Letter to Judith Butler from an ex mulatto woman*

Carta a Judith Butler de una mujer ex mulata

■ **Ângela Figueiredo**
Universidade Federal do Recôncavo da Bahía (Brasil)

Abstract

The study of race relations was established in Brazil from a comparison with the United States. One of the most prominent aspects of this comparison was the existence of a classification scale for color, with more than 300 terms used for self-classification in Brazil, in contrast to the American binary system. Despite the wide range of possibilities for classification, social indicators for income and education indicated the existence of just two categories: black and white. From the 1970s and the demands made by black movements, we have observed the emergence of an affirmative discourse on black identity and a deliberate refusal to use the numerous color terms. From a political point of view, this demand was successful, as it demonstrated the existence of a divided country. The aim of this text is to establish a dialogue with queer theory, especially in relation to questions linked to ethnic and racial identity and its importance in securing rights in the Brazilian context.

Resumen

El estudio de las relaciones raciales en Brasil se estableció a partir de una comparación con los Estados Unidos. Uno de los aspectos más destacados de esta comparación era la existencia de un modelo de clasificación de color, con más de 300 términos utilizados para la autoclasificación en Brasil, en contraste con el sistema binario de América. A pesar de la amplia gama de posibilidades de clasificación, indicadores sociales para la renta y la educación indican la existencia de sólo dos categorías: blanco y negro. Desde la década de 1970 y a raíz de las demandas hechas por los movimientos negros, se ha observado la aparición de un discurso afirmativo sobre la identidad negra y una negativa deliberada a utilizar los numerosos términos de color. Desde un punto de vista político, esta demanda se ha realizado correctamente, como lo demostró la existencia de un país dividido. El objetivo de este texto es establecer un diálogo con la teoría queer, especialmente en relación con las cuestiones vinculadas a la identidad étnica y racial y su importancia en la obtención de derechos en el contexto brasileño.

Keywords

Mixture, identity, queer, race, gender

Palabras clave

Mezcla, identidad, *queer*, raza, género

Cachoeira, February 2, 2015

Dear Judith Butler

I am grateful for the opportunity to read some of your analyses on the relation or non-relation between sex and gender and for the motivation and enthusiasm with which your written work has reached the students at the Federal University of the Recôncavo of Bahia (UFRB)[1] ; the young students are interested in the topic but due to their recent entrance into the university, know little about Gender Studies, despite displaying total interest in the concepts you propose on performance and performativity. In fact, they are captivated by the discourse that updates and constructs these categories.

You are visiting Brazil for the first time and it is important for us to have the opportunity of hearing from you in Bahia, which is an important State to formulate a debate on race in Brazil.

I am an anthropologist and took a doctorate in Sociology. My educational background has been defined as classical training in the area of race and class, or in the field of studies inappropriately defined in Brazil as the study of race relations, instead of Studies on Racial Hierarchies, as I claimed (Figueiredo and Grosfoguel, 2007). Only after acquiring a doctorate did I start to incorporate the notion of gender in the research project that I carried out and directed, and that allowed me to learn more about the subject, with students and colleagues at the university in which I work.

I have been encouraged to write this letter for a long time, and it is only now that I have decided to write, thanks to constant provocation from Cintia Tâmara, Felipe Fernandes[2] and others who "were pressurizing me", as is said around here. My starting point lies in a special interest in the dialogue between problematizing gender identity and its correlation with racial identity and, consequently the effects of these perspectives for empowerment[3] and securing rights for racialized groups.

I think that these two fields, Gender Studies and Racial Studies, defined from a theoretical approach and very distinct bibliographies, effectively show a number of similarities.

I chose to pursue this subject, taking on my positionality as a black female subject and activist, whose sexuality and family composition was constructed in a counter-hegemonic way, discursively constituted in a social and historic context of Brazilian race and sexual relations, marked specifically by the discourse of racial democracy and the refusal to use binary categories, and those binary categories as markers of identity.

Born in a society in which race is discursively constructed and non-polarized, which ultimately existed and still exists today, although to a lesser extent, there is a classification scale for color in Brazil, whose most extreme poles are black and white, but, within this scale, there are a wide number of names to categorize color, such as mulatto, mestiço, cabo-verde (Cape Verdian), moreninho and cor-de-telha (the color of roof tiles), etc. For many, the concept of race in Brazil was added from the social term to highlight its discursive dimension, being a social construction (see Wagley, 1952; Guimarães, 2005). In a very summarized form, we could say that the history of formulating the concept of race in Brazil aimed precisely to respond to a "mixing" process derived from miscegenation between black, indigenous and white people, which made it difficult for Brazil to see itself as a modern and civilized country during the 19th century, a period in which a belief in the damaging effects of racial mixture prevailed. Seen in these terms, the relationship between the normative discourse of the state which makes subjects who are, allegedly, non-racialized is clear –Brazilian mestiços and mulattos– although, paradoxical, the idea of racial mixture originates from a belief in the existence of at least two races.

---

[1] UFRB is a university located in the historic town of Cachoeira in the recôncavo of Bahia, the birthplace of religiosity and black culture in Brazil. I initially accessed Judith Butler's text in order to understand the students' enthusiasm over the author's written work.

[2] I am immensely grateful for their encouragement, assistance and careful reading.

[3] The empowerment of women is the process of securing autonomy and self-determination. And, for us, it is also an instrument/means and an end in itself. To us, the empowerment of women means their freedom from the ties of gender and patriarchal oppression. For Latin American feminists in particular, the greatest reason for women's empowerment is to question and destabilize and, lastly, put an end to the patriarchal order which upholds gender oppression (...) In addition to taking control over "our bodies, our lives (Sardenberg, 2006)

Initially, the "Study of Race Relations in Brazil" established a comparison between Brazil and the United States, seeking to understand, above all, the black experience, in relation to the class classification system, displays of racism, prejudice and racial ideology. In the beginning, the majority of Brazilian and North American researchers considered that racism did not exist in Brazilian society on account of two important reasons: namely, because of the large number of mestiços and the lack of official racial segregation in Brazilian society. From the end of the 1970s, black Brazilian activists and some American researchers put forward a different perspective[4]. To them, racism in Brazil is worse than in the United States, since social inequalities here go hand in hand with the discourse of racial democracy and racial mixture, making it extremely difficult for black people mestiços in Brazil to be conscious that their social condition is related to their racial condition and, consequently, to accept a black identity.

It is important to highlight the relevance attributed to the color categories present in the Brazilian racial model, in which names for color or race were associated to phenotypes, hence the importance attributed to the classification scale and self-classification of color (Nogueira, 1985; Maggie, 1996; Silva, 1994). Although written during the 1950s, Oracy Nogueira (2007) in his classic *Preconceito racial de marca e preconceito racial de origem*, covers the striking difference in racial dynamics in both countries. According to Nogueira (ib) prejudice is present in Brazil due to labels, racial phenotypes and appearance; while prejudice in the United States is due to origins, therefore, marked by black ancestry or origins and class. Also in relation to color classification, the majority of authors emphasized the importance of color classification in Brazil and the role played by a dark mestiço or mulatto in Brazilian social stratification, the so-called "mulatto escape hatch" (Degler, 1976).

However, if different terms are used in daily life to classify color, the official categories in the demographic census are limited to five: white, black, brown, indigenous and yellow. Except for the population census carried out in 1970, the Brazilian census has traditionally included color categories on the questionnaire. On the other hand, the term "negro" (Afro-Brazilian), which has been used increasingly both in academic texts and political language, and in demands for rights, does not appear as an official option. According to Telles (2003), in Brazil, there are three color classification systems operating together or in an isolated manner. They are: the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE); the numerous terms used in popular culture and the bipolar classification of black and white.

From this perspective, straightening your hair in Brazilian society cannot just be seen as an exercise in beauty, but can also be considered as a way of moving along the classification scale for color and becoming less black. Considering the importance given to hair to define the place occupied on the classification scale for color, the Brazilian black movement considered the use of natural hairstyles as a symbol of affirming identity[5]. The model that prevails today in feminist movements for young black Brazilian people taking on their black identity, is based on "accepting yourself". Cutting hair that has been altered by chemicals since childhood is a ritual moment of recognition as black women.

Also related to this subject, it is important to highlight the research carried out within the domain of what we conventionally call a UNESCO project. Broadly speaking, we could say that UNESCO's selection of Brazil maintained a close relationship with concerns that arose following World War II, aiming to end the consequences of a belief in the existence of races and racism. Brazil, therefore, with its harmonic co-existence between different races — since races were not biologically considered here— would offer a good model to the world.

It is important to highlight some changes in focus in studies on "race relations" undertaken from the end of the 1970s, especially in studies carried out by Carlos Hasenbalg (1979), which showed inequalities in access

---

[4] Michael Hanchard (2001).

[5] I dealt with the topic of manipulating hair and assuming a black identity in the texts "Dialogando com os estudos de gênero" (2008); "Cabelo, cabeleira, cabeluda" (2010) on the impacts and representations of hair in a photographic exhibition (2012) and curatorship of the global African hair exhibition (2011).

to education and unevenness in income between black and white people, together with complaints lodged by the recently formed Unified Black Movement (MNU) of prejudice and racial discrimination in Brazil around a similar period. The end of the 1970s and the 1980s are determinant in unveiling the efforts made by black social movements on one hand and, on the other, the approach by researchers, such as Hasenbalg (1979), who strove to show that independent of self-classification for color and its dilution in polar categories, such as those existing in the United States, non-whites, a category used by Hasenbalg, were at lower and diametrically opposed conditions to whites in indicators for education, income and education levels.

This brief description of the subject has the aim of establishing a parallel between the Brazilian and American context, within the domain of racial inequalities, where the absence of fixed or binary racial identities in Brazil, as opposed to what takes place in the United States, is given particular emphasis. Interestingly, securing rights and empowering black people only took place after the 1970s, with dismantling the celebration of the racial mixture and using black-white terms for identity in the political bipolar model.

A more accurate analysis of the Brazilian context will show how deconstruction of the concept of race in Brazil and its decoupling with biology/naturalization took place many years ago, perhaps even before constructing the sex/gender system. From the point of view of deconstructing race and its biological connotation, the experience occurred soon after the abolition of slavery, when Brazil saw its project of forming a modern Nation State threatened by the mass of people of black-mestiço origins. Unlike the American context, the definition of race in Brazil reflects appearance and not ancestry, as highlighted by Oracy Nogueira.

Having said all of this, with the aim of showing that the Brazilian racial context is very distinct from that of the United States, and that the effects produced on our context of identity policies do not find fertile ground in an ideology that takes precedence over an odd number (Da Matta, 1986), that is on a binary scheme. In the Brazilian case, this means that there is no reason to dilute identities for non-white, colonial subjects, from the point of view of political struggles to gain access to rights.

In this sense, Pelúcio (2014) considers that "queer studies start to be referenced in Brazil at the same time in which we were trying to strengthen identity policies (...) In a way that a theory which claimed to be non-identity seemed potentially depoliticizing" in the Brazilian context; therefore, the initial concept of the term had little reference to a practice of life which is placed against socially accepted standards (Colling, 2007). In *Pouvoir de Mots* (2004, p. 289), Butler confirms that "(...) therefore queer identity does not have hermetic and defined limits and, to the contrary, is characterized by its fluidity, constituting a challenge to identity". (Butler, apud Vale 2005; p. 71). For Miskolci (2009), queer theory is a "critical counterpoint to sociological studies on sexual minorities and identity politics of social movements". Citing Michael Warner, Miskolci (ib) observes that identity was based on values, such as family, language and tradition in Brazil. Queer theory does not have nor aspires to a point of similar support. (...) queer theory deals with subjects without a past alternative or present location (Miskolci, 2009. p. 160).

Considering these statements and accepting the place of an ex-mulatto woman, I propose a dialogue with queer theory, with the aim of highlighting the resultant political gains of affirming black identity, as opposed to the numerous terms used to classify color and the absence of ethnic and racial identity. In addition, I would like to underline that narratives about a common origin present in the identity discourse do not take place in isolation, nor is it more important than an emphasis on fighting racism - representations and discourses by others about us –and racial discrimination– updating racist discourses through daily practices which are imposed on the materiality of bodies, such as those practiced through police violence against the bodies of black men or even through low payment of black people in the labor market. We know that definitions of identity operate through homogenizing categories but we have inherited a past that insists on affirming our difference in terms of color and hair type or, in other words, it is a color hierarchy.

Roger Bastide (1976) considers that blackness in Brazil is centripetal or, that is, an identity discourse which demands greater participation/inclusion in Brazilian society,

as opposed to centrifugal blackness, which is taken in a centrifugal discourse, a type of demand to return to Africa (or, symbolically speaking, I may add, to Africanness).

As I recently noted from my experience in the United States, there are topics or theoretical questions that are specific to the Brazilian context, such as the search to understand the meaning of black identity. This means that while Brazilian anthropology grappled with understanding what it is to be black, American anthropology never made this a relevant question, as it seems that ethnic and racial identity is inherited at birth, and, is thus a given, seen almost as a synonym for color and ancestry.

The Brazilian State defined me as "brown" on my birth certificate. Born into a family of 10 children (7 boys and 3 girls), I learned the importance of the nuances in skin tone from a young age. I echo Gloria Anzaldua's (1987) accounts when she discusses the experience of being the darkest in the family and presenting more pronounced indigenous features, *La Prieta*, as it was called, indicating her place in the family hierarchy. As Anzaldua points out, this experience of racism within the family, one of the most important institutions to learn about and reproduce racial and gender ideologies, deeply marks our subjectivity. I am among the darkest members of my household, as I take after my father's side of the family. I grew up hearing jokes which questioned my origins; one of my brothers said that I was not my mother's natural daughter but that I had been found in a trash can, while smiling, sitting next to me. Thanks to this, I developed sensitivity to understanding color issues from a young age and I know, like few others, the meaning of being the blackest in the household. Those who know me would say that my skin tone "is not really that dark", but it was this that made the difference within the family context.

In a correlated analysis, Sarah Schulman (2010) highlights the homophobia existing within families and how these practices contribute to constructing the inferiorization of homosexuals, keeping them in a position of lower value. The author highlights two shared experiences of life as a homosexual: the first is the process of declaring yourself as being homosexual and the second is inferiorization within the family. The author considers that gay people are being punished within the

family context, even though they have never done anything wrong. As a consequence of these practices, a gay person becomes the scapegoat both within and outside of the family.

In Brazilian literature on racial studies, we have paid little attention to understanding the dynamics of reproducing racism and sexism within families. Although examples that people with darker skin are at a disadvantage to those with lighter skin, different aspects of family relations are commonplace, in seemingly inoffensive considerations regarding standards of beauty or even expectations for school performance and professional careers. To a certain extent, we have still considered black-mestiço families as a space to protect dynamics external to it, or we have fallen silent in relation to its exclusionary practices. Certainly, this option of protecting mistakes and confirming the family experience responds for the racism existing in society in a dramatic way, which considers the experience of black families when they accept their existence in an overly negative manner. However, the exercise proposed by Anzaldua and Schulman of reporting racism, sexism and homophobia within the family show how important recognition is of this two-fold oppression existing in the family and society. The debate on sexism and homophobia within the black community has only been an agenda led by young black feminists, who are dissatisfied and no longer willing to acquiesce to the high price of silencing these questions. I genuinely think that now is the time to break the silence, of bringing down family and social structures that both provide support and oppress us.

This personal presentation aims to make it clear that the dialogue that I intend to establish with some of your written work is not so much in the field of sexuality and more in the arena of identity. Today I read your text on the term queer in the book *Corpos que importam* (Butler, 2002) and I checked the existence of any comparisons, although briefly, with race relations in the United States. Reading this text encouraged me to proceed with my questioning and, to some extent, reinforced my initiative of establishing this dialogue.

In this text you inquire about the reasons that allowed the transformation of the negative meaning for the positivity attributed to the term *queer*, as opposed to the failure of the same attempt led by Afro-Americans to use

the term *nigger* in the United States, which is our equivalent to the term "negro". In the Brazilian experience, the term negro was previously considered negative, especially from the post-abolition period until the 1950s and has been gradually made positive. Like many of the identity processes, the affirmation takes place by asserting characteristics considered negative, a process known by Brazilian feminists as "language guerrillas".

With regards to the use of a queer perspective, other authors have observed the importance of being attentive to the contexts in which theoretical formulations are conducted. Marie-Hélène Bourcier (2012), for instance, considers that in France there is a search to reproduce the American context and, therefore, far from being a liberating queer experience and of empowerment, is shown as being a tireless search to cancel out local cultural differences. As observed by Pelúcio (2014) the initial trend in Brazil was of "applying theoretical and conceptual queer findings, rather than fine-tuning them and, therefore, producing our own theories".

Although she has not established any comparison with Brazil, Márcia Ochoa (2014) touches on the Venezuelan context in which similarities with the Brazilian context are visible. Ochoa highlights the relationship between gender, sexuality, race, beauty and nation in social contexts, which are rather different from those in North America.

In this sense, we could say that the Latin American context, in terms of racial and sexual identities, with a special emphasis on Brazil, has always been queer, if we consider the fluidity of the category and challenge the identity contained in this category as a priority (Butler, 2004). This is to say that in a particularly mixed context in which the State is characterized by a lack of respect for the rights of minorities, of sexualizing women in narratives on national identity and disrespect for citizenship, the manner still effective for obtaining rights has been through collective discussion and political mobilization, formulated in terms of identity.

A further concept, which she focuses on in her work that seems to conduct a dialogue with the Brazilian context, is that of melancholy (Butler, 1999). In *Édipo Brasileiro*, Rita Segato (2006) draws on the Afro-Brazilian mythology of different maternities of the female orixas Oxum and Iemanjá, to establish a correspondence between the biological mother and the one who raises them, a role performed by a nanny, a black woman. In Segato's approach, the white woman does not play a maternal role, as this would be carried out by a wet nurse during the period of slavery and, later on, by nannies. This created white boys' identification and desire for black women, which is forbidden by racist structures. The *melancholy* was then the result of losing a desire not fulfilled by the black woman.

A similar analysis was made by Lélia Gonzales years before (1988), on analyzing racism as a neurosis of Brazilian society. According to the author, the black woman educates, gives affection and teaches the first few "black" words or, referred to as *pretuguês* by Lélia. From the perspective of psychoanalysis, a child's desire for the one who exercises the maternal role is a universal characteristic of the human condition. In this sense, white men have a desire for black women from a very tender age. However, racist structures prevent this dream from coming true, creating violence and racial hatred. This is the most striking characteristic of our society.

In another direction, classic authors had interpreted the consequences of a society formed by the absence of a paternal figure. We know that the relationship standards that gave rise to the first generations of mestiços did not result from affectionate, consensual, horizontalized relationships. The result of violence against black and indigenous women or extra-marital relationships, Brazilian mestiços did not have the opportunity to live alongside their white fathers. In your line of thought, melancholy is non-experienced mourning. In this sense, to what extent does a Brazilian mestiço live out a racial melancholy?

In your work, as in Michel Foucault's line of thought, identity is the result of imposing a disciplinary standard on the subject and engaging him in its reproduction. Thus, the price to obtain a socially intelligible identity is subordination because this identity imprisons us in rigid social roles (Knuosen, 2006). But this imprisonment process is only successful when the subject actively takes part in it. Therefore, the construction of identity in your line of thought depends on "self-oppression" to a great extent (Butler, 1997).

Analyzing the Brazilian black experience, it is observed that the process of identity takes place from two perspectives: on one hand, a

rupture with the reproduction of standards and values which insist on dehumanizing the black subject is seen; on the other, there is an attempt to re-work discourses and practices which are able to reinvent the body and the black experience.

To a certain extent, the affirmation that political institutions require a stable subject corresponds with the observation that there cannot be political opposition to this. As you say, defending the distinction between denying the existence of the subject as a premise and totally rejecting the idea of a subject. Are you trying to move feminism from the field of humanism, as a political practice that presupposes the subject as a fixed identity to something that leaves open the question of identity? Something that does not organize the plurality but keeps it open, under permanent surveillance (Salih, 2012). A correlation with racial mixture in Brazil allows for a questioning of the non-preservation of plurality, although this is your rhetoric. Here, racial mixture also sought the standardization of phenotypes and the discourses that walk *pari passu* with denying the existence of racism and demand the strengthening of a racial consciousness. That is to say the opposite of identity/homogeneity would be the plurality/heterogeneity present in the experience of a racial mixture, which did not occur in our context.

From this point of view, the homogeneity of the discourses that accompany identities oppresses individuals because it obliges them to conform to collectivity. In Brazil's case, recourse to the discourse of black identity did not have a context which took precedence over difference and the heterogeneity of black subjects as a backdrop; to the contrary, in contexts structured by racism, recourse to discourses on identity seek to give sense to the experience through collective discussion of a hegemonic discourse which also seeks to respond to a set of stereotypes and stigmas which are generalized for the group. What I would like to highlight is that the homogenizing and generalized vision which makes the singularity/particularities subsumed, is not only present in affirmative discourses on recognition and identity; in fact, recourse to generalizations is a vital part of the dominant discourse. Once, when I was interviewing an Afro-American he recounted that even if he had been the most talented baseball player and the best student in his class when he studied at high school, everything that he achieved would be considered a major exception to the rule. This means that individual performance does not affect negative representations of black men's intellectual performance.

I will make a brief return to the classic distinction between redistribution and recognition politics proposed by Nancy Fraser (2001). According to this approach, redistribution is related to economic aspects, mainly involving social class. While recognition policies involve issues related to difference/identity. Recognition policies are required in contexts strongly affected by discrimination but Fraser considers that this does not need and should not be implemented from identity policies. Redistribution, as opposed to identity policies are more acceptable in the Brazilian context (see the relative higher acceptance of reserving places for students from public schools compared with reserving spaces for black people at universities).

A conservative perspective of identity has only addressed aspects related to the loss of singularity and right to difference... These perspectives have left the fact that identities are dynamic, reinvented and discursively constructed in specific historic social contexts to one side. In addition, collective discourses allow for the removal of discriminated subjects from the isolation to which they have been historically submitted.

In the dynamics of identity, self-identification or self-recognition of victimized/excluded/oppressed subjects or groups are determinants. Also according to Pinto (2008), recognition as self-recognition is essential to construct the subject of the action in the social struggle. The dominated against domination only exists if this is recognized as such. There is no feminism before feminists and there is no participative parity before the subject is self-recognized as equal (ib).

I would like to thank Leandro Colling for having made the writing of this text possible. I decided to write a letter, as I consider that this narrative style allows me to delve into theoretical and personal aspects with greater ease. I would like to thank Alda Motta for encouraging me to continue with this endeavor and for defining this narrative strategy as being "methodologically creative".

Certainly, use of the methodological resource of writing by way of a letter is related to the qualitative approaches initially used by

the Chicago School. The method of life histories, as well as biographies, aim to understand discussions between individual and collective history, and, as such, constitutes a bridge between the individual and social trajectory. A biography, on becoming a discourse narrated by the author or, in other words, autobiographies or self-assessments, always establish the field, where the possibility of re-reading and reinterpreting the facts are present. Thus, a letter is not exactly an autobiography, but allows the author to place herself in the leading role, of establishing a re-reading of her empirical trajectory, interpreting and conversing with what has been proposed, from a theoretical point of view.

This being said, I would like to retrieve the processes through which I constructed my subjectivity and identity. It is fundamentally important to highlight the historical and social context in which such an experience is formulated. Incidentally, the term mulatto or ex -mulatto woman, which is included in the title of this letter refers to a personal experience of transformation or taking on an identity. Like the majority of dark Brazilian mestiços, we were born brown, which is the official category used in the demographic census and was present on the majority of documents, when this was compulsory. Unlike the United States, the color category in Brazil is not synonymous with racial identity. The process of becoming black, as described by Neusa de Souza, is a slow process of searching for a self-definition that has passed through historical and political contexts, tensions and discoveries, family histories and subjectivity.

It is important to reclaim the difference between the terms mulatto and mulatto woman. In a thought-provoking text, Mariza Corrêa (1996), shows how mulattos were associated with the economic development of our country: the mulatto was associated with progress. Therefore, we can add that the mulatto category is intercepted by gender as, after all, the mulatto in Brazil was always associated to incorporating black-mestiços or mulattos to the productive structure. From the point of view of Brazilian nation-building narrative, the social mobility of mulattos was uncontested proof of the non-existence of racism in our society. On the other hand, the black and mulatto woman was discursively constructed as a sexualized subject, responsible for bearing Brazilian mixed race offspring (mostly thought of as males). I would like to highlight here how the state constructed not only racialized and sexualized subjects, thereby reproducing the racist and sexist structures which characterize our society, by making invisible the fact that black and mulatto women were not only reproductive agents but they were also producers in equal measure.

Also in relation to the mulatto category, it is important to highlight Sonia Giacomini's (2006) work when discussing a training course for mulatto women in her research, referring to a well-known Brazilian man who formed groups of black and mixed race dancers to give presentations in Rio de Janeiro clubs and abroad. Thus, the mulatto category is not only a racial one, resulting from the miscegenation process, but also a professional category, of gender and generation. This allows for an understanding that there are also ex-mulatto women or, that is, professionals who gave up dancing and followed other career paths. Certainly, reference to the ex-mulatto women category is used in this text, not referring to the fact that I was formerly a professional mulatto or, that is, a dancer, but that during my experience I chose the self-identification of identity on defining myself as black, following the same transformation as many black women in Brazil.

Likewise, I would like to emphasize that the construction of the black female body, discursively constructed as a symbol of resistance and an important element to assert black identity in Brazil, was prepared as a response to the excessively sexualized representation attributed to the mulatto woman's body. In other words, more than a discourse addressed to white women, the black woman's affirmative discourse has the aim of deconstructing the sexually constructed mulatto woman. What matters now is opposing the image of the foolish, sexualized mulatto woman, depicted in popular culture as "luxo só", thereby constructing the image of a black woman who is proud of herself and, therefore, valued beyond the stereotypes constructed by colonial imaginary.

Evidently, this discourse represents a rejection of constitutive discourses on the mulatto woman, both with regards to narratives related to forming a national identity (Côrrea, 1996; Pinho, 2004; Moutinho, 2004) and the sexual/sensual role performed by the mulatto woman as a profession. Gillian (1995) obser-

ved how mulatto women strove to distance themselves from black women. What is seen is that both the mulatto and black woman are constructed in a relational manner, one in opposition to the discourse and practices that constitute the other.

What is demonstrated from these texts is that the mulatto category is not only a racial category or a color category as we can naively imagine; but it reflects a social construction of race in Brazil, in which color and phenotypes are associated to gender and generational behavior. For this very reason, it is a category which is intercepted by gender, and that is to say the representations about mulatto women are different from those constructed about mulattos.

The debate on the meaning of race, racial categories, racial mixture and color classification in Brazil is the territory on which some of the anthropological texts that discuss gender and race categories are situated. Exploring this topic further, we can also understand how the concept of race is different for men and women. Gillian, for example, suggests that hair is the entanglement between the categories of gender and race and observes that "of all the characteristics, it is hair which signals race and means the most for women" (1995, p. 533). I would also add the fact that the experience of racism is different for men and women. Black men, especially young black men are more exposed to physical violence, institutionalized or otherwise; while women are more vulnerable to another type of violence, not only those who condition their appearance for job opportunities (Carneiro, 1995), but principally those related to representations about the body and constructing hegemonic standards of beauty, which overlook the existence of black beauty.

As mentioned previously, we were born brown in Brazil, as teenagers, (as we underwent bodily transformations we became *mulatto women*) with transformations of the body which categorizes this phase, this made us mulattas and, later, as adults, become black, or better still, I became black. This is an experience which characterized many people of my generation and that comes across in a relatively different way for the new generations, above all for those aged under 25. Therefore, becoming black describes an affirmation process and search for self-definition or, as Patricia Hill Collins suggests, the search for image control.

In contexts in which the coloniality of power[6] still operate, like that existing in Brazilian society, before a black-mestiço child is even born, there is great speculation around skin tone or hair texture. These are two important phenotypes for the self-classification of color in Brazil. The desire for children with lighter skin, but, particularly, straighter hair, is connected to gender representations. "If it is a girl, she could even have darker skin, so long as her hair isn't curly". If the child is a boy, the parents rush to have his curly hair cut extremely short.

But, after all, what is an image? Images are representations of oneself constructed by society through its discourses, which make us subjects. However, Patricia Hill Collins claims that control needs to be taken of image, as it will only be possible to construct a positive self-definition or self-image in this way. Franz Fanon (2008) describes the way colonial subjects construct their image. According to the author, what is seen in front of a mirror is an image which only reflects negation, rejection and lacking, and the look which constructs us and the language that we use to describe ourselves are characterized by absence, negation of oneself as subjects for this very reason. It is not a coincidence that one of the most important aspects of the identity discourse is affirmation of oneself as a subject and language is a significant part of this process.

With respect to the inequalities and hierarchies present in the debate on race studies in Brazil, I would like to highlight that I advocated on behalf of a change in the name of the field defined as studies on race relations in Brazil to the study of racial hierarchies (Figueiredo and Grosfoguel, ib). I would also like to highlight the analyses carried out on the color classification scale, in which the role performed by the mulatto as an intermediary, a dilutor of borders/tensions between black and white people was emphasized. Therefore,

---

[6] According to Anibal Quijano (2002), independence in the Americas took place without transforming the racial hierarchies existent during the colonial period and, therefore, the coloniality of power would be maintaining these hierarchies and privileges assured to the white-creoles.

I am effectively pointing at the racial hierarchies existing between non-whites and underlining that although mulattos have benefited from a physical appearance closer to that of white people, in fact they were much closer to black people in terms of indicators for income and education levels.

By way of conclusion, I would like to reaffirm the importance of analyzing the contexts in which discourses on identity and differences emerge. As I tried to demonstrate, the differences between the United States and Brazil are significant, not just with regards to formulating the concept of race and identity, as much as how the State deals with rights for minority populations. In the Brazilian case, it was only through the sense of identity and politics awarded to the black category, in opposition to the mixtures and fluidity of the numerous racial categories, which structured racism in Brazil, that achievements were accomplished. From a more subjective point of view, while I defined myself as a mestiço or mulatto woman, I was always at the mercy of agreeing or disagreeing with those I addressed, and it was a category which always needs to be negotiated. However, it was only from the process of becoming black that I broke the cycle in which identification passed through approval by others. With regards to the loss of singularity that characterizes subjects in identity affirmation processes, I would like to remind you that the racist and sexist discourses are pioneering in considering us in a homogenous and stereotyped manner. Put differently, I focused on my experience to propose that the process of taking on a racial identity in the Brazilian context is a positive gesture, considering its political gains – highlighting the adoption of reserving places for black people at public universities – and within the domain of social representations – by reformulating the discourse which constructed the sexualized mulatto woman and collective action in response to discrimination, such as through the Cabelaço project, an initiative carried out at places in which black women are discriminated against for not straightening their hair.

❯Referencias Bibliográficas

▪ Anzaldua, G. (1987). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books.

▪ Bastide, R. (1976). Negritude et integration nationale. *Afro-Ásia, Salvador, 12*, 5-30,

▪ Bourcier, M.-H.(2012). Cultural translation, politics of disempowerment and the reinvention of queer power and politics. Retrieved from sex.sagepub.com at the University of Birmingham on October 30, 2012. http://sex.sagepub.com/content/15/1/93 doi: 10.1177/1363460711432107

▪ Butler, J. (1999). On Speech, Race and Melancholia. *Theory, Culture and Society, 16* (2), 163-174. Retrieved from: http://www.egs.edu/faculty/judith-butler/articles/on-speech-race-and-melancholia/

▪ Butler, J. (2002). *Cuerpos que importan: sobre los límites materiales y discursivos del "sexo"*. Buenos Aires: Paidós

▪ Butler, J. (2004). *Le pouvoir des mots. Politique du performative*. Paris: Éditions Amsterdam.

▪ Carneiro, S. (1995). Gênero, raça e ascensão social. *Estudos Feministas, 3*(2), 544-553.

▪ Colling, L. (2007). Teoria Queer. In Almeida, M. de (Org.) M*ais definições em trânsito* [CD] Retrieved from: http://www.cult.ufba.br/maisdefinicoes/TEORIAQUEER.pdf.

▪ Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought*. London: Routledge.

▪ Corrêa, M. (1996). Sobre a invenção da mulata. *Cadernos Pagu, 6/7*, 35-50.

▪ Da Matta, R. (1986). *O que faz o Brasil, Brasil?*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora Rocco.

▪ Degler, C. (1976). *Nem preto nem branco: escravidão e relações raciais no Brasil e nos Estados Unido*s. Rio de Janeiro: Labor do Brasil.

▪ Fanon, F. (2008). *Pele negra mascaras brancas*. Savador: EDUFBA.

▪ Figueiredo, A. and Grosfoguel, R. (2007). Por que não Guerreiro Ramos? Novos desafios a serem enfrentados pelas universidades públicas brasileiras. *Ciência e Cultura, 59* (2), 36-41.

▪ Figueiredo, A. (2008). Dialogando com os estudos de Gênero e raça no Brasil. In: Pinho, O. and Sansone., L. (Org.). *Raça: Novas perspectivas antropológicas* (237-257). Salvador: EDUFBA.

▪ Figueiredo, A. (2010) Cabelo, cabeleira, cabeluda e descabelada. In Oliveira, R. de and Pires, A.. (Org.). *Olhares sobre o mundo negro: Trabalho, cultura e política* (175-201). Curitiba: Editora progressiva.

▪ Figueiredo, A. (2012). Global african hair: representação e recepção do cabelo crespo numa exposição fotográfica. In: Sansone, L. (Org.). A *política do Intangível: Museus e patrimônios em nova perspectiv*a (293-312). Salvador: EDUFBA.

▪ Fraser, N. (2001) Da Redistribuição ao Reconhecimento? Dilemas da Justiça na Era Pós-Socialista. In Souza, J.. (org.). *Democracia hoje: novos desafios para a teoria democrática contemporânea)* (245-282). Brasília: UnB.

▪ Giacomini, S. (2006). Mulatas profissionais: raça, gênero e ocupação. *Estudos Feministas, 14* (1), 85-10.

▪ Gillian, Â. and Gilliam, O. (1995). Negociando a subjetividade da mulata. *Estudos Feministas, 3*(2), 479-489.

▪ González, L. (1983). Racismo e sexismo na cultura brasileira. *Ciências Sociais Hoje, 2*, 223-244.

▪ Guimarães, A. S. A. (2005). *Racismo e Anti-racismo no Brasil*. São Paulo: Editora 34.

❯Referencias Bibliográficas

▪ Hanchard, M. (2001). *Orfeu e Poder. Movimento Negro no Rio e São Paulo.* Rio de Janeiro: Ed UERJ/UCAM-Centro de Estudos Afro-Asiáticos.

▪ Hasenbalg, C. (1979). *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil*. Rio de Janeiro: Graal.

▪ Knudsen, P. (2010). Conversando sobre psicanálise: entrevista com Judith Butler. *Estudos Feministas, 18*(1), 161-170.

▪ Maggie, Y. (1996). Aqueles a quem foi negada a cor do dia: as categorias da cor e raça na cultura brasileira. In Maio, M. and Boas, G. (orgs.), *Raça, Ciência e Sociedade* (225-234). Rio de Janeiro: Editora Fiocruz

▪ Miskolci, R. (2009). A Teoria Queer e a Sociologia: o desafio de uma analítica da normalização. *Sociologias, 21*, 150-182. Retrieved from: http://www.scielo.br/pdf/soc/n21/08.pdf. Last access on July 12, 2015.

▪ Moutinho, L. (2004) Raça, sexualidade e gênero na construção da identidade nacional: uma comparação entre o Brasil e a África do sul. *Cadernos Pagu* (23), 55-89.

▪ Nogueira, O. (1985). *Tanto preto quanto branco: estudo de relações raciais.* São Paulo: T. A. Queiroz

▪ Nogueira, O. (2007). Preconceito racial de marca e preconceito racial de origem: sugestão de um quadro de re-ferência para a interpretação do material sobre relações raciais no Brasil. *Tempo social, 19* (1), 287-308

▪ Ochoa, M. (2014). *Queen for a Day: Transformistas, Beauty Queens, and the Performance of femininity in Venezuela.* Durham: Duke University Press.

▪ Pelúcio, L. (2014). Traduções e torções ou o que se quer dizer quando dizemos queer no Brasil? *Revista Periódicus 1*(1). Retrieved from: http://www.portalseer.ufba.br/index.php/revistaperiodicus/article/view/10150

▪ Pinho, O. (2004). O efeito do sexo, política de raça e miscigenação. *Cadernos Pagu, 23*, 89-121.

▪ Pinto, C. (2008). Nota sobre a controvérsia Fraser-Honneth informada pelo cenário brasileiro. *Lua Nova, 74,* 35-58. Retrieved from: http://www.scielo.br/pdf/ln/n74/03.pdf. Last access on May 30, 2015.

▪ Quijano, A. (2002). Colonialidade, poder, globalização e democracia. *Novos Rumos, 37*, 4-28. Retrieved from: http://www.educadores.diaadia.pr.gov.br/arquivos/File/2010/veiculos_de_comunicacao/NOR/NOR0237/NOR0237_02.PDF. Last access on July 15, 2015.

▪ Salih, S. (2012). *Judith Butler e a teoria queer.* Belo Horizonte: Autêntica Editora.

▪ Schulman, S. (2010). Homofobia familiar: uma experiência em busca de reconhecimento. *Revista Bagoas, 5*, 67-78. Retrieved from: http://www.cchla.ufrn.br/bagoas/v04n05art04_schulman.pdf.

▪ Sardenberg, C. (2009). Conceituando "Empoderamento! Na perspectiva feminina. Revised transcription of an oral communication presented at the I Seminário Trilha do empoderamento de mulheres. Projeto tempo promovido pelo NEIM/UFBA- Salvador-BA, mimeo, 2006.

▪ Segato, R. (2006). *Édipo brasileiro: a dupla negação de gênero e raça.* Brasília: Universdiade de Brasília, Série Antropologia, 400.

▪ Silva, N. (1994). Uma nota sobre "raça social" no Brasil. *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos, 26,* 67-80.

▪ Telles, E. (2003). *Racismo à brasileira. Uma nova perspectiva sociológica.* Rio de Janeiro: Relume-Dumará.

▪ Vale, A. (2005). *O vôo da beleza: travestilidade e devir minoritário*, (doctoral thesis), UFCE, Brasil. Retrieved from: http://www.repositorio.ufc.br/bitstream/riufc/1251/1/2005_tese_AFC.Vale%20(2).pdf

▪ Wagley, Ch. (1952). Comment les classes ont remplacé les castes dans le Brésil septentrional. In Wagley, Ch. (Org.). *Races et classes dans le Brésil rural.* Paris: Unesco.

NOTAS BIOGRÁFICAS

Angela Figueiredo is a professor and researcher on the Master's program in Social Sciences at the Federal University of the Recôncavo of Bahia (UFRB) and Post-Graduation program in Ethnic and African Studies (POSAFRO/UFBA). Coordinator of the Research Group on Gender, Race and Subalternity – The Angela Davis Collective, and currently coordinates the Census on Black Cultural Expressions project. She performs research in the areas of gender, race, inequalities and subalternity.

Contacto: angelaf39@gmail.com