized women.

On this basis, it can be affirmed that Black women have a broadened perspective of the racism-sexism axis, to the degree to which these themes permeate their living experiences and constitute them. As González affirmed (1984, p. 224):

The place in which we are located will determine our interpretation about the dual phenomenon of racism and sexism. For us racism is constituted as the symptom that characterizes the Brazilian cultural neurosis. In this sense, we see that its articulation with sexism has violent effects on the Black woman in particular.

A light-skinned Black woman, the famous “mulatta”, is an important element of “racism a Brasileira” which, according to Schucman (2018), “functions under the logic of a denial of racism and the exaltation of racial democracy”, which seeks to affirm its non-racism through the use of physically and ideologically whitened Black people. To co-opt light-skinned Black people to adapt to the aesthetic standards of whiteness – although they have some (attenuated) phenotypical characteristics that confirm their Blackness – is a form of consolidating the success of the eugenic practices of whitening. It is also a way to disguise the racism present in society, given that the “more acceptable” Black woman comes to be tolerated in spaces of prestige and becomes the exception that confirms the meritocratic discourse that accompanies the myth of racial democracy.

These ideological and alienating uses that are made of the body of Black woman with light-skin are elements that help us understand the permeations of oppressions related to race and gender in the constitution of these women.

¹² According to Torres (2018), territory-body is “the first place of enunciation with its own corporal and historical memory; from the history of colonial expropriation and of rebellions associated to liberation”.

The fetishization, exoticization and eroticization of brown and/or mulatta women and the representation of pardas and or mulattas as the epitome of Brazilianness, *malandragem* and the amalgam of "races" – frequently with implicit ideas of racial degeneration resulting from "miscegenation" are commonly seen in Brazil as positive representations for the self-esteem of individuals in this group, instead of being understood as part of the process of racialization and therefore of the formation of stereotypes that opportunize the discrimination (DAFLON, 2014, p. 130).

We emphasize the problematization of the very category "woman" explored in this section of the article, understood as an invention of the Western gender system. Black women, since questionings raised by second wave feminists in the United States, have been challenging the universalization of the category "woman", which signified a strong advance for feminist theorizations in the West. The development of post-colonial, Indigenous-American studies and of Latin American des- and decolonial critiques, strengthened the questionings of the Western categories of gender (essentialized as universal). The definitive criticism of this dichotomization of the social world between men and women was raised by Oyewùmí (2021) in her study about the invention of women among Ioruba African peoples mentioned above (while recognizing the contributions, from the West, of thinkers such as Michel Foucault (1988), Thomas Laqueur (2001), Judith Butler (2003) and exponents of queer theory such as Paul Preciado (2011)). Oyewùmí questions Western essentialist and constructivist theories about the binary categories that support a logic anchored in the body, a corporal logic, which she characterizes as a *bio-logic*. She questions this logic that she affirms is based on one of the senses – sight – and that produces a Western cosmovision. Oyewùmí substitutes this worldview by proposing the category of *cosmoperception*, which involves other senses and the mind, without the Western dichotomization body/mind. Therefore, it is important to note that the 'Brazilian woman' is a construct marked by different colonial fictions, of gender and race, and must be pondered from a critical perspective, considering aspects of coloniality of gender (LUGONES, 2008).

As Lugones (2008, p. 4) affirms, to understand the "organization of gender in its modern/ colonial system (biological dimorphism, the patriarchal and heterosexual organization of social relations) is central to our understanding of how this organization took place differently when racial terms are added". The coloniality of gender has an intrinsic articulation with racist dehumanization and the entire structure of the coloniality of power. Moreover, according to Lugones, it is essential to decolonize gender.

A praxis is needed to decolonize gender. It is to decree a criticism of heterosexualized, racialized, colonial, and capitalist gender oppression, to attain a lived transformation of the social. As such, the decolonization of gender locates those who theorize amid the people, in a historic, subjective/intersubjective understanding of the oppress-resist relation at the intersection of complex systems of oppression (LUGONES, 2014, p. 4).

Colorism in Brazil?

As emphasized and based on the ideological uses of pardismo, it can be affirmed that racism in Brazil passes through a second filter of racial hierarchization. In the spectrum of color of Blackness, the dominant normative view is modulated according to a person's skin color, configuring a phenomenon known as colorism. Colorism is a term imported from the United States and refers to the modulation of racism according to skin tone in a country in which racism is based on origin and not only on physical markers (Oracy NOGUEIRA, 2007). That is, in the United States, phenotypical marks are secondary to racial origin. As much as a racial mark always points to an idea of origin (SCHUCMAN, 2018; LOPES, 2017), the fact is that in Brazil, racism takes place through racialization of the subject, while in the US a person will be considered Black if they are a direct descendent of a Black person. In this way, in the United States, colorism is thought of through the possibility to identify the racial origin of subjects. Passing, in this context, is related to the possibility to "hide" ancestral roots. Colorism as a concept, however, is a production of a biracial system (Black-white) in which ancestry is synonymous to racial belonging and where there is no possibility of being framed as pardo. Thus, the application of this concept in Brazil, a context of constant denial of racial belonging and the exaltation of "morenidade" [brownness], should be made with caution, based on an extensive sociopolitical contextualization of the dominant racial ideology.

Even if its application is being debated and is reason for concern by us, the authors of this article, a possible adaptation of the concept provides us clues to understanding regimes of authorization that expand or limit the access of Black people to certain spaces in Brazil. As Lopes affirms (2017, p. 156), "our racism is structurally epidermic, melaninocratic, pigmentocratic, and colorist, in which a "light-mestiza" appearance also represents a value of whiteness".

Colorism, therefore, as postulated by Devulsky (2021a), is understood as "a concept, a category, a practice, but above all is an ideology in which we place Black people in a hierarchy according to their phenotype: close or far from Africanity, close or far from Europeaness". The colorist ideology is like a perverse and colonial "system for providing access" that grants more

space/acceptance to light-skinned Black subjects based on their distancing from their Black origins. Colorism, beyond being a phenomenon based on the materiality of race, makes an investment in the racial alienation and ideological whitening of Black people with light skin. That is, colorism is based on an idea that, in a racist society, it is possible to distance people from their Black origins and coopt them for whiteness, by producing the illusion of the insertion of these subjects, even if the racial mark is evident in their bodies.

Black resistance today struggles to revert these effects, producing something that is perhaps unprecedented in the history of the struggle against racism, affirming Black culture and ancestry and breaking with whitening. It is important to understand the effects of this process on contemporary subjectivation. Color, tonality, and social differences can also be correlated to a policy of whitening, establishing a *dégradé* of privileges and exclusions. It is real that a Black [person] with lighter skin tone may have more access to social spaces, to healthcare, to “brotherhoods” and to social ties than people with darker skin tones, which produces and reproduces sufferings. They are still relics of the processes of subjectivation of racism by the effort at whitening, which was not a choice of the Black, but a state imposition, avidly assimilated by a racist, and slavocratic, white-centric society (Kenia Soares MAIA; Maria Helena Navas ZAMORA, 2018, p. 9).

It is important to highlight that Brazil is a nation that produces and reproduces the effects of miscegenation, which even if it has been widely discussed to demystify the fallacious racial democracy (MUNANGA, 2019; NASCIMENTO, 2016), still generates a gap between the Black population. That is, it involves a process of whitening that fragments the collective identity of the Black community while maintaining intact the systems of power that privilege whiteness. The pigmentocracy that idealizes a “thermometer of Blackness” continues to have whiteness as its normative and high point, the white is still the “reference to be attained” serving only interests of hegemony.

Another important element of the phenomenon of colorism in Brazilian society is that, like all other forms of racial violence, it more persistently affects women. In a recent interview on YouTube with the editor of the Brazilian publishing company Companhia das Letras (CARNEIRO; RIBEIRO; SANTANA, 2020), the philosopher Sueli Carneiro indicated her perception that colorism operates with greater force on women and pondered that there is a greater questioning and scrutiny of the legitimacy of their racialization. She warned that this debate tends to be based on problems that generate disputes in the market of affection, which confirms that gender must be considered in this discussion (RODRIGUES, 2020). This comment by the philosopher is another indication of the importance of the study about light-skinned Blackness focusing on women.

To the degree that there exists in Brazil (and in the world) a racial and sexual division of labor (GONZÁLEZ, 1979; 2018), which exploits Black women, it is not surprising that the production of preferences or prejudice based on a colonial lens winds up victimizing Black women with greater intensity than any other group, and even produces an intragender split in the Black community.

Final Considerations

The important discussion about *pardismo* and colorism in Brazilian society is still quite controversial, delicate and imperative. It is a field of disputes in the racial debate. The elastic and circumstantial character of the racial marks of people who have phenotypical characteristics of more than one racial group and who, therefore, can pass through a racial identity transit, is an issue that has only recently been studied by a larger number of authors.

The “*pardo*” is a political and epistemological controversy for the field of what is conventionally called “Studies of Racial Relations in Brazil” and in a broader manner, for the Social Sciences (RODRIGUES, 2020, p. 2).

To better understand the paradox of the mixture (Graziella Moraes SILVA; Luciana T. de Souza LEÃO, 2012), it is necessary to first understand that miscegenation in Brazil had the ideological agenda of whitening the population, which transformed the Black body with light-skin into the paradigm of transition. Miscegenation and whitening are not synonyms. Miscegenation, that is the mixture between phenotypically different peoples and groups, is a process that has occurred since the beginning of times between different ethnic and racial groups. Meanwhile, whitening is a deliberate attempt at “improvement” of the Brazilian population through the instrumentalization of miscegenation, that is, the crossing between non-white and white peoples to gradually lighten the population, in a process that Nascimento (2016) called “genocide of the Brazilian black people”. That is, the miscegenation instrumentalized the ideology of whitening. This process led to the *pardification* of the Brazilian population and fed the ideology of racial democracy, a fallacious idea that in Brazil there is a pretense harmony among three races.

Racial democracy wove the threads of these measures to create an identity narrative based on what became consecrated in the work of Gilberto Freyre as the “balance of antagonisms”. Gilberto Freyre did not invent racial democracy, but his work is certainly the most effective

"paradigm" that can be elaborated on of the mechanism of miscegenation and its more evident effects: the denial of racism, the whitening of the population and pardification as subjectivation (WESCHENFELDER; SILVA, 2018, p. 7).

The concept of miscegenation arose from the idea that there are various races, and that the mixture of these races produces hybrid individuals who carry phenotypical characteristics of both their racial groups of origin. In addition, in an essentialist perspective, miscegenation would cause miscegenated individuals to also carry moral characteristics and those related to personality that are intrinsic to the stereotypes of the races of their ancestors, and thus be improved by whitening. The idea that there is a white or Black essence that can be passed from one generation to the next is absolutely racist, because it produces reductionist and stereotyped discourses about the subalternized group and justifies the hegemony of the group placed in a situation of power. However, despite being broadly rejected today by scholars, this essentialism still supports the idea of the generic and universal Black person that is present in the social imaginary as a motor of the racism that organizes society and excludes from the spectrum of Blackness those men and women who are not in these reified phenotypical and social molds. As Carneiro affirms (2004, p. 1), "one of the characteristics of racism is the way by which it imprisons the other in fixed and stereotyped images, while it reserves for the racially hegemonic the privilege of being represented in its diversity".

In this article we sought to address the social, and to a certain degree subjective effects that this process of "camouflaged racialization" has on Black women with light skin, operating through hypersexualization and the denial of their racial belonging. As Lélia González (1979) affirmed, racism is an ideological construction that, combined with sexism, places the Black woman at the most basal level of oppression (GONZÁLEZ, 1979; 2018).

We also highlight the importance that more academic studies focus on the national formation and problematization of ideologies that permeate racialization in Brazil and support racist discourses about the racialized population. We reinforce the need to produce a situated knowledge (Donna HARAWAY, 1995) to understand the mechanisms through which the folklorization of the racialized body continues to perpetuate a colonial logic. It is necessary to break with the discourses that reify and imprison subjects in fixed identities and that serve the maintenance of the hegemony. These discourses strongly affect women, given that we are under the cisheteronormative patriarchal aegis and therefore, it makes sense to think of alternatives for self-definition and self-affirmation (Patricia Hill COLLINS, 2016) and the decolonization of gender (LUGONES, 2014).

It is also important to note that as much as it is necessary for Black people with light skin to regain their Black identity, it makes sense for them to continue to self-declare themselves in official entities as "pardo" so that the production of statistics in our territory is reliable and concretely demonstrates the material differences, and the production of vulnerabilities that exist within the black community, respecting the differences between the Black and brown population in the totality of Blackness. This is important to allow formulating public policies that consider the specificities of Brazil's Black population (Carla AKOTIRENE, 2019). Moreover, the population as a whole must understand the meaning of "pardo" when it is used on questionnaires of self-declaration, so that white people who have dark skin for a series of exogenous reasons (e.g. a tanned skin) do not declare themselves to be pardo in studies, thus generating statistical imprecisions that can influence political decision making. It is urgently necessary to increase the racial literacy¹³ (France Winddance TWINE, 2004; SCHUCMAN, 2012) of the Brazilian population, and revise the repertoire about the national formation so that we can establish a serious debate about pardismo, self-declaration/heteroidentification and their direct psychosocial effects on subjects. For these reasons, it is evident that race is a relational, contextual, and complex element and that we have a long road ahead to intensify the discussion about colorism in Brazilian society.

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¹³ O letramento racial é um conceito desenvolvido pela socióloga France Winddance Twine em 2004. Ela descreve o conceito como "estratégias e práticas culturais concebidas e empregadas por pais para ensinar filhos de herança africana e caribenha a (1) detectar, documentar e nomear ideologias, semióticas e práticas racistas anti-negras; (2) fornecer recursos discursivos que combatam o racismo; e (3) fornecer recursos estéticos e materiais (incluindo arte, brinquedos, livros, música) que valorizem e fortaleçam suas conexões com a cultura transatlântica dos negros na África, no Caribe e nos Estados Unidos" em sua pesquisa feita no Reino Unido com famílias mestiças.

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